Phone Tag

by kesomon

Summary

"Milliways Steak House and part-time mortuary, how may we serve you today?"

In which the Doctor deals with an unwanted caller and the TARDIS fam learn a few things about their fun-loving alien friend.

Notes

Wrote this while avoiding spoilers for The Ghost Monument. Credit to my friend Viking for the use of weird introductions to unwanted phone calls. He mostly uses them against telemarketers.

Crossposted to Teaspoon & An Open Mind.

A sudden beeping from the console interrupted the Doctor mid-description of someplace called Florana.

It was certainly distracting, and clearly meant something, if the way the Time Lord’s words stumbled, halting mid-sentence. Graham, Yaz, and Ryan perked up with curiosity.

But their alien friend only pursed her lips together before resuming, “- as I was saying, there’s this beach, where you can paddle in the water among the lilies - well, I say lilies, but they’re more like-”

The beeping continued, oblivious to the Doctor’s determination to ignore it to death. Graham and
Ryan shared a look of concern.

“--smells a bit like candyfloss, but without the cavities,” their host continued, speaking louder, but it wasn’t quite enough to drown the incessant noise. “Good for the joints, all that fizziness--Oh, for Gallifrey’s sake,” she finally growled, storming over to the console. She rolled up her sleeves as she went, and stabbed a few buttons with a scowl that only deepened with whatever it was the beeping had been heralding.

Yaz was somewhat grateful for the distraction; a world filled with floating flowers sounded terrible for someone with seasonal hay fever. “Is everything all right, Doctor?”

The Doctor stabbed a few more buttons with a satisfied huff and pushed back from the console. “Junk mail,” she muttered, rejoining them. “Where was I?”

The beeping started again. The three humans watched as the Time Lord halted where she stood and clenched her fists, eyes closed, with a slow inhale, exhale of annoyance.

“Er...Maybe you had better get that?” The most cautious of their group suggested. Graham’s shoulders went up around his ears when the rest of them turned to look at him. “Look, if it’s telemarketers - though, you have those in space? Sorry -- Just, sometimes you gotta tell em off before they quit on you.”

The Doctor looked at him, amused, and then cocked her head like a bird who’d found something shiny. She clapped Graham on the shoulders with a grin that was aglow with delight and mischief; it was a grin Yaz was rapidly coming to learn to fear. “Graham, you have an excellent point. Won’t be a mo’.” And she bounded back to the console, flicking a few switches.

The beeping silenced, followed by a small crackle-fizz and a staticky, blue hologram projected from a spot on the console. It resolved into the head and shoulders of a man, middle-aged and paler than Graham, wearing a skull-cap hat and some sort of high, arching collar decorated lavishly in swirls and loops.

“Milliway’s Steak House and part-time mortuary, how may we serve you today?”

Ryan choked and slapped his hands over his mouth to keep the bark of laughter from interrupting the Doctor’s chirpy, sarcastic opener.

The figure in hologram, too, looked taken aback by the greeting. After a moment he appeared to collect himself, and straightened up with a haughty expression of distaste. “This is the Lord Castellan of the High Council. I have an important message to impart for the Time Lord known as The Doctor.” And then he said nothing else.

The Doctor waited, for what it wasn’t quite clear. A brief but intense stare-down occurred.

“Well?” the man in the hologram finally said, glaring at his combatant. “What are you waiting for? Go and fetch him.”

A look crossed the Doctor’s face, morphing in stages of complexity. It was puzzlement, it was confusion, it was realisation. And then, slowly, the delight of a cat who’d just found an injured bird to play with.

“The….Doctor…?” The woman in question mused, sounding puzzled. “The Doctor…” She tapped her fingers against her chin, and then smiled. “Sorry, nobody here by that name. Wrong number!” And she jabbed a button. The hologram disappeared.
The console began beeping again. The Doctor rolled her eyes at her friends and jabbed the comms again. “Cannibal Pete’s tanning salon and grill; you toast em, we roast em.”

The same man appeared, looking a bit less composed. The Doctor poked her fingers through his hologramatic head.

“Would you stop that!” he blustered. “Look, is the man known as The Doctor there or not?”

“Sorry, not in,” the Doctor said, looking very amused now.

The man huffed. “Will he be back anytime soon?”

“I’d say it’s not likely he will. Bye now.” She jabbed the button off again. It immediately started beeping, but she ignored it to stare at the little blinking light, drumming fingers on the console.

Ryan was in stitches on the floor by now, and Yaz struggling not to follow. Graham just looked bemused. “Aren’t you the Doctor, though?”

“I am the Doctor,” the Doctor replied with a nod and a warm smile at her friend, then jerked a thumb at the console. “Not my fault they don’t recognise me.”

She was definitely having fun with this.

The beeping was really starting to get annoying. “Doctor,” Yaz pled, “Put him out of his misery already, please?”

The Doctor sighed, but jabbed the comms button once again. The hologram reappeared with a glitchy little fizzle. “Yes, what is it? I’m very busy.”

The Lord Castellan of wherever the heck Gallifrey was, glowered at her. “I’m not talking to some pet human about things your tiny mind can barely comprehend. Now put the Doctor on the line, and leave us.”

“Oooo,” winced Ryan, Yaz, and Graham in sotto chorus.

The Doctor blinked. “Did you just - did he just say I had a tiny mind?” She demanded of her friends, incredulous, and straightened up. Suddenly she wasn’t the Doctor, their fun-loving alien friend; she was someone every bit as imperious as the Lord Castellan, matching the Castellan’s glower with a mild gaze and a straight back.

When she spoke, her tone was ice.

“And for that matter, what makes you think insulting my friends will gain you any favours, Lord Castellan?”

There was an echo in the title, melodic and sharp, and the humans listening knew it had been said in a language unknown to their ears, helpfully guided to English by the TARDIS. For the little hologramatic man, he turned a shade of pale that was reserved for sparkly vampires in teenage fantasy drivel and hastily began stammering.

“My Lord Doctor - Lord President - sorry, Lady President, I didn’t - this regeneration isn’t on record, I hadn’t realised-”

The Doctor let him babble, arms crossed over her chest, and then sighed. “Castellan!” He shut up. “What was the message?”
“Oh, er, um...” he floundered, fumbling something out of hologram, and then read from a thing that looked like an e-book. “The High Council requires your return to deal with, um -” he said something that went untranslated and that made Yaz’s brain want to tip sideways and take her body with it.

Whatever it meant, the Doctor blinked, frowned, and then said, with incredulity, “You need me to handle that?”

“Well, er,” the Castellan said, eloquently. “You...do have the most experience?”

The Doctor jabbed the comms off without a reply. When it started beeping again, she reached under the panel and yanked a few wires and a bit that looked, to Ryan, to be fairly important. The beeping stopped.

“Right, that’s sorted,” she said, tossing the bits over her shoulder and turning back to her friends with a hand-clap, jovial once again. “Who’s up for Florana?”

The humans just looked at her.

“Pet humans?” Yaz repeated, irritated.

“Lord President?” Graham echoed, faintly.

“Milliways Steak House,” Ryan said, and lapsed back into demented giggles. “Oh, I gotta remember that one.”

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