but i know better as my eyes adjust, you've been gone for quite a while now

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by juette

Summary

He doesn't want to let Lisa go, he wants to keep all that remains of her in his arms and curl up around it and stay very very still until he, too, withers and dies.

Or, the aftermath of Cyberwoman.

Not-quite-Lisa is standing here, looking at him, blood on her forehead and her hair half-undone, *it's me, you wouldn't shoot me, I did this for you,* and Ianto finds that she's right: he can't pull the trigger because it is *her*, in a sick, twisted way, and this is his *only* chance to be with her again but all that tumbles out of his mouth is apologies and he doesn't know what to do or what to say and he's crying for what feels like the millionth time today and *oh God, she's killed her, she's really killed her—*

And whatever crazy half-formed thoughts in his mind die when gunshots resonate in the tiny basement room and her body is riddled with bullets, her eyes widening and her mouth changing into an *oh* of betrayal as she collapses onto the conversion unit behind her. Ianto turns around, and all his teammates are here, their arms still raised into the air, their guns still smoking. All of them but Gwen stare right at him, unbearably confident, as if they hadn't destroyed the little that was left of his life, and he suddenly can't stand to hold their gazes. He drops to his knees on the hard and unforgiving concrete floor, the blood — *Lisa's blood*, a dreadful part of his mind supplies— seeping into his nice, expensive trousers, but that doesn't matter anymore. He crawls up to Lisa's lifeless corpse and pulls her onto his lap, just to hold her the way he used to, one last time — the metal shell encasing her digs into his ribs and he can't breathe through the tears but he finds that he can't bring himself to care. All he can do is cry and sob and weep and his throat feels raw and his eyes are burning but he's still crying and he's really wondering how there are any tears left in his body after all this but they keep coming and coming and they never seem to stop, endlessly flowing through his eyes like a dam broke inside of him.

After what simultaneously feels like five minutes and five hours, Gwen kneels next to him, reaching a hand out to lay it on his shoulder, and he jerks away from her touch. She says something about needing to take care of the bodies, probably at Jack's instructions, and Ianto clutches Lisa closer, choking out a *don't you touch her, don't you take her away* in a voice so raw it sounds foreign. She asks again, so gently, and Ianto doesn't know how she can be so patient with him when his mistakes almost got her killed a few hours earlier — but he doesn't want to let Lisa go, he wants to keep all that remains of her in his arms and curl up around it and stay very very still until he, too, withers and dies.

Gwen doesn't push further, instead walking back to Jack. Ianto can't make out the words of the argument she and Tosh are having with him. Whatever it is doesn't matter either because Lisa's *gone*, she's dead for the third time already but this time it's *real* and it's *forever* and he's never getting her back, and he's imagined being with her until the end of time and he doesn't know how to live without her. His teammates' heated debate is no more than nonsensical background noise to him. He knows they're talking about him but he doesn't listen, doesn't *want* to listen as he slowly rocks back and forth, cradling Lisa's body.

He suddenly feels a tiny pinprick on the side of his neck and barely has the time to turn and see Owen has injected him with something before it all goes black.

Ianto wakes up on his couch. He's still dressed, so he must've passed out yesterday when he came back from work, the exhaustion not enough to keep him from having nightmares—

He then realises his hands and his clothes are marred with dry blood, and everything hits him like a truck. Doctor Tanizaki. Gwen. The delivery girl. Lisa. If he's at his flat, then they must've taken her, they didn't listen to him, they'll burn her body to get rid of the cybertech and she'll never be allowed the proper funeral she deserves — he has to go back, he *has* to go back, maybe it's not too late yet, maybe he can stop them.

His limbs feel as heavy as lead but he still manages to get up. Suddenly the blood all over him feels unbearable, and he barely has time to rush into the bathroom before he's throwing up. Another wave of sobs wracks his body as he kneels over the toilet, and he roughly rubs his eyes with the palms of his hands, smearing more blood over his face. He grips the sink to get up and his clothes are sticking to his skin and it makes him sick and he has to tear them off and get the blood off off *off*— he turns the water on and scrubs his hands until they redden but still the dry blood clings to his fingernails and no amount of soap and burning hot water makes it go away and it's the worst sensation he's ever had to feel. Ianto figures that if he wants to go back to work quickly, he'll have to endure the nauseating feeling —at least the stains on his body where the blood has seeped through all his layers of clothing wash away more quickly.

Every single part of his body aches as he puts on a clean shirt and suit and leaves his flat, forgetting to lock the door in his haste. (Not that there's much to steal in there: he'd always imagined he'd decorate it with Lisa once she was well enough to leave the Hub.) He's glad whoever brought him back to his flat also brought his car — he lives quite far from the Hub and he needs to go back there as soon as he can. Even though it's the middle of autumn, the sun's already up, meaning it might already be too late.

It's only when he's on the road that his resolve to fight back against his teammates fades. He's got nothing to fight for anymore. Lisa's *dead* despite everything he's tried to keep her alive, and he has nothing left in his miserable life. God, what will Jack even do to him once he arrives? Retcon him? Kill him? Something *else*, something *worse*?

He's seen the way traitors were treated back at Torchwood One, and while Captain Harkness is usually more lenient than Yvonne was, he doesn't seem so kind anymore after his subordinate's betrayal.

If given the choice, Ianto will choose death.

Strangely enough, there's no one waiting for him gun in hand when he arrives. In fact, the only ones in are Jack and Gwen (did she even go home last night?), looking down at him through the meeting room's windows. Jack nods at him, so impossibly calm, and all Ianto can do is nod back. He finds himself starting his usual tasks, his body moving on automatic as he clears the pizza boxes and other trash littering the Hub like nothing had ever happened, like he hadn't ended two lives and risked millions more in his desperate desire to save Lisa, in his love for her that kept him blind to her changed nature until the very end. It's so easy to slip back into this routine, to once again become no more noticeable than a shadow. Neither Gwen nor Jack speak to him, and Ianto feels a strange sense of foreboding: this must be the end, he thinks, but all of his rage and his sorrow and the myriad of other violent emotions that

had been swirling inside of him just hours ago has vanished, leaving him completely numb to the idea.

The door he used to use to reach the lower levels is locked, a silent message for him to stay away. He wishes he could have packed up everything he'd left in Lisa's room, the books, the pictures, the knick-knacks, but he doesn't have the heart to protest, so he just leaves it alone.

He's sitting in the tourist office when Toshiko arrives — it's a lot later than usual for her, but then again, it's been a long night for everyone. He's putting the finishing touches on the website he'd created to make their cover business more believable, and at the moment he's glad it gives him a reason not to look at her: he's not sure he can bear what he'll see on her face. She surprises him, though, by setting down a drink on the desk between them: a styrofoam cup of coffee from the shop that opened last month in a neighbouring street. *Nobody ever gets you a coffee,* she says, and he himself hadn't realised it before, but it's true. She tries to make small talk but he doesn't reply, directing her to the secret passage leading to the Hub instead. He doesn't want to hurt her with his refusal, he really doesn't, but he cannot do this — the door closes behind her, and he starts to cry again. It's pathetic, really, but he'd been ready for everyone to be all thorns and sharp edges, tearing him apart until he was nothing more than a mangled heap of raw flesh on the floor; he can't handle such kindness, such softness, even if it was merely born out of pity for his upcoming death. They don't care, they've never cared, they don't know him beyond whatever lies he's served them and now they've destroyed his entire life and he can't stand their sudden change in behaviour, their sudden concern for him and his life and everything he'd previously hidden from them. It doesn't make sense, it makes him sick, it makes him angry, but most of all it makes him fall deeper into hopelessness. *No one ever cares until you cry.*

It takes him a while to stop sobbing uncontrollably and compose himself enough to go back downstairs. His eyes are still red, but he's already given up on trying to hide the fact that all he's done since yesterday is cry — they probably already know, and they definitely don't care.

Owen is there now, and he drags Ianto to the medical bay for a check-up.

Ianto doesn't like having to undress almost entirely, he doesn't like being bare-chested in front of anyone, but he knows Owen never gives up until he's made sure his patient is relatively fine. His touch isn't gentle, but then again, Ianto doesn't expect anything else of him — on the other hand, there's a strange lack of acidic remarks from the medic, which only serves to unsettle Ianto further. It seems that everyone already knows what's going to happen to him: why else would *Owen* of all people stop being a downright prick?

After a bit of prodding, the doctor declares that Ianto only has cuts and bruises and will thus be fine. It's odd that he doesn't have more serious injuries after having been thrown through the Hub so violently; Owen calls him *damn bloody lucky*. He still hands him a bottle of strong painkillers *just in case* — Ianto doesn't see the point, but accepts them anyway — then tells him Jack wants him in his office. Ianto nods, keeping his head bent as he makes his way there, like a death row prisoner marching towards his executioner. He's decided to accept his fate; it's better than living anyway.

Suspension.

The word resonates in Ianto's mind.

He'd been sure he was going to die. He'd been so careless. This was standard protocol for this kind of treason.

But Jack has decided otherwise.

(Ironic how the man that had mocked Ianto so cruelly for not following through on his threats is now doing just the same thing.)

Ianto isn't sure how he feels about it. He'd seen himself staying with Lisa forever, but she's gone now, and he's still here, and he feels too much and too little at once — he's overflowing with grief and completely hollow at the same time. It's the end of the workday already; he's handed in his gun and his security pass and there's nothing for him to take home, so he cleans up the last of the day's trash and leaves the Hub quietly.

The door clicks closed behind him. His flat and its muted colours feel resoundingly empty now that all the plans he'd made for the future have fallen through.

He can tell someone's been here, probably Jack —everything even the slightest bit dangerous has been removed from his flat. Maybe this is his punishment: wandering aimlessly at the Captain's mercy instead of being granted the release of death.

He sighs and lets himself fall onto the couch, back to where he was this morning. He's exhausted to the point he doesn't think he'll ever move again. He fleetingly thinks about making dinner and decides that there's no point in that, so he closes his eyes and stays there until he falls asleep.

It's a warm day outside and Ianto's standing in front of Lisa in a small park, trying to tell her he loves her. Everything is a little awkward but sunlight reflects on the water tower behind her like a halo around her head, and she's as gorgeous as ever.

There's a loud noise in the distance. Ianto thinks it must be thunder, as it's been a rather hot week.

He looks down at his feet while he fumbles with his words. He's wearing his nicest pinstriped suit with a crisp white shirt, and he hopes Lisa finds it as handsome as he does. God, this whole confession thing is so difficult — he'd planned it all beforehand, but now all the words he'd premeditated seem to be slithering away from him like snakes.

He hears the scream of a wild animal and looks back at Lisa. She's still standing there, silent and unmoving like a statue, and it's strange because usually she'd tease him for making a big deal out of nothing and say something to make him laugh, or she'd reach out and gently stroke his cheek and smile at him reassuringly. Maybe he should just shut up and stop embarrassing himself.

And now he can hear Jack's voice in his ear, talking of death and doom and damnation, and Lisa's still not reacting to anything as the sky darkens like a dangerous storm's brewing, and Ianto's desperate for her to say *something* but she doesn't — and this time when Jack's voice is accompanied by gunshots, Ianto turns around to try and locate the source of the noise, but there's nothing but darkness, and he looks back at Lisa and she's disappeared in the shadows and he's screaming for her to come back because he *can't live without her* and he wants to run, to go after her but Jack's holding him back and no matter how much he struggles he can't escape from the other man's strong grasp and all he can do is listen to Lisa's agonised scream as she's shot over and over and over again, and her voice gets louder and louder and there's blood pooling thickly at his feet and it's *all his fault*—

Ianto wakes with a gasp. Lisa's screams are still ringing in his ears, and it's as dark in his flat as it was in his nightmare. It takes him a moment to find his phone — it slipped from his pocket while he was asleep — and when he finally finds it and checks the time, he realises he's only been asleep for a few hours. That explains why he doesn't feel rested at all, then. He gets up excruciatingly slowly; all his muscles ache, his mouth is dry and his head is throbbing. He needs a glass of water. His ribs are screaming in agony after too many hours of continuous constriction, but he doesn't think he can handle the dysphoria that'd come with taking off his binder on top of *everything else*.

He makes his way to the kitchenette on wobbly legs. Whenever he had trouble sleeping as a child, his nan would make him a glass of warm milk, and even now, the distant childhood memory (one of his rare happy ones) pushes him to drink one every time he has a nightmare. There's no milk left in the fridge, but maybe there's an unopened carton in the cupboard—

There isn't, and Ianto suddenly remembers that he's finished the last one two days ago. He'd meant to buy more on his way home yesterday, he doesn't usually *forget*, he's always been good with grocery shopping and planning and all of those things — everything he's been doing and feeling since Lisa's death has been so uncharacteristic of him, he barely recognises himself anymore.

He doesn't want to be awake.

He doesn't think he can sleep.

He hopes it's early enough for the closest shop to still be open as he heads out.

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