

Determinacy

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by [versaphile](#)

Summary

Crossover with Torchwood, post-S1. For every game, there are a finite number of moves. Jack waits for an opening.

Warning: Graphic sex and violence, torture, D/s, references to mpreg. Really dark for most of the story.

Chapter 1

The first year on the Valiant is unpleasant, to put it mildly, but it's bearable. The Doctor has a plan, and Martha is out there, making sure it happens. He even participates in a few escape attempts, but they're not effective enough to do more than distract the Master from what's really going on.

He's tortured and killed rather a lot at first, but it doesn't feel very real. He's had worse. He's done worse, to his eternal regret. Besides, the Master loses interest after a while. As much fun as it is to have a victim who comes back over and over again, without fail, there's also no way for the Master to leave scars. There's no lasting damage, nothing to build his demented ideas on. Jack is a slate constantly being cleaned. Much better to concentrate on building his weapons and herding humanity into smaller and tighter circles. That damage sticks.

The Jones family pass him bits of information when they can. It's difficult because there are cameras everywhere, and they're always being watched. They develop a small language of subtle gestures. He has a vague picture of the world below. It's not pretty.

He wishes that he could talk to the Doctor, see for himself that he's all right, even with the artificial aging, but the Master keeps them separate.

The Master stops by one day to inform him that his team have been killed by the Toclafane, and as much as it saddens him he's glad it's over for them. As long as the Doctor's plan works, they'll be sneaking behind his back again in the work of a moment, and won't remember any of this.

He wouldn't call it a vacation, but apart from the boredom, pain, and horror, captivity is almost restful. He's not in charge of anything, and on the whole is pretty much useless, which means he isn't responsible for anything. After lifetimes of war and the weight of leadership, it's a relief to be nothing more than a prisoner.

When it all goes wrong and humanity dies and Earth burns, he blames himself. He's been a captain for long enough to know the foolishness of depending too much on one plan, and they had no backup, nothing. Martha had done her part, but the Doctor had failed, and now everyone was paying the price. He tries not to be too angry with the Doctor, who is surely suffering far more than him.

He finds out just how much the Doctor is suffering when the Master tells him. It's horrific, and far worse than he thought. The plan didn't just fail, it backfired, and the Doctor's mind is trapped, forced open so the Master can look inside and feed him the screams of humanity. Jack's had enough run-ins with amoral telepaths to shudder at the thought. Worst of all, it means the Doctor can't even help plan an escape anymore, because the Master knows everything he's thinking.

He mourns Martha and her family along with the rest. He's the last human now. He'd expected to be the last human in a hundred trillion years, so this is somewhat ahead of schedule.

A week after Earth dies, the Master moves him to a new room, and locks him in a cell at one end. He brings in a bunch of televisions and some speakers. He's humming to himself as he sets them up, plugs them into the wall. When he turns on the screens, one of them shows a bed, and the Doctor's lying naked on it. To Jack's surprise and relief, he's youthful again. He feels a glimmer of hope.

But the Master has another surprise for him.

"Do you know what I've done?" the Master asks him, rhetorically. "Come on, guess."

Jack had just glares. He prefers never to give the Master the satisfaction of a response. He isn't sure he could stop himself from pouring out all the bile and hatred he feels, if he lets out a single word.

"Not even a little guess? Oh, you're no fun." The Master pouts theatrically, then his face splits into a huge grin. "But since I'm feeling generous today, I'll tell you anyway." He leans close, mere inches from the bars. Jack could probably reach through and snap his neck if he's fast enough, but he needs to know what's happened first. There's no more Jones family to pass him information.

"I've adapted some of that lovely Lazarus technology, and the hand that you so thoughtfully held on to for me, and mixed in a little of myself, and--" He stops himself, a mischievous look on his face. "Are you sure you won't guess? It's just so *good*."

Jack keeps absolutely still, and waits with increasing worry.

"You see, now that he's let me into his head, I know everything. I know exactly what he wants. Peace in the universe, the blood to wash off his hands, oh, and the Time Lords. He blew them up, and now he feels bad. Poor Doctor." The Master makes a clownish frown. "No more Gallifrey. All gone! It makes him so very sad."

"Me, I'm sympathetic," he continues. "So I'm going to give him what he wants. A new Gallifrey, built on the ashes of Earth. And I'm going to give him back the Time Lords. In fact, I've already given him the first one. It's growing in him now!" He laughs.

Jack feels sick. "What have you done to him?" he growls, unable to keep quiet any longer.

"I've only gone and knocked him up," says the Master, looking as insane as Jack has always known him to be. "He's got a womb and everything! And the best part is--do you want to know the best part? It's going to kill him. It *is*."

Jack bares his teeth, too angry for words.

"Well, maybe not. If I'm feeling generous. See, if by some amazing chance he escapes, he'll only live for, oh, maybe five days? A week, if he's lucky. Or unlucky, because after it dies it's going to make him rot from the inside. Wouldn't that be a shame." A smug smile spreads across his face. "If he wants to live, he has to do everything I tell him. Because if he doesn't..." He drew his finger across his neck, making a choking sound.

"Oh, and just in case you were thinking of escaping yourself--not that you have the remotest chance, by the way--if you escape, I'll let him die. And when he's dying, when he's being killed by the dead baby decaying inside him, I'm going to let him know that it's all your fault. His last thought of you will be 'Jack the baby-killer.'"

The Master dances away from the bars and over to the televisions. "But as long as you're here, I'm going to let you watch. All of it." He points to the unconscious Doctor. "He's your in-flight entertainment for the next, oh, thousand years? Probably less. I don't think he'll last." He actually sounds regretful at this, which is sheer audacity. "Enjoy!"

He leaves Jack to stare helplessly at the screen.

If it was just the suite, the Doctor's own cell, it wouldn't be so bad. But it's also the lab.

Jack watches in horror as the Doctor is drugged and passes out, dying right there in front of him. The Master grins into the camera, gives a wave.

"Think I should save him, Jack?" the Master asks him, over the speakers. "Save him, let him die, save him, let him die. I could flip a coin?" He pats his pockets. "Oh, I forgot. No more Earth currency! I guess I'll have to save him."

He injects the Doctor with something, and the monitor shows that his hearts start beating normally again. Jack slumps against the wall, relieved, and waits for the Doctor to wake up.

He doesn't, not for days. The Master keeps him in the lab, injecting him with drug after drug, watching as his body fails and recovers over and over. Jack wishes he had something he could throw to smash the televisions, knock over the speakers. He has nothing.

When the Doctor finally opens his eyes, the Master tells him he had a bad reaction. The Doctor *believes* him.

"He's killing you!" Jack shouts at the screen, unable to stop himself. "God damn it, Doctor. Wake up!"

But the Doctor can't hear him, and the Master lies so very *reasonably*. The Doctor begs him to stop, but even that is a disappointment to Jack. The Doctor should be trying to think his way out of this, looking for any angle of escape. Jack resents him for accepting the trap he's caught in.

Later on, he reminds himself about the Archangel link, and that the Doctor is dependent on the Master for survival beyond a handful of days. He finds forgiveness and gives it, even if the Doctor may never know. He's not doing much better on the escape front himself, and the bars of his cage are only on the outside and not the inside.

He's angry all over again when they start being *friends*. It makes him furious, makes him sick. The Doctor looks at the Master the way Jack wishes the Doctor would look at him. It's so unbelievably wrong, and he can't make them *stop*.

And every time the Master leaves the room, every single goddamn time, he gives Jack a smug little smile through the camera by the door. Jack wants to scream as loud as he can, scream so loud that the Doctor will hear him and come to his senses and *fight*, but there's yards of steel between them, and the Master's already told him that he's on the opposite end of the Valiant. The only thing screaming would do would be to give the Master the satisfaction, and there's no way he's doing that.

He went to his death willingly to fight the Daleks, because of the Doctor. He waited a hundred and fifty years for the Doctor to return, to answer his questions. He rebuilt Torchwood in the Doctor's honour. All the Doctor's given him in return are warnings about flirting and violence, and a speech about how he's a fundamental wrong. The Master burns Earth and slaughters the human race, then uses some twisted mad science to make the Doctor pregnant and almost kills him every other week, and the Doctor hangs on every word the Master says and smiles at him like an idiot.

Just for a while, he wants the Doctor to die. He wants to escape and let the Master kill the Doctor and let it all be done with. He almost gets his wish.

He's staring up at the ceiling when he hears the panic in the Doctor's voice, and he looks up just as the Doctor collapses. Even the Master looks worried, so he immediately knows it's bad. He's on the edge of his seat as the Master brings the Doctor to the lab and actually cuts him open and puts something inside him.

"Don't worry yourself," the Master says into the camera. "This is actually for his own good. You should thank me."

Jack can't believe that, but the Doctor recovers. He feels an extremely reluctant, extremely small amount of gratitude, and hates the Master for making him feel even that much. The thing is, he's not even getting the full force of the Master's manipulative charm. It's little wonder the Doctor is falling for it.

He catches them kissing. The Doctor's starting to show. If the world hadn't already ended, today would be it. He just can't believe this is happening anymore. The whole 'happy couple' nonsense in combination with the Master's unspeakable sadism makes his head spin.

Still, Jack has hope. The Doctor's still alive, despite the Master's earlier eagerness to kill him horribly. Jack has always believed that where there's life, there's hope; how else did he survive this far without going crazy? He takes one day at a time, the way he's done since Rose brought him back from the dead forever.

When the Doctor actually tells the Master that he trusts him, right before the Master gleefully slices into him again, Jack smashes his fist against the wall so hard he cracks bone. At least physical pain is something he knows how to deal with. He can control that kind of hurt.

The paradox machine is so tantalizingly close. He dreams about it night after night. The only problem is, it's beyond anything he ever dealt with as a Time Agent. It would not be helpful if he accidentally destroys the universe when trying to save it. Then there's the problem of the Doctor's condition. He believes the Master about the Doctor needing him to survive. If they

could just pop to the future and move the Doctor to a hospital that could actually deal with this kind of thing, it wouldn't matter so much, but the TARDIS is useless to them, and Time Lord biology isn't anyone's specialty in the twenty-first century, even without factoring in the baby.

It's definitely a living thing, now, not just a bunch of cells. He's seen the lab tests, the scans, the operations. More than that, it's the Doctor's baby. It's the Master's too, which is not something he's likely to forget, but he can see how much it means to the Doctor to have this. It's not the short-term survival that Jack worries about now. It's the long-term consequences. It's what will happen if the child survives until the Master cuts it from the Doctor's body.

It will become a hostage, surely.

Because Jack never stays dead, goes the Master's reasoning, there's no reason to give him food or water. Jack isn't a living thing anymore, because living things die. Jack is never not hungry, not thirsty. He dies and comes back, injuries healed, but his stomach is always as empty as before. Whatever energy brings him back lets him last for a few days, and then he dies again, to start the process over. It's painful and monotonous and he'd give his left arm for a meal, but the Master leaves him to rot. The Master is busy alternately doting on the Doctor and licking his blood from his fingers.

The only company Jack has for months is his view of the Doctor. He can't stop watching, no matter how much he wants to turn away.

Then one day, to his astonishment, someone new enters his room. He gapes, thinking with intense gladness that another human has survived after all, that he's not the last, that there's hope. It's then that he hears the Master telling the Doctor about the looms, and realizes. It's a Time Lord, or the Master's version of one. He hopes the Doctor's baby isn't going to grow up like this.

The man brings in another television, the other end of another camera, which means another room the Doctor will be allowed to enter. Jack hopes it's not another lab.

The camera comes on, and there's windows. His jaw drops. Where Earth used to be is a rust-colored world, and after a beat he recognizes it from the Doctor's description. It's Gallifrey. The new Gallifrey the Master promised, all those months ago. Jack sheds a few tears for Earth, then. He can't not.

He finally understands how the Doctor feels about Gallifrey. About not being the only Time Lord left. Even though there's no more hope than before, even though they're both just as trapped, Jack's determination is renewed. He will break the paradox, no matter what it takes. He will restore Earth, bring back the human race. He's never going to die, and that means he can afford to wait. No matter how long it takes, the moment the paradox breaks everything will go back to the way it was. Unless the universe breaks with it.

He wants to save the Doctor. He hopes he still can. But he'll sacrifice him, if it comes to that. Everything is expendable. He would be, too, if his life could ever be expended.

He watches the Doctor spiral down, suffocated by depression. There's still nothing he can do. He wonders if maybe it would be better if the Doctor simply dies. The Master would probably turn on him, take out his rage on Jack's endless lives, but ultimately that wouldn't matter. There's a hard centre to Jack that's withstood so much that even the Master at his worst couldn't shatter it.

The Doctor isn't as strong, and by the second week things are looking bleak. That's the funny thing about the Doctor; Jack looked up to him so much at first, seeing only the force of will the man had, the sheer determination for there to be goodness and life in the universe. But even then Jack had seen glimpses of the pain underneath, the fragile hearts beneath the tough exterior. Yet there was strength under that, too. The Doctor is a contradiction, strength over weakness over strength, and so on, down too many layers for Jack to see what it's all built on.

Jack is a simple man. Life is harsh and you take what you need. Except the Doctor showed him that there can be goodness, there can be hope, and both have to be fought for or they're lost; life isn't worth living if they are. Fighting for them is what keeps him going, and no matter what happens he's eternally in the Doctor's debt for that lesson.

This regeneration of the Doctor is both weaker and stronger than the last. Unfortunately, Jack suspects he's weak in all the ways the Master loves, and strong in all the ways that can't help them out of this nightmare. He's proven right when the Doctor recovers, and immediately makes things worse by granting the Master access directly into his mind.

Fuck.

Jack really hadn't thought things could get much worse, but somehow the Doctor found a way. He has to write him off, now. It's too late. Jack is on his own.

When the Master actually puts a remote control into the Doctor's spine, Jack throws up his hands in despair. The Doctor has completely stopped resisting now, has gone beyond acceptance and started welcoming the Master's sadism. He covers his eyes as the Doctor immediately proceeds to *suck the Master's cock*, and groans in frustration.

He has to hand it to the Master. When he wins, he damn well *wins*.

It's his own personal nightmare of a porn film. The Master makes sure the cameras see every angle, every position. Jack seethes with jealousy, and despite the perpetual starvation and everything else he's feeling, he can't not get hard. He can't not stroke his cock as the Doctor's fingers work the Master's cock, can't not imagine the Doctor's lips are around him instead, can't not ache to be fucking the Doctor over and over again.

When he comes, it's dry. His body has nothing to work with. The pain just makes it better. His heart's already broken.

The Doctor is changing before his eyes. The Master often places his hand on the Doctor's face and closes his eyes, and whatever he's doing it's unquestionably evil. Jack's not sure he wants to know, but at the same time he has to know. Someone has to know what's been done,

so when they get out of here the Doctor can be put back together again. *If* he can be put back together again. Jack has his doubts.

He's not sure which is worse: the fucking or the surgeries. Jack has been sick more than once, watching the Master slice the Doctor open, put his hand into him, and ease out a living, extremely necessary part of him. The Master holds it up and runs a scalpel lightly over the surface, pretends to be about to yank it roughly out. Every time, Jack is unable to breathe until it's over.

The Master doesn't talk to him as much these days, because the visuals really speak for themselves. But he does like to gloat about the implants. It's stunningly cruel.

"Look here, Jack," the Master tells him, making the camera zoom in on the Doctor's bloody, glistening guts. "Two on each side. One set to keep him alive, and one set to kill him!" The camera zooms back. He grins, delighted with himself. "Oh, I wouldn't hurt him too badly. Not when he's being so deliciously cooperative. His head, Jack, oh, his head," he croons, closing his eyes, his face a picture of ecstasy. "The way he welcomes me in. I've made him love it so much he *begs* me to rape his mind."

Jack's heart breaks all over again. He hadn't known what they were doing, what that meant. Oh, his poor Doctor. There'll be nothing left of him, when the Master's done.

"The implants are timed, Jack," the Master continues, once he's finished reminiscing. "One makes him better, one makes him worse. Arranged on a schedule for maximum effect, of course." He's so proud. "I think I'll leave them in for a few years. I do so love the way he *needs*."

"You sick, sick bastard," Jack hisses. He's starting to see a picture of the Doctor's future, and it's not at all pretty. Jack just hopes he can find a way to pry the Doctor from the Master's clutches when the time comes, because he's not sure the Doctor will go willingly. Not anymore.

A Time Lord brings in another television, and Jack dreads what he's about to see. Nothing the Master has shown him has ever been a good thing, and these days each new victory over the Doctor seems more horrible than the last.

The television stays blank for a few days, until he hears the Doctor begging to be allowed to help the Master's evil plans. Jack has a terrible sinking sensation.

The camera turns on as the Master guides the Doctor from his suite. It's the inside of the TARDIS, all red light and paradox machine.

"Oh, please," Jack begs, prays. "Please no. Doctor, *please*."

The Doctor enters. There's no sound on this one. The Master *leaves*, leaves the Doctor alone with the very thing that will put everything back. The very thing that Jack has dreamed about for two years, since this all began. Jack shouts at the television, shouts for the Doctor to break it, break the damn thing, BREAK IT GODDAMMIT!

The Doctor drops to the floor, and he's the one that's broken. He crawls away, staggers out the door.

Jack snaps. He screams, he rages, he slams himself against the steel bars over and over again, damages himself and doesn't *care*, because every cell of his body is one hundred percent furious with the Doctor for giving in, for giving up and letting the Master turn him into a twisted fucking *monster*. Jack snarls the Doctor's name, teeth bared like an animal, and doesn't stop raging until his body gives out. He lies on the floor, bruised and broken inside and out, and sobs with dry eyes because his body can't make tears.

He waits for death to wipe him clean again.

The Doctor is at the Master's side, now, slowly helping him conquer the universe. Jack has stopped caring. He exhausted himself in his rage, and now he's numb, drained. Not broken, never broken, because he's still as determined as ever to seize his moment and break the paradox, but his moment is so far away, and the waiting is so hard.

He wills the cameras off, but they never stop. One image after another, an unending, intimate show of the Doctor's slow corruption into the Master's twisted plaything. It inspires neither horror nor arousal. He closes his eyes, turns his back to them. He just wants to rest, to sleep until it's all over.

When he hears the Doctor's voice calling his name, he thinks he must be dreaming, but he's not. He turns over, and freezes in shock as the Doctor blithely strolls right into his room. He has to work to find his voice, after so long.

"Hello, Doctor," he rasps.

The Doctor apologizes. He actually has the gall to *apologize*. Jack's fury surges back.

"Do you know what he's done to you?" he spits. Is this just the shell of the Doctor he's seeing, or is there some spark of the man left in there? He doesn't know.

"What do you mean?"

"Do you know what the Master has done to you?"

The Doctor steps back, as if he's afraid. Afraid of Jack! It's so absurd he wants to laugh.

"The baby," the Doctor says. "Our daughter. Of course I know."

"Your mind, Doctor. Is there even enough of you left to care? Earth? The universe? Any of that ring a bell?"

But the Doctor just shakes his head, keeps backing away. The sheer weakness of it just makes Jack even more furious.

"He's made me watch all of it," he says, wanting this shell of the Doctor to know every sordid detail. "Every goddamn second. There's cameras and microphones all over your suite, the lab.

He made me watch as he cut you open, took out parts of you--" He chokes, unable to finish. "Twisted your mind. Fucked you. He's turned you into a monster, just like him."

"How can you say that?!" the Doctor says, backing away until he hits the wall. "He's not a monster. He's her father. He loves us."

And that's too much for Jack. It's too much on so many levels, so deeply wrong. There is nothing left of the Doctor, nothing that can be saved, and the only thing Jack wants to do is punish the shell that remains.

"You could have stopped all of this," he accuses. "And you walked away. There's cameras everywhere, even in the TARDIS."

Somehow this sinks in, and a look of such horror comes over the Doctor's face that Jack immediately regrets what he's done. He's been so frustrated, so angry, that he lashed out when lashing out was the worst thing to do. He knows exactly how fragile the Doctor has become, and made it worse when he should have tried to coax him into letting him free.

Jack calls for the Doctor to come back, calls out a belated apology, but the Doctor is already stumbling out of the room, and too late Jack realizes he really has made things worse. He sees the Doctor falls to his knees in the hall, collapsing, so suddenly ill, and the regret is bitterly sour in his mouth.

The Master's arrival is swift, and so is his punishment. This time Jack is only too glad to die.

Chapter 2

For two whole weeks the Master keeps the video cameras off. It is possibly the worst two weeks of Jack's too-long life, because he's certain he's killed the Doctor. The guilt is terrible.

When the Master walks into the room, Jack can't be bothered to look up. He doesn't want to see either smug gloating or twisted fury.

"Jack, Jack, Jack," the Master says, with mocking sympathy. "You made a mistake."

Jack doesn't respond, but he does look up. Smug gloating it is, then.

"I was really enjoying him," the Master continues. "So many things to play with. So many things to break. And now..." He makes a face. "Now he just lies there. It's so boring."

The Doctor's dead. Jack hates himself.

Wait. If he'd died, wouldn't he have regenerated? A flicker of hope returns to him.

The Master smiles. "Yes, he's still alive. The baby's fine, not that you'd ask. Still another month to go before she's out, of course."

"I want to see him," Jack says. He needs to see that the Doctor is alive, that he's okay.

"I suppose I'll allow it," the Master says. "I warn you, he's not very interesting to watch." A flick of some hidden remote, and the video comes back on. The Doctor's lying in the lab, unconscious, hooked up to machines.

Jack stands and steps forward, pressing against the bars so he can get a closer look.

"You did quite a number on him," the Master says.

"Is he...?" Jack begins.

"His brain's still intact. As it were." The Master smirks. "I'm keeping him out for the rest of the pregnancy. He'll just whine about his ankles and having to piss all the time, otherwise."

Jack gives him a glare, on the Doctor's behalf.

"Don't be like that," the Master says. "I haven't even told you the best part."

"And what's that?" Jack asks tartly.

The Master's smile broadens. "You see, he doesn't need to be awake for me to go into his head. I can do, oh, pretty much whatever I want to him, whenever I want. We have such an open relationship, you see. So much *understanding*."

"Is there a point to this?" Jack asks, tired of being gloated at.

"A very large, sharp point," the Master says, coldly. "I popped into his head the other day and made him forget every moment of your existence."

No. Jack steps back, horrified.

"So many memories. So many *feelings*. He knew how much you love him," the Master says, in a mockery of sympathy. "He cared so much for you, his little freak of nature. You could have even had him, if you'd ever had the guts." He tsks. "Too late now."

Jack had thought things couldn't get any worse. He was wrong.

The Doctor's silent form is its own punishment. The camera is focused close, showing his face and chest, so Jack can see just how lifeless the Doctor is. If he didn't know better, he would think the Doctor was dying. Maybe he is. The Master has never been known for his honesty. Jack doesn't know how much damage he caused with his thoughtless anger.

Forgotten. Every moment they'd shared, gone. It shouldn't hurt so much, but it feels like something's died. He'd thought he was forgotten by the Doctor on the game station, but he'd hadn't been. He'd just been rejected. Now he really has been forgotten, and it's his own fault this time.

He's still missing two years of his life, even after so long. He never would have wished for the Doctor to suffer the same fate. To lose pieces of himself, to have that blankness and the fear of never knowing what was in that missing time. It's a horrible feeling, even if you're not the kind of person Jack is. Jack is not a good person, never was. He's the kind of man who does what's necessary, and the necessary is rarely pretty.

He's a soldier, a military man, a captain. And for the first time, he realizes that the Doctor is one of his men. He never leaves a man behind, not if he can help it. That means it's up to him to bring the Doctor home. They will escape, somehow, and undo the paradox, somehow, and the Doctor would be fine. He doesn't dare contemplate the alternatives.

When the long month is over, the camera is zoomed back, and Jack watches as the Doctor is once again opened up, and the womb and its occupant are removed. The baby is cut free, and suddenly the Doctor's daughter is there, bloody and crying and waving her tiny fists, and Jack's heart breaks for her, and for the Doctor again, and the weight of it all is so heavy on his shoulders.

He doesn't know what will happen now. He's afraid to think of any scenarios, in case they come true. He can't see any good coming from this, ever.

The Master patches the Doctor back up, but it's days before he finally stirs. And his Doctor, his poor Doctor, he doesn't remember that Jack hurt him. He doesn't remember Jack at all.

The birth of a child should be a joyous occasion. It should be a celebration of hope, of life. For Jack, it's all ashes and despair.

The Master is satisfied with what he has wrought, so much so that he turns off the cameras, and this time leaves them off. Jack is trapped in his cell with nothing. It's truly a bleak little prison, just bars and a raised section that functions as his bed. No amenities, because his body has nothing to process that would require them. He's stopped noticing his hunger, but he's so terribly thirsty at every moment. He'd give both his arms for a jug of water, as long as a straw was provided. He wonders if he'll shrivel up like a mummy, given enough time. Every time he cries, every time he breathes and sweats, he loses just a little more moisture, and it's never replaced. His eyes are dry against their lids. He can't produce saliva. He probably wouldn't be able to speak if he tried.

It doesn't take him as long to die now. Only a day of agony, and then a short rest, blissful nothingness, before he's spat back out into the world again, dry as parchment. He's too weak to move around, so he just lies on his hard bed and makes sure he turns every so often, just for variety.

Finally, finally, the Master visits, and he's carrying a tray. There's a jug of water on it, and a plate of food. Jack's whimper is a whispery, pale thing. It's not even that he refuses to beg. He's just incapable of doing so.

The Master walks up to the bars. "I brought din-din," he says, sing-song. "Who's a good boy?"

Jack can't quite manage a glare. His body won't respond enough for that.

"Play dead, boy!" the Master says, and giggles. "Good doggie. I think you've earned a treat." He raises the tray and moves it back and forth. The water sloshes enticingly. The Master opens the door to his cell, having no reason to fear that Jack might try to escape. Jack can't even breathe without wanting to die properly.

The Master pours ice-cold water into a glass. There's even a straw. He holds it to Jack's lips. "Come on, drink up."

Jack sips, and immediately chokes, coughs dry, agonizing coughs, like sandpaper has coated his insides. But even the little bit of moisture he keeps is enough to revive him, and he forces himself to drink without coughing. He drinks too much too fast, comes close to being sick from it, but he keeps it down. Water fills his cells like the purest balm. He lies there, gasping and shaking, as the pain of utter dehydration recedes.

The Master rests a piece of cracker on his tongue, and he has to wait for his body to generate enough spit to soften it before he can chew. Swallowing takes an eternity, and he can feel every grain of it as it slides down. When it finally reaches his stomach, the smallest burst of energy from the sugar and starch is exquisite. The next piece even has a smear of peanut butter on it. He's never tasted anything so good.

Slowly, so slowly, he begins to feel alive again. He's still far too weak to even think of putting up a fight, but every small step is a victory.

The Master is watching him like he's a terribly fascinating science project. He supposes that's what he is. He can't be bothered to care at the moment.

He tries to lift his arm, but it just flops back down again. The Master refills his glass and holds it for him until it's empty. There's more crackers, with peanut butter and jam, and bits of cheese. He has to stop eating because his body is too weak to digest, and he doesn't dare risk losing what he's been given. He doesn't know if this is all his body will have to work with for another two years. He holds it down, somehow. He's used to having to hold things down.

The Master brings in a folding chair and sits down, making himself comfortable.

"You've lasted longer than I thought," the Master says, sounding duly impressed. "I considered waiting until you died right after you woke up, but it was taking too long. Looks like you win this round."

If this is winning, Jack doesn't want to know what losing is like. Then he kicks himself, because he does know. The Doctor lost.

"How would you like a change?" the Master asks. "Not that it matters what you like. I have plans for you that will last a very, very, very long time. Do you know that under the right conditions, a Time Lord can live to be, oh, twelve thousand years old? Sadly I've already used up a regeneration, but I think I've got a good shot at ten thousand."

The Master wraps a belt around Jack's throat, and applies a very firm, very unrelenting pressure. When Jack can't breathe at all, the belt is secured. "We'll just leave that there for now," the Master says.

Jack's fingers fumble clumsily at the leather, but he's already dying.

The belt is gone. Jack breathes in a huge gasp of air, even bigger than usual. He's startled to find that he's been moved, and surprised to find that his cell is actually something fit for a human this time. He coughs and rubs his throat as he looks around. He's on an actual bed, with a thin but reasonable mattress. There's a sink, and a toilet, even a little shower. No windows, which is par for the course, and also an extremely solid-looking door.

The constant hum of the Valiant's engines is gone. He must be planet-side.

He struggles into a sitting position, and finds that his body must have found time to digest and heal during his death, or deaths. He's never quite been able to figure out how the whole process works, and frankly is fine with that. He gets to his feet and reaches the sink, and cups water in his hands and drinks and drinks until he sloshes when he moves. He collapses back onto the bunk and enjoys no longer being thirsty. He has to find his pleasures where he can.

A tray of food is pushed through a slot in the door. He scarfs it down, unable to make himself go slowly. He's so incredibly *hungry*, and every bite is better than any gourmet meal. He licks his fingers clean, licks the plates clean, gathers up every tiny morsel of food from the tray and eats those too. His stomach hurts a bit afterwards, but that fades, and he's actually full. It's glorious. It'll never last. He doesn't care.

He sleeps. He wakes up and uses the toilet, and even that is a small victory, because his body is finally functioning again because there's water and food. Those two things are everything.

He's given regular meals, and there's always fresh water, and it finally doesn't hurt to exist. When the euphoria of it wears off, he remembers that he's still the Master's prisoner, and the Doctor is still the Master's prisoner even if he doesn't realize it, and neither of these things is at all good.

The cell is beyond solid. Whoever delivers his food and takes his empty trays never speaks. He has no contact with anyone, no televisions, nothing. He's been given a better cell, he's given the basics, but things will get worse at any moment. He's certain of that.

He wonders what the Doctor is doing. Wonders about his daughter. He's so used to always knowing, having a constant feed of the Doctor's every move, that not knowing is far more upsetting than it would be under normal circumstances. It's just that he can't trust the Doctor to take care of himself anymore. He's been broken and doesn't even know it. The Doctor is helpless, a victim who needs to be saved, and Jack is supposed to be saving him. Instead he's stuck in another cell, with four blank walls and lots of nothing. And now that he's off the Valiant, he isn't even close enough to the TARDIS to even think of planning how to reach it. He doesn't know where he is, doesn't know where the TARDIS might have been moved, doesn't know, frankly, squat.

He meditates. There's not much else to do. He does stretches, runs in circles. He's glad to feel strong and healthy again, and takes that as a small blessing. He thinks a lot, probably too much. He loses track of time entirely, except to know that a lot of it passes. He misses the sun.

One day, part of the wall slides away. There's a television screen there, behind thick glass, so he can't break it. He's fairly certain he knows what it means.

It turns on. The picture resolves into a dimly-lit bedroom, centering on a bed with two occupants. The camera angle changes, and he sees that the Doctor is one of them, and he's asleep. The other is the Master, and he isn't. He's smiling into the camera as he fondles the Doctor's naked body.

"I know you've been terribly bored, Jack," he says, quietly so as not to wake the Doctor. "So I'm recording some entertainment for you." He leans down, nuzzles the back of the Doctor's neck, his shoulder. He slips up close to the Doctor, wrapping one leg around his, and the Doctor stirs, smiles.

"Hello," he says, sleepily. He looks happy, content. He doesn't see the cameras.

"Hello," replies the Master, running his hand down the Doctor's body. He pushes away the sheet, revealing the Doctor's cock. It stirs as the Doctor's arousal grows, as the Master's touch becomes more insistent. They're making love, and Jack is already furious and trying very hard not to be jealous.

Whenever the Doctor closes his eyes, the Master stares directly into the camera and grins, a cat with the richest of creams. The camera is always fixed on the Doctor, and the angle changes to whatever puts him most on display. The Master is showing him what he can't have, and Jack deeply hates the fact that it's having the desired effect.

The Master hooks the Doctor's legs over his shoulders, and fucks him slow and easy, like they've done this a thousand times before. The Doctor is in blissful abandon, riding each thrust with delight, his muscles flexing and erection bobbing in the air. Jack groans, slips his hand down his trousers.

The Master slips out, lets the Doctor's legs fall down to the bed, and then sucks the Doctor's cock. The Doctor moans and squirms and makes wonderful little noises that Jack aches to be the cause of. When he comes, he looks beautiful, vulnerable, and he's lazy in the afterglow. The video shuts off, leaving Jack hard and aching with want.

He wants to see it again. God he wants that so badly.

Weeks pass, maybe a month, and then the television flicks on again. Jack is instantly glued to the screen, and it's just as much of a show as before. This time it's a close-up of the Doctor sucking the Master's cock. Jack has to watch as the Doctor's lips slide back and forth, as the bulge of the Master's cock shows in his cheek, in his throat. It goes on for so long he wonders if it's more that one scene spliced together, but it isn't, it isn't. When the Master comes, it makes a mess of the Doctor's lips, and Jack groans as the Doctor licks them clean.

Jack has seen porn. He's been in some movies, and they sold well. But this is more intimate than any porn he's ever seen. It's so good it hurts.

The moment the video ends, he jacks himself off and comes so hard it leaves him panting. He curls up on the bed, and he can't think of anything but those images.

Waiting for the next one is agony. He's not sure if it would make it worse or better if he started keeping track of the days again. He worries about being asleep when it finally comes on. There's audio, but he's afraid it won't be loud enough to wake him up. He absolutely cannot miss it.

The third video comes on, and he doesn't miss it. Instead of tender lovemaking, it's rough sex. The Doctor's hands are bound, and the Master has him bent over a chair. The Master is clothed except for his open trousers, but the Doctor is naked, flushed, sweating. There's a gag in his mouth that's wet with spit. The noises are what makes it, though. The constant whimpers and moans, the muffled gasps, the slap of flesh and rustle of fabric. The Master grips the Doctor's erection with punishing firmness, but the Doctor just thrusts into it, loving every second. Jack wants to press himself into the screen and touch him all over.

The video cuts out just when the Doctor is about to come. Jack screams with frustration, pounds the glass, then brings himself off several times in a row.

When it's been five weeks after that, and nothing's appeared, he's tortured by the thought that he slept through the fourth video, and it drives him crazy. He could have seen it, he needs to see it. It's a terrible violation of the Doctor's privacy, it's not lovemaking but rape, but he needs it too much to care. He starts sleeping lightly, military style. It's less restful but it means he'll wake at the slightest sound.

At week seven, one week early if he had missed the fourth video, the screen comes to life. It's worth the wait. The Master has bound the Doctor in ropes, ropes with knots in, and Jack

knows what this is like because he's used them, worn them. The Doctor's balls and cock are dark, engorged with trapped blood, and the ropes criss-cross his body so beautifully. He's blindfolded but not gagged, and his arms are over his head, wrists bound together. The Master takes his time, taunting the Doctor with sensation, with feathers and a flogger, and then he flogs the Doctor until his arse is bright red, and he uses the handle to fuck him until he comes with long, sensuous shudders. And then the Master leaves him like that, hanging from the rope, the flogger sticking out like a tail, and the camera holds and holds until the Doctor rasps "Please, Master," and then he shudders like he's coming again and it ends.

Jack can barely move. He just keeps seeing it over and over again. He thinks of the bite of the rope on naked flesh, the heat of the Doctor's arse. His fingers itch to be the ones inflicting that beautiful, beautiful suffering. Yes, yes, just like that. That's what he would do, if the Doctor was his.

He's aware that he's letting the Master get to him. He really, really doesn't care. He just wants more.

Video five. God, video five. It's tamer than the previous two, yet unbearably erotic. It's shot after shot of disconnected scenes, all close-ups, of the Doctor giving pleasure with hands and fingers and cock, and of his face as he comes, time after time, and of the Master touching him everywhere, fingers caressing and probing, reading every inch of skin, and the Master's mouth on that body, and the Doctor's mouth as he begs and begs and pleads and begs for the Master to fuck him, to suck him, to hurt him, to give him more, to never stop, and just plain begging. The Doctor looking straight into the camera, even though he can't know it's there, and saying please, please, please, oh yes, oh yes, please, deeper, harder, and then crying out as he comes, dark-eyed and flushed and panting and god, god. Jack can't even stand it, but he hangs on every frame until it finally ends.

The next month, they're back to lovemaking. It's not the same video, but it's similar. It's sweet, it's tender, but now Jack knows the undercurrents, knows what to look for. Sees the redness of the Doctor's arse, sees the bruises around his wrists. Were they there in the first video as well? He doesn't even know if he's seeing these in any kind of genuine order.

Video seven is another blow job, and the Doctor's been practicing because the Master just fucks his throat with long, strong strokes, and the Doctor takes it like a pro. 'Slut,' Jack thinks, for the first time, and afterwards he's ashamed of himself. This is the Doctor he's watching, the Doctor who he loves, and he's turned him into an object of pure lust. He should have better control over himself, no matter what tricks the Master has up his sleeves.

He forces himself not to watch the eighth video, but the audio undoes him. He turns around just in time to watch the last thirty seconds, and then spends weeks wishing he'd seen what came before.

It's two months before the screen comes back, and it's video five again. He tries to memorize it all, every second, every sound. It's the longest of them all but it's over too soon.

And then there are no more videos.

His cell is completely quiet. The only lighting comes from a strip of ceiling at the centre that brightens and dims with what Jack can only assume is the day. Trays are delivered and taken with clockwork regularity. In the fifty-first century, extended solitary isolation is considered a form of mental torture and banned on most civilized worlds.

Trapped alone with his thoughts for months on end, sliding into years, with absolutely no distractions. Jack thinks it might be worse than bamboo splints or waterboarding or enervation. He's always been a social man, always been happier around other people than shut up by himself, even if he has a tendency to self-isolate that's grown with age. At least on the Valiant, he had the televisions. He had something to watch, something to be angry about or sad about. He could see the Doctor's face, and know what was being done to him.

He knows they're having sex, but that means nothing. The Master can control the Doctor's body, his mind. No matter how much the Doctor seemed to be enjoying himself, there's a good chance that inside, deep down, he was screaming for help and not moaning for more. Jack feels sick for the pleasure he's taken from the videos, but he keeps his anger directed outwards, at the Master. He can't let this get to him, because he has a job to do, someday. Two jobs, and he suspects escaping and finding the paradox machine and breaking it will be the easier of the two.

He breaks the silence by humming, singing. Half-remembered songs, new inventions. He's always had a good voice for it, though the military life has meant he never uses it for much aside from seduction. He thinks about when he first met the Doctor, and dancing with Rose and then the man himself. He'd looked into the Doctor's eyes and been humbled, and right then fallen a little bit in love. And then a lot in love.

He was used to desire. He sought desire, swore by it. Love was something else, and far more dangerous. Love changed him and made him sacrifice himself for others. Love brought him to this eternal prison.

Ten thousand years is one ten-billionth of a hundred trillion. A hundred trillion seconds is three million, a hundred and sixty-eight thousand, eight hundred seventy-six point four six years, and ten thousand seconds is two hours and forty-six point six minutes. He can't seem to make the numbers small enough, but the proportion should mean this will end in no time at all. Relatively. It only feels like forever.

He thinks it's been six years or so since they were captured. Six years is a hundred and eighty-nine million, three hundred and forty-one thousand, five hundred and fifty-six seconds. It's point-zero-zero-zero-six of ten thousand years. It's so infinitesimal compared to a trillion years that he refuses to calculate it.

The Valiant was a year, and then two years. He's been here for at least three, unless the light is lying, which is possible. It could be longer, shorter. He could have miscounted, lost track. He knows it doesn't matter. Keeping count is just something to do.

Chapter 3

When the television turns back on, Jack actually falls out of bed in shock. The sudden noise and light startle him badly, but in moments he's recovered, he's watching. He doesn't care what the Master wants to torment him with this time, it's *change*, blessed change.

It's definitely not sex this time, of any kind. It's the Doctor, and he's holding his baby in his arms and he's grinning wider than Jack's seen in either regeneration. He looks incredibly happy, content, like he's finally found his truest joy. The baby reaches out, and the Doctor shifts, offers a finger, and the baby's tiny fist wraps around it and holds on.

This is the other thing the Master has given the Doctor, that Jack never could. It took a mass-murdering psychopathic mad scientist to give the Doctor what he wanted.

The video stays on. It's hour after hour of the Doctor and his daughter, moving through the days with exquisite slowness. He thought the baby would be a hostage, and maybe she is, but Jack is fairly sure the Master has such a tight grip on the Doctor by now that he doesn't need something so impermanent as a hostage. He's in it for the long term, for whatever reason his insanity provides. Jack will never believe it's love, not from the Master's side.

No, she's not a hostage. He sees that, as she starts crawling, walking. She's the Doctor's family. The Doctor plays with her, holds her, comforts her. She smiles and laughs and cries and babbles, and the Doctor is so going to let her walk all over him because he's a puddle of happy Time Lord goo. It's as if the Doctor's love for the universe has been distilled and focused onto this little girl, and Jack can only dream of how powerful it must be to be on the receiving end of that love. He hopes she appreciates what she has. Children rarely do, until it's too late.

The video plays on and on, for months. He has years to catch up on, and the Master seems to have all of the Doctor's life on record. The house must be riddled with cameras, but the Doctor never realizes he's being watched, much less by who. He watches the Doctor sleep, and wakes to him feeding his daughter. There's audio, so he knows her first words, knows her name. Allia. It's a pretty name, for a pretty girl.

He rarely sees the Master in-frame. Probably busy doing something evil, Jack thinks. If he was with the Doctor, and they had a daughter, he would be at his side all the time, sharing these moments. He wouldn't leave the two of them alone for hours and hours every day.

She turns one, then two, then three, and four, and five. The video starts running blank in sections, and Jack realizes with shock that he's caught up. Real time. What he's seeing is what is happening, and just for a moment he feels like he could reach through the screen and touch the Doctor. He doesn't want to shake the sense back into him anymore. He just wants to hold him, and promise that everything will be all right.

As Allia grows up, the Doctor spends more time alone. Jack hopes it's because Allia is spending time with friends, but they've never had visitors. The truth sinks in when he sees

how Allia is changing. She's crueller, colder. She's not the Doctor's girl anymore. She's the Master's.

The Doctor is terribly sad as his little girl grows away from him and towards her other father. It's such a typical story, it's what human children do, but Jack can't help but fear it's far worse than that. Human children don't have the Master as their second parent.

She's not evil the way the Master is evil. She's arrogant, shows little sympathy for weakness, but she's not out torturing small animals. She fights with the Doctor the way human teenagers fight, with cruel words that hurt the Doctor badly. She talks about him being soft, being weak, because he doesn't want to rule or conquer or destroy. She wants all of these things.

But sometimes, afterwards, she goes to him and holds him and says she's sorry. She tells the Doctor that she loves him and didn't mean to hurt him. There's genuine affection there, the love of a child for a parent. But there's a broader society being formed off-camera, and every change in her reveals the ugly truth of it. It's the Master's world, and the Doctor is merely living in it.

The video changes. The Doctor ages far too slowly for Jack to be certain at first, but he thinks it's earlier. Allia doesn't show up, but the Master does. These are the missing sections, he realizes. Another part of the story.

Allia isn't the only one who's been corrupted. The Doctor has a lab, in their home, and when he's not doting on his child or being fucked by the Master, he goes there and designs weapons for him. He improves designs that will allow the Master to conquer the universe easier, faster. The Doctor rationalizes it all by insisting he only wants to lessen the bloodshed, but it's so obviously what the Master wants that the rationalization means nothing. The Master has made the Doctor willing to do these things, and so the Doctor does them.

Jack would despair entirely, except that he can see that the Doctor is bothered. No matter how many years pass, no matter how much he is corrupted, there's always that slight frown, that crease of his brow. His dimples show when he's angry or upset, the opposite of most people, and Jack holds on to the sight of them. Deep down there must be a hard place inside the Doctor that can't be broken, just like Jack has, and it's the first sign of real hope since this all began. Deep down, the Doctor is still fighting, even if it's too far down for anyone to see. Anyone except Jack. He knows who the Doctor really is, and he's probably the only one left who does.

The television is showing the present day again. Jack sees is the Master bringing home a second child, a loomed one because the Doctor wouldn't survive another twisted pregnancy. Still, the Doctor is more than delighted by the baby in his arms.

The video goes blank, and Jack waits for it to come back on. It doesn't, much to his disappointment. As difficult as it can be to watch, he needs to have it. Besides, after over a decade of constant watching, he doesn't know what to do with himself. He wonders what the Master will do next. He doesn't have long to wait.

He hasn't seen a living soul in person since he was brought here. When the Master enters, flanked by two burly Time Lords, some animal instinct drives him back into a corner. They grab him, and he hasn't been touched in so long that it's a shock to his system. He struggles, panicked, running off some primitive survival instinct.

They drag him out of the room, and that's worse. The hallway is too long. His eyes can't focus all the way to the end, to see what awaits him, because his cell is only ten feet long at its widest and he hasn't had to look past that for years. The room he's taken to is too big for him, and he struggles harder. He's strapped to a chair despite his best efforts, and he tries to swallow down his fear. It's not helpful. Not that anything would be helpful.

"Did you enjoy the show?" the Master asks. "I thought now would be a good time to mix things up a bit. It was about to go into reruns anyway."

Jack grips the arms of his chair, forcing himself to calm down. "Where am I?" he asks, not fighting the tremble in his voice. He hopes it will entice the Master into sharing.

It does. "My private dungeon," the Master says, pleased. "It's had a few guests since you moved in, but none of them have lasted as long as you. Though they did need rather more of my personal attention, if you know what I mean."

Oh, Jack knows. He suspects he's about to be reminded, just in case he forgot any details.

"That's what I wanted to talk to you about," the Master continues. "It's the same problem I had with Lucy, really. Lesser species are too fragile for the really interesting games."

"Red doesn't suit me," Jack says, finding some bravado.

"You what? Oh, oh!" The Master laughs. "Very funny. I like that. No, Jack, I already have the Doctor if I want to fuck someone over. You, on the other hand..." He grabs Jack by the chin. "I think you'll find that red is in fact your colour."

There's a sharp pain, and Jack looks down to find a thin spike protruding from his ribs. He gags, gasps as the damage sinks in. A dribble of red spreads out to stain his clothes.

"That's more like it," the Master says, approvingly. "You see, Jack, my mistake last time was letting you die. What I'm going to do from now on is keep you alive. That's going to be so much more fun. Oh, don't worry," he says, pointing at the metal spike impaling him on the torture chair. "I made sure it wouldn't hit anything vital."

"Go to hell," Jack rasps, voice tight with pain.

The Master looks hurt. "Aww. Don't be like that, Jack. We should be friends. We have so much in common. The Doctor, for example." He leans close. "I saw how much you enjoyed our little show. How many times did you come, thinking about the way he looked? His lips around my cock. His wrists bound. The way he writhes in pleasure when I fuck him."

Jack closes his eyes, bites his lip. The images immediately return, even though it's been years.

"This is an opportunity," the Master says. "You want to continue watching the Doctor's every move, and I want to torture you within an inch of your life and make sure you never cross the finish line."

"Are you serious?" Jack asks, wondering if the Master has become that much crazier since the Valiant.

"Perfectly," the Master says, looking deadly. "I do like it when my victims are cooperative. It's so much more... morally compromising."

"And if I don't agree?" Jack asks, because he has to.

The Master considers this. "So many options, it's hard to choose. I could kill the latest prog, and make the Doctor think it's his fault. I could torture the Doctor instead of you. Maybe I'm bored with playing happy families. Or I could just lock you up in a very dark, very secure box and bury you beneath the city for a millennia. You'd die of oxygen deprivation and thirst and starvation all at once! Would that be a record?"

"Persuasive argument," Jack says, feeling so very, very doomed.

The Master smiles. "I knew you'd come around. All I need you to do is try your very very hardest to stay alive. That's not so much to ask, is it? And in return, you'll get to watch."

It's not much of a choice, but at least this way he'll be able to keep an eye on the Doctor. Someday his moment will come, and he'll make all of this stop, but in the meantime he has to know. He can't stand it when he doesn't know what's being done to his friend. And he certainly can't let the Doctor suffer in his place. He's already going through enough.

"Oh, and one more thing," the Master says. "Every time you die and I have to start all over, I'm going to hurt the Doctor. I'll decide how when the time comes. So I hope your will to live is very strong."

Jack lasts a whole year before his body gives out. The Master isn't entirely displeased, but rules are rules. When Jack is returned to his cell, freshly alive and whole, he watches in horror as the Doctor falls to his knees in pain. The Master kindly helps him to the lab, and gives him shots that make him ill for days. The Doctor is so grateful for the Master's loving care.

"God," Jack chokes, closing his eyes. It's so unbelievably twisted that he can't believe it. And the Master has so easily made him a part of it, a party to it. He vows to hold out longer. When the Master is torturing Jack, he doesn't torture the Doctor. He still fucks him, though. Still rapes his mind, sparing a smile for the camera. That's not torture, by the Master's definition. That's just taking what's rightfully his. Besides, the Doctor loves it, begs for it. He can't get enough of his Master. It would be cruel to deny him.

As long as Jack lives to suffer, the medical torture stops. That's something. It's better than nothing. It has to be enough.

For a long time, their arrangement works. Jack finds the strength to survive for years at a stretch, despite broken bones, electrocution, internal bleeding, and the Master's extensive tool chest. He's blind for three years after his eyes are gouged out, but he can still hear that the Doctor is all right. He lets himself be crippled over and over.

When he fails, gives in to death, the punishment for the Doctor is always harsh. The Doctor thinks his body is simply weak, worn out from carrying Allia. For a change, Jack is actually glad he doesn't know the truth.

Allia, meanwhile, has grown up and left home. Briam, the second, is about to follow her. The Master brings home a fresh loom-baby, and the Doctor names him Kerin. The Doctor loves him just as much as he loves Briam, though not as much as Allia. He doesn't love anyone as much as he loves Allia, not even the Master. Kerin is a happy child, but there's a friction between them even from the start.

It's around this time that things start to go wrong.

The Master tries out a new poison, right after Jack has revived, and it's too much. Jack dies in agony mere hours in, and the Master is very displeased. The consequence is watching the Doctor be cut open for the first time in decades, and a fresh set of toxic implants put inside him. The Doctor's health worsens drastically, and even the Master's shots aren't enough to make him feel whole. Kerin watches the Doctor's weakness, and learns to hate his father.

It's all the Master's fault, but Jack still feels responsible.

Maybe Jack is tiring of this game. Maybe the Master is growing bored again. Either way, the frequency of Jack's deaths increases, and so does the Doctor's illness.

"I feel like such a failure," the Doctor tells the Master one night, in confidence, as Jack watches them in bed together.

"Why do you say that?" the Master asks.

"Kerin," the Doctor sighs. "I wish..."

"Yes?" the Master prompts.

"I'm tired of being ill," the Doctor says, wearily. "I wish you could do more to help."

"I don't want to overmedicate," the Master says, so reasonably. "There's only so much I can do." He places his hand over the Doctor's stomach. "You pushed yourself too hard for Allia."

"I'd do it again," the Doctor says, certain. "She was worth every minute."

"I'm glad," says the Master, smiling. "You know, there is one way."

"What?" the Doctor says, then realizes. "Ah. That."

"If you let me kill you," the Master says, sweetly, "I can control the regeneration. Make it all better."

Jack freezes in horror. If the Doctor agrees to that, there's no telling how the Master could twist him. Whatever is left of the Doctor's self would certainly be obliterated.

The Doctor actually considers the offer. He considers it for a long time, then reluctantly shakes his head. "I don't want to lose any time I don't have to."

Jack breathes out. "Thank god," he whispers.

Around the time Kerin leaves for the Academy, the Master ends the game.

"As much fun as it's been, I do have a universe to run," he says, regretfully. "Together you two are taking up far too much of my time."

"What a shame," Jack says, dripping with sarcasm.

"Now, now, don't be like that," the Master says. "We've had such a good time. Don't worry, I'm not going away entirely. I couldn't abandon my two favourite toys."

Jack's starting to lose hope that he'll ever get out of here. The prison is just too secure. He has, at least, figured out where he is. The bottom of the Great Tower, at the heart of the main city of New Gallifrey. The Master's office is at the top of the Tower, so he has a short commute between work and play.

His television isn't turned off, so he can still watch the Doctor. He's healthier now, much to Jack's relief, but with all the children gone and the Master spending so much time away, he's increasingly lonely. Jack knows how he feels. At least the Doctor has things to keep himself busy, his hobbies and his mostly-evil work.

When the Master visits Jack these days, it's not about taking his time. It's about brutality. Every time Jack thinks he's too jaded about torture and pain to be affected by it, he wakes up in his cell shaken by what's been done to him. His nightmares worsen, and the only plus side is that he's glad he doesn't sleep much anymore.

He tries not to hate Rose for making this possible. She wanted him to live. That's very noble, very loving. It's just that all he does anymore is suffer and die, over and over and over again, and even if his body is miraculously restored at the end of every session, he's not sure his mind can take it. And the most horrible thing of all is that there is absolutely no escape from this. He'd waited over a century in the hopes that the Doctor could make him mortal again, to no avail. He'll live forever, no matter how damaged his psyche becomes. If he's ever truly driven insane, he could become someone terrible. It's not a comforting thought, and it haunts him, when he's not being haunted by memories of what comes before the moments of death.

He stops struggling for life, and stops talking during the Master's visits. It's all the same no matter what he does, so he'd rather not bother about it. It makes the Master angry, because the Master wants Jack to fight and argue with him, to keep things interesting. Jack doesn't want to be interesting.

The Master takes his anger out in chunks of flesh and gallons of blood and endless amounts of suffering.

One day, he has new visitors, and they take him away from his television and put him in a new room. At first the only thing he can think about is that he needs to see the Doctor and they should put him back. The Doctor is the only thing Jack has left, even though he doesn't even really have him at all.

Slowly, he realizes what's happened. He's been rescued. After ninety years of imprisonment and torture, it takes him time to adjust to freedom.

They bring him outside. The natural light makes his eyes hurt, and the sky is too high and there's no walls at all. It takes three of them to get him back inside and calm him down. Afterwards, he realizes he's on another planet, because the sky was pink.

"Are you with us now, Jack?"

"I think so," Jack says. He looks around, taking in where he is, who he's with. "You're rebels?" he guesses.

"That's right," says a woman. Her skin is green. "My name is Gauli."

"Nice to meet you, Gauli," Jack says, trying to find his old charm. He used to be charming, and he's sure he can remember how.

"We were worried we'd waited too long," Gauli says. "We've known about you for decades, but it took a long time to reach you. The only place more guarded in the whole Empire is the Eye of Harmony."

"I'll take that as a compliment," Jack says. When he smiles, it feels strange, like the muscles aren't sure what to do. He can't remember the last time he smiled, genuinely smiled.

"A man who can never die is a powerful enemy," she says, looking at him like he's terribly important. "A powerful ally against the Time Lords."

A cold certainty rises within him. "Just tell me how I can help."

Gauli smiles. "The first thing we need you to do is get better. We have a lot of work to do."

"You've got a deal," Jack says, and when he smiles back it doesn't feel so odd.

He's surprised at how quickly he recovers. It seems that all he needed was hope.

The rebels are part of a loose network; all across the Time Lord Empire there are packets of resistance. Groups of people who don't accept their fate, who fight back by destroying the infrastructure of domination that has a stranglehold on their worlds. The problem is, they're not powerful enough to be more than a nuisance. The Master is still using the Archangel network, but it's become incredibly advanced, and it's everywhere.

"We've tried to find what makes us able to resist it," says Tirrop, who has compound eyes and a chittering buzz to his voice. "But it seems to be completely random. It's always about one percent of the population."

"But what you really need is a whole planet that's free of influence," Jack says, understanding. They can't achieve any kind of critical mass of support, so the Master's fleet simply isolates a group and picks them off.

He thinks about the Doctor's frown, and wonders if the one percent resistance was on purpose. It's possible, though there's no way to tell. It's the kind of thing that the Doctor might subconsciously do when forced to build a universal mind control, and it's subtle enough that the Master would accept it as a technical limitation. Whether or not it's true, Jack decides it's what he believes. He still believes in the Doctor, even if the man himself is in a far worse state than he ever was.

"If you really want to win this, we need the Doctor," Jack says.

Everyone looks at him as if he's insane. "You are joking, right?"

"He's not evil. The Master's controlling him, using their children." It's not strictly true, but it's easier to explain. "If we get him out, he can help us."

"Not a chance," Gauli says. "Do you know who controls this sector?"

Jack shakes his head. They hand him a vidsheet. A grown-up Allia looks back at him, and next to her picture is a list of her crimes.

"My god," Jack says, shocked. He touches her face. She used to be kind, and such a sweet child.

"She personally led the slaughter of Chilchin," Gauli says, somberly. "And her brother's just as bad, but thankfully he's nowhere near us. The Master's family are the worst of the lot."

"Not the Doctor," Jack says, needing to defend him.

"It's his weapons that they use to kill us," says Ulter. "You can't seriously expect us to believe he'd help us."

Jack can't believe what he's hearing. "The Doctor isn't evil," he insists. "He needs our help. If we can get him away from the Master, I can reach him. He doesn't know what he's doing."

"But he's doing it anyway," Gauli says. "Even if you're right, it's too risky. We can't afford to go back to New Gallifrey so soon, not without losing our contact. We've already put him at risk by rescuing you. If we took the Doctor, the Master would retaliate by annihilating anyone remotely responsible. He'd make whole galaxies burn. He's done it before."

"All right, all right," Jack says, holding up his hands. He doesn't need a clearer picture.

"I'm sorry, Jack," Gauli says, sparing him some sympathy. "We can't save him."

The Daleks contact them. Jack thinks the universe gets stranger every day.

"We have a common enemy," the metallic voice screeches. "You will obey! You will help us exterminate the Time Lords!"

"I've dealt with these guys before," Jack tells Gauli. "Even if we do what they want, they'll just kill us afterwards. They're worse than the Master."

"Nobody's worse than the Master," Gauli says. "We need all the help we can get. Once the Empire is defeated, we can deal with the Daleks."

"That's just it. You can't deal with them. The Master wants to rule, and destroy some planets on the side. The Daleks want to exterminate anything that isn't a Dalek."

"Daleks didn't kill my family," Gauli says, letting her anger show for once. She hides it again just as quickly. "I learned a long time ago that we need to take every advantage we can if we want any hope of winning. That's why we took the risk and broke you out."

"It's your resistance," Jack says. Even if it does horribly go wrong, he'll always survive to fight another day. "But don't say I didn't warn you."

They meet at a secure location. Jack feels a chill just looking at a Dalek again. They were his first death, the one that made him what he is. It was because of them that he lost the Doctor and Rose and became stuck in Earth's past. Their eyestalks move back and forth, and he wonders if they know that he's an impossible, wrong thing. They don't seem to recognize him, but he hasn't exactly been a public figure.

Gauli handles the negotiations. "We'll agree to help, but on our terms. We want weapons and ships."

"We will provide them," the lead Dalek says. "You will help us. The Master must be exterminated! The Time Lords must fall!"

"They'll fall," Gauli promises. There's a cold light of revenge in her eyes that worries Jack. Revenge makes people do stupid things. "But we want assurance that you'll protect the following sectors." She transfers a list to the Daleks. There's a long pause as they confer with their central command.

"This is acceptable," the Dalek says. "Weapons will come first. We must prepare the ships."

Both sides walk away satisfied, except for Jack. He doesn't like any of this. Strange bedfellows, yes, but he's certain the moment it's convenient, the Daleks will turn on them. Still, when the first weapons shipment arrives, he claims a handheld death ray for himself. It's just like the one that killed him, and he does appreciate the irony.

It's not that hard to kill a Time Lord. The problem is that they don't stay dead. Dalek guns are one of the only definite ways to ensure permanent death, aside from blowing them to bits or incinerating them or a few other extreme options. The gun is clean and quick, and doesn't need batteries or ammunition. Jack won't need to stop to reload.

Chapter 4

"We're attracting attention," Ulter says, bringing in the latest reports.

"Good," says Gauli. "That's what we want."

They're working on a way to get Jack back into New Gallifrey, but this time with a new mission. The current plan is to kill the Master and then destroy the Archangel network from his central control. It's going to mean a messy, drawn-out war, but at least people will be dying for their freedom instead of the Master's amusement.

Jack has a better idea.

"Have you ever heard of a paradox machine?" he asks.

Tirrop's replacement, a shiny-skinned male named Ekk, looks at him in shock. "You mean it's real?"

"Of course it's real," Jack says. He hadn't forgotten about it, but it's been so long and he has no idea what's become of it. "There's a better way to end this. If we can find the paradox machine, break the paradox, everything that's happened since the Master took power will be undone. No Empire, no dead galaxies, no New Gallifrey."

"I always thought it was a myth. Do you know where it is?" Ekk asks.

Jack shakes his head. "The last time I saw it, it was on the Valiant, but I don't think that ship even exists anymore. I don't know what happened to it after I was moved to the Great Tower."

"Someone will know," Ekk says, excited.

"It's in a blue box," Jack says. "It's a ship called the TARDIS. Looks like... well, it's about this big." He gestures with his hands. "Says 'police box' on it."

The description is passed around in whispers through the rebel underground. It takes months, but someone has the answer. It's almost too good to be true.

"It's under the Tower," Ulter says, reading the message. "You'll never believe it, Jack, but you were right on top of it all that time."

Jack laughs. It's just the kind of thing he expects these days. "Can we get back there?"

"We were going to send you to the Tower anyway," Gauli says. "You just have to get into the vault instead of the Master's penthouse." Restoring the universe is even better than revenge, and even Gauli is hopeful again.

It's a year before they have a way in to New Gallifrey, and there's good news and bad news.

"You'll never believe this. They're going to take the paradox machine out of the vault," says Ulter.

"You're kidding," Jack says. They've been trying to figure out how to deal with the security for months, and now it just solved itself. "What's the catch?"

"It's only for a week, and then the paradox is going to be moved."

"They can move a paradox?" Ekk asks, stunned.

"Apparently," says Ulter, shrugging. "The thing is, if we don't reach it in time, that's it. The paradox is going to be connected to the Eye of Harmony, and we'll never be able to get to it. The only option will be to blow up New Gallifrey, and that'd be bad news for you, Jack."

"Why's that?" he asks, getting a bad feeling.

"There's a proximity factor, when a paradox is broken," Ulter explains. "If we break the paradox that way, Earth will come back with a great big hole in it. The planet would probably collapse, and if it didn't the gravity change would alter its orbit drastically."

"That's not an option," Jack says, firmly.

"Then we have to get you into that TARDIS," Ekk says.

They have six months left. They push harder, faster, and at the same time they have to keep up the distractions. If the Master finds out even a hint of their plans, it's all over.

Two months to go, and they catch a real break.

"It's a key to the blue box," Gauli says. "You said it's impossible to break into, so I asked around." She pulls the key out of her pocket and holds it out. "Some collector had it on Yarlta and thought it was a fake."

Jack takes it with reverence, remembering when the Doctor had given it to him. He turns it around, and the other side has the perception filter on it. He can't believe his eyes. "Breaking in just got a hell of a lot easier," he says, and there's a great big grin on his face.

One month to go, and he's leaving tomorrow. They need to transfer him carefully, hiding him in ships and on stations all the way to New Gallifrey. The perception filter will help, but this is too big and too vitally important for any unnecessary risks. The Master has seen through the perception filter once, a hundred years ago. He wonders if the Doctor's plan would have worked, back then, if they'd been able to pull it off.

When he's in position, the Daleks are going to blow up a planet. Jack doesn't like it, especially because it's going to be an inhabited world, but as long as he pulls this off it will all be undone. He can live with that.

It's also a trap for Allia and her squadron.

She's been their biggest problem. Too frequently one step ahead, too fast and deadly an opponent. She's killed more rebels than he can count, even just in the past ten years since his rescue. It saddens him that the Doctor's daughter is such a monster, and he wonders if the Doctor has any idea. Probably not. The Master never let him see what was really going on, not the true horror of it. He probably knows that even his utter control over the Doctor has its limits.

If the Doctor isn't anywhere near the TARDIS when he breaks the paradox, the damage the Master has done to him will be reversed along with everything else. He'll be an old man on the deck of the Valiant, but that can be taken care of once they bring down the Master in the original timeline. Jack has to win twice if he wants to win at all.

The Doctor won't remember his daughter. He won't have the memory of holding her in his arms, playing with her. It's a sacrifice that's worth making.

They've put the word out that the rebels are planning to take out the solar collectors around Rho-4. Allia's death will surely send the Master into a rage, and that will serve as the perfect distraction. And that's a sacrifice Jack can live with, too.

He's never seen New Gallifrey's city until now. He spent ninety years buried at its heart, but he never saw it. It's truly impressive, sleek and shining, and if this is anything like the old Gallifrey, it's no wonder the Doctor misses it so much. But it's built on the ashes of Earth, and it has to go.

The only problem they haven't been able to solve so far is the proximity factor. There's going to be a chunk of Earth that stays the same, with the TARDIS at its centre. The last time he saw the TARDIS, there was no way it could fly, and there's no way they could get it off the planet without being caught. He's not sure where the city is in relation to Earth's layout; he hopes it's where an ocean used to be, but with his luck it's probably the middle of New York or London.

He sticks to the shadows, keeps quiet. The perception filter helps, and no one seems to notice he's even there.

When he reaches the room where the TARDIS has been moved, he readies the gas cylinders and puts on his mask. It's not deadly, but it's potent. He'd prefer to not have to make this a massacre. There's guards all around the ship, which is to be expected.

He's waiting in the shadows when the Doctor arrives. He's so shocked he almost calls out to him, but stops himself. Then he curses under his breath, because if the Doctor's here it means he won't be far enough away to be caught in the reversal, and that means this all just got a lot more complicated.

One of the guards turns around, and it's Allia. Jack's heart sinks.

They go into the TARDIS together, and close the door behind them. What Jack needs is the right opening, so he can knock out as many people as possible at once. He can't afford a big

gunfight when the Doctor could get hit. His luck finally returns when they run a thick cable inside the ship, and it holds the door open.

He quietly rolls the small cylinders into the room and waits.

The guards collapse quickly. Jack waits for the gas to fill the console room, and it doesn't take long. The scientists who had been working on the paradox machine begin to trickle out, coughing and staggering. Jack picks them off one by one; he can't let anyone get away to call for help. He's on borrowed time as it is.

He curses when Allia appears in the doorway and shoots at him. He narrowly misses her blasts, and he hates this but he doesn't have a choice. He shoots, misses, shoots again, and she falls. The Doctor's cry of anguish is terrible.

He hurries into the ship, and as he steps over Allia's corpse, he sees the Doctor crawling towards him, crying and reaching for his daughter.

"Doctor," Jack says, pained with sympathy.

The Doctor passes out, and Jack doesn't have time to worry. He hauls Allia out of the way, dumping her among the unconscious soldiers, and then does the same with the scientists. He gets another nasty surprise when he recognizes Kerin, and of course it would have to be the son that hates the Doctor that's going to be close enough to survive.

It's only once the doors are closed and the Doctor is safely inside that Jack realizes. The TARDIS isn't red anymore, and the console is restored. If she can fly, it won't solve everything, but it's so worth a try.

He has a choice: dump the Doctor outside the ship with the rest, or bring him along. He doesn't have long to decide, and he doesn't even know if the ship can take off. If it can't, he needs to keep the Doctor with him. There's no guarantee that they can restore the Doctor to normal in either timeline, and he guesses that once they go back, the Master's control will be broken. He's waited to see him for so long, Jack can't bring himself to let go of him now. He makes the call.

The console is responding, and the time rotor shudders into action. He brings them into the Vortex. The universe is depending on him to save it, and he's damn well going to do it right.

Goodbye New Gallifrey, Hello Earth. Jack can't wait to be home.

Jack's just finished breaking the secondary paradox machine when the Doctor wakes up screaming. He goes over to the Doctor, ready to help, but he's taken aback by the rage that's directed at him.

"You killed her!" the Doctor growls. "You killed my daughter, you bastard!"

Guilt make Jack flinch and turn away, and in his moment of distraction the Doctor grabs the Dalek gun and shoots him.

When he wakes up, the Doctor shoots him again.

He wakes up, the Doctor shoots him.

He wakes up, the Doctor shoots him.

This goes on for a bit. Jack can't seem to stay alive long enough to get a word out. Finally, he wakes up tied to a coral strut. "Don't shoot!" he says, quickly. "Doctor, please don't shoot."

"Who are you?" the Doctor asks.

Jack knew the Doctor had forgotten him, but he'd hoped that his memory would come back when the paradox broke. So much for luck. "The Master made you forget. I'm Jack. Jack Harkness. I used to be your friend."

The Doctor laughs at him, manic and grief-stricken. "Friend? You murdered my daughter! You've destroyed everything. Everything!"

"I did what I had to do," Jack says, certain of that. But now he thinks he's made the worst mistake of all. He should have left the Doctor on New Gallifrey. "I'm sorry about your daughter. I didn't know she'd be here." He doesn't explain that he expected her to have died days before, in a trap he helped create.

"Are we dead, Jack?" the Doctor asks. His eyes are red, and Jack realizes with a start that his hands are, too. He's bleeding all over the gun. "Is that why I can't kill you? Because I'd really like you to die."

It shouldn't hurt so much to hear him say that, but it does. Jack's only consolation is that the Doctor has no idea who he is. He doesn't even remember what he is. "We're not dead. It's a long story, but I can't be killed. Ever. You used to know that. You said I was wrong."

"Oh, you are. You are so very, very wrong," the Doctor says, then he seems to actually look at Jack for the first time. He shudders and takes a step back. "What are you?" he asks, clearly disturbed.

"Impossible," Jack says. "I'm impossible. A fixed point."

The Doctor shakes his head in disbelief and stumbles away. He falls against the console, then to the floor, and begins to sob with grief. Jack thinks he's finally going to let it all out and calm down, but then he turns on Jack and points the gun at him again.

Then he points the gun at himself. Jack's eyes widen.

"Don't!" Jack yells, desperate not to let this happen. He struggles against the ropes, he knows he can get out of them, but he doesn't have enough time. "Please don't, please, I'm begging you, Doctor, please."

"Why not?" the Doctor asks, hollowly. "There's nothing left."

"There's Earth. Do you remember Earth? There's your ship, your beautiful ship. There's your friends."

"I don't have any friends," the Doctor says, and Jack's heart breaks for him again. How much has the Master taken from him? It's worse than he'd imagined. "You just erased everyone who ever mattered to me."

"You do," Jack insists. "You've just forgotten. You have to remember, please. There's people who love you, who need your help. The Master has them captive." He and the Doctor may have disappeared from that timeline, but Martha is still there, along with her family. The Master just assassinated the President of the United States of America. The three Toclafane that the Master brought back to Earth with him are there.

The Doctor lowers the gun, much to Jack's relief, but he doesn't ask about Martha, either. "The Master's alive?"

The Master probably made him forget her, too. How much was erased? Can it even be recovered? It's too late to undo his mistake. Jack let his need get in the way, and he's rescued the wrong Doctor.

"The Valiant," Jack prompts. "You remember the Valiant?"

"Yes," the Doctor says, slowly, like he's trying to remember. He rubs his head like it hurts. It probably does. "I have to go to him."

"Doctor, please listen to me," Jack says. "Martha and her family. We have to save them."

The Doctor starts muttering to himself as he sets the console. The ship rocks, and they land. The Doctor hurries out, leaving Jack alone in the ship. He immediately works to loosen the rope and free himself. He can see that they're on the Valiant, but that's all.

He gets free, and picks up the gun. He has to wipe the Doctor's blood from the handle. He walks over to the door, and carefully looks out. It's a packed room, just as it was a hundred years ago. The Doctor is at the foot of the stairs, pleading with the Master. Martha is looking confused and angry, and Jack can't blame her. She's expecting a different Doctor.

When the Doctor forces the Master to look into his head, Jack's really hating himself, but he also knows an opportunity when he sees one. He waits until the Master closes his eyes, and takes out the Toclafane with three quick shots. Dalek guns are just as effective on them as they are on Time Lords. He runs over to the Master, scoops the TARDIS key from around his neck, and puts it on around the Master's.

There's instant pandemonium as the Master's hypnotic trance breaks. It looks like the Doctor's plan would have worked after all. Jack's not taking any chances, though. He pulls the Doctor to the floor and points the gun at the Master, who stares back in shock. It's not the same man, but it is, and he's so ready for him to be exterminated from the universe.

When the Doctor springs back up and wrests the gun from his hand, Jack reminds himself that he really needs to stop letting his guard down around him. The Doctor shoots him.

He wakes up, and the Master is being hauled into the elevator by military police. The Doctor is a sobbing, broken heap on the floor, and Martha is trying to comfort him.

It's not the victory he was hoping for, but it will have to do.

It's only now that the extent of the damage is becoming apparent. He wishes he'd paid more attention to the whole mind-raping business, because it's far worse than the grief. The Doctor can barely remember anyone from the original timeline, apart from the Master. There's whole gaps of time he doesn't recall. Even apart from the terrible sadness that hangs over him, he's broken in ways that Jack can't begin to know how to fix.

The worst part of it is, the Doctor hates him, based on the little he knows. To the Doctor, Jack is some madman who defies the laws of nature and killed his family, and that's all.

Thanks to Torchwood, Jack knows more about the Doctor's past than the Doctor does himself. He has Ianto print out photos from the archive, and they track down a few people. Sarah Jane Smith has even met this regeneration, and he goes to see her.

"He's been hurt?" she says, concerned.

"It's bad," Jack tells her. "Really, really bad." He explains about the Master, about the hundred years. He skims or fails to mention the real nightmare material. It's better if she doesn't know.

"The Master seems to have wiped his memories, but he's able to remember enough that we think they're still in there somewhere. We just don't know how to help him get to them."

"I see," Sarah says, looking serious. She has the companion expression, as Jack thinks of it. That determination to make the world better. He used to have it himself, and if he can ever make up for his mistake, maybe he will again. "I'd like to help, if I can."

"Thank you," he tells her, genuinely grateful. He needs all the help he can get with this.

They're keeping the Doctor in the TARDIS, in a comfortable room with a lock. The TARDIS seems to realize that the Doctor needs to be kept safe, for his own good, and Jack appreciates that. Sarah Jane hesitates at the threshold, and takes a deep breath before walking into the console room. The paradox machines have been removed, so everything looks normal.

Martha is sitting with the Doctor, as usual. He sits up when Sarah enters, and looks at her for a long moment before recognition kicks in.

"Hello, Doctor," she says, sitting down next to him. "Jack's asked me to come see you. To help."

"This is Martha," the Doctor says. There's no spark in his eyes, and Jack doesn't know if it's simply buried or if it's been destroyed. "Martha, this is Sarah Jane. Hello, Sarah Jane." He smiles, but it's a haunted, ghostly smile.

"Oh, Doctor," Sarah gasps, and she pulls him into her arms. The Doctor hugs her back, cautiously at first, like he's not sure they're close enough for that.

Martha and Jack leave them alone to talk.

"What do you think?" he asks her.

"I don't know. It might help." Martha shrugs. "It's like when he was John Smith. He's trying to remember, but it's just not coming to him. It was so much easier when he was stuck in a watch."

"Do you still have it?" Jack asks. "Maybe there's some kind of backup copy, we can overwrite him?"

"I don't think it works that way," Martha says. "After he opened it, it was just a watch."

"Maybe the TARDIS has a backup copy? We could use the chameleon arch and bring him back the way he was then."

"I suppose we can look," Martha says. "It wouldn't feel right, though, doing that to him. It'd be erasing part of his life, just like the Master."

"No one's just like the Master," Jack says, deadly serious. He sighs. "If it's not there it won't matter, but if it is we need to at least consider it. A Doctor who's forgotten a few things is better than what we have now."

The TARDIS translates out of Gallifreyan for them and into English, but they can't find a backup copy of the Doctor's mind anywhere in her system.

"Damn," Jack says, leaning against the console.

"You don't really think he can't be fixed, do you?" Martha asks, concerned.

"I don't know. It's so much worse than I thought." If he'd only known, if he'd taken five minutes and really thought about it, he would have let the Doctor revert with the timestream. He had a hundred years of watching the Doctor being damaged and he'd never really faced what that meant. This is entirely his fault, and he hates himself for it.

"Come on," Martha says, her hand on his arm. "Let's see how they're doing."

They're not doing well. Sarah keeps prompting the Doctor with their shared history, and he's trying to remember, he's trying so hard, but all he has are fragments, bits and pieces. He can't even pull up a coherent narrative.

"I'm sorry," he says, looking tired and strained. "I wish I could remember."

"It's all right," Sarah tells him. "I know you're trying. It's not your fault, okay?"

The Doctor nods miserably, and Sarah gives him another hug. She looks like she's about to cry, but she holds it together.

Jack realizes this isn't helping. "Sarah has to go now, Doctor," he says, gently.

Martha stays with him, and Jack takes Sarah back to the console room. She does cry a bit, then, and wipes the tears away.

"I've never seen him like this. So... shattered." She sniffs. "He's always been so strong."

"I know," Jack says. "We're doing everything we can. It's just out of our league." He rubs the back of his neck, frustrated by the consequences of one bad decision.

"You brought back the universe," Sarah says, giving him a comforting smile. "Saved trillions of people from the Master. That's something. Speaking for myself, I'm glad you did it."

Her words put a shiver down Jack's spine, and he's sure he heard Allia say them, or something similar, when the Doctor would tell her about giving up his old life for her.

"What's wrong?" Sarah asks.

"Just remembering something," Jack says. "Sometimes I wish I was the one who couldn't remember." He shakes it off. "Come on, I'll drive you home."

On the way back, Sarah says, "You should talk to the Brigadier."

"It's not going to help," Jack says. "No one's been able to trigger a real, solid memory."

"Not for the Doctor," she says. "For you. You need to talk to someone. If anyone understands, it's Alistair. He won't even mind that you work for Torchwood."

"You're not supposed to know that," Jack says.

Sarah laughs. "Jack, Torchwood is even less of a secret than UNIT, and UNIT is actually supposed to be a public organization. Maybe before Canary Wharf, yes, but the cat's well out of the bag."

Jack makes a face, but he can't really argue with that. It doesn't help that his team are awfully loose-lipped at times.

"Really, you need to go see him. I've seen that look before, and if you don't deal with it you're going to end up dead."

That's so hilarious that Jack has to pull over until he stops laughing. "I can't--" He gasps for breath. "I can't die." The humour turns sour, and he wants to cry, but he's even better than Sarah at holding himself together. He has to be.

"Oh," she says, then gets that companion look again. "Then you're going to end up taking other people with you. And I can tell you're the kind of person who wouldn't want that."

"I've already destroyed one person," Jack says.

"He's not destroyed. I know he's not." She looks so certain, he wants to believe her.

"I don't know how to reach him," he says, letting his exhaustion show, just for a moment, because Sarah understands, and she's not a part of this. He doesn't need to be strong for her.

"He's not going anywhere. And neither are you, apparently. You'll think of something."

"I hope you're right," he says, and drives her the rest of the way home.

Chapter 5

A week later, he's never been so glad to go back to Cardiff. Martha is Doctor-sitting while he looks through the vaults for something to help. He rebuilt Torchwood in the Doctor's honour, and now he hopes it can help the man who inspired it.

Ianto's already been researching, along with Gwen and Tosh. Owen is off doing Owen-things, which is just as well. His medical skills are of no use in this situation, and all he'd do is make sarcastic remarks. Jack is reminded of his years watching Kerin, and shudders. Fortunately Owen isn't evil, just annoying.

He really wishes everyone would stop reminding him of people who don't exist anymore. It makes him feel like the universe is tapping him on the shoulder.

"Find anything?" he asks.

"Not unless you want to melt his brain instead of fix it," Ianto sighs.

Jack sits down at the table with them. "How can we have so much junk and nothing that's actually useful?"

"This is rather specialized, Jack," Tosh says, the voice of reason. "We have some tech that can read minds, and some tech for healing, but we don't have anything to heal minds. We're not even sure what that would entail."

"It's all about his memories," Jack says, with restrained frustration. "His head would work just fine if he could remember the first thousand years of his life."

"Oh, is that all," Tosh says, then bites her lip. "Sorry, Jack. It's been a bit of a shock."

"I had my reasons," Jack says. His team was less than pleased when he finally told them the truth about his past. They'll get over it, but in the meantime they're peeved at him for lying. They wouldn't refuse to help the Doctor because of that, though.

"Memories, memories," Gwen murmurs, looking over the inventory again. "Hmm. There's a memory recorder, but if he can't remember it in the first place it won't help."

"This one lets you record and play back someone else's dreams," Ianto says, finding another. "Perhaps if you feed it what you remember, and anyone else who's met him, he could use those memories instead?"

"Maybe if it was just a short period of time, but he's eleven hundred years old," Jack says, shaking his head. "I can't Frankenstein his brain."

"From what you've said, it's already in pieces," Ianto says, blunting the hard truth with sympathy. If anyone can sympathize, it's Ianto. At least the Doctor isn't trying to take over the Hub and restart the Cyber-race.

"Then we'll glue him back together," Jack says, determined. "I can't leave him like this."

"We're not asking you to," Gwen says, in her police-trained stay-calm voice. "Look, let us handle this. Go take a break."

He looks at his team, and his team look back at him. "All right," he agrees, leaving them to it. "I'll just be..." he waves vaguely in the direction of his office.

There's a piece of TARDIS coral on his desk. He turns it in his hands; it helps him think. He hates the futility of all of this. Hates thinking that it might not be possible to put the Doctor back together. He's certain the Doctor wasn't this badly off before they came back. Maybe it was like yanking the Master out of his head by the roots.

He wants his own paradox machine, so he can go back in time and stop himself from taking the Doctor with him into the Vortex. Too bad he already had the broken ones melted down into slag.

He falls asleep in his chair, finally succumbing to exhaustion. He dreams that he was the one on the lab table being sliced open, and wakes with a terrified shout. His hands are empty, and for a moment he's afraid he dropped the coral and broke that too, but it's back on the desk. Ianto is sitting across from him, looking concerned.

Ianto doesn't ask what he was dreaming, bless him. He hands him a sheet of paper. "This is the closest we could find. It stimulates neural growth, repairs brain damage."

"Thanks," Jack says, taking it and staring at the page. He's not really seeing it. The Master never used a scalpel on him, for some reason. Maybe the instrument was too associated with the Doctor to use on a freak like him. He forces himself to look at the description. "This might work," he says, though he's skeptical. "Tell everybody thanks for me." He's trying to be more considerate. He's had enough of anger and coldness.

Ianto nods, and leaves Jack in peace.

He shows the device to Martha. It doesn't have an official name, just a catalogue number, so they call it a neural regenerator. She peers at it curiously.

"Do you think Time Lord brains work like human brains?" she asks, ever the almost-doctor. She's taken time off from her job until this is resolved, one way or another. Family emergency.

"I'm not even sure his brain is damaged," Jack admits. "All I know is that the Master would touch his face and enter his mind."

"I suppose it's worth a shot," she says, trying to look hopeful.

They wake the Doctor up. He sleeps a lot more these days, and Jack thinks it's because his body is trying to repair itself. Time Lord healing is impressive even beyond regeneration, but a hundred years of torture is hard to recover from. Jack's lucky that he can never be

physically damaged for long, and is fairly sure that's why his mind always rebounds so well. His brain chemistry is never permanently out of balance.

The Doctor rubs his eyes, and gives that tiny flinch he always gives when he sees Jack. He covers it well, at least. The Doctor hasn't exactly warmed to him, but at least there's no more shouting and angry glares.

"We think we've found something to help," Martha says, showing him the neural regenerator. "We're going to try to make you remember something, and then turn it on."

"Might as well," the Doctor says. "Do your worst." He gives Martha a smile to let her know he's only joking. He still has a sense of humour; that's something. The truth is his personality seems largely intact for someone who can't remember most of his life. He's grieving deeply, and his priorities aren't on straight, but that hard core of Doctorness did survive. It gives Jack hope when nothing else does.

They have him lie back down, and Jack sits next to him, ready to hold him down if need be. Martha sits near his head, and attaches the regenerator to his temples.

"Let's start with something easy. How about something with Sarah Jane?" Martha suggests. The Doctor remembers her, if not anything coherent about their adventures.

The Doctor's eyes close, and his brow furrows. Martha turns on the device, and slowly ramps it up.

"Let us know if anything feels wrong," Jack says, bracing himself.

"Just think about Sarah Jane," Martha says, soothingly. "She said you regenerated in a UNIT lab, once. Just collapsed at their feet and scared the life out of them."

"UNIT," the Doctor murmurs, a look of intense concentration on his face. "Turn it up," he says.

Martha exchanges a look with Jack, and turns the machine up a notch, and then another.

"Anything?" Jack asks.

"Something, just--" the Doctor grits his teeth. "Something's in the way. I can't--" He grunts from the effort, then convulses in pain and cries out.

"Turn it off!" Jack says, sharply, and Martha quickly does so. She removes the device and sets it aside.

The Doctor is breathing hard, and he holds his hands to his head. "Hurts," he mutters, his voice tight. "I can almost reach it but I can't. I'm sorry."

"It's all right," Martha says, exchanging concerned looks with Jack. "Just rest, okay?"

They stay with him until he drifts back to sleep, then quietly leave the room.

"So much for that," Martha says, handing the regenerator back to him.

"At least we know the memory's there," Jack says, and frankly it's more than he'd expected to get out of this. If there's mental blocks, that could explain the resistance. Mental blocks can be broken, though that's still beyond anything he can do.

When he gets back from returning it to the Torchwood vault, Martha says the magic words, and they go to find the Face of Boe.

The first thing Jack thinks is, 'oh, he really *is* just a face.' Martha had said 'giant face in a jar,' but he hadn't taken it literally. There's no jar, because it's too soon for that. Still, he's a face with presence. Jack can respect that.

He makes the introductions, and the Face of Boe looks serenely at the Doctor. The Doctor giggles, suddenly, so he assumes telepathy is involved. That's why they're here, after all.

"I can help him," the Face says. "It will take some time. Take your ship forward fifty years, and I will return him to you."

Jack's a seasoned time traveller, but it still hurts to have to do this. Leave the Doctor here for decades, on his own, while they just pop forward. Jack can't help but think that there's some ironic justice in this, given his abandonment on the game station and subsequent slow-path to reunion. At least he's made a promise to come back, and it really is only going to be a minute or two from his and Martha's perspective.

Martha gives the Doctor a hug goodbye, but Jack hangs back. He wouldn't want to hug him, either, if he was the Doctor.

"I'm sorry," he says, apologizing for leaving now and for not being able to save him properly and for killing his daughter in front of him and for everything that came before. There isn't enough sorry in the universe for the full hundred years of pain, but that doesn't stop him from offering what he can. He needs the Doctor to be himself again, to be healed, or Jack can't let himself heal. It wouldn't be fair. "Let him help, if he can. The universe needs you."

The Doctor just shrugs; he's even bleaker about his recovery than Jack's been.

Jack and Martha give him one last look, and then close the TARDIS door and go to the console.

"Here goes," Martha says, crossing her fingers and probably her toes.

Jack pilots them forwards fifty years, then stops, pulls the brake. They turn to the doors, afraid that they'll find the Doctor just as broken as before, and deeply hoping he'll be restored.

They go outside, and the Doctor is standing there, almost the same as when they left. But now his eyes look clear, and he gives them a little welcoming wave.

"Feeling better?" Martha asks, hesitantly.

"I think so," the Doctor says, and hugs her. "Thank you." He looks so much like he used to, like himself, and it's such a sudden change for them that Jack finds it hard to accept. And then the Doctor tells him to come and give him a hug, and the world finishes righting itself. He hugs the both of them as tight as he can, until Martha complains she can't breathe.

Even though he's largely back to normal, it's hard to be with the Doctor again. He's not some restored version from a chameleon arch. He remembers everything that's happened, probably clearer than he did before. His eyes are terribly old, and there's a weariness to him that wasn't there before the Master returned. Jack thinks it's what's left behind after all the mourning.

Jack can't see him happy without thinking of how much happier he was with baby Allia. He can't see him sad without seeing how broken with grief he was after the paradox ended. When he's moody, it's the brooding Doctor he watched from his prison cell. Jack can't seem to see past the hundred years, even though the Doctor can.

There's also the guilt. He killed Allia, and she deserved to die but the Doctor didn't deserve to see her killed. He broke the paradox without realizing the consequences. He was so careful about saving Earth, and not at all about saving the Doctor. Just because the Face of Boe pieced him back together, doesn't mean the cracks never existed, don't still exist. The Doctor isn't quite the man he was, and Jack can't face him without hating himself for that.

So he leaves. He hugs them goodbye and wishes them luck, and he goes back to his team. The Doctor's only a few days off-target for the landing.

To his surprise, Sarah Jane Smith pays him a visit. As in, she's waiting in his office when he walks in. He would ask how she got in there, but instead he just shakes his head at her and sits down in his chair.

"To what do I owe the pleasure?" he asks, casually.

"I had tea with the Doctor and Martha the other day," she says. "He's looking much better."

"Oh, I'm sorry," he says, regretful. "I should have told you, but--"

"You had other things on your mind. I know how it is." And she really does seem to understand. She's caught up in the same craziness that he is, so it only makes sense. "Martha said you were having trouble."

He loves Martha, but she does tend to want to help everyone. It's the healer in her. "I'm fine," Jack lies.

"Uh huh," Sarah says, not even pretending to believe him. "I think you're the kind of man who's always so busy taking care of other people that he never takes care of himself. Am I right?"

Jack just gives her a look.

Sarah smiles back at him.

Jack crosses his arms and puts on his bossy-face.

Sarah keeps smiling.

Jack sighs and gives in. "You're deadly with that look," he says.

"I perfected it on the Doctor," she says. It's no wonder Jack never stood a chance. "If you won't go talk to Alistair--and that's because you're a stubborn man, by the way--then I thought you might like to go for a drink with me."

Jack looks at her, and stops seeing her as the Doctor's former companion and someone trying to help, and realizes that she's a very attractive, very intelligent woman. "A drink sounds good," he says.

She picks the bar, which is just as well because Jack's retcon'd people in all the one's he knows, and the staff tend watch him suspiciously. She orders a pint, and he goes for a vodka martini. They take a seat in the back, where it's nice and private.

She surprises him again by not pressing for how he feels. She small talks him by chatting about a friend of hers, a star poet from Arcateen 5.

"Wait a minute, you're friends with one of those things?" Jack says, disbelieving.

"Why shouldn't I be?"

"One of them messed with my team. She ate human hearts."

Sarah gives him a disapproving look. "Do you judge every species by one individual?"

"Of course not," Jack says. "I'm very open-minded."

"Yes, I've heard something about your open-mindedness," Sarah says, knowingly. "I've asked around about you. You have quite a reputation."

"Yeah," Jack says, but he doesn't quite feel it. He's been in survival mode for so long that it's hard to get past casual flirting and actually reach desire. Sarah's been sending out signals since she showed up in his office--subtle, but only to someone who isn't him. They could easily keep this to friendship and not let it go any further without anyone having hard feelings. He's not sure he wants to do that, but he's also not sure he's ready to be intimate with anyone. He can still see the Doctor and the Master together in his head, and it's in the way just like all his memories are.

They drink in silence, and Jack thinks.

"I couldn't stay," he says, at last. "Every time I look at him..."

Sarah nods. "You're seeing what he was. It was a hundred years, Jack. The Doctor just took fifty to get over it, and I could see that he's still hurting."

"That's just it," Jack says, honesty bubbling out of him. "He's still hurting. And I could've--" He cuts himself off. He hasn't told Martha this, and certainly hasn't told the Doctor. The Doctor probably figured it out himself by now, anyway.

"What?" Sarah prompts.

"I could have left him behind, and he would have been fine. Old, but fine. He wouldn't have remembered anything."

"Oh," Sarah says, quietly. She can see his point.

"I hadn't seen him in years, and to finally have him back... and he... I couldn't leave him," Jack says. He hates this, hates that he needs to talk about this and hates making a scene. Even though his voice is low, and he's barely letting it show, and the few other people in the pub are watching some game on TV. It's all so damned normal.

This is what he brought back. These people were who it was for. Sarah and the bartender and the fat guy in the corner who's already had one too many. Humans. They were extinct for a hundred years, except for him, and he's not sure he even counts.

He downs the rest of his drink and rubs his face.

"I was watching with everybody else when the President was killed," she says, filling the silence. "I saw the both of you there, and Martha. And then... it was like everything turned inside-out, just for a moment, and then the TARDIS landed right there on the deck. The cameras went out just after that."

"You're lucky you didn't see it," Jack says.

"What, the Master being arrested?"

"No, the Doctor begging him to-- to put it all back. To go into his head and keep breaking him." The anger in his voice surprises him, because he's angry with the Doctor, and he'd been refusing to admit that until now.

"Is that what he did?" Sarah asks, a bit saddened.

"He wasn't himself," Jack says, and it's true, of course. It only looked like the Doctor was turning his back on all of them and trying to un-rescue himself. It's far from the worst memory Jack has, but it sure as hell stings.

"You're angry with him," Sarah says.

"Damn right I'm angry with him," Jack replies, evenly. He still wants to shake the sense back into the Doctor, even though the sense has already been shaken back into him.

"He acted like an idiot, doing that," she says, completely against his expectations. "You should be angry."

Jack is speechless for a moment, then leans back in his chair. "Yeah?"

"He can be a real thoughtless bastard sometimes," Sarah says, and maybe she didn't see anything as extreme as Jack has but she's certainly seen something because she means every word.

He stares at her, and then chuckles. Laughs and shakes his head. "I like you," he says. "So I'm going to get the next round."

Sarah gives him a salute with her glass.

When he gets back, he doesn't want to talk about the Doctor, so he tells her about the rebels.

"I think I'd have liked them," Sarah says. "My kind of people. Well, aliens."

"Yeah, no more humans," Jack says, and makes a noise that's supposed to be Earth popping out of existence. It hadn't actually done that, of course, but that's a nicer way to think about it than slaughter and ash and nanobots.

"I met the last of the human race, once," she says. "They were rather rude."

"When was this?" Jack asks, curious. "I'm from the fifty-first century, in case you're worried."

She gets what he now realizes is a journalistic glint in her eyes when he says that. "Before your time, then. Sometime after the thirtieth century, but I don't think it was that long."

"Ah, that bottleneck," Jack says, nodding sagely. "We've almost gone extinct a few times. Always bounce back."

"Here's to bouncing back," Sarah says, and they toast to stubborn humanity.

Jack decides not to mention the Toclafane, so as not to ruin the moment. "On behalf of the future of humanity, I apologize for my ancestors' rudeness."

"Apology accepted," Sarah says. "The rude ones were eaten by Wirm anyway, so they can't be your ancestors."

"Worms?" Jack asks.

"No, Wirm. Great big space bugs." She spreads her arms to indicate their size. "The larva were all over the ship." She makes a face. "To be honest it was really disgusting."

"Oh, I bet," Jack says. "Just when you think the universe can't get any grosser, it finds a way."

"Some of that stuff used to make me scream," she admits, like it's a secret. "I had quite a pair of lungs back then. But frankly if I didn't give a good yell now and then, the Doctor might've forgotten I was there."

"He wouldn't," Jack says, disbelieving. He thinks about how protective the Doctor was of Rose. They'd almost had a pissing match over her, that first night in the TARDIS. He was fairly protective of Martha, too, for the little time they had together before the Master threw the Doctor completely into disarray.

"I think he was just glad to be off the planet, and you know how easily distracted he is," she continues.

"Very true," Jack agrees. He hopes that's come back with everything else. He didn't really stay long enough to find out. It was running away, he knows that now. On the other hand, that doesn't mean it was the wrong decision.

They swap alien and Doctor stories until they're both pleasantly drunk, and they share a taxi on the way back to her hotel. He pays the cabbie for the first leg, and tells him to wait because he's still assuming there'll be a second. He walks her to her door, because he does remember how to be a gentleman, and they stop on the welcome mat.

"So," Sarah says, taking the initiative once again. She's the kind of woman who knows what she wants, and isn't afraid of that. Jack likes that about her.

"So," Jack says. They're standing close enough that he can smell how good she'd taste, her skin, her sweat. He meets her eyes, but he's so tied up inside he still hasn't decided what he wants.

She pulls him into a kiss, and makes the decision for him. They stumble inside, and the taxi drives off without them.

She's beautiful when she takes her clothes off, and much younger-looking than he knows her to be. So's he, and by a lot larger of a margin. He can't stop kissing her, and doesn't want to. She's warm and soft and knows how to touch a man. When he slips inside her, she makes the most exquisite little gasp. When they're fucking, she turns him onto his back and rides him.

It's a good night, a great night. He falls asleep in her arms and doesn't remember his dreams. When he wakes up, she's made coffee, and she's using her laptop in bed. It's so blessedly normal that he laughs.

"I hope you're not laughing at me," Sarah says.

"You look sexy when you're wearing your reading glasses," he says, and pushes himself up to lick her breast. "And naked."

The laptop is forgotten about for a while. She leaves the glasses on for him, and they're even sexier when they fog up.

He has to leave the bed so he can call his team, if only so he can take the day off. He has the face the world eventually, but not today.

"We should do this again sometime," Sarah tells him, over lunch. She likes him, and he likes her.

"Yeah," Jack agrees, surprised by himself but knowing this is a good thing. "You're absolutely right."

"Of course I am," she says, giving him that smile.

He stays a second night, but he has to go to work in the morning. They're going to meet for a drink again on Friday, and just like that Jack has a social life. His team's been nudging him about that on and off for years, and they might just tease him endlessly for a while. He thinks he can live with that.

He arrives at the Hub, at the place he built in the Doctor's honour. It's a good place. Maybe a little rough around the edges, but what isn't?

He's in such a good mood that his team start whispering behind his back and wondering if he might have been possessed by an alien. Ianto, of course, figures it out first, and he's very quietly completely jealous. They're alone in his office, so Jack shuts him up with a kiss.

"Oh," Ianto says, a bit stunned. Jack has that effect on people.

"I'm from the fifty-first century, Ianto," Jack says. "I can like more than one person at a time."

"Of course," Ianto says, blushing in that adorable way. Jack brought him back to life, too. He's feeling really glad about that, and proud. He did save the world, after all, the whole universe even. Not many people can say that.

He kisses him some more, just to make the point, and Ianto's a bit wobbly when he rejoins the rest of them.

"So is it an alien?" Owen asks, looking like he wants that to be the answer.

"He, er... got laid," Ianto says, all embarrassed Welshman.

"Oh, bloody typical," Owen says, rolling his eyes, and he stomps off grumbling about everyone having sex but him.

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