Summary

Charlotte Williams is perfectly human, thank you very much. Well, she WAS perfectly human. Once. Sort of. Who would have thought her life would change so much after her best friend’s work got blown up? Certainly not her. Adventure, around every corner and a discovery that would change who she was. Literally. Oc/9th Doctor (friendship) and eventual OC/10th, 11th, 12th, 13th Doctor.
This is my first ever DW fic and whilst creative criticism is welcome, I ask that your comments not be rude or offensive. There probably will be spelling mistakes in here because, although I try my best to pick up on them all, I'm not always successful at finding them. Now, because of how long it generally takes me to write, proof-read, and edit a chapter, I will not be giving a definite time for when I will be posting chapters. Whilst my Oc and the Doctor will be kinda-friends pretty quickly, any actual romance will be developed over time and I guess that would make this a slow-burn. Some things will change, others won't but this is fanfiction and I am allowing my imagination to run wild.

If you like what you're reading please don't forget to give Kudos and please don't hesitate to leave me a comment and tell me what you think.

P.S. POV will change quite frequently in my story. Just thought I'd warn you all.

P.P.S. I obviously don't own Doctor Who and credit must be given to those who rightfully deserve it. I do own Charlotte and any other OC's I may create in the future.

Charlotte Williams will be played by Katherine McNamara. For now.
Rose Part I

_I should have stayed in bed._ Those six little words would become my mantra over the years, especially in particularly stressful times. Had I stayed in bed instead of rushing to Rose the minute she called me, babbling about some man disappearing after blowing up her shop, I never would have been dragged on these adventures. I never would have been threatened more times than I can count. I never would have lost my best friend – okay, maybe I would have but at least I wouldn't have been there to witness it; not that that made it any better. I never would have encountered aliens who wanted to destroy my planet. I never would have died.

Then again, had I stayed in bed like my body had demanded that I do, I never would have seen the stars as I had. I never would have gone on amazing adventures and visited beautiful planets. I never would have met the people who came into my life and ended up meaning the world to me. I never would have met him, and I could never regret meeting him. Not the Doctor. Not my Doctor.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. In order for you to know how my story ends, we must first see how it begins. And it all begins in my small London flat; more precisely, in my bed.

I couldn't even remember the last time I had gotten such a restful sleep. Wait, that's a lie; I can certainly remember it. I was still a kid, you know? Old enough to complain about having to go to bed so early because I was 'a big girl now', but young enough that I would be yawning as I said it and completely ruin the effect of said words. I think I was eight. Could have been nine.

Whatever, that doesn't really matter. What matters is the fact that I was rudely awoken from my blissful sleep by my Nokia's generic ringtone. In my scramble to get my phone, I leaned just a bit too far over the edge of my bed and hit the floor with a hard thump and a litany of curses that would make my poor grandmother want to wash my mouth out with soup.

"Whattayawant?" I grumbled after pressing the green call button, holding the black Nokia to my ear as I rested my cheek on the cold floorboard beneath me. My eyes fluttered closed, fighting to return to the realm of sleep no matter where my body was currently perched. My blankets had fallen with me and I was tempted to just curl into a ball and go back to sleep.

"Charlie!" Rose's voice screeched in my ear, making my eyes fly open, my body shoot up, and my hands scramble for the phone I was about to drop in my moment of surprise. I could still hear Rose yelling as my fingers managed to get a grip on the very edge of the phone and I hurriedly put it back to my ear, "...and they were alive, Charlie! He pulled its arm right off and then proceeded to blow the shop up!"

I blinked owlishly, what the hell was she on about? Who pulled who's arm off? What shop was blown up? "Rose, are you on drugs? Do I need to be worried?" I sighed, rubbing the bridge of my nose.

"What?" Rose questioned dumbly before she was shouting again, "this is serious, Charlie!"

"You said the same thing when you were sixteen and you told me you broke your finger but it was just your damn fingernail!" I growled, stomping into my tiny bathroom and stubbing my toe on the doorframe. "Bloody hell," I hissed, hobbling the rest of the way to the sink below the bathroom mirror. "You also said the same thing when you and Mickey-Mouse started dating, and I still think
you two are pulling a fast one on me."

"We've been dating for two years!" Rose exclaimed and I could just picture her throwing her free hand in the air as she glared at her phone.

"Pranks don't have a time limit," I retorted snidely.

I hear Rose let out a scream of frustration before she's talking again. "Look," she begins, her voice thick and suddenly I'm more alert than I was a moment ago, "I'm scared, Charlie, something's happening and…" she took in a ragged breath, "…and I need you."

"I'll be there in ten minutes," I answered immediately, hanging up the phone before bolting out of my bathroom. I had planned on showering but that was going to have to wait, Rose needed me and I promised her when we were younger that I'd always be there.

I didn't even bother changing really, I simply threw a pair of sweat pants over my underwear and a black hoodie over my camisole. Socks and shoes were next before I scraped my hair into a messy bun, grabbed my keys, and bolted out the door.

My apartment wasn't far from Rose and Jackie's and the trip was cut in half by the fact I was sprinting as fast as I possibly could. Occasionally, I would jostle a few people here and there, but I simply kept moving, ignoring their comments in favour of reaching my best friend.

Using the spare key Jackie had given me when I was fifteen, I burst into their flat and rushed straight to Rose's room. I barely made it through the door before I was being tackled by a head of blonde hair. We fell to the ground in a pile of limbs but I could feel Rose's chest shaking and the wetness of tears against my neck so I ignored the pain shooting through my back from where I landed on the floor. "What happened?" I breathe, barely able to catch my breath after running a few blocks, "are you okay?" I pull her away from me and check her over with my hands and eyes, "are you hurt?"

"I-I-I…" The words just don't want to come out and I pull her closer to me in another hug.

"Sh," I whisper softly, trailing my fingers through her hair, "it's okay, we'll get through this together, yeah?" I feel her nod and pull back once more so that we can both stand. "Come on," I urge her, "I'll make you a cup of tea and you can tell me everything."

One hour and two cups of tea later and I'm ready to admit my friend just might have finally lost it. I mean, I thought she had two years ago when she began dating Mickey-Mouse, but now? Now she had reached a whole new level of crazy. Living dummies? A man clad in a leather jacket with a bomb in said jacket? Said man blowing up Rose's shop? Nope, she was bonkers.

Then she showed me the news report. The shop had really been blown up. Rose had almost died. I had almost lost one of the most important people in my life to some madman that went around pulling arms off of shop dummies and if I ever saw him I was gonna slap him good and proper.

Jackie had come in earlier, giving me a tight hug and a loving kiss on the forehead before she tried to convince Rose to get a job at Finches. I had snickered behind my cup of tea, smirking at my best friend when she turned to me with a glare.

When Jackie returned to her room a comfortable silence descends between me and Rose. Until we both heard scratching.

"I thought you guys were gonna nail that cat flap down," I commented, taking another mouthful of my tea as I eyed the door to the kitchen curiously.
"Mum said she was gonna do it," Rose huffed, getting up from the kitchen table and leaving to go down the hall.

There was silence, then Rose was chastising Jackie, then I heard her squeak and suddenly she was rushing back into the room. "It's him!" she exclaimed, grabbing my wrist and yanking me from my chair, my cup crashing to the ground and spilling the remainder of my tea.

"Rose!" I hissed, "do you know how much that tea costs?"

"Stop liking such expensive tea then!" she retorted, "he's here, Charlie!"

"Who?!"

"The man who blew up the shop!"

I paused, only a metre from the door, something cold filling my chest as I forcibly restrain the shiver that threatens to take over me. There was a madman out front of my friend's apartment. A madman, that less than twenty-four hours ago, blew up said best friends work. "Don't open the door! We should call the police," I told Rose as she moved to open the door.

This made her pause. She turned to me, her eyebrows furrowed, "why?"

I rolled my eyes and looked at her with an expression that told her exactly how stupid I thought that question was. "Oh, I don't know," I begin smarmily, "maybe because the madman who blew up the shop you work at is currently standing out front of your apartment?" Rose's expression didn't change and I face-palmed before looking back at her with a glare. "What if he followed you?" I hissed, "what if he's here to kill you because you saw his face and he doesn't want any witnesses to what he did last night?"

"He's the one who got me out of the building before he blew it up," Rose answered.

"Oh," I gasp, in mock relief, "well then, that makes it all just peachy doesn't it?" Her eyes narrow at my sarcasm but I continue, undeterred. "You know what? Invite him in, I'll make him a cup of tea and we can all discuss the finer details of blowing up a shop! Do you think he takes sugar in his tea?" I sass, my hands planted firmly on my hips, "maybe he's a honey kinda guy?"

Even with my warning, Rose opens the door, grabs the man by his leather jacket, and hauls him into her apartment. My arms are crossed over my chest and my eyes are narrowed as I look at the man standing in front of me. He's older than I imagined, when Rose said leather jacket I was picturing someone around my age or a little older, maybe covered in tattoos and had a piercing or two. I didn't expect a man who looked like he was in his forties, had a buzz cut, and ears that made me instantly think of Dumbo. I squashed my lips into a thin line to suppress the giggle at the mental image of this man flying about the apartment, his ears flapping wildly around his head.

"Who are you then?" he asked when his eyes finally landed on me.

I huffed, turning on the balls of my feet as I grabbed Rose's wrist and practically stomped down the hall with my best friend in tow.

"Charlie!" Rose exclaims, trying to tug on my arm.

"Who's here then?" I hear Jackie call from the room.

"Dumbo decided to pay us a visit today while he's on break from the circus," I grunt as I walk past her room.
"What?" Rose and Jackie asked.

"Oi!" the man exclaimed from somewhere behind us, his footsteps following us into the living room as I finally dropped Rose's hand and continued on into the kitchen.

The man enters the kitchen, his arms folded over his jacket as he glares at me. "Who are you?" he asks again, not too nicely either, I'm just saying.

"None of your business," I retort, my own hands folded over my own jacket.

"This is Charlotte."

"Rose!"

"What?!

I roll my eyes and gesture wildly in the man's direction, "don't give the madman my name! It's bad enough he knew your name!"

"Charlotte? Nice name," the man mumbled.

"Call me Charlotte and I'll slap you," I growl, my eyes narrowing further. "Get rid of him," I tell Rose, "I'm gonna clean up this mess and hopefully when I'm done the world will have righted itself and everything will go back to normal. We will not have a madman standing in the apartment as if we had invited him over for tea and biscuits and you," I pointed at the man, who was watching me with highly amused eyes, "will not kill my best friend because she witnessed you blow up a shop!"

"Wait, what?" he asked, taking a step forward, his eyebrows furrowed.

"Stop!" I shout, making him and Rose jump. I waggle my finger at him, "not one step closer, mister! Not. One. More. Step!"

The man looked me up and down before he turned to Rose, "is she always like this?" he questioned, pointing in my direction and acting like I couldn't bloody hear him.

Rose shrugged, "usually she would have slapped you by now," she replied, "she's being really nice right now. Enough of that though," Rose continued when it looked like the man was gonna continue asking questions, "you. Me. Living room. You're gonna tell me exactly what's going on."

I mumble to myself as I kneel on the ground and pick up the small piece of the broken cup. This day couldn't get any weirder. Right?

Crash!

Spoke too soon! I jump from my spot on the ground, quickly throw the cup pieces in the trash, and run into the living room where I see the man standing over Rose who is on the couch with a plastic arm covering her face. "Oi!" I yell at the man, picking up the umbrella Jackie always managed to trip over. I rush over to the two of them and begin hitting the man as hard and fast as I can with the umbrella. "Let go of her!" I yell, still whacking him wherever I can reach.

"Ow!" I hear him exclaim, "stop hitting me! I'm trying to help her!"

I whack him again, this time the umbrella connects with his head. A string of words that I can't even begin to decipher stream from his lips before he reaches into his pocket and pulls out a small silver device with a blue tip. He flashes it at the arm, the device makes a whirring sound, and
suddenly he's stumbling back.

He knocks into me and we both fall to the ground in a heap.

"Get off me!" I wheeze, trying to crawl out from beneath his hulking body. Finally, the man gets off me and I turn over onto my stomach before making my way to my feet. "God, I thought the jacket just made you look bigger!" I huff as I gingerly rub my sore chest, still pointing the umbrella at the man with my free hand.

"Are you calling me fat?" he questions, obviously insulted.

I snort, "if the shoe fits," I mutter, earning myself another glare from the man.

"You're not a very nice person, you know that?"

"I know," I retort smugly, smirking at him.

"You're infuriating!" he exclaims, throwing his hands in the air.

"Thank you," I reply.

"It wasn't a compliment!"

"Sure, it wasn't."

"Can you two stop flirting and tell me what the hell just happened?!"

"Your friend attacked me!" the man began, obviously choosing to ignore the flirting comment.

I huffed, "you attacked Rose!"

"I was saving her!"

"Didn't look like it!"

"Well, not everything is how it looks, Charlotte!"

Whack!

"What was that for?!" the man yelled as he rubbed at his head where I had just hit him with the umbrella.

I smirked, though my eyes were narrowed at him once more, "don't. Call. Me. Charlotte!"

"Then what should I call you?!"

"ENOUGH!"

Whack! Whack!

We both turned to Rose with narrowed eyes, our hands rubbing our heads. The blonde was holding up the plastic arm she had just hit us with, her own eyes narrowed but something else shining in them as she gazed between the two of us.

Rose took a step back and almost fell back on the couch, "uh," she began, opening and closing her mouth as she tried to find something to say, "this is the Doctor!"
"I rolled my eyes, Rose never was good at coming up with something on the spot. Then what she told me registered and I turned back to the man with an incredulous look. "The Doctor?" I ask.

"Hello," he smiles smugly, wiggling his fingers at me like a weirdo.

"The Doctor? The Doctor of what?"

"Just, The Doctor," he answers.

I huff, "right, sorry," I reply, rolling my eyes, again, "how silly of me? I mean, it's perfectly natural for someone to be called just The Doctor. I take back what I said earlier about calling the police, Rose."

"Really?" she questioned.

I nod, "yup, I think this one escaped from a loony bin and we should contact the hospital instead." I turned back to 'The Doctor' and smiled sweetly at him, "now, sweetie, do you remember the name of the actual Doctor treating you?"

He glared at me and I could hear Rose trying to stifle her laughs. My smile fell as I turned back to Rose and the plastic arm she was still holding. "He didn't hurt you, did he?" I question, my eyes scanning her as I had earlier.

Rose gives me a soft smile and shakes her head. "He really was just trying to help, Charlie," she assured me, "the arm attacked him and then attacked me when I tried to help."

My God, they were both completely bonkers. "The arm attacked you?" I asked slowly.

"Piece of an Auton," Dumbo, because there was no way I was calling this man 'The Doctor', said from where he stood beside me.

"Okay," I began, still clutching the umbrella, "let's say I believe you. What the hell is an Auton and why did it attack you?"

"No time for that," Dumbo replied as he pushed passed me and Rose, "I've got to go."

"Bye!" I yell, happy we were obviously done with the delusional man.

"Hold on a minute!" Rose yelled, running after Dumbo.

I groan loudly, hitting my forehead against the umbrella. "Don't follow," I mutter to myself, "don't follow. This has nothing to do with you. Don't follow. Don't follow. Don't follow… Damn it!"

Dropping the umbrella on the couch, I book it out of the apartment, chasing after Rose and Dumbo who were already on the first floor and out of the building by the time I reached the stairs. By the time I pushed open the doors of the apartment block, Dumbo and Rose were standing in the street, holding hands and looking intensely at one another.

"If this is some weird marriage proposal, she respectfully declines."

I pulled Rose away from Dumbo who looked down at me with annoyance and a very small trace of amusement.

"Can I come with you?" Rose asked out of nowhere and I turned to look at her incredulously.

"You're kidding, right?" I questioned, "I know Jackie gave you the talk about going anywhere with
strangers, Rose, and Dumbo is by far the strangest person I've ever met."

"Oi! Are you just gonna keep insulting me whenever we're in the same vicinity as each other?" Dumbo asked, folding his arms over his chest and glaring at me.

"I don't plan on making this a regular occurrence so the answer would be no."

Dumbo and I looked at each other, both of us refusing to be the first person to look away. When Rose coughed, we both looked away and towards her as she glanced between us amusedly, that look back in her eyes.

Dumbo shook his head and looked back at Rose, his eyes turning stern as he gazed at her. "Remember what I said, Rose Tyler. Forget me," he told her before his eyes turned back to me, "you too."

"Don't tell me what to do," I huffed, folding my arms over my chest as I gave him a narrow-eyed glare, "who the hell do you think you are?"

"I'm The Doctor," he answered smugly, like that suddenly gave him the right to order me about.

"Well, I'm a Williams, and we don't take orders from anyone!"

"Charlie," Rose scolded softly.

"No, Rose," I interrupted as I looked at Dumbo, "please, just do us a favour and go away. Twice Rose has run into you and both times she's almost died or gotten hurt. I won't lose her, not for anything."

He looked at me like he'd never seen me before, his eyes studying every inch of my face and settling on my eyes. I had no doubt they reflected the fear I felt for my best friend and I watched his body sag as his eyes looked into mine. "Goodbye, Rose Tyler and Charlie Williams," he finally spoke and I felt my body relax.

"Doctor," Rose tried but I shook my head as I grabbed her arm and tugged her gently towards her apartment.

We had just turned the corner when there was a large whoosh of air and Rose suddenly turned and ran back towards the area we had just left. I followed her closely and stopped, my mouth gaping a little at what I saw. Well, more like what I didn't see.

"Wasn't there a blue police box there a moment ago?" I asked Rose, turning to see her shaking her head before she turned and began heading back to her apartment.

I went to follow her but paused for a moment to look over my shoulder where the police box had been. A woman stood where it once was, her abundant curls blowing wildly around her face. She didn't seem bothered by this, however, as she stood with her hands in her coat pockets. She was looking at me and when our eyes met, she grinned widely before placing a finger to her lips. Even from where I stood, I could see her wink before she turned and started walking away, meeting a man at the edge of the park.

His own hands were in a large trench coat and, when he noticed I was looking at him, he grinned and waved. I don't know what possessed me to do it but I waved back.

"Charlie, you coming?"
I looked to see Rose waiting impatiently for me and threw another look at the strange couple only to frown when they were gone. Shaking my head, I quickly turned around and ran towards my best friend, grabbing her hand as we ran back to her apartment.

Could this day get any stranger?

He entered the Tardis, frowning when the door seemed to stick, like she didn't want him to leave just yet. He threw a look over his shoulder and watched as Rose was dragged off by her infuriating friend. The woman had a mouth, that was for sure, and yet, she had made him feel something other than crippling guilt and sadness for the first time in a long time.

True, the emotion had been indignation but he had felt a bit of amusement too. It had been a while since someone had gone toe to toe with him in a battle of wits. She was interesting. Interesting and infuriating.

As he walked into the Tardis, she seemed to hum in displeasure as he walked to the console and prepared to leave. He frowned as one of the levers he needed stuck and he had to put more force behind it to get it to move.

"What's wrong with you today?" he asked her as the familiar sound of the Tardis dematerialising reached his ears.

Another displeased hum was all he got in reply as they vanished.

Rose was a tad obsessive; and by a tad, I mean completely obsessive. After Dumbo had disappeared, Rose had dragged me back to her apartment where I made us another cup of tea and resisted the urge to roll my eyes as she went on and on about Dumbo.

Now? Now we were entering Mickey-Mouse's apartment for a cuppa. Well, Rose was gonna have a cuppa, apparently, I wasn't allowed to have any considering it hypes me up and makes me a little crazy. Nan used to laugh about it all the time, telling me I reminded her of an old friend who was just as crazy without the coffee.

Mr Smith had been a big part of my childhood, Nan and Pop telling me all kinds of stories about him and their shenanigans when they were younger. I had aspired to live a life half as interesting as my grandparents and Mr Smith. Not that I had succeeded as of yet but I was still young.

"Hey, Mickey-Mouse," I grin as we enter Mickey's apartment and living room, "lazy day?"

"Don't you go judging me, Char," Mickey grumbled playfully, pointing a finger in my direction as he gave Rose a kiss.

I held my hands up in mock surrender, winking at him as he grinned and gave me a hug. "Coffee?" he asked Rose. I opened my mouth and he pointed at me again, "no coffee for you."

I pouted, folding my arms over my chest as I glared at him.

"Yeah," Rose chuckled, poking my bottom lip playfully, making me grin, "only if you wash the mug. And I don't mean rinse, I mean wash. Can I use your computer?"

Mickey scoffed, "yeah, any excuse to get in the bedroom," he teased.

"Get your mind out of the gutter," Rose laughed, "Charlie's coming in with me anyway so what
could we possibly do?"

Mickey got a far-off look in his eyes and Rose and I rolled our own as I tossed a cushion I'd picked up off the sofa at his head. "Really, Mickey?" I groaned.

"What?" he asked innocently as Rose disappeared into the room, "don't read my emails!"

"Why? You hidin' something, Mickey-Mouse?" I asked as I leaned against the door frame, my eyebrow raised.

"Not like that, Char," Mickey sighed, knowing how protective I was of Rose.

"Good." I replied simply as I turned and entered the room. I walked over to Rose, who had already booted up the computer, and groaned as I saw what she was looking for. "This is a little stalkerish, don't you think?" I asked as she continued to research 'The Doctor', "just forget about him, Rose, that's what he told you to do."

"Since when do you listen to what someone tells you to do?" Rose asked incredulously.

"Since I didn't want to know him in the first place!" I exclaimed, "you can practically smell trouble on that guy and here you are, trying to find out more about him!"

"Wasn't it you that said you wanted a little more excitement in your life?" Rose questioned.

"Yeah, excitement not potentially life-threatening situations."

"What would Angel do?" Rose questioned and I felt myself deflate.

"Don't bring Angel into this, Rose," I growled.

Rose turned away from the search engine and looked at me, "your Nan used to tell us those stories about John Smith and his Angel, you loved her, said you wanted to grow up to be just like her. Would she do what she was told and forget a mysterious stranger who didn't seem to make any sense?"

I knew she had me there and by the smug grin on her face, Rose knew she had me there too.

Sighing heavily, I ordered her to budge over on the small chair and squeezed on with her. "What are we looking at?" I questioned as Rose clicked on a link and a fuzzy picture of Dumbo popped up.

"We contact Clive," Rose answered, removing her phone to dial the number. She left the room to make the call and I found myself staring at the picture with a frown on my face. Something didn't seem right about it. Why was it in greyscale? Why was it so fuzzy? And why were the clothes so dated? The picture had been blown up to only feature Dumbo but a woman's hat was visible and I could tell it wasn't something recent.

I removed my own phone and quickly dialled a familiar number, cringing internally as I thought about my next phone bill.

"Charlotte?"

I smiled as my Nan's Scottish accent filled my ears. I had picked up a slight accent from living with her my whole life but there were times where I was jealous of my Nan's accent and wished I sounded more like her.
"Hey, Nan," I replied, "did I wake you? What time is it in New York?"

"I was already up, Sweetie," my Nan replied, "still not used to sleeping on my own, I guess. You'd think after three years without your Pop, I'd be used to it by now."

My Nan and Pop had moved back to New York a few years ago and Jacky had allowed me to live with her and Rose when I had been unwilling to leave. Nan had signed the correct papers, knowing that, while we'd miss each other terribly, she and Pop were getting on in years and I really needed someone closer to my own age.

Growing up in America had been hard, I hadn't sounded like the other kids there and never really fit in. When we had moved to London for Pop to get the treatment he had needed at the time, I had met Rose and grown closer to her. It had been the first time in a very long time where I had felt like I truly belonged and I hadn't wanted it to end.

"I have a question," I continued, shaking my head to clear it of its previous thoughts, "you said you and Pop did a lot of travelling when you were younger, right?"

"Yup, we travelled the universe together."

I smiled at how dramatic my Nan could be sometimes but didn't correct her. "On your travels, did you ever hear of someone called 'The Doctor'?" I was hoping she'd tell me she had no idea who I was talking about and I could tell Rose the photo was likely fake. Those clothes weren't recent but the man in the photo couldn't possibly be the Doctor. could it?

I heard a plate smash and my heart jolted, "Nan? Nan, are you okay?!"

"I'm fine," my Nan huffed, "why are you asking about The Doctor?"

"So, you do know him?" I asked, excited to get some more information on him.

"Know him? I've met him," she stated proudly, "back in the day."

I frowned, "Nan," I began softly, "you couldn't have met him back in the day. He's barely forty-five years old. Have you been taking your medication?"

"Don't you take that tone with me, Charlotte Williams," my Nan scolded and I cringed at the use of my first and last name. It was a warning, had she used my full name it would mean I was in a lot of trouble.

"Sorry, Nan," I apologised softly.

"Now, why are you asking about The Doctor?"

I sighed heavily, feeling a headache coming on, "we sort of met him today."

"We? You and Rose?"

"Well, Rose met him the other night when he blew up her shop-

"-typical," I heard my Nan laugh before she was telling me to continue.

"And then he came to her apartment today and there was this arm that they claimed attacked them. Which is silly, right? Plastic arms don't just go around attacking people. It's not possible."

"What did I tell you when you were younger, Lottie?"
I rolled my eyes, "everything is possible and if it isn't, it will be, you just have to be crazy enough to make it that way."

"Exactly, and do you know who told me that?"

"Angel?"

"Angel," my Nan agreed, "one of the bravest, strongest, and craziest women I'd ever met. So, you better believe a plastic arm attacking someone is possible, because a lot of things are about to change."

"What are you talking about?" I questioned sceptically.

"I can't say any more than that," my Nan replied, "but, Lottie?"

"Yeah, Nan?"

"He can be trusted. The Doctor, I mean. He's a good man."

I didn't want to tell Nan that I doubted we were talking about the same man, because the man I had met didn't give me the warm and fuzzy's. Instead, he made me want to get as far from him as possible and keep Rose away from him too. I didn't say this, of course, because I had only ever heard my Nan sound so soft when she was speaking about Mr Smith and Angel.

"It doesn't matter," I told my Nan, "he left earlier today and told me and Rose to forget about him."

I heard my Nan snort on the other end of the phone, "well, that's gonna be a problem."

"What? Why?"

"Spoilers," Nan laughed and I rolled my eyes, "just trust your heart, Lottie, it's never led you wrong before."

"Okay, I love you, Nan."

"I love you, Sweetie, say hello to Rose for me. And don't worry, I'll be fine."

My eyebrows furrowed, "what are you talking about?"

"Bye, Charlotte."

And then she hung up.

I stared at my phone for a moment, unbelieving that my Nan had just hung up on me after being as cryptic as she just was. She had spoken like we weren't going to be talking for a while and it concerned me a little bit. Did she think I was going somewhere? Was she going somewhere?

Rose walked in before I could go stir-crazy thinking about it.

"I rang that Clive guy and he said we could meet him today," she told me as I placed my phone back into my pocket.

"I'm not going, Rose," I stated simply.

"What?"
"You heard me," I replied, " whoever that guy is, he's dangerous, I can feel it. I don't want to be
anywhere near him and neither should you."

"Aren't you even a little bit curious?" Rose questioned.

I nodded my head, "I am. I have millions of questions for that man but that doesn't mean I'm going
to put myself or you in danger to learn them."

"Charlie."

"No, Rose, I'm not going. If you really have to go, take Mickey."

Rose huffed and glared at me before she stomped out of the room. I sat heavily on Mickey's bed,
running my fingers through my hair before I gave the tangled strands a small tug. I didn't like
making Rose upset with me. Nan had told me to follow my heart but it was telling me I could trust
a man I'd never met before today. No. For once I wasn't going to let my heart or gut make these
decisions for me. My brain was the only part of me being logical and it told me to stay as far away
from that man as possible.

"You okay, Char?"

I looked up at the sound of Mickey's voice and saw him looking at me from where he was leaning
against the frame of his door.

"She pissed?" I asked instead.

"Just a bit." I groaned. "Should I be worried about where she wants me to take her?" he asked me
seriously, taking a step forward before he crouched in front of me.

"I don't know," I told him honestly, "something doesn't seem right about everything happening
right now. Keep an eye on her, will you?"

"You don't even have to ask," he told me truthfully.

I stood up and gave him a tight hug. We made our way out of his apartment and down to the street
where his car was parked. Rose was already in the car and turned her head away when she saw me.
I frowned but shook it off as I gave Mickey another hug goodbye and watched him get in the car.
When the car disappeared around the corner, I shoved my hands in my pocket and started walking
back towards my apartment.

As I walked, I thought about maybe calling in sick to work but knew I couldn't. The staff was
already spread thin at the hospital with Maureen having given birth the previous day and I needed
the extra money anyway so I could finish getting the repairs on my motorcycle so I wouldn't have
to keep walking everywhere.

I was a block from home when I heard the same noise I had heard this morning when Dumbo had
vanished. It was coming from the alley up ahead and I groaned but kept walking, pointedly
refusing to look down the alley.

Almost past it, I was suddenly knocked over by a hard body. I groaned as my butt hit the ground
and pain shot up my back.

"Sorry," a voice breathed, without making a move to help me up. He stayed out of the way of the
alley but I had fallen right into view of it and saw Dumbo's mouth drop when he saw me half
laying on the ground a few feet from him.
I looked up to see who had knocked me over but no one was there. Great. Now I'm going crazy. Getting to my feet, I dusted myself off and grumbled as I saw the torn flesh of my palm. I was going to have to clean it but it wasn't anything major. I had just stepped in the direction to head home, still pointedly ignoring the man in the alley, when a callused hand grabbed my arm and dragged me into the alley.

"Hey!" I yelled as I tried to get out of his grasp, "let go of me!"

He roughly pulled me toward his blue police box and when I saw our destination, I planted my feet firmly and roughly tugged my arm out of his grip. He turned to look at me, his grey eyes storming before he hissed as my foot connected with his shin.

"What was that for?!" he yelled, his temper apparently getting the better of him.

"What the hell do you mean 'what was that for'?! That was for manhandling me!" I yelled back before I kicked him in the other shin, "and that's for my head start," I commented before I took off out of the alley, hearing him calling my name before the sound of him pursuing me reached my ears.

I picked up speed and sprinted to my apartment in the block over. I had lost Dumbo somewhere in the busy street but threw a quick look over my shoulder before I ran into my apartment, just to make sure he didn't know which building I had gone into.

My pace didn't slow down until I was up the stairs and safely locked inside my apartment. Only then did I stop, leaning against the locked door as I tried to gulp in air. Damn, I needed to start running again.

I shredded my jacket as I made my way into my room, planning to have a small nap before I had to get ready for work.

The moment my head hit my lumpy pillow, the exhaustion took over and I fell into a restless sleep.

River shook her head as Jack approached her. "Did you really need to be so rough on her?" she scolded him teasingly.

"You know I did," he replied with a small frown, "didn't mean I wanted to do it."

She shook her head and placed a small kiss on his cheek, "I know you didn't, but it was necessary. We both know how stubborn she is and she told us she needed a push in his direction. How's Ianto?"

Jack grinned at the mention of his husband, "he's good, wants to know if you're all coming around for dinner tonight?"

"I'm afraid I'm needed elsewhere," River replied with a wink, "Angel and I are going to talk The Doctor into Solar Wave Surfing."

Jack shook his head, knowing what River and Angel were like when they got together. It only seemed to get worse the longer they knew each other too. He actually felt sorry for The Doctor sometimes, especially whenever those two were anywhere near each other. And Solar Wave Surfing? They both had to be absolutely crazy. Which he knew they were. The Doctor was going to have an impossible time trying to tell them no and Jack imagined they'd do it even if he didn't cave in to their request. After all, there wasn't anything River Song and Angel couldn't get when they worked together.
And sometimes that was utterly terrifying.

The Tardis had been acting up all day and The Doctor couldn't figure out why for the life of him. She kept materialising in places he hadn't wanted to go and didn't seem to want to track the signal he was trying to track.

When she suddenly materialised somewhere else, The Doctor glared at the console. "What's so important about an alley?" he questioned her, only getting an impatient hum in return.

He huffed but turned and made his way to the door anyway. What he saw made him freeze, his mouth falling open. It was Charlotte, half laying on the ground with a frown on her face as she looked at some unseen person. This wasn't possible. He didn't run into the same person more than once. Those kinds of coincidences didn't exist with him.

She looked over and he saw her eyes widen as they met his before she muttered something under her breath and quickly stood up. He had already begun approaching her and grabbed her upper arm just as she was going to walk off. He wanted answers and he was going to get them.

"Hey!" she yelled as she tried to get out of his grasp, "let go of me!"

He pulled her towards the Tardis, a little more roughly than he had intended to, but was halted when her arm suddenly disappeared from his grasp. He turned to look at her, his temper rising as he glared down at her. He wanted answers. How did he find her again? Was she the reason the Tardis was acting up? Why did she seem like she hated him, ever since they'd met?

He hissed as her foot connected with his shin, pain shooting up his leg as his temper flared. He had noticed just how quick this regeneration was to anger but he didn't care at the moment.

"What was that for?!" he yelled, his temper getting the better of him.

"What the hell do you mean 'what was that for'? That was for manhandling me!" she yelled back, her light Scottish accent deepening at her own anger. He saw her brown eyes narrow, ablaze with her own temper and found himself momentarily struck by the storm he saw brewing in them. The look was so familiar and he felt a pang in his hearts before he quelled the blossoming thoughts.

He hissed again as she kicked him in the other shin, "and that's for my head start," she commented before she took off out of the alley, her red hair flowing behind her and disappearing as she turned the corner. He called for her as he took chase, following her one block before he lost her in the crowd of people. He growled as he looked around and couldn't pinpoint where she could have gone. She could have run into any of the buildings but he didn't have the time to check them for her.

_I won't be seeing her again anyway_, he thought to himself. Twice was rare, three times was downright impossible.

That didn't stop him from stomping back to the Tardis, his mood soured by the events of earlier. When he stepped into the Tardis alone, she seemed to hum sadly and he glared at her. "Was this your doing?" he asked, referring to earlier. She didn't answer him and he grumbled as he made his way back over to the console, he had no problem getting the Tardis to take him where he wanted this time.

He just had no idea it was because he would be seeing Charlotte again.
She was disappointed that her plans to get her Thief to take on the feisty redhead had failed. She had made sure to be as difficult as possible, not taking him where he wanted to go but where she knew he needed to go. It was important that the flower and her friend travelled with them. She had seen it. The flower would be important to her Thief but nowhere near as important as her tempered friend. The Phoenix would rise again and help her Thief more than he or she could possibly fathom. She would fix her Thief, restore a part of him he had thought he'd lost in the war. She would make sure of it.

The child of the TARDIS needed her too. She would do what was needed to save her child.

Her plan had failed once again, the Phoenix had not joined them, she had attacked her Thief instead. She knew she shouldn't find amusement in it but she saw everything that could come and knew this was not the only time the Phoenix would lose her temper with her Thief, nor would it be the last time her Thief would lose his temper with the Phoenix. They were both stubborn and hotheaded, but in the end, they were one another's salvation.

And she would do everything she could to make sure the future she saw happened.
It wasn't my alarm that woke me up, but the obnoxious ringing of my phone and the incessant vibrating as it rang in my pocket. My hands stung and I remembered I had forgotten to clean them and should do that as soon as I could. I removed my phone and brought it to my ear.

"If you have been kidnapped and are currently shoved in some creepy blue police box, I am going to be really pissed, Rose."

"Should I be worried, Miss Williams?"

I sat up instantly, cursing mentally, as my Boss' voice reached my ears. "Mrs Martin," I chirped with a nervous laugh, "sorry 'bout that, thought you were someone else."

"Obviously," was the older woman's reply and I could just see her rolling her too-large eyes. "I'm calling to inform you that your shift is going to start later than planned. I'm okay now, but I'll be short staffed later tonight and could really do with the help. Will this be a problem?" she questioned, though, it wasn't really one of those questions where you really had a choice and I sighed heavily.

"No," I replied, "that's fine. I can be in then."

She gave me the new time and I looked at the clock on my bedside table. My shift wouldn't be for another five hours. What was I going to do until then?

"Thank you, Charlotte," Mrs Martin told me sincerely, "I'll see you when you come in."

"Bye, Mrs Martin."

"See you soon, darlin'."

I dropped my phone on the bedside table and buried my head in my pillow with a groan. Twenty minutes of talking myself out of my comfy bed resulted in me showered and dressed in my scrubs as I paced around my apartment. My copy of Romeo and Juliet was on my coffee table but I was too bored to actually read it. Which made no sense. Not that it mattered because, after an hour of restlessly pacing, my Nokia rang again.

I made sure to check the caller I.D this time before I answered the phone.

"Rose? Where are you? Did you talk to that Clive fella? Is he holding you hostage? Do I need to call the cops?"

Rose laughed and I sighed with relief, she wasn't mad at me anymore.

"Yes, it's me. I'm heading towards that pizza place you like to go to, do you wanna meet up for dinner before your shift? I talked to Clive, the guy was a complete nutter. No, I'm not being held hostage and you don't need to call the cops. Did I cover everything?"

I smiled at my best friend, "you did. Pizza sounds good, I'll see you in a bit."

"Okay, Mickey's with me too, okay?"
I shrugged, not that she could see it, "that's okay, means he can pay for our food."

Rose laughed before telling me she would see me soon and hanging up the phone. I grabbed my duffel bag with a change of clothes and a few snack bars before I left my apartment, knowing I wouldn't be back tonight.

It didn't take me long to get to the pizza place Rose had been talking about and I walked in to see her and Mickey sitting at a table nearby. I froze, however, when I saw Mickey. He looked odd, with shiny skin and a creepy grin, I felt my gut churn uncomfortably. Had Rose not noticed that her boyfriend looks like a plastic barbie doll version of himself? Because it seemed pretty damn noticeable to me.

Rose saw me and waved me over, a small smile on her face. She stood when I approached the table and threw her arms around me. "I'm sorry," she mumbled, "I shouldn't have gotten angry at you."

"It's okay," I told her with a smile, "remember who my Nan is? I've seen a Scottish woman throw a tantrum and nothing scares me anymore."

That was a little lie but not too far from the truth. My Nan was downright terrifying when she was angry and my Pop had told me to be as quiet as possible and let her get it out of her system before shoving a bowl of fish fingers and custard in front of her. It was an odd combination, but my Nan always got this nostalgic smile on her face and it honestly didn't taste all that bad either so I never commented on how strange a combination it was.

"Good point," Rose laughed as we sat down. I scooted my chair away from Mickey, eyeing him warily as he continued to grin at Rose. "Do you think I should try the hospital?" Rose asked us, fiddling with her fork as she did, "Suki said they had jobs going on in the canteen."

I scrunched my nose up, "you're not some canteen lady, Rose, don't settle for those kinds of jobs if you know you won't be happy."

"Sounds like you just don't want to put up with me," Rose teased, "afraid I'll make you look bad in front of your nurse friends?"

I laughed at the absurdity of the statement and Rose chuckled too before she let out a heavy sigh, "I could do A levels. I don't know. It's all Jimmy Stone's fault. I only left school because of him. Look where he ended up?"

"In hospital with a busted jaw and nose?" I questioned with a smug smile.

Rose returned the smile, "mum chucked a fit when she had to bail you out of jail for that."

"Totally worth it," I replied without hesitation, and for what that asshole did to my friend he was lucky a busted jaw and nose was all he got. No one messed with the people I cared about and got away with it. No one.

"What do you think?" Rose asked, turning her attention to Mickey who had been watching us talk without saying a word. Which was odd because generally, you couldn't get Mickey to shut up. Believe me. I've tried.

"So, where did you meet this Doctor?" he asked and the question threw me off for a moment before my eyes narrowed.

"I'm sorry," Rose hissed, "wasn't I talking about me for a second?"
"Why the hell do you want to know anyway?" I asked, my body tensing as Mickey's gaze went to me. Sort of. Because it looked like his eyes were empty. Kinda like those creepy dolls, you'd find in an antique store.

"Because I recon it started back at the shop, am I right?" he continued his interrogation, ignoring mine and Rose's questions, "was he something to do with that?"

"No," Rose answered evasively.

"Come on," Mickey scoffed.

"She said no," I growled.

"Sort of."

"Rose!"

"What?" she questioned.

I shook my head, "he told us not to say anything!"

"It's Mickey, we can tell Mickey," she protested.

"I don't think that's Mickey."

She looked at me incredulously, "what do you mean, you don't think that's Mickey? Who else would it be?"

"Well, unless Mickey underwent several major plastic surgeries' since I last saw him, I'd say we're talking to his barbie look-a-like," I stated blithely, my eyes returning to Mickey and narrowing as he met my gaze. This Mickey gave me the creeps and I wanted to get myself and Rose far away from him.

"Don't be ridiculous," she scoffed.

"Me, ridiculous?" I questioned angrily, "says the woman who called me about walking shop dummies?"

"What was he doing at the store?" Mickey interjected.

"Shut up," I growled, my eyes darting between him and Rose, "this isn't Mickey. I don't know who the hell or what the hell he is but he's not Mickey-Mouse. How can you not see that?"

"What was he doing there?" Mickey continued and Rose and I turned to glower at him.

"I'm not going on about it, Mickey," Rose huffed, "Really, I'm not, because, I know it sounds daft, but I don't think it's safe. I think he might be dangerous."

"Hallelujah!" I crowed, "I mean, it only took you, what? A few hours alone to come to your senses?"

Rose glared at me but I didn't wither under her gaze and returned it with a glower of my own.

"But you can trust me, sweetheart. Babe, sugar, babe, sugar. You can tell me anything."

I looked at Mickey with a raised eyebrow and then returned my gaze to Rose who was looking at
her boyfriend, concern shining in her eyes. "I think your boyfriend is broken," I joked, trying to lighten the look in her eyes, "think we can mail him back and get you a replacement?"

Rose cracked a smile but it was gone the moment Mickey spoke up again.

"Tell me about the Doctor and what he's planning," he demanded, "and I can help you, Rose. Because that's all I really want to do, sweetheart, babe, babe, sugar, sweetheart."

"Why are you so interested in the Doctor?" I questioned, "and where is Mickey?"

"That is Mickey, Charlie!" Rose exclaimed before she turned her concerned gaze back to her boyfriend, "what're you doing that for?"

"Maybe he swallowed a broken record player?" I commented, earning a what the hell, Charlie look from Rose. I simply shrugged.

"Your champagne?" asked a waiter and I looked up only to pause as I spied Dumbo standing before me. His eyes widened when he saw me before he gave a small shake of his head and gestured towards Mickey with his eyes. I nodded, even as my eyebrows furrowed and I turned back to the conversation happening in front of me.

"We didn't order any champagne," Mickey said before he reached out and grabbed Rose's hand roughly.

"Hey!" I exclaimed, moving to pry his hand off of her when his other hand shot out and grabbed my wrist in a vice-like hold. Apparently, he was squeezing my wrist a lot harder than he was squeezing Rose's hand because she still looked concerned for him and not pissed at him for manhandling her like I was. "Let go of me, Mickey!" I shouted as I tried to tug my wrist free, cringing as I felt his cold fingers dig into my wrist painfully.

"Where's the Doctor?" Mickey asked and I resisted the urge to throw a look at Dumbo as Rose asked Mickey if something was wrong.

"What's wrong is I'm three seconds away from giving you a good slap if you don't let me go this instant!" I growled, still trying to tug my wrist free.

"I need to find out how much you know, so where is he?" Mickey demanded, everyone apparently deciding to ignore me at the moment.

"Timbuktu," I commented harshly.

"Doesn't anyone want this champagne?" Dumbo asked and I rolled my eyes, couldn't he just get to the damn point? Did everything need a build up with this guy?

"Look, we didn't order it," Mickey growled, looking up only to grin as he laid eyes on Dumbo, "ah. Gotcha."

"Are you going to do something now?" I asked Dumbo impatiently.

He was shaking the champagne bottle and turned his eyes to me, irritation and amusement flashing in them, "must you always be so bossy?"

"You think I'm bad, you should meet my Nan," I answered simply as I felt Mickey's hold on me loosen. I yanked my arm back and cradled my red wrist to my chest as I glared fiercely at my best friends' boyfriend.
"I'll give that a hard pass," Dumbo teased and I actually felt my lips tilt into a small smile at the comment, "anyway, don't mind me. I'm just toasting to the happy couple. On the house!"

Dumbo released the cage around the cork and I watched as it flew into Mickey's forehead and vanished inside of him.

"Gross," I said with a wrinkle of my nose as Mickey chews on the cork and then spits it out. "Has he always been able to do that?" I ask Rose, earning a glare from my best friend.

"What do you think?" she snapped before Mickey was turning his hand into a chopper. I grabbed Rose and hauled us both out of our chairs and away from the table as Mickey wrecks it. Rose's scream hurts my ear but I keep my grip on her as I back us away from Mickey as Dumbo rushes at him and grabs his head.

"What are you doing?" I yell. Is this man insane? He pulls Mickey's head right off, the body still moving around and wrecking things and suddenly the rest of the customers are screaming. "Well, I didn't see that coming," I say as I turn to a panicking Rose, "did you see that coming?"

"Don't think that's gonna stop me," the Mickey head says.

"See, even without a body you can't get Mickey to shut up," I tell Rose before I run over to the fire alarm and pull on it, "everyone out!"

"Out now!" Rose yells, finally getting over her shock, for now anyway, "get out! Get out! Get out!"

I turn back to Dumbo who is still holding the head as the body flails around. "Are you following me?" I ask, my hands on my hips.

"Me?" he asked indignantly, "I was about to ask you the same thing."

I snorted, "like I'd ever follow you."

Dumbo shook his head before he ran off towards the kitchen. I was about to run in the same direction as the other customers when Rose tugged harshly on my arm and led me in the direction Dumbo had gone. "Are you crazy?" I yelled as I ran to keep myself from getting dragged behind her, "he's dangerous, Rose. You said it yourself. So, why are we following him?!"

"He might know what happened to Mickey," Rose puffed as we ran through the kitchens as the body followed behind us.

We ran through the exit and Rose dropped my hand as Dumbo turned, removed his little silver device with the blue top, and pointed it at the door. It made the same whirring sound it had at the apartment and I heard the door lock.

"What is that?" I asked as Rose started pushing against the padlocked gate.

"Open the gate!" she cried frantically, "use that tube thing. Come on!"

"Sonic Screwdriver," Dumbo informed us proudly, holding up the little silver tube.

"That looks nothing like a screwdriver," I replied.

"Use it!" Rose screamed, still pushing against the gate.

"Nah," Dumbo replied, walking over to the blue police box, "tell you what, let's go in here. And what do you mean, it doesn't look like a screwdriver?" he asked, poking his head out the door and
"You have seen a screwdriver, right?" I question as I approach the box and stop just in front of it.

"What are you waiting for?" he asked impatiently.

I shrugged my shoulders, "little small, don't you think? And what's a wooden box going to do if that thing is managing to beat down a metal door?"

"Do you have to question everything?" he said as he rolled his eyes, "just get in, will you?"

"You can't hide inside a wooden box!" Rose yelled as Dumbo disappeared inside the blue box again, "it's going to get us! Doctor!"

I watched as Rose tried the gate once more before she ran for the police box. I grabbed her just before she could enter, "you remember all those times your mum told you not to get into a stranger's car?"

"This is a box, not a car," Rose replied, panic lacing her tone.

"I'm pretty sure the principle still applies," I say, even as she gets out of my grip and runs inside. I look back to the metal door, the Mickey imposer making pretty damn good work on it and feel my heart speed up even more than it already had. Rose was out of the box a moment later and I watched curiously as she ran around the box and stopped beside me, her eyes wide and disbelieving.

"It's not a sex dungeon, is it?" I ask, seeing the look on her face, "I did warn you not to go inside."

"Is everything a joke to you?" she countered, her voice high as the Mickey imposter smashes through the door, "just get in!"

She grabbed my wrist and tugged me inside the blue box as I replied. "I joke when I'm-" my mouth falls open as I look around the blue box, "-scared," I finish lamely as the door closes behind me.

My eyes scanned the room I was standing in, unbelieving of what I was seeing. It shouldn't have been possible. There was no way a box that small should be able to fit a room this big inside.

"Right," Dumbo said as I finally came back to the conversation, "where do you want to start?"

"Er, the inside's bigger than the outside?" Rose asked.

"Or is the outside smaller than the inside?" I questioned, looking at the brass hexagons on the walls. This place was magnificent. Magnificent and impossible.

"Yes."

I looked back at Dumbo, "to which one?"

"Both."

"It's alien," Rose commented.

"Yeah," Dumbo answered.

I smiled, "she's beautiful," I breathed, jumping when a gentle hum sounded out around us. "What was that?" I asked, looking back at Dumbo who was already watching me curiously.
"Are you alien?" Rose suddenly asked and my question was momentarily forgotten as I waited for Dumbo's reply.

"Yeah. Is that alright?"

"Depends," I answer before Rose, both of them turning to look at me as I move further into the room, "are you gonna probe us?"

Rose snorted and Dumbo rolled his eyes, though, I didn't miss how his lips twitched. "No," he answered, "I'm not going to probe you."

"Good enough for me," I shrugged, "Rose?"

"Yeah," Rose agreed, both of us earning a smile from Dumbo. It was nice, seeing him smile, he always looked so sad.

"It's called the Tardis," he continued, "this thing. S. That's Time and Relative Dimension in Space."

"Time travel's impossible," I stated simply.

Dumbo sent me a raised eyebrow, "you're in a box that is bigger on the inside-"

"-or smaller on the outside-"

"-and you think time travel is impossible?" Dumbo finished with an exasperated sigh.

"I'm sure there is a logical explanation for how this box is possible," I argued.

"There is," he nodded, "but do you know what it is?"

I was about to reply when Rose suddenly burst out crying. I quickly turned to my best friend and wrapped my arms around her as she buried her head in my neck and sobbed.

"That's okay," Dumbo went on, "culture shock. Happens to the best of us."

My eyes narrowed at him again. I seemed to do that a lot in his presence. "You're thick, you know that?" I hissed, "she isn't crying because of you or the Tardis."

"Did they kill him? Mickey? Did they kill Mickey? Is he dead?" Rose cried and I shushed her gently as I ran my fingers through her hair.

"Oh. I didn't think of that."

I rolled my eyes at his answer. "No shit," I growled, "I'm sure he's fine, Rosey. Okay?"

"You can't be sure of that, Charlie," Rose sniffled, "they copied him and he could be dead now. You pulled his head off," she said to Dumbo, her eyes red and beginning to puff, "and now you're just going to let him melt?"

I looked at the head to see it was indeed beginning to melt. This seemed to panic Dumbo as he ran around, pushing levers as the sound from earlier filled my ears. "What are you doing?" Rose asked as I let her go to hold onto the railing, hissing as I felt myself get shocked by it.

"Following the signal. It's fading," Dumbo explained as he ran around the console, "wait a minute, I've got it. No, no, no, no, no, no! Almost there. Here we go!"
"Where is here though?" I asked as Dumbo ran passed me and to the door, Rose hot on his heels.

"You can't go out there. It's not safe!" Rose shouted as she ran out the door after him.

"Seriously?" I asked myself, standing a couple feet from the door, "what is it about this guy that makes Rose act without thinking?"

There was another hum and I looked up as the lights dimmed a bit before they brightened again. "Is it usually like this with him?" I asked, feeling a tad stupid for talking to a ceiling. Another hum, and somehow, I knew this was a hum of agreement. I shook my head. "I was kind of afraid you'd say that," I sighed as I followed Rose's path to the door, hearing an amused hum before the door closed and I heard it lock. "Hey," I exclaimed, pushing on the door, "let me out! Dumbo?! Dumbo, unlock the door, this isn't funny!"

"It won't open," I heard him say from the other side of the door.

"What do you mean, it won't open? Just unlock it! You have a key!"

There was a pause before he finally spoke again. "The Tardis won't let me unlock the door and I don't have time to get it to open," he said, my heart sinking with his words, "we'll be back when we've found what we're looking for!"

"If anything happens to Rose, I will personally make you wish you'd never met her!" I yell at him through the door, "I mean it! You keep her safe!"

There was some grumbling before he told me he'd do what he could to make sure she wasn't harmed. Then, silence. I sat down with my back pressed against the door and did the only thing I could do. I waited.

Rose had just followed him out of the door when it closed and he heard the lock click into place. He turned to look at the Tardis curiously, wondering what had gotten into her lately that she was acting up more than usual.

"Hey," he heard Charlotte yell from inside, "let me out! Dumbo?! Dumbo, unlock the door, this isn't funny!"

He rolled his eyes at the ridiculous nickname she had given him as he pulled his key out of his jacket and tried to unlock the Tardis. She wouldn't unlock. His lips turned down in a frown as he took a step back to look over the Tardis.

"It won't open," he informed her and Rose, speaking loud enough to be heard through the door.

"What do you mean, it won't open? Just unlock it! You have a key!"

This woman is absolutely infuriating, he thought as he tried the key again. When it still didn't budge, he removed his sonic and pointed it at the door. Nothing. She wasn't going to let him unlock the door and he didn't have time to stand here and work out what was going on with the Tardis at the moment.

"The Tardis won't let me unlock the door and I don't have time to get it to open," he told her as he tucked his sonic back in his jacket pocket, "we'll be back when we've found what we're looking for!"

"If anything happens to Rose, I will personally make you wish you'd never met her!" he heard her
yell at him through the door, "I mean it! You keep her safe!"

He grumbled under his breath, low enough that Rose wouldn't be able to hear him before he spoke up. "I'll try my best to keep her safe," he told Charlotte through the door. He didn't get a reply and took that to mean she was trusting him to keep his word.

For the life of him, he couldn't figure her out. He had run into her three times today; that was practically unheard of for him. Also, if he didn't know any better, he'd say the Tardis was *pushing* them together; what, with her not going where he wanted her too. She had been more stubborn than usual and he still couldn't figure out why but he'd bet his sonic it had something to do with the fiery redhead currently locked inside.

"She's beginning to trust you."

He turned to look at Rose, the blonde-haired teenager looking from him to the locked door. "I highly doubt that," he replied as he removed the key from the Tardis door and stored it back in his pocket, "we can't stand being in the same room as each other and I've only met her three times."

"You don't have to like someone to place your trust in them," Rose stated, "Charlie wouldn't have fallen quiet that fast unless she trusted you in some way. At least, enough to believe you'd actually keep me safe. She's not quick to trust people."

"I can see that," he replied.

Rose was silent for a moment before she looked back up at him. "What do you mean, you've met her three times? When was the third time?" Rose asked, her arms folded over her chest as she glared at him.

"That's not important," he answered with a shake of his head, "we've got a planet to save."

"So," I began after what felt like forever, "any particular reason you locked me in here?"

There was a hum and a beep but I couldn't make heads or tails of it even if I tried. I looked down at my watch and frowned, "I have twenty minutes to get to the hospital before I miss my shift. Do you know what happens when I miss my shift?" I asked, barely pausing a second before I answered, "I **need** my job to live and I can't **do** my job if I'm fired. So, do you mind unlocking the door so I can get Rose and get out of here?"

Silence.

"Oh, *now* you don't want to communicate?" I mutter before I let my head slump back and connect with the door behind me. A small amount of pain shot through my head but I ignored it as I continued to speak, "I must be losing my mind. I'm talking to a blue police box that is smaller on the outside and somehow alive enough to lock me inside." I shook my head, "maybe I should go back on my meds? Call my therapist and tell him I'm experiencing similar symptoms from my childhood."

There was a low, concerned hum and I moved my eyes back to the ceiling. "I used to have these… delusions, I guess you could call them. Nan and Pop were never concerned about them but one of my school teachers had insisted I see a therapist for them."

An angry hum, almost like the Tardis was mad that my teacher would ever suggest such a thing. I laughed. "Yeah, Nan had a similar reaction," I replied with a soft smile, "scared the teacher so much I thought he might just quit, to be honest. Nan can be down right terrifying when she wants
to be."

I stood up with a heavy sigh, "I can't keep waiting around for them to get back, I'll go stir crazy." I noticed an open doorway leading into a corridor and looked at it with a raised eyebrow before my eyes darted back to the ceiling. "Just how big is this place?" I asked the Tardis.

The only reply I got was a small beep as the lights in the hall brightened. I smiled as my heart raced, eager to explore this new place and get my mind off my anxiety for Rose. Hell, I was even worried about Dumbo to some extent; not that I'd ever tell him that. Besides, it also got my mind off the fact I was likely going to be fired from work and Rose wouldn't be the only one of us job hunting in the morning.

With one last look at the locked door, I followed the flashing lights down the hall, curiosity and awe no doubt shining in my eyes the further I walked.

The Doctor, Rose, and Mickey ran into the Tardis. The Doctor running straight to the console and pushing a few levers to get them out of there. Mickey was tightly clutching Rose who was looking around in search of Charlie, her worry growing when she found no sign of her friend.

"Doctor? Where's Charlie?" she stammered as the Tardis jolted and she had to cling to a nearby support beam to keep herself from falling to the ground.

The Doctor looked up at her question, his eyes scanning the area for the infuriating redhead before he groaned. "She's somewhere in the Tardis," he answered simply, "I'll help you find her in a moment."

"I can go look for-" Rose began only to get interrupted by the Doctor giving her a stern look.

"-the Tardis is a lot bigger than you think; it's easy to get lost if you don't know where you're going," he informed her, "you have a stronger chance of finding your friend if I help you."

"Oh, God," Rose breathed, "what if Charlie's lost?! She's probably terrified!"

The Doctor snorted at the comment before his face became blank as Rose glared at him. He'd only known Charlotte for a few short hours but he was positive she didn't scare that easily. They certainly weren't going to find her clinging to something like a scared child as Mickey was doing right now to Rose. He wasn't happy that she had left the console room but she was only human and humans were a curious species that couldn't help themselves sometimes.

When the Tardis had landed and Rose had managed to pry Mickey off of her leg, she followed the Doctor down several corridors as they searched for Charlotte. The Doctor was opening several doors, shaking his head each time without actually letting Rose look into them. When they came to a large ornate door, he muttered something under his breath and pushed the door open.

Charlotte was in the room, surrounded by books with one on her chest as light snores filled the room. Her red hair had been pulled out of its bun, probably because it had been giving her a headache, and was now spilling over the edge of the sofa. Her neck was craned awkwardly and Rose had no doubt she'd be in a bit of pain when she woke up but also knew Charlie had become used to sleeping like that because she often fell asleep like that after a long shift at the hospital.

"Trust Charlie to find the library on a spaceship," Rose snorted as she watched the Doctor approach her sleeping friend and lift the book, she had been reading off of her. His eyes widened and his face paled, making Rose frown. "What's wrong?" she asked as she walked over to look inside the book. She frowned when there were no actual words, just a bunch of random circular patterns. "Is this
"some kind of alien language?" she asked. When the Doctor didn't reply, Rose looked over at him and took a cautious step back.

His eyes were dark and storming, a look that made her heart race with fear for her friend as he glared down at the sleeping woman. When he turned those angry eyes to her, Rose shrunk back. "Who is she?" he demanded, motioning towards Charlie, "what is she?!

"She's human!" Rose replied tersely, "what else would she be?!

"She shouldn't have been able to read this," he growled, holding up the large, leather-bound book. Rose frowned, "it's just a bunch of circles, Doctor, she was probably just looking at them."

"For seventy pages?"

"Maybe she opened it to that page and was looking at it before she fell asleep, she's been exhausted for days," Rose retorted in defence of her friend, "it's just a book."

The Doctor seemed to pause for a moment and consider what she had said before he nodded grimly. Of course, not before pulling out his sonic and scanning Charlotte. He looked at the results. Human. Female. Twenty-two years old. Nothing out of the ordinary. He shook his head, perhaps Rose is right.

"Can I let her sleep?" Rose asked nervously, "she hasn't been sleeping well these last few months."

"Why?" the Doctor found himself asking before he could stop himself. He pulled out his sonic and pointed it at her again, reading the results with a frown on his face. "Nightmares?" he asked.

"Yeah," Rose answered, "she's had them since she was little. She never told me what they were about, said she didn't want me to get nightmares too; keeps them all written down in her journals at home."

The Doctor nodded and they left the room, leaving Charlotte alone to sleep, a soft lullaby filling the library as the Tardis watched the Phoenix begin to dream.

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Smoke filled my lungs as I ran through the desolate streets. I did my best to ignore the bodies, calling on my training to keep my composure as I searched the streets for two people in particular. My lungs burned as my legs pushed themselves past their limit. Tears stained my cheeks as my mind quickly flashed to the image of my sister's body lying in the street; her eyes devoid of life. I shook my head, I needed to focus.

I'd just turned a corner when a small arm wrapped around my waist and pulled me into a dark alcove as a beam of light and heat rushed passed the spot I had just been standing. My breathing was heavy as I doubled over, trying to fill my lungs with air only to cough as I inhaled more smoke.

A hand was on my back, rubbing circles into the fabric of my shirt. "Val? Are you okay? Where is Theta?" came a slightly high, masculine voice that instantly relaxed my racing hearts. Until his words registered. Then I felt only panic.

"I thought he was with you," I replied, standing straight and turning to look at him. He was so small now, so different from his last regeneration. A mere child now.

"I haven't seen him since we split up to look for you," he answered.
I shook my head in disbelief, "you left each other? Koschei!"

"We weren't going to do anything until we knew you were safe," he argued, "come on, I think I might know where he went."

He took my hand and tugged on it gently but firmly. We ran out into the war tarnished street, running in the opposite direction I had been running earlier. I frantically searched the streets, trying to find my best friend. Where could he possibly have gone? Was he safe? Alive? My hearts skipped a beat at the thought of Theta being dead but I quickly brushed the thought off as Koschei led me into a familiar hall.

"What are we doing here, Koschei?" I asked as I spied the Tardis' lining the hall. Most of them were destroyed now, the ones that were left sounded like they were crying, their hums were so sad.

"I'm getting you out of here," Koschei told me and I felt my hearts freeze.

"What? You can't," I protested, "we have to find Theta!"

Koschei turned to me, his eyes ablaze with anger, fear, and something else I couldn't quite put my finger on as he tugged me closer to him. "I have to make sure you're safe, Valsill," he retorted desperately, angrily.

"I'm not leaving without you or Theta!" I replied stubbornly, my chin lifted and my eyes narrowed.

I saw Koschei open his mouth to speak before I spied something over his shoulder and my eyes widened. "Koschei!" I yelled, pushing him out of the way as pain tore through my body.

I heard Koschei scream my name as I fell, my body already beginning to glow golden as larger hands grabbed me under my arms and dragged me into one of the Tardis'.

"You have... after her," I faintly heard Koschei say to someone, "make... safe or... like what happens." Then he was next to me, his small fingers on my face as he stroked my cheek softly, "I'm sorry... going to be okay... to be hard... through."

"Koschei," I breathed, feeling the energy moving throughout my body, "tell Theta-"

"I know," he interrupted, "he doesn't deserve... I'll tell him... just stay-"

I didn't hear the rest as I was violently thrown from where I was laying.

I awoke with a startled scream as I was thrown from the sofa I had been laying on. The events of the day surfaced like an old movie and I buried my head in my arm with a groan only to pull back with a crinkled nose as my sweat covered forehead soaked my arm. I wiped the perspiration off my head with my hand and then wiped my hand on my scrubs. There was a concerned hum from above and I looked up at the Tardis ceiling as she beeped at me.

"I'm okay," I panted, fanning myself with my hand, "just a bad dream."

I stretched, hearing my back crack and pop before I sighed with relief and proceeded to crack my aching neck. When the pain steadily disappeared, I looked around. I remembered the Tardis navigating me towards the library where I had decided to pass the time by reading. I can't remember exactly what I had been reading before I fell asleep and couldn't seem to find the book when I looked for it either.
Giving up after a while, I followed the flashing lights out of the library, letting the Tardis lead me down the hall towards the console room. How long had I been asleep anyway? It couldn't possibly have been that long, right? I didn't know but when I entered the console room it was still empty.

"Have they not been back yet?" I asked the Tardis, slowly growing accustomed to her strange form of communication. It was sort of weird, talking to a ceiling, but the last twenty-four hours of my life had been pretty weird so I simply shrugged it off. When I found Rose, I would have Dumbo take us back to Rose's apartment and we could part ways somewhat amicably.

I didn't understand why I had fallen asleep, sure, I had been exhausted the last few days, but I had had one of the best nights of sleep that I could recall the night before Rose had called me about the shop. It had been the first time in years that I hadn't had a nightmare and the full eight hours of sleep had done wonders. Apparently, not enough to keep me from falling asleep in a stranger's library. A library inside a box that should be impossible but wasn't.

I walked to the blue door and tried to open it, surprised when it actually did what I wanted it to. "I'm allowed to leave now, huh?" I asked the Tardis, receiving a hum of agreement in reply.

Without further prompting, I stepped out of the Tardis, my eyes widening and my jaw dropping as I was met with a large window revealing an orbital view of Earth. I took two hesitant steps out of the Tardis, still in disbelief at what I was seeing. This had to be some kind of joke, right? God, I hope so.

I shook my head as I looked around the small room before I took the necessary steps back until my back was pressed against the closed Tardis door.

"Nope."

Chapter End Notes

That's the end of Rose and now we'll be moving on to The End of the World. Don't forget to leave Kudos and please take some time to leave me a comment about what you think so far.
Previously...

Without further prompting, I stepped out of the Tardis, my eyes widening and my jaw dropping as I was met with a large window revealing an orbital view of Earth. I took two hesitant steps out of the Tardis, still in disbelief at what I was seeing. This had to be some kind of joke, right? God, I hope so.

I shook my head as I looked around the small room before I took the necessary steps back until my back was pressed against the closed Tardis door.

"Nope."

I turned to go straight back into the Tardis but the door wouldn't open no matter how hard I pushed or pulled on it. "Really?!" I exclaimed, "first you lock me in and now you're locking me out?!!"

When I got no reply and the door still didn't budge, I huffed and turned to look at the surrounding area. There was no way I was staying in the small room by myself but did I really want to go out the door I could see to my right when I had no idea where I was? I was obviously in space. But where? How? Why? And where the hell was Dumbo and Rose? Did he kidnap us? Is Rose okay?

I was sprinting out of the door without a thought, determined to find Rose or Dumbo and demand answers for what the hell was going on. Then, I was gonna demand that I be taken back to Earth because there was no way I was going to allow myself to be carted around like luggage.

I ran into a large area with a few display cases and another view of space but I barely paid the beautiful view any mind because in front of me was a blue-skinned person with golden slits for eyes. He was looking at me like he couldn't believe I was standing in front of him and tonight was not going at all how he wanted it to. Me? I knew I was gawking, but could you blame me? He was blue.

"How many more of you are there?" he demanded as he strode towards me. For every step he took forward, I took one back until my back collided with the wall. My mouth was still agape, my mind blank as I stared at him. "Well? Are you with the Doctor and Rose Tyler?"

"Yes!" I shouted, startling the man and making myself flush at my outburst, "I mean," I coughed, "yes, yes I'm with Dum... the Doctor and Rose Tyler. Where are they?"

"Follow me, Miss-"

"Oh," I stuttered, trying to catch up with him as he turned and walked away, "Williams. Charlotte Williams. Uh, nice to meet you?"

"You too," he answered shortly before he entered another room and I saw Rose and the Doctor standing there waiting for something.

"Rose!" I yell, running over to my best friend who jumped at the sound of my voice and quickly turned to me with a nervous smile on her face. I wrapped my arms around her in a tight hug, "are
"You okay? Where are we? Why are we in space?" My eyes narrowed at Dumbo, "who the hell do you think you are? Taking me and her into space without permission!"

"She said she wanted to go," he argued.

"But I didn't!" I exclaimed, throwing my hands in the air, "not only did I not give you permission to bring me into space, but both of you left me in the Tardis alone! Do you have any idea how frightening it is to find out you're in space on your own?! And don't even get me started on the fact that I had to meet my first alien on my own," I huffed, my arms crossed over my chest, "I made a right fool of myself, I did. Some help would have been nice."

I directed my last comment at Dumbo, who had been watching me with an amused smile on his face. "Wipe that smile off your face right now, mister," I growled, pointing my finger at him. "Now, does someone want to tell me where the hell I am and when I can go home?!"

"Charlie," Rose grinned, "we're in space!"

I rolled my eyes but found myself smiling none the less at her excitement, "I figured that out myself, Rosey," I chuckled.

"But we're in space in the future."

I raised my eyebrow before I looked at Dumbo, "how far in the future?"

"That's it?" Rose asked me, disbelief plain on her face, "you're not surprised?"

"Time And Relative Dimensions In Space," I replied simply, "her capabilities are literally in her name, Rose. Plus, I had my mini freak out when I met the Steward." I turned to look at Dumbo who seemed to be studying me closely. I rolled my eyes and reiterated my earlier question. "So, when are we?" I asked him simply.

He shook his head and the studious look left his eyes for a moment as he met my gaze, "this is the year five-point five slash apple slash twenty-six. We're five billion years into your future."

I whistled lowly, "okay, now I'm impressed."

"Really? That's what impresses you?" Dumbo asked incredulously, "you were inside the Tardis but being five billion years into the future is what you find impressive?"

A chuckle left my lips at the disbelieving expression on his face. "The Tardis is far beyond impressive," I told him simply, "she's absolutely magnificent."

His face seemed to soften at my words and I found myself smiling at him without really thinking on it. I was far too excited to get into a battle of wits with the man standing in front of me. "So, why are we here? What are we doing? Do they have food here, because I'm starving?" I asked in quick succession.

"Today's the day the Sun expands and destroys the Earth," he replied easily.

That deflated my good mood a bit. "Well, that's definitely intense. Is that why we're here? To watch the end of the planet?" I asked.

"Apparently he won't save it," Rose answered a bit bitterly.

"I doubt he could if he wanted to," I told her softly, "how do you stop the sun from expanding?
He's one man, Rose, he's not a God."

There was a cough and we all turned to see the Steward. "And now, might I introduce the next honoured guest? Representing the Forest of Cheam, we have trees, namely, Jabe, Lute, and Caffa," he announced.

My eyes widened as trees, actual trees, walked into the room. A bark-skinned woman entered the room followed by two large male escorts. She was beautiful and walking over to us.

"There will be an exchange of gifts representing peace," the Steward announced and I noticed the small flash of panic in Dumbo's eyes as he began to search the pockets of his jacket.

"Do you not have anything?" I asked him curiously, "why come to an event like this empty handed?"

He glared at me and I smiled innocently, "I wasn't actually planning on coming today. Your friend is hard to impress apparently."

I snorted, "you've met Mickey-Mouse, yeah? I'd say she's easily impressed."

"Oi!" Rose exclaimed, elbowing me in the ribs. I let out a whoosh of air and glared at her. "Serves you right," she continued with a cheeky grin.

Shaking my head, I watched as the Steward introduced the other guests and watched with increasingly widening eyes as alien after alien entered the room. Lost in thought, I missed when Jabe actually stepped in front of our little group until she began speaking.

"The Gift of Peace. I bring you a cutting of my Grandfather," she said softly, regally, as she handed Dumbo a tree cutting.

"Thank you," Dumbo smiled as he continued to search his pockets, "yes, gifts. Er, I give you in return, air from my lungs."

I rolled my eyes as he breathed softly on Jabe, who smiled flirtatiously and I couldn't help the small snicker. "How intimate," she breathed.

"There's more where that came from," Dumbo flirted back and I snorted, earning myself a glare from him and a curious look from Jabe.

I shook my head with a smile and reached for the bracelet on my wrist. It wasn't anything special, something I had made when I was little because I had considered myself an artist. It was a series of coloured ribbons braided together to form a band. There was a small metal ball in the middle with a tiny bell inside that chimed almost musically when I shook it.

"May I offer a Gift of Peace?" I asked, suddenly nervous. This was new for me, after all, it wasn't every day you get to talk to a tree that could actually talk back. But I wanted to at least say I had participated in today's events; you know? For Earth.

"Your companion has already offered a Gift of Peace," Jabe answered softly, turning her attention to me as did Rose and Dumbo.

I shook my head, unclasping my bracelet as I sent her a small, unsure smile. "A Gift you can take home to your people as a physical representation of our exchange today," I replied, gently cradling the bracelet as I raised it for everyone to see. "My Nan told me that the bell inside the ball represented the angels singing," I explained softly as I jingled the bell and the airy sound filled the
small space between us.

Jabe was looking at it like it was the most beautiful thing she had ever seen and I felt my cheeks flush when her dark eyes met mine. "Are you sure you wish to part with such a beautiful trinket?" she asked and I was touched that she'd try and make sure I was okay with what I was doing.

"I'd be honoured," I replied simply as I motioned for Jabe to hold out her wrist. When she did, I fastened the bracelet to her wrist and took a step back, smiling as she admired it closely.

She raised her head to look at me once more and smiled softly at me, "I will cherish this gift, and I shall always remember the Angel who gave it to me."

I bowed my head to hide my rapidly appearing blush as Jabe and her escorts moved on, all of them talking about the bracelet as Jabe gently shook it.

"That was nice of you."

I looked up to see Dumbo looking down at me and shrugged my shoulders, "thank you," I muttered, not meeting his eyes.

"From the Silver Devastation, the sponsor of the main event, please welcome the Face of Boe," the Steward announced and I looked up as a large glass case was brought into the room. A giant head with straggly hair and squinting eyes was inside and I once again felt my jaw drop.

'Hello, Angel.'

I looked around when I heard the voice but Dumbo and Rose were talking to a blue alien sitting on some strange looking chair.

'It's been a long time.'

Stepping away from my companions, I made my way towards the Face of Boe and hesitantly crouched before it. "Are you speaking to me?" I asked curiously.

'I am.'

"You're inside my head," I stated nervously.

'Don't worry,' he said, in a tone that I swore was teasing, 'I promise not to peak.'

"You said it's been a long time. But we've never met before."

'Not yet,' he agreed, 'but you will meet me soon enough.'

"So, you're apart of my future?" I asked, wanting clarification. As I was talking to the Face of Boe, I didn't notice Rose running from the room. Nor did I notice Dumbo throw a curious look at me before he went after her.

'You always were a smart girl,' he smiled.

"Does this mean I continue to travel with him?" I question, not bothering to say his name. Something told me the Face of Boe knew exactly who I was talking about.

'Do you want to travel with him?"

I sighed, moving to sit on my butt with my legs folded in front of me. "No," I answered before I
found myself hesitating, "not really?"

'You don't sound too sure,' he chuckled in my head, sounding amused.

"He's dangerous," I said, more for my benefit than his.

'He is, more than you realise,' the Face of Boe replied seriously, 'but that is not all he is.'

"I know," I frowned, reluctant to admit it, "I've noticed."

'Is that all you've noticed?'

My face flushed at the meaning behind the question and I heard the Face of Boe laugh in my head as I glared at him. It was true, I had noticed how handsome Dumbo was. I didn't like him all that much but I wasn't blind. He was older than me by a good twenty years or so but that didn't mean I found him any less handsome.

"Shut up," I groaned, hiding my face in my hands as the laughing in my head continued, "he infuriates me to no end, does that change in the future?"

'Spoilers.'

"Spoilers?" I asked curiously, my nose wrinkling at the word, "what spoilers?"

There was no reply and I huffed, my hands crossing over my chest as I took a look around the room. My eyes landed on something strange, well, stranger. "What's that?" I asked the Face of Boe, pointing at what had drawn my attention.

'Lady Cassandra O'Brien is 'the last human'.

"Say what now?" I asked incredulously, my eyes darting between the rectangular frame and the Face of Boe. "You're kidding, right? There's no way that is human." I stood up and made my way towards Cassandra.

"Angel?"

I looked up at the sound of Jabe's voice and blinked when a flash went off in my face. Jabe smiled sweetly at me, putting the device down as she did. "Thank you," she said before she walked off, leaving me a little dazed and highly confused about what the hell all that was about.

When I reached Cassandra, I had to fiercely squash the urge to poke her. When I realised that the thin, spread out material was actually skin, I almost threw up. Who would do this to themselves? What was there to gain from this? How was she even remotely considered 'the last human'?

"Hello?" the voice spoke when I came into view of her. Her way of talking, like she was better than everyone in the room, grated on my nerves. It was how people had talked to me before I had come to London, how people had sometimes talked to my Nan and Pop. "Who are you then? You're rather pretty, aren't you?" she sneered like it was a crime for me to look nice.

"How are you the last human?" I asked, not bothering to answer either of her questions, "how are you even considered human?"

Her eyes narrowed at me but I didn't back down. I wanted to know what would drive someone to do this to themselves. What had happened in her life that Cassandra thought this was what she needed to resort to? In a way, I sort of pitied her. Human? No, everything human was gone. All that
was left was skin, eyes, and a mouth.

"How did you get this way?" I asked softly, resisting the urge to touch her once more.

"Well," Cassandra began, apparently, happy to be talking about herself, "it did take some time, a lot of money, and seven hundred and eight operations. Next week, it's seven hundred and nine, but they're well worth it. Don't you think?"

I shook my head and took a step back. "You can't be the last human," I stated simply, "I refuse to believe you're all that's left to represent the Earth."

"Oh?" Cassandra sneered.

"Yeah, 'cause me and my friend Rose, we're human. We were born and raised on Earth. So were her mum and dad, and my Nan and Pop," I said passionately, my hand on my cocked hip, "I don't know what you are, Cassandra, but you're not human. Not anymore. Whatever made you human has long since been removed. I – I can't do this right now," I mutter that last bit to myself as I turn and walk rapidly towards the door.

'Angel?'

"I'm sorry," I told the Face of Boe as I walked passed him, "but I can't handle this. This isn't my world."

'Not yet.' I thought I heard him say but I had already walked through the door and was sprinting down the hall, eager to get far away from that room and find somewhere I could think for just a moment.

Jabe watched the Angel walk rapidly from the room and looked down at her screen. She couldn't believe the results she had gotten when she had asked her device to identify the Doctor.

"Identify species," she repeated, this time looking down at an image of the Angel. The device beeped and whirred but otherwise, nothing came up. Jabe frowned at the stubborn device as she repeated her order.

The results flashed human before they seemed to reconsider and the result vanished. It appeared again before vanishing, doing that quite a few more times before it settled on one result and her eyes widened as she looked to the door the Angel had just gone through.

"Well," she breathed, "that certainly is interesting."

I had found a corridor that was vacant and slid down the nearest wall before I buried my head in my hands and let out a broken sob. My heart was racing in my chest, beating furiously against my ribs as my breathing picked up. I had recognised the signs of an impending panic attack since I had left the Tardis and was happy I was alone so I could try and calm myself down before things got too out of control.

As I sat against the wall, I hummed a lullaby my Nan used to sing to me. When I had asked her where she had learnt it from, she had simply told me an Angel had taught it to her. I never thought my Nan was religious. She absolutely refused to keep any angel related statues in the house, told me they couldn't be trusted and I should always keep an eye out for them like they were gonna eat me or something if I didn't.
The song got softer the more I calmed down but was suddenly cut short when the whole station seemed to shake and I was thrown forward with a squeal. I managed to brace myself but it also meant I landed oddly on one of my hands and winced when I felt my wrist twist painfully. I rolled onto my back and breathed in deeply as I waited for the pain to subside before getting shakily to my feet.

Stumbling for a bit, I manage to get myself righted before I try and trace my steps back to the large room everyone had been in earlier. Maybe Dumbo would be there and have the answers to what the hell just happened.

"So, tell me, Jabe, what's a tree like you doing in a place like this?" The Doctor asked curiously, trying to ignore the small pang of concern he felt for Charlotte. She hadn't been where he had left her last and he knew just how easily people could get lost on their first trip into space. No one could tell him or Rose where she had gone and he hadn't missed the sad look the Face of Boe was giving the main door either. Something had upset Charlotte enough for her to run off on her own and from what he had seen so far, she didn't seem like a woman easily upset either.

"Respect for the Earth," Jabe answered simply, drawing his attention back to the conversation at hand. Something wasn't right with the space station and he was determined to figure out just what that was and make sure it was put back to rights again.

"Oh, come on," he spurred cheekily, "everyone on this platform's worth zillions."

"Well," she began, "perhaps it's a case of having to be seen at the right occasions."

"In case your share prices drop?" he asked. He knew how important most people believed money was. He didn't really have a need for it but that didn't mean he didn't have access to it either. "I know you lot. You've got massive forests everywhere, roots everywhere, and there's always money in land."

Jabe smiled wanly, "all the same, we respect the Earth as family," she informed him, "so many species evolved from that planet. Mankind is only one. I'm another. My ancestors were transplanted from the planet down below, and I'm a direct descendant of the tropical rainforest."

"Excuse me," the Doctor said as he moved to scan a door panel.

Meanwhile, Jabe was studying him curiously, thinking back to the results she had gotten from him and the Angel.

"And what about your ancestors, Doctor? Perhaps you could tell a story or two," she said gently, aware of how sensitive the topic she was broaching was. "Perhaps a man only enjoys trouble when he believes there is nothing left."

The Doctor frowned at her choice of words. Believes nothing was left? He knew there was nothing left. They were all gone. Every single one of them. An image of a woman only a few years older than he looked now flashed before his eyes. Her hair was like fire and her eyes held a level of mischief she never seemed to lose since her childhood. Since their childhood. The image smiled at him before it vanished and he physically shook himself, feeling a tear fall from his eye because of her memory. Losing his home and his people had been bad, and yet, it had been losing her that was the hardest. She had always been there for him, never doubting him. His best friend.

"I scanned you earlier," Jabe continued softly, "the metal machine had trouble identifying your species. It refused to admit your existence. And even when it named you, I wouldn't believe it' but
"it was right," she breathed, "I know where you're from. Forgive me for intruding, but it's remarkable that you even exist. I just wanted to say how sorry I am."

She placed her hand on his arm and the Doctor placed his hand over hers. Another tear fell from his eyes at her words as he continued to work on the door.

Jabe took in a breath and continued, "when I was younger, my grandfather would tell me an old fairy-tale. It was about a Phoenix-" she saw the Doctor stiffen but continued none the less, "-it was said that the Phoenix was a beacon of hope; a creature of such magnificence, the heavens themselves would bow to her will. It was said she was capable of quelling even the harshest of storms. A light in the darkness."

"That's nothing more than an old wives' tale," the Doctor said, his whole body stiff as pain and anguish flooded him.

"Legends are lessons, Doctor, they ring with truth," Jabe retorted, "my grandfather said the Phoenix went by another name. Just one other." She took a step closer, trying to get him to see what she was saying without outright saying it. Jabe had a feeling neither party was privy to the information she now held. "He said they called her the Angel."

"Enough!" the Doctor exclaimed, his body vibrating with his pain and anger. "She's gone," he continued, the sentence coming out broken, "she died."

"A Phoenix may die but then it is reborn from the ashes, Doctor," Jabe replied.

"Not this time," he whispered before he managed to get the door open and stepped inside, bringing an end to their conversation.

I was terrified lost. You'd think that wouldn't be possible, this place didn't look that big, but I was naturally geographically challenged and it seemed being sent into space and being on a space station didn't change that at all. It didn't help that there were no directional signs anywhere. I'd give this place two stars for that alone because I was starting to panic again.

It was as I turned another corner that I heard Rose. I smiled to myself, the smile quickly dropping when I realised, she was screaming. My heart lurched into my throat and I sprinted down the corridor and to the small room I'm sure had been the one I had been in before I had left to find Dumbo and Rose earlier.

"Let me out! Let me out!" Rose screamed and I could hear her banging on the door.

"Rose?!" I screamed, my own fist banging on the door, "Rose, what's happening?!"

"Charlie!" Rose cried, "something's wrong! The sun filter is broken or something! Oh God, I'm going to die!"

I swear my heart stopped at her words and I frantically looked around for anything that could help me get the damn door open. Footsteps were rapidly approaching and I had never been so relieved to see Dumbo. "Doctor!" I yelled as I saw him, "help! Rose is in there!"

"Oh, well, it would be her," he scoffed and I glared fiercely at him.

"Just get it open!" I shrieked.

"Open the door!" Rose screamed at the same time as Dumbo moved to a panel attached to the wall
beside the door.

I felt hands grab my arms and gently pull me away from the door. "Don't worry, Angel, the Doctor will save your friend," Jabe said, but her words were of little comfort to me as I felt my eyes water and tears spill. I couldn't lose Rose, not her; she was like my little sister.

"Please, Doctor," I sobbed, not noticing his shoulders stiffen at the sound of my sob or the use of his name, "please, help her."

"Hold on," he muttered, "give us two ticks."

I heard Rose scream and it was like a knife to my heart, "Doctor!" I screamed, now fighting against Jabe's hold, "do something!"

Then, the most beautiful sound. "Sun filter rising. Sun filter rising." I sagged against Jabe, feeling her fingers in my hair as I released another sob, this one containing all the relief I felt in that moment.

"Sun filter descending."

"No!" I yelled, breaking free of Jabe's hold as I rushed to the door.

"Just what we need," I heard him mutter.

"Rose!" I screamed, my hands moving to the door only to reel back with a cry as my hands burnt on contact with it.

"Stop mucking about!" I heard Rose yell from inside the room and my eyes darted to the Doctor, seeing him working furiously on the panel.

"I'm not mucking about," he responded angrily, "it's fighting back."

"Open the door!" Rose and I shouted simultaneously.

I ran back towards the door, this time making sure not to touch it, "Rose," I yelled, "Rose, get away from the door! Get as close to the ground as you can and for God's sake, stay alive!"

"Doctor," I whispered, falling to my knees beside him, my eyes stinging from my tears, "I can't lose her."

His eyes met mine for a moment and I continued, "please," I breathed, "save her."

I stared back at the door as the Doctor continued to work on the panel.

"Sun filter rising. Sun filter rising."

"Got it!" the Doctor exclaimed proudly and this time I allowed my whole body to slump in my relief.

"Rose?!" I called, "Rose, are you okay?!"

"I'm okay." I released a watery laugh as I heard her voice, "I'm fine, but the locks melted."

"The whole thing's jammed," the Doctor informed them both, "I can't open the doors. Stay there!"

I snorted as Rose replied sarcastically, "where am I going to go, Ipswich?"
"I'm going to sort this out," the Doctor said as he held his hand out to me.

I shook my head, "I'm – I'm going to stay here with Rose."

His eyes softened as he gave me a nod and I watched as he and Jabe ran off. I moved so my back was pressed to the wall next to the door and swiped at my eyes to get rid of the tears that were causing them to sting so much.

"This seems familiar," I heard Rose say and I smiled, knowing exactly what she was talking about.

"Yeah, except, this time, I'm not the one stuck inside the little room," I laughed.

She chuckled and I felt my heart rate slow, knowing she was safe now. The Doctor had saved her. When we were younger, Rose and I had gotten into some trouble, Jackie had let Rose off but Nan had grounded me the moment I got home. I hadn't been allowed out of my room for the weekend except for meals and chores. I also, wasn't allowed to have friends in my room for that weekend either.

Rose had come over the very first day and had sat outside my door and talked to me for hours. Pop had found it amusing and Nan had smiled exasperatedly when eight-year-old Rosey had argued that I technically didn't have any friends in my room. My grounding had only lasted that morning, my Nan too amused by Rose's actions to go through with the rest of it. Pop might have had something to do with that too but he never said anything and I never asked.

I'd been sitting there for fifteen minutes, talking to Rose about anything and everything before the computer-generated voice rang out. "Heat rising."

"That doesn't sound good," Rose commented, "maybe you should go find the Doctor, see if he needs any help."

"I'm not leaving you, Rose, look what happened the last time I did."

I heard her scoff, "that wasn't your fault and we both know you're curious about what's going on too, Charlie. Find the Doctor. I'm not going anywhere."

"You sure?" I asked, not wanting to admit I really did want to find the Doctor and figure out what was happening.

"Go."

"Heat levels critical."

The Doctor and Jabe entered the engine rooms and when he saw where the switch was located, he rolled his eyes. "Oh, and guess where the switch is," he muttered to Jabe who looked on in worry.

"Heat levels rising. Heat levels rising."

The Doctor pulled the breaker switch and watched, satisfied, as the fans slowed a little. Unfortunately, his satisfaction was short lived when he released the switch and the fans sped up. That might be a problem, he thought to himself.

"External temperature, five thousand degrees."

That doesn't help, he thought sarcastically, mentally rolling his eyes at the incessant voice. Like he didn't have enough problems right now, let's throw in a constant reminder. His eyebrows furrowed
when the fans slowed down and he turned to see Jabe holding the breaker switch down.

"You can't," he told her, "the heat's going to vent through this place."

"I know."

The Doctor took a step forward, his eyes growing sad, "Jabe, you're made of wood."

She smiled nervously, "then stop wasting time. Time Lord."

He grinned.

"Heat level critical."

The Doctor made it past the first fan and breathed out a nervous breath. He managed to get past the second fan and turned to look back at Jabe, his heart dropping as he saw her struggling with the steadily rising heat. He knew she wasn't going to make it. Another life needlessly lost.

He took another steady breath.

Jabe felt her body heating up, the pain unbearable but she was determined to keep a hold of the switch. She wouldn't allow her people to die. She wouldn't allow the Doctor to die. And she certainly wouldn't allow the Angel and her little blonde friend to die. That wasn't who she was.

She felt her arm catch on fire and screamed, her grip releasing from the breaker switch just as a piece of material was thrown over her burning arm, patting out the fire. Jabe looked up and saw the Angel standing beside her.

"You need to go," she said, already leading Jabe to the door, "get out. Now."

"The Doctor," Jabe protested even as she moved towards the exit.

"I've got him," she replied sternly, "find somewhere to hide until this is over. Now Jabe."

Jabe threw one more look at the Doctor before she ran from the room, praying the Doctor and the Angel would save them.

The Doctor was preparing to jump past the rapidly spinning fan when he heard a pained scream and the fan began to slow again. He looked back and his eyes widened as he saw Charlotte holding the break switch down, her face pinched with pain as tears fell from her eyes.

"Planet explodes in ten, nine, eight, seven-"

"Doctor!" she screamed, spurring him into action and he moved past the fan and rushed towards the reset breaker.

"five, four-"

"Raise shields!" he yelled as he flicked the reset switch.

He grinned when the countdown finished and the station still seemed to be in one piece. Crisis averted. His smiled dropped rapidly when he looked back at Charlotte and saw her motionless on the ground, smoke rising from her burnt arms.
"Charlotte!"

Rose walked into the large room and felt sadness fill her as she saw the empty chair the Moxx of Balhoon had been sitting in. When her eyes landed on Jabe, she quickly rushed over to the tree.

"Where's the Doctor?" she asked, "and where's Charlie?"

"The Doctor was trying to bring up the forcefields that would protect us from the sun," Jabe explained.

"And Charlie?"

"Who?"

"Charlie!" Rose huffed, "the woman the Doctor and I was with."

"The Angel," Jabe breathed, her eyes darting to her burnt arm, "she is with the Doctor. Your friend saved my life."

Rose smiled proudly until the Doctor walked in. The sight of her best friend laying limply in his arms had her heart dropping into her stomach and her face draining of all colour. "Oh, my God," she breathed as she ran forward, skidding to a halt in front of the Doctor who was cradling Charlie close to his chest. Tears filled her eyes as she looked at her friend's pale face, her arms and torso were covered by the Doctor's jacket but it didn't stop her from smelling burnt flesh and she felt sick. "Is she-" she tried to ask, her throat catching and making it impossible to finish her sentence.

"She's alive," the Doctor replied with barely concealed rage, his eyes a storm as he looked around the room before his gaze settled on the woman in his arms. "She's unconscious, but she's alive," he told Rose, watching the teenager release a relieved sob as she moved a strand of hair out of Charlotte's face.

"Are you okay?" Rose asked, her teary-eyed gaze moving to him and the Doctor felt his hearts seize. Was he alright? No. No, he wasn't. It didn't help that he knew, if Charlotte hadn't interfered when she had, he would be telling Jabe's people that she had died. If it wasn't for Charlotte, he would have another death on his conscience.

"Yeah," he answered with more cheer than he actually felt as he saw Jabe walk over with one of her escorts. "I'm fine," he continued as she stopped in front of him and motioned to her escort and then to Charlotte. The Doctor nodded and reluctantly handed Charlotte over to the escort. He watched Jabe instruct him to make Charlotte comfortable before the Doctor focused his attention back on Rose.

"I'm full of ideas," he continued, "I'm bristling with them. Idea number one, teleportation through five thousand degrees needs some kind of feed." He made his way to the alleged ostrich egg. "Idea number two," he continued, "this feed must be hidden nearby."

He smashed through the ostrich egg to reveal the teleportation device Cassandra had used to make her escape, his rage steadily growing as he briefly looked back at an unconscious Charlotte.

"Idea number three," he almost growled as he watched the escort lay Charlotte down gently in front of the Face of Boe who seemed concerned, angry, and sad as he gazed at her prone figure. "If you're as clever as me," he continued, "then a teleportation feed can be reversed." Pointing his sonic at the device, the Doctor watched angrily as Cassandra reappeared before them all.
"Oh," she was bragging, "you should have seen their little alien faces."

When she noticed whose presence she was in, she looked both shocked and a little scared. Good, the Doctor thought as the Oncoming Storm brewed within him, she deserves everything coming to her.

"The last human," he spat as Rose stepped up beside him, her eyes narrowed at Cassandra and her own temper radiating off of her.

"So," Cassandra laughed nervously, "you passed my little test. Bravo. This makes you eligible to join, er, the Human Club."

The Doctor heard himself growl, "people have died, Cassandra," he bit out, "you murdered them."

"And you hurt my best friend," Rose added, her hands on her hips.

"It depends on your definition of people, and that's enough of a technicality to keep your lawyers dizzy for centuries," Cassandra sneered and the Doctor felt like he was going to lose himself to his rage at her blatant lack of remorse for what she had done. "Take me to court," she continued with a smug smile, "and watch me smile and cry and flutter."

"-And creak," the Doctor deadpanned.

"And what?"

"Creak," he continued, "you're creaking."

Her panic was plain as day but all he could see was Charlotte laying on the floor of the engine room. In the time it had taken him to get back, he had feared she had died. He was afraid he'd have to tell Rose he hadn't protected her best friend, afraid he'd be responsible for another death. His hearts had been breaking as he had approached her body and he had been unable to even breathe a sigh of relief when he had seen her chest rising and falling as he had knelted before her.

"What? Ah! I'm drying out!" Cassandra cried, "oh, sweet heavens. Moisturise me, moisturise me! Where are my surgeons? My lovely boys! It's too hot!"

He crossed his arms over his chest, his body numb as he watched her, "you raised the temperature," he told her simply as she continued to creak.

"Have pity!" she cried.

'Pity, Theta, it's not a weakness but one of our greatest strengths. To show pity, even to our enemies, makes us more. Because we were able to rise above the pettiness and not let our rage or hurt blind us to what is right.'

"Help her," he heard Rose say, her voice laced with fear and concern as she took a step back.

"Everything has its time and everything dies," he replied coldly, not knowing if he was answering Rose or the memory of something his best friend had once told him.

"I'm too young!" Cassandra yelled before her body exploded.

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Rose hadn't been able to stay in the room after what had happened and had left the Doctor to deal with the remaining guests. He walked over to Jabe, her escorts, and the Face of Boe. Jabe was
kneeling before Charlotte's body and studying her burns closely when he stopped before them.

"I'm sorry she was hurt," she told him as she stood up and moved so he could take the place she had just vacated, "know that she saved my life and I will forever be grateful to her for her sacrifice."

He nodded, his throat thick as he looked at her blistered arms. He had burn cream in the medical bay of the Tardis but he knew nothing would stop the scarring. They'd be a constant reminder for both him and Charlotte that he had been unable to help her. His eyes moved to Jabe's arm and could see the charred wooden flesh. "Are you going to be okay?" he asked gruffly.

"I'll be fine, thanks to your Angel."

The Doctor didn't really register her reply as he moved to scoop Charlotte up in his arms and make his way back to the Tardis. He bid Jabe and her people a safe trip home before a voice in his head had him pausing.

'It's not your fault, Doctor.'

He turned to look at the Face of Boe which was already watching him closely. "She shouldn't have been there," he replied, "she never wanted to come. I never gave her a choice."

'Than don't make the same mistake twice,' the Face of Boe answered, 'ask her to travel with you. Show her the stars.'

The Doctor shook his head, "she'll say no. She already thought I was dangerous. This just proves her point."

'We'll see.'

Rose and the Doctor were sitting in one of the observation rooms. The Doctor had already taken Charlotte to the medical bay in the Tardis and tended to her injuries. Now, he and Rose were watching the asteroids that were once the Earth as they floated past the window.

"The end of the Earth," Rose began, her eyes red and puffy from crying, "it's gone. We were too busy saving ourselves. No one saw it go. All those years, all that history, and no one was looking."

The Doctor was quiet as she sniffled beside him, "and now Charlie's hurt," she said, her voice wobbly. "I-I sent her to help you," she cried, "she wanted to stay with me but I told her to go. She's hurt because of me."

"If she didn't want to go, I doubt even you could have made her go," he told Rose softly, "and she'll be fine. The cream should have already begun working and it'll be nothing more than a bad memory in a few days."

"She would have loved to have seen this," Rose said, her voice stronger, "she always did have a strange fascination with space. I just – I can't believe it's just–"

The Doctor stood and offered her his hand, "come with me," he told her gently, helping her stand before they both stepped into the Tardis.

I came to on a comfortable, if slightly small, bed in a room I wasn't familiar with. As I tried to sit up, I hissed as pain shot up my arms. Looking down, I frowned at the bandages that covered a
majority of my arms and hands before I remembered what had happened.

I had passed out from the pain, not able to handle it for as long as I did. Had the Doctor made it? He must have because I doubted I'd be here right now if he hadn't. What of Jabe? Was she okay? Had she made it to safety? And the others, were they alright?

"See you're finally awake."

Callused hands managed to catch me just as I was about to fall off the bed, a startled cry leaving my lips. My eyes focused on the Doctor and I glared as he chuckled at me. "Not funny," I muttered childishly as he helped me back onto the bed, "where am I?"

"Tardis medical bay," he told me as he began unbandaging one of my arms. We sort of fell silent after that, him undressing and redressing my wounds – which looked horrible, just so you know – and me simply watching him as he did it.

I was studying him, I guess, looking for something that could answer my unasked questions. Tonight had shown me that the Doctor truly was trouble, but it had also shown me that he was a truly good man too. He cared about others, regardless of race, gender, or any of those other ridiculous reasons to judge another person. I had watched him work furiously to save my best friend and then had witnessed him risking his life to save people I doubted he even knew.

Yes. He was dangerous, but that certainly wasn't all there was to him.

"Thank you," I muttered as he finished redressing my wounds, more gently than I would have thought possible.

He looked up at me, startled, and I couldn't help but laugh at his dumbstruck expression.

"Uh," he began, rubbing the back of his neck, "you're welcome. Thank you, Jabe wouldn't have made it had you not intervened. You saved her life tonight, Charlotte."

I bit my lip to keep from saying something biting about the use of my full name, I didn't want to argue with him, not now, not after everything that had just happened.

"So, she's okay? Everyone's okay?" I asked, watching as the Doctor moved around the large room and put things back in their rightful places.

"Everyone's okay," he told me. He was lying. I didn't know how I could tell, but I could. Maybe it was the way his shoulders tensed up minutely, or, perhaps, it was the fact he wouldn't meet my eyes when he had spoken.

"Please don't do that," I said, watching as he turned to give me an inquisitive look, "please don't dishonour their death by lying about it to save me from the truth."

He studied me for a moment before I heard him sigh. He moved over to me and I shifted so he could sit on the small bed with me. "The Moxx of Balhoon didn't make it," he told me gently.

"Who else?" I asked, knowing he hadn't told me all of it.

His body tensed again and he refused to meet my eyes as he answered, "Cassandra."

I frowned, on my way to the engine room I had run past the main room and the Face of Boe had quickly informed me of Cassandra's treachery and where I could find the Doctor and Jabe. "I thought Cassandra teleported away after sabotaging the station?"
"I managed to reverse the teleport after we got the forcefields back up," he told me, still avoiding my gaze, "brought her back onto the station."

"And?" I prompted.

"It was too hot, she dried out," he answered simply, in a tone that implied the conversation was over.

I frowned, "why didn't anyone help her?" I asked.

His head snapped to mine, his eyes ablaze with anger and incredulousness, "she was responsible for the death of several people. She almost killed you. I wasn't going to take pity on her, Charlotte. Everything has its time and everything dies."

"Why?"

He sighed, "it's the way of life-"

"No," I interrupted quietly, "why couldn't you take pity on her?" His eyes met mine again and I could see the pain and regret swirling in their depths, "to show pity, even to our enemies, makes us more, Doctor. Because we were able to rise above the pettiness and not let our rage or hurt blind us to what is right."

His entire countenance seemed to change at my statement. His face paled, his eyes became haunted, and his whole body shook.

"What did you just say?" he asked in a voice so quiet I had to strain to hear him.

"Which part?" I asked with a furrow of my brows.

"The part about showing pity, where did you hear that?" he asked, his tone almost desperate as he grabbed my shoulders in a firm hold. I have to admit, I was slightly fearful of the crazed look in his eyes and blinked owlishly, at a loss for words.

"I don't know," I answered, a half lie but close enough to the truth, "I think I read it somewhere."

His entire body deflated and a small part of me felt guilty for lying to him. But how was I to explain to him, a complete stranger, that I had been dreaming of an impossible world since I was a little girl? He'd think I was crazy.

"Doctor? Are you okay?" I asked softly, watching as he let me go and quickly got off the bed.

"I'm fine," he muttered, "Rose wanted to know when you were awake. I should – I should go get her."

Then he was gone and I was left to wonder what the hell just happened.

Chapter End Notes

I always knew I was going to save Jabe; she wasn't a main character but I liked her
none the less and saving her will have significance in a future chapter. Now, with how Jabe had described 'The Phoenix' I realised she sounded like this all-powerful being and I wanted to assure you all that she isn't. Like many stories, the one about The Phoenix has been slightly exaggerated and this will also be explained in future chapters. How are you liking it so far? Do you like Charlie? Hate her? Why?

Anyway, next chapter finds Charlotte, Rose, and the Doctor visiting 1869 and then the chapter after that will be a completely original chapter which I'm actually quite nervous about. With that said, please don't forget to leave Kudos and maybe even take a small amount of time to leave me a comment.
Rose and I had spent some time together during my brief, but very dull, stay in the Tardis' medical bay. The Doctor would come in on occasion to redress my wounds but he refused to meet my eyes and only gave me monosyllabic answers whenever I tried to get him to talk to me. I still had no idea why what I had said bothered him so much. It certainly hadn't meant to be said in a way that would have offended him, it just felt like the right thing to say in the situation.

When I had asked, Rose had given me all the details of what had transpired whilst I was unconscious. I had cringed at hearing that the Doctor had simply stood by and watched Cassandra explode but he had already told me what had happened, just not as explicitly as Rose had done.

The moment the Doctor told me I could leave the medical bay, I almost knocked both him and Rose over in my bid to get out of the room. It was the first time since our conversation that I had seen him crack a smile but it seemed to be gone as soon as it had appeared and the sad, longing look returned to his face.

Of course, the Doctor had gotten Rose to ask me if I'd consider travelling with him. "Just one trip, Charlie," she had said as she tried to persuade me into agreeing.

"We've just been on one trip," I told her simply, though, I had already decided I was going to accompany them. Rose seemed determined to stick around and I wasn't going to let her go off exploring space on her own. Plus, I'm pretty sure Jackie would kill me if I went home without her daughter and an angry Jackie was a scary Jackie.

"That was to the future, the Doctor said he'll take us to the past next," she had argued and, if I hadn't already been about to agree, I certainly would have hearing that. History had always been a favourite topic of mine and to experience it first hand was an offer I would never decline.

The Doctor was apparently waiting for me to heal before we set off. So, now we were just kind of drifting in space and on the third day of doing nothing but listen to Rose try and fill the awkward silence that descended every time the Doctor and I were in a room together, I was about ready to hijack the Tardis and take us back myself. Today, however, there was no Rose to fill the silence. She was currently sleeping in the room the Tardis had provided for her and I was sitting down and watching the Doctor fiddle with the console as he muttered to himself and avoided looking anywhere near my direction.

"Okay, I can't handle this anymore," I finally said, making the Doctor look in my direction. I could have screamed when he still refused to look me in the eyes. "What have I done wrong?" I asked, well, more like demanded. My voice was harsher than I wanted it to be but I was hurt and angry at the way he had been treating me. It's not like I hadn't noticed how he'd fall silent the moment I walked into the room, even if he had just been chatting passionately with Rose the moment before.
It was rude and I was over it.

"You haven't done anything wrong," he replied simply, the most words I'd heard from him since the day I'd somehow managed to scare him off.

"Really? Because you can't even look me in the eyes right now and that's the most you've said to me in days," I growled, my hands on my hips and my eyes narrowed. "It's because of what I said, isn't it?" I continued, watching as his body stiffened, "you've heard it before. Whoever said it, meant something to you. You wouldn't have reacted how you did if they hadn't been important to you."

He didn't answer me and my anger was at a tipping point when I spoke. "Take me home," I ordered. This got his attention and his eyes finally met mine, "take me home, right now," I continued.

"I thought you wanted to travel to the past," he replied uneasily.

"I do," I nodded, "I still do, but there's something in my apartment I need to grab and it's something you need to see. So, take me to my apartment, please," I finished, folding my arms over my chest. My heart was beating loudly in my chest as I thought about what I needed to grab. I hadn't shown anyone; not Rose, not my Nan or Pop. No one. But I felt like the Doctor needed to see it, to get past whatever was bothering him so badly.

I gave him the address and clung to the console as the Tardis took us to our destination. The rattling must have woken Rose, because we had barely stopped when she made her way into the room, rubbing her eyes and yawning tiredly as she did. "Whas goin' on?" she mumbled as she looked from me to the Doctor.

"Nothing, Rosey," I smiled, "I'm just grabbing something from my apartment. I'll be right back. You should probably wake up anyway, though, the Doctor's going to take us to the past when I get back."

I walked out before either one of them could reply and looked around the living room of my apartment. I barely paid it any mind as I moved into my bedroom and made my way over to my closet. On the floor was a box. It wasn't a large box but it wasn't by any means a small box either. It was heavy though, and I grunted as I lifted it. I thought about just taking one and leaving the rest when I realised, I couldn't remember which one it was in. I sighed, resigned to the fact I'd have to let him read them all.

Lugging the box back to the Tardis, I walked in to see Rose not there. Relief flooded me. I didn't want her to see what I had grabbed. She couldn't see it. No one could. Only the Doctor. He was probably the only person that wouldn't think I was crazy. I hoped.

"Here," I said, handing him the box and pouting when he seemed to carry it with ease. "Take us on a trip to the past, then read those," I ordered.

"Why?"

"Because you promised Rose and me a trip to the past," I replied, trying to sidestep the actual question.

"That not what I-"

"-I know what you meant, Doctor, and you'll know the answer to your question when you begin reading them. But, please, don't show Rose." I chewed on my bottom lip nervously, wondering if I
should explain my reason before I shook my head and turned to head back to the room the Tardis had created for me. I passed Rose on my way there and she smiled excitedly at me, a smile I tried to return but don't think I accomplished when I saw her own wane a little. She didn't say anything, however, and we went our separate ways without a backwards glance at one another.

That's one of the things I loved about Rose. She didn't push. Not when she really knew it was something I didn't want to talk about. I guess it was because we had known each other so long because I knew just how pushy Rose could be with other people. She knew there were some things I just wasn't willing to discuss with anyone. Those journals were one of them. And I had just gone and given them to the Doctor.

It was like being doused in a bucket of ice water when the weight of what I'd just done settled on me. He would find out about the dreams, the nightmares, and the delusions. He would know what no one else did. The world I had dreamt up was my own personal Wonderland. Orange grass and magnificent buildings, people who changed their faces when they were about to die, and so much more.

I had dreamt up an entire childhood around that world, a life where I had two best friends and a little sister. A life where I studied at some fancy academy and went on to be a healer. One where I had gotten into trouble pulling pranks with my two best friends that I loved more than anything. Koschei and Theta. Those were the names I had called had them in my dreams, and they had called me Valsill.

People had called me another name in the dreams, a name that seemed to have more weight behind it than Valsill. The Phoenix. A beacon of light and hope. An anchor. The name had felt so smothering, like someone had decided to lay the weight of the universe on my shoulders by 'gifting' me such an extravagant title. I had refused to write the name in my journal for so long, felt like I was admitting to some big secret by telling the pages the name they called me by on my little made-up planet.

Gallifrey. The name itself had been so beautiful to hear as a child and the places I had explored there were nothing short of wondrous.

I hesitated in the corridor outside my door, wondering if it was too late to go back for the journals. My brain screamed for me to run and get them, hide them where no soul would ever find them. But my heart whispered that he needed to know. It told me the Doctor would help to fill the missing pieces in my journals. So many blank lines where my dreams had been so fuzzy, like I wasn't supposed to know those moments just yet. Perhaps the Doctor would have a way for me to recover those fuzzy pieces, to make the image whole.

My fingers drifted into the pocket of my jeans where I breathed a sigh of relief as the familiar cold metal came into contact with them. My Nan had given me the small, ornate pocket watch when I had decided to stay in London. She had made me swear to always keep it on me. Honestly, most the time I didn't even remember I had it, like my mind was purposely ignoring it. Other times, I took it out and just stared at it. I never opened it. It never seemed like the right time or a good idea. Sometimes, I even thought I heard a voice coming from it, whispering nonsensically to me. Then the meds would make it stop.

"You're being ridiculous," I mutter to myself, removing my hand from my pocket and opening the door to my room.

The room was beautiful. The walls were lilac and the large, four post, oak bed was covered in an emerald green bed spread. There was a small desk in the corner and a bathroom through the door off to my right. It was nowhere near as full of stuff as Rose's room was but I liked to keep things
simple and the room seemed to reflect that whilst still giving off a homely feel. Even my room at home had once been pretty simplistic. Until Rose had noticed, that is. Now, it was filled with little trinkets and ridiculous pictures. Every time she would visit me, she would bring something else to my apartment so if would feel more like a home and less like a dwelling. Her words, not mine.

"Am I doing the right thing?" I asked the Tardis, hearing her hum in confusion as the lights in my room dimmed slightly. "Giving him my journals? Letting him read them when I wouldn't even let my family read them?" I continued, "what makes the Doctor so special? Why would I trust him with those over my family?"

The Tardis remained suspiciously quiet before the familiar sound of her taking off filled my ears. It wasn't long before I was clinging to my door frame, rolling my eyes as the whole room shook. Seriously? Did this man even have a licence to drive one of these things? Because it certainly didn't feel like it.

I fell to the floor with a grunt when the Tardis came to an abrupt halt and sort of just laid there, strands of hair covering my face and my arms outstretched as I stared up at the Tardis' ceiling. "Please tell me that means we've arrived?" I asked the Tardis who whirred and beeped happily before falling silent. "Great," I groaned, turning onto my stomach and getting to my feet. I'd barely stood up when Rose ran into the room and knocked into me, sending us both to the ground. "Really?" I huffed as I was pinned beneath her, "get off would ya!"

"Sorry," she muttered, getting to her feet before she helped me to mine. "Come on, we need to get dressed," she smiled, taking my hand and dragging me from my room.

"What's wrong with what we're wearing?" I asked as we took several turns before Rose pushed open a large door and we entered, what was possibly, the largest closet in the universe. I whistle lowly before my eyebrows furrowed, "how is it most of these are women's clothes?"

"Don't judge," Rose scolded lightly, elbowing me in the side.

"Hey," I argued back, "I was the first person to volunteer for the Mardi Gras parade! And some of my colleagues are Drag Queens or transgender! If the Doctor likes to dress as a woman then good for him; but does he need so many clothes?"

"Just pick something to wear."

I watched Rose run forward and shook my head with a small smile turning up my lips, "you still haven't told me why I need to change."

"We're in 1860," Rose replied as she found a whole rack of dresses with 1800's labelled above them.

"1860?" I questioned lightly as I watched her pull out a dress and admire it quickly before she shook her head and put it back on the rack.

"Yup," she grinned, throwing a look at me over her shoulder, "December 24th, 1860."

I watched Rose pull out another dress, this one light green. It had short sleeves that were off the shoulder, a low, wide scooped neckline with fabric detailing. The bodice was clearly crested, the boning evident even from where I stood. Lace trimming detailed the area where the corset stopped and the skirt of the dress began. The skirt was draped at the top and pleated at the bottom and the whole piece looked unnecessarily heavy.

"This one would look perfect on you," Rose told me as she walked over and practically shoved the
A copious amount of fabric into my hand.

"You can't be serious," I scoffed, looking down at the dress in my arms, "this thing weighs as much as I do and you want me to walk around in it for God only knows how long?"

Rose rolled her eyes, "don't be dramatic. It's not that heavy." She noticed something and smiled brightly as she ran to a pair of pale green shoes. They had a small heel and were rather plain but still seemed like you were trying to be impressive. She grabbed a green velvet half cape and a cream coloured hat that had tiny light green flowers and a white ribbon on it.

"Little much, don't you think?" I ask as she thrust the items into my arms before practically pushing me out the door.

"I want to see you wearing all of that, Charlie," she demanded, "and put your hair up, show the Doctor your face."

I paused at the comment, turning to look at Rose. "why would he need to see my face?"

"Because you're beautiful," Rose commented slyly.

"And?" I asked, "so are you. Are you going to wear your hair up so the Doctor can see your face?"

She smirked at me, "maybe I will. Not that it'll matter."

"Why not?"

"Don't worry about it," she replied, "now, hurry up and get dressed, we have a past to explore."

I can tell you right now, getting into that dress was no walk in the park. I had to call Rose into the room when I heard her walking passed after twenty minutes just so I could get her to help me into the damn corset. After that, it felt like I had gained twenty pounds in fabric alone. Why would women subject themselves to this kind of torture? And I was just talking about the dress! Don't even get me started on the corset, I swear Rose tightened it too much because it was near impossible to breathe.

When I did have it on, I curled my hair and placed it in a neat bun before fastening the ridiculous hat into my hair. It covered most of my forehead and part of my eyes just by the way it had to be positioned but I had to admit just how nice I looked. The half cape and the shoes were the last things to go on and I gave a little twirl in front of the floor length mirror that hadn't been in my room when I had left earlier.

"What do you think?" I asked the Tardis, receiving a complimentary hum in reply. "Thank you," I smiled, "I probably should get out there before Rose comes in and drags me out. Wish me luck."

A light beep was my reply before I left my room and made my way back to the console room. The Doctor and Rose were waiting and it looked like wearing era appropriate clothes only applied to Rose and I.

Rose was the first one to notice me and I smiled sheepishly as her eyes widened. "I knew you'd looked amazing, Charlie, but I never imagined how much," she breathed as she moved away from the Doctor, who was openly staring at me, and stepped in front of me. Rose hugged me to her, her eyes quickly darting to my arms and the scars that now rested there from the burns. She gave me a concerned look but I simply smiled at her, the scars didn't bother me and they shouldn't bother her.

Rose grinned in return before she turned to the Doctor and I saw her smile turn into a smirk. What
"What do you think Doctor?" she asked, "doesn't she look beautiful?"

Rose's voice registered in his mind but he couldn't seem to string two words together as he looked at Charlotte. Beautiful was an understatement though. Rose was beautiful. Charlotte? Charlotte was… words couldn't even describe how wonderful she looked. The green certainly complimented her fiery hair and he found his eyes drifting to her naked collarbone without much thought.

"Doctor?" Rose prompted and he swallowed the sudden lump in his throat that had formed at the sight of her.

"What?" he croaked, coughing before he continued, "oh, yeah, you look okay."

He could have slapped himself when the words left his lips and judging by the narrowed eyes and the frown, Rose could probably slap him too. Charlotte, however, smiled wanly at him, like she hadn't really expected him to reply anyway and he felt guilty that he was the cause of that smile.

He hadn't been lying to her earlier when he told her she had done nothing wrong. She couldn't possibly have known the significance of the words she had spoken, after all. But, after hearing them, whenever he saw Charlotte, he could only think of her, his best friend. Valsill. She too had had fiery hair, a trait that seemed to pass on to each and every one of her regeneration. Not that she regenerated often. She had only done it four times before the Time War. But the fiery red hair was a constant. Sure, it was always a different shade of red or orange, but the colour never drifted from that general colour. It had been one of the many reasons for her other name. The Phoenix.

"Thank you," Charlotte said, her eyes lowered as she fiddled nervously with the lace trimming of her dress. When the ensuing silence dragged on, Charlotte coughed awkwardly and looked up. "So," she smiled, "are we going to go check out what Christmas Eve is like in 1860?"

Rose laughed at her friend and even the Doctor couldn't help but smile at the comment, Charlotte's way of trying to break the awkward tension that had once more settled upon them. An awkward tension he was responsible for.

He went to make his way to the door when Rose suddenly turned on him and pointed one of her fingers at him. "You stay there," she ordered, a grin spreading across her youthful face, "you've done this before. This is ours."

He watched as she grabbed Charlotte by the hand and dragged the chuckling woman to the Tardis door where she opened it and paused. "Go on, Rosey," he heard Charlotte gently encourage her, "a whole new world is waiting to meet you."

That warmed his hearts, hearing her softly spoken words as she coaxed her best friend out of the door. He walked to the door after they had vanished through it and saw both of them hugging and laughing in the fallen snow. "1860," he heard Charlotte laugh, "we're in 1860, Rose."

"Ready for this?" he asked, gaining both of their attention as he took a step out of the Tardis and held his arms out for them to take. Rose did so without hesitation but Charlotte paused briefly before shaking her head and resting her hand in the crock of his elbow. "Here we go," he grinned, pushing his internal struggle aside for the moment, "history."
Everything was so beautiful. The old houses, the carless roads, the horse-drawn carriages. I didn't know where to look and felt like my head was on a constant swivel as I tried to take everything in. The Doctor and Rose were talking but I was too focused on burning this moment into my brain that I barely paid them any mind.

I was in 1860. Me. Nan would chuck a fit if she knew.

"It's not 1860," I finally heard the Doctor say and stopped to turn back and look at him and Rose. When had I begun to wonder off? What did he mean we weren't in 1860? "It's 1869," he continued. Well that wasn't too bad, right? Only off by almost a decade.

"I don't care," I heard Rose say and I certainly agreed with her. We were in 1869, I was absolutely thrilled to be experiencing history first hand.

"And it's not Naples."

Were we supposed to be in Naples? No one had really told me anything other than we were in 1860. I probably should have asked where we were and I made a mental note to do that more often in the future. Past? Present? Eh, who cares.

"I don't care," Rose sang, smile still on her face as she began making her way over to me. She looked stunning in the dress she had chosen and I had made sure to tell her that when we had been jumping around in the snow earlier.

"It's Cardiff."

That stopped Rose in her tracks.

I snorted.

The Doctor looked sheepish and by that point, I wasn't even trying to hide my giggles.

"Right," I heard Rose mutter before she was next to me and slapping me lightly on the arm, "would you stop that?"

I cough, grinning sheepishly at her as I straightened up and patted down my dress. "Sorry," I grinned, not at all sorry. Rose rolled her eyes but I saw her smile and she threaded our arms together. "So, 1869, Cardiff," I began, looking back at the Doctor and holding my hand out for him to come and join us, "let's go have some fun, shall we?"

Rose watched as the Doctor eyed Charlie's outstretched hand before he grinned at her and took it, tucking it into his elbow. She saw Charlie give him a small smile and internally grinned like a fool. Honestly, she had seen the potential with them both since they had met in her apartment. Sure, Charlie had been hostile towards the Doctor at first but that seemed to have changed since visiting the future.

She watched her friend try and include the Doctor in a conversation and saw how the Doctor seemed to alternate between relaxed and stiff in her best friends' presence. It had been like that since shortly after Charlie had woken up in the Tardis medical bay and neither of them would tell her what had happened for them to act like that. Well, for the Doctor to act like that. Rose had noticed how Charlie had warmed up to the Doctor a bit, and how she had tried to get to know him better over the last few days. She also noticed how the Doctor seemed to constantly be brushing her off and it both annoyed and concerned Rose.
His earlier reaction to Charlie when she had walked out in the dress had made Rose smirk. Rose knew just how beautiful her friend was and enjoyed seeing the flabbergasted expression on the Doctor's face as he studied her friend. Of course, he had to go and ruin it by telling Charlie she 'looked okay.' Okay? Okay?! Her friend looked like a fairy-tale princess or something. Charlie hadn't seemed offended by the comment though and that had been the only reason Rose hadn't chewed the Doctor out about it.

"We should go to the theatre," she heard Charlie tell the Doctor.

"Why would we want to go there?" he asked.

Rose saw Charlie roll her eyes, "I don't know," she answered sarcastically, "to see a performance? Is that not something people do when they go to a theatre, Doctor?"

The Doctor was about to retort when they heard screams coming from a nearby building. Which, low and behold, just so happened to be the theatre.

"That's more like it," the Doctor grinned before he took off running towards the building.

Rose heard Charlie huff, "that man is infuriating."

"Come on," Rose chuckled before they both went after the Doctor.

"If I knew we were going to be running about, I would have worn sneakers," I huffed from beside Rose and she snorted as we ran into the building shortly after the Doctor. I stopped to catch my breath and vaguely saw Rose disappear further into the theatre.

Taking deep breaths, I tried to slow my rapidly beating heart and made a mental note to ask the Tardis if she had a gym and if not, could she create one? Hell, I'd take a simple treadmill if she could somehow create one, anything so I didn't feel like a couch potato whenever I had to run after the Doctor and Rose.

"Doesn't help that this dress feels like I'm lugging around an extra person," I said to no one in particular as I removed my cape, feeling hot after the short run. Really, I needed to invest in a cardio routine. The thought of exercise made me groan but it was a necessary evil.

I had just straightened out and turned to enter the theatre when two people carrying an unconscious woman ran past me. "Hey!" I called, running after them, "is she okay?" I asked, my mind already jumping to possible reasons she could be unconscious.

The young girl looked up at me as the older man tried shoving the woman into the back of a carriage.

"Hey!" I exclaimed, "what are you doing?! You're going to hurt her!"

"What are you doing?!!" I turned to see Rose running out of the theatre and went to call out to her when a cloth was shoved over my nose and mouth.

I inhaled on instinct and my eyes widened when I smelt the chloroform. It was already too late, however, and I felt my eyes grow heavy as my world went dark; Rose calling my name the last thing I heard before I was being dropped to the ground.

The Doctor ran out of the theatre and saw an older man and a younger woman shoving Rose into
the back of a carriage. The man was ordering the woman to hurry up so they could get the second one into the carriage and he looked over to see Charlotte's unconscious form in the snow.

"Rose!" he yelled, "Charlotte!"

The man and the woman looked at him before they quickly jumped into the carriage and took off, taking Rose and forgetting Charlotte. The Doctor ran to Charlotte and scooped her into his arms, feeling her icy skin even through his jacket. She couldn't have been lying in the snow for long but she had removed her cape and the dress left her arms bare.

"You're not escaping me, sir," the man who had been speaking in the theatre said as the Doctor spied a carriage and hurried over to it. "What do you know about this hobgoblin, hmm? Projection on glass, I suppose. Who put you up to it?" he demanded, his eyes landing on Charlotte, "and what have you done to this poor woman?!"

The Doctor's head shot up at the accusation, his eyes aflame with anger and injustice. "I didn't do anything to her!" he retorted, "and I don't have time for this. Oi!" he continued, his eyes on the driver of the carriage he had approached, "follow that hearse!"

He got in, placing Charlotte down next to him as gently as he could before he took off his jacket and threw it over the top of her, covering her exposed arms like a blanket.

"I can't do that, sir," he heard the driver say and he tore his eyes away from Charlotte to glare at the man.

"Why not?" he demanded.

"I'll tell you why not," the annoying man from the theatre blustered, "I'll give you a very good reason why not. Because this is my coach."

The Doctor rolled his eyes, why did everyone have to be so difficult? "Well, get in, then," he ordered impatiently. When the man was in the Doctor stuck his head out the carriage window and shouted to the driver, "move!"

He could hear the crack of the whip as the carriage moved down the street but he still didn't feel like they were moving fast enough. Someone had taken his friend and had drugged and planned on taking the other one. They needed to find the hearse and get Rose back.

"Come on," he yelled to the driver, "you're losing them."

"Everything in order, Mister Dickens?" the driver asked, ignoring the Doctor who had just frozen in his seat as the name the driver used registered in his mind. It couldn't be, right? Not the Dickens? Charles Dickens? No way.

"No!" Dickens replied angrily, "it is not!"

"What did he say?" the Doctor asked, needing clarification for what he was assuming. And he hoped he was assuming right. This was just too good.

"Let me say this first," Dickens answered him with a glare, "I'm not without a sense of humour."

"Dickens?"

"Yes."
"Charles Dickens?"

"Yes."

"The Charles Dickens?"

"Should I remove the gentleman and his lady friend, sir?" the driver asked.

The Doctor shook himself, his grin wide and his excitement skyrocketing at the man sitting in front of him. "Charles Dickens? You're brilliant, you are," he began, "completely one hundred per cent brilliant. I've read them all. Great Expectations, Oliver Twist, and what the other one, the one with the ghosts?"

Dickens seemed to preen at the obvious praise, his shoulders relaxing and an easy smile crossing his face. "A Christmas Carol?" he asked, hoping to help clarify his work.

The Doctor shook his head, "no, no, no, the one with the trains. The Signal Man, that's it. Terrifying!" he exclaimed, "the best short story ever written. You're a genius."

And he meant it. He had always admired the literary works of Charles Dickens. And to meet him? It was awe inspiring. He only wished it were under slightly better circumstances.

"You want me to get rid of them, sir?" the driver asked again and this time he received an answer from Dickens who simply told him the Doctor and his 'lady friend' could stay.

At the mention of lady friend's, the Doctor's eyes did drift back to Charlotte. She seemed so tiny covered by his jacket, as she had looked when he had covered her after the incident in the engine rooms. He felt guilty for ignoring her these last few days and vowed to rectify it the moment everything that was happening was over. She had given him a box to go through and he was curious and determined to do so when he could.

A wayward strand of hair had fallen over her face and he reached out without thinking, tucking the strand back behind her ear. He saw Dickens throwing him a cursory glance before the Doctor pulled his hand away and quickly distracted the man.

Waking up after being drugged is not a pleasant experience. My head was pounding, my nose was burning, and I was in a really bad mood. However, waking up after being drugged and finding yourself in the presence of Charles Dickens? Yup, that would be my life now.

After I had gotten most of my fangirling out of the way, the Doctor had informed me of what had happened and I was pissed again. Someone had kidnapped Rose! Someone had drugged me and then taken my best friend and the longer we rode in the carriage the angrier I got. The moment the carriage pulled up out front of the funeral home, I was about ready to jump out when I realised that wouldn't be possible with the large dress.

Impatiently, I waited for the Doctor and Charles Dickens to get out of the carriage. Dickens turned back and offered me his hand which I gratefully took, smiling at him as he helped me out of the carriage. I handed the Doctor back his leather jacket and shivered a little as the cold nipped at my exposed arms. I also didn't miss the horrified look on Dickens' face when he saw the scars on my arms from the burns I had suffered a few days ago and several billion years into the future. Time travel was confusing.

Scooping up the fabric that made the skirt of my dress, I held it firmly and practically ran forward as the Doctor reached the door to the funeral home and knocked loudly.
My temper was doused slightly at the small woman who opened the door. She couldn't have been any older than Rose and she looked so scared as she looked at the Doctor standing before her.

"I'm sorry, sir," she said politely, "we're closed."

"Nonsense," the Doctor replied and I could see he was holding his temper back for the sake of this slight woman too, "since when does an Undertaker keep office hours? The dead don't die on schedule. I demand to see your master."

"Please," I added, throwing a reprimanding glare at the Doctor who pointedly ignored it. I turned my head back to the young woman who was looking at me as if no one had ever said please to her before. "We're just trying to get my friend back," I explained gently, "we don't mean you any harm."

"I'm sorry, miss," she replied with a shake of her head, "I've no idea what you speak of and he's not in, sir," she finished, throwing an uneasy look at the Doctor.

"Don't lie to me, child," Dickens spoke up, stepping around me and the Doctor to glare down at the poor girl, "summon him at once," he ordered.

I rolled my eyes and muttered 'men' under my breath. The Doctor must have heard it because I heard him snort in amusement. "I was talking about you too, mister," I added with a small smirk and watched as the amusement left his eyes and he glared down at me, insulted.

"I'm awfully sorry, Mister Dickens, but the master's indisposed."

"Please," I tried once more, quelling my rising temper. This girl hadn't drugged me and taken Rose, her master had, she didn't deserve my ere but her master would certainly receive it when I saw him, "I just want my friend back, she'll be so frightened."

The girl's eyes softened as she looked at me and I could see her stance relax as she slowly opened the door a little more. She reminded me so much of Rose and a swell of protectiveness flared up inside my chest. "The men can stay out here," I tried to coax her, ignoring the protests from the Doctor and Dickens, "I'll get Rose and I'll leave you be, I promise."

She was silent and I began to worry my bottom lip anxiously as I waited for her reply.

There was no way he was letting her go into that building on her own. Not when he knew the man who had drugged both her and Rose was somewhere in there. He didn't trust the man not to try it again and he wasn't going to put Charlotte or Rose in any more danger than they had been in already. His eyes quickly darted down to her scared arms and felt his chest tighten at the sight of them. They didn't seem to bother Charlotte but to him, they were a reminder that she had gotten hurt because of him and, had she not gotten hurt, Jabe would have died.

"Okay, miss," the young woman replied and his head snapped up to look at her, "just you. And you must hurry. You'll find your friend in the back."

"Thank you," Charlotte replied softly, a gentle smile curling her lips.

Then she disappeared into the house.

How had she managed to talk the scared girl into disobeying her master? He only wanted Rose back as well and yet this woman seemed determined to keep him and Dickens out at all costs. Why was Charlotte any different?
The girl looked at him like she was reading his mind, and he felt himself stiffen a little at the action. Something wasn't right here. Not just with the gas-like creature from the theatre either. This young woman seemed a little off. But why?

He didn't know, but he was absolutely going to find out.

A gas lamp behind the small woman flared up and the Doctor looked at it curiously. "Having trouble with your gas?" he asked, not really needing an answer as he dug into his jacket pocket and pulled out his sonic.

"What the Shakespeare is going on?" Dickens exclaimed from behind him.

The Doctor moved past the girl and into the building, moving towards the lamp as he studied it closely. He ignored the girl's protests in favour of trying to solve the mystery that had fallen into his lap.

I was slowly making my way down the hall when I heard Rose shouting.

"Please! Please, let me out!"

I started to run down the corridor only to run into the man who had drugged me and taken Rose as he stepped out of a small side room.

"How dare you, miss, sir!" he exclaimed and I threw a look over my shoulder to see the Doctor a little way behind me. "This is my house!" he continued as he went to grab my arms, no doubt to throw me out.

My hand curled into a fist and I reared it back before bringing it up and punching him in the jaw. Pain shot up my hand and I shook it with a grimace as I heard the man cry out and the woman from earlier squeal. "Damn," I muttered as I pushed my way past the man, "never doing that again."

"Nice right hook," the Doctor said as he came up beside me and we made our way down the hall quickly.

"Thanks," I replied simply as I heard Rose cry out again.

The Doctor stepped around me and kicked the door open before I pushed past him and grabbed Rose, tugging her out of the grip of the cadaver that had been grabbing her. "Hands off," I growled as I pushed Rose behind me before my view of the guy was blocked by the Doctor.

"It's a prank," I heard Dickens stutter behind us, "it must be. We're under some mesmeric influence."

"No, we're not," The Doctor replied simply, "the dead are walking. Hi," he continued with a bright smile and a wiggle of his fingers as he looked back at Rose. I snorted and Rose grinned.

"Hi," she replied before she threw a look at Dickens, "who's your friend?"

"Charles Dickens," the Doctor and I replied simultaneously, grinning at each other when we did.

"Okay," Rose answered.

"Really?" I asked, "that's it? Okay? It's Charles Dickens! The Charles Dickens!"

"I know who he is, Charlie," she replied with a roll of her eyes, "you talk about him all the time."
Him and Shakespeare."

"You talk about me?" Dickens asked with a coy smile.

"Not now," the Doctor and I answered simply as I felt my cheeks flush and threw a glare at a smirking Rose for announcing to everyone I was slightly obsessed with Dickens and Shakespeare. How could I not be? They had written some of the most beautiful and inspiring things.

"My name's the Doctor." I turned my attention back to the two dead bodies that were currently, somehow, moving as the Doctor continued to speak with them, "who are you, then? What do you want?"

"Must you always sound so pushy when you speak?" I asked curiously.

"Not now, Charlotte."

"Don't call me Charlotte."

"Shut up."

"Don't tell me what to do, Doctor!"

"Falling." That voice shut me up pretty quickly. It sounded like several voices speaking at once and it was one of the creepiest things I'd ever heard. "Open the rift. We're dying." Ironic considering it was being said by a dead person. What can I say? I have a dark sense of humour sometimes. "Trapped in this form," the voices continued, "cannot sustain. Help us. Argh!"

Then the gas left the bodies and I flinched as they fell to the ground heavily.

"Well," I said when no one seemed to want to speak, "at least they didn't eat our brains or anything."

The Doctor and Rose threw me a look and I shrugged with an innocent smile on my face. As I said, dark sense of humour.

The Doctor stood by the fireplace as he listened to Rose chew out Mister Sneed whose jaw was slowly turning a dark shade of purple. His eyes darted over to Charlotte who was sitting in a chair on her own as she studied her knuckles. He frowned when he saw they were bruising themselves and made a note to find something to put on them later once they returned to the Tardis.

"-and don't think I didn't feel your hands having a quick wander, you dirty old man."

He had still been watching Charlotte when Rose had said that last bit and watched her head snap up, her eyes narrowed in a glare so icy it could have frozen a volcano. It was clear to anyone just how protective Charlotte was of Rose and the Doctor felt pity for anyone at the receiving end of that woman's temper when it came to protecting her best friend. He was familiar with that level of protectiveness, had felt it for Valsill their entire lives. Even when he had gone off to travel the universe, he would always stop back to check on her.

"I won't be spoken to like this," Sneed yelled, standing up and stepping closer to Rose.

Charlotte was out of her seat and beside Rose before anyone in the room could register her movements. "Sit. Down," she ordered the man in a calm voice that made it clear she was suppressing her anger as she glared fiercely at the older man who shrunk away under her gaze.
Then you stuck me in a room full of zombies!' Rose exclaimed, continuing her tangent as the Doctor watched her thread her fingers through Charlotte's. He watched the fiery redhead relax as Rose squeezed her hand as she continued to speak, "and if that ain't enough, you swan off and leave me to die! So, come on, talk!"

The Doctor was so distracted by how the firelight seemed to dance across Charlotte's pale features that he almost missed Sneed explaining about the house and the strange occurrences that had been happening in it. As Sneed and Dickens were arguing, Gwyneth walked in and placed a cup of tea on the mantelpiece beside him "two sugars, sir, just how you like it," she told him before she moved to hand Rose a cup.

He furrowed his eyebrows, knowing he hadn't told her how he liked his tea.

"We don't have the tea you like, miss," he heard her tell Charlotte softly, hesitantly, her eyes darting to Sneed's cheek before they went back to Charlotte.

He watched Charlotte smile softly at her, the earlier iciness that she had directed at Sneed gone as she replied to Gwyneth. "It's okay," she said, though he didn't miss the confused look on her face either. He had noticed just how observant Charlotte seemed to be and she must have also realised she hadn't mentioned anything about tea to the young woman. And what did Gwyneth mean, they didn't have the tea Charlotte liked? Tea was tea, wasn't it? "I'm happy to take water if it's not too much trouble," she continued after a moment.

"Of course, miss," Gwyneth replied quickly.

"Charlie," Charlotte replied, "just call me Charlie."

He watched Gwyneth smile before she hurried out of the room to get Charlotte some water. The Doctor watched Charlotte watch Gwyneth go before she leaned over and whispered something into Rose's ear. Rose nodded before she untangled her fingers from Charlotte's and the older woman left the room without a word to anyone else.

She was a mystery to him. One he fully intended on solving.

I followed Gwyneth into the tiny kitchen where she was cleaning a cup out for me. "I can do that," I said softly, hoping not to frighten her. It didn't work, however, and I flinched as the cup smashed on the ground. Gwyneth didn't even look at me as she bent down to pick up the pieces and I moved to help her. "I'm sorry," I continued, "I didn't mean to frighten you."

"It's not your fault, miss-"

"-Charlie. Charlotte if you really must."

Her eyes met mine and I tried to offer her a friendly smile. It must have worked because I watched her body relax as we continued to pick up the broken pieces. When we stood up and Gwyneth had disposed of the pieces I spoke again. "And I didn't just mean about a moment ago," I said, fiddling with the lace on my dress once more.

"I know, mi – Charlotte," Gwyneth answered, "I was more surprised than scared."

"I really hadn't meant to hit him," I defended myself, "really. I just wanted to get to Rose."

"I know," Gwyneth smiled, "you are fiercely protective of those you consider family."
I nodded, not thinking much of the comment. It probably didn't take a genius to see how protective I was of Rose. She was my little sister, after all; maybe not in blood but we were sisters where it really mattered and I'd do anything to keep Rose safe and happy.

"She reminds you of the sister you lost so long ago."

My whole body stiffened at that even as confusion flooded me. "I was an only child growing up, Gwyneth, I had no siblings," I told her softly.

"But you did," she insisted, "she died in a war, a horrible war, wrought with loss upon loss. Fought far from here.

"You died there too," she gasped and the confusion turned to dread as I realised where she was going with this, "but the Phoenix rises from the ashes, reborn once more to be a light in the darkness."

It wasn't possible. She couldn't possibly know about my dreams. I'd never spoken of them out loud to anyone, not even the therapist that had tried diligently to get me to speak of them.

"How-"

"So many things lost and left unsaid," she continued, her eyes glazed like she was in some kind of trance and I felt my heart rate increasing the more she spoke, "a sister, a friend, and something more; a love believed to be unrequited and kept secret. You've suffered so much and have come so far. The things you've seen. The things you've felt. The fire," she gasped, "the fire shall burn as the Phoenix rises again-"

I didn't hear what else she had to say, rushing from the room and out of the house. I allowed the biting cold to wash over me as I fell to my knees in the snow. The panic attack had come on too fast and I had been unable to control it before it reared its ugly head. My chest seized as my lungs were deprived of oxygen when it became too difficult to take in a breath of much-needed air.

My fingers were shaking, a mix of the cold and my fear at the things Gwyneth had said. She couldn't have known all of that. She shouldn't have known all of that. It wasn't possible. No one knew that. Only me. And soon to be the Doctor.

I hummed the lullaby my Nan had taught me inside my head as I forced my body to do what I wanted it to do. When my breaths began to deepen, I started humming the tune out loud as my shaking subsided a little.

A coat was placed over my shoulders and I jumped before I looked up.

My mouth dropped.

"You're the woman from the park!" I exclaimed.

She smiled at me, her eyes shining with warmth and affection. "Hello, Sweetie," she said as she rubbed my arms through the fabric of the coat she had placed on me.

"Who are you?" I asked, moving closer to her on instinct to retain warmth.

"Spoilers."

"Spoilers?" That's exactly what the Face of Boe had said to me. "What is with everyone and spoilers? Spoilers to what?"
"I'm afraid that's spoilers too," she sighed exasperatedly.

"Why are you here?" I asked instead.

"You sent me," she answered simply, "ask me to give you this." She handed me a small envelope with my name, a date, and a place on it. It was stamped for exactly a year after the Doctor had taken us away from London before we had gone to the future. "Don't open it until you are in that place on that date," she ordered softly, "and I'm so sorry, Lottie."

My head snapped up at the name, the name only my Nan and Pop ever called me and I saw the woman smile sadly.

"Will I see you again?" I asked as she stood and helped me to my feet.

"You will," she nodded, "not for a while, I'm afraid. But you'll meet others."

"Others?"

"Companions," she answered easily, "friends, family, your choice what you call us, Sweetie. In fact, you'll meet one such person very soon, and I wish I were there to watch that particular meeting but my husband's already mad at me for interfering as it is."

"Your husband?"

"Spoilers."

"I'm really starting to hate that word," I huffed.

She laughed, "oh, I know." She surprised me by kissing my cheek. "Take care of yourself, Sweetie," she told me, "and know it wasn't your fault."

"What are you talking about?" I asked, but she had already walked off, disappearing around the corner and leaving me standing in the middle of the streets, still wearing the strange coat she had placed over my shoulders to shield me from the cold.

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Turns out you can miss a lot when you're too busy talking to a curly-haired mystery woman. Like a séance for instance. Though, if what Rose said was anything to go by, I was happy I'd missed it.

Mr Sneed wisely stayed away from me, though I could admit I wasn't nearly as angry as I had been. No one commented on the strange jacket I was wearing, though I did see the Doctor throwing curious glances at it and I hadn't missed when he had tried to discreetly scan it with his sonic. The letter was in one of the many pockets of the coat, pockets that seemed to be impossibly bigger on the inside. Though curious, the woman had made it seem important that I not open it until the correct time and in the correct place. Which happened to be a park bench my Nan and Pop would sit on as they watched me and Rose play.

My mind was brought back to the conversation in front of me; and by conversation, I mean argument. Apparently, the little gas people were an alien race called the Gelth, a race that was practically decimated during some war. Rose hadn't given me details and the Doctor had looked a little haunted at the mention of it so asking him seemed to be out of the question for now. Whatever the war was, though, the mere mention of it had seemed to make the Doctor more than determined to help the Gelth. Which would be brilliant, if it didn't mean allowing them to inhabit the dead.
I know mine and Rose's aversion to it seemed strange to the Doctor and I'm pretty sure the reasons were pretty much the same too. It was just wrong to allow someone else to inhabit the dead body of another person. Right? I believe so, but the Doctor didn't seem to share the same views and I figured keeping quiet would keep me from losing my temper like Rose seemed to be doing.

"Why not?" the Doctor asked, he and Rose standing almost chest to chest as they argued, "it's like recycling."

"Really, Doctor?" I interjected, that sentence was just too much for me and I tried to keep the disgust off my face when he looked to me, "you're comparing using another person's body to recycling? How do those two even come close to comparison?" He went to answer and I raised my hand with a shake of my head, "please, don't try and justify that sentence to me."

"Seriously though," Rose cut in, "you can't."

"Seriously though, I can," the Doctor replied and I rolled my eyes.

"What, are you two going to start pulling at each other's hair next?" I sassed, "you're acting like a bunch of children."

"It's wrong," Rose almost yelled, ignoring me completely, "those bodies were living people. We should respect them even in death."

"Do you carry a donor card?"

"No," I answered simply, earning a glare from the Doctor, "what?" I asked, shrugging my shoulders before my eyes moved to Gwyneth who was now looking between me, Rose and the Doctor.

"That's different," Rose answered, "that's-"

"It is different," the Doctor interrupted as I made my way over to Gwyneth and sat beside her, taking her hand in mine and squeezing it gently. She offered me a kind and somewhat apologetic smile and I knew she was silently apologising for earlier. I nodded my head at her and felt her squeeze my hand back before we both turned to look at the Doctor. "It's a different morality. Get used to it or go home," the Doctor continued angrily and I felt myself stiffen at the hurt look that flashed across Rose's face. "You heard what they said, time's short. I can't worry about a few corpses when the last of the Gelth could be dying," the Doctor finished resolutely.

"I don't care," Rose huffed, "they're not using her."

"Rose," I quietly scolded, "you're not in control of what Gwyneth does and doesn't do."

"Don't I get a say, miss?" Gwyneth added, her eyes moving to Rose.

"Look," Rose began, "you don't understand what's going on."

"You would say that, miss, because that's very clear inside your head, that you think I'm stupid." It hadn't been said angrily, more like Gwyneth was simply commenting on the weather and the nonchalance in her voice made me frown. Gwyneth was so used to people thinking so little of her that she seemed so unfazed by it now and it made anger swell in my chest.

"You're not stupid, Gwyneth," I told her softly, "not even a little."

"Thank you, Miss Charlotte," Gwyneth smiled softly, "you're too kind."
"That's not fair," Rose defended herself.

"It's true though," Gwyneth replied, "things might be very different where you're from, but here and now, I know my own mind, and the angels need me." She stood up, her hand falling from mine as she did so, and turned her determined gaze to the Doctor, "Doctor, what do I have to do?"

"Charlie, you can't possibly want her to do this," Rose argued, turning her gaze to me in the hopes I would back her up.

I sighed heavily, knowing what I said next was going to make Rose angry with me. "I think Gwyneth can make her own decisions, Rose," I told her softly, "and I'll stand by her choices."

"And if it were me?" Rose huffed.

"It's not you-"

"-but if it was? You'd be trying to stop me, wouldn't you?"

I worried my bottom lip with my teeth, thinking carefully on my answer, well aware of every pair of eyes in the room on me. "No," I answered after a moment, "no, I wouldn't stop you."

"What?" Rose asked, dumbstruck.

"You're not a child anymore, Rose," I replied, "you don't need me making decisions for you. Would I step in to help you if something went wrong or I believed you to be in danger? Of course. But I wouldn't outright tell you that you couldn't do something you believed you were capable of." I stood up and moved so I was beside Gwyneth, my hand resting on her shoulder in silent support as I once more spoke to Rose, "and I think you should let Gwyneth make her own choices, as well, because at the end of the day, they're her choices."

"What do I have to do, Doctor?" Gwyneth repeated, her gaze locked with the Doctor's.

"You don't have to do anything," he told her softly, his eyes momentarily moving to mine before going back to hers.

"They've been singing to me since I was a child," Gwyneth answered, "sent by my mam on a holy mission. So, tell me."

"We need to find the rift. This house is on a weak spot, so there must be a spot that's weaker than any other," the Doctor explained to us all, "Mister Sneed, what's the weakest part of the house? The place where most of the ghost have been seen?"

"That would be the morgue."

I rolled my eyes at the cliché, "of course, it would."

"No chance you were going to say gazebo, is there?" Rose asked and I snorted at her.

The Doctor stopped Charlotte in the corridor as everyone else descended the stairs leading to the morgue. She looked at him curiously before her eyes drifted to the hand on her arm and back up to him, her eyebrow raised. He silently dropped his hand before making sure they weren't being eavesdropped on.

"What do you really think about all this?" he asked her, not knowing why he wanted her input for.
She seemed just as surprised as he felt and it took her a moment to answer. He could tell she was thinking of how to answer because she was worrying her bottom lip with her teeth and her eyebrows were furrowed. "I don't like it, Doctor," she answered cautiously, "something doesn't feel right."

"What do you mean?"

"I don't know, just a feeling I got when Gwyneth decided she was going to help," she continued, "when I said I stood by her decision I felt like I was making a big mistake. Like I was supposed to be trying to stop her instead."

"You're probably just uneasy," he tried to say but Charlotte shook her head.

"It's not that," she told him, "I mean, I am uneasy, but that's not the feeling I got."

"What was the feeling?"

"It was cold," she mumbled, "like I had been doused in a bucket of cold water; and, I felt strange, like something inside of my head was screaming for me to stop Gwyneth."

He saw her fingers move to the skirt of her dress like she was feeling for something that wasn't there, she seemed to shake herself and the faraway look that had entered her eyes when she had begun speaking disappeared as she focused back on him. "I'm probably overreacting," she smiled easily, "not a big fan of funeral homes. We should probably catch up to them though, wouldn't want to miss out on all the excitement."

The Doctor watched as she walked past him and descended the stairs. Something was up with Charlotte and today wasn't the first time he had thought that. Little things that had happened since he had met her didn't seem to add up, she was a mystery and it frustrated him that every time he seemed to be getting close to figuring her out, she just became a bigger mystery. He made a mental note to get started on whatever was in that box she had given him the moment they got back to the Tardis, hopefully, that would shed some light on the mystery that was Charlotte Williams.

It was cold and dank in the basement that apparently doubled as a morgue and I pulled the coat tighter around my body to stave off the cold.

"This isn't creepy or anything," I heard Rose mutter from beside me.

"Pretty sure it's about to get creepier, Rosey," I told her. I wasn't surprised when I didn't receive a reply, I knew she was mad at me for not siding with her earlier. Everyone was gathered in the centre of the room and I found myself drifting closer to Gwyneth as the cold sensation intensified, and it had nothing to do with the lowered temperatures in the room. The feeling that something was going to go horribly wrong refused to leave me and it was putting me on edge the longer it lingered.

One of the Gelth came out of a gas lamp by the door and floated over to stand beneath a stone archway. "You've come to help," it said in that creepy voice that sent shivers down my spine, "praise the Doctor. Praise him."

I frowned, because it wasn't the Doctor that deserved their praise, it was Gwyneth. It almost sounded like they were trying to appeal to the Doctor's ego, and if it wasn't for that guilt-ridden look, I could see in his eyes, I would have believed it had worked. Whatever war that had done this to the Gelth had somehow involved the Doctor and he was helping them because of that guilt he felt.
"Promise you won't hurt her," Rose said, moving to the other side of Gwyneth,

"Hurry! Please, so little time. Pity the Gelth."

My frown deepened as it sidestepped answering Rose and I felt my hand move to clasp Gwyneth's as she went to move forward, halting her momentarily before I saw her give me a pleading look and I reluctantly let go.

"I'll take you somewhere else after transfer," I heard the Doctor tell the Gelth, "somewhere you can build proper bodies. This isn't a permanent solution, all right?"

"Gwyneth," I spoke up, the coldness reaching unbearable levels as I moved closer to her, "are you sure this what you want to do?"

"My angels," she whispered gently, "I can help them live. I want to do this, miss Charlotte."

"Okay," I answered hesitantly, "okay, you can do this. I'll be right here waiting for you when you're done. I won't leave you, okay? I promise. You're going to be okay." I didn't know if I was trying to comfort her or myself because the further I stepped from her the colder I felt and it made me feel nauseous.

"Okay, where's the weakest point?" the Doctor asked, throwing a quick glance at me as he did.

My stomach was churning as I watched Gwyneth stand beneath the archway and everything inside of me screamed to get her away from there. But I had told her I would stand by her decision and I planned to stick to my statement; no matter how bad an idea I thought this was. It would be okay, though; what's the worst that could happen?

I watched the Gelth instruct Gwyneth on how to open a bridge for them to get into this world and took a cautious step back without thinking. Gwyneth opened her mouth and blue gas comes out, the Gelth using her to pass into our world.

"She has given herself to the Gelth," the apparition said gleefully and my heart sunk, "the bridge is open. We descend."

Blue turned to red and the chill in my body became almost paralysing as my eyes moved to Gwyneth. "Gwyneth?" I asked, moving to step next to her only to be halted by large hands grabbing my arms. The smell of leather reached my nose as the Doctor pulled me away from the young woman.

"The Gelth will come through in force," the voices said, deeper, more dangerous.

"Doctor?" I breathed as he continued to move us away from the apparition.

"You said you were few in number," he addressed the Gelth.

"A few billion," the Gelth answered, "and all of us in need of bodies."

"Gwyneth!" I yelled, trying to move towards her again, "Doctor, let me go!"

"Gwyneth, stop this," Sneed ordered fearfully, "listen to your master. This has gone far enough stop dabbling, child, and leave these things alone. I beg of you!"

"Doctor, you have to let me help her," I pleaded as I struggled against his tightening hold, "please, you need to let me help her!"
Rose yelled a warning to Mister Sneed but the surrounding sounds were drowned out by the drumming of my heart as I tried to get to Gwyneth. This was my fault, I should have stopped her. The Gelth had lied to her, to all of us. She believed she was helping angels sent by her mother when they were nothing more than aliens determined to take over.

The Doctor continued to back us away from the approaching dead and when I felt a shaking hand thread through mine, I was momentarily snapped out of my struggling. I looked to my right to see Rose's fearful eyes looking at the dead as her body shook. Seeing that I had snapped out of it, the Doctor loosened his grip on my arms but still pulled me, and by extension, Rose, behind a metal gate. We quickly closed it and pressed out backs to the wall as the dead reached for us.

"I trusted you," the Doctor yelled at the Gelth, his voice breaking, "I pitied you."

I threaded the fingers of my free hand with his and squeezed gently, feeling him squeeze back as the Gelth spoke, "we don't want your pity. We want this world and all its flesh."

"Not while I'm alive," the Doctor replied sternly.

"Then live no more."

"But we can't die," I heard Rose say, her voice as panicked as I felt, "tell me we can't. Charlie and I haven't even been born yet. It's impossible for us to die. Isn't it?" she asked, looking over me and to the Doctor.

"I'm sorry."

He felt Charlotte's cold fingers loosen in shock as Rose spoke something, she mustn't have even considered herself. When he looked over to Rose, he noticed Charlotte's face had paled several shades but her eyes seemed firmly locked on Gwyneth. He recognised the look in her eyes, knew he himself often wore it. Guilt.

"But it's 1869," Rose continued and he moved his gaze to the scared blonde as his own guilt intensified, "how can we die now?"

"Time isn't a straight line," he explained, "it can twist into any shape. You can be born in the twentieth century and die in the nineteenth and it's all my fault. I brought you both here."

"It's not your fault," Rose replied with a shake of her head, "I wanted to come."

"Me too. Sort of," Charlotte spoke up for the first time since they had become trapped behind the gate. Her voice was so quiet that, had they not been so close, he doubted he or Rose would have heard her. She turned to look at him and he was put out by the look he saw there, acceptance. She accepted what was about to happen and she didn't blame him in the slightest for it. It wasn't the look that got him, though, but how familiar it was to him.

"What about me?" he said incredulously, "I saw the fall of Troy, World War Five. I pushed boxes at the Boston Tea Party. Now, I'm going to die in a dungeon in Cardiff."

"Bragging much?" Charlotte joked weakly and the Doctor felt himself smile at her as he heard Rose chuckle. The mood was sobered, however, when Rose said, "it's not just dying. We'll become one of them."

She looked over at him before her eyes went to Charlotte's and the Doctor watched as they silently
interacted before Rose spoke out loud. "We'll go down fighting, yeah?" she asked them both.

"Yeah," the Doctor answered.

"Damn right, we will," Charlotte said, her voice stronger as she spoke to Rose.

"Together?" Rose asked.

"Always," Charlotte answered and the Doctor nodded when they both turned to look at him. He felt Charlotte squeeze his hand and found himself comforted by the gesture.

"I'm so glad I met you two," he told them.

"Me too," Rose smiled.

"Be honest, Doctor," Charlotte joked again, "you couldn't stand me most of the time."

He chuckled and was about to reply when Dickens ran in. "Doctor! Doctor! Turn off the flame, turn up the gas!" he exclaimed as he covered his mouth with his handkerchief, "now, fill the room, all of it, now!"

"What're you doing?" he asked curiously.

"You brilliant man," he heard Charlotte laugh from beside him.

"Turn it all on," Dickens ordered, "flood the place!"

What the man was getting at finally registered and the Doctor grinned, "brilliant. Gas."

As the gas flooded the room, he heard Rose and Charlotte coughing and wheezing, feeling as Charlotte's hand dropped from his as she tried to cover her mouth and nose.

"What, so we choke to death instead?" Rose got out.

"Am I correct, Doctor? These creatures are gaseous."

The Doctor nodded, "fill the room with gas, it'll draw them out of the host. Suck them into the air like poison from a wound!"

"Plenty more!" he exclaimed as he ripped a gas pipe from the wall and watched as the Gelth left the corpses.

"Charlie!"

He looked down at Rose's cry and saw Charlotte on her knees, her coughing twice as bad as Rose or Charles'. She was trying desperately to breathe and he could see her face turning red in her struggle.

"Doctor, she has asthma!" Rose yelled, tears springing to her eyes as she watched her best friend struggle to breathe.

"Oh, now you tell me!" he yelled, his worry turning into anger as he glared down at the two girls.

He picked a struggling Charlotte up off the ground and helped her out from the alcove, watching as Rose threw one of Charlotte's arms over her shoulder.
"Gwyneth," he told the young girl beneath the archway, "send them back. They lied. They're not angels."

"Liars?" the girl asked dazedly.

"Look at me. If your mother and father could look down and see this, they'd tell you the same. They'd give you the strength. Now send them back!"

"I can't breathe," he heard Rose wheeze.

"Charles, get them out of here."

"No," Charlotte wheezed from beside him, "I'm – I'm not leaving with-without Gwyneth."

"Nor am I," Rose told him.

"Remember the world you saw," he told Gwyneth, "Rose and Charlotte's world."

"Miss Charlotte?" Gwyneth asked, clinging to the name.

The Doctor felt Charlotte move away from him and caught her before she could fall to the ground, his concern growing at how pale she was and the fact her breaths had gotten more and more shallow. "I'm-I'm here, Gwyneth," she choked out.

"All those people. None of it will exist unless you send them back through the rift," the Doctor continued as he felt Charlotte cling tightly to his arm.

"It's not your fault, Miss Charlotte," Gwyneth said and the Doctor felt his hearts jerk as he heard Charlotte sob, "it's not your fault. I can't send them back," she continued, "but I can hold them. Hold them in this place, hold them here. Get out."

He saw her take out a box of matches from her apron pocket.

"Gwyneth, no," Charlotte wheezed before her body was overcome by coughing, "you-you can't!"

"Leave this place!"

"Rose, get out. Go now," he ordered, "I won't leave while she's in danger. Now go. Charles, take Charlotte and get her out of here."

"No!" Charlotte cried, trying to struggle as he moved her into Charles' arms. Her asthma had taxed her of any energy she had and her struggling was sluggish and ineffective. "I-I won't leave her! I promised! Doc-Doctor!"

He closed his eyes as her pleas were replaced with coughing before Charles and Rose led her from the room.

"Don't let her blame herself," Gwyneth told him when the others were gone, "she mustn't blame herself."

"I'll try to help her," he promised.

"She's not gone, Doctor," she said in a faraway voice, "a Phoenix may fall but only to be reborn from the ashes."

"What did you just say?" he asked, his body going cold.
She didn't answer him and he moved to feel her pulse, his mouth turning down in a frown and his hearts sinking as he realised, she was gone. "I'm sorry," he told her softly as he placed a kiss on her forehead. "Thank you," he whispered before he ran out of the room.

He managed to get clear of the house moments before it exploded, sending his body flying across the street.

"Gwyneth!"

The Doctor looked up at Charlotte's scream and saw her in Rose's arms as they both cried.

"She didn't make it," Rose said in a small voice as Charlotte cried.

"I'm sorry," he told them both as he moved towards them, "she closed the rift."

"At such a cost," Dickens replied sadly, "the poor child."

"I did try, Rose, but Gwyneth was already dead," he told the blonde as she glared at him, "she had been for at least five minutes."

"What do you mean?" Rose asked him as she continued to try and comfort Charlotte.

"I think she was dead from the minute she stood in that arch," he told her.

"But she can't have," Rose argued weakly, "she spoke to us. She helped us. She saved us. How could she have done that?"

"There are more things in Heaven and Earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy," Dickens answered, "even for you, Doctor."

"She saved the world. A servant girl," Rose whispered, "no one will ever know."

Rose was worried. Charlie hadn't spoken a word to her or the Doctor since they got back into the Tardis. She had gone straight to her room and had locked the door. Even the Doctor's sonic couldn't get it open and he had tried for good twenty minutes.

Now, she was in the console room, watching him look for something as he muttered angrily to himself. "What are you looking for?" she asked him.

"A box."

"A box?"

"Yes, a box, it was right here," he pointed to a spot under the console, "and now it's gone."

"Was it important?" she asked.

"I don't know," he replied.

"You don't know?"

"I don't know, Rose!"

She fell silent at his outburst and watched as he ran his fingers over his buzzcut, "I'm sorry," he apologised.
"S'ok," she said with a shrug, "I'm going to bed."

She moved toward the hall, throwing one more look over her shoulder at the Doctor before shaking her head and leaving the room.

She watched her Thief throw things around her angrily, searching for the box her Angel had given him. He wouldn't find it though. She had hidden it until it was the right time for him to read them. It was still too early, for both of them.

Her Angel was sleeping in her room, tears drying on her cheeks. She had helplessly watched as her Angel had cried for the fallen servant girl. Her Angel believed it was her fault and she didn't know what to do to make her think otherwise. Her Thief and the flower had tried to get into her Angel's room earlier but she knew her Angel wasn't ready for their words and had kept them out. That had made her Thief angry too.

The servant girl had told her Thief more than she should have but her Thief was too angry and the words had been pushed to the back of his mind. For now. They couldn't learn the truth. Not yet. They weren't ready. But they would be. Soon. Well, not too soon.

She was playing a lullaby in her Angel's room to help her Angel sleep. She wondered how long it would take her Angel to realise that the lullaby she played was the same she had played in the library. The same lullaby her Nan had taught her.

Sometimes she really hated having to wait for the things she saw. But she knew it'd be worth it.

It would all be worth it.

Chapter End Notes

I really wish I could have saved Gwényth but I knew there really wasn't any possible way to do that. How are you liking things so far? River has obviously made an appearance much earlier than she does in the series but this will only be for Charlotte. In fact, she'll be making another appearance in the next chapter. River and Charlotte's interactions this early in the story will be setting up a certain plot idea I have for later in the book and I hope no one minds having her show up in a few chapters before we get to Silence in the Library.
That's a Dragon!

Chapter Notes

Now, it might seem that Charlie and the Doctor have some kind of 'instant attraction' to one another but I promise that at the moment it is purely physical and only fleeting. As we all know, you can be physically drawn to anyone, whether you know them or not, whether they're your best friend or your worst enemy. Just because you find someone physically attractive doesn't mean you like or love them. Please keep this in mind the more you read.

"Doctor, I'm worried about Charlie."

The Doctor looked up from where he had been tinkering with the Tardis, seeing Rose sitting cross-legged a little way from where he was working. How long had she been there? Had she just been watching him this whole time? He didn't know and now wasn't the right time to ask as he recalled the words she had just spoken.

He was worried about Charlotte too. It had been four days since the events of 1869 and she hadn't come out of her room once. The Tardis was keeping her bedroom door locked which meant sonicinig it open was pointless and he didn't exactly have a key because there was no actual lock on the door. It had vanished three days ago when he had tried picking it.

She was alive, he could guarantee that much. The Tardis may have been acting strangely lately but he knew she wouldn't let someone die if she could do something about it. He knew she was keeping an eye on Charlotte because there were times when he was working that he would hear her hum sadly. It was at those times that he wished she could talk and tell him what was going on.

"She hasn't come out of her room in four days," Rose continued, speaking what he had been thinking only moments ago, "she's got to be starving by now and I don't like the idea of her alone after everything that happened. I don't even know if she's okay after her asthma attack, she hasn't had one in years."

"There's nothing I can do, Rose," he sighed, rubbing the bridge of his nose as he backed away from the console, "we just have to wait until she's ready to come out."

Rose shook her head furiously, "we really can't," she told him, "I haven't seen her like this since her Pop died three years ago."

That certainly was new information to him. He vaguely remembered Charlotte mentioning her Nan but couldn't recall if she had ever mentioned her Grandfather. "What happened?" he asked, his worry growing a little at the uneasy look in Rose's eyes.

"She locked herself in her apartment for over a week," Rose told him, "wouldn't open the door for anyone, mum forced the landlady to open the door with the spare key. She was just sitting there, on her couch in the living room. She was so pale."

He watched Rose's eyes mist. "Didn't look like she'd eaten the whole time she had been there," she
continued with a hitch in her voice, "she'd been living on coffee by the looks of things, said she didn't want to sleep when we finally managed to get her to talk. Said she just saw his face when she closed her eyes, telling her these things that her Pop would never say."

"Like what?"

"That it was her fault he was gone," Rose sighed, "that she had been selfish staying in London that she had missed her own Grandfather's death. That's what hit her the hardest, I think; that she wasn't there. Charlie's real close with her Nan and was just as close with her Pop, tore her apart when her Nan called to give her the news. Not nearly as much as it did when she couldn't get the money to fly to New York for his funeral. We all tried to chip in but the tickets were just too much. She still hasn't seen where he's buried, doesn't want to either."

"Where were her parents in all this?" he questioned as he sat in front of Rose, his own legs crossed as he looked at the blonde teenager in front of him.

Rose shrugged, "never met them. Charlie hasn't got a clue who they are."

"Doesn't her Nan know?"

"She's adopted, Doctor," Rose told him, "there aren't any records of her parents, we've checked."

Suddenly, the Tardis beeped and whirred, the lights dimming and brightening rapidly. The Doctor and Rose looked up at the ceiling before they looked at each other. "What's that about?" asked Rose.

"I haven't got a clue," the Doctor answered before they were suddenly being thrown about as the Tardis took flight.

"Where are we going?" Rose shouted over the beeping and whirring the Tardis seemed insistent on making.

"We shouldn't be going anywhere!" The Doctor replied as he managed to get to his feet and look at the monitor. "We're not going anywhere," the Doctor said, confused, "the Tardis is searching timestreams."

"Why would the Tardis be searching timestreams."

The Doctor realised the beeps and whirs sounded panicked and his eyes widened as he ran past Rose and down the corridor. He could hear Rose running after him but he ignored the teenager as he took a left and a right before skidding to a halt in front of Charlotte's door. It was open. And she wasn't there.

"She's looking for Charlotte," he breathed as Rose came to a stop beside him.

"What? Where is she?!" Rose yelled, her panic rising, "Doctor, where is she?!"

Suddenly, the Tardis fell silent and they were thrown forward as she landed. "Where are we?" Rose asked, "when are we?"

"We're right where we were and when we were before she took off," he answered after checking his sonic as he got to his feet.

"But where's Charlie?"
"I don't-"

There was a bright flash and suddenly someone was stumbling into his arms. It was Charlotte. She was wearing a pair of ripped jeans and the strange coat she had been wearing in 1869. Her face was flushed and she was giggling like a schoolgirl. Then the smell of alcohol and smoke reached his nose; it didn't smell like cigarettes, more like she had walked through fire or something. The fact her face was dirty and she had a scrape on her cheek didn't help to soothe the concern he felt.

"Are you drunk?" he asked incredulously.

"No," she giggled, "maybe. Only a little."

She held her fingers together and then separated them so there was a small space between them as she spoke. Then she fell into a fit of giggles again.

"Where have you been?" Rose suddenly began questioning, pushing the Doctor out of the way before she had to quickly catch Charlotte before she fell. "How much did you drink?" she continued.

"Me?" Charlotte giggled, "I've been nowhere and everywhere and somewhere."

"How'd you get here? What was that light?"

"Vor-vor," she tried and the Doctor watched her nose scrunch up as she tried to get the word out, "time travel bracelet," she said instead.

"Vortex manipulator?" he asked, already searching her for it but not finding it on her.

"That's it!" she exclaimed, "you're smart. Told her you were smart. She said you could be quite daft sometimes. Gotta agree with her there, Doc."

"Who?" he and Rose asked simultaneously.

"Can't say 'cause I don't know," she giggled, "but I like her. She took me to a festival and we may have drunk a little and then blew up a warehouse."

"You blew up a warehouse?!" Rose screamed shrilly, making both the Doctor and Charlotte cringe.

"Course, I didn't blow up a warehouse," she huffed, "I'm not the Doctor, Rose, I have a bit more tact."

Rose snorted and the Doctor rolled his eyes. This didn't go unnoticed by the drunk woman who pouted at the both of them. "Don't be mean," she whined childishly, "I'm hungry," she continued, changing the subject rapidly, "but I'm also tired. I should sleep. Sleeping's good. Goodnight."

Rose groaned as Charlotte became a dead weight in her arms and the Doctor quickly stepped forward to take her off the teenager. He lifted her into his arms and carried her over to her bed, placing her on top of the covers before he turned to Rose.

"What the bloody hell just happened?" she asked him.

Her guess was as good as his.

Earlier…
I wasn't sure how long had passed since we had left 1869 and I honestly didn't care either. Gwyneth's face was all I could see whenever I tried to close my eyes, yelling at me for breaking my promise. I had told her I would be there for her, that she would be safe. I'd promised. And in the end, she'd died, alone.

The Tardis would try and communicate with me, humming at different frequencies but I hadn't replied, afraid I'd begin crying again and wouldn't be able to stop. Food appeared in my room three times a day and the Tardis seemed determined to get me to eat because every time I ignored the plate it would move closer and closer to me. Eventually, I had caved and eaten, hearing the Tardis hum proudly as I did so. Water was generally next and she refused to give me coffee no matter how much I asked. I was desperate for it to ward off sleep but not desperate enough to leave the room to get it and risk running into the Doctor or Rose.

I couldn't face them. Not yet. The guilt was eating at me. Rose had looked to me to side with her on Gwyneth not doing what the Gelth had asked. I hadn't sided with her. Even the Doctor had asked me for my opinion on what was happening and whilst I had been honest with him, I hadn't voiced all of my fears.

The moment I'd stepped into that basement I should have dragged Gwyneth out of there, kept her from opening the bridge. The cold feeling had vanished shortly after she had stepped under the arch and after hearing what the Doctor had said when the building had exploded, I realised it was because Gwyneth had died. The cold feeling had been a warning of what was to come. It was a warning for me to do something before it was too late and I hadn't listened. And Gwyneth had paid the price.

There was a sudden flash of bright light and I thought the Tardis was trying to communicate with me until I heard her hum happily.

"Nice to see you too," came a very familiar voice and I turned around from where I had been facing the wall, only to fall off the bed and land on the floor with a quiet thump.

"It's you!" I exclaimed as I looked up at the smiling woman.

"It certainly is, Sweetie," she smiled before she seemed to get a good look at me and frowned, "1869." I nodded even though it hadn't been asked as a question. "It wasn't your fault, Lottie," she sighed, moving to help me off the floor and lead me back over to the bed, "didn't I tell you it wasn't your fault?"

"I could feel something wasn't right," I replied lowly, "but I didn't-" I stopped, "-hang on, you knew!" I exclaimed, my guilt giving way to anger as I pushed away from her and began pacing, "you knew what was going to happen and you didn't warn me! I could have stopped it!"

"No, you couldn't have," she answered, "not without consequences."

"Damn the consequences," I yelled, pulling at my tangled hair, "I would have dealt with them!"

"You wouldn't have."

I turned to glare at her, my eyes cold, "you don't know me. I don't know you. Hell, you haven't even told me your damn name. So, don't act like you know how I would have handled the situation!"

"Look at you," she said angrily, standing up and approaching me until we were chest to chest, "look at how you are now, after losing a girl you had barely known for more than a few hours.
Now, picture it with Rose," she continued and I felt my anger vanish as cold dread filled my body, "imagine Rose's body lying there after the Gelth had killed her, only for her body to rise again. But it wouldn't have been Rose, it wouldn't have been your best friend. Not anymore. How would you feel now if that had been the outcome?"

"You-your speculating," I stuttered, shivering, "you can't possibly know the outcome."

"But I do, Sweetie," she said softly, her hand coming up to cradle my cheek. I didn't pull away, the touch comforting to me. "Had it not been Gwyneth it would have been Rose and the Doctor. It would have been you. And it would have devastated the past, the present, and the future."

"It doesn't make it any easier," I mumbled, "and it doesn't change the fact that I couldn't save Gwyneth. If I had stopped her from going in the basement, the Gelth never would have made it through the rift. No one would have died."

"You can't dwell on what-ifs and maybes, Lottie," she told me sternly, "some things are just meant to happen and some things can be changed. We'll never truly know just what it is that we can alter and sometimes it hurts to watch those we love and care about suffer; even if we didn't know them very long."

Silence descended upon us as we sat side by side on the bed. The Tardis hummed lowly and I wondered where she knew the mystery woman from. Suddenly, the curly haired woman perked up, "come on, get dressed."

"What? Why?"

"Because I know just what we can do that will cheer you up," she grinned, "but you certainly can't go looking the way you do."

I wanted to be offended by the comment but I knew what she said was true. "I don't want to leave the room," I told her as I watched her walk over to a door I hadn't noticed before. Turns out, the Tardis had given me a closet. A very full closet. I watched the woman rifle through it and pull out a few items before she would shake her head and put it back, muttering to herself. "I still don't know your name," I told her.

"Spoilers," she sang as she picked out a pair of dark wash denim ripped jeans and a black tank top. "Do you still have the coat I gave you?" she asked, her head poking out from the closet as she did so.

"Uh, yeah," I answered, moving to grab the coat from where it had been thrown hap hazardously on the chair."

"It's been ages since I saw this," she smiled and I furrowed my eyebrows, "at least, in this condition anyway."

"It's only been four days."

"For you," she retorted, "it's been a couple of years since we saw each other in 1869."

I was never going to get used to time travel. Ever. "So, you haven't seen me in years?" I asked. How long did I travel with the Doctor? Is that why we haven't seen each other? Did I stop travelling with the Doctor? Why? What had happened?

"I saw you just a moment ago, actually," she grinned, "you told me I'd be needed and where and when to go and off I went."
"You listened to me, just like that? No questions asked?"

She looked at me like I had just asked the most ridiculous question, "you said you needed me."

"And you came."

Her eyes softened and she smiled easily, "I'll always come when you need me, Sweetie."

"Your husband mustn't like that," I tried to joke, "swanning off to go visit some strange woman at the drop of a hat."

"Oh, on the contrary," she replied teasingly, "he's quite jealous."

"Really?" I asked, surprised, "why?"

"Because it's not his time to meet you yet, and he's very impatient."

"Oh."

She threw the jeans and tank top at me before she practically dragged me over to the door leading to the bathroom. "Shower, dress, and we can go," she ordered.

"Shouldn't we tell the Doctor?" I asked even as I walked into the bathroom.

She snorted, "of course not, serves him right."

"For what?"

"Spoilers."

I shook my head and closed the door, hearing her laugh as it did.

River looked around Lottie's room and frowned at how bare it seemed. The last time she had seen it, not even an hour ago, it was packed with trinkets and things. Lottie had told her that she hadn't been big on collecting things, preferring to keep her room and life as simple as possible. She said it would change the longer she travelled with the Doctor and River vowed to make sure the room was properly filled before long.

Of course, she wouldn't be able to just pop in like this all the time. Yet. The Doctor and Lottie were too early in their timeline for her to be around so often. Her husband was already mad at her for going back to 1869 and had almost popped a blood vessel when Lottie had asked River to go back and visit her younger self today. He had told her that they weren't allowed to interfere with the timeline and Lottie had smiled and kissed him on the cheek.

"She's not interfering, sweetheart," she had said in that soft voice that always had people caving into her requests, "she's already done it before and it helped me more than you know. Don't be mad at her for something I've asked her to do."

She'd been allowed to go after that, though, not without the promise of punishment when she got home. Now, that she was looking forward to. Lottie had simply snorted and left the room to give them a moment, her husband flushing like a schoolboy when he had realised, she had still been in the room when he had said it.

River knew Lottie didn't mind. The Doctor, now that was a completely different story. Lottie and River had made it a sort of game to make him as uncomfortable as they could whenever they were
in a room with him together. So far, Lottie was winning and River would often point out that she had an unfair advantage in their little game.

A cough drew her back to the present and she smirked when she saw Lottie leaning against the frame of the bathroom door. She still couldn't get over seeing her so young, not after spending so long with Lottie's older self. River held up a pair of black biker boots and watched Lottie's lips stretch into a small smile. She was getting through to her and River was happy for that.

"Ready?" she asked when Lottie had put the boots on. Lottie shrugged and River rolled her eyes at the stubborn woman. "Hold on to me, this might be a bit disorientating," she warned as she wrapped her arm around Lottie's small waist.

They vanished in a flash of light.

I threw up the moment we landed and could feel my stomach trying to catch up with the rest of my body as the mystery woman pulled my hair back. "It's okay," she soothed, "it'll pass soon. Vortex Manipulation; cheap and nasty bit of time travel as the Doctor says."

"I can see why," I groaned as I stood up and wiped my mouth. She held out a mint box and I sent her a raised eyebrow. I got no reply, only a sly smirk and a cocky wink as I took the box from her, removed a mint, and popped it into my mouth. "If you won't tell me your name, can you at least give me something to call you?" I asked as I allowed her to lead me down an empty street.

We weren't on Earth, that much was clear by how advanced the buildings and vehicles here were. Or, maybe we were on Earth. "Where are we?" I asked curiously.

"Earth," she answered, "about six thousand years into your future. Also, if you really must call me something, you can always call me Professor."

"Professor?" I asked, "Professor who?"

Her smirk turned into a grin and I saw her eyes flash with amusement, "always wondered how that felt," she laughed, "just Professor for now."

"Are you an actual Professor?"

"I am."

"Of?"

"Archaeology," she replied as we turned down another street and I was almost blinded by lights. "Here we are," she smiled.

"What is this?" I whispered as I looked around. The street was packed with people, all wearing different colours and styles. Music pumped through the air, as did a fine mist of something that seemed to smell like leather, tea, and chocolate.

"Mardi Gras," Professor answered, grabbing my hand and dragging me into the crowd.

I heard myself giggle as I began to relax. Professor chuckled as she looked back and saw the, no doubt, dopey grin on my face. "What do you smell?" she asked.

"Leather, tea, and chocolate."

She snickered and I gave her a curious look, "isn't that what you smell?"
"Nope," she answered with a shake of her head, "after shave, cinnamon, and smoke."

"That doesn't make sense," I told her lightly, "we're smelling the same thing but… not?"

"It's the mist," she explained as we slowed down near one of the street vendors, "it's an aphrodisiac, smells different to everyone according to what they find attractive. So, is it safe to assume you find a certain leather jacket wearing alien appealing?"

My cheeks flushed and I shook my head, "of course not." She gave me a look and I sighed, "fine! He's attractive, but that doesn't mean I like him!"

"Never said you did."

"Good."

"Great."

"Mhm."

"Here, drink this," she told me, thrusting a bottle filled with some kind of pink liquid in it, "bet you'll love it."

"My Nan said never to take drinks from other people," I answered immediately, remembering the reminder she had drilled into my head since I was a child.

"I'm sure your Nan wouldn't mind if it were from me," Professor muttered, almost too low for me to hear, "just drink it, Lottie, then we can go have some fun."

I gave the drink a cautious look, sniffed it, then shrugged my shoulders and downed the contents. It. Was. Amazing! It tasted like strawberries and cream but with the familiar burn of alcohol to accompany it. Professor smirked down at me as she watched my eyes widen and my speed of consumption increase before the bottle was empty and I was requesting another.

They'd been out for just over three hours and River was proud to say Lottie was holding her drinks pretty well. She knew older Lottie had a very high tolerance to alcohol but she hadn't been aware that her younger self seemed to have the same level of resistance to the effects. They had danced, they had laughed, and they had cried. Well, Lottie had cried. River had made sure to get the younger woman to talk about everything that had been bothering her lately and was happy when Lottie seemed to look more relaxed after she had finished spilling everything to her.

Currently, they were taking a moment to themselves off the main street. The smaller street was lined with extravagant cubicles, each one housing different people. To the cubicle to their right, River could hear two men giggling before the sounds of flesh meeting flesh had her focusing her attention elsewhere. It was the cubicle to her left that concerned her. A low-frequency buzzing was coming from the cubicle, a sound she would have missed if not for her life spent with the Doctor and older Lottie. Their adventures had honed her senses enough for her to easily detect something that was out of the ordinary.

"Sweetie," she said to the younger woman laying beside her on the large crimson sofa, "if I asked you to go back to the main street and not come back under any circumstances, would you listen to me?"

She knew the answer before Lottie even opened her mouth and, as much as she wanted to frown, it only managed to earn a large smile from her. "Of course not," she huffed, "is it dangerous?"
"Potentially," she said truthfully, hearing the low-frequency hum pick up before it suddenly went quiet. That wasn't good. It had sounded like a teleportation device had just been activated. The question was, had they teleported in or out?

"Then I'm definitely coming," Lottie answered as she stood up, only wobbling a little on her legs before she caught her bearings, "can't let you have all the fun, Professor."

River smirked at Lottie's words, so much like her older self. It was nice to know the years spent with the Doctor wouldn't change her. Much. She was still stubborn and fun to hang out with. "Well, then," she grinned, pulling out her sonic screwdriver, "shall we?"

"Hey! You have a sonic too!" she smiled, "I thought only the Doctor had one. Did he give one to you?"

"Well, you gave me this one, Sweetie," River smiled, remembering the dumbstruck look on the Doctors face when she had proudly shown him the sonic, she had been gifted. He had gone off on a tangent, River and Lottie smirking as he waved his arms around ridiculously, his eyebrows angrier than usual and his accent thicker than she had ever heard it. Lottie and River had simply laughed when he had turned to glare at them before River had kissed them both on the cheek and left the console room so Lottie could calm the angry man down.

"I did? How would I have access to a sonic?" Lottie asked her curiously, "does the Doctor give me one? Does he give Rose one?"

"Spoilers," River sighed, knowing she couldn't say anything about what was going to happen to Rose Tyler. Brave, stubborn, Rose Tyler. A woman she had heard stories about from older Lottie, who had always worn a sad smile and had a longing look in her eyes whenever she did. Rose Tyler had saved Lottie, and River would never be able to thank the blonde herself. Not without disrupting the timeline and tearing a hole in the universe.

"You know," Lottie said as they left their own little cubicle and moved to the one that had once housed the strange whirring sound, "one day, I'm going to have spoilers and you'll be left frustrated and not knowing."

River smirked over her shoulder at Lottie, "I have no doubt about it, Sweetie," she replied before she turned and used the sonic to open the door. She smiled softly when she heard Lottie muttering about 'stupid time-travellers' and resisted the urge to chuckle as she gave the cubicle a cautious once over. She'd never harm the future she had with Lottie and the Doctor; not for anything.

"What's this, then?" she heard Lottie ask and looked up to see Lottie had moved past her and into the room where she was standing next to a small silver device with a blinking red button.

"Lottie, don…"

Lottie pressed the red button and River watched as she disappeared in a brilliant flash of white light. She rolled her eyes. "Bloody made for each other," she muttered as she watched the teleportation device recharge before the red button began flashing again, "don't press the big red button," she continued as she removed her gun and put away her sonic. "Logic really," she continued as she pressed the red button and felt herself disappear and reappear beside a heavily panting Lottie.

"Note to self," she heard the younger woman mutter to herself, "don't press the big red button."
River snorted at the statement even as she looked around, her gun raised and ready to fire if she needed too.

"Where the hell did that come from?" Lottie asked her, pointing at the gun.

"I never leave home without it," River answered simply.

Lottie groaned, "please tell me I didn't give that to you too?"

River felt the corner of her lips tug. "Don't like guns, Sweetie?" River asked, already knowing the answer.

"I became a nurse to heal not hurt," she replied before she fell silent for a moment, "plus, a solid right hook usually does the trick anyway."

She chuckled again, same old Lottie, she thought fondly. River lowered her gun when the coast remained clear but was smart enough not to put it away completely. She motioned for Lottie to follow her as she began walking down the hall. Now, this was new. Usually, it was Lottie leading the way and River following just behind her. She shook her head, that Lottie would come in time.

"Where are we exactly?" Lottie asked from behind her.

"Still on Earth," River assured her, "that teleport wasn't capable of interplanetary travel or even interorbital travel. We could be on a different continent." They moved past a large window and River nodded, "definitely another continent."

It was snowing outside and by the look of the snow-covered ground, it probably snowed quite a bit wherever they were. The building they were in was surrounded by a vast forest and River wondered just what was going on when a loud, bone-rattling roar echoed through the halls. She was already turned in the direction of the roar, Lottie pushed behind her protectively, before the sound even ended.

"What was that?" Lottie asked, her eyes wide as her nails dug into River's arm.

She shook her head, "I haven't got the slightest idea what that could be," she answered simply.

"Let's go find out then," Lottie replied, moving past River and making her way down the hall. River rolled her eyes but couldn't keep the smile of her face as she followed behind Lottie.

This should be fun.

I have no idea where the burst of reckless bravery had come from, but right now? I felt like I could do anything. Something told me my new mood had something to do with whatever was in the drinks me and Professor were drinking earlier. Whatever it was, I kind of like it.

The narrow corridor we were walking down kind of reminded me of a hospital or a lab. The walls were a shockingly bright white and the floors were only a shade darker, though they gleamed brightly as the harsh lights above reflected off the overly polished surface. The roar from earlier hadn't sound again but there were no doors on the hall so it wasn't hard to try and find where the source of the sound had come from.

Professor was walking just behind me, her gun ready at her side as she constantly threw a look over her shoulder. She kind of reminded me of a soldier with the way she was currently acting, so different from when we were drinking in that small cubicle. Her stance was rigid, her eyes
constantly moving, and her free hand would occasionally move to reach for me as if she was preparing to pull me behind her at the first sign of danger.

I didn't like the fact she thought the gun was necessary but I wasn't going to hold it against her either. Guns were a big no no for me; I absolutely detested them. Don't get me wrong, I could be just as temperamental and violent as the next person, but I absolutely refused to pick up a gun if it didn't have the word NERF attached to it. That, or a paintball gun anyway.

The roar rang out again and I felt my heart race increase as Professor's hand gripped mine in an ironclad hold. My fingers were starting to go numb from her grip and I wriggled them a little before she eased up on her hold on me. "Maybe I should go first, sweetie," she told me, already moving around me to continue down the hall where we could see two large metal doors.

"If there's something dangerous behind there, you going first isn't going to make it any less likely that I'll get hurt or killed," I scoffed as I moved past her and towards the door, "think you could sonic the door open?"

Professor was giving me a look I couldn't quite decipher before she rolled her eyes and walked forward. She pulled out her sonic and I watched as she pointed it at the pad on the wall before the doors slid open.

Two aliens were standing at the door as it opened and both turned to point their guns at us. I raised my hands and saw Professor reluctantly do the same out of the corner of my eye. The aliens were male, they had orange skin and green hair; it was very hard not to make an Oompa Loompa or carrot comment as they took Professor's gun and forced us to follow them.

The older woman stuck close to me, her eyes constantly moving to look me over like she was afraid I'd somehow get hurt if she took them off of me for more than a moment. I, on the other hand, was too busy looking around the large and overly fancy warehouse we seemed to be being escorted through. That loud roar pierced the air again just as we were rounding the corner and I felt my mouth drop as I froze on the spot.

"Is that?" I asked.

"It is," Professor answered, her eyes narrowed at the large cage in front of us.

"But, how?"

"Poachers," she hissed, her eyes moving to glare at our captures.

"But, that's a-" I stuttered, trying to actually form the words as my wide eyes took in the sight before me.

"-I know," Professor answered, a tinge of amusement in her voice now as she turned to look at me.

I took a step forward, my eyes ever widening and my mouth gaping like a fish out of water. I stop, turned on the of to face Professor and the alien men, and then, I laughed.

"That's a dragon!"

Turns out, the dragon was an alien. Go figures, right? After my initial shock had worn off, righteous anger had flared up in me. They kept the dragon in a cage that looked much too small for it and, due to its pale white colouring, you could easily see the burn marks and lacerations from where it had obviously been tortured. Its soulful green eyes had narrowed in on me and I had
expected to become a human barbeque. That wasn't the case, however, and I had stared into its eyes for a good while before I was being roughly grabbed and dragged away.

Professor and I were dragged into a large room where a large man sat behind an equally large desk. He was human, I think; he certainly looked human. He looked like he had swallowed a bear or two, his stomach was so large, and his second and third chin drooped quite low on his chest, completely covering his neck. What little black hair he had was greased back and his moustache seemed to be the only thing actually taken care of. He wore an expensive suit, the buttons straining to do their job and hold his coat together, and he smoked a large cigar.

I didn't miss the looks he threw Professor and I and felt my nose scrunch up in revulsion as his thin, chapped lips stretched to reveal yellowed teeth. His beady eyes looked black from where we stood and had a light in them that made me bristle uncomfortably. In short, this man was an absolute creep and I wanted to get far away from him as soon as possible.

"And who do we have here?" the man asked, his voice sounding like nails on a chalkboard as he spoke.

Professor took a threatening step forward, her eyes narrowed and her chin raised as she looked down at the man sitting in front of them. I took a step forward, not really wanting her to say something that would get herself hurt. The words that tumbled from my lips hadn't been intentional in the slightest but once they were said there was no taking them back.

"I'm the Doctor," I told them, doing my best impression of the man I had been travelling with for almost a week, "and this is the Professor," I continued as I motioned to the older woman whose eyes were shining with mischief and amusement.

"Doctor of what?" the man asked.

"I haven't got the foggiest," I muttered low enough for only Professor and me to hear. "Just the Doctor," I said out loud.

"You are aware that what you're doing here is illegal?" the Professor said as she moved closer to the desk, leaning over it as she sent the creepy man a raised eyebrow, "it's illegal to poach endangered species both here on Earth and on every other civilised planet in the galaxy. That 'dragon' is the last of her kind and as such is a protected species."

The leering grin that had been ever present on his face since we came in fell away the moment the Professor began speaking and I watched as his whole body stiffened. "Are you a cop?" he growled, his hand reaching for something under his desk.

"No," she hissed, "but I don't need to be to stop you either."

I watched his body relax as he subtly motioned with his hand before both the Professor and myself were being manhandled again. The man holding me was around my height, scrawny and yet deceptively strong. Already, I could feel my skin bruising from his rough treatment. "Lay off a little, would you?" I whined as we were pushed out of the room and shoved down another small corridor. A small door was opened and the Professor and I were shoved into a small room before the door was shut and locked, leaving us alone.

"Well, that's just brilliant," I huffed, glaring at the door, "think you could sonic it open?"

The Professor came up beside me and studied the door before she frowned, "I don't think so," she answered, "maybe if there was a pad on the inside but there isn't. We're stuck, sweetie."
"We couldn't be stuck, I refused to believe it. Looking around the room, my eyes fell on a ventilation shaft and my lips stretched into a grin. "There," I said, pointing the shaft out to the Professor who turned to look at it with a scrutinising gaze, "that should lead back into the hall."

"Hate to break it to you, Lottie," the Professor began, "but there's no way I'm going to fit through there."

"But I will," I replied, "you can give me the sonic and I'll open the door from the outside to let you out."

The Professor frowned, "that's very risky, Charlotte," she told me and I frowned at the use of my first name. It seemed wrong coming from her and she seemed uncomfortable using it, like she used it so rarely it didn't sound right on her tongue. "What if you get hurt?" she continued.

I pouted at that, because I wasn't some china doll that broke easily. Says the woman who's been held up in her room for four days, my mind replied cynically and I quickly squashed the thought so not to become consumed by it. Sure, my coping mechanisms weren't health, at all, but that was me. Perhaps, I could try and find a better way to cope with things when I get back to the TARDIS.

"We don't exactly have many options," I told her seriously, "as you said, you won't fit. However, I will, and we need to get out of here before those goons come back for us."

The Professor looked like she was going to protest before she gave a heavy sigh and dug her sonic out of her jacket. She handed the small device to me and I grained. My expression quickly fell when I came to a realisation, however. "Uh, I don't actually know how to use this," I told the Professor who looked at me like she couldn't believe what I was telling her. Not that I was surprised; apparently, I gave her this sonic which meant I at least knew how to use one and likely even had my own in the future.

"Just point and think," the Professor replied and I gave her a sceptical look, "don't forget to hold the button down."

"Which one?" I asked, looking at the copious amounts of buttons on the device. The Doctor's sonic certainly looked a lot simpler.

"That one," the Professor replied, pointing to a small button just above my thumb before she went over to the vent and removed the metal crate blocking my path. I was just about to crawl in when a hand on my shoulder stopped me and I looked up to see the Professor gazing down at me. "Be careful, sweetie," she said, squeezing my shoulder gently.

I smirked, unable to help myself, as I winked at her. "Now, where's the fun in that?" I asked brazenly, hearing her chuckle as I entered the small, confined metal space.

This plan had one little flaw, I realised after a few minutes of practically army crawling through the ventilation shaft. That little flaw? Well, there didn't seem to be an actual exit. This shaft seemed to go on forever before I finally saw it veer off to the left. That wouldn't have been a problem, except the hall, I needed to get to was on the right. I thanked the heavens that I wasn't claustrophobic because this could bloody take a while and I'd be freaking out if I wasn't somewhat enjoying myself.

Another five or so minutes past before I saw an exit. It would be my luck that the only way to get out of the damn ventilation shaft was to jump. I crawled over to the exit and looked through the metal grating, impatiently waiting to see if anyone was present. Slowly, I peeled the vent cover off and placed it on the other side of the small gap. This was nowhere near as easy as they made it
look on the telly and it took some serious wriggling about to get into a position where I could get my feet through first.

My arms shook as I slowly lowered myself down the small exit and I almost slipped once, cursing as my chin hit the side of the ventilation shaft. When I was finally out of the ventilation shaft, I dangled mid air for a bit before I let go and dropped to the ground. I groaned as I landed on my back; yup, definitely looked easier in the movies.

I just laid there for a moment, getting my second wind, before I stood up and looked around. No surprise, the hall looked identical to every other hall they had been down. The symmetry in this place was amazing and really annoying; especially since there didn't seem to be any actual signs, only numbers and letters on the doors.

Well, I couldn't exactly find someone and ask for directions, nothing was ever *that* easy. **What would Angel do?** I asked myself as I looked around. First, she'd pick a direction. A quick game of Eenie Meenie Miney Mo and I was taking off down the right-hand corridor. My shoes squeaked on the polished floor as I ran and my hair whipped around my face.

These corridors seemed bloody endless and I sped up before skidding to a halt as I ran past a vaguely familiar corridor. Who was I kidding? None of this looked familiar; this hall looked like all of the other ones and my frustration grew the longer I ran.

Shrugging my shoulders, I took the newly discovered hall and proceeded to jog down it. It took me a further thirty minutes to find the damn door and then a good ten minutes trying to get the sonic to work for me. Point and think? Well, apparently *that* was easier said than done because all the sonic seemed to want to do was make an incessant buzzing noise without yielding any results for me whatsoever.

Finally, the door opened and I grinned triumphantly as the Professor came into view. She looked a little agitated and worried but her expression softened upon seeing my grin as I handed her back the sonic. "Did you stop for a cuppa?" she questioned sarcastically and I rolled my eyes. "Everywhere looks the bloody same here," I huffed, "you should just be happy I found you in the time that I did. It could have been worse."

She clucked her tongue but didn't otherwise argue and my grin turned into a smirk as I watched her slip the sonic into her jacket. Of course, my smirk fell when she pulled out the gun. "Is that really necessary?" I asked with another roll of my eyes.

"Necessary? No," she replied with a smirk, "am I still going to carry it? Definitely. Now, I do believe the teleportation device is this way."

I watched her walk down the hall but didn't move to follow her. Crossing my arms over my chest, my eyes narrowed. "I'm not leaving," I told her sternly, my accent becoming a little more distinguished as my temper began to rise.

"Yes, you are," she argued, stopping and turning to glare at me.

"No, I'm not," I replied, "not until we've freed that dragon and any other aliens, animals, or people they might have here."

The Professor didn't reply for a long while and I was mentally preparing myself for an all-out fight when she suddenly smiled widely. "Good to see some things never change," she laughed before she was grabbing my hand and running with me down the corridor, "let's go save the day."
River hadn't planned on leaving the facility until the 'dragon' was free, but she had wanted to get Lottie away from any possible danger before she went about saving the large creature. The future was too fragile, something easily broken and River couldn't afford for it to break. Lottie meant too much to so many people and River would never forgive herself if she was responsible for that future not existing any longer.

Lottie, however, was always going to be Lottie and River should have known she wouldn't leave unless she had managed to save whoever needed saving. It wasn't hard to see why she was such a beacon of light now and in the future.

They had found their way into the large room, which was actually a warehouse of sorts, and both River and Lottie had taken a look around to see if there were any other living creatures that had been wrongfully taken and shoved into a cage. Thankfully, there wasn't and they made their way back over to the dragon. River had just pulled out her sonic and pointed it at the cage when a cough sounded from behind them.

She didn't need to look to know who it was, the disgust and anger on Lottie's face told her all she needed to know. "Mr Jenkins," she said as she turned around, remembering the name she had seen on his decorative plague in his lavish office, "I say it was a pleasure to see you again but I'm afraid I'd be lying."

"How did you get out of your cell?" he demanded in a gravelly voice that probably came from years of smoking and drinking. River's nose wrinkled as she looked him over before she smiled sweetly and shrugged nonchalantly.

"It wasn't hard," Lottie answered, her eyes narrowed heatedly at the oversized man, "your ventilation shafts are snug but still big enough for someone to shimmy through."

River stiffened as she watched Mr Jenkins leer at Lottie, his eyes perusing her body in a way that made River want to shoot him in the eyes. Lottie wasn't a piece of meat and she'd be damned if she was going to let someone treat the younger woman like she was. "As I said earlier, Mr Jenkins," River began, taking the man's attention away from Lottie, "it's illegal to poach endangered species. What could you possibly want with her anyway?"

"Does it matter?" Lottie hissed, her whole body shaking with her anger, "you've no right to lock her away and torture her. I doubt she even fought back and yet you still thought it was okay to hurt her?"

She had a point. The entire time they had been talking to Mr Jenkins, their backs had been turned to the dragon and yet, she hadn't made a move to attack them. Even from inside the cage, she was still capable of burning them to death and yet, she hadn't. Why? Because she wasn't a violent creature.

"But that's why you did it, isn't it?" Lottie continued, her voice cold. River looked to the fiery redhead and the look she saw in her eyes was one she had seen many times before from both Lottie and the Doctor. It was rage; barely controlled rage. "You wanted her to fight back, to be violent, and when she didn't you tortured her;" Lottie said, her fists tightly clenched by her side, "you tortured her in the hopes of making her violent. You wanted to sell her as a type of guard dog; but what use is a dog that's all bark and no bite?"

Mr Jenkins sneered at Lottie and River was proud to say the younger woman didn't so much a blink at the look she was receiving. "Aren't you a clever one?" he growled, "I've got buyers ready to pay billions for that stupid thing but none of 'em wants a docile dragon."
"She is a she not a thing, you ignoramus," Lottie hissed, "and she may be a dragon but she is more human than you'll ever be."

River watched Mr Jenkins scoff, "human? Who cares about being human these days? Being human won't make me any richer and money's all that matters here!"

"Money? Money?!" Lottie deadpanned, her face suddenly contorting to show all the rage River had seen simmering in her eyes. "Money doesn't matter once you're dead," she hissed, "who cares if you're the richest man in the entire universe if you act like a monster? It's not the things we have in life that people will remember us by when we're gone; it's how we chose to live our lives, that's all that'll matter in the end."

"How sentimental of you, Doctor," Mr Jenkins sneered, "but sentiment will get you nowhere and I'm afraid this discussion is at its end."

River felt strong hands grab her arms and mentally cursed herself for her inattention as she saw Lottie grabbed from behind as well. She had completely forgotten about his two goons and they had used their distraction to get a jump on the two women. River tried to get out of his grasp, her sonic falling to the ground with a heavy thunk that barely registered to her but apparently registered to Lottie who looked down at it quickly before her eyes got that look in them that told River she was coming up with a plan. River thought that look had come after travelling with the Doctor for so long but now she could see that Lottie had always had it.

"Wait!" Lottie exclaimed as the man holding her tried to drag her away and both men froze as Mr Jenkins turned back to Lottie with a sick grin. He probably thought Lottie was going to beg him for their freedom but River knew better. That look of fear in Lottie's eyes was only there to mask her anger and determination. "P-please," she stuttered and River had to bite her lip to keep from smirking, "please, let us go. W-we won't tell anyone what we've seen. Promise."

Mr Jenkins waddled over to Lottie, his large belly pressing against her and making her stumble into the man holding her. River felt her own fists tighten as he leered at her, both of them almost the same height. "And what, Doctor, are you prepared to do for the freedom of yourself and your companion?" he asked, raising his eyebrow suggestively.

Lottie's whole countenance changed and River watched the shock register on Mr Jenkins' face as he too noticed the change in the young woman. "This," she hissed before she suddenly headbutted him. Mr Jenkins stumbled back with a cry, his hand moving to his nose even though River knew Lottie hadn't hit him hard enough to break it. Lottie then proceeded to step on the toes of the man holding her captive. Her elbow connected with his sternum, then his nose, before she turned around and kicked him between the legs.

Her little display of anger was enough to distract Mr Jenkins and the guard long enough for Lottie to pick up River's sonic before she stood before the door of the cage. The dragon had been quiet through all of this, a low whining sound leaving her ever since Mr Jenkins had walked into the room. As large as she was, she was also terrified of the man and it made River's blood boil.

"Why you little…"

"I highly recommend you not finish that sentence," Lottie told him sternly, her eyes once again narrowed even as River saw pain flash in her eyes. No doubt, Lottie was feeling that headbutt she had dished out to the portly man. "Now," she began, pointing the sonic at the man holding River, "let my companion go."

Mr Jenkins snorted incredulously, "you think pointing some little stick at us is going to scare us?"
Lottie looked from the sonic to Mr Jenkins before she shrugged, "of course not," she replied turning dramatically in a way that would make even the Doctor proud. Her coat fanned out around her body, her hair whipped through the air before she stood before the lock of the cage in a stance very similar to someone participating in fencing. There was a quick whir before the lock clicked and River watched as Mr Jenkins paled. Her eyes never left the obese man as the sound of the cage door slowly creaking open filled her ears.

"Are you scared yet, Mr Jenkins?" River heard Lottie say in an innocent voice as the sound of the dragon getting to her feet reached River's ears, "because if I were the one who tortured a dragon and then she finally got free, I'd be downright terrified."

There was a loud roar and River smirked as the man holding her let go and ran from the room after picking up his injured friend. She dusted off her jacket before she moved to stand beside Lottie who didn't even look remotely scared that a dragon was standing behind her. *Same old Lottie*, River thought fondly as she smirked at Mr Jenkins. "In case she wasn't clear enough," she told the shaking man, "run."

And he did.

Which left them with the dragon. River turned to study the large creature and wasn't surprised to see Lottie already approaching her, her arm outstretched as she took measured steps towards the defensive creature. "It's okay," she coo'd as if she were addressing a scared kitten and not a scared dragon, "no one's going to hurt you anymore."

Again, River wasn't surprised when the dragon relaxed at Lottie's words and allowed the younger woman to touch her. She knew Lottie would chalk it up to luck or something equally ridiculous but River knew the truth. The dragon was drawn to the fire in Lottie. It may have been buried deep within her, and wouldn't surface for quite some time, but the dragon recognised it and found comfort in it.

As Lottie comforted the dragon, River walked over to a wooden grate she had seen when they had been looking around earlier. She smirked when she opened it to reveal explosives, no doubt Mr Jenkins was in the business of selling weapons as well. "I think it's time we get out of here, sweetie," she told Lottie over her shoulder as she started fiddling with the small electronic device that would set off the explosives. By now, Mr Jenkins and his goons should be out of the facility and River had no intentions of letting them continue with their business once she and Lottie left.

"What are you doing?" Lottie asked her as the younger woman coaxed the dragon out of her cage, the beautiful creature stretching her large pale wings once she was free.

"Putting Mr Jenkins out of business," she replied simply, "shall we?"

She had set the explosives to detonate in five minutes and had started dragging Lottie towards the hall so they could get back to the transportation device. Lottie had already opened the large door connected to the warehouse so the dragon could fly out of there and both women were surprised when she laid on her belly to allow them to get on her. Even without being tortured, River knew just how distrustful her species was of others and was the only one to realise just how significant this offer was.

River helped Lottie onto the dragons back before she climbed on herself. "Ready?" she asked Lottie.

"Ready," Lottie replied before she turned to the dragon's head, "let's go."
Flying on the back of a dragon certainly was an experience River could say she hadn't had the pleasure of participating in until that day. Judging by the startled gasp and the awed laugh, she assumed it was safe to say, Lottie hadn't done so either. She smirked proudly, she was definitely going to tell the Doctor about this when she got back, just to see him pitch a fit when she did. No doubt, he'll be angry at her for 'putting Lottie at risk' and then jealous because he hadn't had the chance to ride on the back of a dragon.

They landed on a nearby, snow-covered mountain and it was almost impossible to see the dragon save for her startling green eyes. She blended in quite well with her surroundings, her skin almost the same white as the snow itself. River and Lottie looked up, seeing a helicopter rapidly flying away from the facility before their eyes returned to said building and they waited. Barely two minutes later and Lottie squeaked as the whole facility went up in flames.

There was a satisfied snort from above them before they were sudden shrouded in smoke. River and Lottie coughed as they waved their hands around wildly to clear the smoke before they both looked up at the dragon who was watching them with an almost amused expression.

Lottie smiled before she suddenly stumbled and River quickly reached out to catch her. The sound of the younger woman's giggles reached her ears and River smirked as she realised what was happening. "That would be the alcohol," she chuckled, looking down in time to see Lottie gazing up at her with rapidly glazing eyes. "I was wondering when it would finally hit you," she finished as Lottie let out another drunken giggle. "I suppose that's my cue to be getting you back."

After Lottie had said her goodbyes to the dragon, River had wrapped her arm around the younger woman's waist and pulled her close as she set her vortex manipulator. She was going to have to be quick; she'd need to be gone before the light settled otherwise the Doctor would see her and that could be problematic.

With one final wave at the resting dragon and another drunken giggle from Lottie, the two women disappeared in a flash of brilliant white light.

It had been dramatic of her, flying around the timelines as she had, but she had needed to get her Thief's attention so he would get to Angel's room before the child of the TARDIS returned her. She knew her Angel would come back intoxicated and would need help getting to bed; so, she had unlocked the door and decided to alert them to her Angel's disappearance an hour after the fact.

She watched as her Thief ran into the room, watched as her Angel appeared and her child disappeared. She then watched as her Angel passed out from the alcohol, she had imbibed before her Thief carried her to her bed.

Her Thief stayed long after the flower had left and she watched him as he watched her Angel. She had not been happy with his treatment of her Angel and had been particularly stubborn as of late because of it. Now? Now, she watched him sit on the bed beside her Angel and move a lock of her fiery hair from her face before he tucked it behind her ear. He froze as her Angel shifted in her sleep before her Thief relaxed as she quieted down once more.

She watched the sadness creep back into his gaze the longer he watched her Angel and she wished she could reveal the truth to him. Her Thief was sad because he had lost someone and he had no idea that someone was the very woman lying before him. But it wasn't the time and she had to be patient, the right time wouldn't come for a long time but she knew it would be worth it.

It would all be worth it in the end.
What do you think? Like it? Hate it? I'm actually really nervous how people will like this chapter. Leave me a comment and tell me what you think.
I'm not a massive fan of the next few chapters, they just seemed like they were missing something but no matter how many times I rewrote them, nothing seemed to fill the void. With that said, I still hope you all enjoy it. I'm also currently writing two crossovers for later chapters. What do you guys think of a HP/Doctor Who crossover chapter and a SuperWhoLock crossover too? I love the idea but it is entirely up to you guys if you want to see them added to the story. Any other crossovers you might be interested in? Let me know. Anyway, enough of my incessant babbling. Please enjoy and I am totally sorry for the somewhat crappy chapters ahead. Please, bear with me.

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Rose sat on a large chair by the TARDIS console, her head moving side to side as she watched the Doctor and Charlie fight. When Charlie had finally woken up that morning, she had been very hungover and very grumpy. Of course, Rose knew to avoid any kind of conflict with her when she was like this but the Doctor didn't know that. She didn't even know what they were fighting about to begin with, she had walked in about five minutes ago and neither of them seemed to notice her entry.

"How can someone so smart be so stupid?!" Charlie yelled, throwing her hands in the air as she glared fiercely at the Doctor whose face was a brilliant red in his anger.

"Me?! At least I don't go swanning off and return drunk out of my mind and rambling about blowing up a warehouse!"

Charlie growled and Rose was just getting up to intervene when her best friend spoke in a low voice. "Are you forgetting how you met Rose?" Charlie hissed, "you blew up her work and you're going to criticise me about my choices? I'm twenty-three-years-old, Doctor, and I am perfectly capable of making my own decisions."

"You won't even tell us who you were with!"

"I told you all I knew," Charlie bit back and Rose sank back into the chair with a sigh, this didn't look like it was going to end anytime soon.

The Doctor snorted and Rose looked at Charlie in time to see that all too familiar rage in her eyes. This wasn't going to end well. Charlie could be a very pleasant person but Rose felt pity for whoever was at the receiving end of her temper. Mrs Williams had a very similar temper and Rose had only witnessed it once; though, once was more than enough for Rose to want to avoid the elderly woman when she was in a bad mood.

"Right, 'The Professor', what kind of name is that? And you just go and trust this mystery woman? How stupid can you be?"

Charlie stepped closer to the Doctor, their chests almost touching as she poked him in the chest. "I trust her more than I trust you," she hissed and Rose noticed the quick flash of hurt in the Doctor's eyes before it was replaced with cold indifference. "I'm not some idiot you can travel with to stroke
that ridiculously large ego of yours with," she continued, "nor am I in any way stupid, do you understand me? As for her name, you really can't judge, Doctor."

Before the Doctor could retort, Charlie turned on her heels and left the room angrily. Rose knew not to follow her, she knew Charlie needed time on her own to cool down and so she stayed where she was. Her eyes moved to the Doctor and she saw him rubbing the bridge of his nose with one hand as the other one clenched tightly into a fist by his side. Charlie could have that effect on people; she knew how to get under your skin in a way that made you want to throttle her. She wasn't all bad though, and Rose knew that she hadn't meant what she said about trusting this Professor more than she trusted the Doctor. Whatever they had been fighting about had scared and upset Charlie and her friend didn't have the healthiest form of dealing with negative emotions.

Meanwhile, Charlie had found her way to a large room that housed an equally large swimming pool. She moved to sit by the edge of the pool and dipped her lower legs in, happy she had decided to wear shorts today. A small trace of guilt washed over her as she recalled what she had said to the Doctor before her anger squashed it and she huffed. Charlie ran her nimble fingers through her hair, cringing when her fingers snagged on a knot before she gently worked it out of her hair. Her anger was justified, wasn't it? She shook her head, bowing it as she thought back on what had started the argument only an hour earlier.

She was never drinking that much again. Ever. Since waking up that morning, Charlie had felt nauseated, tired, and emotional. It probably didn't help that she had woken to some of the worst cramps of her life that morning; a sure sign that she was approaching that time of the month. The cramps would last for a few days before they settled down but, in that time, it felt like World War Three was happening in her uterus.

The TARDIS, bless her, had left a bottle of painkillers, a bottle of water, and a few slices of dried toast on her bedside table that morning when she had woken up. Charlie had smiled up at the ceiling before she had gingerly sat up and taken two painkillers. She washed it down with the water and then had proceeded to nibble on the toast.

She'd spent most of the morning in bed, Rose popping in to check on her before she had left after telling Charlie she was happy she was okay. Charlie was okay, too. The Professor had accomplished what she had set out to do and Charlie had felt some of the crippling guilt she had been feeling since 1869 ease off her.

When she had finally left the room, it was to find the Doctor and ask him if he had read her journals. She didn't feel comfortable not having them with her and felt even more uncomfortable that she didn't exactly mind him having them. However, when she had asked about them, the Doctor had told her that they had gone missing.

The first thing she had felt was utter despair. Those journals were the only connection she had to the world she had created as a child and they couldn't possibly be gone. The next thing she had felt was fear; fear that perhaps Rose had found them and had taken them to read. She didn't know why she was so averse to others reading her journals but her little dream world seemed so private. Her adventures with Theta and Koschei were something she treasured and they felt like something no one else should know. So, why had she been so willing to share them with the Doctor?

Eventually, the fear gave way to anger and, before she could talk herself into calming down, they were yelling at each other.

Charlie sighed, rubbing a tired hand down her face before she leaned over and looked at her reflection in the water. She was a little paler than usual which wasn't as visible considering her cheeks were still flushed with anger. Her eyes had heavy, dark bags under them but that was
something she had grown used to. Usually, Charlie would cover the bags with make-up but she hadn't bothered to do so today. Her eyes were red from unshed tears and her mouth was set in a hard line.

She knew she had been harsh on the Doctor and when she calmed down, she would need to apologise to him. He looked genuinely sorry about her missing journals and she could admit to herself that she had overreacted. However, she would certainly be expecting an apology in return because he had said some equally harsh things to her. Charlie highly doubted this would be their last fight; they both had pretty large tempers and short fuses, add close quarters and they were likely to lash out at each other.

She sat by the pool for a good half hour, absentmindedly kicking her feet in the water. Charlie wasn't ready for the TARDIS to lurch violently as they took off and she squeaked before she found herself submerged under water. The water was freezing and she drew in a sharp breath before she could stop herself. When Charlie broke the surface, she began violently coughing up the water she had swallowed, treading the water as she blinked owlishly. Someone needed to revoke that man's TARDIS privileges before he ended up killing her mid-flight.

The TARDIS gave a concerned hum when she had broken the surface and when Charlie had managed to get her second wind, she had assured the TARDIS she was fine. Swimming to the edge of the pool, Charlie climbed out and attempted to wring out her clothes and hair before she stomped from the room. She reached the TARDIS control room in no time and glared fiercely at the Doctor, who was helping Rose off the ground.

"What happened to you?" Rose asked, spying her soaked friend.

The Doctor turned to look at Charlotte and smirked as he laid eyes on the drenched woman. Charlotte's arms were crossed over her chest as she glowered at him and the Doctor resisted the urge to chuckle; Charlotte wasn't so intimidating when she was soaking wet. "Found the pool, I see," he quipped as he moved around the console.

He could see the retort on her lips but it was cut short when Rose spoke. "We're home, Charlie," she told the older woman, smiling wanly at her as she did.

The Doctor watched as Charlotte's whole countenance changed. She looked relieved, nervous, angry, and hopeful. He watched her look between him and Rose before she shook her head and turned away, walking down the hall without a word to either of them. He heard Rose sigh as she stepped away from him and dusted herself off, her eyes looking in the direction Charlotte had just gone. "She'll be alright," she said, and the Doctor wasn't sure if she was talking to him or trying to reassure herself but he simply nodded.

I had changed into a pair of jeans and a black long sleeve shirt with the coat the Professor had given me thrown over it. My hair was braided so I wouldn't have to worry about it falling in my face and my favourite combat boots were hiding my fluffy green socks. I slid my small pocket watch into my jean pocket absentmindedly before I recalled the letter in my pocket.

One year. Was I even going to be able to resist for one year? I was a curious person by nature and having a mysterious letter with words written in my handwriting inside my pocket was torturous. However, I was going to hold out; but the letter better be worth it or I was going to give the Professor a piece of my mind that she could take back to my older self.

Did I mention how much I hated time travel? Everything got so confusing when you were so used to the past, present, and future tenses staying in the past, present, and future. Now? Well, now
everything was little wibbly-wobbly and it was confusing, to say the least.

I didn't know how I felt about being back home. Shouldn't I be excited? After all, now I could go back to my normal life with my normal job and my normal day to day routine. So, why was the idea of going back so horrifying? Why did the idea of routine and normalcy sound like a life sentence instead of an actual life? I already knew the answer but to keep a hold of what little sanity and rationality I still processed, I refused to think further on it. Right now, I would enjoy the fact that I was home. Because I was home. Right?

Shaking my head, I straightened my coat and turned away from the floor length mirror. I was accustomed to walking around the Tardis now. She would let me wonder around at night when I would wake up from a nightmare or a dream, guiding me around as I memorised useful corridors and destinations. There was something comforting about the Tardis, almost like she was the mother I had never had. Which seemed silly, right? I guess, to an outsider it would, but I didn't really care either.

The Tardis was there for me when I woke up screaming or crying. She comforted me the best way she could and made sure I was well looked after. Even when I had locked myself away after the events of 1869, she had made sure I had eaten and drunk whatever she had presented to me. She even listened to me ramble nonstop for hours at a time without complaint, only an acknowledging hum every now and again to let me know she was still listening.

I walked into the console room where the Doctor and Rose were waiting. I smiled at the both, my smile terser towards the Doctor as I stepped up to Rose. "I'm going to head back to my flat and check up on a few things," I told the younger woman.

"Do you want me to come?" she asked softly.

Did I want her to come? Not really. Why? Because I had no doubt the Doctor would come as well and I really needed some time away from him to cool off and gather my thoughts. "I'll be fine, go say hi to Jackie," I replied, giving her an easy grin before my eyes quickly darted to the Doctor. His eyes were narrowed at me, like he could see right through my façade. I quickly looked away, gave Rose a hug, and made my way out of the Tardis without a second look at the Doctor.

I took my time getting to my flat, not really in a big rush to get anywhere. My mind was constantly drifting from one thought to another like they were a swiftly moving river. The thoughts were gone before I could catch them and reel them in for a closer look. Sometimes, I caught a flash of orange grass or a burnt sky; other times, I was assaulted with smells and sounds.

My fingers moved to rub my temples as I began to feel a headache coming on. I made a mental note to grab my meds when I got to my flat; anything to quiet the voices in my head. This was the longest I had ever gone without them and I was certainly feeling the effects.


*Ex-term-i-nate.*

"Ex-TERMINATE!"

"Shut up!" I cried, bringing my hands to my ears to drown out the voices. It didn't work.

"*He's different, Theta. He has been ever since the ceremony.*"

"*Koschei? Koschei, please, what did we do? Just tell us what we did so we can make it right.*"
"Pity, Theta..."

"The Phoenix..."

"It's pretentious and I don't want to be called that! Why can't I be me? Why can't I be Valsill?"

"What about the ...? Come on, Theta, I may be the healer but we all know you're the one that is always saving lives."

Exterminate. Exterminate. EXTERMINATE.

"Stop it!" I screamed, "stop it. Stop it. Stop it!"

Why couldn't they just be quiet? Why couldn't they just go away? I blinked owlishly, my eyes stinging from the salty tears freely falling my them. Looking around, I flushed at the curious and wary glances I was getting from people on the street before I quickly bowed my head and continued on to my flat.

I made it there in record time before I entered the building and ran up the stairs. By the time I reached my floor, I had a rather painful stitch in my side and swore I was going to pass out from oxygen deprivation. The only good thing about my impromptu cardio session was I was now too busy trying not to pass out that the voices in my head were silent. Good. Sometimes I thought I would go absolutely insane on the days I hadn't taken my meds to drown the voices out. Dreaming about them was one thing, hallucinating them was a completely different ballpark.

When I finally caught my second wind and made it to my flat, I frowned. Why? Because my key didn't fit in the lock. Odd. I was up to date with my rent and even if I wasn't, I'm pretty sure I would have at least gotten an eviction notice first. So, why were my keys not working? Moving down to the next door, I knocked gingerly, waiting impatiently before the door opened and I was staring at my neighbour, Mr Harrison.

"Jacob," I smiled easily, my smile falling when the elderly man looked at me with wide eyes and a rapidly paling face. "Jacob? Mr Harrison? Is everything okay you look like you've seen a ghost," I commented.

He spluttered before reaching into his flat and pulling out a sheet of paper before handing it to me. I looked down at it and gaped. It was a picture of me and Rose with the words – Rose Tyler and Charlotte Williams have been missing from their homes since 6th March 2005.

"Oh my God," I breathed before I looked up at Mr Harrison, "I-I'm gonna-"

I bolted. I needed to get to Powell Estate. A year! How had we been gone a year! Poor Jackie must be beside herself. Nan must – Nan! I was two blocks from Powell Estate when I skidded to a halt and dug out my phone. Not even caring for the phone bill or the time difference, I dialled my Nan's number and waited. "Nan!" I yelled when she picked up, "I am so sorry, I swear I didn't mean to be gone so long-"

"-who is this?"

That made me frown. The voice wasn't old or Scottish, so, it certainly didn't belong to my Nan. "Who are you? Where's my Nan?" I demanded.

"Charlotte Williams?" the voice questioned, "my name is Samantha Dwyer; I'm the live-in nurse for your grandmother."
I think my heart stopped. A live-in nurse? Nan never would have agreed to something like that; she was too proud to ever agree to that. So, it must have been bad. "Is she okay?" I asked, my voice small and broken as my heart started to beat slowly, like it was waiting for the news to hit me and stop completely once more.

The long, drawn-out silence didn't help to quell my growing unease and I felt my grip on my phone tightened as I waited for Ms Dwyer to speak. "I'm sorry, Ms Williams," she began and my heart decided it wouldn't stop, it would just prefer to live in my stomach instead of in my chest. "Amelia's health has been steadily declining over the last six months," she explained softly, each word a pin being shoved into my heart, "we tried to get in contact with you but Ms Tyler informed us that you weren't contactable and wouldn't be for the foreseeable future.

"We're doing everything we can to make your grandmother comfortable but I'm afraid her insurance doesn't really cover the expenses for a live-in nurse and her medications," Ms Dwyer continued.

"How-" I swallowed thickly around the lump in my throat. This couldn't be happening; I couldn't lose her, not my Nan. "How long?" I managed to get out, my voice raising in pitch as I spoke.

"Not long, Charlotte," she replied as gently as she could, "I'm afraid it's not a matter of if but when and any day could be the last day."

My legs gave out on me but I barely felt the jolt of pain that radiated from my knees and up my thighs as my knees contacted with the ground beneath me. It shouldn't have come as a surprise; my Nan had been getting sick more often than not and our last talk she had made it sound like we wouldn't be seeing each other for a while. But death wasn't temporary. It wasn't like she could pass away and then I would miraculously run into her again in the future. No, once she was gone, I'd never see her again. Months. I had missed months with my Nan. Her final few months on this planet and what had I been doing? Gallivanting around space and time with my best friend, a madman, and a police box.

"She-she's not in pain, is she?" I cried, my free arm wrapping around my waist like I could somehow hold myself together even as I felt like I was being ripped apart. When would I catch a break? First Pop and now the world saw fit to take away my Nan as well? I wouldn't have any other family, I didn't have parents. Sure, I had Rose and Jackie but I wanted my Nan. I wanted to sit on her ugly sofa and laugh over her stories as we ate fish fingers and custard.

"No," Ms Dwyer replied, "no, she's perfectly comfortable. I just wish there was something more I could do."

"Thank you," I told her, "can-can I call you back? I, um, I'll figure out a way to pay the expenses."

"Of course, and again, I'm sorry."

I hung up, the phone falling from my hand, unable to hold it anymore as I looked at the ground. I felt cold, detached. It was going to be just like when Pop had died. I hadn't been able to be there for him and I wasn't going to be there for my Nan. But I could make sure she was comfortable; I could make sure she had all the treatment she needed for as long as she needed them. And I could start by making one simple phone call.

"Moe's Mechanical Repairs," answered a gruff voice and I felt like I was going to be sick when I spoke.

"It's Charlie, Moe," I replied.
"Charlie-girl? Shit, you've been missing for a year! Where the hell have you been?" he demanded.

"It's a long story. Do you still have my bike?" I questioned, cutting straight to the chase.

I heard him scoff, "course, I do," he replied, "wasn't gonna get rid of it even if we had no clue where you were."

"Still interested in buying it?" I asked, my stomach churning at the idea of getting rid of my motorcycle. It was for my Nan, and she was far more important to me than the motorcycle I had saved up for since I was old enough to get a damn job.

"Really?" he questioned, excitement and surprise warring in his tone.

"Yeah, I'll be around later and we can discuss a price, okay?"

We agreed to meet tomorrow and I hung up with a quick goodbye. Hopefully, we could come up with a price that would pay for my Nan's treatment. If not, I was going to have to sell most of my stuff. Wherever my stuff was. If I had to guess. I'd say Jackie had it.

There were another ten minutes that I spent walking to the Powell Estate and I took the time to get my emotions under control. I knew I was walking into a potentially emotional environment where Jackie was concerned and I really didn't want to add my own problems on top of all of that. The journey up the stairs was almost painfully slow as I tried to draw out the inevitable as long as possible.

I pulled out my spare key as I came to the door and walked in only to come face to chest with a police officer. Looking up, I looked into dark, surprised eyes. "Uh, hi?" I said sheepishly, "Charlotte Williams. Not missing. Kinda live here; sometimes. Uh, carry on, officer. I'm just gonna-" I trailed off, motioning towards the kitchen before I slid past the speechless man and entered the kitchen just in time to see Jackie slap the Doctor. "Ouch, that looks like it hurt," I commented simply, drawing the attention of the occupants of the kitchen.

"Charlotte!" Jackie practically screeched as she took two long strides and engulfed me in her arms. She squeezed tightly and I heard my back crack and the air escape my lungs before her hands were on my shoulder and pushing me so we were an arm's length away from each other. I flinched as her nails dug into my shoulders a bit but didn't say anything as the older woman glared at me. "Where the bloody hell were you?" she demanded, "were you travelling too? Why didn't either of you call? I've been beside myself with worry for both of you and all Rose can tell me is you were both travelling? And with him?" she said, pointing at the doctor and glaring at him.

I managed to pry her hand off my shoulder but in the process, the sleeve of my coat fell down my arm and suddenly Jackie was grabbing my wrist and pulling the sleeve up the rest of the way. "What happened?!" she screeched as she exposed the pink scars on my arms from where I had burnt them saving Jabe. "Did you do this to her?" she asked the Doctor, showing my arm to everyone in the kitchen. I saw the Doctor's eyes sadden and guilt flash behind them as his shoulders sagged and I felt my anger rise.

My temper was infamous and if it wasn't, it should be. Especially, when I was tired, sore, and now worrying about my Nan. So, when we looked back on this, no one could blame me for snapping at everyone. Could they?

"Enough!" I snapped, my accent becoming more noticeable the more upset I got. "Okay? Can everyone just back off for one goddamn second?" My eyes moved to Jackie, who was looking at me with wide eyes and a gaping mouth. Later I would feel guilty for yelling at the woman who had
offered me a home, but right now the thin thread on my temper hadn't just frayed but completely snapped. "No, he didn't do this to me," I growled, holding my arm up, "and it doesn't matter what happened!"

I turned to face the Doctor, "and you need to stop looking so bloody guilty every time you see them. News flash, Doctor, but they're not going anywhere and you need to stop putting everything on your shoulders. You're one man! Okay?"

My ire quickly turned to the police officer that had been sitting at the table. "Look, we're here, we're obviously unharmed, and we're sorry for the miscommunication and unnecessary panic," I managed to get out through tightly clenched teeth, making sure I didn't snap at the man and get myself arrested. "Now, if that's all, this is more of a family problem and I'm sure you have something better to be doing with your time," I dismissed him, ignoring the glare he gave me before he snapped his little book closed and left the kitchen.

"Charlotte," Jackie began to scold, but I wasn't done. Not even close.

"Yes, we were travelling," I snapped once more, now looking at the three remaining occupants of the kitchen as I put my hands on my hips, "yes, the story seems highly improbable because obviously we didn't have our passports. But Jackie, you need to trust that I wouldn't have let anything happen to Rose." I took in a shaky breath and mentally counted back from twenty to try and reign in my temper. "I'm sorry we didn't call you," I told her softly, "as the oldest, I take responsibility for that. We're home now, Jackie, we're home now and we're safe. Okay? Can that not be enough?"

"Oh, Charlie," Jackie mumbled as she took a step forward and hugged me again, this one much softer than the first and I felt my body fold in on itself as I returned the hug. "I'm sorry about your Nan," she whispered in my ear and I buried my head in her neck so Rose wouldn't see my glassy eyes as I took in a ragged breath, "we'll get through this together, love. Okay? I may not be your mother, but you'll always be my daughter."

I coughed awkwardly and was happy when Jackie allowed me to hide my face long enough to swipe at my wet eyes before we stepped away from one another. "Better?" she asked, rubbing my arms through my coat. I nodded my head and she smiled, "your stuff's in the spare room."

I didn't even bother asking her how she knew what I was going to ask. I simply nodded and turned, exiting the room without a second glance at anyone. My hands were shaking and I clenched them into fists as I continued my mental countdown. Sometimes, I wondered how long it would take before I experienced something that would really throw me over the edge of sanity. I also knew it wouldn't happen whilst I had those I cared about. Even though I was losing my Nan, I still had Jackie and Rose; I still had two anchors keeping me from completely succumbing to the darkness in my head.

The spare room was small and housed most of Rose's dads' old things. Now? Now, you could barely walk due to the boxes that now housed my things as well. Thankfully, the box containing my meds had been the third one I'd looked through. I checked the use by date and sighed in relief when they were still in date before I left the room. I didn't need anything else, not really; I wasn't a very sentimental person and my flat had shown that. What few worldly possessions I had, Rose had bought me to breathe some life into my dreary home. The only thing that had meant anything to me in my flat had been my journals and now they were missing somewhere in the Tardis.

Walking back into the kitchen, I moved over to the sink and filled up a tall glass with tap water before I popped two pills in my mouth and chased them down with the water. I pressed the cool glass to my head as my headache seemed to increase and the voices reached their crescendo,
obviously aware of what would be happening once the meds kicked in.

"Dance with me Theta, even you know how to dance."

Exterminate.

"He looks happy. She makes him happy, that's all that matters."

Exterminate.

"We barely see him now, Koschei. I just wish he'd find more time to come home and see us."

Exterminate.

"She's a funny one, that Sarah Jane. You should definitely keep her around, I like her."

Exterminate!

"You know, sometimes I swear I hear the Tardis' singing. If you listen close enough, they sound so beautiful."

Exterminate!

Exterminate!

EXTERMINATE!

The glass in my hand shattered in my iron grip and I heard a startled squeal from behind me before Jackie was at my side. "Charlie?! Are you okay?" she questioned frantically as she gently cradled my hand in hers and looked down. I followed her gaze and saw that some shards of glass had cut my palm.

"I'm sorry," I said, my voice detached before I managed to shake myself into the present and gave an awkward cough, "sorry, Jackie," I repeated, "I was, uh, distracted?"

I knew Jackie knew what I really meant and I was happy when she didn't mention anything. She merely tutted as she led me away from the sink and to the table where she had me sit in a chair. Jackie ran from the room only to return shortly with a small first aid kit in hand. I watched her as she pulled out the little glass shards before she wiped down my palm with an alcohol wipe, apologising whenever I flinched. With the glass gone and the cuts cleaned, it didn't look as bad as it had near the sink and we both agreed that I didn't need stitches. That didn't stop Jackie from complaining until I allowed her to wrap my hand until the bleeding fully stopped.

"Where's Rose?" I asked, finally noticing the lack of people in the kitchen.

The Doctor was gone too and I didn't know how I felt about that. Had he left? Did he take Rose and leave me here? Why did I actually care? Was it because the voices were oddly quiet and subdued when I was on the Tardis? For a time, I could pretend there wasn't anything wrong with me and I had grown used to that feeling.

"I think she went up to the roof," Jackie said, not looking up from where she was meticulously wrapping my hand. "Where did you girls go, Charlie?" she asked me softly, her eyes finally raising to meet mine.

I sighed heavily, "you wouldn't believe me if I told you, Jackie," I told her simply, "but I can promise that I kept Rose as safe as I could."
"What about yourself, though?" she questioned, "because I can tell you didn't keep yourself safe, Charlie."

"I was careful," I argued half-heartedly.

She scoffed in a way only a mother could as she began packing the first aid supplies back up. "I know you better than that, Charlotte Williams," she scolded gently, "the first sign of someone in danger or suffering and suddenly you lose all self-preservation. It'd be admirable if it didn't scare me so much."

"I'm not-" I cut myself off, deflating in the chair as I tried to shut out the voices. The pills should kick in soon enough but for now, it was like I was having a million different conversations, plus the one I was actually having with Jackie, "am I really that reckless?"

Jackie walked over and placed a kiss on my forehead. "Yes," she answered honestly, "but you wouldn't be my Charlie if you weren't."

She left me to my thoughts after that and I just sat there, staring blankly at the wall. I was scanning my memories, trying to see that recklessness Jackie had been talking about and I was horrified to see she was telling me the truth. Now, before you go ahead and assume, I'm some kind of hero, let me tell you now that I'm really not. I was so far away from being an actual hero I would even go as far as saying I'm a step down from being a villain. I don't know, I think I'd make a good Joker; I already had the voices in my head and the unpredictable temper so now all I needed was the creepy face paint and the green hair.

"Val, you're being reckless!"

"Me? Reckless? I've no idea what you're talking about, Koschei."

I shook my head before lowering it to the table and banging it against the hard surface. "Shut up," I whispered, "shut up, shut up, shut up." I enunciated each word with a sharp knock of my head to the table, hoping I could somehow beat the voices out of my head.

My eyes were closed and suddenly, I wasn't in the kitchen anymore.

I sat up, still sitting in the little chair, and looked around at my surroundings. It was Gallifrey, or, at least, the fields outside of the city. My body moved on its own and I found myself standing, the chair vanishing the moment I did. I looked around and felt myself smile when I spied two people sitting on a blanket not far from me.

"Come on, Val," one of them said, pushing dark brown hair out of his face. Koschei. He was young and still possessed the body he was born with, yet to have regenerated. Beside him, sat an equally young boy with sandy blonde hair and a mischievous glint in his deep brown eyes. Theta.

"We're starving, Val," Theta added, his hands going straight to his stomach as his face scrunched up dramatically.

I laughed, the sound so young and carefree. Looking down, I saw small hands and I realised Theta and Koschei looked to be about seven or eight.

Walking over to the two of them, I sat in the middle, my legs brushing against theirs as I placed a basket, I hadn't realised I'd been carrying down on the blanket in front of us. "Okay, I managed to sneak as much food as I could in here, so, dig in," I told them in a bossy yet teasing tone that had them rolling their eyes even as their greedy little hands fought for who was going to open the basket.
We ate, we drank, we laughed, and we played. For that moment in time, we were simply children. We didn't worry that someone was likely wondering where we were, nor did we care that we would be in a great deal of trouble when it was learnt that we had left the city without an escort. Not that we cared either way.

Unfortunately, the playful mood was sobered when Koschei suddenly asked the question we had all been avoiding.

"Tomorrow they take us to look into the Untempered Schism. What then?"

Theta and I shared a look, neither of us really wanting to go through with the initiation tomorrow. It was necessary, however, and once it was over with, we could finally begin our time at the Academy.

Without thought, our hands drifted to one another, Theta and Koschei holding mine as they clasped their hands together so we formed a circle. "It doesn't matter," I told them simply, squeezing their hands, "because no matter what we see tomorrow, we'll always have each other. That's never going to change. Right?"

"Right," they both agreed and I smiled widely.

Time seemed to fast forward after that and I watched as my surroundings changed before I was suddenly standing before the Untempered Schism. My palms were sweaty and my hearts were racing in my chest as I took a hesitant step forward. Did I really want to look? What if I went mad? What if I ran away? What had Theta and Koschei done? Surely, they hadn't been as cowardice as I was being.

I was ushered forward and stood stiffly as I forced myself to look, forced myself to see. All I could see was fire and ice. A storm and a raging inferno. They seemed to twist around one another, somehow complimenting each other in their destructiveness. But they also seemed to temper each other. The fire was mollified by the storm and the storm seemed to bow to the fire. But why? It made no sense.

The longer I looked, the more entranced I became until I was being shaken from my daze.

"Charlie?" Jackie was saying as she continued to shake me, "Charlie, can you hear me, love?"

"What?" I asked as I blinked, her concerned face coming into view. The voices were gone now and the hallucination was quickly disappearing behind the haze the meds created. I gave Jackie a dazed smile, "I'm fine," I fold her, waving off her concern, "I'm okay."

"What did you see this time?" Jackie frowned.

I shook my head, "nothing," I muttered, "nothing at all."

She seemed to mentally be arguing with herself about whether she was going to interrogate me further before she decided again it. "Rose has been up on the roof a while, go check on her, would you?" she asked me in a way that wasn't really asking and more like ordering.

I didn't argue though, I simply stood and walked out of the kitchen and then out of the flat. Now, have I ever mentioned just how much I hate stairs? And I do, with a passion. I once skipped a class in school when I was studying to become a nurse because the lift was broken and I refused to walk up all the damn stairs. Which was probably why I would never go to heaven. I'd much prefer to drive down a highway to hell with the ac working overtime then be all sweaty and pass out halfway up the stairway to heaven.
So, it was no surprise when I burst through the door to the roof dramatically, a litany of swears falling from my lips before I collapsed to the ground with a wheeze. It was certainly a good thing I only suffered from mild asthma, otherwise Rose would be running down those stairs to fetch me an inhaler before I inevitably died.

"Charlie?" I heard Rose asked.

I lazily raised a hand and waved in the direction her voice had come from before my hand dropped heavily onto my stomach as I continued to breathe unevenly. "I'm good," I wheezed, "I'm dying but I'm good."

Now, I could feel that Rose had rolled her eyes and I could feel the Doctor trying to smother his snickering so I was completely justified when I gave both of them the middle finger. Right? Right, glad we're on the same page. With a lot of grumbling, I managed to turn onto my stomach so I could see the two of them standing side by side, leaning against the edge of the roof. I placed my head on my hand and looked at the two of them carefully before I decided to speak.

"So," I began, drawing out the 'o' and earning another roll of her eyes from Rose, "a year, huh?"

"Apparently, we didn't miss much," Rose said in a nullifying way and I had to squash my temper and remind myself that she didn't know about my Nan. This wasn't her fault. Well, not entirely. I mean, she had let the Doctor take us into the future without my permission but our trip into the past had been something we both agreed on. So, no, it wasn't her fault. If anything, it was the Doctor's fault; because apparently, the man didn't know how to properly pilot the Tardis. At all.

"A year? One whole year?" I continued as I stood to my feet, my voice flat as I looked at the pair of them, acting so blasé about the fact we had missed an entire bloody year of our lives when we had only been travelling with him one damn week. Was I the only one that saw the problem in that?

Rose seemed to sense my mounting anger and moved forward like she was approaching an enraged bull. "Charlie," she began softly, "it's going to be okay."

I laughed, the sound deranged and a little watery as I felt my anger turning into blind panic. None of this was okay. My Nan was dying, had been for months and I hadn't been there for her. What kind of granddaughter was I? The worst part? I'd barely even thought about her since we left. I was an awful person who was going to be riding down that highway to hell on a unicycle in a sauna suit.

"Nothing about this is okay, Rose?" I told her simply, "and any normal person who had missed a year of their life wouldn't be acting like it wasn't a big deal!"

"Charlie, calm down," she tried but I was way past the ability to calm down. Was I the only one seeing sense here? Did she really not see what the problem was?

"Don't tell me to calm down, Rose," I told her sternly, counting down from twenty before I took a deep breath and grounded myself. "Look-" I began only to be cut off by the sound of a deep horn before spaceship passed overhead, black smoke trailing behind it. It was heading towards the city before it vanished and a plume of black smoke rose into the air on the horizon.

"Oh, that's not fair," Rose commented.

The Doctor and I shared a look before we ran off.
came to a street that was blocked off. He huffed in frustration, "it's blocked off," he told them as they ran up to his side.

"Really?" Charlotte asked sarcastically as she bent over to get her breath, "wouldn't have realised that without your astute observation skills. Good work, Doctor."

He glared down at her even as he felt a little flare of amusement burgeoning in his chest. He actually looked forward to her witty rejoinders but that didn't mean they didn't annoy him to no end either.

"We're miles from the centre," Rose spoke up and, had he not been looking at her, the Doctor would have missed Charlotte rolling her eyes. "The city must be grid locked," Rose continued, "the whole of London must be closing down."

"Is today 'state the obvious day' because if it is, I obviously missed the memo," Charlotte sniped at the both of them and the Doctor and Rose glared at her. She shrugged her shoulders, "what? Look, it's obvious that our path is blocked off and it's obvious London is closing down. Wanna know why? Because a spaceship just crash landed in the Thames and the normal human response to something like that is to panic."

"I know," the Doctor said excitedly, practically bouncing where he stood, "I can't believe I'm here to see this. This is fantastic!"

Charlotte looked at him incredulously, "how old are you? Five?"

"He's nine hundred years old actually," Rose supplied and the Doctor could hear Charlotte spluttering where she stood slightly behind him.

"I'm sorry? Did you just say nine hundred years old?" she asked, the Doctor turning to meet her surprised gaze. "You don't look any older than forty!" she continued sceptically.

"I moisturise," he snarked.

"Did you know this was going to happen?" Rose asked the Doctor who was happily watching Charlotte gape like a fish.

"Nope."

"Nine hundred years old?!!" Charlotte exclaimed again.

"Do you recognise the ship?"

"Nope," the Doctor replied, throwing a look at Rose before he looked back at Charlotte and grinned at the flabbergasted expression painting her pale features.

"You're almost a thousand?!" Charlotte questioned loudly, earning some strange looks from passer-by's that she didn't even seem to notice.

"Yup," he grinned, proud that he had managed to make her speechless. About time really, she always seemed to have something to say about everything.

"Do you know why it crashed?" Rose continued like her best friend wasn't having a mini freak out in front of her.

The Doctor shook his head, "nope."
"You're almost fifty times older than me!" Charlotte told him. Then she fell silent, her eyes flickering back and forth as if she were mentally working something out. In fact, Charlotte was so lost in thought, that she almost jumped out of her skin when he tapped her on the shoulder to get her attention. "What?" she asked, glaring at him as she placed her hand over her heart.

"You coming?" he questioned, pointing in the direction Rose had already begun walking.

"Where are we going?"

He rolled his eyes, "were you listening to anything we just said?"

"Was I supposed to be?" she replied, "I was kinda stuck on the fact I've been travelling with a man older enough to be my several greats grandfather."

"A spaceship just crashed into the Thames and you're getting hung up on my age?" he asked incredulously.

"A week ago, I walked into the Tardis for the first time after you had pulled my mates head off. Then I went into the future where there was a giant head in a tank and a talking tree. Honestly? A spaceship in the Thames seems like something that would happen while you're around."

He crossed his arms over his chest and glared down at her, "what's that supposed to mean?"

"It means you seem to attract the weird and bizarre wherever you go," she replied as she began walking after Rose.

"That's not true!" he exclaimed.

"Doctor, we've been back less than a day and a spaceship crashes into the Thames," she said over her shoulder as he followed behind her.

"One might call that coincidence," he retorted as he reached her side and walked beside her.

"Yes, well, they obviously haven't met you then," she answered without a thought, "face it, Doctor, trouble follows you wherever you go."

"You say that like it's a bad thing," he scoffed.

She was silent and the Doctor actually felt himself grow uncomfortable. Did she think it was a bad thing? Was it a bad thing? He'd never seen it that way, he saw it more as an adventure if anything.

"Hurry up, Grandpa, you're lagging behind."

He jogged to catch up with her, his mouth drawn down in a frown as he looked over her blank face. "Don't call me Grandpa," he said simply, though, he wanted to get back to their previous topic of discussion.

Charlotte smirked and looked up at him; though, the Doctor wasn't fooled by the mask she wore. Something was bothering her and he wanted to know what it was. "Sorry," she apologized, not at all sounding like she meant it, "would you prefer Gramps?"

She really was infuriating sometimes.
Now, the voices will obviously be explained later on as well, though, you guys are welcome to make your assumptions and I’d be happy to hear them in the comments below. What did you think? I'm still not too sure about this fics and the next few but I still hope they're an enjoyable read. If not, truly sorry xx.
I probably should have been inside with everyone else, watching the News about the 'UFO crash' but I had found the crowded flat so suffocating that I hadn't even bothered to stay more than five minutes before I had walked out of the flat and the building. Now, I was simply walking around Powell Estate, my thoughts drifting from one thing to another. They mostly settled on my Nan, guilt following them like the demon it was; prepared and happy to make me regret ever getting out of bed that fateful day a week ago, well, a year ago.

A part of me still couldn't believe it had only been a week, for me anyway; for the rest of the world, Charlotte Williams had been missing for a year. A whole year just gone. I know Rose said we hadn't missed anything, but I had missed something. I had missed a very big something. My Nan getting sick.

Like they so often did, my fingers moved to the pocket of my jeans where the little circular pocket watch sat. Unlike so many other times, I didn't pull away from the cool metal; instead, I pulled the pocket watch out and settled it in my palm as I looked it over. My head hurt when I looked at it, like it was taking a lot of effort just to keep focus on it. It had always been like that but I had merely chalked it up to coincidence.

My free hand slowly drifted towards it, itching to open it and see what was so important that Nan had made me promise never to be without it. Surely a simple pocket watch didn't merit such a promise?

_Not yet._

The voice made me jump, my fingers twitching like someone was physically fighting me for control of them.

_Not yet. Not now. Patience._

I huffed, undeterred by some imaginary voice. My fingers wrapped around the cool metal, resting just above the little button that would open the pocket watch. It gleamed almost mockingly, telling me to open it even as the voice in my head screamed for me not to. My finger moved, putting pressure on the little button. Only to disappear the next moment as I heard footsteps approaching.

Hurriedly shoving the watch back into my pocket, I hid behind the Tardin and waited to see just who was coming.

"And where do you think you're going?" I heard Rose asked and I felt like head butting the Tardin. Would I ever be free of that man for more than an hour or two? His timing was absolutely horrid as
well. I was just about to… to what? I shook my head, it really didn't matter right now.

"Nowhere," I heard the Doctor reply and I scoffed at the blatant lie in his voice, "it's just a bit human in there for me. History just happened and they're talking about where you can buy dodgy top-up cards for half price."

I could see how that would be annoying to a man like him. Hell, had I bothered to stay in the flat, I may have been just as annoyed. How many times did a spaceship appear in London? How were top-up cards more interesting than that? But really? A bit human? I knew he was an alien but did he have to act so… alien?

"I'm off on a wander, that's all," the Doctor continued and I rolled my eyes heavenward. 'Off on a wander'? Really? Rose could be a little thick sometimes, but even she could tell that he was lying.

"Right," Rose scoffed and I smiled proudly, "there's a spaceship on the Thames and you're just wandering."

You tell him, Rosey. Honestly, that man was an awful liar. He was too inquisitive not to try and check everything out.

"Nothing to do with me," he answered Rose and I listened silently, wondering what exactly he was getting at, "it's not an invasion. That was a genuine crash landing. Angle of descent, colour of smoke, everything. It's perfect."

I could see him bouncing excitedly like a kid on a sugar rush. Not that I could say much; my own curiosity was mounting each passing moment and I was just as eager to learn more about this mysterious spaceship. Though something in my gut told me it wasn't as simple as the Doctor thought and I was inclined to listen to my gut.

"You don't need me," I heard the Doctor say as I shook my head and forced myself to come back to the present instead of letting my mind linger in the clouds. "Go and celebrate history. Spend time with your mum and Charlotte."

"I don't even know where Charlie went," Rose replied and, had I not known the Doctor was up to something, I would have stepped out of my hiding place. "Promise you won't disappear?" she asked him in such a small voice it pulled at my heart. I hadn't even realised how quickly Rose had become accustomed to the Doctor's presence. She had always lacked a father figure in her life and the Doctor was close to the age her own dad would be if he hadn't died when she was a baby. Had Rose chosen the Doctor as the man to fill that void? Would he end up hurting her beyond what I could repair? Over my dead body.

"Tell you what," the Doctor replied, his voice soft and light, "TARDIS key. It's about time you had one. See you later."

"What about Charlie?" Rose called.

"What about her?" the Doctor questioned and I actually felt a little stung at the question. Did he not want me to have my own TARDIS key? Perhaps he didn't wish for me to travel with them anymore. Not that it would change anything; if Rose was going you can be damn sure I wasn't going to be far behind. I'd protect her for as long as I could; no one would hurt her or take her away from me.

Rose didn't answer and the stinging sensation turned into a sharp stab of hurt. Was she really not going to ask him why he wasn't giving me a TARDIS key? I would have argued until I was blue in the face if our positions had been reversed.
Slowly, I began to back away, towards the dumpster that was conveniently located close to the Tardis. I didn't want either of them to realise I was there, not with my moods on the emotional rollercoaster they seemed to be on today. As I watched Rose run back to Powell Estate and watched the Tardis disappear, I bowed my head.

What I needed right now, was a cup of tea.

And maybe a bottle of Scotch.

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My little pity party took me to a little coffee shop my Nan used to take me to when we had first moved here. It wasn't terribly well known which should have been a crime because they made the best tea and coffee in all of London.

Frankie waved to me ecstatically, running out from behind the counter to rush up to me and engulf me in a bone crushing hug. He smelled like coffee and vanilla, a scent I had grown familiar with over the years. Frankie was older than me by five years and had been the first guy I had ever had a crush on. Like the saint that he is, Frankie hadn't wanted to lead me on and had sat me down one day to explain to me that, though I was a very beautiful girl, he happened to be very gay.

"Baby-girl!" he squeaked excitedly, "where have you been?! I've seen the posters. Were you kidnapped? Did they hurt you? Do I need to get my bat?"

I laughed as I patted his back in a signal to ease up a little. When he finally stepped back, Frankie was looking me over with a critical eye. A short moment passed before he nodded and led me over to my usual table in the back of the café. "Don't even think about moving your little butt off that chair," he ordered, waggling his finger at me, "I'll be right back."

And he was. Barely five minutes had passed when he was sliding into the seat in front of me and placing two cups on the table. I smiled as I looked down at mine. "Caramel Mocha Latte," Frankie chirped happily, "with a hint of Scotch and topped with whipped cream and chocolate powder."

"You're an absolute legend," I told him sincerely as I wrapped my hands around the steaming mug. Frankie didn't care about how hyper coffee made me and would generally help me burn off the excess energy at the gym when he got off of work. Of course, today that would have to wait.

"And don't you forget it," he said acting stern before he smiled brightly, "so," he said as I was taking a mouthful of my latte, "seen any aliens lately?"

I choked around my mouthful of latte but managed to swallow it instead of spitting it out; however, this sent me into a fit of coughs and I spluttered for a few seconds as Frankie gave me several hard pats on the back. "What?" I gasped, my eyes watering as I took in an unsteady breath.

"You know, the spaceship?" Frankie said, though, he didn't sound like that was all he had been talking about, "it was a joke, Baby-girl."

I choked around my mouthful of latte but managed to swallow it instead of spitting it out; however, this sent me into a fit of coughs and I spluttered for a few seconds as Frankie gave me several hard pats on the back. "What?" I gasped, my eyes watering as I took in an unsteady breath.

"You know, the spaceship?" Frankie said, though, he didn't sound like that was all he had been talking about, "it was a joke, Baby-girl."

I sat back and eyed Frankie wearily. He was the picture of innocence as he casually sipped on his own Mocha Latte; his dark eyes gazing at me with an equally dark eyebrow raised in my direction. His ebony skin contrasted with his white shirt and cream apron. Frankie wasn't massive, but his clothes were tight enough that you could see the muscles of his arms and the definition of his torso, when he wasn't wearing the apron that is. Of course, I had seen him almost naked so I could tell you now that he possessed a body to be enviable of.

"I know," I mumbled, playing absentmindedly with the spoon in my mug.
"What's wrong?" Frankie asked, "do you want me to put more Scotch in the drink? I keep that bottle of Dimples in my bag just in case you come in."

I snorted at that. Frankie was my spirit animal and I loved him to pieces; he also knew me better than anyone. Though, again, he knew nothing about the contents of my journal and I once again found myself wondering why the Doctor was any different to those, I held closest to my heart. My sardonic smile had his eyes narrowing at me before I dropped all pretences, my shoulders sagging in like I could protect myself from the truth if I made myself as small as possible.

"It's my Nan," I told him softly.

"She didn't try to run over a cabbie again, did she?" he asked immediately, "because I'm still in contact with James and if she needs legal representation, he's only a call away. Free of charge, he still owes me a favour."

"She's dying," I managed to get it out without my voice breaking but any pride I may have felt was snuffed out by the grief that was trying to consume me.

Frankie gasped; not one of his overdramatic ones either, no, this was a genuine, I am so sorry gasp and it made my eyes water. "Oh, Charlie," he coo'd, standing up and moving around to hug me and that was the last straw. You know, how you can keep a tough face on around others but there is always that one person who always manages to make your defences crumble like a house of cards in the wind? That person, for me, is Frankie. "Oh, honey," he whispered into my ear as he hugged me, shielding me from any inquisitive gazes with his body, "honey, it's okay. It's gonna be okay."

"She-she's dying, Frankie," I sobbed, "how is-is anything ever going to-to be okay again? I'm gonna be on my own.

"Poppycock," he replied, pulling away to meet my teary gaze with his stern one, "you will never be alone, Charlotte Angelina Williams. Do you understand me? You'll have Rose, Jackie, and me. And you know me, I'm not leaving even if you order me to."

We were silent for a moment before Frankie stood, pulling me with him. He wrapped his arm around my shoulder and steered me towards the counter. I waited silently as he stepped behind the counter to remove his apron and grab his bag, shrugging it onto his shoulder before he looked at a tall and daunting man. "Leaving early, dad," he told the larger man, "baby-girl needs me."

That got the larger man's attention and I waved gingerly when he looked over at me, "hi, Mr-"

"Baby-girl," the man exclaimed as he bounded forward on large legs, sweeping me into an equally bone crushing hug like his son had done earlier. I wrapped my hands around his hulking shoulders, my feet dangling uselessly as I was lifted a few inches off the ground. He put me down and looked at my puffy eyes with a frown before he vanished into the back of the café and returned a moment later with a large box in his hands. "On the house, darling," he told me softly, "you look like you could use it."

I gave him a watery smile and was pulled into another hug, this one much gentler than the original one. "We're here if you need us, kid," he whispered into my hair, "but please, for the love of God, keep my son out of any gay bars. I've kicked enough men out of my place this month to last me a lifetime."

That comment drew a startled laugh from my lips and I could feel him laughing into my hair as he placed a light kiss to my head before he stepped back. "Go on," he told us gruffly, "get outta here, the both of you."
"Aye, aye, Captain," Frankie said the same time I retorted with, "sir, yes, sir."

We both stood stiffly, our legs locked, saluting Frankie's dad who rolled his eyes at the both of us before he shepherded us towards the door of the café. Frankie and I shared a look before we leaned against one another and giggled like a pair of school girls. "Come on, baby-girl," Frankie said, "lets go to that park you're so fond of."

"Actually," I told him, "I should probably get back to Powell Estate. I didn't tell Jackie where I was going and she's already hyped up about me and Rose being missing for a year."

"Which I still want an explanation for, just, FYI," Frankie told me, "but, we can head to Ms Tyler's flat. We can share the chocolate cake dad just gave us with her."

"How do you know it's chocolate cake?"

He rolled his eyes, "when is it ever not chocolate cake?"

He had a point there. We made quick work of getting back to Powell Estate and Frankie had helped me put my mask in place before we entered the building. Thanks to his EMC (Emergency Make-up Case) we were able to hide the redness of my eyes and no one would even know I had been crying almost the entire walk back. Frankie swore we would be talking about the last year at length and I was dreading that particular conversation, how do you tell someone that you had actually seen them only a little over a week ago without sounding like a complete nutter? The answer? You don't.

We walked into the flat and Frankie and I didn't pay anyone any mind as we made our way into the kitchen where Jackie, Mickey, and Rose were standing. "Well, hello, Mickey," Frankie purred, winking at my best friends' boyfriend as I rolled my eyes. He seemed to notice the tension in the room and took a step back so he was once again standing beside me, "did I miss something?"

"If you did, I did," I returned before Mickey was suddenly marching up to me, his face angry. He was stopped a few inches from me by Frankie's hand resting heavily on his shoulder. "Problem, Mickey-Mouse?" I asked carelessly, wondering what the hell I had done to piss him off. Nothing recent sprung to mind.

"Problem? Problem?!" he practically yelled and I watched him flinch, no doubt Frankie had tightened his hold on him. "I was a murder suspect because of you two," he continued, "and you walk in here like you only just saw me yesterday or something!"

It was a week actually, I felt like saying but I bit my tongue and merely gave him a blank look.

"Hang on," Jackie interrupted, "you still haven't told me why you didn't tell me you knew about the Doctor!"

I watched Mickey huff before he shrugged Frankie's hand off and turned to Rose instead. My hackles rose at the look of smug satisfaction on his face. "Yeah, yeah. Why not, Rose?" he questioned and I felt Frankie wrap his large hand around my arm when I went to take a step forward, "how could I tell her where you both went?"

"Tell me now," Jackie ordered, her hands on her hips as her eyes darted between the three of us.

"I might as well, 'cos you're stuck here. Both of you," he said, throwing that smug look at me before he turned his gaze back to Rose who was quickly paling, "the Doctor's gone." I ignored the way my heart plummeted as I watched my best friend's eyes tear up. "That box thing just faded away," he continued.
That had been half an hour ago though, so why was he just bringing it up now? And why hadn't the Doctor come back yet? Had he really just left without so much as a goodbye? That didn't really seem like him.

"What do you mean?" Rose asked in a small, childlike voice.

"He's left you," Mickey told her meanly, "some boyfriend he turned out to be."

Rose ran out of the flat and with one icy glare at Mickey, I followed her.

"Rose," I called after my best friend as she ran out of the building, "Rose, wait."

"Did you know he left?" Rose asked, turning to face me, "did you know he took off?"

I nodded, "he left about half an hour ago," I told her.

"Why didn't you tell me?" she huffed angrily and I felt that familiar hurt blossoming in my chest. She was angry with me? Why? I wasn't the one that had left. Well, technically, I had left; but I came back. No one had even noticed I had gone.

"He wouldn't just go," Rose denied, shaking her head, "he promised me."

I wanted to throw out a bitter comment about how I knew that because I had overheard their conversation. I wanted to be bitter and jealous that Rose had gotten a Tardis key and I hadn't. Why wasn't I being petty, you ask? Because my best friend, the girl I considered to be my little sister, was absolutely devastated right now and that meant more to me than my own jealousy.

"Oh, he's dumped you, Rose," Mickey began from behind me, "sailed off into space. How does it feel, huh? Now you're left behind with the rest of us, Earthlings. Get used to it."

I had been counting backwards from a hundred while he was talking, gloating, but when I saw the hurt look that flashed across Rose's face, I lost all of my carefully put together composure. The sting of my open palm connecting with the side of Mickey's face was barely felt and did absolutely nothing to temper my mood. Not even the surprised looks of everyone present could quell the raging inferno spreading throughout my body. Who the hell did he think he was? No one upset Rose, not even her boyfriend and my mate. He was being petty, sure, it was a little justified, but we hadn't meant to be gone for a year and Mickey was just being an arse.

"Charlie!" Rose screamed and I felt her tugging on my coat sleeve but I shook her off as I approached my cowering friend.

"Don't you ever speak to her like that," I hissed at him, "ever. Do you understand me?" He gave me a hesitant nod but I wasn't finished. "We only saw you a week ago, Mickey," his eyes widened but nonetheless, I persisted, "so, maybe you should pull your head out of your arse because apparently it's been stuck up there so long, you're starting to act like a piece of s-"

"-Okay," Frankie stepped in, grabbing me around the waist and hauling me away from Mickey as Jackie went to his side to check his cheek. "As much as I'm loving the colourful commentary, spitfire, perhaps we should dial it down. How about we go from MA to G, yeah?" Frankie breathed into my ear.

"You both need to face it," Mickey continued, though he had taken to standing slightly behind Jackie as he did, "he's vamoosed. He didn't care enough to stick around and I doubt he'll care enough to come back."
It was certainly a good thing Frankie had still been holding my waist because, at his words, I had tried to make a leap for Mickey who grabbed Jackie and practically threw her in front of him. Nonetheless, I still tried to get out of his grip and Mickey had every reason to wear that terrified expression on his face because, with the mood I was in, if I got free, I was likely to try and gauge his eyeballs out of his skull.

"He's not," Rose argued, coming to stand beside Frankie and I felt her fingers entwine with mine. Remembering the hurt I had felt a moment ago and earlier at how she seemed to brush me aside for the Doctor, I removed my hand and recoiled into Frankie. Rose gave me a hurt look but I ignored it in favour of staring at the tattoo on Frankie's arm. "Because he gave me this," she continued and I momentarily gazed up to see her holding up the Tardis key proudly, "he's not my boyfriend, Mickey. He's more than that. He's much more important than…"

"We get it, Rose," I cut in bitterly, looking away when she tried to meet my eyes. I shrugged Frankie off and he put me back on the ground but still kept his arm wrapped around my waist. The Tardis key began to glow moments before a familiar and soothing sound reached my ears as the Tardis began to materialise. Frankie's arm tightened around me, his body moving to shield me even if it was unnecessary. That was Frankie, though, someone I could always count on to be there for me.

"I said so," Rose exclaimed happily before she tried ushering Jackie back into the building.

"Baby-girl?" Frankie whispered unsurely into my ear and I threaded my fingers through his.

"It's okay," I whispered back as the blue police box started to come into view, "let me show you something amazing."

When the Tardis fully materialised and Rose unlocked the door, I ushered Frankie in without a backwards glance at anyone else. Was I being petty? Yes. Did I care? Not right now, no.

"All right," the Doctor was saying as we entered and I smiled when I saw Frankie's eyes widen in awe as he got his first real look at the Tardis. "So, I lied," the Doctor continued, not even sparing any of us a glance and I glared fiercely at his back, "I went and had a look. But the whole crash landing's a fake." Surprise, surprise. No, really, I'm actually surprised, that wasn't sarcasm. "I thought so. Just too perfect," he continued as he looked at a little old TV, "I mean, hitting Big Ben. Come on, so, I thought let's go have a look…"

"My mum's here," Rose interrupted, finally getting the Doctor's attention as he turned to see it wasn't just Rose and me.

"Oh," he huffed, "that's just what I need. Don't you dare make this place domestic." His eyes turned to me and narrowed at Frankie, "and who are you?"

Any other day I would have rolled my eyes at the man, but today I was already thoroughly exhausted emotionally and didn't want to put up with him. "None of your damn business," I snapped, garnering a surprised and, dare I say, hurt look from the Doctor. I took Frankie's hand in mine and led him towards the hall of the Tardis, "come on," I told him softly, "I wanna show you something."

Without a backwards glance at the others, I led Frankie towards my room, where hopefully I could finally have a well-deserved cry.

The Doctor watched Charlotte and the mystery man leave the Tardis console room and frowned.
Charlotte had been in a bad mood since this morning but there was something different about the way she had just been acting. It wasn't what she had said, it was more the icy look she had had in her eyes when she had looked at him. Behind the icy look though, he had seen bitterness, jealousy, and hurt. Though, for the life of him, the Doctor couldn't figure out why she felt that way or what he had done to earn her anger this time.

Rose was also watching the door, Charlotte had disappeared through and the Doctor could see the confused and hurt look in her eyes as well. Did that mean she was angry with both of them? What had they done?

"Who was that?" he demanded, wanting to know the name of the man Charlotte had just disappeared with.

"Hm? Uh, that's Frankie," Rose answered absentmindedly, "they've been friends for years."

"What's up with her anyway?" he demanded, looking to Rose for answers about why her friend seemed to be mad at him. Again.

"That time of the month?" Mickey added unhelpfully, earning two identical glares from Jackie and Rose.

Jackie was the one to answer, her arms crossed over her chest. "Not that it's any of your business," she said, looking directly at the Doctor, "but Charlotte just found out that her Nan is sick."

"So?" the Doctor asked, confused about why that would make Charlotte act like she was. People got sick all the time, then they got better.

"She's dying," Jackie hissed and the Doctor felt his hearts break a little for the younger woman.

Rose gasped, "what? She-she never told me."

Jackie directed her glare at her daughter, "when would she have had the time to?" she asked sternly, "ever since you've been back, you're either with him-" she pointed at the Doctor, "-or talking about him. Don't even get me started on the fact that you have a key to this thing and I noticed Charlotte didn't seem to have one."

"I haven't found the right time to give her one," the Doctor defended himself, patting at his pocket where a Tardis key rested against one of his hearts. The Tardis had apparently decided to personalise Charlotte's key. It was Tardis blue with her name on it in a neat scrawl. It had appeared by him earlier when he was telling her that he was planning on giving Rose and Charlotte their own keys to the Tardis. He knew the Tardis had taken an unusual liking to the fiery-haired woman and she only further proved him right with the personalised key.

"Mhm," Jackie replied sceptically, her lips pursed as she threw a stern look between him, Rose, and even Mickey before she turned around and stepped out of the room, Rose following shortly behind her.

"This is impossible," Frankie said as I led him down the hall that would take us to my room.

I chuckled, "I said pretty much the same thing when I first saw her."

"Her?" he asked before he nodded, "yeah, she definitely has a feminine feel to her." The Tardis hummed appreciatively and I giggled as Frankie jumped. "What was that?" he asked me curiously. Yup, trust Frankie not to absolutely freak out about being in a police box that was bigger on the
inside.

"That's how the Tardis communicates," I told him simply as we reached my room. I unlocked and opened the door, ushering Frankie in quickly before shutting the door and locking it again.

"Tardis?"

I nodded, "Time and Relative Dimensions in Space," I told him, having memorised the Doctor telling us when we had first entered. "Basically, she's a spaceship that travels in time," I simplified.

"A spaceship?" I nodded. "That travels in time?" Another nod. "Why does it look like a police box from the fifties?"

"Sixties is a bit more accurate, actually," I told him before I shrugged, "I don't know, I never asked."

"And how does all of this-" he waved his hands around wildly, "-fit inside an old police box?"

"The TARDIS is dimensionally transcendental, meaning the interior exists in a different, relative dimension to the exterior," I explained simply.

Frankie gave me a strange look before he spoke, "and how could you possibly know that?"

"I read the manual," I said, "well, parts of the manual; I haven't gotten all the way through it yet."

"There's a manual?" Frankie asked, surprised.

I nodded, "it was hidden under a stack of books in the library but it seems to vanish and appear in different locations whenever the Doctor's around. Kind of like the Tardis doesn't trust him to find it or something."

"Wait, wait, wait," he said, waving his hands around in a shushing motion, "back up a bit. This place has a library?"

I nodded with a large grin, "and you wouldn't imagine how many books it has; I could live in there happily for the rest of my life."

"Any room in there for your GBF?" he asked me with a dramatic flourish towards himself.

"I have a room you might like a bit more," I grinned.

And I had been right. The moment Frankie and I had entered the large closet-like room in the Tardis, he had made an odd sound between a squeal and a choking sound as he stared around the room. We had proceeded to peruse the stacks of clothes and Frankie had eyed a few tailored suits from the forties as we had passed them.

Eventually, however, we decided to make our way back to the Tardis control room and Frankie had pestered me the entire way there about talking to the Doctor. He told me to explain to the man that I had felt hurt that he had given Rose a key and not me. Of course, I stubbornly refused and Frankie and I had spent the remainder of the walk glaring at each other, having a silent argument through our looks alone.

"That was a real spaceship," I heard Rose say just as we walked through the door and into the control room.

"Yep," the Doctor replied enthusiastically and I gave Frankie a pointed look as if to say 'see what I
have to deal with?"

Of course, Frankie threw me an equally pointed look that said 'just strap on your big girl panties and tell the man how you feel.'

"So, it's all a pack of lies? What is it, then? Are they invading?" Rose questioned and Frankie and I scoffed, garnering the attention of the three people in the room.

"Some invasion," I commented as I led Frankie further into the control room after threading my fingers through his. "The whole world is now aware of the crash in the Thames, everyone's going to be on high alert because of it," I continued.

"Baby-girl's right," Frankie added and I smiled at him, missing the way the Doctor glared at him, "if you were going to invade a planet, wouldn't you want to take them by surprise? It'd make invading a whole lot easier."

"Good point," the Doctor begrudgingly agreed and I felt my lip turn up in a smirk as I saw the pout on his face. He glared at me before he turned away and towards Rose, "so, what're they up to?"

Frankie watched as everyone sat around the Tardis. He still couldn't wrap his mind around everything that had happened so far and knew he was going to go postal when he got home later. His eyes moved to Baby-girl and he watched as she curled a bright strand of hair around her finger as she threw an emotion-filled look at the man she called 'the Doctor' every now and again.

He looked at the man too, something was certainly different about him. It wasn't just the fact that he was apparently an alien either. He looked familiar, like Frankie had seen him before. His eyes went back to Baby-girl and he frowned, she had seemed familiar when he had first met her too. It had confused him because the familiarity had stemmed from his childhood which was impossible for two reasons. One, Baby-girl had lived in America for most of her young life. And two, she was five years younger than him but he could have sworn the familiarity stemmed from someone who had been older than he had been at the time.

Shaking his head, Frankie watched as Mickey approached the Doctor and started up a conversation. He didn't pay much attention to the specifics and quickly looked away only to see Rose throwing looks at Baby-girl from across the room.

He shook his head again; those two girls were about as stubborn as each other. He could see that both of them wanted to talk but neither of them wanted to be the one to break the silence. Frankie was contemplating locking them in a room when he watched the Doctor get up and move out of the control room, telling them he'd be back in a moment.

Frankie watched Rose slowly inch towards Baby-girl and when they were properly distracted, he got up and followed after the Doctor.

At one point, he had lost sight of the man and had thought about turning back so he wouldn't get lost. Of course, then the Tardis had given out two beeps before the lights dimmed around him and brightened down the hall just ahead of him. Remembering what Baby-girl had said to him about the Tardis being sentient, he hurried down the hall.

He had been walking for all of two minutes when he suddenly ran into the Doctor as the older man stepped out of a side room.

"Why aren't you back in the control room?" he demanded, hiding the surprise Frankie had seen quickly flash in his eyes.
Frankie shrugged nonchalantly before he crossed his arms over his chest and straightened to full height. "What are your intentions with Baby-girl?" he asked instead, needing to know his friend would be okay.

"Who? What?" the man said, the surprise coming back as he shifted to look up at Frankie.

"Charlotte," Frankie said with a roll of his eyes, "what are your intentions with Charlotte?"

"What's any of it got to do with you?"

Frankie narrowed his eyes at the man, the look returned with equal ferocity. Any other time, that look might have made him step down and forget his line of questioning; but not when it came to Baby-girl. He loved her like she was his sister and he wasn't going to leave her in the care of this man unless he knew she'd be safe. "She's one of my closest friends," he told the man, "practically my little sister. She's a tough shell to crack but once you do, she's unwaveringly loyal. Unfortunately, she's also easily hurt and I've seen the way she looks at you. I don't want her getting hurt again, Doctor, and I need to know she's going to be safe with you."

He was being completely honest too. He had seen the way Baby-girl had been looking at the older man. It hadn't been in a romantic say, more like, she was beginning to care for him. Of course, Frankie knew that she'd fight it; Baby-girl was hesitant to open up to others and something about the Doctor had spooked her. If he had to take a guess, he'd say it had something to do with how quickly she was coming to trust him.

Baby-girl had given him the cliff notes of everything that had happened so far and the way she talked about the Doctor was almost similar to the way she talked about him, Jackie, Rose, and her Nan. She was beginning to trust him and Frankie could see it was scaring the hell out of her. It wasn't because she trusted him either, it was because of how fast she was trusting him.

"I don't know," the Doctor answered, shaking Frankie from his thoughts. He eyed the older man suspiciously, looking for any sign that he was lying. The Doctor's shoulders were sagged and his eyes were downcast as he suddenly found his shoes very interesting.

"You don't know if you can keep her safe?"

The Doctor's eyes met his and Frankie was surprised at the years he saw there. His eyes were old, far older than how old he looked. They looked worn and seemed to show all the horrors the man had seen. "Has she shown you her arms?" he asked Frankie. When Frankie nodded, the Doctor deflated. "Those scars are my fault," the Doctor told him.

"That's not how Baby-girl sees it," Frankie told him, "she says the choice to go after you had been hers. She had decided to follow you into that room. She decided to get that woman, Jabe, out of there before she could get seriously hurt or die. She decided to push down on that breaker switch, knowing full well what would happen when she did." Frankie took a deep breath and exhaled it slowly, "when Charlie gets an idea in her head, I doubt anyone could ever talk her out of doing it. And, as she tells me, you blaming yourself for her choices, is really beginning to piss her off.

"Charlie is very stubborn, Doctor," Frankie continued, leaning against the nearest wall, "I've never met another human being as stubborn as that woman. She makes you want to throttle her most of the time and then, there are these moments where she removes the mask, she wears to protect herself and you get to see the woman beneath it all. You haven't had that chance yet; but, when you do, do yourself a favour."

Their eyes were burning into each other as Frankie spoke and he could see that the Doctor was
"I'm sorry."

I looked up at the sound of Rose's voice to see the younger woman standing awkwardly in front of me.

"I've been a rotten friend," Rose continued sadly. "I've been spending so much time with the Doctor that I didn't even notice you were hurting."

I sighed heavily and patted the spot beside me. As Rose sat down beside me, I felt the hurt lessen in my chest. No matter what, I could never stay angry at Rose and, if truth be told, I was never really mad with her anyway. I was hurt; because I felt like I was losing my best friend. When the Doctor had given Rose the Tardis key and not even mentioned giving me one, I was jealous. Did he not want to travel with me anymore? Was he going to take Rose away from me? I don't know which thought hurt the most but the second one was definitely the most terrifying.

"I'm sorry to hear about your Nan," Rose said softly, her fingers threading through mine as she placed our entwined hands in her lap. I didn't pull away; instead, I felt myself relax for the first time since we had gotten back. Moving over, I placed my head on Rose's shoulder, squeezing her hand softly.

"I know," I whispered, "I'm sorry for ignoring you. I was hurt and scared."

"Why were you scared?" Rose asked me curiously.

I shook my head, "it doesn't matter." Yes, it does, a voice in my head said and I drowned it out quickly. If Rose was planning on leaving with the Doctor and travelling without me, I didn't want her to know just how much it would affect me. I wanted her to be happy, even if it meant I wasn't.

"He looks happy. She makes him happy, that's all that matters."

I shook my head again, ignoring the familiar and yet unfamiliar voice.

"Do you forgive me?" Rose asked nervously after a moment of silence.

I smiled softly, "I'll always forgive you, Rosey."

Her arms were around my neck in the next moment and I wrapped my own around her waist as we hugged tightly. The hurt disappeared as I tightened my hold on her, closing my eyes and taking in a deep breath as I allowed myself to be calm for the first time all day. We stayed like that for a while, neither of us speaking or moving, just finding comfort in the other as we so often did.

Of course, the moment was soon broken as the Doctor re-entered the room and managed to fix his little scanner thing. Looked like we were officially back in business.

And, wouldn't you know it? The scanner only left us with more questions than answers.
Chapter End Notes

Charlie may seem very rude in this chapter. Please keep in mind that she has just found out that her Nan is dying and for a woman like Charlie, she chose to react in a negative way. She was already feeling emotional before learning about her Nan but the news was a tipping point for her. Don't worry, the Charlie we all know and love will be back soon and I hope this chapter doesn't make you hate her xx
So, in the span of thirty minutes or so, Jackie had apparently freaked out about the Tardis and notified the authorities. We had learned that the aliens were *obviously* not here by accident. Rose and I had made up. The Doctor was still being… well, the Doctor. Mickey sported a nice me sized handprint on his left cheek. Frankie might be a little in love with the Tardis, more specifically, the Tardis wardrobe and now we were all getting driven to Downing Street.

Yup, you heard that right. Downing Street. Turns out, the government had been monitoring calls for any sign of the Doctor and Jackie just so happened to tip them off. Mickey had *run off* the moment the authorities had gotten there and Frankie was still trying to flirt with the officer sitting in the car with us. He was failing too, in case you were wondering.

I hadn't really spoken since we were shoved into the car and had just taken to staring out of the tinted window as we drove. Rose and the Doctor had been chatting happily since we got in the car but whatever they had been talking about had virtually flown over my head as I had taken to counting the lamp posts as we drove passed them.

In all honestly, I wasn't trying to ignore anyone. Well, that's not completely true. I was still ignoring the Doctor who I had seen throwing me cursory glances since he had come back into the console room earlier. I was also actively trying to ignore the voices in my head. The meds usually did a good job at drowning them out but it seemed like they weren't going to be so easily silenced today.

"Baby-girl?"

I jumped when a hand touched my arm, my head snapping away from the window so fast I winced when I felt it crack. Frankie was looking at me, worry etched on his handsome features as he replaced his hand on my arm and gently rubbed at it. I blinked owlishly before shaking my head to clear it of the incessant little voices before I smiled softly at Frankie. "Sorry," I told him gently, "zoned out."

"You were counting the lamp posts, weren't you?" he asked with a shake of his head as I smiled sheepishly at him.

"What?" the Doctor asked and Frankie and I turned to look at him.

"Charlie likes to count things when she's stressed," Rose explained, ignoring my glare when I sent it to her, "she says it helps her relax."

"It does," I snapped, sighing when I saw Rose roll her eyes, "I'm just… I'm not as excited as you two seem to be about going to Downing Street, okay?"

"Why?" Rose and the Doctor asked together.

I rolled my eyes. "Because most people don't take it as a good thing or some amazing adventure when the government comes and carts you away," I replied heavily, turning my gaze back to the
window, "and we still don't know what those aliens want."

"That's what makes this all so exciting," Rose commented lightly.

"Not really," I answered, looking back at Rose, "what's so exciting about a potential alien invasion? If they are hostile, they could kill a lot of people, Rosey."

"We'll stop them," the Doctor tried to assure me.

I slumped back in the chair, my head moving to lay on Frankie's shoulder as he placed his arm around my waist and pulled me closer. "What if we can't?" I asked quietly, "what if we fail and others die because of our ineptitude?"

"Are you always this pessimistic?" the Doctor snapped and I opened my eyes to glare fiercely at him.

"I'm being realistic, Doctor," I answered him tersely, "you may have taken it on your shoulders to save the entire bloody galaxy but even you have to know that you can't save everyone." Why did all of our conversations have to end in a fight? I wondered to myself. "Now, for some reason, Rose and I are apart of your mission and I need to know how I'm supposed to live with myself when all I can see when I close my eyes is Gwyneth standing under that archway," I continued, a tense silence filling the car at my confession as I refused to look at anyone. "How am I supposed to live with myself on the days when we can't save others?" I asked quietly as I felt a tear fall from my eye.

No one answered and I didn't bother to say anything more as I turned to look out the window once more, counting the lamp posts as they flew passed the window. Frankie's arm tightened around me, his fingers drawing little patterns on my coat. I was happy he was here; my pillar of strength in this crazy world I now lived in. Frankie meant a lot to me; nowhere near as much as Rose and Jackie, but enough that I would be devastated if anything were to ever happen to him.

We got to Downing Street and I raised the hood of my coat before stepping out of the car. The violent flashes of lights from the cameras were annoying and made me feel slightly nauseous as I allowed Frankie to direct me into the building. Once inside, I watched as soldiers and government officials milled about the place. You could tell them apart even if they weren't wearing uniforms and suits. Soldiers presented themselves in a humbly proud way that came from the knowledge that they had devoted themselves to something bigger than themselves. Government officials tended to walk around with an air of importance that they didn't rightfully deserve and a look in their eyes that they demanded your respect even when there were people present who deserved it far more.

It was crowded, everyone seeming to wait to be led into a conference room and Frankie and I stood back with Rose and the Doctor as we waited for orders of some kind.

"Harriet Jones, MP Flydale North."

I looked up at the voice and watched an older woman flash her badge at a frazzled looking man wearing a slightly wrinkled but expensive looking suit. She was about my height, wearing a wrinkled and inexpensive suit herself; her hair in a state of disarray

"I feel woefully underdressed," Frankie said, making me jump as he suddenly spoke.

I turned to look at him, still in the same white shirt and dark wash jeans. His worn Nike's were scuffed and dirty and he looked like a hobo compared to the other people present tonight. "I think you look amazing," I told him with a smile and a comforting pat on the chest, "like always."

He grinned at me, winking as I shook my head with a laugh before the Doctor was motioning us
over to the frazzled man the woman, Harriet Jones, had been talking to earlier. "Here's your ID card," he said to the Doctor as he handed him the small plastic lanyard, "I'm sorry, your companions don't have clearance."

"I don't go anywhere without them," the Doctor told the man simply.

"You make us sound like some kind of accessory, Doctor," I told him with a shake of my head.

"Or a condom." We all turned to look at Frankie, who shrugged nonchalantly, "what? Dad says not to go anywhere without at least one."

Rose and I snorted as the Doctor rolled his eyes.

"Uh," the poor man said, looking between the Doctor, Frankie, me, and Rose, "you're code nine, not them. I'm sorry, Doctor. It is the Doctor, isn't it? They'll have to stay outside."

"They stay with me."

"Look, even I don't have clearance to go in there," the man stressed and I felt sorry for the poor guy, "I can't let them in and that's a fact."

"It's all right," Rose told the Doctor, "you go."

The Doctor looked like he was ready to protest and I decided to step forward and help the poor man out. "Doctor," I told him sternly, "for five minutes can you not be your usual bull-headed self and just do as you're told?" The Doctor and I glared at each other before my eyes softened, "you know I won't let anyone hurt Rose," I told him gently, "I'd die before I ever let that happen."

His eyes seemed to look over my shoulder and I felt Frankie take a step closer, his chest pressed to my back. Something silent passed between the two men before the Doctor was looking back at me and nodding hesitantly. I smiled, my earlier feelings pushed aside for the moment as I grabbed his ID card and pinned it to his jacket. I placed my hand over it, feeling his heart beating steadily beneath my hand as I grinned at him. "Now, go," I told him, "be amazing."

"Did you just compliment me?" he asked with a smirk and I rolled my eyes as I stepped back.

"Don't get used to it," I scoffed.

He was about to turn away when that woman I had seen earlier pushed her way through the crowd and walked up to him. "Excuse me," she asked, "are you the Doctor?"

"Are you sure?" the Doctor asked me and Rose, apparently not paying much attention to the woman trying to get his attention as the frazzled man tried to rain her in.

"We'll be fine," Rose and I said together, grinning at each other when we did.

"Fine," he grumbled, "don't get in any trouble."

"How could we possibly get into any trouble with the military around?" Rose asked.

I facepalmed, "you know you basically just jinxed us, don't you?" I asked her as the Doctor turned to leave with the other government officials, "good luck, Doctor!" He looked over his shoulder and smiled at me, giving me two thumbs up as he did before he disappeared. "Well, now what?" I asked curiously.

"You haven't got clearance," I heard the poor man stress to Harriet Jones and I turned to see him
running his hands through his hair, "now leave it." He turned to me, Rose, and Frankie with an apologetic look, "I'm going to have to leave you with security."

"It's all right, I'll look after them," Harriet said as she took Rose by the arm, "let me be of some use."

I stood back as Harriet led Rose and Frankie through the crowd before I turned back to the frazzled man as I dug into one of my coat pockets. "Rough night?" I asked softly.

He looked down at me, like he was startled I was still there. He sighed heavily, running his fingers through his hair again. "You have no idea," he breathed unsteadily.

"I can imagine," I told him simply as I grasped a little package and pulled it from my coat pocket, "gum?" He looked down and saw the small pack of gum in my hand. I removed one for myself, popping it in my mouth and chewing happily on it. He hesitated for a moment before taking a piece himself and popping it in his mouth. "When did you last have a cigarette?" I asked curiously.

His eyes widened, "how?"

"I used to smoke, quit about a year ago," I explained, "I recognised the signs."

"Going on a few hours now," he answered heavily.

I nodded before placing the packet back in my coat pocket and holding my hand out to the steadily relaxing man, "Charlotte Williams, but everyone calls me Charlie."

"Indra Ganesh," he answered, shaking my hand firmly, "friends call me Indy."

"Can I call you Indy?" I asked with a teasing smile.

This earned a small chuckle from the man and I grinned widely as we dropped our hands and just stood there for a moment. We chewed on our gum as we stood in comfortable silence, enjoying the quiet as opposed to the hustle and bustle from a moment ago. "I'd love to stay and talk, Indy," I said after a moment, "but I should probably be finding my friends. Last time I left Rose alone she almost became a human barbeque." His eyes widened and I grinned sheepishly, "long story. It was nice meeting you."

"You too, Miss Williams."

"Just Charlie," I grinned before I turned and ran off in the direction Harriet Jones had taken Rose and Frankie.

You'd think it'd be easy to find someone with Rose's startlingly bright hair and Frankie's general build, but I had been looking for almost fifteen minutes and still hadn't managed to find any sign of them. It was frustrating, to say the least, and I already had a hunch that Rose was getting herself, and Frankie by extension, into trouble. How did I know? Because my Rose senses were tingling. Just kidding, sort of.

Did I mention that Downing Street was like the Labyrinth? Yup, I was Sarah, aimlessly making my way down endless halls trying to find Toby, or, in this case, trying to find Rose. All I was missing was David Bowie dressed as the Goblin King and if he suddenly appeared, I wouldn't be complaining. Who would? Guy was a total knock-out.

I was just turning down another hall when I ran into Indy again. "Charlie!" he exclaimed, grabbing my arms to keep me from falling backwards.
"Indy? Indy! How are you?" I questioned cheerfully.

"What are you still doing here?" he asked me instead.

I shrugged, "looking for my friends. I have no idea where Harriet Jones might have taken them but I doubt it was out of the building."

"They might have."

"You don't know Rose," I replied with a shake of my head.

"But I do know Harriet," Indy told me with a heavy sigh, "come on, this way."

He led me down the way I had just come from and we took a left before we began approaching a fancy door. "Indy? Where are we going?" I asked curiously.

"The Cabinet Room," he told me simply as we reached the door and he opened it to reveal Harriet, Rose, and Frankie. "Harriet, for God's sake," Indy exclaimed as the woman's horrified features came into view, "this has gone beyond a joke. You cannot just wander… oh, my God," Indy said, his eyes widening and his face paling as he looked into a cupboard, "that's the Prime Minster!"

"Not anymore," I told him severely as I looked at what could only be described as a skin suit. My stomach lurched violently and I let go of Indy's hand to turn around and throw up in a potted plant. Warm hands held back my hair as I emptied my stomach before I became aware of Frankie trying to soothe me. "That's disgusting," I managed to get out before the man's skin flashed before my eyes and I was heaving again.

When my stomach was empty and I had managed to stop dry heaving, I stood up, grimacing at the sight of someone else's vomit. My stomach threatened to upend again but I knew there was nothing left to throw up so I simply waited for it to settle. "You okay?" I asked Frankie as I tried to dig out the mints, I knew I kept in my pocket.

"My lunch didn't taste as good coming up as it did going down but I think I'll live," Frankie answered me as my hands wrapped around a small metal tin. I pulled out the mints and gave two to Frankie before popping two in my own mouth. Behind us, Indy, Rose, and Harriet were either freaking out or trying to figure out what the hell had happened to the Prime Minster.

The door, which I had partially closed when we had entered, slowly creaked open and Frankie and I looked up in time to see a plus sized woman with short blonde hair and a dangerous smile. Frankie and I took a large step back, my hand moving to grab Indy's suit sleeve as he turned to confront the new comer.

"Oh! Has someone been naughty?" the woman tsk'd in a mock stern tone.

"Who the hell are you?" I asked.

She didn't answer me, she simply took another step into the room and I felt Frankie take another step back but I kept myself next to Indy; the familiar cold feeling filling my body once more just like it had in 1869. "That's impossible," he told the woman, "he left this afternoon. The Prime Minster left Downing Street. He was driven away!"

"And who told you that, hmm? Me," the woman answered.

"You're an alien," I breathed, putting the pieces together slowly.
She glanced at me, a mocking smile stretching her lips as she reached for her hairline, "oh, you are a smart one." My eyes widened as I watched her unzip her forehead, a blue light filling the room almost blindingly, before an alien began to wriggle out of the skin suit. The woman, now almost eight feet tall with large black eyes, stretch her three long fingers.

"Wow," I commented without thought, "you are the ugliest baby I've ever seen."

Rose watched as the alien creature raised her hand and moved to slash at the suited man and Charlie. She screamed as the clawed fingers came down, only to meet air as Charlie threw herself into the man, sending them both to the ground just in the nick of time before the alien began to spasm like she was being electrocuted.

Frankie moved before anyone, rushing to Charlie and helping her and the man up. "Indy," Charlie began, "are you okay?" she asked, searching the man over frantically.

"I-I'm fine," he stuttered before he raised his hand to her cheek, "but it got you."

Charlie frowned, raising her hand to her cheek and pulling it back to see blood. She hadn't even felt the claw cutting her and doubted it was anything to be concerned about. "I'm okay," she told him, giving him a comforting smile before she looked at everyone. "Well?" she asked, "are we all going to stand around or are we going to make a run for it? Don't know about you guys, but I rather enjoy being alive."

Grabbing Rose's hand, Charlie ran from the room, the others following shortly behind her. They were halfway down the hall when Harriet turned to run back, "no, wait. They're still in there. The emergency protocols. We need them."

The alien crashed through the oak doors and Frankie grabbed Harriet's hand and tugged her arm quickly. "How about we skip the protocols?" he asked sarcastically, "doubt people read them anyway."

They all ran, the alien always seeming just on their heels. "Where the hell is the Doctor?" Charlie yelled as they ran passed a lift and the Doctor stepped out, "do something!" she screamed as they ran passed.

"You're always so bossy," she heard him mutter before they turned another corner and he vanished back into the elevator.

They ran into a sitting room and Charlie quickly slammed the door closed before she and Rose shared a look. "Hide!" they told everyone before Charlie quickly ducked behind the folding screen by the window. She ducked down, making herself as small as she could as she covered her mouth to keep from being heard. Charlie was trying to control her breathing but the combination of panic and cardio wasn't doing her any favours.

"Oh," came the annoying voice of the alien as she apparently entered the room, "such fun. Little human children, where are you?" Charlie rolled her eyes at the stupid question. Yes, because they were totally going to tell her where they were hiding. "Sweet little humeykins," she coo'd, the ridiculous nickname making Charlie raise an incredulous eyebrow, "come to me. Let me kiss you better. Kiss you with my big, green lips."

Charlie jumped when she saw the curtain beside her hiding place rustle a little before she saw Rose and felt herself relax a little. "Are you okay?" she mouthed to the younger woman who shook her head.
"I'm scared," Rose mouthed back.

"Me too," Charlie said, "but I won't let them hurt you, okay?"

Rose nodded her head and Charlie tried to send her friend a comforting smile, though she was sure it looked more like a grimace.

"My brothers."

Charlie felt her entire body stiffen at the alien's words. There were more of them, but how many more?

"Happy hunting?" came another voice and Charlie felt herself shiver.

Rose turned to look at Charlie with wide eyes and Charlie shook her head. "Relax," she mouthed to Rose, slowly getting to her feet as she heard the aliens moving around the room. "Stay quiet," she continued when she was finally standing.

"It's wonderful," the first alien purred, "the more you prolong it, the more they stink."

Charlie's eyebrows furrowed before she sniffed at herself, earning an incredulous look from Rose which she merely returned with a shrug. Sure, she hadn't exactly had time to throw on any deodorant before they were brought here but she still faintly smelt of soap.

"Sweat and fear," came another voice.

Oh great, they can smell emotions, Charlie thought sarcastically, because running for our lives wasn't difficult enough why don't we add not being able to hide because they're part blood hound.

"I smell an old girl. Stale bird and brittle bones. A young man, scared and stressed," said the third voice.

"A young woman," came the second voice as the sound of sniffing reached her ears, "she smells different, like fire."

"Another young man," the third voice continued, "scared but determined."

"And a ripe youngster, all hormones and adrenaline," came the female alien's voice, getting closer. Charlie felt herself stiffen, her body preparing to act, "fresh enough to bend before she snaps."

Charlie didn't even see the alien tear the curtain away, all she heard was Rose scream before she was jumping out from behind the folding screen and punching the alien in the face. The alien stumbled back, more out of shock than pain, and Charlie placed Rose behind her and out of their reach. "Keep your claws off my friend," Charlie hissed, unable to speak any louder out of fear her voice would break. She was terrified, not just for her, but for Rose, Frankie, Indy, and even Harriet. These aliens had every intention of killing them all and she had no idea what to do.

"Feisty," came the second voice as the alien owner stepped forward with a chuckle. He was closing in on them before the Doctor burst into the room with a fire extinguisher.

Frozen with fear, it was Rose who pulled Charlie from the room this time, following the Doctor from the room and praying to whoever was listening that he had a plan.

"Where the bloody hell have you been?" I practically yelled as I finally managed to shake myself out of my fear-induced stupor, my eyes narrowed at the Doctor.
"I've been busy," he snapped and I rolled my eyes; of course, he had, I'm pretty sure the alien's little spasm session earlier had something to do with him. Trouble followed this man wherever he went and I was starting to think he was going to be the death of me.

We ran into a familiar room and stopped a few steps away from the Doctor, throwing my hands to the side as I did a little turn. "Didn't we just escape from this room?" I asked incredulously as Frankie, Indy, Rose, and Harriet entered the room in quick succession. "Why are we back in a room we just escaped?" I continued, watching the Doctor grab a decanter from a side table, "Doctor, is now really the time for you to be drinking?"

He ignored me and moved over to the doorway, all of us standing behind or beside him was the large aliens came into view. "One more move and my sonic will triplicate the flammability of this alcohol," he threatened and I resisted the urge to roll my eyes, "whoof, we all go up. So, back off."

Even though triplicating the flammability of the alcohol sounded like complete and utter bullshit to me, the aliens took a large step back so they were now back in the hall. Was it just me, or did this place seem eerily quiet? Where were all the guards? The soldiers? The politicians?

"Right then," the Doctor continued, still holding his sonic to the side of the decanter, "question time. Who exactly are the Slitheen?"

"Isn't that one of the houses in Harry Potter?" Frankie asked.

"Nah," Indy answered, "that's Slytherin."

"Same thing," Frankie argued.

"Is now really the time?" I questioned them both, my eyebrow raised and my mouth set in a straight line even as I felt the corner of my lips twitch. Trust Frankie to think of Harry Potter in a time like this. Honestly, what am I going to do with him?

"They're aliens," Harriet said.

I rolled my eyes, "ten points to Harriet Jones for the astute observation."

Frankie and Indy coughed behind me and I almost felt myself smile as I heard them try and cover their laughs. Okay, now probably wasn't the best time for a Harry Potter reference.

"Who are you, if not human?" one of the male aliens asked.

"Who's not human?" Harriet questioned.

"He's not human," Rose answered.

"He's not human?"

"Does any part of that man remotely seem human to you?" I asked sarcastically.

The Doctor turned to glare at me, "Oi!" he exclaimed before he was turning to glare at Harriet and Rose, "can I have a bit of hush?"

"Sorry," Harriet mumbled.

"Is it always like this with him?" Frankie whispered into my ear, stepping up behind me so our bodies were pressed together.
I took in a deep breath and looked from the Doctor to the aliens and back again. "As much as I'd love to say otherwise, I'd be lying if I said anything other than yes," I told him honestly.

"I'm worried about you Baby-girl," he continued softly, "he's dangerous and I don't trust that he can keep you safe."

"I don't need anyone to keep me safe, Frankie," I hissed, my pride taking a small hit at his words, "and there's more to him than just being dangerous to one's health."

I watched the Doctor and the aliens converse. Honestly, if they weren't planning on invading Earth than why were they here? When one of them introduced themselves, I knew I was never going to complain about the length of my name again. I mean, wow, a bit much really.

"Ah, excuse me," Alien number two said as he gestured to the decanter still in the Doctor's hand, "your device will do what? Triplicate the flammability?"

"Is that what I said?" the Doctor replied and I rolled my eyes.

"You're making it up," Alien number two exclaimed and I really needed a better name for these guys. Didn't they say they were Slitheen? Okay, Slitheen Number Two? Ugly Baby Número Dos? I dunno, I'll figure it out later.

"He makes a lot of things up," I said, gaining the attention of the others. Yup, still here. "I'm pretty sure he's improvising like ninety-seven per cent of the time," I continued with a glance at the Doctor.

"I do not!" the Doctor defended himself.

"Don't lie, Doctor, it's unbecoming of a man your age," I replied sassily, "may I?" I asked, motioning towards the Decanter. The Doctor handed it over hesitant and I fished around in my pocket as I used my mouth to unstopper the Decanter. "Since we now all know that triplicating the flammability of the alcohol won't work, I'll tell you what," I began as I subtly nudged the Doctor and motions to the wall where there was an outline of a panel. He moved over a little and I took a step forward as I managed to get my lighter out of my pocket. Remind me to give River a kiss the next time I see her, this jacket is amazing.

"If you don't back off, I'll show you how I got a B- for my year ten science experiment," I told them, narrowing my eyes as I flicked the lid off my lighter and lit it up, "because I may not know a bunch of fancy terms, but I know that alcohol is extremely flammable and a person doused with it before it comes into contact with an open flame has a one hundred per cent chance of going up in flames."

I ignored the shocked and horrified looks I could feel drilling into my head as I kept my eyes on the Slitheen who took a large step back, putting them further away from the door. Subtly, I nodded at the Doctor who took over speaking once he shook himself from his own shock-induced stupor.

"Fascinating history, Downing Street. Two thousand years ago, this was marsh land," he began explaining, "1730, it was occupied by a Mister Chicken. He was a nice man," the Doctor told me, looking down at me where I stood shoulder to shoulder with him.

"I'll take your word for it," I replied sarcastically, keeping the lighter and the Decanter raised in warning as I saw one of the Slitheen try to take a step forward.

"Anyway," the Doctor continued after throwing me a glare, "1796, this was the Cabinet Room. If the Cabinet's in session and in danger, these are about the four safest walls in the whole of Great
"Bye," I said cheerily with a wave as the Doctor lifted the small panel by the door and pressed a button. Metal shutters crashed shut across the windows and doors just as the Slitheen made to step forward.

The Doctor turned to the others with a grin, "installed in 1991. Three inches of steel lining every single wall. They'll never get in."

"And chances are, we'll never get out," I pointed out.

The Doctor spun around, his finger in my face the next moment as he glared, "what was that just now?" he ordered, "you were going to kill them?"

Okay, I've never been more insulted in my entire life and I was once mistaken from a prostitute. Don't ask, I'll never tell. "You're kidding, right?" I hissed, "I was bluffing you buffoon!"

"Oh, really? And what was all that on your tenth-grade science project?" he contradicted angrily.

"It was a carefully constructed lie, Doctor," I threw back just as angrily, how dare he insinuate that I would actually kill someone? The nerve of this man. "Or what? Lying's only okay if they're coming out of your mouth? At least mine was more believable! 'Triplicating the flammability'? Really? That was the best you could come up with?" I ranted.

"I was improvising!"

"So was I! Oh, and FYI, my carefully constructed lie didn't involve all of us going up in flames either!" Immaturely, I poked my tongue out at the infuriating man standing in front of me.

"You are the most infuriating person I've ever met!" the Doctor yelled.

I grinned sardonically, "well, I'll take that as a compliment shall I, Gramps?"

"Don't call me Gramps, Charlotte!"

"Don't call me Charlotte!"

"It's your bloody name!" the Doctor exclaimed.

"My name is Charlie," I replied angrily. I hated being called Charlotte, always had.

"Enough!" Rose shouted, gaining both of our attention. She didn't look angry, more disappointed than anything else. "You've done nothing but fight since you've met and I'm sick of it!" she continued, scolding us like we were a pair of naughty children. "If neither of you can say anything nice to one another do us all a favour and don't talk to each other," she exclaimed, "these petty arguments are ridiculous and right now we have more pressing matters to worry about."

The Doctor and I looked at each other for a moment before we both turned away from one another. I walked over to Frankie, who pulled me close to him, as the Doctor made his way over to Rose.

"You okay, Baby-girl?" Frankie whispered into my ear, his fingers tapping out a rhythm against my waist.

One, two, three, pause. One, two, three, pause. One, two, three, pause. One, two, three, pause.

Slowly, my body began to try to relax but my mind was too hyped up or it to succeed and I merely
shook my head. No, I wasn't okay. Did the Doctor think so little of me that he would actually believe me capable of killing another person, alien or otherwise? Had our trip to the future and the past not taught him how much I valued life?

"Y-you don't think I would have killed them, right?" I asked in a small voice, needing my friends' comfort now more than ever. It was getting too much; learning aliens existed, seeing the Tardis, travelling in time, going missing for a year, my Nan getting sick. How much was I going to be able to stand without breaking?

Frankie's hold on me tightened at my question, "of course not, Charlie," he replied in a firm tone, "you're incapable of taking the life of another."

"We never know what we're capable of until faced with a situation where doing something we wouldn't do becomes our only option," I replied softly.

His hands moved from my waist to my arms before he was turning to face me. "Now, you listen to me Charlotte Williams, and you listen good," he began, "you are not a killer; there is not a bone in your body capable of killing someone. You're a good person, one of the best I've ever met, and I refuse to have you doubting yourself because of a middle-aged, leather wearing alien, understood?"

I nodded slowly and Frankie studied my face closely before he nodded, "good, now, let's go join in the conversation, yeah?"

"Hasn't it got, like, defence codes and things? Couldn't we just launch a nuclear bomb at them?" Rose asked as we reached the table.

I looked at her incredulously, "you want to drop a nuke on London? You're kidding right?"

"I'm serious," she argued, "we could."

"Well, there's nothing like that in here," Harriet replied, gesturing to the emergency protocols, "nuclear strikes do need a release code, yes, but it's kept secret by the United Nations."

"Say that again," the Doctor said.

"She said the United Nations keep nuclear launch codes secret," I reiterated, "you know, so that overly enthusiastic nineteen-year olds don't go around planning to nuke London?"

"Very funny, Charlie," Rose sassed.

"I wasn't trying to be funny," I threw back.

The Doctor seemed intent on ignoring me as he continued to speak to Harriet like I hadn't even said anything, "anything. All of it."

"Am I invisible?" I asked Frankie and Indy, both men shaking their head with apologetic smiles.

"Well, the British Isles can't gain access to atomic weapons without Special Resolution from the UN," Harriet explained.

"For good reason, I'm sure," I told the older woman, my arms crossed over my chest, "we don't exactly have a good record in the past, do we?"

"Exactly," Harriet agreed, "the codes have been taken out of the government's hands and given to the UN. Is it important?"
"Everything's important," the Doctor replied as his eyes dared to me. He looked down before he
did a double take, "what happened to your face?" he asked.

"Because yours is so much better?" I threw back offensively.

He flared at me before he took a deep breath, "that's not what I meant," he said in a controlled
voice.

I deflated, "I'm fine," I told him, "it's just a scratch."

"She saved my life," Indy elaborated, "the Slitheen would have killed me if not for her."

I refused to meet the Doctor's eyes and instead, focused on a stain on the table that looked like it
had come from the bottom of a coffee cup. Honestly, I was afraid of what I would see in his eyes;
eyes that have looked at me in anger, concern, cheekiness, surprise, shock, guilt, and happiness in
the span of a week. My mind, however, was stuck on the look of disappointment I had seen behind
his anger earlier. It had hurt more than it should have and that was when I had come to a startling
conclusion.

I cared about what the Doctor thought of me; because I cared about the Doctor.

In only a week, this infuriating and sometimes narcissistic man had managed to worm his way into
my heart where only a few precious people resided. People I had known for years. Why? Why was
the Doctor able to break down all of my carefully crafted walls? How was he capable of earning
my trust and loyalty I all of seven days? Why had I trusted him with my beloved journals over
everyone else?

I didn't know, and now wasn't exactly the best time to be trying to figure it out either.

"What do they want, though?" Rose asked, breaking the tense silence and getting the attention off
of me. Did I mention I loved her? She was absolutely amazing.

"Well," the Doctor began and I chanced a look up to see him pacing, "they're just one family, so it's
not an invasion. They don't want Slitheen World."

"Thank god," Frankie says, "sounds like a bad sixties carnival or something."

I snorted and felt Frankie nudge my shoulder playfully with his own.

"They're out to make money," the Doctor continued, "that means they want to use something.
Something here on Earth. Some kind of asset."

"Like what?" Harriet asked, "gold? Oil? Water?"

"I'm sure there are other planets where all of that can be located as well as Earth," I said, "scientists
believe that gold, like all elements in the periodic table heavier than iron, is formed exclusively
when very large stars explode as supernovae at the end of their lifetimes. The entire Earth's
reservoir of gold is the collected remains of such explosions, probably created when our solar
system was formed."

Everyone turned to me with varying looks of shock and I huffed irritable, "what? I read," I
defended myself, arms crossed over my chest, "you know what? Just-just forget I'm here, okay?"
When they continued to stare at me, I shuffled uncomfortably on my feet. "Can you all stop?" I
hissed, my face growing hot as I blushed.
"Harriet Jones," the Doctor mumbled absentmindedly, the first person to take his eyes off me. When the other's followed, I relaxed a little, pulling nervously on my coat sleeve. "Why do I know that name?" he asked, more to himself than to others.

"Charlie." I looked up and saw Indy holding a glass of amber liquid out to me, "you look like you could use a drink," he elaborated when I looked at him curiously.

I smiled gratefully, taking the cup and swallowing a large mouthful, wincing as it burned my throat on the way down. My body relaxed further as the warmth settled in my stomach and I patted Indy gently on the arm. "Thank you," I told him softly.

"Anytime," he smiled.

We both jumped when a phone beeped, both turning to look at Rose who blushed, "uh, that's me."

"But we're sealed off," Harriet argued, "how did you get a signal?"

"He zapped it," Rose answered, motioning towards the Doctor with a grin, "super phone."

"She is far too relaxed," Indy said.

"Yeah," I mumbled, not wanting to tell him that had been my exact thoughts since we were shoved into the government car earlier this evening. When Frankie moved to stand next to me again, I handed him my glass of Whiskey and watched as he down the rest in two mouthfuls. I felt guilty for dragging him into all this and I wouldn't blame him if he didn't want to talk to me after we got out of this. If we get out of this, my mind added cynically.

"Then we can phone for help," Harriet continued, looking to the Doctor, "you must have contacts."

"Dead downstairs, yeah," the Doctor replied.

"Makes sense," Frankie spoke up, earning a look from the Doctor and Harriet. "Think about it," he continued, "if I were an alien with nefarious plans, I'd want to take out anyone who could be a proper threat to me. The government can only act properly if they know what they're dealing with and the best way to keep them on the dark is to take out any and all personnel that specialise in aliens."

"That… actually made sense," Harriet replied.

"Thanks," Frankie grinned, "I like to think I have my moments."

He held out his fist and with an affectionate roll of my eyes, I gave him a fist bump. "I can't believe you used the word nefarious," I snorted.

"Oh, you love my quirky ways, Baby-girl, don't deny it," Frankie teased.

"Who said anything about denying it?" I teased back, smirking as I looked up at him before I chuckled when he sent me a wink.

Rose coughed, "it's Mickey."

"Oh, tell your stupid boyfriend we're busy," the Doctor grumbled, "it's bad enough we have to deal with Charlotte's boyfriend."

"Okay, one, don't call me Charlotte," I growled, "and, two, Frankie isn't my boyfriend you arsehat."
"Don't get me wrong, Doctor," Frankie added, "Baby-girl is my soul mate, but that's as far as we go; soul mates. Plus, she's not my type."

"Why not?" the Doctor asked, almost sounding offended on my behalf.

I chuckled, "because Frankie is gay, Doctor. He likes men."

"Oh," was all the Doctor managed to get out.

"Yeah, and Mickey's not stupid after all," Rose added, holding up her phone and showing them a photo of a Slitheen.

"Call him," the Doctor ordered.

"Please," I added with an exasperated roll of my eyes. Seriously, guys, I'm afraid I may roll my eyes out of my head if I keep hanging out with this man.

Rose quickly did as asked and I watched as Rose began speaking with him. "Is she all right, though?" she asked, "don't put her one, just tell me."

The Doctor, obviously losing patience, grabbed the phone off of Rose and placed it at his ear, "is that Ricky?" he asked, purposely not using Mickey's real name, "don't talk, just shut Jo and go to your computer."

"Seriously, Doctor?" I asked, "did they teach you no manners on the planet you're from?"

"There was an etiquette class at the Academy," he shrugged, "I was mysteriously sick on that day. Mickey the idiot," he continued, "I might just choke before I finished this sentence, but, er, I need you."

Oh boy.
Chapter Notes

God, I'm still not sure how I feel about these chapters. Again, apologies for any spelling mistakes or grammatical errors. I try my best, but I'm only human.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"There was an etiquette class at the Academy," he shrugged, "I was mysteriously sick on that day."

Something about what the Doctor said had me distracted as they all stood around the phone speaking to Mickey. Me? I was staring off at the wall, my mind racing as I tried to work out why his words seemed so familiar to me.

"Theta," I hissed, chasing after the sixteen-year-old boy, "you can't miss a class simply because you don't like it!"

"Sure, I can, Val," he grinned, looking back at me over his shoulder, "I obviously can't attend a class if I'm ill, now can I? I might get other's sick and that would be irresponsible of me,"

I rolled my eyes, "they'll never buy that excuse," I quipped, "we've never been sick a day in our lives."

"Anything's possible," he sang as he took a left. I stopped, looking at his retreating figure before I sighed heavily and began making my way to the impromptu etiquette class the Academy was holding. In all fairness, it was Theta and Koschei's fault for the class; so, shouldn't they be forced to endure it like I was about to?

"Hey, Val!"

I turned to see Theta peaking his head around the corner. Seeing my raised eyebrow, he gave me a cheeky grin and sauntered forward until we were almost chest to chest. I felt my hearts flutter but kept the emotions off my face as he stood before me. " Skipping class isn't fun if you do it on your own," he told me.

"Well, I'm not 'sick' like you, Theta," I teased playfully.

My eyes widened when he leaned forward and placed a quick peck on my lips, unaware of what the small, innocent action did to me. We had kissed before, friendly pecks on the cheeks, but he'd never kissed me on the lips before. "There," he grinned, "now you're sick too."

I fought hard to control my blush and hid my embarrassment with an eye-roll, "it doesn't work like that, Theta."

"It does now," he replied, "now, because you're sick, you can't go to class. Doctor's orders."

"You're not a doctor," I teased.

He winked at me, making my hearts skip a beat, "who knows, Val, one day I might be."
"Charlie? Charlie, can you hear me?"

I was shaken from my hallucination by Indy, the older man shaking my shoulders gently until he saw that my attention was back on him. "What? Yeah, sorry, uh, zoned out," I muttered, "what'd I miss?"

Indy gave me a concerned look but didn't comment further on my little episode which I was grateful for. "We're discussing the Slitheen's motivation for all of this," he answered, placing his hand on the small of my back as he directed me back over to the table.

"Big Ben – why did the Slitheen go and hit Big Ben," the Doctor asked.

"You said to gather the experts, to kill them," Harriet replied.

I shook my head, "that can't be the only reason."

"Besides," the Doctor added, "that lot would've gathered for a weather balloon. You don't need to crash land in the middle of London."

"The Slitheen are hiding, but then they put the entire planet on Red alert," Rose added, biting at her thumb as she did.

A cold feeling began to grow in my chest again as I went through all the facts in my head. If an alien race wanted to invade it would have made more sense to do so quietly, especially if they were small in number. We'd already ruled out invasion which meant they were likely here for something else that Earth could offer them. But what? I rubbed my forehead, feeling a headache coming on.

"What would they do that for?" Rose continued.

"Panic," I said, "they want people to panic; for whatever reason, it's crucial to whatever they have planned."

"Oh, listen to them," Jackie's voice rang out over the phone.

"At least we're trying," Rose snapped, looking at me for a moment before she directed her attention back to the phone.

"Well, I've got a question, if you don't mind," Jackie began, "since that man walked into our lives. I have been attacked in the streets. I have had creatures from the pits of hell in my own living room, and my daughters disappear off the face of the Earth."

"I told you what happened," Rose defended.

I didn't speak, knowing when Jackie was like this it was usually better to shut up and ride it out. "I'm talking to him," Jackie snapped, "'Cos I've seen this life of yours, Doctor, and maybe you get off on it; and maybe you think it's all clever and smart, but you tell me. Just answer me this. Are my daughters safe?"

"We're fine," Rose told Jackie but I wasn't too sure anymore. Was I fine? Was any of this fine? Rose had almost been killed, had been drugged and kidnapped, and had almost been eaten tonight. How was any of this okay? Why was Rose so okay with it all? Was she really that starved of adventure that she would willingly put herself in harm's way?

"Are they safe?" Jackie asked again, ignoring her daughter, "will they always be safe? Can you promise me that?"
I looked up at the Doctor only to find him already looking at me. His eyes trailed from my cut cheek to my sleeve covered arms where the burn scars now marked my once unmarred skin. His eyes darted back to my face, meeting my eyes but this time I couldn't offer him comfort, because I wanted to know the answer just as much as Jackie. Would Rose be safe with him? I know he gave her a Tardis key and planned on travelling with her. I knew Rose would jump at the chance. So, would he keep my best friend and little sister safe?

"Well, what's the answer?" Jackie prompted irritably.

Before the Doctor could reply, Mickey had apparently taken the phone from Jackie and informed the Doctor that they were in. In where? What had I missed?

"Now then, on the left at the top, there's a tab, an icon," the Doctor informed him, "little concentric circles. Click on that."

A sound came out over the phone and I furrowed my eyebrows. What the hell? "What is it?" Mickey asked.

"The Slitheen have got a spaceship in the North Sea and it's transmitting that signal," the Doctor said, "now hush, let me work out what it's sayings."

"So, you guys do this for a living?" Indy asked me as we waited on the Doctor.

I shook my head, "he does," I answered, motioning to the Doctor with my head, "it's more recent on Rose and my part."

Indy nodded and I smelt Frankie's deodorant moments before his chest was pressed to my back. Indy gave us a long look before he shook his head and smiled at me, "you're a regular Wonder Woman, aren't you?" he teased lightly.

"I'd like to think of myself as more of a Batman minus the copious amounts of money and cool stuff," I replied with a grin, happy to be talking about something that didn't involve aliens.

"I could see you in all black," Indy nodded thoughtfully and Frankie and I snorted, "it'd be a crime to hide such a beautiful face though."

I blinked. Was he flirting with me? Frankie's chest was moving rapidly against my back and I could hear him trying to smother his laughter. Rolling my eyes, I elbowed him in the gut, grinning when I heard him release a whoosh of air. I felt my face heat up from the compliment and shyly tucked a strand of hair behind my ear as I gave Indy a soft smile. What can I say? The man was cute and how often do you meet someone whilst hiding from aliens trying to kill you?

"It's him!" I heard Jackie scream, drawing me back to the current problem. Bad Charlie, getting distracting by the attractive older man. Shame on you. "It's the thing, it's the Slitheen!" she screamed and I covered my snort of laughter with a cough as everyone turned to look at me.

"They've found us," Mickey said.

"We gathered that, thank you, Mickey," I quipped, "Jackie isn't exactly quiet, now is she?"

"Mickey, I need that signal," the Doctor told him.

"Never mind the signal," Rose said, glaring at the Doctor, "get out! Mum, just get out! Get out!"

I moved closer to the table, "Mickey, my baseball bat's still in your apartment."
"Yeah, I know, I've got it," he told me, "we can't get out. It's by the front door. Oh, my God, it's unmasking. It's going to kill us."

"Freaking out about it won't change the inevitable," I told him, earning myself a glare from Rose, "what?" I asked her, "when does freaking out ever do any good in these situations?"

"They're scared!" she huffed.

"Good," I replied.

"How is that good?!" Rose yelled.

"Fear is a natural response to situations like this," I answered, my eyes narrowed at her, "fear activates the amygdala which in turn activates the hypothalamus; that triggers the release of hormones, mostly adrenaline, which is responsible for our fight or flight response."

Rose's glare narrowed, "is now really the time for a biology lesson?!"

"That's more psychology than biology," Frankie interjected.

"There's got to be some way of stopping them!" Harriet exclaimed, looking at the Doctor who had been watching me and Rose, "you're supposed to be the expert, think of something!"

"I'm trying," he snapped.

"I'll take it on," Mickey's voice filtered over the phone, "Jackie, you just run. Don't look back, just run."

"Mickey, there's no way you'd be able to take on that thing," I told him logically.

"Thanks for the vote of confidence, Char," came his sarcastic reply,

I rolled my eyes, if people were going to criticise my input, I was just going to shut up. "You need to get it away from the door so you can both make a break for it," I told him in a low voice, trying to control my rising temper. *He's scared*, I told myself, *it's not his fault if he gets angry when he's scared.*

The sound of the front door splintering echoed over the door and Rose turned to the Doctor, "that's my mother," she said, pleading him with her eyes to help Jackie. My eyes met the Doctor's and I gave him an encouraging smile and nod. He could do this. I knew he could. He just needed to focus.

"Right," he nodded, "if we're going to find their weakness, we need to find out where they're from. Which planet? So, judging by their basic shape, that narrows it down to five thousand planets within travelling distance."

"Five thousand?!" I heard Frankie exclaimed from behind me, the Doctor sending him a look that said 'hush'.

"What else do we know about them? Information!" the Doctor urged, looking around at all of us.

"They're green."

"Yup, narrows it down."

"Good sense of smell."
I nodded, "they could smell our emotions and adrenaline, they were bragging about it when they cornered us in the sitting room."

"Narrows it down," the Doctor nodded, throwing me a look.

"The pig technology," Harriet added.

"And the compression field," Frankie interjected.

"They also look like overgrown babies," Indy added.

"Thank you!" I exclaimed, looking at him over my shoulder and grinning as he smiled at me. At least I wasn't the only one to think that.

The Doctor rolled his eyes but nodded, "narrows it down."

"The spaceship in the Thames, you said slipstream engine?" Rose added.

"Narrows it down."

"Are we getting any closer?" I asked, exasperated, as Mickey yelled over the phone that the Slitheen was getting into the apartment.

"They hunt like it's a ritual," Rose said.

"Not just a ritual," I added, "they made it sound like a game or sport."

"Narrows it down."

"Dear God," I groaned, "this is going to take too long!"

"Wait a minute," Harriet spoke up, "did you notice? When they fart, if you'll pardon the word, it doesn't just smell like a fart, if you'll pardon the word-"

"You do know there's nothing wrong with saying the word fart, right?" I asked, "we're all adults here." I saw Frankie biting his lip to keep from laughing and rolled my eyes, "well, most of us are adults here."

"-it's something else," Harriet continued, "what is it? It's more like, er-"

"-bad breath!" Rose and I added, grinning at each other.

"That's it!" Harriet exclaimed.

"Calcium decay!" the Doctor exclaimed happily, "now, that narrows it down!"

"About bloody time," I huffed.

"We're getting there, mum!" Rose yelled over the phone.

"Too late!" Mickey yelled.

I rolled my eyes, "don't be dramatic, Mickey, it's only too late when you're dead." Everyone gave me odd looks, "what?" I asked, "it's true."

The Doctor shook his head, "calcium phosphate. Organic calcium. Living calcium."
"We get it, Doctor," I interrupted, "they're made of calcium. How is that relevant or helpful in any way?"

"What else?" he muttered to himself, ignoring my comment. This was taking too long and I was getting steadily concerned. Jackie and Mickey were in trouble and they needed to know how to get to safety. "What else? Hyphenated surname. Yes!" he exclaimed, turning to me and grabbing my shoulders. My eyes widened as he enthusiastically kissed my forehead, a large grin on his face, "that narrows it down to one planet. Raxacoricofallapatorius!"

"Now, you're just making things up," Frankie muttered behind me as I took a step back from the Doctor, his arms dropping my shoulders.

"Oh, yeah, great," Mickey sassed, "we could write 'em a letter."

"Get into the kitchen!" the Doctor ordered as the sound of a door being smashed to bits filtered out over the phone followed by a surprised shriek from Jackie. "Calcium, weakened by the compression field. Acetic acid. Vinegar!" he exclaimed.

"Just like Hannibal!" Harriet cried.

The Doctor grinned at the woman, "just like Hannibal. Mickey, have you got any vinegar?"

"How should I know?" Mickey asked.

"It's literally your apartment," I answered, "how do you not know what you do and don't have?"

"Cupboard by the sink," Rose instructed, "middle shelf."

I looked up at her incredulously, "are you his maid as well as his girlfriend?"

"Shut up, Charlie," she grumbled as Jackie's voice filtered over the phone and the Doctor repeated what they needed to find.

"Gherkins. Yeah, pickled onions. Pickled eggs," Jackie listed off and we all turned to look at an embarrassed Rose.

"And you kiss this man?" the Doctor asked.

"Please tell me you make him brush his teeth first?" I asked, "like three times? And then rinse thoroughly with mouth wash?"

"Really?" Rose asked the both of us, glaring at us as she did so. I wasn't the only one thinking it, right? Who even liked pickled eggs? It sounded positively awful.

There was a brief moment of silence where the air was thick with tension before we could faintly hear the sound of something exploding. My stomach churned violently as I realised what it was moments before the cold feeling in my chest went away. The Slitheen was dead. We had just contributed to its death and everyone was currently hugging and celebrating? The Doctor looked almost as sick as I felt and we both shared a severe look before our eyes trailed away from one another. Don't get me wrong, I was happy that Jackie and Mickey were safe, I just wish it hadn't come at the cost of another. Naïve? Maybe; after all, the Slitheen had been trying to kill my friends.

A callused hand in mine had me looking up to see Frankie gazing down at me, his eyes silently asking me if I was okay. I shrugged, feeling my headache increased. Seeing my little wince, Frankie led me away from the others and over to a corner in the room.
"I'm okay," I told him before he could ask, "I-I'm fine."

"No, you're not," Frankie argued, "you haven't been okay since you came back. What is it, Baby-girl?"

I searched his face, my eyes darting from the laugh lines in the corner of his eyes to the little scar on his eyebrow from where he hit his head a few years ago. My eyes settled back on his, the deep, russet orbs searching my own face as he waited for me to answer.

"They won't stop," I whispered, my eyes quickly darting to the others as if they could hear my barely audible words.

"Who won't stop?" Frankie questioned.

My eyes darted down to my worn combat boots as I felt my ears heat up from embarrassment. I didn't want to answer. I didn't want them to look at me like I was some crazy woman they needed to watch in case I had some kind of psychotic break. My hand dipped into the pocket of my jeans and I wrapped my fingers around the small pocket watch.

"The voices," I whispered.

Frankie tensed and I refused to meet his eyes, knowing I'd see concern and maybe a little bit of pity in them. Honestly, I knew I was crazy, but the meds were supposed to make me feel normal. These delusions were supposed to stop as I grew up. There was no such place called Gallifrey. My name was Charlotte Williams, not Valsill. I didn't have a little sister or two best friends called Theta and Koschei. Nor did I have two hearts and people didn't change their faces when they were about to die. Even to my own ears, it all sounded absolutely crazy. So why couldn't I escape the voices and hallucinations?

"Can you hear them now?" Frankie asked me softly. I nodded, biting my lip as I shuffled uncomfortably. "What are they saying?" he questioned.

"Fear, Theta, fear can make us do foolish things. It can make a good man violent and a violent man murderous. Whole wars have been started because of fear--"

"Fear," said, "this has all been about fear." I moved past Frankie and towards the table.

"He's making it up," the Doctor was saying, "there's no weapons up there, there's no threat. He's just invented it."

"Do you think they'll believe him?" Harriet asked.

"Without a doubt," I said, "this whole thing, the crash landing, gathering experts on aliens only to kill them all. It's all about instilling enough fear in the world that the United Nations won't have a choice but to act."

"They release the defence code-" Rose began.

"-and the Slitheen go nuclear," the Doctor finished gravely.

"Dear God," Indy breathed to my left.

"A spaceship would need to be pretty sturdy to handle intergalactic travel," I theorised, "what if the crash landing wasn't just a way to incite panic, but to make it easier on the Slitheen to get to it and ride out the Nuclear blast?"
The Doctor just stared at me for a moment before he grinned brightly, "fantastic! You're brilliant, you are!"

"Try not to sound too surprised, Doctor," I muttered, though, my lips turned up in a smile at his praise.

He walked over to the door and opened the shutters. The Slitheen were back in their skin suits and I looked down at the pudgy woman. It was still hard to believe a creature that big could fit in such a little body.

"You get the codes, release the missiles," the Doctor began.

"But you don't fire into space," I continued, "there's nothing there and you know it. So, you attack another country on Earth."

"Of course," the Doctor took over as I glare at the blonde woman, "they retaliate, fight back. You start World War Three. The whole planet gets nuked."

"-and you ride out the blasts from the safety of your ship," I finished.

"But you'll destroy the planet, this beautiful place," Harriet mumbled.

"They don't care," I hissed, my hands clenching into fists. A callused hand touched my own, loosening my tight fist enough to slip their fingers into mine. I briefly looked over to see the Doctor throwing me a quick glance before he looked at the Slitheen, his hand squeezing mine gently. "They're not from Earth, they don't care if they destroy the entire planet," I continued lowly.

"But, why? What for?" Harriet asked.

"Profit," the Doctor answered disgustedly, "that's what the signal is beaming into space. An advert."

"The sale of the century," the pudgy blonde bragged, "we reduce the Earth to molten slag, then sell it piece by piece. Radioactive chunks, capable of powering every cut-price starliner and budget cargo ship. There's a recession on there, Doctor. People are buying cheap. This rock becomes raw fuel."

"At the cost of five billion lives," the Doctor growled.

"Bargain," the woman shrugged with a smirk.

I went to take a step forward, my fist raised to punch her in her smarmy face when the Doctor tugged me back to his side and I felt Frankie grab my fist and hold it in his hand. My glare was icy but the woman simply smirked wider. Anger coursed through my body as I looked at her, my body heating up as my emotions overtook me. How could she be so cruel? Five billion people. Men, women, children. What kind of monster harms children?

"I'll give you a choice," the Doctor said in a voice that sent an unpleasant shiver down my spine as his grip on my hand tightened. I'd never heard him sound so dangerous before and when I looked at his face, I almost took a step back. His eyes were dark, almost stormy. The look seemed so familiar which was what kept me from cowering away from the angry man. "Leave this planet or I'll stop you," he finished severely.

"What, you? Trapped in your box?" the woman goaded.
"Yes. Me," the Doctor replied before he closed the shutter on the woman's laughing face. "You okay?" he asked me as the others moved away from the door.

I looked up at him, watching the storm brewing in his darkened eyes. "No," I answered truthfully, "but that doesn't matter right now. We need to stop them, Doctor."

"I have a plan, but you're not going to like it," he told me.

My smile was unamused and a little bitter, "when do I ever?" I asked rhetorically.

The Doctor stood around the table with the others, his mind going through every possible plan but still coming back to the only one with any real chance of success. He looked over at Rose, only nineteen years old, she had barely even begun to live yet and this plan could make that all impossible. His eyes drifted over to Charlotte who was standing in between Frankie and the man he had heard her call Indy. She was whispering to Frankie, her eyes darting around the room every now and again before she would continue with whatever they were talking about.

Every now and again, he would see her wince and rube at her forehead. The Doctor had wanted to ask about it; in fact, he had wanted to ask about a lot of the strange behaviour he had witnessed since they had returned to Earth but they hadn't really had a time to have a heart to heart and, with the plan in his mind, that might never happen now. She was still a mystery to him, a puzzle he wanted to put together but had the funniest feeling that there were several pieces missing. She was keeping something from him, he could tell by how often she would look at him cautiously when Frankie spoke to her; almost like she was scared he would overhear them.

His hand went to his jacket pocket, patting it softly and feeling the Tardis key resting inside. He hadn't found a right time to give her that either. Should he do it now? Was there really a point when they might die?

"All right, Doctor," Jackie said to him, shaking him from his thoughts as he looked back at the phone, "I'm not saying I trust you, but there must be something you can do."

Of course, there was, there usually always was something he could do. But he didn't like it, it was too risky. Had it only been his life on the line, he wouldn't have cared; but it wasn't, there were others too. There was Charlotte and Rose.

"If we ferment the port, we could make acetic acid," Harriet suggested.

"We wouldn't have enough and we'd have to get close enough for it to be effective," Charlotte answered and once again, the Doctor found himself pleasantly surprised at just how intelligent she was. Of course, he knew she was intelligent, she was a nurse, after all, but her knowledge branched out to a variety of different subjects. She was fascinating to watch like this.

"Mickey, any luck?" Rose asked, looking down at the phone.

"There's loads of emergency numbers," Mickey replied, "they're all on voicemail."

"Voicemail dooms us all," Harriet groaned.

"If we could just get out of here," Rose said.

Now was the time, time to bring up the plan he had and the plan he hated. "There's a way out," he told them, only keeping his eyes on Rose. He knew, if he looked at Charlotte, he might flat out refuse to go through with this. Not that looking at Rose helped, she just reminded him how young
and inexperienced she really was. "There's always been a way out," he answered morosely.

"That's good, right?" Indy asked, "I mean, we could get out of here."

"Doctor?" He felt his hearts fall at her broken voice. She was smart, he had no doubt she had figured out his plan. "You can't," she continued.

"Why don't we use it?" Rose asked.

The Doctor sighed before he directed his next statement at Jackie, "because I can't guarantee your daughters will be safe."

There was a sharp inhale of air from the direction Charlotte stood and the ache in his hearts increased. I need to do this, he told himself, there are five billion lives at risk. I need to do this,

"Don't you dare," Jackie choked, "whatever it is, don't you dare."

"That's the thing," he answered softly, "if I don't dare, everyone dies."

"Then you know what you need to do, Doctor." His head snapped up at her voice, his eyes meeting hers as she straightened her posture, "six lives versus five billion lives? The choice is simple. Do it."

He looked at Rose who nodded her agreement.

"Neither of you knows what it is," he said, "you'd just let me?"

"Yeah," Rose breathed.

He looked at Charlotte. "I trust you," she said and he felt something he hadn't felt in a very long time at her words and the truth he saw in her eyes. Now wasn't the time to study that long forgotten feeling though.

"Please, Doctor. Please. Rose is my daughter, and Charlie is as good as. They're just kids," Jackie pleaded.

"Do you think I don't know that?" he asked, "because this is my life, Jackie. It's not fun, it's not smart, it's just standing up and making a decision nobody else will."

Could she not see that he didn't want to do this? If he had any other options, he'd be jumping on those without hesitation. He'd run through every possibility and this was the only one with the best outcome.

"Then what're you waiting for?" Rose asked.

"A written invitation?" Charlotte teased.

He looked at the both of them, two women he had come to care about in the short amount of time that he had known them. "I could save the world but lose the both of you," he said, his hearts breaking at the idea.

"Except it's not your decision, Doctor," Harriet interrupted, "it's mine."

"And who the hell are you?" Jackie snapped as the Doctor continued to look at Charlotte. One of her hands had moved to grab Frankie's, the other dipping into the pocket of her jeans where they stayed. She did that a lot, he had noticed, reaching for whatever she kept in her pocket. He assumed
whatever it was, was the same thing she had been reaching for in 1869 whilst she had been wearing the dress.

"Harriet Jones, MP for Flydale North. The only elected representative in this room, chosen by the people for the people," Harriet said before she turned stern eyes to him, "and on behalf of the people, I command you. Do it."

"Doctor," he looked up as Charlotte addressed him, "it's okay," she breathed, "it's going to be okay."

It wasn't. He could lose her without even having had the chance to know her. Charlotte wasn't like Rose, she wasn't open about herself. She kept information about herself quiet and he regretted not making an effort to get to know her. Beneath the snark and the temper, who was she?

"How do we get out?" Rose asked.

"We don't," Charlotte answered, "do we?"

He shook his head, "no, we stay here," he agreed, picking up the Emergency Protocols from the Red Box. "Use the buffalo password," he told Mickey as he clicked through the Protocols, "it overrides everything."

"Frankie?" he heard Charlotte say, looking up at her to see her attention on her friend, "I'm sorry," she told him.

"What for, Baby-girl?" Frankie asked, genuinely confused.

The Doctor watched Charlotte bite her lip, her eyes glistening as she looked up at the older man, "I'm sorry I dragged you into this. You never wanted this; you never would have even known this stuff existed had I not dragged you into the Tardis."

The Doctor couldn't hear the man's reply, Frankie having whispered it into Charlotte's ear. He watched Charlotte's cheeks take on a rosy hue that he was surprised to find he liked. He remembered another time, a long time ago, when he would go out of his way to make Valsill blush just so he could see her cheeks turn a similar colour. He shook his head, now wasn't the time to be dredging up memories of the past. Charlotte wasn't Valsill and he needed to stop comparing the two of them to one another.

"Right," he told Mickey as he snapped himself out of his stupor, "we need to select a missile."

"We can't go nuclear," Mickey argued, "we don't have the defence codes."

_What is with these people and nuclear bombs?_ He thought, resisting the urge to roll his eyes.

"Seriously, Mickey?" Charlotte said, "why the hell would we want a nuke? Do you want to kill thousands of people?"

"We don't need it," he agreed, "all we need's an ordinary missile."

He and Charlotte shared a look and had a silent conversation with their eyes.

_Are you sure about this?_ He asked her wordlessly.

_Do I look sure, Doctor?_ She replied, rolling her eyes at him, _just do it._

"What's the first category?" he asked Mickey.

"That's the one. Select," he told the younger man.

He found his eyes moving to Charlotte once more and saw her eyes darting around the room, her lips moving as she spoke wordlessly to herself. He could see her finger tapping a rhythm on the table. *One, two, three, pause. One, two, three, pause. One, two, three, pause.* She continued to tap it out as she looked around and muttered to herself, her eyes occasionally darting to the other occupants of the room.

"Mickey the idiot," he began, "the world is in your hands." He took in a deep breath and watched as Charlotte's eyes met his, silently giving him her support. "Fire," he said, his hearts clenching painfully as the simple order sealed their fates.

Harriet looked around before she turned to address him, "how solid are these?"

"Not solid enough," he told her, "built for short range attack, nothing this big."

"Charlie?" Rose asked and the Doctor turned to see Charlotte glaring down at the table. She looked up at Rose when the younger girl looked at her, shaking her head at the silent question that passed between the two women. "All right," Rose said stubbornly, "now I'm making the decision. I'm not going to die. We're going to ride this one out," she told them all as she walked over to a door, "it's like what they say about Earthquakes. You can survive them by standing under a doorframe. Now, this cupboard's small, so it's strong. Come and help me. Come on."

Everyone save Charlotte moved to help and the Doctor watched as the red-haired woman continued to glare at the table, her finger still tapping out the rhythm, her eyes were darting back and forth.

"It's on radar," he heard Mickey say as he continued to watch Charlotte mutter to herself and the others cleaned out the cupboard. What was wrong with her? It was like she wasn't even really there. He noticed she did that a lot, zone out. It was almost like she became completely oblivious to the things happening around her but didn't have any control over it either. "Counter defence five five six," Mickey told him.

"Stop them intercepting it," he ordered.

"I'm doing it now," Mickey agreed.

"Good boy," he praised. "Charlie? Are you okay?" he asked, watching as her head snapped to his, her eyes distant for a moment before they came into focus.

"Huh? Oh, um, I'm fine," she muttered, "how are we doing?"

"Five five six neutralised," Mickey told them.

The Doctor unplugged the phone and grabbed Charlotte's hand, pulling the still slightly dazed women towards the cupboard. Frankie, seeing her, took her other hand and gently led her into the cupboard, the Doctor dropping her hand as the distance between them increased.

"Here we go," Harriet said, "nice knowing you all."

"I love you, Rose," the Doctor heard Charlotte say.

"I love you too, Charlie," the blonde replied as she took Charlotte's free hand before using her own free hand to take the Doctor's hand in his.
"You too, Frankie," he heard her whisper.

"Baby-girl, you already know I love you."

The bomb hit and suddenly the cupboard lurched violently, rolling repeatedly. He heard Rose and Charlotte scream, his hand tightening around Rose's as he tried to pull her closer to keep her safe. "Charlie!" he heard Frankie yell and the Doctor felt his hearts lurch but he couldn't do anything.

When the cupboard finally came to a halt, he pushed on the steel door.

"Made in Britain," Harriet stated proudly.


The Doctor turned to see Charlotte laying at the base of the cupboard, her eyes closed and a large cut on her forehead that was bleeding badly. He quickly jumped back into the cupboard, pulling out his sonic as he kneeled before Charlotte. He did a quick scan, looking down and sighing as he read the results, "she should be fine," he assured the others, "but we should probably get her checked out. What happened?"

"She hit her head on the shelf," Indy explained as he pointed to the shelf in question, cringing at the sight of Charlotte's blood.

He nodded, placing his arms under Charlotte's back and knees before he picked her up and got out of the cupboard. The Doctor moved over the rubble quickly, Rose, Indy, and Frankie following him as Harriet dealt with the press. There was already an ambulance waiting and the Doctor placed Charlotte down on the gurney before stepping back so the EMT's could look her over. It was decided that Charlotte would need stitches and they were going to take her to the hospital to monitor her for any sign of a concussion.

Rose was quick to jump into the ambulance when the EMT's had asked if anyone would be riding with Charlotte. The Doctor assured her that he would bring the others to the hospital and threw one last concerned look at Charlotte before the ambulance doors closed and she was taken away.

Okay, first off, ow! Like, ow!

I awoke with a groan which only further managed to aggravate my already horrendous headache. When I began to open my eyes, I quickly learn that light was evil and closed them again. Where was I? What happened?

My mind was blank for a moment before the events of just before I blacked out came back. I had hit my head, twice if I recall properly. That sucked. I raised my hand to my forehead and felt the large bandage above my eye. Beneath it, I could feel stitches and the thought made me groan again, I hated stitches. They were irritating and itched all the time. Plus, my hair would likely get snagged in them once or twice.

"Charlie?"

I groaned again, "Sh, Rosey," I whispered, "too loud."

"How are you feeling?" she asked softly.

"Like the Tardis fell on my head," I muttered. I opened my eyes a little, peaking at Rose who smiled gently at me, "we're in the hospital, aren't we?" She nodded. "Well, that sucks. Where's
"The Doctor just went to get us a cup of tea and everyone went home about an hour ago," Rose explained, "uh, Indy left you this," she continued with a smirk, handing me over a small business card with a mobile number written on it. "He seemed rather adamant that I ask you to give him a call so he can take you out to lunch," she grinned slyly. I felt my face heat up and glared at Rose when she laughed. "Frankie also wants you to call him the moment you're out of the hospital," she told me.

I nodded, knowing Frankie would be worried until he heard from me. The moment they released me, I'd give him a call and arrange to meet him for lunch or something. Alien free this time.

Just then, a familiar face entered the room. "Charlie," she smiled.

"Hello, Louisa," I grinned, "how's the ER treating you?"

"Well, there's never a dull day, that's for sure," she replied easily. "Now, you were brought in earlier tonight with a laceration and contusion to the face which required several stitches. Now, there was a secondary contusion on the back of your head as well and x-rays have shown some minor fracturing of the skull," she explained, "with me so far?"

"Stitches and concussion," I nodded, "but I don't feel dizzy or nauseous."

"It'll probably hit you when you go to stand up," Louisa smiled sadly, "some amnesia is possible as well and you should see a doctor right away if you recognise any symptoms of concussion or amnesia. You were also slightly dehydrated, we've put you on an intravenous drip but you need to start taking better care of yourself Charlotte. We don't want you back in here like last time, do we?"

I cringed as I saw Rose sit up straighter, "what happened last time?" she asked quickly and I glared at Louisa who sent me an apologetic look.

"Nothing," I told Rose, who looked at me with narrowed eyes before she sat back in the chair with a pout, her arms crossed over her chest.

The Doctor chose that moment to walk in and I grinned at him, happy for the distraction. "Hello, Doctor," I greeted cheerfully, "what did I miss?"

"Not much," he smiled back, "how're you feeling?"

"Could be worse," I shrugged, "though, Louisa says that'll change when I stand up."

He nodded before Louisa coughed to draw the attention back to her. "Charlie, Rose told me your meds might not be working as well as they should. She said your hallucinations seem to be getting worse and you zone off more often. Would you like me to contact Doctor Harrison and arrange a meeting to speak to him? Maybe we can give you a higher dosage and hope that helps with the delusions. Are you still hearing voices?"

"Voices?" the Doctor asked.

I blinked at Louisa, my eyebrows furrowing.

"Delusions?" I asked.

She shuffled uncomfortably, "I know you didn't want others knowing, Charlie, but if this is going to be a regular occurrence now, you might need to think about giving up your nursing licence."
Have you been writing in your journals? Would you be willing to share them with your psychiatrist?"

I smiled confusedly, sitting up a little bit more in the bed as I looked between Louisa, Rose, and the Doctor.

"What journals?" I asked.

"The ones you keep in a box in your closet, Charlie," Rose said.

I shook my head, "I have no idea what you're talking about. I've never kept a journal a day in my life. And can someone tell me why you all think I have delusions and hear voices? Is this some kind of joke? Because, if it is, it's not funny."

What the hell was going on?

Chapter End Notes

Ah, I know, I hate me too! When I began this chapter, that was NOT the ending I imagined. However, now that I've taken the time to look a little further into the story, I can see how this could work. Of course, you guys probably won't until much later. Kinda like an extended cliff-hanger?

*Ducks behind pillow* Don't hate me!

Next chapter will follow on from this and will also feature Charlie's Nan.

What do you guys think of Frankie? Should he make more appearances? I thought about having him meet Captain Jack, should be fun, right? Who knows.
This chapter is much shorter than any other chapter in this story so far but I wanted to end it where I did because it had more emotion that way. There's not a lot of the Doctor in this and mainly centres around Charlie and her Nan.

Rose was concerned. Charlie didn't remember anything about her delusions. She didn't remember keeping a series of journals. She didn't remember having therapy sessions or going on any meds. It was like they had never existed and though she should have been relieved that her friend was 'mentally stable', Rose found herself highly concerned. That world had meant everything to Charlie and although she had never told Rose about it, Rose had never missed the small smiles she would occasionally wear after she had zoned out and had one of her 'delusions.'

Louisa said it was a form of amnesia, one that made Charlie forget stuff she didn't want to remember and Rose was confused about why Charlie wouldn't want to remember something she seemed to love so much. Other than the amnesia and the concussion, Charlie was perfectly healthy and was allowed to leave the hospital with the promise of calling Louisa if her symptoms got worse or her memories came back. Charlie still thought they were all pulling her leg and Rose would frown at the amused smile that would tilt her friends' lips whenever she tried to jog her memory. Now she kind of knew what Charlie had gone through and felt a little guilty that she had been one of the people to give her that amused smile.

"Are you sure you're okay?" she asked Charlie as they entered Powell Estate.

Charlie rolled her eyes from where she stood next to the Doctor, their arms linked so Charlie could use him to support herself in case she suddenly felt dizzy. "I'm fine, Rose," she answered for what seemed like the hundredth time that night, "honestly, apart from some nausea and dizziness I feel as fit as a fiddle." She paused for a long moment, her eyebrows furrowed and for one long hopeful moment, Rose thought maybe she was remembering something. "Why do we say fit as a fiddle?" she questioned, "how is a fiddle fit?"

She giggled and Rose watched the Doctor throw her an amused smile as they began climbing the stairs, Charlie clinging tightly to the railing and the Doctor to keep from falling. "So," she began, suddenly serious, "I'm going to go to the roof and try and call my Nan."

"Do you think that's wise?" Rose asked, "you just got out of the hospital and you have a concussion."

"And my Nan is dying," Charlie said quietly, "I'm pretty sure that trumps a simple concussion, Rosey."

Rose fell quiet after that and watched as Charlie dropped her grip on the Doctor's arm as they passed the door to the Tyler's flat. "I'll be right down after I'm finished," she assured them both before she turned and made her way to the staircase that led towards the roof.

When she disappeared, Rose and the Doctor shared a look before Rose sighed and unlocked the
door to her flat. "Are you ever going to explain these delusions and voices to me?" the Doctor asked from behind her and Rose groaned, not having wanted to have this conversation this soon. What was she even supposed to tell him? She didn't even know half of it herself.

She was saved from answering as she walked into the kitchen and saw her mom and Frankie sitting at the kitchen table, their faces serious. Frankie looked up as Rose and the Doctor entered, his eyes darting between the two of them before he looked behind them. When he saw no sign of Charlie, Rose watched his body sag.

"We need to talk," he said simply.

The dizziness didn't abate even when I had sat down but I knew from experience that it could last a while. I wasn't going to tell Rose that I had thrown up when I had gotten up here, that was a sure-fire way to guarantee a trip back to the hospital and everyone was already acting strange from the first time we had gone there. Apparently, I had some form of amnesia that had basically made me forget huge chunks of my life and seemed to be centred around some fantasy world I had dreamt up as a kid.

Crazy, right? That's what I thought but everyone seemed determined to make me 'remember' these delusions. It was like they wanted me to be crazy. The only one who seemed equally as confused about all of this was the Doctor and I still wasn't quite sure I wanted to speak to the man who was going to swan off anytime soon with my friend in tow.

Not wanting to think of it at the moment, I dug out my phone from my coat and dialled my Nan's number. I waited patiently, expecting Ms Dwyer to answer the phone like she had last time; which was why my voice caught in my throat when my Nan's Scottish brogue filtered over the phone. Tears sprung to my eyes and, like a leaky faucet, I couldn't stop them from spilling over and running down my cheeks.

"Hello?" my Nan asked softly, her voice a little strained as she spoke. I couldn't answer, what was I going to say? How do I even begin to explain everything that's happened, to her? "Hello?" she repeated.

"Nan?" I managed to choke out, my voice caught between a sob and something else I couldn't really describe. I could tell you that had I heard anyone else using it, my heart would have broken for them.

"Lottie?" my Nan asked, her voice going from strained to normal in a heartbeat and I knew she was doing it for me. "Don't cry, sweetie," she continued softly, "none of this is your fault."

The silent tears turned into guttural sobs as I buried my head in my knees, the phone still pressed to my ear as my Nan tried to soothe me. "I-I'm sorry, Nan," I cried, "I should h-have been there."

"How long, Lottie?" my Nan questioned me quietly, "how long since you last spoke to me, darling?"

"A w-week," I snivelled.

"Than how is this any of your fault?" she continued, "did you plan to be away for an entire year?" I didn't even have to answer for her to know and she continued as if I had, "exactly. I told you when you left not to worry about me, Lottie, even had you stayed this would have happened; what could you have done?"

Anger and self-loathing mixed with my sadness. "I could have been with you," I growled, "I could
have made sure all of your medical bills were paid and I could have made sure that I didn't make the same mistake I did with Pop-

"Charlotte Angelina Williams!" my Nan exclaimed over the phone, the harshness in her voice making me jump, "you listen to me and you listen good. None of this is your fault. Not me. Not your Pop. Nothing. We lived lives most could only dream about. We had adventures. We travelled. And then we were blessed enough to raise such an amazing young woman. I couldn't be prouder of who you've grown up to be, Lottie," she told me softly and I suddenly found it hard to speak again, "and your Pop was just as proud. We love you so much, and that love doesn't end simply because we aren't here anymore. Do you understand me?"

"I-I understand," I breathed, "I love you, Nan; I love you so much."

"I love you too, my Angel," my Nan replied.

The phone went silent but I didn't move it away from my ear for the longest time. When I did, I slowly moved it into my pocket where I felt something smooth. Wrapping my fingers around it, I pulled out the letter the Professor had given to me in 1869 and looked down at it curiously. Technically, it was exactly a year after I had started traveling and today was the exact date on the envelope.

Standing up, I shoved the letter back in my pocket and descended the stairs, bypassing the Tyler's apartment as I took the stairs all the way down and exited Powell Estate. The park wasn't far and I managed to keep myself pretty much upright. Of course, that didn't stop me from practically falling onto the park bench when I reached it and I looked out, seeing a few kids running around on the nearby playground.

For a moment, I just sat there, reminiscing about a time when I would come here with Rose and my grandparents. If I thought hard enough, I could almost imagine them sitting here on the bench with me, smiling lovingly at each other as they always did when Nan wasn't rolling her eyes affectionately at my Pop.

I removed the letter from my pocket and just sat there staring at it for a good ten minutes before I finally turned it over in my hand and opened it.

Charlie,

I honestly don't know how to start this letter. In all honesty, I wouldn't have even written it if I hadn't already known that I had done so before.

Time travel. You get used to it. Sort of.

I know what you're thinking. You're thinking of giving up on traveling with the Doctor; you don't think you're cut out for this and right now you're determined to think you're right.

But you have no idea just how wrong you are.

You've travelled with the Doctor for a week and you've seen the kind of man he is. He's dangerous, reckless, and self-sacrificing; but he's also a good man trying to do good things and can you really fault him for that? I know, right now, it seems like the bad outweighs the good and I don't want to lie to you and say it gets better because that's not always the case.

We can't save everyone, Charlie, no matter how hard we try and we need to learn to save those we can and remember those we can't.
Don't give up on him. Don't give up on the Doctor because you're scared of the unknown. You have no idea just how important he will become to you. To me. To us. And you'll never know if you give up and stop traveling with him.

You don't have to decide now and I can't make the choice for you. If you chose to stay behind, know that the future will change; it will adapt and I can't guarantee whether it'll be for the best or not.

Just do yourself a small favour. Say yes. When he offers, say yes.

I had no idea what she meant by that and continued to read, a small smile twitching up my lips as I read the last sentence.

Confused? I know, but you'll only be confused for five minutes.

Goodbye, Charlie; and good luck.

It wasn't signed and it didn't really need to be. I folded the letter back up and placed it in my pocket before I continued to sit there. Like I had told myself, five minutes later the Doctor was hesitantly approaching me, Rose absent from his side.

I moved over on the bench silently and waited for the Doctor to speak as he sat down.

"How are you feeling?" he asked.

A smile twitched my lips, "what?" I teased lightly, my voice hitching a little from my earlier crying session, "you didn't 'sonic' me?" I saw him smile out of the corner of my eye and felt my body sag, "I'm doing as well as can be expected. I just feel useless, I can't even say goodbye to her in person."

"What if you could?"

My head snapped up at his question and my wide eyes looked him over. His eyes met my own, serious and yet unsure at the same time. "I-I can't afford a plane ticket," I answered, swallowing around the thick lump in my throat.

"Who needs a plane when they have a Tardis?" he offered lightly before his voice became just as hesitant as his eyes, "I can take you to New York if that's what you really want, Charlie. You can go see your Nan, say goodbye in person."

"Why?" I asked, "why would you do that for me? We're not friends, Doctor, we can barely stand each other most of the time."

The Doctor shuffled uncomfortably, his eyes averting from mine as he answered. "You remind me of someone I used to know," he told me, "and I couldn't be there for her when she needed me most but I won't make the same mistake twice." He looked up as I placed my small hand into his much larger one, squeezing gently to offer him some form of silent comfort. "We can be friends, Charlie," he told me seriously, "if you want."

"Is that what you want?" I asked him, "because friendship is a two-way street, Doctor."

He was silent for a moment before he nodded, "I'd like that," he told me softly.

"I'd like that too, and I'd love to see my Nan," I replied, my eyes flooding with tears once more, "thank you, Doctor."
"Your welcome, Charlie."

Rose had decided that this was one journey I needed to take on my own and we stood in front of the Tardis, hugging one another as the Doctor fiddled with a few things inside. "Say hi to your Nan for me," Rose mumbled into my hair.

"I will," I promised as we pulled away from each other.

Frankie walked up to me, an envelop in his hands that he held towards me when he was standing in front of me. "What's this?" I asked, slowly taking the envelop, my eyes widening when I opened it. "W-what?" I stuttered, "h-how?"

"Moe called my dad," Frankie explained, "told us you were planning on selling your bike. You love that bike, Baby-girl, so I knew the only reason you'd sell it was to pay for your Nan's medical bills. Dad and I thought we'd chip in and Moe was all too happy to throw some cash in as well. The bike's still yours and now you have enough to cover all the expenses."

"This is too much," I urged, trying to hand him back the envelop only to have his hands grip mine and push my hand back towards me, "I can't pay you back, Frankie."

"You're family," he replied, "and family help each other. You don't have to pay us back, Baby-girl, just make sure your Nan is comfortable and taken care of."

Tears flooded my eyes and I jumped on Frankie, wrapping my arms around him tightly as the tears silently fell from my eyes. I buried my head in his neck as his hand came up to cradle the back of my head and his arm wrapped around my waist, squeezing me gently. "Thank you," I whispered into his ear, pulling my head back enough to look at his face. I placed a kiss on his cheek, "thank you," I repeated, slowly pulling away and wiping at my eyes.

Frankie leaned forward and I closed my eyes as his lips pressed to my hairline. "Go on," he urged me softly, "go see your, Nan."

I nodded further away and the Doctor stuck his head out of the Tardis, "ready?"

I nodded and felt Frankie clap a hand on my shoulder. "Try not to have her away for so long this time, Doctor," he told the man before he was gently nudging me forward.

The Doctor rolled his eyes and I smirked as I stepped into the Tardis, feeling my entire body relax as she hummed happily at me. "Hey to you too," I smiled, walking further into the console room as the Doctor walked past me, our arms brushing as he walked around me to enter the coordinates, I had given him earlier. We were going to be arriving during the afternoon and I had already called ahead to let Ms Dwyer know I was coming to see my Nan. She was understandably surprised but also happy that I was coming and couldn't wait to meet me.

"You ready?" the Doctor asked me, pausing with his hand over a lever I had seen him use multiple times to get the Tardis to move.

Taking a deep breath, I nodded my head and he grinned at me before he pushed down on the lever and we were both gripping tightly to the Tardis console to keep from falling over. "Do you even know how to fly a Tardis?" I asked over the loud sound of the Tardis dematerialising.

"Of course, I do," he scoffed, "what do you call this?"

I snorted, "hate to break it to you, Doctor, but this isn't what I'd call flying!" I reached up and
pushed a blue button and suddenly the Tardis went still. "There," I grinned proudly, though, in all honesty I was kind of disappointed now that the Tardis wasn't trying to bounce us around the place.

"What'd you do?" the Doctor asked, moving around the console to look at me accusingly.

"Nothing," I replied innocently.

"How did you know what to touch without blowing us up?" he questioned.

My eyes widened, "we can do that?" I asked curiously. Like, seriously? When the Doctor only continued to glare at me, I shrugged my shoulders. "I read it in the manual," I told him simply.


"Sure, she did," I retorted, "it's in the library."

"And you've read it?"

"You haven't?" I countered, earning another glare that I simply smiled at. The Doctor moved away, grumbling nonsensically under his breath as he moved around the console. The trip was quite boring after that and I vowed not to ever press the blue button again. Stabilisers they were called and they certainly lived up to their name.

When we arrived, I wouldn't have even known if it wasn't for the familiar wheezing sound the Tardis always made when she materialised again. "New York City," the Doctor exclaimed, glancing at a monitor of the screen, "right day, right time, right place; your Nan's house is just down the road."

He was already walking towards the door when I called his name and waited for him to face me. "I, um, I was hoping to do this on my own?" I said it more as a question, hoping I wouldn't offend him after everything he'd done for me. It wasn't that I didn't want the Doctor there; it was that I wanted my Nan to myself. Was it selfish? Probably, but I didn't care either.

Without having to explain, the Doctor seemed to know exactly what I'd been thinking and his face softened more than I'd ever seen it do so when directed at me. He walked up to me and placed his hands on my shoulders; they were heavy and large and comforting in a way they shouldn't have been. "Of course," he told me, "I've got a few things I need to do around here anyway."

"Thank you," I replied, smiling shyly at him as I brought my hands up to grab his wrists. "For everything." I continued, "I don't think people say that to you too often and they really should, Doctor."

He shuffled uncomfortably and I took a step back, his hands dropping from my shoulders, "I'll try not to be too long."

"Take your time, Charlie," he assured me before he walked down the hall that led to his workshop.

The trip to my Nan's didn't take long and it felt strange being back in New York after being gone for over a decade. The ambiance was so much different from London. I knocked on the door and held my breath as I waited for it to open.

Samantha Dwyer was not what I expected. Though she had sounded young over the phone, I had expected her to be aged by her choice of career. I had not pictured a woman barely older than myself with bubble-gum pink hair and neon green lipstick. She didn't wear a uniform; instead, she was clothed in a green Rockabilly dress and exceedingly high platform heels that had straps that
ran up her tattooed legs. In fact, every inch of her save her face seemed to be tattooed and her face was dotted with little piercings from her lips, to her nose, and even her eyebrow.

"Charlotte?" she asked, her lips curling into a crooked smile.

"Just Charlie," I replied, "Ms Dwyer?"

She waved me off with a tsk, "just Sam," she replied, motioning for me to come inside and I did so with only a little hesitance. The house was just the way I remembered it; cluttered with memories and trinkets that made my eyes mist and my heart ache. It was like nothing had changed in the years I had been gone, everything was exactly where it had been and the whole place still smelled of Pop's cologne and Nan's perfume.

"I spray the area with both every morning," Sam told me, catching me smelling the air with a small smile on my face, "it calms Amelia. She's in her room; todays an off day but she's awake and ready to talk to you," Sam informed me gently, "I'm afraid I need to ask that you keep it short; she's already taken her meds and should be asleep within the hour."

I nodded absentmindedly, my feet already taking me down the hall and into the familiar room I would often run into as a child when I woke up during the night from a nightmare. Nothing could have prepared me for the sight in front of me. My Nan was lying in her bed which now seemed much larger in comparison to her small size. She was propped up on a few pillows, her thin, wrinkled fingers folded over one another in front of her as she peered at me with hollowed eyes and sunken cheeks. I managed to mask the heart broken shock on my face but had been unable to stop the sharp inhale of air as my eyes took in her pallid complexion and the dark bags under her eyes.

She hadn't been looking at me when I answered, but upon hearing my sharp inhalation, she turned to look at me with hooded eyes and a weary smile.

"Lottie?" she asked in a voice that was strained and small, "I know what you're thinking; I look amazing."

The laugh was broken and watery as I made my way over to the chair beside her bed and sat down heavily. It was like the energy was zapped from my body at the sight of her own and my legs and arms felt like they were made of concrete as I sagged into the chair. Seeing my Nan like this was harder than I had imagined and tore at my heart in a way that no one ever had.

"How-" I swallowed thickly and coughed before I continued, "how are you feeling, Nan?"

"As fit as a fiddle, darling," she replied softly, her tired eyes slowly meeting mine. "How are you? Where's this Doctor you've told me about?"

I managed to get my arms to work and moved so that I could take one of her hands gently in both of mine. "He's waiting for me," I told her quietly, "I told him I needed to do this on my own. He's… different," I said unsurely, "I may have judged him too harshly, Nan."

She nodded tiredly, "no one can blame you for being cautious, Lottie, but do not allow caution to blind you to something that has the potential to be something amazing in your life."

I nodded. "You're going to be okay, Nan," I told her softly, "I've made sure all your expenses are covered and Sam's going to take good care of you. I wish I could do more-"

"-you came," my Nan interrupted, "that's more than I could have hoped for, darling."

We sat there talking for half and hour and there were times when I could just forget that my Nan
was dying. We laughed as we went over old photo albums of my childhood and as we discussed embarrassing memories. I laid beside my Nan until Sam came in the room and told me it was time to let my Nan rest. Then it was time to say goodbye; and I wasn't ready. Not by a long shot.

I kneeled by her bed, her hand wrapped in both of mine as I pressed a gentle kiss to her knuckles. "I love you," I told her, suddenly regretting not have told her those three little words more over my life, "I love you so much."

"I love you too, darling," she smiled, her eyes shiny with tears, "and I'm so proud of you, never forget that."

"I don't want to lose you," I cried, tears beginning to spill as I gripped her hand as tightly as I dared, afraid to hurt her, "I can't lose you, Nan; please, don't leave me."

"Sh," she cooed softly, "I'd never leave you, child, I'm always going to be with you. We'll see each other again, someday, and you'll tell me all about your amazing adventures."

"What adventures?" I whispered brokenly.

"Spoilers," she smiled, her eyes drifting closed.

When her breathing began to even out, I kissed her hand again, "goodbye, Nan," I whispered gently, "I love you."

Samantha was waiting for me outside of the room and thankfully didn't comment on my wet cheeks and puffy eyes as she led me to the door. "Take care of her," I begged as I stood in the doorway.

"Of course," Sam replied softly, "I call you if anything changes."

I nodded, bidding her goodbye before I made my way back to the Tardis, a cold feeling blossoming in my chest the further I got from the modest home.

Amelia was awoken fifteen minutes later by the familiar wheezing sound she hadn't heard in decades. Her eyes brightened at the sight of the Tardis materialising in her room before the door opened and a very familiar redhead stepped out with an equally familiar brunette in tow.

"Oh, Pond," she said lovingly as she sat down in the chair her younger self had just vacated, her hands moving to grip Amy's as the older woman reached for her, "look at you, beautiful girl."

"Angel," Amy breathed, smiling happily as tears quickly filled her eyes, "you came back."

Angel's smiled softened as the Doctor moved to stand behind her chair, his hand resting on her shoulder as he smiled down at little Amelia Pond. "I promised, didn't I?" Angel answered, squeezing Amy's hands gently.

"Doctor?" Amy whispered, looking up at the floppy haired man, looking no older than the last time she had seen him. Angel had promised she would see her Doctor again, but she had never really believed it.

"Hello, Pond," he smiled softly.

The door opened and Angel, the Doctor, and Amy watched as Samantha walked in. The young woman didn't even blink at the sight of the newest occupants to the room or the large police box
that certainly hadn't been there earlier. "Hello, Angel," she greeted the woman with a smile, "Doctor."

"Sam," Angel nodded, "it's good to see you again. I take it I was here earlier?"

Sam nodded, "you left about fifteen minutes ago. I did everything you told me to do."

"Good, thank you," Angel replied as the Doctor moved to pick up a dressing gown for Amy. He walked back into the Tardis as Angel and Sam helped the older woman up. They got her dressed and placed her in the wheelchair that had been stowed away in the closet. "We'll have her back soon enough," Angel told the young woman who simply nodded before she left the room.

"Where are we going?" Amy asked as Angel wheeled her into the Tardis, the older woman looking around the Tardis as she hummed and whirred happily. "I've missed this," she cried as they moved over to the console.

Angel smiled at her as she put the breaks on the wheelchair just as the Doctor entered the room with a large, thick blanket. As Angel moved around the console, entering coordinates, the Doctor draped the blanket over Amy and sat beside her as he leaned his head softly on her small knee. His eyes closed as Amy's thin fingers came up to run through his hair and he sighed peacefully as the Tardis wheezes but didn't shake. He and Angel had agreed to use the blue stabilisers just this once so as not to jolt Amy around as they journeyed.

Less than five minutes later found Amy's wheelchair parked at the doors of the Tardis with Angel and the Doctor sitting on either side of her as they watched a star explode. Angel had made sure the shields were up to prevent any backlash from the exploding star and was happy to sit there and reminisce with Amy and the Doctor. Soon, Amy had asked to sit beside them and they had obliged her.

They were talking about one of their last journeys together when Amy began to grow tired once more and the Doctor and Angel took her back home. Angel stayed in the Tardis as the Doctor and Amy said their final goodbyes before he came in with teary eyes and gave her a quick nod, disappearing down the hall before she could ask him if he was okay.

He hadn't wanted to come, hating endings, but Angel had insisted. They owed it to Amy and they owed it to themselves.

She walked out into the little room and saw Amy trying to keep her eyes open. "Little Amelia Pond," she said, repeating the words she had said so very long ago, "what a story you've had. All the wonderful things you've seen and done; the places you've been and the people you've met."

"You certainly made your story a good one. The best," she continued as she laid down beside Amy, the older woman using her shoulder as a pillow.

"It was all because of you and the Doctor," she mumbled sleepily.

Angel shook her head, "no, it was all because of you. Marvellous, amazing Amelia Pond; the girl who waited. I think you've waited long enough."

"Will it hurt?" Amy asked in a voice that was small and unsure, so unlike the voice she had used with Angel's younger self. "Will I be alone?" she continued.

Angel placed a soft kiss on her forehead, "it's like falling asleep," she whispered against her skin, "and you will never be alone."
"I love you, Lottie," Amy breathed as her eyes began to close.

Her hearts broke and a tear slipped from her eye. "I love you too, Nan," she replied just as quietly.

Angel sat there whilst Amy's breathed evened out and didn't move until they came to a gentle stop. She moved slowly, resting Amy back on her pillow as another tear fell from her eye and landed on the wrinkled cheek of her friend and grandmother. The door opened and closed as Sam entered but Angel paid her no mind as she moved the grey hairs from Amy's face and kissed her forehead once more.

"Goodnight, Pond."

Chapter End Notes

What did you think? Sorry if there were spelling/grammar mistakes; I was crying a lot whilst writing this because of all the feels. Now, for those who wanted to see more Amy/Doctor in this chapter, I'm writing a one-shot from the Doctor's POV that will be posted once I'm finished with it so look out for that when I post it to my profile.

Next chapter will continue our emotional rollercoaster with some Doctor/Charlie friendly fluffiness as Sam calls to give Charlie the news.
Once again, another short chapter; sorry about that guys. They'll go back to their original lengths after this but I once again thought it was better left where it is. I've written this seven times because I was unhappy with the results I was getting and I'm somewhat happy with this version but just because I like it doesn't mean you guys will.

"Doctor?" I called as I entered the Tardis, rubbing at my eyes and hoping they weren't visibly red or puffy. The Tardis gave a displeased hum and I looked at the ceiling curiously before the lights in the hall started flashing furiously. Knowing she wanted me to follow her, and recognising that she was very insistent that I do so quickly, I hurried down the hall, swallowing the momentary panic that shot through me. Was the Doctor hurt? I shook my head; the Tardis wouldn't have sounded displeased she would have sounded distressed if that was the case.

I soon recognised the path I was taking as the route to the library and the closer I got the more things I could hear. When I opened the door, I had to quickly duck to avoid being hit in the face with a book the Doctor had tossed over his shoulder. "Where is it?" he was mumbling to himself as I cautiously entered the library.

"Uh, Doctor?" I voiced carefully, "looking for anything in particular?"

He startled violently, turning around and throwing the heavy looking book he had been holding before he reached into his jacket, no doubt for his sonic. I narrowly managed to miss getting hit with the brick of a book and sent the man a raised eyebrow as he lowered his sonic and gave me a sheepish smile.

"Sorry," he muttered, barely paying me a passing glance before he turned around and started rummaging through some books again.

I shrugged, not that he could see it, and took a few steps closer. "What are you looking for?" I asked, looking over his shoulder.

"The Tardis manual," he grunted, discarding the book on Quantum Mechanics he had just been holding.

I gave a quick look around the room and spotted the book just under a pile of comics. Walking over to it, I scooped up the manual and made my way back over to the grumbling Doctor and waved the book around in front of him. "This Tardis manual?" I questioned cheekily.

The Doctor stood and turned to face me, practically snatching the book from my hand before he threw me a disapproving look and walked out of the library. I just kind of stood there for a moment, watching him go before I looked up at the ceiling. "What crawled up his -" she gave a disapproving hum, cutting off my sentence and it was my turn to grin sheepishly at her, "right, language. Sorry."

Barely a moment passed before I was walking out of the library to go find the Doctor and ask what
was up with him and why he wanted the Tardis manual so much. Was he finally going to read it? I doubted it, the Tardis seemed displeased with him finding it. I was halted in my tracks when the Tardis shook and I had to quickly grab onto a support beam to keep myself from going arse over tea kettle. The shaking only lasted a few seconds and I made a mad dash towards the console room when the shaking finally stopped.

"Where are we?" I asked as I saw the Doctor pushing a few buttons before he turned to me with a childish smile.

"Right outside that door is a Super Nova," he told me excitedly.

"Okay," I answered, drawing the word out slowly, "why are we near a Super Nova?"

"Because I'm going to throw the Tardis manual into it," he replied as if I should have known the whole time that that was his plan.

I gaped at him, honestly trying to figure out if he was being serious right now. "You're joking," I said incredulously. When he only stepped towards the door, I moved to block his path, "you can't just throw the Tardis manual into a Super Nova, Doctor!"

"Why not?" he replied hotly.

"Because you can't! What if you need to fix something that is explained in the manual?" I answered, crossing my arms over my chest.

He shrugged his shoulders, "I'll wing it," he replied as he tried to step around me.

I moved to block his path again, disentangling my arms and holding them out as another way to block him. "Wing it? Doctor, you can't go through life 'winging' everything!" I exclaimed.

"Sure, I can," he grinned, "I have so far."

I rolled my eyes, "and how well has that worked out for you?"

We stared each other down before the Doctor suddenly made his move. I jumped forward but my hand met air as he darted around the Tardis console and made a break from the door. I quickly got my bearings back and turned on my feet to go after him. Later, if asked, I would never admit that I rugby tackled the Doctor only feet from the door, my arms wrapping around his legs and sending us both to the ground.

Pain shot through my arms and legs from the grated floor but I pushed through it as I crawled up the Doctor's body and tried to reach for the Tardis manual. Even pinned beneath my meagre weight, the Doctor somehow managed to keep the book out of my reach and I huffed as I tried to stretch over his body to reach it. "Give me the book, Doctor!" I grunted as I skimmed the bottom of the book with the tips of my fingers.

"Never," he breathed, somehow managing to stretch his arm a little more so what little leverage I had quickly become useless.

"You have no reason to throw it into a Super Nova!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, I do," he argued back as he suddenly rolled over and I let out a small squeak as his heavy weight nearly crushed me. "I don't agree with it," he continued, "so, it has to go."

I slapped him in the back before I started trying to push him off. "Get off! You're crushing me," I
groaned, my arms shaking under the strain of trying to get him off. "Why are you so heavy?!" I yelled.

"Did you just call me fat? Again?" he questioned incredulously, not even bothering to move off of me.

"Well," I huffed, "you're not exactly a feather, are you?"

I released a pathetic puff of air when the Doctor suddenly went completely limp on top of me. Holy shit, this man was heavy! "Doctor!" I yelled, smacking my palms against his leather clad back. "Do you really want to explain to Rose that you crushed her best friend to death?!"

The Doctor snorted, "I can deal with Rose," he mused.

"Oh yeah?" I challenged, "how about Jackie?"

He rolled off of me as if I had burned him, rolling so we were laying side by side, our breathing laboured. We both glared at one another for a long moment before the Doctor suddenly grinned at me and I couldn't stop the laugh that escaped my lips. The Doctor joined in shortly after and we just laid there for a moment laughing like a bunch of crazy people. When our laughter died down, we wore identical stupid grins as we looked at each other.

I was so absorbed in the moment that it completely took me by surprise when the Doctor suddenly jumped to his feet and bolted towards the door. I had barely stumbled to my feet in the time it took him to open the door and toss the manual from the Tardis. "Doctor!" I cried in exasperation, running to his side as I watched the manual float towards the Super Nova before it disappeared. "Honestly," I huffed, "you're absolutely infuriating."

"Likewise, Red," he replied.

"Red?"

He tugged on a strand of my hair, "seems fitting," he shrugged, closing the door and moving back towards the Tardis console, ignoring my incredulous look as he did so.

"Suppose I should start calling you Ears than," I huffed as I followed after him.

He turned to look at me as he fiddled with a few bits and bobs on the Tardis console. "What was that?" he asked, his eyes narrowing at me.

I gave him an innocent smile, one that really wasn't fooling anyone, "nothing," I told him.

He shook his head, sighing heavily as he stooped fiddling with the Tardis and crossed his arms over his chest. Mind you, it was barely a minute later when he was unfolding them and refolding them. Did this guy have ADHD or something? He seemed incapable of staying still. "How did everything go?" he asked me awkwardly, refusing to meet my eyes.

My happy mood was doused instantly and I felt the fatigue settle back in my bones, making me feels decades older than I was. Every step away from my Nan's house had been heavier than the last until I felt like I was going to become a permanent fixture to the ground. Honestly, I didn't know what I was feeling; grief for knowing I'd be losing her soon, regret for not having been around as much as I should have, fear of being alone, happiness at having been able to see her, anger at having her taken from me so soon after losing my Pop, and relief. That was the one that hit me the hardest. I was relieved. Relieved because my Nan probably didn't have long left to suffer, and she was suffering. She had tried to hide it but I had seen it none the less.
My emotions threatened to drown me and I feared I'd be anchored down by them, forever trying to claw my way to the surface. So caught up in my thoughts, I was completely taken off guard when I found myself being pulled into a hard chest as the smell of leather invaded my nose.

The Doctor's arms were wrapped around my shoulders and my own hands were coming up around his waist before I even knew what was happening. The pathetic wall I had built to keep the tears at bay crumbled and my grip tightened on the Doctor as I pushed my face into his chest to muffle my sobs. He didn't say anything, didn't offer me words of comfort, and for that I was thankful. I didn't want to be told everything was going to be okay because at the moment it felt like it never would. So, we just stood there, the Doctor holding me and acting as my shield from the world as I broke down.

The moment was broken, however, when the Tardis suddenly jolted on her own and I once again found myself being crushed beneath the Doctor's weight. "What's going on?" I asked, wiping my eyes and nose as I felt my face begin to heat up from embarrassment at the fact I had just been sobbing on the Doctor.

The Doctor stood, pausing only for a moment to help me up before he made his way over to the console and looked at the small television that seemed to double as some kind of monitor. I watched him smile softly, his eyes going from the screen to my face and then to the Tardis door. "Fantastic!" he exclaimed, making me jumpy as she suddenly came towards me. He grabbed my hand and started leading me towards the door.

"Where are we?" I asked, wondering why the Doctor seemed so happy all of a sudden.

He didn't answer me, he merely opened the door to the Tardis and I felt my jaw unhinge as I looked at where we were. It was beautiful, absolutely breathtaking. At first glance, it reminded me of a Japanese serenity garden. There was a little river with the bluest water I'd ever laid eyes on and a quaint little redwood bridge. Of course, there were a lot of things that hinted towards the fact that this place was on a completely different planet to Earth.

First off, the river was flowing backwards and so was the waterfall it was connected to. The flowers glittered brightly in the sun like they were touched by diamonds and it was only up one closer inspection that I realised it was because they were made of diamonds. Diamonds of all shapes and sizes formed the flowers that surrounded the garden, each one looking so natural and breathtaking as I looked them over. I was even more surprised when they smelled like actual flowers.

The grass was a brilliant shade of emerald green and was the softest thing I had ever felt in my life. I had removed my shoes at the Doctor's behest and had managed a small giggle when I saw him standing in the garden in jeans, a shirt, a leather jacket, and no shoes or socks. He wiggled his toes as he looked up and grinned at me and I returned it with a smile of my own.

The air was filled with a soft melodious sound and it took me a moment to realise it was the wind. It was gentle and calm and sounded like someone was playing the flute as it breezed past me and ruffled my hair. "This place… it's so-" I could think clearly, too spellbound by the garden I found myself standing in.

"I know," the Doctor replied, his voice soft as he once again took hold of my hand. He didn't pull me along this time, instead, we walked side by side as he took me further into the garden. It wasn't long before we came across a grand pavilion, a place that seemed to be built from a mixture of white and rose gold. The columns of the pavilion were thick and more of the diamond flowers seemed to weave themselves up and around the columns delicately. A simple rose gold bench rested within the pavilion and the Doctor led me over to the seat. "They call this place-"
"-sh," I interrupted softly, "no explaining. Just... let me soak it all in without the need for an explanation, okay, Doc?" I rested my head on his shoulder, our hands still entwined and took in a deep breath before we simply sat there in companionable silence. Occasionally, the Doctor would run his thumb over my knuckles, no doubt from his need to constantly be in motion. I was grateful that he was being still for my sake. I simply wanted to take it all in and allow my mind to drift away.

Of course, my mind wasn't the only thing that began to drift and I was almost asleep on the Doctor when I suddenly jumped as my phone went off. Looking around, I watched as the Doctor pulled it out of his jacket pocket and handed it to me.

"How is it ringing?" I asked, looking at it curiously, there was no way I was getting a signal on another planet. Was there?

"I might have tweaked it a little," the Doctor shrugged, "you going to answer it?"

I shrugged my shoulders and pressed the green call button before placing the small Nokia to my ear. "Hello?" I asked, my eyes widening when someone actually replied. I had to give the man credit, he was a genius.

"Charlie?" came Sam's voice and I felt my heart sink, "it's Sam," she continued as a cold feeling settled over me and a lump formed in my throat. No. No, this couldn't be. "We met last week?" Last week? We'd only met about an hour... seriously?! Would this man ever get this time travelling right? Though, technically, the Tardis took us here so if anything, it was her fault.

"Uh," I managed to get out, "y-yeah, hey Sam. What can I do for you?"

Please don't say it. Please, please, don't say it!

"I'm sorry, Charlie," she began.

No.

"Amelia passed away this morning-"

No. No.

"She went peacefully in her sleep and she didn't suffer at all, I promise-"

This can't be happening. This has to be a nightmare. This couldn't be happening!

"I'm supposed to inform you that her lawyer will be in touch-"

No. A lawyer meant a will and a will meant she was gone. Really gone.

"-once again, I'm so sorry, Charlie. If there's anything I can do-"

There's nothing you can do unless you know how to bring people back from the dead.

Dead.

My Nan was gone.

The phone slipped through my slackened fingers and probably would have smashed if not for the Doctor's quick reflexes. Not that I cared. My Nan was gone. Gone. She would never ring me at some God-awful time of the night or morning to complain about New York cabbies or how her
favourite TV show was cancelled. She'd never send me a letter, liking to do things the old-fashioned way because emailing seemed so impersonal. I'd never hear her scolding me for buying a 'death trap on two wheels' or how I worked too much.

The Doctor was talking to me, kneeling before me as his hands rested on my knees and his concerned eyes flickered across my face. His words sounded muffled and distant and I became aware of a loud buzzing in my ears. Where was that coming from? Could the Doctor hear it? Why was he looking at me like I might suddenly keel over at any moment?

Maybe it was because I would; and I did.

He managed to catch her as she fell forward, her eyes rolling into the back of her head. He looked her over, feeling his concern grow as tears fell from her closed eyes. Before she had fainted, she had whispered the same two words over and over. "She's gone."

The Doctor wasn't a fool, he knew who Charlotte was speaking of and felt his hearts break for the small woman. He had tried to get her attention, realising she was going into shock, but it seemed like she had been incapable of hearing him. He sighed heavily, moving around a bit so he could stand and pick her up. After the news she had just received, he doubted even this peaceful sanctuary could help put her mind at ease and so he made his way back to the Tardis.

The first thing he noticed when he had entered was how dark it was. He could still see everything but the lights had dimmed dramatically and the Tardis seemed to be giving a low, sad hum.

"They sing, you know," Valsill told him as she stood in front of his Tardis, affectionately rubbing her wooden exterior. "When they feel something strong enough; grief, happiness, anger, they sing. I've heard them."

"And how do they sound when they sing because of grief?" he found himself asking, curious as to how Valsill even knew this.

Her smile dimmed a little and she looked up at him through thick lashes. "Beautiful yet haunting," she replied quietly.

The Doctor shook himself but found himself unable to disagree with the memory. The Tardis was obviously grieving and he could hear the low, melodic hum; beautiful yet haunting. He moved through the Tardis and quickly made his way to Charlotte's room where he placed her on her bed.

The Doctor placed her shoes, which he had picked up on his way back to the Tardis, by her bed before he pulled the blanket up over her.

She was still crying and his hand moved without his say so as he used the back of his fingers to wipe away the tears. His body froze when her hand reached out to wrap around his wrist before her eyes were fluttering open and she was looking at him. The look was utterly heartbreaking, reminding him of a lost child. And, essentially, that's what she was. A child who had just lost the last parent figure she had.

"Get some rest," he told her, already watching as the stress and fatigue weighed down her eyelids.

He turned to leave only to be halted by her grip on his wrist tightening. The Doctor looked down at her but she wasn't looking at him, her eyes were closed but a frown turned down her lips. "Stay," she mumbled quietly, "please… just stay."

He was tempted to ignore the request and give her space but every time he tried to remove his wrist from her grip her hold would only strengthen. Eventually, he gave a resigned sigh before he sat
down on the bed. He sat stiffly for a moment before he turned to lean against the headboard, his legs spread straight in front of him over her blanket. Her hold on him relinquished, his body relaxed only to stiffen again when he felt her move so she was curled up to his side, her head resting on his shoulder.

She breathed out a sigh, one mixed between sorrow and content as she curled herself around him, forcing his arm around her shoulders just so both of them would be more comfortable. He sat there and listened to her breathing hitch and little snifflies leave her lips for what seemed like an eternity; each sound pulling on his heartstrings. Finally, her distressed sounds ceased and he looked down to see her looking almost peaceful save for the crease between her brows. His hold on her tightened and the crease vanished as she impossibly moved closer to him.

He didn't mean to fall asleep, he had planned to slip away once she was completely relaxed, but the sound of her deep breaths and her heartbeat lulled him to sleep before he could stop himself.

Even whilst in mourning, she watched her Thief and her Angel as they slept. She knew her Angel would be distraught when she awoke and had already made sure to enter the coordinates to take them back to Earth. Her Angel needed her friends but right now, she allowed her Thief and her Angel to sleep as she continued to hum a lament for the fallen woman she had yet to meet.

"This is dangerous, Lottie," River hissed as they appeared in the Tardis in a flash of brilliant light. "You could rip apart the fabric of time by being here," she continued frightfully, not wanting anything to jeopardise their future together.

"Relax, River," Lottie soothed, walking around the console room and smiling at the old décor. It had been so long since she had seen this version of the Tardis and she reminisced about her times with this Doctor; her younger self not knowing just how short her time with him was going to be. "I promised to do something for Amy and you know how I feel about keeping my promises," she continued as she placed the small brown package addressed to herself on the Tardis console. She already knew from past experience that the Doctor would be the one to find it and would realise the emotional significance it would have to her.

River watched Lottie for a moment, before she sighed, "we need to go, Lottie, if the Doctor knows we were here he'd-"

"-I'd what, exactly?"

Both women jumped, turning to see an angry Doctor standing beside an amused but somewhat angry young man. Lottie wasn't a stranger to seeing anger on the Doctor's youthful face and usually, she would be helping him to calm down but she was still very angry at him. She didn't say a word as she glared at him, River and the young man watching them nervously. The tension could be cut with a knife and if looks could kill the Doctor wouldn't be dead but he'd probably be incapacitated indefinitely.

"It really doesn't matter what you'd do, Doctor," she replied icily, "because it's really none of your business."

The Doctor had just opened his mouth to retort when Lottie grabbed River by the arm and pressed a button on the Vortex Manipulator, both women disappearing a moment later.

With a heavy sigh, the Doctor's shoulder's slumped, his hair falling across his despondent face.
"What'd you do, mate?" the young man beside him asked and the Doctor felt himself stiffen.

"Believe me," he replied, "you don't want to know."

Chapter End Notes

Okay, okay. What do you think? I'm sorry about how short it is guys but it seemed like a chapter that didn't need an overabundance of embellishment and could simply remain short and to the point.

Of course, next chapter is we see Charlie telling her other friends and family the sad news before we move on to Daleks. I'm actually really looking forward to writing that episode and have a few plans for it.

What did you guys think of that last part? Lottie was so cold towards the Doctor, but why? What could he have done and will they fix things between them. Unfortunately, that won't be revealed for a very long time so try not to kill me, yeah?
Dalek Part I

Chapter Notes

Okay, here we go. I'm not sure about this chapter but here it is anyway. Even though I'm not sure about it, I hope you guys still like it.

This chapter might seem a little jumbled and I apologise for that, my minds a little jumbled lately but I still wanted to write this chapter regardless.

Also, apologies for any spelling mistakes; my tablet likes to insert words I don't mean to write and sometimes i don't realise it until after I've posted.

The Tardis materialised on the street in front of Powell Estate silently, her Thief and her Angel still sleeping soundly. They had shifted in their sleep; her Thief laying down with her Angel curled against his side, her head laying on his chest as her arm was draped over his waist. It had been a long time since she had seen her Thief sleeping so soundly; it would seem he hadn't suffered from his usual nightmares that would leave him gasping awake with a tearstained face.

Her Angel was much the same, her eyes had long since dried and she seemed almost peaceful as she slept. She knew it wouldn't last, however; not when her Angel awoke to the harsh reality of life. The little Scottish girl, the one who would come to mean so much to her thief and already meant so much to her Angel, was gone. Her time on this Earth was over and she would move on to her next big adventure.

It was why she had brought them back to Earth, a week after they'd left, and waited patiently for the Flower to see they had returned. It didn't take long, the Flower had been waiting for them and even with her silent arrival, the Flower was aware they were there. She watched as the Flower ran from the building, her mother not far behind her, as they made for her.

The Tardis was prepared for them, her doors already opened by the time they reached her. "Doctor! Charlie!" the Flower yelled; too loud. Far too loud. Her Thief and her Angel were sleeping and she needed to be quiet. The Tardis hummed, her lights darkened before they brightened once more.

The Flower could not understand her like her Angel could but it would seem she understood her well enough to cease her shouting. Of course, that didn't mean the Flower kept herself at bay and it wasn't long before she was running down the hall in the direction of her Angel's room; leaving her confused mother to stand awkwardly in the Tardis' control room.

Rose ran straight for Charlie's room, eager to see her best friend after her week away. She wanted to ask about Mrs. Williams; wanted to know how the elderly woman was doing. When Rose reached Charlie's room she skidded to a stop, her eyes wide as she took in the scene before her.

The door had already been opened, something Charlie rarely allowed because she enjoyed her privacy too much. So, obviously it had been the Doctor that kept it open.

They were laying on the bed, both of them, Charlie basically on top of the Doctor who had a protective arm thrown around her shoulders as his opposite hand held onto the hand belonging to
the arm Charlie had tossed over his waist. Internally, Rose was squealing like a little girl, her eyes eagerly taking in the sight before her. Rose had seen the potential between the two of them the moment they had met and she had hope that they were closer to that potential she had seen.

Quietly, Rose ducked away from the room before she made her way back to the control room where her mum was waiting impatiently. "Well," she asked when she saw Rose had come back, "where is she then?"

Rose couldn't keep the grin off her face but she also knew that if she told her mum what she had seen her mum would march to Charlie's room with all the rage of a mama lion protecting her cub. There were several reasons Rose didn't want that to happen but the biggest reason was that Rose had never seen Charlie looking so peaceful before. Ever.

"She's sleeping mum," she replied.

"And what about that Doctor fellow?" she questioned.

Rose shrugged, "he could be anywhere, the Tardis is huge and the Doctor rarely stays in any one place for too long." It wasn't a complete lie and Rose was sure to make quick work of ushering her mum out of the Tardis, "come one," she said, "we'll come back where Charlie's awake."

She made sure to close the Tardis door as she went, not wanting anyone who was supposed to get in.

I slowly came back to the land of the living, each part of my body coming back with me piece at a time. I wriggled my toes, a vague memory of plush grass beneath them before I became aware of being surrounded by the smell of leather. The smell was relaxing and I buried my nose in the source of it before I froze. I shot up in my bed, a startled yip leaving my lips as I teetered on the edge for a moment before I managed to catch myself.

The sound hadn't woken the Doctor. The Doctor. Was asleep. In my bed. What? Why?

Like the floodgates had been opened, the events of yesterday surfaced in my mind and I was thankful I was sitting down or I may have fallen over. My Nan was gone and I had fainted in front of the Doctor who must have taken me back to my room. I flushed as I remembered asking him to stay, not wishing to be alone. He had and by the looks of things, he had fallen asleep before he could leave.

A silent tear fell from my eye and I quickly wiped it away, there would be a time to mourn later. I turned to my nightstand to see the Doctor had placed my phone on it and I quickly reached for it. I sent off a quick text to Frankie INUASAP – PE before I slowly extracted myself from my bed and made my way to the bathroom.

I quietly shut the door before resting my head on the cool surface as I let out a shaky breath. Another tear fell without my permission and this time I was unable to hold them back. With my hand covering my mouth to muffle my sobs, I allowed myself to cry. Time was irrelevant as I thought over every memory I had of my Nan and allowed my grief to consume me.

It wasn't until there was a loud commotion outside the door that I realised just how long I had been in the bathroom. "Baby-girl?" Frankie called, knocking gently on the door.

I was out of the bathroom and throwing myself into his arms in less than a second, burying my head in his chest as I continued to cry. "She's gone," I whispered, my voice hoarse, "she's gone,
Frankie."

"Oh, sweetheart," he coo'd, his fingers in my hair as his other hand rubbed at my back.

We didn't talk after that, Frankie just held me as I continued to cry until I couldn't cry anymore. After that, we simply sat in silence as my sobs turned into sniffles. "When?" Frankie asked simply after a few moments.

"Y-yesterday," I replied quietly, my throat scratchy and my eyes stinging. His arms tightened around me and I felt my body relax at knowing he was there. He shushed me gently, not offering me condolences which I was thankful for. Frankie knew when to talk and when to keep quiet, it was one of the many reasons we were friends and why I had contacted him and not Rose. Rose would coddle me and try to get me to talk about my feelings which was the last thing I wanted to do at the moment. I wanted to grieve in silence, I didn't want to talk about everything that had happened.

"So," Frankie began, drawing the word out slowly, "I discovered something very interesting been I got here. A certain leather jacket wearing silence was sleeping in my Baby-girl's bed." I groaned, burying my head in his chest and slapping him lightly when I heard him snicker. "Do I need to give him the whole 'you hurt her I'll hurt you' speech yet?" he continued.

I shook my head and raised my head to glare at him; it had no heat behind it, I knew what he was trying to do and I was relieved for it. Frankie knew if I was allowed, I'd wallow in my grief and I was thankful that he wasn't going to let me do that. "It was nothing," I told him sternly, "I asked him to stay and he did."

Frankie nodded, quickly dropping the subject. I didn't want him jumping to false conclusions or judging the Doctor for something I had asked him to do. We were friends now and I defended my friends, even if it meant defending them from my other friends too. "Where's Rose?" he asked instead.

I shrugged, "she's probably around here somewhere," I told him, "I'm kinda avoiding her inevitable coddling."

"You deserve to be coddled right now, Baby-girl," Frankie argued.

"But I don't want to be coddled," I told him firmly, "I don't want everyone to treat me like I'm about to break at any given moment. She wouldn't have wanted me to break and I'm not going to darken the memory of her by doing something she wouldn't want me to do."

Frankie simply nodded before he looked around my room as I thought about everything that had happened and what was going to happen from here on out. I didn't know when the lawyers would get in touch for the reading of Nan's will and I needed to begin arranging her funeral but for now; all I wanted was a large cup of hot chocolate and a huge tub of ice cream. A few crappy movies wouldn't go astray either.

"Come on," I told Frankie, standing up and wiping at my eyes once more just to make sure they had dried, "let's go pilfer the pantry."

We'd barely left my room when I was suddenly knocked over as Rose tackled me in a hug. I groaned as I fell on my bum and felt pain rocket up my back. My pain was quickly forgotten when I heard a small sniffle come from my best friend and I felt myself tense. Was she hurt? Had something happened to her while we were gone?
"Rose?" I asked, "Rose, are you okay? What's wrong?"

I pulled her back so we were an arm's length apart and searched her over for any obvious signs that she was hurt. Rose continued to cry and her own eyes seemed to be studying me closely before she gave a loud sob and threw herself back at me. "I'm so sorry, Charlie," she cried, "I heard about your Nan."

Oh. Well, that explained a lot. "It's okay Rose," I told her gently, "I'm going to be okay."

"R-really?" she asked as she pulled back to look me over again and I realised she was checking to see if I was going to cut myself off from the world again like I had done when my Pop had died.

"Eventually," I told her with a weak smile, "maybe not now, maybe not for a while. But eventually, I'll be just fine."

Strange enough, I actually believed it. My Nan wouldn't have wanted me to wallow; in fact, she had told me to go out and have adventures and I was going to heed her last request whether it killed me. I would live my life the way she would have wanted me to and when I finally saw her again, I would tell her all about the adventures I would have.

Rose dropped her line of questioning immediately and I knew it was because she didn't want to say something that might break the calm I had fallen into.

All three of us made our way through the Tardis before we eventually found the small kitchen and I began raising the pantry for everything I'd need to make some hot chocolate. The Tardis was stocked with all the essentials and most of the luxuries as well. I easily found the drinking chocolate and even a pack of mini marshmallows. When I found the caramel drink additive, I almost squealed but held back my excitement as I quickly removed it from the pantry.

I made four cups of hot caramel chocolate; each cup filled with exactly six mini marshmallows before I placed a cup in front of Frankie and one in front of Rose before I left the other two on the counter and left the kitchen with a promise to return shortly.

Quickly, I made my way through the Tardis and found the Doctor tinkering with something in the console room. "I've made hot chocolate," I began, smiling as he started, "I also made you one. They're in the kitchen."

"Uh, thanks," he said, awkwardly rubbing the back of his head. I turned to head back to the kitchen, knowing he would come if he wanted to. "Charlie." I paused and turned back to him at the sound of him calling my name. "I found this earlier," he continued, holding up a brown paper wrapped package, "it has your name on it."

My eyebrows furrowed at that but I stepped forward anyway, making my way over to the Doctor who was now standing and holding the package out to me. I looked it over curiously before I shrugged and began unwrapping it. My fingers froze as I laid eyes on the small locket sitting innocently atop black velvet. It was one I was very familiar with and I opened it quickly to see that it was indeed the one I had seen around my Nan's neck so often as a child.

The two people were young, one with fiery red hair and the other with floppy brown hair and a large chin. The woman had deep, piercing blue eyes but a soft smile and a friendly face. The man basically looked like an overgrown child; wearing a ridiculous bowtie and a tweed jacket. It was Angel and Mr. Smith, Nan's two traveling companions from before her and Pop had settled down in New York. My whole childhood had been spent hearing stories of the two featured in the locket and I had always remembered being so proud of my red hair because Angel had red hair and I
wanted to be just like her when I grew up.

I closed the locket and flipped it over to read the inscription I knew was on the back. *Nothing's impossible if you've got enough nerve.* My Nan had drilled the quote into my head as I grew up and I took a moment to blink back tears before I looked up at the strangely silent Doctor and smiled softly at him.

Without warning, I stepped forward, wrapping my arms around his waist as I hugged him. I don't know how he had gotten a hold of the package but he had no idea just how much this meant to me. "Thank you, Doctor," I whispered, burying my face in his chest and breathing in deeply, relaxing as I found myself surrounded by the smell of leather and something spicy.

Slowly, almost hesitantly, I felt the Doctor's arms come around my shoulders and return the hug and it only made my own arms tighten around him. With one final squeeze, I stepped back and held the locket out to him. "Could you help me put it on?" I asked when he sent me a confused look.

"Sure," he answered and I turned around, moving my hair away from my neck. He stepped closer, his hands coming into my view as he settled the necklace over my neck and fastened it easily. I let go of my hair, feeling it tumble over my shoulder in curls and knots; I really should have brushed it before I left my room.

"Thanks, Doctor," I smiled and I turned back to him. "Now," I continued when he only continued to stand there and look at me oddly, "hot chocolate? You coming?"

He nodded dumbly before he followed me out of the Tardis console and we made our way to the kitchen. Thankfully, the hot chocolate was still warm; unfortunately, the mini marshmallows had melted and I pouted as I picked up the mug and scrutinised it. A snort from behind me had me looking at Frankie and throwing him a faux glare as I stuck my tongue out at him.

"So," I asked when the Doctor and I had sat at the table with the others, "where are you and Rose going to go next?"

Rose gave me a confused look and the Doctor out his mug down with a frown. "What about you?" Rose asked nervously, "you're still coming too, right?"

I shrugged, "that's up to the Doctor," I told her softly, "it's his Tardis after all."

"Of course, I still want you to travel with us, Charlie," he informed me gently, "why would you think otherwise?"

I felt my face heat up as all eyes turned to me. Frankie was the only one with a knowing glint in his eyes and that was only because I had already told him. "It's just," I began, pausing for a moment before I shook my head and continued, "you gave Rose a key and I assumed when I didn't get one it meant you might not want me to travel with you anymore."

The Doctor's eyes widened a bit before he shook his head furiously, "that's not… I didn't…" he let loose a frustrated growl before he dug into the inside pocket of his leather jacket and pulled out a Tardis blue key before he held it out to me. "I was trying to find the right time to give it to you," he explained, "but things just kept popping up and I didn't get the chance."

My eyes softened at the sight of the small key and I took it carefully from his hands. When I looked down, I was surprised to see my name writing delicately on the key. My heart swelled and I looked back up at the Doctor through my thick lashes and smiled sweetly at him. "Thank you," I breathed, "I love it."
Frankie snorted, breaking the moment as he gave me an amused look, "it's a key, Baby-girl, not a wedding ring."

I once again stuck my tongue out at him and heard Rose and the Doctor chuckle before we all finished our hot chocolate in relative silence. Well, that is, before the TARDIS began making an obnoxious beeping noise. "What's that?" I asked curiously as the Doctor jumped up, a large smile on his face that put me on edge immediately but also sent a thrill of excitement through me.

That smile meant trouble, and I couldn't wait for it.

The Doctor couldn't help the smile that curled his lips as Charlotte whooped excitedly as the TARDIS moved through the time vortex. She, Rose, Frankie, and himself were clinging to the console to keep from falling over and whilst Charlotte and Rose wore large smiles, Frankie looked like he might be sick at any moment.

When the TARDIS did finally materialise, they were all thrown to the floor. The Doctor saw Rose and Charlotte share a look before they began giggling and his smile only seemed to grow. Frankie was looking at the two girls like they were absolutely insane, and, in a way, they were. They'd have to be to want to continue travelling with him but he couldn't help but be grateful that they were. Both of them had wormed their way into his hearts and he cared about them greatly.

"So," Rose asked as they all stepped out of the TARDIS, Charlotte helping Frankie adjust to travelling through the time vortex as she threw a look at them to show she was still listening. "What is it?" Rose continued, "what's wrong?"

"Don't know," the Doctor told them, shrugging his shoulders, "some kind of signal."

Charlotte rolled her eyes and looked up at him as she weaved her fingers through Frankie's and squeezed gently. "No, really?" she asked sarcastically, "we'd never have realised that without your alien genius, Doctor."

He smirked, "I am a genius, aren't I?" he replied and watched as she shook her head, though, he didn't miss the small smile that tilted the corner of her lips.

"Where are we?" Rose asked.

"A-are we in space?" Frankie asked, his voice equal parts nervous and excited.

"Nah," the Doctor answered him before he turned to answer Rose, "Earth. Utah, North America. About half a mile underground."

"And when are we?" Rose continued.

"Two thousand and twelve," he answered simply.

"Really?" Charlotte asked, "that's close."

"No kidding," Rose said, "I should be twenty-six."

"I don't even want to think about how old I'd be," Frankie muttered and the Doctor heard Charlotte snort at her friend's comment. He still couldn't understand why age was such a big deal with humans; he was well over ten times their combined ages and you didn't hear him complaining about it.
The Doctor finds a light switch and quickly flicks it on, illuminating the room and drawing an excited gasp from Charlotte. "It's a museum!" she squeaked, "oh, I love museums! Do we really have alien museums in the near future? Why is it underground? Have you ever been here before, Doctor? Oh, look at that!"

The smile returned to his face as he watched her run off to look at the display cases, dragging a fondly exasperated Frankie behind her.

"We'll never get her to leave now," Rose commented, smiling as she watched Charlotte point at the items in the display cases; her eyes alight with intrigue. "I've never met anyone quite so happy to spend all her time around museums."

"An alien museum," he added, "someone's got a hobby. They must have spent a fortune on this," he said to Rose as they followed behind Charlotte and Frankie, "chunks of meteorite, moon dust. That's the milometer from the Roswell Spaceship."

"That's a bit of Slitheen!" Rose exclaimed as they stopped before an arm, "that's a Slitheen's arms. It's been stuffed."

"Gross," he heard Charlotte mutter a little way down the hall and found himself amused by it for some odd reason.

He moved to the next display case and frowned at what he saw, "oh, look at you."

"What is it?" Rose asked as Charlotte skipped up to stand beside him, Frankie's hand still clasped in her own.

"An old friend," he explained before he corrected himself, "well, enemy. The stuff of nightmares reduced to an exhibit. I'm getting old."

"If it helps," Charlotte said from beside him, her nose close to the case as she studied the Cyberman. Even though it was non-functional, the Doctor had the strongest urge to get her away from it; like it would actually spring up an attack her, which was ridiculous. "You don't look a day over forty," she finished, smiling up at him.

"Wait," Frankie interjected, "aren't you forty?"

"Nah," he answered, "bit older than that."

Charlotte snorted again, "if you call eight hundred and sixty years a bit older then sure, only a bit."

The Doctor heard Frankie choke at his actual age but ignored it when Rose began speaking again.

"Is that where the signal's coming from?" she asked.

"Unless he's connected to a Ouija board, Rosey, I doubt the signal's coming from metal head here," Charlotte commented.

"Charlie's right," the Doctor began only to stop when Charlotte snapped to face him, her eyes wide and her mouth open a little.

"Did you just say I was right?" she asked, her lips beginning to stretch into a smug smirk.

The Doctor rolled his eyes, "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Oh no you don't," she said, wagging her finger at him, "no take backsies, we all heard you,
"As I was saying," he continued, ignoring how her smirk became a smug smile as he dropped the subject, "this thing's stone dead. The signal's alive. Something's reaching out, calling for help."

The Doctor touches the display case and starts when an alarm begins to go off. Armed guards begin to rush into the hall and without thinking, he placed himself partially in front of Rose and Charlotte, feeling Charlotte's free hand come up to grab the back of his jacket in a tight fist hold.

"If someone's collecting aliens," Rose whispered to him, her hands raised, "that makes you Exhibit A."

Well, damn.

We were escorted into a room where three people already resided. One was a man who looked to be around Rose's age, he had short dark hair and thick eyebrows. He excitedly went over a pile of scrap in a box, explaining everything to the man who sat at a desk.

The man practically screamed entitle arsehole and reminded me so much of Mr Jenkins that I immediately disliked him.

Thirdly, the was a young woman, probably a but older than me with slightly curly hair that almost reminded me of the Professor. I may have liked her if she didn't look at us like we were dirt on her overly priced shoes that is.

"And this is the last," the younger man said in an English accent, "paid eight hundred thousand dollars for it."

I whistled lowly, "must be nice," I told Rose and Frankie, "being so rich you can just throw away money like it's nothing more than a pair of old socks or something."

That earned me another displeased look from Miss Uptight and I simply sent her back a frosty look of my own.

"What does it do?" the Mr Jenkins imitation asked. In hindsight, probably not a Mr Jenkins imitation; he'd have to out on well over four hundred pounds before that. It was just his personality and beady little eyes that made me think of Mr Jenkins.

"Well," English began hesitantly, "you see the tubes on the side? It must be to channel something. I think maybe fuel."

"Hardly," I said, "do you have any idea how much fuel a spaceship uses during one trip? That thing's too small to be able to channel fuel that large and being used that fast."

"I really wouldn't hold it like that either," the Doctor added.

"Shut it," Miss Uptight snapped, glaring at the Doctor.

"Oi," I interjected, "only I get to tell him to shut it."

"Really, though," the Doctor continued and I could hear the amusement at my statement in his tone, "that's wrong."

"Is it dangerous?" English asked.
"No, it just looks silly," the Doctor answered and I snorted again as I watched him reach for the small alien object.

My whole body stiffens as I hear firing bolts click all around us, did I mention I hate guns? Really, truly hate them. Thankfully, the man simply handed the curved, palm shaped object to the Doctor and I watched out of the corner of my eyes as the weapons were lowered. A hand on my arm had me looking over my shoulder to see Frankie cautiously looking around.

"You just need to be," he began softly, his hand moving to gently stroke the object and I felt my body relax further as it began to play beautiful notes. "Delicate," the Doctor finished, continuing to play several different notes as I stepped forward to watch. He looked down at me and held his hand out, the musical instrument laying before me as I raised my hand and stroked it gently. I grinned widely as the same beautiful notes filled the air and met the Doctor's eyes to see him smiling softly at me.

"It's a musical instrument," the man said.

"And it's a long way from home," the Doctor said almost sadly. It was at that moment I realised the Doctor never talked about his home. I didn't even know the name of his home planet or where it was. And why did he never go home to visit them? Would he take us there if we asked? I'd have to ask him later.

"Here, let me," the rich man practically ordered, snatching the instrument off of the Doctor before he began to play it. I winced at the notes that filled the air, grating on my ears like nails on a chalkboard.

"I did say delicate," the Doctor instructed patiently, far more patiently than I would have been in his place, "it reacts to the smallest fingerprint. It needs precision."

When he did get it, the Doctor praised him before I let out a disgruntled huff as the man simply tossed it aside onto the floor like it was a piece of trash. "Hey," I exclaimed, "didn't your mother ever tell you to respect the things that are given to you?"

His beady eyes found ins before my vision was blocked by black leather. "Who exactly are you?" the man asked the Doctor as I shoved him to his side of the room once more, glaring at him for interrupting my glaring contest with the Mr Jenkins lookalike.

"I'm the Doctor. And who are you?" the Doctor answered simply as I crossed my arms over my chest, feeling as Frankie stepped up behind me. I leaned into his chest a little, my eyes narrowed intensely on the man sitting before me. I really didn't like him and I certainly didn't trust him. He gave me the heebie jeebies.

"Like you don't know," the man replied pompously, "we're hidden away with the most valuable collection of extra-terrestrial artefacts in the world, and you just stumbled in by mistake?"

The Doctor shrugged and I sniggered when he replied with a simple, "pretty much sums me up, yeah."

"The question is, how did you get in? Fifty-three floors down, with your little cat burglar accomplices," he continued, not even acknowledging Frankie. Great, not only were we in the presence of an arsehole but a racist too it would seem. My glare became icier and my hands balled into fists. "You're quite a collector yourself, she's rather pretty," he continued, motioning towards Rose.
"She's going to smack you if you keep calling her, she," Rose growled.

I watched the man smirk as he heard her accent before he turned to English, "she's English too! Hey, little Lord Fauntleroy. Got you a girlfriend."

"Her name's Rose and if you keep talking about her like she's some kind of object, I'm gonna do more than smack you," I ground out, my teeth so tightly clenched I feared they might crack. I felt a warm hand cover one of my fisted ones and felt Frankie loosen my grip enough to entwine our fingers.

"Scottish, huh?" the man replied, his beady eyes back on me, "and just as fiery as your hair it would seem. Too bad about your taste in men, sweetheart," he finished, throwing a disgusted look at where Frankie's fingers were entwined in mine.

I lost my temper, jumping forward to sock him one when I heard the firing bolts click again and a large arm wrap around my waist. The smell of leather invaded my nose as the Doctor tightened his grip on my waist as I tried to escape his grasp so I could break the pompous arsehole's nose.

"Calm down," the Doctor whispered into my ear and I tried to take a deep breath but the man's next comment made it all a waste of time.

"Ah," he said, his eyes moving between Frankie, me, and the Doctor, "I see why you keep this one around Doctor; she must have cost you a pretty penny."

I didn't even blink before I found myself in Rose's arms as Frankie moved to grab the Doctor's arm when the leather clad alien moved to confront the man. I blinked owlishly as I registered the fact, I had just been called an escort at best and at prostitute at worst. What. The. Hell?!

"This is Mister Henry Van Statten," English told them, looking uncomfortable as his eyes dared from me and Rose to the Doctor and Frankie.

"And who's he when he's at home?" Rose hissed, her own eyes narrowed at Van Statten.

"Mister Van Statten owns the internet," English stated proudly.

I rolled my eyes and patted Rose gently on the hand to inform her that I wasn't going to try and jump Van Statten and beat the hell out of him. Yet. Still didn't mean the urge was there and the more his eyes darted to me, the bigger the urge became.

"Don't be stupid," Rose snorted, "no one owns the internet."

Frankie let go of the Doctor and moved back to stand beside me. He moved me a little way away from everyone else and drew me closer so he could whisper into my ear. "You okay, Baby-girl?" he asked.

"Barely," I replied just as quietly, "I can't stand men like him. What right does he have to judge your?"

"None whatsoever," he replied, "but he's not the first and he won't be the last. I appreciate you coming to my defence, Baby-girl, but I didn't want you to get shot for it so can we try and keep our heads until we leave?"

I nodded and stepped back, turning my attention back to the conversation and Van Statten continued to talk. "And yet, I captured you. Right next to the Cage. What were you doing down there?"
"You tell me," the Doctor replied, throwing a look over his shoulder at me. I nodded my head at his silent question before he turned back to Van Statten.

"The Cage contains my one living specimen," Van Statten answered and I felt myself shiver at the news. I couldn't even begin to fathom what Van Statten was doing to the poor creature he had 'obtained' and a sick churning in my stomach threatened to make itself more physically known before I swallowed it back and focused back in on the conversation.

"And what's that?" the Doctor asked.

"Like you don't know," Van Statten replied.

"Holy Hell Fire," I breathed, "would he be bloody asking if he knew? Honestly, use your damn brain."

"Show me," the Doctor ordered.

"You want to see it?" Van Statten goaded.

"Blimey," Rose muttered beside me, "you can smell the testosterone."

I shook my head, "I'm surprised they haven't just pulled them out and started measuring them already," I added.

"You know what they say about men and shoe sizes, right?" Frankie began, "well, from what I see, the Doctor would definitely win that competition."

I choked on my saliva at the comment and heard Rose snort beside me as a loud bark of laughter left my lips. It soon turned into a sort of deranged peel of laughter as I bent over at the waist, tears springing to my eyes. "Oh, my god," I breathed, composing myself to see everyone looking at me oddly. I waved them off, "don't mind me, carry on."

"Goddard, inform the Cage we're heading down. You, English. Look after the girls and their companion," he sneered the last word and I felt my mirth evaporate as my anger once more replaced it, "go and canoodle or spoon or whatever it is you British do. And you, Doctor with no name, come and see my pet."

"I'm bored," I said as I leaned against the door of the room English had taken us too. He was currently peacocking for Rose and I felt like a third wheel as they made goo-goo eyes at each other. I nudged Frankie who had been poking one of the artefacts and motioned towards the door I was leaning against. Getting my silent message, he nodded eagerly and we both slipped from the room; Rose and English completely oblivious the entire time.

"Finally," Frankie muttered as we began to the hall, "I was going stir crazy in there."

"Sorry you got dragged along again," I told him as he once again threaded his fingers through mine.

Frankie shrugged, "I don't mind," he replied, "racist arsehole's aside, this Si kind of exciting. I can see why you want to stick around so much. Though, I'm sure the company helps."

"Where Rose goes, I go," I nodded.

"I wasn't talking about Rose, Baby-girl," Frankie replied, "I was talking about the Doctor."
Again, I nodded, "he's not so bad," I answered simply.

"I think you kind of like him," Frankie teased lightly.

"He's my friend," I told him, "of course, I like him."

I could hear him face palm and smirked to myself. I knew exactly what he had meant but Frankie had it all wrong. I didn't like the Doctor like that, we were simply friends. Most of the time. Like seventy percent of the time? Maybe. The other thirty percent was us squabbling nonstop and Rose becoming exasperated by us.

Frankie groaned as we turned a corner and I waited for him to speak, peaking in at display cases every now and again as we passed them. I was kind of surprised we hadn't seen any guards so far but as long as I wasn't stuck in that stuffy little room, I was happy. "Baby-girl, in the whole time I've known you, you've never had a boyfriend or a girlfriend; I'm beginning to think you're asexual."

"I'm not," I answered, "and I've had boyfriends. What about Duncan? And Luke?"

"Bah," Frankie replied, waving his hand as if to wave away the names, "Duncan was a blind date that barely lasted ten minutes and Luke was a cheating douchebag that doesn't even deserve to be thought about."

He had a point on both kinds. Dating just hadn't really been high on my list of priorities. I had a few one-night-stands under my belt but nothing substantial. My brain itched for a moment, like there had been a reason for my lack of relationships but I couldn't for the life of me remember what it had been. Oh well, probably wasn't really that important anyway.

"Hey, what floor did Van Statten say the Cage was on?" I asked, looking at the floor number we were currently on.

"Fifty-three," Frankie answered, looking at the big black fifty-two as well, "next floor down. Why?"

"Aren't you just a bit curious about what might be down there?" I asked, already making my way to the stairwell.

"Not really," Frankie replied, following after me.

"Well, I am," I replied, "and I want to make sure they're not hurting whatever it is."

They continued down the stairs in silence and entered floor Fifty-three. They were stopped by a guard before the Cage, "hold it right there," he ordered, his grip on his gun tightening.

"Relax, dude," I answered, pulling out a small black wallet and opening it, "we've got special permission to go in there. Unless you want to tell Mister Van Statten that you're impeding our research?"

The guard straightened as he looked down at me before he shook his head, "of course not; sorry Doctor Williams. Doctor Simmons isn't currently in but I can let you in for a few moments."

"That'll be appreciated, thank you, sir," I replied.

He opened the door and let us in before it closed behind us. Frankie gave me a 'what the hell just happened?' look and I grinned widely as I handed over the small black wallet. "Psychic paper," I
told him, "swiped it off the Doctor before he went off with Van Statten. Kind of like a free for all when it comes to getting into places."

"You stole this from the Doctor?" Frankie asked incredulously as I took back the Psychic Paper.

"Of course, I didn't steal it," I huffed, "I burrowed it with every intention to return it."

I was sure Frankie was going to say something else but he glanced over my shoulder and his eyes widened. Curious, I turned and found myself staring at something very peculiar. "Why the hell do they have a giant salt and pepper shaker in here?" I asked no one in particular.

I almost jumped out of my skin when the little blue dome on the pole sticking out of the top of it moved. "Holy shit," I exclaimed, "you're the living specimen."

"Yes," it answered in a voice that made my body fill with dread and fear simultaneously. It wasn't that I was scared of this thing, but that voice; I had heard that voice before. But where? And why did it terrify me so much?

"Are you hurt?" I asked, pushing the fear aside as my compassionate side overrode it, "I'm Charlotte Williams, but everyone calls me Charlie. This is Frankie," I said, motioning towards my friend who had taken two large steps away from the alien when it had spoken. Something inside of me screamed to follow his example and get as far from this thing as I could but the fear was irrational and I ignored it. "We've got a friend here that can help you if you need it. A doctor. The Doctor. What's your name?"

"Yes," it answered, its voice sending another shot of fear through my body.

"Sorry?"

"I am in pain," it continued, each word slow and drawn out almost, "they torture me, but Stull they fear me." Its answer sent rage shooting through me; how could they torture a living creature that had done nothing to them? The little voice that screamed at me to be afraid was irradiated my rage and indignation. "Do you fear me?" it asked.

Did I? No. Yes? I was so confused and my confusion only served to jumble my thoughts even more.

"A little," I replied, seeing no reason to lie to it, "but I don't know why."

"Because it's creepy as hell?" Frankie offered from behind me and I flared at him over my shoulder. He simply shrugged before I turned back to the creature in front of me.

"I am dying."

"I'm sorry," I answered, his confession bringing forth the very recent loss of my Nan.

"I welcome death," it informed me and that only served to make me feel worse. What had this poor thing endured that it so easily welcomed death?

"That doesn't make what they did to you right," I told it, "is there anything I can do? Are you still in pain?"

"My race is dead," it said, "and I shall die alone."

I shook my head, "no," I told it, "no, I won't let you be alone. I'll stay with you if you'd like."
My hand seemed to raise on its own accord and I vaguely heard Frankie protesting before I placed my hand on its surface. I instantly recoiled as I felt a zap course up my arm and my hand burned briefly. Frankie was my side in an instant and I realised I had let out a painted cry as I cradled my hand to my chest. On the creature, a golden handprint quickly faded before the creature became more animated.

"What's happening?!" Frankie shouted as the creature went crazy.

"Genetic material extrapolated. Initiate cellular reconstruction!"

"That's not good," I said as Frankie and I backed away from the creature just as an older man burst into the room and the creature broke its chains.

"What the hell have you done?!" he yelled as he picked up a drill and walked towards the creature.

"Don't hurt it!" I yelled, moving to stop him only to be held back by Frankie.

The creature raised the odd-looking sink plunger that seemed to double as one of its arms and the older man looked bemused by this. "What are you going to do? Sucker me to death?" he goaded. And the creature did just that.

"Oh shit," I heard Frankie say as he pulled me towards the door, "hey! You gotta help him!"

Then all hell broke loose.

Rose and Adam were still going over some of the alien tech when the alarms began to sound. "What's that?" Rose asked as she stood up and turned to look for Charlie. Only to find her missing. "Charlie? Frankie?" she called.

"The living specimen," Adam breathed in a horrified whisper as he looked down at a screen in his hands.

"What about it?" Rose demanded.

Adam turned to her with dark eyes, "you stupid friends did something! It's free and it's already begun to kill people!"

"What?" Rose gasped, running to look at the screen too. She saw Charlie and Frankie running from a room as a guard hurried them along the hall just as an odd-looking salt and pepper shaker type thing rolled from the room. She would have laughed if not for the look of fear on Charlie's face as she ran passed the camera just as the creature fired at one of the guards. "Oh my god! Charlie!"

The Doctor felt like his hearts were in his throat as he looked at Charlotte on the large screen TV on the wall. His gaze only moved from the TV when Rose and Adam ran into the room, Rose's face pale as she ran up to him and looked at the screen. "Charlie!" she yelled.

"You've got to keep it in that cell," the Doctor told the guard.

Frankie was holding Charlotte close to his chest and he could see her cradling her hand as she tried to take in deep, even breaths. "It's my fault, Doctor," she told him, her eyes refusing to meet his even through the screen, "I shouldn't have even been in there."

"How did she get in there? And why weren't you watching her?" Van Statten growled at Adam but
the Doctor ignored them both.

"I've sealed the compartment. It can't get out, that locks got a billion combinations."

It wouldn't be enough and he couldn't help her from where he was. "A Dalek's a genius. It can calculate a thousand billion combinations in one second flat."

A Dalek's a genius. A Dalek. Dalek.

The very name almost sent me into a panic attack and only served to confuse and scare me more. Why was I so scared of it? I'd never seen a Dalek before, never heard of one either. So why did I feel like I had heard that name? Why did I feel like I had heard that cold, emotionless voice? Why did my body flare with a phantom pain at the sight of it? Nothing made sense.

Exterminate!

I shook my head and looked around; had anyone else heard that?

Exterminate!

I shook my head harder, trying to dislodge the cold voice that apparently, I could hear. Was I going crazy? Was this the voices in my head Rose had told me about? Oh god, I really was going crazy.

Unfortunately, I didn't have much time to freak out about that because just at that moment the cell door opened and the Dalek rolled out.

"Open fire!" the guard from earlier yelled and I covered my ears with a startled yell as they began firing at the Dalek.

"De Maggio," the head guard ordered, looking at a female guard who stood just to the side of us, "take the civilians and get them out alive. That is your job, got that?"

The woman nodded then turned to us, "you two, with me."

We didn't argue, we simply ran.

I was exhausted, the phantom pain still there and only increasing with each sound the Dalek made. It was terrifying, trying to run for your life as you were consumed by pain you didn't know how to stop. Completely and utterly terrifying.

"Civilians," I vaguely heard De Maggio yell as I allowed Frankie to drag me by my hand, "let them through!"

We ran through the incoming hoard of guards, blood roared in my ears and seemed to drown out every sound save for the Dalek firing and people crying out as they died. The smell of smoke filled my nose and confused me even more. Had something been set on fire? I quickly looked around but we were in a hall that was perfectly untouched. Yet, I could still smell smoke.

Exterminate!

Would this nightmare ever end?

"Tell them to stop shooting at it," Van Statten ordered and the Doctor had to repress the disgusted look that threatened to cloud his face. How could this man be so careless that he'd rather the Dalek
be harmed than the guards survive? What kind of man did that make him? He was still angry at Van Statten for what he had accused Charlotte of being earlier and the fact that he had practically tried to torture him didn't do him any favours either.

"But it's killing them!" shouted Goddard, finally seeming to understand the severity of the situation her boss had thrust them all into.

"They're dispensable," Van Statten protested, "that Dalek is unique, I don't want a scratch on its bodywork, do you hear me? Do you hear me?!

The Doctor closed his eyes at the shooting came to a stop, everyone dead because Van Statten hadn't known what he was messing with.

He opened them in time to see Goddard pulling up a schematic of the base. "That's us," she pointed out, "right below the surface. That's the cage, and that's the Dalek."

The Dalek who was closing in of Charlotte and Frankie. The Dalek who would end their lives without a thought or even a care.

"This museum of yours," he began, not wanting to sit by and watch uselessly, "have you got any alien weapons?"

"Yeah," Adam said.

"But the trouble is, the Dalek is between us and them," Goddard finished. The Doctor didn't miss the way Adam seemed to shuffle and he narrowed his eyes at the younger man who simply froze in place and looked anywhere but at him. Rose didn't seem to notice anything, her eyes solely focused on the screen as she seemed to be muttering to herself. He could see the sheer horror in her eyes knowing her best friend was down there with the Dalek and knew her eyes reflected every ounce of horror he felt.

"We've got keep that thing alive," Van Statten protested and the Doctor felt the same urge as earlier resurface, the urge to hit the man standing in front of him. "We could just seal the entire vault, trap it down there," he finished as if it was the simplest answer in the universe.

"No!" Rose protested, the first words she had said since coming in and yelling Charlotte's name.

"You'd leave everyone trapped down there with it. Charlie's down there; so is Frankie." He shook his head, "I won't let that happen. Have you got that? It's got to go through this area. What's that?"

"Weapons testing," Goddard replied instantly, seeing the dark look in the man's eyes and knowing it wasn't wise to leave him waiting.

"Give guns to the technicians, the lawyers, anyone. Everyone. Only then have you got a chance of killing it."

Goddard nodded and turned to give the order. Rose looked up the Doctor and his hearts broke at the scared look in her eyes. "Is she going to be okay, Doctor?" she asked in a small voice, sounding so much younger than nineteen.

"She'll be fine, Rose," he replied softly.

He didn't know if he was assuring her or himself.
"Oh, thank god," I heard Frankie breathed, "I've never been happier in my life to see a flight of stairs. We should be fine, yeah? Its got no legs."

I leaned against the wall, my chest burning from exertion and pain. The pain hadn't gone away, if anything it had gotten worse and it was almost unbearable.

"It's coming!" I heard De Maggio shout, "get up!"

I shook my head, "I can't" I said, struggling to draw in a breath, "I can't" I repeated.

"You have to, Baby-girl," Frankie encouraged, his grip still tight on my hand as he ushered me forward. I forced my legs to move; forced myself to ascend the stairs as my body protested.

We stopped up one flight as Frankie and De Maggio stopped to watch the Dalek. "Y-you're kidding right?" I huffed, "why'd we stop?"

"It can't get up, Baby-girl," Frankie tried to assure me but something was screaming at me that they were utterly wrong.

"Now listen to me," I heard De Maggio begin. We really should just keep going. We're wasting time. "I demand that you return to your cage. If you want to negotiate then I can guarantee that Mister Van Statten will be willing to talk."

"You can't be serious," I said incredulously, "Van Statten kept it in a cage and tortured it and you expect it to return peacefully?!"

"I accept what we did to you was wrong," De Maggio said, her attention planted firmly on the Dalek, "but people have died, and that stops right now. The killing stops. Have you got that? I demand that you surrender. Is that clear?"

"A Dalek doesn't know how to surrender," I hissed.

"Elevate," the Dalek said just to probe my point and I heard Frankie curse as the Dalek began to float up the stairs.

"Get out of here," De Maggio ordered.

"You need to come with us," Frankie argued, "you can't stop that thing."

"Someone's got to try. Now get out! Don't look back. Just run."

Frankie went to do as she ordered and I slipped my hand out of his before I grabbed De Maggio and yank her up the stairs. My grip on her is ironclad as I usher us both up the rest of the stairs. "I told you to go!" she yelled.

"And I listened," I shouted back, "but did you really think I was going to let you die when it was so easily avoidable? You wouldn't have even slowed that thing down and your death would have been for nothing." I pushed her so she was ahead of me but just behind Frankie, "note, move your arse, I don't quite fancy dying down here."

We run past a guard at the entrance to a loading bay and I pause for only a split second as the Dalek slowly comes in. I swear, for a moment, it was looking at me but I didn't wait around to find out. "Just run!" I yell at them, "run or it'll kill you all."

I didn't wait for their answer, I simply ran, grabbing De Maggio when I saw her moving to stand
beside the other guards. "Do you have a death wish?" I hissed through my labourer breathing, "nothing you guys have can kill that Dalek, you might as well be shooting NERF guns with all the damage you're doing."

We paused outside the loading bay and I leaned heavily against the wall, feeling like my lungs were going to collapse in on themselves. The pain was almost unbearable and only adrenaline was keeping me on my feet. "Did you see that?" I asked, "it was looking at me."

"What?" De Maggio and Frankie asked simultaneously.

"The Dalek." I elaborated, "back there, I could have sworn it was looking right at me."

"How did it feel?" De Maggio asked.

I shivered, "terrifying. It's almost as if it knows me."

"It's just a machine, Baby-girl," Frankie tried to soothe.

I shook my head, "no, no, I don't think that's all it is. I think there's something inside of it."

Just like I think there might be something inside of me, I think silently.

Exterminate!

"Perhaps," Van Statten began slowly, "it's time for a new strategy. Maybe we should consider abandoning this place."

The Doctor wanted so desperately to throttle the man and by the look on Rose's face, she wanted very much to do the same thing. Every glimpse of Charlotte on the monitor sent relief coursing through him but was short lived when he would see her pinched face. She was in pain and he didn't know why, nor could he do anything about it.

"Except that there's no power to the helipad, sir," Goddard replied acerbically, "we can't get out."

"You said we could seal the vault?" the Doctor asked, his whole body feeling like it was being weighed down by lead. The feeling only got worse when Rose turned to look at him, betrayal clear in her bright blue eyes.

"Doctor! Y-you can't!" she yelled.

"It was designed to be a bunker in the event of nuclear war," Van Statten replied, ignoring Rose's outburst.

"There's not enough power," Goddard informed them both, sending a pitying glance to Rose who was still staring daggers at the Doctor, "those bulkheads are massive."

The Doctor could still feel Rose's glare but he had to ignore it. He had to think of what was best for everyone. The Dalek would eradicate the entire planet if it got free and he couldn't, he wouldn't, let that happen. "We've got emergency power. We can reroute that to the bulkhead doors."

"You can't just leave them down there!" Rose screamed, "I won't let you! Do you even care?!"

He spun to face her, his face flushed with anger. "Of course, I care," he hissed, "of course, I don't want to leave her down there. And I won't. She can make it to the door before it closes, Rose, but I can't let that Dalek get free. I have to do this."
He pleaded silently for her to understand, to see that this was the last thing he wanted to do. He cared about Charlotte too, and Frankie, he didn't want to leave either of them down there. It was Downing Street all over again; the fate of the world versus the fate of someone he cared greatly for. Once again, he was forced to make tough decisions. But he was determined that Frankie and Charlotte would get out.

He wouldn't accept any less.

We were still in the staircase, running up the flight of stairs as fast as our feet would take us. Frankie and De Maggio were up ahead and I wouldn't have been so far behind if I would stop stumbling over my own damn feet. It was the pain. The pain from running. The pain from desperately trying to get air into my lungs. And the phantom pain that seemed determined to cripple me.

I felt my phone vibrate in my pocket and quickly dug it out before pressing the green button and placing it at my ear. "You really do have the worst timing, Doctor," I said as I turned and began up another flight of stairs.

"Where are you?" he demanded.

"Uh," I looked for the number and spotted it quickly, "we're at level forty-nine. Why?"

"You've got to keep moving," he said and I rolled my eyes.

"No shit, Doctor," I grumbled.

"Charlie," he growled and the sound almost made me trip from surprise at hearing it from him, "the vault's being sealed off up at level forty-six."

"Oh," I said, my voice small and breathless as my heart plummeted, "can't you just stop them from closing? Come on, Doc, you're a genius, you can do it."

He sighed heavily and my heart sunk further, "I'm the one who's closing them. I can't wait and I can't help you."

"But," I began, only to be cut off by the Doctor ordering me to run.

I put on speed, yelling for the others to run as fast as they could. I couldn't believe they were going to close the doors. I mean, I could believe it, it was a good plan; but what if one of us didn't make it? Would we be left to die?

Don't think about it, I ordered myself silently.

"We're almost there," I breathed as I heard Van Statten talking about needing to close the doors. "Please, Doctor, just give us a few more seconds."

Please don't leave me down here.

Rose was biting her nails and the Doctor's nerves were almost fried as Charlotte's small voice came over the phone. "We're almost there," she huffed, sounding more out of breath than she had a moment ago, "please, Doctor, just give us a few more seconds."

Her plead broke his hearts, especially when Van Statten informed him that the system was failing.
He was glad he was facing away from the others because he felt a warm tear fall from his eye as he looked down at the button. "I'm sorry," he whispered before he pressed it.

"No!" he heard Rose shout and turned to see Adam try and grab her as she ran up to him and began hitting him on the chest. "How could you?!" she screamed.

"She can still make it Rose," he tried to assure her, "she can still make it."

*Please let her make it.*

The bulkhead was in sight and I put on an extra burst of speed as I heard De Maggio shout for us to move faster. She was already passed the Bulkhead and Frankie just had time to roll under it. I could have fit, I would have made it. But the pain became unbearable and I doubled over, my vision blurring.

The smell of smoke seemed to permeate the air and I felt like I was choking on it as I scrambled to my feet and tried to get to the bulkhead. It was a useless endeavour. My body flung itself against the hard surface as it sealed my fate and I felt a strangled sob tear its way from my throat.

I was trapped. *Alone.* No, not alone, I was trapped with a Dalek that had just killed everyone else down here. And I had no doubt I was going to be next.

"Charlie, where are you?" the Doctor asked, his voice sounding distant as I turned my back to the bulkhead. I blinked blearily, the hall changing for a second before it reverted back. "Charlie, did you make it?" he continued.

"I never was a really fast runner, Doc," I joked lamely, the effect ruined by my sniffling, I was going to die and I was utterly terrified. But it wasn't for the reason you might think; I was terrified because this seemed so oddly familiar and the phantom pain only seemed to increase that fear.

"Charlie?"

My heart almost broke at Rose's small voice and I felt a tear slip from my eye, "I guess this is goodbye, huh?"

"No," Rose whispered.

"Oh, Rosey, it'll be okay," I tried to assure her. "It wasn't your fault, Doctor. I know you'll blame yourself but I need you to remember that it wasn't your fault," I said as I watched rhea Dalek come around the corner. "I've had the time of my life since meeting you," I continued, my heart thumping in my chest as the hall seemed to flicker and I saw a row of broken Tardis'. "Seen amazing things." There was a young boy in the hall now, where had he come from? *Done* amazing things." He was talking to me, trying to tell me something but all I could focus on was the Dalek. "And you know what? I'd do it all over again even if it ended the same. Every last thing."

"Exterminate!"
"Exterminate!"

Rose screamed as the *Zap!* filled the air before the phone went dead. The Doctor felt his hearts stop, his face going ashen as his hands slackened from the fists, they had been earlier. His whole body felt numb, his brain felt fuzzy and he couldn't identify one of the many emotions swirling inside of him at the moment.

"I killed her." It was almost a whisper but it seemed to carry to every occupant in the room. Rose wouldn't even look at him, her face buried in Adam's chest as she cried.

"I'm sorry," Van Statten said from behind him and it did nothing but fill him with rage. She was gone and while he knew it was his fault, though, fault could also be placed on Van Statten for not listening to him earlier. All of this could have been avoided if he had just listened. Charlotte would still be here, annoying him with her endless repertoire of witty comebacks and one-liners.

"I said I'd protect her," he told them all, "she was only here because of me, and you're sorry?" He turned to face Van Statten, his eyes dark and swirling with the Oncoming Storm as his hands once more clenched into fists. The urge to hit the man in front of him was strong but he resisted. Barely. "I could've killed that Dalek in its cell, but you stopped me," he growled, taking a threatening step forward before he restrained himself.

"It was the prize of my collection!"

"Your collection?" he barely managed to get out between his clenched teeth, "but was it worth it? Worth all those men's deaths? Worth Charlie?" No, his brain supplied him, *nothing would ever be worth her life. Not her, or Rose, or any of his companions.* "Let me tell you something, Van Statten," he continued in a controlled tone, "mankind goes into space to explore, to be part of something greater."

"They're capable of doing horrible things, Val, but even more so, they're capable of doing the most amazing things. They just need a push in the right direction sometimes."

"Well, if anyone can give them that push, it's you, Theta. Now, go on, take that Sarah-Jane Smith on an adventure she'll never forget. She certainly deserves it for putting up with you all the time."

He physically shook the memory off, not needing a reminder of someone else he cared for being lost to him.

"Exactly!" Van Statten exclaimed, "I wanted to touch the stars!"

The Doctor's eyes narrowed at him and heat bubbled beneath the surface of his skin. "You just want to drag the stars down and stick them underground, underneath tons of sand and dirt, and label them," he growled, "you're about as far from the stars as you can get. And you took her down
with you! She deserved better!"

They both deserved better.

I opened my eyes when I realised I wasn't dead and looked at the Dalek standing before me. I was officially terrified but I was also thankful; whilst the phantom pain was still there, the voices and images seemed to be gone. Unfortunately, that meant I was still alone in a hall with the creature that had just killed everyone else down here.

"Y-you didn't kill me?" I asked, more to myself than the Dalek as I felt myself up just to confirm I was actually alive. I slumped against the bulkhead and a relieved laugh left my lips, "oh, thank God!" I exclaimed. The relief I felt was practically palpable and I felt my legs give out on me as I slid down the length of the bulkhead, my arms on my knees and my forehead resting on my arms. I was *alive* and there was no way I was going to question why I was.

But I did want answers, and the only thing capable of giving them to me was the Dalek. The idea of talking to the creature before me made me physically ill but I bit back the urge to throw up and raised my head so my chin replaced my forehead on my arms. "Why're you doing this?" I asked, hearing my voice break, "what could you possibly gain from all of this?"

"I am armed," it replied, "I will kill. It is my purpose."

"You killed them. All of them. They're all dead because of you," I ground out.

"They are dead because of us," it answered simply and I felt fear and rage battle for dominance.

"No," I told it, "they're not dead because of us. This isn't my fault. I didn't tell you to kill them and you certainly didn't have to follow your basic protocols." I stood to my feet, wobbling a little before I managed to right myself and squared off with the Dalek. "Surely there's more to you than killing anything that isn't a Dalek?" I asked, keeping my distance as the phantom pain slowly started to ebb away and allowed me to think more clearly.

"I feel your fear," the Dalek answered instead and I would have laughed if the situation weren't so serious.

"What did you expect me to feel?" I replied, "I thought I was about to die and I'm terrified."

"Daleks do not fear. Must not fear."

I screamed as the Dalek fired at either side of the bulkhead door. "Stop it!" I screamed, afraid that it might hit me if it continued to fire in my direction, "I said stop!"

And it did. It came forward and I pressed my back against the bulkhead in a vain attempt to put distance between us. "You gave me life," it told me, "what else have you given me? I am contaminated."

Oh shit.

When Frankie and De Maggio entered the room both of them were absolutely furious. De Maggio walked straight over to her boss whilst Frankie took one look at Rose sobbing against Adam and then at the Doctor who refused to meet his gaze.

"What the hell?!" De Maggio yelled, "who the hell sealed the damn vault with a civilian still down
 Frankie couldn't believe the sentence had just come from the Doctor and his body moved on its own. He took two long strides, his hand curling at his side before he was sending his closed fist into the Doctor's jaw. Frankie ignored the pain that flared from his knuckles as he glared at the man before him. "How could you?" he asked in a deadly whisper, his eyes cold as he looked at the man his Baby-girl had decided to trust. "Do you have any idea what you've done?" he continued when the Doctor still refused to look at him.

"It was her or the rest of the planet," he replied numbly, "I made a choice."

"You chose wrong," Frankie replied simply.

His jaw hurt but he welcomed the pain. He shouldn't have been surprised by Frankie's reaction; he had seen the protectiveness the two shared the moment he had first seen them together. If anything, he had welcomed the hit, had needed it. A feeling bubbled in his chest the longer he thought about her being gone and he shook his head to try and keep himself from analysing it too closely.

"Open the bulkhead or Charlotte Williams dies."

Everyone in the room jumped at the sudden voice before their heads snapped to the screen and the Doctor felt his hearts start beating regularly at the sight of her. Alive and unharmed.

"Charlie!"

"Baby-girl!"

Rose and Frankie's exclamations were simultaneous as they stepped closer to the screen and the Doctor watched as Charlotte tried to smile at them.

"You're alive," he breathed.

"Didn't think you get rid of me that easy, did you, Doc?" she joked as she tried to take a subtle step away from the Dalek.

"I thought you were dead," he continued, his throat thickening as he said the last word.

She smiled sadly at him, "me too, Doc. Me too."

It somehow felt worse to hear her say it. To hear her admit that she believed she was going to die. She was human, if she died there would be no bringing her back. Not without tearing a hole in the fabric of time. The thing that terrified him the most was he didn't know if he wouldn't have risked it just to bring her back. What did that mean?

"Open the bulkhead!" the Dalek ordered, its gun aimed at Charlotte who flinched away from it even as she glared at the screen.

"Don't you dare," she ordered, "one life isn't worth millions, Doctor; don't open them."

"You can't leave her down there, Doctor," Rose whispered to him, her blue eyes pleading for him to do as the Dalek said.

"Yes, he can, Rose," Frankie growled, his dark eyes on the Doctor who looked up to meet his gaze,
"the question is 'will you leave her down there, Doctor?'"

"What use are emotions if you will not save the woman you love?" the Dalek questioned and the Doctor froze as he felt every pair of eyes in the room settle on him.

"You're kidding right?" he heard Charlotte ask the Dalek as she gave a small snort, "the Doctor? Love me? We barely tolerate each other half the time."

The Doctor shook his head and sighed heavily, "I killed her once," he told the room, "I can't do it again."

He opened the bulkhead door and they all watched as the Dalek and a scowling Charlotte walked through. The Doctor knew he was going to hear about it later but at least there would be a later.

"What do we do now, you bleeding heart?" Van Statten growled, "what the hell do we do?"

"Kill it when it gets here," Adam said simply, ignoring the incredulous look Rose sent him.

"All the guns are useless," Goddard informed them, "and the alien weapons are in the vault."

The Doctor turned to glare at Adam who was shuffling uncomfortably. "Only the catalogued ones," he told them sheepishly.

_I'm coming, Charlotte._

"What do you think you're going to accomplish once you get out of here?" I asked the Dalek as we approached the lift that would take us up to the others.

"The Dalek's survive in me; I will follow the Primary Order," the Dalek replied and I frowned.

I stopped as the lift opened, turning to look back at the Dalek, "is that all? You're just going to destroy and conquer? What happens when there is nothing left? You'll truly be alone."

The Dalek didn't answer me and we both stepped into the lift. I frowned as I watched the numbers slowly tick over before I turned to the Dalek again, "look," I began, "don't kill them, okay. They're my friends, well, most of them anyway. You didn't kill me so please don't kill them either."

"But why not?" the Dalek questioned, turning to look at me, "why are you alive? My function is to kill? What am I? What am I?"

"I honestly don't know," I answered softly, some part of me feeling sorry for the creature before me.

Before I could think further on it, the lift doors opened and we walked out into a small office. I froze when I saw Rose in the room and quickly shook my head when she went to move forward. I couldn't find the Doctor or Frankie and I couldn't read the look on Rose's face either. "Van Statten," the Dalek practically yelled as it rolled forward, "you tortured me. Why?"

"I wanted to help you," he whimpered, cowering away from the Dalek, "I just, I don't know. I was
trying to help. I thought if we could get through to you, if we could mend you. I wanted you better. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry! I swear, I just wanted you to talk!"

I watched as the Dalek backed Van Statten into a wall and felt my heart go out to the Dalek. It wasn't hard to hear the raw pain and fear in the Dalek's voice, even if it wasn't supposed to feel emotions. I wanted to see it have its revenge, but what kind of human would that make me? What kind of human would I be if I allowed my dislike of this man to cloud my better judgement? I'd be no better than a Dalek and the thought made me shiver.

"Then hear me talk now. Exterminate! Exterminate! Exterminate!"

"No!" I yelled as I ran forward and placed myself between Van Statten and the Dalek. The firing stopped as the Dalek looked at me and I swallowed thickly as I met its gaze with my own. "Please, you don't have to do this," I told it, "you don't have to kill him. It won't change what he did to you, it won't make you feel better." In a brazen move, I placed my hand on the little dome that I guess worked as a head. The surface was warm but unlike before, it didn't burn me. "You don't have to do this anymore," I told it gently, "you can make your own choices. Come on, there must be something else you want other than killing people. Tell me. What do you want?"

Our gazes never wavered as I waited for the Dalek's answer, my hand never leaving its warm surface. "I want freedom," it said in a small voice and I felt my heart break for it.

"Then let me help you," I said before we made our way out of the office. I looked over my shoulder once, shaking my head and silently telling Rose to stay where she was, I didn't want her to get hurt if the Dalek suddenly changed its mind.

We walked until we reached level one and I stopped in the middle of the hall when the Dalek did. I watched as it blasted a hole in the roof and a shaft of sunlight streamed down upon it.

I smiled, "you did it," I told the Dalek, "you made it out." I closed my eyes as I stepped under a beam of sunlight, "that feels amazing."

"How does it feel?" the Dalek asked before I jumped back as it seemed to open up. My eyes widened when I saw a one-eyed brain looking creature inside of it. It held out a tendril, reaching towards the sky and my eyes soon softened as I watched it enjoy the sun.

"You've never felt sunlight before, have you?" I asked quietly, moving forward to kneel before it so my eyes were even with its eye. "All your life, you've lived in this cold, dark shell. I can't even imagine a worse life," I whispered, reaching out and gently running my finger over its raised tendril. "I'm sorry," I breathed, "I'm sorry you were created like this. I'm sorry he didn't see fit to allow you to have emotions. I never thought I'd pity a Dalek, but I pity you."

"Your eyes," the Dalek said but before it could elaborate there was another voice piercing the room.

"Get out of the way." I stood and turned to see the Doctor and Frankie running into the hall with two large guns. I couldn't believe what I was seeing and I instinctually moved in front of the Dalek as my eyes narrowed at the two men. "Charlie, get out of the way now!"

"Why?" I questioned coldly, "so you can kill it? I'm sorry, Doctor, but I can't let you do that. I won't let you do that."

Both men looked at me like I was crazy, and maybe I was, but this creature was different than the rest of its kind. I could feel it.
"That thing killed hundred of people," the Doctor told me sternly.

"I'm sure it's killed many more than that, Doctor, but, out of the three of you, which ones are pointing a gun at me?" I asked, crossing my arms over my chest and grounding myself as I met his dark gaze unflinchingly.

"Baby-girl," Frankie began but I stopped him with a raised hand. I didn't want to hear whatever excuses they had; the Dalek wasn't doing anything wrong at the moment. It was simply enjoying the warmth of the sun.

"I've got to do this," the Doctor told me, his eyes begging me to understand. But how could I understand when he never told me anything. Why did he hate the Dalek so much? Why did his eyes lose focus so often and return with a haunted look in them? Why could I hear him up in the wee hours of the morning instead of sleeping? I know he doesn't sleep as we do, but on the days when he does sleep, he barely does so for a couple of hours. The Doctor was running from something, and I had no doubt it involved the Dalek's.

"I've got to end it," he continued, "the Dalek's destroyed my home, my people; they took away everyone I loved. I've got nothing left."

And I think I just heard my heart physically break as I raised my hand to my chest and felt my eyes water. I'd never even entertained the possibility that the reason the Doctor had never taken us to his home planet was because there wasn't a planet to go home to. "I, I never knew," I breathed. I wanted so desperately to run forward and take him in my arms; to try an assure him it was okay and he had me and Rose. I know we couldn't replace the people he lost but we wouldn't leave him either. He was my friend, and I cared about him. Which was why I couldn't let him kill the Dalek. Even looking at him now, he looked so out of place holding a gun. He was a Doctor not a soldier.

"Doctor," I said softly, "lower the gun and just look at it."

I stepped aside, revealing the Dalek to both men and I smiled as I watched the small creature with its eye closed, looking so peaceful. I tried not to think about heat the Doctor had just told me; I didn't want my emotions clouding my judgement.

"What's it doing?" the Doctor asked, lowering the gun further.

"You spend your entire life in a metal cage, what's the first thing you'd want to do when you realise, you're free?" I asked him. "Warmth, Doc, that's all it wants. To feel the warmth of the sun."

"But it can't," the Doctor replied, lowering the gun further. Frankie had already dropped the gun, looking at it like it had bitten him or something. I barely paid him a passing glance before my eyes settled on the Doctor and I walked forward.

When I reached him, I lowered the gun the rest of the way and peered into his aged and haunted eyes. "It didn't kill Van Statten, Doctor, nor did it kill me and it had more than enough chances to do so. Can't you see? It's changing." I raised my hand and placed it lightly on his cheek, watching as he turned into it and closed his eyes. "I'm sorry for what happened to you," I told him softly, "I'm sorry for what you lost. But do you really believe killing it will change anything? The only thing it'll change is you, Doctor."

A tear fell from his eyes and I wiped it away gently with the pad of my thumb. "I couldn't. I wasn't. Oh, Charlie. They're all dead," he said, his voice so broken and pained that I felt my own eyes water.
I wrapped my arms around his shoulders, pulling him close to me as he buried his face in my hair. "I know," I whispered, "I know, Doctor." And I did. But how could I possibly explain to him that a part of me knew exactly what he was feeling? After all, it made absolutely no sense to me.

"Why do we survive?" the Dalek asked from behind us and I turned to look back at it before I extracted myself from the Doctor's arms and made my way back over to the Dalek.

"I don't know," I heard the Doctor say from behind me.

"I am the last of the Dalek's."

I looked back in time to see the Doctor shaking his head, "you're not even that. Charlie did more than regenerate you. You've absorbed her DNA. You're mutating."

"Into what?" I asked at the same time as the Dalek.

"Something new," the Doctor answered, "I'm sorry."

"Is that really so bad?" I asked, looking between him and the Dalek.

"For a Dalek? Yes," the Doctor told me softly.

"I can feel so many ideas," the Dalek said and I turned back to look at it, "so much darkness. Charlotte, give me orders. Order me to die."

"What?" I asked, kneeling before the creature once more, "please, you can't ask me to do that. There must be another way. It's not all darkness. I can't do what you've asked of me."

"This is not life," the Dalek told me, its eye looking at me as it spoke, "this is sickness. I shall not be like you. Order my destruction! Obey! Obey! Obey!"

"I can't!" I cried, resting my forehead on the shell of its cage. I shook my head, my eyes tightly closed, "please don't make me do this."

"Obey!" it ordered and I looked up to meet its gaze. I reached up and gently touched its tendril again, feeling it wrap around my finger gently before it released and moved away.

"I'm sorry," I whispered, a tear falling from my eye, "do it."

"Are you frightened, Charlotte Williams?"

I nodded my head, "yes," I answered softly, wiping the tear from my cheek.

"So am I. Exterminate!"

I couldn't move as I watched it close its eye again before it began to close up its armour. A hand on my arm ushered me back and away from the now rising Dalek. I could smell leather and turned to bury my head in the Doctor's chest. A small sob left my lips when I heard the small explosion before I felt the Doctor's fingers in my hair and his arm wrapping around my waist.

"I'm sorry," I whispered into the Doctor's chest, feeling as the man tightened his hold on me. I hastily wiped my eyes before I looked up at the Doctor and frowned. "What happened to your face?" I asked, only now just noticing the small bruise forming on his jaw.

"Frankie punched me," he answered simply.
"What?" I asked dumbly, pushing away from the Doctor to look at Frankie who didn't look the least bit apologetic.

"He left you down there with that thing, Baby-girl," he answered me simply, "he's lucky all I did was punch him."

I shook my head but before I could scold him, I was being pulled into his hard chest as his large arms wrapped around me tightly. "I thought I lost you," he whispered into my ear, "and it was utterly terrifying."

"It's going to take a lot more than a Dalek to keep me from coming back to you, Frankie," I told him gently, "but do you think we could hold off on punching the Doctor?"

"I make no promises," Frankie answered with a watery chuckle. "Come on, let's go find Rose," he told me, ushering me towards the door the Dalek and I had come out of before.

As we walking past the Doctor, I grabbed his hand, threading our fingers together as I offered him a soft smile. He returned it with one of his own, squeezing my hand as I allowed Frankie to lead us both back to the office where Goddard had ordered two guards to restrain Van Statten.

I was barely inside the office when Rose almost tackled me in a hug. "I'm fine, Rosey," I told her softly, "it's okay."

"I thought you were gone," she cried, "you can't leave me, Charlie."

"Hey," I said, making her look at me, "I am never going to leave you, do you understand? Ever."

We hugged silently as I watched the two guards escort Van Statten from the room before Goddard gave me a courteous nod and followed after them. De Maggio lingered back and waited for Rose to finally let up on her death grip on me before she approached me. She held out her hand, "thank you for saving my life," she said, "you were like my guardian angel today."

"I'm not an angel," I told her, ignoring her hand in favour of hugging the soldier. She seemed surprised but it only took her a second or two to return thee hug. "I'm Charlie, by the way," I told her as we pulled away from one another.

"Hannah," she smiled before she left the room in search of Goddard.

The Doctor led everyone through the museum and back to the Tardis. Every now and again, his eyes would dart to Charlotte, assuring himself that she really was here and unharmed. Whenever her eyes met his, she'd give him a soft smile and he found himself returning it easily. He knew she'd have questions about everything that had happened earlier and he knew it was about time she knew everything. He bowed to tell her everything when they had a moment to themselves later.

"A little piece of home," he smiled when they got to the Tardis, gently stroking her wooden surface as he watched Charlotte's smile brighten, "better than nothing."

"She's brilliant," Charlotte commented, her tone offended by his comment and it took the Doctor a moment to realise she wasn't offended for herself but for the Tardis.

"Is that the end of it, the Time War?" Rose asked him and the Doctor turned away from Charlotte to look at his blonde companion. In doing so, he missed the way her eyes lost focus before her whole body shook and she came back to herself with a shake of her head.
"I'm the only obey left," he said even as the words Jabe and Gwyneth spoke rang out in his head. He refused to allow himself to hope she had made it; the odds were so little they were almost non-existent and so he pushed the thoughts aside. "I win. How about that?" he scoffed, feeling small fingers entwine with his own. He didn't even have to look to know who it was and he squeezed her hand gently as Rose spoke.

"The Dalek survived," she said, her tone hopeful, "maybe some of your people did too."

The Doctor shook his head, "I'd know," he told her softly, "in here." He pointed to his head before he shrugged, "feels like there's no one."

"Well then," Rose continued, "good thing I'm not going anywhere."

He nodded absently as he looked down at Charlotte whose eyes were already on him like she knew he was going to seek out her gaze. "What about you?" he asked quietly, momentarily forgetting they had an audience.

She grinned, "you couldn't get rid of me if you tried, Gramps."

"Good thing I don't want to get rid of you then, isn't that right, Red," he returned with a smile of his own.

She laughed, the sound loud and echoing and it only made his smile larger, "oh, he had jokes," she chuckled, "watch it, Doc, you're playing with fire here."

"I think I can handle the heat," he retorted.

He could see she was about to reply but just then, Adam came running down the hall, "we'd better get out. Van Statten's disappeared. They're closing down the base. Goddard says they're going to fill it full of cement like it never existed."

"About time," Rose scoffed.

"No shit," Frankie agreed.

"Good riddance, I say," Charlotte finished, glaring at Adam. The Doctor wondered about her response to the younger man but didn't comment on it as Adam spoke.

"I'll have to go home," he sighed.

"Better hurry up then," the Doctor said, his hand lightly squeezing Charlotte's to get her to stop glaring at the poor kid, "next flight to Heathrow leaves at fifteen hundred hours."

"Adam was saying that all his life he wanted to see the stars," Rose began.

"Did he now?" Charlotte scoffed.

"Tell him to go and stand outside, then," the Doctor continued.

"Maybe invest in a good telescope," Charlotte added.

"He's all on his own, Doctor," Rose argued, "and he did help."

"He didn't tell any of us about those weapons until after Baby-girl was trapped down there," Frankie argued.
"Better than you leaving her down there," Rose retorted with a glare at the taller man.

"That's not fair, Rose," Charlotte said, stepping forward, "no one left me down there, okay? I was too slow getting to the bulkhead and getting trapped down there was my own fault. Now, drop it, would you?"

"What're you talking about?" Adam asked as he ran back up to them, the Doctor hadn't even noticed he had gone in the first place, "we've got to leave."

"Plus, he's a bit pretty," the Doctor commented, throwing a cautious glance at Charlotte who was still glaring at Adam.

Rose, noticing where his eyes had gone, smirked to herself, "I hadn't noticed," she commented.

"On your head," the Doctor grunted as he dropped Charlotte's hand to get the Tardis key.

His hand stilled near the lock when a small hand covered his. Charlotte was looking up at him with wide eyes. "Can I?" she asked, holding up her own Tardis key. The Doctor grinned and nodded, stepping away so she could move forward to unlock the door. She squealed happily, bouncing forward before she unlocked the door and practically danced into the Tardis.

The Doctor ignored Adam's protests as he followed Charlotte into the Tardis in time to hear the Tardis hum worriedly.

"Of course, I'm okay," Charlotte said and there was another worried hum, "no harm done. You worry too much."

"You can understand her?" he asked, watching her curiously.

She turned to look at him over her shoulder and smiled, "can't you?" she teased. Her smile dropped as Adam entered the Tardis and she took a step towards the Doctor so she could talk to him without being overheard, "I don't trust him, Doc," she said, "there's just something about him. I know Rose wants you to take him on a trip but I really don't think I could keep my temper in check around him. Would you mind taking me and Frankie back to Earth and picking me up when you're done?"

He wanted to protest, to tell her he'd happily take Adam back to his own home and take her to see another alien museum; a proper one this time, just to see her eyes light up the way they had done earlier. But he knew he'd never hear the end of it from Rose and he didn't want to force Charlotte into coming with them if she wasn't going to be comfortable. So, he nodded. She smiled and stepped forward, wrapping her arms around his waist as she hugged him.

"Thanks, Gramps," she said, making him roll his eyes, "you know I don't blame you for anything that happened today, right?"

He was caught off guard by the question and looked down to see her already looking up at him, her chin resting on his chest. "I left you down there, Charlie," he told her quietly.

She shook her head, "you warned me about what was happening, Doctor, in the end, it was my own clumsiness that got me trapped down there."

"What did happen down there?" he asked, his hands absentmindedly rubbing her back.

"I'll tell you later," she informed him, "when we talk about everything that's been bothering you lately."
She pulled away from him and his hands dropped heavily to his side as she stood on her tip toes to place a kiss on his cheek before she brushed past him and met Frankie at the entrance to the hall leading to her room. He watched her entwine their fingers before she and Frankie disappeared down the hall and left him with the two teenagers.

*This was going to be a long trip.*

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I hugged Rose tightly, ignoring her questions about whether I was sure I didn't want to go with her, the Doctor, and Adam. I told her it was fine and to have fun before she once again stepped back into the Tardis before the door closed.

Frankie and I stood side by side as we watched the Tardis vanish before we turned to look at Powell Estate. In all honesty, I didn't really want to be back; I still wanted to be travelling, enjoying our next big adventure. There was just something about Adam that had me instantly distrusting him and I really didn't want to be stuck with him any longer than I had to be.

"Well," came a voice from behind me, "I thought he'd never leave."

"Who the hell are you?" Frankie asked as he turned around and I soon followed after him, my lips spreading into an excited grin.

"It's okay, Frankie," I assured him, "she's a friend."

The woman smirked, "hello, Sweetie; ready for an adventure?"

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Chapter End Notes

Okay, so I have decided to skip over 'the long game' and 'father's day' because Charlie doesn't really have a purpose in either story. With that said, there will be two original chapters to replace those two episodes and now that Frankie and River are meeting, this adventure should be very interesting.

P.S. Apologies for any spelling mistakes, I won't be editing chapters until I've completed the entire fic because I tend to get sidetracked quite a bit. I hope that doesn't bother anyone xx
Zoria 8: Day One

Chapter Notes

Hey everyone, I'm back. Sorry about the long wait, my life has been majorly hectic lately and I haven't really had time to do much writing. Anyway, here's the next chapter for you all, something that shows a bit more of Charlie's skill. I want Charlie to be her own character, to show that she is a capable woman that can equally match the Doctor in intellect and ingenuity and I hope I capture that over the next few chapters.

I couldn't help the smile that stretched my lips at the sight of the Professor standing in front of me and Frankie. She was dressed in a pair of bootleg jeans, a blank tank top, and a black leather jacket. The black combat boots she wore just completed her look and made her look like a total badass.

"Professor," I grinned, moving over to hug her and ignoring the slight protest Frankie made as I did.

"Hello, sweetie," she grinned, hugging me back before she pulled away and looked behind me. "What, no hello from you, Frankie?" she questioned with a raised eyebrow.

"Do I know you?" Frankie asked and I watched the Professor roll her eyes.

"Really?" she huffed, "this pretending not to know me is getting old, Frankie."

"I'm not pretending," Frankie argued, crossing his arms over his chest and glaring at the Professor.

"He's really not, Professor," I told her softly when I saw her about to argue with him, "this is Frankie's first time meeting you."

The Professor fell silent and I watched her lips turn down in a frown before she looked down at me and studied me closely. Her eyes became sad at whatever she was seeing and I watched her take a small step back. I have to admit, that stung more than I thought it would. "I see," she said, coughing before she pasted on a smile and held her hand out to Frankie, "nice to meet you, I'm… The Professor."

My eyes narrowed at how she said it, like it tasted wrong on her tongue but that couldn't have been the case because she had been the one to tell me to call her that. "Frankie," my best friend replied cautiously, shaking her hand quickly before he let it go and turned to me, "baby girl?"

"She's cool," I replied, answering his unasked question, "we've met a couple of times."

"Just a couple?" The Professor asked, eyeing me closely.

I shrugged, "three times," I told her and frowned as I watched her deflate before she seemed to shake off the sadness a moment later and went back to smiling at me.

"Well then," she began, a small hitch to her voice, "how about an adventure, sweetie? You're welcome to come to Frankie," she added when I felt Frankie move to stand behind me.
"Really?" I asked excitedly, "hell yeah!"

"Are you crazy?" Frankie hissed, deflating my excitement a little as he moved to give me a disapproving glare, "in the span of a few days you've hit your head, suffered memory loss, and were almost killed by a Dalek!"

"A Dalek?" The Professor questioned, her concerned gaze moving to me and I shrugged.

"The alien that looks like a salt and pepper shaker with a whisk and a toilet plunger for arms," I informed her, "and it didn't kill me," I retorted to Frankie.

"I said almost killed you," Frankie replied with a huff, crossing his arms over his chest.

"Well, it didn't. So, you wanna come on an adventure or not?"

Frankie's frown only deepened and I was completely expecting him to say no so it was a surprise when he signed heavily and nodded his head. "Fine," he muttered, "what do you have in mind?"

He directed that last one at the Professor who skirted at us both as she began fiddling with her vortex manipulator. My stomach was already revolting just at the sight of the gaudy wrist band and I almost groaned out loud when I remembered just how much I hated travelling that way the last time I saw the Professor.

"There's a race on the planet Zoria 8 and I figured we'd sign Lottie up to participate," the Professor answered, looking up from the wrist band to smirk at us, "of course, we'll have to go shopping first. None of us can be seen in what we're currently wearing."

Frankie looked downright insulted, his eyes moving to look over his clothes and it made me and the Professor laugh as he gave us an indignant scoff. "I look amazing," he told her, his hand on his cocked hip.

"You always do," the Professor replied and I watched as Frankie's eyes warmed. If there was one way to get Frankie to warm up to you, it was to satisfy his ego. "Are you ready?" she continued, holding her arm out for me. I threaded my arm through hers, linking ourselves together before I did the same with Frankie. "Fair warning," she told Frankie with a mischievous smirk on her face, "you're really not going to like this."

"And she's really not kidding," I groaned before the Professor pressed a button and we disappeared in a flash of bright white light.

River knew she shouldn't find amusement in it, but seeing the usually composed man bent over and throwing up made her snigger. Of course, she was less amused to see Lottie looking like she was about to throw up but it didn't take long until the redhead seemed to recover. She watched Lottie look around, her eyes widening at what she saw and it made River smile and momentarily forget that this Lottie barely knew her.

She could tell when Lottie had said they had only met three times; River was sure she hadn't experienced those three moments yet but older Lottie had told her that if she ever met a past Lottie who called her the Professor, to just go along with it. River didn't like it, but she knew Lottie wouldn't have asked her to do it unless it was important. Still, that didn't make it sting any less to see such little recognition in Lottie's eyes.

"What the bloody hell was that?" Frankie croaked when he finally stopped throwing up and River would have rolled her eyes if she didn't recall that this was his very first time meeting her. That also
stung; Frankie was a good friend, and although he could be a complete jerk sometimes, River was always glad for the moments she would run into him in their timeline. Especially, now that they were becoming so few and far between.

"Vortex Manipulator," she told him simply as she hooked her arm with Lottie's once more, "come on. We have some shopping to do."

"Is this Zoria 8?" Lottie asked her excitedly and River smiled softly; the one thing that Lottie would never lose over her many years was her ability to be excited by things. It was an endearing quality and River was happy to see her looking so thrilled to be here with her.

"No," she answered softly, "this is Zoria 7, the shopping capital of Zoria."

"Zoria's a galaxy?" Frankie asked as he followed beside them, standing close to Lottie as he looked around at the tall, futuristic buildings.

"A solar system," she corrected simply, "eight planets, sixteen suns, and seven moons. They weren't very original with naming the planets; that's what happens when you have a selfish and immortal king. Zoria 1-7 are more modernised and have been in development over the last few centuries."

"And Zoria 8?" Lottie asked curiously.

"Zoria 8 is for tournaments; it's a harsh environment but the king makes sure the races are kept fair and no one is seriously injured or killed." 

"That's comforting," she heard Frankie mutter before he let out a whoosh of air when Lottie elbowed him in the stomach. "So, you want Baby-girl to race in one of these tournaments?" he asked with slightly forced politeness.

"Zoria used hover bikes," River explained, already seeing the excitement rising in Lottie's eyes again, "they work almost exactly like a motorcycle and I know how fond you are of your motorcycle." That last bit she directed at Lottie who sent her a blinding smile as an answer. River led them down the almost deserted street and into a gunmetal grey building with darkly tinted windows.

"Welcome," the saleswoman, a purple-skinned, red-haired woman, said enthusiastically as they entered, "what brings you to Yucuries today?"

"My friends and I are in need of something to wear to today's tournament," River informed her, hearing Lottie scold Frankie for staring behind her, "Lottie here will need full race gear."

This captured the woman's attention and she looked around River and at Lottie who waved gingerly. Her good eyes widened at the sight of Lottie and she rushed forward. "Oh, you are going to be perfect for the races," she coo'd, "slim build, short stature. You'll certainly have a speed advantage."

"I will?" Lottie asked unsurely.

The saleswoman hummed, "most definitely," she replied before she turned to River, "we have a new line that has just come in; all new technology and guaranteed to give her an added advantage."

"We'll take it," River said immediately, already fishing around for her intergalactic credit card, "Lottie, follow-" River paused to look at the nametag the woman was wearing, "-Raelle and she'll get you fitted properly. Frankie and I will be finding something to wear to the race." River dragged Frankie away before he could protest and looked over her shoulder to see Lottie following Raelle.
"We need to talk," she told him simply as she moved him over to the designer clothing range.

I looked at my reflection in the mirror and couldn't believe just how much I liked what I was seeing. Sure, it was a little showy in some areas, but Raelle assured me that I wouldn't be injured due to the exposed areas because the suit had an invisible fabric sewn into it that would protect the area. Even now, I could feel the fabric if I focused on it hard enough and I watched it ripple slightly where my fingers grazed it.

"It absorbs impacts," Raelle had explained to me, "the fabric is thin enough not to impair your movements but stronger than any substance found in Zoria."

That had been comforting to know until I realised, I had no idea how strong the strongest substance in this solar system was. For all I knew, it could have the strength and durability of a wet noodle. Still, the suit was amazing.

It was tight fitting and an almost iridescent black. The full piece suit was made from a fabric that looked like leather but was far more breathable and manoeuvrable. It ran the length of her body, from her feet to just below her chin. The suit exposed her sides from just under her breasts to just above her hips. The boots she wore reminded her of her riding boots from Earth; they were black and made of an almost armour like material, the same with the gloves and the helmet I had been given.

Raelle had given me a utility belt that sat snuggly on my hips and had told me I would be given the objects I needed for the race when I got to Zoria 8. She had braided my hair back for me before pinning the curled-up braid to my head so it could be hidden under my helmet. Raelle had just gone to get some more protective gear for me and the amount of protection I needed should have worried me but only managed to excite me. The whole reason I had gotten a motorcycle in the first place was because of the thrill of riding it. The danger that was always present when I went out on it. Today was no different, the thrill was there and it made my heart flutter in excitement.

I found myself wishing the Doctor and Rose were here to see me race. Rose hated when I rode my motorcycle but I was sure if she saw me in action she'd be just as thrilled as I was. The Doctor, he seemed like he'd find the race somewhat interesting and I didn't want to admit to myself that I wanted to see his reaction to me racing today.

When Raelle returned, I turned away from the mirror and grinned widely when I saw Frankie and the Professor behind her. "What do you think?" I asked, placing of my hands on my cocked hip as I used my other arm to hold my helmet to my side.

The Professor removed something from the pocket of the pants she now wore and I watched as she pointed it in my direction and a red light scanned me from head to toe. She smirked as she placed the device back in her pocket and gave me and Frankie a shrug at our inquisitive glances. "Memories," was all she said as she looked me over, "you look wonderful, sweetie."

"She's right, Baby-girl," Frankie answered with a strained smile, "you look amazing."

I looked between Frankie and the Professor with a frown, noticing their stiff postures and forced smiles. They were keeping something from me and something told me I wouldn't be able to get it out of either of them. "Thanks," I replied, forcing my own smile, "you both look great."

And they really did. Frankie was wearing a pair of leather pants and a matching jacket; I could see
his black t-shirt under it but just barely, the jacket was mostly zipped up. The Professor was wearing pretty much the same thing except hers was more form fitting. They both wore black combat boots and just generally looked like a pair of badasses.

The Professor ushered us from the store once Raelle had bagged all the gear I would need for the race. She gave as an enthusiastic wave and a promise to come and watch me race. When I asked the Professor where we were going, she explained that there was a shuttle to Zoria 8 that we would all be taking. I nodded, still able to see and sense the tension in the air. It bothered me, that they were keeping something from me; especially since Frankie seemed to stiffen the closer, we got to the shuttle that would take us to Zoria 8.

We were halfway into our journey when I finally asked something that had been bothering me since Raelle had helped me into my suit. "Professor," I began, gaining the woman's attention, "how did they even have my size? So far, everyone I've seen has been well over six and a half feet."

It was true, even Raelle had been pushing seven feet in height and certainly had the muscle mass to match. Even the children who were on the shuttle were taller than me, so why would they have anything in any of our sizes?

"Zoria 7 isn't the only planet in this solar system with inhabitants, sweetie," the Professor explained to me, "the other planets have inhabitants that can range anywhere from two feet in height to well over ten feet; Yucuries is the most renowned store for race gear and makes sure it can cater to all customers."

I nodded my head and looked around at the occupants of the shuttle. There was a little boy a few seats down from me who hadn't stop staring since we had gotten on the shuttle. His silver eyes had no pupil and I could admit his unrelenting stare was very uncomfortable. The man he was travelling with seemed to notice his stare and nudged the boy to get him to look away. The boy did so, saying something to the man who looked over at me with a curious glance. I looked away, my face flushing at the intense look in his eyes before I began fiddling with the helmet in my lap.

The whole thing was smooth but there was something about the visor that seemed different to other helmets I had seen. Curious, I put the helmet on and gasped as the visor suddenly lit up with different things. Everything from temperature to altitude, to body statistics, was displayed on the visor without impeding my view of what was passed it.

"Wow," I breathed.

"Hello, Miss Williams," came a male voice that made me jumps. I looked over at the Professor and Frankie to see if they had heard it but both of them were deep in discussion about something.

"Hello?" I replied cautiously, "who is this?"

"I am Kaze, an artificial intelligence that will serve as a guide and companion during your race," he informed me.

"Huh," I replied unintelligently, "uh, cool. Can you explain all of this stuff to me?"

"Of course," Kaze replied, "this helmet has been specially designed to do a complete biological scan of your person from the moment you put it on. From the scan, the helmet's function is to adapt to suit your immediate needs at any given time. Body statics will inform me if you are injured or if I have to adjust oxygen levels. The temperature display is for both inside and outside of the suit and I will adjust the suit functions to keep you at a sustainable temperature depending on the climate around you."
"The rest is simple enough; each will be displayed during the race to help you best circumnavigate the course you will be racing. At any time, you can hide these displays but I will be constantly monitoring them and inform you of any necessary changes. Is this acceptable to you, Miss Williams?"

"How do you know my name?" I asked instead of answering.

"Basic memory scan," he answered, "a surface scan just to acquire basic information that will be necessary for me to provide you with the best services. Do not worry, Miss Williams, I only gathered basic information; name, age, height, weight, etc. Your memories remain private."

I nodded dumbly before taking the helmet off and taking a deep breath. This was some new aged shit and I wasn't quite sure what I was getting myself into. But, maybe Kaze did.

"Kaze?" I asked after slipping the helmet back on, "could you tell me about the race?"

"Of course," he replied, bringing up video images of several races. "Zoria has a long history and some of it is very violent in nature," he began, showing me videos of several different races at war. "King Jaek proposed the races as a way to sort out the planets' differences without further bloodshed. It involves a series of races over three days, each with its own unique set of challenges."

The picture of the king disappeared and three different videos appeared on my visor. "Day one will be hosted in the more dry, humid region of Zoria 8 and will consist of a cross-country race through harsh desert environments. Zoria 8 is host to many dangerous creatures," Kaze continued to explain, several pictures of strange and terrifying looking creatures popping up on the screen before they quickly vanished, "and it will be your job to not only avoid or escape these creatures but try to keep one of the first six places in order to proceed on to the next leg of the race.

"Day two will take place in a much more cold environment," Kaze explained, showing me an icy tundra that was dark and seemed to be perpetually snowing, "harsh storms and blizzards will make this journey perilous and again, you will need to avoid the many creatures who dwell in the icy wasteland.

"The final day will consist of a ten-lap race in 'The Arena', during this time, contestants are allowed to use any means necessary to be the victor of the race short of seriously injuring or killing another opponent. Several obstacles will be presented to you during the race and it is your job to navigate these as well as keep yourself from falling victim to one of the other contestants."

My head was spinning at all the new information presented to me. Thankfully, the shuttle ride was pretty short, which was amazing considering it was to another planet. I could still feel the boy's eyes on me but steadily ignored it as I removed my helmet and allowed the Professor to link our arms and lead us out of the shuttle, making sure to grab Frankie's hand and give it a gentle squeeze.

"You okay?" I asked him; he had been strangely quiet, which was odd for her friend.

"Shouldn't I be asking you that?" he questioned.

I shrugged, "I'm cool," I answered, "little nervous but otherwise very excited. But you don't seem to be," I continued, "do you know something I don't?"

Frankie opened his mouth to answer when his eyes caught on to something that had his breath hitching and the words dying in his throat. I ground as I watched him gape like a fish out of water before turning to look at whatever had caught his gaze. He was tall, not as tall as the people on Zoria 7, but still over six feet and four inches at least.
He was white, not pale, but white; like, whiter than paper white. Even his hair was white and fell past his should, not a wave, curl or kink in sight. He kind of reminded me of the elves from the Lord of the Rings movie with his slightly pointed ears and fair features. Well, save for the blood red eyes. He had no pupils and no whites to his eyes, it was all just red. It took me a moment to realise who I was looking at and by then we had already reached him and the Professor was letting me go to talk to him.

"King Jaek," she greeted, bowing her head and placing her right fist to her left breast, "a pleasure to make your acquaintance."

The king looked the Professor over, his red eyes darkening with lust as he slowly eyed her from head to toe. Not that I blamed him, the Professor was an absolute bombshell and her confidence just made her so much more beautiful. I watched the king return her greeting before his eyes moved on to me. He barely even gave me a once over before his eyes became fixated on Frankie.

If his eyes had darkened at the sight of the Professor it was nothing to how dark they got at the sight of Frankie. He seemed to completely forget about me and the Professor as he stepped up to my still gaping best friend. "Well, hello," he purred, his deep baritones sending shivers down my spine, and not in a good way. "And where have you been hiding?" he questioned.

He held his hand out to Frankie who mutely grabbed it and I had to keep myself from sniggering at the blush that spread across his face when the king brought his hand to his lips and kissed Frankie's knuckles. I let out a whoosh of air when Frankie elbowed me in the gut, rubbing at my stomach as I glared up at my friend who was completely ignoring me.

"Such beautiful colouring," the king said, running his clawed finger down Frankie's cheek, "surely you are not to be participating in such a barbaric race?"

"Frankie isn't going to be in the race," the Professor spoke up, "Lottie, however, is certainly going to be entering today."

The king peeled his eyes away from my still strangely silent friend and looked me over once again. I got the distinct impression that he didn't like me and the dismissive scoff he sent my way only cemented the thought. His eyes were back on Frankie a moment later, his hand still grasping my best friends, before he stepped closer so he and Frankie were chest to chest. "Come with me, winimo," he purred, "you shall witness your friend race from the comfort of my suite."

I was waiting for Frankie to comment on how the king seemed to be speaking about me like I was some insignificant insect that he wanted nothing more than to squash. Instead, Frankie allowed the king to steer him through the crowd and away from me and the professor, his eyes still glazed and not moving away from the king's face.

"Did I do something wrong?" I asked the Professor, my eyes not leaving the back of my best friend as he disappeared into the crowd, "because I get the impression that the king might hate me."

When I didn't get a reply, I turn to look at the Professor only to frown when I was met with no one. "Oh no," I mutter to myself as I make my way towards the hover bikes and some of the other racers, "I'm fine. It's not like I've never been on this planet before or have a bunch of aliens trying to glare holes into the back of my head."

It wasn't just a feeling either; almost all of the other racers seemed to be trying really hard to kill me with their eyes alone. I was at a serious disadvantage here, that was obvious by the looks of everyone. I was, by far, the smallest racer. Hell, even the women towered over me. The racers that were smaller than me in height certainly made up for it in muscle; they looked like they could
bench-press a semi-truck using one arm only. The tallest racer looked to be well over ten feet tall and every single one of them looked as mean as the next one. In fact, I made a mental note to keep far away from the medusa looking alien who seemed to be trying extra hard to annihilate me with her eyes, all ten of them.

After receiving an eye roll and a sneer from a woman when I asked if she could point out my bike for me, I made my way over to said bike and started inspecting it. Apart from having no wheels, it looked really similar to my motorcycle at home. I mean, there were a few buttons that made absolutely no sense to me but I got the general idea of how to work the bike.

"You don't need to worry about any of the buttons until the final race."

I jumped at the masculine voice that sounded from behind me, turning with a small squeak and my hand placed over my rapidly beating heart. It was the boy from the shuttle; who, now that I was closer to him, I realised wasn't a boy but a man. His features were young but certainly not young enough to be anyone under the age of eighteen. He looked almost human, save for the completely silver eyes and the weird glow that seemed to surround him. He was also almost seven feet tall and I had to crane my head just to meet his unnerving gaze.

"What?" I asked dumbly, finally managing to calm my racing heart.

He smiled at me; a boyish smile that just made him look far younger than he already did. "The buttons," he repeated, motioning to the buttons I had been wondering about a moment ago, "you don't need to worry about them until the final leg of the race. They can only be activated during the last race."

"Oh," I replied, "thanks, I have no idea what I'm doing. Are you going to participate in the race?"

He shook his head, his hands folded in front of him, "no, but I wish you all the best during the race."

"Thanks," I smiled, "I'm certainly going to need it." I threw a nervous look at the other contestant before returning my gaze to the man info font of me.

"You'll do fine," he assured me, "they look intimidating but… well, they can kind of back it up too."

I chuckled at the sheepish shrug he gave me and that boyish smile returned again, the sight of it made my stomach flip at just how cute it made him look. "I'm Charlie," I told him, holding my hand out for him to shake.

"Zaeden," he replied, grabbing my hand and lifting it to his lips. I blushed as he placed a light kiss on my knuckles before he let my hand go and I allowed it to fall back to my side, the skin where his lips had touched tingling pleasantly. "Charlie," he said, the way he said my name making me blush another shade of red and the butterflies in my stomach increased, "you have a strange, yet beautiful name."

"Oh, thank you," I replied dumbly.

"The opening ceremony should be starting shortly," he informed me, holding his arm out, "may I have the honour of escorting you, Miss Charlie?"

I smiled softly at him, threading my arm through his and allowing him to lead me towards this opening ceremony he had just mentioned.
Maybe this wasn't going to be so bad.

Well, the race was just about to begin and I still hadn't seen Frankie or the Professor. Zaeden had been kind enough to show her around and had introduced her to his friend, Aesel, and both men had given her a lowdown on the people she would be up against. Zaeden knew a lot about the other racers and even more about Zoria. There were times when Zaeden would zone out but Aesel assured me that he was okay. When he did come back down to Earth, or Zoria, he would be much sadder or concerned. I had caught him throwing cautious looks in my direction but the looked was there and gone so fast, I thought I had imagined it and didn't bring it up.

Zaeden and Aesel had stayed with me until all of the racers were ushered to their bikes and then directed to the starting line. Zaeden had assured me, he would be waiting for me when I finished the race to congratulate me on reaching the second leg of the race. He seemed so assured I'd make it that it gave me a much-needed confidence boost.

I was already wearing my helmet, Kaze had already adjusted my suit so that I wasn't sweating my arse off under the three hot suns. "Mozz Williams, you have an incoming call from a Professor. Shall I patch her through?" Kaze asked me as the bikes around me revved loudly.

"Yes please," I replied and not even a moment later, the Professor's face popped up in the corner of my visor. "Hey, Professor," I greeted, anger evident in my voice, "having fun?"

She sighed heavily, "I'm sorry for leaving you on your own, sweetie," she told me, "I followed Frankie and the king. There's something strange going on and I'm trying to figure out what it is and if it might present a danger to anyone here."

"Is Frankie okay?" I asked worriedly, turning to search the crowds to see if I could set my sights on my friend, "Professor, please tell me he's okay."

"He's fine, Lottie," the Professor assured me, "I promise, I won't let anything happen to him."

I nodded my head but I couldn't seem to make the knot in my stomach go away. "Okay," I breathed, "the race is about to begin. Will I see you at the finish line?"

The Professor smirked, "nothing could keep me away, sweetie."

Her image disappeared and I took a deep, calming breath. "You can do this," I told myself, "it's just like your motorcycle, except it has no wheels and can go a lot faster."

A countdown appeared on my helmet and Kaze informed me that I could go the moment it hit zero. The ten seconds felt like ten hours but when the little zero finally appeared all my nerves vanished as I took off with the other racers.

I whooped loudly at the sheer power of the bike I was currently straddling and all other sounds vanished as my ears were filled with the pleasant hum of whatever engine powered the bike. Kaze was silent unless it was to give me directions and tell me about shortcuts that could be used to cut my time in half. By the halfway point in the race, I was about ready to admit that all of this was going to be a huge piece of cake.

It's a good thing that whatever god these Zorian's believe in was there to prove me wrong. I was riding through a canyon short cut when an alarmingly horrifying howl pierced the air. Said alarmingly horrifying howl was then followed by several other howls which made me want to curl up into an itty-bitty ball on the ground and cry my eyes out.
If the howl was terrifying, it was nothing compared to seeing the source of said howls. I was sure they were supposed to be some weird wolf, porcupine hybrid with the size of a grizzly bear and the teeth of a sabretooth tiger. Said spikes were thick and shimmered in the light from the suns, making them look like the spikes were made from gold. In fact, the creature looked like it was made of gold and had skin tougher than diamond. In short, I was officially terrified.

"Kaze, what are those?" I asked the artificial intelligence as I slowed the bike down so as not to get too close to them.

"Sunglow Souleaters," Kaze answered immediately, "a highly dangerous, highly lethal, and highly indestructible creature native to the desert regions of Zoria 8. Their spikes secrete a fast-acting poison that renders the victim completely paralysed before working its way to the heart and stopping it. The process is said to be excruciatingly painful and a cure is almost impossible to come by. In fact, only the king has access to said cure."

"Well, that's just brilliant," I grumbled, "the only man that could potentially save my life if I get poisoned is the very man who seems to hate me and have a hard-on for my best friend. Could my life get any worse?"

I really should keep my mouth shut. Seriously. Because, as soon as the words fell from my lips, one of the Souleaters made to pounce on my bike. Thankfully, the bike had amazing steering and I managed to steer it away from the large animal. Well, mostly. The sound of metal bending filled my ears as I kicked the bike into gear and shot forward.

"Damage has been acquired to the right-hand side of the bike," Kaze informed me needlessly, "bike stability is compromised. Bike integrity at eighty per cent. I advise avoiding any further damage until reparations can be made."

"No shit, Kaze," I muttered as I shot passed two more Souleaters. "Why are they called Souleaters?" I asked, knowing I probably wouldn't like whatever answer he gave me.

"Before their prey dies, the creature consumes the soul of its victims," Kaze told her.

"Well that sounds lovely," I growled, sweating around another Souleater, "any idea how many I can expect?"

"I detect a pack of five."

Great, four were already accounted for so where was number five?

I screamed as something jumped over my head and landed in front of me, forcing me to come to a stop to avoid hitting it. The Souleater in front of me was three times larger than the others and had completely pitch-black eyes. The spikes on its back were raised like a cat and all its teeth were on display at it growled at me.

"Kaze, I need a way around that thing," I told the A.I desperately.

"Searching for alternative routes."

More growls from behind me had me turning to see the other four Souleaters approaching me until they had me backed against the side of the canyon. They all made room for the largest one and all of their teeth were on full display, glistening with the drool that dripped from their mouths. Kaze was still quiet, still searching for a way to get me out of this problem but when the largest one, obviously the leader, stepped forward, I knew I didn't have much time.
If I didn't find a way out of this, I was going to die.

Frankie had felt like a haze had come over him since meeting Jaek. However, said haze faded almost immediately the moment he peeled his eyes away from the handsome king and looked at the screen that featured the race. Apparently, there were drones all over the place to catch all of the action and this one just so happened to be capturing his Baby-girl being surrounded by creatures that looked like they had come straight from a horror movie.

He pulled away from the man he had just be locked in a passionate kiss with a sat at the edge of the overly plush chair, his eyes glued to the screen.

"Ah," the king said from behind him, his hand coming up to the back of Frankie's neck, "it looks like your friend has found the Souleaters."

Frankie heard the excitement in the king's voice and felt his anger bubble to the surface but refused to look away from the screen. Charlie was back against the side of the canyon walls, surrounded by five very large, very scary looking beasts who were looking at her like she was the last pizza at the party.

The drone zoomed in on them and Frankie saw Charlie's head on a constant swivel as she looked for a way out. He felt his heart plummet as he realised, she had no way of escape. Why had he let that woman talk him into letting his Baby-girl do something like this? He shook his head; it was too late to dwell on that now. Now, all he would be able to do was watch uselessly as his best friend faced off against a hoard of feral animals that looked like they had eaten the hulk or something.

He watched her head stop moving, looking up at the sky and it only made his heart plummet further. Was she praying? Did she know she was going to die? The Professor had assured him she would be okay but Frankie had no idea why he had believed her.

His heart leapt back into his chest and finally started beating properly as he watched Charlie turned the bike around and take off. She didn't go through or around, no, his clever girl went straight up. Frankie whooped as he watched Charlie use the hoverbike to scale the canyon wall and watched as the creatures tried to follow. Four of them failed but the largest of the pack seemed to have enough strength to dig its claws into the wall so it could scale it. And fast.

"Come on, Baby-girl," he whispered as he watched her helmet covered head look over her shoulder before she quickly looked forward again and the bikes speed increased. It didn't seem to matter though; the faster Charlie went, the faster the creature did as well.

"The alpha Souleater is the biggest and strongest of the Souleaters," Jaek spoke but Frankie barely paid his words any attention as he watched Charlie turn the bike around and take off. She didn't go through or around, no, his clever girl went straight up. Frankie whooped as he watched Charlie use the hoverbike to scale the canyon wall and watched as the creatures tried to follow. Four of them failed but the largest of the pack seemed to have enough strength to dig its claws into the wall so it could scale it. And fast.

"The alpha Souleater is the biggest and strongest of the Souleaters," Jaek spoke but Frankie barely paid his words any attention as he watched Charlie climb higher, praying to any god that would listen that she didn't fall off the bike. Frankie had seen Charlie ride her motorcycle many times before; she was a speed demon and an adrenaline junkie. There had always been a risk of her hurting herself on the motorcycle but none of those risks included being eaten. "The Wildling girl doesn't stand a chance," he chuckled amusedly.

Frankie turned to glare icily at the king and watched the surprise enter his red eyes before he quickly covered it. "You think this is funny?" he hissed, pointing towards the screen, "that 'Wildling girl' is like a little sister to me. What the hell is even remotely funny about the possibility of her getting hurt or killed?!"

Jaek raised his hands and moved closer to Frankie, his eyes darkening as he did so and Frankie
began to feel the haze from earlier return. He fought it, fought to turn his gaze away from the king and towards the screen so he could make sure Charlie was okay. When Jaek touched his face with a pale, clawed finger, the haze took over his mind and Frankie fell back into the king's embrace.

I broke the top of the canyon, throwing the bike forward before I was raising against the rocky top like a bat out of hell. I wish I could say I lost the Souleater but the sound of heavy paws hitting the ground told me exactly how wrong I would be if I did. A quick glance over my shoulder told me I better find a way to increase speed otherwise I was going to become a Souleater chew toy.

"Kaze, how far until I reach the other racers?" I asked breathlessly.

"Less than ten minutes, Miss Williams," he answered me immediately.

Damn, I couldn't lead this thing to the other racers but I couldn't get myself off course either or I'd risk losing; though, at the moment that seemed like a really good idea. This race was obviously more dangerous than I thought but that didn't mean I was going to quit it either. "I need to lose this thing before the finish line," I spoke out loud, "do Souleaters have any weaknesses?"

"Their own poison can be used to temporarily neutralise them," Kaze told me and I let out a long groan.

"Anything else? Perhaps something that won't put me at risk of losing an arm?" I asked pleadingly.

"A powerful tranquiliser would incapacitate the creature long enough for you to get far enough ahead that it would simply lose interest in the chase."

Perfect, because I just had powerful tranquilisers laying around the place. Okay, plan C. "Zaeden told me Zoria uses cloaking devices on the bikes and suits," I told Kaze, "I have a plan but the timing needs to be perfect."

He didn't answer and I didn't really expect him to. He did, however, throw up a map of the terrain when I asked him to and my eyes quickly darted to a spot I had seen when I had looked at the map earlier. It was another canyon, this one much deeper than the last; so deep, in fact, that the bottom was pitch black because the sun couldn't reach it. With the darkness and the cloaking, I should be able to lose the Souleater and the canyon took me right up to the finish line.

During my little planning session, I hadn't been keeping track of the bike speed and I screamed when I felt sharp claws dig into the flesh of my calf before the sound of ripping flesh filled my ears and a burning sensation could be felt. I almost lost control of the bike but managed to keep it steady and turn out of the path of the Souleater at the same time. Tears stung my eyes at the pain radiating up my leg and my breathing had because laborious.

"Suit compromised," Kaze informed me, "the wound tore through the tissue and at the rate you are bleeding you will pass out in approximately twenty minutes."

"How far away is the finish line?" I asked as I pushed the bike to its top speed.

"Thirteen minutes and forty-six seconds from your current position."

"We can do this," I assured myself and the A.I, "we just gotta get to the canyon."

"Do you have a first aid function?" I questioned through gritted teeth, my leg feeling like it was on fire.
"My first aid functions are basic and would only prolong the inevitable by seven minutes and twenty-three seconds."

"Every second counts," I breathed, "do what you can, Kaze."

I couldn't even feel what the suit was doing to my leg but I was just relieved when the burning subsided enough for me to focus on anything but the pain. The canyon was rapidly approaching but so was the Souleater. I had no doubt it would follow me into the canyon but I just needed to be fast enough to activate the cloaking and use the darkness as a way to move through the canyon. Thankfully, the helmet had built in night vision otherwise this plan would be going to hell before it had even begun.

"Activate cloaking on my mark," I told Kaze as I forced the bike to do well over what was probably safe. This plan needed to be timed out perfectly or the Souleater was going to get much more than its claws into me. "Ready," I breathed as I got closer to the canyon. My breath completely left me as I quickly rotated the bike to the side and suddenly, I was going over the edge of the canyon.

"Now," I yelled as everything went dark. I felt the suit and the bike shiver for a moment before the night vision in the helmet activated and suddenly, I was speeding off through the darkness. The heavy thump of the Souleater landing on the canyon floor had me looking over my shoulder to see if frantically looking around. Zaeden had explained the cloaking to me earlier, told me how it also dampened sound and smell which meant the Souleater wouldn't be able to track me that way either.

"Oh my god," I whispered to myself as I face forward and raced off, "I can't believe that actually worked."

"Yes, I too, am surprised that you actually managed to pull off such a stunt, Miss Williams," Kaze told me.

"Oh, geez, thanks," I grumbled sarcastically.

I kept to the canyon until just before the finish line in which I once again scaled the wall and shot towards said line as if my life depended on it. And, if the light-headedness and the nausea were anything to go by, it just might.

"Hey, there wasn't any kind of poison in the claws, right?" I asked Kaze as I cut back onto the track, just behind the medusa looking alien from earlier. She looked over her large shoulder at me and even with the darkly tinted visor, I just knew she was glaring at me. She was third which meant I was currently in fourth place and that meant that as long as I crossed the finished line without more than two more people getting in front of me, I'd advance to the next leg of the race.

Thinking about legs just made me think of my own and, unwisely, I chanced a look at it. The light-headedness increased tenfold at the sight of the mangled skin and I almost threw up in my helmet. The claws had gone to the bone and the sight of said bone made wish I would just pass out now. The skin was angry and red and the torn flesh was jagged. It was definitely going to leave a scar which meant Rose would see it and I don't want to even imagine the fight that will start up. Not to mention I was probably going to be stuck with a limp for the rest of my life. You know what, Rose was probably worse. And don't even get me started on when Jackie sees it; I'll never be allowed out of the apartment.

I actually didn't realise when I crossed the finish line and probably would have kept riding if not for the Professor standing in front of me. I would later blame my horrible breaking on the light-headedness because the next thing I know, the bike is turning out from under me and suddenly I
have a mouth full of hot dirt. Great, because I hadn't suffered enough today.

Quickly spitting out the dirt, I made to get to my feet only to have my body remind me of everything that had just happened. Turning over so I wouldn't face plant the ground once again, I laid now heavily on my back. My breathing was fast and loud and black spots danced in front of my vision. The Professor was leaning over me and although I could see her lips moving, I had no idea what she was actually saying. There was this annoying ringing sound in my ear and I quickly wondered to myself when my helmet had come off. Had I done that? No, I think I would have remembered removing it.

"...tie... right... sweetie, are you alright?"

I blinked owlishly as I looked at the Professor before I giggled. The sound was so unexpected and high pitched that it only made me giggle harder. Then I caught sight of the Professor's face and my giggling seemed like it would never end. "Ow," I moaned between giggles, "that was... that wass..." My tongue felt heavy and I moved it around in my mouth with a disgruntled expression on my face as I tried to get it to do what I wanted it to.

"I think you need a healer, melda heri," came an almost melodic voice and I squinted my eyes against the almost blinding suns before Zaeden's came into view. He was smiling softly at me, his eyes reflecting his concern as he looked me over.

"And who the bloody hell are you?" the Professor demanded.

"I am Zaeden," he answered in that same soft voice he had used since I had met him. In fact, he never seemed to raise his voice, he was like some kind of Zen master; like master Splinter or Yoda. The thought just made my giggles return and both adults looked down at me. "She's lost a lot of blood," he told the Professor and I could just see the witty rejoinder she was going to send his way before she thought better of it. I grunted when I felt large arms under my shoulders and legs before I was being lifted and brought against a hard chest. A groan left my lips as my leg was jostled and Zaeden muttered an apology as he adjusted his grip on me.

"And where do you think you're going?" I heard the Professor asked heatedly.

"My friend Aesel is a healer; he returned to our rooms for the evening and I'm going to take Miss Charlie to see him so that he may tend to her leg," Zaeden told her as I cuddled up closer to him.

"Mm," I moaned, "you're warm. Soo warm," I breathed, burying my nose into his neck, "and you smell nice... like the rain." I turned my head to look at the Professor and smiled goofily at her, "you sshould smell him, Professssor," I slurred, "he smellss so gooood."

The Professor looked like she was fighting a smile but apparently lost as the little amused grin spread her lips. "I'll just take your word, sweetie," she told me.

I was about to reply but was cut off by my own squeak as something sharp jabbed me in the arm. "Hey! What wass that?" I asked Zaeden, "y-you can't go poking me with things," I pouted, "not until you b-buy me dinner first."

Now the Professor was outright sniggering at me and if I had had the strength, I would have given her the finger. As it was, I no longer felt like I was going to pass out but my arms and legs felt like noodles left in water too long. My glare only seemed to amuse the Professor further and I childishly stuck my tongue out at her.

"I can assure you, Miss Williams," Zaeden spoke up, "if I was going to entice you into my bed, I
would not be doing it by injecting you with a serum to keep you awake long enough to be treated by Aesel."

Okay, now my leg wasn't the only thing burning and I could just imagine my face several different shades of red. The choking laughs the Professor was making wasn't helping either, nor was the amused sparkle I could see in Zaeden's deep silver eyes. I coughed to clear the lump that had developed in my throat before nodded sheepishly, "right," I said, "um, I could probably walk by myself."

"The serum might make you feel more awake but that doesn't mean you still won't suffer the effects of the blood you've already lost," Zaeden told me as he began walking, the Professor falling into step beside him, "besides, what man would ever give up the opportunity to hold such a beautiful woman in his arms for any amount of time?"

"Smooth," I chuckled before I looked at the Professor, "wasn't that smooth?"

She smirked, "real smooth," she answered with a mischievous gleam in her eyes.

We all chuckled for a moment before falling into a comfortable silence that was occasionally broken when the Professor or Zaeden decided to make small talk. I listened to the two of them converse in the background as I kept my other ear pressed to Zaeden's chest, listening to his heart beating steadily.

It was almost enough to lull me off to sleep. Almost.

We got to the suites Zaeden and Aesel were staying in whilst the races were on and Zaeden placed me gently on a plush sofa before assuring me he would be back with Aesel before he left the room. The Professor sat across from me, looking at everything in the room suspiciously before her eyes found mine and they softened. "How's the leg, sweetie?" she asked me quietly.

I shrugged, "like a demon porcupine dog tried to take a chunk out of it," I replied simply.

"I'm sorry, Lottie," the Professor sighed, "I shouldn't have made you race today."

I aborted, "it's cute how you think someone could make me do anything I don't want to do, Professor. Had I not wanted to race today, nothing you could have done would have made me race. Kaze just chose a bad shortcut, that's all. No one's fault."

"Kaze?" the Professor asked me.

"Yeah, the A.I. in my helmet," I told her.

She frowned, "I've never heard of one having a name before, they usually identify themselves with a number."

Before I could reply to the Professor, the door to the room opened and Zaeden walked in with Aesel following just behind me. Aesel smiled when he saw me, the smile only dimming a little at the sight of the Professor before he made his way over to me. "So, a Souleater, huh?" he tried to joke as he inspected my leg closely.

"Well, I did always want a dog," I joked back, breaking the tension in the room as Ariel chuckled at our poor attempt at a joke. "So, think it can be saved?" I questioned, motioning to my leg. "don't know if you can tell, but I'm very attached to it."
"I can see that," Aesel chuckled, "don't worry, winime," he assured me, "we shall have it back to normal before your next race."

I threw my head back with a groan.

I'd forgotten all about that.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, there it is. This is probably going to be three or four chapters instead of just two but I don't want to leave out details and events just to make it shorter. Anyway, what are your thoughts? What do you think is happening to Frankie? He sure isn't acting like himself. What about Charlie, how did you feel about her in this chapter? What do you think of Zaeden? When I picture him I kind of picture a much taller version of Godric from True Blood. Please leave me a review and tell me what you think and I'll hopefully have Part II up in a couple days.

Translations:

Winimo - Little One (masculine)

Winime - Little One (feminine)

Medla Heri - Beloved Lady

All translations are from realelvish because elvish just suited the language I wanted for my characters to use.

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