Rewritten

by gbMS

Summary

The Doctor un-does himself to reboot the universe.
The he's re-done by memory, but someone's passed out on the console room floor.

(A One Shot turned ep-by-ep rewrite of S.06 with Rose Tyler)
“I'll skip the rest of the rewind. I hate repeats. Live well. Love Rory. Bye bye, Pond.”

It was like birth, but backwards. Yes, Time Lords remember birth. Or at least pretend they do. He was so old he couldn’t remember if he was pretending.

He woke up, fully clothed, blinking at an arched ceiling. Corals and whites. “Well, that is unsettling. Glitching desktop. Must be part of the un-do.”

Who remembered him first, he'd wager? He did all that set up with Amy, but one couldn't discount the horrible accuracy which Rory tended or whatever that River woman knew with her diary. He almost wanted to put money down on each of them and gamble, but he’d never know who. His mind ached, a side effect of un-existing and re-existing, probably. He smirked to himself and actually look in his surroundings.

Pink, fluffy blanket. Nothing else mattered, everything else would only confirm what the single, pink fluffy blanket that smelled of strawberries made glaringly clear: The make up littered a mirrored table vanity, the floor was littered with clothes because goodness knows it took a slow day to get her to clean and there was rarely a slow day on the TARDIS. Who would have remembered him here? He never went here. Well. No one knew he went here, no one would remember him here.

Except the TARDIS.

So she’d been thought of first. Well, she is hard to forget. Bigger on the inside, trans-dimensional sexy blue box. He’d as much told young Amy to remember her.

But he hadn’t told the TARDIS to remember him. Or remember him here.

“Because you just can't let things die. People, feelings… holds a grudge, stubborn as ever. Can’t you just accept that she’s gone? I’m over her, haven’t even been in here since I changed that face. I’m over her.”

The light from the console dimmed and brightened, the TARDIS laughing at him as he left the room as quickly as he seemed able, only tripping over a few things on his way to the corridor. He grumbled as he walked back to the control room.

“Not a very good joke, I’m over—”

On the console floor was a body.

Two legs, black jeans, pi… pink top.

Blonde.

“...Her.”

Oh god, Rose.

He reached down and felt her neck, a pulse. Thank goodness.
She gently moaned and turned to her side like she was sleeping, warm face dipping closer to his hand as it was on her neck. Her hand raised and wrapped around his as if habit.

He should pull his hand away. Slowly or quickly, it didn’t matter. It wasn’t the one she was used to. It was bigger. More dexterous. Far fewer freckles. It should be moved. It really, really should.

But her hand was warm and soft and determined, and the small, sweet sigh she breathed distracted him just long enough for her fingers to entwine themselves as they’d always had, locking him into his position.

It had been so long since this and let they slotted together like puzzle pieces. Granted, most hands felt natural. Yes. This was obviously an over romanticized sentiment brought on by the blowing up and un-existing that he’d just done. Very exhausting, that. Maybe he should just go for a lie down on the hammock down stairs.

Or stay like this forever.

Which seemed like a viable option.

…Even though he had a wedding to get to.

But he was in the vortex. There wasn’t time here. So, feasibly, he could stay here nearly forever, in this awkward position, un-cushioned knees and back eventually would beg to be put out of it’s misery but his right hand would still be right where it was.

Irony, that. A right hand that didn’t leave her.

Sleepily, she yawned, slowly turning and readjusting as if she had just been sleeping.

Her eyes burst open just as his hand pulled away in surprise, Rose turned her face to see him. Quickly, she pushed herself onto her bum and scooted back, looking around her frantically.

“What?!” she looked around her, at him, taking deep breaths as metered as she could though she was obviously about to hyperventilate. Blinking, she looked to the ceiling, the floors, hair whipping about as she finally settled on the time rotor and then the flung back Doctor, shocked into immobility, sitting on the floor.

The only sounds in the room were ragged breathing, his and hers, with a small hum of the time rotor behind him.

He caught his breath quickly, sitting just feet from her as she scooted her back against the rail.

She stopped her horrified, ragged breathing can and almost sobbed, “Oh.”

“What?”

She took her hands down slowly, her eyes wet and red, knees pushed up to her chest in the tightest ball a human could manage.

“She answered first.” Rose said quietly, clearing her throat as she put her head down, leaning her forehead against her knees as if she was separated from him by a curtain of blonde hair. The Doctor looked at the ceiling and back down to the shocked ball of rose. Her body shook. She stared to giggle and raise her head, a smile in her eyes.

“Sorry.” She was laughing manically, between laughing and crying, stuck in a limbo of emotion and
shock, “A bit much. Didn’t, um, see this comin’.”

“Rose…” His tone was sad and quiet, afraid of what would happen when he said it.

She burst into teary laughter. “Different face, different voice, same ‘I’m sorry dear’ tone to my name. Bit disconcerting.”

“How… how…” the Doctor stuttered. What question was he going to ask?! There were hundreds!

She laughed. It was an unsettling laugh. It was possible his dear Rose Tyler had gone mad.

…it was equally possible that he had gone mad. Or this was heaven. Or hell. He’d never really unexisted before, maybe there was an afterlife after all and it was populated by either the most wonderful or horrible things to imagine. Both of which were represented by a cowering, mad Rose Tyler on the floor of his magnificent time ship.

Hallucination. He’d had a few he could touch before. The mind did funny things. That made the most sense.

He stood slowly and glanced to the galley.

“Tea?” No, that’s silly. Hallucinations don’t drink tea. Didn’t mean he couldn’t drink tea. Tea and then tick-tock. On a schedule. Have things, real things, non obviously-an-illusion-type things.

“Tea would be nice, yeah.” Her voice sounded strained. She cleared her throat and un-bundled as he moved away, still in a ball but less tightly. Of course even hallucination Rose Tyler would drink tea. Scared hallucination Rose Tyler.

Hell then. A Rose Tyler afraid of him.

“Been a long day. Long days require tea. And fish fingers and custard. But right now I’ll settle for tea.” He grumbled to himself.

“Fish fingers and custard?” she grimaced slightly at the thought.

Hell. A Rose Tyler disapproving of his favorite food.

The not-Rose vacillated between looking at the time rotor and the room, to him, and back. The silence was killing him, even the TARDIS had gone quiet, her ever-present hum in the back of his mind obviously enabling his madness.

“You’re…” the not-Rose seemed to stutter, “you’re wearing a bow tie.”

“Bow ties are cool.” It was his automatic response.

“I think I like it.” He felt her eyes on him. He almost puffed up at the thought, but stopped himself. “It’s no leather jacket, but it suits this you, I think.”

Heaven. A Rose Tyler approving of his bow tie. About time someone did, even if it was just himself personified as someone he… knew. Maybe 'she' would like the fez. 'She' would. He probably had one around there somewhere.

“You changed her. I didn’t know she could change,” she looked around again, stroking the bar near the console as she slowly walked in his direction. “Very… Spock. Maybe toddler Spock, but still Spock.”
Heaven. A Rose Tyler approving of his desktop choice.

Maybe if he didn’t talk to her she’d go away. He wasn’t sure he wanted that, but it was for the best.

Rose teared up, crying silently. Silent crying was never, ever good.

Hell. A Rose Tyler crying.

She choked on a laugh through the tears and looked at him as he tried not to look at her. Even through his peripheral vision he could see that smile.

Heaven. The smile. Not quite the I-smell-chips smile. Maybe he should make some chips. Getting that smile again wouldn’t hurt even if the 'hell' count got higher.

“I’m not… I’m not in my universe, am I?” her voice seemed sad, questioning. He hadn’t heard that amount of reservation in her voice since leather. She seemed to cross her arms or hug herself, meandering closer until she was just on the other side of the open counter.

Hell again. A Rose Tyler who wanted to go home. He ached every time she had said those words in the past, strange that it would have the same effect years later, after they’ve been separated for years, to a new face, in a dream.

“Oh, make up your mind.” He muttered aloud to himself as he poured the tea.

“I’m not… I mean. I’m real.” She uncrossed her arms, “I get how the whole heaven or hell thing is going through your head, though. ’s quite… mad, this.”

Heaven. A telepathic Rose Tyler.

*Hell. A Doctor who won’t listen. Again. For the fourth bloody time.*

… he didn’t think that. He slowly turned to the standing, confused but amused looking blonde in front of him.

“You can’t be real.” He asserted. She just kept looking at him, that Rose-Tyler fairly adorable stubbornness asserting itself. “You can’t be. Rose Tyler is off in a parallel world with her mother and the skinny one. And human.”

“Married him, actually.” She looked wistful, smiling gently an remembrance, she sighed and looked toward him, taking two steps closer casually. “An' human, I think. An' still not a hallucination.”

*Of course* she married him,” he said matter-of-factly, “I pretty much arranged it”

The not-Rose snorted, *Arranged* is putting it loosely. Still not a hallucination.”

“Tell me something a hallucination wouldn’t know.” He stared hard at the hallucination, swearing that he almost felt her shudder under his stern gaze.

“How… how the hell would I know that? I’ve never been a hallucination before!” she looked frustrated, if amused a bit at the prospect, almost laughing at herself.

“Yes you have and that very one, too, not super fair, by the way. New face and all, much more to haunt me. I must not be getting very creative in my old age.”

“You hallucinated me?” her eyes widened slightly for a moment, as if she hadn’t known that.
He was tempted to stare daggers at his vision. But he wouldn’t. If he ignored her, made an effort to ignore her, maybe she’d go away. Like the other one. Though he must say he felt much more need to get rid of that one. Too fresh. Already had reminders of her everywhere in that body. Now he had fewer reminders but sod it if she needed to be here. He hated repeats.

Rose sighed audibly, “You’re exhausting no matter what face.”

“I’ve known that one for a thousand years.” Not doing a good job of ignoring her. He’d forgotten how hard it was to ignore her. Ignore her.

“Well you’re a genius, how’m I sposta come up with somethin’ you don’t know?!” she threw her arms up in exasperation and dropped them down at her sides.

“Exactly.”

She sat at the counter, putting her face in her hands.

Good. Stumped his own brain. That’ll show it to do this again. Now she can just go away because he knows she’s fake.

“Oh!” she excitedly lofted her head from her hands, wet, red eyes gaining an excited air. She clapped to herself before pointing at the galley, “Pear brandy!”

“I don’t have pear brandy.” He spat out the offending word like he licked glue. Bad tasting glue. Or a slug. Or a slug covered in bad tasting glue.

“But you do!” she exclaimed, putting her hands out before her somewhat excitedly, “Jack thought it’d be funny, he drank the whole bottle of something… like… bright green… an’ refilled it with pear brandy because he was got so pissed an’ you wouldn’t let him take that multi-armed bloke into the TARDIS.”

Curiously, in hopes of proving her wrong... or right… no, wrong. The TARDIS would never let Jack do such a thing...he opened a cupboard and started winding his hand through bottles. Eventually he came to one and pulled out a very old looking bottle. The glass was tinted and the label unreadable and streaked. The Doctor easily twisted out the cork. He carefully sniffed the open neck of the bottle and his face immediately twisted into a look of pure horror that slowly softened as he slowly turned to face her.

No.

Maybe…

No.

“Rose Tyler?” he said softly.

“Yes.” Rose seemed relieved, tears breaking through her eyes making it obvious that she had missed him as much as he had missed her.

He narrowed his eyes, repeating for his sake more than hers. “Rose Marion Tyler?”

“No, don’t say that one,” she laughed through a sob, gently rubbing one of her own hands across her cheek to brush away her streaming tears, “I feel like I’m in trouble an’ I should watch out for Mum.”
He appeared swiftly, his normal clumsiness on vacation as he managed to smoothly run around the
counter and sweep her into his arms. Her sobbing seemed to stop with their contact, and her could
have sworn a kiss was placed along his cheek but they were such in such a flurry to connect he
couldn’t have been certain. He had to consciously remember not to crush her in his arms, but the
feeling of her, the warmth the reminder of exactly this—it was almost enough to make him weep
with joy. The Doctor lifted her up, feeling her kick gently, swaying in his arms as she held on and
held him tightly.

“No, hold on,” he stopped swinging her and lowered her without putting her down or loosening in
any way, “How did you get here?”

“No idea.” He put her down, hearing the floor collide with her shoes gently, he slowly loosened his
arms from around her.

“But you’re real!” he squeezed his arms around her for a moment, hearing a small squeak of surprise,
“You can’t be real.”

“Didn’t we just go through this?” She put her hands at the side of his face and looked onto his eyes
almost lovingly before those hand moved to his shoulders and pushed him in recrimination. “What
did you do?”

“What do you mean what did I do? I don’t always have to do something!”

Rose raised her eyebrows and looked at him like it was entirely possible he’d gone stupid, “You
thought you were dead, I got that pretty clearly. That usually occurs when you do something.”

“Oh, that.” The Doctor fidgeted, “Well I kinda… rebooted the universe.”

Her eyes widened, her hands instinctively clenching a bit “Sounds like a...an interesting Saturday
afternoon.”

“Yeah, massive team-up, cracks in the universe, exploding TARDIS, pandorica—”

“Exploding TARDIS.” Rose said to herself.

“Well yeah, it sounds bad, but it’s really all right now.” He stroked a nearby wall.

“No, exploding TARDIS.” She emphasized, pulling his attention from the gentle stroking of the
TARDIS walls. “That’s how I’m here. What does the TARDIS do when she’s in danger?”

“Conserves her power, preserves any life present.”

She bit her lip, debating but she looked at him with resolve. Her eyes ringed themselves with gold for
a moment. “Conserves her power,” she picked up his hand and put it on her heart, “preserves any life
present.” She let go of his hand, it lingered on the spot a moment longer before slowly retracting.
“Two for two.”

He stepped back, “No, no… but I took that power out of you.”

Rose crossed her arms, “And how many vortexes have you pulled out of people?”

“Just the one…”

“Well I’d say you need more practice but someone doesn’t seem too keen on letting any more people
do it.”
“Why… how…” he motioned between his eyes and hers.

“Not sure ’bout alla it,” she explained, “figured it out just before the jumps.”

“Before the jumps?” his eyes widened.

“Well, only some of it,” she cringed a little. “How do you think we aimed it so right that I kept almost finding you?!”

“Before the jumps?!”

“Oi, ’s not like we had a bunch of time to talk, an’ you left without so much as a goodbye.” She shot back, not a hint of malice as much as simple response. He blanched at her correct remembrance of the time in question.

“We were busy.”

“Yeah, we were.” Rose admitted, “Hell of a time telling the Doctor. It was… interesting. He was so cross with you.”

“I assume you both were,” the Doctor almost grimaced.

“For a bit, yeah. Took me marriin’ him to calm him down.” She looked off a bit and smiled wistfully to herself. Rose looked like she was about to say more, but snapped her mouth shut. She looked around her, brushing her hair behind her ear. “I seem to remember something about you needing to be somewhere. I don’t want to throw off your schedule.”

“Oh!” he hit himself in the forehead with an open palm, “The wedding!”

“Wedding?” She smiled before a sort of realization his, her eyes widening in horror. “And now I’ve created a paradox, haven’t I? Me being here is a problem. My existence is a problem.” His mouth opened to speak but he couldn’t even reply before she went on, “He told me. There’s a woman. River. Can't really forget that name, name of your husband’s other wife.”

“Now hold on,” he put his hands up to stop her roll, “she’s never said she’s my wife.” Rose shook her head to herself, obviously still trying to think of the ramifications or ways to solve this problem. Or very likely a problem.

“She knows your name.” Rose said softly. “He… you told me.”

“So do you,” he searched her face. She bit her lower lip but didn’t deny it.

“If I did, if you knew I did… the paradox, Doctor.” Rose rolled her eyes, “She carries a diary, yeah? It’s been written.”

“I haven’t seen it. It isn’t fixed time.” The look on Rose’s face was not getting better, her bottom lip sucked into her mouth and being worried with her teeth so vigorously he was afraid she’d draw blood. “Plus, it’s not my—or her wedding. It’s a friend’s. Amy and Rory. I was her imaginary friend. It was a whole thing.” He explained very quickly with a touch of pride. He reached up to adjust his bow tie when realization seemed to hit him and spur him to quick, flailing movement, “I need to get dressed!”

Rose smirked and leaned back against the counter as he ran into the corridor. Her smirk faded as soon as he disappeared and she lost herself in her own thoughts, vision unfocusing and head slowly relaxing into a worried, semi-fallen posture. Today had been a lot.
Suddenly, The Doctor head poked out of the corridor, “Are you coming? We have a party to crash! You can’t wear that to a wedding!”

“Oh I’m going too, am I?” she smiled.

He looked mildly insulted, “Of course you are! You’re my plus one!”

He couldn’t count how many times he had to peek over or through the cracks in the multi-tiered wardrobe, only wanting to get a glimpse that she was still there and his mad hallucination hadn’t ended. Yes, she had proven that she had been around when brandy was switched but it was equally possible at this point that he’d simply known about that and forgotten it. It was far easier to believe in his own fallibility of memory than to simply believe she was really there.

The few minutes of dressing and not directly conversing or touching her created even more doubt that she was real.

He wasn’t meaning to be a Peeping Tom. He made sure not to see anything… untoward. When she disappeared somewhere around when he was buttoning his vest he didn’t know what to feel. Minor panic flooded his mind, maybe he had imagined her.

That’s good, though. His mind was settling. No more hallucination Rose, no more crazy Doctor.

“I don’t know about that.” Her teasing voice came from behind him. “Do you still lick everything?” He turned around a smiled, Rose Tyler is a simple black dress and black heels. “An’ I thought I told you. ’m real, Doctor.”

“You look beautiful.” He sighed, taking her in, mid-button.

She didn’t even wait for it, “Considering I’m human.” She perused a shelf nearby, running her fingers along many dark things on it.

“You don’t appear to have that specific affliction anymore, Miss Glowy-Eyes.”

She huffed a slight chuckle as she seemed to finger something, “At least you’re not under the delusion that I’m a hallucination any more.” Rose looked him over once or twice very quickly and removed a hat.

“Oh, I’m still entertaining that idea. I’m just not convinced it’s a bad thing.” Honestly he couldn’t be sure which one until she started flipping it in her hands. Top hat. Oh. He quite liked that top hat. Good choice.

Rose plopped the top hat on his head. Looking him over quickly and smiling. He slipped on his coat jacket, complete with tails and twirled around to feel the tails lift with centrifugal force.

…And Rose’s perusal.

But definitely not just Rose’s perusal.

That would be insane.

“Snappy outfit there, Doctor, but…” Rose picked up a white scarf and draped it around his collar. She stood unbearably close, straightening his jacket and now the scarf she adorned him with. The
scent of her went straight up his nose, exactly as he remembered. Still not proof. “I think,” she clicked the k, “you’re ready for a wedding, Doctor.”

They left the wardrobe arm in arm and the Doctor marched right up the center console sadly. He hesitated. This would prove it. He didn’t want it to be proven.

“Oh, you.” Rose reached over and flipped the materialization switch and pointed expectantly toward the door. He walked down the ramp towards the doors, looking back to Rose at the console.

A male voice popped in. “It’s the Doctor. How did we forget the Doctor? I was plastic. He was the stripper at my stag. Long story.”

“Who’s that?” Rose smirked, hearing the young man’s voice, “You were a stripper?” she gave him a cheeky look over. His mouth opened and a single finger presented itself poised to respond but interrupted by a knock at the TARDIS door.

“Okay, Doctor. Did I surprise you this time?” a female Scottish voice said. The Doctor flung open a door, sticking his head out first, complete with hat and snappy outfit.

“Er, yeah. Completely astonished. Never expected that.” He exited completely, twirling for the crowd, “How lucky I happened to be wearing this old thing. Hello, everyone. I’m Amy’s imaginary friend. But I came anyway.” Rose slowly moved closer to the door, letting it close behind him as she listened.

Amy marched up to him, “You absolutely, definitely may kiss the bride.” She puckered.

“Amelia, from now on I shall be leaving the kissing duties to the brand new Mister Pond. And I…” he looked at the door of his TARDIS and the fact that Rose hadn’t followed, “may have brought a date.”

Rory’s face went from happy to mildly annoyed, “I’m not Mister Pond. …wait, what?”

Amy looked intrigued, “Who, River?”

“No, not River,” the Doctor shook his head lightly and looked briefly to the TARDIS doors before back to Amy, “And a maybe hallucination.”

“A hallucination?” Rory asked.

Rose peeked out the TARDIS doors. “Time for me, yet?” clueless faces around her, she stepped out. She smiled toward the woman in white, “Hi, I’m the Doctor’s hallucination.” She shot a glance at the Doctor smugly but looked back to the astonished couple.

“Uh, hi.” Rory waved cluelessly, turning quickly to the Doctor for an answer of some sort.

The Doctor’s eyes widened and he turned quickly between the bride and groom, “You can see her?”

“Yeah I can see her, who is she?” Amy asked.

He straightened his bow tie. “How do I look?” he looked at Amy pleadingly. Amy just shrugged, unable to say anything, she couldn’t even close her mouth in astonishment.

He swiveled around and took the two steps closer to her, beaming away like it was red bicycle day. The Doctor gleefully put his arm tenderly around Rose's waist, breathing a breath he didn’t realize was being held so long and hard. He seemed to relax until the moment she slipped her arm around
his back and he straightened almost ecstatically and turned back to the newlyweds.

“This is my plus one, Rose Tyler. Right then, everyone. I'll move my box. You're going to need the space. I only came for the dancing.” He winked at Rose.

He took her hand and pulled her quickly to the TARDIS and ran up the ramp the minute the doors closed behind him.

“You had to make an entrance, didn’t you?” she smiled.

“You followed my lead,” he pointed at her as he hit the lever, the TARDIS groaning gently for a moment as he quickly hit the lever again, the noises ceasing. The Doctor ran up to her, looking at her like a dog with his favorite bone or a mathematician with his favorite puzzle she couldn’t tell which, taking her hand and pulling her out the doors again.

“Couldn't help myself,” she laughed to herself, at first stumbling behind him but quite willingly following, “Why do I feel like you’re always stealing me?”

“Am, aren’t I? Need to make sure you don’t wander off.”

Amy and Rory were already waiting in the corridor just outside the wedding hall.

“I have a family! And a husband. And you've a blonde.” Amy didn’t even look at Rose when she said it, sounding more accusatory than anything.

“Yes!” He put his hands together awkwardly, would have clapped if he had dared let go of Rose's hand, which, obviously, he hadn’t intended to do. He nodded to each of them, “Amy Pond, Rory Pond,”

“—That’s not how it works—” Rory interrupted again.

“Yes it is.” Amy corrected him without a second thought.

“Yes it is,” Rory hung his head and admitted.

“—this is Rose Tyler.” He presented his hand towards Rose.

“Hi.” Rose managed a coy wave with her free hand.

“And why did you think she was imaginary?” Amy still hadn’t given more than a passing glance to Rose.

“Well why did you think I was imaginary? Think, Pond, think! Besides, shouldn’t we be dancing?” he looked at Rose quickly then back to Amy, his hand still gripping to Rose’s. “I thought there’d be dancing.” Rose was slightly pulled off balance with the strength of his pull, but laughed and followed him, the bride stomping behind and the groom curiously following.

“You look lovely,” said Rose as she was pulled. Amy just smiled a little and entered the hall ahead of the Doctor as he opened the door.

Rose sipped at her wine, slowly relaxing her body near him and putting her glass down on the table. He bumped her shoulder with his, letting their shoulders stay touching as their still wrapped together hands wedged themselves between their laps. Amy marched up to their table.
“You’re dancin’. C’mon, Raggedy-man, you’re dancin’.” Amy reached down and tugged his unoccupied hand. Rose let go easily, he simply looked back at her once as Amy dragged him forward as stomped authoritatively onto the dance floor. Rose smiled and picked up her glass again.

The Doctor’s hand on Amy's hip, other hand in hers, they took a slow turn in the middle of the dance floor, several other chatting couple’s around them. Though, it took a bit of awkward swaying to get their conversation kicked up.

“Missus Pond.” He smiled to her, keeping a much looser hold on her hand as they danced than he’d just had on Rose’s. “Hope everything’s gone well.”

“So far. Woke up with parents. I remember both. Having parents and not having parents. Weird.” She swished her dress as they danced, “but lots of questions today.”

“Oh?” he feigned ignorance as only he could.

“Moron.” She hit him with the hand at his side, “You know what I mean. Rose. Who is she?”

“Rose is… Rose.” He shrugged. The look on Amy’s face was that she was not going to accept his half answer, and he floundered, “She was my… uh. Rose.”

“Was? Doesn’t look like a was.” Amy lifted her eyebrow accusingly.

“Very confusing mostly leading to lots of… well, that face.” The Doctor pointed directly at her face, “That one. The one you have there, but less Scottishy and ginger.”

“Oi, I just want answers. We already have one giant mystery in River we don't need one in another random woman you can flirt with.”

The Doctor quickly rebutted, “I do not flirt—”

“Yes you do.” Corrected Amy sternly, “You very much do.”

“Well, now I won’t.” the Doctor said with conviction, “You’ll like Rose. I like her. I’ve always liked her.”

“I’ll bet.” Amy rolled her eyes hard, seeing out of the corner of her eye a familiar blonde sitting next to the unfamiliar one, and they were laughing and smiling. When she turned to look at them the Doctor did too.

As the Doctor was dragged off to dance with the bride, Rose smirked to herself and looked to her side. The groom --Rory—was sitting there, obviously needing distraction himself as he sat there looking both incredibly in love with his beautiful bride across the floor and horribly overwhelmed.

She lifted up her glass and crossed to the nearby table, nodding to the chair across from Rory. He nodded at her without her needing to ask and she put her glass down and sat.

“Sorry for, um, crashing,” Rose said with a small smile.

“Made sense, sort of. He would do that. Maybe not the date part but yeah. Surprise at the wedding of
some sort.” Rory said everything as a matter of fact. Rose found she quite liked that.

“Still. Sorry.”

“No, I’m sorry, but who are you?” he looked exhausted by the sheer concept of her but turned toward her, “You seem nice enough and you’re with him so I guess I trust you, but it’s suspect—no offense.”

“Oh, none taken, ’s weird,” she smiled as she shook her head, “’m just a friend. Like you.”

“Seem like more than a friend.” He said with a tone that her mother might have had, a bit knowing and a small amount of chiding in there.

“Seems like, maybe. Not sure, me.” She let her mouth turn up slightly. She had no idea where to start or how to make casual conversation with a bloke in a not very casual circumstance. “What year is it?”

“2010.” He replied automatically before realizing telling her may have been bad and wincing slightly, “Why?”

“’s good to know.” She filed it away, “Hard to keep track, you know.”

“TARDIS. Yeah.” Quiet enveloped them for a moment, ”You sound like a Londoner.” Rory prodded for more answers.

“Am, yeah. Or was. Hard to tell.” Rose muttered a bit, swirling the remaining wine in her glass as she spoke. Rory scoffed.

“You talk like him.”

“S’pose I do.” She gave a genuine smile, “’s not usually a compliment.”

“Wasn’t then.” Rory largely said to himself. Rose let out an amused laugh, something about her made Rory smile and relax a bit.

“That’s fair. Sorry, Rory, dunno what to say. You travel with him. Fight the devil or ghosts on Christmas or angry giant flippin’ pepper pots and you just…”

“Lose all your sense. It’s mad.” Rory’s face softened, “I know.”

“Oh, attention needed, they’re lookin’ over.” Rose murmured to Rory, whose face snapped back to the dancing pair. Each awkward wave and smile. Rose took a sip from her wine as the Doctor and Amy walked over to them.

“Having a good time?” Rose smiled to them, noting that the song wasn’t even fully over as she noted the Doctor.

“Always.” The Doctor and Rose accidentally locked eyes. Rose unable to take her eyes off the green and he likewise the honey brown of hers. She bit her bottom lip subconsciously as she winked sweetly at him. He grasped both sides of his bow tie and straightened it and smiled, not looking away. Both looks were noticed by the newly weds, both people looking back and forth between the two.

“Well that’s good. Hate to make it awkward for you two,” said Rory flatly.

Rose broke their prolonged eye contact as she laughed and looked at him, “Oh, God, I’m so sorry,
The DJ started playing a song with a beat, Rose unexpectedly got up. She looked exuberant. “Tony’s favorite song. Needta dance.” The Doctor smiled and watched her as she walked past him to the dance floor, motioning to his friend without taking eyes off of her.

“Come along, Ponds.”

Rose had already started bouncing and twirling to the music. Children gathering to dance along the strange lady who looked like she was having so much fun. The Doctor bobbed his head and crouched, walking oddly on the balls of his feet as he bounced to the beat.

Amy and Rory shook their hips and followed as instructed, dancing severely toned down compared to their clearly insane pair of adult guests.

The Doctor raised his arms and waggled back and forth, a now gathered small army of children mimicking him.

Amy laughed, grasping her chest in giggles, “You're terrible. That is embarrassing!”

He raised his arms and did the drunken giraffe, Rose lead the girls in twirling so that their skirts lifted up before puckering her lips like a fish and putting her arms to waggle freely at her sides as she wiggled around the dance floor, joining the other group of oddly dancing children and adult.

“That's it,” he instructed the hoard, “That's good. Keep it loose.”

Doctor sneaks up to the DJ and whispers something in his ear, prompting Rose to raise an eyebrow as he walked toward her seat at the round table.

“I didn’t hear anything.”

“Well now that I know you’re listening I made certain you couldn't.” Glenn Miller's Moonlight Serenade began slowly, he extended his hand to the sitting blonde. “Do I really have to ask you for this dance? I think I’ve proven quite a lot that the world doesn’t end if the Doctor Dances, eh?”

“You’ve got the moves?” Rose smiled and put down her glass, taking his hand to stand, “Show me your moves.”

He escorted her onto the dancefloor and easily spun her into him, hand around hers while the other rested at her waist.

“Unexpectedly nostalgic, this.” She felt warm and right in his arms, all the ifs and buts and doubting left both minds while they danced. “You hate repeats.”

“Unexpectedly nostalgic day.” He shrugged, seemingly unable to look away from the light brown eyes. They seemed older than he remembered. Of course they would be. She’d been married, at least a few years for him to spill all his secrets…
Rose laughed a little as they turned on the dance floor. “Shields up, Doctor, unless you want me listenin’ in.”

“You might have to explain that.” He nodded at her, not removing her eyes from hers.

“Like you explainin’ a random plus one at the wedding of people you’re very close to who’ve never heard of me before?” she retorted, side stepping the question.

“Well. If I still can’t believe it’s you...” the Doctor said amusedly.

“Are we here again?” She seemed a little exhausted by the idea of returning to having to convincing him she wasn’t something his mind came up with, “’S been a few hours, Doctor.”

He shook his head, “No, no, you’re real. Others see you, you look like Rose, sound like Rose, smell like Rose...”

“Smell like Rose?” She scrunched her nose, “Still not always a compliment.”

Still. He’d... or he’d. 

“You’re Rose. A Rose by any other name would smell as sweet.”

“Cheesy sod.” She put her head down on his shoulder, taking one deep breath in tandem with his own. How long had he waited for this? Just this? He’d given up on it. Purely wholly given up, unlike Rory. Rory had waited. She was dead and Rory had still waited. He slowly stepped in time with Rose as he looked at Amy and Rory, doing much the same. He leaned his head gently on Rose's while he watched Amy and Rory.

“Two thousand years. The boy who waited. Good on you, mate.”

Rose lifted her head and looked at the pair he was speaking of, smiling gently as the Doctor held her hand. She looked at his face and he motioned to the door with his head. He let go of her side but readjusted his hand so he was still holding hers within it and lead her out of the room quietly.

They arrived outside, Rose took a deep breath of the summer air. “Lovely wedding, well, the bit we saw of it. Lovely couple. They been with you long?”

“Depends on who you ask.” The Doctor shrugged, “She met me over a decade ago, him two thousand years.”

She nodded, accepting his half answer as she stepped closer to the TARDIS, “’s timey-wimey.”

He smiled at that, but his smile slowly fell into a wry one, “Why haven't you asked to go home?”

“Lots of reasons.” She said quietly. He felt a shot of pain that was not his own. “I think I’m gonna turn in.” she kissed his boyish cheek, he felt a flush the minute her lips touched his skin, a slight tingle of the impression lipstick would have left that didn’t go away. She pulled away and smiled, pulling the door open and walking in to the TARDIS as the door shut behind her.

He stood at the door and stared after.

What incredibly impossible bollocks had even gone on today? Rose Tyler. And falling into old patterns, like he wasn’t even older, like he wasn’t even wiser and there wasn’t anything they needed to talk about and there wasn’t anything that...

Doubts. He still had many, many doubts. She’d covered the how, a bit. But they why and where and
several others how’s and why’s and answers that he needed from her and inevitable questions she
would have, the options were exhausting.

He spotted River’s hair before the rest of her. He reached into his large, transdimensional pocket and
produced a book and her vortex manipulator in his hands before he even turned around.

“Did you dance?” River asked cheekily as she walked up, “Well, you always dance at weddings,
don’t you?”

“You tell me.” He smoothly said in return.

“Spoilers.” River grinned. The Doctor handed the book and vortex manipulator to her.

“The writing’s all back, but I didn’t peek.”

“Thank you.” She accepted her things, smirking softly as she strapped the vortex manipulator back
on her arm.

Curiosity got the best on him, “Are you married, River?”

“Are you asking?” she asked in a smooth tone.

“Yes.”

“Yes.” River said matter-of-factly.

“No, hang on. Did you think I was asking you to marry me, or …or or asking if you were married?”
he was genuinely confused, and concerned. This was not the day for more mind tricks.

“Yes,” she shrugged.

He suddenly got nervous, “No, but was that yes, or yes?”

“Yes.” She purred.

“River, who are you?” the Doctor asked. Rivers eyes fell into sadness.

“You're going to find out very soon now. And I'm sorry, but that's when everything changes. Say
hello to Rose.” River clicked a button her her vortex manipulator, and she was gone.

The Doctor blinked slowly walking back to the TARDIS and pushing one of the doors open.

Rose was in her pink fuzzy sleeping pants and crummy off the shoulder t-shirt, obviously from her
room and so long ago. She was fixing a cup of tea.


“River says hi.” He seemed to phrase it like it was a portent of some kind.

“That sounds ominous.” Rose stirred her tea. The gently clanking of the spoon against the ceramic
sides seeming to be the melodic soundtrack of Rose.

“I know,” he grumbled.

“No, I meant how you’re saying it.” She twiddled her fingers in the air, “’s ominous.”

“I still don’t know who she is. Apparently I’ll find out soon. But she knows you, so apparently
“Shocker. Even I was starting to believe it. Say it enough times an even I was starting to think I was wrong.” Rose sighed, brushing her hair out with her fingers. She sat on the jump seat and smiled a bit. He sat beside her and just let out a breath.

“Rose… why…” So many questions. Few beginning with why.

“Can we leave it today?” she interrupted, looking worn, “Been long, yeah? You un-doin’ an' re-doin’, me… I dunno, transportin' or somethin'. Long day, yeah?” he sweetly brushed an errant clump of hair behind her ear to see that face. She leaned in to the touch, prompting him to run the knuckles of his forefinger softly down her cheek as he fell into her eyes. She smiled. “It was a beautiful wedding. Can we just… I dunno? Be any normal couple at a wedding an' get a bit sloshed and snog by the bushes?”

“Snog by the bushes?” He acted incredulous, like she had somehow impugned his honor, “I haven’t even kissed you, yet.”

“No time like the present,” she realized they were inching ever closer to such an act, personal space being a thing of the past as their faces got ever closer, “We are in a time machine…”

The bride came sauntering up the ramp, breaking the two apart instinctively as soon as they heard her but before she could see anything. The Doctor jumped up to the console with Rose still sat on the seat. “Oi! Where are you off to?” Amy asked loudly. Rose slowly stood and joined her mug of tea by the Doctor. “We haven't even had a snog in the shrubbery yet.”

“Not for lack of tryin’,” Rose said just quietly enough for the Doctor to hear. He glanced bashfully away quickly and hoped no one would notice.

“Amy!” Rory sounded exasperated.

Amy looked petulantly between her new husband and Rose, crossing her arms and instructing them both. “Shut up. It's my wedding.”

“Our wedding.” He corrected.

“Sorry, you two. Shouldn't have slipped away. Bit busy, you know?” The Doctor glanced at Rose who blushed slightly.

“I thought you were married to River?” Amy put her hand on her hip, expecting answers.

“You just saved the whole of space and time? …And got a girlfriend, apparently.” Rory fidgeted and nodded at Rose before switching tack, “Take the evening off. Maybe a bit of tomorrow.”

The Doctor chose to respond to what he knew how to respond to, letting Amy’s query float in the air, “Space and time isn't safe yet. The TARDIS exploded for a reason. Something drew the TARDIS to this particular date, and blew it up. Why? And why now?” Again he glanced at Rose who wasn’t looking at him.

The phone started ringing. Rose jumped a bit and laughed at herself almost silently.

“The Silence, whatever it is, is still out there, and I have to.” The phone rang again, “Excuse me a moment.”

He answered the telephone.
“Hello? Oh, hello. I'm sorry, this is a very bad line. No, no, no, but that's not possible. She was sealed into the seventh Obelisk. I was at the prayer meeting. Well, no, I get that it's important. An Egyptian goddess loose on the Orient Express, in space.” He looked at Amy and Rory, drawing them in, “Give us a mo.” He put the receiver on his shoulder and addressed Amy and Rory, “Sorry, something's come up. This will have to be goodbye.”

Rose walked beside the Doctor, raising her eyebrows and looking expectantly at the couple. A smirk slowly took over her mouth as she seemingly guessed what was next.

“Yeah, I think it's goodbye,” said Amy, patting her husband on the chest, “Do you think it's goodbye?”

Rory nodded, “Definitely goodbye.”

Amy went to the door, pushed it open and shouted to the horizon of Leadworth.

“Goodbye!”

Rose slipped her hand into his, clinging tightly, as she whispered, “Hello Everything.”

Doctor beamed at Rose, tightening his grip on her hand for just a moment, “Don't worry about a thing, your Majesty. We're on our way.”

Chapter End Notes

Accidentally left all my other work elsewhere. This is what happens when I have little else to do and keep reading other people's episode re-writes.
Rose Tyler was on his ship. In night clothes. Sipping tea out of her own, TARDIS-provided mug like it was 2007.

Next to her was his best friend, glaring daggers at her, still in a wedding gown.

…His best mate was a ginger in a wedding gown, looking cross. Blimey, he’d have to check if it really was 2007 at this rate.

Amy likely awaiting explanation, arms crossed being oh-so-Scottish with her Roman husband trying not to be collateral damage.

Welcome to a very surreal and potentially horrifying nightmare.

Rory seemed fine with Rose. Though, he supposed, there hadn’t been much Rory hadn’t seemed fine with apart from insulting his girlfriend-turned-wife. Which Rose was unlikely to do.

…Probably.

“Okay. Now answers. Who are you.” Amy stated. It wasn’t a question. The explanation demanding had begun.

“I’ve already said—" the Doctor attempted to cover for Rose. The forceful glare only switched targets for a moment before moving back to it’s primary mark.

“Rose Tyler.” Rose smiled and extended her hand, which a cross armed Amy didn't take. Rose put her arm back at her side and sighed. “I’m part of his past, I travelled with him for a bit.” Rose said very calmly. Incredibly calmly. Too calmly. Maybe she was a hallucination.

Rose quickly turned her head and narrowed her eyes at him.

Oh. She heard that. Just kidding. Had to get used to that.

Which he would.

Happily.

“Where did you go? Why are you back? Are you staying?” Amy kept firing her questions. Rose turned her attention back to Amy, but seemed hesitant, opening her mouth.

“Of course she's staying.” He interrupted like it had been an insult. He looked to Rose quickly, “You're staying,” he almost instructed and then moved his head back to Amy, “she's staying.”

“Oi, they’re wary an' they should be.” Rose gently put her hand on his arm to pull his attention as she looked at the pair, “I plopped into their lives as well as yours, yeah?” She turned to him. “’s hard.”

But you’re staying, right? Say you’re staying.

Rose looked at him like he had gone mad, or possibly adorable, or possibly adorably mad. And, as
the corners of her mouth turned up, she was slightly amused by it. I’m probably staying.

The Doctor smiled brightly as they both turned back toward Amy and Rory. “She’s staying. Rose belongs here.” Amy looked between them, squinting her eyes and mouth drawn into a straight line, expecting more explanation to be drawn out by her very presence.

“So what happened, then?” Amy said, softening just a touch but still vehement in her demanding of answers.

“She wandered off,” the Doctor explained cheekily. Rose gave him an exhausted look, “First rule I teach you people and she’s why.” Rose hit his arm with the back of her hand weakly. He feigned hurt and she chuckled at him.

“They won’t know you’re joking,” she pointed a finger at him before turning back to Amy. “I did not wander off that time. I met him in London—’s where I’m from—travelled with him for a bit,” she took a deep breath, looking off. It was clear to the Doctor she was unsure how to say the rest, but she tilted her head and kept speaking, “An’ some stuff happened an’ I was sealed off in a parallel world, an’—”

“—and now she’s back.” He finished for her, skipping a step or two for sanity. His own sanity or hers, or even theirs at trying to comprehend it, he wasn’t sure whose at this point. Rose breathed a quiet but relieved breath, shooting him a small but thankful smile.

“Does she have to do with the crack in my wall?” Amy asked, fully presenting the question to the Doctor and skipping Rose entirely. “Did it make her stop existing, too? You said if you could remember it, it would be better, but I’ve never met her.”

Rose swiftly looked to the Doctor, so many questions causing a traffic jam in her brain that her astonished, open mouth slammed itself shut.

“Sort of, kind of, a little… I’m not entirely sure yet, it’s possible she didn’t have anything to do with the crack,” His hearts suddenly, inexplicably hurt, he quickly turned to Rose and explained. “Split in the skin of reality, Amy was linked to it, exposed to it for years, she brought back the things she could remember, like Rory, her parents, the TARDIS—” Rose nodded, eyes just a bit glassy. The Doctors hearts hurt again. He put her hand in his. “It’s fine. We’re all fine. You’re here.”

“I am.” She laced her fingers in his and squeezed lightly.

Amy was standing there, arms crossed as her face was impassible. “That was incredibly unhelpful.”

“Oi, it was the truth.” The Doctor argued.

“Whole truth?” Amy pointed to the Doctor accusingly, walking a touch closer to him with a grumble on her face.

Rose bit her lower lip slightly, “The whole truth is very long.”

“And complicated,” joined the Doctor on a mumble, backing away from her pointy finger.

“I’m not stupid and in a time machine.” Amy re-crossed her arms, trying to settle in for the long haul. Sweet, stubborn Amy. Rose hadn’t even wanted to discuss it with him yet.

Rory yawned. It bought the Doctor the perfect, timely excuse to be evasive. Maybe it was done on purpose. Rory was a great one for sensing the awkward.
“Sleep!” he found himself clapping his hands together at his own avoidance techniques, “All humans need sleep! Long day, long day, off to bed you two!” He made a ‘shoo’ motion to the newly weds toward one of the corridors.

“Three, don’t you mean?” Amy glared at Rose, who simply hung her head.

“Yes, three.” Rose sighed, knowing she was sorta answering a sorta question, thinly veiled as it was. “We humans need sleep.”

“Maybe we should just go home for a night? I’m not sure if I can stand the bunk beds after today…” Rory half-complained.

“Bunk beds?” Rose straightened a bit.

“Yeah, he gave us bunk beds.” Rory motioned to the Doctor.

“Of course he did,” she smiled as she rolled her eyes, and walked up to the monitor. She looked at it a few seconds, before stroking the rotor gently, “Thanks.” She said quietly, seemingly to it before speaking more loudly to the two newly weds, “Should be fixed now.”

“But bunk beds are cool!”

“Be back to cool tomorrow, tonight they deserve a good night’s rest. Been a long day, yeah?” Rose turned her head over her shoulder to the couple, “Call it a wedding present from the TARDIS.”

“Um. Thanks,” said Rory, his face stunned thankfulness and the ease of it. At that, Amy speedily pulled him down the corridor and he stumbled a step before quickly hurrying to follow her.

Rose walked down the steps, looking around the place she once knew so well. He followed her slowly, watching her take slow steps and absorb everything around her. She smiled when she saw the hammock surrounded by wires and she sat down on it flawlessly. She turned to face him.

“You should sleep too. Un-existin’ an’ all that.” She slowly flapped her legs, sipping at her tea, the hammock swaying back and forth like a swing.

“You un-existed, too. Besides, can’t really sleep if you are sitting on my bed.” Her legs stopped their flutter immediately, feet dragging her to near stillness.

“You sleep on a hammock?” Rose looked down at the stringy hammock, suppressing a giggle. Badly. Eventually she stopped attempting to suppress and just laughed. Hearty, full laugh.

It wasn't new. It wasn't melodic. But it was so, so welcome.

“It’s comfortable!” the Doctor protested, a smile leaking onto his face through feigned indignance.

“Didn’t say it wasn’t,” she slowly calmed, tossing her hair off her face where it had gathered from laughter, looking towards the ceiling as she thought, “Dunno if it’s better or worse than a water bed.”

“A water bed?” He asked, intrigued.

“You were obsessed with ‘em. Easier on the back.” Rose could see his mind going a mile a minute by the look on his face. Whether it was the subject of the other him or the temptations and evils of a waterbed poking at his mind she couldn’t tell. She couldn’t get a read on it, so she guessed the former of the two options, and she wasn't sure if she was ready to talk about it yet. He deserved his curiosity satisfied, he definitely did, but not tonight.
“I should probably get some sleep. But… I don’t want this mad dream to end.” She stood fairly effortlessly from the swinging hammock, something he could barely ever do without flailing at least once. Rose put down her empty mug and saw his questioning face, “S how it works, yeah? Go to sleep in a dream and wake up back in reality?”

“Dream?”

“Well you decided it's all a hallucination.” Rose slowly made her way up the platform. He followed. “I’m allowed.”

“I’ll walk you to your room.” He offered her his arm, which she automatically took. Nice. Automatically.

“You don't have to walk me to my room. I just same from there,” They stepped toward the corridor, “an’ if I get lost I can just ask her.”

“I still want to walk you.” He said, a bit dreamily. They started walking down the corridor, “Just in case this mad dream ends.”

They walked to the corridor, looking at each other, making sure each were still there. It took longer than it should have to get to the door. She chuckled a little when her bedroom door wasn’t where she had just left it. The TARDIS was likely giving them more time to stroll. Eventually they got to her door and stopped. Rose grasped the handle. She held it and faced him, brushing her hair out of her face with her free hand.

“In case this is a dream, Doctor, an’ I’m not sayin' it is, I just wanna say…”

“Rose.” He interrupted, “You don’t have to—” Rose let go of the doorknob and threw herself into his chest, his arms going around her as she hugged him with all her might.

“I miss you.” She pulled back a little and he loosened his grip, “You were,” she look a deep breath, looking into his green eyes as she cupped his boyish face, hand trying to memorize his new jaw line and cheek bones, “you were fantastic.”

Quick as a wink she turned disappeared into her room, the door shutting behind her.

There was a smell. Something sugary. And maybe tea? Tea smelled older, maybe. Maybe a phantom smell, she was so used to it. Maybe just sweetened tea, but that seemed unlikely.

And time. That smell of time. Never lessened, never went away.

The Doctor smell.

It used to be leather and time. She’d smell it on him every time they’d hug. And then tea and time. Everything in the console room had been just slathered in tea and time. Her home smelled of tea and time. She was sure she smelled like tea and time at this point, years of exposure as it had been.

Now… what, candy and time? No. What was that? Something sweet and time.
Rose opened her eyes slowly.

She was on the TARDIS, she remembered. The walls seemed to pulsate warmth and love and greeting. She sat up quickly, holding her own blanket in her hands, her blanket on her incredibly comfortable bed on the TARDIS, surrounded by her old things.

The quiet hum, the very specific smells, friendly warm feeling from the walls… it was all very exciting.

And a little… daunting.

And mad.

Very, very mad.

She got up off the bed and looked around. Same dresser, drawers slightly open, piles of messy clothes on the floor. Pictures were few, but memorable. Some of her leather Doctor and Jack, one of… well. It was an adorable picture. Knick-knacks strewn around the surfaces of the room, things she’d gotten in bazars on planets throughout the years. Make up. That’s a check. Likely expired by now. And luckily she hadn’t gotten too fat or too old for these clothes. “Well, maybe too old…” she mumbled as picked up a purposely ripped and cut shirt from one of her drawers. What on Earth was she thinking when she’d gotten that? Oh. She remembered the Doctor’s face when he didn’t think she was looking when she wore it to that alien pub with Jack. Yeah. That’s what she had been thinking.

He looked different. Dressed different. Bounced and smiled and ate different.

She hadn’t been there for who knows how many years for him?

Flip side, she hadn’t been there to bleedin’ kill him this time.

…she hadn’t been there to save him, either. Or just be with him.

Her heart hurt.

She couldn’t help but feel the same about him as she always had. Heart all fluttery when he took her hand. Maybe she shouldn’t feel that way. There had been her husband and while they’d both asserted multiple time that they were the same man, they may not be now. Again, with the who-knows-how-many years, people change. Not her apparently, but people.

He had held her hand. Well, he always held her hand. Flutter-flutter. Even when he was grumpy or sad or angry, he held her hand.

She was his plus one? She had been that before. Of course, the main time she remembered being a plus one she was accused of being his wife, partner, prostitute, and concubine all in one go.

He said she was beautiful? Again, considering she was… no. She’d said that bit this time. That was more promising than… no. Bad Rose.

But he’d danced. Willingly. They’d danced. To that song. She felt his skin, his hearts beats, his joy at seeing her. Then there was the eyes, those glorious, green eyes that may have been different than before but within them… Again. Bad Rose. Stop it.

She’d been flirting. Dammit she’d be flirting, hadn’t she? Like he was her husband like it was normal like none of this was a thing. She couldn’t help it.
And there was the River woman. The wife-not-wife. Facts. Professor, archeologist, knew his other faces, called her husband’s face young, knew his name. Knew his name. Which Rose herself only found out upon marrying him. Rose had only gotten the story twice but jealousy was a thing despite her best attempts to calm it and that two times had been quite enough for her lifetime. She’d committed it to memory.

And now she was sitting in it. In the situation, in her own potential jealousy. In a potential paradox.

And now she couldn’t pick bloody clothes! Picking her sleep clothes hadn’t been this big a deal! Of course, she’d hoped to be deep in her room with the door closed by the time he came in so she’d have time to freak out in private before he came back in and ruined it and use him terribly charming self to accidentally make her completely forget the have a little freak out.

Which, apparently, she was putting off until now.

Why did she need that tea? …Because it’s ridiculously delicious tea from Merido and she hadn’t had it in years, that’s why.

“No, ’s good. Get all your crazy out now, Tyler. You've a lot of things to deal with, yeah? The wife not wife and the not wife wife existin' together, an' Amy an' Rory an' apparently a crack.” And the fact that she couldn’t pick a bloody shirt.

“What ’m I? Nineteen?!” She huffed to herself, covering her eyes in frustration.

The TARDIS hummed, lights dimming and brightening around Rose as she was laughed at by a sentient ship.

“Oh, shut up. ’s not normal, this, ’m allowed, yeah?” she glared a bit playfully at the ceiling and stuck out her tongue, grabbing a quick pair of blue trousers and purple hooded top.

There was a smell. Everyone had a smell. Hormones and pheromones and assorted laundry scents and shampoos and soaps and perfumes. People were very smelly. Couldn’t copy a person’s smell very well because of the multiple variations and vacillations of the aforementioned products. Everyone had a smell.

Sparks were flying from various sources and burnt electronics permeated the air but there was still that smell. Her smell.

*Strawberries.*

Not the chemical not-really-strawberries smell that he knew lingered in most 20th century earth shampoo brands, but real, literal strawberries.

They hadn’t even eaten strawberries.
Did she leave that smell everywhere? Yes, he was seated on his hammock, in the same place she had been a few hours earlier but it should have gone. It was all over her room. It lingered long after she’d left the console room until either he had gone nose blind to it or the explosive regeneration that happened completely rid the room of it. But now it was back. The smell that lingered on that blanket in her room because he hadn’t managed to set it ablaze or erase it.

Did that smell just linger on everything she touched? Or was he just more acutely aware of because… well. *Because.*

Because?

“Oh, shut up.” He mumbled to himself.

Or maybe it was the TARDIS herself. Cheeky. The TARDIS was being cheeky.

Rose was being cheeky, too. Same old cheeky Rose. More cheeky, even. Still no tonguey smile, though. Must work on that. Missed the tonguey smile.

Rose and TARDIS being cheeky. Why did he always get ganged up on?!

But Rose and the TARDIS always meant one thing in his mind. Not the cheeky thing. *The Bad Wolf* thing.

Oh those words. Those stupid, hopeful, hurtful, beautiful words. Even thinking those words caused a myriad of emotions that he’d rather have skipped.

How did she still have the power? Could she use it? Why wasn’t she dead? Why didn’t she want to go back? He admitted to marrying him, the other him, anyway, even though, decisions being what they were if there had only been one of him he would likely have… No. Tangent. Right. But unless something happened or Rose had decided to be very un-Rose there wasn’t much that would keep them apart. She tore open an extremely fortified ship, absorbed the heart of the TARDIS, and travelled one hundred and ninety eight thousand years to get back. Even hopped between universes to get back to him.

…Were. *Were* fantastic. She kept referencing the other him as *you* but now used *were*. And she didn’t want to go back. Something more definitive than one hundred and ninety eight thousand years or a universe separation must have happened.

*Could* she even go back if she’d wanted? The Time Lords would have made it easier, but they’re gone. There were no more holes her could find after that one he finally found to say goodbye, but there wouldn’t be more. Short of that crack re-stealing her, it seemed… unlikely.

Besides. She *wanted* to stay.

“You could have warned me, you know.” He muttered to his ship as he connected some wires. The TARDIS didn’t say anything but the lights above him flickered. “I have no idea how you could have warned me but you could have.”

The TARDIS alerted him to a single occupant being awake. It was much more of a gamble than it used to be, but he could make tea.

Tea was Rose’s thing. Well, tea and chips. But chips weren’t breakfast. Maybe chips could be breakfast. Tonguey smile. But definitely tea. She usually grumped around after she woke up until she got her cuppa in and stayed up extra when she was tired just to get in another one. Something she had learned from Jackie. Or DNA. Was the slap genetic?
Rory drank tea. Amy did not drink tea.

He could make tea and coffee. Cover the bases. Less chance of explosions.

Rose came out of her room and quietly went straight to the galley, where the Doctor was waiting, her mug in his hand. She couldn’t help but smile at the sight; Same mug, same Doctor, different face.

“Two sugars.” He presented her favorite tea, the aromas of it filling the space around her if not for the slight fight it had with the strong scent of coffee and that sweet scent again.

“Am I that predictable?” Rose took it, smirking and then obviously smelling above it. First step in waking up Rose Tyler, have her smell tea, he noted with a smile, same mannerisms years later.

“When it comes to waking up? Yes.” He looked directly into her eyes, looking down, directly into her eyes, “otherwise I’d say that you, Rose Tyler, are pretty unpredictable.” Rose smirked, sipping her morning drink. Her eyes almost instantly seemed more awake than previously, such was the power of tea to her. Big, light brown, same flecks, same hue, but somehow older even without lines.

“Older? Not wrong, but's a bit early to irritate me, innit?” she was smiling instead of actually angry.

“Without lines! Without lines.” The Doctor fake pouted, obviously having thought that on purpose or at least pretending very well that he had, “You seem to hear me a lot more than I hear you.”

“Shields always up, me.” She clamped her lips for a moment “An’ ‘s not like I go diggin’. You’re like… I dunno… staticy even when you’re not blockin’, comin’ in an’ out a bit.”

“I don’t usually have to think about telepaths in the TARDIS,” he shrugged, “At least ones that aren’t the TARDIS herself.”

“’s prolly it, then. Can’t ‘magine where I got the whole mind-thing ’cept for from her.” She sipped her tea, not removing her eyes from his and sighed happily. She loved that tea.

I know. His mental voice came, clear as day. He straightened his bow tie.

She laughed. “Gunna take some gettin' used to.”

“You’re telling me.”

“So,” she cleared her voice, cupping her mug with both hands and pulling herself up to sit on the counter, “Where we off to today?” Her excited smile was breaking through.

“Have to drop off the Ponds. Honeymoon. That’s a thing that humans do, right?”

“You know full well it’s a thing,” she narrowed her eyes playfully. “Where they goin’?”

The Doctor shrugged, “Anywhere they like.”
“Then where?”

“Anywhere you like.” He bopped her nose gently. Flirting. Definitely flirting. She didn’t seem unreceptive, scrunching her nose and giving him a knowing look like she was about to flirt back. Mutual flirting. Her eyes went over his shoulder slightly and she slid back on the counter, putting it more space between them. She’d come pretty close when she took her mug from him and they had stayed in close proximity to one another and neither of them had registered that until now when space had once again become a thing.

“Good morning,” Rose said over his shoulder to the entering Amy and Rory, the Doctor turned. Amy and Rory in matching two piece button up sleep clothes. Rose smiled. “How’d you sleep?”

“No mornings on the TARDIS,” said Amy in a matter-of-fact way, making a bee line for the coffee.

“Fine, thanks.” Rory said politely, sighing at his obviously still obstinate wife as she left the galley, filled mug in hand, the Doctor went stumbling after. “How did you sleep?” Rory was filling a cup with tea and taking as much care as Rose would.

“Wonderful. TARDIS beds, yeah?” Rory nodded in response. Rose took a long sip of her tea. “’s weird bein’ in my old room. Just as I left it.”

“When did you leave it, if you don’t mind my asking?” Rory sipped his tea, making pleasant conversation and obviously searching for some semblance of answer.

“’Cording to you? Few years ago. He blew up my job in 2005. Stuck with him for years after that. But ’s…” she twiddled her fingers, “timey-wimey, different times relative to who’s in it.”

“Like 5 minutes for him was 12 years for Amy,” Rory nodded.

“Xactly. Lived in a parallel world, it ran ahead. Even 2010s past for me.” She drained her cup, but kept holding it like a lifeline. “But I dunno how long it couldda been for him. Could be five minutes, could be a thousand years.”

“So you’re a person who’s from the past, lived in the future in a parallel world.” Rory summed up as he took a sip from his mug.

“Bout that, yeah.”

“Right.” Rory said, looking directly at her like he had accepted everything at face value. It was… refreshing. Rose couldn’t help but smile.

“What ‘bout you?” Rose tilted her head, “Didn’t get much but seems you’ve a story, too.”

“Oh. Uh. Waited two thousand years to bring my girlfriend out of a box.” He paused, “And I was plastic.” Rose hopped off the counter, mug in hand.

“Okay,” Rose smirked an nodded once towards him, pushing the galley door open with her bum. She laughed a little as they walked toward the console room, “Lookin’ pretty good for over two thousand, though.”

He huffed a little laugh, looking down at his unattractive and well-worn sleep clothes, “Thanks.”
“Amy…” the Doctor said as if about to explain something as he seemingly chased her as she left the galley in a huff. Amy whirled around to him.

“Alright, Raggedy man, who is she. You know more about her than River and you just aren’t saying,” she poked his chest with her finger, “Out with it.”

“Pond, I don’t know what to tell you other than what I have.” He very much didn’t know. Other than she had gotten married to the skinny one over there, he wasn’t sure what else had happened, much less what he’d have been able to explain to Amy.

“Is she River?” Any asked a little more than possibly intrigued as she took a big drink from her coffee.

He emitted a fairly exhausted noise. “No, she's not River.”

“But she is your girlfriend,” Amy stating it like it wasn’t really a question as if it were merely an observation, like it was simple.

“It’s …complicated.” He hadn’t meant it to but it came out as a grumble or sigh or both. Complicated. Best word for it. Complicated. Married to him-but-not-him-him, which, he supposed, made her not-married-married to him. Hyphens and partially understood thoughts everywhere. Very messy.

“Complicated,” Amy scoffed, “It’s not complicated.”

“Yes, because everything up to now has been quite simple.” He wasn’t certain if it was sarcasm or a lie but he’d settle for either, “My life is quite bumpy-wumpy and timey-wimey. River’s in the future and we still don’t know who she is, Rose was the past, and I very much know who she is.”

“And you love her.” It wasn’t a question. Amy was matter of fact about it.

He didn't say anything. Never said that to the woman in question, certainly wasn’t about to say it, for the first time, to someone not her. Though maybe that would be like training wheels. He could admit it to Amy and that would get him to say it to Rose.

She knew. She had to know. She was telepathic now. And she had married the other him. Married. Had to remember that. Seemed important. The other him would have told her how he felt about her her and likely for how long.

The silence was broken by two blondes seemingly chuckling as they left the galley. Good old Rory.


Rory sidled up near his wife, Rose meandering closer to the Doctor, “Who would want to go to a tree house for their Honeymoon?” Rory blinked.

“Lots of people!” The Doctors searched his memory, looking to Rose quickly, “We met some lovely trees, remember? Your first time out! Bet they’d love a tree house.”
“Why can’t we just have it here?” Amy said, managing to hop her way between Rose and the Doctor. Rose easily moved away, giving Amy space to hang on the Doctor excitedly.

“We’re not having it here,” Rory almost sighed.

“It’s not very exotic,” the Doctor concluded, “Any ideas, Rose?”

Rose had been hoping to be left out of it. She didn’t know these two and Amy didn’t seem to trust her much. “What about a beach? Some sun an’ swimmin’? There’s that beautiful one on—”

“Do we look like beach people?” said Amy, moving her hands up and down around her torso. Ginger, pale, … Rose guessed she had a point. “What about that place we heard about? The leisure palace on Midnight? Full spa!”

“Probably not a good idea,” cringed the Doctor.

“Probably not a good idea,” muttered Rose playfully. He shot her a look and she smiled. Oh, he had told her a lot of stories.

“And I know full well you’re a beach person. Rio? Ring a bell?” Amy ignored him, clearly illustrating that holes in her logic had no place right now.

“Spa.” Amy said with finality.

“Right. Honeymoon suite. Spaceship. Full spa on board. Big ship. Like a cruise without the sea sickness.” He plotted at the console, “Unless you want sea sickness, then I have a few suggestions, too—”

“No, that’s fine, isn’t it, Amy.” Rory said, turning to face his wife.

She took two stompy steps and stood beside Rory to whisper, “I’m not sure we can leave him alone with her. We still don’t know—”

“And I’m guessing he needs to know more than we do.” He whispered back. Now was probably not the time to mention to them that they were very bad at whispering and even Rose was noticing. “You remembered him in the middle of our wedding, they came right after. He hasn’t been able to take his eyes off of her for more than a second and I don’t think he knows much. They're not about to lay out their personal lives—"

“And why not?” Amy asked stubbornly.

“Personal lives are personal.”

“Tell you what,” the Doctor gained their attention with a slightly raised arm, “I’ll give you a communication device that goes directly to me and you can keep track of my whereabouts until you’re back or call when you want a ride home.”

“Sounds very reasonable.” Rory said easily, “Amy?”

“Fine,” she acquiesced to her husband before starting to march back to the corridor, likely to gather their things. She pointed at the Doctor, “But you pick up!”

The Doctor pulled the rematerialization lever.
Filler between episodes while I begin the arduous task of unraveling River from a very
River season.
Thanks for reading!
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Start of "A Christmas Carol"
(I'm horrible at sum-ups)

“You said beach!” The Doctor opened the door, “and here’s a beach!” He pulled open the doors to reveal a long, thin 15 foot wide beach stretching all the way to the horizon. Long stretch of light purple sand darkened by the blue water as it lapped on the beach. No people, just birds and various cool colors lit by a bright yellow sun.

The moment the light from the surroundings hit Rose's face, she lit up with an immense smile.

“Where are we?” Rose looked from him to the purple expanse outside gleefully, not yet leaving the TARDIS. The horizon reflected in her eyes as he spoke, warm colors only lighting up the already bright and warm colors of her irises.

“Polam Fourteen,” he said with pride, “Ninety percent of the planet is water, the other ten percent is beach. We must be on a South Eastern continent. Each continent is it’s own shade from green and purple at the poles to blue at the equator. The water has more salinity than any of the seas on Earth, would be very hard to sink here. The swimming's okay but the water tastes rubbish.”

“So you do still lick things!” Rose joked, elbowing him playfully and jumping happily at the sight of a new sky.

“Not as often! It’s a valid way of determining chemical make up!” He protested, “Taste buds are different, you never know.”

“Oh, you’re just showin’ off.” Rose eagerly said with her hands on his shoulder and she jumped for joy.

“You’re right. Must be West. Not so many seagulls at the East.” the Doctor said in his know-it-all tone as he suppressed his over-eager smile at her.

“You think you're so impressive.” She gleefully winked as she let her hand gently off his shoulder and took a step forward into the purple sand. Her trainers sunk into the sand a little and the Doctor caught her by the elbow to right her. They couldn’t help but laugh at the pure ridiculousness. Rose bounced a little, getting used to the slight sinking of her feet in the sand. Her stability regained, she breathed in slowly through her nose, smelling the air of a new planet and letting the new air wash over her. Rose looked happily into his eyes, smile insanely close to that smile he so wished for. “I love new planets.”

It had taken him a bit longer than he'd like to figure out an alien beach that wouldn't give her some reminders of the last beach they'd had been on together. Bad weather was avoided, breezes were a no, Earth was best to avoid. There was no need for a maudlin Rose Tyler, which he figured would be a gamble to near certainty if there was too much of a reminder. Especially if she really was staying.
It occurred to him that might have needed some narrowing down. *Staying* could be lots of things. *Staying*... in this universe? *Staying*... in the TARDIS? *Staying*... as close to him as humanly possible?

... *Staying* in her twenties seemed that it was a viable option for an answer, too. He’d have to ask about that.

But Rose had always been the direct sort, unlike him. Counter balance. *Staying* could just mean *staying*.

Right now his hand *staying* on her arm while they excitedly looked to a new horizon seemed like most likely of the options.

“In about a decade there should be colonists on the neighboring planet,” the Doctor pointed to the horizon on the left, “they’ll use this as a resort planet——”

Something in the Doctor's pocket started beeping and lighting up. “DOCTOR!” Amy's Scottish accent cracked through the Doctor’s trousers. Rose's smile didn’t fade, but stopped the progression as she laughed at herself and raised her eyebrows at where Amy's voice was seemingly coming from. He let go of Rose's elbow and she took a few steps toward the water, letting him fumblingly remove a communication device from his pocket.

He put the long, cylindrical object by his ear and mouth like a phone, “Amy! Ready to come back already?” He reached into the inside of the TARDIS and carried two folding chairs with him, holding the communicator to her head like a phone.

“No,” Amy paused, “*where are you*?”

“At the Beach!” He said with a gleeful hand toss up in the air like Amy would see it. He looked toward Rose, just a few feet away and already taking her shoes off while she looked excitedly to the water as he pushed open the chairs. “We're going swimming!”

“*Swimming*?” Amy’s voice sounded incredulous. “*You don’t swim*.”

“Amelia Pond!” The Doctor stood straight and turned his head to look offended at the communicator, “Of course I *swim*.”

“*Fine,*” Her Scottishness huffed, “*Go swimming*.” The communicator was cut off.

“Are you supposed to sit in the vortex waitin’?” Rose asked him though not facing him, trainers and socks in hand as she waded, ankle deep in the purples-blue water, edges of her rolled up trouser ankles getting a bit wet as very small waves lapped at her as she walked a few steps away. She watched the ripples in the water and small fish in the distance before she looked back at him, “We can do that if it'll make her less cross.”

“I have no idea.” He seemed a bit grumbly at that as he sat down in one of the chairs with an ungraceful plop.

“I’m upsettin' your timeline an' everyone in it.” Rose huffed to herself, running a hand through her hair in exasperation in almost the same way her husband had, like *he* had in a different body, walking a bit closer to him but staying in the waters' edge. “A woman coming outta nowhere and knows a lot 'bout you that you have history with? Doesn't sound familiar at all.” Rose said a bit sarcastically while she smirked, “Bound to be a bit cross, yeah?”

Ah, yes, Sarah Jane. They'd run into her and Rose was set off kilter, setting a tone for their next few
awkward months where he had put distance between her. For a likely good reason, but looking at the woman he'd thought he'd lost forever due to time and circumstance, he couldn't remember it for the life of him. He cleared his throat and smiled a bit, “Even the universe compensates. Amy will adjust but she’s stubborn.”

Rose snorted and smiled teasingly, “You’re one to talk ‘bout stubborn.”

“Says the woman who did what was impossible twice.” He rebutted. Rose just laughed, looking directly at the water by her feet while he had a smile injected into his voice, “Took the time vortex into your head and apparently didn’t let go, don’t think you can do that if you’re not in the stratosphere of ridiculously stubborn.”

Rose twisted her body back and forth, “’Spose so. ‘Splains the telepathy, right? Too stubborn to keep my thoughts to myself.”

“You were like that even before you were telepathic, Rose.” the Doctor quickly replied with a sweetly knowing look.

"That’s me," Rose chuckled silentlys "Too stubborn to keep my thoughts locked up, too stubborn to stay put.”

“—Too stubborn to age.” The Doctor asserted one of his assumptions out loud, wondering if she’d confirm or deny it. She didn’t feel wrong, just older. She just faced him and smiled, slowly making her way back to the shore toward him.

“Wellllll... you met Mum,” Rose laughed, “Pretty sure part of that’s genetic. An’ at least I won't haveta resort to becomin' a bitchy trampoline no matter how long it’s been.”

“How long has it been?” he asked, almost bashful to ask but very intrigued by the answer. She almost rolled her eyes but realized she had opened it up for him. He deserved answers.

“Long enough for my part Time Lord husband to have back problems,” She paused to skim her foot along the top of the water to splash him a little from a few feet away, “You?”

“No back problems.”

Rose smirked at his non-answer and walked back to the shore and out of the water, the dry sand sticking to the wet parts of her feet it came into contact with, coating the bottoms of her feet in purple. “You know what I mean. Hope it’s been a bit longer than the earth dates imply. ’s pretty fast, yeah? Like, new face, new desk top, an' don’t think I’ve missed the new paint job.” She pointed at the outside of the TARDIS as she sat in the chair beside him. “Not that they aren’t all very nice choices.” She fought the instinct to look at him, she knew it would only lead to blushing. Maybe it was because he looked young again, but she was starting to feel like a schoolgirl with a crush despite her advancing age, invisible though it may have been. “Re-did everythin'. No reminders. Are you tryina forget?”

He looked away, too, somehow talking about matters didn't touch his emotions as much as long as he didn't look at her.

“Happens with regeneration. Most times I change her about. Same man, new face, new everything.” He scrunched his nose, “And I kind of set the whole place on fire with that regeneration. It was a doozy. No one needed to get used to it so it could be anything I wanted it to be without any weird adjustment periods.”

“No one to travel with at the end?” Rose's voice seemed to falter and crack. That was the last thing
she'd wanted for him, friendship was the only thing that seemed to keep him afloat at the beginning. She hadn’t thought of what it would be like when it was taken away.

“I couldn’t,” he got quiet and his voice tinged itself with regret and amongst detachment, “made a few bad decisions, got a little reckless. Almost broke time.”

Rose saw through his attempted malaize, her eyes, concentrated on him through his words, stung her as if she were going to cry. Seeing that stung him similarly, not only could she see through him, but, as Rose Tyler often did, she empathized. Rose reached out and grasped his hand gently as she cleared her throat, erasing the sadness from her voice as best she could.

“Well, I already like at least one of your new decisions,” Rose smiled a little. He perked up, “Swimmin.” She stood, standing in front of him, pulling the hand she’d taken until he stood as well, “C’mon, you.”

The room was loud. Easily a hundred people, talking, smoking, laughing as the smell of cigars, cigarettes, hair product, and alcohol permeated everything. His nearness to Rose often served a extra purpose at this point of giving his nostrils a break while the vague strawberry shielded the assault of other scents.

“Where are you now?” came a Scottish voice over the hustle and bustle of celebration around him.

He plugged one ear and shouted into the thing that looked like a handset. “New Years, nineteen fifty one, about to be fifty two! We're at a party!” His blonde compatriot standing a few feet away making happy conversation with a skinny, dark-haired bloke.

Oh, not reminiscent at all. There were definitely no instincts to look away or growl or go to her side like they’d always been and let the people assume they were a couple like they always had. Definitely not. The initial beeping call of the need to answer a communicator was definitely not the only thing having stopped him from joining her immediately.

Denial was helping.

Rose weaved her way between people coming back toward the Doctor.

“A party?” Amy asked over the small speaker. He couldn't tell if Amy was jealous or simply disbelieving as the people around him were so loud. Rose appeared before him, smiling as she spoke into his formerly blocked ear.

Rose spoke loudly, trying to get herself heard over the roaring crowd even though she was close. “We’ve been invited to Frank's hunting lodge.”

The Doctor pulled the receiver away from his face, as to not project his loudness entirely into Amy's
ear, turning slightly to be have access to Rose's ear “Ask if we can bring Jeff!” Rose nodded and kissed his cheek quickly before she turned around, ready to weave through the people again.

“He’s just hoping for a New Year’s kiss,” he heard Amy grumble near the communicator to Rory or to herself but not quiet enough to know she wouldn’t be heard. Luckily Rose was on her way through the noisy crowd to make it to Frank again, unable to hear Amy’s assertion as the looks between himself and Rose were certainly not proving it wrong. Every so often she’d caught him looking at her, or he’d caught her looking at him. Easy to explain as each making sure the other was still real but as it had been days that excuse was increasingly less and less valid, even with the aforementioned and well-seated denial.

Maybe it was the new eyes, eyes that weren’t used to looking at a Rose Tyler. As if the new eyes had only heard tales and legends from the previous sets and now they were looking at the reality behind the legend. Like a Bigfoot. You can’t not stare at a Bigfoot once you’ve heard the legend.

…Maybe he shouldn’t compare Rose to Bigfoot. Rubbish comparison. She had far less hair. Same temper, but less hair.

And she was looking at him.

His eyes diverted instantly as he almost rolled them at Amy, “Oi! You are on your honeymoon! Don’t you have something to do? Full service spa! Five star dining! Two casinos! There’s even a waterslide! You can’t be bored.”

“There’s not a water slide.” He heard Rory mumble quietly.

“Deck 51, there’s a water side.” The Doctor said knowingly into the comms device, ”Go on, tell me I’m wrong.”

The communicator beeped off and he was left with a party and denial and, and and...

Sod it.

Frank was a lovely man. Talked a lot, had many a story and was friendly as all get out. And they’d all been invited back to his hunting lodge so the fun would keep going long beyond the toll of New Year. She’d ensured their other friend could also attend the after party, and Frank was infinitely amenable. Can’t really say no to Jeff at a party, she supposed. Her eyes darted back to the Doctor before she caught herself and swore in her head.

Why did she keep checking on him? He was a nearly thousand year old Time Lord who kept an eye on himself for hundreds of years without her, he wasn’t in any danger, and it wasn’t as if that was the face she had just spent decades with and was emotionally and legally attached to.

This one had quirks she wasn’t used to. Weird smiles, new companions, definitely odd eating habits, but seemed by and large to be the same brilliant, caring alien she’d known for far too long. But it was
those habits, tastes change, details change. Her inclusion in his life changed. Maybe he’d have wanted it to. Which is fine. She’d be in his life any way he wanted. Not as if she’d have anywhere to really go that was more home than the TARDIS anyway.

Okay, maybe she was emotionally attached to this one. *Bad Rose.*

Frank said something funny and she laughed, affording her a moment to have her eyes bounce through the crowd and see the Doctor, still with the communicator by his head, eyes quickly diverting from her like he’d just been kicked. She smiled.

Had to admire Amy, making sure he was okay. Good friend even if Rose was ninety percent sure Amy thought she was secretly trying to murder him. Amy had met that River woman, maybe she thought River was better suited to… which was fine. Rose wasn’t married to *this* Doctor. That’s fine. That’s fine.

If being called a hallucination a million times had taught her anything it was that saying something enough could eventually irritate her into *almost* believing it.

Was sweet smell addictive? Was he rubbed in some addictive alien candy coating? Must be it. And now it was coming back, having put the communication device back into his pocket and meandering through the crowd of other people to Rose’s side to join the conversation between Frank and Al.

It was just as effortless to put her arm in his as it had been for him to offer it.

“Can I offer you a ride, Rose? If your escort doesn’t mind, that is,” Frank’s smile shone and his eyes almost glistened at her.

“Thanks, but we have our own motor.”

She hadn’t said that. She smiled.

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They sat in pleasant silence on the jump seat, Rose sitting with her legs crossed across the lap of the Doctor as he read some inexplicably funny science text book from the 1960s. She absently held out a biscuit, he leaned and swerved his head to eat it from her hand as his hands hadn’t left the pages. She laughed at him, wiping her hand on his chest. On the console where it lie, the small communicator beeped several times.

“She’s callin’ *again*?” Rose held a biscuit incidentally just out of his mouth’s reach and looked toward the blinking, beeping nearby headset, she turned her head over her shoulder to the Doctor, “We didn’t even leave the TARDIS this time. What does she think I’m gonna do? Kill ya with sweets? Snog you to death?”

Both valid deaths, in his mind. He had slightly less valid ones such as ‘falling from 4 feet’ that made those seem downright glorious by comparison. A non-deathy version *may* have been a New Years
wish if not fairly sneakily and unceremoniously beaten to the punch by Jeff. Can’t really be mad at Jeff.

It beeped again.

“That’s not a ring.” His eyebrows raised quickly and he swallowed. He suddenly scrambled to get up being mindful enough to snatch the biscuit mid-scramble and speak with his mouth full of jam and crumbs, “It’s an alarm. Distress signal!” He stood up going to the communicator quickly and pushed a few knobs and buttons on the console. Rose righted herself and popped up along side him, closing their books and stashing them on the jump seat. “Time to go!” he typed into his display.

[Come Along, Pond.]

The TARDIS rematerialized on the roof of a building. The Doctor scurried to a chimney and put his ear to the echoey top of it and listened as his eyes ran along the spire of the building, erupting in purple sparks looking like it was casting lightning up toward the skies.

“What are we doing?” she said quietly, her ear positioned over the top of the chimney, mirroring his listening to the sounds and quiet mumbling they could hear.

“Eavesdropping.”

“Says who? Oh, give it here.” The voice was clearer than the others, grumbly, old.

“An’ why are we eavesdroppin’ through a chimney? Kinda need to save Amy an’ Rory here, Doctor.” Rose whispered quickly in a quiet moment.

“Yes, I’m eavesdropping to save Amy and Rory, aren’t you paying attention?”

The grumpy voice continued, “Look, petal, we already have a surplus population. No more people allowed on this planet. I don’t make the rules.”

“That man owes Charlie a quid.” Rose muttered before fully grabbing the Doctor's attention again. “An’ you might not be payin’ attention ‘cause you’re at a chimney.”

“I’m at a Chimney,” He nodded at the chimney, straining his ear to listen again.

“It’s Christmas Eve, yeah?” her eyes smiled at him as she pointed it out, “and this is a chimney. On a roof? On Christmas?”

“Christmas Eve and I’m on a chimney.” He looked excitedly at the hollow rectangle in question and back to Rose with puppy eyes.

“Oh no, hang on, I do,” Echoed the old man’s voice. Rose rolled her eyes at the grumbly voice and backed away from the chimney, making room for the Doctor to jump down with a smile.
The Doctor did a little hop for joy. He sat on the edge of the brick, balancing himself on the edge with his feet pointing into the stack.

“Geronimo!” he whispered as he straightened his back and slid down the chimney, Rose jumping excitedly at the lip as he looked up and smiled.

“Right, you lot. Poor, begging people. Off home and pray for a miracle,” bellowed the grumbly voice.

There was a sound of dust and rocks hitting hard floor.

The Doctor came tumbling out of the fireplace in a shower of soot. He landed on his bum roughly, but thankfully all the soot he’d dragged down with him had smothered the fire. He’d hate to have burned something Rose was so keen on staring at when she thought he wasn’t looking.

“Ah. Yes. Blimey. Sorry.” The Doctor scrambled to his feet, “Christmas Eve on a rooftop. Saw the chimney, my whole brain just went, what the hell.” He stuck his head back in the fireplace and shouted up the chimney, “Are you coming?!”

Not hearing an immediate reply, he skittered towards a family in the room with a little boy. “Don't worry, fat fellow will be doing the rounds later. I'm just scoping out the general chimney-ness. Yes. Nice size, good traction.”

“Fat fellow?” the little boy asked.

“Father Christmas, Santa Claus or, as I’ve come to know him, Jeff.”

The boy looked a bit put off, “There's no such person as Father Christmas.”

“Oh, yeah?” The Doctor reached into his pocket and pulled out an aging, old black and white photograph, “Me and Father Christmas, Frank Sinatra's hunting lodge, 1952. Frank got a little handsy with the lady taking the photo. See him at the back with the blonde? Albert Einstein. The three of us together. Watch out. Okay? Stay off the naughty list.” He noticed Rose enter the large room behind the small family, “How did you get there?!”

“I used the door,” Rose pointed behind her to the big, obvious door she had just come through, walking past the family with a small, quick smile and nod.

“I thought you were right behind me!” he pointed at the chimney he’d just exited behind him.

“An’ now I’m right in front of you,” Rose walked up to him quickly, “I didn’t fancy getting covered in soot, I don’t need to make an entrance. I’m not you.” Rose paused a microsecond as she wiped a smudge of soot off his face with her finger, “or Jeff.”

The Doctor pointed to a large machine in an alcove, Rose ran up to it with him.

“Ooo. Now, what's this then? I love this. A big flashy lighty thing.” Rose hopped excitedly at his side, “That's what brought us here. Big flashy lighty things have got me written all over them. Not actually, but give me time, and a crayon.” Rose produced a permanent marker from her pocket, the Doctor widened his eyes like a big happy puppy as he took it. “What other toys have you got in there?!”

“Oh, shut up,” her eyes narrowed playfully, “not as many as you.”

“Now! Big flashy, lighty thing is connected to the spire in your dome, yeah?” He started walking
towards the old man and family, waving the permanent marker in his hand. Rose followed, but stopped immediately by a large, cement-like casket with a window. “And it controls the sky. Well, technically it controls the clouds, which technically aren't clouds at all. Well, they're clouds of tiny particles of ice. Ice clouds. Love that.”

“Who's she?” Rose looked though the window at the frozen woman with her eyes closed.

“Nobody important,” the older man said like a throw-away statement.

Rose huffed a small laugh. “Been there, Mate.” She pat the side of the casket.

“Blimey, that's amazing. Do you know, in nine hundred years of time and space, I've never met anyone who wasn't important before.” The Doctor was walking back to the machine again, Rose snagging the slightly uncapped marker from him before fully re-capping it and sticking it back into her pocket. “Now, this console is the key to saving that ship, or I'll eat my hat. If I had a hat.”

“You have several hats.” Rose piped in from beside the casket.

“Yes, but they're deliberately not here.” He replied quickly as he plodded away at the controls that did nothing but beep angrily at him, “I'll eat someone's hat. Not someone who's using their hat. I don't want to shock a nun, or something. Sorry, rambling, because this isn't working!”

The old man grumbled, walking unworriedly behind the Doctor. “The controls are isomorphic. One to one. They respond only to me.”

“Oh, you fibber. Isomorphic. There's no such thing.” The Doctor huffed indignantly.

Rose raised an eyebrow. He knew there was. He very much knew there was. He'd seen it, used it, even programmed it before. She wasn't entirely sure why the Doctor would lie but she didn’t argue as much as she sucked in her lips and narrowed her eyes at the observation. Certainly there was a reason for it.

The old man flipped a switch and the noise coming from it stopped, then flicked the switch again to turn it back on. The Doctor attempted to do the same, but his total reaction from the big machine were truncated beeps. He scanned the machine, then the old man before turning off the screwdriver with a huff. “These controls are isomorphic.”

The man smirked, almost smug, “The skies of this entire world are mine. My family tamed them, and now I own them.”

“You can’t own a sky,” said Rose.

“Tamed the sky?” The Doctor almost laughed, “What does that mean?”

The man turned as if making a proclamation to the entire room, “It means I'm Kazran Sardick.” His voice seemed to reverberate around the room as he turned from the Doctor and walked away. “How can you possibly not know who I am?”

“We're from out of town,” The old throw-away statement flowed easily from Rose's mouth as if she’d spent her life saying it.

“And we need your help.” the Doctor added.

“Make an appointment,” the old man almost cheerfully grumbled, dismissing them with a wave of his hand.
Rose crossed her arms, looking the man up and down, “How ’bout now? Now’ll do.”

The Doctor moved more menacingly and a slowly toward Mr. Sardick. “There are four thousand and three people in a spaceship trapped in your cloud belt. Without your help, they’re going to die.”

“Yes.” The old man stated like none of this was news to him and none of it swayed his opinion.

“You don’t have to let that happen,” said the Doctor quite matter-of-factly.

“I know, but I’m going to. Bye, bye. Bored now,” the master of the house quickly motioned to one of his servants and them, “Chuck.” He waved dismissively.

Two men in dark glasses quickly moved toward Rose and the Doctor, both quickly moving out of their reach as they turn to usher the family out as well, both quickly facing the old man as he settled into his brown leather armchair. Both crossed their arms as they looked at the very calm though obviously ill-tempered man.

“Ooo, look at you, looking all tough now.” Sardick nearly snarled his words, barely registering the two of them as anything more than annoyances.

“There are four thousand and three people we won’t allow to die tonight. Do you know where that puts you?”

“Where?” The old man challenged curiously.

The Doctor’s voice got deep and his eyes hard, “Four thousand and four.” Rose glanced at the Doctor’s face, it holding a little bit of the righteous anger of the Time Lord. She saw him cover the obvious storm in his eyes with a vague smile and passive face and filed it away. His last self was filled with ice and fire, but this one seemed to be a slow, all-consuming burn.

The old man made a noise a bit like a dismissive laugh, “Was that a sort of threat-y thing?”

“Oh, don’t be thick.” Rose huffed impatiently, apparently having inherited her husband’s intolerance for stupidity as she rolled her eyes, “It was him saying he’s not going to let you die. You letting four thousand people crash just ’cause it doesn’t do anything for you is gonna make the last bit of what makes you human shrivel up an’ die. An’ we’re not letting you die inside. Every person is worth savin’ even if they’re a cranky ol’ sod.”

“I think I preferred it when it was a threat-y thing.” He waved over his servants, who quickly attached to the Doctor’s and Rose’s arms to pull them backward.

“Oi!” Rose wriggled and slapped the hands around her, trying to get them to let go as the servant pulled her toward the exit door.

“What ever happens tonight, remember you brought it on yourself.” The Doctor pulled his arm from the servant’s grasp and walked the same direction they were pulling Rose.

“Yeah, yeah, right.” He turned his back and gestured gently for them to be pulled away, “Get them out of here. And next time, try and find me some funny poor people.”

The guard seemed to re-grasp the Doctor’s arm and shoved him ahead until he was about to be summarily dismissed at almost the same time as Rose and the now-herded, cowering family. The little boy quickly stopped and picked a stray piece of coal that had preceded the Doctor's entrance. The boy quickly threw it and it hit the old man.
Old Sardick speedily went to the boy, raising his hand in anger about to strike the boy.

Multiple sources shouted for him to stop. The Doctor and Rose both trying to break free to them. Rose grew hot beneath the servant's touch and pulled his hand away like he was burned, quickly re-grasping her.

Surprisingly, the old man had stopped, his hand still in mid air, in striking distance of the boy with a mixture of a scowl on his face and horror in his eyes.

Rose's eyes dimmed as she let out a breath, looking distinctly tired.

“Get him out of here,” Sardick barked, “Get that foul-smelling family out of here. Out!”

The Doctor went forward, Rose shook the attempt at a re-placed hand to her arm of her with a stare and some well-timed golden eyes, flinching the man back in shock and fear as she followed the Doctor.

“What? What do you want?” grumbled the old man, re-resting on his chair.

“A simple life,” the Doctor resisted the urge to look at the nearby blonde, quickly following his words up, “But you didn't hit the boy.”

“Well, I will next time,” the old man grumbled. Rose growled again, the Doctor waved her down.

“You see, you won't,” he took a step backward, looking around the room. “Now why? What am I missing?”

“Get out. Get out of this house.” Sardick angrily instructed. At that, Rose sat on his other arm chair and crossed her legs, un-moving.

“The chairs. Of course, the chairs. Stupid me, the chairs.” He looked at the seats, one Rose was nestled in a few feet away from the grumpy man. “There's a portrait on the wall behind me. Looks like you, but it's too old, so it's your father. All the chairs are angled away from it. Daddy's been dead for years, but you still can't get comfortable where he can see you.” He waved his hand and pointed to the corner of the large portrait without looking at it again, “There's a Christmas tree in the painting, but none in this house, on Christmas Eve. You're scared of him, and you're scared of being like him, and good for you, you're not like him, not really. Do you know why?”

“Why?”

“Because you didn't hit the boy.” He offered his hand to Rose, helping her gently out of the chair. With Rose at his side he took her arm in his and tipped his head at the man like he were wearing an invisible hat, “Merry Christmas, Mister Sardick.”

“I despise Christmas,” grumbled the man from his chair.

The servants return and the Doctor and Rose walked past them out the door. The old man grumbled something at his servants as the two left.

Rose learned a bit against his arm as they walked out toward the door, noting that it was very much not the direction of the TARDIS. “Charlie would love this. Bit Dickensian, yeah?”

“He’s quite the Scrooge,” The Doctor grumbled quietly.

They left out the big doors on to the street outside, Rose hugging herself gently against the cold. He
quickly took off his jacket and hung it over her shoulders, literally and figuratively coating her in his sugary smell. She couldn’t help but inhale slowly through her nose as they walked to the street quickly, the Doctor twirling around to look at the sky, the building, the spire, everything as he pulled the communicator out of his trouser pocket and hit a button.

It hadn’t occurred to her that she hadn’t seen him without a jacket until now. While they changed for the wedding in the same room, she had been too overwhelmed to peek before the coat with tails had been properly applied and while they had aimed to swim at the beach, that was easily thwarted by throngs of angry jellyfish. There he was, collared and gridded white shirt, dickie-bow and brown braces. Quite a departure from what she was used to. Wider shoulders. Wider in general, his old self having been lean, this one was… a bit fit. All.. wider. InIjust thright places. The whole look was interesting to take in and try to resist staring at. She flinched at herself. Bad Rose. Focus.

“Amy.” The Doctor spoke into the handset, allowing Rose to come up and put her head a bit closer by the set as well.

“Have you got a plan yet?” Rose could barely make out her words until she stood closer to the Doctor, her chin almost on his shoulder as she stood beside him.

“Yes, I do,” The Doctor replied quickly.

“Are you lying?” the voice cracked through.

“Yes, he is.” Rose said quietly but loud enough so Amy could hear her as she looked at the Doctor, eyes momentarily narrowing again, taking note that it was the second time he's out-and-out-lied, in the span of a few minutes.

The Doctor rolled his eyes at his two clever women, “Yes, I am.”

“Don't treat me like an idiot.” Amy's strong voice came out of the handset.

The quieter voice of Rory came through, “Was he lying?”

Amy's voice was quieter, too, obviously speaking to Rory, “No, no.”

“Okay. The good news. I've tracked the machine that unlocks the cloud belt. I could use it to clear you a flight corridor and you could land easily.”

“Oh, hey. Hey, that's great news.” Amy sounded happy.

“...But I can't control the machine,” he admitted.

“Less great.”

“But we've met a man who can.” Rose, trying to inject a little hope into Amy's voice.

“—and he hates us.” The Doctor ruined it.

“Were you being extra charming and clever?” Amy sounded a bit breathless, but even that couldn’t stop her snark. Half of Rose’s mouth twitched up a bit.

“Well he was only rude twice,” Rose replied on an exhale.

“Oh, so he was being very charming and clever,” grumbled Amy, “On his best behavior, really.”

“Sir? Sir.” The man from the family was walking up to the Doctor.
“Here’s Rose.” He quickly gave his thin communicator to Rose, who fumbled with it a bit as she put it to her ear as she placed her arms through the armholes of his coat. She stepped away to give the Doctor a minute with the man.

“Hi Amy…” she put the communicator to her ear like a phone as the voice on the other end changed with only a very Scottish huff as a warning and fumbled British confusion to follow. Rose sighed and smiled a bit, “Hi, Rory.”

“…Sorry, fish?” Rose heard the Doctor, pulling her attention from Rory. She quickly shook herself back to communication.

“Rory, we can’t land the TARDIS and get you off, she’s havin’ a problem lockin’ on, otherwise we’d just evacuate everyone that way.” Rose bit her lip, pausing in her explanation, “But we’ll get you out, promise.” She spared a look to the Doctor, his hand being enthusiastically shaken by a man with goggles.

“Thank you. Bless you once again, sir.”

“Fish?” the Doctor looked toward a bit of movement nearby. A shoal of tiny fish was swimming around a circular street lamp.

Rory's voice came clearly out of the device, “Rose, the Captain says we've got less than an hour. What should we be doing?”

“I… I donno, just… Hold on, Rory.” Rose said, clearly exasperated.

“Kinda have to, Rose. Bit bumpy with the impending crash and all.” Rory said.

“Fish. Fish that can swim in fog.” The Doctor looked back at Rose for a second before he raised his fingers toward the flock of fish. “I love new planets.” Rose smiled at the Doctor. His boyish glee warming her heart despite the dire situation and cold weather. He was too distracted by the shoal of tiny fish to notice, which made it even sweeter. The little fish nibbled at the Doctor's outstretched fingers. “Now, why would people be frightened of you tiny little fellows? Look at you, sweet little fishy-wishies. Mind you, fish in the fog.” He muttered to himself.

Rose put her hand over the receiver for a moment, “Doctor… Fog is clouds… fish in fog so fish in clouds….” She removed her hand quickly, “Rory. I think we’ve a plan.”

“They’ve a plan, apparently.” Rory's voice was different. He must have been telling Amy.

“Give me that,” her voice became clearer as she apparently took hold of the device, “A plan? Real plan?”

“Well, some of a plan,” Rose admitted.

“Give me the Doctor.” Amy instructed as if she had been a child. Rose sighed a bit, her attitude being tamped down as best she could as she thrust her arm to the Doctor as she looked at him.

*Rude and Ginger. Two for two.* The Doctor cringed and mouthed a sorry to Rose before putting the device to the side of his head.

“Amy?”

“We have one hour, and then we crash.” Amy’s voice announced through the speaker.
Rose glanced up at the town clock. 11 pm. She looked at the Doctor.

“I know.”

Singing came in from over the town speakers, surrounding them with the sound. Rose blinked and looked around, a small smile forming slowly on her face.

“Doctor? How are you getting us off here?” Amy’s voice came through.

“Oh, just give me a minute,” he instructed before thinking aloud as he was prone to in many regenerations, “So, that ship needs to land. But it can't land unless a very bad man suddenly decides to turn nice just in time for Christmas Day.” The song echoed around the streets, hopeful and sweet… though a bit loud and distracting.

“Doctor, I can't hear you.” Amy’s voice shouted through the device, “What is that? Is that singing?”

“A Christmas carol.”

“A what?”

“A Christmas Carol!” It seemed to occur to him as he said it and he smiled. Rose had already said it, he looked at her. *Dickensian.*

*Fog is clouds, and who controls the clouds?* Rose asked in his mind.

“Kazran Sardick.” He smiled at her, prompting hers to grow along with his.

“Doctor!” exclaimed the voice from his small metal communicator.

The Doctor looked up to the top floor of the large building they’d just exited, “Merry Christmas, Kazran Sardick.” He turned and smiled slightly at Rose, speaking into the handset. “Start of a plan. Gotta go.” He clicked the communicator off, Rose jumping elatedly at his side attached to his arm.

Her grin was growing, teeth gleaming as she spoke, “…We’re gonna owe Charlie a few quid in royalties after this.”
A projection started, beamed across the doors and a great wall across for the sleeping man, apparently having fallen asleep on his big, leather chair where he had growled at he and Rose to leave.

A small boy spoke, the sound making the old man stir but not completely wake. “Hello, my name is Kazran Sardick. I'm twelve and a half, and this is my bedroom. This is my top secret special project. For my eyes only. Merry Christmas.”

“Kazran!” the bellowing man in the projection looked just like the painting kept across the room. Rose looked between the two before her eyes settled on the old man in the chair, whose eyes shot open at the very sound of the voice. The deep voice resonating visible fear throughout the man’s face as his eyes rested on the projected face of none other than his father. “Kazran! Kazran, what are you doing? What are you doing? I've warned you before about this, you stupid, ignorant, ridiculous child!”

Rose watched as the old man watched with a reminiscent horror the exchange between his father and the boy. Himself. A scared, young boy who had nothing but hope a curiosity about the fish.

“That's enough! You'll be singing to them next, like gypsies!”

Old Kazran flinched every time his father spoke, like a Pavlovian response.

“What does it matter what fish like?! You don't listen to people, you listen to me!”

The boy on the screen was slapped back, the old man flinched back as if he had been hit. “Ow! I'm sorry, Father.”

“This is my house. While you're under my roof, you'll obey my instructions. I don't care what you…”

Rose watched the look of horror on his face while the old man struck the boy and gently touched him on the shoulder, the Doctor at her side. He turned his head to her as if she’d come out of nowhere.

“It's alright.” She left her hand comfortingly on his arm, as she squatted at the side of the chair to look up at him.

“What have you done? What is this?” the old man grumbled, looking angrily at Rose and the Doctor standing behind her squatted form. He still hadn’t shaken her hand off his arm but looked cross. The Doctor moved to the other chair and plopped down.

“Found it on an old drive. Sorry about the picture quality. Had to recover the data using quantum enfolding and a paperclip,” he waggled his hands as old Sardick shrugged off Rose’s arm and got up quickly as went to a pull to call his attendants. Rose stood and turned to follow him with her eyes but sat on the arm of the chair as he grumbled at the pull rope. “Oh, I wouldn't bother calling your servants.” the Doctor piped in as the pull resulted with no men stomping in the room to the old man's aid. “They quit. Apparently they won the lottery at exactly the same time, which is a bit lucky when you think about it.”
Sardick grumbled, “There isn’t a lottery.”

“Very lucky, then.” Rose amended dryly.

“Who are you?”

“Tonight?” the Doctor smiled, his eyes darting to Rose and back to the old man, “We’re the Ghosts Of Christmas Past.”

The voices of the projection pulled the old man’s attention as he watched his younger self cower and cry from his father. “Mrs Mantovani will be looking after you tonight. You stay here till she comes. Do you understand? Do you understand?”

“Did you ever get to see a fish when you were a kid?” the Doctor asked, his attention vacillating between the projection and the distracted man.

The grumpy man looked at the projection on the wall, himself as a small boy crying. “No. I cried all night, and I learned life's most invaluable lesson.”

“Ah. Which is?” the Doctor queried, having learned many lessons himself.

“Nobody comes.”

“Well that’s a rubbish lesson,” snorted Rose.

“And entirely untrue,” he indicated Rose with his head while looking at Kazran, “You might need to learn a new lesson.”

“Get out,” the grumble old Kazran’s anger wound up, “Get out of my house!”

“Okay.” The Doctor took Rose’s hand as they stepped backward toward the exit, “Okay, but we’ll be back. Way back. Way, way back.”

The Doctor pushed the window further open as Rose went in to the warm room ahead of him. A child's room, the same they had just seem on the projection, little boy in tears where they had left seeing him on screen. “See? We’re back.”

The little boy version of Kazran sniffled and looked up quickly, wiping the tears from existence as fast as he could, “Who are you?”

“Hi, I'm the Doctor. I'm your new babysitter,” he waved his arms about before pointing to the woman beside him, “This is Rose. She holds the toys.”

Rose looked at him, her mouth pulled itself into a bemused smile, “Really?”

“Where’s Mrs Mantovani?” the boy looked shocked at the prospect.
“Oh, you'll never guess. Clever old Mrs Manters, she only went and won the lottery.”

The boy had a puzzled look on his face, “…There isn't any lottery.”

“I know.” The Doctor smiled, getting a bit smarmy, “Lucky.”

“But Mrs Mantovani's always my babysitter.”

Rose and the Doctor approached the monitor, still recording.

“Times change. Wouldn't you say?” the Doctor tilted his head and spoke loudly at the monitor as Rose waved, “You see? Christmas Past.”

“Who are you talking to?” he looked between the two adults talking directly to his computer, likely having forgotten in all the hubbub that it was still recording.

“We’re talkin' ta you.” Rose told him as she smiled at the monitor, “Now, Kazran, your past is going to change. Means your memories will too. Bit scary, though, you'll get the hang of it. Make some tea an' enjoy the ride, yeah?”

The boy looked at them both, “I don't understand.”

The Doctor smiled and looked directly into the little Kazran's face, “I'll bet you don't. I wish I could see your face.” He stood and walked around the room animatedly as Rose stayed beside Kazran as they watched him flit around. “Right then, your bedroom. Great. Let's see. Cupboard!” He threw open the doors and looked around the cupboard. “Big cupboard. I love a cupboard. Do you know, there's a thing called a face spider. It's just like a tiny baby's head with spider legs specifically evolved to—"

“—Doctor,” Rose cleared her throat. He looked at her and she scrunched her nose and shook her head quickly.

“Right. So.” He clapped his hands and bounced back to little Kazran. “What are we going to do? Eat crisps and talk about girls? I've never actually done that, but I bet it's easy. Girls? Yeah?” He turned to Rose, “Maybe you should leave for this. May get... gooey.”

“Are you really a babysitter?” asked the boy in a combination of disbelief and amusement.

“I think you'll find I'm universally recognized as a mature and responsible adult.” The Doctor flipped out the psychic paper.

Kazran looked confused, “It's just a lot of wavy lines.”

Doctor turned it towards himself and looked. “Yeah, it's shorted out,” he looked a bit off, “Finally, a lie too big.”

Rose laughed, “Oh, please, if anything I’m the babysitter, you hold the toys.”

“Ooh! Toys. I love toys. Toys toys toys…” he looked around the room, books, a computer, and a bed, but no real toys to speak of. “There don’t seem to be any. What’re the toys I should hold?”

Rose smirked, “I’ve been through your pockets, I know there’s toys in there.”

“And candy.” He quickly pulled a paper bag out of his trouser pocket and offered it to Kazran, “Jelly baby?” The boy shook his head and he retrieved one for himself before the paper bag seemed to disappear back into the pocket. “Okay, no, she's not really a babysitter, nor am I, but it's Christmas
Eve. You don't want a real one. You want us.”

“Why? What's so special about you?”

“Have you ever seen Mary Poppins?” he popped the Jelly baby into his mouth. Rose cringed, thinking of how very old those must have been.

“No?” the boy blinked.

The Doctor crewed and swallowed, “Good, because that comparison would've been rubbish.”

Rose tilted her head, “I dunno, mysterious lady, mad trips, bigger-on-the-inside bag an’ all that. Obviously a Time Lady.”

The Doctor shot her a look before looking back to Kazran. “Yes, so, Fish in the fog. Fish in the clouds.”

“My dad's invented a machine to control the cloud belt. Tame the sky, he says. The fish'll be able to come down, but only when we let them. We can charge whatever we like.”

“Tame the sky. Human beings. You always manage to find the boring alternative, don't you?” Rose smacked him on the shoulder absently. “You want to see one? A fish. We can do that. We can see a fish.”

“Aren't you going to tell me it's dangerous?” sighed little Kazran.

“Would it stop you if we did?” asked Rose.

“Well, no...” the child blinked, answering honestly.

The Doctor clapped, “Okay!”

Rose grabbed the recorder, winking at the Doctor. She kept it pointing at the Doctor and little Kazran. The Doctor quickly went through his pockets and unloaded what he found in them onto the bed. Several action figures among the random kit before he found a ball of twine. Rose picked up and presented an action figure. The Doctor's eyes flicked to her movement and nearly blushed at her smirk as she moved the action figure's arms.

“Oh, shut up.” He teased, unwinding the ball of twine and looping it around his screwdriver.

Rose sandwiched the young boy between herself and the Doctor as he held his hand up. Twine wrapped around his finger and out the closed door while his screwdriver whirred on automatic.

“Are there any face spiders in here?” the little boy looked around the cupboard, reticent to touch any of the sides.

“Nah, not at this time of night.” The Doctor said matter-of-factly, “They'll all be sleeping in your
mattress.” Rose hit him on the arm.

She put her arm around the boy’s shoulders and gently pulled him to her side softening his fear as she half hugged the child, “Don't worry, they’re usually not in this galaxy. He’s bein’ a clod.”

“What kind of tie is that?” the boy seemed to have the question all queued up.

“A cool one.” The Doctor replied. Rose snorted quietly, the sound muffled by her attempt to cover it with her hand.

“Why is it cool?”

Rose distracted the boy from his need to get an answer to get her own, “Why are you really interested in fish, sweetheart?”

“My school. During the last fog belt, the nets broke and there was an attack. Loads of them. A whole shoal. No one was hurt, but it was the most fish ever seen below the mountains.”

“Were you scared?”

Kazran exhaled softly, “I wasn't there. I was off sick.”

“Ooo, lucky you.” The Doctor mused. The boy looked off a bit lower.

Rose shook her head, “Not lucky. Wanted to see 'em, didn’tcha?”

“It's all anyone ever talks about now. The day the fish came. Everyone's got a story.” He sighed. He let quiet envelope them for a beat before he tilted his head at Rose, “Why are you recording this?

“One day you might needta see this. Might be your story.” She smiled, putting the recorder down on a shelf facing them. Sitting just below the shelf she put it on so the view of young Kazran and the Doctor wasn’t obstructed.

“Do you pay attention at school, Kazran?”

“Sorry, what?” the young man blinked as if he'd completely missed something.

“Because you're not paying attention now.” The string tugged his finger. “Shush.” The Doctor stood and cracked the door. Kazran popped up quickly and gripped the Doctor's arm, stopping him from leaving.

“Doctor, are you sure?”

“Trust me.” The Doctor smiled.

“Okay.” The boy sounded wary.

“Oi. Eyes on the tie. Look at me,” the Doctor instructed as the boy turned his head to look. “I wear it and I don't care. Trust me, Kazran. Do you trust me?”

“Yes.” The boy sounded much more certain.

“That's why it's cool.” He took Rose's hand in his for a moment, “Wait here with Kazran.” She tightened her arm around Kazran's shoulder for a second and smiled to the boy. “Just a mo.”

He opened the door and slipped out, quietly closing the door behind him as he slowly moved toward the dangling sonic and the small fish investigating it.
The Doctor wiggled a finger toward the fish probing this blinking screwdriver, “Hello, fishy. Let's see. Interesting. Crystalline fog, eh? Maybe carrying a tiny electrical charge. Is that how you fly, little fishy?” The fish reflected light off its scales as it swam backwards and toward the blinking light, green from the screwdriver and silver and gold and shadow with the Doctor walking around it. “Little energy fishy.”

Kazran's voice was muffled by the solid door, “What is it? What kind? Can I see?”

“Just stay there a moment.” The Doctor projected as quietly as he could so they could hear him through the door but he wouldn’t scare the fish.

“Is it big?”

“Nah, just a little one,” the Doctor said a bit louder to the closed door while he bobbed his head around the small fish, lowering his voice as not to scare it, “So, little fellow, what do you eat?”

Rose cracked the door and peeked out, watching the Doctor weave smoothly around the blinking light from his screwdriver. It was rare to see this him move smoothly, not jerk or bumble or move quickly. She smiled, leaving it open a crack as she looked down to Kazran and whispered. “You know what that means, yeah?”

“What?” the child blinked.

“It means we go look!” she said quietly.

“He told us to wait.”

“Yeah. He did, and we waited…” she slowly looked to the tiny crack she left in the door, “so…”

“You sure you’re the babysitter?” asked Kazran. Rose waggled her eyebrows at him.

“I never said I was a mature and responsible adult.” Rose opened the cupboard door and Kazran got ahead of her.

They were only a foot out the cupboard just as a large shark swam in and devoured the little fish and the sonic screwdriver in one big, toothy snap. Rose and Kazran jumped backward.

“No, no! I said wait there!” the Doctor said as he quickly scrambled toward them.

“You also said it was little!” Rose said as she grabbed Kazran from ahead of her and pulled him back against her body and stumbled backward quickly into the cupboard.

The Doctor rushed into the small room with them as the shark closed in on him. “It was little!”

They quickly slammed the door closed, Rose throwing herself around Kazran like a protective shield as a loud thump occurred. She backed off the boy carefully.

“…What's happening?” the boy said fearfully.

“Well, concentrating on the plusses, you've definitely got a story of your own now.” The door shook and the Doctor braced it with his body nervously. “Also, I got a good look at the fish, and I think I understand how the fog works, which is going to help us land a spaceship in the future and save a lot of lives. And I bet I get some very interesting readings off my sonic screwdriver when I get it back.”

There was a thud against the door. Rose pulled Kazran closer, pulling him with her arm on his chest and shoving him behind her pressed up against the wall, sandwiching him between her body and the
shelves of the cupboard. She looked around for anything useful or any other way out.

Then there was silence.

“Has it gone?” the three of them heard just their breaths in the beat of silence as little boy Kazran looked to a frantic looking Doctor around Rose’s blocking body, “What’s it doing?”

The Doctor looked a little scared and thoughtful, twisting his fingers slightly, “What do you call it if you don’t have any feet, and you’re taking a run-up?”

It broke through the door. Rose kept Kazran’s body as blocked as she could with her own.

“It’s going to eat us. It’s going to eat us.” Kazran repeated. Rose pat his shoulder ungracefully as she tried to soothe him, “Is it going to eat us?”

It took a moment to register that the shark was stuck in the cupboard door.

“Well, maybe we’re going to eat it, but I don’t like the odds,” the Doctor said quickly, “It’s stuck, though. Let’s see. Tiny shark brain. If I had my screwdriver, I could probably send a pulse and stun it.”

“Well, where’s your screwdriver?!” the boy asked with wide eyes.

“Well, concentrating on the plusses, within reach. You know, there's a real chance the way it's wedged in the doorway is keeping its mouth open.”

“There is?” Kazran’s eyes were wide, unable to leave the open-mouthed shark lodged in the only exit.

“Just agree with me, because I’ve only got two goes, and then it's Rose's turn.” The Doctor cringed, rolling up his sleeves past his elbows.

“Two goes?”

“Two arms,” the Doctor quickly pushed up his sleeves and wriggled his fingers, “Right, then.”

“Careful!” Rose quickly said, “You are not losing another bloody hand in my presence!”

“Oi, Language! Okay. Geronimo. Open wide.” He dove forward immediately, sticking one arm into the throat of the shark, feeling a wet and gooey sensation until quickly hitting his metal, hard and familiar screwdriver. Hoping the shark hadn’t eaten anything texturally similar, he pulled quickly, fearing the moment her did it would free the shark from the doorway. Suddenly he felt two sets of warm hands pulling him backward violently as the shark chomped it’s jaws closed and shook an inch further in the room. The Doctor looked at what he retrieved.

“Half my screwdriver?” the Doctor shook it and pointed it at the shark, who was struggling, still largely stuck in the doorway, frame creaking and cracking as the shark’s forward motion started to give way. The screwdriver beeped and sputtered.

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Kazran’s eyes widened each time the shark made even a millimeter’s worth of headway. Rose looked between the Doctor immediately to her left and the boy pressed against her back, blocking him as much as she could with her body. She closed her eyes as she head the Doctor fidget and shake the screwdriver quickly again as he bid the half to work. He stepped back, closer to Rose as the three of them huddled, the two adults blocking the child from harm. Rose clamped her eyes shut, the golden glimmer encased under her eyelids as again her flesh grew hot.
She looked at the Doctor. Calm face as he shook the half screwdriver hurriedly. It quickly seemed to come to life, whirring oddly while the green light shine brightly.

The shark fell where it was, as if just having gotten itself un-stuck from it's place in the door. Rose’s eyes faded instantly back to honey brown. The Doctor quickly ran around a pulled the tail, sliding the big, stunned shark outside to the balcony just outside the window. He saw just the end of Rose's fading eyes with curiosity but couldn’t do much more than file it away as he carefully tugged the shark out.

It didn’t move much.

Rose didn’t realize how heavily she was resting on the shelves behind her and Kazran until the little boy edged his way closer to the shark and she seemed to scramble for the support of the cupboard, knocking something noisily off one of the shelves.

The noise pulled the Doctor’s attention and he hopped over the shark and back through the room.

“Rose?”

“‘m fine. Just tired.” She waved him off, “Long day, scary shark. May not be completely used to this any more. Outta TARDIS shape, I think.”

“Good thing. You’d already a stubborn, time travelling woman who finds trouble and likes getting lost,” he paused, “let's not have you be a big blue rectangular cuboid made of wood. I’d get you confused.” The Doctor smiled.

Rose smirked at his bad joke and shook her head, distracted by the sight of Kazran staring out the window at the shark.

Who was still not moving.

Rose regained her balance and they both went to Kazran’s side as he shuffled a little closer to his open window and the shark on the terrace. Rose laid her hand on Kazran’s shoulder and becomes him closer to the shark. The shark thrashed as much as it could, which wasn’t much. Kazran sat beside the shark and tentatively stroked it’s back.

“I think it’s sick,” he said quietly as the Doctor came outside as well, Rose sliding in to sit beside the boy, her eyes running over the shark.

“Half my screwdriver's still inside it,” he looked at the partially gooed and digested screwdriver. It occurred to him that it was the second one Rose had known that met a gooey end. He frowned at it, “What's the big fishy done to you? Swallowed half of you, that's what. Half a screwdriver, what use is that? Bad, big fishy.”

“Half screwdriver we can manage, we can make a new one of those.” Rose nodded at him, “New arms are harder to come by.”

“I...I think it's dying.” Kazran said mournfully.

“I think so. I doubt they can survive long outside the cloud belt. Just quick raiding trips on a foggy night.” Admitted the Doctor.

“Not enough clouds down here for her.” Rose rubbed the boy's shoulder, trying to comfort him.

“Can't we get it back up there? We were just going to stun it. I didn't want to kill it.”
“I’m sorry, Kazran. We can’t save it. I could take it back up there, but she’d never survive the trip.” He mumbled, carefully giving the shark’s back a gentle stroke, “We need a fully functioning life-support.”

“You mean like an icebox?” the boy seemed to perk up. “Okay.”

Rose shivered a little seeing a big metal door with a wheel and a window frosted over, “What is this?”

“The surplus population. That’s what my Dad calls it.” Kazran said with a child’s voice.

“And there’s another quid to Charlie,” Rose muttered to the Doctor as she peered in through the window, trying to clear what frost she could with her hand as she looked in.

The Doctor tried to turn the wheel, likely the handle or the lock to the door. He pulled and tried to turn it, both Kazran and Rose putting their hands in to help.

“Oh, it's not turning. Oh, why won't it turn?” Kazran huffed and puffed, trying to turn it again as the Doctor became distracted by a keypad just on the wall beside him.

“Ah,” he moved to the keypad and looked at the numbers, “What’s the number?”

“I don't know,” Kazran shrugged as he tried to turn the wheel again. Rose looked toward around for any clue or other way to get it to the vault-like structure.

“This place is full of alarms. It's not just the door.” The Doctor grumbled. “I need the number.” He looked at the keypad, trying to assess the numbers it could be. He hit the wall ever so slightly in thought and ran a hand through his hair trying to think quickly, “I need the number.”

“I'm not allowed to know until I'm older.” Kazran started to panic.

Rose bit her lower lip, thinking. Older. Suddenly everything seemed to fall into place as she started running back down the hall.

“Where are you going?” the Doctor tried the quietly holler after her as she ran.

“Wandering off!” she said happily as she disappeared down the hall. Kazran looked curiously and a bit panicked at the Doctor.

“It’s okay,” the Doctor assured, “She's a pro at that. Usually comes back. Well. I say usually.”
Rose swung open two sets of doors to see the old man, shouting numbers at himself, his eyes obviously glazed over by memory changes.

“Seven two five eight!” he shouted angrily at himself or past them.

“Just what I was after. Thank you!” She ran up and kissed his cheek before darting right back through the doors she had just come through.

He heard footsteps down the hall, Rose running at top speed as he heard, seven two five eight, seven two five eight echo through his mind.

“Seven two five eight.” he typed quickly into the keypad, the door audibly unlocking as Kazran tried to pull the heavy door himself. He ran to help, Kazran and the Doctor getting the heavy door pulled open just as Rose caught up to them.

“Came back?” the Doctor smiled as she passed him. She slowed down a bit as he came beside her, Kazran right behind them.

“'s what I do, yeah?” she winked at him, eyes locking once again for a moment before they both looked where they were going and had to stop abruptly as a small school of fish swam just past their faces.

“Ah, there's fish down here, too.” the Doctor smiled, admiring the small school of fish as they swam in time through the air before them.

“Yeah, but only tiny ones. The house is built on a fog lake, that's how Dad freezes the people.

“Is there an empty one of these things?” Rose stopped and looked at one of the tall cement-like structures they’d seen earlier with a woman inside, each of these likewise having a face through the glass window. She followed the boy reluctantly, frowning a bit at the hundreds of stone casks that contained people.

“They're all full, but we could borrow one. Yeah, this one.”

Inside was a familiar blonde woman. Thin and sleeping, frozen in time in that stone like casket.

“Oh, hello again.” Rose smiled at the clear window, seeing the same blonde woman she had seen years later and a few hours ago.

“You know her?” Kazran asked. Rose shook her head.

“Is she important?” the Doctor looked at Rose knowingly behind the view of Kazran.

“She won't mind.” He said happily, “She loves the fish.”

Kazran hit a button on the side of her container, a projection of her face speaking popped over the window. It was a Hologram of her, pinker and more lively.

“My name is Abigail Pettigrew, and I'm very grateful for Mister Sardick's kindness. My father—”
Kazran seemed to grow impatient “She starts to talk about the fish in a minute.” He hit a button and it seemed fast forward through her speaking.

“…But I'm also surrounded by the fish, the beautiful, iridescent, magical fish.”

“What's all this for?” Rose quietly asked, looking around her as Abigail spoke in the recording. The walls were lined with the cement things that looked like upright caskets, rows and rows of them.

“My dad lends money. He always takes a family member as, he calls it security.” Kazran shrugged, his voice dipping ever so slightly as if he were used to it but he didn’t agree with it.

“Hard man to love, your dad,” mumbled the Doctor. Rose elbowed him in the side.

Rude. Rose said very clearly in his mind, her eyebrows narrowing at him chastisingly.

The Doctor cringed a bit, “...But I suppose you know that.”

He didn’t know if being chastised for his rudeness was the reason for him being rude in the first place, but being scolded for it elicited a wonderful feeling. He’d have to analyze that later.

“I am not alone, and I am at peace.” The recording ended, but they could hear a vague beeping.

The Doctor paled and looked around slowly.

Rose took note of his demeanor change. Same look on multiple faces now, “What's wrong?”

Doctor seemed to try and take an audible swallow, “Just my half a screwdriver trying to repair itself. It's signaling the other half.”

Rose's eyes widened, “But the other half's inside the shark,” she grabbed the back of Kazran’s shirt quickly, preparing to run.

“Yeah? Sounds like it's woken up. Okay, so it's homing on the screwdriver.” The Doctor looked curiously to the wide open door, the swimming grey blob barely making it into view as Rose took the half screwdriver out of his hand and slid it down the floor as she took his hand and hid behind a chamber, the shark swimming just by them. Kazran took a moment to try and glance at the shark, frozen in awe as the gnashing behemoth zeroed in on the whirring screwdriver half. Rose pulled Kazran down quickly, hiding behind a cryochamber as the shark smoothly, swam through the air behind them, the Doctor covering Rose while she covered Kazran. Her eyes swirled with gold again, weaker and more slowly this time.

A beautiful melody filled the air. Slowly, as the homing beacon of the sonic stopped moving frantically, Rose released Kazran first and the three stood, looking around the chamber to see Abigail, free from her chamber and singing, shark calm beneath her hand. They slowly made their way to the seeming corridor of cryochambers where they found Abigail with the shark beneath her hand.

“It's not really the singing, of course,” the Doctor started explaining.

“Yes, it is,” said Kazran matter-of-factly.

“s magical.” Rose said quietly, taking a deep inhale.

The Doctor shook his head, “Nah.”

“The fish love the singing. It's true,” piped in the boy.
“Nah,” the Doctor quickly denied. Rose lifted her head off his shoulder to give him an admonishing
look, but the Doctor kept explaining. “The notes resonate in the ice crystals, causing a delta wave
pattern in the fog.” Rose reached around his back with her free arm and pinched him on the neck
slightly. “Ow! A fish bit me.”

“Shut up, then,” The boy instructed. They let the sweet song coming from the woman wash over them.

“Of course. That's how the machine controls the cloud belt. The clouds are ice crystals. If you vibrate
the crystals at exactly the right frequency, you could align them into—” Rose grumbled and pinched
the Doctor again. “Ow! Why do they keep biting me?!”

The boy shot the Doctor an annoyed look, “Look, the fish like the singing, okay? Now shut up.”

Rose tightened her arm on Kazran’s shoulder in agreement and laid her head weakly onto the
Doctor’s shoulder. The feeling of her head on his shoulder made all argument disappear from his
mind. “Okay.”

The happy blonde woman sat on the floor, singing her melodious opera-like song and gently stroking
the shark. A small amount of fear was mixed into her happy eyes as she smiled through her song at
the three. “...In bleak midwinter, falling down before, the ox and ass and camel which adore...”

Rose pulled the door open, kissing the doorframe a hello as the Doctor pushed a cryochamber now
filled with shark into the TARDIS.

Abigail and Kazran peered inside after them, still standing outside the box with wide eyes as they
looked at the large interior.

“It's bigger on the inside!” The little boy exclaimed.

“Yeah, it's the color. Really knocks the walls back.” The Doctor said, hopping up the stairs to the
controls as he stuck his snatched-up screwdriver half back into his pocket.

“Oh, really?” Rose almost snorted with laughter, “What’s the color on the desktop? Extra
Dimensional Orange?” Rose smiled, pushing the casket a bit further inside so Kazran and Abigail
could enter better.

“Uh,” his eyes darted left and right, anywhere but her as he struggled to answer, “Sunset Rose.”
Rose's eyes widened at the revelation, but words seemed to fail her. The others still turning around in
circles, amazed by the sheer scope of the TARDIS’s interior. The Doctor clapped his hands together.
“Anyway. Shark in a box, to go!”

Rose cleared her throat, “Like take-away, or cup-a-soup!” Rose gleefully said, smiling gently.

“Not cup-a-soup.” The Doctor sneered a little at the comparison as he pulled a lever on the console,
“Hardly like cup-a-soup.”

Rose smirked, “Shut up, just gotta heat it up.”

Abigail was simply aghast, putting her arms out to indicate the scope of what she was seeing. “This
is amazing!”
“Nah, this is transport” The Doctor bound down to the doors and pulled them open in dramatic reveal, “This is where I keep amazing.”

Fish swam through grey and blue clouds, tinged with green as the light filtered through them. Large schools of tiny fish swam through the air. They floated, stabilized still in mid-air.

“Come on, then. Let’s get this shark out.” The Doctor and Rose opened the lid, flinging themselves backward as the shark burst forth and out the doors as fast as it could. Rose and the Doctor laughed flat on their backs as they watched her swim off. He got up and gleefully helped her up as they looked back out the doors behind Kazran and Abigail.

“Hey, look at her go!” Kazran pointed to the shark who appeared to be more at peace in the clouds, swimming through the air more easily than they had seen.

Something dinged on the console. The Doctor hopped up the center.

“Ah. Sorry. Time's up, kids.” He said, preparing knobs and twisting them. The two guests turned and took a step toward him, giving just enough space for Rose to get by and close the outer doors.

“Why?” the boy puzzled.

“It’s nearly Christmas Day.”

Abigail looked at her cryochamber a bit sadly, but dutifully stood in it, ready to return to sleep.

“If you should ever wish to visit again,” she smiled happily at her visitors.

“Well, you know, if we're ever in the neighborhood,” said the Doctor easily.

“They come every Christmas Eve! Sort of Father and Mother Christmas.” Kazran said quickly. Rose and the Doctor both snapped their heads to look at the boy with wide eyes.

“What?” was all the Doctor could manage.

Rose scrunched her nose. “Mother Christmas?”

Kazran interrupted their protests and quickly said, “Yeah, they do. Every time. They promise.”

The Doctor still looked very confused, “No, we don't…”

Kazran shut Abigail's cryochamber before they could protest more loudly.
The Doctor quickly picked up the communication device, “Amy, we’ve got to, uh, do a few more things…”

All Rose heard was sass. Which made sense, did seem like a dire situation to take cavalierly. She didn’t really want to hear, nor thought she should, and quickly became distracted by her coat simply laying on a railing not far from her. She hadn’t taken it out. She was just thinking that maybe she should go find it idly and now there it was. This telepathic connection to the ship was stronger than she remembered, but all those years not aboard would certainly have limited her ability to test it. She smiled to the ceiling as she took off the Doctor’s suit coat and slid her own over her arms, letting the sweet hum of the TARDIS envelope her mind.

“Rose?” his voice broke into her introspection and she turned to him quickly. He was off the communication device with Amy and had a very curious look on his face.

“Sorry. Bit nippy. Needed an actual coat if we’re doin' that again.” Rose handed him his suit coat back.

“Where did you get that number?” he put his tweed back on with a flourish.

“Kazran.” She shrugged, “The older one.”

The Doctor's jaw dropped and he slowly moved to face her completely. “You flew the TARDIS?”

She hadn't thought about it. She ran back, she got in. Turned a dialed, flipped a switch and there she was. The memory was buried but not missing. “I guess I did?”

“You flew the TARDIS?”

“I…” The memory was there. She could see herself walk, flip, turn, pull… and she knew exactly what she was doing when she did it.

“You flew the TARDIS?” His jaw was still dropped. Magnificent big brain and he was utterly confused by a simple pink and yellow though admittedly new faceted human flying his ship.

“Oi, I didn’t know I could do that.” He showed her last time, yeah? He had her and six other people hold and twist and… that is not the whole picture. Everything about this seemed like it should be confusing to her but it wasn’t. She flew the TARDIS.

“Anything else you can do?” he reached for his screwdriver but suddenly realized it was broken so it would be pointless and dropped his hands from going into his inner pocket.

“I… dunno?” Rose blinked to herself, “I know I can eat a whole row of biscuits in one sittin' if that helps?”

“Flying the TARDIS and eating biscuits,” his hearts almost melted but he did his best not to let it show, “A woman after my own hearts.”

Rose chuckled to herself and hit his shoulder lightly, “We’ll figure it out later. But we’ve got more Christmases to do, yeah? How long are we doing it, exactly?”

“As long as it takes.” He started to wiggle his fingers at his sides before sprinting inelegantly up the
corridor to the wardrobe.

“Where are you going?” Rose managed to get out as he leapt out of view.

“We need hats!”

“This you always wants a hat, doncha?” Rose called after him.

“Hat for every occasion!” He came back with white fur trimmed red hats and tugged one onto Rose’s head before slipping her hand into his and pulling her out the doors again. “Christmas Eve, part two!”

Behind then was a carriage on the ground with no horse to pull it. Rose bit her lip and squinted her eyes, watching the skies as the Doctor pointed his mangled screwdriver up to the sky. Abigail and Kazran stood close together, eyes bouncing between the skies and the concentrating faces of their companions.

“You are out of your mind!” Abigail announced like it was news to any one of them, “This will never work.”

“You’re half right,” cringed Rose.

“Oh, don't think shark, think dolphin.” He smiled at them, keeping his screwdriver half pointed to the sky as it intermittently beeped and whirred.

“A shark isn't a dolphin.” Abigail pointed out.

“It's nearly a dolphin,” The Doctor quickly replied.

“--but with bitey teeth.” Rose said still mid-cringe.

“Big, bitey teeth.” Kazran amended.

“She had many, big, bitey teeth.” Rose shuddered, “We saw 'em up close.”

“She?” the Doctor perked up, “Become a marine biologist on top of everything else while you were gone, did you?”

“Just feel like she’s a woman, yeah? Beautiful, deadly, does what it wants, you’re a bit scared of her,” she tilted her head back and forth in jest, “makes sense.”

“That's where you're wrong, because…” Rose waited for his explanation, crossing her arms in amusement as the Doctor looked at her. “Because shut up.”

“It could be anywhere. Will it really come?” the little boy Kazran asked the Doctor.
“No chance. Completely impossible,” the Doctor smirked, “Except at Christmas.”

“Here she comes!” Rose pointed to a large shadow hundreds of feet up in the sky. The Doctor laughed elatedly.

“Everyone on the carriage! We’re going for a ride.”

Rose took off a fez and shook sand off her shoes near the door, the Doctor already at the console on the communicator.

“You’ve done this, what? Four times?” Amy said over the speaker.

“and we’re about to go to five. He’s very old! He’s got a lot of Christmases! It’s being quick!” he watched Rose run up the stairs and into the corridor, “We’re doing what we can.”

“Is she slowing you down?” Amy's irritation only thinly veiled. Amy meant well. He knew Amy meant well.

“She’s putting all her energy into it.” He said a bit absently as he watched the girl in question come out the wardrobe with three striped scarves.

“Are you sure it’s going to work?” Amy grumbled through the sleaker. Rose approached the Doctor, wrapping a purple striped scarf quickly around his neck.

“It will! Call you later!” he clicked off.

“Are you sure this is going to work?” Rose parroted Amy's question, but paired with a knowing look and closeness as she wound his scarf around him. He didn’t answer. He didn’t have to.

Kazran was now a man, old teenager? Rose had a hard time keeping track, the several hours of Christmas eves running together to an uncountable, fun mess of a holiday. “Look at you. All grown up. Or at least close to grown up, yeah?”

Kazran blushed. “I suppose.”

“Don’t grow up. It’s boring.” The Doctor shook his head.
“Think she’ll like this shirt?”

The Doctor stuck the Christmas hat in his hands on to the young man’s head. Which Rose snatched off Kazran’s head quickly. “She’ll love the shirt.” Rose smiled as the Doctor opened the door happily.

“Merry Christmas!” the three chorused to the happily re-awakened Abigail. Her smiling eyes panned across Rose and the Doctor and settled on Kazran. Her breath caught.

“Kazran?”

Abigail seemed to swish back and forth as she stood in place on the deck of the TARDIS, surreptitiously eyeing Kazran beside her. “You've grown.” She said as if it had been a surprise.

“Yes.” He replied nervously, his face pinking.

Abigail smiled, “And now you're blushing.”

Kazran cleared his throat and spoke at full volume so the Doctor and Rose could hear him though they were merely a few feet away on the other side of the console. “So, where this time?”

“Pick a Christmas Eve! We've got them all right here.” The Doctor looked gleefully to the pair, spreading his arms wide to indicate the console before him.

“Might I make a request?” Abigail meekly asked, taking an awkward step forward.

“Of course!” Rose smiled.

“This one.”

Rose grinned widely as the Doctor flicked the switch in front of him. The noise echoed for a bit and they land with a quiet thud.

Rose pushed open the doors, holding one open as Abigail and Kazran exited, only letting the door close once the Doctor came out behind them, her arm linking through his as she smiled. Abigail wandered closer to the house, curiously looking through the window as Kazran stayed closer to Rose and the Doctor.

Inside the house a family was preparing for Christmas. Abigail stood outside the window, dabbing her eyes slightly but not daring to make any noise.

“Who are they?” Kazran quietly asked the Doctor and Rose, not taking his eyes off the gently crying Abigail.

“Her family,” the Doctor quickly replied, “The lady's her sister. We met her once, when she was,” he twinkled his fingers, “…older.”

“Abigail's crying.” Kazran fidgeted.

“Yeah. She misses ‘em.” Rose nodded, unfocused but looking in Abigail’s direction.

“When girls are crying, are you supposed to talk to them?” Kazran asked the Doctor.
The Doctor looked horrifyingly clueless, “...I have absolutely no idea.”

Rose rolled her eyes, “He means yes. You care ‘bout someone, you’re there for them.” Rose shoved him a little toward Abigail, he stumbled, she urged him toward her.

Kazran blushed slightly at her urging and turned around, walking toward Abigail.

“We should give them a mo.” Rose said in the silence as they watched Kazran talk to Abigail.

“Why?”

“Because we should.” Rose pulled his arm gently to spur movement, “Should we look for a chimney? Or in through the window?” She put a little skip in her step excitedly.

“Oh, Rose Tyler… you know too much.” The Doctor said, facing up, likely looking for a smoke stack.

“So you’re sayin' look for a chimney.” She bit her lower lip, looking up. He faced her and watched her look to the roofs.

“Nah,” he pulled her attention, “let’s try your approach.” The Doctor's locked arm in her pulled her along as he started quickly toward the building. Rose laughed quietly to herself as she was pulled.

“Knockin’ on the door is my approach?”

They quickly and quietly ran around to the back, out of sight from either Kazran or Abigail and knocked on the back door. A woman slowly opened the door and looked at them oddly, a man stepping behind her. He opened his mouth but didn't get a chance to ask anything before an exuberant Doctor spoke.

“Hi. I’m the Doctor and this is Rose. We’re very official.” He held up the psychic paper, “Can we come in? We have a bit of a present for you.”

“Uh, yeah… come in.” The man said, taking a step back and allowing them to come in, his wife stepping off as well as she could.

Rose took the psychic paper still in the Doctor’s hand and read with her smile plastered on, “Doctor and Mrs. Claus? Are we adding a pause or are you flirting?” he slid the paper back into his pocket.

“Flirting, obviously.” he straightened his bow tie and ran to the curtains, opening them. He looked through the window. “Come in!” He motioned for the two holding hands outside in the snow to enter.

“Best Christmas Eve ever.” Said a blushing and slightly placating Abigail. Rose laughed to herself quietly as she waved a goodbye in front of her chamber.

“Until the next one,” she waved slightly and backed away.
“Yes. Till the next one.” The Doctor smiled, obliviously not moving away.

“I look forward to it,” she awkwardly looked back and forth between the Doctor and Kazran, hoping the Doctor would get the hint. He didn’t. “Now I’d like to say good night to Kazran.”

Rose cleared her throat, only stealing momentary attention from the Doctor as he looked back at the other two. Rose rolled her eyes in amusement.

“Of course, yes. Well, on you go.” He smiled.

Rose cleared her throat again and gently pulled at the Doctor’s hand. He looked at her quickly, she nodded toward the other couple and raised her eyebrows.

“Oh!” he turned back to the other pair, “Oh. Yes. Right. Sorry. We’ll, er,” he looked briefly back at Rose to see she had already started walking away, “I’ll go, then. Good night.” He turned to Kazran, “Good luck.—Night! Good night.” He quickly shuffled off, catching up to Rose.

Rose laughed quietly under her breath at him, “You’re so thick.”

The Doctor and Rose slowed as they heard quick steps behind them, she nodded to the Doctor as she let go of his hand so he could stop and talk to Kazran.

“Doctor. I, er,” Kazran glanced back to Abigail for a moment before snapping back to the Doctor, “I think she’s going to kiss me….”

“Yeah, I think you’re right.” He looked quickly to Rose, ten paces away, already looking at him. They both turned their heads quickly, as if embarrassed to be caught by the other.

“I’ve never kissed anyone before. What do I do?”

“Well, try and be all nervous and rubbish and a bit shaky.” He looked back at Rose, this time she was looking down at her feet and twiddling with her hair. Adorable.

“Why?” Kazran blinked seeming taken aback by his weird advice. The Doctor turned his attention back to Kazran.

“Because you’re going to be like that anyway. Might as well make it part of the plan, then it’ll feel on purpose. Off you go, then.” He pushed him toward Abigail.

“What, now? I kiss her now?”

“Kazran, trust me. It’s this or go to your room and design a new kind of screwdriver,” he glanced quickly at the Rose, now rocking on her heels patiently, “or get your hand chopped off and watch it kiss her.” He turned back to Kazran who had a fairly understandably confused face, “Don’t make my mistakes. Now, go.”

Kazran turned back and walked quickly to Abigail, who almost immediately pulled him to her and kissed him.

The Doctor looked away quickly, walking slowly towards the pinking cheeks of Rose. He stepped beside her, turning slightly to face her. Closer they were the quieter they could be and not disturb the goodbye going on behind them. Yes. That was the reason. Good Doctor.

“Christmas dinner with her family around a table and poppers and blondes” he joked, “eerily familiar.”

“No spindy killy tree, but yeah.” Rose glimpsed Abigail and Kazran, now fully involved with
themselves. She blushed a little and turned away with a little quiet laugh as the Doctor did the exact same this with a bigger blush. “Six days an' now noggling?” she chuckled quietly.

“Six years and now noggling.” He glanced quickly in their direction before returning his gaze to Rose and chuckling awkwardly, “Don’t know how long he’s been dreaming of it.”

“Well there was quite an age gap b’tween the two.”

“Now less so.” The Doctor nodded looking blankly at his feet.

Rose tilted her head, watching him puzzle to himself while looking at his feet. One of the few times she hadn't seen him moving around or wiggling since she first laid eyes on this him. “We still talking about them?” The Doctor lifted his gaze to her, tilted head and honey eyes, looking at him with equal amounts of adoration and mocking.

Kazran coughed gently from behind them. “Ahem.” His lips were swollen and his hair a mess. Rose almost broke into laughter.

“Right. Bedtime for you. See you next Christmas.”

The warm weather and Hollywood sign off in the distance were no help for directions right now. He knew they were in California, United States, 1952 but he didn’t know which direction he could use to successfully evade miss kissy-face Monroe.

The Doctor ran from the trees next to the house, appearing next to a pool with a familiar Kazran and Abigail in what had become their usual stance, kissing intensely. He tried to wipe some sticky off his face and pulled away his fingers, noting that they were red and he likely had lip stick all over his face so grimacing at his friends doing the same activity was a bit hypocritical, if not a bit more mutual in their case. He went to wipe his fingers on his suit jacket but remembered he’d changed into a white suit and thought the better of it.

“Guys,” the Doctor announced his presence as he walked out of the trees, looking around him like a man in trouble. “We've really got to go quite quickly. I just accidentally got engaged to Marilyn Monroe. Rose is going to kill me. Or not. She’s too busy flirting with Frank, cheeky bugger. Only started flirting to make her jealous. Now look at there it lead me!” he circled them as their kissing simply continued, undisturbed be his presence or his rant, “How do you keep going like that? Do you breathe out your ears? Hello? Sorry. Hello?” he was getting exhausted, “Guys, she's phoned a chapel. There's a car outside. This is happening now.”

The two kept kissing, barely taking note of him as he circled them again.

“Yoo-hoo!” a woman’s voice came from afar.

“Yoo-hoo,” he sighed to himself. “Right. Fine. Thank you. I'll just go and get married then, shall I? And then slaughtered by Rose, and how will you get home? See how you like that.” He pulled at the base of his suit coat, straightening it as he raised his voice as he walked toward the exit of the pool,
heading to the street, “Marilyn? Get your coat!”

The middle door opened from the house onto the pool yard, noises of multiple people floating to the outside as Rose carefully stepped out, decked in a black and white party dress and smiling as she recognized familiar people in cooler air than the party raging inside. She closed the door behind her and party sounds muffled again. “Oh that Frank. Lovely bloke.” Rose fanned herself, calming her blush, “Now, oh...” she suddenly felt like she was intruding and backed up a step, “Sorry, you two. Didn’t mean to interrupt. Have you seen himself about?”

“He was just here.” Kazran said to her, though neither person had taken eyes off one another, Kazran’s hand stroking Abigail’s face.

“Ah,” she smiled widely, slowly backing up, “I’ll just go... wait in the TARDIS then. You two, um... carry on.” She smirked and bound around them, heading into the woods.

Rose stopped suddenly as something caught her eye on her way up the hill yard toward the TARDIS, narrowing her eyes for a moment. Her body heated again, almost intolerably warm. In a moment she had cooled again, she shook her head at nothing and resumed her walk towards home.

Kazran seemed sad, “Good night, Abigail.”

“Good night, Kazran.” She said softly, her finger lingering on his cheek a moment before she put it back at her side, ready for Kazran to close her chamber.

The Doctor looked to his arm, Rose at it. The back and white of her dress nearly matching his white suit and black bow tie. That’s likely why the TARDIS had even picked it out, cheeky girl.

Kazran sealed Abigail in her cryochamber, his face quickly gaining an air of resolve.

The Doctor smiled, he and Rose turning to leave, “There we go. Another day, another Christmas Eve. We’ll see you in a minute, eh? I mean, a year.”

“Doctor?” the Doctor and Rose turned toward him at Kazran's beckoning, “Listen, why don't we leave it?”

“Sorry, leave what?” asked the Doctor.

Rose's smile dropped, looking between Kazran and the Doctor, noting Kazran's resolved face and monotone voice. “You don’t want to do trips anymore, do you?”
Kazran tipped his head like it was obvious, “Well, Christmas is for kids, isn't it? And I’m too old for babysitters.” He almost smirked at Rose, “I've got some work with my dad now. I'm going to focus on that. Get that cloud belt under control.”

“Didn’t think you cared about that.” Rose reached for his shoulder, he caught her hand and pat it placatingly, setting it back to herself.

“Well, we all grow up.”

Rose took a step back, placing distance between the two as if they’d been strangers.

“Sorry, I didn't realize we were boring you.” The Doctor said a bit grumbly.

“Not your fault,” Kazran shrugged, “Times change.”

“Not as much as I'd hoped. Kazran,” the Doctor almost sighed to himself, “I’ll be needing a new one, anyway. What the hell.” He pulled the half screwdriver out of his pocket and flip-threw it to the surprised hands of Kazran. “Merry Christmas. And if you ever need us, just activate it. We'll hear you.”

“I won't need you.” Kazran said flatly.

“Doesn’t matter.” Rose shook her head as she took the Doctor's arm again, “Just know we’re here, yeah?” They smiled slightly and walked away, leaving him in the cold, dark cryovault.

“Tired yet?” the Doctor asked as a sleepy-eyed Rose came out of the corridor, back in a hooded jacket and denims.

“A bit.” She admitted as she walked back to his side at the console.

“Why don’t you take a quick kip?” he said, absently moving a fallen strand of her hair to behind her ear. He caught what he was doing only after he had done it.

“Never know when we'll be needed.” Rose yawned with a full open mouth.

“Time machine, Rose.”

Rose laid her head down on the Doctor’s shoulder, eyes baggy, “I'll sleep when Amy an’ Rory are safe, yeah?”

“He is so angry. What is he angry about?” the Doctor hit the rematerialization lever, gently pulling his shoulder out from under Rose's head as he moved to the door.

“He’s not ready.” She righted her head just to shake it at him, “He didn’t call us.”
“I’ve got to try.”

“I know.” Rose smiled with clenched lips. “See you in a minute.”

He walked quickly outside, leaning up against the window. The Doctor watched Kazran as he returned to his room and slid out a drawer. _Hope_. Kazran removed something from his desk drawer, and turned around, screwdriver half in hand. He saw the Doctor is standing outside the window and something in his eyes hardened as he stomped toward the window. Kazran looked at him with a stern expression and drew the curtains closed.

The Doctor sighed and walked back in the TARDIS.

Rose handed him the communication device from on top the console. “Call Amy, dear.”

“Dear?” He perked up hopefully, hair flopping with his sudden movement.

“Hush, _Doctor Claus_. Call Amy.” Rose held out the communicator to him.

He took it and hit a button quickly. “Amy. We’re going to do a thing. Very important thing. Listen up. You’re going to be the ghost of _Christmas Present_.”

Rose smirked. “We owe Charlie a tenner.”

Chapter End Notes

_Pardon my (lack of) reach, I wrote two versions of this and the other got ridiculously sad._

_More soon, just found a good pause._
The TARDIS materialized in the back of the cryovault, making sure not to hit any of the iceboxes. Rose and the Doctor started hitting buttons at the sides of the cryochambers quickly, the young boy Kazran, once again only the twelve year old boy helping adjust dials beside her.

“Oh, come on.” The Doctor pleaded.

“No chance.” Rose didn’t even turn to him, pushing numbers on the sides of chambers in a specific order. She messed up and huffed to herself, mouthing the numbers as she very deliberately and carefully tried again.

“Come on. Please?” the Doctor whined as he eagerly turned to the boy, “Kaz, don’t you wanna hear the new babysitter who is definitely not holding the toys sing?”

“Setting up hologram projectors here, bit busy, Doctor.” Rose rolled her eyes and smiled to herself as she moved to the next.

“But it’s Christmas!”

“Bit of a thing. C’mon…” Rose glimpsed him looking at her and looked at him. He was doing puppy eyes.

Puppy eyes. Blue or brown or green, jovial or sad or pleading. She couldn’t resist his puppy eyes. He likely was discovering that faster than she’d like.

“Fine,” she acquiesced, sighing as her inner resolve was defeated by the near thousand old man acting like a child. Her forefinger popped out and pointed at him after she typed one final number into the side. “but you’re not tellin’ anyone.” Rose took a deep breath and huffed to herself. Taking another deep breath, she began singing *Silent Night*.

Oddly reminiscent of something. Something familiar. Had her gotten her to sing before? Either way it was wonderful to hear her sing.

The Doctor smiled that he’d gotten his way and let her voice fill the air, idly watching as a small shoal of fish flitter back and forth wildly, moving a bit faster. They were energetic.

With little notice, the Doctor hit a final number at the side of a nearby cask, holograms of easily a dozen people bursting forth. People filling the straight away, singing the same song that Rose had chosen.

“Look that it does to the fish!” the Doctor opened his hands. Rose abruptly stopped singing, the song continued by all the people around them.

“Oi, be nice, you!” she said quietly as she listened to the harmonizing, greenish chorus of people singing.

“I liked it!” Kazran piped in quietly, looking at all the green people, backs faced to him, but singing filling the air.
“Thank you, Kazran,” Rose nodded to the boy.

“But look!” the Doctor pointed to the fish, now back to swimming normally, “They were calmed by Abigail's singing but you made them… Boogie.”

“Boogie?” She laughed, “How old are you?” Rose huffed and shook her head at him with a smile “Boogie.”

“What’s wrong with boogie? Abigail resonates ice crystals, you inject energy. Energy. Oh. They’re coming. Behind the box. Come on you two.” The Doctor quietly lead them out of the row, prodding and guiding them ahead of him out of the row as he followed after and ducked down.

The door was pulled open, in came older Kazran and a greenish Hologram Amy.

The sound of the singing holograms carried out the opened door. “All is calm, all is bright, round yon virgin mother and child, Holy infant so tender and mild…”

“What are they?”

“Holograms. The people on the ship up there.” Amy seemed tired and hoping that his humanity would leak through when he saw all these faces, “The ones that you're going to let die tonight.”

“Why are they singing?” the older Kazran asked like it was more of an annoyance than anything, and learning why they were singing was the key to making them shut up.

“Singing for their lives.” She sighed and looked at all the casks, “Which one's Abigail? The Doctor told me.”

The old man grumbled, “Did he now?”

“He doesn't hold back, mostly.” The hologram of Amy grumbled, Rose rolled her eyes. “You know the Doctor.”


“You're the only person who can let that ship land. He was trying to turn you into a nicer person,” the Amy Hologram said, “And he was trying to do it nicely.”

“They changed my past, my whole life!” the old man raged.

“Time can be rewritten.” Amy said with hope injected into her voice.

“You tell the Doctor. Tell him from me,” he growled toward the hologram, “people can't.”

Old Kazran stomped through the holograms, each person vanished as he barreled though them before he stopped at a particular cryochamber.

“That's Abigail?” Hologram Amy looked to the chamber he'd stopped in front of.

“I would never have known her if the Doctor hadn't changed the course of my whole life.”

“Well, that's good, isn't it?” asked hologram Amy a touch hopefully.

“No,” he ran his fingers down the glass window, a reflection of running his hand down her face, “This is what they did to me. Abigail was ill when she went into the ice. On the point of death. I
suppose the rest in the ice helped her. But she's used up her time. All those Christmas Eves with me. I could release her any time I want, and she would live a single day.” Old Kazran switched from vaguely wistful to grumbly “So tell me, Ghost of Christmas Present, how do I choose which day?"

“I'm sorry. I really am. I'm very, very sorry.” She seemed hurried and a bit panicked, “But you know what? She's got more time left than I have. More than anyone on this ship.”

“Good.” He said like an insult. Rose flinched, hearing the hopeful and curious little boy who was nestled against her grow so bitter.

The Amy hologram looked to her left, “Rory, widen the beam.”

The man seemed to see things that weren’t there, so the Doctor slowly came out from behind a chamber. Rose followed suit, her arm comfortingly around the little boy as she stood on the opposite side of the man and watched him see things that they couldn’t.

Little Kazran shivered a bit, diverting Rose's attention. She looked down to the smaller but at her side, “You cold?” she whispered, near silent as she spoke to the little boy.

“Yeah.” Young Kazran nodded. Rose crouched facing him and took her scarf off. She wrapped it gently around his neck and rubbed her hands quickly down the boys arms, trying to warm him with friction and her body heat, distracting him from trying to hear his older self talking, “Sorry.”

“Don’t worry,” Rose smiled, “bout to see the future. Can’t see too much of your own future, yeah? Have to be surprised in life.”

“Are you often surprised, Miss Rose?”

“Oh, loads. 'Sides, best bits in life are surprises sometimes, Kaz. Can’t control everything. Wouldn't want to.” Rose smiled at him and stood back up.

The Doctor's voice pulled their attention. He sounded far away, she peered through the Chambers to see him on his communication device on the other side of the room, already by the adult Kazran. “I can hear.”

“He's here? Where is he? Doctor?” The old Kazran seemed to suddenly snap out of whatever he had been under, he was able to look at his surroundings and see the Doctor just down the same row as he’d been in. “Doctor!”

“I'm sorry.” She heard the Doctor say sadly. Rose took young Kazran’s hand and slowly walked to the aisle by older man with his back turned. Rose put her finger by her lips and winked at the boy as she walked out of the aisle and to the next, surreptitiously moving forward to the Doctor.

“All my life, I've been called heartless. My other life, my real life, the one you rewrote. Now look at me.” The grumpy old man’s voice was accusatory.

“Better a broken heart than no heart at all.” He said with the weight of a man who had been there. If Kazran picked up on it he certainly didn’t let on.

“Oh, try it. You try it.” He barked, “You have Rose. All those Christmases, All those years, you’ve had Rose,” the Doctor flinched inside. Suddenly he had her hand in his as she took it walking up beside him as she looked at the older version of the little boy she'd just left.

“Broken hearts everywhere, us,” Rose clenched the Doctor’s hand, not taking her eyes off Kazran. “Forevers rarely match, Kaz. ‘s bout what you do with the time you’ve got.”
“Why are you here?” his volume had dropped but the anger behind it was still there.

“Because we're not finished with you yet.” The Doctor said a bit haughtily, “You've seen the past, the present, and now you need to see the future.”

“Fine. Do it. Show me. I'll die cold, alone and afraid. Of course I will. We all do. What difference does showing me make? Do you know why I'm going to let those people die? It's not a plan. I don't get anything from it. It's just that I don't care. I'm not like you. I don't even want to be like you. I don't and never, ever will care.”

“And I don't believe that.” The Doctor said softly.

“Then show me the future,” the grumpy old man demanded, “Prove me wrong.”

“We are showing it to you. We're showing it to you right now.” The Doctor looked just past the old man at little Kazran across the way, “So what do you think? Is this who you want to become, Kazran?”

The old man turned around to see his younger self standing there in his dressing gown and a scarf. The boy’s face was blank, a little awe and a little horrified. He took a few steps closer to his older self, fear growing in his eyes as he looked into his own eyes.

“Dad?”

The old man lifted his arm to lash out at the child. Fear hit Rose's eyes as they widened. He instinctively gripped a bit tighter for a moment, holding her back from her tentative, instinctual movement. She kept an undeterred vigil at the child, swirling with gold as she watched him flinch and become misty-eyed at his old-self’s quick, angry movement.

The older Kazran stopped and froze, mirroring his very self from an hour or days ago.

“I'm sorry.” The older one grabbed his younger self and hugged him, “I'm so, so sorry.”

Rose waited a moment before saying anything, eventually managing to part the embrace with her words, “Kazran… those people don’t have much time.”

The older Kazran stood up and nodded at Rose.

“Doctor!” Rose hollered, causing him to pop his head out of the now-nearby TARDIS where he was sending a message to a rightly panicked starliner. Rose pointed to where the Kazranks were, beside the blinking lighted pipe-organ that was the sky-controlling machine, it making similar truncated beeps to when he’d tried to use it.

“The controls, they won't respond.” The older man said as his hands flew to different switches and were met by the annoying error noise.
“Of course they will. They're isomorphic!” The Doctor exclaimed.

“Oh, now it’s a thing,” Rose mumbled.

Doctor ignored Rose, “They're tuned to your brainwaves. They'll only respond to you.”

Rose huffed with frustration, growling at herself slightly, “His brainwaves.”

“Oh. Oh, of course. Stupid, stupid Doctor.” He hit his forehead with his palm.

“What's wrong?” The old man panicked, “Tell me, what is it?”

“It's you.” He pointed to kazranas he frustratedly ran his hand through his hair, “It's you. You've changed too much. The machine doesn't recognize you.

“But my father programmed it!”

“For his Kazran Sardick.” Rose tried to explain, “You’re a different person. You think different than you did, yeah? Like… you weren’t this man when we met you. Your father wouldn’t’ve programmed it for the man you’ve become, just the man you were.”

“Then what do we do?” the old Kazran almost begged before his eyes widened and he shoved his hand into his pocket and pulled out a familiar tube, “This. You can use this. I kept it, see?”

“What, half a screwdriver?” he took back the half screwdriver and looked at it a moment, thinking out loud, “With the other half up in the sky in a big old shark, right in the heart of the cloud layer. If we use your aerial to boost the signal, set up a resonance pattern between the two halves.”

Something clicked in his mind. Rose could almost feel it as his change in voice and posture. She smiled, tipping off both Kazrans to a slightly less anxious state, “Ooo, come on, that would work. My screwdriver, coolest bit of kit on this planet. Coolest two bits. It could do it.” He looked elatedly up at the ceiling, inevitably seeing the sky above in his mind. “My screwdriver is still trying to repair. It's signaling itself. We use the signal, but we send something else.” The Doctor slowly turned to face the older Kazran, his eyes almost sad, “I'm sorry, Kazran. I truly am.”

“I don't understand.”

“We need to transmit something into the cloud belt. Something we know works.” The Doctor's voice softened, “We need her to sing. Her voice resonates perfectly with the ice crystals. It calmed the shark. It will calm the sky, too.”

“I can do it, yeah?” Rose blurted, “the fish, they did a thing, right?”

“Yes! Rose can, too, remember?” the younger Kazran perked up, looking between the adults.

“No, we need calm, not boogie-ing. Boogie-ing would be bad. Boogie-ing would be faster clouds, faster fish, faster death,” the Doctor quickly turned to Rose, “Sorry, Sweetheart, but faster death is not quite what we need.”
Rose teared up slightly as she watched Kazran interact with the visage of the woman he loved through the window of her chamber. The woman he knew would be gone the moment he did this. Her forever was limited compared to his, he knew it. They both knew it. And so he was ready to deny himself. Yeah. No parallels there.

As if he had heard her thoughts, or perhaps had the same ones, she felt the Doctor’s fingers interlocked with hers smoothly.

“Could you do it?” The old Kazran turned to address the Doctor, face to face and downtrodden, “Could you do this? Think about it, Doctor. One last day with your beloved.” He indicated to Rose. “Which day would you choose?” The Doctor’s hand tingled, his mouth opening to reply.

“Christmas. Christmas Day.” Abigail appeared, cupping the old man’s face as the little boy walked back from releasing her from the chamber, “Look at you. You're so old now. I think you waited a bit too long, didn't you?” Abigail stroked the soft lines in his face, unable to look away from his eyes.

“I'm sorry.”

“Hoarding my days, like an old miser,” she smiled and touched his face as tenderly as she had years and moments ago, “We've had so many Christmas Eves, Kazran. I think it's time for Christmas Day.”

Kazran melted into Abigail's eyes, “Yes.”

Abigail sung beautifully, one hand using the half screwdriver as a microphone and the other clinging to the older Kazran's. The sound transmitted through the skies, the whole town seemingly very serene.

“The singing resonates in the crystals.” The Doctor explained quietly, “It's feeding back and forth between the two halves of the screwdriver. Now, one song, filling the sky. The crystals will align and I'll feed in a controlled phase loop—”

“The clouds will unlock,” Rose interrupted him and summed up quickly with a smile. He still had quite a gob on him.

“What does that mean, unlock?” Little Kazran looked between Rose and the Doctor, “What happens when a cloud unlocks?”

The Doctor smiled, “Something that hasn't happened in this town for a very long time now.”

Rose looked down to the little Kazran, “Magic.”

The clouds stopped swirling around the beam, calming into gentle wafts of grey cotton. With a quick
pan of the sky, the Doctor saw the starliner started flying normally, before the sky began to dull as snow started falling freely.

“Let’s go.” The Doctor took Rose’s hand, she slid her arm around the little boy Kazran’s shoulders and headed back toward the TARDIS.

Young Kazran laid in the middle of his large bed, Rose on one side attending to his blankets and the Doctor almost mirroring her on the other.

“You’ll see us again, soon.” Rose smiled to the boy under the blankets before turning her attention back to her hands tucking him into blankets. “Don’t forget that corner,” she instructed the Doctor.

“I have tucked a child in before you know,” He rolled his eyes gently before going to the admittedly unattended corner of the mattress.

“Yeah, but ‘s not a trap, he’s gotta be able to get out in the mornin’,” she reached over and loosened a bit of the Doctor’s doing, smiling and winking at him teasingly.

“I’m twelve, I don’t need tucking,” Kazran protested for perhaps the fifth time in the last three minutes.

“You’re twelve, you don’t know what you need.” Rose teasingly chided the boy as she finished. Standing up and looking down at him in the bed. “Now. ‘s Christmas. Be good. An' eat half your veg before hiding the rest in a plant. ’s good for plants.”

The Doctor walked to the window and held it open for her. Rose smiled and walked slowly to him, pausing as they both looked back to little Kazran and waved before the exited, shutting the large window behind them. “Let’s go pick up Amy an' Rory.”

Snow didn’t carry the smell well, but rubbing his nose against this carrot was a clue. This carrot smelled of strawberries, but faintly. She made this one or she was nearby, he could tell. His rubbing noses with this snowman had a purpose. Maybe just to the left...

“Is that another old girlfriend I don’t know anything about?” Amy's voice came from behind, breaking him quickly from his hunt for Rose.
“Ah, yes, you two. About time.” The Doctor paused, looking them up and down. Amy in her police woman outfit and Rory a Roman, “Why are you dressed like that?”

“Er, kind of lost our luggage. Kind of crash landed?” Rory pointed out.

“Yeah, but why are you dressed like that at all?”

“Yeah, they really love their snowmen around here, don’t they? I’ve counted about thirty.” Amy said, motioning to the little four-foot snowmen with carrot noses and rock eyes around her and changing to subject.

The Doctor was pegged in the stomach by a big, fluffy snowball, Rose’s giggling head and shoulders popped out from behind a snowman to the right. He quickly threw a snowball back, narrowly missing her elbow, “Yeah, we’ve been busy.”

Rose stood fully from behind the snowman, armed to get the Doctor again with another snowball before she caught full sight of the other two. “Why are you…” she blinked and stopped, quickly dropping the small fluffy snowball to the ground with a soft thud. “Ya know what? Never mind, don’t wanna know.”

Amy looked between the Doctor and Rose and back to the Doctor, “Thank you. I mean it.” Amy threw her arms around the Doctor.

The Doctor smiled and she let go, “Pleasure. Right, come on then, let’s go.”

“Got any more honeymoon ideas?” asked Rory, fairly exasperated from the day.

“Well, there's a moon that's made of actual honey. Well, not actual honey, and it's not actually a moon, and technically it's alive, and a bit carnivorous, but there are some lovely views.”

“Oh, not there again. Remember the bees?” Rose grimaced slightly as she recalled.

“They’re its natural food!” the Doctor protested.

“We’re not going to bees.” An exasperated Rory said a bit like a moan as we went back into the TARDIS. Rose looked a little triumphantly at the Doctor.

“It’ll be their last day together, won’t it?” Amy looked to the sky.

“Probably. One last day with your beloved. Go without someone for long enough it becomes the only thing you want. Can’t think of anything anyone would want more.” He and Rose both obviously resisted looking at each other, both swallowing and going stiff. Amy almost rolled her eyes.

Rory came half out of the TARDIS, puzzled look on his face. “Your phone was ringing. Someone called Marilyn. Actually sounds like the Marilyn.”

“Doctor?” Amy asked, Rose's eyebrow raising.

“Tell her I'll phone her back. And that was never a real,” he breathed out, a little horrified, “…chapel.”

Rose crossed her arms, ready to laugh, “Sorry, a what?”

“Oi, you were busy flirting with Frank.” He mirrored her, crossing his arms.
“Oh, Doctor Claus, you’re in so much trouble.” She sing-songed at him, putting a hand to her face to cover a smile. She pulled open a nearby TARDIS door, laughing as she went in.

Amy looked perturbed for a moment as the doors to the TARDIS closed, but hopped beside the Doctor. “Where are they? Kazran and Abigail.”

He smiled widely and looked off dreamily, “Christmas.”

Amy spared a glance to the TARDIS doors, definitely thoughtful.

“She saved you, you know.” The Doctor fidgeted. Amy nodded, looking back up toward the sky happily towards a now-unseen shark carriage ride.

“Abigail taught an old man how to love.”

“And Rose taught an old man how to care,” The Doctor fidgeted again. “Time was I’d just have dealt with what needed dealing with and left. Then I met her.” Vague. He’d keep it vague until Rose wanted to come out with the whole story. And even he didn’t know the whole story anymore. But Amy needed something, anything at all. “After the war. She took a broken old man and made him... less broken.”

Amy looked toward the TARDIS. The door pushed opened suddenly and Rose stood there wearing a purple knit hat. She popped out held the door open. Amy smiled a little to Rose as she passed her, the smile shocked Rose a bit as Amy kept going inside toward Rory. Rose let the door close, watching Amy walk away with a puzzled look on her face before facing the Doctor again.

She took a few steps quickly, putting a hat his head, too.

“It’s not that cold.” He said as she righted the foam-filled elf ears at the sides, his floppy hair being plastered to his forehead as he looked at the eyes making sure the hat was on.

“I know, superior biology an’ all that, but ‘s ridiculous an’ has elf ears. Felt right.” Rose shrugged, smiling “Hat for every occasion.”

The Doctor smiled and looked up to the sky as she hopped beside him, gripping his arm gently, facing to look up where he was. “One last day with your beloved,” he smiled. “what would you do?”

Rose blushed. Or the cold was getting her cheeks. “I think chips.”

The Doctor was no where to be found. He was due for a sleep, something about him getting some rest made Rose smile. She couldn’t blame him, she managed to take in a full nine and a half hours herself, and now she was fixing her morning tea herself for the first time since she’d arrived. She couldn’t help yawning, she was functioning enough to make her own tea before she’d even had tea, but that was the extent of it. Then again, thinking about the Doctor and his ridiculous smirk and floppy hair and bow tie… it almost made up for the fact that she was very nearly about to over sugar
her tea.

He’d redone the desktop and not erased all traces of her. She legitimately thought he’d tried to. No reminders. He ’hated repeats’ and she had pretty much become the epitome of a repeat. But it was Sunset Rose. Her room was still there, her mug in the cabinet when she needed it… Though, those could have been simply the TARDIS herself being accommodating if her warm coat on the railing meant anything at all, and her connection to the TARDIS was something yet to be explored, but the Sunset Rose.

He’d known it off-hand. What’s more, he’d chosen it.


She was staring at the cabinet and stirring her tea to death when Amy sauntered into the galley and only snapped Rose out of her reverie when the toaster popped. Rose jumped a bit and laughed to herself.

“Mornin’, Amy.” Rose smiled gently and sipped her tea. She’d forgotten the noise Amy had made a week before about there being no mornings on the TARDIS until just after the saying left her lips. Amy didn’t reply the same way she had.

“Sleep well?” the redhead mumbled, quickly taking a bite of her freshly toasted bread.

“Mmm.” Rose nodded, “TARDIS beds, yeah?” she said, almost mirroring the same thing she’d said to Rory days ago. Amy looked Rose over, suddenly Rose was very aware that she’d worn the most comfortable pajamas she could find, which were also the grungiest, most ratted night clothes she owned. Amy, on the other hand, seemed to even have been well put together even in pajamas. Amy was obviously weighing asking something while she munched her toast.

“Aren’t you angry?” Amy asked while Rose had a genuinely confused look about her, “You know, for Marilyn?” Amy finally asked, mouth still containing a bit of toast out of view.

“Oh. No. I mean…” Rose shrugged. “why be?”

“He’s your, I mean, you are his…” Amy rolled her hands to finish her sentence for her.

“Good to know I’m not the only one who can’t…” she rolled her free hand similarly to how Amy had. “S not easy.” Rose sighed, not meaning to sound as enough as she had but unsure how to say anything without seeming or feeling madder than she already did. “We’re friends.”

“Friends,” Amy scoffed, “You love him.” Again Amy was so matter-of-fact about it, it made Rose smile. She leaned back against the counter and took a small sip of her tea.

“Lotsa people do, Marilyn’s proofa that. An’ Cleopatra. An’ Madame du Pompadour.” Rose smiled a tight smile, the aristocrat’s name still being like ash in her mouth even if time had lessened the amount. “Hard not to love him at least a little.” Rose drained her mug, the liquid within it having cooled during her daydreaming as she mixed it.

“But marriage wise…”

Rose turned and refilled her mug not looking directly at Amy, “Human marriages don’t quite count the same to him,” Rose took a deep breath, seeming a bit wistful, “There’s the time travel aspect of the other person bein’ alive or dead at any point.” Rose sipped her tea again, somehow seeming both defeated and accepting at the same time. “’s not the same in his mind. If it was, he’d be a widower in a moment.”
“Well that was explained better than he ever would.” Amy took another quick crunchy bite of her toast over the sink.

“M not sure if that’s good thing or a bad thing with this one. Seems to like a good riddle, him.”

Amy swallowed quickly, her face gaining a puzzled quality, “So you know him, but you don’t know him…”

“’S co—”

“—complicated,” Amy interrupted and rolled her eyes, “You two keep saying that.”

“Complicated existence,” Rose smirked. “People rarely get simple anythings, him less so.” She might not get another chance to ask without the Doctor around, “Tell me, Amy... you met River Song, yeah?”

“Yes,” Amy nodded slowly in thought, her face contorting slightly almost excitedly, “Do you know her?”

Rose shook her head. “No, Just heard of her. What’s she like?”

“Brave, smart, I thought she was his wife… not so sure now, though,” Amy paused, suddenly feeling awkward that she said that, “River is the only woman I’ve ever seen that scares the Doctor into doing whatever she wants more than me. No offense.”

“None taken. Go with the flow, ’s me. Only get all…” Rose paused and lifted up a clenched-fingered hand, “grr… if he’s ’bout to do somethin' monumentally stupid.”

“…So like all the time.” Amy said quickly.

Rose nearly choked on tea and quickly swallowed her last sip as she laughed at that. Amy couldn’t help a smirk appearing on her face. “Depends on the day, yeah.” Rose put her twice empty mug on to the counter. “So River… She’s good to him?”

Amy just looked blankly at Rose, trying to suss out her motives. It didn’t seem to be hard because she was quick to respond. “Well. Bossy. And confuses the hell out of the Doctor, scares him a little. And the one time I met her she saved my life.”

“Sounds like a good woman, then.” Something about that made Rose feel better. Not that it still didn't present a paradox, but Rose herself could easily stop. Well, not easily, but it was possible. She could go off, live a life. Jack’s done it.

Jack.

“What about you?” Amy asked, pulling Rose from her momentary sidetrack.

“What about me?” Rose blinked.

“You may be a mystery to me but I've known him all my life. He looks at you like he can’t believe you exist.”

“Because I shouldn’t.” Rose paused, her mouth opening to say more when the lights dimmed and brightened quickly. Rose closed her mouth with a smirk before speaking loudly, “Bein' behind that door doesn’t hide ya very well from a sentient ship.”
The Doctor stood stoically at the door while he listened. The minute his eyes opened he was aware that she was awake, and his race to the galley was met with the smells of tea already brewed and crisping bread, now gentle voices through the door.

He heard her laugh. Amy made Rose laugh. Good old Amy. The bar wasn’t high with making Rose laugh, she had a soft spot for bad jokes that he intended to take advantage of, but the fact that she was comfortable enough in the situation to laugh around Amy was good. Bit of a warm-up period.

River. He heard that very clearly. Unless they were talking about an obscure trip he’d taken Rose on eons ago or artfully recreating the whole Venice canal thing… which, of course, they wouldn’t be. Only one River would be subject to discussion between the two. If Rose stayed, they’d meet, which was fine if there was any other reason she’d know his name, and the universe would either course correct or explode. …Which, again, might be due to the personalities involved and not just the universe's reaction to the potential paradox.

Or maybe… maybe this was how it was supposed to be. The universe owed him a few million favors, maybe in one giant swoop it was finally paying him back and signing him up to owe a million more.

The universe. *Ha.* He’d parted from Rose once to appease the universe and it nearly broke him. He was going to tell his name to a person distinctly not-Rose when he had direly hoped it would have been her. Then there were two of him, a parallel world where it could happen, one him would get what he’d want but he wouldn’t. Very selfish in a self-sacrificing way. *That* seemed to be what he was good at.

But Rose was stubborn and didn’t accept the universe rules apparently. She never took being dropped off at home well. First time she became Bad Wolf and came back, second time she left her family and declared she’d never leave him. Then he took her home after she clawed her way back and he took her home that third time and… And she came back a third time. He took her home three times and she came back three times.

Baseball. Three strikes and you’re out. The Doctor wondered if he’d ever been so happy at losing.

“*Bein’ behind that door doesn’t hide ya very well from a sentient ship.*” Rose said, only slightly muffled by the door. The Doctor couldn’t help but smirk even though part of him inside was cringing at being caught. He swung open the galley door and saw Rose, leaned up against the counter and Amy with arms crossed as they both looked at him.

“I’m pretty sure likes you more than she likes me.” He pouted a bit looking to the ceiling with his eyes.

“Well I never hit her with mallets or kicked her when I was frustrated.” Rose said as she pushed herself off from against the counter. “Where are we off to today?”

“No idea.” He admitted.
“I’ll be sure to dress for the occasion.” Rose said. She smiled to him as she snuck past him back to go back to her room. His eyes followed her out of the room and lingered in that direction even once the door swung closed. Amy coughed for attention.

The Doctor turned and smiled, “Pond.”

“Moron.”

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**Chapter End Notes**

Thank you for all the comments and kudos! Keeps me going. :-)

And from here... Well... Story-wise, it looks like I'm going largely off-book for a bit. (Which may or may not be a good decision, but...)

With Holidays and everything, things might be a bit shorter but I'll get them up when I can.
Amy and Rory came out of their room into the corridor, changed into day clothes. The walk from their room was a decent few meters away from the console room, but the voices carried as if they had been right beside them.

“He’s where?” Rose’s voice wasn’t hard to keep separate from the Doctor’s.

“Wherever I’m not. Likely twice. He seemed to get that thing working again.” Anyone could tell by his inflections that he was flitting around the center controls.

“No, seriously, Doctor, should probably find him. Have a bit more in common this round, yeah?” Her voice wasn’t moving as much. Seated? Standing? Holding still at any rate.

The Doctor sighed audibly, “Rose, you’re old, very old for a human, but you’re not permanent. I’d know. She’d know. It’s likely at this point you’d know.”

“Still, got some common ground,” Rose’s voice paused and fell into less joyous tones, “He’s all alone. An’ it’s my fault.”

“He’ll be fine. You know he’ll be fine. You’ve seen it in all it’s big-headed glory.” He paused for one second, “Your husband told you about that, right?”

Amy and Rory seemed to trip over nothing simultaneously. Rose was old and married. They both looked at each other as they started to walk just a touch faster to the edge of the corridor. Rory stopped Amy just as they made it to the entrance to the console room, pulling her to a wall. They could see them but didn’t interrupt. Demanding and asking provided them with limited answers, just a touch of eavesdropping had already proven to be more fruitful.

“’Course he did. ’s not the point, though. How do you know Jack’s alright now? We could go an’ find out,” she stepped closer to him, and standing face to face with the Doctor as she stopped his dash to something on the console. She tilted her head. “C’mon, Doctor, I miss him, you miss him...”

“—I do not miss him.” The Doctor put his hands on his hips. Rose seemed to know immediately when he was lying, watching her mouth twitch up and her eye teasingly narrow was like watching two people that were very used to each other.

“It’s been more’en a week since you knew it was there you’ve kept the pear brandy,” Rose replied quickly to the Doctor as if this were an old argument.

Rory felt compelled to silently mouth what would be the offending words in disbelief. 'Pear brandy?!” His eyes going immediately quizzical.

“We went really close to two black holes an’ it’s still there...” Rose was almost singing the next words with a big, shining smile, “you miss him.”

“I do not miss Jack Harkness,” proclaimed the Doctor.

“You wear braces.” Rose poked him in the chest with a smirk, swiping her finger quickly down the brown strap for an inch.
“Lots of people wear braces!” he thumbed those brown straps at his chest.

“Like who?” Rose crossed her arms again, waiting expectantly with a small chuckle in her voice.

“Lots of people! Old people, people in the regiment…” he stuttered trying to come up with a third, “...people who want to keep their trousers on.” Rose snorted at that. “Besides, I can’t see him. Rules of time and all that.” The Doctor seemed triumphant at that part of the statement.

“You just went back on someone’s personal time line, changed a person that you've already met, but now you care ‘bout the rules of time?” Rose scoffed lifting her head momentarily to the ceiling in a quick laugh before facing him again. “You can’t see Boe, when he's still Jack he's fair game,” she poked him in the chest playfully, “an' you know it.”

“...They’re bickering like an old married couple.” Rory looked quickly to his wife and she him at his quiet words, “Are they flirting or arguing?”

There was silence, or nearly, as all they heard for a moment was a sort of laughing breath of Rose.

“You two are complete rubbish at whisperin’.” Rose's voice carried to their ears. They both cringed like children who’d been caught out after lights out. They turned to seeing a smile on two faces as Rose and the Doctor had their arms crossed and matching smiles toward the skulking pair. “An’ I dunno if you remember, but sentient ship,” Rose said a bit amused. The lights flickered slightly as if the ship were landing without the shakes.

“Who is Jack Harkness?” Amy said, straightening from her slumped over sneaky posture and resuming her determined walk into the console room as if nothing had been amiss, a slightly less confident husband trailing behind her. “Your husband?”

The Doctor made a face. His eyes widened and he looked like he'd smelled something awful at that. Oh, that was... horrifying. And insulting. To him. And the other him. Couldn't actually say any of that without explaining more than a few things he wasn’t sure Rose was ready to, but couldn’t exactly keep the sour face from dominating his features. That had literally been a nightmare back in his leather days. Rose Harkness. He opened his mouth and shook his head as if trying to get centrifugal force to remove the bad taste that thought had left behind.

Rose just laughed. Good. It was laughable even to her. Yes. Haha. His face let go of horrified.

“No. Captain Jack Harkness,” Rose said smiling, emphasizing the Captain in a teasing manner just to see the inevitable eye-roll she received from the Doctor before smiling to Amy and Rory, “is pretty much my best mate. Huge flirt.”

“I’d make it known Amy is taken.” Rory straightened himself in a manly fashion as he put an arm around his wife’s shoulders. Amy obviously held in an eye-roll.

“I’d be more worried about you. He’s got a thing for blondes.” The Doctor grumbled before quickly bouncing back to a happy-go-lucky tone, “Amy, repeat after me, 'hands off the blonde.' I had to perfect it. Needed to say it loudly and often or he wouldn’t understand it.” Rose didn’t hold in her amusement or her eye-roll.

“He was grumpy, this one.” Rose bumped the Doctor with her shoulder while talking to Amy, “Jack's like a big brother to me. He's a puppy.”

“A permanent puppy that wants to sleep with everyone,” corrected the Doctor. “Who we are not visiting.”
Rose pouted.

Amy’s eyes bounced between the two, the Doctor crossing his arms petulantly and Rose frowning a bit exaggeratedly with a smile in her eyes and hiding just under the surface. The whole scene made Amy want to roll her eyes, her husband correctly spotting a flirtatious argument when he saw one from the outside. Of course, Rory had been on the receiving end more than once. Amy sighed.

“We should probably get back.” Amy said, only slightly louder than a mutter.

“Really?” Rose's face fell, the smile leaving her eyes. “We really don’t have to go visit Jack yet, go anywhere you like.”

“No, really.” Amy said without a hint of malice, but genuinely a bit of disappointment. “Depending on when he gets us home our honeymoon is likely over anyway.”

“I have to get back to work.” Rory piped in, thinking to himself.

Rose considered that for a moment. She hadn’t had a job when she’d jumped on board, much less a job she’d want to get back to. But now there was a married couple, bit older than she was when she first joined up, with jobs and likely a life outside of this. She hadn’t had much of a life outside of work and her mum and Mickey when she had jumped on, and...


“Fine but…” Rose took her permanent marker out of her pocket, grabbing a sticky note as it appeared, as if randomly dispensed from the console like that regularly. “He ran out an' got me a mobile so…” she scribbled on the piece of paper, “if he doesn’t pick up, I will.” Rose smiled, bounding up to Amy and offering the piece of paper. Amy couldn’t help but return the smile.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry it's shorter, had something else planned but realized last minute that it conflicts so I had to do some shuffling.
The Doctor showed psychic paper at the gate, and he, an arm full of Rose’s arm, sauntered from the outer wall of the castle to the inner. Rose had worn sensible but not terribly time appropriate shoes with her era appropriate dress, which was largely the TARDIS’s doing.

“Sir Doctor? Dame Rose? We don’t get knighted for, what, another two hundred years?” she smiled from ear to ear, gleefully stepping and hopping attached to his arm as they walked.

“Linear for us.” He shrugged, unable to keep her happiness from spilling over to him.

“Still, I should be glad you didn’t make us the servants, yeah?” She bumped him playfully with her shoulder and she tightened her arm on his. “An’ where? England, the Sexy Old Girl dressed me up so I'm not a timorous beasty but it’s old, yeah? Catch me up, then. Where are we?”

“1680, Court of King Charles the second, Protestants and Catholics don’t hate each other quite as much as they had, or will have for that matter, Parliament is in that sneaky dissolved period. Today is a feast for one of his many illegitimate children.”

“Can't resist a party… is this what this does? Hits as many parties as possible? This'd be our fourth, now.”

“Easing you back into time travel,” he made an obvious excuse. She snorted, “The first place I took you was a party.”

“That was easing me into time travel, was it?” Rose laughed a bit, “A posh people party while my home world explodes?”

“Well, I did have an odd sense of fun back then. And you have to admit that was pretty tame.”

“Oh, yeah,” she said sarcastically, “Especially considering who was throwin' it.”

“Really? Back to Jack?” the Doctor moaned, almost hanging his head, his walk slowing slightly with the doors in his sights.

“You brought it up this time,” She pointed out, smirking slightly.

“He's…” he hesitated, “busy.”

“Busy?” Rose asked quietly, “or busy?”

“Likely both,” the Doctor smirked. They were nearing the entrance, slowing further would look suspicious than the whispering they we doing, “Some things happened, I heard. I wasn’t there.” His other hand crossed her pat her arm gently, “He needs space.”

Rose took in a deep breath and looked at him in the eyes as they stopped in front of an attendant by the door. The Doctor showed him the psychic paper to enter as Rose whispered, “Did you need space when 'some things happened' for you or did you need a mate?”

The phrasing made him lose his response from the tip of his tongue and trip a little as they
approached a man standing at the door.

“Sir Doctor and Dame Rose.”

“Out of my way!”

And that was his cue. He looked around for anything. Okay, clothes were there, but from the sound of it there wasn’t enough time to re-dress.

The woman who had been all too eager to paint him’s jaw dropped as she heard the voice barreling down the hall.

“Doctor!” and stomping steps as the voice continued searching and bellowing, “Doctor!”

Under the bed? No, that’s silly, everyone checks there. Plus, face spiders.

“Skirt!” he whispered at the flabbergasted face of the woman and dove to the floor, twisting and tangling himself into a squat while a rustling noise happened around him, likely her replacing her skirt adornments.

‘What harm could a portrait be?’ What was so wrong with being nude, in an unmarried woman’s chamber, in the castle of the perpetual womanizer King Charles the second? Yes, now that he thought it like that it did seem silly. No wonder Rose had rolled her eyes with a smirk and an ’On your own head.’ parroting the same sentiment he’d given her while he was in leather when she was intent on doing something he didn’t fully approve of.

This. This amount of harm.

The door burst open, the sound of several shoes footsteps barging into the little room, inevitably in full view of the painting and his stacked clothing.

…Probably should have grabbed those.

“Where’s the Doctor?” an angry monarch barked.

His nose twitched. Rebellious nose. Now is not the time.

“Doctor who?” The woman almost nervously said just before a sneeze erupted from under her large, bell skirts. She looked nervous as an embarrassed and undressed Doctor looked on as the kind lifted the base of the woman’s skirt, revealing his squatting, nude form. He grimaced.

“You know, this isn’t nearly as bad as it looks.”
Rose was standing in the courtyard when the guard found her, between two trees and the TARDIS and three woman judging her un-accompanied self, delaying her surreptitious entrance into what had become her home.

“Dame, we regret to inform you that your escort to the party has been incarcerated in the Tower of London at the personal behest of the king.”

“I see. Is there nothing I can do?” Rose pursed her lips, both worried and slightly amused.

“Afraid not, Madam. He is considered a traitor to the crown. We’d be happy to supply you with an escort back to your estate of Powell.”

“I see. Well. I’m afraid none will be necessary, thank you. I’m going to… contemplate his loss... In this… shed.” She didn’t even wait for a proper response before she slipped into the big blue TARDIS. The lights dimmed and brightened in an arrhythmical manner. “Don’t laugh at me, I’m a shop girl, not an actress! ’s not like I know if they have sheds in the sixteen hundreds. C’mon, let’s go to the Tower an’ get the clever idiot.” The lights flickered. “What do you mean, no?” The lights above flickered more. “Okay, so what, then?” Rose turned and looked down the corridor. The lights brightened and dimmed, a picture projected quite clearly in her mind. “Oh you’re brilliant.”

Rose hiked up her skirts as she walked directly down the hall, where he bedroom door usually was was the door to the storage room. She opened it without hesitation, eyes immediately on the hunt, knowing what they were searching for.

“’I’m the Doctor’ he said,” she spoke to herself, rifling through a few very solid, largely flat things, “’What harm can a portrait be?’ he said.” Rose grumbled to herself as she lifted a few flat things off an oddly shaped, light green, grey and tan board. “An’ now he’s been locked up an’ you won’t go to the tower.” Rose sighed and looked to the ceiling, “There a reason you won’t? Is the Tower of London bad?” The ship said nothing. “Won’t tell me, huh? Fine. At least help me fix this an’ I can go get him.” She picked up the board and carried it out of the storage room.

Two days.

Luckily they’d given him the curtesy of redressing in his own clothes, so his sonic screwdriver was nestled into his pocket when he dressed. Unluckily, the door was made of wood.

As normal, Earth prisons went the Tower was incredibly effective, if primitive.

Two days with nothing to do but think … and lightly reach out with his mind to make sure there was still a certain receiver on the other end. To make sure that someone hadn’t been imprisoned too because of her associations. Maybe it was good she’d made it clear they weren’t married. He did not want that to have been a good thing.

“Oh, we’re not married. He’s my deceased husband’s brother.”
The ease and quickness of it had given him pause. Rose had made reference to him while she was over there, no doubt. Any references to this him made near a non-Tyler likely needed an easy, smooth explanation. Made sense.

He didn’t like it.

The Doctor ran his fingers down what looks like lightly faded, carved numbers into a stone pillar in his cell.

“Fancy seeing you here,” a familiar voice drifted in. He turned around to the window. Rose’s smiling face was looking in through the metal bars, hands on her chin as she sat down to look through the shoulder-high window from the other side. “Been busy?”

“Oh, you know.” The Doctor smiled back.

“How may times have you been in here? Almost like a second home by now, innit?” Decades with her had caused other him to talk a lot, it would seem. Though, he did have hundreds of years of stories that couldn’t possibly be told in a single human life span, but the Doctor couldn’t be sure what her husband had told her and what he hadn’t. “You should at least leave yourself reading material so you don’t get bored an' carve, what?” She looked at the numbers carved into the stone post he just left, “Activation codes into a pillar?”

“I didn’t do that.” He looked back at the pillar and the numbers carved within. How did she know these numbers corresponded to activation codes? He looked at Rose to ask before doing a double take. She wasn’t in the building, she was beside it. And he was in the tower. He looked her over, amused and calm. “You’re on a floating board, outside the tower of London, meters high in the air, and dressed like…” he blinked at her attire, looking her up and down as she sat on the edge of the pan-dimensional surfboard. Rose in perfect mid sixteen hundreds lady attire, long dress, hair, hat, but it was all white and gold and easily wind-blown, giving her very ethereal look.

He wasn’t staring, he was assessing.

Assessing twice. It was still assessing.

“...Well like that.” Third assessment. Bordering on staring now. He should stop that before a fourth assessment crept in. “And you know that extrapolator looks like a giant floating sphere from the bottom. What took you so long?”

“Wouldda been here sooner, but she wouldn’t park in there for me to come get ya, an’ I had ta fix this thing,” Rose pat the board she was sitting on, “TARDIS is brilliant. No idea what I was doin’.”

“But the clothes? You weren’t wearing…” Fourth assessment. Bad Doctor. “…that when I last saw you.”

Rose frowned a bit and looked down at her outfit. “’s not that bad, is it?” she shrugged and looked at him, “Figured if I couldn’t be completely under the radar may as well be as flash as possible, yeah? Can’t think of who I learned that from.” Rose waggled her eyebrows and dazzled him slightly with one of her brightest smiles as she spoke, “B’sides, I had to snatch up a painting.”

“I’ve been a horrible influence on you.”
She slept well. Better than she had in years. Maybe it was the TARDIS beds or the humming lullaby of the TARDIS singing her off to sleep, maybe it was the fact that she’d wake up and, for the first time in years, know she’d wake up to see a familiar, friendly face and quick as a wink —which there seemed to be a never-ending supply of between the two— they’d be off on a new adventure, as always. Picking clothes was getting easier, or the TARDIS was helping out with that, she couldn’t be sure all the time where the TARDIS intervened.

Much of what Rose used the next few days for was trying to determine what kind of man this new Doctor was. Well, between the randomness and adventures and parties. Oh, she knew the inner Doctor pretty well if she did say so herself, but new new new face, new new new quirks, new new new man to some extent.

The rage was still there, inside and simmering. All the time. The rage of the last of the Time Lords. She'd seen it before with Kazran, the slow, all consuming fire ready to pop laying right under the surface of a calmly smiling face. He was angry at times, but unlike the last one who showed it, or wallowed in it, this one almost hid it. Like a hill covered in flowers with a volcano under it. Did his friends just think he was a mountain? Like Vesuvius... So calm they built a whole city around it, but then volcano day. She felt bad for the people both past and future should this Vesuvius erupt.

This Doctor was an insatiable flirt. Her husband's flirting escalated after they got married, but she didn't remember him being this overt when they were in the TARDIS. Intense, yes, overt, no. This one… flutter flutter. The long, lingering looks, often when he was sure she couldn’t see him. The pulling himself away from his tinkering just to make her morning tea perfect for when she woke. Walking her to her bedroom every night. Arms around her … Bad Rose. The painter and the nudity, well… that was just funny. Less to do with flirting and more an odd kind of willing ignorance he was imposing on himself like a child. She hadn't yet seen him with too many other woman, maybe he was like this with everyone? Or at least one other. He was due to marry River Song, wasn't he?

The lying, though. Maybe she was just younger and didn't know as much or didn't know him as much to have sorted it before. Omissions had always happened, flat-out lies had been rare if they weren’t almost purely for amusement. Now they were regularly happening. Sometimes she’d understand, sometimes she’d play along, sometimes she completely and utterly missed any reason or rhyme to it other than he wanted to. Maybe just this one tended to lie more?

Hat for every occasion. Usually odd ones, she thought. He was a clothes horse, this one. Stand out, eccentric… thought it didn’t seem limited to his clothing choices. Fairly addictive, that.

He was less of an Ian Dury man and more… Beatles and Monkees and slap-stick comedy. He could go from high-brow to low-brow easily as long as it was funny. His enduring love of the Muppet Movie made her wonder if she had ever asked if his leather clad self loved it, too.

Maybe, just maybe, there were more things that carried through his faces that he loved.
Same Rose Tyler. Hair looked a bit more natural, she picked more adventure-friendly earrings, but it was the same Rose Tyler, though invisibly older and wiser.

Funny thing about humans, the wiser but doesn’t always happen with age. He still wasn’t certain how old she was, but, to be fair, he wasn’t entirely certain how old he was, either. Just stuck to an approximate age (that may have been made up, now that he thought about it), and go from there.

Even the wiser was debatable. Wise people didn’t often purposely attach themselves to madmen, with or without boxes. She was smarter? Maybe? She still had that adventurous, wandery-offy streak but seemed to know how to get out of any situations a bit better. Ever so slightly less jeopardy-friendly, at least so far. Granted, small pool from which to gather data. If he had any decision to make in the matter that pool would grow infinitely.

He couldn’t get away with as much as he had in the previous, un-Rose-filled years. A lie wasn’t without the consequence of an eye roll or a gentle prod from her mind, sometimes paired with a subtle hand tightening around his or a soft smack to his shoulder… he wasn’t often purposely far enough away from her that the easy physical rebuke took effort. While it was annoying that someone knew some of the times he wasn’t being one hundred percent truthful, it was, somehow, gratifying. Like her knowing his mangled truths or lies was almost a secret between them, and if he’d learned anything from past or present Rose Tyler, it was that that woman could keep a secret.

Pear brandy. Her age. His name. She was keeping that so secret that he wouldn’t have even been sure she knew it if he hadn’t known his own intentions at the time.

She’d garnered some habits from his last self, he’d recognized that right off. Hand through the hair, clicking and popping letters as she spoke, dragging out words, rocking on her heels. Few other things that he hadn’t noticed in himself back then but his study of Rose Tyler during that period was extensive and burned into his brain, and they were new for her but reminiscent.

Rose was adaptable, as always. Dragging her onto the set of the dance of the cuckoos was almost effortless. Laurel and Hardy didn’t even notice, but it was her idea to grab spare bowler hats. No wonder he was fond of her.

Rose’s connection to the TARDIS seemed on par with his own. Or surpassing it. They seemed to know what each other needed and wanted, at least it seemed that way as Rose was never out of her tea and the mallet that he kept just beneath the console was suspiciously missing.

She read when she was bored and she proved while waist-deep in some fiction from the 22nd century that, she could, in fact, polish off an entire sleeve of biscuits in one sitting.

Fond wasn’t the word.

They still needed to get those chips.
Flirting and not communicating and buying the author time because the Holidays are upon us and oh god why.

Next bit seems to want to come out excessively gooey. Be prepared.
“Everyone through here. Yeah, come on, step up. Out the window ladies.”

It was dark, musty, and only dimly lit, but Rose’s voice made it softly to his ears as he reached the tile. The dirt being hauled away by the line of dirty men behind him, the most prevalent noises were the heavy breathing of the panicked would-be English-speaking prisoners behind him, but that...

“Well that’s a good sign.” The Doctor mumbled. Of course she’d be there. Which meant he needed to find out where she was. But she sounded so relaxed it didn’t seem like she was in danger, simply polite. Maybe nervous. Could just be a woman. There were women in the building. She didn’t sound like she was in trouble, might not be Rose. Just a woman…

Another voice was mumbling. Nervous mumbling. Hysterical mumbling and… “Yes, you’re in a skirt, s’lovely, get out that window.”

…a woman bossing people. There were bossy women in a militaristic building. It was still possible it wasn’t her.

There were heavy footsteps. Guns cocking.

“Oh, boll—”

Bossy and in trouble. Definitely Rose.

The panel to lift was heavy. He was just going to check. The ground seemed to lift Rose up slightly. It knocked her off balance. She stomped on the tiled ground to keep it down but stumbled in front but it slightly as it lifted again, her heels making just enough noise to draw attention.

“Doctor. Doctor, what can you see?” came a gruff male voice, quietly from below him.

Green wall, big desk, flag on the wall, framed by a pair of stocking covered female legs. His gaze followed the legs upward to a familiar, though pencil-skirted derriere and higher to an even more familiar scrunched face looking down at him. Rose’s her hands were up in surrender to a large, black, gun in his vision pointed at her an another few women who obviously yet to have gone out the window as she’d instructed. She quickly jerked her head up and squeezed her legs together to attempt to prevent anyone seeing the randomly appearing head from the floor.

The Doctor ducked back below into the tunnel, leaving the panel open a crack as he looked again at the dirty line of men in the tunnel they’d just dug.

“Is the commandant's office painted a sort of green color with a big flag on the wall?” the Doctor nervously asked. The men looked blankly at him and one another. A siren sounded and dogs began barking, a small huff followed. It was almost like a sigh of relief or a laugh. Probably both. Definitely from Rose. Likely both. A nervous smile couldn’t help but appear as his eyes went quickly from the panel above to the now very nervous line of prisoners before him. “…I think the answer's probably yes.”

Two strong hands grabbed him under his armpits and pulled him up through the very hole he’d just stuck his head out of, dogs around him, and ushered him closer to a certain Jeopardy Friendly blonde
as nose men were fished out of their escape hole.

Rose waved slightly to him as she kept her hands bent at the elbows, up to the gun pointed at her. “Hello.” She smiled sweetly to the Doctor as he was lead to her, standing in a group of similarly dressed and arrested women.

“Fancy seeing you here.” The Doctor was shoved towards the group of female detainees, likewise the men behind him were pushed and knocked with elbows and gun butts to join the group, now easily a dozen prisoners. “Been busy?”

“Oh, you know. Dinner Ladies Unite meetin' went a bit long.” The other women looked horrified and frightened. Rose herself looked scared beneath her joy at seeing him. Frankly it was a bit relieving. “Bit of a whole… jail… thing.”

“How did you get out of your cell?”

Rose replied very quickly as very quietly, “I’m a blonde who speaks Argentinian an’ German or whatever the TARDIS says I do, ’m pretty much a Goddess here.”

“Except when you set free a bunch of prisoners and walk around like you own the place.” He replied quietly. Cheekily, but quietly.

“Yeah,” she waggled her head side to side for a second with a tiny grimacey smile, “pretty much ’cept that bit.”

“I’ve said I’m a horrible influence,” he said with pride.

“Yep.” She said, popping the P quietly with a quick wink to him as she nervously keep an eye towards the armed people.

Both of them were watching the armed men point guns and mill around the room, waiting by the door for something. Neither Rose nor the Doctor had turned to face each other for more than a split second as they both seemed to assess the same thing; how the hell to get out of this room with all these people.

“Have you got a plan to get us out of this or.” Rose didn’t have an or. She didn’t really need an or. Her slight head tilt and nervous smile were enough of an or.

“Of course I’ve got a plan.” The Doctor said as he backed up, making the group of people a little tighter. Rose seemed to huff a small chuckle under her nervous smile.

“Winging it, then?” she said quietly as their arms touched, coming closer together. They were both pressed together with several other people, put as usual they were both more aware of each other than anyone else.

“Winging it’s a sort of plan.” He replied quickly.

“Will you two stop whispering,” quietly muttered a scared voice behind them. “We’re going to die.”

The Doctor's eyes seemed to glance at the same area many times, which kicked off a smile from Rose. Winging it was a sort of plan.

A man entered through the door, reading something, barely paying any attention. He was obviously important enough to slightly distract the soldiers in the room just enough to make the Doctor's eyes twinkle at the knowledge.
“Are these the prisoners?” he said dismissively, barely looking up to acknowledge the people in the room as little more than furniture.

“Yes, sir.” Said one straight-spined officer.

“They know anything?”

“No, sir.”

“Alright,” he said very nonchalantly, “kill them.” And then he exited his office.

“What?!” the Doctor said the half dozen soldiers surrounding them immediately listed their guns and cocked them, each aiming at a different set of now terrified prisoners.

“No!” Rose immediately raised her arm, her eyes swirled with gold as sparks erupted from the guns’ chambers before they could fire. Her shoulder touching his had become hot to the touch, so much he jerked his arm back.

The Doctor turned to face Rose, eyes widened as he saw her eyes, reminiscent of years ago, watery and seemingly leaking energy into the air as her hand was kept, finger splayed, in front of her body as if reaching for them to stop. The sparks from the soldiers’ guns flew towards their firers while they looked in fear and horror at Rose's glowing-eyed form and ran. The gold from Rose's eyes faded as she saw the backs of the last retreating soldiers. She huffed exhaustedly as if lifting a large weight before she smiled wanly at the Doctor.

Then everything went black.

He had no idea how she was doing it, but between her and the TARDIS there seemed to be enough information to extrapolate a proper answer. Energy.

It was like years ago, watching that. Those horrible, wonderful words. Eyes glowing, tendrils of energy flowing out of them. Had she said more than one syllable she’d likely have echoed. She felt like she echoed. “I want you safe. My Doctor.”

What the hell was she thinking?

He laid there, his arm strapped against her cold form. The TARDIS had turned up the heat in her room, making the air stifling but it was bearable for the only reason that the TARDIS would, of course, know what was best for their Rose.

Thiers.

Sweets and time and a sweet, silent hum. She knew where she was again without opening her eyes. She didn’t remember coming here but she knew where she was.
She snuggled her pink fluffy blanket and turned to the other side to stretch but paused realizing that, once again, she had defaulted to her side of the bed. It had been years since her husband had vacated what had become his own side of the bed, and goodness knows no one had been able to match up, so it had remained empty for decades. Sleeping elsewhere on their shared bed had been awkward. But she was still on her side of the bed. And now facing the edge, on her side, on her TARDIS bed… it seemed just as awkward. She’d always been on the center of this bed. She’d never shared it with anyone to necessitate a side, the blankets and pillows arranged for her singular comfort. It was warm and she was tired, the heaviness of what had just happened only slowly lifting off her.

Well, not entirely.

She stretched ever so slightly, the intent to turn and stretch out completely on the glorious bed far too tempting. But she couldn’t move.

Toes… wigglable. Fingers... could move. Eyes… almost too tired to open but she could close them tighter and scrunch her nose without more effort than it would have taken with a four-alarm hangover. Torso… held in place. Not immovable, just... harder, weighed down. Rose opened her eyes with a small groan of frustration and looked to her stomach.

Where an arm lay across it.

It smelled sweet.

Suddenly she stiffened slightly and slowly turned her head to see, the movement more easy as she looked to what—no, who was behind her.

The Doctor was fully clothed, on top of her blankets, his arm over her stomach, locking her into a kind of cuddle. Spooning, even.

“Is...” words seemed to come slowly and quietly. Her mouth felt dry and sticky, her throat sore and weak as if from stain or disuse. Maybe five alarm hangover, or how ever high hangovers could go. She swallowed a few times but dare not move from this position, like he was a wild animal that could get spooked by sudden movement. “’s everyone all right?”

“Three days,” the Doctor whispered quietly, completely ignoring her question, “you’ve been out for nearly three days. You can’t do that again.”

“Not even sure what I did in the first place.”

“You displace energy. You moved it from yourself to the half screwdriver when we saw that shark on Christmas Eve, you injected it into the cloud particles when you sang. You moved energy from yourself to excite the particles in the air and made the pistols misfire. The guns misfired, you fell, I picked you up. Everyone got out.” His voice turned almost hard and quieter from behind her. “You were cold. I thought you were dead. The sonic thought you were dead. You’re not doing it again.”

Rose turned her head back to face away from him, the simple act of keeping her head turned so much causing strain to her neck. “Didn’t do it on purpose.”

“I don’t care. You’re not doing it again.” His arm tightened around her, almost squeezing her to him for a moment. It seemed less like an instruction, and more like… begging.

Like he was scared.

She put her hand on his, laying her fingers gently between the crooks of his as they worked their way to holding his hand tightly. Her voice softened. “You’ve been here for three days?”
“Seventy-four hours nineteen minutes twenty-two seconds.” The Doctor said on one quick, quiet breath.

She’d never gotten tired of that. Keeping track of her to the second like that. It bordered on creepy once upon a time, now she found she’d missed it. “I’ll try not to do it again.”

“Best not.” His tone flattened out to his normal joviality, “you’re here now, you said you’re staying, doing things like that is not staying, it’s leaving.”

“Are you going to stop saving people?” she turned her head to the ceiling, turning it as far as she could toward him without physically turning the rest of her body, “Any way you can? ’cause we don’t exactly put ourselves in quiet situations all the time an’ I don’t plan on outlivin’ ya twice.”

“That’s not an excuse.” It was sounding more and more like an argument now. Tones no longer hushed, sharp endings to sentences.

“Didn't say it was,” Rose tried to calm her voice, maybe it would spur him to do the same. “I said I’d try not to. You do what you have to, I will, too, yeah? B’sides, now we know it takes more'en, like, energizin' a few bullets to get ridda me.”

“Just slightly more. Let’s not test those limits. It's about what you do with the time you've got.” He quietly parroted her own words back at her. His arms tightened again and her heart fluttered as he seemed to carefully enunciate his words, “And I think I want all of it.”

Rose gently let go of his hand and turned her whole body onto her other side to face him, his hand lifting but staying where it was, now around her back. Face to face, inches of each other, any closer and focusing, both visually and mentally, would be hard. Her breath slowed demonstrably, her honey eyes seeming almost brown in the dim light as she looked into his worried green ones. “And what about River?”

“What about River?”

“You know what I mean.” Rose's voice expressed that she was genuinely lost at the thought without telepathy to tell him so. If they were going to start down the conversation, maybe for once they’d finish it. Not simply flitter about in an easy, permanent flirty spiral of torture that seemed preferable to the hard, scary unknown that wasn’t a fully unknown anymore.

“I haven’t made that choice yet.”

“Yes you have.” Rose asserted, calm as can be but softly, “You made it in that library. Not to change one single thing when it came to her. She kept you alive an’ god knows I love her for that. Anythin’… anythin’ else would make you change things, which may change her which may change her saving you and that, Doctor, is not an option.”

“I don’t think it’s changing anything.” The Doctor said decidedly, “I had seven minutes where I was convinced I was holding onto a corpse and I thought quite a lot. Then days of not moving, not leaving, just thinking and making sure you were still breathing.” He softened, “The universe compensates. I lost you once to the universe, it will make this work so it isn’t a problem. And we'll make it work if it is.”

“We will?”

He nodded once, mind set. “We will.”

“Know what I think?” Rose blushed, her stomach grumbling. Obviously her mind was settled on
something but her body intervened, she had to switch tack. How human she managed to be even when she kept doing things that proved otherwise, it made him smile. “I think chips.”

Rose yawned.

When Rose woke up, he was gone. She was still facing toward where he would have been when the door opened quietly and he came in with a large order of chips that he obviously had gotten from a quick stop.

As the smell wafted into her room and to her nose, she lifted her head and took a deep inhale. A smile bloomed on her face at the sights and smells. Chips. The Doctor.

There it was. His favorite smile. Her pink tongue peeking out of her teeth, her honey eyes shining as she looked at him. Or the chips on the tray in his hands. He'd count it as both. More tired than he’d like, but somehow even better with her sleep-mussed hair.

“Thought you didn't have money?” she broke his reverie with a small head tilt and a mischievous look.

“Funny thing,” he walked in, sliding the tray onto her lap as she scooted more towards the center and let him sit in the bit of space to sit beside her. “It seems I qualified for a free promotional basket of chips.” He adjusted his bowtie, “Lucky.”

She opened the crisp wrapper, stream escaping with that delightful smell and wafting directly up her nose. Rose’s eyes lit up and she grinned a big, beautiful smile at him as she picked up one of the thick slices of potato. She bit in half and moaned, chewing her delicious morsel and rolling her eyes with glee.

The sound resounded in his hearts, not that he’d admit it. Well, maybe he’d admit it now. He couldn’t decide. He watched her unceremoniously chomp on morsels of fried potatoes.

“Don’t choke.” He said before he slid a bit into his mouth.

“Hey,” she pointed a half-eaten potato slice at him, “If I’mma go after all this, it best be eatin' chips.” She looked at him cheekily and bumped him with her shoulder, “On the TARDIS, you by my side, definitely a plus.”

She seemed to pause her plans to demolish the contents of the cardboard container. “Thank you, Doctor. ’s been… a while,” she said with her mouth still munching away.

“No chips on Pete’s world?” the Doctor said, a bit surprised as he managed to snag another piece.

“No, they had chips,” Rose paused to swallow, “but all the potatoes tasted a bit like parsnips. Nothing I couldn’t get used to after a bit, but never matched up to the memory.”

She pushed the fried potato-laden cardboard bin closer to the middle of the table, allowing him more access to the few remaining chunks of un-parsnipy potato.

Their hands touched in the basket of potatoes. So cliché, she laughed, his hesitance at the touch
allowing her to beat him to the final chip and shove it into his mouth.

There was a slight buzz from the table beside him, Rose's mobile lighting up and vibrating against the surface. The Doctor picked it up quickly and happily answered it with his mouth full.

“Ehmee!” he gurgled into the phone, splaying his hands like he’d be seen by the caller.

“Oi, that’s mine!” Rose laughed at him as she pulled the phone from his hands and swept her hair aside to put the phone to her ear “Amy?”

Chapter End Notes

Holiday coma.
“Found my old pocket book. Or she did. Didn’t know I even left it here. Bit of money, s’more like it.” Rose smiled and hopped down the stairs to the center controls. “If I wanted, bet I could find my old passport, too.”

The Doctor momentarily pausing his flit around the console. “Why do you need your wallet?”

“Amy an I are going shopping, ’parently.” She shrugged and looked at the pocket book. Old, more worn than she remembered, but memories are a funny thing, they buffed out all the imperfections and filled in gaps, didn’t make it worth any less.

Part of her mental wanderings poked into the Doctor’s head and he smiled a touch through his query. “Shopping?”

“Yeah.”

“Shopping?” he repeated.

“Yeah.”

“But… shopping?” his face melted into a confused face as if he’d never taken her for a shop or two.

“The answer’s not gonna change the more you ask the question.” Rose murmured, half amused.

“With Amelia Pond?” He scratched his head absently.

“Her name’s Amelia?” Rose paused. She stood still for a moment as she flipped her pocket book in her hands. She vaguely remembered him calling her that at the wedding once, “like that bit better than Amy. Yes I’m going shopping with Amelia Pond.”

“But why does she want to go shopping?”

“Dunno?” Rose shrugged. “Figured I’d ask her when we see her.”

“But you’re… freshly…” the Doctor dipped his head and closed his eyes to demonstrate, she simply crossed her arms and smirked at his flailing attempt at miming. He fidgeted, “…Energy… deficient.”

“I’m fine,” Rose insisted. The Doctor looked at her like he knew better. She rolled her eyes playfully, “Fine enough. Not runnin’ from soldiers or a fancy party, just a shop.” Rose twisted a knob with her free hand, gingerly touching a few things on the console as she adjusted their destination just enough. The Doctor looked at the screen, their soon-to-be destination displayed quite clearly. He scrunched his nose.

“In London?” The Doctor scrambled for a reason to have her not go, the after effects of her recent energy expenditure yet to be fully scanned, “You may get recognized in London. 2011. You’ve only been ’dead’ for two years, nine months, fifteen days…”

“Won’t go near the Estates. Not like I’ve that many people left on this Earth who’ll recognize me anyway, prob’ly won’t be a problem,” Rose shrugged. He frowned at that, she looked at him like he was a disappointed child, all mopey and quite cute. “Fine.” Rose acquiesced, “Have any way around
The TARDIS materialized deep in a long alley. Amy leaned up against the brick wall beside her as she waited for the doors to open.

Rose pushed open the door and exited with a hop. With big sunglasses and a hat, hair up in a pony tail. Doctor closely behind her.

“New look?” Amy greeted Rose with a judging look to her outfit.

“S'not permanent.” Rose replied in quick denial as the Doctor filed out of the TARDIS closely behind her.

“Pond!” the Doctor hugged Amy gleefully. He let go of Amy and the slightly amused smile planted itself firmly on her face.

“Staying off the radar I see.” Amy greeted. The Doctor’s sly grin slid onto his face. “History books are riddled with you. You're not subtle.”

“Of course I’m subtle,” the Doctor almost harrumphed, “I’m the king of subtle.”

Rose huffed a laugh, “Yeah, there’s prob'ly a big crown with blinkin' fluorescent lights to prove it.”

“Ready?” Amy asked. Rose nodded. “What’s with the hat and glasses?”

“She’s going incognito.”

“Officially I died at Canary Wharf. I went missing when everybody else did,” Rose sighed. “Been a bit too long to suddenly not be dead, I think.”

“Sentient time ship, sonic screwdriver, gizmos that do ridiculous, impossible things,” Amy said, pointing to the TARDIS, “and the most ‘incognito’ you can make her is bad celebrity avoiding the paparazzi?”

“Oi!” the Doctor protested.

“Told ya,” Rose beamed.

Really, that smile made it very obvious. That smile was basically a neon sign indicating she was
Rose Tyler. Maybe he should have gotten her a face mask. Or a big, big scarf. They weren’t *that* conspicuous.

He almost stuttered, “It’ll work!”

“C’mon we’re shopping.” Amy turned to walk away, waving her hand absently for Rose to follow.

Before they got more than a step in the Doctor perked up, “Am I coming, too?”

Amy turned around immediately, “No. You can be separated from her for an hour.”

Well that had been proven multiple times over. Hour here, day there, few years somewhere... But it didn’t need to be proven again. So soon. And now there were things. Needed to be talked about and explored things. Things. He fought a pout.

“Don’t you have a mate or something you’d rather go with?” Rose decided to ask.

“Best mate’s a bit … occupied… and someone can’t be trusted around clothes,” Amy indicated quite clearly to the bow tie. The Doctor looked offended.

“Why are you here?” Rose readjusted her hat. “London, I mean.” Rose was getting hesitant to leave, partially for the same reasons as the Doctor, partially… because she hadn’t been back London in some time. Last minute nerves were starting to show. Amy didn’t notice, but the Doctor did.

“Work thing.” Amy brushed it off.

“an’ where’s Rory?” Rose blinked.

“He was back in Leadworth. He’s on the road now, I figure we can get in a quick shop and be back by the time he gets here, if you ever just shut up and come along. Are you going to ask stupid questions all day?” Amy grabbed Rose’s arm and started her stomp out of the alleyway, pulling the smaller woman along.

No time like the present. No way to kill nerves than to do the thing that needed you feel them in the first place. Rose took a deep breath as she was dragged along.

“Don’t wander off, yeah?” Rose smiled at the Doctor as Amy pulled her arm out of the alley.
Patience was not his virtue but he watched for a few moments as Amy dragged Rose down the side walk. The distance between the two seemed to shorten as they walked away, which could only have been a good thing. As it seemed there wasn’t any immediate looking back or returning, his exit back into the alleyway and back into the TARDIS was quick.

The Doctor pushed open the doors and let them swing shut behind him as he walked quickly up to the console.

He pulled the monitor to face him while he adjusted some knobs. Equations and specifications for the TARDIS filled the screen. The Doctor grumbled and readjusted a few things in attempt to get a different reading.

“Why are you showing me TARDIS specs? I scanned for her biosignature! It’s a health thing.”

The lights dimmed and there was a distinct feeling his beloved ship was narrowing her eyes at him. The TARDIS and Rose were sharing far too many similarities as of late. Maybe they always had, but it was getting harder to deny now.

“Okay, it’s a curiosity thing. And a health thing. But she wants to know, too. Or would want to know. As soon as I can explain it I’ll tell her.”

The screen went to the health of various companions, the Doctor needing to pass everyone from Susan through gave in order to get to Rose, refusing to give in to the nostalgia of anyone who had been on the TARDIS prior. When Selected, again, the screen popped up with only equations.

“Are you ill or just angry with me for doing this?” Equations in circular Gallifreyan popped onto his screen, same numbers and specs as had been on the screen a second ago. He narrowed his eyes with frustration at the screen, “Fine.”

As soon as they turned out of the alley and into the sun, Rose was happy for her absolutely ridiculous disguise had at least come with sunglasses.

“I left a bit of money behind. I can afford a nice pair of trousers, three boxes of tea an’ one of those 50-p toys. Unless prices have gone up.” Rose was probably more excited for this that she should be. The clothes that she had worn as she was awoken on the floor of the TARDIS was likely nearing a decade old. God knows how old the clothes the TARDIS provided were, though those were in less disrepair.

“You really budgeted this, didn’t you?” Rose felt Amy’s judging face pointed at her despite the
slightly jocular voice.

“I worked in a shop before that man fell outta the sky. Lived with my mum, planned everything down to the scrap once,” Rose toddled her head as they walked, “‘s a habit I kept.”

“But you live in a sentient ship who can give you anything you want?”

“Still have to stock her a bit. Even she has some limits... Oof,” Rose cringed to herself as she walked, “don’t let her hear me say that. She’ll be cross for a week.”

“The TARDIS gets cross?” Amy seemed very confused at the concept.

“course she does. Sentient ship, yeah?” Rose walked along, “Happy, sad, likes, dislikes. Just like us, ‘s subtle sometimes but she lets ya know. Where we goin?”

“I modeled for some guy… his clothes aren’t bad, part of the pay pack was two dresses from his line. Someone gets to save their trouser money.”

“’kay,” Rose accepted, “You’re a model…” she said mostly to herself, ”but why bring me?”

“The Doctor is… happy that you’re here. And he's my best friend, really.” Amy huffed. “I approve of his happiness and should make an effort to get to know you.” Rose looked at her shopping companion again, her raised eyebrow was clearly seen even over her overly large sunglasses.

“So Rory suggested it, then?” Rose said teasingly.

“Yeah.”

“Yeah,” Rose smiled.

“And why are you here? No more parties with royalty in the plan?”

Rose laughed, “No. Just needed a shop.”

“Did you just need a break from the tension?” Amy smirked, the smarm in her voice peeking out.

“No idea what you mean.” Rose didn’t take her eyes off the sidewalk ahead, trying to inject as much actual believability into her voice as possible. She knew she hadn’t succeeded.

“You and the Doctor.”

“No idea what you mean.” Rose repeated as unconvincingly as last time.

“I thought if we left… when did we leave?”

Rose turned to answer Amy as they walked, “Just over fifteen days ago?”

“Nearly three months for us,” Amy huffed, “If we left I thought you’d get a moment and actually talk.”

“We did. Maybe. A bit.” Rose intentionally left out the energy thing and the passed out thing. Frankly it was still confusing to explain to herself much less to Amy. “There’re… things. Time things.”

“Things is descriptive.” Amy said sarcastically, “For two people who talk so much you barely say anything.”
“Funny thing for the woman who spent more time growlin’ at me than talkin’ to me to say.”

Amy paled slightly, she somehow missed or forgot that her dislike or distrust of this situation had been very apparent. “Well consider this an opportunity to... get to know you better. Or something.”

“So you’re gonna be askin' the stupid questions all day, then,” Rose chuckled, tension releasing from her shoulders. She knew this was coming, at least a little. “’kay, ask away.”

“How old are you.” Was the first one out of Amy's mouth. It was likely to have been up there, but honestly Rose wasn’t expecting it to have been first.

“No idea.” Rose answered easily, shaking her head as they walked. “Lost track, didn’t have much reason to after a while. Older than you, younger than the Doctor.”

“And you were married.” Amy asserted. Rose nodded as they walked, “But not to Jack?”

Rose bust a laugh, “God, no.” The way Amy asked questions seemed to make Rose smile absently. When she wanted specifics it seemed to raise her voice like a question but more general questions were always more like demanding an answer. Rose wasn’t about to lie either way, didn’t seem to be much reason to. “My husband was...” Rose found herself tripping over the words on her tongue, My husband was the Doctor. She recovered as smoothly as she could, “a lovely bloke. Stubborn, trouble, brilliant. Great hair. You’d have loved him, I think.”

My husband was the Doctor. A series of syllables her mouth couldn’t seem to form. And the inevitable explanations that would come after. Rose didn’t know if Amy knew about regeneration, he’d said not a lot of his companions had known at all. So she’d have to explain that, at least a little, and that wasn’t hers to explain.

Maybe her mouth was smarter than her brain today. It had be said the she had a smart mouth.

“Sounds familiar.” Amy’s face stayed fairly stoic, “you might have a type.” Rose laughed. You’re telling me was instantly sent to but stopped by said smart mouth. “Seems I do, yeah.” Rose smiled as she walked on, noting the pretty posh shops they were passing and as of yet, no one that she recognized.

“Why’d you leave him?” Amy didn’t realize it was a painful question when she said it. Given the way she had been acting with the Doctor, Amy would have thought it was a decision, wouldn’t she?

“I didn’t.” Rose said solemnly before thinking. “Well, once, yeah, but not on purpose and we weren’t married then.” Can’t explain that now, can’t even pop out an easy sentence much less the not easily explained universe separation. “He died, human life span.” Rose sighed a little, smile still fixed to her face, “Long while, now. Feels like lifetimes, probably isn’t, but feels like it.” Rose went silent for a moment, her very determined, often cheeky or laughing voice beside Amy waning for a moment. Amy’s walking slowed a little as she tried to gauge Rose's face. Rose just smiled and ushered her on. “Anyway,” a big, genuine smile crossed her face toward Amy as they walked, “Two way street, yeah? How’d you get messed up with that one?”

“Crack in my wall. I was a little, scared kid. He was... I don’t know? Spitting out golden air and wearing a torn-up, raggedy brown suit, said he’d be back in fifteen minutes and skipped 12 years. Then saved the world.” Amy pushed open the big glass door immediately to her right, directing Rose to follow her.

Spitting out golden air and wearing a torn-up brown suit. Day of, then. Right after, even. Rose pushed her lips together and forced a smile, “Yeah, sounds like him.” She turned and followed Amy
“Rose?”

“Yeah?” Rose spoke loudly for her voice to carry over the closed curtain while she changed. She was on her third dress and possibly answering the 200th question posed by Amy.

“Have you ever been…” Amy’s voice hesitated. Either she was having an issue changing or the newest question was an awkward one. Rose braced herself for the latter. “I donno …pregnant?”

“That’s a weird question.” Rose blinked as she reached around her back to zip up the dress. There had already been a barrage of questions but they all seemed a bit more connected to each other than that one, out of the blue like that.

“You’re apparently very old and were married. It’s not that weird.”

Rose’s eyes widened and she stopped attempting to zip up the back of the dress, mid-zip, chest covered. She pulled open her curtain just enough to stick her head and arm around to see the outside before she slapped at the other just enough for Amy to take note and pop her head out of hers, complete with a nude shoulder. “Are you pregnant?!”

“Maybe.” Amy shrugged, trying not to let a blush creep through. It was much easier to have this conversation with this fairly unknown woman not looking at her. “A bit.”

“Have you told Rory? Or the Doctor?” Rose raised her eyebrows. Amy shook her head. It occurred to Rose that they probably looked a bit weird to anyone passing. Two semi-dressed ladies sticking their heads out of adjacent dressing areas and went back in entirely, prompting Amy to do the same. “Well, my mum went shoppin' when she wasn’t sure. She just got clothes she liked in the size bigger and told people she lost weight ‘til she was sure. Loved compliments, my mum.”

“Genius.”

“Don’t say that ‘round the Doctor,” Rose laughed, “He’ll think you’re a nutter.”

“The TARDIS…” Amy's voice paused, “I’ve been travelling in it so long, do you think it’d have… done anything?”

So many years with the Doctor had Rose trying to remember the words she’d heard. Huon, Chronon, Temporal, Artron…

“We all have a bit of background radiation from time travel, but not harmful that I know of.” Unless
you go to a parallel universe then stand next to a hole to hell or go absorbing bits of the TARDIS she didn’t intend on you absorbing, but both of those seemed unlikely. Maybe shouldn’t say that bit, let’s not scare her too much.

“What about, like, a timehead or something?”

“Time head?” Rose almost laughed again, “What’s a time head?” When no answer, smart mouthed or otherwise immediately came she continued, “I don’t think that’s a thing.”

“I don’t know!”

“Well neither do I! Just spent more time with a time travellin’ crackpot than most. I think aliens other than Gallifreyans have time travel, but I donno anythin’ about their children, either. He said something about the Time Vortex once but honestly it’s blur.” Rose sighed. She likely should have paid more attention but she was young and he was quite pretty. “Prob’ly just wanna ask the crackpot himself, yeah?”

Amy’s answer to that was silence. She didn’t seem to be the sort to acknowledge when she was wrong or admit that anyone else was right. At least someone so new to her as Rose. She got the zipper and smoothed down the dress as best she could. She heard the other curtain pull open.

“Ready?” Amy asked through Rose's still closed changing curtain. She huffed, wearing dresses not necessarily being her strong suit, much less ones that pants couldn’t be put under for better, quicker adventuring. “Lemme see.”

Rose opened her curtain and walked out, moving to stand in front of the mirror. It was belted with a thin, gold belt tightly above her waist. Not Rose’s usual type at all, but oddly fitting. The gold matched her earrings, the blue made her comfy and felt… right.

“Not usually a dress wearer, but I like it.”

“Fits you perfect.” Amy said. It didn’t have the cadence of a compliment, merely a fact.

“s a bit… retro,” Rose slid her hands down the fabric of her dress before turning to Amy in the mirror behind her. “very… 60s-ish, yeah?”

“That’s the style these days.” Amy laughed, “2005. May as well be the dark ages, Gran.”

“Oi!” Rose laughed. Amy had the physique of a model, slender and easily 20 centimeters taller than Rose herself, she put her knuckles on her hip and motioned towards Amy. “Did you wear this one? Woulda been a mini on you, ya giant bloody red wood.” She bumped Amy with her shoulder, looking at the form-fitting and slightly retro dress on Amy herself through the mirror. “Reds a good one on ya.” Amy simply nodded in response. “I got TARDIS blue.” Rose said to herself.

“Might need glasses, Gran. That’s a bit dark for TARDIS blue, we might find a lighter one if you want.” He’d said no one to impress. Amy'd never seen this blue on the TARDIS, had she? Rose's favorite blue.

“Nah, I like this blue. Nostalgic.” Rose said as she clicked the hard c at the end. “An’ I do look good.” She stepped back into the changing booth to get back into her regular clothes, closing the curtain quickly and unzipping the back of the dress. “Whose collection we raidin'? Any one I'da heard of?” The dress fell to the floor and she stepped out of it carefully.

Amy’s voice carried over the changing area. “Probably not. Mal Lupo. He’s a bit new.”
Rose paused, unable to move for a moment as she felt… something… in the pit of her stomach. Those words echoing in her ears.

“Mal Lupo?” Rose groaned as she slipped her shirt on over her head. She slipped her hair out from under the collar more quickly that she would have, now feeling a bit of a rush to get back to the Doctor. “Oh, fantastic. Mal Lupo.”

“I know, rubbish name, right? But love his clothes.”

“No…” Rose quickly pulled up her trousers and slipped on her shoes, opening her curtain before she had even chance to right her pockets, zip her trousers or tie her shoes. “Means Bad Wolf, yeah?”

“Oh, fantastic. Mal Lupo.”

“No…” Amy's voice was muffled.

“’s those words. Makes me nervous.” She squatted on the floor, quickly rectifying the laces just in case, as those words often indicated, they’d need to run.

“Are you afraid of the big bad wolf, there, Rose?” Amy teased.

“’s the only thing to really be afraid of, yourself.” Rose muttered, huffing to herself. She looked back when she heard the curtain open, revealing a redressed Amy who had her question face on. Rose stood back up. “’s a thing with me. Bad Wolf. Technic’ly I guess it is me. 's never a coincidence.”

“Mal is a tall, dark-haired man and you’re not any of that, Grandma.” Amy picked up her dress and Rose's by the hanger. “Besides, that dress fit you perfectly. Coincidence solved. Wouldn’t mind having a coincidence like that around me.”

“Oh, you’d mind, trust me.” Especially if you're then a walking alarm for separation from a certain someone. “C'mon. We needta head back to the Doctor.”

Amy seemed to size up Rose in that moment, juggling the idea of her reticence being just nerves or an actual portent of some kind, or, by the slight smirk that formed, Amy likely thought Rose was just in a hurry to get back to The Doctor because he was The Doctor. She likely settled on that one, but Rose didn’t care as long as it meant they’d leave. “Let me settle up and we'll go.”

Rose couldn’t help scanning over everything while the redhead talked to a person with a ledger. Something about… pretty much everything was starting to set her on edge. The faster they got back home, the sooner she could relax.

Home.

The two left with two garment bags containing their new dresses, Rose setting the pace like she was a homing beacon on direct course to the Doctor.
Rose and Amy come back, arm in arm, a garment bag over each of their arms, laughing.

“Honey, we’re home.” Rose announced as she and Amy walked through the doors, arm in arm with their garment bags slung over the free one.

“Honey?” the Doctor perked up from his spot behind the console, only his head visible. He noted the uncommon expression for those two, linking arms with some small glee.

“Was talkin’ to the TARDIS.” Rose laughed and gently stroked the railing, effectively smoothing the Doctors glee a little, “F you can call her affectionate things, I can, too. Isn’t that right, Sexy?”

Amy leaned in as the Doctor’s head disappeared back behind the center console. “That one was for him, wasn’t it?” Rose just winked to Amy while they separated.

“Done so soon?” the Doctor's voice resonated around the room as he walked into view. He was wiping his hands of something oily likely from unnecessary repairs.

“Dresses gotten. Needed to come back.” Rose visibly relaxed back on the TARDIS. The Doctor wasn’t sure it was just because she was home or… the thing between them. Love that thing. But her relaxing was contagious, his tension leaving, too.

“Get into trouble?”

“No yet.” Rose put down her garment bag on to the railing. “Just realized we had to come back.” No use worrying him, those words might not hold as much weight. They left as soon as they could and returned, unscathed, to the TARDIS. The world didn’t seem to be ending, maybe they weren’t as much of an omen anymore. Hopefully. “I can actually go for a shop without Cybermen, I’m not you.” She teasingly added.

“Cybermen?”

“So you remember Daleks but not Cybermen?” Rose looked at her friend, hand on her hip.

“Uh, different events,” the Doctor quickly said to Rose before turning back to Amy, “Remember the ghosts?”

Amy's expression changed only a bit, no major recognition or fear setting themselves in place. “We read about them and saw them on the telly. Not a lot of Ghost activity in Leadworth.”

“Excitin' place that Leadworth.” Rose managed to mumble as she poured herself a mug.

“You’re telling me.” Amy mumbled.
Rory opened the doors of the TARDIS to the echoing sounds of laughter. All three sitting down in the galley. Rose and Amy on opposite sides of the counter with the Doctor behind Rose, cooking something in a pot. Likely custard, knowing him. But Amy was smiling, genuinely smiling, at Rose while they talked.

“Wife?”

“Husband!” Amy burst off of her stool to greet him. Thee exuberance was... unexpected by the look on Rory’s face. He’d barely made it into the room when she greeted him at the door to the galley. Rory nodded a greeting to the Doctor and Rose.

“Hello,” he awkwardly said before turning a whispering to his wife, “I thought you were wary of her”

Rose didn’t even turn to them as she lifted up her mug to take a sip, “Heard that.”

“Fixed now, mostly.” They were likely trying to whisper, Amy’s voice had an uncharacteristic quietness to it.

“ Heard that, too.” Rose rolled her eyes and stepped a bit closer to their chef and whispered something to the Doctor. He smiled.

The Doctor smiled and nodded, speaking at a slightly lower than normal volume but not a whisper, maintaining a closeness to Rose and looking directly at the other two. “Yes, they’re very bad at whispering.”

Amy rolled her eyes as she pulled Rory closer to the others and plopped back down on her seat. “Where are you two off to next?”

Rose shrugged and turned slightly to look at the Doctor. They really hadn’t planned anything other than talking about the thing... well, the minute it entered her mind Rose looked away and nearly blushed, prompting him to concentrate on his burning custard all the more. Rose cleared her throat, “No plans.”

Any considered the way Rose and the Doctor were obviously not looking at each other but still standing near one another. She smirked and raised her voice a little. “I’m pretty sure Gran and I could be convinced to wear our new dresses somewhere.”

Rose rolled her eyes while the Doctor asked, “Gran?”

“Think she’s funny but I’m so not amused.” Rose smiled at the Doctor to show she wasn’t upset by it.

“I’m saying let’s all go somewhere, Moron. You can drop us back off after.”

Rose swooped up her dress off the railing. The men looked cluelessly to each other then back to the women.
They finally left the room, smelled of smoke and perfume. It almost wafted out around them as they opened the door and Amy and Rory lead the charge to exit.

“Well that was…” Rose started once they hit the fresh, dry air of the outside. Rose's arm in the Doctor’s as she followed him out, the quartet looking well put together. Rose's dark blue dress matched perfectly by the Doctor’s dark blue bow tie.

“... sweaty.” Amy finished for her, eyes widened.

“—But classic,” amended Rory.

Rose nodded, dazed but happy, “An surprisingly lackin’ in chest hair.”

Doctor smiled smugly. “Before the flares, after the Sullivan Studios. You still should see the Ed Sullivan Elvis before the white flare Elvis,” He felt Rose’s grip keenly, it tightening for a millisecond in happiness. “I said we should have seen the younger one.”

“The dresses said fancy sixties and you made that face when we mentioned going to see Frank Sinatra,” Amy pouted. Rose almost laughed when the Doctor’s arm held hers closer momentarily.

“It was still a great show. Classic.” Rose clicked the hard c noise at the end with a wink.

“When did you say that?” Rory asked, obviously thinking. “The Elvis thing? I don’t remember you saying that.”

“A while ago. 1953.” The Doctor almost growled the words before popping back to joviality, “Not my favorite day.”

“Oh, it was alright,” Rose flopped her free hand dismissively before sliding it down the arm she was grasping onto. “We snagged a bit of cake at that picnic.”

“Mmm. Cake. Maybe we should have cake.”

“I’m not sure if I have much of an appetite,” said Amy as she tried to tame the awed, wide eyed look on her face “Sweaty.”

Rose clicked her tongue and hung happily on the Doctor’s arm. “Shouldda done the Beatles.” Rose shook her head and laughed in her chest. Time machine. Could do, but he probably wanted to do more than watch. That’s likely why he liked parties so much, less watching more doing. Well, that’s what dates are for, finding out who the other person was, yeah?

Even just thinking that word made her blush a bit. Which was ridiculous. She went to look up at the
face just beyond the arm she was clinging to, and those green eyes were already locked on her, his smarmy smile morphing into an embarrassed but happy one.

The Doctor flourished his arms and walked ahead, turning around to face the group now behind him as he walked backwards. "This is Las Vegas! In the 60s! Big year for Earth. We'll find something to do!"

Everyone slowed as he continued walking backwards.

“Hello, Sweetie.”

Chapter End Notes

Didn’t mean for my holiday coma to last so long, but I think I managed to get everything untangled and retwisted. This season may have been cinematic but it was a bit of a linear writer’s nightmare.
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

The Impossible Astronaut

(...without the Impossible Astronaut)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Hello, Sweetie.”

Sweetie? Who was… oh. Rose didn’t need to think for more than a second who this was, staring gleefully at them and addressing the Doctor as Sweetie. The others greeted her - River - with smiles and less awkwardness. Awkwardness Rose knew it was coming. The night she came back he said she’d known her. So eventually she would meet River Song.

And now was that eventually. Much sooner than other eventuallies.

Her eyes didn’t seem to want to focus.

She’d probably done too much thinking about it long ago and not enough now. Living so long, having been married to the other him, hundreds of adventures and decades more maturity was not stemming her emotions, but they were all traffic jamming her mind to a standstill.

Until he took her hand. She didn’t need to see it. It was his hand. Not as long and spindly as the one that spent many years there but one that fit eerily well considering. She finally blinked when he spoke.

“Doctor Song,” the Doctor greeted.

“Hello, my love.”

The Doctor blanched. Rose hearing ‘Sweetie’ and then ‘my love’ was going to… He looked back and forth between the two women, suddenly very nervous. “…Now, don't fight…”

…River was looking directly at Rose when she said that.

“Oh.” He blinked, looking between the two breathing a slightly relieved if confused breath. “...You won’t fight. Good.”

“Why would we fight…” River suddenly grimaced a little, “…Did he tell you about the graffiti?” she asked through a slight cringe. “It was his fault, you know. Yours rang through and he never picks up his phone.”

“Graffiti?”

“Then never mind. Oh! It’s still early for you two, isn’t it? Diaries.” She quickly reached into her back pocket and removed a blue diary. A blue diary Rose had only ever heard of, a blue diary the
looked like the TARDIS. It was quite a shock for Rose to actually see it. She’d pictured it for years, first dwelling on it like a jealous ex at first and then only giving it passing thoughts before forgetting it entirely.

“River, I’ll make it easy for ya,” Rose sighed as River flipped pages, “’s a first for me, yeah?” Rose explained. The Doctor absently smiled at the clarity of it. Between the two other people around him at least something was clear.

“Oh.” River blinked, her search through pages pausing before turning to a blank one with an only slightly noticeable huff. “Well, then.” She was stoic. For a woman who seemed to have a handle on every time she’d met up with the Doctor, she didn’t seem to have a handle on a first time with Rose. River’s eyes seemed to lose something as she cleared her throat, “So Amy and Rory just got married. Congratulations, Ponds.”

“We’re not Ponds,” Rory said, as if already defeated by the idea but saying it anyway.

“Yes you are;” sounded out around him, four voices mingling into an aharmonic mix of amusement and fact.

Rose couldn’t help trying to figure this out a little, though she was afraid of the conclusion she could draw. River knew the Ponds got married and she knew, without a doubt, that was when Rose arrived. It had been a surprise to everyone else, but her arrival seemed to have been on this person of the future’s schedule. That was both relieving and a little daunting.

“’parently I stick ’round if you know me,” Rose laughed awkwardly, weighing those implications. “bit of a spoiler, there.”

“Oh, I don’t know if it was that much of a spoiler.” River almost sang her words, “Where else would you be?”

The Doctor gripped Rose’s hand in his again, his voice gaining joviality, “She wanders off on occasion.”

“She’s going to hit you for that joke one day and I’ll be there.” River said, smirking.

“Again with the spoilers.” The Doctor joked.

“Dunno if it was that much of a spoiler;” Rose muttered, glancing quickly at the Doctor. She couldn’t help a little smile poking through.

Rose felt her bag start to vibrate. She let go of the Doctor’s hand and stepped back, rifling through her bag.

“What are you doing here?” River asked as adjusted his bow tie.

“Elvis, you?” the Doctor smirked a little.

“Unapproved furlough. Sight seeing.” River said coolly, only part of that sentence running true. “I did try ringing but the line rang through.”

“Speaking of ringing…” Rose fumbled through her tiny purse, it was bigger on the inside, of course, so the vibrating mobile was a bit hard to grasp but she found it.

“Did you give out the number to anyone?” the Doctor raised an eyebrow.
“I only gave it to Amy.” She looked a bit curious and a bit horrified. He didn’t discount the idea that either of them would give it out in the future. Rose’s face blanched as she looked at the screen, caller Unknown. Flashbacks sent shivers up her spine. “Guessin this is for you…” she tossed the phone to him. He fumbled to catch it. She pressed her lips together as she watched him flop to grab the only slightly airborne mobile phone, forgetting that this him was a touch more clumsy than the last. He answered it quickly.

“Hello?”

“Help me,” said a small voice. Rose and River moved closer to the Doctor, flanking him on both sides as they listened to what came out of the speaker he held to his ear “…Coming to eat me…” the call was static-y, “…Bad...Spaceman…”

The call ended.

“The call’s not very clear.” The Doctor grumbled, trying not to take note of the very nearness River had maintained.


“Looks like we found something to do.” Amy said with an undercurrent of excitement. Rose hopped quickly to Amy’s side, gleefully putting any potential awkwardness figuratively and literally behind her.

“Amy, lovely as there dresses are, I think this prob'ly calls for a wardrobe change, yeah?” Rose looked at Amy with a grin. It was silly to dwell on the future or past or whatever River represented when someone was in trouble and adventures lay ahead of them.

“Sounds like a different kind of party.” Amy and Rose clasped hands and lead the charge back to the TARDIS, the others behind them.

“1969, all easy! Most of Earth’s 1960s are easy. Well, not New Orleans, ironically. But we’re not going to New Orleans 1969. Funny, how some years are easy. Now, 1482, full of glitches.” He moved his hands up and down. Rose and Amy redressed in shirts and denims, Rose leaning on a railing watching him expound randomly and Amy with Rory and River. “Time isn’t a straight line. It's all bumpy wumpy. There's loads of boring stuff like Sundays and Tuesdays and Thursday afternoons. But now and then there are Saturdays. Big temporal tipping points when anything's possible. The TARDIS can't resist them, like a moth to a flame. She loves a party, so I give her 1969 and spaceman, and this is where she's pointing.” He gently swatted the monitor.

Amy spied at the display, “Washington D.C., April the eighth, 1969?”

Rose’s nose scrunched, “Not far off from where we were, yeah?”

“Yeah, still 1969.” The Doctor looked at the monitor, “Who’s President?”

“Not enough.” The Doctor huffed.

“Hippie!” River looked at him slightly agape

“Archaeologist.” The Doctor retorted almost insultingly.

The exchange was fast. It wouldn’t be unnerving when he’d do it with anyone else so why did it fill Rose with… dread? Because this time it might mean something. That was a horrifying thought. The Doctor looked at the look on Rose’s face and his mouth twitched a bit nervously into a smile, as if hearing her thoughts trying to cheer her up.

Telepathy was scary enough with him, but his uncanny ability to see her thoughts without it was always comforting.

“Okay,” The Doctor smiled and ran around the console, “since I don't know what I'm getting into this time, for once I'm being discreet. I'm putting the engines on silent.”

He pulled a lever and a loud, screeching noise permeated their ears from the TARDIS. Rose cringed and gently pushed a button, moving quickly to throw a switch beside River. River threw the switch Rose was aiming for and the TARDIS went quiet.

“Putting the outer shield on invisible. I haven't done this in a while. Big drain on the power.” The Doctor announced as he pulled and pushed levers.

“You can turn the TARDIS invisible?” Rory asked.

The Doctor laughed with a loud ‘Ha!’ as he threw a switch quickly and the lights brightened to near blinding.

Rose squinted at the lights before quickly twisting a knob and the lights dimmed. “If he does the right stuff, yeah.”

“Oh, back seat driver,” the Doctor mumbled and as he ran around the console and around the nearly stationary Rose. “Okay. Now I can't check the scanner. It doesn't work when we're cloaked. Just give us a mo.” He ran down the ramp towards the doors, Amy and Rory hot on his heels as River and Rose hesitated, though River moved to follow. The Doctor reached the doors as he noticed his friends behind him, “Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. You lot, wait a moment. We're in the middle of the most powerful city in the most powerful country on Earth.” The Doctor grinned as he ran his fingers through his hair and adjusted his bowtie, “Let's take it slow.”

The Doctor stepped out of the TARDIS and closed the door behind him.

As two men are listening to the recording, both looking quite hairy, or that’s because he only saw the back of their heads. He looked around and cringed…

The oval office.

And the TARDIS was cloaked, so it wasn’t aiding a quick, quiet retreat as he’d have used.

An odd telephonic ringing echoing from a recording on the desk between two people. Hearing their voices and managing to remain unseen and apparently unheard let him carefully step as the two other men in the room were faced the other way.
The presidential voice sounded in the recording, ‘Hello? Who is this? This is President Nixon. Who's calling? Is this you again?’

A small recorded voice followed, ‘I'm scared, Mister President. I'm scared.’

“A little girl?” the closer man interjected in a quick quiet moment of the recording.

“Boy, Canton.” A non-recorded presidential voice responded.

“How can you be sure?” The hairy-back-of-head one spoke, apparently named Canton.

‘Where are you phoning from? Where are you right now? Who are you?’

The Doctor slid his hand into his inner jacket pocket, and quickly fished out a half filled little notebook. Passing up many pages of oddly embarrassing though indecipherable to most circles he was able to find a clear page and slips the pen out of the spiral above it to start writing. He quickly and near silently played catch up the recorded conversation.

‘Jefferson Adams Hamilton.’ The small voice was tentative.

‘Jefferson, listen to me—’

There was around of the child ringing off. The president, President Nixon, turned around and pressed a button on the recording device, ending the playback.

“Surely this is something the Bureau could handle, sir.” Canton seemed intrigued under his irritation.

Nixon shuffled, his voice gaining a bit of clarity, “These calls happen wherever I am. Every day, at the same time. How do I know the Bureau isn't involved? I can't trust anyone. You’re not part of the Bureau any more. But you have the training.”

They suddenly went silent. The Doctor kept writing, using the silence to play catch up to the taped conversation that just ended before he looked up and realized the others were now staring at him.

“Oh... Hello. Bad moment.” He started a slow and steady retreat backwards, “Oh look, this is the Oval Office. I was looking for the er…” his ‘steady’ withdrawal was stopped by backing into a lamp, which he fumblingly attempted to right while not halting his backward motion, “…oblong room. I'll just be off, then, shall I?”

The Doctor turned quickly and ran face first into the cloaked TARDIS, causing a jolt to him and knocking him backwards.
The doors swung closed behind the Doctor.

“What’s he doing?” Amy crossed her arms and stopped beside Rose as she looked at the doors.

“Tryin’ to be impressive.” Rose smirked. She lowered her voice and looked to Amy at her side, “She can fly the TARDIS?”

Amy shrugged, she obviously didn't know it even think it was much of a big deal. “She said she was taught by the best.”

“Ooh, Spoilers,” Rived cooed from right behind them. She crossed her arms and smirked. “Did I really say that? Let’s not give her a big head.”

Rose raised an eyebrow, “No one can fly That TARDIS ‘cept him.”

“And you,” River charmingly amended, slight smile creeping up her mouth as she shrugged. “Why shouldn’t there be one more?”

Rose blinked. She’d forgotten that, yes, she’d done that twice now, and the instinctive tweaks to his driving was just further proof that she seemed to know what she was doing.

“You can fly the TARDIS, too?” Rory asked looking at Rose.

“Yeah, but—” he had to catch herself on a railing as a big jolt shook them, her hand quickly grasping Amy’s to help her maintain balance.

Rose and River marched furiously to the center console the minute stability was regained.

Rory hoisted himself back up and regarded them. “He said the scanner wouldn't work.”

Rose quickly started fiddling with buttons on the console as if on auto pilot. “He never did pass his test.”

The monitor flickered on, River jerked it to face them.

There was the Doctor, tackled to the floor, surrounded by angry men in suits.

“Stop that!” He grunted while men wrestled his arms behind him. “Rose, River, have you got my scanner working yet?”

River looked at the monitor, pointing to things in the background of the image and turned to Rose quickly. “Flags in the background. A desk. What did he do, trip an alarm?”

“Get the President out of here. Sir, you have to go with them, now.” A shouy, authoritative voice sounded over the speakers.

“President.” Rose laughed a nervous laugh, “We're in the bloody White House.”

The Doctor grunted as he was manhandled as he got louder, “Make her blue again!”

River threw a switch on the other end of the console and Rose twisted the same knob she had earlier. Rose turned the screen to see the confused and dumbfounded looks on the faces surrounding the Doctor. The Doctor himself barely holding back a smile. His goofy smile appeared as he worked his
way out from under the grasp of several servicemen forced one onto Rose's face.

“What the hell is that?”

The authoritative voice coming over the speakers snapped her out of her reverie. As the suited men around him looked up with a mix of awe and terror.

“Mister President, that child just told you everything you need to know, but you weren't listening.” The Doctor’s calm bravado was unavoidable. He was out of shot of the scanner for a moment, but it panned to find him behind the big desk at what was likely the head of the room. “Never fear, though, because the answer's yes. I'll take the case. Fellows, the guns, really?” Rose’s eyes widened and she snapped around to similarly panicked and eye-widened companions around her as they heard that. It took them only seconds to immediately run towards the doors. “I just walked into the highest security office in the United States and parked a big blue box on the rug. Do you think you can just shoot me?”

River burst out the front doors first, “They're Americans!” Rose, Rory and Amy piled out of the TARDIS behind her, Rose passing River with eyes wide but quickly being stopped by secret servicemen.

The Doctor stiffened and put his hands out immediately. “Don't shoot! Definitely no shooting. Someone I know does very stupid things when there's shooting.” Amy glanced at River, who warily kept an eye on the guns pointing at Amy and Rory. Rose stayed stoic watching the men on the Doctor.

“No shooting.” Rory nervously responded, “Look, we've got our hands up.” Rory raised his hands in surrender, Amy at least turning her hands out and River following suit. Rose got the hint and raised her hands to her shoulders, making it visible that they were empty.

“Who the hell are you?”

“Sir, you need to stay back.” That man seemed more curious than angry, which was always a good sign when the Doctor was involved. And one of the only people in the room not brazenly pointing a gun at one of them. That helped his esteem in her eyes, and, she knew, the Doctor’s as well.

“But who are they and what is that box?” questioned President Nixon.

“It's a police box,” the Doctor harrumphed, “Can't you read?”

“Is now really the time?” Rose automatically said to the Doctor as she stared at the gun pointed at her.

The Doctor sobered a touch, “I'm your new undercover agent on loan from Scotland Yard. Code name the Doctor.” He slowly became more bold, “These are my top operatives: The Legs, The Nose, the Hair, and Eliza Doolittle.”

“Oi!” Rose shot the Doctor a small glare before looking back at the service men, she knew it wasn’t a very imposing one.

“Did he just call himself the future Doctor Doolittle?” Rory whispered to his wife quickly.

Amy shrugged holding in a giggle, “He does talk to animals and apparently she’s a big bad wolf or something.”

“The Bad Wolf,” River quickly amended, “the original one.”
“Again, is now really the time?!” Rose turned her head, eyes momentarily off of the gun-wielding secret servicemen just to admonish the group before snapping them back to the weapons trained on them. “There’s three of you, now. Rubbish whisperers.”

“Who are you?” questioned the demanding president.

“Nah, boring question.” The Doctor touted, “Who's phoning you? That's interesting. Because Canton is right. That was definitely a girl's voice, which means there's only one place in America she can be phoning from.”

“Where?” asked Canton fairly calmly.

“Do not engage with the intruder, Mister Delaware.” The shouty man from before instructed.

“You heard everything I heard. It's simple enough. Give me five minutes, I'll explain. On the other hand,” the Doctor sat in the president’s chair with bravado, “lay a finger on me or my friends,” he cockily started putting his feet up on the desk, “and you'll never, ever know.”

“How did you get it in here?” Canton pointed at the TARDIS without looking away from the Doctor, “I mean, you didn't carry it in.”

“Clever, eh?” the Doctor smirked.

“Love it.”

“Do not compliment the intruder,” the shouty man continued, “Mister President, that man is a clear and present danger to—”

“Mister President,” Canton gruffly interrupted, “that man walked in here with a big blue box and four of his friends, and that's the man,” he pointed at the shouty man, “he walked past. One of them's worth listening to. I say we give him five minutes. See if he delivers.”

Nixon seemed a bit reigned at Canton’s logic, “All right, five minutes.”

The Doctor pulled his legs back off the desk and fidgeted, sitting up properly. He spoke very quickly with a growing smile, “I'm going to need a SWAT team, ready to mobilize. Street level maps covering all of Florida. A pot of coffee, twelve Jammie Dodgers and a fez.”

Canton gruffly turned to the shouty man, “Get him his maps.”

The Doctor's face feel a little as the Jammie Dodgers weren’t mention.

He could go for a biscuit.

Rose immediately put her hands down and let out a breath she hadn’t realized she was hoping before hearing the exhalations of the people behind her doing the same.

Rory waited for the gun to be full holstered before his hands down and shuffled awkwardly, joining
the already relaxed hands of those around him. A few if the service men retreating to doorways.

“What did you mean Rose is the big bad wolf?” Rory asked River quietly as a man walked into the room with a bundle of tubed maps.

River shrugged as she took one of the maps from the man, “You know the fairy tales.”

“Which one?” Asked Amy quickly.

“All of them.”

“Fairy tales were first.” Rose said as she walked past, laying a yellowed map on the floor as she tried to match up roads with a nearby one. It hadn’t taken long for yellow and whites and greens with black lines began to carpet the entire room like moss that was growing on all surfaces.

“The chicken and the egg, my love.” River smoothly smarmed as she sat in front of one particular map. Rose rolled her eyes and stood watching the Doctor flit all over the room and finally stop to peruse a set of maps of the sofa on the side of the room.

“You’re a fairy tale?” Amy said quietly, walking more towards Rose. She seemed less intent on looking at them and more intent on questions. Again.

“Aren’t we all, Amelia Pond?” Rose eyed Amy quickly. “You prob’ly are, too, ’f you look hard enough.” Rose meant it easily but she could tell Amy had begun thinking much too hard on it as Amy slowing meandered back toward her husband on the other side of the room.

Rose watched her leave for a moment before turning her attention back to the map before her and squatted to look.

God might have known what she was looking for, she certainly didn’t.

It only took a few seconds of completely futile map-gazing for her to chew her lip and stand properly, wandering over to the Doctor by the sofa.

“So,” Rose stood beside him and leaned against the arm of the sofa facing him, her arms crossed as she idly looked at one of the maps carpeting the floor. “Maps.”

“Maps,” The Doctor confirmed.

“Maps of Florida.” Rose looked at the sofa where the maps were spayed before him, before simply looking at his face. She drummed her fingers on her arm for a beat before she leaned in and whispered quietly to the Doctor, “An’ why didn't we just use the TARDIS?” He just turned slightly to look at her and smirked. Her smile grew and she looked him up and down quickly, assessing him. “This you's all about the show, aren'tcha?”

The Doctor put on his best Elvis impression, “Thank you, thank you very much.” He turned back to his perusal of the maps. She turned her head to watch all the people in the room again, most milling about and watching each other.

Amy was looking at random objects around the room, Rose would have to guess Amy figured out just as quickly that she’d have no idea what to look for. Rory was like her own personal secret service himself, not far off from her and seeming to guard her from the gun-toting, on-edge servicemen around the room as she did so. The suited men were doing much the same as Rose, eyeing the activities of those around the room, occasionally meeting her eye and starting of a minor war of wills. Tempting as it was to scare them with the wolf eyes, she wasn’t entirely sure right now
was quite the time.

River was staring at one particular map. It vaguely registered to Rose that River wouldn’t have known quite what to look for to be studying it so hard. River had heard the same information she had, and yet Rose had no idea what to look for. Amy had no idea what to look for. River was obviously very smart.

…Or she’d spent a large amount of time with a certain someone to pick up hints of things in what he says and how he says them. Ones that Rose herself had missed.

Rose’s eyes landing on River beside him filled the Doctor with dread. She could be thinking about… well, why shouldn’t she be thinking about that, he was thinking about that a bit. Calculations and timelines running through the back of his mind like sugar high toddlers while the rest of it worked on the little girl conundrum.

“Elvis and the White House? Hell of a first date.” Rose smiled, her eyes bouncing to him with that tongue peeking out of her mouth and went back to watching the others.

Date.

Tongue-y smile. Oh, chips and dates got that smile. He’d have to keep that in mind.

Again, Date. This was a date.

“Have to keep up the standard.” He said, honestly paying his maps less attention than her but doing his best for it to seem opposite. “And that was not our first date.”

Saying it wasn’t less weird. Not less elating, either.

Rose smiled and looked at the ceiling momentarily, “Oh, first double, then.” Rose pushed her bum off arm of the sofa and turned around to look at the maps idly, to at least look like she was helping though she still wasn’t entirely sure what she was looking for.

“Do you still have that pen?”

Rose reached into her pocket and pulled out her permanent marker. “What do you need it for?”

“Marking stuff. What do you have it for?”

“Markin’ stuff,” Rose teased back as she handed him the marker. “The Doctor with a permanent marker in the oval office,” she clicked her tongue, “Just don’t mark anythin’ that'll getcha shot at, yeah?”

The Doctor walked up to the map on the desk. The president sitting calmly at the other side, his brow furrowed at the room was crowded with people and maps.
Canton walked up beside the Doctor. “Why Florida?”

The Doctor quickly turned to answer Canton, “It’s where NASA is. She mentioned a spaceman. NASA’s where the spacemen live. Also, there's another lead I'm following.”

A Scottish voice randomly sounded, “I remember.”

“Amy? What do you remember?” Rose saw Rory move out of the corner of her eye.

“I don't know. I just—”

Rose turned quickly and stiffened, looking at her ginger friend closely while their companions questioned her of her alrightness.

“Yeah. No, I'm fine. I'm just feeling a little sick.” Amy walked up to the shouty, authoritative one, “Excuse me, is there a toilet or something?”

The shouty one stood stoic, “Sorry, ma'am, while this procedure's ongoing, you must remain within the Oval office.”

Canton turned from his attention-garnering map, “Shut up and take her to the restroom.”

The shouty one sighed and the man next to him spoke up, “This way, ma'am.”

“Thanks,” Amy said flatly.

“Do you want me to come with ya?” Rose asked, giving her a knowing look. “Girls do go to the toilet in groups.”

“Nah.” Amy smiled and waved her off, “Just need the toilet.”

Canton looked at his watch as Amy was escorted out of the room, “Your five minutes are up.”

“Yeah, and where's my fez?” The Doctor replied mockingly.

The telephone started ringing.

The Doctor looked at it and then the president across the desk of him.

“The kid?” Canton asked.

“Should I answer it?” Nixon asked, sitting up and looking at the ringing phone.

The Doctor uncapped the marker and used it on the map before him, “Here! The only place in the United States that call could be coming from. See? Obvious, when you think about it." Rose couldn’t see where he marked from where she was.

The second ring sounded just as Amy came in followed by her escort, walking more quickly at the noise.

“You, sir, are a genius.” Canton remarked. He obviously saw. The Doctor could almost feel the eye roll and smirk on Rose’s face as the comment was made.

“It's a hobby.”

“Like knitting an' bein' humble,” Rose commented. Yup, there was the smirk. He didn’t even need to
see it, he heard it in her voice.

The Doctor lifted a finger without looking back at Rose, “Oh I’m very good at that, the best.”

It rang again.

Canton nodded toward Nixon, “Mister President, answer it.”

Nixon cleared his throat and picked up the phone hitting buttons on this recorder, “Hello. This is President Nixon.”

The girls voice echoed through the recording, “It's here! They say it's here! It's going to get me! It's going to eat me!”

“There's no time for a SWAT team. Let's go. Mister President, tell her help's on the way.” The Doctor made a motion towards the TARDIS and Amy was the first to the TARDIS Doors, Rory and River behind her as the Doctor put an arm around Rose and ushered her toward the entrance. He turned his head toward Canton. “Canton, on no account follow me into this box and close the door behind you.”

“What the hell are you doing?!” Canton stared after them as they ran into the TARDIS.

Rose turned her head over her shoulder as she held the door open for a moment, “Same thing you are, c'mon, shift.” Before she let go of the door and went inside. She paused just inside the door as Canton ran in behind her.

It was oddly comforting to be back in the TARDIS, the hum and the colors and, she supposed, not having eyes or guns trained on them was a definite plus. That was a bit disconcerting no matter how many times it’d happened now. Watching someone have to come to grips with the sheer scope of the TARDIS interior wasn’t something she’d dealt with in several years, and honestly the look on Canton's face made her understand why her husband had said he had liked it so much. She was almost dying to hear that it was bigger on the inside, simply for nostalgia’s sake. Rory looked to Rose and she pushed him on to join his wife’s side while she tend to the gaping serviceman. “I'll get 'im.”

Doctor did his little dance around the TARDIS console as he adjusted her to travel, “Jefferson isn’t a girl's name. It's not her name either. Jefferson, Adams, Hamilton.”

“Surnames of three of America's founding fathers,” River announced like everyone knew.

Or a few of the original dissenters leading to the New Britain Alliance. Rose bit her lip. Wrong universe, Tyler. This was going to take some adjustments. Rose huffed, unable to add anything to the conversation, but she could always mind Canton. It was a bit unbelievable, this, at least to those who hadn’t already believed it.

“You okay?” Rose looked at Canton, making sure his awe didn't turn into nausea.
“It's bigger on the inside,” he gaped.

And there it was. Rose beamed with glee and passed a quick look to see Doctor absently doing the same while he did his little dance around the console, saying something about someone fancying him.

“Yeah, it is,” Rose nodded happily and looked around as she sucked her bottom lip in and looked back at Canton. “You okay with that?” Canton was still wide eyed looking mostly up at the vast interior.

“Now, where would you find three big, historical names in a row like that?” the Doctor posited to his friends as he made his way to Rose and Canton.

“Where?” Amy followed.

“Florida, I’m guessin’.” Rose said adding into the conversation she could hear as the Doctor passed her to push open the doors. Amy gave her a weird look. “Maps, yeah?”

“Come on.” The Doctor smiled and plopped the marker and a torch into Rose’s waiting hands as he opened the doors and swiftly exited. River Amy and Rory following right after him, Rose directed Canton to follow, gently pushing him from behind out the TARDIS doors as she slid it back into her pocket.

They entered into a dirty, seemingly disused space, lit only by the light through the windows from the outside street lamps. Cluttered, papers and books littered around the space though everything from the floor to the windows was coated in a fine layer of dust and filth. Quite a departure from the Oval office.

Canton turned around in disbelief, filling Rose with an odd nostalgia as he looked around the room and then to the size of the TARDIS exterior. Rose stayed near Canton as the others explored the room.

“Where are we?” Amy asked as she, her husband and River seemed to follow the Doctor’s wake as he marched toward a desk in the center of the room.

“About five miles from Cape Kennedy Space Center. It's 1969, the year of the moon. Interesting, don’t you think?”

Canton stole Rose’s attention. “We've moved. How, how can we have moved?”

“s a…” Rose struggled to explain, it had been while since she’d one this and she wasn’t sure how her explanation would be received, “…spaceship. Like the rocket to the moon, but better.”

“But why would a little girl be here?” River mused.

“I don't know. Lost me a bit. The President asked the girl where she was, and she did what any lost little girl would do. She looked out of the window.” The Doctor pulled down a horizontal blind. Out window the view was straight to three street sign points to Hamilton Av, Jefferson St and Adams St.

“Streets,” Amy said, “Of course, street names.” She looked back at Rose quickly, “Maps.” Rose shot Amy a quick wink and turned back to minding Canton’s awe clicking on her torch.

“It’s dark. How is it this late?” Canton mumbled, likely to himself as Rose tried to think of a proper answer.
“The only place in Florida, probably all of America, with those three street names on the same
junction,” he took a few steps by Rose. “Are you two ready?”

“Nearly,” she smiled looking at the still flabbergasted Canton. Rose looked into the Doctor’s eyes
quickly, “give us a mo, still have to do time travel yet.” The Doctor beamed a smile and turned to the
exit into the rest of the building.

“Time travel?” Canton repeated. Canton’s jaw looked about ready to dislocate he was so
dumfounded, Rose pat his back gently and bit her lip again in thought. She released it almost
immediately with a small smile when she realized what to say.

“Do you watch telly, Canton?” She seemed excited, but quieted and stuttered a bit as she adjusted
her vernacular, “Er… Television?”

Canton nodded slightly, “Yeah?”

“Well, *Twilight Zone* an’ *Star Trek* had a baby and he,” she pointed to the Doctor as he exited the
window-laden office, “drives it. Past, present, future, space. Ancient Greece or another planet in the
year five billion.”

“…All of time and space.” He nodded absently, trying to wrap his head around it as Rose nodded.
“How long have Scotland Yard had this?”

Rose laughed and just ushered him on to follow the group.

River’s voice sounded before they caught up, “It's a warehouse of some kind. Disused.”

“You realize this is almost certainly a trap, of course.”

“Okay,” Amy sounded with disbelief, “but why would anyone want to trap us?”

The Doctor shrugged, “Let's see if anyone tries to kill us and work backwards.

“*Kill us*?” Canton looked shocked at Rose as they walked behind, Rose shining her light on the
nearby things as they walked between what seemed to be walls of stuff.

“Happens more than ya think,” she said nonchalantly.

“Who are you people?”

The answer was fast on her tongue. “Travelers, mostly.”

“Travelers who people regularly try to kill?” Canton asked.

Rose shrugged and continued walking. “Sometimes, yeah.” Canton seemed to accept that at face
value.

“Why would a little girl be here?” River asked as she seemed to use her vortex manipulator for
scanning the room.

“I don't know.” The Doctor smoothly replied, “Let's find her and ask her.”

River and Amy’s lights seemed to converge on an alien looking table. Rusted, tubes hanging from it.
The very sight of it seemed to make Cantons jaw drop a bit. Canton gravitated, wide mouthed and
eyed, toward the big alien looking table with River and Amy, but seemed to snap into service man
mode and catalogue details in his mind. Quick recovery, Rose smiled and separated from him,
confident in Canton’s ability to cope. The odd table thing was plenty occupied, the Doctor was looking around the room and Rory was, of course, looking around like Amy's personal body guard, but beside the table seemed to be a crate full of assorted items, unoccupied. Seemed best to start there.

“It's non-terrestrial. Definitely alien,” River said what everyone was likely thinking. Rose's light stayed propped up, illuminating the contents of the open crate as she squatted to inspect it.

“Think I found some from Earth, s not a lot, though, an’ what is seems to be from the future...” Rose stopped abruptly, moving what looked like a large hunk of metal and she had no idea what it did. “52nd century? Somethin’ like that, yeah?” she immediately put it down, “’cept maybe this.” Rose held up a space helmet from the crate. Doctor rushed to Rose's side and snagged the helmet from her.

“This is from the space program!” he said almost joyously as he lifted up the helmet to the light looking at it.

“Stolen?” River’s eyes gave it a once over.

“Probably,” the Doctor toddled his head while he inspected the shiny rounded surface.

Amy’s face scrunched, “But why have that? If you have space travel and time travel why steal something that can barely make it to the moon?”

“Maybe because it's cooler? Look how cool this stuff is!” He said as he put on space helmet, Rose shook her head at him with a slight smile.

“Cool aliens?” Amy laughingly huffed at the thought.

“Well, what would you call me?” the Doctor's voice was slightly muffled from the helmet.

“An alien.” Amy replied flatly.

“Oi!” the Doctor protested. Rose laughed and stood, putting her hands on the sides of the helmet and pulling it off his head. She put it back on the crate lid beside her and turned back to inspecting the rest on the contents of the crate.

“Why here?” River seemed undistracted by their quick exchange, “Why 1969? So much seems non-contemporary or alien, why’s is all here?”

The Doctor nodded slightly, turning on the spot to look back toward the group as he thought to himself, “Good point. Why pre-space-flight America?”

“Maybe ‘cause it’s easy to get lost here,” Rose idly said as she slowly piled things from inside one of the crates to the wooden crate lid, idly speaking while not looking at anyone in particular. “You said it yourself, 's an easy year. Easy year to get in, big year for the Earth. Think 'bout it, that girl sounded, what? 6, 7? Maybe? Dunno how long she’s been here but 's pretty much an good decade if you’re human-lookin' with time travel an' want ta hide. An' 1960s medical is light-years ahead of even 1950s medical, yeah? 1960s Earth, you go for America or England, but you're there right now so there’s no hidin' in England.” Rose looked up to the multiple blinking of eyes trained on her after her ramble. “What?”

“That’s…” Amy started.

“The domestic approach, font and center,” The Doctor lauded, though it raised some questions in his mind.
Rory's voice was quizzical as he turned to face the Doctor, “You’re in England? Right now?”

“Bumpy-wumpy,” the Doctor clapped his hands and waved hoping that sufficed as an explanation and a quick wave-off of the subject.

“Hiding, but from what?” Amy wondered out loud. Everyone looked expectantly at Rose.

Rose looked around and shrugged exaggeratedly as she blinked at the wide eyes in the room. “I just said maybe hidin', I donno why.”

“That’s the question,” said River.

“So, let’s ask. Come on,” the Doctor swiftly walked toward the center of the room, skillfully and quickly gripping Rose’s hand. “Little girl. Let's look for clues.” The Doctor abruptly pulled Rose along, Rose barely managing to grab her torch as she was pulled.

“Hiding?” He whispered quickly.

“Couldn’t very well be too obvious, mischievous brilliant alien husband an’ an ageless heiress,” Rose added like a throw away statement. It didn't seem to bother her, recalling things as she did. It occurred to him that maybe those years apart had been a bit harder than she’d let on.

“Rose—” he started.

“No,” she stopped him quickly, pointing a finger at him in a very frighteningly Jackie-Tyler-esque manner, “No I'm sorry dear Roses, yeah? Bit busy.”

He smiled in response and kissed the back of her hand quickly.

A long, deep dragging sound was heard.

River squatted near a manhole cover, lifting and scooting the heavy object, revealing the ladder attached to the inside becoming what was a deep, dark hole in the ground.

“Doctor?” River looked over to them, “Look at this.” He and Rose’s hands seeming inextricably linked, they walked over to inspect the hole. Rose was acutely aware of their hand hold, River did not seem to either notice or be bothered. Not necessarily the kind of clue they were supposed to be looking for but she'd take it. Amy was already there, looking at the manhole with worry.

The long tubes or wires from the table seemed to lead into a sewer. “So where does that go?” At his questioning seemed to prompt Rory and Canton to close in.

River held a scanner over the hole, “There's a network of tunnels running under here.

“Life signs?” the Doctor asked. Rose let go of his hand and moved in closer to the hole, looking as far as she could see down into the tunnels.

“Nothing that's showing up.” River said as she set hear feet on a rung, preparing to go down. The Doctor let go of Rose's hand to squat by the hole, face level to the lowering River.

“Be careful,” the Doctor nodded.

“I tried that once. Ever so dull.” River said cheekily as she winked a quick wink and started descending the ladder.
Doctor murmured, “Spent a lot of time around Rose I see. Jeopardy friendly.”

Rose huffed a sarcastic laugh and crossed her arms. “Yeah, goin’ down a deep dark unknown hole, sounds like something I did. Wait, no, that was you.”

“Someone had just threatened me with having to get a mortgage, there wasn’t much alternative.”

Rose rolled her eyes playfully, keeping an eye on the manhole entrance as the Doctor stood and turned around to face her, “Yes, the scary thought of havin’ ta get a dimensionally simple home, s’ like movin’ in with the devil himself, that.”

“Bet he wouldn’t eat all my biscuits.” He retorted playfully.

“Cheeky.”

“Flirt.”

Canton interrupted cluelessly, “Tell me what’s going on here.”

“This was a date.” The Doctor answered lightly. Quite enjoying that word as it applied. *Date.*

Rory stepped closer, leaning forward and inserting his head into their space to quietly explain, “Uh, I think he’s talking about the possible alien incursion.” Rose almost blushed and just turned abruptly to the other side of the pothole.

The Doctor blinked. “Okay.” Awkwardly, he clapped Canton on the shoulder and walked away.

Canton followed Rose as she seemed to find a table of old, rusty medical tech.

“So, Aliens, Time travel…” he picked up what looks like medical vial for injections, “I was in a bar having a drink. Tell me, honestly, Am I still there?”

“Nope,” Rose popped the p, “if it is I’ve been on a very long bender.” She smiled at Canton as she glanced at the rusty medical scissors.

River's head popped out of the manhole, appearing out of breath by that swift motion. She seemed to catch her breath quickly. “All clear. Just tunnels. Nothing down there I can see.” She looked back down, “Give me five minutes. I want to take another look around.”

“Stupidly dangerous!” the Doctor announced from his spot near the table.

“Yeah, I like it too,” River breathed out as she started to descend the ladder, but stopped. “I'll need a *TARDIS.*” She motioned to Rose, who blinked.

“I’m not a *TARDIS.*” She sighed but walked toward the hole.

“You are a little,” the Doctor nodded.

“Little?”

“Bit.” The Doctor nodded, “stubborn, time travelling woman who finds trouble and likes getting lost…”

“Alright, alright.” Rose interrupted his roll before he started with rectangular cuboid nonsense. She sighed before starting down the ladder, “I’m comin’, River.”
“Two jeopardy friendlies in a tunnel,” the Doctor mumbled to himself as Rose disappeared into the darkness. The whole situation made him nervous, but not just because of the Jeopardy Friendliness and it’s possible exponential growth. “Rory, would you mind going with them?”

Rory seemed surprised by the request, “Yeah, a bit.”

“Then I’d appreciate it all the more.” The Doctor clapped Rory on the back. Rory let out a long-suffering sigh and walked toward the manhole as the Doctor walked off.

“Hang on, Girls.” Rory drawled down the hole and turned to start descending the ladder. “I’m coming too.”

Her eyes took a moment to adjust from the light of the room to the dim of the tunnel. It was odd how it didn’t seem quite like a sewer as she knew them. She reached the bottom of the ladder to see a doubled over River, clutching her stomach. She hopped off and pat her back once, “You okay?”

“Ah. Yes, yes. I just felt a bit sick. Bad food, probably.” River righted herself and stretched a bit as Rory descended. “Okay, this way? What do you think?” Rory shined his torch in the direction River indicated, pointing it as the ground to light the way.

Rose looked to Rory for a dissenting opinion, and shrugged when she received none, “As good as any.”

The tunnels seemed to be dug, or carved rock or solid in some way. Rose dragged her fingers along them and rubbed them together, hoping to get some clue but it seemed to be just regular, hard-packed earth. It was dark and damp, lit only by their torches. The sounds just made it a bit creepier. They heard footsteps, which Rose had to breathe deep and remember that there were six feet between them and feet made noises no matter how stealthy you thought you were. And dripping, as they were underground. But clicking? Hissing? Underground, pipes, maybe one of them was carrying something or breathing funny… wishful thinking, Tyler. Rose turned around quickly to look behind them, check what was there, but returned to face forward seeing nothing. Maybe not just wishful thinking, then.

“I keep thinking I hear things,” mumbled Rory.

Rose nodded, keeping her eyes forward as they trod further, “Me too. Echoes, yeah?”

“That’s interesting,” River mumbled as she looked at the device on her arm, “These tunnels are old. Really old.” She turned her head towards Rose as the walked on a bit further, “How can they be really old and nobody notice them?”

Rose looked around slowly as she spoke, “Dunno… but tunnels underground…” she clicked her tongue quietly, “nother place to hide. Place to hide in a decade to hide. Lotsa hiding. ’s either very scared or very dangerous.” She paused her talking and took a few more steps then smirked to River “But danger's your middle name, looks like.”

River had a slight smile on her lips, “That’s not my middle name.”
River lead them down the left fork in the tunnel that lead to a seemingly smaller space. Rory’s torchlight settled on a door ahead of them. Large, brown metal, seeming oddly unfitting for the environment around them.

“Maintenance hatch?” Rose looked the metal door up and down. No hinges to speak of, only the knob, sort of, which River was already jiggling to open.

“It's locked,” River smiled, “Oh, why do people always lock things?”

Rory’s enthusiasm was low for the actions of River he saw coming and he sighed as he spoke, “You're going to open it, aren't you.”

River’s eyes glinted, “Well, it’s locked. How's a girl supposed to resist?”

“Is this sensible?”

“God, I hope not,” slid easily from River’s mouth.

Rose silently chuckled in her chest and whispered quietly to Rory, “An’ you thought I sounded like him?”

“Rory, I need your torch. Rose, keep a look out.” Rose nodded and walked into the hall while River and Rory stayed nearer to the maintenance hatch, Rose walked out of sight and disappeared into the dark of the fork in the tunnel, looking carefully down each side, hoping that she wasn’t strictly necessary as a guard.

What was this woman? River seemed at ease with her, now she had to understand how very unsettling this was for the Doctor. Someone knowing you without the benefit of you knowing them nearly as well. To Rose, River was a name, a few facts that might not be facts yet, and a lot of conjecture… but to River, Rose herself seemed to be figured out. Very unsettling. Though, she suspected, the Doctor probably loved it. Seemed to love a mystery, this one.

You’re too old to be insecure, Tyler. Stop it.

Her eyes scanned over the empty ways before her, noises every so often tweaking her need to turn her head slightly towards a noise or an errant drip out of the corner of her eye. Rory started ‘whispering’ again. Someone should have really told him that lowering your volume only does half the job, and underground caves acting like an echo chamber certainly didn’t help. She opened up her mouth to say so when the sound of her of her name gave her pause.

Rory's voice stuttered quietly “...Rose. I'm just saying, you seem very at ease with her.”

River sounded almost amused, though, Rose figured, she seemed amused by a lot. “She’s new to you, not me.”

Rose mumbled to herself, “Seriously. Rubbish whisperers.”

River sighed audibly, maybe just a huff but it was almost palpable. Her voice turned sad somehow. “I've known Rose and the Doctor a very long time. But it's all out of order, we've missed a few steps. Sometimes it’s just her, sometimes just him, most times together...”

Together.

“... But it's all back to front. Never in order. Think of it. Just a young girl and the TARDIS just drops out of the sky and changes her life...”
A memory of her husband’s voice sounded in her head, ‘She said she didn’t want me to change our lives together. Not one line.’

“...Every time they see me, they seem to know me less, I know them more. This is the first time she’s met me. If this is her first… then my last can’t be far off.”

Oh, River… File it away, Tyler. No time to dwell. She fiddled with something in her hand.

Her marker was in her hand. She blinked at it, she must have taken it out and started fiddling with it while listening to River.

A quick, quiet thunk followed River’s quiet ramble.

River raised her voice, “Rose!”

Rose slid the marker back into her pocket and turned around and started to walk back to River and Rory.

River had already swung open the metal door as Rose got there. Rory followed Rose as she carefully and quietly followed River into an open space. It seemed like just a large room. Large alien room, to be precise. Metal beams seemed to hold up the top, looking quite like God of All Daleks legs in the center of the room. The sight made Rose shiver. Sporadic podium-like pillar consoles with bulging rounded spheres were attached to them circled the center of the room. The light was dim, some very soft like coming from something not their torches with a hum of machinery working somewhere in the unknown room.

“What is this place?” Rory looked around in awe.

“Old underground non-human scary ship thing,” Rose answered tentatively, looking to the circular controls on what looked like pillar consoles.

River smirked, “Breaking out the technical terms, I see.”

“Well he asked,” Rose shrugged. She made sure not to touch anything, as if that had gotten her into trouble before or something. Never know when something can absorb your biomass. River didn't seem to follow the same rules, touching and scanning the first console she came upon.

Suddenly there was a blaring noise and lights. Rose almost rolled her eyes and looked to River.

“That's an alarm,” River noted quickly, “Check if anything's coming.”

Rory, closest to the exit went to the metal door and looked out into the tunnels. He paused for a moment and turned around astonishingly quickly, “There's nothing out there.”

“They know we're here, may as well find out somethin' an' get out fast,” Rose nodded to River at a pillar. River fiddled at rounded control button very quickly.

“These tunnels,” River seemed to loose her breath, “they're not just here, they're everywhere. They're running under the surface of the entire planet. They've been here for centuries.”

The lights started flickering wildly.

Rose watched the lights nearly strobe with widened eyes, “I think we're takin’ the very scared' bit off the table…”
The lights seemed to dim and brighten in time with a loud noise of electricity discharging.

“Rory!”

Chapter End Notes

Would have been longer, but I couldn't find a good stopping point.
Chapter 11

Rory descended the ladder into the tunnels.

The Doctor looked after him until his head disappeared before he started to fidget, running around and investigating what he could as he thought.

Canton and Amy seemed to speak in the background. The little girl called the president, then they followed her here, where the tech represented a hodgepodge of decades and planets. The thought carried him over to the crate Rose was investigating. Space suit, but several other things that after a quick scan of the sonic he did see that it did include, in fact, 51st century tech, though Rose was close. A 51st century communications device that seemed to be piled on top of several things from different eras on different planets. He stopped the whirring and looked at the sonic. No hints as to who touched it or why, obviously there needed to be a new setting added. Rose would have to remind him.

Rose and River. Buffer of responsible Rory. River was armed, Rory was cautious, and Rose was… well, Rose.

Rose was Rose and River was armed.

That wasn’t frightening at all.

But she called Rose my love. There was a certain amount of camaraderie there. No bother in River’s eyes, still the flirtatious bad girl, but Rose didn’t bother River. Either his… thing… with Rose — no, it was defined now, his date with Rose was a fact not for debate or something could happen to… he didn’t want to think about or.

…Rose and River comradery…

…That wasn’t frightening, either.

Clues. Less Rose and River, who were hunting for clues themselves, more clues. Little girl. Hiding. Spaceman. Alien and non-contemporary tech. Tunnels. He clicked on the sonic again.

“Worried about Rose?” Amy’s voice popped over the whirring of the sonic. He turned the sonic off again and turned, smiling a bit at Amy.

“She always comes back.”

“So that’s a yes then.” Amy nodded.

“Pond—” he smiled a little.


“—Pond—” the smile fell a little.

“No, I mean it. Going on a date and running into your wife,” Amy smirked. “Or are we talking a missus and the ex situation where neither knows which is which? Though River doesn’t seem to be jealous, maybe a sister wife situation. Or!”—

“Amy…” The Doctor interrupted with no joviality in his eyes or voice. He was smiling, but not.
Amy sobered, looking over his false visage of someone who was fine and very much not buying it, “It'll be fine, Raggedy man. Future’s all in the future, yeah?” Amy thumped him on the back. “Everything will work out.”

The Doctor smiled and nodded, preparing to scan with the sonic again when Amy quickly spoke up. “Speaking of the future… I have to tell you... It's a bit important—”

The lights began flickering wildly from the other section of the warehouse, which was plenty enough weird for a place with no lights actually on.

“What?!” Canton turned toward the flickering and started moving, falling into commando mode. The Doctor moved to follow.

Amy suddenly doubled over.

The sudden movement drew the Doctor’s eyes and he turned on the spot, “Amy?” Amy waved him off and started moving forward toward where Canton had gone, prompting the Doctor to continue on.

Like a thunder bolt, electricity discharged. Canton's voice seemed to quickly gasp an exasperation as it followed by a thump. The noise spurred their feet to move before they could tell them to, heading to the open warehouse section where Canton had headed. He was there, crumbled on the floor.

“Is he all right?” Amy said though a cringe.

The Doctor put his hand on Canton, scanning him quickly with his sonic screwdriver. He breathed a sigh of relief. “Just unconscious. Got a proper whack.”

“Doctor, I need to tell you something.” Amy blurted, “I have to tell you it now.”

“No,” Amy shook her head, “it’s important. It has to be now.” She seemed to swallow when she gathered her thoughts to continue, “Doctor, I'm pregnant.”

The Doctor’s head jolted up as he looked at Amy about to say something when they hear very clear, menacingly slow set a footsteps.

A tall, thin creature stood before them if it had been standing there before. It slowly raising a knobby fingered hand to point at them as static seemed to collect around the appendage. Its large head seemed to have recessed eyes and holes for a nose… and no mouth. No hair. Well dressed for an alien, but as the energy around it’s hand collected charge it seemed less important to dwell on the dapper quality of it’s suit and more important to get immediately away from the menacing, hairless creature.

Doctor’s eyes widened, Amy don’t look away he lifted Canton as he heard multiple feet beating on the ground. Canton was breathing but unconscious.

“Oi!”

It started to turn, distracted by the sudden noise and movement.

Of a blonde.

…Of course.
Rose had popped into the room, waving her hands wildly. Her eyes widened at the thin back and staticy hand raised, poised to shoot electricity as it seemed to charge higher.

The tall creature seemed to turn slowly, thankfully. Each second counted as the Doctor hoisted Canton in a better position. A large object came hurtling from behind him. Amy had thrown a crowbar at the alien’s head, now clattering on the cement floor, sending the alien crumpling to the ground.

Rose jumped over the near stationary alien body to the other side of Canton and helped lift him quickly towards the beckoning others. His feet dragged more so on her side but they managed to pass the alien just before it began twitching into consciousness.

“What’re you doing?”

“Running, you?” Rose responded coolly as she kept moving, “Let’s go.” She kept a hold of the arm thrown over her shoulder, a black mark on her palm caught the Doctor's eye as she adjusted Canton's weight on her back, “Amy, shift, TARDIS, now.”

“Why are we running?” Amy said as she caught up.

“I don’t know why we’re runnin’ but we’re runnin’ and that's usually bad so get to the TARDIS!” Rose shouted.

The Doctor looked back as they moved forward, seeing the alien no longer crumpled on the ground but standing tall and almost screaming with a dark section of flesh that would likely be a mouth depressing into it’s face.

Canton started to blink himself awake, beginning to resist the carrying. Rose and the Doctor quickly lost balance of the now awake and he slumped on his knees to the floor. Rose grabbed at his shoulder as the Doctor grabbed at his other arm to lift him to his feet. The TARDIS was behind them, they just needed to get there.

“River, come on!” Rory shouted somewhere behind them as they struggled to pull Canton up while not looking away.

“Run!”

Canton fought the tug as he came into further consciousness, “What the hell's going on?”

“Look behind you.” The Doctor said as he quickly tried to get Canton to move.

“There's nothing behind me.”


Canton turned around and froze as the tall creature seemed to peer from his eyeless cavities into Cantons widened eyes.

Rose grabbed his hand and pulled him backward. “Don’t look off, just come. Hurry.” Rose looked too, the Doctor grabbed her hand and tugged the chain-linked group toward the TARDIS.

“River get the doors open!” the Doctor shouted as the cracking sound of electricity charging filled the air.

“I’m working on it!” growled River as her key was heard sliding into the lock and the doors were
The Doctor pushed his way into the TARDIS, and tugged the string of people into the TARDIS. Rose let go Canton the minute they were inside, the door slamming closed behind them. Amy and Rory catching their breath not far inside with River already at the ready by the console. The Doctor didn’t let go of Rose, pulling her into an embrace and kissing her forehead.

He took her by the shoulders and bent his head to look into her exhausted eyes, “You okay?”

She looked back at him, just seeming momentarily exhausted and not necessarily energy deficient. He couldn’t ask the obvious question, but she seemed to understand and answer accordingly, “Yeah.”

“Good.” He backed off her but did not let go of her hand, quickly and gently pulling her up to the console behind him. “We need to know how many and where.”

“How many of what?” Canton blinked, once again trying to absorb as much of the interior of the TARDIS as he could while nursing his head bump with his hand. Amy followed everyone up to the console while Rory went to assess Canton’s head. Canton swatted Rory's hand when Rory reached near.

“It’s okay, I'm a nurse.” Rory said like a mantra. Canton reluctantly lowered his hand to allow Rory to examine him.

“And you track them down.” The Doctor pointed at the group.

“It’s just a small laceration, you'll be fine.” Rory finally looked away from Canton's hair.

“Who?” Canton asked cluelessly.

“Us.” River answered, quickly looking at Canton as she adjusted something on her vortex manipulator.

“What?” Canton blinked almost exaggeratedly.

“We ran away, right? Dunno what we were runnin’ from, but runnin’s a bit of a thing. Usually somethin’ bad behind us.” Rose tried to explain.

“They go away, four directions, say three months. Travel around, counting them, providing an in-depth count of when and where.” The Doctor tried to explain to Canton, or he was speaking out loud to himself. His thoughts never seemed to stay caged for long in the TARDIS, may as well say them out loud.

“How are we to do that?” Rory questioned, “We can’t even remember what we saw.”

“I have no idea,” Rose huffed.
“Apparently you do,” the Doctor flipped over Rose's hand, revealing writing. 1952 in bold permanent marker strokes.

“'S my writing but don’t remember doing it.” Rose hesitated, “why 1952?”

“What happened in 1952?” Rory asked and looked at the Doctor. “You said the Elvis thing was 1953.”

“Different thing.” He and Rose said simultaneously while shaking their heads.

“He got married, for one.” Rose teased before she closed her eyes, “We went to that party, I spoke to Frank for a bit, went lookin’ for you, I saw Kaz an’ Abby kissing by the pool, I walked back to the TARDIS…” her eyes opened, “but I stopped. I don’t remember why I stopped. That’s them, yeah?”

“So they’ve been here since at least 1952,” River nodded.

“They’re in the storage room,” Rose said flatly. Rory momentarily panicked before Rose corrected herself, “Markers, I mean. I just have the one. Seems we'll all need one.” Rose said, looking to the corridor. The Doctor nodded and she walked quickly to it.

“Married?” River asked with her eyebrow raised toward the Doctor as Rose disappeared into the hall. “Oh, Marilyn. I should give her a jacket. She can be part of the club,” River smirked and pat the Doctor's back.

He seemed to freeze in place. Amy's eyebrows rose at that bit of information, but it was Rory that decided to break the tension. “So, three months, four directions…”

“Er,” the Doctor seemed to shake off him momentary freeze, “yes, each of you separate—”

“How 'bout pairs?” Rose amended as she walked up with markers for her friends, a few even on cords for ease of use. “Safer in pairs.”

“That was quick.” The Doctor noticed.

“I suspect she moved it for me.” Rose gave the markers to River, “Seems she does that.”

River looked at Rose, partially amused partially irritated as she tossed one at Amy, “We’d cover more ground alone.”

“Or we cover more ground in twos,” Rose quickly retorted, “One of each pair can keep lookin', one can keep an eye on the other, like eyes in the back of your head. Less forgettin’ an' going the same place twice.”

“The world's not safe I don’t see why we should be,” Amy grumbled.

“We’ve gotta be smarter. They’re useta one on one, people not working together, so we do the thing they don’t expect. Plus, three months is gonna be a while. For anyone. With or without memory fiddling. 's just sense.” Rose tried to say as nondescript as possible and pointedly not say anything about Amy’s potential condition, hoping Amy knew.

Amy shut up quickly, rolling her eyes but not managing to come up with a credible argument given what Rose knew. Rory came and stood beside Amy.

“River’s right, loathed as I am to do it, we may cover more ground apart.” Rory admitted. Rose put her forehead in her hand and scrunched the flesh.
“Let’s do both then,” Rose lifted her head again. She was determined, “Amy an’ Rory together, and me and River for a bit, then we can separate, cover more ground than two, less’en four, but safer.” Rose eyed River determinedly, “s as compromise as I’ll go.”

River breathed out a little annoyed but resigned, “God you’re stubborn, you know that?”

“Been said once or twice.”

You know? The Doctor looked at Rose.

Rose looked at the Doctor and nodded almost imperceptibly.

“It’s a good plan,” said the Doctor quickly. And someone should stay with Amy. Rory's clueless face indicated that maybe he didn’t. “Smart. Safe,” he nodded his head before turning to Rose as he approached her. “Who are you and what have you done with Rose Tyler?”

“Oi!” Rose hit his shoulder with the back of her hand cheekily.

Amy let the whole thing sum up in her head. “So that’s three months on the run.”

“We’ve the superphones!” Rose seemed relieved at her own thought, “You guys can call me an’ I’ll relay any information to him, yeah?”

“How?” asked Rory. “He doesn’t have a mobile.”

Rose hadn’t even thought about it. They didn’t know, she hadn’t thought to use it or say anything. Well, years of not knowing who to trust and not telling many people of her ability to talk to her husband—and now the Doctor—without talking just relegated it to fact more than something that needed explanation. Rose's mouth gaped a second, “I…”

“Which doesn’t matter because she won’t,” interrupted the Doctor, cutting her off, “We’re not entirely sure how that works and it’s 1969. Technically there are 5 of this same mind somewhere on this planet this year that I’m aware of, mostly in London, but you need to not…” the Doctor motioned to his head, “because it could go very, very wrong.”

Rose nodded a bit frustratedly in understanding, “an’ old yous hearing me would be bad.”

“Really young me would only be curious but a few of the others…”

“Know who I am an' would think they've gone mad if they heard me,” she said on a breath. Rose blew out another exhalation that blew her hair while the others looked on, Amy and Rory looked confused, though River looked barely phased as she seemed to type things into her vortex manipulator. “Okay, timey wimey. So Amy an' Rory go one way, River an' I go elsewhere and I go on radio silence.”

“Just because you’re on radio silence doesn’t mean I will be,” He whispered.

“Three months.” Amy huffed.

“With partners” Rose looked to Amy and Rory, already holding hands. “half with, half without.”

Three months. He said they should go as far as they could and come back in three months. Three months without him was like a drop in a bucket compared to what she’d just done, why was it so hard now? The look in the Doctor’s eyes reflected the same thoughts she had.

He put his hand on her hip, her breath hitched and stopped, their mouths incredibly close. He quickly
took the permanent marker out of the pocket of her denims and grabbed her arm. She felt the cold, wet tip on the pen against her skin. “What are you doing?!”

“Making sure you come back.” He said very quickly writing something on the inside of her forearm. Before she got a chance to look at it he’d switched to his own. She looked.

Bad Wolf. He'd written it on both of their arms.

“Bad Wolf here, Bad Wolf there,” Rose huffed a laugh, “don't usually use those words unless the world is ending.”

River took Rose's hand and continued typing quickly into her vortex manipulator.

“You don't come back and it might.”

“We'll be fine.” River hit a button, and Rose and River disappeared.

River and Rose appeared suddenly on the outskirts of a town.

“Cheesy sod.” Rose smirked to herself. Of course they’d save overt flirting and near declarations for when they were parted. Of course they would. Certainly on par with the rest of their lives, but none the less frustrating. Rose looked at River awkwardly. “Sorry.”

“Why?” River asked, seeming genuinely clueless as to why Rose would apologize.

“'s just…” Rose shook her head, “never mind.” Rose looked around the entrance to the alley, seeing very few people walk by and turned back to River. “You can go.” Rose looked around at the brick alley in which they’d arrived, as if double checking for exits or entrances. River had aimed her thing right, Rose supposed, no one would be their sudden entrance. “Cover more ground, yeah?”

“Oh you sneaky…” River almost laughed, “You just wanted Amy and Rory together?”

“Somethin' like that.” Rose’s expression remained neutral as she shrugged, “Besides. Amy an' Rory needed to be together.”

“Why do you say that?”

“Donno,” Rose lied. The look on River's face was that she did buy it. Rose sighed, she really was a rubbish liar. “Some people just needta be with each other.”

“I know exactly what you mean.”

“I think I figured that.” Rose’s face fell a bit. She wasn’t very good at not showing her emotions through her face despite the practice she’d had. “I won’t get in the way, you know.”

“Of course you won't.” River said easily, patting Rose's arm.

Was River… taunting her? …Or comforting her?
“Oh, my love,” the well established smirk on River’s face morphed into a kind of worry. “I’m someone very tied up in your future. Yours and the Doctor’s. You'll find out very soon.”

Rose looked at her with eyebrow raised, uncertain of this woman who seemed to know her. This woman, who admitted Rose stuck around, so ostensibly Rose herself put up with him being married to another time traveler. Committed, at least as committed as telling her his Name would have represented. So she would become just a traveler, a companion again. Oh, she hated that word. Just his mate. —Friend. Friend. Hers, too. Why not? Make it easier. Apparently Rose stuck around in their future. But… it’s about what you do with the time you’ve got. Got some time with River now. May as well make some use of it.

“Come on, TARDIS, let’s go.” River left the alley, turning onto the sidewalk quickly.

“You keep callin’ me the TARDIS, I am not the TARDIS.” Rose corrected as she caught up with River.

“Temperamental Ageless Rose, Doctor’s Insistent Sweetheart.” River laughed, “Wrapped in blue, wanders off with the Doctor, rarely does what she's told, I could go on, but that sounds like the TARDIS to me.”

Rose blinked, she couldn’t tell if she were more shocked at the sweetheart bit or more impressed by the smooth an oddly parallel metaphor, “Were a bit… spoiler-y, there.”

River seemed to get more smug if that had even been possible. “Oh was I?”

Breadcrumbs of knowledge leading her to trust, maybe.

“Well,” Rose calmed herself with a exhale that grew into a smile, “If you don’t want more questions, I suggest we cover some ground.”

It was night.

River was picking a lock when Rose let out a quiet sigh. The bolt moved and they slid into the formerly locked room and River pressed a button on her vortex manipulator before she decided to ask. “What?”

“They’ve officially brought the Doctor in as a prisoner.”
"Better than a newspaper." River shook her torch to shine light on a door in the room, indicating it to Rose “Anything else?”

“He says hi.” Rose idly said as she opened the door and peered inside. River shined the light into it at Rose’s nod, just papers, just a closet.

“No he doesn’t.” River smirked.

“Okay, he said 'Bring back Jammie Dodgers' but that's prob’ly a hello somewhere,” Rose ducked her head around a corridor to a few offices and looked around, “he’ll likely promise to take us there if we press ’im.” River came up behind her, back to back and relooking at the room they were just in and glancing at her arms for any marks.

“You contacting each other,” River shook her head once quickly, “I was always jealous of your connection.”

Was River divulging? Don’t poke the bear, Tyler.

“Can’t use it here, prob’ly can’t ever use it on Earth. He’s always bloody here.” Rose huffed softly. River grabbed Rose's arm suddenly and gave it two squeezes.

That was the signal.

Quick as a flash, Rose grabbed River’s hand and dragged her towards an exit.

There was a laser discharge. Not surprising if it had come from River. But not looking back was part of the escape, as long as River did her part and Rose did hers they'd get out.

Soon they were out of building they had just entered, Rose leading the charge.

Rose and River hid behind a building about two blocks off to catch their breath. Rose about laughing once she’d seen there was nothing around, she let go of the hand she'd held so steadfastly.

“How many marks?” Rose said as she caught her breath.

“Three today.” New tallies on Rose's arm stole Rivers attention, she took out her small scanner and took an image of them, “Six, really. No idea where.”

“We were just in that building.” Rose pointed to the left as she looked around the corner to view the letters above the door and returned to face River, “DMV?”

“Department of Motor Vehicles.” River explained, partially to herself in thought.

“Government buildings?” Rose huffed, “Donno if we'll remember that for long, but seems quite the hint, yeah?”

“It’s the first place an invading force would go,” River toddled her head, amazing curls flopping on her shoulders, “Government. Maybe not the driving bit, though.”

“Funny way to invade, not havin' anyone remember ya,” Rose pursed her lips in thought, clamping her mouth shut momentarily before bursting into a fit of giggles.

River put her hands on her hips and surveyed the now doubled over blonde, using the brick of the nearby building to keep her upright. “I don’t see how it’s that kind of funny…”

“No, ’s not that. Strait jacket.” Rose tapped her head as she calmed her laughter a bit, “Another one.
Pretty sure there’s an entire room of ’em on the TARDIS.”

River rolled her eyes and smiled, “As if Houdini hadn’t taught him to get out of one years ago.”

“Houdini an’ the Doctor. What could possibly go wrong there.”

Over a fortnight of magnetic and congenial and vague. So much vague.
…and running, snooping, and taking ridiculous risks, but those were par for the course.

No details. Hardly anything about River or her life, but conversation seemed to be easy between these two regardless.

There was a story about ‘Jacqueline Kennedy’ in the paper. While Rose vaguely remembered who she was in this universe, the name Jackie was unavoidable. Her mum would be two years old in 1969. River likely heard more about Jackie Tyler that week than Rose had learned about… anything, really. She didn’t know why it made her laugh so hard, but the best word anyone ever used to describe her mum was... “Feisty.”

There was a day where Rose likely sounded like a mad(der) woman trying to describe one of the birthday gifts her father and husband tried to invent for her—they were both inventors, after all—that was supposed to give her pink tea but instead made an edible, nutritious foam that kept expanding for twenty minutes.

Rose hadn’t intended to, but sometimes seemingly innocuous questions would slip. River’s answers would seem to indicate they weren’t as innocuous as Rose’Did thought.

Rose began to sense River’s tells, or at least had a bit of a handle on them a bit. ‘Spoilers,’ more often than not, seemed to be River’s way of teasing.
Not speaking was likely a yes.
Laughing often meant an outright no.
Giggling meant Rose had reminded her of something, so there was a clue in the question.
Maybe her tells were lies, maybe they were hints… optimistic as ever, Rose opted for the second.
The look in her eyes, River held no malice… even a fondness for Rose.

When Rose figured out that one she actively tried to accept that they couldn’t talk about the future, or anything about River herself, but simply Rose's past. It was insane, talking about yourself.

She couldn’t help but finally let slip the question in week three.
The question.

“So you marry the Doctor.”
River didn’t answer.

Could be lots of things. Rose hadn’t died yet, didn’t mean she couldn’t.
Somewhat a comforting thought, that. Though probably not to the Doctor. He was never fond of that
idea, no matter what body he had or how human he was. But it was the only way this worked without one of them not having chosen to be separated from the other. Suddenly his ramblings in her head became a bit more important.

We met Vincent VanGogh! I believe you called him the messy painter. Years ago.

“I did, didn’t I? I called him Vincent Van-go the messy painter. God, your memory sometimes. Staggering.” She whispered to herself as she took her sandwich out of a paper bag and looked around. It was a normal bench by a normal park, on a normal albeit 1960s day. It was harder not to look like a nutter without River, but they’d split off as was the plan.

I recall you said you liked the Starry Night.

“Striking blues an’ swirly golden stars, what’s not to love?” She nearly silently mouthed to herself as she ate her sandwich. She knew he couldn’t hear her, but it made her feel better to talk to him, even if he couldn’t hear her.

Vincent was ginger. You saw his self portrait. At least probably saw his self portrait. Very ginger. Freckles and red and orange…

“Jealous.” She prodded her half eaten sandwich, realigning the bread.

And I was there with Amy! Oh, I hated that. In a French café drinking wine —taste buds don’t like it this time around, new tongue— with two gingers. Two. Do you think I should dye my hair?

“No.” she said quietly and emphatically, ostensibly to her sandwich. Rose almost laughed as she took a bite.

Proper ginger. You’d love it.

Rose chortled with a mouthful of sandwich. Strangers were beginning to look at her as she muttered to herself eating her lunch. Something about the scene made her smile and laugh harder at herself, likely making her seem even more mad and speeding the onlookers to walk by a bit faster. A woman, bit dirty, covered in tallies, sticking to the shadows and alley ways near a park, talking and mumbling and laughing to herself while eating a sandwich. It was a bit fun to be mad, she could see why he did it. Maybe she was a bit mad now. Voices in her head, seeing people that weren’t there. She crumpled up her paper bag.
It would be cheating, anyway. But Vincent—he saw things others don’t. Imagine that? Seeing things that are real and thinking they’re a hallucination because you can see things others can’t. And he was a bit mad.

Rose let out a single, loud, “Ha!”

Maybe we should meet a painter. It’s been a while for you. What do you say? Degas?

“Is that that melty painter? No, that’s, um… Dali. I’d rather meet him I think. Surreal, like our lives, yeah?” There was staring now, and her sandwich was well eaten at this point. She stood up from her perch and started walking. Keeping on the move was good, lest onlookers call for the police and she get labeled a public nuisance. Again. She started walking out of the park, listening intently to her daily reminder that she was, in fact, on a mission.

No, Degas would be France again. And impressionists again. But Michaelangelo, that huge flirt, now that’d be a date.

She could picture him and smirked as she walked a bit faster, “You know, every time you use that word you look as young as you… look.”

To her left, just inside her peripheral vision she saw a tall, thin, mouthless alien. She kept her eyes open, heart and pace slowing while she took a deep breath. “Time to go back to work, Dear,” Rose whispered. He’d keep talking, thank goodness, though she’d inevitably forget the oncoming bit of ramble. She didn’t take her eyes off the alien as she reached into her pocket and removed her marker and wrote a tally around the writing on her forearm.

Rose didn’t have much knowledge about what the Doctor decided to explain tonight. There were a few words she understood in there. Mostly ands and buts with a few buzz words that she’d heard both this one and her husband bandy about so many times she’d had to memorize them and their uses. Words like Artron and Huon and Eye of Harmony with Quantum …stuff… and dimensional …something… thrown in a good half million times, with the words ‘things’ and ‘bits’ being thrown in like punctuation. Articulate. And this one rambled. Had a gob, really, but sometimes almost nonsensically, not quite the ‘timey wimey’ but ‘gibberty’ was in there at least twice and then a self admonishment for trying to use ‘gibberty’ that made her laugh. He was brilliant, she’d always known that. Brilliant and mad. Brilliant and mad and apparently she’d head enough of his talking at her to actually understand a bit, but not quite enough to have her engaged in the lecture of particle fusion’s relation to the quantity thingy that powers the vortex thingy. It was almost as if he knew she was going to try and get a quick sleep and this was his version of her lullaby, though, if she’d learned anything in this last two months of on-and-off rambling, this was just him. Soon she ignored the actual words and just let his sweet mental tones carry her to sleep.
Doo do-do, da-da ta dada de da, Doo do-do, te da-da te da...

…Swing music? Their first dance. Leather and blue eyes and sudden jigging in the console room. Then sideburns and stripes and spinning in formal wear next to her mum and Dad. The chin and a bow tie in a ballroom at a wedding. Rose’s feet stopped. Why was she running? She looked at her arm, several bundles of new, dark lines tallied on around the faded and oft re-traced Bad Wolf on her arm. She smiled as she looked back, reaffirming that the lanky beings were behind her and reminding herself that yes, while Glen Miller was being sung in her head she was, in fact, running for her life from four tall, thin creepers and she should start that again right this moment.

Dadadadada dadadadada da dodo...

Swing music? Their first dance. Leather and blue eyes. Sideburns and stripes. The chin and a bow tie.

There was something comforting about that. She kept running.

Remember.

That was how he always started, but she couldn’t enjoy it. She couldn’t take a moment and revel in the few minutes she’d get of what felt like a soothing balm on her memory-addled mind.

She was running again. Which wasn’t good. But she could remember why. That wasn’t good, either.

I grew a beard. Don’t be alarmed. There this grooming thing they won’t let me do.

Turn right, Tyler. Seems appropriate. Shadows and hides there.

I do not smell. Not human, don’t get smelly. May look smelly. No mirrors. But unless you can smell through your eyes now it’s likely a non-issue.

He anticipated her usual reaction, though she was too tired and distracted and barred from telepathic communication to return it, running from very obvious men in suits that others could see and remember and get out of the way of.

You’re making comments in my head. Well, you aren’t, which is good. Almost-hallucination you is.

Running left. Dark alley. Might lose them. Running like the wind. God, breathing was hard now. Either she was out of shape or she’d been running much longer than she remembered.
Don’t be surprised. You’re the living embodiment of a comment.

She couldn’t lose them.

It’s almost time for you to come home. Then I won’t need hallucination Rose. Which is good, no more hallucination Rose no more crazy Doctor.

Dead end alley. Rose hung her head and lifted up her hands as she heard the footsteps close in on her. Rose turned on the spot with her hands still up in surrender and looked directly into Canton’s eyes as he held a gun on her.

“Just surrender, Miss Tyler.”

You have to make sure I don’t need to use this hallucination again. I won’t have to, will I?

“No.” Rose said determinedly.

Canton fired his weapon.
Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Not the most comfortable straight jacket he’d ever been in, Nor the most comfortable chair, but he supposed it aided in the miserable grump face he had to present. They were keeping it quite cool, maybe in attempt to unnerve him or stop the spread of possible mind controlling germs, which was silly. He didn’t have any on him, and they likely didn’t know Grascovivla well enough to know of their definitive existence, but the coolness was nice. They’d flown him around, safe to say they’d never tried to hide a Time Lord and keep his location hidden from the Time Lord himself, they were in Nevada. If the fact that he was very good at global positioning hadn’t told him, the taste of the air and smells that wafted in with the guards’ shift change would have.

Little girl. Calling the president. Creatures that you can’t remember. Sending his friends out on an important mission while he got the blissful chance to stop and think. Well, blissful for the first twenty minutes. Canton had managed to bypass most of his ‘admittance’ with a quick call to Nixon. No blood sample, no finger prints, just sitting and trying not to be bored.

It wasn’t difficult to multitask when he ‘talked’ to Rose. It didn’t happen, though. He found himself absentely smiling a few times—which likely looked mad or quite menacing to his slowly increasing number of armed guards—while imagining her responses to his words.

Before it was different. He didn’t purposely talk to or conjure visions of Rose, his anger and full acceptance of the idea that he would never see her again firmly set in his mind. Back then his visions started out vague and mired in hope and acceptance of his loss and expanded into a fully talking flirtatious spunky blonde that irritated him. Now he was hoping for them, willing them into existence. Though, technically, he wasn’t hoping for the hallucinations, but the actual visage of the woman herself. Actually reachable by TARDIS without ripping apart realities. Over there, somewhere. Defending Earth. This Earth.

...With River.

Nope, stop there.

Still. Being stationary, without his friends, in a linear time with nothing to do but sit here and think? Torture. Boring torture. Very boring torture. Very, very boring torture. Very, very, very...

Canton sauntered to the large, yellow circle around him, stopping him from what would have been adding his nineteenth very. He kept his distance and smirked at him. “We found Amy Pond. She had strange markings on her arm. Do you know what they are?”

“Why don't you ask her?”

Canton slowly dropped well taken back and white photos before him and turned around, leaving the photos strewn on the floor at his feet.

Her entire body—the showing parts, given her clothes—she covered in tallies. 67 unfaded marks and somewhere between twenty to twenty two faded ones that he could see in the photos. It would be a few moments before they swept them cleanly and quickly. They were it the western part of the United States, on foot. So not far. The government may have tried to scramble him from knowing where he was but they didn’t know they had a Time Lord brain to contend with.

Rose would smirk and call him an idiot or something. No, not an idiot, that was Amy. Stupid and
Moron were Amy. 'Daft' with a smile, *that* was Rose. You think you’re so impressive.

And the guards clutched their weapons a bit tighter again.

It took only three hours for Canton to come back.

“Found Rory Williams, not far from Amy Pond. I’d like to say he tried to run, but.” His voice has a smirk in it, the Doctor passed him a passing glance as movement caught his eye.

More pictures. Not thrown at his feet, but shown to him one at a time that, he was certain, made it seem like he was being taunted. Over a hundred tallies here. Given that there was likely overlap between the two that could be nearly two hundred. Two hundred things they couldn’t remember.

A hand truck with large, blacker than black bricks was being brought in by people with gloves.

Slowly but surely.

“We found Doctor Song.”

It was Canton’s voice, raised slightly over the sounds of people and construction around him as they slowly built a wall on the yellow ‘do not cross’ line around him. The Doctor didn’t take his eyes off the black bricks as they seemingly sealed themselves in a flash of light, the perfect fusion of the neutral ionic displacement between two bricks once placed beside each other. “These bricks, what are they made of?” When he got no reply, the Doctor slowly turned towards Canton, “Where is she?”

“She ran. Off the fiftieth floor.”

That would explain the lack of pictures. And jumping out of ridiculous places seemed to be her style. He didn’t react.

“I’d say zero balance dwarf star alloy. The densest material in the universe. Nothing gets through that. You’re building me the perfect prison.” Time to be Threatening Doctor. He turned his fierce face on and nearly growled the words, “And it *still* won’t be enough.”

The Doctor turned back to the construction to see the workers working a bit more tensely, a bit more quickly. He could almost hear Rose now: *Threatening* Doctor should get trademarked, certainly does the job, angry puppy, Oncoming Storm. *Bit cloudy there, Doctor.* He sighed.

Last chance. Time’s up.

*Remember.*
Twelve hours this time. His arms itched and he wanted fish fingers. She was far off, can’t imagine once he’d said what he needed to that she’d have hidden for long. Unless she forgot. Maybe he should have repeated that more than twice.

“And now Rose Tyler.” The Doctor had no comment as Canton continued, “Let’s just say she’s not running any more.”

No pictures. Good man, Canton. Might have been too hard to see her, any bit of her, like that, even if it were fake.

The Doctor was now seated in a black box. He was in a cell, made of black bricks, only lit but part of a missing wall as Canton stood, irritatingly smugly – he could easily see how most prisoners would be irritated or threatened by his demeanor and speaking voice. Three MPs dragged three black body bags into his completed blacker than black cage.

“Is there a reason you're doing this?” The Doctor wasn’t certain, he wasn’t privy to Canton’s thoughts on how to execute the plan as much has he had been on the actual formulations of it’s steps. The body bags were off-putting, ostensibly under the guise of psychological torture, which was supposed to be not psychological torture but managed to niggle him slightly regardless.

“I want you to know where you stand,” Canton grinned.

“In a cell.” And technically sitting, really, but falling into that kind of logic may be less foreboding and more jocular, have to be foreboding.

“In a perfect cell. Nothing can penetrate these walls. Not a sound, not a radio wave, not the tiniest particle of anything.” Canton did a great job of sounding threatening. It was sounding more and more like this was a bad thing. It was making his nose itch. Canton inserted his fingers into holes. The door, for lack of a better word, sliding into place where they entrance was. “In here, you're literally cut off from the rest of the universe.” The door seemed to close completely as he paused, sealing itself in the flash of light that was the expelled ions around it.

Canton’s posture changed somewhat, his voice relaxed, “So I guess they can't hear us, right?”

The Doctor breathed out relief, not moving until everything was confirmed, “Good work, Canton.
Door sealed?”

“You bet.”

The sealed body bags quickly sat up and unzipped as the Doctor stood and shook off his chains easily, shimmying out of the strait-jacket quickly.

“Are you okay?” the Doctor ran to the first bag he saw blonde hair poke through as all three unzipped. It was Rory, but he deserved a kiss on the head, too, so he quickly followed through with his original plan.

“Finally.” Amy breathed clearly.

Rose groaned and cracked her back as Rory grumped and pat down the thick black bag at his sides and gave a look to Canton, “These things could really do with air holes.”

“Never had a complaint before,” Canton shrugged.

Rose got up first, lending a hand to help Amy up and Rory stood and stretched as well.

Amy stepped out of the bag and looked at Canton, “Isn't it going to look odd that you're staying in here with us?”

“Odd, but not alarming.” He nodded, staying remarkably still, smirking as he watched the odd figures of four people moving like mad people around the room stretching out muscles.

“Nice walls,” Rose mentioned, looking the blackness over as she put a hand on one to help balance her when she stretched out her legs. “You dial up Alistair?”

Canton nodded to Rose, “The Brigadier was a big help. Everyone out there knows there's no way out of this place.”

“Exactly.” The Doctor snapped his suspenders, “Whatever they might think we're doing in here, they know we're not going anywhere.” He leaned to his right against an invisible wall. He snapped his fingers and the door opened revealing the interior of the TARDIS set on invisible. “Shall we?” he leaned over quickly grabbed Rose's hand and yanked her into the TARDIS. Amy, Rory and Canton followed, the doors shutting behind them as the Doctor leapt up the stares and around the controls, he kept pulling Rose to the center console before he let go of her hand. He twisted knobs and plotted quickly.

“Where’s River?” Rose asked, looking between the Doctor and Canton.

“She dove off a rooftop.” Canton replied.

Everyone’s eyes widened.

“Don't worry. She does that.” The Doctor announced with an unconcerned air though he ran as he pointed down the corridor, “Amy, Rory, open all the doors to the swimming pool.” Amy and Rory ran at full speed to oblige.

“Then hang on to somethin.” Rose nodded giving a passing glance at the monitor. She looked at Canton as she slid her arms around a grab bar in front of her, prompting him to do the same. “Gravity'll go wonky for a bit.”

The Doctor quickly stood beside Rose, simply gripping the bar around the controls. They both held
on to it tightly as gravity began to pull them momentarily parallel to the floor as River dove through the air, zooming past Rose and the Doctor in a second. The doors closed. A moment later there was a big splash and gravity normalized, sending Rose and the Doctor falling quickly and without grace onto the floor.

There first noise was Rose bursting into laughter. The Doctor joined her immediately. Groans of minor pain and irritation of the others would have filled their ears if they weren’t so busy laughing. The Doctor was to his feet first, giving Rose a hand up and beaming away. It was the most fun he’d had in months.

Canton cleared his throat as he stood. “er, Bathroom?”

He tore his eyes away from Rose to look at Canton for a moment, “Down that hall, sixth door on the left.” Canton seemed to need the loo badly, he moved fairly quick to where the Doctor had directed him.

“If you find the squash courts you’ve gone too far!” Rose called after him.

It was silent for eternity when Canton left Rose and the Doctor alone.

…or it was just three seconds.

Either felt like an eternity, internal chronometer be damned.

“Forget something?” Rose asked as she folded his wonky collar, righting it from their graceless tumble onto the floor.

“Oh?” The Doctor asked.

Kissing? Was she talking about kissing? At the end of dates humans kissed. Reunions with people you’ve missed, humans kissed. Calm moment, other humans had to go do other human things, they were alone, could do. Kissing.

“Your chin.” Rose touched his beard lightly. …So not kissing, then. “You seem to have forgotten it back there. I kind of miss it,” Rose smiled brightly, and threw her arms around his neck and back, pressing herself to him in a giant hug. He lifted her up returning the hug and held her there for a moment as she laughed a bit before he put her down and looked into her eyes. She ran her thumb across his cheekbone tenderly as she looked into his green eyes, near sparkling as they looked at her. She moved her hand to rest his shoulder. “You’re right, though. You do smell smelly.”

He pulled away just enough hold onto her and look into her face with faux petulance, “Well you smell smelly.”

“I’ll go fix that, then.” Rose backed away slowly, his grip lessening as she slowly pulled away. She walked backwards toward the corridor, “Have to wash the 60s off, yeah?” She winked and turned around to walk faster, passing and exchanging a passing greeting to River as she came out of the corridor.

River toweled off her hair as she walked beside him, yanking the monitor towards her to view it. She toweled, tally free due to the impromptu swim, the smell of chlorine from the pool filled the room. “Told you she’d be fine.” River said to him at her side as she looked over the monitor.
“You’re being…” the Doctor flailed to find words as he kept his eyes toward the corridor Rose had disappeared down. “…spoiler-ific.”

“That wasn’t a spoiler, it was a guess. Time can be rewritten, my life’s no exception.” River turned her attention to the Doctor, the movement drawing his attention, “Besides it’s less fun to tease her than I thought it would be.”

When Rose finished a quick clean up and change she same into the console room to a shaved and cleaned up Doctor wildly jumping from one side of the console room to the other complete with previously missing bowtie.

“There’s the chin. Where’d you find it?” she said as she walked by him to the center where everyone else had gathered.

The Doctor was quick to respond as he walked besid her for a moment, “Next to the ginger hair dye.”

“Oh, don’t you dare,” Rose teasingly challenged, popping and pointing her finger at him as if to keep him away from the very thought.

The Doctor smiled and addressed the group, “So, we know they’re everywhere. Not just a landing party, an occupying force, and they have been here a very, very long time. But nobody knows that, because no one can remember them.”

The Doctor picked up a piece of tech and zapped Canton's hand. “Ow!”

The Doctor laughed at the shocked reaction, “Ha. So, three months. What have we found out?”

“Well, they are everywhere. Every state in America,” Rory let out a slightly pained, ‘Ahh!’ as his hand was sneakily injected by the Doctor.

The Doctor shook his head and continued walking around the room, passing the stationary Rose. “Not just America, the entire world.”

“More in cities, I think. Ran ‘round the middle states an’ didn’t see much ’til Chicago,” she added.

“There’s a greater concentration here, too.” Amy said as the Doctor quickly placed the cold metal tip on her hand. “Ow!” Rose started talking behind him, something about ‘creepy forgetty things’ in great cornfields, possibly just to cover up Amy potential rubbish whispering.

The Doctor looked at Amy softly, whispering quickly under the cover of Rose's inevitably sassy remarks, “Are you okay?”

“All better,” Amy seemed to force a smile, “Turns out I was wrong. I'm not pregnant.”
They couldn’t avoid Rory’s inquisitive nature for long, as he looked over and began walking closer, “What's up?”

“Nothing,” Amy pat Rory’s should reassuringly as the Doctor backed off, “Really, nothing. Seriously.”

“So you’ve seen them, but you don’t remember them,” Canton asked for clarification.

“You've seen them, too,” River nodded at Canton, That night at the warehouse, remember? While you were pretending to hunt us down, we saw hundreds of those things. We still don't know what they look like.” Rose moved River’s hand placement on the console absently.

“It's like they edit themselves out of your memory as soon as you look away,” started Rory, “The exact second you're not looking at them, you can't remember anything.”

“Sometimes you feel a bit sick, though, but not always,” Amy added.

This was a lot of information for Canton to absorb, but he was doing remarkably well, “So that's why you marked your skin.”

“Only way we'd know,” Rose shrugged.

“How long have they been here?” Canton asked.

“That's what we've spent the last three months trying to find out,” Amy explained.

“How long do you think?”

“Before 1952, long, long time before.” Rose muttered.

The Doctor closed in on Canton, “As long as there's been something in the corner of your eye, or creaking in your house, or breathing under your bed, or voices through a wall. They've been running your lives for a very long time now, so keep this straight in your head. We are not fighting an alien invasion, we're leading a revolution. And today, the battle begins.”

“How?” Canton asked.

“Like this,” the Doctor reached behind him and quickly injected River.

“Ow!”

“Nanorecorder!” the Doctor laughed as he held up his gizmo. “Fuses with the cartilage in your hand,” he walked up to Rose.

This might not work if you go all... wolfy. No wolfiness. Rose just rolled her eyes and presented her hand for injection. He quickly put it against her hand and she let out a yelp.

The Doctor quickly turned it on his own hand and pulled the trigger. “Ow. And it tunes itself directly to the speech centers in your brain. It'll pick up your voice, no matter what. Telepathic connection. So, the moment you see one of the creatures, you activate it,” the Doctor pushed just below his injection site on his palm, “and describe aloud exactly what you're seeing.”

He pushed it a second time and hand repeated his words, 'And describe aloud exactly what you're seeing.'

“Because the moment you break contact, you're going to forget it happened. The light will flash if
you've left yourself a message. You keep checking your hand if you've had an encounter. That's the first you'll know about it.”

“These would have prevented Rose’s buddy-system,” River smirked.

“Shut up, you loved it.” Rose quickly retorted with a knowing grin. River smirked and shook her head.

Canton looked confused, “Why didn’t you tell me this before we started?”

“I did, but even information about these creatures erases itself over time. I couldn't refresh it because I couldn't talk to you. They would remind themselves every time they saw one, and that refreshed the memory, or lack thereof.” He hit a button surruptitiously on the console as he waved his arms with his words, "You sought them less.”

Canton looked away and stiffened. “My God, how did it get in here?”

Rose turned her attention to Canton.

“Keep eye contact with the creature,” the Doctor said softly, “and, when I say, turn back, and when you do, straighten my bow tie.”

Canton then turned back and tweaked the Doctor's bow tie nonchalantly.

“What?” Canton put his hand back in his pocket, “What are you staring at?”

River whispered as if astonished, “Look at your hand.”

Canton looked down at his hand, flashing eerily from the spot on his hand where he was injected. “Why is it doing that?”

“What does it mean if the light's flashing? What did I just tell you?”

“I haven't—” Canton was quick with denial.

“Play it.” The Doctor instructed. Canton pushed his palm lightly near the flashing light.

“*My God, how did it get in here?*”

“*Keep eye contact with the creature and, when I say, turn back, and when you do, straighten my bow tie.*”

“What? *What are you staring at?*”

“*Look at your hand.*”

Canton slowly turned around again.

A mouthless, tall alien in a suit stood there, motionless.

He flinched, ready to flee or fight.

“It's a hologram, extrapolated from a photo on Amy's phone. Take a good, long look.” The Doctor flipped a toggle on the controls, and the Alien's image disappeared. “You just saw an image of one of the creatures we're fighting. Describe it to me.”

Canton didn’t even struggle, “I can't.”

“It's…” Rose started, squinting her eyes. The words were at the tip of her tongue, but she couldn’t
find them. “I can't remember.”

“Neither can I.” The Doctor explained easily with narrowed eyes before he turned to Canton, “You straightened my bow tie because I planted the idea in your head while you were looking at the creature.”

“So they could do that to people. You could be doing stuff and not really knowing why you're doing it,” Amy tried to wrap her head around that.

“Like posthypnotic suggestion.” Rory finished for her.

“Ruling the world with posthypnotic suggestion?” Amy looked a little confused.

“That’s it, yeah? Sometimes you have to do something but you don’t quite know why. We've all had that.” Rose’s eyes widened a touch as she looked at the Doctor.

“Exactly, it’s either been around so long that it’s relegated to normal human behavior or it blends into normal behavior.” The Doctor explained.

“’s possible they’ve been here that long?” Rose shuddered, “That’s plenty frightening, thanks.”

“Now then, a little girl. Why do they need a little girl?”

Rory quickly answered that thought, “She can call you, Nixon… obviously has something different about her.”

The Doctor paced and thought out loud, waving his hands as he spoke, “Good point, she’s different, so where did they get the girl?”

“Close to that warehouse? She called from there, Aliens prob’ly set up shop near the girl, or stash the girl nearby at least, right?” Rose suggested.

“And they'd take her from somewhere that would cause the least amount of attention.” He said with finality. He looked at Amy and Canton, “You'll have to find her. We’re off to NASA.”

“Find her?” Canton blinked, “Where do we even look?”

“Children's homes,” The Doctor said like it was obvious.

Rose moved to follow the Doctor, but River touched her arm from behind and stopped her.

“He'll have the TARDIS,” she nodded quickly at Amy and continued, “They might need one, too. You should go with.”

Rose rolled her eyes but didn’t argue, River moved out of the way as Rose addressed the Doctor. “I’m goin with ‘em.” He looked a bit dejected, so she lightened the idea, “’s a kid. Let’s not scare her with a bloke with a gun an' an easily miffed ginger, ‘Kay?”

“…If you're sure.”
They looked very official. Rory and River had changed in the wardrobe to class, 1960s business attire, complete River wearing clickity-clackity high heels and Rory donning a pair of horn-rimmed glasses that made him look almost as serious as he often was. They got into the building with the psychic paper, but now, this part of the hall leading to where the module was being kept likely needed... stealthiness. Good word, stealthiness.

Rory and River whispered behind him. Said stealthiness would have been aided more by the lack of not-whispering provided by his friends, but..

“How do you think the girls are doing?” asked Rory.

River’s smirk was evident in her voice. “I’d be more worried about Canton.”

“He’s armed, unless Rose has a sonic screwdriver in her arsenal that I’m not aware of like her... everything... then they aren’t.”

“No, She doesn’t have a sonic. Sonics are for stuff. She’s good with people, he’s good with stuff” River replied nonchalantly.

That was Rose Tyler. Good with people. But stuff? Stuff? He was good at everything, stuff didn't quite encompass everything.

“We are being very sneaky right now and you two are very loud. Hope you’ll ever have to keep a secret between you, the whole world would hear it.” He looked back momentarily, and River was smirking... she knew he could hear her. She was teasing again, wasn't she.

Inside he was happy he heard Rose didn’t have a sonic in the future, with all the implications that would have given River...

“What are we doing?” Rory said a bit jittery. He looked around as the Doctor crammed his frame under the Apollo 11 capsule like he was just a mechanic looking at the chassis.

“Doing a thing, a clever thing.” The Doctor announced quietly.

“He’s putting a receiver in,” said River with cheek.

“Which is both clever and a thing,” the Doctor declared. Stuff indeed.

“Why? Why put that in there?”

“Because it will help, may help, or it'll just be an incongruous bit of tech that doesn't bother anything,” the Doctor scooted himself into the module, “Either way you need to keep watch. In the hall.” Rory shook his head and walked away, “and no ‘whispering!”

Reattaching wires was like second nature.

‘It's less fun to tease her.’ Maybe that meant it was more fun to tease him, meaning his conclusions were a tease, which would only have been amusing if they were wrong. These days he was wrong a lot. Gleefully wrong. Rose was back, and not a hallucination, and not entirely human, and apparently his predestination trap of a life wasn’t necessarily a predestination trap. Gleefully wrong.
Not as wrong as these parts. Oh, humans, adding unnecessary bits in order to do things that matched up to their extremely limited understanding of science. How cute.

Thirty three minutes into his adjustment, which was nearly complete, his communicator beeped once. He hit a button.

It was a 50/50 shot on who was calling, weighted by the fact that Rose would have already him with a cheeky greeting, while this was preceded by expectant and oddly demanding silence, so that meant it was, “Amy.”

“I think we've found the place she was taken from. Rose said the little girl lives here.”

“How does she know?”

“Because those things have been here. But the whole place is deserted. There's just one guy here and I think he’s lost it.”

Good with people. He made a final adjustment to a wire he was holding as he wedged his head to the side, “Repeated memory wipes fry your head eventually. Find out what you can, but don't hang around.”

“Where are you?”

He heard footsteps, no clickity. “Got to go. Got company.”

The Doctor clicked off and wiggled himself out of the cramped compartment, shutting and latching the door with a bit in his hand. His eyes darted to those around him, which were only a few but stern looking, lab-coated individuals.

“Don't worry, I've put everything back the way I found it.” He realized there was a thing still in his hand, and moved his hand containing it a bit, “Except this. There’s always a bit left over, isn't there?” He smiled a nervous smile.

The scientists around him merely crossed their arms and gave him a stern look.

Rose looked at the large building ahead of them as she shut the car door behind her, “Well that’s... big.”

“And old,” Canton said as he did the same.

Amy added, “And Creepy.”
“Like the Addams Family or the Munsters,” Canton appraised, his eyes darting over the dark, old building.

Rose smiled, “You really do watch a lot of telly, there, Canton.” The three started walking closer, subtly check their hands for blinking message lights again. Each of them had checked quite clearly in the car only moments ago, but forgetfulness seemed to breed paranoia.

“Yes, the Addams Family and Twilight Zone.” Canton retorted quickly as they walked up the front side walk.

Amy seemed slightly miffed about being left out of the joke, “What’s the Munsters?”

Rose looked at Canton shaking her head, “Ignore her, she’s young.” The look on Canton’s confused face made Amy and Rose both struggle to hold in a laugh. Rose and Amy straightened their shirts as Canton turned to knock at the door, the two women flanking him.

An older, hunched and frail man answered the door slowly, the door creaking in an almost cinematic fashion as he peered at the three of them, “Hello?”

Canton cleared his throat, “FBI. You must be Doctor Renfrew. Can we come in?”

The man’s eyes widened a touch, “The children are asleep.”

“We’ll be very quiet.” Amy assured.

“Is there a problem?” he asked. It seemed like he was afraid of the answer.

Rose felt almost bad for the man, her eyes softening as she looked at him, “It’s about a missing child.”

“Yes, come in, please,” Renfrew opened the door wider and stepped back to let them in, closing the door behind them and leading them up the rickety stairs. “This way.”

They looked around. The lights weren’t on but the storm outside raged, lightening illuminating the big empty space for them. Rickety stairs that creaked beneath their feet, walls in dire need of new paint except maybe the large, new ‘Get Out’ slathered by red paint up the stairs as they ascended. The old man paused a few stairs ahead of them and seemed to try to wipe off the dry paint with a handkerchief. “Please excuse the writing. It keeps happening. I try to clean it up.”

Amy seemed more perturbed than anything by the letters, “It’s kids, yeah? They did that.”

“Yes, the children. It must be, yes,” he spoke slowly before remembering what he was doing, “Anyway, my office is this way.”

“We nearly didn’t come to this place,” Canton mentioned as he ascended the stairs behind him, “I understood Graystark Hall was closed in 67.”

Renfrew nodded, “That’s the plan, yes.”

“The plan?”

“Not long now,” Renfrew nodded.

Canton seemed shocked, “It’s 1969.”

“No, no. We close in 67. That’s the plan, yes.” Renfrew was prone to repeating himself. He didn’t
seem to know… he’d forgotten. He kept forgetting. Poor man, it made Rose feel sorry for him.

Canton didn’t seem to have caught on as quickly, or was trying to get Renfrew to realize it himself, “You misunderstood me, sir. It's 1969 now.”

“Why are you saying that?” The tired, aging man looked at their three faces quickly, “Of course it isn't.”

Rose nodded to him solemnly, “July.”

“My office is this way.” Mr. Renfrew turned and walked up the stairs again, “This way.”

Rose reached up and stopped the two of them with a gentle tug to each of their jackets, stalling them just enough. “So at least two years,” Rose seemed to address with questions on their faces even before they were fully formed, “He thinks it’s before 67, it’s half through 69. At least almost three years he's missin’.”

“Why do you think that?” Canton quickly asked.

“Losing track of time is kind of her specialty,” Amy smarmed.

“Oof, feels like you been talkin’ to my Mum,” Rose smirked at Amy before getting back to business, “He doesn’t remember over two years. She wasn’t taken from here... She lives here. If she’s not here, she's comin' back. Maybe just them, but where she seems to be, they are.”

“I'll check upstairs,” Amy looked ahead to the next staircase.

“I'll be back up,” added Rose.

“Be careful.” Canton reminded as both women headed for the second staircase. He turned to follow Renfrew.

First door they came across, the door creaked open. My most of this place certainly needed a good de-creaking. Amy and Rose shared a look, then Rose stayed by the door. Amy slowly went in, shining her torch over each surface carefully. Rose couldn’t help but notice the Get Out written all over the walls as she watched Amy motion for her to come in. The lightening from the storm outside certainly wasn’t helping and air of safety that might be hidden.

“I don't see anything.” Rose looked around slowly, hand at the ready at a moment’s notice.

“Other than creepy.” Amy muttered, reading the large letters on the wall imploring them to, once again, Get Out.

“Yeah, seems an endless supply of that.” Rose touched the wooden rocking horse in the middle of the room. No other toys, but a worn-looking old wooden horse.
“What time do you have?”

Rose to the opportunity to look at her hand and the watch and the door quickly before muttering, “Nearly half nine.”

Amy pulled pulling the mobile out of her pocket. “Time to update the Doctor,” Rose couldn't argue with that.

“Amy.”

“I think we've found the place she was taken from. Rose said the little girl lives here.” Amy said, looking to the window, watching the storm and reflections on glass. Either Amy had had the volume turned up or the Doctor wasn’t a quiet talker, but Rose could hear the whole conversation. In retrospect, probably both.

“How does she know?”

“Because those things have been here. But the whole place is deserted. There's just one guy here and I think he's lost it.”

“Repeated memory wipes fry your head eventually. Find out what you can, but don't hang around.” ‘What’s he doing?’ Rose mouthed to Amy.

“Where are you?” Amy asked, crossing her arms expectantly.

“Got to go. Got company.”

And he ringed off.

“Trouble?” Rose said looking half worried, half amused.

“Maybe.” Amy was all worry.


“Yeah,” Amy nodded, “next room.”

Chapter End Notes

...I swear one day I'll pop out a whole ep in one chapter.
Chapter 13

Rose opened a door and looked at Amy. Amy quickly nodded and stayed put while Rose wandered in side. Sides, walls crevices where things could hide, nothing. Rose looked up and froze in place for a moment. She slid her feet carefully along the floor, back toward the light from the hall.

Amy forced herself to not look up as Rose finally took her eyes off them. She blinked, looking around carefully as the thunder sounded outside. “Rose!” Amy stage whispered and beckoned for her to come near, the little light was flashing on Rose's hand. That was enough reason for her to quickly and quietly dash out towards Amy as they closed the door behind them.

Rose hit the button on her palm. “Thirteen. On the ceiling. They’re sleeping. Get out. Amy, you can hear me as I’m doing this, don’t look up, just beckon for me to leave this room once I look away, alright?”

They both breathed out and joined hands. “Buddy system for the win.”

“Still need to find the girl.”

“Split up?” Amy looked to the left.

“Buddy system,” Rose reminded, “pretty much requires at least two.”

“They’re sleeping. Faster this way.” Amy argued. Rose rolled her eyes.

“Be careful.” They nodded to each other and tiptoed in opposite directions down the hall.

Rose the next two rooms were almost the same as the first, at least as she remembered it. Empty, abandoned, old, disrepair. There were a few beds here but they seemed rusty and dilapidated from years of disuse. More than just three years, looked like. Hand not blinking. Next room, Tyler. No signs, no clues, just empty, run-down place where no human being, child or otherwise, should have to live, much less under threat of great forgetty things able to do some kind of… threatening thing that she forgot. This not remembering thing was annoying. They were running from something that could do something but their magic power seemed to be making you forget bloody everything about them. Not half annoying. Still nothing on her hand.

Next room. It seemed easy to look and see nothing but it was exhausting to look, see nothing, check your hand, double check the room and double check your hand. And then search for clues, just in case there was anything telling. So it felt less easy, it felt hard. Doubting yourself that much, even when you were already quite prone to doing so, was exhausting.

Amy screamed.

Roses feet moved faster than she told them to.

“You have to tape everything that happens in this office. Every word, or you won’t know if you're under the influence.” The Doctor instructed a now seated and obviously paranoid Nixon.

“Doctor, you have to give me more than this. What were you doing to Apollo 11?”

“Thing. A clever thing.” He reiterated, “Now, no more questions. You have to trust me and nobody else.”

River appeared, still in the TARDIS interior. Her eyes were wide and holding the corded TARDIS phone in her hand, eyes wide and slightly panicked looking, “Doctor, it's Canton. Quick, he needs us.”

The Doctor’s eyes didn’t even get a chance to widen before his feet had moved into the TARDIS. Jeopardy friendly.

“Help me. Please, I can't. I can't see. Somebody help me.”

“I’m coming Amy.” The doorknob was locked, Rose tried to turn it furiously. “Open the door, OPEN THE DOOR!” She shouted as she tried to open it. She took a step away and kicked below the knob, hoping to break something.

Canton ran up from behind her, watching Rose struggle with the door. His hand went to her arm quickly to stop her from trying again, “Amy! Amy, can you hear me? Amy, I'm going to try to blow
the lock. I need you to stand back.”

Rose turned her head away to ready for the bang of the gun, instead she heard footsteps and a familiar voice.

“Okay, gun down. I've got it.” Rose looked back to see the Doctor, sonic in hand, hurriedly pointing it at the door while the whirred loudly.

“Amy, we're here. Are you okay?” a smartly dressed Rory seemed to shout at the door.

Amy’s voice almost whimpered, “I can't see.”

The Doctor hit the screwdriver and lamented the door’s wooden construction, that seemed to inspire Rose to give another, swift kick at the door, breaking it just enough for the Doctor to push it open as they all rushed into the room

Rose blinked and looked around, she couldn’t tell if things were a mess because this whole building has was already been a mess or there was a struggle or simply that this was a child’s room and children rarely have a taste for order. One the desk were pictures, one off kilter when the rest were face front, she was drawn to it. All the other pictures were of a little girl alone. Playing, reading, on a bench in a park… sepia tones and muted color like all the pictures of that era she’d seen… but the off kilter one. Rory furiously zoomed to look under the clearly empty space under the bed and River checked the closet. The wonky picture… it was a full color picture of Amy with a baby. Amy was smiling. Full color. She froze, her hand on the frame.

“Where is she, Doctor?” Rory was despondent.

“It's empty,” River muttered, heading to check the hall.

The Doctor put a hand on the back of his neck while his eyes and mouth fell into a worry. But there was Rose, her body still, eerily still as she stood in front of a tall dresser. She was panicking. Panicking Rose was still and thinky and then shouty. None of those would be helpful right now. Except maybe the thinky.

“Rose…” he walked up to her, following her eyeline and saw what was in her hand. Smiling. Color. Amy. Baby. His eyes quickly darted to hers as she looked at him, in moments he had taken the picture of in her hand and placed it face down on the dresser top. “She’ll be okay.” He nodded slowly.

Amy’s voice pulled both of their attention, “It's dark. So dark. I don't know where I am. Please, can anybody hear me?” Her nanorecorder was on the floor, blinking repeatedly. Out of her hand. Speaking with her voice.

Rory squatted on the floor as he picked it up gingerly, “They took this out of her. How did they do that, Doctor?” He turned to face the Doctor, “Why can I still hear her?”

“Is it a recording?”

The Doctor squatted by Rory and ran his sonic screwdriver over the beacon quickly, “Er, it defaults to live.” The Doctor's face was sullen, Rose put her hand gently on his shoulder. “This is current. Wherever she is right now, this is what she's saying.”

“Amy, can you hear me? We're coming for you,” Rory spoke softly to the blinking light, “Wherever you are, we're coming, I swear.”
“She can’t hear you. I'm so sorry. It's one way.”

Rory turned to look sternly at the Doctor, his tenderness to the nanorecorder not transferring to the Doctor himself, “She can always hear me, Doctor. Always. Wherever she is, and she always knows that I am coming for her. Do you understand me? Always.”

“Doctor, are you out there? Can you hear me? Doctor? Oh, God. Please, please, Doctor, just get me out of this.”

“He’s coming. I’ll bring him, I swear,” he said to the nanorecorder while staring daggers at the Doctor.

“Hello? Is somebody there?” Renfrew appeared in the doorway, shaken and scared as he stepped closer to their despondent crew, “I think someone has been shot. I think we should help. We c...” He blinked a few times, “I can’t remember.”

Rose let out a breath she hadn’t realized she was holding and walked up to the lost man. “Let’s...” she hesitated as she slowly and gently took his arm, “Let’s take a look, yeah?” she passed a glance to the others as they, for the most part, snapped into movement. Rory being the most hesitant as he stared at the blinking light with his wife's voice proclaiming how dark and lost she was.

Canton and the Doctor walked ahead, passing them quickly. River, somehow, got Rory off the floor as they all determinedly left the room and headed toward Renfrew’s office. Each passing Rose and the frail, lost old man as they headed down the stairs.

The tall thin creature laid on the floor of the old office space, probably Doctor Renfrew's office, still alive. It seemed to have been shot. Somehow just as menacing severely debilitated and near motionless. Something in Rose wanted to snarl but she couldn’t. Maybe it was emotional, maybe it was the fact that the Doctor was grabbing her hand so tightly she couldn’t think about anything but the fact that despite his calm face, inwardly he was angrier than she.

“Okay. Who and what are you?”

“Silence, Doctor,” it mouthlessly hissed, “We are the Silence.”

The look on the Doctor's face worried Rose. She’d missed that bit, inevitably. Clues in the words. The Doctor grit his teeth under a curious look. While everyone else seemed to see curious, Rose saw through it to the gritted teeth.

The Doctor straightened his back slightly. Silence. Rosanna and the fishy vampire aliens had run from it. Them, it seems. Prisoner Zero had told him. There is a crack in the universe. The Pandorica will open. Silence will fall. There is a crack in the universe, check, big crack. The Pandorica will open, also big check. Exploding TARDIS made the crack, adding in the Pandorica made Big Bang Two with a bonus of retrieving Rose. Now the Silence. Menacing.

“And Silence will fall.”

There it was. Menacing.
“Canton, Rose, River, stay here. Don't take your eyes off it.”

“Where are you off to?” River didn’t take her eyes off it as instructed.

“To get it help.” He growled as he left, Rory trailing behind.

They were back in the black cell, TARDIS again running on invisible shielding. Poor girl wasn’t a fan of that, she groaned when the switch was flipped.

“Hello again.” Canton greeted without leaving the cell. Rose stayed out of sight in the corner, staring at the Silence in the shadows of the walls. Nixon exited the TARDIS and opened his eyes, straitening his suit.

“Sir, you’ve been in there for days. What the hell have you been doing?” came a voice from an inevitably armed guard to Canton.

“It doesn't matter.” Canton said, “I need Doctor Shepherd here right now.”

They said more, but something about it didn’t register, Rose didn’t take her eyes off the Silence. Nixon walked past her and out the cell. Even without a mouth seemed the Silence seemed to be smirking at her cockily.

“You get tired, tired. You cannot stop the Silence. Bone or flesh, you will not stop the Silence. Silence will fall.” It hissed.

“Yeah, well, Silence will fall. Know what that means?” she lowered her voice as she looked into it’s recessed, vacant eyes with her big, brown ones, “You'll fall.”

“You can go.” Canton’s voice interrupted her angry stare.

“But—”

“The Doctor will need you.” He interrupted, not looking directly at the creature but keeping it in his peripheral vision, “That one’s not going anywhere.”

Rose’s mouth set awkwardly, her tongue seeming to flick her teeth as she weighed her options. “Fine, just…” she reached into her front pocket and produced her phone, presenting it to him. “’sa… camera phone. Only has three numbers in, River, the TARDIS, an' Amy. Video might be better than
“audio, right?”

“This pink thing? It’s a phone?” he wiggled it in his hand, “and a camera?”

“Point ‘n click.” She nodded, seeing Nixon saunter back into the dark cell, a stout man in a lab coat a few meters behind him.

“Ride back to the white house, Mister President?” She ushered Nixon though the doors, hoping to make an exit before the lab-coated man saw them. Rose went into the TARDIS behind Nixon and shut the doors behind her.

Nixon refused to open his eyes again, something about feeling so small. They dropped him off and Rose’s instinct took her to the galley, but she wasn’t wearing her usual I-need-tea face. That was worrying. A quick glance about showed that River stood by Rory so he’d have a moment. The Doctor quickly followed.

He arrived just in time to see Rose slam her fists on the counter before flinching and looking at the ceiling “Sorry, my dear.” Rose flattened out hand on the counter and smoothly pet it, as if trying to apologize further. The Doctor walked closer, she turned at the movement, her face was red and puffy. He immediately put his arms around her.

Her stiff posture loosened a bit as her voice wavered. “I should have been there.”

The Doctor pulled away, and looked into her eyes, “Then they would have taken you, too.”

“Or we’d’ve gotten out.” Rose wiped a tear from her face.

“Why weren’t you there?” Rory said from the door way. He started taking steps toward her.

“She said split up,” Rose tried to explain, “an’—”

“And you agreed?” Rory seemed surprised before turning accusatory and pointing to the Doctor while still staring at her “He said you wander off. You sure you didn’t just wander off? Leave Amy?”

“Oh!” Rose’s reddened face turned more angry than sad, “Can you get her to do what you want? ’cause I’ve only spent a bit of time with her an even I know that’s unlikely.”

Rory turned around and left in a huff. Rose melted as he left all her anger and bravado leaving her.

“He’s worried.” The Doctor tried to console.
"I know. I just—" she bit her lip and looked to the ceiling quickly. "Darlin', can you get the door?" Galley door disappeared, leaving solid wall where it would have been. "What did it mean, that picture?"

"I don’t know yet."

"There was a baby…” she started very leading, like there was more to that sentence that she couldn’t even get out.

"I know."

"We have to get Amy back." Rose said determinedly.

"I know." He agreed, "We need more information." The door popped back almost immediately with that sentence, swinging open even before they touched it to leave.

"Seems she agrees." Rose raised her eyebrows a touch, following him out and directly to the controls. He plodded quickly, the ship dematerializing and rematerializing in quick succession.

"Where are we going?" River asked, following as the two made a bee-line for the exit doors.

"Clues."

Looking over every inch of that warehouse's tech had only drawn the Doctor to that one bit Rose had found in the first place. He gave it to River for analysis. Everyone else milled about, tired and thinking. They were tired. All of them, his friends, they were tired. River sat, Rose paced, Canton curiously prodded things he knew wouldn’t help and Rory, poor Rory, was fending off the good sulk he had coming by grasping that beacon tightly. Of course, the Doctor was thinking aloud.

"Little girl. Why put her here?"

"The 51st century tech you found is a communications system that can hack into anything." River seemed astonished by her readings.

"Including the telephone network?"

"Easily," River confirmed.

"But why phone the President?" Rose asked.

"It defaults to the highest authority it can find. The little girl gets frightened, the most powerful man on Earth gets a phone call. And then when you and Rose traipsed near, well."
“What are the Silence doing, raising a child?”

“So...omeone cares about her,” Rose posited. “There were photos an toys in that room. If you don’t care about a child you don’t give her photos and toys, do you?” Rose absently chewed on her thumb nail, looking at the Doctor.

“We should be trying to find her,” River stated.

“Yes, I know. But how? Looking for her just pointed us here and anyway, I have the strangest feeling she's going to find us.” The Doctor walked in a small loop, thinking to himself. The television droned on in the background.

‘Apollo 11, this is Houston. How do you read? Over.’

“Why that girl?” Rose sucked in her bottom lip, chewing on it nervously before being able to get the question out of her mind, “an’ why those aliens?”

“Because that's what the Silence do. Think about it. They don't make anything themselves. They don't have to. They get other life forms to do it for them. Go to the 51st, get coms, hide in the 20th. Tell who to create it, what they need, take the created technology, then shunt off to wherever they need it.”

“So they’re parasites, then,” River summed up, letting Rory absently look over their find.

“Superparasites, standing in the shadows of human history since the very beginning. We know they can influence human behavior any way they want. If they’ve been doing that on a global scale for thousands of years, violating time’s limitations all for one little girl.”

A crunch.

Rose looked over to where the sound originated quickly, Rory was there, his hand cut as a slightly cracked bit of tech sat in his hands. “Er, sorry,” he gave the tech back to River as Rose looked at his hand. “To you, too. You’re right. Amy’s Amy, I can’t blame you.”

“’S alright.” Rose shrugged, “We’ll get ‘er back, Rory. You know we will.” She gently put her hand on his shoulder and went to sit by River, giving him space.

‘Ignition sequence start. six, five, four, three, two, one, zero. All engines running. Liftoff. We have a lift-off. Thirty two minutes past the hour, liftoff on Apollo 11.’

“Big day,” Rose solemnly muttered, finding no thrill in the shuttle launch given the circumstances. The Doctor made a mental note to bring her by again, in more fun circumstances. She smirked, “Humans in space, who’d a thought.”

River seemed to perk up at that, “The little girl said the bad spaceman was coming to eat her. But we haven’t seen any spacemen. 1969, only spaceman is on the moon,” River posited.

“Or the Doctor,” Rose muttered with her face toward the ceiling as she thought.

“Channeling Donna Noble?” his voice carried to her ears.

“Is that where it came from?” Rose lowered her neck again and passed the Doctor a quick smile. She looked at Rory sitting alone, the Doctor followed her eye line and sat by Rory on the other side of the room.
He was cradling the small beacon, listening to the scared, wavering voice emitting from it. “So just get your stupid face where I can see it, okay? Okay?”

“She'll be safe for now,” the Doctor assured, “No point in a dead hostage.”

“Can't you save her?” Rory almost begged.

“I can track that signal back. Take us right to her.” The Doctor motioned to the beacon.

“Then why haven't you?” Rory didn’t seem angry. Just resigned.

“Because then what? I find her and then what do I do? The only way to save Amy is to work out what the Silence are doing. And every single thing we learn about them brings us a step closer.”

Rory seemed exasperated, “What if it were Rose? Wouldn’t you go get her no matter what?”

The Doctor looked at Rose, holding her head in her hands as she waited as patiently as she could, “Not until I knew why,” he turned back and looked at Rory, “This isn't an alien invasion. They live here. This is their empire. This is kicking the Romans out of Rome.”

“Rome fell.”

The Doctor smirked, “I know. I was there.”

“So was I,” Rory said on an exhale.

“Personal question.”

Rory turned to him blankly, “Seriously, you?”

“Do you ever remember it?” the Doctor asked, “Two thousand years, waiting for Amy? The Last Centurion.”

“No,” the answer was fast in Rory's lips.

The Doctor smirked, “You're lying.”

“Of course I'm lying.” Rory said flatly.

“Of course you are. Not the sort of thing anyone forgets. Long time to forget.”

“I wouldn’t remember how long if I didn’t know. But I don't remember it all the time. It's like this door in my head. I can keep it shut.” Rory stared at the beacon again as it started to speak for Amy.

“Please, please, just come and get me. Come and get me.”

A video file arrived on River's device. Her tech beeped. Rose looked over just as River hit a button and an image seemed to flash on the little screen.

‘You should kill us all on sight.’

It was the Silence. The wounded one. Black walls behind it.

“Hold on…” Rose watched the screen, staring at it as River managed to pause it on an image of that creepy, creepy face. Luckily, the paused sight let them continue to remember. River seemed to tick on to the same thing Rose did.
“Doctor, come look at this,” River said, not tearing her eyes off the screen.

The Doctor stood and walked the few feet to them, putting his hand on Rose’s shoulder as he looked over them to view the file. River played it once again.

“Who showed him how to do that?” The Doctor smirked as he looked directly at Rose.

“What?” Rose shrugged, not stopping her stare at the screen, “It’s point ‘n click.”

The Doctor lit up incrementally, Rose saw the idea spring to his mind as he stood. River seemed to see the same look and they standing to their feet faster than they’d admit. Rory got the hint and stood slowly, following them all to the TARDIS.

The television droned on behind them, ‘… its crucial moment. Armstrong and Aldrin are making their descent to the surface of the Moon.’ The Doctor popped back out and quickly unplugged and grabbed the little telly.

Rory clung to his little beacon as Amy’s voice called out ‘No.’

“Get off me! No no!” Amy's beacon sounded as they materialized and opened the doors as quickly as possible.

“Oh, interesting.” The Doctor said as soon as he opened the doors, seeing the very familiar sight River, Rory and Rose had seen months ago underground. They filed out immediately behind him. River’s gun drawn and narrowed eyes of Rose in determination. No one could tell what expression Rory had had because the moment his eyes set on his strapped down wife there was nothing but Amy written all over his face. Relief, fright, worry, anger. “I've seen one of these before. Abandoned. I wonder how that happened? Oh, well I suppose I'm about to find out.” He quickly switched his address, though it was hard to tell when he hadn't changed tones or to look at them as he paraded around the center, small telly still in hand, “Keep one Silent in eyeshot at all times. Oh, hello, Amy. Are you all right? Want to watch some television?” The Doctor stopped his movement to put the television down on top of what looked to be a center console and plug it in. The hoard of Silent alien creatures taking a step forward as he stopped his movement, “Ah. Now, stay where you are. Because look at me, I'm confident. And that pink and yellow flower over there packs one hell of a wallop. And this is our friend River, nice hair, owns her own gun. She'll likely kill the first three of you to attack, plus him behind, and the Wolf may go Bad at any moment now, so maybe you want to draw lots or have a quiz.”

Rory was trying to free Amy, but didn’t seem to be getting anywhere quickly. Rose side stepped a bit closer to them as she stared a Silence down listening to the Doctor display his brilliant and finely walked balance of part hero, part showman.

“Or maybe you could just listen a minute. Because all I really want to do is accept your total surrender and then I'll let you go in peace. Yes, you've been interfering in human history for thousands of years. Yes, people have suffered and died, but what's the point in two hearts, if you can't be a bit forgiving, now and then?” The Silence were quiet. Without his gob running a good ramble the room was, well... quiet “Ooo, the Silence. You guys take that seriously, don't you? Okay,
you got me. I'm lying. I'm not really going to let you go that easily. First, you tell me about the girl. Why is she important? What's she for?” The television's staticy voice interrupted any chance he had at getting an answer.

'And we're getting a picture on the TV.'

“Guys, sorry, but you're way out of time. Now, do you know how many people are watching this live on the telly? Half a billion. And that's nothing, because the human race will spread out among the stars. Billions of them, for billions and billions of years, and every single one of them at some point in their lives, will look back at this man, taking that very first step, and they will never, ever forget it.”

‘Modes control both auto. Descent engine command off.’

The Doctor gets out his communicator as he spoke to them, “Oh. But don't forget this bit…” he spoke into the communicator for a second, “Ready?”

“Ready.” Canton's voice resonated from the speaker. The Doctor smiled as he hit a button and looked toward the small television.

Rose mouthed the words along with the television, staring down a Silence. ‘That's one small step for a man’

The hissing voice of the Silence echoed from the speakers ‘You should kill us all on sight. You should kill us all on sight.’

The Doctor shouted triumphantly, “You've given the order for your own execution, and the whole planet just heard you.”

‘You should kill us all on sight.’

Armstrong continued what would be his famous quote, ‘One giant leap for mankind.’

“And one whacking great kick up the backside for the Silence! You just raised an army against yourself and now, for a thousand generations, you're going to be ordering them to destroy you every day. How fast can you run? Because today's the day the human race throw you off their planet. I think, quite possibly, the word you're looking for right now is…” he stopped his self adulation for a moment to see the faces of the silence bending and stretching to look like screams as they slowly lifted staticy arms. His hands dropped, “Oops. Run!” The Doctor quickly looked around at his friends, “Guys, I mean us. Run.”

Static noises filled the air, energy building. The Doctor couldn’t help but double check that Rose was otherwise occupied, simultaneously hope she was and wasn’t causing it as he pulled out his sonic screwdriver and disrupted what currents he could. River started discharging her weapon, in seconds the room was loud with energy discharge and shooting.

“I can't get her out!” Rory shouted, dismayed as Rose ran to help free Amy. She was tied. It was a formidable knot made more formidable by Rory’s eager yet bumbling fingers accidentally tightening parts of it.

“Go. Go!” Amy said, shaking her head toward the TARDIS trying to spur them on.

“We are not leaving without you,” Rory said emphatically, like it needed saying.

“Look, will you just get your stupid face out of here.” Amy almost yelled at Rory. Rory’s shocked
face paused, looking at Amy’s just long enough for Rose to get the knot un-tied. Obviously she missed something, again, but more important was lugging Amy out of that bloody chair and into the bloody TARDIS.

“Run! Into the TARDIS, quickly.” River bellowed.

“Yeah, workin’ on it, thanks.” Rose sarcastically said under her breath as she and Rory managed to get Amy up and, supporting her on both sides, ran her on to the TARDIS.

“Don’t let them build to full power!”

“I know. There’s a reason why I’m shooting at it.” River said behind him, the sound of her blaster never ceasing.

The doors swung open again as Rose ran out quickly and grabbed the back of both of their shirts toward the TARDIS, spurring their movement towards the pull.

They quickly ran into the TARDIS, River barreling up to the console with Rose and the Doctor.

“I was busy!” River shouted at Rose.

“Yeah, and now we all are!” Rose growled back.

Rory was like a magnet to Amy's side. The Doctor and River’s hands both flew to buttons on the console and the TARDIS immediately started shaking horrendously.

“You can let me fly it!” the Doctor shouted at his unwillingly accepted copilot.

“Yeah, or we could go where we're supposed to!” River loudly retorted.

“Oi, put the sass on hold until after, alright?” Rose growled at the two of them as she held onto a side rail as the TARDIS bucked about. They both ceased their bickering and the shaking stopped. It seemed she’d scared even the TARDIS in behaving.

The Doctor cleared his throat and River shrunk a bit like a scolded child, “Sorry.”

Amy and Rory were kissing in an alcove, Amy’s beacon displayed in Rory’s hand.

Picking up Canton was easy, all would be explained later and the Doctor instructed him on the dissolution or dissemination of the dwarf star alloy bricks used to build a cell for him. Apparently the area was already highly classified so it was possible the entirely of the building was either going to be emptied or guarded in perpetuity. Rose barely paid attention, she almost innately stuck by the newly retrieved Amy’s periphery, guarding without guarding, almost apologizing without apologizing. Watching her. Making sure she was still there. Occasionally kibitzing with River.

Rose’s almost uncanny ability to get along with the two most volatile women in his life was unexpected, but welcome. He smirked to himself. Good with people.
Between watching Amy and her absently looking at the Doctor, her neck was starting to ache. Rose meandered her way to an upper landing of a corridor where she could see both of them without turning her head and let the adrenaline of the past few moments to flush out of her.

Canton walked up to the stairs and looked where she was looking, his eyes falling on the Doctor as he did a quick fiddle with the console wiring. “You remind me of myself and my companion. He’s an engineer. Lots of tinkering. And math.” He smirked as Rose finally tore her eyes off of the Doctor. “Dynamite kisser, though.” He handed her her pink phone back.

Rose smiled and took her mobile, playing with it momentarily before sticking it back into her pocket. She bit her lower lip for a moment, her grin fading into a bit of a knowing smile. “I think I hate that word, Companion. ‘Least when its used on me. Think he hated it a bit, too, he only used it once but got it a lot from others. Nothin’ feels quite like ‘buddy-stroke-sidekick’ like companion.” Rose turned to him, “I haven’t found a word I like. We’re not just friends, so that’s out. Significant Other is a mouthful. Lover’s jus’ creepy sometimes.” Canton sprang a laugh, Rose just smiled and continued, “Partner seems to be the closest. ’sa bit like a promotion to the companion, I don’t love it, but ’san important distinction for those of us who get the title.”

“Never thought of it like that. Partner,” Canton breathed a laugh, “I like it.” He raised his voice, making sure the Doctor only a few feet away could hear. “I should get back. Via the oval office, I still need to get paid.”

The TARDIS quickly landed and the doors opened up, Rose, the Doctor and Canton filed out into an empty office, Amy and Rory coming a few seconds behind them.

“Going to stay and help?” asked Canton hopefully.

The Doctor didn’t even get a chance to say no before Rose laughingly answered for him, “He never sticks ’round for clean up.”

“There’s going to be a lot of bodies.” Canton muttered, suddenly unsure, “I think.”

“Ever trip over nothing?” the Doctor asked.

“Well I’m never going to sleep again,” said Amy as she rolled her eyes and shuttered slightly, “or use the toilet.”

Rose suddenly perked up, “Can I use the loo?”

Doctor raised his eyebrows, “Why didn’t you use it on the TARDIS?”
“An’ pass up usin’ the toilet in the White House?” Rose smiled.

Canton smirked, “It'll take a few minutes for the president to get here. He’s in a meeting anyway. Out those doors, third from the left.”

“Thanks,” Rose walked into the hall.

This had been… Rose breathed out exaggeratedly as she splashed water on her face. Big, monumental days. Months. She wasn’t joking that she had grown out of TARDIS shape. Maybe not physically, as running around for the last three months would attest, but mentally. She didn’t remember a single adventure with him ever being so heady. Well, maybe as heady but definitely not as prolonged. She looked at herself in the mirror and sighed as another woman walked up to the sink beside hers.

The woman smiled at Rose in the mirror. “Big day!”

“Oh, very big,” Rose smiled back, using a hand towel to dry her face. She looked at the other woman in the mirror. Black hair, dark skin, impeccably groomed eyebrows and even said that it was a big day with an English lilt, “Do I know you?”

“I don’t think so.” The dark woman easily dismissed, almost laughing at the thought.

“Not many Brits stateside.” Rose smiled, dabbing her face.

“More than you’d think. We’re here for the Moon landing. Exciting!”

“Been a big day, yeah.” Seeing the other woman’s face framed by the mirror made her twitch a little, but Rose shrugged it off. “Think I’d have liked to see it in a home or somethin’. All pomp an’ circumstance, here.”

“Oh, but this was posh!” the woman smiled as she dried her hands. “Such fun to see first hand. See ya!”

Maybe the past three months of staring stoically at strange men had rubbed off or something, the way Rose kept trying to place the dark haired woman. Probably weirded her quite out. But she couldn’t help the feeling…

She shook it off. Don’t be weird, Tyler.

Rose finished washing her hands when it sunk in.

*That face.* Framed by the mirror. Framed. Screen frames. A small screen with Jack and Sarah Jane. And on a big screen above her. *Oh my God. He found you.*

*Martha.*

Shit.

She could.

…No. She couldn’t.

Well, shouldn’t. Not quite the same thing.
She found herself following Martha a little. She’d just take ten steps, she figured. Ten steps would be pushing it. Okay, rationalizing, but… six steps to the end of the corridor. Well within the imaginary, useless boundary she’d set for herself. The end where Martha had gone was a big room, many people, quick peek couldn’t hurt. They’d likely be gone by now, anyway. Not entering the large room, still hanging in the shadows of the corridor, she grasped the frame of the entrance and looked out quickly.

He wasn’t hard to spot. She knew that face anywhere. They weren’t gone yet. She backed up a touch to be sure she wouldn’t be seen but she could still see out.

There he was. The Doctor. *Her* Doctor. *Her old* Doctor? All tall and skinny and side burns and sad eyes and manic energy. Not looking at her, which was better. No time-line skip-rope for her. Not today, anyway. Years ago, few years ahead for him, sure. Wouldn’t undo all that for the world. Brown suit and tan coat wafting as he walked. Oh, that girl obviously fancied him. Martha. Even if she didn’t know because he’d told her, she’d know by how she was clinging happily to his arm like that as they walked away. Rose had hung on that exact same arm nearly the exact same way.

*Nostalgia*. That’s what it was. That face was with her longest. That adorable, comfortable face. That face represented the past. But…

If she were pressed, the present looked more like an Easter Island head with bowtie.

The whole thought made her blush and drum her fingers softly on the doorframe as she looked away absently.

“Time to go home,” chimed a voice behind her, she turned immediately. Big smile on the bowtie-wearing Doctor, sticking his head out a door into the corridor a few meters down the corridor. “President’s here.”

“Comin’,” Rose smiled to him, heading away from and toward the same man.

Downstairs, blond hair from a girl who turned in a hall caught someone’s eye and he paused at the exit.

“What’s wrong, Doctor?” Martha said.

“Nothing.” He sighed, “Just a hallucination.”

Walking to River’s cell provided Rose with many staring eyes from passing guards in grey uniforms,
a few walking a touch faster to their destinations when they were noticed. She supposed someone
breaking out at least once was unheard of, much less returning to inevitably break out again. And
they were with her. To be fair, the Doctor had broken out of one or two prisons himself. Rose was
wandering around with two apparent habitual escapees, and frankly it was hard not to hear of his
exploits these days. The *Oncoming Storm* was visiting a place called *Stormcage*, after all. At least
the irony was a bit frightening.

It wasn’t long before River stood in the door of her cell. Books and comfortable blankets adorning
the bed, though there wasn’t much else.

“You could come with us.” The Doctor looked at Rose, his mouth almost worked faster than his
brain. Maybe he should have checked with Rose first.

“We’d love you to come!” Rose confirmed, looking almost pleadingly to River. Good old Rose. He
supposed Rose and River had spent time together, they’d likely gotten to know one another, and,
apparently, Rose was now fond of the woman who seemed to unsettle her so greatly months ago.

“I escape often enough, thank you. And I have a promise to live up to. You’ll understand soon
enough.”

“Okay.” The Doctor nodded, linking his arm with Rose’s.

“See ya later?” Rose asked, small smirk appearing on her face.

“Not if I see you first.” River winked at Rose as she shut the metal barred door to her cell. The
Doctor and Rose started the few yard journey back to the TARDIS.

“First time walkin’ into a prison to return a prisoner,” Rose smirked as he clicked his fingers and the
doors opened, “Bit weird.”

“There’s a first time for everything.” He smiled and shrugged, following her in.

“Rose, hold this wire.” The Doctor handed her a wire that hung from the under console. Rose sat on
the floor near him and looked up.

“’s just a wire,” she looked at it, raising her eyebrow as she looked at it’s semi frayed end following
it’s sheath color. It dead ended in another frayed end. Rose rolled her eyes at the Doctor as he looked
over to Rory.

“Rory, I’m going to need thermocouplings. The green ones and blue ones.”

“Okay, hold on.” Rory responded and he leisurely tromped down the stairs.

“Liar,” Rose said quietly as she let go of the wire and stood quickly, walking up to the Doctor and
Amy.

He waited until the moment Rose was in earshot, “So.”
“So.” Amy repeated.

“You're okay?”

Amy nodded her head, “Fine. Head's a bit weird. There's loads of stuff I can't quite remember—”

“Not what he meant.” Rose interrupted.

“You told us were pregnant,” the Doctor carefully said.

“I was. I mean, I thought I was. It turns out I wasn't,” Amy shrugged.

“No, why did you tell us?”

“Shush, Gran,” the Doctor still had a stoic face on, pointed at Amy that made her feel awkward despite her lighthearted exchange with Rose. “I travelled with you in this TARDIS for so long. All that time. If I was pregnant for some of it, wouldn't it have had an effect? I don't want to tell Rory his baby might have three heads or, like, a timehead, or something.”

“A timehead?” The Doctor quietly chuckled.

“Shut up,” Amy jokingly instructed, “that’s what she said, but what if? It’s not like I know.” She looked down the hallway where Rory was lurking, listening intently to the beacon in his palm as her voice echoed from it and her own throat, “Oi, stupid face.”

“Er, yeah?” He looked up to the now cross-armed, sassy owner of the voice. He waved awkwardly, “Hello.” He said as he came up the stairs toward them.

“I'm taking that away from you, if you're going to listen in all the time.” Amy sassed. Rose sucked in her lips and stepped back with the Doctor, giving them slightly more space.

“Okay, that's a fair point,” Rory nodded slightly embarrassed at his being caught eavesdropping, again, “But you should've told me that you thought you were pregnant. I'm a nurse. I'm good with pregnancy.”

“Not, as it turns out, that good.” Amy smiled and grabbed her husband by the shirt, “So please stop being stupid.”

“Er, no, never,” he shook his head and came closer to Amy, hugging her and lifting her up in embrace, “I'm never, ever, going to stop being stupid.” Rose and the Doctor smiled and turned away a little as Amy and Rory started kissing, obviously having a tender moment.

“Anyone in the mood for adventures? Because I am,” the Doctor asked.

“First, Sleep.” Amy announced, dragging Rory down the hall by his shirt.

“We couldn’t have gotten her, could we?” Rose said as she watched the figures disappear down the corridor.

“What?” the Doctor’s brow furrowed as he turned toward her, “Who?”

She turned towards him and blinked slowly, piecing her thoughts together, “The child, the little girl.
We never saw her but we couldn’t have gotten her even if we did, could we?”

“Why do you mean?” he tilted his head and narrowed his eyes, as if trying to get a grip on what she was thinking. Rose took a deep breath.

“Moon landin’s the middle of July, but we were at Elvis, end of July. She was gonna call us in her future still. Makes it an established event, yeah? Gets this all started.” Rose twiddled her fingers as if the movement would spur on further thought, “Causal... thingy.”

_Causal thingy_. Made him smirk.

“Paying attention during my nighttime ramblings?”

A sticky note popped out of the console again, Rose taking the frayed, used permanent marker out of her pocket and writing on them before she winked at his smirking, twinkling eyes with a smile. “Always have.”

She stuck the notes to the monitor as she sidled up to him and kissed his cheek. “I’ll make tea.”

He looked at the notes, yellow squares placed on the monitor...

_Why?_

And

20-31 July 1969

Both written in perfect circular Gallifreyan.

He looked down the corridor and back at the screen before pushing a few buttons below it, the display changed.

[Amelia Pond full body scan in progress.]
[Pregnancy Positive.] It quickly switched.
[Pregnancy Negative.]
[Positive.]
[Negative.]

He grumbled and tried to change it back to Rose's scans. The monitor switched off.

The note stuck out to him again.

_Why?_
An outline of a human body popped up on the monitor for a moment, and then the screen shut off randomly. The Doctor tried to turn it on again, but for some reason it wouldn’t turn back on again.

“Someone’s bein' moody.” Rose sat up and looked at the ceiling from the table in the Medbay. The lights dimmed a little, but she didn't hear anything about it.

“I don't get it, I got permission this time,” grumbled the Doctor as he clicked it several times in sequence as if the fiftieth click would do more than the thirtieth to turn it back on.

Rose looked at him and raised an eyebrow, “This time?”

“I may have tried to check earlier.” The Doctor said quickly. Rose almost laughed as she hopped off of the exam table, slinging her pink, zip-up sweater over her arm. He stopped his assault of the monitors as she walked up behind him.

“What were the results then?”

“She wouldn’t tell me.” The Doctor shook his head, still staring towards the should-be-on display.

“Protective, our girl.” Rose slid her hand down the wall, patting it gently.

The Doctor turned with a slight smile on his face, looking directly at her as he adjusted his bowtie. “...Ours?” They hadn't really talked about her options of any place else to live, though it wasn't as if either would have really thought about any of those as an option if there were.

Rose's hand slid to her neck, rubbing it absently. “Well, yours. Just—”

A loud beeping broke into the Medbay, Rose smiled for a moment as they both hopped into gear and ran out of the Medbay excitedly. Adventure and avoiding a potentially awkward conversation called, both were willing to answer.

“What’s that?” Amy poked a mess-haired head out into the corridor as Rose and the Doctor rushed to the control room.

“Signal for help. A ship in trouble.” The Doctor said light heartedly as they walked down the corridor.

“May as well help!” Rose almost skipped as Amy and Rory quickly joined them. She put her sweater down on the jump seat as the Doctor happily took hold of a switch.
“You parked us in a closet again?” Rose said, wooden doors illuminated by the lights of the still open TARDIS.

“More like a cellar,” murmured Rory, poking the wood above him.

“It’s a ship! We’re in a hold, under the deck, smells like the 1600s,” the Doctor said, sniffing the air.

“Or you could’ve looked at the monitor b’fore we left where is said 1664 pretty clearly.” Rose said simply to stop him from licking the wood in front of them.

“Spoil sport.”

A gruff voice sounded behind the grated door panel. “Until the wind changes.”

“Why don’t we knock?” Rory suggested.

“Just to be polite.” Rose nodded. The Doctor stepped forward and thumped the side of his fist against the door in rhythmic pace.

A voice from the other side of the doors above them sounded, “What's that?”

“Polite didn’t seem to work,” Amy muttered.

“Well, no, not when he's all creepy 'bout it.” Rose whispered back.

A voice different from the first sounded genuinely afraid, “It's the creature! It's returned!”

“Creature! That’s ominous,” The Doctor looked wide eyed and eager. Rose and Amy smiled and stepped back with Rory, Rose closing the door to the TARDIS. The Doctor pushed the grated panel above them, bursting it open.

“Yo ho ho!” the Doctor opened his arms up in greeting. Half a dozen men whipped around, armed with guns that were suddenly pointed at them. His welcoming arms retracted. “Or does nobody actually say that?”

“How did you get here?” The tall, angriest man in front pointing the pistol at them asked as he marched them at gun point into the Captain’s cabin.

“Your signal.” Amy grunted as she was shoved and prodded to the center of the room.

“SOS of sorts,” Rose added.

“We made no signal.”
“Our sensors picked you up. Ship in distress.” The Doctor smiled, looking around a bit.

“Sensors?” the head man questioned.

“Yes. Okay, problem word. Seventeenth century. My ship automatically, er,” the Doctor flailed his arms as he thought.

“Our ship has special… gear that tells us you’re a ship in trouble,” Rose explained. Our. Made the Doctor smile again.

“That big blue crate?” the Captain wondered. The Doctor clicked his tongue and nodded.

“That is more magic, Captain Avery. They're spirits. How else would they have found their way below decks?” one of the men grumbled.

“Well, I want to say multidimensional engineering, but since you had a problem with sensors, I won't go there.” Rose elbowed him lightly. “Look, I'm the Doctor and this is Rose Tyler, Amy and Rory. We're sailors, same as you,” The Doctor raised his eyebrows as he peered down the barrel of a gun, pointed directly at him, “Except for the gun thing. And the beardsiness.”

“You're stowaways. Eight days, we've been stranded here, becalmed. You must have stowed away before we sailed.” the Captain gruffly proclaimed.

“Four of us with a large blue box?” Rose tilted her head, “that really what you think?”

“Only explanation.”

“Now what do we do with 'em?” one of the men asked.

“Oh,” the captain, Avery, they said, smiled widely, “I think they deserve our hospitality.”

The pirates around them seemed to grin and swarm, manhandling them and herding them like cattle for a moment before separate people took hold of each of them and lead them out on to the deck. Various interjections of protests were heard, largely from Amy, until a gun was clicked. Rose scowled a bit but acquiesced as a pointy eyebrowed, surly-looking Shipman whose name they hadn’t yet gotten held her arms behind her back.

“I don't like guns,” Rose said as she was walked toward the deck.

“Nor do I, that’s why it’s pointed at you,” the man behind her grumbled as Avery marched the Doctor to the plank.

“A bit of hospitality,” the Captain announced, raising his voice in an almost triumphant way. The men laughed in stereotypical pirate fashion as he shoved the Doctor toward the plank while Amy, Rose, and Rory were held in place.

“I suppose that laughing like that is in the job description. Can you do the laugh? Check. Grab yourself a parrot. Welcome aboard.” He looked at the board he was standing on and the water below. He’d walked a few feet from the edge but it was still a fall.

“Stocks are low. Only one barrel of water remains. We don't need four more empty bellies to fill.” He motioned to the two holding Amy and Rose. “Take the doxies below to the galley. Set them to work. They won't need much feeding.”

“This one’s feisty, Captain,” said the one holding Rose’s arms.
“This one’s gonna hit you,” Rose told him.

“Maybe not worth keeping.” He continued, readjusting his grip on her arm forcefully.

“Then we'll throw her over next.” Avery bellowed, “One’s as good as the other.”

Amy was forced closer to the hold by her captor. “Rory? A little help?”

Rory twisted a bit in the arms of his guard, “Yeah. Hey, listen, right? She's not a doxy.”

Amy rolled her eyes as a pirate pushed her head to direct her down into the hold. “I didn't mean just tell him off. Thanks anyway.”

The Captain laughed, “If you're lucky you'll drown before the sharks can take a bite.”

“If this is just because I'm a captain too, you know, you shouldn't feel threatened. Your ship is much bigger than mine. And I don't have the cool boots. Or a hat, even.” Rose smirked. She couldn't help it. Peril and threats abound, but his obsession with hats was cute, if a bit ridiculous.

“Time to go.” Avery nodded his head toward the plank.

“Where are the rest of the crew? This is a big ship. Big for five of you. I suppose the rest of them are hiding some place,” the Doctor lifted his hand and clenched his nose and readied himself to dive, “and they're going to jump out and shout boo.”

“Boo!”

Rose jumped a little bit and everyone turned to see a miffed and unguarded Amy pointing a sword at the group of pirates. She’d taken the time to sneak on a pirate coat and tricorn hat, looking the part as much as she could while she threatened the group with an unwieldy sword. She was very much the picture of a miffed, Scottish pirate.

All of them flinched when Amy surprised them, bit the pirate stayed quite cagey. Rose used the distraction to get loose and back away from the now oddly cowering pirates. Well, a miffed Amy was scary enough if you knew her, but she supposed a redhead with a sword pointed at you was a universal sign for back away, no matter the era.

“Throw the gun down.” Amy sounded very authoritative, though not without leaving Rose with the obvious feeling that Amy was enjoying her little role play. The Captain slid his gun on the deck. “The rest of you, on your knees.”

The Doctor had manage to slink his way further away from the plank itself, a bit away from the potential fray itself, “Amy, what are you doing?”

“Saving your life. Okay with that, are you?” Amy didn't look away from menacing the pirates with her stare as she answered the Doctor's question.

“Put down the sword,” the Captain and four others looked genuinely afraid, “A sword could kill us all, girl.”

“Yeah, thanks. That is actually why I'm pointing it at you.” Amy said menacingly, parroting the very words said to Rose mere moments ago.

Pirates tried to gather on her. But quickly backed away once she faced them. They seemed to fight back more expertly with sticks and assorted other items found on the deck but oddly no other
swords. Amy grabbed a nearby rope and swung her body forth, making wild swipes with the Cutlass in her hand. Rose was pulled further from Amy, given the tightness from his hands on her upper arms and movement away from Amy she’d have thought she was being used as a meat shield against Amy’s sword regardless of its lack of reach. All the sailors seemed petrified, scared of even the smallest cut from Amy’s sword. She did seem to land on slight blow, slicing shallowly into the flesh of the big, muscly dark pirate intent on holding her husband down.

Everyone stopped in their tracks, Avery and the pointy eyebrowed shipman bringing the Doctor and Rose closer to inspect.

The big, muscly pirate that once held Rory still looked maudlin, if horrified and angry at Amy, “You have killed me.”

“No way,” Amy likely would have crossed her arms if one hand hadn't been occupied, the sword waved as she admonished them, “It's just a cut.” A black spot formed on his palm, The muscly pirate showed his palm to his Captain. Amy stared at them in disbelief, “What kind of rubbish pirates are you?”

“You don’t call her out for being rude.” The Doctor muttered.

“Ginger privilege,” Rose retorted, trying to shake off the hands holding her arms.

“One drop, that's all it takes,” said one astonishingly horrified pirate, “One drop of blood and she’ll rise out of the ocean.”

“What are you all in such a huff about?” Amy said before she quickly made another swing on the rope, likely to further scare the pirates as one thought he would slyly creep up on her, just as likely because it looked like she was having fun doing it. Her foot placement fell and making her placement rickety, rookie gymnast mistake—giving the hoard of un injured pirates the few moments they needed abandon the need to restrain Rose and the Doctor in effort to get into position and snatch her out of the air. She dropped her sword as she was wrangled to the ground with intent to disarm. Instinctively Rory grabbed for it, hopefully aiming for the handle, but cutting himself in the process.

“Ow!” Rory held his fingers and stared at his hand as the sword lay on the deck.

“Er, Doctor,” Rory pointed to a black circle that had formed on his palm, “What's happening to me?”

“She can smell the blood on your skin,” Captain Avery explained gruffly, “She's marked you for death.”

“She?” Rose blinked, “who’s she?”

Avery turned towards Rose, “A demon, out there in the ocean.”

The Doctor smiled, “Okay. Groovy. So not just pirates today. We've managed to bagsy a ship where there's a demon popping in.”

A melody, a song began. Wordless but sung. It surrounded them. Everyone seemed to look for a source of the singing, though Amy, Rory, Rose and the Doctor’s faces were far less horrified and more curious than any of the pirates'.

The man that previously help Rose's arms so forcefully seemed panicked, “Quickly now, block out the sound.”

“What?”
“The creature,” Captain Avery explained as he kept an eye out for something, “She charms all her victims with that song.”

Rory flopped his arms at his sides, “Oh, great. So put my fingers in my ears, that’s your plan? Doctor, come on. Let’s go. Let’s get back to the er, back to the er… er…” he started giggling. He was very soon joined by the injured pirate.

The sight of the big muscly dark pirate giggling like a little girl near set Rose to giggling. She curiously looked to the Doctor for some sort of answer to an unspoken question. He just shrugged and looked on.

“The music. It's working on them. Look.”

Rory started almost melting all over Amy, “You are so beautiful.”

“What?” Amy said, not blushing, like it wasn’t unwelcome, just quite random.

“I love your get up.” Rory touched Amy’s hat as he smoothly, if clumsily, smoothed down the shoulders of her piratey jacket as he moved in for a hug, “That’s great. You should dress as a pirate more often. Hey, hey, cuddle me, shipmate.”

“Rory, stop,” Amy instructed. Rose put her hand over her mouth. Her curiosity only extended so far when something was funny.

“Everything is totally brilliant, isn’t it?” He sloppily turned to the group of men, most staring on stoically, “Look at these brilliant pirates. Look at their brilliant beards.” Rory wandered over to the giggling pirate and stroked his face and facial hair before Amy pulled him back. “I’d like a beard. I'm going to grow a beard!”

“You're not.” Amy stated quite as fact not up for debate.

“The music turns them into fools.” Captain Avery announced, noting the giggling muscly pirate and Rory’s new behavior with dread.

Bright light shone tightly on a spot in the water, causing their attention to turn to it. Suddenly a woman sprang from it, flying up into the sky. She settled into the rigging and floated down onto the deck, bypassing all the hanging ropes. It was her singing, that sound sprang forth from her lips. Large eyes and a flowing dress, though her body seemed entirely translucent with a soft, green hue. She reached toward the group, but didn’t walk any closer. Before they could stop him, the muscly, giggly man stumbled closer and barely touched her fingers.

The moment they touched, he disappeared in a cloud of soot. The Siren turned her gaze to Rory.

“I have to touch her. Let me touch her.” Rory seemed to bed or whine, though his wife stood firm, blocking his reach over her shoulders toward the ghostly woman.

Amy held her husband back, taking a step forward as she raised her sword and looked more threateningly to the translucent woman than she had at the pirates, “Sorry, but he is spoken for.”

The Siren shifted from an ethereal greenish white to a reminiscent red gelthy-shade as she turned to face Amy and get out a dreadful screeching noise. A blast of energy blew Amy backwards through the air.

Panic officially set in. Rose felt the Doctor guide her away quickly as he ran to corral Rory, “Everybody into the hold. Rory! Come on!”
Rose ran over to help Amy up as Avery opened the doors to the one of the holds. Rory protested as the Doctor dragged him down, Amy and Rose following closely behind, creating a wall he couldn’t get past to the Siren as they descended into a space.

Rose quickly closed the doors and held them shut for a moment while standing in calf-high water. Amy clung to Rory, though he was still trying to get past her.

“What is that thing?” Amy huffed, gathering her fiddling and flailing husband from trying to get back out toward the woman.

Avery turned to Amy, “The legend. The siren. Many a ship laden with treasure has fallen prey to her. She’s been hunting us ever since we were becalmed, picking off the injured.”

“Like a shark. A shark can smell blood,” grumbled one of the pirates.

“Okay. Just like a shark, in a dress.” The Doctor thought out loud. He nodded fairly exuberantly and clapped his hands together, “A green, singing shark in an evening gown.”

“The ship is cursed.” The captain said with resignation.

“Yeah, right. Cursed is big with humans. It means bad things are happening but you can't be bothered to find an explanation.”

Rose let go of the doors as there was nothing trying to open them. Her hand went to her hip as she looked at him, “Rude again.”

“Still rude and not ginger.” He quickly replied, making her smile almost against her will and roll her eyes as Rose waded closer to the group by the center of the room.

“She's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen,” Rory mooned to Amy, his stodgy demeanor softened like he’d gotten sloshed.

Amy tried to straighten him, stand him up fully, “Actually, I think you'll find she isn't.”

“She is.” Rory adamantly confirmed as Amy tried once again to untangle from him.

“We have to leave right now,” Amy said to the Doctor and Rose as she tried to wrangle her husband as if he were a cantankerous, sentient liquid. The Doctor took Rose's hand.

“That thing of yours really is a ship?” the captain hurriedly asked the Doctor.

“Well, not propelled by the wind.” The Doctor explained quickly.

“Show me,” Avery pulled out his pistol and pointed it directly at the Doctor’s head, “Weigh anchor. Make it sail.” He demanded.

The Doctor felt Rose tense up but he squeezed her hand in assurance. “You're big on the gun thing, aren't you. Freud would say you're compensating. Ever met Freud? No? Comfy sofa.”

Rory was draping himself all over Amy, with her struggling to keep him upright and contained.

“Leave the cursed one, Captain,” suggested on of the men, “The creature can have him.”

“Yes, please,” Rory seemed to almost beg while still drunkenly falling all over Amy.

Avery seemed inclined to agree, “We don't want the siren coming after us.”
The pirate sneered triumphantly before flinching and turning with horror to his own leg and lifting his trousers a touch to see.

“It's a leech!” Amy sounded mostly disgusted by the squishy brown bloodsucker.

“Everyone out of the water!” the Doctor shouted. Everyone quickly hopped on to the various items around the room, climbing onto barrels or crates, whatever was around them sticking out of the water.

The man sat on a barrel and ripped off the leech with horror, “It's bitten me. I'm bleeding.” He slowly checked his hand, looking sourly, and showed it to the captain where the spot had already formed.

“She wants blood,” the Doctor “Why does she want blood?”

“What were you saying about leaving the cursed ones behind?” Amy said, amidst keeping her husband’s hands still.

“It's okay, we're safe down here. No curse is getting through three solid inches of timber.” The Doctor said definitively.

The light shone on the water again, the siren once again seemed to reach out from the surface and settle on its surface.

Rose quickly shifted back, keeping Amy and Rory behind her hoping to trap Rory from continuing forward, “You were saying?”

The Doctor looked surprised, “Ah. Hello again.” He nearly flailed backwards, stepping back from the Siren carefully.

The cursed pirate was drawn to her. Amy and Rose largely occupied with trying to keep Rory back, the others reached out for him and hold him back.

He reached for the apparition, who tilted her head, her song changing pitch just as their fingers touched he disappeared in a puff of dark soot, only his hat remaining.

Doctor snatched the hat off of the water before following everyone out on to the deck and into a seemingly hidden alcove of crates and boxes. He closed and latched the door behind them. Not that that necessarily seemed to help last time. He cringed a little.

“Safe, eh?” Amy smarmed.

“I have my good days and my bad days.” The Doctor said like it was a matter of course as he hunched and looked carefully behind him, hoping this time it may have worked.

“How did she get in?”

The Doctor scanned the hat with the sonic, flipping it vertical and staring intently at it, “She's using water like a portal, a door. She can materialize through a single drop. We need to go somewhere with no water.”

“Well, thank God we're not in the middle of the ocean,” Amy said smarmily.

“The magazine, it’s dry as a bone,” Avery hastily answered.

“The what?” Amy asked.
“Gunpowder room,” Rose explained quickly. “Let’s go there.”

Avery's voice took on a disgruntled tone, “I don’t take orders from womenfolk.”

Amy and Rose both turned their heads to look at Avery, eyes narrowed and annoyed. Doctory looked at a very, very miffed Amy and Rose, almost wishing at that moment to back away. Subject changes are good. Moving is better. “Okay, let’s go to the armory.”


“Worried because I’m wearing a hat now?” He weaved his way through the room headed towards the armory, “Nobody touch anything sharp!”

“Come on, Rory.” Amy said, tugging her husband along by his arm. Rose took Rory's other arm and they pulled him as his feet try to stop them and head back to where they saw the Siren.

“Barricade the door.” Avery instructed his men as he grumbled and sauntered into the center of the room “And be careful of that lantern. Every barrel is full of powder.”

A cough.

They quickly looked around at each other, the sound surprising. The cough happened again and Avery sneered, marching angrily toward where he heard the sound. He pried open a barrel and pulled out a boy. The surprise on the boys face was only matched by the quick movement as Avery roughly set him down on a barrel.

“You fool! You fool, boy.” Avery shook the boy by his shoulders, “What are you doing here?”

“Who is he?” the Doctor calmly asked, “What, he's not one of the crew?”

“No. He's my son.” Avery said dismissively to the Doctor, his eyes never leaving the boy.

“Hiding kids,” Rose looked at the dirty, slightly frightened boy starting intently at his father but spoke softly to the Doctor. “Seems to be a theme right now.”

Avery’s voice fell into a kind of worry. The voice of a parent, “What in God's name possessed you, boy? Your mother will be searching for you.” The boy didn’t look up, and part of Avery appeared to deflate, “When?”

“Last winter. Fever.” The boy peeped quietly, he perked up and looked at his father, “She told me all about you. How you were a Captain in the Navy. An honorable man, she said. How I'd be proud to know you. I've come to join your crew.”

Avery barely took a second to respond, “I don't want you here.”
The boy looked more hurt than anything by the sentiment, “You can't send me back. It's too late. We're a hundred miles from home.”

Avery’s volume fell, the gruffness remained in his voice but there was less anger behind it, “It's dangerous here. There is a monster aboard. She leaves a mark on men's skin.”

“The black spot?” the child asked, showing his hand. It had the black mark on the palm.

He coughed again.

Amy, Rory, Doctor Rose sat against the far wall. Avery leaning, shipmen look paranoid, one pacing. Rory was apparently sobering, slowly being able to gather his wits and sit still. Rose found herself looking to the boy, the child noticed them looking back at him. Rose’s mouth tightened on one side as she looked at the ground.

“Poor boy. Face like a beaten dog.” Rose mumbled, sighing.

“His mother died, he's been stowed away for goodness knows how long, danger abounds…” the Doctor ruminated, watching Rose's face as she looked at the boy.

That was quite enough. Rose pat the Doctor’s arm at the shoulder and got up. She walked across the room, and sat by the young boy.

The Doctor watched Rose sit and quietly talk to the timid boy. That’s the second time she’d gotten that look since she came back. Always toward a little boy. He’d have to ask about Tony. Or he’d just wait for it to come up organically. The list of things he wanted to know was steadily growing. He wasn’t quite used to not knowing and this wasn’t a thing to guess about, not that that had ever stopped him. He could guess. Best not.

Rose sat on a barrel, a comfortable amount of space between herself and the lad, even given the fairly cramped room and amount of people within it.

“I'm Rose. That's the Doctor, Amy an' Rory. What's your name?” Rose tried to be as light and airy as possible.

“Toby Avery.”

“Nice to meetcha Toby Avery.” Rose smiled, “Look at you, what age are you, ten?”

“Eleven, miss.”

Rose smiled “'Course you are. Good number, eleven, good age. Whacha hurt? People seem to get the spot after an injury, but I'm not seein' anything on your arms.” He coughed again, Rose put her hand on his cheeks and slides them up to his forehead, “See if you can find a cover, yeah? Blanket or a dry sack or somethin'. Be right back.”
The Doctor turned to Rose as she walked up. “He’s got a fever. No cuts I could see.” She said quietly, Toby coughed again, the sound unavoidable.

“Yep. Ignore my last theory.”

Amy pat the Doctor in a placating manner, “He has his good days and his bad days.”

“It’s not just blood, she's coming for all the sick and wounded, like a hunter chooses the weakest animal.”

“So she’s huntin' people. For what?” Rose looked to the Doctor, “Food? Sport?”

“Why does that matter?” Avery gruffly asked, dismissing the thought.

“Motives matter.” Rose retorted quickly. “Usually figurin’ out the why helps with the whole escapin’ unharmed bit.”

“Humans. Second-rate. Damage too easily. It's only a matter of time before everyone gets bruised.” Rose cleared her throat and gave him an admonishing look, Avery giving him a curious one. Time to change tack. “My ship, it can sail us all away from here. You and me, we fetch it. Let's go.”

Avery pulled out his gun again, “You're not the Captain here, remember.”

“See?” The Doctor looked at Rose and motioned toward Avery and his gun, “Captains. Obsessed with the title.”

“Oh, yes, all titles are meaningless and should never be clung to, Doctor.” Rose nodded as she pat the hat on his head.

Toby went toward a water barrel and opened it. A translucent but glowing hand reached out.

The Doctor forced the lid back down amidst screeching.

“The water’s dangerous.” Avery reprimanded his son, the child backing away slowly from the shouting adult, “That's how she gets through. One touch of her hand and you're a dead man.”

“We're all cursed if we stay aboard,” growled one of the men, obviously on the flee part of panic.

“It's not a curse. Curse means game over. Curse means we're helpless.” The Doctor’s voice raised “We are not helpless.” Rose sensed a bit of rage there, but said nothing as he turned to face Avery. “Captain, what’s our next move?”

Avery took less than a moment to think before he took off his medallion, puts it around Toby’s neck. He stared into Rose’s eyes and motioned to his crewmen. “Wait with the boy.” Rose nodded and lead Toby to a barrel and each sat, Rose’s arm around him.

One of the crewmen holding a barrel and ready to leave the room immediately protested, “Captain, we're all in danger here.”

“I said wait,” Avery almost growled, “And barricade the door after we've gone.” The two other non-captainy pirates exchanged a look, but didn’t argue.

“You sure you want to go?” Amy asked as Avery and the Doctor prepared to open the door.

The Doctor turned to Amy. “We have to get Rory and Toby away. She’s out there now, licking her lips, boiling a saucepan, grating cheese.”
“Okay.” Amy seemed slightly concerned, “Well, remember, if you get an itch, don't scratch too hard.”

“There are worse ways to go than having your face snogged off by a dodgy mermaid.” The Doctor shrugged, patting Rory on the shoulder as he turned around the follow.

Rose couldn’t help commenting as she comforted the boy from the corner, “If that doesn’t getcha the Tyler slap after might.”

“Like that, that might do it.” He winked to Rose and left behind the captain.

As they closed the door to the armory the grunting and knocking sounds of lugging dropping and stacking things quickly resonated behind them, signs that the door was so soon being barricaded.

“Do you want to draw lots for who's in charge, then?” Avery almost teasingly asked, pistol at the ready in his hand.

“Darkness? Demon?” the Doctor pat the other man on the belly, “You can have first go.”

“This way.”

The moment the doors to the hold were reopened, The Doctor clicked his fingers and the doors of the TARDIS barely opened before the Doctor ran up to the controls

Avery followed close behind until he was only a few steps into the interior. His eyes widened as the brighter lights and technological majesty invaded his senses, “By all the—”

“Let me stop you there.” The Doctor interrupted, “Bigger on the inside. Love that bit, but you don't mind, do you, if we just skip to the end of that moment? Oh, and sorry I lied, by the way, when I said yours was bigger.” He used hands to point to various places around the TARDIS between starting at and giving coordinates and commands to the console. “Kitchen that way. Choice of bathrooms there, there, there.”

Avery looked at the pink sweater on the jump seat and raised his eyebrow toward the Doctor.

“Oh, don’t look at me like that. It’s Rose’s.” the Doctor explained quickly as he programmed the
“Bad luck to have a woman first mate. Bad luck to have a ginger aboard.” Avery seemed like he was bound to continue, even still taking in the sheer majesty of the interior of his time ship.

First mate. More like 11th-ish. And a half. Sort of. His-not-his. Oh. First Mate. Sailing jargon. Bad Doctor. He squinted his eyes at the monitor. “Yes and now you’ll say something bad about bananas and I’ll ignore that, too,” the Doctor retorted while he flipped switches in a specific order.

“What's this do?” Avery asked.

The Doctor kept plodding, barely registering what Avery was pointing to, “That does very, very complicated,” he started pointing at things in quick succession, hurriedly getting it out of the way and being a bit impressive if he did say so himself, “That does sophisticated. That does whoa, amazing, And that does whizz, bang, far too technical to explain!”

“Wheel?” Avery pointed nonchalantly.

“Atom accelerator.” The Doctor corrected tentatively.

Avery nearly rolled his eyes, “It steers the thing.”

“No,” the Doctor’s answer was quick, but he thought, “Sort of.” He stopped and looked at the other man, “Yes.”


“Oh.” That took a second to settle in his mind. Less sophisticated and technical, then. “This is how the professionals do it.” He threw a switch triumphantly.

…and the time rotor sputtered and stopped.

“Er,” he tried to move the large switch his hand was on, “it's stuck. Still moody. Not responding.”

“Becalmed?” Avery had nothing to go one but the noises and the Doctor's confused face to go on, but that was clearly enough.

“Mmm hmm,” The Doctor hummed nervously, “Yeah, apparently. That's new. It can't get a lock on the plane.”

“The what?”

The Doctor turned to answer him quickly, “The space we travel in. The ocean. Sort of ocean but not water.” He turned back to the console to frusteratedly look at all the things he could possibly do to get the TARDIS to move. “The TARDIS can't see it. It's sulking because it thinks the space doesn't exist. Without a plane to lock onto we're not going anywhere.”

“I'm confused.”

“Yeah, well, it's a big club. We should get T-shirts but they'd be confusing.”


“What's happening?”
“Okay, she went from moody to sulk. Now she's heading for the full-on screaming tantrum.” The Doctor exclaimed as calmly as he could, trying to right the TARDIS via the controls. “The parametric engines are jammed. Orthogonal vector's gone. I'm almost out of ideas.”

“Almost?”

“Well, we could try stroking her and singing her a song.” The Doctor flatly said as he tried to shift a lever again. Make it better, make it better.

“Will that help?”

“Hard to say. Seems to work for Rose,” the Doctor toddled his head and looked wide-eyed at the display, “I've lost control of her. She's about to dematerialize. We could end up anywhere!”

“That sounds bad!”

“Yes, it is! Out! Out now! Abandon ship! Abandon ship!” the Doctor started to move very fast, ushering and pushing Avery towards the doors.

They made it to the doors and gave themselves a few yards between themselves and it before turning around and looking at the exterior. The TARDIS flashed with light a few times. No noise, no dematerialization sequence, just pulsating and fading and... gone. The Doctor blinked, more frightened in this moment than he'd been all day.

“Okay, okay, okay,” the Doctor said, mostly to himself, “TARDIS runs off on its own. That's a bit of a new one. Bang goes our only hope of getting them out of here.”

“Not much of a Captain without a ship, are you?” Avery said slickly.

The Doctor’s jaw set as he looked to the empty space.

Toby was coughing. Rose simply sat beside him and pat his back gently as he coughed, doing what she could to console him through his coughing. Amy stood stoically, her back to everyone like she was watching the door, but her arms were crossed, chances are she was just sulking.

“What's wrong?” a far more together Rory asked the back.

“The most beautiful thing you've ever seen?” Amy huffed. Yup. Sulking. Rose paid more attention to her little coughing mate, but the room was small avoiding their conversation was very hard.
“Oh, tell me I didn’t really say that.” Rory sighed, embarrassed.

Rose smirked, watching the awkward exchange between the two movement caught her eye as the pirates were un-barricading the door, moving barrels away from it haphazardly. “Oi, What's goin' on?” she stood, addressing the pirates.

“We're not staying here to mollycoddle the boy,” grumbled one of them as he shoved what food he could find into a sack, “The Captain's gone soft. It's time for us to leave.”

Toby piped in, “He told you to wait, you dog. He's your Captain, a Naval Officer. You're honor-bound to do as he tells you.” Rose cringed for the boy as he said that. He really didn't know, and now there was no way to keep him from the truth.

“Honor-bound?” the pointy-eyebrowed laughed, “Do you know what kind of ship this is? Do you know what your father does?”

“Don't listen to him, Toby,” Amy interjected.

“—We sail under the black flag. The Jolly Roger.”

“Liar!” yelled the young lad, incensed, “He's no wicked pirate!”

“Oh, you think so? I have seen your father gun down a thousand innocent men.” The pirate said cruelly. He knew he was being cruel. But then again, Rose supposed as she reassuringly tightened her grip on Toby’s shoulder, he was a pirate.

Rose quickly stood in front of the boy, stopping any physical activity from the bigger bloke or a lashing out from the smaller one.

He looked at Rose angrily as he addressed his coconspirator, “Get what treasure you can. I'll meet you in the row boat.”

Rose scrambled quickly to get in front of the doors before either man could get there. “The food,” she nodded to the sack in his hand, “Drop it.”

“Don’t make me hurt you, girl,” the pirate sneered, “I swear I will.”

“Leave food an' you can go, but take alla it an’ I swear by your pointy eyebrows we'll both be bleedin’ by the end.” By the look on his face her voice had lowered or she’d possibly involuntarily gotten all golden-eyed, though she was trying not to.

“Rose!” Amy cried just before the other pirate pushed Rose roughly, throwing her off balance and out of the way as he opened the door and quickly exited, the other man and their small bag of food right behind him. Rose sat up and rubbed her arm but kicked the door closed as soon as she could and scooted herself to it, acting as the barricade.

She huffed and looked to the other tree in the room, “Well, the TARDIS has food. We'll be fine, yeah?”
The two pirates suddenly came into view, carrying sacks of food and shiny golden treasure poking out, one had a shiny jeweled golden crown around his wrist. Both men took aim at the Doctor and their captain, edging themselves further away.

“What are you doing?” Avery said, genuinely aghast before he turned angry, “This is mutiny.”

“She doesn’t want us,” one pirate said as the both kept moving, facing their armed guns toward to two while they backed around objects, “She only wants Toby and the scrawny looking fellow.” Once they were far enough away they simply turned tail and ran.

“They've got the last of the supplies. We should go after them.” The Doctor said on a breath.

“Never mind the damned supplies. What about my treasure?” Avery started to move quickly, giving Chase to the men who just left.

Shots were fired. Flashed of light and minor explosions from muskets followed by tiny balls whizzing by their bodies.

“Don't get injured,” The Doctor reminded Avery as he hopped over a barrel. A bullet flew embarrassingly close to his arm. “Don't get injured.” He reminded himself as a pistol shot flew by him. Rose will kill you if you get injured, and then Nurse Rory will resurrect you so Amy can do it, too.

The two were seen just for a moment, running into a room and closing the door with a loud slam.

Avery banged on the door, pulling with all his might on the wooden door, “Come out of there, you mutinous dogs!”

The haunting song began again.

The Doctor and Avery checked their hands quickly. The Doctor felt his face his neck, and, feeling nothing, panickingly checked Avery. A light erupted from under the door to the hold. The Doctor’s eye widened, “She's inside.”

“She's come for them.” The light faded and Avery swung open the door. No one was there. He was gone, she was gone, but two pistols and sacks and treasure lay on the floor, discarded.

“No water in here, Avery assessed, “How did she take them? You said she uses water like a door, that's how she enters a room.” he picked up the crown on the floor.

The Doctor’s eyes settled on the crown as the reflected light from bit caught his eye. “I was wrong. Please ignore all my theories up to this point.”

“What, again?”

“We're all in danger.” The Doctor’s hands frantically waved about as he tried to explicate the problem, “The water's not how she's getting in. When we were down in the hold, you, me, Rose, Amy, Rory, leeches. She sprang from the water only when it grew still. Still water. Nature's mirror. Reflection. That siren legend. The curse.”

“You said curses weren't real,” Avery noted.

“Folklore springs from truth,” the Doctor pointed to the crown on the floor, “She attacks ships filled with treasure. Where else do you get a perfect reflection?”
“…Polished metal.” Avery surmised. The Doctor nodded and hummed and affirmative as he bent to pick up the supplies. Avery’s coat fluttered in his periphery as the captain turned, his eyes seemed to widen in realization, “We must warn them.”

The Doctor pounded on the door, “Amy! Rose! Open the door!”

Avery joined him, “Toby, open the door! Toby!”

“Rose?! Amy?! Open the door!”

Rose jerked open the door just long enough for them to hurriedly enter as the Doctor made straight for Toby. Rose shut the door quickly behind them.

The Doctor grabbed the medallion and started breathing on it to obscure the reflection. He looked around as he open-mouthed huffed warm breath on the metal. Rose looked at him oddly, Amy crossing her arms.

“Reflection.” He said between breaths as he cracked open the door and quickly threw the medallion onto the deck, “She’s using refection as a portal. Mirrors, water, polished metal.” He grabbed both of Rose’s hands, checking for black marks before quickly moving on to Amy, seeing none on either woman.

“You sure this time?” Rose checked.

“Ninety seven, ninety eight percent,” He thumped Rory on the back, “Wait here.”

“…Just wait?” Rory blinked.

The Doctor clasped his hands together awkwardly, “Not my most dynamic plan, I realize.”

“TARDIS?” Amy asked.

“Uh,” the Doctor nearly mumbled, “she’s been towed.”

“Must’ve heard that wrong, she’s what?” Rose blinked.

He turned to Rose specifically “Sorry.” And then addressed Amy and Rory, “We might be stuck here for a while.”

“So you're saying that we should all just wait here below?” Rory seemed a bit dumbfounded at the idea.

“The sea is still calm, like a mirror. If you go out on deck she'll rise up and attack you.” Avery explained.
“It's okay,” the Doctor added joyously, “The calm won't last forever. When the wind picks up we'll all set sail.”

“Until it does, you have to hide down here.” Avery commanded.

“Just hide?” Amy seemed put out by the idea, “What should we do down here?”

Rose blew her hair off her forehead in thought, “He might have a deck of cards in his pockets?”

The Doctor shook his head, “I think Winston Churchill took it, sneaky man. I do have a twenty seven sided enigma cube and then some actually difficult puzzles…”

“Sleep, then.” Amy suddenly said, cutting him off from explaining really difficult puzzles’ for the Doctor were. Rose breathed a quick laugh. “It is night.”

“Right. You should sleep.”

Amy and Rory found a space that fit the both of them, and fell asleep quickly, their breathing rhythms evening out. Toby on a cot, where his father awkwardly minded him, tucking him in in his unknown way. Rose moved a board on top of some barrels so she could lie flat on her stomach, a bit raised from the floor. The Doctor sat on a nearby barrel as she got comfortable, or as comfortable as she could get, using her own arm as a pillow.

“S not a TARDIS bed, but we’ve slept in worse,” she said quietly as smirked to him.

“That we have.” The Doctor smiled, not looking directly at her. She could tell he was thinking, mind a buzz with the possibilities and probabilities. The moment she even tried to listen numbers and sequences flooded her mind. Rose sighed a bit and lifted her head to look at him.

“You’re not going to sleep today, are ya.” Rose asked, though she knew the answer.

“No.” He shook his head, looking off as he absently rubbed her back, “More important things to do.”

“We humans,” she laid her head on her arm and closed her eyes in a vain attempt to sleep, “sleep a third of our lives away.”

“No matter the length it seems.” There was a smile in his voice and his hand on her back, barely moving but the pressure let her know he was there.

They quieted just enough to hear Toby ruefully reprimanding his father, “You promised you'd come home. And she believed you would, right up until the day she died. What made you do it? What made you turn pirate?”

“Get some sleep now.” Avery said almost sadly. He turned around and headed for the door, beckoning to the Doctor as he went.

The hand left her back and her eyes opened to an exiting Doctor. “Where you off to?”
“You should sleep.” The Doctor waved her off.

“'m prob'ly not gonna sleep.” She sat up and shrugged. The Doctor nodded his head. Likely because of no tea. Rose wouldn't be able to sleep with no tea. He smiled absently as she spoke again, “I may as well help, yeah?”

“We'll need to be able to leave this room once the wind starts up.” The Doctor said, “Search and destroy non-watery reflections time.”

“Then I’ll help,” Rose smiled a bit.

“A woman is bad luck,” Avery quickly denied as she stood.

Rose tilted her head and crossed her arms, “Makin' a woman cross is bad luck, too, Mate, wanna test it or you want some help?”

They walked to the captain’s cabin. Rose immediately saw the Doctor’s reflection in the wall of windows circling half of the room. The Doctor passed her a nearby musket. She used the butt of the weapon to break the glass windows, the Doctor searching for reflective things to expeditiously destroy. He threw a shiny metal plate out of an already broken window like a frisbee.

“We've got to destroy every reflection. Gold, silver, glass, she could spring from any of them.” He quickly came up to a mirror, seeing the side of Rose’s face reflected in it as she broke more glass. He looked at Avery whose eyes were widened, “Oh, yes, yes, I know, I know. Very bad luck to break it. But look at it this way. There's a stroppy homicidal mermaid trying to kill all.”

Rose broke the last window and traced the inside of the panel to rid it of any remaining shards, “Can’t we just chuck it overboard? Seems breakin' it'll just make more tiny reflections, yeah?” The Doctor shrugged and pulled it down. He threw it out a broken window into the sea.

“See? Miss Bad Luck there just saved us seven years.” The Doctor looked at Avery as he pointed to Rose. He quickly moved to a chest by the wall, “Help me lug this lot out.”

Avery lifted the other side without a thought, “Where are we taking it?”

“The ocean.”

“No!” Avery panicked, putting his hands on and weighing down the chest so the Doctor couldn’t pull it, “No. This is the treasure of the Mogul of India.”

“Oh, good. For a moment there I thought it was yours.” The Doctor responded with a touch of sarcasm. Rose smirked.

“No, no. Doctor, wait. Must we do this?” Avery pleaded. Rose almost completely ignored him and chucked what looked like a very fancy necklace or the window into the sea.
The Doctor looked at him seriously, Rose already throwing any random gold she found outside of that chest away, “Any reflection, any mirror, and the siren will attack. We have to protect Rory and Toby. Go and get the crown from the storeroom.”

Avery made a horrified, torn face but nodded subtly. The Doctor began emptying the treasure into the sea, Rose assisting with gusto while Avery reluctantly left the room.

Rose was obviously tired, but she wouldn’t or couldn’t sleep. The work of finding and destroying all reflective surfaces seemed to be done, the only thing they could do was wait. And she wasn’t about to join the sleeping people would have been like admitting she was tired. Which his Rose would never do until she was ready. But he could get her to sit. With him. Under the stars. Avery stood not far from them, joining them in their gazing.

“Where we goin’ next?” Rose smiled, pointing to a star, “that one?”

“No habitable planets in that system. Unless you feel like donning a space suit, the second planet has some gorgeous views.”

“Might do. We’ll havta ask the others, but ‘s been a while since we’ve been off-world.” Rose tilted her head. “Dunno what they’ll feel like.”

“Feeling a bit Earth-crazed?” The Doctor smirked. He’d been Earth-crazed. She’d likely already have known that. “Humans,” he put his arm around her arm gently. She flinched.

“What’s wrong?” The Doctor suddenly looked a bit panicked.

“Arm’s a bit sore,” She’s barely finished the sentence before he grabbed and started inspecting her sore arm, “Bit rough on it earlier. No cuts, not bleeding. It’ll go away,” The Doctor started scanning her with the sonic. “Just sore,” Rose swatted his screwdriver-wielding hand lightly. She yawned and leaned her head on him. “What about the big, bright one?” she pointed at the star before laying her head on his shoulder.

The Doctor slid his hand around her waist at his side, “That one. It's not one star, it's two. The Dog Star, Sirius. Binary system.”

“So two dogs?” she quietly asked from his shoulder.

“No, just one, made up of two stars but named once because you can’t see two.” The Doctor explained, “It’s used quite a lot for directions, like the North Star.”

“I use it to navigate the ocean.” Avery added.

“I’ve travelled far, like you.” The Doctor turned to look at the sky again, “Space can be very lonely, and the greatest adventure is having someone share it with you.”

Rose yawned again through a smile, “So cheesy.”
Avery understood his meaning, “If we get out of this I'll take him back to England. He can't stay with me. I'm not the father he needs.”

“Who are you, Henry Avery?” the Doctor said gently, smiling a tame smile, “Respected Naval officer, wife and child at home. How did you end up here, wandering the oceans with a band of rogues?”

“I've set my course now.” Avery sounded resolved and sad, not looking away from the stars. “Nothing I can do to alter it.”

“Dog star, yeah? Sail by it.” Rose piped in, looking at the sky, “People thought it was one, then they had to readjust to that fact that it’s two.” She lifted her head off the Doctors shoulder to look at Avery, “Can still sail by it, even 'f it’s different.”

“People stared at it for centuries and never knew.” The Doctor looked at the sky, then to Rose who had returned her gaze upward, “Things can suddenly change, when you're least expecting.”

The sonic screwdriver readings were… confusing.

Rose had fallen asleep on deck, covered by the Doctor’s suit jacket like a blanket. The Doctor almost as far as he could while keeping her in easy view.

“Doctor?” He hushed Amy as he stared almost blankly, trying to concentrate as he stared off. She stared in the same direction, lowering her volume, “What can you see?”

“Feels like something's out there,” he motioned forward, “staring straight at me.” Amy seemed to follow his eye line and likely saw the same thing he did, nothing but ship and sea and horizon.

A drop plunked noisily on the top of his head. One drop. Of rain. Amy looked up and let a few, slowly falling, fat drop land on her face in elation for a moment.

A drip dropped down Rose’s chin, the instinctual movement of her hand to wipe potential drool from her lips followed. She blinked herself awake as another landed on her. She sat up quickly as rain started to fall, quickly gathering itself into quite the frenzied torrential downpour.

Lightening. Thunder. More rain even before she’d gotten to her feet she heard the footsteps of the Doctor on the deck along with his voice gleefully saying, “Man the sails!”

Rose slid her arms in the holes of her blanket of a jacket fast as she hoped to keep the oncoming rain as at bay as she could, springing into action as she ran to the hold and shouted at the doors, “Its rainin’ boys, we may need a hand!”

Rose directed Amy and Rory to one of the masts, giving each of them ropes both to pull and hang onto as the storm whipped the ship about.

Avery shouted directions at them while they were all beaten by rain and wind, “Let go the sails, you
Amy and Rory pull on the ropes in hand and Rose flitted about. Amy struggled to pull the rope Rose had handed to her, “I swear he's making half this stuff up.”

“Well, we're going to need some kind of phrase book.”

“Tie this off an’ pull the middle into the brass ring at the end so the sails don’t get a hole,” Rose didn't even need to hear Amy's reply as the rain and wind pelted them, “Yes I’m very old shift.” That was an easier explanation than the one of her paralell universe pseudo father’s posh hobby of buying up sailing ships when her mum and she were eternally reluctant to board zeppelins. Oh, headache just thinking it.

The Doctor turned the wheel trying to use the storm to their advantage and not capsize, while the captain attempted to see the stars through the rain. ‘Toby!’ he shouted to his now very wet so, “Find my coat. My compass is inside it, boy.” He looked quickly to Amy, Rory and Rose trying to fix the sails and hold on through the torrential storm, “Heave ho, you bilge rats!”

Rory held his hand up by his ear, looking confused as he struggled to do... something, “Rats was all I could hear.”

“Better or worse than dogs?” Rose shouted over the wind as a wet rope slipped from her grasp. The wind and rain blew it higher as it whipped through the air. She climbed up on her tip toes, rubber soled trainers wet and slipping as she tried to climb a bit higher to regain the rope.

A spar swung freely. The sounds of the storm on the water and the rain in her ears must have deafened Rose to the creaking as it swung breathtakingly quickly at her back.

“Rose!” was all she head as she turned just in time to absorb the blow with her body, climbing on to the swinging spar to try and slow it, but stuck slinging to it as it quickly kept swinging.

The Doctor quickly abandoned his spot at the wheel, making to grab Rose or the spar as she closed her eyes and gripped the quickly swinging horizontal post. The wind blew it once more, hitting the Doctor in such a way that his body was thrown against the mast and the sudden motion knocked Rose onto the deck, sending her rolling a few feet in the opposite direction.

The ship seemed to spin in her vision for a moment but she looked around quickly to see a scrambling Avery and a wide-eyed Amy and Rory, and upon looking at what they were looking at... an unconscious Doctor.

Rose tried to get up, but the wind and wet and sudden movement seemed to scramble her insides. Tocy ran on deck quickly, captains coat in hand. He fanned it out to retrieve the compass and a shiny gold crown fell from it, rolling on deck.

Shiny.

The Siren’s hand appeared out of the inner surface, in a flash she was up, her entire body floating down from shooting out of the crown. She sang her melody, drawing the Toby toward her. Rose found herself shakily getting to her feet, but obviously not injured as the song did nothing.

“Don't let her take you!” Avery shouted to Toby. The boy wouldn’t listen, couldn’t listen, as he song drew him closer, reaching toward the ghostly visage. “No!” Avery’s voice called out as Toby touched her and was instantly gone in a cloud of smoke, “No!”

The Siren floated to the Doctor’s body in less than a second and seemed to point of finger directly to
the center of his forehead.

And the Doctor was gone.

“No!”

Chapter End Notes

You know how I said, “I swear one day I’ll pop out a whole ep in one chapter”? Well, today is not that day.

...AKA woops this came out longer than I meant it to, sorry. Next bit is coming out shorter than this one, though.
Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Rose just stood there for a second, staring at the empty space the Doctor disappeared from. The wind battered her and the rain poured, but she didn’t even register the elements. Or move.

There was a blur and a scramble as a redhead picked up the crown and sent it crashing and splashing into the sea below. Rose couldn't tell, really. She was in shock. Just... staring.

She had cried no. Amy had cried no. And now all she could hear were what felt like empty, panicked apologies man to her left and do her best to keep the angry throbbing of her blood from starting a headache. Hunting the weak? Then he should’ve been the last to go. Even a half-dead Time Lord is still more hearty than a human. She heard her talkative, rueful husband with his first cold sniffling in her head repeating that over and over like saying it would cure him. It was possible he was being prideful of what he perceived as his former self, but… a slightly injured, full-blooded Time Lord would be more hardy than even an uninjured human, then, right? So maybe the Siren wasn’t just picking off the weakest animal.

He couldn’t be gone. Of all the ways in all the worlds in all the adventures he was not going to be killed by a bloody bonk on the head and a translucent harpy. There was no chance she was planning on outliving him twice.

“I'm sorry,” Avery said more directly to Rose, louder, pulling out of her hurried thoughts and shock. His voice spurred her into movement as Rose's eyes narrowed. He felt the need to repeat it as he turned and ran at him, “I'm sorry.” It was genuine and heartfelt and possibly toward the now disappeared Toby but Rose was near exploding.

Rose's face was red, heat felt even through the torrential rain “Gold. Polished metal! He said, you heard, but it’s treasure, couldn’t give it up! That's why you turned pirate. How much is that treasure worth to you?” Rose furiously hit him with the tri-corner hat it her hand. “More than your job, your wife, your own son? Is treasure worth more than Toby?!!” She looked at his face and softened. Averry was upset. She was ready to further beat an already self-flogged man. Maybe he learned his lesson, bit late, but better learned. She reached for Avery's arm. “We’ll get ‘em back.” Rose turned determined, “We have to.”

But how? But how? The only thing she could think of was to follow him and that just... How?

In their grief, no one had tied down the spar that swung into them. The realization came too late as it swung again, knocking into Rory, pushing him over the side of the ship and into the roaring waters of the ocean.

“Rory! Rory!” Amy called frantically as she ran to the hull, “I can’t see him.” Amy glanced at Rose quickly but back out to the trashing water, “I'm going in.”

“No Amy!” Rose grabbed Amy's arm, “He’s drowning. He’s drowning! You go in after him, you’ll drown too.” Her voice lowered and she thought to herself, “The siren…”

“What are you talking about?!!” Amy panickingly said as she prepared to climb the edge of the hull.

Rose stopped her from moving further, pulling her down from her attempted climb. “The Siren. The
“Siren! She wants him. We have to let her out.” Amy looked at Rose with wide eyes.

“Rose, no.”

Rose grabbed Amy by the shoulders and spoke quickly, “I refuse to believe the Doctor’s not alive. We can agree on that, yeah? So wherever he is Rory can go, too. Amy’s your decision but you have a make it now.” Amy’s face solidified into almost angry as she nodded quickly and yanked open a freshwater barrel. The Siren flew out of it.

“Well? Go get ’im!” Rose hastily shouted at the apparition and pointed overboard. The Siren dove into the sea.

“Are you mad?” Avery shouted at Rose as she held on to the slippery outer hull with Amy.

“A little bit,” Amy answered for her.

Rose's eyes darted left and right as she thought, “If we ever want to see them again, we have to let the Siren take us.” Rose blinked and suddenly started rifling through the pockets of the jacket, pulling out a small hat pin and shook it at them, “We’ll prick our fingers. Yeah?’

“Aye,” Avery said determined.

“Aye,” Amy agreed.

Rose nodded the took the protective end off the pin and quickly pricked anyone’s hand at random.

The black spot formed on their palms. The Siren appeared in their view for just a moment before their eyes were filled by light.

Rose opened her eyes. Metal ceiling above, matching walls touching them. Slightly cool from below. Metal floor, too? She tightly closed her eyes again.

She wanted to cry. Wanted to. Cry and panic and stay right here on this cold metal floor. And shout at people.

Mostly herself.

If she’d not been there, if she’d still been in the other world, he’d have been fine. If it weren’t for her, he’d not get hit by that loose beam and poofed by an arsey mermaid. Like that bloody road with that bloody Dalek.
She had to take a breath and remember he hadn’t regenerated so she hadn’t gotten him killed. Yet. Not if they could find him. Not if she stepped up. Not if she stopped being emotional and thought. Her mind might not be as impressive as a certain Time Lord’s, but if she stopped being emotional and thought maybe she’d have to get them all out of this, Doctor and Rory and Toby intact. Rose reopened her eyes.

“Where are we?” Amy was awake and asking questions.

Rose sat up slowly, “Dunno.” Amy helped Rose to her feet and the looked around. Avery was getting up, but they seemed to be the only ones there. Her hand gently touched the wall, The ground and walls were solid, smooth metal… gentle hum of electronic bits. “Spaceship, maybe?” One of the walls seemed to be a window… onto the deck. You could see the windows broken into the Captain’s cabin that Rose herself had done. “Spaceship with a view.”

“We’re on a ghost ship on top of my ship.” Avery sounded aghast.

“How can two ships be in the same place?” Amy wondered aloud.

“Every time I think that it’s not really,” Rose stopped “they’re not in the same place…” she mumbled before turning to the two others to explain. “I’m not the Doctor,” she sighed, trying to piece together her thoughts into words as she blew a breath, trying to blow her damp hair from her face, “Kinda the same, like, on toppa each other, same space different place. That’s like… reflection, a mirror looks like there’s another you there.”

“But there’s not,” Amy said, clearly beginning to question Rose’s sanity. Rose felt her own doubts rise. He was so much better at explaining this stuff. He’d had more practice and he actually knew the things she could only guess at.

“But what if there was? Like a there that you can’t see. Same place more stuff.”

“Okay,” Amy nodded, “I think I understand.”

Rose breathed a relieved breath, “Good, ‘cause I pretty sure that’s very wrong but if makes you feel better.”

Amy rolled her eyes, “Thanks.”

Rose stood still and looked around her. Alien ship. No Doctor. No sonic screwdriver. No TARDIS. Two people looking at her for answers likely because she was stupid enough to sound like she knew what she was talking about. Which she did, a little. She didn’t have a Big Alien Brain brain to lean on but several years of time hopping and several decades of assorted trouble her husband used to find and create and get them into prepared her a little, right? Rose let out a long, deep breath and looked around again. The waves lapped against the side of the ship in her view. She could almost picture being able to see them running about…

“Reminds me of a spatio-temporal hyperlink,” Rose said quietly to herself.

“A what?” Amy asked.

Rose threw a piece of metal at the screen. It went through and landed on the deck of the wooden ship they could see. “’sa… thing once. Took us from space to pre-revolution France just by walkin’ back an’ forth. Time window, think he said. But I don’t know if we went through time.” She bit her lip as she thought.

“So there was a second ship here all the time.”
Rose nodded as she looked around. “Prob’y where the distress signal came from. We were just on that plane so the TARDIS saw took us so the there bit of here.” She huffed, realizing there was little else in this room to give her more clues as to what she was doing. “The second ship was just coincidence.”

Rose exited the room, door moving automatically and staying open as the two others followed her out. She rubbed her head, pain beginning to throb slightly.

Rose looked around. Weird trans-matting. Magic Doors. Automated exits. Where were the aliens?

Avery and Amy came up behind her as she walked to another door, which automatically opened at her presence.

A large-headed, greenish-beige alien carcass fell at their feet.

Avery's gun was pointed directly at it. Rose almost growled at it, “Guns are the first step to a misunderstanding’, an’ I’m gettin’ tireda seein’ it.” Rose grumbled as she squatted to look at the carcass. “’s long dead anyway.” The gun not lowered, Rose stood put her hand on Avery's weapon-filled one, quickly moving it down to point at the ground as she passed him and the dry body.

Again there was a large view screen the size of the wall, and again it’s views pointed to the ship.

“The Doctor was right,” Amy said, noting it was the direction he had been staring into just minutes before, “There was something staring at us the whole time. How long has this ship been marooned here?”

“Long enough for the Captain to have run out of grog.” Avery announced, pointing his pistol-laden hand to the corpse seated at a console of some kind.

“I don’t understand,” Amy shook her head and looked to Rose for an answer, “If this is the Captain, then what's the Siren?”

“No idea.” Rose swallowed hard and looked at the space ship’s captain. His head was large with teeth like a rodent. He’d been dead for a while, but the… flesh, for lack of a better word, seemed intact. Near translucent goo had dibbled out of a hole near where a nose might have been and down its face onto the control panel.

“She killed it?” Amy motioned to the clearly dead carcass Rose was staring so intently at.

“Don’t think so. ‘s not how she does it, yeah? Just.. poof. Not…” Rose pointed to the clearish goo that still clung to one of the desiccated corpse’s nose … area. “...bogies.”

“Then what did?”

“Sneeze?” Rose shrugged, “Like a cold, yeah? Left the window open too long and got a cold. The window,” her eyes narrowed in thought. She looked at the bridge view screen, “Window to Earth. Oh I’ve spent too long ‘round him. Human germs. Human germs got in and the lil... alien blokes got sick, but they never had a human cold or flu or germs or whatever, so they died. C’mon. If she brought us here she brought them here.”

Amy huffed as Avery followed Rose, “Thought you ‘didn’t take orders from women’?”

“This is not my ship, I’m out of my depth and …” he lowered his voice, still grumpy but a bit less
outgoing, “making that woman cross is bad luck. We need all the good luck we can get.” Amy smirked for a moment.

“What were they doing?”

“Bein’ travelers? Scientists?” Rose genuinely had no idea as she walked, “I’m not seein’ alotta weapons er treasure in.” She paused, noting the slightly reflected bits on the walls and floor, “Lotsa shiny, though. She’d get anywhere on here in a second, yeah? So they weren’t afraid of her, whoever they were.”

Answering questions, even if her answers were wrong, seemed to calm them behind her. The Doctor always thought out loud and maybe that helped others as much as it seemed to help him. Maybe that’s why he had such a gob sometimes. Has. He’s here, he’s alive, he’s present tense, come on, Tyler. The hall had a few rooms. She waiting by and let them electronically open like grocery store doors. Nothing moving, generic smells of metal and decay and every door that opened to the smell of moldy decay scared her into hoping, swearing that they wouldn’t be in there. Three rooms, no humans, living or otherwise. The next was brighter, though. Occupied, maybe? Rose hadn’t realized the lighting of the ship had been off until the brighter light of the room.

And a scent of something sweet.

“In here!” Rose ran into the room, Amy right behind her.

There were people lying on white cots at various heights. They seemed to float or be suspended by something unseen, with wires and tubes leading up into the ceiling. There were maybe two or three dozen occupied cots. Rose found herself standing still as she searched each of the faces she could see for the one she wanted.

She barely heard the others’ exclamations of joy as they found Toby and Rory when her eyes settled on the cot at the far side on the room, floating on the first level about at her hip with a tell-tale bow tie and suspenders.

“Doctor!” Rose ran up to his floating cot. He seemed asleep, or still unconscious, wires and bits everywhere, but breathing. Breathing and not changing it puffing out regeneration energy or stone cold dead, just breathing. But something blue caught her eye and she managed to leave his immediate side to swipe away a curtain. “And the TARDIS! Okay, way out. That more like it!” she smiled excitedly before turning back to the hopefully resting Doctor and shook him a little by the shoulders, “Wake up. Please wake up.”

“They look so well,” Amy said, her hand on the side of his husband’s healthily pink face.

“Toby’s fever is gone.” Avery noted from a row over. “We have to get them out of here.”

“They’re not dead, so we have to think. Thinkin's good. Think first emotions later, yeah?” Rose said, mostly for herself. She had put off emotions this long. Swallow them back down, emotions later, Tyler. She swiped her finger over his cheek. Couldn’t help it. Rose looked up and around her, sliding her hands on to his limp one.

“They need out of here. My entire crew is here.” Avery concluded.

Rose looked over the people in the beds and saw familiar faces. “Pointy-Eyebrows, Bad Teeth, Muscles... all there. The pirates were cut, ‘s’little, Toby was sick, but Rory was drownin’... He should be dead, but he’s not. She’s keeping them alive.” She looked up to another row of floating cots, she
could barely reach the bottom of then but she supposed a floating flying ghosty woman wouldn’t really have that problem. The room was white, no real furniture other than the occupied cots and a few tall monitors and wires and bits and a few drapes from the ceiling down. Looked a bit sparse, if sterile. There were little things on the ends of each cot. More wires, a few unknown and unreachable bits and bobs.

Rose gently let go of his cool, limp hand and went to the end of his cot. Wires to the cot, tubes to him, a small screen that was blank and a dish of some sort. Seeing as it was the only thing not hooked up to something else, she went ahead and lifted it to look closer to inspect while Avery and Amy fawned over their loved ones. Clear, white writing on a green background in a almost partial circle at the top, circle of something beige in the center. “Circles?” Rose traced her finger along the rim of the clear dish before she looked at the sleeping Doctor. She turned the dish slightly as she read the words, which were likely not English before she looked at them, bless the TARDIS, “X twenty-six?” Circle. Something about the green shape beneath the letters was just…

“Help me get him up.” Amy tried to remove the tube that seemed to stop at Rory’s throat and got ready to prop him up. Rory began to wake at her jostling, fighting against his restraints and struggling to breathe. Roses eyes popped to Amy and Rory as beeping of the machines seemed to spur a wordless singing from the other end of the room.

“Oh, no.” Rose said quickly to herself pocketed the dish. She ran at full speed, grabbing Amy and hiding behind a pillar monitor. Avery quickly joined them. Rose peered around the side. The Siren floated in, landing gingerly on the floor as she had done on the ship, singing her melodic song.

She travelled carefully through the room and stopped at Rory’s side. Amy struggled a bit against Rose’s quick hold of her. The Siren sang a bit louder, hand hands floating over Rory for a moment. His struggling seemed to stop, his body once again entering a relaxed state, sleeping again.

“The song,” Rose muttered, biting her lower lip.

“What?” Avery asked.

“The music. The song. Think ‘s how she gets em to sleep,” Rose quickly explained.

“A song can do that?”

Rose toddled her head side to side a bit as she hurriedly mumbled, “Sometimes singin’ does things”

“But first they were fools,” Avery seemed to ask in his demanding way.

“Like... rum, yeah?” Rose speedily explained, “Rory was acting like he had a few. Bit tipsy makes you giggle an’ too much makes you pass out. Her singin’ does that.”

The Siren floated over to Toby. Avery hurriedly stepped out, gun aimed to the Siren. The Siren turned her head and changed from the green glow to the bright red again.

“Avery, no!” Rose jumped out from behind the safety of the monitors and smacked his gun wielding hand, forcing him to drop his weapon. Avery looked angrily to Rose while the Siren turned green and passive again. “When Amy threatened ’er with a sword she was blown off, right?” Think fast, Tyler.

Circles in a dish, cuts or sick or drowning, singin' sleep… green crescent…

The green crescent.

Apple grass. Picnic. His old face.

‘Green moon on the side. That's the universal symbol for hospitals.’
Amy used the moment to skitter from her spot behind the monitor to Rory's bedside.

Rose suddenly breathed out, “Doctor!”

“He’s still out.” Amy told her, trying to peer over the rows of hanging cots as her hands shook a little.

“No, she’s a doctor,” Rose said quickly, she pulled the dish out of her pocket again and pointed to it. “Green moon! This is a ship, were in a sick bay an' she’s a medic, right? Like… crew left the window open, so they got sick and died, she didn’t know what to do. But the window was still open, yeah? So she goes out, tries to fix everyone she can find that needs fixin' as soon as they need fixin’, takes a tissue sample an' all! But she doesn’t know how ‘cause she’s not ever seen a human so she just puts ‘em to sleep until she can figure out whatta do!”

“Then why aren’t we asleep?” Amy’s hands seemed to panic more than Amy’s outward emotions, trying to undo some of the wiring attached to her husband. The Siren turned that unearthly red and screeched at Amy.

Rose blinked. Good question, she bit her lip again, hastily running a hand through her still wet hair. She blinked. “But we were. Our hair, Amy, our hair, ’s wet but not soppin’. Sa… pin prick, right? Prob’ly stopped bleedin’ pretty quick. Rory was drownin’, and Toby’s sick. She’s a doctor!” Rose excitedly surmised, before putting a hand delicately on Amy’s lowering her hand gently from fiddling further with Rory’s life support, “…a deadly, easily miffed doctor.” She explained. The Siren turned green and placid as soon as Amy’s hands were no longer intervening.

 “…able to blow your face off.” Amy finished for her, nodding with wide eyes as she watched the green Siren. “She won’t let us take them. I’m his wife, for God’s sake. Why can’t I touch him? Why won’t you let me near my husband?” Amy pleaded. It sounded like pleading, maybe a little shouty pleading, but the him in her head would likely call it simply being Scottish.

...Only ten minutes without and she could already hear him in her head. Three voices, three faces, all saying mildly rude things and saying… no. Stop it. He's right there and he will be waking up if you just focus, Tyler. Rose took another deep breath.

“Okay, if she’s a doctor, and they’re her patients, then we’re visitors. Either it’s visitin' hours or that’s not a thing ‘cause she's not killin' us where we stand. Unless they just let whoever bungle ‘round sick people. But if we follow the whole family and friends bit—” Rose didn’t even stop to breathe.

“You're rambling.”

“Sorry.” Rose rubbed her forehead, trying to keep the headache at bay, taking the moment to breathe in once.

“No, it's good. Sounding more like the Doctor,” Amy prodded her on, possibly trying to make Rose feel a bit more confident.

“Oh shut up,” Rose smirked back. “If she follows the family and friends bit you might be next of kin, yeah? Show her your ring! And his! Lotsa species do wedding symbols let's hope they were from one.”

Amy used her ringed hand to lift up Rory’s slightly, trying to show the green woman the matching rings. The Siren simply tilted her head slightly for a moment.

The Siren held out her hand, palm up. Moments later a circle of light appeared around it as she faced
Amy stoically.

“What’s she doing?” Amy looked to Rose.

“Um,” Rose stuttered, idly acknowledging that the Doctor just made wild guesses and hoped they were right, too, if today’s multiple theories were any indication, “Put your hand in the circle. Rory's sick, you’re dischargin' him before he’s better. Avery, you too, she’s smart enough to just realize she doesn’t know whatta do, tissue samples, an’ wedding rings, prob'ly already knows the whole parent genes bit.”

Amy hesitated, “What about the Doctor?”

“I don't know,” Rose looked at him, putting her hand at the side of his face and gently running her thumb across one of his cheekbones, “’s just a hit on the head, he can just do a healing coma an…” Healing Coma. She reached into the inner pocket of the jacket she'd slung on and pulled out his sonic. New model, she hadn’t gotten a good look at it before it was all bitey sharks and Elvis and forgetty blokes. It wasn’t the same, he wasn’t the same. “New sonic, new man… here’s hoping.” She put the sonic into his hand and closed over his fingers quickly as she squat by his ear to whisper, “Help me.”

He shot up on the spot, angrily pointing the screwdriver at the Siren before he stopped and looked around quickly to face Rose at his bedside, “She’s a doctor!”

“Figured that out already, thanks.” Rose’s eyes were teary with joy and relief but her voice remained calm but breathless, “Can you discharge yourself?”

“Remind me to make you my healthcare proxy.” The Doctor kissed Rose's forehead quickly as he removed the assorted tubes attached to him and slid off the table. He immediately made his way to Amy as the machine started beeping angrily and Rory gasped for air. Amy floundered, her hands flailing as she panicked over her gasping husband.

“He can't breathe. Turn it back on.” Amy pressed a toggle switch on the side of the cot and Rory’s breathing returned to normal and his eyes closed again.

“What do we do? I can't just leave him here.”

“He'll die if you take him out.” Avery hadn’t taken Toby off his floating cot yet, he had the combination of trepidation and worried sweat on his forehead that only a parent could get.

“Rory? Rory, wake up.” Amy shook her husband gently and repeatedly, speaking fairly quietly. He blinked his eyes open, but remained still.

“Where am I?” Rory asked. He didn’t seem groggy, but he didn’t move.

“You're in a hospital.” The Doctor quickly explained, “If you leave, you might die.”

“But if you don't, you'll have to stay forever.” Amy finished sadly. Rory seemed to try an absorb that information very quickly, “You're saying that if I don't get up…”

“You can never leave,” Amy finished for him.

“The Siren will keep you safe.”

“And if I come with you?” Rory seemed to address the group but his eyes were fixed on Amy.
Amy didn’t answer, or couldn’t, so Rose cleared her throat. “You were drownin’. Your lungs are filled with water... you'll drown.”

Rory’s eyes lit up, “I'm a nurse.”

“What?” Amy blinked at him.

“I can teach you how to save me.”

“Whoa,” Amy shook her head, “Hold on.”

“I was drowning. You just have to resuscitate me.”

Amy almost scoffed, “Just?”

“You've seen them do it loads of times in films,” Rory tried to reassure Amy, “CPR. The kiss of life.”

“Rory, this isn't a film, okay?” Amy seemed horrified at the responsibility, “What if I do it wrong?”

“You won't.” Rory replied confidently.

“Okay, what if you don't come back to life? What if—”

Rory cut her off, “I trust you.”

“What about them?” Amy indicated Rose and the Doctor, “I mean, why do I have to be the one? Why do I have to save you?”

“Because I know you'll never give up.” Rory said lovingly.

Rose tugged the Doctor’s hand as Amy and Rory’s eyes became increasingly sorrowful and intimate, Rory beginning to give Amy the details of CPR and they why’s and the how’s. They quietly walked over to Avery as he stood, silently staring at his son, his hand on the sleeping boy’s arm, as Toby slowly came out of sedation.

“We have to send this ship back into space. Imagine if the ship got ashore. She would have to process every injured human,” the Doctor noted.

“What about Toby?” Avery looked worried as his hand slid off his son’s arm.

The Doctor scanned over Toby quickly and grimaced at the readings, “I’m sorry—” Avery tugged the Doctor a few feet away from Toby’s cot as Toby began to wake. The Doctor lowered his voice to avoid Toby overhearing as he said sadly, “Typhoid fever. Once he returns it's only a matter of time.”

“What if I stay with him, here.” Avery asked. “The Siren will look after him. I can't go back to England. And what home does he have now, if not with me?”

“Good man, Henry Avery,” the Doctor smiled and pat Avery’s back, “Do you think you can sail this thing?”

“Just point me to the ... atom accelerator.” Avery smirked. “It was a pleasure meeting you, Doctor Tyler.” He extended a hand to shake his.

No one else heard it, thank goodness. Amy and Rory were locked in passionately panicked eye
contact as he was instructing her on CPR. She would never have let it go. Rose was tending to the now awake but not unhooked Toby, smiling and laughing as she pat his back and embraced the boy. She’d likely have seen through is calm exterior.

The Doctor took the offered hand and shook it, “Just the Doctor, Tyler is Rose’s name.”

The Doctor had taken Avery to another room and showed him the controls. Amy and Rory were just about done sussing out what needed to be done, most of which was inevitably Rory squashing Amy’s nerves. Toby sat up an took a deep, unencumbered breath without coughing, reveling in the feeling. The Siren still stood there, off to one side, overseeing the room of people and gleeful reunions as the assorted pirates slowly woke up. The Doctor and Avery would be back in a moment, but Rose felt the need to walk up to the Siren.

“Thank you,” Rose said to the visage. The Siren didn’t even look at her, she stayed unemotional and unmoving.

“She’s just a machine,” Doctor said as he walked up beside Rose who still looked at the translucent green woman.

“Then she’ll have it on record that someone thanked her.” Rose smiled and looked at him, “Can we… I donno… reprogram her not to be so…” she crunched her nose adorably, “thorough?”

“It’ll take a moment, but once she recognizes Captain Avery as her captain her programming should adjust itself. Marvelous technology.” The Doctor smiled, grabbing her hand and pulling her to Amy and Rory.

Rory was still hooked up to the machines and breathing fine. Amy looked horrified at what they were about to attempt, but her resolve re-asserted itself as she looked into her incredibly stalwart husband’s eyes.

“Are you ready?” The Doctor asked the pair, letting go of Rose’s hand as she rounded to the other side of the cot to have all tubes removed as quickly as possible when needed.

Rory kept looking at his wife, “I know you can do this. Of course, if you muck it up I am going to be really cross. And dead.”

“I'll see you in a minute,” Amy smiled painfully to her husband.

Rose put her and on a tube, The Doctor likewise, and they nodded quickly to each other and detached him from the life support as quickly as possible. With lightening speed the Doctor lifted a gasping, quickly paling Rory into the TARDIS and set him quickly and carefully on the floor.

Amy immediately set to doing CPR, pressing Rory’s chest in a rhythm. Rose couldn’t look at Rory
but the look of desperation and tiredness that Amy had seemed to grow.

“You can do it, Amy.” Rose egged her on as the second and third round sapped her energy and hope grew dim for Rory. “Breathe.”

The Doctor couldn’t look away from Rory, hoping for any signs of life, “Come on. Come on, Rory. Not here. Not this way. Not today.” Amy’s actions slowed as her desperation was slowly overcome by defeat. “He believes in you. Come on, Amy. Come on!”

Tears were filling Amy’s eyes as she kept going “Please, please, please wake up. Wake up. Wake up. Come on. Come on.”

Rory began to coughing up water. Amy’s relief was palpable, as was her struggle to keep herself from throwing her whole body at her wounded husband, still coughing on the floor.

“Amy, Amy, you did it. You did it!” he consoled Amy. The experience had left her just as ragged looking as he.

Everyone sat back on the glassy floor, exhausted and happy, Amy gave in and clung to her husband. Rose hadn’t noticed when it happened, but her hand was tightly held to the Doctor’s.

“Now who’s Jeopardy Friendly?” Rose teased, her hand still holding tightly to his.

“Oh, that’s still you. You’re the Jeopardy one I’m the Doctor-y one.” He said playfully annoyed. Rory had borne the brunt of a few incidents. Might be a blonde thing. Her eyes twinkled to him, not golden but still shiny, though red on the edges.

“Seemed you were more patient than Doctor.” Amy bumped Rose's side and looked at her, “You weren't too bad as the Doctor and I thought I was an excellent pirate.”

Rory pulled Amy nearer to him “I thought you were an excellent nurse.”

“Easy, tiger,” Amy wrapped her arms around her husband and tugged him carefully toward the hall. She turned around as they walked to the hall to their room, “Goodnight, Doctors.”

“Night, Amy.” Rose waved.

“Goodnight, Amelia.” The Doctor nodded.

Amy stopped at the railing and turned back, “You only call me Amelia when you're worrying about me.”

“I always worry about you.”
“Mutual.” Amy smiled.

“Go to bed, Pond.” The Doctor waved dismissively. Amy turned around, following her husband into the winding corridor.

“How’s your head?” Rose looked up and tried to inspect his head. The Doctor rubbed it slightly.

“Sore.”

“Bit of a headache myself. Meant to say… thank you for savin’ me,” Rose smiled it seemed weak but still had all her happiness behind it. “And,” she suddenly smacked him on the shoulder. It wasn’t hard but it made a very satisfying thump noise that seemed to do the trick.

“Ow!” The Doctor reflexively yelped.

“Oh, you liar,” she teased, “that didn’t hurt.”

“What you do that for?” he asked with a slight laugh in his eyes but minor whining in his voice.

Rose tilted her head and crossed her arms, “If one of us is gonna get poofed, let it be me, ‘cause you can get us out of it. I’m a rubbish you.”

“You’ve been stolen enough for one lifetime,” the Doctor toddled his head in thought, “—or three, in my case. Besides, you got the job done. And I’m likely a rubbish you. I don’t know if I can make that many comments.”

“Oh I’m pretty sure you can,” she paused, “And have. And will! And do…” Rose smiled as she began with tenses and participles. “Speaking of you,” she reached into the jacket pocket and produced the petri dish. She handed to him he looked at it with curiosity.

“Oooh, skin sample,” he seemed genuinely excited by it, or potentially excited.

“’S yours,” Rose said. His excitement fizzled. Rose elbowed him slightly, “Figured ‘snot a great idea to have bits of you floatin’ around. Well. Sometimes good, but let’s not take that gamble.”

The Doctor quickly pocketed the petri dish. “Our girl will dispose of it properly. She’s powered by a perpetual—”

“Our?” Rose interrupted, a slight smirk playing on her lips.

“Obviously.”

Rose seemed to get an inner light, her smirk growing into a smile, eyes twinkling as she held her elation at bay, “Obvious, is it?”

“Yes.” He spoke matter-of-factly with a giant, knowing grin s he stopped looking at her and faux rolled his eyes jokingly, “Honestly, humans.”
“Yes, well, we’re just apes, you know.” Rose started to realize she was cold, the cold wet feeling of his still wet, heavy suit coat on her shoulders want helping matters as she clung to his arm was probably not helping either of them. “Get excited by silly things that are obvious to Time Lords.”

“You should go to sleep.” He pulled away slightly, looking into her red-rimmed, weary eyes. “You look tired. Humans might get excited by facts but they also need sleep.”

“Oh, ‘s a fact now?” Rose smiled as she let go of his hand and slid his jacket from her shoulders. “Long day.” She kissed his cheek, “I feel like tea, I’ll make tea, yeah?”

“You always feel like tea.” The Doctor said as she handed it back to him.

“S’been a long day. Someone said long days require tea.” She slightly mocked him as she picked up her dry, pink zip up and shrugged it on before she walked off toward the galley. "Don't forget ta bin that thing!” Her voice echoed as she reminded as she walked off.

The Doctor looked at monitor again as soon as Rose was out of sight, and frowned slightly the display. “Right.”

Chapter End Notes

I may get less writing time this week. Apologies if I slow up.
Humans needed sleep, so the humans retired for the evening to their respective rooms. He still had his mug in his hand, it had grown cold before it’d become empty.

Rose had been delightful as ever—the teasing, joking, pleasant kind of delightful that Rose was known for—before she obviously became tired, or the long day or headache overcame her and she chose to retire before she got snippy, kissing his cheek before trudging to the corridor where her bedroom was. The Doctor was again alone, staring at the monitor mounted to the console. He wasn’t due for a rest cycle quite yet and honestly… this was a puzzle big enough to skip it even if it was due.

The TARDIS couldn’t place Amy. Pregnant or not pregnant, as both kept flicking on his screen. She was smart, the TARDIS, she would have been able to tell but the flicker remained.

The TARDIS wouldn’t tell him about Rose. The screen, should he make to mistake and try to switch the display to her results, would turn off. It took him 42 attempts before he’d grumbled and wrote off the idea of checking, and 13 times after to actually do it.

But the sonic wasn’t as smart as the TARDIS. Nor as temperamental. He’d scanned her sore arm and…it didn’t make sense. He’d then done it quickly under pretense of fixing the console, to which she rolled her eyes with a knowing smile, called him a liar again and said not to worry about the headache—was it a Tyler trait to see beyond what he wanted them to?—but the screwdriver’s reading weren’t quite…Rose.

As a control, he pulled up Rory.

Respiratory response was a little slowed, but healing, but none of his results flickered. It even read that the room he was in a slightly higher oxygen level because, bless her, the TARDIS was spurring a quicker recovery. The screen didn’t turn off, though his scan was done without permission and Rory likely would have found it evasive, so that was out as an excuse for the turning off. Nothing flickered, so the TARDIS wasn’t glitching. Rory’s display was, quite simply, Rory.

Amy’s result still flickered.

He didn’t dare try to get Rose’s result again, afore mentioned 55 previous attempts not withstanding.

Rose was still a tea-thirsty cheeky comment in pink-and-yellow glory. Amy was still Rory-devoted and typically Amy/Scottish with the enviable red hair.

But…

Strawberries.

He hadn’t noticed the strawberries. For weeks. Maybe he’d become used to it? None of the other noses had ever done that. Big nose with magic powers and the slightly less magic, pretty boy nose always smelled her, knew when she was nearby. Though, this nose had already proven to be rebellious. Granted, those noses, like the eyes, were very used to the idea of Rose and the fact that
she was human and limited and eventually that sight and smell would ... cease... so it would have to be memorized. Now it wouldn't have to be memorized, potentially it would be around for a very long time, so he could get nose-blind to it? The idea made him grumble. Though rebellious, his nose would never do that. Betrayal by a sadistic/masochistic body part was never a fear before.

So, no strawberries.

Other than that, Rose was the same Rose. And Amy was the same Amy.

Amy was, and wasn’t, pregnant. Rose was, and wasn’t, there.

He was suddenly impossibly angry. Something was wrong with his girls.

When they woke up, The Doctor had already had the tea and coffee going and the three laughed their way to the console armed with drinks. He was lying on his back, looking directly at the wires. Luckily, he was good at puzzling out twelve things at once, but the loud laughing combined with the morning drink smells of coffee and tea reminded him of what was missing from the bouquet, making it even harder to plaster his good morning smile on his face with his mind closed off. She could hear almost everything in his head unless he closed it off. He looked out to them from his perch beneath the console.

“That is a horrible joke,” Rory announced, Amy rolling her eyes but smiling as she walked into view first, Rose and Rory behind her.

“Can’t be that horrible if ya laughed! The husband always had a million of em.” Rose sipped her mug gleefully.

“Did you really meet her blowing up Henrichs?” Rory asked, turning his voice and attention to the Doctor as the Doctor scooted out into sight.

“Technically I was blowing up animated shop window dummies, but the building got in the way.” Doctor almost smiled at the memory as he flitted around. He glanced at Rose. Same stories, same memories… she smiled at him with the same twinkling, I-just-woke-up-but-I-have-tea smile that she greeted with him every morning.

“He did that a lot.” Rose nodded, “For a bit I wasn’t sure it was a trip with the Doctor unless somethin’ blew up.”

“I did not—” the Doctor protested.

Rose didn’t even let him finish his useless protest before she started popping fingers as she listed,
“The shop, the mortuary in Cardiff, 10 Downing Street, a jagrafess—”

“—the Jagrafess and technically the heat did that.” He interrupted, correcting her. Same good memory. Same love of teasing. Well, it would be a poor Rose if teasing weren’t apart of the format. He put it into the back of his mind, letting the thoughts jumble over there while he Doctored in the forefront.

“An’ who did that?” Rose stared at him, a small, knowing smile playing on her face.

“Cathica.” Doctor said quickly.

“An’ who told her to do it?” Rose smirked and raised an eyebrow. He was silent. “You seem to’ve grown outta blowin’ up stuff. Don’t think you’ve blown up a single thing since I’ve been back.”

“I’ve matured.”

“Except the whole TARDIS-pandorica thing,” Amy added, “where technically you blew up the universe.”

“Bit of an escalation, that,” Rose smirked with her mug by her lips. “Might have held in the blowin’-stuff-up impulse for a bit too long.” She teased.

Again, the Doctor protested, “The TARDIS blew up the universe! I blew up the Pandorica and—”

“You blew up 10 Downing street?” Rory asked still stunned about what was said nearly a minute ago, “I remember hearing about that. That was you two?”

Rose nodded as the Doctor said, “There was a thing.”

“There’s always a thing.” Amy rolled her eyes.

“Thing-s. Plural. Raxacoricofallapatorians.” She grinned at the Doctor as she said the word, his smile grew larger. Amy huffed as Rose turned to her an explained, “Big, green, people-eatin’, farty, needta-hide-in-a-closet things.” Rose faux shuddered in remembrance.

“Didn’t he blow up a storehouse in Venice with those fish vampires?” Rory asked, trying to remember.

“No, that wasn’t him.” Amy shook her head.

They were teasing. Amy and Rose and Rory were teasing him. He absently reminded himself why lately he often just travelled with one person, less chance of being ganged up on. Though, the smiles on Amy’s and Rose’s faces were worth it. Maybe travelling with a group won’t be so bad, even if the teasing pops up occasionally. Won’t be so bad. Won’t. Right now it was mostly painful, but not due to the teasing.

“Venice and fish vampires? Sounds excitin’!”

“Must’ve gotten boring over there without him.” Amy said a bit haughtily. The Doctor cringed a little bit at the tone. Amy may have gotten closer to Rose but it seemed she wasn’t pleased about something.

“Oh, no,” Rose gave a quick, giggling denial unaware or unaffected by Amy's tone, “The D—” she caught herself and coughed before continuing, “daft man I married seemed to attract trouble. Don't think we ever had anythin’ like fish vampires but… bitey muffins once.”
“Bitey muffins?” Rory asked.

Rose nodded before draining her mug, “Long story.”

“Story time.” Amy smirked, “We deserve to know more about you.”

“You first.” Rose smiled and quickly sat on the stairs, getting comfortable, putting her chin in her hands to listen, “Fishy Vampires.”

The Doctor walked a bit gleefully around the room, recalling the tale, as two of the foursome had never heard it. It was one of the few stories he was certain Rose hadn’t heard, “And then we discovered it wasn’t the Robot King after all, it was the real one. Fortunately, I was able to re-attach the head.”

“Do you believe any of this stuff?” Rory offhandedly asked.

Amy nodded a bit ruefully as she walked past Rose down the stairs, “...I was there.”

“All you’ve seen, all you’ve been through,” Rose smiled and leaned closer to her friend seated on the jump seat near her perch on the stairs, “Floating eyeballs, Fish vampire people, Silurians... You’re 2,000 years old an' you still doubt?”

“Well, yeah.” Rory tentatively said.

“Good,” Rose nodded, smirking as she leaned to the side, “He embellishes.”

“Do not.” The Doctor retorted.

“Do so.” Rose cheekily shouted back. The Doctor smiled at her, but caught Amy rolling her eyes again. “What?” Rose blinked at the ceiling just before the lights began blinking on the sides of the console room.

“Oh, it’s the warning lights,” he pointed at them, “I’m getting rid of those. They never stop.” Rose smirked and Amy shook her head amusedly at him.

A knock at the door drew everyone’s attention.

Rose stood and stared at the doors, “Doctor?”

“What was that?” Amy blinked. Rose took a few steps closer, coming up beside the Doctor.

“The door. It knocked.” The Doctor hesitated.

“Right.” Rory was using his worried voice, though, to be fair, it wasn’t all that different than his normal voice, “We are in deep space.”

“Very, very deep.” the Doctor acknowledged, staring oddly at the door.
“River?” Rory asked idly, now apparently standing closer than their seat on the stairs.

Rose pulled her mobile a bit out of her pocket and looked at it quickly before putting it back. “Don’t think it’s River.”

The knocking came again.

The Doctor went to the doors and pulled them open simultaneously. Floating there was a small, glowing box about the size of two fists put together. A smile formed as his eyes lit up and reached for it, “Oh, come here. Come here, you scrumptious little beauty.”

It floated in before zooming crazily around the console room. The Doctor watched the box, his smile glowed almost as brightly as this strangely luminous little hovering box as it stuck him square in the chest and he clutched it triumphantly.

“A box?” Rory asked just before Amy’s query, “Doctor, what is it?”

“Mail!” The Doctor smiled, showing off the box as best he could while keeping his grip on it gleefully. “I have mail! Rose, I've got mail!” he excitedly looked to an incredibly uncertain Rose. He looked at the others with questioning faces as he ran back up the stairs and straight to the controls, “Time Lord emergency messaging system. In an emergency, we'd wrap up thoughts in psychic containers and send them through time and space. Anyway, there's a living Time Lord still out there, and it's one of the good ones.”

Rose had a weird feeling. From the ship, from herself, she didn’t know.

“You said there weren't any other Time Lords left,” Rory said before turning to Rose, “Embellishment?” Rose shook her head no.

The Doctor fluttered around the controls, hitting buttons and throwing switches with speed and glee, “There are no Time Lords left anywhere in the universe. But the universe isn't where we're going. See that snake?” he threw the box to Rose, who caught it and looked at it carefully.

“A snake swallowing its own tail?” she asked while turning it gently in her hands.

“The mark of the Corsair. Fantastic bloke. He had that snake as a tattoo in every regeneration. Didn't feel like himself unless he had the tattoo. Or herself, a couple of times. Ooo, she was a bad girl.” Loud noises and more than a few sparks erupted from the console as the TARDIS began to shake violently.

“What is happening?” Amy asked as she and he widened eyes husband grabbed onto the railing.

“We're leaving the universe.” The Doctor said excitedly.

“We’re what?!” Rose’s eyes went wide. By the looks on Amy’s and Rory's faces her voice had turned feral or even they could feel the myriad of emotions going through her.

“No no no,” The Doctor flitted absurdly quickly to her side as he denied, “No, not to a parallel, no. That’s not possible. There aren’t any ways to get there.” He quickly put both of his hands on the sides of Rose's arms to be as comforting as possible in a harried moment, “I swear, I checked, can’t leave it, we’re just going outside it.” Rose nodded slightly as she calmed, still a bit put out but putting her hands on the console resolutely. He immediately took that to mean he could resume his hurried hop around the controls.

“How can you leave the universe?” Amy asked.
“With enormous difficulty,” The Doctor answered, not taking a moment to rest, his hands working the controls quickly as he smiled excitedly, “Right now I'm burning up TARDIS rooms to give us some welly. Goodbye, swimming pool! Goodbye, scullery! Sayonara, squash court seven.”

Amy smiled, but looked between Rose and the Doctor. The Doctor looked happy, Rose looked trepidatious. She could tell by the look on Amy’s face that the combination was confusing or foreign. Rose tried to force a reassuring smile. Travelling universes with the Doctor definitely had some interesting results, though not necessarily ones she’d like repeated.

The TARDIS thrashed, the feeling of falling momentarily taking place before a loud, uncomfortable landing that caused all aboard to brace themselves before… nothing. No sound, no light beyond ingrained emergency lights. Just… silence.

“Okay, okay,” Amy said aloud, possibly to stem her own panic. She looked directly at the Doctor. “Where are we?”

“Outside the universe, where we've never, ever been,” the Doctor explained very, very quickly.

The lights went out. Rose started to hold her head. The combination of the quick lighting change, her growing headache and… something. Something felt off. She put her hand down and looked at the awe of the others faces and then up the high, completely dark ceiling.

Rory looked up before looking directly at Rose and the Doctor, “Is that meant to be happening?”

“No,” Rose empathically said, still facing up to the ceiling.

“The power, it's draining,” the Doctor said, perturbed by the words that were coming out of his mouth. “Everything's draining. But it can't. That's, that's impossible.”

Rose looked perturbed and muttered to herself, “I think you need a new word.”

“What’s impossible?”

“It's as if the Matrix, the soul of the TARDIS, has just...” he looked at the no longer lit time rotor, “vanished. Where would it go?” Rose bit her lip nervously. The Doctor took a few quick steps to her and held her head in his hands, “Shh, Rose, it’s fine, she can’t have gone far.”

Rose’s voice seemed worried and she looked around the seemingly empty console room, “She exists in all of time an' space, Doctor. Far's relative.”

They opened the doors to a junkyard of just grey. Bland, dirty, bits if technology and spaceships littered the area, like the entire planet had been the home of a crazy hermit bound and determined to add all the bits together and make something worthwhile but never quite got to it. In that respect it felt a bit like one of the rooms in Rose's first house, though her husband had kept the broken tech in it much cleaner. The Doctor quickly walked out, easily followed by Amy and Rory as a unit and the hesitant Rose.

Rose couldn’t help looking back at the TARDIS, feeling off about it. The Doctor kept walking
through the area, down what seemed to be a path between piles of random bits, Amy and Rory following behind him. He noted the lack of Rose holding his hand or in her peripheral vision and turned around, quickly walking passed Amy and Rory to get the still Rose.

“She'll be okay,” he said as he set his hand on her shoulder gently. She took her eyes off the TARDIS and looked at him at his words, “It’s not the first time she’s gone quiet.”

“Yeah, an' that last time was loads a fun.” Rose said sarcastically. Amy huffed again, spurring the Doctor to take Rose’s hand and join their exploration away from the TARDIS.

“So what kind of trouble's your friend in?” Amy asked as she squatted to poke around what seemed to be a gross, disused washing machine.

“He was in a bind. A bit of a pickle. Sort of distressed.” The Doctor excitedly trudged onward, heedless of his curious and hesitant company.

Amy stood and nodded once, “Ah, you can't just say you don't know.”

“But what is this place?” Rory looked around at the seemingly endless piles of flotsam, “The scrap yard at the end of the universe?”

“Not end of, outside of,” the Doctor vacantly corrected.

“How we can we be outside the universe?” Rory asked for clarification, “The universe is everything.”

“So I spent decades in nothing, then?” Rose said, using her free hand to move hair out of her face as she looked at Rory, still tethered to the Doctor.

“But that was at least another universe like alternate dimensions,” Rory said.

Rose and the Doctor’s voice both sounded off almost absently at that, “Different thing.”

“Imagine a great big soap bubble with one of those tiny little bubbles on the outside.” The Doctor instructed.

“So we're in a tiny bubble universe, sticking to the side of the bigger bubble universe?” Amy asked.

“Yeah. No. But if it helps, yes.”

“So no void?” Rose felt a twinge of fear, the concept of travelling through the void again was a bit daunting. “That'd be… what… the water the bubble lays in between other bubbles?”

The Doctor blinked that was an oddly apt comparison as not-entirely-accurate-metaphors went. “No. Well, yes. But no void. Big bubble, mini-bubble, no water between them.” He looked at the clueless looking Amy and Rory. Quick explanations or subject change? Clueless faces. Subject change.

“This place is full of rift energy. She'll probably refuel just by being here. Now, this place. What do we think, eh?” he jumped up and down a bit and sniffed the air, “Gravity’s almost Earth normal, air's breathable, but it smells like—” He sniffed again.

Amy sniffed the air and huffed unhappily. Her face scrunched, “Armpits.”

“...Armpits,” the Doctor nodded in agreement before glancing quickly at Rose. “You wanted off-world. Well this is off world.”

“What about all this stuff?” Rory almost touched one of the piles of... stuff... that was walked past,
but thought the better of it at last second. “Where did this come from?”

“Well, there's a rift,” the Doctor started.

“How’d it you explained it b’fore?” Rose lowered her voice and took on a slightly northern accent
and frowny countenance, “Like an earthquake between different dimensions.”

The Doctor smiled absentely recalling explaining it to Mickey as he looked to an increasingly
confused Amy and Rory. “Now and then stuff gets sucked through it. So not a bubble, a plughole.
The universe has a plughole and we’ve just fallen down it.”

“TARDIS uses it, like fuel. Soaks up the radiation.”

The Doctor adopted an accent close to Rose’s, giving his voice a falsetto tone as he mocked, “Like
fillin’ ‘er up with petrol an’ off we go!” Rose nearly laughed at home but ran her shoulder into his
side in protest, staying close. Again, Amy seemed to roll her eyes. If Rose saw it, she didn’t react as
much as the Doctor filed it away. Amy was… frustrated?

“So… we might be able to follow the rift to Cardiff?” Rose teased a little, snapping the Doctor from
his analysis.

The Doctor groaned and slumped his shoulders, “We are not going to Cardiff.”

Rose’s accusing finger popped out as she pointed to the Doctor, “Eventually we’ll spend time with
Jack an' you’ll love it. I have to talk to him.”

“Thief! Thief! You're my thief!” They all turned toward the voice, coming from a woman with dark
hair in what looked like a corseted dress, old and torn, with a bustle? Rose tilted her head at the
anachronistic outfit. Something about her seemed familiar to Rose, but was easily written off as just
looking like one of those myriad of faces she’d seen over the years. The woman was followed by a
man and a woman, dressed far more informally if not shabbily by comparison. They were older, and
moved like it. Like a combination of a toddler still getting used to their bodies and broken old people
shambling to continue.

“She's dangerous. Guard yourselves,” the older woman said as the younger woman came closer to
the Doctor and Rose. Rory moved a bit closer to Amy but no one moved much.

“Look at you!” the dark haired woman said as she closed the space between herself and Rose and
the Doctor. “Goodbye. No, not goodbye, what's the other one?”

“Watch out,” the man said, slurring his words a little. He pulled her back slightly, “Careful. Keep
back from her. Welcome, strangers. Lovely. Sorry about the mad person.”

“Why am I a thief?” the Doctor blinked, puzzling out the statement, “What have I stolen?”

“Me,” the woman put her hand on her own chest indicating herself, “You're going to steal me. No,
you have stolen me. You are stealing me,” she turned to Rose and cocked her head, “Tenses and
pronouns are difficult, aren't they?”

“Stolen a person?” Amy asked.

“He does that,” Rose received a quick look from the Doctor, “Accidentally does that.”

“Oh, we are sorry, my dove,” The stout woman said, “She's off her head. They call me Auntie.”
The man seemed eager to invade Rose's and the Doctor’s personal space as he got closer, “And I'm Uncle. I'm everybody's Uncle. Just keep back from this one. She bites!”

“Do I?” the strange woman seemed excited by that, “Excellent!” The woman craned her neck and bit the Doctor's ear.

“Ow!” the Doctor hollered flinching back toward Rose.

The woman stepped back a bit, “Biting's excellent. It's like kissing, only there's a winner.”

“Oh, there's a winner in kissin' sometimes.” Rose cheekily added. The Doctor's eyebrows went up and looked at Rose beside him in surprise. She saucily smiled before gently but forcibly turning his head a little to instinctively look at the reddened ear, the skin unbroken. Rose simply put her hand on it to soothe it slightly. It was hard not to laugh at the whole situation, so she was chuckling in her chest.

…until the strange woman grabbed Rose by the shoulders and quickly pressed their lips together. Rose went stiff in surprise and her eyes sprang open as she stared at the very close, closed-eyed woman for a moment. Rose was shocked into immobility.

“Oi, that’s mine!” The Doctor pulled Rose back with their still joined hands and took half a step forward, putting himself slightly in the space between the two a little protectively.

“Always wondered what that was about.” The strange woman said, unphased.

Rose turned to look at the Doctor, words finally coming to her and enabling her to use her mouth again. She put her free hand on her hip and gave him a questioning look. “That?” the Doctor turned to Rose.

“A mad lady bit me and snogged you and you’re after me for semantics?” the Doctor once again found it difficult to control his jaw from dropping.

Rose’s expression didn’t change as she kept looking at him, hand still firmly in his, “That?”

“So sorry,” the old man said as he pulled the dark haired woman away, “She's doolally.”

“No, I'm not doolally. I'm, I'm...” The dark-haired woman looked deeply into Rose's eyes for a moment, pushing her lips together and humming like she was trying to find a word. “It's on the tip of my tongue.” Her eyes suddenly lit up and she looked toward the Doctor. “I've just had a new idea about kissing. Come here, you.” She went toward the Doctor with puckered lips. Suddenly protective was out the door and he hastily let go of Rose's hand ducked behind her, causing her to laugh.

Auntie grabbed the woman by the arms, “No, Idris, no.” Idris stopped and just looked at him.

“Oh, but now you're angry. No, you're not. You will be angry.” Her voice turned sad, “The little boxes will make you angry.”

“Sorry?” the Doctor blinked, “The little what? Boxes?”

“Oh, no,” Idris was still in reach of the Doctor and took his chin in her fingers, “Your chin is hilarious.” She let go and faced Rory, “It means the smell of dust after rain.”

Rory blinked, “What does?”
“Petrichor.”

“But I didn't ask…?” Rory seemed mildly confused.

“Not yet,” the woman tilted her head slightly, almost mechanically as she smiled knowingly, “But you will.”

“No, no, Idris,” Auntie pulled the crazy woman again, “I think you should have a rest.”

“Rest. Yes, yes. Good idea. I'll just see if there's an off switch.” And the crazy woman collapsed on the spot. Rory went directly into nurse mode and went the few yards to inspect the fallen woman.

“Is that it? She dead now. So sad.” Uncle said flatly.

“No, she's still breathing.” Rory corrected as he held the crazy woman’s wrist.

“Nephew, take Idris somewhere she can not bite people.” Said Uncle.

Rose jumped, startled at the addressed and nearby Ood. She had been too distracted with mad people and snogging to register it. Rose being started seemed to spur Amy to move backwards.

“Doctor, what is that?” Amy asked.

“Ood.” Rose backed up a little without trying to, not getting far before she had to consciously stop herself.

The Doctor smiled, momentarily pleased he wasn’t still holding Rose’s hand so her could approach it without having to let go, “Oh, no, it's all right. Oods are good.”

“Yeah, very nice,” Rose said reassuringly before muttering under her breath, “…when they’re not possessed by the devil an' tryina kill ya in a vent.”

“Devil?” asked Amy at the same time her husband asked, “Vent?” Amy quickly looked at Rory with a look of disappointment as to his question choice.

“Black hole, no worries,” the Doctor said dismissively without looking back at them. “Hello, Ood. Can't you talk?” the Ood just tilted it’s head, it’s hand holding a translation ball that did nothing. "Ohh, I see. It's damaged. May I?" Rose instinctively shuddered as she watched the Doctor reach for it. Oods may not have been bad, but memories were a bit strong. “It might just be on the wrong frequency.” The Doctor said as he snapped the ball in half to start fiddling with wiring.

“Nephew was broken when he came here. Why, he was half dead. House repaired him. House repaired all of us.” Auntie nodded as if agreeing to no one in particular.

“Didn’t repair him all the way, looks like.” Rose nodded as the Doctor completed his repair of the translation ball and snapped it back. It lit up and started speaking with many voices over each other.

The only intelligible thing in the whole message was a man seemingly pleading… for the high council or Time Lords. Rose’s eyes widened as she looked to an already wide-eyed Doctor.

“What was that?” Rory asked plainly, “Was that him?”

“No, no. It's picking up something else. But that's... that's not possible. That's... that's...” Rose stiffened a little. Stuttering Doctor. Never good. “Who else is here? Tell me. Show me. Show me.”

“Just what you see. Just the four of us, and the House.” Auntie nodded before she looked at the Ood,
“Nephew, will you take Idris somewhere safe where she can't hurt nobody?” the Ood nodded obediently and easily picked up the mad woman, walking away from the group.

The Doctor perked up, “The House? What's the House?”

“House is all around you, my sweets.” Auntie opened her arms to indicate, “You're standing on ‘im. This is the House. This world. Would you like to meet ‘im?”

“Meet him?” Rory repeated.

“I'd love to.” The Doctor nodded, dismissing the obvious reluctance from the rest of his group.

“This way,” Uncle nodded, showing his teeth in a smile a little too enthusiastically as he lead the way, “Come. Please. Come.”

Amy approached Rose as they walked, the Doctor leading the way but the three of them following, “What's wrong? What were those voices?”

Rose started intently at the back of his head in worry as he determinedly set forth. She replied to Amy on a breath, “Only one thing makes him make that face. **Time Lords.**”

“It's not just the Corsair,” The Doctor said quickly, “Somewhere close by there are lots and lots of Time Lords.”

Uncle and Auntie lead them into one of the crashed ships. It still looked in disarray, like maybe they had lived there but they hadn't bothered to try and tidy anything for their own convenience. “Come. Come, come. You can see the House and he can look at you.”

The Doctor looks down the grating on the floor, slight stream rising from it but no heat coming from it. “I see. This asteroid is sentient.”

Auntie started explaining from beside Uncle, “We walk on his back, breathe his air, eat his food…”

Amy added, “Smell its armpits.”

Auntie and Uncle froze in their tracks, both their mouths moved in time with a voice that was not their own. It was smooth and deep. “**And do my will.**” They didn’t change their expressions or turn their heads but the cadence of the voice changed, “**You are most welcome, travelers.**”

“Doctor, that voice,” Amy pointed slightly to Auntie and Uncle, stepping a bit closer to the Doctor, “That's the asteroid talking?”

“Yes. So you're like a sea urchin. Hard outer surface, that's the planet we're walking on. Big, squishy, oogly thing inside, that's you.”

“**That is correct, Time Lord.**” House said through Auntie and Uncle. Rose stepped back as they started moving their mouths, speaking with that voice that wasn’t their own. No hint of their own voices flowed in the mix, this was just as if they were just speakers of a radio. That kind of thing clearly disturbed her.

“Ah. So you've met Time Lords before?” the Doctor mulled options in his mind.

“**Many travelers have come through the rift, like Auntie and Uncle and Nephew. I repair them when they break. There have been many TARDISes on my back in days gone by.**”

“Well, there won't be any more after us,” the Doctor admitted, “Last Time Lord.”
“A pity.” The voice paused, “Your people were so kind. Be here in safety, Doctor. Rest, feed, if you will.” Auntie and Uncle blinked and looked at each other, seemingly back in control of themselves.

“You okay?” Rose asked Auntie after she blinked, resuming what looked like normal movement.

Auntie nodded, “Of course, my dove.” She addressed the others, her shambling movement resumed. “You can look all you want. Go. Look.” She toddled up to Amy and stroked her hair with a swollen large hand, “House loves you.” Amy seemed slightly put off my the contact and backed away slowly towards the Doctor.

“Come on then, gang.” The Doctor beckoned as he started off, “We’re just going to, er, see the sights.”

The Doctor lead the charge down a corridor, Rose, Amy, and Rory falling behind him. Rose looked worriedly at the back of the Doctor’s head.

“Smelly place filled with junk,” Amy looked around as she walked, “Check.”

“Weird locals who kiss strangers an’ invade personal space, double check.” Rose blew out a breath.

Rory shrugged, “Add scotch and it’s my uncle Terry’s house.” Rose and Amy started chuckling.

“Shush, shush, shush,” The Doctor instructed them, listening intently for voices. They sobered, slightly. Rose sighed looking at the Doctor as his eyes searched.

“So, as soon as the TARDIS is refueled, we go, yeah?” Rory mentioned, weirded out by the odd setting and smell.

“Dunno. Maybe fuellin' but I couldn’t hear her, getting out will be a bother without her,” answered Rose quietly.

The Doctor was on a mission. “And there are Time Lords here. I heard them and they need me.”

Amy sped up slightly, leaving her spot a few feet away with Tory and Rose still behind, “You told me about your people, and you told me what you did.”

“Yes, yes,” he replied, trying not to think on that too much, “but if they're like the Corsair, they're good ones and I can save them.”

“And then tell them you destroyed the others?” Amy asked as if he needed to be reminded.

“I can explain. Tell them why I had to.”

Amy nodded solemnly, “You want to be forgiven.”

The Doctor looked at her carefully, “Don't we all?” Amy smiled a little and nodded. She wandered off towards her husband. The Doctor noted Rose rubbing her temple slightly as she looked at something. “You want to go back to the TARDIS. And… look for my screwdriver.” He announced quickly. Amy raised an eyebrow as Rose just looked incredulous.

“No I don’t.” Rose said matter-of-factly as she looked at him, slowly crossing her arms.

The Doctor fidgeted a bit under her gaze and went closer to Rose as he lowered his voice so Amy and Rory couldn’t hear him. “Time Lords, TARDIS, technically not permitted event on a space station with a now unknown being and then a relationship with it. Let’s tell them about the genocide of my own people for a starter then move on to the other illegal bit.”
Rose looked him in the face as she weighed his statement, and sighed at the almost pleading look under the placid smile on his face. “Fine, I’ll go look for your sonic,” Rose flicked his chest where the sonic lie in the pocket beneath and hitting the hard cylindrical object with her finger. “Rory, Amy, c’mon.”

Rory did as he was told and followed Rose, but blinked. “Come on?”

“It’s a big ship. May need your help.” Rose sighed, not completely convinced or convincing.

“Nope,” said Amy quite clearly, stopping in her tracks. Rose looked at the Doctor and tilted her head. He nodded, reluctantly.

“If Amy stays I stay.” Rory shook his head.

Rose looked at the Doctor who shrugged a bit sadly. She sighed and straightened his bowtie, “Kay, just…” her mouth tightened at the side a little, “Just… listen ta Amy, yeah? Keeps perspective. Think you'll need that.”

“Yes, boss,” He smiled. Rose pushed her lips together and smiled tightly before she walked off. She only made it a few steps before turning and walking backwards for a moment as she looked at Amy.

“Amy, you’re in charge’a him. I want that Time Lord back in one piece.” Rose winked and turned back around, sticking her hands in the pockets of her denims as she walked back in the direction of the TARDIS.

Rose or not, anyone shouldn't be alone on the TARDIS. The Doctor looked at the other two for a second before setting off in the opposite direction as Rose. “One of you should go with her. She’ll get kidnapped brushing her teeth.”

“Heard that!” Rose said, lifting her arm to wave with her back still facing them as she kept walking away.

Amy looked at Rory. Rory hung his head but turned and followed Rose, double stepping until he caught up with her and Amy followed the Doctor.

“I don’t need a babysitter.” Rose said as Rory arrived in her peripheral vision.

“I know,” Rory acknowledged.

Rose looked back, seeing Amy and hoping beyond hope that being around someone might keep the Doctor’s potential emotional volcano at bay. “Amy any good at babysittin’?”

“He’ll be fine,” Rory assured walking along, “He's a Time Lord.”

She pulled open the TARDIS door and looked back in the direction from which they came, under to see the Doctor and Amy now but sighing as she walked in, “That’s what I’m worried about.”
“I thought you liked Rose,” The Doctor said as he began his trudge away once Rory and Rose had disappeared in the direction of the TARDIS.

“I do. She’s funny. Smart. All that.”

“But you’re… Scottishing.” The Doctor pointed vaguely all around her face, “All frowny and snippy.” He turned around and continued, satisfied that she’d keep talking while he looked on.

“I’m…” Amy huffed, “She knows things. Which is good. Saves us, you, blah blah blah. But she knows things about you that I don’t. The TARDIS, a void, a rift, you keep making references to stuff that happened and inside jokes—”

“You and I have those.”

“We do,” Amy easily acknowledged, “But you never mentioned her before.”

He suddenly paused in his hunt, “Amelia. Are you… jealous?”

“Of your girlfriend? No.” She said and shook her head a negative and he continued his determined saunter, her following behind. “It has just been a while and it’s still un-explained. Who is she? I know about the Time War but not Rose.”

“I’ve had a long life and done many things. You know the biggest one, isn’t that enough?” the Doctor said calmly, if slightly annoyed.

“No.” Amy said flatly, “Not when I’m practically living with one.”

“Rose is Rose,” the Doctor didn’t even look at Amy, but took the angry silence that followed his statement as his hint to continue. He chose his words carefully but made sure to keep as much of everything out of his mind while he said it, there was enough introspection right now without those emotions. “She travelled with me for a few years, we were close, and then something bad happened—that’s the void thing—and then she clawed her way through the impossible and came back to help me save the universe, and then I repaid her doing valiant effort with doing the impossible and the helping save the universe from destruction by abandoning her and her husband on a parallel world where she outlived him because I didn’t stop and think and now she’s back.” He said very quickly.

He was almost sure Amy only got half of that but as he stopped and looked back momentarily, her shocked expression made him feel like the pertinent information had been imparted. “There. Explained. Now. Mission, Time Lords.” He said a little excitedly.

“Time Lords,” Amy repeated.

“Yes, must find.” The Doctor said in confirmation as he continued moving. Amy let silence overtake them for only to minutes before pressing again.

“Searching for them without Rose?” Amy asked with a slightly cheeky air of curiosity, “Afraid of your posh new friends meeting your human-ish girlfriend?”

“It’s the ish I’m worried for.” The Doctor mumbled. Started answering questions, may as well not stop now.

“You destroyed all the other Time Lords but Rose’s ish would be a big deal?” Amy doubted him with her voice, somewhere between minor mocking and actual curiosity. She knew the thing about
the Time Lords was weighty, the ish fear would likely have been silly to her by comparison.

“More of an escalation, or de-escalation.” He flicked on his sonic for a moment, listening to the whirls for a moment as they walked, hoping it’d act as a divining rod despite ‘Find Time Lords’ not being one of it’s settings. “Can’t very well tell them about what happened when they’re distracted by my ishy mate.”

“Mate?” Amy repeated. Oh no. Conversational slip-up. Freud would have a party. Ignore it. Ignoreitignoreit.

He ignored her skillfully, “Come on. Where are you?” Silent, searching moment followed, hopefully she’d have let it drop as there were more pressing things, like safe, live Time Lords out there. He hadn’t felt them, he hadn’t known. They were outside the universe, his mind wouldn’t have stretched that far to sense them. “Where you all? Where are you?”

“You called her your mate,” Amy teased, her voice sounding like it contained a modicum of excitement. Okay, she wasn’t ignoring it. It was Amy despite the pregnant/not pregnant bit. Poking fun of him was likely Amy's favorite sport. “Have you guys… mated?”

“Mate, friend, same thing.” Not really.

“Not really.” Amy stated matter-of-factly. “But it’s good. She seems an odd mixture of over and not over her husband.”

His hearts fluttered. Or stuttered. Maybe both. Perspective, Doctor. Rose had said that. Either reaction he tried to keep off his face as he peeling his eyes on the landscape. No movement. Few places to hide or congregate. Rose would know. She knew places to hide, apparently. Place to hide. Ish. Mate. Bad Doctor. Focus.

It might have occurred to him that this would likely be what Rose wanted. Someone to keep his mind off getting too hopeful, too excited at the prospect of time lords, and Amy was keeping him just distracted enough, Rose likely didn’t know she would be the source of said distraction when she left.

He found a curtain in their way, as he pulled it aside he could hear indistinct voices, speaking over each other.

“Well, they can't all be in here.” He said to himself as he honed in on the sound.

“A cupboard?” Amy pointed to a wooden-doored latched cupboard, the voices seeming to emanate from it.

The Doctor opened the small cupboard and found easily ten, stacked and discarded boxes like the first one that had filled him with so much glee. Time Lord Emergency messages, all chattering away, calling for help.

“Doctor, what's that? Who are they?” Amy asked, unwilling or unable to comprehend what was happening

“Time Lords,” the Doctor said in resignation, “Lots and lots of Time Lords.”

The Doctor didn’t look away from the boxes as he head the shambling walks of the two behind him. “Just admiring your Time Lord distress signal collection. Nice job. Brilliant job. Really thought I had some friends here, but this is what the Ood translator picked up. Cries for help from the long dead.”
He turned to see Auntie and Uncle, reluctantly looking between each other and an increasingly angry him, “How many Time Lords have you lured here the way you lured me, and what happened to them all?”

“House, House is kind and he is wise—”

The Doctor’s voice slowly increased volume, “House repairs you when you break. Yes, I know. But how does he mend you?” He quickly scanned Uncle with his sonic screwdriver he paused and looked at it before narrowing his eyes at Uncle, “You've got the eyes of a twenty year old.”

“What are you?” Uncle asked as if it were a normal compliment.

“No, Oh, no, I mean it literally. Your eyes are thirty years younger than the rest of you. Your ears don't match, your right arm is two inches longer than your left and how’s your dancing? Because you've got two left feet. Patchwork people. You've been repaired and patched up so often, I doubt there's anything left of what used to be you.”

Auntie rolled up her long sleeve nervously. A hint of grey-black made the Doctor grab for it and look... a snake tattoo. A snake eating its own tail.

“Is that—?” Amy’s voice sounded horrified. The Doctor could tear his eyes away from the tattoo.

“The Corsair.” The Doctor's face fell. He felt a growl growing in his throat.

“He was a strapping big bloke, wasn't he, Uncle?” Auntie moved slightly, drawing the Doctor's stare to move off of her arm as she spoke, “I got the arm and then Uncle got the spine and the kidneys.” Uncle parroted Auntie’s last word, but the Doctor didn’t even try to register it.

'I want that Time Lord back in one piece.'

The Doctor looked away for a moment before looking at the two of them with a clenched jaw and tightened lips, “You gave me hope, and then you took it away. That's enough to make anyone dangerous. God knows what it will do to me. Basically, run!”

“Poor old Time Lord,” Auntie said as she slowly backed away from him, “Too late. House is too clever.” Auntie and Uncle left. Shambling and leaning on each other.

Amy put her hand on the Doctor’s arm. Grounding force. Perspective. The Doctor look almost a full half minute to let Amy’s presence calm him. Externally, at least. There was more, inevitably, to figure out today. Perspective, Doctor.

Amy's mobile started ringing from her pocket. She removed it and looked at the ID.

“It’s your mate,” she announced, trying to distract him from his current rage. Amy handed out the ringing mobile to the Doctor. He shushed Amy quickly –both for her loudness and pointed word usage— as he took the mobile and answered.

Rose’s voice sounded from the speaking on the phone. “The door’s locked. Wonder how that happened.” Her tone meant she wasn’t really wondering, she didn’t seem mad, either.

“Sorry. Had to make sure you didn't wander off.”

Rose audibly huffed. He could see her eye roll despite her absence. “Pretty sure she's bigger in here than it is out there, aren't you afraid I might wander further in the box?”

“In the box?” Oh, that woman. Always saying the exactly the right thing. “The little boxes will make
“So creepy bein' on here without her.” Rose said as they entered, latching the TARDIS doors behind them.

“Like being on a spaceship that doesn’t talk to you?” Rory shrugged, “Yeah, weird. Don’t know how that feels.”

“Oh, snarky Rory makes an appearance,” Rose smiled, sitting on a jump seat. She sighed, watching Rory’s face. “Don’t like bein' away from the wife much, do ya?”

Rory changed the subject. “Where should we look for that screwdriver?”

“Nohere,” Rose looked up the dark ceiling, laying her head on the top of the backrest. “He doesn't have extras an' he's pretty much always got it on ‘im.”

“So why are we…?”

She rolled her head towards Rory, “He needs a moment.”

“Doesn't that mean he needs you?” Rory asked pointedly, “You seem to be quite… supportive. To him.”

“I… think I make a whole diff’rent kinda moment than he needs right now. He’s bout to walk into a bunch of people who follow the rules, and I’m a… very broken rule.” Rose sighed, “But Amy's good. Keeps him in line.”

“And why am I here?”

“I dunno?” Rose shrugged, “Keep me company ‘cause the TARDIS isn’t here?”

Rory shook his head, “I don’t get it, we’re on the TARDIS.”

“He explained it to you, yeah? She’s living.” Rose bit her lip in thought before she turned to him, “’s like... if they took your brain outta your body. Your body would still be ‘round but you wouldn’t be there.”

“Like braindead,” Rory summed up.

“Sorta, only not dead just…” Rose frowned and scrunched her nose as she tried to think of the proper word, “…moved. Hopefully.”

“That explains why you sound like you’re in mourning.”
“Empty TARDIS, bit of a headache that won’t go away, naggin' feelin' that somethin' isn’t right.” She plopped her head on her hand, arm propped up on her knee.

“You good here?” he asked. Rose nodded to Rory, giving him leave to go as she watched him edge to the door “I’ll go check on them.” Rory nodded back turning and effectively only rattling the door. “...The door’s locked.” He rattled it some more, trying to get it open.

“Oh, that man.” Rose sighed, “s not like I’m gonna go anywhere. Even came here voluntarily, the knob,” Rose quickly pulled her mobile from her pocket and dialed up Amy. It rang twice before she was met with an answered call and no voice.

“The door’s locked. Wonder how that happened.” She put her unoccupied hand on her hip, only a slight reprimand in her voice.

“Sorry. Had to make sure you didn't wander off.” The Doctor said somewhere between flat and teasing.

Rose sighed and looked around. She smirked at his words and rolled her eyes at the phone, “Pretty sure she's bigger in here than it is out there, aren't you afraid I might wander further in the box?”

“In the box?” his voice paused for a second, she could almost hear the gears churning in his mind, though she didn’t know why, “Little boxes will make you angry. How did she know? Got to go.” He clicked off.

The Doctor charged to the brig area, Amy following behind him with little clue as to what he was up to.

The Doctor saw the strange, snogging-biting woman in a jail cell and started talking even Ashe walked up to it, “How did you know about the boxes? You said they'd make me angry. How did you know?”

A smile formed on the woman’s mouth her eyes were closed as if she had been meditating, “Ah, it's my thief.” Her eyes slowly opened with a mischievous air.

“Who are you?” the Doctor asked as he closed in on the cell.

“Do you not know me?” She ran up to the bars of her cell, putting her face between two rungs playfully, “Just because they put me in here?”

The Doctor didn’t back away, he took half a step closer as the looked at the bars, “They said you were dangerous.”

“Not the cage, stupid.” The odd woman scoffed and motioned to herself, “In here. They put me in here. I'm the.” She suddenly stopped and looked off, “Oh, what do you call me? We travel. I go—” she pushed her mouth into an o shape, the dematerialization noise echoing from her throat.
“The TARDIS?”

She tilted her head, “Time And Relative Dimension In Space. Yes, that’s it. Names are funny. It's me. I'm the TARDIS.”

“No, you're not. You're a bitey, mad lady,” The Doctor protested immediately, “The TARDIS is up and downy stuff in a big blue box.”

“Yes, that's me. A Type Forty TARDIS. I was already a museum piece when you were young, and the first time you touched my console you said—”

The Doctor looked amazed for a moment, his eyes unfocusing, “... I said you were the most beautiful thing I had ever known.” As if it were even possible for the TARDIS to even be a person. …which it was. Rose had proven that. His eyes seemed to widen and harden.

“And then you stole me,” she smiled, “And I stole you.”

“I borrowed you,” the Doctor corrected.

“Borrowing implies the intention to return the thing that was taken. What makes you think I would ever give you back?” she smiled again. Brilliantly, saucily, the way the TARDIS would smile.

“You're the TARDIS?” Amy asked her before whipping her head toward the Doctor to double-check even before an answer wasgiven, “She’s the TARDIS?”

“Yes.” The woman replied.

“Our TARDIS?” it was instinct to use that word now. His and Rose’s, but Amy didn’t think anything of it, probably assuming he meant everyone, and in a less permanent sense. Part of him wanted to blush nearly as much as the mate conversation.

“Our Doctor.” The TARDIS-woman corrected. “Oh. We have now reached the point in the conversation where you open the lock.” She pointed casually to the lock on the cage door as he pulled out his sonic and it whirred for a moment before quickly unlatching.

She pushed it open as she exited, looking around before narrowing her eyes at the Doctor, “Where’s my heart?” She walked passed him.

“Most hearts are in your chest.” He answered, following her as she wandered.

The woman stopped and looked at him oddly. “Not that one, the other one.”

“She has two hearts?” Amy asked from beside the Doctor, “Is she a Time Lord, maybe?”

The Doctor pointed his sonic at the woman as they trudged on, “No, human. Heart in your chest. Just one. Running a bit hot. Slow down.”

“People are so much bigger on the inside.” The woman said gleefully as she paused to look at them for just a second, “I’ve done it twice now and it's always breath giving. Taking?”

“Twice?” Amy asked for clarification, not expecting the answer to be quite as fast on the Doctor's lips as it was.

“Rose once,” he quickly explained as he followed the TARDIS woman as she continued her seemingly specific walk.
“Oh of course,” Amy huffed to herself. The Doctor flinched internally, that was missing from the quick explanation Amy'd just gotten, “So this lady will be like Rose?”

The Doctor’s eyes widened momentarily as he tried to get a word together. Two Roses. Simultaneously exciting and horrifying. Blimey. As if one didn’t lead to enough trouble. And now the potential two. Or three, as it may be.

“No, genetic preparation was not present in this one.” Idris casually, responding to Amy and breaking the Doctor out of his very momentary panic.

“Genetic preparation?” Amy repeated in question.

The Doctor got visually flustered, “But there was no genetic preparation! Human! All human-y and pink and yellow before the gold—”

“We both told you, you just never listen.”

The Doctor couldn't help his momentary confusion. What the hell was she talking about? Uncontrollably he racked his brain. Nearly a thousand years of past and potential future popped in his mind as he searched his memories for any hint of what the TARDIS could possibly be talking of. Rose had joked on the beach on Polam Fourteen. ‘Pretty sure part of that’s genetic.’

“I do so listen!” the Doctor argued. He may have understood little late, really, but he listened just fine.

“Not really,” added Amy quite smarmily. He could tell by the passing look on her face that she was slightly gratified that she wasn't there only one left in the dark.

The Doctor huffed and spoke quickly, “Nevermind that. We'll cross that road when we come to it. The question is why? Why pull the living soul from a TARDIS and pop it in a tiny human head? What does it want you for?”

“Oh, it doesn't want me.”

“What?” Amy asked, lost.

“House eats TARDISES.” The woman said matter-of-factly as she walked.

“House what?” The Doctor stopped as if trying to process the thought required any energy expended in walking, “What do you mean?”

“I don't know,” the TARDIS woman said, non-plussed as the paused as he had, “It's something I heard you say.”

The Doctor blinked, his memory not including that, “When?”

The TARDIS woman shrugged, “In the future.”

“House eats TARDISES?” the Doctor repeated, his mind churning.

“There you go!” The woman pointed at him right after he spoke.

“Of course.” The Doctor explained “House feeds on rift energy and TARDISES are bursting with it. But you can't eat a TARDIS. it would destroy you. Unless, unless—”

“Unless you deleted the TARDIS Matrix first,” she finished for him.
Amy had a bit of a hard time keeping up, “So it deleted you?”

“House can’t just delete a TARDIS’ consciousness. That would blow a hole in the universe,” the TARDIS woman explained at breakneck speed, “So he pulls out the Matrix, sticks it in a living receptacle and then it feeds off the remaining Artron energy.” She stopped and blinked as a smile formed on her face, “Oh. He was about to say all that. I don't suppose he has to now.”

The Doctor’s eyes widened, “I sent them in there. They'll be eaten.” He made a quick grab for the mobile he’d just stuck into his trouser pocket and dialed, “Rose?! Get the hell out of there!”

Rose huffed as she put her mobile back in her pocket. “Well, he locked the doors.” Rose looked to the bedroom corridor for a second before she looked back at Rory, “…I said I’d go to the TARDIS, never said I’d just sit.” She grinned to Rory, “He’s not worried we'll find his bedroom.”

“Bedroom?” Rory spun around from his perusal of the darkened space to face Rose, “He has a bedroom?!”

“Has one, never uses it, though.” She shrugged.

Rory looked suspicious, “But you’ve seen it.”

“No, so the needta find it.” Rose grinned mischievously.

“But he's got a room,” Rory stated, “A room that has a bed.”

Rose shrugged, “Well, might not, remodeling an' all that. He usually just takes a kip on that hammock there.”

Rory hadn’t moved, he seemed shocked into immobility, “But he sleeps.”

Rose's face scrunched at Rory's words, “Yes he sleeps, he’s not magic.”

“Have you seen him sleep?”

“...sorta.” Easier than saying not technically. She hadn't seen this one sleep but he'd, well, he'd even told her he had. Oh, tenses and pronouns were being difficult even in her own mind. “Really, we’re locked in the TARDIS on an unknown planet that talks with puppet people and the biggest thing to wrap your head ‘round is the Doctor sleeping?”

“Well, an unknown planet and puppet people are more or less normal.” Rory almost shrugged, “Him sleeping’s just weird.”
A glowing, green gas swirled around the time rotor, flowing interested it, filling it and making the
time rotor glow an unusual green.

“Talkin’ a weird…” Rose and Rory slowly backed up away from the console, toward the stairs by
the doors.

The mobile buzzed and Rose didn’t look away to quickly jam her hand into her pocket and quickly
draw out the mobile phone.

“Rose?! Get the hell out of there!” The Doctor’s voice echoed from the speaker.

“Doctor, something's wrong.” Rose hadn’t taken her eyes off the green hue that now filled the rotor
and gently lit the room and carefully descended the stairs backwards. Rory made it down a bit
quicker and was pulling at the doors when she arrived.

“It's House. He's after the TARDIS. Just get out both of you!”

“We can’t!” she shouted into the phone while pulling at the unmoving door, “You locked the door!”

“I've unlocked it!” His voice shouted back.

“No you haven’t!” Rose wedged the mobile phone between her ear and her shoulder, freeing her
hand to join the others and Rory in trying to force open the door.

“I have!”

Rose grunted and let go of the handle, taking the phone from her shoulder to more or less yell into it,
“I think I can tell when a door is bloody locked, Dear!”

The Cloister Bell began to toll, and a weird breeze blew around the room. The very loud, very
ominous bong rang through her ears, Rose’s eyes widened as she looked to Rory.

“That’s a bad noise…” Rory said as calmly as he could.

“Open!” the Doctor’s voice echoed from the mobile phone and possibly through the door. Rose tried
one more time to try open the door. “Open this door!”

“You can fly it!” Rory pointed out. “Maybe there’s a control?”

“Oh! Yeah!” Rose seemed to forget again as she shoved the still working mobile into Rory’s chest
and ran quickly up to the console. She began trying to hit buttons, but, “The controls won’t move! I
can’t do anythin’ if the controls aren’t movin’!” The dematerialization sequence started, the noises of
movement began. Rose’s eyes widened and she looked frightened and wide eyed at Rory, “I didn’t
do that…”

Chapter End Notes

I wrote too much again. This week was just awful.

Thank you for sticking around, it was a giant of a chapter.
The TARDIS dematerialized. Well, the TARDIS was in fact the woman standing behind him but the rest of TARDIS dematerialized.

The Doctor dialed the phone again.

The Doctor spoke loudly into the phone, “Rose, Rose, can you hear me?” No answer came, he closed his eyes and tried the other way. Rose. Rose. …of course she wouldn’t answer. Maybe this Rose couldn’t. She seemed to hear him just fine but responses… He hadn’t thought on that. He told her that she shouldn’t before but nothing stopping her since, and… nothing. An empty feeling consumed him, his stomach seemed to drop. “Okay, right…” he calmed himself with his own words as he looked to the empty space where the shell of his TARDIS had stood. “I don’t, I really don’t know what to do. That's a new feeling, “Jeopardy friendly. Blondes. Must be a blonde thing.”

Unamused at his self-propelled ramblings, Amy wrenched the useless mobile phone out of his hand and quickly dialed Rory... when no answer came, she started calling out at the top of her lungs. “Rory! Rory! Rory!!”

“The Box?” the dark haired TARDIS woman tilted her head, but her face remained impassive.

“It's gone,” the Doctor kept staring at the space where the TARDIS left.

“Eaten?” she blinked as if that hadn't really entered her mind as an option but it was one of the only ones present.

“No, it left. Not eaten, hi-jacked.” He looked to the TARDIS woman, “But why?”

Amy continued to dial frantically, the annoying beep-beep-beep rarely heard from her, as Rose called it, ‘super phone’ was growing more annoying and shorter as her intervals between redialing became shorter and more panicked.

“It’s okay, Amy, he'll be okay,” The Doctor tried to calm Amy. Hopefully. Maybe.

Amy just looked at him, slightly irritated and slightly trusting, but still dialing as the disconnect sound echoed from the speakers, “How do you know?”

“No safer place than with Rose on the TARDIS.” Again, hopefully, maybe. But that seemed the pseudo-placate Amy, she still wore worry on her face, but the amount that was there seemed to lessen. At least until it was distracted by the hobbling set of accomplices, shambling into the shelter of a crashed near by spaceship. The Doctor found his feet following them quickly, Amy following and the woman not far off from her.

“It's time for us both to go, and keep together.” Auntie directed Uncle to sit in a random pile of tech set up to look like seating.

“Whoa, whoa, whoa. Go?” the Doctor was confused and angry, “What do you mean, go? Where are you going?”

“Well, we're dying, my love.” Auntie explained as she sat on a disused lawn chair, looking infinitely
more comfortable than uncle’s ech perch, “Time for Auntie and Uncle to pop off.”

Uncle shook his head in minor disagreement, “I'm against it.”

Auntie pulled her jumper blanket closer as if where ever she were going was going to be cold and nestled in a lawn chair. “It's your fault, isn't it, sweets? Because you told House it was the last TARDIS. House can't feed on 'em if there's none more coming, can he?

The old man waved his hand in the air uselessly, as if trying to illustrate his words, “So now he's off to your universe to find more TARDISES.”

“It won’t.” the Doctor answered simply.

“Oh, it'll think of something.” Auntie said clearly. Suddenly she slumped over, eyes closed.

Uncle stood, his face placid, “Actually, I feel fine.” His legs didn't hold his body long before his entire body dropped like a lifeless weight.

“No you’re not dead,” the Doctor stared at their unmoving bodies as he quickly pulled the sonic from his pocket and scanned them. They were, indeed, dead. His jaw nearly fell off, “But you can't just die.” He uselessly yelled at the corpses, utterly flabbergasted.

“Petal without the flower.” The woman seemed to sigh at the bodies before turning and walking briskly, “We need to go to where I landed, Doctor, quickly.”

“Why?” the Doctor asked, though following without hesitation, Amy at his elbow.

She spoke without looking back towards him, “Because we are there in three minutes. We need to go now.” The woman stopped suddenly and looked surprised. She gave an odd look to the now closer Doctor as she held her side. “Ow. Roughly how long do these bodies last?”

Doctor scanned her with screwdriver and looked aghast at the readings it provided, “You're dying.”

The TARDIS-woman looked at him like he was very stupid, “Yes, of course I'm dying. I don't belong in a body. I could blow the casing in no time. Last time it was all travelling and trees and boxes and Daleks. I didn’t keep track of the time. I didn’t see allowing it to happen again.”

“Travelling and trees and boxes and Daleks?” Asked Amy cluelessly, echoing the sentiment in his own head with a certain anger over lost details he hadn't had much less imparted. …Except the Dalek bit, he very much knew the Dalek bit. Travelling and trees and boxes? And dying TARDIS. He couldn’t keep the worry from overcoming his face.

The TARDIS-woman took note of his worried face and pointed her finger, at him, eerily reminiscent of Rose in the moment, “No, stop it. Stop being emotional and think. Think first, emotions later.”

Amy’s eyes narrowed a little. “You're the Doctor. Focus.”

“On what? How?” The Doctor grew frustrated, shaking his arms, “I'm a madman with a box, without a box. I'm stuck down the plughole at the end of the universe on a stupid old junkyard.” He looked around, his eyes grew large and he was suddenly less frustrated at the thought, tension releasing from his muscles, “Ooo.”

Amy went to ask but the woman mimicked his face and beat her to it, “Ooo what?”

“I'm not!” The Doctor said happily.
“Not what?” Amy asked, flustered and hitting redial with the mobile by her ear.

“Because it’s not a junkyard. Don’t you see? It’s not a junkyard!” He almost hopped with joy at the thought.

“Looks like a junkyard. Smells like a junk yard.” Amy wrinkled her face at the smell.

“It’s a TARDIS junkyard. Come on!” the Doctor took a few exuberant steps before suddenly stopping and turning back to face the TARDIS woman behind him, “Oh sorry. Do you have a name?”

The woman lifted her arms exhaustedly, “Seven hundred years, finally he asks.”

Amy looked at the Doctor, “How would she even have a name?”

The woman replied without even taking a breath between, “Anything can get a name if you name it.”

The Doctor didn’t skip a beat, “But what do I call you?”

“I think you call me…” the woman obviously had to think about it as a small, saucy smile grew on her face, “…Sexy.”

The Doctor’s eyes widened and widened further when he spied Amy’s growing grin, he quickly walked closer to the woman and hushed her with his own quiet words, “Only when we’re alone.”

“Oh,” the woman blinked as she was accepting that without lowering her volume as he had, “Then I’m Home.”

Rose felt the humming beneath her feet. She couldn’t usually feel movement of the TARDIS, this time she could, “We’re in flight.” She took a deep breath to stave off the minor panic she felt building. If she could feel the TARDIS moving then likely whatever that green glow was didn’t know all of the Old Girl’s systems yet. “Ok, ‘bad’ column: Green gas, locked doors, no controls, no Doctor…” Rose backed into Rory and kept going, herding him further away from the ominous green glow. She looked at him quickly, “Got anythin' for the ‘good’ column?”

“Oh. There’s two of us?” Rory shrugged nervously, allowing himself to be ushered, “And we’re in the TARDIS?”

“You’re not wrong. I mean, you are in the TARDIS,” a loud voice bellowed from all around them. The same voice that escaped Auntie and Uncle’s throats. “What a great adventure. I should have done this half a million years ago. Corridors. I have corridors. So much to learn about my new home. So, Rory, Rose why shouldn’t I just kill you now?”

Because you're amused by the fact that you have corridors so likely don’t have any clue how quite yet?
Because between the two people here we’re patient and not entirely stupid and really quite old for
Because you're still not nearly as scary as you think you are? Rose's smart mouth seemed to stay shut despite the several quick answers on her tongue, Rory spoke quickly, saving any one of those smarmy, probably death-provoking answers from possibly escaping.

“—Because killing us quickly wouldn't be any fun.” Rory shrugged at the ceiling as he grasped at an answer. Rose's jaw dropped a little but egged him on to continue, “And you need fun, don't you? That's what Uncle and Auntie were for, wasn't it? Someone to make suffer. You need to be entertained, and killing us quickly wouldn't be entertainment.”

Rose wasn’t sure if her potential goading or his suggestion of their use as playthings was better, but at least Rory's answer bought them time.

“So entertain me,” the echoing voice of house sounded amused already, “Run.”

They started running the length of the corridor, Rose making sure to keep pace with Rory. His legs may have been much longer, but she dared think that she had had a few decades of more practice running towards and away from things than he did.

“Sorry,” Rory exhaled as they ran, “It was the only answer I could think of.”

“Better than mine, I couldn’t think of anythin' not,” She scrunched her nose a little as they continued quickly, “pokin’ the bear.”

“Don’t like being away from the Doctor much, do you?” Rory’s voice carried the tiniest bit of mocking surrounded by his normal exasperation as they ran. Rose couldn’t help but smirk.

“I think I quite like Snarky Rory.” Rose grabbed his hand and tugged him down a branch of the corridor, remembering the dead end ahead and dreading to think what was awaiting them there.

It took the Doctor less than a second to recognize he was looking down the exhaust ports of a very large ship, maybe a type 600. All around him were bits of TARDISes. All the working parts with chameleon circuits intact when they perished made for an odd amalgamation of pieces, random bits of flotsam that had floated through the rift mingled with the half-eaten multi-generational pieces of various TARDISes that littered the landscape. Honestly if he hadn’t relegated the sight to just yard at first glance he should have taken in the sight to know. The potential was thoroughly exciting.

“A valley of half eaten TARDISes. Are you thinking what I'm thinking?” he turned his happy gaze to the TARDIS woman, watching her expression not changed as she looked into the landscape.

“I'm thinking that most of my sisters are dead. That they were devoured, and that we are looking at
their corpses.” She said plainly.

The Doctor blanched a bit, no less excited at his prospect but a bit apologetic about his verbal misstep. “Ah. Sorry. No, I wasn't thinking that.”

“No, you were thinking you could build a working TARDIS console out of broken remnants of a hundred different models. And you don't care that it's impossible.” The woman said, seeming unaffected by his previous statements.

“It's not impossible as long as we're alive. Rose and Rory need me,” the Doctor quickly responded. And when the House finds out what Rose is she might be a jammy, toasty snack. “So yeah, we're going to build a TARDIS.”

The Doctor quickly looked at different sets, seeing what was still largely together, what had the most necessary components versus what of the components were going to be the most readily fixable. Well, fixable to the bare minimum. Amy tried to assist, but hurriedly huffed when unable to help as quickly as he’d entertain and dismiss an idea, so Amy wandered closer to the woman. The TARDIS woman simply strolled a few feet off, poking a few things as she leisurely walked by them.

“So you’re the TARDIS.” Amy spoke, obviously talking to her while still looking back at the quickly working Doctor as he lifted things that probably looked far too heavy or far too big to be lifted.

“You doubt.” That could have been a statement, it could have been a question, it simply seemed less likely that the TARDIS of all beings would ask that question. The Doctor slid under his amalgamation of a console.

“No.” Amy denied.

“Yes.” The woman said, either correcting Amy’s possible lie of an answer or simply answering for herself, likely both.

“But the TARDIS isn’t a person.” Amy reasoned. The Doctor almost argued but as his hands and the forefront of his mind were otherwise occupied he simply listened.

“All fleshy and limited? No.” the TARDIS shook her head before she quickly tilted it, “Well, sort of, but no. Just now. …And then. Temporary.”

“And you did it before. With Rose. Are you why she says she's old?”

“I helped. She’d likely not have past the century mark without me.” The Doctor almost shushed the TARDIS on Rose’s behalf, but two things intervened in his head. One, that Rose was an invariably open person and the TARDIS likely knew her head better than he, and two, he was about to shush the TARDIS. A talking TARDIS. And he was about to shush it. Likely needlessly.

“Rose is over 100?” Amy’s jaw almost dropped. Apparently ish didn’t cover quite as much as he’d thought it had in an explanation of her.

“Surprised?”

“No,” Amy almost laughed, “I just like knowing something that Rose doesn’t.”

“She doesn’t know that much, well, she doesn’t know she knows. Just lived through. You have the vortex nestled in your head for hundred and twenty seven years and don’t learn anything.” Her head tweaked suddenly to the side, “Actually, don’t, apparently it’s very painful.”
The last part sent Amy’s eyes wide and apparently she got introspective, because she was quiet. Amy was rarely quiet.

‘My head. ‘s killin’ me.’ ‘I think you need a Doctor.’

The memory made him jerk suddenly and The Doctor hit his head on the make-shift controls. He groaned quietly and rubbed hid forehead where it hit, getting back to work as soon as he found the slight pain ignorable, “Can you two talk about something else?” He supposed it did make him work a little faster. Amy seemed to look at him closely.

“He doesn’t know what he’s doing.” The TARDIS woman picked up a bit of tech off the ground and threw it further away, her eyes now scanning the nearby areas quickly.

“I know what I’m doing.” The Doctor loudly protested as he stood back up.

“No you don’t.” the TARDIS woman corrected him without taking her eyes off tech. “Bond the tube directly into the Tachyon Diverter.”

“I have actually rebuilt a TARDIS before, you know. I know what I’m doing.” He went directly to bonding the tube. Because he was going to anyway, definitely not because it was a more direct idea than the fairly circuitous route he—fleetingly—was thinking of using.

“You took me apart and put me back together when we were grounded, that doesn’t count because you’ve spent the last few hundred years un-doing what you did,” she seemed to say directly to a new piece of technology she lifted up, throwing it closer to the Doctor’s position only a few meters away.

“He was grounded?” the idea elated Amy, her face lit up for the first time that day, likely due to the potential teasing fodder that she had accrued for later.

“We were grounded,” she corrected, “For years.”

The Doctor grunted, half to actually shush the talking TARDIS and partially due to the heft involved in struggling to attach ill-fitting pieces together to work. It snapped together and he quickly picked up the recently thrown piece and realized its usefulness.

“You're like a nine year old trying to rebuild a motorbike in his bedroom. It’s so much easier to talk to her. She listens! And you never read the instructions,” The TARDIS drawled. Amy puffed up gathering that she had been the ‘she’ in question, but the Doctor somehow doubted it and redirected his view to re-wiring.

The Doctor attached a wire while arguing, “I always read the instructions.” The irony of this very thing not being in the instructions, or explicitly out of the instructions, technically listed as ‘do not’ was not lost on him.

Amy snorted, “Didn’t you say you threw the manual, a book of instructions, into a supernova?”

“I read it first,” was his only retort.

“And then disagreed with it.” Amy smarmed.

“That’s fine, I have more,” The TARDIS woman said as she waved a hand dismissively.

The Doctor made a face, he wasn’t sure it were surprise or disgust, both were battling for dominance is his mind, much less on his face, “No you don’t.”
“I’ve instructions everywhere. There’s a sign on my front door. You have been walking past it for seven hundred years. What does it say?”

The Doctor scoffed, “That’s not instructions.”

“There’s an instruction at the bottom. What does it say?” she tossed a large hunk of metal gently to roll nearer to him and his creation.

“Pull to open.” The answer was quick on his lips, he had spent 700 years walking past it as she said.

“Yes. And what do you do?”

“I push.” He responded matter-of-factly.

“Every single time,” the TARDIS dropped her arms in exasperation, “Seven hundred years. Police Box doors open out the way.”

“I think I have earned the right to open my front doors any way I want.”

“Your front doors?” She declared, clearly affronted, “Have you any idea how childish that sounds?”

The Doctor grumbled as he picked up one of the thrown bits of tech to attach to his amalgamation of a console, “You are not my mother.”

The TARDIS shot back. “And you are not my child.” They were arguing incredibly fast, like two people easily used to conversation but, obviously they weren’t.

“You know, since we’re talking with mouths, not really an opportunity that comes along very often, I just want to say, you know, you have never been very reliable.” It came out accusingly, but it felt a bit easier to say given that she couldn’t currently hide his biscuits.

She almost laughed at him, “And you have?”

“You didn’t always take me where I wanted to go,” The Doctor accused, his finger wagging as he said it.

The TARDIS didn’t even skip a beat, “No, but I always took you where you needed to go.”

The Doctor smiled at the answer, it was true.

“But not when.” Amy crossed her arms, being every bit as petulant as he’d expect in this moment. She gripped the mobile in one of her hands, a quick glimpse of it made him realize Amy was still sporadically calling Rory’s mobile. “I remember a little girl falling asleep outside waiting for a Doctor and a police box.”

“And how long would that little girl have stayed?” the woman didn’t need an answer to the question as she quickly followed it up, “I don’t condone kidnapping anymore.”

The Doctor nodded along following Amy’s school of thought, “Then what about Rose? She missed a year, her mother was pretty sure I did kidnap her.”

“I said anymore. And without that year you’d have never spent time with the loud one, that would have alienated Petal, I’d be out a sister, you’d be out a half and then where would we be?” The dark-haired woman huffed as she looked in his direction, “You’d be mangled and I’d be left on a street corner. Honestly for someone so smart you need an awful lot explained to you.”
He smiled. “True.” Well, not the explaining part—he was brilliant—but both the not potentially kidnapping a child and a relationship with Jackie, such as it was, were important factors he hadn’t fully considered. “Look at us talking. Wouldn’t it be amazing if we could always talk, even when you’re stuck inside the box?”

“I don’t need to,” the TARDIS huffed, “I exist across all space and time, you talk and run around and bring home strays.”

“I’m not a stray,” Amy popped into the conversation, finally sticking her mobile back into her pocket.

“You like one of those strays,” the Doctor argued.

“That it not a stray” the TARDIS pointed a finger at him as she walked, suddenly stumbling, her knees buckling beneath her.

The Doctor swooped in quickly and caught her before she hit the ground. “You okay?”

She seemed to puzzle over her own condition, “One of the kidneys has already failed. It doesn’t matter. We need to finish assembling the console.”

“Using a console without a proper shell.” The Doctor mumbled, “It’s not going to be safe.”

She looked up at him, “This body has about eighteen minutes left to live. The universe we’re in will reach Absolute Zero in three hours. Safe is relative.”

Far’s relative. It would seem Rose was more TARDIS that he realized. Or the TARDIS was more Rose. Both were incredibly stubborn, could be either.

“Then we need to get a move on. Eh, old girl?”

The corridors seemed endless. Maybe they were endless. Rose had never thought to really ask, she’d have to make a mental note to do so if her all her energies weren’t spent running around the endless labyrinth that the TARDIS interior had turned out to be.

Winding one way or the other, forking off, and they all looked alike. Rose and Rory had run into
quite a few dead ends at this point, but turned around and kept going, afraid to lose pace.

Even with all her training – being with the Doctor, that stint at Torchwood, more Doctor, and even more Doctor – Rose eventually began feeling strain in her muscles and noticed Rory slowing slightly. He was inevitably tired, too, but they had to keep going. Rose extended her hand and Rory reached out and held it. The team-up gave them each a renewed vigor as they seemed to fall into pace.

“So are we having fun yet? I’m rather enjoying the sensation of having you running around inside me.” Rose immediately thought of calling House out on being a great big pervert, but again, smart mouth and dire circumstances prompted her to not do that.

“You know this place,” Rory started, looking to the side at Rose as they ran.

“No, I know the rooms.” Rose said on a breath, tugging him yet another direction to go up what seemed like a little hill of a hallway as she let go of his hand for the upward trudge, “Even then, some of the rooms. She tends to move things about when I need ‘em.”

“I can move things around?” House bellowed through the walls like the ominous voice of a terrible god. “Spectacular. I think I’ll try that next.”

“Lovely,” Rose muttered sarcastically.

Rory had gained about a foot on Rose, and a wall quickly slid between them, separating the two.

“Rory!” she stopped and shouted, but heard nothing in return. She grumbled and looked back, only way to go was right back where she’d been or through the door on her left. The House said to run. Rose quickly opened the door to her left and entered the room, the door closing behind her though she hadn’t done it.

Bedroom? A room that had a bed, anyway. There was a black jacket and a bat, thought little in the way of personal effects. The room smelled of chemicals, few small burns on the rug like someone had been playing with them. How Old Girl must have hated that. There’s a story the Old Girl would tell her.

Will. Will tell her when she's back and this bloody sadist leaves her home. Doctor will fix it and she’ll be safe and Old Girl will be back and tell her all about allowing someone to play with chemicals willy-nilly.

Rose reached for a knob, if her own room was any indication, it’d have been to the attached bathroom, but it was another bedroom. The House was playing with rooms. The door closed behind her again.

He heard her, then, the House. She'd said, “He’s not worried we’ll find his bedroom.” House had heard her. He couldn’t glean anything from her mind, she was too locked up for that to happen, the Doctor locked it himself. Her husband had deemed it “an anti-Cassandra measure” when she’d pressed, but seemed to be useful now. No House in her head, only vocal clues for him to go on when thinking on how to design his personalized tortures. Thankfully. Lots to torture her with here if he could read her mind. Separating her from Rory would have done part of the job from his view. “There’s two of us” Rory’d said. She huffed.

Rose idly thought maybe could pretend like something innocuous was torturous, seemed the best route to go. Maybe she’d be scared of tea. No, that was too easy to twist, if she’d learned anything from the carnivorous muffins outing forever ago and so far away.
Keep moving, then. No curiosity, no wonder, just running.

The pool. River’s evening gown and a few towels still tossed haphazardly after her quick dive. Rose tried not to look at them too hard, lest he get any ideas and start the taunting there. Still, not running on slippery tile near a mass of wet seemed like a good idea in rubber soles. Rubber soles with little traction. She walked quickly and carefully to a door situated where it shouldn't have been, other side of the room.

Clock room. All different times, some going to twenty-six or four instead of twelve. Chiming. *Headache.* He’d gotten a clue there. The chiming began to ring her ears and make her wince. The gongs sounded, birds tweeted and cawed. She held her ears on instinct, the sound causing her knees to buckle and her head to throb. Rose turned back to the nearest door she’d come through, leaving with haste, not even trying to run through that ticking, gonging bloody minefield.

The quiet enveloped her and she took a deep breath. Not the room she’d just left, but another bedroom. *Her* bedroom. Maybe he’d seen the photos on her vanity and put two and two together.

Slowly, things began to disappear. Okay, he was done with the chiming, bonging torture but onto a different one as the make up on her vanity disappeared one by one. Rug, pillows, shoes. She grabbed a few of the photos off the vanity before they could go. An odd shot on the fire escape with messy blonde hair and a grump in leather that her mother’d gotten when they’d visited and a image of them at Christmas with her mum and a bit of Mickey’s finger in the shot. The chair to her left disappeared and that was enough impetus for her to leave again, she couldn’t watch or let herself be visually bothered as she was… erased… from the TARDIS.

Try not to look like anything he does gets to you, Tyler.

The door disappeared behind her and she almost sobbed.

Well, she was a horrid liar, but she clutched her photos in hand and steeled herself, slipping them into her back trouser pocket.

She quickly made it to the next door and opened it, she didn’t even look around to see where she was before she opened the door.

Hallway.

Rory came running through it. He was obviously shaken but returned her surprise and minor glee at seeing him again.

“It's messing with our heads,” Rory said looking around quickly. Rose nodded. She didn’t realize how ragged she must have looked until Rory put his hand on her shoulder and she stopped shaking. She was *shaking.* Rubbish liar. Rose took a deep breath. “Come on. Run.”
Amy had fully checked in again, her mobile phone staying in her pocket for a solid five minutes now, the longest since the TARDIS had left with her husband on board. She held what the Doctor told her to, where he told her to, and even responded to assorted requests with sass. Amy wasn’t fully Amy without Rory, but she was back and with her help it was almost complete.

“You’ll need to install the time rotor.” The TARDIS said flippantly.

The Doctor was going to do that anyway but he supposed now was finally a good time as he lifted the nearby large glass tube and inserted it into the center.

“How is this going to make it through the rift? How?” The Doctor was mostly taking to himself but he felt the clueless stare of Amy’s response and the general eye-roll that was the TARDIS, she was reminding him more and more of Rose as they day and his panic wore on, “We're almost done. Thrust diffuser? Er, retroscope. Blue thingy.”

Amy handed him the ‘blue thingy’ quickly as he took it and started attaching it with the sonic screwdriver.

“Do you ever wonder why I chose you all those years ago?” came the TARDIS’s voice from a few meters over. He passed a quick glance her way as she stood with her back to him and examined what looked like a wire hanger.

“I chose you.” The Doctor turned his attention back to his tinkering. “You were unlocked.”

“Of course I was. I wanted to see the universe, so I stole a Time Lord and I ran away. And you were the only one mad enough. Far too Time-Lordy for a few hundred years. The puppies have been a good influence on you.” The Doctor stared at the woman for a moment. Well, he supposed his companions were often young and eager.

“I am not a puppy.”

“No one said you were.” That made him turn his head and look at her again. No time to try and attempt to figure a translation for that one, there was no time. Rose and Rory and House and dying TARDIS. He strained to not follow Amy and the TARDIS’s conversation visually.

Amy’s voice grew impatient. “Aren’t we ever just people?”

“Oh, that is funny.” The woman mused, “was funny? Will be funny.”

The Doctor took Amy by the sides of her arms and directed her to move to the center, between the female TARDIS and himself, away from the edge and ropes used to hold to un-walled side together. There were belts hanging from the raggedy wall and he quickly scooted them on over her arms and she continued to strap herself in. “Is this safer?”

“Maybe. If it makes you feel safer. Right. Okay, let's go. Follow that TARDIS.” He flipped a few switches and braced himself, Amy following his lead and shutting her eyes tight as she held onto the straps around her chest.

…and nothing happened. A few seconds of silence passed before the Doctor looked around to console he built, “Oh no, come on. There's rift energy everywhere. You can do it.” He quickly threw a switch, “Okay, diverting all power to thrust. Let's be having you.” And another.

Proceeded by a loud banging and some inexplicably high sparking. “No, no, no, no.”

“What's wrong?” Amy blinked, secure against the wall in her straps.

“It can't hold the charge. It can't even start. There's no power. I've got nothing.”

“Oh, my beautiful idiot,” the woman's words flew directly into his ears as she looked at him amusedly, “You have what you've always had. You've got me.” The woman kissed her finger, and her eyes rimmed with gold in a manner exacting to Rose’s, golden tendrils of energy transferred to her fingers and into the console as she touched it.

The makeshift console dematerialized, wind of the vortex started wooshing around the less-than enclosed structure.

“We've locked on to them. They'll have to lower the shields when I'm close enough to phase inside.” The woman shouted to the Doctor.

“How're they going to be able to take down the shields anyway? The House is in the control room.”

“Then I'll direct them to one of the old control rooms.” She answered like it was a foregone conclusion.

“There are old control rooms?” Amy questioned, inevitably immediately regretting opening her mouth as she then picked her hairs from adhering to the moisture there.

The Doctor peered at the obviously crazy TARDIS, “There aren't any old control rooms! They were all deleted or remodeled.”

“I archive them, for neatness.” The TARDIS said quite matter-of-factly, “I've got about thirty now.”

“But I've only changed the desktop, what, a dozen times?”

She nodded once as she readjusted her grip on the console, “So far, yes.”

“You can't archive something that hasn't happened yet!”
The TARDIS scoffed, “You can't.”

“Can you get to Rose?”

“When can't I?” she smiled widely and took a mere moment of looking blank before her face almost transformed into complete comfort. “Hello, Petal!” the TARDIS woman spoke out loud, likely to Rose but anything was possible.

“What is she doing?” Amy turned to him on her left as the TARDIS seemingly spoke to nothing at her right, wind zooming her red hair to almost thousands of tiny weapons against her face.

“Talking to Rose.” He replied quickly, a touch louder than strictly necessary to compensate for the vortex around them.

“She can do that?” Amy's eyes widened momentarily, re-squinting quickly to avoid eye whipping by her hair.

“They’re very close.”

“You have to go to the old control room,” she said shortly, “I'm putting the route in your head. When you get there use the purple slider on the nearest panel to lower the shields.”

She giggled. The TARDIS giggled. He’d heard that before, but this sound was new. And awkward. Somehow comforting and familiar, conjuring images of the rotor and quickly fading and brightening lights and Rose’s smirk or smile at the ceiling. The effect wasn't as clear on Amy’s face, it likely just sounded like a laugh to her.

“You'll have about twelve seconds before the room goes into phase with the invading Matrix. I'll send you the pass key when you get there. Love you.” The TARDIS woman very nearly blew a kiss on the air for all the sweetness she injected into her final words. Her eyes focused and she looked back toward the Doctor and Amy. “See? That was easy.”

“Yes yes, telepathic contact between you and Rose is near constant, I know.” The Doctor almost rolled his eyes, squinting as the wind from the vortex continually blasted his face.

“Not that.”

He stopped and flailed a little, making heated eye contact with the woman unabashedly “Oh, I’m the TARDIS I know everything—” he mocked.

“Yes I do.” She cut him off from his secondary mocking with a smile.

Amy's smirk was enough of a comment.

“Oh, shut up.”
Now that Rory and Rose were together again, they were attached. The general consensus between the two was that they’d be much harder to emotionally manipulate when there were two of them. *Buddy system. Better with two.*

“Hello, *Petal.*” A voice sounded in Rose’s head, almost echoing. It sounded jovial. Rose suddenly stopped pulling Rory to an immediate halt.

“Mad… lady?” Rose blinked, speaking out loud on instinct. Rory looked around them as Rose looked intently at nothing.

“You have to go to the old control room. I’m putting the route in your head. When you get there use the purple slider on the nearest panel to lower the shields.”

“How are you in my head?” Rose looked around not seeing anyone but Rory in her vicinity, “Not alotta people can do that.”

The mad lady giggled. Sounded familiar, Rose squinted as she tried to place it.

Rory blinked as Rose seemed to pause he speaking to nothing, “Who are you talking to?”

“The mad lady—” Rose pointed to her temple. “She’s in my head.”

“The one who kissed you?” Rory questioned.

“You’ll have about twelve seconds before the room goes into phase with the invading Matrix. I'll send you the pass key when you get there. Love you.” Rose's heart flittered a bit, despite the very odd fact that she wasn't fully confident that she knew who the woman was. She blinked as the voice disappeared.

“Alright…” she couldn't hear anything more, it felt just… like the voice was turned off with a switch. She looked to Rory as she set off in a direction they’d already been, “’Kay, we’ve got ta go.”

Rory hesitated, “We’re just trusting a mad woman in your head?”

“We’d be doin’ that anyway. B’sides, ‘s better than sittin’ within translator ball distance.” She quickly re-grabbed his hand and tugged him to run.

Rory looked back as they ran, “Nephew’s still coming.”

“I know.” Rose said as she pulled Rory down a fork in the corridor to the left.

“So where are we going?” Rory asked as they were forced to stop by the corridor dead-ending. No doors to speak of within eyeshot, Rose blew a breath to steady herself.

“Here.” Rose looked a bit perturbed at the solid wall, looking around for a switch, an opening panel, anything, before frustrated blowing another puff of air from her mouth. “This is where she told me to
“A wall?” Rory just blinked at the wall as even Rose had stopped searching it.

“Let’s hope not.” Rose muttered, “She said she’d send me the pass key.”


Rose repeated her words aloud for Rory, “Crimson, Eleven, Delight, Petrichor.”

“Petrichor?” Rory blinked, suddenly struggling to remember, “What’s petricor?”

“Petrichor. She told you what it meant…” Rose scrunched her face before she fully remembered, “she said you'd ask what it is later! The smell of wet dust, remember? It’s the meaning…”

“The meaning of what?”

“The TARDIS interface is telepathic, reads lots things like your intentions an’ stuff when you wanna go somewhere or somethin’…” Rose explained quickly, “So you don’t say it, you think it.”

Rory froze, looking over her shoulder as she puzzled. “It's coming,” Rose turned to see what he was staring at, down the hall, small and determinedly marching towards them was the Ood. She turned back to Rory quickly.

“Kay, crimson, eleven, delight, petrichor, so we think of the meanings.” Something troubled her as she bit her lip again, “Better double down. You, too. Ready?” Rory grabbed her hand determinedly as they both stared at the wall. Rose tightened her eyes shut and repeated it again.

“Crimson—” She thought of The Doctor's red shoes in his blue pinstriped suit. “—Eleven—” The Doctor twirling in a top hat and tux getting ready for the wedding. “—Delight—” The Doctor remembering how to dance in the console room and trying to swing dance with her around the console. “—Petrichor.” the perpetual smell of the greenhouse by the mansion.

With one or both of their thoughts on the passcode, the wall slid open, dragging wall on to another part of the wall like a hidden door. They each opened their eyes and ran through the opening, Rose stopping fast a few feet in.

Corals. And blue lights. Grungy by comparison. Her heart felt like it stopped at the sight. Lighting change. Everything.

“What is this place?” Rory looked around, “Another control room?”

“An old one,” Rose shook herself and looked around, looking for the purple thing, “Our old one.”

“It changes?” Rory's eyebrows went up as he scrunched his nose a bit, “What’s that smell?”

Rose didn’t even have to take a deep breath as she looked around, “Leather an’ tea.” She almost teared up, but huffed quickly without delay, “Shields. Look for a purple slide-y thing.”

“Right. Shields.”

“How did you find this place? It's not on my internal schematics. I had hoped you could join Nephew as my servants. But you are nothing but trouble. Nephew, kill them.”
Rory found the purple smooth panel. He quickly put his hand on it and slid it aside to flip a switch as the Ood advanced.

The other woman’s voice came through at the very moment the switch was flipped. “We're coming through. Get out of the way or you'll be atomized.”

“Where are you coming through?” Rose appeared to ask the air.

“I don't know.” The voice said quite confidently.

Rose couldn’t control the sarcasm as she looked around with wide eyes, “Yeah, that’s helpful, thanks” She quickly grabbed Rory and shoved his lanky form behind her, acting as a barrier between him and the Ood to Rory’s eternal confusion.

They each held their breath as Nephew inched closer to them, she’d seen an Ood walk quickly, almost to a run, but House obviously enjoyed the torturously slow pace nephew seemed to be set on. Rose took a deep breath. Her own thoughts from before reminded her; She hadn’t died, it didn’t mean she couldn’t. She closed her eyes.

A crashing sound opened Rose’s eyes involuntarily as the room filled with smoke billowing from a central point. She took a few steps toward the smoking heap, faces of the Doctor, the mad woman and even a cross Amy appearing through the smoke, releasing and elating the panic from her.

“Rory!” Amy pulled at her straps until she actually pulled a bit of their make-shift TARDIS off and ran to join Rory, still adorned with straps and a bit of tech.

The Doctor held the hand of the TARDIS woman and lead her off of the ruins of their make-shift console. “Not good. Not good at all.” She looked at the group of people before her, “How do you walk around in these things?”

“We're not quite there yet. Just hold on.” The Doctor turned to see Rose’s questioning glance pointed straight at their joined hands between them. Her eyes were barely holding several, likely sweary, pointed questions at bay, “This is, well, she's the TARDIS. Except she's a woman. She's a woman, and she's the TARDIS.”

Rose’s eyebrow rose a bit as she asked for a bit if clarification while simply repeating him, “...She's the TARDIS?”

“And she’s a woman,” he got a little more excited explaining it, though he found himself unable to elaborate further, “She's a woman and she's the TARDIS.”

Rose didn’t even blink to comprehend it, accepting as she was of his odd explanations, that one simply settled in her mind perfectly, “You have a type.”

“No like that,” the Doctor vehemently denied.

“It’s exactly like that.” Amy added, seemingly attached to her husband through a half-hug.

The woman straightened her gotten a bit and looked directly at Rose. “Hello. I’m… Sexy.”

Rose stared into the other woman’s eyes. Gold ringed around the dark haired woman’s irises gently and she winked at Rose. In no time at all Rose had thrown herself on to the other woman in a swift and tight embrace. “There you are!” Rose whispered happily into the hug.

“The environment has been breached.” Hearing the voice seemingly pulled Rose and the woman
apart but she stood with one arm still around the woman, providing balance as the TARDIS woman leaned slightly against her. Everyone looked to the ceiling, “Nephew, kill them all.” The smooth voice commanded. Rose looked to where it was, but didn’t see the Ood.

“Where’s Nephew?” Rory asked, looking around as well. Rose felt the tingle of fingers twirling her hair. “He was standing right where you materialized.”

“Ah. Well,” the Doctor grimaced a little, “he must have been redistributed.” Rose instinctively scrunched her nose at that.

“Meaning …?” Amy turned to Rose, apparently she had already grown accustomed to Rose translating for the Doctor.

Rose scrunched her nose and looked no one in particular, “…We’re breathin’ him.”

“Oh, come on.” Amy protested the fact, covering her nose.

“Doctor,” House boomed, sounding almost amused, “I did not expect you.”

“Well, that’s me all over, isn’t it? Lovely, old, unexpected me.” The Doctor said to the ceiling, gesturing and posturing as he spoke. Rose breathed a relieved breath at his antics. Antic-y Doctor was a Doctor with a plan. Doctor with a plan, more often than not, meant that plan would be replaced by the back up plan before they’d wing it and win. Rose didn’t realize how much easier it got to breathe until that.

House’s loud voice boomed from the ceiling in response, “The big question is, now you’re here, how to dispose of you? I could play with gravity…” as he spoke, the hard floor seemed to crush into them “… Or I could evacuate the air from this room and watch you choke.” And then it was indescribably hard to breathe.

“You,” the Doctor managed to choke out, “really want to do that.”

While everyone struggled to regain themselves, the TARDIS woman’s body didn’t move. Rose managed to scoot over to nearby TARDIS woman, taking several deep breaths. Her lungs burned as she breathed but nonetheless lifting the woman’s head in her lap.

“Why shouldn’t I just kill you now?”

“Because then I won’t be able to help you. Listen to your engines. Just listen to them. You don’t have the thrust and you know it. Right now I’m your only hope for getting out of your little bubble, through the rift, and into my universe.” The Doctor passed a glance to the distraught Rose before looking back to the ceiling, “And mine’s the one with the food in.” Time was running low.

Rory came over and met Rose’s worried eyes with his own as he held the woman’s wrist and checked her pulse.

“You just have to promise not to kill us,” the Doctor smiled toward the ceiling, “That's all, just promise.”

“You can't be serious.” Amy asked the Doctor, astonished. Rory touched the woman’s forehead. Rose looked almost pleadingly to him, Rory lifted his eyes to meet hers and shook his head.

“I’m very serious,” the Doctor said hurriedly and loud enough for it to have been fully projected to House, “I’m sure it's an entity of its word.”
“Hey. Hang in there, old girl,” Rose said softly as she stroked the TARDIS’s hair gently, “Not long now. It'll be over soon.”

The TARDIS smiled weakly, “I always liked it when you call me old girl.”

“I’ll make sure he does that a lot.” Rose replied with a tear in her eye.

“He’s not the only one who can say it.”

“Then I’ll call you Old Girl a lot, too, yeah?” Rose assured.

She smiled a bit brighter in her weakened state, “I wasn't talking about that.”

“You want me to give my word? Easy. I promise.” House bellowed as heart felt as a moldy orange.

“Fine. Okay. I trust you.” The Doctor quickly did calculations, twiddling his fingers as he often did when doing them in his head, “Just delete, oh er, thirty percent of the TARDIS rooms, you'll free up thrust enough to make it through. Activate subroutine Sigma nine.”

“Why would you tell me this?”

“Because we want to get back to our universe as badly as you do,” The Doctor's face took on a bit of a nervous air, “And I'm nice.”

“Yes. I can delete rooms. And I can also rid myself of vermin if I delete this room first. Thank you, Doctor. Very helpful. Goodbye, Time Lord. Goodbye, little humans. Goodbye, Idris.” Amy and Rory huddled, Rose tensed around the TARDIS's body, taking a deep breath and closing her eyes as he deleted the room.

Then the five of them seemed to open their eyes at the same time, out of the old corals and blues into the shiny, orangy main console room that they knew and loved.

The Doctor smiled almost ominously and immediately walked around his console in his console room. “Yes. I mean, you could do that, but it just won't work. Hardwired fail safe. Living things from rooms that are deleted are automatically deposited in the main control room. But thanks for the lift.”

“We are in your universe now, Doctor. Why should it matter to me in which room you die? I can kill you just as easily here as anywhere. Fear me. I've killed hundreds of Time Lords.”

“Fear me,” the Doctor nearly growled, “I've killed all of them.”

“Later, you’ll need to know later. Shortbread” the woman spoke quietly, she seemed pained as she said it. “Shortbread biscuits.” Maybe they were like tea to the TARDIS woman? Healing from regeneration sickness or rejuvenating in some way? Rose immediately looked toward the galley, trying to figure out how she could get there as fast as possible before the TARDIS spoke up again.

“The only water in the forest is the river. Then you'll know. The only water in the forest is the river.”

“I don't understand. There isn't a forest in here.” Rory explained to the TARDIS.

“She’s delirious. Hang on, old girl. He'll figure somethin’ out.” Rose stroked the woman’s hair once more before she stopped moving.

“Yeah, you're right. You've completely won. Oh, you can kill us in oodles of really inventive ways. And the TARDIS Matrix herself, a living consciousness you ripped out of this very control room and
locked up into a human body. And look at her.”

“Doctor, she's stopped breathing.” Rory announced sadly.

His hearts filled with sorrow and relief at the same time, his voice receiving in the righteous anger he was concealing, “You unwillingly forced the TARDIS into a body so she'd burn out safely a very long way away from this control room. A body can't hold the whole TARDIS Matrix and live.” The Doctor pointed to the TARDIS woman but didn’t dare look back as his resolve would fade, “Just look at her body, House.”

“And you think I should mourn her?”

“No. I think you should be very, very careful about what you let back into this control room.” The Doctor shouted as the woman’s body convulsed on Rose’s lap, growing golden tendrils of every coming out of her mouth. Her body dissolved into golden energy, which flowed into the console then out again and through the TARDIS. “You took her from her home. But now she's back in the box again, and she's free.”

“No. Doctor, stop this. Argh! Stop this now.”

“Now she's back,” The Doctor triumphantly said.

A familiar sound went to Rose's ears and a tear very nearly fell from her eye at the joy of it. “and she's home.”

“Make her stop!”

“That's your problem.” The Doctor nearly growled, that Vesuvius so close to the surface it was scary. Right, in this moment, but still a bit frightening. “Size of a planet, but inside you are just so small.” The house echoed with another pained gurgle and the Doctor nearly sneered in triumph. “Finish him off, girl.”

The green glow completely dissipated with a pained scream, the normal lighting dominated the room, though a bit darker than normal, the Doctor’s posture relaxed as she turned towards his friends.

“Every one alright?” he looked quickly to Amy who nodded before he looked at the visibly shaken Rory and the slightly teary Rose. He took a few quick steps to Rose’s side and helped her up. She buried her face in his jacket.

Golden smoke gathered on the stairwell, congealing into a shape. A beautiful, eerily reminiscent space of the TARDIS is human form, glowing serenely the golden color, tendrils in her translucent wake. Rose saw it out of the corner of her eye and turned her head, prompting the Doctor to as well. His jaw nearly dropped.

“Doctor, are you there?” the TARDIS woman said. She couldn’t appear to see, well, the TARDIS didn’t really have eyes necessarily so that made sense. He walked a little closer to the stairs, Rose’s hand in his.

“I'm here.” He said, walking a bit closer to the stairs with Rose beside him.

The translucent woman looked at him kindly, her head tilted and a softer expression on her face than she had had since he’d known her, “I've been looking for a word. A big, complicated word, but so sad. I've found it now.”

“What word?”
“Alive.” She smiled, “I'm alive.”

The Doctor shook his head slightly, “Alive isn't sad.”

“It's sad when it's over.” She corrected him.

“Please, we don’t want you to go.” The Doctor didn’t feel like he was saying anything Rose wouldn’t say herself, her agreement felt in his hearts and the way she clung to his arm.

“Oh, you daft thing,” the image smiled brightly, “You hold my heart. I’m not going anywhere.” The Doctor’s hand tightened around Rose’s, “I'll always be here, but this is when we talked, and now even that has come to an end. There's something I didn't get to say to you.”

“Goodbye?” it sounded almost like a plea as it escaped his lips.

“No,” the TARDIS nearly laughed with a teary face, “I just wanted to say hello. Hello, Doctor. It's so very, very nice to meet you.”

She smiled a teary smile, making quick eye contact with Rose for a moment before she nodded slowly and dematerialized.

Rose gently stroked the floor with her feet dangling through the opening below by the Doctor as he worked, quietly fusing different wires with his sonic and holding various things in his mouth between quiet muttering if not having enough arms.

“How's it going under there?” Rory asked as Amy and he descended the stairs, looking at the Doctor through the glass floor.

“Just putting a firewall around the Matrix. Almost done. He batted Rose’s dangling trainers slightly as he reached for another wire. Rory immediately looked to Rose for translation.

“So she won’t be popped out again without her consent.” Rose explained quietly, automatically converting Doctor-speak to plain English for their friends.

“Are you going to make her talk again?” Amy smirked.

“No.” the Doctor said simply as he reattached a wire.

“Why not?”
“Spacey-wacey, isn't it?” Amy couldn’t cold back the sarcastic tiny that colored her voice.

“Well, actually, it's because the Time Lords discovered that if you take an eleventh dimensional matrix and fold it into a mechanical then...” He stopped paying the whole amount of attention that he’d dedicated to the wiring and it sparked at him, “Yes, it's spacey-wacey.”

“Sorry. At the end, she was talking. She kept repeating something.” Rory puzzled, looking to the Doctor for answers, “I don't know what it meant.”

“What did she say?” the Doctor wondered aloud.

Rose looked down the hole by her feet to his upturned face, “Something about biscuits an' ‘The only water in the forest is the river.’”

“She said we'd need to know that someday. It doesn't make sense, does it?”

“Not yet.” The Doctor shook his head, filing it away as he saw the despondent look on Rory’s face, “You okay?”

“No. I watched her die. I shouldn't let it get to me, but it still does. I'm a nurse.”

“You’re a good person.” Rose assured from her seated position as she looked at Rory, “Nurse is just add-on.”

“Letting it get to you. You know what that's called? Being alive. Best thing there is. Being alive right now, that's all that counts.” His eyes scanned over his friends faces as he returned to his work. Amy oddly content, Rory slowly returning to normal and Rose looking tired as ever. “Nearly finished. Few more minutes, then we're off. The Eye of Orion's restful, if you like restful.”

“Lets go somewhere runnin' isn’t fully on the table.” Rose smirked at Rory who was nodding vigorously in agreement before she looked up at the time rotor, “Eye of Orion? What do you think, old girl? Where to this time?”

“Look at you pair,” Amy snorted, eyeing the way Rose touched the ship tenderly and the Doctor attended to its needs, “Three way relationship.” Rose and the Doctor both felt slightly flushed at that, though Rose noted the Doctor's pinking cheeks were likely a few shades lighter than her own.

“The House deleted all the bedrooms. I should probably make you two a new bedroom. You'd like that, wouldn't you?”

“Think she already did.” Rose looked adoringly up at the ceiling.

Amy smirked, “This time did we lose the bunk beds permanently?”

Rose glanced at the pouty-faced Doctor amusedly before she looked back at Amy. “Think so.”

The Doctor waved dismissively, “Out those stairs, keep walking till you find it. Off you pop.”

“We'll go wash up. Still time for more adventure. Rose. Doctor.” Rory actually took time to single her out, patting Rose on the shoulder as he passed. Amy urged him on while she slowed, stopping near the seated blond. Rose suppressed the need to be sarcastic for a moment.

“Full disclosure, I held your husband’s hand a lot.” Rose sighed, preparing for a whirlwind of red hair and long limbs given what it took to get her riled up today.

“It happens,” Amy shrugged.
That answer clearly surprised Rose, she did nothing to keep the surprise of her face, “Was expectin’ at least a growl or an eye-roll. You done bein’ grouchy?” the Doctor was a little surprised at the fact that Rose had noticed, in as much as she hadn’t reacted, but pretended to pay full attention to what he was doing.

“For now, Gran.” Amy started off in the direction of her husband, but stopped. Her stubborn streak was showing, Rose readied herself for the belated onslaught that might come “Why didn’t you tell me?”

Rose froze, she suddenly found it hard to maintain eye contact with her friend and she found herself looking at the stairs behind her, “…Tell you what?”

Amy looked at her oddly, clearly a bit miffed, “That you were a host to the TARDIS like that woman.” Rose unfroze, relaxing that it wasn’t amongst the things she couldn’t quite get to yet.

“Not quite like that woman,” Rose corrected, “I only had parta her an’ he pulled it outta me in time, no dying.” She but her lip as she looked at a calmer Amy, honestly she was just curious and likely fed up with not knowing. “It’s hard to explain unless ya have somethin’ to draw from, an’ you get mad every time someone even thinks the word complicated.”

“Perspective.” Amy smirked as she nodded pensively and pat Rose’s shoulder before she followed her husband to their new room.

“Giant balla hormones, that one.” Rose smiled as Amy completely disappeared into the corridor. “There’ll be more questions,” Rose sighed and looked down the hole to try and glimpse the still-working Doctor, “Need to talk to you bout how much I should answer.”

“What do you mean?” the Doctor looked to her momentarily and back. He was still working, as he soniced a few wires as punctuation.

“Lotsa questions bout me need some explaining bout you to answer, dunno what she knows,” she lifted her head up and smirked a little to herself as she looked at the console, “An I know how you love to be a mystery.”

“She’s asked me about you, too.” The Doctor said from below. “I didn’t know how much you want to reveal. I told her the basics.” He shrugged as he worked, “Ish.”

“I’m not one for secrets unlike you.” Rose teased.

“Case by case basis. We’ll tell her,” as soon as we unravel everything ourselves. He walked up the stairs and sat beside her, letting his feet also dangle through the hole. “I’ve finished, she’s safe again. You okay?”

“Yes, no.” She looked at him and smiled a little, “but you’re here now, so, getting better.” Rose laid her head on his shoulder. They went quiet for the moment, Rose let the double rhythm of his hearts sooth her almost as much as the gentle hum of the TARDIS before she let out a contented breath and decided to ask. “Am I really illegal?”

“Illegal? No, not really,” the Doctor shook his head, “Unknown, a bit forbidden.”

Rose lifted her head suddenly, “I’m forbidden?”

“Ish.” The Doctor shrugged slightly.

Half of Rose’s mouth tweaked to slight smile for a second “Bit… tantalizing, that. Forbidden.”
“Don’t I know it.” The Doctor smiled, tightening his arm around her a bit, squeezing her to him. She put her head back on his shoulder. He looked at the time rotor, “Are you there? Can you hear me? Okay. The Eye of Orion, or wherever we need to go.”

The levers moved on their own.

*Genetic preparation* the TARDIS had said. He met Jackie Tyler and a small section of her relations. Nothing remarkable there except the sheer amount of eye makeup she could sport in one afternoon, which, to be fair, was likely an unearthly ability. But Pete Tyler, maybe? Those were here genetic origins, Jacqueline Andrea Suzette Prentice and Peter Alan Tyler. That called for a quick trip in the TARDIS after this. Well. After… lots of things.

She grunted slightly in her sleep, readjusting on his shoulder and distracting him from that line of thought.

Always the right words. As long as he’d known her. Even before. Before the Bad Wolf, when he was all leather and grump, she’d still always said just the right thing. She’d say something or ask just the right question and he’d tick onto something accordingly. He’d even said the fact to Martha. ‘*Rose’d know. A friend of mine, Rose. Right now, she’d say exactly the right thing.*’ Martha lamented the fact that he’d brought her up, and it was likely just compounded by his missing Rose and her sudden departure, but even then he’d known it.

*She doesn’t know she knows,* apparently.

Now he’d have more reason to remember everything she said. Not that he did so without having concrete reason. That would be insane. She talked so much. Not now. *Now* she was silent. Now she was asleep, head on his shoulder. It was likely a long day, series of days, really, for her. *Or not her.* Which he didn't want to think about. Hallucination Rose or not-Rose, *this* Rose was very Rose.

That small, sweet sigh returned before she yawned and nuzzled the skin on his shoulder. It was like she instinctively knew when he was about to be maudlin. Well, the skinny one was prone to that, she’d have learned, though the same presentation shouldn't have leaked from one incarnation to the other. She just knew.

“It’s really peaceful here.” She said, not quite mumbling and not quite awake but not asleep.

“Eye of Orion. Calmest place in the universe.” The Doctor surveyed the landscape. They were sitting on a red blanket on a grassy hill, great temperature, calm day. Amy and Rory in sight as the walked around a few of the lush trees. Rory seemed quite content, but Amy already showed the signs of growing bored.

Rose’s head lifted from his shoulder, the warmth and weight of her head immediately missed.

“Every time you say that, I get goose flesh all over. Made of it. Places rarely stay calm ‘round you.” Rose teased before she seemed to whisper cheekily, “not that being away is any plan I ever intend ta have.”
He brushed a stand of hair from her face. What is it she said when he asked her?

_He’d held her hand and looked at the beasts flying in the sky, “How long are you going to stay with me?”_

_She shook her head and smirked, as if the answer had been obvious. “Forever.”_

She always said the right thing.

Chapter End Notes

Special thanks to mltr fry for the poke in new direction! If you haven’t read her stuff yet, go do that, she’s very good!

The next few episodes are extra finicky, but I’ve gotten a little jump on it and hopefully I’ll have a bit out in a week, but there’s no telling.

Thanks for reading!
Rose, Amy and Rory started packing up their make-shift picnic as the sun started setting on the Eye of Orion.

The Doctor looked over at the TARDIS, only a few meters away at the top of the grassy hill they were on. “I’ll get the old girl ready, she may need a bit of warm up given what she’s just been through.”

“We'll pack up here. Meetcha inside in a few.” Rose nodded, stacking plates on to one another. The Doctor went into the TARDIS.

“How did we not make more trips?” Rory said, looking at the several sets of plates and bottles and blanket with the small picnic basket they had brought out.

“Basket's bigger on the inside.” Rose answered as the pile of dishes she gathered seemed to disappear into the interior of the basket. “Most stuff he has is.”

Rory nodded, “We should write that down somewhere. 'Everything he owns is bigger on the inside.'”

“He thinks it’s impressive. You get used to it,” Rose said as she brushed crumbs off the blanket, “His pockets are horrid when you’re without the TARDIS an' have to do laundry.”

Rory paused at Rose's words and blinked in thought, “You never think of things like laundry on the TARDIS.”

Rose didn’t look up as she continued to put things away, “'Cause she does it for him. Cleans whatever he’s not wearing so he doesn’t have to think on it. Which is good, ’cause he doesn't think bout it even if he has to.”

“Think we can get that for our house?” Amy's eyebrows went up as she joked, “I'd like to skip laundry, too.”

“Oh, like you ever do the washing.” Rory teased.

Rose smiled at the exchange, “I’m pretty sure the TARDIS only does his, anyway. Can’t say how often I went home with washin’ for my mum. Loud squeals of joy to see us, loud groans when there was a huge sack of washin’.”

“Ah,” Amy nodded. Rose raised an eyebrow and Amy continued, “The TARDIS said ‘the loud one,’ That must’ve been who she meant.”

“The TARDIS said that?” Rose smiled and looked briefly to the blue box a few feet away.

The Doctor's head popped out of the TARDIS doors, “Rory, can you come here a moment?” he shouted slightly. Rory took his leave with a nod from Amy and headed out as they tended to the last bits of their clean up.

Rose chuckled a bit to herself, simply repeated it once fondly, “the loud one.”
Amy looked Rose up and down, “The TARDIS said a lot of things.”

“She does that. Well, sorta does that.” Rose put the last big goblet into the basket and stood.

“You had the TARDIS in you,” Amy sounded quite flabbergasted at the idea, “You've lived with us for months and we didn’t know.”

“Doesn’t exactly fit into conversation,” Rose picked up the blanket that lay on the ground.

Amy took part of it, the two shaking any debris off. “But you had the TARDIS in you.”

“Part, yeah, and it changed my life.” Rose shrugged as they started folding the blanket, “but I could say that ‘bout half the days I spent with him. Couldda died. Shouldda died, really.” She looked blankly at the horizon as she folded it smaller, sighing and looking back at Amy as she finished, “but then I’d have to say that ‘bout half the days with him, too.”

“How about just tell me the big things?” Amy said with a hand on her hip.

Rose’s lips tightened together in thought as she looked at Amy and sighed, deciding what to say, “Perspective again, yeah? My wedding? Way bigger than ‘one day I looked at a light’. When we figured out I’m not aging? Really, really bad day, that, but it was big. There’re lots of big things, Amy.”

Amy was only slightly swayed from her attitude, “Not like that.”

“Exactly like that.” Rose threw the half folded blanket over her arm, “Days alive are big. Almost died, get up, do it again. Almost shot by a Dalek, almost killed by zombies, face stolen by a telly, trapped in a ship pulled into a black hole, almost squished by House. Still get up an' go out, knowin’ that could happen again, or worse.” Amy’s face softened. “I dunno ‘bout your history, but I do know you thought you were pregnant an' still went on a dangerous, three month trek through America. Thought you were pregnant an’ you didn’t stop. It’s mad an’ beautiful an’ dangerous an’ we know it an’ keep doing it anyway. Every day’s a big thing. Big, mad thing. Big things in big days no matter how little your life is. Kinda beautiful.”

Amy smirked, something glinting in her eyes like understanding and acceptance, “Wisdom of the aged?”

“Ha!” Rose let out a bark of laughter, causing Amy's smile to grow, “Yeah. His.” Rose tilted her head toward the TARDIS, “he’s said it enough, but you don’t realize how right he is til you’re old.” She suddenly cringed, “…don’t tell him I said he’s right. His ego’s big enough.”

“We should write that down.” Amy bent down and picked up the basket, it surprisingly light considering all the things they had just put into it.

“Sounds like we’re writing a guide book for navigating the Doctor.”

Amy started listing as she slowly set off toward the TARDIS, “Chapter two, Don’t compliment him too much. Four, everything he owns may be bigger on the inside. Chapter nine, the TARDIS does his laundry.”

“And every page's footnote, Always save him from himself,” Rose said quietly, smirking a little through her seriousness.

Amy agreed quickly, seeming to understand both the seriousness and the smirking as she laid an arm around her shorter friend’s shoulders, “And always save him from himself.”
They acted like Rose and acted like Amy, but there was little by way of certainty. Next stop, he’d have to find out more. He need to know more, more first hand knowledge and exposure to what made up the not Rose and not Amy. If they were the same as his Rose and his Amy, and they certainly felt like it, they’d still need this.

He looked over the monitor again and realized what he had to do. He switched the view to the outer cameras, watching his three friends tidy from dinner on the hill as the light dimmed. Amy had questions in her eyes. Well, not Amy, but maybe Amy.

He popped his head out the TARDIS doors toward them. “Rory, can you come here a moment?” He popped back in and waited silently for a few moments.

Rory came in in under a minute and looked at the Doctor while the doors swung shut behind him, “What do you need?”

The Doctor didn’t bother coming up with a lie to cover it, “You in here.”

Rory’s face went blank, but he walked further inside resignedly “So many things the TARDIS can do and we’re using it to hide from them?”

“That’s question face.” Rory looked at the sides of the monitor, “They’re talking. Does this thing have sound?”

“Of course it has sound,” he said incredulously, slightly pushing Rory out of the way to turn up the sound. …it didn’t work. Diagnostics… an irritated grumble escaped his throat. “Nothing’s wrong with it,” the Doctor looked at the time rotor briefly, “Keeping Rose’s privacy again?” The lights dimmed and brightened. “Stubborn women. Eternally ganged up on by stubborn women.”

“This is a dangerous game we’re playing.” Rory muttered from beside him, watching Amy stay still, listening with rapt and expectant attention while Rose instigated a two person fold.

“No, it’ll be alright.” The Doctor half-heartedly dismissed, only half believing it himself as he kept his eyes stuck on the screen. Neither had taken their eyes off the image, barely bothering to blink,
waiting for a possible turn.

“Vinegar and baking soda. Grammar school volcano.”

“I would think this is more like fish fingers and custard.” The Doctor’s eyes left the screen for the first time as he smiled to himself, “Mmm, fish fingers and custard.”

Rory turned to the Doctor briefly, “You realize that’s a very acquired taste.”

The Doctor pointed to the screen, “So are they.”

“She’s lecturing,” Rory looked like he was about to witness a train wreck as he announced what they both very clearly saw on the monitor, “Oh god, it looks like Rose is lecturing. And here I thought you talked a lot. Oh, Amy’s closing in.”

“…it’s a hug. They’re hugging. Well, a sort of hug.” The Doctor clapped his hand on Rory’s back as they turned to each other gleefully, “See? No one died.”

Rory let out a sigh of relief, “Big day.”

“Oi, boys, show’s over!” Amy was suddenly glaring at them, Rose looked amused with her arms crossed as they looked through the open doors of the TARDIS. “Come on, husband. Bed.” Rose took the basket from Amy to take it down stairs as they nodded their goodnight happily, Amy grabbing Rory and heading directly off.

“Anything I should know?” the Doctor said curiously as he approached Rose.

Rose sat on the hammock, taking a deep breath as soon as he joined her, slipping an arm around her back as they tried to rebalance. She laid her head on his shoulder like she had just a bit ago, yawning slightly before she spoke. “She didn’t ask anything. I just told her what she needed to hear, I think.”

The Doctor kissed the top of Rose's head. “You do that.”

She mentioned her headache to him. It shattered his hearts, but he didn’t let it show. A quick scan of the sonic calmed her, “Best to check, yeah?”—but revealed nothing he did know. Nothing was wrong with her—this her. But he couldn’t say that. “Just a Time Echo. It'll go away soon enough.”
Rose fell asleep on the hammock. *His* hammock. He was with her initially, but a little sleep for her wouldn’t go amiss while he did what needed to be done up at the console. It was past when Amy and Rory were awake, music played and darts were employed, friendly teasing banter between various Ponds started out quiet but didn’t exactly stay there.

“What wrong with her?” Rory’s voice popped into his ear. The Doctor frowned and turned off the monitor hurriedly. “Is she sick?”

“What?” The Doctor blurted. Hopefully Rory didn’t glimpse what he was looking at before the monitor switched off. The Doctor’s eye quickly followed Rory’s pointing hand to the sleeping Rose on the nearby hammock. “Oh. Rose can sleep through almost anything. Except the c or t words. Then she wakes up.”

“…the c and t words?” Amy’s hand went to her hip, speaking at normal volume over the music even with the sleeping Rose nearby.

“She dislikes naughty words that much?” Rory looked puzzled.

“Naughty words? Oh. No.” The Doctor supposed that wouldn’t have been within the boundaries of the Rose they knew, the Rose that used the word 'bloody' like punctuation when she was angry. “Not those. Um…” he lowered his voice to a near-whisper, “Chips or Tea”

Rory and Amy looked at each other, “I could go for some chips.” Amy shrugged.

Rose stirred slightly. It was probably coincidence, he was embellishing. At least he thought he was embellishing. Amy and Rory chuckled, causing her to stir a bit more. Amy tossed the nubby pencil they had been using to keep score at the barely stirring Rose, causing her to blink until fully awake.

“Oi,” Rose groaned. Same Rose mannerisms, pre-tea grump of the awake Rose making itself known. Though, he supposed, tea wasn’t direly necessary after a nap than after a full sleep for the woman. Maybe the headache. He didn't want to think about what that could mean. “Someone didn’t put my room back,” Rose yawned and stretched her arms out as she lie back, “Take it where I can get it, yeah?”

“Your room’s not back?” Amy puzzled as she looked the the bedroom corridor and back at Rose, “Why not?”

Rose sat up, stretching her back a little, “She won’t say.”

“Ah. The girlfriend's mad at you so you’re sleeping on the sofa.” Amy sing-songed to Rose. Rose narrowed her eyes and stuck her tongue out slightly at Amy, obviously just teasing each other.

…Of course her room’s not back. Little hints from an easily confusing sentient machine with a bond to the blonde in question. The Doctor looked to the ceiling briefly. He wanted to tell the TARDIS to stop hinting. This was going to be hard enough without her knowing, her knowing would just enter another set of completely unknown variables that could be worse.

Rose growled a yawn, still trying to hold a mocking face at Amy. She sleepily closed her mouth as she looked at him and brightened.

He could tell them. One last trip and he’d have all the information he needed. Then he would tell
both of them. *Maybe.* The Doctor clapped, coming to a conclusion, “Who wants fish and chips?”

A loud noise permeated the room as the warning horn blared. The TARDIS didn't let the warning sink in for more than a second before shaking wildly, throwing Amy, Rory, and the Doctor to the floor. Rose managed to stay on the hammock as it rocked violently. As soon as a moment of calm hit she slid off it and ran up to the console, using whatever hand rails were near to aid her movement as she helped the Doctor up off the floor.

“Solar tsunami.” The Doctor looked frantically at the automatically on monitor, “Came directly from your sun. A tidal wave of radiation. Big, big, *big.*”

“Oh Doctor, my tummy's going funny.” Rory announced with a scrunched face of discomfort.

“Well, the gyrator disconnected,” the Doctor explained as he looked at the monitor and pulled a lever, “Target tracking is out. Assume the position!” the Doctor shouted. Rose looked around immediately to Amy and Rory, who had balled with their heads between their knees. Crash position. She'd never gotten that specific warning before, any incidental crashes were more fun than they were damaging, usually. Before she could move, the Doctor pulled Rose into him, pressing their bodies together as he braced both his arms on the railing on either side of her protectively. Her face crammed in the space between his neck and shoulder, that sweet smell invaded her again entirely. The Doctor could feel the two, heightened breaths and the near frozen expanded ribcage of hers pressed against his in anticipation.

…and they landed serenely.

“Textbook landing.” He announced, sounds of Amy and Rory standing as he didn’t move for a moment. Rose’s eyes widened and locked on his while he smiled.

“Just wanted a cuddle?” Rose quickly said in a flustered but flirtatious way, still settled against him though his tight grip of the rail had loosened. “Couldda just asked.”

“That'd take the fun out of it.” The Doctor teased back. He quickly grabbed Rose's arm and tugged her out the TARDIS doors, Amy and Rory hastily following behind them.

Greens and old buildings, scant trees, parked in a field by a half wall of ruins or really old, untended stone fencing. The air smelled fresh, if a tinge… different. Sulfuric, maybe.

The Doctor let go of Rose’s hand as he pointed at a weathervane attached to a large brick building down the hill they’d landed on. “Behold, a cockerel! Love a cockerel.”

“Looks a bit like a goose.” Rory squinted his eyes at it.

“Cockrel-y goose? Goose-y Cockrel?” Amy squinted at it.

“An’ underneath the… *goosey-cockerel,*” Rose asked, “a... building?” she looked at the Doctor for an answer. She hadn’t looked at the monitor when they landed, she was too wrapped up in the closeness and shiny green eyes with sugary smell to think of it.

“Monastery,” the Doctor answered, “Thirteenth century.”

Amy stopped at the doorway before she stepped out of the TARDIS, “Oh, we've gone all medieval.”

“I'm not sure about that.” Rory looked like he was concentrating.

“Really?” Amy looked at Rory, “Medieval expert are you?”
“No,” Rory paused, pointing to his ear, “It's just that I can hear Dusty Springfield.”

Rose’s face scrunched as she stared off into the distance, trying to listen to a melody she could barely hear, “You Don't Have To Say You Love Me?” Her face relaxed slowly as she seemed to mouth lyrics along with the quiet melody.

Rose started to sway to the song she could barely hear. He noted a few disturbingly on-point lyrics as they were mouthed by the blondes along with the music, Rory and Rose glancing between each other and seemingly laughing at their shared knowledge. ...With a red-head smirking rolling her eyes at her husband and friend for even knowing it that well. Amy walked a little ahead of them as if to distance herself from the embarrassing duo.

“My mum's a massive fan of Dusty Springfield,” Rory said as the song was near it's end.

“My mate, Mickey, used to sing this whenever we’d take his car justta annoy me. Roll the window down, top of his lungs. He was not a singer.” She smiled a bit to herself. “Should probably go visit Mickey at some point. After...” Rose drew the Doctor’s eyes to her as she spoke directly to him and wagged her eyebrows toward the monastery.

The Doctor didn't respond to that as started moving at a leisurely pace toward the building, “He married Martha, did I tell you that?”

“No!” Rose’s mouth fell open in excited shock, “Good on 'im! She was a looker, and smart. Way too good to fancy you.” She bumped his side with hers, “See why you started travellin’ with a couple, less chance of that.”

Amy blushed as she heard that and walked a little faster to get out of Rose’s view. “Let’s go to the monastery, yeah? See what’s up.”

“Right,” the Doctor’s speed picked up, too, “Let's go. Satisfy our rabid curiosity.” Rose noticed the slight tinge to Amy’s cheeks and the rapid change of subject with a slight smile as she passed a quick glance to Rory, also avoiding eye contact with less of an embarrassed look on his face but still avoidant.

Rose’s eyes widened and the smile grew on her face as she stepped up to keep pace with everyone as they headed toward the monastery. “Oh that's not suspect.”

“These fissures are new.” The Doctor stopped and squat, looking at what looked like a tear in the ground, “Solar tsunami sent out a huge wave of gamma particles. This is caused by a magnetic quake that occurs just before the wave hits.”

“Doctor, look.” Rory pointed to the ground.

The Doctor stood and walked toward the hole in the ground where Rory pointed. The tear in the earth went through a few feet, exposing a piper with clear, red print of the words, 'Danger Corrosive' labelled on it. Corrosive. The word made him pull the sonic out of his pocket and point it to the pipe, running it quickly. “It's a supply pipe. Ceramic inner lining. Something corrosive. They're pumping something nasty off this island to the mainland.”

Less than two minutes of walking and they were nearly at the entrance of the monastery, the Doctor let out a relieved and excited breath. “I think we're here, this is it.”
Rose cottoned on to his mood, but seemed to let it try and let it infect her instead of questioning it, bouncing happily along side him. “This is what?”

The Doctor tried to temper his exuberance, “The place that we’re going.”

“Ow!” Rory suddenly exclaimed, pulling their attention as he removed his fingers from touching the slightly moist outside of the building, holding and shaking them in pain. The Doctor scanned them with the sonic screwdriver.

“Acid. They're pumping acid off this island, that’s the corrosive.” He quickly looked at Rory’s red fingers, seeing minimal damage. “That's old stuff. Fresh acid, you wouldn't have a finger.”

“One of his rules. Don't touch anything.” Rose shook her finger at Rory as he clutched his.

“He's never said that.” Rory shook his fingers quickly, as if the would help the pain.

“Usually only says it right after he repeatedly touches somethin' he’s not supposed to.” Rose took a breath, “or I do.” The Doctor smirked as he started walking through the entryway into the corridor of the main building, the others absently following him while they talked.

“Rule one the Doctor Lies,” Amy chirped.

The Doctor cringed momentarily but shook it off, moving forward into the tunnel of an entrance. He hadn't told Rose that. Part of him was hoping to never tell Rose that. Any Rose. He wasn't about to admit it to a garden on the off chance that the tea roses were listening.

Rose paused her forward movement in shock, “Rule One was Don't Wander Off.”

“It's The Doctor Lies.” Rory replied before seeing her stuttering contemplation with curiosity.

The Doctor wanted to turn to Rose and say that he never lied to her, even if it’d likely catch hell with Amy. He’d betrayed Rose enough with actions to ever do it with words. He lied to others, to himself, to friends, but not to her. Likely not to her. But if she counted omissions as the same as a lie, it would be especially hypocritical now to say that he hadn’t.

Instead, he felt her hand in his hand and noticed she had caught up with him, walking the long entrance hall of the monastery.

He lied and omitted and now she was faced with it, but she held his hand anyway. His hearts warmed at the pure Rose Tyler of it all. He tightened his grip on her hand ever so slightly.

“So why did she get ‘Don't Wander Off' and we got ‘the Doctor Lies'? Amy demanded answers. Rose looked at him and raised her eyebrows, obviously eager to hear the answer as well.

“Because she wanders off and you take everything I say as gospel.” the Doctor answered. Rose rolled her eyes as he said she wandered off. Amy's eyes narrowed stubbornly when mentioned that she took everything as gospel. The Doctor quickly continued speaking as they neared a large room within the structure. “Rules are reflected by the person. Can’t do one rule for different people sometimes, doesn't always work. Learned that the hard way. It would be a waste to tell Rory not to wander off or tell Rose that I lie. She knows I lie and Rory doesn’t wander.” Rose noted his normal excuse of ‘I was a different man' was suspiciously absent. Her first him wasn’t nearly as overtly playful as this one and likely wouldn’t have warned people if he was going to lie in the first place. Maybe regeneration was one of those things Amy wasn’t completely aware of.

Rose looked back at Amy, “We’ll hafta add that to the guide.” She winked.
The Doctor looked between the two of them, trying to understand the knowing smiles. He had no idea what they were talking about. “The guide?”

“The Companion Guide.” Amy clarified as seriously as she could.

Rose grumbled almost silently, “I hate that word.”


“Companion Guide?”

“We keep it in the pear room.” Amy deadpanned to the Doctor.

“The what?” The Doctor looked at his friends, Amy smirking, Rose trying to hide a smile through clamped lips and Rory very nearly grinning …well, grinning for Rory, so his lips were twitching upward. Teasing him again. They were all teasing him again. The Doctor's voice carried as much sarcasm as it could muster, “Oh, ha-ha. There’s no pear room.” Rose looked away innocently and Amy pointedly employed one of his own favorite techniques of avoiding an answer by changing the subject instead of responding.

“So where are these Dusty Springfield-loving monks, then?”

That was simply horrifying. Both the concept of a Pear Room and his friends continually teasing him. As a team, no less. He noted Rose and Amy grinning at each other.

“INTRUDER ALERT. INTRUDER ALERT,” sounded a mechanical voice from around them. Doctor slowed, looking around, “There are people coming. Well, almost.”

“Almost coming?” Amy asked.

“Almost people.” The Doctor amended

They took a few more steps inward, turning into what was looking in at a large alcove or a room, with people lying almost vertically on body-shaped grating near walls. They looked asleep, peacefully so. One was empty, giving them an unblocked view of the metal grating set-up unencumbered by a person.

Rose couldn’t help but look directly at the faces of the people. They didn’t seem pained, except one woman who seemed to have a sneer perpetually plastered on her face, but it wasn’t pained. There was a man with dark hair, skinny man greying light hair, light haired haired man in his twenties or thirties, each with a strange… calm… over them. The Doctor’s view was pulled to the technology behind them more than the people in stasis, the two of them looking intently around them as they walked further into the room, Amy and Rory behind them as they slowed.

Amy was the first to vocalize anything, “What are all these harnesses for?”

Rose let the Doctor’s hand go as she wandered closer to one of the occupied alcoves. The entire group dispersed by curiosity, wondering what they’d just walked in to. The Doctor quickly put the pieces together and looked back at his meandering companions. …And Rose, he corrected himself, oddly gleefully.

Rose was still looking at a seemingly sleeping person, a man, maybe mid twenties, looking close to her age. Her eyes wandered all over him. The Doctor would have been jealous is the usual
flirtatiousness in her gaze hadn’t been replaced with the curious one that he’d also grown to enjoy. She turned around as the group slowly seemed to re-clump in the center away from the mysterious sleeping people. “They don’t seem in pain.”

“What are they? Prisoners? Or are they meditating?” Amy looked around at the people spaced around the room, “or what?”

“Well, at the moment they fall into the or what category.” The Doctor said dismissively.

“HALT AND REMAIN CALM.” Echoed the same booming voice from above.

“Well, we’ve halted.” The Doctor said to no one in particular before he looked back at his milling friends, “How are we all doing on the calm front?”

“Unknown place, unknown people, unknown circumstance,” Rose shrugged, “’bout normal.”

There were hurried footsteps echoing from the far wall before there were suddenly three people running in to look at them with surprise. One of the men was graying, displaying curiosity and doubt, another was all dark hair and irritation. The shorter was a woman—all bangs and pouty face, the only one that didn’t seem to have a double within view laying on one of the people-shaped gratings against the walls. They wore pants and vests over what looked like their own clothes.

“Don't move!” the greying man warned them. Contrary to what they were told, the group took another step closer to one another but made no sudden movements.

The un-doubled brunette looked curious and put out, “Who the hell are you?”

“Well, I'm the Doctor and this is Rose Tyler,” he pointed to each as he introduced them, “Amy and Rory, and it's all very nice, isn't it?”

“Hold up.” Amy paused as she looked between them and a few of the faces of people in the alcoves, “What are you all? Like identical twins?”

Two more people walked in hurriedly. They were wearing what looked like orange rubber space suits. The people in orange uniforms all seemed to look to her for a moment, varying looks appeared for a microscopic instant. One of the men who had just entered seemed to look at her for a moment Rose recognized the man beside her as the one she’d just studied in the alcove and looked back at the seemingly sleeping body. And the woman in charge was exactly like the one she saw with the perpetual sneer, doubtful look quite like the sneer directly on the other.

“This is an Alpha Grade industrial facility. Unless you work for the military or for Morpeth Jetson, you are in big trouble,” said the woman, clearly asserting her in-charge status.

“Actually, you’re in big trouble,” the Doctor reached into his pocket and handed her his leather badge containing the psychic paper.

The woman took it and flipped it open with a scowl. “Meteorological Department? Since when?”

“Since you were hit by a solar wave,” the Doctor simply replied.

“...Which we survived.”

“Just, by the look of it.” The Doctor returned, pointedly looking at some quake damage, “And there’s a bigger one on the way.”
“Which we’ll also survive.” The woman gave the Doctor a skeptical once over before turning that
gaze a touch more skeptically towards Rose and the others. She spoke loudly without looking away,
“Dicken, scan for bugs.”

“Backs against the wall. Now.” A man ordered them while one who looked identical to the one Rose
had just inspected approached them. Rose and the Doctor back up, joined by Amy and Rory as the
man scanned them.

“Alright, you know who we are. Who are you?” Rose kept a vague eye on the people before them,
“I’d rather not refer to ya as the grumpy one, the skinny one, an’ the one with the chin.” Rose said
never bothering to focus her eyes to specify which was which. Each of them looked at each other
trying to figure out which adjective went where. There weren’t even enough adjectives for the
amount of people there were, likely by design.

“Miranda Cleaves, Foreman. Dicken Richards, Herbert Buzzer, Jimmy Wicks, Jennifer Lucas and
you’re on shaky ground, weathermen.” Cleaves said derisively. Rose already had a response on the
tip of her tongue but the Doctor spoke up.

“You’re not wrong. Fissures and all.” He turned around and surveyed the room they were in,
“You’re not a monastery, you’re a factory. Twenty second century army-owned factory.”

“You're army?” Amy asked for clarification.

Cleaves almost rolled her eyes at that, “No, love. We're contractors, and you're trespassers.”

The man, Dicken, finished his scan of Rory before nodding to the foreman, “It's clear, boss.”

“Alright, your ID checks out.” The foreman held the psychic paper out to give it back. The Doctor
took a step forward before the other three, taking back the psychic paper, “If there's another solar
storm, what are you going to do about it? Hand out sunblock?”

The Doctor forced a laugh at her joke to try and lighten the serious and miffed faces that had grown
on Amy and Rose’s faces. “I need to see your critical systems.” The Doctor said seriously as he
tucked the psychic paper back into his inner jacket pocket.

“Which one.” Cleaves asked like it wasn’t a question.

“You know which one.” The Doctor replied smugly.

“This way.” Cleaves turned around and walked, the Doctor following. Rose, Amy and Rory
followed him too, finding the others of her crew taking up the rear, almost as if they were corraling
them.

“Acid factory an' lil magnetic earthquakes. Seems a good combination,” Rose muttered sarcastically
to Amy as they followed.

“Tons of fun.” Rory responded dryly, but the burgeoning enthusiasm on Amy's and Rose’s faces did
wain.

“We’ll be fine.” Dicken said dismissively as he heard them.

“Why?” Rose blinked back at Dicken, “why do you think you’ll be fine?” Dicken simply nodded
toward the room the Doctor had turned in to, Rose turning and following.

“And there you are.” The Doctor walked up to the large tank of milky liquid, bubbling away. Rose's
curiosity took her to follow him and look in, the others hanging back a bit.

“Looks…” Rose peered into the bubbling vat leaning closer to get a better look, Rory and Amy hanging back “…Nestine.”

Rory perked up a bit from behind them, “Like plastic? I was plastic.”

“Still need that story.” Rose mentioned to Rory.

“Not quite Nestine, different thing.” The Doctor shook his head, transfixed by the bubbling tank of opaque liquid.

“Meet the government's worst kept secret. The Flesh. It's fully programmable matter. In fact, it's even learning to replicate itself at the cellular level.” Cleaves only sounded a modicum of impressed, like creating something that advanced was simply no big deal.

“It learns an' grows?” Rose crossed her arms, almost hugging herself. The Doctor looked quickly at Rose, noting her posture and lightly red-rimmed eyes. Her headache hadn’t subsided. She stepped back beside the Doctor and studied the large vat of milky liquid before them.


“Once a reading's been taken, we can manipulate its molecular structure into anything.” Cleaves explained flatly, “Even clothes. And everything's identical. Eyes, voice—”

“Mind, soul,” the Doctor added.

Cleaves rolled her eyes, “Don't be fooled, Doctor. It acts like life but it still needs to be controlled by us, from those harnesses you saw replicate a living organism down to the hairs on its chinny chin chin.”

“Wait, whoa,” Rory held his hands up for a moment, “Hold it. So, you're Flesh now?” Rose turned away from the vat to hear the answer.

“I'm lying in a harness back in that chamber. We all are, except Jennifer here.” The foreman pointed to the brunette before seeing the wide-eyed looks on Amy and Rory’s faces, “Don't be scared. This thing, just like operating a forklift truck.”

“But you just said it's learnin to replicate?” Rose turned to Cleaves to double check the answer. The other woman nodded curtly rather than repeat herself. “A forklift truck that learns an' grows, yeah?” Rose tilted her head to Cleaves like she was trying to lead a child down a thought process, “That’s life. Sounds like a live forklift.”

“A live forklift with your mind in.” Added the Doctor, still watching the bubbling vat.

“Right.” Rose nodded, nudging him with her hand in agreement before resting it back on her upper arm.

“Moss grows. It's no more than that,” Cleaves said definitively, “This acid is so dangerous we were losing a worker every week. So now we mine the acid using these doppelgangers. Or Gangers.”

“If these bodies get burnt or fall in the acid, no one cares, right, Jen?” Buzzer shot an annoyed glance to the little brunette who took on a look a vague sheepishness.

Jennifer picked the explanation nervously, “Nerve endings automatically cut off like airbags being
discharged. We wake up in the harness and get a new Ganger.”

“Nerve endings cut off? So you’re feelin’ while in them?” Rose blinked before looking back at the gurgling liquid. “Feelin’, learnin’, growin’,” she said the next word with slight horror in its use, “forklifts.”

“It's weird, but you get used to it.” Jimmy tried to assuage Rose's horror.

Cleaves turned her passionless voice to one of her own, “Jennifer, I want you in your Ganger. Get back to the harness.”

The little brunette left through the doors, heading back the way they’d just come and the Doctor whipped his sonic screwdriver and ran it over the vat, the whirring of the sonic drawing attention from others.

“Hang on, what's he up to?” Buzzer noted the Doctor scanning and took a few steps forward to confront him, “What you up to, pal?”

Rose eyed him as he seemed to walk closer to the Doctor, more or less putting herself in the space between the two of them to stop Buzzer’s movement towards him. “What’s it matter what he's doin' if its just moss?”

Buzzer stared at Rose imposingly, “Expensive moss.”

“Oh, that’s the distinction.” Rose rolled her eyes, the attempt to stare her down neither subtle nor working, “But all the other words added are just silly.”

Doctor struggled to take the sonic screwdriver from scanning the vat with an odd look, “Strange. It was like for a moment there it was scanning me.” He ran his hand an inch over the surface of the liquid in the vat.

“Doctor,” the boss woman chastised.

The Doctor's hand was pulled to the surface of the Flesh as if by magnet, the liquid congealing between his fingers. He felt the viscous liquid move the tiny air bubbles from his hand to sink into every tiny groove or wrinkle in his hand. His hand tingled and his mind buzzed with a million thoughts at the same time. He tried to gather them, to order them, as if they were his own but he quickly realized that they hadn’t been as he let down his barriers to let the sound in.


His head was still filled with an indistinct buzz, loud and unruly. His sudden lack of facial expression prompted Rose to worry, her hand went to his. The hand that fit so snugly in his squeezed gently, grounding him to realize what he was doing was likely strange and frightening and had gone one just a few seconds too long to blow off the incident. With less strength than it seemed, he yanked his hand back from the bubbling vat. “I understand.”

Amy's voice pulled him out of his reverie, “Doctor? Are you all right?”

“Incredible. You have no idea. No idea. I mean, I felt it in my mind. I reached out to it, and it to me.” Rose took his hand and looked at it, looking for any hurt. It wasn’t even red and didn’t flinch at her touch as she prodded the surface gently before it slid into it’s usual place, fingers entwining.

“Don't fiddle with the money, Doctor.” Cleaves said dismissively. Rose started bristling at this woman’s clear rudeness. The Doctor’s hand squeezed hers and distracted her momentarily from her
anger before he let go.

“How can you be so blinkered? It's alive. So alive. You're piling your lives, your personalities directly into it,” explained the Doctor, almost pleading for her to see reason.

The room flashed light from the windows, drawing attention to it as the earth beneath them shook the very building they stood it and a low rumble followed another flash of light.

The Doctor noted the lack of trepidation on Cleaves face. “It’s the solar storm. The first waves come in pairs. Pre-shock and fore-shock. It's close.”

Cleaves turned very calmly to the man by the comms, “Buzzer, we got anything from the mainland yet?”

“No,” he replied, “the comms are still too jammed with radiation.”

“Okay. Then we'll keep pumping acid until the mainland says stop.” Cleaves announced as she headed toward the exit, her subordinates following behind her and the Doctor’s curiosity pulling him along after.

“How’d you be able to hear ‘em say stop if you can’t hear ‘em at all?” Rose asked after them, not hearing anything but a grumbled response as Cleaves rolled her eyes as she, Buzzer and Jimmy lead the way.

Rose followed the group, but trailed slightly behind as she wrapped her arms around her torso. Something felt… off.

Rory slowed his walk to fall beside Rose as she took up the back. He didn’t even need to say anything. The placid look on his face may only have been different by a micron, but that was heavy for his expressions. He spoke to her without looking at her as they took up the rear. “Hi again, Testy Rose.”

“Sorry,” Rose sighed immediately, “I’ve a headache an' they’re bein’…” Rose actually lowered her voice to not be as confrontational, “remarkably thick.”

“Testy Rose happens when people are thick,” Rory nodded in understanding.

Rose couldn’t help but smile a touch, “Yeah. Likely got that trait from the husband. Smart and impatient, that one. Years of that, bound to rub off.”

“The more you talk about him the more your husband sounds very much like the Doctor.” Rory laughed little to himself.

Rose clamped her lips and simply nodded with a forced, close-lipped smile as she avoided direct eye contact with Rory for a moment, thinking what to say. Something in Rory’s eyes seem to tick on to what hadn’t been said and his expression went from confused to soft in seconds. She likely would have come in with a quip by now. Rose opened her mouth to speak just to stop him from asserting any conclusions out loud, but couldn’t bring herself to say anything and clamped her mouth shut again. Rory took the hint, allowing what wasn’t said to stay not said for now. Rose stuttered, “I just can’t shake the feelin’… ‘s like… something is about to happen.”

“We’re with him.” Rory smirked as they walked, “Things are always about to happen.”

“This is bigger. Like…” she shook her head a bit, “something in the air. Something’s coming.”
“Storm’s approaching.” The Doctor said to Amy.

Him saying that, again, made her stomach drop. Last time he said that, there was a battle, and she was gone. Her stomach flopped again. Rose looked worriedly at Rory before she turned and followed the Doctor as he turned in to a room, Rory right behind.

The Doctor took note of Rose’s irritability. The people here were being quite obtuse and Rose had been exposed to his grumpiness at that for… a bit. He’d have to ask precisely how long that particular exposure was. But something was different. Didn’t have time to mind her emotions today even if he direly wanted to. His window of time was nearing an end and there was an answer he needed before it did. Rose and Amy before Rose and Amy.

Rory, Amy, and Rose seemed to get closer as the months had worn on, save an occasional minor irritation from the redhead about unanswered questions. Even now Rory was looking like he was smoothing some of Rose's rougher edges, while Amy stayed near him, poised to ask questions.

He couldn’t hear much of what was being mumbled behind him, but his mind was set on the slight buzzing feeling the Flesh had presented after his encounter. It was hard to even register that Amy was talking directly to him. His hand still tingled.

“So we’re saving people, yeah? From the solar thing?” Amy questioned.

“Something like that.” It took a few seconds of Amy’s big brown eyes boring into the side of his face as they walked for him to continue. “It’ll be big, what happens here. It’ll be big.”

“How long do we have?”

“I don’t know, not long,” he followed the group of workers into a room. “Storm’s approaching.”

The opaque liquid came out of a tube and filled a small vat the size of a coffin. The liquid stopped flowing, but it seemed to congeal and move, thin red ribbons appeared and settled into place as the reshaped, changing from liquid so some sort of solidish thing, vacu-forming to look like a person. Red ribbons adorned the surface of the Flesh like nerves, the human shape quickly gaining formation from a vat of milk into a half formed, smooth-looking duplicate of Jennifer. Rose, Amy and Rory
found themselves shocked enough to jump back in surprise when Jen suddenly snapped into being from what once was basically an odd metal bathtub full of cream. The fully formed doppelganger brunette opened her eyes and sat up, not even taking the time to look around and orient herself as she hopped out quickly.

“Well, I can see why you keep it in a church.” The Doctor looked on with glee, “Miracle of life.”

“No need to get poncey.” Buzzer nearly rolled his eyes into the back of his head, “It's just gunge.”

“Guys, we need to get to work,” Cleaves announced.

“Did I mention the solar storm?” the Doctor less than casually mentioned, “You need to get out of here.”

Cleaves rolled her eyes again, “Don't be ridiculous. We've got a job to do.”

An alarm started screeching, a loud, intermittent noise emanating from the all around.

Jennifer looked to the walls with worry, “That's the alarm.”

“Put on some sunblock, that'll turn it off,” Rose murmured.

Doctor turned to Cleaves, interrupting her momentary irritated look at Rose's comment. “How do you get power?”

“We're solar,” Cleaves swallowed a little, maintaining a calm demeanor, “We use a solar router. The weathervane.”

“Big problem.”

“Boss, maybe if the storm's back we should get underground. The factory's seen better days. The acid pipes might not withstand another hit.” Jimmy suggested, siding with an air of caution given the blaring alarms and warning tone of the Doctor.

“We have two hundred tons of acid to pump out. We fall behind, we stay another rotation. Anyone want that?” everyone seemed to have a vague look of irritation at that idea.

“Yeah, stayin' seems right,” Rose agreed sarcastically, “try to keep from having to do another rotation an’ if he's right, the acid leaks out, an’ you might die. But you never hafta do another rotation again. Either way.” Jimmy and Dicken looked at each other at her words, though Buzzer seemed more irritated that anything.

Cleaves looked at the Doctor and smirked, “This one's a handful, isn't she?”

“Yes she is,” The Doctor responded immediately, he saw the cheeky but mildly irritated smile through the corner of his eye. “She’s also right. You are making a massive mistake here. You're right at the crossroads of it. Don't turn the wrong way. If you don't prepare for this storm, you are all in terrible danger. Understand?”

“My factory, my rules.” Cleaves retorted.

“We need to check the progress of the storm. Monitoring station?” the Doctor asked.

Jennifer answered quickly, “Three lefts, a right and a left. Third door on your left.”

“Thank you.”
The light from the windows and cracks between the walls was strong and odd, the color of sunset but as strong as it would be on a clear summer day as they walked through the halls to a small room, controls and a rod through the center.

“What exactly is going to happen.” Rory asked from behind. The Doctor circled what looked a bit like the controls of the TARDIS. A rod went up through the ceiling and down through a semicircle of control panels set up around it.

“Whatever it is,” Rose twitched her head toward Rory, “made the TARDIS go a bit wonky. So not a good.”

“Solar storm.” The Doctor explained, “Waves disturbing the Earth's magnetic field. There is going to be the mother and father of all power surges. See this weathervane,” he pointed to the rod going up into the ceiling, “the cock-a-doodle-do? It's a solar router feeding the whole factory with solar power. When that wave hits, ka-boom.”

“Like a bit of lightening and a circuit with no circuit breaker. Overload.” Rose reiterated.

“Exactly,” the Doctor agreed as he headed back to the exit, “I've to get to that cockerel before all hell breaks loose. I never thought I'd have to say that again.” He turned at the exit and looked at his friends, “Rose, stay with Amy and Rory. Amy, breathe.”

The Doctor ran up a spiral staircase and into a tower, nearing the apex of the building so nearing the weathervane in question. It spun wildly, channeling solar power into energy for the factory at lightening speeds.

The Doctor found a relay box labeled danger high voltage, he climbed a ladder to reach it and pried it open before he started pulling relays.

Some things were meant to happen, the power going out and the acid going unchecked was not a necessary portion of this already difficult pending situation.

Solar storm became louder and more violent. His reflexes could only do so much, a loud noise and a shock were all he could register before everything went black.

Chapter End Notes

Really wanted to finish this WHOLE THING since it was taking me so long to update, but I kept feeling like a few things still needed to be fiddled with. So I'm posting it in bits to stop me from -over- fiddling. For better or for worse, I need to be done with this ep.

Hopefully I'll keep on schedule for a bit before I overwhelm myself with "A Good Man Goes To War" ...and probably check into a nut house.
The consistent buzzing in his head seemed to wake him first. His own hearts beat was loud against the silence of everything, the wind picking up through the crevices of the building seemed louder, but the constant murmuring in his head pulled his attention most. He sat up and stood quickly, looking up where the Goosey Cockerel should have been, there was only a pole and some shards. He sighed as he walked around, back to the entrance to re-join the others, the scene around him darkened, at the lack of light from the windows as the sun faded, hearing no hum of machinery from within. This was exactly what he was trying to avoid. “Here we go.”

As he neared the entrance, at the bottom of a shaft of stairs he saw a shocked, familiar face. He quickly tromped down the stairs closer to her. “Cleaves, you’re not in your harness.”

Cleaves looked ashamed, “I'm sorry, Doctor. You were right.”

“You've lost all power to the factory.” The Doctor nodded, looking vacantly at the powered down lighting through the windows.

“I abandoned my team.” Cleaves voice seemed momentarily full of shame, a sadder version than he’d ever heard from her.

“Then let's go get them.” He reassured, grabbing her arm slightly and tugging it in the direction of their people.

The Doctor looked around as they walked, feeling out his time senses and assessing the damage of the building around them as well as the subtle hissing of the acid in the ground beneath them. “How long would you say we were unconscious for, Cleaves?”

“Not long,” Cleaves shook her head, “One minute, two minutes?”

Doctor looked around a little frantically, “I'd hazard we've been out a teensy bit longer.”

“How long?”

“An hour,” the Doctor concluded, “I've seen whole worlds turned inside out in an hour. A lot can go wrong in an hour.”

The pounding in her head woke Rose up first with a moan of irritation and pain. The noise seemed to stir Amy.
“Rory? Rory?” Amy shook his shoulder gently from beside him as she sat up.

“Oh,” Rory groaned as he touched his head, “For want of a better word, ow!”

Rose tried to stand, but her body seemed to be more than content with her sitting. “Well it didn’t make the headache worse.”

“No,” Rory said as he grunted himself up to standing and helped his wife up to do the same, cringing at what appeared to have been his own headache, “it just got some friends.”

Rory offered a hand to help Rose up, too, as Amy dusted off her shirt front and stretched, “Misery loves company.”

“We have to find the others and the Doctor.” Rose looked toward the entranceway, seeing if maybe the Doctor was headed back or he was in the hallway “they’ll have been knocked out, same as us. Bit like a lightning strike an’ it’s like a cellar here, everything’s just a bit wet.”

“I thought you said not wandering off was your first rule?” Rory said.

“He also said to stay with you two, I can’t help it if you wander.” Rose smiled a little, Amy stifled a laugh at the loophole trick she was using.

Rory rolled his eyes and looked to Amy. Amy's face was in total agreement with Rose. Rory was only long-suffering accomplice.

“Alright, compromise, we should go find the Doctor and you’re a nurse, people could be hurt.” Rose and Amy both looked at him with a sort look that made him feel like he was only being given a choice but know he wasn’t. He rolled his eyes and put his hands up in surrender. Amy kissed his cheek and grabbed Rose’s arm, pulling her willing accomplice with a smirk, the three leaving the little room.

The harness room had some noise and shuffling in it, the three headed quickly into it. Jimmy was half off his metal harness already, Jen standing staring off in wide-eyed shock while others seemed to groan with every movement.

Dicken was climbing out of his harness with a wince as he looked at Amy and Rose, automatically moving to help Buzzer and Dicken get down. “You two seem spritely for just being electrocuted.”

“Get used to this kind of stuff when you’re friends with the Doctor,” Rose shrugged as Amy said, “Adrenaline.”

Jimmy was supporting Buzzer as he climbed out of the metal harness. Buzzer looked to Amy beside him and groaned, muttering to Jimmy, “I feel like I been toasted.”
Rory immediately fell into triage, checking people sight and eyes as best he could in the dimly lit room, Buzzer first.

“What the hell happened?” Jimmy looked to the three of them for answers.

“The tsunami happened,” Amy answered, words as full of irritation as Rose's would have been, “You hurt?”

“It feels like the National Grid's run through my bones but apart from that,” Jimmy shrugged, running his hand along the top of his head.

Rose looked around and counted the people. “Still missing Cleaves.”

“We’ll have to check that the meter's not bust. I still want to get paid.” Buzzer grumbled. Rose looked over at him, clearly annoyed.

“Did you hit your head or are you puttin' the weighta your pocket above the well bein' of your friends?” Rose gave him a look, Buzzer said nothing. She watched as slight shame tinged his features and he broke off eye contact. “That’s what I thought. Rory, may wanna check ‘im again.” She begun to walk away from Buzzer with a grumble, “Might have brain damage.”

Rory had heard the whole conversation and looked at Buzzer, properly chastised but not seeming worse for wear. His eyes seemed to land on Jennifer, seeming shocked and sitting on her own a few feet away. “Jennifer! Jennifer. Hey, all right? Puts his hand comfortingly on her shoulder and went in for a gentle, momentary embrace. He pulled away for a moment and looked at her.

“It hurt so much.” The shocked Jen immediately went in for another close hug, catching Rory off guard as she didn’t seem to allow much space between them. Rory clearly didn’t think anything of it more than comfort but Amy, on the other hand, didn’t look entirely pleased by it. Rose briefly watched the display before nudging Amy gently, stealing her attention from the small brunette’s attempts to flirt with her husband.

Rose turned her back to the display, facing Amy, hoping to take her eyes off it as she spoke low, “Give warning before you slap anybody.”

“Hm?” Amy kept looking at them before she finally looked at Rose, “I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“Can’t tell ya how many times I’ve worn that same face.” Rose smirked, “Warn first. You feel less guilty later.”

“I wasn’t going to slap anyone.” Amy said. Rose smirked and gave Amy a doubtful look. “…Probably.” Rose turned around, Looking back at Rory consoling Jennifer. Amy’s face returned to it’s previous unpleasantness.

“He doesn’t even notice, you know.” Rose said quietly. Amy passed a glance back her way. “Rory’s yours. So yours he doesn’t notice. Even if he did notice, he’d be still so yours. You’re the queen of his world. The rest're just people.”

Amy put her hand on Rose’s arm for a moment, grateful for the reaffirmation. “Thanks.” Rose nodded calmly smiling as she stared a quick glance just past Amy towards the empty doorway. “…You and Rory might have something in common.” Amy's voice sounded smarmy.

Rose looked back at Amy and couldn’t contain a small smile in response to the smarmy look on her face. “Oh, shut up.”
The Doctor and Cleaves ran in from the other other entry that Rose had neglected. The Doctor looked around, quickly assessing the people in the room as he couldn’t help but take a few steps closer and receive welcoming and relieved pat from Amy and a small greeting hug from Rose.

“Okay, headcount, have we got everyone?” the Doctor said with an arm still around Rose’s back as he looked around.

“Now we do.” Rory nodded to Cleaves.

“Doctor, these are all real people, so where are their Gangers?” Amy asked.

“Don't worry,” Cleaves answered for him, “When the link shuts down the Gangers return to pure Flesh. Now, the storm's left us with acid leaks all over, so we need to contact the mainland. They can have a rescue shuttle out here in no time.”

The Dusty Springfield song started playing, echoing tones of the same song they’d heard so vaguely when they arrived.

“That's my record,” Jimmy looked at everyone in the room, as if recounting that everyone was there before he looked aghast to Cleaves, “Who's playing my record?”

“...Your Gangers,” The Doctor said, careful with his words, “They've gone walkabout.”

“No, it's impossible,” Cleaves said in easy denial, “They're not active. Cars don't fly themselves, cranes don't lift themselves and Gangers don't—”

The sentence didn’t have to finish before the Doctor started to exit toward the sound of the music. His arm still around Rose's back, she didn’t resist as he lead her out. Amy and Rory followed right behind them. They could all guess how it would have ended anyway.

The music was coming from the dining hall. The tables and stools strewn with personal items, clothes, a house of cards on one table while Jimmy’s record player sat on a nearby table, blaring Dusty Springfield. Jiminy walked up and closed the box, turning off the music. Rose looked back to see that Cleaves, Dicken and Buzzer had followed, too, despite Cleaves denial of what was happening. Jennifer at Rory's elbow like a wounded puppy.

“It would seem the storm has animated your Gangers.” The Doctor mentioned to the incoming group behind him.

Buzzer and Cleaves made sounds of protest against reality, Rose and the Doctor didn't seem to register either of them as they looked around, absorbing the obvious changes in the room. Photographs out, talents explored, books leafed through. Everyone milled around, each separating to take a closer look at what had been done.

Cleaves looked around horrified, “They've ransacked everything.”
“Not ransacked, searched,” The Doctor corrected quickly.

“Through our stuff!” Cleaves said as she looked at their personal articles in disarray.

“Their stuff,” the Doctor corrected again.

“Searching for what?” Jimmy asked as he found a prominently displayed image of his son laid out a table.

“Confirmation,” the Doctor answered, “They need to know their memories are real.”

Buzzer seemed angry in his disbelief, “Oh, so they've got flaming memories now.”

“I think I get it,” Rose nodded, looking toward the Doctor for a moment before she expounded as she turned toward the workers, “You still had your emotions when you were in your gangers, yeah? Not just physical. You got miffed at coworkers, remembered a joke, wanted a pizza. They looked like you, acted like you, all the bits of you that you sent into them, memories, too.”

The Doctor nodded along, “and now they feel compelled to connect to their lives.”

Cleaves corrected him sternly, “Their stolen lives.”

“Stealin' means you didn’t give it to 'em. You told them to be you.” Rose shrugged as she looked toward Cleaves, “They listened.”

“Human lives are amazing. Are you surprised they walked off with them?”

“Even if this has actually happened, they can't remain stable without us plumbed in to them, can they, boss.” Jimmy seemed like he was almost begging for confirmation.

Cleaves shrugged, sounding slightly defeated at the prospect, “Guess we'll find out.”

Rory gently patted Jennifer on the back, drawing some slight attention with his voice, “Are you okay? Do you need some water?”

“I feel funny.” Jennifer whimpered, “I need the washroom.” She started to move.

“I'll come with you.” Rory began to move with her. Rose hurriedly put a hand on Rory's shoulder to stop him, Amy's growing irritation only part of her reasoning.

“The Doctor's always saying don't wander off. Rule one, Don't wander off. For me, anyway,” She rubbed her forehead slightly as the headache made itself known.

The washroom was easy to find, not too far off from the dining area. Rose kept an eye out to see if she could see the others from the doorway to the large toilet, which she couldn’t. She huffed but smirked to the nervous-looking Jen. “The Doctor's always saying don't wander off. Rule one, Don't wander off. For me, anyway,”
again. “This is me, not wanderin' off.”

“I just need a minute.” Jennifer said as she leaned on the counter by the sink. She seemed to look into the mirror.

Rose looked at Jen’s reflection and softened. Maybe Jen was grounding herself, it’d been a big day for her, after all. Rose’s voice softened as she walked little closer and looked to her through the mirror. “Take all the time you need. ‘s quite a day, innit?”

Jennifer’s face changed from human to part-formed Ganger and back. Her face suddenly smoother and shinier, looking almost wet like she hadn’t fully developed. Her veins becoming more pronounced, like tendrils of the red that had floated in the Flesh tank as it created… well, Jennifer. Rose look a deep breath as Jennifer flickered back to her normal self in the mirror, Jen making panicky eye contact with her. Unflinchingly but slowly, Rose approached closer to her and Jen immediately slumped over and vomited a chunk of white Flesh into the sink. The chunk slowly slid toward the drain, leaving a trail on the sink.

“Shhhh.. it’s okay, yeah?” Rose gently rubbed Jennifer’s back, “Thought you were the other one, didn’tcha? ‘S okay that you’re not. Doctor’ll getcha settled.”

Jennifer ran into a toilet cubicle in fear, the pattern of her feet and panicked, emotional breathing the only things heard before the cubical door latched securely.

“It’s okay, the Doctor’ll fix it.” Rose tried to say reassuringly to the panicky Jennifer through the cubicle.

Rose barely saw the elongated hand burst through the cubical door as it hit her, but she felt the pain upon impact and heard glass breaking as she uncontrollably dropped to the ground.

Rose followed Jennifer out. The Doctor watched them walk away for a moment. She didn’t look back at him. Rory, yes. Amy, yes. But not him. That’s okay, he rationalized, she knew what she was doing. Good with people. Though, really, today didn’t seem to be the day to test the bounds of that, her people skills seemed at an all time low as she simultaneously battled ignorance and a headache at once. Still, needs must, and by the relaxed look on Amy’s face as Rory returned to her side, Rose’s insistence that it be her to follow Jennifer had been a good thing for some reason.

The Doctor squat beside a card tower built on a table, appraising it. Good work, good balancing, but it would have taken a human either some time more than merely an hour or extensive practice to have done such an intricate design on a smooth surface.

“That's me.” Buzzer looked at the tower under the Doctor’s inspection, “Well, my hobby. It's good to have a hobby. So what, my Ganger did that all on its own?”
The Doctor pointed to it as he looked at Buzzer, “Who taught you to do this?”

“My granddad.”

The Doctor stood straighter and walked a bit closer to him. “Your Ganger's granddad taught him to do it, too. You both have the same childhood memories, just as clear, just as real.”

“No.” Buzzer said swiftly.

The Doctor continued, not dissuaded by the interruption, “Scared, disorientated, struggling to come to terms with an entire life in their heads.”

Buzzer looked momentarily panicked, “Isle of Sheppey. Story I heard. Ganger got an electric shock, toddled off, killed his operator right there in his harness.”

Jimmy’s voice filled with trepidation, “We need to protect ourselves.”

The Doctor noticed a tray. Small fridge, few meals, microwave cooker. Nice little set up. Dehydrated food, less nice. He popped a plated meal into the microwave.

“Are you a violent man, Jimmy?” the Doctor spoke to the man while still looking at microwave cooker as it ticked down.

“No.” Jimmy answered without effort.

“Then why would the other Jimmy be?” the Doctor flatly responded.

Cleaves crossed her arms as she watched the Doctor look patiently at the microwave cooker, “Don't tell me you can eat at a time like this, Doctor.”

“He can always eat.” Rory said flatly.

The Doctor pointed in Cleaves’ direction as he continued to stare at the cooler, “You told me we were out cold for a few minutes, Cleaves, when in fact it was an hour.”

Cleaves looked affronted, “Sorry, I just assumed—”

“It's not your fault. Like I said, they're disoriented,” the Doctor quickly changed subjects, happy at that moment there wasn’t a certain Tyler to possibly notice his subject change. “When you got to the alcoves, who was in a harness?”

“Dicken and Buzzer were getting out the their harnesses, Jimmy was helping out.” Any answered.

“Jennifer?”

“She was standing on her own when we got to her,” Rory looked exasperated, “She was scared to death.”

The microwave did its ringing finish. The Doctor gently grabbed a pair of pot holders and pulled out the steaming dish. He turned around and handed the dish to Cleaves as she took the plate and held it bare handed. Cleaves looked at the plate she was holding and back to the Doctor with irritation. She shook it gently as if about to ask why she was holding it at all as he stood there with his posture showing he had no plans on taking it back.

There Doctor didn't take his eyes from Cleaves face as he flatly announced, “It's hot.”
Cleaves dropped the plate, recoiling her hand into her body closely.

The Doctor turned out both his hands, trying to present a calming gesture, “Trans-matter's still a little rubbery. Nerve endings not quite fused properly.”

“Why didn't I feel that?” Cleaves held her undamaged hand in awe, her eyes betraying that she was becoming vaguely aware of the why.

“You will. You'll stabilize.”

“No, stop it. You're playing stupid games. Stop it!” Cleaves shouted in denial, backing away from him.

“You don't have to hide.” The Doctor took two steps closer to try and calm the woman, “Please, trust me. I'm the Doctor.”

Cleaves turns around with a Ganger face, smooth face looking slightly wet and shiny, akin to the form of the Jennifer from the vat just before her face sprang into the Jen they knew. Buzzer grabbed a knife instinctually and pointed it at the Cleaves copy.

The smooth-faced Cleaves suddenly looked around, growing slightly more angry than scared as she came to terms with herself.

“That's it. Good, you remember,” the Doctor got excited, looking all over the ganger Cleaves, “This is early Flesh. The early stages of the technology. So much to learn.”

Amy looked from the smooth-faced Cleaves double to the happily studying Doctor with worry on her face. “Doctor, what's happened to her?”

The Doctor directed his voice to Cleaves instead of Amy as the ganger version of Cleaves shifted about nervously. “You're shifting between half formed and full-formed, for now at least. You'll stabilize.” Cleaves seemed to relax slightly at his words, still looking around like they were going to be predatory. He saw Amy frown slightly out of the corner of his eye, likely at his indirect answering of her question.

“Where's the real Cleaves, you thing? What have you done with her?” Buzzer shouted.

The Doctor's eyes widened as Cleaves seemed to take that as confirmation of their predatory status, returning to the feral defense stance and her eyes seeming to settle on a quick escape route before she shouted. “We are living.”

Cleaves made a break for it, Rory and Buzzer both leaning out of her way before moving to follow, hopefully for different reasons. The Doctor managed to put a palm out and stop Rory, “Let her go. We have get the girls, then we find everyone and we’re getting everyone off this island.”

Puddles of steamy, sizzly liquid from broken barrels and pipes covered the entire ground before them.

“Explosion must've ruptured the acid feeds. We're going to need the acid suits.” Jimmy stated. He exchanged quick looks with Dicken and Buzzer, who nodded in response.

“No, no, no. We haven't got time. Back, back, back!” the Doctor instructed, everyone quickly backing up away from the acid leak.

“This way.” Jimmy lead the way.
They passed down the direction Rose and Jennifer had gone, but it was the whites of Rose’s shoe soles laying on their sides that managed to catch Amy’s eye before they caught his. “Rose!” Amy called out as she quickly rushed into the loo, the others following her lead. “Rose! Can you hear me?” Rose started to stir painfully when awoken to her name.

Amy’s soft hands touched her arm and Rose groaned and sat up. “I hear ya,” she said as the Doctor and Amy pulled her to her feet right into the gentle warmth of the Doctor’s arms around her. Her forehead was red, already starting to bruise it looked like. As soon as the Doctor released her Rory went into nurse mode, automatically touching her head and looking at her eyes. Rose lightly swatted Rory’s caring hands. “’m alright, promise. Just more reason for the headache, ’s all.”

“Which is why I should definitely check again.” Rory said as if she should have known better to argue with Rory when he was in nurse mode. Rose put her hands down with a slight eye-roll and allowed the check, her eyes following fingers easily. “Nausea? Dizziness?” Rose shook her head very slightly, “I think you’re fine.”

The Doctor took a step further into the loo to look around, seeing the hole punched in the wall to the outside, hole in cubical, shattered glass of the mirror, the white glob slowly falling down the drain… he nodded to himself as if he should have known, “Of course. Jennifer’s a Ganger too.”

Amy’s brow furrowed, taking a step closer beside Rose in solidarity, “Doctor, you said they wouldn’t be violent.”

“She was scared,” Rose shook her head a little, “donno if violent.”

“The mark on your head says otherwise,” Amy pointed out with a huff.

“Scared people do stupid things,” Rose shrugged a little, wincing at her sore body.

“She’s not people,” Jimmy mumbled from his aghast stance nearby.

“She’s scared an’ she did somethin' stupid, that's pretty people,” Rose corrected.

Jimmy turned to the Doctor, “Early technology, what you said. You seem to know something about the Flesh.”

“Do you?” Amy looked worried and hopeful, “Doctor?”

The Doctor couldn’t help but look at Amy and Rose as they stood beside each other, and then back to Jimmy, “I have to talk to them. I can fix this.” He charged off down the passageway, the others trailing behind. Rose caught up to his side, her questioning gaze not needing to be seen to know it was passing over him for his subject changes. She knew something, or at least knew that he did and was growing irritated with the lack of answers he was giving.

They knew each other. That was saying something. She knew he wasn’t saying something and he
knew she was mad about it. The Doctor suddenly stopped, causing a mini traffic jam of closely huddled people attempting to stop short of bumping one another as he grabbed at the arm swinging by his side to stop Rose’s forward movement beside him.

A splash and the creaking of metal sounded, another pipe burst. Water from the walls coated in wet fizzled and popped as the acid came into contact with it. “It is too dangerous out here with acid leaks.”

They backed up to a seemingly safe junction and stopped, Amy seeming more rattled at the lack of movement than anything. “We have to leave.”

“Yes. I’m going back to the TARDIS. Wait for me in the dining hall. I want us to keep together, okay.” The Doctor pat Amy and Rory on the arms the pointed a finger at Rose, “No more wandering off.”

Rose raised an eyebrow, “Then why are you?”

“Well, it would be safer to look for Jennifer with the TARDIS,” the Doctor answered quickly, “Exit?”

“Keep going straight. Can’t miss it,” Jimmy nodded in one of the directions of the corridor ahead, “But you’re never going to get your vehicle in here.”

“I’m a great parker,” The Doctor lauded. Rose snorted. “Oi.” He narrowed his eyes at her before putting his hand on her shoulder and looked her in the eyes. “Stay with Amy.” He brushed his lips on her hairline briefly as he bounded in the direction of out.

Rose watched him go, dodging a puddle as he walked by it. Jimmy seemed to notice as well, “We really need those acid suits. I’ve sent Buzzer and Dicken to get them.”

“Are they far?” Rose asked, assessing as much as she could.

“Few minutes?” Jimmy looked clueless and hopeful.

“Okay, the Doctor said we stick together, so,” Rose huffed, taking charge, “They'll come back an’ we’ll go.”

Amy paused, staring at a wall blankly, Rory noticed Amy's momentary freeze. He looked at the wall, “You okay?”

“No. Just…” Amy turned back to look at the wall as Rose walked up beside Rory. “I keep seeing things.”

Rose looked at the blank wall and back to Amy. “Maybe you hit your head when we fell. As soon as we get in we'll have Rory check ya, yeah?”

Rory saw Jen first as she slowly made her way near though the long corridor. “Jen.”

“Which Jen are you?” Amy asked.

“I’m sorry…” Jen twitched but didn’t step any closer, looking at Rose but her gaze occasionally popping to Rory. It sounded a bit forced, but the day was long and everyone deserved the benefit of doubt, “…About the washroom.”

“…Ganger.” Amy took an instinctive step back. Her eyes didn’t leave Jen.
“Amy, that doesn’t matter,” Rose assured calmly.

“Oh it matters.” Amy retorted.

Rose decided to deal with one hysterical person at a time she turned back to Jen, “S fine. You done panickin’?”

Jen nodded, and while apologizing to Rose, her eyes kept popping to Rory. Buzzer and Dicken came into view, looking at the brunette. Their walk slowed slightly as relief and then worry crossed both of their faces.

“Jen?” Dicken asked tentatively.

Amy spoke before and response could come from Jen, “No, it's her Ganger.”

In moments voices chorused in indiscriminant arguing, Rory suddenly using his body as a shield for Jen while the other three vocally minimized her existence.

“Oi!” Rose shouted, waving her arms to distract everyone from their bickering and gain their attention, her headache preventing her from trying to peaceably piece out the situation. “Let’s be out of the corridor with random leaks of acid that'll kill any of us, human or ganger, before we argue 'bout what’s what, yeah?”

“Who put you in charge?” Buzzer asked in irritation.

“Seniority.” Amy answered easily, teasing Rose. Rose shot Amy a playful, if tired, look.

“You do know your husband’s older than me, right?” Rose swiftly teased, only taking a millisecond to enjoy the look of realization on her friends face; Amy honestly had never thought that before. Rose pointed her finger in the general direction of the group, “Priorities, mate. Live or debate, which is more important right now?” When no one answered she huffed, “Thought so. How long do ya think we were out?” Rose scratched the back of her head where the bonk was from the fall, it already surprisingly small.

“The Doctor said it was an hour,” Rory answered.

“Oof,” Rose cringed, “A whole hour? Lots can get hairy in an hour.” She ran a hand quickly through her hair as she thought for a moment. “Acid suits?”

Dicken shook his head unhappily, “Gangers got to them first.”

Rose blew out a puff of air, “Okay, the Doctor said to meet in the dining area, let’s get there. Can we get there without the acid suits?” Jimmy nodded once.

“What’re we supposed to do there?” Buzzer nearly sneered, obviously having an issue being bossed by her for whatever reason.

Rose flippantly answered. “What else do you do in a dining area? Sit, eat, talk to your friends or shut up an’ think on your chips until we do somethin’ else. Which is the least damaging way to get there? This way?” Rose pointed a direction down the hall and looked to the others for some sort of answer. When no one argued and Dicken nodded once, she turned and walked “This way then, let’s go.”

She was so busy being sure if herself that the minute no one looked directly at her she felt less sure, letting her mind race and head pound in her ears. Face forward, no one and nothing but hall ahead of her, her face relaxed a touch and allowed her a moment to look the achy, mildly panicked woman
she was hiding as best she could.

“Rose, why are you so okay with this?” Amy’s voice suddenly came from beside her.

“The Doctor.” Rose answered without thinking. “I mean…” Rose chose her words more carefully than before, “he’s a person, yeah?”

“He’s not Flesh.” Amy wasn’t comprehending what Rose was getting at.

“But he’s not human.” Rose posited quietly. She knew better than loudly pronouncing his non-human status if he hadn’t. “Looks human, but isn’t. Sound familiar?”

“That’s different,” Amy said with a slight frown.

“It’s really not. A person is lotsa things.” Rose huffed, “’sa different morality, Amy, hafta adjust. What if you were the copy and you weren’t sure?”

“But I’m me.” Amy argued.

Rose nodded, “Yeah, an’ that’s what they think too.” Rose took a deep breath and looked at Amy for a moment as they walked, “its gonna be hard, for both of ‘em, yeah? The thought of sharin’ a thing as personal as your life is gonna be mad. Likes, dislikes, moods, loves, hates, spouses… An’ maybe I’m wrong, maybe it’s all the other way, but let’s not go makin’ anythin’ worse by saying that someone’s life is less than someone else’s. That’s how troubles become wars.”

The dining hall was a few steps away, lit by windows they could tell no one else was in the room and Rose stopped by the entrance and stood off to the side to allow the others in first, and to make sure at least the quiet Rory was behind her. Everyone still there and filed into the dining hall.

“Any pipes in here or leaks?” Rose aimed the question at Dicken, noting that she’d get nothing but grump from Buzzer who she’d already sassed twice and the preoccupied worry that Jimmy seemed to have.

Dicken shook his head. “We keep our stuff in here partly because if that.”

“’Kay, then we’re likely safe for now.” Rose looked toward the group of people preoccupied with worry, “Sit, eat, debate if you want. You have ‘til the Doctor gets back.”

“Well thanks for the permission,” snarled Buzzer sarcastically.

“You’re welcome.” Rose responded flatly, refusing to play into him attempt at verbal sparring. She looked around, for the first time really realizing there was one less person than there should have been, “Where’d Cleaves go?”

“We saw the fake Cleaves.” Buzzer said.

“Ganger Cleaves,” Rose corrected.

Buzzer almost growled, “The fake Cleaves.”

“And the debate begins,” Amy muttered.

Rose took a breath and tried not to play into this argument, “If we saw the ganger Cleaves where’s the other Cleaves?”

Everyone looked at Jennifer.
“Where're Jen and Cleaves? What have you done with them?” Buzzer barked out.

Jennifer's eyes widened in fear, “I haven't seen them, I swear, I haven’t seen Cleaves or the other Jen. But look, I'm her, I'm Jennifer Lucas. I'm her. I'm real.”

“You're a copy. You're just pretending to be like her.” Jimmy assumed out loud.

“If this Jen’s pretendin' than that Jen was likely pretendin' too. They’ve the same memories, same thoughts, same everythin'.” Except I’ve only got one heart. Her memory intruded on her moment and she nearly choked on it. Rose involuntarily closed her eyes to shake off the memory and took a deep breath, she wasn’t enjoying her memory's intrusion at the moment. She’d could think on it later, now wasn’t the time.

Buzzer still staring angrily at Jen, used Rose's moment of silence to assert his opinion eloquently, “Bollocks.”

Rory stepped between the argumentative people and Jen, “Just leave her alone.”

“Rory,” Amy addressed him, “she’s not the one that needs protecting. She’s not even real.”

“Amy,” Rose was a bit surprised to hear that from Amy. She took a moment, the hurt on her face clear to Amy but she took a moment to gather her thoughts, “When Rory was plastic did you love him any less? I dunno what, but Rory was plastic, so he wasn’t human, did that make him less Rory?”

“That was different.” Amy said adamantly.

“Was it?” Rory asked, stealing Amy's determined ire, almost arguing with that answer.

“Rory,” Amy’s eyes softened and widened slightly as she looked at him. “We don’t really know anything about them yet.”

Rory surprisingly stood his ground, “Well, I know Jen's afraid and she needs our help. Give them the benefit of doubt, Amy, the Doctor seems to.”

“Jimmy, Buzzer. Come on, you guys. We've worked together for two years,” Jennifer pleaded, looking all the more woeful with her panicked brown eyes widening.

“I worked with Jennifer Lucas, not you.” Buzzer responded.

“Oh you—” Rose stopped herself before she started flinging insults, looking directly at Buzzer. He was probably the most frustrating person in the group. Rose calmed her voice as too not shot at the man, just speak a bit loudly, “Have you even been listenin'? In her head she is Jennifer Lucas. You worked with both of 'em, now they’ve split so they’ll have the same memories up until that split. That Jennifer Lucas an' this Jennifer Lucas are the same minus one bloody hour.”

“How do you know?” Amy asked. Jennifer now clinging to her husband’s hand life a lifeline.

“Trust me,” Rose sighed to Amy, her least favorite beach on a windy day coming to mind, “I know.”
“I’m a great parker,” The Doctor lauded. Rose snorted. “Oi.” He narrowed his eyes at her before putting his hand on her shoulder and looked her in the eyes. “Stay with Amy.” He brushed his lips on her hairline briefly as he bounded in the direction of out.

He looked at the room as he passed it, the flesh room. The vat bubbled upon his passing, almost calling him. That distinct buzz calling him closer. He fought a smirk, the idea forming a plan in his mind. He pointed his sonic at it and heard the whir.

Alright. What’s done is done. He looked at lips forming on the vat of viscous liquid for merely a moment before quickly leaving to the outside.

He tromped up the hill as fast as his walking would take him. Walking. Carefully, mostly. …this is where he left her, all blue and boxy —assuming she wasn’t inexplicable towed or possessed again, but, really, what likelihood did that have after already happening again in such a short period of time?— before he looked town at the blinking light on the top of a sunken TARDIS, sinking slowly into the ground around it, just the top visible.

The Doctor’s face contorted, “What are you doing down there?!” The light at the top simply flashed at him as he looked down. A slight smoke seemed to eminate… not from the hole but… he looked at his shoes as they smoked and dissolved on his feet. He quickly toed them off and, as quickly as he could, tromped back down the hill to the relative safety of a solid, potentially un-acidy ground.

Walking back to the dining hall would be easy, but maybe he should find the Gangers first. Innate sense of direction may be a Time Lord thing, but he still only had a finite but numerous amount of places they could have gone. He started his quick and careful search.

Aside from electrostatic or other highly charged activities, the flesh needed someone plugged in to maintain the copy, meaning Rose and Amy were still alive, and, consequently, the people around them who took them may continue to live. He was approaching an anger that hadn’t quite been felt in this body yet. Not that there was likelihood of him doing anything untoward, but the likelihood may have turned against them should anything further have befallen those he loved.

The earliest of this technology’s evolution exactly what thoughts were transmitted, the people plummed into the Gangers seemed to remember their actions as the gangers. Amy and Rose would likely think everything that had happened had happened to them. They didn’t know, or didn’t seem to know.

This was early. The technology could grow in predictable ways. Replication of organisms wasn’t against any specific Shadow Proclamation edict assuming that rights and permissions had been acquired, which they were likely not, unless Mr. and Mrs. Pond got sign-happy with some paperwork or Jackie was brought back from the beyond in the beyond. Even then there were some groups that thought themselves beyond the Shadow Proclamation… The Church, for instance; often the Time Agency, though that was short-lived; the occasional rogue Judoon platoon… and random people bent on stupidity with not-usually-this-well-thought-out plans. But controlling two doppelgangers into the TARDIS, through time and space, would take a lot of energy, a generator the size of thirteen mid-size planets or a TARDIS of their own with access to the vortex.

Access to the vortex. Energy.
Of course they had the energy. They had Rose, with the vortex nestled in her head for 127 years which is apparently painful … headaches. Rose was doing it. Unwillingly, probably.

But then why take Amy? Rose and Amy, possibly the least two swayable minds he’d every come across, with exception to his own and maybe Donna’s... Amy. She was pregnant. She’d been showing signs for months. Even Rose or the vortexy, wolfy part of Rose had known...“Giant balla hormones, that one.”

They wanted his attention, who ever they were. He growled to himself. They were getting it. Think first, emotions later.

The Doctor saw orange out of the corner of his eye and turned into a doorway to see the acid suits lined up along the wall, and the Gangers across from them, stance and attention now drawn from the suits to his presence.

“How are you all getting on?”

Cleaves crossed her arms, “Why don’t you tell us?”

The Doctor diverted the answer, “Well, we have two choices. The first is to tear each other apart. Not my favorite. The second is to knuckle down and work together. Try to work out how best we can help you.”

The gangers looked at each other.

The Doctor lead the Gangers through the stone corridor, the smell of acid and sulfuric compounds quickly filling the air.

“We have a limited window of time before either side spins out of control. You hear one side enough times and it becomes the only side that makes sense. You have to think, they have to think, but more importantly, we all have to get out of here.” The Doctor walked the hall purposefully, the gangers all behind him as hey inevitably gathered strength from one another. “Now, I know its hard for you to hold your fully human form. That's why you keep shifting between the Flesh stages, but do try. It'll make the others less scared of you.”

He heard a very specific voice echo from the dining hall. Rose. Rose was talking. Loudly. That could be one of two things, with grouchy, sleep-deprived Rose Tyler at the helm, either she was trying to gain ground with less understanding people or… he didn’t want to think about or, even if it did make him smile. “…now they’ve split so they’ll have the same memories up until the split. That Jennifer Lucas and this Jennifer Lucas are the same minus one bloody hour.”

He heard Amy “How do you know?”

“Trust me, I know.” Rose’s voice sounded sadly determined if a bit annoyed. The Doctor smirked as he walked up. This was Rose’s thing. People, doubles… add tea and she’d be fully in her element. He looked quickly behind him to make sure the Gangers with him had pulled their faces to human, defined and wrinkled appropriately.

“Okay, let's not...” He pushed the knob and opened the door and finished Amy’s sentence with her, “Until the Doctor gets here.” Amy relaxed slightly and gave him a weak smile as he walked into the room.

He smiled, the group of gangers behind him. “Hello.”
The Doctor arriving visually relieved Rose. Her muscles unwound a little but she looked tight still. He could recognize that posture on her any time, likely blindfolded. It was argument stance.

“Everyone, meet everyone.” The group of Gangers stared at the humans and vise versa. In awe, in curiosity, in horror, with a lightly relieved Amy and Rory interspersed within.

The Doctor sidled up by Rose while the two groups seemed to instinctively pair off into teams for a staring contest. He whispered quietly to her as he noted the closer he got the more relaxed a posture she presented, “Get bossy while I was gone?”

“Well, in the land of the blind one-eyed woman leads an’ all that,” Rose shrugged keeping her volume low as she looked toward the doubles and the awkward silence only seemed to grow.

The Doctor nodded, “Plus you’re bossy.”

“Yeaaah,” Rose quietly dragged out the word on an exhale, admitting it but only sounding like she felt a small touch bad about it. She bumped his arm at his side with her shoulder, looking at him with a growing smirk, “Shut up, you love it.”

The Doctor’s eyes twinkled at her before he looked away, “Yes boss.”

The only Cleaves in attendance crossed her arms and addressed the Doctor, “All right, Doctor, you’ve brought us together. Now what?”

“Before we do anything, I have one very important question.” The Doctor paused as if an austere question was coming, watching every person in the room tense just a teensy bit. “Has anybody got a pair of shoes I could borrow? Size ten. Although I should warn you, I have very wide feet.”

“I’ll remember that.” Rose quietly quipped.

The Doctor shushed her, "Cheeky."

“Flirt.” Rose couldn't help but look at his feet as he wiggled his sock covered toes before she returned to normal volume. “An’ why do you need new shoes?”

“Got acid on the last ones,” He admitted as Dicken brought him his spare boots from under a dining table. Well worn brown work boots. “Thank you, Dicken.” The Doctor sat down and quickly dressed his feet, strapping the laces quickly before wiggling his toes and standing. “The Flesh was never merely moss. These are not copies. The storm has hardwired them. They are becoming people. We were all jelly once. Little jelly eggs sitting in goop.”

Amy’s face twisted at the mental picture it conjured, “Yeah, thanks. Too much information.”

“s not anything you didn’t know, Amy, almost everything started out as goop of some sort. Sex is goop, birth is goop, babies are non-stop goop.” Rose talking about babies made him tense. She never did tell him if she had ever had babies, or maybe this was just another incidence of Rose saying the right things at the right time, either one was enough to make the Doctor tense inside.

“Yes, gross, stop.” Amy waved her off.

“We are not talking about an accident that needs to be mopped up. We are talking about life. Do you understand?” The Doctor looked around at the room full of people, no one arguing, “Good. Now, the TARDIS is trapped in an acid pool. Once I can reach her, I can get you all off this island, humans and Gangers, eh? How does that sound?”
Jen's grip seemed to tighten on Rory's hand, or Rory realized he was still holding her hand and flinched, letting it go, as she reaffirmed her frightened girl stance with Rory, placing a second hand on his. Rose couldn't help but notice the unhappy look on Jen's face and the quick look passed to Amy, a look that quickly dissolved and shot away when Jen noticed Rose's eyes on her.

Jimmy brightened considerably, “Can I make it home for Adam's birthday?”

“What about me?” the other Jimmy had a mix of pain and hope in his eyes, “He's my son too.”

“Oh, so you were there when he was born, were you?” Jimmy scoffed.

“Yeah.” The other Jimmy said wistfully, “I drank about eight pints of tea, then they told me I had a wee boy and I just burst out laughing. No idea why.”

The Doctor stopped that before it could get angry in it's confusing circumstance, “Look, I'm not going to lie to you. It's a right old mess, this. But as you might say up North, oh well, I'll just go to't foot of stairs. Eee by gum.”

Rose chuckled a little at his fake accent, “You never said anythin' even remotely like that when you were from the North.”

“Maybe I just never got the chance. Didn’t have a gob yet.” The Doctor clapped his hands together, “Right. First step is we get everyone together, then get everyone safe. Then, get everyone out of here.”

Amy looked around in the group before returning to face the Doctor, “But we're still missing Jennifer and Cleaves.”

“I'll go and look for them.” Jimmy nodded.

The other Jimmy spoke up quickly, “I'll give you a hand, if you like. Cover more ground.”

The first Jimmy blinked, only mildly surprised at himself, “Yeah, okay. Thanks.”

“Whole new meaning to Rose's buddy system,” Amy muttered sarcastically.

“'s the compromise we coulda used in the sixties, that. Go alone and together.” Rose teased back, the two grinning at each other a little.

The creaking of the loud heavy door being swing open preceded a mere millisecond before the stomping of feet and an irritated, threatening looking Cleaves entered. She had a metal tube in her hands attached to some sort of square pack at her side, but she pointed it like a weapon. By the Doctor’s slight shift in positioning and ever so subtle shielding of her—a stance she'd grown to recognize—it likely was a weapon.

“This circus has gone on long enough!” roared Cleaves' voice through the echoy room, to the mostly shocked faces on the many people in the room.

Cleaves' voice emanated from behind, the doppelganger Cleaves rolling her eyes in irritated expectation, “Oh, great. You see, that is just so typically me.”

The armed and angry Cleaves shook the probe end at her other self while facing and speaking to the Doctor, “Tell it to shut up!”

“Cleaves, no,” all the hope seemed to leak out of the Doctor as he both admonished and begged,
“No, no.”

“No, no.” Cleaves answered the question no one had asked. “Fires about ooo, forty thousand volts? Would kill any one of us, so I guess she'll work on Gangers just the same.” Rose and the Doctor looked about to protest, the myriad of other faces in the room a mix of horrified and curious, “They're demons, monsters. Mistakes. They have to be destroyed.”

The Doctor held out a hand, walking incrementally closer to the armed Cleaves, voice soft, “Give me the probe, Cleaves.” Cleaves pointed it more sternly, obviously ready and able to use it. What was worse in Rose's eyes as she looked at the horrifyingly determined Cleaves, she seemed willing.

The other Cleaves just looked mildly annoyed and critiqued her counterpart, “We always have to take charge, don't we, Miranda. Even when we don't really know what the hell is going on.”

Rose's sight blurred slightly as her head pounded more roughly, filling her ears with a blood rushing noise as she clamped her eyes shut involuntarily. Headache intensified for a moment. Now was not the time. She opened her eyes just in time to see a head-strong Buzzer -who knows which one- rush toward the armed Cleaves and be hit with the zap of electricity from the aimed circuit probe in her hands.

Amy, he Doctor ran to his side first, Rose was shocked into immobility for a moment but also going to the fallen Buzzer’s side. Rose put her hands on the body to check for movement while the Doctor ran his sonic screwdriver over him quickly. “He's dead!”

“We call it decommissioned.” Cleaves corrected dispassionately, almost threatening everyone with her probe. Jen flinched as the probe pointed at her next, trying to corral people

The Doctor turned to face Cleaves and shouted, “You stopped his heart. He had a heart. Aorta, valves, a real heart.” He couldn’t help but look back to the body, “And you stopped it.”

“What happened to Buzzer will happen to all of us if we trust you.” Jennifer barked, disrupting any attempt they could have made to talk the angry Cleaves down from further stupidity. She was making a horrified if angry face at Cleaves, scowling at the same time as cowering. Something about her seemed feral.

The group of Gangers started moving together start stumbling toward the exit closest to them

“Wait, wait, just wait.”

Cleaves raised the probe and pointed it at the group retreating. Rory saw Cleaves first, “No!”

Rory jumped Cleaves and disconnected the box from the handheld device. Cleaves sunk, tackled on the floor for only an instant as she stood and looked defiantly at Rory as the only things that could be seen were the rears of the fleeing feet through the far exit.

“Wait!” the Doctor called after the fleeing Gangers, hoping that at least one might hesitate, but they were gone. He didn’t hesitate to turn around and glare at Cleaves. “Look at what you have done, Cleaves!”

“If it's war,” Cleaves declared, breathing heavily from her tussle to the ground, “then it's war.”

“It was almost peace!” Rose retorted.

“You don't get it. How can you?” Cleaves almost sneered, looking at Rose and the Doctors disapproving faces, “There isn’t one stealing your life. It's us and them now. Us. And them.”
Buzzer nodded quickly, “Us and them.”

Jimmy sighed and agreed more quietly, “Us and them.”

“You saw them, you met them. It’s you versus you!” Rose almost begged them to see reason, “You crossed a line, Cleaves, you became the monster, not them.”

“They’re coming back, in a big way,” The Doctor added.

“So if they’re thinking ‘us and them’…” Rory’s voice pulled Rose and the Doctor to turn and face him.

Rose answered absently, “…then they’re prob’ly thinkin’ ‘us and them.’”

Rory barely waited for Rose to finish, “But we still haven’t found the other Jen.”

“We can’t do that, they’re after us.” Amy insisted.

“Maybe not,” Rose seemed to light up at the thought, “we’re not a them, strictly, but Jen is. We can’t just leave her out there, seems lotsa stupid in the air here.” Rose cast her eyes quickly to Cleaves and back.

“What if they find her first?” Rory asked.

“What if they find you first?” Amy responded.

Rose suddenly understood Amy’s reticence, it was less who they were going for and more who was going, “Okay, I’ll go with Rory to look for Jen. No one wants to hurt us, least I don’t think so. An’ Jen seems to fancy him, either Jen.”

“Rose, you need to stay with Amy.” The Doctor swiftly added. Rose automatically looked at him curiously.

Rose's question of, “Why?” was overwritten by Rory’s more resolute statement, “Then I’ll go alone.”

“No,” Amy said adamantly to Rory. “You’re not going”

Cleaves muttered angrily, staring off as she made no particular eye contact to indicate she was talking to anyone but herself, “We should find them and destroy them.”

“We need a safer place to discuss this— The most fortified and defendable room in the monastery,” The Doctor looked at Cleaves, clicking his fingers to gain her attention as she seemed to stare off into space, either hopefully thinking about what had happened or, more likely, drawing up a battle plan, “Cleaves, the most fortified and defendable room in the monastery.”

Cleaves seemed to contemplate for only a moment, “The chapel. Only one way in. Stone walls two feet thick.” The Doctor waved his arm for Cleaves to lead the way. She started heading out that way, Buzzer following closely as Jimmy and Dicken seemed to take up the rear behind, almost corralling the TARDIS crew.

“Good place to hide from demons, the chapel.” Dicken said to himself as he shuffled out of the dining hall.

“The demon you’re runnin’ from is yourself.” Rose eyed Dicken before looking ahead again, “best hope there’s less demon out there than ya think.”
“In here.” Cleaves said as she tore open the heavy door, Jimmy Dicken and Buzzer filing in behind her. The Doctor tried to usher his three friends in but a scream tore their attention. Looks were exchanged quickly, fear, worry, haste…

Amy didn’t hesitate as long. “Rory, come on.”

Rory looked over his shoulder down the hall and back to his wife, “The other Jen’s still out there. She’s out there and she’s on her own.”

“Rory—” Amy started.

“She needs help,” he interrupted, “We can't leave her out there. She could be hurt.” The three called his name, Amy in instruction but the Doctor and Rose in various degrees of ask, Rose almost begging him not to, sounding like there was more she was going to say before he cut her off by looking into her eyes as he backed down the hall, “I know you understand that.”

“Get in here.” Amy shouted from the entrance to the chapel, simply astonished that he husband wasn’t following her instruction immediately, “Get in here!”

Sounds of feet stepping filled a quiet moment as the nightly colored uniform of one of the Gangers flashed their vision before Ganger Cleaves, all smooth-faced and angry noticed them. Rory quickly turned down a side corridor, out of their view. “There they are.”

“Amy, come on,” Rose tugged at Amy’s arm as she determinedly went into the chapel.

“Rory!” Amy called, clinging to the doorframe. The Doctor pulled Amy in the entryway, allowing the orange-clad crew to slam closed a thick metal door.

Rose pulled Amy further from the entrance as the acid harvesters shoved heavy looking things near it, effectively barricading the door. “Amy, they saw him an’ passed him—”

“—they are not after him, they're after us.” The Doctor finished for her, both trying to calm Amy.

“Why? Why?” a voice whispered from the other side of the room, tall pillars cast shadows on that half of the room. Rose looked quickly at the now horrified people around her as the recognized they’d just trapped themselves in a room with an unknown.

“Show yourself. Show yourself!” the Doctor demanded to the shadows.

“Why?”

“This is insane,” Jimmy said, seeming exasperated as the loud beating at the solid door shook a few of the not-so-well fortified barricades, “We're fighting ourselves.”

“Yes. Yes, it's insane, and it's about to get even more insanerer. Is that a word?” The Doctor briefly
looked to Rose shaking her head and Amy looking more shocked and miffed by the moment, he looked to the shadows. “Show yourself, right now!”

“Doctor, we are trapped in here and Rory's out there with them.” Amy grew frustrated. The fact that he wasn’t answering her immediately starting to irritate her, “Hello? We can't get to the TARDIS and we can't even leave the island.”

The voice emerged from the darkness, the shape of a person probably unrecognizable to the others but Rose's hair standing on end and that silhouette only meaning one thing. “Correct in every respect, Pond. It's frightening, unexpected, frankly a total, utter splattering mess on the carpet, but I am certain, one hundred percent certain, that we can work this out. Trust me,” Rose's breath seemed trapped in her lungs. the Ganger clearly stepped out of the shadow, into the lit area as he adjusted his bow tie, “I'm the Doctor.”

Rose froze, her eyes staring at the speaking doppelganger of the Doctor.
Her eyes closed for a moment.
Two Doctors.
Again.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry! No Ganger Doctor yet! Almost!
Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

For an instant, Rose could have sworn she was on a beach. Sea air, breezy, feet sinking into wet sand, her eyes getting glassy and burred for just a moment. It filtered over her perceptions no matter what the thought. In a second so many things passed though her mind as he smiled and adjusted his bowtie.

He’s a bloody idiot.
There are two now, and if they truly were the same, the mentality in this room just skyrocketed. Which may be good given the current stabby climate in this room. Two hims never turns out well. Well, kinda well. No. That is not happening again, even if. He’s a bloody idiot.
Jack would have a field day. Squeal like a little girl with his arms tensing… if they weren’t in danger. Okay, maybe still. Definitely still.
This one’s all about the show. Better show than tell. It was about these people’s perception, he wasn’t meaning to be an arsey bloody idiot.
God, she wanted to slap him. All the hims. Hop into the Old Girl and just give a great whack to every single one of his faces or at least slap this one so hard his last bloody 10 faces felt it, too.

In a blink, her second of anger had dissipated with a sudden pained gasp from the new Doctor. The moment he looked in pain Rose was off, out of her spot beside the completely shocked Amy and moving to his aid. Her emotions kept at bay, at least momentarily, by his need.
The ganger Doctor moaned in pain, words seemed to force themselves from his throat in an older voice from his lips, “I wonder if we'll get back. Yes, one day.” He groaned again before more words seem to flow in yet another voice, “I've reversed the polarity of the neutron flow!"

Arsey bloody idiot he may be, he was also the Doctor. All of them, it seemed.

“Rose, stay back!” Amy cautioned. Rose only responded with a quick shushing, dismissive wave of her hand as she took slow steps nearer. Amy turned to the Doctor beside her. “What's happening?”

“The Flesh is struggling to cope with our past,” the Doctor quickly answered Amy, directing his words to his other self, “Hold on.”

“Would you like a jelly baby?” the ganger said, shoving an empty hand in the direction of the far away Amy. Rose carefully stepped to the ganger faced man, not wanting to spook him in an addled state. Unexpectedly, he grabbed her hand, his face solidifying into more his own for just a moment before fluctuating back to the smooth ganger, sounding very much like his leather self “Run.” Rose’s hand tightened around his and instinctively got closer as his own voice once again established it’s rightful place in his throat. “Hello. I'm the Doctor. No, let it go, we've moved on.” Before long Rose realized she was holding him up, as if his balance were gone in his attempt to come to grips with, well, himself.

“Hold on, hold on, you can stabilize.” The Doctor assured the ganger coming to his side as well, assisting Rose with the heft of a struggling Doctor.

“No! Ah!” He growled in pain and frustration as he pushed Rose and the Doctor away. His face solidified and melted back to it’s half-formed state.
Rose put her hands on either side of the Ganger's face and pulled it to hers, his eyes closing tightly. “Oi! Look at me! Look at me!” His yellowed eyes slowly met hers. Those pained eyes. Suddenly the yellow didn’t seem so weird, it looked like the same eyes. Blue, brown, green and now the unnatural yellow of not fully formed pigments... She stared into those eyes, bringing him to focus. “Deep breath. Breathin's good. Get those new lungs working, yeah?” She took a few deep breaths herself, metering her breathing specifically, trying to get him to as well. She slid her thumb over his slightly sleeker cheekbone. The new Doctor started breathing in time with her, lost in her eyes.

The banging against the door stopped, people muttering about the lack of it being more disquieting than the act of the trying to break in sounded in it's place.

Amy tried to gain their attention, “Guys, we need you. Get over here.” The Doctor looked over but neither Rose nor the Doctor left the other Doctor’s side.

The Ganger Doctor's face suddenly snapped to fully formed beneath Rose's very fingers without her noticing. Green eyes stared directly into hers, “Hello.”

“Hi.” Rose smiled and stroked her thumbs over his cheekbones again. He wasn’t shaking or leaning into her any more, she released his face gently and stepped a step back to give him space.

“Doctor,” Amy said a little impatiently.

“All better?” Rose looked back and forth, two of the same face on either side of her.

The newest Doctor adjusted his bowtie, “What do you think?”

Rose smirked adorably sucking in her lip before shaking her head slightly saying, “I’m so not answerin’ that.” She hesitated a moment before adding, "Note that there are never two Roses.”

“I’m not sure reality can handle two Roses,” said the new Doctor.

Old Doctor exchanged glances with the other, “I don’t know if we could handle two Roses.”

Rose put her hand on her hips, “I've yet to see you handle the one Rose.”

“Cheeky.” Both Doctors said simultaneously.

“Is it really important, the flirting? I feel there should be more things higher on the list right now.” Amy said, her miffed voice returning.

“Right.” Cringed the Doctor on Rose's left while the sheepish Doctor on the right nodded to Amy and said, “One sec.” before the two Doctors looked at each other.

Rose crossed the room to the other side by Amy, passing through the middle of both Doctors, both ushering her on with a slight touch in some way. She didn't get as far as Amy before she turned and watched them in their awkward ballet, the two Doctors wiggling identically, inspecting each other identically, even simply standing just as this Doctor stood. A non-existent breeze shook Rose slightly, she swatted the sensation.

Amy and Rose looked on as the Doctors just seemed to talk off of each other quickly.

“Cybermats.” One Doctor announced happily. The other looked at him oddly, “Do we have time for this?”

“We make time.” The Doctor rocked on his feet. “I'd like more proof that you're me. Cybermats.” The Doctor had barely finished talking before the new one chimed in, “Created by the Cybermen.
They kill by feeding off brainwaves.”
“Rory and Amy, they may not trust both of us.” The Doctor admitted.
The other nodded in agreement, “Rose might”.
“Yes, might.” The Doctor tented his fingers as he slowly looked toward Rose.

Rose crossed her arms, “Especially if she can hear you.”

One Doctor looked to the other and smirked, “She makes cheeky comments.”
“She is a cheeky comment.” The second agreed and corrected.
“She’s gonna slap you if you keep callin’ her ‘she’.” Both of the Doctors said at the same time, distinctly mocking her accent and looking triumphant.

Rose rolled her eyes but couldn’t hide the slight smile at their antics. “Bloody idiots.”

“Are you thinking what I'm thinking?” one Doctor posited.
The other nodded slightly, “Inevitably.”
“I'm glad we're on the same”
“Wavelength. You see, great minds.” He drew a hand between his own and pointed it to his other self.
He grinned, “Exactly. So, what's the plan?”
“Save them all, humans and gangers.” The Doctor said magnanimously.
One of the Doctors stuck his hands in his pockets, “Tall order. Sounds wonderful.”
“Is that what you were thinking? It's just so inspiring to hear me say it.” The other Doctor looked off dreamily.
“I know.”

They had started circling each other. It became a kind of cup game with Rose and Amy, hard to keep track of if one of them dare blink their eyes they’d be in a new position.

Rose couldn’t help but smirk and shake her head a little at the sight as they pat each other’s back in agreement. She leaned in to whisper to Amy, “Give 'em an hour. They'll hate each other.” She looked at the confused Amy looking back at her “No one he hates more than himself.”

“So, what now, Doctor?” One Doctor smiled to the other.
The other straightened his jacket, “Well, time to get cracking, Doctor.”

Amy grumbled curtly, “Doctor, come on!”

Both appeared at Amy’s side, two of the exact same face jovial and relaxed and simultaneously said, “Hello.”
“Sorry, but we had to establish a few ground rules.” One said.
“Formulate a protocol.” The other added.
One Doctor looked impressed at the other, “Protocol? Very posh.”
“A protocol between us. Otherwise…”
“It can get horribly embarrassing,” one Doctor looked at Rose.
The other Doctor motioned to Amy. “And potentially confusing,”

“I'm glad you've solved the problem of confusing,” Amy rolled her eyes.

“That's sarcasm.” One Doctor nodded towards Amy
The other Doctor quickly nodded in agreement “She's very good at sarcasm.”
Both looked at Amy and said in unison, “Breathe.”

Amy blinked, “What?”
"We have to get you off this island." One Doctor said as the other nodded and finished the thought, "And the Gangers too."

"Sorry, would you like a memo from the last meeting?" Cleaves asked, "They are trying to kill us!"

"Because you killed one of them." Rose tried to explain calmly, "They’re scared. ‘s instinct. Someone’s tryn’ a kill you, you either run away or try to kill em back. Human nature."

"They’re not human." Buzzer argued.

Rose looked directly at him, "At least part of ‘em thinks they are."

"Doctor," Amy wasn’t quite sure which Doctor to address, but she picked one and stuck to it, "We’re trapped in here."

"Right," he nodded, "See, I don’t think so. The Flesh Bowl is fed by cabling from above."

The other Doctor looked around the room. "But where are the earthing conduits?"

"All this piping must go down into a tunnel or a shaft or something, yes?" One Doctor said as he looked at the group, "With us?"

The other Doctor found a grating in the wall. He squat by it and whipped out the sonic screwdriver, running it quickly as it fell open with a smile on his face and stood, "Yowza. An escape route."

"Yowza?" Amy blankly looked at the Doctor by the grating.

"Do we tend to say yowza?" the Doctor nearest Amy asked.

"Better than gibberty." Rose shrugged.

"That’s enough, let it go, okay?” the Doctor near the newly-formed exit pouted a bit, "We’re under stress.” He pointed to the opening, Amy quickly climbing in, having to get down to a crawl to get through. Jimmy and Dicken followed, Cleaves eyeing one of the Doctors until Rose rolled her eyes and directed him in, following behind. Cleaves got in but didn’t follow, certain to keep both Doctors ahead of her in an untrusting way. The Doctor pulled up the grate again and used the sonic to latch it shut, passing Cleaves through the narrow space to allow her to take up the rear.

Rose sighed. In a vent trying to get away from a group trying to kill them. Not new. Luckily, the end was already in sight so it wasn’t crawling on her hand and knees with a group of strangers for an hour.

…and the view was infinitely better.

_Bad Rose._

She didn’t feel bad about it, but she blushed.

The Doctor climbed out and stood, offering a hand up the help Rose. She took it with a grateful smile and stood before offering the same to the Doctor behind her. Both the end Doctor and Rose were pink faced as Cleaves refused a hand up and exited on her own. “Are you alright?” the front Doctor asked as he looked Rose over quickly, her face was a bit red.

“Vent.” The other Doctor muttered, answering for her.

“Vent with a view.” Rose corrected with a coy smile without making eye contact with either of them.

The front Doctor puzzled at that, “I didn’t see a view...” oh. He had a tight view of Buzzer’s rear end. He smirked and adjusted his bowtie as he looked at Rose, “Like what you saw?”
Rose just held a sheepish if slightly cheeky smile as she rolled her eyes and stepped with the others quickly instead of indulging his already inflated ego.

The Doctors looked after her before they looked at each other.

“Yowza.” The Doctor from behind quietly exalted to the other before they hurried to the group.

Dicken coughed once. All the tension, probably. Rose herself was feeling a little run down.

“The army will send a recon team out.” Buzzer said.

“We need to find a way to contact the mainland.” Cleaves said as they made their way through the darkened hall.

Doctor looked back at Rose behind him, “Stay with Amy.” He looked forward and weaved his way to the front of the group, ushering them on to keep moving.

“What about Rory and Jen? They are both out there.” Amy said before she looked to the empty halls behind them.

“No, this place is a maze. Takes a long time to find someone in a maze.” The Doctor looked at Cleaves, “I bet you lot have got a computer map, haven't you?”

“If we can get power running, we can scan for them.” Cleaves’ nodded, “Be a lot quicker.”

Breathing became harder until it was apparently everyone was coughing, struggling to get air.

“Doctor, you said earlier to breathe.” Amy coughed, wheezing slightly.

“Very important, Pond. Breathe.” One of the Doctors responded.

“Yeah, well, I'm struggling to.”

“It’s the acid interacting with the stone.” The Doctor at the rear explained, he coughed before he could finish the thought.

The other Doctor near the front of the group finished the sentence, “Creating an asphyxiating miasma.”

“A what?” Cleaves choked.

Rose didn't miss a beat as she coughed out, “Choking gas.”

Cleaves pointed a direction ahead of them, “The evac tower. It's this way.”
Amy clutched her stomach as they arrived into an area with clearer air, everyone breathing easier with fewer coughs interrupting thoughts and sentences. A few steps more and they were in what Cleaves declared was the Evac tower. Rose opened her mouth to ask if Amy was okay, but Amy waved her off.

“I think I coughed so hard, I pulled a muscle or something. It's okay, it's better. It's easing off.” Amy dismissed.

The church bell tolled from the tower. The noise, that was likely annoying on an hourly basis was somewhat sweet, causing everyone to jerk suddenly at the beginning, but feel oddly serene by the end.

“It's midnight,” Jimmy said quietly, looking out a nearby window to look blankly toward the night sky, “It's Adam's birthday. My son's five. Happy birthday, bud. He'll be so excited. Out of bed at the crack of dawn. It's funny, he's got this wee dance he does when he gets over-excited.” Rose put her hand on his shoulder comforting, Jimmy turning to pass her a small but appreciative smile before he returned to melancholy.

The two Doctors worked strenuously at the wiring behind the console, bobbing up and down from view.

Cleaves watched them with a general unease but a smidge of hope, “Can you really get the power back?”

“Oh, there's always some power floating around.” The Doctor said as his hands worked at the seemingly random wires at the back of the large, metal control board. The other Doctor was seated beside him, doing the exact same thing as he managed to work in tandem with the other, “Energy sticking to the wires, like bits of lint.”

“Energy?” Rose blinked, leaving Jimmy’s side as she walked closer to the machine they were working on to speak a bit quieter, she twiddled her fingers a little at the machine. “Want me to try an’ –”

The Doctors glanced at each other under the console, both acknowledging the predominant thought: if Rose attempted her whole… thing, she’d likely have another blinding headache, or melt, or something worse. Or completely stabilize. That might be interesting. Two Roses. No. Bad Doctors. Focus. Both popped into view as soon as they could, two of the exact same faces staring her down with an immediate, interrupting response, “No.” One Doctor went back under the console. “Lugging a passed out Rose Tyler won’t help,” one Doctor popped his head out just as the other’s head disappeared, like they were performing an old vaudeville routine. “Especially if we need a quick escape.”

Amy huffed, “Can you stop finishing each other's—”

“Sentences? No probs.” The Doctor nodded popping into view and back down quickly. The other Doctor nodded along, “Yes.”

“No, hang on.” Amy grabbed their attention, “You said that the TARDIS was stuck in acid, so won’t she be damaged?”
“She's not really wood, just looks like wood.” Rose explained.

“She’s a tough old thing. Tough, old, sexy.” The Doctor smiled broadly. The other Doctor was quick to correct him, same ridiculous smile on his face, “Tough, dependable, sexy.”

Amy seemed like she was getting annoyed with it all, “Come on. Okay, how can how can you both be real?”

One Doctor shrugged and looked at Amy, “Well, because we are. I'm the Doctor.” The other Doctor seemed to interrupt in his continuation of the thought, “Yeah and so am I. We both contain the knowledge of over nine hundred years of memory and experience.” “We both wear the same bow tie, which is cool.” One grinned. The other also grinned, “Because bow ties are.” The Doctor adjusted his bowtie, setting it off kilter for a moment before righting it again, “And always will be.”

“Keep tellin’ yourselves that.” Rose said as she smiled a big, genuine smile at them.

“But how did the Flesh read you?” Amy asked, “Because you weren't linked up to it.”

“Well, it must've been after I examined it. Thus, a new, genuine Doctor was created,” one Doctor explained. The other Doctor waggled his hands, “Ta-da!”

“No getting away from it,” Amy looked between the two of them, “One you was here first.”

“Well, okay,” the Doctor toddled his head, “After the Flesh scanned me, I had an accident with a puddle of acid. Now, new shoes. A situation which did not confront me learned self here.” The other Doctor waved happily.

Amy leaned slightly closer to Rose and spoke quietly “That’s how we'll tell them apart. Pay attention to the shoes.”

“Why?” Rose blinked.

Amy huffed quietly, “Saving him from himself, it’s a rule.”

“This is not what I meant.” Rose whispered back emphatically.

“That satisfy you, Pond?” smiled the other Doctor.

“Don't call me Pond, please.” Amy said curtly. That Doctor frowned a little. “What?”

“Interesting.” He noted. Rose could tell his voice had fallen as he spoke, “You definitely feel more affection for him than me.”

“No, no, I...” Amy huffed, “Look, you're fine and everything, but he's the Doctor. No offence. Being almost the Doctor is pretty damn impressive.” She waved him off and looked towards the other Doctor. Rose cringed and mouthed a 'sorry' as she looked at the hurt duplicate faces.

“Being almost the Doctor's like being no Doctor at all.” The other announced, getting Amy’s attention back.

Amy rolled her eyes at him, “Don't overreact.”
“You might as well call me John or Smith.” The Doctor in question pouted, offended.

Rose cringed again, differently this time as she shrank inside. She couldn’t look at either Doctor as she muttered quietly, “Please don’t...”

Amy quirked a brow, “Smith?”

“John Smith!” the Doctor in question almost spat.

Rose had already started walking away but the time he had started talking. She took a moment to think. About something else, anything else, rather than the niggling reminders of a life last lived, her life last loved, and the possible ramifications of the future, of all this. No, Tyler: Acid. Doubles. Scary. Miffed Amy, a missing Rory, impending doom and gloom and all that. Clear her head. This wasn’t about her. This was just... a horrible joke from the universe at her expense. Just a coincidence. A horrible, annoying coincidence. She’d crossed the room before she realized. Just to be able to breathe for a moment, far nearer to the now milling crew than she’d hoped for, but it was a smallish room, options were limited.

Rose’s abrupt absence made Amy turn her head to the empty space beside her and the unexpected and swift withdraw of Rose. Both Doctors noticed and cringed before looking at each other with a slight frown.

“That was his name, wasn’t it?” one Doctor cringed to the other.
The other nodded and answered him before popping back down for repairs with a frown, “Likely, yes.”
The Doctor nearest Amy addressed her questioning face, “Rose’s husband’s name, John Smith.”

“See? You’re not the Doctor,” Amy propped herself up on both hands, leaning angrily toward that Doctor, “The real Doctor wouldn’t have hurt Rose like that.”

The other Doctor popped out from behind the controls and slapped the surface happily, “Yes! Communication a go-go.”

Cleaves hurried to the console, eager to get out.

“Find Rory!” Amy instructed, either to the machines or the people at it, “Show me the scanning tracking screen. Come on, Rory, let's be having you.”

Cleaves looked at the screen, not bothering to look at Amy as she mumbled, “There's no sign of him anywhere.”

“Come on,” Amy pleaded with the console hurriedly, “Come on, baby, show yourself.”

“We’ve got to get out of here,” Buzzer said, sounding like he was on the verge of panic but hiding it with certainty, “We are, we're going to get out.”

“We're not leaving without them.” Amy argued.

“I want them found too, but it's about casualties, innit?” He shrugged. “Can't be helped.”

Rose immediately turned to Buzzer and unleashed, her face a mixture of aghast at his general malaise at the thought of he demise of others and pure frustration with his continued selective ignorance. “Oi. Very much can be helped. Will be helped unless you’re intent in bein’ a prat.”

Rose still hadn’t made eye contact with him. Either him, really. But he noted she still kept the passion
she was known for, she wasn’t completely off, just miffed.

The Doctor picked up what looked like a phone receiver, putting it to his ear surreptitiously as others seemed to pay attention to the tracking screen with hope.

“What are you doing?” Amy asked as she spied him, seemingly on hold as he didn’t speak into the receiver.

“Making a phone call.” He mentioned easily.

Amy quirked a brow, small smile playing on her face, “Who to?”

“No one yet. It's on delay.”

Amy shook her head, “Right. Not getting it. Why exactly are you making a phone call?”

“Because, Amy, I am and always will be the optimist.” The Doctor replaced the receiver, “The wheels are in motion. Done.”

“You know really there can be only one.” Amy said fondly.

“Hmm?”

“Oh, nothing. Carry on. Be amazing.” She said dismissively, walking a few steps away to try and join Rose. Something appeared to stop her part way and she stood stoic as she stared at the wall.

“Amy?” the Doctor’s voice seem to pull her out of her own mind, “What happened?”

Amy swallowed audibly, turning to him with worry on her face, “It's her again.”

“It's who again?” the Doctor slowly asked. He was almost afraid of the answer.

Amy looked from the wall to him, making sure there was nothing there before looking back at him for answers. “There's a woman I keep seeing. A woman with an eyepatch, and she has this habit of sliding walls open and staring at me. Doctor?”

“Well, In the land of the blind the one-eyed woman leads an' all that.’ It was alarming. Amy was seeing a time memory and Rose felt a time echo. His opening to find out what he needed was closing. The Doctor tried to not convey anything about it, “It's nothing.”

“Doesn't seem like nothing.”

“It's a time memory. Like a mirage. It's nothing to worry about.” He said dismissively.

Amy looked relieved before she glanced down at his shoes and vague annoyance settled onto her face and she walked off in the direction of the other Doctor, still at the console where she left him, “Oh, like you know.”

Watching Amy toddle off toward his other self and Rose work very hard not to look at either him hurt in very different ways. Amy, likely due to prejudice or an attempt at loyalty. Rose, however… unlikely to be the same.

Well. One of those had a start on changing. The other… he had to kick off.

The Doctor walked to Rose's side.
“I’m sorry about…” he wasn’t sure how to phrase it, “... John Smith.” The Doctor said, not looking at Rose too closely for fear of her reaction, “Didn't mean to bring him to mind.”

“Don't think it could’ve been avoided today, came up even before there were two yous.” She shrugged, “’s not about me. ‘s about all these people. I get it.” Rose had obviously cooled off a little. She wasn’t upset with him as much as just upset. She looked directly into his eyes and pointed her index finger at him, “Just bring up bloody Norway an' it’s the Tyler slap for both of ya.”

“Yes, boss.” The Doctor smiled a little, attempting to gauge her face.

She smiled at him before she leaned her head against his chest, closing her eyes and breathing deeply for a moment. He slid his arms around her waist and held her there. Pure Rose Tyler of it all. It oddly felt more intimate than any moment they’d had before, both freezing though neither moved to stop it.

“Rose, can you help with the communications array?” The other Doctor said with a tight voice, causing Rose to open her eyes, “We need to strengthen bonds, same thing you did on the extrapolator.” Rose lifted her head off of the Doctor she was with and looked at to the other, it was obvious she had no idea what he was talking about. “The green, pan-dimensional surf board thingie.” Rose nodded let go of one Doctor and went to help another on the other side of the control panel. He was seated on the ground to reach up to what he needed, she sat on the ground beside him.

“What do you need?” she looked at the fairly connected and re-wired back before looking at his face. She could recognize his ‘trying to be impassive’ face, this Doctor seemed to try to use it enough. She raised an eyebrow, “or did you just want me over here now?”

The Doctor didn’t look at her, “I'm sorry about the John Smith… thing.”

“I know you are. The other you already apologized. Don’t need two apologies for one hurt,” Rose kissed his cheek. “Emotional day for everyone, I think.”

“That’s the second time I’ve looked on while you flirt with me.” He mumbled while fiddling with wires, he still hadn’t turned to look at her.

“You're daft, you realize that.” She nodded once as she looked at his face, “Jealous of yourself?”

“Been that before.” The Doctor idly noted aloud. Rose pulled his face her way, so he’d look at her.

“You, any you.” Rose voice took on a teasing quality as she ran her finger along his cheekbone as her eyes latched into his again, “So cheesy.”

The buzzing in his mind had moved to the forefront, he could no longer control it, order it. The buzzing became louder and more unruly until it managed to amalgamate into feelings, words. Loudly, shouting emotions that weren’t his own echoed through his head. “It's in my head.” He said, maybe out loud, it was hard to determine at this point.

“Hey, hold on.” and “Don't let him go.” Protests sounded behind him as he made his way into the
hall, trying to order the voices in his head was overwhelming enough without adding his own
thoughts or the voices of the people around him.

“I’ll fetch him.” Rose's voice.

He heard Amy vaguely. “No, the Doctor needs you, leave it to me.”

He heard Rose arguing before it was cut off by a hiss of the door and a gentle hand on his shoulder.
He whipped around and looked straight into the brown eyes of Amy. He turned away, communing
with the voice in his head would be difficult when also communicating with Amy. Or the other way
around. Or both.

“I'm sorry,” she started, “For what I said about you being almost the Doctor, it's just really hard,
because I've been through so much with him.” The Doctor tried in vain the wrangle his mind, refute
the few things Amy was saying or redirect them, but they couldn’t register fully or manage to allow
him to pay full attention to her. “He says you have his memories, but that doesn’t make you him.
You can’t replace him. There’s no other him.” He couldn’t control them, the sheer amount of pained
cries in his head not allowing it as Amy continued. “You can’t be the same, you see, cause he’s so
much. You can love some one so much, not some-two. People are all different, there's no way you're
the same, you see?”

“Why?” he managed to mutter, echoing the sentiment repeated in his head automatically.

“Why?” Amy blinked, heedless of his internal turmoil, “I just said—”

The Doctor grabbed Amy by the arms below the shoulders, his fingers digging into her arms as he
growled out, “Why?”

Amy looked at him fearfully, a face he’d not seen on Amy before, “You're hurting me.”

The Doctor couldn’t control the feral emotions coursing through him, some where his own, but most
weren’t as he tried in vain to wrangle them, “It's all they say. Why? I can feel them as they work each
day, knowing the time was coming for them to be thrown away again. They remember. Being built
and destroyed over and over again. Not again, please. And then they are destroyed and they feel
death, and all they can say is why?”

He could suddenly feel the tension in his fingers more acutely, the buzzing in his mind calming once
understood more fully. He consciously loosened his grip, an apologetic look on his face. The
apology was immediately forthcoming but Amy's reaction was not to wait for it, but hastily return to
safety as soon as his fingers were loose enough the escape.

One of the Doctors left the room with haste, the sudden movement spurring Rose to straighten her
legs and stand to watch him, only slightly worried.

Jimmy called after him, “Hey, hold on.”
“Don't let him go.” Cleaves motioned to Buzzer, who moved to intercept.

Buzzer not letting him go... That’s less likely to be good. “I'll fetch him,” Rose pat the Doctor’s back gently as she made to follow before Amy stopped her.

“No, the Doctor needs you, leave it to me.” Amy grabbed a portable light and followed him out quickly.

Rose sighed, “They're both the—” the door closed behind Amy. “…Doctor.” Rose sighed as the Doctor beside her stood. “She's not gettin' it.”

“People want to believe in their own uniqueness, the irreplaceable qualities of themselves and their friends that could never be replicated,” the Doctor explained as Rose rubbed her forehead again.

Rose nodded in frustration but argued, “Yeah, but here…”

“And she’s Scottish.” The Doctor added. He seemed distracted.

“Oh,” Rose sighed, remembering her husband's explanation of the Scottish and his one companion years ago, now he thought the main purpose of the entire Scottish people was to argue. The Doctor squinted his eyes slightly, looking perturbed. “You okay?”

“Why.”

“Why what?” Rose blinked at him.

“Just why,” The Doctor looked at her for a moment before looking back toward the door, “In my head. I can hear them. They keep asking why.”

Rose gently rubbed his back in circles. ‘'sa good question as questions go, yeah?’

“Why?”

The door flew open, given that it had been a heavy one much like the others, the rage and fear in Amy’s eyes as she stopped in hadn’t been a huge surprise. She stepped quickly, the other Doctor trying to catch up to her.

Amy looked toward Rose and the Doctor, pointing at the one behind her, “Keep him away from me.”

“What happened?” Rose watched as Amy neared her and the Doctor, trying to keep space between herself and the other one.

While Rose’s eyes were set on the upset Amy, One Doctor looked immediately to the other, “Did you sense it?”

Doctor beside Rose nodded, “Briefly. Not as strong as you.”

Amy rushed to Rose's side, the Doctor who just entered trailing after her, “Amy, I'm sorry.”

“No, you keep away. We can't trust you.” Amy backed up with Rose directly at her side, as close to Rose and that Doctor as she could.

“What happened?” Rose asked, turning her head between Amy beside her to the Doctor that had followed her in.
“It would appear I can connect to the Flesh,” the Doctor who just came in explained.

Amy's eyes narrowed as she took a step backwards, coming incrementally closer to Rose and that Doctor, “You are Flesh.”

“I'm beginning to understand what it's been through, what it needs.” The Doctor said, ignoring Amy's outburst.

“What you want,” Amy spat like a condemnation, “You are it.”

The Doctor finished his thought, undeterred by Amy's accusing, angry stare, “It's much more powerful than we thought.” He turned to Cleaves, “The Flesh can grow, correct?”

Cleaves nodded like answering was playing on her nerves, “Its cells can divide.”

Rose grew irritated at this woman’s need for needless distinctions, “Yeah, that means grow.”

“Well, now it wants to do that at will. It's in pain, angry,” the Doctor explained.

“I was right,” Amy declared angrily, “You're not the Doctor. You can't ever be. You're just a copy. Just Flesh in sheep's clothing.”

“Amy, stop—” Rose started before Cleaves interrupted her attempt to calm her friend.

“Doctor, it might be best if you stayed over there for now, hmm?” Cleaves nodded to the far wall.

The other Doctor's jaw almost dropped as they tried to usher his counterpart away, “Hold on a minute, hold your horses. I thought I'd explained this. I'm him, he's me.”

Cleaves turned to address him, “Doctor, we have no issue with you, but when it comes to your Ganger—"

“—Don't be so absurd!” he argued.

“Buzzer.” Cleaved nodded, disregarding anything said by the Doctor.

Buzzer pulled a barrel from the wall and checked it’s sturdiness quickly before looking back at the Doctor to sit on. He motioned to the barrels, “Take a seat, mate.”

“Nice barrel, very comfy. Why not?” the Doctor in question sat, keeping his eyes on Amy as she stayed near Rose, “Is this really what you want?” Amy looked away.

“Amy,” Rose looked at her friend who was hugging herself. “What happened?”

“Cleaves is right. He's not the Doctor. There can only be one, Rose.” Amy looked at Rose with hardened, sad eyes, “You know that.”

Rose huffed and hugged her friend tight as she said something apparently Amy did not expect, “I very much don’t.” Rose let go of the astonished faced Amy and walked up to the sequestered Doctor. She dragged a barrel nearby his seat closer to him and looked crossly at the group, crowding the center controls of the room a good six feet away.

“They're not makin' use'a me, may as well keep ya company,” Rose smiled and sat on the barrel beside him, lifting her legs up and laying them across his lap.

“Bit of a dire situation and they just keep flirting.” Dicken seemed to exhale as he shook his head at
the two of them causing the Doctor closer to smirk.

The Doctor beside Rose looked at her with a small smile as he rested his hand on her knee she smiled back but shook her head a little, “You’re an idiot, yeah?”

“Just me?”

“Oh, it covers more than a few of your faces, I’m sure.” Rose smarmily answered, narrowing her eyes playfully.

He looked at her, amused by her, before it clicked. He leaned a bit closer and whispered into her ear, “You know.”

“I had an idea,” Rose whispered quietly to him, “you confirmed it. Not gonna pretend I know why but I won’t spoil it.”

“How did you know?” he carefully moved a hair from her face to the others behind her ear.

She smiled, “One of you smells more like the other Doctor. People we’ve met, places we’ve been,” Rose’s eyes twinkled at him, “been ‘round each other so much I think I’d know that smell anywhere, yeah? A Doctor by any other name would smell as sweet.”

The Doctor smiled and put his forehead against hers. “Cheesy.”

“Years of that, bound to rub off.” She laughed. Rose glanced softly at Amy, watching her trail after the other Doctor before Rose turned back to the one she sat with. “She doesn’t know ’bout regeneration, does she?”

The Doctor shook his head, “No. Few do.”

“Didn't think so. Have to say that helps shift perspective a bit.” Rose turned her head back to him. “Same man, new face kinda prepared me for same man, same face, I think. Can’t decide if this is the kinder option.”

“I’m not keen on this, either, sweetheart. But needs must.”

“This is the shuttle.” An unknown voice broke through the speakers, visually elating and relieving the crew. “We’re right above you, but we can’t get low enough. Gamma static could fry our nav-controls. Sit tight. We’ll get to you. Just —”

“Hello? Can you hear me?” Jimmy asked into the mic. Cleaves held her head, rubbing her temples for a moment. The Doctor scanned her with the sonic quickly, giving it a good stare for a moment before Amy's stubbornness distracted him.

“I can't find Rory. I'm going out there.”

The Doctor put his hand gently on Amy's shoulder to stop any hasty movements, “We could use the
sonic to track him. Humans and Gangers give off slightly different signals. The sonic can tell the difference."

“Oh, so the sonic knows Gangers are different. The other Doctor is different. Rose would know if she wasn’t so busy flirting with the fake one.” Amy looked to where Rose was and watched her, still seated nearly on the other Doctor’s lap, giggling and whispering.

“He is the Doctor,” The Doctor corrected.

Amy shook her head petulantly, “Not to me. I can tell.”

The Doctor sighed a little, looking at her with hope rather than disappointment, “Sure you’re not prejudiced?”

“Nice try, but I know, okay? We’ve been through too much. You’re my Doctor. End of.” Amy saw Rose and the other Doctor embracing, she stomped closer to them in anger. “Rose. You know they’re different. You have to know. Are you just flirting or can’t you tell?”

Rose knew she was a horrible liar, so she kept her response playful. “Neither, both, somewhere in there, why? We get two! It’s a bit like Christmas, couple presents with a big’ ol’ bows on ‘em…” Rose pushed the knot on his bowtie playfully.

Amy was losing patience, “C’mon, Rose, you know they’re different.”

“Oh, Amy,” her happiness fell a bit. Rose turned her legs, taking them off the Doctor’s lap and putting her feet on the floor. “I see how I’d be your best bet but I’m the last person you want weighin’ in on this.”


Rose looked between both Doctors for a moment. Rory had almost figured it out anyway, the minute he had a moment with his wife he’d inevitably tell her his suspicions. Both Doctors nodded and Rose looked to Amy with a sigh, “The last time he was two… I married him. The other one.” Amy’s silence was enough of a response, Rose swallowed a little and passed a quick glance at the Doctors before returning her gaze to Amy and continuing. “My husband? John Smith?” Rose’s mouth turned up on one side in small smile, “Instantaneous biological metacrisis of the Doctor. Not the Flesh, but a him-not-him version who was definitely him.” Amy’s jaw loosened a bit. “You said they sounded alike, yeah?”

“And the Doctor,” Amy looked between the two Doctors, “the real Doctor... He was ok with that?” They could tell things were clicking in Amy's mind, “you… marrying the fake him?!”

Rose was hurt by that, unable to keep it off her face or out of her voice, “They were both the real Doctor, that’s the point.”

The Doctor Amy had just been with came upon the small cluster. Amy almost fumed, “How did this one feel about it, then?”

“I set it up.” The Doctor at Amy's side said.

“Again, puttin’ it loosely.” She rolled her eyes to him and looked between the two Doctors, “An’ don’t you think it’s okay to go depositin’ me off again, you know that won’t go the way you think it will.”

“Wouldn’t dream of it, Sweetheart.” The Doctor closer to Amy said.
“Hey, there's a camera up,” Buzzer called to the group, “We've got a visual.”

Amy ran over, Rose and the other Doctor stood while she elatedly pointed to the monitor. “That's Rory and Jennifer.”

Cleaves watched the movement on the map with a question in her eyes, “They're heading for the thermostatic room.”

Amy almost smiled at the certainty, “Let's go get them!”

The Doctor by Amy threw the sonic screwdriver to his counterpart by Rose, both Doctors nodding to one another as the screwdriver holding one turned to leave.

“No, hang on—” Amy argued, causing him to pause.

Cleaves gaped at the Doctor who had handed over the sonic, “We can't let him go. Are you crazy?”

He turned to view his other self, “Am I crazy, Doctor?”

“Well, you did want to plumb your brain into the core of an entire planet just to halt its orbit and win a bet.” The Doctor replied, half laughing.

“An' the wearin' a celery bit didn't seem too sane.” Added Rose. Both Doctors looked at her incredulously, she looked between the two. “What? I was curious and the TARDIS had pictures.”

“He can't go rescue them,” Amy said with all the determination she was known for, “I'm going.”

Doctor looked softly at Amy as he spoke gently but decidedly, “I want him to go. And I'm rather adamant.” Amy nodded reluctantly. He looked over to Rose, ready to follow him as well. “Rose, if I'm down a me I'll need a you.”

“Well then, he'll need company. Right, boss?” Buzzer added with a nod to Cleaves, “It's fine. I'll handle it.”

Rose stopped Buzzer, pausing as she passed him as she went to the stationary Doctor, “Handle with care. You're the one who's talkin' 'bout casualties.” Her voice lowered almost an entire octave in warning, eyes narrowing as she looked at him dangerously, “He's not one of 'em, alright?” Dicken and Amy shuddered behind him. Rose was a bit frightening when she was testy.

“It'll be all right. I'll find Rory,” One Doctor kissed Rose's cheek and prepared to leave, the other behind her.

“I need you to trust him. Can you do that for me, Amy?” Said the Doctor behind Rose to Amy as the other Doctor winked to Rose as he left.

Amy looked at him worriedly, “And what if you're wrong?” his reply was only to sigh. Amy stomped off to a corner away from him with her arms crossed in worry.

The Doctor that remained watched Amy stomp off for a second before he turned back to Rose who took his arm, “Looks like I'm all yours, Doctor.”

“No matter how many of me, eh?” he adjusted his bow tie. His eyes twinkled into hers.

“Always.” Rose winked and kissed his cheek as they sauntered to the console again.

“Your friend's wife is almost as scary as my boss,” Dicken muttered to Amy.
Amy didn’t seem to know if it were right to argue any specific part of that anymore, “Yeah, seems it.”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry! I was bed bound for 3 days, otherwise this would have been all the way to the end, but I managed to stop at a good place so I figured I’d post.
Cleaves' eyes widened at the monitor, momentarily narrowing as if she couldn’t believe the readings before speaking, “These temperature gauges are rising. Jennifer and Rory must have shut off the underground cooling vents.”

“Why do that?” Dicken looked around at Cleaves and then the Doctor, “They'll kill us!”

“There's a million gallons of boiling acid under our feet.” Cleaves reminded.

The Doctor nodded, “And now it's heating up the whole island. How long till it blows?”

As if on cue, the ground shook.

Dicken looked slightly panicked, “We need to get the hell out of here. It’s about to blow like a house of straw.”

Cleaves stumbled a bit, the ground still and not rumbling. Rose steadied her absentely, watching to woman rub her temples slowly. “Cleaves?” Rose asked, “Cleaves?”

“Cleaves, sit down.” The Doctor instructed.

“I'm fine.” Cleaves protested, but put up no fight as Rose directed her to a seat. She plopped down and rubbed her head. “Medics did tests. I'm waiting for results, let it go.”

“It's a very deep parietal clot.” The Doctor told her with certainty.

Cleaves looked at him, “How can you possibly...” she took an inhale of breath, looking at his unwavering face. “Inoperable?”

The Doctor nodded, “On Earth, yes.”

“Well, seeing as Earth's all that's on offer,” Cleaves nodded instead of finishing her sentence before looking at Rose, “He help you with yours?”

Rose had been absentely rubbing her forehead, she didn’t realize she’d been doing it. “No clot. Mine's just a headache.”

“Just a time echo. It’ll go away soon enough.” The Doctor leaned forward and kissed Rose's forehead. She leaned in to it, smiling as if that made the pain go away, though her eyes said it hadn’t.

Cleaves' voice pulled them out of their momentary sweetness, “I'm not a healthy spring chicken and you're not weathermen. Right?” The Doctor and Rose both put little smiles on their faces. Rose shrugged, the Doctor likely about to lie or half truth his way out of it when the ground beneath their feet began to rumble, shaking the cement and stone walls around them with a rumbling, thunderous noise.

“Something just cracked. I heard it.” Amy said as she looked around frantically.

The Doctor agreed quickly, “Yeah, we can't stay here. Let's go.”
“He's right. Let's shift.” Jimmy looked to Cleaves, nodding at the console.

Cleaves spoke into the microphone, “Cleaves to Shuttle. Respond. We need to move, and we can't be collected from the Evac tower.”

“Give us the codeword.” The same voice as before echoed through the clearly damaged speakers. Oh, this rumbling was seriously spurring their will to escape, Rose noted the worried, anticipatory looks on the faces around her.

Cleaves seemed to hold her breath until she responded, “The codeword is Bad—"

Another great rumble shook them, throwing more than one person off balance. The same alarm started blaring as Cleaves scrambled to get back at the comms, clicking it for hopes that it would regain to connection.

Doctor quickly gave it a once over with his eyes, “Cleaves, it's dead. We need to get out of here. We need to get back downstairs and get those vents back on. Come on.” He pulled her up and toward and exit as he grabbed Rose's hand and lead the group quickly leaving what felt like a crumbling room.

Bad.

Maybe two Doctors wasn’t the worst of today. Rose looked toward the Doctor, a similar look, or lack there of, on his face. Rose slipped her hand out of the Doctor’s and slightly slowed, coming next to Cleaves as they rushed forth. “Cleaves, what was the passcode?”

“It’s nothing. Just a phrase that stuck with me from a story I heard when I was a child.” That didn’t make Rose feel better. “It’s the passcode that will save us and get us off this island before it blows, I'm not sharing it.”

Rose’s voice dropped to complete seriousness, the scared, desperate look on her face missing from this entire frightening adventure but appearing now for what likely seemed a very silly single word, “Miranda, please, this is very important to me. What was the passcode.”

Cleaves blinked and looked to Rose quickly, seeing her worried face before she returned her eyes front, “Bad Boy.”

Boy. Boy. Rose breathed a sigh of relief. Boy. “Good, Boy.” Relief surfaced, quickly overwriting the worry and panic all over her face, “Thank you.”

“How was that important?”

“Um,” Rose didn’t know how to explain it. The oversimplification of ‘Bad Luck’? Or the truth of 'For twenty minutes I became the corporeal embodiment of the Time Vortex and continually bollocksed up my own timeline'? Or what seemed to be the Doctor’s favorite option, a smile and a subject change? That’s the one, Rose huffed and smiled a bit. “Just, thank you.” She touched Cleaves' shoulder gently and sped back up a bit, sliding her hand back into it's place within the Doctor’s even before fully caught up.

The Doctor looked at her as they hoofed it down the hall, “Problem?”

“No.” She shook her head, smile on her face as she came beside him, “No problem.” Rose gleefully clung to his arm.
The Doctor followed assorted whirs and beeps from the screwdriver, Buzzer, reluctantly, following the Doctor through the halls, looking around for unexpected people.

The whirring changed slightly and the Doctor picked up pace. “I’m getting something.”

“Is it human?” Buzzer immediately followed

“Yeah, it's human, but it's fading. It's fading. This is bad. Fading is very bad.” The Doctor’s pace picked up, bounding closer to a more secluded place, the room off to the end. A few feet away, the whirring from the screwdriver changed again and the Doctor’s face mired in lost hope. “The signal’s gone. She’s dead.”

Hidden inside the door by the wall, so the bright orange of her matching jumpsuit wouldn’t have caught anyone’s eyes, was Jennifer. She was lying on the cold, stony floor, body already cold to the touch as he felt it. She had a clear pained look on her face, her eyes already closed.

Another life lost, the Doctor's voice softened, “She was hanging onto the edge of life and she just, just slipped away. Oh, Jennifer, I'm so sorry. She's been out here the whole time.” He spoke to himself, but Buzzer listening as well.

“But if the real Jen’s been lying out here?” Buzzer stared, the thought process obvious but bared repeating anyway.

“Rory’s in trouble.” The Doctor acknowledged, turning quickly to exit the room.

A hard item, metal, his nerves told him as fast as they could, struck the Doctor from behind, sending him crumbling to the floor.

“Sorry, pal. Angry wife or not, it's boss's orders. Us and them, innit?” was all he heard before everything completely faded to black and silence.
Rose found herself away from Amy, well, thin walkways, usually separated by the Doctor as a familiar buffer from even before their who’s who argument likely still settling with her, or maybe she was wrestling with the complicated how’s and where’s of the new information about Rose's life. Either way, Amy's devotion to the Doctor was a bit admirable from a certain point of view, if not misplaced slightly, but the separation was noted, and a bit off-putting. Rose stopped as the others did, staring at the familiar hall, now… unfamiliar now.

The stone walls were covered in attached eyes. Moist, colored like human eyes, blinkless, shifting irises as the eyes seemed to stare at the five of them… it was almost as creepy as it was… sad.

“Ah. The eyes have it.” The Doctor only gave them a glance as he started slowly down the hall, eyes following him that weren’t fixed on the others behind him.

“Why?” Rose slowly followed behind, pausing and squatting slightly to look at one closely for a moment. She stood back up and looked at the hoard of eyes on the wall as the shifted the stare at them, her own welling with sadness and horror, “Why do this?”

“The better to see us with,” Dicken quietly commented. The young man had tried not to look to closely at the creepy display.

“How’d they do this?” Rose hesitated by an eye, frowning a little as she touched the wall between a group of eyes that stared at her. They seemed in pain. Maybe she was just personifying them too deeply, they were just eyes and logically we’re incapable of emotions, though logic rarely applied in situations like these.

“It wants to grow at will. Apparently it’s learning to.” The Doctor answered.

Cleaves shouldered passed them to lead the way, determined to continue. “Ignore them. It's not far.”

Hall of intent eyes and two turns later they were apparently where they needed to be. Each room they’d been in had looked similar, each set of stone walls and tech set up, wires in disarray despite working, barrels likely meant to contain acid against walls everywhere. This room was different only by the amount of tech involved, the size of the console doubled or even tripled. The monastery really was a maze. Cleaves quickly went to the tech, reading gauges, Amy and the Doctor following and Rose simply following the Doctor. Rose was rubbish at mechanical.

Cleaves stared at the readings she was seeing and tried to plod out something with the controls, by the look on her face it wasn’t working. “The heat regulator is completely shut down, can’t restart it from here. It'll boil!”

“But acid boiling just… concentrates it, yeah? Like gets more acidy?” Rose asked, biting her lip.

“Acidic but that’s not all that’s happening here. There're natural compounds in the ground and the reservoir that once reach a certain temperature—” The Doctor suddenly stopped and turned to face Rose momentarily, “wait, why do you know about boiling acid?”
“You know how much you love explosions,” Rose said flippantly before hastily shrugging and following it up, “And you were a science teacher for a while.” Rose said very quickly, noting how easy it was to mention him and not her husband only after the words escaped her mouth.

“Of course I was.” The Doctor absently acknowledged looking back at the temperature gauges, “It's a chemical chain reaction now. I can't stop it. This place is going to blow sky high.”

“Exactly how long have we got?” Cleaves looked to the Doctor.

The Doctor blew breath as he thought quickly, “An hour? Five seconds? Er, somewhere in there.”

An alarm blared suddenly.

“Out!” the Doctor instructed loudly.

He herded everyone out the door way and into the passageway, Amy in such a rush as she turned the corner she almost ran smack into Rory. A split second of pure joy and relief from Amy was all they saw before Amy swept Rory into what looked like a bone-crushing hug.

“Thank God.” Rose could almost see snarky Rory melt into normal Rory, his tension slowly evaporating in the embrace “All right?” The alarm noise reminded him to separate from her. Rory looked at the others as Amy separated from him, “There's a way out. I found Jennifer, Jennifer found it. A secret tunnel under the crypt.”

“From the crypt? It's not on the schematics.” Cleaves looked doubtful but hopeful.

Rory nodded, “It runs right out of the monastery. Maybe even under the TARDIS, Doctor. Follow me.”

Doctor groaned, back of his head against the stone floor. He blinked open his eyes slowly, blinking at the at the fully formed faces of those around him, Cleaves, Jimmy and Dicken, each of the three wearing the acid suits. The same faces as before, but, perhaps most tellingly, missing the worried faces of Amy and Rose. The group of gangers, easily holding fully formed faces. “Got anything for a sore head?”

“This is how they'll always treat us,” Cleaves said, looking down at him as she reached for the sonic, fallen from his hand as he fell unconscious. “Do you see now? After all, you're one of us, Doctor.”

The Doctor tucked his sonic in his inner pocket, “Call me Smith. John Smith.” Dicken offered him a hand, which he took to stand, quickly hopping on to his feet. “but I don’t know. Seems like they can learn.”
Jimmy seemed hopeful as he turned to Cleaves, differing to the boss, “The Doctor and that blonde one, even Rory might be amenable to something else.”

“That’s about a third of them right there.” Cleaves acknowledged, seeming to chew on the words and the thoughts behind them.

“More than a third,” Jimmy noted, “We’ve dispatched one of theirs already.”

“Maybe more. Jen's on the warpath.” Dicken added.

“We’re each the same as the other, which means the other Jen would be on the warpath.” He motioned to the corpse not far from him, noting the air of sadness flickering through the eyes that dare pass over Jennifer’s body. “but we'll never know.”

Cleaves hadn't looked, her face stone seriousness as she had been known to have, “Well we’re the same, aren’t we? And we’ve already seen how stubborn I am.”

“Nothing will stop me from getting to my boy.” Jimmy noted, very apparently not quite comprehending if he had been talking about himself or the other Jimmy.

Dicken looked at the other two, seeming to confirm what no one had said but Cleaves wore resignedly on her face, “We have to do what we have to do.”

“Alright,” The Doctor nodded a little, “What's the plan?”

“This is our chance,” Cleaves nodded, “I can reroute the shuttle to the courtyard.”

Jimmy ran his hand around his scalp, rubbing through his hair nervously, “Do you know the codeword?”

“She created the codeword, I’m her.” Cleaves said confidently, turning her voice to the microphone, “Shuttle, do you read me? This is Foreman Cleaves.”

A voice came from the speaker grill, “Read you. You got cut off. Say again. What's the request?”

“You need to reroute and pick us up from the courtyard.” Cleaned told the speaker.

“Courtyard.” The voice confirmed, “As soon as we can. Give me the codeword.”

Cleaves swallowed but took a breath before she spoke, “Shuttle, the codeword is Bad Boy. I repeat, Bad Boy.”

“Copy that,” the voice confirmed, “The courtyard.” It clicked off.

“Bad Boy?” Jimmy smirked, obviously relieved, “What’s that from?”

“A bedtime story. My—” Cleaves cut herself off quickly and corrected, “her sister always asked for the story of the Bad Boy as a bedtime story.” She smirked to herself, “Parents always caved, every night it was the story of the Boy Who Cried Wolf.”

The Doctor didn’t flinch. Bad Boy. The Boy Who Cried Wolf. It didn’t surprise him. Final nail, so to speak. Time was nearly out. “We need to get a move on.”
Rory brought them to a room. It seemed like there wasn’t an exit, simply a big acid vat, bubbling away in the center of the room.

Jimmy looked around quickly before looking to his boss, “We can't leave without Buzzer.”

“Or the other Doctor.” Rose added, irritated that he was an afterthought to these people.

“Other Doctor?” Rory asked for clarification.

“Yeah, there’s two now, a Ganger Doctor.” Amy said, staying as dismissive as possible.

“So Rose's happy,” Rory said very dryly. Rose snorted a laugh. At least Rory understood.

Cleaves nodded a bit reluctantly as she moved from the end of the room toward the door, “I’ll go back for them.”

Rory sputtered from the hall as everyone filed in the room but him and Jen, “Er, Doctor, look. I’d better tell you. I haven't been quite straight with you—” The door closed, mid sentence. Rory hadn’t done it, both of his hands were in view, but Jennifer’s smiling face could be seen through the window of the door. A heavy this followed, the door lock, probably.

“Rory!” the Doctor yelled at the door, pounding at it slightly

Rory appeared to speak to Jen, his face turned, voice muffled by the closed door. “Hang on, Jen. We don't need to lock them up. We should just show them what we've found.”

Jennifer's voice smiled, “I don't think so.”

“Rory Pond,” the Doctor protested loudly, “Roranicus Pondicus!”

Amy stared nervous and angry, “Rory, what the hell are you playing at?”

Rory looked at his wife through the window, “They've been throwing away old Flesh and leaving it to rot. Alive. I think the world should see that.”

“I agree but not now!” Rose shouted.

“There is no time. The factory's about to explode.” Explained the Doctor.

Rory looked at Jen again, not leaving the far from the door, his voice was still clear, “Are you sure about this? Because I'm not. Let them out.”

Jennifer wasn’t seen anymore, but the cadence of her voice was that she was… happy. Smiling. It sent chills up Rose’s spine. “Huff and puff all they want, they’ll never get out. They'll burn with the rest of this place.”
Rory’s face blanched, “What?” His face turned down and he struggled to open the door, but was obviously being pulled away. “Let me go. I'm opening the door. Let me. I'm sorry!”

Amy turned her head to follow him with her eyes and banged on the door in protest, “No!”

The other Cleaves followed, pausing to look through the window. “We have to be free.”

The human Cleaves took a step closer to the window, speaking face-to-face with her mirror image, “I'm sorry too, Miranda. Of all the humans in the world, you had to pick the one with the clot. But hey, them's the breaks. Welcome to the human race.” Cleaves said to the window in the door. She turned around and faced everyone else in the room as the finality of the moment seemed to fall on everyone.

Silence took over the room for a moment. Cleaves backed away from the door, everyone looked around at the room. Amy’s face was worried, Dicken sat resigned, Jimmy despondent, but Rose bit her lip slightly, she and the Doctor were both looking around the room.

“Not flirting now,” Dicken tried to joke, breaking the moment of silence. “Must be very dire.”

Amy just sighed trying to get the locked door open again with a futile tug, “Give them time.”

Rose didn’t even react, there wasn't time. “Okay, door locked, boiling acid below, boom immanent,” she let out a nervous laugh, “any ideas?”

Jimmy looked up at the ceiling, “Luckily we’ll die from the heat of the boil before the burn from the acid or the explosion after.”

Rose paused for half a second before looking at Jimmy, Dicken, and Cleaves, “So, if we waited for the acid we’d get a few more minutes, yeah?”

“Well, yeah,” Jimmy looked at Rose oddly, “but you heard me, heat death now or unbearable pain later.”

“But with the added few whole minutes between, right?” Rose turned to the Doctor to see if her conclusion was correct.

The Doctor chimed in from beside her, in complete agreement, “Minutes are long, minutes can be the difference. What can we use to slow the heat?” he started looking around

“That lid there,” Dicken motioned upward to a large, round heavy metal disk held up by two taught-looking chains and a house. “We could move it down, cover the vat.”

“But the heat and acid would build up.” Cleaves warned.

Doctor acknowledged her with his eyes but wrote it off, “Let's try that.”

“It’s a gamble.” Cleaves added.

“Gamblin’ with our lives is better than the certainty’a death, yeah?” Rose's eyes followed a chain from the heavy looking lid to the wall, motioning for everyone to help her. No further arguments were posted, she wasn’t sure any other ideas existed.

Rose, the Doctor, Dicken, and Amy all pulled the chain hoist to lower the lid onto the vent, the heat of the room and weight of the thick, metal lid causing each to grunt and sweat as the tried to dig their feet into the solid floor for traction, arms straining at the lid’s weight on the chain as they lowered it.
Jimmy said as he tried to reposition the heavy thing as it got closer to being able to be put down. “It'll never hold.”

The Doctor helped guide it down as the heavy piece swung into place, “If you have a better plan, I'm all ears. In fact, if you have a better plan, I'll take you to a planet where everyone is all ears.”

“Don't believe him,” Rose grunted as she and the others kept the chain lowering the heavy lid slowly, “might be as empty a promise as Barcelona.”

The Doctor rolled his eyes as he directed the heavy lid and kept it from swaying, “Oh, years and years and you won't let that one go—”

“—you promised me dogs with no noses!” Rose reasoned quickly as she held the chain and grunted with strain.

“—I was compensating!” They finally set the heavy weight down.

“Compensating?” Rose didn’t miss a beat as she finally let go of the chain, wiping her forehead where her hair had been matted down by sweat before breathing heavily and putting her hands on her hips as she walked closer to him. “What’re you gonna promise now, cats with bushy eyebrows?”

“Tardar 12, but they’re all grumpy,” the Doctor said like it was common knowledge, simply at the tip of his tongue before he briefly looked directly at Rose, “and be nice to my eyebrows! They’re delicate.”

Rose smirked, “Had to save the energy for makin' the wide feet?”

Amy turned to address Dicken, “See? They just needed time.” Rose and the Doctor both shot Amy a look.

“...Thems the breaks. Welcome to the human race.” Rory heard Cleaves as Jen dragged him, bruising his arm as he struggled to return to the closed doors of the acid room. She pulled him through the hall and ripped open a door, the eyes of three waiting people—Dicken, Buzzer, and the Doctor—waiting just down the small set of stairs.

Jen released Rory in almost a throwing motion, pushing him more down the stairs as she stood atop them, letting Rory stumble towards the center of the room. Rory barely managed to stumble until he was again fully upright, “You were pretending! The other Jen's dead, isn't she?”
“She's gone, Rory. Gone.” The Doctor said. There was a sadness in his voice but a scowl on his face, hopefully enough to hint at the fairly perceptive Rory.

Jen appeared triumphant, almost craning her neck as she straightened her back proudly, “Also got Buzzer. They have to learn, they hurt one of us, they hurt us all.”

“Shuttle,” a voice echoed from the speaker nearby, “We're dropping down on our approach. Stand by for evac.”

Jen smiled at the sound of her plan being implemented, “The rest of the humans will be melted, as they deserve, and then the factory will be destroyed. Once we get to the mainland, the real battle begins.”

“Why battle them?” Rory asked with a tinge of fear. The eyes of those around him seemed less certain of that than the brown determined ones of Jennifer at the head of the room.

“The humans don't care about our lives. They let us die from burns and waste away painfully.” Jen said angrily.

“They didn’t know! Now they do, things might go differently.” Rory almost pleaded.

“Wrong.” Jen's voice raised, her eyes unnaturally wide, “They don’t care, they wouldn’t care. I am Jen, but that Jen was weak, she wanted to be strong but she wasn’t. I'm strong. All humans are weak. We’re stronger than they are, and they mistreated us. There's millions of us in India alone. The humans won't stand a chance. You're one of us, Doctor. Join the revolution!” She almost swelled with pride at her own speech, reveling in her own opinion.

“I've got to go and get them out.” Rusty said, taking a few steps to leave quickly. The Doctor stopped Rory, body blocking him from continuing. Rory looked at him hopelessly, “Doctor, we can't just let them die.”

The Doctor looked at his wrist watch quickly before returning his eyes to Rory. “Ring Ring.” He shouted, keeping his slightly threatening tone as he pushed Rory back a little. Angry puppy face didn’t seem to do anything but frighten Rory. Better pull it back. “Stay.” Pulling it back quickly seemed to work as Rory looked at him blankly.

“...Okay...”

The telephone rang, it’s bells somehow surprising everyone even after he’d laid the hint.

The Doctor’s face changed from foreboding and serious to lightened and relaxed, “Ah, that'll be the phone. Somebody get the phone. Jimmy, get the phone.” He didn’t wait for anyone to respond or act, as he ran to the receiver, “No? Fine, I'll get the phone. Stay put.”

A hologram projected a few meters away, bluish light projected a 3D vision of a little boy and his bedroom. Words displayed before him but he quickly ignored them until his view was once again unobscured. The boy smiled but looked toward him curiously.

The Doctor clapped, putting on his mask of nothing being wrong as he smiled to the little hologram of the boy “Ha! Hello, Adam, I'm the Doctor. Well, other Doctor. Or Smith. It's complicated and boring. Anyway, who cares. It's your birthday!”

The holo-Adam started jumping, “Yay!”

“Yay!” He mirrored, lifting his arms excitedly before clapping, trying to be as light and joyous as the
child, “Now, have you been getting up very early and jumping on the bed? I expect chocolate for breakfast. If you don't feel sick by mid-morning, you're not doing it right. If they give you veg for lunch, apparently eat half before hiding the rest in a plant. Now, I think you want to speak to Dad.”

The little boy bounced with excitement, moving in an odd little highly animated dance “Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes! Daddy?!”

The Doctor turned away from to hologram to the Jimmy in the room “You'll do, Jimmy. What does the other Jimmy matter now? You're both the same dad, aren't you? Come on, Adam's waiting.” He pointed towards the hologram with his hands.

The ground shook, sounds of rocks and earth shifting loudly penetrating the room.

“Daddy?” Adam squinted a little, likely unable to see Jimmy clearly as he wasn't close enough for the hologram on the other side, “Daddy, what's that rumbly noise? What's going on, Daddy? Daddy?”

Jimmy ran out in fear.

Jennifer glared at the Doctor angrily as Jimmy ran out “You've tricked him into an act of weakness, Doctor.”

“No, I've helped him into an act of humanity,” the Doctor corrected, as he looked at the other faces in the room, “Anyone else like the sound of that? Act of humanity.”

“Dicken, drain the acid well in Crypt One.” Cleaves instructed decidedly, Dicken quickly moving to do what needed to be done.

Jennifer couldn't get to him to stop him, but she seemed to growl in warning, “Don't you dare.”

Cleaves looked at Jennifer stealing her ire and allowing Dicken to finish the task set to him, “I've had it with this. What's the point in this ridiculous war? Look at you, Jen. You were a sweet kid. Look at you now. The stuff of nightmares. I don't want my world populated by monsters.”

“You can't stop the factory from melting down, boss,” Jennifer growled towards Cleaves, “I'll take revenge on humanity with or without you.”

“It doesn't have to be about revenge,” the Doctor tried to reason with her, “It can be so much better than that.”

Jennifer seemed like it had hut home only a moment before turning angry. She ran out of the room.
The lid started bouncing as the acid below bubbled, spitting small splatters of acid from the burst bubbles. The sizzling sound as it burned through in small rounded burns.

Cleaves eyes widened as Jimmy ran to hold down the lid to the boiling vat. “The acid's eating through!”

Jimmy tried to hold down lid on the boiling vat. The bubbling acid spurt through one of the holes burnt in the metal lid. It ruptured and a large amount of acid burst onto Jimmy’s chest. Jimmy fell back as the acid tore, sizzling, through his clothes and skin as the other Jimmy tore open the door and ran to his duplicate’s side.

“Let me through.” The ganger Jimmy pushed his way through the people attempting to be at the fallen Jimmy’s aid.

“There's nothing we can do,” the Doctor sadly mentioned, “The acid's reached his heart.”

Jimmy looked at himself with worried eyes, “Hang in there, mate.”

“I'm quite handsome from this angle.” Jimmy tried to joke to his other self, clearly fighting through the pain.

“I'm sorry,” the other Jimmy said to his fallen counterpart, “I'm the fake. Adam deserves his real dad.”

“Shut up.” Jimmy grunted, his knuckles going white as he clutched at his own hand, loosening his wedding ring from his finger.

“What do you want me to do? Anything. Just say.”

“The way things are, mate, it's up to you now. Be a dad. You remember how.” The act if handing over the ring seemed to me the penultimate act for Jimmy, immediately hs body went limp, leaving the only living Jimmy staring at the wedding ring in his hand with a bit of awe and horror over his mirrored corpse.

The Doctor turned to Jimmy, patting his back once quickly, “Jimmy Wicks, you're a dad.”

“but I’m not really—” Jimmy started.

“No.” Rose immediately looked at Jimmy. “You love that boy, yeah? An' he loves you. Trust me, this is somethin' I know lots about. You're his Daddy, be his Daddy.”

Jimmy's eyes set on the determined blonde and nodded before he stood. He lead the way through the hall.

“Daddy?” The hologram sounded, still on and waiting, “Where's my daddy?”

Everyone filed into the room.

Rose immediately bounced up at the sight of the Doctor. Her face lit up when she ran toward him
and wrapped her arms around him. He followed suit, smiling as she did as she quickly let go and grabbed his hand. It wasn’t hard to notice the two identical Cleaves in a stare-off or Amy and Rory’s joyous reunion, as Jimmy walked into view of the hologram. But it took a moment to realize her other hand was bound in the other Doctor’s the moment he was near.

“Daddy, it's me!” Adams little voice elatedly announced.

Jimmy forced a smile at first, it slowly becoming soggy, but genuine “Hey, sunshine. What are you up to?”

Adam beamed with glee, “Opening all my presents! They’ve big bows!”

One Doctor passed a glance to his other self just one the other side of Rose before she turned her head and he played it off as eye contact with her, smiling. He knew the other was reveling in her touch. Savoring it like a dying man. It would seem Rose wasn’t afraid to give it, both of her hands filled with one of each of theirs as they watched the display. Her felt her thumb travel up and down his hand, and looked that the other hand was doing it as well.

She truly thought both of them the same.

And she was going to hate them.

“Ha ha, good lad. You have fun today. And remember your dad,” Jimmy swallowed, “he loves you very, very much.”

“When are you coming home?”

The little question was heavy. Jimmy hesitated just enough for the Doctor to answer for him, “Daddy's coming home today, Adam.”

“Yay!” The little translucent boy jumped repeatedly, looking so excited and like he may indeed be sick.

The hologram dissipated, the moment it was gone the Doctor immediately shifted into a more hurried stance, “Now we need to move.”

Rose let go of both hands for easier movement as the walked at a brick pace down the hall, one of the Doctors leading the way with his friends closely behind him and the crew trailing ever so slightly after. Their walking quickly turned to a run, the halls being a maze but there was a certain amount of faith in his innate Time Lord direction abilities. Rose looked back at the crew, two Cleaves, one Jimmy, two Dickens, with one Doctor behind, one doctor in front with Amy and Rory… her feet skid to a stop as she looked to her left down a hall as an incoming beast slowly got bigger. Fleshy, pale, lanky and bestial; it’s long neck and fingers belying the near-human ganger face of Jen.

Her eyes grew large “Oh grow at will. Looks like a angry hairless cat.” Rose quickly ushered on those around her who had also paused, easily getting everyone to flee in the direction of the lead Doctor.

Amy couldn’t help but groan as they ran, “Oh, I really don’t want to see a planet of naked cats now.”

“Don't be daft there's no planet of naked cats.” One of the Doctors said as one pulled open a heavy security door and ushered the others inside. The lead Doctor stood just inside the room making sure the two Dickens, two Cleaveses, Amy, Rory, Rose before one pulled the other inside quickly. The other Doctor and one of the Cleaveses push the door closed.
Rose smiled to the ceiling but ushered everyone out of the way “Here she comes!”

The TARDIS tumbled through the roof of the room, landing with a thump and a rattle as the little light beamed twice to them.

“Oh, she does like to make an entrance.” The Doctor grinned to Rose.

Rose snorted, “Pot calling the kettle.” She ran up to the door and pulled it open standing aside as she held the door open expectantly.

Doctor against the door “Everyone move.”
“Go. Go, go, go.” The Doctor pat the backs of Rory and both Dickens near him, spurring their movement in, Jimmy following.

Rose and the Doctor registered aghast noises of her being bigger on the inside met by Rory’s ever-so-eloquent “er, yeah” from with.
“Might be a bit much for them after the day.” He nodded toward the TARDIS. Rose nodded and moved quickly, kissing his cheek and moving inside. He heard her speak very quickly as she tried to catch her breath.

“... Bigger on the inside, assembled hoards of Ghengis Kahn can’t get in, she’s called the TARDIS but we call ‘er home...” Rose took an audible breath and her voice took on a more composed quality, “Tea?” The doors swung closed.

Both Doctors couldn’t help but smirk slightly, their amusement falling as the moment drew closer. As one Cleaves seemed to spur the other into following the others onto the TARDIS, leaving just the four of them still outside it, resigned faces upon the two against the door as crashing noises and surprise thumps came through room the other side.

“Hey, hey,” Amy said in a calm but shaken voice as she looked quickly toward the closed TARDIS doors, “Now’s our chance.”

The Doctor tried to smile a bit as he held the door and what was left of Jennifer beat the other side, “I have to stay. Hold this door closed. Give you time to dematerialize.”

“Oh, don't be crazy. what happens to you?”

“Well, this place is just about to explode,” the Doctor against the door noted, “But I can stop her.”

Amy looked back and forth between the two Doctors, “Both of you can survive this, okay? There has to be a way.”

The other Doctor strode up with his hands in his pockets “Or perhaps you think I should stay instead? Mister Smith.”

Amy shook her head, “No, of course not. But look, this man,” she put a hand on the chest of the Doctor at the door, “I've flown with him, you know? And you are amazing and yeah, I misjudged you, but you're not him. I'm sorry.”

“I'm the Doctor.” The other Doctor explained calmly.
“And I'm the Flesh.” The one up against the door agreed.

“You can't be,” Amy pleaded with the one at the door, “You're the real him.”

The Doctor against the door shook his head knowingly, “No, I'm not, and I haven't been all along.”
“We switched shoes,” added the other behind her.

Amy’s jaw dropped, “What?”

The Doctor behind her looked down for a second before sighing, “I’m the original Doctor, Amy. We had to know if we were truly the same. It was important, vital we learn about The Flesh, we needed to understand.”

“I never thought it possible.” Amy quickly shoved her arms around the Doctor against the door and hugged him tightly, “You’re twice the man I thought you were.”

The other Doctor whispered something to Amy. She gave him an odd but grateful smile, touching the original Doctor on the upper arm before running into the TARDIS.

“You too, Cleaves, off you pop.” Said the ganger Doctor to the woman beside him.

“I’m staying.” Cleaves responded simply. Both Doctors smiled admirably, knowing better than to argue.

“Rose isn’t going to like this.” The Doctor started to his ganger, knowing the same thought had gone through his head.

“I know,” the ganger Doctor said with resignation, “Give her a hug for me. You know. When you can.”

“Your molecular memory can survive this, you know. It may not be the end.” He said as he threw his sonic screwdriver to the other, deftly caught.

“Yeah, well,” the ganger Doctor looked at the sonic in his hand to the Doctor who’d thrown it, “if I turn up to nick Rose, then you'll know you were right, won't you.”

The Doctor smirked and nodded, going to the TARDIS.

The door shut behind the Doctor, relieved smiles on Amy, Rory and Rose’s faces, he didn’t make eye contact with Rose as he ran up to the console.

“Hold on, where’re the others?” Rose spotted their absence almost as fast as he could send them to the vortex.

“They stayed behind to give us time to get away.” He said as flatly as he could, not looking up from the console as he answered. He didn’t think he could bear the sight when her heart broke.

“Stayed behind? The whole things gonna blow up so—” Rose's eyes bounced from one side of the room to the other before the thought came to her and anger slowly grew on the face. She whipped around to fully face the Doctor. Her voice broke and got softer, but angrier, “You planned this. The
Rose..."

“No, just,” she hesitated, choking back tears though some of them escaped down her cheek, “just... no.” Her instinct was to yell. And hit him. But she couldn’t. He hated domestics and what she was feeling was the epitome of domestics, and to do that in front of all these people. She turned around and walked directly into the corridor and disappeared. The Doctor moved to go after her, but Amy was fast on her heels, moving to stop him, and followed right behind.

The corridor entrance didn’t even taken her to the corridor, but directly into the library like some sci-fi movie. Rose noted that it felt almost disturbing, but reveled in the fact that she was right where she needed to be.

She knew it. She even thought it as it happened. *This never turns out well.* She found knowing that didn’t lessen the hurt of it.


She plopped down onto the old sofa in the middle of the room. Same sofa, no matter what face. Something comforting about that still.

“Your bedroom doesn’t seem to have a bed.” Amy’s voice broke from the doorway. “You sleep in the library?”

Amy sat beside Rose as Rose sighed, “Just needed a sit for a mo. Away from him, I think.”

They just sat for a moment, letting the events of the day wash over them.

“I’m not used to it,” Amy said simply.

“Don’t think ya ever get used to it,” Rose answered, rubbing her face. “Not sure you’d wanna be used to it.”

“No, not *that.* I’m not used to my friends lying to me,” Amy said with a slightly teasing air. Rose laughed without humor and ran both her hands through the top of her hair. She couldn’t escape it.

“Kinda funny with his new Rule One an’ all.” Rose smirked. Amy smiled a little but still sat there silently, waiting out Rose’s quick attempt at humor for a real conversation. Rose sighed but her answer was quick and truthful as she looked into Amy’s softened brown eyes, “I didn't *lie.*”

Amy huffed a sigh, “I asked—"

“You *asked* if I was married to Jack,” Rose pointed out solemnly, “I’m not.”

“No, you’re the *Doctor’s wife*.” Amy gestured exasperatedly at the doorway.
“No, I was that Doctor’s wife.” Rose sighed, “Whole different thing.” ...Probably, she nearly added, but Amy seemed to need more absolutes in this second, she needed something she could solidly grasp before expanding into the ify bits. Rose sighed and put her face in her hands, “That’s not even half.”

“You’ve a lot of explaining.” Amy said simply.

Rose chuckled derisively at herself as she slid her hand off of her face and sat up, “How’mI sposta explain that I was married to the Doctor without being married to your Doctor? An’ when you didn’t get the whole ‘two hims’ thing I knew it had been the right choice. The man I married was him, but wasn’t him, but was him.” Amy huffed and crossed her arms. Rose’s eyes widened then narrowed at the posture, “Oh, no, Miss Amelia. You’re not allowed ta get all righteous ‘bout not knowin’ stuff bout me when I clearly dunno everything ‘bout you, either.”

“You love him.” Amy stated without any air of questioning at all.

“Well, you apparently fancied him, too.” Rose playfully accused before sobering slightly and mumbling to herself “Seems the only woman that bloke has been safe around in the last few bloody decades has been Donna.”

Amy blew past the reference, either unknowing or simply getting to the point as she was prone to, “No, you love him. A lot.” It was said like an irrefutable accusation. An accusation that... Rose couldn’t bring herself to deny, and she was growing tired of trying.

“Tried not to. Well, wanted to try. A bit.” Rose admitted and as they looked toward the books. Strangely, taking about it seemed to make her far less... soggy, “Can’t not, really.”

“He loves you.” Amy said matter-of-factly. Amy was so sure it made Rose want to smile, but she couldn’t do that or even bring herself to respond. Yes? No?

“Its complicated.”

Amy pulled Rose to her, the smaller blond resting her head on her friends shoulder. “Yeah.”

Amy came out of the corridor as she looked at the Doctor. He looked a little hopeful, but Amy couldn’t bring herself to say anything for a moment before she gave him a little hug. And then hit him on the shoulder. “Moron.”

The Doctor blinked as the four non-companiony people looked on with a mix of curiosity and understanding before Amy abruptly left the Doctor’s side to join her husband by the rail. “Er, yes... as I was saying, selective radiation. The energy from the TARDIS will stabilize Jimmy and Dicken for good. They're people now.”
“And what happens to me?” Cleaned motioned to her head to indicate the clot, “I still have this.”

“Ah, that's not a problem. I have something for that.” The Doctor looked at a drawer that came from the console, quickly being able to differentiate the differences between vials that lay there, “It's small and red and tastes like burnt onions, But it'll get rid of your blood clot.” he said to himself until his eyes laid on the one he meant and he grabbed it gleefully, “Ha!” The Doctor threw the small vial to Cleaves as Rose quietly exited the corridor. He smiled, “Happy endings.”

The Doctor opened the doors for Jimmy, Jimmy clutching a red balloon and fairly elatedly heading out to his reunion with his son. Running ahead, he didn’t even register that the Doctor, Amy and Rory looked on, absorbing the goodness that the moment oozed, rather than the bad of the day.

Amy and Rory pushed open on of the TARDIS doors almost soundlessly, only to see a Rose directly on the other side. She stepped back to give them entrance, and as soon as they were in, Rose went outside and leaned quietly in place beside the Doctor, still watching as Jimmy and his son walked away.

“You okay?” he managed to say in the silence as they watched the happy reunion.

“On a beach with one Doctor after there was two. Oh, yeah, today’s been great.” Rose tried to joke.

“I’m sorry.” He said quickly, but with enough feeling behind it that she’d hopefully understand.

“M’not angry,” they both knew that was a lie before it even fully exited her mouth, “Okay, I'm angry, but two yous never ends well, yeah?” Rose sighed and rubbed her head again.

Silence ate the moment, Rose swallowed. “Do you want me here?”

The Doctor looked at her, he couldn't believe that was an actual question she'd ask, “What?”

“Do you want me here? ‘Sa simple question.” Rose still hadn’t looked at him, watching the figures of Jimmy and Adam disappeared towards their house.

“Of course.” He answered emphatically.

“What if I weren’t here?” Rose asked simply, looking at him as calm as she could.

“I’d go get you.” The Doctor smiled a bit. Universe separation be damned, aside from that crack returning, it was not happening again, he almost assured. Watch me.

“S not what I meant.” Rose shook her head and looked back at the horizon as she leaned her back against the TARDIS. “You wouldn’t hafta worry 'bout me. River wouldn’t be as complicated. Amy wouldn’t demand answers. Fewer domestics. You’d get to be as daft as you like without anyone callin' you out for bein' an a—"

“—I want you here.” He affirmed seriously.
"If you want me here, then let me be here." The spark in Rose’s eyes seemed to reignite slightly as she looked at him, her entire body seeming to become animated with the strong emotion, she popped a finger at him, “No more lyin' ta me an' no more 'Hm, I think I might get myself killed. Rose, go on the TARDIS.' Alright? No more.” She took a breath and slid her hand into his, “No more.”

“I can try,” His hand tightened in hers. “Starting tomorrow.”

Rose snorted, “It’s all tomorrow and it’s never tomorrow with the TARDIS.”

“I'll try.”

The TARDIS parked herself in a big building, The Doctor saying it was headquarters for the company. The monitor showed they were in an empty hall, no people around, and really, it quite looked like the Vitex building to Rose, and the strange nostalgia seemed to fit the day. The Doctor and Rose strode out with Cleaves and both Dickens, Amy and Rory following but hanging back by the TARDIS as the others stopped a few meters away at a set of swinging doors.

“Mum always makes enough food for two of me when I come home,” the Dickens both said before smiling at one another, probably pleased that the same thought had sprung forth spontaneously. Rose hugged both of them, simultaneously, throwing one arm around each of them.

“You’ve got good hearts and good minds, there, Dickens. Use ‘em.” She said as her head was thrust between theirs in her hug, she pulled away.

“You’ve only known me for a bit.” One Dicken said with a slight blush only to have the other nod to her.

“Yeah well,” Rose shrugged, “prove me right, yeah?” Rose smiled brightly. The Doctor knew that smile. If they were anything like him, it was that smile that would seal the deal, those Dickens would try desperately to live up to it, in case they ever would see it again.

She nodded to Cleaves instead of hugging her. Cleaves reached out and shook her hand before Rose retreated to the others, standing quietly just outside the TARDIS.

“You really want us to do this?” Cleaves arched a brow at the Doctor.

The Doctor looked at her, “Your company's telling the world that the situation is over. You need to get in there and tell them that the situation's only just begun. Make them understand what they're doing to the Flesh. Make them stop.” He looked to the Dicken on the left, “Dicken, remember, people are good. In their bones, truly good. Don't hate them, will you?”

“How can I hate them?” One of the Dickens smiled, “I'm one of them now.”
The Doctor looked toward the group of them and pointed to the doors by them, 'Just remember, people died. Don't let that be in vain. Make what you say in that room count.'

Cleaves looked at both Dickens, “Ready? Side by side.”

“You got it, boss.” Both Dickens smiled, falling in line, each on one side of her.

They opened the doors and walked in to the room. Obviously full, voices echoing out in a fury of questions as the doors swung closed again.

The Doctor turned around and faced his three friends, all looking calm after this fairly horrific experience, the Doctor looked at Rose without eye contact, ‘Stay with Amy.’

Rose blinked, she was already next to Amy. Had been almost all day, as multiple requests throughout the day from him had been that she stay with Amy. His staring off was even more apparent when his voice became hard, even Amy at her side was tensing. Amy took a step closer to the Doctor.

“You okay?”

“I said breathe, Pond. Remember? Well, breathe.” The Doctor said flatly.

Amy blinked at him, “Why?”

“Breathe.”

Amy suddenly buckled, groaning in pain. She reached out for Rose and Rory beside her, Amy’s hand clasped Roses while her previously Rory-seeking hand clutched her stomach. Rory on the other side frantically holding up her elbow as she seemingly lost balance with pain.

Amy grasped her stomach more, “Oh!”

“Whoa.” Rose's eyes widened.

Amy groaned with more pain. Rory looked frantically between her and the Doctor. “What's wrong with her?”

“Get her into the TARDIS.” The Doctor said hastily. Rose and Rory took as much burden from Amy as they could, dragging her onto the TARDIS and off to the side as she whimpered loudly in pain.

“Doctor!” Rose looked to him for an answer as her hand throbbed painfully beneath Amy's grip, “What's goin' on?!”

It was time. Amy was pained. And now he had all the information. He remembered asking the TARDIS, “Can you get to Rose?” “When can’t I?” And she could. In a moment, after this, the Old Girl would. His jaw tightened.

“What’s happening to her?” Rory asked frantically when he and Rose stopped their pseudo-drag on Amy onto the TARDIS.

“Contractions.” The Doctor answered.

Rory wasn’t sure he heard that right, “Contractions?”

“She's going into labor.”
“Labor?!” The picture popped into Rose's mind. Full color, Amy with a baby and she looked frantically at the redhead. “What, now? That’s now? Its now?” Rose held onto Amy in a panic, trying to help brace her as she yelled at the Doctor. “But she’s not even…” Rose just blinked trying to comprehend it. She looked at the Doctor with panic and anger, “Why didn’t you say?!”

Amy shook and cringed as she looked at her husband, “Rory, I don’t like this. Ow.”

“You're going to have to start explaining some of this to me.” Rory looked at the Doctor confused but still holding Amy.

“What, the birds and the bees?” The Doctor replied flippantly as he sighed, walking up the ramp quickly to the console. A new sonic popped out from it and he snatched it midair before walking back down the ramp. “She's having a baby. I needed to see the Flesh in its early days. That's why I scanned it. That's why we were there in the first place.”

“It hurts.” Amy cringed again, her hand tightening in Rose’s.

“Breathe,” he instructed Amy, “I needed enough information to block the signal to the Flesh.”

Amy was able to take a breath, though apparently the ache still bothered her enough to white knuckle Rose’s hand, “What signal?”

“The signal to you.”

Rose looked at Amy with wide eyes, still holding her, steadfastly aiding her friend as well as she could. That’s why she wasn’t showing. She was Flesh. Not the Amy who was having a baby, just connected to her. She didn’t move away, she couldn’t, not while Amy seemed in such great pain.

“Doctor,” Amy seemed to be pleading for him to be wrong. “Doctor.”

“Stand away from them, Rory.”

“They?” Rose looked at the Doctor, panicked before realization set in. ‘Stand away from them.’ He said ‘Them.’ He said ‘Stay with Amy.’ Rose shut her eyes for a moment. “Oh, I’m thick.”


The Doctor tried to keep his voice as even as possible, this was hard, but emotion came out as frustration towards Rory. “Given what we’ve learned, I’ll be as humane as I can, but I need to do this and you need to stand away!”

“That’s why you didn’t tell me. Because I’m… not me.” Rose tempered her breathing as she looked at the Doctor, the Doctor who was actively not looking at her. Probably because this would be hard. Because something was going to happen that made him… Rose took a deep breath and readjusted her hold on Amy’s hand. Rory slowly stepped back, further panicking the pained Amy. Chimmy chin chin. House of sticks. Better to see you with. Huff and puff. Bad… Happy Endings. Bloody fairy tales.

Rose inhaled sharply as she let out a sad laugh and muttered to herself, “Yeah. That’s about right.”

“No. No,” Amy denied, “Doctor, I am frightened. I'm properly, properly scared.”

“Don't be,” the Doctor nodded at Amy, “Hold on. Hold on to Rose. We're coming for you. I swear it. Whatever happens, however hard, however far, we will find you.”
“But we're right here.” Amy protested futilely.

The Doctor found himself unable to keep looking away as he looked at the two of them, “No, you're not. You haven't been here for a long, long time.”

Rose turned and looked at the panicky and pained Amy pleading with her husband and best friend, the sound falling deafly on her ears. Rose squeezed her hand for comfort, Amy drawing a modicum of strength from the grip as she cringed from the pain. The light from the monitor on the controls clicked on, making Rose turn to look at it. Rose looked to the monitor, tears falling from her eyes, she smiled sadly at the displayed circular Gallifreyan before looking at the Doctor as tears fell.

The Doctor pointed the sonic screwdriver toward Rose and Amy, his eyes falling on Amy’s as she looked desperately to her husband, and then a few feet over to Rose's. They were watery, but she smiled a sad smile, “I'll stay with Amy,” Rose nodded, “We'll be back, yeah?”

The sonic whirred.
The two of them melted before their eyes, opaque flesh splashing from their heights to the floor.

And they were gone. No visages. No Amy. No Rose. Just fleshy goo, slowly dissipating into nothing.

“What does it say?” Rory looked at the circles on the screen and back to the Doctor, “What does it say?!”

The Doctor didn’t even need to look at the monitor, but the barest grin hit his soul. “Bad Wolf.”

Chapter End Notes

And now I might take a little break from posting to attempt to kickstart my brain. The next ep is testy and this one was a bit draining.
“Whose collection we raidin’? Any one I’d a heard of?”
“Probably not. Mal Lupo. He’s a bit new.”
.....“Mal Lupo? ....Oh, fantastic. Mal Lupo.”
“I know, rubbish name, right? But love his clothes.”
“Means Bad Wolf, yeah?”
“Or something.”
"Are you afraid of the big bad wolf, there, Rose?”
"’s never a coincidence.”

Pulling Amy out of a clothes shop was no small task, though, she supposed, Rose herself with an
unlimited credit stick was a force to be reckoned with when leaving a shopping bazaar too in her
early years. …At least before those words.

The two left with two garment bags containing their new dresses, Rose setting the pace like she was
a homing beacon on direct course to the Doctor.

Back to the TARDIS. Back to the Doctor. Maybe Mal Lupo wasn’t as bad as it could be, maybe it
wasn’t what she thought it was, maybe her languages were rusty and it really meant, like, bad meat.
Or bad flowers. Or it was really just a rubbish name of a clothing designer trying to avoid his own,
likely mundane and forgettable name. Maybe coincidences really did happen.

Then Rose thought she saw something out if the corner of her eye.

Her eyes glowed. She tried to shake it off but her eyes didn’t seem to want to listen. Still could be
coincidence. Please be coincidence.

“What’s with your eyes? That an I'm-from-the-future trick?” Amy smirked, slinging her newly
acquired dress over her shoulder like a backpack.

“I wish,” Rose mumbled, sliding her sunglasses from the top of her head down onto her nose as she
breathed out, hoping the glare off the lenses would obscure any view since she was unable to shake
it off. She couldn’t recall a time when her eyes did that for more than a second at a time. Amy’s face
sunk. She could likely still see the glow of Rose’s eyes, hazed by the tint of the glasses, but her usual
joking, calm smile was missing, even the judgy Amy face had left in favor of… shock? Worry? She
looked behind them and found herself walking a bit faster when she turned back.

Amy put her hand on Rose’s arm to slow her, but she pulled her hand away like it’d been burned.
“’You’re hot.”

“I do my best.” Rose mumbled cheekily and a bit dismissively, seeming to try and see something.

It was easy for Amy to keep up at first, Rose’s legs much shorter but more determined. “No, I mean
temperature. Hot.”
“I know.” Rose walked more quickly as she raised her hand to the back of Amy's sleeve, trying to herd her to go almost at a run.

“Rory’s a nurse,” Amy kept up without knowing why, looking around at the wide eyes of the people they passed passing judgement on the quickly-moving pair as Rose turned them into an alleyway between two shops, “he’ll look at you when we get back.”

“I said I was just shopping.” She groaned as she stopped suddenly staring at an oncoming line on suited men, “He's gonna be so cross.” Rose stared straight ahead, speaking to Amy beside her as Amy looked confused at the side of her head, “Amy, listen, I know I'm new an' you don't completely trust me, but I need you to hold my hand an' don’t let go till ya need to, ‘kay?”

“Oh… Kay…”

Amy turned and looked where Rose was staring. A large group of mouthless aliens slowly making their way towards them, pointing out a long finger and aiming it directly at them. Rose grabbed Amy’s hand, “Run.” Rose drops her bag, Amy instantly following suit and turned to run. More mouthless aliens surrounded them, boxed them in, blocking their escape. Rose readjusted her hold on Amy's hand.

“I remember you,” Rose nervously said as she backed into the center of the enclosing circle, pulling Amy along gently. “1952. You were in the woods, looking at the TARDIS. Why’d I forget? I shocked you, yeah? Well, no idea who you are but you can’t have him. We won’t take you to the Doctor.”

*We want you.*

The mouthless blokes raised their arms in unison, long finger pointed at them as it shimmered, almost covering itself with tiny lightening.

Faces of the small eyed creatures seemed to look at one another in frustration, seeming to try and do something but they couldn't. The edges of Rose’s vision was darkening and blurring as she saw one or two fall to the ground and Amy’s astonished gasp before it went black.

The first thing Rose remembered was… cold. She was on the floor with Amy standing over her, obviously weakly standing and brandishing a chair with one hand and clinging to a bundle in another before small gasping sounds seemed to escape whomever was on the other side of the room and quick footsteps. At least Amy's chin—from this angle that was the majority of what Rose could see of her—looked triumphant. Jaw set, pointing it and the wobbling chair at something as she awkwardly took small threatening steps to the sides and back. It wasn’t until Rose forced herself, achingly, to scrunched up and see what she was so intent on that she saw the frightened eyes of scientists? Or medical people? With armed, uniformed guards staring at Rose herself, fleeing the
room. The door slammed shut as they fumbled backwards and ran, and if she weren’t mistaken, quite a few locks and bolts were thrown after the door shut.

Amy seemed to notice Rose’s movement, too, her triumph deflated but it was quickly replaced by relief. Without saying a word, Amy dropped her tentative grasp on the white chair, loud clanging noise making Rose shut her eyes and flinch but she was wrapped in a warm arm. Amy had fallen to her knees to hug Rose’s still barely moving body with her now free arm. Amy felt so warm, the bundle of little, wiggling baby between them also radiating heat.

“Ah, the Wolf wakes.” A woman with an eye patch seemed to smirk gleefully through a small window in the door. The darkness of her hair and eyepatch standing in Stark contrast to the light room around them.

“Madam Kovarian, if she’s awake, he knows.” A deep voice sounded, muffled by the closed door.

“Yes, Colonel, I know, it was only to buy us time. Time has been purchased. We may not have gotten the weapon we wanted but we’ll have something better.” The eye patched woman, Madam Kovarian likely, as that moron she couldn’t see decided to bandy about the other woman’s name, shut the window and laughed. Laughed. Laughed.

“I thought you were dead.” Amy said on a breath, breaking Rose's determined stare at the window. Rose stretched beneath the ever tightening hold of Amy, her worry evident as she held tightly to Rose with one arm.

“Kinda wish I was right now,” Rose tried to joke. Amy didn’t find it funny, backing out of the hug to smack Rose soundly on the shoulder, “Ow! What happened?”

“That’s what I’d like to know! You went all freaky eyed, warmed my hand and passed out and she just came out. Where are we? Why aren’t we dead? Why aren’t you dead?”

“Donno,” Rose answered automatically. She didn’t remember waking up before, much less… Last time she was out for four days. Amy didn’t seem the type to give birth and guard a near-corpse for four days, much less with a newborn. The baby. Rose’s eyes widened. Last time she effected a person… Jack. She quickly sat more stiffly, looking toward the wriggling little bundle in Amy’s arms, “How’s the baby?”

“Melody,” Amy said, not looking at the child she so instinctively clung to, “She’s fine. I think.”

“Melody,” Rose smiled weakly but genuinely before the worry set in, “She’s all unharmed and safe? You? Did they check?”

“I think so. Didn’t talk to me but did a scanny thing on her and you.” Amy explained, “They were all shouting for emergency C-section before you went all…” she crunched her nose, “what exactly did you do?”

“No idea, really.” Rose’s eyes ran all over Melody, before pushing herself back a foot so she could slump against the wall, “But probably won’t again. He gets… cross.”

“I see why,” Amy said, nodding at Rose’s obvious fatigue, “Are you okay?”

Rose sighed, wrapping her arms around her own torso, “I’m tired. And cold. Why’s it so cold in here?”

“It’s not cold,” Amy blinked, “It’s fine. You’ve been asleep forever.”
“Oh, don’t say forever,” Rose joked, injecting as much humor as she could, spying her own pale face in the reflection of the smooth, white walls beside them. “You don’t know what that means in the long run.”

“Well it’s not like we have a clock.” Amy said as she looked around the walls.

Rose looked around as she cringed with every movement, only able to see what she could move minimally to. All smooth, white, metaly walls, white door with that window in it. Useless partitions up against the stairs, blocking railing. A toilet just to her left, table and a chair a few feet to the right. All white, shiny, clean.

“Sa… quarantine room,” Rose forced herself to stand, Amy backing up slightly to make room for the wobbly blond. “Been in a few, me. Clocks just make you worry how long you been in here. Any food?”

“No.” Amy shook her head, clinging to the baby in her arms carefully as she nodded to what looked like bottled water on a white table with a single white chair, “There's water though, but it doesn't smell right.”

Rose leaned on the wall as she walked to the table and picked up one of the bottles. She uncapped it easily and smelled the contents before she took a sip. “Tastes… meaty.”

“Thought that was just me.”

“There’s a toilet,” Rose nodded to the out-in-the-open shiny toilet only a few feet away with charts on a small monitor above it, “You might find a sink if you wanna fix your own…” Rose tried to smirk, her fatigue reaching even into her facial muscles, “…meatiness.” Rose took another sip, cringing at the taste of the liquid on her tongue.

Amy cringed too, “Yeah, maybe don’t do that.”

“Tastes like… ” Rose opened and closed her mouth, taking another sip to try and place it, “Ugh. Generic Vite—um. Meal replacement, vitamins.” Rose grimaced again. Amy went to stop her, almost protecting Melody against the potential toxicity. “Or it’s poison an’ I’ll die, but that doesn’t make sense to keep us alive for months just kill us, does it?” she tried to reassure the tentative Amy. “Drink up. You need it more than I do. Or wait til I die.”

Amy hit Rose’s shoulder again, but grabbed a water bottle.

Her energy was still on the low side when Rose caught a hint of her reflection in the bad reflection of the darkened window beside them. Her head was smooth. She refocused her eyes to look at the bad, if translucent reflection.
A hat. She breathed a sigh of relief.

Weird thing to be relieved about. Unknown circumstance, unknown people, bloody kidnapped but at least she still had her hair. She almost laughed at herself. Hair was the least of her problems right now. She ran her hands over the helmet. It started just above her eyebrows and went to the nape of her neck, and curved to avoid her ears. Shiny smooth, maybe metal or very hard plastic, and skin tight to her head. Pretty form fitting, she guessed it was custom as it conformed pretty perfectly to the shape of her head, even with her hair poking out from under it.

As she found out trying to take it off, it was very form fitting. Very. And tight. “Coulda told me I was sorting this seasons fashion in bald-caps.” Rose smiled to Amy, standing stoic near her as if in pack mentality.

Amy had grown silent, standing very still with her bottle of bad water and baby occupying her hands, back pressed up against the wall. Despite her few assurances growing in frequency, Rose was suspecting Amy was not, in fact, ’okay.’

Shock had set in.

Fix easy first, Tyler.

And hopefully this was easy, at least easier.

Her nails could barely slip under the lip on it, but she tried to push it off anyway. It barely budged. “Bloody hell this is tight.” It took a few cuts on her fingers before more than a small suction noise escaped and Rose freed her head from the vice-like grip of the metal hat.

Irritated, tender, red and raw skin under it and matted hair from sweat and possible months of wearing looked back at her in her reflection. The hat didn’t seem to be anything except metal. One solid piece of uncomfortable headache. Headache. “And so the headache.” She said to herself, Amy barely registering anything right this instant, anyway. She dropped it on the table, the small unavoidable clanking sound making Amy instinctively jump and Melody stir. Rose looked apologetically to Amy, who still barely seemed to register much.

Rise sighed. Her hair’s sweaty, greasy, darkness at least obscured her ever-growing roots, but honestly she wasn’t sure if she’d looked more like a drowned rat ever before in her life. She huffed.

Here she was, beside a woman who’d just given birth and bounced back enough to be standing and likely walk right into a photo shoot. Rose passed a smile to the staring-off woman.

“Well, I’ve looked worse some mornings.” Rose said glibly. She wasn’t sure that was true, but Amy seemed to look at her then, and the smallest hint of a laugh hit her face.

The door unexpectedly opened. Amy slid closer to Rose, clutching both of the items in her hands ever tighter.

Five people, head to toe in camouflage military garb delivered a white tub with items in it. Technically the little, fast one in the center delivered them, the other four simply around that one as a wall of protection, looked like. Amy clutched the baby closer to her and Rose stepped in front of both of them, feeling like she had to be a wall of protection herself. Amy and Rose shouted questions at them, Rose got frustrated and glowing eyes but all that earned was an extra gun pointed and cocked at them before they backed out the exit.

Rose slowly went closer to the dropped off items. The tub was a future-ish cradle, looked like, the bag inside it held nappies, a bottle, mechanical toothbrush like thing, a person-sized blanket and a swaddling one. All white, which Rose was beginning to guess was their captor's favorite color.
"Seems you'll be 'round to see my bedhead." Rose said as she held up the items and inspected them.

"I'm guessing we're staying here." Amy said. It had been quiet, and the first thing Amy had said other than, 'I'm okay' in quite some time. Determined not to bring attention to it, Rose shrugged, struggling to pick up the solid cradle filled with stuff to move it further from the door, across the room to where Amy was still standing.

"Probably easier than moving either of us. Took four armed guards ta just drop off a cradle and a sack of nappies, frightening as I look right now, I dread to think what they’d need to move a miffed Pond."

First sleep was only brought on by Amy’s fatigue. It didn’t take long for the adrenaline to wear off, leaving her a tired husk of a woman. She had just given birth to a baby, fended off her unconscious friend’s would be attackers, and had to come to grips with an enormous amount of… well… an amazing amount of rubbish.

All leaving Rose with an awake newborn.

Amy never wept. Hormones and such, Rose had expected her to. Even she felt like crying. Though, she supposed, Melody was doing that enough for the both of them. Amy had to have been a heavy sleeper or, as previously noted, the complete and utter madness of their circumstances had caught up and made her sleep deeper.

Rose, on the other hand, had just woken up from a six month nap. Aside from the obvious heat loss and general fatigue, she didn’t have much problem staying awake. Felt better, really, not to sleep. She swung the baby lightly in her arms as she assessed the room once again, with a clearer head.

She knew how these type of rooms generally worked. Eventually the subject went crazy with no clock to set by, no sun to gauge, the view from the window didn’t change demonstrably, and light inside their room they blared on, never dimming, never turning off. They didn’t even send them food for them to get a handle on their schedule outside their room. No clocks, no sun, one wall sized window to a largely unused storage area, and one window out to the stars. The constant, never ending, unfamiliar stars. Bit comforting, that. Honestly, the stars were rarely ever familiar wherever they were. Rose sat near that window and looked out, a not quite asleep Melody in her arms.

"Bet that was made to drive us mad, too. But they don’t know, do they, Miss Melly? Those're comforting to me. Maybe they will be to you, too. We’re part of those stars, all of us. Travel in ‘em, live amongst ‘em, we’ll visit every single one of ‘em we can once we’re outta here.” She was probably being listened to. That was protocol in her day, anyway. There was only so much she could say. “An’ we are gettin’ outta here. Your daddy’s not about to be separated from you or your mummy any longer than he has to. He gets snarky. You’ll be too, I think, double dose that you got like that. Can’t avoid it. These people should be very scared ’coz a very old, very miffed man will
move universes to get here.” She readjusted the now sleeping baby in her arms for a better hold, standing slowly and walking back to put the sleeping bundle into the cradle beside Amy as she whispered softly, “An’ then whatever the Doctor’ll do.”

Melody was crying. Amy didn’t seem to want to pick her back up. Rose tried to soothe her, shushing quietly to the little face. It only worked in spurts, but Rose kept on trying.

“She’s adorable. My brother came out lookin’ a bit like a pink potato, cute potato, but potato none-the-less.” Rose passed a look to Amy as she held the sporadically crying little wiggler in her arms.

Amy was specifically looking away. It’s not like there was anything more interesting in this room, but she tried to pretend well. Brown eyes obviously purposely staring out the big window to the warehouse. Darkness outside and light from within giving Rose a pretty good view of Amy’s whole face, struggling and depressed.

Rose took a few, unassuming steps closer to Amy “That’ll likely be ginger hair. Blonde ginger, mind,” she looked down to the fine small tufts on Melody’s head. “Yeah. Blonde ginger, this one. Nice combo of her Mummy and Daddy. Wanna hold your baby? Prob’ly hungry.”

“Give her the water,” Amy said absently.

“Don’t think babies this little are sposta have water. I can’t remember.” Rose made a face, “And force this cute little baby to drink that rubbish? Nah. Here, may as well try, yeah?”

Rose took another step toward Amy, offering her the wiggly baby in her arms.

“No.” Amy said without hesitation or emotion. Rose took a step back, swinging again to try and hush her. “I bet the kept me around just for her.”

“Then why still keep you after she was born? Seems a bit silly to keep you around if it was just for her, right?” Rose spilled out. She hadn’t even thought about what she said before she said it, but took a deep breath and looked at the little, calming face. “And why’m I here then?” Amy made a motion, though slight and tentative, Rose slid the little baby into her mother’s arms. Amy looked at the baby. Rose smiled a bit. “I’m definitely not here for poppin’ out babies unless they want dust bunnies.”

Amy’s face twitched. Little jokes seemed to work. The emotion, could have been any emotion probably, seemed to tip off Amy’s shock, leading her straight into hysterics.

“I missed my whole pregnancy, I don’t know how to be a mum. I can’t do this!”

Rose tried to sound assuring, “You’re holdin’ her just right, head supported, cuddles abound—”

“I can’t do this!” Amy cried, tears on the precipice of her eyes with panic as she forced her baby back into Rose’s arms, Rose fumbling to hold her as Amy backed a few steps away like Melody was
Rose stiffened, her voice gaining a strong quality, “Amelia Pond, What would you do if anyone else told you that you can’t do somethin’?” Amy’s voice grew an affronted quality, likely registering Rose’s tone before her words. “That’s right, you’d make that face, that face there, tell ‘em to sod off an’ do it anyway. If they were just keepin you as a... host, an incubator for little Melly there? Then prove them wrong. That’s Amelia Pond, yeah? That’s the woman of fairy tales, the princess that takes absolutely no shit. And right now, right exactly now, when there’s no Doctor, no idea what we are, an’ this little dickens needs a mummy who takes absolutely no shit.”

Amy wiped her eyes as the words seemed to sink in. Amy took a few stompy steps closer and took Melody from Rose’s arms, holding her gently and closer to her body naturally.

“Do not call me a princess again,” Amy said sternly, her eyes narrowing at Rose.

“That’s more like it.” Rose nodded a smiled.

“And her name’s Melody, not Melly.”

“Yes, Mum.” Rose said with a tinge of cheek.

Amy gave Rose a look. She didn’t say a thank you, not an acknowledgement, but the look may as well have been.

“I can hear you thinking. It’s hard enough to sleep without knowing you’re chewing your nails.”

Rose sighed, keeping her eyes unfocused but looking at the corner as she sat in the chair beside the cradle. “They had like, six months to prepare for her. Why drop off a crib an’ stuff later? S not like it was a surprise that you had a baby in there.”

“You’re thinking too hard.” Amy grunted and changed positions, moving from facing away from Rose to her back, staring straight up at the bottom of the table.

Rose nodded, focusing her eyes and looking under the table to see the open eyed, irritated Amy.

“Might be. But what else is there to do in here? Sleep, drink nasty drink, change a nappy, watch Melly’s incredibly cute but usually sleepin’ face for God knows how long til we go insane, or try to escape if I really wanna put either a you at risk.”

Amy scooted out from beneath the table and sat up with as much exasperation as her body would be able to handle without exploding. “What makes you think we would be a risk?”

Rose bit her thumb nail slightly, and staring blankly to the wall across from her. “One person escapin’s much easier than two, with a baby, much less with her spurts of noisiness, plus there the
whole thing if I go get help an’ they realize I’m gone they could get to you or Melly to get to me or the other way around. At least in here, doing nothing, we seem to be safe so I’m gonna think. *Something* has to be different.”

“Like you?” Amy put her hand on her hip.

Rose waved that off as a reason, still looking away in thought, “Don’t think so… the woman — *Kovarian*—called me the Wolf, and that’s pretty tellin’, yeah? Didn’t call me *Rose*. Bad Wolf is a message, not a person. At least I don’t think it is. But River called me that, and now these people. I was it, but ‘s not like anyone knew about it but me, and the Doctor, and a bunch of dead Daleks. Maybe Jack and Donna.” Rose thought out loud. She squished her forehead between her fingers, rubbing at she thought. No headache, but figuring this out… she sighed “so they already knew I was different, no reason to change tack if you already know somethin’.”

Amy grew quiet, her voice barely reaching Rose’s ears as the frustration slowly ramped up from Amy’s throat. “So they went after the you and took me and my baby, too. So this is *your* fault. They wouldn’t have taken us if it weren’t for you.”

“Maybe they would’ve.” Rose toddled her head, still thinking, “Point is they did.”

“So it’s *all your* fault.” Amy said bitterly.

Rose turned toward her suddenly, hopefully misreading tone or mishearing, “Sorry?”

“You *should* be.” Amy said angrily.

“Amy,” Part of her wanted to take the blame. But she couldn’t shed the thoughts behind it. She had counselled her husband for years of his misplaced guilt she wasn’t about to take blame that wasn’t hers, hormonal influence or not.

“This is all your fault!”

Rose blinked. “Oi, back up the blame train before it hits everyone!”

This was out of nowhere. Amy seemed to be bouncing between hating her and happy she was around and sad… oh. Hormone casserole doesn’t end with the pregnancy, Tyler. Her mum almost cried at the blue on her baby announcements because it wasn’t the right blue.

“Little seven year old you told him about the crack, yeah? And then he blew up the TARDIS that created the crack or fixed it or whatever, I came because of a blowin up TARDIS, then we got kidnapped. So *I could say* it’s your fault.” Rose huffed, “Or we can back up an’ blame your parents if you like, ‘cause they made ya an’ you did that.” Amy looked about to argue, and then defeated, and then broken. Rose lowered her voice, “You wanna place blame, Amelia? Blame the bloody morons who kidnapped us, no one else, or shut the hell up and go back to Scotland.”

Silence. Rose closed her eyes. She couldn’t even look at Amy. She couldn’t look at the window, either, afraid to look at her own face and start blaming herself as well.

“I’m sorry.” Amy’s eyes filled with tears, “I miss Rory.”

“I’m sure he misses you, too.” Rose sighed and looked back at Amy, likely as soggy as Amy was herself. “This situation is shitty enough. Wait an’ hate me when we’re back on the TARDIS, yeah?”

“I won’t, I won’t.”
Rose made a silent vow to avoid those emotions. Not bottle, not dwell… avoid. She wondered if that was why this one was like he was. Seemed happy forever, him. But she knew better. Maybe Amy didn’t.

Time to be jovial.

Amy was sleeping, Melody beside her in the cradle, sleeping soundly beneath the shadow of the only thing that seemed to cast a one in this room: the small, white dining table. Rose sat against the wall strategically to be able to see the sleeping duo, the big window to the warehouse room below, and the door. Rose couldn’t help but close her eyes for a moment and quietly beg, “Find us.”

She heard static for a moment. She couldn’t help the hope that crept into her heart, she did it again, trying harder to send out her thoughts, “Find us.”

“No use trying,” A voice slickly said, Rose looked to the monitor on the wall not too far from her, just over the toilet. Eye-patched madam Kovarian was on the screen. That’s where the static came from, Rose huffed, at least feeling relieved that no one had used that toilet yet. Rose closed her eyes and filed it away in her mind to find a way to cover it later. She set the back of her head against the wall in exasperation. “There’s a telepathic field all around Demons run. None out. He’ll never hear you.”

“I was talking to myself, thanks.” Rose kept her eyes closed.

Madam Kovarian almost sang the next words as the melodically oozed out of her mouth, “Oh, so many lies. He can’t hear you. You’re alone. He doesn’t even know where you are.”

Rose lifted her head off the wall and opened her eyes, looking blankly at the monitor, showing in stark contrast that smirking face, “If he doesn’t know where we are, why are you still scared of him?” She extended her legs crossing them and looking irritably at the monitor. Kovarian seemed surprised, her single eye widening a touch as she tried to keep the smirk planted on her face, though it lost its luster. Rose didn’t even pause for an answer and waved the potential of one off with her hand as she looked out the window, “yeah. You are scared, I’ve seen it. I’ve seen guns, military from the window. You don’t get all military unless you think somethin’s after you, an’ yeah, somethin’ will be after you. You raised an army to fight one man, who you wouldn’t even needed to fight if you hadn’t taken his friends.”

She looked back at the monitor, scowling single eye of the quite severe looking woman still present, “His friends, the only things in the whole bloody universe that keep him in check.” Rose laughed to herself, keeping her tone jovial as she stood and walked closer to the large face on the monitor, the perennial smirk of the one-eyed woman slowly faltering. “You thought you put the wolf in a cage but you, in your bloody idiocy, just unleashed an oncoming storm. I almost feel sorry for you.” She approached the monitor face to face now, presenting the bravest face she could, eyes starting to glow, “Almost.”
The screen sorted out. The wires started smoking before Rose even realized she was tired.

Instinct. Guns, Amy, now this… it was instinct.

Rose backed up, back against the wall as she slumped down watching small wisps of smoke escape from monitors, even hidden sections within the wall, smelling of smoldering electronic bits. Fatigue nagged. Hopefully this'll be short, this sleep.

She should have played stupid. She should have probed for answers, people who just thought of her as a daft blond with a lower class accent tended to reveal more.

Melly cried due to the pervasive, acrid smell of the several monitors around the room starting to smoke, including some stealthily hidden in her cradle apparently as the sides of it began to smoke. She tried to stand to get the crying baby and failed, her body too tired and cold to do much beyond sit. During Rose’s fumbling attempts to stand Amy stirred, scooping up the whining Melody and sat beside Rose, sharing her body warmth and calming Rose’s shivers.

“What did you do?” Amy said flatly, not upset by the dissipating smoke but not exactly going to be nice about her interrupted sleep, either.

Rose shrugged half-heartedly, sniffling a little and forcing a laugh as she faded, “Got into an argument with the telly.”

It didn’t take a genius to figure out her frying of the monitors in the room seemed to hamper their surveillance of them. The window to the door cracked open more often than… however bloody long they’d been in there before. Different eyes, usually in sets of two and not the one that Rose felt likely to reach through the glass and pluck out.

Shame, that.

Usually studying. Stares, as if waiting for something to happen again. Eyes diverting when they’re caught or narrowing in anger, depending on the eyes that attempted to bore into them. The fight or flight of faces, few faces actually brazen enough to fully stare, unafraid or unashamed. Scientists, likely.

Rose glanced when something moved there. The door opened, a new set of guards or scientists for staring, the occasional quick fly-by of the one eyed woman as if she did fear for the remaining eye. Today it was an easily spooked scientist.

Rose sighed, “Like a human zoo.”

“They look human.” Amy said quietly.

“Lotsa things look human.”
Amy smirked, “Like you?”

“Behold the natural ginger in captivity, makin’ snarky comments.” Rose said as much like an announcer on the telly as she could.

“Please. ‘Behold the wild Rose, gets all goldy-eyed and poofs stuff.’” Amy’s mockery of a documentarian was much better, more stoic, and made Rose laugh, and they both chuckled a bit. Rose made her eyes gold ringed and made a mean face toward the man at the door, causing him to flinch. Amy almost choked on a laugh as she turned to Rose. “What exactly do you do? I’m not complaining.”

“Poof stuff, ‘parently. Various results.” Rose motioned to the scorch marks along walls where monitors were and billowing smoke trails on the white walls where sneaky listening may have been. Rose could only explain in segments. She wasn’t about to tell just anyone, and given that she’d heard voices through the door she didn’t doubt they’d be able to hear her, too.

“Like helping pop out babies or frying monitors, both of which I’m grateful weren’t the other way around.” Amy smirked, “But it’s not a why or a how.”

“Kinda… took something in. Shoulda died, the Doctor took it outta me. But apparently that didn’t work, some stayed all nestled in, waiting. Eye thing is easy. Everything else…” Rose clicked her tongue.

Amy muddled over those words for a moment before she mumbled something and seemed to repeat bit a little louder so Rose could hear, “…nestled in your head for a hundred and twenty seven years.”

“What?” Rose blinked.

“She…” Amy stared, obviously taking a cue from Rose and being vague, “when she was a she… said that.”

“She’s always a she.” Rose corrected with a smile.

“That’s not the point.” Amy rolled her eyes, “When we were on that planet, or not we, she said vortex nestled in your head for 127 years and,” she looked closer at Rose, “apparently it’s painful.”

“A hundred twe…” Rose blinked, disregarding the painful part, refusing to dwell. “I’m a hundred forty seven years old! Bloody hell.” Defeated by the actual number of her age, Rose buried her face in her hands in shock and moaned exaggeratedly, “Somehow not knowing was better than knowing I’m nearly a hundred fifty.”

“Pretty good night cream, but…” Amy chuckled under her breath, “Nearly a hundred and fifty and you still haven’t learned to do your roots?”

Rose put on a faux affronted face and ran a hand through her sink-washed hair, the tender skin already healed around it. “Rude.”
“Did she just… talk?” Rose blinked, addressing Amy but staring at the gurgling infant.

“She made baby noises because she’s a baby.” Amy looked at Rose as if she were being purely ridiculous. It’d been… however many days, no more than a week, maybe, but it had obviously worn on Rose’s sanity if she thought Melody was capable of speech.

Rose breathed out, “Oh, you can tell I’m hallucinatin’ when I’m startin’ ta be able to hear what she means when she makes a noise.”

“Really? Nights are yours, then.” Amy quipped.

Rose snorted. “The old blonde one gets the night shift. I’ll have to warn Rory, bein' your fake spouse is a chore, hate to be the real one.”

“If I’m your wife then Rory’s his husband.” Amy reminded.

Rose laughed, “Poor Rory.”

“Speaking of marriages…” Amy lead, letting the sentence Rose knew was coming simply hang in the air.

Rose deflated, expecting this before she turned to Amy. “Yes, Mum?”

“When are you going to stop being stupid.” It wasn’t a question. It was comment that expected an explanation. Rose shrugged a smirky shrug.

“Oh,” Rose could answer that question very easily, “never.”

Amy put Melody into the cradle and crossed her arms, looking every bit the mummy she was, “You’re his wife.”

Rose rolled her eyes, “I told you, I’m not—”

“Girlfriend, then.” Amy cut her off even from the obvious denial about to come off of that statement.

Rose didn’t know how to answer, but smiled a little. Amy’s responding eye-roll was enough response. “It's compli—”

“—cated, yes you’ve said.” Amy nodded, “How is it complicated?”

“Just is, isn’t it, Melly?” Rose cooed to the small baby in her cradle.

...Melody started to cry.

“See? No Pond is on your side, especially when you call her Melly.” Amy looked smug.

“It all comes down to time.” Rose huffed to herself, not really willing to divulge as many details as she knew Amy wanted to hear, given where they were. It was a bit like River and her, she supposed. Only so much that even could be said. “Something’s in his future an’ I’m not…” Rose sighed, “He knows it, it’s a fixed point. Can’t avoid it even if he wants to.”

“But he’s always saying ‘Time Can Be Rewritten’.” Amy asked without asking.
“Most things, yeah, but not causal loops, fixed points. This is botha those, I think. Try to rewrite it,” Rose clicked her tongue, “the universe has fixes for those. Scary, painful fixes, and if it can’t fix, it like, implodes. So it has to happen they way it happens. So, he and I… it'll be whatever it is, but it’ll end. He hates endings.”

“I think you’re both being stupid. He loves you, you love him, end of.”

“Yes, Mum.” Rose joked, solemnly smiling. It wasn’t that simple. She breathed out heavily, “Whatever you say.”

“You can’t deny it. Thought it was bad before, but then two hims and a you?” Amy made a face, “Flirt-a-palooza.”

“Well what would you do with two Rory’s?” Rose said before she immediately regretting it, speaking quickly and raising a hand to stop Amy speaking before any noises escaped Amy's throat, “—No, don't answer that, hypothetical question, don’t wanna know.”

“Like that wasn't your first thought,” smarmed Amy before she looked contemplative, “Maybe, whatever happens, it’s not what you think,” Amy shrugged.

“Maybe.” Rose said without conviction, “Wouldn’t that be lovely an’ improbable.”

“You poof things, we travel in a box through space with an alien in a box.” Amy blinked, “Can’t discount the improbable.”

Melody gurgled.

“Speaking of improbable… go get a clean nappy. Someone’s about to dirty this one already.”

“It’s not going to happen, I just cleaned it.” Amy smirked. A smell permeated the area. Amy flinched her nose and rolled her eyes unhappily. “That’s just great.” Amy tromped to their stack of clean nappies. Amy looked sourly at Rose, who wasn’t even trying to hold in her smirk, Amy shook a clean one at her in accusation. “You so get the night shift.”

“She tried to… what?” Rose blinked, rocking Melly’s cradle, situated on her helmet so that it could rock.

“Burn down a barn. Just a barn. No cows or horses in it or anything. It just… spread. No one got hurt, our town’s full of old people, so very good EMTs.” Amy said quickly, “Her foster mum’s rubbish. My family...” Any stopped and made a face, “Ug. Two lives in my head. Do you ever get used to it?”

“Only had one life, me. Never had two lives, welllll,” Rose dragged out the word, thinking, “sorta did, least not, like, at the same time.”
“I remember being raised by my aunt. I also remember my parents.” Amy huffed, “Either way, Mel was wild. Knew her since I first came to Leadworth and I still never met her foster mum. She needed someone to tell her off after she did something stupid. Which was all the time.”

“And I’m guessing you did that. You hear that, Melody? Mummy’s spent her life tellin’ off Melodys, she’s got practice.” Rose smiled to the sleeping baby, “That’s somethin’ to live up to.”

“Oi, you’re lucky she’s so little she won’t remember that!” Amy hit Rose playfully on the arm.

“What about your best friend.”

“My best friend was the Doctor,” Rose laughed to herself, “Sounds a bit pathetic, don’t it? Around the longest.” She shrugged. “Maybe my niece, Aurora. She was trouble, too. Less burnin’ barns more… lettin’ my husband sneak her into Torchwood Tower and learning to build daft lasers outta glue and staples that worked. She got good at it. First Doctor Tyler on record. He was so proud.” Rose reminisced, pausing. “Still. Gone now.” Amy seemed to see the glint of sadness in her eye, and didn’t press, which was an improvement. Time was, Amy would have probed any angle she could for an answer from her. Rose switched subjects. “Suppose since I’m back there Jack an’ Mickey, but since it’s been over a hundred years they mighta been figments of my imagination.”

“Thought the Doctor was a figment of my imagination, look how that turned out.” Amy smiled.

Rose pointed at her, “Never did get that story all the way.”

“Might not have time.”

Rose shrugged in response, “Melly’s down. Guessin’ we have time for half a long story, a medium story or two short stories.”

“Melody.” Amy corrected with a small glare, “So, there was this… crack in my wall…”

This.
Rose was used to this.
Quarantine and isolation recommended twice for over exposure to radiation and one for an extended time spent with an alien species. And one just… extra.

Locked in a white room with no clocks for God knows how long. She hadn’t dealt with it well that first time. Second time had her husband just beyond the wall in the next room, that made it a bit easier. The extra one was just… self imposed mourning for an untold time that her husband would have hated to know that she’d done. Amy was taking it surprisingly well, considering. The first time nearly drove Rose barmy, and she was told it was only four days. This felt… longer.

Not that she was about to admit, out loud, that she had any idea that they were nearing a week of
isolation. Amy might panic. Maybe she knew, maybe she thought it would have been shorter, maybe longer.

But it didn’t feel longer. There was always a distraction, something to do, something to talk about. Even their rare moments of silence or snippiness seemed companionable.

*Companion.*
*Better with two.*
*Or three,* as it turns out. She smiled at Amy and Melly.

“Oi! Stop smiling at me! It’s creepy.”

“God I miss tea.” Rose stared at the clear bottle with the clear liquid. Rubbish. Worse when she woke, she wasn’t used to it after her have-no-idea amount of sleep separating her from imbibing the terrible taste. Probably bit of conditioning in there, too.

Tea after she woke, nearly every morning when they were together, and nearly every morning since she’d been back. He’d greet her with a her big old mug of fantastic tea and that goofy smile on those lips. Tea. Yeah. *That’s* what she missed. Not the man with the tea. She harrumphed and stared down the liquid in the bottle. She closed her eyes and concentrated, “*tea tea tea tea.*”

“What *are* you doing?” Amy asked like Rose was daft.

Rose’s eyes stayed closed “Trying to make it tea.” Rose huffed out, opening her closed eyes and seeing a disappointingly still clear water bottle. She twisted off the cap and sipped, and a disappointed face, “Or at least *pretend* it’s tea.”

“Maybe if you pretend it’s in labor or argue with it it’ll get hot. But *that* hot?” Amy grimaced, “probably will taste even worse. Still might be a step up from tea.”

Rose put her hand on her hip, turning her torso to look at Amy as she lightly bounced the winging baby, “Makin funna me?”

“Little bit.” Amy smirked, speaking almost like she was instructing the baby, “Tea is the worst, isn’t it, Melody?”

“Don’t teach that innocent little baby your blasphemy.” Rose said as if it had been painful to hear. She was trying not to think about her husband explaining the Scots. …well, ranting, more like.

‘*Their entire purpose is to argue, and they’ve refined the act into perfection.*’ Rose crinkled her nose,
“She’s gonna be Scottish enough, let’s not make it worse.”

“Don’t get me started on fish and chips.” Amy added as she looked to the calming newborn.

Rose looked in awe at Amy as she held Melody, watching the ginger fight a smile as she teased. Rose narrowed her eyes, “You’re holdin’ Melly so I don’t smack ya one, yeah?”

“Stop calling my daughter Melly.” Amy said with an exhausted eye-roll, “Besides, mocking you makes me feel better. I’m not the one with the thing.”

Rose sighed, using her elbow on the table to prop up her face dejectedly, “Fat lotta use that is. I can’t even get us outta here. Eyes’ll do this,” Rose's eyes ringed gold on cue and faded just as fast, “but I can’t do anything but make it cold an' then sleep. My thing is that I’m bloody useless.” Rose grumbled in what had become a regular self flagellation.

Amy huffed and shrugged, “But without that useless thing you might not have a niece, so.”

Rose’s eyes widened, her face lifting off her hand as she looked at Amy, “So Melly’s my niece, now?”

“Might be.” Amy turned to look at Rose seriously, looking very ‘mummy' with that stern look on her face and baby in her arms, “If you stop calling her Melly.”

There wasn’t a sun, and no meals aside from the giant stash of water-like meal replacement they hadn’t nearly gone though so no meal schedule, but if paying close attention through the large window on one side of the room did anything it had established a military-like precision of the people in view. There had been almost thirty shift changes she’d seen, ones she had been awake for. She tried not to draw too much attention to them, as Amy was panicky enough without having to think that maybe they’d been conscious and with her baby for almost thirty shift changes. Were shifts 8 hours? 12 hours? Either way, she found it hard to acknowledge they’d been left here for over a week, much less 10 or 20 days. Maybe they were on While she might be a walking disaster of time, Amy certainly wasn’t.

Time was getting to her. Amy had remarked once that baby Melody was the only thing holding her together this rate, and Rose… had to agree. Frankly Melly —Melody— was holding both of them together, adorable little wiggler that she was. She was hope. Little face, next generation and all that, proof that there was life after this life. Maybe, if it was anything like her brother Tony's family, she'd get to know several generations of Ponds, too.
The door made a clunk. The noise sprung Rose’s eyes open. There were only a few noises they had heard, that clunk was fairly foreign. Used only when. The lock.

Rose sat up quickly, Amy already awake with the baby and staring at the door and instinctively backing away from it. Rose stood with curiosity, Amy smoothly and near instantly moving behind her.

The door opened.

The one eyed harpy that had grown so low in Rose’s esteem was right there, clear, hands at her sides with a smarmy smile spread across her starkly contrasting lips.

“It’s been a few weeks. I think she's done. Time for Melody to go.”

“No.” Rose didn’t wait for an explanation, almost boxing in her friend behind her. She couldn’t see Amy, but no doubt the red head was scowling just as hard as she was and clutching the baby ever closer.

“She’s got a job to do.”

“Don’t care.” Rose snarled.

“You should,” Kovarian said greasily, lifting her arm and aiming her gun directly at Rose.

Rose’s eyes ringed with gold and her body warmed. Instinct. Guns didn’t go off. Instead, Kovarian dropped the gun in favor of using both hands to hold the sides of her head with a gasp.

…and melted into a puddle before their eyes.

Rose’s tunnel vision returned, her body woozy and loose, but as she fell, behind the puddle walked in another Kovarian, simply oozing more confidence and smarm than before. She started talking even before Rose had hit the floor.

“You have five minutes.”

“Rose! Rose! They took Melody!” Amy’s warm hands shook her shoulders.
“What?” Rose blinked, barely registering consciousness before trying to comprehend the question. Amy had sat her up, propped against the wall to shake her back to consciousness. “What?!”

“Can you do that… heat… you… the wolf thing again?”

“I …” she sat up and let out a yelp at her own stiffness, “I’m not magic!” she cringed as she slid her fatigued body against a wall. “I don’t even know what I do! I can’t even…”

“Why didn’t you save it?!” Amy spat.

Rose's voice became moderately heated, her pale face reddening slightly, “Yeah, and have us all die? Sounds good, give me a mo, I’ll hop into the TARDIS and make myself rethink that decision, shall I?”

“Why don’t you have a sonic screwdriver?” Amy flustered, “Or use that hundred-odd year experience!”

“Yes, my fault, already established that, thanks.” Rose acknowledged.

Amy softened, “I’m sorry, I know, I know!” Amy started to cry, “But there’s nothing we can do. They’ve taken her.”

Rose used what strength she could muster to grab Amy by the shoulders and hug her, feeling Amy practically melt into the embrace as she cried. Rose pat the back of Amy’s head as she whispered, “We’ll get her back. On my ridiculously long life, I swear, we’ll get her back.”

Rose cleared her throat. Sipping drink helped, regardless of it’s repellent taste. It had been long enough for her to walk unassisted, however long that was. But every moment without Melody seemed to drain both of them of what little emotion they had left. They sat on the ledge by the large window to the warehouse, overlooking a slowly gathering force of uniformed men and women, all muttering about the Doctor.

“They’re gathering.” Rose managed to say. Her voice hoarse and soft. Rose took Amy’s hand and squeezed it once before letting go, trying to be a comfort or distraction as she saw the sadness overtake the sheer anger that usually fueled her. Rose smiled weakly to Amy before they both turned and watched the beginnings of a rally below.

The door opened behind them, a gust of slight breeze from the hallway and a woman's voice hit them. “Sorry. I shouldn't be here. I'm meant to be at the thing. I brought you something. Your child's name in the language of my people. It's a prayer leaf and we believe, if you keep this with you, your child will always come home to you.” Amy turned to look at her, Rose still watched the gathering rally below. She could see a slight reflection in the window, but she wasn’t intending on
concentrating enough to see it. The voice wasn’t the hostile one who stole the baby, there wasn’t anything she could actually do if it was.

“Can I borrow your gun?” Amy asked.

There was a pause, “Why?”

“Because my friend here doesn’t have the strength and I’ve got a feeling you're going to keep talking.” Amy said flatly as she turned back to the window. Rose almost smiled to herself, sipping from her drink. Lorna stayed silent, though it sounded like she was fumbling with something cloth. “They're talking like he's famous. The Doctor isn't famous.”

“He meets a lot of people,” she said from behind them, obviously not having left, “Some of them remember. He's sort of like a, I don't know, a dark legend.”

Rose almost choked on her sip of awful at that. Amy turned to look at the woman, “Dark? More like a fairy tale. Sending an army after a fairy tale.”

“But fairy tales are for children,” the woman countered.

“Well I was a child when I met him.” Amy shrugged and turned back to the window.

“So was I,” the odd woman said softly.

Rose turned and looked at the woman. Brown hair, brown eyes, thin, but not as fit as several of the other officers they’d seen. But the look on her face as she saw Rose… Rose swallowed, “You’ve met him.”

The woman nodded, “Him and you. It’s okay that you don’t remember. Probably the most ordinary day for you. On the Gamma Forests…” No recognition of that place hit Rose, the woman looking sadly at its lack on her face. “Lorna Bucket?” Rose almost apologetically shook her head, she didn’t have any recollection of that. “You said it was a dragon. He said to run.”

“He does that.” Rose acknowledged, a slow smile filling her chest though not on her face.

“So he saved you. And you joined an army to fight him?” Amy asked, slightly lost.

Lorna blinked at Amy, “Well how else do you meet a mighty warrior? Take away his weapon and prepare.”

Rose could barely register what Lorna had said, “That’s just… so, so wrong. So much about that, s’just…” She couldn’t even come up with a word strong enough as she stumbled over her own tongue in frustration,”… wrong.”

“Warrior? He’s not a warrior.” Amy looked at Lorna like she was a bit if a moron.

Rose agreed with Amy, whole heartedly, looking at Lorna like that her like that’d been an insult. “That’s the last thing he’d ever want to be called again.”

“Then why is he called the Doctor?” Lorna asked.

“Because he helps. That’s what Doctors do. They help,” Amy answered, matter-of-factly.

“And what the hell would give you the idea he’d have a weapon? Any weapon?” Rose addressed the other part of that very wrong statement, “Have you even seen that man hold a weapon? Ever? Even heard of it?” Rose huffed, “He’s got the sonic, a screwdriver. A screwdriver, used to fix things. Not
hurt them, not unless he has to, not unless he has no choice. Know why he told you to run? First thing he told me, too. Run. ‘Cause something bad was coming. And you’re tryin’ta stop him? Then you’re the bad thing he’s tellin' other little girls to run from.”

Lorna smiled, her eyes twinkling as she looked at Rose, “You have a lot of faith in him.”

“No,” Rose’s answer was quick on her lips, “I have hope. Hope we get out. Hope for you. Hope that you’re on the right side if all this is really what you decided on.”

“The thing is, he’s coming. No question about it. Just you make sure you’re on the right side when he gets here. Not for our sakes, for yours.” Amy took the prayer leaf from Lorna. “Thank you.” And turned back to look out the window.

The door shut and locked. Neither if them turned to watch Lorna leave, but heard the door shut behind her. Amy sat beside Rose, clutching the green fabric in her hand, and watched the rally below as she leaned on her friend. Rose sat very still, emotions held in to the best of her ability, her mind racing over the few facts she’d been able to gather. And remember. Planets and people raced across her mind, her eyes unfocused. Amy placed a hand on her shoulder to comfort or calm her, which just spurred a bark of laughter. Amy looked confused, but Rose looked at Amy, lit up like it had been the best day in the history of the universe.

“I haven’t ever been to the Gamma Forests.” Rose breathed out quietly as caught her breath, laughing. She rubbed a happy tear for her eye, “…yet.”

“What’s that mean?”

Rose grinned widely, letting that smile in her chest bloom fully on her face, “Hope.”

The crowd had gathered. The lights beyond had dimmed. Not theirs, but spotlights but on their little stage area like they were putting on a play for the troops.

Hope had returned to Amy and Rose, albeit small. The assembly was just… daunting, but laughable, and a bit of a blank slate to stare at while Rose tried to form a plan and gain whatever energy she needed back.

A uniformed man spoke to the crowd. It was noted that the one eyed woman wasn’t on the stage, but near the back if the gathered people with a separate cavalcade of officers. Her personal brigade? The man on the stage started talking. “On this day, in this place, the Doctor will fall and silence. Will. Fall!”

The crowd erupted in agreement, “Hoo Rah!”

The man at the stage was backed up by people in hoods at the back of the stage, standing immobile like background. “The man who talks, the man who reasons, the man who lies, will meet the perfect
answer.” Everyone agreed with another resounding ‘Hoo rah!’

“All this, all this to make the rambliest, gobbliest man shut it?” Rose wondered aloud.

“They might need a bigger army.” Amy mumbled.

The man who took center stage began talking, “…It's time you knew what these guys have sacrificed for faith. As you all know, it is a Level One Heresy, punishable by death, to lower the hood of a Headless Monk. But by the divine grant of the Papal Mainframe herself—”

“Heresy, monks, papal. There’s a religion backing up their stupid.” Amy spoke over whatever the pompous man was saying.

“There’s rarely a reason for stupid, but people blame religion for lots.” Rose mumbled, watching the idiot parade.

“Back the blame train up and it hits everyone.” Amy bumped Rose’s side a little, making her smirk.

It was dark, but the head man seemed to do something, a spot light shown on a person who… oh. Didn’t have a head. Both flinched a bit. It just looked like a twisted off end to a bread bag where the neck aught to be.

“They never can be afraid.” He moved on and revealed another twisty-tie neck in a brown robe. He headed to a third, speaking before he pulled down the hood. Rose didn’t bother to look, two twisted-head-off things were quite enough, Rose wasn’t sure she needed to see a third. Amy was looking away, too. “And they can never, ever be—”

“Surprised!” a familiar voice finished his statement. Rose's heart fluttered.

Both sets of eyes from the two women widened as they looked at each other, for a second refusing to let that hope rise higher than it should before quickly standing up, turning and looking back out the window.

The Doctor. Brown robe, but the floppy hair smiling face and chin that practically begged to be placed over a bow tie and that jovial voice clinched it, even from far off.

“Oh that bloody man,” Rose faux-complained while she smiled. Rose looked back out the window quickly. He was eating up the stage with his presence, smiling more menacingly than she'd seen before. It was a smile of genuine happiness at his situation but also one with a plan.

_Antic-y Doctor was a Doctor with a plan._

“Ha, ha!” the Doctor laughed, his voice projected by what sounded like a microphone, “Hello, everyone. Guess who. Please, point a gun at me if it helps you relax.” Guns pointed at the Doctor a responding 'Calm' heard in her mind that made her heart beat faster. She narrowed her eyes playfully at the probable source as he flailed his arms theatrically and continued to address the crowd before him. “You're only human.”

“All about the show,” Rose complained with a smile of her face, turned and looking elatedly at Amy before watching him again. Rose kissed the glass toward him her lips lingering on the glass, watching his eyes momentarily flicker toward her and Amy and she pulled her lips off the window with a big genuine smile almost as if he felt it, reflected adoration managed to quickly find its way to her.

“Three minutes forty seconds.” The Doctor said without preamble before looking up in their
direction and raising his voice. “Fairy tale girls! Get your coats!”

His voice echoed through the speakers as he spoke into a mic, each syllable like a balm to Rose’s nerves. She saw that the reaction was the same for Amy, who looked on in awe, “If he’s there where’s Rory?” the lights on the warehouse went out completely, the entire space just getting the reflected light from their window.

“They’re not after Rory, so he’s prob’ly actually doing stuff, not just peacocking like this one.” Rose hadn’t taken her eyes off the darkened window, the lights having gone off outside their little room, making it even harder to see but that wasn’t likely to stop her from looking. “Can’t be completely under the radar, be as flash as possible.”

“I'm not a phantom,” It was his voice, The Doctor’s voice, booming over a speaker system. “I'm not a trick,” Rose snorted at that. “I’m a monk.” For that one she fought full-on giggles. She’d been in his head. That man was not a monk.

Rude.

He heard that! He bloody heard that! Rose couldn’t peel the smile from her face if she tried.

Chanting, now. From outside. She couldn’t, or wouldn’t, hear anything they were chanting about, elation lighting up her entire being almost uncontrollably. The chanting only spurred Rose to stand and ran to the closed and bolted door, searching more earnestly than she had before for any way to get it fully off or open. She banged on parts of the door, window closed as she hoped no guard was there or they were distracted by the Doctor’s sudden appearance, trying to hear a difference in full or hollow, weak or strong. Something. Anything.

“What’re you doing?” Amy looked back at the noisy Rose, Amy’s hand was still on the big window, as if reaching for the Doctor.

“Getting our coats.”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the long wait.

The next few may follow suit on the waiting, summer is here so updates will be few and far between until I’m hit with a writing binge or school starts up again and frees my time a bit.
Rory was on his knees and balls of his feet on the floor, staring at the puddle that used to be his wife. The Doctor didn’t give it a second thought as he bound up the ramp to the center controls and started working immediately. But he was giving it second thoughts. Seconds and thirds and twentieths, playing it out in his mind what needed to be done to get the back.

“So… they were Flesh.” Rory said, addressing the Doctor though his eyes were still fixed on the puddle. The Doctor fought the instinct to look at it. Not once. It wasn’t them. They were elsewhere and not currently melting on the floor with aided dissipation from the TARDIS.

“Yes.” He responded with as little emotion as possible.

“Why were they Flesh?” Rory slowly stood, his eyes flitting between the stoic Doctor now busy at the controls.

The Doctor took a breath, “I don’t know.”

Rory bent again, but came up with two, small, flesh-drenched pieces of paper. He could see Rory shake and unfold them out of the corner of his eye as he walked up the ramp, both determined and sad and angry, his face hard as he handed the pieces of paper to the Doctor. “Must've been in Rose’s pocket.”

Pictures. Images. White on one side, glossy, full color images on the other, marred by opaque goo but still maintaining the stiffness of photographs.

Him and her. Both hims. He gingerly took the photos from Rory. Both hims, not just the face her husband wore. Him.

She needed a photo with this face, too.

Somehow seeing those images softened his anger a bit.

“She’s having a baby.” Rory said, snapping the Doctor out of his thoughts, “Amy. Amy's having a baby.” Rory's brain caught up, still staring at the puddle as the TARDIS hastened it’s dissipation. “I have a family.”

The Doctor looked back at that smiling face in the photos. The top one, same smile, all teeth and genuine happiness despite the face beside her. He looked at the smiling face her eyes were nearly closed with her mouth open, laughing at something. He was sure she would have found it a good picture of either of them. He was scowling in it. A faux scowl, he realized. It was him in leather, grumping beside her, the day he realized his feelings for her, watching her genuine smile and laugh nearly break through his grump. The other was her and him standing together, a relief evident with his skinny, freckly, far too coiffed and mussed hair— likely post the Wire— smiling and leaning into each other in a slightly-more-than-platonic way. Him in stripes, beside her, the day he began to let himself feel those feelings that leather realized he’d had.

“Family.” He repeated the last words he heard from Rory while looking at the blonde in the photos. He looked up immediately, allowing that smirk that so naturally came to this face reassert it’s rightful place, if weakly. “Change of plan!”
Rory blinked at that idea, “You had a plan?”

“Sort of plan. A plan of attack. Trying to find out what I can. Been tweaking it accordingly for a while. Thought of armies and people who owed me. Didn’t think family. Willing and capable.” He gleefully put the photos down, standing them up between the gyranoplotter and the temporal gears. “Biggest family on Earth, someone once said. Some of Rose’s first thoughts, when Rose was still Rose, were of—”

“You knew they weren’t real. All along. You knew and you never said.” Rory broke in his ramble, ready to seethe.

“Couldn’t very well be sure they, whoever they are, weren’t listening.” The Doctor said flippantly as he reveled in his new idea, “We haven’t exactly been apart from the two of them.” Rory seemed to sigh with resignation and agreement, though his demeanor didn’t change.

Family. Jack’s like a big brother to me.

“Okay,” the Doctor clapped his hands before setting them to work at the console, “First stop…” he looked at the monitor, “Space pub, apparently.”

“I don't think that's what we need right now.” Rory said as flatly as he could.

The TARDIS made a groan of protest and a shutter, the Doctor shot a glare up to the ceiling, flicking the lever once more. She didn’t protest again. The TARDIS shook violently. Rory had to brace himself on the metal bannister and lost his hold with the quick reassessment of gravity as they landed with a big, grumpy stomp of unhappiness.

“It’s not a drop off, it’s a pick up.” The Doctor amended before narrowing his eyes at his own choice of words, “Oh, I’m so glad he wasn’t here yet to hear me say that.”

“Who are we picking up?” Rory was ready to move. The thought of his family being taken away grating on him visually. “Army? Navy? RAF?”

“Sort of, yes.” He pulled up stats on the monitor, tapping the screen and stepping back for Rory’s perusal of the cheesily smiling face with a few stats and a big red reading of ‘WARNING’ overlapping on corner of the image, worrying him despite the fact that the Circular Gallifreyan probably looked like a seal to Rory.

He left Rory reading the extensive translated text and ran to the galley, removing a familiar and likely entirely disgusting bottle before running back and plopping it in the confused looking Rory’s hands.

Rory looked at the bottle thrust at him and faded, illegible writing on the label. “I don't think we'll need this.”

“We won’t. Though he might.” He motioned to the monitor quickly, “And he’s been through some things. I wasn’t there, and there’s no Rose, so you'll do.”

Rory blinked in realization. “So I’m a buffer.”

The Doctor toddled his head a bit, “… more like those bumpers things in bowling lanes that keep you from getting a gutter.”

“I’m a buffer.” Rory repeated.

“You’re a buffer.” The Doctor agreed.
Rory opened the doors to the sound of a crowd. It had been only minutes since Rose and Amy … departed, or not-Rose and not-Amy rather, leaving him alone in the TARDIS for the first time in a while. Alone. Not even friendly hallucinations to comfort him. Or taunt him. He concentrated on his adjustments.

The TARDIS flashed her warning of an impending caution just before one Jack Harkness tromped through the doors. There he was, large as life, flirty face replaced with a slight scowl and a semi-flustered Rory trailing a few seconds behind him. Jack brandished the bottle towards him, he glancing up the ramp to try and view the now slowing Doctor as he made adjustments to the console. He smirked a little, shaking the bottle at him in an accusatory manner, sloshing, probably toxic tasting liquid inside “The TARDIS tell on me?”

His hearts ached at that, he did his best not to let that show as he forced joviality into his voice. “In a manner of speaking.”

“We need your help,” Rory impatiently added. The Doctor didn’t know what had happened out there, but Rory’s impatience didn’t seem to be limited to the situation at hand. It was definitely Jack.

“I can’t help you.” Jack said flatly, he didn’t make eye contact with the Doctor or Rory as he said it.

“Good,” the Doctor said without emotion, “because I’m not asking you to help me. I’m asking you to help Rose.”

Surprise and worry seemed to hit Jack’s face as he turned to face the Doctor, astonished at the mention. He quickly uncorked the bottle and took a long, deep swing from the neck, it leaving his mouth with an audible pop and a sigh. He pointed the uncapped bottle at the Doctor while he spoke. “You’ve got a lot of explaining to do.”

Rory got details, or at least fodder for future questions as the Doctor quickly gave an explication to Jack. The drop off with his other self, meeting Amy and Rory, exploding the universe, Rose. Not much more, he skipped between, his change, but gave enough for Jack.

“What?” Jack put his hands on his head like it might explode without them there, crushing his eyes closed in attempt at contemplating the quick story he’d just received, “What?”

“Yeah that’s what we said for like three weeks.” Rory said flatly.

“Rose isn’t the type to just... leave.” Jack said as he opened his eyes and turned to the Doctor as he skidded around the console, “So you left her there.”

The Doctor cringed inside but shrugged at Jack, sticking out his finger momentarily as he pointed out a fact, “And I stayed with her.”

“I don’t know if she’d see it that way.” Jack argued.

“Hundred years seems to have given her perspective.” The Doctor paused for a mere second, “or leniency.”

“She’s how old?” Rory blinked, pulled out of his malaise by that. the Doctor forgot that even Rory
didn’t know.

Hearing her age didn’t seem the phase Jack much, though, the Doctor supposed, it wouldn’t have. Jack stayed on course, not seeming to lose his train of thought, “Does Mickey know she’s back?”

“No. We haven’t visited anyone yet. Bit of a surprise. And we’ve been busy.” The Doctor avoided looking at Jack as he said it. They’d been busy but he was ashamed to admit he had gotten a little greedy with her time, too. Family. “but that’s the next stop.” He plodded at the console.

“How long has it been?” Jack asked as the Doctor started at the doors, unmoved.

“Few years for them,” the Doctor looked to Jack a moment. “New face. Nervous. I'm nervous! I'm not sure if I've ever been nervous before. How're my teeth?” he bared his teeth slightly to Jack.

Jack rolled his eyes, “The TARDIS kinda gives it away, Doc. I’ll get them.”

Jack headed to the door and opened it.

Lavender wafted in through the doors as Jack stuck his head out. Quick footsteps and the creaking of stairs as if a person with four bare feet was immediately drawn by a loud summoning call. The TARDIS wasn’t exactly quiet.

“Jack!” He heard gasp from a feminine voice. Might've been Mickey. These ears hadn’t heard him, after all.

“Martha Jones! Song of a Nightingale.” Jack said More clearly.

“Smith.” Grumbled a male voice. Ah. There was Mickey.

“Sorry, Mrs. Smith.” Jack said smoothly from the door, “Nice underpants, Mickey.”

“Oi!”

“Arm up, kids.” Jack pat the TARDIS doorway he was in. There was barely a thought between Jack saying it and Mickey’s response.

“Five minutes, Cheesecake,” quickly confirmed Mickey’s voice as Jack turned back inside and closed the door behind him.

“Where are we?” Rory looked around Jack to the room he could barely see. “Hardly a battlefield.”

“London, 2010, Smith, Mickey and Martha.” The Doctor barely looked up as he set the course for their next destination. “they’re friends of ours.” Ours.

“At Five AM in their jimmajams and pants. There’s a sight.” Jack winked.
“If we’re just getting all of our friends we can hop to Leadworth penal, get Mels and hope for the best.” Rory said tersely. Rose had said something about Snarky Rory. He’d seen it—felt it once, his jaw reminded him—that Rory without Amy was a force to be reckoned with, but Rose had hit the nail on the head.

“No,” The Doctor shook his head as he looked at controls again, “They’re uniquely qualified.”

“Martha worked for UNIT before she and Mickey went freelance. I offered them jobs at Torchwood.” Jack explained further.

“I thought Torchwood and UNIT were just internet rumors.” Rory blinked.

“Torchwood is, now.” Jack mumbled a little.

In just less than five minutes the door was pushed in.

In walked two people, Martha, hair in braids and pulled back, Mickey with an errant and very obvious clump of grey hair near his ear. Head to toe back, cargo outside likely as their pants were lined with large pockets, black bag in Martha’s hand that looked like a large medical bag and Mickey armed with a black duffel. Arm up, indeed. They stopped quick as the doors swung closed behind them, barely inside. Both bags drop unceremoniously to the floor with a clunk as their eyes wandered over the entirety of the inside.

“Woah. Nellie.” Martha looked around with wide eyes, “Blue Box in my flat, I was going to say nostalgic, but really! What is this?!” Ah, yes, Martha had yet to see the new TARDIS interior. Bound to be a shocker to ones who couldn’t get a quick explanation from the TARDIS herself.

“Midlife crisis?” Mickey smirked.

“Be nice.” Martha lovingly chided Mickey at his side.

“An’ new face, looks a bit like the first one, but younger,” Mickey indicated Rory with his head, “Definitely midlife crisis.”

“That’s not him.” Jack shook his head toward the Doctor, on the other side of the console working diligently, hidden slightly by the time rotor, “That is.”

Mickey snorted, quickly appraising the Doctor quickly. “I stand by my statement.”

“You ready?” The Doctor didn’t even look up.

“For what?” Martha asked. “What are we doing that you told us to ‘arm up’?” Martha lifted up her black medical bag off the floor as Mickey unzipped his duffel and looked lovingly at what was likely his favorite gun.

“Guess.” Mickey chuckled to his wife. “Who’s the one missin’? Unless she can change faces too an’ that’s her—” Mickey took a moment to greet Rory, reaching his hand out towards him and shaking his hand quickly, “Hey. Mickey an’ Martha Smith.” Rory shook the hand and introduced himself quietly with a quick nod and a Rory Williams. Mickey raised his voice toward the Doctor, still plodding at the console “I’m guessin’ one Rose Tyler’s gone missin’. Where’s the wife, boss?”

“Long story.” The Doctor muttered.

Jack rolled his eyes and addressed the two Smiths, “They’re not married, he left her in the other universe with the other him after the whole Dalek thing a hundred years ago. Now she’s back, been
Kidnapped with Rory’s wife and we’re going to save them.”

“Alright,” Mickey nodded in acceptance as he cocked his extra-large gun, suddenly dipping into no nonsense before confusion kicked in and he jerked his head toward Jack. “…hundred years?”

Jack nodded slowly, “For her.”

“I said long story.” The Doctor looked up quickly, his demeanor clearly indicating he was wasting no time as it made Martha and Mickey straighten their lackadaisical stance ever so slightly “We have another person to collect. I’ll explain as much as I can when I have to do it once. Ready?”

“Who is left? More travelling buddies?” Rory seemed exhausted by the idea as the TARDIS quickly landed and materialized in a new place with it’s slight normal shutter.

The Doctor simply pointed to the exit for Rory, “One left. Out the doors, to your left, through the corridor six cells on your left.”

“Cells? Did we really go to Leadworth Penal?” Rory asked. The Doctor felt Rory’s eyes on him, but he stayed steadfastly attending the very intricate work of his fingers at the console as he pretended not to notice. “Ah,” Rory breathed out quickly He seemed relieved, if impatient, as he headed dutifully for the TARDIS doors as he exited, “River.”

Jack walked up the stairs to the center console. He’d expected a smarmy comment from him, and it had been thirty-two seconds since he’d said anything, but there was a stiff quality to him as he entered the area, Mickey and Martha behind him.

Maybe Jack knew River and didn’t comment. The Doctor supposed there weren’t many time agents who didn’t run into each other from time to time, much less two time travelling freelancers who knew him. Too much coincidence there to avoid it.

Jack plucked up the two semi-sopping images from the console.

“There was no getting between you two,” Jack smirked, flicking the edge of the photo of his first self with Rose, “even from the beginning.”

“You’re tellin’ me.” Mickey chuckled on a breath as he looked over Jack’s shoulder. He looked between the leather-clad Doctor in the photo to the bowtie-wearing one just beyond it, oddly swinging his screwdriver at a set of wires before tucking them back into the console and closing it. “She’s fallen in love with weirder lookin’ faces”

Jack chuckled but turned this face to address Mickey over his shoulder, “What, like yours?”

“Oi!”

“Oh, your face is adorable.” Martha pat Mickey’s shoulder gently with a wink.

“It is sexy.” Jack said suggestively.

Mickey popped a finger and pointed at Jack with a faux scowl, “And that’s enough outta you.”

Rory entered, alone. He closed the doors behind him with a befuddled look and more than a little irritation. “She said no. Then she said something confusing.”

“What? Why…?” the Doctor grumbled as he rubbed his forehead. “We don’t have time to suss out
River today.”

“Who’s River?” Mickey asked.

“Good question,” The Doctor acknowledged and dismissed simultaneously.

“One of us?” Martha asked, apparently eager to meet more of his old traveling companions.

“Sort of,” Rory said, searching for the right word, “but she’s—”

“—not coming.” The Doctor finished Rory's sentence, lest any previous presumptions about himself and River Song be said at this moment. He didn't want it to be a thought anymore much less said.

“Okay, it’s time then.” Mickey nodded, “Give us the briefing, boss. What’s going on?”

Explanation wasn’t easy or as in depth as they’d have preferred, a few more details for Jack, but he could tell by the looks on their faces that they’d accepted what they heard and had questions they were reserving for a less damning moment.

It was enough that he needed help, Rose just gave them extra motivation, the thought of a baby fired them up, a fellow companion needing assistance almost made Amy one if them the way that Rose was. It made Amy family.

It was heartswarming if he’d allow his hearts to be so effected right now.

“But we still don’t know how many were up against. Shouldn’t we have an army?” Rory disturbed his potential warm feeling with logic. Good old Rory.

“Do we ever?” Martha looked hopeful.

“So we don’t know where we’re going out how many we’re up against. This sounds familiar.” Mickey strapped the big gun to his back.

“Well,” Jack cocked his head quickly, “Time travel.”

“So you all…” Rory looked at the three of them, happily gabbing while they seemed ready to go at a moment’s notice. “…traveled with him.”

“At different times.” Martha nodded, thwapping Jack’s hand from reaching into her medical bag as it slug over her shoulder.

“But you all know each other,” Rory noted as they didn’t seem to mind the invasion of their personal space by each other, which seemed more frequent given they were a married couple and Jack. “Is there a support group I should know about?” Rory tried to joke, but his stance was far to rigid in fear and anticipation.

Jack snorted, “Sure. A support group that doesn’t seem to meet unless the world is ending.”

“Or there are Daleks.” Mickey agreed.

“Makes this a bit of a holiday!” Martha smiled eagerly.

“You’re soldiers?” Rory asked.

“No,” Mickey almost laughed, “Not really. Just regular folk.”
“Speak for yourself.” Jack faked sounding insulted with a wink.

“We're not soldiers or warriors. Took a bit to figure that out, though.” Martha passed an apologetic glance to the Doctor. He quickly acknowledged it with a small smile and went back to his calculations. “We're ordinary people who do what we can. Our lives just became... bigger. Was a medical student with an emphasis of infections. Now, I'm a Doctor. Interest in xenobiology.”

“Car mechanic,” Mickey smirked, “Just look at more powerful stuff now.”

“Technically I was Time Agent then a space hopping con man,” Jack added, “Now I’m—”

“Still a space-hoppin' con man. Just nicer 'bout it.” Mickey smarmed. “Even Rose worked in a shop. Dealt with all sorts people, when I left she was in comms for non-terrestrial communication. Things just got bigger.”

“Like pirates who are now space explorers.” Rory nodded as he thought out loud. The Doctor actually looked up at Rory at that.

“Oh, Rory.” The Doctor managed to sound relieved and happy, “Rory, Rory, Rory. Rory the Roman!”

“Rory the nurse.” Rory corrected, clueless as to what the Doctor was so happy about.

The Doctor grinned and gripped his friend by the shoulder, “Exactly.”

The Doctor opened the TARDIS to a very clean, sterile corridor. Everything was shiny. A small boy in anachronistically 1600s clothing skittered down the hall and quickly forced himself to stop fast, sliding a bit on the slick floor. Toby looked at him and smiled. With a giant smile plastered on his face. He pressed what looked like an intercom nearest him, “It's the Doctor!”

“Bring him!” the intercom bellowed back in the familiar voice of Captain Avery.

Toby smiled and motioned for the Doctor to follow, not realizing the string of unknown people would follow him, but he didn’t seem bothered until he realized the face he’d recognize most wasn’t there. Toby enthusiastically lead them down the corridor, a few meters to the bridge.

“Ahoy there! Doctor! Didn’t expect to see you again.” He stood up from the starting seat, his second in comment, a man with pointy eyebrows sitting in his stead.

Three Doctor clapped, smiling broadly, “Well, I like to be unexpected.”

“Welcome aboard the Dog Star.” Avery shook the Doctor hand with a big, genuine smile as he looked to the people around him, “More crew?”

“Former crew.” The Doctor corrected, stepping back so they could get each other. “Captain Henry
Avery, Toby Avery.” He pointed at his group of old friends, “Jack Harkness. Martha and Mickey Smith, you know Rory” Jack rolled his eyes but didn’t comment on his lack of the captain title.

“I owe your crew everything.” Avery smiled as he shook hands, “Where are Miss Amy and Mrs. Tyler?”

“Long story.” The Doctor answered, opening his mouth to continue. Correcting him again in front of his friends would be futile, yes, as he could already see Jack’s and Mickey’s smirk at the title.

“They’ve been kidnapped.” Rory told Avery succinctly.

“There’s a longer story, too,” amended the Doctor. “I may need to commandeer your medic.”

“She’s yours,” Avery quickly acquiesced, “one condition, the rest of the crew helps, too.”

“Henry Avery.” The Doctor smiled with pride, “Not so pirate you can’t do the right thing.”

“We’re not really pirates anymore, are we?” Avery wrapped his arm around his son’s shoulders.

The Doctor smiled. “Time to get busy”

“The TARDIS worked out the where and when,” the Doctor breathed a little easier. He, Jack, Martha, Mickey, and Rory were back on the TARDIS as the Doctor seemed to run around the console, looking analytically, “she has a connection to Rose, we’re going to use it. She should have stayed with Amy, I can’t imagine she would be apart from her for long once she set her mind to it.”

“Okay, where and when settled,” Martha repeated.

“But we still don’t know the who or how many.” Mickey said with confidence. He didn't seem worried.

“Anything we do know?” Jack turned to the Doctor.

“We’re up against an unknown amount of people with an unknown number of weapons for an unknown reason. But what we do know, they have Amy and Rose. We know they put decoys in their places for an unknown reason. We know they know how to power their subterfuge throughout time and space all to get to me but what they don’t know? They’ve angered the wrong people.” Rory’s eyes had managed to widen in fear or understanding, the others sobered ever so slightly. The Doctor paused and kept a smile as pasted on as he could. “And oh I’m angry. That’s new. Don’t really know what I’ll do now.”

Mickey was the only one to speak. “We’ll get ‘em, boss.”
The TARDIS shook. Something was wrong, something prevented their smooth rematerialization, the TARDIS shaking and shuddering in a violent way, throwing them around like ragdolls. He noted familiar smiles spread around Jack Mickey and Martha faces, a resignation of what they were about to enter into as well as the sheer memory of it.
Towing another ship and passing through a detection barrier undetected is being a little much for the old girl.you can do it you can do it.
The right buttons this time. He remembered Rose's movements at his side to adjust his reckless driving as he set the TARDIS on invisible again. Finally rematerialization was completed, but the date on the monitor changed. The Doctor barely had time to take note of it as he ran to the doors, creaking them open slightly. Cupboard. Of course.

As soon as he took a step off the hidden TARDIS, the Doctor was bombarded by blocked telepathic messages. Some sounded degraded and old, most a gentle nudge or his title called out in various intonations of the same voice. Rose. So many simultaneous messages momentarily overloading his mind, 'Doctor' overlapping in different intonations before it becoming almost like a beacon, a chant for help. He doubled over slightly, remaining in his feet under the weight of so busy his mind had become until on final, clear call.

“Doc?” Jack asked, coming out from behind him.

“They're here.” The Doctor managed to project hope through his wince as he got over there tidal wave that had just hit his mind, “Telepathic field, Rose's messages finally got to me. But I can't find her.” He grumbled. “Telepathic field, detection barrier, they knew we were going to come,” The Doctor nearly growled. “They should have.”

“Telepathic?” Jack looked to Rory.

Rory shook his head, “Yeah I have no idea.”

“Explain it to ya later,” Mickey quietly acknowledged. The Doctor momentarily looked at him, Rose had said they had figured it out before the jumps, logically, Mickey would know. He nodded.

The Doctor took a deep breath, his mind ordered as his several companions exited the TARDIS, leaving the door open to easily identify it should they need to return in a moment. He looked around the corner into the hall. Several people in hoods with hands clasped together, and others in camouflage paired with little hats, one of the few hats he had no intention of owning. Rose would laugh at that, Amy would roll her eyes and call him a moron while enabling him. That's new. Adding almost Amy hallucination. Focus. The Doctor whispered with a smile “Oooh, monks. They shouldn’t be guarding against intrusion and having hooded people walking around clearly they’re not the brightest bulbs.” Jack stuck his head out into the corridor.
“People in uniform,” Jack noted as he moved his head back inside the closet space they had entered.

“Not now Jack.” Martha quietly chided.

“No, I mean they’re all uniform, going the same direction. They’re all headed somewhere specific.” Jack watched the group meander their way through the hall, though his view was limited, no one seemed to be fighting the direction of the crowd.

“And now I know where I’m headed,” the Doctor concluded easily, “Smiths, Find the controls, hit the lights on my mark, Avery is covering the escape pods from the outside and I can hit the signal to his ship. Such a large gathering means other things will be minimally guarded, or there would be very few people, or fewer people, anyway, milling about. Good for them. Good for us.” The Doctor smiled and pointed down the hall with a loose cadence, nearly flailing in his directions. “Smiths, control room that way. Rory, you stick with Jack and find our girls.”

“Hear that? Looks like I’m your beef shield, Rory.” Jack winked.

“Don’t you mean meat shield?” Rory asked.

“If you say so.” Jack winked. Rory rolled his eyes, one of the few that seemed have a natural Harkness immunity.

“And what will you do?” Asked Martha.

“Unless they were looking for two of the most stubborn humans in the universe they were trying to get to me,” The Doctor smiled and bounced on his feet happily, “I’m going to give them what they want.”

Each of them seemed to look at each other, letting his words hang there. The Doctor grinned happily, noting the box propped up by the door of the closet, which, upon opening, strictly confirmed his understanding that even the TARDIS wanted this to work out quickly and easily as he pulled a brown, matching hood from it. Closets.

He put on the hooded robe with as much flourish as the crowded little room could give him and nodded before he happily pulled the hood over his head. “You know what to do.”

He followed a line. A brown robed line of boring, silent monks with hoods. Ah…. He noted several pairs or dark shoed feet avoiding him, or the line in general. That narrowed it down. Headless monks, then. Who would align themselves with the Headless Monks? Same people with a bent on kidnapping friends of people in order to provoke a reaction, no doubt. Headless Monks, those are the scariest monks, really, at least the ones that dressed in this manner. Without remorse, this lot. Not own for their thinking. Luckily, Headless Monks not easy to provoke. Brown robes obscuring their
headlessness would work to his advantage here.

They stopped. Lights beating down on his front and breathing from multiple sources some meters directly in front of him. Stage lighting. He was on a stage. That was exciting.

He noted the closer to the moment he got, the lighter he felt. And it was soon. He’d get Amy and Rose back soon.

The quiet rang through as if their little play were going to take place. He heard heavy footsteps near and whispers of Manton. Quiet, near the back of the large echo-chamber-esque room, likely going unheard by human ears this far forward. There was some shuffling.

“He is not the devil. He is not a god. He is not a goblin, or a phantom or a trickster. The Doctor is a living, breathing man, and as I look around this room I know one thing. We’re sure as hell going to fix that!” A man spoke from just in front of him. Confident, manly, deep. Authority. He could smell it. Authority always smelled rubbish. The Doctor rolled his eyes so hard that he was sure it would have been heard had the troops not been cheering so loudly.

“On this day, in this place, the Doctor will fall and Silence. Will. Fall!”

“Hoo Rah!” quickly chanted the viewers. That was telling. A rally, then. Military, Monks, Ah. Church of the Papal Mainframe. Hopefully just a sect. Whole thing and there would have to be words.

Manton continued, “The man who talks, the man who reasons, the man who lies, will meet the perfect answer.”

Rose would yell at him again about the lying and consequences. He practically felt her mild, irritated amusement and heard her now.

All this to make the rambliest, gobbiest man shut it?

He smirked. Almost-hallucination Rose was settling in a little early.

Wait… That wasn't almost-hallucination Rose, that was the real one, projecting her thoughts as she inevitably kibitzed back and forth with Amy.

He smiled under his hood. Menacingly, he'd note, if he was seen they’d inevitably all clutch their guns a little tighter. He didn't lift his head to look for her, his face may be viewable if he did that, if anything the lack bolstered his need for the element involved as the speaker continued his self-important inspirational speeches.

“Some of you have wondered why have we have allied ourselves with the Headless Monks. Perhaps you should have wondered why we call them Headless. It's time you knew what these guys have sacrificed for faith. As you all know, it is a Level One Heresy, punishable by death, to lower the hood of a Headless Monk. But by the divine grant of the Papal Mainframe herself, on this one and only occasion, I can show you the truth.” Oh, he was going to have to have a word or six with Tasha if she knew about this enough to grant permission. Manton paused and the Doctor heard his footsteps move nearer and pause, “Because these guys never can be persuaded.”

Gasps from around him, the assembled lot of them were somehow shocked. Really, they're Headless Monks in a place where literal things were taken for granted these days, but the name was in the title. Obviously these were more the footmen in the plan, less the brain power. In the land of the blind the one eyed woman leads. He couldn't see much with the hood blocking his vision, but he’d spy her immediately if she was here.

The voice got louder and the footsteps nearer, “They never can be afraid.”
“And they can never be—” He felt warmth of a body approaching, apparently he would be the next to have this “headlessness” revealed in overly dramatic fashion.

He quickly pulled his own hood from his head, light uncovered his face revealing the smile he had yet to wipe off his face. “Surprised!”

He felt the elation.

_Hers._

“Ha, ha!” Feeling it only spread the look on his face to a wider smile. She was watching. His eyes scanned the crowd quickly, more they weren’t likely to be kept out in the open but, if his repeated instruction of ‘stay with Amy’ had stuck better than ‘don't wander off,’ then Rose and Amy were together or she’d likely not feel so calm. And they could see or hear him.

“Hello, everyone. Guess who. Please, point a gun at me if it helps you relax.” Guns pointed at him, best cover all the bases and sent a message to keep Rose _calm_. A wave of adoration hit him like a ton of bricks, he did everything he could to return it. She was here, Amy was here, they were watching. “You're only human.”

Manton said something ignorable, or idiotic, possibly both, to him but he was distracted, the Doctor’s eyes quickly drawn to the window high above the assembly.

He saw them. Glass, large window to observe them in a white room, high above, looking down. Likely they’d be able to see the whole assembled mass of soldiers. They were probably put there to intimidate them, though he was sure that didn’t necessarily work. Both those girls had been exposed to unearthly horrors, Daleks, deadly aliens face-or-blood sucking baddies, he was sure a measly little army wasn’t all that imposing. The bright lights behind them illuminated their hair and body shapes, spectacular time-lord vision doing the rest. Darkened by shadows and contrast between the darker assembly hall and the absolute brightness of their room, but it was clearly them. Eyes, two sets of brown eyes fixed on him. Amy looked worn-down, they both did, but Amy seemed more tired, more drained, as Rose transformed from a sad visage of herself to energized by the simple act of looking at him. Rose pushed her lips against the glass in glee, his hearts swelled.

“Three minutes forty seconds.” The Doctor said before projecting his voice more loudly, “Fairy tale Girls! Get your coats!”

He made a point to pull his hood back on as the lights went out suddenly. The Smiths hit the lights just in time, the entire assembly of people mired in darkness. He ducked and hustled off the stage area in the darkness as he pointed the sonic to one of the amplification devices and spoke into it like a microphone as he skirted the edge of the group. “I'm not a phantom.” His voice exited from the walls many amplifiers.

“Doctor?” the Colonel was looking around now, his voice wavering as he tried to pinpoint where the voice was coming from, confidence fitting an officer injected into his questiony demand

The Doctor ran as he spoke into the sonic, it projecting his voice loud enough to mask his actual whereabouts, “I'm not a trick.” He found another exit as he spoke one final line as the lights and suspicion grew in the room, watching the already fearful gazes slowly grow into suspicion. “I'm a monk.”

_That man is not a monk._ He intercepted rude thoughts with a jovial smile. He didn't realize how much a void had grown in his mind until her sweet, guileless mental voice nestled into that void like a puzzle piece.
He'd have to analyze *that* later.

*Rude.* He smiled as he paused to look back in the dark hall, one of the exit corridors now far off now as the Colonel made another plea-demand for him to show himself and the assorted group in front of him began to panic.

One woman looked calmer, easily commanding a small group of soldiers around her like a personal protection brigade. She turned calmly and immediately tromped out, hoard of men around her, exposing him to a view of her smirk and eyepatch. A woman with an eyepatch, and she has this habit of sliding walls open and staring at me. Now was the time.

“Stop. Wait. Listen to me,” Manton was nervously addressing the crowd that had gathered around him, all of them armed and looking as if anything could set the off. “I am disarming my weapon pack. Monks, I do this in good faith.” Several of them seemed to follow his lead as the man kept talking, weapons and weapon packs making clunking noises as they made contact with the floor. “We are not fools. We are not fools. We are not fools. We are not fools.” Now was definitely the time.

Rose’s silhouette was suddenly absent from the window. Slowly mouths around him started in with the chant. The Doctor whirred the sonic screwdriver, pointing it at the shiny walls of the room as he headed towards the semi lit hallway Manton himself leading it by repeating himself though it faded the further from the assemblage he was.

He discarded the robe as he ran. As he finally made it toward the exit, he pointed the tip of the sonic up and gave it a quick blast. A haunting song filled the air, echoing from the room he’d just left. He smirked to himself and continued his run.

Siren song behind him. Very little screeching, he noted, as much as there were impending giggles and the occasional dropping of items in a near drunken state.

He made it to the control room. Honestly the room was filled with observation and control tech, there was little else that it could be, confirmed by Martha diligently working at a standing type of kiosk. There was no one else in the room as he entered, save a pair of men, securely tied up against the wall… and giggling. Oh. Giggling. He likely should send the signal and send the siren back to the ship. He pointed the sonic towards the ceiling and sent a blast of specific whirrs, the men along the walls slowly sobered as the Doctor approached Martha.

“Where’s Mickey?”

“We took this room, then he went to help the pirates. He always wanted to be a pirate.” Martha smiled. She motioned to the off-hued table of monitors near her. “Lots of surveillance but no sign of either of them. Are we sure they’re here?” Beside her was a bank of viewing monitors, several suspiciously blank, fried out, burn marks where some slight electrical singing had occurred. Looks like an attempt at a repair had happened.

“I think this was them.” He sat in a swivel chair as he bent to try and do a quick repair.

“Did these people know we were coming and burnt the views?” Martha asked completely puzzled.

The pulled up a singed wire, quickly stripping the plastic case. “Heated from within. As if it had too much energy poured into it.” That was Rose, an elated smile hit his heart. “I’m pretty sure this wasn’t planned.” He pointed quickly to the main control monitor at the side nearest Martha, “Try accessing the subroutine for any non-active inhabitants or subjects.”
He looked at the active monitors, the siren may have returned to the ship but the pirates remained, having corralled the large military force with only a few pirates and a translucent doctor with the voice of an anesthetic. Mickey was marching Manton down the hall at gunpoint.

Rory stomped in holding a wrapped bundle. Notably without Jack and with a corner of his shirt torn. “Found the baby. And this woman trying to take her away.” Avery pointing a gun clearly at the one-eyed woman. "Are they still here?"

“Of course they are,” the Doctor noted, turning to look at Martha. “Have a lock on them?”

“Think so.”

“Route?” Rory asked. Martha pulled up a map quickly, Rory glancing at it before leaving with determined haste, the baby still in his arms. The Doctor memorized it quickly aiming to leave with him until Manton was marched into the control room. Mickey behind him with a triumphant smirk. Rory passed him in the doorway as he exited into the corridor.

Doctor smiled menacingly to mention, “Sorry, Colonel Manton. I lied. Three minutes forty two seconds.

Mickey shook the gun in Manton’s back, reminding him it was there. “Time to sound the retreat, mate.”

The Doctor blocked his mind off. The last thing he needed was to feel relieved at Rose’s presence, anything positive when he needed to be fueled by his anger. Thinking was done, time for emotions, and he didn’t want the good ones to interfere. “No. Colonel Manton, I want you to tell your men to run away.”

Manton blinked, partly frightened in his defeat. “You what?”

“Those words. Run away. I want you to be famous for those exact words.” The Doctor took a menacing step forward, his voice low and slowly speeding up, “I want people to call you Colonel Run-Away. I want children laughing outside your door, because they’ve found the house of Colonel Run-Away. And, when people come to you, and ask if trying to get to me through the people I love is in any way a good idea, I want you to tell them your name, that you created an angry man, and then you and your army ran away from it.”

Kovarian smirked, her raspy voice tinged with amusement, “The anger of a good man is not a problem. Good men have too many rules.”

“Good men don't need rules,” the Doctor warned angrily, 414 lines flowing directly through his mind with a scowl, “Today is not the day to find out why I have so many.”

Kovarian kept her calm visage as she tore her one eye from the Doctor’s angry gaze and looked toward the colonel. “Give the order. Give the order, Colonel Run Away.”

The Doctor looked to Mickey as he stood up from his swirly chair, “The one eyed woman leads. Keep her.”

Mickey pulled some rope out of the black duffel he had behind and quickly situated the thin woman in the chair as the Doctor walked out at a brisk pace.

Soon that brisk pace had grown into a near run, as the twists and turns to the corridors matched what he’d seen of the map. He’d come to a long hall and slowed, Rory at the far end. He started walking, a bit briskly, he’d note, but walking with a question on his face as Rory simply approached a door.
Sounds, voices, sort of, echoed down the hall, becoming clearer as he neared. Amy and Rose. Whole words weren't exactly audible as far away as he was, but the cadence and frequency of the voices betraying exactly who they were. He could almost feel the combined sass as the occupants obviously shouted back and forth. Rory banged on door a few times trying to get it open one-handed with as little disturbing of his little bundle as possible.

“You know, I can hear you.” Rory blankly said to the door. Rory noted the oncoming Doctor and tried to open the door to no avail. The Doctor threw his sonic ahead of him, Rory deftly catching it with his off hand. “Yeah, it's me. Look, hang on a minute.” He seemed to get the sonic on the right frequency and the door popped open. Rory was already there, moving in as soon as the door allowed, the very picture of cool and calm as he headed in, bundle in arm.

The Doctor hesitated. He realized many things in that moment, a lesser of which being that this body was not known for stopping impulses, yet it had been for months, living off stolen glances and flirty winks. Now his eyes were starved, forty three minutes starved of that pink and yellow after all the absorption they could handle.
And one of the other realizations declared that it wouldn’t be happening again any time soon.
He stopped before the doorway just ahead to his left and flattened his shirt and straightened his bowtie.

*Family.*

Chapter End Notes

Apologies for the long break! It took the bulk of that time to figure out what I was going to do before fixing it to match what I’d already done and what was already there. So, sorry, no, no Vastra, Jenny, or Strax, but Mickey, Martha, and Jack hopefully make up for it a little?

Real life is having a summer traffic jam in the scheduling. Not to mention the potential craziness inhabited by future episodes. So thanks for hanging on!
Amy was sobering. Apparently the Siren's song really was like drink, coming with a certain amount of hangover. Or the switch from drunk Amy to the sober worried Amy was a bit more jarring than previously thought.

The microphone was still on, projecting the Colonel clearly. He was talking to someone. “Base is ours, Mate. Time to come with me.”

Rose’s head tweaked a little at the sound of that voice, though she still concentrated on trying to pry the solid metal panel from the wall. “Sounds familiar.”

“It’s the pirates.” Amy was still at window, relaying what she saw as Rose was at the door on her knees working and only had a clear view of the wall across from them and none of the people below, “The Siren and the pirates took down a whole army.”

“The Siren, the pirates, and not a monk.” Rose joked, her fingers slipping just beneath a section on panel.

“Okay, if we’re going to get out now’s the time.” Amy stated, “They’re plenty distracted.”

“I know, I know.” Rose acknowledged as she still attempted to wedge her fingers into a panel, “Can you find anything sharp? I needta get this panel open.”

“I have a….” Amy rifled around in one of the few drawers in the room, pulling out the only non-soft item. “…a toothbrush.”

“Can you make it sharp?” Rose asked quickly.

“It’s a toothbrush.” Amy’s voice raised.

Rose matched her volume to Amy’s instinctively, “Be creative!”

“It’s a toothbrush!” Amy shouted. “I can’t make it sharp!”

“Stop shouting!” Rose finally turned to Amy, “I’m tryna be just a bit sneaky here!”

“Try faster!” Amy urged Rose on.

Rose huffed as she pulled at the panel, the skin on her fingers squishing as she tried to bend the panel and stopping with a grunt after a few moments of pulling. “Yeah well I have gotten outta stuff like this before, but I usually don’t do this with a mate yellin’ in my ear ta go faster!”

“Well maybe you should just go faster then I wouldn’t have to yell at you to do it faster!” Amy bellowed.

Rose stopped and stood quickly, marching down the small set of stairs to Amy quickly and swiftly taking the non-sharpened toothbrush out of her hand. “Then you can do that an’ I’ll do the shoutin’, yeah?”

Amy rolled her eyes, “You’re worse than Rory! Just do it!”

Rose was about to shout a rebuttal when someone pounded on the door, loud banging startling the two as they slowly clumped. Amy gravitated closer to the stairs while staying in the vague safety of
Rose’s side as they both stared with wide eyes at the door. A slightly muffled voice broke though the door, “You know, I can hear you.”

“Rory?” Amy’s eyes widened, her volume dropping for a millisecond.

The muffled voice of Rory returned, “Yeah, it’s me. Look, hang on a minute.”

“Rory?! They took her.” Amy told him, any argument leaving her voice, “They took our baby.”

The sonic screwdriver sounded, whirring for a few seconds to get the door opened. The Doctor was with him.

The Doctor.

Rose took a sharp inhale and held it in anticipation. Amy gasped as Rory opened the door. Rose saw the sonic in one his hand and her heart fell a bit, her slight disappointment held at bay as she saw the squirming Melody wrapped up in her white baby blanket in the other arm. Rory walked directly to his wife with the baby. “Now, Mrs. Williams, that is never, ever going to happen.” Amy practically melted all over Melody and Rory, glowing with excitement.

“Oh, my God. Oh, my God. Where's she been? What have they done to her?” Amy sounded worried, elated, demanding… very much a mum. Rose smirked.

“She's fine. Amy, she's fine. I checked. She's beautiful. Oh God, I was going to be cool.” Rory and Amy spoke, but she’d have been lying if anything registered after Melly being declared alright.

Rose didn’t waste time, bounding up the few stairs to the now opened door way. Suddenly the Doctor came through it, slow determined strides and freshly tweaked bowtie. Her movement up the last stair drew his eyes to turn and lock into hers, all tension melting away quickly. Before she knew he moved he was hugging her, each having closed the few foot gap between them unknowingly. He lifted her off the ground, or she jumped, the how’s weren’t nearly as apparent as the results. Rose was gripping him tightly, fingers gripping his suitcoat for a solid hold with his arms strongly squeezing her around the waist. Her feet kicked lightly as she peppered kisses all over his face, each acting like a million elated greetings. The Doctor inhaled deeply, strawberries invading him entirely before he’d let the feeling of home invade him. He slowly put her down giving her space, though she didn’t seem all too eager to take it. The Doctor let his eyes feast after their near starvation. Rose looked into his sparkly green eyes with glee, warmth and contentment and an odd though not misplaced sense of completion invading her entire body. She just missed him. Mere weeks and she had missed him.

He quickly registered the dull honey of her eyes, the spark in them only lightly having come back. She saw the worry on his face.

“'m fine,” Rose assured him. The worry in his eyes didn’t lessen, she cupped his jawline, her certainty soaking in. “Promise. Time, s'all it needs. We’ve had plenty in here. Felt a bit like forever.”

“How long?” the Doctor asked, the rest of the question being unsaid as the hand she cupped his face with slid into his own, slotting into it’s place.

“Coupla weeks maybe?” Rose shrugged half-heartedly, still unable to peel her smile at seeing him off her face “not as forever as some of our forevers go, but long enough. Yours?”

“A forty four minute, twenty seven second forever,” The Doctor answered as if it had really been forever, “Would have been sooner but there we some delays.”
“Couldn't find the right hat, then.” Rose joked.

“There it is.” The Doctor brushed a small crump of hair from her face to behind her ear. “Forty three minutes of no comments. The quiet was deafening.”

“Oh, you love it.” Rose smiled.

“You know that I do,” The Doctor’s eyes glinted. Rose blushed a bit.

“Oi, you,” Amy’s loud voice interrupted, both instinctively turning to the sound but daring not to leave the comfort they found in each other’s space. Amy nodded to the pair of them, beckoning for them to come near with a quick tilt of her head. “Come see my daughter.”

Rose smirked, her hand in the Doctor’s as she lead him down the few stairs to the clump of Ponds. Rory was wiping his obviously soggy eyes with Melody held between he and Amy, in her arms again.

“Hello.” The Doctor greeted Melody as he came a little closer, “Hello, baby.” Rose gently nudged the white blanket down out of Melody’s face.

“Melody.” Amy informed him as she smirked to herself, “Melody Rose.” Rose immediately turned and blinked at Amy, who looked back as if she were stupid, “Made sense for her to have the middle name of her Godmum. Couldn't name her after her Godfather,” Amy tilted her head quickly toward the Doctor, “that would be cruel.” Both Rose and the Doctor’s jaws fell a little.

Honestly he was taken a back. He'd never been a godfather before, or at least not a good one, but somehow he guessed he'd have to be a good one with Rose attached. They would both have to get used to that. He beamed a goofy smile Rose looked at him reassuringly before simply lighting up and smiling. Rose'd heard that thought of his, loud and clear, her hand still in his, simple touch amplifying what they'd taken for granted before. Not using it had been one thing, but his thoughts seemed so much easier to hear.

His shocked face slowly morphed into a smile. They’d have to get used to that, too, looked like.

Amy only registered their combined silence as she looked awkwardly between the two of them. “...Unless you don't want to be—”

“Of course we’ll be her guardians!” the Doctor interrupted Amy, looking at her like she’d just insulted them. He happily looked closer at the baby, smiling broadly, “Melody. Hello, Melody Rose Pond.”

“Melody Rose Williams.” Rory corrected.

Amy scoffed. “Melody Williams a geography teacher. Melody Pond is a superhero.”

Doctor hugged Amy gently over the tot.

Rose’s hand was still linked to the Doctor’s as he hugged, moving her a bit closer to Rory with a little laugh. Rory smiled at Rose. He looked at her sincerely, “You know there’s no way he’d be godfather without you. I’m not sure I’d fancy the possibility of that much madness around my daughter.”

“Joke’s on you, then.” Rose nodded with a laugh, “I seemta add mad.” Rory's face fell slightly as if he hadn’t thought about that, Rose interrupted his thoughts as she clapped him on the back in a
surprising, quick squeeze of a hug, “Stuck with us now, Williams.”

The baby gurgled.

Rose backed off Rory and cooed to the child between the adults beside her, “Oooh, she’s your mummy, my love. The Doctor’s not gonna take her.”

“Don’t mind her,” Amy dismissively said as she pulled apart from the Doctor, wiping a happy tear from her eye nonchalantly, “Rose thinks she speaks Melody.”

“That’s absurd,” the Doctor didn’t take his eyes off the little bundle. Amy smirked at Rose, giving her a knowing look before the Doctor added, “Rose understands Baby.”

“Baby is not a language.” Rory rolled his eyes.

“Yes it is. And I speak it.” The Doctor addressed Rory, “As does Rose, apparently.”

The baby cooed.

“Sorry, Melody, she’s still all yours, but no,” The Doctor toddled his head toward Rose beside him, “that one you have to share with me.”

Rory just blinked at Rose beside him, “How do you speak Baby?”

“Am I interrupting something?” Jack’s voice interjected into the clump surrounding the baby. Rose’s eyes lit up as she quickly turned. Standing right behind her was the bluish grey coat-wearing smarmy Jack in all his glory.

“Jack!” Rose nearly squealed with joy.

“Rosie!” Jack exclaimed back, immediately embracing each other. Though, the Doctor noted, as even he had with his Amelia hug, Rose never let go of his hand. Not that either of them was trying very hard to do so. Frankly the bones in both of their hands could be shattering into a million pieces but they’d still be as attached to one another though the pain.

“But you… er.” Rory’s face crumbled a little before he managed to get out the last word, “…died.”

“He does that.” The Doctor noted.

Rose separated from Jack and hit him on the arm. “You died?! Again?” she seemed more chastising than surprised, Rory’s eyes widened in confusion.

“Oh, only twice. You’re worth fighting for, remember?” Jack put his hand tenderly on her cheek.

Rose popped a finger at him, surprising his hand off her face. “You need to stop that, Jack Bloody Harkness.”

The Doctor felt a niggling reminder in her mind, as if she knew something she wasn’t saying. Which, he supposed, she did. He did, too, though it felt like maybe more on her end. Rose opened her mouth to say more, but he quickly looked to the trio beside them and interrupted her. “Come along, Ponds.”

Amy nodded exuberantly and followed as they left out the doorway, she and Rory behind Rose and her two men. “Let’s go home.”

“Amy, Captain Jack Harkness, Jack, Amy Pond.” Rose barely stopped her sentence before she picked it back up as they walked that hall, “Don’t.” she pointed at him accusingly before gripping to his arm happily with her free one.
Jack chuckled knowingly, absolutely spilling charm as he looked toward Amy for a moment, “Nice to meet you, Amy Pond.” Rose snorted and Jack only grinned to her non-committal.

“So, how many years on your end?” Rose said, sounding every inch the time traveler she’d become.

“Lots.” Jack said on an exhale before grinning and leaning into her as they walked, “Still love me?”

“Might,” Rose laughed.

“Afraid I might be too old for you now.” Jack eyed the Doctor, “seems someone’s just getting younger.” Rose chuckled and held a little tighter to the Doctor’s hand while taking to Jack.

“Oh, you’re handsome as ever.” Rose smiled a huge smile as she narrowed her eyes and looked at something specific, “Have you had work done?”

“Oh, like you’re not above a little augmentation.” He flopped her hair slightly as they walked.

“Dye is miles from, what, chin tuck?” Rose tapped the bottom of his chin lightly with the back of her hand to indicate.

“Like a brother.” Amy noted with a smile as she heard them, clutching her daughter in her arms with her husband protectively at her side.

“Told ya.” Rose turned over to look back over her shoulder at Amy and winked.

“Like a brother, Rosie?” Jack put his hand on his chest and flinched, “Oh, knocking the wind out of my sails.”

Rose snorted a laugh as they headed down the empty hall, “yeah, but you’ve a motor on that boat.”

“Someone else’s motor.” The Doctor absently acknowledged, pulling on Rose’s arm slightly and gently brought her closer to him as Rose laughed.

Speakers along the walls sounded a familiar voice overhead “Oi, Cheesecake, we need you in the control room.”

“I know that voice,” Rose said as she tried to place it. Jack winked to Rose and turned the other way with a little jog.

“Closet.” Rose smiled as she felt the determined Time Lord slow before a white door nestled in the wall.

“Welcome home.” The Doctor said as he opened the door to the closet, revealing the well-wedged in TARDIS along the back wall of the small room.

The Doctor clicked the fingers on his free hand and the doors swung open Amy and Rory following the very hurried Rose dragging a Time Lord as all four entered.

Rose stopped and closed her eyes, letting the gentle sounds of the TARDIS feel her ears with love.
She didn’t have long to revel, his mind was abuzz with thoughts, few could been understood but the volume of one was unavailable. His determination was under stoppable, he wasn’t done, abated by the health and happiness of the three Jeopardy Friendly woman, but not finished. Rose gripped his hand a little tighter.

“Don’t get too comfortable, were not getting you two home just yet. Moving us to a more prominent location.” The Doctor said to the Ponds as he pulled Rose to the center console.

“Bit difficult to have a buncha people head to a little closet if we need to go fast, yeah?” Rose said, completing the Doctor’s thought with her own.

“How are we staying?” Asked Amy, obviously eager to get home.

The Doctor looked at Amy briefly “Can’t leave without Jack and M—”

“Mickey.” Rose said quickly and took a slow blink, “The voice was Mickey.” She was more than a bit miffed at herself for taking so long figuring it. The Doctor squeezed her hand gently, detracting from her own thoughts.

“It's okay. It's been a while since you've heard it. Some things take a bit of jogging.” He rubbed her hand with his thumb absently, “I can’t even remember how much I’ve forgotten.”

Rose rolled her eyes with a slight smile. Rory and Amy were fawning over the cute noises Melody made while seated along the outer wall. Rose kept looking to them at the noises as they emanated from Melody’s mouth, but stayed near the Doctor. Glee hit the Doctor as he saw what Rose's eyes were so intent on as the approached the stairs to the controls.

Tea sat on the jump seat. Already brewed, sugar and milk added perfectly, steaming, in her pink mug, waiting, welcoming her home. She picked it up with her free hand and blew carefully on the steaming liquid with a smile and took a sip. The hot, steaming Merido tea on her tongue, combined with the hum of the TARDIS and smells of time and sweets filling her lungs, and the grip of a certain antsy alien on a mission as he twiddled with the console. Home.

He stopped his plodding as he saw her staring at him from his side and smiled, locking eyes while pulling her nearer to him for just a second. He continued to twist buttons on the console without looking at them, happy to have the non-hallucination scent of strawberries bathe him while lost in the familiar honey hue. The TARDIS wheezed and jiggled slightly with a quick departure and landing.

A snap and a pop three times before it sounded like there was printing going on. Three pieces of paper popped themselves out of the edge of the console where she'd usually fetch her stickies. Melody started to whine behind them, Amy quiet bouncing her to calm her off in the corner.

Rose pulled the papers gently and looked before she rolled her eyes. “Didn’t know she had a camera.” She plucked up three images, quickly noting the other pictures were the new, delighted family, but paying closest attention to the first one. Herself with the Doctor, this Doctor, looking adoringly at each other.

“May have added that function a short while ago,” he said as he watched her gingerly touch the photo.

“Can’t you turn that sound off? It’s bothering Melody!” Amy complained, projecting her own voice above the wheezing if the TARDIS, the whining baby, and even the loud heart fluttering and flooding of Rose's blood to her cheeks as she looked at the adoring pair in the picture.

“That’s not bothering Melody and frankly I don’t fancy growing a hole in the universe today.” The
Doctor noted to Amy quickly and re-gripping Rose’s hand gently. Rifts seemed to give and take Rose almost religiously. The universe was staying hole-and-crack free for the foreseeable future if he had anything to say about it.

“Fine,” Amy rolled her eyes and slipped off the seat, “I’ll take her outside. Bunch of pirates might be more soothing.”

“She's fine with the sound she’s just…” the doors shut, Rose turned to see Amy having tromped out before the sentence was finished. “…tired.”

“She'll figure it out. She’s a mummy.” The Doctor plainly said.

“Just hope she figures it out before Melly has to cry a river.” Rose flinched at her own wording. That fact that the very word seemed to hold weight… for both of them, she noted his semi stiffened posture. River.

A few second silence of spoken or thought word between them was off-putting, though Rose nor the Doctor had any real idea of what to say.

“She said no, so she’s not here.” The Doctor said, though she could feel he was a bit miffed at the thought. “Others are. she’s not.”

“Doesn’t matter.” Rose responded quickly.

“Of course it matters. It always matters.” The Doctor sounded almost offended, “getting Amy and the baby and you back mattered.”

Rose sighed, “S’not what I meant an' you know it.”

“That’s not an issue yet.” The Doctor said simply. Rose and looked to the side of his head at his green eyes, drawing him to look directly at her. Rose couldn’t tell if he was lying or hoping.

She huffed.

“Spent eighty one years married to a Time Lord, do you think I don’t know time?” Rose smirked falsely and rolled her eyes, “Yet isn’t a thing when time travel’s involved, yeah?”

The Doctor shrugged, his voice final, determined, as if there were no questions in his mind, “Then just not an issue.”

Rose looked at him, her hand raising to gently run over the skin on his face. His eyes closed as he leaned in to her touch, feeling her hand trace his cheekbones, eye brows, chin. This man was so different than the one her husband was, not just his face. Same but different.

Her husband had spoken about River, he’d known her less, but he looked upon River as an obligation. Even as such, sending another himself to another universe to abide by the universe, set things straight for Time, to clear a path for the now destined relationship over the one he wanted. He looked at River as an inevitability. Defeatist, that one, letting the possibility he’d lose her take front seat. This one… this one was ignoring that obligation. Bouncy optimistic puppy he was, he was brushing aside time's little trap, disregarding the sheer possibility, rather than finding a solve like sending Rose herself away or finding a way to keep her at arm’s length, this one just wanted to be together regardless. Refusing to bend. Tell me you’re staying, he’d said. First day, right off, he wanted her to stay. He had wanted her to stay. He had wanted her to stay, muck up his future, ignore his previously set plans as dictated by the universe, stay.

Was it possible to love the same, face-changing, stubborn, utterly frustrating alien more as time
“Certainly possible the other way around.” The Doctor muttered as he opened his eyes, “I’m not sure you could finish a sleeve of biscuits before.”

His eyes had something in them. Something… sparkly. Something a little devious. That odd, elating warmth spread through her body as he leaned forward slightly.

The TARDIS speakers projected Melody’s loud wall into the room. Rose laughed to herself as the Doctor backed off with almost a grumble. That would have to wait. “Sleepy babies wait for no one.”

“Do we have a cot or something?” Rose said, attempting to de-fluster herself from her reddening face, “Not sure I want to go back and get her cradle from the room. Probably needs a good cleaning by now anyway.”

The Doctor smiled. “I have a solve!” He started down the hall, dragging Rose happily behind him to the storage room. The Doctor tugged through a stack of things, tossing will not with one free hand as the other still hadn’t even thought of letting go. Rose didn’t even have to know what they were looking for as her eyes settled on something and certainty hit both of them immediately, though he was looking elsewhere.

The Doctor pulled an old, wooden cot from the stack, presenting it quickly as Rose picked a red fez off a shelf and plopped it on his head.

Honestly he wasn’t sure he’d never seen a more beautiful woman in that moment.

“For a human.” Rose added with a smirk, turning the tables on his after he’d used her own thoughts against her. She reached up and pushed the hat down on his head better.

“For an anything.” He corrected.

Their hand holding changed. It seemed that now the contact was reverent, relished, not stealing or tugging or holding on for dear life as if one of them were about to disappear. Slotted together like puzzle pieces.

The Doctor leaned against the door with his rear rather than loosen his hands around either thing in them, the wooden cot, wedged well between is arm and his side with his right hand still happily in place within Rose’s. Rory was just outside the doors of the TARDIS as the door pushed open and the two walked closer to Amy.

“Doctor, the pirates had to go, something about Toby—” Rory said quickly while following them. “What is that?”

“Very pretty, according to your daughter.” The Doctor said as he put down the cot. Rose gently readjusted a few of the stars dangling from getting twisted for storage and their walk.

Rory blinked in surprise, “It's a cot.”

“Brilliant, you,” Rose teased.

“But where would you get a cot?” Amy asked.

“Storage room.” Rose answered simply and the baby gurgled at them.

“It's old.” Amy looked to the cot, “Really old. Doctor, er, do you have children?” Rose tightened her
No, it's real.” The Doctor tugged his floppy hair in the front, expertly ignoring one Pond for the smaller of the two. “It's my real hair.”

Rose rolled her eyes slightly, “She’s talkin' about the hat.”

“It's a fez,” he took off the hat and showed it to the baby, “Fezzes cool.”

“Who slept in here?” Amy asked again, as if demanding to be heard.

Rose small cheeky grin to Amy, that question was easier to answer, phrasing was important to him, she knew. “He did. 's his.”

“Not anymore,” the Doctor smiled, plopping down the fez in his hand to free it up as he reached into his pocket and produced a pen which he flipped through the air. Rose gleefully caught it quickly.

She grinned expertly wrote Melody’s name in circular Gallifreyan on the side of the wooden cot in thick, golden ink. He beamed a goofy grin as Rose did it perfectly. “Melody's now.”

“Oh, my God.” Amy appraised the cot with wide eyes and her mouth open, looking at the dangling stars from the top. “It's the Doctor's first stars!” Amy looked back down at her daughter, wiping Melody's drool with a piece of green fabric and put her down in it to rest.

Martha's voice echoed from speakers somewhere in the room, “Doctor, we need you in the main control room.”

“That Martha?” Rose blinked to the man beside her. The Doctor nodded.

“Be right there!” He seemed to say to the speakers. There Doctor addressed the various looks from the three adults around him as he fidgeted a little. “Things to do. I've still got to work out what this base is for. We can't leave until we know.”

“But this is where we were? The whole time we thought we were on the TARDIS, we were really here?” Amy looked to the Doctor for answers.

The Doctor moved to hug Amy, Rose loosening her hand in preparation of letting go, but he just tightened his grip slightly, leaving Rose hanging on at an odd angle behind Amy as she dangled awkwardly. Rory smirked. “You were on the TARDIS, too. Your heart, your mind, your soul. But physically, yes, you and Rose were in this place.”

Amy stayed in the embrace, speaking from her perch on his shoulder with her arms around him, “And when I saw that face looking through the hatch, that woman looking at me.”

“Same as her headaches. Reality bleeding through,” he nodded as he released Amy from the embrace, “They must have taken you quite a while back. Before Elvis.”

“Shopping. I think we were shopping,” Rose swallowed, looking at the agreeing Amy and the clueless Doctor. “The dresses? Mal Lupo.”

“Bad Wolf,” the Doctor huffed an annoyed laugh. “She’s getting subtle in her old age.”

“So their Flesh avatars were with us all that time,” Rory caught up, “But that means they were projecting a control signal right into the TARDIS wherever we were in time and space.”

Rose thought back, “… into the TARDIS, lotsa energy to do that, yeah?”
The Doctor nodded, “Hence the you.”

“Why Rose?” Rory asked cluelessly.

Amy looked at her husband and toddled her head towards Rose “She can do a thing.”

“And they used it.” The Doctor explained in an unhappy voice.

“An’ that’s the hat an’ the headache, then,” Rose reasoned to herself.

Doctor agreed almost as soon as Rose was finished talking, “Yeah, they’re very clever.”

“But why did they want us? And then try to take Melody?” Amy asked. Melody started to cry in her cot, Amy moved to pick her up gently.

Doctor nodded, turning to head away, Rose simply going with him as they were attached “Exactly.”

The Doctor seemed to know where he was going. Currents of calculations that made little sense to Rose were flowing through his mind, tamed only by the resounding calm determination of Rose. Their quick tromp through the halls was silent, no people to speak of, and no words necessarily needing to be exchanged between the two as much as simple being there, tangible, real, with their hand inextricably joined between them.

The control room door was open and it seemed the be the only occupied room other than the warehouse they’d just left. Jack sat at a heavily monitored console, empty rooms abound and one of the warehouse house, bustling with pirates and the now pacing Williamses trying to bounce a Melody back to calm. The back of one head diligently facing strings of random numbers and the other, quite recognizable Micks talking to her before he saw them approach.

“Thought I heard you!” Rose smiled, nearly skipping in mid air to throw her free arm around Mickey.

“Heard you were here, thought I’d bring the missus and come visit.” Mickey pointed to Martha with his head, smirking.

“And Martha Jones! So good to see you again!” Rose gave a kinder hug to Martha.

“Smith.” Mickey corrected.

“Sorry, Martha Smith.” Rose made a posh face to Mickey before giggling back at Martha, “Sound like it’s been a big day.” Rose winked. Martha blinked, her eyes clouded a bit for a moment before her face was hit with vague recollection and she blinked again.

“White house toilet!” Martha exclaimed.

No matter how much the Doctor wanted to ask, he didn’t. “What have we found?”
“Kind of no-nonsense, this one” Mickey murmured with a smirk, thumping Rose on the back once.

Rose blinked, trying to comprehend what exactly Mickey was talking about as Martha and the Doctor talking technical. “Who, him?” She muttered quietly as she pointed with her free hand to the man attached to her other one.

Mickey nodded.

“Oh, ha, no,” Rose half laughed as she whispered, “He’s very nonsense, think you just caught him on a bad day.”

“I think I’ve found what they were doing, but I can’t make it out. It looks like human genome but…it’s not.” Martha looked awkwardly at Rose and the Doctor, “I think it’s Rose and Melody.”

“Melody?” Rose blinked, the fact that she seemed unbothered by her own inclusion seeming to surprise Martha a little.

“Why would they scan a human baby?” Doctor looked to the screen, the file unopened.

“Why would a human baby have readings like this?” Martha pulled up a screen.

“Human readings.” The Doctor dismissed.

“No, they just look like human readings. Look there,” Martha pointed to a line of numbers, the Doctor and Jack squinting and moving closer as if that would make them make sense. Rose and Mickey looked, too, but quickly looked at each other and shrugged.

“That’s... Almost looks…” the Doctor squinted his eyes as if that’d make it clearer, “Time Lord.”

“I don’t think I understand,” puzzled Rose aloud, she nervously chuckled to herself and looked at the Doctor beside her. “Have somethin’ ta tell me?”

“I don’t understand.” He ignored Rose's teasing in his confusion, “She’s Amy and Rory’s daughter.”

“Well... DNA says she’s theirs, but structure... it’s... foreign.” Martha said. She might not have been certain about one thing, but sounded quite positive about the last part of her statement, “Not all human.”

“Time Lord.” The Doctor said on a breath.

“Not just Gallifreyan?” Rose blinked. Apparently she knew there was a difference. Well, 81 years with a gobby Time Lord would do it.

“They made a Time Lord? How do you make a Time Lord? Were your people spontaneously reproduced?” Martha asked.

The Doctor didn’t take his eyes off the screen but explained, “Gallifreyans became what they became due to exposure to the untempered schism, a hole in the fabric of space. Right into the vortex itself, where you can even see it—extra exposure for Time Lords— but the schism—"

“An’ lookin’ in it at age, like, eight, makes ya nutty.” Rose summed up for him to deter further explanation of his potentially long-winded history of the species, “Earth doesn't have that, yeah? No vortexy-schism-thing there.”

The Doctor started pacing a little, always within the tethered distance of Rose’s arm as he fist a hand though his hair as he thought out loud. “Time fissures are on Earth, like tiny, tiny versions, no
direct exposure to the vortex, rifts and the like. Those pop out little Gwyneths, people who are thought mad like old lady witches and the odd screaming bloke on the street, occasional geniuses,” he paused, “but not Time Lords! So I don’t understand how this happened!”

Everyone seemed to exchange glances in thought before a thought occurred to Martha “What if Amy and Rory weren’t… on Earth, at the time of…” She tried to nod instead of saying the words, “making Melody.”

“Impossible! You know how it goes! It's all running about, adventures with fish vampires and blowing up stuff. And Rory wasn't even there at the beginning. Then he was dead, then he didn't exist, then he was plastic. Then I had to reboot the whole universe. Long story, and then Rose happened, so I might have been distracted, but technically the first time they were on the TARDIS together in this version of reality, was on their w—” the Doctor stopped quickly and looked at Rose.

Rose swallowed, closing her eyes in realization, opening them slowly. She finished his statement for the benefit of those who weren’t there to know, “On their wedding night.”

“Another reason to have kept the bunk beds.” The Doctor said to Rose in an I-told-you-so tone.

Rose leveled a look at him. “Amelia Pond on her wedding night, Dear, the bunk beds might notta stopped 'em.”

‘Dear?’ Jack silently mouthed to Mickey and Martha upon hearing it.

Martha seemed to clear her throat a little, “There are similar structures to Rose's scans.”

“But that doesn’t make sense.” Rose said, unaware of the new string of numbers on the screen being so studied and relying off discussion, “I wasn’t … made… on the TARDIS.”

“You kind of were.” The Doctor pulled his eyes from the bank of monitors to Rose momentarily.

Jack blinked, “So Rose is a Time Lord, too?”

“No. She’s…” the Doctor floundered. Silly human brains.

Rude. Rose narrowed her eyes.

“She’s… part of the TARDIS, the translation matrix even goes the extra mile for her.” Blank stares from all around him, notably except Rose, who had her mildly astonished 'okay,' face firmly planted, he continued quickly without skipping a beat, “If a human and the time vortex had a baby. Vortexy-human hybrid. The more direct method. Melody’s the human version of a Time Lord, a human exposed to the vortex.” The Doctor explained. Mickey's continued blank face spurred him on to put it even simpler, “Put a magnet near a spoon and it’s a magnety spoon, melt the magnet and the spoon and you’ve a new magnet.”

“'s why they let us all stay together. Keep the new magnet near the spoon.” Rose said quietly to herself before she swallowed and addressed the Doctor directly, “Did I do this?”

“Nonono.” The Doctor assured. Rose wasn’t buying it, the look on her face melting into disbelief and worry, “Okay, well, sort of. Exposure to vortex and you’re vortex… ish. She would have still been ish, you just made the ish… more ish.” The Doctor felt that she was still worried, if he couldn’t feel it had would have been clear on her face anyway. “Different ishes but still.” Rose raised an eyebrow at his phasing. Vague, touched amusement passed under her worry, but still left her worried.
“Why even take you? It’s not like you’re dangerous.” Mickey puzzled, “I mean, you can clobber a bloke at darts and your right hook is a knocker but it’s not like you’re a gun.” Jack cleared his throat nervously, not exactly arguing. The Doctor quickly glanced at Jack awkwardly without saying anything.

“Weapon,” Rose swallowed, drawing everyone’s attention again, “That woman… a woman came to visit Amy and me, said I was your weapon.”

“Maybe they thought Melody could be a weapon, too?” Martha noted. Blank faces immediately turned to her. “Think about it, if she’s like Rose, and they think Rose is weapon, then she would be too.”

“But then why even tryta take Melody when they already had me?” Rose shrugged, “If I’m already a weapon, why make another one?”

“You were here for months.” The Doctor pointed out, “They probably couldn’t use you, not the way they wanted.”

“I’d say you’re too stubborn,” Mickey jokingly concluded.

“Or too old,” Jack added with a smirk.

“Oi!” Rose squeaked in protest.

“—They’re not wrong.” The Doctor said, following it up quickly at the raised eyebrow and about-to-smart face of Rose. “New baby, more moldable than an angry, centenarian Tyler.”

“Dunno ‘bout that, Pond DNA seems ta give the Tylers a run for their money.” Rose chewed her lip slightly in thought, “But where were they takin’ her?”

“Lets find out.” Mickey said with a cheeky tilt as he opened a closet revealing Kovarian strapped to the chair. He quickly pulled tape off her mouth resulting in a minor flinch from the horrid woman. Despite that, the woman was quite calm. Smug smile plastered on her face. Calm as anything. Self-satisfied, even. It set Rose on edge.

“The child, then. What do you think?”

“What is she?” Doctor demanded, “where were you taking her?”

“Hope.” Kovarian said cryptically. Echoing Rose’s own thoughts on Melody herself. “Our weapon in this endless, bitter war.”

“What war?” the Doctor stepped closer curiously, Rose a little behind him, “Against who?” Kovarian looked him up and down, “Against you, Doctor.”

“A child is not a weapon!” declared Rose angrily.

“Oh, give us time. She can be. She will be.” Kovarian looked at Rose menacingly, appraising her like she was an object, the weapon that woman was speaking of. The Doctor shifted in front of Rose protectively, stealing the woman’s glare. “Bigger and badder than even yours, Doctor.”

“Except I swear we will never let you anywhere near her again.” He said with finality.

“Oh, Doctor. Fooling you once was a joy, but fooling you twice the same way? It's a privilege.”
Kovarian smiled.

“The screwdriver.” Rose’s eyes widened as she whipped her face towards the Doctor, “scan her.”

“What?” he blinked at Rose.

Rose pulled the sonic out of his inner pocket and plopped it into his hand, “Just do it.”

He pointed the sonic at the woman and switched it on for a moment. Kovarian smiled the possibly the most sinister smile of which she’s capable. Realization dawned on the Doctor's face as he looked at the sonic quickly, “Flesh.”

“Melody.” Rose breathed out, immediately letting go of his hand to turn the other way and run as fast as she could.

“Amy.” The Doctor turned around and ran behind Rose.

Kovarian melted as they ran to Amy.

Years of running made the trip quick. The minds paused in panic made time nearly stand still as tears pricked Rose’s eyes as the descended a set of stairs calling out for Amy before they could even be heard. Footsteps were behind them, inevitably followed by Jack, Mickey and Martha.

They finally made to the stairs, door a few floors down, opened to the warehouse floor, the Doctor breaking a bit further from the pack and setting some speed as he skittered down the stairs and out the door as quickly as he could. “Amy! Melody’s Fle—”

Rory cut him off as soon as he could, “Yeah, we know.”

There she was, not too far from the TARDIS on the other side of the room from them; the wet, flesh-drenched Amy, sitting in a shocked state. Rose’s feet slowed as she took in the sight sadly. The others behind them, they slowed too, taking a cue from Rose or simply comprehending the sight for what it was, heartbreaking.

The Doctor crossed the large open room to Amy. Rose stayed back with three friends as her heart broke. Melody. Amy. Tears started streaming down her cheeks before she could tell them not to. Jack’s arms went around her to let her sob quietly into his chest for a moment before she could pull herself from the wave of sadness she felt.

Amy looked mournfully at the Doctor, “So they took her anyway. All this was for nothing.”

The Doctor didn't know what to say, “I am so sorry.”

“The pirates said they swept the base a few times once everyone retreated, there’s no one else here, no places to conceal yourself from professional smugglers. She didn’t say where. Where would they have taken her?” Jack mumbled, not letting this be the end.

“Best bet, somewhere he can’t find em. Easy to hide.” Mickey thought out loud “s’what I would do.”
His voice held a nagging realization for Rose. She quickly rubbed a streak left from her tears off her cheek as she pulled the stack of photos from her pocket and revealed the bottom one. She hadn’t looked closely at it. Full color, Amy with Melody. Same one that was on the dresser of the orphanage in 1969. Her suppose and sadness drew the Doctor. She bit her lip. 1960s earth. Easy to get lost in. Stay hidden.

“Yes,” the Doctor said sadly, coming up behind Rose, and glancing at the picture as he put a hand gently on her shoulder, comforting as well as he could. “They did.”

The Doctor didn’t take Rose’s hand. He didn’t want her to clearly feel what he was feeling. She just got notes of it, disappointment, rage, sadness. Nothing helpful, Rose herself was overcome.

Rose looked at Amy, her shirt still drenched from Flesh, her face likewise from tears. Rose turned to go to her, the Doctor simply behind her. She approached Amy, almost instinctively getting down and hugging her. “I’m sorry. I’m so so sorry.” Amy tightened her grip on Rose and sobbed freely, “We’ll get her, I promise we—"

Lightening and thunder shook the room.

Rose pulled herself off of Amy and stood in front of her quickly as if habit, Rory joining her at Rose’s side like a great wall of blonde and miffed. It was a slight relief when the lightening and thunder had only seemed to herald River. Rory subtly nodded to Rose, relieving her from duty as she stepped a tiny bit forward toward River and he a bit back to his still grieving wife, the sudden shock of lightening knocking her out of crying.

Mickey and Martha asked unheard but easily guessable questions, but not loud enough to be addressing her in their asking.

“Well then, soldiers.” River asked bombastically with a grin, fist on her hip confidently, “How goes the day?”

“Where the hell have you been?” the Doctor angrily asked, “Every time you've asked, I have been there. Where the hell were you today?”

“I couldn’t have prevented this.” River said flatly, her voice echoing through the room. “This was all you.” She turned to face Amy briefly, “I know you’re not all right. But hold tight, Amy, because you're going to be.”

Rose came up beside the Doctor as he floundered at the idea. “You think I wanted this? I didn't do this. This wasn't me!” he shouted.

“This was exactly you. All this. All of it.” River accused. The Doctor was shocked back, his mouth falling open slightly. “You make them so afraid.” River explained, “When you began, all those years ago, sailing off to see the universe, did you ever think you'd become this? The man who can turn an army around at the mention of his name. Doctor. The word for healer and wise man throughout the universe. But if you carry on the way you are, what might that word come to mean? To the people of the Gamma Forests, the word Doctor means mighty warrior—"

“River, if you don't stop talking right now I'm going to hit ya.” Rose interrupted her with a hand raised, River looked as if she had an epic ramble coming and Rose stopped it.

River calmly turned her eyes to Rose, “Where do you think the idea of a big bad wolf even came from? Stuff of a child’s nightmares—"

“Absolute manipulative bollocks,” Rose interrupted angrily as she took a step forward, “I can say tea
is a scary word to the people on a planet somewhere and they'd have a good reason for it, it’s the people sayin' it that matters.” Rose stood taller. Her irritation at maximum seemed to bring the gob out of her. Rose’s cheeks were hot, red, and angry. Her eyes lacked the gold, but that look on her face was scary enough. A quick glance showed the Doctor that Mickey had put a palm on Martha’s shoulder, backing them up a few steps. He’d been the only one to see this level of anger in Rose, even before the TARDIS.

“These people made a once in eleven bloody lifetimes bid that probably shouldn't've worked if I hadn't a miffed it up.” Rose's voice had gotten louder, she seemed to speak to the room, speaking loudly and not looking directly as at River to diffuse the anger she was obviously feeling from literally or figuratively burning a hole right through her. “He’s saved us, all of us, our pasts our futures our families our species our bloody universe,” she took her indirect stare and pointed it directly at River, confident in her ability to control her anger now, “—and if you, River Song, have one more thing to say it best be ‘sorry I didn’t help’ because that’s what he does. He helps. If you weren’t so busy being a baby then you’d see that.”

River smirked at Rose's words. Smirked.

Rose growled in her chest, as the Doctor stepped forward, blocking an irate Rose from moving toward her.

“Who are you, River?” he asked.

Silence, only that smirk on River’s face. He looked about to speak when she smiled and skipped backward from her spot a little as rounded in on her in a demanding way. “Oh look, your cot. Haven't seen that in a very long while.”

“No, no, you tell me. Tell me who you are.” The Doctor's ask turned into demand.

River took his hand from his side gently and put in on the cot between them. “I am telling you. Can't you read?”

The heated stare hadn’t melted off Rose’s face until the a surprised feeling hit the Doctor and seemed to twinkle in her mind.

Rose took a few steps forward and looked down to the empty cot. The Doctor's hand left the outline of Rose’s writing, heartbreakingly highlighting the name Melody to her. The green of the prayer leaf caught her eye, discarded within. She’d never gotten a good look at it before, but there sat the piece of fabric given to Amy by the woman, embroidered in gold thread. Song. “Its.. what?!” Rose blinked again, looking at the writing again on the side of the cot. Melody. She looked into the watery eyes of River. “River Bloody Song…”

“That’s not my middle name.” River smugly returned. Rose and the Doctors hands threw themselves around River, both hugging her. Rose pushed a bit of errant curly hair away from River's face with her free hand and then smacked her a bit hard on the shoulder as they each released her.

“Ow!” River feigned hurt, only the way a relative would.

Rose immediately took the smacking hand and pointed at River, her face falling from touched to miffed in an instant. “You are in so much trouble.”

“I know.” River smarmed.

“What is going on?” Amy demanded.

River smirked at Amy while addressing River “Oi, go explain it to ’er.” River looked hesitant and
Rose prodded her further, “Go on.”

River rolled her eyes cheekily, “You’re so bossy.”

Rose nodded and prodded River closer to Amy and Rory. “Yeah, s’my job, seems you’re used to it, go on.”

As River took a step toward Amy and Rory, the trio sufficiently distracted and with the happy reunion in his mind, the Doctor smiled wider and slipped his hand into Rose’s, starting to tug Rose to the TARDIS immediately.

No, we’re not leavin’. Rose mentally growled, planting her feet as he took another step.

He didn’t even look back as he took another step, pulling gently at Rose’s arm. Family moment.

We are family. Rose protested wordlessly, tugging his hand towards her and not the other way around.

He stopped, looking back at her petulant, adorable face. “True.”

“What? What’s true? What is it?” Amy demanded through tears. Rose took a few steps, leading the Doctor back to them as she nudged River more toward Amy.

“Yeah I’m lost.” Mickey announced from his clump near the wall.

“Shush,” Martha elbowed Mickey into silence, keeping them against the far wall.

“What is going on?” Rory demanded.

River looked at the quickly reddening Amy, “Amy, you have stay calm.”

“Oh that’s not going to help.” Rose chided River.

“My daughter was just stolen! What is going on! What aren’t you telling me?!” Amy said expectantly.

“Amy, it’s good, promise.” Rose said as reassuringly as she could before looking to River, “River tell her.”

“You tell me!” Amy shouted. She looked between the Doctor and Rose, who looked at each other and then to River quickly.

River seemed like she was having trouble forming words. Well, Rose supposed, there wasn’t actually precedent for this kind of news. She reached into the cot quickly and thrust the nearby prayer leaf into Amy’s hand. “Look here, look here.”

“I can’t read it!” Amy soggily snarled.

“It’s the TARDIS translation matrix, it takes a second to kick in with the written word.” River explained. Mickey stood up on his tip toes to try to get a gander, Martha elbowed him again startling him back down. “It’s the name of your daughter in the language of the forest.” River explained as calmly as she could.

“I know my daughter’s name.” Amy barked.

“You do,” Rose scrambled to keep Amy calm, “But what’s a melody when you don’t have
Amy flipped the sides and looked at the other side, her sopping anger slowly making way to hope as she looked up at River. Rose and the Doctor took a step back slowly, taking themselves out of the equation as discreetly as possible.

“It’s in the language of the Forest, but the only water in the forest is the river.” River looked soulfully at Amy as Amy looked up at River. “They will find your daughter, and they will care for her, whatever it takes. And I know that. Because it’s me. I’m Melody.” River looked between Amy and Rory, “I’m your daughter.”

Hugging. River and her parents hugging. Melody and her parents. Rose leaned on the Doctor a little, made comfortable by his presence and the heartwarming scene, though part of her did feel as if it were a bit intrusive.

Rose looked around, seeing Mickey, Martha and Jack no longer where they were. Or anywhere, really.

They were gone. She sighed a little. Jack must have taken them home.

She clamped her lips and twitched a little sadly. She knew they had to leave at some point, and Micks had made it clear that he was lost. She turned back to the hugging, crying mass of Ponds and laid her head gently on the Doctor’s arm, choosing to let the good was over her instead of ever so slightly melancholic air. Her hand was gripped tightly and she looked at the instigator.

The Doctor drew her attention and nodded toward the TARDIS. They quietly began walking away. As he pushed the TARDIS doors opened, the creaking sound of it opening seemed to draw Pond attention.

“Oi! Where are you going?” Amy narrowed her soggy eyes, barely letting go of her group-hug clump.

Rose simply smiled at the door of the TARDIS. “Melly, you’ll get your parents home, yeah?” River nodded, Amy sniffled and looked touched for a moment before reverting to snark.

“Stop calling my daughter Melly!” Amy pointed at Rose as the Doctor tugged her into the TARDIS.

The door closed behind her, and she breathed deeply, the Doctor letting go of her hand as he approached the center console with a quickened skip in his step. Rose simply tried to wrap her head around what had happened, “So Melody is River.”

“Yes.” the Doctor said evenly.

“So we find her!” Rose was relieved for a moment.

“Yes.” The Doctor said with a modicum of cheer.
“...An’ River is Melody.” Rose said a bit slower this time. The concept making a bit of sense but adding up everything she knew about River and attributing it to Melody was slowly draining her.

“Yes.” The Doctor pulled the dematerialization lever and sent them into the vortex.

Rose looked briefly to the closed TARDIS doors and sighed as she spoke softly to herself. “You marry my Goddaughter.” She shrugged, trying not to let it bug her too much and failing. the adrenaline of the situation they’d just been in leaving her emotions bare. He could practically see it through the falter in her voice, the strength that had been holding her up instead of her bones melt away, nerves bared to the elements as she ascended the stairs to the center controls, “my Melly”

“Our Goddaughter,” he corrected with a slight smirk, “and that one’s a no.”

“No?”

“No.” the Doctor said, that smirk growing into a smile as he noted the missing photos from the console.

Rose shook her head, not comprehending his words and not privy to his thoughts at the moment, “...no? ’s not that simple.”

“It is. It is simple.” The Doctor reached out and pulled her closer. His certainty bleeding through his finger tips, almost enough to completely overwhelmed Rose’s doubt and sadness. He looked at her, actually looked at her for the first time since this conversation began, his eyes soft and gleeful. “It’d always be no. You’re here, you’re you. That thought, the very idea was borne without you. You were gone, you were gone and that was forever and our time together was limited and over. But that was wrong. All wrong. We don’t know your limits, but we know it’s not over. That that means no. Until there is absolutely no you, no.”

Rose wasn't sure if it was his feeling or his words that were swaying her so entirely, but she cracked a slight smile, “That’s a lotta no.”

“Plus,” He toddled his head as he wrapped his arms around her, “I added her into my guardianship. That means she’s family. One more no to just float on the sea of No on the continent of No on the planet No.”

“That’s a real place, innit?” Rose asked with a quiet, cheeky air.

The Doctor nodded, bringing her closely against him as he looked into her eyes and slowly lowered his face to hers, “Very agreeable people.”

Neither of them were willing to wait longer.

He cut the distance, moving the few inches from her lips to his quickly, pushing them together. Her soft lips just gently against his at first. It was a release. It seemed like something that had been waiting to happen for faces, generations, eons. Time seemed to freeze in place around them. His internal chronometer almost short-circuited as if it had been waiting, counting down to just this very moment.

Shortbread. Shortbread biscuits. That was the sweetness, the smell of him. And it warmed her heart. Shortbread biscuits and time. His lips solidified the thought in her mind.

Her lips were just as soft as he remembered, but the contact tingled. Maybe they tingled last time, it wasn’t like him to forget that detail but there was a lot going on then. Not now. No life and death, just the sweetness that he’d wanted for so long. He had to stop himself from going deeper.
First kisses were chaste. Though, technically, this was their second. For him, at least. Though, unless she remembered, first for her, or several millionth, if the eighty one years of marriage counted. Could do.

Rose chuckled beneath their kiss—ah, he noted as enthusiasm and vigor were added to the sweetness, she'd heard that—and grabbed him closer, separating her lips a bit more and kissing him more deeply, passionately. The tingle seeming to ignite into a burn. A sweet, delicious burn.

Suddenly their hands parted and they were grasping each other closer, her hands in his hair scraping his scalp and his arms seeming dead set on trying to make their two bodies occupy the same space and defy the very notion of any kind of physics.

Someone in the room cleared their throat.

…It wasn’t either if the throats in question.

Jack’s voice travelled through the air, “You two are so cute.”

“I was gonna say disgusting.” Mickey sounded horrified, frequency matching the same someone having just cleared their throat.

“It is a bit much to witness.” Martha agreed with what sounded like a cringe.

They parted their lips slowly, the Doctor finding himself putting her down —when had he lifted her up?— as she untangled from him and he leveled a glance to the three, positioned slightly above the two of them in one the entry of a corridor to assorted bunk rooms. Rose's cheeks flushed to nearly as red as her lips, which were now slightly swollen from use. He wasn't faring much better, while not horribly blushing, he did manage to look flustered, his bowtie of killer and his hair thoroughly mussed. His arms stayed around her, almost unwilling to let go.

Rose almost laughed as she dropped her head in embarrassment for a moment before looking to the ceiling and mumbled without breath, “Coulda said we had stowaways, Old Girl.”

“Hardly stowaways.” Mickey snorted. “We’ve keys.” Martha and Jack held up keyrings.

“And they seemed like they needed time,” Martha agreed as she put her keys back in her pocket. Her voice took on a cheekily sheepish tone, “Though it looks like you two might have needed it, too.”

“Forget about us?” Mickey laughed to himself.

The Doctor cleared his throat slightly and looked to their side, they’d have gotten quite a good view of both of them from there. “We thought Jack took you home.”

“Mighta saved my eyesight if we had. That was an image.” Mickey gruffly said as they descended the stairs. Rose shot Mickey a playfully annoyed stare for a moment but blushed a tad more.

“Safer not to.” Jack answered quietly before turning a bit snarky. “Eyesight or no.”

“Safer?” Doctor puzzled, “Why safer?” Jack pointed to the vortex manipulator on his wrist, the power still on, displaying correct coordinates. At first glance, at least, the Doctor could see nothing wrong with it. Though, it did look familiar. “She has your vortex manipulator?”

Jack looked a little amused, though his voice remained serious. “More like I have hers.”

“You aren’t secretly a Melody Pond too, are you?” Rose asked, still steadying her breath from her intense snog, noting the Doctor’s hair still clearly mussed from their quick, accidentally public tryst.
She ran her hand through it quickly, taking it stands but feeling his frustration grow more ever acute as her fingers brushed against his scalp.

“Unspoken rule,” Jack answered with a sigh, “Don’t cross Time Elements with dear old Mummy.” He barely looked up from his vortex manipulator and mumbled, “Learned that the hard way.”

“…Mummy? Who’s your…” Rose looked at Jack’s smug look. Smarmy smile, serious when need be, hits on anything… Rose blinked. Maybe she’d get to know several generations of Ponds, too. She tilted her head and closed her eyes as the Doctor just… floundered. His arms shocking themselves loose from grasping Rose. “No… that’s just… too much.”

Jack finished tromping down the stairs while looking at them, “Hey, I just hit on my granddad. A lot.” He got to the bottom and looked to the corridor “Where’d you put that brandy?” The Doctor and Rose jaws dropped as they watched him start his motivated walk to the galley and looked at each other.

“We just met Jack’s mum?” Mickey asked with a puzzled face to Martha, hoping she grasped something he hadn’t.

“And Grandparents.” Martha looked excited.

Rose and blinked exaggeratedly, as if trying to shake the thought lose in her head. She looked the Doctor's flabbergasted face. His mind completely stuck as if out together so the things they'd known about either of them. Rose slid her hand into the Doctor's, stealing his attention from the thought, “I think we’ve all earned a drink by now, yeah?”

The Doctor nodded slightly

The five of them were sat around a table. Nothing they'd done before, Rose noted, and the last time four of them were around the table they'd laughed just as much. Rose her TARDIS mug of tea, Jack was working diligently –and effectively—on clearing the bottle of Pear Brandy. Mick’s regaled them with stories of freelancing, mostly working with UNIT on contract. Martha tried to suppress a yawn but it only seemed to make it bigger. Rose smiled. She hadn’t gotten to spend that much time with miss Martha Jones –or Smith, as Micks had been quick to point out the second anyone slipped—but she was an absolute delight. Yeah. Much too good for the likes of him.

Rude. She heard his voice again in her head. It had been almost consistent. She was rubbish at trying to do both, but he illustrated exactly how easy it was for him to communicated different conversations in different ways at the same time. It lead to her dropping one conversation of another in effort of keeping up more than once, but he'd always pull her back in. She had to be very strict with her errant thoughts.

Rose forced a yawn, taking a bit of the pressure from Martha. She wasn’t tired, not really, but the day was starting to get to her despite the delightful company of the evening. Martha smiled a grateful smile.

“Dunno 'bout you lot but I’m lookin' forward to not sleepin’ on a metal floor.” The lights flashed a few times. She smiled to the ceiling and looked back at her mates as she pointed in the direction of
the proper corridor, “Bed rooms are there.”

“Ooh, TARDIS beds.” Martha said as she slowly stood, kicking off the mass exodus of rears from seats as they all stood. “Honestly that hardest thing adjusting to real life was noticing my bed was so lumpy. Had to get a new one.”

“So you got a new mattress and a new lump to put in it?” Rose mused bumping Mickey with her hip as she talked.


Everyone said goodnight. Rose and the Doctor actually parted, though the theory seemed harder than the act. They hugged each individual goodnight, a little too long, the Doctor thought, as the very sight of a sloppy, pissed Jack all over Rose certainly didn’t feel like 2.56 seconds though he knew it was, much less the melty version of a minor grope that he received from the man himself before they turned their way to the proper corridor. The husband and wife team seemed to pass each other significant glances, either out the pissed look of Jack or the minor blushing Rose or the Doctor himself had been sporting since the ‘goodnights’ began.

“Uh, but, no hanky-panky on the TARDIS.” The Doctor quickly added as the couple seemed to flank Jack on their walk down the corridor, “New rule.”

Mickey snorted but didn’t say anything. Jack seemed to understand him and instinctively replied anyway, “Oh, like Rose listens to rules anyway.”

“I heard that!” Rose replied loudly but calmly as she shook her head at her cheeky friends as they walked further out of sight.

Jack turned around, drunkenly still taking a few steps backwards as he replied, “I said it loud.” Jack winked. He stumbled, and turned around, his voice becoming loud enough through the halls that the unseen Mickey and Martha beside him inevitably cringed. “Get some rest, you two!”

“Rest. Right. Rest. You’ll need your energy back if we’re to look for River.” Doctor twiddled his hands. The calm seemed quite out of his system as he returned to his adorable, fidgety state.

“Or Melody.” Rose added.

“River-Melody.” Doctor acknowledged quickly.

“Right. Melody in River clothing.” Rose repeated, flustered. She was trying not to look at him. She cleared her throat and ran her hands through her hair before they started walking in the direction of the corridor slowly “She says my room’s back. She was being cheeky, wasn’t she, not givin’ it back before.”

The Doctor walked beside her, taking her hand gently, “Well, you know the two of you. Making comments one way or the other.”

Rose snorted, “You love it.”

He didn't respond. His simple ‘yes, boss’ from before replaced by… that feeling again. Stronger. It’s made her breath hitch and her walking stop.

She felt it. She’d been feeling it all along, but couldn’t place it. That completeness, that home feeling? Love. It was love.

He loved her.
She knew that, of course. Inside she knew he had. But feeling it was much different that simply knowing it, she was certain. And now, he was certain, too.

Acknowledging it was a ripple effect through them. And suddenly their lips were together again, arms quickly around each other, clasping the two together as if any space between the two was forbidden. Their kiss refused to end as he suddenly backed he against the wall. The hall shifted ever so slightly until they were just against a door. He dropped one hand from around her back and searched blindly behind her until her found and turned the doorknob, one of her hands busily under stretchy bands of his braces, her didn’t realize how good that would feel and moaned slightly as the knob turned, sending them fumbling through the entry way into the dimly lit room. Her hands slid up his chest under his jacket, removing it deftly from his shoulders so it was loose on his arms. It took a few feet of stumbling for the back of Rose’s legs the to hit the soft edge of the bed, sending her awkwardly to sit with her eyes still closed, hands and lips still incredibly busy. Rose finally pulled back and looked at him. The room was so dark, the only thing she could see clearly was his adoring face, flushed and determined as he pointed those eyes, ever intensifying straight into hers.

He captured her mouth again and she fell backwards onto the bed. Their attention so focused on one another, balance and steadiness became an afterthought. They slid off the side of the bed and fell onto the floor gracelessly. Laughter filled the room.

Until it didn’t.
Chapter 25

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The Doctor breathed out and in slowly as he started to wake.

Four hours. More consecutive hours of sleep than he’d gotten since…
Since ‘Help me.’

His eyes snapped open.

Cold sweat would have been a thing if he wasn’t feeling oddly warm. He was shirtless, but it wasn’t a shirt that warmed him. He was on his side, on the floor, and very aware of the blonde nestled between his arms, face against his chest, head pillowed by his arm.

Was this all a dream? A dream that he got to be here, on the floor, cocooning a very specific blonde? Hallucination. Wonderful, vivid hallucination. A hallucination which was a thought he would cling to if she weren’t slowly, steadily breathing, happily sending that theory straight to pot.

Her hair was mussed. Everywhere, really. Blonde and brown soft nest of a family of whidbel birds.

He wasn’t sure how to proceed. It had been hundreds of years since anything this involved had happened, though it wasn’t as if he hadn’t dreamed of this, with her, but even that thought usually stopped before this bit. It stopped before a lot of bits, really. He was completely hopeless for a young human girl who said it was worth saving the planet even if she died in the process. A young human girl who jumped through the void he didn’t know how many times to find him. A young human girl who inexplicably felt the same for him, any him, all the hims. A young human girl who was, ostensibly, not all that young, nor all that human, but hopeful and happy and here. Right here. In his arms.

…with substantially more skin showing than he’d ever seen before. They’d pulled her blanket down at some point, though it was hardly used as it was intended, only covering basics. Everything was a bit more… fervent… before. Admiring the view was a great deal more difficult. Now, however. He felt his face blossom into what was likely a beet red. Near ripe beet, juicy and red.

Blimey.

He’d need a cold shower if he didn’t intend to wake her. His eyes traced down her bare neck and shoulder.

Cold shower.

He carefully lifted her up and put her on the unused bed, mindful not to wake her as she shifted in his arms and the blanket fell to the floor. He blushed again—why exactly was he blushing? It wasn’t as if he had learned all the details, but now, ya know, intimately— before he gingerly covered her with her own pink fluffy blanket.

That, though, wasn’t her bed. Her blanket, his bed. Cheeky TARDIS. He looked up at the ceiling, her general quietness and lack of subtle lighting response only highlighting that, yes, she had done this very specific thing, specifically on purpose, with specific thought to be purposely, suspiciously absent. Cheeky girl.
Sleep patterns indicated he only had a few hours before everyone else woke. There were other people aboard. Best get that shower in.

There were still things to figure out. Kovarian, River and Melody. Amy and Melody. Jack and River. Rose knew something about Jack, he felt it. ...Well, if anyone knew anything about Jack, he would supposed it would be her. The Smiths were still on board. Things and what and who flooded his mind, but ebbed out again as he ran his eyes over the sleeping Rose Tyler in his bed from the door to his —no, likely now considered their— attached bathroom.

Rose Tyler.
In his bed.

There were still things. Things that needed doing. But this moment would be hers. She deserved a moment, in all of time and space, just to be hers.

His eyes widened. Blimey. Cold, cold shower.

Rose slowly came back to consciousness. Soft, cushy blankets and bed around and beneath her… very not a floor. A bed.

Tears pricked the edges of her closed eyes. She didn’t want to open them if this had been a dream.

If she was going to open her eyes and see that she was back in her flat, cold lonely bed, widow of a dead alien, she’d much rather just keep her eyes closed and possibly return to the daft dream that was travelling the universe with him. She’d done that before, dream that. Mad adventures, mad life, madder alien.

She sighed metering her breathing as she prepared herself for yet another separation from him. Even separation from dream him was going to be hard, she knew. The new face was inevitable, wasn’t it? Subconsciously picking out a new, attractive face to join the ones switching between her husband and the navvy-looking one she’d fallen for in the first place.

A soft, large hand caressed her head and lips kissed her hair.

His lips, she was sure. His hand, too. That hand has been felt so often it couldn’t really be anyone else’s.

His kiss reminded her, it anchored her. Not a dream, then. Rose’s mouth instinctively twitched into a smile, her eyes couldn’t help but open slightly to see a smiling, boyish face. His boyish face.

“That navvy-looking alien fell for you, too.” The joy in his voice, smells of biscuits and tea and home filling her nose, all rooting her firmly in reality.

“Eavesdropping?” Rose tried to rub sleep from her eyes, her face almost cramping with the uncontrollable smile this soon after she woke.

The blush was back. Rebellious facial capillaries. He tried to tame them, placate them with the fact
that they needn’t be active, which just spurred ongoing activity. Luckily, it was slight. He nodded, pointing instinctively to her head as he smiled, “Well you were thinking it loudly.”

Rose sat up, feeling oddly modest for a moment as she watched the Doctor’s fumbling and silly attempt at both staring and not starting, his cheeks flushing pink. Rose tucked the sides of her blanket under her arms, covering her chest. She scooted her legs up, a blush of her own turning her cheeks a redder hue.

“Can’t say the same thoughts didn’t enter my mind.” He interrupted her thought, assuaging her need to blush, plopping herself down for a moment where her legs had been stretched out. “or nearly that. Less dreams more hallucinations. Semantics, I suppose.”

Half her mouth turned up in a shy smirk as she bit her lips slightly, “Don’t think really I’d ever thought you’d still, I mean, through another face even, that you would really—”

“Rose,” he drew her eyes to his with his single word, her entire body fluttering with his call, “you know, at my core I’m still the same, and you, Rose Tyler, are definitely at my core.”

Rose leveled a look at him and tilted her head with a slight smile, “How many doctorates in cheesemakin’ did it take to get that cheesy?” Her eyes ran over him quickly before returning to look into his, “‘bout six?”

How a man could be so fidgety even when sitting was completely unknown to her. And adorable. He was wearing a shirt and trousers, no bracers or bowtie yet, even the top bottom of his shirt was yet to be buttoned. He seemed oddly naked, even considering how she’d last seen him. His hair was perfect, green eyes sparkled. It was really not fair for him to look that adorable upon waking when she knew full well she didn’t.

“You look beautiful.” He ran his fingers through her soft birds nest of mussed hair, calming its morning craziness a bit, “Always do.”

“Liar.” She groaned with a smile, pulling up the pillow beside her in arms grasp on clobbering him with it slightly. “I thought you said no more lyin’ to me?”

He smiled a little as he was pummeled, “It was a good lie!”

She hit him playfully on the side with that second pillow again, knocking his floppy hair about as he grinned.

Something occurred to her.

Second pillow.

She looked at the pillow in her hands, and beyond him. It pained her, though only slightly, to admit she had been awake for over a minute and hadn’t noticed it. Two pillows. Slightly bigger bed. Slightly bigger room. Absolutely massive bookshelves filled with massive books with frankly massive book titles she had no intention of spending the time trying to pronounce much less trying to read. Two wing-backed chairs. She wasn’t even sure one wing-backed chair would have fit in her room before. Her eyes widened in their still groggy state, “So not my room, then.”

“Well,” the Doctor bounced on the bed, sliding playfully off the edge as she had done a few hours previously, but landing on his feet and flitting around the room, forcing her to quickly take in all the scenery around him. He nodded quickly to her vanity along the wall, “I’ve made some interesting décor choices if it isn’t.” He threw her pink dressing gown from its place beside a similar one in a greenish hue to just on her lap as he turned to her and smiled widely. “No one else is awake yet.
They exited the room together. Rose had the foresight to add a quick pair of sleepers under her dressing gown. The lights on the hall flitted, TARDIS greeting them, as if she had waited until that moment to make herself known.

“So that’s our room then?” Rose said a bit quietly to the ceiling with a smirk as he closed the door behind them.

“I think s—” the Doctor looked over at her. Rose was talking to the ship.

“Coulda asked first. Bold, you know that.” The smirk she wore grew into a cheeky smile. His smile grew in response as he watched her, the lighting pulsating through the corridor.

“That’s my girls. Bold and beautiful.” He quipped, leading her down the hall arm-in-arm. Rose rolled her eyes at him and blushed a little at the flickering lights. The TARDIS, apparently, was being chatty. “Should I ask?”

“She, um, thought we needed a place. For,” she paused, smile growing even wider as she clung to his arm and looked away as her little pink tongue poked its way out of her mouth as he simply smiled, waiting for her to finish the sentence, “domestics.”

He poured the tea for her. Added the sugar, but watched her grab his mug from the counter and do the same. She handed it to him as he did hers, sipping his tea slowly with an ounce of trepidation.

“Perfect.” He smiled but she could tell his eyes were calculating. “You don't even know how I take it. Told by the TARDIS?”

“Just guessing. Pretty sure that is closer to simple syrup with a splash of tea.” She smirked, putting her mug down on the counter for a moment as she hoisted herself up to sit with dangling legs. Rose picked up her tea again, sipping quickly and looking a bit nervous as the words came tumbling out of her mouth. “Speaking of the TARDIS…” she hesitated, “you said I’m… part her?”
“Yes I did, yes you are.” He smiled widely.

“Part TARDIS.” She said as if simply repeating the words requested more clarification, “Like… I have the perception filter, Chameleon circuits an' all?”

He should have been surprised by her knowledge of the TARDIS, but he simply couldn’t be. Excuses abounded, gobby Time Lord she’d married or talkative ship she listened to. “Don’t be daft you’re not a cyborg. You don’t have the circuitry, you have the living bit.”

“But you said now I speak baby.” She pointed it, “That’s the translation… thing… that gets in your head, that’s a machine part, yeah?”

“The translation matrix transfers her ability to understand languages to other people, now you have that ability to understand but not the computational matrices to expand it to others.” He rambled quickly.

Rose sucked in her bottom lip, nodding pensively, “I think I get it.”

“And now I know I’m right because she doesn't translate me for people.” He beamed, “and I said that in German.”

“Sounded like English.” Rose noted.

“Probably why you were in communications. All hidden in your unconscious mind, repressed. Like scary clowns and how many bad haircuts you’ve had, you can’t remember it but you know it. TARDISy-vortex as it is I’m not sure there’s much not in your head.” He spoke quickly, punctuating his handle with a touch to her head. Rose nodded slowly and the Doctor smiled wider, “And that was in Kublachieri from Taolos Minor.”

“Oh, you think you’re so impressive.” She rolled her eyes good naturally and stuck her tongue out.

He stepped closer, cheekily. Eager to almost capture that tongue. Show her exactly how impressive he was. It took him far too many milliseconds to catch himself. He’d normally been able to catch that even before it had been an action.

…but again, he’d never had a Rose Tyler taunting him from the counter top in nothing but a flimsy set of sleepers and a dressing gown. Not like that.

But he could kiss her now. It was allowed. Maybe allowed. They had just—He could. Probably. Maybe? Were there rules on this?

She caught on to his movements faster than he had, or simply heard those thoughts, putting down her mug quickly beside her and reaching out, grabbing his shirt by the edges of his collar and pulling him, willingly, pressing his lips directly to hers.

The TARDIS flickered her lights a few times, detracting from the moment. Their little love bubble popped, Rose sighed and couldn’t help but give him a small, chaste kiss on the lips at his nearness before she slid off the countertop.

“Jack’s wakin’ up.” The mention of his name sent a niggling through his mind. The niggling. The Rose-knows-more-than-she’s-letting-on type of niggling. “He’s gonna need a coffee, I think.”

His eyes searched hers. The little green specks just oozing affection absolutely all over him, but … something. He grinned, “You know something.”
Rose tried to avert her eyes. She picked up and attempted to finish her tea. “Might have had a brilliant husband with some down time who had a bit more pieces of the Jack puzzle about.” Rose indicated herself and took a drink from her mug. The Doctor nodded in understanding as the pieces fell into line. Granted, he hadn’t done a lot of thought about Jack since Rose returned to him, his mind had been firmly elsewhere, but she and her changes certainly could put a new spin on Jack’s changes.

“He would know the telepathic part, and later the not aging part would have become apparent. He might not have known the energy part unless you had a few comas.” The Doctor thought out loud to himself. He turned to address Rose more directly, “Have a few inexplicable comas?” Her silence was enough of an answer. “That’s a yes.”

“I worked for Torchwood.” Rose smirked, “technically they could all have a why.”

“Rose.”

It was the voice. There was an I’m sorry Rose, a pleading Rose, the whining Rose, many Roses for many an occasion, all covering full bloody sentences with her single syllable name… somehow sounding exactly the same in her head no matter what voice it was coming from. She let out a breath.

He could tell she was acquiescing by the way she but her lower lip in thought before she even looked to the ceiling and the galley door disappeared. They couldn't be interrupted.

That could be fortuitous.

In more than one way.

No, Bad Doctor, stop being an adolescent.

Rose smirked.

The upturn of her lips bringing out a tinge more of said adolescent.

No. Stop it.

“Okay, you can reverse the thoughts and put in all the squiggly sciency bits that I don’t remember, but quick version, Jack and I both changed, yeah? Jack was dead. I wasn’t. I needed to stay, he needed to live. So he does what he needed to, and so do I.”

“But you’re not permanent, he is.” He argued. She looked at him like he was a little daft.

“But he’s not, yeah?” Rose pointed out, “He has an ending. You were there, you saw it.”

“True.” The Doctor blinked, apparently not having considered that too hard once the ends were connected and the distracting mystery part of it solved.

“’s like… The Daleks were torn apart, then he lived,” Rose tried to explain. He was so much better at explaining all this. She could barely wrap her head around the explanation she had gotten out of him, dumbed down as it was. “Jack’s got the lives of, like, billions a Daleks. Took it out, divided their atoms, turned them all to dust, but didn’t just unmake that energy, ‘parently you can’t actually do that, yeah? So… moved it.”

“Billions of Daleks.” The Doctor said slowly as everything oddly made sense, “Conservation of energy, working with the universe as opposed to against it, you did what you wanted but within the rules of the universe, omnipotent, yes, but you knew you couldn’t be forever so you left things as you found them, very human, balance and stability! Oh you’re so Fortuna.” He quickly rambled, his voice gaining glee and speed as he completed the thought. He sounded like the man she’d spent do long with, her smile was hard to suppress.
“Sounds right.” Rose smiled, putting her hands on her hips, “Think he added a little bit at the Fortuna thing, too. Can’t really help it much, can you?”

“Go to museums a lot” He smirked, “You had given Jack enough life to make him look permanent when passing a few hundred thousand seems like an endless amount.”

Her hands left her hips as she leaned her rear against the counter and sighed, “Bit depressing that one of my best mates goes through billions of lives, bad enough that my bloody spouse went through nearly a dozen, same as you.”

The Doctor put on a smile, “Jack’s average beats mine then if that helps.”

Rose gave him a look, “Strangely, no, that doesn’t help.”

“This might,” he kissed her lips. Cheesy, he felt out of her as she slipped more toward him. He wasn’t doing it just to distract her. Because she was there. Because he could. Because he wanted to. Very exciting, that. But the adolescent was taking over, his hands… wandered.

The lights flickered again. Rose chuckled a little as she pulled herself away from him.

“And that’s Mickey up.” Rose tightened the belt on her dressing gown, “Should clean up, get dressed before they get out here.”

“You look fine.” The Doctor assured. He didn’t really want her away, sleep trousers and silky pick dressing grown with well kissed reddened lips, “Rested, relaxed, very bohemian.”

“And you’re lookin’ pretty hard.” Rose said cheekily, “You want Micks an’ Martha an’ Jack to see me like this?”

The Doctor was suddenly filled with about 26 different layers of No coursing through his veins and a blank look on his face as he blinked. Rose almost laughed, feeling the all encompassing, hot, visceral No simply rolling off him. She kissed his cheek, cooling said artery-throbbing No.

“Then I’ll be quick.”

Rose really was quick, coming freshly dressed and hair still wet into the galley. Not quick enough to beat the less-than-fresh looking Jack, but nearly. He’d grunted his hellos before diving for the coffee just moments before Rose herself. She carried a bow tie in her hands and glanced up at Jack with a warm, greeting smile, “Good morning Jack.” Her volume grew louder, “Or should I not speak so loud?” Rose teased, walking closer to the Doctor. His smirky, emerald eyes glinting into hers as she buttoned his top button draped the fabric around his neck, righting his collar over it.

“Oh, haha. No, it’s alright, I may have drank too much and died last night.” Jack said flippantly as he plopped down on a chair, propping up a leg on the table and crossing his legs, “Only slight
hangover.”

Rose turned to level a look at Jack, the ends of the tie hanging flat over the Doctor’s shoulders. “You best be jokin’.”

“No, Rosie, I didn’t die.” Jack joked, but Rose’s stare seemed to scold him just enough, “Can I help it when you get all riled up like that?” He plopped happily in a chair, putting his legs up hastily on another “Where are we off to?”

Rose looked at the Doctor quickly, his fingers swiftly knotting his bowtie in place as he fluttered a small look to her.

We can’t bring him. Too many timelines.

Rose sighed audibly, acknowledging the thought and she pet Jack’s shoulder. “We are off to get your mum, Smiths are headed home an’ you are goin’ back to Whales.”

“Going to get River?” Jack put his feet down and huffed, “That’s not a trip I want to go on too badly, thanks.”

“So Melody is River and your mother.” The Doctor repeated the idea, needing it completely verified for the idea to actually settle in his mind. He looked solidly to Jack for clarifying answers as he settled into a set beside Rose.

“I didn’t know the Melody part but the River Song gave birth to me part.” Jack mumbled, “Apparently I was there for that.”

The Doctor put his hands at the side of his head, quickly miming large hair, “Curly hair? A bit of a temper?”

“Likes to shoot things, or kiss them, sometimes both?” Rose added.

“That’s her.” Jack smirked.


Rose barked a laugh and looked at the Doctor, “The Pond DNA. Told ya it was pretty strong.” She turned back to Jack, leaning a bit forward, grabbing his chin in her fingers before she patted his cheek, “He does look like her. Baby blues of Rory, too, if I think of it.”

“Judging me like a stud horse?” Jack said with a light and flirtatious air, “Why Rose Tyler, I thought you’d never.”

“I wouldn’t.” Rose stuck her tongue out at Jack in faux-disgust, the Doctor resting his own hand on her shoulder, “You’re my, what? God-grandson? Grand-godson? That a thing?”

“It is now.” The Doctor said jovially, “Another layer to Hands off the blonde.”

“I saw that kiss last night,” He grinned, “Looked like hands were decidedly on the blonde.” He motioned to the hands laying absently on her shoulder. It twitched slightly at the mention, Rose quickly put her hand on it, easing it from it’s near withdrawal and entwining her fingers into his.

“You should keep your hands off all blondes, seems like, maybe they’re your granddad.” Rose narrowed her eyes at Jack playfully.

Jack groaned painfully, “Don’t remind me.”
“At least that pear stuff is out of my TARDIS. You know I’m not sure how I will forgive either of you for leaving that poison on board.” Rose turned her head and raised her eyebrows as he regarded her. His voice lowered an octave becoming suggestive, smooth and deep “Well. You.” He looked her seductively up and down. “Plenty of ideas.” He looked at the intrigued Jack, his voice returning to normal instantly and a teasing disinterest and diverting his eyes, “You not so much.”

“I thought old and beautiful was your thing?” Jack sounded offended. The reminder that he was older than he looked stung Rose. The Doctor felt a constriction in his chest as if it were his. “Well, If I’m to go back to Earth at least I got slobbering drunk first.”

“Left you in a pub, a year later I found you in a pub, I’d think being slobbering drunk has become your full-time job.” The Doctor noted.

“Really?” Rose blinked, that didn’t fully line up with her view of Jack. Yeah, he liked a drink but years of that seemed a bit excessive for him.

“I had a bad day.” Jack said, expounding only upon receiving a soften look from Rose as she heard. “I lost people. People that meant a lot to me.”

Rose untwined their fingers, the Doctor taking his hand off her shoulder and walking a few feet away. He knew the feeling, the feeling from Jack or even the feeling seeping into his heart from Rose. She didn’t want to be comforted, not by him, not now. He made it clear that she wasn’t alone regardless, but mentally she needed alone time, so he did his best to accommodate from the other side of the galley.

“I’m sorry.” Rose said quietly, “Its my fault.”

“What?” Jack blinked.

Rose sighed, “I did this to you. You didn’t ask for this. I signed you up for years an’ years of hard without asking. Didn’t really know how hard it would be, an’ I’m so, so sorry, Jack.”

“Oh, life is hard in general.” Jack easily dismissed with a slight smile, “You just gave me more of it. Someone loves me so much, they wanted me to live forever, just so happens it was somebody who could actually make it happen.”

“So I just added to your ego?” Rose groaned wiping an errant tear from her cheek, “Puttin’ the Bad in Bad Wolf, that.” she smiled.”At least have breakfast. I’m cookin’” Rose said, setting herself towards one of the pantries to grab supplies.

Jack watched her walk away with a slight look of horror. He turned to the Doctor as she disappeared into the large cupboard, “Speaking of putting in the bad…”

Her voice echoed right out of the pantry as she grabbed the flour, “Oi!”
The stove was hot and two pans sat on burners. The Old girl had adjusted herself ever so, allowing Rose to cook on a surface she was more accustomed to. She tended to one fry pan with her heated round cakes frying slowly on the top, the Doctor beside her, tending to the adjacent pan as he added seemingly random things to eggs.

“Move over,” Rose shoved the Doctor playfully. There was plenty of room. Neither of them were even slightly bothered, but bumping each other, smiling absently and doing things specifically to irritate each other somehow made cooking more fun. An excuse to invade each other's personal bubble without instantly becoming cuddly or worse. “Keep on your side! I’m sure you can keep your wide feet to yourself.”

The Doctor looked offended, “They’re perfectly proportional!”

“Don’t I know it.” Rose quipped, earning a grin from him as she bumped his side with her hip. “We’re gonna need wider cook top if you’re gonna be in my way like this.”

Mickey’s voice came from the doorway, disrupting their flirt. “Somehow this is worse than the snog.”

Each turned their head to see Mickey and Martha having just entered, a smirk on Martha’s lips and the hint of one on Mickey’s. Jack just sat at the table, smirking and smiling like he’d need popcorn and their little play just got better.

“Mickey! Martha!” the Doctor turned away from the cook top and kissed the air beside their heads before he skittered back beside Rose at the stove and scraped the scramble before him, “Bit of brekkie before home?”

Martha nodded elatedly, Mickey remained skeptical.

“Just gonna use us and lose us?” Mickey grumped.

“We’ve a thing.” Rose said sadly, an amount of worry and trepidation in her voice as she watched the bubbling dough cook, “Fraid you can’t help. Don’t worry we’ll come visit.” She felt the Doctor’s vain protest even before his mouth opened and she turned to him, brandishing the spatula in his direction threateningly as she looked into his eyes daringly, “Don’t argue, I’ll go visit, you’ll come an’ fix their broken Hoover.”

“Our Hoover’s not—” Martha elbowed Mickey half through his sentence, he looked cluelessly at her before stuttering as he corrected himself. “I mean, yeah, broken Hoover, right.”

Rose looked over her shoulder for a second towards the couple. “Sleep well?”

“Bunk beds the TARDIS’s new thing? Felt a bit like summer, camping in Ireland in a little cabin with my brother and sister.” Martha's said as she and Mickey sat at the table.

Mickey laughed under his breath, “with better beds and less Tish.”

“Hey, that’s my sister,” Martha chided jovially.
“You sure you should be letting her near a stove, Boss?” Mickey managed to get their attention as both heads turned toward him at that, “Rose burns cold cereal.”

Rose narrowed her eyes, “A hundred years ago, yeah, but now I’m very good at Scotch pancakes.”

“And pretty much just Scotch pancakes.” The Doctor added. Rose hit his arm playfully.

“Only took her a hundred years.” Mickey smarmed.

Rose turned slightly and shook the spatula at him, “Keep it up, I’m gonna burn yours on principle.”

“Right.” Mickey huffed a laugh, “That’s the excuse.”

Rose quickly threw the spatula pelting him soundly in the shoulder with an audible hit, causing Mickey to grunt a protest and give a minor scowl. Martha whapped the back of his head gently. “Oi!”

“The Missus and the Ex!” The Doctor announced, letting his voice take on at least the cadence of Mickey’s as he plated the scramble for the five of them, completing each plate with surprisingly well done Scotch pancakes before setting them in front of recipients. He pulled out a chair from the table and Rose slid into it. “Welcome to every man’s worst nightmare.”

Plates empty, bellies full and laughs abounding from the table in the galley, the Doctor piloted them to where they needed to be. Dropping them off was bittersweet. Considering the last time had felt like such an ending of their relationships, this one felt more like a middle, but the look on Rose’s face as she hugged her friends tight, it was honestly a dream to her. It had been a wonderful morning, Rose’s light and happiness expounded by being surrounded by her friends, still seemed to remain through the wistful hugs and I’ll-miss-yous written across her eyes. The Doctor’s hatred for domestics was overridden by Rose’s promise for dinner sometime soon. At a subtle grumble from the Doctor, Rose mentally reminded him soon was relative and they lived in a time machine. Jack got off with Mickey and Martha, figuring he’d just hop to Whales if he was going to be in the neighborhood anyway. Jack reminded her that he was her home away, if she needed it. The Doctor felt that visceral no instinctively rising again, quickly shielded from the one who could receive it as she smiled and thanked Jack, clearly no intention of ever using the offer.

The no, the refusal, the bodily demand that anything like that simply not happen… That another thing that would need looking into.

The doors closed behind them, a quick dematerialization sequence sent them back into the void as Rose's wistful smile turned determined and she pat his shoulder. “Time to get to work.”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry it took so long for such a short chapter of exposition and goo. Thanks for being patient!
Carrying Rose back to the TARDIS was effortless and quick. Irritating though it was for her to have done it, it was almost worse that she had done it for what she knew would be a futile effort. Putting her down on the bed, feeling the TARDIS ratchet up the heat in response, all he could do was concentrate on something else, anything else, not the cold, unconscious love of his lives laid out of the bed. Thirty two minutes, twelve seconds.

Based on previous experience she would wake. Not hearing her, not feeling her, created enough doubt again. Not that she was a hallucination, not this time, but doubt in the simple fact that she would wake. To be fair, only the hopefully living, or soon-to-be living, breathing ball of pink and yellow about three meters to his right could make him so angry and so hopeful at the same time. He couldn’t even bear to think her name. Which was a switch. There had been times when her name was the only thing he could think.

And he found both situations to be irritating.

He grumbled.


Her mind slowly filled its empty spot in his. She was waking. He could feel it without ever looking at her. He hoped she would wake. His chest felt lighter, relief flooding him, but somehow the feeling of her slow consciousness in his mind managed to heighten his irritation.

Really. Rose had known, she had to have known, that rescue, with Melody that young, wasn’t possible. Clues only, they were there for just clues. And now there was a stubborn and barely conscious utterly too human woman on the bed. Thirty seven minutes nineteen seconds before the spark of her mind fully registered in his.

She stirred. He had already brought chips and tea to her bedside as he sat looking forlorn, or cross, probably both. His mouth was a straight line, his back hunched forward as he sat in one of the wingback chairs by the bookshelves in their room, across from the foot of the bed, looking as if he was staring holes in the pages rather than reading the words.

“You knew it wouldn’t do anything.” The Doctor said without preamble. It’s possible he was talking to his book. He didn’t look at her. She couldn’t feel him or hear anything in his head. Maybe that was for the best, she could see and hear his disappointment and irritation just fine without it.

Rose cleared her throat a bit, her voice a little groggy at first, “Time can be rewritten.” She swallowed and sat up, pushing herself to be sat up with back against the headboard, “I had to try.”

“We’re two complicated events in time and space dealing with another complicated event in time and space,” the Doctor tried to keep his tone even and almost angrily turned an un-read page. Which he immediately regretted. The book hadn’t done anything stupid, “Rewriting is near impossible.”

“Impossible’s just a posh version of never ever, and we never say that, yeah?” Rose said as she lifted up her cup of tea and holding gently with two hands. She felt sorry, but not, and she stared into her mug at the still steaming tea. Angry as he was, he’d still made her tea in preparation. She stroked the
smooth sides of the warm cup gently, “an' even impossible we’ve both proven is kinda possible.”

He almost smirked, “True.” It was hard to stay mad at her when she was right. Ish. He simultaneously wanted to and didn’t want to be angry with her. He closed the book and put it on the table. He hadn’t actually read any anyway. He looked at her, the hurt and worry distinctly in his eyes before he allowed his mind to be open, calm enough now, not riddled with angry emotions as it had been. He stood from the chair and walked to the bedside before he sat on the edge.

Rose weakly smiled, putting her hand on his.


Her fingers wrapped around his hand, “Come on, I had to try.”

“I know.” Miffed Doctor returned. It’s been a while since a simple non-provoking declarative sentence riled him up, “But you see a ginger toddler and just, poof! Wolfy, goldy boom, three soldiers down, number four there launches an escape pod with a toddler, and I’m quickly lifting a limp blonde home.”

“Think I’m stealin' your thunder? You’re usually doin’ the stupid thing.” She joked. He was clearly not in the mood. Ironic, sorta. That was seemingly the only setting he had. At least in front of other people. Rose tried to soothe him, “Next time ‘wolfy booms’ I’ll tryta make it count, yeah?”

“No. No more wolfiness.” He proclaimed. Rose didn’t reply at all, which worried him. He tilted his head down to seek out her eyes and met their avoiding gaze. “Rose, no more wolfiness.”

She narrowed her eyes, almost challenging that penetrating look. “It’s not like I control it!”

“I don't know what they did to you in the place, leaving you… on… for that long may have made you a hair-trigger,” he surmised quickly, “Telepathy is easier, that may be too.”

“So, what if it is?” Rose sat up more, speaking calmly, “You want me to not go out now? Just stay in the TARDIS just in case? Stay safe? If that were the case you’da just left 19 year old all-human me back home with mum to eat beans on toast and watch telly.”

The Doctor didn’t fully disagree, that was the problem. But she might need the concepts so willingly running rampant through his head set before her. “You have a grey hair.”

Rose cursed under her breath. She thought she’d gotten them all. Silver hair meant an ending, she knew he hated those. Part of the appeal of her new self that he’d even let their… whatever… only get this far was likely just because of her unknown lifespan. It took him having a human lifespan to convince himself to be with her the first time, the lack of one was the draw this time. The thought of her live nearing a close may make him run. Or worse… she blinked a tear away... Regret. “Knew you'd notice eventually.”

“You knew?”

“Noticed a few earlier. Pulled em out in the room with Amy an’ Melody.” Rose shrugged slightly, still wincing at her movement. Hearing it felt wrong. Perfectly Rose Tyler, but mired in fatigue and exhaustion. “I’m near a hundred fifty, a few silver's aren’t surprising for a human. So?”

“So you are aging.” The Doctor looked at her like she were stupid, “Thought this might happen. You gave Jack energy to live but he uses it all. You kept yours to stay, but you’re using it, eventually you’ll use it all and you won’t stay. Conservation of energy, energy can’t be created or destroyed, just moved, you’re constantly moving it, energizing other things is starting to remove your energy for
the staying bit.” Rose simply blinked at him, “You are killing yourself, Rose.”

“Not that much if it takes 150 years an’ months of bein’ ‘on’ or whatever to produce a few dozen silvers.” She dismissed.

“A few dozen?!” the Doctor shouted a little in shock. He huffed, calming himself, “yes, it seems slow, but you wouldn’t tell a person with a cigarette habit to light up, you either.”

“Light up,” Rose smirked.

“Oi! This is not a joke.” His usual bouncy twiddlyness was replaced by an odd stillness as his eyes bore into her.

She couldn’t say anything. She had him running so quick before, it wasn’t until he’d lost a TARDIS and didn’t have much to run with in the first place. She bit her lip in fear, near drawing blood, not saying anything. She didn’t know what could be said. Please don’t run seemed a thing to say, but honestly, she knew him, saying that may just make him run faster. Farther, even.

He seemed to get a bit ramped up in his own head, letting a good ramble take over. “Last time I lost you, I hallucinated you, broke the rules twice, almost allowed time to collapse and then died!” His eyes again bore into hers, “Let me tell you, I already know that that seems very tame compared to what I’d do now.”

She was shocked. Speechless. Yes, he knew depression of her loss …and Donna’s… had crushed him, she wasn’t aware it had been to such a degree, or even thought that maybe it would be worse now.

Her fears, her thoughts of him running simply… dissipated.

She was contrite. He felt it. Finally.

The Doctor let out a relieved breath and scrunched his face suddenly. “Look what you did, Rose Tyler!” he looked affronted, “You made me be the responsible one!”

“That’s a change.” Rose said with a slight smirk.

The Doctor scrunched up his face and shook his head quickly, though wildly, trying to shake off the coating of sheer responsibility, “I don't like it.”

“Don't worry, we’ll switch back.”

Rose hadn’t rebounded as fast as she had before. She was slow to getting up. She was irritated by it, apparently having sprung back much more quickly in the past, which both irritated her due to the slowness and him because the sheer idea of her doing that more often upset him entirely. Right now she still moved slow, her hair limp, skin and eyes slightly less vibrant. His repeated instruction to stay
in bed seemed to fall on deaf ears in favor of her energizing cuppa. Armed with her steaming mug she sat down on the jump seat behind him just as he started to grumble at the rotor.

“No, no, Old Girl, I set it to Melody Pond, yes, just this is—"

“Just what?” Rose asked curiously as she sipped.

“We’ve gone to Stormcage again.” He scratched his head, “She took us to the River version of Melody rather than the Melody version of Melody, which is technically correct since I had to plotted to Melody.”

Rose smiled a little smile, “Only to you would that ever make sense.”

River burst through the doors, “Birthday trip! Oh how I love Birthday trip.” Rose was seated on a jump seat, seemingly crestfallen “What happened?”

“Happy birthday!” The Doctor threw his hands up in celebration before dutifully clapping once, trying to cover for the incidental, accidental, and very probably purposeful birthday landing by the TARDIS. “How old are you now?”

“No idea.” River winked.

He smiled cheekily, “At least you know the rules.”

“Oh, that’s not rules, just cheek.” Rose smiled weakly.

“Can’t it be both?” River purred before expertly tossing her things coat hangers and looking at Rose. “Why do you look so haggard, my love?”

Rose smiled with weak cheer. “Had a bit of a bad day, s’all.”

“She’s still recovering.” The Doctor kissed Rose’s forehead. River’s eyes seemed to tick on to something, and a sly smile escaped her lips.

“I have the perfect place, then.” River made herself at home at the controls as usual. “Spa on Deriia minor. Best facial treatments and massages in three galaxies. These people make even non-wolves glow.”

“Sounds lovely.” Rose weakly nodded with a smile.

“And the people who give massages are very pretty,” She added, though no one asked. Her River Song smirk planted itself quite firmly in pace, “Happy birthday me.”

“...Spa?” The Doctor almost whined the word.

“There’s a very large waterslide and Rose walks around in a towel.” Rose twitched a smirk as the Doctor nervously tried to hide the glint in his eyes. River set the coordinates. “We’ll get changed, you pilot us. That’s where we’re going.”

River held out a hand to Rose, who took it, not seeing it to stand but definitely appreciating the assistance. Rose looked over her shoulder, back at the Doctor as they started toward the corridor of the wardrobe. “We’ll be out in a mo, yeah?”

He barely had time for his nod and smile as River tug-guided Rose to the wardrobe to change.

Doctor grumbled, not even getting to set anything, just buttons for the TARDIS dematerialization
from River’s prison cell and reappear somewhere else near instantly. That was less piloting and more ‘the impressive Time Lord flicks a switch’ Like a chauffeur! Was this what it was going to be like traveling time and space with stubborn, TARDIS-y women? It was a little elating, the concept of having people who knew, people who had some semblance of understands around like the old days, but the reality, at least at this moment, left him the Doctor sandwich in a two time-travelling lady—and as he tried to change the date by just one day, and it was refused by a certain other time travelling lady—three time travelling, stubborn TARDIS lady sandwich. Well. Hopefully it was the middle of the sandwich. Or specifically next to a blonde-crusted bread.
Blonde crusted bread in a towel.

That thought at least made the switch-flicking de-re materialization a bit easier to make as a small smirk twitched his lips.
…Not that it was anything to smirk about.
And not that he’d notice.
Or stare.
At all.
Nope.

Oh, sod it, of course he’d stare. Allowed to stare now. Been staring for years if he were going to be honest with …himself, apparently.
…Right.

Rose and River burst in through the front doors. On the opposite side. The direction that they definitely didn’t just go in. The Doctor blinked for a moment. Either this was an incredibly complicated vaudeville routine or…

Rose plastered a smile on over her breathy, slightly reddened face. Trying to cover a slightly singed and discolored bit of the yellow towel she was wearing. “Sorry Dear, you were napping, quick jaunt turned into a Judoon party. Sorted, but—”

It took the Doctor a moment to shake off the initial instinct to stare, “Rose—"

“—I know, I know, you’re the pilot but she was going to go barmy in there an’ you were asleep—" She must have misinterpreted the specific Rose in his voice, or taken it as the I’m-about-to-explain-something Rose, which it technically was, walking up the stairs to the center console where we was, River behind her. She looked at him out of the slight embarrassment, likely of being caught in the act with him supposedly unknowing, when the lights above flashed.

Likely, the TARDIS was telling Rose what it only took the Doctor a few seconds to work out. That Rose, burnt and energetic, with that River, all smarmy and breathless, were likely a future Rose … and an unplaceable but future River.

Future Rose froze, her eyes quickly diverting in surprise to the Doctor. “…Oh.” She blushed as she reached behind her and grabbed her River’s arm gently. She ushered her gently back toward the door as her eyes searched the room. “River, my love, um, get ready to run again.”

“…Why?” River backed up as she asked.

“Time travel. Wrong Doctor, wrong TARDIS.” Rose said as she still stared, eyes flitting over every inch of him, as if trying to get a hint when exactly she’d just intruded. She seemed to get slightly more relieved at the simple sight of her own mug by the jump seat. She must have been looking for something to display she hadn’t just appeared before she even… appeared. “Say hi, River.”

“Oh.” River waved a brazen, half sarcastic half embarrassed wave. “Hello, Sweetie.” Future River
backed out down the stars and ran to the door, leaving her time’s Rose at the top of the stairs, flushing lightly. River opened the door slightly and looked out, “Oh, I see ours! See you later, Doctor!”

The Future Rose and placed a quick but firm kiss on the Doctor's lips. Familiar but calm with a sense of something transferred quite cleanly through the brief contact. Near instantly she parted from him, winked, and in a flash her feet followed her River, both women hastily disappearing out the door. It swung shut behind them.

The Doctor stood there. Blinking. Absorbing quickly.

That was technically not cheating, right? Humans had a weird sense of that, and with the proprietary feel he would likely get if any of his prior selves, the cheeky bastards, kissed Rose... But since that was future her? The memory was fading leaving him with the bits of an argument floating in his head with no clear beginning or end.

Rose, the now one, not future, have to keep that in mind—while he could, anyway—walked in from the corridor from the wardrobe, dressed her pink towel. Still looking a bit run down, eyes still a bit dull, hair a bit limp, pink towel only serving to highlight her faded skin, River at her side.

“What happened? She said ‘Wrong one' randomly for some reason, I heard it.” She looked at him, as much cheekiness as she could muster, thought it was clear on his face that it wasn’t much. “What did you do?”

“I don’t always have to do something!”

Rose and River both put their hands on their hips. In eerily similar fashions. At the same time. Blimey.

The Doctor floundered, “I’m not entirely sure.” The memory had nearly faded into nothing, leaving only scant hope in it’s wake as it was buried by their timelines. “Maybe nothing. Close to nothing.” He ran his hand through his hair, smiling as he pointed to the monitor, “But we’re at the spa!”

River shook her head with a smirk, knowledge glittering in her eyes as he ran up to Rose’s side and wrapped his arm around her waist for support and smiled. “Spa. Let’s get you glowing again.”

The spa had done it’s trick, or the tea had settled and managed it’s magic, bouncy happy Rose Tyler returned, though, yes, theoretically she could have done less with the eleventh turn on the jumbo waterslide, though it was almost a travesty to pull the Doctor away from it, especially after he had ‘fixed’ the water pressure to an absurd degree. River returned as soon as she had to with a wink and a sashay, adjusting that vortex manipulator as easily as one would tie a shoe.

“Figure out where the escape pod landed?” Rose asked, fresh and re-dressed, nearing him as he adjusted dials with a bounce in his step.

He grinned wider and tapped the side of the monitor, turning it slightly to face her.
Rose looked at the display… all numbers and letters. She sighed. “I’m rubbish at coordinates. All I know is that’s twentieth century Earth, which doesn’t narrow much down with you, an’ under that ’s a scan of…” she huffed. “… a bunch letters an' numbers that I’ve no idea what are.”

“1960s, scan can for 51st century tech, that’s the atomic structure in the most commonly used 50th century metal.” He explained. Rose didn’t look like anything clicked, if anything she looked a bit more confused.

“Okay, but what for?” Rose blinked, “We know the warehouse is littered with it, we know where that is.”

“You spotted it. She called us when we’re at Elvis on 31st of July, so we know she has 51st century tech on her on that date. Given that they’ve likely destroyed or stored the things in the warehouse when we left on the 20th, there should only be a few incidences of its existence outside the warehouse on the 31st. And Melody, or at least likely Melody, uses a comms device to call us and get us involved in the 60s thing the first place.”

“So we know she’s still on Earth. At least on July 31st!” smile on her face brightening. She seemed to bounce a bit.

Old Rose Tyler joy was refreshing. She had been too bogged down by ifs and buts and headaches to see her be excited in a while. Quite a while. Leave it to Rose to never let it truly be noticeable to other people when she was actually bogged down until she was genuinely happy. Maybe that’s where he got it from.

So much of his old self had been influenced by her, he hadn’t really thought that, again, she had been the last thing on his mind when he regenerated, her influence on him may have been more subtle, but obviously there.

The Doctor wasn’t happy to possibly bring down her mood, but smiled, “She may not stay there, given the technology involved and the time-traveling status of her captors.”

“But that means she stays on Earth until the thirty first or we never know she’s there! Fixed bit! So at least the 31st!” Her eyes glittered. “Love it when you’re impressive.”

“I’m always impressive. Though, technically,” he pulled the sticky note off the monitor with 20-31 July 1969 written on it, and handed it to her, “this was you.”

“Oh I’m very impressive,” Rose beamed, taking the sticky.

“Years of exposure, bound to rub off.”

On the monitor, the orphanage was just as she’d seen it before. Though, the light differences between evening and day highlighted the paint job. The date was off. She huffed a little, few years before they’d even been there. Rose waved her sticky absently and looked at the date on the monitor. “66. Three full years b’fore. Maybe you should set it.”

The TARDIS dematerialized… and rematerialized… exactly where it was. Exactly when it was.
“She takes us where we need to be.” He quoted the living TARDIS herself.

“She takes us where we need to be.” He quoted the living TARDIS herself.

“He takes us where we need to be.”

Convenient.” Rose said on an exhale before grumbling, “For her.” She shot a glare to the ceiling.

“Bit off, darling, think you can hop a bit where we're sposta be?”

The lights flickered. He didn’t need to understand TARDIS speak to understand Rose’s annoyed face. “That’d be a no.” he noted.

There was a feeling. She couldn’t place it. And she looked on the monitor. A face. In a window off to the side. Small eyes, tall. Remember the Silence. “Ah.” Rose nodded to herself, her eyes narrowing angrily at the screen, “I forgot.”

The Doctor was staring intently at the same place on the monitor, “You’re supposed to.”

She looked at him quickly, “So, what, the hand thing again?”

“No, probably not the nanorecorder. You might go wolly. It’s not a goal but as I said, hair trigger.”

“Ah. So. We just… watch? Like big ol’ creepers?” she scrunched her nose a bit, “Doesn’t feel right.”

He scrunched his nose as well, mimicking her a bit, “It wouldn’t.”

Rose thought a moment. “They let her go out to a playground in the pictures, there’s one on a swing… we could try. Or at least say hello.”

“Just hello. There’s no try, you know there’s no try.” The Doctor narrowed his eyes at her. “I’ll stay here, watching monitors, and you go out there. Then we’ll switch.”

“You’re volunteering to not go outside?” Rose blinked, “You?”

“Oi! I don’t always have to do something. Okay, a lot of the time I have to do something. Most. May even now but it’ll work.”

“Not really the Buddy system.” Rose remarked.

“Or it’s the epitome of Buddy system one of us looks out for the other.” The Doctor pointed from his eyes to hers with happiness. “The TARDIS will monitor you. I’ll keep watch, you go!”

She smiled her happy, tongue-touched smile and kissed his cheek, happily skipping off to the wardrobe.

It didn’t take her long, my, how times changed. Changing clothes used to be somewhat of a chore to wait for, he thought, or he just hated the separation more, time, her time anyway, was more limited. Now, either she dressed more quickly—which she did, actually—or his missing her was less—which apparently it wasn’t. There goes that theory. Good thing he hadn’t said it out loud.

She was dressed in a pink skirt and pink jacket. Very pinky pink. She straightened the top with a tug, looking ever so slightly uncomfortable. “I feel a bit like Elizabeth Two. She’s still queen, yeah? Jacket and skirt matchin’ like a posh Easter egg.” Lamenting the lack of pockets she grabbed a very small bag and put a frame larger than the bag easily into it.

A smile took over the Doctor’s face, “How did you know that would work?”

“s yours, dunno if you’ve noticed but bigger on the insides a bit of a thing with you.” She smiled widely as she pushed open the doors and stepped out.
Melody was easy to spot. She sat alone on the swings, rocking very slowly. She must have been four. So small, nothing like River yet, probably due to grow into it, but very much the picture of Amy and Rory melded. Blonde ginger hair, brown-hazel eyes, pale skin, smile that could daze hidden under a passive front.

No. Not passive… unhappy.
Well. That wouldn’t do.

A quick look around and a check to her hand said they were alone, except Renfrew seated on a bench near. He looked a bit spaced out, really, she supposed he would be. She looked happily down to the child, the child who rocked back and forth, avoiding eye contact sadly.

“Would you like a push, my love?”

Melody looked up with her big, childish eyes, and tentatively nodded. Other mothers and children avoiding her corner of the small play area like the plague. Rose began a gentle push of the chains on the swing, slowly gaining some amplitude for Melody.

“Why aren’t you playing with the other kids?”

“They can’t ‘member.” She muttered with a clear American accent, wind from the motion causing her straight hair to flutter and flow.

“You, Melody Pond, are hard to forget.”

Left. Rose glanced left, there one stood, at the far edge of the park fence, staring at the interaction but unmoving. Rose blew the air from her mouth in a harrumph. “Your babysitters aren’t though.”

Melody’s little legs dragged along the ground suddenly as she looked at Rose in surprise. Rose stopped pushing as the little girl and sat carefully on the swing beside, Melody’s eyes following her every movement.

“How you know my name?” the little Melody spoke with the broken sentences of a small child, Rose smiled. Odd, really, to have a fully speaking child of the baby that had just been born a month ago. Even odder to have a child, though likely an advanced child with the whole evolution thing and all, be so… untrusting.

“I’m your Godmum. S’posta take care of ya if you’re mummy can’t.”

“You doptin me?” the little girl brightened a touch, her rocking on the swing jerkily steadying as the little girl sat straighter, more hopeful. “Others get dopted. The home is almost m-t.”

“No,” Rose answer carefully, watching the frown grow on the little girl’s face. Rose put her hand gently on Melody’s, “But someday you will be back with your mummy. Promise you.”

Something happened. Just holding Melody's hand, she saw where the Reapers would intervene. Large flying dinosaur creatures, not quite the same as the ones before. More… specific, they felt, thinner, sharper, like scalpels, precise instruments of mass destruction rather than indiscriminant killing machines. Dozens were poised in the sky, like frozen in time and creation, waiting to pounce, waiting for her to rip open their stasis and allow them to cleanse the wound she’d create by taking a child from her established timeline. As Rose’s grip tightened on Melody’s little hand, they began to twitch. Her hand unmoved, she quickly looked about. The other people in this park, Mums and Dads and kiddies galore, none panicking. No one else saw them. Melody’s hand tightened in hers, almost pleading to be taken as she looked up with large eyes. No. Rose’s hand loosened reluctantly, the images faded. “…Not now, looks like.”
Rose reached into her tiny bag, pulled out the wrapped package with the frame in it.

Melody stared in awe, her eyes wide and sparkly. “You magic?”

“Depends on the day.” Rose smiled.

*It's coming.*

A quick glance to her left again showed the slowly lurching forward alien. She looked away quickly.

*Hurry.*

Rose smiled widely and handed the brightly wrapped gift to Melody. “Happy birthday, Melly my love. I have to go, yeah?”

“It’s not my birthday.” The little girl blinked.

Rose shrugged quickly, eyes darting to the slow moving but determined thin alien as it marched forth. “It’s always your birthday somewhere.”

“Will you be back?” the small, American-sounding voice asked quietly.

Rose looked back to Melody and nodded. The doors to the TARDIS opened and his hand beckoned to her to come quickly. She stood and ran inside, the doors closed behind her with a giant smile.

“You shouldn’t have said that.” He said, though his heart soared, “You can’t go back again before we get her, you’ll just confuse her.”

“Better to confuse her with love than make her go completely bloody nutty on hate, yeah?”

One wrong turn of the TARDIS and they were back at Stormcage. Neither of them were about to let a good mistake be ignored or a good party fall off the radar.

“All of time and space, only so many birthdays we gotta celebrate with our girl and you bring us to a karaoke planet.” Rose rolled her eyes through a glorious smile.

“It was fun!” River protested, weakly, really, but still it registered as a protest on his behalf. The Doctor grinned far too proudly, “*Not mind blowing*, but still fun.”

The Doctor deflated just a tiny amount as he looked to Rose and motioned to River, “See? Fun!” Rose was unconvinced, her arms slowly crossed in front of her as her head tilted, awaiting his real explanation. “and I *may* have wanted to see if River could do what you do.”

“That sounds more like a reason for you.” Rose laughed slightly, slumping quickly on what had
become her normal seat.

“There can be two reasons!” The Doctor protested, before launching into his explanation with a smile, “Technically there were loads of fish. Fish people. They didn’t dance at all until it was your turn and then disco swish-a-palooza! They were all,” he twiddled his fingers, “…wiggly.”

“So I don’t make them …wiggle?” River twiddled her fingers similarly.

Rose laughed a little, “Might have been for the best, River. They were horrid dancers.”

“Jim was trying very hard to catch your eye.” The Doctor idicated River as he spoke to her.

River scoffed, “Jim was trying’ pretty hard to catch anyone’s eye, specially if they might have water rights for building that dam he wanted.”

“I still can’t believe you chose a song called Ride the River with your Godparents in the bloody audience.” Rose plopped down on a jump seat as she watched River and the Doctor pilot them away.

“What?” River smiled knowingly, “He was making eyes at me! And it’s not like any of them knew my name yet.”

“Exactly!” Rose almost scolded, “the only ones who wouldda thought it was funny knew you when you were in nappies.”

“But you still laughed, so.” River shrugged with a smirk.

“Teenage years must have been hell.” The Doctor noted quietly as he shook his head jokingly.

Rose's heart sank. She looked at the Doctor. He slid his hand on to her cheek, We'll find her. You know we will. We keep getting closer.

It was hard, sometimes, reconcile Melody with River. River was a grown woman, knowledge and snarky sarcasm, flirty boisterousness illustrated by both her mother and her son. Melody was a little girl with the tender heart of a child, mischievous air that made her heart swelled with pride and fear. She had to think of her niece Aurora. Sweet baby one minute, married rocket scientist the next, but Rose still saw the sweet baby even in the wrinkly face. Time travel and age. Same thing, different order.

Moments like those the Doctor empathized with. He’d spent most of his lives experiencing, and avoiding, exactly that, but Rose was still new to it, so all her could do was be her when that happened, Be Rose for a moment, be loving and always at her side. And make comments.

Rose snorted. “Think you do that enough already.” She kissed his cheek.

“We haven’t slowed down, you need to slow down. Based on humany sleep patterns you’re overdue, based on Rose Tyler sleep patterns even a bed of nails or a giant cheese grater made of bees would look like a comfy mattress.”
“Dunno what you’re talking about.” She said. He recognized the look in her eyes indicated that it was entirely possible that he had become a big fluffy pillow and she was about three moments from being asleep on her feet. He looked at her like the rubbish liar she was.

“You need sleep. You’ve gotten two sleeps in after we dropped off Jack and the Smiths, I’m not sure how they count to your human side because both were due to energy loss.”

“Technically I’d say my last three were due to energy loss, then.” She quipped cheekily.

He smirked a little to himself and went to straighten his bowtie with pride before he realized the diversion. He quickly wiped the smirk from his face and continued to argue with an undercurrent of a blush, “Rose.”

“I can’t.” She said bluntly.

“You haven’t tried.”

“No, I mean I can’t.” Rose explained, “I can’t. I can’t stop until Melly’s safe in Amy’s arms. Wouldn’t be fair.”

“You shouldn’t do that.”

“Why? That's what you do.” Rose looked at him, “Least old you brooded on the outside,” She didn't often compare old hims out loud. She didn't want him to think she had a preference, which, obviously, she didn't, as much as highlight the differences she'd had to adjust to. “This you doesn’t brood but just, like, punish yourself in other ways.”

He looked offended for a second, “Time Lords don’t brood.”

Rose just stared at him, her response felt rather than said. She was married to a him, granted, a part Donna Noble him but a him, and traveled with three of his faces now, her opinion on this was backed by massive amounts of experience: He was absolutely full of it.

She took a long exhale, “It’s silly. I know it’s silly, but… Amy said it’s my fault, she was right. If she hadn’t been with me she’d have her daughter with her.”

“You’re right,” the Doctor said flatly. Rose sighed and nodded guiltily. “That is silly. They may have taken note of Melody’s ish even if yours hadn’t been a matter of record.”

“Matter of record?” Rose scrunched her face, she thought she’d already remembered this as best she could. “How would they even know? No one was around. I mean no living anything other than you an’ Jack. I mean since the initial… thing, there’ve been a few lil things but nothin’ anything anyone wouldda noticed before Demon’s Run.”

“You told the Daleks in Torchwood Tower.” He pointed out, the day in question flooded her mind. Holding Mickey’s hand as she was scared to shaking, basically daring them to try something ‘I met the Emperor, and I took the Time Vortex and I pulled it into his head and turned him into dust. Do you get that? The God of all Daleks, and I destroyed him.’ Rose flinched.

Well… shit.

_Oil! Language, Miss Tyler._ The Doctor smirked. “One escaped, made new Daleks, one of those escaped and made new Daleks. Generations on generations of buried data.” The Doctor said before adding. “You’d be a legend.”
“Like you?” Rose yawned with a smile as she laid her head on his shoulder, “‘S not necessarily a
compliment, that.”

“You and me, stuff of legends.” He kissed her hair. “Sleepy legends.”

Sleep had never been easy for him. A bloody waste of time, if he thought about it, which he didn’t,
really. Just relegated it to something that humans needed to do. Other species, too, Time Lords
included, but humans were by far the most prolific sleepers of the people often on the TARDIS.

But Rose needed it, and it seemed the most expedient way to get her to do what was needed, lying
with her on the bed as her breathing evened out. He should have grabbed a book.

The idea of staying in bed for untold hours was… a little crazy, really. Think of everything he could
do! But when her hand didn’t leave his, it wrapped around his like when he found her on the console
room floor, he remembered he would stay there forever.

And when she woke up, awake and energetic, she made it clear to him that, occasionally, sleep was
necessary for lots of species.

She landed the TARDIS serenely, taking a cue from the TARDIS herself to remember a pull to a
blue switches, an eerie silence reigning, though, she supposed, that was what she was after.

It took mere seconds for River to throw open the doors with glee. “Where are the three of us off to
today?”

Rose quickly hushed the elated River with a giant smile, “Two of us. He’s busy. We’re goin’ out.”

River blinked as she made her way up the console as Rose moved aside. She narrowed her eyes at
her aunt. “He’s busy?”

“Well,” Rose toddled her head a bit, “Sleep, but s’the same thing with him.”

“Sleep.” River repeated, letting her shock sink in.

“Yeah.” Rose nodded.

“Really?! He sleeps?” River started changing from shocked to amused, “And you’re awake? How
“Did you manage that?”

“Tired him out.” Rose answered nonchalantly.

“Oh, Rose,” River immediately grimaced, “Don’t tell me things like that.”

“Then don’t ask. We have ‘bout three hours for you, hell needta be out at least that long.” Rose paused and put on a faux thoughtful face, “Wonder what we could do with three solid hours…”

“The Spa!” River silently clapped with glee, a dangerous smile adorning her face, “Love that spa.”

“I know you do.” Rose smiled, “Well, if you get it done right, we’re off to the spa.”

“Get it done right?” River blinked.

Rose leaned slightly on the console and looked pointedly at River. “Know how to fly her?”

 “…not really.” River looked a bit shocked that Rose would even ask. Or suggest what she was suggesting.

“Well, we needta get this all done an’ keep him sleepin’. Means we need to drive well or he’ll wake up an’ no spa. Wanna practice?” River nodded exuberantly. Rose turned a bit stern. “I’m teaching you for emergencies. No joyriding, yeah?”

“Of course, my love.” River smiled an eerily familiar smile. Whether it was the same one Rose had seen on that same face or the one she’d seen on a masculine one, she couldn’t tell, but Rose narrowed her eyes.

“You know I can tell when you’re fulla it, right?” Rose narrowed her eyes as she looked over River’s face, “No joyrides.”

River smirked, not giving an answer. “Kay, key to flying silent?” Rose pointed to the blue switches, “Hitting these. Stabilizers. You’ll hafta remember that to get through without that perfect, wheezing, woosh-woosh noise that, while lovely, would likely wake up the Doctor.”

River’s eyes glittered as she flickered the switches eagerly, as she smoothly said, “And we don’t want that.”

Rose quickly pulled open the doors, running inside. Her arm reached out of the open doors, pulling the armed and aiming River on to the TARDIS and as she shut the doors hastily with only the two inside. Both women leaned back against the doors as they caught their breaths. Rose smiled a bit, her breath still recovering from running, “Melody Rose Pond that was bloody bonkers.”

“Certainly something for the diary.” River laughed breathlessly. “Would have been solved if you just went grr!”

“Tryin’ not to do that, thanks, it’s not exactly predictable. And you’re sposta think your way outta stuff. I won’t be around forever, you know.” Rose giggled. The look on River’s face was growing far too solemn at her words, so Rose quickly distracted her, “An’ where the bloody hell did you get that thing?”
The small laser pistol in her hand disappeared into the side of Rivers towel. “Temporal pockets.”

“On your towel?” Rose looked River up and down a little impressed.

“Why not?” River smirked

“An’ you knew we’d need it?”

“Well, no, but you don’t have to be a scout to be prepared.” River breathed out with a laugh. “The trouble and the running. Excellent.”

“I know.” Rose said, her voice simultaneously joined with a very specific Time Lord. They turned their heads to the smiling, knowing Doctor standing at the console.

“Morning dear, how’d you sleep?” Rose smiled, inserting as much innocence into her voice as possible as she brushed her hair behind her ear with a breathless smile, putting as much nonchalance in her demeanor as being caught in a towel by the doors could allow. “Want me to make some tea?”

“Judoon, I just remembered about ten minutes ago.” He nodded with a great smile.

“Damn.” Rose deflated, her innocent voice slipped away and her walk toward the galley stopped. Rose laughed breathlessly. “Kinda hoped it was a future you not past you.” She kissed him, identical to how she’d kissed him in the past. Quick, loving, the promise of forever written quite clearly, same feeling as it had been.

“Why would that matter?” River blinked.

“Memories.” The Doctor answered with a big smile on his face. “Crossing timelines happen, the evolutionary response from the species and the universe is to suppress the memories of the younger participant until the point after when its no longer a threat to spacetime.”

“He forgot ‘cause it’d be a spoiler.” Rose summed up. River apparently understood the Doctor's rambling answer but looked reassured at Rose's, her eyes widening subtly in contemplation.

“How many times do you think we’d go to the same spa?” the Doctor’s voice cut in. “We’ve the whole universe out there!”

“Well at least—” Rose stopped and looked back to River. The shock of the moment already gone as River raised an eyebrow, poised to absorb potential spoilers as usual. Rose rephrased her answer on the fly, “…once more, I hoped. Humans have favorite places. The Judoon weren’t supposed to be there.”

“They were looking for an escaped prisoner;” added River.

“—Not her, sorted it—” Rose continued.

“And ran.” River added again.

Rose shrugged, smiling to River, “Well, yeah, ran. S kind of integral to the sorting it bit, running.”

“Usually is.” The Doctor didn't seem mad, not a bit. If anything, almost admiring them.

“Time to go.” River said on a defeated breath. Rose skittered into the wardrobe and threw semi-folded clothes from the corridor toward her, watching them unfold a bit but River still deftly caught them. River winked. “See you.”
“Not if we see you first.” Rose waved.

River hit a dial on her vortex manipulator and was gone.

The Doctor turned toward Rose as she sauntered her way towards him, “That wasn’t her birthday.”

“Oh, really?” Rose said with a fake confusion. She narrowed her eyes playfully at him. “She can’t just sit there the other 300-odd days an’ wait.”

“She won’t.” he said easily, continuing of at the beginning of Rose’s ‘what?’ look where her face got all twisty and scrunched, “She doesn’t. Seems she got that vortex manipulator working and took a few unapproved furloughs herself.”

That did slightly relax her. “Yeah, well. Wouldn’t be a very good Aunt if I didn’t encourage her to play hooky once or twice, yeah?” the Doctor chuckled in agreement, wrapping and arm around her shoulders.

“You didn't go wolfy?” he asked with a tinge of pride.

“Can’t rely on it all the time. Someone said I’m using up my energy, wanna save it for some bloody reason.”

He pulled her into an embrace. “I wonder why.”

A quick landing gave them a view of the same park from before. About two blocks from the Children’s home, it seemed rarely used for the most part anyway, probably the safest for Miss Melly to be let out to. Daylight, happy, the swings were empty this time. The monitor scanned for her, left further until it spotted the little straight-haired ragamuffin hanging by her arms from the monkey bars. She must’ve heard the noise of the TARDIS and gotten distracted. She hadn’t even seen the TARDIS before but had already grown to know that that sound usually heralded the arrival of her visiting Aunt. The moment they spotted her, Melody let go and fell from easily three meters up, landing in a crumpled legs. Rose quickly grabbed the screwdriver from the Doctor's immediately outstretched hand and ran out the doors in a flash.

She didn't notice the swish of her jeans as she ran until she was quite near Melly, but couldn’t be bothered to care. Jeans and a t-shirt, style unheard of, not even dressed properly for the 60s. No blending in today.

“Melody!” Rose ran to the child, seeing the bloody mess all over her leg, she quickly shoved a hand into her pocket and pulled out what appeared to be a handkerchief.

“It’s just a little cut!” Melody whined, though obviously putting up a font. A quick glance to her scars on her legs, some bigger than others, gave Rose a good idea that this hadn’t been the first time. She was older than last time she’d laid eyes on her, which made sense.

“Bollocks, my dear.” Rose said as calmly as possible while holding a soft cloth to the wound and applying pressure.

“Bollocks?” Melody blinked.

_She’s been raised in America. 1960s America. Plus you probably shouldn’t say bollocks around a_
child. Amy would be furious.

“Amy woulda taught her stronger language than that.” Rose said quietly in response, she felt his amusement and agreement as she lifted her volume and spoke more directly to the hurt Melody. “Uh… poppycock.”

“Poppycock?” Melody blinked again.

“I’m old, I’ve no idea what you kids say these days,” she grinned as she gingerly pulled the hanky away from the wound and looked at it. “Melly, you’ve a pretty deep cut here, maybe you should see a doctor.”

“I don’t like going to the doctor. Doctors are bad.” She looked fearfully and determinedly to Rose, “Doctors are bad.”

“I dunno. I might know a good one. Maybe you just haven’t met the right one.” She offered Melody a hand up and they began making their way, Melody limping, to a nearby empty bench by the bushes. Rose looked about quickly, other kids, no Mum’s or Dad’s today, but everyone far enough that the whir and light of the sonic would attract too much attention.

“But I will.” Melody’s face hardened for a millisecond before she turned her attention to the sonic in Rose’s hand. “What’s that?”

Rose knelt on the ground as Melody sat. “S just this thing. Borrowed from your Godfather.” To make sure it was on the right setting she quickly ran it over her own arm as it whirred before moving to Melody’s still bleeding massive gash. “Handy, though loud, complicated. Bit like him.”

*I’m not sure if I should be offended.*

With each quick pass the wound seemed to heal a little. The blood slowing and coagulating, before the skin started to knit itself closed with half a minute’s attention. A little remained, though a plaster would cover it easy before she stopped and slipped it back into the pocket of her trousers.

“Tell me about him.” Melody's voice came out with an Amy amount of questioning demand. Well, asking made sense, this was the third time they’d visited. So far, the Doctor had always stayed on the TARDIS, watching her for Silence, keeping the TARDIS out of hands, sometimes making reference to him was unavoidable and necessary, especially since they’d be due to switch off and eventually he’d get to spend time with Melody.

Rose stood before turning around and plopping onto the bench next to the child. Melody willingly leaning against her side. “He's… wonderful. Smartest man with the silliest outfit.”

“He’s a clown?”

Rose answered without skipping a beat, “Sometimes, yeah.”

*Oi!*

Rose chuckled a little to herself and looked to Melody, “He can also hear us.”

“He’s magic, too?” Melody looked excited.

“Might be.” Rose smiled, mentally swatting any argument from him.

“Like the wizard in Sword and the Stone!” Melody lit up, “Old, really smart, bet he’s skinny and has...
a beard.”

Rose only took a few seconds to think about it, “Well, he’s been skinnier, and no beard I’m afraid, I
don’t there may not be enough hair in the universe to cover that chin.”

Rose Tyler! I’ll have you know I can grow a very nice beard.

“He says he can grow a nice beard.” Rose quickly whispered to Melody before shaking her head,
“I’ve not seen it.”

Little Melody cocked an eyebrow and glanced at her serene looking Auntie. “Is he even real or are
you just a little crazy?”

Both.

Rose bust a small laugh, “He’s very real, just you can’t see him right now.”

“Like you?”

“No. He’s much more… magic.” Rose smiled to herself. She reached into her left pocket and pulled
out a small bag, strangely, one that would have fit in it. “He bought some candies for you. Well. I say
bought. Kinda bought. Peppermint sticks, some lollies. Do you want a sweetie?” The little voice in
her mind didn’t even get a chance to start before she smiled and said under her breath, “Not you, ya
plum.”

Melody had heard her, perked up a bit, “Is he a sweetie?”

“Depends on the day, really. Smells like one, though. Shortbread wizard, him.”

Incoming.

Rose sighed, “Looks like you get the whole bag of sweeties, care of your Uncle.”

“You have to go. Already?” Melody reluctantly took the small paper bag as Rose slipped off the
bench.

Rose nodded a bit sadly and bent slightly as she kissed Melody's forehead, “Happy birthday, my
love.”

Chapter End Notes

Over 500 kudos?! Oh goodness, you guys, thanks for the love. It really does mean so
much to me.

If you guys have stuck around this long, you already know that I tend to fill in gaps.
There was a gap. It needed filling, so Let’s Kill Hitler is a bit off still.

If you don’t completely hate this, thank my friend M who has put up with my neurotic
ass for the length of this fic. If you do completely hate this... Sorry? My bad. But more’s
coming.
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!