Nothing Else Matters
by bubblygal92

Summary

After saying goodbye to Grace, the Eighth Doctor is pulled to Earth again and meets Rose Tyler. 13 original adventures of the 8th Doctor and Rose when the Time Lords and Gallifrey are still intact. Set immediately post the TV movie. First in the 'Celestial Love' Verse.
"Oh no, not again," the Doctor groaned as the record got stuck again. Ignoring the memories of the past day, he reluctantly put his book down and went to check what had happened. The beacon on the console was beeping lightly and flashing red lights. He frowned and examined it.

It was a summoning signal emanating from Earth. Not when he had just left, but further into the future. He frowned as he saw the date.

2005 was awfully early to have a summoning signal of the kind that he was receiving. Earth was still a level 5 planet at this time. Thinking that it probably had to be some obscure piece of alien technology that had fallen to Earth, he decided to go and see for himself. No harm in snooping around some. He shrugged and entered the coordinates to take him there.

H.G. Wells and the tea could wait.

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Rose Tyler folded the clothes with a bored expression on her face. It was a regular day as usual. She got up at 7, took the bus to work, had lunch with Shareen, back to work and now it was almost closing time.

"Rose," Shareen whispered.

"What?" she asked her friend, looking up from the seventh pink sweater she had folded.

"I'm on changing room duty tonight," Shareen said.

Rose rolled her eyes as she picked up the eighth sweater to fold. "Let me guess," she said. "You wanna get with Shaun."

Shareen turned her eyes pleading. "Please, Rose," she said. "He asked me to meet him at 6."

Rose nodded. "Fine," she said. "But you owe me one."

Shareen hugged her happily. "Yes! Thank you," she grinned happily.

Rose shook her head. "Go on, get," she nodded.

Shareen gave her another hug and took off. Rose smiled at her slightly love-crazed friend's back. Shaun was her newest boy-crush. Personally Rose thought he was a bit full of himself but Shareen had stars in her eyes when she looked at him.

Still, Rose thought she couldn't talk. After what happened with Jimmy Stone...

She shook her head to clear out that line of thought and headed to the changing rooms. The changing room duty was the worst of its kind. If there was any time that Rose thought that people were the most annoying things to ever live, this was it.

The changing room was littered with clothes and hangers and labels. Rose sighed. It was going to take her an hour at the least to sort through the mess. She took out her phone to call her mother.

"Hello," Jackie Tyler chirped happily on the other end.
"Mum, it's me," Rose said.

"Oh hello, sweetheart, I was hoping you would call," Jackie said. "Bev's nephew is visiting and such a charming lad he is..."

"Mum, I don't want to be set up on another blind date," Rose said, rubbing her eyes in frustration. "It will do you good, Rose. You haven't gone out with a bloke in over a year. That's not like you, love," Jackie said.

Rose cut her mum off before she could start talking about the issue any more. "Mum, I'm going to be home a bit late, yeah?" Rose asked. "Shareen had to meet a bloke so I'm covering for her. And I'm going for a pint later," she added spontaneously.

Jackie began to protest but Rose hung up. She did not want to fight with her mother again.

Stuffing her phone back into her pocket, she began to pick up the mess of clothes. She heard a rustle behind the last curtain and stood up. "Hello?" she asked. "We are closing," she said, hoping to get the person out. She dearly hoped it wasn't another couple shagging. She had caught one last month and the sight wasn't pretty.

Ignoring her slightly nauseous thoughts, she waited for the person to come out. When no one did, she sighed and headed towards the stall. "Excuse me? Is anyone in there?" she asked, cautiously.

No answer but there was movement behind it. "Is someone mucking about?" she asked, her temper barely under control. No answer. Rose glared angrily at the closed curtain. She was not in the mood to be played around with. "I'm coming in then," she said and swished the curtain open.

And let out a loud scream.

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The Doctor heard someone scream and he ran full pelt in the direction of the voice. The signal detector in his hand beeped loudly and frantically as he came closer to his destination. He looked down at the contraption and felt someone run into him.

"Umph," he groaned as he clattered to the floor with the person on top of him. He looked up and saw it was a young girl, about nineteen.

She clambered off of him and he stood up. "Are you alright?" he asked her in concern.

"Those things," she panted, her eyes wide with terror.

The Doctor followed her gaze and he saw three Cybermen. He took her hand.

"Run!" he commanded.

Rose ran behind the weird bloke dressed like he had stepped out of an Austen novel. He seemed to know what he was doing as he led her to the main elevator which would take them to the storage floor just above the basement.

Once the elevator doors had closed, Rose turned to him. "What the hell were those things?" she asked, her voice high with fear.

"Cybermen," he answered, his expression dark. "I should have recognised the signal," he said, apparently talking to himself because he was making no sense to Rose.
"Were they students?" she asked him. "Is that a student thing or what?"

"I beg your pardon?" he asked her, looking at her in confusion.

"I don't know," she said, feeling confused as well.

"Why would they be students?" he asked her, genuinely curious.

Rose stared at him. He didn't look like he was mocking her, just very curious. "Well, to get people dressed up like tin robots and scaring shop girls, they got to be students," she said rationally.

"Ah," he nodded, realisation in his eyes. "No," he said immediately. "They were not students. They were Cybermen."

"Is that like a branch of computer geeks?" she asked him, hoping the humour would conceal her fright.

He didn't smile and Rose saw that he had no idea what a computer geek was. Strange, that. Maybe he really had stepped out of an Austen novel. "Cybermen are one of the most vicious creatures in the universe. If they are invading, then it is extremely bad for the human race," he said.

Rose stared at him. "Are you saying they are aliens?" she asked him incredulously.

"Of course," he said, slightly offended. "What else would they be?" he asked her in confusion.

The elevator pinged as they arrived on the storage floor. "Who are you?" Rose asked him. He didn't look like he was mad but he was talking about aliens. Why were all the good-looking ones nutters, she wondered absently.

"I'm the Doctor," he said, striding forward so quickly that Rose had to jog to keep up with him.

"Doctor what?" she asked.

"Just the Doctor," he said and then gave a triumphant smile when they reached a fire exit. He turned to her. "I'm sorry, awfully indecorous of me not to ask your name," he said.

Rose was taken aback at the posh words. She had only ever heard blokes in old films talk like that. "Rose," she answered.

"Nice to meet you, Rose," he said and then gently ushered her out into the street. "I will take it from here."

He gently led Rose out and turned to shut the door behind him. Of course, he was never that lucky, was he? Rose walked back in. "Hang on," she said. "You can't just swan off. I wanna know what those things are," she said.

He sighed in exasperation. "They are dangerous," he said.

"They are also invading my planet according to you," she shot back. "So," she said firmly walking up to him. "How can I help?"

He stared at her defiant face and knew that she wouldn't back down. He had always said that humans were an indomitable species. He sighed and began to explain. "They are transmitting a summoning signal. From what I could gather, that is the only Cybermen ship that has landed here. If I can cut off the signal, I can stop any more Cybermen coming to Earth," he said.
"But what about the ones that are already here?" she asked logically, trying to ignore the voice in her head that was yelling that he was talking utter nonsense.

He looked slightly impressed at her ability to suppress her disbelief and think rationally. But he didn't have an answer for her. "One thing at a time," he said as they hurried along.

"So what's the plan?" Rose asked.

The Doctor looked at her in confusion. "I just said," he said.

Rose rolled her eyes. "How do we cut off the signal? We can't just stroll up to their ship now, can we?" she asked him.

The Doctor gave her a quick, cheeky grin that made his bluish green eyes light up, somehow making him look younger. "That is exactly what we are going to do."

Rose followed the Doctor, wondering if she was being incredibly fearless or incredibly thick in going along with this. In a matter of minutes, she had found out that aliens existed and that they were invading Earth. And now she was helping some bloke called the Doctor sneak onto their ship and cut off their signal to prevent more of the aliens attacking. Not a regular Tuesday then.

She watched the back of the Doctor's green velvet coat and wondered if he was just leading her along on some prank. She dismissed the thought. He was a bit strange but she couldn't help but trust him. There was something childlike about his romantic persona yet something ancient and fierce. Rose was intrigued.

"Here we are," he whispered as they came back to the main floor of the shop. He peeked around the corner cautiously for any approaching Cybermen and saw none. "Where did you see them before?" he asked Rose.

"The changing rooms," Rose answered.

"Is there any sort of an exit around there?" he asked.

Rose frowned. "No," she said. "Just an old service lift," she added as an afterthought. "Bloody thing doesn't work."

"Since when?" the Doctor asked sharply.

Rose was taken aback at the strange question. "Ever since I started working here. So more than a year then," she shrugged.

The Doctor nodded absently. "Then that must be the teleport spot," he said.

"Wait, teleport?" Rose asked him, her eyes wide. "Seriously? Like Star Trek?"

"Just call me Mr. Spock," he grinned but then frowned. "Or, actually don't. Mr. Spock sounds like a horrible name to have. Call me the Doctor."

Rose chuckled, despite the tense situation, and let the Doctor take her hand as he led her to the lift. "Are you sure this is a teleport spot?" Rose asked him, her tone betraying that she thought he was a little, okay maybe a lot, bonkers.

He smiled reassuringly at her. "Yes, I expect so," he said and took out a weird tube thing. It made a whirring sound and the lift doors opened.
Rose followed him silently and the Doctor chuckled at the look of shock on her face. "Sonic screwdriver," he explained. "Good at opening doors."

Rose nodded and suddenly the Doctor grabbed her tightly around the waist. Rose squeaked in surprise and went to push him off but stopped when she felt the air around them change and suddenly they were looking at the interior of what appeared to be the inside of a spaceship.

"Unbelievable," Rose said slowly.

The Doctor let go of her. "I do apologise for clutching hold of you like that, Rose, but if you had been out of the range of the teleport beam it would have given you a terrible headache," he explained as he began to examine the machinery.

"No problem," Rose mumbled as she stared around. She was still a bit speechless as she walked behind him. "I'm not hallucinating, am I?" she asked him.

The Doctor chuckled under his breath. "It can be a bit too much to take in all at once," he said, smiling sympathetically.

Rose let out a small, breathy laugh. "Yeah," she agreed. "But it's...just...so..." she said slowly.

"What?" he asked her curiously, stopping his scans to look at her.

"Fantastic!" she said, her eyes bright with excitement.

The Doctor laughed at her enthusiasm and then went back to scanning the machinery. "Aha!" he exclaimed. "Found it!"

"Can you cancel it?" Rose asked him, kneeling down next to him.

"Yes, shouldn't be too hard," he said and there was a small beep. He gave a satisfied smile and stood up, giving her a hand as well. "The signal is cancelled."

Rose grinned at him as she took his hand and got to her feet. "You did it!" she said happily and then surprised both of them by giving him a big hug.

The Doctor seemed shocked for an instant before returning the hug just as enthusiastically. Rose laughed and then pulled away. "So, what do we do now?"

"Well," the Doctor said. "There's that taken care of them. Now, we can contact..."

But Rose never found out who he was going to contact. At least half a dozen Cybermen had marched into the control room of the ship and were staring at the Doctor and Rose. The Doctor's face hardened and he stood in front of Rose protectively.

"Intruders, detected," one of the Cybermen said.

"They must be upgraded!" the Cyber Leader said as they began to converge on the Doctor and Rose.
"Intruders detected," one of the Cybermen said.

"They must be upgraded!" the Cyber Leader said as they began to converge on the Doctor and Rose.

"Stop!" the Doctor ordered and Rose was taken aback at the power his voice carried. "I'm the Doctor. President Elect of the High Council of Time Lords, Keeper of the Legacy of Rassilon, Protector of Gallifrey and the Defender of the Laws of Time." Each word was spoken deliberately and with enormous emphasis.

The Cybermen halted and Rose was impressed. "You are the Doctor," the Cyber Leader said finally. "You are an enemy of the Cybermen. You will be destroyed."

The Doctor changed tactics. "Under Convention 15 of the Shadow Proclamation, I order you to cease hostile action in order to parlay."

"We do not recognise the authority of the Shadow Proclamation," the Cyber Leader intoned.

The Doctor grinned lightly. "Well, it was worth a shot, wasn't it?" he asked Rose who stared at him in disbelief. So much for being impressive.

"You will be destroyed!"

"Halt!" another cry, this one a deeper mechanical voice, echoed in.

"The Doctor and the Earthling will be taken to the holding cells," the Cyber Controller ordered.

"The Doctor is an enemy of the Cybermen."

"You will follow orders!"

The Doctor watched in disbelief as the Cybermen stood down. "You will be led to the holding cells," the Cyber Leader said.

Rose watched as a bigger (and uglier) Cyberman walked forward. There was a clear glass covering on his head and there was a blackened brain that was visible through it. Rose was slightly sickened at his appearance. He looked a bit too human.

"The Doctor and the Earthling will be taken to the holding cells," the Cyber Controller ordered.

The Cyber Leader, who had been calling the shots before now, turned to look at the Controller. "The Doctor is an enemy of the Cybermen."

"You will follow orders!"

The Doctor watched in disbelief as the Cybermen stood down. "You will be led to the holding cells," the Cyber Leader said.

Rose looked scared and the Doctor took her hand so that they could follow one of the Cybermen to the holding cell. He was a bit confused. The Cybermen could have killed him and Rose instantly. Why were they being kept alive?

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Well, the Doctor mused. As far as holding cells went, this wasn't too bad.

Rose, on the other hand, didn't think so. "So, you got a plan, yeah?" she asked him as she paced
nervously.

"Not really," he admitted with a slight frown. He was still wondering why they were being kept alive.

Rose stared at him incredulously. "You're kidding, right? What happened to all Protector of Time Keeper and President of Lords or something?" she asked.

"President Elect of the High Council of Time Lords, Keeper of the Legacy of Rassilon, Protector of Gallifrey and the Defender of the Laws of Time," he corrected absently. "And titles aren't really helpful right now. It was worth trying, though."

Rose gave a sputter of disbelief. She resisted the urge to yell at him or at least shake some sense into him. She forced herself to be calm. "Alright, what about the Shadow whatever?" she asked, through gritted teeth.

The Doctor shrugged carelessly. "There is no good reason to contact the Shadow Proclamation," he said. "That was just a bluff. A bluff that didn't work."

Rose started counting backwards to ten, hoping she didn't lose her temper and slap him. "Is there any piece of good news?" she asked him finally.

The Doctor finally looked at her and gave a beaming smile. "We are alive." At Rose's look of irritation, he hastened to add. "And also I destroyed their communication network so they can't communicate with anyone and their summoning signal was destroyed."

Rose nodded and sat down next to the Doctor. "So, you are an alien too?" she asked him, wondering why she wasn't freaking out yet. Must be the adrenaline or something, she thought absently.

He grinned at her. "I'm a Time Lord," he said.

"Right," Rose said uncertainly. "So, you travel through time or something?" she asked, meaning it to be a joke.

"Yes, actually," he said. "Also space."

Rose stared at him, trying to gauge if he was joking but he looked completely serious. "Okay," she said, filing that away for later. "So, how did you become an enemy of the Cybermen?" she asked.

The Doctor's face darkened. "I have met them many times before," he said, his eyes far off.

"What exactly do they want from Earth?" Rose asked. "Oil? Minerals or something?"

His eyes snapped to hers and he gave a small smile. "No, but that's good thinking. No, what they want are the people."

"Why?" Rose asked, horrified.

The Doctor sighed and leaned back. "The Cybermen were human once," he said.

Rose gasped, her initial suspicions confirmed. "So they want to make us like them?" she asked, her eyes wide with fear.

The Doctor looked mildly impressed at her deduction. "Yes," he nodded.
"Well, how do we stop them?" she asked at once.

The Doctor frowned. "These are Mondasian Cybermen," he said.

"What does that mean?" Rose asked him.

"Mondas was the twin planet of Earth. The humans on Mondas turned themselves into Cyborgs when Mondas lost orbit from the solar system," he explained.

"You're saying there was another human-inhabited planet here before?" Rose asked.

He nodded. "The Mondans would be considered humanoid, I suppose," he amended. "Ever since they upgraded themselves, they have been finding other compatible species to 'upgrade'," he said the last word like it was poison.

"Who were you saying you were gonna contact?" she asked, remembering what he had said right before they had gotten caught.

The Doctor looked confused for a moment before he remembered their conversation. He nodded slowly. "I was going to suggest UNIT."

"What's UNIT?" Rose asked.

"Unified Intelligence Taskforce," he said. "Earth's best defenders against alien threats. I worked for them once. A long time ago."

"Wait, people on Earth know about aliens?" Rose asked, though she was unsurprised. Suddenly the weird conspiracy theories her mate Mickey spouted didn't seem so rubbish.

He nodded. "Earth has always had contact with aliens. There's UNIT, of course. Britain also has something called Torchwood. Never did find out how it got started," he mused, launching into deep thought again.

Rose began to speak to stop him from lapsing into one of his long, thought-filled silences. "So, any way of getting out of here? What about your sonic screwdriver?" she asked eagerly. "You said it was good at opening doors. Can it get us out of here?"

"The lock is dead bolt sealed," he said. "But..."

"Oh, I like that word," she said, perking up.

He grinned at her. "There is another way. And my ship is parked just outside your shop. If we can get back to Earth..."

"Wait, get back?" Rose asked. "Where are we now?"

"Space, in orbit around Earth," he answered like it was obvious.

"I'm in space?" Rose asked. "Why didn't you say so before?" she demanded, her eyes wide as coins.

"I really thought you knew," he said, perplexed. "The Cybermen wouldn't park their ship under a shop in London, although they did live in the sewers for a while..." he trailed off.

Rose ignored that part and gave an excited jump. "But this is brilliant," she gushed. "I'm in Space," she let out an exhilarated laugh. She was in space. How many people got to do that?
The Doctor watched her excitement with intrigue. She was fascinating. One minute she was terrified of being imprisoned and the next, excited at the prospect of being in space. He leaned back and observed her quietly.

In the hurried manner that they had met, he hadn't had a chance to see her properly. She was very young; barely more than a child, even by her culture's standard. He hadn't even asked her full name. But his reason for watching her was simple and utter fascination. He watched her for potential futures, what she would do, what she would become.

And that was when the Doctor got the biggest shock of his nearly thousand year old lives.

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Rose was oblivious as she walked around the cell, trying to catch a glimpse of outer space. But the cell had no windows or viewing screens. She was slightly disappointed but then again she realised that getting out of here was more important.

Maybe later she could ask the Doctor to show her space. He did say he had a space ship after all. She turned to him and was startled to see him sitting stock-still, staring at the floor. His posture was tense and he was radiating tension and worry.

"Doctor?" Rose asked cautiously.

He didn't react but Rose heard a chiming sound from his mouth. She had no idea what he had said but it sounded awfully like he had cursed. She tilted her head in confusion wondering what had happened. A moment ago, he had been fine.

"Doctor?" she tried again.

He looked up at her and forced a smile on his face. "Yes, sorry, I was just coming up with an escape plan. I do apologise for ignoring you, Rose," he said, his smooth, honey voice exceedingly polite and reassuring.

Rose nodded, still looking a bit uncertain. "So, how do we get out of here?" she asked him.

The Doctor stood up and walked along the walls of the cell, tapping in random place. At one particular spot, he paused and grinned. He took out his sonic screwdriver and ran it over the spot. Rose watched in surprise as a panel with numbers appeared there.

"They put a lock inside the cell?" Rose asked, thinking how stupid that was.

"It's not exactly the lock. It is a panel connected to mainframe. If I can hack this..." he trailed off.

"But still..." Rose said, wondering how they could overlook such a simple yet crucial flaw.

He grinned. "They probably didn't imagine there would be a way to overcome their security. Either that, or they had a concealed panel here before and built the cell later, completely forgetting about it," he said. "Cybermen may be very intelligent but they lack imagination," he said triumphantly.

"Yeah well, they take away humanity and replace them with machinery. Imagination would be the last thing on their mind I imagine," Rose said insightfully as she watched the Doctor try and hack into the mainframe.

At her words, the Doctor was reminded of what he had seen when he had looked at her. He suppressed a shiver and gave her a weak smile. "Yes, you are quite correct, Rose," he said. He
paused in his hacking and looked at Rose questioningly. "I didn't even get to ask your name properly," he said instead, wanting to know about this creature who had utterly baffled him.

"Rose Tyler," she answered.

"Rose Tyler," the Doctor repeated as if her name carried the secrets of the universe. And maybe it did. She smiled at him and he couldn't help but smile back.

The lock beeped and the cell door slid open silently. "You did it!" Rose said, giving him another hug.

The Doctor grinned as he took her hand as if it was the most natural thing in the universe. "Rose Tyler, run!"

As they crept along the corridors to get back to the teleport spot, the Doctor thought about what he had seen. He had looked at Rose Tyler and seen absolutely nothing. He couldn't see her timelines. Neither her past nor her future. She was a complete mystery to him. And it had scared him to death.

They reached the corridor near the teleport site and there were two Cybermen guarding it. The Doctor uttered a curse under his breath, silently chastising himself for swearing in front of a lady even if she had no way of knowing what he was saying.

"Any way to get past them?" Rose whispered in his ear.

"Yes," he said, knowing it was the only way. "Stay here until I say so," he told her. She opened her mouth to protest but he looked pleadingly at her. She nodded but was definitely unhappy about it.

The Doctor pulled out two gold knives from one of his dimensionally transcendental pockets. He moved stealthily behind the Cybermen. Rose watched in astonishment as the Doctor held a knife in each hand and then in a blink of an eye he had plunged them into the back of the heads of the Cybermen.

The Cybermen clattered to the floor and the Doctor looked at where Rose was hiding. "Come on," he called in an urgent whisper.

Rose ran out of the hiding spot and took the Doctor's offered hand. They stepped into the teleport spot. "Ready?" the Doctor asked, his sonic screwdriver pointed at the activation button.

Rose wound her arms around his neck and nodded. "Yeah," she said.

The Doctor slipped an arm around her waist and grinned. "Off we go then."

Rose blinked as they arrived back into the broken service elevator of the shop. The Doctor pulled her out of it and then proceeded to fiddle with the controls of the elevator with his sonic screwdriver. "I can't disable the teleport but I have damaged it a bit. It will take them some time to fix it," he explained at her questioning look.

Rose checked her mobile and saw that it was almost ten. She tucked her phone back into her pocket just as the Doctor finished damaging the teleport. "What do we do now?" Rose asked.

The Doctor was unsurprised yet oddly pleased as she said 'we' instead of 'you'. "We should go back to my ship," he said. "And then we can contact UNIT."

Rose nodded and took the Doctor's hand as the two of them walked out of the shop and into an
alleyway behind it. There was no ship there, just an old Police Box.

The Doctor was unfazed as he reached into his pocket and pulled out an odd, shield-shaped locket on a chain. Rose watched in fascination as he inserted it into a slot on the door of the police box where the lock should have been. That seemed to unlock the box and the Doctor looked at Rose with a smile.

"Come on then," he said. Rose stepped forward uncertainly. The Doctor stood to the side, watching her with a smile as he let her go in first.

Rose stepped inside and felt her mouth fall open. A loud gasp escaped her. She was looking at the most unbelievable sight in the world.
Rose nodded and took the Doctor's hand as the two of them walked out of the shop and into an alleyway behind it. There was no ship there, just an old Police Box.

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Her mouth was open and she didn't even attempt to shut it. She looked at the Doctor who was watching her with a wide grin that was bordering on smug. He looked exceedingly pleased with himself. She stumbled back out of the door. It was still just a box. She walked around it a few times, just to be sure.

She finally realised that her mouth was open and snapped it shut. The Doctor was still watching her with the same infuriating grin. Rose straightened herself up and walked inside the box again. It was a spaceship, alright.

But unlike the Cybermen's mechanical and utilitarian interior, this was decorated lavishly. It reminded Rose of one of those parlours in posh mansions that you would see on old period dramas. Absently, she was reminded that this particular decor was from the Romantic Era. It definitely suited the dandy appearance of the Doctor.

There was a central console with a huge column in the centre. There was an array of knobs, levers and switches decorating the mushroom shaped console. Several smaller screens around the console were flashing numbers and data; some of which she could read and some that she couldn't. A bigger scanner which seemed to be hanging from above the console read: "London, Earth 2005 A.D."

"Okay," Rose exhaled slowly. "You have a spaceship that is bigger on the inside than it is on the outside." She tried and failed to keep the awe and slight fear out of her voice.

The Doctor chuckled at the forced calm in her voice. "It's called the TARDIS. T-A-R-D-I-S. Time and Relative Dimension in Space," he explained as he walked up to the console.

Rose nodded, still a bit stunned. "It flies, does it?" she asked, wondering how that worked. Surely someone would notice a police box flying about in the sky. Or was it maybe like Harry Potter's bus that only wizards could see?

"No," he said. "It disappears in one place and reappears in another." He seemed to be deriving far too much amusement from her reaction.

Rose shook herself slightly and turned to the Doctor. "Are you gonna call these UNIT people now?" she asked him, determined to not let him keep being so smug.
"Not just yet," he said, frowning at one of the screens.

"What's wrong?" Rose asked as she walked up to him and saw the screen. There were swirly symbols on it that made no sense to her. She guessed that it must be his language. He really was an alien. An alien who had an alien language. She took another deep breath to calm herself down.

"There are seven Cybermen in their spaceship," he said, frowning slightly. "Including the Cyber Controller and the Cyber Leader."

"How'd you know?" Rose asked curiously.

"I counted when we got cornered," he said. "And I also did a scan now. The two I got rid of would have made a crew of nine."

"Is that unusual?" Rose asked, guessing from his frown.

He nodded seriously. "They attack in numbers significantly larger than this," he said.

"Maybe they were waiting for reinforcements," Rose suggested, logically. "They were sending a summoning signal, weren't they?"

The Doctor looked at her and nodded slowly. He had to confess that she was raising a valid point. "It is possible," he admitted.

"So, what do we do now?" she asked him, when he fell into deep thought again. "Stab them like the other two?"

He shook his head immediately. "Not if I can help it," he said through gritted teeth.

"Why not?" asked Rose curiously.

"I am not about to murder them in cold blood," he said sharply.

"They are the ones invading my planet. You just said they'll make humans like them," Rose snapped back, not ready to be deterred. He glared at her and Rose flinched at the anger in his eyes. But she stubbornly refused to back down. "What about those two that you did kill?" she demanded.

"I had no choice. It was necessary," he said angrily. "But I don't kill if I can help it."

Rose stared at him for a moment and then nodded. It was fair, she supposed. And she really had no right to ask him to kill for her planet. And killing anyone, even a bunch of tin robots, made her stomach turn. "Okay then, if not kill them then what can we do?" she asked. "How do we stop them?"

He exhaled roughly and frowned slightly. "I'm not sure," he admitted. "There are several ways, of course."

"Such as?" Rose prodded.

"Gold is their weakness," he said. "It's non-corrosive, and chokes their respiratory systems," he explained.

"Is that why you used the gold knives?" Rose asked.

He nodded. "Unfortunately, I only have one more of those," he said, showing her the last knife. "Gold is effective but it's a very delicate metal. Those two knives broke when I used it to severe
"So, we can't stab our way through. What else?" Rose asked as she examined the delicate (yet deadly to the Cybermen) knife. "Do you have anything else that might be gold?" she asked.

He frowned slightly. "I did have some gold dust but I gave it away to a friend of mine. Just recently, as a matter of fact," he said.

"Okay," she said. "Anything else, apart from gold?"

"Electromagnetic bombs are effective but very messy," he said, walking around to the other side of the console.

"You wouldn't happen to have any of those lying about, would you?" she asked him, knowing the answer.

"No," he admitted.

"How do those UNIT people fight Cybermen then?" Rose asked curiously.

The Doctor scowled slightly. "They use gold-tipped bullets. They are quite effective," he said darkly.

Rose nodded, thinking over his words carefully. So, it was just him that had a problem with violence. But she remembered the lethal intensity with which he had killed those two Cybermen. He had moved as quickly as a cat and his kills had been clean and methodical. He hated to kill but could kill like a trained soldier. He was an oxymoron in himself and confused the hell out of her.

"What's the best way then?" she asked him.

"The Cybermen are all linked via the Cyber controller. If we could damage him, then the rest should shut down," he considered.

"Which one was the Cyber Controller?" Rose asked.

"The big, ugly one with the blackened brain. Think of him like the mainframe for all the others," he explained.

"Hold on," Rose said. "You're saying that just damaging the controller will damage all of them?" she asked him incredulously. That sounded very, very unlikely. Surely the Cybermen were more advanced than that if they had teleports and stuff.

"Not usually, no," he said, guessing her line of thought accurately. "No, but there is such a small number of cybermen in their crew."

"Why does that matter?" Rose asked.

The Doctor sighed. "Such a small number means that they may be original Mondasian Cybermen. Which means that they were converted willingly and therefore it is very likely that they established a connection via the Cyber controller," he explained.

"How sure are you about this?" Rose asked him bluntly. "About them being original Mondasian, I mean?"

He looked at her seriously. "Sure enough," he said, trying not to let his doubts show. It was just a possibility. For all he knew, they were newer Cybermen and weren't linked at all which meant that
damaging the Controller wouldn't do anything. Except perhaps antagonise them even more.

He didn't tell Rose all that, though. No point in frightening the human girl. But she had been surprisingly resilient through all of this.

Rose nodded, not completely sure why she was trusting him so easily. Her personal issue with trust (or lack thereof) was her mum's primary worry when it came to her. Jackie meant well, but more than a year had gone by but Rose was in no way back to her old self. Ignoring the jumble of her own thoughts, Rose focused on the Doctor.

"Okay, so do we just go back up to the ship and damage the Controller?" she asked him.

The Doctor was all set to agree but he paused as he remembered his earlier doubts. "Let's take the TARDIS. It will be safer and quicker," he said. And that way, we have an escape, he added silently.

~

Rose watched in fascination as the Doctor whirled around the console, twisting dials and pressing buttons. The huge column in the centre began to move up and down and a wheezing noise filled the room. Rose couldn't help the giggle of excitement that bubbled through her as the console moved.

The Doctor was moving around the console, a childish glee on his face. He looked at Rose and winked as he pulled a lever. Rose gasped loudly as the ceiling became transparent and she saw the night sky outside.

"Oh, wow," she murmured. "This is just..." she laughed. "Brilliant!"

The Doctor felt immensely pleased at the air of obvious delight that shone from her. Maybe after all this, he could ask her to come with him. So soon after Grace had refused him, he felt a bit worried that Rose might refuse as well. And his life was dangerous. But her wonder at the universe was so refreshing and he had missed that.

Maybe that was what this new regeneration needed. A fresh start in the universe, seen through the bright, young eyes of one Rose Tyler. Not to mention her mystifying absence of timelines. In all his lives, he had never met anyone whose timelines he couldn't see (apart from his own, of course).

Was it just him? Or was she equally puzzling to other Time Lords? He made a small note to ask Romana or one of his other friends about it. He saw her looking at the inky sky with awe and smiled.

Even with her mysterious absence of timelines, she was still just a human from Earth. An ominous peal of laughter rang in his ears that sounded suspiciously like his seventh self. Passing it off as an effect of a new regeneration, he focused on piloting the TARDIS onto the Cybermen's ship.

"Won't they detect your ship landing into theirs?" Rose asked him.

He grinned at her question. She was good. "Very good, Rose. Yes, they will. Or at least, they would have but I managed to do quite a lot of damage to their systems earlier. I doubt they are looking at any new arrivals right now. Plus, we just escaped and they won't be expecting us to saunter back in now, would they?" he asked her.

"No, suppose not," Rose nodded.
The Doctor smiled. "Not to mention the fact that if they did indeed come to Earth for invading, then their priority will be to fix the teleport," he grinned.

Rose returned his grin with a bright one of her own. "So, let's hurry on and stop them, yeah?" she asked.

His grin widened impossibly and he gave her a short bow. "Miss Tyler," he said, offering his hand. "If you will so oblige."

Rose almost giggled at his posh tone but managed to keep her face straight as she inclined her head. "As you were, Doctor," she said, placing her hand in his.

Both their lips twitched and they burst into laughter. They calmed themselves down and the Doctor opened the doors of the TARDIS with a flourish that made Rose giggle again. They stepped out of the TARDIS. And found at least five different Cybermen waiting to confront them.

"Ah," said the Doctor.
Invasion of the Cybermen: The Beginning

Previously

They stepped out of the TARDIS. And found at least five different guns pointed at them by the Cybermen.

"Ah," the Doctor said.

"Take the Earthling to the holding cell," the Cyber Leader ordered.

"Stay away from her," the Doctor said, moving in front of Rose protectively. Rose was terrified at the anger in his voice, even when it wasn't directed at her. She found herself holding on to his hand tightly.

"Step away from the Earthling," the Cyber Leader said warningly.

"Not a chance," the Doctor said, his eyes set in a furious glare.

It was futile, two Cybermen held back the Doctor as a third one closed an iron fist around Rose's arm and began to march her away. "Doctor!" she called, completely scared.

"I'll come back for you, Rose," he promised fervently.

Rose was thrown into the same cell as before. Only this time, she was alone and had no sonic screwdriver to break out of there. Plus, there was a Cyberman standing guard with his back to her.

She was well and truly trapped.

~

The Doctor was led to the Cyber Controller. He was already angry at getting Rose caught and he was in no mood for the Cyber Controller's games. "What do you want?" he demanded.

"The Cybermen require your assistance," the Cyber Controller said.

Whatever it was, the Doctor was not expecting that. "What?" he asked, thinking he had heard wrong.

"This is the last Cyber ship of the Fifth Cyber Legion," the Controller droned.

The Doctor paused at that and frowned. "The Fifth Cyber Legion was destroyed in the battle of Helios," he remembered.

"All but one ship," the Cyber Controller agreed. "This ship crashed to Earth. The residual power kept it in orbit."

"When was this?" the Doctor asked, his eyes calculating.

"390 rotations of this planet ago," the Controller answered.

The Doctor nodded. That matched up with Rose's story of the lift not working for over a year. "What do you need me for then?" the Doctor asked warily.
"We require power to boost our ship away from this planet," the Cyber Controller answered.

The Doctor looked shocked. "Hold on," he said. "You want to get away from here? Not invade and convert humans?" he asked, incredulously.

"That is correct," the Cyber Controller said. "It is imperative that we return to Helios to rejoin our troops in the battle against the Sycorax."

The Doctor paused. He could try to destroy them or he could help them. But they were his enemies, capable of causing unmentionable damage. Even if they didn't want to invade Earth now, it didn't mean that they wouldn't return to finish them off when they were more powerful. On the other hand, if he sent them to Helios, they were sure to die there. The battle of Helios was one of the worst of its kind and left no survivors on either side.

Even then, there was no guarantee that Cybermen wouldn't return to Earth. His mind made up, he turned to the Cyber Controller.

"Why would I want to help you?" he asked, wanting to verify that he was making the right choice. "You are nothing but a bunch of tin robots fighting with other scavenging creatures of the universe."

"You will help us or the Earthling will be destroyed," the Cyber Controller said.

~

Rose sat down with her back against the wall, trying to think of an escape. The mainframe panel was still inside the cell but she had no idea how to hack it. She let out a growl of frustration. She hated feeling helpless.

She thrust her hands into the pockets of her jacket and her fingers hit a cold, smooth surface. Eyes widening, Rose carefully felt it. It was the gold knife that the Doctor had shown her. She must have put it in her pocket and forgotten all about it.

She swallowed back a giggle of relief. She had a way out. All she had to do was get her guard to come in and then stab him. Easier said than done, though. Rose could think of no way as to how to get him inside the cell.

And even after she got him inside, she had no idea where to stab him. The Doctor had stabbed the back of the heads of those two Cybermen. There was no way the Cybermen would turn his back to her if he came inside the cell.

The Doctor had also said something about the respiratory track of the Cybermen being damaged by gold. She remembered seeing a chest opening on the Cybermen but there was no way she would be able to get close enough to stab it.

She worked her brain furiously, trying to come up with a plan.

"You promised to leave the people of Earth unharmed and yet you threaten me with the death of one of them?" the Doctor asked, bitingly. He wondered why he had even considered helping them. They would turn around and kill him and Rose as soon as he had finished helping them.

"If you assist the Cybermen, the Earthling will be left unharmed," the Controller said.

"Fine," he snapped angrily, knowing that he would have to comply for now. He looked speculatively at the Cyber Controller. "On the condition that you bring Rose here as proof of her
being alive, I will help you get away from this planet."

"It will be seen to," the Cyber Controller promised.

~

Rose was still trying to come up with an escape plan when her cell door opened and her guard walked in. "You will follow," he ordered.

She thought about protesting but then realised that it was a perfect opportunity to put her earlier plan into action. "Alright," she agreed, her hand closing around the knife in her pocket.

The Cybermen turned his back to her and began to lead. Rose carefully gave herself a small running start and used her old gymnastics muscles to leap onto its back. The Cyberman was too stunned to retaliate immediately and she plunged the knife into the base of his neck with all the force she could muster. The Cybermen let out a strangled cry and fell to the ground.

Rose jumped away from him as sparks erupted from him and then he lay motionless. She breathed with relief and began to run to where the TARDIS had landed.

~

"The Earthling has escaped!" the Cyber Leader reported to the Controller.

The Doctor heard that and looked up from the panel near the door that he was working on. "Excellent!" he grinned and then activated a series of numbers on the panel. "It seems like I have no incentive to help you any longer. Funny how that worked out," he grinned.

"You must finish your task!" the Cyber Controller ordered furiously.

"Actually, I don't," the Doctor said as he activated the final switch on the panel. "You pathetic tin soldiers. I have defeated you time and time again. Did you truly believe I would help you, just so you could return?" he asked, his eyes narrowed into slits. "Setting you to self-destruct now."

"You will be destroyed!" the Cyber Leader cried angrily.

The Doctor grinned sarcastically at them. "Sorry, must dash," he said and took off running in the direction of the TARDIS.

Rose turned the corner and ran straight into a person. Thankfully, it was the Doctor. "Are you always going to make a habit of running into me?" he asked cheekily as he helped her to her feet and began to pull her along behind him.

"That depends," Rose said cheekily as they ran hand in hand. "Are you going to make a habit of getting me trapped in Cybermen cells?" she asked cheekily.

He laughed as they reached the TARDIS and he unlocked the door and ushered her inside. He checked his watch and saw that he had ten seconds before the ship would self-destruct. "Perfect timing," he said, sounding definitely pleased with himself.

He closed the doors of the TARDIS and the TARDIS vanished from the destructing Cyber ship with a wheezing sound.

~

The TARDIS materialised near her building in the Powell Estate. Rose stepped out and grinned in
wonder at being back home. She checked her phone and saw that it had just gone past midnight. Everything had happened in a matter of six hours.

To Rose, it felt like she had lived for years in those six hours. She had discovered so much, saved the Earth with an alien and travelled into space. How could anything else even come close to the six hours that she had just had?

She turned back to the TARDIS and saw the Doctor leaning against the open doors, with a warm smile. "Cybermen? Easy," he clicked his fingers.

"Absolutely," Rose agreed with a grin.

He nodded and then his smile turned impossibly shy. "I should be on my way, then," he said.

"Oh, right," Rose nodded, ignoring her disappointment. He was easily the best person she had met in her full nineteen years of life. But he was an alien and she had known he was going to leave. It was still hard to not be disappointed.

He saw her disappointment and it gave him the courage he needed to ask the next question. "Or...you could come with me?" he offered. "All of time and space, Rose Tyler."

Rose heard the extremely tempting offer and suppressed the urge to yell 'yes' and run into the TARDIS. She would love to; more than anything. She had lived more today than in nineteen years. If this was the life he was offering her, she wanted to dive headfirst into it. But everything had happened in a flash and as tempted as she was, she couldn't rush in into a new life, so easily.

She had done that once before; left her old life for a bloke and that had blown up miserably in her face. But the Doctor wasn't an ordinary bloke; he wasn't even a bloke, he was an alien.

Indecision tore at her and she finally made a decision. The Doctor looked expectantly at her, waiting for an answer.

Rose smiled at him. "Ask me again in the morning," she said.

The Doctor looked shocked. "I beg your pardon?" he asked, astonished.

"I'm too tired and I don't want to make a decision yet. Will you ask me again in the morning?" she asked, almost afraid of what she was going to do if he refused and left.

The Doctor gaped wordlessly at her. Was this girl even real? Did she just tell him to ask her again in the morning? No, was his immediate answer. He was the Doctor, a Time Lord. He was not going to wait on the whims and fantasies of a young, human girl.

Except, a sly voice reminded him, we all know you are.

Ignoring that particular piece of advice from his seventh self, who was somehow designated to be his voice of reason this time around, the Doctor weighed up his options.

He thought back over the last few hours. He had laughed with her, more than he had in a long time. She was smart, quick, brave and everything that he loved about the human race. But he never asked twice.

Who was he kidding? He had been handed his own personal mystery. An absence of timelines and a very interesting pink and yellow human girl. He had a sneaking suspicion that she could ask for anything and he would give it to her.
He looked up at her and found her chewing on her lip nervously. He nodded shortly at her. "Seven in the morning. I will be here," he found himself saying.

He didn't wait to see her wide smile of happiness; he went inside the TARDIS and closed the doors behind him. He had done it. Swallowed his high and mighty Time Lord pride and complied with her wishes.

He piloted the TARDIS away from her as quickly as he could and when it landed with a thud, he saw that the TARDIS had brought him to the moon. Snorting at the absurd destination, he opened the doors and stayed within the TARDIS's force field to gaze upon his favourite blue and green planet in the distance.

Rose Tyler was there somewhere, probably sleeping. Or would she be packing to come with him? She still hadn't agreed to travel with him. She had said to ask her again. A bizarre request that he had complied with. Whether that was a stupid decision or a brilliant one, only time would tell.

After spending another hour staring at the planet pensively, the Doctor set the TARDIS to travel to seven in the morning the next day. As the TARDIS hurtled through the vortex, he wondered if she would be there. The TARDIS materialised and he took a deep breath and opened the doors.

The space in front of him was empty. No Rose Tyler. He sighed in disappointment and turned to go back into the TARDIS. He had tried. Broken every one of his rules and all for naught.

"HOLD ON!" he heard the familiar voice and he turned back, his hearts beating in double time.

Rose ran towards him, a large and heavy-looking rucksack on her back reducing her running speed. The Doctor felt a wide smile appear on his face as Rose threw himself straight into his arms. He grinned and hugged her tightly, twirling her slightly.

He broke the hug and looked at her bright, shining face. "Will you come with me, Rose Tyler?" he asked.

"Absolutely," Rose grinned.

The Doctor took her hand and led her inside the TARDIS. "Well then," he said airily, taking her rucksack off her back. "Welcome aboard, Miss Tyler," he said. "Rule One, don't wander off..."
Rose wandered into the room that the Doctor had shown her to. It wasn't half bad. A light purple comforter lay on the huge bed which was very soft as she judged after she jumped on it for a bit. There was a connected bathroom with soft lavender walls and floors.

The room itself was painted a very faint lavender colour. As far as rooms went, it was quite good, if a little bare. Rose tossed her bag into her wardrobe, intending to unpack it later.

She had spent the whole of last night, coming up with a decision. She had been so restless that finally at 4 am, her mum had woken up and made them both tea.

"Are you alright, sweetheart?" asked Jackie, worriedly.

Rose shrugged, not knowing how to explain. "Have you ever had a chance to change your life completely?" she asked her mum. She winced as soon as that question had slipped out. She hadn't meant to sound...well, so much like the Doctor.

Jackie appraised her daughter critically. "What's happened, Rose?" she asked carefully.

"I wanna travel," Rose said, turning to Jackie earnestly. "Just wander about and see new places."

Jackie pursed her lips. "Maybe you should go to bed, darling. You're not thinking straight."

"No, but I am," Rose said earnestly. "I am tired of staying here, mum. I wanna go out there," she said, her eyes shining.

"And just how do you plan on doing that?" Jackie demanded. "What about money?"

"Don't worry about it," Rose said. "I'll manage."

"Sleep on it and we'll talk tomorrow," Jackie said, knowing her daughter's stubborn nature. Too much like her father, she was.

"No mum, I'm leaving in the morning," Rose said.

"What?" Jackie asked.

"Please mum," Rose said.

Jackie could only nod and accept it with a sigh. For there had been a spark in her eyes that she hadn't seen in a while.

Her mum hadn't been happy but seeing her look much better than she had in a year, she had reluctantly given in.

There was a knock at the door and the Doctor smiled at her. "Is the room to your liking, Rose?" he asked her politely.

Rose smiled back. "Yes, thank you," she said.

"How about a trip then?" he asked. "I do have a few places in mind."

Rose grinned happily and jumped to her feet. "Where are we going?" she asked in excitement,
linking her arm with his as he led them to the console room. He paused thoughtfully and then grinned. "How about Lorena Major?" he asked.

"What's that?" Rose asked curiously.

"It's a vacation planet. All tropical climate and rainforests. Beautiful place," he said. "It's not too far from Earth. We go only one galaxy over to Andromeda."

Rose's eyes were wide as he talked casually about it. "An alien planet?" she asked in wonder.

"Well, yes," he answered. "The inhabitants are humanoid though. Earth's cousin species, in a way. But your species wouldn't develop like theirs for another three centuries."

"Develop how?" Rose asked curiously. Did humans grow weird organs or something? Three heads, five hands, four eyes or something?

"Oh, technology mostly," the Doctor said, pulling her thoughts away from a weird alien image. "It's really fascinating how you humans have managed to retain your basic outward appearance all throughout time and space," he said, sounding delighted.

Rose grinned at him, her tongue touching the corner of her mouth. "What can I say?" she said airily. "We are a brilliant species."

He smiled back. "Oh I absolutely agree, Rose Tyler. Come along then, Lorena Major awaits."

As soon as the TARDIS had landed, Rose looked at him in excitement. He gestured to the doors. "Go on then, Miss Tyler," he said, his eyes shining with mirth.

Rose's smile widened as she walked to the doors and stepped out. Warm, humid air hit her and she grinned in delight. It was perfect. They had landed in front of some sort of a huge mansion. The mansion was painted a nice ochre colour and tropical plants with orange leaves grew all around it. The sky was, oddly enough, a very clear blue. The soil at her feet was warm and reddish in appearance.

"This is amazing," she breathed.

"Isn't it?" the Doctor asked from behind her, watching her with a pleased smile.

Rose grinned. "Yep," she agreed. She pulled off her hoodie and tied it around her waist, leaving herself in her white tank top and jeans.

"Warm?" the Doctor asked her.


He drew himself up proudly. "I'm a Time Lord, Rose," he said, a haughty note in his voice. "We can regulate our core temperature according to the environment."

"Like a frog then?" Rose asked curiously, remembering that she had learnt about it in school before she dropped out. Or was it the lizard? She never was any good at science.

The Doctor looked extremely offended. "An amphibian? I tell you that I am a superior being who
can regulate my temperature and you compare me to an amphibian?" he asked her in disbelief.


The Doctor glared half-heartedly at her and then took her hand. "Come on, let's go and find you a relaxing holiday," he said, continuing to mutter under his breath about Earth, insolent humans and amphibians.

~

The Doctor pulled her straight in the direction of the mansion in front of them. "What is this place?" Rose asked him.

"It's a resort," he explained. "An intergalactic resort," he added with a grin.

Rose grinned in excitement as he led her down the long driveway to the mansion. They passed several people of Lorena who bowed to them as they walked past. Rose noticed that they looked like humans but their skin had a natural tan like they spent a lot of time in the sun. They were all dressed in white jumpsuits with a sash tied around their waist. Some had an orange sash around them while the others had a green one.

"What are the sashes for?" Rose asked the Doctor in a low voice.

"They denote their race," he said.

"They are not of the same race?" Rose asked in surprise. There was nothing to indicate that they were two different races, in their appearances at least.

"No," the Doctor answered. "The ones wearing the orange sash are called the Kiragees. And the others are the Pollas."

"What's the difference between them?" Rose asked in a very low voice, not wanting to sound offensive.

The Doctor lowered his voice even further. "None whatsoever," he said. "Many years ago, they were just one race. But then they were invaded by the Dehus. The Dehus used a policy of divide and rule. They put the people from Lorena Minor in positions of power and the group eventually came to be known as the Pollas."

"Is that why there are more of the Kiragees than those of the Pollas?" Rose asked curiously.

"Very well spotted, Rose," he beamed proudly. "Yes, the Pollas only consist of about 10% of their population but they are the ruling class. The Kiragees are in majority but they are the common people, as they are considered."

Rose nodded. "That's not right, though," she said.

"It's not too different from your world," he pointed out.

Rose let that not-so-subtle insult slide. "What about the Pollas on Lorena Minor?" she asked.

"Lorena Minor is a dying planet. It's almost empty. Most of the Pollas have migrated here anyway," he said.

"Why is it dying?" Rose asked.
"No reason. Except why live on a planet where you are the majority when you can emigrate one
planet over and be the ruling class?" he asked airily.

Rose nodded; that made sense in a twisted way. "So, the Kiragees are fine with living as the
working class on their own planet?" she asked.

He nodded. "It's not a black and white divide, Rose," he explained gently. "Inter-class marriages
are allowed and the two races live without conflict. Like I said before, tourism is their living and
they work together to achieve it," he said.

Rose nodded. "Why are they bowing to us, though?" she asked.

"We are visitors," he said. "Visitors are held in the highest position of honour on Lorena Major.
That's what makes it such a popular spot for vacation."

"So even after the Dehus invaded, the planet remained peaceful enough to have tourism?" Rose
asked.

He nodded. "The Dehus were the ones who started the tourism business in the first place.
Unfortunate to say, but before the Dehus invaded, the people of Lorena were akin to savages. The
Dehus brought order to Lorena," he said.

"And even after the Dehus left, they continued to carry on the business and live peacefully?" Rose
asked in wonder. It was fascinating.

The Doctor grinned. "Good to hear, isn't it?" he asked. "Although," he frowned. "They do have an
uprising sometime in the future. One of the worst."

Rose looked worried. "When?" she asked uneasily.

He stroked his thumb over their clasped hands. "Don't worry," he said. "The TARDIS won't land us
inside a rebellion," he assured her. When she continued to look worried, he smiled at her. "Relax
Rose, look around you. Does it look like we're in a rebellion?"

Rose looked around the peaceful place and smiled. "No," she agreed. "You're right, of course."

The Doctor grinned. "That's the spirit," he beamed. "Now come on," he said, leading her through
the doors of the resort. "Let's find you a relaxing spa."

~

The Spa was the most amazing thing Rose had ever seen. The Doctor had handed her a long, thin
metal stick that he said was a credit stick and then ushered her off to the spa. He had said that he
was going off to the marketplace to find a part for the TARDIS.

The receptionist at the front desk had smiled at the unlimited credit stick that Rose had shown her
and immediately booked Rose for a full pampering treatment.

Rose had got a massage, a mud bath, a steam bath, and was currently lying on the lounger wearing
a white terrycloth robe. She was extremely comfortable and very content being a puddle of relaxed
goo. She felt like a princess. Her mum and Shareen would give an arm and leg for the treatment
that she had just got.

She mused that if this was the sort of travelling she got to do with the Doctor, then she wouldn't be
opposed to it at all. Maybe the thing with the Cybermen was a one-off thing. Smiling in
contentment, she closed her eyes to take a nap.

"Rose," she heard the Doctor say and she opened her eyes lazily. "Enjoy yourself?" the Doctor asked, looking extremely pleased at how relaxed she looked.

"Yes I did," Rose answered honestly. "Thank you for bringing me here. This was amazing."

"You're very welcome, Rose," he smiled. "Here, see this," he said, pulling out a piece of paper from his pocket. "I found this at the market."

Rose leaned forward to read it. "I smell like vanilla and roses?" she asked in confusion, reading it.

The Doctor raised his eyebrows and stuffed it back into his pocket quickly. "Right," he said, blushing slightly, much to Rose's surprise. "It must have developed a fault."

Rose grinned. "Oh?" she asked. "What is it then?"

He blushed even deeper. "It's a check-your-things psychic paper."

Rose smiled in amusement at his discomfort before sobering. "It's a psychic paper? What does that mean?" she asked, taking pity on him.

He brightened at once, forgetting his embarrassment in face of giving a scientific explanation. "It's a convenient little thing. It shows whatever you want it to," he explained. "Easier for infiltration and getting access to places where you otherwise wouldn't be allowed."


He nodded. "No more dressing up as an old woman," he said.

"What?" Rose asked in confusion.

He shook his head, smiling in amusement. "Nothing," he said. "Come on. Get dressed and we shall go and see more of the marketplace."

Rose nodded. "Give me a minute," she said, getting up and stretching lightly. She grabbed her pile of clothes and left for the changing rooms.

The Doctor smiled after her and picked up the newspaper that was lying on the table next to Rose's lounger. His eyes fell on the date and he tensed. "Oh no," he murmured. A loud boom shook the whole of the resort and Rose rushed back out, dressed in her clothes.

"What was that?" she asked him.

"I am so sorry, Rose," he said, showing her the newspaper. "I'm afraid I have miscalculated the timing of our trip."

"What?" Rose asked in horror.

"We have landed on the eve of the biggest revolution on Lorena Major," the Doctor said gravely. "Tomorrow, the Kiragees rise in rebellion and start a brutal war against the Pollas."
Rebels of Lorena: The Rebellion

_Previously_

"I'm afraid I have miscalculated the timing of our trip."

"What?" Rose asked in horror.

"We have landed on the eve of the biggest revolution on Lorena Major," the Doctor said gravely. "Tomorrow, the Kiragees rise in rebellion and start a brutal war against the Pollas."

"What do we do?" asked Rose.

"Leave. At once," said the Doctor, tossing the newspaper aside and taking her hand.

"Hold on, can't we stop it? We're not just going to run away, are we?" Rose demanded.

"Rose, we can't interfere," said the Doctor, looking at her seriously. "This is their planet's history. And we can't rewrite history. Not one line," he said firmly.

"But you're a Time Lord," said Rose. "If you know the future, why can't you use it to stop all the bad things from happening?" she demanded.

His eyes flashed furiously and he grabbed her arms. "Rose, Time Lords do not interfere. Now, we are leaving and that is it," he said, a note of finality in his voice.

Rose was taken aback at his angry tone but she glared right back. "Don't talk to me like I'm a child," she said furiously.

He sighed and wondered why he liked humans so much again. "Rose," he tried gently. "What do you think would happen if I went back in time and stopped the Titanic from sinking or killed Hitler when he was a child?" Before Rose could answer, he continued. "Chaos, that's what. Every single event spins a future and a minor disruption can turn the universe on its head."

Rose nodded but she looked far from satisfied. "But what happens to this planet?" she asked.

The Doctor took her hand and began to lead her towards the exit. "The rebellion lasts three months. But after that, the Pollas and the Kiragees come to an agreement and they actually build a more equal society," he explained.

"You mean they actually stop the war and get along?" Rose asked.

"Exactly," he nodded. "So you see, this rebellion is a good thing," he said.

"How many people die though?" she asked stubbornly.

The Doctor had been afraid she would ask that. He hesitated.

"Doctor, how many?" she persisted.

"15,000 Pollas and about 12,000 Kiragees," he said. "But," his voice turned stern. "We can't interfere. We must leave now."

Rose had a lot of things she wanted to say to that but they had reached the exit only to find it
blocked by a throng of people. The Doctor looked confused. "What's happening?" he wondered.

"Honoured visitors, kindly refrain from panicking," a Kiragee employee was saying.

The Doctor walked up to him, pulling out his psychic paper as he went. Hoping it didn't comment on the scent of the Kiragee employee, he flashed it. "Hello, I'm the Doctor," he said. "What seems to be the matter here?" he asked.

"Sir, we can't let anyone outside until our law enforcement officials get here," he said.

"What's your name?" the Doctor asked the tired employee.

"Ratan," he answered.

"Ratan, can you get all the guests to the main lounge?" the Doctor asked kindly.

"Yes, sir," Ratan said.

"Good, tell them that the police are on their way," he said, gently ushering Ratan away. His eyes flickered over Ratan briefly. "Oh and Ratan, I would advise calling your friend, Lila, and warning her to stay in the house."

Ratan was wide-eyed but he nodded as he hurried away, ushering the crowd of people to the main lounge.

"What was that about?" Rose asked him curiously.

"His friend Lila is a Polla. He is in love with her," he said.

"How do you know?" Rose asked him in fascination.

"I'm a Time Lord, Rose," he said wryly.

"You can see people's future?" Rose asked incredulously.

"Usually. Just a bit here and there," he lied, not mentioning that if he chose to focus, he could read the entire myriad of timelines surrounding a person. All that is, all that was and all that ever could be. But it didn't half give him a headache.

"What about me then? Can you see my future?" Rose asked.

He paused and then gave her a small smile. "The future is always changing, Rose," he answered, deflecting the question. "Now, we have to get back to the TARDIS."

Rose seemed to have realised that he wasn't going to answer. She was curious as to what he knew about her future that he didn't want to tell her. "But the doors are locked," she pointed out.

He rolled his eyes and showed her the sonic screwdriver. He was just about to unlock the door when another loud boom shook the resort. The noise was followed by a cacophony of people chanting something loudly.

"What are they saying?" Rose asked, her eyes wide with alarm.

The Doctor's mouth was set in a hard line. "Death to the Pollas," he grimaced. "The rebel forces seem to have arrived in the city."
"Will they come in here?" Rose asked.

"No," he said, shaking his head. "They won't harm the visitors. It goes against everything that they believe in."

"Excuse me," a pink-haired woman approached them. She was not a local, dressed as she was in purple robes. "Are you aware of what is going on?" she asked.

"The doors have been locked," Rose said helpfully. "They're not letting anyone out."

The woman looked even more worried at that.

The Doctor smiled kindly at her. "Hello, I'm the Doctor and this is Rose. May we know who you are?" he asked.

She smiled weakly at them. "My name's Althea. I'm from Clan Jonarbi of the Jax Cluster," she said, crossing her arms in front of her and bowing.

"You're a Jonarbian Priestess," the Doctor said in wonder and returned her bow perfectly. "May I ask what your Holiness is doing on Lorena?"

Althea smiled. "Formalities are unnecessary, Doctor," she said. "I was here on a holiday. I presume you and your Rose were doing the same?" she inquired politely.

"Yes, Rose is from Earth and we just arrived some hours ago, I'm afraid," he said.

Althea nodded and then frowned at the locked doors again. Rose watched as her eyes flitted around anxiously. "Are you alright?" Rose asked her in concern.

Althea gave her a small smile. "I'm looking for my consort," she said. "He was supposed to meet me for lunch but I cannot seem to locate him."

"Is he a Polla?" Rose asked, equally concerned.

"Yes, I met Valen when I arrived here a month ago. He has been courting me ever since," Althea nodded. "How on Jax did you know he was a Polla?" she asked curiously.

"Althea, can you contact Valen?" the Doctor asked, a note of urgency in his voice.

"Is he in danger?" Althea demanded immediately.

"Yes," the Doctor said and Rose stared at him. What happened to not interfering? It was one thing to warn Ratan but to actually imply that he knew the future? "We'll give you some privacy," he said, taking Rose's hand and pulling her away.

Rose stared at him questioningly. "I thought you said we weren't meant to interfere," she said.

"This isn't interfering," he said firmly.

"What is it then?" she asked.

The Doctor looked a bit sheepish. "A nudge?" he offered.

Rose considered that. "So, we can't change the big stuff but the little things can change?" she asked him eagerly.
He sighed as he realised that she had figured it out on her first trip. He debated whether to lie but knew she would catch him. In an unprecedented move, he opted for the truth. "Yes," he admitted. "But," his voice was sterner now. "Technically, we just helped Althea in the right direction. We can't interfere too much. It's forbidden."

"By who?" Rose asked.

"Whom," he corrected and ignored it when Rose rolled her eyes. "The Time Lords," he answered.

"Hold on, you're breaking the law of your own people?" Rose asked curiously.

"Not breaking it," he said immediately.

"Oh? What then?" Rose asked, a grin threatening to burst out at how uncomfortable he looked.

"Just...bending them a bit," he said, looking sheepish again.

Rose laughed. "So, underneath the tough Time Lord exterior, you are just a softie like the rest of us," she grinned, her tongue poking out of the corner of her mouth.

The Doctor looked exasperated. "Rose," he groaned. "I'm not a 'softie' as you so eloquently put it. I just happen to do things...differently sometimes."

Rose looked like she wanted to tease him again but nodded. "Okay, so we're gonna help Althea now? And what's a Jorabian priestess?" she asked curiously.

"Jonarbian," he corrected. "The Jonarbian Priesthood is a highly intelligent group of people. They are acclaimed all over the galaxy for their healing solutions," he explained.

"They are doctors?" Rose asked.

"In a manner of speaking," the Doctor said. "Their science is much advanced than Earth doctors though."

"Is her boyfriend going to be okay?" Rose asked him.

He gave her a worried look. "I'm not sure," he said.

Rose nodded. She had never seen him this worried. Not even when they had been captured by Cybermen. "If the rebels are not harming visitors, we can just go, right?" she asked him tentatively.

His eyes met hers sharply. "Yes, we can. Come on," he said, taking her hand. There was a round of bullets fired and the noise seemed to come from the main lounge where the guests had been sent.

Rose and the Doctor were frozen for an instant before they took off running in the direction of the main lounge. They noticed that Althea had followed them as well. The Doctor paused right outside the doors and indicated to Rose and Althea that they needed to be quiet.

In the main lounge, the guests were crouching on the floor with fright. Three of the Kiragee employees were standing above them holding weapons in their hands. The Doctor's face hardened into a marble mask.

"We will take Lorena for us!" the Kiragee employee, who seemed to be in charge announced and fired a few more bullets into the air.

Ratan, who had been crouching on the floor with the guests and the remaining employees, looked
at him. "Bana, what are you doing?" Ratan asked, looking horrified. "These are visitors."

Bana's face tightened as he walked up to Ratan and picked him with the front of his jumpsuit. "Will you support the filth that the Pollas inflicted on us than your own brothers?" he demanded.

Ratan looked scared but didn't waver. "Bana, be reasonable," he begged.

Bana's face turned red with anger as he let go off Ratan's jumpsuit and Ratan stumbled back slightly. The Doctor knew what was going to happen right before Bana levelled his weapon at Ratan and fired.

"NO!" Althea yelled as Rose gasped in horror and the Doctor looked frighteningly furious.

"Who is there?" Bana demanded, looking towards where they were hiding. "Milo, Ren, check near the entrance," he barked to the two Kiragee employees who had been standing with him.

The two people nodded and began to move towards the entrance. The Doctor took Rose and Althea's hands and pulled them away. There was an alcove down the hall but it was only big enough for two people to hide properly.

The Doctor thought quickly and pushed Rose and Althea to hide there. "Stay here and don't move," he hissed in a low voice.

"What're you going to do?" Rose asked in a whisper.

"Find another hiding place," he answered, looking around. He spotted a closet further down the hall but as he began to move towards it, he heard footsteps behind him.

"Stop right there! Or we'll shoot," the one called Ren said as he and Milo pointed their weapons at the Doctor.

The Doctor raised his arms to his side and turned to face them. He noticed that Rose and Althea looked ready to jump out so he shook his head subtly. Rose was still trying to move but Althea was holding her back.

"Walk up here slowly," Milo ordered. "Keep your hands where we can see them."

"You know, you should really put those guns away. You might seriously hurt someone," he said pleasantly as he walked up to them.

"Shut up," Ren hissed.

The Doctor raised his eyebrows. "You're attacking visitors to your planet," he said, his voice hardening. "I hope you are ashamed of yourselves."

"I said, shut up!" Ren said angrily.

The Doctor quieted down but he noticed that Milo looked a bit uncomfortable. So it wasn't too late for him to change his mind.

"Milo," the Doctor said gently. "Is Derina alright?" he asked, inquiring after his wife.

Milo's eyes widened and he looked scared. "H-how did you know?" he asked.

"He's a spy," Ren said. "He has been spying on us. He is a Polla in the disguise of a visitor. Let's take him to Bana and execute him."
"I'm not a spy," the Doctor said firmly. He looked at Milo. "Would Derina want you to do this, Milo?" he asked him gently.

"He's a spy," Ren hissed to Milo. "Don't listen to him. He might have taken Derina and the kids hostage and is threatening us."

Milo's face tightened and he glared at the Doctor. "Keep your hands up and follow Ren. If you say another word, I will personally execute you."

Ren nodded in satisfaction at Milo's stance. "Follow me, Spy," he said to the Doctor.

The Doctor cast a last pleading look at Milo who ignored him. Sighing in defeat, he followed Ren back to the main lounge.

"Bana! We found a spy," Ren announced as he and Milo led the Doctor right to the front and forced him onto his knees.

"I am not a spy," the Doctor said calmly. "If you'd let me explain..."

"Shut up, Spy," Ren said, hitting him across the face with the back end of his weapon. "He knew about Milo's wife and everything."

"Then he must be a spy," Bana declared. "And he must be executed."

The Doctor rubbed the trickle of blood from the side of his mouth and turned to face Bana. Bana grinned in an ugly manner and pointed his weapon straight at the Doctor's head. "Die," he declared.
Rebels of Lorena: Freeing the Hostages

Previously

"I am not a spy," the Doctor said calmly. "If you'd let me explain..."

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Meanwhile

"We have to help him," Rose hissed to Althea as the two rebels led the Doctor away, claiming he was a spy.

"I know, Rose," Althea agreed. "But we have to be smart about it."

"Then what do you suggest?" Rose demanded.

Althea pursed her lips and looked around. She nudged Rose and pointed out the stairwell at the end of the hall. "The stairway leads to the balcony above the main lounge," she said.

Rose's eyes brightened. "Come on then," she said as the two women hurried away from their hiding place. They raced up the stairwell and reached the balcony. It ran all the way around the top of the main lounge.

"We're still a bit exposed up here," Rose pointed out to Althea.

"But they won't be looking up here," Althea said logically. "The guests are all crouching onto the floor and those three won't take their eyes off them."

"Fair point," Rose agreed as they cautiously walked out onto the balcony and leaned over the railing to take a look. "There he is," she pointed out as the Doctor was seen kneeling before Bana.

"...must be executed," Bana declared.

"They are going to kill him," Althea gasped.

Rose looked around frantically for a way to help the Doctor. Her eyes fell on the giant crystal chandelier that hung from the ceiling of the lounge. "There!" Rose pointed out. "The chandelier!"

"How is that helpful?" Althea asked in confusion, her eyes worried as she watched Bana level his gun at the Doctor.

"Bana and his goons are standing in the same spot. The chandelier is held up by four clasps. If we undid two of those clasps, the chandelier will swing onto them," she said.

"But won't it kill them?" Althea asked.
"Nah, they will have plenty of time to jump out of the way. But it will give the Doctor just the chance to run off again," Rose said. "Come on!"

Althea agreed and helped Rose loosen the clasp from one end. She nodded back at her. Rose loosened the second clasp and the two women pushed in unison as the chandelier swung right at Bana, Ren and Milo.

~

"Die," Bana declared with an ugly smirk. His eyes turned to the people crouching on the floor. "This is what we do to spies!" he announced. His eyes fell back on the Doctor who stared at him calmly.

Suddenly, the chandelier in the middle of the room swung violently towards them. The Doctor jumped out of the way just in time while Bana, Milo and Ren ducked for cover. The Doctor sprang to his feet and disappeared out of the lounge quickly.

Smiling at the escape, he rushed up the stairs, just to run into Rose and Althea. "Oh thank god," Rose said as she threw her arms around him.

He laughed slightly as he hugged her back. "Wonderful idea, swinging a chandelier at them. Non-lethal yet effective," he praised.

"It was Rose's idea," Althea added and Rose blushed.

"Yeah, enough of that," Rose said, fighting a smile. She turned to the Doctor. "I thought you said they didn't harm visitors?"

"Did I?" he asked. "I probably should have added a 'maybe' in there somewhere."

Rose rolled her eyes lightly and Althea looked at him critically. "You've been injured, Doctor," she said.

The Doctor rubbed his jaw lightly. "Don't worry, Althea. It will heal soon enough. Meanwhile, we have three people holding nearly fifty people hostage," he said.

"We have to get them out of there," Rose said. "Those three are so paranoid, they will probably start killing people if they moved wrong."

"Very astute, Rose," the Doctor murmured. "You are, unfortunately, correct. There is no telling what Bana and his cronies will do and we certainly don't want them harming innocent hostages."

"We shouldn't stand out here in the open," Althea said, leading them into a small room next to the stairs. "One of them might come to investigate."

"Good thinking, Althea," the Doctor nodded as he soniced the door of the room shut behind them.

The room turned out to be a viewing chamber. There was a huge glass window in front of them which showed the city outside.

"Oh my God," Rose murmured as she looked outside.

The market stalls that had been bustling with people and vendors were now burnt to the ground. There was an odd hush over the whole place. No one was about. Smoke seemed to be rising from further down the road where the houses were.
"I didn't imagine it would escalate this quickly," Althea murmured in horror.

"Neither did I," the Doctor said grimly. "Did you manage to get in touch with Valen?" he asked Althea.

She nodded. "He has managed to leave the city and is reassembling troops to fight the rebels," she said.

"What about those law enforcement people that were supposed to get here?" Rose asked.

"They have either been killed or they must have joined the rebellion," Althea said.

"Do you have a plan?" Rose asked the Doctor.

"I never do see the purpose of plans. Circumstances usually ruin plans," he said breezily. "I do have an idea."

"Well, what's the idea then?" she asked, barely restraining herself from rolling her eyes.

"We have to get those hostages out of here," he said.

"Where would they go?" Rose asked, looking pointedly at the destruction in the city outside.

"I meant away from Lorena Major," he said.

"How do they do that?" Rose asked.

"There is a shuttle port in the resort," Althea said.

"Quite right, Althea," the Doctor nodded. "Where is its precise location?"

"In the east wing of the resort," Althea said. "It has a shuttle every hour to Lorena Minor."

"But wouldn't it be closed now? Most of the employees are hostages as well," Rose pointed out.

"No, no," the Doctor shook his head. "The shuttle is very likely to be fully computer-operated. But the east wing will require everyone to go to the other side of the resort."

"And we still don't know how we can get them all there. What with our three friends making it difficult for us," Rose said, shaking her head in frustration.

"May I ask why we are evacuating over fifty hostages when we could simply overpower and restrain the three rebels?" Althea asked.

"The resort is not safe. Neither is anywhere on Lorena Major. Even if we deal with Bana and his cronies, there is no guarantee that more rebels wouldn't launch an attack. And they might be better prepared and trained," the Doctor said.

"So, what do we do, Doctor?" Rose asked.

"First things first," the Doctor said, producing a piece of paper and pencil from his pocket. "Althea, I need you to draw me an exact map of the resort, specifically the quickest and safest way to get to the east wing from the main lounge."

Althea nodded and immediately set about sketching a path.
"Rose," the Doctor said, turning to her. "I need you to come with me. The two of us will lure Bana, Ren and Milo out of the main lounge."

"How are we gonna do that?" Rose asked.

The Doctor grinned at her. "I'll explain. So here is what we do..."

~

"Have you found the spy yet?" Bana demanded from Ren.

"No, but Milo is still searching," Ren answered.

"He had help. The chandelier would not fall on its own," Bana said, glaring at the broken chandelier.

"There's no one outside," Milo said as he returned to them. "The spy has vanished." He looked at Ren. "Do you really think he has harmed Derina and the kids?"

"You never know with spies, Milo," Bana said. He exchanged an almost amused look with Ren. Milo could be really naive sometimes.

There was a noise right outside the main lounge and the three men turned in that direction immediately. "Milo, go and see what it is," Bana ordered.

Milo nodded and raised his weapon as he walked to the door outside. He stepped out into the corridor and felt a blow to the back of his head.

"Sorry, Milo," the Doctor whispered as the man fell to the ground unconscious. "Rose, tie up his hands and put him in that cupboard over there."

Rose nodded as she used a thick piece of string to tie Milo's hands behind his back. The Doctor helped her lift him as the two of them put him inside the cupboard. As an afterthought, the Doctor took out a handkerchief from his pocket and tied up Milo's mouth as well.

"What about the other two?" Rose whispered.

"Leave it to me," the Doctor winked at her. Before she could ask what he was going to do, the Doctor ran to the door and threw them open. "Hello! Could I interest you two gentlemen in a game of 'I spy'?" he asked pleasantly.

Bana and Ren let out outraged screams and turned to fire at him but he dodged the bullets neatly.

"Hell of a plan, that was," Rose hissed at him as they took cover from the bullets.

"You have little faith, Rose," he said, shaking a finger in her direction. He chanced a glance inside the main lounge and saw that Bana and Ren had stopped firing and were now approaching towards them with their guns raised.

"Get ready," he told Rose. "When I say now, use that crowbar to knock the gun out of Ren's hand."

Rose nodded and tightened her grip on the crowbar that they had used to knock out Milo. The Doctor held up his finger. "Now, Rose!"

Rose brought the crowbar crashing on Ren's hand and he let out a startled cry as the gun clattered to the floor. Rose quickly picked it up and pointed it at Ren. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw
the Doctor taking the gun off Bana who was crumpled to the ground in pain.

"Just a bit of pressure on the right veins," he explained at her questioning look. "Venusian karate, extremely efficient."

Rose could only nod as Bana stood up, still grimacing in pain. The Doctor tied both their hands and left them tethered to a big pillar in the foyer.

"Come along, Rose," he said.

"What do we do with these?" Rose asked, holding up the guns.

"Oh, just toss them in the bin," the Doctor shrugged as they returned to the main lounge.

Althea had already started filling in the employees about their plan and they had started ushering the guests towards the east wing.

The Doctor strode over to where Ratan's body lay and closed his eyes in remorse. He felt a comforting hand on his shoulder and recognising Rose's touch, he silently patted her hand in thanks. He crossed Ratan's hands respectfully over his body and then stood up.

"Are the guests on their way to the east wing?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," one of the employees, whose tag named her as Tia, answered. "But there is something wrong, sir."

"What seems to be the matter?" the Doctor asked.

"It seems like the programming of the shuttle has malfunctioned," Althea said.

"Have the guests all boarded?" the Doctor asked as they made their way to the shuttle port.

"Yes, sir," Tia said.

"Show me to the control room then," the Doctor said.

"Do you know what's wrong?" Rose asked the Doctor as he checked the equipment in the control room.

"It is the security protocol. Program Bad Wolf. It's blocking my access," he said, frustrated.

"Any way to override it?" Rose asked.

"Yes, I should be able to," he said, as he began to fiddle with the circuitry. "Althea, why are you still here?"

"I am not leaving Lorena Major," Althea said.

The Doctor sighed in exasperation. "It's not safe for you here. You should board the shuttle and go to Lorena Minor. Valen will come fetch you when the rebellion is over," he said.

"Be that as it may, I will be staying here," Althea said stubbornly.

"Doctor, did you hear that?" Rose asked, interrupting their argument.

The Doctor and Althea stopped to listen and then looked horrified as they realised that the chants
of the rebels were coming closer. "They've entered the resort," Rose said, her eyes wide.

"Althea, just go," the Doctor said, not taking his eyes off the circuitry.

"There is no chance of that happening, Doctor," Althea said. Growling in frustration, both at Althea's stubbornness and the uncooperative Bad Wolf program, the Doctor shoved the sonic screwdriver into the main circuitry. The whole thing sparked violently but the shuttle began its launch countdown.

5...

The Doctor stood up as he, Rose and Althea faced the doors.

4...

The chants of the rebels got closer.

3...

Rose held on to the Doctor's hand tightly.

2...

The door of the control room flew open.

1...

The shuttle took off, and a group of rebels entered the control room.

"There they are!" Bana shouted, pointing at them. "Execute them!"
Rebels of Lorena: Dawn of Peace

Previously

5...

The Doctor stood up as he, Rose and Althea faced the doors.

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The door of the control room flew open.

1...

The shuttle took off and a group of rebels entered the control room.

"There they are!" Bana shouted, pointing at them. "Execute them!"

"Stand down, Bana," the leader of the new group said calmly. His eyes appraised the three people carefully. "I am Hutap. The leader of the rebels," he said.

"I am the Doctor. This is Rose Tyler and that is her Holiness Althea," the Doctor said. His voice was pleasant enough but his eyes were sharp and focused.

"Well, then, Doctor. Perhaps you and your companions would like to step outside the control room," Hutap said. At their look of distrust, he waved for his followers to lower their weapons. "They will not harm you unless I say so."

"And will you say so?" the Doctor asked shrewdly.

Hutap gave a grudging smile. "That depends on how you and the two women answer my questions," he said.

The Doctor nodded and walked out of the control room followed by Rose and Althea. Hutap and his men led them to a sitting room.

"Please Doctor, have a seat," Hutap said with a wide smile.

The Doctor said with Rose and Althea on either side of him. Hutap's smile widened and he clapped his hands and sat down in front of them. "Now, questions," Hutap said, far too cheerily for it to be genuine. "Who are you?"

"I said so before," the Doctor said. "Rose and I were visitors and Althea is a Jonarbian priestess."

Hutap nodded slowly. "Bana believes you're a spy," he said, glancing at Bana who was glaring at the three of them.
"Did Bana also mention that he shot a Kiragee by the name of Ratan?" the Doctor asked.

Hutap was slightly taken aback and looked sharply at Bana, all traces of humour gone from his face. "Bana?"

"He was a traitor," Bana said. "And they are spies," he accused, pointing a finger at the Doctor. "He knew about Milo's wife and everything."

Hutap turned back to the Doctor. "Deplorable as his actions were, he does speak the truth, Doctor," Hutap said. "How did you know about Milo's wife if you were just a visitor?"

The Doctor sighed. "I'm telepathic," he answered.

"What species are you?" Hutap asked, his eyes narrowing.

"I don't want to answer that," the Doctor said immediately.

Hutap smirked. "Shoot the yellow girl," he ordered.

"No!" the Doctor said and Hutap waved his hand to stop the rebel who was advancing towards Rose with his gun. "I'm a Time Lord."

"There is no such thing," Bana spat. "He thinks we are fools! Kill them!"

"Can you keep the homicidal maniac out of here?" the Doctor asked Hutap.

"I have heard legends of Time Lords," Hutap said speculatively.

"Well only half of them are true," the Doctor joked, still casting wary looks at the rebels.

Hutap didn't smile. "Very well, even if you are telling the truth..."

"I thought you didn't harm the visitors," Rose interrupted, tired of sitting there and being threatened.

Hutap looked surprised. "Of course we don't," he said. "That is why Bana evacuated the visitors. We are curious as to why the three of you remained behind."

"Oh Bana said that he evacuated the visitors, did he?" the Doctor asked, looking at Bana who shifted uncomfortably.

Hutap glared at Bana. "I demand the truth, Bana!" he snarled.

Bana mumbled incoherently under his breath. "He and two of his men held the visitors hostage and when Ratan tried to intervene, they killed him," Althea answered coolly.

"And he didn't evacuate the visitors. The Doctor did that," Rose added forcefully.

Hutap stood up. "Bana, you, Ren and Milo will be charged. We are rebels intent on restoring balance to our society, not turn into assassins," he said. He nodded at his men and the three men were led away. Hutap sat down and looked at the Doctor. "I appear to have done you a great disservice, Doctor."

The Doctor nodded coolly. "I am glad that the matter is settled but I hope you realise that the issue is far deeper than that," he said.
Hutap nodded. "Some of my brothers misunderstand the purpose of the rebellion," he said, sounding tired. "We Kiragees don't want to kill our Polla neighbours. We just wish for equality in our society."

"Then you have to work together, not against each other," the Doctor said eagerly.

"It hasn't worked before this, Doctor," Hutap said. "Many times in the past, the Kiragees have tried to bridge the gap but the Pollas of higher ranks have always crushed any sort of resistance to the old rules."

"Then what you need are like minded Pollas," Althea said.

"If there are any," Hutap said.

"I assure you there are," Althea said.

The Doctor turned to her. "Is Valen...?"

Althea nodded. "Valen has always advocated for Kiragee equality. We can get his help," she said.

The Doctor turned to Hutap. "What do you say, Hutap? Are you willing to make peace?"

Hutap smiled and stood up. "Indeed I am, Doctor," he said. He bowed to Althea. "If your Holiness could contact this Valen you speak of."

Althea nodded. "Where shall I have him come?" she asked.

"Here," Hutap answered. "The resort will be declared as a neutral zone."

"Will it work?" Rose asked the Doctor in a low voice.

The Doctor shrugged. "It is possible," he said. Althea was talking to Valen on a communications device and Hutap was talking to his men, who looked a great deal happier.

"But you said the rebellion lasted three months," Rose remembered. "Wouldn't it change the history after we've interfered?"

He gave an almost sad smile. "Rose, this is a planet-wide rebellion. It takes time for these things to happen. Valen and Hutap have a long and arduous task ahead of them. Peace is hard to achieve," he explained gently.

"And while they do, the rebellion will continue outside," Rose finished, her eyes widening with realisation.

The Doctor nodded. "I'm afraid that our interference may have simply become part of events," he mused.

Rose smiled softly at that. "Is it like that every time?" she asked him.

His brow furrowed and he looked at her. "I don't understand," he said.

"I mean any event," Rose clarified. "Do things in history have a tendency to have an alien influence to shape it like we know it today?"

He smiled at her. "Quite often it does," he admitted. "But this is not just alien influence though, Rose. Events are shaped by each action occurring in that specific causal nexus."
"Uh-huh," Rose nodded. "Is it just a fancy way of saying that every action impacts what happens next?"

He laughed softly. "Yes, indeed it does. But you would be surprised at how much of your own history is littered with alien influence."

"Seriously?" Rose asked, her eyes wide. "What parts of history?" she asked curiously.

"Too many to recall," he said, waving his hand.

Rose nodded slowly at that. Her eyes darted around the sitting room. "You know, these things are so weird," she said slowly. "Alien planets, causal nexus, time travel...feel like I'm in a sci-fi show."

He looked indignant. "I show you an alien planet with a whole evolved species and you compare it to cheap science fiction?" he asked, sounding remarkably like his sixth self.

"It's not that alien," Rose defended. "I mean, they all speak English for one."

"Of course they don't," he snapped but then smiled as he began to explain. "It's the TARDIS translation circuit. It translates any alien language into one you would understand. Speech, writing, everything."

"How does it do that?" Rose asked in astonishment.

"She uses telepathy, just like I do," he said.

"It gets inside my head?" Rose asked.

"Yes, she does," he nodded and then looked at the displeasure on her face. "It doesn't affect free will, Rose."

Rose nodded slowly, still a bit freaked out by the ship being in her head. Then something else occurred to her. "Hold on, your ship's telepathic? Does that mean it's alive?" she asked.

"Of course," he said. "What else would she be?"

"Oh, right," Rose said slowly. She sat down, still contemplating it.

"Are you alright?" he asked, looking at her in concern.

"Yeah," she said, her voice a bit high. "I mean, it's just a lot to...soak in. And the telepathic ship kind of threw me a bit," she gave a weak chuckle.

"If it makes you feel better, the TARDIS can understand you as well on some level. You're in her metaphorical head as well," he said.

Rose didn't know why but that seemed to calm her apprehension down a bit. She smiled weakly at the Doctor, who beamed at her in relief.

Althea came over to them. "I managed to contact Valen. He is assembling a peaceful faction and coming to the city as soon as he can," she said, smiling widely.

"Excellent," the Doctor beamed. "Have you told Hutap?"

"Yes, I have. He sounds pleased and he is getting in touch with other rebel leaders to join the peace conference," she said.
"Wonderful," the Doctor said. "Then I suppose it is time for us to leave."

"We're not going to stay for the peace conference?" Rose asked in surprise.

The Doctor smiled gently at her. "We have done all we can. It is now up to them to mould their own future," he said.

"And we will be bound to mould it into a better one, I assure you, Doctor," Hutap said as he walked up to them.

The Doctor nodded and shook his hand. "Good luck, Hutap. I wish you all the success," he said.

Hutap nodded back in thanks. He bowed to Rose. "My apologies for threatening your life earlier, Lady Rose. My brothers and I are thankful for yours and the Doctor's help."

"We were glad to help you," Rose said, smiling at him.

"I will have a guard escort you to your ship," he said. "That way you won't be in danger outside the resort," he said.

"Thank you, Hutap," the Doctor nodded.

"Goodbye," Rose waved as the Doctor took her hand and began to lead her away.

~

"Alright then, Althea," the Doctor stood as he and Rose stood outside the TARDIS. "I guess this is goodbye."

Althea smiled. "Yes, I suppose it is. It was very nice meeting you both," she said. "I do hope we will see each other again."

"Oh, I expect so," the Doctor said cheerfully.

"Are you going back to Jax now?" Rose asked her.

"Oh no, dear Rose," she said. "I believe I shall stay here. War always requires healers. Peace takes time and I have my Valen here to support."

"You have a hard task ahead of you, Althea. I wish you all the luck," the Doctor smiled.

"Take care," Rose said, smiling at her.

"And you, Rose," Althea smiled. "Peace be with both of you."

"Peace be with you, Althea," the Doctor returned with a smile. "Come along, Rose."

He smiled at Althea and opened the doors of the TARDIS. Rose smiled at Althea too and with a small wave, stepped into the TARDIS.

Althea watched with wonder as the curious little box made a wheezing sound and slowly faded away. Smiling in awe, she turned back to the resort. The Doctor was right; she had a hard job ahead of her.

"Will she be okay?" Rose asked the Doctor as he steered the TARDIS away from Lorena Major.
"Yes, I believe so," he said.

"Oh come on," Rose cajoled. "Give us a hint. Come on, you must have seen some future of hers."

He teasingly shook a finger at her. "Telling about the future is very dangerous, Miss Tyler," he warned. His eyes then became full of mischief. "But if I were to let you know that Althea and Valen marry and have eight children, I won't exactly be telling you, would I?"

"Telling me what?" Rose asked, her eyes wide and innocent but her lips twitching in amusement.

"Exactly," he agreed. "And now, Miss Tyler, I should probably show you more of the TARDIS. Perhaps we should start with the Library..."
Previously

"Telling about the future is very dangerous, Miss Tyler," he warned. His eyes then became full of mischief. "But if I were to let you know that Althea and Valen marry and have eight children, I won't exactly be telling you, would I?"

"Telling me what?" Rose asked, her eyes wide and innocent but her lips twitching in amusement.

"Exactly," he agreed. "And now, Ms. Tyler, I should probably show you more of the TARDIS. Perhaps we should start with the Library..."

"This place is huge," Rose commented when she saw the main TARDIS library. "How many books are there?" she asked the Doctor eagerly.

The Doctor shrugged. "I am not quite sure really," he said. "I appear to have lost count eventually."

Rose gazed in wonder at the rows and rows of books. "Do you have the final two Harry Potter books?" she asked him eagerly.

The Doctor chuckled fondly. "Yes, they should be in the 'H' section," he said.

Rose grinned at him and began to make her way down the rows. "God, I have been waiting for them to be ready for ages," she said.

"Never took you for a Potter fan," the Doctor smiled as he followed her slowly.

Rose turned around and smiled weakly, not telling him her reason for it. When she had shacked up with Jimmy, she took to reading the Harry Potter series because she realised that it irked him when she read. Jimmy hated it and taunted her cruelly over how reading wasn't going to make her smart. That she would always be a chav off the Estate. But she stuck with it and eventually, she actually came to like the books herself.

The Doctor watched as a shadow flickered over her face. He frowned. He had realised that there was a lot about the past of his pink and yellow companion that she wasn't sharing with him. And he had met his fair share of trouble over a thousand years to recognise a troubled soul. Yet again, he cursed his curiosity. He wanted to know what it was that made her so sad now and then.

"Found it," Rose said and he began to walk towards her. Rose smiled as she saw the copies of 'Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince' and 'Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows'. She took out the Half Blood Prince copy and found a bat peering at her.

She let out a scream of surprise and toppled backwards. The bat flapped his wings, scared out of its wits by her scream.
"ROSE!" the Doctor came running and gave her a hand so she could stand up. "What happened?" he asked.

The bat landed flew towards him and he gently picked it up and cradled it in his hands. "Aww, Jasper," he cooed lovingly at the bat, while Rose watched with her eyes wide. "Did the pink and yellow human scare you?"

"Jasper?" Rose yelped.

The Doctor looked at her with a beaming smile. "Yes, this is Jasper. Jasper, this is Rose," he said to the bat, scratching his head lightly.

The bat turned to Rose and seemed to relax. "You have a pet bat?" Rose asked as she cautiously extended a finger to scratch Jasper's head.

"I have two pet bats," he corrected. "There's Stewart," he pointed at another bat who was perched in the eaves. It seemed to Rose that he was extremely amused by the whole thing. "Come on down, Stewart. Meet Rose."

Stewart flew in and settled down on Rose's shoulder. Rose flinched slightly when he landed but then relaxed when he didn't harm her. He seemed calmer than Jasper who was practically itching to get out of the Doctor's hand and fly again.

The Doctor chuckled at the look on Rose's face. "They're old friends of mine. They sort of moved in," he said.

Rose smiled, despite everything. He would never be conventional, would he? No, he would have pet bats named Jasper and Stewart. The two bats felt that the talks had gone on long enough and took off flying.

"Get some rest, Rose," the Doctor said. "We'll finish the tour some other day."

A warm meal and seven hours of sleep later, Rose was incredibly well-refreshed and ready for a new day of adventures. She finished her breakfast on her own and then went to look for the Doctor. She eventually found him in the console room, tapping his fingers impatiently.

"Morning," Rose said and he looked up with a smile.

"Good morning, Rose," he said and then went back to tapping impatiently.

"Something wrong?" she asked.

"No," he shook his head. "The TARDIS is making me a new sonic screwdriver."

"What happened to the one you had before?" Rose asked curiously.

"It was destroyed, remember? When I had to override the security protocol of the shuttle launch on Lorena?" he reminded her.

Rose nodded and the TARDIS beeped and a sleek new screwdriver slid out. "Wow," Rose said as the Doctor picked it up. "So much better than before."

"Do you think so?" he asked her.
"Definitely," Rose nodded as a blue light lit at the end. "The last one was too...steampunk."

He looked confused at the word and Rose shook her head with a smile. Sometimes she just forgot he was an alien.

He twirled the new screwdriver in his hands a few times and then tucked it into his pocket. "Well it will do, I suppose," he shrugged. "So, Rose," he said. "Where would you like to go next?"

Rose thought about it for a moment and then knew exactly where. "Can we go to your planet?" she asked him.

The Doctor looked at her sharply. "What?"

Rose thought she might have offended him so she hastily backtracked. "We don't have to, if you don't want," she said. "I just thought..."

"No, no," he said, smiling slightly. "We can go, if you like. I was just caught off-guard," he said.

"Oh," Rose realised and then smiled. "So we can go?"

The Doctor nodded. "I don't see why not. It's an awfully boring place, though," he warned her. 
"It's the home of the Time Lords," Rose said. "I think it would be fascinating."

The Doctor made a face but began to set the coordinates. "Don't say I didn't warn you," he said.

"What's it called?" Rose asked him, ignoring the jibe.

"Gallifrey," he answered, a smile appearing on his face despite everything.

"Sounds Irish," Rose said.

The Doctor smiled at her in amusement. "It has been said," he nodded.

Rose grinned cheekily at him. "So, why don't you like going home then?" she asked him.

He paused and pondered over her question. "It's not like I don't want to go," he said slowly. "It's just that..."

"Everyone leaves home in the end?" Rose asked him.

He looked at her and smiled widely. "Exactly," he said.

The TARDIS landed with a thud and the Doctor gestured to the doors. "Gallifrey, as you asked, Rose," he said with a flourish.

Rose grinned at him but then paused. "Will I be alright, though?" she asked him nervously.

He smiled warmly at her. "Of course. Some of them might stare but I garner stares as it is. No different with a human in tow," he said breezily.

"Do all of the Time Lords dress like you?" Rose asked him, still not moving from her spot.

The Doctor looked mildly offended as he looked down at his clothes. Was she saying she didn't like his clothes? He thought they were quite wonderful, thank you very much. They were very flattering on him if he might say so himself.
Rose seemed to have guessed that she might have offended him so she clarified herself. "I mean, is there like a dress code or something?" she asked.

The Doctor's frown subsided into his usual warm smile. "No, but you might want to wear a jacket. The weather might be slightly cold for a human."

Rose nodded as she went back inside to get a warm jacket. When she came back outside, she found the Doctor still standing where she had left him. He smiled at her when she came in. "Well, then, Miss Tyler," he said courteously. "After you."

~

The woman was in her villa when the device on her wrist pinged. "Yes?" she asked in a rather bored voice.

"He's here," the person on the other end said.

Instantly, she sat up straighter. "Are you sure?"

"It's unmistakeable. It's his Type 40 TARDIS."

"Where is he?" she asked eagerly.

"Near the Lake, outside the Citadel. He's regenerated again."

"Alright, I'll find him," she said and then ended the communication. She smiled as she sat up. "K-9, find the Doctor."

~

Rose opened the doors and had to hold back a gasp. She carefully stepped one foot out of the door and onto the red grass and watched it in fascination. She stepped out completely and her eyes roamed around the scenery.

She wished she had about seven more pairs of eyes. It was all absolutely magnificent and she had no idea where to look first. The grass was bright red which rippled slightly with the breeze. There were purple and gold rocks dotting the surface of the ground. Trees with silver leaves moved in the wind. The hills around them were capped with pure white snow.

There were twin suns in the background casting a magnificent orange glow around the whole place. It was the most beautiful place Rose had ever seen.

The Doctor watched the awe and delight on Rose's face with utter fascination. This was why he loved to travel with people. He was completely familiar with his planet but watching it through Rose's eyes felt new. It was a warm feeling.

"It is..." Rose whispered, afraid to disturb the serenity of the place.

"What?" the Doctor asked her gently, curious as to what she saw. Rose turned her shining eyes to his. He was startled to see tears in her eyes and on her face. "You're crying," he said, sounding confused. "I didn't mean to upset you."

Rose gave a tinkling laugh that shot a shiver down his spine. "I'm not upset. It's just so beautiful," she said, carefully wiping her eyes. She wasn't much of a crier but this sight had literally brought her to tears. After the desolation and gloom of Lorena Major, this was like stepping into heaven.
Rose had a tiny suspicion that even after she saw more of the universe, the sight of Gallifrey would never be outshined.

"It is known as the Shining World of the Seven Systems," the Doctor murmured, captivated by the look of wonder on her face.

"Rightly so," Rose mumbled. "Why don't you like coming back here?" she asked him, knowing that if her planet had been this beautiful, she would never leave.

He seemed to guess her train of thought. "It's not so much the planet as the people on it," he said.

"You don't get along with your family?" Rose asked him.

The Doctor's face tightened. "No, I don't," he said, not mentioning that he didn't have a family on Gallifrey. Not anymore.

There was a sense of finality in his tone so Rose didn't push him. She decided to change the subject. "What is this place?" she asked him.

The Doctor smiled softly. "This...This is the Lake of Tranquility," he said. "We are just outside the Citadel of the Time Lords," he said.

"Where's the lake then?" Rose asked.

The Doctor grinned and offered his arm. "Let me show you," he said.

~

The Lake of Tranquility was named rightly so. The water was so calm, even the breeze seemed to leave it undisturbed. There was a calm hush around the lake with only the wind and the trees whispering quietly.

Rose felt a shiver of something alien as she and the Doctor sat down at the edge of the lake. "That's the Citadel of the Time Lords," he murmured in a slow whisper that belonged so rightly in this environment.

Rose followed his gaze and saw beautiful group of buildings encased in a transparent globe. "What is it exactly?" she whispered back, afraid to raise her voice and disturb the peace of the place.

"It's where the Time Lords sit," he explained. "Watching and vowing not to interfere," he said with a bitter undertone in his voice.

Rose raised her eyebrows but didn't say anything. They had done plenty interfering on Lorena Major and from what she could gather, the Doctor seemed to be against the ideals of the Time Lords. Maybe that's why he didn't like coming back here.

They heard footsteps coming towards them and they both looked up to see a woman walk over to them. She couldn't have been more than thirty and had long brown hair and startling blue eyes that fell on the Doctor. "I got word that you were here. I would not have believed it if I hadn't seen you," she said.

The Doctor stood up and beamed at her. "Hello again," he said. He looked at Rose who looked a bit confused. "Rose, I would like you to meet an old friend of mine. This is Leela."
They heard footsteps behind them and they both turned around to see a woman walk over to them. She couldn't have been more than thirty and had long brown hair and startling blue eyes that fell on the Doctor. "I got word that you were here. I would not have believed it if I hadn't seen you," she said.

The Doctor stood up and beamed at her. "Oh, hello again," he said pleasantly. He looked at Rose who looked a bit confused. "Rose, I would like you to meet an old friend of mine. This is Leela." Rose smiled tentatively at Leela who beamed back at her. "Welcome to Gallifrey, Rose," she said warmly. "Is this your first time here?"

Rose nodded. "Yeah, I just started travelling with him," she offered. "Well then, you must come to the Citadel," Leela said. "No, no, Leela," the Doctor said immediately. "We must be going back, I'm afraid," he said hastily.

Leela rolled her eyes. "The President will need to see you, Doctor, you know that. Besides, I haven't seen you in years. Please," she said. The Doctor sighed. "Oh, alright," he conceded. "Where's Andred?"

"On an errand for the President. He won't be back until tomorrow," Leela said as she began to lead them towards the Citadel.

Rose followed them quietly, wondering who Andred was and why the President wanted to see the Doctor. Were they in trouble because of their interfering on Lorena?

They arrived at a lavishly decorated villa within the Citadel and Leela led them to a wide sitting room. A tin dog rolled forward and stopped at the Doctor's feet. "Doctor master," it greeted.

"K-9!" the Doctor grinned in delight. "How have you been, old friend?"

"Very well, Master," the dog answered in a mechanical voice.

Leela chuckled at the look of surprise on Rose's face. "That's K-9," she explained. "He belonged to the Doctor once. He was the one who located you."

"He's a bit disco," Rose said honestly.


Leela nodded, still looking a bit confused as to how a type of dance and K-9 were alike. She shook her head. "K-9, send the President a message that the Doctor is here."

"Affirmative, mistress," K-9 said. "Master Andred has sent a message, mistress."

"I'll check it later," Leela said.
"Who's Andred?" Rose asked the Doctor curiously.

"Andred is Leela's husband," the Doctor answered. "Leela settled down on Gallifrey when she met him."

Rose nodded again, a thousand more questions on her mind. She sat down next to the Doctor, who seemed to sense her nervousness and was holding her hand, rubbing small circles on it. It seemed like an unconscious action, one that made Leela raise her eyebrows in surprise.

"So, she is sending people out on errands?" the Doctor inquired lightly.

Leela rolled her eyes, a smile tugging at her lips. "Everyone says that she is doing quite well as the President. She had trouble initially, of course. She was not happy with you," she said.

The Doctor looked slightly abashed. "Yes, well, I suppose it all worked out for the best. I always knew she would be a great President."

"And that wouldn't be why you passed up yet another opportunity to be President, did you?" Leela asked slyly, her voice mischievous.

"You were President?" Rose asked him, her eyes wide.

"President Elect," he corrected. "I always made sure to delegate my authority."

"What he means is that he took off running any time he was offered the position of the President," Leela told Rose conspiratorially and Rose giggled.

The Doctor pretended to be offended but smiled in amusement nonetheless. "Leela, it was lovely seeing you but Rose and I must leave. Please make sure that the President knows that I will drop in to see her some other time."

"Well, now, Doctor," a new voice said. Leela, Rose and the Doctor turned around to see a middle-aged woman with blonde hair and deep green eyes, standing in the doorway of the villa. "Not going away already, are you?" she asked with an amused smirk.

The Doctor plastered a smile on his face and gave a short bow. "Wouldn't dream of it, Madam President," he said pleasantly. He looked at Rose. "Rose Tyler, may I present the President of the High Council of Time Lords, Lady Flavia."

Lady Flavia gave a customary nod towards Rose and then turned to the Doctor. "There is some business that I wish to discuss with you, Doctor. If you would follow me to my chambers," she said. Her voice wasn't a request, it was an order.

The Doctor wondered if he should protest but then nodded shortly. He turned to Leela. "Can you please look after Rose while I meet with the President?" he asked her.

"Yes, Doctor," Leela answered.

Rose wanted to protest but Leela placed a hand on her arm and shook her head slightly. Lady Flavia nodded imperiously and turned around and left. Her guards and the Doctor followed her.

"What was all that about?" Rose asked Leela.

"Time Lords," Leela rolled her eyes. "Pretentious people if I ever saw them."

"What'd you mean?" Rose asked in confusion. "Aren't you...?"
"Me?" Leela asked incredulously. "I am as human as you are," she said. "You are human, aren't you?" she asked as an afterthought.

"Yeah, I'm human," Rose nodded. "From Earth. And you?"

"I was a warrior of the Sevateem tribe," Leela said as the two women sat down again. "I met the Doctor when he landed on our planet and I left with him to travel."

"And your husband?" Rose asked curiously.

"Andred is a Time Lord. Those guards that you just saw with the President? Those are Chancellery Guards and Andred is a Commander," she explained. "I met him when the Doctor and I came to Gallifrey. That was a long time ago."

"You don't seem that old," Rose observed.

Leela gave a wry smile. "I'm almost 300 years old, Rose," she said.

Rose stared at her. "Seriously?"

Leela nodded. "Living around Time Lords often changes physiology and aging patterns," she said. She didn't mention that she would start aging rapidly the minute she left Gallifrey.

Rose nodded, still a bit stunned. "Is the Doctor really old as well?" she asked her curiously. He did seem old in the way that he talked but he looked young enough.

"Oh the Doctor has to be over 900 years now. He was well over 700 when I met him," Leela said. "But his body is younger this time around."

"Sorry, what?" Rose asked, almost missing the last part through the revelation of the Doctor's age.

"His regeneration," Leela said as if it should mean something. When Rose looked clueless, she sighed in exasperation. "He hasn't told you about regeneration? Typical," she muttered.

"What is it?" Rose asked.

"Well..." Leela began.

~

"I assume there is a reason for this impromptu meeting, Madam President?" the Doctor asked as he was led into her chambers.

Lady Flavia sat down at her table and then dismissed the guards with a nod. "Have a seat, Doctor," she said, sounding tired.

He took a seat and appraised her tired appearance critically. "Are you approaching regeneration soon, my lady?" he asked her in concern.

She gave a tired smile and nodded. "Yes, but that is not the matter at hand," she said. "Recently, there have been three attempts on my life."

The Doctor was shocked. "An attack on the President? Surely the culprit must have been caught," he said.

"Unfortunately Doctor, they haven't been caught," she said. "All three times the attempts were
lethal and designed to fully kill me. The first time, a Raston warrior robot was unleashed into my quarters. The second, an aspirin-laced meal and the third, an attempt at trapping me into a disintegration chamber."

The Doctor was getting increasingly angry as the list went on. "But your guard...?"

She smiled wryly. "They were either too late, too slow or conveniently absent," she said.

"You suspect a conspiracy," he said, his eyes calculating.

"Yes, I do," she said. "I would be foolish to exclude that possibility, especially when it is the likeliest one."

"Whom do you trust?" he asked.

"At the moment, no one," she said. "You do remember Doctor that I was named President only because you put me in charge instead of yourself?"

The Doctor looked abashed and rubbed the back of his neck. "Lady Flavia..."

"You do not have to apologise, Doctor," she waved away. "When the Council realised that you wouldn't be returning to Gallifrey in the foreseeable future, they held re-elections and I was officially voted into the office," she said.

"Then why would there be a conspiracy against a voted President?" the Doctor wondered. "Who were your contenders?"

"There weren't any," Flavia said. "I was the only candidate and I had the support of the Inquisitor who supervised your trial."

"Ah yes," he nodded. "How is Lady Darkel?"

"Fine," Flavia nodded. "She is busy overseeing trials at the moment."

The Doctor nodded and stroked his chin in thought. "Why have you brought me here?" he asked. "Surely you don't suspect me?"

"Of course not, Doctor," Flavia said. "I needed an unbiased investigator. One I can trust." She leaned in. "This is to be my final term of Presidency and I plan on seeing it through before I retire. I refuse to be driven out by power-hungry politicians."

"I understand, Lady Flavia," the Doctor said. He sighed and nodded. "Very well, I shall investigate and see what I can find."

She nodded gratefully. "You have to be very discreet, Doctor," she said.

"I understand," he nodded and stood up. "Take care, my lady."

~

"So, let me get this straight," Rose said. "He changes his face and personality and everything?" Her head was spinning.

Leela nodded. "I was shocked when I heard too. But Andred has regenerated once since we had met and the changes aren't usually too bad," she explained.
Rose nodded, a bit placated. "What else changes?" she asked her.
"Tastes in clothes, food, favourite hobbies," she listed. "Little things, I suppose."

Rose had another thought. "So, what was the Doctor like when you met him?"

Leela smiled. "He was very tall, older-looking than what he is now and he had this scarf..."

~

"Doctor," the Castellan on duty greeted him with a cold nod. "Your presence on Gallifrey is a surprise."

"And not a pleasant one either, eh Castellan?" the Doctor asked, sounding as cheerful as he could. He really did wish Castellan Spandrell was on duty.

The Castellan almost glared at him in disgust but instead nodded coolly. "My guards have told me that you have one of your...humans on Gallifrey again," he said, almost spitting out the word.

"Yes that is correct. Word travels fast," the Doctor said but offered nothing else. The Castellan could jump off the mountain of Great Endeavour if he wanted, the Doctor didn't care.

"Keep it in line," the Castellan almost hissed. "We don't require one of your aliens upsetting order on Gallifrey again."

The Doctor resisted the urge to snap and nodded back. "I'll let you get back to your duties, Castellan," he said.

The Castellan threw him a final look of disgust and then stalked off. The Doctor watched him go with a sigh. Without the cooperation of the Castellan, this investigation was going to get harder by the minute.

~

"That long a scarf?" Rose asked in excitement as she and Leela giggled.

"Yes, yes," Leela nodded. "It was a wonder he never managed to strangle himself with it. But it did help us out a lot of times."

The two of them burst into a fresh pair of giggles. They were interrupted when the communicator on Leela's wrist pinged again. Leela stopped laughing and pressed the switch. "Yes?" she asked.

"It was as we thought," the woman on the other end said. "The President has asked the Doctor to help."

"I knew she would," Leela said smugly. "Have you seen the Doctor yet?"

"No, but I am looking for him. How soon can you get here?"

Rose looked on curiously as Leela continued to talk with this mystery woman. Leela met her eyes and smiled in assurance. "I have a friend of the Doctor's with me. The two of us will see you soon."

"Alright," the woman agreed. There was a small pause. "Is that friend a certain Miss Rose Tyler, by any chance?"

Both Leela and Rose looked equally shocked at the communicator. And was Rose right when she
heard an almost hopeful hesitance in that woman's voice?

"Yes, it is," Leela said, slowly. "How did you...?"

"Never mind," the voice was cheerful again. "I will explain later."

~

The Doctor walked down the corridors of the Capitol, moving towards the archive sections. He needed to know more about the incidents before he could determine who was involved. So lost he was in his thought, that he jumped out of his skin when a door to his left opened and a hand pulled him inside.

He stared in shock at the person who had pulled him in. "Romana?"
Previously

_The Doctor walked down the corridors of the Capitol, moving towards the archive sections. He needed to know more about the incidents before he could determine who was involved. So lost he was in his thought, that he jumped out of his skin when a door to his left opened and a hand pulled him inside._

_He stared in shock at the person who had pulled him in. "Romana?"

"Hello, Doctor," Romana said calmly as if she hadn't just bodily dragged him into a room. "How are you?"

"How am I?" he asked her incredulously. "Ever heard of approaching me like a normal person?" he asked.

She rolled her eyes as if addressing a child. "It wouldn't do well for you to be seen with me," she said.

"No, what you mean is it wouldn't do for you to be seen with me," he corrected.

"Well so maybe I did," she shrugged, unbothered. "It doesn't change the fact that it wouldn't be good for us to be seen together."

He nodded, conceding the point. He would leave but Romana had to stay behind on Gallifrey. "I assume you have something to tell me, that is why you dragged me in here," he said, getting to the point. "What is this place anyway?" he said, looking around.

"It's an archives room. Specifically dealing with communication," she said, her eyes sparkling.

"And you work here?" he asked.

"No," she answered. "I have broken in."

His eyes widened but a smile tugged at his lips. "Indeed?" he asked her. "May I ask why?"

"It's one of the old ones. No one comes in here anymore," she admitted, sitting down in one of the chairs and offering him another.

He sat down and looked at her critically. "Skulking about in unused archive rooms isn't like you, Romana," he observed.

"No it isn't," she admitted. "It's not my favourite thing to do, but I believe in drastic actions when faced with a situation that demands it."

"And what situation might that be?" he asked her.

"The attempts on the President's life," she stated.

His eyebrows shot into his hairline. "Lady Flavia implied that no one outside the High Council and her personal guard knew of those attempts. As I understand, the Castellan has been doing quite a good job of keeping the public in the dark," he said. "Nothing new there, I suppose," he muttered darkly.
Romana chose to ignore the last quip. "You are correct, Doctor. But a friend and I have been keeping an eye on the President."

"A friend?" he asked. "And who might that be?"

There was a knock at the door and the two Time Lords were instantly alert. Romana approached the door cautiously and opened it just a crack. Seeing the person on the other end, she opened the door and let them in. "So, I believe you know my friend," Romana said to the Doctor, sounding just a tad cheeky.

The Doctor rolled his eyes. "Hello again, Leela. And Rose, how are you finding my charming home world?" he asked, sarcasm evident in his tone.

"Boy, you're really stressed, aren't you?" Rose observed, much to the amusement of both Leela and Romana. "You're never this rude."

"The reason for that, my dear Rose, is that my planet and my people severely try my patience," he said, sitting back down. "Ah, have you met Romana? She's an old friend of mine."

Romana rolled her eyes at him and then smiled at Rose. "Hello, Rose. Nice to meet you," she said.

"Yeah, same here," Rose nodded. "How'd you know who I was before?" she asked.

Romana gave a rather mischievous smile. "Well dear Rose, you see time travel can sometimes be a bit complicated."

The Doctor looked up in interest at their conversation. "Are you saying that you have met Rose before?"

"Yes," Romana nodded. "I have met you too for that matter."

"Did I accidentally cross my timestream again? Have I arrived on Gallifrey with Rose before?" he asked her.

"Not on Gallifrey, no," Romana said. "It was back when I was travelling with you."

"Wait, I met you and the Doctor before?" Rose asked, gleaning what she could from the conversation. "How come you didn't say?" she asked the Doctor.

"Because it hasn't happened to him yet. Like it hasn't happened to you," Romana said cheerfully.

"But if he has met me before when he was younger..." Rose pointed out.

"Even then it hasn't happened yet," Romana explained patiently.

"Then how do you remember?" Leela asked, confused as well.

"Because it's not my personal history," Romana said. "And that is all I should say."

Rose and Leela continued to look confused but the Doctor nodded in understanding. "It's a whole lot of timey-wimey. I'll try and explain later," he said. "So," he turned to Romana. "You and Leela have been keeping an eye on the President, eh? She didn't mention it to me."

"Oh she doesn't know," Leela quipped in. "We managed to intervene and stop the attempts on her life by ourselves."
Romana nodded her assent. "She's right, Doctor. The first time, Leela managed to kill the Raston robot. I managed to replace the aspirin laced meal and we both found her in the disintegration chamber just as it was about to kill her."

"Hold on, someone is trying to kill your President?" Rose asked, bringing her thoughts away from the complications of paradoxes and time travel.

"Yes, they are," the Doctor said. "You didn't tell Andred?" he asked Leela.

"I told her not to," Romana said. "We couldn't be sure who was involved."

"Andred won't be involved, I'm sure of it," Leela said. "But Romana was right, we couldn't take chances."

The Doctor nodded. "How did you know the President asked me to investigate?" he asked them.

"Ah, you see, I mentioned that this archive room is concerned with communication, yes?" Romana asked. She pressed a few buttons and the screen hummed to life and replayed the Doctor's and the President's conversation.

"The President's office is bugged?" Rose exclaimed.

"Bugged?" Romana asked in confusion.

"It's an Earth term," the Doctor said absently. "It means it is under surveillance."

"Yes, yes it is," Romana nodded. "We have been keeping an eye on her through this."

"Do you suspect anyone in particular?" Rose asked.

Romana shrugged. "As far as I am concerned, everyone is a suspect."

"What we do not understand is why," Leela said.

"Yes," the Doctor agreed. "Flavia said that she was the only contender for the office."

"But that was over 200 years ago," Romana said.

"Has it really been that long?" the Doctor asked mildly surprised.

"Just because you're 900," Rose quipped and the Doctor smiled sheepishly at her.

"900?" Romana asked incredulously. "Oh, he's 1063 by now."

The Doctor glared at her. "Thank you, Romana," he said through gritted teeth.

"You're welcome, Doctor," she said, either unaware or just choosing to ignore his anger.

Rose gaped wordlessly at the Doctor. He was over a thousand years old. No wonder he dressed and talked like that. His people had to be ancient. Then she remembered that Leela was almost 300 and that it must be a part of who they were. Whatever it was, it still made her head spin.

She shook her head to dispel her thoughts and tuned into the conversation that was going on around her. "...we were thinking of calling you," Leela was saying to the Doctor. "Things are getting worse."
The Doctor nodded. "Any new opposition come up for Presidency?" he asked.

"No," Romana shook her head.

"Yeah, I was afraid you would say that," the Doctor said. "It never is that simple."

"Did she change something?" Rose suggested. "I mean, sometimes politicians are assassinated because they wanted to change things, yeah?" Plus these people seemed just unwelcoming of change.

The three people looked at her and she felt nervous under their gazes. "Rose Tyler, you're brilliant," the Doctor grinned as he took both her hands in his. "Simply marvellous."

"That is something that we hadn't considered," Romana admitted, typing rapidly into the system. "The President has a veto over all decisions. If one of her policies has disrupted one of the Chancellor's agenda or opinion, they would be looking to overthrow her."

"Overthrowing, I understand," the Doctor said grimly. "Killing her, I don't."

"Maybe it isn't the whole of the High Council at all," Leela suggested. "Maybe it's just one of them."

"The Castellan, perhaps?" Romana suggested. "It might explain why the guards were conveniently absent during each of those times."

"Who's the Castellan?" Rose asked.

"The Castellan is in charge of the Chancellery Guards," Leela told her.

"Oh, those blokes in red with the capes and the silver boots?" Rose asked.

"Yes, those," the Doctor nodded. "Sticks up their ars..."

"Doctor," Romana interrupted. "I think you should see this."

"What is it?" Leela asked.

"It's one of Flavia's veto. The only one she ever used," Romana said.

"What did it do?" Rose asked.

"It diminished the ties of the Time Lords of Gallifrey with the CIA," Romana said.

"CIA?" Rose asked in confusion while the Doctor let out a low whistle.

"Celestial Intervention Agency," the Doctor told her. "That was bold of Flavia."

"Indeed it was," Romana nodded.

"Why does it matter?" Leela asked in confusion.

"Well, you see Time Lords are a pompous lot who believe in non-interference in the matters of the universe," the Doctor stated bluntly, ignoring Romana's eye roll. "Somewhere along the line, they realised that this non-interference did not allow them as much control as they desired. So, they decided to form the CIA who can interfere."
Rose's eyes widened at the anger in his blunt tone. She had never heard him be so brash and rude. These CIA people must have really made him angry.

Romana didn't appreciate the Doctor's choice of words but ignored them. "The CIA functions to keep certain events for happening or seeing them through," she said.

"Oh come off it, Romana," the Doctor snapped. "They're a way for Time Lords to keep their hands clean of the dirty tactics used to dominate the universe."

"They're not as bad as you make them out to be," Romana protested.

"Tell that to someone who hasn't been used as their errand boy for all the dirty work that they needed to be done," the Doctor said darkly.

Romana wisely kept her mouth shut. She turned to Rose and Leela who were watching their argument like a tennis match. "Diminishing ties with the CIA was a very bold move on the President's part. Most Time Lords don't like the CIA..."

"More like they are afraid of what the Agency has on them," the Doctor muttered.

"...but for the Agency to openly lose the support of the President is highly unheard of," she explained, without having given any indication of hearing the Doctor.

"So, this CIA tribe must be really angry with Lady Flavia," Leela said in understanding.

"Precisely, Leela," the Doctor nodded. "And they have a puppet on Gallifrey who has been trying to assassinate her."

"How do we know who that is?" Rose asked.

The Doctor turned to Romana thoughtfully. "Does this archive have recent communication reports?" he asked.

"How recent?" Romana asked.

"Just before the attempts started," he said.

"The assassination attempts started nearly three months ago in linear time. These archives are fairly updated," Romana said. "What am I looking for?"

"Communication with the CIA," the Doctor said. "Start with the High Council. Has any one of them suddenly started having one too many conversations with them?"

Romana scanned through the reports and then paused. "Yes," she said. "This one has been making regular contacts to the CIA. And all of them are encrypted messages."

"Decoding them is not important," the Doctor said impatiently. "Who is it?"

"It's Chancellor Ryoth," Romana said. "Ryoth is the one planning to kill the President."

"Very good, Lady Romana." The four of them spun around to see a tall, lanky man dressed in swathing Arcalian robes pointing a gun straight at Rose. He smirked at them and entered the archives room, closing the door behind him.

"Chancellor Ryoth" Romana greeted calmly but her eyes wide with fright. The Doctor and Leela were tense and ready to spring but Rose was standing completely still.
"Indeed," he nodded. "Now," his face hardened. "I truly, truly regret doing this," he said. "But you know too much. So, I must," he said, and aimed the gun at Rose's heart with his finger on the trigger.
"It's Chancellor Ryoth," Romana said. "Ryoth is the one planning to kill the President."

"Very good, Lady Romana." The four of them spun around to see a tall, lanky man dressed in swathing Arcalian robes pointing a gun straight at Rose. He smirked at them and entered the archives room, closing the door behind him.

"Chancellor Ryoth" Romana greeted calmly but her eyes wide with fright. The Doctor and Leela were tense and ready to spring but Rose was standing completely still.

"Indeed," he nodded. "Now," his face hardened. "I truly, truly regret doing this," he said. "But you know too much. So, I must," he said, and aimed the gun at Rose's heart with his finger on the trigger.

"Lord Ryoth, you will gain nothing but more trouble if you harm us," the Doctor said calmly.

"Oh, I know," Ryoth said. "But the four of you can't be allowed to leave here. You and your meddlesome friends have discovered far too much already, Doctor."

"Yes well, meddle this," Leela said as she stuck a Janis thorn in Ryoth's hand. He seemed shocked for an instant before he fell to the ground, paralysed.

"Leela!" the Doctor admonished. "You killed him."

"No, Doctor," Leela said calmly as she kicked the gun away from Ryoth's motionless hands. "Romana did something to the thorns," she explained.

The Doctor looked at Romana, who nodded slowly. "I neutralised the fatal poison. Now, they only paralyse for twenty minutes."

The Doctor nodded and then cautiously touched Rose's shoulder. She jumped and inhaled shakily. "Rose," he said gently. "Are you alright?"

"Yeah," she said, sounding a bit hoarse. "Sorry, sorry," she said, trying to regain her composure. Truth was, she had never been so close to death. The gun was pointed at her heart and Ryoth was going to kill her, no doubt about it. She started to feel a bit dizzy.

"She's in shock," Rose vaguely heard Romana say.

"Oh, move over," Leela said and then shook Rose by the shoulder quite roughly.

Rose snapped her eyes to hers and then gasped. "What happened?" she asked.

"You were going into shock," Leela explained calmly.

"We have to get out of here," Romana said. "Ryoth might wake up at any moment."

"But it's over, yeah?" Rose asked, her voice still a bit high, but her eyes were focused. "We know who it is."

"Unfortunately, we have no proof," the Doctor said as he took her hand and began to lead her out.
Romana was leading the way and Leela was bringing up the rear.

"He tried to kill us!" Rose almost shrieked but was shushed down by everyone.

"In here," Romana said and ushered them into what appeared to be a very advanced laboratory.

"Ryoth tried to kill us. Can't you just tell them that?" Rose hissed in a quieter voice but still as angrily.

"He just has to deny it," the Doctor said, pacing around the lab. "It will be a classic bad wolf scenario."

"The Doctor's right," Romana said. "The word of a renegade and two aliens will be disregarded and my previous association with the Doctor will negate any credibility I have. Even if Flavia believes us, the rest of the Council never will."

Rose let out a frustrated sigh and sat down. This was ridiculous. Ryoth had tried to kill them but they couldn't even do anything.

Leela, on the other hand, was checking the time. "It's been twenty minutes. Ryoth would have woken up by now. We have to get to the President," Leela said and to Rose's enormous surprise drew a knife from her belt.

"Leela, put that away," the Doctor said in a long-suffering tone.

Leela looked startled at the gentle chiding but only lowered the knife a little. "Doctor, the President is in danger," she protested.

"No, she isn't," Romana said, catching onto the Doctor's thought. "Ryoth hasn't attacked the President openly."

"He attacked us openly," Rose protested. "He's getting desperate."

"Rose is right," Leela spoke up immediately. "We must go there at once and kill the traitor Ryoth."

"No, no," the Doctor said. "No killing anybody," he said firmly.

"So get him arrested," Rose said.

"Again, no proof," the Doctor said as if it pained him to say it.

"What about those messages to the CIA?" Rose asked.

"Proves nothing," Romana countered. "Just that he's been involved into their matters."

"But they're in code, you said," Rose argued. "If you can crack it..."

"It still wouldn't prove anything," the Doctor said reluctantly. "Romana is right. Ryoth was too careful. We need certain proof of his involvement if we are going to accuse a member of the High Council."

"Yes," Romana nodded. "I wonder how he managed all of this on his own," she mused.

"Yes," the Doctor said slowly. "How did he? I mean I understand the aspirin laced meal or even the disintegration chamber. But how on Earth did he get a Raston robot on Gallifrey?"
"What is the Rastan robot?" Rose asked. She had been wondering about that.

"Raston," the Doctor corrected. "It's the perfect killing machine."

"Yes," Leela piped up. "It knew as we moved and it would shoot arrows at us. It could move at the speed of lightning," she explained.

"How'd you kill it then?" Rose asked her.

"I stabbed it one of its own arrows," Leela shrugged like it was no big deal.

Rose stared at her in awe and the Doctor cut in hastily before Rose started asking for Janis thorns from Leela. "Still, how did it get on Gallifrey? I mean it should be imposs..." he trailed off.

"Doctor?" Romana asked.

"Time Scoop," the Doctor realised. "Ryoth must have used a Time Scoop."

"What's a Time Scoop?" Rose asked but the Doctor gestured frantically as his thoughts raced.

"If we can prove Ryoth used a Time Scoop, it will be enough to arrest him," he said.

"Yes, Doctor," Romana said patronisingly. "Time Scoop would be irrefutable proof. Except for the part where it is supposed to be fictional."

"It's no fiction," the Doctor snapped. "I have seen it with my own eyes and a Raston robot was brought to Gallifrey then too," he said, remembering the unwelcome reunion in the Death zone.

"What is this Time Scoop?" Leela asked.

"It is a device used to lift people out of different points in time and space and drop them off at a particular destination," the Doctor said.

"It was said that in the Dark Ages, the Time Lords used it to bring combatants to the Death Zone where they would play the Game of Rassilon," Romana elaborated. "I thought it was just fiction. You know, tales to scare the Time Tots."

"I can assure you it's all too real," the Doctor almost shuddered at the memories. "We must find that Time Scoop. If we can prove Ryoth used it, then that combined with the messages to the CIA would be enough for Darkel to prosecute him."

"Are you sure we should do it?" Romana asked him slowly.

"What'd you mean?" he asked her, astonished. "Of course we should."

"No, I agree with catching him but are you sure you want him publically accused?" Romana clarified.

"Why not?" Leela asked.

The Doctor gave Romana an almost disappointed look. "Because it could cause irreparable damage to the relations between the High Council and the CIA," he explained to Leela.

Romana looked uncomfortable but stood her ground. "You have to admit it could cause severe tension," she said.
"Is she right, Doctor?" Rose asked.

The Doctor gave her a sad smile. "Unfortunately, I'm afraid my people will be inclined to agree with Romana. The CIA will, of course, deny that Ryoth was acting on their command and things will be fine again."

"That is not important," Leela butted in. "Politics doesn't interest me. How do we plan on catching Ryoth?" she demanded, her hand on her belt.

The Doctor paused. "Here's what we do. Romana, you and I are going to search Ryoth's quarters. Leela, you and Rose go back to your villa," he said.

Both Leela and Rose protested violently at that. "We're not staying behind. We want to help," Rose said indignantly.

"You will need someone to protect you," Leela said, drawing her knife out.

The Doctor sighed in exasperation. "Oh alright," he said. "Romana, can you access the surveillance footage from the President's office to a safe location?"

"I can divert it here," she said, indicating a computer.

"Good," he nodded. "Then stay here and keep an eye on the President. First glimpse of Ryoth near her and you go to the Castellan." Romana nodded.

"Rose, you stay with Romana," he said. Rose opened her mouth to protest but he grasped her hand pleadingly. "Look, you're a stranger here. If we get caught..." he shook his head. "Just stay here with Romana."

Rose looked a bit alarmed and then nodded slowly.

"Leela, you come with me and we will search Ryoth's quarters," he said. He then paused. "We need lookouts."

"Oh that won't be a problem," Romana said. "We can use K-9!"

"Yes," Leela agreed. "Your K-9 can stay on guard with you and I will take my K-9 with us to keep a lookout," she told Romana.

"Absolutely," Romana agreed, pulling out a whistle from her pocket while Leela did the same.

Rose watched their interaction in fascination and then looked at the Doctor. "Do you hand a dog in as a goodbye gift or something?" she asked him.

He snorted. "Seems like it, doesn't it? No, the thing is that I build them, care for them and when my companions decide stay behind, they choose them over me," he said.

"Yikes," Rose said. "That sounds bad."

He chuckled and ran a hand through his curls. "That is why I stopped having the dog in the first place," he said.

"So it wasn't a regeneration thing then?" Rose asked, her voice too casual.

The Doctor looked at her, slightly alarmed. "Leela told you about regeneration, did she?" he asked her, even as he knew the answer.
Rose nodded and then glared lightly at him. "Might have been nice if you had mentioned it, you know," she said. "And the fact that you're like a thousand years old."

He rubbed the back of his neck awkwardly. "Oh, you know, slipped my mind, I daresay," he said sheepishly.

Rose shook her head, fighting a smile. "You're so weird," she said. "Completely mad."

"I have always said that anyone worth knowing is a little bit mad," he said haughtily. "Now, come along Leela. We have to search Ryoth's quarters."

~

"You're angry at the Doctor," Romana observed.

"No," Rose shook her head stubbornly.

Romana smiled and turned to face her properly. "It's alright, I won't tell him," she said.

Rose smiled reluctantly back at her. "It's not him I'm angry at," she confessed.

"Oh?" Romana asked curiously.

Rose nodded. "I didn't know the first thing about him, you know and I jumped at this chance of travelling with him. And now that I know so much more..." she trailed off.

"Do you want him to take you home?" Romana asked bluntly.

"No," Rose answered immediately. "Of course not. He's a bit odd and such an enigma but this...this travelling, it's so..."

"Wonderful?" Romana suggested. "Yes, I thought so too."

"Why did you stop travelling with him?" Rose asked.

"I was called back on Gallifrey," she said. "But like you, I couldn't bear going back home after seeing the universe. I finally understood why the Doctor keeps travelling on. So, I stayed behind in a parallel universe. E-space, where the Time Lords couldn't find me."

"But you still came back," Rose pointed out.

"Yes, unfortunately, you can't run from your responsibilities forever," she said with a wry smile. "But I don't complain. For all its faults, Gallifrey is still home for me." She then smiled at Rose. "Don't let these unfortunate set of incidents to colour your opinion of us, Rose."

"Of course not," Rose said. "Every race has their share of trouble, I expect. But there are always good people in the world to balance it all out."

Romana laughed. "You know, I am quite beginning to understand the Doctor's fondness for your species. You're quite marvellous, dear Rose and you haven't changed at all."

~

The Doctor tapped around the wall to find an opening. "Any luck?" he asked Leela.

"No Doctor," she answered. She hesitated and then turned to look at him. "Doctor, may I ask you
something?"

The Doctor turned around in surprise. "Yes, of course, Leela," he said.

"You and Rose," she said. "Are you lovers?"

The Doctor's eyes bulged out in surprise. "No, of course not," he said. "Why?"

Leela shook her head. "You seem quite close to her," she shrugged.

"I'm close to all my friends," he said, sounding quite defensive.

"Yes, but not quite like this," Leela said. "And that Romana has met you two before leads me to believe..."

"Rose is a friend, just like everyone else, Leela," the Doctor interrupted. "Now, can we actually look for that Time Sc...aaaaaarrggghhh!"

"Doctor!" Leela yelled as she ran to where he had fallen. He had leaned heavily against a wall and it had opened a secret room. "Are you alright?" she asked.

"Yes, fine," he nodded and stood up. He looked around in surprise. "Leela, this is it. It's the time scoop."

"What do we do now?" she asked him.

"Contact Romana, and get Flavia and the Castellan here," the Doctor said triumphantly. "We have proof enough to arrest Ryoth."

~

"Doctor, I must say I am quite grateful for your help," Flavia said when she came to see them off.

"I had great help," he said, looking significantly at Leela and Romana who both smiled at him. A slight frown appeared on his face. "What will happen to Ryoth?"

Flavia's face tightened. "He will be relieved of his title and he will join the workers in the old Library."

"Ah," the Doctor nodded. "And the Agency denies all responsibility?"

"Of course," Flavia said smoothly, a muscle twitching in her jaw. She arranged her features into a smile. "I had the guards bring your TARDIS to the Capitol. It will save you and your friend a walk."

"Thank you, Madam President," the Doctor said and next to him, Rose smiled. Flavia nodded and left with her guards in tow. The Doctor smiled at Leela and Romana.

"I hope you will visit again soon," Leela smiled. "Both of you."

Rose nodded and gave Leela a hug. "Wouldn't miss it," she said.

Romana handed Rose a bunch of flowers. They were absolutely beautiful. "A gift for you," she smiled.

"They're gorgeous," Rose said. "What are they?"
"They're called Arkytior," Romana smiled and then gave Rose a hug and kissed her cheek. "I do hope we see each other again soon."

Rose nodded, touched by the gift. The way that Romana said the name of the flowers and the way the Doctor had gasped quietly on seeing the flowers meant that there was something significant behind it all.

"Rose," the Doctor said, touching her arm. "We should be on our way."

Smiling at her new friends, Rose entered the TARDIS. A moment later, the Doctor joined her. "Ready?" he asked her.

"Yeah," Rose nodded.

The Doctor smiled at her and began the dematerialisation sequence. The TARDIS made the wheezing noise and left Gallifrey.

"I should go and put these in water," Rose said, looking at the flowers in her hand.

The Doctor nodded and smiled as she left. His eyes fell on a post it note on the scanner that hadn't been there before. Frowning, he pulled it off and read the circular Gallifreyan.

'Theta,

Good work on the job for the President. Quite impressive.

I.B.'
"Sleep well?" the Doctor asked Rose.

Rose grunted in answer as she reached for a mug to make her tea. The Doctor looked slightly amused at her actions. Rose Tyler was a bouncing ball of energy but in the mornings, she was quite the opposite. He'd had sleep driven companions grunt at him before but he never remembered them being this attractive. He must be getting old.

Or maybe it was just this incarnation. He had kissed Grace several times; maybe this regeneration was just very drawn to attractive women. Somehow, that wasn't a very convincing argument with himself.

A third voice in his head pointed out the possibility that he was determined to ignore. Maybe it was just Rose. He had met someone whose future was completely invisible to him. True that he never peeked into the future of his companions but he could feel their timelines but Rose Tyler was an enigma that had him baffled.

She, however, was blissfully unaware of his dilemma. She had stood with him as they battled Cybermen, helped the rebels of Lorena Major and befriended Leela and Romana. He had noticed several Time Lords watching her with great interest while they were on Gallifrey. Good to know that he wasn't the only one hopelessly besotted with her.

"You okay?" she asked him. He realised that he had lapsed into what she called 'one of his broody-thinking-silences'.

"I'm very well," he answered formally, wincing internally. Why did he sound so formal all the time? It was frustrating.

Rose, however, was used to it. "So what are we doing today?" she asked.

He shrugged. "I'm not sure yet. What would you like to do?" he asked.

"I chose last time," she pointed out.

"Yes, you did," he said, inclining his head in acknowledgement. She had asked for something that he liked and he had taken her to the Mystic Falls of Jh'ha. The waterfalls flowed over crystalline rock formations which created sweet melodies. That had been quite an amazing trip.

He frowned in thought. Where should he take her? His face brightened and he jumped up. "I have just the place in mind."

Rose calmly put her mug back in the sink while the Doctor rushed off to the console room. He was far too excited this early in the morning. Well, she supposed, there was no morning on the TARDIS. She walked slowly to the console room and found him pulling out a small crate.
"Aha!" he said triumphantly, opening it. "Nachos 7...Nebulax 4...Neptune...Nira! Found it!"

"Should I be worried?" Rose asked warily, hiding a smile.

He winked at her. "Nothing to worry about. I have a longstanding invitation to the Spring Ball of the Sisterhood of Yriti," he said, presenting her the invitation with a flourish.

"What?" Rose asked, utterly confused.

The Doctor smiled patiently. "The planet of Nira is a matriarchal planet. The Sisterhood of Yriti is their equivalent of the Royal Family," he explained.

"A planet ruled by women?" Rose asked. "That sounds brilliant."

"It is," he nodded. "They are not oppressive like some other matriarchal planet. The two genders co-exist happily and the Sisterhood are very good rulers."

"How did you meet them?" Rose asked curiously.

"It was in my fourth body. In fact, just before I met Leela. I saved the oldest princess from a kidnapping attempt. I had landed on the planet by mistake and happened to land just outside the hideout that the kidnappers were using," he said.

"Let me guess," Rose grinned. "You went in and beat the kidnappers into submission with your charm and rescued the princess."

He pretended to glare at her. "Don't spoil my story, Miss Tyler," he admonished playfully, wagging a finger at her. "Yes, in fact, that was what happened. The princess was only 7 at the time. I took her back to the Sisterhood and they bestowed a title of honour on me. I got the invitation to the Spring Ball when I was in my fifth body. I never had chance to go up until now," he said.

"So, we're going to the Spring Ball?" Rose asked, excited.

"That we are, Ms. Tyler," he grinned, pleased at her excitement. "But not just any old Spring Ball. It's the princess' night to choose a husband."

"Really?" Rose asked, her eyes wide. This sounded so much like a fairy tale.

He nodded. "Princess Maia has turned twenty three, which is their age to choose a husband. At the Ball, she will meet the eligible men and announce her decision to court the ones she likes," he explained.

"What if she doesn't like anyone?" Rose asked curiously.

"Eligible bachelors from all over the galaxy attend the Ball. She is bound to find someone," he said. "Well then, Miss Tyler. You go and get dressed and I will pilot the TARDIS to get us to Nira."

"Anything particular I'm supposed to wear?" Rose asked.

"Something blue or black," he said absently, flicking the switches on the console. "And with feathers."

"Aren't you going to change?" Rose asked.

He looked down at his clothes. "What's wrong with what I'm wearing?" he asked, not caring that he
sounded like a petulant child.

Rose smiled indulgently at him. "You said blue or black. Not green or grey," she said, casting a pointed glance at his attire.

"Fine, I'll change," he said, sulking slightly. Nope, not sulking. Time Lords did not sulk.

"Alright, then," Rose grinned and went to her room.

She was going to go to the wardrobe room but she needn't have bothered. There was a garment bag laid out on her bed. The TARDIS was always helpful to her. Rose zipped open the bag and gaped at the dress. Oh, it was gorgeous.

And it was both blue and black. Rose ran her hand over it and couldn't shake the excitement of looking like a princess.

~

The Doctor swapped his grey trousers and green velvet frock coat for black trousers and a black velvet jacket. The grey cravat and vest gave way to blue cravat and vest. He frowned critically at his reflection. He still preferred the green and grey. Blue and black reminded him of mourning.

Tugging on his blue cravat uncomfortably, he walked back to the console room and saw that the TARDIS had landed them on Nira. "Rose!" he called. "We are here!"

Why did human women take so long to dress? He tapped his feet impatiently, not caring that he was behaving like a Time Tot. "Rose!" he called again.

"Coming!" she called back. "Should I wear trainers?" she asked cheekily.

"Very funny, Miss Tyler," he shot back, smiling slightly.

Her voice was coming closer. "Well, you never know. There might be another kidnapping plot and we might have to run for our lives."

"No, no," he said. "No more kidnapping plots. No running. No..." he swallowed as she came into view.

"Is it too much?" she asked, looking nervous.

"No," he said hoarsely and then cleared his throat. "I mean no, it's...perfect."

Rose blushed and shifted from one foot to the other. "Like the new look," she said.

It took him a moment to realise that she was talking about him. "Uh, yes, yes," he agreed immediately. Maybe he would keep this look if she liked it.

"So, um," Rose prompted. "Nira?"

"Yes, yes, Nira. The Spring Ball," he said hastily, trying to recover from his embarrassment. She had reduced the genius Time Lord to a being who spoke in single syllables.

She nodded and walked forward and his mouth became dry again. How was he to survive a whole evening if he couldn't even get over the way her dress moved as she walked.

"Where'd you get the dress?" he asked her.
"The TARDIS put it on my bed," she answered, like it was a casual occurring.

"I beg your pardon?" he asked, thinking he had heard wrong. Since when did his TARDIS pick out clothes for his companions?

"Well, yeah," Rose said, sounding surprised at his disbelief. "She's always done that. Unless you've been laying out clothes for me?" she asked the last part cheekily.

He ignored it and looked at Rose in a way that made her nervous. "Rose, the TARDIS doesn't lay out clothes for anybody. Not even me," he said.

Rose tried not to look shocked and failed. "Are you saying you have Dobby the house elf on the TARDIS or something?" she asked jokingly.

It worked and he chuckled. "No, it's strange though," he said.

"Is it bad if she does?" Rose asked hesitatingly.

"No, no, not at all," he hastened to reassure her. "It means she likes you, I suppose."

"Yeah?" Rose asked hopefully.

"Absolutely," he agreed. Maybe even more than him if she was laying out clothes for her. "What else has she been doing?" he asked.

Rose shifted uncomfortably. She wished he would stop looking at her like she was a box of riddles that he had got for Christmas. He seemed to sense her discomfort. He extended his hand. "Let's sit down and talk," he said kindly.

"But what about the Ball?" Rose asked.

"I landed us an hour before it's due to start. Experience has taught me that human women take an ungodly amount of time to get ready," he said breezily, ignoring Rose's dirty look.

"I'll have you know, the women need all of that time to get ready," she sniffed as she sat down in her armchair, adjusting the feathery skirt of her dress around her carefully. Did his eyes just flicker over her bare shoulders?

He sat down opposite her and cleared his throat. "So, what else has the TARDIS been doing?" he asked again, gently this time.

Rose sighed. "Well there's setting out my clothes, having my favourite breakfast ready every day, translating Gallifreyan writing," she listed off and watched as the Doctor's eyebrows shot into his hairline.

"She's been translating Gallifreyan?" he asked incredulously.

Rose nodded. "Like up there," she pointed over the fireplace and the Doctor's eyes shot there. "It says Theta Sigma."

The Doctor almost shivered at her casual way of using his old Academy nickname. But she was still talking. "Wonder what Theta Sigma is? It's scratched onto a lot of surfaces around the TARDIS."

"It's not important," he said, clearing his throat. "Rose, anything else?" he asked.
"No," Rose said, shaking her head. "What's going on, Doctor?"

He pursed his lips and then grinned. "Nothing at all, dear Rose," he lied smoothly. "The TARDIS merely likes you a lot."

Rose nodded, still a bit uncertain. "Well should we get going then?" she asked him.

"Yes," he said, getting to his feet and giving her a hand. Rose smiled and took his hand to stand up. Then he remembered something else. "Uh, Rose..."

"What is it?" she asked.

He looked extremely uncomfortable. He fished around in his coat and pulled out two gold bracelets joined by a long, thin gold chain.

"You're into bondage?" Rose asked cheekily.

To her surprise, he blushed and looked even more uncomfortable.

"Doctor? I was just kidding," Rose asked, looking concerned. "What's wrong?"

"It's just a tradition of the planet," he stuttered out.

"To wear handcuffs?" Rose asked, sounding confused.

"No, no, they are not handcuffs," he said. "It's a symbol..."


"I said, it's a symbol of being... unavailable," he said.

Rose stared at him for a moment and then burst into laughter. "They wear a literal ball and chain?"

Rose asked through her giggles.

The Doctor laughed as his discomfort lessened. "Yes, actually they do," he said. "Not always, mind you."

"What do you mean 'not always'?" Rose asked.

"Well on the night that one of the members of the Sisterhood chooses a husband, anyone not wearing this is considered to be eligible," he explained.

Rose giggled again, intent on teasing him. "But don't you wanna marry the princess?" she joked.

He blushed even more which made Rose laugh even more. "Rose, please..." he said, turning his big blue-green eyes on her.

Rose laughed and patted his hand. "Okay, come on, bring on the ball and chain," she said, extending her left hand.

"The right one, actually," he said as he took her hand and fastened one end of the bracelet on her wrist. Rose bit her lip and tried not to read too much into the way his fingers caressed her wrist.

He cleared his throat and fastened the other end around his left wrist. "Done," he said. Was it her imagination or did he sound a bit hoarse?
Rose tugged on the chain experimentally. It was long enough for her to move a foot away from him but not more. She cleared her throat to dispel the slightly tense atmosphere. "Let's get going then," she said.

"Yes, let's," he agreed, linking their joined hands and trying to calm his racing hearts.
Vampires of Nira: The Spring Ball

Previously

Rose tugged on the chain experimentally. It was long enough for her to move a foot away from him but not more. She cleared her throat to dispel the slightly tense atmosphere. "Let's get going then," she said.

"Yes, let's," he agreed, linking their joined hands and trying to calm his racing hearts.

They stepped out into what appeared to be a cluster of woods. The ground was surprisingly even though. "Oh good," the Doctor commented. "We have landed just outside the palace. It means we don't have to walk through the city."

"Thank goodness," Rose said. "I am not wearing shoes meant for walking," she said, shifting in her heels.

The Doctor's gaze was fixed steadfastly in front of him. "Come on then, let's go," he said, tugging on her hand lightly.

The jingle of the bracelets they were wearing brought the slightly awkward atmosphere back. "So," Rose began. "Tell me more about the Sisterhood."

The Doctor grinned. She was trying to get him to be more comfortable. Well, he would oblige of course. "Nira is a very old planet. The current population is mostly humanoid. The Sisterhood has been ruling for 3 millennia now."

"Wow," Rose commented.

He nodded in agreement. "It is quite unique in that aspect. The Sisterhood has always been a bit mysterious to outsiders but I always found them to be extremely intelligent and rather excellent rulers," he said.

"Will they recognise you? Now that you've regenerated," Rose said.

"I have the invitation, and it is commonly known among knowledgeable worlds that Time Lords have the ability to regenerate," he explained.

Rose nodded, that made sense. "I'll be okay though, yeah?" she asked, their recent trip to Gallifrey in mind. The Doctor might not have noticed but she certainly did see some of the looks she got from the other Time Lords. It wasn't even derisive, just far too knowing and curious at the same time.

He sensed her discomfort and stopped to look her in the eye seriously. "Rose Tyler, never let anyone make you feel anything less than you are, which quite frankly, is absolutely marvellous," he said.

Rose blushed. "Thank you," she said shyly.

He grinned and took her hand as they started walking again. "No need to thank me. As for Nira, you'll command more respect here than even me. Human beings are the most sought after mates across the universe," he said.
"Why?" Rose asked curiously.

"Well, they are the most compatible species in the universe," he said casually.

Rose blushed and nodded. They reached the gate of a massive ivory coloured palace. The guards at the gate, sprang to attention when they approached. "Invitation, sir?" the guard asked.

"Of course," the Doctor smiled charmingly as he showed them the invitation. "This is my companion Rose Tyler."

The guards straightened themselves up even more when they saw Rose. "Lady Rose Tyler, the Royal Guard of the Sisterhood of Yriti welcomes you and your life mate, the Lord Doctor, to the Spring Ball," they bowed deeply.

Rose looked a bit flustered at the attention and looked at the Doctor for help. He smiled encouragingly at her. Rose faced the guards. "Thank you for the kind welcome," she said, hoping she didn't sound completely silly.

She needn't have worried. "Lady Rose Tyler, you and the Lord Doctor may proceed."

The gates opened fully and Rose and the Doctor walked through to the palace doors. "That was brilliant, Rose," the Doctor grinned.

Rose grinned back. "You weren't kidding about this being a matriarchal planet," she said.

"They respect women tremendously here," he said. "I may have a title of honour but being your life mate is considered a greater honour," he said.

Rose's eyes widened when he said 'life mate'. They had ignored it when the guard had said it. But now, both of them blushed and looked away. They reached the ballroom and the host bowed at them deeply.

"The Lady Rose Tyler and the Lord Doctor," the host announced.

"Come on," the Doctor said, leading her towards the grand staircase where a group of four women dressed in regal blue robes stood with their heads held high. "My heartiest greetings to the Sisterhood," he said with a sweeping bow.

"Doctor," the tallest one greeted with a smile. "It is very nice to see you again."

"Thank you, Princess Maia. May I introduce my companion, Miss Rose Tyler," he said.

The women smiled graciously at Rose. "Lady Rose, please accept our congratulations on your matrimony. May the goddess bless you and your life mate," Princess Maia said. "Allow me to introduce my sisters, Vallita, Helena and Isandra."

Rose blushed deeply. "Thank you," she managed to say. "It is very nice to meet you."

The Doctor was slightly amused at her embarrassment but he smiled at Maia. "Princess Maia, we would both like to wish you luck for tonight," he said.

"Thank you, Doctor. Lady Rose, kindly enjoy the Ball," Maia smiled.

The Doctor steered Rose away and as soon as they were far enough, she laughed breathlessly. "That was like from a film or something," she whispered to him.
He laughed. "Yes, but they're royalty. They tend to be a bit..."

"Formal?" Rose asked. "But they seemed nice, you know. Not snobs or anything."

The string band started their music and the big dance floor was immediately filled as couples began to approach it. Rose's eyes lit up. "Come on," she said to the Doctor.

The Doctor looked confused. "What? Where?" he asked, in confusion.

"To dance," Rose said.

"No, no, no," he said immediately.

"What? Why not?" Rose asked.

"I don't dance," he said firmly.

"But Doctor," Rose said, turning on her pleading eyes. "I can't dance with anyone else," she said, jingling the chain that bound their hands for emphasis.

"Why do you have to dance?" he countered. "We could socialise. Meet more people," he suggested.

"Nuh-uh," Rose said. "When you promised to take me to a Ball, the dancing is included," she said firmly. Then she smiled slyly. "Unless, I can take the chain off and find another partner."

He fiddled with the pocket watch attached to his vest. "Rose," he protested weakly.

"Come on, please," Rose cajoled. "Or, I'll take the chain off." Something else occurred to her. "Hold on," she said. "Now that the Sisterhood knows you're not available, we could take this off, right?"

The Doctor ran a hand through his curls. "Ah, no," he sighed.

"Oh," Rose said. "Why?"

The Doctor mumbled under his breath.

"What?" Rose asked.

"I said, the princess is not the only one allowed to pick a husband," he said.

Rose giggled. "So, you can be pounced on by any member of the Sisterhood?" she asked.

He glared at her. "Glad you find my plight amusing," he said, unable to keep being angry when she was giggling so much.

Rose stopped giggling but then gave him a bright smile. "So, you know what that means," she said. "It means you have to dance with me. Or," her voice hardened. "I'll take the chains off and throw you to the wolves," she teased. "Your choice."

"Not much of a choice there," the Doctor said, taking her hand and leading her to the dance floor. "I don't particularly want to be thrown as the piece to entice the wolves in here."

"Yes!" Rose crowed in a low voice as he led her in a traditional waltz. "Don't worry, Doctor," she said. "I'll protect you from the big, bad wolves."
Five dances later, they took a break. Rose sat in the balcony overlooking the ballroom and the Doctor brought them a cool purple drink served in crystal goblets.

"Oh," Rose said when she tasted the drink. "This is gorgeous. What is it?" she asked.

"Glad you asked, Rose," he said, slipping into his lecture voice. "This is a concoction made from Vanda berries. They look like blueberries from Earth but aren't sour. The drink is their equivalent of a wine. Very expensive and very rare."

"Rare? How?" Rose asked curiously, sipping the purple drink.

"The Vanda berries only grow in the mountains," he said. "It's a very lucrative trade. Vanda berry collectors are some of the highly paid labourers in this entire galaxy," the Doctor explained. "And people who own the businesses are rich as can be."

Rose sipped her drink, watching the dancers downstairs. She spotted Princess Maia dancing with a tall, blond man. "She's dancing with him for the fourth time tonight," Rose murmured to the Doctor.

"Hmm?" the Doctor asked and his eyes travelled to Maia and the mysterious blond. "Yes, I suppose she is," he said. "Perhaps she has found a husband."

"She is one lucky woman, I can tell you that," Rose said, looking at the bloke that she was dancing with.

The Doctor frowned slightly as he looked at her. "How so?" he asked her, confused.

"You're joking, right?" Rose asked incredulously. "He's gorgeous," she said, like it was obvious. She waved her hand for emphasis and the chain clinked between them again.

The Doctor sniffed slightly, with an unreadable expression on his face. "Yes, well," he said. "We should get ready to leave then?"

"Nope," Rose said, finishing her drink. "You still owe me a few more dances," she said, tugging him to his feet.

"Maybe you could ask the gorgeous bloke to dance," the Doctor grumbled but went along with her.

"Can't," Rose answered with a cheeky smile. "He and Maia are inseparable."

Eventually, the Ball dwindled down and people began to disperse. Rose had had an amazing time and her smile hadn't fallen for a second the whole evening. The Doctor congratulated himself on bringing them to a relaxing and trouble-free trip.

"Lady Rose? Doctor?" It was Helena.

"Oh, Princess Helena," the Doctor smiled. "How may we help?"

Helena smiled at them. "The Sisterhood would like to extend our hospitality to you and Lady Rose. We would be very grateful if you would consider accepting our invitation to stay at the palace a while longer."
"That is very kind of you, Princess Helena. But I'm afraid we must decline," he said.

"But we insist," Helena said.

The Doctor looked at Rose who gave him a pleading look. "Alright," he said as if he could deny Rose anything. "We will stay, if only for the night."

"Excellent," Helena clapped. "I will have someone show you to your chambers."

The chambers turned out to be quite beautiful. Rose's eyes were wide the whole time she stared at the lavish rooms. The Doctor chuckled at the look on her face. "Never say I never take you anywhere nice," he teased, using the sonic screwdriver to unclasp their 'ball and chain'.

Rose absently rubbed her wrist as she looked around. "This is amazing," she said, pushing aside the soft curtains and stepping out onto the balcony that overlooked the garden.

"Yes, quite glad you enjoyed herself," the Doctor said. "You see Rose, travelling in the TARDIS is not all conflict and trouble, you know..."

"Doctor," Rose called.

"There's also balls, parties, the very occasional execution, which when I think about it, is not a good thing at all," he continued, obliviously.

"Doctor," Rose called more insistently and he snapped his head towards her and went out onto the balcony.

"Something wrong?" he asked her.

"Yeah," Rose said, her eyes looking at the garden and the woods beyond. "I think I saw something move in the gardens."

"This is private land," he said. "There couldn't have been anyone."

"No, I did see something or someone move," Rose insisted. "They moved from the garden and went out into the woods."

The Doctor looked sceptical but his sharp gaze caught a quick moment near the woods. "Yes, I saw it. Probably just some stray animal or something," he shrugged.

"It didn't look like a person to you?" Rose asked.

The Doctor turned his sharp gaze on her. "Did you think it was?" he asked her.

"No," Rose shook her head. "It was just..."

"Yes?" he prodded.

"I saw a glint of something. Like jewellery or something. Unless it's like some stone on a dog collar or something," Rose said, wondering when she had become so paranoid.

"No dogs on this planet, Rose," the Doctor said, now a great deal worried. At Rose's look of alarm, he smiled gently. "Probably nothing to worry about," he said reassuringly.

There was a knock on their chamber doors.
"Now you've gone and jinxed it," Rose muttered as the Doctor opened the door. It was Helena and she was slightly out of breath, like she had run all the way there.

"Doctor, Lady Rose, I apologise for bursting in like this," she gasped through her breaths.

"Princess Helena, kindly sit down," the Doctor said, leading Helena inside. Rose handed her a goblet of water. "What happened?"

"Maia," Helena said, looking at Rose gratefully and gulping down the water. "Maia is missing."

"Missing?" Rose asked.

"Yes," Helena nodded. "We think she was taken against her will." She looked at the Doctor and Rose, tears filling her eyes. "We think she might have been kidnapped."
Vampires of Nira: The Rescue

Previously

It was Helena and she was slightly out of breath, like she had run all the way there.

"Doctor, Lady Rose, I apologise for bursting in like this," she gasped through her breaths.

"Princess Helena, kindly sit down," the Doctor said, leading Helena inside. Rose handed her a goblet of water. "What happened?"

"Maia," Helena said, looking at Rose gratefully and gulping down the water. "Maia is missing."

"Missing?" Rose asked.

"Yes," Helena nodded. "We think she was taken against her will." She looked at the Doctor and Rose, tears filling her eyes. "We think she might have been kidnapped."

"What makes you think that?" asked the Doctor sharply.

"Things around her chambers were disturbed," said Helena, tears streaming down her face. "Vallita and Isandra are summoning the council and they told me to fetch you."

"Yes, of course," said the Doctor. "We would like to examine Maia's chambers first."

Helena nodded. "I'll get some of the guards to take you," she said.

"Did Maia have guards?" Rose asked.

"Yes, but they are never permitted to enter her chambers," Helena said. "We don't know who the attackers were or how they took her."

"We'll handle it, Princess Helena," the Doctor said comfortingly. "Come on, Rose."

"Reese will show you," Helena said and a young guard clicked his heels and began to lead the way.

~

Maia's chambers indeed looked like they had been disturbed. The curtains were ripped, crystal figurines and lamps had been shattered; the whole room was a mess.

She had put up one hell of a fight and had definitely not left of her own free will. The Doctor was sonicing random parts of the room so Rose wandered out onto the balcony that had been similar to theirs.

There, right on the corner, she saw it. "Doctor!" Rose called.

The Doctor ran out and followed Rose's gaze. "A piece of Maia's robes," the Doctor said, examining the scrap of fabric caught in the rails of the balcony. He bent over the rails and saw that it wasn't too far of a jump. Plus, there was an extremely soft bed of springy heather underneath.

"Someone took her through here, didn't they?" Rose asked the Doctor, reaching the same conclusion as him.
The Doctor nodded. "Yes, appears so," he nodded. The heather did look a bit disturbed.

"Doctor," Rose gasped. "Remember the movement we saw in the garden and the woods? Could it have been Maia being kidnapped?"

The Doctor gazed at Rose in undistinguished wonder. "Rose, I believe you are correct," he said.

"Then they must have left a path through the woods," she finished, beaming at him.

"Exactly and we are going to follow it," he said. "Come on."

The Doctor and Rose weaved their way through the garden together. Reese, the young guard, had insisted on accompanying them. "There," Rose pointed at another scrap of fabric caught in a bush that looked like a cross between holly and ivy.

"We're on the right track," the Doctor said. He bent down. "Footprints," he observed.

"How many of them, my lord?" Reese asked.

"Call me the Doctor, none of this 'my lord' stuff," the Doctor waved. "And there were two of them. Neither of these footprints belong to the princess."

"How'd you know?" Rose asked.

"These are men's boots. By Earth standard, I should expect you would call them 'size twelve'," he said.

"So there were two men and they carried her off?" Rose confirmed as they kept walking.

The Doctor nodded worriedly. "Reese," he turned to the young guard. "Perhaps you should go back for reinforcements."

"But sir, what about you and the Lady Rose?" Reese asked, looking horrified at having to leave them unprotected.

"Rose and I can take care of ourselves," the Doctor said. "I want you to go back to the palace and bring a few more guards with you. We know there are at least two of them, there may be more."

Reese looked torn but then nodded quickly. "I shall be back soon, sir," he said and then nearly took off running back to the palace.

"He's sweet," Rose smiled after him.

The Doctor raised an eyebrow but didn't comment. "Come on, the footsteps are becoming relaxed."

"What does that mean?" Rose asked curiously.

"Well it could mean that they thought they were safe," the Doctor said, lowering his voice.

"But we're not that far off from the palace," Rose said, logically. She could still see the palace lights if she turned around.

"Yes," the Doctor said. "But I did mention it was largely a peaceful planet, didn't I? Well, their defences aren't quite so...strict."
"Meaning the security is bad?" Rose confirmed.

"Not precisely," the Doctor said. "The Sisterhood has a reputation of severely punishing offenders who harm any of them or any woman on the planet."

"There's a factor of trust mixed with fear," Rose realised.

"Yes, and you know what that tells me?" the Doctor asked. At Rose's questioning look, his face became grim. "It tells me that the kidnappers are not locals."

Rose nodded, that made sense.

"No local would dare do anything like this," the Doctor said. "And they certainly won't become complacent after getting away."

"They would run for their lives," Rose murmured and the Doctor nodded gravely.

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Twenty more minutes of scrambling through the woods, the Doctor and Rose reached a small clearing. It was empty, save for a small shack. It wasn't overly big or flashy, in fact it looked like one storm would finish it off.

If it had been on Earth, Rose would have thought it was an old hunting cabin like they showed in films. You know, the one that always looks like it's haunted.

The Doctor raised his finger to his lips, indicating to Rose that they needed to be quiet. Rose nodded back. Carefully, the two of them tiptoed over to the shack. The door wasn't much of a barrier and the shack seemed to have only one small room.

Rose spied a flash of blue through the window and saw the Princess. She tapped the Doctor's shoulder and mouthed 'Maia' nodding towards the window.

The Doctor nodded and gestured that there might be a guard near the door. He crossed over to the door and touched the knob. It was unsurprisingly, locked. He pulled out the sonic screwdriver which whirred quite loudly and the lock clicked open.

The door flung open from the inside and the tall man who had obviously been a guard charged towards the Doctor. The Doctor had little time to dodge as the gargantuan man turned around, advancing on him again.

Watching the Doctor being cornered, Rose darted inside the shack and looked around for anything that might help. She spotted a clay jug that looked promising. Taking careful aim, she lobbed it at the guard's head. The jug met its mark and the guard went down.

The Doctor quickly pulled out some string from his jacket and tied up the guard's hands behind his back. He flipped him over and examined him grimly. When he realised what he was, a disgusted grimace appeared on his face.

Rose, on the other hand, rushed into the shack. Princess Maia had been chained to the wall and was unconscious. Rose touched her forehead and was scared to find it cold and clammy. She was unnaturally pale too. She examined her neck and saw a single puncture wound.

"They've been taking her blood," the Doctor said from behind her, watching Maia with a mixture of horror and pity.
"Blood?" Rose asked in a disgusted voice.

"Yes," the Doctor said, kneeling down and freeing Maia's hands. He took out a stethoscope from his coat and examined her.

"Are they vampires or something?" Rose asked as the Doctor listened to Maia's heartbeat and took her pulse.


Rose flinched slightly at the anger in his voice. She patted Maia's forehead. "Is she going to be okay?" she asked.

The Doctor sighed, his anger leaving him slightly. "Yes, they only drained her a bit," he said. "Some rest and a few square meals will have her back on her feet in a few days."

"Good," Rose said. "So these Plasmavores drink blood, do they? How are they different from vampires then?" she asked. "And for that matter, are you telling me vampires are real?"

The Doctor gave a slight chuckle at the barrage of questions. "Plasmavores are the less-powerful and less advanced descendants of the original vampires. The original vampires are extinct now," he said, taking a handkerchief and dousing it with water.

"How did they become extinct?" Rose asked as she took the handkerchief and dabbed Maia's forehead.

"It was during the Dark Times," the Doctor said. "A single vampire could kill an entire planet. They were a threat to the universe. The Time Lords hunted them down. It was a long and bloody war."

"And your lot won?" Rose asked.

"Yes," he nodded. "But the violence was so bad that the Time Lords forever swore off interfering but vampires are still declared enemies of my people. Every Time Lord has a duty to destroy a vampire if they see one."

Rose nodded. "And these Plasmavores are not as powerful like the original vampires?"

"No, they're more like a shape-shifter. They can drink the blood of any species and assume their shape. Apart from that, they're just filthy murderers," the Doctor said, glaring at the unconscious guard who was lying outside.

"And how do we stop them?" Rose asked. "Stake them through the heart?"

The Doctor snorted. "Amusing idea, but no," he said. "Actually, they're quite easy to kill. Any blaster can kill them. Like I said, they're weak. The Judoon mostly hunt them through space."

"What are the Judoon?" Rose asked curiously as Maia began to stir lightly.

"Intergalactic cops," the Doctor explained. He looked at Maia. "Maia? Can you hear me?"

Maia groaned in pain and touched her neck. "Careful," Rose said. "It's a wound."

"What happened?" Maia asked in a raspy voice.
"You were kidnapped but you're okay now," Rose said comfortingly.

Maia nodded, closing her eyes again. "Shouldn't we be getting her back?" she asked.

"There's no hurry," the Doctor said. "We can wait for her to regain her strength."

"What if more of those Plasmavores come back?" Rose asked.

"Reese is on his way with more guards," the Doctor said. "I dare say they will manage just fine to stop them."

Rose nodded and continued to dab Maia's forehead. "Poor thing," Rose said. "How much blood did they take?"

"A pint, maybe more," the Doctor said and then frowned.

"What?" Rose asked, looking at his expression.

"Wonder why they did that," he said.

"What do you mean?" Rose asked.

"Well Plasmavores don't usually space their meals out," the Doctor said bluntly. "Once they have their prey, they suck them dry and leave a withered corpse."

"So why did they leave her like this?" Rose asked.

"I don't know," the Doctor said, sounding frustrated. "None of this makes sense. Why kidnap her and not even feed on her? And where are the rest of them?"

"Could they have needed her for ransom?" Rose asked. "So they just weakened her instead of killing her," she suggested.

"Possibly," the Doctor shrugged. "Unlikely, though."

"Then what?" Rose asked. Her eyes widened. "Could they have wanted to, you know, make her into one of them?" she gasped.

The Doctor gave a wry smile. "Good thinking but Plasmavores don't 'convert', so to speak. Their breeding pattern is much more traditional."

"Meaning?" Rose asked.

"Meaning they mate like humanoids and bear children," he said.

"Now there's an image," Rose muttered. "Blood-sucking monsters being parents."

"You know, I do believe there comes a very popular set of fiction books in your time about that," he said lightly.

"What?" Rose snorted. "Seriously? Vampire parents?"

"Yes," the Doctor nodded. "I forget the exact details but apparently the girl is human when they, you know," he cleared his throat.

"Have sex?" Rose offered innocently, grinning at his discomfort. "Shag?"
"Copulate," the Doctor said, shooting her a playful glare. "Anyway, she bears a half-vampire, half-human child who is some sort of an extraordinarily powerful creature."

"That sounds rubbish," Rose said bluntly. "First off, if you're human, how do you even have sex with a vampire? Aren't they supposed to be the undead?"

"That's your issue with it? Necrophilia? And not a whole blatant list of impossibilities?" the Doctor asked her.

"I said, 'first off' meaning there are more," Rose said, sticking her tongue out at him. "Anyway, how come you know so much about it? Vampire and humans copulating," she emphasised the word and the Doctor rolled his eyes. "It just doesn't seem to be your usual sort of reading material," she teased.

He cleared his throat and coughed. "Yes well, always good to be informed," he said, averting his gaze.

"About half-human and half-vampire babies who are all powerful creatures?" Rose asked incredulously.

"Seize them!" a voice hissed and the two of them spun around to see two tall men stalking towards them. The guard that they had tied up was one of them. A smaller, younger man was the one giving orders. Rose's eyes widened when she realised that it was the same blond man who had been dancing with Maia all evening.

"Seize them!" the blonde pretty boy hissed again. "They've discovered the plan! Seize them!"
Previously

He cleared his throat and coughed. "Yes well, always good to be informed," he said, averting his gaze.

"About half-human and half-vampire babies who are all powerful creatures?" Rose asked incredulously.

"Seize them!" a voice hissed and the two of them spun around to see two tall men stalking towards them. The guard that they had tied up was one of them. A smaller, younger man was the one giving orders. Rose's eyes widened when she realised that it was the same blonde man who had been dancing with Maia all evening.

"Seize them!" the blonde pretty boy hissed again. "They've discovered the plan! Seize them!"

"Plan?" the Doctor asked, standing up. "What plan?"

"Do not play the fool," the blond hissed. "I know you have discovered it. I do not know how, but you have."

"Orwell?" Maia asked in a small voice, her eyes wide.

The blond one, Orwell, started. He looked at his goons. "Don't harm the princess," he ordered. "But these two," he said, looking at Rose and the Doctor, who were standing protectively over Maia. "Kill them."

"Orwell, what're you doing?" Maia asked insistently.

"I'm afraid he's a Plasmavore as well, Maia," the Doctor said.

"Impossible," Maia said, looking disbelieving.

Orwell laughed harshly. "Shut up, you stupid girl," he hissed. "I have had enough of your simpering nonsense all evening."

Maia recoiled like he had slapped her. Rose glared at Orwell. "Leave her alone, you bloody..."

"Shut up!" Orwell snapped, glaring at Rose. He turned to his goons. "Kill them! How many times I have to say it?"

"You should really think about this," the Doctor said warningly. A small movement outside the shack caught his eye. "You won't get away with it."

"Get away with what?" Orwell asked angrily. "You two are unarmed and can't harm me. I'll be out of here with Maia before your bodies turn cold."

"Look, I'm giving you a chance," the Doctor said slowly. "Surrender now."

Orwell snorted derisively. "Kill them," he ordered his men, almost lazily.

"Step away from them!" Reese ordered, stepping out of the darkness and pointing his blaster at Orwell.
"Don't be foolish," Orwell said to him. "These two will devour you in an instant too."

"Possibly," Reese said, still pointing his blaster at Orwell. "But I doubt they can defeat the rest of us."

Orwell turned around and paled at the sight of nearly half the Royal guard armed and pointing their blasters at them. He gritted his teeth. "Fine!" he snapped. "Kill us then!"

"No!" Maia ordered. She scrambled to get up and Rose helped her. She smiled at Rose thankfully and then glared coldly at Orwell. "Arrest them and bring them to the palace," she ordered.

"Your Highness," Reese began but at a look from Maia, lowered his eyes and nodded.

"Doctor," Maia said. "I believe you mentioned some kind of law enforcement officials who are responsible for dealing with...these creatures?"

"The Judoon. You might do well to contact the Shadow Proclamation," he suggested.

Maia nodded. "See to it," she told Reese who nodded. "And take these three into custody."

The guards hastened to comply. A bunch of guards who were unarmed came to help Maia. As they lifted her carefully, Maia gave a small smile to Rose and the Doctor. "Thank you," she whispered.

~

The odd party started to make their way back through the woods. First went Maia and the guards carrying her. Next, Orwell and his two friends were being nudged forward by guards holding blasters to them. The Doctor and Rose were bringing up the rear.

"So, it worked out after all," the Doctor said.

Rose groaned. "You jinxed it again," she said.

"Nonsense," he said. "Just old superstition. Everything has righted itself. Orwell and his friends will be arrested by the Judoon and the princess is safe and happy again," he said triumphantly.

"Safe, yes," Rose nodded. "I don't know about happy," she frowned, looking at the morose expression on Maia's face.

"What do you mean?" the Doctor asked.

"She liked him," Rose said. "Maybe even loved him."

"And he betrayed her," the Doctor nodded. "Tragic, yes."

Rose nodded, feeling sorry for the princess. "What was his plan? If he was going to kidnap her anyway, why did he go to the Ball and be nice to her and everything?" she asked.

"I don't know," the Doctor shrugged. "Perhaps he wasn't as confident that the Princess would choose him."

Rose frowned but nodded. "And what did he mean when he said that we had figured out the plan?" she asked.

"Probably that he planned to have children with the princess," the Doctor grimaced. "A cross-species. He might have believed it would be all-powerful."
"That's disgusting," Rose stated. "He would have..." she shook her head. The bastard would have forced Maia. She swallowed the bile rising in her throat, glad that it had all been sorted.

Orwell, on the other hand, was not one to come so quietly. When they were going through a particularly thick part of the forest, he knocked his guard backwards. The guard stumbled and crashed into the Doctor, both of them toppling backwards onto the ground.

Orwell let out a deranged yell and lunged towards the Princess, his face contorted in rage.

Without thinking, Rose picked up the blaster of the fallen guard and fired at Orwell. Time stood still as the blast hit him square in the chest. His eyes widened for one instant before he fell to the ground, dead.

Rose was completely frozen, the blaster still in her hand as she watched Orwell fall. Her mind went completely blank and her ears filled with an odd ringing noise. Blood thudded around her head, almost drowning out the ringing. Cold sweat broke out on her forehead. Slowly, her hands began to tremble and her knees felt shaky. She gasped in a shuddering breath and her legs gave out.

Strong, warm arms gripped her and kept her from falling. The blaster fell out of her hands as she brought her shaking hands to her face. Loud, anguished sobs burst from within her, tears spilling down her eyes. She had just killed a man. She was a killer. Oh god, what had she become? She sobbed loudly, breaking down completely.

The Doctor for his part was in immense pain. Watching Rose break down like that, almost broke him too. He cradled her as close as he could, rubbing her arms in comfort, trying to soothe her. He could understand her anguish, her pain. "Shh, Rose," he said, kissing her hair and pulling her closer.

Rose gave a loud sob and threw her arms around him. He held her close, rocking her gently. He nodded at the guards and Maia to go on ahead. Maia looked pained at Rose's anguish and was ready to protest but the Doctor's look made her stop. She nodded and let the guards take her away.

Reese was the last one to go but he too gave a sad nod to the Doctor and left.

Alone in the woods, the Doctor sat down and pulled Rose on to his lap. "I'm sorry, Rose," he murmured. "I'm so sorry, my dear."

Rose buried her face in his chest, her tears soaking his cravat and waistcoat. "I killed him," she cried.

"I know, I know," he said, trying to soothe her. "You had no choice." Rose gave a loud wail at that and the Doctor's arms tightened around her.

"My fault," Rose cried. "All my fault."

"No, no, my darling," he said softly. "It's not your fault. You're wonderful, Rose. So brave and so wonderful. Not your fault. Never your fault, darling." Rose felt undeserving of his words. But she couldn't bear to let go of him. She pulled him closer and he let her, running a hand through her hair soothingly.

They didn't know how long they sat there. Well, the Doctor did. It had been thirty three minutes and twenty one seconds when Rose finally lifted her head to look at the Doctor.
He gave her a small smile and she gave him a watery smile in return. It was a sad smile and there was a burden in her eyes that hadn't been there before. His hearts clenched when he realised that he had been responsible for that.

"Can we go home?" she asked, her throat hoarse from crying.

He looked alarmed. "Home?" he asked. Of course, she wanted to leave. Why would she stay? She had agreed to seeing the universe. She had not signed up for knowing how to make life or death decisions. "Sure," he said, cursing when his voice broke. "I can take you home."

Rose looked confused. "Take me?" she asked. "Are you going somewhere?"

"No," he said at once, his arms tightening around her. "I just...you said 'home'."

"The TARDIS," she said, a small smile appearing on her face. "Can we go back?"

He almost laughed with relief. "Yeah," he nodded, unable to stop the smile on his face. "Come on," he said and picked her up.

"I can walk," Rose protested.

"Well," he said, ignoring her demands of asking him to put her down. "You did say that your shoes were not meant for walking."

Rose gave a reluctant smile at that and let him carry them back to the TARDIS. Once they reached the blue box, the Doctor lowered her onto her feet. He fished into his jacket and pulled out the key. Opening the door, he ushered her inside.

She smiled at him in thanks. He was being nice to her. Even after she had...she frowned. Had he wanted to take her home before?

"Rose?" he called. Her eyes snapped to him. "I shall make tea, shall I? Do you want to get cleaned up?"

"Y...yeah," Rose nodded. She felt grimy and polluted. She wanted a shower and just wanted to forget everything that had happened. "I'll be...just...yeah," she said and disappeared down the corridor.

The Doctor frowned after her but then started the dematerialisation sequence. He hoped that the Sisterhood would forgive their abrupt departure and even if they didn't, he could care less. His priority right now was Rose.

As soon as the TARDIS was floating along in the vortex, he went to the kitchen and made them both tea. He shucked off his coat, waistcoat and cravat and headed to Rose's room.

He found her already in bed, her covers pulled up to her chin. She appeared to be sleeping but she was frequently twitching like there was something bothering her. The Doctor sighed and turned to leave when a shrill scream made him stop.

Immediately, he put down the cups of tea and rushed over to her. "Rose! Rose! Wake up!" he called frantically, waking her up. "Just a nightmare."

Rose's eyes snapped open and tears began to flow. "Doctor?" she asked, sounding so broken that his hearts clenched.
"Yes, it's me," he said, gently manoeuvring her in bed so that she was lying down comfortably. "Go to sleep, Rose. It will all look a lot less worse in the morning," he whispered, stroking her hair.

Rose sniffled but settled down. "I am sorry," she mumbled. "For everything."

He gave a sad smile at that. "None of it is your fault. You saved Maia's life. Perhaps even the life of some of the guards. Not to mention, me," he said.

Rose opened her eyes and looked at him. "And what about the life I took?" she demanded. Her voice wasn't accusing; it sounded heartbroken.

"It is regrettable, certainly," he said and stroked her cheek tenderly. "But you reacted to danger, Rose. I know it hurts, but someday you will realise that you did what you had to do and a lot of people are well and alive because of you."

Rose gave a watery smile as a few more tears slid down her face. "Do you want me to go?" she asked him in a small voice.

"Never," he said. "I will always want you here, Rose."

Her returning smile was a bit brighter. "Then I will always stay," she promised, her eyes drooping slightly.

"How long can you stay, Rose Tyler?" the Doctor murmured sadly to himself as he sat on the floor next to her bed and watched the amazing human girl fall asleep. "How long will you want to?"

"Forever," she mumbled, burrowing deeper into her covers.
Rose hummed lightly as she passed the Doctor two cups from the cupboard. They were his finest pieces of china. Personally, Rose thought they were a bit too much for everyday use but the one thing that Rose knew about the Doctor was that he loved his tea.

When she said he loved his tea, she should point out that there is an entire cupboard (that is bigger on the inside) filled with different brews of tea collected from all over the universe and different time periods at that.

There are brews that Rose is familiar with and some that she isn't. Then there are the ones that she knows but never in this combination. There's the regular Earl Grey and Darjeeling to the adventurous Chamomile, Honey-Ginger, Green and Mint. And then there's the odd combination of Raspberry and Peppermint which the Doctor seemed to adore. Rose herself had found herself quite partial to the Parsley and Ceylon Orange brew.

Tea making was like an art for the Doctor. He would heat the water to the precise temperature for that particular brew and soak the tea leaves for the right amount of time to the second. Rose had found it quite endearing. She had been raised by Jackie Tyler, a woman who loved her tea. But the Doctor's obsession with tea would be enough to even put her mother's to shame.

Still, Rose wasn't about to complain. He made the best tea she had ever had and was content for him to make them tea after one of their adventures.

"Here you go, Rose," the Doctor said as he passed her perfectly made cup of tea. Rose smiled as she inhaled the parsley and orange scent of wafting from her cup.

"Thank you, Doctor," she said and took a sip. It was delicious.

"Glad you like it," he said and Rose realised that she must have said the last part out loud. He held out his hand and the two of them went to the console room. The Doctor picked up the contraption that he was working on and Rose sat down in her armchair, sipping her tea in peace.

The Doctor was fiddling with the contraption, pausing to take small sips of his tea. Rose loved moments like these. They were quiet, peaceful and just so restful. The past few weeks, the Doctor had been...wonderful. She'd still had nightmares about what happened on Nira but he was there every time, stroking her hair, comforting her, reminding her that it was in no way her fault.

She had been miserable for the first few days but slowly, the pain began to lessen and the hate that she had piled onto herself began to ease as well. She and the Doctor began to spend a lot of time together. After one of their adventures, he would make tea and the two of them would sit in the lovely gothic sitting room in the corner of the console room.

They began to talk about their pasts. The Doctor confessed about the pain he felt every time anyone died. He also began to tell her a little bit about his companions. Not a lot, and Rose suspected that he left a lot of it out but she appreciated the fact that he trusted her enough. In turn, she told him about Jimmy. The Doctor had looked the angriest she had ever seen him. Not Cybermen, not Time Lords, not killings could bring that look upon his face. It somehow made Rose feel more protected than she ever had.

Rose sighed and snuggled back in her seat. The Doctor was wonderful. At her contented sigh, the Doctor looked up and smiled.
"Here," he said, pulling the lever to reveal the sky outside. "Have a nice view to go with your tea."

Rose looked up and gasped. They were parked under a nebula. Green, blue and golden light swirled above them. It was magnificent. "It's gorgeous," Rose gasped.

He grinned. "It's a good view, isn't it? I do hate parking under a boring view," he said, turning back to his contraption.

"I thought we were in the vortex," Rose said, looking at him.

"We were, but I wanted to repair this," he said, indicating the contraption in his hands.

"What is it?" Rose asked curiously.

"It's the TARDIS lock," he said. "I didn't much fancy fixing it when we were in the vortex."

"Hang on," Rose said, sitting up straight. "That's the lock? Meaning anyone can just walk into the TARDIS?"

He gave her a quietly amused look. "We are parked around a nebula, Rose. Not Piccadilly Circus," he said. "Trust me, we're perfectly safe."

Because the universe has a cruel sense of humour, at that very moment, the TARDIS lurched, sending them sprawling. Alarms rang imperiously as the TARDIS demanded immediate attention. "It's like there's a jinx on those words," Rose groaned as she got to her feet, wincing at the broken china. She had told the Doctor not to use the good ones. Fortunately neither of them had been scalded or cut. This time, at least.

The Doctor paid no attention to her words as he set about trying to see what had got the TARDIS so worked up. "Something's approaching us," he said. "We're on a collision course with a freighter."

"Can't we move out of the way?" Rose demanded over the blaring sounds.

He looked a bit sheepish. "I might have dismantled the dematerialisation circuit to fix the lock."

Rose glared at him. "Meaning, we can't move?" she asked.

"Yes," he nodded. "But not to worry, just hope this works," he said, pressing a random series of buttons.

"What're you doing?" Rose demanded.

"I'm setting the TARDIS to use the momentum of the collision to propel us to the nearest available surface," he explained quickly.

"What?" Rose asked.

"The TARDIS is going to be like a cricket ball and the freighter will act as a bat," he said.

"And the bat's going to hit us and throw us into a planet or something?" Rose all but shrieked.

"Yes," he nodded, far too calmly. "You might want to hold on to something."

Rose sat down in her armchair and clutched onto the arms with all her might. They were still for a split second before the TARDIS tilted violently and spun through space at an abnormally fast pace.
The Doctor and Rose got to experience firsthand what a cricket ball felt like.

With an almighty bang, the TARDIS crashed onto solid surface. A few wires around the console came loose and sparked violently. Smoke began to rise from the console. Coughing, Rose stood up and looked for the Doctor.

"Doctor?" she called. "Are you alright?"

"Yeah," he answered as he stood up, rubbing his elbows as he did. "Well, we seem to have landed, at least."

Rose ignored him and went over to the scanner. "Eden IV," she read.

"Is it really?" the Doctor asked as he came up behind her. "Well, could have been worse places to land. The temporal meter isn't working, though."

"Eden IV, meaning there were three before. What happened to them?" Rose asked.

"Eden, the original planet is banned for visitors," he said. "It contained a powerful drug that is best thought to be exhausted. Eden II has a methane atmosphere. Eden III is a pleasure planet."

"And this one?" Rose asked.

"An old colony of humans. Not from Earth, we are too far away from your galaxy," he said.

The TARDIS gave a loud beep and lights began to flash. "Oh, what now?" Rose asked.

"She's kicking us out," the Doctor said. He grabbed Rose's hand and pulled her out of the TARDIS. The doors slammed shut behind them.

"She's got in a strop about the landing?" Rose guessed, raising an eyebrow at him.

"Well," the Doctor said, running a hand through his curls. "Just a little, maybe."

Rose laughed at him and then turned her eyes to their surroundings. "Oh my god," she said, looking at the destroyed street that they were on. It was completely deserted. Gloom hung in the air and rubble decorated the surface.

The Doctor examined it pensively. "Most curious," he murmured. He picked up some rubble and sniffed it. "Metallic," he commented. "Now, where have I smelled that before?" he asked himself.

Rose looked around for herself, fighting off a shiver. It was like the whole place felt like death. She wandered over to a building and jumped violently when a hand grabbed her arm.

"What're you doing, eh?" the man who had grabbed her hand asked. He was completely filthy and one of his arms was bandaged and bloody.

"Doctor!" Rose yelled.

"Shh," he said, clapping a grimy hand on her mouth. "Keep your voice down, girl."

"Let go of her," the Doctor said, appearing at her shoulder.

The man looked at the two of them and slowly released Rose who immediately moved next to the Doctor. "You're off-worlders," he said.
"Yes," the Doctor said. "I'm the Doctor and this is Rose."

"Name's Cal," he nodded. "And you shouldn't be here. Get out while you can."

"Why? What's the matter?" Rose asked at once.

"If they find out...if they catch you...just take the girl and go," Cal told the Doctor.

"Look, Cal, who will catch us?" the Doctor asked, stepping towards him.

"I've said too much already," Cal said, retreating into the shadows. "If they find out..."

"Cal, wait," the Doctor called but Cal had disappeared into the shadows.

"Where'd he go?" Rose asked.

"No idea," the Doctor said grimly.

"What do you think he was talking about?" Rose asked.

"I don't know," the Doctor said. "Rose, I think we should go back to the TARDIS."

"Right, yeah," she said and they made their way back.

The Doctor reached for his key before remembering that he had dismantled the lock. He pushed the door but it wouldn't budge. "Ah," he said.

"What?" Rose asked.

"I think she's repairing herself," he said, patting the doors. "She will let us in when she's ready."

"Meaning we are stuck here," Rose said, looking around apprehensively.

"For the time being, yes," he nodded.

"Maybe we should look around a bit instead of standing out here," Rose suggested.

The Doctor nodded. "Very well, but keep close to me. Let's see if we can find anyone who can be more forthcoming than Cal," he said, taking Rose's hand.

"He sounded so scared," Rose said. "And he was injured too."

The Doctor gave her a sudden smile.

"What?" she asked him, puzzled by the odd reaction and the way he was looking at her.

"Rose Tyler, that man made you feel threatened yet you choose to remember him as a victim," he said. "Human beings, so unique. You, more so."

"Shut up," Rose said, smacking his arm to cover up her embarrassment.

He laughed at having embarrassed her and pulled her down the street. They approached a river and Rose frowned. "The water's filthy," she observed.

"Yes and it shouldn't be," the Doctor said, sniffing the air. "It's just after monsoon. That water should be crystal clear."
"How odd is it that we've only seen Cal so far?" Rose asked, looking around. "And it's so quiet. Like there is no life."

"There isn't," the Doctor said, frowning. "No birds, no trees. Eden IV got its name for being a fruitful planet. It's not supposed to be a barren wasteland."

"Then how come it's all destroyed?" Rose asked, looking wide-eyed at his furious and calculating expression.

"Someone has interfered with time and disrupted this planet's history. It should be thriving and hosting festivals. Not on the brink of collapse," he said.

"But who else can time travel?" Rose asked. "I thought it was only your people."

"Time Lords are not the only ones with time travel. But we are the only ones who have perfected it," he said.

"Modest as ever, Doctor," Rose remarked and the Doctor winked at her.

"But I am telling the truth," he said. "Humans have the Time Agency, then there is the Temperon. The Shugs developed Time travel but it ended badly..." He shook his head. "Time is best left alone. Something that wasn't done for this planet."

"Doctor!" Rose yelled and the Doctor broke away from his thoughts.

Rose edged closer to him as she spotted a group of odd men approaching them. They had blank expressions on their faces and a metal frame around their heads. They reminded Rose of Cybermen but they were human, weren't they?

The Doctor pulled Rose behind him, a furious and horrified look on his face. "Robomen," he hissed.
"Doctor!" Rose yelled and the Doctor broke away from his thoughts.

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"What do we do?" Rose demanded as they began to converge on them.

A shrill ringing filled their ears and the Doctor and Rose covered their ears. The Robomen collapsed one by one to the ground.

"Run, ya ninnies!" a man yelled and the Doctor and Rose ran towards the voice.

A rough hand gripped Rose's and began to pull her along. Rose kept her other hand tightly in the Doctor's as they followed their mysterious rescuer. He led them to an abandoned building that said 'Library' at the front. It did not have any books and was completely abandoned. Their rescuer led them down into the basement through a hidden trapdoor in the floor.

There was another metal door in the basement. The man knocked twice in quick succession. "It's me," he said and the metal door swung open. He grunted as he pulled Rose and the Doctor inside and someone closed the door behind them. "These two you were talking about, Cal?"

Cal, who had been sitting near a stove, nodded. "I told ya, didn't I?" he asked. "I said they were off-worlders."

"Yeah," the rescuer said, looking disdainfully at them. "Found them cornered by the Robomen near the river."

"I told you to get away," Cal hissed them. "If Finn hadn't found you, you'd be walking about with metal things in your brain."

Finn, who was apparently their rescuer, grunted as he looked at them. "What are your names?" he asked.

"I'm Rose and this is the Doctor," Rose said. The Doctor seemed to be ignoring everyone and glaring at random things.

Finn raised his eyebrow. "Is she your woman?" he asked the Doctor.

Rose bristled. "I'm nobody's woman," she said, crossing her arms.

"Enough," the Doctor hissed, his eyes snapping to Finn's. "Those were Robomen that attacked us near the river. There is only one species in the whole of time and space that I know of, who uses them as slave labour. They're here, aren't they?" he demanded, his words hissing out like poison from his mouth.

"Who are here?" Rose asked him. "Doctor, what are you talking about?"
"The Daleks," the Doctor said, hatred seeping into his tone.

Finn nodded. "Aye," he said. "You've heard of them then."

"I've tangled with them once or twice and this is playing out in a far too similar pattern," the Doctor said, gritting his teeth.

"Doctor, what are the Daleks?" Rose asked. She had seen him angry, furious, hurt but she had never seen him like this. It was like all his rage and his hatred was brought to the surface at the mere mention of these things.

"Daleks are an alien race," Cal told Rose. "They are creatures of hatred."

"Their ships came three years ago to Eden IV. Our planet was ravaged by them. Some humans were converted into those Robomen, others were taken to their prison camps in the hills," Finn said, sitting down.

"And you held out?" Rose guessed.

"Aye," Cal nodded. "Finn and I are the only ones left in the city, that we know of. We heard rumours of resistance groups in neighbouring cities but it is hard to travel. Those Robomen are always about."

"You said they had prison camps," the Doctor said. "Why?"

"Got me," Finn shrugged. "From what I have heard, they are making them dig the hills down."

"Dig the hills down?" Rose asked in confusion. "Why?"

"Like I said, we don't know," Cal said.

"There must be something they want," the Doctor said, pacing up and down. "Is there some sort of a rare metal in the hills? Power source? Energy source?" he demanded.

"No," Cal said. "It's just the hills. Even the plants have died out."

"Daleks never do anything without a purpose," the Doctor said furiously.

Cal and Finn exchanged a look and the Doctor caught it. "What?" he demanded.

"There were rumours that they are preparing for war," Cal said slowly.

"A war?" the Doctor asked. "With whom?"

"Don't know," Cal shrugged. "They said it was an old war, happening all over the place."

"You know who they were fighting with?" Rose asked the Doctor.

"Yes," the Doctor said. "The longest war that began on their planet of Skaro. The Daleks are fighting the Thals."

"These Thals," Finn said, speaking at last. "They friendly?"

"Depends on your perspective," the Doctor said. "Generations of them have been fighting the Daleks and they have mutated to hold out against them."
"So they're the same as the rotten Daleks," Finn spat.

"Not quite," the Doctor said coolly. "They still have their humanity. But the incessant war has destroyed their spirit too. They were an intelligent and gentle race once."

"So how come they haven't come here yet?" Finn asked.

"I don't know," the Doctor said, sounding frustrated. "It might just be that Daleks are building a war base and laying in wait when the Thals do come."

"Great," Finn said with a sarcastic smirk on his face. "Not only are we invaded by a bunch of pepper pots but now their old friends are coming to destroy what is left of us."

The Doctor sighed and rubbed his head. "They've got to be stopped," he said. "Do they have a base of some sort?" he asked.

"They all stay in the hills," Cal said. "The Robomen do the dirty work. They haven't set foot or plunger in the city for over a year."

"Then why haven't you escaped?" Rose asked. "You defeated the Robomen near the river."

"It is a minor sonic disruptor. The metal heads can't bear this pitch of sounds," Finn said smugly, showing a small transmitter. "But it only confuses them for a few moments. Hardly enough for an escape plan."

"But still good enough," the Doctor said. "How far are the hills from here?"

"You're not thinking of going there, are you?" Cal asked him.

"That is precisely what I am thinking," he said. "How far?"

"You're mad," Finn said flatly. "You'll be killed the minute you leave here."

"That is my problem," the Doctor said.

"Fine," Finn nodded. "The Pass is three miles from here. The hills begin beyond that. The area is under heavy guard by Robomen and Daleks. The prisoners work there."

"Three miles, that's not too far," the Doctor said.

"You can't go," Cal protested. "And especially not with her," he nodded at Rose. "Oi," she protested, glaring at him. "I'm not staying behind for anything."

The Doctor looked torn. "Rose, maybe," he began and Rose turned her fierce glare onto him.

"Don't you start," she said. "I'm going with you," she said firmly.

"Rose," he said, grabbing her shoulders gently. "The Daleks are my oldest, most deadliest enemies. I am on their number one list to kill. They're merciless."

"And do you think I'm gonna let you go on your own knowing what you just told me?" Rose asked. "Someone's got to have your back. Besides, what would you do without me?"

He gave her a little shake. "Rose, it's no joke," he said.
"I'm not joking," she said. "You're on a suicide mission and you need someone to keep an eye on you."

He sighed. "Can I say anything that will make you change your mind?" he asked.

"Nope," she said firmly.

He gave a half-hearted smile. "Fine, but you listen to everything I say," he said sternly. "If I say run, you run. If I say leave, you leave. Got that?"

Rose nodded and the Doctor searched her eyes for a moment before nodding back.


The Doctor ignored him. "Rose, do you have your phone?" he asked.

"Yeah, why?" Rose asked as she took it out of her pocket and handed it to him. He had 'upgraded' it for her, shortly after she had started travelling with him. She had been making frequent calls to her mother. A pang of sadness hit Rose as she realised that she missed her mum quite a bit. Maybe if they survived the Daleks, she could ask the Doctor to take her home for a visit.

The Doctor didn't answer as he started to take her phone apart. He fiddled with a few different components with the sonic screwdriver and held it up. "There," he said, in a satisfied voice. "That should do it."

"What did you do?" Rose asked him curiously.

"I made us our very own sonic disruptor," the Doctor said. "This will scramble the brains of any Roboman in a five feet radius."

"Won't it kill them?" Rose asked.

The Doctor's eyes saddened. "I'm afraid they're already dead, Rose," he said, regretfully. "It will be a mercy to end it."

Rose nodded sadly. Cal and Finn glanced at the contraption with interest. "Will that really work?" Finn asked, trying not to sound impressed.

"Yes, it will," the Doctor said firmly.

"But you still don't have weapons to fight them Daleks," Finn pointed out. "And what is it that you're going to do once you get there anyway?"

"Right," said the Doctor. "The plan is to get near the hills and infiltrate the Dalek base."

"And what then?" Cal asked.

"I'm making it up as I go along," the Doctor said. "Come on, Rose."

Rose nodded and stood up to go with him.

"Wait," Finn said, standing up and taking an odd weapon out. "I'll go with you."

"You don't have to," the Doctor said. "Besides Cal's injured."
"Cal can manage on his own. I'll take you two as far as the Pass. You can do whatever you want next," Finn said dourly.

The Doctor nodded. "Thank you," he said as Rose smiled at Finn.

Finn nodded back. "Don't thank me yet," he said, beginning to lead the way out. "I still think you're on a suicide mission."

~

Night had fallen by the time they emerged out into the devastated city again. Finn made them keep to the shadows as he began to lead them out. "Robomen patrols are worse during night time," he explained in a whisper.

It took them twenty minutes to leave the city and enter the wasteland. "This used to be a forest," Finn said sadly as they made their way across. "Course, nothing's grown here for two years."

The hills were visible in the distance as they walked through the wasteland. Smoke hung over them and sounds of machines reverberated across the land.

"Do they continue digging through the night too?" Rose asked Finn.

"Aye," Finn nodded. "We had a few people escape and they said that they had work shifts."

"And they mentioned that the Daleks were preparing for war?" the Doctor asked.

Finn nodded. "Them Daleks needed flat land but they are digging the hills instead of using the flat plains. I don't understand them," he said, frustrated.

"I stand by what I said earlier," said the Doctor. "There is something in those hills that made them choose that spot."

"Here it is," Finn said as they arrived at the Pass. The Doctor looked around absently and Rose noticed an old rusty signpost. Curious, she moved towards it and flipped it around. It identified the place as 'Bad Wolf Pass'.

"Yes, this will do," the Doctor was saying as he and Finn examined the way. "The path up here leads directly near their base. The night should provide sufficient cover. Thank you, Finn."

Finn nodded. "I do wish you'd not go," he said. "It is said to be..." he trailed off with a horrified look in his eyes.

The Doctor felt his hearts get cold as he turned around. Coming towards them was a group of Robomen followed by three Daleks. "Run!" he commanded.

Rose only had a quick glimpse of the Daleks and Robomen before she turned around and started following the Doctor and Finn.

"There's a hidey hole up here," Finn called back as he ran.

"We're right behind you," the Doctor said.

Rose was only a few paces behind him when she remembered the disruptor in her hand. She turned around and pressed the button on her phone. The sonic frequency made the Robomen stop in their tracks. Grinning victoriously, Rose turned to follow the Doctor, but her foot stubbed a giant rock.
She tripped and fell onto the ground, her head hitting the same rock as she went down. Pain shot through her head and her vision swam.

The last thing she noticed before blacking out was a Dalek looming over her.
Tyranny of the Daleks: Thals and Daleks

Previously

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"TAKE THE FE-MALE TO INTERRO-GATION!" the Dalek ordered.

Rose vaguely realised that she was lifted up by someone (or something) but was too disoriented to struggle or escape. She touched a hand to her head and it came back wet and sticky. Feeling nauseous, she blacked out again.

The Doctor followed Finn but then registered that Rose wasn't behind him. He turned around and stopped in horror when he saw her being carried off by the Daleks into their base. He turned to go back when Finn grabbed his coat.

"Let me go," the Doctor said furiously.

"Don't be foolish," Finn hissed, pulling him out of sight. "And keep your voice down."

The Doctor glared angrily at him. "They've got Rose," he hissed.

"Yes, and if you don't shut up they will get us too," Finn said rationally.

"I've got to go," the Doctor said. "I have to save Rose."

Finn grabbed fistfuls of the Doctor's coat and held him back. "Stop being a madman for one moment and think this through," Finn said.

"She may not have time," the Doctor said, struggling.

"She's a woman. She will be put to work in the prison camp," Finn said. "If we get caught, it's automatic conversion to Robomen for us."

The Doctor faltered for a moment. "But I still have to..."

"Look, we did it your way once," Finn said furiously. "And you got the girl captured. This time, stop and make a proper plan."

The Doctor stopped and sighed. "Yes, of course," he nodded.
Finn seemed relieved and let go of the Doctor's coat. "Alright, there is a way beyond this..."

"Hold on," the Doctor interrupted and then observed the hidey hole they were in. "This is strange."

"What?" Finn asked.

The Doctor didn't answer. He reached a hand across the rough surface of the hidey hole and then a smile lit up his face. Finn looked on with wide eyes as the Doctor put his hand straight through the solid wall. He let out a startled yell.

"Ssh," the Doctor said. He reached his arm further inside the wall and grinned brightly at Finn.

Finn watched in astonishment as the wall opened up. The Doctor smiled triumphantly. "Excellent cloaking," the Doctor commented as he walked into the spaceship.

"What the hell?" Finn asked as he followed the Doctor inside. "Is this a spaceship?"

"Yes," a new voice answered and a very tall, broad-shouldered man with blonde hair stepped forward with a group of four more people. At first blush, they could look like siblings. Their hair was the same shade of blonde and they were dressed almost identically.

"Who are they?" Finn asked the Doctor.

"The Thals," the Doctor said, frowning at the group in puzzlement.

"Yes," the Thal answered. "I am Elitus and these are my friends: Platus, Temus, Kinus and Dela."

"I'm the Doctor, this is Finn," the Doctor said, still staring at them coolly. "This ship isn't yours, though."

"No," Elitus answered. "It isn't."

"Well, whose it then?" Finn asked.

"This is a Dalek timeship," the Doctor said.

"I thought you said that the Daleks and Thals were enemies," Finn said.

"We are," Temus said, stepping forward. "We stole this ship."

"Why are you on Eden IV?" the Doctor asked them. "We are nowhere near New Davius."

Platus snorted. "New Davius? We have not been back there in years," he said.

"Why not? All Thals relocated there from Skaro," the Doctor said. "Before..."

"Before the sun went supernova, yes," Temus nodded. "Our people moved to New Davius well before that happened."

"Yes, traitors the lot of them," Platus snarled.

The Doctor's face hardened. "What do you mean by that?" he demanded.

"The Daleks are still loose in the universe. Our ancestors were killed by them. And our elders decide to settle on a planet, away from it all," Platus said angrily.

"Platus," Elitus warned as Dela placed a comforting hand on Platus' shoulder.
"You are seeking out the Daleks on your own," the Doctor realised.

"Yes, we are," Elitus nodded. "We stole this timeship and have been slowly destroying as many Dalek factions that we can find."

"Yes," Kinus nodded eagerly. "We find a planet, lure the Daleks with promise of resources and then destroy them."

"Hmm, I see," the Doctor said, sighing. "Yes, it's all quite clear to me now. Just one thing that I do want to know: Are you INSANE?" he demanded, his voice rising dangerously.

The Thals were taken aback. "But...the Daleks are evil," Temus said.

"Infernal fools," the Doctor snarled. "Of course they are. But you, you decide to lure them onto innocent planets. Meddling with time, setting the Daleks loose on that planet's people."

"You telling me they did this to my planet?" Finn demanded angrily. "On purpose? For some sort of revenge?"

"Yes," the Doctor said angrily. He turned back to the Thals. "Your people were wise, intelligent and they fought for self-preservation. But you fools have decided that you are too smart for that, have you?"

"Now look here," Platus began.

"Shut up!" the Doctor hissed, his eyes frightening. "You thought yourselves as some forms of vigilantes."

"We killed a lot of Daleks," Dela protested.

"How many innocent people did you kill?" the Doctor demanded, advancing on her. "How many beautiful planets did you destroy? How many timelines did you ruin? ANSWER ME!"

There was deafening silence as the Thals stared at the Doctor. The Doctor looked beyond furious. "Just as I thought," the Doctor said, his lip curling in disgust. "You're worse than Daleks, that's what you are."

~

Rose slowly came to. She blinked slowly as an odd room swam into focus. She was in a chair, strapped down. Her wrists and ankles were bound to the chair and there was a metal frame around her head. Rose panicked and started struggling.

"DO NOT MOVE!"

Rose stopped moving and stared as a Dalek approached her. "YOU WILL BE INTERROGATED!"

"Where am I?" Rose asked.

"SILENCE!"

Rose bit back her retort as the Dalek's eye stalk appraised her carefully. "WHAT IS YOUR NAME?"

Rose stubbornly refused to answer.
"ANSWER!"

"R-Rose," she said, cursing herself for stumbling.

"WHAT IS YOUR PLANET OF ORIGIN?"

"Eden IV," she lied.

"DO NOT LIE!"

Rose flinched at the angry reprimand.

"Earth," she answered.

"HOW DID YOU COME TO EDEN?"

"We crashed," she answered and then bit her tongue at the slip.

"WE?"

"My...friend and I," she said. "Look, our ship crashed and we were only looking for help." Always lie with the truth. That was something that she had learnt early on in her life.

The Dalek paused and Rose prayed that her lie had worked. "INFORMATION?" the Dalek asked.

Rose jumped in her seat as another Dalek answered. "SENSORS INDICATE TRUTHFUL RESPONSES."

Sighing in relief, Rose relaxed only for a split second before her interrogator snapped its eye stalk towards her. "THE PRISONER WILL STAND!"

The restraints around her wrists and ankles fell open and the metal frame around her head was lifted away. Rose stood up shakily in front of the Dalek.

"YOU WILL BE TAKEN TO AREA SIGMA."

"What's that?" Rose asked.

"DO NOT INTERRUPT!" the Dalek yelled and Rose flinched back.

"Sorry, sorry," she said.

"YOU WILL JOIN THE LABOUR FORCE. YOU WILL OBEY ALL DALEK COMMANDS. DO YOU UNDERSTAND?"

"But...I..." Rose tried.

"DO YOU UNDERSTAND?" the Dalek repeated the question in a louder tone.

"Yes!" Rose said. "Yes, I understand."

"FOLLOW ME!"

Rose followed the Dalek out of the interrogation room, feeling truly scared. She was a prisoner of a deadly race and she had no way out. Her head still ached and her palms were scraped. She was well and truly trapped.
Her only hope was that the Doctor would find a way to rescue her somehow.

"Look, I don't care who you are," Platus said angrily. "But you don't get to come in here and call us worse than those creatures."

The Doctor laughed harshly. "Daleks have no emotion, no sense of morality. They are machines of hatred. But you," he shook his head. "Where is your sense of morality? Your compassion? Your consideration for other life forms?"

The Thals flinched at the reprimand.

The Doctor wasn't done. "Eden was a beautiful planet. You came here, intent on your revenge. Did you for one moment think of all the people who lived here? Their lives, their families. You brought the Daleks here on purpose. And the Daleks destroyed their lives," he continued.

"Why did you bring them here?" Finn asked. He had been silent all this time but was just as angry as the Doctor. "Why Eden? What did our planet ever do to you?"

"We picked it at random," Elitus answered slowly, looking stricken. "We spread rumours of a powerful energy source nestled in the hills. The Daleks took the bait."

"We usually wait for a few years after they invade," Dela continued. "As more years pass, more Daleks arrive in that place."

"Once they are there, we infiltrate their base and blast it away with nuclear weapons, killing as many Daleks as we can," Kinus finished.

"And the prisoners and any other people in the area," the Doctor said bitterly. "Not to mention what nuclear waste will do to that planet."

Elitus raised his head and met the Doctor's eyes squarely. "Doctor, we appear to have done our fellow life forms a great injustice. We became far too blinded in our journey of revenge that we seem to have lost our way," he admitted steadily.

"Elitus," Platus said in a betrayed voice. He was the only one of the Thals who seemed like the Doctor's words hadn't done much to affect him.

"No, Platus," Kinus said firmly. "Elitus is right. We have turned into the very monsters we despise."

"Doctor," Dela said. "How do we set this right?"

The Doctor sighed and sat down. "I have a friend in there. She is so young," he said. "We have to save her and the other prisoners. Then we have to deal with the Daleks."

Elitus nodded. "Alright, Doctor," he said. "Temus, the plans."

"Plans?" the Doctor asked.

Temus nodded and indicated to a screen. "These are the floor plans of the temporary Dalek base," he said, as a schematic appeared on the screen.

"How did you get those?" Finn asked curiously.
"This ship is theirs. We hacked their network with their own technology," Temus answered. He indicated five different zones on the plan. "These are the five areas of the prison camps. Alpha, Beta, Omega, Sigma and Gamma."

"Each area has about fifty prisoners," Kinus explained. "They usually work in groups of ten."

"Each group has two Daleks supervising," Dela said.

"Meaning there are about fifty Daleks in the prison camps," the Doctor nodded.

"Yes," Elitus agreed. "Plus, five other Daleks in charge of running the base. The Supreme Dalek gives the orders but he is off-planet."

"Very well," the Doctor nodded. "So, here is the plan..."

~

Rose stumbled into a half-dug cave in the hills. Her eyes roamed over the place and chilled her to the heart. People were dressed in rags and had a myriad of injuries on their bodies. No one was speaking or making any other noise apart from laboured breathing due to their tasks. Their expressions were blank and they were working efficiently like a well choreographed routine.

"MOVE!" the Dalek ordered her and Rose tripped on her feet as the Dalek pushed the plunger into her back.

She braced herself for the fall but found herself being held up. She looked up into the tired eyes of a man her age. "Are you alright?" he asked her.

"Yeah," she answered.

"CONTINUE WITH YOUR TASKS!"

The man steadied Rose and with a withering glare at the Daleks, led her away from them. "Here," he said, handing her a shovel.

Rose took the shovel and winced quietly when the splintered wood of the shovel handle dug into her scraped palms. The man noticed and gave her a pitying smile. "It will be alright," he said. "A few days and you won't even notice the pain."

Rose looked at him, determined. "I am not planning to stay," she said firmly and struck the ground with the shovel. "I have someone who is coming for me."
Previously

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"What are you on about?" the man asked. "No one escapes this."

Rose sighed and looked at him. He was about her age, and dressed in torn trousers and shirt that looked as if they hadn't been washed in months. There was a deep gash on his left cheek that looked fresh. His blue eyes were haunted, like they had seen far more than they should have. "What's your name?" Rose asked him gently.

"Brett," he answered, still looking at her like she was an oddity.

"Brett," Rose smiled. "My name's Rose."

He nodded slowly and cautiously, reminding Rose of a spooked animal. "You're not of Eden, are you?" he guessed.

"No, my friend and I crashed here," Rose said. She glanced around for signs of approaching Daleks and saw that the only Dalek that was supervising them was at the other end of the cave, ordering a group of people to work faster. She leaned in to whisper to Brett. "I bet by now he has a plan to get us all out."

"Get you out maybe," Brett muttered.

Rose's brow furrowed. "Why do you say that?" she asked.

"He's your friend. Why would he bother with us?" Brett asked in a low voice, digging his shovel into the ground and scooping out the dirt. "I was brought here two years ago. I haven't set a foot out of the prison camp since."

Rose placed her hand on his arm and he jumped at the contact. "I'm sorry," she said. "But I promise you, we are gonna get out of here," she said sincerely.

Brett was still staring at her hand that was on his arm. He nodded slowly and covered her hand with his. "Thank you," he said. His eyes snapped to hers. "You're very odd, Rose. I don't know why I believe you," he said honestly.

Rose grinned and withdrew her hand, getting back to work. "I know the feeling," she said.

~

As night fell on Eden, the Thals, Finn and the Doctor put their plan into action. There were five
sections of the base, built in the shape of a pentagon. The space in the middle was used as the main Dalek base where presumably the communications and interrogations took place.

The five sections were digging their way through the surrounding hills, presumably looking for the fake energy source.

The Doctor had found that odd. The Daleks had been here for three years and found no trace of the energy source. It just didn't make sense why they didn't stop the digging.

The Thals and Finn seemed to believe that the Daleks had taken bait and that was enough. The Doctor wished he could be this optimistic.

The plan to deal with the Daleks and liberate Eden was mostly straightforward. Kinus, Dela, Finn, Temus and Platus would enter a section each and get rid of the Daleks using the guns that the Thals had. Once the Daleks had been dealt with, they would free the prisoners and take them away from the hills as fast as they could.

The Doctor and Elitus would be the ones to infiltrate the central base of the Daleks. The Thals had a bomb which would be attached to the circuitry of the mainframe of the Daleks. The bomb was equipped to blow up the base and all Daleks with it.

The two of them were wearing a teleport device on their wrists that would carry them out before the explosion could happen.

The plan was full of risks but the Doctor had been adamant that the prisoners would not just be left to die as collateral damage. Platus had grumbled and complained at that but with Finn, Dela, Temus and Kinus backing the Doctor, Elitus had ruled in their favour.

"Are you ready?" Elitus asked the Doctor.

"Yes," the Doctor answered.

"We can't teleport directly into the central base. We will teleport to the Omega section and make our way through," Elitus said.

Getting into the Omega base was surprisingly easy. It was the oldest camp and had been the first section to be built. There was a tunnel dug into the hills that led straight to the entrance hatch of the Omega prison camp. It wasn't guarded from the outside but the Doctor was positive that there must be some sort of security inside.

The hatch was locked but the Doctor used his sonic screwdriver to open it. The metallic door swung open and the Doctor and Elitus quickly slipped inside.

They could hear the prisoners working away to their right but they were yet to see a Dalek anywhere. "That way," Elitus whispered, pointing to the left which led further down the corridor.

The two men crept into the corridor and made their way down. The lack of Daleks was troubling the Doctor. Surely they would have detected them intruding or found them lurking through the prison camp by now.

"Only fifty more meters until we reach the entrance of the central base," Elitus said, checking a device. "We will signal the others once we get inside."

"That would the entrance, I think," the Doctor said, pointing straight ahead. The back of his neck was tingling, letting him know that something was very wrong. He savagely pushed the feeling
aside. He had to stop the Daleks. He had to rescue Rose. There was no other alternative. The danger was irrelevant.

"Can you get it open?" Elitus asked.

The Doctor nodded and used his sonic screwdriver to unlock the entrance. The door hissed slightly and slowly slid open. The chamber beyond was dark and seemed empty.

"Come on," Elitus said, leading the way.

"EXTERMINATE!"

"No!" the Doctor yelled as the ray shot out of the darkness and hit Elitus. He let out a strangled yell and was dead before he hit the ground.

The lights came on in the chamber and there were at least a dozen Daleks waiting in there. "IT IS THE DOCTOR!"

"THE DOCTOR MUST BE EXTERMINATED!"

~

The other Thals and Finn were getting restless as the signal from the Doctor and Elitus did not come.

"Something must have gone wrong," Dela said into the communicator.

"What do we do?" Kinus asked.

"I say we go ahead anyway," Finn said.

"Are you mad?" Temus demanded.

"I agree," Platus said. "Get as many Daleks as you can and get the prisoners out."

"But we..." Kinus interrupted.

"Go!" Platus ordered and cut off the communication. He approached the entrance of the Sigma section and briefly touched the medallion around his neck. "For you, my lovely Vera..." he murmured, before taking out his gun and bursting through the entrance.

~

"Did you hear that?" Rose asked Brett in a low voice.

"What?" Brett asked.

Rose raised a finger for silence. Several moments paused but there were no more noises. "I thought I heard something," she said, shaking her head.

"You really do believe that this Doctor will come for you, don't you?" he asked her.

"Yeah," Rose nodded without any hesitation. Brett looked like he had more questions but Rose shushed him. "Where's the Dalek?" she asked.

"What?" Brett asked but then looked around. The Dalek that was supervising them was gone. Brett
tapped an older man on the shoulder. "Quinn, where'd the tin pot go?" he asked.

"Aye, he gone ain't he?" Quinn rumbled in a low voice. "Heard a voice he said. Paranoid them tin pots," he muttered.

"I was right," Rose said. "Come on."

"Rose, wait!" Brett cried but Rose was already leaving the cave and stepping out into the corridor with her shovel raised.

~

"Come and get me, you bubbling lumps of hate!" Platus yelled as he aimed his gun. He had taken out six Daleks so far and there were two more approaching him rapidly.

"EXTERMINATE!" "ANNIHILATE!"

"Yeah, that's right," Platus yelled, his eyes betraying some sort of a lurking madness. "Come and get me!"

The two Daleks were gaining on him and he was being backed steadily towards the wall. Sighing in frustration, he stopped and aimed his gun at one of them, firing in rapid succession.

"MY VISION IS IMPAIRED! I CANNOT SEE!" The Dalek began to flail around, firing random bursts of the death ray.

"YOU WILL BE EXTERMINATED!" The other Dalek said, aiming his ray at Platus.

"I took out seven of you bastards," Platus grinned madly. "I welcome death!" He spread his arms and closed his eyes, awaiting death. A loud clang made him open his eyes.

There she was, a young blonde girl, using a shovel to hit the Dalek eye stalk. Platus had a moment of incredulity before he registered that the Dalek was unaffected and was now aiming at her. Thinking quickly, he pushed the still flailing Dalek towards them.

"Get down, girl!" he screamed.

The girl saw the approaching Dalek and ducked to the ground.

"MY VISION IS IMPAIRED! I CANNOT SEE!" The Dalek from before was still shooting random bursts of the death ray around.

"HALT! HALT!" the other Dalek called.

"MY VISION IS IMPAIRED! I CANNOT SEE!"

"HALT!"

The two Daleks fired at each other the same time and blew up together. Platus coughed through the smoke and stumbled towards where he had seen the girl. She was lying face down on the ground, covered his scraps of metal from the two Daleks.

"Rose! Rose!" a young man came calling. "Oh, Rose!" he said, dropping to the ground.

The girl, Rose, groaned slightly and Platus immediately knelt to help her. "You're Rose?" he asked. "The Doctor's friend?"
She nodded slightly, still looking a bit dazed. "Is he...here?" she asked.

"He's dealing with the Daleks," Platus said, slinging her arm around his shoulder. "You, there," he looked at Brett. "What's your name?"

"Brett," he answered.

"Well Brett, evacuate the prisoners. Get them out that way and tell them to keep going towards the city. There's about to be a big blast over here," he said.

"But what about Rose?" Brett asked.

"I'm fine," Rose said, withdrawing her arm from Platus' shoulder and standing on her feet. "You get the prisoners out. I'm going to find the Doctor."

"Don't be foolish, girl. He and Elitus went to the central base. We haven't heard from them yet which means they might as well have died," Platus hissed.

"Then nothing can stop the Daleks?" Brett asked fearfully.

"We don't know," Platus said. "Let's just hope they set up the bomb before they died. I have the detonator."

"I'm still going to find him," Rose said, picking up the shovel that she had dropped. It had been about as useful on a Dalek as hitting it with a feather but it was the principle of the matter.

"I'll go with you," Brett said at once.

"Listen to me, both of you, stop being so damn stubborn," Platus said angrily.

"You get the prisoners out," Rose told him. "Brett and I will find the Doctor."

"You will need someone to show you the way," Platus said. "I'll go with you as well. Tell the prisoners to get out."

"Splendid," Brett said. "Quinn!" he called. "Get everyone out!"

~

"You didn't have to kill him," the Doctor said as he looked at Elitus' body.

"HE WAS A THAL. THALS ARE ENEMIES OF THE DALEKS!"

"Yes," the Doctor said, his mouth twisted with disgust. "So you murdered him. Because that's what Daleks are and that's what you do!"

"CORRECT!" the Dalek answered. "THE DALEKS WERE AWARE OF THE THAL PLAN."

"Yes, how is that?" the Doctor asked, glancing quickly around the chamber.

"THEY HAVE IMPLEMENTED THE SAME STRATEGY ON TWELVE OTHER PLANETS!"

"So you were lying in wait here," the Doctor realised. "You knew there was nothing in those hills but you kept the prison camps and the base as if there was."

"THE THALS WERE FOOLDED. AND NOW THEY WILL BE EXTERMINATED!"
A different Dalek rolled forward. "THE PRISONERS ARE ESCAPING!"

"WHICH SECTION?"

"ALL OF THEM!"

The Doctor spotted the main circuitry but it was at the far end of the room. Hearing that the prisoners were escaping, he reevaluated the plan quickly. He laughed loudly and started walking across the room.

"HALT! DO NOT MOVE!"

"Oh but don't you have prisoners to stop from escaping?" he asked, not stopping at all. "I'd say that the Thal plan worked."

"THE THALS WANT TO KILL THE DALEKS!"

"Usually, yes," he answered, almost near the circuitry. "But you see, I dropped in and changed things around a bit. Like this circuitry here for instance," he said, pointing at it. "Brilliant Dalek innovation, connected to all parts of the base."

"WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS TALKING?"

"The purpose, you pathetic creatures, is to do THIS," he said and slapped the bomb onto the circuitry. "The detonator of this bomb is in a safe place and they will blow this whole place up to the sky on my signal."

"BUT YOU WILL DIE WITH US!"

"Correct," he mocked. "And it will be worth it to rid this planet of your filth."

"Doctor!" Rose called as she, Brett and Platus burst into the chamber.

"Rose, get out!" the Doctor yelled, sounding scared. "Go, just run!"

"DOC-TOR!" the Dalek said slowly. "YOU WILL NOT USE THE EXPLOSIVE DEVICE NOW!"

"Yeah?" Brett asked bravely. "Why not?"

"HE HAS A WEAKNESS. HE FEELS AFFECTION!"

"That ain't a weakness," Rose said angrily.

"BUT HE WILL NOT USE THE EXPLOSIVE NOW." The Dalek somehow managed to sound smug.

The Doctor was breathing heavily, his mind racing. He couldn't kill Rose. Of course he couldn't. He had lived so long but brilliant Rose was so young. He couldn't let her die. He wouldn't kill her.

"But it's not up to him," Platus said. "I have the detonator. Ah, ah!" he said, as the Daleks tried to approach him. "One move and I blast us all," he said, his finger on the trigger.

"Platus," the Doctor warned.

"The teleport on your wrist is still working, isn't it?" Platus asked him. "Take those two and go."
"It only carries two and I am not leaving you," the Doctor said.

"Take Elitus' as well," Platus said, his finger still on the detonator.

"But what about you?" Rose asked him.

"I will be with my Vera again. My lovely little girl," he said. "GO!" he ordered.

Brett pulled off the teleport from Elitus' wrist and the Doctor grabbed Rose's hand. "Platus..." he said.

"Yes, I know, Doctor," Platus said. "Go."

The three people teleported out and Platus held up the detonator to the Daleks. "This is for my Vera, you monsters."

The Doctor, Rose and Brett watched from the city as there was a loud explosion and the Dalek base was blown up. The prisoners watched the blast from the city. Cheering and ringing broke out everywhere as the sun dawned on the horizon.

The Daleks were gone from Eden IV.

~

"What happens to us now?" Dela asked the Doctor. "Will you turn us in to the Shadow Proclamation?"

The Doctor looked ready to say that he was going to do just that when Finn interrupted. "If I may," he said. "I think they should stay here and help us rebuild."

"That's a good idea," Rose said at once.

The Doctor sighed and appraised Dela, Temus and Kinus carefully. "Alright," he conceded. "You can stay on Eden. But," his voice was warning now. "If I hear that you are baiting Daleks again, I will personally hand you over to the Shadow Proclamation."

"Understood," Temas nodded eagerly. "You have our word, Doctor."

The Doctor gave a smile and nodded. "Very well then," he said. "Rose and I must be on our way. I daresay our ship has forgiven us by now."

"Forgiven you, you mean," Rose shot, elbowing him lightly in the ribs.

"Forgiven me," he conceded with an apologetic grin.

Brett turned to Rose. "I do wish you'd stay, Rose," he said.

"I can't," Rose said. "Eden isn't home for me."

Brett ducked his head and nodded slowly. "Yes, I thought you would say that," he said.

Rose gave a small smile and walked up to him. To everyone's surprise, she lifted his head and kissed him softly on the mouth. Brett's eyes were wide when she pulled away. "Goodbye, Brett," she said.

"Goodbye, Rose," he said, still looking very shocked. "I shall miss you."
She didn't reply but gave him a brilliant smile. She met the Doctor's shocked gaze. "Back to the TARDIS?" she asked him.

"Yes," the Doctor said, seemingly shaking it off. "Of course, come along."

Rose waved at the group and followed the Doctor who was walking very swiftly towards the TARDIS. He pushed on the doors and they opened quite easily for which they were both thankful. The interior looked as it always did and there was no sign of damage anywhere. The TARDIS really had repaired herself.

The Doctor bounded over to the console immediately, running diagnostics on everything he could think of and trying to understand why he had the sudden urge to run as fast as he could.

Rose closed the doors of the TARDIS behind her and then leaned against them.

"Doctor," she said softly.

"Hmm?" the Doctor asked, trying to sound nonchalant and not like he was on the verge of an anxiety attack.

"I wanna go home," she said.
Previously

Rose closed the doors of the TARDIS behind her and then leaned against them.

"Doctor," she said softly.

"Hmm?" the Doctor asked, trying to sound nonchalant and not like he was on the verge of an anxiety attack.

"I wanna go home," she said.

"What?" the Doctor asked. He could feel his respiratory bypass kick in, even as some part of his brain realised that he was not engaging in any strenuous activity for that to happen.

"Yeah," Rose nodded, walking towards him. "I mean the phone calls are all good but I kinda do wanna see my mum for a bit."

"You want to visit your mother?" he asked and then exhaled roughly as the penny dropped. She wasn't leaving. She just wanted to see her mother. "You want to visit your mother," he repeated, this time in a lighter voice.

"Well, yeah," Rose said like it was obvious.

He gave a short laugh. "Alright," he said, his lips quirking into a smile. "Powell Estate, London. 2005," he said, setting the co-ordinates. "I guess it should be around October."

"October, really?" Rose asked, her eyes wide. "Wow, I have been travelling with you for more than six months now."

"Seven months, three days, twenty one hou..." he began to rattle off but Rose cut him off with a laugh.

"Alright, alright, so it's been a while," she said, nudging his shoulder with hers. "How soon do you think we'll get there?"

"Shouldn't take too long," he shrugged. "You should get cleaned up."

Rose looked down at her torn, muddied and bloodied clothes and conceded that it was a good idea. There was no way of explaining to Jackie if she showed up like this.

She waved at the Doctor and turned to go but the Doctor snatched her hand in his. Rose turned around in surprise. "Doctor, what...?"

"You're hurt," the Doctor said, looking at the scrapes on her palm.

"Oh yeah," Rose said. "It was at the pass. I tripped and fell, remember? It's not bad though, just some scratches."

"Nevertheless, off to the med-bay with you," he said sternly.

"You have a med-bay?" she asked in surprise.
He grinned impishly at her and started leading her through the maze of corridors. "I am the Doctor, Rose," he said, sounding a tad patronising.

Rose rolled her eyes at him. "Yeah, but isn't that just like a title or something?" she asked him.

"Who told you that?" he asked her curiously.

"Romana did, I think," Rose shrugged.

The Doctor nodded unsurely and they arrived in the corridor next to the library which had a solitary door with frosted glass, clearly labelled Medbay. The Doctor led her to it and opened the sliding glass door.

The place beyond the door was unlike anything that Rose had ever seen. It was almost the size of the console room but the interior was strictly utilitarian. Numerous machines and instruments were arranged neatly around the sterile white room. It reminded Rose of one of those serious labs on futuristic shows.

"This is a med-bay?" she asked. She knew she was no expert on medicine but she couldn't recognise a single instrument in the whole room.

"Yes," the Doctor said, leading her to what could only be described as a tanning bed. "It's an exact replica of a 31st century Veritasian infirmary."

"Verita-what?" Rose asked.

"Veritasian," the Doctor said. "Veritas is the leading asteroid in your galaxy which pioneered modern medicine."

"And what's this?" Rose asked, pointing to the tanning bed thingy.

"It's a full body scanner," he said. "Which is what you're getting. In you go," he said, lifting the top.

Rose watched the device apprehensively. "Does it hurt?" she asked.

"You won't feel a thing," he assured her.

Rose searched his face for a moment before lying down inside the scanner. The Doctor gave her a reassuring smile and lowered the top over her. "Should I have stripped down to my bikini and worn swimming goggles?" she joked, half-heartedly.

"No, no," Rose chuckled. "I meant...never mind." She really wasn't going to discuss tanning practices of humans with him. Three days ago, she had tried to explain the purpose of a hairspray and they had argued for over an hour.

"If you say so," the Doctor said doubtfully. "This won't hurt a bit," he said and lowered the top again.

Rose felt a small wave of light pass over her. True to the Doctor's word, it didn't hurt her nor was it too bright for her eyes. The Doctor lifted the top and gave her a hand so she could step out of the scanner.
"What's the verdict, Doc?" Rose asked with an exaggerated accent, grinning cheekily at him.

The Doctor cracked a smile at that but frowned when he saw the results of the scans. She had a minor head injury, abrasions on her palms and legs, and she was suffering from exhaustion and dehydration. "Rose, I'm afraid the visit to your mother will have to wait," he said.

"Is it really that bad?" she asked.

"I need to heal the abrasions and then give you something to deal with the effects of the concussion and dehydration. After that, you are going to bed and getting a full eight hour sleep," he said firmly.

"Fine," Rose said, knowing he would only argue if she refused. "I'm taking a shower first, though." She felt distinctly grimy from the prison camp and the subsequent explosions.

The Doctor nodded. "I'll be in here," he said. "Once you've had sufficient sleep, I'll take you to London."

~

The next morning, Rose felt much better. Whatever the Doctor had given her, had done wonders for her. Add to that the ten hour sleep and she was feeling immensely refreshed.

"Morning," she said cheerfully when she came out into the console room.

"Good morning, Rose," the Doctor said from underneath the console.

Rose knelt next to him. "Are we in London?" she asked.

The Doctor grunted lightly as he pulled himself out from under the console and sat up. "Yes, I landed us about an hour ago," he said.

"Brilliant," Rose grinned and then flung her arms around his neck and gave him a quick hug. "I won't be long, just a quick visit."

"Take your time," he said, grinning widely. "Oh and before I forget," he said, searching his pockets. "This is for you."

Rose gasped as he handed her the TARDIS key on a silver chain. "Is that... for me?" she asked, her eyes shining.

"Yes," he nodded. "Spare TARDIS key. I thought you should have one."

Rose beamed happily at him and slipped the chain around her neck immediately. "I'll be back soon," she said and quickly kissed the Doctor's cheek before dashing out of the TARDIS at a lightning speed.

The Doctor stayed frozen for an embarrassing amount of time before the TARDIS chimed, demanding his attention. "Yes, old girl," he said and retired under the console again. "Let's have a look at those thermocouplings, shall we? I promise not to propel you into a planet again..."

~

Rose ran out of the TARDIS, her face flushing madly. Why on Earth had she done that? But he had been so sweet, giving her the key to the TARDIS and everything. She had just reacted, not even thought too much about it. Rose clasped the key in her hand and felt immensely comforted.
Biting her lip to hide the ridiculous grin on her face, she broke out into a run towards her building. It was only when she had reached the security door that she realised that something was wrong. She glanced around with a frown. The street was deserted. Never in living memory could she remember this part of the estate being empty.

She stepped away from the door and looked up and down the street again, just to check. There wasn't a soul in sight. The shops were closed and boarded up, the park was empty, no cars whizzing about, no people around the market, no one walking their dogs; just a deathly quiet over the whole place.

Feeling unnerved, Rose debated what to do. She could go back to the TARDIS and tell the Doctor but she was worried for her mum. What if something had happened to her? Rose ran back towards the building and tried to open the security door but it was locked. She pressed the buzzer to her mum's flat, very close to panicking.

"Mum," she called. "Mum, are you there?"

"R-Rose?" Jackie's voice came through the intercom.

"Oh thank god," Rose gasped in relief. "Mum? Mum, are you okay?"

"Is it really you, Rose?" Jackie asked.

"Course it's me," Rose said. "Who else would it be? The Queen?"

"Hold on," Jackie said.

The line went silent and Rose saw her mother rapidly climbing down the stairwell. She reached the security door and unlocked a set of locks. Rose was shocked as to why there would be that many locks on the security door.

"Mum, what is going on?" Rose asked.

"Shh," Jackie said and quickly pulled her inside. "Keep your voice down."

"Mum, you're scaring me," Rose said as Jackie redid all the locks on the security door.

Jackie gave her a tired smile but then pulled her into a tight hug. "You should have called, Rose," she said.

"My phone broke," Rose said. It was true after all. "Where is everyone? What's happening?"

"We're on a lockdown," Jackie said. "The whole of Britain is," she said as they climbed the stairwell back up to their flat.

"What?" Rose asked. "Why?"

"Because of the zombies, of course," Jackie said as they reached their flat.

"The what?" Rose asked, feeling like a broken record. "Did you say zombies?"

"Yes, the zombies," Jackie nodded, shutting their flat's door behind them and locking it securely. Rose took note of the array of new locks on the door. "I got Bev's nephew to put up the new ones," she explained at the look.

"Hang on," Rose said. "Are you serious? There are zombies in London?"
"All of Britain, they are saying," Jackie said. She appraised Rose carefully. "Where'd you say you were last?"

"Oh, uh, I was near Richmond," she made up. "Boring and uneventful. No zombies."

"Uh-huh," Jackie nodded. "The rest of the world has closed off the boundaries, they're saying. I was worried you might be stuck in Brazil or something."

"When did this start?" Rose asked, following Jackie into the kitchen, who had started making tea.

"Four days ago," Jackie said. "Keisha's stepmother was in town and saw this man attacking a woman. We thought she was making it up but then the evening news said to go on lockdown. The Queen did a speech and everything."

"Did they say zombies?" Rose asked, still not believing the absurd rumour.

"They're not saying anything," Jackie said. "But Keisha's stepmother saw it. The man was looking just like a zombie, she said. Asking for flesh, he was."

"Right," Rose nodded. "And any news since?"

"Oh they keep announcing on the telly every few hours to stay under lockdown and keep calm," Jackie said derisively. "If you ask me, they haven't the foggiest what's going on either."

Rose nodded and then observed the kitchen with a frown. "Of course the important question is, where did all this stuff come from?" she asked, looking at the extra food, cartons of long life milk and things.

"Oh, Howard dropped it off," Jackie said, eager for a chance to talk about something other than zombies.

"Howard from the market?" Rose asked. "Since when has that been going on?"

"Oh, a month after you left. He started bringing me baskets of fruit and things," Jackie giggled. "This zombie thing happened and he dropped this all off two days ago. 'Look after you, Jackie' he said."

Rose shook her head slightly but smiled at Jackie. She deserved someone who would look after her like that. But something weird was going on. Zombies on Earth?

Rose automatically reached for her phone to call the Doctor but then realised that it was probably lying in pieces on Eden IV. She sighed and turned to Jackie. "Mum, my friend yeah?" she said. "You know, the one who's travelling with me?"

"Oh, yes," Jackie's eyes lit up. "You never tell me anything about him."

"I have to go and fetch him," Rose said. "He's sort of an expert on things."

"What kind of an expert?" Jackie asked.

"He just is," Rose said, picking up her hoodie. "Look, I'm gonna go fetch him."

"But you can't go outside," Jackie protested.

"I'll be fine," Rose said. "I'll come right back."
Jackie looked torn between letting her go and wanting to meet this mysterious traveller friend of Rose's who specialised in zombies. "Oh alright," she said. "But be careful and take this."

"An axe?" Rose asked in surprise. "What am I gonna do? Slash the zombies head off?"

"Well it's better than the zombie taking your head off," Jackie snapped shrilly.

Rose sighed and took the axe to appease her mother. "Won't be long," she said and made her way downstairs. It was steadily getting darker and Rose hurried as she undid the locks on the security door and ran out onto the street.

A gust of chilly wind made her shiver and she hurried across the park to where the TARDIS had landed. Upon getting there, she held the axe handle between her neck and shoulder while trying to open the TARDIS doors with the key.

The lock clicked opened and she went inside quickly, sighing in relief as the doors closed behind her. "Doctor!" she called.

"Rose, back already?" the Doctor asked, looking up from his book. He was sitting near the fireplace in his usual armchair and his feet resting on the footstool. He stood up when he saw the look on her face. "Is everything alright? Why do you have an axe?"

"The whole of Britain is on lockdown," she said, catching her breath. She felt a bit foolish at having run the whole way but better safe than sorry.

"Why?" he asked.

"Zombies," Rose said.

"Oh come now, Rose," the Doctor said as he walked out of the TARDIS and looked around. "It's probably a harmless prank or something. Humans do celebrate Halloween around this time of year, don't they?"

"Well, they didn't put the whole country under lockdown for a prank," Rose said as they made their way towards Rose's building. "And mum said that Keisha's stepmum saw..."

"Rose," the Doctor interrupted, slowing down and grabbing her shoulders gently. "There are no such things as zombies."

"Uh, Doctor," Rose interrupted.

"There are energy based creatures who can reanimate corpses or the Hinkies who smell like the undead but that's only because of their atmospheric composition and well, their staple diet which quite frankly isn't all that bad..."

"Doctor," Rose said, more insistently, her eyes fixed over his shoulder.

The Doctor turned around and saw a group of well, zombies, ambling towards them.

"Flesh..." they whispered in a hissing voice. "Flesh..."

"Still think it's a prank?" Rose tried to joke lightly.

"Rose," the Doctor said slowly. "When I say run, run. Don't stop until you get back to the TARDIS. Understand?"
"What about you?" she asked.

"I'll be right behind you," he said.

Rose nodded slowly and the Doctor took the axe from her hands and gripped it tightly.

"Ready?" he murmured. "RUN!"
The Earth Epidemic: Old Friends

Previously

"Rose," the Doctor said slowly. "When I say run, run. Don't stop until you get back to the TARDIS. Understand?"

"What about you?" she asked.

"I'll be right behind you," he said.

Rose nodded slowly and the Doctor took the axe from her hands and gripped it tightly.

"Ready?" he murmured. "RUN!"

Rose turned around and ran towards the TARDIS. She was severely tempted to turn around and see if the Doctor was okay, but knew she had to trust him enough to escape. The familiar blue box loomed just a few paces away and Rose started pulling the chain off her neck to open the door.

The key fumbled slightly in her hand due to sheer nervousness but the lock clicked open. Rose rushed inside the open doors and turned around to look for the Doctor. He was brandishing the axe in front of him but was doing so to ward off the oncoming zombies rather than attacking them.

If anyone had ever told Rose that zombies were real, these were the kind she would have imagined them to be. They were deathly pale, with red-rimmed hollow eyes and covered in blood. Whether the blood was their own or off some poor victims was unknown. Flesh hung off their bodies in various places like ripped pieces of fabric. Their yellow teeth were bared at the Doctor as they hissed for flesh, moving sluggishly towards him.

Rose fidgeted in the doorway of the TARDIS, not knowing what to do. The Doctor was doing fine in getting closer to the TARDIS without attacking anyone but she hated not being able to help. Although she was quite sure that she would only make matters worse by interfering.

The Doctor was almost at the TARDIS now and Rose finally realised that he was baby-talking to them.

"Aww, come here, you lovely little zombies," he cooed, sounding positively delighted. "Come on then, yummy Time Lord here."

Rose stared incredulously at him. Was he barmy? Was he actually goading them into attacking him?

"I've got two hearts," he said in a sing-song voice. "Yum, yum!"

"Flesh...flesh..." the zombies chanted slowly.

"And oh yes, plenty of flesh too," he said happily. "Not as much as I've had in the past. But you'd be sure not to starve, I'm certain."

The zombies kept advancing on him and he carefully led them towards the doors of the TARDIS, before stepping in next to Rose quickly, slamming the doors shut. "That was close," he sighed.

"Close?" Rose demanded. "Did you actually lose your mind along the way?" she asked.
"I beg your pardon?" he asked, sounding genuinely confused. He tossed the axe aside and went to the console, pressing switches in earnest.

Rose followed him, determined not to let him brush her off. "You were practically inviting them to take a bite out of you," she said, her eyes wide.

"Oh yes, that," he nodded. "Well, it worked, didn't it?"

Rose stared at him incredulously and shook her head. "You know, I get that you're mad. But this was just bloody suicidal," she said.

"Rose," he said eagery. "I knew what I was doing. Funnily enough, I used to employ the same trick while calling Vortisaurs when I was at the Academy. Now that was fun."

Rose neither knew nor cared what Vortisaurs were. She was about to go off on a rant when there was a loud bang on the TARDIS doors. "They're trying to get in," Rose gasped.

"They won't," the Doctor said grimly. "But we have to move. We can't just stay trapped in here."

"Where are we gonna go? The whole country is swarming with those things," Rose pointed out.

The Doctor pursed his lips. "Alright, plan B then," he said.

"You have a Plan B?" Rose asked.

"As a matter of fact, I do," he sniffed. "Hold on," he said, pulling on a lever which jolted them forward before the TARDIS started to rematerialise again in the new place.

"Where did you take us?" Rose asked.

"Your house," he said, grinning widely at her. "Ingenious, huh?" he asked, sounding immensely pleased with himself.

"Ingenious?" Rose all but shrieked. "How do I explain to my mum why a great big, blue Police Box appeared out of thin air in her living room?"

The Doctor evidently had not considered that. "Ah," he said but Rose was already rushing off towards the door, muttering to herself.

When she got outside, her mum was staring at the box with both her hands clasped over her mouth. "Hi mum," Rose said, trying to sound cheerful. "I can explain..."

Jackie made an odd sound in her throat, like a cross between a scream and a whimper. Her eyes looked about ready to bulge out of her head when she saw a man dressed like Byron emerge from behind Rose.

"Hello," he said pleasantly, not noticing the glare that Rose was shooting at him. "You must be Rose's mother."

~

A short distance away from them, there was a rapid onset of communication. A woman in her early sixties observed the footage of a disappearing Police Box with an odd smile on her face.

"That's him," she said.
"Are you sure, Dr. Shaw?" Colonel Mace asked.

"Yes, Colonel," she said. "I suggest you find a way to locate him quickly. I have a few phone calls to make."

"Phone calls, ma'am?" Colonel Mace asked.

"Yes," she smiled. "It's time to call in reinforcements. And, what about our expert?"

"He has boarded the shuttle and we've managed to get clearance from NATO to get him back to Britain. He'll be arriving shortly," Colonel Mac told her.

"Good," she said. "I'll make sure I'm here to meet him. In the meantime, find the Doctor."

"Yes, ma'am," Colonel Mace nodded.

~

Tension in the Tyler flat was so palpable that Rose could almost feel it hovering around her. Jackie was making tea, shooting furious looks at her and the Doctor.

The hurried introductions, during which the Doctor cheerfully stated that he was a Time Lord from a planet called Gallifrey who owned a machine that travelled through time and space, had Jackie sputtering in disbelief at first, and then furious at Rose for lying to her.

Rose had tried her best to make her understand, without any help from the Doctor who was observing the flat with the same fascination that he had been examining that weird mushroom from Delta Hedra a week ago.

Now finally, Jackie had gone into the kitchen to make tea, the Doctor was still watching the photos on the mantelpiece in amusement and Rose was simultaneously plotting to kill him and thinking of ways to appease her mother.

"Are you alright?" the Doctor asked Rose in a low voice, probably noticing the tension for the first time.

Rose gritted her teeth so that she wouldn't snap at him. "Fine," she said, still not being able to soften the blow of that jab.

"Have I upset you?" he asked, tilting his head in confusion.

The lost puppy dog look and the genuine concern in his voice made her resolve falter and she cursed her own weakness. "It's okay," she said, even though he hadn't apologised. "We're okay."

The Doctor beamed at her happily and she couldn't help but smile back. Jackie entered the living room and handed them both tea, still looking between them suspiciously. Then, without preamble, she looked at the Doctor and blurted out her question. "Are you shagging my daughter?"

"Mum!" Rose shouted in outrage, her face flushing madly from sheer humiliation.

The Doctor looked taken aback. "Er, no," he said politely, ever the gentleman. "I don't believe I am."

"Hmm," Jackie nodded. "Why not?"

"Mum! Stop it!" Rose snapped.
"What? I'm not allowed to ask?" Jackie demanded.

"No!" Rose said like it was obvious. "Mum, it's not like that."

Jackie looked about ready to ask 'why not' again, so Rose hastily changed the subject.

"We've got more important things to worry about," she said. "Those zombies for one."

"Yes," the Doctor said, snapping out of the confused daze that he had fallen into following Jackie's questions. "You're right, Rose."

"Rose said you were an expert," Jackie said. "Do you know what those things are?"

"No I do not, Mrs. Tyler," he said. "But I do intend to find out."

"Oh, call me Jackie, love," she said. "And how're you gonna find out?"

"Well, Jackie," the Doctor said. "What I need, is to run a few tests on the samples from those creatures."

"How do we get that?" Rose asked.

"I don't know," he said. "If it was just one, it would be easy to subdue it but they seem to travel in groups."

"Mum," Rose said, turning to Jackie. "Didn't you say that they kept saying they didn't know what it was, on the news?"

"Yeah," Jackie nodded.

Rose looked at the Doctor. "But you said that there were organisations on Earth who dealt with these sorts of things," she said, remembering what he had told her when they had first met.

"Oh don't be silly," Jackie said.

The Doctor beamed happily at Rose. "That is brilliant, Rose Tyler," he grinned. "I'm very sure that UNIT has done their best to unearth this. I suppose they will just be waiting for me to turn up and clear it all up for them," he said, rushing into the TARDIS. "Come on Rose."

Rose turned to follow him but Jackie caught her arm. "Rose, it's not safe. Those zombie things..." Jackie said.

"Mum, it's fine yeah," Rose said comfortingly. "Him and me, we've been through a lot worse, believe me."

"Rose! We have to go!" his voice came from the TARDIS.

"I'll be back, yeah," Rose promised, giving Jackie a hug. "Love you. Bye."

"Yeah," Jackie whispered as Rose ran into the box and it vanished slowly from the flat.

~

"Have they found him yet?" the elderly man asked her.

"No, but he's been spotted. We know he's on Earth," she smiled.
"Ma'am, Sir," Colonel Mace sprang into salute when he saw them.

"Ah yes, Colonel Mace, I presume," the man said, looking at him carefully as if sizing him up.

"Yes sir," he said. "May I say what an honour it is..."

"Yes, yes," the man waved away the praise. "Any sign of the Doctor yet?"

Colonel Mace opened his mouth to reply in negative when one of the techs called out. "Sir! Right outside!" she said.

Everyone looked to the screen showing the footage outside as a blue Police box materialised slowly with a wheezing sound. "It's him," the woman smiled.

"I need units at the entrance," Colonel Mace started ordering into the comms. system when he was interrupted.

"No need," said the elderly man. "Ms. Shaw and I are perfectly capable of greeting him."

"Yes," Liz agreed. "It would be better if he was greeted with familiar faces rather than soldiers with guns."

"Sir, Ma'am, I must protest," Colonel Mace began.

"Believe me, Colonel," the man said with an amused smirk. "If you want to keep the Doctor happy, do not point a gun at him. Coming, Ms. Shaw?"

"Lead the way, Brigadier," she said with a wide smile.

~

"Very nice place," Rose said as she looked at the scanner. "Is this the HQ?"

"Yes, cosy isn't it?" he asked. "It has an interesting history, you know."

"Doctor, who are those people?" Rose asked, pointing to a man and a woman walking towards the TARDIS.

The Doctor looked at the scanner and beamed at the two people. "Come on," he said to Rose. "It's time I introduced you to some friends of mine."

Rose was curious as the Doctor opened the TARDIS doors eagerly and ushered her out. Beaming at the man, he rushed forward to shake his hand. "Brigadier Alistair Gordon Lethbridge-Stewart," he greeted. "How are you?"

"Very well, Doctor," the Brigadier smiled.

"And my dear Liz, how wonderful to see you again," he said happily.

"And you, Doctor," she said, smiling widely. "You look as though you've aged well," she teased lightly.

The Doctor rubbed the back of his neck awkwardly, chuckling along. "Yes, I do suppose I have," he said. "Oh and may I introduce my companion, Miss Rose Tyler," he said, indicating Rose who waved shyly at them. "Rose, meet Dr. Elizabeth Shaw and Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart or is it Sir Alistair yet?"
"How did you know?" the Brigadier asked him curiously.

The Doctor merely smiled mischievously.

"Nice to meet you," Rose said, shaking hands with the Brigadier and then Liz. They both looked much, much older than Rose would have expected but then she had no idea how long ago the Doctor had worked for them.

Despite her age, Rose could tell that Liz was very beautiful. Her red hair was streaked liberally with grey but she was dressed impeccably and held herself like she was twenty years younger. The Brigadier, on the other hand, reminded Rose of an old uncle who was all tough exterior but a big softie underneath. His mere presence put Rose at ease.

"And you, Miss Tyler," the Brigadier said with a warm smile.

"So, UNIT is dealing with zombies now are they?" the Doctor asked as they started to make their way back towards the HQ.

"We're not calling them zombies," Liz said. "For now, they're unidentified creatures. But Doctor, we are stumped. We have absolutely no idea about what they are, how they're infecting people or how it all started."

"What have you tested so far?" the Doctor asked.

Liz immediately launched into an explanation which led Rose to concur that she was a scientist as well. The Doctor was nodding along to her words, occasionally interrupting with questions.

"...finally sent for an expert. There was no sign of you, so we had to ask for..." Liz was saying when they saw a car with tinted windows being driven inside the gates. It stopped a few feet away from them and a man stepped out from the back, clutching his hat on his head.

"I say," he said, straightening up and looking at them. "I'm not too late, am I?"
"What have you tested so far?" the Doctor asked.

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"I say," he said, straightening up and looking at them. "I'm not too late, am I?"

Rose observed the man curiously. He seemed to be only a few years older than Liz but definitely younger than the Brigadier. He had a full head of curly snow white hair and he was dressed like a proper English gentleman, from the hat to the shiny boots.

"Ah, Sullivan," the Brigadier greeted him with a smile and a firm handshake. "Right on time."

"Hello, Brigadier," he said. "And Liz, lovely to see you again."

"Hello, Harry," Liz smiled at him. "Glad you could make it."

"Oh, I was on the first plane to Britain as soon as I received clearance," he said at once. He looked at the Doctor and Rose curiously. "And, who might they be?"

"Surgeon Lieutenant Harry Sullivan," said the Doctor, grasping his hand with both of his in an enthusiastic handshake.

Harry looked a bit confused at the strange young man shaking his hand so vigorously. Liz and the Brigadier hid their smile at his confusion before Liz took pity on him. "It's the Doctor, Harry," she said.

"Oh good grief," Harry said, looking at the Doctor with wide eyes. "You've changed."

"Oh yes," the Doctor said easily. "May I introduce my young companion, Miss Rose Tyler."

"How do you do, Miss Tyler?" Harry asked, shaking Rose's hand, still looking a bit shocked at the Doctor's appearance.

Rose shook his hand, almost amused at how baffled he looked. She supposed she would be too, if the Doctor suddenly turned up with a new face one day. "Nice to meet you," she said.

"Harry's a doctor," the Doctor explained to her. He looked at Harry. "I suppose with both you and Liz working with me, we would soon be able to understand what it is that's happening to these people exactly."

"That is what we hope, Doctor," the Brigadier said. "You have access to full UNIT resources, of course."
The Doctor nodded as they entered the HQ. The whole place was abuzz with people running around, frantic transmissions and beeping machinery. Rose observed it all in fascination. It all looked like a proper military operation. The machinery looked very advanced and Rose was in awe of how something like this could be kept secret from the general public.

When they entered, the noises slowed down and every eye in the room turned to the Doctor. A tall, balding man in uniform approached the Doctor. "Welcome, Doctor," he said, sounding positively like a giddy fangirl. "May I say what an honour it is to meet you," he said.

The Doctor looked confused at the man's enthusiasm and looked at the Brigadier for help. The Brigadier's moustache twitched as he failed to hide his amusement. "Doctor, this is Colonel Mace. He's in charge," he said.

"Oh, is he?" the Doctor asked in mild interest, shaking his hand. "How do you do?" Even though it seemed like a question, it was obvious that it was a dismissal.

Liz must have seen the confusion on Rose's face as Colonel Mace muttered something about duties and left. "The Doctor does not like soldiers much," she whispered to Rose.

Rose nodded. She remembered that. "And guns too," she added in a whisper.

Liz agreed with a quick smile. She turned to the others. "Excuse us. I need to show Dr. Sullivan something," Liz said.

At their nods, Liz led Harry over to a desk and handed him a thick file which he took and immediately started to read.

Rose turned to the Doctor "So Liz and Harry are both doctors and you used to work with them?" Rose asked him, trying to understand.

"Liz used to be my assistant," the Doctor nodded. "And Harry travelled with me for a while. I haven't seen them in years," he said, looking at Liz gathering files and handing them to Harry one by one.

Rose looked at the Doctor and saw a nostalgic smile on his face. He looked like a proud parent.


"Do excuse me, Rose," the Doctor said, his voice returning to his usual cheerful tone, all sense of melancholy gone. "I have to see this."

Rose nodded as the Doctor went off towards Liz and started looking at the results that she was showing him. Rose looked around and saw practically everyone busy with something or the other.

"Overwhelmed, Miss Tyler?" the Brigadier asked kindly, approaching her.

"Oh, no," Rose said at once. She did not want the Doctor's old friends to think that she couldn't cope. Or worse, that she was stupid or something.

The Brigadier nodded with a knowing look on his face. "Miss Tyler, have you seen one of those creatures?" he asked.

"Yes," Rose said immediately. "They cornered us near my mum's flat."

"Good then you can help me," he said briskly, leading her away from the crowded main control
room, towards a quieter office.

~

"The first case was four days ago in London," Liz told the Doctor. "A man named Stephen Collins attacked Rebecca Maison near Trafalgar Square."

"Ah yes," the Doctor nodded. "Rose's mum said that her friend witnessed it."

Liz was certain she had heard wrong. "Did you say her mum?" she asked.

"Yes," the Doctor continued. "Jackie Tyler. Makes very nice tea."

Now even Harry was giving him odd looks. Liz was almost speechless. The Doctor going to tea with a companion's mother. That was new.

"Anyway," Liz said, shaking herself slightly. "We thought it was a singular incident but then Rebecca Maison woke up in the morgue and attacked two people working there."

"She was fully dead?" the Doctor asked sharply.

"Yes," Harry piped up, showing him a file. "I have just been reading the paramedic's report. The Collins chap severed her carotid artery with his bite. She bled out on the scene."

"The two people at the lab escaped and the epidemic has been spreading ever since," Liz said with a tired sigh. "We don't know anything, Doctor. The whole country is scared. We are all scared."

"Oh, don't despair, Liz," the Doctor said warmly, his eyes twinkling. "With me guiding you, Harry and the Brigadier, what could possibly go wrong?"

Liz cracked a reluctant smile but Harry wasn't as optimistic. "But where do we start, Doctor? All our tests have been inconclusive. It isn't a virus we recognise. And I have been over Collins' autopsy results with a fine tooth comb. He was completely human."

"Correct," the Doctor said. "Collins was human, not some sort of a creature. However, this is not an infection or an epidemic, as Liz called it."

Liz and Harry exchanged shocked looks. "But all the signs point to..." Harry protested.

"Ordinarily, yes," the Doctor nodded. "But I observed the zombies for myself, you know. It's not an infection."

"Then what is it?" Harry asked curiously.

"I wasn't sure of it before, but with all the results it's obvious," the Doctor continued in his excitement.

"Doctor," Liz called. "What is obvious?"

"That before Collins died, he came into contact with a Flimian Regulator," he said triumphantly.

All he got were blank looks from Liz and Harry. "What?" Harry asked, finally.

The Doctor looked exasperated. "Honestly, UNIT must have heard of the Flimian Regulator?" At their still blank looks, he rolled his eyes. "Flimian Regulators are a metamorphosis device which causes mutations."
"So it is an infection," Harry said.

"No," the Doctor rolled his eyes. "Haven't you been listening? Flimian Regulator is a telepathic converter. It latches onto a thought and grows like a creature."

"So, you're saying that these zombies were created by some sort of telepathy?" Liz asked, slowly.

"Exactly," the Doctor agreed. "Collins must have been thinking about zombies or something similar when he came into contact with it."

"But how is it possible?" Harry asked, still in disbelief. "Surely telepathy cannot overcome basic physiology and cause mutation."

"Not only is it possible, but once the thought takes root, it takes on a life of its own," the Doctor said grimly. "That's what makes it dangerous."

Rose sat down opposite the Brigadier, trying not to fidget. The Brigadier smiled at her, easing her nervousness a bit.

"Miss Tyler, I would like a proper description of those creatures, if you don't mind. Anything you can think of?" he asked.

Rose was going to explain but then looked speculatively at him. "I thought you had footage of them. And pictures and stuff," she said.

The Brigadier looked slightly abashed but then smiled widely at her. "Just between you and me, Miss Tyler, I hate waiting around and doing nothing," he confessed. "It seemed like you did too."

"Tell me about it," Rose said, feeling surprisingly at ease talking to him. "I have no clue what they're talking about," she said, nodding towards the control room.

The Brigadier chuckled. "You know, I always said that 'science leads'. It's hard not to, when you work with the Doctor," he said with a wry smile. "But until science decides what's best, us soldiers are trapped doing nothing."

Rose laughed with him. "How long have you known the Doctor?" she asked curiously.

"Oh years, I suppose," he said, leaning back in his chair. "Different faces too."

"Really?" Rose asked with interest. "I met a few old friends of his sometime ago. They said he had a big scarf."

"Ah yes," the Brigadier said reminiscently. "I think that was his fourth body. Mind you, it took me a while to understand this whole body changing thing. I believe, Miss Smith called it regeneration."

"Miss Smith?" Rose asked.

"Sarah Jane Smith," the Brigadier said. "She was a journalist. Still is, I suppose. Sullivan knew her. He travelled with her and the Doctor."

"And Liz was his assistant?" Rose asked, fascinated.

"That was a different Doctor. The one before," the Brigadier said. "I probably knew him the longest."
"How many Doctors have you known?" Rose asked curiously.

"Quite a few, I must say," he said. "Well let's see, there was this short fellow with the fur coat..."

"Brigadier! Rose!" Liz interrupted, bursting into the office with a surprising speed for her age. "The Doctor's solved it."

The Brigadier stood up immediately and he and Rose followed Liz out into the main control room at once.

"Well, Doctor?" the Brigadier asked.

"I need someone to find out where Collins was before the incident. Any place that he might have visited," the Doctor ordered.

"Do as he says," Liz snapped to a group of technicians who looked confused at the bizarre request but complied immediately.

"Doctor, what is it?" Rose asked curiously.

"Collins came in contact with a Flimian Regulator which latched onto his thoughts and is by now a full-fledged creature," the Doctor muttered absently.

"Who's Collins?" Rose asked.

"The first zombie, though I use the term loosely. The one that your mum's friend saw," the Doctor answered.

"Is this creature controlling the zombies?" Rose asked.

"No, there are no zombies," the Doctor said, sounding tired of repeating it.

"Hang on now, Doctor," the Brigadier said. "What are you saying? We have footage of those things. You yourself have seen them."

"Yes," the Doctor said. "The creature feeds off the power of minds. The more people believe, the stronger it gets."

"So the zombies are a hallucination?" Liz asked.

"Not quite, they are real enough," the Doctor said. "But they aren't flesh eating creatures who spread the infection through bites."

"I get it," Rose said slowly. "Collins was thinking about zombies and this regulator thingy made that thought into a reality. Everyone knows about zombies and the idea spread, making everyone believe that there were zombies and the ones who were bit thought they were zombies themselves."

"Exactly, Rose," the Doctor beamed proudly at her, making her flush at the praise.

"So basically, the creature is feeding off our belief," Liz put it all together.

"Yes, it's so strong that it could bring Rebecca Maison back to life as the undead," the Doctor said.

"But Collins is dead," Harry said.

"The first host," the Doctor said, shaking his head sadly. "The creature was too weak to bring
Collins back. But it has grown stronger with every person believing in the projected thought."

"How do we stop it?" the Brigadier asked, now all military tactics and action.

"We have to find that Flimian Regulator and destroy it," the Doctor said.

"Uh, sir," a technician interrupted timidly. "We have details about Mr. Collins' last whereabouts."

"Excellent," the Doctor grinned at the young technician. "What's your name?"

"Lydia Wilson," she said, looking nervous.

"Well, Lydia Wilson," the Doctor smiled charmingly. "Lay it on us."

"Yes, sir," Lydia said, trying not to blush. "Mr. Collins was in Cardiff, hours before he came to London."

The Doctor gave a triumphant cry at that, surprising everyone.

"Is that helpful?" Harry asked.

"Helpful?" the Doctor asked, incredulously. "Of course, it's helpful. When the source of your so-called epidemic visits the biggest rift in space and time on Earth, you'd better believe it is important!"

"The rift?" Rose asked curiously.

"Yes," the Doctor grinned and turned to the Brigadier. "How soon can you get us to Cardiff?"
Previously

"Mr. Collins was in Cardiff, hours before he came to London."

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"Is that helpful?" Harry asked.

"Helpful?" the Doctor asked, incredulously. "Of course, it's helpful. When the source of your so-called epidemic visits the biggest rift in space and time on Earth, you’d better believe it is important!"

"The rift?" Rose asked curiously.

"Yes," the Doctor grinned and turned to the Brigadier. "How soon can you get us to Cardiff?"

Two miles away from the Roald Dahl Plass, a cylindrical device about the size of a soft drink can was affixed to the ground, beeping monotonously. Green numbers flashed across the length of the device, the number slowly inching towards 60 million. The device had calculated that the number would reach 6.7 billion in the next 96 hours.

It would have been there 48 hours ago, if the Bad Wolf virus hadn't corrupted half the power circuits. The computer had been able to override it but the frequency had been severely diminished. However, even with reduced speed and half-repaired power circuits, the Flimian Regulator was moving along and gaining strength.

The cloaking was still functioning at only 35% but there was 63.27% chance that no one would discover its location. 96 more hours and the whole planet's psyche would be under the influence of the Regulator. It was impossible for computers to be smug but the Regulator was as close as it could get to that feeling.

~

"Harry!" Liz called in a whisper. "This way!"

"Alright, alright, I'm coming," he said, hurrying across after her.

Four hours ago, the Doctor, Rose and the Brigadier had left with Colonel Mace and two UNIT squads for Cardiff. Harry and Liz had been asked to stay behind by Colonel Mace, a decision that had been met with protests from all parties concerned.

"They are consultants, not soldiers," Colonel Mace had stated adamantly. "I'm breaking protocol by letting Miss Tyler along as it is."

The Doctor had bristled at his words but then his face had smoothed and he had nodded. "Of course," he said calmly.

Colonel Mace looked satisfied and went off to order his soldiers. The Doctor held his hand out to Harry. "I will see you soon, Harry," he said, shaking his hand. Harry shook his hand and tensed only slightly when he felt cool leather of a wallet slip into his hand. "Yes, Doctor," he nodded.

The Doctor smiled and opened his arms for Liz. "Give us a hug, Liz," he said enthusiastically.
Knowing that he was up to something, Liz gave him a hug and felt him slip something in the pocket of her lab coat. "Stephen Collins," he whispered.

"Goodbye, Doctor," Liz said as she pulled away. "Good luck."

Rose and the Brigadier seemed to have caught on so they just nodded quickly at Liz and Harry and then followed the Doctor outside.

Now, Harry had the psychic paper, which took him a while to figure out and Liz had the Doctor's sonic screwdriver. They were currently lurking outside Stephen Collins' building, trying to get in.

The Doctor had asked them to investigate, meaning that it was important. Something that the other UNIT technicians had missed.

"Here, this one," Liz said, pointing at flat #6.

"It's locked," Harry said, trying the knob.

"The Doctor gave me this," Liz said, pulling out the sonic screwdriver. It looked more complicated than the one she had seen before, but when she pressed the button, the lock clicked open. "Let's go," she said, beaming triumphantly.

"Good-o," Harry said and opened the door. He was the first one to step inside the flat but one look at Stephen Collins' living room, made him stop in his tracks.

"Harry! What's wro...?" Liz trailed off as she took in the same sight as Harry.

"Well now," Harry said, trying to keep his voice calm. "This is different."

~

"This is mad," Rose whispered to the Doctor.

"Perhaps," he said, inclining his head. "But it's the best way."

"But why?" Rose asked. "Why lie to them?"

"Because I don't want a bunch of clumsy, ham-fisted soldiers blundering into my way," he said, his tone very close to snappish.

"Alright, alright," Rose said, not wanting to argue.

The Doctor started to say something but clicked his mouth shut. His worried eyes were sweeping all over the place.

Two hours ago, they had arrived in Cardiff along with Colonel Mace, the Brigadier, and two full UNIT squads. Upon arrival, the Doctor had sent the two UNIT squads on false leads, telling them to look around the docks for a metallic, cube-like structure.

"And keep looking until you find it," the Doctor had told them. "It can move and is probably cloaked."

Rose had kept quiet, knowing that the Doctor had told her that the Flimian Regulator would not be near water, was cylindrical and flashed green numbers. Colonel Mace had hastened to take charge, leading one of the teams himself. The Brigadier had observed this quietly and then pulled the Doctor aside.
"What is it that you need, Doctor?" he had asked.

The Doctor had smiled impishly at him. "Keep them on the wild goose chase, Brigadier. Rose and I will track the regulator down and destroy it. No one need get hurt," he said.

"How will you destroy it?" the Brigadier asked.

The Doctor showed him a small, high impact explosive that the Brigadier knew for certain came from UNIT storage. The Doctor grinned at the Brigadier's uncertain expression. "I borrowed this from the UNIT supplies," he confided.

"Borrowed, Doctor?" the Brigadier asked, torn between amusement and exasperation. What was he expecting to do? Give the explosive back after he had finished blowing it up?

"We are heading out," Colonel Mace said. "I will ask all of you to stay inside."

"Oh, we assure you we will," the Doctor said at once with a disarming smile.

Colonel Mace nodded in satisfaction as he led his men out of the temporary bunker that they had created in the middle of the redeveloped Oval Basin. The Doctor scowled childishly after them, much to the amusement of Rose and the Brigadier.

"Now that he's out of the way," the Doctor said, pulling out a weird device from his coat that looked like cobbled bits of a phone and a telly remote.

"What the Dickens is that?" the Brigadier asked.

"I made a tracking device," the Doctor said. At their rather blank looks, he shook his head. "If I had more time, I would have made a more sophisticated one. I had limited time and resources."

"Will that track the Regulator thingy?" Rose asked.

"Yes, it should well do," the Doctor said, switching it on. It began to make a whirring sound, reminding Rose of the old dial-up internet modems or one of those really annoying car alarms.

"We'd better get to work," he said to her.

"Hold on, Doctor," the Brigadier said, pulling out his phone. "I have Ms. Shaw calling."

"Ah yes," the Doctor said, taking the phone and putting it on speaker. "Liz, did you manage to get into Collins' flat?"

"Yes, we did, Doctor," Liz said, sounding nervous.

"Well?" the Doctor asked, slightly impatiently.

"His flat's covered with..." Liz said but trailed off.

"With what?" Rose asked curiously.

"Zombie survival guides," Harry answered.

"Pardon?" the Brigadier asked incredulously.

"Yes," Liz said. "There are books about surviving a zombie apocalypse, pamphlets and whatnot all over the place."
"Doctor, I'm afraid Mr. Collins was very ill. He had a severe phobia of zombies and the end of days," Harry explained in a grave voice.

"I see," the Doctor nodded. "It does explain why it latched onto that thought."

"What do you mean?" Rose asked.

"Fear, Rose," the Doctor said. "Fear is the most powerful thought of all. This Flimian regulator fixated on it rather than a random passing thought, which makes it more dangerous than ever."

"What are you going to do?" Liz asked.

The Doctor was silent for a moment. "Harry, Liz, return to HQ. Brigadier, keep Colonel Mace and his men at bay, so to speak. And Rose," he said, turning to her.

"We are going to find that regulator."

"Good luck, Doctor," said the Brigadier at once, a sentiment echoed by Liz and Harry.

The Doctor nodded and took Rose's hand, leading her out of the bunker. Outside, it was just getting around midday. Rose had never seen Cardiff so empty in living memory. It was like a ghost town. She didn't like it one bit. It reminded her too much of Eden IV.

The Doctor was currently turning around in circles, trying to see which direction the signal was the strongest in. "That way!" he pointed and began striding towards it quickly. Rose ran up beside him, trying to keep up.

They walked quietly for all of three minutes before the Doctor broke the silence with an abrupt question. "You and Brett," he said, without preamble.

Rose's head snapped towards him as she gaped wordlessly. "Wh...What?" she asked, cursing herself for stumbling.

"Brett, the boy you met on Eden," the Doctor said, staring at the tracker instead of her as he spoke. "You kissed him."

Rose dearly wished he would look at her so she could understand why he was asking. Was he jealous? Disappointed? Confused? Curious? She decided to go with an equally vague response. "Yeah," she said.

"That's not an answer," he pointed out.

"Fine," Rose said, exasperatedly. "If you really wanna know, he looked after me in the prison camp and came to my defence against the Daleks. I just wanted to say thank you and goodbye," she said. It was partially true, of course. Always lie with the truth.

The Doctor considered that. "So, if humans feel gratitude for something, they choose to express their affection in the form a kiss," he said. That would explain his body's imperative to have kissed Grace. She had saved his life (well, taken and then saved) which would explain why he had kissed her.
"Yes," Rose said immediately, glad to be coming to the end of that discussion. "That is exactly it."

"Huh," he said. "Well that explains it."

"Explains what?" Rose asked, despite herself.

"Why you kissed me when I gave you the TARDIS key," he said, as casually as one would talk about the weather.

Rose's face flamed but she was spared having to answer as the tracker beeped rapidly, drawing away the Doctor's attention. He was so bloody confusing. He'd had no problem kissing her hair or her forehead and calling her 'darling' immediately after the events of Nira. But since then, they had gone back to usual and Rose had dare not bring it up. And then he would start up a conversation like this, making her wonder if he was being deliberately obtuse. He was frustrating.

"The signal is stronger here," he said. "Come on."

Rose followed him quickly, shoving the conversation back into the recess of her mind. They had reached an empty clearing, with nothing but rocks and gravel around. The Doctor put the tracker in his coat and pulled Rose behind him.

"See that," he whispered, pointing into the distance. "That's it."

Rose squinted in the direction that he pointed and saw a small, cylindrical device just as the Doctor had described before. "What're we gonna do?" she asked, equally quietly.

"Stay here," he said, taking the explosive out of his pocket. "I'll just attach this to the Regulator."

"I'm coming with you," she said stubbornly.

"Rose," he said sternly. "Back up slowly and get ready to run. Do as I say."

"And let you get blown up?" she asked, her voice rising furiously.

"Sssh," he said forcefully. "Fine, if you must," he said.

Rose glowered at him and followed him slowly. As they got closer to the regulator, they could hear the beeping sounds coming from it. The green numbers read 61.45 million and the number was rising rapidly. Rose remembered the Doctor telling her that the numbers would signify the number of people who had been influenced by the Regulator.

The Doctor was mere inches away from the regulator, with the explosive in his hand when a silver laser bolt shot out of the regulator, hitting the Doctor's chest. The Doctor groaned in pain and fell to the ground, dropping the explosive.

Rose picked up the explosive but before she could place it on the Regulator, she heard a dreaded cry behind her.

"EXTERMINATE! EXTERMINATE! EXTERMINATE!"

She turned around in fear, and saw seven Daleks marching towards her, their ray guns pointed at her. Her hands began to shake. How could Daleks be on Earth? No, no, it was impossible. She heard the Doctor groan in pain behind her and it clicked.

The Regulator had hit the Doctor. Hadn't it drawn on Stephen Collins' fear? Now it was drawing on the Doctor's fear.
Turning her back on the approaching Daleks, Rose affixed the explosive on the Regulator, keeping an eye out for another bolt. However, it seemed that something was draining the power of the Regulator, making it beep frantically instead of the monotone from before.

The Daleks behind her seemed to be flickering as well, their cries being cut off mid-syllable. The explosive was ready and primed, the timer was set to 30 seconds and counting.

The Doctor was still on the ground in pain but Rose wasted no time in hauling one of his arms across her shoulder and half-dragging and half-carrying him away from the regulator. The Daleks were almost like holograms now, so she was able to pass easily through them.

The countdown reached the final 10 seconds and the Doctor regained some of his strength, making them both pick up their pace. Just as the countdown reached one, the Doctor threw himself on top of Rose, bringing them both down to the ground, shielding her body with his.

Rose clutched onto him with all her might as a loud explosion resonated behind them. Rose closed her eyes and buried her head in the Doctor's chest as dust and debris flew around them from the Flimian Regulator.

Several moments passed before either of them moved. The Doctor was the first one to lift his head as he glanced back at the destroyed Regulator that had caused so much trouble for his favourite planet. He met Rose's eyes and beamed happily at her.

"Hello," he said.

"Hello," Rose returned, her smile as wide as it could go. "Think we should bring Colonel Mace and his men back from the docks?"

"Oh," he said as he stood up and offered her a hand. "I do think they'd have heard the explosion by now."

Rose took his hand to stand up and began to follow him. "Where are we going?" she asked as he led her in a different direction from the bunker.

"I don't stick around for cleanups," he said. "I don't like it. Too many questions."

"But the TARDIS is back at the HQ in London," Rose pointed out.

"Yes it is," he grinned and then pointed straight ahead.

Rose laughed in disbelief as she spotted the Brigadier standing near a helicopter a short while ahead. "Just when I think," she shook her head.

"When you think I've done the impossible?" he asked cheekily. "You see my dear Rose, like Alice, I like to do three impossible things before breakfast."

Rose laughed giddily as they approached the Brigadier who smiled widely at them. "A job well done, Doctor," he said, over the sound of the helicopter. "And you as well, Miss Tyler."

"Thank you, Brigadier," the Doctor said, shaking his hand vigorously. "We'll say goodbye then."

"Goodbye, Doctor, Miss Tyler," the Brigadier said, shaking Rose's hand. "I daresay we'll see each other again sometime."

"I hope so," Rose said as she beamed at him.
The Brigadier nodded enthusiastically as Rose and the Doctor climbed into the helicopter and it slowly lifted off the ground. Rose was bouncing in her seat like a child as she took in the view.

The Doctor caught her joyful look and felt his hearts warm. He laughed happily and put an arm around her, pulling her into his side.

The remaining goodbyes were quick. Harry and Liz came to see them off, and they both talked to the Doctor individually in quiet tones. Liz hugged Rose goodbye, and gave her card in case she needed to talk sometime.

"I won't be on Earth much longer either," she confided to her and the Doctor in a low voice. "UNIT's offered me a position on the moonbase."

Harry was slightly awkward in his goodbye to Rose since the two of them hadn't really spent a lot of time together. All the same, Rose gave him a hug and kissed his cheek, making him blush like a schoolboy.

"Right-o, Doctor, Miss Tyler, take care," he said.

"Goodbye Harry," the Doctor beamed as he and Rose entered the TARDIS. Liz and Harry gave a nostalgic sigh as the TARDIS vanished with a grinding noise.

"Well now, Dr. Sullivan," Liz said, after the TARDIS had left. "I suppose NATO is waiting for you."

Harry grinned at her as the two of them returned to the HQ. "I suppose it is," he agreed. "Duty calls and all."

~

The TARDIS landed almost immediately and Rose looked surprised before the Doctor gestured grandly to the doors. "I believe your visit to Jackie was cut short," he said.

Rose grinned at him and gave him a quick hug. "Thank you," she said.

"Don't mention it," he said easily. "Take your time."

Rose nodded and smiled at him before opening the TARDIS doors. She saw that he had landed them just outside her building but the changes couldn't have been more noticeable. Children were playing around happily, the shops were being reopened, people were bustling about and Rose realised that things were more or less back to normal.

As she made her way towards her mum's flat, she passed the newspaper vendor and saw the front page news.

'HALLUCINOGENIC DRUG IN BRITAIN'S WATER SUPPLY'
'ZOMBIES: A HOAX'

She shook her head and giggled as she almost skipped home. Things would probably never change. And she wouldn't have it any other way.
...Paradise Lost excited different and far deeper emotions. I read it, as I had read the other volumes which had fallen into my hands, as a true history. It moved every feeling of wonder and awe that the picture..."

Rose closed her eyes in contentment as the Doctor's honey smooth voice washed over her. Even a horrific tale like Mary Shelley's Frankenstein sounded soothing in his voice. They had recently visited Lake Geneva during the Year without Summer as guests of Lord Byron. The Doctor had just winked and tapped his nose when Rose had asked him how he had pulled that one off.

Mary Shelley had been there with Percy Shelley and Claire Clairmont who in addition to being Mary's stepsister was also pregnant with Byron's child. The Doctor had been happy to fill her in on all the latest scandals and rumours as they stayed with Lord Byron and his young (and very handsome, in Rose's opinion) physician John William Polidori.

Of course, on the infamous night of 16th of June 1816, they all sat down in the villa discussing ghost stories. Rose had been wonderstruck as she saw the history of one of the greatest literary creations of her culture happen right before her eyes. They had left soon after but Rose had insisted that the Doctor read Frankenstein to her again. Which was what they were doing right now while the TARDIS floated along in the vortex.

Rose had read the book once when she was young and hadn't thought much of it. But as the Doctor read it to her now, she was captivated by the tale and his voice as he read the creature's introspection and the comparisons he drew between him and Satan.

"I always feel like the people were the real monsters in the story," Rose murmured slowly, when the Doctor paused to take a sip of his tea.

He smiled down to where she was resting her head in his lap. "Yes, it seems so, doesn't it? Frankenstein created a creature and the people turned him into a monster. And then the monster turned Frankenstein into a monster too," he said.

"Mmm," Rose said. "When I tried to tell that to Miss Dell, she told me to quit being a smart arse," Rose recalled. The Doctor frowned at that, but Rose closed her eyes again, snuggling back into her blanket and resting her head more comfortably in his lap. "Keep reading," she requested.

He grinned lightly. "As you wish, Miss Tyler," he said as he picked up the book and looked for the line that he had left at. "Everything is related in them which..." Light knocking made the Doctor pause.

Rose met his eyes in slight alarm. "I thought you said we were in the vortex," she said.

"We are," he said, placing a bookmark in the book. Rose got up quickly as the two of them crossed the console room and reached the TARDIS doors. The knocks repeated and the Doctor went to
open the doors.

"Hang on," Rose said. "Is it safe to open them?"

"Temporary force field," he explained and opened the doors slowly, only to have a small white cube encased in a glass case fly inside the TARDIS.

"What is that?" Rose asked.

The Doctor took the cube and examined it grimly. "It's a hypercube," he frowned. He looked at the mark in alarm. "It's Romana's!" he exclaimed.

"What's the hypercube exactly?" Rose asked, looking at the cube and wondering why he was freaking out so much.

"It is a way of sending a distress call by Time Lords," the Doctor explained. "See this mark here?" he pointed. "That's Romana's signature."

"Romana is in trouble?" Rose asked, scared for her friend.

The Doctor nodded. "Come on," he said.

"Do you know where she is?" Rose asked as he flew around the console, setting the coordinates for their destination.

"Gallifrey," he said. "She says to come at once."

"Then how can she be in trouble?" Rose asked, confused. It was a bit unnerving to know that he could hear something she couldn't but she guessed that it was telepathic, like the TARDIS.

The Doctor pulled a lever, rougher than he would have. "I don't know," he said, knowing that Rose was right. "But she wouldn't just send the hypercube unless she was in trouble."

Rose nodded. "How long till we get to Gallifrey?" she asked.

"Almost there," he said and the TARDIS landed with a thud. The two of them ran to the door and threw it open.

"Oh good, you made it on time," Romana grinned at them.

"Romana," the Doctor said, his eyes wide. "I thought you were in trouble."

"Well it was the only way to get you here," she shrugged calmly.

"Romana!" the Doctor admonished. "We were really worried."

Romana smiled mischievously. "Oh don't be so melodramatic, Doctor," she said. She waved at Rose. "Hello, Rose."

"Hi, Romana," Rose grinned. "What'd you need us here for?"

Romana opened her mouth to explain but the Doctor cut in. "Why couldn't you send a normal message?" he demanded. "Or call the TARDIS?"

"Would you have come if I had?" Romana asked.
The Doctor knew the answer to that. He would have come up with some excuse not to. He crossed his arms in exasperation and Romana rolled her eyes at him.

There was a knock on the chamber door. "Enter!" Romana said.

Rose saw as a tall, good-looking man in a Chancellery Guard's uniform walked inside who bowed to Romana. "My lady, the proceedings are underway," he said.

"Thank you, Andred," Romana said.

Rose remembered that this was Leela's husband, who was a Commander in the Chancellery Guard. His eyes fell on the Doctor and Rose and he nodded at them.

"Doctor," he nodded.

"Andred, I trust you are well," the Doctor said pleasantly.

Andred nodded politely and he looked at Rose. "You must be Miss Tyler," he said. "Leela speaks highly of you."

Rose blushed lightly. "It is very nice to meet you," she said.

He gave her a tight smile and with a final bow to Romana, he left the chamber.

"What proceedings was he talking about?" the Doctor asked Romana.

"President Flavia has finished her final term as the President," Romana said.

"Yes, I expect she would have by now," the Doctor nodded. "I assume she recommended you as her replacement?"

Romana nodded. "The High Council voted on it yesterday and as of today, I am President Elect of the High Council," she said.

"My congratulations, Madam President," the Doctor said with a small bow.

Romana smiled. "Thank you, Doctor. I wanted you and Rose to be at the ceremony," she said.

"Romana..." the Doctor began. He hated ceremonies of all kind. And this was his least favourite one.

"Doctor," Romana interrupted. "This is the highest honour a Time Lord or Lady could receive."

"What ceremony?" Rose asked curiously.

"This ceremony will swear me in as the new President of the High Council," Romana explained to her.

"And you don't want to go?" Rose asked the Doctor in disbelief.

The Doctor looked uncomfortable. "Rose, it's boring and stuffy..." he protested.

"This is important to Romana," Rose said.

Romana smiled at Rose. "Thank you, Rose," she said.

Rose nodded. "We'll be there. I will drag him there if I have to," she said firmly.
Romana looked amused. "I have no doubt you would, dear Rose. Thank you very much. I am very grateful," she said.

"Don't I get a say in this?" the Doctor asked petulantly.

"No," the two women answered in unison.

"When does the ceremony start?" Rose asked Romana.

"Two hours, relative time," she said. "I assume you'll both come."

"Wouldn't miss it," Rose promised.

"Then I will see you both in the Panopticon in two hours," she said.

"Good luck," Rose grinned as she took the Doctor's elbow and led him back to the TARDIS.

~

"Do we have to go?" the Doctor groaned.

"Just why are you so opposed to the idea?" Rose demanded. "Romana is our friend."

He nodded. "Yes, I know and I am very happy for her. It's just..."

"Just what?" Rose asked curiously.

"I have bad memories of this ceremony," he admitted, throwing himself on the chaise that he and Rose had been resting on before. "Or, rather none at all."

"What?" Rose asked, completely confused.

"Apparently, I have been through the ceremony but the details are so hazy in my mind," he confided, grasping both her hands in his. "I remember that it was necessary and there was something about an invasion." He shook his head as the memories refused to surface.

Rose knelt in front of him in concern. "Do you want to leave?" she asked softly. "I'm sorry I just assumed that..."

"No," he said, finally. "We'll go. Like you said, Romana is a friend and this is an immense honour for her."

Rose nodded and patted his shoulder. "You're a wonderful friend, Doctor," she said, knowing that he was willing to ignore his own discomfort in order to support Romana. She considered him thoughtfully. "If anyone should be worried about going, it should be me," she said lightly.

His eyes snapped to hers in surprise. "Why would you think that?" he asked incredulously.

Rose rolled her eyes. "In case you haven't noticed, Doctor, I am human," she said. "No offense, but I don't think anyone apart from Romana and Leela even thinks of me as more than some sort of an exotic specimen."

He frowned as he realised how accurate she was in her deductions. But her reasons were all wrong. It wasn't the fact that she was a human that fascinated the Time Lords. It was the fact that even the most experienced Time Lords couldn't see more than a few strands of her timeline. The Doctor, of course, couldn't see a thing but he was aware that the Time Lords were as fascinated by his young
friend as he was.

However, this wasn't something he wanted to tell her. Instead, he cupped her face with both his hands. "Rose Tyler," he said, relishing the way her name rolled off his tongue. "You are more brilliant and astonishingly amazing than that stuffy bunch of people. You have faced Daleks, Cybermen, deluded mobs, Plasmavores. You even survived Byron's and Polidori's flirting," he joked, his eyes hardening only slightly as he remembered that.

Rose blushed madly and ducked her head but the Doctor lifted her chin and gave her a disarming grin. "You, my dear, have nothing to fear," he said, tapping her nose affectionately with his finger. "You have accomplished more than any of these people have in their thousand year lives."

Rose grinned and threw her arms around him, giggling into his neck. His arms were equally enthusiastic as they hugged her to him. They stayed in each others' arms longer than was acceptable for a standard hug but neither of them could bring themselves to pull away first.

Finally, Rose broke the hug mumbling something about not being late. The Doctor smiled at her, trying in vain to ignore the smugness emanating from his younger selves in his mind.

~

An hour and half later, the Doctor was pacing in the console room while he waited for Rose. She had flat out refused to attend the ceremony wearing her usual jeans and hoodie, claiming that Romana deserved better than that.

He had wanted to argue but he got a warm feeling in his hearts when he thought of Rose making such an effort to get along with one of his friends. Rose had only met Romana once and if what Romana had said was true, even she couldn't have met Rose more than once before.

It was surprising to him that Romana, of all people, had taken such a liking to Rose. As far as he remembered, Romana never took much liking to anyone. Not her fault, of course, it was just the way that all Time Lords were raised. Romana had been typical of her planet when he had first met her, but her regeneration had changed her quite a bit.

He was also very pleased that she was going to be President. She had no experience in politics officially, but she was extremely intelligent and her travels with him and later in E-Space had made her an incredible person. He had no doubt that she would be a terrific President. In fact, he wouldn't be surprised if she already had a list of things that she wanted to accomplish once she was President.

Rose emerged from the depths of the TARDIS back into the console room, momentarily knocking him speechless. She looked absolutely beautiful, dressed as she was in a white Edwardian gown and her hair in tumbling curls with small braids going around the crown of her head.

"What'd you think? Will it do?" she asked nervously, an eager smile fluttering at her lips.

He beamed widely at her, ignoring his racing hearts. "Oh yes," he agreed at once. He walked up to her and offered her his hand. "Will you do me the honour, Miss Tyler?" he asked.

Rose suppressed the urge to giggle and placed her hand in his. "But of course, Doctor," she said. Her breath hitched only slightly as he kissed the hand that he was holding, tucked it into the crook of his arm and began to lead her out.

~
The Panopticon was a magnificent structure with six different sides, each having a statue in front of them. The Doctor explained to Rose in a low voice that each statue belonged to a founder of the Time Lord society. He did tell her all the names but the only ones she remembered were Rassilon, Omega and the Other. The place was swarming with Time Lords some of whom nodded at the Doctor, while many others merely stared at them as they walked past.

Tired of the looks she was getting, Rose looked at the ceiling of the Panopticon only to find that she couldn't. The Doctor grinned at her look of surprise. "No one really knows how high the ceiling is," he whispered in her ear. "It is rumoured that once clouds gathered inside and made it rain."

Rose had heard of stranger things to have happened after she started travelling with him so she nodded along to that tidbit of information. She did turn around once to see Leela waving at her, who gestured that she would talk after the ceremony to which Rose nodded back eagerly.

The conversations around them were still hushed but then silence fell as processional music started playing loudly. A man dressed in gold entered the Panopticon followed by three guards each carrying something on a red cushion. Behind them, entered Romana dressed in plain white robes, covered from neck to toe.

The man in gold, who was the Gold Usher as the Doctor whispered in Rose's ear, stepped onto the dais as the guards and Romana followed after him. The guards stood on one side and Romana stood right in the centre of the dais as the Gold Usher addressed the Time Lords.

"Honoured members of the Supreme Council, Cardinals, Time Lords," he called, his voice as pompous and grand as Rose had imagined it would be. Then to her enormous surprise, his eyes fell on her and then on Leela. "Madams," he said and Rose tensed just slightly before remembering the Doctor's words and holding her head up high. She wasn't expecting to be addressed but she was not going to shy away either.

The Gold Usher continued to speak. "We are here today to honour the will and the wisdom of Rassilon," he said and then banged his staff on the floor three times, pausing for a heartbeat between the strikes.

"Is there anyone here to contest the candidate's right to the Sash of Rassilon?" he asked.

No one spoke and the Usher marked the words with a single strike of the staff against the floor.

"Is there anyone here to contest the candidate's right to the Rod of Rassilon?"

Silence again which was marked with another strike of the staff.

"Is there anyone here to contest the candidate's right to the Great Key of Rassilon?"

There was silence and the Usher struck the floor again. "By custom, with wisdom, and for honour, I shall strike three times. Should no voice be heard by the third stroke, I will, duty-bound, invest the candidate as President of the High Council of the Time Lords of Gallifrey," he said. His words were met with silence which was then punctuated by the three strikes of the staff.

The Gold Usher now turned away from the Time Lords and looked at Romana. "It is my duty and privilege, having the consent of the Time Lords of Gallifrey, to invest you, Lady Romanadvoratrelundar, as President of the High Council. Accept, therefore, the Sash of Rassilon."

Rose was a bit surprised at the long name that Romana had, but focused her attention as Romana lifted the heavy sash from one of the cushions and put it around her neck.
"Accept, therefore, the Rod of Rassilon," the Gold Usher said. Romana lifted the odd-looking sceptre and cradled it in her arms.

"Seek, therefore, to find the Great Key of Rassilon," the Gold Usher announced. Rose was surprised when there was no key on the third cushion. But Romana didn't miss a beat as she extended her hand and held it over the cushion.

Nothing happened but Rose noticed the Doctor smiling out of the corner of her eyes. Deciding she would ask later, Rose directed her attention back to the ceremony.

"Do you swear to uphold the laws of Gallifrey?" the Gold Usher asked Romana.

"I swear," she stated clearly.

"Do you swear to follow in the wisdom of Rassilon?"

"I swear," she said.

"Do you swear to protect the law and the wisdom?"

"I swear," Romana said and at her words, a circlet rose from the floor and into the hands of the Gold Usher. Rose watched curiously as the Gold Usher walked behind Romana who kneeled.

"I invest you," the Gold Usher said. "Lady President of the High Council, Romanadvoratrelundar." He lifted the circlet and slowly placed it on Romana's head. "I wish you good fortune and strength. I give you the Matrix," he said as the circlet went around Romana's head.

Romana stood up, as if in a daze and Rose was so absorbed in the ceremony that she almost didn't notice the Doctor tugging on her hand. Rose quickly knelt like everyone else as Romana gazed upon the Panopticon.

"I am Lady Romanadvoratrelundar," she spoke deliberately, her voice strong and steady. "Of House Heartshaven of the Prydonian Chapter. President of the High Council of the Time Lords of Gallifrey." Her gaze swept over the Panopticon again. "Arise, now."
The Time Agency: Gallifreyan Blues

Previously

Rose watched curiously as the Gold Usher walked behind Romana who kneeled. "I invest you," the Gold Usher said. "Lady President of the High Council, Romanadvoratrelundar." He lifted the circlet and slowly placed it on Romana's head.

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Rose and the Doctor slowly got to their feet along with other Time Lords. Romana shook out of her daze and nodded in acknowledgement as the Time Lords bowed to her. She walked back out of the way that she had entered, beckoning Andred as she did.

"Is it over?" Rose asked the Doctor in a low voice as the Time Lords began to disperse.

"Yes," the Doctor said. "The ceremony was a success."

"Oh," she said, a hundred questions on her mind.

The Doctor gazed down at her and smiled. "I assume you have many questions," he said.

Rose chuckled and nodded. "Loads of them but I'll hold off until we get back to the TARDIS," she said.

"Splendid," the Doctor said, taking her hand. "Let's go to the TARDIS now, shall we?"

"Oh no, we can't," Rose said at once.

"Why not?" he asked. And no, he did not whine.

Rose rolled her eyes at him. "Leela," she said and then looked over his shoulder. The Doctor turned around just in time to see Leela approach Rose and the two women immediately hugged each other. The Doctor was left wondering since when his companions liked each other more than him.

"Oh, I was hoping you would be here," Leela said as she looked at Rose. "Romana did mention that she had a way of bringing you but I didn't think the Doctor would..."

"I am standing right here," the Doctor protested.

Leela looked confused. "Well, of course you are, Doctor," she said, as if wondering why he was stating the obvious.

Rose almost laughed at the Doctor's affronted face but settled for smiling widely. They were interrupted by Andred who walked up to them with quick strides. "The President wishes to see you
and Miss Tyler," he told the Doctor.

"Oh? What about?" the Doctor asked in mild interest.

Andred looked uncomfortable. "I don't know, Doctor," he said.

"Fine," the Doctor nodded. "If you could just show us to her new office..."

Andred nodded and began to lead. Leela decided against following them, claiming she had to speak with Rodan.

Andred led the Doctor and Rose along a corridor lined with flowering shrubs to a pair of deep red double doors. Rose held the Doctor's hand, wondering why she felt so nervous. She had spoken to Romana mere hours ago.

But she hadn't been President then. Rose remembered the grand ceremony and the circlet that the Gold Usher had placed on Romana's head. The Matrix, whatever it was, sounded forbidding. Rose made a note to add that to a list of questions she had for the Doctor.

Andred knocked on the doors. "Enter," Romana's voice beckoned. The command was slightly imperious but nothing out of the ordinary.

Andred opened the doors and clicked his heels. "The Doctor and Miss Tyler, Madam President," he said.

"Thank you, Andred," Romana dismissed him with a nod. "Once I am finished talking to the Doctor and Rose, could you ask Leela and Rodan in here?"

"Yes, my lady," Andred gave a short bow and left the office swiftly, closing the doors behind him.

Romana's office was quite wonderful. There were long columns, reminiscent of Grecian architecture but the walls were painted a deep red and the thick carpet covering the floor matched the wall. There were paintings on the walls, each in an ornate golden frame with an overhead spotlight. The structure and design did not adhere to any specific style, rather it was a mixture of several styles.

Whatever it was, it suited Romana perfectly. She herself was sitting at a desk in the middle of the room and smiled at the Doctor and Rose. "Please, sit down," she said, indicating the two armchairs in front of her.

"How are you feeling, Madam President?" the Doctor asked, sounding a bit concerned.

"Fine," she answered. "The headache is all but nonexistent now."

"Headache?" Rose asked before she could help herself.

"Yes," Romana answered her. "The Matrix can be...overwhelming."

"You wanted to see us?" the Doctor prompted, perhaps because he wanted to be off Gallifrey as soon as possible.

"Yes," Romana said and then opened a small ornate, wooden box on her desk. She reached inside and carefully pulled out a silver scroll made of delicate metal, the width of which was the size of the Doctor's palm.

The Doctor stared at in surprise. "Is that a...?" he asked.
"A contract?" she asked. "Yes. But it's not for you."

"Okay, who's it for then?" he asked, a bit relieved.

Romana put the scroll on the desk and leaned back in her seat. "What do you know about the Time Agency?" she asked.

"Number of things," the Doctor said, now distinctly wary. "Am I to assume that the contract is for them?"

"It is," Romana nodded. "I need you to deliver it."

"Excuse me?" the Doctor asked, more shocked than anything else.

"You heard me right, Doctor," Romana said, a tiny smile gracing her face.

"What does the contract contain? You're not pulling a Claudius are you?" the Doctor asked, only half-joking. However, the reference was lost on both Romana and Rose and he sighed. "Hamlet. Claudius sent Rosencrantz and Guildenstern with...never mind," he said, waving it off. "What's in the contract?"

"A proposition," Romana said as she unfurled the contract. It was about as long as her arm. "I want to employ the Time Agents."

"Employ them?" Rose asked. The Doctor had told her about the Time Agency but she was vastly under the impression that the Time Lords did not like anyone other than them to have time travel.

Romana nodded and Rose realised that the Doctor looked equally shocked. "That is very unusual, Madam President," the Doctor said, with deliberate use of Romana's new title.

"I realise that, Doctor," Romana said at once. "But times change and we must progress with them."

Rose was surprised when the Doctor did not smile at that. He looked torn between pride and concern. "Romana, you do realise what you're doing?" he asked her gently.

"I am making changes," Romana asserted without hesitation. "Don't worry, Doctor. I'm not doing it on my own. The CIA has been very helpful."

"The CIA?" Rose asked. "But the last time...

"Last time was different," Romana assured her. "It has been a while since your last visit, I'm afraid. CIA went through a major overhaul during Lady Flavia's final term. She, ah, changed a lot of things around."

"Who's the Head now?" the Doctor asked, leaning back in his chair. Absently, he realised that he sounded far too much like his previous self. In fact, he was channelling Time's Champion in full force now.

"Narvin," Romana answered.

The Doctor nodded, his finger twirling absently in front of him. "What are your plans for the Time Agents?" he asked, his voice all sharp and focused now.

Rose realised with a start that this was the side of the Doctor that always reminded her of a soldier. A strategist, a chess master who knew exactly what needed to be done to win a war. She kept quiet, staring at the Doctor whose eyes distinctly more blue than green and his aura felt darker,
somehow.

Fighting off a shiver, Rose focused on a random spot on Romana's desk as the Doctor and Romana traded questions back and forth. She was unsure as to how to react to this Doctor. He was still the Doctor, her best friend who read to her and whispered Byron's conquests to her while they sat opposite the man himself, but right now, he sounded more and more like the Time Lord who stood up to Daleks and Cybermen and handed down death without mercy on those who did wrong.

Rose wondered whimsically why she was not scared of him. Even Romana seemed a bit tense as she answered the Doctor's questions but Rose felt fine. In fact, she realised that she had been stroking her thumb over their clasped hands on her lap. The Doctor didn't even seemed to have noticed but his cool fingers were gripping her hand in a soothing grasp like always.

She was lost in her thoughts and started slightly when her name came up. "I trust you and Rose enough to know that you will succeed," Romana said.

The Doctor nodded, his features softening. Rose relaxed again. This was known territory, nothing unpredictable with this Doctor. "We will leave for Gerron then," he said. "Come on, Rose."

Rose stood up and smiled at Romana who returned her smile with a dazzling one of her own. The Doctor had already pocketed the scroll and the two of them hurried towards the TARDIS.

However they were waylaid by a tall, lean man dressed very unconventionally in a perfectly fit plain black suit with a white shirt and a black tie. His black hair was slicked back, with not a hair out of place. His high cheekbones and sharp blue eyes were somehow familiar but before Rose could ponder more on that, the Doctor tensed beside her.

"Thete," the man said, an amused smile gracing his lips. "I wasn't expecting you to be here."

"The President called me," the Doctor said, his voice steady, considering the death grip he had on Rose's hand.

The man did apparently notice the tight grip for he smiled swiftly at Rose. "Irving Braxiatel," he said, offering his hand. "I presume you are the infamous Miss Rose Tyler. The girl who has baffled all of Gallifrey with her timelines."

Completely confused at his words, Rose did best to hide her surprise and returned the handshake. "Nice to meet you," she said, feeling proud of herself for not stumbling on her words. The Doctor did relax slightly, for he had gone positively pale at Braxiatel's words before.

Braxiatel smiled at Rose. "I must say I can see why everyone is baffled," he said, staring at Rose in a way that made her want to fidget.

"You're being rude, Brax," the Doctor said and Rose made a mental note to hug him later in thanks.

"Forgive my curiosity, Miss Tyler. It is very nice to meet you too," Braxiatel said to Rose and then looked at the Doctor. "Thank you for the Christmas present. The socks were lovely."

The Doctor nodded back tersely. He noticed Rose's look of confusion and stroked his thumb over their clasped hands. "Rose, I would like you to meet my older brother," he said. "And do forgive his rudeness. His manners seem to have worsened with age."

Rose's eyes went wide. "O-Of course," Rose said, stumbling only slightly and staring at Braxiatel. No wonder he had seemed oddly familiar. The Doctor's brother, wow wasn't expecting that. They seemed more like rivals but then again, knowing what she did about her cousins, she was certain
that all siblings were rivals one way or another.

"Oh, my manners have got worse?" Braxiatel asked, sounding annoyed. "As I remember it, you're the troublemaker not me."

The Doctor was about to retort but then he smiled at Rose gently. "Rose, will you please wait for me in the TARDIS? I have something I wish to speak to my brother about," he said.

Rose nodded quickly and the Doctor smiled reassuringly at her. Rose smiled at Braxiatel and left the two brothers to talk. As soon as she was out of earshot, the Doctor rounded on Braxiatel. "Have you lost your mind?" he demanded of his brother. "Mentioning timelines?"

Braxiatel looked slightly amused at the outburst. "You hadn't told her, I see. She was surprised when I brought it up," he said. "I thought she was your friend."

"She is," the Doctor said. "But until I know exactly why her timelines are the way they are, or rather aren't, I'm not going to mention it to her and cause her unnecessary worry."

"Do you mean to tell me," Braxiatel was definitely amused now. "You cannot see her timelines at all, can you? Not even a glimpse." For the first time in years, Braxiatel actually laughed out loud. "Rassilon Thete, this is priceless."

"Shut up," the Doctor said sulkily. "It's not funny."

"There is something wrong with you if you don't see the humour in this," Braxiatel told him, getting his laughter under control.

"I got your note the last time," the Doctor said, abruptly changing the subject. Any more of his brother's teasing and his face might turn permanently red.

Braxiatel wasn't fooled for a second by the subject change. "Yes, I did," he said. "I also noticed that Romana gave Miss Tyler some flowers," he said and smirked when he saw the Doctor tense again. "Arkytior, if my regeneration's memory isn't failing," he continued, his tone teasing.

"Yes, she did," the Doctor replied. "Now if you will excuse me..."

"Have you told her what they mean?" Braxiatel asked him.

"No, and it's about to stay that way," the Doctor said.

"You know the history of those flowers, Thete," Braxiatel said. His tone turned serious. "You have to tell her."

"Should I really?" the Doctor asked him, equally serious. "Without knowing anything?"

Braxiatel held his gaze for a moment before conceding with a nod. "Fine, but don't do anything stupid," he said. He reached into his suit pocket and pulled out a pocket watch. "I'm late for a meeting," he said. "I believe I shall see you sooner or later in the next century?"

"Yes," the Doctor agreed. "Goodbye, Brax."

"Goodbye, Thete," Braxiatel said, his mask slipping for a second to reveal the concern underneath. "Take care of yourself. And Miss Tyler."

The Doctor was only mildly surprised when he included Rose but he nodded and then left for the TARDIS. Braxiatel watched his brother in worry but then sighed and headed towards the
President's office. With luck, he would catch her in time for a light celebratory drink.

~

As he walked towards the TARDIS, the Doctor pondered over Braxiatel's words. All teasing aside, he could see why Brax wanted him to tell Rose about Arkytior and what it meant.

The legend of Arkytior was infamous. The flowers bloomed only on Mount Perdition, the place where he had grown up before coming to the Academy. But the legend went that the flowers would bloom only before the Draug goddess came to Gallifrey.

He hadn't thought much of the legend but as absentminded that this incarnation was, it did not miss the little things. All the wolf insignias that had followed him after he had met Rose had not been lost on him. Not to mention that 'Arkytior' was a Gallifreyan word whose English translation roughly meant 'Rose'. And the timelines not being visible just added to his confusion.

His instinct had caused him to pick up all these things but his mind refused to connect them. He was missing a vital piece and it frustrated him. It was quite obvious though, that Rose Tyler was no ordinary human. The girl was something extraordinary and one day she would be glorious. That much, he did know.

The fact that he might, very possibly, be attracted to her was neither here nor there.

He was a bad liar.
The Time Agency: Gerron Alpha

Rose waited for the Doctor in the TARDIS while he spoke with his brother. She still couldn't wrap her head around it. Hadn't he said that he didn't have a family anymore? Plus, Braxiatel had mentioned something about her timelines that had got her thinking.

She had asked the Doctor once before about whether or not he could see her future, but he had dodged the question then. Rose sighed in frustration and sat down near the fireplace, deep in thought.

The whispers and stares that followed her on Gallifrey, the curious looks that she got from the Time Lords, all of it had to mean something, hadn't it? She wished for once the Doctor would just tell her but that was a false hope to cling on to. She had known him for almost nine months now and she knew well enough that for all his long-winded talks, he never did say much.

The TARDIS doors opened and Rose looked up to see the Doctor hurry over to the console. The bluish light of the rotor highlighted the pensive look upon his face which disappeared a split second later when his eyes found her.

"Ready to go?" he asked, his usual ready smile appearing on his lips.

"Yeah," Rose said, smiling softly in return. Things would have to wait for now. They had a job to do. "So, where exactly are we going?" she asked.

He grinned at her and hurried around the console in quick steps steering them away from Gallifrey. "An asteroid called Gerron Alpha," the Doctor answered. "The last remaining unit of the Time Agency has their Headquarters there."

"Last remaining?" Rose asked. "What happened to the rest of them?"

"I have no idea, to be perfectly honest," he answered, frowning at that. "History says that by the 52nd century, the Agency was on the brink of collapse and was never heard from again."

"And when are we going?" Rose asked, already knowing the answer.

The Doctor winked at her. "The 52nd century," he said. "Perhaps we might become the necessary catalyst."

"How do you know that's when we should land?" Rose asked, curiously. "You know, besides the fact that we seem to attract trouble," she added cheekily.

He glared playfully at her and tugged on a loose blonde curl on her head. "Cheeky, Miss Tyler," he teased. "The Time Lords have isolated a point in time which we call a temporal tipping point," he explained, his voice abruptly serious now.

"Whatever happens at that point in time will decide the future."

"What is it that is meant to happen?" Rose asked, feeling a slight chill as the Doctor described the weight of their task.

"Ideally, the Time Agents will either sign the contract or reject it," he said, pressing a few buttons on the console rapidly. "If there are no complications, of course," he added as an afterthought.
"And what exactly does the contract say? Romana said she wanted to employ them," Rose said.

"Technically, it's the CIA that wants to employ them," the Doctor said. "Don't worry," he smiled, looking at the alarm on her face. The mention of the CIA brought back the memories of her first visit to Gallifrey. She still had nightmares about Ryoth pointing that gun at her heart. "I have read the contract. It's nothing bad."

Rose nodded and was still pondering over it when the TARDIS came to a stop. There hadn't been the usual materialisation sound but they had definitely stopped. "What happened?" she asked him.

"We are hovering in the air zone of Gerron Alpha," the Doctor said, pressing a series of switches before lifting up what looked like a microphone.

"Why can't we just materialise near the Agency?" Rose asked.

"It would be rude to enter without knocking," he said. At her raised eyebrows, he gently tapped her nose. "Plus, the Time Agents are known to be a bit trigger happy and I would rather enter in peace."

There was static heard in the TARDIS before a female voice with a thick Irish accent spoke. "Unauthorised spacecraft, you are now in the air zone of Gerron Alpha. State the name of your ship, the names of passengers and your purpose for the visit."

The Doctor grinned as he spoke into the microphone. "This is the good ship TARDIS. Two passengers onboard. The Doctor and Miss Rose Tyler. We are on a mission for the Time Lords of Gallifrey and come bearing a proposition."

There was silence on the other end before the Irish voice spoke. "Authorised Spacecraft, TARDIS. You have permission for entry. Kindly land in docking bay Zeta."

"See," the Doctor said smugly to Rose. "It's my fantastic diplomatic skills."

Rose snorted. "Yeah, we'll see," she said. She'd frankly heard enough of his diplomatic skills. Those usually got them thrown in prison or sentenced to execution.

He glared at her for that remark but his lips were twitching as he fought a smile. "Enough laughter at my expense," he said, pulling a lever. "Landing, now!"

~

Josie Kilburn was a pureblood human. Her ancestors came from Earth and she had managed to trace her bloodline right back to the Londoners of the twenty first century. She was only 25 and the youngest Time Agent on the base at Gerron Alpha.

Her usual job was assisting the official medic on base. However with recent events, she had been hastily promoted to being in-charge of the medical bay. As pleased as she was with the promotion, she wished it had been under better circumstances.

"Josie?" the Captain asked as he entered her office. "Any progress?" he asked.

He did that every day. Josie had been quite certain that no Captain was capable of caring much for his unit but that had been before she had met Captain Jack Harkness. He had arrived only three years ago, after he had lost his whole team in a mission gone horribly wrong. Their own base captain had been killed on mission just weeks prior, so Captain Jack's arrival had been met with general happiness.
Well, Josie amended, by most of them. Perry was still bitter about being passed over for a promotion in favour of the new Captain. Personally, Josie felt that Jack was a much better leader than Perry would ever be. Jack was flirty and a bit mischievous but he was immensely kind and treated all of his crew like his family.

Perry, on the other hand, had a tendency to bend rules far too much in his own favour and he cared about nothing but himself and his band of idiots who followed him.

The past three years had gone from bad to worse. The base politics were in full play, Perry was still hoping to be Captain, their resources were drying out, the Agency was almost dead and most of their Agents were...well...

"No change, Captain," Josie said, wishing she could give him a different answer.

He smiled at her and ruffled her hair affectionately. "It's alright, kiddo," he said, his blue eyes kind and twinkling. "You're doing your best."

Josie smiled and busied herself with lab results. She caught sight of Jack's reflection in the screen of her scanner and frowned as she saw all the merriment gone from his face. He looked very tired and very worried as he stared into the medical ward through the glass. She wished there was something she could do for him.

Before she had a chance to even think of anything appropriate to say, his communicator pinged.

"Gaea, what is it?" Jack asked.

"Unauthorised vehicle in the air zone, Captain," Gaea's thick Irish accent came over the communicator. "Say they're from Gallifrey. Time Lords."

Josie felt her mouth fall open. Time Lords? For real? She had been taught about them when she had first joined the Agency but it was widely known that they kept their distance from the Agency and well, all sorts of interfering really. Why would they come here now?

Evidently the Captain was thinking the same, for a worried expression crossed his handsome face. "Their purpose?" he asked sharply.

"They're saying they have a proposition," Gaea answered.

Josie saw Jack hesitate for only one second before he answered Gaea. "Authorise their entry. Ask them to land near docking bay Zeta," he ordered. As an afterthought, he added, "Send Slade as backup."

"Yes, Captain," Gaea said.

Jack turned to Josie. "Josie, you and I will greet the Time Lords. Let me do all the talking. Understand?" he asked, his eyes deadly serious.

"Yes, Captain," Josie said.

"Captain," they heard Slade in the doorway of Josie's office. "What am I doing?"

"Slade, you're staying near the docking bay but out of sight. If they're hostile, alert Gaea and come help us," Jack ordered. "But not before. Time Lords aren't known to be inherently violent."

"Sure thing, Cap," Slade said.
"Come on, Josie," Jack said and Josie followed Jack quickly as they approached the docking bay. The ship hadn't landed but a moment later, Josie saw a blue box slowly materialising in and out of existence with a slow, wheezing sound.

"Is that...?" Josie asked Jack in a low voice.

"A time capsule, yes," Jack nodded.

Josie realised that he was trying very hard to keep the awe out of his voice. She couldn't blame him. Time Lords were the stuff of legends and it wasn't every day that you got to meet one of them, not even for a Time Agent.

The box became completely solid and Josie waited for the cloaking to kick in, but apparently the box didn't have a cloaking device or it was faulty since it remained as a blue Police box. Whatever Police Boxes were supposed to be.

The doors of the box opened and the Captain drew out his weapon, pointing it straight at the doors. Josie's hand was firmly on her sidearm but she didn't draw it.

"Don't shoot," said a male voice with a posh old Earth English accent. A moment later, a very handsome man with long curly brown hair emerged from the box. He was followed by a very pretty blonde girl and both of them were holding their hands up to their sides as signs of surrender.

Josie realised that her mouth had fallen open yet again. Whatever she had been expecting, this hadn't been it. The two oddly dressed people did not resemble any of the pictures she had seen of Time Lords. In fact, unless shock was clouding her knowledge of history, she was quite sure that their clothes were from the Edwardian era of Earth. Yes, she realised. With his trousers, vest, cravat and green velvet frock coat, and her long white gown, they were indeed dressed as per the fashion of the Edwardian era.

"Hello," the man said cheerfully, though he had a wary eye on the Captain's gun.

"Are you Time Lords?" Jack asked as if he was finding the idea a bit odd to comprehend.

"Well, I am," the man said. "I am known as the Doctor. This is my friend Rose," he said, gesturing to the blonde girl who smiled nervously. "She is human."

This only served to confuse Josie but to her astonishment, the Captain holstered his weapon. "Captain..." Josie said.

"It's alright, Josie," Jack said and Josie relaxed slightly as Jack approached the two strangers.

"Captain Jack Harkness," he said flirtatiously, offering his hand to Rose.

She blushed wildly and shook his hand. "Rose Tyler," she said.

"Nice to meet you, Rose Tyler," he said, kissing the hand that he was holding.

Josie observed this quietly and was surprised as the Time Lord's gaze darkened slightly at the action. However, it was gone the second Rose's hand left Jack's.

"So, what brings the two of you here?" Jack asked them, all professional now.

Josie had an insane urge to giggle immaturity as she realised that despite his professional demeanour, Jack was looking at the Doctor and Rose as if he couldn't decide whom he fancied
more. And honestly, she couldn't blame him. They were both insanely attractive.

As much as she tried to hide her amusement, a giggle slipped out and the Doctor and Rose turned to her. "Dr. Josie Kilburn," she introduced herself. "I'm the base medic."

"How do you do, Dr. Kilburn?" the Doctor asked charmingly.

"Just fine, thank you," she answered but her eyes swivelled to Rose eagerly. "If I may ask, what era are you from?" At Rose's astonished look, Josie clarified hastily. "My ancestors come from Earth so I'm very curious."


Josie nodded quickly, abashed. "Yes, Captain," she said meekly.

"I'm from the 21st century," Rose answered her. "London."

Josie's eyes lit up but she merely nodded and tried to curb her excitement. Jack turned to the Doctor. "Your purpose stated that you come bearing a proposition. What did you mean by that?" he asked.

"Just that, as a matter of fact," the Doctor said. "I am here on the behalf of the Time Lords of Gallifrey to offer you employment with the Celestial Intervention Agency," he said, taking out the silver scroll out of his pocket.

Josie gasped in surprise but Jack's face hardened. "Why?" he asked.

"If you read the contract, you will find out," the Doctor said pleasantly.

Jack took the contract but didn't open it. "You want to employ us? Do you even know how many of us there are?" he asked.

"That's an odd question," the Doctor remarked. "But judging from the size of this base I should say there are at least fifty of you."

Jack snorted and turned to Josie. "Show them," he said.

"Are you sure, Captain?" she asked him.

At his nod, Josie beckoned the Doctor and Rose to follow her. The two of them exchanged confused looks but followed her with Jack trailing behind them. Josie led them to her office, made them stand near the glass overlooking the medical ward and turned on the lights.

She heard two sharp gasps from the two visitors as they took in the sight. The medical ward was a massive chamber filled with rows after rows of medical beds and examination tables. Each bed had a patient lying on it, alive and breathing but not conscious. Every few patients were connected to a life support mechanism. It was deadly quiet with only the light beeping of machines and the light breathing of the unconscious patients to fill the silence.

"How...how many are there?" Rose asked slowly.


"What's wrong with them?" the Doctor asked, his eyes fixed upon the ward in horror.

"We don't know," Josie said. "The illness struck six months ago, infecting almost every base of the Time Agency. This is the last base and there are only eight more people here, including Jack and
"So, you see," Jack said, looking at the shocked faces of the visitors. "It isn't quite as straightforward as you think."

"I am inclined to agree," the Doctor murmured, at last. This certainly changed things. He was positive that the Agency, Narvin and Romana had no idea about this.

His quiet introspection was disturbed by a barrage of footsteps which came to a halt right outside Josie's office.

"Are these the Time Lords?" the man demanded, his weapon drawn out and pointed at them.

"Stand down, Perry," Jack ordered as the Doctor instinctively pulled Rose behind him.

"Sorry, Captain," he said sarcastically, his weapon holding steady. "I am relieving you of your duty."

"Just what do you gain to achieve now, Perry?" Jack asked, in a long suffering tone.

"Ransom," Perry said. "The Time Lord and his pretty companion would make valuable bargaining chips," he said with an ugly smile towards them. He cocked his weapon and pointed it at Jack. "Have I made myself clear?" he asked, mockingly.

"Perry..." Jack sounded urgent now, as he realised that this wasn't one of Perry's usual hissy fits. The man had truly and completely lost his mind. "Listen to me..." but his words were cut off as a loud shot rang through the air.
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Rose screamed as Perry fell to the ground, blood spurting from his shoulder. Slade, having stayed out of sight before, had fired the shot and wounded Perry. Jack acted quickly by kicking the gun away from Perry's hand.

"Throw him in a holding cell," Jack ordered Slade, nudging Perry with the tip of his boot.

"Yes, Captain," Slade said as he dragged a howling Perry up.

"Shouldn't he get medical help?" Rose asked, still looking very pale.

"It's just a flesh wound," Slade said. "He can deal with it on his own."

"You can't be serious," Rose said, sounding furious.

"In case you didn't notice, your Ladyship," Slade snarled. "He just tried to kill you," he pointed out, glaring at her.

"That does not mean you should let him bleed to death," Rose said, refusing to back down.

Slade gave an exasperated sigh and looked at Jack for help. To his enormous surprise, Jack was smiling at Rose as if he never had seen anything quite like her. "I would do as she says, Slade," Jack said.

"Yes, Captain," Slade said sulkily. "Come on, you," he said, pulling Perry away.

"Josie, go down to the holding cell and treat Perry for his wound," Jack said. "Be careful, though."

Josie nodded hastily. "Yes, Captain," she said, gathering her bag and leaving her office quickly.

Rose's anger dimmed and she smiled at Jack. "Thanks," she said.

"You were right," he said, smiling back at her. His attention moved to the Doctor who was frowning over the results on Josie's desk. "Something interest you, Doc?" he asked.
"Yes and don't call me 'Doc'," said the Doctor, not even looking up from the screen.

"Fine, do your thing," Jack said. "I have to go back up to the rest of my team. See how far this mutiny goes and I'll read the contract too."

"Good," said the Doctor.

Jack winked at Rose and with a jaunty smile, left the two of them.

"Captain Jack Harkness," Rose said slowly. "He seems nice," she said. "Smart and a good leader."

"I doubt his name's Jack Harkness, Rose," the Doctor said. "Time Agents have aliases upon aliases."

Rose shrugged, unbothered. "He seems like a good bloke, that's all," she said. "Handsome, too."

The Doctor sniffed but didn't deign to reply. "Come and take a look at this," he said, turning the terminal screen towards her.

Rose squinted at the screen in confusion. "What is that?" she asked, looking at the weirdly shaped, cream coloured blobs moving in red, around the screen.

"It's the blood sample of one of the affected Time Agents," he said. "Do you see it?"

"What exactly am I meant to be seeing?" Rose asked.

"Here, perhaps this will help," he said, typing rapidly so that the screen split in two. "This is a normal blood sample of a human from this era."

"The blobs are less in number and they're smaller," Rose observed, looking at the unaffected sample.

"Very good," the Doctor nodded. "The blobs, as you said, are a particular type of protein called ST-3," he explained. "It's mostly dormant and is unnoticed in most human bodies, so much so that its presence wasn't even discovered until the 58th century."

"But we're only in the 52nd century," Rose pointed out.

"Just because it wasn't discovered, doesn't mean it wasn't there," he said. "The illness is actually just an enlargement of those proteins affecting the central nervous system."

"What caused it?" Rose asked. "If it has been dormant for all these years..."

"Time travel," he said, grinning at her. "Time Agents use something called a vortex manipulator to travel through time and space. It's basically like a teleport bracelet which means they travel without a capsule. There are several side effects of that, you know. Terrible for your health."

"So, it's basically just a side effect of time travel?" Rose asked, incredulously.

"Yes," the Doctor nodded. "Simple, isn't it?"

"Do you have a cure?" she asked.

"I do," he said. "It's a simple enough remedy. They should have the materials on base and Josie will be perfectly qualified to prepare it."
"Prepare what?" Josie asked as she returned, having caught the last part of their conversation.

"Is he okay?" Rose asked, at once. "The bloke who was shot."

"Perry, yes," Josie nodded. "He'll live. Have you found anything?"

"Yes," the Doctor said quickly before Rose could. "It's a rare disorder and I have a remedy that you can whip up. Here's a list of things you need," he said scribbling them down on a piece of paper and giving it to Josie.

Josie took the list and stared at him, impressed. "I was gone for twenty minutes," she said. "How could you have worked it out? I have been working on it for six months."

"I'm just that brilliant," he said. "Those solutions, please," he nodded at the list.

"Yes, yes, of course," Josie said eagerly. "I'll be right back."

"You lied to her," Rose said as soon as Josie had left.

"I couldn't tell her about a protein that wouldn't be discovered for 600 more years," he said. "When she comes back, ask her to follow these instructions to make the solution which then has to be injected into every patient," he said, writing down the instructions carefully and handing them to Rose.

"Where are you going?" Rose asked.

"To talk to the Captain," he said. "Stay with Josie and make sure every patient gets the cure."

Rose nodded. "You be careful," she said, trying not to sound as worried as she was.

"I'm always careful," he protested.

"That isn't comforting," Rose said.

He smiled and tapped her nose lightly. "I'll be back before you know it. The solution will work just fine and if they sign the contract, the CIA can clean up."

"Kay," Rose said, smiling softly.

He grinned at her and left the office, just as Josie returned. "So," she said, looking at Rose eagerly. "Let's get this started."

~

"So, did you read it?" the Doctor asked Jack.

"I did," Jack answered.

"And?" the Doctor prompted.

"Don't get me wrong, it's a great offer," Jack said.

"But?" the Doctor asked.

"It's far too great an offer," Jack said. "The Time Lords aren't exactly known to favour other time travellers."
"We have a new President," the Doctor said. "I believe that if anyone is capable of changing things, it would be her."

"So, she and the CIA are willing to offer us proper employment. Proper missions, access to time capsules, and a fair pay on top of it," Jack said, his voice betraying his disbelief.

"I understand your cynicism and your hesitance," the Doctor said. "But times are evolving. Gallifrey has tried to stay out of it but we garner our usual share of trouble. Alliances count, Captain."

"You do realise that if we accept, the CIA basically has an army of Time Agents?" Jack asked.

"Yes," the Doctor said. "Like I said, allies."

Jack considered the Doctor thoughtfully and then nodded slowly. "Personally, I will be willing to accept. But you have 400 other Agents to convince."

"You're the Captain of the last remaining Agency," the Doctor said. "Give them a choice. If they sign on, they're hired. If they don't wish to, they are free to go. But the Time Agency ceases to exist the minute you agree to the contract."

Jack nodded gravely. "Fine," he said. "Are you sure your cure will work?"

"Positive," the Doctor said. "Rose and Josie are reviving them as we speak."

Jack picked up the contract and met the Doctor's eyes. The Doctor stared back unwaveringly. With an acknowledging nod, Captain Jack Harkness picked up an energy signature pen and signed the contract.

~

"So, you really are from the 21st century?" Josie asked as they injected patient #173.

"Yeah," Rose nodded. "2005, to be precise."

"The last I know of my ancestors was from the year 2014," Josie confided. "I have always been fascinated by Earth history, you know."

Rose smiled at her enthusiasm. "Why did you study medicine then? I should think that the Time Agency needed historians too," she said.

"They do," Josie said as they moved to patient #174. "Or, did anyway. But my parents wanted me...

"Ah," Rose said, nodding in understanding.

"They didn't approve of me joining the Agency but I guess they took solace in the fact that at least I was a medic," she confided. "What about you? What did your parents want for you?" she asked Rose.

"My dad died when I was young," Rose said.

"Oh, I'm sorry," Josie said at once.

Rose smiled. "Thanks. Anyway, it's just my mum and me. She just wanted me to stay in school and earn my keep, I suppose. No demands for a fancy degree. Didn't want me getting airs and graces,
she used to say."

Josie smiled back comfortably. "She can't complain, can she?" she asked. "You're working with Time Lords."

"Well actually, I'm just travelling with the Doctor," Rose said. "He's just running this errand for a friend."

Josie seemed like she had more questions but she nodded back and returned to treating the next patient. "Rose," she said. "I have run out of syringes. Could you fetch a few more from my office? They're in a box underneath the terminal."

"Sure," Rose said and left the medical ward to go to Josie's office. She found the right box and pulled it out, laying it on top of Josie's desk. It was sealed shut so she started to look around for a box cutter or a knife of some sort.

She was just rifling through the drawers when she felt a gun press into her back. "Don't move," the voice hissed at her. "And don't make a sound."

Rose hardly dared to breathe as she recognised Perry's voice. "How...how did you get out?" she asked.

"Shut up," he hissed, pressing the gun more insistently into her back. "Stand up straight and start leading."

"To where?" Rose asked, wondering if she should scream.

"The time capsule that you and the Time Lord came in," he said. "Come on, move!"

Rose nodded quickly and started walking slowly towards the docking bay where the TARDIS was. "What do you want with it?" she ventured bravely.

"I'll sell it or keep it for myself," Perry snapped. "What's it to you?"

Rose felt an immense amount of anger at his attitude towards the TARDIS. The anger surprised her. Since when had she become protective of the TARDIS? She didn't have a chance to ponder long as the TARDIS came into view. Absently, she wondered if Josie had noticed that she had been gone a while. She dearly hoped she called the Doctor or Jack.

"Get it open," Perry hissed to her.

"It's locked," Rose said.

She felt Perry laugh before his hand grasped her throat, making her gasp in pain. "There is a chain around your neck," he hissed. "Is it the key?"

Rose could hardly breathe as his grip on her throat tightened. She nodded quickly as tears sprang into her eyes from pain.

"Good," he said, releasing his hold.

Rose gasped sharply, trying to gulp in more air into her lungs. She reached for the chain around her neck and pulled out the key. Her hand shook as she tried to insert it into the lock.

"Hurry!" he said, jamming the gun painfully into her spine.
Rose winced at the pain and the key slipped from her hand, falling to the floor.

"Pick it up," he ordered.

Rose was about to, when she got an idea. It was instinctive and she didn't have time to consider its merits but as she bent down, she swung her elbow to hit Perry right below his belt. He howled in pain as the gun dropped from his hand. Rose turned around and punched him squarely on the nose, wincing when there was a loud cracking sound. Adrenaline wouldn't let her know if it was her fist or his nose that was broken.

She wasted no time in stomping on his foot and kicking his knee as she had learned in that one odd self-defence class that Shareen had dragged her to. She was about to go for the gun when she remembered that he was injured from the bullet from before.

She turned back around and punched the bandaged wound, making him fall backwards and scream loudly. Knowing that he was in too much pain, Rose dived for the fallen gun. She was surprisingly calm as she picked it up and pointed it at his head.

"Don't move," she ordered sharply, trying not to flinch from the pain in her hand. Maybe she had broken it after all.

"Kill me then," Perry snarled.

"I'm not going to kill you," Rose said, her hand surprisingly steady.

They could hear footsteps coming closer and Perry glared at Rose. "Last chance to kill me, pretty," he taunted. "You do not want me alive and hunting for you."

"You'll have to get through him first," she said, nodding over his shoulder towards the Doctor who had arrived there with Jack.

Jack drew out his weapon at once and pointed it at Perry. "Don't move," he ordered sharply. "Rose, there are handcuffs in my coat."

"Here, use these," the Doctor said, pulling out a pair from his coat and handing them to Rose.

"Hmm, the Turbo 65 model," Jack commented as Rose cuffed Perry. "Nice choice," he grinned at the Doctor.

"Not a chance, Captain," the Doctor said and Rose's mouth fell open when she realised that Jack had been flirting.

The Doctor almost laughed at the look on her face. "They're 52nd century people, Rose," he said. "They're just flexible."

Rose laughed in sheer disbelief but jumped when the Doctor walked up to her quickly and lifted up her chin. "You have bruises," he said, looking at her neck.

"Yeah and probably a broken hand," Rose said, trying not to wince. She had been able to hide it pretty well up until that point.

A muscle twitched in the Doctor's jaw as he turned his furious gaze on Perry. Rose quickly noticed the tense set of his shoulder and grabbed his hand with her unbroken one.

"Doctor, it's okay," she murmured slowly.
"I'm fine," she said quickly. "Let's go back to the TARDIS."

"You are welcome to use our medical ward," Jack said in concern. "Josie can treat you."

"No, Josie is busy with the revival," Rose said. "The TARDIS will be fine." She wanted to get the Doctor away from Perry. It would not bode well for Perry if he remained in the Doctor's sight any longer.

The Doctor looked like he was about to argue but then sighed and nodded. "Fine," he said and turned back to Jack. "The CIA will be here shortly. They'll help you clean up and revive the others," the Doctor said. "Talk to Narvin and give him the contract."

"Yes sir," Jack said, saluting him. "And thank you, both of you," he said.

"Thanks, Jack," Rose smiled. "It was very nice meeting you."


"It may not be goodbye, Captain," the Doctor said as he picked up Rose's fallen key and used it to open the TARDIS doors. "Perhaps we shall run into each other again."

"I hope so," Jack smiled. "See you two in hell."

Rose grinned and even the Doctor managed a weak smile before the two of them retreated into the TARDIS. With a low grinding noise, the TARDIS disappeared from Gerron Alpha.
Interlude: As We Are

Rose stared at the lavender walls of her room idly, her brain whirring with so many thoughts that she was positive she could hear the noise. She groaned and dragged a pillow over her head. She just wanted her brain to shut up for some time.

The TARDIS hummed soothingly around her and Rose smiled involuntarily. The ship was oddly comforting to her. Whenever she went back to her mum's, she became restless without the hum of the TARDIS. Up until some time ago, she would have considered time spent travelling with the Doctor as reprieve from her life but that was changing now.

Her life with the Doctor felt more real than nineteen years of her life in London. It was odd but in a matter of months, her life had tilted on its axis and left her spinning. But it was the good kind of spinning, like executing a perfect pirouette or performing a flawless somersault. Rose snorted at the thought. She was starting to sound like the Doctor. The man was like a walking poetry anthology.

She frowned at her last thought. It was an oddly fitting simile for the Doctor. Like a poem, you had to dig deep to find out if he meant something else or it was just him going off on tangents. The man was an enigma. So far, she had avoided lingering too much over it.

She had tried to chalk it up to him being an alien, or a member of a higher species or even the fact that he was just a man. Neither explanation would justify the Doctor's behaviour. That was what all her thoughts were about. She knew she should confront him, just ask for a straight answer.

But they didn't do that. They had mad adventures and then drank tea. That's it. No talking about feelings, no discussing all those moments when they would get too close. But that had changed. Their most recent visit to Gallifrey had brought up all the unanswered things that had been brushed aside before.

Irving Braxiatel, the Doctor's brother. Hadn't he said that he had no family anymore? Rose had been slightly hurt at being lied to but in all fairness, it had been right when they had met so she wouldn't have expected him to tell her the truth. Besides, it was his personal business and as much as Rose wished he would trust her, he had a right to keep it from her.

What couldn't be justified was the business with the timelines, whatever they were. Apparently, the Doctor had known along that there was something different about her if what she had gleaned from Braxiatel's words was correct. There was something wrong with her, the Doctor knew what it was and he had kept it from her.

Rose stood up, anger and hurt overriding her logic as she strode out of her room and went in search of the Doctor. She found him in the library, talking to Jasper in a low voice. She almost smiled at the adorable scene before remembering that she was mad at him. But coming face to face with him, her resolve faltered. How would she even start?

"Rose?" he asked, startling her slightly. "Why are you awake?"

Rose remembered that the TARDIS was still in the night cycle but she just shrugged past it. "Couldn't sleep," she said shortly, sitting down on the armchair opposite his. Jasper immediately abandoned his shoulder for Rose's knee. She smiled and stroked his furry head gently. Jasper stayed there for a few moments before flying off again.

"Are those bruises still bothering you?" the Doctor asked in concern.
Rose looked confused but then the memory of Perry squeezing her throat rose in her mind. She flinched slightly and shook her head. The Doctor had fixed them almost immediately after they had left the Time Agency and her throat wasn't even sore anymore.

"Well, that's good," the Doctor smiled pleasantly.

"What are timelines?" Rose blurted out, not even caring how odd her question must sound. She was really, really tired of brushing things off. If it was something concerning her, she needed to know.

The Doctor looked a bit shocked which was smoothed down a split second later, making Rose scowl. He was not going to make this easy. "Why do you ask?" he asked and Rose detected caution in his tone.

"Well, I figured I'd just ask why exactly I baffle your people," she said, her voice heavy with sarcasm.

"It's nothing to worry about, Rose," he said, with an easy smile.

"Tell me what they are," Rose said, her voice hardening. He was treating her like a child and she'd had it.

"It's not exactly easy to explain," he said.

"Oh right, 'cos I'm just a stupid kid from London, is that it?" Rose demanded angrily.

"Rose, Rose, Rose," he said rapidly. "That's not what I'm saying."

"Then what is it?" Rose demanded. "Whatever they are, they affect me somehow, yeah? I have to know."

"Rose, I wish I could..." the Doctor said.

"Just tell me." Three words spoken not in a scream but in a calm voice full of hurt.

"Please."

The Doctor sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose. "Alright," he said. "I might regret this. But I'll tell you."

Rose nodded slowly. "Go on then..."

"Every person is surrounded by possibilities. Things that they might choose. Different paths that they might take. Do you follow?" he asked. At her nod, he continued. "Every possibility surrounding a person is a single timeline. Time Lords can see these timelines because we exist across all dimensions."

"So, when you see the future of the people..." Rose said, trying to make sense of his words.

"I am just reading their timelines," he nodded. "Sometimes the person is shrouded by timelines, sometimes they are only surrounded by only a few strands."

"Right, so what's wrong with me then?" she asked.

"There's nothing wrong with you, Rose," he said at once. "No, I am telling you the truth," he continued before she could protest. "The baffling thing is that your timelines are incredibly difficult to see."
"Difficult? How?" Rose asked.

"You're a mystery, Rose," the Doctor said with a wry smile. "A timeline can be read to see the future or the past but in your case, even the more experienced Time Lords can only catch short glimpses. You, my dear Rose, are completely unique."

"Unique rhymes with freak for a reason, you know," Rose said, smiling bitterly.

"You are not a freak, Rose," the Doctor said sternly. "I mean that." He looked like he was going to say more but stopped himself in time.

"What do you see?" Rose asked him. "You said that this incarnation of yours was more telepathic."

The Doctor looked distinctly uncomfortable as he shifted in his seat. "I, well, I can't see anything," he admitted. She didn't look as shocked as he expected, so he felt compelled to clarify. "The only timelines that can't be seen are one's own or if they are..." he closed his mouth in horror.

"What? What is it?" Rose asked immediately.

"Or if they are bound with your own," he said, turning pale.

"Well yeah," Rose said. "I travel with you so we must have the same timelines, right?" she asked.

The Doctor smiled weakly; she didn't get it. He was more relieved than anything about that. "Must be," he agreed.

Rose nodded slowly. "So, the reason why I get stared at is because they're all trying to read my timelines?" she surmised.

"Yes," the Doctor nodded.

"Could..." she cleared her throat and began again. "Could it be that there really isn't anything interesting about me?" she asked in a small voice.

To her surprise, the Doctor snorted. "I highly doubt that. You are anything but ordinary, Rose," he said with such conviction that Rose was surprised and just a bit embarrassed.

"How long have you known?" Rose asked.

"That I couldn't see your timelines?" he asked. "Ever since I met you."

Rose digested that bit of information. "So...you knew all this time. Why didn't you just tell me?" she asked. Her tone wasn't angry, but curious now.

"Honestly, I didn't want to worry you," he admitted. "I had no idea what it meant. Until we visited Gallifrey, I thought it was just me."

Rose was quiet for several moments and the Doctor observed her thoughtfully. Various emotions played out on her face but the Doctor kept silent, letting her process all of it. There was the legend of Arkytior as well. He wondered if he should tell her.

"What is it?" Rose asked him and the Doctor looked surprised. "You look as if you're trying to decide whether or not to say something."

The information about the legend of Arkytior was at the tip of his tongue but he stopped himself. He would prefer to keep that part to himself. It was enough that she was worried about her
But she had clearly caught him, so he came clean with the other thing that he knew was bothering her. "I know you think I lied when I said that I had no family on Gallifrey," he said, waiting for a reaction.

She looked surprised but then nodded. "I guessed you didn't want to tell me. Which is fine," she added hastily.

"Brax doesn't live on Gallifrey. I was as surprised to see him there as you were. He looks after his own collection of paintings and antiques on an asteroid," he said.

Rose nodded and then hesitated before asking him the next question. "Do you...is there...any other family?" she asked haltingly.

The Doctor paused and then turned his eyes to the fireplace to watch the flames dancing. "Yes," he admitted after a long moment. "My...Susan," he cleared his throat. "She's my granddaughter."

He heard her exclamation of surprise which she tried to hide. "Oh," she said, slowly. "Right."

The Doctor turned his gaze back to her. "Ask me, Rose," he encouraged. If he was opening up, then he might as well be honest.

Rose was slightly heartened by his encouragement. "What about the rest of your family? If you have a granddaughter..." Rose trailed off.

"I don't have a wife or children that I know of, if that's what you were asking," he answered honestly. "Children on Gallifrey are loomed. The parents of an offspring might never meet."

Rose looked confused. "But how could you know your granddaughter then, if you didn't know her grandmother or your child?" she asked.

"Susan was given to me at a very young age," he said slowly. "I thought it was odd since I had never volunteered my TNA for looming. I tried to trace Susan's mother or her grandmother but I never could. They simply...couldn't be found."

Rose got up and knelt next to him. "I'm sorry," she said, grasping his hand. "Did you raise Susan on your own?"

The Doctor nodded. "I was on the High Council in those days. One of the youngest Councillors. But I disagreed with them and all their policies of non-interference. One day, I'd had enough. I stormed off from the Citadel to the museum under the Capitol. To find an obsolete capsule that would just take me away from that place."

Rose rubbed his hand between hers. He smiled gratefully at her. "Susan ran after me when I stormed off," he said, his eyes far off. "Wait for me, Grandfather. I'm coming with you. "I could never refuse her. And she had no one except for me. So I took her and the capsule and ran. And I never stopped running."

"What happened to Susan?" Rose asked, wondering if he would answer.

"She grew up," he said with a sad smile. "Became a young woman who couldn't travel with her old grandfather anymore. She fell in love with a human from Earth. David Campbell. Wonderful young man. The last time I visited them, I was introduced to my third great-grandchild."
Rose smiled at that and the Doctor's smile was brighter than she had ever seen it. It diminished when he began to speak again. "I have limited time with them. Susan never went through the Academy so she will not regenerate. Just live one life with her family. I try to space my visits as far as I can to get more time with them but time is always running out."

"I'm sure she appreciates it all the same," Rose said.

He nodded. "She does. And so do David and the kids." He fell silent, lost in bittersweet memories.

Rose watched him with a look of compassion on her face. She had never expected him to divulge so much about himself. Their conversation had taken an unexpected turn. All her worries from before seemed trivial and insignificant in face of what the Doctor had revealed about himself. His mask was down, his emotions out in front of her. She wondered if he had ever told anyone else this. It didn't seem like he had.

She just stayed there in front of him, holding his hand and comforting him as much as she could. They stayed like that for a long moment, shaken by the path of trust that they had paved between them.

Finally, to her greatest surprise, the Doctor stood up and placed the most tender kiss on her forehead. Her eyes fell close involuntarily as his lips stayed against her forehead as he spoke.

"Thank you, Rose," he said. With that, he turned around and left the library in quick steps.

Rose opened her eyes and watched him go silently. She knew in her heart that they would never speak of this again. But she was fine with that. After a long time, her heart felt right.
"...and this here is the sixth swimming pool," the Doctor said, opening a door. "It's filled with Venusian nectar. Wonderful for healing sore muscles and bee stings," he told Rose.

"It's golden," Rose said in wonder as she dipped her fingers inside the pool tentatively. It was denser than water but it didn't stick to her fingers like she expected. Instead, she felt an odd tingle.

The Doctor smiled. "Come along then, let's see what else we can find," he said. Rose grinned as she took his offered hand and followed him down the hall. They had just escaped from a prison on Lixon Three where they had been arrested for the Doctor's hair. On a planet where all men were obliged to have a shaved head, the Doctor's long, curly hair had quickly found them thrown in jail. Fortunately, it had been quite easy to escape and return to the TARDIS.

The adventure hadn't been very tiring, so they had spent the past three hours exploring the TARDIS. The Doctor had shown Rose the game room, the countless bedrooms, the theatre room, a garden full of freesias, and the butterfly room which was easily Rose's favourite place now.

"Ah, here we are. The Cloister Room," he said, leading her to a magnificent cathedral-like chamber. The high ceiling and columns reminded Rose of a forbidding church. The figure eight symbol that the Doctor had explained was known as the Seal of Rassilon was carved onto numerous surfaces.

Right in the centre of the room was a sunken structure. Rose peered at it curiously.

"It's the Eye of Harmony," the Doctor explained at her curious look. "It's the power source of the TARDIS."

Rose nodded as she observed the almond shaped structure that did indeed look like a giant eye. "Is it meant to glint?" she asked. Something about that flicker seemed unnatural.

"Glint?" he asked and then looked closely at the Eye. He hadn't come back to the cloister room ever since the Master had briefly taken over his TARDIS. He shook away the memories and looked at the Eye carefully. Rose was right, there was something glinting at the side, like a tear.

He bent his head down and the glint suddenly shot straight at him. There was a bright flash and he knew no more.

_Always a final trap, my dear Doctor..._
deeply. A scent of roses and vanilla hit his senses. It briefly comforted him before he realised that his body felt like it had been through a grinder.

He blinked slowly and heard the voice exclaim. "...tor, can you hear me?"

A young blonde girl swam into focus. She was the one speaking. Her long, blonde hair was tickling his face as she bent over him. She looked worried for some reason and he wondered why that was. She was a stranger but she didn't look like she meant him harm. He opened his eyes fully and sat up.

"Are you okay?" she asked him, looking very concerned.

"I think so," he answered, his brain completely scrambled. "Who are you?" he asked her.

Rose felt her heart almost stop when she heard him ask that. He looked completely confused. "You don't know?" she asked, feeling scared.

He shook his head. "I am positive I would remember you," he said. He then frowned. "For that matter, who am I?" he asked.

Rose bit her lip in worry. "The Doctor," she said tentatively.

His eyes looked back at her innocently. "Am I the Doctor?" he asked. A series of images flashed before his eyes, too quick for him to understand and then his eyes brightened. "I am the Doctor," he said triumphantly.

"Yes," Rose said, in relief. Maybe it was just a temporary amnesia thing or something.

"You still haven't said who you are," he said, focusing his eyes back on her.

"Rose," she said. "Rose Tyler," she said, looking for any signs of recognition.

There was none. He looked genuinely regretful. "My sincerest apologies, Miss Tyler. I appear to be suffering from amnesia," he said.

Rose almost smiled at that. Even with his memory gone, he was the very picture of a gentleman. "Do you remember what happened?" she asked him, trying to jog his memory.

"I'm afraid, I don't," he answered. "What did happen?" he asked in a calm voice, like they were discussing the weather.

Rose, on the other hand, was nowhere near as calm. "You were looking at that Eye thing and there was this bright light and you fell unconscious and..." Rose gushed out.

"Slow down, Miss Tyler," he said, patting her shoulder in comfort. "Is this the Eye you were talking about?" he asked, pointing to the sunken structure.

"Yes," she said.

He nodded as he got to his feet and observed it. "I don't remember what it is," he said, frustrated with himself.

"You called it the Eye of Harmony," Rose reminded him.

"The Eye of Harmony," he repeated. Some long forgotten line from a book (or was it a person explaining it?) flashed through his mind. "It's a source!" he exclaimed.
"Yes!" Rose agreed, her eyes lighting up with excitement. "You said it is the power source of the TARDIS."

"TARDIS...TARDIS..." he muttered, wondering what that was.

"Your ship. Time and Relative Dimension in Space," Rose supplied helpfully.

He nodded as he paced about in the cloister room. "I don't remember anything else," he said, sounding aggravated. "It's just bits and pieces."

"How can we get your memory back?" Rose asked, wanting to keep him on track.

He looked at her in surprise; bewildered as to why she would want to help. "Are we friends, Miss Tyler?" he asked her.

"Yes," Rose said. "And you can call me Rose, Doctor."

He smiled. "Alright Rose, I can get my memories back. It would help to know how," he frowned.

"Should we go to Gallifrey? Romana might be able to help," Rose suggested.

"Gallifrey," he murmured, racking his brains. "Memories!" he exclaimed and then grabbed Rose's arms in excitement. "That's it!" he grinned.

"What is?" Rose asked, looking a bit worried about his sanity.

"I'm a Time Lord, aren't I?" he asked, his eyes wide with excitement.

"Yes," Rose nodded. "I don't see how that helps though."

"Oh every little bit helps," he said. "A Time Lord...is the sum of his memories," he said. The words sounded like he had spoken them before. He shook his head and focused on Rose who was looking at him anxiously. "Did I ever mention what regeneration I was in?" he asked her.

"This is your seventh regeneration, meaning your eighth body," Rose said, remembering.

He nodded and stroked his chin thoughtfully. "Then it seems that I have to travel back in time to see my previous seven incarnations," he said. "Get my memories firsthand from them, as it were."

"Is that even allowed?" Rose asked. "It's just that you said that timestreams shouldn't be crossed or something."

"Honestly, I don't see another way," the Doctor said thoughtfully. "And I do suppose this would be construed as an emergency. Exceptional circumstances, shall we say."

Rose nodded. "Okay, let's go then," she said.

He looked surprised again. "You're coming with me?" he asked her.

She nodded firmly. "You haven't got your memories. I'm not letting you out alone," she said, her tone leaving no room for argument.

He felt a rush of gratitude towards her. He didn't particularly want to admit that he needed help. But she had offered without him asking. For that, he was grateful.

"How do you suppose we will we get there?" he asked her. "It has to be a right point in time, you
"The TARDIS," Rose answered. "Do you remember how to fly her?"

He nodded, a bit unsure. "I'm sure I can. Let's find out, shall we?"

~,~

Turns out, that he did know how to fly the TARDIS. Or maybe the TARDIS was flying herself. The Doctor still looked thoroughly confused. The TARDIS stopped and the Doctor looked at Rose. "We should go out now, correct?" he asked her.

"No, wait," Rose said. She walked over to the lever that she knew made the TARDIS ceiling transparent so that they could see what was outside. The Doctor gasped as the ceiling vanished and they were looking at snow falling softly.

Rose walked over to the small scanner to see where they had arrived. Plain of Pamir, Earth. 1289 A.D. She hadn't heard of it but then again, it might simply have been renamed by the time it was 2005.

"You're familiar with the place?" the Doctor asked curiously as he watched her stare at the scanner.

"It's my planet but not a place that I recognise," she said. "It's centuries before I was born."

He nodded absently. "We should go outside then?" he asked.

Not used to him being so unsure, Rose merely nodded. She hesitated slightly but then slipped her hand into his as the doors opened. He looked very surprised at her actions but instead of pulling away, he squeezed her hand gratefully.

"How will we know your younger self?" Rose asked.

"I'm not entirely sure," he said. "I have no idea what I look like right now either."

"We'll get you to look in a mirror once we go back to the TARDIS," Rose said as they stepped out into the wintry tundra. Rose was thankful for the big fluffy white coat that had appeared at the coat rack near the door. Thanking the TARDIS silently, she pulled it tighter around herself. The Doctor seemed unperturbed by the cold as per usual. He did turn around briefly to look at the blue police box.

They heard a hush of voices and Rose pulled him behind some rocks. They spotted a man and a woman walk away, and Rose nudged the Doctor. "Is that you?" she asked in a low voice, pointing to the man.

"No, I don't believe so," he said, frowning at the man's back.

"Right. Come on," Rose said to the Doctor. "We need to look for you then."

The Doctor nodded and led her in the opposite direction from that of the two people. Rose felt her spirits rise as she spotted the familiar TARDIS in the distance.

The blue was slightly different and the doors looked different too, but it was undoubtedly the TARDIS.

There was an elderly man kneeling in the snow, keenly observing the ground. When he heard them approach, he looked up. It happened so quickly that Rose was stumped. The moment that the
elderly man looked at the Doctor and Rose, the snow stopped falling around them, like the three of them were in some sort of a bubble.

"What on Earth are you doing?" the elderly man demanded as he stood up. His face was pulled into an admonishing scowl and his severe dress sense made Rose feel like she had been sent to the principal's office.

"Are you the Doctor?" Rose asked him, hoping she didn't sound as shocked as she felt. He looked nothing like the Doctor she knew.

"Indeed, I am," he said, drawing himself up in a manner so similar to the Doctor beside her that Rose did a double take. His quick blue eyes flashed between Rose and the older Doctor. "And who might you be young lady?"

Before Rose could answer, the younger older Doctor cleared his throat. "We need to make contact," he told his younger self.

"We do, do we?" he demanded. "Is it relevant to why I can't reach your mind?"

"I have lost my memories," the Doctor said. "I do believe that regaining them through myself would be the best way to resolve the issue."

The first Doctor made a noise of contempt. "I hope you know how reckless this was, young man," he grumbled but then closed his eyes. "Contact," he said.

The Doctor closed his eyes and said "Contact." Ten seconds later, both the Doctors opened their eyes. The Byronic Doctor smiled slightly.

"How are you feeling?" Rose asked him in concern.

"Better," he said. "I remember my youth now." He looked at his younger self. "This is Miss Rose Tyler. She is helping me get my memories back."

The first Doctor looked critically at Rose, as if measuring her up. "You have a difficult task ahead of you, young lady," he said. "I do hope you will be able to cope with it."

"I will be," Rose said firmly and a contemplative gleam appeared on the young Doctor's old face.

"Yes, yes, quite extraordinary. You seem to mean that," he muttered, looking keenly at her. His voice was oddly soft now, so very different from the crisp, snappy tones that he was speaking in before. His eyes flashed over to his older self clutching her hand like a lifeline and felt his eyebrows shoot up. It felt like he was missing something very important but was extremely reluctant to even try and label it. "Good luck to you, Rose," he said, his tone more or less back to before.

Rose smiled at him and the older Doctor nodded at his younger self. "We should be off then," he said.

All remaining tenderness instantly vanished from the first Doctor's face as he nodded briskly. "Very well. Off you go and try and be less of a menace. You are on the right path to discovering your memories. But remember, as you learn more about your past, so shall you learn the future," he said, a hint of warning in his voice.

The older Doctor nodded and then paused thoughtfully. "You're doing the right thing too, you know," he said to his younger self. "Ian and Barbara deserve the chance you have decided to give
"Yes, yes, well," the younger Doctor looked a bit flustered. "Don't tell me about the future. You're interfering enough as it is."

The older Doctor smiled at him and then looked at Rose. "Come along, Rose," he said.

Rose nodded and then smiled at the younger Doctor. "Goodbye, Doctor," she said, extending her hand for him to shake.

"Goodbye, my dear," he said, patting her hand lightly with both of his.

The time bubble broke as the Rose and the Doctor moved away from the first Doctor. They hurried across the snow and as they neared the rocks, Rose distinctly heard a young girl. "Oh, Grandfather. I found those two L ohs you asked for."

"Hmm, what?" the Doctor asked her. "Yes, let's see what we can do, shall we?"

~

Back in the TARDIS, Rose turned to her Doctor. "Those two people we saw before. Were those Barbara and Ian?" she asked him.

He nodded. "They were teachers of my granddaughter," he said.

"Susan," Rose nodded. "It was her that we heard as we were leaving, wasn't it?"

He looked surprised. "I have told you about Susan?" he asked.

"Yes," Rose nodded. "What did you mean about giving Ian and Barbara a chance?"

He smiled lightly. "My younger self has very recently decided to trust them. And he was right. As I get access to my old memories, new ones are budding up slowly. I am positive I would never regret trusting Ian and Barbara," he said.

Rose grinned. "Okay then, one down. Six more to go. Let's go and meet your second self, yeah?"
Chapter Notes

The Doctor and Rose meet his Second and Third self. The Second Doctor is set during 'The War Games' and Third Doctor at the end of 'The Sea Devils'.

Previously

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Rose grinned. "Okay then, one down. Six more to go. Let's go and meet your second self, yeah?"

The TARDIS landed with a thud and Rose pulled the lever again. It showed a normal enough sky outside and it was almost dusk. "What does the scanner say?" Rose asked the Doctor.

"It's malfunctioned. It won't say anything," he said, sounding frustrated again. He hit the scanner twice and then yelped when his hand burnt.

"Don't worry. The scanner malfunctions sometimes," Rose assured him, trying not to giggle. "And don't hit the TARDIS. She likes her little revenges."

He nodded, shaking his hand to get it to cool. He was about to head towards the doors when he caught sight of himself in one of the mirrors resting near the fireplace. Intrigued, he examined his curly hair and the high cheekbones of his face.

He was young; much younger than his first self had been. He turned his head this way and that, observing the contours of his face. It was quite a pleasant look, he imagined.

"Oi, Doctor!" Rose called. "If you're done admiring yourself, we should go and meet your second self."

He blushed lightly and then nodded. "Yes, yes, you're quite right, Rose. Let us go outside."

~

"Madam President," the technician bowed.

"What is it?" Romana asked.

"It's the Doctor, my lady," the technician said. "He's crossed his own timeline."

Romana raised her eyebrows. "You'd better elaborate," she said.

"Yes, my lady. He has made contact with his first self and is now very close to meeting his second self," the technician answered.
Romana hid her smile. "Never mind," she said. "The Doctor has permission for this."

The technician looked uncomfortable but nodded at the President's words. "As you wish, my lady."

"Keep an eye on his timeline, nevertheless," Romana said. "You'll report only to me. Understand?"

"Yes, Madam President," the technician bowed.

Romana nodded as the technician left. She knew what this was, of course. She just hoped that the Doctor got his memories back properly.

~

The TARDIS had landed them on a steep hill. The Doctor looked around, trying to understand what part of the universe they were in.

"There's a path down there. Maybe we should just follow it," Rose suggested.

He nodded. "We should hurry up and find myself. It will get dark soon," he said.

The two of them hurried down the path, searching for any sign of the Doctor's second self.

"What's that coming towards us?" Rose asked, pointing straight ahead.

"I'm not sure," the Doctor said.

The two of them peered through the growing darkness and saw a chariot draw up to them. The Roman soldier driving it stopped and looked at them in surprise.

"Hail!" the Doctor saluted, apparently on instinct.

"Are you a Roman citizen, sir?" the soldier asked, looking between him and Rose.

"Indeed," the Doctor nodded. "I am an Imperial Legate and this is my lady. I am on a tour of inspection."

The soldier stood up and clashed his sword on his breastplate in salute. The Doctor returned the salute, much to Rose's astonishment.

"May I ask what the Legate and his lady is doing wandering in the hills?" the soldier asked.

"We appear to have mislaid our servants and baggage," the Doctor answered, placing a hand on Rose's to warn her to let him do the talking.

"Will you be requiring assistance, Legate?" the soldier asked.

"It won't be necessary," the Doctor said crisply. "Just point us to the way of the battle stations."

The soldier looked confused at the request. "Up the path, sir. Behind the hills," he answered.

The Doctor nodded. "Hail and farewell!"

The soldier saluted. "Hail and farewell!"

"What was all that about? And why are we actually going towards the battle?" Rose demanded.

"This isn't Earth, Rose," he said.
"But, the Romans," Rose said, confused.

"Yes and the young soldier appeared to be thinking of firing thunderbolts and vanishing wagons," he said.

"You used telepathy on the poor bloke?" Rose asked angrily.

"It just happened," he defended. "Besides the soldier appeared to be in a trance, like he had been hypnotised or more likely, brainwashed. There is something quite odd going on here, Rose. And I have a feeling that my second self is involved in some way."

They arrived closer to the battle station and Rose felt herself shaking and flinching at the sound of explosions around them. To her surprise, the Doctor let go of her hand and then put his arm around her shoulders, drawing her closer.

"Why, Rose?" he asked, sounding so passionate that Rose had to swallow the lump in her throat. "Why are there so many battles around us? Isn't it enough that life is so short and painful? Why must we fight and fight till everything beautiful in the universe is destroyed?"

As if to punctuate his words, there was a loud explosion followed by screams of dying men. Rose and the Doctor clung to each other, honestly not knowing what to do. Rose felt tears gathering in her eyes, both at the Doctor's words and at the sounds around them.

"YOU TWO!" came a shout from behind them. "Put your hands up!"

The Doctor and Rose turned around and raised their hands in surrender at the soldier who was pointing his weapon at them. Rose was horrified when she realised that she recognised his uniform. He was German soldier from World War I.

The soldier led them to an underground bunker at gunpoint. A young officer looked at them in astonishment. "I am Lieutenant Lucke of the Imperial German Forces. Who are you?" he demanded.

"I am the Doctor," the Doctor said, anger colouring his tone. "This is my friend Rose and you must be the butchers orchestrating the massacre we just witnessed."

The officer's face turned red with anger. "How dare you?" he shouted. Then as if it had just struck him, he looked wide-eyed at the Doctor. "Did you just call yourself the Doctor?"

"Yes," the Doctor answered, still glaring at him.

"There can't be two of you," he said, glaring at the Doctor. "I bet you will say your name is John Smith if I asked."

"Did you meet someone with the same name?" Rose asked eagerly. If this man knew where the second Doctor was...

"Oh, I met him alright," Lucke glared at her. "He stole my gun and ran off with the young boy and girl that he had with him."

"Ran off?" Rose asked. "Where?"

~

The Doctor stood motionless, his mind warring with the possibility of what he might have to do.
He could see the War Chief glaring at him and the remaining poor souls looking at him like he would have all the answers.

"Doctor, you mustn't call them in or it will be the end of us. They'll show no mercy," the War Chief roared.

"You stop the fighting!" the Doctor demanded, his voice rising angrily.

"Do as you're told!" Russell said, picking up a gun and point it at the War Chief.

The War Chief glared disdainfully at the Doctor, who refused to meet his eyes.

"This is the War Chief to all War Zones," he announced. "This is a command direct from the War Lord. All fighting will cease. I repeat, all fighting in the War Zones will cease. You will stand by for further orders."

The Doctor didn't relax at his words and in the next moment, he felt the unmistakeable sensation of being encased in a time bubble. He turned around and glared angrily at his young future self who was positively beaming at him.

"Oh well done," the curly-haired dandy said. "Well done, Doctor. You stopped the fighting."

The Doctor absently considered the pros and cons of strangling his future self. His companion, on the other hand, noticed his morose face. "What's wrong?" she asked. "It's over, isn't it? You stopped the fighting."

"I can't get them all home, Rose," he admitted, surprising himself. Now, why had he told her that? He wasn't sure he could tell even Jamie and Zoe.

"But there is a way, isn't it?" she guessed, her young face so compassionate that the Doctor had to swallow past the scratchiness in his throat.

He nodded. "I can call the Time Lords..."

"But that's good, isn't it?" Rose said, a bit confused now. "I know you don't like them..."

"Like them?" the Doctor demanded in astonishment. "My dear Rose, I am a fugitive in their eyes."

"He's not wrong, Rose," the velvet clad Doctor spoke at last. He looked at his second self. "Your barriers are down, the memories have caught up with me."

"But that's not true," Rose protested. "We've been to Gallifrey and I know they're a bit weird..."

"Rose, stop," the older Doctor ordered. "Do not reveal the future."

The second Doctor's eyes had gone wide. Humans weren't allowed on Gallifrey. At least not until now, they weren't. He looked at the young girl's face. There was no trace of deceit. She was telling the truth. Was she right? Would he do the right thing by calling the Time Lords?

"You'll do what is right," his older self said wisely.

"Easy for you to say," he grumbled. "It's already happened for you."

"Yes, but I have no memories of it," he said, sounding distinctly put out. "I can't help you, not when I am so much less than myself right now. But I trust myself enough to do the right thing."
"You think I should call the Time Lords," the second self guessed through the waffle his older self had wheezed out. "I suppose you are right," he conceded grumpily.

Rose had been silent the whole time but she felt her heart go out to the young Doctor. At first glance, she would have thought of him as a mad old professor with his ill-fitting black coat, the Beatles haircut and the daggy clothes. But listening to him right now betrayed his age.

He was very, very young. Like an adolescent, who knew he had done wrong and was ready to own up but scared of the consequences. Absurdly, Rose remembered the first time she had got drunk and had to sneak back home without disturbing Jackie's sleep.

While the circumstances were on a much larger scale than being on the receiving end of her mum's tongue-lashing, Rose felt she could relate to the Doctor. If only a little bit.

The older Doctor took Rose's hand. "I trust you to do the right thing," he told the second Doctor.

He nodded slowly, closing his eyes briefly. Rose patted his arm comfortingly. "I hope you will be okay, Doctor," she said.

He opened his eyes and smiled at her, his face so expressive that Rose couldn't help but beam back at him. He patted her hand like he had done the first time he had met her. "I hope so too, my dear," he said. He sighed slightly and glanced at Jamie and Zoe who were frozen around him.

"Go," he ordered his future self and Rose.

He received a nod from his future self and a smile from Rose. Then the two of them moved away as the time bubble began to fade. The Doctor sighed as Zoe turned to him. "What did he mean Doctor? Who mustn't you call?" she asked.

"The only people who can put an end to this whole ghastly business and send everyone back to their own times," the Doctor said, his mind made up. "The Time Lords."

~

"You were okay, yeah?" Rose asked nervously as the TARDIS raced through the vortex towards the Third Doctor.

He nodded absently. "Yes, I expect so. It was the right thing to do," he said, sounding convinced.

Rose wasn't as confident but she had seen firsthand that the Doctor had a lot of pull on Gallifrey. Maybe things would be fine. The TARDIS landed and Rose ran to the scanner. "London, Earth," she read. "What the hell is wrong with that?" she asked, pointing where the year on the scanner kept changing. It would start at 1970 then run all the way through 1980 and then jump back to 1970.

"The temporal meter must have shorted out," the Doctor sighed. "I'll take care of it later."

Rose nodded as they both stepped out of the TARDIS. "We're at UNIT HQ," Rose exclaimed. "Indeed we are, Rose," the Doctor agreed. "Let's go and see Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart shall we?"

"Oh," Rose said and stopped.

"Something wrong?" he asked.
"I have met him in the future," she said. "But he never gave any indication of having met me before."

"That's because you haven't met yet," the Doctor said. At Rose's look of confusion, he sighed. "It will take too long to explain. Come on."

Rose chewed her lip nervously but followed the Doctor into the HQ. She had to stifle a gasp of astonishment as a much younger Brigadier approached them.

"May I ask what you are doing here? This is a restricted facility," he said, casting a suspicious eye at them.

Rose didn't blame him. She was wearing clothes from the 36th century and the Doctor looked like a 19th century poet. She smiled winningly at the Brigadier. "We are here to see the Doctor. We're friends of his," she said in her most charming voice.

"And your names are...?" the Brigadier asked.

"I'm Rose and this is..." Rose said.

"The Doctor," the Doctor said.

"Good heavens, did you change again?" the Brigadier asked, looking at the man.

"Not quite," the Doctor answered with a pleasant smile.

The Brigadier looked thoroughly confused. "Relatives then?"

"Yes, we're very close," the Doctor answered and Rose had to stop herself from giggling.

The Brigadier seemed satisfied with the explanation. Apparently, he had noticed the similarities between the velvet clad young man before him and the velvet clad grump who was his scientific advisor and all around pain in the...ahem. "He's out chasing the Master with Miss Grant," he said. "We're expecting him back soon," he said. "You're welcome to wait in his lab."

"Thank you," Rose smiled.

The Brigadier nodded and left after casting a last confused look at the two strangers. The Doctor was observing the laboratory quietly. So, he was set up on Earth. Rose seemed to be thinking the same. "Is this the time you settled down on Earth and worked for UNIT?" she asked him eagerly.

"Must be," he said. "Wonder why I did that..." he muttered to himself. He absolutely loathed settling down. He was too impatient for that. That much he did know about himself. Maybe this incarnation lacked his usual wanderlust.

"YOU!" a sharp voice was hurled in accusation at him.

He snapped around and their minds met. Images and memories of his third life filled him. He was right. He wasn't here voluntarily, he had been exiled. Still, the people around him seemed nice. That was some comfort.

The contact ended and his third self glared angrily at him. "You have some nerve to show your miserable face to me!" he glared.

"Why? What's wrong?" Rose asked, shocked at the anger in the third Doctor's voice.
He looked at her and his face melted into a warm smile. "Forgive me, my dear. I don't mean to be angry at you, it's myself I'm angry at," he said, throwing a glare in his direction. He smiled again at Rose and took her hand. "How are you, Rose?"

Rose smiled at him. "I'm fine, Doctor. How are you?" she asked him.

He sighed in reply. "I'm not as good as I used to be, Rose. I am, well for all intents and purposes, stuck on this planet," he said.

"Why?" Rose asked him, her eyes melting in concern.

"I was exiled by the Time Lords. After I listened to the idiot over there," he said, nodding towards the older Doctor.

"They exiled you?" Rose asked, outraged. "That's ridiculous."

"Exactly my sentiment," he said, taking her hand and leading her to a seat. "Stupid and pompous the lot of them."

"I'm sorry," Rose said, feeling terrible. "I shouldn't have..."

"You couldn't have predicted what those self-important idiots would do," he said, patting her hand in comfort.

"Oh stop feeling sorry for yourself," the older Doctor snapped at his younger self. "You're surrounded by people who admire you, need you and despite everything, care for you."

"And what about me, eh?" the third Doctor stood up angrily. "Do you know how hard it is to come by new places? I am on a damn leash like a misbehaving animal."

"Spare me the self-pity," the Eighth Doctor snapped.

The Third Doctor looked ready to blow his top. "You don't get to say that," he said. "I'm only here because of you. I was going to leave but you insisted on contacting the Time Lords. And look what happened. Zoe and Jamie," he trailed off and here, the two Doctors looked sad. "And I'm exiled, by my own people."

Rose watched between the two Doctors fearfully. She wisely decided to stay out of it. How do you solve a fight between the same person anyway? This was the Doctor fighting with himself. As much as she wanted to help him, this was something he had to work out on his own.

"Look," the Eighth Doctor said in a soothing voice. "I am sorry about Jamie and Zoe. You know I am. But I'm very sure that this isn't going to last. Hang in there, old chap."

"No," the Third Doctor said. "You know what?" he asked, pulling out the Master's Tissue Compression Eliminator that he had nicked just today. "You stay here and finish my sentence. I'll take your TARDIS and go."

"Don't be a fool," the Eighth Doctor said, watching him with an air of an adult watching a child throw a tantrum. "You would never do that."

"Wouldn't I?" his younger self demanded.

"Think of the paradox it will cause. Think about Rose," his older self said rationally.

"You're already causing a paradox by being here. What's one more, eh? And I won't leave Rose
here. I'll take her with me," he said.

The Eighth Doctor sighed exasperatedly. "Put down the damn Tissue Eliminator. You don't want to kill yourself. Besides, regardless of whether or not I turned up on the planet of War Games, you would have done the same thing."

The Third Doctor faltered and lowered the tissue compressor. The Eighth Doctor's voice was calmer now, more soothing. "I know what it's like to feel like a shadow of myself. It terrifies me that at this moment I know so little about myself. But I do know enough that I wouldn't do something like this. This isn't us, Doctor."

The Third Doctor sighed mournfully and tossed the Tissue Eliminator away. "I know I won't do it," he admitted. He looked at Rose who seemed scared. "I'm sorry for scaring you like that, my dear," he said.

Rose threw her arms around him, without a second thought. This was the Doctor and he was in pain. There was no way she would turn away from that. "I'm so sorry, Doctor," she said. "But really, I promise you get to leave this stupid, boring planet and go back into time and space," she said, not caring that she was insulting her own planet in the process.

He patted her back gently and smiled. "Yes, I know," he whispered, his eyes shining with the same knowledge like her Doctor's did when he saw someone's future.

Rose smiled back at him as he brushed the tears off her face. "Tell you something else," she said. "You get to be President."

"Rose!" the Eighth Doctor grumbled. "No telling about the future!"

Rose giggled, both at him and the younger Doctor who looked horror-struck at the thought of being President. "I'll be sure to conveniently forget that little bit of information," he said.

Rose laughed at him and kissed his cheek. "See you, Doctor!" she said.

"Yes," he nodded, blushing just a bit and rubbing the back of his neck. "Goodbye, Rose."

The Eighth Doctor just nodded curtly at him and received a nod in return. He offered his arm to Rose, who took it but turned around to wave at the Third Doctor who stared after them longingly.

Back in the TARDIS, Rose wiped her tears. "Are you alright?" the Doctor asked her.

"Yeah," Rose nodded. "Sorry, just don't like seeing you so sad."

He smiled at her. He was sure by now, that maybe their relationship in the future wasn't strictly platonic or the kind that he usually had with his companions. The readiness with which their hands found each other every time was baffling to him.

Still, he shook his thoughts off. He had to see his fourth self.
The Eighth Doctor and Rose travel back in time to see the Fourth Doctor and Romana, and then the Fifth Doctor.

Four and Romana are set at the end of 'State of Decay' and Five is after 'Earthshock'.

Romana ran through the dark forest as fast as she could. Her respiratory bypass kicked in and her long, blonde hair flapped around her as she ran. Even though her perfect memory allowed her to remember the path through the woods, she couldn't ignore the feeling that she was going to get lost and the Doctor was going to die.

She was only halfway through to the village, when she heard it. Her feet came to a skidding stop, scattering dead leaves and twigs in front of her. Romana turned around in circles, looking for the place where the noise had come from.

Perhaps Adric had woken up and upon discovering both her and the Doctor missing, had decided to pilot the TARDIS. She could box the little idiot's ears for that, but right now she was more pleased than anything to see the TARDIS materialising only a few feet off her path.

She eagerly ran towards it but stopped short when the doors opened and two strangers she had never seen, stepped out of the Police Box. "Why was the TARDIS making that noise? And why couldn't we see outside?" the young blonde girl asked the man.

Romana hid behind a broad tree trunk to eavesdrop on their conversation.

"Well Rose, we appear to have left our usual universe," the man said patiently. "We're in E-space."

"Huh," the girl, Rose said. "I've heard that before. E-space, I mean."

"Have you?" the man inquired.

Romana decided that now would be a good time to reveal herself to them. "Who are you?" she demanded, determined to sound brave and not scared witless as she was.

"Romana," Rose said, her eyes lighting up in recognition.

"What? How do you know my name?" Romana asked, unnerved by the look of recognition. Had she been in a far rational state of mind, she would have understood that it was merely a Time Lord's nature to meet people in the wrong order sometimes.

"Romana, it's us," Rose said and then she stopped short. "Oh," she said. "You don't know who I am, do you?"

Romana shook her head quickly. Neither of the strangers looked like they meant her harm. Speaking of the strangers, the man had stayed quietly interested the whole time. Romana wondered briefly why he seemed familiar before her eyes widened. It was the Doctor.
"Impossible," she gasped. "You cannot cross your timeline. It is highly dangerous to interact with yourself, Doctor."

"These are exceptional circumstances," the Doctor said pleasantly. He stepped towards her and offered his hand. "I assume we are acquainted?"

Romana considered screaming in frustration but then it clicked. "Do you not know?" she asked, shocked.

"He's got amnesia," Rose explained.

"I see," Romana said. "I assume you are using telepathic link with your younger selves?" she asked him.

"Indeed," he nodded.

Romana nodded but then clapped a hand to her mouth. "The Doctor. I almost forgot. Come on," she said.

"What happened?" Rose asked as she dragged the Doctor behind her.

"There were vampires here. The King Vampire himself," Romana explained as they ran through the forest.

"Vampires?" the Doctor hissed angrily.

"They're enemies of the Time Lords, aren't they?" Rose asked, remembering what the Doctor had told her during the plasmavore incident.

Romana nodded, her breathing a bit laboured. "We managed to defeat the main three and the King Vampire too. But this coven was hidden and they lured me to their nest under false pretences," she said.

"And I followed you," the Doctor said. "They attacked me but fled before they could convert me."

"How do you know that?" Romana asked in surprise.

"As I learn more about the past, future memories start trickling in," the Doctor said. "We have to hurry."

"But you just said they fled," Rose said.

"Not before they managed to drain me of a lot of blood," the Doctor said. "And what happens next hasn't happened yet so I'm afraid I have no idea."

They reached an old rundown house and Romana stopped, catching her breath. "It's gone quiet," she said.

"Come," the Doctor beckoned as he led the way inside the dark house.

Rose and Romana followed him slowly. The house was abandoned. In the main drawing room was a long table upon which a man lay so still that he appeared dead.

Rose gasped loudly as she saw the long burgundy scarf that was tossed next to him. It was the Doctor, and he wasn't moving.
"Romana," the Eighth Doctor snapped. "Take this," he said, tossing her a heap of odds and ends from his coat.

"What should I do with these?" Romana asked, looking very distressed at the sight of the unconscious Doctor in front of them.

The Eighth Doctor was taking his coat off. "A crude mechanism for blood transfusion," he said. "Hurry now!"

Romana nodded and started setting up the equipment. The Doctor tossed his coat aside and began rolling up the sleeves of his white shirt. "Rose," he ordered. "Get the other Doctor's right arm bared."

Rose moved from her motionless position and ran over to the unconscious Doctor. She carefully pulled his right arm out of the long maroon coat. Like her Doctor he also wore a white shirt with a vest, but his vest was burgundy rather than grey. She undid his cuffs, noting the odd question mark monogram on it.

By the time she had rolled his sleeve down, Romana approached her with a needle. "I will need to insert it," Romana said.

"Your hands are shaking," Rose noted. "Should I do it?"

Romana nodded tensely and showed Rose the right spot to pierce. Rose prayed she got it right as she inserted the needles into the Doctor's arm.

~

He felt an irritating pinch on his arm and he went to swat it off but found that he couldn't move his arms. Oh, of course. He was dying. Dying men weren't allowed to move their arms. Or anything really.

Well, this would be considered a hero's death, he supposed. Killed by one of the most formidable enemies of his people. At least, it wasn't an embarrassing death.

Except, he was going to get very mad at the person who was pinching his arm and not letting him die in peace. It didn't occur to him that he was still alive. After all, the vampires had enjoyed a good feast on his blood. What made them flee was something he couldn't remember. He had lost too much blood by then.

The pinch on his arm was now feeling decidedly odd. He was also starting to become aware of voices around him. Two female voices, conversing in low voices.

"Will it work?" It was the voice that the Doctor had only heard thrice before in his life. The voice of young Rose Tyler. Before he had a chance to ponder over why he could hear her in his death, he heard Romana answer.

"I think so," she answered. She didn't sound so sure and the Doctor wished he had more strength so he could tell her off for losing confidence in herself. Romana was brilliant; she should never think otherwise.

"Why are they both unconscious though?" Rose asked. It took him a moment to identify the emotion in her voice. She was very worried.

"He's also establishing a telepathic connection," Romana answered. "The recovery process will be
sped up.”

So that's what that annoying tickle in his head was. He just thought it was because of the odd wine that Kalmar had made him sample. The mental signature of his Eighth self prodded more insistently against his own consciousness and he groaned as he let him in.

Memories of everything since the Sea Devils till now flooded into the Eighth Doctor's mind. The Fourth Doctor also started getting the feeling back in his appendages.

*Time to get up, Doctor.*

The Doctor slowly opened his eyes and smiled when the two faces swam into view. With their near identical blonde hair, the two women could have passed off as sisters. "Hello," he said, his voice still a bit hoarse.

"Oh, I could almost kill you for being so reckless," Romana said and the Doctor knew it was her way of expressing relief. "Putting yourself in harm's way like this, just to create a diversion."

"It helped you escape," he reminded her slowly, a grin appearing on his face.

Romana glared at him but he saw her lips twitch as she fought off a smile. His grin widened and then his eyes found Rose. Unlike Romana, she hadn't bothered keeping her emotions under control. There were tears streaks on her face as she smiled tentatively at him.

"Hello, Rose," he said, trying to insert cheer into his voice.

"Hello, Doctor," she said, her voice a bit high but otherwise relieved. "How are you feeling?"

"Oh, fit as fiddle," he said, at once. "All systems go!" He raised his left arm and was surprised when he saw that he had been cradling Rose's hand in his the whole time. How had he not noticed it? Must be the effect of the blood transfusion, he decided as he let go of her hand gently. The odd feeling in his gut, though, had nothing to do with blood loss.

There was a groan next to him and he turned his head to see his eighth self regain consciousness. Rose ran over to him and knelt in front of his chair. "Doctor," she said, cradling his cheek with her hand. "Can you hear me?"

He nodded slowly and his eyes met Rose's. "I'm fine, Rose," he said. Rose threw her arms around him and the Doctor held her tightly against his chest. The odd sensation in the Fourth Doctor's gut deepened.

"Let's get these needles outta you both," Rose said.

~

Romana was baffled. She was calmer now than she had been before as she helped Rose remove the needles from the Doctors' arms. And that right there, was the source of her bafflement. She had been too preoccupied to notice it before but she remembered the wide smile that Rose had given her when she had seen her in the forest before.

She had offered to help when she saw Romana was struggling without her having to ask. And she was treating her like they were old friends. Romana was confused.

Friendship was a concept that she hadn't put much stock into. In all honesty, she would consider the Doctor as the closest thing to a friend she had. Ever since her Academy days, she had trained
herself to never harbour any sort of friendship. Not that she didn't want to.

But all the mocking, snide remarks of her Academy classmates would still plague her. Perfect Romanadvoratrelundar. With her pretty hair and perfect grades. But no friends.

Romana had learned to ignore the remarks. She was smarter than them, was beautiful and had a bright future ahead of her. She never let their remarks hurt her but she never made friends either. She guarded her hearts far too well from something as fickle as friendship.

Then she was summoned by the Guardian to help the Doctor to help with the Key to Time. The man had infuriated her because he challenged her. Slowly, she had started opening up to him and found herself liking him very much. Then she regenerated and her old resentments were all but gone.

The Doctor was her friend and she admired him very much. And now it seemed that this tiny, insignificant human girl had also gained a place in her life. Perhaps in her previous form, she would not have liked the girl at all. But as it was, she found herself quite charmed by her now.

"You okay?" Rose asked her and Romana nodded.

"Yes, fine, thank you," she said. "Where are the Doctors?"

"Blimey, you were in your own dreamland, weren't you?" Rose asked, giggling slightly. "My Doctor is helping the younger Doctor back to the TARDIS. They told us to find anything that could be used as a weapon and follow them," she said. "Here," she added, giving her a sword.

Romana took the sword and nodded. She saw that Rose herself was holding a long dagger in one hand and a candle stand in another. Unbidden, a smile blossomed on Romana's face. She was starting to see why she was her friend.

"Come on," Romana said, springing into attention. "The vampires appear to have left..."

"But with the Doctor, it's best to be prepared," Rose finished with a grin and Romana grinned back.

"Exactly," she agreed. They trailed a few paces behind the Doctors, looking around for signs of approaching vampires. The forest seemed quiet and the walk was quieter still. Romana finally just decided to ask the question that was plaguing her. "Rose, I don't wish to be intrusive...but could I ask you something?"

Rose looked at her, confused. "Of course," she said.

Romana took a deep breath as she realised that she was breaking every rule that had been taught to her from a young age. But she didn't care. "I have got the call from Gallifrey," she confided in a low voice so that the Doctors couldn't hear.

Rose seemed unsurprised, confirming Romana's suspicions that her future self must have confided in her. "Yeah," Rose said. "Have you decided what to do yet?"

"I don't want to go back to Gallifrey," Romana said earnestly. "How can I just go back? After everything I have seen. I have skills, Rose. Skills I can use to help people in the universe. If I go back, then all those skills will do is be written into boring papers and stored into archives for all eternity."

Rose looked as surprised as Romana at the tirade. But then her eyes melted in concern. "It's your choice to make, Romana," she said. "Do what you think is best for yourself. What will make you
“Happy?”

Romana looked like she was about to question that, when there was rustling in the clearing ahead. Rose and Romana tensed as they moved closer to the Doctors, their weapons raised. The fourth Doctor was still weak and was completely supported by the Eighth Doctor.

"Get down!" Rose yelled as three figures dressed in long black cloaks leapt out of the shadows. Romana ducked down just in time as a vampire hissed loudly and jumped in front of them. She raised her sword. The sword wouldn't do much to hurt them but they had to buy time. She thrust the sword forward as she tried to attack the vampire.

The creature was a lot quicker and a lot stronger than her. Behind her, Romana could hear Rose's laboured breathing as she tried to hold off two vampires. Romana focused her time sense for a brief instant and used the delay to use the sword to behead the vampire.

The time delay had also affected Rose, so she managed to stab the dagger into the heart of one of the vampires. She threw the candle stand at the other vampire's head and Romana beheaded the vampire in the same moment.

"Move!" the Eighth Doctor hissed.

"But they're dead," Rose said.

"No, they are not," Romana said. Already the one with the dagger in his heart was starting to stir.

The four of them hurried across the forest and were more than a bit relieved when they saw the familiar blue box.

Rose opened the doors with her key and Romana stumbled in after the Doctors. The interior was far interesting than the one that the Doctor had now. Speaking of whom, the two Doctors had collapsed into armchairs in the console room. They both looked a bit pale.

Romana realised that Rose had already dashed off to fetch some food for them. The blood transfusion had made them both weak.

"Extraordinary job with the vampires, Romana," the Fourth Doctor praised her with his usual manic grin, despite his pale face.

Romana gave him a small smile. The Eighth Doctor stuffed some fruit into his mouth that Rose had brought him and walked over to the console. "I'll drop you two off in the village," he said. "Kalmar and his men can smoke out the remaining nests."

"That would be splendid, Doctor," the Fourth Doctor said with a smile and Romana nodded at him in thanks.

True to his word, he landed them in the village. The Doctor and Romana said a hurried goodbye to the Doctor and Rose since they had to warn Kalmar and the villagers about the vampires. To their enormous surprise, Rose hugged both the Fourth Doctor and Romana in goodbye.

When their TARDIS had left, Romana was left staring at the empty spot. "What an extraordinary girl," she murmured to herself.

"Yes," she heard the Doctor say next to her. "I always thought so." She looked at him quizzically and he grinned widely at her. "Come on, let's warn the villagers, Romana. There's always work to be done."
"Are you feeling better?" Rose asked the Doctor.

He smiled at her and nodded. "Yes, thank you. The Saama fruit helped a lot."

"It's your favourite," Rose shrugged.

The Doctor gazed at her quietly and then pulled her into a hug. "You were wonderful out there, Rose. With everything. And I realise that I'm not being the Doctor you know and I am sorry," he said sincerely.

Rose pulled away and he was surprised to see that she was glaring at him. "Oi! You stop that right this instant. You are my best friend. I'm gonna help you whether you like it or not and if you even think about apologising, I'll smack you one. Got that?"

He grinned in delight. "Oh, my wonderful Rose," he said, his rich, smooth voice making her heart leap. "What would I ever do without you?"

The TARDIS landed with a thud and Rose was spared having to respond to that. She was blushing too hard to think of a coherent response anyway. She checked the scanner and was surprised to find that they were on Earth.


"Do you remember anything?" Rose asked.

He shook his head. "No, I don't," he said. "Well, no point speculating. Let's go." They stepped out into a quiet London park which was empty. Rose looked around and realised that it was almost dark which would explain why no children were about.

"There," the Doctor said.

Rose followed his gaze and gasped sharply. Had the Doctor not pointed the man out, Rose would have missed him. He was sitting so utterly still that he could have passed for a statue. The Doctor and Rose walked towards him slowly.

When they got close to him, he slowly looked up at them with such sad eyes that Rose felt her heart twist painfully. He was clutching something in his hand and his fist tightened involuntarily as he saw them.

The young bloke was dressed in a way that only the Doctor could be. Beige striped trousers, a cricket jumper and beige coat with a stick of celery on his lapel with white trainers on his feet and a panama hat on his lap.

"Doctor?" Rose said softly.

He looked at her with devastated eyes and slowly uncurled his fist. In his hand was a broken gold star.

"I'm afraid you both have caught me at a bad time," he said, looking at the pieces of the star mournfully.
The Eight Doctors: Of Loss and Future

Chapter Notes

The Fifth Doctor is set after 'Earthshock' and the Sixth Doctor during 'The Ultimate Foe'

Previously

The young bloke was dressed in a way that only the Doctor could be. Beige striped trousers, a cricket jumper and beige coat with a stick of celery on his lapel with white trainers on his feet and a panama hat on his lap.

"Doctor?" Rose said softly.

He looked at her with devastated eyes and slowly uncurled his fist. In his hand was a broken gold star.

"I'm afraid you both have caught me at a bad time," he said, looking at the pieces of the star mournfully.

Rose remained quiet, not knowing what to say or even guess what had happened. The Doctor next to her frowned at his younger self. "What's the matter?" he asked gently. "Your shields are up."

"That's deliberate," the younger Doctor said, wearily. "I don't think you want to know."

"Surely you understand that I have to know?" the older Doctor asked in the same gentle tone.

The younger Doctor dragged his eyes away from the broken pieces of the star in his hand and looked at him tiredly. "Do you remember this?" he asked, showing his older self the pieces of the star badge.

Rose watched the Doctor next to her frown as he saw it. "It's Adric's, isn't it? He wore it," the Doctor said.

The fifth Doctor flinched at the name and nodded slowly before hanging his head in remorse.

The older Doctor gasped sharply and sat down next to the young Doctor. "No," he said. "Adric..."

"Died saving the Earth," the Doctor confessed in a broken whisper. "Couldn't save him..."

Rose sat down on the young Doctor's other side and carefully placed a comforting hand on his shoulder. He flinched slightly at her touch before going still again. Rose felt tears gather in her eyes as she saw how broken he seemed. She had no idea who Adric was, but he must have been a friend of the Doctor's who had died.

She had met so many of his friends: Leela, Romana, Harry, Liz, the Brigadier; had known how much he cared for them. To lose one of them had to be one of the worst things in the universe.

The older Doctor dropped his face in his hands, looking even more broken than the younger
Doctor. Rose felt her heart twist painfully. Both the Doctors were hurting and she couldn't do a thing about it.

"You wanted memories?" the Fifth Doctor asked, his voice getting harder with each syllable. "Here!"

The Eighth Doctor flinched but kept his head buried in his hands as memories of his fifth life flooded him. Brave heart Tegan demanding that they go back and save Adric, young Nyssa sobbing at Adric's loss; the Doctor wished he hadn't known. He wished for Adric to have got on the escape pod and not gone back to try and solve the problem.

He wished Adric was alive so he could yell at him for thinking he knew better than the Doctor. But most of all, the Doctor wished that he could forget again. Forget the pain. Forget the loss.

"Go away," the Fifth Doctor said, his voice sounding gaunt and broken again. "Please leave me alone."

The Eighth Doctor stood up and without a backward glance began walking back to the TARDIS. Rose opened her mouth to stop him but she saw the tense set of his shoulders and stopped herself. She looked at the Fifth Doctor who was staring at the broke pieces again.

"He was a very impertinent young man," the Doctor told Rose slowly. "He thought he knew better."

Rose didn't say anything, just kept her hand on his shoulder. The Doctor slowly put the broken pieces of the star in his pocket and covered her hand with his own slightly cool one.

"But he was so brilliant," the Doctor continued, his voice a bit lighter now. "And he knew it. Got into more trouble trying to be clever, he did."

"I'm sorry, Doctor," Rose said, tears flowing down her face. "I truly am."

The Doctor nodded mournfully and finally raised his head to look her in the eyes. The blue eyes were so similar to the ones she knew so well that Rose almost sobbed out loud at the feeling. But instead of breaking down, she gave him a watery smile which he didn't quite return but his eyes didn't seem so burdened either.

"You should go," the Doctor said, looking towards the older Doctor's TARDIS. "The time bubble has already gone. We don't want to create any more strain on the timeline."

Rose nodded, but then carefully put her arms around his neck in a hug. His arms stayed stiffly at his sides but he did sigh into her hair. "See you then, Doctor," she said, fighting back more tears.

"Goodbye, Rose," he whispered against her temple.

Rose withdrew her arms and stood up from the cold park bench. She wished there was something else she could say to make him feel better but everything sounded hollow and meaningless in her head. There was nothing she could think of that would make losing someone easier.

Unable to find words, Rose bent down and placed the smallest kiss on his forehead. His eyebrows shot up in surprise at the intimate gesture but Rose had already withdrawn and was moving away from him. Before he could gather his bearings to say anything, she was already back in the TARDIS.

The doors closed after her and the TARDIS vanished slowly from the cold park.
The fifth Doctor stared at the empty spot for a long time before touching the pocket of his coat where the broken pieces of Adric’s gold star badge were resting. With hearts not quite as heavy as they were before, he trudged back to his own TARDIS.

~

Rose entered the TARDIS and saw the Doctor standing with his arms resting on the console. He was staring pensively at the time rotor, his face so weary and sad that Rose couldn't help but remember the man sitting in the park behind them.

When he heard her approach, he looked up and drew her into his arms. Rose held onto him tightly as he breathed in harsh, ragged breaths, and stroked his hair with one hand. "I'm so sorry," she said.

"I am, too," he said. "Cybermen." Rose felt confused at the random mention but the Doctor elaborated. "That's how we met, wasn't it?" he asked, his arms still holding her tightly. "In a shop in London."

Rose nodded, not knowing why he was bringing that up now. "Yeah," she said.

"Things are getting clearer now," he said, as if guessing her internal monologue. "Adr...Adric's loss triggered some more memories. I can already hear the echoes of bullets on the streets of San Francisco and Madame Butterfly."

Rose had no idea what either of those things meant but she listened quietly and kept stroking his hair slowly. The TARDIS landed, yet the Doctor seemed reluctant to let her go. It was Rose who pulled away and gave him an encouraging smile.

"Come on then, Doctor," she said slowly. "We have to keep going."

"I don't think I should," he said, sounding tired.

"Why?" Rose asked, her brow furrowing in confusion.

"I think I preferred myself as the blank slate. It's better than knowing all the things I did. What I became," he said, shaking his head. "I think it's better if I never know what I am."

Rose shook her head. "That's not true," she said. "You said it yourself. You have to know who you are, Doctor. Good or bad, everything has made you what you are. You can't just give up because you don't like what you've discovered."

"But I am not a good person, Rose," he said desperately.

"No one really is," Rose said. "Look for what it is worth, you try and do good things. For your friends, for the universe, for everyone. Sometimes it works, like the day we brought about the start of peace on Lorena Major or the end of Daleks on Eden. Some days, you cure 400 Time Agents with a single cure. And then there are days when you lose. When all hope is lost and you can't save anyone. But you have to remember the good bits in your life, Doctor. Or the universe will be a much darker place."

The Doctor stared at her in wonder. "How do you know just the right thing to say, Rose Tyler?" he asked in surprise.

"It's something you told me," she said, her eyes darkening. "When I had my dark days..."

His eyes turned soft. "Nira?" he asked. At her nod, he squeezed her hand comfortingly. "You did
what you had to."

"So did you," she said. "Don't stop now," she pleaded.

The Doctor stared into her pleading eyes and nodded. "I won't," he said determinedly. "Come, my sixth self awaits."

Rose smiled in relief and turned to the scanner. Her relief gave way to confusion when she saw it.

"What is it?" the Doctor asked.

"We're on Gallifrey," she said, looking at him in surprise.

The Doctor's eyes widened briefly before he snatched Rose's hand and pulled her out of the TARDIS. "We have to hurry. We have to get to the Matrix," he said, dragging Rose behind him.

"Why? What's going on?" Rose asked, not noticing the chaos around her as she followed the Doctor.

"Because that's where I am trapped. And about to be killed," the Doctor said.

"Who's trying to kill you?" Rose gasped.

The Doctor grimaced. "The Valeyard."

~

"By Order of the Inquisitor and the judgement in the name of Rassilon we find you, the Doctor, guilty of the crime of genocide. As such, the punishment shall be death without regeneration."

The Doctor was surprisingly calm for someone who had been handed a death sentence. He remained impassive as the judgement was read and he was led to the execution chamber.

The dome filled with the obliteration gas was just lowering onto his head when a young man wearing a green velvet frock coat and dragging a young blonde girl in tow burst into the chamber.

"Stop!" the man proclaimed. "This is an illusion."

The execution chamber vanished along with the dome, and the sixth Doctor was left standing in a dark, empty space with his older self and Rose. He turned and glared at the young, old Doctor.

"What did you do that for, you blithering imbecile?" he demanded.

"Imbecile? You thought they were going to execute me," the man snapped back.

"Of course I wasn't going to be executed," the Sixth Doctor snapped. "I am fully aware that this is the Matrix and the Valeyard is doing his damnedest to make me think that I'm going to die."

"Oh," the Eighth Doctor said, a bit sheepishly. "I suppose you were going along with the ruse in order to find the Valeyard."

"Obviously," the colourful Doctor said, glaring at him. "Till you bumbled in like a half-wit and ruined my chance. Now, I have to sit through another fake reality where I'm supposed to die," he groaned.

"Just who is this Valeyard bloke?" Rose asked. "And why is he so hellbent on making you think you're dying?"
Both the Doctors avoided her gaze and her questions, making her confused. She looked more closely and it was almost like they were...ashamed?

"You shouldn't have come here," the Sixth Doctor told his older self. "And you definitely should not have brought Rose."

"Yes, I realise that now," the older Doctor snapped. "Where's the way out?"

"Leaving already, Doctors?" the Valeyard's chilling voice was heard around them.

"Such a shame. And this was turning into a proper reunion. Sort of like that time with Omega."

"Why don't you come and show yourself to me?" the Sixth Doctor demanded, gesturing subtly to his eighth self to take Rose and run.

"Your foolish heroism fascinates me," the Valeyard's voice was dry and amused. "But it won't help them escape." The voice changed into something much lighter which was more terrifying than before. "Rose! How are you, my dear? Long time, no see."

Rose's confusion deepened as the Doctors tensed. "Have we met?" she asked, before she could stop herself.

"Leave her alone," the Sixth Doctor said as he and the Eighth Doctor pulled Rose between them.

"Now, now, Doctor," the Valeyard chided. "Don't be rude to our Rose. There shouldn't be any secrets between us, should there?"

Rose looked at the Doctors but they were both steadfastly avoiding her gaze and looking around for the Valeyard.

"Go on," the Valeyard said, almost lazily. "Tell her. Tell Rose who I am."

"Doctor?" Rose asked, looking between them.

"Rose..." the Eighth Doctor shook his head. "He's...I'm..."

"Wasting precious time, Doctor," the Valeyard taunted again. "My dear Rose, I am known as the Valeyard. And we met when your common little planet was invaded by Cybermen."

Rose's brow furrowed before realisation crashed on her painfully. It couldn't be. She looked at the Doctors, hoping one of them would shake their head and say that the Valeyard was lying. But they both looked deeply ashamed and refused to look her in the eye.

Rose felt faint. It was the Doctor. The Valeyard and the Doctor were the same person. But it couldn't be. The Doctor was not evil. He would not try and torture his other selves. He wasn't like that...

"Hard time believing me?" the Valeyard asked her. "But you really aren't surprised, are you? You have seen what the Doctor is like. Arrogant, thinks he knows best, collects companions like trinkets and feels sad when they break."

"And what are you then?" the Eighth Doctor roared, anger colouring his face viciously. "A mere amalgamation without a proper self. You are just a Victorian mermaid, you unscrupulous villain."

There was no answer; just deathly silence. The Sixth Doctor grabbed Rose's wrist gently and pulled her towards him. "When I say run, run," he whispered to her.
"What about him?" Rose asked, looking towards the Eighth Doctor who was still glaring around in the darkness.

"I'll hold him off," the older Doctor said, without looking at her. "Go with him."

Rose looked reluctant to leave him but when the colourful Doctor yelled 'Run!', Rose grabbed hold of his hand and started running. Through the darkened streets and towards the exit that only the Doctor knew where it was, Rose followed him blindly.

But as they were running, her feet tripped over something and she fell, losing her grip on the Doctor's hand. "Doctor!" she yelled.

There was no answer and Rose groaned in pain as her left ankle twinged painfully. She tried to sit up but felt something crawling up her leg. She looked down and saw a swarm of scuttling insects crawling onto her leg. She screamed loudly and started to swat them away.

"Rose! Rose! ROSE!"

She gasped and looked at the Sixth Doctor's frantic face. He was cupping her face gently, looking at her with undisguised concern. "It's not real, Rose. Whatever you're seeing isn't real," he said urgently. "The Valeyard is playing tricks on us."

Rose heaved in painful breaths and looked down at her legs. There was no sign of any insects, nor was her ankle hurt. She grabbed onto the Doctor's arms like a lifeline and let him haul her back onto her feet. "I...I thought there were..." she shuddered painfully at the memory.

"It's alright," the Doctor said soothingly. "Here, have a jelly baby." Rose took the offered sweet and ate it quickly. The sugar relieved some of her stress. The Doctor nodded approvingly as some colour returned to her cheeks. "The exit's just this way," he said.

Rose nodded shakily and followed him. She chanced a look at the Sixth Doctor and was unsurprised to see his jaw tense. The first time she had seen him, she had almost laughed out loud at his appearance. Had the circumstances not been so dire, she would have found the yellow trousers, the horrible vest and the odd multi-coloured coat very amusing.

Yet seeing him up close like this, Rose realised that she could not imagine him wearing anything else. It was the same when her Doctor wore those Edwardian clothes as a shield. This Doctor held himself in a way reminiscent of the first Doctor and his biting tone was a cross between his second and third self. Rose was surprised at how easily she could see how each of them were the Doctor.

She shivered as she thought of the Valeyard. If he was the Doctor as well...

"What does he want?" Rose asked finally.

"He wants my remaining lives," the Doctor answered tensely. "He staged this whole farce of a trial to have me put to death."

"He's not really you, is he?" Rose asked hesitatingly.

The Doctor sighed and looked at her with resigned hazel eyes. "For all I know, he might be," he said.

"I don't believe that," Rose said, surprising herself at how sure she sounded. "You're not... you won't do something like this."
The Doctor didn't answer but Rose noticed his lips quirk into a small smile.

"Here," he said. "The way out. Wait here."

"Where are you going?" Rose asked.

"I still have to face the Valeyard. He has to be stopped," the Doctor said. "Oh, and here's the long-haired ponce now."

"At least, I'm not colourblind," the older Doctor snapped as he ran up to them.

"Any trouble from the Boatyard?"

"Nothing we couldn't handle," the Sixth Doctor said. "Now get going and try not to drop in on more inconvenient moments."

The Eighth Doctor rolled his eyes and turned to Rose. "Let's go, Rose. The Doctor will deal with the Graveyard," he said. Then he snapped around and looked at his younger self. "Peri's alive."

The Sixth Doctor stared at him in surprise and delight. "She is?" he asked.

"Yes, but act surprised when they tell you later," the Doctor said. "Goodbye, Doctor."

Rose hugged the Sixth Doctor in goodbye and gave him an encouraging smile. He patted her cheek affectionately and let her go.

The Eighth Doctor took her hand and the two of them left. Outside the Matrix, they appeared in a corridor where the younger Doctor's TARDIS was standing.

"That's where the trial is going on," the Doctor told Rose in a low voice, pointing to a pair of gilded double doors. The doors started to open and he pulled Rose behind the TARDIS. A young, petite redheaded woman burst out of the trial chamber. She had a big key in her hand and a determined expression on her face as she entered the Matrix.

"Oh Melanie," the Doctor whispered in a slow voice as she disappeared into the Matrix.

"Who was she?" Rose asked.

"Melanie Bush," the Doctor explained. "She'll make sure I'm fine. We have to leave."

"And the Valeyard? What happens to him?" Rose asked as they started walking back to their own TARDIS.

The Doctor racked his brains. "He dies in the Matrix," he said.

Rose didn't quite know how to react to that. She squeezed his hand nevertheless as they reached the TARDIS. The Doctor smiled gratefully at her and unlocked the doors.

"Just the last one to go," he said, bounding over to the console. "After that, we can go have chips at your favourite chippy."

"You remember?" Rose asked, her face brightening.

"Oh yes, I do," he said. "Like I said, the gaps fill themselves. Now, it's just the meeting with my seventh self that's left. Come along."
Final chapter of #8 The Eight Doctors. The Eighth Doctor and Rose finish their journey by meeting the Seventh Doctor.

The Seventh Doctor and the Master are set right before the Eighth Doctor TV movie.

Previously

"Just the last one to go," he said, bounding over to the console. "After that, we can go have chips at your favourite chippy."

"You remember?" Rose asked, her face brightening.

"Oh yes, I do," he said. "Like I said, the gaps fill themselves. Now, it's just the meeting with my seventh self that's left. Come along."

In a time and place far, far away from where the Doctor and Rose were about to land in the seventh Doctor's timeline, the Master laughed to himself as he walked back to his TARDIS. The rumours about the technology of the Morgs had not been exaggerated and he had found the deathworm.

His triumphant smile did not diminish at the prospect of his plans ahead. Now, all he needed to do was find an enemy who would execute him and request the Doctor to take his remains back to Gallifrey. The noble fool would no doubt agree and that would be his chance to sneak aboard his TARDIS and usurp the Doctor's remaining lives.

He even had a backup trap set in the Eye of Harmony in case all of this wasn't sufficient for his goals. The only thing left to decide was which enemy he would choose. The list was quite long and exhaustive. Finally, he set course for Skaro.

Those tin robots would jump at a chance to kill him and it would make a convincing death. All that was left now, was to send a telepathic signal to the Doctor in his dying moments. Everything else would simply fall into place.

~

The Doctor sighed as he took in the beauty of Metebelis Three. He supposed he should have been pleased and contented at the sight but his hearts just weren't in it. Yet again he wondered if it would have been better if he had a companion with him, but travelling alone had done him good.

It was easier for Time's Champion to travel alone. He had only himself to think about when time came for him to make decisions for the universe. No one else getting hurt as collateral, no faiths broken, no lives lost. At least, not many lives lost.

Chuckling moodily at his morbid thoughts, he walked away from his TARDIS, swinging his brolly as he went. The Master's dying words came back to him and he frowned. He didn't want to think about that right now. He continued to walk down the path.
A ways away, he came to a nice panorama and stood there quietly. So lost was he in his own thoughts, that it was too late when he felt a painful pinch at the back of his neck. He yelled in shock and pain as everything slowly went black.

~

"Metebelis Three?" Rose asked.

"Absolutely charming place," the Doctor told her. "Oh, I wanted to bring you here on vacation. Perhaps this will count as one."

"Oh no," Rose said. "You're taking me on a proper vacation after this. On a beach or a spa or something."

The Doctor grinned at her. "Alright, Rose Tyler. I promise to take you on a vacation after this. After meeting my seventh self, you might need one."

"Why's that?" Rose asked him curiously.

"I never quite liked him much," he said honestly. "I don't think any of us did."

Rose snorted. "Doctor, as far as I have seen, none of you seem to like each other," she said.

The Doctor chuckled. "Yes, well," he shrugged. "When you are younger, you perceive the older ones as being annoying for possessing hindsight and as the older one, you are constantly annoyed by the stubborn immaturity they seem to possess. I'm sure you would have a few choice words to say to your younger self."

"Yeah, I'd tell her to dump Jimmy Stone sooner and clock him one for good measure," Rose said dryly.

"And there might be a future Rose Tyler who would want you to stop travelling with me. Perhaps even clock me one too," he said. The tone was light and teasing but his eyes were anything but.

"That's not gonna happen," Rose said confidently. "Travelling with you, I'm never gonna regret that."

The Doctor's smile was so wide that Rose was surprised his cheeks didn't hurt. She looked away from his bright gaze and towards the scanner. "So, shall we go?" she asked.

In reply, the Doctor grabbed her hand and pulled her out of the TARDIS. Rose couldn't quite contain her gasp at the beautiful surroundings. The slight blue tint that the place had was comforting rather than alarming. Rose linked her arm with the Doctor's as they went in search of the Seventh Doctor.

"Stop," the Doctor whispered to her, his brow furrowing. "Something bad happened to me here."

Rose instantly became worried. "I thought you said that there was no danger here now," she said.

"Help!"

The Doctor and Rose whipped their heads around, searching for the source of the call. There didn't seem to be anyone about but they had both heard the sound unmistakeably.

"Help!"
This time, the Doctor pointed straight ahead. "There, come on," he said, grabbing Rose's hand and pulling her behind him. Rose didn't know what he had seen but they seemed to be getting closer to the sound.

"Is that you in there, Doctor?" the Doctor asked as he gazed at what appeared to be a cocoon made from spider web.

"Yes, now get me out!" the voice answered from inside the cocoon.

"Are you trapped in there?" Rose asked in surprise as the Doctor drew his sonic screwdriver and began severing the quite strong spider threads.

"Yes, I was attacked by one of the remaining spiders," the Doctor said as he worked on freeing his younger self.

"Caught me off-guard too," the younger Doctor's voice said sulkily. "All I wanted was a peaceful vacation. Instead I almost end up as supper for a spider."

"Cheer up, Doctor," Rose said. "It could be worse than a spider. Remember those slug things on...what was it?"

"Uhma Nova," the older Doctor answered absently.

"Ahh, the Ulmins," the younger Doctor's voice agreed. "Yes, quite unpleasant things. They prefer to skin their prey alive before consuming them."

"You don't have to tell me," Rose said, fighting off a shudder.

"We got away," the Eighth Doctor reminded her, though his eyes were twinkling.

"'Course we did," Rose agreed, rolling her eyes. "But I still had to hear their chief saying that he was going to 'sssskkkeeeeeeeennn' me," she said, with an exaggerated imitation of the Ulmin Chief's accent.

The younger Doctor laughed and even her Doctor's lips quirked into a smile at that. The sonic screwdriver finally managed to sever the web cocoon and the younger Doctor stuck his head out.

"Ah, Rose. Nice to see you again. Quite literally," he grinned, his bright blue eyes twinkling at her.

Rose couldn't help but smile at him; his grin was far too mischievous to resist. "Hello, Doctor," she said.

The Doctor grinned at her and then shot a glare at his older self. "Couldn't hurry up, could you? A man could stifle in here," he said.

"Be thankful that I'm not leaving you here to be consumed," the Eighth Doctor said coolly. "And don't move around. I might sever a limb instead of the web."

"So, you came here for vacation?" Rose asked quickly, changing the subject before the Doctors started bickering.

The Doctor nodded. "Yes, I needed a distraction so to speak. I got a very distressing telepathic message earlier," he said.

The Eighth Doctor's hand slipped at his words but he recovered quickly. The younger Doctor and Rose remained oblivious. "Oh?" Rose asked in concern. "What happened?"
"The Master has got himself sentenced to death on Skaro. He wishes for me to take his remains back to Gallifrey," the Doctor said.

"The Master?" Rose asked curiously, not noticing the way that the older Doctor's knuckles tightened.

"My best enemy," the younger Doctor said. "A vicious, cruel villain."

"All done," the Eighth Doctor interrupted. "Can you get out?"

"Of course I can," the younger Doctor snapped and with surprising agility, he climbed out of the cocoon. Once outside, he straightened his jacket and plonked his hat back on his head. "Come on then, don't just stand there. The spider might return with friends for supper."

The three of them quickly hurried over to where the Seventh Doctor's TARDIS was. He opened the doors and invited them inside. "I'll make tea," he announced. "Make yourselves at home."

Rose observed the TARDIS interior which was almost exactly the same as the one they had now. There were, however, a few differences. There was only one armchair near the fireplace, the chaise on which the Doctor and Rose would read was missing; little things that suggested that the Doctor was on his own.

"I travelled on my own for a while," the older Doctor told Rose as he saw her observing the console room.

Rose nodded and then looked around for any sign of the younger Doctor before leaning in. "Something bad is about to happen, isn't it?" she asked. "You're being odd."

The Doctor nodded gravely. "He's at the end of his life," he confided in a low voice. "After gathering the Master's remains from Skaro, he makes an emergency landing in San Francisco."

"And is that when you...?" Rose asked, feeling her heart fill with pain at the thought of the mischievous younger Doctor dying.

The Doctor nodded. "Yes, but," he said, his voice sterner now. "We cannot tell him that. If we warn him, it could be disastrous. So keep it to yourself."

Rose thought about protesting but realised that if this Doctor did not die, then the Doctor that she knew would never have been born. As horrible as his imminent death was, it was necessary for the chain of events. Sometimes she hated time travel.

"Here we are," the younger Doctor said, arriving with a tray of tea. Rose forced a smile on her face and compelled herself to look as normal as possible as she accepted her cup from him. Opposite her, she found the older Doctor do something quite similar as he sipped his tea silently.

"Well now," the Seventh Doctor said, breaking the awkward silence. "I suppose all your memories have caught up with you?"

"Yes, they have," the Doctor said. "The past and the present is secure in my mind."

"Good," the Seventh Doctor said as Rose smiled at him in relief. "That means you can stop this ridiculous hopping around and return to your customary place in time and space."

"You've just been waiting to say that, haven't you?" the Eighth Doctor groaned.
The Seventh Doctor grinned but didn't answer. He turned to Rose with a genuine smile on his bright face. "Rose, I must say I owe you a great deal of thanks for helping my future self."

Rose blushed. "Oh, it was nothing honestly," she said. "Best friends and all that."

"Best friends, yes," the Seventh Doctor said, leaning back in his chair and observing her with such keen eyes that Rose felt she was being weighed up for something.

"Stop," the Eighth Doctor said, his eyes blazing in anger at his younger self.

The Seventh Doctor raised an eyebrow at him but then complied and went back to sipping his tea. The Eighth Doctor continued to glare at him for a moment before finishing his tea quickly. Rose was left confused, trying to understand what had happened between the two Doctors.

"Rose, we should be leaving," the Doctor said, his tone still a bit tense.

"Right, okay," Rose said, placing her cup down. She turned and smiled at the Seventh Doctor. "It was nice to meet you."

"And you, my dear," he said, taking her hand gallantly. He nodded once at his older self, who seemed like he wanted to get as far away as he could from him.

"Well, goodbye then Doctor," he said.

"Goodbye," the Doctor nodded. "Rose," he said, offering his arm.

Rose took his arm and waved at the Seventh Doctor who was now looking at them speculatively with an odd gleam in his eyes. Rose had a startling revelation as she recognised that look. She had seen it on her Doctor only a handful of times.

It was the exact same look he got when he was playing Chessmaster in the grand scheme of things in the universe. All those times that his eyes seemed far more blue than green were the ones where it was this Doctor's quietly observant and powerful gaze shining through him.

Suddenly, the bright, mischievous face was cunning and dangerous. Rose realised that she should look away but she returned his gaze firmly. He seemed a bit startled at first; before he nodded once in acknowledgement. Rose nodded back, and with a smile, she allowed herself to be led away by her Doctor.

The walk back to the TARDIS was thick with tension and Rose realised why the Doctor did not seem to like his seventh self much. Those quick blue eyes saw far, far too much and most days, the things he saw were the ones he wished he couldn't see.

Rose couldn't explain how she had known that but knew it to be the truth in the very core of her being. She was far too absorbed in her thoughts to register that they were back in their own TARDIS but was shaken out of her reverie when the dematerialisation sequence started.

"So, chips?" the Doctor asked, trying to insert cheer into his voice.

Rose met his gaze and saw how tired he looked. She also knew that he would deny it for all eternity. "Nah," she said. "I think all I need is sleep. We can plan our vacation later. You did promise me one, Mister."

"Yes I did," he grinned easily. "Alright, off you go. Get some sleep." Rose smiled at him and turned to go. "Rose!"
"Yeah?" she asked, turning around.

The Doctor seemed a bit indecisive as he approached her slowly. "I just wanted to say thank you," he said earnestly. "I really appreciate everything you have done in helping me."

"Don't be ridiculous," Rose said softly. "Like I said, we're friends, Doctor. No need to thank me."

"I do think it's necessary to thank you, Rose," he said seriously. "Few can cope with meeting all of my selves and keep their sanity intact."

"That's easy then," Rose said, her tongue poking out of the corner of her mouth. "I was never sane to begin with."

The Doctor threw his head back and laughed heartily at that. "Oh Rose Tyler," he said, his eyes shining. "You are simply precious."

"So you say," she teased.

"Oh, I do," he winked. Then he chuckled and cupped her face gently. "Thank you, Rose," he said, his eyes shining with genuine warmth.

Then, he pressed his lips to hers in the sweetest and most tender kiss.
Monsters of India: Trapped

Rose was staring at the same page for the last thirty eight minutes. Her mind just wasn't in it. In fact, she knew exactly where her mind was.

The kiss. The Doctor had kissed her.

Not a thorough snog or even the least romantically inclined. Just a simple pressure of his lips against hers. But it had still sent butterflies fluttering in her stomach.

She had been trying to convince herself from the moment she had come on board, that the Doctor wasn't like ordinary blokes. And he wasn't. He was odd and brilliant and completely alien.

He was a thousand years old, for heaven's sake. Rose always felt incredibly immature when she was with him. But she was attracted to him, no doubt about it. The Doctor was very handsome but more than that, he listened to her when she spouted her odd ideas and shared his own whimsical thoughts about it. He read to her, made her tea the way she liked it and showed her all of time and space.

If it hadn't been for the alien factor, Rose would have labelled them as being a couple from the get-go. As it was, she had no illusions.

She had met so many of his friends. People who had been an important part of his lives before she had come along. She knew each of them loved the Doctor in their own way. How could they not? He was wonderful and cared a great deal about his friends.

Perhaps if she had never met any of them, she would have been easily able to fool herself that the Doctor only thought of her that way. But knowing what she knew, she couldn't fool herself even a little bit.

Susan, Ian, Barbara, Jamie, Zoe, Liz, the Brigadier, Harry, Leela, Romana, Adric, Melanie were just some of the names and people she knew. She couldn't deny that each of them were special to him. His love and pride for them was visible each time he spoke of them or met them. Oh, he hid it well but his eyes shone every time.

So, the kiss could not have meant anything at all. In fact, in light of the conversation they'd had in Cardiff during the zombie incident it was very likely that the Doctor thought it was just a way to express gratitude. It may well have been a handshake in that case.

Well, that stung a bit then. As hard as she was trying to convince herself that it didn't mean anything, it was still obvious to her that she had already started loving him. Perhaps that was why she had been hiding from him since then. The TARDIS had been very helpful in that regard. Not that she was even sure the Doctor was looking for her. For all she knew, he was avoiding her too.

She felt a light flutter of wings before one of the bats landed on her shoulder. She turned her head and smiled at Jasper. "What do you think?" she asked him. "Did the butler do it?"

She giggled at her own silliness and closed her book. Agatha Christie would have to wait. Though she was sure that the secretary was the killer. But she had an alibi for the second murder. A second killer then. That would make sense. Perhaps the old teacher.

Stewart flew over to them and settled down on Rose's arm. She smiled at him too. Never would she have believed that she would befriend two bats. Her knowledge of the bats had been limited to the
scary myths that she and her friends had discussed when bats in caves would get tangled in someone's hair. The thought still made her jittery.

But Jasper and Stewart had become a part of her life just as the travels with the Doctor. She loved every second of it. The good and the bad. She would never change it. And for that, she would push the kiss to the far recess of her mind and never bring it up.

A polite knock on the door sounded a moment after her mind was made up. She looked up and smiled at the Doctor who grinned at her. "Enjoying yourselves?" he asked, casting an amused eye on the bats and her.

"Oh yes," Rose said, surprised at how easy it was to interact with him as if nothing had happened. Whoever said that ignoring things did not make them go away obviously had no idea what they were talking about.

"Are they reading the book with you too?" the Doctor asked, looking at the copy of Cat Among the Pigeons.

"Yep," Rose winked. Jasper and Stewart realised that their human perch was leaving so they decided to move to their usual, more permanent (read boring) perch. Rose sat up and looked at the Doctor. "So, where are we going?"

The Doctor rubbed the back of his neck sheepishly. "Well, the other day you said...that you liked Jane Austen," he said. "So, I was about to suggest that we could go to Regency England. Maybe even meet the woman herself."

"Jane Austen?" Rose asked, her eyes wide. "Seriously?"

"Why not?" he countered gently.

Rose jumped to her feet and with a brilliant grin, was gone in the direction of the wardrobe room.

The Doctor chuckled and returned to the console room to start plotting a course to Regency England. He had kept his attire much the same but had a top hat tucked under his arm. His clothes would be considered a tad modern but who knows, he might become a trendsetter.

He frowned as he waited for Rose to emerge from the wardrobe room. As was common these days, his thoughts inevitably drifted to the kiss he and Rose had shared. As much as he tried to convince himself that he had just been kissing her in gratitude for her help, he couldn't deny how the kiss had made him feel.

He wanted more, oh Rassilon did he want more. But he wasn't about to let himself ruin Rose's life by starting something between them. She was young and had a bright life ahead of her. He didn't need to see her timelines to know that. Her future was not with an old, selfish man like him.

The fact that he was madly in love with the young human girl was utterly inconsequential. He had decided that he would be her friend, her mentor, her shoulder, her hand to hold. Because one day she would leave. For something infinitely better than him. The thought made his hearts clench but knew that it was the responsible thing to do. He would keep his distance, just as she was keeping hers. Distance was good; it was safe.

"So? How do I look?"

He turned around and smiled widely. "Very nice, Rose," he said, taking in the light green dress she was wearing. Her face had almost no makeup as was appropriate for the era and her hair was in a
modest knot at the base of her neck.

She curtsied in return with a mischievous smile on her face. "Come on then," she said, linking her arm with his. "Let's see Jane Austen."

He grinned and opened the doors of the TARDIS with a flourish. Instantly a blast of hot air hit them, shattering any notion of being in England.

"Did you land us on the sun by mistake?" Rose asked with a gasp as she stepped out of the TARDIS.

The Doctor snorted as he looked around. "No, it's definitely Earth," he said.

"A desert then?" Rose asked, looking at the nearly abandoned place.

"Too humid for a desert," the Doctor said, sniffing the air. His brow furrowed as he bent down and touched the hot soil at their feet. "Aha! I was right," he said, picking up some soil and letting it drop through his fingers.

"Right about what?" Rose asked, the heat making the layers of clothing extremely uncomfortable.

"We're in India, Rose," the Doctor said excitedly, getting to his feet.

Rose's eyes went wide. "Really?" she asked.

"Oh yes," the Doctor said, jogging a few steps ahead. "Beautiful country. Amazing culture. So old and ancient with so many meaningful connections. The land of wealth, scholars, mathematicians, philosophers, warriors: brilliant!"

Rose laughed at his enthusiasm. "So where is everyone?" she asked. "What I do know of India is that it's filled with people."

"Good question," the Doctor said, frowning slightly. "A very good question. We are in western India as far as I can gather. We must have landed in a remote area."

"Well wherever we are, we should get out of these ridiculous clothes before going exploring," Rose said practically.

"Why?" the Doctor asked.

"Doctor, we are dressed in Victorian clothes in forty five degree heat," Rose said, like it was obvious.

"We could simply go back inside and try reaching Regency England," the Doctor said.

"And miss exploring India?" Rose asked, sounding almost scandalised. "You have to be kidding me. I've always wanted to come here."


Rose was about to turn around to go back to the TARDIS when she heard the unmistakeable sound of the TARDIS dematerialising. She and the Doctor met each other's eyes for a split second before running towards the rapidly disappearing TARDIS.

"What is happening?" Rose asked in a frantic voice.
"I don't know!" the Doctor said, sounding agitated. He was trying to use his key but the door wasn't solid. "I can't get it open. I don't know what is causing it to dematerialise."

"Can't you stop it?" Rose asked.

The TARDIS disappeared completely and the Doctor stared in shock at the empty spot. "She's gone. My TARDIS is gone," he said, sounding extremely shocked.

"It can't just be gone," Rose said, trying not to sound hysterical.

The Doctor took out his sonic screwdriver and did a scan. "I'm afraid it is," he said. He met Rose's eyes. "We are trapped."

Rose inhaled shakily. "What are we going to do now?" she asked.

"I...I really don't know," the Doctor said, running a hand through his hair in frustration.

Rose nodded and tried to blink back the tears gathering in her eyes. They were trapped, with no way out. The TARDIS had simply vanished. And worse, the Doctor had no idea what had happened. "It's alright," she found herself saying. "You'll think of something. You'll find a way to get the TARDIS back."

"Do you think so?" he asked her, sounding almost scared as if he was afraid she was going to start accusing him of trapping her on purpose.

Rose took his hand and gave it a squeeze. "Absolutely," she said with conviction. "You'll do it."

The Doctor smiled at her faith in him. "Rose, I..."

The sound of a carriage pulled by horses echoed through the quietness of the place. The Doctor and Rose were instantly on alert as they sprang apart and started looking to where the noise was coming from. The place they were in was literally in the middle of nowhere. In fact, Rose couldn't even see electrical lines or anything around.

A carriage pulled up to them. The man driving the carriage was in his early twenties and was dressed as a redcoat. He jumped down and sprang into a salute.

"Sir, Madam," he bowed. "I apologise for my lateness. The carriage wheel broke on the way and I had to fix it."

"Oh, that's not a problem," the Doctor said pleasantly. "Lance Corporal...?"

"Milton, sir," the young man answered. "Patrick Milton. Captain Wesson sent me to pick you and Mrs. Smith and take you to the cantonment, sir."

"Ah yes, Captain Wesson," the Doctor said, with an air of mentioning an old friend. Rose could however see that he was merely going along with the Lance Corporal's words. "How is he?"

"He's been in Bombay for the past week, sir," Lance Corporal Milton answered.

"He will be back by tonight."

"Yes, in Bombay," the Doctor said, stroking his chin thoughtfully. "Well," he said, regaining his enthusiasm. "Lead on Lance Corporal Milton. To the cantonment."

"Yes of course, Doctor Smith," he said at once. He opened the door to the carriage and offered
Rose his hand. "Mrs. Smith?"

Rose plastered on a smile and took his hand to climb into the carriage. Her heart was thudding as she realised that Patrick Milton was a British soldier in India and he had just called Mumbai Bombay. She looked at the Doctor who had climbed in after her in the carriage.

"Yes," he said in a low voice as he caught the look on her face. "We are in India. Except..."

"We're in the past," Rose said, finishing his sentence. "This is during the British Raj."

"1893 to be precise," he said. "We are trapped more than a hundred years in your past."
Monsters of India: The Cantonment

Chapter Notes

Some trigger warnings for racism in the chapter.

Previously

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"We're in the past," Rose said, finishing his sentence. "This is during the British Raj."

"1893 to be precise," he said. "We are trapped more than a hundred years in your past."

The carriage ride was a very helpful one. Lance Corporal Milton was a chatty lad and the Doctor was always eager to talk his way through a marathon. Rose was mostly silent, picking up the bits and pieces that Milton was inadvertently letting slip.

Initially she had been worried that he had mistaken them for some other Dr. and Mrs. Smith but slowly it became evident that it was indeed the two of them that were expected. It was mind boggling to Rose but as the Doctor explained in a low voice, it was all about time travel.

"That was a bit of an odd place you picked sir," Lance Corporal Milton said. "Right in the middle of nowhere."

"I did, didn't I?" the Doctor asked. "Our earlier...carriage could only take us that far."

"I know what you mean," he nodded. "There's some peculiar folk around here. Superstitious lot. They refuse to take the carriage through the woods."

Rose looked out of the window and shivered at the sight of the woods. She wouldn't want to go through them either. They spoke of treacherous terrain and dangerous beasts lurking in their depths.

The Doctor quirked his eyebrows at that statement. "Really?" he drawled and Rose realised that he was intrigued. "Well, but you knew where to find us after all."

"Captain Wesson gave me your letter sir," Milton said. "Your instructions were very thorough."

"My letter, you say?" the Doctor mused.

Lance Corporal turned around briefly to glance at them inside the carriage, before reaching into his pocket and handing the Doctor a letter. "It is the right one, isn't it sir?" he asked, a bit nervously as if expecting a reprimand.

The Doctor unfolded the letter and read through it quickly. "Indeed," he said and Rose was
surprised to hear the optimism in his voice. "This seems to be in order."

"Very good, sir," Milton agreed with obvious relief.

The Doctor leaned in towards Rose and showed her the letter. "My writing," he said. "Dated two weeks ago and bearing Her Majesty Queen Victoria's seal," he whispered in her ear.

"But how?" Rose asked, her eyes wide.

"Time travel, of course," he grinned. "Do you know what else that means?"

"We get the TARDIS back," Rose said, her voice low but enthusiastic.

"Precisely," the Doctor agreed. "I am apparently the newly transferred Doctor from Britain, arriving with his young wife, Rose," he said, reading the letter.

Rose stomach flipped at those words but she kept her smile fixed. "So we're staying at a military base? For how long?"

"Until we have the TARDIS back," he said. "For the time being, we're Doctor and Mrs. Smith of Powell Estate, England. Here in the service of Her Majesty."

The carriage ride lasted nearly an hour. The sun overhead was getting more intense and Rose had to work hard not to fidget due to the heat. She did succeed for a while but after some time, Lance Corporal Milton noticed.

"The heat troubling you, ma'am?" he asked sympathetically. "You're not alone in that. Most ladies in the cantonment complain about it."

"How many women are there in the cantonment?" Rose asked curiously.

"Well apart from Lady Beatrice, only four other officers have their wives here," he answered.

"Who's Lady Beatrice?" Rose asked.

"Captain Wesson's wife, ma'am," Milton said. "She really keeps the whole thing together. Arranges the balls, deals with the servants, that sort of a thing."

Rose nodded at that tidbit of information. The carriage pulled in through the gates to a military base that looked like it came right out of a history book. The closely constructed group of houses had brick walls and red tiled roofs, giving it a sense of cultured simplicity.

Lance Corporal Milton stopped the carriage in front of the main house and then jumped down to open the carriage door. The Doctor stepped out and gave a hand to Rose so she could climb out.

A woman came bustling out of the main house. She was in her late forties and dressed impeccably in a peach coloured dress with her blonde hair elegantly tied into a bun. Her face burst into a smile at the sight of them but her expression remained guarded. "Oh, you must be Doctor and Mrs. Smith. How delightful," she said, her voice airy and extremely posh. "Do come in, dears."

"Ma'am," Lance Corporal said respectfully, clicking his heels.

"Oh, Patrick thank you so much," she said, giving him a smile that didn't quite reach her cool grey eyes. She turned her gaze to the Doctor and Rose. "I'm Lady Beatrice Carter, Captain Wesson's wife," she said, extending her hand.
The Doctor took her hand and placed a kiss on the back of it. "Lady Carter, it's an honour. May I introduce my wife, Rose."

Rose curtsied like she had seen in 'Pride and Prejudice' on telly. "Lady Carter," she smiled.

"Charmed, my dears," Lady Carter said, with a smile so fake that it set Rose's teeth on edge. Something about that woman seemed completely off. "You poor dears look exhausted. Come in, come in. I'll send for some refreshments."

The Doctor and Rose followed in her wake, exchanging slightly confused looks. Whatever it was, Lady Carter did not seem to like either of them much. She led them into a wide parlour with marble floors and teak wood furniture.

An Indian girl barely younger than Rose, approached them with a tray of tea as Lady Beatrice ushered them to sit. "I'll make the tea," she said to the girl in a sugary sweet voice.

The girl nodded wordlessly and left quickly, leaving the tray resting on a table. "You mustn't get too friendly with the servants, my dear," she told Rose with an air of someone imparting great wisdom. "They're quite barbaric."

Rose gritted her teeth and forced a smile on her face. She was beginning to dislike the woman entirely. The Doctor sensed her tension and turned to Lady Beatrice. "I understand Captain Wesson is in Bombay," he said.

"Oh yes," Lady Beatrice answered, passing them both a cup of tea. "Edmund will be back by the ball, don't you worry."

"The ball?" Rose asked, as politely as she could.

"There's a ball tonight," Lady Beatrice said. "You will meet the other wives then, dear. After all, we ladies have to stick together in this heathenish land."

They drank their tea in relative silence, broken only by Lady Beatrice's remarks that were seriously grating on Rose's nerves. She was certain that if Lady Beatrice began one more sentence with these indecent brown people she was going to throw her expensive china at her face.

The Doctor was surprisingly attentive and was consistently steering the conversation away from tense moments. It was quite a role reversal since it was usually Rose who was the peacemaker while the Doctor insulted his way through time and space.

After what felt like several long hours to Rose, the tea was finished and Lady Beatrice clapped her hands with a girlish giggle. "Come, my dears. I will show you to your quarters. Your luggage arrived yesterday and I got the servants to have it placed there," she said. "If you do find some jewellery missing, my dear," she said to Rose. "Do let me know. I will deal with it."

Rose resisted the urge to curse colourfully at her and nodded politely. "That's very kind of you," she said, hoping she didn't sound as angry as she was.

Lady Beatrice led them down a long hall and then up two different sets of staircases. She kept a running commentary the whole way about the different rooms they passed. Finally, they arrived at a set of rooms that Lady Beatrice opened with a heavy set of keys.

"Your quarters," she said, smiling benevolently. "The surgery is right next door, Dr. Smith."

"Thank you," the Doctor nodded courteously.
"Keep the keys," she told Rose, handing them to her. "I have spares if you lose them. Keep your doors locked at all time."

"Of course," Rose said, eager to be rid of the woman's presence.

"Dinner's at five and the ball begins right after," Lady Beatrice said.

"Thank you, Lady Beatrice. You have been very kind and welcoming," the Doctor said charmingly. Lady Beatrice flushed at the praise. "Oh it was nothing at all," she said, looking almost sincere. "I hope you settle in well."

With that, Lady Beatrice left and Rose and the Doctor ducked into their quarters. They were quite comfortable and spacious. The parlour was small but inviting which then led to the bedroom.

There was even a balcony beyond the bedroom that overlooked the woods. The bathroom was surprisingly modern with underground plumbing and all. When Rose expressed her surprise at that, the Doctor grinned.

"A very recent invention," he remarked. "I believe only the officers would have such luxurious facilities."

Two tightly packed cases stood next to the bed. They bore their names on the side and when Rose opened hers, she found it was bigger on the inside. There were enough clothes to last her a few weeks. The Doctor, on the other hand, was frowning at each piece of clothing.

"This is ridiculous," he grumbled. "My old clothes are fine."

"You're a few years early," Rose reminded him, wondering if she had packed his bag too.

"I have always been at the forefront of fashion," he said, puffing his chest out.

"Tell that to someone who hasn't seen you wear a twenty feet long scarf, a multicououred coat and a piece of celery," Rose told him, her tone teasing.

He glared at her but couldn't quite help the smile. "Cheeky," he said, rolling his eyes.

"No, if I was being cheeky I'd have told Lady Beatrice to shut up a few times," she said, gathering her dresses and hanging them inside the cupboard. "What an unpleasant woman."

"She is actually quite on par for a woman of her time and position," the Doctor said, still examining his clothes with distaste.

"Doesn't mean she has to be so horrible about it," Rose muttered, tossing the empty case aside and sitting down on the bed. "How long before we have to go down for dinner?"

"Two hours," the Doctor said.

Rose nodded and pushed herself off the bed. "I'm taking a bath and then taking a nap. Wake me up in an hour," she told him.

"Fine," he said. "I'll go and see my surgery though I do hope no one needs serious medical help for a while."

"You do have a degree in medicine, right?" Rose asked him worriedly.
"Yes, but it was a while ago. I am not as proficient as my title might betray," he winked. "Rest for a while and I'll wake you up in an hour."

Two hours later, Rose had just finished getting dressed in a maroon evening dress and arranging her hair in neat ringlets. Her bag had contained her usual shampoo, lotion and conditioner, even her curling iron. Instead of electricity, it ran on batteries.

The dress looked like it was made from silk but it was slightly cool to touch and kept the heat from making her uncomfortable. When she asked the Doctor, he launched into an explanation about a fabric from a planet whose name she couldn't pronounce, which regulated the body temperature of the wearer to stay at optimum level.

"Do you know the way to the dining hall?" Rose asked, pulling her long, white gloves on.

"Yes, we passed it on the way," he said. He looked very different dressed in a fine, tailcoat tuxedo. His unruly curls had been slicked back and tied in a ponytail at the base of his neck. He was fidgeting with the white bow tie around his neck, even after Rose had told him off twice for it. "Are you ready?"

Rose nodded and placed her arm on his. "Showtime," she smiled as they left the safety of their quarters.

~

Dinner was more pleasant than Rose would have imagined it to be. She was seated between the Doctor and a Lieutenant by the name of James Campbell. He was a fine man of thirty with a strong jaw and intelligent green eyes. He inquired politely after Rose and kept a steady conversation going throughout dinner.

The Doctor himself was engaged in a very absorbing conversation with Nora Campbell, the Lieutenant's wife who was a delightful woman. Contrary to Lady Beatrice, she was very pleasant and very kind with her attitude towards everything.

There were many others at the table but Lady Beatrice had promised that the introductions could wait till the ball. After dinner, Lieutenant Campbell led Rose out to the ballroom and when the music began, he asked for her first dance.

Rose had never been more thankful for her love of dancing. The dance was a waltz, which she knew well. It was still relatively new to the time, having only been seen as less scandalous in the past few years. Still, Lieutenant Campbell was an excellent dancer and when the song ended, he kissed her hand and left her with the Doctor, before taking his wife's hand.

"Dr. Smith, Rose, there you are," Lady Beatrice said eagerly, walking up to them. "Come, I have to introduce you to so many people."

The next hour and a half involved Lady Beatrice dragging them across the ballroom, introducing them to everyone. Her husband, Captain Wesson, was a blustering man of forty six, who wore a monocle. Rose had an incredible desire to giggle every time she saw it.

She took an immediate liking to Lieutenant Campbell's wife Nora as well as Clarissa Webb who was the wife of the Sergeant Major David Webb. A Corporal named George Gibson said that his wife Mary was ill and sent her apologies for missing the ball.

"Oh, that's a shame," Lady Beatrice said in disappointment. "Oh well, I do hope she feels better."
The only other one who had a wife was Sergeant Thomas Hill whose wife Eleanor reminded Rose of a junior Lady Beatrice in the making. After forced smiles and conversation, Rose was glad to return to the dance floor, this time with the Doctor.

"This is exhausting," Rose murmured to him as they danced.

"Dancing?" he asked, confused.


"Ah, you humans and your social structures. I am constantly surprised," he said with a wide grin.

"So, any ideas as to how to get the TARDIS back?" Rose asked, her smile dimming a bit. It had been fun to play house for a while, but neither one of them had forgotten that they were essentially stranded.

"No," the Doctor frowned. "Everything here is as it should be. No sign of alien activity. No disruption in timelines. Not even a bit of foul play."

"MURDER! THERE'S BEEN A MURDER!"

The music stopped as everyone turned to the young Private who had burst into the ballroom.

"MURDER!" he said yet again and then slumped to the floor in a dead faint.
Monsters of India: Deadly Secrets

Previously

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The flurry of activity began immediately as the Doctor and Rose ran outside, closely followed by Lieutenant Campbell, Captain Wesson and a few other men. As they left, they heard Lady Beatrice ordering the servants to fetch brandy for the shocked guests.

Outside, it was a horrible sight as a woman's bloody and lifeless body lay in the middle of the courtyard. Her coral coloured dress was streaked with her blood and torn in many places. Her pale eyes were glassy and open.

"Dear lord have mercy," Captain Wesson mumbled as they saw the body.

"Mary," Corporal Gibson murmured in shock. "That's my Mary!" he yelled as he ran towards the body.

Rose gasped loudly as she saw the man's anguish. The poor man was completely distraught as he saw his wife's body.

The Doctor knelt next to the body and checked for a pulse. Rose didn't even have to wait for him to confirm it; it was obvious that Mary Gibson was dead.

"The lady shouldn't be seeing this," Lieutenant James said at once. "Dr. Smith, I shall escort your wife back inside with your permission."

"Thank you, Lieutenant," the Doctor said. He looked pleadingly at Rose, and it was a testament to how brutal the murder was that Rose nodded and let the Lieutenant escort her back to hers and the Doctor's quarters.

As they climbed up the stairs, Rose noticed the young servant girl from that afternoon watching her with frightened brown eyes. Rose tilted her head towards her and the girl was so spooked that she ran off and disappeared.

They arrived at the quarters and the Lieutenant patted her hand. "I shall have Nora bring some brandy for you, Mrs. Smith," he said kindly.

"That won't be necessary," Rose said immediately. "I'm fine. I have assisted the Doctor before."

"But I assume not with something as brutal as this," he said wisely. "Poor Mary. She was a kind woman. Nora was very fond of her."

"Then you should be with Nora. She will be very distressed," Rose said kindly. "I will just lie down or something."
The Lieutenant nodded gratefully. "Goodnight, Mrs. Smith. I assume Dr. Smith will be back as soon as he can," he said.

Rose gave him a small smile as he left. An image of Mary Gibson's mangled body rose in her mind and she shivered violently. Who could have done something like that? That sort of murder seemed...inhuman.

There was a knock at her door and she ran to open it, expecting it to be the Doctor or Nora. Instead, it was the young Indian girl from before. She looked frightened but had a slightly determined look in her eyes.

"Lady Beatrice send drink," she said in broken English.

Rose noticed the tray in her hand which had a glass of brandy resting on it. "Come in," Rose said. "What's your name?"

"Rui," she answered, her voice shaking slightly reminding Rose of a spooked deer.

"Rui, that's a nice name," Rose said kindly. "My name's Rose."

Rui looked a bit disconcerted at the gentle tone and Rose wondered if anyone in the cantonment had ever spoken nicely to her. Whatever it was, Rose was determined to know why the girl was so frightened.

"Rui, do you know what happened today?" Rose asked.

She nodded slowly, her eyes wide with fear. "Sherni," she said.

"Sherni?" Rose asked. "What is that?"

"Sherni," Rui said again. "Sherni kill Gibson memsahib (madam)."

"This Sherni killed Mrs. Gibson?" Rose asked.

Rui nodded quickly, her eyes filling up with tears. "Sherni very scary," she said. "Sherni want..." she struggled for the English word. Rose wanted to curse at the lack of the TARDIS translation. This would have been so much easier that way.

"The Sherni wants something, does it?" Rose asked. "What?"

Rui said something in Hindi but at Rose's blank look, her face fell. She tried again. "Want to kill because killing," she said.

Rose's brow furrowed at the odd sentence. "The Sherni wants to kill because of killing?" she asked in confusion before her eyes brightened. "Revenge?"

"Yes, yes memsahib," Rui nodded quickly. "Sherni kill for revenge."

"Did Mary Gibson do something to the Sherni?" Rose asked.

"Not memsahib Gibson," Rui said, becoming more confident when she saw that Rose believed her.

"Then who?" Rose asked eagerly.

There was a knock at the door and Rui's confidence evaporated as fear flashed across her face. Rose wanted to throw something at the person who had interrupted. Rui was spooked again and
probably wouldn't talk. With gritted teeth, Rose gave permission to enter and saw that it was Lady Beatrice.

"Oh, Rose," she said in a falsely sorrowful voice. "You must be distraught, poor dear."

"I am quite alright, Lady Beatrice," Rose said. "You shouldn't have bothered."

"Oh nonsense," Lady Beatrice insisted. Her eyes fell on Rui. "You girl! Are you bothering Mrs. Smith?" she snapped.

"No, no, she is not bothering me," Rose said at once as poor Rui looked close to tears.

Lady Beatrice ignored Rose. "Get out and leave Mrs. Smith alone," she snapped at Rui. "I do not want you hovering around."

Rui grabbed the empty tray and ran out quickly. Rose was fuming as Lady Beatrice turned back to her. "We must not indulge the brown servants, my dear," she told Rose. "Indecent folk like them belong with their own uncultured savages. We must teach them civility of course, but keep our distance too."

A muscle was twitching in Rose's jaw as she contemplated slapping Lady Beatrice. Uncultured savages? They were in the country that had produced one of the richest ancient cultures of the world, a land of gentle folks who had never invaded any other country. If anyone was uncultured, it was people like Lady Beatrice who thought that the colour of their skin made them superior to others.

She would have let loose that tirade if the Doctor hadn't returned just then. "Lady Beatrice," he said. "I wasn't expecting you here."

"Oh, Dr. Smith," Lady Beatrice smiled. "I was just comforting poor Rose. She was quite distraught."

The Doctor noticed the rage on Rose's face and knew it would be wise to get Lady Beatrice out of there as fast as possible. "Yes, and I must thank you for that. I believe Captain Wesson was looking for you," he said.

"Of course, of course," Lady Beatrice said quickly. "What about poor Mary?"

"We have moved her," said the Doctor sombrely. "Lieutenant Campbell and Sergeant Major Webb are making the arrangements to send her and Corporal Gibson back to Britain."

"Tragic, tragic," Lady Beatrice said, sounding distressed. "Goodnight, Dr. Smith. Rose, dear."

"Goodnight," Rose said through gritted teeth. When the door had closed after her, she huffed out the breath she was holding. "That racist bitch," she snarled. "How dare she?"

"Rose, Rose, calm down," the Doctor said, placing a comforting hand on her shoulder.

"I am not going to calm down," Rose snapped at him. "She is a disgusting excuse for a human being."

"Yes, but..."

"We used to have people like that around the Estate, you know," Rose continued without giving any indication of having heard him. "People that yelled slurs and spray-painted vile messages on
people's doors, just because of their race. My mum threatened to wallop them if they didn't stop and I so wish I could wallop that arrogant, prissy bitch too."

"Rose," the Doctor said, grabbing her arms. "I understand your anger and it is completely justified. But there is a larger matter at hand."

Rose glared angrily at him. "I know that," she snapped. "But that does not make this any less important."

"I'm not saying it does," he said soothingly. "Please, Rose, you have to calm down."

Rose still looked furious but then nodded slowly as the angry patches of colour on her cheeks started to fade. The Doctor cupped her face and kissed her forehead softly. "You are a very nice human being, Rose Tyler. And I know that for every person like Lady Beatrice, there are some like you and your mother. That's what makes your world a better place."

Rose nodded tearfully and threw her arms around his neck in a hug. The Doctor cradled her head gently, making shushing noises as sobbed away her frustration. "I am sorry, Rose," he said.

"You didn't do anything," she mumbled. "It's my species that's so dumb."

The Doctor didn't say anything, merely patted her hair in reply. Rose pulled away after a few moments and wiped away at her face. "Sorry about that," she said. "I shouldn't have yelled out at you. I just...hate being silent when something like this is happening."

The Doctor's eyes softened as he looked at her. "I know," he said, understandingly.

Rose wiped away the last of her tears and looked determinedly at him. "So, what happened to Mary Gibson?" she asked.

The Doctor sighed and sat down in an armchair. "She was mauled by an animal," he said. "The claw marks that I examined looked feline."

"She was mauled by a cat?" Rose asked disbelievingly.

"A very large cat. A tiger most likely," he said.

Rose sat down next to him. "I talked to one of the girls here. Rui, her name. She said that something called a Sherni had killed Mary," she said.

"Sherni?" the Doctor asked.

"Yeah, you know what that is?" Rose asked.

"It's the Hindi word for a tigress," he said. "So my suspicions were correct. Poor Mrs. Gibson was mauled by a tiger. Though I fail to understand how it got inside the courtyard past the night guards."

"Hang on, that makes no sense," Rose said. "Rui said that the Sherni killed Mary out of revenge but not for something she had done."

"Revenge?" the Doctor asked incredulously. "Against whom?"

"Lady Beatrice interrupted and scared the poor girl before she could say. I don't think this was just some tiger that killed Mary Gibson," Rose said.
"Are you sure that the girl wasn't just frightened?" the Doctor asked.

"Of course she was frightened," Rose said, indignantly. "But she didn't sound like she was talking about an ordinary tiger. Look, I know it sounds daft but you said yourself that the circumstances are weird. Not to mention that the TARDIS has disappeared."

The Doctor pursed his lips and nodded. "Alright, you have me intrigued," he said. "Can you get your friend to reveal more about the Sherni? There could be a local legend that we might be missing."

Rose nodded. "I'll try and talk to her tomorrow," she said.

The Doctor nodded and smiled softly at her. "Get some sleep. You look exhausted, Rose," he said.

Rose smiled at him and left towards the bedroom. The Doctor sighed slowly, pondering over Rose's words.

He had to swallow his revulsion as he remembered examining Mary's injuries. Her death had not been quick. She had suffered a lot of non-fatal yet painful scratches before the final blow had severed her carotid artery. And therein lay the anomaly.

The injuries were far too methodical to have been done by a loose animal. It was as if the killer had wanted her to suffer before she died.

In perspective of what Rose had said, it did indeed seem like revenge killing. He huffed out a breath and stood up from his armchair. The TARDIS had disappeared and a mysterious feline creature was killing in revenge. They had to be connected somehow.

He wandered into the bedroom to ask Rose if she had any more ideas but found her fast asleep in bed. Smiling at her peaceful face, he left her quietly and went out to the balcony overlooking the woods. The night was a lot cooler and it was pitch dark outside.

He peered at the woods, wondering if the creature was prowling in its depths and if it would show itself. He blinked rapidly as two red pinpricks shone out of the darkness quickly. He knew that a tiger's eyes often flashed red when light hit them but it was completely dark.

He focused his gaze and saw that the two pinpricks were in fact, eyes of a feline creature. And judging by the way they were glinting, they belonged to a creature that was most definitely not of this planet.

"Hello," he murmured. "What are you?"

There was no answer but the pinpricks stayed focused on him. He returned the gaze unwaveringly. "Are you trapped here? Do you want us to take you home?" he tried again.

The eyes blinked quickly and then disappeared. The Doctor sighed. That hadn't been useful at all. Except now, he knew that Rose was right. There was an alien creature loose that was apparently killing people for revenge. He would have to find out if anyone else had died in a similar incident. There was also the matter of upon whom that revenge was being taken.

It was a tangled web of secrets alright.

~

A few chambers over, Nora Campbell had only just managed to stop sobbing after having heard of
Mary's death. The timid woman had been Nora's friend and her death had come as an awful shock.

"There, there, Nora," James Campbell said, patting his wife's shoulder.

"Poor Mary," Nora said. "She would never hurt a fly."

"I know, my dear," James said comfortingly.

"But don't you see James?" Nora demanded, sounding near hysterics now. "This is exactly what happened with Wilhelmina."

"Nora, Wilhelmina's death was an accident," James said.

"Dr. Forrester did not seem to think so," Nora pointed out.

"Of course he didn't," James said. "Wilhelmina was his wife. Poor man was so distraught by her death that he lost his grip on reality. Thankfully Dr. Smith was able to arrive so soon."

"What if he was telling the truth, James?" Nora asked. "What if the targets are the wives of people who..."

"Nora, stop!" James ordered, sounding angry now. "Poor Bill Forrester had lost his mind after his wife's death. Do not put stock into an insane man's ramblings. The killings are just an accident. Nothing more."

Nora dissolved into tears and James sighed as he drew her into his embrace. "There, there, Nora. You are completely safe, my dear. Nothing is going to hurt you," he whispered comfortingly.

~

"I'm telling you Edmund," Lady Beatrice snapped. "We ought to leave for England at once. It's madness to stay here. First Wilhelmina and now Mary."

Captain Wesson glared at his wife. "Do you expect me to go back to England and tell them that a curse killed the wives of those poor men?" he demanded. "I'd be laughed out."

"Well, even if they won't believe you, it wouldn't make it less true," she said angrily. "If we waste anymore time, I could be next."

"Selfless as ever, Bea," he said sarcastically. "Could you stop thinking about yourself for one moment?"

Lady Beatrice swelled furiously. "Do not forget that I made you what you are, Edmund Wesson," she said in a venomous voice. "You were a nobody before I married you. I would have married Lord Blakeley instead of a poor soldier with neither a title nor a penny to his name. Do not forget your place with me."

Captain Wesson paled but glared at her. "Watch it..."

"Shut up!" Lady Beatrice snapped. "You are leaving for Bombay in the morning to find Major Lloyd-Griffiths and telling him what has happened. Demand a transfer or close the cantonment. I expect to be on the next boat to England and I expect you there with me. Am I understood?"

"Yes, Beatrice."
The next morning, Rose was awoken by the harsh sunlight filtering into the bedroom from the balcony. She groaned and buried her face into the cool side of the bed, dragging her pillow over her head. She was so not a morning person.

"Good morning, Rose," the Doctor greeted from somewhere inside the bedroom.

"What time is it?" Rose asked, without lifting the pillow from her head.

"Five-thirty," he answered. "We have to go down to breakfast soon."

Rose cursed under her breath as she threw the pillow off and sat up in bed. The Doctor was sitting in a chair near the balcony, reading a newspaper. "So," she began, getting out of bed and tying her hair in a knot. "Find anything new?"

The Doctor set down his newspaper and nodded gravely. "I saw the creature last night," he said. "At least, I think I saw it."

"What do you mean?" Rose asked, intrigued.

"It is a feline creature with red eyes," he said. "It certainly isn't a documented species from Earth."

"So, alien then?" Rose asked as she headed towards the bathroom to brush her teeth.

"No," the Doctor said, raising his voice slightly so that their conversation could continue. "I mean, I'm not quite sure. It may just be an Earth species that was never discovered. There are all sorts of legends and myths, you know."

He heard her make a noise of assent at that. "So, here's what we do now. You try talking to your friend from yesterday. Ask her about the legend of the Sherni. Anything you can find," he said.

"And what're you going to do?" Rose asked, coming back into the bedroom and searching for a fresh dress in the cupboard.

"Some investigating of my own," he said. "I rather suspect that our hosts have been less than honest with us."

"So you do believe it's a matter of revenge?" Rose asked.

"It's certainly possible," he said.

"Right then," she said. "I'm taking a bath and getting dressed. Then, we'll see what the hell all of this is about."

~

Breakfast was an unusually tense affair. The gloom of Mary Gibson's death hung in the air but Rose couldn't help but realise how jittery everyone seemed. The Doctor seemed to have sensed the same since he appeared to be observing everyone discreetly.

The only one speaking was Lady Beatrice, but even her demeanour seemed tense as she made small talk about the horrid weather and her usual complaints about everything. For the first time, they didn't bother Rose. There were important matters to uncover today.
Lady Beatrice would still be mouthing off after they had resolved this issue. Rose had a good mind to give the woman a piece of her mind once she and the Doctor had the TARDIS back.

Her small talk did reveal that Captain Wesson would be leaving for Bombay to inform the Major of Mary Gibson's death. "A wise decision," Sergeant Major David Webb agreed.

"Yes, I quite agree," Nora Campbell spoke up. "What with Wilhelmina and now, Mary..."

"Nora!" her husband chastised sharply as everyone looked at Nora with concealed anger.

The Doctor and Rose observed this curiously. So there had been someone who had been killed before Mary. Nora's face flushed with shame as she lowered her gaze.

The Doctor nudged Rose subtly and she nodded. She would definitely be cornering Nora later and asking her more.

Everyone was visibly relieved when breakfast was over. The tension had only multiplied after Nora's slip. Everyone kept looking at the Doctor and Rose as if expecting one of them to start demanding what Nora had been talking about.

They drifted to different parts of the cantonment as per their duties. The Doctor whispered to Rose that if anyone asked where he was, to tell them that he was in his surgery working on something important. Rose nodded and went in search of Nora and found her sitting in one of the smaller parlours. She was knitting something but kept pricking herself.

"Nora, are you alright?" Rose asked, genuinely concerned.

"Oh hello, Rose," Nora said, her voice a bit hoarse and her eyes unfocused. "My hands keep shaking too much."

Rose gently pried away the knitting needles away from her hands. "Perhaps you should rest," she told Nora. She had wanted to interrogate her but seeing her look so distraught erased all intent of grilling the poor woman.

"What is the use?" Nora asked. "We are all going to die."

"Why do you say that?" Rose asked gently, grasping her hand comfortably.

"You do not understand," Nora said, sounding defeated. "It's not going to stop until we are all dead."

"Who isn't?" Rose asked.

"They never should have," Nora continued, appearing to not have heard Rose at all. "They should never have killed it."

"Killed what?" Rose asked insistently.

Nora's eyes snapped to Rose before rolling upwards. She slumped in her seat, unconscious. Rose glanced at her in dismay before calling for help. It was Lance Corporal Patrick Milton who appeared.

"What's wrong, Mrs. Smith?" he asked.

"Mrs. Campbell has fainted," Rose said.
"Oh no," he said, looking genuinely concerned. "Shall I help you take her back to her chambers, ma'am?"

"Yes please," Rose said. Between the two of them, they managed to take Nora back to her quarters and lay her in her bed.

"Shall I fetch Doctor Smith, ma'am?" Lance Corporal Milton asked.

"No, he's busy," Rose said. "She will be fine. She's just in shock."

"Understandable, ma'am," Lance Corporal Milton said sympathetically. "With everything that has been going on."

"What do you know about the woman killed before Mrs. Gibson?" Rose asked him.

Lance Corporal Milton looked uncomfortable. "We're not supposed to talk about it," he said.

"Oh go on," Rose encouraged.

He sighed and complied. "Dr. Forrester was the medical officer before your husband, ma'am. Mrs. Forrester was the one who was killed. She was mauled by an animal one evening," he said.

"Just like Mary Gibson," Rose said.

"Exactly the same way, ma'am," he nodded.

"Mrs. Campbell kept saying that they never should have killed it," Rose said. "Do you know what she was talking about?"

Lance Corporal Milton's face immediately shut down. "No, ma'am," he said briskly. "I should return to my duties," he said and left quickly.

Rose watched him go with raised eyebrows. This just got more mysterious by the minute.

~

While Rose had been busy with Nora Campbell, the Doctor himself had not been idle. He was examining Mary Gibson's body again to see if he could find any trace of the animal. So far, he hadn't been able to find anything useful.

Huffing in impatience, he left his surgery to get some fresh air. The heat didn't bother him but he stayed indoors to avoid discomfort. It was on one of his wanderings into the halls lined with photographs that he came across something that made him stop in his tracks.

He looked at the photograph again and his face set in a hard line. He plucked the photo frame off the wall and stalked off in search of Captain Wesson. He found him in the main parlour, getting ready to leave for Bombay. Most of the officers were there along with Lady Beatrice, Clarissa Webb and Rose.

Rose's face lit up when she saw him but her smile vanished upon seeing the rage on his face. The Doctor strode to the middle of the room and dropped the photo in front of Captain Wesson. "You killed it!" he snapped angrily.

Everyone fell silent and Rose leaned past them to see the photograph. It showed Captain Wesson along with most of his officers, posing over the dead body of a tiger with guns held at their sides.
Rose gasped as she looked at the tiger. It was nothing like she had ever seen. It was about eight foot long with broad black stripes on yellow but that was where the similarities with an ordinary tiger ended. It had long teeth like a sabre-toothed tiger and its open eyes were completely red. The claws were curved and were smooth and dark grey in colour.

It was alien yet so earthly at the same time. A majestic creature that had been slain by bullets shot into his abdomen lay at the feet of its killers. Rose felt revulsion rising within her as she looked up from the photograph.

"You killed it," the Doctor repeated angrily. "And now, the other member of the species requires revenge."

"Surely, Doctor," Captain Wesson began blusteringly.

"Oh don't even start," the Doctor said, sounding enraged. "This was a beautiful creature. So unique that there probably had never been anything like it. And you killed it, you inhuman beasts. You disgust me."

"Now see here, Doctor," Lady Beatrice said, jumping to her husband's defence. "I do not see what right you have to call us inhumane. It was just an animal."

"Just an animal?" Rose demanded, losing her patience. "It was a unique species. Nothing like ever seen on Earth. And instead of protecting it, you made a sport of it. You killed it and humiliated it by posing over the body like it was some sort of a conquest," she spat angrily. "Nora was right. You should never have killed it."

"And now two women are dead," the Doctor said. "How many more must die because you killed a creature who had never done a thing to hurt you before?"

The silence was extremely palpable. The emotions of the people ranged from shame to anger at the Doctor and Rose's accusations. Through the silence, a loud scream echoed and everyone snapped to attention. They ran out into the courtyard just in time to see Eleanor Hill's jugular being torn by the tiger similar to one that had been killed.

The sharp red eyes looked furiously at them as the creature killed Eleanor Hill.

"Fetch the rifle!" Captain Wesson ordered, his voice hoarse with fear.

"No!" the Doctor said angrily. He broke away from the group and approached the tiger. "I'm not going to hurt you," he said softly.

The tiger stopped hissing and stared at the Doctor quite calmly. The red eyes probed the Doctor's blue ones for a long moment before the tiger's eyes glowed brighter. Then, to everyone's enormous surprise, the tiger opened its mouth and spoke in a soft feminine voice.

"They killed my mate, I kill theirs," the tigress said.

"You can speak," the Doctor said in surprise.

"Yes," she said. "Do not interfere, Lord of Time. This does not concern you."

"How did you know that?" the Doctor asked.

"Your machine," the tigress answered. "I am sorry to have captured it. It will be returned to you when my work here is finished."
"Your work, meaning you want to kill Mrs. Campbell, Mrs. Webb and Lady Beatrice?" he asked calmly, ignoring the gasps of fear behind them.

"Yes," the tigress hissed.

"But why kill them? They did not kill your mate," the Doctor said.

"No," she agreed. "But their mates did. Death is easy, Lord of Time. You of all people should know that. It is living in pain that is true suffering."

"So you want to make them suffer by killing their mates," the Doctor said.

"An eye for an eye, a love for a love," the tigress hissed.

"Then where does the killing stop?" he asked gently.

The tigress' tail twitched. "Tell me, Lord of Time," she said. "What would you do if your mate was harmed?" she asked, turning her red eyes on Rose.

"She's not my mate," the Doctor said, sounding a tad defensive. "We're friends." Rose noticed Lady Beatrice looking horror-struck at the thought of Rose and the Doctor not being a married couple. She suppressed her desire to roll her eyes. That woman needed a lesson about looking at the bigger picture.

The tigress made an odd sound that might almost have been a laugh of derision. "Blind Lord of Time," she said. "Mate or not, what would you do to the one who caused her harm?"

"This isn't about me," the Doctor said sharply, his fists clenching at his side.

The tigress flicked her tail lazily. "You would do the very thing I am doing. You would seek revenge, Lord of Time. We are alike, you and I," she said.

A muscle twitched in the Doctor's jaw as he stared at the tigress. Rose waited for him to deny it. He wouldn't kill someone in revenge if someone harmed her, would he? He would be angry yes, but he wouldn't go on a killing rampage. Right?

She felt a tug on her sleeve and looked to see Rui beckoning her. Rose looked questioningly at her and she gestured insistently for Rose to follow her. Rose looked towards where the Doctor and the tigress were locked in a confrontation and quietly slipped away from the group towards Rui.

Rui grabbed her hand and pulled her inside the cantonment. "You want to stop Sherni?" she asked.

"Yes," Rose nodded. "Do you know how?"


"The temple?" Rose asked. "Show me."

Rui nodded and led her towards the back exit of the cantonment that went into the woods. Through the thick undergrowth, Rose followed Rui. Rui was quick on her feet and Rose had trouble keeping up with her. The Victorian garb didn't help an iota.

Ten minutes of scrambling through the thick woods, they reached a clearing.

"Temple of Sherni," Rui pointed triumphantly.
Rose watched wide-eyed at the bright red crystal the size of a chicken's egg embedded in the thick trunk of the tree. As she approached it, the scent of the tree hit her nostrils. It was a Eucalyptus tree and Rose remembered that the area they were in was named after it.

"Nilgiri tree," Rui said helpfully.

Rose nodded; they were near the Nilgiri Hills where these trees grew plentiful. She touched the crystal, expecting something to happen but nothing did. It was slightly cool to touch despite the hot day. Rose carefully pried it out of the tree and held it in her palm.

"Come on," she said to Rui.

Getting back was easier and when they got back into the courtyard, the Doctor and the tigress were still locked in an intense debate. "I cannot allow you to kill," the Doctor was saying.

"You won't be able to stop me, Lord of Time. I shall have my revenge," the tigress spat.

"And then what?" he demanded. "What shall become of you then?"

The tigress' voice calmed. "Then I shall die," she said. "My vengeance is the only thing keeping me here. Once I have it, I shall attain peace and rejoin my mate in our life after death."

"Then join him now," the Doctor begged. "Leave these people."

"I can't do that," she said.

Rose broke away from the group and ran to the Doctor. "This crystal," she said, holding it up.

The tigress hissed in anger. "How did you find that?" she demanded.

The Doctor took the crystal and examined it. "Interesting," he murmured. "Very interesting." His eyes flashed to the tigress. "You are not of this world. You came through the rift."

"What rift?" Rose asked.

"Not like the one in Cardiff. This one's smaller," said the Doctor. "This crystal would be embedded in something organic, creating a small rip in the fabric of reality."

"It was in a Eucalyptus tree," Rose said. "Rui showed me."

The Doctor held up the crystal to the tigress. "Please leave," he pleaded. "Join your mate."

"Or what?" she asked angrily. "You'll shatter the crystal and kill me yourself?"

"If I am left with no choice, yes," the Doctor said, his voice full of remorse. "I cannot allow more blood to be shed."

"Then kill me, Lord of Time," the tigress said, holding her head up proudly. "Kill me, get your machine back and return to the stars."

The Doctor's hand shook as he held the crystal. "Please," he said. "Don't make me kill you."

The tigress tensed her muscles and turned her gaze to Rose. "Lord of Time, perhaps it's time to put my theory to test," she said. With that, she lunged towards Rose, landing on top of her.

"Rose!" the Doctor yelled as the tigress' teeth neared her jugular.
"Doctor!" Rose yelled. She could feel the tigress' weight on top of her and her teeth millimetres away from her throat.

The tigress raised a paw to deliver a sharp blow to Rose's head but there was a clinking sound as the crystal was thrown onto the ground, shattering it completely.

The tigress stumbled off Rose, wobbling on her feet. She looked at the Doctor and he saw relief and bitterness in those previously blank, red eyes.

"See, Lord of Time," the tigress said as she fell to the ground. "You did kill to save your mate after all."

The tigress' eyes fell close and slowly a red glow enveloped her form. The body glowed a bright red for a moment before vanishing completely. The Doctor was still breathing heavily as he stared at the empty spot on the ground. It was only when heard Rose wince that he snapped out of it and ran to her.

He carefully helped her to her feet and then crushed her to his chest. Rose held onto him just as tightly, breathing heavily as the adrenaline began to wear off. The Doctor's grip on her was on the verge of being uncomfortable but Rose couldn't bear to pull away.

A slow wheezing sound filled the air as the TARDIS began to materialise in front of them. They looked up, but refused to untangle their arms from around each other as the TARDIS came to a halt. The Doctor pressed a kiss to Rose's forehead and slowly let go of her, but kept her hand in his.

"Come on," he said. "Let's go."

Rose nodded but then turned around one last time. The British officers and their wives were in various states of shock and hysterics at the events that had unfolded. Rose saw Rui staring at her with a tear-streaked face. She raised a hand in farewell at her, a gesture that was returned quickly and enthusiastically.

The Doctor opened the TARDIS doors and Rose followed him inside. He started the dematerialisation sequence and Rose put a hand on his shoulder. "Doctor," she said. "Are you okay?"

He turned and smiled softly at her. "Yes, I'm okay," he said. Rose wasn't particularly convinced at his tone. "We need to make arrangements to finish the paradoxical loop," he said. "Could you pack our bags from the wardrobe room?"

Rose nodded but seemed reluctant to leave him. The Doctor leaned in and kissed her cheek softly. "Go, Rose," he said. "I am fine."

With a last concerned glance at him, Rose left the console room to go to the wardrobe room. The Doctor immediately darted over to the screen with the TARDIS's databanks and entered the search. The file opened up for him.

*In the October of 1893, the British Cantonment in Nilgiri Hills was shut down after an incident that claimed the lives of Wilhelmina Forrester, Mary Gibson and Eleanor Hill. The building was torn down and the forest was allowed to grow back.*

*Years later, the place gained its unique reputation for being known as a Suicide Point. Star-crossed lovers trekked to the area to commit suicide. It is said that dying together there meant that you were joined in the after-life. Free from the worldly bodies, soul mates could live in eternal*
To date, more than 700 different couples from all over the world have taken their lives there. It is rumoured that just before death, the young lovers hear a tiger howling and a red beacon shines through the forest. Locals avoid the area completely, believing it to carry the spirits of those dead.

According to one legend, two lovers came from another world to live there. One of them was murdered cruelly and his mate took revenge on those who had killed him. She was stopped by two strangers from the stars. Every year on the last day of October, the locals pay homage to the strangers from the stars who had protected them.

Not much is known about those strangers except their odd names: the Lord of Time and the Wolf Flower. It is said that they continue roaming the stars in their blue chariot, saving those in need.
"Is it anything cold yet?" Rose asked in a hopeful voice.

The Doctor beamed at her. "It is indeed," he said.

"Snow?" she asked.

"Ice," he corrected.

"Ice?" Rose asked in confusion. "Where are we?"

"In your own solar system," he said, opening the TARDIS doors and leading her outside. "Rose Tyler, welcome to Europa."

Rose's eyes widened as she stepped onto the smooth icy surface of Europa. Her mouth fell open as she looked skyward. "Is that...?"

"Jupiter, the largest planet in your solar system," the Doctor said, taking immense pleasure from the look of awe on her face.

"It's huge," Rose said. "Europa is one of its moons, is it?"

"Yes, one of the earliest ones discovered," the Doctor said. "By Galileo himself."

Rose nodded in awe as she looked around. "Uh, when are we?" she asked. Straight ahead of them was what appeared to be a small town and she was certain that wasn't there in the early twenty-first century.

"The year 2482," he said. "Not so far off from your time after all. Europa was the second off-planet Earth base in this solar system. The first one being your own moon."

"So, that's an Earth colony?" Rose asked in excitement. "But hang on, I thought nowhere else in the solar system was capable of having life."

"That was before the new developments with terra-forming and atmospheric globes," he said, taking her arm and leading her towards the colony. "See that?" he asked, pointing skyward again.

Rose followed his gaze but couldn't see anything different from before. "What am I looking at?" she asked.

"Exactly," he grinned. "It's a transparent bubble created by artificial technology."

"And that's how they create the atmosphere, do they?" Rose asked.

"No," he said, smiling. "The atmosphere already mimicked that of the Earth. The barrier is to filter out radiation from Jupiter and keep the surface temperature at a warm level."

"This is warm?" Rose asked sceptically. It had to be at least -5 degrees.

"The original surface temperature for this part of the moon is -160 degrees Celsius," he said dryly.

"Okay then," Rose said, digesting that bit of trivia. "Definitely warm."
"The first humans who came here mostly led a subterranean existence," he said. "Living underground meant that they were protected from both the radiation and the temperature. It was only a couple centuries ago that they could take to the surface."

"So, what is the colony for?" Rose asked. "Exploration? Research? Residential?"

"Entertainment," he grinned.

"What?" Rose asked, thrown by that.

"Exactly," he winked. "Europa is the primary tourist spot for any traveller visiting the solar system."

Rose looked around at the colony that they had arrived in and realised that he was right. It was like arriving at a carnival. If carnivals were high-tech and had Jupiter hanging in the sky, that is.

There were booths where people could shoot or throw stuff to win a prize, food stalls, kiosks selling trinkets, rollercoasters and other carnival rides and right towards the end was...

"Ice skating!" Rose grinned in excitement. "Come on," she said enthusiastically, dragging the Doctor behind her.

The Doctor laughed at her childish enthusiasm and went along with it. The ice rink was the size of a football stadium and had a number of people skating around on it. Humans, humanoids, even a few odd aliens were having the time of their lives gliding smoothly on the ice. A few would fall over, bipeds mostly, but everyone was having fun.

While the Doctor had been busy staring at the skaters, Rose had found them both a pair of skates and was already tying hers to her feet. She almost looked giddy with excitement and it was contagious. The Doctor tied the skates around his feet and then took her offered hand as they joined the rest of the skaters on the ice.

Rose was spectacular at it, a fact that surprised the Doctor. His surprise must have shown on his face, for Rose rolled her eyes at him. "I did gymnastics since I was a kid," she reminded him. "Balance comes naturally."

The two of them skated a few rounds around the rink, holding hands and generally giggling like children on sugar high. Then, Rose let go of his hand and skated a few steps away from him before executing a perfect Axel jump.

The Doctor was sure that his jaw was on the floor, judging by Rose's giggling. Not to be outdone, he snapped his mouth shut and winked cheekily at her as he skated away from her. Rose waited in anticipation and let out a whoop of celebration as the Doctor performed a perfect loop jump.

From then on, the two of them engaged in one-upping each other with fancy moves. From flawless jumps to ridiculously awful tricks, the two of them had an absolutely amazing time. Rose was sure she would be bruised all over the next day from the amount of falling that they had done but she hadn't had this much fun in ages.

"Shall we stop and find something to eat?" the Doctor asked, his breathing a bit laboured as they raced each other around the rink. "I think some of the other skaters might be a bit disgruntled with us."

Rose nodded quickly, smothering her giggles. She and the Doctor hadn't exactly been on their adult behaviour as they skated, resulting in bumping into several skaters and bursting into giggles as a
form of apology. The two of them skated to the end of the rink and Rose was sure that the breeze blowing at their backs was the collective sigh of the rest of the skaters.

They took off their skates and wandered around the food stalls, finally finding one that served chips in auto-heated packs. They sat down on a bench near a group of buildings, sharing the chips and hot cocoa that the Doctor had found.

Rose was just trying to get her fingers to warm by clutching the cocoa mug when she noticed that the Doctor was frowning at the building in front of them. She looked where he was looking and saw that it was a museum.


"Cryogenic Restoration is still in its early stages, being used for food and other organic matter. Research into human cryogenic restoration is in its very early stages," he frowned.

"So definitely not close enough to have a museum then," Rose said. "Alright then," she said, finishing her cocoa and wiping her fingers on the paper napkin before crumpling it into a ball and tossing it into the rubbish bin. "Let's go and see."

The Doctor grimaced as he stood up. "Rose, I promised you a vacation," he said, half-heartedly. His curiosity was burning but after stranding her in India for a while, he had wanted to give her a nice, relaxing holiday.

"Doctor," Rose said, rolling her eyes. "It wouldn't be a vacation without us finding trouble anyway. Something is happening here, contrary to the Laws of Time. It is our business to investigate."

"You're stealing my best lines, Rose Tyler," the Doctor grinned, slipping an arm around her waist and drawing her into his side. "Fine, we'll go and see the museum."

"That's the spirit!" Rose grinned as they entered the slate grey building. The dark doors opened into a surprisingly warm hallway with a thick golden carpet on the floor and golden lamps hanging overhead. The museum was quiet; it definitely wasn't a popular tourist place.

"The reception," Rose pointed ahead where there was a singular desk with a myriad of pamphlets strewn across it.

"Perhaps we should take a guided tour," the Doctor murmured as they approached the desk. It wasn't manned but the Doctor found a switch. He pressed it, expecting a computer screen or a hologram to pop up.

To their great astonishment, a short, stout man in his late fifties ambled up to them with a beaming smile on his face. He was dressed like a 20th century university professor, with braces, a bowtie and a tweed jacket with elbow patches. He even had thick glasses resting on his nose.

"Welcome, welcome," he beamed, looking immensely pleased to see them. "I'm Professor Maximilian Niamah but everyone calls me Professor Max."

"Hello," the Doctor said pleasantly. "I'm the Doctor and this is Rose. We were just visiting and were hoping for a tour."

Professor Max looked like Christmas had come early. "Of course, of course, I'd be delighted to give you a tour, young man. It is so rare to find youngsters with enthusiasm for museums these days," he said.
Rose almost giggled at the look on the Doctor's face at being called young but stopped herself since she didn't want to hurt the Professor's feelings. She and the Doctor followed the Professor as he led them to the hallway on the right, talking almost at the Doctor's rate.

"This is our Mesoamerican exhibit. Some of our best collections," the Professor said eagerly. "This is a Mayan warrior from the Classic Period. And over there, is one of the Aztecs' Perfect Victim."

Rose looked at the two exhibits and frowned. Both the Mayans and the Aztecs, while being chronologically far apart themselves, were old civilisations. The two men could not have been cryogenically frozen in their time unless she had missed something very important during her history class in school. She looked at the Doctor and saw his eyebrows drawn together, confirming her suspicion.

"Fascinating," the Doctor said. "Very good specimens too. I suppose they have been verified as being genuine?"

"Of course," the Professor said, sounding a bit indignant. "I verified them myself."

"I thought you were the one who restored them," the Doctor said in confusion.

"Oh no, that was all Professor Dawn," the Professor said.

"Professor Dawn?" the Doctor asked.

"Professor Regina Dawn," the Professor nodded. "She's the leading expert on Cryogenic Restoration."

"Hmm, I see," said the Doctor. "Could we meet Professor Dawn by any chance?"

"Oh no, no, no," the Professor said. "She is a very busy woman and I hear she has just received a new specimen to restore. She won't be disturbed."

"A new specimen?" the Doctor asked. "May we see it?"

"I'm afraid you will have to wait until it is restored and verified. Professor Dawn is very particular about her work. We passed her workshop earlier you see, and no one's allowed in there when she's working. Not even me," he said.

The Doctor nodded. "Right, I understand," he said, smiling at the Professor.

"Excuse me, Professor," Rose said. "Could you point me to the nearest restroom?"

"Oh, uh, sure young lady," he said. "Back the way we came from, to your right."

"Thanks," Rose smiled. "I'll catch up."

"You do that," said the Doctor with a smile before leaning in towards her and dropping his sonic screwdriver into the deep pocket of her winter coat.

Rose grinned and then nodded subtly at the Doctor before going back into the hallway. She spotted the bathroom but didn't go towards it. She started looking for Professor Dawn's workshop and found it right opposite the restrooms.

The door had numerous signs warning people off and the door was locked. Rose checked up and down the corridor once before pulling out the Doctor's sonic screwdriver and unlocking the door. The room was tiny and completely empty. Rose snuck inside and observed it with a frown.
There wasn't enough room in the workshop to hold two grown adults, let alone be a workshop of any kind. Rose moved to the far wall which was literally two steps away. She could feel a slight draught. Smiling victoriously, she ran her hand over the wall and she must have touched a right spot, for a part of the wall slid open.

Rose grinned to herself and poked her head inside the newly revealed room. Her mouth fell open as she slowly walked into the room. It was no workshop. The walls were a light grey and there were jars filled with different specimens placed neatly around the...

"Console," Rose murmured. This was a TARDIS. Definitely not the Doctor's, unless he had a hobby he wasn't sharing. But the hum wasn't the one she knew. In fact, it was entirely too silent inside this TARDIS.

Rose walked to the console and looked at the controls curiously. They looked more high tech than the ones in the Doctor's TARDIS. She turned around to go and find the Doctor when a strong arm grabbed her waist roughly. Before she could even struggle, a sharp point of a needle touched her neck.

"Should not have meddled, girl," a sinister female voice said slowly as Rose felt blackness envelope her completely.
The Lunar Discovery: The Roman

Rose slowly opened her eyes and the first thing she realised was that she was strapped to a flat surface. Her wrists and ankles were bound to the cold table with metal clamps.

She turned her head to the side and saw a Roman soldier strapped similarly to the table next to her. He waved his bound hand awkwardly at her.

*Just hallucinating, just hallucinating, just hallucinating,* Rose chanted to herself as she clamped her eyes shut and slowly opened them again.

"Still here," the Roman soldier said, looking at her apologetically.

"Where am I?" Rose asked, turning her neck but she could only see a dark ceiling.

"I have absolutely no idea," the Roman said. "I woke up ten minutes before you did."

"Right," Rose said. She tested her restraints but they were expertly attached. "Can you get loose?" she asked him.

"Been trying for the past ten minutes," he shrugged. "Can't move anything besides my head."

"Yeah, same," she said, blowing her hair out of her face in frustration. She turned her head back towards the Roman. "What's your name?"

He hesitated only for a second. "Rory," he said. "My name's Rory."

"Rory?" Rose asked. "That's not a very Roman name."

"You can call me Roranicus if that makes you feel better," he said dryly.

"Yeah, I'll stick with Rory. I'm Rose," she said. "Do you remember how you got here?"

He snorted without humour. "Haven't a clue," he said. "You?"

"I was grabbed...I think," she said, trying to remember. "Are we still in the museum?" she asked, trying to raise her head even a little so that she could look around better.

"What museum?" Rory asked.

"The Cryogenic Restoration museum," Rose said. "The Doctor said it was weird..."

"Are you saying we're in a museum?" Rory asked. "Where is this museum?"

Rose looked sheepishly at him. "Hate to break it to you but this is the year 2482," she said. "And this is Europa, one of Jupiter's moons."

Rory's eyes went wide. "Great," he said, heavy sarcasm in his voice. "So not only have I travelled in time again, it's also through space this time."

"Come again?" Rose asked. "Did you just say you travelled through time again?"

"Yeah," he said. "Look, you may not believe me but time travel is real."

"You don't say," Rose said dryly. "How'd you travel through time then?"
"You won't believe me," he said, looking away from her. "But I'm telling you the truth. This isn't the first time I've travelled through time and I don't know how it's happened."

"Look, I'm pretty sure that Romans did not have time travel," Rose said, but she could see that he was telling the truth.

"I'm not Roman," he said. "Well, not until two years ago at least."

"What?" Rose asked, confused.

"Two years ago, I just woke up in Rome in 102 A.D.," he said. "Without any explanation. No clue how I got there. So, I just sort of assimilated into the Roman society."

"So, where are you from?" Rose asked, completely shocked by the revelation.


"Were you doing some sort of a weird experiment?" Rose asked. "Meddling with physics?"

"Hardly," he said. "I was at a Halloween party."

"Right, you win," Rose said. "That is officially the weirdest thing I've heard."

"You believe me?" he asked, looking very surprised and hopeful.

"Yeah, I believe you," Rose said. "Thing is, I'm not exactly from this time either."

"Where are you from then?" Rory asked eagerly.


"This Doctor? Who is he?" Rory asked.

"Someone who can help," Rose said. "Look, we have to get out of here and find him."

"Right but how?" Rory asked.

"I just have to reach my pocket," Rose said, wriggling her hand towards the pocket of her winter coat where she could still feel the sonic screwdriver resting against her leg.

"Well, hurry up," Rory said. "Cos whoever tied us up might return at any moment."

~

She raised the hood of her long cloak to hide her face from view and hurried into town quickly. There wasn't a chance that anyone would recognise her after her recent regeneration but she wasn't taking any chances.

The blonde Earth girl that she had found in her TARDIS was definitely not from this time. She hadn't brought her so the matter remained as to how a strange time traveller got here. She increased her pace.

The girl was no Time Agent nor an Agent for the Celestial Intervention Agency so that left the option of some other Time Lord bringing her. And there was only one Time Lord she knew that travelled with primitive humans.
"Doctor," she snarled as she reached the blue box. "I should have known. You meddlesome, interfering idiot."

The Rani was furious but she was far from flustered. She quickly attached the levers for the Chronon loop around the Doctor's TARDIS and pressed the switch on her remote. The Doctor's TARDIS was surrounded by a golden ring which slowly made the TARDIS disappear. She smirked in satisfaction as she put the remote back inside her cloak.

"Let's see you get away from this one, Doctor," she said and turned around to make her way back to her specimens.

~

The Doctor was only half-listening to Professor Max's commentary on the Ancient Mesopotamia. Rose had been gone for a long time and with her, he had learnt to expect the worse. Honestly, she could find trouble anywhere. His jeopardy-friendly pink and yellow human was going to give him a double coronary one day.

He cut the Professor off in mid-sentence. "Professor, I think I should go and look for Rose. She might have got lost," he said.

"Hmm, what?" Professor Max seemed to have forgotten all about Rose in his excitement at having an eager ear to listen. "Oh, of course, you must find your lady friend."

"Thank you," the Doctor smiled. "Glad you can understand."

He began to jog back to where they had come from, searching for Rose. The museum was completely empty save for the restored specimens. The Doctor found his way back towards the hallway with Professor Dawn's workshop. He felt an odd shiver wash over him as he took in the sight of the door leading to the workshop.

He made his way over there and tried the handle, unsurprised to find it locked. He began to search his pockets to see if could find anything to pick a lock since Rose had his sonic screwdriver. Finally, he dug out an old-fashioned lockpicking tool from his coat and bent down to pick the lock.

"I definitely should rely much less on the sonic screwdriver," he muttered to himself as he tried to get the door unlocked. There was a click and he smiled as the door opened. He went inside and frowned. It was tiny and completely empty.

He ran a hand over the far wall but was surprised to see that it was completely solid. There were no disturbances, no sign of an opening mechanism, not even draught blowing from the wall. There was nothing beyond it. The Doctor ran a hand through his hair in frustration. If there was nothing there, then where was Rose?

~

"Got it," Rose said as she carefully pulled out the sonic screwdriver.

"What is that?" Rory asked.

"Sonic Screwdriver," Rose answered as she twisted her wrist around and aimed it at the clamp around her right wrist. With its usual buzzing sound, the sonic screwdriver opened the cuff and Rose smiled at Rory in relief. "Hang on," she said. "I'll get us both free in a moment."

Rory watched wide-eyed as she undid the cuffs on her wrists before sitting up and releasing her
ankles. Then, she jumped off the table and began to undo the restraints on him. He sat up and rubbed his sore wrists while she worked on his ankle restraints. "Thanks," he said, once his feet were free. "Do you see a way out?"

"Only door in and out," Rose said, pointing to a silver door at the far end of the dreary room they were in. She glanced teasingly in his direction. "You know, for a soldier you're not that attentive."

"I'm not really a soldier," he said, rolling his eyes. "You know what I did before getting trapped in Rome? I was a nurse."

"Well, nurse or soldier, pay attention now," Rose said as they reached the door. "See if you can find an opening mechanism."

"What does it look like?" he asked. Rose gave him a look. "Right, paying attention and looking," he said. He found a switch and pressed it. Nothing happened. "I'm guessing that's not it."

"It wasn't the door opening mechanism," Rose said.

Rory looked at her in confusion before realising that they were no longer in the room that they had woken up in. "Where are we?" he asked.

"On the roof of something, I should guess. That switch must have been a transmat beam," Rose said.

"Oh my God. Is that...?" Rory asked, pointing to the sky.

"Jupiter, yes," Rose nodded. "Gorgeous, isn't it?"

"Amazing," he said, smiling at it.

Rose smiled at the awe and wonder on his face. "Come on," she said, hating to interrupt. "It seems that we're still on Europa, except not in the museum."

"How can we have moved?" Rory asked, tearing his eyes away from the giant planet in the sky.

"The TARDIS that I saw," Rose said. "Whoever that belonged to, must have moved us."

"Sorry the what?" Rory asked.

"I'll explain later," Rose said. "Come on, we have to find the Doctor."

~

"Ah, Doctor, have you found your young friend?" Professor Max asked him.

"No, I haven't," the Doctor said. "I can't find her anywhere."

"Well, could she simply have left? She didn't seem terribly interested in the specimens," he said.

"Probably," the Doctor lied. "Tell me, Professor, when did you meet Professor Dawn?"

"Oh, it must have been a few years ago," Professor Max said. "I was on Earth when she came to see me and offered me the job as the curator to a museum she was opening on Europa. Naturally, I was a bit sceptical but her credentials and reputation were unquestionable."

"I see," said the Doctor. "So, nothing suspicious about her."
"Of course not," said the Professor. "Like I said, she is very intelligent and very experienced in the field of cryogenic restoration. Here, follow me." The Doctor followed the professor who led him to his office and showed him a photograph on the wall. "Last year, she was awarded by the President of the Galilean Lunar Union."

The Doctor saw Professor Max standing next to a tall, statuesque woman with straight dark hair and very sharp blue eyes. Despite the fact that she was smiling, her mouth remained hard and her eyes seems icy. The Doctor's brow furrowed. That woman looked very, very familiar.

"Something wrong, Doctor?" Professor Max asked, evidently noticing his confusion.

"Yes, I just thought she looked a bit familiar, that's all," he said. "It's probably nothing."

A gong sounded through the museum and the Professor glanced at the Doctor apologetically. "That's the closing alarm, I'm afraid," he said.

"Right, I should leave then," said the Doctor. "Just as well, I should find Rose."

"Very well, Doctor," Professor Max said. "It was very nice meeting you. Goodbye."

"Goodbye, Professor," said the Doctor amicably. "Thank you for the tour."

"Oh it was nothing," the Professor said. "You should visit again."

The Doctor smiled and headed towards the exit. The lights were now dimmed and the shadows cast on the walls around him seemed very sinister and foreboding. He frowned as he reached the exit. He still had not found Rose. Perhaps she had gone back to the TARDIS.

That was very uncharacteristic of her but he couldn't rule it out completely. He quickened his stride as he started to make his way back towards the TARDIS. It wasn't too far away from the settlement so he found the place quickly enough.

Problem was, the TARDIS wasn't there at all.

~

"How are you doing down there?" Rose asked.

"Yup, fine," Rory said. "Almost at the bottom."

The two of them were climbing down the side of the building using a service ladder attached to it. After ascertaining that this building appeared to be more residential rather than the ones she and the Doctor had seen before, Rose realised that the owner of the TARDIS had simply moved them to a different colony on Europa.

"I'm there," Rory called out in a whisper and Rose climbed down the last few steps to join him on the ground.

"Right," she said. "Which way, do you think?"

Rory looked up and down the street. There were only similar looking buildings around with a single ice road going through the middle of it. "I don't know," he said.

"Can you see a carnival sort of thing anywhere?" Rose asked. Rory gave her an odd look. "'Cos that's where we landed."
"Right, okay," Rory said as he looked up and down the street again. "I can see something that might be a rollercoaster down there," he said, pointing to the left.

"Good, let's go then," Rose said.

Rory caught her arm quickly. "Did you hear that?" he asked.

"Hear what?" Rose asked.

"It was a..." Rory shook his head. "Sorry, it just sounded like a humming sound."

"A humming sound? Where did it come from?" she asked.

"From the building, I think," he said as he walked towards it and put his hand on the side of the building. "It's vibrating."

"What?" Rose asked in surprise but when she placed her hand on the side of the building, she realised that Rory was right. Then, it struck her where she had heard that sound before. She grabbed Rory's arm. "Rory, we have to run. Now and fast," she whispered to him.

Rory looked surprised at the grave tone in her voice but nodded quickly. He let Rose pull him towards the street and then the two of them broke out into a run towards the carnival whose silhouette they could see in the distance. He was about to ask Rose why they were running when a bolt of laser whoosed past his ear.

"What the hell was that?" he demanded.

"Keep running!" Rose yelled as a bolt narrowly missed her right arm.

"Who's shooting at us?" he asked, his breathing a bit laboured as they ran through the icy street.

"The owner of the other TARDIS," she said. "That building was the TARDIS. The chameleon thingy on that must be working."

Rory did not understand a single word of what she had just said but he kept running with her while the person continued to shoot that their backs. As they rounded a corner, a man grabbed Rose's arm and pulled her into his side.

"Oh thank god, Doctor," she said, hugging the man. Rory stopped as the man hugged Rose back and patted her hair lightly. Rory felt a smile begin on his face before enormous pain shot through his back.

"RORY!" he heard Rose scream as his world went dark.
The Lunar Discovery: Time and Intrigue

Previously

As they rounded a corner, a man grabbed Rose's arm and pulled her into his side.

"Oh thank god, Doctor," she said, hugging the man.

Rory stopped as the man hugged Rose back and patted her hair lightly. Rory felt a smile begin on his face before enormous pain shot through his back.

"RORY!" he heard Rose scream as his world went dark.

"Quick!" said the Doctor, hauling the unconscious Roman up from the ground. "This way!"

Rose took hold of Rory's other arm and followed the Doctor. "Is he...?" she asked fearfully.

"He's breathing," said the Doctor. "Probably just stunned. Come on," he said and led them to a small glass booth that was hardly enough to hold the three of them.

"What is this?" Rose asked as they squashed in together inside the booth.

"It's the city's transmat system," said the Doctor freeing one of his hands so he could press the switch in the booth. "It's how I got here in the first place."

"Does this whole place work on transmat?" Rose asked as she felt a slightly cool breeze wash over her which told her that they had been moved to a different booth via transmat.

"It does, yes," said the Doctor as he opened the door so that they could carry the Roman out.

"Do you think we were followed?" Rose asked as they headed over to a bench near the now deserted ice rink.

"No, I believe whoever was shooting at you lost our trail," the Doctor said as they laid Rory down on the bench. "Do you have my sonic screwdriver?"

"Yes," Rose said, pulling it out of her pocket and giving it to him. "Is he going to be okay?" she asked as the Doctor scanned him.

"He should be," said the Doctor. "Where did you meet a Roman?"

"He's not exactly Roman," said Rose.

The Doctor's eyebrows shot up. "I do hope you are planning to elaborate," he said.

"He said he's from the 21st century and he woke up in Ancient Rome two years ago," she said.

The Doctor's brow furrowed as he looked back at the unconscious man. "Oh dear," he said.

"What? You think he was lying?" Rose asked.

"No, I'm afraid he was telling the truth," said the Doctor. "His timelines are all...disrupted. He was deliberately taken out of time by someone. Or something."

"Could it be the same person whose TARDIS I walked into?" Rose asked.
The Doctor's eyes snapped to hers so quickly that Rose flinched in surprise. "TARDIS?" he demanded.

"Well, yeah," Rose said, still a bit surprised at how furious he looked.

"It's her," said the Doctor. "It has to be her. Regina Dawn. I can't believe I missed that!" he yelled the last part loudly enough to startle Rose.

"Doctor, what are you talking about?" Rose demanded, completely lost as to what he was saying.

"No wonder she was familiar. She has regenerated but I should have known. The discrepancy in time, the restoration of the species, it's all her," said the Doctor.

"Who?" Rose asked.

The Doctor met her eyes gravely. "The Rani."

~

Logan Niamah tried not to let his anger and disgust show on his face as the Rani knocked his gun out of his hand.

"You imbecile!" the Rani spat. "You shot my specimen!"

"My gun was set to stun," Logan said, his jaw clenched.

"I do not need you to use your primitive way of thinking," she said angrily as she stormed back inside her TARDIS with Logan on her heels. "Your little stun gun could have damaged the integrity of the specimen."

"He was escaping," Logan protested.

The Rani spun around and glared coldly at him. "And yet you failed to recapture him or the girl. Now, it is very likely that the Doctor has found them and if the girl tells him she saw my TARDIS, then it wouldn't take him long to know who I am. So tell me you blithering primitive, why shouldn't I get rid of you and your father right now?"

"Papa had nothing to do with this," Logan protested. "You said you wouldn't harm him."

The Rani smirked disdainfully at him. "If I didn't require your services, you and your father would be discarded sooner than your primitive minds can process it. Now, find the specimen and if the Doctor or the girl try to stop you, kill them."

~

Rory groaned slowly as he opened his eyes. A man's face swam into view. "Easy does it," said the man in a soothing voice. "Just breathe."

Rory closed his eyes again and concentrated on breathing properly. It hurt to breathe and felt as if something was jammed inside his chest. "What...happened?" he managed to ask.

"Don't you remember?" the man asked him lightly.

"Here, I found the only open store," a girl's voice said from his left.

"Rose?" he asked, recognising her voice.
He felt her kneel next to him and he turned his head to find her smiling at him.

"How are you feeling?" she asked, concerned.

"Like someone ran me over with a truck," he said.

She giggled and handed him a small container of water. "Here, drink this," she said.

"Slowly, please," the man interjected.

Rory took the offered container and sipped the liquid slowly. The cool drink made the weight in his chest lessen. The man smiled. "Well, you look well enough now," he said. "I'm the Doctor."

"Rory," he said.

"Yes, Rory Williams from Leadworth," the Doctor said.

Rory's brow furrowed. He was certain he hadn't told Rose his last name. His confusion must have shown for Rose smacked the Doctor's arm lightly. "Don't scare him, Doctor," she said, her tone slightly admonishing yet amused.

The Doctor rolled his eyes at her, a smile playing at his lips. "Fine," he said. "I'll call him Rory the Roman if that pleases you."

"Ignore him, he's being a smartarse," Rose told Rory.

"You still haven't told me what happened," Rory asked as he sat up with their help.

"You were shot by a stun gun," the Doctor explained. "When the two of you were escaping from the Rani."

"The Rani?" he asked. "Who is she?"

"The one who captured you," the Doctor said seriously, all merriment gone from his eyes. "She might also be the one who pulled you out of time."

"You still haven't told me who she is," Rose interrupted.

"She is one of my people," said the Doctor, looking away. "A ruthless yet brilliant foe. She's a biochemist and is known for her sick, twisted experiments."

"And you think that all the museum specimens were because of her? She was the one who took them out of time?" Rose asked.

"Most definitely," the Doctor nodded. "But that's what's puzzling me."

"Why?" Rory asked.

"Cryogenic restoration would be child's play for her. We learnt that in nursery," he said. "So, why is she doing these experiments now?"

"Maybe she just likes it or something," Rory said. "You did say she was sick and twisted."

"Yes, but she is also very brilliant and she wouldn't waste her time on such a primitive restoration method," the Doctor said.
"But she isn't just restoring specimens, is she?" Rose interrupted, making the Doctor and Rory look at her in confusion. "She took Rory out of his time, popped him back in the past and then brought him here."

"I shouldn't think that would make a difference," said the Doctor, before his eyes widened. "Unless..."

"What?" Rose asked.

"How did you end up in the past, Rory?" the Doctor asked him eagerly. "Tell me exactly what happened!"

"Uh, I was at a Halloween party," Rory shrugged. "I went outside my friend's house to get some fresh air."

"And then what?" the Doctor asked, his eagerness not slipping.

Rory shook his head. "I blacked out," he said. "When I came to, I was in Rome. I thought I was hallucinating at first. Too much to drink and all that."

"Were you alone when you left to get fresh air?" the Doctor asked.

"Yeah," he nodded.

"And nothing unusual happened?" the Doctor asked, sounding slightly disappointed.

Rory went to shake his head again before stopping and looking thoughtful.

"What?" Rose asked him.

"There was this weird sort of...breeze," he said, scrunching his forehead as he tried to remember. "I thought it was odd because it looked like it was shimmering. It came at me."

Rose raised her eyebrows at that but when she turned to the Doctor, she saw that he looked positively smug. "I knew it!" he said triumphantly. "I knew how you were taken to Rome."

"Uh, share with us will you?" Rose prompted.

The Doctor grinned widely at her. "What Rory saw was a time storm. He got caught up in it and ended up in the past," he said.

"Yeah, still not getting it," Rory said and Rose nodded in agreement.

The Doctor almost rolled his eyes. "Time storms can be used to move people or objects through time," he said. "Usually, they are incredibly complex, but..."

"But for one of your people, it's easy," Rose finished.

"Exactly!" the Doctor agreed. "That's what the Rani is doing. Taking people out of time by getting them caught in a time storm and then freezing them cryogenically."

"But what's it all for?" Rose asked.

"Knowing the Rani, she must have found some new protein to cultivate or energy to metabolise from the restorations," said the Doctor, his lip curling in disgust.
"But that's sick!" Rose said angrily.

"Yes indeed," the Doctor nodded. "And we have to stop her."

"How?" Rory asked.

"I have a plan," said the Doctor.

~

Professor Max sat in his study, trying to work on the decoder that his son had given him. There was a knock on his door and Professor Max quickly shoved the decoder back into his desk drawer and stood up. "Come in," he said, hoping that he didn't sound too guilty.

The door opened and the Professor was relieved to see that it was his son. "Sorry to interrupt, Papa," said Logan, shutting the door behind him. "Have you found a way to repair it yet?"

"No, no I need more time," Professor Max said.

"You have to hurry, Papa," Logan said urgently. "She will kill us if she suspects that we stole it."

"I am working as fast as I can," said the Professor. "This technology is beyond anything I have ever seen," he said, taking the decoder out again. "Where is she now?"

"Shut inside her lab in a bad mood," Logan said, rolling his eyes. "Her specimen escaped."

Professor Max looked up quickly, his glasses slipping off his nose in his haste. "What?" he demanded.

"The Roman Centurion," Logan said. "Some blonde girl wandered into her lab and then the two of them escaped."

"This blonde girl? What was she wearing?" Professor Max asked.

"Uh, denim trousers and a long grey winter coat," Logan said.

"It must have been that young lady who came to the museum," Professor Max said. "The Doctor's friend."

"That's what she called him too," said Logan. The venom with which he said she made it abundantly clear who he was talking about.

"Professor Dawn knows the Doctor?" Professor Max asked.

"I don't understand why you keep calling her that," Logan said angrily. "She is no Professor. She's a monster."

"Keep your voice down, Logan," the Professor said pleadingly.

Logan scoffed but lowered his voice. "She has asked me to find her specimen and kill the Doctor and his friend," he confided.

"Will you?" Professor Max asked.

Logan stood up and opened the door of his father's study. "We need that decoder repaired, Papa," he said and left closing the door behind him.
Professor Max sighed as he turned back to the decoder. "Yes, I know," he said in a tired voice. "It might be our only hope of being rid of her."

He carefully parted the main circuitry wire to see if he could find a secondary switch. There was a small spark before the whole thing went quiet again. Professor Max rubbed his eyes in frustration before returning back to work.

~

Across the universe, an alert sounded through the tracking system of the Celestial Intervention Agency. Agent Josie Kilburn's eyes widened as she saw the bio pop up on her screen.

"Get in touch with Coordinator Narvin," she ordered the Agent next to her.

"This is Coordinator Narvin," his voice came over the comm. systems. "What is it?"

"An alert just popped up on an escapee," Josie said. "A high profile target."

"Who is it?" Narvin asked.

"The Rani," said Josie triumphantly.
The Lunar Discovery: The Foe

Previously

"Knowing the Rani, she must have found some new protein to cultivate or energy to metabolise from the restorations," said the Doctor, his lip curling in disgust.

"But that's sick!" Rose said angrily.

"Yes indeed," the Doctor nodded. "And we have to stop her."

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~

"An alert just popped up on an escapee," Josie said. "A high profile target."

"Who is it?" Narvin asked.

"The Rani," said Josie triumphantly.

~

Logan Niamah left his father's office, his mind warring with what he knew was right and what he had to do. He couldn't defy her wishes. Not if he and his father wanted to live another day. He did not want to kill the Doctor or his friend but it wasn't like he had a lot of options.

Their only hope was the decoder that he had stolen from her machine. Logan had only stolen it because in the early days of arriving on Europa, she was periodically checking it every day. It was as if that was her way of looking over her shoulder.

As soon as the checks became rare, Logan took the chance to steal it. His father had told him that it was some sort of a device that was turned off. Logan wasn't naturally a guard or a soldier but he knew that she was scared of it turning on and so that was what he and his father set on to do.

So far, they hadn't been able to do much. Logan knew that he couldn't delay the inevitable any longer, so he set off in search of the Doctor and his friend. Whether he liked it or not, he had to eliminate them and bring the Roman back. His father's life depended on it.

~

Rory actually had no idea why he was going along with all of this. It wasn't like he had known the Doctor and Rose for long. And even with his heightened ability to embrace the impossible, he was having a hard time believing that the Doctor was an alien. And apparently, the same sort of alien as the Rani.
He couldn't really remember the Rani's face. In all honesty, he didn't even remember being brought to Europa. He had been laying down for his nightly rest in Rome and had woken up strapped up to the table next to Rose.

The Doctor's explanation about the timestorm did actually make some sense. But he was yet to understand why the Rani had taken him out of time in the first place. Had she already experimented on him? He felt an insane urge to scratch at his skin.

"Hey," he heard Rose say next to him and he jumped slightly, his hand stopping itself from scratching at his skin.

"Hi," he mumbled, lowering his hands. He was being irrational.

"Everything alright?" Rose asked him, concerned.

"M'fine," he said, giving her a small smile.

She didn't look like she believed him but she nodded nevertheless. "Any sign of the Doctor?" she asked.

Rory cautiously peeked around the corner. "No," he said, shaking his head. "How's he going to signal us anyway?"

Rose showed him an ordinary cellphone. "He has my phone's frequency on his sonic screwdriver," she said. At Rory's blank look, she chuckled. "Just think of it as jiggery-pokery. His explanations only make sense to him."

Rory gave a reluctant chuckle at that. "Do you think this will work?" he asked.

"Well, he did manage to find the Rani's TARDIS. If he can set the trap then it should work," Rose said.

Rory nodded. "It's taking a long time though," he said.

Rose gave a resigned sigh. "I know. If we don't get his signal in the next five minutes, we'll follow him," she said.

"But he said not to," Rory said.

"I don't care," Rose said. "He has a knack for attracting trouble. I swear, sometimes..." she stopped mid-sentence and Rory turned around to look at her, only to find a man jamming a gun into her back.

"Don't hurt her," Rory said as he raised his arms to his side.

"Move," said the man. "Both of you."

Rose met his eyes and the two of them slowly started walking. The man still had his gun pointed at Rose as he led them towards the museum and then inside. "You!" he said to Rory. "In there," he indicated to a small supply closet.

"What about her?" Rory asked. He got the door slammed in his face and there was an unmistakeable sound of it locking from the outside. Rory banged on the door. "ROSE!"

There was silence on the other end.
The Doctor smiled to himself as he sneaked aboard the Rani's TARDIS. She really ought to invest in a better cloaking method, he thought as he entered the console room. As with the last time he had been there, he wrinkled his nose at some of the specimens.

Such a brilliant mind, yet so cruel and cold. She could have been such a remarkable scientist instead of a cold-hearted killer. He examined the console and found it missing a few components. His brow furrowed. The Rani was pedantic enough to keep her TARDIS in the best shape possible.

Come to think of it, it made no sense for her to be on Europa in the first place. At least, not as a permanent base as the museum. She had the whole planet of Miasimia Goria to herself. He found a small controller for a chronon loop resting on the console and he picked it up triumphantly.

"So that's how you got my TARDIS," he muttered, pocketing it. "Very clever."

He walked around the console, carefully considering how he was going to set this trap. It had worked all the other times. He bent down under the console to find the navigational system. A bit of jiggery-pokery, as Rose had called it, and the next time the Rani entered her TARDIS, it would take her far, far away from Europa.

The navigational system was quite easy to damage but he decided that he should also alter the landing sequence just in case. He pressed the switch to start maintenance but it didn't start. His brow furrowed in confusion as he pressed it again. Nothing happened.

"Isomorphic controls," he heard from behind him and he snapped around.

"Rani," he nodded. "How very nice to see you. I like the new regeneration."

She smirked at him as she walked up to him. "It's no thanks to you, Doctor," she said. "Although yours is a big improvement on the last two. I was afraid that maybe you had gone colourblind."

He chuckled humourlessly. "Sometimes I wonder the same," he said. "So, I believe this is the part where I ask you what you are doing here."

"You know very well what I'm doing, Doctor," she said, her smirk still in place. "And I also happen to know what you were trying to do. Altering my navigational systems again?"

"It has worked before," he shrugged, unashamed.

She scowled at him. "You do realise that it will take me a full day to fix that again? Such a waste of my time," she said crossly.

"Well as long as we are wasting time, why don't you tell me the exact nature of your experiments? One scientist to another?" he asked charmingly.

The Rani rolled her eyes at him. "Your charm does not work on me, Doctor, as you ought to remember. But to answer your question, I was merely curious as to the effect of time alteration on brain chemistry. Hence the timestorms as the Roman Centurion will undoubtedly have told you."

The Doctor nodded gravely. "So am I to understand that all the specimens were taken out of their contemporary times and dropped in an unfamiliar time period before being brought here?"

"Yes," she said, unbothered by the accusation in his tone. "I did discover that different time periods have different effects on their brain chemistry, hence the need for a museum. I needed a wide range
of timelines. Once I have the results of their brains, I am quite happy to give them to Professor Niamah for the collection."

"And those poor souls that you cruelly snatched from their lives and later experimented on, end up as pieces in an exhibition," said the Doctor with disgust in his voice. "This is a new low, Rani. Even for you."

Her demeanour remained unchanged. "It amuses me that you can expect one of your morally sound declarations to have any effect on me," she said, in an almost bored voice.

The Doctor looked furious but stopped himself quickly, a puzzled expression crossing his face. "Why are you telling me all of this? You do realise that I am going to put an end to this?"

She smirked again and pointed to a door. The Doctor turned around and his face went pale when he saw Rose being led inside at gunpoint. The Rani's smirk widened. "You were saying, Doctor?" she asked maliciously.

~

Rory banged his hand against the door in a futile motion. There was no way he was going to be able to break open. He even remembered Rose's advice to find an opening mechanism but he guessed that a supply closet had no need of a sophisticated opening system. A simple lock would suffice.

He kicked the door in frustration. He was useless in here. Rose was a prisoner of that man who was presumably the same one who had shot him before. The fact that he hadn't shot Rose meant that he would use Rose as leverage against the Doctor.

"And I'm stuck here," he muttered angrily to himself. "Fat lot of a good I am. Soldier, indeed."

"Well, nurse or soldier, pay attention now." Rose's words came floating back to him.

Rory stopped and took a deep breath. He had to focus. The lock was simple enough, so all he had to do was find something to pick it. He had no knowledge of picking locks but there was a first time for everything. That had been his mantra for two years in Rome. He searched his person to see if he could find anything. His sword was gone as were his shoulder plates. His chest armour was still on though.

He carefully reached his hand to his left side to find his dagger. The cold metal of the blade came into contact with his hand and he smiled as he pulled his dagger out. Yes, this would do very nicely.

Professor Max was startled out of his mind when the Roman Centurion burst into his study, pointing his dagger at him. "Where have they taken them?" he demanded angrily.

~

"Don't hurt her," said the Doctor, fixing the Rani with a furious glare. "Revenge isn't your design, Rani."

"You're right, it isn't," the Rani said casually. "Revenge is for fools who have nothing better to do. My time, on the other hand, is very valuable and I do not waste it on getting revenge."

"That's not the feeling I'm getting," Rose muttered and winced when the gun at her back was jabbed painfully into her spine.
"Quiet, girl!" the Rani snapped. She turned back to the Doctor. "Revenge may not be my design but I'm willing to make an exception this time."

"But why?" demanded the Doctor. "Why leave Miasimia Goria and come here in the first place. Why disrupt life here?"

For the first time, anger flashed across the Rani's face. "It was all your fault. Don't you dare blame me for it," she said.

"What are you going on about?" the Doctor sighed.

"Miasimia Goria has been liberated. By the army of Time Agents you helped the CIA recruit," she spat.

The Doctor's eyes widened and unbidden a chuckle slipped through his lips. "The CIA liberated the planet you enslaved? And now I assume there's a bounty on your head too?"

"I am on the run like some common criminal," she snarled angrily. "Do you know what that's like? I had to set up in this dump of a solar system, isolated from all civilisation among the savage apes. I can't even repair my TARDIS properly. That's how primitive the technology here is."

The Doctor listened to her tirade quietly. "Why not just surrender? I would say that your life here isn't better than a stint on Shada."

"Only if I get caught, Doctor," the Rani said, a cold smirk appearing on her face. "But who is going to tell them? You and the girl die here and I carry on."

"Let them go," Rory said, holding the decoder in plain sight as entered the Rani's console room.

"Fool!" the Rani hissed. "Where did you get that?"

"Professor Max had it," Rory said and the Professor entered sheepishly from behind him. Rose felt the gun at her back lower.

"That's the decoder of the Rani's TARDIS," the Doctor said triumphantly. "The Time Lords keep track of different time capsules using that."

"It was switched off," Rory said, still holding it in plain sight. "You let us go or the Doctor will turn it on."

"Kill him!" the Rani yelled at Logan.

Logan removed the gun from Rose's back and pointed it at the Rani. "Who do you think stole the decoder in the first place?" he asked.

The Rani's eyes were wide with fear and anger as the Doctor took the decoder from Rory's hands. "Don't kill her," he snapped to Logan. "She will be handed over to the CIA."

"Doctor," the Rani began furiously. "Do not hand me over to them. I will release you, you can even take the Roman if you leave me alone."

The Doctor looked at her in resignation. "I can't let you loose on the universe, Rani. Time and time again we have met and you fail to show remorse at any of your actions. Sadly, I must deal with it."

"Doctor, you will regret this. I will find you, Doctor!" she threatened furiously.
The Doctor looked up from the decoder. "It is too late, anyway," he said. "The decoder was switched on for a brief instant before. The CIA has already been notified."

The Rani went pale as her TARDIS door snapped open and a batch of CIA agents burst into the console room. Two agents walked up to her and grabbed each of her arms.

A familiar redhead walked up to the Rani. "The Rani, I'm officially charging you for crimes against the occupants of Miasimia Goria on my authority as an Agent of Celestial Intervention Agency. You will be brought before Coordinator Narvin."

Rose gasped. "Josie?"

Josie turned around and grinned at her. "Hello Rose. Nice to see you again." She turned back to the agents holding the Rani. "Take her into custody."

The Doctor smiled as the Rani was led away. She glared murderously at the Doctor the whole way. "Well done, Dr. Kilburn," he said.


The Doctor turned around just to come face to face with the CIA's former Coordinator. Vansell glanced at the Doctor with ill-disguised contempt.

"Ah, Vansell," said the Doctor, his smile bright but his eyes guarded. "So nice of you to show up on time."

"Clearly you got to her before we did," Vansell said with a twisted smile that was definitely a grimace.

"Oh don't worry, Vansell," said the Doctor cheerfully. "I shall leave the cleanup to you."

Vansell's grimace deepened yet he inclined his head in acknowledgment. "Of course," he said dryly.

The Doctor nodded and then smiled at Josie. "I believe we will see each other around, Dr. Kilburn," he said, pleasantly.

"I'm sure we will," she said. "Goodbye, Rose."

Rose waved and gave her a bright smile. The Doctor gestured for her and Rory to follow him. Vansell noticed this. "Oh, I believe we can deal with the anomaly," he said, looking at Rory pointedly.

Rory looked confused at that but Rose noticed the Doctor's face tighten in anger. "I wouldn't wish to burden you with it, Vansell," said the Doctor through gritted teeth. "I can make sure he gets back to his time."

"But the CIA will surely be more...efficient, than your capsule. I believe it's a Type 40," Vansell's lip curled in amusement.

The Doctor gave up all pretence of civility and glared at Vansell. "My capsule is perfectly capable. It got me here before you, didn't it?" he asked.

"A coincidence, I'm sure," Vansell said. He looked at Rory and then back at the Doctor. "If you wish to take him back to his time, by all means go ahead. Be sure to deal with everything, though."
The way Vansell said the last part made it sound extremely sinister. The Doctor certainly thought so for his face hardened with anger and a muscle twitched in his jaw. Vansell gave him a curt nod and left, ordering the agents as he did.

Rose observed the way he was dressed and realised that he was a Time Lord as opposed to one of the agents. The Doctor continued to glare at his back before muttering something under his breath that the TARDIS wouldn't translate.

"What was all that about?" Rory asked as soon as Vansell was out of earshot.


"Would they have done something to Rory?" Rose asked.

"Wiped his memories," the Doctor said. "Vansell implied that he expected me to do the same."

"You're not going to, are you?" Rory asked, sounding cautious yet his stand was determined as if he was going to deck the Doctor if he suggested it.

The Doctor smiled reassuringly at him. "Of course not," he said. "Consider it your own space adventure. Something to tell people back in Leadworth."

Rory snorted. "And get thrown into the mental ward? No thank you," he said.

The Doctor grinned as they reached outside. He pulled out the controller of the chronon loop from his pocket and pressed the switch. He was sure it would be materialising exactly where they had parked on arriving. "Or," he suggested. "You could come with us."

Rose looked at him in surprise and even Rory looked taken aback. "Where are you going?" Rory asked curiously.

"We don't know. That's the fun part," Rose said, a smile starting to break through on her face. Now that the surprise was gone, she found that she liked the idea of having someone else on board with them and Rory was nice. And he had saved their lives after all.

Rory continued to look a bit shocked as they arrived at the TARDIS. "Here we are," said the Doctor as he unlocked the doors.

"That's a box," Rory said sceptically. "That's your spaceship?"

The Doctor and Rose exchanged a mirthful look. "Maybe you should go in first," Rose said, her eyes twinkling with mischief.

Rory looked a bit confused at their odd behaviour but opened the doors of the box.

He froze in the doorway taking in the sight, barely noticing the Doctor and Rose brushing past him inside. "It's..." he mumbled. "It's..."

"Go on, say it," the Doctor said smugly. "Everyone does."

"It's a different dimension," Rory said.

Rose burst into loud laughter as she saw the Doctor's dumbfounded expression. "That's got to be a first, I must say," the Doctor said, recovering from his shock and clapping Rory on the back.

"It's called the TARDIS," Rose said. "Time and Relative Dimension in Space. And it appears she
likes you," she added, pointing towards the fireplace where a third armchair had appeared next to Rose's and the Doctor's.

"She?" Rory asked.

"Yeah," Rose nodded. "She's alive. But in a good way."

"You have a sentient time-travelling phone box?" Rory asked the Doctor, his eyes still wide.

"Well technically it's a Police Box, and yes," the Doctor winked. "So, Rory Williams from Leadworth. What do you say?"

Rory began to smile slowly. "I say...let's go and see the universe," he said.

"Good," said the Doctor as he pulled a lever with a flourish, sending the TARDIS lurching. Rory grabbed one of the metal scaffolds as he saw the central column move up and down and a rhythmic wheezing sound filled the air.

He glanced at the almost identical looks of delight on both the Doctor and Rose's faces and felt his own smile widen. This was going to be fantastic!
Life aboard the TARDIS was very interesting, as Rory realised very quickly. He'd had a hard time believing that the ship was alive but the frequency with which the rooms shifted or that the tea always stayed warm or how you never ran out of hot water, made him rethink his initial dismissal.

It was quite the norm to find that the kitchen had moved beyond the Cloister room overnight or that the library had moved next door. It was also quite normal to run into the Jasper and Stewart in odd places. The bats had shocked him at first, and he had let out a rather embarrassing scream upon seeing them. He still wasn't too keen on them but he didn't mind them anymore. Like the ever changing rooms, they were a part of the TARDIS.

What he found fascinating was that the Doctor and Rose were so much at ease with it as if these were regular occurrences. The Doctor, he could understand. But Rose was human like him. They were even from the same time period. Yet, he was surprised at how used to she was to the TARDIS being a sentient entity.

When he had first come on board, the Doctor and Rose had shown him to a room that Rory was surprised looked much like his room back in Leadworth. It was painted the same light green colour and the bed had dark blue sheets. Even the paisley pattern on the sheets was the same. His mouth had fallen open in surprise but the Doctor had merely smiled and told him to get some rest.

The wardrobe in his room was empty but Rose had shown him to the big wardrobe room and he had found a rack full of clothes much like the ones he had worn back in Leadworth. The Doctor had helped him push the rack into his room and into his wardrobe.

The Doctor had inquired lightly if he wished to go home to get some of his own things. Rory had quickly shaken his head at that. Even if the Doctor took him back to the same day as he had been caught in the timestorm, Rory had no intention of going back to Leadworth. It wasn't like he had anyone left there. It was better that people believed that he had simply run away or something.

Even though time was relative inside the TARDIS, Rory could tell that three days had passed since he had come onboard. They hadn't landed anywhere since the Doctor said that he had some maintenance to do in order to make sure that the Rani had not sabotaged anything for the brief time that she had his TARDIS.

Rory had spent most of his time exploring the TARDIS with Rose. When he had first seen the medbay, he knew he was practically salivating. He spent the next days studying a huge manual of Veritasian medicinal practices. That was where Rose had found him an hour ago.

"Hey," she said, dropping into a seat next to him. "Whatcha readin’?"

"Dermal regeneration," he said, unable to help his excitement. "Did you know, the Veritasian skin graft can heal bruises four times the rate of natural healing?"

"Yeah, fascinating," she said, hiding her smile at how adorably excited he was. "Listen, the Doctor says we are ready to land."

"Land where?" Rory asked with interest, closing the large tome with a snap.

"He didn't say," Rose said. "Said to dress warm though."

"Sure," Rory nodded. "I'll see you in a few minutes."
Rose smiled and turned to go but then stopped. "Rory," she said, slightly hesitant.

"Yeah?" he asked.

"The Doctor told me that you said you didn't wanna go home," she said.

"I thought you didn't mind me travelling with you," Rory said, slightly confused.

"No, no, I'm thrilled," Rose hastily reassured him. "I just thought that your family might be worried. Might wanna let them know you're okay," she suggested.

Rory sighed. "Rose, I don't have a family back home," he said. "My mum died when I was 11 and my dad," Rory sighed again. "He passed away just days before the timestorm happened. The Halloween party was the first time I had been out since his death."

Rose gasped and grasped his shoulder comfortingly. "Oh gosh, Rory," she said sympathetically. "I am so sorry."

"You didn't know," he shrugged. "Truth be told, I really don't want to go back to that place, you know. People looking at me with pity everywhere I go, the house with my parents' things in it, it's better to let that part just fade away, I guess."

Rose rubbed his arm comfortingly. "Sure, whatever you want," she said and then her voice brightened. "So, come on then. The Doctor will land us any minute."

Rory smiled at her gratefully and followed her as they left the medbay and headed towards their respective rooms to get dressed for the cold weather.

~

"Go on then," Rose was saying when Rory came out to the console room. "Tell us where we are."

The Doctor shook his head and smiled mysteriously at her. "Patience, my dear Rose," he said.

Rose stuck her tongue out at him and the Doctor pretended to be shocked before bursting into laughter. He noticed Rory and beckoned to him eagerly. "Come along, Rory," he said. "We are almost there."

"Where exactly are we?" Rory asked.

"You humans are so impatient," the Doctor teased. "Alright, alright, I'll tell you," he said when Rose glared at him. "We're on Felspoon."

"Ye-ah," Rose said, after a moment of awkward silence. "We don't know where that is."

"Felspoon," said the Doctor, as if they were being deliberately obtuse. "One of the most spectacular planets in the universe. It's considered to be third among the top ten greatest destinations for the discerning intergalactic traveller."

"What's wrong with the first two?" Rory asked.

"The first one is the planet of the coffee shops," Rose said, making a face. "Might as well be back in New York then. Don't know about the second one though," she added, looking at the Doctor.

"Apalapachia," said the Doctor, helpfully. "But they have currently quarantined us all off. Some sort of a virus."
"Felspoon it is then," Rory said.

"Indeed it is," said the Doctor, pulling the handbrake violently.

The three of them lost their balance and had to hold on to the console to stop from falling. "Less than smooth landing, Doctor," Rose said as she straightened up and arranged her scarf properly around her neck again.

"It was just a bit of a bump," he protested sulkily as he drew the scanner down towards himself. His face brightened at once. "See," he said smugly. "Perfect timing. Felspoon, at the height of its beauty."

When the doors opened, the three time travellers were hit by chilly wind. Fluffs of snow swirled slowly to the ground but it wasn't too thick. The scenery was absolutely beautiful. Grey cobbled roads were covered with snow, dark pine trees were shining silver because of the snow and further down the road there were cottages that looked much like gingerbread houses.

"I thought you said you'd had enough of cold," Rose grinned as they stepped out of the TARDIS and into the winter wonderland.

"And I thought you loved snow," the Doctor countered fondly as he took her gloved hand in his and squeezed it.

Rose grinned happily at him and looked back at the TARDIS. "Rory!" she called, for Rory had been gaping at the scene with his mouth wide open.

"Coming!" he said, snapping out his wonderment. He jogged out of the TARDIS, blowing lightly on his hands to warm them against the cold. "This is...marvellous."

"I said so, didn't I?" said the Doctor smugly, pleased at having brought them to such an amazing spot.

"So, tell us," Rose said as the three of them set off down the street towards the village. "What are we doing?"

"I thought we could visit the mountains," the Doctor said. "They sway in the breeze."

"What?" Rory asked as Rose gaped at the Doctor. "How do they do that?"

"Well they don't actually sway," the Doctor amended. "But the..." he launched into a complicated explanation about the air pressure and the axis of the planet and the two humans quickly lost interest. They had reached the village and it really did remind Rose of one of those tiny Christmas towns she had seen in picture books as a child.

"What is that?" Rose asked eagerly, pointing to a large brick cottage. It was much more posh than the houses surrounding it.

The Doctor paused in his explanation and followed her gaze. "It's what you would call a tourist centre," he said. "We ought to pay it a visit. If we are going to the mountains, we could see which paths would be best."

"Come on then," Rose said, pulling on his hand.

The Doctor laughed and went along with her. He turned around when he realised that Rory hadn't followed them. "Rory?"
"Uh, I'll catch up in a minute," Rory said, standing in front of a large wooden signpost which had facts about the planets carved onto it. It was fascinating and Rory was eagerly caught up reading it.

The Doctor waved in reply as he and Rose entered the tourist centre. Rory finished reading through the facts of the planet and was still chuckling that their planet's mascot was a griffin. Who knew griffins were even real?

He glanced towards the tourist centre but the Doctor and Rose had shown no signs of returning. He turned to go and find them when his gaze caught on a figure in a grey cloak hunched over on a bench, sobbing bitterly. Concerned, he moved towards the person.

"Hello? Are you hurt?" he asked, his instinct of a nurse rising to the occasion.

The person looked up and Rory was surprised to see that it was a girl of Rose's age. She even had the same blonde hair. She shook her head quickly but couldn't quite stop her tears.

Rory smiled kindly at her and offered a handkerchief from his pocket. "But you're not okay," he said gently. "Can I help?"

She took the handkerchief gratefully and dabbed at her eyes. "You can't help but it's nice of you to offer," she said, sniffling slightly.

"I'm Rory," he said. "What's your name?"

"Abigail," she said.

"So, what's wrong Abigail?" Rory asked again.

She started sobbing again. "It's my boyfriend," she said. "He's missing."

"Oh?" Rory asked, feeling sorry for her. "Have you tried contacting the police?" he asked, not even knowing if this planet had anything like the police.

To his surprise, she nodded. "I did," she said. "They say there's nothing they can do. They say tourists get lost all the time."

"Couldn't he just have wandered off and lost track of time or something?" Rory tried.

"Kazran wouldn't do that," she protested at once. "Look, the two of us just ran off from our planet because Kazran's father wouldn't let us marry. Kazran wouldn't just disappear and leave me now."

Rory nodded and patted her arm in comfort. "Where did you see him last?" he asked.

"We were sightseeing," she said. "We went to the mountains. I wanted another view of the swaying mountains so I went to the vista point, leaving Kazran at the cabin that we were staying at. When I got back, he was gone. All our stuff was still there. Even his coat and boots."

"Could he have been taken?" Rory asked.

"By what?" Abigail asked. "There's nothing dangerous in the mountains. The police agreed with me on that at least."

"Right, okay," Rory said. "Look, I have friends who can help. If you like," he offered.

Abigail wiped her tears and looked at him hopefully. "Will you, really?" she asked earnestly.
"Yeah, of course," Rory asked. "They went to the tourist centre. Come on."

Abigail stood up eagerly and followed Rory as they went towards the tourist centre. They ran into the Doctor and Rose at the door, just as they were just exiting.

"Ah, Rory, we were done," the Doctor said. "We think we ought to take this route..."

"Doctor," Rory interrupted. "This is Abigail."

The Doctor stopped rambling and smiled at Abigail. "Hello, Abigail, I'm the Doctor and this is Rose," he said and Rose waved at the girl.

"What's wrong?" Rose asked, when she noticed Abigail's red eyes.

"Her boyfriend has gone missing," Rory said, before Abigail could. "He just vanished when they were camping out on the mountains. I said we would help."

The Doctor and Rose looked a bit surprised at his determined face before the Doctor beamed at him. "Of course we will," he agreed.

"Yeah, sure," Rose nodded quickly. "Where were you camping?" she asked Abigail.

"May I?" Abigail asked, indicating the map that the Doctor was holding. The Doctor gave it to her and Abigail showed them one of the vista points. "Here," she said. "The Xanti vista. We were renting a cabin near the caves."

The Doctor examined the spot. "It's not too far off from here," he said. He took off the pocket watch from his waistcoat and opened it. "If we leave now, we can get there in an hour. There's still plenty of daylight left."

"Right then," Rory nodded. "Let's go."

Abigail smiled gratefully at them. "Thank you," she said. "Oh, thank you so much."

"Oh, don't be absurd," the Doctor said, waving her thank you away. "Always happy to help," he bowed.

"Shall we then?" Rory asked, indicating to the main path off the street that led to the mountains.

"Lead on," Rose said, linking her arm with the Doctor's as the four of them set off towards the mountains.
Angels of the Xanti: The Mountain

Previously

"Let's go."

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The trek to the mountain, despite being a bit sombre due to the nature of their mission, was magnificent. Felspoon was living up to its position as the third most distinguished tourist destination. All around them, snow capped mountains shone like diamonds. If they stood still long enough, they could see them move.

The path itself was paved with dark red coral dotted with bright silver snow. The trees around them were dark in colour which made the pure white snow falling on it present a stark contrast. Added to that was the slightly red tinted sun which made the white snow glow a lazy pink.

The air was fresh and brisk, smelling of pine and sweet flowers. Had it not been for the grim matter of Kazran's disappearance, it would have been a perfect spot for visiting.

Abigail was silent but determined as she led the way with Rory. The Doctor kept the silence filled with his usual ramblings about the planet, the star system, and most importantly that griffins were Felspoon's mascots. Rose was grateful for the ramblings; it made the silence less awkward.

Half an hour of trekking through some difficult terrain, they all stopped for a break in a wide clearing off the path. It overlooked the valley and they could see the village in the far distance below. From up there, it looked even more picturesque.

"It's beautiful, isn't it?" Rory asked Rose as he came up to stand next to her.

Rose nodded. "So quiet and peaceful here," she said quietly. She looked around to see if Abigail was approaching and lowered her voice. "What do you think happened to her boyfriend?"

"You're asking me?" Rory asked in surprise. "What do I know? This is my first trip, remember?"

Rose playfully smacked his arm. "I'm not asking for the right answer. I just want to know what you think. It's sort of what we do, you know. Figuring things out."

"You and the Doctor run into trouble often then?" Rory asked, not surprised in the least.

"More than you'd think," Rose agreed with a grin. "So go on, deduce."

Rory coughed nervously before lowering his voice. "She told me that they had eloped because Kazran's father wouldn't let them get married," he said.

"There you go, that's important," Rose said encouragingly. "Could mean that his father found him
and dragged him kicking and screaming back home. My mum woulda done that."

Rory snorted at the idea of anyone forcing Rose to do anything. He hadn't known her long but he knew that she was stubborn enough to do what she damn well pleased. "But if his father found him, you'd think he would get him to put his coat and boots on," he said, bringing his thoughts back to the matter at hand. "Or he could have knocked him on the head and dragged him away," Rory said, only half-serious.

Rose apparently took that for a joke, laughing at him. "Nah, wouldn't be that extreme," she said. "Anyway, Abigail was only gone for a little while. Unless there was a teleport involved, it would be hard to silently disappear like that."

"Teleports aren't a thing here then?" Rory asked.

"Don't think so," Rose shrugged. "The tourist centre was advanced enough but the Doctor did say that this is a new star system."

"When did he say that?" Rory asked.

"Somewhere between talking about cocoa bean cultivation and powdered griffin claw being a major ingredient in their chocolate," Rose said, wrinkling her nose.

Rory made a face at that. "I suppose we can cross off chocolates from our souvenir shopping list," he said.

Rose tilted her head in agreement and turned around to look for the Doctor. "Where's he gone now?" she wondered when she only saw Abigail leaning against a tree, staring pensively into space.

"Better go and find him," Rory advised.

Rose nodded and they set off towards Abigail, who looked up hastily when she heard them approach. "Oh, are we moving on?" she asked.

"Yeah, as soon as we find the Doctor. Where is he?" Rose asked.

"Oh, he went off to the other end of the clearing, beyond those trees there. Said there was something interesting," Abigail said. "Sorry, I wasn't paying much attention," she added apologetically.

"Don't worry, we all tune out a bit when he gets going," Rose confided with a grin.

"Evidently not as much as me," Rory added. "I would have almost eaten chocolate with griffin bits in it if you hadn't told me."

Rose grinned at him. "I'll go find him," she said, turning around to make her way to the other end of the clearing.

Abigail smiled wistfully after her. "She and the Doctor remind me of Kazran and I," she told Rory sadly. "Being so in love with each other."

Rory chuckled. "They're not together," he told her. "I know," he said when Abigail's mouth fell open. "I was shocked when I heard too. Apparently they're just friends."

"Surely not," Abigail said. "But they are so..."
"In tune with each other? Yeah, that's what I thought as well," he said. "But then Rose told me that they aren't like that."

"That's a shame," Abigail said. "Our lives are so short. It's a pity to let it slip away without loving someone completely." She looked especially sad as she said that, looking down at her hands instead of Rory.

"Are you okay?" Rory asked her.

She lifted her face and plastered a smile on her face. "Of course," she nodded.

Mentally, she could visualise her calendar where she crossed off a date as she got closer to the day when her body would fail and death would claim her.

~

"Oi, we have to get going if we are going to make it to the campsite before dark," Rose said as she walked up to the Doctor.

"Ah, Rose, there you are," the Doctor said, taking her hand and pulling her up to him. "What is wrong with this picture?"

Rose followed his gaze and saw seven statues lined in a semi-circular formation, facing the valley. "You mean apart from the fact that those statues have their backs to us so we can't really see what they look like?" she asked.

"It is odd, isn't it?" he asked as he walked up to one and tapped his knuckles against it. "Solid stone."

"Maybe it's some sort of a symbol," Rose said. "They look like angels, don't they? Some cultures on my planet believe that angels were avengers or protectors."

The Doctor looked at the wings of the statues and nodded absently. "It would explain why they look like they're standing vigil over the village," he said. "But I find it curious that the only way to look at them face to face is from that tower over there," he pointed in the distance.

And indeed it felt like the tower was seemingly in the middle of nowhere. It was huge; taller than anything else in the village or beyond it. Even at the height that they were at, they were only the same level as the lower third of the tower.

"That's a big, ugly thing," Rose frowned. "Why is it built like that?"

"Hmm, do you see?" he asked. "As the crow flies, the top of the tower is at the same height as the peak of this mountain."

"Coincidence?" Rose asked. The Doctor smirked at her and Rose rolled her eyes. "Of course not," she said. "So what is it do you think? The statues face a tower that is the same height as this mountain."

"Whatever it is, I'm intrigued," said the Doctor. "What's so important about these statues? Why can they only be seen from there?"

"Beats me," Rose shrugged.

"Did you know that this clearing we're in has a name?" he asked. When Rose looked interested, he
pulled out the small infostamp that they had bought and clicked on the right chapter. A hologram of an angel burst out from it, but like the real statues, its back was turned.

*The Angels of the Xanti have been on the mountain ever since the first colonists came to Felspoon. It was a curious phenomenon to see such work of art being present in a land where no civilisation had ever set foot. No explanation has ever been found to explain their presence but any attempt to move them has been met with resistance by the Cult of the Angels, an organisation notorious for believing that the statues possess life.*

The Doctor turned off the commentary and looked at Rose. "What do you think?" he asked.

"Sounds completely stupid to me," Rose said. "They're statues. How can they have life? It's like those daft miracles you see on the telly."

The Doctor looked admonishingly at her. "Now, now Rose," he said. "Let's not be too hasty in dismissing anything. That tower you see belongs to the same cult. To have that monstrosity constructed in a lucrative tourist spot means that the cult isn't just a bunch of irrational fanatics. They do have some power."

"It could just be a religious thing, you know," Rose said. "People believe what they think is right. So if someone believes that these statues possess life, they're entitled to their belief."

"Why do I get the feeling that you're strongly discouraging me from something?" the Doctor asked, a smile playing at his lips.

"That's because I am," Rose said. "As much as you and I know that statues don't have life, we're not going to disrupt the belief of the people here. We're going to find Kazran, enjoy the sights and then leave."

"You're starting to sound like Romana," the Doctor grumbled as he took her hand and started leading her back to where Rory and Abigail were waiting.

"Good," Rose nodded. "Someone has to be the voice of reason around here."

"Rose Tyler, I resent the implication," the Doctor said, grasping his right heart dramatically. "I wouldn't dare interfere."

"Yeah, yeah," Rose grinned, her tongue poking out of the corner of her mouth. "Come on then, non-interfering Time Lord."

"I'll get you for that," he said as Rose laughed and took off at a run with the Doctor chasing after her.

If either had them had turned around, they would have seen one of the statues turn around just a fraction before returning to their quantum locked state.

~

"Priestess Liana," Theo greeted as he entered the altar chamber. "Everything running smoothly?"

Liana nodded briskly. "The prisoner is stable. We had to sedate him some time ago, so he's docile. Did you want to see him?"

Theo shook his head. "Not now," he said. "Where is Torres? We have a problem."
"He's in the village at a meeting with the Chief," Liana said. "I'm in charge in his absence."

"Then you'd want to know that our little abduction was far from subtle," he said.

"Nonsense," Liana snapped. "The boy was alone when we took him. The girl with him isn't particularly bright and the Chief made sure to fend her off."

"Be that as it may, she might have found help after all," Theo said.

Liana looked up in alarm. "Who are they?"

"Tourists by the look of them. They are heading towards the caves now," Theo said.

Liana frowned as she sat down near the altar. "I see," she said slowly. "How far off are they?"

"Half an hour, maybe less," Theo said. "What do you want me to do? Kill them?"

"No," Liana snapped. "Take them into custody. Torres and the Chief will want to interrogate them. Afterwards, we can let our Angels have them."

Theo bowed with a wide grin on his face. "As you wish, Priestess Liana," he said. "They shall be brought to you."

Liana nodded. "Good," she said. A timer beeped and Liana smiled. "I think our Angels need to feed again. Bring the prisoner to the feeding chamber."

"Of course," Theo agreed with a nasty smile. He left the altar chamber and made his way towards the prisoner's cell.

~

Kazran looked up with blank eyes as the man in the dark red cloak opened the door of his cell. "What do you want?" he asked. He'd meant to sound threatening but the sedative made him sound sluggish.

Theo ignored his question and hauled him to his feet, propping one of his arms across his shoulder to hold him up. Kazran could barely feel his legs as the man half-dragged and half-carried him out of the cell and towards a different room which was completely empty save for a bed with restraints in the middle of it.

"No, no," Kazran tried to protest but his body wouldn't cooperate.

Theo dropped him onto the bed and used the restraints to bind his wrists and ankles to the bed. Kazran tried to yell but his tongue felt heavy in his mouth. "Don't struggle," Theo told him. "Just keep blinking."

Kazran frowned at that odd piece of advice as Theo left the chamber. For a moment, nothing happened. Kazran blinked and when his eyes opened, he gasped loudly. There were five statues in the chamber, their claws bared at him and mouths open in a snarl.

He struggled to get free but the restraints were too tight. He blinked again and somehow the statues of the angels had moved closer to him. He kept his eyes wide open, refusing to blink. Those things were moving when he blinked. His eyes started watering from the effort and the sedative was making him drowsy.

He blinked against his will and screamed when one of the angels touched a cold stone finger to his
chest. It was like someone was draining his life out of him. He felt his eyes grow tired and heavy and he slumped back onto the bed, the fight leaving his body.

Outside, Priestess Liana gave a pleased smile as she turned on her voice recorder. "Prisoner #6597 Kazran Sardick. Original age: 19 years. Age after first feeding: 27 years."
"We're almost there," Abigail said as they climbed past a particularly tough part of the path.

"Some spot you picked out, Abigail," Rory said through laboured breathing.

"It was the only one we could find at such short notice," Abigail said. "It was quite cheap too."

"Really?" the Doctor asked, carefully noting that fact. It couldn't all be a coincidence.

Abigail nodded in reply to his question and then turned off the path to go into a cluster of dark trees. The three time travellers followed her through it and Rose gasped when they reached past it. It was a wide meadow in the middle of which was a cosy looking cabin.

"Oh wow," Rose whistled.

"I know," Abigail said. "It's so beautiful."

The four of them walked over to the cabin, but before they could reach it Abigail stumbled. "Are you okay?" Rory asked as he steadied her.

Abigail nodded as she tried to stand on her own but ended up losing her balance.

The Doctor and Rory caught an arm each to stop her from falling. "She definitely isn't well," the Doctor said as Abigail began to look pale and dizzy. "Rose, get the cabin open."

Rose reached into the Doctor's coat and took out the sonic screwdriver. While the Doctor and Rory carefully supported Abigail over to the cabin, Rose used the sonic screwdriver to get the door open. Once inside, Abigail was laid down on the bed. She was barely clinging on to consciousness by that time.

"What happened to her?" Rose asked worriedly.

"I don't know," said the Doctor. He took out his stethoscope and carefully listened to her heart.

"What?" Rory asked when he saw the Doctor frown.

"Listen to her heart," the Doctor said, handing the stethoscope to Rory.

Rory looked confused as he took the stethoscope but upon listening to Abigail's heart, he too frowned. "Arrhythmia," he said. "She's ill."

"Very ill, by the looks of it," the Doctor said gravely. "I'm afraid she's dying."

"Can't we do something?" Rose asked.

"I'm afraid not," said the Doctor as he examined the array of medicines on the stand next to the bed. "Her body is failing. Her days are numbered."

"There must be something we can do," Rory said. "The TARDIS medbay will have..."

"Rory, understand this because it's very important," the Doctor interrupted seriously. "Never, ever mix medicines from different time periods and star systems."
"Why not?" Rory asked, sounding curious rather than angry.

"Because a single strain of the wrong sort of organism can alter entire established species. What if her doctors decide to examine her blood to see what cured her? How would you explain the presence of a drug that isn't ever discovered in this part of the universe?" the Doctor asked.

"But we can't just let her die," Rory protested. "I know what you're saying makes sense but..."

"Yes, yes, I understand Rory," said the Doctor, patiently. "But judging from the presence of all this," he waved at the medicines. "Abigail has been aware of her condition for a while."

"She knows she's going to die?" Rose asked, horrified.

"Yes," they heard Abigail answer in a faint voice as she opened her eyes with effort.

"Don't speak," said the Doctor gently. "Just rest."

Abigail nodded slowly and slipped back into unconsciousness. Rory stood up and walked out of the cabin, going in the direction of the vista point. Rose sighed and turned to the Doctor. "He's a nurse, Doctor. He just finds it hard to watch someone being in pain like this," she said.

"I know," said the Doctor. "I shall go and talk to him."

"I'll stay," Rose said, smiling at him.

"Be careful," said the Doctor. "If something goes wrong, shout. We're only a few paces away."

"I will," Rose said. "Go."

The Doctor smiled at her and followed Rory's tracks. He found him leaning against a tree overlooking the valley. It was almost identical to the clearing where they had stopped before except that there were no statues in sight.

Rory jumped slightly when the Doctor came up to stand next to him. "Are you alright, Rory?" the Doctor asked.

"Yeah, sure," he said, half-heartedly.

"You sympathise with Abigail's pain, Rory," said the Doctor. "That is not a bad thing."

"But apparently I can do nothing about it," he said bitterly.

The Doctor glanced at his tense posture and sighed. "Did Rose mention why I left my own planet?" he asked.

Rory looked at him in surprise and shook his head. "She just said that you are among the very few of your people who travel," he said.

"That is correct," said the Doctor. "My people call themselves Time Lords, Rory. They mastered time and then never touched it again. The very first rule of being a Time Lord is that you do not interfere."

"But you interfered on Europa and we are interfering now," Rory said.

"Yes, I never quite learned the aspect of non-interference. It has brought a fair share of trouble my way," he said, smiling a little. "But there are times when I cannot interfere. Not just because I'm a
Time Lord but because I have a responsibility to keep the universe safe when I travel."

"We'd only be saving one person," Rory protested. "It probably isn't even significant."

"Ah," said the Doctor, his smile becoming kind. "There is nothing insignificant about saving a life, Rory. It is the one thing, above all, that is the most significant."

Rory looked confused at that and the Doctor clapped his shoulder kindly. "Someday you will understand that we cannot save everyone, Rory. So for now, we shall reunite Abigail with Kazran so that the poor soul can spend her last days in peace with her love."

Rory smiled reluctantly at the thought and nodded. "I still don't like it," he said.

"I don't either," said the Doctor. "Neither does Rose. But it isn't about what we feel or think. We are only tiny cogs in the vast machine that is the web of time."

"I doubt you are just a cog, Doctor," Rory snorted.

"Well, just between you and me, Rory," said the Doctor with a mischievous smile. "I think I am quite a lot significant than a cog. But so are you. So is Rose. What we do, can never be done by anyone else. That is the best part, you see."

Rory chuckled but stopped when he heard a twig snap behind them. The Doctor and Rory turned around, thinking Rose had come to find them. That was the last thing they thought before they disappeared.

~

Rose patted Abigail's forehead as she slept. She really hoped that the Doctor made Rory understand. It wouldn't be easy, she knew. She'd had a hard time with non-interference at first too. Not being able to do certain things for fear of damaging the web of time was the worst.

Knowing that the Doctor and Rory would sort things out, Rose focused on the matter of Kazran's disappearance. She stood up and looked around the cabin to see if she could find anything. But the cabin was as it should be and Kazran's coat and boots were still there.

Frustrated, Rose picked up the infostamp about Felspoon that the Doctor had pulled out while looking for his stethoscope. She turned it on from the beginning, determined to know about the place. Their visit to India had proved that local legends often had a hand in the unexplained.

"Alright, Felspoon," she muttered as the commentary started up about the first colonists coming to Felspoon. "Let's hear your secrets."

~

Rory groaned as he opened his eyes. All he could see was darkness. He began to get up but felt a hand holding him back.

"Don't sit up yet," he heard the Doctor say. "Your head's bound to be a bit sore."

"What happened?" he asked, rubbing a hand across his forehead.

"Spatial displacement," the Doctor said. "Not as nasty as time displacement but still irritating."

"You mean we've moved through space?" he asked.
"Yes, but not far I should think," said the Doctor. He sniffed the air. "We're still on Felspoon."

Rory's eyes adjusted to the darkness and he realised that they were in a prison cell. "Where are we?"

"I think we shall find out when our captors decide to reveal themselves," said the Doctor dryly. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a white paper bag. "Jelly baby?" he offered.

~

The Angels of the Xanti have been on the mountain ever since the first colonists came to Felspoon. It was a curious phenomenon to see such work of art being present in a land where no civilisation had ever set foot. No explanation has ever been found to explain their presence but any attempt to move them has been met with resistance by the Cult of the Angels, an organisation notorious for believing that the statues possess life.

"Yes, I know that part," Rose muttered angrily. "Tell me more about the Cult of the Angels."

The Angels of the Xanti have been on the mountain ever since the first colonists came to Felspoon. It was a curious phenomenon to see such work of art being present in a land where no civilisation had ever set foot. No explanation has ever been found to explain their presence but any attempt to move them has been met with resistance by the Cult of the Angels, an organisation notorious for believing that the statues possess life.

"Alright, you stupid machine," Rose snapped as she shut it off. She had listened to the infostamp but the only mention of the cult was in that one clip.

An hour ago, she had realised that the Doctor and Rory had been taking an awful long time to talk. She had gone in search of them but they had vanished. Just like Kazran. She had run back into the cabin, determined to find out exactly what the hell was going on.

"Are you venting your anger at the harmless piece of machinery?" Abigail asked from behind her.

"The Doctor and Rory have vanished," Rose said and Abigail gasped.

"Oh no," Abigail said. "What are we going to do?"

"I don't know," Rose said. "Nothing on this planet's weird except for that cult."

"We simply have to find more about it then," Abigail said as she stood up from the bed. Rose moved to help her but Abigail was quite steady and waved her help off.

"That would work except this stupid infostamp won't say anything more," Rose said, glaring at the infostamp viciously.

"We can use the computer," Abigail said. "Kazran brought the one that was top of the line," she added, pulling out a sleek machine from one of the bags.

"Right then," Rose said. "Search for the Cult of the Angels on Felspoon."

~

The Doctor and Rory had made their way through five jelly babies each and were now tossing a cricket ball back and forth. The Doctor's sonic screwdriver was still with Rose and the lock was too advanced to pick with the old tools that the Doctor had in his pockets.
"This is getting dull," Rory said as he caught the ball and threw it back to the Doctor.

"Yes, but it is quite cathartic, isn't it?" the Doctor asked, tossing it to Rory again. "I used to have a good arm for fast bowling in my fourth body but it was my fifth body that really loved cricket."

"That was the one with the celery?" Rory asked, throwing the ball back.

"Yes," the Doctor nodded. "The one after that hated cricket with a passion. Actually I hated all sporting activities in that body. Mel was forever on me about that. She made me drink carrot juice. Can you believe it?"

Rory snorted as the Doctor made a disgusted face and threw the ball back at him. As he caught it, they heard a noise outside their prison cell and they were instantly on alert.

"Ah," said the Doctor when a figure in a dark red cloak approached them through the darkness. "You must be the one who captured us," he said pleasantly. "I'm the Doctor and this is Rory. May we know who you are?"

Rory was surprised at the Doctor's calm demeanour and wondered just how many times the Doctor had found himself locked up. It wouldn't surprise him in the slightest if it was a regular occurrence.

The person in the red cloak lowered the hood and Rory was surprised to see a woman in her early thirties with brown hair pulled into a braid. Her green eyes appraised them sharply though her mouth was curled in a smile. "I am Priestess Liana," she said.

"Ah yes, a priestess," said the Doctor, with interest. "I suppose you belong to the Cult of the Angels?"

"Very astute, Doctor," Liana said, looking impressed.

"Well, it was the obvious explanation," said the Doctor. "Not to mention that the air around here suggests that we are at a height and therefore I assume that we are in that tower of yours. The one that overlooks the statue circle from the Xanti mountain."

Liana's smile dropped infinitesimally. "You are quite good, Doctor," she said, almost begrudgingly. "Perhaps you can also tell why we brought you and your friend here."

"Oh I believe that is where you come in," said the Doctor, still smiling pleasantly. "After all, I can't hog all the lines can I?"

Liana's eyes became cold. "Quite," she said. "You and your friend were brought here because you meddled where you ought not to have."

"Looking for Kazran then?" Rory asked.

Liana ignored him, her eyes fixed on the Doctor who hadn't reacted to her words. "I see you aren't surprised," she said.

"Well no," said the Doctor. "I knew that already. But what I would truly like to know is how you brought us here. The spatial displacement was very efficient indeed."

Liana's gaze was definitely icy now. "You show knowledge beyond your means, traveller," she snarled.

"Oh now, don't be offended because I happen to know more than you," said the Doctor, his
infuriating smile still in place. "I simply want to know how you achieved the spatial displacement."

"The Cult did not bring you here," Liana said in a superior tone. "It was the Angels."

"The statues you believe possess life?" Rory asked.

"They're not statues, you foolish boy," Liana snapped angrily. "They are creatures beyond your wildest imagination, powerful beyond your pitiful comprehension."

"Yes, yes," the Doctor said, waving his hand impatiently. "Don't give us the definition you print on your cult's recruiting brochure. What I want to know is what sort of creatures they are. You say they are creatures that possess life yet they were solid stone when I checked." The Doctor's eyes lit up. "Oh!" he said loudly. "Of course, they were quantum-locked."

"What's that?" Rory asked when Liana's nostrils flared in anger.

"It's a defence mechanism," said the Doctor. "The statues can move only in certain circumstances. That is fascinating. I have never heard of quantum-locking ever actually being used by a creature."

"What do you mean certain circumstances?" Rory asked.

"Think of the stone statues as a facade for the creatures. They are statues only when you see them. The rest of the time, they can move around like any creature. Am I wrong, Liana?" the Doctor asked shrewdly.

Liana's furious expression smoothed into a pleasant smile. "You are quite correct, Doctor," she said. "But you haven't understood the Angels completely."

The Doctor looked slightly confused when Liana clapped once and a person in a cloak that matched hers approached their cell door supporting a man. The man was tossed inside the cell and the Doctor and Rory ran to help him.

"Look at him carefully, Doctor," Liana said, her lips curving in pleasure. "Do you recognise him?"

The Doctor glanced at his face and his eyes widened in horror. Rory gasped sharply. "It's Kazran, but he's...older," he said. The picture of Kazran that Abigail had shown them had Kazran at the same age as her yet the man in the cell with them was in his late-twenties.

"They fed off his temporal energy," the Doctor said, raising his eyes to Liana and glaring furiously at her. "These Angels are capable of spatial and temporal manipulation."

"Very good, Doctor," Liana said with a sinister smile. "And you will be pleased to know that you and your friend are next. The Angels need to feed and you appear to be bursting with temporal potential. Prepare yourselves."
Rose smacked the computer in frustration. "It's no use," she said, irritated. "There is nothing odd about the cult. You know, besides it being a cult."

Abigail looked slightly thoughtful. "There might be another way," she said slowly. "May I?" she asked, looking at the computer.

Rose nodded and let her have it. "What are you doing?" Rose asked when Abigail started typing something rapidly on it.

"Kazran's father is an inventor," she said. "He invented this computer program that can be used to bypass security of databanks to access restricted information."

"Like hacking?" Rose asked, remembering something her mate Mickey had once tried to explain to her.

"No, it has nothing to do with cutting anything," Abigail said absently.

"No, no, I mean...never mind," Rose shook her head. "You're breaking into the planet's databanks, is that right?"

"Yes, if I can work the program," Abigail said, looking a bit sheepish. "I didn't exactly grow up with the luxury of having my own computer. All of this is very new to me."

"Is that why Kazran's father was opposed to you marrying Kazran?" Rose asked.

Abigail looked down and nodded. "I come from the lower classes and Kazran's father is the richest man on our planet," she said. "He is not a very nice man."

Rose placed a comforting arm on her shoulder. "Doesn't matter what he thinks," she said. "You are a wonderful person and being poor doesn't matter. My mum raised me on her own on the council estates."

Abigail smiled at her in thanks and turned back to the computer. "I think Kazran said that I had to enter a password to get it operational," she said, screwing her forehead in concentration.

"What's the password?" Rose asked.

"Bad Wolf," Abigail said.

"What'd you say?" Rose asked, a bit startled.

"It's Kazran's idea of a joke," Abigail said, not noticing her alarm. "Last year, a traveller from some planet called Earth came to our city and he had a book of fables that he gave Kazran's father. Kazran read me the stories and the big, bad wolf was the character in one of them." She turned to Rose and looked confused at her shocked face. "Rose, is something wrong?"

"No," Rose said, at once. "It's just that I have heard those words before. Never mind."

"I have done it," Abigail said as the password was accepted. She quickly typed in some searches and her eyes went wide. "Rose...this is very, very bad."
"What is going on, Doctor?" Rory asked the Doctor in an urgent whisper as they made Kazran comfortable on the single bed in the cell.

The Doctor's face was drawn in anger when he turned to look at Rory. "I have made a grave error of judgment, Rory," he said, pacing in the cell. "These Angels are much, much dangerous than I initially thought. If they are capable of temporal manipulation, who knows what they could do."

"You mean worse than aging someone?" Rory asked, disbelievingly.

"They haven't just aged him, they have absorbed his temporal potential," the Doctor said, increasing his pace. He caught sight of Rory's confused look and sighed. "As long as a person lives, they occupy a certain space in the web of time. Now if that person is aged before their time, the potential of their existence still remains which the angels then feed on."

Rory frowned as he tried to understand. "So, they basically age people to death and consume the energy that might otherwise be used by that person to continue living," he confirmed.

"Exactly," said the Doctor, sounding proud of his understanding despite the gravity of the situation. "They're assassins, Rory. One might even say silent assassins. Instead of killing them outright, they age them to death."

"It's sick," Rory said, sounding disgusted. "Any way of stopping them?"

"None whatsoever," the Doctor said gravely. "We can hinder them, though."

"How?" Rory asked.

The cell door clanged open and Liana entered with two men in cloaks flanking her. "Doctor," she said. "The Angels await you."

"Yeah well, tell them they can't have him," Rory said bravely.

Liana looked faintly amused and turned to one of her henchmen, who began to advance on Rory.

"That won't be necessary," said the Doctor, stopping the man in his tracks. "I shall go quietly."

"Doctor, you can't," Rory said.

"I must, Rory," said the Doctor. "Look after Kazran."

"No, Doctor, wait," Rory protested but the Doctor gave him a quiet nod and left with Liana and the two men.

Rory kicked the wall of the prison cell in pure frustration. He heard a faint moan and he ran to Kazran's bedside.

"Abigail..." he muttered.

"She's okay, she's safe," Rory assured him.

Kazran nodded and fell back into the catatonic state he had been since being brought into the cell. Rory sighed sympathetically. "At least, I hope she is," he muttered. "I hope they both are."

~

The two girls in question were currently back in the village. The sun had long set and it was very
dark. Only the sparse lighting from the street lamps guided their way. Rose had insisted on them both wearing dark cloaks to prevent being seen by anyone.

She had also tried to tell Abigail to stay behind but she had stubbornly refused. So, the two of them had trekked back to the village and were now slowly making their way towards the tower. The information that they had unearthed had shocked them both and they were eager to avoid any attention.

"Not far now," Rose whispered to Abigail who looked a bit pale but was carrying on determinedly.

"Hide," Abigail hissed and they ducked into a cluster of trees by the side of the road.

"What is it?" Rose asked in a low whisper.

"It's the village chief," Abigail replied in a low voice, nodding towards the street where a stout man was whistling cheerily as he walked.

The two girls held their breaths as he passed them. Their information had revealed that he was in the thick of it all and they had no intention of getting caught. They waited for him to pass and then emerged quietly back onto the street.

"Let's keep going," Rose said.

They were a bit more cautious after that, ducking out of sight quickly if they even thought that someone might be around. They couldn't be sure as to who all were actually involved with the cult but the sort of cover-up that Felspoon had done couldn't have happened without the locals being aware or worse, involved.

They finally reached the gate surrounding the large tower. Standing at the base, Rose could finally appreciate how big it actually was. It wasn't any better looking than it had been before; in fact, the darkness threw menacing shadows on it making it look more sinister. Or perhaps it was just that they knew what secrets it held that made it so menacing.

Rose pulled out the sonic screwdriver and opened the lock on the gates, praying that it wouldn't set off any alarms. The lock clicked open and the two girls prepared to run at the first sound but it was still quiet. Only the slight sighing of the swaying mountains still lingered as they opened the gate and snuck inside.

The gates weren't manned which was lucky. Abigail had told Rose that the planets in this star system lacked labour force since it was so new. Their technology was better but the fact that alarms weren't blaring as they reached the main entrance of the tower was a good sign.

Rose raised the sonic screwdriver to the main entrance of the tower and met Abigail's eyes. Abigail gave a short nod and there was a buzzing noise as the sonic screwdriver worked its magic and the door opened slowly. The two girls slipped inside but weren't prepared for the sight of wide circular entrance hall with dark red carpet and bright golden lighting that greeted them.

"We have to hide," Abigail said urgently as she grabbed Rose's arm and pulled her into the first open room she could find.

"Think anyone spotted us?" Rose asked as she shut the door behind them.

"It looked empty," Abigail said. "What do we do now? We don't even know where they are."

Rose was meanwhile looking around the room that they had taken refuge in.
"There might be a way," she said, holding up a dark red cloak with a smile.

Theo looked up from his post when he saw the blonde girl being brought in. "Found her, did you?" he asked the cloaked member of the cult who was leading the girl.

"What do you want me to do with her?" the cloaked figure asked.

"Put her in with the rest," Theo said lazily. "They're in section 6G."

The cultist nodded and pulled the girl along who struggled the whole way. Theo shook his head and sat back down. "New recruits," he grumbled. "Need to be reminded where the prison blocks are. Idiots."

In the corridor up ahead, Rose lowered her hood and winked at Abigail as the two of them started making their way to Section 6G.

~

The Doctor walked sedately next to Liana who had a smug smile on her face. "You should think it a privilege, Doctor," she was saying. "The Angels are a divine blessing."

"And what have they promised you?" the Doctor inquired politely.

"We require nothing," Liana said. "We only seek to please them."

"So, fear then," the Doctor said, smiling at her. "If you don't keep feeding them people, they will turn on you."

Liana glared at him but said nothing as she opened a door. "Step inside," she said. "We have to do your initial assessment before taking you to the feeding chamber," she said.

The Doctor stepped towards the door but stopped in the doorway, looking at Liana. "Considering that the Angels have been here before the first colonists, I should think that you have been abducting and killing tourists to the planet for a long time now," he said.

"We do not kill them," Liana said, enraged.

"No, you just let the statues drain all life out of them and then cover up their disappearance," the Doctor said, never raising his voice yet sounding so disgusted that the guards behind Liana shifted slightly.

Liana, on the other hand, did not flinch. "Yes, we do," she said simply. "In you go, Doctor."

The Doctor entered the small chamber which wasn't much bigger than a cupboard. He looked around briefly before a painful ray of light ran over his body. He yelled in pain and doubled over, clutching his chest where his hearts were beating faster than usual.

Outside, Liana's eyes went wide as she read the results of the scan. "Get Torres," she ordered one of the guards, without taking her eyes off the results. "The Doctor may be more than he has been letting on."

~

Finding Section 6G was embarrassingly easy. The whole place was so well sign-posted that Rose had to wonder if a lot of the cultists had a habit of getting lost in the tower. It was certainly a large enough place that people could get lost in it. In fact, the whole village could have made the tower
their home.

Section 6G was a prison block and there were rows upon rows of prison cells, all of which were empty. Rose and Abigail slowly made their way across and finally arrived into a small semi-circular enclosure that housed a larger prison cell. "Kazran!" Abigail cried in delight as she ran to the cell door and reached her hands inside through the bars.

"Abi...Abigail," Kazran mumbled as he trained his eyes on her and tried to get up.

"Oh, what did they do to you, my love?" Abigail sobbed.

"How did you get here?" Rory asked as he jumped to his feet and ran to the door.

"What do you take me for, Rory?" Rose teased as she winked. "Of course we would find a way." She raised the sonic screwdriver to open the lock but Rory yelled. "Rose! Behind you!"

Rose turned around and saw an angel statue standing at the entrance of the enclosure. Its claws were bared and the mouth was open. Rose went still as she stared at it. "Why is it just standing there?" she asked in confusion, looking at Rory.

Abigail screamed and Rose turned back, only to gasp when she realised that the Angel had moved closer. "What the hell?" she mumbled.

"Don't...blink," Kazran mumbled, pushing himself to his feet.

"What?" Rose asked.

"Of course!" Rory said. "The Doctor said they're quantum-locked. They can't move if you are looking at them. Rose, keep looking at it. Don't blink."

Rose kept her eyes fixed on the angel, trying her hardest not to blink. She tried to unlock the cell door but it proved nigh impossible when looking away like that.

"Rory, can you reach my hand?" she asked, still not blinking.

Rory reached his hand through the bars and grabbed the sonic screwdriver from Rose's hand. "How does this work?" he asked.

"Point it at the lock and press the button," Rose said, her eyes watering. "Abigail, I need to blink. Keep looking at the statue."

"Yes, okay," Abigail said and Rose blinked quickly, sighing in relief when the statue remained unmoving.

"Hurry, Rory," Rose said as she went back to staring at the statue while Abigail rubbed her eyes.

Rory tried to unlock the door but looked up when he heard Abigail scream again. A second statue has entered the enclosure, from the left side. Abigail turned and kept her eyes on it while Rose kept staring at the first statue. In the brief moment that Rose had looked away because of Abigail's scream, the angel had moved closer.

Now, the two girls stood back to back in the middle of the enclosure with an angel advancing onto them from both sides. "We have to do something," Rose said frantically. "I can't keep this up for much longer. Rory, hurry up."

"I'm trying," Rory replied. "It's not unlocking properly from the inside. The Doctor said the lock
was too complex."

"Keep trying," Rose said. "Abigal, keep looking at the one on your side."

"Rose, I don't think I can any longer," Abigail said. "I'm feeling faint."

"Hold on, please," Rose begged, her own eyes watering with the effort of not blinking.

"I..." Abigail said. "I'm sorry." Upon hearing it, Rose grabbed Abigail and ducked to the ground, shutting her eyes. When nothing seemed to have happened, Rose cracked open one eye just to see that the two angels were pointing at each other and neither was moving.

Rose quickly pulled Abigail away from the statues towards the cell door. "What happened?" Abigail asked in confusion.

"We all looked away," Rory whispered, shocked. "I was looking at the lock, Kazran's been staring at the ceiling and you two ducked down."

"So, why didn't they attack?" Rose asked as she approached the statues. She cautiously tapped one and realised that it was stone.

"I...I don't know," Rory said. He growled at the sonic screwdriver. "Rose, can you get us out?" he asked. "They have the Doctor."

Rose jumped to action and with a quick well-practiced flick of her wrist had the door unlocked. Rory ran out quickly and Abigail ran inside to hug Kazran.

"We have to find the Doctor," Rory said. "They took him to the feeding chamber."

"Right," Rose said. "Abigail, stay here with Kazran. If anyone comes in, lie and say that Rory was taken to the feeding chamber too."

Abigail nodded and closed the cell door. She took Kazran's head in her lap and rubbed his head slowly. "It's okay, Kazran," she said. "You're going to be fine. It's going to be alright."

~

The Doctor was still in slight pain from the invasive scan when he was dragged to a bigger chamber this time. He registered being dropped onto a bed and his wrists and ankles being bound but couldn't see too clearly in the bright light.

"Doctor," a male voice spoke. "My name is Torres. Can you understand me?" The Doctor mustered up enough strength to nod. "The scan revealed that you are not an average humanoid," Torres continued. "You have a binary cardio-vascular system and your age is shown as being 1065 years which is just impossible."

"I never liked the word impossible," said the Doctor impertinently.

"Doctor, do not make it harder on yourself," Torres said. "Tell me what I want to know. Who are you? Where do you come from?"

"Why do you care?" the Doctor asked. "It won't make a difference. You'd still leave me at the mercy of those Angels."

"Fine," Torres snapped. "Have it your way then. Judging by your aging patterns, we should be able to keep the Angels satisfied for years and years to come."
The Doctor felt a genuine stab of fear as Torres left. The Angels would drain his temporal energy until he aged and aged and regenerated. And it would continue till he ran out of regenerations. They could be kept well satisfied for generations.

He struggled with the restraints but gave up quickly when he realised that it was futile. He looked up and flinched when he saw two statues enter the chamber.

Knowing what he did about quantum-locking, he kept his eyes fixed on them. "I have a lot more restraint with not blinking," he muttered to them as he stared them down. A third one entered from behind him and he screamed in pain as it touched a finger to his chest. He began to feel the temporal energy flowing away from his body. Still, he determinedly kept his eyes fixed on the other two. He was not going to make this easy on them.

He heard the door slam open loudly but didn't dare move his eyes. "Rory! The one behind the Doctor!" he heard Rose yell and felt relief grip his hearts.

The angel behind him went still and Rose ran up to the Doctor. "Don't blink," she told him, as she began to undo the restraints on his wrists and ankles.

"What about Liana and those cultists?" the Doctor asked as his hands sprang free. "Yeah, we knocked them out," Rory murmured as he kept staring at the third angel. "But we have to get out before someone else sounds the alarm."

"I'm going as fast as I can," Rose said.

"Uh, Doctor," Rory said. "Why are the lights flickering?"

"They're trying to plunge us into darkness," said the Doctor as his feet sprang free. "Keep your eyes on them and start moving towards the door."

"We can't!" Rose yelled as she saw another angel at the door. "We are surrounded."

"Rose," said Rory urgently. "Remember what happened before?"

"You're right," Rose said. "On three then."

"What are you two talking about?" the Doctor asked as the two angels advanced on him through the flickering darkness.

"One...two...three!" Rose threw herself on top of the Doctor and felt Rory land on her as all three of them fell to the ground. The lights stopped flickering as they looked back up.

"Oh, brilliant!" said the Doctor enthusiastically as he saw the four angels trapped in a circle.

"They can't move now. Not ever. Quantum-locked forever!"

"Yeah, we discovered that by accident," Rory said as they ducked under the stone arms. "What do we do now?"

"We have to do something about the remaining angels," said the Doctor as they stepped out into the control room next to the feeding chamber. "Only one problem though..." he frowned, staring at the screen.

"What?" Rose asked.

"They're gone," said the Doctor.
"What do you mean, gone?" Rose asked.

"I told you that the tower was the only place that you could see them from, remember?" asked the Doctor. He pointed to the array of screens. "The mountain is empty. All the statues have gone."

"But isn't that good?" Rory asked.

"Oh it is definitely bad, Rory," said the Doctor gravely. "Because if they aren't here, it means they have escaped."

"Escaped where?" Rose asked, with a sinking feeling in her heart.

"Into the vortex," said the Doctor. "My temporal energy gave them quite a boost. They could turn up anywhere in time and space."

"But they won't be able to feed on people like this," Rose said. "This has taken them years to set up."

"They might not have to," the Doctor said. "They could always improvise. Instead of aging them slowly, they could simply cast them back through the vortex and feed on the energy."

There was complete silence as the three of them processed the implications of that. "How many of them do you think escaped?" Rory asked, finally.

"Hard to say," said the Doctor.

"Kazran and Abigail!" Rose remembered. "Come on!"

"What about the cult?" Rory asked as they raced back towards the prison block.

"No angels, no cult," said the Doctor. "Felspoon will clean up after itself. We can send an SOS to a capital city from the TARDIS."

"Doctor, Rose, is everything alright?" Abigail asked when she saw them.

"Oh yes, quite," said the Doctor with a smile. "How are you feeling, Kazran?"

"Much better, thank you," he answered weakly but with a bright smile. "Thanks for everything."

"Oh it was nothing at all," said the Doctor as they all started to make their way towards the exit of the tower.

"Where are you all escaping off to?" Theo demanded.

Kazran responded by punching him in the face and knocking him out. "Always wanted to do that," he said in reply to the shocked looks.

~

"Are you sure we can't give you a lift?" Rose asked.

"No, I think Kazran and I will return to the cabin in the hills. Since the owner was involved with the kidnapping, I'm quite sure we would be able to buy the cabin at a cheap rate once he is convicted," Abigail answered.

Rose smiled and hugged Abigail. "Take care," she said.
"And you, Rose," Abigail smiled. She looked at Rory. "Thank you for all you did, Rory," she said sincerely. "Not many people would have stopped to help a stranger like you did."

"Oh, it was nothing honestly," Rory said, blushing deeply at the praise. Abigail hugged him as well and kissed his cheek when she pulled away. If possible, Rory went even redder at that.

Kazran shook hands with all of them, thanking them for all their help. Despite his slight aging, he and Abigail seemed to have no qualms being around each other.

"You two take care of each other now," said the Doctor with a wide smile. "Oh, and Abigail, this is for you."

Abigail took the sealed test tube with the dark purple liquid in it and looked at in confusion. "What is it?" she asked.

"Something for your illness," said the Doctor. "It won't cure you, but it would prolong your lifespan by a few years at least."

Abigail let out a sob and threw her arms around the Doctor. "Thank you, thank you, thank you," she cried joyfully. "Kazran!" she yelled happily as she jumped into his arms. Kazran picked her up and swung her around as the two of them laughed happily.

In the chaos, the three time travellers slipped away quietly into their blue box and vanished. Once inside, Rory looked at the Doctor. "I thought you said we couldn't interfere," he said.

The Doctor smiled as he ran to the console. "Sometimes, we make an exception," he said.

Rory grinned as he and Rose joined the Doctor. "So, where are we going now?" Rory asked.

"I don't know about you two," said Rose. "But I think we should go somewhere warm. Had enough of cold to last me a few months."

"Something warm it is," beamed the Doctor as he pulled on the handbrake and sent the TARDIS reeling into the vortex.
Something warm didn't happen until three trips later. The first time, they landed in a sinking city on a small planet in the Andromeda galaxy. Unlike Venice, this sinking city was a futuristic structure that had been abandoned nearly a decade earlier. But the TARDIS had caught a distress signal and they had found the crew of a lost explorer ship who had crashed.

The Doctor had volunteered to help them to repair their ship and so they were there for nearly a week. The crew was very grateful and Rose was positive that their navigator, Iris, had taken a shine to Rory. Finally, the ship had been repaired and the crew was sent on their way.

The next trip took them right in the middle of a blizzard. They would have left immediately but the Doctor caught sight of something he was positive was the Yeti. The three of them had bundled up in winter clothing and gone out in search of the Abominable Snowmen. After thirteen hours of search and getting lost twice in the snow, they discovered that the "Yeti" was in fact, a hiker dressed in a giant fur coat.

On their trek back to the TARDIS, a sheepish Doctor regaled them with how his second incarnation had owned something quite similar.

Their last trip had been to the Eye of Orion. While it was still quite chilly, it was easily one of the best places they had ever visited. The constant bombardment of positive ions made it for a quiet, peaceful retreat. After a fun picnic there, the three time travellers returned to the TARDIS.

"Now then, where do you think we should try?" the Doctor asked. "There's this wonderful little planet, thirteen million light years from Earth that..."

"Why don't we just go to Earth?" Rose suggested. "Brazil, maybe?"

"Brazil sounds nice," Rory nodded quickly, before the Doctor could rattle off another supposedly warm destination that would land them in bog, snow or water. Again.

"Or," Rose said, glancing teasingly at Rory. "We could stop by Leto Prime and Rory could see Iris again."

"Shut up," Rory muttered, turning red. "Brazil works."

The Doctor looked at his two human companions thoughtfully. "I suppose we could go to Brazil if you two are so keen," he said. "Anywhere in particular you'd like to visit?"

"Rio," Rose said, at once. "Sunshine and carnivals sound like heaven right about now. I mean, the Eye of Orion was wonderful but I can still feel the chill in my bones."

"It would be great if we could go to Rio for a New Years' Eve celebration," Rory added in. "Apparently, it's supposed to be the best ever."


"Why?" Rory asked curiously, having heard the muttered part.

"I was in San Francisco on that date. My very first day in this body," the Doctor said with a quick grin.
"Right," Rory said, looking at Rose to ask if he should look happy or sad about that. Rose just shrugged at him as the Doctor started materialising at their destination.

Landing went smoother than on other occasions but when the doors opened, Copacabana Beach was nowhere in sight.

"Well," Rose said, looking around. Even if it wasn't the one that they expected, the sight before them definitely had them in awe. It was a bustling market next to a port filled with a myriad of people. There were stalls upon stalls of vendors selling everything from bright tropical fruits to delicate ivory jewellery. The warm sun shone down upon them illuminating the vibrancy of the place.

"Okay," said Rory slowly. "I'm guessing this isn't Rio. The flight has gone wrong again."

"Not completely," said the Doctor, optimistically. "We're still in Brazil. At least, I think so," he said as they stepped out of the TARDIS and into the warm sunshine.

"This is amazing," Rose said, her eyes shining as they walked around. "This market is huge!"

"It's a port town though I'm not sure which one," said the Doctor. He inhaled deeply and analysed the scent. "We are near the Amazon, I can tell you that."

"Why is everyone staring at me?" Rose asked, suddenly noticing the slightly shocked looks she was receiving.

"Well, this might have something to do with it," Rory said as he picked up a newspaper from a stall.

"What?" Rose asked.

He turned the paper and showed her the date. "It's 1910," he said.

"Oh great," Rose said, glancing around at the crowd again. Her knee-length green dress suddenly felt too short as she glanced at the women clad in Edwardian dresses, walking around the marketplace. "I'm going to the TARDIS to change," she said.

"If it bothers you," said the Doctor.

"It doesn't bother me," Rose said. "But I'd rather not have everyone stare at me. Plus, it gives me a chance to dress up."

"Alright, but don't take too long," said the Doctor. "Rory and I will keep moving and see where we are. Come and find us when you are done."

Rose nodded and turned to go back to the TARDIS. The Doctor and Rory made their way out of the marketplace, only to see a magnificent structure in the distance.

"Is that...?" Rory asked.

"It is, indeed, Rory," said the Doctor. "Teatro Amazonas. In all its glory."

~

A hooded figure in the marketplace observed the girl as she walked away from her friends. She was European in appearance, yet he reckoned her attire could have put some of the native savages to shame. The two gentlemen with her spoke English and the older one would definitely be
considered "posh" as the English would call it.

Nico couldn't hear what they were saying as they moved away from the market. He decided against following them, knowing it would be easier to get to the girl. He carefully rolled up his right sleeve and glanced at the tattoo of the red snake etched upon his skin.

He smiled as the snake raised his head and hissed once at him before becoming still again.

"I understand, Lord Mara," he whispered to his arm and lowered his sleeve. Nico left the shadows and went after the girl. He would do as his Lord commanded.

~

"So does that mean we're in Manaus?" Rory asked.

"It appears so," said the Doctor. "Beautiful place, Manaus."

"Yeah," Rory nodded. "Well, we did find somewhere warm after all."

"A little more faith wouldn't go unappreciated, Rory," the Doctor said dryly. "Come on, let's see if there's a good show playing in the theatre."

"We're going to see a show?" Rory asked.

"If you like," the Doctor shrugged. "Or, we could see if we can charter a boat and sail up the Amazon."

"That sounds more fun," Rory said.

"Well, let's see what Rose thinks, shall we?" the Doctor commented. "She's been gone for a while," he added with a frown.

"She always takes long to get ready," Rory shrugged. "Think we should go down to the docks and see if there are any boats leaving?"

"Why not?" smiled the Doctor. "Come on. This way."

~

Rose walked out of the TARDIS, dressed in a proper Edwardian dress and holding a parasol to protect herself from the sun as she had seen many women do. The place was indeed magnificent and she found herself curious as to where exactly they were.

She closed the door of the TARDIS behind her and walked back into the marketplace, keeping an eye out for the Doctor and Rory. While walking through the rows and rows of stalls, her eyes caught on an intricate figurine of a crystal wolf. The sun shining on it threw rays of rainbow light around it, making it glow in an ethereal fashion.

Unbidden, she gravitated towards the stall with her eyes transfixed on the figurine.

"Do you like it, miss?" the vendor, a middle aged man with golden Brazilian skin and wide intelligent eyes, asked her.

"It's very beautiful," Rose said, looking at it appreciatively. Up close, she could see that the wolf had a rose vine wrapped around his right foreleg. The work was extremely delicate. "Did you make this?"
"Yes, yes I did," he nodded. "I am Abel and I make all of these on my own," he added, waving his hand towards the rows and rows of figurines. "But I see you have your eye on the wolf. It's from a tribal legend."

"Oh?" Rose asked, interested.

"There is a tribe up the Amazon that call themselves the Tala. It is said that their protector is the wolf princess who will protect them from the great serpent in times of peril," Abel told her. "Superstition, of course but the Indians believe it. The Tala are gentle folk but they keep to themselves."

"So, that is the wolf princess from the legend?" Rose asked, looking at the figurine.

"Yes," Abel nodded. "My wife is a Tala and she was the one who told me the legend. Would you like to buy it?"

"Yes but I'm sorry, Abel. I'm not carrying any money," Rose apologised. Her purse had some pounds but the currency in question was nearly a century older than the time she was in.

"I see," Abel said thoughtfully. "Tell you what, I will trade you the figurine for your parasol."

Rose glanced curiously at the parasol that the TARDIS had left next to her dress and then back to the crystal wolf. It was a beautiful figurine but she was reluctant to give away the parasol when she knew that it did not belong to her.

"I'm sorry," Rose apologised again. "Perhaps, I'll come by later with money."

Abel nodded and smiled. "As you wish, miss," he said. "I'll be here then."

"Thanks," Rose grinned and left his stall reluctantly. She really was intrigued by the story of a wolf princess, and the figurine was beautiful but she wouldn't feel right getting it from trading something that didn't even belong to her.

Away from the hustle and bustle of the marketplace, Rose glanced around the town for any sign of the Doctor and Rory. It was getting towards midday which was why there weren't a lot of people around. She was just contemplating about how wealthy the town looked when someone brushed into her.

"Oh, I'm sorry madam," the man bowed apologetically. He was hunched over and wore torn clothes, with a dark scarf tied over his head.

"It's okay," Rose said, feeling a certain sense of unease from the man's presence. Usually, she would delight in talking and making friends with strangers but something about the small, beady eyes of the man made her very uncomfortable.

"No, no, my oversight was inexcusable," he said profusely but somehow his words seemed insincere. Rose was going to tell him to forget it when he grasped her wrist quickly. "I insist that you let me apologise, madam," he said, his voice threatening now.

Rose was startled at how strong his grip on her was. He seemed frail in appearance yet there was no doubt that he could easily overpower her. "Let me go," she said warningly.

"I think not," he said, drawing out a knife and holding it close to her spine. "You scream and I will
"kill you before you hit the ground." Rose went still when she felt the blade press into her back. "This way, come on," he said, leading her away from sight of any prying eyes.

"What do you want?" Rose asked him bravely as he removed the knife from her back yet kept his hold on her wrist tight.

"Take the mark," he hissed slowly.

"What?" Rose asked in confusion, trying to loosen his grip.

"The Mara," he said, pulling up his sleeve of the hand that was clutching her wrist. Rose's eyes widened when she saw the tattoo of a red snake on his arm. "Take the mark of the Mara, Miss Tyler."

Rose struggled to get loose and opened her mouth to scream when he clasped his hand on her mouth. His grip tightened almost painfully on her wrist and Rose screamed in horror when she saw the snake on his arm come to life.

"Don't worry, Miss Tyler," he crooned as her scream was muffled by his hand. "Just take the mark of the Mara."

Rose could only watch with horrified eyes as the snake lifted up from his arm and slowly crawled onto her arm. She felt a fog fall over her mind before the Mara took hold. The man let her go with a triumphant smile and Rose glanced proudly at the mark on her hand.

"You have done well, Nico," she told the man in a voice that wasn't quite her own. "All this potential, all this power. So much chaos," she murmured. "Go now," she ordered and Nico scurried off.

Rose traced the snake on her arm almost lovingly before pulling on the long gloves that went with the dress to cover up her arms. With a smile and a shrewd look in her eyes, she went towards the docks where she knew the Doctor and his friend were.

It was time for the Mara's revenge.

~

"She really is taking a long time," Rory said as he and the Doctor waited near the docks. They had found a motorboat that was going up the Amazon and the owner, Kuma, had agreed to take them on a small tour.

"We shall sail past the Tala habitat, near the Tapherini," Kuma had said. "It's a small supply run but I can make room for you and your friends."

The Doctor looked slightly worried but his face brightened as he saw a blonde approach them. She looked nigh unrecognisable because of the dress she was wearing. It was a long cream dress with black lace overlay and red roses near the neck. Her face burst into a smile when she saw them.

"There you two are," she said. "I've been looking everywhere."

"Yeah, we decided to take the boat up the Amazon," Rory said eagerly.

"That sounds great," Rose agreed. "Is it like a tour?"

"They're going for a supply run and we're just tagging along, I'm afraid," the Doctor said.
"Still sounds nice," Rose smiled. Her eyes appraised the boat named Gwendolyn, quickly.

"Yes, this will do," she murmured under her breath.

"Hmm, what?" asked the Doctor.

"I said, let's go," said Rose enthusiastically, smiling at the Doctor as she linked arms with him.

The Doctor's face melted into a smile as he took her hand and led her towards the boat behind Rory. They stood on the deck as Kuma prepared to launch. Rose kept her smile intact and it widened only slightly when she saw Nico helping as part of the crew. She rubbed her right arm slowly as the snake under the glove hissed quietly.

"Alright, here we go," Kuma said as the Gwendolyn began her journey.
Trouble in the Amazon: The Journey

Previously

"I said, let's go," said Rose enthusiastically, smiling at the Doctor as she linked arms with him.

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"Alright, here we go," Kuma said as the Gwendolyn began her journey.

No one would ever dare say that the Amazon was anything short of beautiful. Despite the sticky heat, the beauty of the place could not be denied. Trees with foliage thick enough to block out the bright sunlight grew on both sides, the water was crystal clear in some places and slightly muddied in others but the most important thing was the whole place was alive.

There was a continuous chatter of birds and insects all around them. If they passed by a particularly narrow channel, they heard the workers in the rubber growths chatter in different languages. Despite the TARDIS translating everything into English, the different intonations and accents made it for a pleasant and diverse cacophony of sounds.

Rory had immediately sought out Kuma to see how the boat worked. If there was one thing about Rory, it was his incessant need to learn new things. It was an endearing quality in him. Be it the economy of some obscure planet or simply how a motorboat functioned in the early 1900s, Rory wanted to know. He had tried to get Rose to come with him but she had said she was feeling seasick and had shut herself in the cabin.

In reality, Rose was nowhere near the cabin. After assuring the Doctor and Rory that she was seasick but there was no cause for concern, she had snuck out to find Nico.

"Did you do it?" she hissed.

"Yes," Nico said, bowing low before her. "The oil tank has been damaged."

"And you're sure it will get us to the Tala habitat?" she asked.

"I have made certain," Nico nodded.

With a satisfied smile, Rose left Nico to his work. The Mara within her had many plans to execute and getting revenge on the Doctor was just one part of it.

Truthfully, all that the Mara craved was chaos. This world was too peaceful, too coordinated. The industries of this era had flourished and people in this vicinity lived like royalty. Such organised wealth and management felt wrong to the Mara. Chaos was the true ruler of any world. And it was the Mara's rightful place as the heir of chaos.

~

"Rory," said the Doctor in a low voice, pulling him away from Kuma. "Have you seen Rose?"

"She was in the cabin, wasn't she?" Rory asked.
"I just went to check on her and she's gone," said the Doctor worriedly.

"She's probably just exploring," Rory said. He stared hard at the Doctor. "Why? Do you think something is wrong?"

"No, I don't see why there should be," said the Doctor, dismissively. "She does have a knack for wandering off."

"Talking about me?" Rose asked and the two of them spun around.

"Ah Rose, there you are," said the Doctor, looking visibly relieved. "We were getting worried."

"I felt better when I walked around," Rose said shortly. "But I think I'll go and lie down for a bit."

The Doctor felt a stab of worry at that. Rose wasn't one to sit around meekly. Her energy was one that would put his to shame. "I'll come with you," he said, keeping his face calm.

"Sure," she nodded, without missing a beat. She held out her hand to him and the Doctor took it, doubting his earlier worry. Maybe he was just being paranoid. As they walked over to the cabin, the Doctor realised that it had been a while since the two of them had spent time on their own.

Rory was an excellent friend and companion but the Doctor had also missed having just Rose as company. Tightening the grip on her hand, he smiled. She had been his first proper companion to travel in the TARDIS in this body. And they'd had excellent adventures together. She was definitely one of his best friends.

Although, he was shocked when the said best friend pulled him inside the cabin and pushed him against the closed door to glue her lips to his. Alarm bells sounded in his head even as the warm pair of lips on his did a very good job of distracting him. After all, it is very hard to hear the alarm bells in your head when your blood is pounding in your ears.

Her hands seemed to be everywhere, roaming his chest, scratching her nails down his abdomen, hips flush against his. His own hands had fallen uselessly against his sides and the door against his back was the only thing keeping him standing.

But then her hands slowly moved into his hair and the Doctor was lost. His own lips moved against hers and Rassilon, he'd wanted this for a while. Strong arms gripped her waist and pulled her closer.

Rose's hands left his hair, descending down his shoulders, caressing his arms and gripping his wrist where he was holding her waist and then...metal.

The Doctor's eyes flew open. With a speed and strength, he wasn't expecting Rose to possess, the Doctor found his wrists bound by a pair of handcuffs. "Rose...what?" was all he could manage to say before she delivered a sharp blow to his head, knocking him out.

When he awoke, the Doctor realised that his hands were still bound but he was now chained to the table in the cabin. The table's leg was bolted to the floor, making it impossible for him to break free.

"Who are you?" the Doctor asked, menacingly as he raised his eyes to Rose, or rather someone that looked like her, sitting across from him.

She smirked. "Why Doctor, I shouldn't think you would have to ask that question considering the way you kissed me just now," she said.
The Doctor's eyes narrowed at her. "You are not Rose," he said, his voice thunderous. "Whatever you are, let her go."

In reply, she threw her head back and gave a throaty laugh that sent cold shivers down the Doctor's spine. The menacing sound was so unlike Rose that the Doctor felt fear seize his hearts. At the same time, his mind raced with trying to remember why that laugh sounded so...familiar. Rose's gaze lowered to his and the Doctor saw a rim of red around her eyes and suddenly it clicked.

"The Mara," he whispered, aghast.

"Correct, Doctor," Rose said, her smirk taking on an almost mocking turn. She kept her gaze locked with his as she slowly began to take her glove off. "The Mara!" she said, leaning close to him and holding up the arm bearing the snake in front of him.

"Let her go," said the Doctor, anger colouring his tone. "You're not even supposed to be on Earth."

"No, but I do not regret the trip I made to this wonderful planet," she said, sitting cross-legged opposite him. "So organised, so much order."

"What do you want?" asked the Doctor stoically.


"Rose," begged the Doctor. "If you are in there, you have to fight it. Rose, please."

"Do-Doctor," came a meek voice as tears filled her eyes.

"Rose," exhaled the Doctor in relief. "Please, fight the Mara."

"I-I can't," she sobbed. "It's too strong."

"Come on Rose," said the Doctor encouragingly. "You are strong, Rose. Fight it, please."

Rose stared at him with tear-filled eyes before bursting into loud laughter. "Your face!" she laughed. "Oh, you are adorable."

The Doctor's face became as still as stone. "Very amusing," he said, his lips barely moving in his anger.

"Oh now, don't get mad because I pulled a fast one over you," she said, looking amused. "I really do admire your optimism, Doctor. But the pull of the Mara is so strong," she whispered, leaning in close to his ear. "Almost irresistible," she added, pressing a kiss to his cheek as she pulled away.

"Think, Doctor!" she said in a louder voice as she stood up. "What I can do with this beautiful face and doe eyes. And don't you just love this beautiful mind. So incredibly complex yet pathetically human at the same time. It's...hmm, intoxicating."

The Doctor could do little more but glare angrily as she paced around the cabin, carefully avoiding the mirror. Even after years of power, the Mara could not look at its own reflection.

"I will be able to watch as this civilisation falls. And then the next one and then the next. Until chaos reigns this wonderful planet," she gave a sigh of pleasure. "I'm getting shivers already."

Then, her face hardened as she turned to him. "But first..."
Rory had spent some time with Kuma, learning about the boat but had then wandered onto the deck to take in the sights. The sun was hanging low in the sky now and but the air still remained muggy. Kuma had told him that they’d pass the Tala habitat soon. They weren't going to stop there but would continue on to Tapherini.

So, he was surprised when the boat started to slow down before coming to a halt. He made his way inside in confusion. "Kuma, what's wrong?" he asked. "I thought you said we weren't going to stop until we reached Tapherini."

"We have a problem, my friend," Kuma said, looking dejected. "It appears that the oil tank has sprung a leak. We have run out of fuel."

"Oh no," Rory said. "Don't you have any reserve fuel onboard?"

"No," Kuma shook his head. "We can only do one thing. The Tala habitat is very close. We can dock the boat and ask them for shelter for the night. A supply boat will pass this way in the morning and we can ask for help from them."

"Will these Tala people really help us?" Rory asked.

"Oh yes, they are nice," Kuma said. "If you'll excuse me, friend, I have to dock the boat now."

"Yeah, okay," Rory said, leaving them and going in search of Rose and the Doctor. He reached the cabin but was surprised when Rose came out before he could open the door.

"Rory!" she said, looking a bit surprised. "Why have we stopped?"

"Oil tank's got a leak," he said. "Looks like we're stranded for the night. But Kuma says that we can ask the Tala people for help."

"Right," Rose nodded. "That doesn't sound so bad."

"Where's the Doctor?" he asked, realising that he hadn't come out from behind her.

Rose actually giggled. "He fell asleep," she said, lowering her voice. "Serves him right, boasting about his superior biology all the time."

"He fell asleep?" Rory asked, fighting back a laugh. "Now that is a sight I'd love to see."

"I took pictures," Rose said. "When we go back to the TARDIS, we'll blow them up and plaster them all over the library."

The two of them were still laughing as they met Kuma and the crew on deck. "The Tala habitat is through there," said Kuma. "Just follow me."

"What about the Doctor?" Rose asked.

"Some of the crew is staying onboard. If he wakes up, they'll tell him where to find you," said Kuma. "Come on now."

Rose and Rory carefully disembarked behind Kuma and two of his men. Rose rubbed at her head as they walked past the small shore and into the forest.

"You alright?" Rory asked her.

"Yeah, just a headache," she said, trying to smile at him reassuringly. "Don't worry about it."
"The habitat is just up ahead," Kuma said, having heard their conversation. "The Tala are good at medicine. They'll have something for your headache."

As they parted the last of the trees, they came upon a wide clearing. Small thatched huts were built in a formation around the clearing and people were doddering about. Some form of meat sizzled on the big fire in the middle, sending delicious aroma wafting through the darkening night air.

A tall broad-shouldered man with russet coloured skin and long dark hair approached them. "Welcome weary travellers," he greeted politely yet keeping a cautious eye on Rose and Rory. "Kuma?"

"They are trustworthy, Muro," said Kuma. "This is Miss Rose Tyler and Mr. Rory Williams. They're English."

Muro appraised them carefully and then nodded. "The tribe of the Tala welcome you to our humble habitat. Please enter."

They entered the circle of huts, aware of the curious eyes of the other tribe members on them. Rory glanced at Rose, who was rubbing her head again. "Rose," he said.

"Rory," she said, looking at him and he was startled to see tears in her eyes. "I..." Rose sank to the ground in a dead faint.

"Rose!" cried Rory, kneeling next to her.

"Out of the way, traveller!" Muro cried as he easily lifted Rose up. "Kana!" he called.

A woman few years older than Rose emerged from a hut. She took one look at the unconscious Rose in Muro's arms and beckoned them in. "Come," she said.

Rory followed Muro in worry as they entered Kana's hut. Muro laid Rose on a cot made from woven hemp. Kana pressed her hand to Rose's forehead and then looked at Rory in worry. "She's very troubled and in much pain," she told him.

"Can't you do anything?" Rory asked, feeling almost useless. He had no idea what kind of medicine the tribe would have or if they even had anything resembling good medicine in this era.

"I can ease her pain," said Kana. "But I cannot stop her trouble..."

"I'll fetch the Doctor," said Rory. "Just look after her, please."

When Kana nodded, Rory left the hut and ran back the way they had come from. It was quite easy to find the path that they had taken and soon, he arrived at the docked boat.

"Doctor!" he called as he ran towards the cabin. "Doctor!" He opened the door and his eyes went wide. The Doctor was chained to the table, a look of despair on his face.

"Rory! Quick, let me loose. It's Rose. She's possessed!"

At the Tala habitat Rose bolted up from the cot, screaming at the top of her lungs.
"Doctor!" he called as he ran towards the cabin. "Doctor!" He opened the door and his eyes went wide. The Doctor was chained to the table, a look of despair on his face.

"Rory! Quick, let me loose. It's Rose. She's possessed!"

At the Tala habitat Rose bolted up from the cot, screaming at the top of her lungs.

"Hush, you are safe," Kana repeated, trying to keep her patient from jumping off the cot.

"No, no, no," Rose screamed, nearly hysterical. "Rory! Where is Rory?"

"Your friend has gone to fetch your Doctor friend," Muro said, trying to calm her down.

"No, Rory! Rory!" Rose screamed.

"Do something," Muro told Kana as Rose dissolved into hysteries. "She's going to hurt herself."

Distressed, Kana quickly picked up a sleep inducing herb and held it under Rose's nose. Rose's movements slowed down before her body went limp and she slumped down on the cot, unconscious.

"Why was she screaming for her friend?" Kana wondered.

"What is the matter with her, Kana?" asked Muro.

"I do not know, Muro," said Kana. "Help me get those gloves off. I can rub some soothers on her hands to stop her from having another panic attack."

~

"What do you mean she's possessed?" Rory asked as he searched through the Doctor's coat to find the sonic screwdriver.

"I should have realised when she was acting so differently," said the Doctor. "Hurry, Rory!"

"Got it," said Rory and pulled out the sonic screwdriver. He pointed it at the cuffs and they sprang open.

The Doctor stood up immediately and rubbed his wrists lightly. "Where is she now?" he asked.

"I took her to the Tala people. She said she had a headache and then just fainted," said Rory as the two of them emerged out onto the boat's deck. Night had fallen and they could hear the continuous chatter of insects as they buzzed around the dark night.

The Doctor looked visibly worried. "It could mean that she is gaining awareness," said the Doctor. "Or..." he grimaced.

"Or what?" asked Rory, scared.

"Or, the Mara is getting stronger in her mind," said the Doctor gravely.
"Think, Doctor!" she said in a louder voice as she stood up. "What I can do with this beautiful face and doe eyes. And don't you just love this beautiful mind. So incredibly complex yet pathetically human at the same time. It's...hmm, intoxicating."

The Doctor could do little more but glare angrily as she paced around the cabin, carefully avoiding the mirror. Even after years of power, the Mara could not look at its own reflection.

"I will be able to watch as this civilisation falls. And then the next one and then the next. Until chaos reigns this wonderful planet," she gave a sigh of pleasure. "I'm getting shivers already." Then, her face hardened as she turned it to him. "But first..."

Rose thrashed on the cot as the hazy memory started floating into her head. But the drug Kana had given her kept her from gaining consciousness. Trapped in her own nightmare, the memories gained sharp focus in her mind.

"But first...I have a proposition for you, Doctor," she said, smiling slowly at him. "You obviously care a great deal for Rose. I mean, that kiss made even me blush."

The Doctor glared angrily. "Your proposition?" he asked, through gritted teeth.

"I will let Rose go," she said, smiling benevolently.

"And in return?" asked the Doctor.

"In return, I shall try and possess you," she said. "You seemed keen to have Rose try and resist me. Why don't you try it yourself then?"

"I am much stronger," said the Doctor. "You won't be able to hold my mind."

"Then you have no objection?" she asked. "If you are so confident in your abilities, then take my mark Doctor. If you resist me, I shall die. If not..."

"I'll take your mark," said the Doctor. "Leave Rose alone."

She kneeled in front of him. "As you wish," she said and pulled his mouth down to hers in a kiss. At the same time, her hand grasped his right hand and the snake moved from her hand to his."Let's see you fight me, Doctor," she whispered as she broke the kiss.

Rose shot out of her unconscious state, loud screams erupting from her mouth again. "The Doctor!" she gasped. "Stop him!"

~

"It's just through here," said Rory as he led the way through the dark forest.

The Doctor followed after him, rubbing his right arm periodically. He could feel a wide smirk waiting to just burst forth on his face. But he would wait until they got to the Tala. The Mara would rule and chaos would reign all over this planet and the Tala were the key to attaining that goal.

Rory parted the trees and they emerged into the clearing again. Fires were lit now to allow for visibility during night. The Doctor couldn't quite control the smile that appeared on his face. He caressed his right arm and the snake hissed quietly under his sleeve.
"RORY!" Rose had run out. She came to a stop a few paces away from them and stared at the Doctor with frightened eyes. "Rory, get away from him," she said, looking at him warily.

"I told you it had messed with her mind," said the Doctor to Rory. "Don't let the thing in her mind fool you, Rory."

"Don't listen to whatever he is saying to you, Rory," said Rose frantically when she saw the Doctor whisper something to him. "He is possessed!"

"No, Rose!" said the Doctor. "You are the one who is possessed. You left me tied up in the cabin, remember?"

Rory was inclined to believe the Doctor and was eyeing Rose with doubt. "Rose, maybe you should calm down," he said. "That thing in your mind is messing with you. This is the Doctor. He won't harm anyone," said Rory, trying to reassure her.

Rose let out a sigh of despair before her eyes widened. "His arm!" she yelled, pointing at the Doctor. "Ask him to show his arm."

"Rose, you are being ridiculous. Perhaps, the Mara has left your mind addled," said the Doctor. "If I was possessed, I'd still have the Mara's mark," said Rose, gaining her confidence back. She held up her arms in the firelight. "See! No mark. Now, ask him to do the same."

The Doctor's jaw clenched but Rory just shrugged at him. "Just show her your arms," he said. "Then she'll calm down."

"Fine," said the Doctor and slowly removed his coat and set it on the ground. Then he carefully raised his arm and made to roll up the sleeves. Suddenly, before anyone could register it, he had grabbed Rory's neck.

"Let him go!" Rose yelled.

"I applaud your mental prowess, Rose," hissed the Doctor in a throaty voice that did not sound like him at all. "I thought the mental block I put in would hold for a bit longer. But you fought through and came to the true memory rather quickly. Foolish Doctor, he thought he could resist me better than you did."

"Please, let Rory go," said Rose, as Rory started to look a bit blue. "Please, Doctor. Please."

The Doctor's grip loosened and he looked at Rose in amusement. "Sorry, darling," he said. "I'm afraid the Doctor isn't in. And as for this pretty boy Rory Williams; well he would look good with my mark!"

Before Rose could do anything, Muro ran up to the Doctor holding a mirror. With a loud cry, the Doctor released Rory and covered his face. "Run!" Muro cried and Rose grabbed Rory's hand as the two of them followed the rest of the Tala people who were fleeing deeper into the forest.

Muro held up the mirror in front of the Mara's face as everyone escaped. He started to back away slowly but the Doctor let out an angry growl and knocked the mirror out of his hands. It fell to the ground and shattered.

"You really shouldn't have done that," hissed the Doctor and grabbed Muro's neck. With a quick flick of his wrist, he snapped his neck. Muro fell to the ground, dead.
The Doctor stepped over his body and looked at the dark forest where the tribe had run off along with Rose and Rory. "Nico!" he called and the hunched over servant emerged from the bushes.

"Lord Mara!" he bowed.

"The final phase is nearly here, Nico," said the Doctor as he bared his arm and stroked the snake on it. "It's time to issue an ultimatum."

~

"I don't understand," said Rory, shaking his head. "The Doctor is possessed now?"

Rose looked dejected as she nodded. "The Mara offered to release me," she said. "He seemed to think he could fight it off. But now..."

"It's not your fault, Rose," said Rory, slipping his arm around her shoulder.

"It is so horrible, Rory," said Rose, burying her face in his neck. "I was completely aware, you know. But it was like I was trapped in my mind as the Mara used my body. There was just so much hatred in me."

Rory comforted her as best as he could. "Do you think the Doctor can fight it?" he asked.

Rose snorted without humour. "Do you?" she asked, cynically.

Rory rubbed his neck where bruises were starting to appear. "There has to be a way," he said. "The Doctor is still in there somewhere."

Kana approached them with a bowl. "Some food for you," she said kindly.

"Thank you," said Rose. "And we're very sorry about bringing this down on you."

Kana smiled sadly and sat down on the log opposite them. "Our ancestors spoke of this, you know. They said the Great Serpent would come into our midst, bringing death and destruction in its wake."

"Do you know of a way to stop it?" Rory asked. "M-Muro used a mirror."

Kana nodded. "Our ancestors said that the Serpent could never bear the sight of its reflection. Such darkness and evil can never look at itself. That is why Muro ran to it with the mirror. He sacrificed himself to save us all," she said, looking sad as she thought of brave Muro.

"I'm sorry," said Rose.

Kana nodded in acknowledgement. "It says nothing of how to defeat the Serpent in our legends," she said. "But it did say that the coming of the wolf princess will bring a way to defeat the Serpent."

Rose's eyes widened. "The wolf princess who has a rose vine on her hand, right?" she asked.

"That's right," said Kana, looking surprised. "I am astounded as to how you know that."

"I saw the wolf figurine in Manaus," said Rose. She huffed in irritation. "Everywhere we go, there is something about a wolf or a bad wolf. It feels like...a warning or something."

"Hang on," interrupted Rory. "What do you mean, everywhere we go?"
Rose looked at the small fire that they had built in the cave they were hiding in. "Just something I noticed," she said, shrugging. "I keep hearing it. Like it's following us or something. Sounds daft, I know."

"But then it must be true," said Kana, her eyes brightening at Rose. "You must be the princess our ancestors spoke of."

"I really doubt it," said Rose, trying not to sound too unkind about it. "I'm not a princess or anything like it, I promise."

"But it all fits," said Kana, excited. "Even your name is the one tied to the wolf's arm."

"I'm sorry, Kana," said Rose. "But it's just a coincidence. I really have no idea about how to defeat the Mara..." she trailed off, her lips pursing. "Hang on, though..."

Rory and Kana leaned forward eagerly to hear what she had to say but they were interrupted by a loud sound.

"The tribe of Tala!" It was the Doctor's voice and it appeared that he was speaking over some sort of a loud microphone.

"What's he doing now?" asked Rory, in a worried voice. Rose shrugged as she saw all the people listen to the Doctor's voice in fear.

"I know you are hiding but you needn't fear me," he continued in a warm voice. Both Rose and Rory flinched at that because it sounded too much like the Doctor and not enough like the Mara. "I only wish to help you."

"Don't believe him," said Kana, at once.

Rose and Rory looked confused as to why she was saying that when it was obvious that no one would believe him. But then Rory noticed that some of the members of the tribe were listening quite intently to his words and fear gripped his heart. He nudged Rose who swept her eyes over the people and met Rory's eyes in worry.

"Your life hasn't been easy, has it? All these strangers came to your home and made you work for them. Now, they live like princes and treat you like a servant in your own home. Don't they?"

Some of the members of the tribe nodded along to his words, murmuring amongst themselves. Kana looked increasingly worried along with Rose and Rory.

"But if you join me," continued the Doctor. "I promise that all these strangers will leave. You shall have your home back. You shall be in power. You shall have control over your own life!"

The murmurings became louder as they nodded along to it in excitement. "He's lying!" Kana shouted but received hostile looks in return.

"So, I ask of you to join me," said the Doctor. "I am waiting in the clearing that you made your home. Come to me and no harm shall come to you. Only wealth and prosperity."

The night went silent again. "Don't believe him," said Kana. "He killed Muro. He's the Great Serpent our ancestors spoke of. He shall bring nothing but death and destruction."

"Don't believe her," said a middle-aged man. "She is lying."
"I am not lying, Von," said Kana, agitated. "Have you no regard for what our ancestors said?"

"Well they're not here now, are they?" Von demanded angrily. "The Doctor is right. He will return our home to us. Our land shall be our own once again." There were shouts of agreement from the tribe at his words. Von looked triumphantly at Kana, who looked devastated. "Looks like our decision is made," he said. "Let's go!"

With a cry of agreement, the Tala started leaving the cave. Soon, the only people left were Kana, Rose, Rory and Kuma. Both of Kuma's men had left but he had refused to go.

"They will be killed," said Kana, her voice shaking. "They are marching to their slaughter."

Rose gripped her shoulder in comfort. "We'll stop the Mara," she said confidently. "There is a way..."
Trouble in the Amazon: The Evil Within

Previously

With a cry of agreement, the Tala started leaving the cave. Soon, the only people left were Kana, Rose, Rory and Kuma. Both of Kuma’s men had left but he had refused to go.

“They will be killed,” said Kana, her voice shaking. “They are marching to their slaughter.”

Rose gripped her shoulder in comfort. “We’ll stop the Mara,” she said confidently. “There is a way…”

The Doctor watched with a wide smile as the Tala emerged from the dark forest one by one. He hastily arranged his features into far friendlier ones. A middle-aged man approached him as the rest of the people stopped a few paces away.

“I am Von,” the man declared. “I speak for the Tala now.”

The Doctor smiled. This was too easy. He really had expected more of a challenge. "I am the Doctor. It is very nice to meet you, Von. I must congratulate you and your people for making the right choice,” he said.

Von preened at his words. "Then you might also want to know that your two friends refused to come, along with Kana and Kuma,” he said.

The Doctor shrugged carelessly. "I am not particularly bothered about them," he said. "If they refuse to see sense, then they can stay in the forest until they do." His gaze sharpened as he walked up to Von. "But you, you will be useful," he grabbed his arm.

Before Von could do more then look up at him in shock, he felt the Mara's will take over his mind. The Doctor smirked as he let him go. "My lord," Von bowed to the Doctor. "I await your command.”

"Get your people together. Break into the rubber groves at Tapherini. Then, steal the rubber seeds and load them onto the Gwendolyn. After the boat is full, take it back to Manaus and then make sure it gets on a ship to England,” he said in a clipped tone.

"How will that take the strangers from our land?" a young man from the group asked bravely.

"Avi," Von snapped. "It is not our place to question, Lord Mara."

"No, no," said the Doctor as he glanced at Avi with interest. "Avi, is it? Come here, boy." Avi looked a bit scared but walked up to the Doctor. The Doctor put an arm around his shoulder in a gesture of friendship. "You see Avi, all these foreigners came to your land because of the rubber. But if they get to grow the rubber on their own lands, they will leave yours alone."

"So, the rubber seeds we steal from Tapherini will get them to leave us,” said Avi, understandingly.

The Doctor smiled and clapped his shoulder. "Good lad," he said. "Now, get to work.”

At Von's orders, the Tala started forming into groups. The Doctor watched with a smile as they slowly left into the dark forest. The only ones staying behind were three newborns being looked
after by a ten year old girl. They were inside one of the huts. Otherwise, men and women alike were marching to steal the rubber from Tapherini.

The Doctor had rolled up the sleeves of his white shirt, keeping the mark proudly on display. He glanced at it now and threw his head back in joyous laughter that rang through the silent night. This had been far too easy. These people were too primitive and stupid to understand the consequences of their actions.

Once the Europeans had a way of growing rubber, they would leave this land. And with them, they would take away all the wealth and order that they had established. The labourers would lose their source of income, the traders would go bankrupt and the economy would collapse. The so-called rubber boom would fall into decline before plunging this land into poverty.

He heard a slight rustle from the shrubbery and his head snapped around quickly. To his surprise, the bushes parted and Rose Tyler emerged out of them. His brows rose almost lazily as he saw her raise her hands to her side in a gesture of surrender.

"I just wanna talk, I swear," she said.

Intrigued, the Doctor nodded and beckoned her forward. She hesitated slightly but walked up to him, stopping in front of him. "I came to warn you," she said.

"Warn me?" asked the Doctor, sounding a bit amused.

She nodded quickly, chewing on her lip nervously. "Look, we were debating on how to stop you," she blurted out. "The mirror thing worked before and Kana said that if we kill you when you were hiding from your reflection, you would die."

The Doctor's eyes narrowed in anger as he advanced on her. "And you just decided to tell me all of this?" he asked, gripping her wrist tightly and pulling her close to him.

Rose met his eyes in fear and nodded. "Rory and Kuma agreed," she continued, even as her wrist hurt where he was gripping it.

His grip loosened as he gazed thoughtfully at her. "And yet here you are," he said.

She nodded quickly. "If they kill you, they kill the Doctor. I couldn't let that happen," she said.

He let go of her wrist and threw his head back in laughter. "Foolish human emotions," he murmured, as he brushed his fingers quite tenderly against her cheek.

Rose almost recoiled before holding her ground firmly. "I want to make a deal," she said.

"You do, do you?" he asked, looking amused once more. "I'm listening."


"You know Rose, you and the Doctor confuse me. So quick to sacrifice yourself for the other," he said. "But I'm afraid I must decline your offer. The Doctor simply has more potential."

"But you must have seen something in me," she said, desperately clutching at straws. "You said so before."

"You are right," he said. "You have much potential. Much untapped power," he murmured, running his fingers over her cheek again. "I will make you a counter-offer," he said.
"What?" she asked warily.

"Join me," he said, leaning close to her. "You and me. The Doctor and Rose. Just like the old days. We could travel in the TARDIS. Find new places. And we could be together." He was moving closer and closer to her as he spoke.

Rose hesitated for a moment before closing the distance between their mouths. She felt his triumphant smirk as he kissed her languidly. She was almost surprised at the gentleness of the kiss but there was no hesitance on her part as she matched him stroke for stroke of their lips and tongues. When they pulled away, they were both a bit breathless.

"I take it that is a yes," said the Doctor. "A wise decision, my dear."

Rose smiled at him and caressed his jaw with her fingers. "But there is something we must do first," she said, her eyes hardening.

"What?" he asked.

"Stop the others," she said. "I rather like this body. They know that I came to warn you and they'll try to kill you."

"Don't worry, my dear," he said. "I know a safe place."

"Where?" she asked. "Kana knows this forest better than you. Even Kuma must, I suppose."

"Then we must simply get out of the forest," he said. "Never liked the wilderness much, anyway. We'll go back to the Gwendolyn. We could...catch up," he added, his gaze seductive as it ran over her.

Rose almost shivered but managed to control her reaction. Barely. "Let's go then," she said. "I don't like staying here in the open."

The Doctor smiled as he took her hand. "Come on then," he said.

~

"Are we ready?" asked Kana in a whisper.

"Almost," said Rory as he and Kuma moved the last mirror in place.

Kana paced around the cabin which had a circle of mirrors in the middle of it. She remembered the plan that Rose had explained to them.

"We'll stop the Mara," she said confidently. "There is a way..."

"How?" asked Kana, sounding almost desperate.

"When the Mara was in my head, it was thinking about the first time it met the Doctor," said Rose. "It was on a planet called Deva Loka."

"And the Doctor defeated it?" asked Rory.

"Yes," said Rose. "But more importantly, I saw the way he defeated it. I couldn't remember it before but the longer the Mara stays away from me, the more of its memories float into my mind."

Rory patted her shoulder in comfort. He wouldn't want a monster's memories in his head at all.
"What did he do?" he asked.

"He made a circle of mirrors and trapped the person possessed by the Mara inside it. Surrounded by all of those mirrors, the Mara's true form got revealed and left the possessed man," she said, her forehead slightly wrinkled as she tried to remember it.

"So we can save the Doctor AND defeat the Mara?" asked Rory, sounding hopeful.

"I expect so," said Rose. "But where are we going to find mirrors in the middle of the Amazon?"

"On the boat," said Kuma immediately. "The cabin has a full-length mirror and there are mirrors in each of the crew rooms and my personal stateroom."

"Great, so we can use them," said Rory.

"But how do we get the Doctor to the boat?" asked Kana.

"I'll do it," said Rose, a look of determination crossing her face.

"Rose, it will be incredibly dangerous," said Rory. "If he finds out you're tricking him, he will kill you. This is not the Doctor anymore."

"I know that," said Rose softly. "But I'm the only one who can do this. I have to, Rory."

Rory gazed at her determined face and nodded once. "Please be careful," he said.

She smiled. "Of course," she nodded. "I'm always careful."

Now, Kana's pacing was getting worse. The Doctor and Rose should have been here by now. She saw the circle of mirrors and had to admit it was an ingenious plan. Rory and Kuma had made sure that there was no mistake. It would take considerable strength and agility on their part to get the Doctor inside it and also out of it once the Mara left him.

"I hear them," said Kuma. "Hide!"

Kana moved next to Kuma as they hid next to the door. Rory was on the other side. As soon as the Doctor entered, she and Rory would create a gap in the circle, leaving Rose and Kuma to push the Doctor inside.

"You know Rose," he was saying as they approached the cabin. "Those handcuffs from before were an interesting idea."

They heard Rose's nervous laughter as she made a remark about him being shameless in a fond voice. Kana held her breath as the handle on the door moved and the door opened slowly. The Doctor's head was turned around as he was flirting with Rose.

Kana met Rory's eyes and with a quick nod, she and Rory pushed the mirrors in front of the door aside. The Doctor's head snapped around but Kuma and Roseb sprang into action and pushed him inside.

He yelled in surprise and Rory and Kana pushed the mirrors back together again. "Fools!" he screamed.

"Will this work?" asked Kuma, in a slightly apprehensive voice as the Doctor screamed over and over at them.
But Kana was positive it was working. His screams became quieter and quieter which made Kana peer at him through the slit between two of the mirrors. He was clutching at his arm as the snake on it jumped to life. The Doctor screamed loudly once before the snake dropped off his arm.

"NOW!" Kana yelled. "Get the Doctor out."

Kuma and Rory created a gap and Rose grabbed an unsteady Doctor and pulled him out. The snake hissed loudly as the circle closed again. Kana gasped as the snake started getting bigger, hissing loudly as if in pain.

Soon, it was as big enough to touch its head to the cabin's ceiling. But the mirrors stayed steady and there was a final, loud hiss as the snake dissipated into red smoke. Kana burst into tears of relief and threw her arms around Kuma who returned her hug just as enthusiastically. She saw Rose and Rory fussing over an unconscious Doctor but he appeared to be breathing fine and Kana knew he would be alright.

"I should find the tribe," she said finally leaving Kuma's arms, feeling a bit embarrassed.

"Yeah, I should go and stop the other supply boat," he said, scratching the back of his head in embarrassment. Then almost shyly, he gazed at her. "Can I come and see you sometime?"

Kana felt her heart flutter and she nodded quickly. "I would like that very much," she said. Then, before she lost her nerve she quickly got on her tiptoes and kissed him. Grinning with exhilaration, she ran away before he could open his eyes.

"Okay then," said Kuma slightly breathlessly, a goofy smile on his face. He glanced to the side where the Doctor was awake and saying something to Rose and Rory. He nodded at them and left to flag down the supply boat.

~

Rory saw Kuma leave and then glanced down at the Doctor and Rose. Rose was cradling the Doctor's head in her lap and the two of them were asking if the other was fine over and over again. When an awkward silence fell upon them, Rory knew it was time to leave them alone.

"I'll just go see if Kuma needs help," he said.

The Doctor and Rose barely heard him as the Doctor sat up slowly, keeping his eyes on Rose.

"I'm sorry," they blurted out together. Their eyes went wide and they laughed nervously.

"You go," said Rose.

The Doctor took a deep breath. "I am very sorry, Rose," he said. He shook his head, knowing that he couldn't even begin to apologise for everything.

"Me too," said Rose. "I..."

"You have nothing to be sorry for," he said at once. "In fact, you were the one who stopped the Mara."

"I was the one who got possessed in the first place," she pointed out.

"Yes, but that was not your fault," said the Doctor. He hesitated slightly before grasping her hand, sighing in relief when she didn't flinch away from his touch. "I, on the other hand, have much to be
"It was the Mara, not you," protested Rose at once.

The Doctor shook his head. "That is not an excuse, Rose," he said. "Not when I caused so much damage."

"Do you blame me for the things I did when I was possessed?" she asked him.

"Of course not," he said at once.

"Then don't blame yourself either," she said, reaching up to cradle his cheek. "You took the Mara from me. You saved me."

The Doctor's eyes closed as he sighed. "And you saved me, Rose," he said. "Thank you for that." He opened his eyes to find Rose smiling at him. He hesitated for a moment. "I killed Muro," he confessed.

Rose's eyes softened and she stroked his face lightly. "I know," she said. "It wasn't your fault."

"I wish I could believe it," he said, hanging his head.

"Do you believe in me?" she asked.

The Doctor raised his eyes to hers again. "Yes," he answered without hesitating.

"Then just believe me when I say that Muro's death wasn't your fault," she said.

A smile graced his face and he raised her bruised wrist. "I believe you," he whispered and gently kissed her wrist.

Rose's breath caught at the tender action. The Doctor's lips left her wrist and he moved his face towards hers slowly. Rose felt her eyes close.

"Hey, we're ready to go," Rory said, poking his head into the cabin. "Oh," he stopped short as the Doctor and Rose froze, their faces inches away from each other.

"Yes, of course," said the Doctor, pulling away and jumping to his feet. "Rose?" he asked, offering his hand.

Rose gave him a small smile and took his hand to stand up. "Let's go. I'm ready to go back to the TARDIS and get out of this dress. It's almost completely ruined," she complained, glancing at the delicate lace that had been torn in places.

Daylight had fallen over the Amazon as they emerged onto the deck. Kuma waved at them. "We're ready to set sail," he said.

"Onwards then," said the Doctor, squeezing Rose's hand.

The Gwendolyn pulled out of the dock and began her journey back towards Manaus. Unknown to any of them, three crates of rubber seeds were stashed away in her hold. They would reach England safely and the decline of the rubber boom would be set in motion.

Sometimes, history couldn't be rewritten.

~
"Hey, where's the Doctor?" asked Rose as she emerged out into the console room, changed out of the dress.

"Said he had to find something," shrugged Rory. "Listen Rose, about before..."

"It's okay, Rory," said Rose. She was disappointed that they had been interrupted but she wasn't going to let Rory feel guilty over it.

"You think you two will get together?" he asked.

"I...I don't know," she said, honestly.

"I think you should," he said.

"Wouldn't that make you feel like you're playing the gooseberry?" asked Rose teasingly. "If the Doctor and I play a couple all the time."

"Oh you two already play the couple all the time," smirked Rory. "Only difference is that you two would stop denying it." With that, he patted her shoulder and left the console room grinning to himself.

Rose glanced after him in confusion and jumped slightly when the TARDIS doors opened and the Doctor came in. "Oh hello, Rose," he said.

"Where were you?" she asked.

"I just had to get something," he said. "In fact, I'll give it to you right now."

"You got something for me?" she asked in surprise.

"I did," he grinned and pulled something out from his coat. "Hold out your hand and close your eyes."

Rose looked a bit confused but decided to humour him. She closed her eyes and extended her right hand. Her eyes flew open when she felt something cool drop into her palm. She gasped when she saw that it was the wolf figurine from Abel's stall.

"How did you know?" she asked.

"The legend of the wolf princess," smiled the Doctor. "The princess who saved the Tala from the Great Serpent. Seemed appropriate to get it for you."

Rose smiled as she glanced at the figurine again. "Thank you," she beamed.

"You're very welcome, Rose," he said as he started the dematerialisation process. "I'm sending the TARDIS into the vortex. I guess we all need some rest."

Rose nodded, realising that she was very sleepy and tired. But she knew that the minute she closed her eyes, the nightmares would come rushing back. She took a deep breath and turned to the Doctor. "Can you stay with me tonight?" she asked, hating how small her voice sounded.

The Doctor looked up at her in surprise. The last time she had asked him that was with the aftermath of the Nira incident. But he supposed it was only natural that she would want him close after their ordeal with the Mara. He himself was dreading the possibility of being away from her.

"Of course," he answered her. "Come on."
She smiled as the two of them walked down to her room, hand in hand. As Rose got into her bed, the Doctor contemplated the comfort of the thick carpet. "Don't be daft," said Rose, guessing his line of thought. She nodded pointedly at the space in her bed.

"Are you sure?" he asked and she knew he was asking about far more than just sharing the bed.

"Yes," she answered with complete certainty.

The Doctor smiled widely as he nodded at that and walked towards her bed.
"There's no way," Rose snapped at Rory.

"I am from your future. I am telling the truth," Rory argued, equally stubborn.

"I don't believe you," Rose huffed. "There is no way that any of the Harry Potter films are bad."

"Well clearly you haven't seen movies 5 and 6," Rory said smugly.

"Oi, just because you are from 2010 doesn't make you right," she argued, crossing her arms.

"Of course it does," he said. "I have seen both of those movies and I am telling you, they're not as good as the other ones."

"I quite have to agree with Rory," the Doctor said absently, examining the vector tracker which was humming Can't buy me love by the Beatles for some reason. "Now, the last two, they are quite amazing."

He wished he hadn't said anything when Rose's eyes snapped to him. Great, now she was mad at him as well as Rory. Why hadn't he kept his mouth shut? It was like he couldn't help himself interfering.

He offered her a nice smile but Rose's glare remained icy as ever. Rory mouthed good luck to him behind her back.

Thankfully, the vector tracker went silent right at the moment and a large mauve beacon on the console lit up. The Doctor's smile vanished as he ran towards the beacon and pressed the switch next to it.

"This is the Doctor. Whatever you want, I'm not going to do it," he said.

"What's that about?" Rory asked Rose in a whisper.

"Must be from Gallifrey," Rose said. "He hates getting those messages."

The two of them jumped when the Doctor banged his fist against the console. "I can't hear a word," he snapped. "Speak up."

To their greatest astonishment, Romana's voice came over the speaker next to the beacon. "Doctor...out...TARDIS...Impo...rtant..."

"Romana, what was that?" the Doctor asked. "I can't hear you. Ask one of those idiots in the Chancellery to get you a better microphone."

"Please...go out...TARDIS."

"I should go out of the TARDIS?" the Doctor asked. "Why?"

There was no reply from the other end; merely static. The Doctor growled in frustration. "Useless idiots, why won't you ever stop bothering me?" he asked the beacon that was still flashing mauve.

"Doctor," Rose interrupted. "What was that?"
"Annoying little twerps on Gallifrey," he answered snappishly. "Go outside, indeed. Do I look like I am to be ordered about?"

"Blimey, he has issues with them doesn't he?" Rory muttered to Rose.

"You have no idea," Rose said.

"Go outside," the Doctor was still muttering angrily to himself. "Why should I go outside? There is nothing outside."

"Uh, where are we?" Rory asked cautiously, not wanting to annoy the Doctor more.

"I don't care," he said. "I am not going outside."

"Maybe you should just see," Rose suggested with a bright smile. "Might be important."

"If it is so important, then those idiots can see it for themselves," he said petulantly.

"But Romana has asked, Doctor," Rose said, knowing that this would work.

The Doctor grimaced childishly but nodded. "Fine, stay here," he told them. "I'll only be a moment and then we can actually go somewhere fun." He opened the TARDIS doors and went outside still muttering to himself. "Think of me as an errand boy. Go outside, they tell me."

"Boy, he's really pissed off," Rory said.

Rose giggled. "Yeah, his people really annoy him sometimes. With good reason, too. They can't seem to make up their minds about him. Sometimes they exile him and sometimes name him President."

The static cleared and Romana's voice rang clearly from the speaker. "Doctor, if you can hear me. Do not go outside your TARDIS. This is important. Stay inside. I repeat: do not go outside."

The beacon stopped flashing and the instrument went silent. Rose ran towards it and pressed the switch. "Romana? Romana! What's going on?" she demanded as Rory ran for the doors to get the Doctor back inside.

There was no answer from Romana and as Rory reached the doors, they slammed shut and the time rotor began to move. "What did you do?" Rory asked Rose.

"I didn't do anything," Rose said. "It just started up on its own."

They heard a banging on the doors. "Rose! Rory! Open the doors!" the Doctor yelled.

"We can't!" Rory said, tugging on the doors. Rose ran up to him to help but the doors wouldn't budge. The dematerialisation sound started building up.

"Doctor, use the key!" Rose yelled.

"It won't work!" the Doctor yelled back. "What's happened?"

"There's danger, Doctor," Rose yelled. "Romana said..."

It went quiet and Rose knew that dematerialisation was complete. She met Rory's gaze in horror. "Oh god," she murmured.
"What do we do now?" Rory asked. "Do you know how to fly us?"

"The Doctor only showed me the basics," Rose admitted as they ran over to the console. She pressed the few switches she remembered the Doctor showing her. They displayed their destination and Rose inhaled sharply and looked at Rory.

"What?" Rory asked.

"We're in the vortex," Rose said. "I'm sorry, I don't know what to do."

Rory put an arm around her shoulder in comfort. "It's okay," he said. "We'll think of something."

There was a zapping sound behind them and they turned around quickly. A hologram of a woman had propped up in the console room. She was shorter than Rose and a few years older. Her dark hair was cut in a pixie hairdo and she was dressed in dark trousers and a blue blouse.

"You have to listen," the hologram said.

"What the hell?" Rory muttered as he and Rose approached the holographic woman cautiously.

"There isn't time to explain. Follow these space-time coordinates. 7-2-10-8-0 by 3-8 from the Galactic Centre. The TARDIS will help you," the holographic woman said.

"Hang on," Rose said as Rory scribbled down the coordinates. "Who are you? And why should we do this?"

"But you must," the woman insisted. "It's the only way to save Grandfather. Everything is at stake. You must do this."

The hologram vanished and Rose and Rory looked at each other in confusion and shock. "What was all that about?" Rory asked.

"No idea," Rose said, remembering the slip the woman had made. Was she about to say Grandfather? She didn't voice it to Rory but looked at the coordinates that he had scribbled. "We should do as she says I suppose?"

"I guess," Rory said doubtfully. "We don't have many options unless we want to float in the vortex forever."

Rose nodded and went to the console. "The coordinates go here," she said, pointing to the right component.

Rory nodded and started entering the coordinates. "Now what?" he asked.

"We're already in flight so we don't need to dematerialise," Rose said trying to remember what the Doctor had taught her.

"Uh, Rose is this supposed to flash?" Rory asked, pointing to a series of buttons that were flashing golden in a fixed pattern.

"No," Rose said, sounding relieved. "It's the TARDIS helping." She pressed the buttons in the order that they lit up and the TARDIS gave a long hum and lurched. "It's working!"

"Great, now what?" Rory asked, clutching the console.

Rory pushed and pulled the knob as Rose instructed. The TARDIS stabilised a bit and Rose ran over to the other set of switches that had started glowing. "And now the landing sequence," she said, pressing the switches in order.

"What now?" Rory asked as the materialisation sound started up.

"The brakes. Pull the handbrake," Rose said and Rory let go of the helmic regulator to pull the handbrake. The TARDIS tilted violently, throwing them both down to the floor but the materialisation sequence had worked and despite the shaky landing, they had successfully arrived at the set coordinates.

"Are you alright?" Rory asked Rose.

Rose nodded as she sat up slowly and then took Rory's offered hand to get to her feet. "We've landed, I think," she said.

"Right," Rory said. "Do you think it's safe to go outside?"

Rose pulled the lever to operate the scanner but it sparked violently when she touched it. "Guess we can't find out unless we go outside," she grimaced.

Rory exhaled roughly as he and Rose opened the doors of the TARDIS and stepped outside. They had arrived in a clearing of tall crops that looked like corn but weren't really as Rory declared after touching one of them.

"This isn't Earth," Rose said, pointing at the sky where twin moons were shining silver against the inky sky.

"But the atmosphere is like Earth's," Rory said. "We aren't choking at least."

"Why did we have to come here?" Rose asked as they looked around the clearing.

"There's nothing here."

"Alright! Put your hands up and turn around slowly!" A voice barked at them in command.

Rose and Rory raised their arms in surrender and turned around to see a group of three men dressed like mercenaries, pointing their guns at them.

"Don't shoot," Rory said. "We're nice."

Rose looked at him oddly but the men ignored him. "Come on," their leader ordered. "This way!" he indicated with his gun.

The two of them obeyed as they set off down the path through the not-corn. Rose and Rory tried to ask their captors where they were being taken but they just got a gun jammed in their backs for their trouble. They finally arrived at a group of tents set up in a clearing not unlike the one they had landed in.

"Captain!" the leader of their group called. "Found two intruders."

"Send 'em in," a distinctly female Scottish voice answered from the largest tent in the place.

"Go on," the leader ordered and Rose and Rory exchanged mystified looks as they entered the tent.

A tall, redheaded woman dressed in a black jumpsuit stood up and appraised them with interest.
"I'm Captain Amelia Pond. Now, who are you and what the hell are you doing here?"

~

The Doctor stared at the empty space where his TARDIS had been. He was confused and shocked beyond imagination. Rose and Rory would know not to deliberately take the TARDIS away, meaning that something else was controlling the TARDIS.

Rage boiled within him at the very idea of someone messing about with his beloved TARDIS and he kicked a rock out of sheer frustration. He was in a deserted quarry on a planet that was most certainly not Earth. He could feel the radiation in the place and was thankful for the pills he had in his coat. He popped two of them in his mouth and then decided to take a look around the place.

He left the rocky ledge where the TARDIS had disappeared and went towards the only path through the hard rock and gravel. An odd sense of déjà vu washed over him and he tried to remember why this place seemed so familiar. He passed an odd cave and the feeling of déjà vu intensified. Frowning, he walked towards it and touched the rock at the cave's entrance.

The rock's composition was quickly determined as he broke off a piece and analysed it with a quick taste. It was nothing special; just ordinary concrete but the growing dread in the pit of his stomach wouldn't go away. He had been here before; had known this place very well.

He left the cave's entrance and went back towards the path. Lost in thought, he kept on walking until a dreaded cry rang through the air, chilling him to his very bones.

"EXTERMINATE!"

~

Rose and Rory exchanged a quick look amongst themselves as Captain Pond looked at them expectantly.

"I'm Rory and this is Rose," said Rory, at last. "We sort of...crashlanded."

"And you?" asked Rose, not trusting the other woman at all.

"You're my prisoners. You don't get to ask questions," Captain Pond snapped.

"Prisoners? For what, exactly?" Rose demanded.

"What did I say about asking questions?" she asked, advancing on Rose.

"Uh, ladies," Rory interrupted and the two women stopped glaring at one another. "Let's just be civil, okay?"

"You're right," said Rose. "We don't have time for this. Just let us go. We have something important to take care of," she said to the Captain.

Amelia narrowed her eyes at her. "Listen blondie, I say what you can and cannot do," she said, crossing her arms in front of her.

"And just who are you exactly?" asked Rose, her glare intensifying.

"It's a good point," Rory piped up. "Who exactly are you to arrest us?"

Captain Amelia Pond glanced between them and then huffed out a breath. "My crew and I crashed
here as well, okay?" she said, looking slightly embarrassed. "We thought you two might be locals."

"We don't even know where we are," said Rose, still looking a bit distrustful of her but not glaring anymore.

"This is the planet Calamity," said Amelia. "It's somewhere in the constellation of Kasterborous."

"You said you and your crew crashed here?" asked Rory while Rose tried to remember why the constellation's name sounded familiar. "Can't you call for help from your own planet or something?"

Amelia looked away at that. "We are...sort of, freelancers," she said.

"Freelancers?" Rose asked sharply. "Doing what exactly?"

"We...acquire certain items," she shrugged meaningfully.

"What is that supposed to mean?" asked Rory while Rose's eyes hardened.

"It means they are Space Pirates, Rory. The Doctor and I met a few of them back before we met you," said Rose, glaring at Amelia. "And you were about to arrest us? That is rich."

"Listen, pirates we may be but I prefer to be thought of something like Robin Hood," glared Amelia. "My crew and I steal from flourishing planets and drop off relief and supplies in war-ridden zones."

"Robin Hood?" asked Rory. "You're from Earth?"

Amelia looked startled before her face went smooth. "What's it to you, pretty boy?" she asked haughtily.

"You can't be from Earth, we are too far away," said Rose.

"How could you know that when you didn't even know what planet you were on?" asked Amelia.

"Because I just remembered why Kasterborous sounded familiar," said Rose. "It's the constellation that houses Gallifrey."

Amelia snorted without humour at that. "Gallifrey is a myth, sweetie," she said patronisingly. "Everyone knows that."

"It's not a myth," said Rose, in the same patronising tone. "I have been there twice already."

Amelia suddenly became interested. "Are you sure?" she asked.

"Of course I'm sure," Rose snapped. "The Time Lords live there and more recently, I should say the Time Agents as well."

Amelia snapped to attention so quickly that Rose and Rory were startled. "You know about the Time Agents? Prove it!"

"What?" Rose asked, confused by the sudden demand. At Amelia's insistent look, she sighed. "Their leader was a man called Captain Jack..."

"Harkness," finished Amelia, sitting down in her chair. "Oh god," she sighed, her face ashen.
"What's wrong?" asked Rory, looking a bit confused.

Amelia looked at the two of them and then down at her hands. "I used to be a Time Agent, that's how I knew about Earth and Robin Hood," she said. "But when the big merger of CIA and the Time Agency happened, I chose to go freelance rather than join the CIA."

"What?" asked Rory in confusion while Rose understood completely.

"Then you know that Gallifrey isn't a myth," said Rose. "Why would you say that it was?"

"Because that is what everyone thinks," said Amelia, meeting her eyes. "Ever since the war with the Daleks killed all Time Lords and destroyed Gallifrey, it's like it never existed."

~

The Doctor turned around at the dreaded cry and saw that a Special Weapons Dalek was advancing on him. He froze in place, knowing that there was no way out of this. His jaw clenched and he got ready to face death head on when a wheezing sound reached his ears.

Startled, he started to look around but realised that the TARDIS was actually materialising around him. He stood completely still as the Dalek got increasingly confused. The console room became more solid around himself and he turned around when he heard a familiar voice call out to him.

"Stay still, Doctor!" said the man who was running around the console, rapidly pressing switches and pulling levers.

"WHAT IS HAPPENING?" the Special Weapons Dalek was screaming. "EXPLAIN! EXPLAIN! EXPLAIN!"

"Hold on, Doctor!" said the man as the console room became completely solid and the TARDIS lurched as she took flight again.

The Doctor had to hold on to the hatstand since it was the only fixture in the bare, white console room. The dematerialisation worked and the Doctor stood up slowly, brushing down his green frock coat. "What in the hell?" was all he could manage to say.

His fifth self smiled sheepishly at him and adjusted the celery on his lapel. "Well, my dear fellow," he said, stuffing his hands in his trouser pockets. "It is quite a long story."
Then you know that Gallifrey isn't a myth," said Rose. "Why would you say that it was?"

"Because that is what everyone thinks," said Amelia, meeting her eyes. "Ever since the war with the Daleks killed all Time Lords and destroyed Gallifrey, it's like it never existed."

"What do you mean 'the Time Lords are dead'?" asked Rose as she and Rory stared at Amelia in shock.

"Why do you think my crew and I are looting in these parts?" asked Amelia bitterly. "All the planets that the Daleks colonised are war-ridden. The original inhabitants are fighting for their lives. We do what we can to supply them with aid."

"But...that is just not possible," said Rory. "The Doctor was just with us."

"None of this makes sense," said Rose, shaking her head in frustration. "We heard Romana less than an hour ago. How long ago was the war?" she asked Amelia.

"It's hard to say," said Amelia. "Depends on where you are standing, really."

"Funnily enough, that makes sense," said Rory and then looked at Rose. "What are we going to do?"

"If it helps at all," Amelia interjected. "I found out that my memories changed just a few days ago."

"Memories changed?" asked Rory.

"It's because she was a Time Agent," said Rose absently. "When you travel in time, you start to develop a time sense. It might explain why we still remember the Doctor and Gallifrey when the rest of the universe has forgotten."

"Who is this Doctor you two keep bringing up?" asked Amelia.

"He's a Time Lord," said Rory. "It was his ship that we crashed in."

"You have an actual Time Capsule?" asked Amelia as she stood up quickly. "Where?"

"Why?" asked Rose at once.

Amelia rounded on her. "Because I want to get to the bottom of this, just as you two," she said.

"Yeah, we are not going on a mystery finding excursion," snapped Rose. "We are actually trying to save our friends. So we'll be on our way now."

Amelia stared at Rose before nodding. "Fine, go ahead," she said.

Rose and Rory stared at her suspiciously but Amelia nodded at them dismissively and they left her tent. They were almost expecting one of the other pirates to attack them but they left them alone. Confused and slightly suspicious, they left the clearing and began to make their way back to the TARDIS.
"What the hell just happened?" asked Rory in a low voice as they navigated their way through the not-corn.

"Beats me," shrugged Rose. "What was the point of us coming here?"

"Maybe we had to find out about this supposed war," suggested Rory.

Rose pursed her lips but nodded. "Think we'll have more places to go to after this?" she asked.

"Definitely, I would say," said Rory as they arrived back in the clearing where the TARDIS was waiting for them. "But this is good, you know."

Rose nodded determinedly. "The fact that we are getting these clues means there is still a way to find a way out of this mess," she said firmly.

She pulled off the chain from her neck and unlocked the TARDIS doors. But before she or Rory could enter, a figure barrelled past them straight into the TARDIS. Rose and Rory exchanged mystified looks before running in after them.

"Get out!" said Rose when she saw Amelia standing in the console room, looking smug.

"Is that how you always treat your guests?" asked Amelia with an infuriating grin.

"What exactly is it that you want?" Rory asked her, since Rose looked too furious to speak.

"Look, I want to find out what is happening okay?" snapped Amelia, losing her smug attitude. "All three of us know that the universe is not supposed to be like this. And I might be able to help."

Rory had to admit that she had a point. He looked at Rose. "She may be right, Rose," he said.

Rose glared at him before huffing in frustration. "Fine!" she snapped. "Except we don't know what to do next."

Just as she finished speaking, there was a familiar zapping sound in the console room. They turned in its direction and instead of the woman from before, it was a tall man dressed in swathing Time Lord robes. Rory was quick to notice that he looked slightly familiar when Rose gasped next to him.

"Braxiatel!"

~

*The dematerialisation worked and the Doctor stood up slowly, brushing down his green frock coat. "What in the hell?" was all he could manage to say.*

*His fifth self smiled sheepishly at him and adjusted the celery on his lapel. "Well, my dear fellow," he said, stuffing his hands in his trouser pockets. "It is quite a long story."

"You had better start telling it then," said the Eighth Doctor impatiently.

The Fifth Doctor sighed and the smile fell off his face, replaced by steely determination. "Do you remember that old reunion in the Death Zone?" he asked.

"What of it?" asked the Eighth Doctor. "As I understand, we managed to avert that bit of disaster with minimal damage."
"Well, I was about to take Tegan and Turlough on a trip after that when I decided to check on my timeline to ensure that the reunion hadn't caused any major problems," said the Fifth Doctor.

"It wouldn't have," said the Eighth Doctor. "Rassilon himself fixed the whole thing."

The Fifth Doctor looked slightly uncomfortable. "Yes, but I decided to be careful and check it anyway. Good thing I did since I discovered that it disappears after you."

"You looked into the future?" asked the Eighth Doctor, his eyes widening. "Have you utterly lost your mind?"

"Hold back on the insults, will you?" chastised the Fifth Doctor. "It wasn't that it disappeared exactly, but the fact that it is shrouded after you. More specifically, shrouded after the point I just rescued you from."

The Eighth Doctor fell silent at that. "I see," he said finally. "So, someone has trifled with the web of time."

"Why else would our timeline have just vanished?" asked the Fifth Doctor.

"Someone or something has interfered in matters of time when they had no business doing so."

"So," said the Eighth Doctor. "We are just anomalies then."

"For now, yes," said the Fifth Doctor with a grim nod.

"And if we don't fix what has been done wrong very quickly..." the Eighth Doctor trailed off.

"Then I'm afraid we'll be swallowed up by the void caused by this paradox," grimaced the Fifth Doctor. "In all our lives."

~

"Braxiatel!" Rose gasped.

"Theta, Miss Tyler, if either of are still there, follow these coordinates quickly!" said Braxiatel, sounding urgent despite his cool exterior. "3-5-9-1-5 by 7-4. May Rassilon guide you. For all our sakes." A faint voice sounded as if it had come from behind Braxiatel. "Cardinal Braxiatel! Sir, you have to get away from the Capitol! The Daleks are here."

The hologram disappeared and Rose stood frozen in horror. "Oh god," she murmured.

Rory ran to her side quickly. "Rose, who was that?" he asked.

"He...he was the Doctor's...," said Rose through unmoving lips, her gaze still fixed where Braxiatel had been a moment ago.

"That was a Time Lord," interrupted Amelia. "One of the important ones, judging from the way he was dressed. The coordinates he gave are for the planet of Lyon."

Rose snapped out of her daze and nodded quickly. "We have to do as he said," she said. "Rory, enter the coordinates." She then turned to Amelia. "What do you know about Lyon?"

"Peaceful planet in the correct universe," said Amelia.

"And now?" asked Rose, grimly.
"War-ridden," grimaced Amelia. "Daleks are exterminating the local population at an alarming rate."

"Coordinates entered," Rory interrupted.

"We have to dematerialise this time," said Rose as she approached the central console, trying to remember. She flicked the first switch and the rotor lit up. Encouraged, she twisted the first knob and the rotor brightened. She bit her lip when she realised that she couldn't remember what happened next.

Amelia noticed her hesitation. "Where is the auxiliary power switch?" she asked.

Rose's eyes brightened. "It's that long lever over there," she said.

Amelia saw the right lever and moved it smoothly to the correct position. The rotor started moving up and down as the dematerialisation sound filled the air. Rose smiled triumphantly and met Amelia's gaze. A look of understanding passed between them as they nodded at each other and looked back at the console.

Following the same procedures that they did before, they managed to pilot the TARDIS between the three of them. It was a lot easier this time but Rose and Rory were well aware that it was because the TARDIS was helping rather than their ability to fly her. No wonder the Doctor made so many mistakes. The process was incredibly complex.

They materialised on Lyon and as before, the scanner wouldn't work. "Well, we should go outside, right?" asked Rory after they had stared at each other in silence for a few moments.

"It's really bad out there," said Amelia. "My crew and I barely survived our last trip here."

Rose squared her shoulders. "But we must," she said. She led the way out of the control room and went towards the door. However, before she could open them, there was a clear sound of someone unlocking the door from the outside. She jumped back in shock when a familiar man entered the TARDIS.

"Rose!"

"Doctor!"

~

"Found it!" said the Eighth Doctor triumphantly. "That's strange."

"You have isolated the causal nexus?" asked the Fifth Doctor, looking up from something that looked like a waffle iron had mated with a curling iron.

"Yes, and that's why I called it strange," the Eighth Doctor said. "It originates from Gallifrey."

"Splendid," remarked the Fifth Doctor and it was hard to say whether or not he was being sarcastic. "That ought to make it easier."

"You would think so, wouldn't you?" said the Eighth Doctor dryly. "Except I can't find Gallifrey."

~

"Rose!"
"Doctor! What are you doing here?" she asked, staring wide-eyed at him.

"Precisely the question I meant to ask you," he said, closing the doors behind me. "I had landed on Lyon, hoping for a quiet rest. Instead I am chased by Daleks halfway across the ruined city. Now, where is that fop that you travel with? I ought to have a word with him about avoiding paradoxes."

"He's...I mean, you are gone," said Rose.

"Is that the Doctor you've been going on about?" Amelia asked Rory in a whisper.

"I have never seen him before in my life," said Rory, staring at the strange man in disbelief.

"Gone?" the Doctor asked Rose. "Where?"

"That is what we are trying to find out," said Rose. "Doctor, listen..."

"Who are these two?" asked the Doctor, staring at Amelia and Rory.

"Rory Williams and Captain Amelia Pond," said Rose. "But Doctor..."

"A Captain of what, precisely?" he asked, looking at Amelia critically.

"Doctor," Rose interrupted. "You have to..."

"Rose, who is he?" asked Rory finally.

"I am the Doctor," he said, advancing on Rory with a fierce expression on his face. "And I would like to be addressed as such, understand?"

"He's an earlier incarnation of the Doctor, Rory," said Rose as she tugged on the Doctor's arm to stop him from intimidating Rory further. "The Sixth Doctor."

There was the zapping sound behind them again and they whirled around just in time to see the hologram of a different woman this time. Her appearance was dishevelled and she held a knife in one hand and a Janis thorn in the other.

The Doctor and Rose gasped in unison. "Leela!"

"You must come to Gallifrey! At once!" said Leela's hologram. "Hurry up!" She let out a cry and jumped out of sight, her knife raised in front of her. The hologram disappeared and the Doctor turned to look at Rose in horror. "Rose, I think you'd better start explaining what has happened," he said.

~

"What do you mean, you can't find it?" asked the Fifth Doctor.

"It's not at the usual coordinates," said the Eighth Doctor calmly. "Yet, there is an echo of her presence."

"What are you going on about?" asked the Fifth Doctor, sounding uncharacteristically impatient.

The Eighth Doctor's jaw tightened and his fierce eyes met his younger self. "Someone has tried to wipe Gallifrey from the skies and failed miserably at it. That is what is causing the distorted timelines and the disruption in the web of time."
"And how does that connect with our timeline?" asked the Fifth Doctor.

"Because we are in a causality bubble. The eye of the storm," he said, his gaze so intense that even his Fifth self looked a bit uncomfortable. "And the eye is closing very quickly."

"What do we do?" asked the Fifth Doctor, horrified.

"We have to get to Gallifrey. There is enough of an echo to let us arrive there," said the Eighth Doctor, moving towards the Fifth Doctor's TARDIS console. "We must find what villain has tried to disrupt the precious balance of the universe and stop them before it engulfs us all."
Previously

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Before Rose could shake off her horror and answer the Doctor, Rory was at her side. "That was the next set of instructions, wasn't it?" he asked her.

"Instructions?" asked the Doctor sharply, all business now.

Rose nodded slowly and met his eyes. "When you, I mean our Doctor, went outside the TARDIS, she took off on her own. And then a hologram popped up in the console room," she said. Her voice lowered. "Doctor, I think it was...Susan."

The Doctor's eyes went wide as he stared at Rose. "Are you sure?" he asked. Rory's brow furrowed. Why hadn't Rose told him that she had recognised the first woman? And who was Susan?

Rose ignored Rory's questioning look. "Yes," she said. "The coordinates she gave us took us to the planet of Calamity where we met Captain Pond."

Amelia nodded as she walked up to them. "I used to be a former Time Agent," she said and was cut off by the Doctor's groan.

"52nd century, should have known really," he grumbled, shaking his head. His eyes then narrowed. "Dare I ask what your current profession is?"

Amelia glared at him. Surprisingly, it was Rose who shook her head. "Doctor, not now," she said. "That was where we found about the war."

In quick words, they explained about the war to the Doctor. His face became more and more closed off as he heard their part. "And who told you to come to Lyon?" he asked finally.

Rory and Amelia looked at Rose. "Braxiatel," she answered the Doctor.

The Doctor's lips tightened. "Right," he nodded. Tension was radiating off him in waves. Despite his colourful appearance, there was a shadow across his face that spoke of the Oncoming Storm. He walked over to the console wordlessly and began to type rapidly.

Rory met Rose's eyes. "Who were those people who helped us?" he asked her finally.

Rose glanced at the Doctor who had heard Rory's question. He raised his eyebrows as if waiting to see what Rose would do. Rose took a deep breath. "You should ask the Doctor once all of this is fixed," she said. Rory looked a bit hurt at the detached answer but Rose added a quiet 'Please' and
Rory nodded.

"What are we doing now?" asked Amelia, directing the question at the Doctor.

It was a sign of how worried the Doctor was that he did not snap at her. "I'm trying to find Gallifrey," he said.

"But how are we gonna do that if it's no longer there?" asked Rose.

"Gallifrey exists across all dimensions. We just have to find the correct one..." the Doctor murmured as his eyes scanned the screen. "Aha!"

"Aha what?" asked Rory.

"You should hold onto something," said the Doctor as he rapidly began to press the switches around the console. "This is going to be a bumpy ride."

~

The TARDIS materialised slowly on Gallifrey before coming to a stop with a thud. Inside, the two Doctors finished the post flight checks, only to find that the TARDIS was not giving off any more readings. Meeting each others' worried gaze, they opened the doors.

Two sharp gasps left their mouths as they stepped outside. The TARDIS had materialised right into the Panopticon except it was nigh unrecognisable. It was dark, the regal pillars and architecture was turned to rubble, the floor was muddied and it was utterly deserted.

An eerie silence hung over the place, which raised the hairs on the back of their necks. Exchanging dismal looks, they closed the TARDIS doors behind them. "I suppose we should search for survivors or at least, something," said the Fifth Doctor after a heavy silence.


~

Calling it 'a bumpy ride' was a gross understatement in everyone's opinion but the Doctor's. The TARDIS shook and shuddered violently, tossing her occupants around like loose change rattling in an empty tin. Twice, the Doctor had to catch one of his companions from planting their faces into the metal scaffolds around the central console.

When the TARDIS did finally materialise, the Doctor brushed down the lapels of his colourful coat with a smug look. "See, perfectly fine," he said.

His companions didn't deign to reply as the doors were opened. The Doctor went first, followed by Rose, with Rory and Amelia bringing up the rear. Rory heard a gasp from Rose as they stepped out into what appeared to be a ceremony hall. It was dark, deserted and almost completely destroyed.


"Yes," the Doctor answered tersely. He stopped suddenly when he saw an identical TARDIS parked right opposite them.

"What the hell?" said Rory as he saw it too.

"How is it possible?" asked Amelia. "Isn't this a paradox?"
"The web of time has been so convoluted that this is a very minor paradox for it to sustain," said the Doctor. He pulled off the pocket watch hanging off his vest by a lurid turquoise cord and flipped it open. "We haven't got long before this dimension collapses like the other ones. We should split up, cover more ground."

"What are we looking for?" asked Rory.

The Doctor turned to him. "You and the Captain go in the direction of the Presidential Palace and look for any survivors. You're a nurse, aren't you?" At Rory's nod, he continued. "You might be able to help if you find survivors. And I assume you are armed?" he directed the question at Amelia.

Amelia gave a quick nod. "I'll take care of it if we run into one of our tinpot friends," she said confidently.

"Hmm, yes," said the Doctor, not looking entirely happy at the prospect of violence but not terribly regretful either. "Rose and I will head to the Space Traffic Control room."

"What's that?" asked Rose, curiously.

"The highest protected room on all of Gallifrey," said the Doctor. "Every defence around the planet is controlled from there. The Daleks did a very poor job of trying to destroy the planet. They didn't account for all of the temporal and dimensional defences that were put down by Rassilon himself to protect Gallifrey from being destroyed."

"So, Gallifrey is virtually indestructible then?" asked Amelia with interest.

"Unless you destroy it from within," remarked the Doctor darkly. "Anyway, off you go. The Presidential Palace is that way. Oh, and keep a look out for any of me that you might run into."

"Take care, Rory," said Rose.

"You too," he smiled as he and Amelia left through a door in the Panopticon.

"Interesting young man, that one," said the Doctor after they had left.

Rose shrugged in reply. "So, we're going to the Control room then?" she asked.

"Yes, this way," said the Doctor.

~

"So, this Doctor fella is an interesting one," remarked Amelia as she and Rory walked through the darkened corridors.

"I wouldn't know," said Rory. "Met him for the first time today."

"Rose seemed to know him though," said Amelia.

"Rose seems to know a lot," said Rory and then immediately felt bad. He knew that the Doctor and Rose were a lot closer and it wouldn't do for him to be envious of the closeness that they shared. And Rose had been just as stressed as him this whole time. It wouldn't be fair of him to turn on his friend just because he felt like he had been left out of the loop.

Amelia observed his turmoil curiously. "Something wrong?" she asked.
"No, it's just..." he shook his head. "Rose and the Doctor have always been close. I guess, I never quite realised how much."

"When you say close," Amelia trailed off, raising her eyebrows as if to convey her meaning. "Is that even possible? A Time Lord and a human?"

"You can't help who you love," shrugged Rory.

The look Amelia gave made him blush to the very roots of his hair. Before he could say anything vaguely coherent, he saw something behind her. "Amy!" he yelled, trying to push her out of the way.

Amelia was quicker than him though as she dropped and rolled. The approaching Dalek never even saw the ray of her sonic blaster before being blasted into oblivion. Rory was breathing heavily as Amelia stood up slowly, tucking her gun back into her belt.

"Nice shot," said Rory.

Amelia was staring at him as if she had never seen anything quite like him. "Did you just try to push me out of a Dalek's way when you had nothing to defend yourself with?" she asked incredulously.

Rory blushed and looked at his shoes. "Yeah, sorry," he muttered. "Old instincts."

When he chanced a look at her, he was surprised to see that she looked like she was trying to decide whether to call him stupid or snog him senseless.

"You called me Amy," she said instead.

"Yeah, sorry," he said again. "Sounded easier than Amelia. Won't happen again."

"I don't mind," she said, regaining her composure. "Amy sounds good," she added with a grin and a wink.

Before Rory could do more than smile gratefully at her, there was a noise further down the corridor. Amy raised a finger to her lips and drew her gun out. They carefully hid in a corner as the noise came closer to them.

When the noise was only a hair's breadth away from them, they jumped out of their cover and Amy pointed her gun at the Dalek. Except instead of a Dalek, she saw two men dressed so eccentrically that she did a double-take. Behind her, Rory gave a delighted cry.

"Doctor!"

The one in the green frock coat smiled when he saw Rory. "Rory, splendid to see you," he said. "Who's the lady with the gun?"

"Uh, this is Amy," said Rory, blushing again when Amy beamed at him for using her new nickname. "We sort of...met her."

The Doctor raised an eyebrow at the odd choice of words. "And where's Rose?" he asked, concern colouring his tone.

"She's with you," answered Rory. At the Doctor's shocked look, he hastily clarified. "A different you."
"Oh no," said the other man who was with the Doctor. "Which one is it?"

"I'm sorry, who are you?" asked Rory.

"I'm the Doctor," he answered politely.

"Right," said Rory, not even bothering to stop staring at the man who was younger than even their usual Doctor. "The other you is a man in a colourful coat and yellow trousers."

"Goodness," said the younger Doctor. "I don't think I've met him."

"You haven't," said the older Doctor shortly. "He's the one after you."

"Does that mean you're the Fifth Doctor?" asked Amy.

"Yes," he answered. "And judging from your friend's description of my next self, I'm in no hurry to change that."

"Bigger matters at hand," snapped the older Doctor. "Where is Rose and my sixth self?"

"The Space Traffic Control Room," answered Rory. "The Doctor-I mean you-he said that the Daleks didn't destroy the planet properly because of...um..."

"Temporal and Dimensional defences put in by someone called Rassilon," Amy added.

The two Doctors exchanged a quick look. "Of course," said the older Doctor. "Quick, we must get to them."

"Uh, he...you...told us to look for survivors at the Presidential Palace," interrupted Rory.

"We've just been there," said the Fifth Doctor. "There is no one here."

"Are they dead?" asked Amy.

"No," said the Eighth Doctor. "There is quite literally, no one here."

"But that's not possible," said Rory. "All those people that helped us. Where are they?"

"What people?" asked the older Doctor sharply.

"Uh, someone called Susan, and then a man called Braxiatel or something and I think the last one was..." he looked at Amy for help.

"Leela," said Amy. "The other Doctor and Rose called her Leela."

The two Doctors exchanged another look, before the older one sighed. "You'd better start explaining everything that happened the minute I left the TARDIS," he said.

~

"Is this it?" Rose asked as she and the Doctor entered one of the chambers. It seemed virtually untouched as if no one had even tried to enter it, let alone try and destroy it.

"Yes," said the Doctor. He began to move towards the controls but felt the barrier hold him back. "Ah."

"What?" asked Rose.
"We can't get in," said the Doctor. "There is a forcefield in place. I did say that this was the most protected room in Gallifrey."

"How are we going to get in then?" asked Rose. "What about your sonic screwdriver?"

"Destroyed in my fifth life," he answered casually. "I never quite bothered to make a new one."

Rose gritted her teeth. "Tell me you have another way," she said, trying to keep calm.

The Doctor gave her a slightly superior smile. "I have another way," he said.

Another way turned out to be the Doctor trying to hack into the control panel outside the main control room. It didn't look as if he was being too successful. Rose sighed and gave up trying to keep him company. He wasn't as pleasant as her Doctor when he got impatient. She wandered over to one of the long windows and peered out to take a look.

The Doctor looked up from the jumble of wires when he heard a loud gasp from Rose. Thinking she was in trouble, he dropped the machinery and ran over to her.

"What? What is it?" he asked frantically.

Rose wordlessly pointed outside the windows and the Doctor peered out curiously.

His eyes went wide. "What in the name of Rassilon..." he murmured.

"It's beautiful," said Rose, her eyes never leaving the sight. Outside, all they could see were rows and rows of flowers blooming as brightly as only they could. "Arkytior," she murmured.

The Doctor looked startled. "How do you know that?" he asked.

Rose looked confused as she looked back at him. "Romana gave some to me when I first came to Gallifrey," she said. "Why?"

The Doctor stared at her as if she had sprouted extra limbs. "Those are incredibly rare and not even supposed to grow anywhere but Mount Perdition."

"Do you think the distortion in the web of time caused this?" asked Rose, as her brows furrowed.

"Maybe," he said doubtfully. "The legend goes that the flowers bloom only when the Draug goddess comes to Gallifrey."

"Draug?" asked Rose.

"It's an old High Gallifreyan word," he said. "It means 'wolf'."

Rose groaned. "Oh not again," she said.

"And just what do you mean by that?" asked the Doctor, looking even more alarmed than before.

"It's just...I've been hearing that a lot lately," she said. "Everywhere we go." She stopped suddenly and looked at the Doctor in alarm. "You think it was a warning for all of this?" she asked, waving a general hand around as if to indicate the massive paradox that they were in now.

"It's possible," said the Doctor, his mind racing with theories and ideas. "Did I-your Doctor-mention anything?"
"No," said Rose. "I don't even know if he noticed it."

The Doctor doubted the fact that his older self will have let this go unnoticed but he didn't voice it out. Something was definitely connecting the flowers and the wolf and this paradox. And it all came back to Miss Rose Tyler. He glanced at the young girl out of the corner of his eyes. Yes, something was definitely connecting it all.

~

"Rose!"

She turned around and grinned in delight when she saw her Doctor run into the Space Traffic Control Room. She and the Sixth Doctor had finally managed to get in and he had been examining something called a transduction barrier for a while now.

"Doctor!" she grinned as she ran to greet him. He got nearer to the main room and then ran smack into the forcefield. Rose giggled at the look of surprise on his face. "Hold on," she said, before pulling the lever on the wall which lowered the forcefield.

"Huh, not quite as smooth as I expected," muttered the Doctor to himself before closing the distance between them and hugging her tightly.

Rose giggled as she hugged him back. "It is so good to see you again," she said.

"And you," he agreed with a disarming grin.

Rose beamed at him for a long moment before realising that in addition to Rory and Amelia, there was another person behind him. "Doctor?"

"Hello, Rose," he said, waving shyly. "Nice to see you again."

"Nice to see you too," she said, smiling brightly at him.

"Yes, yes, everyone is pleased to see everybody," came the Sixth Doctor's disgruntled voice from where he was examining the large screen. "Now come and give me a hand, would you?"

The order was clearly directed at his two selves and the Eighth Doctor winked at Rose before he and his Fifth self joined him in examining Gallifrey's defences. Rose turned back to Rory and Amelia. "So, how did the search go? Did you find Leela or Romana?"

"The Doctors said the Presidential Palace was empty," said Rory.

Rose nodded absently but turned around when she heard the three Doctors talking. "I think we ought to put each other in the picture," suggested the Fifth Doctor. "Contact?"

"Contact," said the Eighth Doctor.

"Contact," said the Sixth Doctor.

All three Doctors closed their eyes and stayed completely still for a moment.

"What is going on?" asked Rory in a low voice.

"Their minds can connect," answered Rose, remembering that this was how the Doctor had communicated with his other selves after the Eye of Harmony incident.
"Time Lords ARE a telepathic race," agreed Amy.

"Well then," said the Eighth Doctor, opening his eyes. He quietly glanced at Rose in worry as his other selves went back to looking at the transduction barrier. They were trying to understand the precise dimensions that the Daleks had used to invade Gallifrey.

"Everything okay?" Rose asked, noticing his worried look.

He gave her a small smile. "Of course," he answered.

Rose didn't look like she believed him but they were interrupted by a loud noise that sounded like a landing spacecraft. The Sixth Doctor quickly fiddled with the instruments in front of him and brought up the view of the Panopticon.

On the screen, it showed at least a dozen Imperial Daleks entering the Panopticon. The Dalek in the lead stopped in the centre of the chamber, its eyestalk moving between the two TARDISes.

"CONFIRM. THE DOCTOR IS ON GALLIFREY!"

"REPORT TO THE EMPEROR!" cried another Dalek.

"No need," came a gravelly voice as a domed figure wheeled itself into the Panopticon.

"No," whispered the Eighth Doctor as they watched the scene unfold on the screen.

"What is it? Who is that?" asked Rose, confused by the look of anger and hatred on all of the Doctors' faces.

Before they could answer, the white dome lowered and the ugliest alien that they had ever seen was visible. He looked humanoid but his face was gaunt and a sickly green colour. His eyes were nothing but sunken holes and his teeth were completely blackened. He had a clawed hand raised in front of him to operate the controls on his "wheelchair".

"Davros," said the three Doctors simultaneously.
Previously

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"Davros," said the three Doctors simultaneously.

Golden heat...whispers of a lost world...the sway of the trees...the scent of the flowers...Eyes closed, Rose Tyler dreamed of a world she had only seen a few times.

"...you should have told her," came the whispered voice of the Fifth Doctor.

"What should I have told her precisely?" asked the Eighth Doctor in a furious whisper.

"You made the connection though, didn't you? Whatever is shrouding her timelines is connected with the legend of the Draug goddess," said the Sixth Doctor logically.

"And Arkytior and the Bad Wolf," added the Fifth Doctor.

It sounded as if both his younger selves were united in their argument against the older Doctor. He sighed heavily and even in her dream-like state, Rose knew he would be shaking his head. "It is not that simple," he said. "I knew she was unique the first time I met her. But back then, I was just curious. Things are different now..."

"We have cared for companions before," said the Sixth Doctor delicately.

"This goes beyond that, I'm afraid," confessed the Eighth Doctor quietly.

Rose felt consciousness pulling her away from the bizarre dream she was having and all at once, everything went quiet. She slowly opened her eyes only to find all three Doctors staring at her. She gave them a small smile and sat up in the chair that she had previously been dozing in. To her right, she noticed Rory and Amy asleep, leaning on each others' shoulders.

"How long was I asleep?" she asked the Doctors.

"About an hour," said the Eighth Doctor, smiling at her. "The Daleks are still searching the Presidential Palace. They won't come here for another hour or so."

"Have you got a plan yet?" she asked.

He exchanged a look with the other Doctors. "Of course we do," he said. "Why did you think we told you three to get some sleep? Humans need their sleep, you know."

Rose stuck her tongue out at him as she got up and stretched lightly. "So, what's the plan?"
The Sixth Doctor cleared his throat. "This one right here," he pointed to their Fifth self. "...and I will take you and the other two to the Panopticon. Meanwhile, the fop will cause a diversion to get Davros and the two Daleks with him away from there."

Rose's brow furrowed in confusion while the Eighth Doctor glared at his younger self for calling him a 'fop'. "Hang on though," said Rose. "Then what?"

"What do you mean, 'then what'?" asked the Sixth Doctor, in an almost astonishingly insulting voice. "You get away."

Rose started to shake her head. "And leave you here at the mercy of the Daleks? No way that's happening," she said stubbornly.

The Eighth Doctor sighed as he pulled Rose close. "Rose, this is the only way. Those two will make sure that you, Rory and even Captain Pond get away safely," he said soothingly.

"And what about you?" asked Rose again, her eyes narrowed.

"I have a way to stop the Daleks," he said.

"Then why can't we all go? Or me, at least?" she asked.

"Because it's incredibly dangerous, Rose," he said.

"As opposed to what? Every day of our lives?" she asked stubbornly.

"This is different," he said, stroking her cheek slowly. "I...I don't expect to make it out of this, Rose."

"All the more reason why I should come with you," she said. "I can't just leave you here to die!"

The Eighth Doctor sighed and cupped her face with both his hands. "Oh Rose," he whispered and then carefully pressed his lips to hers in a kiss. Rose was slightly startled before she melted into his embrace. She felt his hands drift away from her cheeks and start moving towards her hair. And then his fingers were pressing against her temple and she knew no more.

The Doctor caught her in his arms as Rose lost consciousness. He glanced at the slightly disapproving look on his Fifth self's face. "Save the admonishment," he snapped as he stroked Rose's hair tenderly.

The Fifth Doctor glared at him but didn't say anything as he took Rose and lifted her bridal style into his arms. His Sixth self, on the other hand, was checking the screens. "This is the opportune moment," he said. "Wake the other two."

The Eighth Doctor sighed at the sight of an unconscious Rose in the Fifth Doctor's arms and then woke Rory and Amy. "Huh...wha...?" Rory mumbled as he woke up.

"Time to go, Rory," said the Doctor. "Captain Pond?"

"What happened to blondie?" asked Amy as she stood up.

"Is she alright?" Rory asked, noticing that Rose was unconscious.

"She's fine," said the Doctor with a sigh. "The Fifth and Sixth Doctors will take you to the TARDIS and away from here."
"And you are going to take on the Daleks and their Emperor on your own?" asked Amy sceptically.

"That is exactly what I plan to do," said the Doctor.

"You can't," said Rory flatly. "It's suicide."

"Rory, don't make this difficult," said the Doctor pleadingly.

Rory glared at him. "Rose refused to go, didn't she? That's why you knocked her out?" he asked angrily.

"I didn't knock her out," snapped the Doctor, ignoring the quiet scoff from his Fifth self. "Rory, I would never lead you or Rose on a suicide mission if there was a chance I could keep you safe. That is precisely why you need to leave."

Rory swelled furiously but Amy placed an arm on his shoulder. "He is right, Rory," she said. "He is going to destroy this entire dimension with the Daleks and Davros with him. The universe will be set right again. Gallifrey will be back where it was along with the Time Lords."

Rory shrugged off her arm and met the Doctor's eye. "What will happen to you then?" he demanded.

"I'm not sure," lied the Doctor; a lie which was only detected by his other selves and Amy, who kept silent. "There is a chance I might survive. But I can't promise the same for you and Rose if I take you with me."

Rory looked slightly placated. "Okay," he nodded. "I'll go. But you come and find us right away, you hear?"

The Doctor beamed at him and clapped his shoulder. "Of course I will," he promised, keeping his smile fixed.

Rory looked slightly happier and then nodded in assent. The Doctor turned to his other selves. "Wait till I give the signal and then run," he said. He looked at Amy and saw that she had seen right through his lie. "It was nice meeting you, Captain," he said, holding out his hand.

Amy nodded, determined not to give in to the tears she was feeling in the back of her eyes. This brave man was going to die to save the whole universe. His friends, so ready to die for him, would lose him forever. She shook his hand firmly. "Good luck, Doctor," she said, her voice wobbling only slightly.

He smiled charmingly at her and then she saw him glance lovingly at blo...Rose, before he was gone from the Space Traffic Control Room. The next few minutes were excruciatingly silent. Finally, about fifteen minutes later, the two Doctors left there stiffened for a moment before looking towards the screen. The Panopticon was empty.

"Let's go," said the Sixth Doctor quickly.

Rory and Amy followed him and the Fifth Doctor, who was carrying Rose, followed them. The Panopticon was indeed empty when they got there. They went to the Eighth Doctor's TARDIS and the Fifth Doctor set Rose down on the chaise in the console room. He patted her cheek and murmured a quiet apology as he moved away from her.

"I am setting the coordinates to Earth," said the Sixth Doctor. "It will take you to Rose's time. Unless there's somewhere else you'd rather be?" he asked them.
"No, Rose's time will be fine," said Rory. "The Doctor will be able to find us there easily."

The Sixth Doctor avoided his eyes and punched in the coordinates. "You won't be coming with us?" asked Amy.

"No," said the Fifth Doctor as he came up to them. "We will both leave from my TARDIS. Our time here is up. We will return to our own times."

"Right," said Rory. "Won't you remember this though?"

"No," answered the Sixth Doctor shortly. He pointed at a red button. "Press that the minute we leave."

"Okay," nodded Rory. "Uh, nice meeting you both."

The Fifth Doctor smiled and shook his hand. "It was splendid to meet you, Rory Williams. And you, Captain Pond."

Amy smiled sadly at him and shook his hand. The Sixth Doctor didn't smile but he did shake both their hands. His eyes wandered over to Rose for a sad moment before he turned around and left the TARDIS abruptly. The Fifth Doctor followed him almost immediately, closing the doors of the TARDIS after him.

They heard the other TARDIS dematerialise and there was an echoing noise as it was two different TARDISes taking off rather than one. When it became silent again, Rory pressed the red button that the Sixth Doctor had shown him.

The TARDIS rotor started to move and on the chaise, Rose opened her eyes. It only took her a moment to glean where she was and then she was running towards the console. "No!" she yelled. "Take me back! We have to go back!"

Rory caught her arms. "Rose, Rose, calm down," he said. "The Doctor is going to be fine."

"No, he isn't," snapped Rose. "Whatever he told you, he was lying! He is planning to sacrifice himself to save everyone."

Rory was shocked and his shock doubled when he saw that Amy merely looked sad. "You knew?" he demanded, rounding on her.

"Yes," sighed Amy. "It was the only way he could destroy this dimension."

"Like hell he is," snapped Rose. "We worked the TARDIS before, we can do it again."

"You're right," agreed Rory.

But before either of them could touch the controls, the rotor stopped. "We have arrived," said Amy.

Rose ran to the doors and flung them open. She gasped when she took in the sight. Rory ran up behind her. "What? Are we on Earth?" he asked.

"No," said Rose. She patted the doors of the TARDIS. "You clever girl, you didn't let us leave."

Rory looked past her to gaze at a field full of flowers. "Oh wow," he murmured.

Rose left the TARDIS and moved into the field of blooming Arkytior. Rory started to follow her
but before he could step a foot out, the doors of the TARDIS slammed shut and started to
dematerialise.

Rose felt a smile tug at her lips as she gazed at the flowers. They felt like home to her. Behind her,
she heard the TARDIS doors slam shut but she didn't turn around.

A haunting melody filled her mind as the field around her seemed to sway in an almost hypnotising
manner. The TARDIS disappeared from behind her as Rose felt a warm glow envelope her.

She closed her eyes and felt her mouth move. "I am the Bad Wolf," she whispered as she slowly
opened her eyes. They were golden.

~

The Doctor felt saddened at having to trick Rose but he knew it was necessary. He was not going to
kill her. She was stubborn enough to follow him even in death but he could never do that to her.
Oh, he would follow her in death without hesitation but that wasn't quite the same, was it?

He remembered the kiss and sighed. It had been cheating to kiss her like that, knowing he was
going to trick her. But he did not regret that he got to kiss her properly at least once before his
death.

And then there was Rory. Rory the brave Roman. He would have followed the Doctor into death
too. But again, he was important. The Doctor would not lead him to his death. He was only glad
that Captain Pond had indulged his lie. She would look after Rory, he just knew. He hurried away
from the Space Traffic Control Room, before he lost his nerve.

He knew his other selves were slightly tormented at having to send him to his death but it was the
only way. If one of his earlier selves died, then the damage to web of time and established events
could be catastrophic. Better to do it in the latest version, as his Sixth self had put it. But then
again, he had always been the pragmatic one.

The distraction was quite easy to make. He let one of the tinpots catch sight of him, before running.
He knew the Capitol like the back of his hand. Reluctantly, he had to admit that the reason for that
was that he had been chased through it far too many times. He made his way through Borusa's old
office and through the trapdoor in there.

He could hear the Dalek alerting the others of his presence. "Come on, come on," he muttered
under his breath. "Get Davros away from the Panopticon." He almost sagged with relief when he
heard Davros' order to chase the Doctor and the fact that he himself was joining in the chase.

He waited the appropriate amount of time, before sending a telepathic message to his younger
selves. "Go now!" was all he said.

He led the Daleks away from the Panopticon and towards the Presidential Palace which was on the
opposite side. He was running out of places to run into when he heard his sixth self in his mind.
"Everyone safe and away from Gallifrey!"

He sagged with relief and stopped running. The Daleks stopped in confusion when the Doctor
stopped mid-run and spun around to face them. They were in a wide circular room in the
Presidential Palace and as the Daleks surrounded the Doctor, he smiled triumphantly.

"At last, Doctor," said Davros in a gravelly voice as he wheeled himself forward through the circle
of Daleks.
"Hello Davros," said the Doctor as if greeting an old friend. "Last time I saw you was when you sent the hand of Omega to destroy your own planet."

Davros grumbled angrily. "Skaro remains safe, Doctor," he said angrily. "As do I."

"Of course," said the Doctor. "Block Transfer Computation. Should have guessed really."

"Indeed," agreed Davros. "And now, I have my revenge. The Time Lords have been destroyed at last!" he cried, his voice manic with glee. "The Daleks shall be the new Lords of Time."

"Yada yada, heard it all before," said the Doctor in a bored voice. "What I don't understand is why your little invasion was so messy. Surely, 'the new Lords of Time'," he said the words mockingly. "...would not have any problem with dimensionally inclined defences of an itty bitty planet."

Davros snarled angrily at the Doctor before reining in his anger. "The defences were more advanced than I anticipated," he admitted slowly. "And yet," his voice was triumphant now. "I have succeeded."

"I suppose you have," murmured the Doctor. "But you see, Davros, I cannot allow you and the Daleks to have all this power. Time is a tricky business and the Daleks cannot simply have control of it."

"And how will you stop us?" demanded Davros, almost mockingly.

"Why do you think I lured you all here?" asked the Doctor in an even tone. He calmly opened his jacket to reveal a bomb strapped to his chest. "A bomb built to destroy a dimension," he said by way of explanation.

"You lie! You never would!" Davros shouted angrily.

"To save my planet and my people and to keep the rest of the universe safe?" he asked evenly. "Oh yes, I would!"

"Stop him! Exterminate him!" yelled Davros.

The Doctor had a split second to make a decision but before he could press the detonation switch, a Dalek ray was already moving towards him. He felt horror at having failed but it gave way to surprise when the ray just stopped in his path. He was so astonished that he forgot he had to press the switch.

"Don't press it," called a familiar voice in a soothing tone.

"Rose! No!" yelled the Doctor but then stopped when he saw her. She was different; almost gliding as she moved through the circle of the Daleks and to his side. The Daleks tried to shoot at her as she passed but their rays would simply stop in their paths. She got close to him and he saw her eyes glowing a beautiful golden that set his hearts racing and panic building between them at the same time.

"What is this abomination?" demanded Davros angrily. "Exterminate her!"

Rose turned her eyes on him and glared for a moment. The venom in her glare, the anger in her eyes, sent even Davros reeling backwards, speechless for the time being. Rose turned her gaze back to the Doctor, softening as she did. "No need for this," she murmured as she began to remove the bomb from his chest.
"Who are you?" asked the Doctor, too stunned to even stop her.

"I have many names," she said, her lips quirking slightly as she removed the bomb and threw it on the floor. "But right now, I am the Bad Wolf."

"Are you possessing Rose?" he asked angrily. "What have you done to her?"

She looked slightly amused at his outburst. "I am not possessing anyone," she said calmly. "You would do well to realise that my intent is to not harm anyone." Then her lips quirked. "Well, almost anyone," she corrected, her venomous glare falling on the Daleks who were still trying to shoot at her and the Doctor with cries of 'EXTERMINATE', 'ERADICATE' and 'ANNIHILATE' but they were not having any effect. She grimaced as she turned back to the Doctor. "Hold on a moment, will you? I must deal with this."

The Doctor watched with wide eyes as she raised a single hand and one by one, the Daleks started disintegrating into a golden light. All around the circle a glow covered them, turning the Daleks into dust. Soon enough only Davros remained, surrounded by nothing but dust.

"NO! NO! I SHALL EXTERMINATE YOU! I SHALL END YOU!" he screamed in anger and desperation as he watched his creations turned to nothingness.

Her gaze moved to Davros and with a vengeful glare at him, she raised her hand higher. Davros continued to scream as the glow moved to him, enveloping him slowly. The echo of his screams continued to ring in the circular room for long after he turned to dust.

The Doctor felt his knees give out as he stared at Rose. "What are you?" he asked, not even realising that he was kneeling.

She smiled as she knelt in front of him and took both his hands in hers. "You would do well to remember Gallifrey's history, Doctor," she said and he could hear the smile in her voice. "Temporal and dimensional defences aren't the only ones protecting Gallifrey."

"Rassilon made more defences?" he asked.

She shook her head, a smile playing at her lips. "Not Rassilon," she said, looking at him as if he should know the answer.

"Omega then?" he asked.

She looked at him as if he was being deliberately obtuse. And suddenly the Doctor knew exactly who would have put this defence in. She smiled when she saw the realisation in his eyes. "The legend of the Draug goddess, the flowers that grew only where you were born, everything, Doctor," she said, her voice warm and playful now.

"You...you..." the Doctor could say no more as he slowly stroked her cheek. "But Rose? How does this...what does Rose have to do with it all?"

"Everything," she said. "Do you really want to know everything?" she asked deliberately.

The Doctor paused to think about it. As Lady Peinforte had pointed out, he really did not relish accepting the reality of who he really was. Should he ask her for more? No. It was obvious. He looked at her and shook his head with a smile. "No," he answered.

"Splendid," she said as if she had known he would say that.
"Will you-Rose-remember this?" he asked, stiffening at the thought of her knowing the truth about him.

"Perhaps not the last part," she said, after considering it. "But destroying the Daleks and Davros? I will remember that. My Doctor," she whispered and slowly closed her eyes, going limp in his arms.

The Doctor smiled as he hugged her to his chest. Then, he remembered that this dimension was starting to collapse. He was startled when he realised that he still had no way out. And there was no way he was losing Rose now. Not after all that he had just found out.

But he needn't have worried as the TARDIS began to materialise in front of him. He gave a laugh and scooped up Rose in his arms. The doors opened and Rory poked his head out. "Did we make it?" he asked and then saw the Doctor holding Rose in his arms.

"Splendid job, Rory," said the Doctor as he carried Rose inside. He realised that Rory and Amy had taken it upon themselves to pilot the TARDIS here. He quickly laid Rose down on the chaise and after pressing a small kiss to her forehead, he ran to the console. "Let's get away before this dimension collapses completely, shall we?" he asked as he began the flight procedure.

Behind him, he heard Rose stir and wake up. He turned around and smiled at her and received a blinding smile in return. The next minute, she had run into his arms and hugged him tightly.

"Uh, can you tell us what happened exactly?" asked Rory as he and Amy looked confused.

The Doctor and Rose pulled away and laughed slightly. "You tell it," said Rose. "I'm going to make some tea." The Doctor watched her go and allowed his smile to slip only slightly. She would not remember who she really was for a long, long time. If ever at all.

But for now, he would tell the story of a girl who destroyed the Daleks by activating an old defence from his planet. The one that began with some flowers, became the legend of a goddess and ended with the Bad Wolf.

~The End~

Chapter End Notes

Next to come in the sequel: 'For Whom the Bell Tolls'

"Doctor, do you remember the Key to Time?"

"We're on the Orient Express. In space!"

"Gorgeous, Amazonian blonde women. Are you sure they're the bad guys?"

"Hello, Professor!"

"A parallel universe?"

"Name's Fitz Kreiner."

"Caesar's death is a fixed point in time. Nothing must change that!"
"Meet an old friend of mine, the Corsair."

"I am Merlin!"

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