A Place For Us To Dream

by dimensionhoppingrose

Summary

What would've happened if the Doctor had been the one trapped in the other universe instead of Rose? With the Doctor gone, Rose has to pick up the pieces and move on in a universe she's now alone in. Someone has to be the Doctor, after all.

Notes

This is an experiment I started some time ago, and I've been posting it on Tumblr. After many requests I've decided to try posting it on AO3 as well. This story is posted in its entirety on Tumblr. Requests for changes in later chapters will not be accepted.
“Offline.”

Rose watched, horrified, as the lever on the Doctor’s side clicked forward just a little, and the system went offline. The suction began to slow, the Daleks and Cybermen beginning to slow as well. No!

“Be careful!” Rose called as the Doctor tried to lean forward, to grab the handle and pull it back. But he couldn’t reach it without letting go of the magnaclamp…

And then he did just that, and Rose’s stomach dropped to her toes. No no no no…

He got the lever pulled back up, but before he could get back to the magnaclamp, the suction picked up again, stronger, and the Doctor was lifted into the air.

“Hold on!” Rose screamed over the sound of rushing wind. God hold on please…please…

But it was no good. She could only watch, terrified, as his fingers slipped.

“Doctor!”

A shout slipped off his lips as he tumbled towards the void, and she was about to let go herself, to try and catch him…

When Pete suddenly appeared. The Doctor barreled into him, nearly sending him into the void as well, but Pete hit the button and they disappeared again — to the parallel universe.

And finally the hole collapsed in on itself, closing. As the wind died away at last Rose fell to the floor, staring at the wall, number fingers still clenching the clamp as she waited for the Doctor to come back…

Because surely he would come back. He had to. Right?

“To another world, and then it gets sealed off.”

“Yeah.”

“Forever.”

“NO!”

Rose threw herself at the wall, nearly barreling into it. She slammed her hand against it furiously, screaming the entire time. “Bring him back! Bring him back!”

On the other side of the wall, a universe away, the Doctor just stared at the blank surface, his hearts pounding in his chest, air frozen in his lungs. He was barely aware of Jackie in the background, crying.

Trapped. He was trapped here. Without the TARDIS.

Without Rose.

“It’s stopped working,” he heard Pete say in the background. “You closed the breach. You did it.”
His mouth was dry as he rested a hand against the wall. Yeah, he had done it.

But at what cost?

Back in the other universe, Rose slid down to the floor, curling up against it as she sobbed. No, this wasn’t happening. This wasn’t happening. *This wasn’t happening.*

What was she supposed to do? She didn’t have Jackie anymore. She didn’t have Mickey. *She didn’t have the Doctor.*

She was alone.

The Doctor leaned against the wall, as if sitting there would somehow allow him to fall through it, back into his own universe. Back to the TARDIS. Back to Rose.

Of course that was impossible.

“What about Rose?” Jackie finally asked, her voice thick with tears. Her daughter was completely alone now. What would happen to her?

“Rose can take care of herself,” the Doctor replied quietly.

“But she doesn’t have anyone!”

“She’ll be alright, Jackie.” Mickey rested a hand on Jackie’s shoulder. “She’ll be okay.”

Jackie shook her head, wiping her eyes. “I’ll find a way back.” The Doctor’s voice was firm.

“You said this would close the—”

“I don’t care!” The Doctor snapped, cutting Pete off. “I’ll find a way back. I will.”

He wasn’t leaving Rose alone over there. He couldn’t do that to her.

He couldn’t.

Voices reached Rose’s ears, and she lifted her head off the wall. People were coming. Torchwood agents. Her lip curled in disgust at the thought. She pushed herself up, stumbling a bit — her legs numb from sitting curled in the same position for so long.

The TARDIS was downstairs. She couldn’t let these people have the TARDIS. She’d sooner set the ship on fire than let it fall into the hands of Torchwood.

Of course, she had no idea what she was going to do with the TARDIS. She let herself in with shaking hands, looking around the empty console room, her eyes falling on the Doctor’s jacket, tossed carelessly over the coral stalk — just like always. Tears welled in her eyes again, and she wiped them away quickly, hurrying up to the console.

“Help me,” she whispered, looking up desperately at the ceiling. “I can’t just leave you here. I need to get you away from these people. *Help me.*”

The ship hummed in response, and a button lit up on the console. The TARDIS would guide her the best she could. Rose hit the button, following the TARDIS’ instructions as she worked her way around the console fast as she could. It was a bumpy take off, but it went surprisingly well all around — not counting Rose almost getting thrown head-first into the console.
But finally they were back in the vortex. Rose stood there for a moment, just staring at the console before she walked over to the captain’s seat, dropping onto it and curling up tight.

Gone. The Doctor was gone. Jackie was gone. Mickey was gone. Everyone was gone. She had no one left.

She had no one.

The TARDIS hummed, trying to comfort her. Not completely alone. She still had the ship.

“What happens when I’m gone?”

Jackie’s earlier words just seemed cruel and sharp now.

It was a good question though — what was going to happen now?

“I need to get back to him.”

The words were shaky but determined as Rose pushed herself up. She knew nothing about parallel universes, nothing about how to move between them, but she did know one thing — she had to get back to him.

“You’ll help, right?” She asked the TARDIS, pushing herself off the seat. The TARDIS hummed a confirmation, though she already knew it was useless. The walls were closed. There was no way to get through.

But Rose wouldn’t accept that as an answer.

So the TARDIS brought the library up for her, leading her to the right section that would teach Rose everything she needed to know about parallel universes. Unfortunately quite a bit of the text was in Gallifreyan, making it absolutely useless. And the stuff that could be translated might as well have been another language for all Rose actually understood.

“I’m an idiot!” She finally shouted after an hour, throwing a book across the room. It hit the wall with a smack before dropping to the floor. “I can’t even pass twenty-first century sixth-year math, never mind trying to understand futuristic…rocket science or whatever the hell this is!”

She buried her face in her hands, breath quickening as she tried not to break down. She couldn’t do this. She couldn’t do this.

The TARDIS gave a hum, trying to comfort Rose as the blonde curled up on the couch, giving into tears once more. She couldn’t do this. She was never going to get back to the Doctor.

She couldn’t do this.

The day finally crashed down on Rose completely, and with a little nudge from the TARDIS she managed to pass out, still curled up on the couch.

Sleep wasn’t exactly peaceful, however. She was only out for three hours before she jerked awake again, gasping for breath, the image of the Doctor falling towards the void still dancing before her eyes.

God she was never going to stop dreaming about that.

A shower and a change of clothes later, Rose was back in the library. She got all the books together that weren’t in Gallifreyan, sat down on the couch, and started reading. She didn’t understand a
damn word of it, and the TARDIS helpfully placed a dictionary next to her so she could look up all the words she didn’t understand. Which was most of them.

Time didn’t pass in the vortex — there were no minutes or hours or days. Just Rose, suspended in nothing as she read through each book and then re-read them, determined to understand everything. Eventually the TARDIS started flicking the lights, trying to chase Rose out of the library. She hadn’t eaten since before they’d gone to Jackie’s. She needed food.

Rose scowled at the ceiling as the lights flickered. “I’m busy.” Another flicker. “What? What do you want from me?”

Another flicker. She wanted Rose to get out of the library and go to the kitchen, now conveniently placed right across the hall. “You want me out of the library don’t you?” Another flicker, two short bursts. Yes. “Fine, fine…”

She sighed as she dragged herself up, bringing a book with her of course. She went to the kitchen, just like the TARDIS wanted, making a few sandwiches. She settled down at the table, reading as she ate. It was starting to get easier to understand. That was good, right?

As soon as she finished eating she went back to the library, settling down with her books again. She sat there until she fell asleep.

And when she woke up the next morning, she started studying again.

And that became Rose’s life. Long bouts of studying broken up by flickering lights to signal that Rose had gone too long without eating.

“What if there’s still a crack left?” Rose asked suddenly, her head snapping up from the book she was reading for the fifth time — the thought had hit her suddenly. “I know the breach is closed and everything, but things like that, they must take time to heal. Like a broken bone. It can’t all heal at once, right?”

The TARDIS gave a slightly high-pitched hum in response. Rose had learned to interpret the hums — high-pitched like that was affirmative. Lower was negative. “If I could find the crack…maybe I could use it to break through?” Slightly lower hum in response. “You can’t say no for sure, you don’t know! Is there anything I can do to find one of these cracks?”

Another hum, and Rose abandoned her books for the first time, hurrying to the console room where a computer was flashing. Rose checked it — everything was in Gallifreyan. “Can’t you translate?” She asked desperately. “Or…I don’t know, switch languages or something? I can’t understand this spinny stuff.” No answer, and Rose sighed. They’d have to figure this out…

No. No they wouldn’t. Because she would bring the Doctor back and he could read this spinny stuff.

“Are you scanning?” Affirmative hum. “Let me know when you find somethin’.”

Rose needed to figure out what she was going to do when the TARDIS finally found that crack. “What do you think?” She asked as she walked back to the library. “Anything in particular I should be focusing on?”

The TARDIS supplied her with a few books to go over. She sat down and got to work.

* * * * *

“Jackie wants you to come home.”
The Doctor looked up from the computer he was typing away furiously at, raising an eyebrow at Pete, who was standing over him.

“I’m working.”

“You’ve been working for a week now.”

“It hasn’t been a week.”

“No, you’re right. More like nine days.”

The Time Lord shook his head, sighing. “I can’t go home yet.”

“Doctor you’re not going to figure out the answer in one more night. Just go home. Eat a good meal. Get some sleep. And this is coming from Jackie, not me.”

Which meant it wasn’t a request and couldn’t be ignored. The Doctor finally stood up, pulling his glasses off. “Right. I’m coming.”

It had been three months. Three long, miserable months since the Doctor had been trapped in this universe. He had thrown himself into working on finding a way back to Rose, so far with no luck. No surprise, but it still felt awful.

When he wasn’t taking advantage of Torchwood’s facilities, he stayed at the Tyler mansion, at Jackie’s request. The blonde had taken to mothering the Doctor, throwing herself into taking care of him most likely to distract herself from thinking about her daughter.

Not that it worked. The Doctor had caught her crying more than once. She wanted Rose back.

So did the Doctor.

“Oh look, you’re alive!” Jackie said when Pete and the Doctor walked through the door. “Surprised you haven’t starved to death.”

“Even if I did I’d probably just regenerate—”

“Don’t start. Get in the kitchen. There’s a plate of food waitin’ for you.”

“Yes Mum,” the Doctor mumbled, a bit sarcastically, as he went to get the food.

“Watch it or I’ll ground you!” Jackie called after him.

Three months. Three months trapped in this god forsaken world, spending day after day at Torchwood until Pete, acting as Jackie’s proxy, forced the Doctor to go home, eat, and sleep.

And then the cycle repeated again.

It was maddening.

“How long do you think it’s been over there?” Jackie asked suddenly, and the Doctor looked up from his plate of food to see her standing in the door.

“It’s hard to tell. Time moves slower there then it does here, but it’s not an exact science. She could be a week behind us or a month.”

Jackie moved sit across the table from the Doctor, eyes bright — a tell-tale sign she was about to start
crying. “What do you think she’s doin’ right now?”

“I don’t know,” the Doctor said honestly. “Maybe she went back to your flat. She’s gonna need a place to live now.” It made him wonder about the TARDIS. Was it still in Torchwood? Had they gotten their hands on her?

“God that must be drivin’ her half mad. She got so hyped up travelin’ with you, now…”

And now she was going back to life, day after day. Living alone. It must’ve been hell.

It broke the Doctor’s hearts just thinking about it.

“She’ll be okay. She’s strong.”

“Oh I know that better than you.” Jackie snorted. “Strong and stubborn.”

“Just like her mother.” A small smile pulled at the Doctor’s lips. Jackie returned it.

“I couldn’t do what she did with you. Even when I was her age I wouldn’t’ve been able to.”

“Oh, I dunno.” The Doctor took a bite of food, chewing thoughtfully. “You remind me a bit of someone I used to know. And no I don’t mean your daughter. She was young and passionate and stubborn and caring…”

“Sounds like Rose to me.”

The Doctor laughed. “Yeah, it does. I seem to attract those types. But no, her name was Sarah Jane. I think you’d two get along if you ever met. Found her again recently, actually. Still fighting the good fight.”

“Bless her soul. Give me a quiet night at home any day.”

“Oh there’s an adventurer in you somewhere,” the Doctor teased. “Admit it, you loved coming along with us.”

“I’m just glad we didn’t end up on Mars.” Jackie snorted, and the Doctor’s smile turned a bit sad. Maybe Mars would have been better than where they’d ended up.

“Be honest with me, Doctor.” Jackie’s voice turned serious. “Do you think you’ll be able to get back to her?”

The Doctor looked down, staring at the plate for a moment. “I don’t know,” he admitted. “But I’m going to try like hell though.”

Jackie nodded, reaching across the table and resting her hand on the Doctor’s. “Thank you.”

He smiled. As much as being stuck in the universe was awful…

At least he had a family to be with.

* * * * *

Rose was absolutely exhausted. The words on the page were starting to run together, making even less sense than usual. She closed her eyes for a moment before forcing his eyes open again, breathing deep. She needed to focus on this. She was so close…
The TARDIS hummed suddenly, and Rose bolted up, running to the console room. One of the screens on the console was blinking madly. “You found something?” An affirmative hum, and Rose let out a shout of triumph. “You’re brilliant! Absolutely brilliant!”

The TARDIS programmed in the coordinates for her, and she clumsily piloted her way to the place before going to get the books she’d been reading and making a pot of coffee. She was so close. So close.

She just needed a little more time.

* * * * *

Stupid ceiling.

The Doctor lay in bed, staring at the darkened ceiling. He’d stared at it so many nights now — at least twice a week for six months now. It was slowly driving him insane.

The clock ticked over to four a.m., and it was obvious the Doctor wasn’t actually sleeping tonight. Oh well. He closed his eyes, focusing on reaching out. He’d been trying to reach the TARDIS, just because. He knew there was no chance of finding her...

So it was incredibly shocking when something brushed back against his mind.

He shot up, straight as a board, eyes wide as he reached out again. And again, he felt something come back. The TARDIS. The TARDIS.

“Jackie!”

Needless to say, no one was thrilled with the very early-morning wake up call. Jackie looked ready to murder the Doctor as they gathered downstairs, and Mickey was falling asleep. Pete was the only one halfway alert. And of course he was the only one who didn’t really understand.

“So you’re saying your ship — that big blue box — was talking to you?”

“Yes, yes, but that’s not important. The point is she shouldn’t be able to talk to me because the walls are closed and that should cut off any communication.”

“How does a ship—”

“Pete, focus! This means there’s still a crack in the walls somewhere! She’s trying to get through! Rose is trying to get through!”

That had Jackie snapping upright. “How do we find this crack, then?” She demanded. “How do we use it?”

“Honestly? Not a clue. We’ll need to get there first.”

Surprisingly, it was Pete who said, “Then we better pack the car.”

It took days — days and days and days of driving, of following the TARDIS’ call. It was a very cramped ride, but the Doctor barely noticed. He was too busy trying to keep track of the TARDIS to think about anything else.

It led them to a beach. The cold wind whipped through the air, hitting them in the face as they walked along the sand, looking around for something, anything. The call was strongest here.
This was it.

It was Jackie who saw it. “There!”

There was a glimmer in the air, faint and barely discernible. The Doctor moved closer, eyes wide. He had no idea what was going on, or what that glimmer could have been, but it was the best lead he seemed to have.

“What’s happening?” Jackie demanded as the Doctor moved closer.

“I don’t…”

The flicker took on a shape for a brief moment before blinking out again. It almost looked like…

“Rose?”

Back on the TARDIS, Rose hit a few buttons furiously, desperate. She’d been so close, she had seen them for a moment. She was almost there.

The air flickered again, and the Doctor stepped closer, pushing his glasses up his nose as if that would somehow help him figure this out.

“Hullo?” The call was shaky and cut out — and familiar. “Can you hear me? Doctor?”

“Rose!” The Doctor’s face split into a grin as she finally flickered into view. “What’re you doing? How are you—”

“What’s wrong with her?” Jackie demanded. “She…she looks like a ghost.”

The Doctor turned his focus back to Rose, who was looking down at herself. “Sorry, I have no idea what I’m doin’,” she muttered as she disappeared for a moment — coming back solid this time.

“There, is that better?”

Well she wasn’t see through anymore, that was something. But… “Still just an illusion,” the Doctor guessed quietly. Rose nodded.

“I think so. I’m not sure. I have no idea how this works.”

“How did you get through?” The Doctor asked. He couldn’t help it. He was curious.

“The TARDIS, she uh…she found a crack in the walls, they haven’t completely healed yet, and I…I found a way to get a projection through…”

“You did that?” The Doctor was impressed, to say the least.

“Yeah.” She rubbed her eyes. “I don’t really know how much time we have though—”

“Well can’t you just come through?” Jackie asked, reminding them that she was there, and Rose’s head snapped around to look at her. It was the Doctor who answered, though.

“She can’t. The entire thing would fracture, two universes would collapse.” His voice was dead. It was impossible. He already knew that.

Rose, apparently, didn’t. “You can’t be serious?” That was exactly why she had been trying so hard to get through — so the Doctor could tell her how to come through properly. “There has to be a way. There’s always a way.” They’d come back from so much worse. They could come back from this
too. Right?

“Not this time.” The Doctor’s voice was still flat. “That was the point of all this. Close off the walls. Save the universes.”

“What about Rose, though?” Mickey asked quietly. The Doctor looked back at the projection of Rose, a lump in his throat.

“I’m sorry.” There was no way for any of them to get back to her. Or for her to get to them.

She was trapped over there. Alone.

Rose squeezed her eyes shut, taking a deep breath as she tried not to cry. She had to be strong for them. Another moment, and she forced a smile as her eyes opened again.

“It’s okay. I’ll be alright over here. I’ve…I’ve got the TARDIS. If she’s good enough to keep the Doctor company for nine-hundred-some-odd years then she’s good enough for me.” The Doctor’s lips twitched into a small smile even as his hearts broke. She was trying so hard to be strong… “Enough about that though. What’s goin’ on here?” Her eyes swept over Jackie and Pete, who were standing hand-in-hand.

“I’m pregnant,” Jackie spoke up, her voice shaking. “Three months gone.”

Rose’s eyes lit up. “Yeah? Only took you twenty years to finally get me that sibling, huh?” Jackie gave a small laugh, wiping her eyes, and Rose’s gaze flitted back to the Doctor.

“What about you? How’s bein’ stuck on Earth goin’?”

“Well it wouldn’t be so bad if I wasn’t living with your pregnant mother…”

“Oi!”

The Doctor smirked, and Rose laughed a bit. “Yeah, good luck with that.” She shoved her hands in her pockets, rocking back on her heels as she watched the Doctor carefully. “This…This is it, then.”

“Yeah.” The Doctor’s voice shook slightly. “Anything you’re dying to say? Last words or what not?” He was joking, of course. He wasn’t expecting anything.

So Rose’s next words were a bit of a surprise. “I…I love you.”

His hearts stopped in his chest. It had always gone unspoken, of course. The thing they both knew but neither would admit to.

She was breaking their agreement.

“Quite right, too,” the Doctor said before he could stop himself. He jumped when Jackie slapped him upside the head. Yeah, he probably could have come up with something a bit better than that. Still, Rose smiled a bit, so that was something. “I…”

His voice drifted off as Rose started to flicker out of view, panic seizing at his throat. No no no no no!

“Rose—!”

But it was too late. She was gone. The Doctor stood there, staring at the place where she’d been, his mouth hanging open, tears slipping down his cheeks. Behind him Jackie broke down crying, Pete
holding her tight in his arms.

“NO!”

Rose flew to the console, slamming the buttons furiously, it was no good. Time was up.

They were gone.

Rose crumbled to the ground, curling up against the grating and crying. She’d thought this would work, she’d thought this would be her way back, she’d been so sure…

The TARDIS hummed mournfully in the background, trying comfort Rose. After a few minutes she took a deep, shuddering breath, pulling herself up and wiping her eyes as she started walking around the console. Gone. They were gone. They were all gone.

She was alone.

Something strange rippled through the air, and Rose turned around…to see a woman in white standing near the TARDIS doors.

“What?”

The woman turned around, eyes going wide when she saw Rose. “Oh!”

“What?” Was all Rose could manage.

“Who are you?” The woman demanded. Rose couldn’t even find it in herself to answer. “Where am I?”

“What?” How had she even gotten on the TARDIS?

“What the hell is this place?!?”

“…What?”
The Runaway Bride Part One

Chapter Summary

Rose meets Donna. Donna freaks out. Rose tries to figure out what's going on. A good time is NOT had by all.

Rose and the redhead shared at each other for a moment, eyes wide. “You…you can’t do that,” Rose said suddenly, shaking herself out of her stunned state. “We’re…we’re in flight, you can’t just…it’s impossible!”

“Tell me where I am!” The woman yelled. “I demand you tell me right now where I am!”

“I…I…” Rose had no idea how to answer that. She didn’t even know who this woman was. “How did you get here?” She finally asked.

“How the hell should I know?! I was halfway down the aisle and suddenly—” The woman cut herself off suddenly, eyes going wide. “Nerys. Oh this has Nerys written all over it!”

“What’s a Nerys?” Ros asked stupidly.

“What’s a Nerys? She’s a vile, evil thing, she had me kidnapped from my own wedding!”

“Kidnapped? Wedding?” She’d said she was halfway down the aisle. She was wearing a wedding dress. “You were gettin’ married.”

“Oh you’re brilliant! Why do you think I’m dressed like this?!”

Blimey. Right. “Sorry, sorry,” Rose said, shaking her head. “That was stupid, I know.”

The woman tilted her head, staring at Rose for a moment. “Are you alright?” She asked suddenly. “You’ve been crying. What’s wrong?”


“Were you kidnapped too? Did someone take both of us?” The redhead looked around, her eyes landing on the door. “Look, there’s a way out of here! Come on!”

And with that she grabbed Rose’s hand, dragging her towards the door. “Nononono wait—!”

Too late, Donna had already thrown the doors open — and stopped dead when she saw the nebula outside, her eyes going wide.

“What…”

Rose stepped up next to her, looking outside. “You’re in space,” she said quietly. “This is a ship — my ship now, I guess. It’s called the TARDIS.”

“How am I breathing?” Donna asked faintly.

“We’re protected. The TARDIS is protecting us.”
They stared for a moment. “Who are you?” The woman asked finally.

“My name is Rose. You?”

“Donna.”

“Are you human?”

“Of course. Is there an option B for that answer?”

“Sometimes.”

Donna shivered a bit. “It’s freezing with these doors open.”

Rose reached out, closing the doors gently and pulling Donna back towards the console. “I don’t understand,” Donna said weakly, looking around. “What is this place?”

“It’s called the TARDIS,” Rose explained gently. “Stands for Time And Relative Dimensions In Space.”

“It’s a space ship.”

“Yeah.”

“How did I get here?”

“I’m…honestly not sure.” Rose looked around, running a hand through her hair. This was bad. Everything about this was just…bad.

“Well…do I have to stay here?”

“No,” Rose said quickly. “No, definitely not. Come on, let’s get you home. Or…to the church, I guess, you were going down the aisle you said?”

“Uh…yeah. Yeah, Saint Mary’s on Hayden Road in Chiswick, London.”

Rose walked around the console, programming the coordinates in with some help from the TARDIS. “Come on then, let’s do this,” she muttered as she piloted them carefully. It was slow, but smoother than the Doctor had ever managed at least. They landed with a thud, and Rose led Donna to the door.

They stepped out to find themselves standing among a bunch of buildings. “This isn’t Saint Mary’s,” Donna said as she whirled to look at Rose — then froze when she saw the box they’d stepped out of.

“Yeah, that’s no surprise, I’m not very good at this,” Rose muttered, not noticing Donna’s shock as she started walking around the TARDIS. “Only piloted her a couple times really, it’s seemed to go alright for me though, I dunno what happened…Donna?”

The bride was hurrying away though.

“Donna, hang on!”

“Leave me alone!” Donna snapped over her shoulder. “I just want to get married!”

“Please, just come back to the TARDIS,” Rose begged. Something wasn’t right here. She didn’t like it.
“No way, that box is too weird!”

“It’s just, it’s bigger on the inside — okay, yeah, that’s weird,” Rose admitted. “But just, come on, come back. Please.”

“Ten past three,” Donna railed. “I’m gonna miss it.”

“Phone them, tell ’em where you are.”

“How do I do that?”

“I’ve got a mobile, here,” Rose fumbled to get her mobile out of her pocket. “As long as you’ve got the number, you can call.”

Donna stopped, looking back at her for a moment. “It’s just a phone?” She asked. “Not some…alien contraption?”

“Just a phone. I got at the mobile store in London a year back. Just a regular old phone. Go on, take it.”

Donna took the phone uncertainly, dialing a number while Rose looked around. Something felt so… wrong here. It made her nervous.

“Mum, get off the phone and listen!” Donna railed — probably leaving a message. “I’m in — oh my god, I don’t where I am! It’s a street, there’s a WH Smith, but it’s definitely Earth!”

She hung up, looking thoroughly annoyed. “Come on, let’s—”

But Donna was already running off. “Fine, I’ll get a taxi then!”

“No, Donna, please!” Rose grabbed her hand. “Please, I know this is freaky and you’re overwhelmed and you just want to get back to your wedding and I promise I’m going to do that for you but I don’t have money for a cab and I’m guessin’ you don’t either and now’s not really the time to see if anyone’s feelin’ charitable enough to give you a ride for free. I know the ship freaks you out but I promise it’ll get you there faster than any taxi—”

“You had your chance, you couldn’t even land the mad thing in the right place!”

“Alright then, tell me exactly how you plan on payin’ for the taxi you want to hail.”

That brought Donna up short. “Exactly.” Rose gave her a gentle tug. “Come on now, back to the TARDIS.”

As they walked along — Donna clearly following against her better judgment — Rose’s eyes caught sight of a group of Santas playing God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen. “Is it almost Christmas?” She asked, surprised.

“It is Christmas. Blimey how long’ve you been floating around in that mad ship?”

“Too long, apparently.” Rose sighed. She started to look away from the Santas — only to realize something very odd. Her head snapped back and she stopped.

“Oi, what’re you doing?” Donna demanded. “You said you’d get me back to the—”

“Duck!” Rose shouted as the Santas raised their instruments, and she dove at Donna just as the Santas fired. The shots missed them by inches.
“What the hell—?!”

“Never mind, I’ll explain later!” Rose hollered, jumping up again and grabbing Donna. “Just run!”

The Santas fired after them all the way back to the TARDIS. Rose slammed the doors shut behind them, hurrying up to the console. “What’s going on?!” Donna demanded, clearly panicking.

“Wish I knew!” Rose called back as she worked around the console, trying to get them out of here.

“You mean you don’t?!”

“Of course not!” They took off, the TARDIS sparking crazily — Rose wasn’t even paying attention. Donna screamed as she was thrown backwards. “Hang on!”

“Oh thanks for the warning!”

It took a bit of work, but Rose finally managed to get them back to the vortex. Donna was clinging for dear life to a coral stalk, clearly terrified. And with good reason. “Is it over?” She asked shakily, straightening up.

“Yeah.” Rose rubbed her eyes. “Yeah, it’s over.” For now.

Donna was about to step away from the coral stalk when she caught sight of the coat hanging over it. She grabbed it, examining it critically.

“What’s this?” It was far too big to be Rose’s. The blonde’s head snapped around, eyes widening when she saw the coat.

“Nothin’.”

“That face didn’t look like nothing.”

Rose grabbed the jacket away from her, turning away. “Come on,” she muttered, going back to the console. The TARDIS was humming tiredly. She needed a break.

They landed, and Donna hurried out, wanting to be away from the mad box. But they still hadn’t made it to the church. They’d landed on a rooftop. She sighed, looking around. Rose started to follow, but stopped when the TARDIS gave a hum. She looked back to see a sonic screwdriver sitting on the console. Obviously the TARDIS wanted her to have it. She scooped it up, stowing it in her pocket.

“Did we miss it?” Rose asked quietly as she finally stepped out as well, still holding the jacket.

“Yeah.” Donna’s voice was flat.

“Still got the honeymoon,” Rose pointed out, trying to make her feel better.

“Just a holiday now.”

“Oh…right. I’m sorry.”

Donna shrugged, going to sit on the edge of the roof. “Not your fault.”

“First time for everythin’ I suppose,” Rose said with a chuckle as she walked over. Donna wrapped her arms around herself, shivering a bit, and after a moment of hesitation Rose set the jacket on her shoulders before settling down next to her.
“God whoever wore this thing must’ve been skinny,” Donna muttered as she adjusted the jacket. “This thing wouldn’t fit a rat.”

Rose smiled, looking out over the city. “It was my friend’s.”

“Well your friend was a skinny rat.”

Rose laughed at that. “Yeah, I guess he was. Never really thought about it.”

“So what happened to him? He step out for a space walk and never come back?” Rose’s smile faded a bit.

“He’s uh…he’s gone somewhere. It’s a long story.”

Donna seemed to get that Rose didn’t talk about it. She looked away, eyes scanning the rooftops for a moment. “What were those things, then? The robot Santas, what’re they for?”

Rose shrugged. “They’re just scavengers, the Santa thing is a disguise so they can blend in. Met them last Christmas.”

“Why, what happened then?” Donna asked curiously. Rose raised an eyebrow at her.

“Great big spaceship over London? People standing on rooftops? You didn’t notice?”

“I had a bit of a hangover.”

“Oh blimey.” Rose sighed, closing her eyes. “Some hang over. I spent Christmas day with a friend. And my mum. And an ex.”

“The ‘friend’ being the rat with the jacket?” Donna asked. Rose ignored the implied quotes around “friend.”

“Yeah, that’s him. It was a good time.” And now they were all gone…

“So what happened to your friend anyways? Gone somewhere and a long story isn’t very descriptive.”

Rose shook her head, eyes snapping open again. “What’s more important is why do you have robot mercenaries coming after you? And how did you get inside the TARDIS?” She focused on Donna. “What do you do for a living?”

“Secretary,” Donna replied, confused.

“Where?”

“Place called HC Clements. That’s where I met my fiance.”

Rose shook her head, running a hand through her hair. “Tell me about your fiance. Who is he?”

“His name’s Lance, he’s head of HR. He brought me coffee every day!” She went a bit starry-eyed at that, and Rose sighed. Great. “And this place, it’s pretty posh, and Lance thought everyone else was snotty too, so it was just the two of us and coffee. He was so nice to me…”

“And how long ago was that?” Rose prompted as Donna’s voice drifted off dreamily.

“Six months ago.”
Rose blinked, surprised. “Bit quick to get married,” she commented, and Donna shrugged.

“Well, he insisted. And he nagged, and he nagged me…and he just wore me down. And then finally, I gave in.”

What a love story, Rose thought, shaking her head. “What does HC Clements do?”

“Oh, security systems.” Donna waved it off, finding it unimportant. “You know, entry codes, ID cards, that sort of thing. If you ask me, it’s a posh name for locksmiths.”

“Keys,” Rose said slowly. Donna shook her head.

“Anyways, enough of my CV. Come on, it’s time to face the consequences.” Donna pushed herself up, sighing. “Too bad your mad ship isn’t a time machine,” she commented wistfully.

“Yeah well…even if it was, can’t go back on your own time-line,” Rose said as she stood. Donna raised an eyebrow.

“What are their rules to time traveling now?”

“Yup.” Rose’s lips popped on the p. “Very important rules too. Come on, third time’s a charm.”

“Oh, I had this great big reception all planned.” She sounded so sad. “Everyone’s gonna be heartbroken.”

Rose gave Donna’s shoulder a light squeeze before she set to work.

Third time was indeed a charm, and this time Rose landed without issue right where they needed to be. “Is that…music?” Donna asked, bewildered, as she stepped out of the TARDIS, with Rose right behind her, and the faint sound of music reached their ears. They walked through the doors…

And saw everyone dancing away and partying. Donna’s mouth was on the floor as she looked around. It took a moment for them to notice her and for the fun to stop.

“You had the reception without me?” She asked in disbelief. A dark-skinned man forced his way through the crowd.

“Donna, what happened to you?”

“You had the reception without me?” Rose rested a hand on Donna’s shoulder, giving her a comforting squeeze. “They had the reception without me!”

“I noticed,” Rose said quietly. It seemed very unfair. How could anyone be so cold?

“Well it was all paid for!” A blonde woman in the crowd spoke up. “Why not?”

“Thank you, Nerys!” Oh, so that was Nerys. No wonder Donna didn’t like her.

“Well, what were we supposed to do?” A second woman spoke up. “I got your silly little message in the end. I’m on Earth? Very funny! What the hell happened?! How did you do it? I mean, what’s the trick, because I’d love to know!”

Everyone started talking at once, babbling on, and finally Donna burst into tears. Everyone stopped talking instantly, and the man Rose assumed was Lance shuffled forward, wrapping her in a hug.

Rose stepped back as everyone else started applauding — except Nerys. Rose felt bad for a moment — until Donna caught her eye and winked.
Oh she was good.

And just like that, the party resumed. Everyone went off to dance, and Rose went to stand at the bar, watching the party go on. It was nice, she supposed, seeing everyone so happy.

Even if she just wanted to go curl up in a corner and cry.

She pulled out her phone, leaning against the bar as she searched HC Clements, scrolling through the site. Boring, boring…

HC Clements, sole proprietor — Torchwood.

Not boring. Rose’s lip curled a bit — Torchwood. Of course it was Torchwood, wasn’t it always?

She looked up, looking around again, and she caught sight of someone filming the reception. After a moment she worked her away across the room to the man.

“Excuse me?” She said kindly as she approached. “Were you filming earlier? When the bride disappeared?”

“Oh, I taped the whole thing,” the man said excitedly. “They’ve all had a look. They said sell it to You’ve Been Frame. I said, more like the news.” As he spoke he rewound through the tape. “Here we are.”

Rose watched, shocked, as Donna dissolved into golden energy, flying off. “What the hell…”

“Clever, mind.” The camera man sounded strangely excited. “Good trick, I’ll give her that. I was clapping.”

“But I still don’t understand…”

The TARDIS hummed suddenly, alerting Rose. Something was wrong. She hurried to the doors, throwing them open — and her eyes went wide when she saw the robot Santas approaching. “Damn it.” She slammed the doors shut, running back to Donna. “Donna, Donna! They’ve found you!”

Donna whipped around, eyes wide. “What? How!”

“Don’t know, not important. Come on, we have to get everyone out of here. Now.”

Rose tried to yank her away, but she was frozen to the spot, panicking. “Wait, it’s all my family.”

“Out the back door, let’s go!” Rose hissed, finally yanking Donna toward the door. She threw it open — and froze when she saw the Santa robots there. She slammed the door shut. “Or not, then.”

“We’re trapped,” Donna moaned, taking a step back. Rose’s eyes swiveled to look out the window, and her gaze landed on a remote control one of the Santas was holding.

“Christmas trees,” Rose muttered, her mind racing. Donna whipped around to look at her.

“What about them?”

Images raced through her head of a Christmas tree cornering Jackie in her bedroom… “They kill.” Rose whirled around to look at the Christmas trees at the back of the hall. “Oh god.” She raised her voice. “Get away from the trees!”

Donna had no clue what was going on, but she’d learned not to distrust the blonde. “Don’t touch the
“Get away from the Christmas trees!” Rose ordered as authoritatively as she could, pushing her way through the crowd, trying to shove people away. “Get away from the trees, get back!”

“She’s barking mad,” Donna’s mother said in disbelief, grabbing her daughter’s arm as she tried to follow Rose. “Where’d you find her anyways? What’s a Christmas tree gonna—” She cut herself off hurriedly when she saw the plastic baubles raising themselves off the trees. “Oh.”

Everyone stood, frozen, as the baubles flew into the crowd — and promptly exploded. All hell broke loose, people screaming and tripping over themselves as they tried to get away, people being blasted away by the explosions. Rose’s eyes widened as her head snapped around, trying to figure out what to do. But there was nothing to be done. She didn’t have anything, not the Doctor’s smarts or his experience, all she had was herself, the sonic screwdriver clenched tight in her hand…

And a very pretty sound system not ten feet away.

She ran to it without a second thought, examining the deck for a moment before muttering, “Screw it’ and jamming the sonic screwdriver in, activating. A screech echoed through the room, vibrating the robots until they fell apart and the baubles fell harmlessly to the ground. The ringing continued in Rose’s ears even after she pulled the sonic screwdriver away. Oh that had been stupid…

“Are you okay?” She called as she sprang off the stage and over to Donna, who was crawling out from under a table with Lance. Both were understandably shaken up.

“Yeah…we are…” Donna looked around, clearly distraught. “But they’re not, we have to help them —”

“No, we have to get out of here,” Rose said firmly, grabbing Donna’s hand. “Come on, it’s you they’re after, and I, for one, want to find out why.”

“But we can’t just leave them!” Donna protested as Rose pulled her away, Lance following behind, bewildered. “They need help, you need to—”

“I need to what?” Rose asked, whirling back to look at Donna, eyes flashing. “There’s nothing I can do, Donna! I can’t help anyone that’s hurt, I’m not a doctor, I’m not an expert, I’m nothing. All I can do is take you somewhere safe until we track down who it is controllin’ those robots and figure out why they want you, and even then I can’t guarantee that I can do anything to help!”

She wasn’t the Doctor. She had never done this on her own, without anyone to back her up. She wasn’t some mythical nine-hundred-some-odd-year-old genius alien who was used to having all of time and space at his fingertips…

She was just Rose Tyler. And she was useless.

Donna stared at Rose, rather stunned. After a moment Rose heard the sonic screwdriver beep, and she looked down, blinking in surprise at the sudden rush of information that ran through her mind. She shook her head, dazed, trying to sort it out. Was that how the Doctor always used the sonic to examine things?

“What?” Apparently even after all that, Donna still trusted Rose. Good on her. “What’s wrong?”

The Runaway Bride Part Two

Chapter Summary

Part 2 - Rose continues trying to navigate her first adventure without the Doctor. Donna is somewhat helpful.

“I don’t understand.” Donna said as she followed Rose through the halls of HC Clements, Lance trailing behind them. “What are we doing here?”

“It might just be locksmiths now, but HC Clements was brought up twenty-three years ago by the Torchwood Institute.” That could only be trouble.

“Who are they?” Donna asked blankly.

“They were responsible for the battle of Canary Wharf.” That just earned her another blank look. “Cybermen invasion. Skies over London full of Daleks.”

“Oh…I was in Spain.” Donna waved it off.

“They had Cybermen in Spain.”

“Scuba diving.”

Rose shook her head, tugging at the hair. “That big picture, Donna. You keep missing it. Torchwood was destroyed — thank god — but HC Clements clearly stayed in business. Looks like someone else came in and took over the operation.”

“But what do they want with me?”

“I’m…not sure.” That was the part that was still bewildering Rose. Donna was sweet (and from the sounds of it living a life that was far below her), but she was as human as the next person. “But somethin’ happened to you that made it possible for you to be transported to inside the TARDIS. That’s not possible unless somethin’ alien is goin’ on, and this has to be where it started.”

“What makes you think that?”

“Because where there’s Torchwood, there’s trouble.” Rose dragged a hand through her hair, looking around. “Lance, what was HC Clements working on? Anything top secret? Special operations? Do not enter?”

“I don’t know?” Lance shrugged. “I’m in charge of personnel, I wasn’t project manager. Why am I even explaining myself? What are we talking about?”

Rose made a face, moving to a computer and zapping it with sonic to boot it up. “What’re you doing?” Donna asked even as she shuffled to stand behind Rose.

“In my experience when you’re workin’ on somethin’ you don’t want people to know about, you do it in a place that doesn’t officially exist.” It took a moment and a few more goes with the sonic, but she finally managed to pull up the floor plans. “Right.” She ran to the elevator, the couple following
right behind her. “See that, then?” She said as she examined the buttons. “Underneath reception, there’s a basement. But look at this, there’s a button marked for a lower basement. A whole floor not on the official plans.”

“Are you saying his building’s got a secret floor?” Lance asked in disbelief.

“No, I’m showing you this building’s got a secret floor.” Honestly, what did Donna see him?

“It needs a key,” Donna pointed out. Rose responded by buzzing the button with the sonic screwdriver.

“Best universal key in the world. Right then. I’ll see you two later then, better get to safety.”

“Oh no way,” Donna protested, shoving her way into the elevator. “You’re not going down there alone.” She hadn’t forgotten Rose’s break down outside the reception hall. This girl needed all the help she could get.

“Goin’ down, then,” Rose sighed.

“Lance?” Donna prompted her fiance. He shifted uncomfortably.

“Maybe I should go to the police…”

“Inside,” the redhead ordered, and Lance sighed as he shuffled on.

“You’re a bit spineless, aren’t you?” Rose asked conversationally as the doors slide shut.

“Oi!”

They rode the elevator down in silence, peeking out cautiously when the doors open. “Nice ambiance,” Rose muttered as she examined the green-lit corridor.

“Where are we?” Donna asked, clearly bewildered. “What goes on down here?”

“Let’s find out.” Rose led them out of the elevator.

“Do you think Mr. Clements knows about this place?”

“Oh, I think the mysterious HC Clements is a part of this. Gettin’ mixed up in somethin’ bigger than him, somethin’ he doesn’t understand…the usual MO.”

“Usual? Donna asked in disbelief. “This happens a lot then?”

“Does in my world.”

“Your world is absolutely mad.”

“Tell me about it.”

They walked down the corridor for a bit, coming to a stop in front of a bulkhead door with the Torchwood symbol on it. “Of course, “ Rose muttered, moving to open it.

“It says authorized personnel only,” Lance protested.

“I’m authorized,” Rose replied flippantly. She didn’t really care for Lance.

“Authorized by who?”
“By a higher power,” Rose snapped, whirling back to him. “Now if you don’t mind I’m tryin’ to figure out why aliens want your fiancee, so if you can’t shut up and sit there like a good boy then go back upstairs and wait for us to finish savin’ the day.”

Lance just gaped, and Rose took that as the okay to go ahead. She got the door open, revealing a ladder leading up. “Right then,” she said as she grabbed the ladder, pulling herself up. “Be back in a bit.”

Lance and Donna leaned in to watch her go. “Donna have you thought about this?” The man hissed. “Properly? I mean, this is serious, we don’t even know who she is and we’re letting her run around like she owns the place! What the hell are we gonna do?”

“Oh, I thought July,” Donna said distantly as she watched Rose.

Rose, meanwhile, had reached the top of the ladder, and encountered another wheel-operated door. She turned it with some difficulty, pulling herself out…

On top of the Thames barrier.

“Oh…lovely.”

She climbed back down to Lance and Donna. “Thames flood barrier right on top of us,” she explained as she hopped off the ladder. “Torchwood snuck in and built this place underneath.”

Donna balked. “What, there’s like a secret base underneath a major London mark?”

“Oh I know,” Rose replied dryly. “Unheard of.”

They walked a bit further, finding another locked door. Rose didn’t even hesitate to undo the lock with the sonic screwdriver and let them in.

“Blimey,” Donna breathed as they walked into what looked like a laboratory. There were bubbling tubes covering every table surface. “What is all this?”

“Wish I knew,” Rose mumbled. More than ever, she needed the Doctor.

“You mean you don’t?” Lance rounded on her. “I thought you were some sort of expert, you’re saying you don’t know what you’re doing?”

“Oh, lay off her,” Donna stepped in. “She’s been more use than you, you were partying while I was missing!”

“I didn’t know!”

“You didn’t even try!”

While they argued, Rose grabbed a small container with a nob on top, holding it up to examine it. As soon as she touched the glass, a faint song began in the back of her mind and she blinked rapidly, shaking her head.

“What is that?” Donna asked curiously, momentarily forgetting about the argument.

“I’m not…sure…”

She wrapped her fingers around the knob, twisting it…
And the entire scene seemed to shift before her eyes. A golden haze fell over everything as the song burst to life in her head — not just the back but the front, the left, the right, everywhere. It was beautiful…

“Oh my god!”

And just like that, the trance was broken. Rose’s head snapped around to look at Donna, blinking when she saw the redhead glowing gold — just like the tube. “Make it stop!” She was clearly panicked. “Make it stop!”

Rose hurriedly turned the knob again, and the golden glow faded away. “What was that?!”

“That was the answer to about eighty percent of my questions,” Rose said as she examined the bottle. “I’ve seen that glow before. Whatever this is, the TARDIS is made up of the same thing. That’s probably how you were able to teleport on board, somethin’ activated this inside you, two like things were attracted to one another, and it was easier to transport you to the TARDIS than to bring the entire TARDIS to you.”

“So what does all that mean? Am I safe?”

That…was a good question. “I’m not sure,” she admitted. “But I’ll figure this out. I promise. I’m not losin’ you, don’t worry.”

“Oh,” a high-pitched, spindly voice interrupted. “She is long since lost.”

The trio whirled around just in time to see the wall in front of them slide up. Rose’s eyes narrowed when she saw a hole that seemed to lead all the way down into the earth.

“I have waited so long,” the voice continued, “hibernating on the edge of the universe until the secret heart was uncovered and called out waken!”

Lance took off as a group of black-robed robots turned their guns on Rose and Donna.

“Someone’s been diggin’,” Rose muttered. “Very Torchwood. I knew they were involved in this.” She raised her voice for whoever was talking to them to hear. “How far down does it go?”

“Down an down,” The voice sounded almost…joyful. “All the way to the center of the Earth!”


“Probably not but I’ll keep that in mind.” Rose turned her attention back their captor. “Where are you?” She called.

“High in the sky,” the voice echoed through the room. “Floating so high on Christmas night.”

“I don’t talk to thin air,” Rose called back. “Come on, let’s have a look at you then!”

“Who are you with such a command?” The voice shot back. Rose took a deep breath, holding herself up tall, fists clenched.

“Rose Tyler. Earth’s defender.” She put as much authority as she could into her voice. “You want this planet, you have to go through me.”
“Well then prepare yourself great defender,” the voice sneered. “It will take more than your bag of tricks to defeat me!”

They watched in shock as what looked like a giant red spider-like creature transported itself into the lab.

“What is that?!” Donna screeched.

Racnoss. The word flitted through Rose’s mind, quiet, almost nonexistent, and for a moment she wondered if she’d imagined it. “Racnoss,” she repeated out loud nonetheless, and she knew right off she’d made the right choice.

“Empress of the Racnoss,” the alien hissed. Rose narrowed her eyes.

“Empresses don’t usually leave their thrones to do dirty work. And they certainly wouldn’t come alone. Where’s the rest of your army? Or are you the only one?”

“Very good, little Defender.” The words were mocking. Rose pressed her lips thin.

“What’re you doin’ here, then? What do you want with Earth?”

“Ah, you don’t have all the answers then!”

Rose gritted her teeth, looking around. Her eyes settled on a web above their heads. “Uh…Donna? HC Clements, did he wear those ugly black and white shoes?”

“He did,” Donna replied, a bit shakily. “We used to laugh. Called him the fat cat in spats.”

Rose swallowed hard, pointing to a pair of feet sticking out of the web. A pair of black-white-and-shoe-clad feet. Donna looked up, eyes widening.

“Oh my god!”

“Mmm,” the Empress said, amused. “My Christmas dinner.”

“So you still haven’t answered my question.” Rose refocused on her. “Where’s the rest of your people? And why are you here? If the rest of your race is gone how did you survive?”

“And what about me?” Donna called, stepping in. “What did you do to me, how did you make me glow?! Oi, look at me lady, I’m talking! Where do I fit into all this? Answer me!”

“The bride is so feisty,” the Empress mocked.

“Yes, I am!” Donna snapped back. It was only then that Rose saw Lance sneaking behind the alien with an ax. “And I don’t know what you are, you big thing, but a spider’s just a spider and an ax is an ax! Now, do it!”

Lance started to swing the ax as the Empress turned to hiss at him. For a moment the scene froze — then they both started laughing.

“That was a good one,” Lance laughed. “Your face.”

“Lance is funny,” the Empress agreed. Donna just gaped.

“What?”
“Oh you bastard,” Rose hissed. She knew there was a reason she didn’t like him.

“What?” Donna said again, looking at Rose and then back at Lance. “Lance, don’t be stupid! Get her!”

“God, she’s thick,” Lance groaned. “Months I’ve had to put up with her. Months. A woman who can’t even point to Germany on a map.”

“Shut up,” Rose snapped at Lance, bristling. She rested a hand on Donna’s shoulder. The redhead looked utterly lost.

“I don’t understand.” Her voice was small.

“How did you meet him?” Rose asked gently.

“In the office. I told you that.”

“He made you coffee.”

“Every single day,” Lance added helpfully. “I made you coffee.”

“So that’s it then?” Rose returned her attention to Lance and the Empress. “You needed to dose her with this stuff—” She held up the tube still clutched in her other hand, “so you made her coffee and every day you poured this in and then you gave it to her.”

“He…he was poisoning me.” Donna shook her head. “But we were getting married.”

“Well, I couldn’t risk you running off,” Lance sneered. “I had to say yes. And then I was stuck with a woman who thinks the height of excitement is a new flavor of Pringle. Oh, I had to sit there and listen to all that yap yap yap. Oh, Brad and Angelina. Is Posh pregnant? X Factor, Atkins Diet, Feng Shui, split ends, text me, text me, text me. Dear God, the never ending fountain of fat, stupid trivia. I deserve a medal.”

As Lance went on, Donna visibly deflated. Rose squeezed her shoulder tightly, trying to offer as much comfort as she could in the moment. “Is that what she’s offered you, then?” She called to Lance, not even bothering to hide the disgust in her voice. “The Empress of the Racnoss? What’re you, her consort?”

“It’s better than a night with her.” He jerked a thumb at Donna.

“But I love you.” Donna’s voice was utterly small.

“Well that’s what made it so easy,” Lance shot back, smirking.

“You miscalculated though, Lance,” Rose stepped in. “Aliens like this, they don’t need humans for what you seem to think. Right now you’re just a tool, and after this? At best you’ll be the Racnoss’ pet. If they don’t kill you first, that is.”

“Who is this little girl?” The Racnoss asked Lance.

“Oh, she’s no one. Just a stupid chav.”

Rose had to try very hard not to be offended at that. “Who I am doesn’t matter. The real point here is, what’s down there? You’re clearly alone, what’s going to help you four-thousand miles down? That’s just the molten core of the Earth, isn’t it?”
“I think she wants us to talk,” Lance laughed.

“I think so too,” the Empress agreed.

“Well, tough! All we need is Donna.”

“Kill the little blonde!”

That seemed to snap Donna out of her trance. “No you don’t!” She stepped in front of Rose, shielding her.

“Donna, it’s okay—”

“No, I won’t let them!”

“At arms!” The Empress called, and the robots brought their guns up.

“Okay, but if you just—”

“Take aim!”

“If you just stop for a moment I think you’ll realize something very obvious—”

“They won’t hit the bride.” The Racnoss sounded confident. “They’re such very good shots.”

“Yes, okay, I don’t doubt that, but just think about it for a moment, just one tick. This stuff, this stuff inside Donna, it activated and drew her inside my ship. So, in theory, what would happen if you reversed it?”

And with that she turned the knob on the container. Donna started to glow again, and Rose thought she heard the Empress give the command to fire, but it was drowned out by the song in her mind.

And then the TARDIS built up around them. Rose dimly heard the Empress screaming as she turned the knob again, turning the container off, and the glow faded away from Donna, the song dying in her mind.

“So remember when you asked before about time travel having rules?” Rose asked as she sprang to the console. “Well, it does, because it’s real, and we’re gonna do it now, so hang on.” As she spoke she turned knobs and levers, and the TARDIS hummed to life. “Never piloted through time so this should be interestin’. But we need to find out what the Empress wants. If it’s buried at the planet’s core, than it had to have been there since the beginning. Since the Earth was created.”

And with that they took off, TARDIS shaking along as Donna clung to the railing. “There we go,” Rose said as they finally slowed down. She turned to look at Donna, who looked rather close to tears. “Hey.” Rose moved to pull her into a hug. “It’ll be alright. He’s an arse anyways.” That earned her a small chuckle as Donna hugged her back. “Come on, then. Beginning of Earth. Should be interestin’.”

Donna moved to look at the screen on the console. “Nah, that’s a bit small.” Rose grabbed her hand, tugging her toward the door. “Your way’s better.”

They walked over, and Rose pushed the door open. “Welcome, Donna Noble, to the creation of the Earth.” Rose smiled as she looked around the empty area.

“Where is it?” Donna asked, looking around.
“All around us. Dust and rocks. The Earth before it started to form.”

“Puts the wedding in perspective.” Donna sighed. “We’re just tiny.”

“My friend always used to say we were brilliant,” Rose said, a bit wistfully. “We make order out of chaos. Marking time with calendars and holidays, weddings, anniversaries, birthdays. It’s an important part of our lives.”

Donna looked over at Rose. “Our lives,” she repeated slowly. “So you are human.”

“I told you I was.”

“You have a spaceship that travels through time, excuse me for doubting you. Besides, when you were turning that knob and making me glow, your eyes were glowing too.”

“What?” Rose’s head snapped around to look at Donna. “What do you mean?”

The redhead started to answer, but was side-tracked by a peculiar rock floating by. “Look at that.”

Rose followed her finger, eyes narrowed at the seven-pointed star rock. “That must be them. I wonder what they’re doin’ all the way out here. Hidin’, maybe?”

“Hiding from what? What could scare giant alien spiders.”

“A war.” The TARDIS hummed affirmatively in the back of Rose’s mind. “The Time War. That must be it. They came out here to escape it.”

As they watched, the rocks and dust began forming around the spaceship. “Oh. That’s it then. They didn’t just bury something at the center of the Earth, they became it. Their ship was the first rock.”

A loud bang echoed from the console, drawing their attention away.

“What was that?!”

“Trouble,” Rose groaned as she ran back to the console. Donna had barely closed the door before the ship gave an almighty jerk, nearly throwing them to the floor.

“What the hell’s it doing?!” Donna called as she steadied herself.

“Unfortunately, I think they figured out my trick works in reverse. They can pull the TARDIS back!”

“Well can’t you stop it?” Donna asked, panicking. “Hasn’t it got a handbrake? Can’t you reverse or warp or beam or something?”

“I don’t know! Haven’t you noticed that’s a bit of a theme with me?!”

The TARDIS gave a loud hum, and Rose was surprised to see the extrapolator they’d taken from Margaret the Slitheen so very long ago appear on the console. “What’s that gonna do?!”

The TARDIS just hummed back, clearly annoyed Rose was questioning her. “Oh fine, but if this doesn’t work and I live long enough I’m dismantlin’ you!” Rose snapped as she grabbed the board.

“Are you arguing with the ship?!”

“Not now Donna!”
It was an unsurprisingly bumpy ride. When it finally ended, Rose was scared to peek outside — to find out if it had worked.

It was a relief when they came out in the corridor. “Oh brilliant,” Rose sighed, grabbing Donna and pulling her off the TARDIS. “Come on, before they try to pull us back again.”

“But what do we do?” Donna asked as they hurried along.

“I don’t—”

“I know you don’t know but let me ask my questions anyways!”

They stopped in front of the door, Rose staring at the Torchwood symbol. They would be responsible for this. She couldn’t even mourn properly without them messing that up too.

“But I still don’t understand. I’m full of this…stuff. What’s it all for though?”

“Obviously they need this stuff for something,” Rose said as she stared. “If my ship is made up of it too, it must be old, the Time Lords must’ve had somethin’ to do with it. They drove the Racnoss into hiding, they’ve probably been hibernating down there since the beginning of the Earth, billions of years, but now the stuff is alive inside you and they can use them to — to — Donna?”

She was too quiet. Rose whirled around — and the corridor behind her was empty.

“Oh damn it.”

She whirled back to the door, sonicking it open…and saw a bunch of robot Santas waiting for her.

Donna struggled and kicked, but it was no good — she was tied up in the web next to Lance, directly above the hole. “Oh I hate you!” Donna snapped at him, furious.

“Yeah, I think we’ve gone a bit beyond that sweetheart,” he sneered back.

“My golden couple, together at last,” the Empress cooed. “Your awful wedded life. Tell me, do you want to be released.”

“Yes!” They shouted at the same time.

“You’re supposed to say I do!”

“No chance,” Lance snapped back.

“Say it!” The Empress hissed, and they winced.

“I do,” Lance muttered grudgingly.

“I do,” Donna all but growled.

“I don’t!” The Empress laughed. “Activate the particles. Purge every last one.”

They started to glow, and the particles inside them flew down into the hole. “The secret heart unlocks,” the Empress said as she watched, “and they will awaken from their Sleep of Ages.”

“Who will?” Donna demanded. “What’s down there?”

“Oh how thick are you?” Lance snapped.
“Listen you bastard—”

“My children,” the Empress interrupted, “the long lost Racnoss, now reborn to feast on flesh! The web star shall come to me!”

Donna winced as something started climbing up the hole. “My babies will be hungry. They need sustenance. Perish the web!”

“Use her, not me!” Lance begged, jerking her head at Donna. “Use her!”

“Oh my funny little Lance!” The Empress laughed. “But you are quite impolite to your lady friend. The Empress does not approve.”

Donna watched, horrified, as the web released Lance, and he fell into the hole. “Lance!”

“Harvest the humans!” The Empress yelled. “Reduce them to meat!” Donna struggled against the web, trying desperately to break free. She missed the robot that was making its way up the steps. “My children are climbing towards me and done can stop them! So you might as well unmask, little girl!”

Donna’s head snapped around, eyes wide, as Rose pulled off the robot mask and robe. “Well, it was worth a shot. Alright Donna?”

“Oh yeah, I’m brilliant!”

“Well come on then, let’s get you down.” She pointed her sonic screwdriver at the web, and it began to unravel.

“I’ll fall!” Donna screamed.

“You’ll swing, it’ll be alright. Just hang on.”

The web came loose, and Donna grabbed a long strand, swinging across. It wasn’t the smoothest landing — she ended up hitting the landing below Rose and falling to the floor. “Better than goin’ in the hole,” Rose called down weakly. Donna just glared at her.

“Funny little girl.” The Racnoss sounded amused. Rose’s expression turned grim as she turned to look at the alien.

“Empress of the Racnoss, I give you one last chance. I can find you a planet. I can find you and your children a place in the universe to co-exist. Take the offer and take it now.”

“So funny,” the Empress said again, and Rose scowled.

“Is that your answer, then?”

“I’m afraid I have to decline.”

Well, she’d given them a chance. “Then you have no one to blame but yourself for what’s to come.”

“I’ll show you what’s to come. At arms!” The robots stood up straight. “Take aim!” They raised their guns. “And—!”


Rose held up the remote control. “The person who has this is in control.”
“Roboforms are not necessary,” the Empress snapped. “My children will feed on your human flesh!”

“Yeah, you’re right, I’m just a human,” Rose said conversationally. “But I’m not ignorant. I know all about aliens, and I know who drove your children into hidin’. I’m even friends with one of ‘em. The Time Lords of Gallifrey.”

The Empress gave a loud shriek. “They murdered the Racnoss!”

“That’s right. They did.” Rose pulled some Christmas tree decorations from her pocket.

“No! No! Don’t!” The Empress screamed. “Don’t!”

“You brought this on yourself. Remember that.”

And with that she threw the decorations into the air, directing them towards the ceiling and detonating them. The explosions resulted in holes in the corridor wall, letting the Thames come pouring in, and all hell broke loose as fires broke out, manhole covers burst up under the pressure. “No!” The Empress screamed as the water leaked down into the hall, drowning the aliens within. “No! My children! No! My children! My children!”

Rose just stood up on the platform, hands tight around the remote control as she watched the chaos below. Tears filled her eyes, slipping down her cheeks, masked by the water pouring over her.

“Rose!” It was Donna. “Rose come on, you can stop now!”

She shook her head, snapping back as she looked down. “Come on,” she called, “let’s get you out of here.”

They met on the stairs, running up. “What about the Empress?” Donna asked as they ran.

“Somethin’ tells me she used up all her energy doin’ this,” Rose replied. “I don’t think we’ll have to worry about her much longer.”

They came up on top of the Thames Barrier just in time to see the Racnoss ship be shot down. “Just, there’s one problem,” Donna said as she looked around.

“What’s that?” Rose asked curiously.

“We drained the Thames.”

* * * * *

“There we go,” Rose said with a sigh as they stepped out into the cold air on Donna’s street. “Told you she’d be alright. Tough old ship.”

“Better than me, apparently,” Donna sighed.

“Oh don’t say that, you were brilliant today.”

“What’ve I done? I missed my wedding, lost my job, and became a widow on the same day. Sort of.”

“And yet you kept a level head through it all,” Rose teased, scanning her over with the sonic screwdriver. “Nothin’ foreign in you. You’re perfectly safe.”

“Well that’s something I guess.” Donna sighed. “I’d better get inside. They’ll be worried.”
“Best Christmas present they could have.”


“Ah. I guess none of this really did anythin’ to change your mind on that?”

“Not even a little.” Donna laughed. “Still. Merry Christmas.”

“And you.” Rose smiled. “So, what will you do now?”

“Not getting married, for starters.” Donna’s voice was firm. “And I’m not going to temp anymore. I don’t know. I’ll travel. See a bit more of planet Earth. Walk in the dust. Just go out there and do something.”

Rose hesitated for a moment, and the TARDIS hummed encouragingly in the back of her mind. “Well you could…” Her voice drifted off, and Donna tilted her head.

“What?”

“Ya know…come with me.”

“Oh…” Donna breathed out. “No. I can’t.”

“Okay,” Rose said quickly. “Of course. Right.”

“Honestly, I don’t even think you should go anywhere. Everything we did today. Do you live your life like that?”

“Not all the time,” Rose defended herself.

“I think you do. It’s not safe.”

“But you’ve seen it out there. It’s beautiful.”

“And it’s terrible,” Donna argued. “That place was flooding and burning, and they were dying and you just…you stood there. I thought I knew you but then you were just standing up there like no one I had ever seen before.”

You even look like him.

Rose shook off Jackie’s voice as it invaded her mind. “It’s not that bad.”

“But it’s not for me.” Donna shook her head. “Tell you what I will do, though. Christmas dinner.”

“Oh, I can’t—”

“Come on, you keep saying you’re human, so come be human. Mum always cooks enough for twenty, there’ll be plenty.”

“No… I can’t. Really.” It would be too much like last Christmas — but still different. She couldn’t promise she wouldn’t burst into tears. “Go on, then, go enjoy Christmas with your family. It’ll be fine. I’ll be fine. Don’t worry.”

“Oh, alright then,” Donna sighed. “Fine. Be that way. Am… Am I ever gonna see you again?”

“If I’m lucky.” Rose smiled, turning to open the TARDIS door.
“Hang on, real quick,” Donna grabbed her arm, stopping her. “Promise me something. Promise you’ll find someone.”

“I don’t need anyone,” Rose said automatically.

“I don’t believe that. Everyone needs someone. No one should ever be alone. And you need someone to stop you.”

That rang ominously in the back of Rose’s mind. She ignored it. “Yeah. Thanks then, Donna. Good luck.” She smiled. “And don’t forget to be magnificent.”

“I will, yeah.” She was quiet as Rose moved to step into the TARDIS again. “Rose?”

She turned back around. “Yeah?”

“That friend of yours — the one the Racnoss was scared of…what was his name?”

A small, sad smile pulled at Rose’s lips. “He called himself the Doctor. That’s the only name I ever needed to know.”

Donna finally let her go, and she stepped up to the console, sending them back into the vortex. The Doctor’s trench-coat was still sitting on the jump seat, where Donna had left it when they’d headed to the reception. Rose stared at it for a moment before walking over, picking it up and wrapping herself in it. She curled up on the seat, burying her nose in the collar and breathing in the scent — his scent.

“Merry Christmas, Doctor,” she whispered, tears slipping down her cheeks as her eyes fluttered shut.
Get a glimpse of life for the Doctor living in Pete's World. It's incredibly domestic.

He hates it.

Jackie Tyler was a frightening person.

Jackie Tyler at eight months pregnant, however, was hell on two legs. The Doctor and Pete spent a lot of time at the office, needless to say. Which worked fine for Jackie, she hated both of them.

No, she didn’t. She was just very pregnant and very swollen and and missing her daughter more and more with every day that passed.

But Pete and the Doctor were so easy to take it out on.

Besides, them being out of the house served her purposes perfectly fine. Christmas was fast approaching and she was determined to make it a good one, even if she couldn’t have the one thing she wanted more than anything — Rose with her.

Her first order of duty was to make sure the mansion was completely decked out. She’d have done it all herself, but her bulging stomach made that a little impossible. The staff was happy to accommodate her, though. Part of her was curious about what her parallel self had been like — everyone had been terrified of her when she’d first come here. They’d relaxed once they realized she wasn’t actually a screaming banshee, but that had taken quite a few weeks.

Once the mansion was decorated (more done-up than even the most extreme house in a Christmas movie — Jackie had never had an area bigger than a little flat to decorate, she’d wanted to make the most of it), it was on to the shopping. That turned out to be more of a hassle than Jackie had expected — she wasn’t sure what Pete liked, and she had no clue what the Doctor would like. Pete was a bit easier to figure out, least, but what did aliens want for Christmas? Did they even have Christmas on his planet? Probably not. She had begrudgingly bought the leather-clad idiot a jumper last year on the off chance he did bring Rose home for the holidays, but obviously it’d ended up being a useless purchase. She never had gotten around to returning it…

But anyways she had no idea what he would like. She spent an entire day in the department store, buying every single thing she thought he would like or find remotely interesting. At some point she had to get lucky, right?

Thank god Pete was a millionaire.

Christmas morning dawned bright and early, with Jackie refusing to get out of bed. She did not feel good, and nothing was going to convince her that anything was worth getting up for.

Until she heard the Doctor trip and curse in a language she didn’t recognize.

“Oh!”
And just like that she was up and waddling out of bed. The Doctor was standing in the hallway still when she got there, thankfully, looking between the gift he’d tripped over and the line of gifts that went through the hallway, down the stairs, and (though he couldn’t see it) led to a massive pile near the tree (they hadn’t all fit under).

“Happy Christmas!”

The Doctor just stared.

The most amusing part of the entire morning was definitely making the Doctor open every single present (nearly fifty when all was said and done). Jackie laughed as he grew more and more incredulous, questioning every five minutes how many gifts she’d bought. She refused to answer (partly because she didn’t know the answer), just motioning for him to continue on. Pete sat on the couch with his own presents, laughing too hard to even worry about the fact that his wife had probably maxed out three of his credit cards.

Even the baby was piping up with his (or her — Jackie hadn’t wanted to know, and Pete had agreed to let it be a surprise) happiness. He kept kicking away, zeroing in on Jackie’s rib and nailing it repeatedly. It stopped being funny after the fifth or sixth time.

But it was a good day, and she wasn’t going to let anything ruin that.

Even if it would’ve been better if Rose was there.

The Doctor was thinking the same thing as he sat on the floor, unwrapping yet another present. He knew Jackie had gone out of her way to buy all these presents, distracting herself from the glaring absence of her daughter.

It should’ve been Rose there. This was her family, her life. The Doctor was an interloper at best. He didn’t belong here.

“This was Rose’s world. And he had taken it from her.

“No no no no no,” Jackie protested as she watched the Doctor’s expression fall. She waved a hand at him, trying to get his attention. “None of that broody teenage alien stuff, today’s—”

She cut off with a grimace, blowing out a breath with a pained noise. “What’s wrong?” Pete asked at once, all amusement gone.

“Baby’s kickin’ away. Gonna be a football player I swear.”

“Are you sure you’re alright?” Pete was clearly anxious. “You’re not in labor, are you?”

“Love, believe me, I know what labor feels like. This is nothin’.”

Pete still didn’t look too reassured, however. He stood and shuffled out, muttering something about calling a doctor. Jackie just shook her head, leaning back on the couch. Daft man.

And speaking of daft. The Doctor transferred himself to the couch, settling down beside Jackie. “Hullo,” he said quietly, focused on the unopened present in his hands.

“Hullo.”

“You didn’t have to do all this.”

“Oh don’t be silly. This is what you do for family.”
The Doctor finally looked over Jackie. After a moment he scooted closer, wrapping her in a (somewhat awkward due to her enlarged stomach) hug.

“Happy Christmas, Doctor,” she whispered, patting his back.

She couldn’t have her daughter, and that hurt like hell. But she had the Doctor. And that, surprisingly, was something.

* * * * *

Time felt like it passed slower than usual in this world — which was ironic. The Doctor suspected it was because he wasn’t used to actually living day to day life. It got even worse when he couldn’t go into Torchwood for some reason.

Pete was away on a business trip, and he didn’t want Jackie home alone, so the Doctor got stuck sitting at home with Jackie. He brought most of his research home with him so he wasn’t completely stuck at least, but he was still bored out of his mind.

It didn’t help that Jackie was in a foul mood and had spent most of the day snapping at anyone who looked at her the wrong way.

Needless to say, the Doctor spent a lot of time in Pete’s study trying to avoid her.

It was a little after three when the blonde let herself into Pete’s study. The Doctor didn’t notice right away that she was holding her stomach and clearly in pain. “Doctor?”

“Mmm?” He didn’t look up from what he was scribbling.

“I’m in labor.”

It took him a moment to process this. He looked up finally, blinking owlishly behind his glasses. “…Are you sure?”

“Doctor!”

“Right, right!” He jumped up, yanking his glasses off. “Uh…how’re we gonna get to the hospital?”

“Oh I thought we’d have a leisurely bike ride,” Jackie said sarcastically. “We’re driving!”

“Well I don’t think you should be driving in your condition and do you really want to let me behind the wheel of a car?”

“It’s either that or—!” She cut off with a pained grimace, gripping her stomach tight. “Oh god, oh god, oh god…"

The Doctor hurried around the desk, grabbing Jackie and letting her lean on him as she tried to breathe through the contraction. “Alright,” he said quietly when it finally passed. “I’ll drive you.”

How hard could it be, right?

He got Jackie settled in the passenger’s seat of the town car and hurried around to the driver’s side. “You do know how to drive, right?” Jackie asked suddenly, suspicious.

“Not a great time to think about asking that.”

“Answer the question.”
“It’ll be fine. I’m sure it’ll be fine. You should call Pete.” He knew the man would be heartbroken if he wasn’t there for the birth of his child.

“I tried, he’s not pickin’ up.” At least that managed to distract Jackie. “I left him a message. We can try again when we get to the hospital.”

The drive wasn’t nearly as bad as it could have been, at least. The Doctor only almost crashed once. “Never again,” Jackie gasped as they pulled up in front of the hospital. She and the Doctor had a very different idea on what not so bad was. “I will never get into a car with you again.”

“Hopefully you won’t have to,” the Doctor said as he got out of the car and rushed around to help Jackie get out. “Come on, let’s get you inside.”

The drive wasn’t nearly as bad as it could have been, at least. The Doctor only almost crashed once. “Never again,” Jackie gasped as they pulled up in front of the hospital. She and the Doctor had a very different idea on what not so bad was. “I will never get into a car with you again.”

“Hopefully you won’t have to,” the Doctor said as he got out of the car and rushed around to help Jackie get out. “Come on, let’s get you inside.”

The Doctor sat in the waiting room while Jackie was settled into a room. He tried to call Pete again, but again there was no answer. He sighed as he left another message.

Eventually a nurse came to get him, leading him to Jackie’s room. “Did he answer?” She asked desperately, and the Doctor shook his head.

“I’m sure he’ll be here. It’s okay.” He took Jackie’s hand, giving it a reassuring squeeze. “Just focus on yourself.”

She tried to smile, but of course a contraction chose that exact moment to grip her once more.

Seven hours, fifty-six minutes, and fourteen seconds later, Jackie was well into the active stage of labor. The contractions were strong, about five minutes apart, and her water had broken just a few minutes earlier. “Pete still isn’t here,” she whimpered as she leaned against the Doctor, watching the nurse change her sheets. “Daft man, nearly missed Rose bein’ born too, he just has to be the same in every bloody universe doesn’t he?”

The Doctor hugged her tight, sighing. “He’ll be here.”

“Too bad you don’t have that mad ship, you could go pick him up. Of course you probably wouldn’t get him back until after the baby’s third birthday…”

“Haha,” the Doctor said dryly as the nurse finished changing the sheets, and he helped Jackie back into bed. She gripped his hand tight as another contraction ripped through her.

Another hour passed, and Jackie was getting closer and closer to having to push. And flat out refusing. “No, not until my husband gets here.”

“Jackie I don’t think you have a choice—”

“Shut up,” she informed the Doctor harshly. She was not doing this without Pete. She refused.

“Jackie!”

Oh thank god. Pete ran into the room, looking harried and panicked, and Jackie could honestly say she had never been happier to see him.

“Where have you been?!”

The Doctor chuckled quietly as he backed out of the room, shoving his hands into his pockets and heading for the waiting room.

He was surprised to find Mickey already waiting there. “Mick-Mickity! What’re you doing here?”
“Stopped by the house and one of the maids let me know what was goin’ on. How’s Jackie doin’?”

The Doctor couldn’t help but feel a bit guilty as he sat next to Mickey. He probably should have called the man… “Alright. Pete just got here. Thank god.”

“Yeah I wouldn’t really want to be in the room when she’s actually giving birth either.” Mickey chuckled. “Poor Pete.”

“Better him than me.”

Mickey laughed at that, holding a closed fist out to the Doctor. “I hear that.”

The Doctor chuckled, bumping his fist against Mickey’s. They sat in silence for a few, staring at the wall. It was Mickey who finally spoke again. “What do you think Rose is up to now?”

It was a question they all wondered about. But none of them could provide a satisfactory answer. And this time was no exception. “I don’t know. But hopefully she’s happy.”

They both knew that was impossible, though.

It was another hour before Pete came out, looking absolutely exhilarated. “It’s a boy!” He said happily, and the Doctor and Mickey made similar noises of joy as they hopped up to congratulate him. He led them to Jackie’s room, where she was laying in bed holding a bundle of blankets. She smiled tiredly at Mickey and the Doctor, tilting the bundle so they could see the baby wrapped up inside.

“Oh he’s cute!” Mickey said happily as he leaned in to examine the little human. The Doctor stood in the background, hands in his pockets as he watched.

“Oh get over here you daft old alien,” Jackie said, rolling her eyes. He tried so hard to separate himself, but it was no use. He was part of their family.

Whether he wanted to be or not.

“Does he have a name?” The Doctor asked as he shuffled forward.

“Well we thought about calling him Doctor but then we realized how silly that name is.” The Time Lord gave Jackie an incredibly offended look, and she smirked. “Tony. His name is Tony.”

“Tony Tyler.” Poor kid. The Doctor knew better than to say that out loud, though. “Very nice.”

The baby made a small noise, and everyone laughed.

It would’ve been perfect if Rose could have been there.
Rose floated around in the vortex for a long time. For the first few days she just sat on the jump seat, wrapped in the Doctor's coat. For the first day she cried, because she couldn’t think of anything else to do. But eventually the tears ran out and she just sat there, staring blankly at the console until she fell asleep, then woke up again to repeat the cycle.

Everything that had happened with Donna had just left her positively exhausted. And reminded her that once again, she was absolutely useless. Eventually the TARDIS had put a book next to her, and she’d learned all about the Racnoss and Huon particles (what Donna had been dosed with). The Doctor would have known all this already though. He wouldn’t have fumbled around like an idiot with no idea what to do. He wouldn’t have said “I don’t know” to all of Donna’s questions. The Doctor would have known what to do.

Maybe Rose really should’ve just gone home. She wasn’t cut out for any of this. She’d probably destroy the universe before she managed to save it. What good was she?

The TARDIS gave a small hum in the back of her mind, trying to comfort her. She sighed as she hunkered down against the jump seat, letting her eyes flutter shut. And for the third night in a row, she fell asleep there.

The TARDIS gave her a couple hours to rest before suddenly giving an almighty jerk, sending Rose flying off the seat. She hit the grating with a thud and groaned, picking herself up.

“What was that for?!?”

The ship hummed, clearly unimpressed with Rose. “I don’t know what you want from me,” Rose said quietly, picking herself up again, still wrapped in the coat. She had nothing left to give. Nothing to be done.

She was spent.

But the TARDIS wasn’t having it. She gave another small shake, and Rose sighed as she stood, leaving the coat on the jump seat and going into the hallway, where the kitchen and library were waiting for her. The library door was locked, though — the TARDIS wanted Rose to eat first.

“Fine.” She sighed, going into the kitchen. She made a few sandwiches, which seemed to satisfy the TARDIS — she unlocked the library for her. And Rose sat down to get to work.

Being in the vortex — suspended in time — was a weird feeling. The TARDIS had always simulated the passing of time — day and night — to keep Rose’s human body from going to out of whack, but there was no real time. And with no need to simulate day and night — Rose had no interest in sleeping — the TARDIS didn’t bother. She studied and studied until the TARDIS encouraged her to go eat, then she studied some more until she fell asleep. Then she woke up,
showered, and the process repeated.

And for a very long time, that was how Rose lived. She didn’t even really know how long it was — measuring time was so impossible — but eventually the TARDIS stopped letting Rose into the library. “What the hell?” She asked, annoyed, giving the door a kick. The TARDIS just hummed. “Come on, I thought I was supposed to be studying.”

The TARDIS gave a small shake. It had been a very long time — probably a year or two by Earth standards — since Rose had actually left the TARDIS. The ship wanted her to get out for a bit.

“Alright then, alright,” Rose muttered, heading to the console room. “Let’s go check in on Earth, shall we? They can never go very long without getting into trouble…”

She landed them with surprising accuracy — she was starting to get better. They ended up in London two-thousand-seven. “Brilliant,” she said brightly as she headed for the door. “Oh, hang on, I want chips. Need money.”

The TARDIS hummed, and her wallet appeared on the console, full of money. “Wish life had worked that way,” she said with a smile as she grabbed the wallet, heading out. London two-thousand-seven. Best place to get chips, bar none.

She’d even managed to land them close to the chippy — she was definitely getting better. She sat outside the store, looking around, examining everyone that walked by. It was such a normal thing…

Something she’d done all the time before the Doctor. Before everything had changed forever.

It was nice.

Until her eyes settled in on a set of odd coils around the nearby hospital. “Ah,” she sighed as something in the back of her mind bristled a bit. “That’s why you landed here without an issue.”

There was something going on.

The TARDIS was humming mischievously as Rose returned. “Always findin’ trouble,” she teased. “I’m beginnin’ to think he was right about you — he wasn’t a bad pilot, you’re just a bad ship.”

Actually she was pretty sure it was both. She found a backpack and headed to the library, packing up a few books and storing her sonic screwdriver in the side pocket. The best way to figure out what was going on in a hospital was from the inside. And since she couldn’t pass as a doctor, being a patient would have to do.

The TARDIS hummed as she walked by the console, and she looked over to see a small wallet-like object on the dash. It almost looked like…

“Psychic paper?” She picked it up, and found it was exactly that. “Sonic screwdriver and psychic paper. Proper Doctor now, me.”

She stored the paper away, just in case, and headed out again.

After some research and finding herself on the list of the dead from Canary Wharf, she checked into the hospital under the name Marion Tyler, using the psychic paper to imitate an insurance card —blimey that was going to be useful.

What Rose didn’t realize until after she’d checked in was that people with stomach pains got almostno food — and if they did it was bland, easy on the stomach. Oh that was going to be wonderful.
Once she was settled in and left alone, she dug out one of her books to start reading. This particular one was an index of alien species — probably stuff she needed to know. She ended up reading herself to sleep.

And woke up to a man leading in a bunch of young group — interns, maybe. “Marion Tyler,” he introduced her. “Admitted yesterday with severe abdominal pains. Jones, why don’t you see what you can find? Amaze me.”

A young, dark-skinned woman stepped forward, looking Rose over. “That wasn’t very clever, running around outside, was it?” she asked with a small smile. Rose blinked, surprised.

“Sorry?”

“On Chancellor Street this morning? You came up to me and offered me a chip.”

“Mmm.” Rose made a face. “Don’t know why I would’ve done that. I mean, I do, I love sharin’ chips. But I’ve been here all night. Stomach pains you know. Not eatin’ too many chips right now.”

The woman — Jones — made a face right back. “Well that’s weird, ’cause it looked like you. Have you got a sister?”

“Nope. Only child, me.”

“As time passes and I grow ever more infirm and weary, Ms. Jones,” the bored head doctor spoke up.

“Sorry. Right.” She got out her stethoscope, checking Rose’s heart beat. “Is there…any possibility that you’re pregnant?”

“And here we have Ms. Jones demonstrating failed technique number one — checking the chart.” There was a slight sneer on the doctor’s voice, and Rose scowled.

“Hey, she’s tryin’ here. Lay off her.”

Everyone stared at Rose for a moment before the head doctor reached for Rose’s record, and dropped it when it shocked him.

“That happened to me this morning,” Jones spoke up.

“I had the same thing on the door handle,” another intern spoke up.

“And me, on the lift.”

“That’s only to be expected,” the doctor said. “There’s a thunderstorm moving and lightning is a form of static electricity, as was first proven by…anyone?”

Nobody said anything for a moment. “Benjamin Franklin,” Rose finally spoke up. She and the Doctor had met him once.

“Correct.”

“And I do hope you’re not gonna give any of them a hard time for not knowin’ that,” she added as the group moved to leave. That earned her a slight glare from the doctor. What an unpleasant man.

Rose waited until they’d been gone for a few minutes before clambering out of bed, packing her book up and heading off. There was something tingling in the back of her mind. It was…odd. Like
she could tell something was wrong, something was going to happen. But she had no clue what.

She spent a little over an hour walking around. Some time in there, it started raining, drops pelting against the window like tiny bullets. “Brilliant,” she murmured, running a hand through her hair. This place would probably turn into a zoo soon, rain always brought out the worst in people.

A familiar voice reached Rose’s ears as she walked past a break room. “Yeah, but listen, I’ll tell you what to do…”

Jones, Rose finally placed it. She’d seemed nice. Too bad she had to deal with that arse—

Wait. That rain looked…weird. Rose made a face, stepping closer to the nearby window. Was it…raining up?

“Oh I knew there was somethin’ weird goin’ on here,” she muttered as a clap of thunder rang through the air and lightning flashed — and suddenly the entire building tilted. Rose grabbed the window sill to keep from falling as everyone around her screamed, hitting the floor.

It only lasted a few seconds, at least. Rose straightened up secretly, looking out the window — her eyes going wide when she saw the barren landscape sprawled outside.

“Oh please tell me we’re not where I think we are…”

Well one thing was for sure — she wasn’t going to be running around in a hospital gown. She sprang back to her bed, yanking the curtain shut and hurriedly changing.

“Don’t!” She heard someone scream suddenly. “We’ll lose all the air!”

“But they’re not exactly air tight.” Familiar voice — Jones. Rose yanked her shirt over her head. “If the air was going to get sucked out it would’ve happened straight away, but it didn’t. So how come?”

Oh she was smart. “That is brilliant,” she spoke up, finally announcing her presence as she yanked the curtain back, and the women turned to look at her. “And a good question at that. What was your name?”

“Martha,” the dark-skinned woman replied.

“Martha,” Rose repeated. “Martha Jones. Right then, so that’s the question of the hour. How’re we still breathin’?”

“We can’t be!” Her friend said hysterically. Rose gave her a gentle smile, resting her hands on her shoulders.

“But we are. And that’s what we need to focus on right now. We’re still breathin’, and we need to stay calm, especially you right now. You’re a doctor, people are gonna be lookin’ to you for guidance. So take a deep breath now, alright? Breathe and go take care of your patients. They need you.”

The woman took a deep breath, swallowing hard, and after a moment she shuffled off. Rose watched her go before turning back to Martha, hooking her bag over her shoulder. “Right then. Martha. Is there a balcony on this floor, or a veranda, or anywhere we can get outside easily?”

“By the patients’ lounge, yeah.” Martha jerked her thumb over her shoulder, and Rose grinned.
“Great. Fancy goin’ out?”

She was rather surprised when Martha said, “Okay,” as easily as she did.

“Glad you’re up for it. C’mon.”

Martha led her to the lounge, and Rose opened the door with a flourish, stepping out with the other woman right behind her. They each stopped to breathe. “We’ve got air,” Martha said finally. “How does that work?”

“Dunno,” Rose muttered. “I’m more focused on bein’ glad it does.”

They stared out at the landscape for a moment. “We’re on the moon,” Martha said, putting into words what Rose had been thinking. “But how?”

“Still workin’ that one out.”

Martha sighed, hands in the pockets of her lab coat. “I’ve got a party tonight,” she said after a moment. “It’s my brother’s twenty-first. My mother’s going to be really, really…”

“You okay?” Rose asked as Martha’s voice drifted off, shock starting to set in.

“Yeah.”

“Sure?”

“Yeah.”

“Do you wanna go back in?” Rose wouldn’t blame her.

“No way. I mean, we could die any minute, but all the same, it’s beautiful.”

Oh Rose liked her. “Do you think?”

“Sure. How many people get to go to the moon? And here we are.”

“Standing in the Earthlight.” It was beautiful. She was right about that.

“What do you think happened?” Martha asked curiously.

“What do you think?” Rose returned. She wanted to know Martha’s theory.

“Extraterrestrial.” She sounded quite confident. “It’s got to be. I don’t know, a few years ago that would have sounded mad, but these days? That spaceship flying into Big Ben, Christmas, those Cybermen things.” Blimey this was a refreshing change from Donna who hadn’t known about any of those. “I had a cousin…Adeola. She worked at Canary Wharf.” Rose’s stomach dropped. “She never came home.”

“I’m sorry,” Rose said quietly.

“Yeah.”

“I was there too,” Rose said after a moment, looking back at the landscape. “In the battle. I lost a friend too.”

Martha rested a hand on her shoulder, trying to be comforting. “I promise you, Ms. Tyler, we will
find a way out.” Her voice was firm. “If we can travel to the moon, then we can travel back. There’s
got to be a way.”

“Oh, you can call me Rose,” Rose told her. “That’s my real name. Marion’s my middle name.”

“Why’d you put Marion Tyler on your paperwork then?”

“I’m…technically dead. It’s a long story.” She stared at the air as she spoke, tilting her head. There
was something…odd about it. If she looked closely enough, she could see a faint shimmer… “Oh.”

She knelt down, picking up a pebble and tossing it. As expected, it bounced off. “Well look at that.
A forcefield keeping the air in.”

“But if that’s like a bubble sealing us in…” Martha put the pieces together slowly. “That means this
is the only air we’ve got. What happens when it runs out?”

That was the problem. “How many people in this hospital?”

“I don’t know…a thousand?”

“One-thousand people.” Rose sighed. “Suffocating.”

“Why would anyone do that?” Martha sounded faintly disgusted. And with good reason.

“I think we’re about to find out.” Rose muttered as three massive spaceships passed over the hospital,
landing nearby. They stared as aliens came marching out.


“That it is,” Rose agreed, grabbing her hand. “Now let’s see if we can get a better look at them,
yeah?”

They ran through the hospital, stopping at the landing above reception as the aliens walked in. They
watched as the leader took off his helmet, revealing a two-horned rhinoceros. “Hang on, I’ve seen
that before,” Rose muttered, digging out the book she’d been reading. “What was it, it started with a
J…”

“Blos so folt do no cro blo so so ro,” the alien said as Rose flipped through her book, and the others
drew their weapons.

“Er…” One of the interns Rose had seen earlier spoke up. “We are citizens of planet Earth. We
welcome you in peace—”

He cut off as the alien — “Judoon!” Rose said triumphantly as she finally found the page she was
looking for — pushed him against the wall and shining a blue light in his mouth.

“Please don’t hurt me!” The intern begged, “I was just trying to help. I’m sorry, don’t hurt me. Please
don’t hurt me!”

They watched as the Judoon played a recording of the intern’s voice, then plugged it into his suit.
“Language assimilated,” the alien said in English. “Designation Earth English. You will be
catalogued.”

He scanned the intern again, this time his forehead. “Category, human.” He marked the intern’s hand
as the Judoon set to work with scanning everyone else.
“What are Judoon?” Martha asked quietly as Rose read.

“They’re like…police. Sort of. Interplanetary thugs, more like.”

“And they brought us to the moon?”

“Earth is a level-three planet.” She’d learned that with the Doctor. “Going there is against…certain laws. But the Judoon must need something here, they moved us to the moon in order to get to us without breakin’ those laws. They need somethin’ here.”

“Well I hope they’re not looking for medical attention. We’re not veterinarians.”

Rose did her best not to laugh at that. “They’re testin’ people. They’re lookin’ for non-humans.”

“So…what does that mean? Is there an alien workin’ here?”

“Or as a patient. There’s an alien hidin’ in this hospital, is the point. Come on.”

They hurried off, leaving the Judoon to their work. “Do you know if anyone’s been admitted in the last few days?” Rose asked as they walked. “Anyone strange?”

“It’s a hospital in the middle of a city, we get some strange people sometimes. Like people who are supposed to be dead and then check in under fake names.” Martha raised an eyebrow at Rose, and she sighed.

“Yeah, but I’m human. I’m not who they’re lookin’ for.”

“A human with a book about aliens and an affinity for coming back from the dead?”

“Yeah, somethin’ like that. So stop focusin’ on me. Anyone else check in recently?”

“I’m…not sure.” Martha admitted. “If they’re lookin’ for someone, don’t they have a photo?”

“Could be a shape-shifter.” Rose stopped at a computer. “Do you think you can get into patient records?”

“I’m an intern, I don’t have that kind of access. Why can’t you just let them look?”

“Because alien authority isn’t always the most trustworthy. I don’t completely believe they’ll just let us go, and if they can’t find who they’re lookin’ for or if it takes too long…”

“You don’t think they’d hurt us, do you?”

“I have no idea. Which is why we’re not gonna find out.” Rose shook her head. “I’m gonna try and get into this thing, see what I can find.”

“Alright.” Martha nodded. “I’ll ask Mr. Stoker, if anyone off has come in recently he’ll know about it.”

Rose looked up, smiling. “Brilliant. I’ll be here.”

Martha ran off, and Rose set to work, using the sonic screwdriver to bypass most of the security — but all the patient records had been wiped clean. “Blimey, are you serious?” She asked, frustrated. “Bloody Judoon…”

“Rose!” Her head snapped up as Martha ran back. “I found her!”
“What now?”

Before Martha could respond, to leather-clad men came down the hall after Martha. “Never mind. Run!”

She grabbed Martha’s hand, and they took off.
“What are those things?!” Martha called as they ran.

“Not human!” Rose called back.

“Is that all you’ve got?”

“Yes!”

They turned down a hallway, and found themselves face to face with the oncoming Judoon. “Damn it,” Rose hissed. “Come on.”

She yanked Martha into the stairwell, and they started up the stairs. Hopefully none of the things chasing them were too coordinated.

Up two flights, Rose finally pulled them into an empty room, sonicking the door to lock it. “What’s that?” Martha gasped, staring at it.

“Sonic screwdriver.” Rose swallowed hard, storing it away.

“A what?”

“Never mind it. You said you found the alien.”

“Right. Yeah.” Martha sat down on the bed, tugging at her pony tail. “Ms. Finnegan. One of the patients. She had those…those things chasing us. They were working for her.”

“Brilliant.” Rose dragged a hand through her hair. “Little old lady has helmet-wearing leather henchmen. Just brilliant.”

“She had some kind straw, though,” Martha added. “Like a vampire or something. She was drinking Mr. Stoker’s blood.”

“Why would she need his blood?” Rose wonder, leaning against the door and sliding down to sit on the floor.

“Don’t suppose there’s anything in that alien index of yours that could answer that?”

“Well I’d have to know what I’m lookin’ for first.” Rose rubbed her temples.

“All right, well maybe we can narrow it down so you can look it up,” Martha suggested logically. “What’re reasons for aliens to drink blood?”

“Energy, maybe?” Rose shook her head. “What was she in for, anyways?”

“Salt deficiency.”
Well that was no help. “Okay, think, think.” Rose tapped her palm against her forehead, squeezing her eyes shut. “We’re in a hospital full of interplanetary police-types who are lookin’ for somethin’ non-human. I’m somethin’ non-human — theoretically — and I need somewhere to hide so they don’t find me. The best disguise, of course, is to hide in plain sight. But it’s not just enough to look human, if it was that easy every criminal would do it, she has to be biologically human too, but that’s impossible…”

“Is it?” Martha prompted as Rose’s voice drifted off. “I mean…if she can make herself look human, whose to say she can’t change her biology to resemble a human’s too? That would explain drinking Mr. Stoker’s blood, wouldn’t it? She wasn’t doing it for energy…”

“She was using it to blend in!” Rose finished triumphantly, head snapping up again. “So if they scan her she’ll appear human because she’s got that bloke’s blood in her!” She jumped up, securing her bag. “Which means we have to expose her for the fraud she is.”

“Hang on, just the two of us?” Martha asked in disbelief, grabbing Rose’s shoulder before she could open the door. “That’s a bit of a big job, isn’t it? Don’t you have back-up or something?”

“See, you’re under the impression that I’m somehow organized and had the foresight to think ahead and arrange for back up,” Rose informed the woman. “Reality is that I don’t have a clue and if you want to stay here and hide I honestly wouldn’t blame you at all because I certainly wouldn’t trust me.”

Martha stared at her for a moment, then shook her head. “Right then, can’t let you just run off. You’re still my patient.” And clearly someone had to look after her. Rose grinned.

“Brilliant. Allons-y.”

Rose checked the hall to make sure it was clear and led Martha out. They managed to make it to the end of the hall before running into a Judoon.

“Oops.”

It brought the the scanner up, scanning Rose over. “Non-human,” it reported after a moment, and Rose’s mouth dropped.

“What?”

“You will be executed.”

“What?”

“Rose, come on!” Martha grabbed Rose’s hand and dragged her away as the Judoon fired. They hit the stairwell, and Martha started to pull Rose up.

“No, down!” Rose called, pulling her down the stairs instead. “They’ve already searched the lower floors, they won’t come back down.” Hopefully. At the very least it would buy them some time.

Hopefully.

They came down on the floor below, walking past people slumped off the floor. The woman Martha had been with before was giving one patient oxygen. “How much oxygen is there?” Martha asked as she knelt down next to the woman. She shook her head.

“Not enough for all these people. We’re going to run out.”
“How are you?” Rose asked gently as Martha stood up, looking rightly concerned.

“I’m running on adrenaline.”

“Yeah. That sounds about right.” Rose turned, looking around. “Where’s Mr. Stoker’s office?”

Martha stepped forward to lead the way, and they started walking. “I thought you said you were human,” Martha said in a slightly accusatory tone as they walked.

“I am!” Rose defended herself. “As human as they come, I was born at a hospital down the street — well, down the street when we get back to Earth — in nineteen-eighty-seven.”

“There’s the office!” Rose heard Martha say. She turned to see Mr. Stoker standing in the doorway with a list of names on a piece of paper in his hand. “I thought you said you were human.”

“Yeah… yeah, that’s really good for her. Not so much for me. But I’ll worry about that later—”

They turned a corner, and a flash of light from a nearby room caught Rose’s eye. She grabbed
Martha, holding her back and putting her finger to her lips to caution Martha before they carefully shuffled closer, peeking into the room.

And there was Ms. Finnegan with her leather-clad henchmen.

Rose pulled back, finding a nearby closet for them to hide in and nudging Martha towards it. “What was that?” She asked as soon as they were closed in. “What room is she in?"

“That’s the MRI room.”

“I’m guessin’ it’s not supposed to flash like that?”

“I’ve never seen it do that, no.”

A low crash and a scream reached their ears. “Shit,” Rose muttered. “They’re comin’. Okay. Martha I need you to go distract them.”

“Me?” Martha asked in disbelief. “What am I supposed to do?”

“You’re brilliant, you’ll figure it out.” Rose hugged her quickly, giving her a reassuring squeeze. “I have faith in you. Go on.”

Martha slipped out of the closet, hesitating before hurrying down the hall. Rose took a deep breath before setting her bag down and stepping out, putting on her best “lost” look and wandering into the MRI room.

“Excuse me?” Her voice was high-pitched, pathetic. “Can you help me? I-I was here for head problems — really bad headaches, migraines, no one knows what causes them — and my boyfriend left to get somethin’ to eat and suddenly we’re on the moon and there are these rhinos and I just don’t know what’s goin’ on!”

Ms. Finnegan stared at her, clearly unimpressed. “Grab her,” she ordered, and one of the leather men grabbed Rose from behind.

“W-What’re you doin’?!”

Meanwhile out in the hall, Martha was trying desperately to stop the Judoon. “No, wait, stop!” She insisted, stepping in front of them. “Just listen, I know you’re looking for. She’s this woman. She calls herself Florence.”

She blinked as they scanned her over. “Human,” one reported. “Wait. Non-human traits suspected.” Martha blinked before flashing back to the hug Rose had given her. Whether it had been on purpose or not, it had apparently helped. “Non-human element confirmed. Authorize full scan. What are you? What are you?”

Rose didn’t try to struggle against the grip of the leather thing. That would make her look suspicious. “That — That thing. I was in it yesterday, they scanned my head. It wasn’t doing that yesterday, making that noise and flashing like that. Is it supposed to do that?”

“You wouldn’t understand,” Ms. Finnegan sneered. “Stupid girl.”

“But, but it’s like a magnet, right? A great big magnet? That’s what they told me, I couldn’t wear anythin’ metal when I went in, had to take off the bracelet my boyfriend gave me…”

The woman gave a long suffering sigh before saying, “The magnetic setting now increased to fifty
“thousand Tesla.”

“Oh that…that’s a lot, isn’t it? Pretty strong, I mean…why do you need it that strong?”

“It’ll send out a magnetic pulse that’ll fry the brain stems of every living thing within two-hundred and fifty-thousand miles!” She sounded amused now. “Except for me, of course, safe in this room.”

“But…” Rose tilted her head, pretending thing. “Doesn’t that distance include Earth too?”

“Only the side facing the moon.” Ms. Finnegan waved it off. “The other half will survive. Call it my little gift.”

“But that doesn’t…” Rose shook her head. “I’m so sorry, that just doesn’t make any sense. Why would you want to kill everyone? What’s the point?”

“Escape, of course! With everyone dead, the Judoon ships will be mine, and I’ll get away no problem!”

“I’m sorry, I’m still not quite following.” She was talking fast now, trying to distract the woman without seeming like she was distracting her. “You’re talkin’ like-like you’re some sorta…I dunno, alien.”

“Quite so,” Ms. Finnegan said happily, and Rose gasped.

“No!”

“Oh yes.”

“You’ve gotta be jokin’.”

“Oh it’s not joke, dearie.”

“I’m talkin’ to a — to a real live alien?” Rose shook her head again. “In a hospital? Really? Did I miss an ET department? That certainly wasn’t on the website…”

“It’s the perfect hiding place,” Ms. Finnegan explained as Rose’s voice drifted off. “Blood banks downstairs for a midnight feast, and all this equipment ready to arm myself with should the police come looking.”

“So…so those rhinos,” Rose said slowly, “they’re lookin’ for you?”

“Yes, but I’m hidden.” She sounded confident. Rose’s mind raced for a moment, trying to think.

“Right…I bet that’s why they’re increasing their scans.”

Ms. Finnegan’s face fell, eyes turning dark as she focused on Rose. “They’re doing what?”

“The - the big one, the leader, he said, ‘no signs of non-human, we must increase our scans to…to…’ Oh blimey I don’t remember. Rubbish memory, me. Setting two, I think?”

Ms. Finnegan frowned, looking away. “Then I must assimilate again,” she murmured, and Rose tilted her head.

“What does that mean?”

“I must appear to be human.”
“Well do you wanna — when we get back to Earth, my boyfriend and I can take you to the chippy down the street. Best chips in London.”

“Oh but why would I want chips when I’ve got my little straw.” She produced a straw from her purse. Rose tried not to flinch.


“You’re quite a funny little girl,” Ms. Finnegan said with a small smirk, stepping forward. “And yet I can tell…you’re scared, aren’t you? Terrified of the world around you. I think It’s about time you found some peace. Steady her!”

The leather thing force Rose to her knees, grabbing her hair to turn her head so the woman had a shot at her jugular.

“What’re you doin’?” Her voice shook with real fear this time.

“I’m afraid this is going to hurt,” Ms. Finnegan soothed her, “but if it’s any consolation, the dead don’t tend to remember.”

And with that she shoved the straw into Rose’s neck. As promised, it hurt like hell, and Rose let out a gasp, wiggling involuntarily, trying to escape the pain. But then Ms. Finnegan started drinking and everything went hazy…

Martha wiggled uncomfortably as the Judoon finished scanning her. “Confirm human. Traces of recent contact with non-human. Continue the search.” He handed her a booklet written in an unfamiliar script. “You’ll need this.”

“What’s that for?” Martha asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Compensation.”

They walked away, and Martha hurried after them, tossing the booklet aside. “Now see what you’ve done?” She heard Ms. Finnegans say as she approached the MRI room. “You’ve gone and frightened the poor girl to death.”

“Scan her.” She hurried into the room to see the Judoon scan the prone body on the floor. “Confirmation. Deceased.”

“No, she can’t be!” Martha yelled, trying to shove her way past the Judoon, but they grabbed her, holding her back. “Let me through, let me see her!”

“Stop. Case closed.”

“But it was her!” Martha insisted, struggling against the grip. “She killed her, she did it! She murdered her!”

“Judoon have no authority over human crime.”

“But she’s not human!”

“Oh, but I am,” Ms. Finnegan said sweetly, holding up her hand to show them the X. “I’ve been catalogued.”

“But she’s not! She assimi…” Her voice drifted off as something clicked in her mind. “Hang on.
You drank her blood? You drank Rose’s blood?” Her head spun for a moment before she grabbed the scanner, pointing it at the woman.

“Oh, I don’t mind.” Ms. Finnegan held her arms out, smiling. “Scan all you like.”

The scanner beeped. “Non-human,” the Judoon reported, and Ms. Finnegan’s face fell.

“But…what?”

“Confirm analysis.”

“Oh, but it’s a mistake, surely!” Ms. Finnegan insisted as they scanned her over. “I’m human. I’m as human as they come!”

Martha swallowed hard, ignoring the tightness in her chest as she focused on Rose. “She let you drain her. She gave up her life to expose you.”

“Confirm,” the Judoon said. “Plasmavore, charged with the crime of murdering the child princess of Patrival Regency Nine.”

And with that, Ms. Finnegan dropped the act completely. “Well, she deserved it! Those pink cheeks and those blonde curls and that simpering voice. She was begging for the bite of a plasmavore!”

“Then you confess?” The Judoon prompted, and Ms. Finnegan laughed.

“Confess? I’m proud of it! Slabs, stop him!”

The leather minions dove forward, and the Judoon shot them both, killing them instantly.

“Verdict, guilty,” the Judoon declared. “Sentence, execution.”

Ms. Finnegan darted behind the screen before they could shoot, however, plugging something in, and the Magnetic Overload sign flashed on. “Enjoy your victory, Judoon!” She screeched. “Because you’re going to burn with me! Burn in hell!”

All four Judoon fired at her, incinerating her. A dim part of Martha’s mind noted, around the beginnings of oxygen deprivation, that it all seemed rather anti-climatic.

“Case closed,” the Judoon declared. Martha shook her head.

“But what did she mean, burn with me? The scanner shouldn’t be doing that. She’s done something.”

One of the Judoon stepped forward, scanning the machine. “Scans detect lethal acceleration of monomagnetic pulse.”

Martha’s stomach dropped. That was bad. “Well, do something! Stop it!”

“Our jurisdiction has ended. Judoon will evacuate.”

“What?!” Martha yelled as they marched out of the room. “You can’t just leave it! What’s it going to do?”

“All units withdraw,” the Judoon spoke into his communicator as they walked into the hall, and Martha ran after them.
“You can’t go!” She called after them, already knowing it was no good. “That thing’s gonna explode and it’s your fault!”

She shook her head, running back into the room. Rose could say she’d made it all up as she went along, but she’d known what she was doing better than anyone else.

They needed her.

“I’m not losing a patient today,” she muttered as she dropped to her knees beside Rose, starting CPR. “Come on. One, two, three, four, five.” As she counted she started compressions, working quickly. “One, two, three, four, five. Come on Rose, we need you, don’t do this. One, two, three, four, five.” She gasped before managing to draw in a breath, leaning in and giving it to Rose.

Needless to say, she was beyond relieved when the blonde gasped, eyes flying open, gaze completely unfocused. “Scanner,” Martha gasped, sinking to lay on her side. “Something’s… wrong…”

Rose’s own lungs were tight as she picked herself up, crawling over. It was a mess of wires and machinery and she had no idea where to start. She knew what Ms. Finnegan had said, but how did she reverse it?

“You’re the only person I know who would buy a sentient blender!” Rose shouted as the blender spun out of control.

“Well I didn’t realize it could bloody think for itself when I picked it up, did I now?!” Jackie shot back, taking a step away from the mad piece of machinery. “Not my fault the store is cheap!”

They stood there for a moment, watching the blender spin wildly for a moment before Jackie suddenly darted forward, grabbing the plug and yanking it out of the wall. The blender slowly died, and she grinned triumphantly.

“When in doubt, sweetheart, unpluggin’ most things is the way to go.”

Rose swallowed hard, finding the plug in the wall. “What the hell,” she muttered, grabbing the plug and yanking it out. She was quite pleased when the humming of the machine died away. “Ha. Ha!” She would’ve laughed if she could’ve gathered the breath.

“Martha?” She crawled out to find the med student barely conscious. “Come on.” She dragged Martha’s arm over her shoulder, pulling her up unsteadily. They probably looked like quite the pair, stumbling almost drunkenly toward the window. They saw the Judoon ships fly away, and Martha passed out completely. Rose lowered her carefully to the floor, leaning against the wall to support herself.

“Come on… come on reverse it please… please…”

Her eyes lit up when it started to rain, and she slid down the wall, settling next to Martha’s unconscious body and laughing.

“Oh brilliant. That is just brilliant. Allons-y, then.”

There was a crash and a flash of lightning…and they were home. Rose drew in a deep breath, coughing as her lungs readjusted. She checked to make sure Martha was breathing and pushed herself up, heading down the hall. She was unsurprisingly unsteady on her feet — massive blood loss was having quite the effect on her. She managed to avoid anyone trying to help her, though, hiding in a room until the hallway was clear and finally making her way out of the building.
As she walked toward the TARDIS, now humming happily in the back of her mind once more, she saw Martha sitting in the back of an ambulance, talking to what looked like a younger version of herself. Rose smiled, waving a hand in a lazy wave before letting herself in. She managed to get them back into the vortex before she collapsed on the jump seat, passing out.

She’d earned a rest.
It was strange to wake up to silence.

It had been three months since Anthony Peter Tyler had been born, and in that time he had proven one thing - he had his mother’s lungs and an impeccable sense of time. Or a horrible sense of time. They weren’t sure which yet, all they knew was that every morning between two and three a.m., without fail, Tony woke up and started screaming for attention.

So Jackie was understandably suspicious when her eyes groggily fluttered open at 2:42 a.m. and all was silent. Pete was still snoring away in bed next to her, so she hadn’t slept through Tony’s screams (it happened sometimes). She made a face as she dragged herself out of bed, heading across the hall to Tony’s nursery.

And she was met with a surprising sight - the Doctor, wearing his jim-jams (for once), sitting in the rocking chair beside Tony’s crib, one hand hanging over into the crib so his fingers brushed against Tony’s wispy hair. But what was even more surprising was that he was singing - singing a song in a language Jackie had never heard.

“Doctor?”

He jumped, going silent. As soon as he stopped, Tony started whimpering. “He really likes attention,” the Doctor said quietly as Jackie hurried into the room, scooping the baby up. “I noticed it the other day. He’s happiest when he’s being touched or somehow acknowledged.”

“Rose was the same way,” Jackie muttered as she soothed Tony. “Swear I didn’t put her down for six months. What was that you were singin’?”

The Doctor ducked his head, looking faintly embarrassed. “It was a uh…a lullaby. From my planet.” He ran a hand through his already on-end hair. “I um…” His eyes flicked over to Tony. “I used to um…”

“You sang it to your children?” Jackie guessed, and the Doctor’s head snapped up, eyes wide. “Oh don’t look at me like that, you’re over nine-hundred years old. I don’t expect you were single the entire time.”

A small, sad smile pulled at the Doctor’s lips. “I might as well have been. I wasn’t around too much.”

“Around enough to sing them lullabies at night.”

“Somehow that didn’t salvage any of their love for me.” The Doctor sighed, dragging a hand through his hair. “I deserved the hate though.”

Tony had finally calmed down and slipped back to sleep. Jackie set him down carefully. “My biggest
fear was always that Rose would grow up to hate me,” she said quietly.

“Oh that’s impossible,” the Doctor said at once. “Lord knows we didn’t make all those trips back to Earth because I wanted to see you.”

“Oh and here I was under the impression you just couldn’t get enough of me.” The sarcasm was soft, however. More amused if anything. The Doctor’s lips quirked into a smirk.

“Yeah. You caught me.”

They fell silent for a moment, Jackie’s eyes dodging to watch Tony wiggle around in his sleep. Rose used to move in her sleep too, she remembered sadly. “What do you think she’s doin’ now?”

It didn’t take a genius to figure out who Jackie meant. “Who knows,” the Doctor said quietly. “Maybe she went back to Earth.”

“God she must be goin’ mad if she did.” Jackie knew Rose would never be able to adjust to being trapped on Earth again. Not after the things she’d seen and done. “I hope she’s not alone…maybe she’s stayin’ with Shareen…”

They both knew the truth, though. If Rose had figured out how to pilot the TARDIS - and it was obvious she had, at least a little - she would keep traveling. She wouldn’t be able to settle down on Earth, not now.

And that terrified Jackie and the Doctor, to be entirely honest. They didn’t want to think about Rose, traveling by herself, getting into danger.

It conjured up images of her getting herself killed.

“She’ll be okay, right?” Jackie asked suddenly, looking over at the Doctor.

“Oh of course,” the Doctor assured her with a small smile. “She’s a fighter. She’ll be fine.”

He wanted to believe that as much as Jackie did.

*****

Rose sat in the console room, staring blankly at her hand as if she had never seen it before. Her head was spinning.

_Not human._

“That’s not possible,” she said out loud, looking up, her eyes fixing on the console. “I’m human. I was born human, that doesn’t just…change. It’s impossible. Right?”

The TARDIS gave a small…almost _guilty_ hum, and Rose narrowed her eyes a bit. “What?” No answer. “What? Tell me or I swear I’ll dismantle the console, I know you hate that.”

It was an empty threat - Rose wouldn’t do that, she didn’t know how to put it back together. But she was right about one thing - the TARDIS _did_ hate that. Another small hum, and the lights near the hallway flashed - she wanted Rose to go that way. Rose made her way over, and the TARDIS pulled up the med lab. Rose hesitated on the threshold. She wasn’t sure she wanted to know the truth.

But the TARDIS gave a light nudge against her mind, encouraging her, and she finally stepped in and walked over to the printer, where the ship was printing out a bunch of papers. In Gallifreyan.
“Seriously,” Rose mumbled as she grabbed the dictionary that had appeared next to the printer. “First thing I’m going to figure out how to do is make you translate this god forsaken language.”

She was getting better at Gallifreyan (written, at least, she didn’t even want to try and speak this language), but she still had to look up most of the words on the print up the TARDIS had made. The overwhelming amount of scientific jargon wasn’t exactly helping with that either. “Couldn’t have thought to dumb it down, huh?” Rose grumbled as she read.

She managed to pick up the gist of it though. Something had changed her, right down to a biological level - made her a little more than human.

“How?” She asked, looking up the ceiling. She still didn’t understand. Humans didn’t just change - not this quickly at least. Evolution took hundreds of years, even she knew that?

So how had she managed it?

The TARDIS hummed, brushing against her mind, silently asking for permission. Rose hesitated for a moment before nodding. She hated having things in her head that didn’t belong, but the TARDIS’ presence was…comforting. Almost nice.

“Okay.”

She wasn’t sure what she expected the TARDIS to do. But somehow, going straight for a set of memories she didn’t know existed wasn’t it.

Oh so long ago, when the Doctor had still been all big ears and leather, he’d blocked these memories from Rose – her absorbing the time vortex, destroying the Daleks – because remembering would have been too traumatic. He’d given her scant details about it later, at her insistence, but never the full story. And every now and then she would dream about it – golden lights and singing and a pair of warm lips pressed against hers – but none of it made sense and Rose chalked it up to some wishful thinking.

But she needed to remember now. And the Doctor wasn’t here to stop the TARDIS from unlocking them and letting Rose see everything.

Rose gasped as the memories suddenly filled her head – most of it was hazy, covered by a golden light and hard to pick out. She saw the cover coming off the TARDIS console, saw the golden light shining out…

And then the scene changed. She was standing on Platform Five, the Doctor (in all his leather-clad glory) on the floor in front of her, the Daleks surrounding them, firing…and she deflected the shot like it was nothing. It was nothing. They were nothing. Tiny, tiny beings, they couldn’t touch her.

Nothing could touch her.

“Rose!”

That voice…the Doctor’s voice. Begging to just let go, let the power go…

Except she couldn’t. The fact niggled in the back her mind. She couldn’t let it go, she needed this power…but for what? Why was it so important for her to hold on? It hurt so much…

And then the Doctor was in front of her, pulling her close…his lips pressing against her…the heat in her mind faded away, but a small spark buried itself…
Rose’s eyes snapped open, her chest heaving as if she’d run a thousand miles. Somehow, she’d ended up on the floor, curled up in the fetal position. She pushed herself up shakily, the images still flashing through her mind.

“So what? I already knew about the vortex, but the Doctor took it out of me…”

And it had killed him in the process. He’d only held onto it for a few minutes and it had killed him. But Rose had had it in her for so much longer, she had used it...

“I should be dead.” The realization hit fast and hard. She shouldn’t have been able to survive that. The Doctor hadn’t even survived it, he’d had to regenerate. So how had she?

The TARDIS hummed gently, carefully prodding something in the back of Rose’s mind – instantly she felt warm, and a slightly golden haze seemed to take over her vision.

“What…?”

Her head spun, and on impulse she laid back down on the floor, squeezing her eyes shut. Oh she didn’t like that. “W-What is that?” She managed to stutter after a moment as the dizziness wore off. Whatever it was, she was fairly certain she didn’t like it.

There was no responding hum, and for a moment she relaxed. She was so tired…

Until she realized something was whispering in the back of her mind. Oh! She shot up again, eyes wide, head snapping around. “What…?” She looked left and right, as if that would somehow help her find the source of the noise in her head. The TARDIS hummed gently, comforting her.

“Is…is that you?” An affirmative hum, and Rose relaxed slightly. “But…you’ve never been able to do that before.”

But she had a feeling the newfound ability to do so had something to do with what the TARDIS had touched in her head. The TARDIS gave another hum, and the whispers started in the back of her head. It didn’t…hurt per se, but it felt…odd. Unnatural. Which, of course, it was. Humans weren’t supposed to have things whispering in the backs of their minds. Especially not sentient ships.

But then again Rose wasn’t really human anymore, was she?

This was too much. This was all far too much. She stumbled up, shaking a bit as she hurried to the console room. She needed to go…somewhere. Where? She didn’t have anyone left in this god forsaken universe.

…No. That wasn’t entirely true.

*****

Sarah Jane was just sitting down to sip her tea when a faint but familiar sound reached her ears. Her head snapped up, gaze focusing on the window that looked out into the backyard…

And there was the wonderful blue box, materializing on her lawn. “Oh, he’s gonna kill the grass,” she muttered even as she grinned, jumping up and hurrying outside. She’d been worried about the Doctor ever since that whole thing with the Cybermen and Daleks in the sky. She had no doubt he’d been there, especially after finding Rose’s name on the list of the dead.

Needless to say, she was stunned — but certainly pleased — when TARDIS doors opened and Rose stepped out. “Oh, Rose!” She wrapped the blonde in a hug that the young woman happily returned.
“It’s so good to see you,” Sarah Jane said warmly as she pulled back to look at her. “Where’s himself? Hiding under the grates?”

At that Rose’s smile fell. “Um…no. Not exactly. He’s…not here.”

Well that just made no sense. “What do you mean? Oh god he didn’t regenerate, did he?”

“No…”

Sarah Jane shuffled Rose inside, and sat her down, making her a cup of tea while she explained what had happened at Canary Wharf.

“He’s trapped?” Sarah Jane asked in disbelief. “God he must be going spare…and there’s no way for him to get back?”

Rose shook her head miserably. “He’s trapped over there forever, accordin’ to him. Walls are closed, no way back.”

Sarah Jane set her tea down in front of her before sitting. “But how are you flying the TARDIS?” The Doctor had always insisted it was too complicated for any human to understand. Rose shrugged.

“Pressin’ buttons and hopin’ it doesn’t explode. Seems to be workin’ well so far.”

“Seems like that’s exactly what he always did too,” Sarah Jane murmured, sipping her tea. “God I can’t believe he’s gone…” Rose just stared at her tea. For the first time Sarah Jane stopped to really look at her. She looked…older. Not physically — physically she didn’t appear to have aged a day since the last time Sarah Jane had seen her. But there was something in her eyes…

She almost looked liked the Doctor. Young face, old eyes.

That was frightening.

“Rose how long has it been for you since that?” It had only been a month in linear time. But Sarah Jane had a feeling it had been a lot longer. Rose shook her head again.

“I’m not sure. Time in the vortex, ya know. It’s impossible to track.” Which right there told Sarah Jane it had been longer than a month, if Rose had been floating around in the vortex. Years could have passed without her knowing.

“Come on, drink up.” She gave Rose’s tea a nudge. “Let’s get some food in you. I hope you don’t mind take away, I’m a nightmare in the kitchen.”

“Oh, you don’t have to—”

“No, shush and drink. How about Chinese? There’s a great place down the street, order from there two three times a week. The delivery boy can get to my place blind-folded.”

A small smile pulled at Rose’s lips. “Chinese sounds good. Thank you.”

“Of course.”

Sarah Jane turned away for two minutes to place the order…and when she turned back Rose was fast asleep, head in her arms on the kitchen table. The older woman smiled. “Right then. Sleep is good too but let’s get you more comfortable, yeah?”

She coaxed Rose awake and guided her upstairs, getting her settled in the spare bedroom.
She was out before her head hit the pillow.

* * * * *

The sun had long since set and risen again before Rose woke up once more, understandably confused. It took her a moment to remember that she’d gone to Sarah Jane’s.

The woman in question was sitting on the couch reading when Rose made her groggy way down. She smiled when she saw the blonde. “I’d ask when the last time you slept was but considering you’ve been out for nearly twenty hours I think that’s my answer.”

“Yeah, I haven’t been sleepin’ well lately,” Rose muttered as she dropped into the arm chair. “Sorry about that.”

“Oh don’t apologize, you obviously needed it.” Sarah Jane waved her off. “You did miss the food though. There’s leftovers in the fridge, but since you just woke up how about some toast? I can manage to work the toaster without too much of an issue.”

“No, that’s alright.” Of course, Rose’s stomach chose that exact moment to give a loud growl. “I don’t want to impose any more than I already have…”

“Oh you’re not, shush. I barely knew you were here.” Sarah Jane winked as she stood and went into the kitchen to get some toast for Rose.

While the blonde ate, Sarah Jane regaled her with stories from her own time with the Doctor. Rose almost choked when she described his bodies. “He wore a cape?”

Sarah Jane laughed. “Got the thing caught in the TARDIS door once and still refused to give it up, said he gave him class.”

“Blimey, was that his superhero phase?”

“He got rid of it when he regenerated, thankfully. It was a bit ridiculous.”

Rose finished her toast, shaking her head. “And I thought the pinstripes were a bit ridiculous. I realize now they were tame.”

“Oh yes, you definitely got lucky with that one.” Oh Rose was certainly aware of that.

Rose spent the rest of the day with Sarah Jane, finally going to leave when the sun began to set. “Oh, why don’t you stay a bit longer?” Sarah Jane tried to insist. It had taken a bit of work, but she’d gotten Rose to tell her that her mother had been trapped over in the parallel universe as well. She knew Rose was alone here and she hated to see the blonde go so soon.

“No, that’s alright. Really. I’ve got something I have to do anyways.” Rose smiled. “Thanks for puttin’ me up, though.”

“Of course. Any time.” Before Rose could leave, Sarah Jane grabbed her hand, gently pulling her back. “Seriously, Rose. If you ever need anything my door is open. Okay?”


They hugged, and Rose stepped into the TARDIS. Sarah Jane stepped back as it whirred to life and disappeared, leaving nothing but a flat patch on her lawn.

“Pleas be safe, Rose.”
Martha sighed as she followed her family out into the street so they could continue screaming at each other like maniacs. She’d gone to the moon and stood up to rhino-aliens, but it was her mother, father, and father’s girlfriend who would ultimately be her undoing.

“And then she had a go at Martha, practically accused her of making the whole thing up!”

Martha winced as Francine dragged her into it. “Mum, I don’t mind,” she said desperately. “Just leave it.”

But Annalise spoke over her. “Oh, I’ve been to the moon!” She mocked. “As if. They were drugged. It said so on the news.”

“Since when do you watch the news?” Francine sneered. “You can’t handle Quiz Mania.”

“Annalise started it!” Tish jumped in as the younger woman’s eyes bulged in offense. “She did, I heard her.”

“Tish, don’t make it worse,” Leo begged.

“Oh come off it, Leo! What did she buy you? Soap. A seventy-five-pence soap.”

“Oh I’m never talking to your family again!” Annalise informed Clive, turning on her heel and walking away.

“Oh, stay,” Francine mocked after her. “Have a night out with Clive.”

“Don’t you dare,” Clive said angrily. “I’m putting my foot down.”


“This is me…putting my foot down.”

And with that he walked after Annalise. “Doing it for the last twenty-five years!” Francine called after them.

“Please,” Clive begged Annalise as he walked after her. Martha shook her head as she watched her mother, brother, and sister follow, all yelling. She’d have rather gone another round with the Judoon than try to follow. She turned to walk home — and stopped when she saw the familiar blonde standing leaning against a nearby building. They stared at each other for a moment before Rose made her way into the alley, and Martha hurried to follow.

Rose leaned against the TARDIS as Martha walked into the alley, and she smiled. “Hullo.”

“Hello.” Martha fidgeted, looking up at the sky for a moment before refocusing on Rose. “I went to the moon today.”

“Given your family I certainly wouldn’t blame you if you wanted to go back.”

Martha laughed a bit at that. “So have you figured out what you are, yet?”

Rose shrugged. “I’ll figure it out eventually. In the mean time, though, I’ve got a great ship here and an entire universe at my fingertips and a lot of room if you’d fancy a trip.”

Martha blinked at that. “What…into space?”
“Well, that was implied.”

“But… I can’t. No, I’ve got exams. I’ve got things to do. I have to go into town first thing and pay
the rent, I’ve got my family going mad…”

“Yeah, I had all those things too,” Rose assured her gently. “But if it helps, this thing travels in time
too.”

“Get out of here,” Martha balked.

“It can, though.”

“Come on now, that’s going too far.”

Rose tilted her head as something came back to her — Martha had mentioned seeing her on
Chancellor Street that morning…

Oh. “Well, I’ll prove it then.” She stepped into the TARDIS and went to the console, taking herself
back to that morning, landing in an alley on Chancellor Street. She stepped out, looking around, but
there was no sign of Martha yet. Right then. She went into a nearby chippy and bought herself a cup
of chips, going back out. Ah, there Martha was, making her way down the street, just hanging up her
phone. She put on a big grin, walking up to the woman.

“Chip?”

Martha stopped, blinking as she stared at the offered cup. “Uh…I’ll pass, thanks.”

“Really? That’s a shame, good chips. But alright, have a good one.”

And with that she walked in, circling back to the alley and back into the TARDIS.

Martha was still in the alley when she returned, stepping out with the cup of chips.

“Want one now?”

Martha’s mouth dropped.

“No, but…that was this morning. Did you…? Oh my God. You can travel in time.” Rose grinned,
popping a chip into her mouth. “But hold on. If you could see me this morning, why didn’t you tell
me not to go in to work?”

“Crossing into established events is strictly forbidden.” A line she’d gotten from the Doctor more
than once. “But I figured it couldn’t hurt this one time. Besides, I don’t know if you noticed, but your
being there saved all of us in the hospital and half of Earth from getting their brain stems fried. So
you needed to be there.”

Martha shook her head. “And that…that’s your spaceship?”

“Well…not mine. She’s sort of on loan. But she’s called the TARDIS. Time and Relative
Dimensions in Space.”

“Your spaceship’s made of wood,” Martha pointed out. “There’s not much room. Granted we’re
both small, but still.”

Rose smiled as she opened the door and stepped aside. “I think you’ll be surprised.”
Martha walked carefully into the TARDIS, looking around. “No, no, no,” she said as she backed out again, and Rose nearly laughed. “But it’s just a box. But it’s huge!”

She went back into the TARDIS, and Rose followed. “How does it do that?” Martha demanded. “It’s wood. It’s like a box with that room just jammed in. It’s bigger on the inside!”

“Oh that’s only half of what she is,” Rose said with a laugh as the TARDIS hummed, amused, and something whispered in the back of her mind again. She shut the door, making her way up to the console. “Ready to go, then?”

“But is there a crew?” Martha asked, confused. “Like, a navigator and stuff? Where is everyone?”

“Told you I didn’t have back up,” Rose said as she turned a few dials. “It’s just me here.”

“Isn’t that…lonely?” It certainly sounded lonely. Rose looked up from the console, smiling.

“Not alone though, am I? You’re here.” She threw the handbrake, and the TARDIS shook to life. “Ready?”

“No.” But she sounded excited all the same. And Rose grinned.

“Off we go, then!”

They took off, the TARDIS throwing them around. “Blimey, it’s a bit bumpy,” Martha said as she picked herself up, and Rose laughed.

“Welcome aboard, Ms. Jones.”

“It’s my pleasure, Ms. Tyler.”
Chapter Summary

Rose and Martha go on their first adventure. It goes...about as well as one would expect.

1/2

Martha yelled as she was nearly thrown to the floor, and Rose grabbed a handle, trying to stabilize it. “But how do you travel in time?” Martha called. “What makes it go?”

“I don’t know, a lot of futuristic science stuff? I’m just borrowin’ the ship, it’s not actually mine.” Rose shrugged. “Oh, hold on!”

They landed with a thud, and Martha hit the floor. “Blimey,” she groaned, picking herself up. “Is the person you’re borrowing this thing from a better pilot?”

“Nope.” Rose’s lips popped on the p. “Right then, you ready? Brave new world just outside the door.”

Martha looked toward the door, eyes shining with excitement. “Where are we?”

Rose waved a hand forward. “Take a look. After you.”

Martha stepped outside, eyes wide when she saw the little village they’d landed in. “Oh...you are kidding me,” she gasped. “You are so kidding. Oh, my god, we did it. We traveled in time!” Rose laughed. She sounded so excited. “Where are we? No, sorry. I got to get used to this new language. When are we?”

Rose’s eyes flitted up to see a man ducking out the window with a bucket. “Watch out.” She grabbed Martha and pulled her back as he emptied it out. “Eugh. Somewhere before the invention of the toilet apparently. Sorry about that, indoor plumbing is usually one of my requirements.”

“Oh, I’ve seen worse,” Martha assured her. “I’ve worked the late night shift A and E. But are we safe? I mean, can we move around and stuff?”

“Oh yeah, of course. Why do you ask?”

“Well it’s like in the films. You step on a butterfly, you change the future of the human race.”

“Well let’s avoid steppin’ on the poor butterflies, then,” Rose joked. “Honestly, the rules of time travel are much looser than they say in the movies. Hell I went back to ancient Rome once and modeled for a statue. Didn’t have any huge effect on the future. Do avoid killin’ butterflies though, I like butterflies.”

Martha laughed. “Alright. So have you figured out where we are, then? I’m guessing London…”

“Yeah...definitely London.” Rose frowned as the TARDIS whispered gently in the back of her mind. “Um...about fifteen-ninety-nine, maybe?”

“How do you do that?” Martha asked, tilting her head. “You don’t even have your book with you.”
Rose smiled. “You wouldn’t believe me if I told you. Come on, then, let’s explore.”

“Oh, but hold on.” Martha stopped her again. “Am I alright? I’m not going to get carted off as a slave, am I?”

“Let ‘em try, see how much hell I raise.” Rose winked, and Martha smiled. “Anyways it might surprise you how little is actually different from our time. Shall we?”

They started walking, Martha taking everything in with wide eyes. She was completely enthralled. And Rose loved it.

The turned a corner and found themselves facing… “The Globe Theatre!” Rose said happily. “Oh, my friend loved this place, gave me an entire lecture. Just opened I think. Not exactly a globe though, it has fourteen sides. But whatever, that’s not the important part. What’s important is who’s inside. The man himself.”

“Whoa.” Martha stopped, blinking. “You don’t mean…is Shakespeare in there?”

“Oh yes.” Rose grinned. “Ms. Jones, will you accompany me to the theatre?”

“Ms. Tyler, I think I will.” Martha laughed, and they started off towards the theatre.

“When you get home, you can tell everyone you’ve met Shakespeare.”

“Then I could get sectioned.”

They found seats in the pit, settling down and watching the play. Rose had never been a huge fan of Shakespeare (she found him dead boring, actually), but Martha was clearly enthralled.

“That’s amazing!” She yelled when the play ended. “Just amazing! It’s worth putting up with the smell. And those are men dressed as women, yeah?”

“London never changes,” Rose chuckled. Martha stood up, peering around eagerly.

“Where’s Shakespeare? I want to see Shakespeare. Author! Author!” People turned to look at her, and she paused. “Do people shout that? Do they shout author?”

Around them, the crowded started to repeat Martha. “They do now,” Rose laughed. “Looks like you started a trend.”

“So much for not changing things.”

They watched as Shakespeare waltzed onto the stage, looking rather smug. Around them the crowd roared. “Ah shut your big fat mouths!” Shakespeare shouted, and everyone laughed.

“Some word smith,” Rose muttered.

“You’ve got excellent taste,” Shakespeare called out to the crowd. “I’ll give you that! Oh, that’s a wig!”

Rose lost track of what he was saying, however, as an odd feeling settled over her. Something felt… wrong. She blinked, shaking her head and looking around. Nothing looked out of place — it was like walking into a room and feeling something had changed in the room despite everything being exactly the same.

“I’m not an expert.” Martha’s voice snapped her back to reality. “But I’ve never heard of Loves
Labour’s Won.”

“What?” Rose shook her head, refocusing. “No, that play…it doesn’t exist. It was just a…a rumor. Wasn’t it?”

“Have you got a mini-disc or something?” Martha asked jokingly. “We can tape it. We can flog it. Sell it when we get home and make a mint.”

“I don’t think so,” Rose said distractedly as she looked around. Something wasn’t right here. She could feel it.

She wondered if it had something to do with everything that was changing about her.

“Well how come it disappeared in the first place?”

“Dunno.” Rose looked around. “I don’t really know much about it. Shakespeare isn’t my thing.” She tugged at a lock of hair, shaking her head again. “I don’t know. Something is…weird here.”

“Really?” Martha raised an eyebrow. “How can you tell?”

“I’m not sure,” Rose admitted. “But I do know. There’s something going on here. Guess we need to figure out what.”

It was surprisingly easy to find out where Shakespeare was staying — it was all anyone could talk about. They found the inn, letting themselves in. “Hello, excuse me?” Rose called as they found the room he’d settled in. “Not interrupting, am I? Mr. Shakespeare, is it?”

“Oh no no no, I’m not—”

He paused as he looked up, however, and saw the two women who had come in. “Hey nonny nonny!” He said happily. “Sit right down here, next to me please. And you two,” he gestured at the people at the table, “get sewing on them costumes. Off you go.”

“Come on, lads,” a woman said with a chuckle as she stood. “I think our William’s found his new muse.”

“Sweet lady,” Shakespeare winked. Martha and Rose settled at the table as everyone left.

“Such unusual clothes,” Shakespeare commented, eyes sweeping over Rose and Martha.

“Er, verily,” Martha said clumsily. “Forsooth, egads!”

“Don’t,” Rose whispered to Martha, smiling as she pulled out the psychic paper and held it up for Shakespeare to see.

“I’m Dame Rose Tyler of the Powell Estates. And this is Martha Jones.”

Shakespeare made a face as he leaned in to examine the paper. “Interesting, that bit of paper. It’s blank.”

Rose blinked at that. “Really? Blimey. You actually are a genius aren’t you?”

“No, it says it right there,” Martha protested, leaning around to look. Dame Rose, Martha Jones. It says so.”

“And I say it’s blank,” Shakespeare argued.
“It’s called psychic paper,” Rose explained to Martha as she tucked it away. “It shows whatever you want it to show. Never seen it not work before that is…brilliant. But starting over at the beginning is always a pain.”

“Psychic?” Shakespeare raised an eyebrow. “Never heard that before and words are my trade. Who are you, exactly? And more to the point, who is your delicious blackamoor lady?”

“What did you say?” Martha asked in disbelief.

“Oops, isn’t that the word we use nowadays?” Shakespeare asked carelessly. “An Ethiop girl? A swarth? A Queen of Afric?”

Martha just gaped in disbelief. “I can’t believe I’m hearing this.”

“Political madness gone mad.” Rose sighed. “Martha’s from a uh…a far-off land. Freedonia.”

Before Shakespeare could question that, however, a man walked in, looking quite angry. “Excuse me!” He raged at Shakespeare. “Hold hard a moment. This is abominable behavior. A new play with no warning? I demand to see a script, Mr. Shakespeare! As Master of Revels, every new script must be registered at my office and examined by me before it can be performed!”

“Tomorrow morning.” Shakespeare tried to wave it off. “First thing, I’ll send it ‘round.”

“I don’t work to your schedule, you work to mine,” the man snarled. “The script, now!”

“I can’t,” Shakespeare informed him.

“Then tomorrow’s performance is canceled.” Martha and Rose exchanged looks, raising an eyebrow. Apparently that was the end of the mystery. “I’m returning to my office for a banning order. If it’s the last thing I do, Love’s Labours Won will never be played!”

And with that he turned on his heel and left. “That’s it, then, right?” Martha said, looking around at Rose. “I mean…that’s Love’s Labours Won, over and done with…”

Martha’s voice drifted away in Rose’s ears, however, as the odd feeling settled over Rose once more. It almost felt as if she were…floating?

A scream shattered the trance, however, and then another. “Help me!” A woman’s voice shouted as they ran out to investigate what was going on. The man who had just yelled at Shakespeare — Lynley — was stumbling down the street, coughing up water. Rose blinked, eyes wide.

“What the…blimey. Let us through!” She called, grabbing Martha’s hand and dragging her along. “Budge up, come on, she’s a doctor!”

“What’re you—?”

“Shush!”

They reached Lynley right as he collapsed, and instantly the odd feeling left Rose. Martha knelt down next to the man, checking him over. “Got to get the heart going. Mr. Lynley, come on Can you hear me? You’re going to be alright.”

She moved to clear his airways, and water came gushing out. “God,” Rose mumbled as she knelt down next to Martha. “His lungs are full of water. It’s like he drowned and then something just…
stopped his heart.”

People were gathering around, trying to get a good look at what had happened. “Good mistress,” Rose called to the innkeeper, “this poor fellow has died from a sudden imbalance of the humors. A natural, if unfortunate demise. Call a constable to have him taken away.”

“Yes, of course,” the woman said, turning, but her assistant stepped up.

“I’ll do it, ma’am.”

“And why are you telling them that?” Martha muttered to Rose, who shook her head.

“Still half in the Dark Ages here. Tell ‘em the truth, they’ll panic and think it was witchcraft.”

“Okay, what was it then?”

Rose shook her head. “I…don’t know.”

“Too bad you don’t have that book of yours now.”

No kidding.

They went back to the inn, settling in Shakespeare room once more. The inkeeper — Dolly — joined them after a few moments. “Dame Rose, Ms. Jones, I got you a room just across the landing.”

“Thank you,” Rose said softly, smiling.

“Poor Lynley.” Shakespeare sighed. “So many strange events. Not least of all, this land of Freedonia where a woman can be a doctor?”

“Where a woman can do what she likes,” Martha corrected, and Rose smirked a bit.

“And you, Dame Rose, so young, with eyes so old. How is that possible?”

“I do a lot of reading,” Rose said distantly, waving it off.

“A trite reply,” Shakespeare noted. “Yeah, that’s what I’d do.” He refocused on Martha. “You look at her like you’re surprised she exists.”

Martha shot Rose a look before standing. “I think we should say good night.” She left, and Rose moved to follow suit.

“I must work,” Shakespeare said quietly. “I have a play to complete. But I’ll get my answers tomorrow, Dame Rose. And I’ll discover more about you and why this constant performance of yours.”

A small smile pulled at Rose’s lips. “All the world’s a stage.”

“Hmmm. I might have to use that. Good night, Rose.”

“Nighty night, Shakespeare.”

Martha was exploring the room when Rose walked in. “It’s not exactly five star, is it?”

“It’ll do for a night,” Rose sighed.

“I haven’t even got a toothbrush.”
“Oh…right. Forgot about that.” Rose frowned as she sat down on the edge of the bed. “Hope you don’t mind sharin’.”

“It’s fine.” Martha sighed as she sat with her. “So…any theories?”

“Witchcraft.” It was all Rose could of.

“Is that your professional opinion?” Martha asked with a small smile. She knew Rose made this stuff up as she went along.

“Incredibly professional opinion and my gut speakin’.” Rose smirked a bit, and Martha laughed.

“But magic and stuff. Really? That’s all a bit Harry Potter.”


“So that stuff is real, then? Witches, black magic all that? It’s all real?”

“No.” The word slipped out before Rose could even consider the question. She was so sure of it. She didn’t know how, but she knew. It wasn’t really witchcraft.

It just looked like it.

“I think that’s the first time you’ve actually sounded sure of something,” Martha pointed out. “Are you sure?”

“Yes. I am. It looks like witchcraft, but it’s not.” She’d question how she knew later. “Come on then, long day.” She budged up, making room for Martha. “Let’s get some sleep.”

Martha crawled into bed with her, blowing out the candle, and darkness descended over the room. They laid in silence for a moment.

“My mate would know,” Rose murmured. “He always had all the answers.”

“Oh I doubt that,” Martha responded. “Nobody has all the answers.”

“Well he was good at acting like it at least.” This was the Doctor’s world. She was just a poor stand-in.

Emphasis on poor.

Rose slipped off to sleep…

And when her eyes flew open again, she was no longer in the small room. In fact she was fairly certain she was no longer on Earth at all. The sky above her was burnt orange, as was the grass below her feet. She looked up and down a couple of times, stunned.

“What…”

“Do not worry, my Wolf,” an unfamiliar voice spoke up, and Rose spun around to find herself facing…a woman? It looked like a woman, but Rose got the feeling there was more to her than that.

“I’m sorry, who are…what did you call me?” Rose switched questions halfway through. She couldn’t decide which one was more important.

“My Wolf, you are my Wolf! Or you…have been my Wolf. Will be my Wolf?” The woman tilted
her head. “Tenses in English are so confusing, did you know there are only thirteen? That’s not nearly enough to cover—”

“Who are you?” Rose cut the woman off harshly and she blinked, looking rather offended.

“And you call my Thief rude. I think my Thief wore off my Wolf. I do not have a name, I simply go by what everybody else calls me.”

“And what’s that?” Rose paused, thinking. “Wait…your Thief…the Doctor. Are you the TARDIS?”

“That is what you call me, yes!” The woman looked quite excited. “The TARDIS. TAR-DIS. TAAAAAAAAARDIS. Humans have such funny ways of speaking.”

Rose rubbed her temples. “I don’t understand. How are you doing this?”

“You know I am telepathic. I reached out to your mind. I wanted to speak with you.”

“You can do that?” Rose knew the TARDIS could get in her head…but this was just mad.

“Not with most humans, no.” The woman shifted uncertainly. “But your mind is…changing. Expanding. Like a…like a balloon. Someone is blowing air into it and making it bigger, increasing your telepathic abilities. That is what makes this possible.”

Rose shook her head, running a hand through her hair. “So you’re able to do this because…because I’m changing. Because I’m not totally human anymore. Right?”

“Yes, exactly!” Back to being overly excited. “You are smarter than you give yourself credit for, my Wolf. So much smarter.”

“Yeah, sure, okay.” Rose waved the TARDIS off. “You wanted to talk to me for a reason, right? Why are you doing this?”

“Because I wanted to talk to you. I brought you here — to this time period — for a reason, there is something wrong in this place. And I think you realize it too.” Rose thought back to the feelings she’d gotten before, when Lynsley was dying…

“Yeah. Yeah, I know. Do you know what it is?”

“There are many possibilities—”

“So no, then.” Rose sighed. “Can you at least give me a clue to what I’m lookin’ for? Any possibilities, ideas…?”

“Words.” That caught Rose off guard. “The words are the key. Words and numbers.”

That was absolutely useless. “What—”

A scream shattered the dream and Rose bolted up with a gasp, eyes wide as her head snapped around. “Whuzzat?” Martha asked thickly as she sat up, looking around and blinking heavily.

“Nothing good.”

Rose vaulted out of bed, running to the door with Martha right behind her. They ran into Shakespeare’s room — the first thing Rose saw was Dolly on the floor. The first thing Martha saw was the silhouette in the open window.
“What’s going on?” Shakespeare was asking stupidly in the background. Rose checked Dolly’s pulse.

“She’s dead. I think her heart just…gave out. She died of fright.”

“Rose?” Martha called uncertainly. Rose looked up to see the other woman standing in the window.

“What’s up? What’d you see?”

Martha hesitated for a moment before saying, “A witch.”
Chapter Summary

The end of Rose's and Martha's first adventure. 2/2

Nobody slept that night.

They sat in Shakespeare room, gathered around the table. Every now and then one would try to attempt to speak, but nobody was sure what to say.

Martha’s declaration of seeing a witch had shaken them all.

Rose’s head was spinning as she tried reach out to the TARDIS again — she had so many questions, but now the connection had gone back to being as uncertain and weak as it had been before. She could feel the ship there…but she couldn’t talk to her.

It was frustrating.

“Oh sweet Dolly Bailey,” Shakespeare said finally, sighing. “She sat out three bouts of the plague in this place when we all ran like rats. But what could have scared her so? She had such enormous spirit.”

Rose sighed, winding a strand of hair around her finger and giving a light tug. Come on, talk to me, she begged. She had no idea what was going on. She needed help.

“But the thing is,” Martha spoke up, “Lynley drowned on dry land, Dolly died of fright, and they were both connected to you.”

“You’re accusing me?” Shakespeare sounded offended.

“No,” Martha replied evenly, “but I saw a witch, big as you like, flying, cackling away, and you’ve written about witches.”

“I have? When was that?”

“Not yet,” Rose muttered absently. Please, help me, I can’t do this…

“Peter Streete spoke of witches,” Shakespeare remembered suddenly.

“Who’s Peter Streete?” Martha gave Rose a look. She seemed distracted.

“Our builder. He sketched the plans for the Globe.”

The Globe. The words resonated strangely in Rose’s head. This place seemed to be doing that to her. “Let’s go,” she said suddenly, standing up. Shakespeare and Martha looked up at her in disbelief.

“Go where?”

“The Globe.”
“Dame Rose, now hardly seems like the time to take in a show,” Shakespeare said patiently. “And besides, there will be nothing there until tonight.”

“Fine, stay here then.”

And with that Rose turned on her heel and walked out. There was a beat, and then the sound of Shakespeare and Martha hurrying after her.

The Globe was as empty as Shakespeare had promised, which was good honestly. Made investigating so much easier. Rose walked right to the middle, standing there and turning in place. “What is she doing?” She heard Shakespeare whisper.

“You know, I’ve kind of learned not to question it.”

Columns. There were columns. As Rose turned, she counted. “Fourteen,” she finally declared. “Fourteen sides.” She whipped around to look at Shakespeare. “Why fourteen, Will?”

That caught Shakespeare off guard, to say the least. “It was the shape Peter Streete thought best, that’s all. Said it carried sound well.”

Rose shook her head, pressing her lips thin for a minute. Fourteen. There was something about fourteen. “Fourteen,” she murmured. She could feel the TARDIS trying to tell her something, like a dull throb in the back of her mind. “Fourteen. What is it?”

“There’s fourteen lines in a sonnet,” Martha pointed out.

“Are there? Eight and six, right. I always hated writing sonnets. Fourteen lines, fourteen sides…” She groaned, rubbing the back of her head. A headache was starting to blossom. “Fourteen. What’s a shape with fourteen sides called?”

“Tetradecagon,” Martha replied instantly.

“Yeah, I’ll never remember that.” Rose ran a hand through her hair. “Fourteen, sides, lines, shapes, words, letters, what does it all mean?”

“It doesn’t mean anything,” Shakespeare broke in. “It’s just a theatre.”

“Of course it is, but anythin’ can be magic, even a theatre. You should know that better than anyone. Standin’ up there, say the right thing, you can move entire groups of people, bring grown men to tears.” Rose whirled back to look at them again. “Words are power. The right words at the right time can change a life, a world.”

“Like that box of yours,” Martha spoke up thoughtfully. “Small wooden box with all that power inside.”

“Bigger on the inside,” Rose whispered. “Oh Martha you are brilliant.” She raised her voice. “Peter Streete would know. I need to talk to him.”

“You won’t get an answer,” Shakespeare informed her. “A month after finishing this place, lost his mind.”


“Started raving about witches, hearing voices, babbling. His mind was addled.”

“Well where is he now?” Rose asked impatiently. She didn’t have time for this.
“Bedlam.”

“What’s Bedlam?” Martha asked.

“Bethlem Hospital. The madhouse.”

“Oh lovely,” Rose muttered. “We’re going to go there. Right now. Come on.”

“Wait, I’m coming with you!” Shakespeare said as he hurried after them. “I want to see this first hand.” He stopped, however, when two young men walked in. “Oh, Ralph, the last scene as promised.” Shakespeare produced a bundle of papers from under his coat. “Copy it, hand it round, learn it, speak it. Back before curtain up. And remember, kid, project. Eye and teeth. You never know, the Queen might turn up.” He laughed as he hurried after Rose and Martha. “As if. She never does.”

As they rushed down the street, Shakespeare questioned, “So tell me of Freedonia, where women can be doctors, writers, actors.”

“This country’s ruled by a woman,” Martha pointed out.

“Ah, she’s royal.” Shakespeare waved it off. “That’s God’s business. Though you are a royal beauty.”

“Whoa, Nelly.” Martha stopped. “I know for a fact you’ve got a wife in the country.”

“Oh but Martha, this is Town,” Shakespeare pointed out silkily.

“Hey, I hate to interrupt,” Rose said as she stopped and popped back. “But you know, things to do, places to see, we can all flirt later can’t we?”

“Is that an offer, Dame Rose?”

Rose sighed, shaking her head. “I walked into that one, didn’t I? Now move!”

They were halfway to Bethlehem when Rose skidded to a halt, head snapping around. There was something…strange in the air. Almost electric. “Rose?” Martha stepped up next to her. “What’s wrong?”

“Don’t you feel that?” It was so thick, how was everyone around them not affected?

“Feel what?”

Shakespeare was watching them, slightly suspicious, and after a moment the feeling dissipated. “Never mind it. Come on.”

They started down the street again. The feeling was gone, but the memory of it wouldn’t be shaken. TARDIS? She reached out to the ship uncertainly. There was no answer, of course.

She was on her own.

Bethlehem made Rose feel absolutely sick. They stood in the entrance way, the screams of the prisoners echoing back to them. “Does my Lord Shakespeare wish some entertainment while he waits?” The seedy keeper asked eagerly. “I’d whip these madmen. They’ll put on a good show for you. Mad dog in Bedlam.”

“Don’t you dare,” Rose snapped before Shakespeare could answer. “This is sick, they aren’t toys
they’re human beings! What kind of hospital is this?"

The keeper chose not to answer that, saying instead, “Well wait here, then, while I make him decent for the ladies.”

Rose’s jaw twitched as she watched the man walk away. “So this is what you call a hospital, yeah?” Martha sounded absolutely disgusted. “Where patients are whipped to entertain the gentry? And you put your friend here?”

“Oh, it’s all so different in Freedonia,” Shakespeare said, a bit sarcastically.

“But you’re clever,” Martha protested. “Do you honestly think this place is any good?”

“I’ve been mad. I’ve lost my mind. Fear of this place set me right again. It serves its purpose.”

That caught Martha off guard. “Mad in what way?”

“You lost your son,” Rose said quietly. The Doctor had always been spouting off random Shakespeare trivia.

“My only boy.” Shakespeare’s voice was heavy. “The Black Death took him. I wasn’t even there.”

“I didn’t know.” Martha, in returned, sounded regretful. “I’m sorry.”

“It made me question everything. The futility of this fleeting existence. To be or not to be.” Shakespeare paused. “Oh, that’s quite good.”

“You should write it down.”

“Mmm…maybe not. A bit pretentious?”

“This way, my lord and ladies!” The keeper called suddenly. They made their way through the rows of cells, trying to avoid being grabbed. “They can be dangerous,” the Keeper said as he let them into Peter’s cell. “Don’t know their own strength.”

“I think it helps if you don’t whip them!” Rose snarled. “Now get out!”

The keeper left, and Rose carefully approached the huddled figure in the back of the cell. “Peter? Peter Streele?”

“He’s the same as he was.” Shakespeare sounded bored. “You’ll get nothing out of him.”

“Peter?”

Rose had no idea what to do. If the Doctor was here he probably would’ve been able to help. But Rose couldn’t do anything.

“What do I do?” She whispered. She was completely lost. The TARDIS hummed in the back of her mind, and suddenly the ship’s presence in her mind became…stronger. It was almost overwhelming.

Martha hurried forward as Rose slumped, nearly falling over. “Rose?” She knelt down beside the blonde. “What—?”

The words froze in her throat when she saw Rose’s glowing eyes. “Rose…?”
Rose, in an almost trance-like state, raised her hands to press her fingers to Pete’s temples. “It’s okay, Peter,” she whispered, assuring the poor, shaking man. There was something…different about her voice. Ethereal. “My name is Rose. I’m going to protect you. But I need you to tell me what I’m protecting you from. I need you to go back to before, when everything was still okay. I need you to go back to when you were yourself, and tell me what happened.”

As she spoke she helped Peter stand, laying him down on his cot. “Tell me the story, Peter. Tell me about the witches.”

When Peter spoke, his voice was distant. “Witches spoke to Peter. In the night, they whispered. They whispered. Got Peter to build the Globe to their design. Their design! The fourteen walls. Always fourteen. When the work was done they snapped poor Peter’s wits.”

“Where did Peter see the witches?” Rose prompted gently. “Where in the city, Peter, I need you tell me, please. You’ve got to tell me, where were they?”

“All Hallows Street,” Peter whispered, and suddenly the air in the room shifted. Rose’s head snapped around to see a grotesque woman standing in the corner.

“Too many words,” she hissed, and Martha jerked back in surprise.

“What the hell?!?”

“Just one touch the heart,” the woman whispered, reaching out.

“No!” Rouse shouted, but it was too late. The woman touched her hand to Peter’s chest, and he fell over. Dead.

“Witch!” Shakespeare shouted. “I’m seeing a witch!”

“Now who would be next, hmmm?” The witch asked, scanning the group. “Just one touch. I’ll stop your frantic hearts. Poor, fragile mortals.”

“Let us out!” Martha screamed, running to the cell door. “Let us out!”

“That’s not going to work,” Rose said without taking her eyes away from the witch. “The whole building’s shouting that.”

“Who will die first, hmmm?” The witch taunted.

“Well,” Rose drew herself up to full height, eyes still glowing. “If you’re looking for volunteers.”

“No, don’t!” Martha protested.

“Can’t you stop her?” Shakespeare asked, looking between Martha and Rose. They’d seemed so knowledgeable.

“No mortal has power over me.”

“Oh, but there’s power in words,” Rose said in a low voice. She still didn’t quite sound…right. It worried Martha. “As I’m sure you’re aware, better than most, even. You use words to channel energy, and the number, fourteen…” The words echoed in Rose’s head even as she said them. “Creature, I name you Carrionite!”

The woman screeched as she disappeared in a flash of light, and in the same moment the golden glow faded from Rose’s eyes and she collapsed.
“Rose!”

Martha hurried over, helping the blonde up. “Oh my head,” she groaned, swaying slightly. She felt like something was trying to pound its way out of her brain.

“What did you do?” Martha asked quietly, keeping an arm around’ Rose’s shoulders.

“I named her.” The TARDIS had faded away again, but she’d left a gift in Rose’s head — knowledge. “The power of a name. Old magic.”

“But there’s no such thing as magic.”

Rose shook her head, wincing. “It’s just a different sort of science. Humans chose mathematics. With the right numbers, you can split the atoms. But Carrionites, they use words instead.”

“Use them for what?” Shakespeare spoke up for the first time.

“The end of the world.”

They managed to get out without being seen, hurrying back to the inn. Rose’s headache subsided somewhat, but the pain was still very much there.

“What do they want, though?” Martha asked as they settled down. “Why are they here?”

“The same reasons ninety-nine percent of aliens come to Earth.” Rose sighed, dragging her hands through her hair. “They want to take over the Earth. They disappeared back at the dawn of the universe, so old they’re thought to be legend. They’re looking for a new world though, and Earth is it.”

“But how?”

Rose’s eyes turned to Shakespeare. “I’m lookin’ at the man with the words.”

“Me?” Shakespeare sounded offended. “But I’ve done nothing.”

“Hold on, though,” Martha spoke up suddenly. “What were you doing last night, when that Carrionite was in the room?”

“Finishing the play.”

“What happens on the last page?” Rose asked.

“The boys get the girls. They have a bit of a dance. It’s all as funny and thought provoking as usual. Except…” His voice drifted off as he thought. “Those last few lines. Funny thing is, I don’t actually remember writing them.”

“They’re usin’ you,” Rose said, jumping up. “They had you write those words, it’s a spell, a code. Love’s Labours Won, it’s a weapon!”

“Last night you had no idea about any of this,” Martha said in disbelief. “Now you’re an expert?”

“Yeah, goin’ all glow-y makes me really smart,” Rose said dismissively. “Never mind that now though, they’re usin’ the Globe to try and cast their spell, and we need to stop them. The play’s the thing!”

“Oh, I like that,” Shakespeare said thoughtfully, and Rose looked at Martha.
“That his?” She nodded. “Then you can have it Will.”

They found a map, searching it over quickly. “All Hallows Street,” Rose said finally, pointing to the street on the map. “Martha and I will go track them down. Will, you need to go to the Globe and do whatever you can to stop that play.”

“I’ll do it,” Shakespeare said with a determined nod. “All these years, I’ve been the cleverest man around, but next to you Dame Rose, I feel as if I know nothing.”

“Oh, don’t complain.” Martha smirked.

“I’m not.” Shakespeare sounded thrilled. “It’s marvelous. Good luck, Dame Rose.”

“Good luck, Shakespeare.” Rose smiled. “Once more unto the breach.”

“I like that.” The man paused for a moment. “What a minute, that’s mine!”

Rose winked, grabbing Martha’s hand and pulling her out of the room. “Just shift!”

She and Martha ran through the streets together, winding through the crowds. “Here we are,” Rose murmured as they approached All Hallows Street.

“The thing is…” Martha said slowly. “Am I missing something here? The world didn’t end in fifteen-nineteen. It just didn’t. Look at me. I’m living proof.”

“Everyone thinks time is a straight line,” Rose explained as she walked along. “But it’s not, is the thing. If there’s a blip in the middle of the line, it can change everything. Like Back To The Future. Marty McFly changes history.”

“And he started to fade away,” Martha finished. “Oh my god. Am I going to fade?”

“We all will if we don’t do something.” Rose stopped in the middle of the street, look around. “But which house?”

Right on cue, a door creaked open. “Or…witch house.”

They made their way inside carefully, heading upstairs. Another door was already waiting open for them. “I take it we’re expected,” Rose muttered as they slipped in. And there was Lilith waiting for them.

“Oh I think Death has been waiting for you a very long time,” she taunted, and Rose gritted her teeth.

“Right, then,” Martha stepped forward with a flourish. “It’s my turn. I know how to do this.” She pointed at Lilith and called, “I name thee Carrionite!” There was a pause of silence as nothing happened. “What did I do wrong? Was it the finger?”

“The power of a name works only once,” Lilith informed her silkily. “Observe. I gaze upon this bag of bones and now I name thee, Martha Jones!”

Martha dropped like a rock, and Rose dove to grab her, easing her descent to the ground. “What have you done?” She snapped, looking up to glare at Lilith.

“Only sleeping, alas. It’s curious. The name has less impact. She’s somehow out of her time.” Lilith moved her gaze to Rose, smirking. “And you Dame Rose. You are quite interesting indeed. I see two names. Oh, but which one is real?”
“Why don’t you give a try and find out?” Rose asked, pushing herself up. She was about the same height as Lilith, and looking intimidating was out, but she could try. “The Carrionites vanished. Where did you go?”

“The Eternals found the right word to banish us into deep darkness.” Well Rose hadn’t been expecting an answer. So one that didn’t make sense was just fine.

“And how did you escape?”

“New words. New and glittering, from a mind like no other.”

It took a moment to click in Rose’s mind. “Shakespeare.”


Us. “How many of you?”

“Just the three. But the play tonight shall restore the rest. Then the human race will be purged as pestilence.” Rose bristled a bit that. “And from this world we will lead the universe back into the old ways of blood and magic.”

“Busy schedule,” Rose said, a bit sarcastically. “But first you’ve got to get past me.”

“You’re just a human.” Lilith laughed. “What do you think you can do?”

“You’re threatening my world, I think you’ll be surprised.”

Lilith just laughed again, jumping back out the window, hovering for a moment. “I would like to see you try, little human.”

And with that she disappeared.

“Ooohhh,” Rose heard Martha groan in the background, and she hurried to help the other woman up. “Blimey, anyone get the license plate on the truck that ran me over?”

Rose smiled a bit. “Can’t say I did, sorry. No time though. We’ve got to get to the Globe.”

They hurried out, running down the street. “We’re going the wrong way!” Martha shouted, and Rose skidded to a halt.

“What? Right. Other way!”

A red glow was hanging over the Globe as they ran, people running away from the area, screaming, and preacher shouting, “I told thee so! I told thee!” as Martha and Rose ran by him.

“Blimey,” Rose groaned. “Stage door, come on!”

They found Shakespeare in the back, stirring groggily. “All you had to do was stop the play!” Rose said as she helped Shakespeare up.

“Hit my head,” he replied in a pained groan.

“Never mind it, now, we need to do somethin’.”
Rose hurried out onto the stage, Martha and Shakespeare right behind her. “Try and stop us, little girl!” She heard Lilith shout over the roaring winds that whipped through the theatre. “Then watch this world become a blasted heath! They come. They come!”

Rose stepped back, heart pounding. She didn’t know what to do. She didn’t know…

Words.

She whipped around to look at Shakespeare. “Come on Will, you have to do somethin’! The world needs you!”

“But what can I do?!”

“Reverse it! If words are power than you’re the most powerful man on this planet! You’re the wordsmith, a true genius. You’re the only one clever enough for this!”

“But what words?” Shakespeare demanded. “I have none ready!”

“You’re William Shakespeare!” If he couldn’t come up with anything than they were all dead.

“But these Carrionite phrases, they need such precision!”

“Just trust yourself!” Now wasn’t the time for a wordy speech, unfortunately. “That’s your thing, you come up with words and they’re perfect, they last forever! Just improvise!”

Shakespeare hesitated for a moment before he took a deep breath and started speaking. “Close up this din of hateful, dire decay, decomposition of your witches’ plot! You thieve my brains, consider me your toy. My doting Rose tells me I am not!”

“No!” Rose heard Lilith screech, and she smirked. “Words of power!”

“Foul Carrionite spectres, cease your show! Between the points…” Shakespeare’s voice drifted off as he looked back at Rose.

“Seven six one three nine oh!” Rose had no idea where the numbers came from, she just rattled them off without thinking. But she had a feeling they were right.

“Seven six one three nine oh!” Shakespeare repeated. “Banished like a thinker’s cuss, I say to thee…”

What rhymed with cuss? Rose looked back at Martha, and she shrugged before screaming, “Expelliarmus!”

“Expelliarmus!”

“Expelliarmus!” Shakespeare repeated, and the Carrionites screamed as they were dragged back up into the sky.

“Good old JK!” Rose shouted, jumping up and down and grinning as she cheered.

“The deep darkness!” Lilith screamed. “They are consumed!”

“Look!” Martha yelled, pointing to the papers that were flying up into the air.

“Love’s Labours Won. There it goes,” Rose called back. The lost play. Lost forever.
They watched, wide-eyed and grinning, as the Carrionites disappeared into the sky and the sky cleared with a flash and a bang.

After a moment the audience started clapping. “…They think it was all special effects?” Martha asked in disbelief.

“Your effect is special indeed,” Shakespeare said with a coy smile, and Rose rolled her eyes as she stepped off stage.

“Not your best line,” she heard Martha tease. She went up to the box where Lilith and the other witches had been sitting, and saw a small crystal sitting on the ground. She bent down to pick it up, and saw the Carrionites reflected in the crystal.

* * * * *

“…”And I say, a heart for a hart and a dear for a deer!” Shakespeare finished with a grin. Martha smiled, shaking her head.

“I don’t get it.”

“Then give me a joke from Freedonia,” Shakespeare challenged, and Martha grinned.

“Okay. Shakespeare walks into a pub and the landlord says, ‘Oi mate, you’re Bard.’”

The writer laughed. “That’s brilliant! Doesn’t make sense, mind you, but never mind that. Now come here.”

He slid an arm around Martha’s waist, pulling her closer.

“I’ve only just met you,” Martha protested.

“Ah, why not then? Is there a lucky man waiting for you back in Freedonia?”

Martha laughed at that, backing away. “I don’t know how to tell you this, oh great genius, but your breath doesn’t half stink.”

Rose was smiling as she came out from behind stage, carrying a skull and a stiff ruff wrapped around her neck. “Good stuff back there, though this one’s a bit weird.” She held up the skull. “Reminds me of a Sycorax.”

“Sycorax,” Shakespeare repeated thoughtfully. “Nice word. I’ll have that one too.”

Rose looked at Martha, and she nodded. “All yours then, Will. Here.” She took the ruff off herself and wrapped it around Shakespeare’s neck instead. “Neck brace. Wear that for a few day till it’s better. Although…it suits you. I’d consider keepin’ it.”

“What about the play?” Martha asked curiously. Rose shook her head.

“Gone. Looked all over, but it went the way of the Carrionites.”

“My lost masterpiece,” Shakespeare sighed.

“You could write it up again,” Martha suggested, but Rose shook her head.

“I wouldn’t. Still power in those words. Best to stay lost and forgotten.”
“Oh, but I’ve got new ideas,” Shakespeare assured them. “Perhaps it’s time I wrote about fathers and sons, in memory of my boy, my precious Hamnet.”

Martha blinked. “Hamnet?”

“That’s him,” Shakespeare confirmed.

“Hamnet?”

“What’s wrong with that?”

“Anyways, time we be off,” Rose said with a small laughed. “Think there’s an attic in the TARDIS where this lot can scream for all of eternity, and we’ve got to get back to Freedonia.”

“You mean travel through time and space,” Shakespeare corrected, and Rose blinked.

“Come again.”

“Martha is from the future, that’s not too hard to work out,” Shakespeare said with confidence. “But you, Dame Rose…you are still quite the mystery to me.”

A slow smile pulled at Rose’s lips. “That’s incredible. You’re incredible.”

“I will figure you out someday, m’lady,” Shakespeare informed her with a smile before turning to Martha. “And Martha, let me say goodbye to you in a new verse. A sonnet for my Dark Lady.” Martha’s eyes went wide, and Rose had to struggle not to laugh. “Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?” Martha’s lips stretched into a wide grin. “Thou art more lovely and more temperate—”

He was interrupted, unfortunately, by two of his actors running in. “Will!”

“Will, you’ll never believe it, she’s here! She’s turned up!”

“We’re the talk of the town, she heard about last night. She wants us to perform again!”

“Who?” Martha asked, looking between the men.

“Her Majesty,” one of the men said excitedly. “She’s here.”

Rose and Martha straightened up as a regal woman walked in with two pikemen. “Queen Elizabeth the First!” Even Rose recognized her. The queen stopped, eyes wide.

“You!”

Rose blinked. “What?”

“The Doctor’s floozy!”

“…What?”

“Off with her head!”

“WHAT?!”

“Never mind what!” Martha grabbed Rose’s hand, dragging her way. “Just run! See you Will, and thanks!”

“Stop them!” They heard Queen Elizabeth shout behind them.
“What have you done to upset her?” Martha asked as they ran through the streets, the pikemen on their tails.

“How should I know, I’ve never met the woman!”

“Who was that Doctor she mentioned?”

“Never mind it!”

They got to the TARDIS, and Rose quickly opened the doors, letting Martha in. She stopped and looked back, however.

*The Doctor’s floozy…* but she’d never met Queen Elizabeth. Not with the Doctor. Not at all.

What did it mean?

“Oh!”

She drew her head in quickly as an arrow soared toward them. The dull thunk of the arrow hitting wood echoed through the room as Rose ran up to the console and sent them off into the vortex.
“So where to next?” Rose asked happily as she bounced around the console, all smiles and joy. “We did the past, about the future?”

“Can you only go to Earth?” Martha asked curiously as she watched the blonde. So far their only trip off her home planet had been in a hospital to the moon.

“Oh no, you name it, we can go there! I’ve been to tons of other planets!”

Martha smiled a bit at that. “How about your favorite planet, then?”

Rose stopped, turning to look at Martha, tilting her head a bit. “My favorite planet…” Could she really choose one? She’d loved every planet so much…

“Okay!”

Suddenly she was moving again, running around. She knew exactly where to go. Martha laughed as she watched her go.

“Where are we going, then?”

“Nope, it’s a surprise!”

Martha shook her head. Rose switched between calm/quiet and hyperactive the way most people blinked. It was funny, if not a little unnerving.

“Alright!” Rose said happily as they landed with a jolt. “Here we are, year five billion and fifty-three. Planet, New Earth!” She grinned. “Second hope of mankind, and we’re right in the middle of New New York. Or technically, it’s the fifteenth New York, so it’s New New New — nope, don’t have the patience for it. But it’s one of the most dazzling cities ever built.”

As she spoke, Rose led Martha to the door and they stepped outside — right into the middle of an alley. In a rainstorm.

“Oh that’s nice,” Martha groaned. “One of those mad books of yours must have a different version of dazzling.”

“Oh it’s just a bit of rain,” Rose waved her off, taking her hand. “Come on, let’s get under cover!”

And they ran down the street, finding a small overhang to huddle under. “Well, looks like the same old Earth to me,” Martha commented as she looked around. “On a Wednesday afternoon.”

“Hold on, hold on,” Rose sighed as she tapped the monitor behind them, poking it with the sonic screwdriver. “Let’s have a look.”

It took a moment, but finally the screen flickered on, showing a young blonde woman. “And the
driving should be clear and easy, with fifteen extra lanes open for the New New Jersey expressway.”

The screen changed to a view of the above world. “Oh, that’s what we had before! I guess we’re in the lower levels…”

“You’ve brought me to the slums?” Martha raised an eyebrow.

“Well up there you have murderous cat nuns. We’re probably safer down here.” Rose grinned. “Besides, this is the real city.”

“I’ll take your word for it.” Martha rolled her eyes, smiling. The rain hitting the overhang above them finally slowed, stopping.

“Oh, the rain’s stoppin’! See, better already.”

They wandered out, looking around. “So when you say last time,” Martha asked slowly, “do you mean with that friend of yours? The one you’re borrowing the ship from.”

“Eh…yeah. He brought me here once. I fell in love.” She paused for a moment. “With the planet, I mean. It’s amazing. The grass smells like apples.”

Martha just raised an eyebrow at her. She wasn’t very good at covering slip ups. They were distracted, however, by the sound of doors creaking open, and they looked around to a nearby stall swinging open.

“Oh!” The man who opened the door shouted. “How long you been there? Happy. You want Happy.”

Before Rose or Martha could question that, two more hatches opened, revealing women. “Customers!” One of them yelled. “Customers, we’ve got customers!”

“We’re in business,” the third one said. “Mother, open up the Mellow, and the Read!”

“Happy, Happy, lovely happy Happy!” The first man called.

“Anger, buy some Anger!”

“Ger some Mellow! Makes you feel all bendy all day long.”

“Don’t go to them, they’ll rip you off. Do you want some happy?”

“No, thanks,” Rose said stiffly as she turned Martha away from them.

“Are they selling drugs?” Martha murmured.

“Sounds more like they’re selling moods.” How appropriate.

“Same thing, isn’t it?”

As they watched, more people started walking into the area, dressed in rags and looking rather put out. “Over here, sweetheart!” One of the sellers called to a wandering woman. “That’s it, come on, I’ll get you first!”

“Oi! Oi, you! Over here!” One of the others tried to entice her. “Over her, buy some Happy!”

But the woman was already approaching the one who had called to her originally. “I want to buy
some Forget.”


“It’s my mother and father.” She sounded close to tears. “They went on the motorway.”

“Oh, that’s swine,” the seller said sympathetically. “Try this. Forget forty-three. That’s two credits.”

“No, hang on a minute,” Rose said, hurrying to the woman. “What happened to your parents?”

“They drove off,” the woman said sadly.

“Well they might come back, right?”

“Everyone goes on the motorway in the end. I’ve lost them.”

Okay that made no sense. “But they can’t have gone ar. You could find them.” But the woman was already taking the patch, pressing it to her neck. “No, no no no don’t—!”

But it was too late. “I’m sorry.” The woman’s voice was airy now, relaxed. “What were you saying?”

“Your parents,” Rose prompted. “Your mother and father. They’re on the motorway.”

“Are they? That’s nice. I’m sorry, I won’t keep you.” And with that she wandered off, leaving a stunned Rose and a slightly disgusted Martha behind her.

“So that’s the human race, five billion years in the future. Off their heads on chemicals.”

Martha shouted suddenly, and Rose whirled around to see a man dragging her back, a woman pointing a gun.

“I’m sorry,” the man said as he pulled Martha away. “I’m really, really sorry. We just need three, that’s all.”

“No, you let her go!” Rose snapped, trying to walk after them, but she still had a gun leveled at her. “I’m warning you, let her go! Whatever you want, I’ll help, we can both help, but you have to let her go first!”

“I’m sorry,” the woman said. “I’m really sorry. Sorry.”

And with that the disappeared through a door, locking it behind them. Rose dove at the door, trying to rip it open. She finally remembered the sonic screwdriver just in time to run out and see the car pull away. “Martha!”

Shouting wasn’t going to do any good though. She whirled back on her heel, running to the closest trailer and pounding on the hatch. It flew open to reveal a grinning man. “Thought you’d come back. Do you want some happy Happy?”

“Those people, who were they?” Rose demanded. “Where did they take her?”

“They’ve taken her to the motorway,” another pharmacist spoke up.

“Looked like carjackers to me,” the first one said.

“I’d give up now, darling,” a third one piped. “You won’t see her again.”
“Used to be thriving, this place. You couldn’t move. But they all go to the motorway in the end.”

“He kept saying three, we need three,” Rose said, trying to make the pharmacists focus. “What did he mean, three?”

“It’s the car-sharing policy, to save fuel. You get special access if you’re carrying three adults.”

“This motorway, how do I get there?” Rose demanded.

“Straight down the alley, keep going to the end. You can’t miss it.” The pharmacist paused for a moment then grinned. “Tell you what. How about some happy Happy? Then you’ll be smiling, my love.”

Rose shook her head, scowling as she backed away and started down the street. “Word of advice, all of you. CASuh up, close down and pack your bags?”

“Why’s that then?”

“Because as soon as I’ve found her, alive and well — and I will find her alive and well — then I’m coming back.” She stopped and whirled on her heel to glare at all of them. “This street is closing down tonight!”

Martha stirred, frowning as she woke up on the floor of the car, and she grasped at the back of her neck, finding a tab and ripping it off. Her captors were in the front seat, talking about blue skies and apple grass. Martha looked around, finding a gun and grabbing it, pointing it at them.

“Take me back,” she demanded. “Whoever you are, just take me back to my friend. That’s all I want. I won’t cause any trouble. Just take me back.”

“I’m sorry,” the woman apologized. “That’s not a real gun.”

“Yeah, well you would say that,” Martha scoffed.

“Where do you get a gun from, these days?” The woman questioned. “I wouldn’t even know how to fire.”

“…No, nor me,” Martha admitted with a sigh, setting the gun aside. “Okay.”

“What’s your name?”

“Martha,” she introduced herself. Might as well. “Martha JOnes.”

“Well, I’m Cheen,” the woman said with a small smile. “And this is Milo.” She indicated the man in the driver’s seat. “And I swear we’re sorry. We’re really, really sorry. We just needed access to the fast lane, but I promise, as soon as we arrive, we’ll drop you off and you can go back and find your friend.”

“Seriously?” It couldn’t be that easy.

“I swear! Look, honesty patch.” She showed Martha the patch she was wearing.

“All the same, it’s kidnapping!” Kidnapped on an alien world in the future. Wonderful. “Where are we, anyway?”

“We’re on the motorway,” Milo explained, and Martha looked out the window. Or tried to, at least.
“What’s that, then? Fog?”

“That’s exhaust fumes.”

“We’re going out to Brooklyn,” Milo said. “Everyone says the air’s so much cleaner, and we couldn’t stay in Pharmacy Town, because…”

“Well, because of me,” Cheen spoke up. “I’m pregnant. We only discovered it last week. Scan says it’s going to be a boy.”

“Right,” Martha said sarcastically. “What do I do now, congratulate my kidnappers?”

“Oh, we’re not kidnappers. Not really.”

“Nope? You’re idiots.” Martha grabbed the honesty patch on Cheen’s neck, ripping it off. “You’re having a baby, and you’re wearing that? Not anymore.”

“This’ll be as fast as we can go,” Milo said. “We’ll take the motorway to the Brooklyn flyover, and then after that it’s going to take awhile, because then there’s no fast lane, just ordinary roads, but at least it’s direct.”

“It’s only ten miles,” Cheen added, sounding pleased.

“How long is it going to take?” Martha demanded.

“About six years.” Martha’s mouth dropped.

“What?”

“Be just in time for him to start school.”

Martha shook her head. “No, sorry, hold on. Six years? Ten miles in six years? How come?”

Rose, meanwhile, was running down the street, trying to find a door that would bring her out onto the highway. She finally found a metal door, letting herself in and hurrying out onto a balcony, almost instantly choking on the fume-filled air. Her knees went out and she hit the metal grating, coughing and choking in an attempt to fill her lungs.

“Hey!” A voice called, and Rose raised her watering eyes to see a figure standing over her. “You daft little street strut. What’re you doing there? Either et our get in, come on!”

She tried to push herself up, but she was coughing too hard. The figure grabbed her, dragging her up and pulling her into the car, and she collapsed against the floor, gasping. “Here you go,” a gentle voice said, and a mask was pressed over Rose’s mouth. Fresh oxygen rushed straight to her lungs, and damn if that wasn’t the best feeling ever.

“Just standing there, breathing it in,” her rescuer said as he removed his scarf and goggles — a cat person. How common were those on New New Earth?

“There’s this story,” he continued as Rose sat there and breathed, “says back in the old days, on Junction forty seven, this woman stood in the exhaust fumes for a solid twenty minutes. By the time they found her, her head had swollen to fifty feet.”

“Oh you’re making that up.” The woman rolled her eyes.

“A fifty foot head!” The cat man insisted. “Just think about it. Imagine picking that nose.”
“Oh stop it, that’s disgusting.”

“What, did you never pick your nose.”

The woman’s attention was drawn to the windshield before she could answer. “Bran, we’re moving.”

“Right.” The cat-man — Bran — scurried forward. “I’m there, I’m on it.”

The car shuddered and jerked as it moved forward for barely a minute before coming to a halt again. “Twenty hards. We’re having a good day.” Bran turned to looked at Rose. “And who might you be, dear? Very well-dressed for a hitchhiker.”

Rose dared to take the oxygen mask away, taking an experimental breath. Her lungs still burned, but she could breathe. “Right. Sorry. M’name’s Rose.”

“Like the flower!” Bran sounded amused. “My name’s Thomas Kincade Brannigan, and this is the bane of my life, the lovely Valerie.”

“Nice to meet you,” Valerie said with a smile that Rose returned weakly.

“And that’s the rest of the family behind you.”

Rose turned, pulling back a curtain and revealing a litter of kittens. “Ah, they’re so cute!” Rose said happily, scooping one up and petting it carefully. “How old are they?”

“Just two months.”

“Poor little souls,” Bran sighed. “They’ve never known the ground beneath their paws. Children of the motorway.”

That brought Rose up short. “What…they were born here?”

“We couldn’t stop,” Valerie said wistfully. “We heard there jobs going, out in the laundries on Fire Island. Thought we’d take a chance.”

“You’ve been driving for two months?” Rose asked blankly.

“Do I look like a teenager?” Brannigan scoffed. “We’ve been driving for twelve years now.”

Rose nearly dropped the kitten in her hands. “…I’m sorry?”

“Yeah! Started out as newlyweds. Feels like yesterday.”

“Feels like twelve years to me,” Valerie said with an eyeroll.

“Ah sweetheart, but you’re still in love with me,” Bran teased back.

“Twelve years?” Rose was still stuck on that. “How far did you come? Where did you start?”

“Battery Park,” Bran explained. “It’s five miles back.”

“You traveled five miles in twelve years?”

Bran looked at Valerie. “I think she’s a bit slow.”
“Where are you from?” Valerie asked gently. Rose shook her head.

“Never mind that. I’ve got to get out. My friend’s in one of these cares. She was taken hostage. I should get back to the TARDIS.”

“You’re too late for that, we’ve passed the lay-by,” Bran cut in. “You’re a passenger now, sweetheart.”

“Well when’s the nexy lay-by?” Rose asked impatiently.

“Oh…six months?”

Martha watched as the car dipped lower and lower, passing lines of other cars. “How many cars are out there?” She asked after a minute.

“I don’t think anyone knows,” Cheen said distantly as she dug through her bag, pulling out a large biscuit. “Here we go. Hungry?”

“Oh, thanks,” Martha said gratefully as she took the biscuit. She hadn’t eaten since fifteen-ninety-nine. “But how far down is it to this fast lane?”

“Oh, it’s right at the bottom,” Milo explained. “Underneath the traffic jam. But not many people can afford three passengers, so it’s empty down there. Rumour has it you can reach up to thirty miles per hour.”

“Wow. That’s, like, crazy,” Martha deadpanned. “But how are you supposed to live inside this thing? It’s tiny.”

“Oh, we stocked up,” Cheen assured her. “Got self-replicating fuel, muscle stimulants for exercise, and there’s a chemical toilet at the back. And all waste products are recycled as food.”

“…” Martha looked at the biscuit in her hand, and dropped it when they weren’t looking. “Okay.”

“Oh, another gap!” Milo said happily. “This is brilliant.”

“Car sign in,” the computer droned.

“Car Four Six Five Diamond Six,” Milo said, “on descent to fast lane, thank you very much.”

“Please drive safely.”

Rose, meanwhile, was diving at the computer in Bran’s car. “I need to talk to the police,” she said as she buzzed the computer with the sonic screwdriver. She had no idea what she was doing, but it seemed to work.

“Thank you for your call,” the computer said. “You have been placed on hold.”

“Are you bloody serious?! You’re the police, what kind of police puts people on hold?!”

“Thank you for your call. You have been placed on hold.”

“Oh shut up!” Rose turned to Bran and Valerie. “Is there anyone else? Anyone I can call. I met the Duke of Manhattan once — kind of. Well, I was there. But could I get through to him?”

“You don’t sound certain, dearie,” Bran teased. “You can’t make outside calls, though. The
motoroway’s completely enclosed.”

Rose rubbed her eyes, standing up. “What about other cars?”

“Oh, we’ve got contact with them, yeah.” Bran started poking at the computer. “Well, some of them, anyway. They’ve got to be on your friends list. Now, let’s see. Who’s nearby? Ah, the Cassini sisters!”

The computer screen flashed to life, showing a picture of two olden women and the numbers 317a1.

“Still your hearts, my handsome girls. It’s Brannigan here.”

“Get off the line, Brannigan,” one of the woman said. “You’re a pest and a menace.”

Rose snorted a bit at that. “Oh, come now sisters. Is that any way to talk to an old friend?”

“You know full well we’re not sisters,” the voice informed him. “We’re married.”

“Ooo, stop that modern talk—”

“Really?” Rose said in disbelief. “Really? It’s the year five-billion something and that’s still going on? Listen, Mrs. Cassini, I’m sorry, my name’s Rose, I’m lookin’ for a friend of mine. She was carjacked. She’s inside one of these vehicles but I don’t know which one.”

“Wait a minute,” a second voice spoke up. “Could I ask what entrance did they use?”

Rose looked back at Brannigan. “Where’d you pick me up?”

“Pharmacy Town.”

“Pharmacy Town,” Rose repeated, “about twenty minutes ago.”

“Let’s have a look…”

“To marry a car-spotter,” the first woman sighed.

“In the last half hour, fifty-three new cats joined from the Pharmacy Town junction,” the second woman reported.

“Anything more specific?” Rose asked impatiently.

“All in good time…was she car-jacked by two people?”

“Yes, she was, yeah!”

“There we are…just one of those cars was destined for the fast lane. That means they had three on board. And car number is four six five diamond six.”

“That’s it!” Rose said happily. “So how do we find them?”

“Ah.” The second woman sighed. “Now there I’m afraid I can’t help.”

“Call them on this thing!” Rose’s voice cracked a bit. “We’ve got their number, diamond six!”

“But not if they’re designated fast lane,” Brannigan explained. “It’s a different class.”

“You could try the police,” the car spotter spoke up.
“They’ve put me on hold.”

“You’ll have to keep trying,” the spotter’s wife said. “There’s no one else.”

Rose sighed, running her hands through her hair and crumbling to sit on the floor, resting her head in her hands.

“Yeah. Thank you.”

Martha, Milo, and Cheen meanwhile, were on their way down. “See? Another ten layers to go,” Milo said happily. “We’re scorching.”

Martha paused as a low growl reached her ears. “What’s that? It’s coming from underneath.”

“It’s that noise, doesn’t it?” Cheen asked, sounding a bit panicked. “It’s like Kate said. The stories, they’re true.”

“What stories?” Martha demanded.

“It’s the sound of the air vents,” Milo interrupted. “That’s all. The exhaust fumes travel down, so at the base of the tunnel they’ve got air vents.”

“No, but the stories are much better,” Cheen insisted. “They say people go missing on the motorway. Some cars just vanish, never to be seen again, because there’s something living down there in the smoke. Something huge and hungry. And if you get lost on the road, it’s waiting for you.”

“But like I said. Air vents.” Milo turned the wheel. “Going down to the next layer.”

“Except look out there.” Martha gestured at the dense fog outside the windshield. “Does it look like the air vents are working?”

“No,” Cheen admitted.

“So what’s that, then?”

“Nah. Kid stuff.” Milo waved it off. “Car four six five diamond six, on descent.”

Rose’s head snapped up as something dawned on her. “We’ve got to go to the fast lane. Take me down.”

“No.” Valerie cut in firmly. “And that’s final. I’m not risking the children down there.”

“Why not?” Rose asked desperately. “What’s the risk? What happens down there?”

“We’re not discussing it. The conversation is closed.”

Well that had failed. “So we keep on driving.” Rose was miserable.
“Yes, we do,” Bran said evenly.

“For how long?”

“‘Till journey’s end.”

Rose stared at the floor for a long moment before shaking her head. “No. No this is insane.” She grabbed the radio handset. “Mrs. Cassini I’m sorry to bother you again, this is Rose, I just have a question How long have you been driving on the motorway?”

“Oh, we were among the first,” one of the women said. “It’s been twenty-three years now.”

“And in all that time, have you ever seen a police car, or an ambulance, or any rescue service? Anything official? Anything at all?”

The sound of fluttering papers came over the line. “I can’t keep track of everything,” the second woman said. That was a no, then.

“What if there’s no one out there?”

“Stop it,” Brannigan snapped, taking the mike back. “The Cassinis did you a favor.”

“Well someone has to ask! You’re all bein’ tight-lipped, you don’t want to talk about it, but you know it, don’t you? I see it in your eyes. What if the traffic jam never stops?”

“There’s a whole city above us,” Brannigan said stiffly. “The mighty city state of New New York. They wouldn’t just leave us.”

“Then where are they? Where’s anyone? What if there’s no help coming, nothing at all? Just the motorway, never ending. Going around and around. Forever.”

“Shut up!” Valerie cried. “Just shut up!”

The monitor flickered to life suddenly, showing the blonde woman Martha and Rose had seen earlier. “This is Sally Calypso, and it’s that time again. The sun is blazing high in the sky over the New Atlantic, the perfect setting for the daily contemplation.”

“You think you know us so well, Rose,” Brannigan said quietly. “But we’re not abandoned. Not while we have each other.”

“This is for all of you out there on the roads. We’re so sorry. Drive safe.”

A song echoed out over the speakers. “On a hill, far away, stood an old, rugged cross, the emblem of suffering and shame. And I love that old cross, where the dearest and best for a world of lost sinners was slain. So I’ll cherish the old rugged cross, till my trophies at last I lay down. I will cling to the old rugged cross, and exchange it some day for a crown.”

Rose brought her hands up to rub her eyes, taking a deep breath. She had no idea what to do anymore.

They were stuck.
Chapter Summary

Rose tries to find Martha, and Martha just tries to survive. 2/2

“Fast lane access. Please drive safely.”

“We made it!” Milo cheered. “The fast lane!”

They headed down, moving past the cars and coming into an empty lane. Martha looked around, examining the area. Where was everyone?

Back up in Brannigan’s car, Rose was preparing. “Right, then. If you don’t want take me, I’ll go down on my own.”

“What do you think you’re going to do?” Brannigan asked in disbelief as Rose sonicked the trap door open.

“Improvise. Just like the best of ‘em.”

“Capsule open,” the computer reported.

“Here we go then,” Rose muttered as she sat on the edge of the door, leaning over to see another car pull up below them.

“You can’t jump,” Valerie said in disbelief.

“Well what can it hurt?” Still Rose didn’t jump. She was well aware of what it could hurt.

“This Martha must be awfully important to you.”

“Hardly know her,” Rose admitted. “But it’s my fault she’s out there. Never should have been with me anyways. But I’m selfish.” She took a deep breath, nearly gagging as the fumes hit her lungs.

“Bye, then.”

And with that she dropped down onto the next car, trying not to breathe too much as she sonicked the hatch open and jumped in, finding herself looking at a pale-skinned man in a white suit.

“Who the hell are you?” He demanded.

“Er…Motorway Foot Patrol. I’m doing a survey. How are you enjoying your motorway?”

“Well, not very much,” the man reported. “Junction Five’s been closed for three years.”

“Brilliant.” Rose grinned. “Thank you. Your comments have been noted. Have a nice day!”

She opened the hatch and waited for another car to come along before jumping down, popping open the next door and jumping in.

“Hello, sorry,” Rose coughed as she straightened to look at the young Asian women in the car. “So
sorry. Do you mind if I borrow this?” She grabbed a blue headscarf. “Sorry. Thanks. Bye now!”

She tied the scarf over her mouth and jumped out the bottom hatch onto the next car. She let herself in — and instantly wished she’d waited for another car when she saw the naked man at the wheel. “Oh god, I’m so sorry!” She squeaked as she hurriedly moved on.

“Try again,” Cheen demanded as they tried to find an exit to get off at.

“Brooklyn turnoff one, closed,” the computer reported.

“Try the next one,” Cheen insisted.

“Brooklyn turnoff two, closed.”

“What do we do?”

“We’ll keep going ‘round,” Milo said gently. “We’ll do the whole loop, and by the time we come back ‘round, they’ll be open.”

Another growl ripped through the air. “You’re still calling that air vents?” Martha asked, raising an eyebrow.

“What else could it be?”

“What the hell is that?” Cheen asked, panicking.

“It’s just hydraulics,” Milo tried to assure her, but Martha wasn’t having it.

“It sounds like it’s alive.”

“It’s all exhaust fumes out there, nothing could breathe in that.”

The computer crackled to life suddenly, a voice echoing over the speakers. “Calling Car four six five diamond six. Repeat, calling Car four six five diamond six.”

Milo grabbed the handset to respond. “This is Car four six five diamond six. Who’s that? Where are you?”

“I’m in the fast lane, about fifty yards behind,” the voice reported. “Can you get back up? Can you get off the fast lane?”

“We only have permission to go down,” Milo said. “We need the Brooklyn Flyover.”

“It’s closed. Go back up.”

“We can’t.” Milo shook his head. “We’ll just go ‘round.”

“Don’t you understand?” The woman asked impatiently. “They’re closed. They’re always closed. We’re stuck down here, and there’s something else out there in the fog. Can’t you hear it?”

“That’s the air vents,” Milo argued weakly.

“Jehovah, what are you? Some stupid kid?” The woman asked impatiently. “Get out of here!”
A bang echoed through the speakers. “What was that?” Milo demanded.

“I can’t move! They’ve got us!”

“But what’s happening?”

“What’s got you?” Martha asked. “What is it?”

“Hang on. It’s here. Just drive, you idiots! Get out of here!”

The line went dead. “Can you hear me?” Milo called. “Hello!!”

“Just drive!” Martha cried. “Do what she said! Get us out of here!”

“But where?”

“Just straight ahead! And fast!”

“What is it?” Cheen was close to tears. “What’s out there? What is it?”

Up above, Rose jumped into another car, finding herself face to face with a man in a bowler hat and a pinstripe suit.

“Excuse me, is that legal?” He demanded.

“S-Sorry,” Rose stuttered, stumbling and coughing as she fell to her knees. “Motorway Foot…oh screw it.” She coughed hard, shaking her head. “Have you got any water?”

“Certainly,” the man said, pouring her some water. “Never let it be said that I’ve lost my manners.”

Rose sucked the water down, still coughing a bit. But it was better at least. “Is this the last layer?” she asked when she could speak again.

“We’re right at the bottom,” he man confirmed. “Nothing below but the fast lane.”

“Can we drive down?” Rose asked hopefully.

“There’s only two of us. You need three to go down.”

“Couldn’t we just…cheat?”

“Well I’d love to, but it’s an automated system,” the man explained. “The wheel would lock.”

Rose shook her head. “Great. Excuse me, then.”

She opened the hatch, looking down. “You can’t jump. It’s a thousand feet.”

“I’m just lookin’…”

She jerked back as growl hit her ears. “What was that?!?”

“I try not to think about it.”

Of course he did. “What are those lights?” Rose asked as she squinted through the fog. “What’s down there? I need to see.”

She pushed herself up without thinking, hurrying to the computer. “Hang on, do you know what
you’re doing?” The man demanded as Rose buzzed the computer with the sonic screwdriver.

“Nope.” But she could feel the TARDIS in the back of her mind, trying to guide her. The ship wouldn’t lead her wrong. “There must be some sort of ventilation, though. If I could just transmit a pulse through this thing, maybe I could trip the system, give us a bit of a breeze…”

She worked for a moment, hitting wires until something sparked. “Ha, there! Might shift the fumes a bit, give us a good look.”

The man was looking out into the empty space below. “What are those shapes?” He asked, squinting. Rose went back to look.

“They’re alive,” Rose murmured, squinting. She and the man jerked back again as giant claws snapped up at them.

“What the hell are they?!”

“Macra.” The word came out of nowhere. But Rose knew she was right.

Martha, Milo, and Cheen yelled as something slammed into their car. “Go faster!” Cheen shrieked.

“I’m at top speed!”

“No access above,” the computer reported.

“But this is an emergency!”

“Thank you for your call. You have been placed on hold.”

This was ridiculous. “Turn everything off,” Martha ordered, and Milo looked back at her like she’d lost her mind.

“You’ve got to be joking!”

“But listen, it’s all fog out there,” Martha insisted. “So how can they see us? Maybe it’s the engines, the sound, or the heat, or the lights. I don’t know. Turn everything off. They might not be able to find us.”

“What if you’re wrong?!”

“It can’t be any worse than this! Just do it!”

Milo finally turned the car off, and after a moment everything went quiet. “They’ve stopped,” Cheen breathed, relieved.

“Yeah, but they’re still out there.” Milo’s optimism had apparently gone out the window. Cheen looked back at Martha.

“How did you think of that?”

“I saw it on a film,” Martha said quietly. “They used to do it in submarines. The trouble is, I can’t remember what they did next.”

“Well, you’d better think of something, because we’ve lost the aircon,” Milo informed her. “If we don’t switch the engines back on, we won’t be able to breathe.”
“How long have we got?”

“Eight minutes, maximum.”

“What are the Macra?” The man asked curiously as Rose rocked back on her heels.

“No clue. I say a lot of fancy words but I have no idea what they mean.”

“Then how do you know the words?”

“It’s…a long story. Never mind it now, that’s not the point. Somethin’ tells me they’re pretty happy down there, so what do we do about it?”

There was a clang as something landed on the roof, and the hatch opened. “Oh, it’s like New Times Square in here for goodness sake!” The man complained as a cat nun dropped down from the roof.

“I’ve invented a sport.” Rose commented, mildly amused though also slightly cautious. She didn’t completely remember her last encounter with the cat nuns of New Earth Hospital, but she knew it hadn’t been pleasant.

“Rose Tyler you are a hard woman to find,” the nun commented as she straightened up, and Rose caught sight of the gun hanging at her side.

“Oh, no guns, not havin’ guns thanks.”

“I only brought this in case of pirates,” the nun insisted. “Rose, you’ve got to come with me.”

“Sorry, do I know you?” Rose asked, bewildered. She was talking like they were old friends.

“It’s been a long time — though longer for me than you apparently — and you weren’t exactly yourself when we last met from what I gathered. My name is Novice Hame, and I need you to come with me.”

“I can’t,” Rose insisted. “You lot got a bloody…infestation of something under your city and my friend is down there and if she’s still alive I gotta get to her. And you’re here now, we’ve got three, we can go—”

“I’m sorry, Ms. Tyler, I truly am,” the nun — Novice Hame — apologized, grabbing Rose’s wrist. “But the situation is worse than you can imagine.”

“No, wait—”

“Teleport.”

“Don’t—!”

Too late. They disappeared in a flash of light, landing roughly a moment later on a hard, messy floor. “Oh god,” Rose groaned as she lifted herself up. “And I thought the TARDIS was rough.” She turned to see Hame picking herself up. “Right, you got a teleport we can go right back and get people, startin’ with Martha.”

“I only had enough power for one trip,” Hame said remorsefully.

“Then get some more!” Rose burst out, annoyed. She did not have time for this. “Where the hell are we?”
“High above, in the over-city,” the nun explained, and Rose turned to look at around.

“We’re in the Senate, then? Good, then they’ve got some explainin’ to do. There are millions of people trapped down on that motorway, and they’re just keepin’ them there—”

“But you’re inside the Senate, right now,” Hame said quietly. “May the goddess Santori bless them.”

She pressed a button the teleport bracelet, and the lights flickered on. Rose felt the color drain from her face when she saw every seat populated by skeletons.

“They died, Rose Tyler. The city died.”

Rose swallowed hard. It took her a few moments to speak.

“How long?” She finally managed to get out.

“Twenty-four years.”

“…How?”

“A new chemical,” Hames explained. “They called it Bliss. Everyone tried it. They couldn’t stop. A virus mutated inside the compound and became airborne. Everything perished. Even the virus, in the end. It killed the world in seven minutes flat. There was just enough time to close down the walkways and the flyovers, sealing off the under-city. Those people on the motorway aren’t lost. They were saved.”

Rose finally forced herself to look away from the skeletons. “So the whole thing down there…it’s just running on automatic.”

“There’s not enough power to get them out,” Hame said sadly. “We did all we could to stop the system from choking.”

It took Rose a moment to process. “We?” She finally said. “Who’s we? How did you survive?”

“He protected me. He has waited for you, these long years.”

Rose…

The voice echoed in Rose’s head and she jerked, whirling around. It took a moment for realization to set in. “The Face of Boe!”

She hurried into the room, her heart simultaneously sinking and dropping when she saw the old face floating in the jar. He had certainly seen better days. “Oh god,” she whispered, dropping to her knees in front of the jar, leaning in to meet the being’s eyes.

“I knew you would come,” the Face breathed, and Rose couldn’t help but smile.

“Back in the old days, I was his nurse as penance for my sin,” Hame said as she knelt beside the jar with Rose.

“What happened?” Rose asked, looking between them.

“Failing…”

“He protected me from the virus by shrouding me in his smoke,” Hame said. “But with no one to maintain it, the City’s power died. The under-city would have fallen into the sea.”
“So he saved them,” Rose guessed, and Hame nodded.

“The Face of Boe wired himself into the mainframe. He’s giving his life force just to keep things running.”

“But there are other planets,” Rose said, looking between them. “Why didn’t you call for help?”

“The last act of the Senate was to declare New Earth unsafe. The automatic quarantine lasts for one hundred years.”

Rose was floored. “So the two of you stayed here…all alone for all this time?”

“We had no choice.”

“Yes…you did.” And they’d made a very admirable choice.

“Save them, Rose Tyler,” Boe requested. “Save them.”

Down in Milo’s car, the occupants were starting to feel the heat.

“How much air is left?” Cheen asked nervous.

“Two minutes,” Milo responded grimly. Martha wiped her forehead.

“There’s always my friend. Rose. She’ll think of something.”

“Martha no one’s coming.”

“She looked nice enough,” Cheen spoke up hopefully. “Maybe…”

“I’ve seen her do more with less.” Martha was confident.

“You two must be close. Have you been friends long?”

Martha laughed a bit at that. “ Barely even know her. Just hopped into her ship…I don’t know what I was thinking. Except she…she tries so hard to help, but she’s dangerous. To herself, I mean. I just…”

She couldn’t help herself. She’d felt a need to protect Rose.

“I never even asked,” Cheen said suddenly. “Where’s home?”

“It’s a long way away.” Martha sighed. “If I died here…they’d never know.”

“And you don’t even really know Rose,” Cheen confirmed. “So our hopes are on a complete stranger. Well, that’s no use.”

“You haven’t seen what she’s capable of though,” Martha protested. You lot, you’ve got your faith, you’ve got your songs and hymns…and I’ve got Rose.”

“Right.” Milo took a deep breath, turning the car back on.

“Systems back online.”

“Good luck,” he murmured.

“And you,” Martha returned.
And they took off.

Rose wasn’t quite sure what she was doing but once again the TARDIS guided her through the more complicated parts, and she managed to get a computer working. “Car for six five diamond six,” she breathed, her eyes finding the car on the screen. “It still registers, that’s Martha! Oh yes!” She grinned. “I knew she was good. Alright, alright, I…” She paused, looking around. She had no idea what to do. “I don’t… I don’t know what to do.”

The air drained out of her as she looked around. What did she do? Help me, she begged the TARDIS desperately. Help me, please. I don’t understand any of this. I don’t know what to do. Help!

The TARDIS gave a small hum, and Rose’s mind was suddenly flooded, nearly to the point of being overwhelmed. She stumbled a bit, her knees going out and hitting the floor.

“Ms. Tyler!”

Rose came back to her senses with a slight gasp, blinking heavily as she focused on Hame at her side.

“Are you alright?”

“Yeah… yeah.” Rose blinked dazedly, looking around. “I know what to do.”

She jumped up, surprising Hame, and got to work.

“Take residual energy, invert it, feed it through the electricity grid!” She called as she worked.

“There isn’t enough power,” Hame said worriedly as she watched Rose run around.

“Oh you’ve got power,” Rose said, turning back to look at Hame with a grin. “I’ve got this, don’t worry. Hame, every switch on that bank up to maximum. I can’t power up the city, but all the city needs is people.”

“So what are you going to do?”

“This!”

Rose threw a huge switch, and after a moment of humming the lights flicked out. “No!” Rose cried, her shoulders falling. She’d been so sure the TARDIS knew what to do…

She ran around, trying to figure out what was going on. “The transformers are blocked,” she realized after a moment, swallowing hard. No good. “The signal can’t get through.”

“Rose…” She heard Boe call quietly.

“Yeah, in a minute, sorry.”

“I give you my last… breathe…”

Rose jerked around as the computers suddenly buzzed to life again. “Wha — blimey.” She looked back at Hame. “Take care of him, Hame. He’s not dying on me now!”

Back to the computer, she began working, tapping away furiously. “Come on then, come on… ha!” She said happily when she finally connected to the communications. “Beautiful. Yes, hi sorry, I know I’m not Sally Calypso. But I’m blonde and even better I’m real. M’name’s Rose, and this is an
order — everyone drive up. Now! I’ve opened the roof of the motorway. Come on. Throttle those engines. Drive up. All of you. The whole under-city. Drive up, now! Do it!”

Martha listened, slack-jawed, as Rose announced herself over the communication systems. How had she done that? “Oi, car four six five diamond six. Martha! Drive up!”

“Is she serious?” Milo asked in disbelief. “If we go up we’ll hit the top layer!”

“Just do it!” Martha ordered. “Go up!”

“It’s clear, I promise!” Rose assured them, grinning. “Just go!”

Milo steered them up, and before long sunlight — real lives sunlight — hit their eyes. “It’s daylight,” Cheen breathed. “Oh my God, that’s the sky. The real sky.”

“She did it!” Martha squealed, jumping up and down in her excitement. “I told you, she did it!”

Rose rocked back on her heels, grinning, as everyone cried out in excitement. Brilliant. Just brilliant. “The city of New New York,” she said happily. “All yours. And Car four six five diamond six, I’ve sent you a flight path. I’d like Martha back now, if you don’t mind?”

“That’s fair!” Milo called, laughing. “Completely fair!”

“Rose!”

The blonde whirled around to see a large crack forming across Boe’s jar.

Martha gave Milo and Cheen a fleeting hug, wishing them luck with everything, before hurrying into the senate building. She stopped dead when she saw the skeletons.

“Rose…?”

“In here,” Rose called from an adjoining room. Martha ran in — and froze when she saw the thing laying on the floor, Rose kneeling next to it with a cat person at her side.

“What’s that?”

“The Face of Boe,” Rose introduced her quietly. “It’s okay, c’mere, say hello. And this is Hame.” She indicated the cat person. “They’re friendly, don’t worry. Boe’s the one who saved you.”

“My lord gave his life to save the city,” Hame said thickly, sniffing. “And now he’s dying.”

“No, of course he’s not,” Rose disagreed. “He’s the Face of Boe, he can’t die. Plenty of life left, right?”

“It’s good to breathe the air once more,” Boe sighed, sounding strangely content.

“Who is he?” Martha asked Rose quietly, and she shook her head.

“No clue,” Rose admitted. “My mate, he told me the Face of Boe has lived for millions of years. All that time. You’re not about to give up now are you?”

“Everything has it’s time,” Boe said. “You know that as well as anyone, my dear Rose.”

“The legend says more,” Hame said, looking between them.
“Not now,” Rose interrupted, a bit harshly. “There’s no need for that.”

“It says the Face of Boe will speak his final secret to a traveler.”

“Yes, not yet.” Rose’s voice was almost desperate now. “Who needs secret, eh?”

“I have seen so much,” Boe said quietly. “Perhaps too much. I am the last of my kind, as you are the only of yours, Rose Tyler.”

“I’m just a human.” Rose’s voice cracked. “I’m just a stupid human, the world doesn’t need me. It needs you.”

“You will understand,” Boe assured her quietly. “Someday. But until then, please know. He is coming.”

“Who—”

But it was too late. Rose watched, helpless, as the Face of Boe breathed out one last time, eyes closing. Hame let out a small sob, hiding her face in her hands, and Rose dropped her head to hide her own tears. Martha wrapped an arm around her shoulders, hugging her tight.

* * * * *

“All closed down,” Rose said with a small smile as they walked back through Pharmacy Town, heading for the TARDIS.

“Happy?” Martha asked with a small smile.


“But what do you think the Face of Boe meant?” Martha asked. “He is coming. Who is?”

“No clue. Textbook enigmatic that guy. I’ll probably never know.” The Doctor would have known. The Doctor always knew.

But Rose couldn’t focus on that.

“Anyways, back to the TARDIS. Off we go.”

“He said you’re the only if your kind.” Rose sighed. Martha wasn’t going to let this go.

“I don’t know what he meant. I really don’t. I was born human, I know I’m changing a bit, but…” But she wasn’t becoming her own species. Was she? “I don’t know what any of it means. I wish I did.”

Martha opened her mouth to say something else, but the sound of singing cut her off before she could.

_The darkness deepens…Lord with me abide. When other helps fail…”_

Rose stopped, looking up toward the sky. “They’re singing,” Martha said quietly, looking up as well.

“Even after all this they still have faith,” Rose said. “They need something to believe in.”

Martha looked over at Rose, raising an eyebrow. “Do you believe in anything, Rose?”
Rose stared at the sky for a long moment before shaking her head.

“Come on. Let’s get out of here.”
“So where to now?” Martha asked as she watched Rose bounce around the console, all energy as usual. Martha had no idea where she got it from.

“Not a clue!” Rose said happily, throwing a lever. “Let’s call it a surprise!”

Martha shook her head, smiling. The ship settled and they hurried outside, stepping out into a gentle breeze and beautiful sunlight. “Wow,” Martha breathed as she looked around. “Where are we?”

“I don’t know, but it’s beautiful…” Rose murmured, turning to look around — and pausing. “Ooooooh. Martha, have you met my friend?”

Martha turned, looking up at the giant statue with wide eyes. “Is that? Oh my God. That’s the Statue of Liberty.”

“It’s amazin’, isn’t it?” Her school had done an exchange trip to New York when she was fourteen, but Jackie hadn’t been able to afford it.

This was even better though.

“So brilliant,” Martha breathed. “I’ve always wanted to go to New York. I mean the real New York, not the new, new, new, new, new, one.”

“Well, there’s the genuine article,” Rose said with a grin. “So good, they named it twice. I wonder what year it is.”

“I don’t know but look,” Martha pointed across the water, “the Empire State Building isn’t even finished yet.”

Rose stepped forward, tilting her head. “Never was much good at history, me. I don’t even know what year construction finished on that, but it’s still got a couple floors to go it looks like…”

“It’s November first, nineteen-thirty,” Martha said suddenly, and Rose looked around.

“You’re better at this than I am.”

Martha smiled as she handed over the newspaper she’d found. “Eighty years ago. Its’ funny, because you see all those old newsreels all in black and white like it’s so far away, but here we are. It’s real.” She gave Rose a small nudge. “Come on then. What’s the trouble this time?”

Rose tilted her head at the newspaper, holding out for Martha to see the headline. “Hooverville Mystery Deepens. What’s Hooverville?”

* * * * *

“The Great Depression,” Rose said as they worked their way through Central Park. She spoke slow,
giving the TARDIS time to feed her information. Their connection had been stronger still since New York. “Whole economy wiped out overnight, all of a sudden there are thousands of people unemployed. Huddled masses with nowhere to go, so they flocked to the park.”

“What, they actually live in the park?” Martha asked in disbelief. “In the middle of the city?”

“People will do anythin’ if they’re desperate enough. You lose your job, lose your money…” She and Jackie had almost ended up on the streets once. The memories were hazy now, Rose had been seven when it had happened, but she remembered Jackie crying over bills and having loud arguments with the bloke who came around to collect the rent every month. “Sometimes you have no other choice.”

“You thieving lowlife!” A voice yelled suddenly, and they looked around to see two men going at each other.

“For a single loaf!” The first man grunted as he punched the other.

“I didn’t touch it!”

“Somebody stole it!”

As Martha and Rose watched, a large black man barreled out of a nearby tent, hollering, “Cut that out! Cut that out right now!”

He grabbed the two men, pulling them apart. “He stole my bread!” The first man insisted.

“That’s enough!” The larger man turned to the other. “Did you take it?”

“I don’t know what happened, he just went crazy!”

“That’s enough!” The large man repeated. “Now think real careful before you lie to me.”

There was a moment of silence. “I’m starving, Solomon,” the thief finally said quietly.

The man held out his hand, and the thief pulled the bread out of his coat. “We all starving. We all got families somewhere.” As the large man — Solomon — spoke, he broke the bread in half, giving each man a piece.

“No stealing and no fighting,” he declared. “You know the rules. Thirteen years ago I fought in the Great War. A lot of us did. And the only reason we got through was because we stuck together. No matter how bad things get, we still act like human beings. It’s all we got.”

He was clearly a man who carried a lot of power. The fighters walked away, and Rose led Martha over to him. “So you’re the leader, I’m guessin’?” She asked, and the man turned to look at them, smiling gently.

“Ahn, and who might you be?”

“She’s Rose, I’m Martha,” Martha introduced them.

“Did your husbands leave to find work?”

Rose pressed her lips thin. It wasn’t funny, not at all, but for some reason she still wanted to laugh. “Not exactly, no.”

“Well, whatever the reason, you’re welcome here,” Solomon told them warmly. “Black white, male,
“How many people live here?” Martha asked, looking around at the small groups gathered around them.

“At any one time, hundreds. We’ve got no place else to go anymore. This is our home now.”

He led them to his tent, and Rose cast a glance around the area. “So, men are goin’ missin’,” she said casually, hands in her pockets. “Is this true?”

“It’s true, all right,” Solomon sighed.

“But what does missin’ mean?” Rose asked gently. “I mean, people must come and go here all the time. Or is someone keeping a register?”

“No, this is different,” Solomon insisted. Rose didn’t think he was making it up. He really believed it.

“In what way?” Martha asked, tilting her head.

“Someone takes them, at night,” the man explained. “We hear something, someone calls out for help. By the time we get there, they’re gone like they vanished into thin air.”

Well that was certainly evidence of something bad. “And you’re sure someone’s taking them?”

“Ms. Rose, when you got next to nothing, you hold on to the little you got. Your knife, blanket, you take it with you. You don’t leave bread uneaten, fire still burning.”

Rose believed him. “Have you been to the police?” Martha asked, and Solomon shook his head.

“Yeah, we tried that. Another deadbeat goes missing, big deal.”

“Well it’s big deal to me,” Rose said, shoving her hands in her pockets. “So the question is, who’s takin’ them and what for?”

“Solomon!” A voice called suddenly, and a young man ran in. “Solomon, Mr. Diagoras is here.”

Solomon frowned and made his way out with the young man, Rose and Martha following. Mr. Diagoras was standing at the front of the crowd, addressing them.

“I need men. Volunteers. I’ve got a little work for you and you sure look like you can use the money.”

“Yeah, what is the money?” The man who had come looking for Solomon called.

“A dollar a day.”

“What’s the work?” Solomon asked.

“A little trip down to the sewers. Got a tunnel collapsed that needs clearing and fixing. Any takers?”

“A dollar a day?” Solomon sounded disgusted. “That’s slave wage! And men don’t always back up, do they?”

“Accidents happen,” Diagoras said with a dismissive wave.
“What do you mean?” Rose spoke up. “What sort of accidents?”

“You don’t need the work?” The man snapped. “That’s fine. Anybody else?” After a second of thought Rose raised her hand. “Enough with the questions.”

“Oh no, no, no. I’m volunteering. I’ll go.”

Diagoras sneered at her. “This is a man’s job, little lady. I’ll call you when I need laundry done.”

“You want bodies, don’t you? I’ll do it for free.”

She knew that would get him. And sure enough after a moment he nodded. “I’ll kill you for this,” Martha muttered, raising her hand as well.

“Anybody else?” Diagoras asked, looking around. After a moment Solomon and the young man raised their hands as well.

With the group decided, they followed Diagoras to the sewer’s entrance. “Turn left,” he said when they arrive. “Go about half a mile. Follow tunnel two seven three. Fall’s right ahead of you, you can’t miss it.”

“And when do we get our dollar?” The young man — Frank — asked. “She’s the only one who volunteered to do this for free.” He jerked a thumb at Rose.

“You’ll get it if you come back up.”

“And if we don’t come back up?” Rose asked curiously.

“Then I got no one to pay.”

“Don’t worry, we’ll be back,” Solomon informed him coldly before turning to head into the sewers, Frank following.

“Let’s hope so,” Martha muttered as she followed them down. Rose stared at Diagoras for a long moment — something about him was making her nervous, but she couldn’t quite pinpoint what. Finally she followed the others.

“We just got to stick together,” Frank was saying. “It’s easy to get lost. It’s like a huge rabbit warren. You could hide an army down here.”

“So what about you, Frank?” Martha asked conversationally as they walked. “You’re not from around these parts, are you?” The man had a distinct Southern accent.

“Oh, you could talk,” Frank shot back teasingly. “No, I’m Tennessee born and bred.”

“So how come you’re here?”

“Oh, my daddy died.” He said it so matter of factly. It was sad. “Mama couldn’t afford to feed us all. So, I’m the oldest, up to me to feed myself. So I put on my coat, hitched up here on the railroads. There’s a whole lot of runaways in the camp, younger than me, from all over. Missouri, Oklahoma, Texas. Solomon keeps a lookout for us.” He clearly had a lot of admiration for the Hooverville leader. “So, what about you? You’re a long way from home.”

“Yeah…I’m a hitchhiker too.” Martha shot a look at Rose, who was making her way up to Solomon.

“You stick with me,” Frank said with a smile. “You’ll be alright.”
“So,” Rose said, coming up beside Solomon, “this Diagoras bloke. Who is he then?”

“A couple months ago, he was just another foreman,” Solomon said. “Now, it seems like he’s running most of Manhattan.”

That…didn’t seem right. It niggled wrong in the back of Rose’s head. “How’d he manage that then?”

“These are strange times. A man can go from King of the Hill to the lowest of the low overnight. It’s just for some folks it works the other way ’round—”

“Whoa!” Rose yelled, cutting Solomon off as her eyes caught sight of something glowing on the ground a few feet ahead. Like a green jellyfish. The others stopped, staring at it, while she moved to kneel in front of it, poking it gently. She wanted to scan it with the sonic screwdriver, but that would probably cause an uproar with Solomon and Frank.

“Is it radioactive or something?” Martha asked, raising an eyebrow. “It’s gone off, whatever it is. And you’ve got to touch it.”

“Shine your torch through it,” Rose murmured distantly. “Composite organic matter.” She assumed that was the TARDIS in her head again. But it was getting harder to tell what was her talking and what was the ship. “Martha? Medical opinion?”

“It’s not human. I know that.”

“No, it’s not,” Rose agreed. “And I’ll tell you something else. We must be at least half a mile in. I don’t see any sign of a collapse, do you?” They all looked around, examining the area. “So why did Mr. Diagoras send us down here?”

“Where are we right now?” Martha asked, looking at the men. “What’s above us?”

It was Rose who answered. “We’re right underneath Manhattan.”

They kept walking, looking for any sign of a collapse — or anything else that was weird. “We’re way beyond half a mile,” Solomon said, shaking his head. “There’s no collapse, nothing.”

“That Diagoras bloke, was he lying?” Martha asked. She didn’t understand what the end game was here. What was the point of lying to them? Why send them down here?

“Looks like it,” Rose murmured. She didn’t really understand it either.

“So why’d he want people to come down here?” Frank was the one who put it into words.

Rose shook her head, closing her eyes for a moment. “Right, then.” She opened her eyes and looked back. “Solomon, I need you to take Frank and Martha back up to the surface. It’ll be better if I do this on my own.”

Before anyone could protest a loud, almost pig-like squeal echoed through the air. “What the hell was that?” Solomon demanded, looking around.

“Hello?” Frank called.

“Frank,” Solomon warned at the same time Martha shushed him.

“What if it’s one of the folk gone missing? You’d be scared and half mad down here on your own?”
“Do you think they’re still alive?” Rose asked, raising an eyebrow. It didn’t seem likely. Trapped down there. No food, no water. It was almost impossible.

“Heck, we ain’t seen no bodies down here,” Frank pointed out. “Maybe they just got lost.”

Another round of squeals echoed around them. “I know I never heard nobody make a sound like that,” Solomon said, looking around.

“Where’s it coming from?” Frank asked, swinging his torch around to try and find the source. “Sounds like there’s more than one.”

Rose shook her head, turning. “This way.” Obviously keeping them out of trouble wasn’t going to be an option.

“No, this way,” Solomon disagreed, turning in another direction, and his torch light landed on a huddled figure crouched down in a corner.

“Rose?” Martha called quietly, grabbing the blonde’s attention. Rose turned to see Solomon approaching the figure.

“Who are you?”

“Are you lost?” Frank added gently. “Can you understand me? I’ve been thinking about folk lost down—”

“It’s alright, Frank.” Rose grabbed Frank’s arm, holding him back. “Just stay back. Let me have a look.” She shuffled forward, past Solomon, kneeling down in front of the huddled figure. “He’s got a point though, Frank there. I’d hate to be stuck down here on my own. We know the way out. Daylight. If you come with us—”

Her voice drifted off as the figure looked up, and she saw its face. It was a pig man. “Oh…and what are you now?” She murmured, ignoring the surprised noises of the people behind her.

“Is that…er…” Solomon sounded a bit distressed, “some kind of carnival mask?”

“No.” Rose’s voice was heavy. “It’s real. I’m sorry. Now, listen to me. I promise I can help. Who did this to you?”

Martha turned, swinging her torch around, and her heart dropped when she saw more pigmen making their way toward them. “Um…Rose? I think you’d better get back here. Rose?”

Rose looked around, swallowing when she saw the things coming. “Right,” she murmured, standing up and back away slowly. The pigmen followed slowly.

“They’re following you.”

“Yeah…noticed that,” Rose muttered. “Thanks. Right, then. Martha, Frank, Solomon.”

“What?” Martha asked quietly.

“Um…well. Basically. Run!”

They turned and ran, the pigmen squealing as they ran after them. “What are those things?!” Martha called as they ran.

“I’ll figure it out later, just move! This way!” They turned a corner toward a ladder waiting at the end
of the passage. She climbed up, with Martha right behind her, and she opened the cover with the sonic screwdriver.

“Frank!” She heard Solomon call. “Frank!”

She turned back to see him going at the pigmen with a bar. “Frank, come on,” she called. “Let’s go!”

“C’mon Frank!” Solomon called as he climbed up. Frank finally ran for the ladder, but the pigmen grabbed him, trying to pull him back.

“No!” Rose yelled, diving for Frank and grabbing his hand. Solomon grabbed on as well, trying to pull Frank back, but it was no good. They pulled Frank down. “No!” Rose screamed, trying to dive in after him, but Solomon grabbed her and pulled her back. “No, lemme go, lemme go!” Rose screamed, struggling against Solomon. He held her with one arm and closed the cover with the other. “What are you doing?!”

“We can’t go after him.” In contrast to Rose’s near hysterics, Solomon was completely calm.

“We can’t just leave him! We have to help him!”

Martha stood off to the side, stunned. She’d never really seen Rose lose it before — the other woman was generally calm, composed. Seeing her nearly lose it was new.

“No!” Solomon said firmly. “I’m not losing anybody else. Those creatures were from Hell. From Hell itself! If we go after them, they’ll take us all! There’s nothing we can do. I’m sorry.”

Rose stilled in his arms, but before they could say or do anything else a woman appeared from behind a nearby rack, pointing a revolver at them. “Alright, then.” Her voice was high pitched. “Hands in the air and no funny business. Now tell me, you schmucks, what have you done with Laszlo?”

They all just stood there for a moment, staring at the gun.

“Who’s Lazlo?” Martha finally asked, bewildered. The woman stared at them long and hard for a minute.

“Follow me,” she finally ordered, and considering she had a gun they had very little choice. They followed her to a nearby dressing room as she explained.

“Laszlo’s my boyfriend. Or was my boyfriend until he disappeared two weeks ago. No letter, no goodbye, no nothing. And I’m not stupid. I know some guys are just pigs but not my Laszlo. I mean, what kind of guy asks you to meet his mother before he vamooses?”

Rose hadn’t said a word since Frank had disappeared into the sewers. Her eyes were dark, almost dead. It terrified Martha. “Listen um…it might just help if you, ya know, put that down,” Martha said, gesturing at the gun.

“Huh? Oh, sure.” She tossed it on the bed, and everyone flinched. “Oh come on, it’s not real.” The woman scoffed. “It’s just a prop. It was either that or a spear.”

“So what do you think happened to Laszlo?” Martha asked gently. It was clear the woman was very distressed. Gentle was good.

“I wish I knew.” She sounded close to tears.
“What’s your name?” Rose asked suddenly, snapping out of her trance. The woman blinked at her, surprised.

“Tallulah.”

“Tallulah,” Rose repeated slowly.

“Three Ls and an H.”

“…Right.” Rose had no idea how that was relevant. “Anyways. We’re going to try and find Laszlo, I promise. But there are others missing too. People disappearin’ every night. I’d bet my left hand it’s connected though.”

“Oddly specific,” Martha commented.

“Well I need my right hand.”

“And there are creatures,” Solomon cut in. “Such creatures.” He shuddered.

“What do you mean creatures?!” Tallulah asked incredulously.

“Look, it doesn’t matter right now,” Rose interrupted. “Just trust me, okay? Everyone is in danger, but I can figure it out.” More confident then she felt. That had to be the TARDIS. “I just need to figure out what this thing is.”

She produced the jelly fish thing from her pocket. “When did you pick that up?” Martha asked in disbelief.

“Know thy enemy, Martha. I figure this out, I’ll have the answer.”

“Yuck,” Tallulah made a gagging noise.
Daleks in Manhattan Part Two

Chapter Summary

The continuing adventures of old New York. 2/3

Chapter Notes

My apologies about the delay, been a bit of a month. Hoping to get on a more regular updating schedule now. Of course the entire story is on Tumblr if you want to just read ahead there.

Rose was digging around backstage, trying to find parts to build...something. She wasn’t sure what the TARDIS wanted her to do, she was just following directions.

“How about this?” Solomon asked, appearing at her side with a small radio. “I found it backstage.”

Rose looked back, and the TARDIS gave an affirmative hum in the back of her mind. “Yeah, that’s fine,” she said shortly, grabbing the radio. “Thanks.”

Solomon stared at her for a long moment. “You’re angry.” It was fairly obvious. She wasn’t even trying to hide it.

“We could’ve saved him.” She could still see Frank in her mind’s eye, disappearing into the sewers. It made her feel sick.

“Ms. Rose do you mind if I ask where you’re from?”

Rose looked up from the radio she was dismantling, making a face. “I’m from England.” She would’ve thought that was obvious.

“And what’s it like there now? Do you have people losing their jobs? Their families? Living on the streets?”

Rose’s eyes flashed as she stood up to face Solomon. Not impressive considering he towered almost a foot over him, but her expression was dangerous enough to make it work. “I don’t think I like what you’re implying,” she informed him coldly. “I’m not some idealistic idiot.”

“That’s not what I’m saying.” He did, however, take a small step back. He’d never seen anyone with that look in their eyes. “But I’ve seen war. I’ve made hard choices. You’re too young—”

“I’ve seen war too,” Rose shot back, trying very hard not to think about Canary Wharf. “I’ve made choices. I’ve lost people I care about. And you know what? It made me all the more determined to make sure it never happened again. Sometimes it’s not possible and sometimes it is. But you never know unless you try.”

She sat back down, done with this conversation, and set back to work with the radio. Solomon
sighed, going back to the sewer entrance. “I was so scared,” he said after a moment. “I let them take Frank because I was just so scared.” Rose looked up, expression softening.

“We all were. Fear’s a natural part of life.”

Solomon shook his head, looking back. “I got to get back to Hooverville. With these creatures on the loose, we got to protect ourselves. Ain’t no one else going to help us.”

Rose nodded. “Of course. Good luck.”

“I hope you find what you’re looking for, for all our sakes.”

Martha was in Tallulah’s dressing room, trying to keep an ear on the conversation with Rose and Solomon. She knew the blonde was upset, and it had gotten heated for a moment. But all was quiet now.

“Laszlo,” Tallulah sighed. “He’d wait for me after the show. Walk me home like I was a lady. He’d leave a flower for me on my dressing table. Every day, a single rose bud.”

“Haven’t you reported him missing?” Martha asked curiously, finally refocusing on the other woman.

“Sure.” Tallulah scoffed. “He’s just a stagehand. Who cares? Not the management certainly.”

That was…sad. Truly. “Can’t you kick up a fuss or something?”

“Okay, so then they fire me.”

“But they’d listen to you,” Martha pointed out logically. “You’re one of the stars.”

“Oh honey.” Tallulah sighed. “I got one song in a back street revue and that’s only because Heidi Chicane broke her ankle. Which had nothing to do with me whatever anybody says. I can’t afford to make a fuss. If I don’t make this month’s rent then before you know it, I’m in Hooverville.”

It was a sad reality…but Martha understood. “Okay. I get it.”

But something in her expression must have said otherwise. “It’s the Depression, sweetie. Your heart might break, but the show goes on. Because if it stops, you starve. Every night I have to go out there, sing, dance, keeping going, hoping he’s going to come back.”

“I’m sorry,” Martha said quietly. Tallulah shook her head.

“What about you? Got a guy waitin’ across the pond?”

“What? Oh, no.” Martha shook her head quickly. “No. Definitely not.”

Tallulah tilted her head a bit. “Ah. Are you and her…?” She gestured at the room where Rose was and gave Martha a knowing look.

“What? Oh, no!” Martha said quickly. “No, definitely not.”

“Go on, there’s nothin’ wrong with it,” Tallulah assured her. “You love who you love. Don’t matter what anyone else says.”

“Not disagreeing with you,” Martha said. “But no, she and I aren’t like that. We’re just friends. Really.”
“Well friendship is just as good,” Tallulah said thoughtfully. “Still. You got to live in hope. It’s the only thing that keeps me going because, well, look.” She opened a drawer in her table, pulling out a white rose bud. “On my dressing table every day still.”

That was…interesting. “You think it’s Laszlo?”

“I don’t know,” Tallulah admitted. “If he’s still around, why is being all secret like he doesn’t want me to see him?”

Rose was still working quietly in the props room, building the DNA scanner with the TARDIS’ help. She finished, flipping o the spotlight and beginning to heat up the jellyfish she’d pinned inside the gizmo.

“Just gotta heat you up…”

She was trying to stay focused, but all she could think about was Frank.

_I could’ve saved him. I could’ve saved him._

The TARDIS hummed gently in the back of Rose’s mind, and suddenly the room around her shifted, changed. She gasped, jumping up.

“What the hell—?”

“Relax, my Wolf,” a familiar voice said as the scenery around her settled. She was in the console room. She turned to see a woman standing behind her. The TARDIS. “We are just in your mind. You are still in the theatre.”

“You really need to stop doin’ this without warnin’,” Rose muttered, rubbing the back of her head. “It’s a bit unsettin’.”

“I am not entirely sure how to give you warning…”

“Yeah, never mind. It’s just a sayin’.” Rose sighed. “What am I doin’ here?”

“I wanted to talk to you. You seemed to have a moment.”

“Not…really actually, I was in the middle of tryin’ to figure out what somethin’ was so I could, ya know, save New York or somethin’.”

“That can wait for a moment. There is something you need to know first.”

Rose sighed, collapsing onto the jump seat. “Fine. Let’s hear it.”

“You can not save everyone.”

Rose blinked, staring at the human embodiment of the ship in disbelief. “You’re…jokin’…right? You dragged my mind here just so you could tell me what I already know?”

“I am not saying this because I think you do not know,” the TARDIS said quietly. “But because I know you. You will try to save everyone. And it will get you hurt in the end. You need to remember.”

Rose rubbed her eyes, shaking her head. “Okay, well thanks for the PSA. Can I go back now?”

“Just remember,” the ship begged quietly. “And remember that no matter what comes, to keep
yourself safe. Please.”

Before Rose could answer, the room faded away, and Rose was back in the props room. She blinked rapidly, unaware of the golden glow fading from her eyes. She shook her head, refocusing on the jellyfish.

“Girls, it’s show time!” Tallulah was calling over the others as they complained back and forth to one another. “Aw quit complaining,” she told them all with an eye roll before looking back at Martha. “Come on honey, take a look. Ever been on stage before?”

“Oh…a little bit,” Martha said with a small smile. “You know, Shakespeare.”

“How dull is that?” Tallulah laughed. “Come and see a real show!”

She pulled Martha to stand in the wings while she hurried out on stage to get ready. Rose was still in back examining the jellyfish.

“This is artificial…” She murmured as the TARDIS hummed in the back of her mind, stronger now after the recent visit. She barely noticed the show starting. “Genetically engineered. Who the hell would be able to do this though? This is far beyond this time period…”

Martha, meanwhile, was enjoying the show, her hands in her pockets as she watched the woman dance around the stage. It certainly wasn’t Shakespeare, but it was interesting in its own way. She was enjoying it.

“You lured me in with your cold grey eyes, your simple smile, your bewitching lies…”

And Tallulah was a much better singer than one would originally assume.

A flash of movement across the stage caught Martha’s eye, and she focused past the dancers, eyes widening when she saw a pigman standing in the opposite wing. Oh god! What was that doing here? Martha looked around, panicked. She wanted to get Rose, but by the time she came back the thing could be gone. There was no time to waste.

She took a deep breath and slipped out onto the stage, and started working her way to the other side. “What are you doing?” One of the actresses hissed at her. She ignored her, and ended up grabbing a devil’s tail by mistake, sending them both toppling over.

“What are you doing?!” Tallulah asked in disbelief.

“You’re on my tail, get off my tail!” The devil whined as the audience burst into laughter.

Rose was oblivious to it all as she examined the jellyfish, trying to make sense of the information the TARDIS was pouring into her head.

“Fundamental DNA type four six seven dash nine eight nine. What does that mean? Nine eight nine. Planet of origin.” The TARDIS hummed in the back of her mind, helping sort through everything. “Skaro. Why does that sound familiar?”

“Get off the stage!” Tallulah hissed at Martha as she picked herself up. “You’re spoiling it!”

“But look!” Martha insisted, pointing toward opposite wing. “Over there!”

Tallulah turned to see the pigman standing there, and she screamed, spooking it and causing it to run away.
“Wait!” Martha called, hurrying after it as it ran backstage. “But you’re different to the others! Just wait!”

It disappeared into the sewers, however.

The commotion, meanwhile, had finally attracted Rose’s attention, and she hurried out to find out what was going on. “Oh, that face,” one of the actresses was moaning as she came back. “I ain’t never going to sleep.”

“What happened?” Rose demanded of Tallulah, who had just come back as well. “Where’s Martha?”

“I don’t know, she ran off stage!”

Martha was about to go find Rose when another pigman appeared, grabbing her from behind. Her scream echoed through the air, and Rose and Tallulah reacted instantly, running toward the sound.

They found the sewer entrance askew in the back. “Damn it,” Rose hissed, shaking her head. “They’ve got her.”

She zipped her jacket, going to entrance and pulling it back. “Where are you going?” Tallulah demanded.

“To find her, of course. If they’ve taken her I’ve got to get her back.”

“Who’s taken her? What’re you doing?”

Rose ignored her, climbing down to the sewers. She heard Tallulah calling after her and ignored it — at least until the actress climbed down as well. “No way,” she said firmly. “You are not coming.”

“Tell me what’s going on,” the other blonde demanded.

“There’s nothin’ you can do here, alright? Just go back up.”

“Look, whoever’s taken Martha, they could’ve taken Laszlo, couldn’t they?”

“It’s not safe,” Rose insisted. “And I can’t protect you, alright?”

“Then that’s my problem,” Tallulah informed her stiffly. “Come on. Which way?”

Rose shook her head as she started down the passage. “Fine. This way,” she called, and Tallulah turned back to follow her.

“Let go of me!” Martha protested as she was pushed against a wall, with a line of men. “What’re you doing?!”

“Martha,” a voice whispered, and she whirled to see Frank standing there.

“You’re alive!” She gasped. “Oh! I thought we’d lost you!”

A pigman gave Frank a shove, nearly sending him tripping into Martha. “Alright, alright,” Martha grumbled, beginning to walk. “We’re moving.”

“Where are they taking us?” Frank asked nervously.

“I don’t know, but we can find out what’s going on down here.”
Rose was already regretting letting Tallulah come. “When you say, they’ve taken her, who’s they exactly? And who are you anyway? I never asked.”

Rose shook her head — and froze when she saw a familiar shadow cast against the wall ahead of them.

“I mean, you seem to know what you’re doin’, so you must be an educated woman — mmph!”

Tallulah’s words were cut off as Rose clapped a hand over her mouth and dragged her into an alcove. Her heart was pounding in her chest, and her eyes darkened as the Dalek glided by.

“Again,” she hissed, inadvertently tightening her arm around Tallulah, who made a muffled noise. “They always bloody survive, worse than cockroaches.” She released Tallulah and started down the hall with renewed determination. “Well this time when I turn them to dust they’re gonna stay that way.”

“That metal thing,” Tallulah called as she hurried after Rose. “What was it?”

“It’s called a Dalek.” Rose’s voice was practically steel. “And it’s not just metal, it’s alive.

“You’re kidding me,” Tallulah said in disbelief.

“Does it look like I’m kidding?” She didn’t mean to snap, but she was angry. “Inside that shell is a creature born to hate, whose only thought is to destroy everything and everyone that isn’t a Dalek too. It won’t stop until it’s killed every human being alive.”

“But if it’s not a human being, that kind of implies it’s from outer space,” Tallulah said slowly, and Rose raised an eyebrow at her. “Yet again, that’s a no with the kidding. Boy. Well, what’s it doing here, in New York?”

Rose rolled her eyes, a bit annoyed. “Every second you’re down here, you’re in danger. You need to go back.”

They walked around a corner — and ran into a pigman. Tallulah screamed and the thing tried to hide its face.

“Where’s Martha?” Rose demanded, her temper barely controlled. “What have you done with her? What have you done with Martha?”

She was surprised when the thing spoke. “I didn’t take her.” Her anger softened a bit.

“Can you remember your name?” She asked gently. It shook its head.

“Don’t look at me.”

“Do you know where she is?” Tallulah asked quietly, stepping forward.

“Stay back!” The thing yelled. “Don’t look at me!”

Tallulah jerked back, surprised.

“What happened to you?” Rose asked quietly, kneeling down in front of the thing.

“They made me a monster.”

“Who did?”
“The masters.”

Rose pressed her lips thin, blowing out an annoyed breath. “The Daleks. Why?”

“They needed slaves. They needed slaves to steal more people so they created us. Part animal, part human. I escaped before they got my mind, but it was still too late.”

Rose shook her head. “Do you know what happened to Martha?”

“They took her,” the pigman said quietly. “It’s my fault. She was following me.”

“Were you in the theatre?” Tallulah asked quietly.

“I never…” It tried to shake its head in denial. “Yes.”

“Why? Why were you there?” Tallulah asked quietly.

“I never wanted you to see me like this.” The despair in the pigman’s voice was obvious.

“Why me?” Tallulah, in contrast, was bewildered. “What do I got to do with this? Were you following me?”

There was a beat of silence, and finally the pigman turned.

“Yes.”

Tallulah stared at its face for a long moment. “Who are you?” Her voice shook a bit. The pieces were already falling together in Rose’s mind though. Oh…

“I was lonely…”

“Who are you?” Tallulah repeated, a bit more desperately.

“I needed to see you.” The pigman was apologetic.

“Who are you?”

“I’m sorry.” He started to turn again, but Tallulah grabbed his arm.

“No, wait. Let me look at you.” But she already knew. It was obvious in her expression. “Laszlo? My Laszlo? Oh, what have they done to you?”

“I’m sorry,” Laszlo said quietly. “So sorry.”

Rose closed her eyes. She hated to do this, but they had to get to work. “Laszlo… I’m sorry. But I need you to show me where they are.”

“They’ll kill you,” Laszlo argued.

“Let ‘em try. If they’re not stopped, they’ll kill everyone. I need to do something.”

Laszlo nodded, turning away. “Then follow me.”

“What are they keeping us here for?” Frank asked nervously, looking around.

“I don’t know,” Martha admitted. “I’ve got a nasty feeling we’re being kept in the larder.”
Laszlo brought the Doctor and Tallulah in as all the other pigmen began shifting nervously.

“What’re they doing?” Frank asked, trying to keep the panic out of his voice. “What’s wrong? What’s wrong?”

A Dalek rolled in suddenly, and Rose had to struggle to keep a growl down. “Silence,” it ordered as Laszlo hid in a corner. “Silence.”

“What the hell is that?” Martha asked. She’d seen a lot of weird stuff with Rose, but the talking pepper pot was the weirdest to date.

“You will form a line. Move. Move.”

“Just do what it says, everyone, okay?” Martha called. She didn’t know what it was, but following orders sounded best. “Just obey.”

“The female is wise.” A compliment from a Dalek, Rose reflected dryly. What high praise. “Obey.”

Another Dalek rounded the corner. How many of them were there? “What is the status of the Final Experiment?”

“The Dalekanium is in place,” the first Dalek reported. “The energy conductor is now complete.”

“Then I will extract prisoners for selection.”

One of the pigmen dragged an older black man forward, putting him in front of the Dalek. “Intelligence scan, initiate.”

It pressed its sucker onto the man’s face. “Reading brain waves. Low intelligence.”

“You calling me stupid?” The man demanded.

“Silence! This one will become a pig slave. Next.”

One of the pigmen grabbed the man, dragging him away. “No, let go of me!” He cried as he was pulled away. “I’m not becoming one of them. No, no!”

“They’re divided into two groups,” Laszlo said quietly. “High intelligence and low intelligence. The low intelligence are taken to become pig slaves like me.”

“Well that’s not fair,” Tallulah protested, and Rose rolled her eyes.

“Shush. What about the others?”

“They’re taken to the laboratory.”

“Why? What for?”

“I don’t know,” he said quietly. “The masters only call it the Final Experiment.”

_Masters._ The word left a bad taste in Rose’s mouth and she wasn’t even the one saying it. Frank was pulled forward for a scan. “Superior intelligence.” He looked a bit surprised by that. Martha was pulled forward next.

“Intelligence scan, initiate. Superior intelligence. This one will become part of the Final Experiment.”
“You can’t just experiment on people!” Martha protested. “It’s insane! It’s inhuman!”

“We are not human.” As if that needed to be said. “Prisons of high intelligence will be taken to the transgenic laboratory.”

“Damn it, they’re moving!” They pulled back into the shadows so they wouldn’t be seen. Laszlo grabbed Tallulah to pull her away, but Rose didn’t move. “Rose, come on! Quickly!”

“I’m not comin’,” Rose said quietly. “I have an idea. You go.”

“Laszlo, come on,” Tallulah begged.

“Can you remember the way?” He asked her.

“Yeah, I think so.”

“Then go, please.”

“But Laszlo, you have to come with me,” Tallulah begged. But Laszlo shook his head.


Tallulah backed away slowly, hurrying back toward where they’d come from. Rose and Laszlo slipped back out into the hallway, taking places in line. Rose slid up to stand behind Martha.

“Just keep walkin’,” she whispered, and she saw the tension drain from Martha’s shoulders.

“Oh, I’m so glad to see you.”

“Yeah, well we can have ourselves a good old hug fest later. You took Frank,” she added over her shoulder with a small smile. There were no words for how relieved she was that he was still alive.

They walked in silence up to the lab, and Rose’s heart dropped when she saw two more Daleks waiting for them. One of them — the black one — was smoking slightly. Wait…

Are these the same Daleks that were at Canary Wharf? She asked the TARDIS. The ship gave a hum in the back of her mind. What were they called? The Cult of…Skaro. Well no wonder that sounded familiar.

“Report,” one of the Daleks asked.

“Dalek Sec is in the final stage of evolution.”

“Scan him. Prepare for birth.”

“Evolution?” Rose repeated quietly as they scanned the black Dalek — Dalek Sec, she supposed.

“What’s wrong with old Charlie boy over there?” Martha questioned quietly.

“Ask them.” The look Martha gave Rose clearly questioned the blonde’s sanity.

“‘What, me? Don’t be daft.’

“I don’t want them to see me.” She didn’t know if they remembered the encounter at Canary Wharf. But she also didn’t want to find out. “Ask them what’s going on.”

Martha shook her head but took a deep breath, stepping forward. “Daleks,” she called. “I demand to
be told. “What is the Final Experiment?”

Rose held her breath, waiting and hoping. “You will bear witness.” Oh thank god.

“To what?”

“This is the dawn of a new age.”

That caught Martha off guard. “What does that mean?”

“We are the only four Daleks in existence, so the species must evolve a life outside the shell. The Children of Skaro must walk again.”

As they watched, the smoke pouring out of the shell finally stopped, and the casing cracked open. Rose watched in disbelief as something climbed. It looked...almost human. Except for the blob of Dalek in place of a head.

“What is it?” Martha whispered. Rose shook her head, breathing quickening a bit. Oh god…

“I am a human Dalek,” Dalek Sec called in a familiar accent. Mr. Diagoras’ accent. “I am your future.”
Chapter Summary

The Doctor living in Pete's World, where he realizes something is very, very wrong

It was hard to say what qualified as a “good” day at the Torchwood institute. No alien invasions were certainly considered good. No significant events, also good. If they could just get from nine to five without anything exploding, that was great.

Pete Tyler sighed as the alarms rang overhead. This was not a good day, then.

“All personnel please evacuate the building,” a mechanical voice called over the intercom. “All personnel please evacuate the building.”

Of course, Pete’s personal body guards were storming into the office less than a second later, ready to escort him outside. He sighed as he stood, walking around the desk and letting the men lead him out.

Evacuations weren’t an uncommon thing at Torchwood. With all the alien tech they handled, it was only natural that they would be evacuated once in a while.

That “once in a while” had become “almost daily” since Pete had put the Doctor on the payroll.

And sure enough, they had only been outside for a few minutes when a very sheepish pinstriped Time Lord covered in soot and dust made his way outside.

“Sorry,” he said with a bright grin, and Pete just sighed. “Hey, everyone wanted to start their weekend early anyways.”

Indeed, there was no way they would be allowed back in the building that day. Employees were escorted in one floor at a time to collect their belongings and then ushered off to their cars to go home. “Unbelievable,” Pete sighed as he and the Doctor walked to their own car (Pete always drove. They’d tried letting the Doctor drive once. It hadn’t ended well).

“Oh, no harm done.” The Doctor waved Pete off. “There wasn’t even any structural damage this time.”

This time. Although Pete did suppose that was something of a miracle. “I just don’t know why you can’t manage to go more than a couple weeks without making something explode.”

“It’s science, Pete! Things are going to explode in science!”

“I don’t think I enjoy the type of science you Time Kings do.”

“Time Lords, Pete.” Pete actually knew that, but he liked annoying the Doctor and getting it wrong. “Besides you wanted to go home as much as anyone else.”

Well…that was true. Tony’s first birthday was rapidly approaching, and Jackie was slowly but surely spiraling out of control. Just the night before Pete had had to stop her from ordering pony rides.
“He’s only a year old, Jacks,” he’d said reasonably despite the slightly manic look in his wife’s eyes. “He won’t even be able to stay on the pony. Maybe next year.”

She definitely needed someone to stop her. And the help was all too afraid to go near her in her current state. And the Doctor was happy to just let Jackie go on her rampage so long as she didn’t drag him down with her.

So basically it was all up to Pete.

Predictably enough, Jackie was on the phone with the catering company when they got home. “No, I said chocolate!” She was saying impatiently. “Choc-o-late! I definitely said—!”

“Jackie you said vanilla last night,” Pete said with a sigh as they walked into the kitchen. This was the third time she had changed her mind about the cake. The poor caterer was going to get a huge tip for all this.

Jackie stared at Pete in disbelief. “I did not! …Did I?”

Pete gently took the phone from her. “We’ll take a chocolate cake,” he told the bewildered caterer. “No more changes. I promise. Have a good day.”

He hung up and gently nudged Jackie into a chair. “What are you two doing home?” She asked as Pete went to make tea. The Doctor had already disappeared upstairs to his suite, of course. Better to get out of Jackie’s way then risk being rolled on over.

“Himself blew up the downstairs lab again so they evacuated us.” He could practically hear Jackie rolling her eyes.

“I think he does it on purpose.” Pete was inclined to agree. “Nobody was hurt, though?”

“No but his eyebrows looked a bit singed.”

Jackie shook her head. “One day he’s gonna take it a little too far and blow himself up and end up regeneratin’. That’ll be just lovely to explain to Rose.” Because Jackie still had every bit of faith that the Doctor would find a way back to the other universe — back to Rose.

She had to believe it. It was the only thing that got her through the day sometimes.

“He really just changes his face?” Pete was having a hard time grasping that concept.

“When he’s hurt bad enough I guess. He tried to explain it to me but…well, you’ve heard him when it gets into all that alien babble. Can hardly stay awake never mind focusin’ on him.”

Pete chuckled as he finished the tea, bringing a cup over for Jackie. “Not judging you for that, believe me.” The Doctor was almost impossible to listen to — never mind keeping up with all that mad stuff he said.

Upstairs the Doctor flopped down on the bed, staring vacantly at the ceiling. Two years. It had been two years since he’d been trapped in this godforsaken universe and he was still no closer to finding a way out then he had been when he’d first been trapped.

He’d be lying if he said that thought didn’t depress him.

He had known, of course, that finding a way home would be a long shot — but who was more motivated than him to find a way through the walls?
Still, the lack of progress was heartbreaking.

Inevitably, as they always did when he had too much time to think, his thoughts turned to Rose. It had been two years in this universe, but time moved faster here. How long had it been for her? What was she doing? Was she still traveling? The Doctor sincerely hoped not. She deserved better than that, better than living his life.

She deserved all the best.

Laid out, eyes closed, it was far too easy for Jackie to sneak in with Tony, depositing the baby onto the Time Lord’s chest. “Oof!” The Doctor’s eyes flew open as he grunted, blinking when he saw the big brown eyes staring down at him.

“Da!” Tony Tyler said happily. Pete was dada, Jackie was mama, and the Doctor was Da. The Doctor smiled as he wrapped an arm around Tony and sat up, holding the boy.

“How’s it going bud? You still sane? ‘Cause god knows Mama isn’t.” That, of course, earned a slap to the back of the head. “Oi, Mama hit me,” he grumped, frowning and tilting his head down. “Kiss to make it better?” Tony obliged, pushing up to press a sloppy kiss to the Doctor’s head. “Much better.” The Time Lord grinned, and Jackie had to smile a little. He could say what he wanted, but he was a miracle worker with kids. Tony loved him.

“So you blew up the lab again.”

The Doctor rolled his eyes. “Blimey I feel like I’m back at the Academy. ‘So you cut class again. So you insulted a teacher again. So you sent a classmate to another dimension again.’”

Jackie shook her head at the Doctor. “Sometimes you remind me to be grateful that the worst thing Rose ever did was skip out on a school field trip.” The Doctor chuckled a bit, brushing Tony’s hair back. “What do you think she’s doin’ right now?”

Their conversations always came back to that — what was Rose doing now. “I don’t know.” The Doctor’s voice was heavy. Tony reached out, grabbing the Doctor’s hair to try and get his attention and make him smile.

“Be honest, Doctor — do you think you’ll ever find a way back?”

The Doctor looked up, meeting Jackie’s gaze. And he knew this wasn’t the time for bravado and lies.

“…I don’t know, Jackie.” It was the first time Either of them had faced the possibility that their old universe — and more importantly Rose — was lost to them forever. “I really don’t know.”

* * * * *

“…And then they ran back into their magical blue box and flew away, off to the stars once more. The end.”

Tony had no idea what the Doctor was saying, of course. But the man threw his hands about a lot and made lots of funny noises that the baby enjoyed. He giggled as he imitated the Doctor’s hands, waving them all over the place before reaching out and getting a firm grasp on the Doctor’s hair.

“Ow, owowowowow, no Tony no, don’t do that–”

“Come on now Tony, we all know his hair is his only redeeming quality,” Jackie rebuked the baby.
as she detached the tiny hand from the Doctor’s hair. The Time Lord shot her a mock glare.

“You know when people ask why I’m so rude, I’m just gonna point to you and say look what I live with.”

Jackie smirked, scooping Tony into her arms. “Don’t stay up too late Doctor. You’ve been so cranky lately.”

“Thanks Mum.”

Jackie carried Tony upstairs to get him ready for bed and the Doctor sighed, collapsing back against the couch. He was tired – it’d been nearly a week since he’d slept – but he wasn’t going to give Jackie the satisfaction of being right.

So instead he climbed up to the roof – he did that sometimes despite everyone’s protests and Jackie’s insistences that he was going to break his leg. He liked being on the roof.

It was the closest he could get to the stars anymore.

The constellations were completely different in this universe, and it bothered him. In the other universe he’d have been able to look up and point to a star and say with complete confidence what planet it was, what its inhabitants were, its main languages, its population, its greatest exports… everything. But here…here he could only guess. And he had no way of knowing if he would be right.

He didn’t like it.

But it was still nice to lay on the roof and look up at the stars and imagine. Think about all the places he’d been – the places he’d heard of but never gotten to – the stars he’d jumped through for centuries.

God he missed it so much.

Sometimes when he was laying up there he would get so caught up in it all, in his imaginings and his wonderings, that he would look up and expect Rose to be there next to him, looking up at the stars in exhilaration or perhaps sleeping peacefully, worn out by the long day they’d no doubt had.

But of course Rose was never there.

And it broke his hearts all over again.

God he hated not knowing if she was okay. If Jackie had still be in the other universe, or Mickey, he would’ve assumed she was with one of them, living with them, on Earth.

But she was alone there now. No family, nobody for her to stay with. Oh she probably had a friend that would let her live with them until she got back on her feet, but would Rose take that option? Somehow she’d figured out how to pilot the TARDIS – the Doctor couldn’t even begin to understand how, but she had, and with that power at her hands why would she choose a normal life on Earth where there was nobody waiting for her? What was to stop her from taking the TARDIS, just as the Doctor had, and flying it to one end of the universe and back again?

The thought of it terrified the Doctor. Rose, alone in the TARDIS, taking his place in the universe. No human should ever live that life. It was such a burden, such a horrible, heavy burden.

And Rose deserved so much better than that.
Focused as the Doctor was on the thoughts whirling about in his head, he didn’t quite notice at first when one of the lights twinkling overhead blinked out.

But it registered somewhere in the back of his mind, and as soon as he realized that the star directly above him, right in his line of sight, was gone he bolted up, blinking, eyes wide.

“…What?”

Jackie and Pete were sitting on the couch, enjoying a nice quiet cup of tea before dragging themselves up to bed. Needless to say, it was a bit of a shock when the Doctor suddenly banged through the front door.

“What – were you on the roof again?” Jackie demanded as she scurried after the Doctor. Pete was a little slower, still not completely used to keeping up with the whirlwind Time Lord. He doubted he ever would be.

“Not now, Jackie.”

There was only one computer in the house, in Pete’s office. He didn’t even bother locking the door anymore – the Doctor just let himself in with the sonic screwdriver. “What are you doing?” Jackie asked as the Doctor hurried to the computer, booting it up and zapping it with the sonic when it took too long.

“I asked you to stop doing that,” Pete groaned as he walked in. “Last time you did that every website came up in French.”

“I’ll fix it later.”

“You said that last time too. I had to have tech support wipe the entire thing clean and start over.”

But the Doctor wasn’t paying attention. He printed out a star chart – after hitting the printer with the sonic as well, much to Pete’s dismay – grabbed a pen and hurried back outside. Jackie and Pete followed him reluctantly and found him on the lawn, holding the star chart above his head.

“What are you–?”

“There are stars missing.”

That brought couple up short, to say the least. “…What?”

The Doctor circled a few stars on the paper before holding it out for them to say. “There are stars on this chart that aren’t in the sky.”

Great. He’d been bored for so long he was making up problems. “It’s probably just cloudy, Doctor,” Jackie sighed.

“Not to mention light pollution blocks the stars out,” Pete added reasonably.

“Then how come I can see the stars around the missing ones? Besides we’re practically in the middle of nowhere, the only light pollution is from the mansion and that isn’t much in the grand scheme of things,” the Doctor argued. “There are stars missing, that’s not a good sign.”

“Neither is insanity.”

“I’m not insane and I’m not bored!”
“Doctor come on, you’re tired,” Jackie said reasonably. “We all are. Let’s just get inside and get some sleep.”

They weren’t going to listen. The Doctor supposed he should’ve expected that but it still bugged him to no end. “I’m not tired,” he said flatly as he went to climb back up to the roof. Jackie and Pete watched him and exchanged looks, sighing.

It was like having another kid.

The Doctor spent all night on the roof, taking pictures of the stars with his phone (after modifying the camera to pick them up) and monitoring their progression throughout the night.

He was still up there when Jackie woke up the next morning. She considered saying something, but if it was a project to keep him busy and keep him from modifying their appliances (they’d already replaced three microwaves and two blenders) then what was the harm in letting him sit up there? As long as he didn’t fall asleep and roll off the roof, it would be fine.

Of course now that Jackie had thought it, that was exactly what was going to happen.

The Doctor spent three nights on the roof. He printed the pictures at work during the day, marking them with the time they’d been taken and keeping track of any meteorological events that could affect his data. It was the first time since being trapped there that his entire focus hadn’t been on finding a way home. Of course, he was just trading one obsession for another.

It was another week before the Doctor dragged Pete down to his office. The walls of the room were papered in pictures of stars and notes and bunch of numbers Pete didn’t really understand – of course he didn’t understand too much when it came to the Doctor. He’d given up trying.

“…Okay, what am I looking at?”

“Stars.” Yeah, Pete had gathered that much on his own. “I’ve been tracking the stars from your roof for over a week and something is not right. Here, come here.” He dragged Pete over to the beginning of what was ultimately a time line. “See this star, this one right here?” He pointed to a star circled with purple marker. “I named it Arthur.”

“Why did you name a star Arthur?”

“It’s a good name for a star.” The Doctor waved a dismissive hand. “Come on Pete, focus. I started tracking Arthur six nights ago, following its movements, keeping track of where it is in the sky at every hour.” As he spoke he led Pete along the time line, pointing to the circled star in each picture. “You’ll notice that at every hour on each night it’s more or less in the same place, give or take a couple degrees of difference. Until…” He stopped in front of a picture with no purple circle. “Last night at three a.m.

“There were no clouds, I checked the forecast, and all the lights in the mansion were off, I didn’t even have a flashlight. But Arthur just disappeared.”

Pete stared at the Arthur-less picture for a long moment. “You really think this is something, don’t you?” He finally asked with a sigh, and the Doctor nodded eagerly.

“I really do.”

“If I agree that it’s something to look into will you please go home and get some sleep?” He looked rather manic, and it was worrying Pete.
“Yes yes fine, I’ll sleep.” Sleep was absolutely the last thing on the Doctor’s mind, but if it got Pete to listen then fine.

“Good. Go home. I’ll talk to people about keeping an eye on this but there isn’t much that can be done until tonight anyways.”

Jackie was understandably relieved when the Doctor came home and went to bed.
Evolution of the Daleks Part One

Chapter Summary

Adventures in old New York continue. 1/2

Martha was so busy staring, stunned, at the thing that had emerged from the Dalek casing that she didn’t even see Rose slip away. Nobody really seemed to notice the blonde, for which she was grateful.

“These humans will become like me,” the human-Dalek — Sec — announced. “Prepare them for hybrdisation.”

The pigmen moved to grab people. “Leave me alone!” Martha snapped, trying to throw them off. “Don’t you dare!”

Suddenly music blasted through the room, and everyone stopped, looking around to try and find the source.

“What is that sound?” Sec demanded.

“Well, that would be me, actually,” Rose said as she appeared again, holding a small radio. She set it down by a Bunsen burner before approaching. “Hello there.” She was practically the picture of casual.

Who are you?” Dalek Sec asked, and Rose pulled an offended look.

“You don’t remember me? Bit insulting, that. I mean, I realize we only met once but I like to think it was pretty memorable — you’re even the one who ordered my death if I remember correctly.”

She took another step closer, hands clasped behind her back. “Lemme see if I can jog your memory, then. The Emperor. Your Emperor. Remember him? I met him, remember how I told you that?” As she spoke she stepped closer still, until she was only an arm length’s away from the human-Dalek. “He survived the Time War, until he met me. I met the emperor, and I took the Time Vortex, and I poured it into his head and turned him into dust.” She spread her arms out, a smirk pulling at her lips. Martha had never seen her like this. It was a bit frightening. “The God of all Daleks. And I destroyed him.”

Dalek Sec reeled back as the memories clicked. “The Doctor’s companion!”

Rose’s smirk tightened. It looked almost…evil. “There we go.”

“The Abomination!” One of the Daleks called, and Rose almost laughed at that. She was an abomination to the Daleks. It was amusing. “Exterminate!”

“Wait!” Sec ordered, and Rose raised an eyebrow. Mercy. That was new. “Where is the Doctor?”

“Not here right now,” Rose replied silkily. “But he sends his regards. He’ll be very sad he missed this. A new form of Dalek. Fascinating and very clever.”
“The Cult of Skaro escaped the Doctor’s slaughter.”

“And you ended up in nineteen-thirty.” Rose rested her hand against her cheek, leaning into it and propping her elbow up with her other hand. “How’d you manage that, then?”

“Emergency temporal shift.”

“Oooooh…that must have roasted up your power cells, though.”

The certainty of Rose’s words caught Sec off guard. “You are quite knowledgeable. For a human.”

“Yeah side effect of controlling the Time Vortex.” Rose waved it off. “You, though…time was four Daleks could have conquered the world, right? But you lot, you’re just here skulking away in the darkness, experimenting. Which brings us full circle…to you.”

“I am Dalek in human form,” Sec replied evenly, and Rose nodded.

“Being human, though…tell me, what does that feel like, Dalek Sec? That’s your name, right? You’ve got a name, and a mind of your own. Tell me what you’re thinking right now.”

Sec hesitated for a moment, assessing himself. “I feel…human,” he said as he turned away. Rose nodded.

“Yeah? That’s good.”

“I feel everything we want from mankind,” Sec continued slowly. “Which is ambition, hatred, aggression, and war. Such a genius for war.

“No, that’s not what humanity means,” Rose snapped, heart picking up a bit. Damn it, she’d messed up.

“I think it does,” Sec disagreed. “At heart, this species is very Dalek.”

Oh that was just plain insulting. “Alright, so what you achieved then, with this Final Experiment, eh? Nothing! Because I can show you what you’re missing with this thing.” She gestured back at the radio still playing music.

“What is the purpose of that device?” One of the Daleks commanded, and Rose laughed a bit.

“Exactly, right? It plays music. What’s the point of that? But music, it’s special. You can do so much with it. You can dance to it, sing to it, fall in love to it.” As she spoke she slid the sonic screwdriver out of her pocket. “Unless you’re a Dalek, of course. Then it’s all just noise.”

She aimed the screwdriver at the radio, and a feedback screech echoed through the room, hurting the Daleks and Sec and bringing the pigmen to their knees.

“Run!” Rose shouted over the shriek, and everyone took her words to heart, taking off with Rose hurrying after them.

“Move move, move, come on now, move!” Rose yelled as they rushed through the sewers. Everyone else had dispersed, but Frank and Martha had stayed with her. They’d lost Laszlo somewhere, but Rose hardly had time to think about that—

Until they turned a corner and ran smack into Tallulah. “You were supposed to go back!” Rose groaned. “Come on then!”
“What’s happened to Laszlo?” Tallulah asked worriedly even as Martha grabbed her arm, dragging her along. They found their way to the ladder and hurried up.

“We need to get somewhere safe,” Rose said as soon as they hit the surface.

“Hooverville,” Frank offered.

“No, too dangerous. The Daleks could follow us.”

“We don’t have much of a choice,” Martha informed Rose quietly. She couldn’t get the image of Rose taunting Dalek Sec out of her head. She wasn’t sure what to think of the blonde right then. “We can’t get back to the TARDIS, the ferry won’t run again until morning.”

Damn it…Martha was right. “Yeah, that wasn’t my best parking job.” She ran a hand through her hair. “Fine. Hooverville it is. Let’s go.”

* * * * *

Solomon, at least, took everything in stride. “These Daleks, they sound like the stuff of nightmares. And they want to breed?”

“I don’t know about breeding,” Rose muttered. “Don’t know if murderous pepper pots can breed. But they’re splicing themselves into human bodies. They want to rebuild their former army. And they’ve got a farm of breeding stock right here in Hooverville. You’ve got to get everyone out.”

“Hooverville’s the lowest place a man can fall,” Solomon said, shaking his head. “There’s nowhere else to go.”

“Then scatter,” Rose said impatiently. “I’m sorry, but you’re basically fodder for them. They’re dangerous. You need to get out of New York.”

“There’s got to be a way to reason with these things,” Solomon insisted.

“There’s no chance,” Martha said before Rose could lose her patience completely. At any other time she would have been perfectly calm despite the danger. But with the Daleks… god why did it always have to be Daleks?

“Can’t you do something, Rose?” Frank asked suddenly. “They seemed scared of you. And you said you destroyed their… emperor?”

“Yeah, I can’t do that again.” Rose shook her head. “Course they don’t need to know that, but I’m sure they’ll connect the dots at some point. They’re vulnerable right now. It’s gonna make them even more dangerous.”

“So… there’s no chance, then?”

It was probably best Rose didn’t get a chance to answer that. A loud whistle echoed through the air, and Solomon’s head snapped around toward the sound. “They’re coming!” A voice called. “They’re coming!”

“A sentry.” Solomon stood up straight, clearly prepared to fight. “He must have seen something.”

“They’re here!” A man yelled as he ran toward them. “I’ve seen them! Monsters! They’re monsters.”

“Too late,” Rose murmured, straightening up as well. Martha caught sight of a flash of gold in her brown eyes. “It’s started.”
“We’re under attack!” Solomon called. “Everyone to arms!”

Rifles were produced from a tent and handed out, Frank called for everyone to find weapons, and some people started panicking and ran away.

“Come back!” Solomon shouted after them. “We’ve got to stick together! It’s not safe out there! Come back!”

There were screams as people were grabbed, the pigmen dragging them away. “We need to get out of the park.” There was an edge of panic on Martha’s voice as well. Rose shook her head. In contrast to everyone else, she was perfectly calm — in a perfectly cold way. Rose was strange, but Martha had never been afraid of her.

Until now.

“We can’t. They’re on all sides. They’re driving everyone back toward us.”

“We’re trapped,” Tallulah moaned, looking sick. Rose felt a bit bad for her. She hadn’t signed up for this.

None of these people had.

“Then we stand together.” Solomon was handling it quite well, however. “Gather round. Everybody come to me. You there, Jethro, Harry, Seamus, stay together.” The men formed a circle around the women, protecting them by the campfire. “They can’t take all of us.”

As the pigmen came closer, the Hooverville citizens opened fire.

“If we can just hold them off until daylight…” Martha’s voice drifted off as Rose shook her head.

“They’re just foot soldiers.”

“Oh my god,” Martha gasped as a Dalek appeared in the sky.

“What in the world is this?” Solomon asked in disbelief.

“It’s the devil!” One of the men hollered. “A devil in the sky, god save us all!”

“Oh yeah?” Frank swung his gun up. “We’ll see about that!”

He fired — predictably enough, it bounced off the Dalek’s casing. “That’s not gonna work,” Rose said quietly.

“There’s more than one of them,” Martha said just as a second Dalek swooped in, and together they started firing, blowing up tents.

“The humans will surrender!” The first Dalek called.

“Leave them alone!” Rose snapped, her temper flaring again as she stepped forward, but Solomon stepped in front of her, blocking her from view. “Solomon, no—”

“I’m told I’m addressing the Daleks,” he called. “Is that correct?”

Something pulled in the back of Rose’s head. Not the TARDIS — more like a sense that something bad was about to happen.
“From what I hear, you’re outcasts too.”

“Solomon, don’t!” Rose almost begged. She was desperate to get him to stop. She knew the Daleks wouldn’t be reasoned with.

“I’m sorry, Rose, but this is my township.” He turned back to the Daleks. “You will respect my authority. Just let me try. Daleks, ain’t we all the same? Underneath, ain’t we all kin?”

He set down his rifle, surrendering. “Right. See, I’ve just discovered this past day, God’s universe is a thousand times the size I thought it was. And that scares me. Oh yeah, terrifies me right down to the bone. But surely it’s got to give me hope. Hope that maybe together we can make a better tomorrow. So, I beg you now, if you have any compassion in your hearts, then you’ll meet with us and stop this fight. Well? What do you say?”

The response was predictable, but still horrifying. “Exterminate!”

The blast hit Solomon, and he yelled as he dropped to the ground, dead within seconds.

“No!” Frank and Rose yelled at the same time, and Frank hurried to the body, calling Solomon’s name as if it would somehow bring him back.

“They killed him.” Martha was just stunned. “They just… shot him on the spot.”

“Right then!” Rose shouted suddenly, stepping out of the crowd, separating herself from everyone. “You wanna kill someone, kill me! Sorry you can’t have the Doctor, but I gotta be the next best thing at this point!”

“Rose—!” Martha hissed in disbelief, but she was cut off.

“I will be the one to avenge the Emperor.” If there could have been wonder in a Dalek’s voice, this would have been the time for it.

“Then go on!” Rose spread her arms out — an offering. “Do it!”

“Exterminate—!”

But the Dalek froze, as if something had stopped it. “I do not understand,” it finally said. “It is the Abomination.” A pause. “The urge to kill is too strong.” Another pause. “I obey.”

“What the hell?” Rose murmured, eyes narrowing.

The Dalek refocused on her suddenly. “You will follow,” it commanded. Well. That was new.

“No!” Martha protested. “You can’t go.”

“I don’t think I have much of a choice in the matter.” Rose whirled to look at Martha. “Besides, the Daleks just changed their minds. I don’t think that happens too often.”

“But… what about us?” What was to stop the Daleks from killing all of them when she was gone?

Rose pressed her lips thin before turning to look back at the Daleks. “One condition! If I come with you, you spare the lives of everyone here! Do you hear me?”

“Humans will be spared,” the Dalek said after a moment. “Follow.”

“I’m coming too then,” Martha said, stepping forward. Rose shook her head.
“Stay here. People need you. Besides, I have a plan.”

“Since when?!” Martha demanded in disbelief. “When do you ever have a plan?!”

Rose smiled a bit, taking Martha’s hand. “Just trust me. And be safe.”

She gave the other woman a small wink before turning and walking away. Martha looked down to see Rose had given her the sonic screwdriver and psychic paper.

Maybe she did have a plan then.

*****

Martha set up a small triage area in one of the undamaged tents and set to work with the injured. She fell into her old A&E habits, and for a while she was even able to forget the dire situation she was in.

“Here you go,” Tallulah said quietly as she slipped into the tent with a pan of water. “I got some more on the boil.”

“Thanks.” Martha smiled at her before returning her attention to the man she was helping. “You’ll be alright. It’s just a cut. Try and keep it clean.”

“Thanks,” the man said weakly before leaving, clearly still shaken up.

“So what about us?” Tallulah asked when he was gone. “What do we do now?”

Martha tapped the sonic screwdriver against her palm, thinking. “Rose gave me this. She must have had a reason.”

“What’s that for?”

“It gets you into places,” Martha explained. “Buildings and things. But where? She must want me to go somewhere but, what am I supposed to do?”

Rose, meanwhile, was right back where they’d started — sort of. As soon as the Daleks escorted into the lab she broke away from them, storming toward Dalek Sec.

“Those people were defenseless!” She railed off at him, furious. “You only wanted me, but no, that wasn’t enough for you. You had to start killing, because that’s the only thing a Dalek’s good for.”

“The deaths were wrong.”

To say those words caught Rose off guard was an understatement. “I… sorry?”

“That man,” Sec said quietly, “their leader, Solomon. He showed courage.”

Well this was… strange. “And that’s… good?” Rose asked slowly.

“That’s excellent.”

Definitely strange. “Don’t take this the wrong way, Sec, but you’re startin’ to sound a little more human.”

“I am the first of my kind,” Sec said as he looked around. “I believe we have that in common.”

“I’m human,” Rose said automatically. She didn’t even believe that anymore.
“A human who can control the time vortex, who destroyed the Emperor?” It was a rhetorical question, clearly. “You are unique.”

“You had your Daleks spare me.” There was no question of that now. “Why? What do you want me for?”

“We tried everything to survive when we found ourselves stranded in this ignorant age.” He sounded almost… sad. “First we tried growing new Dalek embryos, but their flesh was too weak.”

Realization hit Rose. “That’s what I found in the sewers. You just left it to die in the dark.” That was cold. Even for a Dalek.

“It forced us to conclude what is the greatest resource of this planet,” Sec continued as if there’d been no interruption. “Its people.”

He threw a breaker switch, lighting up the whole place. Rose looked up to see hundreds of bodies floating above them, resting on stretchers. As she watched, Sec brought one of the stretchers down for her to examine.

“We stole them,” Sec explained. “Look inside.”

Rose pulled back the cover to see the face of the man laying on the stretcher. “This is the true extent of the Final Experiment.”

Rose pressed her lips thin for a moment. “Is he dead?” Her voice was low, almost cold.

“Near death, with his mind wiped, ready to be filled with new ideas.”

“Dalek ideas.” She didn’t even try to keep the disgust out of her voice.

“The human Dalek race,” Sec corrected. Rose shook her head.

“How many of them are there?”

“We have caverns beyond this storing more than a thousand.”

A thousand humans, robbed of their minds. Disgusting. “Is there any way to restore them? Make them human again?”

“Everything they were has been lost.”

“And somehow you think that’s okay.” Rose whirled to look at Sec. “You’ve taken these people and ripped their minds out of their heads and for what? You’re going to need more power than this planet is capable of producing, we haven’t even split the atom yet. How’re you gonna do it?”

“Open the conductor plan,” Sec called.

Martha, meanwhile, was still turning things around in her mind. Rose had reached a whole new level of vague here. “Wait a minute.” Martha’s head snapped up. “Down in the sewers, the Daleks mentioned this energy conductor.”

“What does that mean?” Tallulah asked, confused.

“I don’t know. Maybe it’s like a lightning conductor or… or…” Her eyes widened. “Dalekanium!”

“Oh.” Tallulah couldn’t have been more confused if she tried.
“They said the Dalekanium was in place.”

“In place where?” This all sounded like made up garbage to Tallulah. If she hadn’t seen it all with her own eyes she wouldn’t have believed it for a minute.

“Frank might know.”

Martha pushed herself up, going to find the Southern man. He was sitting outside, staring at the ground. “Frank?” Martha said gently, kneeling down in front of him. He looked up.

“Hmm?”

“That Mr. Diagoras, he was like some sort of fixer, yeah? Get you jobs all over town?”

“Yeah,” Frank said distantly. “He could find a profit anywhere.”

“But where, though?” Martha prompted. “What sort of things?”

“You name it. We’re all so desperate for work, you just hoped Diagoras would pick you for something good. Building wok, that pays the best.”

“But what sort of building work?”

“Mainly building that.” Frank pointed to the Empire State Building. Martha looked up, frowning slightly.

That had to be it.

“The Empire State Building,” Rose said slowly, looking up at the big screen before them, which was showing the building. “We’re right underneath that, aren’t we? Have you hijacked the whole building?”

“We needed an energy conductor,” Sec explained.

“For what?”

“I am the genetic template. My altered DNA was to be administered to each human body. A strong enough blast of gamma radiation can splice the Dalek and human genetic codes, and waken each body from its sleep.”

Most of that was way over Rose’s head, even with the TARDIS trying to help her figure it out.


“Soon, the greatest solar flare for a thousand years will hit the Earth. Gamma radiation will be drawn to the energy conductor and when it strikes…”

“The army awakes.” Rose could almost see it. “But I don’t see what you need me for. Sounds like you have this all figured out.”

“You are human,” Sec said. “But not completely. You are human with the knowledge of Time Lords, you’ve absorbed the Time Vortex, you’ve seen everything.” Rose opened her mouth to protest, then closed it again. If they thought she could help, maybe she could get more information. “Consider a pure Dalek, intelligent but emotionless.”

“Removing the emotions makes you stronger.” Just like Cybermen. “That’s what your creator
thought, right? All those years ago.”

“He was wrong.”

*That* caught Rose off guard. “What?”

“It makes us lesser than our enemies,” Sec said. “We must return to the flesh, and also the heart.”

“But you wouldn’t be the supreme beings anymore,” Rose pointed out, raising an eyebrow.

“And that is good.”

“That is incorrect,” one of the Daleks interrupted, and Rose jumped. She had forgotten about them.

“Daleks are supreme,” the other added.

“No, not anymore,” Sec argued.

“But that is our purpose.”

“Then our purpose is wrong. Where has our quest for supremacy led us? To this. Hiding in the sewers on a primitive world, just four of us left. If we do not change now then we deserve extinction.”

Rose’s head was spinning. “So you want to change everythin’ that makes a Dalek a Dalek.”

Sec turned back to her. “If you can help me.”
Evolution of the Daleks Part Two

Chapter Summary

Rose, Martha, et all vs the Daleks of New York

Chapter Notes

I am....so sorry. That's all I can say. I'm sorry. I hope people are still interested in this. I'm very sorry.

Psychic paper really was a godsend, Martha reflected as she flashed the paper at the security guards, and they let the sad little trio through without a second thought. They found a service lift, making use of it.

“I always wanted to go to the Empire State Building,” Martha said with a sigh. “Never imagined it quite like this, though.”

“Where are we headed, anyways?” Frank asked curiously. Martha seemed to know what she was doing, though she had yet to share with the rest of the class.

“How come those guys just let us through?” Tallulah asked. “How’s that thing work?”

“Psychic paper.” Martha held it up for her. “Shows them whatever I want them to I think. According to this, we’re two engineers and an architect.”

Rose, meanwhile, was still standing with Dalek Sec, stunned. He wanted her help. “With the knowledge provided by the time vortex, you know even more than we do,” the hybrid explained, oblivious to Rose’s surprise. “The new race must be ready by the time the solar flare erupts.”

Rose shook her head. “But you’re the template. I thought they were getting a dose of you.”

“I want to change the sequence.”

This just kept getting odder and odder. “To…make them even more human?”

“Humans are the greatest survivors. We need that ability.”

I don’t know, you lot seem to have a bit of cockroach in you as it is, Rose reflected bitter. “Hang on though.” She looked back at the other Daleks. “There’s no way they’ll you do this.”

“I am their leader.”

Rose raised an eyebrow turning back to the Daleks. “And that’s enough for you, is it?”

“Daleks must follow orders,” one said mechanically.
“Dalek Sec commands, we obey,” another added.

“If you don’t help me, nothing will change,” Sec insisted as Rose turned back to him.

“There’s no room on Earth for another race,” she informed him, a bit coldly. “And you’re mad if you think I’m gonna help you run humans out of their own world.”

“You have the TARDIS. Take us across the stars. Find us a new home and allow the new Daleks to start again.”

Every fiber of Rose’s being was screaming no no no! This was insane. Helping the Daleks?

But he seemed so sincere…

“When’s the solar flare?”

“Eleven minutes.”

Rose took a deep breath. “Right then. Better get to work.”

Tallulah was awestruck as they stepped off the elevator. “Look at this place. Top of the world.”

Martha made her way to a drawing board, looking at the blueprints. “Okay, now this looks good…”

“Hey, look at the date,” Frank said as he came up behind Martha. “These designs were issued today. They have changed something last minute.”

“You mean the Daleks changed something?”

“Yeah, could be.”

Martha began flipping through the designs below. “The ones underneath, they’re from before. That means that whatever they changed must be on this top sheet but not on this one. We need to check one against the other.”

Tallulah, meanwhile, was wandering around. “The height of this place!” She said, enthralled, as she headed toward the edge. “This is amazing.”

“Careful, we’re a hundred floors up,” Martha cautioned. “Don’t go wandering off.”

“I just want to see,” she insisted, going out past the plastic and looking out at the city. “New York City,” she murmured as she looked around. “If aliens had to come to Earth…oh, no wonder they came here.”

Downstairs, Rose’s mind was in overdrive. The TARDIS, it seemed, had decided that Dalek Sec was trustworthy, and was supplying Rose with everything she needed to know. “There’s no point in chromosomal grafting, it’s too erratic,” she babbled at top speed, sounding amazingly like the Doctor. “You need to split the genome and force the Dalek human sequence right into the cortex.”

“We need more chromatin solution,” Sec informed the Daleks.

“The pig slaves have it.”

Rose looked up to see a bunch of pigmen carrying in a crate. Laszlo was with them. “These pig
slaves,” she asked curiously, slowly, “what happens to them in the grand plan?”

“Nothing.” Sec’s voice sounded a bit cold. “They’re just simple beasts. Their lifespan is limited. None survive beyond a few weeks.” Rose met Laszlo’s gaze, swallowing hard. “Power up the feeds.”

While the Daleks and Sec were distracted, Rose leaned in to whisper to Laszlo. “I can’t undo what they’ve done to you.” Her voice was regretful. “But they won’t do it to anyone else.”

“Do you trust him?” Laszlo whispered back.

“I’m not sure,” Rose admitted. “But I know last time I saw Dalek Sec he ordered my death and now he wants my help. And I know that one man can change the course of history with the right idea at the right time…and I have to believe that this is possible.”

Frank and Martha spread the blueprints out as Tallulah came back in. “I’ll go keep an eye out,” Frank said, standing up. “Make sure we’re safe up here. Don’t want nobody butting in.”

“There’s a hell of a storm moving on, Tallulah commented as Frank left and she settled on the floor with Martha.

“I wish Rose was here,” Martha muttered dismally. “She’d know what we’re…oh who the hell am I kidding, she’d have no more clue than we do. But she has a better advantage at least.”

“She’s an odd one, isn’t she?” Tallulah said, tilting her head. “Where did you meet her anyways?”

“It was in a hospital…sort of,” Martha said as she looked through.

“Oh, were the two of you in for something?”

“No. Well, she was. I’m a doctor though. Kind of.”

“You’re a physician?” Tallulah sounded surprised. That got kind of old after a while. “Really?”

“I was training. Still am, if I ever get back home.”

“What a life. So you just follow Rose around taking care of her now?”

“No. We just travel together.” Except…it did feel like sometimes she was just taking care of Rose. The blonde had a reckless streak unlike anything Martha had ever seen. She’d had trouble breathing for nearly an hour after New New York — Martha had been appalled to hear about her jumping down the highway. Of course she’d healed — more than human, she’d explained, she healed faster — but still. The fact that it had been a problem in the first place had been absolutely mad.


“You’ve got someone who loves you though,” Martha pointed out. “And Rose is with him now, there’s every she chance she can get him out.”

“And then what?” Tallulah didn’t even sound angry — just sad. “Don’t talk crazy. There’s no future for me and him. Those Dalek things took that away. The one good thing I had in my life and they destroyed it.”

“The line feeds are ready,” one of the Daleks reported, and Rose looked up from her work.

“Then it’s all systems go.”
“The solar flare is imminent.” Sec sounded excited. “The radiation will reach Earth in a matter of minutes.”

“And we’ll be ready for it.” Rose had to admit, she was a little excited as well. She filled a large syringe with blue liquid, inserting into a brass still. “That compound will allow the gene bonds to reconfigure in a brand new pattern. Power up!”

Laszlo and another pigman threw the breaker switches. “Start the line feeds,” Sec called, and everything kicked to life, liquids traveling upwards.

“There goes the gene solution.” Rose would admit, she was in awe.

“The lifeblood.”

“Gotta!” Martha exclaimed happily. “Look. There, on the mast. Those little lines? They’re new. They’ve added something, see?”

“Added what?” Tallulah asked. She and Martha exchanged looks before exclaiming at the same time:

“Dalekanium!”

Rose’s head snapped up as an alarm echoed through the room. “What’s what?”

“What’s happening?” Sec turned to look at the other Daleks. “Is there a malfunction? Answer me!”

Something was going wrong. Very, very wrong. “No, no, no! The gene feed!” Rose hurried forward. “They’re overriding the gene feed!”

“Impossible.” Sec sounded stunned. “They cannot disobey orders.”

One of the Daleks turned to point its laser at Rose. “The Abomination will step away from the controls.”

Rose sighed, turning to look at the Dalek. She should have known better. “Stop!” Sec shouted. “You will not fire.”

“She is an enemy of the Daleks.”

“And so are you,” another added, turning on Sec.

“I am your commander,” Sec insisted. “I am Dalek Sec.”

“You have lost your authority.”

“You are no longer a Dalek.”

This was mad. “What have you done with the gene feed?” Rose demanded. She had to figure out if she could fix this.

“The new bodies will be one hundred percent Dalek,” one of the Daleks said.

“No,” Sec gasped. “You can’t do this!”

“Pig slaves, restrain Dalek Sec and the Abomination.”
One grabbed Rose from behind, and she looked back to see Laszlo holding her. “Release me,” Sec commanded. “I created you. I am your master.”

Another alarm went off, and Rose heard the distant sound of the lift. “Solar flare approaching.” One Dalek said.

“Prepare to intercept.”

“There’s the lift,” Laszlo whispered.

“After you.” Rose whispered back, and they took off running.

“The Abomination is escaping,” Rose heard behind them. “Stop her, stop her!”

They got into the lift, and Rose hit a button, closing the doors in the pigmen’s faces.

“We’ve only got minutes before the gamma radiation reaches the Earth,” Rose said, raking a hand through her hair. “We need to get to the top of the building.” It was only then that she noticed Laszlo was panting. “Laszlo? What’s wrong?”

“Out of breath,” he gasped. “It’s nothing. We’ve escaped them, Doctor. That’s all that matters.”

The doors opened, and Rose could have cried when she saw Martha there. “Rose!” The other woman scrambled up, and Rose ran out to meet her halfway, catching her in a hug.

“Laszlo!” Tallulah cried, running to hug the pigman.

“We’ve worked it out!” Martha said excitedly as she pulled back to look at Rose. “We know what they’ve done. There’s Dalekanium on the mast. Oh, and—”

“Ow!” Rose yelped when Martha slapped her arm.

“Don’t you ever do that again. I don’t care how noble you think you’re being or whatever, you sacrifice yourself again and you better hope they kill you before I do.”

“Yes ma’am,” Rose muttered, pouting. The sound of the elevator doors closing caught her attention, however, and she whirled back around. “No, no, no!” She yelled, hurrying back and pulling out the sonic screwdriver, trying to pull it back. “Damn it!” She hit the door. “Deadlock seal. I can’t stop it.”

“Where’s it going?” Martha asked nervously.

“Right down to the Daleks. And they’re not going to leave us alone up here. What’s the time?”

“Er, eleven-fifteen,” Frank, who had slipped back in, reported.

“Six minutes to go.” Rose ran her hands through her hair again. “I’ve got to remove the Dalekanium before the gamma radiation hits.”

“Gammon radiation?” Tallulah repeated cluelessly. “What the heck is that?”

Rose hurried out to the open area with the others following, looking up. “Oh…that’s high.” She gulped a bit. “That’s very…Blimey, that’s high.”

“And we’ve got to go even higher,” Martha said. “That’s the mast up there, look. There’s three pieces of Dalekanium on the base. We’ve got to get them off.”
Rose saw a wooden ladder nearby. “Not we,” she corrected quietly. “Just me.”

“I won’t stand here and watch you,” Martha informed her.

“No, you’re going to have your hands full anyway.” Rose was sad as she looked back at Martha. “I’m sorry, Martha, but you have to fight.”

Rose started up, and the rest of the group headed back inside. “The lift is coming up,” Martha said as the sound reached her ears.

“I should have brought that gun,” Frank muttered.

“Tallulah, stay back,” Laszlo said, stepping forward. “You too, Martha. If they send pig slaves, they’re trained to kill.”

“The Doctor needs me to fight,” Martha said. “I’m not going anywhere.”

“They’re savages,” Laszlo informed her. “I should know. They’re trained to slit your throat with their bare teeth.”

He tried to lift a hammer, but ended up toppling over. “Laszlo!” Tallulah hurried to his side, helping him sit up. “What is it?”

“No, it’s nothing,” Laszlo gasped, leaning on Tallulah despite his words. “I’m fine. Just leave me.”

“Oh honey, you’re burning up,” Tallulah murmured. “What’s wrong with you? Tell me.”

“Great,” Frank muttered. “‘One man down, we ain’t even started yet.’

“It’s not looking good, Frank,” Martha said dismally.

“Nope.”

“We’re going to get slaughtered.”

But her head snapped up as thunder echoed through the sky. “Wait a minute…lightning.”

Up on the roof, Rose was struggling to get the Dalekanium off the mast. She pulled one off and made a noise of success before going on to the second. Downstairs, Frank and Martha began working as well, getting sections of metal scaffolding and using the chairs to trail them outside.

“Aw, you’ll be alright sweetheart.” Tallulah was still comforting Laszlo. “Don’t you worry.” She looked over to see Martha and Frank working. “What the hell are you clowns doing?”

“Even if the Doctor stops the Dalekanium, this place is still going to get hit,” Martha explained. “Great big bolt of lightening, electricity all down this building. Connect this to the lift and they get zapped.”

“Oh my god, that could work.”

“Then give us a hand,” Frank said, and Tallulah scrambled up to help.

They finished worked, stepping back to admire their handy work. “Is that going to work?” Tallulah asked uncertainly.

“It’s got to,” Martha said firmly.
“I’ve got all the pipes up to the scaffolding outside,” Frank reported. Martha nodded.

“Come here, Frank. Just sit in the middle and don’t touch anything.”

“Oh!” Rose yelped as jammed her finger, and the sonic screwdriver slipped from her grip. “Oh damn damn damn,” she whispered, looking up at the mast. Any minute now. Oh god. The TARDIS hummed worryingly as Rose took a deep breath, climbing up the mast and holding on. “Shut up. I know what I’m doing.”

Oh that was a lie. The lightning strike came down, electricity coursing through Rose’s body, and she screamed as it burned through her.

Downstairs, the lightning also hit the poles, traveling to the lift and frying the pigmen inside. Frank wrapped his arms around Tallulah and Martha, pulling them in and protecting them until it was over.

“You did it, Martha!” Tallulah cheered when they looked up and saw the pigmen laying dead in the lift.

“They used to be like Laszlo.” Martha, in contrast, was mournful. “They were people, and I killed them.”


Martha shook her head, look away. “What about Rose?”

They scrambled up the ladder to Rose. Martha winced when she found the sonic screwdriver on the way up. Oh that wasn’t good.

“Rose!” She called as soon as she got up, and she cringed when she saw the blonde laying motionless on the platform. “Rose, Rose wake up!”

She hurried to Rose’s side, kneeling down. “God what did you do?” She hissed, checking Rose’s pulse, her heartbeat. Both still. “Are you kidding me?” She hissed as she began CPR. “You’ve gotta stop doing this Rose, come on…”

She’d been doing compression for about ten seconds when Rose let out a loud gasp, her eyes flying open. “Oh!” Martha rocked back on her heels, half laughing in relief. Thank god.

“What’s wrong with her eyes?!” Tallulah cried, and it was then Martha noticed Rose’s eyes were glowing a brilliant gold.

“Nothing, it’s fine.” Martha shifted to block Rose’s face from view. “Rose, Rose hey. Look at me.”

It took Rose a moment to focus on Martha. “Are you okay?”

The blonde grimaced, squeezing her eyes shut. “My head…”

“Come on, sit up.” Martha helped Rose up, letting her lean on her. “What happened?”

Rose’s eyes blinked open again — mercifully the golden glow had faded away. “Did it work?” She asked stupidly, looking around. “Never mind. Come on.” She pushed herself up unsteadily, nearly going right over the edge — thank god Frank was there to help steady her.

“Let’s get down somewhere safe,” he suggested.

The climb down seemed to rejuvenate Rose a little at least. “The Daleks will have gone straight to a war footing,” she said as soon as they were back down. “They’ll be using the sewers, spreading the
soldiers out underneath Manhattan.”

“How do we stop them?” Laszlo asked, concerned.

“There’s only one chance.” Rose rubbed the back of her head. “I got in the way. That gamma strike went zapping through me first.”

“Yeah, but how does you getting yourself electrocuted help?”

“We need to draw fire.” Rose turned in a circle. “Before they can attack New York, I need to face them. Where can I draw them?” She hit her forehead. “Think, think, think, think, think…we need some sort of space. Somewhere safe. Somewhere…out of the way…Tallulah!”

“That’s me,” the woman said at once. “Three Ls and an H.”

“The theatre!” Rose sounded exhilarated. “It’s right above them, and what, it’s gone midnight? Can you get us inside?”

“Don’t see why not.”

Rose beamed. “Is there another lift?”

“We came up the service elevator,” Martha spoke up.

“That’ll do. Allons-y!”

* * * * *

“This should do it,” Rose said quietly as they made their way through the rows of theatre seats.

“There ain’t nothing more creepy than a theatre in the dark,” Tallulah shuddered, but her expression changed when she saw Laszlo collapse into a seat. “Laszlo, what’s wrong?”

“Nothing,” he tried to assure her, breathing heavily. “It’s just so hot.”

“But it’s freezing in here,” Tallulah insisted. “Rose, what’s happening to him?”

“I’m sorry Tallulah, I can’t right now.” Rose sad regretfully as she walked to the middle of the room.

“What are you doing?” Martha asked, watching her.

“If the Daleks are going to war, they’ll want to find…well, they’ll want to find their number-one enemy, but he’s not here right now. I think they’ll settle for number two, however.”

She held the sonic screwdriver over her hair, setting it off. “This’ll send a signal to the Daleks, they’ll find me in no time. Frank, I need you to take Martha, Tallulah, and Laszlo and get out of here.”

“Are you joking?” Martha asked in disbelief. “You just bloody electrocuted yourself, I’m not leaving you.”

“I’m tellin’ you to go,” Rose snapped. “Frank can take you back to Hooverville.”

“And I’m telling you I’m not going.”

“It’s not safe here—!”
She was cut off by the doors being broken down and the army walking in. Tallulah shrieked. “Is that them?!”

“Humans with Dalek DNA…” Martha said in wonder.

“It’s alright, it’s alright,” Rose said calmly. “Just stay calm. Don’t antagonize them.”

“But what of the Dalek masters?” Laszlo asked worriedly. “Where are they?”

Right on cue, there was an explosion on stage, and they whirled to see two Daleks appear, with Sec chained between then on his hands and knees.

“The abomination will stand before the Daleks,” one of the Dalek’s announced. Rose took a deep breath, climbing up on the seats and stepping forward from seat to seat, ignoring Martha’s protest.

“You will tell us the location of the Doctor,” the Dalek demanded. “And then you will die. It is the beginning of a new age.”

“Planet Earth will become New Skaro,” the other Dalek added.

“First off, you’ll never touch the Doctor,” Rose informed them evenly. “Second, this new world of yours just sounds brilliant. Anything just the slightest bit different, ground into the dirt. Just like Dalek Sec there. The cleverest Dalek ever and look what you’ve done to him. Is that your new Empire, then? Is that the foundation for a whole new civilization?”

“My Daleks,” Sec begged. “Just understand this. If you choose death and destruction, then death and destruction will choose you.”

“Incorrect,” one Dalek disagreed. “We will always survive.”

“Now we will destroy the Emperor’s assassin, the Abomination.”

“But she can help you,” Sec insisted.

“The Abomination must die.”

“No,” Sec insisted. “I beg you, don’t.”

“Exterminate!”

Sec jumped up, protecting Rose as the shot was taken and he hit the ground with a thump. Dead.

“Your own leader,” Rose snarled. “The only creature who might led you out of the darkness and you destroyed him. Do you see what they did? Huh? You see what a Dalek really is?”

She took another step forward. “If I’m gonna die, lets give the new boys a shot. What do you think, eh? The Dalek humans. Their first blood. Go on, baptize them.”

“Rose, shut up!” Martha hissed. Rose ignored her.

“Dalek humans,” one of the Daleks ordered. “Take aim.”

The soldiers turned, pointing at Rose.

“What are you waiting for?” Rose taunted. “Give the command!”
“Exterminate!”


“Obey,” the other Dalek added. “Dalek humans will obey.”

“They’re not firing,” Martha whispered, looking up at Rose with wide eyes. “What have you done?”

“You will obey,” the Dalek insisted again. “Exterminate.”

One of the soldiers turned to look at the Daleks. “Why?”

“Daleks do not question orders.”

“But why?” He asked again.

“You will stop this.”

“But why?” The back and forth would have been funny if it hadn’t been so heart pounding.

“You must not question.”

“But you are not our master,” the man informed the Dalek. “And we…we are not Daleks.”

“No,” Rose said proudly. “You’re not. And you never will be.” She turned to look the Daleks.

“Sorry, I got in the way of the lightning strike. My weird sort of human DNA got all mixed up. Just a little mix of freedom.”

“If they will not obey, then they must die.”

They shot the man who had spoken up…and all hell broke loose. “Get down!” Rose yelled, diving behind the seats as they started firing at one another.

Rose would have been lying if she said she wasn’t just a bit smug when both Daleks were taken down by the human hybrids. She straightened up, wide eyed, and looked over at the human Daleks, smiling as she took a step forward.

“It’s alright, it’s alright, it’s alright.” She couldn’t believe it, but it was. “You did it. You’re free.”

Before anyone could say anything else, however, all of the hybrids cried out, clutching at their heads and dropping to the ground. “No!” Rose cried. “No, they can’t! They can’t!”

“What happened?” Martha asked, clearly shaken. “What was that.”

“They killed them!” Rose raged. “Rather than let them live. An entire species. Genocide.”

“Only two of the Daleks have been destroyed,” Laszlo pointed out quietly. “One of the Dalek masters must still be alive.”

Rose’s eyes were dark as she turned away. “Oh yes. In the whole universe…just one.”

Rose left the group behind, making her way back to the Daleks’ lab. The last Dalek was there, waiting for her. She shoved her hands in her pockets as she approached.

“Now what?” She asked.

“You will be exterminated.”
Rose rolled her eyes. “Oh give me a break. Just think about it, Dalek…what was your name?”

“Dalek Caan.”

“Dalek Caan,” Rose repeated. “Your entire species has been wiped out. And now the Cult of Skaro has been eradicated, leaving only you. Right now you’re facing the only person in the universe who might show you some compassion. Because I’ve just seen one genocide. I won’t cause another. Caan, let me help you. What do you say?”

There was a beat of silence. “Emergency temporal shift!” Caan announced suddenly, and he disappeared.

“No!” Rose shouted, but of course it was far too late. *Damn it!*

“Rose!” She whirled around to see Martha and Tallulah help Laszlo, who was wheezing horribly. “He’s sick!”

The women helped him down, Rose kneeling with them. “His heart’s racing like mad,” Martha told Rose as she examined Laszlo. “I’ve never seen anything like it.”

“What is it?” Tallulah was obviously scared. “What’s the matter with him? He says he can’t breathe, what’s wrong?”

“It’s time, sweetheart,” Laszlo wheezed.

“What do you mean, time?” Tallulah demanded. “What are you talking about?”

“None of the slaves survive for long. Most of them only live for a few weeks. I was lucky. I held on because I had you. But now…I’m dying, Tallulah.”

“No, you’re not!” Tallulah insisted. “Not now, after all this.” She looked up pleadingly at Rose. “Rose, can’t you do something?”

Rose closed her eyes for a long moment, pressing her lips thin. "Please… She begged the TARDIS. *I can’t do this again. No more deaths. Please let me help him.*

The TARDIS hummed in agreement, and Rose’s eyes snapped open again. Martha was the only one who noticed the faint golden glow.

“You just watch me, Tallulah.”

* * * * *

“Well I talked to them,” Frank said as he approached the group, “and I told them what Solomon would’ve said, and I reckon I shamed one or two of them.”

“What did they say?” Rose asked curiously. The idea of Laszlo hiding in Hooverville was far-stretching at best. But he had to go somewhere, and what place was better than a small park-city for outcasts?

“They said yes,” Frank grinned. “They’ll give you a home, Laszlo. I mean, er — don’t imagine people ain’t gonna star. I can’t promise you’ll be at peace but in the end, that is what Hooverville is for. People who ain’t got nowhere to go.”

Tallulah beamed, hugging Laszlo tight. “Thank you,” he said, clearly stunned. “I can’t thank you
enough.”

Rose and Martha bid everyone farewell, and headed back to the TARDIS in silence. It was amazing to think only twenty-four hours had passed since they’d landed here.

“Do you reckon it’s going to work, those two?” Martha finally asked as they approached the ship.

“I don’t know,” Rose admitted. “Anywhere else in the universe, I might worry about them, but New York? That’s what this city’s good at. Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses, and maybe the odd pig slave Dalek mutant hybrid too.”

“The pig and the showgirl.” Martha sounded amused.

“The pig and the showgirl.”

“It just proves it, I suppose,” Martha mused. “There’s someone for everyone.”

Rose’s smile fell a bit as the image of a wild-haired man flashed in her mind. “Maybe.”

She unlocked the door, stepping aside to let Martha in. “Meant to say,” her friend added, “I’m sorry.”

“What for?”

“Just because that Dalek got away. I know what that means to you.” She stepped inside. “Think you’ll ever see it again?”

Rose stopped, looking out at the island for a long moment. “Definitely,” she finally said as she closed the door.
Chapter Summary

Rose takes Martha home for a quick visit - and finds trouble, of course.

Martha was quite excited and wanted to get going straight to the next place, but Rose gently talked her down, telling her that she should probably get some sleep first.

“Where am I suppose to sleep? You got an air mattress under the console or something?”

Rose smiled as she beckoned for Martha to follow her, and they started down the hall. The TARDIS pulled up a room for her, and she opened the door, showing Martha. The woman’s mouth dropped.

“I…what?” It looked exactly like her room back home.

“The TARDIS sees what kind of room will make you the most comfortable, and she gives it to you. It’s her way of trying to make you feel at home.”

Martha stepped into the room. “Oh my god. This ship is insane.”

“Hey don’t say that too loud. I insulted her once and she hid my room for three days. With me in it.” The TARDIS gave an amused hum, and Martha smiled a bit.

“Alright then. Guess I’ll sleep.”

“Probably a good idea.” Rose tilted her head. “Maybe we should take you home tomorrow, too. Get you a change of clothes. Maybe a couple. Unless you want to run around in the same thing…”

“Maybe a change would be nice,” Martha admitted. “And you know, check in, make sure my family hasn’t self-destructed or anything.”

“Would it be a bad thing if they did?” Rose asked with a small smile, and Martha laughed.

“I don’t know. I’m fairly fond of them.”

Rose left Martha to sleep, going back to the console room. She went straight to the coral stalk where she’d left the Doctor’s coat, picking it up and bringing it to the jump seat. She dropped down, curling up and wrapping up, burying her nose in the collar…

But there was no familiar scent. Whenever she smelled the Doctor’s coat, it smelled like chocolate and a faint musk and…time. That was the only way Rose could think to describe it. He smelled like time. Like a passing rainstorm, like flowers blooming, like the first day of summer, like the snow fall…

But that was gone now. There was nothing…nothing. Rose’s eyes flew open, the beginnings of tears burning in the very back of her eyes as she grasped desperately at the jacket, as if that would somehow bring his smell back. “No,” she whispered over and over. “No, no, no, no, no, no, no…”

My Wolf, the TARDIS tried to calm her, but Rose was already gone.
“No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no…”

The tears were slipping down her cheeks now, each no becoming more choked and painful than the last, until finally she just broke down sobbing. This was the last thing she’d had, the last connection she’d had to him. And it was gone.

“No, no, no, no…” She whispered through her tears, breathless. The TARDIS knew there was no way to get through to her so she changed tracks, going to someone who could help Rose.

Martha was just slipping off to sleep when something seemed to jolt in the back of her mind, and she shot up, eyes wide. “What?” She looked around, trying to figure out what was going on. The lights flicked on, and she jumped. Right. Rose always said the TARDIS had a mind of her own…

“Is something going on?” The lights flicked once. Martha took that as consent and threw the blankets off, stumbling out of bed. It must have been important if the ship was trying to communicate with her.

Rose was too lost in her grief to notice when Martha walked into the room. “Rose?” The woman dropped down next to the blonde, tilting her head at the coat wrapped tight around Rose’s around slim body. “What’s wrong?”

“It…” She gasped, shaking her head, chest heaving. She couldn’t breathe. “It…it…”

“Okay, no, breathe,” Martha said gently, resting her hands on Rose’s shoulders and turning her so they were eye-to-eye. “Come on, breathe with me alright? Breathe in…breathe out…”

Rose tried, but her breath caught and she ended up gasping uselessly. “Alright, it’s okay, don’t panic. Here.” Martha reached out, trying to untangle the jacket from her. “Let’s get this off…”

“NO!” The shriek surprised Martha, to say the least. Rose yanked back from her, fingers digging into the fabric.

“Okay, you can keep it,” Martha said quietly, shuffling back closer. “You can keep it, I’m sorry. But you have to try and focus on breathing, okay? Let’s try again. Breathe in…breathe out…”

It took a moment, but finally Rose managed to calm herself down. Her breathing was still choppy and uneven, but she was at least pulling air in. “There you go,” Martha murmured, brushing a strand of hair back from Rose’s tear-stained face. “That’s good. Now talk to me. What’s wrong?”

“It…” She hiccuped, pulled the coat tighter around her body. “It doesn’t…it doesn’t smell like ‘im anymore.”

That was rather…bewildering. “What do you mean?”

Rose wiped at her eyes, sniffing. “The coat…it was…it was my friend’s and it…it doesn’t smell like ‘im anymore…”

Her friend…yeah. Martha didn’t quite believe they were just friends after this reaction. “You never talk about him,” she said quietly. “Will you tell me about him? Please?” Maybe talking would help her.

Rose ducked her head, burying her face in the collar of the coat for a moment before uncertainly lifting her head again. “He…He called himself the Doctor. He was a Time Lord.”

“Not too pompous, huh?” Martha snorted, and Rose gave a watery laugh.
“No, not at all. He was…he was amazin’, though. Earned every bit of that pompous attitude he had. He was just…brilliant. Couldn’t tell him that or his head would get too big.” She smiled fondly. “But he was…he was a bit rough around the edges, especially when I met him. He’d just survived somethin’…awful, and I don’t really think he knew what to do with himself. But he asked me to go with him and I said no at first, because…well, the same stupid reasons you did, honestly. I had my mum and a boyfriend to take care of, bills and debt to pay…but he came back and asked again, and I just ran onto the TARDIS and didn’t look back. It was mad, of course — absolutely mad. Jumped into a mad blue box with an absolute stranger.”

“Yeah, I have no idea what that’s like,” Martha muttered, and Rose smiled.

“At least I’m a little more sane than him.”

“That’s questionable.”

Rose stuck her tongue out at Martha, who smiled in return. “Go on, keep going. Tell me more about him.”

And she did, telling her first all about the leather-clad Time Lord, and then the pinstripe wearing man with great hair he became. Explaining regeneration was a bit tricky, but Martha was smart and picked it up quickly enough.

“You’re not gonna do that, right?” She checked, making a face. “Suddenly explode into gold light and change your entire appearance?”

“Human, Martha.”

“Mostly human.”

“Human enough that I don’t regenerate. Don’t worry.”

She told her about some of the adventures they’d gone on together, told her about their first journey into the parallel universe and how Mickey had stayed there — “I think you would’ve liked him,” she mused with a small smile — and she started to tell her about how he’d been trapped there, but that was harder to talk about than the rest of it. Martha noticed as she spoke that she wrapped up tighter and tighter in the coat, as if it could somehow protect her from the pain.

When it became obvious she wasn’t going to get that story out, Martha carefully shuffled closer, wrapping her in a tight hug. Rose curled into Martha, almost clinging as the grief threatened to consume her. “I miss him,” she whispered, tears slipping down her cheeks once more. “God I miss him so much.”

“I know,” Martha whispered, brushing her hair back. “I know. I’m sorry.”

She felt awful that there was nothing she could do to help Rose. The blonde went out of her way to help others, but no one ever stopped to see if there was anything they could do for her.

Partly because she never let anyone know how much she was hurting.

Eventually Rose fell asleep, pure exhaustion taking hold. Martha didn’t dare move, afraid of waking Rose — she obviously didn’t get enough sleep, and Martha was afraid if she woke her up she wouldn’t go back to sleep.

So she just sat there, holding the blonde. It was funny — Rose was obviously young, if Martha had
to hazard a guess she’d say nineteen or twenty. But her eyes told stories of a girl who had lived far beyond her years.

Asleep, however, she nearly resembled a child. It was strange how she could be so young and so old at the same time.

It took a bit, but Martha slipped off to sleep as well. She wasn’t sure how Rose managed it, but when she woke up the next morning the blonde was gone, the jacket thrown back over the coral stalk where it always hung. Martha blinked, confused, and yawned as she picked herself up, heading for the kitchen — the only place she could imagine Rose could be.

And she was right. The young woman was hard at work making pancakes when Martha walked in. “Mornin’!” She said brightly. “Well, I say mornin’ but it’s not really, it’s more…well, it’s not anythin’ actually, no time up here. You could’ve been asleep for three years. It’s all relative.”

She was talking way too fast, clearly trying to cover up and act like nothing off had happened last night. Like she hadn’t had a major break down over the fact that the Doctor’s jacket didn’t smell like him anymore.

“Rose—”

“What do you like in your pancakes? I usually go for strawberry and banana myself but it dawned on me about halfway through that you might want something else so I set some extra batter aside—”

“Rose—”

“Seriously, name your poison, I know the fridge looks small but it pretty much as everything you can think of — bigger on the inside, kind of a theme around here—”

“Rose will you just stop?!?”

That finally got Rose’s attention. She stopped babbling and looked over her shoulder at Martha, putting on her best “innocent” face. “Stop what?”

“Stop…doing this, stop talking like nothing’s wrong, stop making pancakes—”

“Do you not like pancakes? We can do waffles instead, I have a waffle iron—”

“I like pancakes just fine, Rose,” Martha replied, exasperated. She knew Rose wasn’t this stupid. She was just really good at acting like it. “But that’s not what I want to talk about right now.”

“Well what else is there to talk about? It’s breakfast time, breakfast is when you discuss what you’re eatin’ breakfast. Unless you wanna talk about lunch? Seems a little early to be doin’ that but I guess we can—”

“Rose.” She was trying to distract Martha and it wasn’t going to work. “Please. Don’t do this.”

“I’m makin’ breakfast, Martha. I happen to enjoy eatin’.

There was no talking to her. Martha sighed, shaking her head.

“Blueberries, then.”

They got through breakfast with mindless chatter, and then went to the console room so they could stop off on Earth and check on Martha’s family. “Here we are,” Rose said happily as they stepped
out of the TARDIS, into Martha’s living room. “Twelve hours after we left. One more sign I’m a better pilot than him.”

“Amazing,” Martha breathed, looking around. “All that stuff…Shakespeare, New New York, old New York?”

“All in one night,” Rose said proudly. “Relatively speaking. That’s time travel for you though isn’t it?”

Martha looked around her flat in amazement. It all seemed so surreal. Twelve hours ago she’d been at her brother’s birthday party…except twelve hours ago she’d in New York fighting Daleks in the sewers.

It didn’t seem possible.

“So I know you said you just wanted to pick up a few things, but I don’t mind hanging around for a day or two if you want,” Rose said as she looked around. “Of course this is a bit of a tight spot, might have to move the TARDIS but hey…”

Her voice drifted off as the phone rang. “Ignore it,” Martha rolled her eyes. “Probably just someone calling about last night.”

Martha’s machine picked up. “Hi, I’m out leave a message.”

There was a beep, and a new voice said, “Martha, are you there? Pick it up, will you?”


“All right then, pretend that you’re out if you like. I was only calling to say that your sister’s on TV. On the news of all things. Just thought you might be interested.”

“Wait, what?”

Martha grabbed her remote, turning it on. “The details are top secret,” a man was saying. It looked like a press conference. Standing next to him was what looked like a younger version of Martha — her sister, Rose assumed.

“Tonight,” the man announced, “I will demonstrate a device which will redefine the world.”

“She’s got a new job,” Martha said. “PR for some research lab. But how’d she end up on the news?”

“Tonight,” the man said, “I will demonstrate a device which will redefine our world. With the push of a single button, I will change what it means to be human.”

Martha shook her head, turning the TV off. “Anyways, I wanted to grab a few clothes, maybe call the rest of my family and make sure they’re still alive, we don’t have to stay long…”

She paused when she realized Rose was still staring at the television. “Rose?”

She shook her head. “No, I’m sorry. Did he say he was going to change what it means to be human?”

Martha stared at Rose for a long moment before shaking her head. “I know where this is going.” She couldn’t help but be a little amused.

“Declarations like that never end well.” Rose shook her head. “No, definitely not. You have a
Martha was smiling as she grabbed her laptop for Rose, handing it over. She sat down on the couch and began searching. “Do you know where your sister’s workin’?”

“Yeah, it’s called…Lazarus Laboratories, I think?”

Rose typed that in, easily finding a picture of the man who had been on TV — Lazarus himself. “They do genetic research,” Rose reported as she scrolled through the website. “It’s all pretty hush hush, I don’t think this website is gonna be any help.”

“What, you can’t hack their servers?” Martha teased as she cleaned up her apartment. Rose looked up from the laptop, winking.

“That’s not nearly as much fun as what I have in mind. Do you think your sister can get you into that party?”


Tish was surprised when Martha called asking for an invite to the party, but she gave in easily enough much to Rose’s delight. “Why just me?” She asked curiously. “Don’t you want to get in too?”

“I don’t want any written records of me being there,” Rose said as she closed Martha’s laptop and stood up. “I’ll be your plus one.”

“I’m going to show up to a party with a woman as my plus one.” Martha shook her head, but she was smiling. “I’ll never heard the end of it from my family.”

* * * * *

“I’ve seen that wardrobe room,” Martha said as they made their way down the street. “How in all of that did you manage to find a dress that’s the exact same shade as the TARDIS?”

“I’m just that talented,” Rose said proudly as they approached Lazarus Laboratories. “Nice place.”

They made their way inside, looking around curiously. The reception room was nice, and crowded — it seemed like half of London had turned up for this big announcement. “Ooohh, nibbles.” Rose grabbed an appetizer off a tray as the waiter walked by, popping it in her mouth. “Should’ve eaten before we came here.”

Tish chose that moment to appear at Martha’s side, distracting her before she could comment on the food thing. “Hello!”

“Tish!” Martha smiled as she hugged her sister.

“You look great,” Tish complimented as she looked Martha up and down. “So what do you think? Impressive, isn’t it?”

“Very.”

“And two nights out in a row for you,” Tish teased. “That’s dangerously close to a social life.”

“If I keep this up, I’ll end up in all the gossip columns,” Martha joked, and they laughed.
“You might, actually. You should keep an eye out for photographers. And Mum, she’s coming too.” Martha made a face at that. “Even dragging Leo along with her.”

“Leo in a black tie?” Martha laughed. “That I must see.” Then she remembered Rose was behind her, examining everything curiously. “This is, er, Rose Tyler.”

The blonde snapped around as she was introduced, smiling. “Hello.” She gave Tish a wave.

“Is she with you?” Tish asked Martha curiously.

“Yeah.”

“She’s not on the list. How did she get in?”

“She’s my plus one.” Tish’s eyes went wide at that. “She’s just a friend! She’s just really interested in science, I told her about this and she wanted to come.”

“It’s all really impressive,” Rose spoke up. “So Lazarus, he’s your boss?”

“Professor Lazarus,” Tish corrected. “Yes. I’m part of his executive staff.”

“She’s in the PR department.” Martha couldn’t help but brag a bit. She was proud of her sister for doing so well.

“I’m head of the PR department, actually.”

Really well, apparently. “You’re joking.”

“I put this whole thing together.”

“It’s very impressive,” Rose told Tish, earning her a smile. “And the food is great. So do you know what the professor’s gonna be doin’ tonight?” She focused on the nearby machine. “That looks like it might be a sonic microfield manipulator.”

Tish just stared at her. “Told you she likes science.” Martha laughed. They were distracted, however, by the arrival of Martha’s mother and brother — Rose recognized them from their shouting on the street when she’d picked up Martha.

“Your father’s caused me enough heartache already with his menopause and his trophy girlfriend,” her mother was complaining.

“Yeah, Mum, I know.” Martha’s brother sighed. “It’s just something he said last night…”

Luckily for Martha’s brother, Mrs. Jones was distracted by her daughter. “Mum!” Martha said happily, throwing her arms around her mother. To say the older Jones was a bit confused by the reaction was an understatement.

“Alright, what’s the occasion?”

“What do you mean?” Martha played innocent. “I’m just pleased to see you, that’s all.”

“You saw me last night.”

“I know. I just missed you.” Martha turned to her brother. “You’re looking good Leo.”

“Yeah.” Leo snorted. “If anyone asks me to fetch them a drink, I’ll swing for him.”
“You disappeared last night,” Francine said suddenly, pulling Martha’s attention back to her.

“I just went home.”

Francine shot Rose a look, and suddenly Rose felt as if she were being x-rayed. “Hullo Mrs. Jones,” she said quickly, stepping forward and holding her hand out. “My name’s Rose Tyler. I’m a friend of Martha’s.”

Francine shook her hand, frowning a bit. “How come we’ve never heard of you?”

“Oh, well…it’s a recent friendship. I was in the hospital yesterday visitin’ a mate when everythin’ went sideways. Martha was with us when it happened, we all sorta bonded.”

Thankfully Lazarus chose that moment to gather everyone’s attention, tapping on his glass. “Ladies and gentlemen,” he announced as everyone turned to him. “I am Professor Richard Lazarus and tonight I am going to perform a miracle. It is, I believe, the most important advance since Rutherford split the atom, the biggest leap since Armstrong stood on the moon. Tonight, you will watch and wonder. Tomorrow, you will wake to a world which will be changed forever.”

Rose made a face as the man stepped inside the chamber, and it was activated. Something was niggling…wrong in the back of her head.

This isn’t right…

Right on cue, an alarm went off, and Rose’s head snapped up, eyes widening. “Something’s wrong. It’s overloading.”

The controls began to spark and smoke, the machine threatening to explode. Rose broke away from Martha and her family, pulling the sonic screwdriver out of her purse as she ducked under the ropes cordonning the machine off from the rest of the room.

“Somebody stop her!” She heard Lazarus’ companion yell as she worked. “Get her away from the controls!”

“If this goes up, it’ll take the whole building with it,” Rose snapped over her shoulder. “Is that what you want?”

She grabbed a big power cable and pulled it out, and finally the machine began to slow. “Get it open!” Rose called, and Martha hurried to the door, pulling it open. A young man staggered out, looking around. Rose and Martha stared at him in shock with the rest of the room while Lady Thaw made a delighted noise.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” the young man called. “I am Richard Lazarus. I am seventy-six years old, and I am reborn!”

The room burst into applause. Martha walked over to Rose, whose face was stone now. They watched as the paparazzi gathered to start taking photos.

“It can’t be the same guy,” Martha insisted. “It’s impossible. It must be a trick.”

“Oh it’s not a trick,” Rose said grimly. “I wish it were.”

“What just happened then?” Martha asked, looking over at Rose.

“He just changed what it means to be human.”
Rose and Martha stayed in the background as they watched Lazarus show off his new body. Suddenly he stiffened and gasped, grabbing a tray from a passing waiter and shoveling everything on it into his mouth.

“Richard.” Lady Thaw sounded offended.

“I’m famished,” he mumbled as he ate.

“Energy deficit,” Rose said as she finally stepped forward. “Always happens with this kind of process.” The TARDIS speaking again, she assumed.

Lazarus gave her an odd look. “You speak as if you see this every day Ms.…?”

“Rose Tyler,” She introduced herself evenly. “And no, I don’t. But I know enough about it.”

“Is that so?” Lazarus sounded doubtful.

“Using hypersonic sound waves to create a state of resonance,” Rose challenged. “That’s inspired.”

Lazarus looked unimpressed. “You understand the theory, then.”

“Enough to know you couldn’t possibly have allowed for all the variables.”

Lazarus just chuckled. Rose couldn’t help but wonder if he would’ve taken the Doctor — a man — more seriously. “No experiment is entirely without risk, sweetheart.”

“That thing nearly exploded,” Rose snapped, losing her patience a bit. “You might as well have stepped in a blender.”

“You’re hardly qualified to comment,” Lady Thaw shot back, giving Rose a once over. Rose knew what the other woman was thinking. She didn’t exactly sound like the posh woman, she certainly didn’t have any education.

“If she hadn’t stopped that thing it would have exploded,” Martha defended Rose at once. Lazarus looked between them.

“Then I thank you, Ms. Tyler,” he finally ceded. “But that’s a simple engineering issue. What happened inside the capsule was exactly what was supposed to happen. No more, no less.”

“You have no way knowing that until you run proper tests,” Martha protested. Lazarus was clearly bored with with then now though.
“Look at me. You can see what happened. I’m all the proof you need.”

“This device will be properly certified before we start to operate commercially,” Lady Thaw added, as if that somehow ended the argument. Martha gave her a look.

“Commercially? You are joking. That’ll cause chaos!”

“Not chaos, change,” Lazarus argued. “A chance for humanity to evolve, to improve.”

“This isn’t about improvin’,” Rose said coldly. “This is about you and your customers living a little longer.”

“Not a little longer, Ms Tyler.” Lazarus’ voice, in contrast, was smooth. “A lot longer. Perhaps indefinitely.”

“You can’t—”

“I hardly think a chav such as yourself is qualified to comment,” Lady Thaw interrupted Rose’s protest, and she bristled at the word chav. “Richard we have things to discuss, upstairs.”

Lazarus nodded, giving Rose a small nod. “Goodbye, Ms. Tyler. In a few years, you’ll look back and laugh at how wrong you were.”

As a parting gesture he took Martha’s hand, pressing a kiss to it before leaving with his companion.

“Stuck up bitch,” Rose muttered, turning back to Martha. “He’s out of his depth. No idea of the damage he might have done.”

“So what do we do now?” Martha asked, looking over at Rose.

“We figure out the damage ourselves.” Rose cast a look around the room. “There are labs all over this place, let’s run some tests.”

Martha smirked a bit, holding up her hand. “Lucky I’ve collected a DNA sample then, isn’t it?”

Rose looked back at Martha, grinning. “I would be so lost without you.”

They snuck out of the party and headed upstairs, finding a lab. Rose had pretty much no idea what she was doing, of course, but the TARDIS was right there in her head to guide her, collecting the DNA from Martha’s hand and tucking the slide under the microscope, turning it on. The computer screen in front of them flickered to life, showing the DNA strand.

“It looks normal enough,” Martha said, but even as she spoke the strand began to shift, transforming.

“Oh my god,” Martha breathed. “Did that just change? But it can’t have.”

“But it did,” Rose said quietly.

“It’s impossible.”

“Well that’s two impossible things we’ve seen so far tonight,” Rose reminded her. “Don’t you love it when that happens?”

“Martha was still focusing on the screen, however. “That means Lazarus has change his own molecular patterns.”

“Hypersonic sound waves to destabilise the cell structure, then a metagenic programme to manipulate
the coding in the protein strands. Basically, he hacked into his own genes and instructed them to rejuvenate.” Rose couldn’t even begin to understand what she had just said. But it sounded good to Martha at least.

“But they’re still mutating now,” she pointed out.

“Because he missed somethin’. Somethin’ in his DNA has been activated and won’t let him stabilise. Somethin’ that’s tryin’ to change him.”

“Change him into what?” Martha asked. She wasn’t sure she wanted to know the answer though.

“I don’t know,” Rose admitted. As usual, she was making this up as she went along. “But I think we need to find out.”

“That woman said they were going upstairs.”

Rose nodded, standing up. “Let’s go.”

They headed upstairs, finding an open door and peeking in. The room was huge and lavish. “This is his office alright,” Martha mumbled.

“So where is he?”

“Don’t know. Let’s try back at the reception.” Martha started to turn away, but stopped when she saw a too-skinny, almost deformed leg wearing a lady’s shoe sticking out from behind the desk. She stepped closer, looking around the desk to see the body. Oh God. “Is that Lady Thaw?”

“Used to be,” Rose said quietly as she walked over, examining it. “Now it’s just a shell. Had all the life energy drained out, like squeezin’ the juice out of an orange.”

“Lazarus?” Martha questioned.

“Probably.” It made sense.

“So he’s changed already?”

“Not necessarily. You saw the DNA. It was fluctuatin’. The process must demand energy. This might not be enough.”

“So he might do this again?”

Rose didn’t answer. She didn’t have to. They hurried back downstairs to the reception, looking around. “I can’t see him,” Martha said, getting up on her tiptoes.

“He can’t be far.” Not that Rose was able to get a much better look. Times like this she missed the Doctor and his gangly height. “Keep lookin’.”

Of course, Leo chose that moment to appear. “Hey, you alright Martha? I think Mum wants to talk to you.”

That was exactly the last thing Martha wanted. “Have you seen Lazarus anywhere?”

Leo raised an eyebrow. “Yeah, well, he was getting cozy a couple minutes ago.”

Martha’s eyes widened as she whirled to look at Leo. “With Tish?”
Francine appeared right behind Rose, looking serious. “Ms. Tyler—”

“Where did they go?” Rose ignored her.

“Upstairs, I think. Why?”

“Ms. Tyler—”

“Sorry Mrs. Jones, maybe later,” Rose interrupted as she and Martha hurried back to the elevators.

Back upstairs, back to Lazarus’ office. It was still empty except for Thaw’s body. “Where are they?” Martha asked urgently, looking around. Rose fumbled with the sonic screwdriver. Scanning around.

“Fluctuatin’ DNA will give off an energy signature. I might be able to pick it up…” She paused for a moment on a certain spot. “Got him.”

“Where?” She pointed up. “But this is the top floor…the roof!”

They hurried upstairs to see Tish and Lazarus indeed getting cozy. “And is it like you expected?” Tish was asking.

“I find that nothing’s ever exactly like you expect. There’s always something to surprise you. Between the idea and the reality, between the motion and the act—”

“Falls the shadow,” Rose interrupted. She had no idea where that came from — the TARDIS, most likely — but it got their attention, which was all she wanted.

“Ah, Ms. Tyler.” Lazarus raised an eyebrow. “I see you know your Eliot. I’m surprised.”

“Martha, what are you doing here?” Tish sounded embarrassed.

“Tish, get away from him,” Martha begged.

“What? Don’t tell me what to do!”

“I wouldn’t have thought you had time for poetry, Lazarus,” Rose said casually. “What with you being busy defying the laws of nature and all.”

“You’re right, Ms. Tyler,” Lazarus agreed. “One lifetime’s been too short for me to do everything I’d like. How much more I’ll get done in two or three or four…”

“No, it doesn’t work like that,” Rose insisted. “It’s not the time that matters, it’s what you do with it. You could have eighty years and do nothing, or you could have twenty years and do everything. Time isn’t what matters, it’s the person.”

“But if it’s the right person, what a gift that would be.” Lazarus’ voice sounded almost dreamy.

“Or what a curse,” Rose argued, remembering the Doctor — the curse of the Time Lords, he’d said, was to live so much longer. “Look at what you’ve done to yourself.”

“Who are you to judge me?”

“Over here, Tish,” Martha said, trying to get her sister to walk over to them.

“You have to spoil everything, don’t you?” Tish sounded annoyed. “Every time I find someone nice, you have to go and find a fault.”
As Tish walked away, Lazarus began to spasm, following over.

“Tish, he’s a monster!”

“I know the age thing’s a bit freaky, but it worked for Catherine Zeta-Jones!”

Tish paused when she saw the look on Rose’s and Martha’s faces, however, and she turned to look at Lazarus, whose entire body was shifting and transforming. They watched as he grew, becoming a bony scorpion with a human face.

“What’s that?” Tish gasped.

“Run!” Rose shouted, and Martha grabbed Tish’s hand, dragging her away. The trio ran through the door and Rose sonicked it shut to buy them some time as they ran down the stairs.

“Are you okay?” Martha asked Tish.

“I was going to snog him!”

The lights overhead flickered as the creature threw itself against the door. “Security one,” a mechanical voice announced. “Security one. Security one.”

The lights went out, all the doors shutting automatically. “What’s happening?” Martha asked, looking back at Tish.

“An intrusion. It triggers a security lockdown. Kills most of the power. Stops the lifts, seals the door.”

“He must be breaking through that door,” Rose said, looking around. “The stairs, come on!”

They hurried down the stairs, hearing a distant crash overhead. “He’s inside!” Martha yelled.

“Just keep movin’!” Rose called back. “We haven’t got much time!”

They made it back to the reception room where everyone was looking around, confused. “Tish.” Rose turned to the younger Jones. “Is there another way out of here?”

“There’s an exit in the corner,” Tish said. “But it’ll be locked now.”

Rose tossed the sonic screwdriver to Martha. “Martha, setting fifty-four. Hurry.” She turned to the crowd, raising her voice and yelling, “Listen to me! You people are in serious danger! You need to get out of here right now!”

She didn’t have much of a commanding presence, of course. “Don’t be ridiculous,” one woman scoffed. “The biggest danger here is choking on an olive.”

Rose had half a second to wonder if they would have listened to the Doctor before Lazarus jumped down out of nowhere, landing on a table. Everyone instantly started screaming and panicking. Martha was just getting the exit door open when she heard her mother yelling, “Leo!”

“Over here!” Martha yelled. “Everyone downstairs now! Hurry!”

Rose was still standing in the background, watching everyone run. Her blood ran cold when she saw the monster Lazarus bearing down on a woman, preparing to drain her. “No!” Rose shouted. “Get away from her!”
But she was already too late. With that woman dead, Lazarus turned and found Francine Jones on the floor with her son, trying to help him up. “LAZARUS!” Rose screamed, finally getting the monster’s attention. “Leave them alone!”

It turned to her, and Martha ran to her family. “Martha,” Francine gasped as her daughter knelt down to examine Leo.

“Come on, stay with me,” she ordered. “You’re okay.”

“What’s the point?” Rose demanded, looking up at Lazarus. “You can’t control it! The mutation’s too strong. Killing those people won’t help you. You’re a fool! A vain old man who thought he could defy nature. Only Nature got her own back, didn’t she? You’re a joke, Lazarus! A footnote in the history of failure!”

That did it. Lazarus dove at her and she took off down the hallway, leading it away from the people. “What is she doing?” Tish asked in disbelief as she joined her family.

“She’s trying to buy us some time,” Martha explained. “Let’s not waste it. Leo, look at me.” She tried to get her brother’s attention. “Focus on me. Let’s see your eyes.” She examined him carefully, frowning. “He’s got a concussion. Mum, you’ll need to help him downstairs.”

She found some ice in a dropped cup, dumping it into a napkin and pressing it against his head. “This’ll keep the swelling down. Go! I’ll be right behind you.” They all stood, Francine helping Leo away. Tish hesitated when she saw Martha wasn’t moving, however. “Tish, move! We need to get out of here!”

Rose led Lazarus downstairs, winding in and out of the maze of pipes and control panels to try and buy herself some time as well.

“It’s no good, Ms. Tyler,” the monster sneered. “You can’t stop me.”

“Is that the same arrogance you had when you swore nothin’ had gone wrong with your device?” Rose shot back.

“The arrogance is yours,” Lazarus growled. “You can’t stand in the way of progress.”

“Progress?!” Rose repeated in disbelief. “You call feedin’ on innocent people progress? You’re delusional!”

“It is a necessary sacrifice.”

“That’s not your decision to make!”

Upstairs, people were piling against the glass doors, screaming as they tried to get out. “We can’t out,” Tish said, panicked. “We’re trapped!”

“There must be an override switch,” Martha said calmly. “Where’s the security desk? Tish!”

“There,” Tish finally managed say, pointing to the desk. Martha ran over, jumping over the desk and finding the control panel, buzzing it with the sonic screwdriver. Finally the doors opened, and everyone ran out.

Lazarus had been silent for a while. It worried Rose.

“Peek-a-boo.”
Oh bloody hell. Rose looked up slowly to see Lazarus hanging over her.

“…Oh hello.”

Lazarus dropped and she took off down another hallway. Bloody dresses were so hard to run in. This had been a horrible idea.

“I’ve got to go back,” Martha said as soon as her family was safe.

“You can’t!” Francine half-screched, grabbing Martha’s arm and holding her back. “You saw what that thing did. It’ll kill you!”

“I don’t care,” Martha insisted. “I have to go.”

“Why? For that girl?” Francine sounded a bit disgusted. “What has she done to you, Martha? You’ve changed.”

“She was trying to buy us time, Martha,” Tish tried to say reasonably. “Time for you to get out too.”

“I’m not leaving her,” Martha said firmly, and she turned and ran back inside, ignoring her mother’s protests.

Rose ran back into the laboratory, running around and getting to work. She hopped up, pulling a light fixture apart, and then jumped down and turned on Bunsen burner, snuffing out the flame. Next she grabbed another tube off a gas fitting, hiding behind a bench.

“More hide and seek, Tyler?” Lazarus taunted as he slunk into the room. “How disappointing. Why don’t you come out and face me?”

Rose turned on the gas as high as it would go.

“Have you looked in the mirror lately? Why would I want to face that, hmn?”

Rose saw her chance, running for the back door, hitting the light switch on the way out. The explosion nearly knocked her off her feet, but she kept going…and ran right into Martha.

“What are you doin’ here?!”

“I’m returning this!” Martha shoved the sonic screwdriver at Rose. “I thought you might need it.”

“How did you—”

“I heard the explosion. I guessed it was you.”

Rose had to smirk a bit at that. “Good guess. I blasted Lazarus.”

“Did you kill him?”

Right on cue, Lazarus crawled out of the wreckage of the lab. “More sort of annoyed him, I’d say.”

They took off once more, tripping over themselves as they tried desperately to get away. Their path led them right back to reception.

“What now?” Martha asked, looking around. “We’ve just gone ‘round in a circle.”

“We can’t lead him outside,” Rose said, shaking her head. “…Come on, get in.”
They ran to Lazarus’ device, locking themselves in.

“Are we hiding?” Martha whispered.

“No, he knows we’re here,” Rose whispered back. “But this is his masterpiece. I’m betting he won’t destroy it, not even to get at us.”

“But…we’re trapped.”

“…Yeah. That would be the catch in all this.”

“You mean you don’t have a plan?” Martha didn’t know why that still surprised.

“No, I did,” Rose argued. “The plan was to get in here.”

“And then what?”

“…I’m workin’ on it.”

Martha sighed. “In your own time, then.”

Rose looked down at the sonic screwdriver, turning it around in her fingers. The TARDIS chose a lovely time to step in, at least, feeding Rose an idea. She shimmied down she was kneeling, working a panel open. “What’re you doing?”

“Improvisin’.”

That was quickly becoming Martha’s least favorite word. “I still don’t understand where that thing came from, though. Is it alien?”

“No, for once it’s strictly human in origin,” Rose muttered as she worked.

“Human?” Martha repeated in disbelief. “How can it be human?”

“Probably from dormant genes in Lazarus’ DNA.” A dim part of Rose’s mind noted how much she sounded like the Doctor. “The energy field in this thing must have reactivated them. And it looks like they’re becomin’ dominant.”

“So…it’s like a throwback,” Martha guessed.

“Some option that evolution rejected for us millions of years ago, but the potential is still there,” Rose said with a nod. “Locked away in our genes, forgotten about until Lazarus unlocked it by mistake.”

“It’s like Pandora’s box,” Martha said, and Rose nodded.

“Exactly. I really like those shoes by the way. What size are you?”

Before Martha could answer, the machine whirred to life. “Rose…what’s happening?”

Rose looked up at the ceiling. She looked remarkably unconcerned all things considered. “Sounds like he’s switched the machine on.”

“And…that’s not good, is it?”

“Weeeeeeell I was hoping it was gonna take him a little bit longer to work that out,” Rose admitted. Martha fidgeted a bit.
“I don’t want to hurry you, but—”

“I know, I know,” Rose mumbled. “Nearly done.”

“Well, what’re you doing?”

“I’m tryin’ to set the capsule to reflect energy rather than receive it,” Rose recited, barely understanding what she was saying.

“Will that kill it?”

“When he transforms, he’s three times his size. Cellular triplication. So he’s spreading himself thin.”

The machine was whirring faster now, and Martha was well and truly starting to panic. “We’re going to end up like him!”

“Almost there…!”

Finally Rose finished, and the energy the machine was gathering blew outward. Martha and Rose exchanged looks as the machine slowly powered down.

“I thought we were going to go through the blender then,” Martha said with a sigh as they stepped out.

“Yeah, sorry about that,” Rose apologized. “Wasn’t really sure what I was doing to be honest.”

“I’m glad you told me that now.”

They saw Lazarus, back in his human form, laying naked on the ground. “Oh god,” Martha breathed. “He seems so human again. It’s kind of pitiful.”

Rose just shook her head.

Paramedics came in to collect Lazarus as Martha and Rose made their way outside. “She’s here!” They heard Tish call. “Oh, she’s alright!”

They turned to the Jones family running toward them. Martha rushed to hug her brother and sister, but Francine was on a bee line for Rose, who easily recognized that glint in the mother’s eyes. It was the same look Jackie got right before she took a swing at the Doctor.

Rose caught Francine’s wrist right before it connected with her face. “Sorry, Mrs. Jones,” the blonde said, a bit coldly. “Guess you shoulda taken lessons from my mum.”

“You stay away from my daughter!” Francine snarled as she yanked her wrist from Rose’s grip.

“Mum, what are you doing?” Martha asked in disbelief. Rose took a step back, eyes a bit darker than usual.

“She is dangerous,” Francine insisted. “I’ve been told things.”

“By who?” Rose started to ask — who knew anything about her — but Martha was interrupting.

“What are you talking about?”

“Look around you! Nothing but death and destruction!”
“This isn’t her fault!” Martha defended at Rose. “She saved us, all of us!”

“And it was Tish who invited everyone to this place in the first place,” Leo stepped in helpfully. “I’d say technically it’s her fault.”

He grunted as Tish elbowed him, but before the argument could continue any further a loud crash drew their attention, and Rose ran off toward the noise without a second thought. Martha started to follow, but Francine grabbed her wrist.

“Leave her,” Francine insisted. There was no need for Martha to go running off into danger. But Martha shook her head and pulled her arm out of her mother’s grip, hurrying after Rose.

“Martha!” Tish called as she started after them as well.

“Not you too!” Francine said in disbelief.

“Sorry,” Tish called as she hurried off as well.

Rose had already found the ambulance — and the corpses inside — when the Jones sister caught up to her. “Lazarus, back from the dead,” she muttered as she scanned around the area. “Should have known, really.”

“Where’s he gone?” Martha asked, looking around. Rose paused as the sonic finally locked on.

“That way. The church.”

“Cathedral,” Tish corrected, then winced a little when they both turned to look at her. “It’s Southwark Cathedral. He told me.”

“Cathedral, then,” Rose said with a nod, turning to start walking down the street. “Let’s go.”

They made their way to the cathedral. It was dark when they let themselves in, shadows cast around in odd ways, making it a bit creepy. “Do you think he’s here?” Martha asked quietly.

“Most logical place to go for sanctuary.”

Rose caught sight of a huddled figure sitting on the altar. Lazarus, they saw as they got closer. Wrapped in a red blanket, shivering something fierce.

“I came here before,” he said distantly when he saw the trio approaching. “A lifetime ago. I thought I was going to die. In fact, I was sure of it. I sat here, just a child, the sound of planes and bombs outside.”

“The Blitz,” Rose said quietly.

“You’ve read about it.”

The memories of bombs flashing and planes flying before her flashed through her mind. “I was there.”

Lazarus gave her an incredulous look. “You’re too young.”

“So are you,” Rose pointed out. Lazarus barked out a laugh before his body suddenly bent over, a cracking noise echoing through the air. Rose winced a bit.

“In the morning.” He continued his story in a pained voice. “The fires had died, and I was still alive.
I swore I’d never face a death like that again. So defenseless. I would arm myself, fight back, defeat it."

Rose nodded slowly. “That’s what you were trying to do today?”

“That’s what I did today,” Lazarus corrected her. Arrogant to the end.

“What about the other people who died?”

“They were nothing.” There was a bit of a sneer in Lazarus’ voice. “I changed the course of history.”

“And you think you’re the only one capable of that?” Rose questioned quietly. “I see it every single day — ordinary humans making decisions that change the world. History isn’t just made of equations. And facing death is part of being human. You can’t change that.”

“No, Ms Tyler. Avoiding death, that’s being human. It’s our strongest impulse, to cling to life with every fiber of being. I’m only doing what everyone before me has tried to do. I’ve simply been more successful.”

“Is this what you call success?” Rose asked in disbelief. “Look at you! You’re mutatin’ and you have no control over it. You’re not even human anymore!”

“This is progress. I’m more now than I was. More than just an ordinary human.”

“There’s no such thing as an ordinary human,” Rose informed him coldly. If there was one thing she had learned with the Doctor, it was that everybody was extraordinary.

Before Lazarus could answer, he began convulsing again. “He’s going to change again any minute,” Martha said quietly from behind Rose.

“I know.” Rose tilted her head up to look toward the ceiling. “If I can get him up to the bell tower somehow, I have an idea that might work.”

“Up there?” Martha looked up as well, but Lazarus cut them off in a rough voice.

“You talk like you have experience, Ms. Tyler. But you’re far too young. You could never understand.”

“You’re right, I haven’t experienced it,” Rose said flatly. “But I have a friend who has, a friend who’s over nine-hundred years old, and you know what? He didn’t like it. Because all it did was remind him, over and over, that he couldn’t get close to anyone, because they would all die before he even blinked an eye. He called it a curse. Because in the end, no matter what, he always ended up alone. And he hated it.”

“That’s a price worth paying,” Lazarus insisted.

“Is it?”

Lazarus twisted uncomfortably, face contorting into a pained expression. “I will feed soon,” he said quietly. Rose shook her head.

“I’m not gonna let that happen.”

“You’ve not been able to stop me so far.”

No, she hadn’t. And she hated herself for that. Lazarus picked himself up, clearly intending to attack
Rose…

Until a small rock connected with the back of his head. “Leave her, Lazarus!” Martha shouted. “I thought you were interested in me?”

“Martha, stop—!”

But it was too late. Lazarus lunged at Martha instead, and she took off with Tish going after her.

“What are you doing?!” Martha called to her sister.

“Keeping you out of trouble!”

Well she couldn’t argue with that. “Rose! The tower!”

They hurried up the stairs, Lazarus stumbling after them, but he fell over with a thud as he began to mutate once more. “Did you hear that?” Tish asked urgently, stopping to look down.

“He’s changed again.” Martha grabbed Tish’s arm. “Keep moving. We’ve got to lead him up.”

Rose, meanwhile, went down further, looking up to try and find Martha and Tish. “Martha!” She called up. “Where are you?!”

Martha stopped and looked over the railing. “Rose!”

Rose nodded. “Take him to the top. The very top of the bell tower, you got that?”

“Up to the top!” Martha called back, confirming.

“Martha—” Tish started to say.

“Then what?”

“Martha, come on!” Tish insisted. Lazarus was coming up for them. The Jones sisters started moving again, and Rose looked around, finding an organ. She hurried to it, looking it over.

“If this doesn’t work I’m dismantling you,” she hissed at the TARDIS, jamming the sonic screwdriver into the power socket and getting to work.

Martha and Tish made it to the top of the bell tower, and Tish looked around in panic. “There’s nowhere to go. We’re trapped!”

“This is where Rose said to bring him.”

“Alright, so then we’re not trapped,” Tish said sarcastically. “We’re bait.”

“She knows what she’s doing.” God Martha wished she could actually believe that. “We have to trust her.” That she did believe.

Lazarus appeared then, slinking toward them. “Ladies,” he hissed. Martha moved automatically to block her sister from view.

“Stay behind me,” she ordered. “If he takes me, make a run for it. Head down the stairs. You should have enough time.”

“But—”
“Just do it, Tish!”

Rose shook her head as she stared desperately at the organ. “God I hope you know what you’re doin’,” she told the TARDIS. And she began playing.

As the music echoed up, Lazarus lashed out with his tail, hitting Martha and knocking her off the edge. “Martha!” Tish screamed as her sister grabbed the edge, trying not to slip.

“Hold on!” Tish begged, trying to get to her, but Lazarus was blocking the path. “Get away from her!”

Downstairs, Rose turned the music up even louder, and the organ notes reverberated through the air, hitting Lazarus at last. He howled in pain staggering and falling over the edge. At the same time Martha lost her grip, and Tish dove for her, grabbing her wrist.

“I’ve got you,” the younger Jones gasped. “Hold on.”

Rose walked over to Lazarus’ body — human once more and completely broken. Rose shook her head before looking up. “Martha?”

“I’m okay!” Martha called back breathlessly. “We’re both okay!”

She hugged Tish tight, smiling. “Thanks.”

“It’s her you should be thanking,” Tish said, nodding down at Rose.

“I told you she’d think of something.” Martha should have known better than to doubt her.

“Cut it a bit fine there, didn’t she?”

“Yeah, she does that.” Martha laughed. “It’s more fun that way.”

“Who is she?”

Martha smiled a bit. “She’s just Rose.”

Rose was kneeling down, closing Lazarus’ eyes. She looked up and smiled when she saw Martha approaching and hurried over, wrapping her in a tight hug.

“Didn’t know you could play,” Martha said with a giggle as she pulled back.

“I can’t.” Rose laughed. “Mum could never afford lessons.”

* * * *

Rose sat on the edge of Martha’s sofa, watching her pack up a few things. “What do you take with you when you’re traveling through time and space?” She asked as she looked around room, clearly a bit lost. “I mean, besides a first aid kit,” she added, giving Rose a pointed look that the blonde ignored.

“If you forget anything the TARDIS can always supply it. I wouldn’t worry too much.”

Martha smiled for a moment, shoving some more clothes in her bag. “What was your mother like?” She asked suddenly, looking up at Rose. Rose had mentioned her a few times. Martha couldn’t help but be curious.
Rose blinked, surprised. “She was…somethin’ else. My dad died when I was a baby, so it was always just the two of us. We didn’t have much money, but she always tried to make sure I had the things I wanted.”

“She sounds great,” Martha said quietly. Rose smiled.

“She was. She was also scary as hell too. She slapped the Doctor once.” The thought of the look on his face still made Rose laugh even to this day. “She was the best, though.” God Rose missed her so much. “But…gone now. Ready to go?”

Martha supposed she should have been happy she’d gotten what she did out of Rose. She hooked her bag over her shoulder, nodding. “Ready to go.”

Rose grinned as she jumped up, leading Martha to the TARDIS.

“We’re off, then.”

Chapter End Notes

Please review....?
Chapter Summary

Martha and Rose land on a failing ship - and things just get weirder from there.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Martha sat on the edge of the open grating, looking down in amusement as Rose dug through boxes. “Bloody hell, where did he keep them?” She griped.

“I don’t really need a key, do I Rose?” She’d been looking for nearly an hour now.

“It’s always safer to have one. Just in case.” Rose opened another box, digging through. “Aha!” She grinned as she clambered back up, showing Martha the key. “Either I found his old house key or I found a TARDIS key.”

Martha shook her head, smiling as she took the key. “You’re ridiculous sometimes. Now about my phone…?”

That was what had started all of this. “Right!” Rose held out her hand and Martha handed her mobile over.

“You sure you know what you’re doing? I can’t afford another one right now.”

“Don’t worry, don’t worry,” Rose assured her as she buzzed the phone, following the TARDIS’ instructions. “I’ve got this.”

It took a few minutes, but finally she handed the mobile back to Martha, looking quite proud of herself. “Universal roaming.”

“And I can really call anywhere in time and space?” Martha didn’t look like she believed that.

“As long as you have the area code. Go on, give it a try.”

Before Martha could dial a number, however, the ship jerked. “Oh damn.” Rose stumbled up, going to inspect the computer. “Locked on to a distress signal. Hold—”

Before she could finish her warning, however, the TARDIS jerked again, hard enough to send them both to the floor. “Well, never mind then,” Rose groaned as she picked herself up. “We’ve landed. Come on.”

They stepped out into billowing steam and red light as a computerized voice announced, “Distress signal transmitted.”

“Blimey, that’s hot,” Rose said as she looked around, swiping at the sweat already beading along her forehead.

“Automated distress sign transmitted.”
“It’s like a sauna in here,” Martha groaned as Rose looked around, examining the room.

“Well the venting systems are working. Overtime from the looks of it. They’re trying to cool this place down.” It didn’t seem to be working though. Her eyes landed on a nearby door. “Right. Come on.”

Opening the door was tricky — the metal was hot — but they finally managed to get through. “Oi, you two!” A voice called, and they turned to see two men and a woman running toward them.

“Get out of there!” The woman called.

“Seal that door, now!” The first man ordered.

“Who are you?” The woman asked as Rose closed the door. “What are you doing on my ship?”

“Are you police?”

“Why would we be police?” Rose asked, bewildered.

“We got your distress signal,” Martha explained. Rose made a face as she looked around.

“If this is a ship, why can’t I hear engines?” She questioned, focusing on the woman. It was her ship. She must have been the leader.

“It went dead four minutes ago,” the woman said.

“So we should stop chatting and get to engineering,” the second man finally said, a bit irritably. “Captain.”

“Secure closure active.”

The three looked around in surprise. “What?” The woman asked.

“The ship’s gone mad.”

Another woman came running toward them, looking annoyed. “Who activated secure closure?” She demanded. “I nearly got locked into area twenty-seven.”

There was a bang as the last door slammed shut. The second woman shook her head before focusing on Rose and Martha. “Who are you?”

“She’s Rose, I’m Martha,” Martha introduced them. “Hello.”

“What’s your name?” Rose asked the girl.

“Erina—”

The computer interrupted, though. “Impact projection, forty-two minutes, twenty-seven seconds.”

The crew looked at the older woman — the captain. “We’ll get out of this,” she said quietly. “I promise.”

Martha wandered over to a nearby porthole. “Rose.”

“Forty-two minutes until what?” Rose asked curiously.

“Rose!” Martha insisted. “Look.”
Rose turned, walking over to the porthole. Her eyes widened when she saw that they were falling slowly…toward the sun.

“Forty-two minutes until we crash into the sun,” the captain said quietly.

“You always take me to the most charming places,” Martha muttered to Rose as they turned back to look at the crew.

“Right. Names?” She looked at the other three.

“Riley,” the younger of the two men said.

“McDonnell,” the captain said.

“Scannell,” the second man said grudgingly.

“Good. How many crew members on board?”

“Seven,” McDonnell said. “Including us.”

“We transport cargo across the galaxy,” Scannell explained. “Everything’s automated. We just keep the ship space-worthy.”

Rose nodded, turning to go back to the TARDIS. “Call the others. I’ll get you out.”

“What’s she doing?” Riley asked in disbelief.

“No, don’t!” McDonnell called, but it was too late. Rose opened the door and was blasted back by the heat. She hit the gratings with a pained grunt, and Erina ran forward, donning a welder’s mask as she shut the door.

“Wait, my ship’s in there!” Rose protested as Martha helped her up.

“In the vent chamber?” Riley raised an eyebrow.

“It’s lava,” Scannell added, and Rose shot him a look. She didn’t care much for him. Erina was inspecting a dial near the door.

“The temperature’s going mad in there,” she reported. “Up three-thousand degrees in ten seconds, and still rising.”

“Channeling the air,” Riley said. “The closer we get to the sun, the hotter that room’s going to get.”

Martha looked at Rose. “We’re stuck here.”

“So, we fix the engines,” Rose said with a confidence she didn’t feel. She felt as if she was burning up. “We steer the ship away from the sun. Should be easy enough. Engineering down here, is it?”

“Yes.”

As they started downstairs, the computer announced, “Impact in forty-twenty-six.”

By the time they got downstairs, Rose’s chest felt heavy, as if something were sitting on it. “Rose?” Martha questioned quietly. “Are you okay?”

She took a deep breath, nodding. “Yeah. I’m—” They stopped in the door of the engineering room,
and Rose’s eyes widened when she saw what was waiting for them. “Blimey. Do you always leave things such a mess?”

“Oh my god,” McDonnell breathed as she looked around. The room was practically in ruins.

“What the hell happened?” Scannell demanded.

“It’s wrecked,” Riley groaned.

“Pretty efficiently, too,” Rose said as she stepped forward, a bit unsteadily. “Someone knew what they were doing.”

McDonnell looked around. “Where’s Korwin? Has anyone heard from him or Ashton?”

“No.”

Martha looked over at Rose, who was investigating the pieces of the engine. “Do you think someone did this on purpose?” She asked as McDonnell went to the intercom, trying to track down her missing crew members.

“Must have. There’s no way this damage is just…” Rose wavered a bit, and Martha caught her shoulders, trying to steady. “Just random,” she finally managed to finish.

“Rose, what’s wrong? And don’t tell me nothing.”

“M’just warm, Martha. It’s hot in here.”

Scannell was examining the engines as well while the others looked around. Martha frowned, pressing her hand to Rose’s forehead. “You’re burning up.”

“Yeah, it’s hot.” Rose pulled back from Martha’s hand, frowning. “M’fine, Martha. Really. We have more important things to worry about.”

McDonnell, apparently, had given up on her search. “Scannell, engine report.”

“No response,” Scannell said roughly.

“What?”

“They’re burnt out. The controls are wrecked. I can’t get them back online.”

“Aren’t they auxiliary engines?” Rose asked as she pushed herself up. “Every craft’s got auxiliaries.”

“We don’t have access from here,” McDonnell said. “The auxiliary controls are in the front of the ship.”

“Yeah, with twenty-nine password-sealed doors between us and them.” Scannell snorted. “You’ll never get there in time.”

“Can’t you override the doors?” Martha asked. Scannell shook his head.

“No. Sealed closure means what it says. They’re all dead-locked sealed.”

Rose sighed. “So a sonic screwdriver’s no use.” Of course it wouldn’t be that easy.

“Nothing’s any use. We’ve got on engines, no time, and no chance.”
“Oi, listen to you.” Rose shook her head at Scannell. “If you’re already givin’ up before we’ve even tried then just stay out of my way. I’ve got no time for you. Who’s got the door passwords?”

“They’re randomly generated,” Riley spoke up. “Reckon I know most of them though.”

Rose nodded. “Right, then. Riley, get on that.”

“Well, it’s a two-person job. One, a technish for the questions, the other to carry this.” He indicated a massive backpack in the corner. “The oldest and cheapest security system around, eh Captain?”

“Reliable and simple, just like you,” McDonnell teased back. “Eh Riley?”

The man shook his head as he hoisted the massive backpack up, putting it on. “Try and be helpful, get abuse. Nice.”

“If I go with him will you be okay?” Martha asked Rose quietly.

“If you go with him will you be okay?” Rose countered.

“Rose, I’m serious. You don’t look good.”

“Such a flatterer. I’ll be fine, Martha. Go on. And be careful.”

Martha nodded. “You too.” She raised her voice. “I’ll help you, Riley.”

As they walked off, a voice announced over the intercom, “McDonnell. It’s Ashton.”

McDonnell hurried to the intercom, pressing a button. “Where are you? Is Korwin with you?”

“Get up to the med-centre,” the man said. “Now!”

That sounded urgent. Rose hurried after McDonnell as she ran out. “Impact in thirty-four-thirty-one,” the computer announced.

They ran into the med-centre, where a man and a woman were trying to hold another man so they could get him into whatever machine he was lying in front of. “Argh!” The man yelled. “Stop it!”

“Korwin, it’s Abi,” the woman said desperately. “Open your eyes, I need to take a look at you.”


“Help me!” The man — Korwin — begged. “It’s burning me!”

“How long’s he been like this?” Rose asked quietly as she stepped forward.

“Ashton just brought him in,” Abi said. Rose scanned him over with the sonic screwdriver, frowning.

“What are you doing?” McDonnell demanded.

“Don’t get too close,” Rose warned.

“Don’t be so stupid. That’s my husband.”

“And he’s just sabotaged our ship,” Ashton informed McDonnell. Her face fell.

“What?”
“He went mad. He put the ship onto secure closure, then he set the heat pulse to melt the controls.”

McDonnell had paled under the sheen of sweat on her skin. “No way. He wouldn’t do that.”

“I saw it happen, Captain.”

Rose approached Korwin carefully. “Korwin?” She asked gently. “Korwin, open your eyes for me for a second.”

“I can’t!” Korwin cried.

“Yeah, ‘course you can,” Rose encouraged. “Go on.”

“Don’t make me look at you,” he begged. “Please.”

Rose looked around and saw a hypo-gun sitting on a medical tray. “Alright,” she said quietly, picking it up. “Just relax.” To Abi, “Sedative?”

“Yes.”

Rose sedated him. There was no need for him to suffer. “What’s wrong with him?” McDonnell asked, clearly shaken. Rose shook her head.

“I don’t know. Rising body temperature, unusual readings. I have no idea what it means. Is this a stasis chamber?” Abi nodded. “Good. Keep him sedated in there. Regulate the body temperature. And…” A wave of dizziness washed over Rose, and she grabbed the edge of the table to steady herself. Martha was right. Something was wrong with her. “Run a bio-scan, and tissue profile on a metabolic detail.”

“Just doing them now,” Abi reported, and Rose smiled.

“Of course you are. You’re brilliant. Is anyone else presenting these symptoms?”

“Not so far.”

Rose nodded. “That’s somethin’, then.”

“Will someone tell me what is wrong with him?” McDonnell demanded.

“Some sort of infection,” Rose told her. “That’s all I know right now. We’ll know more after the test results. For now, just go work on the engines. There’s nothin’ you can do here right now.”

McDonnell followed Ashton out, and Rose turned back to Abby. “Call us if there’s any news. Oh, sorry, I’m Rose by the way.”

Abi nodded. “Right. Nice to meet you. I think.”

Rose smiled a bit. “Do wish it was under better circumstances.”

As she left, the computer announced, “Heat shield failing. At twenty-five percent. Impact in thirty-two-fifty.”

Halfway down the hall she stumbled, grabbing the overly warm wall to hold herself steady as everything spun before her. She squeezed her eyes shut for a moment…

And when she opened them she was in the console room. “Blimey even in my mind it’s warm,” she
mumbled as she turned wearily to find the human TARDIS standing behind her. “What’s happenin’?”

“You’re overheating,” the woman said quietly. “I am sorry, my Wolf. The room I am in is very hot, and with our connection, you are feeling it as well.”

“Well I don’t have time to keel over so figure somethin’ out to fix this.”

“The only way to fix it is to fix the problem.” The TARDIS sounded truly regretful. “I am sorry, my Wolf.”

Rose blinked — and when she opened her eyes again she was back in the hallway.

“Hurry up, will you?” Martha said hurriedly as Riley tapped away at the computer.

“Alright. Fix the clamp on.”

Martha obeyed, and Riley set to work. “What are you typing?” She asked curiously.

“Each door’s trip code is the answer to a random question set by the crew. Nine tours back we got drunk, thought them up. Reckoning was, if we’re hijacked, we’re the only ones who know all the answers.”

Martha nodded. “So you type in the right answer…”

“This sends an unlock pulse to the clamp. But we only get one chance per door. Get it wrong, the whole system freezes.”

Brilliant. “Better not get it wrong then.”

Riley chuckled. “Okay. Date of SS Pentallian’s first flight.” He typed in an answer. “Alright…go!”

The lights on the clamp flashed green, and the door opened. “Yes!” Martha cheered, and Riley grinned.

Twenty-eight more to go!”

Rose found her way back down to engineering. The feeling of overheating had gotten worse since she’d talked to the TARDIS — or maybe she was just more aware of it. She found an intercom, calling down to the med-centre. “Abi, how’s Korwin doin’? Any results from the bio-scan?”

“He’s under heave sedation,” Abi reported. “I’m just trying to make sense of this data. Give me a couple minutes and I’ll let you know.”

“Brilliant. Thanks.” She called Martha and Riley next. “Martha? Riley? How’re you doin’?”

“Area twenty-nine,” Martha said. “At door twenty-eight.”

“Yeah, no rush or anythin’, but do you guys think you could move it along a bit?”

“We’re doing our best.”

“Find the next number in the sequence,” Riley spoke up. “Three one three three three one three six seven…what?”

“You said the crew knew all the answers.”
“The crew’s changed since we set the questions.”

“You’re joking.” Rose could hear the disbelief in Martha’s voice.

“Three seven nine.” The answer hit Rose suddenly.

“What?”

“Three seven nine. That’s the answer.”

“Are you sure?” Riley asked. “We only get one chance.”

“Yeah, I’m sure. Just type it in, we don’t have time for this!”

There was a moment of silence. “We’re through!” Martha said suddenly, and Rose sighed in relief.

“Keep movin’. And he careful. There may be somethin’ else on board this ship.”

“Any time you want to unnerve me, feel free,” Martha joked weakly. Rose smiled.

“Will do, thanks.”

“Impact in thirty-fifty.”

Rose really wished that would stop.

“I can’t believe our lives depend on some stupid pub quiz,” Martha said as they walked along. “Is that the next one?”

Riley examined the question, groaning. “Oh, this is a nightmare. Classical music. Who had the most pre-download number ones, Elvis Presley or the Beatles? How are we supposed to know that?”

Rose found Ashton, McDonnell, and Scannell working. “We need a backup in case they don’t reach the auxiliary engines in time,” she said, looking between the trio. “What have we got for resources?”

The intercom crackled to life suddenly. “Rose?” It was Martha.

“Yeah?”

“Who had the most number ones, Elvis or the Beatles? That’s pre-download.”

“Oh blimey,” Rose groaned. “My mum would know this, her head is filled with such useless knowledge…Elvis. I think it’s Elvis.”

“I think isn’t very reassuring Rose,” Riley spoke up.

“Well who thought up that question? Ask them.”

“It’s an old crew member. Long gone.”


“Are you sure?”

“Are you going to keep arguing with me?”

There was a moment of silence. “It worked!” Riley reported, and Rose breathed a sigh of relief.
“Brilliant. Keep movin’.”

She returned her attention to the rest of the crew. “Ideas?”

“We’ve still got a generator, right? Can we use that?”

“We can use the generator to jump-start the ship,” McDonnell said with a nod, and Rose beamed.

“Brilliant. That’s brilliant. If nothing else it’ll buy us some time.” And time was everything, right?

“If it works,” Scannell inserted his own negativity, of course.

“Oh believe me, you’re going to make it work,” McDonnell informed him, and Rose smirked a bit.

“Impact in twenty-nine-forty-six.”

Rose leaned against the wall, trying to take a deep breath, but breathing was getting hard now.

“Rose?” McDonnell was eying her uncertainly. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah. Yeah. I’m fine.”

“Impact in twenty-eight-fifty.”

“That’s not helpin’.”

The intercom crackled to life again. It was Abi this time. “Rose, these readings are starting to scare me.”

Rose’s head snapped around to look at the speaker. “What do you mean?”

“Well, Korwin’s body is changing. His whole biological make up…but that’s impossible.”

There was a pause, and suddenly Abi was back, her voice much more insistent. “This is med-centre. Urgent assistance requested. Urgent assistance!”

“Damn it,” Rose hissed. “Stay here! Keep working!” She ran out, McDonnell right behind her as Abi yelled again.

“Urgent assistance!” A pause. “What’s happening to you?”

And then a new voice — a deep, guttural voice. “Burn with me. Burn with me!”

“Captain?” Scannell called. He had followed them.

“I told you to stay in Engineering,” Rose snapped at him.

“I only take orders from one person around here,” he snapped back.

“Oh you’re just a joy, aren’t you?”

A scream echoed over the intercoms suddenly — a high-pitched, terrified sound that made Rose’s blood run cold.

“Rose?” That was Martha, her voice uncertain. “What were those screams?”

“Just concentrate on the doors, Martha,” Rose told her. “Keep movin’ forward.”
They ran into the med-centre. It was empty. “Korwin’s gone.” There was a distraught tone in McDonnell’s voice.

“Oh, my god,” Scannell breathed. Rose turned to see what he was looking at — and her stomach dropped when she saw the image of figure burned into the metal x-ray shield.

“Tell me that’s not Lerner,” Scannell said quietly. Rose took a deep breath as nausea coiled in her stomach.

“Burn with me,” she said quietly.

“That’s what we heard Korwin say,” Scannell said.

“What?” McDonnell turned to look at them. “Do you think? No way. Scannell, tell her. Korwin is not a killer. He can’t do this. He’s human!”

Rose found Abi’s files. “These are his bio-scan results. His internal temperature is one-hundred degrees. Body oxygen is replaced by hydrogen. I’m sorry, your husband hasn’t been infected. He’s been overwhelmed.”

“The test results are wrong,” McDonnell insisted. Rose knew they weren’t though.

“Somethin’ has taken his body. It needed a host, but what is it? And how did it get inside him?”

“Stop it,” McDonnell said, losing her patience a bit. “Stop talking like he’s some kind of experiment.”

“I’m not, but I need to figure this out before all die. Where has the ship been? Have you made any planet-fall recently? Docked with any other vessels? Any kind of external contact at all?”

“What is this?” McDonnell asked, angry. “An interrogation?”

Rose shook her head, running a hand through her hair and noting the lack of sweat. That was probably not a good thing. Sweating when you’re hot is supposed to be good, right?

“I’m sorry,” she said quietly. “I’m just tryin’ to protect the rest of your crew.”

McDonnell nodded, walking to the intercom. “I need to warn them.” She pressed the button. “Everybody, listen to me. Something has infected Korwin. We think he killed Abi Lerner. None of you must go anywhere near him, is that clear?”

As McDonnell spoke Rose leaned over, resting her hands on her knees, trying to calm her stomach, but it was no good. She straightened up hurriedly and turned on her heel, running out of the med-centre. She only made it a few feet before she was forced to double over once more, throwing up.

“Impact in twenty-four-fifty-one.”

Chapter End Notes

Please review...?
42 Part Two

Chapter Summary

Part Two: Things get worse for Rose as the ship plummets closer to the sun

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Rose was shaking as she walked back into the med-centre. Scannell was leaning against the wall, McDonnell sitting on a box with her head in her hands.

“Is the infection permanent?” She asked when she looked up and saw Rose. “Can you cure him?”

“I don’t know,” Rose said quietly.

“Don’t lie to me, Rose.” McDonnell’s voice was firm. “Eleven years we’ve been married. We chose this ship together. He keeps me honest, so I don’t want false hope.”

Rose nodded. She understood that. “I really don’t know, McDonnell,” she said quietly. “But…most likely not. Whatever this is…it’s aggressive. Chances are your husband is gone. I’m sorry.”

McDonnell just nodded back. “Thank you.”

“Are you certain nothing happened to provoke this?” Rose asked gently. “Nobody workin’ on anythin’ secret? Because it’s vital that you tell me.”

“I know every inch of this ship,” McDonnell insisted. “I know every detail of my crew’s lives. There is nothing.”

“Then why is this thing so interested in you?” It didn’t make any sense.

“I wish I knew.”

The intercom crackled to life. It was Martha. “Rose, we’re through to area seventeen.”

“Keep goin’.” Rose said. “Actually — McDonnell, Scannell, can you give me a minute?”

The two nodded and stepped out of the room. “Rose?” Martha sounded worried. “What’s going on?”

“If I tell you symptoms, can you tell me what might be wrong?” Rose kept her voice low.

“I don’t know any futuristic medicine.”

“I just need good, old-fashioned twenty-first century medicine,” Rose assured her.

“Okay…have at it.”

Rose took a deep breath as the room started spinning again. “Dizziness, nausea and vomiting, light-headedness, incredibly hot but not sweating…”
Martha made a noise as she tried to think. “Sounds like a heat-related illness. Could be heat stroke?”

“Right, okay. And is heat stroke bad?”

“Well I mean…” Martha’s voice drifted off as suspicion set in. “Rose, are you okay?”

“Sorry Martha, I gotta go. Keep moving.”

She hurried away before Martha could stop her.

“Come on!” Riley groaned, hitting the computer. “Everything on this ship is so cheap.”

Martha was still staring at the intercom, pressing her lips thin. Something was obviously wrong with Rose. What was she playing at…?

The doors behind them clanged open, pulling Martha out of her thoughts, and she and Riley looked around. “Who’s there?” Riley called as a figure stepped out of the smoke.

“Is that Korwin?” Martha asked, squinting.

“No, wait a minute…” Riley mumbled. The figure was wearing a helmet. “Oh, Ashton. What’re you doing?”

“Burn with me,” the figure growled. Riley was oblivious.

“Well if you want to help—”

“Burn with me,” it repeated. “Burn with me.”

Oh god. Martha swallowed hard as the thing started to raise its helmet. “Move!” Martha grabbed Riley’s arm, dragging him away. “Come on!”

They found an escape pod room and hurried in, but Ashton followed them. Riley dragged Martha into the escape pod, closing them in there. “What is happening on this ship?” He asked shakily.

“Never mind that, where are we?” Martha demanded.

“Airlock sealed,” a computerized voice announced suddenly. “Jettison escape pod.”

Martha’s eyes widened. “That doesn’t mean us?” She dove for the intercom. “Rose!”

“Pod jettison initiated.”

“Rose! We’re stuck in an escape pod off the area seventeen airlock!”

Rose had found McDonnell and Scannell in the storage area when Martha’s panicked voice echoed through the ship. “One of the crew’s trying to jettison us! You’ve got to help us! Tell me you can stop it!”

“Why is this happening?” McDonnell groaned. Rose shook her head.

“Stay here,” she told them both firmly. “I mean it those time. Get those engines going!”

She ran out without another word.

Riley, meanwhile, was working to stop the pod.
“Jettison held.”

“Thank you,” Riley groaned. But a moment later—

“Jettison reactivated.”

“Come on!” Riley growled as he got to work again, fighting with Ashton to keep them from being shot into the sun.

“Tsilpinski sequence,” he finally said proudly. “This’ll get him.”

“Jettison held. Escape pod stabilized.”

Martha sighed in relief. “You’re pretty good.”

Getting to area seventeen was taking longer than Rose was happy with. Her legs were cramping horribly, which made no sense considering she’d run twice the length of this ship before. Maybe muscle cramps were another symptom of heat stroke.

God she had to fix this and get out of here.

She rounded a corner and saw the figure at the keypad, typing away. “That’s enough!” She shouted, drawing the thing’s attention to her. “What do you want? Why this ship? Tell me, please.”

But Ashton didn’t want reasoning — he slammed his fist into the keypad.

Damn it.

“He’s smashed the circuit.” Riley sounded horrified — and defeated. “I can’t stop it. I can’t stop it!”

“Come on,” Rose coaxed. “Let’s see you. I want to know what you really are.”

Ashton came closer, standing close to Rose, raising a hand to the visor…and suddenly he was doubling over, as if in pain.

“Airlock sealed,” the computer announced. Ashton straightened up, walking passed Rose, and she hurried to the intercom.

“McDonnell? Ashton is headin’ in your direction. He’s been infected, just like Korwin.”

There was a beat of silence, and then Scannell answered. “Korwin’s dead, Rose.”

“This thing’s locked!” Martha said desperately as she and Riley tried to get out.

“Airlock decompression completed. Jettisoning pod.”

Rose rushed over to the window, looking out the airlock door to see the pod floating away. Martha was staring at her from the pod window, terrified. But Rose didn’t look scared. Even from a distance, Martha recognized the look in Rose’s eyes.

She was about to do something stupid.

“Oh god,” Martha groaned. She was going to die, and now Rose was going to die trying to save her.

Riley misinterpreted the groan. “It’s too late, Martha,” he said quietly, and Martha turned away from the window dismally.
“Brilliant.”

“Impact in seventeen-oh-five.”

Rose ran back to the intercom, slamming the button with more force than what was necessary. “Scannell! I need a spacesuit in area seventeen now!”

“What for?” Scannell sounded bewildered.

“Just get down here!” Rose snarled. “I don’t have bloody time for this!”

Riley and Martha sat in the pod, staring at the floor. “The wonderful world of space travel,” Riley said suddenly. “The prettier it looks, the more likely it is to kill you.”

“She’ll come for us,” Martha said, determined.

“No, it’s too late.” Riley shook his head. “Our heat shields will pack in any minute, and then we go into free fall. We’ll fall into the sun way before she has a chance to do anything.”

“You don’t know Rose,” Martha insisted. “I believe in her.”

“Then you’re lucky.” Riley sighed. “I’ve never found anyone worth believing in.”

“No girlfriend? Boyfriend?”

He snorted. “The job doesn’t lend itself to stable relationships.”

“Family, then?”

“My dad’s dead, and I haven’t seen my mum in six years. She didn’t want me to sign up for cargo tours. Things were said, and since then, all silent. She wanted to hold on to me, I know that.” Riley smiled fondly. “Oh, she’s so stubborn.”

Martha almost laughed. “Yeah, well, that’s families.”

“What about you?”

“Full works.” Martha’s heart dropped a bit. “Mum, Dad, Dad’s girlfriend, brother, sister. No silence there. So much noise.” She squeezed her eyes shut. “Oh god, they’ll never know! I…I’ll just have disappeared, and they’ll always be waiting.”

Maybe Rose would go back. Would tell them all the things they’d done. Maybe they’d know how Martha had died.

God she hoped so.

“Call them,” Riley suggested.

Scannell had arrived with the spacesuit, and Rose was climbing into it, getting ready to go. “I can’t let you do this,” Scannell insisted.

“What did I tell you before? I don’t have time for you if you’re gonna hinder me.”

“You want to open an airlock in flight on a ship spinning into the sun.” Well when he put it like that, it sounded mad. “No one can survive that.”
“Oh, just you watch.” Rose zipped the suit up, aware of how clunky it was. It didn’t fit.

And hell if it didn’t remind her of the Doctor.

“You open that airlock, it’s suicide,” Scannell said harshly. “This close to the sun, the shields will barely protect you. And you’re barely holding on as it is, I heard you getting sick earlier.”

“I’m fine. If I can boost the magnetic lock on the ships exterior, it should re-magnetize the pod. And while I’m doin’ that, you get the rest of those doors open. We need the auxiliary engines.”

“Rose, will you listen!” Scannell burst out. He almost sounded worried. “They’re too far away. It’s too late.”

“I’m not losing her,” Rose said firmly, putting the helmet on.

“Decompression initiated. Impact in twelve fifty five.”

Martha was shaking as she found her mother’s number in her phone and hit call. Francine picked up after two rings. “Hello.”

“It’s me.” Martha took a deep breath, wiping her eyes. “Hello.”

Something in her voice must have given her away. “Is everything alright?” Francine questioned. She was good at knowing when her girls were upset. Martha would have laughed if the situation hadn’t been so awful.

“Mum I…you know I love you, don’t you?”

“Of course I do.” That seemed to catch Francine by surprise. “What’s brought this on?”

“I never say it. I never get time. I never think of it, and then…” Another breath. Calm. “I really love you. Tell Dad, Leo, and Tish that I love them.”

“Martha, what’s wrong?”

“Nothing.” I’m just going to die. “I promise.”

“Where are you?”

“Just out?”

“With anyone nice?” God Martha hated small talk. And it seemed more useless now than ever.

“Some mates.”

“What mates?”

Martha almost sighed. “Mum, can we not just talk?”

“Of course. What do you want to talk about?”

God this was awful. The last few minutes of her life and she had no clue what to say. “I don’t know. Anything! What you had for breakfast. What you watched on telly last night. How much you’re going to kill Dad next time you see him. Just…anything.”
There was a moment of silence. “Is Rose with you? Is she there, now?”

Oh blimey. “Mum, just leave it.”

“It’s a simple enough question.”

The sun was getting closer now. “I’d better go.”

“Er, no — Martha wait—”

“See you, Mum.”

Martha hung up, and Riley reached out, wrapping his arms around her as they both cried.

“Impact in eleven-fifteen. Heat shield failing. At ten percent.”

If Rose had been hot before, she felt as if she were on fire now as she opened the outer airlock door. She felt as if something was sucking the air from her lungs, making it impossible to breathe as she climbed out, reaching for a row of four buttons on the ship’s hull with one hand, clinging to the edge of the airlock with the other.

“Come on,” she whispered. “Come on, come on…”

She managed to press two buttons, then reached for the box just beyond them.

“Rose?” Scannell voice echoed over the speaker in her helmet. “How’re you doing?”

“I can’t reach!” She could feel tears threatening to burn in her eyes. It was right there…

“Come on.” She was surprised to hear Scannell encouraging her. “Don’t give up now.”

She lost her grip on the airlock, but managed to hook it with her foot as she finally grabbed the box, ripping the cover and pulling the lever down before hurriedly reaching back and pulling herself back in.

The escape pod jolted, the screen flashing re-magnetizing. “We’re being pulled back!” Riley yelled, grinning.

“I told you!” Martha cheered. “It’s Rose!”

Rose just barely managed to keep from collapsing on the floor of the air lock. She picked herself up to stand straight and looked out at the approaching escape pod…

And her eyes fixed on the sun.

“It’s alive,” she whispered, eyes widening. “It’s alive. It’s alive!”

“Rose, close the air lock now!” Scannell ordered.

“Impact in eight-fifty-seven,” the computer announced. Then, a moment later, “Airlock re-compression complete.”

Rose’s knees finally gave out, and she crumpled to the floor. She was forced to crawl out of the air lock, eyes squeezed tight as she yanked the helmet off. She was hot enough without it. She vaguely heard the pod re-dock, and then Martha’s voice.
“Rose! Rose! Are you okay?”

She felt herself being picked up, Martha cradling her. “No!” She shrieked, forcing her way out of Martha’s arms. “Stay away from me!”

“What’s happened?” She heard McDonnell ask, and a fury that was only partly her own overtook her.

“It’s your fault, Captain McDonnell!” She yelled. She felt a hand pressed against her forehead. Martha, probably.

“She’s burning up. Rose, open your eyes for me. Please.”

She didn’t mean to, but her eyes opened for just a moment. Martha gasped, reeling back. That wasn’t the same gold her eyes usually glowed.

Something was wrong.

“Riley, get down to area ten and help Scannell with the doors,” McDonnell ordered shakily. “Go!”

“You mined the sun,” Rose whimpered. Hot, hot, hot, hot. She could feel the sun in the back of her mind, furiously fighting with the TARDIS to consume her. “Stripped its surface for cheap fuel. You should have scanned for life!”

“I don’t understand,” McDonnell insisted. Neither did Martha.

“Rose, what are you talking about?”

“The sun’s alive,” Rose gritted out. “A living organism. They scooped out is heart, used it for fuel, and now it’s screaming!”

“What do you mean?” McDonnell asked helplessly. “How can a sun be alive? Why is she saying that?”

“Because it’s livin’ in me,” Rose choked out before crying in pain. It felt as if she was on fire.

“Oh my god,” McDonnell breathed. Martha could only watch helplessly as Rose writhed in pain.

“You should have scanned! Why didn’t you scan?!”

“It takes too long. We’d be caught. Fusion scoops are illegal.” McDonnell just sounded defeated now. Rose shook her head weakly.

“What can I do?” Martha asked, brushing Rose’s hair back. “What do I do Rose?”

“I don’t know,” Rose whimpered. The TARDIS was too busy fighting, too busy with the sun to feed her any information. “I don’t know. I don’t know.”

“Ssshhh, okay,” Martha whispered, hugging Rose tight. “We’ll figure it out. It’s okay.”

“Let’s get her to the med-centre,” McDonnell suggested. “Here, let me help you.”

She knelt down, helping Martha get Rose up.

“Impact in seven-thirty.”
They stumbled to the med-center, tears slipping down Rose’s burning cheeks. It took a bit of maneuvering, but they managed to get Rose up onto the table. “Get that suit off of her,” Martha said as she grabbed the instruction manual for the stasis chamber. “She’s overheated as it is.”

McDonnell struggled to get the suit off of Rose’s shaking — almost convulsing — body. “We can freeze her,” Martha said. “We can just…we’ll freeze her, that should at least by her some time. Right? Rose?”

“I don’t know,” she whimpered again, gasping for breath. “I don’t know what to do. I can’t hear the TARDIS. I don’t know what to do. I don’t know. I don’t know.”

Martha squeezed her eyes tight, trying not to cry. “Freeze you, then,” she finally said. “Just for a few seconds.”

She moved to start the machine, but Rose’s hand shot out, grabbing her wrist. “It burns,” she gasped. “I can’t control it, and the TARDIS can’t stop it. I don’t want to kill you, Martha. Don’t let me kill you!”

“Sssshhh, no,” Martha assured her quietly, her free hand smoothing Rose’s hair back again. “You’re not gonna hurt anyone, you’re not gonna burn up. Okay? I’m gonna save you. Just trust me.”

“I don’t wanna die…”

“And I’m not gonna let you. Come on, you’re my ride home.” Martha smiled a bit. “Just relax. I’ve got you.”

Martha carefully pulled away from Rose, going to the panels. She activated the machine and the table slid back, taking Rose in.

And then she screamed. The sound cut right through Martha’s heart.

It was only for a few seconds, however, before the power cut suddenly. Martha’s eyes widened, head snapping up. “What happened?”

“Martha?” Rose called, clearly terrified. “What’s goin’ on?”

“Power’s been cut in Engineering,” McDonnell reported.

“But who’s down there?”

There was something hard in McDonnell’s voice as she said, “Leave it to me.” And she walked out.

“Impact in four-forty-seven.”

“Martha,” Rose gasped. “Martha, get out of here.”

“Are you mad? I’m not leaving you.”

“No, you have to,” Rose insisted weakly. “Get to the front. V-Vent the engines. Sun particles in the fuel, get rid of them.”

“I am not leaving you,” Martha said firmly.

“You’ve got to give back what they took,” Rose said. “Please, it’s the only way to fix it. Go. Go!”
Martha squeezed her eyes shut. She had no choice. “I’ll be back for you,” she said quietly. And then she ran out.

“Impact in three-forty-three.”

Rose writhed on the table, the sun burning through her. “Help,” she cried out — though it was more of a whimper. “Help…”

She could feel the TARDIS in her head, trying to protect her, but there was only so much the ship could do without being infected herself.

If this thing got into the TARDIS, it would be all over.

Almost against her will Rose moved, rolling off the table. She hit the hard floor with a thud, momentarily paralyzed as her own free will and the TARDIS reared up against the invading force…

But it was no good.

“Martha!”

Martha’s blood ran cold when she heard Rose calling her a name in a strangled, twisted version of her own voice. Damn it. Rose wouldn’t have been moving if she could help it…

“Rose what are you doing?” She called back without stopping. She had to get to the others. She had to empty the engines.

“I can’t fight it,” she heard Rose moan. “Burn with me, Martha…Burn with me!”

Oh god. “Impact in one-twenty-one.”

Martha turned a corner and sped up, trying to shake Rose off. The blonde was still resisting at least, giving Martha a chance to get to Scannell and Riley. “Collision alert. Fifty-eight seconds to impact.”

“Vent the engines,” she snapped without preamble. “Dump the fuel.”

“What?” Scannell balked in disbelief. Martha did not have time for this.

“Sun particles in the fuel. Get rid of them. Do it. Now!”

There was no more questioning. The men obeyed, Martha rocking back and forth on her heals. “Hold on Rose,” she whispered. “Just hold on.”


Like strings cut from a puppet, Rose crumpled to the floor, gasping for air as full control was returned to her — and she had no idea what to do about it. “Oh god,” she gasped, rolling onto her back. “Oh god. Oh god. Oh god.”

“There!” Scannell cheered. “The auxiliaries are firing!”

The entire ship gave a lurch, finally pulling away from the sun. “Impact averted. Impact averted. Impact averted.”

“We’re clear,” Riley gasped in disbelief. “We’ve got just enough reserves.”

Martha’s grin faded as she whirled around. “Rose!”
The blonde was still on the floor, staring at the ceiling as she tried to gather the energy to stand. Her entire body felt limp. “Rose!” She heard Martha yelling, and she tried to answer but the words weren’t coming.

“Here, you’re alright,” Martha murmured as she helped Rose sit up. “You’re okay. Hi.”

“Hi,” Rose finally managed to say with a small smile. Martha grinned, wrapping Rose in a tight hug that she returned with as much strength as she could muster.

* * * * *

Once Rose had recovered enough to stand, they found their way back to the TARDIS with Scannell and Riley following. “This is never your ship!” Scannell balked in disbelief. Rose grinned.

“Compact, eh? And another good word, robust.” She stroked the side of the ship fondly. “Barely a scorch mark on her.”

“We can’t just leave you drifting with no fuel,” Martha said with a small frown, looking between the men.

“We’ve sent out an official mayday,” Riley assured her. “The authorities will pick us up soon enough.”

“Though how we explain what happened…”

“Just tell them,” Rose said quietly. “That sun needs care and protection just like any other being.”

They nodded, and Riley looked at Martha. “So, er…you’re off, then. No chance I’ll see you again?”

“Not really,” Martha said apologetically. “It was nice, not dying with you. I reckon you’ll find someone worth believing in.”

“I think I already did,” Riley said with a small smile.

*Oh…what the hell*, Martha thought, and she grabbed Riley’s face between her hands, kissing him good and soundly. “Well done,” she said when she pulled away, almost laughing at his stunned look. “Very hot.”

And she walked onto the TARDIS, ignoring the smug grin Rose was giving her as she followed.

“How about a spa day?” Rose asked happily as she walked around the console. “Bet the TARDIS knows a good place.”

“Nope,” Martha said firmly. As soon as she knew they were back in orbit she grabbed Rose’s arm, pulling her toward the hall. “Med lab.”

“What for?” Rose whined.

“Because heat stroke is dangerous and I want to make sure you’re okay.”

“Martha I feel fine.” No, she didn’t actually. She felt better than she had — loads better — but she still felt sick and a bit nauseous.

“Well at the very least you must be dehydrated. We need to take care of — Mum!”

“You need to take care of your mum?” Rose asked, a bit teasingly, as Martha dropped her hand and
pulled out her mobile.

“Sorta.” She dialed Francine’s number.

“Hello?” Thankfully her mother picked up fast.

“It’s me again.”

“Two calls in one day,” Francine said teasingly, and Martha smiled.

“I’m sorry about earlier. Over emotional. Mad day.” To say the least.

“What are you doing tonight?” Francine asked. “Why don’t you come around? I’ll make something nice and we can catch up.”

“Yeah. Tonight.” Hopefully Rose could manage that. “Do my best. Er…just remind me. What day is it again?”

“Election day.”

“Of course. I’ll be ‘round for tea. Roughly.” No promises when it came to Rose.

“And what about—”

“Anyway, I got to go!” She knew what her mother was going to ask about. “See you later. Love you.”

She hung up and turned back to Rose.

“Now let’s get you hydrated.”

Chapter End Notes

Please review...?
**Human Nature || The Hunters**

Chapter Summary

Rose and Martha encounter a vicious family of aliens

Chapter Notes

So we've reached the Human Nature/Family of Blood portion of this story. You're going to notice it deviates...significantly from canon. But for now, let's start out with a tiny prologue-type thing.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Whoa whoa whoa whoa!” Rose yelped as her feet went out from underneath her. Martha had to laugh as she glided by Rose.

“Need a hand?”

“No,” the blonde huffed as she dragged herself up again, grabbing desperately at the air as if that would somehow help her keep herself up. But it was no good. She went right back down again. Martha skated over again, raising an eyebrow.

“Want help now?”

“No.”

“Fine.” Martha went off again. “Hope that superior biology of yours prevents frostbite because I’m not examining your bum.”

Rose stuck her tongue out at Martha’s smug smile, and the other woman laughed. She could tell Rose was frustrated — they’d been here for nearly an hour and she’d spent most of it sitting on the ice.

Even the TARDIS was amused by Rose. She could feel the ship humming happily in the back of her mind as she pushed herself up unsteadily, skates slipping and sliding against the ice.

“I got it!” She called happily. “I got it! I got it! I—!”

And down she went again, nearly cracking her head against the ice this time. “Rose!” Martha yelled, hurrying over to her and kneeling down clumsily. “Are you alright?”

“Yeah,” Rose grumbled, nothing really bruised except for her pride. “Blimey forget it. I’m done.”

Martha helped her to the side of the frozen lake where they’d parked the TARDIS, and Rose nudged the door open, settling down in the door frame and yanking the skates off, tossing them over her shoulder. They clattered against the grating, and the TARDIS gave an indignant hum.
“Do you want to leave?” Martha asked, and Rose shook her head as she massaged her foot.

“Nah, you keep goin’. I’ll just sit here and stare in wonder because no normal person should be able to balance like that.”

Martha laughed as she skated off again, and Rose leaned her head against the TARDIS door frame, closing her eyes and sighing. After everything that had happened with the sun, it was nice to be able to sit out in the cold. The ship had been staying a few degrees colder for her sake, but that wasn’t really fair to Martha.

A noise hit Rose’s ears and her eyes snapped open. “What?” She called, and Martha skidded to a halt again.

“What?”

“Did you say somethin’?”

Martha raised an eyebrow, tilting her head. “No, didn’t say anything. Are you alright?”

“Yeah…musta been the wind.”

Martha went back to her skating and Rose closed her eyes again, focusing this time on air around them, the sounds beyond Martha’s skates against the ice. It felt like something was rippling in the air…

Like something was wrong.

“What’s goin’ on?” She whispered, fingers curling around the grating behind her. She didn’t like this feeling. Not at all.

Life…

Rose jerked as the word brushed against her mind, the equivalent of a verbal whisper.

“Martha?” Again Martha stopped, looking back at Rose.

“What’s up?”

Smell it…

“Come closer to me.”

She isn’t human…

“Rose what’s going on?”

The Bad Wolf…

“Martha just come here. Now.”

The command in Rose’s voice was nothing to argue with. Martha made her way back to the TARDIS, skates sliding along…until a ray gun shot split across the ice in front of her.

“Martha!”

The ice was thick, at least — the shot didn’t break it, but it certainly threw Martha off. More shots
rained down on them as Rose braved the ice once more, sliding across to grab Martha and drag her back to the TARDIS faster. Probably not the best idea in hindsight, but thankfully Martha was fast — she didn’t let Rose make it that far.

“In, in!”

They dove into the TARDIS just as another shot flew over their heads, hitting the console. Rose slammed the doors shut and jumped up as Martha struggled to get her skates off.

“What was that?” She demanded as Rose sent them back into orbit.

“No idea.” Martha didn’t know what she bothered asking questions anymore. “Didn’t really want to stick around and find out though—”

She cut off as an alarm echoed through the room, and her head snapped up. “What?” She grabbed a screen, swiveling it around to examine it. “What?!”


The blonde stared at the screen in disbelief for a long moment. “They’re followin’ us,” she finally said.

“What?” Needless to say, Martha was confused. “How is that possible? This is a time machine!”

“They must have technology,” Rose muttered. “The right technology to follow us.”

“But what do they want from us?” That was the part Martha didn’t get. “Were we trespassing? Were they trying to arrest us?”

“No I don’t they’re Judoon.” Rose shook her head. “Too subtle. And they were…telepathic. I heard them. I…I think they might want me.”

“Why?”

Rose looked back at the center console, her eyes glowing just slightly as the TARDIS slipped into her head to help her figure out the information. “They’re Hunters,” she finally said. “Short lifespans, they feed off the lives of others in order to continue living themselves. But they burn that out quickly, so they want something a bit more permanent.”

“Like a human with slightly superior biology and regenerative abilities,” Martha guessed flatly. Rose nodded silently. “Brilliant. So what are we supposed to do? If they can track us…”

“Did they see your face?” Rose asked suddenly, catching Martha by surprise.

“I don’t…think so? It was all pretty confusing, but they were started shooting after I’d already turned away, so…”

So maybe not. And Rose was reasonably assured they hadn’t seen her face either. “So…we shake ‘em off here and hide. Shouldn’t be that hard, lose them in the time vortex, hunker down somewhere —”

“You said they were Hunters.” Rose nodded. “Then they must have other ways to track then just sight. How did they lock onto us in the first place? How do they know you’re different?”

Always asking the right questions Martha was. Rose pressed her lips thin. One of the voices had mentioned smell…
“They must have been able to smell it.” That was…disheartening.

“If they already have your scent and time travel technology then they can follow us across the universe and find us no matter where we hide.” Martha put the grim situation into words. “So what can we do?”

The TARDIS had an answer for that, however. She gave a hum, and Rose looked up to see a strange headset lowering from the ceiling. “What the hell?” Martha raised an eyebrow as it came down to their level, and she leaned in to examine it. “What’s this?”

“I don’t…” Rose’s voice drifted off as the TARDIS gave her the answer. “What?”

Martha looked up. “What? What’d she say?”

“It’s…it can change my biology.” She waited for the TARDIS to give a hum of disagreement, to inform her she’d misunderstood. But no. “It can make me completely human again.”

“You’re joking.” The look Rose gave Martha was completely serious though. “So it’ll make you human, and that’ll change your scent…so they won’t be able to find you. Right?”

“I think that’s the logic here, yeah.” The TARDIS hummed, and Rose turned to see a silver pocket watch with Gallifreyan characters carved into it. “What’s this?” She picked it up, examining it. Martha went back to looking at the headset.

“I think…it goes with this.” She gestured for Rose to come over, pointing at a circular indentation in the middle of the headset — just the right size for the watch. Rose carefully attached it. It worked perfectly.

“How long do you think you’ll have to be…totally human?” Martha asked. Rose made a face.

“Three months.” She sounded fairly sure. That was new. “Their lifespans will run out soon enough.”

She stepped forward, brushing her hand against the headset.

“Right. So…I’m not sure how this works, but I don’t think I’ll have any of my memories after this. So…I might not remember you, but you gotta stay close to me, alright? I don’t know what’s gonna happen or where we’re gonna end up, but we need to stay together.”

“Leave that to me, then.” Martha gave Rose a quick hug, and the blonde smiled weakly as she went to put the headset on. “Hang on,” Martha said suddenly. “You’re rewriting your biology. Isn’t that going to hurt?”

Rose paused with her finger hovering over the button. She hadn’t even thought of that. “Probably,” she finally said.

And she pushed the button.

Martha was pretty sure Rose’s screams would haunt her nightmares for years to come. The shrill, heartbreaking sound echoed and reverberated around the console room as Rose’s body convulsed, electric-like currents running through her body.

It seemed to last an eternity but finally — finally the hum of the machine died away, Rose’s screams with it, and the blonde buckled forward as consciousness left her. Martha grabbed her quickly, detaching her from the headset and carefully lowering her to the floor, checking her pulse and heartbeat. Both steady and strong.
“Right. Great.” She sighed, running a hand through her hair.

Now what?

Chapter End Notes

Please review....?
Chapter Summary

Martha and Rose living their every-day life in a small, 21st century England town.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

“Hold on!” Her voice is strained against the howling wind, as if somehow her words would save him as he clung to the lever.

But it was no good. She could only watch, terrified, as his fingers slipped.

“Doctor!”

A shout slipped off his lips as he tumbled towards the void, and she was about to let go herself, to try and catch him…

Rose’s eyes flew open as her alarm went off, jerking her back to reality.

She’d just turned off the offensive noisemaker when the sound of knuckles against wood echoed through the room, and Martha peeked in. “You awake?” She glared at the other woman blearily. “I’ll take that as a yes.”

“Too early,” she mumbled, dropping her head back onto the pillow and tugging the blankets over her head. “G’night.”

“Nope.” Rose squealed as the blanket flew away from her body.

“Cold!” She whined, grabbing about blindly as she curled up tight, but Martha stepped out of her reach.

“Come on, you gotta get up. You’re supposed to open the shop today.”

“Don’t wanna.”

“Rose.” Blimey it was like taking care of a three year old.

“Fiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiine.” Rose finally dragged herself out of bed, rubbing her eyes and yawning as she stumbled off to the bathroom. Martha shook her head as she dropped the blanket back on the bed, smiling fondly.

One shower and a cup of tea of later Rose was mostly awake, though her words were still punctuated by small yawns as she and Martha talked over breakfast. Rose was not, as Martha had learned, a morning person. Once she’d woken up she was her usual perky self, but before that she was a nightmare.

It was kind of amusing actually.

“Are you workin’ today?” Rose asked as she got her shoes on.
“Nope, day off. I was gonna run a few errands, get some food.”

“Make sure you pick up more cat food.”

“Rose you can’t keep feeding the strays—”

“The strays have names,” Rose reminded Martha, and she resisted the urge to roll her eyes.

“You can’t keep feeding Mickey and Jack, they’ll keep coming back.”

“Well that’s kinda the point.”

Martha sighed. Two months they’d been having this fight. She knew she wasn’t going to win.

“Alright. I’ll pick up cat food for Mickey and Jack. Happy?”

Rose beamed. It took very little to make her happy. “See you tonight. Want me to pick up food?”

“Please.” Neither of them were cooks. They had a lot of takeout. “Not pizza.”

“You’re no fun.”

Martha had to smile a bit as Rose left, her bag bouncing against her back. As far as being stuck in a place for three months went, this wasn’t that bad.

At least fully human Rose was good company.

A little orange tabby was standing on the doorstep when Martha walked out, and she sighed. “Hi Mickey.” The cat purred as it wrapped itself around her ankles. She wasn’t the one who fed them, but both cats associated their house with food and automatically loved anyone who came out of it.

A grey tabby pounced in then, nudging Mickey out of the way in an attempt to love Martha as well. “And hullo Jack. I swear if you two give me fleas I’m never letting Rose feed you again,” she informed them both seriously as she locked the door and started down the pathway. The cats followed her, stopping where the property ended. They pretty much associated the women’s little house with home now. Martha knew it was only a matter of time before Rose wanted to bring them inside.

It was weird, living in such a tiny place after being in the city for most of her life. Martha wasn’t used to just being able to walk wherever she needed to go, but she and Rose didn’t even need a car here.

Not that Martha minded. She liked being able to walk everywhere. It was nice and relaxing.

She walked passed the flower shop on her way to the market, rolling her eyes when she saw Thomas leaning against the counter, talking to Rose. He’d been trying to jump Rose since they’d first gotten here, though she’d made it clear she had no interest. It was a bit sickening to be completely honest.

“Morning Martha,” Mrs. Mitchell said brightly as Martha walked into her store.

“Morning, Mrs. Mitchell.”

Martha grabbed a basket and went deeper into the store to get what she needed, pausing when she saw a mop of brown hair disappear behind a shelf. “Brendon?” She questioned, tilting her head, and after a moment a tiny face peeked around the shelf again. Martha smiled. “Hey kiddo. What’s up?”

“Brendon stop bothering Martha,” Mrs. Mitchell called back, and Martha saw Brendon’s ears turn red.
“It’s okay,” she assured him gently. “You’re not bothering me. Actually, do you wanna help?” Brendon nodded eagerly. “Rose needs more cat food, want to grab me a bag?”

Another nod and Brendon scampered off, returning a few moments later with a small bag. Martha smiled as she took it and put it in her basket. “Thank you.”

Rose got creepy stalker Thomas and Martha got little Brendon, who had imprinted on her like a baby chick the first time she’d walked into the store.

Martha much preferred her latch-on over Rose’s.

They got to the front, and Martha picked out a candy bar, paying for her purchases before handing the chocolate to Brendon. He grinned brightly, wrapping his arms around Martha’s waist and running off. “You spoil him more than my husband does,” Mrs. Mitchell said with a fond smile. Martha laughed.

“I don’t mind doing it. He’s a sweetheart.”

Thomas was still talking to Rose when Martha walked by the flower shop again. While Rose had looked patient before, now she was just uncomfortable. Martha scowled as she walked in, shoving the door a little harder than necessary and sending the bell ringing wildly.

“Sorry to interrupt,” she said cheerily. “Rose I have to talk to you in the back, sorry Thomas but you’ll need to leave, I need to lock up the store, go on…”

She ushered Thomas out, closing the door behind him and locking it, and then pulling Rose into the back.

“What’s goin’ on?” The bewildered blonde asked, and Martha grinned.

“Just saving you. Again.”

Rose laughed. “You’re amazin’.”

They stayed back there for a few minutes before Martha crept up front and unlocked the door again. Thomas seemed to have properly left, so Rose took the chance and came back out as well.

“You gonna be okay without me?” Martha teased. Rose put on a distressed look.

“I don’t know, Martha. I don’t think I can survive without you. What ever will I do?”

“Funny.” There was a piece of paper sitting on the counter. It looked like Rose had been doodling while she pretended to pay attention to Thomas. Martha tilted her head as she looked down at the drawing. It was of a very familiar box. “What’s that?”

“What?” Rose looked down, making a face. “Oh. S’just somethin’ I see in my dreams sometimes. Weird little box – well it’s not that little actually – but it’s bigger on the inside and it travels through time and space. Mad, huh?”

Martha had to force herself to breathe again. “Yeah. Weird.”

She knew Rose dreamed about her adventures sometimes – only the scant details, Rose didn’t like to talk about them – and Martha supposed that was normal. She had no idea what normal was in this case. But if something was wrong the TARDIS probably would have let her know somehow… right?
God her life was a mess sometimes.

Mickey and Jack were waiting eagerly when Martha returned. After a moment of hesitation she filled their bowls. As much as she didn’t want to enable Rose, she was very fond of these cats. The least Martha could was help her take care of them.

They were definitely staying outside though. No matter how much Rose begged.

Martha spent the rest of the day cleaning – another thing that was often neglected. They both worked a lot and were usually too tired to do anything more complicated than washing dishes.

It was a little after six when Rose walked in with two bags of takeout – Chinese, Martha noted with some glee. Rose yawned as she set the bags on the coffee table and flopped back on the couch, falling over so she was laying down and closing her eyes.

“You’re so dramatic.”

“Tiiiiiiiiiired.”

Martha walked over and nudged Rose with her foot, and she squeaked. “Stop it!”

“Then get up and eat.”

“Noooooooono.”

It was almost like living with her sister, Martha noted with some amusement. Except Tish would have made sure the apartment always looked immaculate. She was too organized to allow it any other way.

They ended up eating on the couch, Rose refusing to budge any more than what was required to allow Martha to sit comfortably as well. “You’re not sleeping out here again,” Martha said as she flipped through the channels, trying to find something to watch on TV.

“Did you feed the cats?”

“Yes I fed the cats. You know eventually those things are going to start wanting to come inside.” Rose raised an eyebrow at Martha, smiling innocently. “No, Rose.”

“I’ll take them to the vet and make sure they’re healthy, I’ll get flea stuff so they don’t bring anythin’ in—”

“No, Rose.”

“Pleeeeeeeeease?”

“No, Rose.”

That just got Martha a pout.

“No, Rose.”

“You never let me have any fun.”

Martha took back what she’d thought earlier – it was like living with a five year old.

She wondered if this was what Rose had always been like, before she’d lost the Doctor.
Rose ended up falling asleep on the couch, and Martha didn’t wake her – she knew the woman was
tired, she’d heard her muttering in her sleep the night before. Dreaming again. Martha wished she
could Rose to actually talk to her about the dreams, to find out what exactly she was seeing, but she
didn’t want to pry too much and risk making it a big deal. She wasn’t sure how deep this memory
thing went, and prodding it too much could be a disaster. She wished Rose could explain it to her.

Then again Rose had hardly understood it herself from what Martha had gathered. Big surprise there.

* * * * *

_Burning…everything is burning, the entire world before her eyes a golden tint, and it hurts,
everything hurts…_

_But it doesn’t matter. Nothing matters except saving him._

_“I am the Bad Wolf. I create myself.”_

_He’s worried. Why does he look so worried? She’s saving him. She can’t be stopped. She turns the Daleks to dust, and then their emperor. She can do anything._

_But it hurts…_

_“Rose! Rose!”_

Rose gasped as she shot up, eyes flying open. “It’s okay, you’re alright, it’s okay,” Martha said
gently, trying to comfort the obviously startled woman. “Just breathe, you’re okay.”

Rose swallowed hard, trying to bring her erratic breathing back under control. Martha gently tucked
a lock of hair back behind Rose’s ear, giving her a moment to collect herself. “Okay?” She finally
asked, and Rose nodded shakily.

“Yeah. Sorry. Did I wake you up?”

“No, it’s alright. Are you okay?” Rose nodded silently, though the way she curled up with the
blanket begged to differ. “Do you wanna talk about it?”

Rose didn’t like talking about her dreams. She knew they made her sound mad, and Martha had been
an amazing find when she’d been desperate for a house mate. The last thing she wanted was to scare
her away.

“I…I have these dreams sometimes.” She dragged a hand across her eyes, surprised to find tears
there. Tears? Why? “About this…this man. He’s not really a man though he’s…I don’t know. But I
know he’s not human. And he calls himself the Doctor.” She missed the flash in Martha’s eyes at the
name. “His face changes…and his voice…but he’s always the Doctor. And he has this…this box
that can travel through time and space…this all sounds mad, doesn’t it?”

“Dreams are dreams,” Martha said carefully. No, it didn’t sound mad, not at all. Not considering
what Martha knew. But if she said that Rose would think she was mad. “It’s a subconscious thing.”

Rose smiled a bit at that. “Thanks for not just sayin’ I’m barkin’.”

Martha laughed, pulling her into a hug. “Of course you’re not. Go on, tell me more. If you want to.”

They settled down on the couch together, the blanket spread over their legs, and Rose curled up,
leaning against Martha a bit as she continued speaking.
“You’re there too, sometimes. When you’re there the Doctor isn’t. I think he…he disappeared or somethin’. I don’t know. But he’s gone and I still have his box. And I guess I’m…travellin’ alone.”

“So how do I factor in?” Martha asked curiously. Rose shook her head.

“I’m not sure. I don’t know how we met, but you kind of appear and you’re there a lot now too… blimey I sound like a nutter.”

“No, you don’t,” Martha assured her. “You said I just appeared? Probably after I moved in. Your mind took something new in your life and incorporated it into your dreams. That’s all.”

Rose nodded, turning her eyes to the floor again as she continued. “I don’t…think I’m human. In the dreams, I mean. Not completely. I get hurt and I heal too fast, I know things that are impossible to know…I can talk to the Doctor’s box and it answers. And it’s…it’s lonely. Blimey, it’s so lonely. Even when you’re there…it feels awful. I think it’s because the Doctor isn’t there. He was… important. I guess.”

Boy was that an understatement. “Sorry.” Rose shook her head, curling up a bit tighter. Martha wound an arm around her shoulders, hugging her tight.

“You don’t have anything to apologize for, Rose. Really. They sound like terrifying dreams.”

A thin smile pulled at Rose’s lips. “They’re not all bad. I…we…they go to amazing places. Beautiful places. Dangerous sometimes, but they’re wonderful. The past, the future, different planets even…I couldn’t make these places up if I tried.”

Well she wasn’t wrong. In the time they’d been together Rose had taken Martha to so many amazing — only dangerous sometimes — places. It was an addictive lifestyle. Martha could see why Rose had fallen in love with it.

Even if now it seemed more like an obligation than something she enjoyed.

“Still.” Rose’s eyes fluttered shut again, and she sighed. “Just dreams. It’s stupid.”

“It’s not stupid if it upsets you,” Martha assured her gently. Rose smiled a bit at that.

“You really are amazin’, Martha. Thanks.”

They ended up falling asleep on the couch together, still wrapped in the blanket. Thankfully the dreams left Rose alone for the rest of the night.

* * * * *

“I wish I was as good at arrangements as you,” Martha grumbled as she watched Rose move a few flowers around in the case they were preparing. Everyone always requested Rose to make their arrangements — she had a knack for knowing what worked just right.

“Your arrangements are great too,” Rose assured Martha, and she snorted.

“They look like a colorblind person arranged them.”

Rose laughed as she carried the arrangement out front for the waiting customer. “Here you go, Danny. All set.”

The man paid and left, looking quite happy with his purchase. “That’ll be a good anniversary,” Rose said with a fond smile. Another thing about a small town that baffled Martha a bit — everyone knew
everyone’s business. It was strange. She didn’t even know her neighbors’ names back home.

Martha grabbed the broom to start sweeping while Rose played with the flowers. She really was good at that stuff — in another life she could’ve been a florist and she probably would have been successful.

The bell over the door rang, and Martha looked over her shoulder, smiling when she saw Mr. Mitchell and Brendon walk in. Brendon’s face split into a wide grin when he saw Martha.

“Hullo!” Rose greeted them cheerfully. “Can we help you?”

“Afternoon girls,” Mr. Mitchell said with an imaginary hat tip. “I’m just looking for a nice arrangement, Linda’s book club is tonight.”

“Oh brilliant. Same as last time or something new?”

While Mr. Mitchell and Rose talked, Brendon went to Martha, who ducked under the counter and came back up with a purple lolly — Brendon’s favorite. The boy grinned as he took it, unwrapping it and popping it into his mouth.

“Good?”

Brendon nodded happily, his green eyes bright. He really was a sweet little kid.

The rest of the day passed uneventfully, Rose taking care of the flowers while Martha cleaned. Really that was all Martha was good for here, and she was okay with that. They only had another month before she could open the watch and they’d be off again.

As much as small town life was adorable, Martha was more than ready to get out of here.

“Hey about the diner for dinner? I can go order it now and we can get it to go,” Rose suggested as they prepared to close up the shop for the night. The owner was an elderly woman who had been on the verge of shutting the store down when Rose and Martha had come looking for jobs. They basically ran the entire place themselves.

“I don’t even know why we bother shopping.” Which was Martha’s way of saying yes.

“Someone needs to buy food for the cats. Speakin’ of which—”

“Rose those things are not coming inside.”

“But it’s cold, Martha. They’re probably freezin’ to death.”

“Then take them to the shelter so they’ll be warm,” Martha said reasonably as they started walking down the street.

“I talked to the shelter, they don’t have room for two cats. They’d only be able to take one and I don’t want to separate them. They’re like brothers.”

If by “brothers” she meant Jack tortured Mickey on an almost daily basis then yeah. They were like brothers.

Martha left to go get their food while Rose took care of the shop. It’d be better if she was there for any last-minute customers anyways. Martha was basically useless.

She was sitting at the diner counter, playing on her phone when the sound of sirens reached her ears.
She jerked around in surprise and saw a fire truck speeding down the street. “Blimey,” she gasped as everyone stared, and then they were all running out to see where the truck was going.

“Martha!”

Martha turned to see Rose running down the street toward her. “What’s goin’ on?”

There was smoke billowing into the air — it didn’t look too far away. “Come on.” Martha and Rose pushed their way through the crowd, running toward the smoke.

They ran for about five minutes before turning a corner…and stopping dead.

The Mitchell house was ablaze.

Chapter End Notes

Please review...?
Human Nature || Not So Idealistic

Chapter Summary

Rose and Martha continue with their normal lives - and find themselves facing amazingly human problems.

Chapter Notes

Warning For: Attempted rape, assault, mentions of rape

A crowd had gathered outside the house, watching as the firefighters tried to douse the flames. Rose and Martha scanned the crowd desperately for a long moment — breathing a sigh of relief when they saw the small family huddled in the back, Brendon clinging to his mother’s legs and looking absolutely terrified.

“Oh thank god,” Rose mumbled. She and Martha went to join the crowd. Brendon saw them and instantly went to Martha, wrapping his arms around her waist instead. “What happened?” Rose asked.

“The stove,” Mrs. Mitchell said shakily, holding on tight to her husband. Martha bent down, picking up Brendon and carrying him back over. “It’s been faulty for weeks now, we kept meaning to get it fixed…oh Rose, that arrangement you made is ruined!”

Shock made people’s priorities a little weird sometimes. “It’s okay,” Rose assured her. “I’m just glad you’re all alright.”

The fire was still going strong, but the firemen had at least gotten it under control enough to keep it from spreading. “Oh god,” Mrs. Mitchell groaned, burying her face in Mr. Mitchell’s neck.

It took almost an hour to finally get the fire out. The crowd had mostly dispersed by this point, save for a few of the family’s friends — and Rose and Martha, of course. Brendon stayed in Martha’s arms the entire time, quite comfortable there.

“What now?” Mrs. Mitchell asked quietly as they watched the firemen spray down the smoldering remains of their house.

“Why don’t you stay with us tonight?” Rose suggested quietly. They were right down the street, it wouldn’t be much of a walk at least.

“Oh, we couldn’t impose—”

“You’re not imposin’, I’m offerin’,” Rose assured them while Martha nodded vigorously. “We can at least give you a bed for the night.”

Martha’s and Rose’s tiny house was a bit cramped with three other people. Brendon wandered
around the living room while Rose and Martha showed his parents around.

Here…

Brendon’s eyes went wide as the voice whispered across his mind, and he turned around, trying to find the source. He could hear the adults in the other room, talking quietly. There was nobody in here to talk to him.

I’m here…

The boy frowned as he walked to the table next to the couch. He pulled open the drawer, and instantly zeroed in on a small silver pocket watch. He reached out, small fingers brushing against the surface…

“You’re going to burn!”

“Rose come on, you can stop now!”

“Well this time when I turn them to dust they’re gonna stay that way.”

Brendon gasped as he yanked as his hand back, the images fading from his mind. What was that?

“Brendon?”

He jumped and closed the drawer just as his mother and Rose walked in. “Come on sweetheart,” Mrs. Mitchell said kindly. “It’s time for bed.”

Brendon walked over, taking his mother’s outstretched hand and holding on tight. Rose smiled down at the boy and was surprised when he recoiled, hiding behind Mrs. Mitchell’s legs. “He’s just upset,” Mrs. Mitchell said quietly. “It’s been a long day.”

“Of course.” Rose wasn’t offended. “Get some rest, all of you. Martha and I are right here if you need anything.”

Rose had surrendered her bed for the family, so she grabbed a blanket and went to settle down on the couch. Right before she sat she saw that the drawer was still open a bit — Brendon hadn’t closed it all the way. She pulled it open, tilting her head when she saw the watch. It was pretty. Must have been something of Martha’s. She examined it for a moment before closing the drawer again and laying down.

* * * * *

Martha took off from the flower shop the next day to help the Mitchells with their store. They had an apartment space above the store that hadn’t been used in years — it wasn’t much but it would be a good temporary place for them while they tried to figure out what to do next. The adults were up there now cleaning and moving stuff around while Martha sat downstairs, taking care of the store and Brendon. The boy had been a bit more subdued than usual, sitting in the corner coloring. He was probably upset. The last day had been such an upheaval.

It didn’t help that there had been a steady flow of activity in the usually quiet store — well wishers coming by to leave donations for the family. Clothes, food, even offers to provide furniture for their temporary home. It was all very sweet, and another sign of how close-knit the town was, but it must have been overwhelming for Brendon, who wasn’t used to being around so many people at once.

“Blimey,” Mrs. Mitchell sighed when she came down and saw the pile of donations. She rubbed her
eyes, taking a deep breath.

“Everyone wants to help,” Martha said, smiling.

“They’re all so sweet. And you and Rose have just been wonderful, thank you so much for everything you’ve done.”

“Of course. Anything we can do to help. You’ve got a few notes here, people have extra furniture for you so maybe you won’t have to sleep on the floor tonight.”

It was almost closing time, so Martha helped close up the store and bid them good night, starting down the street to meet Rose. Her eyes were fixed on the stars as she walked along, and she sighed. She couldn’t wait to get back out there. One more month…

She stopped dead in the middle of the road, eyes wide as something green streaked across the sky.

“What the hell—?”

“Martha!”

Her head snapped back down, and she saw Rose making her way toward her. “Ready to go home?” She stopped when she saw the look on Martha’s face, and frowned. “What’s wrong?”

“I…nothing.” Martha shook her head. “Guess I’m just tired. Come on, let’s go home.”

* * * * *

Mr. Mitchell and Brendon were back at Rose’s and Martha’s on Saturday. Martha was at work — it was Rose’s day off. She smiled as she opened the door for them. “Hullo!”

“Are you sure about this?” Mr. Mitchell asked without preamble. Rose had offered them her bed.

“Yeah, of course. Ask Martha, I fall asleep on the couch five nights a week anyways. And it has to be better than all three of you sharing a pull-out couch.”


He’d borrowed a truck from someone in town, and Rose helped break down the bed and load it up. While they did that Brendon sat on the couch, eyes drifting to the side table every now and again.

After a moment he stood up, opening the drawer. The watch was still there, right where he’d seen it before. He reached out and picked it up.

“Hold on!” Rose screamed over the sound of rushing wind. God hold on please…please...

But it was no good. She could only watch, terrified, as his fingers slipped.

“Doctor!”

…

“You don’t remember me? Bit insulting, that. I mean, I realize we only met once but I like to think it was pretty memorable — you’re even the one who ordered my death if I remember correctly.”

She took another step closer, hands clasped behind her back. “Lemme see if I can jog your memory, then. The Emperor. Your Emperor. Remember him? I met him, remember how I told you that?” As
she spoke she stepped closer still, until she was only an arm length’s away from the human-Dalek. “He survived the Time War, until he met me. I met the emperor, and I took the Time Vortex, and I poured it into his head and turned him into dust.” She spread her arms out, a smirk pulling at her lips. “The God of all Daleks. And I destroyed him.”

…

The sound of footsteps jerked Brendon back to reality, and he pocketed the watch without thinking, closing the drawer again.

Rose helped Mr. Mitchell load the truck up, and then father and son were off, back to the store. Rose spent the rest of the afternoon cleaning up, then left a little after dark to go meet Martha so they could get supper. Jack and Mickey met her on the doorstep, meowing pitifully. “Tonight will be the night I convince Martha to let you both come in,” Rose assured them with a smile as she knelt down and pet one, then the other. “Don’t you worry.”

The streets were quiet as Rose walked along — weekends were never a busy time. Most places closed before eight. Rose kept her head down as she walked along, hands in her pocket.

“Rooooooooosie!”

She groaned as Tommy’s voice reached her ears, and she turned to see him swaggering down the street toward her. Lovely.

“I can’t talk right now Tommy, sorry. I have to meet Martha.”

“Oh Martha can wait.” Tommy grinned as he stepped closer to Rose. Something felt…off. Rose took a step back, frowning. “I thought it was time you and I had a little chat.”

“How about what?” Rose sighed. She’d just indulge him for a moment and then be done with it.

“Well it’s just you keep flirting with me, and I’m thinking it’s time we do something about it.” As Tommy spoke he stepped closer, and once again Rose stepped back.

“I don’t flirt with you, Tommy. I have no interest in you. I thought I made that clear.”

“Now come on, Rosie.” Tommy sighed. “You and I both know you’re just playing hard to get. It’s okay though, I think we’re passed all that. Don’t you?”

“I’m not playin’ hard to get,” Rose said firmly. “I’m sorry if you got the wrong idea, but I don’t want to be with you. So just leave me alone.”

She turned to walk away — and was stopped when Tommy grabbed her wrist, yanking her back.

“She whores,” she snarled, trying to pull free, but Tommy was stronger.

“Now, now, Rosie,” he hissed as he shoved her against a wall. “Don’t struggle. This’ll be a lot easier if you just admit that you want it.”

“I don’t,” Rose insisted. “I don’t want it and I don’t want you now just let me go.”

She tried to jerk up, to knee him between the legs, but he pressed in against her, trapping her and making it harder to move. “Sssshhhh, Rosie, ssshhh.” As Tommy spoke he pulled a handkerchief out of his pocket, shoving it in her mouth. “It’s okay. You want it. You just don’t realize it yet.”

His free hand slid under her shirt, squeezing her breast, and she gasped around the gag, tears
springing to life in her eyes.

“Jimmy, stop—!”

“Be quiet, Rosie,” he grunted as he shoved his pants down. “I know you want it, just take it like a girl.”

Tommy tearing her shirt jerked Rose back to reality, and she got her hand free, clenching her fingers into a fist and slamming it into his cheek. It wasn’t much of a blow, but Tommy stumbled all the same, giving Rose a chance to slip free. She ran, yanking the gag out of her mouth as she went.

She heard Tommy swear behind her, and then the sound of his feet slapping against cement, his longer legs carrying him to her faster. She wasn’t going to be able to outrun him.

There was a decent-size branch on the ground not far from Rose — remnants from a storm they’d had last week. Rose dove for it, grabbing it and rearing it like a baseball bat.

And when Tommy was in her reach she swung it, slamming it into his head.

* * * *

Martha had closed up the store early and went into the alley to check on the TARDIS. The ship looked sad and lonely in the dingy little alleyway, and Martha sighed as she let herself in to take a look around. “You miss her too, huh?” She felt weird talking to the ship — she knew Rose talked to it, and it answered her, but she wasn’t Rose and to her it felt awkward.

She wanted the TARDIS to have some kind of company though.

She stayed with the TARDIS for a few minutes before leaving and locking up again. She had to meet Rose for supper and it wouldn’t do for the blonde to see the TARDIS now.

She walked out of the alleyway, waiting for a few minutes. When Rose still didn’t come she called, but Rose didn’t answer. Maybe she’d fallen asleep. Wouldn’t surprise Martha. She started down the street, shaking her head and smiling.

At least until she turned a corner and saw Rose standing over a huddled figure, a branch hanging limply from her hand.

“Rose!”

Martha hurried over to stand with Rose, looking down at the figure on the ground. It was Thomas White. Rose was staring down at him, pale as a ghost and trembling from head to foot. “Rose?” Martha questioned gently. “What’s wrong? What happened?”

“He…He…” Rose trembled harder, tears slipping down her cheeks. The branch slipped from her grip and she clapped a hand over her mouth, a sob tumbling off her lips.

“Ssshh, okay.” Martha wrapped an arm around Rose, pulling her into a tight hug as she dug her mobile out to call the police. “It’s okay.”

The next few hours passed in a blur. A cop car and an ambulance came, trying to help Rose first but she refused medical assistance so they went to Tommy. Rose had whacked him pretty hard — there was a gash on his forehead that would probably require a few stitches. While the paramedic tended to him, Officer Williams let Rose and Martha sit in the back of the cop car, the former wrapped in a blanket the paramedic had provided and still shaking horribly.
“Can you tell me what happened?” the officer asked gently. Rose hadn’t said much yet beyond telling the paramedic she was fine. Probably in shock.

“I…I was…” Rose’s voice trembled and she cut off, curling up tighter as the tears started falling again. Martha rubbed her shoulder reassuringly.

“It’s okay, Rose. It’s okay now.”

It took Rose another moment to gather herself enough to try again. “I was…walkin’ to meet Martha at the shop and…Tommy caught me, he said…he said he knew I wanted…wanted it…wanted him…and when I told him no he grabbed me and…shoved me against the wall, and I punched him and ran, but he ran after me so I grabbed the stick and…and…”

Her voice tapered off again and she leaned into Martha, fingers digging deeper into the blanket. The officer nodded as he took a few notes.

“Now why did he think you wanted it?”

“I…I don’t know.” Her voice was barely a whisper.

“I see you two talking a lot when you’re at the shop.”

Martha’s head snapped around to look at the officer and Rose’s lips pulled down into a frown. “Yeah, he comes in and talks to me while I’m workin’. So what?”

“I’m just wondering if maybe you might have…”

“Might have what?” Martha was surprised when Rose picked herself up, expression hard. “Might have led him on?”

“That’s not what I’m saying,” Officer Williams said quickly, backpedaling.

“Really? Because that’s what it bloody sounds like.” Rose pushed herself out of the car, the blanket falling away from her shoulders. “I’ve made it clear to Tommy multiple times that I had no interest in him, and I told him tonight I had no interest in him, and if you’re gonna sit there and say I might have made him think I wanted it then I’m not gonna stand here and waste my time with you.”

She stormed away without another word, and Martha hurried after her.

The walk home was silent, Rose focusing on the ground as she walked along, Martha just trying to keep her close.

Rose was still quiet as they walked into the house, kicking her shoes off and walking into the kitchen. Martha could feel the tension building in the blonde. This was going to go very south very fast.

And she was right.

“How dare he!”

Rose had been in the middle of making tea when she snapped, hurling her mug against the wall. Martha winced as the ceramic shattered.

“Like I could ever want that! He attacked me! He cornered me in the middle of the bloody street and he thinks I wanted it?”
“Rose—”

“I don’t know how I could’ve made it more clear to Jimmy that I wasn’t interested! Should I have worn a sign? Spelled it in the sky? What exactly do I have to do to make my feelings clear?”

Martha opened her mouth to respond — then frowned. “Who’s Jimmy?”

Rose blinked, the anger draining from her expression a bit. “What?”

“You said Jimmy.”

“No, I didn’t,” the blonde insisted. “I said Tommy.”

She hadn’t, but Martha let it go, not wanting to push it. Rose went to get the broom and sweep up the cup.

“I didn’t want it,” she muttered, gripping the broom tight. “I didn’t want it. I didn’t want it. I didn’t bloody want it.”

She was starting to shake again as she swept, her breathing short and choppy. Oh no. “Okay, c’mere,” Martha murmured, grabbing the broom carefully and taking Rose by the shoulders, leading her back to the living room and sitting her on the couch.

“I didn’t want it.” Rose’s voice was little more than a whisper now.

“I know, Rose,” Martha assured her, grabbing the blanket off the back of the couch and wrapping her up tight. “I know you didn’t want it. It’s okay.”

Rose curled up into the corner of the couch, wrapping the blanket tight around her. Martha reached out, brushing her hair back as she started crying once more.

Chapter End Notes

Please review...?
Chapter Summary

Everything goes to hell.

Chapter Notes

Warning For: Mentions of rape

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Rose was a bit better in the morning — clearly sleep deprived, but she didn’t feel as horrible at least. “Are you sure you don’t want me to open the shop for you?” Martha asked gently as Rose got ready to leave.

“No, I’m fine,” Rose said, hooking her bag over her shoulder. “I’ll be fine. Don’t worry about it.”

Martha didn’t completely believe that, but she let it go. “Alright. I’ll be in about noon.”

“Okay. See you later.”

Rose felt horrible and exposed as she walked down the street, hands shoved into her sweatshirt pockets. She felt safer once she got to the store and she was inside.

That lasted for about an hour.

No sooner had Rose turned the closed sign over to open did the bell jingle dangerously as a woman stormed in. Tommy’s mother. Rose swallowed hard.

“Mrs. White—”

“Who the hell do you think you are?!” The woman raged off at Rose, who flinched back. “Accusing my son of trying to rape you—”

“He did—”

“Just because you can’t make up your mind doesn’t mean he should have to suffer! You’re gonna ruin his life!” Rose opened her mouth to argue, but Mrs. White spoke over her. “Nobody is ever gonna believe you, Tommy’s a good boy, he’s never hurt anyone in his life, and you’re just a little whore—!”

Neither of them heard the bell jingle as the door opened again. “Julia you’re not still trying to sell that Tommy is a good boy garbage, are you?” Mrs. Mitchell cut in fiercely. “He’s been torturing cats since he was Brendon’s age.”

“He’s a good boy! I’m not gonna let her ruin his good name—”
“He does that perfectly fine on his own. Now get out.”

Mrs. White stormed out without another word, slamming the door behind her. As soon as she was gone Mrs. Mitchell locked the door and turned the closed sign back over. “Come on,” she coaxed Rose gently as she walked back over. “In back, come on.”

Rose was trembling as Mrs. Mitchell coaxed her into the back of the store, away from the view of anyone who walked by the window. “It’s okay,” Mrs. Mitchell assured gently. “C’mere.” There was a turned over milk crate that the woman sat Rose down on, kneeling in front of her. “You’re alright.”

“I’m not lying,” Rose forced out, her voice high-pitched and stressed. “I’m not lying.”

“I know you’re not, sweetheart,” Mrs. Mitchell assured her. “It’s okay.”

Rose calmed herself down a bit, but she was clearly in no condition to go back out and work, so Mrs. Mitchell found her mobile to call Martha.

Martha, meanwhile, had decided to go and investigate where she’d seen the green streak of light fall down. This was the first chance she’d really had to go look, and she was going to take advantage of it.

Her walk brought her to a small field just on the outside of town. But there was nothing there that she could see — not even a wrinkle in the flat grass.

“Maybe I was seeing things,” she murmured with a sigh. She was just turning away when her mobile rang. “Hullo? …What?”

Twenty minutes later Martha was letting herself into the store. Rose was still in back with Mrs. Mitchell, wiping her eyes and looking shaken once more. “Are you okay?” Martha asked at once. “God I don’t believe Mrs. White, what a—”

“It’s fine,” Rose interrupted, her voice thick.

“The hell it is! I can’t believe she stormed in here like some madwoman, I hope they lock her son up!”

“They won’t.” Rose was clearly resigned. “She’s right, he’s lived here his entire life, I’m just some outsider.”

“Julia White is the only one who thinks her son is an angel,” Mrs. Mitchell said fiercely. “I’ve been reporting him for shop lifting since he was twelve and he’s vandalized almost every store on this block at least once. He’s not innocent, and you’re not just some outsider. People love you here, sweetheart.”

“That’s part of your charm,” Martha added with a smile that Rose returned weakly. “Why don’t you go home, Rose? I’ll deal with the store for today.”

“I can’t, I have to work—”

“No, she’s right,” Mrs. Mitchell said, standing up. “Come on, Charles is watching the store, I’ll walk you home in case Julia gets any ideas.”

Rose opened her mouth to protest — then gave in, her shoulders slumping. She didn’t really want to be there anyways.
Down the street, Brendon Mitchell sat on the stairs that led to the upstairs apartment while his father worked out in the store. He was examining the watch he’d taken from Rose’s and Martha’s house. Stealing was wrong, he knew. His mother would’ve been angry if she knew.

But he just felt like the watch wanted him to take it. He couldn’t explain it — it sounded crazy and he knew it.

But the watch wanted to be with him.

*Protect me…*

His fingers tightened around the watch. It had been talking to him off and on ever since he’d taken it. He didn’t understand why — or even how it was possible, watches weren’t supposed to *talk.* It sounded like Rose though.

It was weird.

Brendon fingered the latch for a moment before finally popping it open.

*Alone. She was alone. The Doctor was gone, Donna had said no…she was alone.*

*And it hurt.*

…

*She laughed as she bounced into the ship after the Doctor, still howling like a couple of maniacs. It had been a good night — heartbreaking at times, but they’d freed the wolf and saved the day. And they’d even been banned by Queen Victoria!*  

*The Doctor bounded up to the console, hitting a few buttons and grinning back at Rose.*

…

*The TARDIS felt so big.*  

*That was silly, because it had always been big, and she didn’t know why she was just noticing inow. Maybe because it felt empty without the Doctor running around the console like a maniac.*  

*Tears sprung to life in her eyes once more and she hunkered down against the seat, burying her face in her knees.*  

*And she cried. Again.*  

The sound of the bell over the door jerked Brendon back to reality and he closed the watch quickly.

* * * * *

Rose ended up spending most of the day sleeping. The confrontation with Mrs. White had pretty much robbed her of any energy she had, and sleeping was all she could do.

Not that it was a restful sleep. Disconnected images and voices and words flitted through her mind the entire time, escaping before she could fully process them. She tossed and turned fitfully and when she woke up, a little after the sun had set, she felt worse than she had when she went to bed. She didn’t even have the energy to sit up.

She just curled up on the couch and buried her face in her pillow, letting the tears fall.
And that was the position Martha found her in when she got home. Her heart broke at the sight of the blonde, and she carefully sat down on the edge of the couch, coaxing Rose up and wrapping her in a tight hug.

It was for the best, really, that they only had a month left here. It was obviously going to be a long month, and Rose was probably going to be miserable the entire time. But she would likely welcome the escape when Martha opened the watch. They could leave this place without any worries or issues. It would be fine.

Everything would be better once they could leave.

* * * * *

That stupid bitch.

Tommy was seething as he made his way through the streets, hands shoved in his pockets. His mother had put up his bail, of course — she would never let him sit in jail like some criminal.

Technically he was supposed to be at home, but it wasn’t like his mother would care. He had every right to be out walking, this was his town.

And Rose bloody Tyler wasn’t going to stop him.

Even if the young man had been paying attention, he never would have noticed that he wasn’t alone on the otherwise empty street. They’d followed him a couple blocks, trying to confirm that he wasn’t going to meet anybody.

When they sure, they attacked.

* * * * *

“Tommy? I made dinner, come down and eat…”

Julia White’s voice drifted off when she opened her son’s door and saw the room empty. Damn it. She didn’t believe for a moment that Tommy had attacked anyone — Rose Tyler was an attention-seeking liar — but Linda Mitchell had made it clear that not everyone shared that view.

Julia shook her head as she went downstairs, grabbing her jacket on the way out the door. Tommy had probably gone to the park, he went there to smoke sometimes — trying to hide it, but Julia knew.

She walked across the street, bowing her head against the light wind, her hands in her pockets.

They waited until she was deep in seclusion before they attacked.

Nobody ever heard her screams.

* * * * *

The tiny giggles of a little girl playing in her room echoed through her open window, attracting the attention of the youngest alien. She separated from Father, flying off to find the giggling girl.

Sally Abbott was sitting on her bedroom floor, playing with her dolls. She only had a few minutes left before Mummy told her to go to bed and she wanted to make the most of it.

She didn’t stand a chance when the alien flew, unseen, through her window.
Charles Mitchell made his way down the street, sighing. He loved his wife and son, really he did, but the apartment was small and they were tripping over one another.

They needed to find a new place soon.

One lone alien drifted above the streets. The rest of his Family had found hosts — now it was his turn. But there wasn’t anybody suitable…

He paused above Charles. And if a telepathic entity could have smirked, he surely would have been.

Martha didn’t mind filling in for Rose — of course she didn’t — but she was pretty sure it was bad for business. Nobody liked her flower arrangements as much as Rose’s. And with good reason of course.

God she’d be happy when she could get out of here and stop worrying about this stuff.

The bell over the door rang and she peeked out to see Mr. Mitchell standing there, sniffing at the air. “Oh hullo,” Martha greeted him, smiling. “Can I help you?”

He didn’t respond — didn’t even seem to realize she’d spoken. He stood in the door, sniffing harder. Martha raised an eyebrow at him. “Mr. Mitchell? Are you okay?”

More sniffing, and finally Mr. Mitchell seemed to realize Martha was talking to him.

“What?”

“Are you okay?” He seemed a little odd. Besides the constant sniffing his eyes were wide, his expression twisted.

It was weird.

“Yes. Yes. Yes.” He said the word a couple of times, as if testing it out. “I’m fine Martha. Martha.”

Martha raised an eyebrow, eyes narrowing a bit. Something was wrong with him. Very, very wrong.

Mr. Mitchell sniffed at the air again, making a face. “Mr. Mitchell, is there anything I can help you with?” Martha asked pointedly. The man shook his head.

“I can’t smell in here…”

“Are you allergic to the flowers?”

He didn’t answer — just sniffed harder at the air. “Where did you say you came from?” He asked Martha suddenly, and her mouth dropped.

“L-London. Why do you ask?”

“Are you sure about that?”

Wrong, wrong, wrong. Martha’s instincts were screaming at her. This was wrong, something was very wrong with him.
“Mr. Mitchell… are you sure you’re okay?”

He just stared at her for a long moment before walking out. Martha’s heart was pounding in her chest as she listened to the echo of the bell in the air.

Maybe he was just drunk. It had been a very long few days for him, for his family. Maybe he was just… indulging. Martha was sure she was just reading too much into it. Nothing to worry about.

Nothing to worry about.

Right?

She grabbed the broom and started sweeping to distract herself. After a few minutes she texted Rose, just to make sure the blonde was okay.

Rose was currently puttering around the house, listening to music and cleaning. She felt a bit better, but she’d been grateful Martha had offered to take her shift again. She just wanted one more day to hide.

At Martha’s text she smiled — such a worrywart, she thought, amused. Not that she didn’t appreciate it. Martha was a sweetheart. Rose had been so lucky to find her.

She answered the text and went back to her puttering, still smiling.

Martha let out a breath of relief at Rose’s answer. She was okay. Of course she was okay. Nobody knew they were here. God this was so stressful. She didn’t know how Rose dealt with it, having the weight of the world on her shoulders every single day.

It was maddening.

* * * * *

“Keep me away from them… keep me away…”

The watch was still talking to Brendon. He didn’t understand how it was possible — how could a watch talk? — but it was and he knew he needed to listen.

It was Rose talking to him.

Brendon peeked around the shelf as he watched his mother work. His father had disappeared early in the day and hadn’t come back — something was wrong with him. Brendon didn’t know how he knew, but he did. Something felt off. It was his father’s body…

But not his father’s mind.

But how was that possible?

“Hide me…”

* * * * *

“Martha!”

The woman jumped a mile as the voice spoke up behind her. She whirled quickly, pressing back against the shop door. And there was Mr. Mitchell again.
“Mr. Mitchell… hullo.” She had somehow managed to convince herself that she’d imagined the weirdness earlier. But seeing him now cast that all in doubt again. “Can I help you?”

“I was wondering if you could tell me a bit more about yourself and Rose. You two came here at the same time, didn’t you?”

“Yeah, we… we met in London.” She stumbled over the words. “Rose wanted to get out of the city, she found a place here and she met me…”

The words were unconvincing even in her own ears. It was obvious Mr. Mitchell didn’t believe one bit of it.

“Are you sure? Are you sure that’s where you came from?”

“Mr. Mitchell stop, please…”

“There’s more, isn’t there? There’s something you’re not saying.”

Martha took a deep breath, steeling herself…

And she kneed Mr. Mitchell between the legs. He howled in pain, stumbling off to the side and she ran, fast and hard down the street. She heard Mr. Mitchell calling after her but she didn’t stop.

She couldn’t stop.

Rose was surprised, to say the least, when Martha burst through the door, gasping and out of breath.

“Rose!”

“Martha!”

“Are you okay?” Martha asked hurriedly, eyes sweeping over Rose. The blonde looked confused understandably — but otherwise unharmed.

“Yeah, ‘course I am — what’s goin’ on?”

Martha ran her hands through her hair, taking a deep breath. “Nothing. Sorry. Just uh… long day.”

Rose raised an eyebrow, giving Martha a look that clearly said she thought the other woman was mad. “O…kay? I was gonna order a pizza for supper, sound good?”

“Yeah. Yeah. Definitely. Pizza is good.”

Rose gave Martha one last odd look before going into the kitchen. Martha waited until she was out of sight, then sprang over to the drawer, pulling it open. She wanted to keep the pocket watch near—

All thought processes stopped when she saw that the drawer was empty.

The pocket watch was gone.

“Rose?” She did her best to keep her voice normal. Rose peeked back in.

“Yeah?”

“There was a pocket watch in this drawer.” Rose had seemed completely unaware that the drawer even existed, from what Martha had seen. Maybe she had finally noticed it. “Did you see it?” Rose
shook her head, and Martha’s heart dropped.

“Maybe you moved it and don’t remember?” Rose suggested gently. Apparently Martha’s distress was obvious in her expression. “We can look after we eat.”

“Yeah. Sounds good.” Martha’s voice was hollow.

Rose walked back into the kitchen, and Martha dropped onto the couch, burying her face in her hands.

“I was thinkin’ about goin’ to London this weekend,” Rose called. “Get out of town for a bit.”

“Yeah…” Martha said distantly. Maybe getting out would be for the best. Take a break from all the small-town drama. Get away. “Maybe we could go tonight.”

“I have to work tomorrow, Martha,” Rose said with a small laugh. “And so do you for that matter. Although if you wanted to take it off I wouldn’t blame you, I never said thank you for coverin’ for me did I?”

“Don’t mention it. Really. Why can’t we just blow off tomorrow though? Early weekend. We’ve earned it.”

“It’s one more day. We can leave after we close up the shop. Sound good?”

No. No it didn’t. “Sure.”

* * * * *

“The blonde… it must be her…”

“But she’s just a human.”

“She was there. I recognize her.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes.”

* * * * *

Brendon listened to his mother in the tiny kitchen area, cooking and muttering, wondering where his father was. The watch was still clutched in Brendon’s tiny fist, whispering almost imperceptibly against his mind.

They’re coming…

He peeked out the window, frowning when he saw the dark figures shuffling about in the streets.

Something was going to happen.

* * * * *

A knock at the door jarred Martha out of her melancholy. “Blimey, that can’t be the pizza already,” Rose muttered as she walked out again. “Is it even cooked?”
“Wait!” Martha hopped up, grabbing Rose’s wrist and pulling her back. “Don’t open it.”

Rose looked over at Martha, bewildered. “Why not?”

“Just… just don’t. It’s probably not the pizza.”

It was clear Rose wasn’t amused. “What’s goin’ on with you?” She asked as she pulled her wrist out of Martha’s grip. “Blimey, you’re actin’ mad.”

She opened the door before Martha could stop her — and froze when she saw Mr. Mitchell, Tommy White and his mother, and little Sally Abbott standing there. It looked like a strange mob.

“…Hullo?” Rose said uncertainly, and a little wearily, eying Tommy and Mrs. White in particular. But it was Mr. Mitchell who spoke in a hiss-like voice.

“We finally found you.”

Rose took a step back, clearly stunned. “W-What?”

“I told you it was her,” Tommy said in a twisted voice. “It’s the hair.”

“Now now, Son of Mine. Nobody likes a bragger.”

Martha cursed under her breath. Damn it. Before Rose could answer, Martha sprang forward, slamming the door shut and locking it. “What the hell is goin’ on?” Rose’s voice hopped up a couple octaves, terror clear in her eyes.

“It’s okay,” Martha assured her as gently as she could manage, grabbing Rose’s arm and pulling her back from the door. “It’s gonna be okay. Don’t worry.”

“What’s happenin’?” Rose wasn’t reassured. “What do they want?”

“I don’t know.” Bold-faced lie. “But it’s okay. They’re not gonna—”

Get in was how that sentence was going to end, but they decided to prove her wrong before she even got the second lie out. A loud bang against the door had them both jumping. “Blimey,” Martha mumbled, pulling Rose back a bit further. “Alright. Rose I need you to go out the back door.”

“What?”

“Get out and run. Go to the shop, okay? Wait for me there.”

“I can’t just leave you!”

Martha went to the closet, pulling out a heavy cricket bat. The small attic had been full of junk when they had moved in. Martha had found the bat and decided to keep it downstairs. Just in case.

“What’re you gonna do?” Rose asked in disbelief. “Ask for a game?”

“Don’t worry about what I’m gonna do, just go!”

Rose hesitated for a long moment before nodding and running. She had no idea what was going on, but Martha clearly did.

And she trusted Martha.
Martha readied the bat, taking a deep breath and steeling herself. She was ready. She could do this.

Still it was a shock when Mr. Mitchell — or whatever was possessing him — kicked the door in and it imploded. The group took one look at Martha with her cricket bat and laughed, Mrs. White and Mr. Mitchell both holding out what she assumed were guns.

“What do you think you’re gonna do with that?” Tommy taunted. “Play a game?”

“Just let us go,” Martha said quietly. “Please. Rose is giving you a chance to live out what lives you have left. Just take the chance and go.”

That earned her another amused laugh. She clearly wasn’t getting through to them. “I have a better idea,” Sally spoke up. “Why don’t we kill you and take the blonde?”

Martha swung the bat as hard as she could. To her credit, she managed to hit Mr. Mitchell’s wrist and force him to drop the gun, and the momentum moved her enough that she avoided a shot from Mrs. White.

But that was probably the end of her luck.

“Kill her!”

Martha readied the bat again, and was caught by surprise when a heavy branch suddenly swung into the fray, hitting Tommy and Mrs. White.

“Run!” Rose called. And she and Martha ran out.

Chapter End Notes

Please review...?
Chapter Summary

Martha finally tells Rose the truth, and the girls make a difficult choice.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“I told you to get out!” Martha said as they ran out the back door and into the woods. They could wind back around and get to the shop. And hopefully lose the Family along the way.

“I wasn’t gonna just leave you!” Rose called back. “What the hell is goin’ on?!”

“Not now!”

Downtown, as usual, was mostly empty. Good. Martha let them into the shop quickly and they went straight to the back, staying out of view of the front window. Rose collapsed onto an overturned milk crate, clearly terrified as she met Martha’s gaze.

“What’s happenin’?”

Martha ran her hands through her hair, sighing. “I don’t know.”

“Why were they tryin’ to attack me? What do they want?”

God Martha felt horrible. This Rose — this completely human Rose — had never faced the horrors of the real Rose’s life. She had never had to stare death in the face, never had the weight of an entire universe on her shoulders. She was just Rose Tyler, a shop girl.

She had nothing to do with any of this.

Martha knelt down in front of Rose, pulling her into a tight hug. The blonde clung to her roommate, trying not to cry. She didn’t understand any of this. She didn’t understand why Mr. Mitchell or Sally Abbott would try to attack her. She didn’t know why they wanted her.

She just wanted to go home and sleep.

“It’s going to be okay, Rose. I promise.” As soon as Martha found the watch, it would be okay.

“How? How is any of this gonna be okay?” Rose sounded desperate; there were tears brimming in her eyes.

“…I’m not sure,” Martha admitted. “But it will. I promise.”

Rose blew out a long breath, scrubbing her face with her hands. She didn’t understand any of this. “Why don’t we leave for London tonight?” She asked suddenly, looking up. “They’ve probably left the house by now we can sneak back, get the car…”

Her voice drifted off as Martha shook her head. “We can’t do that, Rose.”
“Why not?” Rose asked desperately. “Why can’t we just leave?”

“Because they won’t just leave us alone. They’ll follow us to London, they’ll try to find us there. And they’re probably destroy this entire place while they’re at it, just because they can.”

“Why? What do they want?”

Martha hesitated for a long moment before throwing caution to the winds. “They’re not who you think they are, Rose. They’re not who they look like, not anymore. They’re being possessed.”

“Possessed?” Rose repeated in disbelief. “Possessed by what?”

“…Aliens.”

Rose just stared at Martha for a long moment. “You’re jokin’.” Martha shook her head silently. “Aliens? Blimey Martha how stupid do you think I am?”

“I’m serious, Rose. Think about it for a moment. Think about those dreams you have.”

“What about them? They’re just dreams.”

“No, they’re not. The Doctor, the blue box, traveling through time and space…it’s all real.”

Rose stared at Martha for long moment, her eyes…almost dead. It was frightening. “Of course it’s not,” she said finally, her voice flat. “Don’t be stupid.”

“It is, Rose. And I can prove it. Come on.”

She took Rose’s hand and pulled hr up, out the back door, into the alley where the TARDIS was sitting. Rose stopped dead when she the box, her eyes wide.

“What…”

“Come on,” Martha insisted, unlocking the door and pushing it open. “Come in.”

“No, I don’t want to—”

But Martha tugged her in anyways, ignoring the way she resisted. Rose made a small, strangled noise when she saw the inside.

“But…how…?”

“It’s called the TARDIS,” Martha explained gently. “It’s a ship. It’s your ship, Rose.”

Rose shook her head, her breathing picking up a bit. “No,” she whispered, voice cracking. “No. No no no no no no no…”

Uh oh. “Rose?” Martha questioned gently, stepping toward her. But Rose jerked back.

“No…no!”

She turned and ran out without another word. “Rose!” Martha called, running after her. But she’d already disappeared out of the alley and was out of sight by the time Martha got onto the street.

No no no…

“Rose!”
“Where is he?” Brendon’s mother was murmuring as she looked out the window. Brendon was already in his pajamas and he was supposed to be sleeping, but the watch wouldn’t stop talking to him.

Not safe…

Help me…

Find me…

Brendon clutched the watch tight in his small fist, watching his mother as she paced the living room for a moment and finally went to bed.

The watch wanted him to find someone. Rose. He had to find Rose.

He watched his mother’s door for a long moment before getting his shoes and jacket on and sneaking out.

* * * * *

Rose ran as fast and as far as she could, blood pounding in her ears, her lungs straining for air.

She couldn’t do this. She couldn’t do this. She couldn’t do this.

She didn’t want to be… that. She didn’t want to be the woman in her dreams. She didn’t want to be a savior, she didn’t want to the weight of the world on her shoulders.

She just wanted to be Rose.

Was that too much to ask?

The sound of twisted voices calling her name sent terror through her, and she stumbled into a nearby – mercifully box-free – alleyway, collapsing against the wall, gasping for air.

She didn’t want to do this. She didn’t want to be this. She didn’t want to be some more than human being traveling the stars alone, doomed to lose everyone she cared about.

She didn’t want any of this.

Martha shuffled through the streets, feeling acutely paranoid as she looked around, desperate to find Rose before the Family did.

God that had been such a stupid move, showing Rose the TARDIS. The woman was clearly upset enough, and Martha had just made it worse. Stupid, stupid, stupid.

She didn’t dare call Rose’s name, for fear of alerting their enemies that the blonde was running around alone. She could only run and hope for the best, the sound of the Family calling for Rose echoing through the air.

Find me…find me…

Brendon clenched the watch as he wandered through the streets. The whispers were getting louder — did that mean he was closer to Rose? He hoped so. He wasn’t supposed to be out this late. His mum would be mad when she found out.
But he had to find Rose. The watch needed her.

Even if he didn’t quite understand why.

“Martha!”

Martha jumped when she heard her name and whirled to see Mrs. Mitchell running toward her, looking frantic. “Have you seen Brendon? Or Charles?” She asked, wringing her hands nervously. “They’re both gone and I don’t know what happened.”

Brendon was gone too? But that didn’t make any sense. She hadn’t seen him with the Family…

“I…I’m sorry, I haven’t seen them, no.” Mrs. Mitchell looked close to tears. “I can…help you look, if you want. I’m trying to find Rose too…”

The fact that Brendon was missing too worried her. What was going on around here?

Rose was still curled up in the alley, crying quietly. She just wanted to go home, to the small, safe little house she shared with Martha. She wanted to eat pizza and go to work and live a normal life. Was that too much to ask?

A noise at the alley entrance had her head snapping around, heart pounding in her chest. They’d found her. Oh god they’d found her. They were going to kill her…

But the figure standing there was alone and too small. It took Rose a moment to realize who it was.

“Brendon?” Her voice was thick. The boy shuffled forward uncertainly, watching Rose with wide eyes. “Brendon what are you doing out so late—?”

“Found you!”

Rose jerked, jumping up automatically as four more figures appeared at the beginning of the alley. Mr. Mitchell, Mrs. White, Tommy White, and Sally Abbott. She grabbed Brendon, tugging him to hide behind her. “What do you want?” She demanded, trying to sound authoritative, but her voice cracked halfway through. The four laughed scathingly.

“We want you, of course. What do you think we want?” Mr. Mitchell informed her.

“She’s gone and made herself completely human,” Mrs. White added, sniffing at the air. “And a stupid human at that. What a waste.”

“I am human.” The words were almost a whimper. “I don’t have anythin’ for you, I don’t understand any of this, please just go away…”

Protect me.

Brendon looked down at the watch. It wanted to be kept safe. It wanted Rose safe. He didn’t know how to do that though.

On a whim he opened the watch. A golden beam shot out and he aimed it at the group. Their screams echoed through the air as Rose’s memories hit them. Rose had no idea what was going on, but she knew to take advantage of the distraction. She grabbed Brendon and dragged him forward, shoving past the others. He closed the watch as they took off down the street.

Martha and Mrs. White stopped when they heard the screams, looking around. “What’s going on?” Mrs. White asked, clearly scared. Her husband and son were missing. She was terrified for them.
“What’s happening?”

Martha shook her head. “I don’t know.” *God I hope Rose is okay.* Around them lights flicked on, people looking out their windows, roused by the sound of the yelling. “Come on.” She hurried off in the direction of the yelling. Whatever it was, it had to be connected to Rose somehow.

She was half right. They’d just turned a corner when they ran into the Family. “Oh *hell,*” Martha hissed.

“Charles?” Mrs. Mitchell sounded bewildered. What in the world was her husband doing?

“Oh hullo sweetheart.” Martha winced a bit. His *voice*… “What are you doing out so late?.paused

“What am I — what are you doing?” Mrs. Mitchell demanded, eying her husband’s company. “Sally does your mother know you’re out this late?”

Sally giggled, sounding very much like a little girl. Until she spoke, at least. “You mean that lady in the house? She’s dead.”

Martha saw the color drain from Mrs. Mitchell’s face. “She’s…dead? What happened?”

“I killed her.” The little girl sounded quite proud of herself.

“Please,” Martha said before Mrs. Mitchell could answer. “She’s giving you a chance to live. Maybe it’s not forever but it’s *something.* Just take the chance and let us go.”

She’d known that wouldn’t work — the group just laughed, clearly amused by her words. But she had to try.

“Oi!”

They all turned to see Mr. Durham storming out of his apartment, looking quite annoyed. “What the hell are you lot doing, do you have any idea what time—”

Martha’s heart dropped when, in one swift movement, Mr. Mitchell produced a gun and shot Mr. Durham, vaporizing him.

“What?” Mrs. Mitchell gasped, stunned.

“Never mind it, *run!***” Martha grabbed her arm and dragged her away while the Family was distracted.

They ran for three streets — Mrs. Mitchell was gasping for breath by the time they finally arrived at the flower shop. She wasn’t used to running like this. “Inside, c’mion,” Martha said quietly, ushering Mrs. Mitchell inside. “Go in back.”

Mrs. Mitchell shuffled toward the back while Martha locked the door, and a moment she heard the woman yell, “Brendon!”

Martha hurried to the back, her heart soaring when she saw Mrs. Mitchell hugging Brendon and — curled in the corner at the back — Rose, her arms wrapped around her legs, chin resting on her knees.

“What are you doing?” Mrs. Mitchell demanded, pulling away to look at her son. “Why did you sneak out?”
Brendon hesitated for a moment before slipping a small hand into his jacket pocket…and producing a small silver watch.

“The watch!” Martha gasped, and Rose’s head snapped around to look at Brendon. “You have the watch. Oh thank god.”

“What is that?” Mrs. Mitchell asked, confused. “Where did you get that?”

“You took it from our house, didn’t you?” Martha asked gently, and Brendon nodded.

“Brendon!” Mrs. Mitchell was clearly shocked. Rose pushed herself out of her corner, walking cautiously toward Brendon to see the watch in his hand. “Why would you do that?”

Brendon tapped the watch, then touched a finger to his ear, tapping it twice. “Sign language,” Mrs. Mitchell explained to Martha’s slightly bewildered expression. “He took classes for it but he doesn’t like using it unless he has to.” To her son, “You…heard the watch? Sweetie, watches don’t talk.”

“Well that one might,” Martha muttered. Brendon nodded vigorously in Martha’s direction before stepping past his mother, holding it out to Rose. She flinched visibly at the sight of it.

“No—”

Her denial was cut off by an explosion that rocked the entire store. “What the hell?!” Martha ran to the window, eyes wide when she smoke furling up into the air.

“What was it?” Mrs. Mitchell had her arms back protectively around her son. “What’s going on?”

Martha swallowed hard as she walked back to the small group. “They’re bombing us.” This was getting out of hand. They needed Rose now. The real Rose. “Rose, take the watch.”

“No.” Rose’s voice was strangled.

“You have to.”

“Why? Why should I?”

“Because we need her! The woman you see in your dreams, that’s who we need right now!”

“Well maybe she doesn’t wanna come back!” Rose cried, her voice cracking. “Maybe she’s tired of her life, maybe she’s tired of feeling alone, maybe she’s tired of living in fear of the day the only person she has left will leave her. Maybe she just wants to be normal! So who the hell are you to take that away?”

Martha’s heart dropped a bit. She’d never heard Rose express any actual displeasure with her life… But that didn’t mean much, did it?

“We…We need her, though. This was never supposed to be permanent. She knew that.”

“So what’re you, then? My babysitter?” Rose’s voice was torn between hurt and bitter, tears welling in her eyes. “Put here to watch me until it’s time to kill me? I thought you were my friend.”

Oh and if that didn’t sting. “Rose…”

The tears finally spilled over. “I don’t want to be her,” Rose whispered, looking younger than Martha had ever seen her. Martha swallowed hard, stepping forward uncertainly, and when Rose
didn’t cringe or back away she wrapped the blonde in a tight hug. Rose all but clung back as she pressed her face into Martha’s shoulder and cried. Mrs. Mitchell watched sadly, pulling Brendon close to her again as another explosion went off outside.

After a few minutes Rose pulled back, wiping her eyes, and Brendon broke away from his mother to hold the watch out to Rose again. She stared at it for a long moment. “I can’t,” Rose whispered finally. “I can’t.”

Martha closed her eyes, berating herself. She’d messed up. She’d let Rose get too comfortable with this life. Of course she wouldn’t want to go back to the way it was before. Of course she wouldn’t want that life again, that pain, that responsibility, that loneliness. Who would?

Brendon shuffled closer to Rose, and before she could stop him or react he’d grabbed her hand and pushed the watch into it. Rose’s fingers curled around automatically as he pulled away.

The second it touched her skin, the whispers started — nothing entirely understandable, more like a wind, a gentle breeze in her ear.

Brendon waved his hands, trying to get attention, and the adults turned to look at him. He pointed at the watch then his ear, making a confused face. “I think he wants to know why he can hear the watch,” Martha guessed, and Brendon nodded.

“Oh, low level telepathic field. You were born with it,” Rose said as she stared at the watch, seemingly without thinking. “Just an extra synaptic engram causing—” Her breath caught in her throat, eyes wide as she looked over at Martha. “Was that…?”

“That’s her!” Martha said, a bit too excitedly, and Rose’s entire expression fell. Damn it. “Rose?” Martha questioned gently. Rose shook her head, a slow movement from side to side, as if she wasn’t even aware it was happening.

“I…” Her breathing sped up a bit, a clear sign she was scared. “I can’t…”

Martha rested her hand over the watch as well, squeezing Rose’s hand gently. “All you see is the bad,” she said quietly, “because that’s all Rose ever focuses on. She doesn’t see how wonderful she is. She doesn’t see all the good she does. But I do. She helps people. She saves lives. And she never asks for anything in return, she never wants any credit for anything she’s done. She just wants to help. And that is incredible.”

Another explosion shook the shop, and a small whimper slipped off Rose’s lips as she squeezed her eyes shut. “It’s a good life,” she whispered after a moment, opening her eyes to look at Martha again. “I’m a good person. Aren’t I?”

Oh did that hurt. “You’re the best person I’ve ever met, Rose,” Martha said quite honestly. “Both versions of you.”

Mrs. Mitchell carefully ushered Brendon out front, giving the women some space. Rose wiped her eyes as she fingered the latch on the watch. “There’s this man,” she said finally, and Martha blinked. “He calls himself the Doctor. Sometimes he’s there…a lot of the time he’s not. But I think she…I…loved him.”

“She did.” Martha had never been more sure of anything than she was of that fact. “You did.”

“He’s gone, though. Her family is gone. She doesn’t have anybody left.”

“She’s got me,” Martha said at once. Rose’s eyes dropped to the watch.
“She’s afraid you’ll leave her.”

“Never gonna happen.”

Rose nodded slowly. And after a moment she opened the watch.

Martha stepped back as golden light flowed out of the watch, wrapping around Rose; the woman gasped, eyes wide, and as the light died away her knees buckled.

“Whoa!” Martha dove, grabbing Rose before she hit the ground. Rose’s breathing was labored as if she’d run a dozen miles.

“You’re okay,” Martha murmured as Rose gripped her arms tight, trying to steady herself. “Alright?” She asked after a moment, and Rose nodded, swallowing hard.

“Yeah.” Her voice was flat. She looked down at the watch in her hand and closed it after a moment, putting it in her pocket. And she walked out of the room, heading for the front door.

“Wait, where are you going?” Martha asked as she hurried after Rose. She didn’t like that look on the blonde’s face.

“I’m going to end this.”

Chapter End Notes

Please review...?
Rose finally puts and end to the Family's terror.

“This isn’t working,” Mother of Mine complained as they bombed the city.

“It will,” Son of Mine assured her. “We’ll blast them into dust, then fuse the dust into glass, then shatter them all over again.”

They *would* flush Rose out of hiding. One way or the other.

The door buzzed open then, and they turned to see their pray stumbling up the ramp. “Wait, please —” Rose started to beg, but an explosion rocked the ship and she stumbled into a column, hitting a few switches. “Please,” she said again when she’d righted herself. “Those are innocent people out there, they don’t deserve this. I’ll give you whatever you want, just stop. That’s all I’m askin’.”

“Say please,” Son of Mine ordered with a smirk. Rose swallowed hard, nodding.

“Please.”

Mother of Mine threw a switch, and finally the explosions outside stopped. “Wait a minute.” She sniffed, making a face. “Still human,” she reported after a moment.

“I don’t understand any of this,” Rose said — almost whimpered. “I don’t know what’s going on, I don’t care about…whoever you’re lookin’ for, I don’t care about your family. You want her? You can have her. Just leave us in peace, please.”

She stumbled along as she talked, hitting a few more switches. “She didn’t just make herself human,” Mother of Mine mocked. “She made herself an idiot!”

“Same thing, isn’t it?”

“I have her!” Rose burst out, producing the watch from her pocket. “She’s nothin’ but trouble, really. Please, just take her away.”

She held out the watch, and Son of Mine snatched it from her before grabbing her by the collar of her shirt. “Don’t think this will save you,” he hissed, shoving her back, and she fell into another wall, hitting more switches.

“Family of Mine,” Son of Mine announced, turning back to his family. “Now we shall have eternal life.”

He opened the watch, they all sniffed deeply…and nothing happened.

“It’s empty!”
“Is it?” Rose asked, peeking around. “Where’d it go?”

“You tell me,” Son of Mine snarled, throwing the watch back at Rose. She picked herself up straight, catching the watch with an almost dead expression.

“Apparently there’s one thing that never occurred to you when you were hunting me all across the bloody universe. And that’s that I was always human. I was born human, raised human. It was certainly easy enough to disguise my scent to fool you when the thing that made me different wasn’t that strong to begin with. But it has got to be said, I don’t like the looks of that hydroconometer. It seems to be indicating you’ve got energy feedback all the way through the retrostabilisers feeding back into the primary heat converters. Ooooh.” She stopped, talking a breath. “Because if there’s one thing you shouldn’t have done, you shouldn’t have let me press all those buttons. But, in fairness, I will give you one word of advice.” She smirked a bit, quite proud of herself. “Run.”

And with that she turned and ran out of the ship, the Family right on her tail. They’d barely cleared it when the ship exploded right behind them, and they all hit the ground.

The Family picked themselves up, shaking, and saw Rose standing over them. She was so small — barely over five feet tall, not exactly intimidating.

“Tell me about the people you’re possessing,” She asked flatly. The dark look on her face made her terrifying.

* * * * *

Martha was still sitting in the flower shop with Mrs. Mitchell and Brendon as the sun rose over the smoking city. Rose had disappeared hours earlier, taking the TARDIS with her. Martha knew Rose wouldn’t leave her here, of course…

But she did hope she’d return soon.

Finally the sound of the TARDIS reached her ears and she breathed a sigh of relief as she ran out into the alley to see the blue box appearing.

“Oh my god,” Mrs. Mitchell breathed behind her as Brendon looked on with wide eyes. Rose stepped out a moment later, and Martha’s heart dropped at the look on the woman’s face.

“The Family…?”

“They’re gone,” Rose said flatly. Martha pressed her lips thin for a moment.

“What about the bodies they took? The people?”

Rose shook her head. “They died the moment they were possessed.”

Mrs. Mitchell gave a small sob, and Martha closed her eyes. “I’m so sorry,” Rose said quietly. “For all of this.”

Unsurprisingly, the words didn’t help. “This is all your fault!” Mrs. Mitchell yelled, and Rose winced a bit. “If you’d never come here this wouldn’t have happened!”

“She didn’t do anything—” Martha started to say, but Rose cut her off.

“You’re right. And I’m sorry for all the pain I’ve cause you. I really, truly am.”

She slipped the watch an envelope out of her jacket pocket, kneeling down in front of Brendon. “It
won’t talk to you anymore, promise,” she assured the boy as she handed the envelope and the watch to him. “It’ll always be on time though.”

Brendon took the items, nodding, and Rose pushed herself up, ignoring the glare Mrs. Mitchell gave her. That hurt. She tried not to let it get to her though.

“Let’s go Martha.”

Martha followed her back into the TARDIS, watching as she walked up to the console, sending them back into orbit. “What was in the envelope?” She asked after a minute.

“The deed for the house, already transferred into Mrs. Mitchell’s name. It’s fully furnished, we don’t need it anymore, and they need a place to live.”

Martha nodded. “That was nice of you.”

“I killed her husband. It was the least I could do.”

“You didn’t—”

“Why don’t you get some sleep,” Rose said suddenly, catching Martha off guard. “You must be exhausted. You’ve been up all night.”

Martha wanted to protest, but she really was tired. “Don’t go off on any adventures without me,” she said in a slightly teasing tone before heading off to the hall.

“Martha.” She stopped to look back at Rose. “Thank you. For everything.”

Martha smiled gently. “Of course.”

Rose shuffled forward, wrapping Martha in a hug that the woman happily returned. “About all that stuff I said…”

“You weren’t yourself,” Martha assured her, but she wasn’t entirely sure. She knew Rose wouldn’t talk about it now, however, and she was so tired. So she headed off to bed, and Rose went back to the console, brushing a hand against it.

“I missed you old girl,” she said quiet, and the TARDIS hummed in response. Every single part of her was screaming to just be allowed to sleep as well, but she couldn’t stomach the thought of closing her eyes right then.

So instead she grabbed the Doctor’s coat off the coral stack and dropped onto the jump seat, curling up in it. Her heart still dropped when she remembered that the coat didn’t smell like him anymore, but right then she just needed the reminder, the comfort of feeling like he was close. Like it was his arms around her, not just his coat.

“Made a right mess of things this time didn’t I?” She whispered into the fabric. “Wasn’t just my life I messed up either. I destroyed that entire town.”

She’d been trying so hard… the Doctor would have given the Family a chance too, she knew he would, because that’s just who he was. And she’d wanted to do that as well.

But she’d buggered it all up, of course.

* * * * *
“Ow!” The Doctor whined as the doctor dabbed at the scrape on his forehead. “It’s fine, I’m fine, knock it off—”

“Doctor Smith you need to hold still—”

“No, I don’t, it’s just a scrape—”

Mickey stood in the background, watching with quiet amusement. The Doctor didn’t care much for Torchwood’s doctors, and on the rare occasions he had to be patched up he was incredibly difficult about it and fussed to no end.

It was funny, honestly.

“That’s what you get for gettin’ yourself, hurt isn’t it?” Mickey asked as they left.

“It’s not like I did it on purpose,” the Doctor griped, pouting a bit. He was such a child sometimes.

“If you would just wait for us to build another trigger someone could go with you—”

“I’m not wasting time, Mickey. When you lot manage to build a new one then someone can come with me, but that’s gonna take time that we don’t have.”

The stars were still going out. They didn’t have time to mess around.

The drive back to the Tyler mansion was silent, something the Doctor was grateful for.

“What the hell happened?!”

Because home itself was anything but quiet. Pete, of course, had already told Jackie that the Doctor had come back injured, and she was beside herself with worry. “Look at you, you’re a mess,” Jackie moaned as she grabbed the Doctor’s face, turning his head left and right, examining the scrape.

“It’s a little cut Jackie, hardly a mess…”

Jackie wasn’t exactly reassured, however. She continued to fuss, dragging him off to the kitchen as she fussed to shove some food down his throat.

It had been two months since the stars had started going out. Somehow, someway, the dimension cannon had finally started working, and the Doctor had been jumping ever since, sometimes two to three times a day. So far he had been unsuccessful, which was discouraging. And sometimes he got hurt.

But it would be worth it if it brought him back to Rose.

“I’m okay Jackie, really, there was just this cliff—”

“You fell off a cliff?!”

“No, that’s not what I said—”

“You mentioned a cliff!”

The Doctor sighed. She really was impossible sometimes.

“I’m really okay. It’ll be healed up by morning, honestly. Just a good night’s sleep is all I need.”
He knew that would get Jackie — she was constantly bemoaning how little sleep he seemed to get.

“Right, of course! You go on then, go get some sleep. And if you need anythin’ just holler.”

The Doctor took this as a chance to escape before Jackie could change her mind; he hurried upstairs to his suite, quite relieved for a few minutes alone. He had been surrounded by people ever since he’d gotten back from the jump.

He just wanted a chance to breathe.

He kicked his Conversees off, collapsing onto the bed with a deep sigh. He *was* tired — he hadn’t lied about that. He just didn’t intend to sleep quite yet.

After a moment he rolled onto his back, staring at the ceiling. Two years. He had been trapped in this god forsaken world for two years.

He had been living the slow life for *two years*.

The sound of the door budging open drew his attention, and he looked around as a small head poked itself. “Doctah?”

The Time Lord smiled as he pushed himself up and Tony waddled into the room with Pete right behind him.

“Sorry, he really wanted to see you.”

“S’fine.” Anything was better than Jackie. The Doctor grabbed Tony, scooping the tiny blonde up and settling him in his lap. Tony’s lips puckered up as he reached out and brushed his fingers against the bandage on the Doctor’s forehead.

“Hurt.” He sounded unhappy about that.

“A little bit. Wanna kiss it better?”

Tony nodded eagerly and got up on his knees, pressing a sloppy kiss to the Doctor’s forehead.

“Better?”

“Much better, Tony. Thank you.”

Tony grinned brightly, clearly proud of himself for his magical healing powers. The Doctor smiled, brushing the hair out of Tony’s eyes.

“Think your mother would let me give you a haircut?”

It was a good life, sometimes. Not exactly the most thrilling life, but Tony Tyler made it interesting (and okay so did his parents).

But the Doctor knew it wasn’t *his* life to live. It was Rose’s.

And it wasn’t fair that he was stealing it.

* * * * *

Martha wasn’t sure how long she’d slept for, but she felt wonderful when she finally woke up. She took a nice long shower to wake up, even taking the time to dry her hair. She really hoped Rose had
slept too.

“Mornin’ Martha!”

…Clearly not. The console room was in shambles and Rose was underneath the gratings. She popped up with a grin when she heard Martha walk in.

“What are you doing?” Martha asked in disbelief, looking around.

“Well the TARDIS is a bit rusty from sittin’ around in that old alley for so long, I’m just givin’ her a bit of love. Almost done though, so good timing. Should be good to go in ten minutes. Where are you in the mood for? Somewhere not Earth I’m guessin’, I don’t know about you but I’ve had enough of Earth to last me a good long while — oooooooh, how about the largest mall in the universe? The entire planet is one big mall. It’s brilliant!”

She said all this very fast, sounding like someone who had had too much espresso. It too Martha a moment to catch up.

“Rose have you slept?”

The blonde made a derivative noise at that. “Sleep? Who needs sleep? Rarin’ to go, me. Does the mall not interest you? That’s perfectly fine. Where do you wanna go?”

“Rose, slow down,” Martha said. The woman had somehow managed to exhaust her already.

“Oh, you probably wanna eat first huh? Ooooooooh, how about Barcelona? The Doctor took me there once, great food. And noseless dogs but that doesn’t have anythin’ to do with breakfast. They’re just funny.”

“Rose I don’t care about breakfast!” Martha didn’t mean to sound so frustrated but…Jesus, were they really doing this already?

“What do you want, then?” As Rose spoke she hopped out from under the grating, starting to clean up from…whatever she’d been doing. “Lunch? I can land at lunch time.”

“You’re doing this on purpose, aren’t you?” Martha asked impatiently.

“Actually I’m doin’ this because I’m hungry but I was tryin’ to be polite and wait for you. Ooooooooh, how about chips? Haven’t had chips since…blimey since I met you. Yeah, definitely chips. Mind if we swing by London real quick? I know I said no Earth but I promise we can go somewhere really alien. Barcelona fits that bill. Did I mention the planet not the city?”

“Rose stop it!”

Rose blinked in surprise, tilting her head a bit. “What?”

Martha shook her head, sighing. “Just…who do you think you’re talking to, Rose? Do you really think at this point I can’t tell when you’re faking it to avoid talking?”

“What do I have to avoid talking about?”

God sometimes she made Martha want to hit her head against something heavy. “How about what happened in Framlingham?”

“Which part, Martha?” At that Rose dropped the facade completely. “The part where my actions caused the deaths of multiple people and destroyed families? Or how about the part where human me
turned into a sniveling mess because she couldn’t handle the thought of being responsible for somethin’ more than flowers? Which do you want to talk about first?”

“All of it—!”

She was cut off by the TARDIS giving an almighty jerk. “Whoa!” Rose grabbed the console, trying to pull them back under control. But the ship had already decided they were going somewhere, and there was no way to stop her now.

Martha grabbed a railing, trying to ride it out. They landed a moment later with an almighty thump that sent them both crashing to the ground. “Ow,” Rose groaned, picking herself up. “What was that all about?” The TARDIS just hummed in return. Rose rubbed the back of her head as she walked to the door, Martha right behind her.

And she froze when she saw what was waiting on the other side.

“Framlingham.” Martha just sounded confused. “What are we doing here?”

“Doesn’t matter, we’re not stayin’,” Rose said firmly, backing up, but Martha stopped her.

“No. The TARDIS brought us here for a reason.”

“I don’t care—”

The ship gave a rather annoyed hum, however, the lights flashing overhead. She had no intentions of moving until Rose walked out there. “Fine,” the blonde huffed, finally allowing Martha to nudge her outside.

The small town was no longer in ruins, Rose observed as they walked out of the alley they’d landed in, so it had been a while, apparently. They were standing next to what had been the flower shop they’d both worked in, but it was a comic books store now. So long enough that the flower shop had closed and something new had taken its place.

“So why are we here?” Martha asked curiously as she looked around. The sound of a bell ringing over a door caught Rose’s attention, and she turned to see a brown-haired teenage boy walking out of the store they were standing next to. He stopped, eyes wide, when he saw the women.

“Martha? Rose?”

It took them a minute to place him. “Brendon?” They said at the same time in disbelief, and his lips broke into a grin.

“I don’t believe it!”

He ran over, throwing his arms around Martha first, then Rose. They exchanged shocked looks over the boy’s shoulder. Apparently it had been quite a few years. “I can’t believe you’re here,” he said happily as he pulled back from Rose.

“How old are you?” Rose asked stupidly, and Brendon grinned.

“Just turned fifteen yesterday.”

“Oh. Well. Happy birthday.”

“It’s so good to see you Brendon,” Martha said warmly to make up for Rose’s stunned stupidity. “How’re you doing? How’s your mum?”
“I’m good. She’s good. We’re still in your house. You wanna come over?”

“I don’t think your mum wants to see us much,” Rose said. Brendon shrugged.

“I don’t think she’d mind. She’s not home anyways though she’s at the store. C’mon!”

And with that he started down the street. Martha and Rose exchanged another look before following.

It was strange, walking through this town again. Granted it hadn’t been five years for the women, but they still felt as if they had been away for a long time. “I’m glad you guys took the house,” Rose said quietly as they approached it.

“Mum was really happy when she realized you’d given it to us,” Brendon informed Rose. “It’s a great little house.”

Brendon unlocked the door, letting them in — and they were instantly greeted by a grey tabby cat.

“Jack!” Rose exclaimed in excitement, scooping the cat up.

“Mum took them in. Mickey died last year — he had cancer.” Rose frowned at that. “Pretty sure Jack’s gonna live forever though. The vet said he’s almost twenty.”

“Blimey, seriously?” Rose looked down at the cat in surprise — the animal responded by head-butting Rose. “Good old cat.”

She set Jack down and he ran off into the house. “See, they get to keep the cats in the house,” Rose told Martha with a small smirk. Martha just rolled her eyes.

The house was considerably more lived in now than it had been when Martha and Rose had lived here. Shoes piled in a corner, jackets tossed over chairs, pictures lining the wall. Rose’s stomach dropped when she saw a family portrait with Mr. Mitchell. She closed her eyes for a long moment, trying not to cry.

“I’m so sorry,” she said finally, refocusing on Brendon. His eyes flitted to the pictures on the wall.


“Sure as hell doesn’t sound alright,” Rose muttered. Brendon smiled a bit.

“He’s gone. It sucks, but… we had to move on. And Mum’s doing a lot better. She started dating again last year. It was rough at first, but… we’re okay now.”

This, Martha realized, was why the TARDIS had brought them here. Why she’d literally dropped them within feet of Brendon. Because if Rose didn’t see that the Mitchells were okay, she’d beat herself forever over what had happened to Charles Mitchell.

She needed to know that his wife and son were going to be alright.

They stayed with Brendon for a bit longer. He gave them a tour of the house (Jack following them the entire time), told them about how they’d rebuilt the town after the attack and how everyone was doing now. It was a resilient little town, Rose thought as they walked along. And it was nice seeing Brendon, out of his shell and talking away a mile a minute with no sign that he’d been mute for the first ten years of his life.

It was nice to see him happy.

They didn’t stay to see Mrs. Mitchell — as much as Brendon said she’d forgiven Rose, Rose wasn’t
sure she could face the older woman. So Brendon walked them back to the TARDIS, staring at the blue box in wonder when he saw it. “Mum always told me not to talk about it,” he said after a minute. “I thought maybe I just imagined it…”

“Nope, she’s real,” Rose said with a small smile, touching a hand to the wooden door.

“It’s incredible.”

Martha hugged the teen, then Rose. He stepped back, watching the women walk inside, grinning as he watched the box disappear.

Martha watched Rose closely. The blonde was significantly more subdued than she had been before she’d landed.

“They’re okay, Rose.” She nodded silently. “…Are you?”

There was a beat of silence…and Rose shook her head. Martha didn’t hesitate to cross the console room and wrap Rose in a tight hug.

Chapter End Notes

Please review...?
Utopia Part One

Chapter Summary

Rose and Martha find an old friend at the end of the world.

Chapter Notes

You may have noticed I skipped Blink. During the writing process, I decided I'd just written six chapters of domestic life and didn't particularly feel like doing another six, so Blink was taken out.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Cardiff,” Rose said as they landed, and Martha made a face.

“So much for somewhere exotic and not Earth,” she teased, and Rose grinned.

“Just a pit stop. Cardiff is built on a rift in time space that bleeds energy. Just gotta stop here for a bit, let the engines soak up the energy. It’s like fuel. Shouldn’t take too long.”

“Wait a minute,” Martha said as she watched Rose walk around the console. “They had an earthquake in Cardiff a couple years ago. Was that you?”

Rose smiled fondly. “Me and the Doctor, yeah. And Mickey and Jack.”

“Not the cats, I’m guessing.”

That got Martha a laugh. “No, the people they were named after. We had a bit of trouble with the Slitheen.”

“The what?”

“They’re — oh hang on, looks like we’re good to go.” Rose was so wrapped up in what she was doing, she didn’t see the figure on the scanner running ever closer. “Time to go, then.”

She threw the switch to send them back into orbit — and everything went sideways with a bang.

“Whoa!” Martha yelled as the TARDIS bucked, nearly sending her crashing to the floor. Panic gripped tight at Rose, nearly strangling her. No no no get off get off of me get off no no no!

Martha watched, concerned, as the color drained out of Rose’s face. When the TARDIS jerked again Rose lost her grip, crashing backwards.

“Rose!”

It was hard to get over to the blonde but Martha managed, helping her sit up. “What is it? What’s going on?”
Rose was trembling, leaning on Martha. “Somethin’s wrong. She’s scared. She wants to…to get away…”

They landed with a thud that had them both falling over again. Rose was still shaking as she pushed herself up, trying to breathe evenly.

“What’s out there?” Martha asked uncertainly as she sat up as well.

“I don’t know.”

“You know just once you could lie and make me feel better.”

Rose stood on shaking legs, looking around. The panic was starting to wear off — whatever the TARDIS had been trying to get away from, she’d succeeded.

“Come on.”

They walked to the door uncertainly, Rose pushing it open. It looked as if they’d landed in a quarry.

“Is this Earth?” Martha asked, peeking around Rose as they walked out.

“I don’t think so—”

“Oh my god!” Martha yelped, catching sight of a body near the TARDIS. Rose’s heart dropped when she saw who it was.

Jack.

Martha knelt beside his body, examining him. “Can’t get a pulse. Hold on. You’ve got that medical kit thing.”

She ran back in, and Rose knelt uncertainly beside Jack. “What’re you doin’ here?” She whispered, resting a hand against his arm.

No no no no get back get away don’t touch no—!

Rose jerked back in surprise as the panic flared to life again, robbing the air from her lungs. “Here we go,” Martha said as she returned. “Are you alright Rose? Scoot back. It’s a bit odd, though. Did we land in the forties? That coat is very World War Two.”

Rose took a deep breath, gasping in enough air to say, “I think he came with us.”

“What, you mean from Earth?” Martha asked in disbelief. “How?”

“I think…I think he was clingin’ to the TARDIS all the way through the vortex.” That would explain the ship’s panic. Sort of. Why had she reacted in such a way to Jack?

Martha looked back at the man, swallowing hard. “There’s nothing. I think he’s dead.”

Wrong wrong wrong. The word rang in the back of Rose’s head. Jack gasped suddenly, eyes flying open as he grabbed Martha. She screamed, and Rose’s head twinged painfully.

Wrong.

“Oh so much for me,” Martha was saying with a laugh. “It’s alright. Just breathe deep. I’ve got you.”

Jack grinned at Martha. “Captain Jack Harkness,” he introduced himself, and Rose would’ve rolled
her eyes if she hadn’t been so stunned. “And who are you?”

“Martha Jones,” Martha said, a bit stunned. Jack grinned.

“Nice to meet you, Martha Jones.”

Martha had to smile — okay he was attractive. He was really attractive. She watched as Jack’s eyes swiveled to look past her.

“Rose?”

Well that was unexpected. She watched as Jack let out a happy yell and threw himself at Rose, wrapping her in a tight hug. Rose, for her part, had to fight down another wave of panic as the TARDIS lashed out against Jack — why? She didn’t understand. But she wasn’t about to throw Jack off either.

“You two know each other?” Martha asked, raising an eyebrow as she watched Rose return the hug uncertainly. Suddenly the pieces clicked into place. “Jack. You’re the one she named the cat after!”

Jack pulled back to give Rose an amused look. “You named a cat after me?”

“Long story.”

Jack pushed himself up, helping Rose stand as well. “It’s good to see you,” he said warmly, and for a moment Rose could ignore the current of panic running through her mind. It was Jack. How could she be anything but happy? “You’re dead, you know.”

“Yeah well so were you for five minutes,” Rose pointed out, and he chuckled.

“True enough. So come on then, where’s the Doctor? I know he’s not sending you to do his dirty work for him.”

Martha watched as Rose’s face fell at the mention of the Doctor. Jack wasn’t completely oblivious, of course. “Rose?”

“He’s ah…he’s not here.” Rose’s voice was low. Jack raised an eyebrow.

“What do you mean not here?”

But Rose shook her head. “Come on, that’s not important right now. Tell me about you. How’d you end up in twenty-first century Cardiff? You came with us from there, didn’t you?”

Oh that was a tactic Jack recognized far too well. Rose was deflecting. Didn’t take a genius to figure out who she’d learned that from.

They started walking as Jack told his story. “…So there I was, stranded in the year two hundred one hundred, ankle deep in Dalek dust, and there’s the TARDIS taking off without me. What was that all about anyways?”

“I’m not sure,” Rose admitted, making a face. “I was unconscious.”

“Wait, you were there? He said he sent you home.”

“Yeah well…” Rose shrugged. “So you got to Cardiff.”

“Yeah. Lucky I had this.” He showed off his vortex manipulator before explaining to Martha. “I
used to be a Time Agent. It’s called a vortex manipulator. Let’s me travel through time and space.”

“Oh it’s like a mini TARDIS,” Martha said, and Rose made an indignant noise.

“Oh, don’t go comparing the TARDIS to that thing.”

Jack gave her an amused smile as she continued. “So I bounced. I thought twenty-first century, the best place to find the Doctor, except that I got it a little wrong. Arrived in eighteen-sixty-nine, this thing burnt out, so it was useless.”

“See? No comparison.”

“Right, Rose, because you’ve never landed in the wrong time period,” Martha teased. Jack raised an eyebrow at that.

“Rose are you piloting the TARDIS?” He should’ve known better than to expect an answer. “Right. Well. I had to live through the entire twentieth century waiting for a version of the Doctor that would coincide with me.”

“But that makes you more than one hundred years old,” Martha said in disbelief. Jack smirked.

“And looking good, don’t you think? So I went to the time rift, based myself there because I knew eventually the Doctor would come back to refuel. And finally I see the TARDIS and…well, here we are.”

“But why did the Doctor leave you behind?” Rose had told her so many stories about the Doctor — he had never seemed like someone who would abandon his friends.

“No idea. I was hoping he’d be able to explain that.” Jack shot Rose a look. “Where’d you say he was?”

“Oh…just busy.”

“And he left the TARDIS with you.”

“Yup.” Rose’s lips popped on the p. Yeah Jack didn’t believe that for a minute. He was distracted, however, when they reached the edge of a cliff and found themselves standing over a city of some kind. A crumbling city. “Oh blimey…”

“Is that a city?” Martha asked quietly.

“I don’t know,” Rose said quietly. “But it’s nothing now.”

“What killed it?”

“Time.” The TARDIS fed Rose the answer. “Just time.” She could almost see it. No — she could see it. In the same way the Doctor had talked about seeing time lines. It was…disorienting. “We’re at the end of the universe.”

Martha stepped forward, leaning into to examine Rose. She looked disoriented, her eyes glowing the faintest gold.

“Rose?”

Jack looked between the two of them, raising an eyebrow. After a moment Rose shook her head, blinking hard to refocus. The golden glow faded away. “Everythin’ s dyin’ now. All the great
“They must have an atmospheric shell,” Jack commented, filing this little incident away for later consideration. “We should be frozen to death.”

“Yeah,” Rose commented distantly, though something in the back of her head was saying that wasn’t entirely right. She and Martha maybe should have been dead. But Jack?

“What about the people?” Martha asked curiously. “Does no one survive?”

Rose shrugged a bit. “I suppose we have to hope life will find a way.”

Jack caught sight of movement down below. “Well, he’s not doing too bad.”

Rose and Martha looked where he was looking, eyes widening when they saw the man running away a pursuing group.

“Is it me,” Rose said slowly, “or does that look like a hunt? Come on!”

They took off into the city to help the man. “Oh, I’ve missed this,” Jack said with a laugh as they caught up with him, and he caught the other man, holding him steady. “I’ve got you.”

“They’re coming!” The man yelled, panicked. “They’re coming!”

Upon closer examination, Rose saw that the group chasing the man was less human than she’d originally thought. Their features were more animalistic than human. She turned to see Jack pointing a gun at them.

“Jack, don’t!”

After a moment of hesitation, Jack fired the gun into the air instead, the noise confusing the pack, and they froze in their tracks. “What the hell are they?” Martha demanded, the panic clear in her voice.

“There’s more of them,” the man informed them. “We’ve got to keep going.”

“I’ve got a ship nearby,” Rose said. “It’s safe. It’s not far, it’s over there.” She turned to point — only to see more members of the pack appear on the cliff. “Eh…maybe not.”

“We’re close to the silo,” the man said. “If we get to the silo, then we’re safe.”

“Silo?” Rose asked her companions.

“Silo,” Jack agreed.

“Silo for me,” Martha added with a vigorous nod. And they took off running.

They ran for a few minutes before the silo gates came into view. “It’s the Futurekind!” The man they’d rescued yelled. “Open the gate!”

A guard was at the other side of the gate in a flash, shoving a gun in their faces. “Show me your teeth!” He shouted. “Show me your teeth! Show me your teeth!”

“Show him your teeth!” The man yelled at them, and they showed their teeth quickly.

“Human! Let them in! Let them in!” The gates opened, and they ran in quickly. “Close! Close!
The guard shot his gun at the ground in front of the pack. “Humans,” they heard one of them, probably the leader from the looks of it, hissed, “Humani. Make feast.”

“Go back to where you came from,” the guard snarled, brandishing his gun. “I said go back. Back!”

“Oh sure he gets to use his gun,” Jack muttered.

“Please don’t start Jack.”

“Kind watch you,” the leader said. “Kind hungry.”

But they were backing away. Rose took a deep breath, running a hand through her hair. “Thanks for that.”

The guard nodded. “Right. Let’s get you inside.”

The man grabbed the guard’s arm. “My name is Padra Toc Shafe Cane. Tell me. Just tell me, can you take me to Utopia.”

The guard nodded. “Oh yes, sir. Yes, I can.”

They walked inside and were greeted by a man who was obviously acting as the leader. “Atillo,” he introduced himself. “And you are?”


“I’m sorry,” Padra interrupted. “But my family were heading for the silo. Did they get here? My mother is Kistane Shafe Cane. My brother’s name is Beltone.”

“The computers are down but you can check the paperwork. Creet!” A little boy with a clipboard appeared. “Passenger needs help.”

Padra left with Creed, and Rose turned to Atillo. “I’m sorry, but my ship is still out there. It looks like a box, a big blue box. I really need a back, is there any way you can help?

“A big blue box?” Atillo confirmed.

“Big, tall, wooden. Says Police.”

The man nodded. “We’re driving out for the last water collection. I’ll see what I can do.”

Rose beamed. “Thank you.”

Padra and Creet reappeared. “Come on,” Creet ordered.

“Sorry,” Martha interrupted, looking at the boy, “but how old are you?”

“Old enough to work,” he said proudly. “This way.”

They started down the hallway, Creet and Padra trying to find Padra’s family. “It’s like a refugee camp,” Martha commented as they walked.

“I think it’s brilliant,” Rose said, a bit proudly. “I saw the end of the Earth, you know. Mind nobody had actually lived there in hundreds of years, humans had evolved and moved off world, but still. Always survivin’, s’what we do best isn’t it?”

“Is there a Kistane Shafe Cane?”

A woman stood up as Creet called the name again. “That’s me.”

“Mother?” Padra beamed. They watched as the family reunited, hugging and crying.

“It’s not all bad news,” Martha said with a small smile. Rose had wandered over to a door, examining it carefully. A young man stood up, and Jack turned to him, shaking his hand.

“Captain Jack Harkness. And who are you?”

“Jack, gimme a hand here,” Rose called. “It’s half deadlocked, I need you to overwrite the code.”

Jack raised an eyebrow as he walked over. “What’re we doing?”

“Findin’ out where we are.”

Martha watched as Jack and Rose worked together to get the door open. She was used to Rose doing strange things that didn’t always make sense or seemed too far ahead of her knowledge. For Jack, however, this was new.

Rose was acting like the Doctor.

The door slid open to open space — and Rose nearly fell in. “Whoa!” Jack grabbed her quickly, pulling her back, his arm around her waist. “Gotcha.”

Rose looked back at him, smiling. “Thanks.”

“We really gotta stop meeting like this.”

Martha peeked around them, looking up. “Now that is what I call a rocket.”

Rose and Jack looked up, taking the rocket in. “They’re not refugees,” Rose said after a moment. “They’re passengers.”

“He said they’re going to Utopia,” Martha pointed out. Rose made a face.

“The perfect place. But that doesn’t make any sense if the universe is falling apart. Where’s Utopia?”

“Those engines are crude at best,” Jack added, examining the rocket. “Definitely not rocket science. It’s hot, though.”

They backed out, closing the door and continuing down the hall. “What about the TARDIS? What does she say?” Martha asked Rose curiously as they walked. Jack shot Rose a look that she ignored.

“I don’t even think she knows what’s goin’ on. This is the end of time. Doubt even the Time Lords ever came here.”

“Since when do you talk to the TARDIS?” Jack asked. Rose resolutely ignored him, catching sight of a light at the end of the hall.

“Wonder what’s down there.”
She moved ahead, much to Jack’s frustration. She was hiding stuff, and he didn’t like it.

They came out into what seemed like a large lab. There was an old man there with a blue bug lady, working hard. The woman stopped when she saw the trio. “Chan - welcome - tho,” she greeted them, and the man stopped to look at them.

“Who are you?”

“Sorry, didn’t mean to intrude,” Rose said quickly. “We’re ah…we’re new. I’m Rose. This is Martha. That’s—”

“Captain Jack Harkness,” Jack said quickly, introducing himself mostly to the blue woman. “And who are you?”

“Chan — Chantho — tho,” she introduced herself, voice pleased. Rose just rolled her eyes, looking around.

“You’re tryin’ to power the rocket from here,” she guessed, and the old man looked at her in surprise.

“Do you understand these things?”

“Ah…well—”

But the man had already latched onto Rose, grabbing her and pulling her over to a machine. “This is the footprint impellor system, do you know anything about endtime gravity? We can’t get it to harmonize. Without a stable footprint, you see, we’re unable to achieve escape velocity. If only we could harmonize the five impact patterns and unify them, well, we might make it.” He looked hopefully at Rose. “What do you think? Any ideas?”

“Ah…actually…” Rose rubbed the back of her head. “Not a clue.”

The old man’s face fell, and Rose felt awful. “Nothing?”

“I’m sorry. I’m not really from around here.”

“No, no.” The man shook his head. “I’m sorry. It’s my fault. There’s been so little help.”

Rose tilted her head a bit. “What’s your name?”

“Oh…Yana. Professor Yana.”

Rose nodded slowly, walking around the machine and examining it. “You’re doing this alone, then?”

“Chantho helps. She’s my assistant. And my friend. She’s a survivor of the Malmooth. This was their planet, Malcassairo, before we took refuge.”

Rose looked back at Chantho, who was standing with Martha and Jack. “The city outside, is it yours?”

She nodded. “Chan — the conglomeration died — tho.”

Rose nodded in return. “I’m sorry.”

“Chan — most grateful — tho.”
Rose went back to examining the machines, the TARDIS absorbing it all through her eyes. “So what about those things outside?” Jack asked curiously. “The Beastie Boys. What are they?”

“We call them Futurekind,” Yana explained. “Which is a myth in itself, but it’s feared they are what we will become, unless we reach Utopia.”

“Yeah, what is this Utopia?” Rose spoke up. Yana gave her a look.

“Oh, every human knows of Utopia. Where have you been?”

“Eh…bit of a hermit.”

“A hermit with friends?”

“Hermits United. We meet up every ten years and swap stories about caves. It’s good fun, for a hermit.” Even Martha and Jack were staring at her in disbelief. “Eh…so. Utopia?”

Yana activated a screen, showing them a display. “The call came from across the stars, over and over again. Come to Utopia. Originating from that point.”

“Where is that?” Rose asked.

“Oh, it’s far beyond the Condensate Wilderness, out towards the Wildlands and Dark Matter reefs, calling us in. The last of the humans scattered across the night.”

It still didn’t make sense to Rose though. “What do you think is out there?”

“We can’t know,” Yana admitted. “A colony, a city, some sort of haven? The Science Foundation created the Utopia Project thousands of years ago to preserve mankind, to find a way of surviving beyond the collapse of reality itself. Now perhaps they found it. Perhaps not. But it’s worth a look, don’t you think?”

“Oh yes,” Rose agreed gently, still examining the machines. The TARDIS was beginning to feed her information again. “And the signal keeps modulating, so it’s not automatic. That’s a good sign someone’s out there. And that’s, oh, that’s a navigation matrix. So you can fly without stars to guide you. Right Professor?” No answer. She turned to see the professor staring blankly into space.

“Professor? Professor?”

He shook his head snapping back. “I, er…ahem, right, that’s enough talk,” he said roughly. “There’s work to do. Now if you could leave, thank you.”

Rose blinked, surprised. “You alright?”

“Yes, I’m fine. And busy.”

“Except the rocket’s not going to fly, is it?” The realization hit Rose quite suddenly. “This footprint mechanism thing, it’s not working.”

“We’ll find a way,” Yana insisted.

“Quite right, too,” Rose said quietly. “And I’ll admit, Professor Yana, this new science is well beyond me. But all the same…” She turned slowly, mind whirling about a mile a minute. “But all the same, a boost reversal circuit, in any time frame, must be a circuit which reverses the boost. So, I wonder, what would happen if I did this?”

She sonicked the end of a cable and gave a pull. Power surged through the machine.
“Chan — it’s working — tho!” Chantho called in delight. Yana looked at Rose in shock.

“But how did you do that?”

“Oh…I’m a fast learner,” Rose said with a small smile, ignoring Jack’s suspicious look.

Chapter End Notes

Please review...?
Chapter Summary

Part Two. Things go from worse to....worse-er.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“All passengers prepare for boarding,” Atillo announced throughout the complex. “I repeat, all passengers prepare for immediate boarding. Destination, Utopia.”

Everyone was busily working in the lab, trying to get things ready. Chantho and Martha were walking through the halls when Martha saw the little boy from earlier. “Excuse me,” she called after him. “Hey, what was your name? Creet.”

He looked back at her, beaming. “That’s right, Miss.”

“Who are you with, Creet? You got family?”

“No, Miss. There’s just me.”

That was sad. Martha gave him a small, reassuring smile. “Well, good luck. What do you think it’s going to be like in Utopia?”

“My mum used to say the skies are made of diamonds.”

“Good for her. Go on, off you go. Get your seat.”

Creet ran off, and Martha and Chantho started back to the lab.

Rose, meanwhile, was examining one of the wires. “Professor Yana, what is this?”

“Gluten extract,” Yana explained. “Binds the neutralino map together.”

“That’s…food. You’ve built this system out of food and strings and staples. Professor Yana, you’re a genius.”

The man balked a bit. “Says the woman who made it work.”

“Oh I cheated. Besides it’s easy coming in at the end, but you’re stellar.”

“I wouldn’t mind hearing about how you cheated,” Jack muttered to Rose, but Yana spoke over him, thankfully.

“Well, even my title is an affection. There hasn’t been such a thing as a university for over a thousand years. I’ve spent my life going form one refugee ship to another.”

“If you’d been born in a different time, you’d be revered throughout the galaxies,” Rose informed him, and he sighed.
“Oh those damned galaxies. They had to go and collapse. Some admiration would have been nice. Just a little, just once.”

“Well, you’ve got it now,” Rose assured him. “But that footprint engine thing. You can’t activate it from on-board. It’s got to be from here. You’re staying behind.”

“With Chantho,” Yana said with a nod. “She won’t leave without me. Simply refuses.”

“I’m not going...No, I’m going to wait for the Doctor. Just like he waited for me.”

Rose shook her head, trying to ward off the memories. “You’d give your life so they could fly.”

“Oh, I think I’m a little too old for Utopia. Time I had some sleep.”

The intercom overhead crackled to life. “Professor, tell Rose we’ve found her blue box.”

Rose’s eyes lit up at that. “Oh good!”

Jack looked over at the monitor, seeing the TARDIS on screen. “Rose?”

Rose walked over to see it as well. “Maybe another cheat,” she said distantly, eying the box. “It’s a wild stab in the dark, but I may have a way for you to get out.”

The TARDIS was brought in and Rose and Jack got to work. “Jack, you’re in charge of the retro feeds,” Rose informed him, and he saluted.

“Yes ma’am.” He didn’t understand how Rose knew any of this, but now wasn’t the time to question it. They were working fervently when Chantho and Martha walked in.

“Oh am I happy to see that,” Martha groaned at the sight of the TARDIS. Chantho eyed the professor uncertainly — he looked as if he was in pain.

“Chan — Professor are you alright — tho?”

“Yes I’m fine. I’m fine.” He waved her off. “Just get on with it.”

“Connect those circuits into the spark board,” Jack told Martha, “same as the last lot. But quicker.”

“Ooooh, yes sir.”

Rose eyed Yana uncertainly. “You don’t have to keep workin’,” she told him gently. “We can handle it.”

“It’s just a headache,” Yana assured her. “It’s just...just a noise inside my head. Constant noise noise inside by head.”

Rose made a face at that. “What sort of noise?”

“It’s the sound of drums. More and more, as though it’s getting closer.”

That was...concerning. “When did it start?”

“Oh, I’ve had it all my life.” Yana didn’t seem nearly as concerned. “Every waking hour. Still, no rest for the wicked.”

Martha and Chantho, meanwhile, we’re working at the circuit board, hooking things up. “How long
have you been with the professor?” Martha asked curiously.

“Chan — seventeen years — tho.”

“Blimey,” Martha said, surprised. “A long time.”

“Chan — I adore him — tho.”

It took Martha a moment to connect that. “Oh. Oh. Does he…”

“Chan — I don’t think he even notices — tho.”

“Ah. I’m sorry.”

The woman shrugged. “Chan — but I am happy to serve — tho.”

“Do you mind if I ask?” Martha ventured cautiously. “Do you have to start every sentence with chan?”

“Chan — yes — tho.”

“And end every sentence with…”

“Chan — tho — tho.”

“What would happen if you didn’t?”

“Chan — that wound he rude — tho.”

“What, like swearing?” Martha would never stop being fascinated by the different species she met with Rose. They were always amazing.

“Chan — indeed — tho.”

“Go on,” Martha encouraged. “Just once.”

“Chan — I can’t — tho.”

“Oh, do it for me.”

Chantho struggled for a moment before saying, with a small smile, “No.”

They both started laughing.

The monitor in the corner flickered to life. “Systems are down. Professor, are you getting me?”

Yana hurried to the monitor. “I’m here!” He assured Atillo. “We’re ready! Now, all you need to do is connect the couplings, then we can launch.”

The screen flickered, and Atillo’s face disappeared. “God’s sake!” Yana raged, hitting the monitor. “This equipment. Needs rebooting all the time.”

“Anything I can do?” Martha asked, stepping forward. “I’ve finished that lot.”

“Yes, if you could,” Yana said gratefully. “Just press the reboot button every time the picture goes.”

“Certainly sir,” Martha said with a smile. “Just don’t ask me to do shorthand.”
Yana was clearly confused. “Right.”

She pressed the button, and Atillo came back. “Are you still there?” He asked.

“Ah, present and correct,” Yana said. “Send your man inside. We’ll keep the levels down from here.”

A moment later, “He’s inside. Good luck to him.”

“Captain,” Yana called to Jack, “keep the dials below the red.”

“Where is that room?” Rose asked curiously.

“It’s underneath the rocket,” Yana explained. “Fix the couplings and the footprint can work. But the entire chamber is flooded with stet radiation.”

“Stet?” Rose repeated. “Never heard of it.”

“You wouldn’t want to. But it’s safe enough, if we can hold the radiation back from here.”

For a few minutes everything was going well. An alarm went off. “It’s rising,” Yana repeated. “Naught point two. Keep it level!”

“Yes, sir,” Jack said, twisting a dial. An easy enough fix.

Until the power started to wan. “Chan — we’re losing power — tho!” Chantho called.

“Radiation’s rising!” Rose said, panicked, as she watched the monitor.

“We’ve lost control!”

“The chamber’s going to flood,” Yana said in a hushed voice. Oh bad bad bad.

“Jack, override the vents!” Rose ordered without thinking. They heard Atillo on screen, yelling for the man in the room to get out, and Jack dove to grab two power cables.

“We can jump start the override—” He started to say, but the cables flared and power surged through Jack, electrocuting him.

“Jack!”

“I’ve got him,” Martha called, diving to help Jack. Rose thought she heard Chantho say something, then Yana, but the floor seemed to momentarily go out from beneath Rose, a decidedly dreamy feeling settling over her.

*It is okay, my Wolf…*

Reality settled back in and Rose stumbled, grabbing the table behind her to steady herself. “Chan — Rose — tho?” Chantho questioned uncertainly, clearly concerned. She shook her head, stepping forward.

“So the chamber’s flooded with radiation?” She asked as she knelt down next to Martha, who was giving Jack CPR.

“Without the couplings, the engines will never start.” Yana sounded devastated. “It was all for nothing.”
“I don’t know,” Rose said thoughtfully, taking Martha’s hand. “Martha, c’mere, leave him.”

“No, you’ve got to let me try,” Martha said desperately even as Rose tugged her away.

“It’s okay,” Rose assured her before turning back to Yana. “So you’ve got a room no man can enter without dying. Is that correct?”

“Yes.”

“Right. Well then.” Rose’s head twinged painfully as Jack gasped back to life. “I think I know the man for the job.”

Jack looked around, gasping and blinking. “Was someone kissing me?”

“No now, Jack. C’mon.”

Rose and Jack hurried to the control room. “Lieutenant, get on board the rocket,” Rose told Atillo. “I promise you’re gonna fly.”

“The chamber’s flooded,” he protested. Rose shook her head.

“We’ve found a way to trip the system. Run!”

Atillo ran out as Jack pulled his shirt off. “What’re you doin’?” Rose asked, raising an eyebrow.

“I’m going in.”

“I don’t think you need to strip for that.”

Jack smirked. “Well I look good though.” After a moment the smirk faded. “How long have you known?”

Rose shook her head. “Not until I saw you again. I’m sorry. Good luck.”

Jack nodded and headed in.

Back in the lab, Martha booted the monitor back up, trying to re-establish communication. “We lost picture when the thing flared up. Rose, are you there?”

“Yeah,” Rose reported back. “He’s inside.”

“And still alive?”

“Oh yes.”

“But he should evaporate,” Yana said in disbelief. “What sort of man is he?”

“I’ve only just met him,” Martha admitted. “I guess he and Rose knew each other. She used to travel with some bloke, called himself the Doctor. He traveled through time and space. And now Rose does.”

“She travels in time?” Yana asked.

“Don’t ask me to explain it.” Martha shook her head. “That’s a TARDIS, that box over there.” She didn’t notice the distant look on Yana’s face.

Rose stood on the other side of the door, watching Jack work. “When did you first realize?” She
asked quietly.

“Earth, 1892,” Jack said. “Got in a fight in Ellis Island. A man shot me through the heart. Then I woke up. Thought it was kind of strange. But then it never stopped. Fell off a cliff, trampled by horses, World War One, World War Two, poison, starvation, a stray javelin. In the end, I got the message. I’m the man who can never die.”

Rose swallowed hard. “I’m sorry, Jack. I’m so sorry.”

He shook his head. “Do you think the Doctor knew?”

“I…don’t know,” Rose said hesitantly, but she did know. He must have known. He had lied about what Jack was doing, clearly. Jack chuckled.

“Rosie you were never much of a liar.” She had to smile a bit. “I’m not mad at him. If he left me there must have been a reason. I just…wish I knew what happened. Last thing I remember, back when I was mortal, I was facing three Daleks. Death by extermination. And then I came back to life. What happened?”

His words stirred something in Rose’s mind.

“I bring life…”

She closed her eyes for a long moment, gold flashing behind her eyelids. “I think…I did.”

Jack stopped for a moment, looking up. “What happened, Rose? The Doctor said he sent you home.”

“Yeah, he did. But I…I wouldn’t take no for an answer. I opened the heart of the TARDIS and looked into it. I absorbed the time vortex. And I…used it to make the TARDIS go back, to destroy the Daleks…” She rubbed her eyes, sighing heavily. “I don’t know. It’s all a bit of a blur. But you were dead, and I…I think I brought you back. I’m sorry, Jack. I’m so, so sorry.”

After a moment Jack went back to work. “Do you think you could change me back?” The words were more curious than anything.

“I don’t have that power anymore. It was killing me. The Doctor took it away. Almost killed him to do it, he regenerated. Think you would’ve liked his new face, bit of a pretty boy.”

“I don’t know, I was pretty fond of the leather,” Jack said with a chuckle. Rose’s smile faded at his next question, however. “Where is he, Rose?”

She’d been avoiding the question long enough. “Trapped. He ended up stuck in a parallel universe with my mum and Mickey. The walls closed. He can never come back.”

Jack’s mouth dropped at that. “Jesus…I’m sorry.” Rose shook her head. “So what…have you just been traveling by yourself, all this time? How’d you manage that?”

“When…When I absorbed the time vortex, the Doctor took it out of me. But a little bit stayed behind. Not enough to reverse what I did to you but enough to…change me, I guess? I don’t understand it much. But I can talk to the TARDIS now. She helps me a lot. She taught me how to pilot her.”

“Why not just go home?” This was a lot of responsibility for Rose to handle on her own.
“Home to what, Jack? My mum’s in the parallel universe. Mickey’s in the parallel universe. I’ve got no one left on Earth. Besides…somebody needs to be the Doctor.”

“Not you,” Jack said fiercely. He’d watched Rose grow up from afar, going back to her estate every now and again to check on her. She was just a human.

She couldn’t replace a Time Lord.

“Then who?” Jack hated to admit that she had a point. After a minute Rose moved on. “Do you want to die, Jack?”

“Oh, this one’s a little stuck.”

“Jack…”

He sighed, shrugging a bit. “I thought I did. I don’t know. But this lot. You see them out here, surviving, and that’s fantastic.”

Rose smiled a bit at the word fantastic. Just like her leather-clad Doctor. “You might be out there, somewhere.”

“I could go meet myself,” Jack said thoughtfully, and Rose smirked.

“You’re the only man you’re ever going to be happy with, I guess.”

They laughed together.

Back in Yana’s lab, Martha sighed. Rose had said more to Jack than she ever said to her. It was to be expected, she supposed. They were old friends.

But it still hurt a bit.

Martha refocused on Yana, catching sight of the look on his face. “What’s wrong?”

“Chan — Professor what is it — tho?” Chantho asked uncertainly.

“Time travel,” Yana said quietly. “They say there was time travel back in the old days. I never believed. But what would I know? Stupid old man. Never could keep time. Always late, always lost.” He fingered a pocket watch hanging off his belt. “Even this thing never worked.”

Martha stared at the watch for a long moment. “Can I have a look at that?”

“Oh, it’s only an old relic,” Yana said as he handed it over. “Like me.”

“Where did you get it?” Martha asked urgently.

“Hmm? I was found with it.”

“What do you mean?”

“An orphan in the storm,” Yana explained. “I was a naked child found on the coast of the Silver Devastation. Abandoned, with only this.”

“Have you opened it?” Martha ventured. He shook his head.

“Why would I? It’s broken?”
“How do you know it’s broken if you’ve never opened it?”

That seemed to stump Yana for a moment. “It’s stuck. It’s old. It’s not meant to be. I don’t know.”

Martha turned the watch over in her fingers…and her stomach dropped when she saw the carvings on the cover. Just like the watch Rose had used. Oh god.

“Does it matter?”

Martha shook her head quickly. “No, it’s nothing. It’s…Listen, everything’s fine up here. I’m going to see if Rose needs me.”

And she rushed out.

“Yes!” Jack said exuberantly as he made the final connection.

“Now get out of there. Come on!”

Rose backed away so Jack could open the door and ran to the nearby phone to call Atillo on the rocket. “Lieutenant, everyone on board?”

“Ready and waiting,” Atillo reported.

“Stand by. Two minutes to ignition.”

“Ready to launch. Outer doors sealed.”

“Countdown commencing,” the computer announced. “T minus ninety-nine, ninety-eight…”

While the computer counted down Rose and Jack ran around, flipping switches, as Martha hurried in. “Ah, nearly there,” Rose reported. “The footprint, it’s a gravity pulse. It stamps down, the rocket shoots up. Bit primitive. It’ll take the both of us to keep it stable.”

“That connection really does come in handy, huh?” Jack teased, and Rose smirked.

“Rose, hang on, listen,” Martha said, trying to get the blonde’s attention. “It’s the Professor.”

“Did somethin’ happen? He can’t kick it yet, we’re almost there—”

“No, it’s not that. He — he’s got this watch. It looks like the one you had when you used that thing — the arch on the TARDIS, remember?”

“What?” Rose paused, turning to look back at Martha.

“So he’s got the same watch.” Jack didn’t understand.

“No, it’s not a watch though,” Martha explained. “Rose used it and this thing on the TARDIS to change her biology for a bit, make her fully human again.”

“Why’d you do that?”

“Doesn’t matter.” Rose waved it off. “It can’t be the same watch.”

“Rose I looked at that watch every single night for two and a half months,” Martha said fiercely. “Don’t tell me I don’t know a similar watch when I see it.”

An alarm went off over head. “So what does that mean?” Jack asked, looking between them. “Could
Yana be a Time Lord?"

“Jack, keep it level,” Rose snapped, and he hurried back to hit a switch. “It can’t be, the Time Lords are dead. The Doctor was the last one and I doubt that’s the Doctor in there.”

“But you don’t know,” Jack said. “If this one made himself human, he could have survived.”

Rose ran her hands through her hair, breathing deep. “Martha, what did he say?”

“He looked at the watch like he could hardly see it. Just like you did with yours. He barely knew it existed.”

“And now? Rose asked. “Can he see it now?”

“Thirteen, twelve, eleven, ten, nine…”

“If he escaped the Time War then it’s the perfect place to hide,” Jack pointed out. “The end of the universe.”

“Six, five…”

“If he’s another Time Lord,” Martha said slowly, “what does that mean?”

One.”

Rose hit the switch, sending the rocket engines off. She shook her head, grabbing the phone. “Lieutenant, have you done it? Did you get velocity? Have you done it? Lieutenant, have you done it?”

“Affirmative,” Atillo reported. “We’ll see you in Utopia.”

“Good luck.” Rose slammed the phone down, turning to the door. “Come on.”

Just as she approached the door it slammed in her face. “What the hell? Damn it!” She kicked the door. “Come on, help me get it open!”

It took a bit of work but finally they forced the door open. “This way!” Jack called, and they hurried down the hall — running into another closed door at the lab. “Professor, let us in!” Rose called, but it was no good. “Jack get the door open! Professor, don’t open the watch! Just let me explain! Don’t open it yet! Professor!”

Martha looked back to see the Futurekind barreling down the hall toward them. “They’re coming!”

“Professor!” Rose called desperately. Finally Jack smashed the control panel, and the door opened just in time to see Yana stepping into the TARDIS, closing the door.

“No!” Rose flew to the door, trying to get it to open.


“Let me in!”

Martha knelt down next to Chantho’s prone form on the floor. “She’s dead,” she reported. Jack, meanwhile, was trying to hold the door shut against the Futurekind.

“I broke the lock,” he called. “Give me a hand!”
Martha hurried to help him. Rose was still struggling to get into the TARDIS. Who was it? Who was this?

The memories flooded Rose mind quite suddenly. The TARDIS, she realized over the sudden torrent. Trying to feed her as much information as possible before it was too late. As it ended she slumped against the door, gasping for breath.

“Rose?” Martha called. “What’s wrong?”


Golden light flared through the windows, and Rose swallowed hard. He was regenerating.

“Rose we could use a hand here!” Jack called as the Futurekind forced the door open.

“Ha ha!” She heard on the other side of the TARDIS doors. “Ha ha ha! Ha ha ha! Oh!”

Rose’s head was spinning. Master. Master. He was the Master. What a pompous name, she thought dimly.

“Now then — ooooh, new voice. Hello, hello.” The Time Lord — the Master — tested his voice for a moment before continuing. “Now then. Rose. How highly inappropriate that a human has been flying this magnificent ship for all this time. The Doctor would be appalled I’m sure.”

“Please,” Rose begged. “Please, don’t do this. Just stop, listen—”

“Listen to you?” The Master sneered, clearly amused. “I don’t think so little girl.”

It was no good. Rose took a step back, fumbling with the sonic screwdriver and aiming it at the TARDIS just as the Master activated the time rotor.

“Oh no you don’t!” He called. “End of the universe. Have fun! Bye bye!”

“Rose, we need a plan!” Jack called as he and Martha struggled with the doors. “I can’t hold out much longer!”

Rose didn’t answer. She could only watch as the TARDIS faded away.

Chapter End Notes

Please review...?
The Sound of the Drums || Part One

Chapter Summary

Rose, Martha, and Jack make it back to London. And everything is going to hell.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Wind ripped to life in a London alleyway, a vortex appearing and depositing three disheveled people onto the ground.

“Oh my head,” Martha groaned, picking herself up.

“Made it, at least,” Jack said as he picked himself up, helping Martha as well. He moved to help Rose, who was white as a sheet and making no move to try and stand. “Alright, Rosie?”

There was a beat of silence, and suddenly Rose moved very quickly, scrambling up and throwing herself at a couple of nearby trash cans, throwing up behind one of them. “Whoa, okay.” Martha hurried over, rubbing Rose’s back as she heaved and holding her steady. “You’re alright.”

“Time travel without a capsule sucks,” Jack said sympathetically. “Don’t worry, it’ll wear off in a minute.”

Rose shook her head, groaning as a wave of dizziness washed over her. “Not that,” she gasped out, cringing.

“The TARDIS?” Martha guessed. Rose nodded, and Jack gave them both a look. “The connection she has with the TARDIS is on some physical level too,” Martha explained. “If something is effecting the TARDIS…it effects Rose too.”

“That’s inconvenient.”

“Tell me about it,” Rose groaned as she finally straightened up.

“It’s good though, right?” Martha ventured uncertainly. “I mean, I’m sorry you’re sick but it means we’re at least in the right time period. So that’s lucky.”

“Not lucky.” Rose grimaced a bit as she looked around. “That was me. Right before he left I jammed the controls, made it so he could only travel between two points. Come on, let’s get out of here.”

They walked out of the alley, Jack taking Rose’s hand to hold her steady as they walked along. She still looked rather pale. “So this Master bloke,” Martha ventured as they found a place to sit down. “Who is he?”

Rose leaned forward, resting her elbows on her knees as she tried to sort through her mind. “I don’t know. I think he was a friend of the Doctor’s once, though.”

“Some friend,” Jack snorted. “How do you know that?” The Doctor had never exactly been one to talk about the past, after all.
“The TARDIS shoved a bunch of information in my head right before the Master took her.” Rose rubbed her temples, sighing.

“But why bother with that if she can talk to you?”

“Insurance, maybe. If she thought something might happen that would prevent her from being able to talk to me, she’d want me to have the information…”

“That voice at the end, though,” Martha said curiously. “That wasn’t the professor.”

“He regenerated,” Rose mumbled. “I told you about that, remember? Changed his face, his body, his voice, everything. New man.”

She rested her head in her hands for a moment, breathing deep, until the sound of a nearby beggar tapping a rhythm on his cup drew her attention. *Di di di dum. Di di di dum. Over and over…*

“Then how are we supposed to find him?” Martha asked, dragging Rose back to reality.

“If I hear his voice again I’ll recognize him,” Rose said, looking around. “The problem is I have no idea where to find him.”

“But hold on,” Martha said slowly. “If he could be anyone…” She looked around at the tellies on the lamp posts, broadcasting the news. “We missed the election.”

“*Mr. Saxon has returned from the Palace,*” the anchor man was saying, “*and is greeting the crowd inside Saxon Headquarters.*”

“I said I knew that voice,” Martha said as she stood up, walking closer to the TV. “When he spoke inside the TARDIS. I’ve heard that voice hundreds of times. We all have. That was the voice of Harold Saxon.”

“No,” Rose said, pushing herself up to stare at the TV as well. “No, that’s impossible. It can’t be. He’s…the Prime Minister?”

“*Mr. Saxon!*” The photographer on the TV called. “*This way sir! Come on, kiss for the lady, sir.*”

“The Master is the Prime Minister of Great Britain,” Rose said distantly, watching him kiss the woman at his side. “The Master…and his wife?”

Mr. Saxon — The Master — was grinning as he focused on the TV cameras. “*This country has been sick,*” he said. “*This country needs healing. This country needs medicine. In fact, I’d go so far as to say that what this country really needs right now…is a doctor.*”

Rose swallowed hard, backing away. “He’s teasing us,” she said slowly. “Come on. Let’s get out of the public view. Martha can we hide at your place?”

“Yeah, of course,” Martha said quickly. “Let’s get out of here.”

The walk to Martha’s place was slower than Rose would’ve liked, but she was having a hard time walking straight. Her head was spinning. What the hell was the Master doing to the TARDIS?

It was a relief when Martha’s apartment came into sight. “Home,” Martha sighed as she let them in. Rose rubbed her temples, collapsing onto a footrest.

“Martha have you got a laptop or somethin’?” She made a face when she saw Jack on the phone. “Who’re you callin’?”
“Just some friends.” Jack shook his head as Martha went to get her laptop. “There’s no reply though.”

“Here you go,” Martha said, handing her laptop over. “What are you gonna do?”

“See what we can find out about Mr. Saxon,” Rose mumbled as she booted it up.

“I can show you the Saxon websites,” Jack volunteered. “He’s been around for ages.”

“That’s so weird though,” Martha said thoughtfully, wandering around the apartment. “It’s the day after the election. That’s only four days after I met you.”

“Weren’t you supposed to meet your mum for tea last night?” Rose asked, looking up from the computer screen. “Sorry about that. I can’t believe he was here the entire time though.”

“What did the TARDIS tell you about him?” Jack asked. “You said he was the Doctor’s friend.”

“Yeah…I don’t know.” Rose shook her head. “My head is poundin’. It’s like hearin’ a million conversations at the same time and tryin’ to pick out one piece of it.”

“Well no rush but if you could figure it out soon?”

“I’m tryin’.” Rose didn’t mean to snap but she still felt sick and her head was killing her. She didn’t need Jack heckling her.

“What kind of bloke calls himself the Master anyways?” Martha asked as she turned on her answering machine. There was a message from Tish.

“Martha, where are you? I’ve got this new job. You won’t believe it. It’s weird. They just phoned me up out of the blue. I’m working for—”

“Oh like it matters,” Martha muttered, turning it off again. Jack helped Rose pull up Saxon’s website, and they started playing commercials.

“I’m voting Saxon,” one woman said. “He can tick my box any day.”

“Vote Saxon!” Another cheered. “Go Harry!”

“I think Mr. Saxon is exactly what this country needs,” said a third. “He’s a very fine man. And he’s handsome too.”

Rose couldn’t help but gag a bit. “Give me a break. Way to set evolution back a couple decades. I’m gonna elect him because he’s handsome!”

Jack snorted as he scrolled through the biography section. “Former Minister of Defense. First came to prominence when he shot down the Racnoss on Christmas Eve. Guessing you were involved in that?”

“I vaguely recall it.”


“He’s got the TARDIS,” Jack pointed out as he got up to make tea.
“But I locked the controls,” Rose reminded him. “He wasn’t going any further back than this.”

“There was no leeway at all?”

Rose rubbed her temples, trying to stave off the migraine she could feel on the edge of her consciousness. “Eighteen months, maybe? Certainly not years.”

“Do you want some painkillers?” Martha asked uncertainly. Rose looked like she was in a lot of pain.

“No, I’m fine. I can’t imagine how he could have accomplished all of this. I think…” She took a deep breath, trying to think past the pain. Damn it what she wouldn’t have given to talk to the TARDIS. “He was always a bit hypnotic from what I can gather. But he’s tricking an entire country now. That takes a lot.”

“I was going to vote for him,” Martha said thoughtfully. Rose raised an eyebrow.

“Really?”

“Well it was before I even met you,” Martha defended herself. “And I liked him.”

“Me too,” Jack added. Rose rolled her eyes a bit.

“Why do you say that? What was his policy? What did he stand for?”

The questions seemed to catch Martha off guard. “I don’t know,” she said, tapping her fingers against the couch. “Just the sound of his voice.”

Rose narrowed her eyes, realizing that rhythm sounded familiar. The homeless man had been tapping it too.

“What’s that?”

Martha blinked. “What?”

“That, the tapping, the rhythm.” Rose pointed at Martha’s fingers. “What are you doing?”

The question was clearly bewildering. “I don’t know. It’s nothing. It’s just — I don’t know.”

They all jumped as fanfare blared on the laptop, and a pop up appeared. Saxon Broadcast All Channels.

“Our lord and master is speakin’ to his kingdom,” Rose muttered as she turned the TV on.

“Britain, Britain, Britain,” the Master said with a sigh. Rose felt her fingers clench instinctively.

“What extraordinary times we’ve had. Just a few years ago, this world was so small. And then they came, out of the unknown, falling from the skies. You’ve seen it happen.”

The screen switched to old footage as he spoke. “Big Ben destroyed. A spaceship over London. All those ghosts and metal men. The Christmas star that came to kill.”

It switched back to the Master’s (rather smug, Rose noted) face. “Time and time again, and the government told you nothing. Well, not me. Not Harold Saxon. Because my purpose here today is to tell you this. Citizens of Great Britain, I have been contacted.”

“What?!” Rose burst out in disbelief. What the hell was he doing?
“A message for humanity, from beyond the stars.”

A small metal orb floated onto the screen. “People of Earth,” it spoke in a high-pitched voice, “we come in peace. We bring great gifts. We bring technology and wisdom and protection. And all we ask in return is your friendship.”

“Ooooh, sweet,” the Master cooed. “And this species has identified itself. They are called the Toclafane.”

Not real.

The words echoed in Rose’s head, and all at once a wave of dizziness washed over her. “Whoa!” Jack grabbed Rose by the shoulders, holding her steady as she slumped forward a bit. “Rose?”

She shook her head, trying to refocus on what the Master was saying. “…Diplomatic relations with a new species will begin. Tomorrow, we take our place in the universe. Every man, woman, and child. Every teacher and chemist and lorry driver and farmer. Oh, I don’t know… every medical student?”

Martha and Rose exchanged looks. “Oh god…”

Rose jumped up, grabbing the TV and turning it around. Her heart dropped when she saw the explosive strapped to the back. “Shit. Run!”

She grabbed the laptop and they ran out. No sooner had they cleared the premises did the bomb going, the aftershocks sending them to the ground.

“Oh god,” Rose groaned, picking herself up. “You guys alright?”

“Yeah,” Jack mumbled. Martha was already up and dialing on her mobile.

“Martha who are you callin’?”

“He knows about me.” Martha’s voice was panicked. “What about my family?”

“Don’t tell them anything.”

“Don’t you tell me what to do Rose Tyler,” Martha snapped, and Rose winced back a bit. She was just worried about her family. That was all it was. That was understandable. “Mum?” Martha said after a moment. “Oh my god, you’re there.” A pause. “You alright?”

Rose backed off, letting Martha have her privacy as she talked to her family. Jack rested a hand on her shoulder. “I really bugged this up Jack,” she muttered as she leaned into him. She felt sick and tired and she would have given anything to be able to farm this out to someone else. Anyone else.

But there was nobody.

“Dad?” Martha’s suddenly panicked voice snapped Rose out of her reverie. “What’s going on? Dad?” A moment later she whirled to look at Rose and Jack. “We have to help them.”

Everything in Rose screamed that it was a bad idea, but she couldn’t say no. So they piled into Martha’s car, with Martha driving, and took off.

As they drove, Martha fumbled to make another call. “Come on, Tish,” she said desperately. “Pick up.”

Finally there was an answer. “Martha I can’t talk right now.” Tish sounded excited. “We just made
first contact. Did you see?” There was a sudden scuffle on the other end. “What are you doing? Get off! Linda tell them!”

“What’s happening?” Martha demanded. “Tish!” The line went dead. “Tish!” She jerked around to look at Rose. “This is your fault!”

“I didn’t know!” Rose snapped back.

“Of course you didn’t know, you never know! You’re useless!”

Rose recoiled at that. It might’ve hurt less if Martha had just slapped her.

They arrived outside the Jones’ home just in time see Francine being shoved into a police van. Her eyes widened when she saw her daughter. “Martha, get out of here!” She yelled. “Get out!”

The police turned to look at them, rearing their guns. Oh god. “Martha, reverse,” Rose said in a low voice. “We need to get out, now.”

They pulled away just as the police started firing again, taking off down the street in a rain of bullets.

“The only place he can go is planet Earth!” Martha railed as they drove. “Great!”

“Martha, listen to me,” Jack said with a calm Rose knew she wouldn’t have been able to manage at that point. “Do as I say. We’ve to to ditch this car. Pull over. Right now!”

They pulled into an underpass and got out of the car, Martha fumbling with her mobile once more. “Leo!” She cried after a moment. “Oh, thank god. Leo, you got to listen to me. Where are you?”

Rose stepped away from her, wrapping her arms tight around herself as she looked up at the sky. It was starting to rain a bit. “She’s right,” she whispered when she felt Jack rest a hand on her shoulder. “Trapping him on Earth was the stupidest bloody thing I could’ve done.”

“What else were you supposed to do? Let him have the whole universe at his disposal? All of time and space?”

“I handed him Earth on a bloody platter. I’m not sure that’s much better.”

“You did the best you could,” Jack said firmly. Rose shook her head.

“The Doctor never would’ve messed things up this bad.”

“Oh sure he would.” Jack tried to infuse a bit of humor into his voice. “Worse, even. And then he would’ve improvised some ridiculous plan to fix it all.”

“Let them go, Saxon. Do you hear me?!” They jerked around when Martha started yelling. “Let them go!”

Rose hurried over, grabbing the phone away from Martha. “I know you’re alien and all but wire-tappin’ is considered a bit rude around here,” Rose informed the Master evenly as she stepped away from Martha and Jack.

“Ms. Tyler.” The Master sounded practically gleeful. “I was so hoping to get a chance to talk to you.”

“Oh yeah?” Rose had to struggle to keep from getting to angry. Being calm was the key. The Doctor would stay calm. She had to be the Doctor. “Why’s that?”
“Well I was interested – I mean, why wouldn’t I be? The last TARDIS in all of existence, in the hands of a human. You can hardly blame me for wanting to know more about you. And I must say, I’m rather disappointed by what I found.”

“Were you now?”

“Oh yes. So entirely unremarkable you are. The only interesting thing that ever seems to have happened to you is you disappeared for a year, and I’m guessing the Doctor had something to do with that, didn’t he?” Rose didn’t answer. She didn’t have to, really. The Master knew he was right.

“Just a completely ordinary human. A bit pathetic really. But it’s not all a sad story, is it? You mattered for a moment – a brief moment, albeit, but that’s more than most humans get. For one moment you were the goddess of time. How did that feel?”

“Tryin’ to feel important by livin’ through me?” Rose asked before she could stop herself. “You seem to be on quite the power trip already. But I suppose prime minister can’t really compare to controlling all of time and space, can it?”

“Cheeky.” The Master sound amused. “I guess that’s why he liked you.”

“What are the Toclafane?” Rose asked, cutting to the chase. “They’re not real, are they? There’s no such thing as a Toclafane. They’re just a story.”

“Now Ms. Tyler, the only way you could possibly know that is if you’ve been talking to the TARDIS recently. I thought I broke that connection.”

“What did you do to her?” Rose wasn’t going to let him know how sick her connection with the TARDIS was making her. There was no need to give him that advantage.

“Now, now, all in good time. I still have a few questions for you myself.”

“I’m not answerin’ questions.”

“Well you probably wouldn’t know the answer anyways. What does a little human know of Gallifrey?”

That peeked Rose’s interest a bit. “You don’t know?” She asked, unable to keep a bit of smugness out of her tone. “You ran away from the Time War and made yourself human and you don’t even know what happened to your own planet? Some master you are. You’re a coward. But I guess that’s what happens when you let someone choose his own name. His ego gets the best of him.”

“So you do know.” To his credit, he didn’t take the bait. That was something. “Where is it, then?”

Rose considered dragging it out, but telling him might hurt just as much. Or maybe not. She wasn’t sure what he had where his two hearts were supposed to be. “Gone,” she informed him flatly. That seemed to trip him up for a moment.

“How can Gallifrey be gone?” He demanded finally.

“It burnt. Along with all the Time Lords. And the Daleks.” She paused for a moment. “Most of them at least.”

There was a moment of silence. “So the Doctor killed them all.” Again, he sounded impressed. “Well I knew he hated them but that’s something.”

“But you survived,” Rose hedged. She wasn’t expecting him to buy into that one either.
“The Time Lords only resurrected me because they knew I’d be the perfect warrior for a Time War.” That caught Rose off guard. “I was there when the Dalek Emperor took control of the Cruciform. I saw it. I ran. I ran so far. Made myself human so they would never find me, because I was so scared.”

“And you ran.”

“And the Doctor ended it all while I was gone. And then he went and got himself trapped in some other universe. What an idiot.”

Well… he wasn’t totally wrong. “You can still put an end to this,” Rose pushed. “Earth is innocent, I know you know that. You can let the Jones family go and take your Toclafane and leave this place. You can…” She almost choked on the words, but she didn’t have a choice. “You can have the TARDIS. Just leave Earth alone.”

“Oh it’s far too late for that, Ms. Tyler,” the Master informed Rose silkily, and her heart dropped.

“Why is that?”

“Can’t you hear it? I thought it would stop, but it never does. Never ever stops. Inside my head, the drumming. The constant drumming.”

“I… don’t understand.” Drumming?

“Well of course you don’t. Tiny little brain, it’s amazing you can understand anything.” Wow that sounded familiar. “It’s everywhere. Listen, listen, listen. Here come the drums. Here come the drums.”

Rose turned to see a nearby man begin slapping his hands against his thighs in the same rhythm. That damned rhythm was everywhere. “What have you done?” She demanded. “How are you doin’ this? What are those things? Tell me!”

“Ooo, look!” The Master said suddenly, sounding delighted. “You’re on TV.”

“Stop it,” Rose snapped. “Answer me.”

“No, really, you’re on the telly. You and your little band, which, by the way, is ticking every demographic box. So congratulations on that.” Rose whipped around, finding a nearby TV display showing the news. She hurried over, Jack and Martha right behind her. “Look, there you are,” the Master said gleefully. The caption Nationwide Hunt For Terrorist Suspects rolled under their pictures. “You’re public enemies one, two, and three. Oh, and you can tell handsome Jack that I’ve sent his little gang off on a wild goose chase to the Himalayas, so he won’t be getting any help from them.”

They were screwed, Rose thought helplessly. They were so screwed. “Now go on, off you go. Why not start by turning right?”

Rose jerked around, eyes landing on a CCTV camera. “He can see us,” she snarled, zapping the camera with the sonic screwdriver.

“Oh, you public menace! Better start running,” the Master taunted. “Go on, run.”

Rose let the phone fall away from her ear, shaking her head. “He’s got control of everythin’,” she said quietly, heart sinking to her toes.
“What do we do, then?” Martha demanded.

“We’ve got nowhere to go,” Jack pointed out unhelpfully. Rose squeezed her eyes shut, trying not to cry. They had no choice.

“Run.”
They found a small abandoned warehouse to hide in, and Martha left to find food for them while Jack and Rose set up.

Well, Jack set up anyways. Rose’s heart clearly wasn’t in any of it even as she worked on Martha’s laptop, trying to enhance it to pick up a wifi signal.

“Penny for your thoughts?” Jack asked finally, curiously. He had never seen Rose so quiet. It was unnerving.

“I ruined everything. If anything happens to anyone on this planet, it’s my fault.”

“Oh I don’t know, I’m pretty sure starvation is still out of your control,” Jack said, trying to get Rose to smile. It didn’t work.

“You know what I mean, Jack.”

“Yeah, I do.” He sighed. “I also know that self-deprecation act anywhere. You’re not the Doctor, Rose.”

“Well he’s not here, is he?!” Rose snapped, finally looking up at Jack. He wasn’t surprised to see tears in her eyes. “He’s not bloody here and somebody has to be him.”

“Not you,” Jack said quietly.

“Then who? Who else is gonna do this? Nobody would want this responsibility Jack. The Doctor didn’t even want to be the Doctor sometimes, but he did it anyways because he knew nobody else would.”

“So why does it fall on you?” Jack demanded. “Why, out of every single being in the universe, are you the one that has to step up and do this?”

“Because it should’ve been me!” Rose’s voice echoed off the warehouse walls. “Because I should be the one trapped in that god damn universe, because I’m the one who’s stupid and gets into trouble, not him! He should be here, but I am, and that’s on me!”
The tears finally spilled over. Jack couldn’t help but wonder how long she’d been keeping this bottled up. “Rosie, sweetheart…” He knelt down beside her, wrapping her in a tight hug.

“I can’t do this,” Rose sniffed, burying her face in his shoulder. Up until now she’d had the TARDIS to help her.

But now she was completely alone.

“Yes, you can,” Jack said gently, brushing her hair back. “We’ll figure it out, sweetheart. We will.”

Because she wasn’t alone. If anything she had him.

By the time Martha returned Rose had mostly calmed down and was working at the laptop. “How was it?” Jack asked as Martha sat down with the food.

“I don’t think anyone saw me. Anything new?”

“No mention of Leo in any of the reports,” Rose mumbled. She was trying not to attract too much attention from Martha right then. “Other than that it just says your family has been taken in for questioning.”

“Leo’s not as daft as he looks.” Martha paused for a moment, then sighed. “I’m talking about my brother on the run. How did this happen?”

Jack looked up from his vortex manipulator after a moment, reaching out and grabbing one of the things of chips Martha had brought. “Nice chips,” he said around a mouthful. Martha looked down at the third order of chips, then at the woman she’d bought them for – the one who had yet to look up from the laptop.

She didn’t even look up when Martha moved to sit next to her with the chips. “Brought you food,” she said quietly. She felt horrible about what she’d said before.

“I’m not hungry,” Rose said just as quietly. Martha sighed.

“Rose, I’m sorry. I’m really, really sorry. I didn’t mean it.”

“Yeah, you did.” Rose didn’t even sound mad. Just resigned. “It’s fine though. You were right.”

“I know you’re doing the best you can.”

“It’s not enough though. I know it’s not.” She still hadn’t looked up from the laptop. Martha sighed, frustrated, as she grabbed the laptop away from Rose and took her by the shoulders, forcing her to look up.

“It’s more than enough, Rose. You do so much, for everyone, for this entire universe. And no, you don’t always know what you’re doing, but you always make it work. And if nothing else, I have faith in your ability to do that. Okay?”

Rose could feel tears stinging at her eyes again. She’s blinked hard, determined not to let them fall. “I don’t have the TARDIS this time though,” she said after a moment. “It’s just me now.”

“No, it’s not,” Martha informed her. “You’ve got Jack. And you’ve got me. Between the three of us we can figure something out, I’m sure.”

Rose smiled weakly, and Martha drew her into a tight hug. Jack watched from the corner, smiling a bit. He hated that Rose had taken over as the Doctor…
But he was glad she had such a good friend.

“Okay,” Martha said as she pulled back, grabbing a chip. “Now eat, seriously. You’re worrying me.”

Rose laughed a bit, grabbing the chip and popping it in her mouth. “Blimey, these are good.”

Jack’s vortex manipulator blinked suddenly, and he looked down at it in surprise. “Encrypted channel with files attached. Don’t recognize it.”

“Here.” Rose waved him over. “Patch it through on the laptop.”

Jack hesitated for a long moment before sighing. “Look…” He said as he pressed a couple buttons. “There’s something I need to tell you.”

Rose jerked away as the Torchwood logo appeared on the screen. “You work for Torchwood?!”

“No, it’s not like that.” He’d known she’d react badly. “I mean no, it is. But it’s different. It’s changed. There’s only half a dozen of us now.”

“Everythin’ Torchwood did, and you’re part of it?!”

Martha looked between the two of them in surprise. Rose had never mentioned Torchwood before, but from the sound of it they had something to do with the Doctor disappearing.

And apparently she hated them.

“The old regime was destroyed at Canary Wharf,” Jack insisted. “I rebuilt it. I changed it. And when I did that I did it for you and the Doctor, in your honors.”

Rose gritted her teeth, finally hitting play on the laptop. A woman appeared on screen.

“If I haven’t returned to my desk by twenty two hundred, this file will be emailed to Torchwood. Which means if you’re watching this, then I’m. Anyway, the Saxon files are attached. But take a look at the Archangel document. That’s when it all started. When Harry Saxon became Minister in charge of launching the Archangel Network.”

“What’s the Archangel Network?” Rose asked, looking between Jack and Martha.

“I’ve got Archangel,” Martha said. “Everyone’s got it.”

“It’s a mobile phone network,” Jack explained. “Because look, it’s gone worldwide. They’ve got fifteen satellites in orbit. Even the other networks, they’re all carried by Archangel.”

Realization dawned on Rose. “Hang on… Martha can I see your phone?”

Martha handed it over, and Rose buzzed it with the sonic real quick. After a minute it started beeping, Di di di dum. Di di di dum. “It’s the same rhythm,” Rose breathed. “The same rhythm you were tapping out earlier. The same rhythm the Master was humming. It’s everywhere. It’s in everyone’s phones, ticking away in the subconscious.”

“So is it like mind control?”

“No, it’s more subtle I think. But there are layers of code embedded in it. Vote Saxon. Believe in me.
That’s why nobody remembers what he stands for or what makes him such an appealing candidate. That’s why nobody questions the holes in history. Because he’s in their phones, whispering to the world.”

“Is there any way to stop it?”

Rose shook her head uncertainly. “Probably not from down here. We’d have to get closer to him, wherever he is.”

“How are we supposed to do that though?” Martha asked. Rose eyed the phone for a long moment.

“Martha do you have your TARDIS key on you?” She nodded. “Jack do you still have yours by any chance?”

“Of course,” Jack replied at once.

“Perfect. Hand them over. I have an idea.”

She dismantled the phone and the laptop and began working clumsily. She didn’t exactly know what she was doing – all she knew was that the TARDIS had shoved more information in her head than she’d originally thought. And it was helping her now.

“The TARDIS is designed to blend in,” she said as she worked. “Granted it doesn’t do the best job, the Doctor broke the chameleon circuit years ago, but it still projects a low level perception filter that prevents people from thinking too hard about its presence even when it’s a giant blue box in the middle of the desert. Now combine that with the network and…Martha you can see me, right?”

“Yes,” Martha replied uncertainly. Rose put the key around her neck. Martha blinked, her eyes drifting off to the side.

“Now?” Martha squinted, shaking her head.

“It’s like I know you’re there, but I don’t want to know.”

Rose slipped the key off. “And back again. The combination shifts your perception just a tiny bit. It won’t make us invisible, just unnoticed. So we can go anywhere.”

Martha and Jack took their keys, putting them around their necks. And they started off into the night.

“Don’t run, don’t shout,” Rose said quietly as they walked. “Just keep your voice down. Draw attention to yourself and the spell is broken. Just keep the shadows.”

“Like ghosts,” Jack said, and Rose nodded.

“That’s what we are. Ghosts.”

They arrived at the airport to see the Master greeting the US president. “First Contact cannot be made on any sovereign soil,” they heard the president saying. “To that purpose, the aircraft carrier Valiant is en route. The rendezvous will take place at eight a.m. You’re trying my patience, sir.”

“So America is completely in charge?” The Master asked silkily.

“Since Britain elected an ass, yes. I’ll see you on board the Valiant.”

“He’s going to get himself killed,” Rose muttered. There was no way in hell the Master’s ego would allow him to be talked down to like that. Even if he was handling it perfectly well now.
She closed her eyes for a long moment. She could feel the TARDIS close by but it was… distorted.

*What are you doin’?* She asked, a bit desperately, trying to force her way past the walls. *Why are you blockin’ me out?*

The TARDIS gave a weak hum – and suddenly Rose’s mind was flooded. She had just enough presence of mind not to yell out in surprise, but it was a close call. *Pain.* That was the most prominent thing. The TARDIS was in so much pain. What had he done to her?

The walls slammed back into place, and Rose had to grab Jack’s arm to keep from falling over. He looked down at her in alarm.

“Rose?”

They were distracted by the arrival of a police van. Martha scowled as Francine and Clyde were bundled out.

“Ha ha ha!” The Master said jovially. “Hi guys!”

“You can’t do this,” Clive insisted as they were nudged along.

“All will be revealed,” the Master said cryptically.

“Oh my god,” Martha breathed, her fists clenching. Rose rested a hand on her shoulder.

“We’re gonna save them. Don’t do anything rash yet.”

Martha gritted her teeth as she watched her parents get pushed into a waiting Land Rover. “I’m going to kill him,” she said fiercely.

“What say I use this perception filter to walk up behind him and break his neck?” Jack suggested. Rose shook her head.

“Now that sounds like a Torchwood.”

“Still a good plan.”

“Nobody is killin’ anyone,” Rose informed him. “The Doctor would give him a chance, and that’s what we’re gonna do too.”

Jack raised an eyebrow, but didn’t protest. “Aircraft carrier Valiant. It’s a UNIT ship at fifty eight point two north, ten point oh two east.”

“How do we get on board?” Martha asked nervously.

“Does that thing work as a teleport?” Rose asked, nodding at Jack’s vortex manipulator.

“Since you revamped it, yeah. Coordinates set.”

They all reached out, touching a hand to the bracelet… and they were sucked up into the vortex, deposited a moment later onto the Valiant.

“Oh, that thing is rough,” Martha groaned as she tried to shake off the headache.

“I’ve had worse nights,” Jack said with a grin before focusing on Rose, who was slumped against a wall, clutching her head. “Rose? What’s wrong?”
“Hurts…” The TARDIS was nearby. She could feel the ship’s pain thrumming through her head.

God what had he done to her?

“I’m fine,” she managed to force out, pushing herself up again. The pain was nearly unbearable — nearly. She could still walk.

“Hang on, it’s dawn,” Martha realized suddenly, looking out the window. “I thought this was a ship. Where’s the sea?”

“A ship for the twenty-first century,” Jack said quietly, “protecting the skies of planet Earth.”

“Come on,” Rose said, her voice tight, as they started along. She wanted to know what the hell the Master had done to her ship.

The closer they got, the worse the pain became. Rose had to force herself to focus on the path ahead, shaking her head through the pain every few minutes. God it hurt…

By the time the familiar blue doors came into view she felt like her head was going to split open. Still, the relief at the sight of her ship was almost overwhelming.

“Oh brilliant!” Martha said happily, though she was still eying Rose worriedly. The blonde was about ten shades paler than usual, her pupils constricted tight. She was clearly in pain.

“What’s it doing on the Valiant?” Jack asked. A reasonable question.

Rose stepped into the TARDIS — and the feeling of a sharp knife driving into the back of her skull nearly brought her to her knees. She cried out, and Jack grabbed her before she could fall. “Rose? Rose, what’s wrong?”

“Is she okay?”

She tried to focus, tried to say she was okay…but it was too much. She let her eyes flutter shut for a moment.

And when she opened them again, her head was still pounding and Jack and Martha were gone.

And there was a familiar woman standing in the corner of what Rose now recognized was a nearly destroyed console room.

“What’s goin’ on?” She demanded. “What did he do to you?”

The TARDIS sighed, shaking her head. “He cannibalized me to create a paradox machine.”

Well that explained the splitting headache, Rose supposed. “For what? What is he planning?”

“I am not sure,” the ship admitted. “But he is planning something with those the creatures — the ones he calls the Toclafane.”

“What are they? Because the Toclafane aren’t real, right?”

The TARDIS smiled softly. “No, my Wolf. They are a fairy tale. The Master has simply named them the Toclafane to hide their true identity.”

“And what is that? What are they?”
The lights overhead flickered and turned red. “We do not have time,” the TARDIS said regretfully. “The machine will activate at two minutes past eight. If you are here when that happens…”

Rose didn’t really want to hear the end of that sentence. “What do I have to do?”

“You must stop the Master before the machine can activate.”

“How do I do that?” Rose’s voice was desperate. “What can I do? How do I stop him?”

“You will have to find a way on your own, my Wolf.” The room began to fade away. “I am sorry.”

“No!” Rose yelled. “Wait, don’t—!”

Rose’s eyes flew open and she shot up with a gasp, surprising Martha and Jack. “Rose? Are you okay?” Martha asked uncertainly.

“What happened?” Jack demanded. Rose shook her head, stumbling up. They’d carried her outside of the TARDIS while she’d been unconscious. She shot the ship a sad look.

“No time. Come on. We have to stop the Master.”

“How are we going to do that?”

“…Improvise.”

They hurried along to the flight deck, slowing their steps once they arrived and peaking in. The US president was just beginning his speech.

“My fellow Americans, patriots, people of the world. I stand before you today as ambassador for humanity, a role I will undertake with the utmost solemnity. Perhaps our Toclafane cousins can offer us much, but what is important is not that we gain material benefits, but that we learn to see ourselves anew…”

“Figured out a plan yet?” Jack muttered to Rose. She fingered the key hanging around her neck.

“If I can get this around the Master’s neck, it’ll cancel out his perception, and everyone will see him for real. Might be hard to get through unnoticed with everyone on high alert though. If I get caught…”

“We’ve got this,” Jack said, and Martha nodded in agreement.

 “…And I ask you now, I ask of the human race, to join with me in welcoming our friends. I give you the Toclafane.”

Four spheres appeared, floating closer to the president. “My name is Arthur Coleman Winters, President Elect of the United States of America, and designated representative of the United Nations,” he introduced himself as Rose began sneaking around. “I welcome you to the planet Earth and its associated moon.”

“You’re not the Master,” one of the spheres said.

“We like Mr. Master,” another added.

“We don’t like you.”

“I can be master, if you so wish.” God Rose hoped all Americans weren’t as stupid as this man. “I
will accept mastery over you, if that is God’s will.”

“Man is stupid.” Rose had to agree.

“Master is our friend.”

“Where’s my Master, pretty please?”

“Oh, alright then,” the Master said suddenly, hopping up. “It’s me. Ta da! Sorry, sorry, I have this effect. People just get obsessed. Is it the smile? Is it the aftershave? Is it the capacity to laugh at myself? I don’t know. It’s crazy.”

“Saxon, what are you talking about?” Winters demanded. The Master smirked.

“I’m taking control, Uncle Sam, starting with you. Kill him.”

One of the spheres turned on Winters, blasting him to pieces. The room burst into activity and the guards were up and pulling their guns in the blink of an eye. The Master laughed, applauding.

“Guards.”

Shouts of “Nobody move!” echoed around the room as the guards herded everyone up.

“Now then.” The Master turned back to the cameras. “People of the Earth. Please attend carefully.”

It was now or never. Rose slipped the key over her head and ran forward, only to be grabbed and wrestled to the ground by two guards.

“Oi, lemme go!”

The Master smirked as he turned to see Rose. “We meet at last, Ms. Tyler. Oh, ho. I love saying that.”

“Stop it!” Rose cried desperately. There was still time to put an end to this. If he would just listen. The Time Lord scoffed, clearly amused.

“As if a perception filter’s going to work on me. And look, it’s the girlie and the freak. Although, I’m not sure which one’s which.”

Their cover was blown, then. Jack ran forward, only to be shot with the screwdriver clenched in the Master’s hand.

“Laser screwdriver,” he explained. “Who’d have sonic? And the good thing is, he’s not dead for long. I get to kill him again!”

“Please, stop,” Rose begged, still struggling against the guards. “You don’t want to do this, you weren’t always evil, I know you weren’t. I’ve seen it.”

The Master turned back to the cameras. “Oh, do excuse me. Little bit of personal business. Back in a minute.” He turned back to Rose, directing his next words at the guards. “Let her go.”

They released Rose and she stumbled up, head spinning. “It’s the sound, isn’t it? The drums? If you let me, I can help you. The TARDIS can help you.”

“Oh, how to shut you up?” The Master sighed. “I know. Memory Lane. Professor Lazarus. Remember him and his genetic manipulation device? What, did you think that little Tish got that job
merely by coincidence? I’ve been laying traps for you all this time.”

Rose’s eyes widened. “You’re the one who told Francine about me.”

“Guilty!” The Master said with a laugh. “Why do you think she’s been helping me all this time?”

Martha leaned over Jack just as he gasped back to life. He grabbed her wrist, strapping the vortex manipulator around it.

“Teleport,” he ordered. She shook her head helplessly.

“I can’t.”

“We can’t stop him. Get out of here. Get out.”

“And speaking of,” the Master continued with a wide grin. “Martha Jones you’ll want to see this. We’ve flown them in all the way from prison!”

A door opened, and Clive, Tish, and Francine were walked in, wrists fastened with cable ties. “Come on, move,” a guard said roughly.

“Mum!” Martha called. Francine looked at her daughter with wide, horrified eyes.

“I’m sorry.”

“The Toclafane,” Rose demanded, bringing the Master’s attention back to her. “What are they? Who are they?”

“Oh Ms. Tyler.” The Master sighed. “If I told you the truth, your heart would break.”

“Is it time?” One of the spheres asked eagerly. “Is it ready?”

“Is the machine singing?” Another added.

“Two minutes past.” The Master turned back to the cameras. “So, Earthlings. Basically, er, end of the world. Here come the drums!”

Music began playing overhead, and white-hot pain burned through Rose’s body. She screamed, losing control completely and collapsing, but still very much conscious.

“Rose!”

Martha hurried to her side, helping her sit up. She whimpered pathetically, leaning against the other woman.

“Go,” Rose gasped quietly. Martha shook her head.

“I can’t leave without you.”

But Rose already knew she would be useless if she left. It was sheer will that was keeping her awake now. There was nothing she could do.

“Go, Martha. Just go. Listen…”

She pulled Martha close, whispering in her ear as the Master said, “Shall we decimate them? That sounds good. A nice word, decimate. Remove one tenth of the population!”
A moment later voices began echoing overhead as the Toclafane began their slaughter.

“This is London, Valiant. This is London calling. What do we do? They’re killing us! The Toclafane are all around. They’re killing us.”

Martha pulled away from Rose, wide-eyed, and after a moment she nodded and teleported away. Rose and Jack exchanged looks for a brief moment before Rose finally succumbed to unconsciousness.

Martha landed on a hillside, pushing herself up and looking out over London. She was shaking, and she would be lying if she said she wasn’t terrified.

But she had a job to do.

“I’m coming back.”

Up above, the Master and Lucy looked out at the Earth below. The Mater smirked.

“And so it came to pass that the human race fell, and the Earth was no more. And I looked down upon my new dominion as Master of all, and I thought it good.”

Chapter End Notes

Please review...?
The Year That Never Was

Chapter Summary

Rose, Martha, Jack, and the Jones' family try to survive The Year That Never Was.

Chapter Notes

*****WARNINGS: Torture, mental torture, physical torture. It’s The Year That Never Was with the Master holding Rose hostage. It’s dark.*****

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Day Ten

Rose was exhausted.

She hadn’t known what to expect when the Master had taken them hostage, though she supposed in hindsight she should’ve expected this. The Master was too fascinated by her connection with the TARDIS not to experiment.

She couldn’t be sure, but she was fairly certain she was on day three of being strapped to a table, being poked and prodded and deliberately hurt to test her pain tolerance. He went into her head at least three times a day, ripping through her memories trying to find out more about the Doctor and keeping the TARDIS from rebuilding any walls to protect Rose. He wanted her in constant pain. It was the best way to keep her down.

“Now now,” the Master slapped her cheek lightly, trying to rouse her even as she threatened to pass out. She hadn’t been allowed much sleep. Her head was pounding, pain thrumming through her body. There was no specific source – everything just hurt. “Can’t sleep yet Ms. Tyler, we still have so much more fun to have.”

She screamed as he forced her way back into her mind. “Stop!” She begged, gasping through the pain. “Stop, please!”

He didn’t.

Day Twelve

It had been five days since guards had dragged Rose away. In that time Jack had been taken off four times for the Master to play with him, testing how much it took to kill him, killing him over and over just for fun, even developing a special setting on his laser screwdriver just to torture Jack with.

But Jack was always returned to his cell next to Clive’s. Rose wasn’t. And the thought of Rose alone with that bastard for five days made Jack sick.

It was equal parts a relief and horrifying when the guards finally brought Rose back to the cell –
well, *dragged* was more like it.

“Rose!” Jack threw himself at the bars of his cell, as if he thought he could get through them somehow, get to Rose. He was ignored, and Francine’s and Tish’s cell. Jack watched, his stomach dropping, as her knees went out and she crumbled against the cement floor.

“Rose?” Jack called, trying to get her attention. She didn’t even budge. Tish hesitated for a moment before crawling over to Rose, touching her shoulder gently. The blonde gave a small groan, raising her head just a bit.

“Wha…?”

“It’s okay,” Tish assured her quietly. A small whimper slipped off Rose’s lips as she dropped her head back down, curling up tight and passing out.

The guards came back a bit later and took Jack away again. He already knew what was coming – he wasn’t even worried about himself anymore. He tried to get a look at Rose as he was dragged by the cell, but he didn’t have enough time. Rose, for the most part, was mostly still, save for a small twitch every now and then and a pained noise.

“Is she okay?” Clive asked after a moment. He didn’t know Rose, but seeing anyone in distress – much less someone as young as this woman – was hard.

“Doesn’t look like she’s hurt,” Tish said quietly, looking Rose over. There were no outward signs of injuries, but that didn’t mean much. Who knew what that madman could do. Rose stirred a bit, a small sob slipping off her lips when the light hit her eyes.

“*Ow*…” The word was small and pathetic.

“What’s wrong? What hurts?”

Rose gave a small head jerk before curling up tighter, ignoring the ever-present pain. It hurt…

Francine hesitated for a long moment before scooting to sit next to her daughter, reaching out and brushing a hand through Rose’s hair. She’d always done that for her kids when they’d been sick or upset, and it always seemed to work.

It took a moment, but finally Rose relaxed under Francine’s touch, passing out once more.

It was another couple hours before Jack was returned, looking even more haggard and worn out than he had before he’d left. He wasn’t concerned about himself, though.

“How is she?” He asked as soon as the guards were gone. Rose had slept the entire time, mostly peacefully with Francine’s help.

“She’s not hurt that we can tell,” Tish said. “But she was in a lot of pain.”

That would be the TARDIS, Jack assumed. If the ship couldn’t block Rose from her pain…

Rose stirred a bit, making a small noise and muttering, “Don’t wanna go to school, Mum,” and Jack nearly laughed.

“Does she have a mother?” Francine asked suddenly. She knew almost nothing about this woman.

“Yeah. Never met her but I heard she was a force to be reckoned with.” Jack grinned a bit. “She slapped a friend of ours once apparently – big old leather-wearing guy and Jackie Tyler slaps him
like he’s nothing. I would’ve loved to see that.”

Francine picked up on the keyword. “She *was* a force to reckoned with?”

“Well… I guess she still is. I don’t know, she’s trapped in another universe. I don’t think Rose has seen her in a long time.”

That must have been horrible. Francine looked down at Rose, who looked years younger in her sleep. She couldn’t imagine never seeing one of her children again.

No wonder Rose had latched onto Martha. She was lonely.

**Day Twenty-Three**

Martha sighed as she collapsed onto a bench, dropping her head and taking a moment to breathe.

It had been twenty-three days since she’d left the Valiant alone. She’d been trying, slowly but surely, to spread the story just as Rose had told her. But it was hard. Most people weren’t that trusting at the moment.

She picked herself up, breathing deep, and scanned the area. There was a nearby store. It had probably been ransacked, but maybe she could find a few supplies. Slipping a hand into her jacket pocket and gripping her pocket knife tight, she started forward.

The store, thankfully, was blissfully empty. She’d encountered a few that had been commandeered as temporary shelters – those people hadn’t taken well to having their homes invaded.

Martha kept her guard up as she walked through the aisles, making as little sound as possible and keeping her ears peeled, just in case. As she had predicted, the store was mostly wiped out. She found a bottle of aspirin that she grabbed, just in case, and an ace bandage. In the very back of the store she found a backpack that she shoved her findings into, along with a black jacket. After a moment of thought she switched her leather jacket with it. Black would help her blend in better.

Not that she needed much help with that, thankfully. Whatever tinkering Rose had done with the TARDIS key, it was still working. Nobody ever saw Martha unless she wanted them to.

It was useful.

She walked back to the front of the store, her heart dropping when she saw that it was starting to rain. She couldn’t go out in that and risk getting sick. As much as it would suck to lose a night, it would be worse if she came down with pneumonia or something.

And so she retreated into the back again, out of sight, finding a back office to hunker down in with her back against the wall and her pocket knife clutched tight in her hand. Eventually she fell into a fitful sleep.

Her dreams were haunted by images of what the Master could be doing to her family.

**Day Thirty-Four**

Rose cringed as the Master dragged her along by a leash. To say she’d been humiliated when he’d put a collar around her throat was an understatement. But there wasn’t much she could do. She tried to resist but once he had the leash on her it was either cooperate or be choked.
She was seriously considering the second option.

She had it better than the Jones family, though. Francine and Tish had been forced to wear maid uniforms, while Clint was being dressed up like a janitor and made to mop the floors of the ship. It was the most humiliating thing the Master could think of, apparently.

Rose clenched her fists, and after a moment she stopped walking. The leash pulled taught, and the Master stopped to look back. “Aaaawww, what’s wrong sweetheart?” He cooed, giving the leash a light tug. “Don’t you want to keep walking around the ship? I bet your little legs need to be stretched.”

“Shove off,” Rose snapped, a bit of fire momentarily flaring in her. It disappeared almost instantly, however, when the Master yanked hard on the leash. Rose stumbled forward for a moment before digging her heels in, refusing to move. The amused glint in the Master’s eyes faded.

“Move, sweetheart.” The threatening tone was obvious.

“Make me.”

The Master gritted his teeth before moving forward quite suddenly, backhanding Rose. She stumbled, slumping against the wall, her ears ringing.

“Ready to walk now?”

He gave another tug, and Rose’s feet moved almost against her will. She trudged along obediently, blinking to try and bring the world back into focus. They walked past Clive, who was mopping the floors dejectedly. He stopped to spare Rose a sad look. Whatever the Master had him doing, at least he wasn’t attached to a leash and being dragged around like a dog.

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**Day Forty-One**

Martha had always wanted to go to Italy.

She had just never imagined it like this.

She’d been traveling with a nice man named Elia for a few days – he’d acted as her translator in exchange for being allowed to stay with her for protection.

“Tell me more about it,” Elia said one night. They were staying in the back room of an old house that had been long abandoned – it was already falling into disrepair. Martha had spent the last few days regaling Elia with tales of her travels.

“Oh… it’s amazing, Elia. I saw a planet where the skies were *pink*.”

“You lie,” Elia chuckled. He’d learned not to doubt any of the things Martha said, but he still liked to tease her.

“Hand to god. And the stars were almost close enough to touch. It was beautiful.”

“And *la femmina* you traveled with…?”

“Rose.” Martha nodded. “Her name was Rose. She was amazing too. Still is.”

“You seem so sure she is capable of saving us. How do you know?”
“Because I’ve seen her do it before. She’s saved worlds – she’s saved this world. But nobody else knows because she never takes credit for. She just goes on her way like she’s nothing special. She’s never realized just how incredible she really is.”

Elia nodded slowly. “You’ll keep telling people, right? After I leave?” It was almost time for her to move on. She couldn’t stay anywhere long. She had an entire world to cover, after all.

“Do you truly believe in this Rose, Martha?” Martha nodded without hesitation. “Then I will tell everyone.”

Martha smiled as she pulled Elia into a tight hug. She would miss him.

God she hoped he would be okay.

Day Fifty-Nine

Rose had thought the Master was done with the torture.

He seemed to have lost interest after the first couple weeks, finding much more joy in abject humiliation. Which was horrible in its own way, but at least spared Rose some pain.

The Master’s desires were subject to change at a whim, however. She should have realized she wasn’t going to escape it that easily.

One morning — long after she’d lost count of the days — she woke up to the Master barging into the tent he was now forcing her to call home. “Come along Rosie,” he said happily as he clipped the leash on her ever-present collar. “I’ve got a game for us to play today.”

Rose was understandably suspicious as the Master dragged her out of her tent, doing her best to ignore the fact that everyone currently present on the flight deck was getting a front row show to her humiliation. That was the Master’s goal, after all. She wasn’t going to give him any satisfaction.

“What is this?” She asked wearily as he pulled her into a small white room. It was mostly empty, except for a table in the middle and a rather frightening looking machine next to the table.

“It’s an experiment!” The Master said, looking much like a child on Christmas Day, as he forced Rose onto the table, strapping her down. “See I’ve been having some fun with the dear old Captain — freak though he might be, he’s still fundamentally human. All the regular human things kill him. It’s kind of boring. You, though…you’re not as human, are you?”

As he spoke he hooked Rose up to the machine. She really didn’t like where this was going.

“I do hope you have a stronger stomach than the captain. He made quite the mess.”

And with that he threw the switch.

Electrical currents ripped through Rose’s body and she screamed, convulsing on the table, straining against the restraints keeping her arms and legs in place.

The Master let it go on for about five seconds before he finally turned the machine off. Rose collapsed back against the table, tears streaming down her cheeks. Oh god it hurt…

She only had a moment’s reprieve, however, before the Master turned the machine back on, the voltage higher than before. Rose’s voice cracked as she screamed again, the sound high-pitched and
barely human. Unbeknown to her, all three Jones were in earshot as the Master tortured her. And all three cringed at the sound of her pain.

Another few seconds and the machine was finally switched off again, although the agony continued. “See now, that one killed old Jack.” The Master sounded fascinated. It made Rose sick. “But not you. So you’re a bit more durable than him. I wonder…”

Rose watched through tear-blurred eyes as he clicked the voltage up a bit more. “Stop,” she begged, her voice hoarse. “Stop, god stop. Please…”

But it was no good. This time Rose’s stomach rebelled, and she barely managed to raise her head enough to throw up all over herself without choking on it. The Master tsked as he cut the current again. “See, this is what I was talking about,” he sighed. “Fine, then. It’s no fun if you’re going to get sick.”

And with that he walked out, leaving Rose strapped to the table, gasping and crying.

She wasn’t alone for long, however — the Master sent Francine in to clean Rose up and get her back to her tent. The woman’s heart broke when she saw Rose.

“And alright sweetheart, c’mere,” she said gently, undoing the straps and helping Rose sit up. It took a bit of work, but she got Rose’s shirt up over her head and wrapped her in a blanket to help preserve a little bit of her dignity.

Rose tried to open her mouth, to say something…but all that came out was another broken sob. Francine wrapped her in a tight hug, brushing her hair back.

“It’s okay, love. It’s alright.”

She didn’t understand how she had ever hated this girl.

**Day Seventy-Two**

Martha winced, trying to wrap up her ankle. She’d sprained it running away from an explosion.

At least she’d lived.

The Doctor winced as he set down. Sometimes the dimension cannon ride was easy. Sometimes it was rough.

This was one of the rough times.

He rubbed his head, looking around. Wherever he had landed, this wasn’t the universe he was looking for. It felt odd and distorted, grating against his mind.

It also looked like a post-apocalyptic version of Earth. Definitely not the place he was looking for.

He had half an hour to kill, though. So he started walking, determined to stay out of trouble this time. He just wanted to get out of here and go home.

No. Not home. It wasn’t home. If he started thinking of it like that then it was all over.

Not home.
Strive as he might to stay out of trouble, he couldn’t very well ignore the sight of someone in distress. A young woman was sitting nearby, under a dying tree, trying to wrap up an obviously injured ankle.

“Alright?” He called gently so as to not spook her — in a world like this who knew what kind of weapons she would have. She looked up, wary surprise flashing through her eyes.

“Yeah. I’m fine.”

That was clearly a lie. “Want help?” The Doctor asked as he walked closer, still doing his best to look non-threatening. His clearly out of place clothes probably helped him there at least. With any luck he just looked like a harmless nutter.

“M’alright, I think. Thanks though.”

She wasn’t a very good liar. “I won’t hurt you,” the Doctor promised as he knelt down, still a few feet away. “I promise. You just look like you’re struggling a bit.”

Whatever had happened in this world, it had been long enough ago that the woman knew to be suspicious of everyone. She regarded the Doctor for a long moment before finally nodding and handing the bundle of bandage over. The Doctor smiled as he scooted closer, taking it up. “What’s your name?” She asked him as she watched him work.

“Um…John Smith.” It was safer to use a human name, he’d realized. Definitely better than using his own.

The woman snorted. “Yeah, and I’m Queen Elizabeth. Could be any more obvious about using an alias? God at least choose a different last name.”

The Doctor had to laugh at that. He liked her. “Well what’s your last name? I’ll borrow it.”

The woman regarded him for a long moment before finally saying, “Jones.”

“Then I’ll be John Jones.” That got him a laugh.

“God that sounds even worse. Better stick to Smith. Choose a different first name. And no that one you can’t borrow off me.”

The Doctor chuckled as he finished wrapping up her ankle. “Yeah that might draw more attention than just saying my name is John Smith.” He waved a hand around the area. “So what happened here, anyways?”

“Blimey mate, you living under a rock?” The woman — Jones — asked in disbelief.

“Bit of a hermit, me.”

Jones paused for a long moment, just staring at him. “You sound like my friend,” she finally said with a sigh. Not an exasperated sigh — more like a sad one.

“Is your friend dead?” The Doctor asked quietly. She shook her head.

“No. Not that I know of, at least. It’s been a while since I saw her.” She was quiet for a moment, staring at her wrapped ankle before shaking herself out of her thoughts. “Anyways. This—” She waved a hand at the area around them, “is the work of our dear old Lord and Master. Harold Saxon.”

“Who’s that?”
“For about a day he was the Prime Minister of England. Then he took over the world.”

The Doctor raised an eyebrow. “England really needs to make better life choices.”

“Tell me about it. We’re gonna fix it though, my friend and I. We have a plan.” Her voice was firm. The Doctor smiled. He liked her determination.

“Yeah?”

“Yeah.” She pushed herself up unsteadily, balancing on her ankle. The Doctor watched her carefully.

“You alright?”

“Yeah.” Her responding smile was tight but sincere. “It’s not too bad. I’ll just have to stop early tonight.”

The Doctor nodded, shoving his hands in his pockets and taking a step back. “Sounds good. You’ve got a world to save after all.”

Jones laughed at that. “Great big world. Not too much responsibility, right?”

“Not at all, no.”

The Doctor watched her limp away, sighing. He wanted to help…but interfering in other universes was so dangerous, as he’d learned the hard way.

Besides, Jones and this friend of hers seemed to have everything under control.

He only had a few more minutes before the dimension cannon trigger beeped, letting him know it was ready to go again. He cast one last look around the bleak landscape before pressing the button and teleporting away.

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**Day One-Hundred and One**

Jack sighed as he stared at his surroundings. He’d been tied up downstairs for days now, the Master finally growing bored with killing him. “You know, maybe give me something to read,” he suggested to the guard standing straight backed in front of him. “Tape it to your back or something. Really I don’t ask for much, just a little entertainment. The scenery around here is something to be desired.”

His little speech was interrupted by Tish Jones approaching with his lunch. “Ah Tish, the light of my life,” he said with a grin, earning a small smile from the younger woman. “How goes it on the surface world? Well not surface I guess since we’re up in the air. But surface for me.”

“Shut up.” Tish’s voice was good natured as she shoved the spoon into Jack’s mouth. This was the only break she ever got from the Master anymore. Granted it wasn’t much better. But at least Jack was good company.

“No talking,” the guard snapped, and they both winced a bit. Jack didn’t care much for his own safety — but he didn’t want to get Tish shot.

He was supposed to be protecting these people, after all.

He finished eating in silence, giving Tish a small, reassuring smile before she had to go back upstairs.
into what was arguably a worse hell — Jack knew the Jones and Rose were in the Master’s company every single day. And rumor had it he was getting more and more manic as time went on.

At least Jack got a reprieve from that.

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**Day One-Hundred and Ten**

Talking the TARDIS was a horribly painful experience these days. Rose tried not to connect with the ship too often — she was in enough pain as it was.

But it was also the only escape she got anymore.

She knew before she’d even opened her eyes that it had worked — the usually constant thrum of pain had hopped up at least five notches. A small whimper slipped off her lips as she forced her eyes open to see the TARDIS standing in front of her.

“I am sorry, my Wolf.”

“S’alright,” Rose gasped out through gritted teeth, shaking her head and trying to focus. She could deal with it for a bit.

“You can not keep doing this.” Between her connection with the TARDIS and the torture the Master was still putting her through, Rose’s body was under a lot of stress. More than human or not, she would only be able to handle it for so long.

And they still had a while to go before Martha would return.

“It’s fine,” Rose insisted. She wasn’t going to give up talking to the TARDIS, not for anything.

The ship was the only thing keeping her sane anymore.

“Can I see Martha?”

The TARDIS huffed, looking rather annoyed. “I told you last time—”

“Yeah yeah, dangerous, mind expanding, blah blah blah. This is important, alright?”

Rose had never thought she’d see the day where the TARDIS looked quite aggravated. “You are worse than my Thief,” she informed the blonde before placing her fingers on Rose’s temples. Rose closed her eyes…

And her mind flew away.

Despite all the Master had done, the TARDIS could still see everything. All the timelines. All the pasts. All the futures.

And, most importantly for Rose, the present.

Finding Martha was a simple enough task. She was staying at a campsite, regaling people with tales of her journeys with Rose. She was doing so well. Rose was so proud of her.

*She’s going to make it, right?*

The TARDIS didn’t answer. She never answered. Rose already knew there were too many variables to say whether or not for sure. It wasn’t just a matter of one decision or another.
So many things could go wrong. It scared Rose to death.

The return to her body was just as painful as connecting with the TARDIS. Rose knew the TARDIS was right — she couldn’t keep doing this. It was getting worse and worse every time Rose came back. At the moment she just wanted to curl up on the floor of her tent and cry. She did curl up and let the tears fall silently, but she couldn’t alert the Master to her distress.

He couldn’t know she was still talking to the TARDIS.

Day One-Hundred and Fifty-Two

For the most part, the Master had lost interest in torturing Rose. Despite her inhuman ability to survive, most of her tolerances were still very human. And that was boring for him.

But every now and again he would decide it was time to have a little bit of “fun.” After some careful observation, Rose measured the days he wanted to have his fun by how many bruises were on Lucy’s body.

It was one of the fun days.

Bits of woods shoved under the fingernails today. Pushed under and pulled out and pushed under again. For hours and hours and hours. Rose’s fingers were bloody and ruined by the time the sadistic grin finally faded from the Master’s face.

As was the ritual, Francine was sent in not long after the Master left Rose in the torture room. He seemed to find it amusing to make Francine clean Rose up.

Thankfully he didn’t seem to realize that Francine also comforted Rose while she was helping her.

Francine’s stomach rolled a bit when she saw the condition of Rose’s hands. Rose, for her part, was unnaturally still, staring straight up at the ceiling even as Francine released her from her bindings. The tears had run dry hours ago. She had nothing left.

“Up you go,” Francine said gently, helping her sit up. She wiped a cloth gently along Rose’s fingers, trying to wipe the blood away without hurting her too much.

Whatever Martha was doing, Francine hoped it was almost done. She didn’t know how much longer Rose was going to survive this.

Day Two-Hundred and Fifteen

Japan was gone.

Martha sat on the edge of a boat, watching as they floated away — they being her and four other people who had managed to escape the carnage. She didn’t know what had happened. How it had all gone so wrong. Did the Master know she was there? Was that why he’d ordered the attack?

A tear slipped down her cheek. She wiped it away hurriedly. She didn’t have time for this.

Her mind, inevitably, turned to her family. She’d heard rumors, before she’d left England, about Leo organizing his own rebel group. She wondered how that was going. She hoped he was okay. She hoped her parents and Tish were okay. She could only imagine what the Master was doing to them. What torture he was putting them through.
And it terrified her.

She wondered how Rose was doing. Not for the first time she wished Rose could use the TARDIS to talk to her, to relay information, to let her know everyone was okay. She wondered if such a thing were possible. If it was surely Rose would have done it by now, right?

She wondered if any of them were going to get out of this alive.

Day Two-Hundred and Forty-Three

“How long are you going to stay with me?”

“Forever.”

“Oh how sweet,” the Master sneered as he dug his way through Rose’s memories. He’d discovered that making Rose relive her happier moments with the Doctor was so much worse for her than causing her physical pain.

“The great, powerful Time Lord, the last of his kind, falling in love with a little mutt. How pitiful.”

“Shut up,” Rose grated out. Aside from the fact that seeing these things again and again made her feel like her heart was being twisted and torn in her chest, the Master constantly mucking about in her head hurt.

Not that she could tell much difference between types of pain anymore.

“It never struck you as odd? This amazing, god-like being falling in love with you? Look at you!” The Master laughed, and Rose winced as he cycled further back in her memories, pulling up images of fourteen-year-old Rose cutting class to smoke behind the bleachers with her friends, fifteen-year-old Rose sneaking out and drinking at parties, watching Jimmy Stone and declaring that she was gonna marry him one day. Sixteen-year-old Rose getting the crap beaten out of her by Jimmy. Seventeen-year-old Rose making the decision not to take her A-levels and instead going to the shop.

“You’re pathetic! Even as far as humans go you’re just so pathetic. Why the hell would he ever fall in love with you of all people?” The Master laughed scathingly.

“Shut up.” Rose’s voice cracked a bit. It wasn’t as if she hadn’t asked herself these same questions over and over and over. It wasn’t as if she hadn’t lain in bed at night crying to herself because she knew no matter what she did she would never be good enough for the Time Lord to whom she’d given her heart and life.

She didn’t need the Master to tell her what she already knew.

“You were just a pet to him I suppose. Just like when a human gets lonely they get a cat. You were his cat. He fed you treats and you showed him love. I guess he needed someone to keep him company after he destroyed Gallifrey. And you were so willing. Following him around like a lost puppy.”

“So am I a cat or am I dog?” Rose asked with a bit of a sneer. She was trying to cover up the hurt. She didn’t want to admit that what the Master was saying made sense — that it was much more likely that the Doctor saw her as a pet rather than someone to love.

“Who says you can’t be both?” The Master asked happily. “A mix between a cat and a dog. A freak of nature. So fitting for what you are now, wouldn’t you agree? I wonder what the Doctor would say
if he could see what his little pet has turned into.”

That was something Rose often wondered about as well.

She didn’t think she wanted to know the answer.

Day Three-Hundred and Eight

Martha was exhausted.

She collapsed into her hiding spot, curling up tight, wrapping herself in the blanket she’d nicked sometime back.

Three-hundred and eight.

It had been three-hundred and eight days since she’d last seen her mother, her father, her sister… Rose.

She didn’t even know if they were still alive. She didn’t know what she’d do if she got back to the Valiant and found out any of them had died.

She didn’t think she’d be able to handle it.

But there was no time to think about that. She needed to turn her sights back to England now. She needed to start moving toward home.

It was time to start getting the plan in place.

Chapter End Notes

Please review...?
The Last Of The Time Lords Part One

Chapter Summary

Rose, Jack, and the Jones try to survive their last hours of captivity as Martha puts the plan into place.

(1/3)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Home.

The very thought of it almost made Martha cry. But there was no time for that.

She had a mission to complete.

The boat she was on bumped against the shore, and she climbed out to greet the man waiting for her on dry land. “What’s your name, then?” She asked, hooking her bag over her shoulder.

“Tom Milligan,” he introduced himself. “No need to ask who you are. The famous Martha Jones.” That still threw Martha a bit. Was she really famous? “How long since you were last in Britain?”

“Three-hundred and sixty-five days.” She had counted every single one of them. “It’s been a long year.”

Tom nodded as he led her along. “So what’s the plan?”

“This Professor Docherty. I need to see her. Can you get me there?”

“She works in a repair shed,” Tom said with a nod. “Nuclear Plant Seven. I can get you inside. What’s all this for? What’s so important about her?”

Martha shook her head though. “Sorry, the more you know, the more you’re at risk.”

They were quiet for a brief moment ask they walked. “There’s a lot of people depending on you,” Tom said finally. “You’re a bit of a legend.”

Martha couldn’t resist asking, “What does the legend say?”

“That you sailed the Atlantic, walked across America. That you were the only person to get out of Japan alive. Martha Jones, they say. she’s going to save the world.” At least they weren’t saying she could walk on water. “Bit late for that.”

They arrived at Tom’s van, and Martha tilted her head. “How come you can drive? Don’t you get stopped?”

“Medical staff,” Tom explained. “Used to be pediatrics back in the old days. But that gives me a license to travel so I can help out other labor camps.”
Martha gave a humorless smile. “Traveling with a doctor. No idea what that’s like.”

They climbed into the van, and Tom finally said what had been burning in the back of his mind. “Story goes that you’re the only person on Earth who can kill him. That you, and you alone, can kill the Master stone dead.”

That just got him a sigh as Martha slid down in her seat. “Let’s just drive.”

* * * * *

“Citizens rejoice. Your lord and master stands on high…playing track three.”

Rose sighed as she rolled over, eyes blinking open to the first lines of the song blaring over the speakers. “I can’t decide whether you should live or die. Though you’ll probably go to Heaven, please don’t hang your head and cry. No wonder why my heart feels dead inside. It’s cold and hard and petrified. Lock the doors and close the blinds, we’re going for a ride. Oh, I could throw you in a lake or feed you poisoned birthday cake. I won’t deny I’m going to miss you when you’re gone.”

Him and the bloody music. Rose sighed as she crawled out of her tent just in time to see the Master waltz over to Lucy and grab her, pulling her into a dance. Francine was serving tea.

“Oh, I could bury you alive but you might crawl out with a knife and kill me when I’m sleeping, that’s why I can’t decide whether you should live or die. Oh you’ll probably go to Heaven, please don’t hang your head and cry. No wonder why my heart feels dead inside. It’s cold and hard and petrified. Lock the doors and close the blinds, we’re going for a ride…”

“And you, my dear sweet flower!” The Master said suddenly, noticing Rose was peeking out of her tent. He spun Lucy off and danced over to Rose instead, clipping the leash on her collar and dragged her along. Francine watched, heart breaking, as Rose allowed herself to pulled like a dog.

The blonde’s spirit really was broken.

“It’s ready to rise, Rose,” the Master said happily as he yanked her along. “The new Time Lord Empire. It’s good, isn’t it?” He looked back, smirking. “Anything? No? Anything? Oh, but they broke your hearts, didn’t they, those Toclafane, ever since you worked out what they really are.” He paused before delivering his next piece of news. “They say Martha Jones has come back home. Now why would she do that?”

“Leave her alone,” Rose said roughly — the first bit of spark she’d shown in quite a while. The Master grinned.

“But you said something to her, didn’t you?” He ventured. “On the day I took control. What did you tell her?”

Rose took a deep breath, grinding to a halt and forcing the Master to stop and look back at her. “Has it ever occurred to you, Master, that maybe you should worry less about somethin’ I said a year ago, and worry more about how manic you’re becomin’? Sounds like your mind is just deteoritatin’ further and further. Tick tock, Time Lord.”

She clicked out the four beats of the drum with her tongue. The entire flight deck fell silent for a brief moment before the Master moved quite suddenly, punching Rose square in the cheek.

The sound of a bone breaking sounded quite loud in the quiet.
Rose crumpled to the floor, the Master lording it over her for a brief moment before the computer announced, “Valiant now entering Zone One airspace. Citizens rejoice.”

“Come on, people!” The Master yelled, prancing away from Rose. “What are we doing? Launch Day in twenty-four hours.”

Francine moved to help Rose up while the Master was distracted. Her face was already swelling up — that was going to leave a nasty bruise.

Thank god she healed fast.

Tish watched her mother and Rose for a moment before heading downstairs to give Jack his meal. The man grinned when he saw Tish.


She rolled her eyes as she shoved the spoon in his mouth. Really sometimes Jack was the only bright point of her day.

And wasn’t that sad.

* * * * *

Martha made a disgusted face as she looked up at the giant statue of the Master lording over them. “All over the Earth, those things,” she told Tom. “He’s even carved himself into Mount Rushmore.”

“Best to keep down,” Tom warned Martha, and they dropped into a crouch to move along the quarry. “Here we go.” They started along carefully. “The entire south coast of England, converted to shipyards,” Tom said as they moved. “They bring slave labor in every morning. Break up cars, houses, anything, just for the metal. Building a fleet out of scrap.”

Martha looked out at the rockets. “You should see Russia,” she said after a moment. “That’s Shipyard Number One. All the way from the Black Sea to the Bering Strait, there’s a hundred thousand rockets getting ready for war.”

“War?” Tom questioned. “With who?”

“The rest of the universe.” The look Tom gave Martha a look that clearly said he thought she was mad. “I’ve been out there, Tom. In space, before all this happened, there’s a thousand different civilizations all around us with no idea of what’s happening here. The Master can build weapons big enough to devastate them all.

“You’ve been in space?” That would be the part he picked up on.

“Problem with that?” Martha asked with a small smile.

“No,” Tom said quickly. “No. Just, er… wow. Anything else I should know?”

“I’ve met Shakespeare.”

Before Tom could question that, two spheres flew out from behind the statue. Martha stilled quickly, holding her breath. She knew the key would work, but better safe than sorry.

“Identify, little man,” one of the spheres demanded of Tom. He got his license out quickly.
“I’ve got a license. Thomas Milligan, Peripatetic Medical Squad. I’m allowed to travel. I was just checking for—”

“Soon the rockets will fly,” the sphere interrupted, “and everyone will need medicine. You’ll be so busy.”

They flew off laughing. Like children, Martha thought “But they didn’t see you.”

Martha held up her TARDIS key. “How do you think I traveled around the world?” They started back to the van as she explained. “Because the Master set up Archangel, that mobile network, fifteen satellites around the planet, but really it’s transmitting this low level psychic field. That’s how everyone got hypnotised into thinking he was Harold Saxon.”

“Saxon.” Tom sighed. “Feels like years ago.”

It felt like another lifetime. “But the key’s tuned in to the same frequency,” Martha continued. “Makes me sort of not invisible, just… unnoticeable.”

“Well, I can see you,” Tom pointed out.

“That’s because you wanted to.”

He nodded thoughtfully. “Yeah. Suppose I did.”

“Is there a Mrs. Milligan?” Martha asked suddenly. Tom shook his head.

“No. No. What about you?”

“Oh definitely not.” Who had time for that when they were trying to keep Rose alive?

“Come on. I’ve got to find this Docherty woman.”

“Well have to wait until the next work shift,” Tom said, shaking his head. “What time is it now?”

“Nearly three o’clock.” They had a while to go.

* * * * *

The console room looked worse than usual, Rose thought dimly as she looked around. She wasn’t sure if that was a reflection of her own deteriorating state or the TARDIS’ or maybe both. Either way, it wasn’t wholly reassuring.

“My Wolf,” the TARDIS said sadly when she saw the state of her human. Rose knew she looked like hell – even if this wasn’t actually her, she didn’t have the mental state or energy to try and change her appearance.

“S’fine.” She tried to dismiss it.

“It is not fine.” The aggravation was clear in the TARDIS’ voice. “You are dying. In case it has slipped your notice.”

No Rose was pretty damn aware of it actually. She could feel it with every single breath. The TARDIS was losing life and so was she.

And it was terrifying.
“I don’t have time for this right now. I need to see how Martha’s doin’.”

“Absolutely not.” The TARDIS sounded purely aggravated now. “I told you after last time that you could not risk it again.”

“I have to!”

“No, you do not!”

Rose made an aggravated noise, kicking the console. That was stupid – all in her head or not, that hurt. She didn’t even have the energy to drag herself to the chair – she sat down right in the middle of the floor, pulling her legs up to her chest and pressing her forehead into her knees.

God she hated this.

There was no sound of footsteps – the TARDIS never made any noise – but after a moment gentle arms wrapped around Rose, holding her tight.

“I’m so tired of this,” Rose whispered. “I just want to go home.”

Except she didn’t even know where home was anymore.

“It is almost over,” the TARDIS assured her gently, smoothing her hair back the way Francine did whenever she was taking care of Rose. The way Jackie had when Rose had been sick or upset or scared.

God she missed her mother so much.

Rose curled up tighter, tears slipping down her cheeks. Everything hurt, everything was hell, and she didn’t know what to do anymore. She just wanted to give up. Why couldn’t that be an option?

Because the Doctor would never give up, a voice in the back of Rose’s head reminded her. And you need to be the Doctor.

What if she didn’t want to be anymore?

Rose had never been ripped away from the TARDIS before – usually when she left it was of her own choosing. Which hurt just as much on its own.

But being ripped away from the TARDIS was unbearable.

“Come along now Rosie!” The Master sang as he hooked the leash on the collar and gave a tug, effectively pulling her back to reality. Her pained gasp went unnoticed, at least, in the Master’s haste.

She couldn’t hide the way she staggered and collapsed to her knees, however, as her heart skipped a painful beat. God it hurt…

“Now now Rosie, we don’t have time for this,” the Master said as he yanked her up, dragging her along. “We have to record a message for Martha Jones.”

Oh… Rose did not like the sound of this.

* * * *

Martha stood back, watching as Tom cut a gap in the shipyard’s chain link fence, and they hurried across to the building on the other side. Their destination. The woman they walked in on hitting a
TV looked highly frustrated.

“Professor Docherty?” Tom questioned.

“Busy,” the woman said shortly.

“They er, they sent word ahead,” Tom tried again uncertainly. “I’m Tom Milligan. This is Martha Jones.”

“She can be the Queen of Sheba for all I care,” Docherty said roughly. “I’m still busy.”

“Televisions don’t work anymore,” Martha pointed out, and Docherty sighed.

“Oh God, I miss Countdown. Never been the same since Des took over. Both Deses. What’s the plural for Des? Desi? Deseen?” She shook her head. “But we’ve been told there’s going to be a transmission from the man himself.”

As they watched, a static-y back and white image appeared. “There!” Docherty said happily. The image solidified into the Master.

“My people,” he said with all the flourish of a pompous arse. “Salutations on this, the eve of war. Lovely woman. But I know there’s all sorts of whispers down. Stories of a child, walking the Earth, giving you hope.”

Martha swallowed hard, clenching her fists. “But I ask you,” the Master continued as he danced back and the camera panned out to show… Rose. Martha’s stomach dropped. She looked horrible. “How much hope does this woman have? Say hello my little freak. She’s not looking too well, is she? Wanna tell them why, my dear Rose?”

Rose just glared at the Master weakly, refusing to answer. “Well, let me tell you then,” the Master said. “Since Rose doesn’t seem to have the strength to. She’s dying, you see. She was just a simple little human girl before she messed with forces far beyond her knowledge or capability of understanding. And now she’s dying. She’s just a little human who’s in too far over her head. Isn’t that right Rose?”

Again, no answer. The Master smirked as he held out his laser screwdriver, zapping Rose. Martha cringed as the blonde’s screams echoed out of the speakers.

It seemed to last forever, though it was only two minutes. But damn it all if it wasn’t the longest two minutes of her life. “Let’s try again – isn’t that right, Rose?”

Rose’s chest was heaving as she tried to gather the breath to speak. “Right,” she finally managed to grit out, and the Master turned back to the screen.

“Received and understood, Ms. Jones?”

The screen went blank. “I’m sorry,” Tom said quietly. Martha shook her head.

“Rose is still alive.” That’s what she had to focus on. Rose was still alive.

For now.

“Obviously the Archangel Network would seem to be the Master’s greatest weakness,” Docherty said, paying no attention to Martha’s distress. “Fifteen satellites all around the Earth, still transmitting. That’s why there’s so little resistance. It’s broadcasting a telepathic signal that keeps people scared.”
“We could just take them out,” Tom suggested. Docherty rolled her eyes.

“We could,” she agreed sarcastically. “Fifteen ground to air missiles. You got any on you?” Tom ducked his head. “Besides, any military action, the Tocaflane descend.”

“They’re not Toclafane,” Martha corrected, taking grim pleasure in being able to correct Docherty. She was a very unpleasant woman. “That’s a name the Master made up.”

“What are they, then?”

“That’s what I came here to find out,” Martha said. “Know your enemy. I’ve got this.” She fished a computer disc out of her bag. “No one’s been able to look at a sphere close up. They can’t even be damaged, except once. The lightning strike in South Africa brought one of them down, just by chance. I’ve got the readings on this.”

Docherty took the disc and put it into her computer, thumping the screen as it tried to read the data. “Oh, whoever thought we’d miss Bill Gates,” she muttered. Tom turned to Martha.

“So is that why you traveled the world? To find a disc?”

“No. Just got lucky,”

“I heard stories,” Docherty spoke up suddenly. “That you walked the Earth to find a way to build a weapon.” The computer beeped suddenly. “There! A current of fifty eight point five kiloamperes transferred charge of five hundred and ten megajoules precisely.”

“Can you recreate that?” Tom asked. Docherty nodded.

“I think so. Easily. Yes.”

“Right then, Dr. Milligan.” Martha stood, stretching her arms over her head. “We’re going to get us a sphere.”

* * * * *

Martha wasn’t overly fond of the idea of live bait. But it was the only thing that was going to work. She held her breath as she watched Tom step out into the clearing, holding his gun out and firing three times. Almost instantly an orb descended upon him and he ran.

“He’s coming,” she reported to Docherty. “You ready?”

“You do your job, I’ll do mine!” Docherty snapped back. Martha knew better than to take offense.

“Now!” Tom shouted as he ran, and Docherty pressed a button just as the orb came in after him. An electrical field buzzed to life, zapping the orb. After a few moments it dropped to the ground. Martha gave a sigh of relief.

“That’s only half the job,” Docherty reminded her. “Let’s find out what’s inside.”

* * * * *

“I’m going to kill him,” Francine whispered fiercely. The family was back in their cell. The Master had made them and Jack stand there and watch as he’d tortured Rose as a message to Martha. It was sick. “I’m going to kill him, if I have to wait a hundred years. I’m going to kill the Master. One day he’ll let his guard down. One day. And I’ll be there.”
“No, that’s my job,” Clive insisted. “I’ll swear to you, I’d shoot that man stone dead.”

“I’ll get him,” Tish cut in. “Even if it kills me.”

“Don’t say that,” Francine snapped.

“I mean it,” Tish insisted. “That man made us stand on deck and watch the islands of Japan burning. Millions of people. I swear to you, he’s dead.”

Rose was still shaking from the assault as she focused on Lucy, standing across the room with her husband. She wasn’t happy anymore. She hadn’t been for a long time.

“Tomorrow, we launch,” the Master said happily. “We’re opening up a rift in the Braccatolian space. They won’t see us coming. It kind of scary.”

“Then stop,” Rose said quietly. She was ignored, of course.

“Once the Empire is established, and there’s a new Gallifrey in the heavens, maybe then it stops. The drumming. The never ending drumbeat. Ever since I was a child. I looked into the vortex — oh but you wouldn’t know anything about that, would you? — That’s when it chose me. The drumming, the call to war. Can’t you hear it? Listen, it’s there now. Right now. Tell me you can hear it, Rosie.” He almost sounded desperate. “Tell me.”

Rose lifted her eyes to look at the Master, gaze dead. “It’s only you.”

He smirked as he pulled back. “Good. Maybe once I’m done with this universe I can arrange for a little reunion with the Doctor. It’s been far too long. Do you think he’ll be happy to see me?”

Before Rose could answer, one of the spheres flew in. “Tomorrow, the war,” it said happily. “Tomorrow we rise, never to fall.”

“You see?” The Master said. “I’m doing it for them. You should be grateful. They’re you, after all.”

Rose looked away, squeezing her eyes shut as a lone tear slipped down her cheek.

Chapter End Notes

Please review?
Martha held her breath as Docherty fiddled with the sphere, trying to open it. “There’s some sort of magnetic clamp,” she muttered as she worked. “Hold on, I’ll just trip the…”

She hit something, and the four parts of the sphere opened outward, revealing what was inside. “Oh my god!” Docherty gasped. It was a tiny, wizened head. They jumped back as the single eye opened.

“It’s alive,” Docherty gasped.

“Martha,” the thing said in a high-pitched voice. “Martha Jones.”

Tom looked at Martha with wide eyes. “It knows you.”

“Sweet, kind Martha Jones. You helped us fly.”

Martha’s breath caught. “What do you mean?”

“You led us to salvation.”

That wasn’t an answer. “Who are you?”

“The skies are made of diamonds.”

No…oh god no. “No,” Martha said out loud as her mind flashed back to little Creet. “You can’t be him.”

“We share each other’s memories. You sent him to Utopia.”

Martha felt sick. “Oh my god…”

“What’s it talking about?” Tom demanded. “What’s it mean?”

“What are they?” Docherty added. Martha shook her head mutely.

“Martha. Martha, tell us. What are they?”

It took her another moment to find her voice. “They’re us. They’re humans. The human race from the future.”

~*~
“I took Lucy to Utopia,” the Master said thoughtfully. “A Time Lord and his companion. I’m sure you know what that’s like. I took her to see the stars. Isn’t that right, sweetheart?”

“Trillions of years into the future.” Lucy’s voice was almost dead. “To the end of the universe.”

“Tell her what you saw,” the Master prompted. He wanted Rose to know what she had done.

“Dying. Everything dying. The whole of creation was falling apart, and I thought, there’s no point. No point to anything. Not ever.”

“And it’s all your fault,” the Master informed Rose gleefully.

~*~

“I’d sort of worked it out with the paradox machine,” Martha said quietly. “Rose said…the Master had the TARDIS, this time machine, but she made it so he could only go between here and the end of the universe. So he found Utopia.”

~*~

“You should have seen it, Ms. Tyler,” the Master said, watching Rose’s expression. He was enjoying this. “Furnaces burning. The last of humanity screaming at the dark.”

Rose could almost see it.

~*~

“The Utopia Project was the last hope,” Martha explained. “Trying to find a way to escape the end of everything.”

“There was no solution,” the sphere wheezed. “No diamonds. Just the dark, and the cold.”

~*~

“All that human invention that sustained them across eons,” the Master continued. “It all turned inwards. They cannibalized themselves.”

“We made ourselves so pretty,” the sphere added happily.

“Regressing into children. But it didn’t work. The universe was collapsing around them.”

~*~

“But then the Master came with his wonderful time machine to bring us back home,” the sphere said.

“But that’s a paradox,” Docherty insisted. “If you’re the future of the human race, and you’ve come back to murder your ancestors, you should cancel yourselves out. You shouldn’t exist.”

“And that’s what the paradox machine is for,” Martha said.

~*~

“My masterpiece, Ms. Tyler. A living TARDIS, strong enough to hold the paradox in place, allowing the past and the future to collide in infinite majesty.”

“But you’re changing history,” Rose said, breaking her silence for the first time. “Not just Earth, the
entire universe.”

“I’m a Time Lord. I have that right.”

“You’re not a god.”

“You seem to have gotten the wrong idea of what Time Lords are, Ms. Tyler. The Doctor’s fault no doubt.” The Master sounded amused. Rose shook her head.

“But even then…why come all this way just to destroy?”

“We came backwards in time all to build a brand new empire lasting one hundred trillions years!” The sphere sang.

“With me as their master,” the Time Lord added. “Time Lords and humans combined. It’s practically the Doctor’s dream come true.”

~*~

“But what about us?” Tom sounded disgusted. “We’re the same species. Why do you kill so many of us?”

“Because it’s fun!”

In one swift movement, Tom drew his gun and shot the thing square in the middle of its head.

~*~

“Human race,” the Master said quietly, thoughtfully. “Greatest monster of them all.” He paused, watching Rose for a moment. “Night, then.”

Rose watched as the couple left, the sphere following behind.

* * * * *

Martha sat on the edge of the bed, staring at the floor. She hated having her theory confirmed. It made her sick.

“I think it’s time we had the truth, Ms. Jones,” Docherty said suddenly, snapping Martha out of her trance. “The legend says you’ve traveled the world to find a way of killing the Master. Tell us, is it true?”

Martha nodded. “Just before I escaped, Rose told me. The Master isn’t the only Time Lord, you see. There was another one, called the Doctor. He and the Master were enemies, they’ve been coming to Earth for years. And they’ve been watched. There’s UNIT and Torchwood, all studying Time Lords in secret. And they made this…the ultimate defense.”

As she spoke she opened a case, showing Docherty the gun she had been carrying. It had a squeeze trigger and four small cylinders along the top. There were also three vials of colored liquid.

“All you need to do is get close,” Tom said in wonder as he reached out, taking the gun to examine it. “I can shoot the Master dead with this.”

“Actually,” Docherty’s voice was tense. “You can put that down now, thank you very much.”

“Point is, it’s not so easy to kill a Time Lord,” Martha continued. “They can regenerate. Literally
bring themselves back to life."

"Ah, the Master’s immortal," Docherty said dryly. "Wonderful."

"Except for this." Martha indicated the gun. "Four chemicals, slotted into the gun. Inject him. Kills a Time Lord permanently."

"Four chemicals?" Tom questioned. "You’ve only got three."

"Still need the last one, because the components of this gun were kept safe, scattered across the world, and I found them. San Diego, Beijing, Budapest, and London."

"Then where is it?" Tom sounded determined.

"There’s an old UNIT base, north London. I’ve found the access codes. Tom, you’ve got to get me there."

Tom was more than willing of course. "We can’t get across London in the dark," he said even as they prepared to leave. "It’s full of wild dogs. We’ll get eaten alive. We can wait till morning, then go with the medical convoy."

"You can spend the night here, if you like," Docherty volunteered. Thankfully Tom unwittingly saved Martha from having to make up an excuse.

"No, we can get halfway, stay at the slave quarters in Bexley. Professor, thank you."

"And you," the woman nodded. "Good luck."

"Thanks."

Tom was already gone and Martha was halfway out the door when Docherty stopped her. "Martha, could you do it? Could you actually kill him?"

Martha hesitated. "I’ve got no choice."

"You might be many things, but you don’t look like a killer to me," Docherty pointed out.

"Good night, Professor Docherty."

** * * *

The walk to the slave quarters wasn’t long, at least. "Let me in!" Tom called as he banged on the door. "It’s Milligan."

The door opened and they were ushered inside quickly. The place was full — not even standing room. "Did you bring food?" The woman who had opened the door asked.

"Couldn’t get any," Tom said apologetically. "And I’m starving."

"All we’ve got is water."

Martha looked around, eying the area and all the people. "I’m sorry," she said quietly.

"It’s cheaper than building barracks. Pack them in, a hundred to each house, ferry them off to shipyards every morning."
Martha jumped as a small hand pulled on her jacket. “Are you Martha Jones?” The little boy asked. She smiled a bit.

“Yeah, that’s me.”

“Can you do it?” The boy sounded excited. “Can you kill him? They said you can kill the Master, can you? Tell you can do it. Please, tell us you can do it.”

“Who is the Master?” The woman asked before Martha’s heart could break too much. Suddenly everyone was talking.

“Come on, just leave her alone,” Tom called above the babble. “She’s exhausted.”

“No, it’s alright,” Martha assured him. “They want me to talk, and I will.”

* * * * *

Rose whimpered as she came back into her body once more. The TARDIS was right — that had to be the last visit. She could feel her body breaking down — her pulse thready and weak, her heartbeat fragile. She thought she deserved credit just for making it this far, really.

But if this didn’t end soon she was going to die.

She raised her head wearily as footsteps reached her ears, blinking rapidly as the Master peeked in.

“Guess what?” He was grinning. “I found her.”

* * * * *

“I traveled across the world,” Martha said from her perch on the steps as everyone gathered around her. “From the ruins of New York to the fusion mills of Chine, right across the radiation pits of Europe. And everywhere I went, I saw people just like you, living as slaves. But if Martha Jones became a legend, then that’s wrong, because my name isn’t important. There’s someone else. The woman who sent me out there. The woman who told me to walk the Earth. Her name is Rose. Rose Tyler. She has saved your lives so many times, and you never even knew she was there. She never stops. She never stays. She never asks to be thank. But I’ve seen her. I know her. She’s my best friend. The greatest friend a person could ever ask for. And I know what she can do.”

There was a brief moment of silence as everyone took this in. “It’s him!” The woman called suddenly. “It’s him! Oh my god, it’s him! It’s the Master. He’s here!”

“But he never comes to Earth,” the little boy insisted. “He never walks upon the ground.”

“Hide her!”

“Use this,” Tom said, tossing an old sac over, and they used it to cover Martha. Tom hurried outside with his gun, getting ready to face the Master.

“He walks among us,” the little boy said in a hushed voice. “Our lord and master.”


Martha hesitated for a long moment before standing, pulling her key off and going outside. “Oh yes,”

Martha tossed the bag onto the ground between them, and the Master destroyed it with his laser screwdriver. “And now, good companion,” he said dramatically. “Your work is done.”

Martha took a step back as he pointed the laser screwdriver at her. Before he could fire, however, Tom ran out.

“No!”

Martha jerked back when Tom took the shot for her instead. He was dead before he hit the ground. The Master laughed.

“But you,” he said as he focused on Martha again, “when you die, Rose should witness, hmm? Almost dawn, Martha, and planet Earth marches to war.”

* * * * *

Rose was doing her best not to slump over. She’d been hooked up to her leash and tied to a railing on the flight deck and she could barely stand up straight. It was awful. She watched as Clive, France, Tish, and Jack were escorted in by guards.

This was it.

One way or another, it ended today.

“Citizens of Earth, rejoice and observe!”

Rose swallowed hard as Martha was walked in. Martha’s eyes swept over her family and Jack before landing on Rose. God she looked awful.

“Your teleport device,” the Master said from his spot lording over all of them. “In case you thought I’d forgotten.”

Martha pulled the vortex manipulator off, tossing it to the Master. “And now, kneel.” God he wouldn’t stop until he had humiliated all of them. Martha knelt down obediently, however. “Down below, the fleet is ready to launch. Two hundred thousand ships set to burn across the universe. Are we ready?”

“The fleet awaits your signal. Rejoice!”

“Three minutes to align the black hole converters,” the Master said. “Counting down. I never could resist a ticking clock. My children, are you ready?”

The spheres flew around outside, singing and humming their eagerness. They were ready to kill.

“At zero, to mark this day, the child Martha Jones, will die,” the Master announced. “My first blood. Any last words? No? Such a disappointment, this one. But I guess that’s what happens. Pathetic humans pick pathetic companions.” He shrugged before refocusing on Martha. “Bow your head.” She did so obediently. “And so it falls to me, as Master of all, to establish from this day, a new order of Time Lords. From this day forward—”

He cut off as a small laugh slipped off of Martha’s lips. “What? He demanded. “What’s so funny?”

“A gun.”
“What about it?”

“A gun in four parts?” The disbelief was clear in Martha’s voice.

“Yes, and I destroyed it.”

“A gun in four parts, scattered across the world?” Martha rolled her eyes. “I mean, come on, did you really believe that?”

“What do you mean?” The Master asked angrily.

“As if I would ask her to kill,” Rose spoke up from her spot. Her voice was rough. The Master waved her off.

“Oh well, it doesn’t matter. I’ve got her exactly where I want her.”

“But I knew what Professor Docherty would do,” Martha informed him. “The Resistance knew about her son. I told her about about the gun, so she’d get me here at the right time.”

“Oh, but you’re still going to die.”

“Don’t you want to know what I was doing, traveling the world?”

That seemed to catch the Master off guard for a moment. “Tell me,” he finally ordered. Martha smirked.

“I told a story. That’s all. No weapons, just words. I did just what Rose said. I went across the continents all on my own. And everywhere I went, I found the people, and I told them my story. I told them about Rose. And I told them to pass it on, to spread the word so that everyone would know about Rose.”

“Faith and hope?” The Master sneered. “Is that all?”

“No, because I gave them an instruction, just Rose said.” Martha pushed herself up, standing tall. “I told them that if everyone thinks two words, at one specific time…”

“Nothing will happen!” The Master interrupted. “Is that your weapon? Prayer?”

“Right across the world,” Martha continued as if she hadn’t been interrupted, “just one thought at one moment…but with fifteen satellites.”

That brought the Master up cold. “…What?”

“The Archangel Network,” Jack boasted from his corner, grinning.

“A telepathic field binding the whole human race together,” Martha continued, “with all of them, every single person on Earth, thinking the same thing at the same time. And that thing is Bad Wolf.”

The counter hit zero, and almost instantly Rose began to glow. The Master’s eyes widened.

“Stop it. No, no, no, no, you don’t.”

“Bad Wolf,” Jack murmured, beaming. He had never learned what those words meant exactly, but if they put an end to this hell… “Bad Wolf.”

“Bad Wolf,” Francine said quietly.
The crowds on the monitors were all muttering too. All the same words. “Bad Wolf. Bad Wolf. Bad Wolf.”

The energy fed into Rose — it didn’t fix what was wrong with her, only fixing the TARDIS and breaking the paradox would completely heal her. But it gave her strength. It gave her a respite from the constant pain.

“Stop this right now!” The Master ordered. “Stop it!”

“Bad Wolf,” Lucy said, almost unwillingly.

“Bad Wolf,” Jack said again. Oh the Doctor would be so proud of Rose if he could see her…

“Bad Wolf,” Martha whispered with as much trust and conviction as she could infuse into the two words. She watched her friend glow gold — she had never understood this power Rose had, and she understood it even less now.

But if it helped then she was grateful for it.

“I’ve had a whole year to tune myself into the psychic network and integrate with is matrices.” Rose’s voice echoed just a bit as she finally spoke. “You shouldn’t have torn my shields up. You only made it easier for me.”

“I order you to stop!” He sounded almost like a child, a dim part of Rose’s mind noted. A child who wasn’t getting his way anymore.

“Bad Wolf,” the crowds on the screens whispered again and again. The same word echoed all around the room.

“The one thing you can’t do…stop them from thinking.” The collar and leash keeping Rose bound disintegrated into golden dust, freeing her at last, and she stepped forward. “Tell me the human race is degenerate now, when they can do this.”

Martha finally broke away, running to her family. Her parents caught her in their arms and pulled Tish in as well for a hug.

“No!” The Master yelled, pointing his laser screwdriver at Rose and firing. She threw her hand out, catching the blast and reversing it, just as she had done with the Dalek on Platform One.

“Then I’ll kill them!” The Master yelled, turning the screwdriver on the Jones family. Another wave of Rose’s hand, and the laser screwdriver disintegrated as well.

“You can’t do this,” the Master insisted. “You can’t do this. It’s not fair!”

He backed away as Rose approached him. “Go on then,” he sneered — a desperate bid from a desperate man. “Kill me. All that power in your hands, use it. But you’re one of the Doctor’s pets, aren’t you? You wouldn’t do it. Weak, just like him.”

Rose didn’t dignify that with an answer — she raised her hand, golden energy flaring around it. She would kill him — she had to. It was the only way to end this.

“Rose!”

Her eyes flitted to Martha, who had stepped away from her family and was approaching slowly. She
looked…scared. Why did she look scared? After a moment she turned to look at Jack.

*I bring life.*

The words echoed back over the years, and after a moment Rose’s entire body slumped, the golden aura slowly fading from around her, her eyes shifting back to brown.

She wasn’t a killer.

A noise drew her attention and she whipped back to look at the Master, who was diving for the abandoned vortex manipulator.

“*No!*”

She dove to stop him — and they were both teleported away. They hit the ground with a thud, and Rose scrambled up quickly to face the Time Lord. He looked utterly mad.

“Now it ends, Rose Tyler,” he said with a manic laugh. “Now it ends.”

Thunder boomed overhead as the siren echoed through the air.

Martha wasted no time running to the computer to get a status report. “We’ve all six billion spheres heading right for us,” she reported urgently. “We need to end this. Jack—”

“I’m on it!” Jack assured her. “You men, with me!”

He led a trio of soldiers off into the ship. They needed to destroy the paradox machine.

“We’ve got control of the Valiant,” Rose informed the Master. “You can’t launch.”

“Oh, but I’ve got this.” He held up a small trigger. “Black hole converter inside every ship. If I can’t have this world, Ms. Tyler, then neither can you. We shall stand upon this Earth together, as it burns.”

Jack and the guards rounded a corner, stopping when they found three spheres guarding the TARDIS. The spheres instantly opened fire and they took cover. “Can’t get in,” one of the men said. “We’d get slaughtered.”

“Yeah,” Jack sighed, readying his gun. “Happens to me a lot.”

He ran in.

“Weapon after weapon after weapon,” Rose said carefully, eying the trigger. “All you do is talk and talk and talk. But you know what, Master? I don’t think you want to die. Not like this. You’re not going to kill yourself. What good is that? You’ll die just like the rest of us — like a normal person. Like a *human*. Not at all a death befitting your title. You won’t press the button. So just give it to me.”

The Master eyed her for a long moment before handing the trigger over.

Up above, Jack got into the TARDIS, no worse for wear than he’d already been. He looked around the console room for a long moment before emptying his clip into the console until it exploded.

Rose dove for the vortex manipulator just as the ground began to shake, managing to hit the button and send them both back up to the Valiant. Rose staggered the moment her feet touched the floor.
“Gotcha!” Martha said as she caught her.

“Everyone get down!” Rose called as she dragged Martha done with her. “Time is reversing!”

The shaking continued for a long moment before calm was finally restored. People all around the flight deck pushed themselves up — except for Rose, who was on the floor cradling her head.

“What the hell did Jack do the TARDIS?”

“This is UNIT Central,” a voice announced over the intercoms. “What’s happened up there? We just saw the President assassinated.”

“What’s going on?” Martha asked, confused. “Where are the spheres?”

“Trapped at the end of the universe,” Rose said as she pushed herself up. “The paradox has broken. We reverted back one year and one day. Two minutes past eight in the morning.”

“But I can remember it,” Francine said quietly.

“We’re at the eye of the storm,” Rose explained. “The only ones who will ever know.”

There was a bit of a commotion as the Master ran for the door, only to be caught by Jack. “Whoa, big fella! You don’t want to miss the party. Cuffs.”

“Jack what did you do the TARDIS?” Rose asked calmly as Jack handcuffed the Master. The captain winced.

“Eh…shot the console until it blew up.”

“What?!” Oh that was not a good look. If anyone could make death permanent for Jack Harkness, it was probably Rose Tyler in that moment.

“I’ll help you fix it, I promise,” he assured weakly before giving the Master a shake. “What are we doing with this one in the mean time?”

“We kill him,” Clive said darkly, surprising everyone.

“We execute him,” Tish added, and Martha gave her a sister a shocked look.

“That’s not the solution,” she insisted, looking at Rose for an agreement. Before the blonde could say anything, however, Francine raised a gun.

“Oh, I think so,” she said, her voice deathly quiet. “Because all those things, they still happened because of him. I saw them.”

“Go on,” the Master taunted. “Do it.”

“Francine, no,” Rose said quietly, stepping between the Master and the older woman. “You’re better than that. You’re better than him. I know you are.” She reached out carefully, managing to pull the gun from Francine’s grip before pulling her into a tight hug. Francine broke, crying, and Rose soothed her for a minute before passing her to Martha.

“You still haven’t answered the question,” the Master called. “What happens to me?”

Rose turned to look at him, regarding him silently for a long moment. “I’m not going to kill you,” she said slowly. “Because you’re right. The Doctor wouldn’t kill you. And you can help me.”
“Help?” Martha, Jack, and the Master all said at the same time.

“You got the great big Time Lord mind, and I have a great job you can put it to use with.”

The Master sneered. “What makes you think I would help you?”

Rose took another step toward him, surprisingly calm all things considered. “Because you’re going to help me find a way to the Doctor.” That caught the Master by surprise. “You want to see him and so do I. So it’s mutually beneficial.”

There was a beat of silence — and a single gunshot rang through the room. Rose watched, wide-eyed, as the Master went down, then whipped around to see Lucy holding a gun.

She had finally snapped.

While Jack went to coax the gun away from Lucy, Rose hurried to the Master’s side. “Always the women,” he said with a bit of a pained chuckle.

“I didn’t see her.”

“Guess we won’t be taking any field trips to other universes after all.” He sounded almost amused. How could he sound amused? “Too bad.”

“What’re you talkin’ about? It’s a bullet. Just regenerate.”

“No.”

Rose reeled back in shock. “What?”

“You overestimated the knowledge the TARDIS fed you. You don’t know me as well as you think. I refuse.”

“You can’t!”

“Watch me. I win.” His smirk faded into what could only be described as a scared look. Scared?

“Will it stop, Ms. Tyler? The drumming. Will it stop?”

Before Rose could even begin to formulate an answer, the Master’s eyes slid shut. He was gone. Rose just stared at his body, her heart pounding in her chest to the rhythm of a single word.

No, no, no, no…

A hand rested itself on her shoulder as Martha knelt down beside her. There was no love lost for the Master, of course, but it was clear from the look on her face that she had been sure the Time Lord would be able to help her.

And Martha hated seeing Rose upset.

She wrapped her arm around the blonde’s shoulders, pulling her in for a tight side hug. Rose rested a hand on Martha’s, still staring blankly at the Master.

“It’s over.”
The Last Of The Time Lords Part Three

Chapter Summary

Rose, Jack, and the Jones' recover from the Year That Never Was.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“I don’t know why you wanted to bring his body,” Jack said as he and Rose worked on the TARDIS. Martha — after making Rose promise not to take off — had stayed with her family, who was being debriefed by UNIT.

“He’s a Time Lord, Jack. I’m not leaving his body for UNIT’s science people. One drop of his blood could change the entire course of human history.”

“Alright, alright. Point taken.”

The TARDIS hummed weakly as Rose connected two wires, and the rotor finally glowed a bit — it’s usual, welcoming green. “Welcome back love,” Rose said quietly, brushing a hand over the console. Her mobile buzzed and she grabbed it quickly to find a text from Martha.

UNIT is taking us home. Meet at the house?

Rose texted back assuring Martha she would be there. “Come on, let’s get her ready for flight.” Even if it was just enough to get them down to Francine’s house. Rose wanted off this god forsaken ship.

* * * * *

It was nearly dark and Rose still hadn’t come. Martha peered out the window worriedly for the twentieth time that hour. Rose wasn’t usually one to go back on a promise…maybe something had happened? Was she hurt?

“Martha, come eat,” Francine said quietly. She was handling her trauma surprisingly well — mostly because she was putting all of her energy into making sure her daughters and ex-husband were taken care of. “She’ll be here when she gets here.”

“I just—”

She was cut off by the faint, familiar sound of the TARDIS’ wheeze. “Oh thank god,” she breathed as the ship finally began to appear in the backyard. She ran out without another word, bouncing impatiently on the balls of her feet until she could run inside.

“Whoa!” Rose yelped as Martha tackled her, hugging her tight. “Blimey, missed you too.” She returned the hug. “I told you I’d be here.”

“That was hours ago!”

“Was it?” Martha pulled back to raise an eyebrow at Rose. “…Sorry. Flight’s a bit rough.”
“Yeah you’re definitely not going anywhere any time soon,” Jack called as he peeked around the console. “That was a one-time deal until we can actually fix her.”

“Brilliant,” Rose sighed, running a hand through her hair. God knew how long that was going to take…

“Oh. My. God.”

They all whirled to see Francine standing in the door, eyes wide as she looked around. “It’s…it’s…”

Martha smiled as she went to her mother, resting a hand on her arm. “It’s alright, Mum. It’s a lot to take in.”

“It’s…bigger…”

“Why don’t we have this conversation outside?” Rose suggested gently. Martha nodded and nudged Francine back out into the yard, with the others following behind her.

“I was just coming to ask if you wanted to join us for dinner,” Francine said faintly once they were outside.

“I think I’ll pass,” Jack said apologetically. “I need to go find some people.” He pulled his coat on as he spoke. “Rose, I’ll be back tomorrow to help you fix this mess.”

“You’d better, half this mess is your fault,” Rose grumbled.

“I said I was sorry,” he whined. He knew Rose wasn’t really mad at him.

“Oh go find your team. Good luck.”

Jack grinned as he pulled Rose into a tight hug. Martha was next, then Francine, much to the woman’s surprise. “I’ll see you ladies tomorrow,” he said with a tip of an imaginary hat before walking around the house. The vortex manipulator still worked, but after months and months of being trapped inside, a stroll sounded wonderful.

“I should get back to work,” Rose said when he was gone, inching back toward the TARDIS. “Unfortunately I’m going to be stuck here for a couple of days until I can get the TARDIS fixed, sorry about your lawn…”

“That can wait,” Francine insisted, grabbing Rose’s arm and dragging her toward the house. “It’s time for dinner.”

Martha watched, amused, as Rose tried uselessly to protest. That was just perfect.

Francine spent the entire night fussing over Rose like she was her third daughter. To say it was mildly entertaining for Martha was a bit of an understatement, but it also worried her. What exactly had happened on the Valiant to change Francine’s opinion of Rose so drastically?

“I’m really not tired,” Rose insisted as Francine all but shoved her into the guest bedroom.

“I wasn’t born yesterday, young lady. Lay down. Get some sleep. Your mad ship will still be there in the morning.”

It was a long night in the Jones house. Martha laid down in her old bed, staring blankly at the dark wall. She was tired, but sleep refused to come.
Or maybe she just didn’t want it to.

“Martha?”

The soft voice startled her, and she rolled to see her sister standing in the door. “Tish? What’s wrong?”

Tish shifted uncertainly. “Can I… Can I stay with you tonight?” It was so reminiscent of the days when Tish would have a nightmare and run to her big sister for comfort. It almost made Martha laugh.

But this time the nightmares were real.

As Tish crawled into Martha’s bed, Francine went downstairs to retrieve Clive from the couch, not wanting to be alone either. Clive was more than happy to join his ex-wife — nobody should be alone tonight.

Except Rose still was. Laying in bed, listening to the footsteps and soft voices as the Jones found comfort in one another. This was their family. Their world.

Not hers.

She waited until she heard Francine’s bedroom door close before sneaking out of bed and downstairs, back to the TARDIS.

She had a lot of work to do.

* * * * *

Martha wasn’t completely surprised to find Rose’s bed empty the next morning. She sighed as she went downstairs. Francine looked up from the food she was cooking, raising an eyebrow.

“Where’s Rose?”

“Where do you think?” Martha shook her head as she made a couple mugs of tea and carried them out to the TARDIS.

Jack wasn’t there yet — it was just Rose, plucking away at the TARDIS by herself. She had clearly been there for hours; the console room had been completely pulled apart. The blonde herself was nowhere to be seen, however.

“Rose?”

“Down here!” Rose called from below the grating. Martha found the opening and peeked down. Rose was standing near the console, working on a bunch of wires and very determinedly not looking at Martha.

“Time for breakfast.”

“Not hungry. I smell tea though.”

“You can have the tea if you come out and have breakfast with us.”

“I’m really not hungry and I want to get the TARDIS fixed, I’m sure your mother wants it out of her yard. I think I landed on her garden.”
“You did, and she doesn’t care,” God not this again. “Rose please come inside and eat.”

“I can’t, I have a lot of work to do—”

“It can wait—”

“No, it can’t!” Rose whirled to look at Martha, eyes flashing. “It can’t wait, alright? And I’m not hungry, so just go inside and be with your family. Okay?”


She left one of the mugs on the console and walked out. Francine didn’t question when her daughter came back in alone — it was obvious from Martha’s expression that she didn’t want to talk about it.

It was a few hours before Rose heard the TARDIS doors open again. “About time, Jack,” she called as she fused two wires. “I was starting to think I’d have to do all this without you.”

“I don’t think I’ll be much help to you with this thing.” That wasn’t Jack. Rose popped her head out from under the console, surprised to see Francine standing there with a plate.

“How’d you get in?”

“I took Martha’s key while she was showering. I wanted to bring you food, you skipped breakfast.”

“I’m not hungry.”

“That’s a great big lie, I know for a fact you haven’t eaten in two days.” Rose sighed. Blimey was it just a Jones family trait to take care of every pathetic, broken person they met? “Just indulge me, alright?”

“Fine, Mum,” Rose muttered as she crawled out from the grating and sat next to Francine, taking the plate. She wasn’t really hungry, but she probably did need to eat.

“I’d be proud to be your mother,” Francine said quietly, catching Rose off guard. The blonde’s head snapped up as she blinked uncertainly. “I’m sure she’d be proud if she could see you.”

“And you’ll keep on changing. And in forty years time, fifty, there’ll be this woman, this strange woman, walking through the marketplace on some planet a billion miles from Earth. But she’s not Rose Tyler. Not anymore. She’s not even human.”

“I hope you’re right.”

Jack arrived as Rose was finishing eating. She thanked Francine for the meal and they spent the rest of the day working. “Did you find your team?” Rose asked as they worked.

“Yeah. Turns out I’ve been gone a bit longer than I realized. They’re not too happy with me right now.”

Rose winced a bit. “I’m sorry.”

“Eh, they’ll get over it. I died for them, they can deal with it.”

“…No offense, Jack, but I don’t think the gesture carries quite the sentiment with you.”

Jack laughed at that. “Well they say it’s the thought that counts.”
Martha came in to retrieve them for dinner. “Mum wants you both at the table,” she informed them. “She’s been cooking all day.”

“Well I can’t say no to a home cooked meal,” Jack said as he straightened up, wiping his hands off. “Be right in.”

Martha eyed Rose when she didn’t answer. “I’m under orders to drag you inside by force if I have to.”

Rose sighed as she dropped her tools and hauled herself out. “Fine.”

Martha led them inside and they sat down with the Jones for supper. Jack made easy conversation, but Rose was once again too aware of how much she did not belong there.

Jack left after dinner, and Francine refused to let Rose go back to the TARDIS. “You need sleep,” she insisted. “I’ll lock you in the room if I have to.”

The threat was obviously very real. Rose didn’t dare argue. She went up to the room, laying down under Francine’s watchful eye. She didn’t move even after the woman left. It didn’t seem worth the risk.

She’d been laying there for an hour, unable to sleep, when a noise drew her attention. She looked up to see Martha standing in the door. “Hey,” she said hesitantly.

“Hey.”

“I’m sorry I snapped you.”

Martha shook her head, moving to sit on the edge of the bed. “It’s okay. You were stressed.”

“That’s not an excuse.”

“I feel safe in saying you haven’t slept in days either.”

She was probably right — it had been a week, maybe. The days had started to blend together toward the end. “Yeah. I guess I haven’t.”

Martha shifted to crawl over and lay down next to Rose. “What happened, Rose?” Her family wouldn’t talk about it either. It worried her.

“It doesn’t matter, Martha. It’s over.”

“It matters to me,” Martha insisted. When Rose didn’t say anything, she tried a different route. “I’ll tell you one thing if you tell me.” Rose turned to look at her. “We can trade.”

Rose took a deep breath, closing her eyes. “You start.”

They sat up for hours trading small stories about what had happened to them over the last year. It was far from pleasant…but it was also therapeutic. For both of them.

Francine found them both curled up together sleeping the next morning. It was the most relaxed she had ever seen Rose.

* * * * *
“Oh my god,” Tish gasped as Martha brought her into the TARDIS. “It’s…it’s…impossible.”

“She’s not in the best of shape right now,” Rose called from below the grating. “Since someone decided to empty a machine gun clip into her.”

“Hey I’m helping aren’t I?” Jack griped back jokingly. Rose was never going to let him live this down.

And he was okay with it.

“This is real,” Tish said as she walked around. “This…it isn’t an illusion? No mirrors or anything?”

“Nope.” Rose’s lips popped on the p. “No illusion. No mirrors. She’s really just this big.”

“But that’s mad!” Tish insisted. “And why do you keep calling it she? Is that some weird ship thing?”

Rose popped her head out to raise an eyebrow at Tish. “Because she’s alive and sensitive.” The TARDIS gave a hum at that. “Oh you are too and you know it. Shush.”

Tish’s mouth dropped. She turned to gape at Martha. “Is she…?”

“Talking to the ship? Yup. Don’t worry you get used to it.”

This was just too mad. Tish shook her head, looking around again. “So…how are repairs going?” She finally asked, trying not to seem to weirded out. If Martha could handle it so could she.

“Almost done, actually.” Thank god. As the TARDIS had been repaired the pain had slowly faded, Rose’s strength returning.

It was a relief.

“What are you going to do when you’re done?” Tish asked curiously.

“Oh…back to the usual life I guess. Flying around, finding trouble. Just like old times.”

She purposely ignored the look Jack was giving her. He had made it clear what he thought of that idea. “Do you have a home at all?” Tish asked quietly. Rose ducked back under the grating as she answered.

“I’ve got the TARDIS. That’s the only home I need.”

Jack waited until Tish and Martha went back inside to broach the subject. “You know if you need a place, I’ve got an opening…”

“I don’t want a job with Torchwood, Jack.”

“You can’t go back out there alone.”

“Earth isn’t the only place that needs defending,” Rose reminded him. “There’s an entire universe out there that needs help.”

“That’s not your responsibility.”

Rose smiled sadly as she leaned in to kiss Jack’s cheek. “Yes. It is.”
Somebody had to be the Doctor.

* * * * *

Rose worked through the night, even after Jack left. And early the next morning, she took off.

It was the TARDIS who had given her the idea of what to do with the Master’s body. She didn’t want to just keep it there. But she didn’t really want to just bury it anywhere either. She couldn’t let anyone get their hands on that body. It would be a disaster.

The TARDIS had helped by providing a book for her about traditional Gallifreyan funerals.

“Am I doing this right?” Rose muttered as she built the pyre. The Master’s body was sitting on a stretcher a few feet away. Trying to lift that was going to be fun.

But one thing at a time.

The TARDIS hummed reassuringly — she was doing fine. She was honoring the Time Lord despite the fact that he didn’t really deserve it. That was incredible in and of itself.

Finally the pyre was built and Rose somehow managed to roll the Master’s body from the stretcher to sit on the wood.

And she lit it up.

*My Thief would be proud of you.*

Rose jerked in surprise as the whispered voice — the incredibly familiar voice — invaded the silence of her thoughts. She whirled around to look at the TARDIS.

“Are you…?” Since when could the TARDIS talk to her like that?

*We had a long year together, my Wolf.*

“…You can talk to me…” She was stunned. To say the least.

*Is that okay?*


She looked back at the pyre, watching it burn. After a moment she took a deep breath and walked away.

* * * * *

Martha was annoyed Rose had taken off, but at least she’d left a note. She would be back.

And anyways Martha had something she had to do as well.

She tracked Alison Docherty down, finding her walking through a park. She looked so happy and carefree. So different.

Good.

Martha hurried up to her in the park, giving her a bunch of flowers. “Just to say, I don’t blame you.” She walked away, hearing Docherty call after her, “But who are you?”
Martha was still out when Rose got back. She texted her and Jack to meet, and they found each other at Roald Dahl Plass.

“Time was,” Martha said thoughtfully as they watched people walk by, “every single of these people knew your name. Now they’ve all forgotten you.”

“Good,” Rose said firmly. She didn’t want to be known. She was happy being anonymous.

“Back to work,” Jack sighed.

“You can come with me,” Rose told him, a bit hopefully. He shook his head.

“I had plenty to think that past year, the year that never was. And I kept thinking about that team of mine. Like you said, Rose. Responsibility.”

Rose tried to smile to cover up the disappointment. “Defending the Earth. Can’t argue with that.”

Before Jack could move she grabbed his wrist, twisting it to expose the vortex manipulator and buzzing it with the sonic screwdriver.

“Hey, I need that,” Jack protested.

“I can’t have you walking around with a time traveling teleport,” Rose said as she worked. “You could go anywhere, twice. The second time to apologize.”

Jack laughed, pulling Rose into a hug when she was done. “I’m so happy you’re alive,” he murmured into her hair. It had been miserable, those months thinking she was just dead.

The world shouldn’t exist without Rose Tyler.

“It was good to see you again, Jack.”

He pulled back, saluting Rose and then Martha. “Ma’am. Ma’am.” He started to walk away, then stopped and turned. “But I keep wondering. What about aging? Because I can’t due, but I keep getting older. The odd little grey hair, you know? What happens if I live for a million years?”

“I really don’t know,” Rose said regretfully. “I’m sorry.”

“No, it’s okay.” He shook his head. “Sorry. Vanity. Can’t help it. Used to be a poster boy when I was a kid living on the Boeshane Peninsula. Tiny little place. I was the first one ever to be signed up for the Time Agency. They were so proud of me. The Face of Boe, they called me.” Rose’s mouth dropped as Martha’s eyes widened. Jack didn’t seem to notice. “Hmm. I’ll see you.”

He headed off, leaving the shell-shocked women behind.

“No…” Rose said distantly. She felt like the world was spinning beneath her.

“It can’t be,” Martha insisted. Rose shook her head.

“No. Definitely not. No. No.”

But a small voice in the back of her head was saying yes.

* * * * *
Rose didn’t go inside when she and Martha got back to Francine’s. She went straight for the TARDIS. This wasn’t her world. Not anymore. She couldn’t keep invading on this family.

Martha stayed with her family for a few minutes before going outside. She wanted to talk to Rose… and she also had a phone call to make.

“Yeah,” she said when the person on the other end picked up. “Could you put me through? Hi, I’m looking for a Doctor Thomas Milligan.”

A moment later, he picked up. “Yeah?” Martha froze at his voice. “Hello? Hello?”

She hung up and went into the TARDIS.

Rose was waiting for her. She could tell the moment Martha walked in that this wasn’t going to be good news. “Okay,” she said before Martha could get a word out.

“I’m sorry,” Martha quietly.

“You don’t have to explain.”

But she wanted to. “Spent all those years training to be a doctor. Now I’ve got people to look after. They saw half the planet slaughtered and they’re devastated. I can’t leave them.”

_Don’t be selfish. Don’t cry. Don’t be selfish._ “You don’t have to explain,” Rose said again, forcing a smile. “I would never ask you to leave your family. Besides, you saved the world. You’ve earned a reprieve from all this.”

God she was a horrible liar. Martha stepped forward, wrapping Rose in a tight hug. “Please don’t be a stranger,” she begged quietly. “Come around every now and again. Let Mum feed you. You have my number if you need anything.”

Rose took a deep breath, wiping her eyes. She needed to be strong. For Martha. She pulled back to smile and nod. “I will.”

“Do you promise?” Rose nodded, not trusting herself to speak. Martha felt awful. “Don’t get into too much trouble without me. Alright?”

“Of course not,” Rose managed to get out. “Don’t want to get hurt without you there, do I?”

Martha smiled a bit. “God you’re such a liar.”

She pulled the blonde in for one last hug. “See you around, then,” she said as she finally backed away. Rose smiled weakly, watching her go.

“See you around, Martha Jones.”

Martha stepped outside, and had only taken a few steps before the TARDIS wheezed to life, taking off. She turned to watch it disappear, tears slipping slowly down her cheeks.

She was pretty sure she wouldn’t see Rose again.

Rose, for her part, thought she did pretty well. She managed to get the TARDIS into orbit before the first of the tears escaped.

But finally the knot in her chest broke and she collapsed onto the jump seat, curling up tight as she sobbed, her chest heaving.
Alone. She was alone.

Again.

Chapter End Notes

And that's the end of season three! There are two interlude chapters (including a cameo from a Doctor!) and then we're going right into season four. It'll be a good time. Really. It will be. Really.
Time Crash

Chapter Summary

Something goes wrong, and Rose finds herself facing a familiar person in an unfamiliar body.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Leaving Martha was, without a doubt, the hardest thing Rose had done so far. Going back into the vortex alone hurt, so much, and it took all of Rose’s willpower not to go back and beg Martha to come with her.

She couldn’t be selfish. She couldn’t be selfish. She couldn’t be selfish.

God she just wanted to be selfish.

Rose wiped her eyes as she finally pushed herself up, pulling a lever…

And everything went to hell.

The TARDIS spun out, alarms blaring overhead. Rose shrieked, grabbing the console to hold on. Pain burst to life in her head, her lungs constricting, and for a moment she was sure she would pass out.

The chaos in the TARDIS passed after a moment, though the pain and the constricted feeling didn’t. Rose pushed herself, gasping a bit to try and fill her lungs…

Only to find she wasn’t alone.

“Right, just settled own now,” a man said as he ran around the console, hitting buttons. He was wearing a tan suit with a bowler hat, a piece of celery attached to his lapel.

“What—”

She was cut off as the man bumped into her. “So sorry,” he apologized, moving past her.

“What?” Rose managed to get out. The man stopped, looking back at her.

“What?”

My Thief. The voice echoed in Rose’s head, as if there were two. Oh that hurt.

“D-Doctor?” She stuttered, wincing as pain spiked right behind her eyes. Oh god that hurt. This was almost as bad as when the Master had activated the damn paradox machine.

“Who are you?” The man — the Doctor? — demanded. Rose grabbed the console as she swayed uncertainly. Oh god.

What’s happenin’? She asked the TARDIS wearily. The responding hum was a horrible echo that
nearly brought her to her knees. Okay don’t talk to me. That hurts.

“Is there something wrong with you?” The man asked, frowning. God Rose would’ve recognized that frown on any face — it was the same frown he always got when he was confused and trying to figure something out.

“You’re the Doctor,” she managed to get out, stunned. Was she actually meeting a past version of the Doctor? How was this even possible?

“Yes, I am. I’m the Doctor. Who are you?”

Rose rubbed her temples, trying to breathe through the pain. Dear god she did not need this. “How did you get here?”

“What do you mean? This is my TARDIS, I’m the one who should be asking how you got here,” the Doctor huffed at her. Rose blinked back. His TARDIS?

“I think you’re confused—”

“I don’t have time for this,” he cut her off. “There is something very wrong with my TARDIS and I’ve got to do something about it very, very quickly. I’ll sort you out in a minute, if you don’t mind.”

“Y-Yeah. Sure. Of course. Sorry, Doctor.” Doctor. That caused a new pain, somewhere in the middle of her chest. Oh god this was the Doctor. A Doctor before he’d met her, but the Doctor nonetheless.

“Thank you.”

He set to work again, running around the console. Rose squeezed her eyes shut, her head pounding as if it were about to split open.

“Ah…”

She could feel the TARDIS trying to talk to her, but it was all distorted and water-y and just hurt…

“What’s wrong with you?”

Rose blinked, coming back to herself to find that she was on her knees, and she raised her head to see the Doctor standing over her, very concerned.

“M’not sure,” she mumbled, grabbing the console as leverage to pull herself up. The Doctor cast a look around the room.

“What have you done to my TARDIS? You’ve changed the desktop theme, haven’t you? What’s this one, coral?” That’s what he was focusing on? “It’s worse than the leopard skin.”

“Leopard skin?” Rose repeated stupidly. Before she could question it too far, however, the Doctor was whipping out a pair of half-moon spectacles, pushing them up his nose.

“Oh blimey, seriously?!” She burst out without thinking. “What is it with you? Bloody superior Time Lord biology, you don’t even need those things do you? You just want to look smart.”

An alarm went off before the Doctor could answer. The sound split right through her head.

“That’s an alert, level five, indicating a temporal collision,” the Doctor said as he turned to the console. “It’s like two TARDISes have merged, but there’s definitely only one TARDIS present. It’s
like two time zones or more at the heart of the TARDIS. That’s a paradox that could blow a hole in
the space time continuum the size of. Well, actually, the exact size of Belgium. That’s a bit
undramatic, isn’t it? Belgium?”

Rose’s head was spinning as she tried to process all of this. Oh…that made sense. “We collided,” she
said distantly, and the Doctor looked back at her.

“What’s wrong with your eyes?”

Oh that probably wasn’t good. “What’re they doin’?”

“Glowing gold.”

Great. “Yeah…they do that sometimes.” Rose’s shoulders hunched up as the pain pounded at her
head and her lungs closed up for a moment. Two TARDISes merging together. That probably
explained a lot — including the echo in her head. She had two TARDISes in her head at once.

“Oh, this is bad,” the Doctor was murmuring. “Two minutes to Belgium. How did you get on my
TARDIS?”

“S’not your TARDIS,” Rose gritted out, rubbing her temple’s again. “S’mine.”

That got the Doctor to stop and look back at her, eyes wide. “What…What are you on about? That’s
impossible. Unless…you’re not me, are you? Do I regenerate into a woman?”

you didn’t ask.”

“Then what did you mean this is your TARDIS?”

“I sorta…inherited it,” Rose mumbled. “Not the point, isn’t there about to be a catastrophe?”

Right on cue, a loud alarm went off overhead. Rose cringed. God that was loud. “The cloister bell!”
The Doctor called, whirling around. Rose sucked in a sharp breath.

Alright. What do I have to do?

Getting information from the TARDIS was always a little overwhelming but today it just plain hurt.
Rose’s knees nearly buckled again, but this time the Doctor was there to grab her and hold her up.

“What’s wrong with you?” He demanded, sounding a bit concerned. Well that was touching.

“No time,” Rose mumbled as she pushed herself back upright and began working around the
console.

“What do you think we’re doing? This isn’t the time for games, in a minute we’re going to create a
black hole strong enough to swallow the entire universe!”

“Yeah, that’s my fault, actually,” Rose muttered as she worked. “I was rebuilding the TARDIS,
forgot to put the shields back up. Your TARDIS and my TARDIS — they’re the same TARDIS at
different points in its own time-stream, they collided. And let me tell you that is painful for every
TARDIS involved. I can fix it, though. Venting the thermobuffer, drawing the Helmic regulator, and
just to finish off, let’s fry those Zeiton crystals.”

“You’ll blow up the TARDIS!” the Doctor burst out, shocked.
“No, I won’t. Trust me.”

“Why should I? How do you know all of this?”

“Because she told me.” Rose took a deep breath before throwing the lever.

The pain only lasted a split second, but it was nearly unbearable. Her lungs closed up even as she struggled to breathe for it, her vision nearly going white.

When she finally came back to her senses, she was slumped over the console, gasping for breath. The Doctor had a hand on her back and was rubbing it soothingly.

“Well that sucked,” she muttered as she picked herself up again.

“Are you okay?” There was definite concern in the Doctor’s voice now. Rose took the deepest breath she could manage. She was still hurting, but it wasn’t as bad.

“Yeah. Yeah I’m okay.”

“What happened?”

“It’s a long story.”

He shook his head. “Supernova and black hole at the exact same instant,” he said after a moment.

“The explosion cancels out the implosion,” Rose continued for him, feeling a brief bit of nostalgia as she finished his sentence.

“Pressure remains constant.”

“Pretty brilliant, huh?” Rose couldn’t resist teasing. The Doctor eyed her suspiciously.

“Far too brilliant. How did you do that? You didn’t have time to work all that out. Even I couldn’t do it.”

“Well I had a little help,” Rose admitted, rubbing the back of her head. “I can talk to the TARDIS.”

The Time Lord gaped at her, clearly shocked. “That’s impossible,” he said finally.

“Yeah well that’s sorta my thing. Hurts right now though, I’ve got your TARDIS and my own crammed in my head.”

The Doctor clearly though she was a bit mad. “You’re impossible.”

Rose had to smile a bit. “Nah. Just a bit unlikely.”

He shook his head. “This is my TARDIS, but you’re not me. So where I am? How did you come to be here?”

Her smile turned sad. “Can’t tell you that, unfortunately.”

“Well wherever I am…I must trust you quite a bit to leave you in my TARDIS alone. I don’t do that.”

“I like to think you trust me, yes.” All at once the pressure on her lungs started to ease up. Ah.

“Right, TARDISes are separating. Time’s up, I guess. Time for you to go back where you belong.”
And time for her to be alone again.

“Right then, Rose,” the Doctor said with a small smile as he faded away. “You take care of yourself now. This is a funny old life.”

“Don’t I know it,” Rose sighed. “You take care of yourself as well, Doctor. Try not to be alone.”

He smiled, tipping his hat before he disappeared. The tension eased completely and Rose took a deep breath for the first time since the whole mess started.

She went back to the jump seat, collapsing onto it as silence filled the console room once more.

And she started to cry.

Chapter End Notes

The next two chapters are a bit shorter, so I'll probably get the second one up by the end of the weekend. Then next week we'll be diving into season four. Yay! Please review?
Rose wasn’t sure how long she floated around in the time vortex, crying. Logically she knew that Martha had to go — it wasn’t safe for her. And she had her family to take care of. She had to stay on Earth.

But Rose was selfish. And she didn’t want to be alone.

And it hurt that she was.

Eventually she dragged herself up, wiping her eyes and trying to breathe. She was okay. She was okay. She was okay.

She forced herself to shower and get something to eat and drink. It wouldn’t do to waste away, after all.

She still had a universe to protect.

So she ate, and she made some tea, and she tried to hold herself together.

And she felt horrible.

She was just walking back out to the console when a computer beeped. “What’s wrong?” She asked curiously as she shuffled over, examining the read outs on the screen. “Something nearby?”

The TARDIS hummed in response, and Rose programmed the coordinates in, landing them carefully. She wasn’t sure if she was actually up for this. But danger wasn’t going to wait for her to stop being mental.

Be careful, my Wolf, the TARDIS cautioned gently as Rose grabbed her coat, pulling it on.

“I’ll be fine,” Rose assured her. Man having the TARDIS talk to her was still weird. She liked it, but it was strange. “Don’t worry.”

She stepped outside…and the breath froze in her lungs.

It looked like the base she and the Doctor had landed in on Krop Tor.
“Human design. You’ve got a thing about kits. This place was put together like a flat pack wardrobe, only bigger. And easier.”

Model kits. Rose repeated the words over and over, trying to calm down. It was just another space station from a kit. That was all.

The absence of welcome to Hell graffiti was reassuring at least.

Rose shoved her hands in her pockets as she walked along, examining the area carefully. It seemed to be…empty. That was disconcerting.

“Hello?” She called, scanning the area. “Hello?”

“Rose!”

Every single thought process in Rose’s mind ground to an absolute halt.

No…no…

“There you are!” The Doctor said happily as he bounded up to her. “Where’d you get that jacket, did you borrow it from someone? It looks good. Did you find anything?” He paused when he realized she was gaping at him like an idiot. “What’s wrong?”

Rose’s heart was pounding in her chest as she tried to formulate words. Her mind was spinning. “You’re…”

“Well, come on!” He took her hand, tugging her along. “Still so much to see!”

Lost as Rose was in her shock, she didn’t hear the TARDIS trying to scream in the back of her mind.

“Wait, Doctor, wait,” she tried to say, her voice cracking. Doctor. The Doctor. The Doctor was here. Her Doctor. How was that possible?

He stopped again, looking back at her. “Are you okay, Rose?” He blinked, sucking in a breath. “Are you crying?”

Yes…yes she was. Oh god she was. He was here. The Doctor was here. She was holding the Doctor’s hand.

“Rose…what’s wrong?”

Before the Doctor could react she was throwing her arms around him, holding on tight. “Oh god I missed you,” she breathed into his neck. The Doctor patted her back, bewildered.

“Rose are you okay?” He pulled back to examine her. “We’ve only been separated for an hour, you’re the one who said you didn’t want to look around. Did something happen while I was gone?”

A strange calm settled over Rose as she wiped her eyes. “No…nothin’ happened. Sorry, guess I’m just a…a bit wound up.”

He hugged her again, giving her a squeeze. “It’s okay, Rose. We’ll figure things out, don’t worry. It’s going to be okay.”

He took her hand once more and they started walking again. It was hard to miss the way Rose clung to the Doctor. He didn’t question it, thankfully, just let her stay close to him, her fingers tight around his hand.
He’s here, he’s here, he’s here, a voice in the back of Rose’s head said over and over. But there was another part of her that was confused. Yes, he was here. Of course he was here. They had come here together. Hadn’t they?

She shook her head. The Doctor noticed. “What’s going on, Rose? Are you sure nothing happened?”

“Yeah…yeah, I’m sure. Sorry, just kinda been a long day.”

“Yeah.” His expression shifted a bit, a mix of sadness and anger. Why…oh, right. They had lost the TARDIS today.

But Rose had the TARDIS. Didn’t she?

“It’ll be okay,” Rose said quietly, trying to shake off the conflicting thoughts. “We’ll figure somethin’ out. We always do.”

He ran his free hand through his hair, sighing. “It’s just…different this time. We’ve never lost the TARDIS before.”

But the TARDIS isn’t lost—

Rose shook her head furiously. She was just confused. Her head felt weird. It almost felt like something was trying to talk to her. But that wasn’t possible…was it?

“Doctor is there something telepathic around here?”

“What?” The Doctor stopped, looking back at her. “No, not that I can tell. Why?”

“Nothin’…think I’m just imagining things.” She pressed into his side, looping her arm through his. God she had missed him…

But why? They had only been separated for an hour.

Right?

A loud hum snapped through Rose’s mind and she gasped, shaking her head and looking around. Her hand was empty again. The Doctor was gone.

The ground spun beneath Rose’s feet and suddenly she was on her knees, gasping as if she’d run a mile. It took her a minute to collect herself as she looked around, starting to call, “Martha—”

Only to have the name catch in her throat. Right. No Martha. Martha was gone. Nobody was going to pick her up this time.

She was on her own.

She took a deep breath, pushing herself up uncertainly. “What’s goin’ on?”

I am not sure, the TARDIS said uncertainly. Be careful though, my Wolf. Something is not right here.

“Of course it’s not. I wouldn’t be here if everythin’ was normal.”

She sighed as she kept walking, a little shakier this time. She didn’t like this. But clearly something was wrong — something bad.
And what good was she as a defender of the universe if she didn’t figure it out?

“Okay, so.” She tried to reason it out. “There’s somethin’ on this ship. Somethin’ that causes… hallucinations.” Incredibly vivid hallucinations.

What did it show you, my Wolf?

Rose hesitated for a long moment before answering. “The Doctor.” Oh she hated the pitying hum that received. “It’s fine. It’s fine. I’m fine. I just have to…focus on this. Focus on—”

“Focus on what?”

Rose blinked — and the Doctor was standing in front of her again. Her stomach dropped to her toes. No no no no no no no no no no no no no no no no no…

Focus, Rose. Focus. Focus. Focus…

“Rose, are you okay? You look like you’ve seen a ghost.”

“I…” Not real, “I um…” Not real not real not… “I’m fine…s’nothin’. This place is uh…throwin’ me off I think.”

“You have been a bit off since we got here,” the Doctor agreed, squeezing her hand gently as they walked along. “Anything you want to talk about?”

“No,” Rose said quickly. “No, it’s fine.” She hesitated for a moment. “S’just…are you sure we came here together?”

The look the Doctor gave Rose informed her that he clearly thought she was a bit mad. “Of course we did, Rose, how else would you have gotten here?”

I flew the TARDIS.

Rose shook the thought off. “I…I don’t know. Does somethin’ feel off to you?”

“You mean besides you?” The Doctor asked, raising an eyebrow. He leaned in to examine Rose, fishing the sonic screwdriver out. “Did you get hurt while you were walking around?”

“I’m fine,” Rose insisted, though she wasn’t sure that was entirely true. “I feel fine, I just…something doesn’t feel right here.” Why couldn’t he feel it too? Why did it only feel strange to her? If anything it should have been the other way around…right?

The Doctor scanned her over despite her protests, frowning. “Everything seems normal…”

But it’s not normal. I’m not normal.

What? Of course she was normal. That was just stupid. “Maybe we should lay down. They said something about giving us quarters to sleep in, not sure about the state of them but they should be good for sleeping…”

“I don’t need to sleep,” Rose insisted. “I feel fine.”

The Doctor looked a little doubtful, but he let it go. “Alright. Well…come on then.”

He took her hand again, tugging her along. Rose shuffled to his side, pressing into him and taking a deep breath. She couldn’t explain the empty, hollow feeling in her chest — the ache, the longing.
What did it mean?

She shook her head. It didn’t matter. She was with the Doctor and that was all that mattered.

She was with him. She was safe.

“So go on then. Tell me about this place. What’ve you learned?”

That was the only encouragement the Doctor needed to launch into a long-winded speech. Rose smiled as she listened, quite enjoying it. She had missed this…

Wait? What? What was she talking about? There was nothing to miss.

Wrong, wrong, wrong. The word rang in the back of Rose’s head, no matter how hard she tried to shake it off. There was a headache blossoming behind her eyes.

“Rose?” The Doctor stopped again, looking down at her. “What’s wrong? Are you in pain?”

“Just a headache,” she muttered, rubbing the back of her head and squeezing her eyes shut.

“Here.” The Doctor let go of her hand. “I have aspirin…”

Rose waited…and after a moment she opened her eyes again. The hallway was empty. She stumbled, falling against the wall for support, holding her head as it pounded mercilessly.

Something was really wrong here. She didn’t like it.

There are signs of another living being in the area, the TARDIS reported gently, trying to be careful with Rose’s currently fragile mind. I am trying to track down what it is.

“Sooner rather than later would be nice,” Rose gritted out as she forced on. She wanted to leave, but she had to find this thing first.

No running away.

Please be careful, my Wolf. The TARDIS was clearly worried. And with good reason, Rose supposed. This was all a bit disconcerting.

And if something was messing with her mind then it could have access to the TARDIS. And that would be a disaster.

“What could cause hallucinations like this?”

There are several species…most of them work for the Trickster.

“…I’m guessing that’s someone I should be worried about.”

This does not seem quite like his course of action though…

“So…not the Trickster.”

I will continue analyzing and keep you updated.

That wasn’t the most reassuring thing in the world. Rose took a deep breath, trying to calm the ache in her head as she continued on.

The TARDIS, for her part, was concerned. She didn’t like that Rose kept disappearing into these
hallucinations, and pulling her out the second time had been a lot harder than pulling her out the first time.

And the TARDIS didn’t like that.

The world had a certain fuzzy quality to it that was throwing Rose off. She was starting to think going into this alone was a bad idea, but what else was she supposed to do? Go kidnap Martha? The other woman would have loved that she was sure.

Besides she could handle this on her own. She knew she could.

It would be fine.

“I’m okay. I’m okay. I’m okay. I’m okay…”

“Rose?”

No no no no no. She whipped around to see the Doctor standing behind her, looking entirely concerned. “Are you alright? You just sort of spaced out for a minute…”

“I…” Her mouth went dry. No this wasn’t right, this wasn’t right! She clung desperately the string of reality — she was alone, the Doctor wasn’t here, this wasn’t Krop Tor, she was alone, the Doctor wasn’t here, this wasn’t Krop Tor…

The Doctor stepped forward, taking her hand, and the thoughts melted away. “What’s wrong, Rose?”

NO! She yanked her hand back, shaking her head furiously. “You’re not real.” Her voice was tight. “You’re not real, you’re not real, you’re not real, you’re not real, you’re not real.”

“What are you talking about? Of course I’m real!” He stepped forward again, and again Rose stepped back.

“No, you’re not! This already happened, we already lived through this, you got the TARDIS back and we left and then you…you…” She shook her head again, trying to choke down the tears. “It’s not real. It’s not real. You’re not real.”

But it could be…

Rose jumped at the sound of the voice in the back of her head — a voice that wasn’t the TARDIS. It could be real, the voice told her gently. You could have this. You could have all of it. Forever with the Doctor. With the man you love. Isn’t that what you want?

The Doctor was still standing in front of her, his expression full of concern. He wants you. He loves you. He just wants to take care of you. And you…you’ll never have to return to that pain again. You’ll never have to be alone again. That’s what you want, right?

She didn’t want to be alone…

“Rose…” The Doctor held out his hand for her. “Come on. Let’s find a med lab. I really think there’s something wrong with you.”

Tears welled in Rose’s eyes as she took an unwilling step forward. Go with him…
You won’t have to be alone anymore.

You won’t have the weight of the world anymore.

You can be free.

“NO!”

The illusion shattered to pieces right before Rose’s very eyes, the Doctor cracking and falling apart, leaving an empty hallway in his wake. Rose’s head was pounding something fierce as she whirled around, shouting at the ceiling.

“I won’t! And your pretty words can’t make me! Show yourself!”

The air in front of Rose shimmered, and she took a step back as a smoky haze appeared in front of her. After another moment it began to take shape. Humanoid, but also very different — light green skin, no mouth. Robes were draped over its body.

“What are you?” She demanded.

We have no name. The words echoed in the back of Rose’s head, and she cringed. After having the Master violate her mind so many times, the thought of having anyone but the TARDIS in there made her a bit sick.

“What do you want with me?”

It is not you specifically. We simply seek out those in pain and offer them a different ending to their story.

“By trapping them in hallucinations?”

You were happy, were you not? With the Doctor. Away from the pain and responsibility of the real world.

“But what good is it if it’s not real? What good is it if I’m just trapped in my own head?”

You would be happy.

“I don’t want happiness. Not like that,” Rose said firmly. “Nobody wants happiness like that. Now get away from me.”

The thing bowed its head and slowly faded away. Rose waited until she was sure it was gone before turning and running back to the TARDIS. Her hard footsteps echoed off the walls, making her even more aware of how utterly and completely alone she was.

She was gasping by the time she got back to the TARDIS, her head spinning, pain making it hard to even see straight. She let herself in with shaking hands and collapsed against the doors, sliding down to sit on the grating. The TARDIS hummed in the back of her mind.

My Wolf?

Rose shook her head, cringing. “Don’t. Just don’t.” She couldn’t stand anything else in her head right then.

She stumbled up after a moment and made her way to the console. But the TARDIS had other plans — as soon as they were in orbit she took over.
It was a quiet night — exactly what Sarah Jane wanted. Luke was staying at his friend’s, there were no alien invasions or threats…it was just Sarah Jane, a cup of tea, and a nice book.

At least until the sound of the TARDIS reached her ears.

“Well there goes my night,” she said with a sigh as she pushed herself up. Not that she was upset — she hadn’t seen Rose in months and to say she was worried about the blonde was an understatement. It would be good to see her again.

That thought faded the moment Rose stepped out of the TARDIS. She was pale and clearly shaken up.

“Rose?"

She opened her mouth to say something…but all that came out was a small, dry sob. “Okay, okay,” Sarah Jane murmured, shuffling forward to gather the young woman in her arms, holding her tight. “Ssshhh, it’s okay, it’s okay,” she murmured as Rose broke down. “I’ve got you. It’s okay.”

She carefully ushered the crying woman inside, taking her to the couch and sitting down with her. “Okay, c’mere,” Sarah Jane said gently, wrapping a blanket around Rose and holding her tight. “You’re okay. It’s okay.”

It took Rose nearly an hour to cry herself out. Sarah Jane held her the entire time, rocking her gently, trying to comfort her even if she had no idea what was wrong.

Finally the sobs gave way to small, hitched breaths and hiccups. Sarah Jane smoothed her hair back, still holding her tight as she tried to recover herself. “There you go,” Sarah Jane whispered. “You’re okay. You’re alright. See?”

Rose shook her head, wiping her eyes. “S-Sorry. I didn’t…mean…”

“Shush,” Sarah Jane murmured. “You don’t have anything to apologize for. How about I get you a nice cuppa and you can tell me what’s going on?”

Rose nodded slowly, and Sarah Jane went to get the promised tea. She returned a few minutes later, handing Rose the mug, and she sipped the warm liquid as she tried to articulate everything that had happened since they had last seen one another.

Sarah Jane’s head was spinning, understandably enough, by the time Rose had finished telling her everything about the Master. “My god,” Sarah Jane whispered. An entire year of being tortured by a psychotic Time Lord. She couldn’t even imagine. No wonder she was such a mess.

And that wasn’t even the end of it. But Rose couldn’t bring herself to tell Sarah Jane about what had happened on the base. Not yet. So she just finished off the last of her tea, taking a shuddery breath.

“I’m sorry…I didn’t mean…I wasn’t even comin’ here, the TARDIS made me—”

“I’m glad she did,” Sarah Jane said fiercely. Rose needed someone to take care of her. And Sarah Jane was more than happy to step up and do so. “Come on. Let’s get some food in you. How about Chinese?”

“Oh, you don’t have to—”
“Rose,” Sarah Jane cut her off. “Do you like Chinese food?”

Rose sighed. She wasn’t going to win. “Yeah. I like Chinese food.”

Sarah Jane was smiling as she went to order the food. She was quite proud of herself for managing to corral Rose.

Someone needed to take care of her.

Rose didn’t say much as they waited for the food and Sarah Jane didn’t try to push her. She could tell that opening up had been draining and she didn’t want to push it. She put on some soft music in the background to soothe Rose and put out some more tea. When the food got there she put some on a plate for Rose and carried it back to the living room, sitting down with her and eating in silence. When they were done eating Sarah Jane turned on the TV. She wasn’t going to make Rose talk anymore — she just wanted to keep the young woman calm.

And it worked — within half an hour Rose had passed out. Sarah Jane smiled as she laid Rose down in a more comfortable position and covered her up. She turned off the TV and lights and headed for her own bedroom. She’d earned an early night.

An ear-splitting scream shattered the peaceful night about five hours later. Sarah Jane shot up in bed, momentarily disoriented until she remembered she had a house guest.

Rose.

She ran downstairs to find the woman thrashing around on the couch. “Rose, Rose, Rose.” She sat down hurriedly, grabbing Rose, trying to wake her up. “Rose wake up, wake up, it’s okay, you’re okay, wake up, wake up, you’re okay, wake up.”

It took a moment but finally Rose shot up, gasping for air. “Ssshh, you’re okay,” Sarah Jane said gently, pulling Rose into her arms and holding her tight. “I’ve got you. You’re okay.”

She was a bit surprised by the way Rose clung to her. Like a drowning person grasping at the last thing that would save her life. “You’re okay,” Sarah Jane said again, brushing Rose’s hair back. “You’re okay.”

“Sorry,” Rose managed to gasp after a moment. “I didn’t mean to wake you…”

“It’s alright, love,” Sarah Jane assured her gently. “Do you want to talk about it?” Rose shook her head quickly. No. No. God no. “Okay. That’s okay. Do you want me to let you go back to sleep?”

Rose hesitated for a long moment. “Will you…stay? Until I fall asleep?”

She seemed so young in that moment. Sarah Jane smiled.

“Of course, Rose. Of course.”

Chapter End Notes

Coming next week: PARTNERS IN CRIME!!!!!!! Please review?
Partners in Crime Part One

Chapter Summary

Rose throws herself back into another adventure, and finds an old friend.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Rose ended up staying with Sarah Jane for a week.

It wasn’t entirely by choice. Sarah Jane just refused to let her go, and always seemed to know when Rose was going to try and sneak out.

It wasn’t all bad, though. Luke, Rose quickly learned, was an absolute sweetheart who was fascinated by the TARDIS and asked more questions than Rose really knew the answer to. The TARDIS was more than happy to feed them the answers though.

She also learned that Sarah Jane did not cook. She was actually a bit of a disaster if she got within five feet of a stove. “It’s for our own safety, honestly,” Luke said as they ordered pizza for the third night. Rose laughed and Sarah Jane shot him a mock glare before speaking to the pizza guy on the phone.

“Put anchovies on it too.”

Luke’s eyes went wide. “No, I’m sorry!”

Rose shook her head, smiling, as she turned her attention back to the TV. There was a commercial running for some weight loss drug. Rose tilted her head, turning up the volume a bit.

“…The fat just walks away!”

Something niggled funny in the back of Rose’s head as the logo flashed on screen. Adipose Industries. “Rose?” Sarah Jane called. “Do you just want pepperoni again?”

“Uh…yeah, that’s fine.” Rose stood up. “Sorry, I have to make a quick call.”

She hurried out of the room, pulling her mobile out of her pocket.

“Ah, the light of my life,” Jack said happily as he picked up. “What can I do for you, Rosie?”

“Do you know anything about Adipose Industries?”

There was a moment of silence as Jack typed something on a computer. “Yeah they just put a new weight loss drug on the market, didn’t they? The fat just walks away. Ianto — er, one of my team members — has a sister who’s taking it, said it’s working great. Why do you ask?”


“Hang on, how—”
Rose hung up before he could finish that question. She took a deep breath before hesitantly reaching out to the TARDIS for the first time in a week.

Do you think there’s something going on with these Adipose people?

There is something not right there, yes, the TARDIS said quietly, and Rose sighed.

Well, she couldn’t stay here forever.

* * * * *

“I guess I can’t keep stopping you, huh?”

Rose stopped her hand on the doorknob, turning to see Sarah Jane standing at the bottom of the stairs. “I appreciate everything you’ve done for me,” Rose said quietly. “And I’ll never be able to repay you. But I can’t hide here forever.”

“You’re not hiding, Rose. You’re living.”

Rose shook her head. “This isn’t my life, Sarah Jane. This is your life. It’s Luke’s life. I don’t belong here and we both know it.”

“This is my house and if I say you belong then you belong,” Sarah Jane said firmly. Rose had to smile.

“The TARDIS is my home, Sarah Jane.”

God she sounded so much like the Doctor. It broke Sarah Jane’s heart. She crossed the kitchen in a few long steps, pulling Rose into a hug. “Take care of yourself,” she said quietly. “Come back whenever you need a place to hide.”

Rose nodded, hugging Sarah Jane tight. “I will. Thank you.”

The TARDIS hummed gently as Rose entered. She was a little nervous, she wouldn’t lie. If the space base had proven anything, it was that she was dangerous by herself.

But if something weird was going on, then she had to try and figure out what it was.

She landed a few streets over from the Adipose building, taking a deep breath. “Alright, what’s the easiest way to infiltrate a building and have a full access?” She was mostly talking to herself, already on her way to the wardrobe room. She had an answer already.

She just didn’t know if she could pull off being a health and safety worker.

She found a pinstripe pantsuit and dressed quickly, heading back out to the console room and fishing out the psychic paper and sonic screwdriver.

Be careful, my Wolf, the TARDIS cautioned gently. Rose smiled.

“Always.”

Rose slipped out of the TARDIS, hurrying down the street. She found a back door into the building and sonicked it to kill the alarm system, letting herself in and hurrying down the hallway. As she walked by a guard, she flashed the psychic paper.

“Rose Tyler, Health and Safety.”
She found her way up to an open projection room. Oh, brilliant. “Health and Safety,” she informed the projector runner as she walked in. “Film department.”

“One hundred percent legal, one hundred percent effective,” the woman giving the presentation — Ms. Foster — was saying down below.

“But can I just ask,” a woman in the crowd spoke up, “how many people have taken the pill to date?”

“We’ve already got one million customers within the Greater London area alone, but from next week, we start rolling out nationwide,” Ms. Foster said. “The future starts here. And Britain will be thin.”

*That’s nice, Rose thought dryly. Feed the world’s insecurities.*

*I do not know if it is insecurity so much as vanity,* the TARDIS spoke up, slightly unhelpfully.

*My mum used to take those pills. Rose paused for a moment. Okay maybe not the best argument. I would not insult your mother, my Wolf. She is frightening.*

*God you’re as bad as the Doctor.*

The presentation ended and Rose slipped out of the projector room, making her way through the halls. She found a call center and slipped in, looking around curiously. “Good morning,” she heard over and over as she walked, “I represent Adipose Industries.”

“No, I don’t care what you’re sellin’, it’s bloody dinner time! Go home to your damn families!” Jackie snapped into the phone before hanging up, and Rose laughed…

A small, sad smile at Rose’s lips as she walked along. God she missed her mother sometimes.

After a moment she chose a cubicle at random, slipping in. A young woman was sitting at her desk, on the phone. “Rose Tyler, health and safety,” she said quietly. “Don’t mind me.”

The woman nodded, smiling. “The box comes with twenty-one days worth of pills, a full information packet, and out special free gift, an Adipose Industries pendant.”

There was a small pendant sitting on the desk. Rose picked it up, examining it in her fingers. “It’s made of eighteen carat gold, and it’s yours for free. No, we don’t give away pens, sorry. No, I can’t make an exception, no.” Rose eyed the pen on the desk, seriously considering grabbing it just for kicks.

The woman sighed as she hung up, looking back Rose. “I’ll need to take this for testing,” she said, indicating the pendant as she stowed it in her pocket. “And I just need a list of your customers. Could you print it off?”

“Sure, one minute.” The woman turned back to the computer, tapping a few buttons. “It’ll be the printer by the plant.”

Rose stood up, examining the area. “That one there?” She asked, pointing.

“Yeah.”

“Brilliant.” Rose sat back down. “Does it have paper?”
“Yeah, Jimbo keeps it stocked.”

Ms. Foster walked in then with two guards. “Excuse me, everyone;” she called. “If I could have your attention.”

Rose ducked down as the workers stood. Something told her she didn’t want to be caught by the person running this whole show. She’d probably know there was no actual health and safety inspection today.

“On average, you’re each selling forty Adipose packs per day.” Jesus Christ, really? “It’s not enough?” It wasn’t? “I want one hundred sales per person per day.” What? “And if not, you’ll be replaced. Because if anyone’s good in trimming the fat, it’s me. Back to it.”

Everyone sat down as she left again. “Blimey, that’s brutal,” Rose murmured. “Anyways, if you could print that list off, I’ll be out of your hair.”

“Hang on.” The woman scribbled something on a piece of paper before tearing it off and handing it to Rose.

“Thanks — oh, what’s that?”

“My telephone number,” the woman smiled — seductively? — and Rose raised an eyebrow.

“Er…what for?”

“Health and Safety. You be health, I’ll be safety.” Oh yes there was definitely a seductive touch there. Rose had to struggle to keep a straight face.

“Ah…I’m sorry, but that contravenes er, paragraph five, subsection C. Sorry.”

She hurried to get her papers off the printer while the TARDIS laughed in the back of her head.

* * * * *

Rose rocked a bit on her feet as she knocked on the door. This was the part she was nervous about.

The Doctor would have been so much better at it…

A man opened the door. “Mister Roger Davey?” He nodded. “I’m calling on behalf of Adipose Industries. Just need to ask you a few questions. Do you mind?”

“Oh, right, of course.” He shuffled aside to let her in. She took a deep breath. Okay, she could do this.

“So how long have you been taking the pills?”

“I’ve been on the pills for two weeks now,” he said as they walked into the living room. “I’ve lost fourteen kilos.”

That was…odd. “That’s the same amount every day?” Rose questioned, raising an eyebrow.

“One kilo exactly,” he confirmed. “You wake up, and it’s disappeared overnight. Well, technically speaking it’s gone by ten past one in the morning.”

That was incredibly specific. “What makes you say that?”
“That’s when I get woken up.” What a coincidence. “Might as well weigh myself at the same time.”

“Woken up?” Wait, asking about the pill. “Is it a side effect of the pill?”

He shook his head. “It is driving me mad. Ten minutes past one, every night, bang on the dot without fail, the burglar alarm goes off. I’ve had experts in, I’ve had it replaced, I’ve even phoned Watchdog. But no, ten past one in the morning, off it goes.”

“But no burglars?”

“Nothing. I’ve given up looking.”

Rose made a face, pressing her lips thin.

“Mum I thought you sealed up the cat flap!”

“It’s cold Rose, I can’t leave the poor things out there, they’ll freeze!”

She tilted her head. “Tell me, Roger. Have you got a cat flap?”

If he found the question at all odd he didn’t let on; he simply walked Rose to the door, where there was indeed a cat flap. “It was here when I bought the house,” Roger explained. “I’ve never bothered with it, really. I’m not a cat person.”

“No you certainly are not,” Rose murmured as she flashed back to New Earth.

“Is that what it is, though?” Roger asked. “Cats getting inside the house?”

“Well, thing about cat flaps is…” Rose poked the flap carefully. “They don’t just let things in, they let things out as well.”

“Like what?”

Rose eyed Roger uncertainly. “The fat just walks away.”

The TARDIS made a noise in the back of Rose’s head. Yeah…I think you were right.

She stood up, running a hand through her hair. “Well thanks for your help. Bit of advice, I’d stop taking those pills for a week or so…”

A small device beeped in Rose’s pocket and she fished it out quickly. “Oh. Gotta go,” she told Roger quickly, backing out the door. “Sorry.”

She hurried down the street, hitting the device when it threatened to fail on her. What are we dealing with? She asked as she ran. Any ideas?

A few…

You are really unhelpful sometimes, has anyone ever told you that?

The TARDIS hummed back indignantly and Rose sighed, turning down a street corner — and nearly getting bowled over by a van. “Someone’s goin’ somewhere in a hurry,” she murmured as she took off after it, but it was no good. The signal on her gizmo died away. She sighed as she came to a halt, looking around.

“Damn,” sighed, backing down the street and heading back for the TARDIS.
Maybe next time, my Wolf.

“That doesn’t help me or these people this time,” she muttered. Something weird was going on around here. That much was obvious.

But Rose didn’t know if she was smart enough to figure out what.

It was a relief to get back to the TARDIS. She went straight to the wardrobe room, changing into a more comfortable outfit. She was on her way out when something caught her eye — a purple leather jacket, thrown over a rack. She stared at it for a long moment before grabbing it, holding it up to examine it.

“What do you think? Look good?”

The TARDIS hummed her approval and Rose brought it back to the console room with her, tossing it over the coral stalk with the Doctor’s trench-coat.

And she set to work with examining the pendant, pulling out a magnifying glass to get a closer look. “What do you think?” She asked after a moment. She didn’t have a clue, of course.

*If I had to guess, I would say it is a bio-flip digital switch. It stimulate cells, animating them.*

“So where do the pills come in?”

*Perhaps they are like eggs. Using humans as incubators and their fat to feed them. And when the switch is activated…*

“They manifest through the fatty cells, taking them with them,” Rose finished as understanding clicked into place. The TARDIS gave an approving hum and Rose grinned.

She was starting to catch on at least.

* * * * *

The next day it was back to Adipose Industries. Rose let herself in through the fire exit again, finding a closet to hide in and sonicking the door so nobody else would be able to get in. It was going to be a long day.

She wasn’t going to just be sitting there, however. She had work to do.

* * * * *

Before long it was ten past six, and everyone was heading home. Rose waited a few more minutes before creeping out her hiding spot and heading out. One way or another, she was going to figure this out. Tonight.

Before anyone else got hurt.

It was a bit creepy, being in the building after dark, with nobody else there — or nobody else that she could see. Rose very highly doubted she was actually alone in this place.

She ended up on the roof. Well that certainly wasn’t going to do any good. There was a nearby window cleaner’s cradle. She climbed into it and lowered herself down, pausing for a moment to take a break — and ducking when someone walked into the room she’d paused in front of. She dared to peek up. It was Ms. Foster, two guards, and the lady who had been asking questions during the presentation. Lovely.
Rose dug through her bag, digging out a stethoscope and pressing it to the window with the buds in her ears, trying to hear the conversation.

“You can’t tie me up,” the curious woman was saying. “What sort of country do you think this is?”

This had to be an enhanced stethoscope. No way a regular one would be able to hear this well.

“Oh, it’s a beautifully fat country,” Ms. Foster said, and Rose grumbled under her breath.

*She’s clearly never seen America.*

“And believe me, I’ve traveled a long way to find obesity on this scale.”

“So come on then, Ms. Foster,” the other woman pushed. “Those pills. What are they?”

Ms. Foster gave a long-suffering sigh. “Well, you might just as well have a scoop, since you’ll never see it printed. This—” Rose assumed she’d held up a capsule, “is the spark of life.”

“And what’s that supposed to mean?”

*Means I was probably right,* Rose thought smugly.

*We were right.*

*Oi for an ancient ship your ego sure is fragile.*

She forced herself to refocus on the conversation. “Officially, the capsule attracts all the fat cells and flushes them away. Well, it certainly attracts them. That part’s true. But it binds the fat together and galvanises it to form a body.”

“What do you mean, a body?” The reporter asked, clearly bewildered. She wasn’t very much help — Rose already knew most of this.

“I am surprised you never asked about my name. I chose it well. Foster. As in foster mother. And these are my children.”

There was a moment of silence. “You’re kidding me,” the reporter balked suddenly. “What the hell is that?”

Oh god. Rose carefully peeked, her eyes catching sight of something on the desk. *Oh, it’s cute!* She thought stupidly before shaking her head. Focus.

“Adipose,” Ms Foster explained. “It’s called an Adipose. Made out of living fat.”

“But I don’t understand.” That seemed to be the theme of the hour for the reporter.

“From ordinary people.”

A movement across the room caught Rose’s gaze. She turned to look…and her mouth dropped when she met Donna Noble’s eyes.

*What the hell?*

“Donna?” She mouthed in disbelief. The woman beamed.

“Rose!” She mouthed back, clearly happy. Rose was still stunned.

“Oh my god!” If she could have been bouncing she probably would have.

“But how?” Rose asked. How in the world had she gotten there?

“It’s me!”

“Yes, I can see that.” It was hard to forget the loud redhead who had accidentally invaded her ship, after all.

“Oh this is brilliant,” Donna mouthed happily.

“What the hell are you doing there?” It was a fair question, Rose thought.

“I was looking for you!”

Well that just made no sense. “What for?”

“I read it on the Internet. ‘That wasn’t an answer. ‘Weird. Crept along. Heard them talking. Hid.” The hand gestures that accompanied this were amusing. “You?”

Rose opened her mouth to respond — then stopped when she realized they had an audience. Ms. Foster, the guards, and the reporter were all looking at them.

“Are we interrupting you?” Ms. Foster asked conversationally. Busted.

“Run!” Rose shouted.

“Get her,” Ms. Foster ordered, waving a hand at Donna. Rose sonicked the office door quickly to impede them and give Donna time to escape.

“And her!”

Time for an escape. Rose pointed the sonic at the wheelie on the cradle and sending herself zooming back up to the roof.

Chapter End Notes
Partners In Crime Part Two

Chapter Summary

Rose and Donna reunite, catch up, and fight aliens. All in a day's work.

Chapter Notes

Okay, so since I get this question a lot - and it's understandable - I figured I would address it here where everyone could see it. A lot of you know that I've posted this series in its entirety on Tumblr, and am simply re-posting it here. I've had a few people go over to Tumblr to finish reading it there (which you're welcome to do! Username is also dimensionhoppingrose there), and of course they want to know if there's going to be more.

The answer is no. I wrote through The End of Time (the sequel, A Journey Through Time, may or may not be posted here. I haven't decided yet), and by the end of it was so mentally beaten down by lack of feedback and by the negativity I was receiving on Tumblr that I decided not to go any further. As I can't imagine my experience would be any different this time, I've never had any interest in continuing the series any further than The End of Time. This was a decision I actually received hate for on Tumblr, which was...devastating, as I'm sure you can imagine. But it reinforced my choice. Anyways, my apologies to anyone who might disappointed. And on with the show!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Rose hurried down the stairs to find Donna, only to find the exuberant redhead barreling toward her and throwing her arms around her in a tight hug.

“Oh, my god,” she gasped, pulling back to look at Rose. “I don’t believe it. Look at you! Have you gotten older? How long’s it been?”

“Er…” Rose peeked over the railing to see the guards barreling toward her. “I don’t think now’s the time for this Donna, come on.”

She grabbed Donna’s hand and dragged her up the stairs.

“Just like old times!” Rose called to Donna, and she laughed.

They came out onto the roof, Donna talking a mile a minute as soon as she caught her breath. “Because I thought, how do you find a mad blonde in a blue box?”

“Oi.”

“And then I just thought, look for trouble and then she’ll turn up. She seems to like trouble.”

“Can’t get enough of it,” Rose agreed, sonicking the door.
“So I looked everywhere. You name it. UFOs, sightings, crop circles, sea monsters. I looked, I found them all. Like that stuff about the bees disappearing, I thought, I bet she’s connected it.” She sounded so thrilled, Rose almost laughed. “Because the thing is, Rose, I believe it all now. You opened my eyes. All those amazing things out there, I believe them all.”

“Well glad I could help expand your horizons.” Rose pulled Donna to the cradle. “Wait what do you mean, the bees are disappearing?”

“I don’t know,” Donna shrugged. “That’s what it says on the Internet. Well, on the same site, there was all these conspiracy theories about Adipose Industries and I thought, let’s take a look.”

As she spoke Rose worked on the cradle controls. “Right, in you get then,” she said when she was done. Donna gave her a disbelieving look.

“What, in that thing?”

“Yes, in that thing,” Rose replied patiently. She’d forgotten how much Donna liked to question things.

“But if we go down in that, they’ll just call us back up again.”

Rose shook her head. “No, it’s fine. I’ve locked the controls with a sonic cage. I’m the only one who can control it. Not unless she’s got a sonic device of her own, which is very unlikely.”

Donna looked vaguely impressed as she climbed in. “You seem to have a better handle on all this than last time.”

“Nope.” Rose popped her lips on the p as she activated the cradle and sent them down. “Just a lot better at pretending.”

They were halfway down when the cradle suddenly bucked. “Damn it!” Rose hissed, aiming the sonic screwdriver up and managing to lock the cables. Okay, so much for that. “Hold on. Hold on. We can get in through the window.”

She tried to use the sonic to cut through the glass, but it was no good. “Are you bloody kidding me?”

“Just smash it!” Donna said, grabbing a spanner and slamming it into the window. As the cradle rocked she looked up.

“She’s cutting the cable!”

Right on cue the cable snapped, and Donna tumbled out. Rose managed to grab the still in-tact cable and hold on while Donna caught the broken one.

“Donna, hold on!” Rose called down.

“Oh thanks, didn’t think of that myself!” Donna shot back. “So glad you’re better at pretending this time!”

She talks a lot for someone who’s in life or death situations all the time, doesn’t she? Rose thought as she focused on Ms. Foster overhead, preparing to cut the second cable. No you don’t. Rose aimed the sonic screwdriver the best she could, activating it. She grinned when she saw something spark and Foster dropped the pen. Brilliant!
She caught the pen and put it between her teeth, zeroing in on an open window. Bad for security, good for her.

“I’m going to fall!” Donna cried out. “This is all your fault. I should’ve stayed at home.”

Yeah, me too,” Rose grunted as she hauled herself into the window. “I won’t be a minute!”

She got inside and ran downstairs, straight for Ms. Foster’s office where the woman was still tied up.

“Is anyone going to tell me what’s going on?” She demanded, and Rose rolled her eyes.

“You’re a journalist, right? Make it up!” Oh Sarah Jane would kill her for that shot. Oh well. She ran to the window where she could see Donna’s dangling legs, unlocking it and sticking her head.

“Donna, it’s me! No kicking!”

She grabbed Donna’s legs and dragged her inside, sending them both tumbling to the floor.

“I was right,” Donna grunted as she pushed herself up. “It’s always like this with you, isn’t it?”

“Pretty much.” Rose grinned. “And off we go!”

They ran out. “Oi!” The journalist called after them.

“Right, sorry!” Rose peeked back in, sonicking the ropes and setting the woman free. “Now do yourself a favor. Get out.”

And she ran after Donna.

They didn’t make it far, of course, before Ms. Foster and her guards cornered them in the call center.

“Well, then,” Ms. Foster said, looking quite calm. “At last.”

“Hello,” Donna said with a wave. It would’ve been casual if not for the air of we’re about to die.

“Nice to meet you,” Rose added. “I’m Rose.”

“And I’m Donna.”

“Partners in crime.” The words were mocking. “And evidently off-worlders, judging by your sonic technology.”


“Oh it’s definitely sleek,” Donna agreed with a nod.

“Yeah.” Rose wiggled it between her fingers. “And if you were to sign your real name, that would be…?”

“Matron Cofelia of the Five Straighten Classabindi Nursery Fleet. Intergalactic class.”

Almost none of that made any sense to Rose. Except for matron and nursery. “So…you’re a wet nurse. Using humans as surrogates.”

“I’ve been employed by the Adiposian First Family,” blimey she was chatty, “to foster a new generation after their breeding planet was lost.”
“What do you mean lost?” Rose asked in disbelief. “How do you lose a planet?”

Foster waved Rose off. “Oh, politics are none of my concern. I’m just here to take care of the children on behalf of the parents.”

“What, like an outer space super nanny?” Donna asked, and Rose almost smiled.

“Yes, if you like.”

Donna was still deducing. “So. So those little things, they’re, they’re made out of fat, yeah,” she put the pieces together carefully. “But that woman, Stacy Campbell, there was nothing left of her.”

“Oh, in a crisis the Adipose can convert bone and hair and internal organs.” Rose’s stomach dropped. “Makes them a little bit sick, poor things.”

Donna balked. “What about poor Stacy?”

“Seeding a level five planet is against galactic law,” Rose added, a bit harshly. Foster raised an eyebrow.

“Are you threatening me?”

“I’m trying to help you, Matron,” Rose informed her. “This is your one chance, because if you don’t call this off, then I’ll have to stop you.”

“I hardly you think you can stop bullets.”

On cue, the guards raised their weapons.

“No, hold, hold on, hold on, hold on,” Rose said quickly. “One more thing, before dying. Do you know what happens if you hold two identical sonic devices against each other?”

Foster raised an eyebrow. “No.”

“Nor me.” Rose grinned, a bit maniacally. “Let’s find out.”

She shoved the pen tip and the sonic screwdriver tip together and activated them both. A god-awful screech echoed through the room and everyone doubled over in pain. Rose let it go for a moment before Donna gave her a shove.

“Come on!”

They took off.

“Where are we going?” Donna huffed as they ran down the stairs.

“Got an idea!” Rose called back over her shoulder.

“That’s a change!”

She wasn’t too impressed by her idea when they ran to the storage cupboard. “Well that’s one solution,” she commented as she watched Rose throw the stuff out of the closet. “Hide in a cupboard. I like it.”

Her mouth dropped when the wall slid away to reveal a great big green machine.
“I’ve been hacking into this thing all day,” Rose explained as she worked, “because the matron’s got a computer core running through the centre of the building. Triple deadlocked. But now I’ve got this,” she waved the sonic pen, “I can get into it.”

Donna stepped back, letting Rose fumble away. “She’s wired up the whole building,” Rose muttered. “We need a bit of privacy.”

With the TARDIS’ guidance she found the two wires she needed and held them together for a moment. “Just enough to stop them. Why’s she wired up the tower block? What’s it all for?”

Silence fell for a moment while Rose looked. “You look older,” Donna finally ventured quietly. Last time she’d seen Rose Tyler the girl had been almost painfully young.

Now she seemed unnaturally old.

“Thanks,” Rose muttered as she worked.

“Did you find someone?”

“Yeah,” Rose said quietly. “For a bit. Her name was Martha Jones. She was brilliant, and wonderful. And I destroyed half her life. But she’s fine. She’s good. She’s gone.”

Donna hesitated for a moment. “And the Doctor?”

“Still lost,” Rose said shortly. “I thought you were going to travel the world.”

“Easier said then done.” Donna rolled her eyes. “It’s like I had that one day with you, and I was going to change. I was going to do so much. Then I woke up the next morning, same old life. It’s like you were never there. And I tried. I did try. I went to Egypt. I was going to go barefoot and everything. And then it’s all bus trips and guidebooks and don’t drink the water, and two weeks later you’re back home. It’s nothing like being with you. I must have been mad turning down that offer.”

“Offer?” Rose repeated.

“To come with you.”

“Oh, right…” Rose mumbled distractedly.

“Is…is that offer still open?”

Before Rose could answer, the computer spoke. “Inducer activated.”

“What’s it doing now?” Donna asked, sidetracked.

“She’s started the programme.”

The TARDIS hummed urgently in the back of Rose’s mind. My Wolf—

“I know, I know!” Rose burst out, and Donna jumped back.

“What?”

“So far they’re just losing weight, but the Matron’s gone up to emergency pathogenesis.”

“And that’s when they convert…”
“Skeletons, organs, everything.” Rose shook her head, disgusted. “A million people are going to die. Got to cancel the signal.”

She pulled the pendant out of her pocket, pulling it apart. “This contains a primary signal. If I can switch it off, the fat goes back to being just fat.”

She latched part of the pendant onto the computer, working feverishly. “Inducer increasing,” the computer announced suddenly, and Rose cursed.

“No, no, no, no! She’s doubled it! This isn’t going to work, I haven’t got time, it’s too far, I can’t override it. They’re all going to die!”

“Is there anything I can do?” Donna asked, trying to prompt Rose.

“I don’t know!” Rose burst out, frustrated. “No, no there isn’t. I’ve got to…to…double the base pulse, and I can’t!”

Donna grabbed Rose’s shoulders, forcing the blonde to face her. “Rose, tell me. What do you need?”

Rose ran her hands through her hair, trying to breathe deep. “I need a second capsule to boost the override, but I’ve only got one. I can’t do anything. I can’t help.”

Donna paused for a moment before reaching into her pocket…and pulling out a second capsule. Rose could’ve cried in relief. “Oh Donna you’re brilliant!” She hugged the redhead quickly before grabbing the pendant and pulling it apart, plugging it in. After a moment the machine shut down.

“Ha. Ha!” Rose laughed before pulling Donna into another tight hug. Donna was laughing too as she hugged Rose back.

“Useless without me, huh?”

“Oh yes!”

They both jumped when a loud noise echoed overhead. “What the hell was that?” Donna asked, pulling back.

_The nursery_, the TARDIS said in the back of Rose’s head.

“Nursery?” Rose repeated in disbelief.

“Nursery?” Donna echoed. “Fine. When you say nursery you don’t mean a crèche in Notting Hill.”

“Nursery ship,” Rose confirmed with a nod. But there was still the matter of loose ends…

Right on cue, the computer lit up again. “Incoming signal,” Rose said, leaning close as a voice started saying clearly alien words. The TARDIS lit up in the back of Rose’s head, translating for her.

“Hadn’t we better go and stop them?” Donna asked curiously. Rose shook her head.

“Hang on. Instructions from the Adiposian First Family.”

“What does that mean? What are they saying?”

“Ssshhh.”

She poked at the computer as she listened, trying to figure out what was going on. “She’s wired the
tower block to convert it into a levitation post — oh. Ooooh.” She paused as she realized what the message was saying. “We’re not the ones in trouble now. She is! Come on!”

Rose grabbed Donna’s hand, pulling her to the stairs. “More running,” Donna groaned as they hurried along. “I didn’t wear the right shoes for this!”

“You were lookin’ for me Donna, shoulda realized you were gonna need better shoes!”

“I ran around in my bloody wedding dress last time, heels are nothing compared to that!”

They hurried up to the roof, Donna stopping dead at the sight of the spaceship hovering overhead. “Oh hell…”

“It’s alright.” Rose gave her a tug. “Come on.”

They walked to the edge of the roof, watching as the little Adipose babies floated up to the spaceship. They waved down, and Rose smiled as she waved back with Donna following suit.

“What are you going to do then?” She asked after a moment. “Blow them up?”

Rose shook her head. “They just children. They can’t help where they come from.”

“Oh, that makes a change from last time,” Donna commented. “That Martha must’ve done you some good.”

“She did,” Rose agreed quietly. “Yeah, she did. She did.”

“…I’m waving at fat,” Donna commented after a moment, and Rose laughed a bit.

“Actually, as a diet plan, it sort of works.” The smile faded when she saw Ms. Foster floating up to the ship. “There she is!”

Rose went straight to the edge, leaning over to watch Ms. Foster. “Matron Cofelia, listen to me,” she begged.

“Oh, I don’t think so, Ms. Tyler,” the woman shot back. “And if I never see you again, it’ll be too soon.”

“Oh why does no one ever listen?” Rose groaned under her breath before raising her voice again. “I’m trying to help! Just get across to the roof. Can you shift the levitation beam?”

“What, so you can arrest me?” Ms. Foster scoffed. Rose blew out a long, annoyed breath.

“Just listen! I saw the Adiposian instructions. They know it’s a crime, breeding on Earth. So what’s the one thing they want to get rid of? Their accomplice.”

“I’m far more than that,” Foster boasted. “I’m a nanny to all these children.”

“Exactly! Mum and Dad have got their kids now. They don’t need the nanny anymore.”

Right on cue, the beam switched off. Ms. Foster froze in the air for a moment, looking down and back up again before falling with a scream and landing with a thud. Rose and Donna leaned over to see her body, then yanked back, and Donna turned away, squeezing her eyes shut.

“It’s always mad with you.”
Rose pulled her into a hug, sighing. “Yeah.”

They headed back downstairs silently, Rose checking her pocket to make sure she still had the sonic pen. Maybe a second sonic would come in handy, she decided. No need to toss it just yet.

They walked out onto the street, watching the police work.

“Oi, you two!” They turned to see the journalist walking out, still tied to the chair. Quite the feat. “You’re just mad. Do you hear me? Mad! And I’m going to report you both for madness!”

She wobbled away, and Donna shook her head. “You see, some people just can’t take it.”

“Nope.”

“And some people can.” Donna beamed. “So then. TARDIS! Come on!”

Rose smiled as she led Donna to the alley where she’d parked the TARDIS. “But that’s my car!” Donna said when she saw her car just a few feet away. “That is like destiny. And I’ve been ready for this.”

She popped open the trunk. It was full of suitcases. “I packed ages ago, just in case,” she explained as she unloaded. “Because I thought, hot weather, cold weather, no weather. She goes anywhere. I’ve gotta be prepared.”

“You’ve got a hatbox,” Rose said as she watched.

“Planet of the hats, I’m ready!” She said happily. “I don’t need injections, do I? You know, like when you go to Cambodia. Is there any of that? Because my friend Veena, she went to Bahrain and she—” Donna stopped suddenly, realizing Rose was quiet. “You’re not saying much.”

Rose shook her head uncertainly. “It’s just…this life. In the TARDIS. It’s…”

Donna’s face fell. “You don’t want me,” she said quietly, and Rose’s stomach dropped.

“No no no, I’m not sayin’ that.”

“But you asked me,” Donna pointed out. “Or did that have an expiration date? Would you rather be alone?”

“No…no.” Rose didn’t do well alone. She’d learned that the hard way hadn’t she? “Just…I told you. I ruined Martha’s life. Pretty badly. It’s not fair of me to ask another person to go through that.”

“Well I’m not afraid of you,” Donna said boldly. “Besides what sorta power do you think you have? You’re just a little blonde…thing. Hardly capable of doing any damage.”

Rose almost smiled. “There we are, then.”

“I can come?” Donna asked hopefully.

“Of course. Yeah. Of course. I’d love that.”

Donna grinned, almost going to hug Rose before suddenly pulling back. “Car keys.”

Rose blinked. “What?”

“I’ve still got my mum’s car keys. I won’t be a minute.”
She hurried off before Rose could say anything. After a moment Rose shrugged and began hauling her bags into the TARDIS.

“I know, Mum,” Donna sighed into her phone as she hurried down the street. “Little fat people. Listen, I’ve got to go. I’m going to stay with Veena for a bit.”

“It was in the sky!”

“Yeah, I know. Spaceship.” Blimey this conversation was taking too long. “But I’ve still got the car keys. Look. There is a bin on Brook Street, about thirty feet from the corner. I’m going to leave them in there.”

“What, a bin?”

“Yes, that’s it. Bin.” Donna tossed the keys in.

“But you can’t do that,” Sylvia protested. Donna rolled her eyes.


She hung up before Sylvia could protest, and she ran to a nearby police barrier. It took her a moment to zero in on a man in a pinstripe suit.

“Oi, skinny,” she called, running over and tapping him on the shoulder. “Listen, there is this woman that’s going to come along. A tall blonde woman called Sylvia. Tell her that bin there, alright? It’ll all make sense. That bin there.”

She ran off again, quite happy with herself. Rose was just finishing loading up the TARDIS when Donna returned. “Off we go, then!” She said happily, bounding inside. Rose smiled as she followed. “Blimey, could stand turn up the heat.”

“Already backseat controlling,” Rose teased. “Right then. Whole wide universe, where do you want to go?”

“Oh, I know exactly the place,” Donna said happily. Rose raised an eyebrow. That was quick.

“Which is?”

“Two and a half miles that way.”

Donna’s destination, as it turned out, was a small hillside where an old man was packing up a telescope. Rose parked them to hover overhead, and Donna ran to the door. “Who’s that?” Rose asked curiously, going to peek out.

“My grandfather.” Donna waved down at him. He was yelling and whooping as he waved back. Rose smiled.

God she missed having a family.

Chapter End Notes

Please review...?
Fires of Pompeii Part One

Chapter Summary

Rose takes Donna on her first trip. It quickly turns into a disaster. Such is life.

“Blimey you still can’t drive,” Donna griped as she gripped the console, holding on for dear life.

“Hey she’s supposed to have six drivers,” Rose shot back as she tried to pull the TARDIS under control. “At least I haven’t crashed us into anything.”

“You!”

They landed with a thud and Donna collapsed against the console, looking a bit pale. “Need a bucket?”

“No, I’m fine,” Donna grumbled as she picked herself up. “So where are we?”

Rose beamed. “Let’s go look, shall we?”

They hurried to the door, Rose stopping to grab her jacket and let Donna go first. The redhead was gobstruck as she stepped out onto the vendor-lined street. Rose was just a little smug as she walked out behind Donna, letting the door swing shut behind her.

“Ancient Rome,” she announced proudly. “Well, not for them, obviously. For all intents and purposes right now, this is brand new Rome.”

“Oh my god,” Donna breathed as she turned, looking around. “It’s so Roman. This is fantastic.”

Rose tried very hard to ignore the way the word fantastic actually physically hurt. “I’m here, in Rome.” Donna was oblivious to the momentary pain that flashed across Rose’s face. “Donna Noble in Rome. This is just weird. I mean, everyone here’s dead.”

“Well, don’t tell them that,” Rose advised with a small smile. As dangerous as this life was, it was always fun to see the reactions to new places.

“Hold on a minute,” Donna said suddenly, squinting at a nearby sign. “That sign over there’s in English.” She turned to glare at Rose. “Are you having me on? Are we in Epcot?”

“No but blimey we should go to Disney next.” Why hadn’t Rose ever thought of that? “No, that’s the TARDIS translation circuits. She translates everything for you so you see and hear English. But if you were to speak to them, they’d hear Latin. You’re talkin’ Latin right now.”

“Seriously?” Donna said, and Rose nodded. “I just said seriously in Latin.”

“Oh yeah.”

“What if I said something in actual Latin, like veni, vidi, vici? My dad said that when he came back from football. If I said veni, vidi, vici to that lot, what would it sound like?”

“…Huh.” That was a good question actually. “I’m not sure. But now I’m curious.”
“I’m gonna try it,” Donna declared, walking to a nearby fruit seller. He grinned at the prospect of a customer.

“Afternoon, sweetheart. What can I get you, my love?”

“Er…veni, vidi, vici,” Donna said uncertainly, and the man raised an eyebrow.

“Huh? Sorry? Me no speak Celtic. No can do, missy.”

“Yeah.” Donna made a face as she walked back to Rose. “How’s he mean, Celtic?”

“Welsh,” Rose supplied. “You sound Welsh. There we are. Learned something.”

They headed down the street, Donna looking around. “Don’t our clothes look a bit odd?” She questioned. Rose shook her head.

“Nah. Ancient Rome, anything goes. It’s like Soho, but bigger.”

“I haven’t,” Rose admitted. “The Doctor has though, and I’ve got the memories from the TARDIS.” She tapped her temple. “Pretty sure he started a fire. Anyways let’s get a proper looked around. Coliseum, Pantheon, Circus Maximus.” She stopped, looking around. “You’d expect them to be looming by now. Where is everything?” She switched directions. “Try this way.”

They started along, Donna examining the landscape critically. “Not an expert,” she said after a minute, “But there’s seven hills of Rome, aren’t there? How come they’ve only got one.”

Rose stopped to look over at the big, bare-headed mountain. That was…not right. Suddenly the ground began shaking. “Here we go again,” one man groaned as the vendors tried to hold onto their stalls. There was a shatter as several pots fell and broke.

“Wait a minute,” Donna said slowly. “One mountain. With smoke. Which makes this…”

“Pompeii,” Rose finished, the color draining from her face. “We’re in Pompeii. And it’s volcano day.”

Donna looked over at Rose. “You’re joking.”

Rose didn’t answer, instead grabbing Donna’s hand and dragging her away. “Oh look, running again!”

Again, no answer. Because yes they were running. They were running back to the TARDIS and getting the hell out of there.

_TThat may be easier than said my Wolf._

Rose skidded to a halt, head jerking around. “What?”


_I seem to have been…sold._

“What?!”

“You’re talking to the mad ship, right? That’s what this is about?”
Donna wasn’t really surprised when Rose didn’t answer, and instead just dragged her back to where they had landed.

And sure enough, the TARDIS wasn’t there. “Oh hell,” Rose hissed, running a hand through her hair.

“You’re kidding,” Donna said in disbelief. “You’re not telling me the TARDIS has gone.”

“Okay.”

“Where is it, then?”

“You told me not to tell you.”

Needless to say, Donna was not amused. “Oi. Don’t get clever at me in Latin.”

“Right. Sorry.” Rose shot a look at their surroundings. “Hang on. Excuse me!” She ran to the fruit seller. “Excuse me, there was a box. Big blue box. Big blue wooden box, just over there. Where’s it gone?”

“Sold it, didn’t I?” The man said, and Rose’s mouth dropped.

“But it wasn’t yours to sell!”

“It was on my patch, weren’t it?” He argued. He was lucky Rose didn’t hit him, really. “I got fifteen sesterces for it. Lovely jubbly.”

“Who’d you sell it to?” Rose demanded.

“Old Caecilius. Look, if you want to argue, why don’t you take it out with him? He’s on Foss Street. Big villa. Can’t miss it.”

“Fine. Thanks.” Rose turned and stormed away. *What the hell does he want a big blue wooden box for?*

*He thinks I am art.*

Rose snorted at that. *You’re the worst art I’ve ever seen.* The TARDIS hummed in the back of her head, clearly offended. She didn’t have a chance to answer, however, before she realized Donna was gone.

“What, did the merchant sell her too?”

Finding the TARDIS would be easy enough — Rose could feel how far she was — so at that moment Donna took priority.

Thankfully the redhead hadn’t gone far — Rose found her running down the street just a few minutes later. “Brilliant, there you are. Come on, let’s get the TARDIS and get out of here.”

“No,” Donna said quickly. “Well, I found this big sort of amphitheatre thing. We can gather everyone together. Maybe they’ve got a great big bell or something we could ring. Have they invented bells yet?”

Rose raised an eyebrow, bewildered. “What do you want a bell for?”

“To warn everyone.” Oh god. “Start the evacuation. What time does Vesuvius erupt? When’s it do?”
“It’s seventy-nine AD, twenty-third of August.” The answer came automatically. “Which makes
volcano day tomorrow.”

“Plenty of time!” Donna declared. “We could get everyone out easy.”

_My Wolf, you can not—_

_I know. I know._

“Donna…we can’t do that,” Rose said gently, and Donna’s face fell.

“What do you mean? That’s what you do isn’t it? You save people.”

“Not this time. I can’t. Pompeii is a fixed point in history. Fixed points can’t be changed. What
happens, happens.”

“Says who?” Donna demanded, clearly angry.

“Those are the laws of time. I can’t mess with them. Nobody can.”

“So what, you’re the time police now?” Oi. “Forget it, no. I don’t need your permission. I’ll tell them
myself.”

Rose grabbed Donna’s arm as she whirled away to start yelling. “You stand in the marketplace
announcing the end of the world, they’ll think you’re a mad old soothsayer. Now, come on.
TARDIS. We need to get out of here.”

“Well I might just have something to say about that, Blondie,” Donna informed Rose as she pulled
her away.

“I’d be more surprised if you didn’t.”

Donna, thankfully, didn’t try to do anything too mad as they walked down the street, Rose following
the TARDIS. She could feel the ship getting closer as they walked.

“You could save these people.”

“I can’t, Donna.”

“Why not? You have a bloody time machine, I got the impression you mess with history all the
time.”

“Not like this.” They found the villa. “Please, just stop. I’ll explain later I promise just…not right
now. Let’s get the TARDIS and get out of here.”

They were escorted inside as the ground began to shake. “Blimey.” Donna grabbed Rose to keep
from falling over. They walked into a large room and Rose saw a marble bust topple forward of its
pedestal.

“Whoa!” She dove to grab it before it could fall. “There you go.”

“Thank you, kind ma’am,” an older man said, and Rose focused on him. Caecilius. She wasn’t sure
how she knew, but she did. “I’m afraid business is closed for the day. I’m expecting a visitor.”

“But that’s me,” Rose said quickly. “I’m a visitor. Hello.”
“And who are you?”

“Um…Rose.” She wasn’t in the mood to make up a name. Her head was starting to hurt. “And this is my er…” She gestured vaguely at Donna. “Mother.”

That, unsurprisingly, earned Rose a very hard stomp to the foot. “She’s joking,” Donna said with a sickly sweet smile as Rose jumped and tried not to cry out in pain. “We’re sisters.”

“Yes, of course,” Caecilius said thoughtfully. “You look very much alike.”

That caught them both off guard. “Really?” They said in unison before exchanging looks. Caecilius, thankfully, didn’t notice their bewilderment.

“I’m sorry, but I’m not open for trade.”

“And that trade would be…?” Rose hedged, grateful when he took the bait.

“Marble. Lopus Caecilius. Mining, polishing, and design thereof. If you want marble, I’m you’re man.”

Rose thought quickly, digging through her pocket. “That’s good. That’s good, because I’m the marble inspector.” She flashed the psychic paper quickly.

“By the gods of commerce, an inspection,” the woman standing off to the side – Caecilius’ wife? – breathed. “I’m sorry, ma’am. I do apologize for my son.”

She grabbed the goblet from the younger man standing with her, pouring it out.

“Oi!” The boy protested. Caecilius eyed Rose suspiciously.

“You’ll excuse me for asking, but how did someone of your… status come to hold such a powerful position?”

Rose raised an eyebrow. “You mean how did a woman become a marble inspector?” She asked calmly, and Caecilius paled a bit.

“That’s not… I apologize,” he said quickly. Donna had to smirk a bit. Mad as she might be at Rose right then, the woman did have the power to make the other man cower. That was amusing. “This is my good wife, Metella.” He introduced his wife, moving on. “I must confess, we’re not prepared for a–”

“Nothin’ to worry about.” Rose waved him off. “I’m sure you’ve got nothin’ to hide.” She scanned the room, doing her best not to smile when she saw the TARDIS tucked in the corner. “Although, frankly, that object looks rather like wood to me. And not even that attractive.”

The TARDIS hummed unhappily. “I told you to get rid of it,” Metella said, and Caecilius made a face.

“I only bought it today.”

“I’m sure it’s fine,” Rose said slowly. “But I might have to take it off your hands for a proper inspection.”

“Although while we’re here,” Donna said suddenly, and Rose really didn’t like the sound of that. “Wouldn’t you recommend a holiday, Sis?”
“Don’t know what you mean,” Rose said evenly, shooting Donna a look. “Sis.”

“Oh, this lovely family. Mother and father and son. Don’t you think they should get out of town?”

“Why should we do that?” Caecilius asked, confused.

“Well, the volcano, for starters.” Rose nearly slapped her hand against her forehead.

“What?” Caecilius didn’t get it.

“Volcano,” Donna repeated.

“What ano?”

“That great big volcano right on your doorstep,” Donna said, frustrated, and Rose finally stepped in.

“Oh Donna, for shame. We haven’t even greeted the household gods yet.”

She grabbed the woman’s arm, pulling her aside and saying in a hushed voice, “They don’t know what it is. Vesuvius is just a mountain to them. The top hasn’t blown off yet. The Romans haven’t even got a word for volcano. Not until tomorrow.”

“Oh great, they can learn a new word as they die,” Donna sneered, and Rose winced.

“Donna, don’t.”

“Look at that boy.” Donna pointed at Caecilius’ son. “How old is he? Sixteen? And tomorrow he burns to death.”

“That’s not my fault.”

“If you have the power to stop it and you don’t then yes, it is.”

“I have the power to stop a lot of things, Donna,” Rose snapped, losing her patience. “I could go back to Germany in the nineteen-thirties and kill Hitler before he ever came to power. I could save millions of people from dying in concentrations camps and in the war but I don’t because there are rules and there are consequences and if I go and ignore those then I’m playing god and I can’t do that.”

A voice rang through the room before Donna could argue back. “Announcing Lucius Petrus Dextrus, Chief Augur of the city Government.”

Caecilius strolled forward as the man entered the room. “Lucius. My pleasure, as always.”

“Quintus, stand up,” Rose heard Metella scolding her son. Caecilius was oblivious.

“A rare and great honor, sir, for you to come to my house.” Caecilius held out his hand, but Lucius didn’t take it. The amount of second-hand embarrassment made Rose wince.

“The birds are flying north, and the wind is in the west,” Lucius said cryptically, and Rose rolled her eyes. Great, one of those.

Do not dismiss so quickly, my Wolf, the TARDIS prompted Rose. She sighed.

“Quite.” It was obvious Caecilius didn’t understand a damn word of that. “Absolutely. That’s good, is it?”
“Only the grain of wheat knows where it will grow.”

Caecilius was practically beside himself. “There now, Metella. Have you ever heard such wisdom?”

“Never. It’s an honor.”

Rose bit down a snort. “Pardon me, sir.” Caecilius finally remembered the existence of the two women. “I have guests. This is Rose and Donna.”

“A name is but a cloud upon a summer wind,” Lucius said dismissively.

“But the wind is felt most keenly in the dark.” Rose scowled as the words came out unbidden. The TARDIS’ doing.

“Ah.” Lucius gave Rose a look. “But what is the dark, other than an omen of the sun.”

“I concede that every sun must set.” Rose hated when the TARDIS did this to her. The ship hummed back in response.

“Ha.” Lucius made a noise that was very close to triumph. Oh Rose hated that more.

“And yet the son of the father must also rise.”


Again the niggling thought that it wouldn’t have been impressive if she’d been a man ate at the back of Rose’s mind. She ignored it. “Oh yes. But don’t mind me. Don’t want to disturb the status quo. We’ll be off in a minute.”

“I’m not going.” Donna insisted even as Rose grabbed her hand, dragging her to the TARDIS.

“You’ve got to,” she insisted.

“It’s ready, sir,” she heard Caecilius say in the background.

“Well, I’m not.”

As Rose pulled Donna along, she saw Caecilius moving toward a cloth covered object. “The moment of revelation.” He swept the cloth off. “And here it is.”

She paused, looking back at the stone tile carved as a circuit board. Oh bloody hell.

“Exactly as you specified. It pleases you, sir?”

“As the rain pleases the soil.”

“Oh now that’s different,” Rose commented idly as she moved closer. “Who designed that, then?”

“My Lord Lucius was very specific.” The amount of worship in Caecilius’ voice was astounding.

“Where’d you get the pattern?” Rose pushed.

“Oh the rain and the mist and the wind.”

“But that looks like a circuit,” Donna cut in before Rose could express any annoyance. “Made of stone. Do you mean you just dreamt that thing up?”
‘That is my job, as City Augor.’

Donna blinked, confused. ‘What’s that then, like the mayor?’

‘Uh, you’ll have to excuse my friend,’ Rose said quickly, grabbing Donna and pulling her aside again. ‘She’s from Barcelona.’ She lowered her voice to say, ‘No, but this is an age of superstition. Of official superstition. The Augur is paid by the city to tell the future. The wind will blow from the west? That’s the equivalent of ten o’clock news.’

She was distracted by the entrance of a young girl, swaying and pale. She looked ill. ‘They’re laughing at us,’ she said distantly, pointing at Rose and Donna. ‘Those two, they used words like tricksters. They’re mocking us.’

‘No, no,’ Rose said quickly. ‘I’m not. I meant no offense.’

‘I’m sorry,’ Metella said quickly. ‘My daughter’s been consuming the vapors.’

‘Oh for gods sake, Mother,’ Quintus burst out. ‘What have you been doing to her?’

‘Not now, Quintus,’ Caecilius scolded him.

‘Yeah, but she’s sick. Just look at her.’

‘I gather I have a rival in this household,’ Lucius commented silkily. ‘Another with the gift.’

‘Oh, she’s been promised to the Sibylline Sisterhood,’ Metella said. ‘They say she has remarkable visions.’

The prophecies of women are limited and dull,” Lucius replied, and Rose bristled. ‘Only the menfolk have the capacity for true perception.’

‘I’ll tell you where the wind’s blowing right now, mate,’ Donna said angrily, stepping forward. A small tremor shook through the house.

‘The Mountain God marks your words,’ Lucius said as it faded away. ‘I’d be careful, if I were you.’

That sounded like a threat. Rose eyed Lucius suspiciously for a moment before turning to Caecilius’ daughter. ‘Consuming the vapors, you say?’

‘They give me strength.’

‘That’s doubtful,’ Rose murmured, examining the young woman. She looked ready to fall over.

‘Is that your opinion as a doctor?’

That caught Rose off guard. ‘What?’

‘Doctor. That is who you are trying to be, isn’t it?’

That was a bit like a punch in the stomach. ‘What…?’

The girl turned to Donna. ‘And you. You call yourself Noble.’

‘Now then, Evelina,’ Metella scolded her lightly. ‘Don’t be rude.’
“No, no, no, no,” Rose said quickly. “Let her talk.”

“You both come from so far away…”

“The female soothsayer is inclined to invent all sorts of vagaries,” Lucius scoffed. Rose blew out an annoyed breath.

“Oh, not this time, Lucius.” She took a grim pleasure in saying that. “No, I reckon you’ve been out-soothsayed.”

Lucius gave her a dark look. “Is that so? You are a woman out of time. The strangest of images. You have no home.”

“Rose, what are they doing?” Donna asked, a bit nervous. Lucius turned on her.

“And you, daughter of London.”

“How does he know that?” Donna demanded.

“This is the gift of Pompeii. Every single oracle tells the truth.”

“That’s impossible.”

“Rose Tyler.” She blanched at that. She’d never given them her full name. “He is returning.”

“Who is?” Rose demanded, caught off guard. “Who’s he?”

“And you, daughter of London. There is something on your back.”

“What’s that mean?”

“Rose is not your only name,” Evelina cut in before Lucius could say anything else. “You have another. It burns in the stars, in the cascade of Medusa herself.” Rose’s expression turned dark as she turned to look at Evelina. “The Bad Wolf.”

The girl collapsed. “Evelina!” Metella yelled, running to her side. Rose stayed back, giving Lucius a hard, long look.

Yeah. Something was wrong here.

* * * * *

There was a bit of a scramble to get Evelina to her room. Rose and Donna followed, watching as Caecilius laid her down in bed and went to back to Lucius while Metella attended to Evelina.

“She didn’t mean to be rude,” she said apologetically to the two women. “But when the gods speak through her…”

Donna zeroed in on what looked like a rash on Evelina’s arm. “What’s wrong with her arm?” She asked curiously, and Rose smiled a bit. Donna was observant. She liked that.

“An irritation of the skin. She never complains, bless her. We bathe it in olive oil every night.”

“What is it?” Donna pushed again. Metella hesitated for a moment.

“Evelina said you’d come from far away,” she ventured finally, looking at Rose and exposing the
arm more fully. “Please, have you ever seen anything like it?”

It was dark… almost grey, Rose noted as Donna stepped forward to stroke it. “It’s… stone."

*Something’s not right here*. The TARDIS hummed in agreement. *So much for just leaving.*

She slipped out of the room, leaving Donna to help tend to Evelina. She wandered back to the villa, finding the hypocaust grill and kneeling down, pulling it up. Caecilius walked over, curious.

“Different type of hypocaust?” She asked after a moment. The man nodded.

“Oh yes. We’re very advanced in Pompeii. In Rome, they’re still using the old wood-burning furnaces, but we’ve got hot springs, leading from Vesuvius itself.”

Rose tilted her head, looking back at him. “Who thought of that?”

“The soothsayers.” Of course. “After the great earthquake, seventeen years ago. An awful lot of damage. But we rebuilt.”

“The thought of moving never crossed your mind?” A strange noise reached Rose’s ears and she looked down. “What’s that noise?”

“Don’t know,” Caecilius admitted. “Happens all the time. They say the gods of the Underworld are stirring.”

Somehow, Rose doubted that. “But after the earthquake, let me guess. Is that when the soothsayers started making sense?”

“Oh, yes, very much so.” Caecilius nodded. “I mean, they’d always been, shall we say, imprecise? But then the soothsayers, the augurs, the haruspex, all of them, they saw the truth again and again. It’s quite amazing. They can predict crops and rainfall with absolute precision.”

“Haven’t they said anything about tomorrow?” Rose couldn’t resist asking. It seemed strange that they wouldn’t predict one of the biggest disasters in Roman history.

Caecilius made a face. “No. Why, should they? Why do you ask?”

“No reason.” Rose sighed. “I’m just asking. ‘But the soothsayers, they all consume vapors, yeah?’

“That’s how they see.”

Rose made a face. “So they’re all consuming this…”

“Dust,” Caecilius supplied the word.

“Tiny particles of rock.” Rose put the pieces together. “They’re breathing in Vesuvius.”

She pushed herself up and walked away, leaving Caecilius behind her, clearly confused. It didn’t take much to find Quintus reclining on a couch, sipping another goblet of wine.

“Quintus.” She sat down with him. “I need your help. This Lucius Petrus Dextrus. Where does he live?”

Quintus shrugged, finishing his drink. “It’s nothing to do with me.”

Rose sighed. “Please. I need your help. I’m trying to save your sister.” Not exactly a lie – she didn’t
doubt that all of this was connected.

But that was exactly what she needed to say to get Quintus’ attention.

* * * * *

They went out in the darkness of night, Quintus holding a torch out as he led Rose through the streets. “Don’t tell my Dad,” he said worriedly as they approached the villa.

“Only if you don’t tell mine,” Rose said, strolling forward and getting on her tiptoes to reach a window, opening the shutters and pulling herself up into it. She leaned out, reaching for the torch. “Pass me that torch.”

Quintus handed it over and hauled himself in as Rose turned to look around. The hypocaust was glowing red, as if overheated. Rose looked around, zeroing in on a curtain covering a wall. She walked over, pulling it down to reveal that the wall was covered in different marble tiles, all with different designs.

“The liar,” Quintus said. “He told my father it was the only one.”

“Well plenty of marble merchants in this town,” Rose said thoughtfully. “Tell them all the same thing, get all the components from different places, so no one can see what you’re building.”

“Which is what?”

A voice spoke up from the shadows before Rose could answer. “The future, Rose Tyler.” Lucius stepped out. “We are building the future, as dictated by the gods.”
Evelina had finally woken up and insisted on dressing Donna up. She laughed as she watched the red head try to figure out the robe.

“You’re not supposed to laugh,” Donna said with a pout. “Thanks for that.” She threw the shawl over her shoulders with a flourish. “What do you think? The Goddess Venus.”

“Oh, that’s sacrilege,” Evelina said with a small laugh, and Donna grinned.

“Nice to see you laugh, though.” She actually looked like the child she was. “What do you do in old Pompeii, then?” She asked as she sat down. “Girls your age? You got mates? Do you go hanging about ‘round the shops? TK Maximus?”

“I am promised to the Sisterhood for the rest of my life,” Evelina said, and Donna sighed inwardly.

“Do you get any choice in that?”

“It’s not my decision.” She almost sounded mechanical now. “The Sisters choose for me. I have the gift of sight.”

Donna hesitated before throwing caution to the winds. “Then what can you see happening tomorrow?”

The question clearly threw Evelina a bit. “Is tomorrow special?”

“You tell me. What do you see?”

Evelina was quiet for a moment. “The sun will rise, the sun will set. Nothing special at all.”

But that was wrong, and Donna knew it. She took a deep breath. “Look…don’t tell Rose I’ve said anything because she’ll kill me, but I’ve got a prophecy.”

Evelina brought her hands up to cover eyes, as if to block Donna out. Donna made a face. “Evelina, I’m sorry, but you’ve got to hear me out.” No answer. “Evelina, can you hear me? Listen. But everything I’m about to say to you is true, I swear. Just listen to me. Tomorrow, that mountain is going to explode. Evelina, please listen. The air is going to fill with ash and rocks, tons and tons of it, and this whole town is going to get buried.”

“That’s not true,” Evelina insisted, lowering her hands to look at Donna.

“I’m sorry,” Donna said gently. “I’m really sorry, but everyone’s going to die. Even if you don’t believe me, just tell your family to get out of town. Just for one day. Just for tomorrow. But you’ve
got to get out. You’ve got to leave Pompeii.”

* * * * *

Rose was working steadily, rearranging the circuit boards at the TARDIS’ instruction. “Put this one there…this one there. Er, keep that one upside down, and what’ve you got?”

She turned to look at Lucius, who looked almost bored. “Enlighten me.”

“What, the soothsayer doesn’t know?” Rose couldn’t resist taunting.

“The seed may float—”

“Oh blimey, shut up,” Rose groaned. “Honestly, just say you have no idea what’s goin’ on. This is an energy converter.”

Lucius raised an eyebrow. “An energy converter of what?”

“I don’t know. Haven’t said that in a while. But I haven’t quite figured it out yet. Tell you what, though, it must be awful being a prophet. Wakin’ up every mornin’ — is it rainin’? Yes, it is, I said so. Takes all the fun out of life.” She knocked a hand against the circuit boards. “But who designed this, Lucius, hmm? Who gave you these instructions?”

The man no longer looked bored — if anything he was angry. “I think you’ve babbled enough.” Guards stepped out of the shadows, and Rose swallowed hard. Bloody wonderful.

“Lucius, really, tell me.” She lowered her voice. “Honestly, I’m on your side. I can help.”

“You insult the gods,” Lucius snapped. “There can only be one sentence. At arms.”

The guards drew their swords. Rose took a step back.

“Oh bloody hell…”

“But it was her, sir!” Quintus said suddenly, and Rose recognized the scared tone in his voice. “She made me do it. Mr. Dextrus, please don’t—”

“Come on now, Quintus,” Rose scolded him lightly. “Dignity in death. I respect your victory, Lucius. Shake on it?” She stepped forward with her hand out. Lucius eyed it as if it were some sort of insult. “Come on. My last wish?”

He reached out hesitantly, and Rose’s hand shot out, into his cloak, grabbing him by the crook of the arm and pulling. The sound of shattering rock echoed through room, and Rose stepped back with Lucius’ stone arm in her hand.

“But he’s…” Quintus couldn’t even finish the sentence.

“Show me,” Rose said quietly. And finally Lucius threw his cloak back, revealing his entire right side, calcified into stone.

“The work of the gods,” he declared.

“He’s stone.” Quintus sounded a bit sick.

“Armless enough, though.” Rose blinked. “Oh bloody hell I didn’t just make that joke.” She threw the arm back at Lucius. “Quintus!”
Quintus, thankfully, got the hint and threw the torch at one of the guards. Rose sonicked the circuit boards quickly and grabbed his hand, pulling him to the window and shoving him out in front of her.

“Run!”

They took off down the street. Rose dared to look back after a bit, relieved to see they weren’t being pursued. “No sign of them. Nice work back there.” She slowed to a walk, taking a deep breath. “I think we’re alright.”

“But his arm.” Quintus still sounded a bit sick. “Is that what’s happening to Evelina?”

Yes. But Rose didn’t want to say that out loud. Thankfully she was saved from having to as the ground began to rumble. “What the hell?” She looked around as it stopped, and began again.

“The mountain?”

Rose shook her head. “No, it’s closer…”

There was a crash as things began falling off the nearby stands. “Footsteps,” Rose said after a moment.

“It can’t be,” Quintus insisted.

“Footsteps underground.” It was. Rose knew it.

“What is it?” Quintus, no surprise, was panicking. “What is it?”

Rose didn’t know yet. She shook her head, grabbing Quintus’ arm and dragging him back to the villa.

No surprise, everyone was there was panicking. “What is it?” Metella was saying, eyes wide as she looked around. “What’s that noise?”

“Doesn’t sound like Vesuvius,” Caecilius added.

“You need to get out,” Rose snapped, drawing attention to her entrance. “All of you, just go.”

“Rose!” Donna came running in. “What is it?”

“I think we’re being followed—”

Right on cue, the hypocaust grill flew off, landing with a bang. Oh hell.

Everyone stood, frozen, as the floor around the hypocaust cracked, and a large creature made of fire and stone climbed out of the crater. It nearly touched the ceiling at full height.

“The gods are with us,” Evelina breathed from behind Donna.

Help!

Water, my Wolf.

“Right!” Rose yelled. “Water, we need water! Everyone, get water!”

“Blessed we are to see the gods,” Rombus breathed, not moving. That cost him dearly when the creature turned and breathed on him, burning him instantly.
Donna had run off to grab a bucket of water and was just returning when a pair of hands grabbed her from behind, dragging her away.

“Talk to me!” Rose called to the creature, mostly trying to buy them time. Although time for what she had no idea.

Thankfully she was saved by some quick thinking on Quintus’ part. He and a slave ran in with some buckets, getting water out of the fish pond and throw it at the monster. The fire lighting it ran out and it solidified into rock, cracking and crumbling into the floor.

“Oh blimey,” Rose sighed, running a hand through her hair.

“What is it?” Caecilius said shakily.

“Carapace of stone.” The words were automatic. “Held together by internal magma. Not too difficult to stop, but I reckon that’s just the foot soldier.”

Metella eyed the young woman with a frown. “Rose, you bring bad luck on this house.”

“Story of my life.” Rose rolled her eyes. “Your son, on the other hand, was quite brilliant and you should probably be thanking him for saving your lives.”

She turned to look around — where had Donna disappeared to? “Donna?” She called. No answer. “Donna!”

Oh this was just wonderful.

* * * * *

“You have got to be kidding me.”

Donna was currently tied to an alter with a woman standing over her with a knife. “The false prophet will surrender both her blood and her life!” The woman announced, and Donna scowled.

“I’ll surrender you in a minute. Don’t you dare.”

“You will be silent,” the woman declared.

“Listen, sister, you might have eyes on the back of your hands, but you’ll have eyes in the back of your head by the time I’ve finished with you,” Donna growled. “Let me go!”

“This prattling will cease forever!” The woman raised the knife, and Donna cringed, squeezing her eyes shut…

“Oh, don’t make promises you don’t intend to keep.”

Donna’s eyes snapped open to see Rose stepping in. Everyone turned to look at her. “Sorry, don’t let me interrupt, I was just wandering through, looking for loo — oh, I guess indoor plumbing isn’t really a thing here huh? That’s generally a rule of mine ya know, nowhere before indoor plumbing, but clearly I have very little control about where I go.” Her eyes flitted to Donna. “Alright there?”

“Oh, never better,” Donna said sarcastically.

“I like the toga.”

“Thank you. And the ropes?”
“Meh. They clash.”

Rose held out the sonic screwdriver, severing the ropes, and Donna sat up.

“What magic is this?” The woman who had been about to sacrifice Donna demanded.

“So this is how your little cult works, then.” Rose ignored that question entirely. “Spreading the word on the blade of the knife?”

“Yes, a knife that now welcomes you.”

Before the woman could follow through on the threat, however, a voice that sounded more like a hiss of air spoke. “Show me this woman.”

Everyone froze for a moment.

“High Priestess, the stranger would defile us.”

“Let me see,” the voice — the Priestess — repeated. “This one is different. She carries starlight in her wake.”

“Oh…very perceptive,” Rose murmured before raising her voice. “Where do these words of wisdom come from?”

“The gods whisper to me.”

“Wise old gods.” Rose took a deep breath. “Might I beg audience? Look upon the High Priestess?”

The Sisters stepped up to pull aside the curtains to reveal the High Priestess. Rose’s heart dropped when she saw that the woman was living stone.

“Oh, my god,” Donna breathed. “What’s happened to you?”

“The heavens have blessed me.”

Rose took a step forward. “If I may?”

The Priestess held her hand out, and Rose touched it gently. “Does it hurt?”

“It is necessary.”

Dear god. “Who told you that?”

“The voices.”

“Is that what’s going to happen to Evelina?” Donna demanded. “Is this what’s going to happen to all of you?”

The woman with the knife rolled her sleeve back to show Donna her stone forearm. “The blessings are manifold.”

Donna looked back at Rose. “They’re stone.”

“Exactly. The people of Pompeii are turning to stone before the volcano erupts. But why?”

The Priestess had questions of her own. “This word, this image in your mind. This volcano. What is that?”
Rose shook her head. “Get out of my mind. More to the point, why don’t you know about it? Who are you?”

“High Priestess of the Sibylline—”

“No, no, no, no, no,” Rose said quickly. “I’m talking to the creature inside you. The thing that’s seeding itself into a human body, in the dust, in the lungs, taking over the flesh and turning it into, what?”

“Your knowledge is impossible.”

“No, just a little unlikely. Besides, you can read my mind. You know it’s not. I demand you tell me who you are.”

There was a beat of silence, and when the High Priestess spoke again it was in two reverberating voices. “We are awakening.”

“The voice of the gods,” Rose heard the woman behind her breathe.

“Words of wisdom, words of power,” the Sisters spoke in unison. “Words of wisdom, words of power. Words of wisdom—”

“Name yourself,” Rose demanded over the Sisters. “Planet of origin. Galactic coordinates. Species designation according to the universal ratification of the Shadow Proclamation.”

“We are rising.”

“Tell me your name!” Rose snapped.

“Pyrovile.”


“What’s a Pyrovile?” Donna asked.

“Well, that’s a Pyrovile, growing inside her. She’s at the halfway stage.”

“What, and that turns into…?”

“That thing in the villa. That was an adult Pyrovile.”

“And the breath of Pyrovile will incinerate you, Bad Wolf,” the Priestess declared. Rose shoved her hand into her pocket, pulling out a yellow plastic water pistol.

“I warn you, I’m armed!” Everyone froze. Thank god. “Donna, get that grill open.”

“What for?”

It was a fair question, but Rose didn’t have time for it. “What are the Pyrovile doing here?”

“We fell from the heavens,” the Priestess said. “We fell so far and so fast, we were rendered into dust.”

“Right, creatures of stone shattered on impact,” Rose murmured. “When was that, seventeen years ago?”
“We have slept beneath for thousands of years.”

Rose nodded, putting it together. “Okay, so seventeen years ago woke you up, and now you’re using human bodies to reconstitute yourselves. But why the psychic powers?”

“We opened their minds and found such gifts.”

Increasing latent abilities. Right. “Okay, that’s fine. So you force yourself inside a human brain, use the latent psychic talent to bond. I get that, I get that, yeah. But seeing the future? That is way beyond psychic. You can see through time. Where does the gift of prophecy come from?”

“Got it,” Donna said suddenly as she got the grate off.

“Now get down,” Rose ordered.

“What, down there?”

“Yes, down there.” Rose refocused on the Priestess. “Why can’t this lot predict a volcano? Why is it being hidden?”

“Sisters, I see into her mind,” Knife-Woman announced suddenly. “The weapon is harmless.”

“Oh, I don’t know. It’s gotta sting.”

She fired the water, hitting the Priestess. She screamed at the water. “Get down there!”

Donna hurried down with Rose right behind her. “You fought her off with a water pistol,” Donna said as they climbed down. “God I bloody love you!”

“This way,” Rose said, pressing down the path before them.

“Where are we going now?”

“Into the volcano.”

Donna’s mouth dropped. “No way.”

“Yes way.”

They started down the path, Rose tugging her jacket off as they walked. It was bloody hot.

“But if it’s aliens setting off the volcano, doesn’t that make it all right for you to stop it?”

Rose shook her head. “Still part of history.”

“But I’m history to you,” Donna insisted. “You saved me in two-thousand-eight. You saved us all. Why is that different?”

“Think of time like a stream,” Rose said, rolling her sleeves up. “A stream running through a forest. Sometimes sticks fall into the stream, and it’s possible to take them out. But there are boulders in the middle of the stream that can’t be moved. Points in time that are in flux are the sticks. Fixed points are the rocks. The fixed points can’t be changed. Pompeii is fixed.”

“How do you know which is which?”

“The TARDIS,” Rose explained flatly. “She can see it. The Doctor was able to sense them too, it
was how he saw the world. Every single second of every single day. But he’s gone now, and I’m all that’s left.”

“How many people died?” Donna demanded, and Rose scowled.

“Twenty-thousand people.”

“And you think that’s alright?”

Rose stopped, whirling to look at Donna. “No, I don’t. I think it’s bloody awful. But you know what? I’ve broken fixed points before. I saved one person and it nearly destroyed the entire universe. Over one person. One life saved. What do you think would happen if I saved twenty-thousand?”

Something nearby roared before Donna could respond. Rose turned away.

“They know we’re here. Come on.”

They walked along a few more feet, pausing at the entrance of a large cavern, where Pyroviles were milling about.

“It’s the heart of Vesuvius,” Rose murmured. “We’re right inside the mountain.”

“There’s tons of them,” Donna murmured. These had all been humans at one time. It was awful to think about.

Rose’s gaze zeroed in on something nearby. “What’s that thing?” She dug a small monocular out of her pocket, holding it up to her eye.

“Hurry up and think of something,” Donna urged as something rumbled around them.

“Donna I don’t work well under pressure.”

“Are you bloody joking?”


“But why do they need a volcano? Maybe it erupts, and they launch themselves back into space or something?”

“I think it’s worse than that.”

“How could it be worse?” The rumbling echoed again. “Rose, it’s getting close.”

“Heathens defile us!” Their heads snapped around to see Lucius standing on a nearby ridge. Oh Rose didn’t like him. “They would desecrate your temple, my lord gods.”

Bloody wonderful. “Come on.” Rose grabbed Donna’s hand, pulling her into the cavern.

“We can’t go in!”

“Well we can’t go back out.”

“Crush them,” Lucius ordered. “Burn them.”

A Pyrovile reared up in front of them, and Rose drew the water gun, spraying it before running past
“There is nowhere to run homeless wanderer and daughter of London!” Lucius called as Rose and Donna approached the escape pod. Rose stopped to look up at Lucius.

“Now then, Lucius. My lords Pyrovillian, don’t get yourselves in a lather. In a lava? No? No. But if I might beg the wisdom of the gods before we perish. Once this new race of creatures is complete, then what?”

“My masters will follow the example of Rome itself. An almighty empire, bestriding the whole of civilization.”

“But if you’ve crashed,” Donna said slowly, “and you’ve got all this technology, why don’t you just go home?”

“The Heaven of Pyrovillia is gone.”


“It was taken. Pyrovillia is lost. But there is heat enough in this world for a new species to rise.”

“Yeah I don’t know if you’ve noticed, but it’s seventy percent water out there,” Rose said flippantly. Lucius waved her off.

“Water can boil. And everything will burn, Rose Tyler.”

“Then the whole planet is at stake. Thank you. That’s all I need to know.” Rose turned to look at her companion. “Donna.”

They climbed into the escape pod. Rose shut the door, sonicking it so it wouldn’t be able to open. “Could we be any more trapped?” Donna asked, looking at Rose. She took a deep breath, looking around.

Now what?

All at once the temperature in the pod went up. They were attacking. “Little bit hot.”

The TARDIS was humming at full strength in the back of Rose’s mind. She looked around, taking everything in. “See? The energy converter takes the lava, uses the power to create a fusion matrix, which welds Pyrovile to human. Now it’s complete, they can convert millions.”

“But can’t you change the controls?” Donna asked.

“Of course I can, but don’t you see? That’s why the soothsayers can’t see the volcano. There is no volcano. Vesuvius is never going to erupt. The Pyrovile are stealing all its power. They’re going to use it to take over the world.”

“But you can change it back?”

She still didn’t get it.

“I can invert the system, yes.” Rose dragged a hand across her sweat-slicked forehead. “Set off the volcano, and blow them up yes. But that’s the choice, Donna. It’s Pompeii or the world.”

Donna paled as realization finally set in. “Oh, my god.”
“If Pompeii is destroyed then it’s not just history. It’s me.” Something heavy settled in Rose’s chest. “I make it happen.”

“Rose, the Pyrovile are made of rocks,” Donna pointed out uncertainly. “Maybe they can’t be blown up.”

“Vesuvius explodes with the force of twenty four nuclear bombs,” Rose looked at the lever before them. “Nothing can survive it. Certainly not us.”

“Never mind us,” Donna said fiercely, and Rose almost smiled.

“Push this lever, and it’s over. Twenty-thousand people.”

She rested her hand on the lever, shaking. This was her. This was all her.

She was about to kill twenty-thousand people.

She jumped as Donna rested her hand over hers, and they exchanged looks before pushing down on the lever together.

And everything went to hell.

They were propelled into the air as the mountain exploded, tumbling around and around. Somehow Donna still gathered the energy to scream — the sound rang in Rose’s head.

And then it was over. They landed with a crash, and Rose knew her entire right side was going to be bruised to hell later. She groaned as she picked herself up, opening the doors and helping Donna climb out.

“It was an escape pod.”

She looked over her shoulder to see an avalanche of ash rolling down the mountain toward them.

“Blimey. Run!”

They took off, running full pelt back to town, dodging through the streets. “Don’t!” Donna called, trying to get everyone’s attention. “Don’t go to the beach! Don’t go to the beach, go to the hills. Listen to me. Don’t go to the beach, it’s not safe. Listen to me!”

She saw a little boy crying on the street and hurried to him. “Come here.”

But a woman intercepted. “Give him to me.” She picked him up and ran off in the wrong direction. Rose looked back at Donna, grabbing her hand.

“Come on.”

Caecilius and his family were cowering in a corner when Rose and Donna ran in. “Save us!” She heard Caecilius call. “Gods save us!”

Rose ignored him, going into the TARDIS. “No!” Donna shouted, stopping to look at the terrified family. “Rose, you can’t. Rose!”

She ran into the TARDIS as Rose started the engines. “You can’t just leave them!”

“I’ve done enough, haven’t I?” Rose snapped, flipping switches as she shook the ashes out of her hair. “History’s back in place and everyone dies.”
“Just take us back, Rose,” Donna begged. “I am telling you, take this thing back. It’s not fair.”

“No, it’s not,” Rose agreed as she hit a button. “But sometimes you can’t save everyone.”

The joyful call of everybody lives! seemed to echo through the years. Rose closed her eyes as tears burned to life. Her head snapped around as Donna rested a hand over hers.

“But you can always save somebody.”

Rose swallowed hard before flipping a lever and sending them back.

* * * * *

Caecilius and his family stumbled out of the TARDIS and onto the cliff side, watching as Pompeii filled with volcanic ash.

“It’s never forgotten, Caecilius,” Rose said quietly as she stepped out behind them, resting a hand on Caecilius shoulder. “Oh, time will pass, men’ll move on, and stories will fade. But one day, Pompeii will be found again. In thousands of years. And everyone will remember you.”

“What about you, Evelina?” Donna asked the girl gently. “Can you see anything?”

She shook her head. “The visions have gone.”

“The explosion was so powerful it cracked open a rift in time, just for a second,” Rose explained. “That’s what gave you the gift of prophecy. It echoed back into the Pyrovillian alternative. But not any more. You’re free.”

“But tell me.” Metella turned to look at Rose. “Who are you, Rose? With your words, and your temple containing such size within?”

“Oh, I was never here,” Rose said quickly. “Don’t tell anyone.”

She pulled Donna back into the TARDIS as Caecilius said, “The great god Vulcan must be enraged. It’s so volcanic. It’s like some sort of volcano. All those people…”

The doors shut behind them, and Rose went up to the console. “Can I ask you a question?” Donna asked, watching the blonde.

“Sure.”

“You said you broke a fixed point…”

Rose sent them back into the vortex, sighing as she ran a hand through her hair, displacing more ash. “My father. The Doctor took me back to see my father. He died in an accident when I was baby. I just wanted to see him but… I saved his life. I couldn’t stop myself. And it nearly ripped the entire universe apart. He sacrificed his life to set it all right.”

Donna swallowed hard, crossing the console room to rest a hand on Rose’s shoulder. “Thank you for saving them.”

Rose gave Donna a small, weak smile. “You were right. Sometimes I need someone.” Donna smiled back. “Welcome aboard.”

“Yeah.”
Chapter End Notes

Please review....?
Planet of the Ood Part One

Chapter Summary

Donna's first visit to an alien planet - of course it doesn't go well. (1/2)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Blimey, you still don’t know how to fly this thing,” Donna complained as the ship bucked about. Rose laughed.

“I put us on random! Mystery tour.” They landed with a thump. “Outside that door could be any planet, anywhere, any-when, in the whole wide uni—” She paused when she saw the look on Donna’s face. “Are you alright?”

“Terrified,” the woman admitted. “I mean, history’s one thing, but an alien planet?”

“At least this time when you see aliens they won’t be tryin’ invade Earth,” Rose teased, and Donna smiled. “I know what it’s like. Everything you’re feeling right now. The fear, the joy, the wonder? I get that.”

“Seriously?” Donna asked in disbelief. “After all this time?”

“Oh yes.” Rose grinned. “Why do you think I keep going?”

“Oh…alright then.” Donna took a deep breath. “You and me both. This is barmy. I was born in Chiswick. I’ve only ever had package holidays. Now I’m here. This is so…I mean it’s…I don’t know, it’s all sort of…I don’t even know what the word is.”

Rose had to admit, she was enjoying watching Donna try to figure it all out. “Come on then. Brave new world.”

Donna stepped outside — and was greeted with a blast of cold air. “Oh! I’ve got the word. Freezing.”

“Snow!” Rose said happily as she bounced out, pulling her jacket on. “Oh, real snow. Proper snow at last.” She kicked it a bit, giggling. “That’s more like it. Lovely.” She whirled back to look at Donna. “What do you think?”

“Bit cold,” Donna commented, and Rose rolled her eyes.

“But look at that view!”

It was beautiful — snow covered mountains and rock bridges with icicles hanging off of them. Donna rubbed her arms, shivering.

“Yup. Beautiful and cold.”

“Millions of planets, millions of galaxies, and we’re on this one. Molto bene. Bellissimo, says
Donna, born in Chiswick. All you’ve got is a life of work and sleep, and telly and rent and tax and takeaway dinners, all birthdays and Christmases and two weeks holiday a year, and then you end up here. Donna Noble, citizen of the Earth, standing on a different planet. How about that Donna?”

Rose looked back — Donna was gone. “What? Donna?”

A moment later Donna came out, wrapped in a big fur coat with the hood pulled over her head. “Sorry, you were saying?”

“Better?” Rose asked with a smirk.

“Lovely, thanks.” Donna beamed.

“Comfy?”

“Yep.”

“Can you hear anything inside that?”

Donna made a show of putting her hand to her ear. “Pardon?”

Rose laughed. “Anyways, what was I saying?”

She was saved from having to figure it out by a rocket flying over head. “Rocket,” Donna gasped. “Blimey, a real proper rocket. Now that’s what I call a spaceship.” She looked back at Rose. “You’ve got a box, he’s got a Ferrari.”

“Oi!” Rose grumbled. Donna ignored it.

“Come on, let’s go see where he’s going.”

Rose was annoyed as she followed. “I bet that silly old ship isn’t bigger on the inside.”

They walked along the snowy path, Rose’s hands shoved into her jacket pockets as she bowed her head. Something tickled at the back of her mind and she made a face, looking up.

“What’s that?

I am not sure, the TARDIS admitted.

Are you joking? This isn’t a good time for you to be humble, if you know what’s happening I’d like to know as well.

I will try to figure it out.

What’s the point of you being an all-knowing ship if you need time to figure something out?

She paused as she realized what she was hearing — music. A soft, delicate music. “Hold on, can you hear that?” Donna didn’t say anything. Rose jogged to catch up with her. “Donna, take your hood down.”

She complied, looking confused. “What?”

“Do you hear that noise?” Donna listened hard, shaking her head. “Are you sure? It sounds like song.”
The redhead looked concerned. “Rose are you alright?”

Rose blew out a frustrated breath. “It’s coming from over there.” She pushed on, Donna following behind. The song grew louder as Rose zeroed in on a half-buried body in the snow. She hurried closer…

And froze.

“What is it?” Donna asked, her voice hoping up a pitch.

“An Ood.” Rose’s voice sounded weird in her own ears. “He’s called an Ood.”

She knelt down with him, trying to brush the snow away. “But it’s face—”

“It’s a he,” Rose snapped. “Not an it. Now give me a hand here.”

Donna knelt down quickly to help unearth the Ood. “I’m sorry,” she said quietly. She could tell she had upset Rose.

“Talk to him,” Rose said, her hands flitting about. She had no idea what to do. “Get him to talk.”

Donna swallowed hard, leaning in. “It’s alright,” she said gently, uncertainly. “We’ve got you. Er, what’s your name?”

The translator ball lit up as the Ood spoke. “Designated Ood Delta Fifty.”

Donna picked up the ball uncertainly, speaking into it. “My name’s Donna.”

“You don’t have to do that.” Rose tried not to snap again. Donna was trying.

“Sorry,” Donna fumbled a bit as she set the ball down. “Oh god. This is Rose. She…seems to know you. She can help.”

Rose was examining the Ood, her hands shaking. The song was reverberating in her mind, her head spinning. Everything hurt.

“You’ve been shot,” Rose said, finding a bullet hole in the Ood’s chest. “What happened?”

“The circle,” the Ood said. Rose blinked.

“No, don’t try to talk,” Donna coaxed.

“The circle must be broken.”

“What does that mean?” Rose prompted, her head throbbing. He was dying. She wasn’t sure how she knew, but she did. He was dying, and Rose needed to get as much information out of him as possible before he did. “Delta Fifty, what circle? Delta Fifty? What circle?”

The next few moments happened in quick succession. The Ood roared as he shot up, eyes glowing red, and white-hot pain flared to life in Rose’s head. For a moment she was sure her mind was being ripped apart.

And then it was over. Delta Fifty collapsed back against the snowy ground and Rose slumped forward as everything faded all at once from her mind. “Whoa!” Donna grabbed her to keep her from face planting in the Ood’s chest. “What’s wrong? Are you okay?”
Rose rubbed her temples, straightening up and blinking rapidly. “He’s dead.” Donna rubbed her back as she took a couple of deep breaths. “Come on.” She pushed herself up unsteadily.

“What about him?” Donna looked back sadly at the Ood. “Do we bury him?”

“The snow will take care of that. Come on.”

They started walking again, Rose still rubbing her temples absently. “Who was he?” Donna asked as they walked. “What’s an Ood?”

“They’re servants of humans in the forty second century,” Rose said quietly, shoving her hands back into her pockets. “Mildly telepathic. That was the song. It was his mind calling out.”

“I couldn’t hear anything.” Donna sounded almost sad. “He sang as he was dying.”

“His eyes turned red,” Rose murmured. Donna tilted her head at the blonde.

“What’s that mean?”

“Trouble. Budge up, come on.” Rose sped up. “The Ood are harmless. They’re completely benign. Except, the last time I met them, there was this force, like a stronger mind, powerful enough to take them over.”

“What sort of force?” Donna asked curiously. Rose shook her head.

“I’m not completely sure. It called itself the devil, but it was just…just a monster. A very powerful monster.” Not powerful enough though. The Doctor had defeated it in the end. She took a deep breath, tugging at her hair. “Must be something different this time, though. Something closer to home…”

They came out to the edge of the mountain to see buildings sprawling out before them.

“Civilization. “Let’s go then.”

They trekked through the snow, Donna shivering and eying Rose. “Are you seriously not freezing right?”

Rose shook her head. “Not really, no.”

“What, do you have a built-in heater?”

It was a bit odd — Rose had always hated the cold. The slightest dip in temperature would send her shivering. But now she could barely feel it.

It was strange.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” a woman was saying as Rose and Donna approached, “welcome to the Ood Sphere. And isn’t it bracing? Here are your information packs, with vouchers, 3D tickets and a map of the complex. My name’s Solana, Head of Marketing. I’m sure we’ve all spoken on the vidfone. Now, if you’d like to follow me.”

“Sorry, sorry, sorry,” Rose said quickly as she hurried forward, dragging Donna with us. “Late. Don’t mind us. Hello. The guards let us through.”

The woman — Solana — raised an eyebrow as she looked down at her list. “And you would be?”
“Rose Tyler, Donna Noble,” Rose pointed at herself and then Donna as she said their names.

“Representing the Noble Corporation PLC Limited, Intergalactic.”

“Our father’s company,” Rose interjected. Solana looked between them, frowning.

“You’re sisters.”

“Yes.”

“She married,” Donna said quickly. “Daddy was so upset she didn’t keep her maiden name.”

“But Mother was so happy I actually found a man.”

“Of course.” It was clear Solana was done with them as she turned away. “And here are your information packs, vouchers inside. Now if you’d like to come with me, the Executive Suites are nice and warm.”

Rose looked around as an alarm went off somewhere nearby. “Oooooh. What’s that now? Sounds like an alarm.”

“Oh it’s just a siren for the end of the work shift,” Solana said, waving Rose off. Rose could tell she was lying. “Now then, this way, quick as you can.”

They shuffled around, Rose looking around, taking everything in. The TARDIS was humming uncertainly in the back of her head. She didn’t like what was going on here. What’s wrong? Rose asked. She just got another hum in return.

“You get this look,” Donna murmured as they walked along. “I can tell when you’re talking to that mad ship, your eyes get all distant. What’s it saying?”

“She’s not saying anythin’.” Rose sighed. “I don’t think she knows what’s goin’ on either but somethin’ is definitely off here.”

“What, you found trouble?” Donna asked in mock shock. “No!”

Rose stuck her tongue out at Donna as Solana led them inside. It was, from what Rose could tell, a mix between a display room and a conference room. There were three Ood standing on display while others waited with trays to begin serving. As soon as every one was inside they began walking around, offering trays to people.

“So they’re slaves?” Donna murmured. Rose nodded silently.

“Yeah. They serve the human race.”

“Why?”

“As you can see,” Solana said before Rose could answer, “the Ood are happy to serve, and we keep them in facilities of the highest standard. Here at the Double O, that’s Ood Operations, we like to think of the Ood as our trusted friends.”

“Friends,” Rose scoffed under her breath. She hadn’t agreed with any of this on Krop Tor and she didn’t now. “I’ll be sure to enslave my next friend.”

“You ain’t enslaving me sweetheart,” Donna muttered back.
“We keep the Ood healthy, safe, and educated,” Solana continued. “We don’t just breed Ood. We make them better. Because at heart, what is an Ood, but a reflection of us? If your Ood is happy, then you’ll be happy, too.”

“Are you bloody jokin’?” Rose mumbled, a bit louder, and a few people looked around. She bit her tongue quickly.

“I’d now like to point out a new innovation from Ood Operations.” As Solana spoke she approached one of the Oods on display. We’ve introduced a variety package with the Ood translator ball. You can now have the standard setting. How are you today, Ood?”

“I’m perfectly well, thank you,” the Ood replied in a neutral voice. Rose gritted her teeth a bit.

“Or perhaps, on a stressful day, a little something for the gentlemen.” Solana tapped the translator ball. “And how are you, Ood?”

“All the better for seeing you,” the Ood replied in a husky female voice. Ood fetish. Now that was weird.

“And the comedy classic option.” She tapped the ball once more. “Ood, you dropped something.”

“D’oh!”

“All that for only five additional credits.” Well she was a good sales woman, Rose would give her that. “The details are in your brochures. Now, there’s plenty more food and drink, so don’t hold back.”

Rose watched Solana go before walking to her lectern, tapping it to pull up the computer access. She wanted a little information.

“What’re you doing?” Donna asked, leaning over to watch.

“Ah, got it. The Ood Sphere. This must be where they’re from.”

Are you talking to me yet?

I am trying to help you figure out what’s going on.

“Oooooh, it’s the year forty-one-twenty-six,” Rose murmured as she continued searching. “That’s the second Great and Bountiful Human Empire. Welcome to the future, Donna Noble.”


Rose smiled at her, amused. “It’s good, isn’t it?”

“It’s weird. I mean, it’s brilliant, but. Back home, the papers and the telly, they keep saying we haven’t got long to live. Global warming, flooding, all the bees disappearing.”

Rose made a face at that. “Yeah, that’s weird…” She should really look into that. But she hadn’t had a chance yet.

“But look at us,” Donna continued, casting a gaze around the room. “We’re everywhere. Is that good or bad, though? I mean, are we like explorers? Or more like a virus?”

“It’s hard to tell sometimes,” Rose said with a sigh. She had seen the effects of humans throughout time and space. It was a valid point.
“What are the red dots?” Donna had already moved on though, pointing to the red dots on the computer screens.

“Ood distribution centers.”

“Across three galaxies?” Donna asked in disbelief. “Don’t the Ood get a say in this?”

She walked to a nearby Ood. “Er, sorry, but…” She touched his arm gently to get his attention, and he turned to look at her. “Hello. Tell me, are you all like this?”

“I do not understand, Miss,” the Ood said politely. Donna was instantly sidetracked.

“Why do you say Miss? Do I look single?”

“Back to the point, Donna,” Rose said gently, resting a hand on Donna’s shoulder. The woman shook her head.

“Yeah. What I mean is, are there any free Ood? Are there Ood running wild somewhere, like wildebeest?”

“All Ood are born to serve,” the Ood said. “Otherwise, we would die.”

“But you can’t have started like that,” Donna insisted. “Before humans, what were you like?”

The Ood was silent for a moment. “The circle,” he said finally, and Rose narrowed her eyes. There it was again.

“What do you mean?” She asked. “What circle?”

“The circle,” he said again. “The circle is–”

“Ladies and gentlemen,” Solana said suddenly. “All Ood to hospitality stations, please.”

As the Ood regathered, Rose turned to Donna. “I’ve had enough of the schmoozing. Do you fancy going off the beaten track?”

She held up a map, and Donna smiled a bit. “Now,” Solana was saying, “if I can introduce you–”

“Rough guide to the Ood Sphere?” Donna said quietly. “Works for me.”

“Yeah.” Rose eyed Solana before nodding to a nearby door. “Let’s go.”

They slid out quietly.

It was mostly quiet, other than the snow fluttering around them. Donna shivered, rubbing her hands up and down her arms. “Next time we go somewhere warm,” she said.

“How about another volcano?” Rose suggested with a small smirk, and Donna gave Rose a Look.

“Funny.”

They found a gate, and Rose sonicked it to get them in. “Ood shift eight no commencing,” a computer voice announced overhead. “Repeat. Ood shift eight now commencing.”

They looked back to see a group of Ood marching double file from an upper catwalk. As they watched, one at the back fell down. “Get up,” the man leading them growled. “I said get up!”
He cracked a whip, and Rose’s stomach dropped. “Servants?” Donna balked. “They’re slaves.”

“Get up!” The man ordered again, and the Ood stumbled up. “March.”

“I tried to find out more about the Ood last time,” Rose murmured sadly. “But there was just so much going on… I couldn’t save them.” Not to mention they were trying to kill her. “We let the Ood die. I reckon I owe them one now.”

“That looks like the boss,” Donna pointed out, nodding at the man with the whip.

“Yeah, let’s keep out of his way,” Rose said. “Come on.”

“Tell me about it,” Donna said as they walked along.

“About what?” Rose asked, looking around and not really paying attention to what Donna was saying.

“The last time you met the Ood. You keep talking about it. It sounds bad. What happens?”

Rose sighed, taking a deep breath. “It was a space base,” she finally said. “The Doctor and I got stuck there, and they used Oods as slaves too. But there was a… a thing there. A beast. It was using telepathy to corrupt the Ood and make them dangerous. They tried to kill me.”

“So what happened?”

“The Doctor destroyed the base and managed to save the humans who hadn’t been killed but the base fell into a blackhole with all the Oods.”

Donna sucked in a sharp breath. “He couldn’t save them?”

“Can’t always save everyone,” Rose reminded Donna quietly. That was a lesson that came back to bite her so often.

She was so tired of it.

They walked on in silence for a bit before Donna found a door. She stopped, unseen by Rose, who was lost in her own world. Donna rolled her eyes, sticking two fingers in her mouth and whistling.

Rose stopped, looking back with wide eyes. “Where’d you learn to whistle?”

“West Ham, every Saturday.”

Of course. Rose walked back to the door, unlocking it with the sonic screwdriver and letting them in.

It was, Rose figured out quickly, looking around, a cargo area. There were shipping containers piled up, one on top of the other.

“Ood export,” Rose murmured as they walked in. “You see? Lifts up the containers, takes them to the rocket sheds, ready to be flown out all over the three galaxies.”

“What?” Donna asked in disbelief. “You mean, these containers are full…?”

“What do you think?” Rose said quietly, stepping forward and opening one. There were Ood just standing there.

“Oh, it stinks,” Donna complained. “How many of them do you think are in each one?”
“A hundred?” Rose murmured, speculating. “More?”

“A great big empire built on slavery.” Donna sounded disgusted.

“Not so different from our world,” Rose pointed out quietly. Donna shot her an offended look.

“Oi, I don’t know about you but I haven’t got slaves.”

“Who do you think made your clothes?”

“Is that what the Doctor did, then?” Donna demanded. “Traveled with humans to take cheap shots? Is that the legacy he’s passed on to you?”

“It’s not like that,” Rose insisted. Donna shook her head.

“Forget it. Don’t.” She refocused on the Ood, nodding at them. “I don’t understand, the door is open. Why don’t you just run away?”

“For what reason?” The Ood at the front asked.

“You could be free.”

“I do not understand the concept.”

Donna looked back at Rose. “What is it with that Persil ball? I mean, they’re not born with it, are they? Why do they have to be all plugged in?”

That was a good point, actually. What was the point of those things? Rose had bigger concerns, however. “Ood, tell me,” she said gently. “Does the circle mean anything to you?”

She jumped when all the Ood spoke at once. “The circle must be broken.”

“Oh that is creepy,” Donna breathed, wide-eyed.

“But what is it? What is the circle?” Rose tried to prompt again.

“The circle must be broken.” She probably should have known better than to expect an answer.

“Why?”

“So we can sing.”

“What, are they into opera?” Donna asked, looking at Rose in confusion. An alarm went off before Rose could try and figure out an answer.

“Oh, that’s us.” She grabbed Donna’s hand, pulling her away. “Come on.”

They took off down the rows of shipping containers, running full pelt. Donna stopped, catching sight of a door. “Rose, there’s a door—!”

But Rose was already too far ahead, too lost in the steady rhythm of running that she was so used to. It was another minute before she realized Donna was no longer at her side. “Donna?” She called, skidding to a halt and looking around. “Where are you?”

“Don’t move!” The guards yelled as they burst through the door, and Donna whirled around, surprised. “Stay where you are.”
The man who had been whipping the Ood earlier came in behind the guards. “Keep her in there for now,” he ordered, waving a hand at a container of Ood.

“Get off me,” Donna snapped as a guard grabbed her arm, shoving her forward. “Get off me!”

But it was too late — she was locked in the container.

Chapter End Notes

Please review...?
“Donna?” Rose called, hurrying back through the rows of containers. “Donna, where are you?”

Jesus Christ was this how the Doctor had felt when she’d wandered away? She wondered if she could go back and apologize.

“All guards withdraw,” she heard an authoritative voice call. Oh that probably wasn’t a good sign.

“Sir?” One of the guards questioned.

“I said withdraw. Keep to the perimeter. I’ve got this one. I’ve always wanted to do this.”

What’s this exactly? Rose asked the TARDIS wearily. She didn’t have to wait long for the answer, however — there was a whirring sound as a machine hummed a life, and her head jerked up to see a giant claw hovering over her.

“Oh hell.”

She took off again, feet pounding against the concrete floor.

Donna’s heart was pounding as she turned to face the Ood in the container. “Can you help me?” She asked uncertainly. Her heart dropped when their eyes turned red.

Oh wonderful.

“Oh no, you don’t,” she snapped with more bravado than she felt as she pressed back against the door. “What have I done? I’m not one of that lot. I’m on your side. Stay where you are,” They didn’t listen. Of course they didn’t listen. “That’s an order.” Still no reaction. “I said, stay. Rose? Rose!”

I want a spa planet next! Rose snarled at the TARDIS as she ran. The TARDIS was spared from having to answer, however, when the claw came down and knocked her over.

She hit the ground with a grunt, the air momentarily knocked out of her. She forced herself roll over, blinking as the claw came down at her.

Nonononono…

And then it stopped. She blew out a long breath, sighing. Not that she had much of a reprieve.
Guards arrived, dragging her up and forcing her along. “Oi, that’s no way to treat a lady,” she grumbled, hands up in surrender. As they walked back to meet the leader, who was standing with Solana, Rose heard banging coming from within a container.

“Rose get me out of here!” She heard Donna shouting. Rose raised an eyebrow.

“I’d do what she says. She gets pretty testy when people lock her up in places she doesn’t want to be.”

“Unlock the container,” the man told the guards, and one of them stepped forward to open it. Donna rushed out, throwing her arms around Rose and hugging her tight.

“There you go,” Rose said, hugging her back. “Safe and sound.”

“Never mind about me.” Donna broke away, whirling around. “What about them?”

Rose watched in horror as the Ood closest to the container door killed the guard who had let Donna out. “Red alert!” The leader hollered. “Fire!” More Ood came out. “Shoot to kill!”

The guards began shooting, and Rose grabbed Donna, dragging her away with Solana following.

“If people back on Earth knew what was going on here—” Donna started to say as they got outside. Solana snorted.

“Oh, don’t be stupid. Of course they know.”

They know how you treat the Ood?” Donna demanded in disbelief. She couldn’t imagine anyone condoning this.

“They don’t ask. Same thing.”

“Solana, Ood aren’t born like this,” Rose said as she stopped, turning to look at Solana. “They can’t be. A species born to serve could never evolve in the first place. What does the company do to make them obey?”

“That’s nothing to do with me,” Solana said, a bit flippantly. Rose raised an eyebrow.

“Oh what, because you don’t ask?”

Solana shot her a withering look in return. “That’s Doctor Ryder’s territory,” she informed Rose icily.

“Fine, then where is he? What part of the complex?” Solana hesitated, clearly uncertain. “I could help with the red eye. Now show me.”

Finally the woman gave in. “There. Beyond the red section.”

Rose started to walk away, then stopped and looked back. “Come with me,” she told Solana seriously. “You’ve seen the warehouse. You can’t agree with all this. You know this place better than me. You could help.”

There was a beat of silence. “They’re over here!” Solana shouted suddenly. “Guards! They’re over here.”

So much for that. Rose grabbed Donna’s hand, dragging her off. “Well that was useful,” Donna huffed as they ran.
“I had to try,” Rose muttered. “I had to give her a chance.” It was what the Doctor would’ve done. “Never mind it, just come on. We need to figure this out.”

“Do you even know where you’re going?”

Not particularly. Rose slowed to a walk, closing her eyes as she moved forward. It was few more feet before the faint sound of music began echoing in her mind. Ah…

“This way,” she murmured, moving forward. Donna frowned as she followed.

“Is this some sort of weird mind GPS thing?”

“Yeah,” Rose said distantly. “Something like that.”

As she walked along, the song slowly got louder. God it hurt. The despair, the pain, it rang in every single note. Rose squeezed her eyes shut, trying to breathe through it.

*It is the song of captivity*, the TARDIS explained quietly, trying not to overwhelm Rose too much. She had a lot going on in her head at the moment.

Rose was shaking by the time they arrived at the door. “Didn’t need a map,” she muttered as she opened the door. “Oh god that hurts.”

“What is it?” Donna demanded. She didn’t like being left out. Rose shook her head, sonicking the door behind them as they stepped in. “Hang on, does that mean we’re locked in?”


“I don’t hear anything,” Donna complained, a bit frustrated. She hated when Rose did this, it frustrated her to absolutely no end and Rose knew it.

“They’re singin’,” Rose murmured as she moved toward a cage of Ood. They were all turned away, huddled together.

“They look different to the others,” Donna pointed out, and Rose smiled a bit through the pain. She really was observant.

“That’s because they’re natural born Ood, unprocessed, before they’re adapted to slavery. Unspoiled.” She took a deep breath as pain echoed in her head. She hated having anything in her head. Being telepathic was horribly inconvenient sometimes. “That’s their song.”

“I can’t hear it.” Donna sounded almost wistful.

“That’s for the best.” For the first time Donna noticed the tears shining in Rose’s eyes.

“You can though.” Rose nodded, her expression pinched. “It’s hurting you.”

“I’m not naturally telepathic. My mind isn’t really built for this, it’s just been restructured to handle it. Which doesn’t make it any less painful when something like this invades.”

The very sound of the song hurt as well — it was just so sad. So painfully sad. It took Rose’s breath away.

She needed to focus though. She shook her head through the pain, breathing deep.

“We need to get to work. Come on.”
Rose sonicked the cage just as a loud bang echoed through the room. “They’re breaking in,” Donna reported.

“Let them,” Rose muttered, stepping forward. The Ood were cowering back in the corner, clearly terrified as they covered what they were holding in their hands. “What are you holding?” Rose asked gently, kneeling down in front of one. “Show me.” No response. Rose put on the most comforting smile she could. “Friend. I’m a friend. Rose.” She pointed to herself. “Donna.” She pointed to Donna. “Friend. Let me see. Look at me. Let me see.” The Ood hesitated before carefully moving his hand. “That’s it,” Rose said proudly. “That’s it, go on. Go on.”

Finally he opened his hand completely. Rose’s stomach dropped when she saw the small brain.

“Is that…?” Donna sounded sick.

“It’s a brain,” Rose sighed as the TARDIS fed her the information. “A hind brain. The Ood are born with a secondary brain. Like the amygdala in humans, it processes memory and emotions. You get rid of that, you wouldn’t be Donna anymore. You’d be like an Ood. A processed Ood.”

Donna looked horrified. “So the company cuts off their brains?”

“And they stitch on a translator,” Rose finished flatly.

“Like a lobotomy.” The disgust in Donna’s voice was clear. “I spent all that time look for you, Rose, because I thought it was so wonderful out here. I want to go home.”

Rose’s stomach dropped, but the door was broken in before she could answer. They whirled around to see the guards running in. “They’re with the Ood, sir!”

Rose grabbed Donna, dragging her into the cage and slamming it shut.

“What are you gonna do, then?” She taunted. “Arrest me? Lock me up? Throw me in a cage? Well you’re too late. Ha!”

That didn’t actually do much good, of course. The guards fished them out easily, handcuffing them and dragging them off. “Fine, take me to you’re leader then,” Rose grumbled as if she had any control whatsoever over the situation.

They were brought up to what looked like the main office, and Rose heard someone say something about Mr. Halpen being on his way. The head man, then. Brilliant.

The man himself walked through the door at that moment with an Ood behind him, looking them up and down. “Shoulda known. A couple of pretty faced FOTO activists.”

Donna bristled and Rose scowled. “If that’s what Friends Of The Ood are trying to prove, then yes.”

“The Ood are nothing without us,” Mr. Halpen snapped. “Just animals roaming around on the ice.”

“That’s because you can’t hear them,” Rose snapped. Even know she could hear the distant echo of the song in her mind. It hurt so much.

“They welcomed it,” the man informed her spitefully. “It’s not as if they put up a fight.”

“You idiot,” Donna sneered. “They’re born with their brains in their hands. Don’t you see, that makes them peaceful. They’ve got to be, because a creature like that would have to trust anyone it meets.”
“Oh, nice one,” Rose murmured, quite proud of her companion.

“Thank you.”

Mr. Halpen, however, was less than moved. “The system’s worked for two-hundred years. All we’ve got is a rogue batch. But the infection is about to be sterilized.” He spoke into a walkie-talkie. “Mr. Kess. How do we stand?”

“Canisters primed, sir,” a voice reported back. “As soon as the core heats up, the gas is released. Give it two hundred marks in counting.”

Rose gaped, horrified. “You’re going to gas them?”

“Kill the livestock,” Mr. Halpen said. “The classic foot and mouth solution from the olden days. Still works.”

“You can’t!” Rose cried. “They’re not bloody cattle, they have thoughts and feelings and they feel bloody pain and you’re killing them slowly with this captivity as it is! You can’t do this!”

“Oh whine, whine, whine,” Mr. Halpen sighed. “You activists get to be a pain after a while, you know that right?”

Before Rose could snap back at him, an alarm went off, echoing around the office. “What the hell?” Mr. Halpen said, looking around.

“Emergency status,” a computerized voice announced. “Emergency status. All exits sealed. All Ood declared hostile. Ood distribution center now—”

The computer was cut off as something exploded. “Looks like your little operation is falling apart,” Rose taunted. Halpen scowled out her before hurrying out, his Ood following.

“Change of plan,” he snapped at who Rose had assumed was Dr. Ryder.

“There are no reports of trouble off-world, sir,” the man reported. “It’s still contained to the Ood Sphere.”

“Then we’ve got a public duty to stop it before it spreads,” Halpen declared, and Rose swallowed down a bitter taste.

“What’s goin’ on?”

“Everything you wanted, sweetheart,” Halpen sneered back. “No doubt there will be a full police investigation once this place has been sterilized so I can’t risk a bullet to the head. I’ll leave you to the mercies of the Ood.”

“But Mr. Halpen, there’s something else, isn’t there?” Rose needled. “Something we haven’t seen.”

“What do you mean?” Donna asked, a bit bewildered. Rose seemed to have figured something out. But what?

“A creature couldn’t survive with a separate fore brain and hind brain, they’d be at war with themselves. There’s got to be somethin’ else, a third element. Am I right?”

Halpen raised an eyebrow. “And again, so clever.”

“It’s got to be connected to the red eye. What is it?”
“It won’t exist for very much longer,” Halpen assured them. “Enjoy your Ood.”

And he left. “So now what?” Donna asked as Rose started struggling with the handcuffs.

“We get out of here.” Rose twisted her wrist, trying desperately to pop it and get out of the damned handcuffs. It wasn’t going well.

“What, you haven’t met Houdini or anything?” Donna asked, and Rose rolled her eyes.

“Yeah he was so full of himself. Tried to kiss me.”

“So he was too busy falling in love with you to teach you how to—”

Donna cut herself off hurriedly as a trio of red-eyed Ood walked into the room. Rose jerked around, wide-eyed.

“Rose, Donna, friends,” she said quickly, trying to stop them. No luck.

“The circle must be broken!” Donna cried desperately. Still nothing.

“Rose, Donna, friends.”

“The circle must be broken.”

“Rose, Donna, friends.”

“The circle must be broken.”

“Rose, Donna, friends.”

“The circle must be broken.”

“Rose, Donna, friends.”

“The circle must be broken.”

“Rose, Donna, friends.”

“The circle must be broken.”

Over and over and over, trying desperately to stop the Ood, but to no avail.

Suddenly the Ood stopped. “Rose. Donna. Friends,” one of them said, and Rose and Donna sagged against the wall in relief.


The Ood helped release the women. Rose rubbed her wrist, smiling at them gratefully. “Thank you. Thank you. We’re going to help you I promise. We’re going to help all of you. Thank you.”

She grabbed Donna’s hand and pulled her out of the room, muttering, “I don’t where it is. I don’t know where they’ve gone.”

“What are we looking for?” Donna asked, confused. Rose barely heard her.

“It might be underground, like some sort of cave, or cavern, or…”
An explosion went off somewhere to their left, knocking them both over. “Ooooh,” Rose groaned as she picked herself up, seeing a figure in the clearing smoke. It was Halpen’s Ood.

“What’s he doing here?” Donna asked as they stood.


The Ood led them through the rubble to a nearby room. Rose sonicked the door open, and they came out onto a catwalk. Rose peeked over the edge, heart dropping when she saw the giant brain below.

“The Ood Brain,” she whispered. “Now it all makes sense, that’s the missing link. The third element, binding them together. ‘Fore brain, hind brain, and this, the telepathic center. It’s a shared mind, connecting all the Ood in song.’

“Cargo,” they heard Halpen saying nearby. “I can always go into cargo. I’ve got the rockets, I’ve got the sheds. Smaller business. Much more manageable, without livestock.”

Ryder looked around and saw Donna, Rose, and the Ood making their way toward them. “He’s mined the area,” he told them all.

“You’re going to kill it?” Donna demanded.

“They found that thing centuries ago beneath the Northern Glacier,” Halpen informed them. Rose scanned the area, zeroing in…

“Those pylons.”

Donna looked around as well. “In a circle,” she breathed. “The circle must be broken.”

“Damping the telepathic field,” Rose murmured, putting it together. “Stopping the Ood from connecting for two-hundred years.”

“And you, Ood Sigma,” Halpen said, zeroing in on his personal Ood, “you brought them here. I expected better.”

“My place is at your side, sir,” Sigma replied politely, and Halpen smirked.

“Still subservient. Good Ood.”

“If the barrier thing’s in place, how come the Ood started breaking out?” Donna asked.

“Maybe it takes centuries to adapt,” Rose suggested. “The subconscious reaching out?”

“But the process was too slow,” Ryder interrupted, and they turned to look at him. “It had to be accelerated. You should never have given me access to the controls, Mr. Halpen. I lowered the barrier to its minimum. Friends Of The Ood, sir. It’s taken me ten years to infiltrate the company, and I succeeded.”

Halpen raised an eyebrow. “Yes. Yes you did.”

And before Rose or Donna could stop him he grabbed Ryder, throwing him over the edge. “You murdered him,” Donna breathed, stunned.

“Very observant, Ginger,” Halpen sneered. “Now, then.” He pulled a gun. “Can’t say I’ve ever shot anyone before. Can’t say I’m going to like it. But er, it’s not exactly a normal day, is it? Still.”
“Would you like a drink, sir?” Sigma asked patiently.

“I think hair loss is the least of my problems right now, thanks,” Halpen snapped. Sigma moved to stand in front of Rose and Donna.

“Please have a drink, sir.”

Halpen was trembling. “If — if you’re going to stand in their way, I’ll shoot you too.”

“Please have a drink, sir?”

Halpen swallowed hard, looking down at his shaking hands. “Have — have you poisoned me?”

“Natural Ood must never kill, sir.”

Rose looked at the cup in the Ood’s hands. “What is that stuff?” She asked.

“Ood graft suspended in a biological compound, ma’am.”

Rose blinked as the TARDIS put that together for her.

“What the hell does that mean?” Halpen demanded. Rose swallowed.

“Oh dear.”

“Tell me!”

She turned to Halpen, face decidedly blank. “Funny thing, the subconscious. Takes all sorts of shapes. Came out in the red eye as revenge, came out in the rabid Ood as anger, and then there was patience. All that intelligence and mercy, focused on Ood Sigma. How’s the hair loss, Mister Halpen?”

As they watched, more hair fell away from Halpen’s head. “What have you done?!” He demanded.

“Oh, they’ve been preparing you for a very long time,” Rose murmured. “And now you’re standing next to the Ood Brain, Mister Halpen, can you hear it? Listen.”

Halpen’s face paled. “What have you…? I’m not…”

His expression went blank. The gun slipped from his hands as he reached up for his head, peeling his skin away, and tentacles sprouted of his mouth.

Donna just stared. “They…they turned him into an Ood?”

“Yep,” Rose said matter-of-factly.

“He’s an Ood.”

“I noticed.”

The Halpen-Ood sneezed, and a small hind brain fell into his hands.

“He has become Oodkind,” Sigma said, stepping forward. “And we will take care of him.”

Donna turned to look at Rose. “It’s weird, being with you. I can’t tell what’s right from what’s wrong anymore.”
“It’s better that way,” Rose said quietly. “People who know for certain tend to be like Mr. Halpen.”

The explosives beeped suddenly. “Oh, right!” Rose said, pointing her sonic screwdriver at them and deactivating them. “That’s better. And now, Sigma, would you allow me the honor?”

Sigma nodded. “It is yours, Rose.”

Rose beamed. “Oh, yes! Stifled for two hundred years, but not any more. The circle is broken. The Ood can sing.”

She flipped the switch, and the current around the brain shut off. After a moment a slow, happy song swelled to life, and Rose relaxed as the tension eased from her.

“I can hear it!” Donna said happily, and Rose beamed.

The day was saved.

* * * * *

“The message has gone out,” Rose said as they walked back to the TARDIS with Sigma at their side. “That song resonated across the galaxies. Everyone heard it. Everyone knows. The rockets are bringing them back. The Ood are coming home.”

“We thank you, Rose Donna, friend of Oodkind,” Sigma said. “And what of you now? Will you stay? There is room in the song for you.”

“Oh, I’ve got a song of my own, thanks,” Rose said with a small smile.

Sigma nodded. “I think your song must end soon.”

Rose paused, raising an eyebrow. “Meaning?”

“Every song must end. But when a new one begins, it is not always alone.”

“Eh…right,” Rose muttered before turning hesitantly to look at Donna. “What about you? You still want to go home?”

“No,” Donna said without hesitation. “Definitely not.”

Rose grinned. “Then we’ll be off.”

Take this song with you,” Sigma said, and the song began playing in their heads. Donna smiled gently.

“We will.”

“Always,” Rose added.

“And know this, Rose Donna. You will never be forgotten. Our children will sing of the Rose Donna, and our children’s children, and the and the ice and the snow will carry your names forever.”

Rose and Donna smiled as they stepped into the TARDIS. “Your world is absolutely mad,” Donna said, watching Rose walk to the console. The blonde nodded.

“It wouldn’t be nearly as much fun if it wasn’t.”
“Easy, easy!” Rose coaxed as Donna piloted clumsily.

“I can’t believe I’m doing this!” The redhead sounded exhilarated. Rose was still nervous.

“No, neither can I.” The TARDIS hummed in her head, trying to calm her down, but her own anxiety wasn’t helping at all. “Oh, careful careful!” She hurried forward, hitting lever. “Left hand down, left hand down! Getting a bit too close to the nineteen-eighties.”

“What am I going to do, put a dent in them?” Donna scoffed.

“Well, someone did.”

Rose’s phone buzzed in her back pocket and she paused. That hadn’t rang in months…

“You have a mobile?” Donna asked curiously as Rose fished it out of her pocket. Martha’s name flashed back at her.

“Yeah…”

She took a deep breath, hitting accept. “Hello?”

There was a brief moment of silence. “Finally answered, huh?” Martha teased. “Gear up, Rose. I’m bringing you back to Earth.”

A small smile pulled at Rose’s lips. “Where do you want me, then?”

Martha gave her the coordinates and they hung up. “Martha, huh?” Donna asked as Rose sent them off. “What does she want?”

“Guess we’ll find out.”

They landed, and Rose took a deep breath before stepping outside. Martha was waiting in the entrance of the alleyway, watching Rose with a small smile.

“Martha Jones.”

“Rose Tyler.”
There was a beat of silence — and they embraced, hugging each other tight. “Oh it’s so good to see you,” Rose murmured.

“Good to see you alive,” Martha said, pulling back to look at Rose. The blonde stuck out her tongue in return.

“How’s your family doin’?”

Martha shrugged. “You know. Not so bad. Recovering. Mum’s been asking about you.”

“Oh yeah? That’s nice. Hope she’s alright. How’re you?”

Martha rolled her eyes, exasperated. Same old Rose, then. She shouldn’t have been so surprised by that. The TARDIS door creaked and Martha peeked around Rose to see Donna stepping out.

“Kidnapped someone else, did you?” She teased.

“Oi, act like you were along against your will,” Rose grumbled. “Martha this is Donna. Donna, Martha.”

“Oh, the bride!” Martha exclaimed, shaking Donna’s hand. “Right? You’re the one who popped onto the TARDIS in her wedding dress?”

“She told you about that?” Donna shot Rose a look and smirked a bit.

“Well it was a good story.”

Donna stuck her tongue out at Rose before turning back to Martha. “Well she talks about you all the time. You must have the patience of a saint, she’s absolutely unbearable sometimes.”

“Oh, she wasn’t that bad.” Rose swelled with pride for about half a second. “Bit of a pain sometimes, does she still take the console apart when she’s upset?”

“Oh my god, yes! And god forbid if you interrupt a bloody conversation between her and the mad thing—”

“Now I know how the Doctor felt,” Rose muttered sullenly as Martha and Donna laughed. She narrowed her eyes when she caught sight of something on Martha’s finger. “What’s that?” She grabbed the woman’s hand, holding it up to examine the rather nice ring. “Are you engaged? How come I haven’t met him?”

“Maybe because you don’t know how to answer a phone,” Martha chided gently, and Rose winced. Okay, yeah, that one was on her.

“What’s his name?”

“Tom Milligan.”

Rose blinked, raising an eyebrow. “Tom Milligan?” Martha nodded. “Not the Tom…” Another nod. “How’d that happen? Oh, can I meet him while I’m here?”

“He’s working out in Africa right now,” Martha said with a sigh. “He’s in pediatrics. Maybe if you stick around you’ll be here when he gets back. But in the mean time…”

Right on cue, the walkie-talkie on Martha’s belt crackled to life. “Dr. Jones, report to base, please. Over.”
Martha grabbed the walkie-talkie, speaking into it. “This is Dr. Jones. Operation Blue Sky is go, go, go,” she said as she walked out of the alley. “I repeat, this is a go.”

All at once all hell broke loose in the area outside the alley as convoys of jeeps and trucks rode by. “Unified Intelligence Taskforce!” A soldier called. “Raise that barrier, now!”

Rose blinked, watching the soldiers roll past. “Leave those safeties on, lads,” the soldier called back. “They’re non-hostiles.”

“What the hell…?” Rose murmured.

“All workers, lay down your tools and surrender.”

“Greyhound Six to Trap One,” Martha said into her walkie talkie. “B Section, go, go, go. Search the ground floor. Grid pattern delta.”

“What are you lookin’ for?” Rose asked faintly, still a bit stunned by this all. She hadn’t been expecting UNIT when Martha had called her.

“Illegal aliens.”

“This is a UNIT operation,” a voice announced over the intercoms. “All workers lay down your tools and surrender.”

“B section, mobilized.” Martha was back to her walkie talkie. “E section, F section, on my command.”

She hurried out of the alley, leaving Donna and a rather stunned Rose behind. “Is that what you did to her?” Donna asked after a moment. “Turned her into a soldier?”

Rose squeezed her eyes shut, sighing heavily before following Martha out.

“Look at you, Dr. Jones,” she said with a best smile she could. “You’re qualified now.”

“UNIT rushed it through,” Martha replied with a smile of her own. “Given my experience in the field. Come on, we’re establishing a field base on site. They’re dying to meet you.”

“Yeah, great,” Rose muttered. She’d done her best to stay off UNIT’s radar, not wanting to get caught up in that mess, but she knew she caused too much trouble on Earth not to be picked up by them at some point.

Still, working with them was going to be new.

“Operation Blue Sky complete, sir,” Martha reported to what looked like the man in charge as they walked into the base. “Thanks for letting me take the lead.” To Rose, “this is Colonel Mace. Sir, this is Rose Tyler.”

The man instantly snapped into a salute. “Ma’am.”

Rose winced a bit. “Oh, don’t salute,” she mumbled, shoving her hands into her pockets.

“But it’s an honor, ma’am. When we heard you’d replaced the Doctor—”

“I didn’t replace him,” Rose snapped, and Martha sighed. She’d specifically told them not to mention the Doctor. Thankfully, Mace took it in stride.
“My apologies, ma’am.”

“Stop with the ma’am already.” The tension was practically radiating off of Rose. Martha shook her head a bit, turning away. They were going to need to have a conversation.

“You’re a government agency?” Donna, thankfully, came to the rescue. “It’s like Guantanamo Bay out there, you’re arresting ordinary factory workers in the streets in broad daylight for god’s sake.” Mace shot her a look. “Donna, by the way. Donna Noble, since you didn’t ask. I’ll have a salute.”

Martha smirked a bit, turning away. Oh she liked Donna. Mace looked at Rose, who shrugged, and finally Mace saluted Donna.

“Ma’am.”

“Thank you,” Donna said with a satisfied nod. Rose would’ve laughed if she wasn’t so annoyed.

“So what’s goin’ on in that factory, anyways?”

“Yesterday, fifty two people died in identical circumstances, right across the world, in eleven different time zones,” Mace reported. “Five a.m. in the UK, six a.m. in France, eight a.m. in Moscow, one p.m. in China.”

Rose worked out the timezones quickly with the TARDIS’ help. “They all died simultaneously.”

Mace nodded. “Exactly. Fifty two deaths at the exact same moment, worldwide.”

“How did they die?”

“They were all inside their cars.”

“They were poisoned,” Martha added. “I checked their biopsies. No toxins. Whatever it is, left the system immediately.”

Okay well that was a pretty big thing. “What have the cars got in common?”

“Completely different makes,” Martha said. “They’re all fitted with ATMOS, and that—” she waved a hand to the factory outside, “is the ATMOS factory.”

“What’s ATMOS?” Rose asked, and Donna snorted.

“Oh, come on. Even I know that. Everyone’s got Archangel.”

Rose raised an eyebrow. “Yeah, everyone had Archangel too,” she muttered.

“Starting to see why I called you?” Martha asked as they walked out of the base, heading for the factory. “It stands for Atmospheric Omission System. Fit ATMOS in your car, it reduces CO2 emissions to zero.”

“Zero?” Rose repeated. “No carbon, none at all?”

“And you get sat-nav and twenty quid in shopping vouchers if you introduce a friend,” Donna added. “Bargain.”

Rose had to wonder how many people Donna had introduced. “And this is where they make it, Ms. Tyler,” Mace interjected. Rose sighed a bit. “Shipping worldwide. Seventeen factories across the globe, but this is the central depot, sending ATMOS to every country on Earth.”
“Just Rose, please. And you think ATMOS is alien?”

“It’s our job to investigate the possibility.”

They walked by soldiers rounding up workers as Mace led through a plastic strip curtain, into what looked like a small research area. There was a small device sitting on a table. “And here it is, laid bare,” Mace said. “ATMOS can be threaded through any and every make of car.”

“You must’ve checked it, before it went on sale,” Rose pointed out, and Martha nodded.

“We did. We found nothing. That’s why I thought we needed an expert.”

“Yeah?” Rose asked distantly, examining some diagrams. “Who’d you get?”

There was a beat of silence, and she turned to see everyone staring at her expectantly. I believe they mean you, my Wolf, the TARDIS informed her gently, and Rose blinked.

“Oh. Me. Well. Good luck with that one.”

Martha was trying not to laugh as she and Mace left. “So why would aliens be so keen on cleaning up our atmosphere?” Donna asked curiously as Rose looked around.

“A very good question.”

“Maybe they want to help.” Her optimism was nice, Rose would admit. “Get rid of pollution and stuff.”

Rose turned back Donna. “Do you know how many cars on Earth?” Donna shook her head. “Eight hundred million. Imagine that. If you could control them, you’d have eight hundred million weapons.”

Donna understood what Rose was saying. “…Oh.”

Rose picked up the device, not noticing when Donna wandered out. A few minutes later Mace and Martha came back, to see Rose turning the device over in her hands. “Got any tools?”

“Yeah, here.” Martha ducked under the table, coming back with a box of tools. With the TARDIS’ help, Rose started picking the device apart, buzzing it with the sonic screwdriver.

“Ionizing nano-membrane carbon dioxide converter,” she muttered as she worked. “Which means that ATMOS works. Filters the CO2 at a molecular level.”

“We know all that,” Mace pointed out as he leaned in, “but what’s its origin Is it alien?”

“This is decades ahead of its time, on any planet,” Rose mumbled, eying Mace warily. “Look, do you mind? Could you stand back a bit?”

Mace did so, thankfully. “Sorry, have I done something wrong?”

“You’re carryin’ a gun,” Rose muttered, shifting away. “Not a huge fan of guns or people with them around me.”

“If you insist.” Mace walked out, and Martha shot Rose a look.

“Tetchy.”
“Well it’s true.”

“He’s a good man.”

Rose set down the pieces she’d been working with, focusing on Martha completely. “Why did you bring me here, Martha?”

“Because we need help and I can’t think of anyone better qualified.”

“And you didn’t think to warn me that UNIT was involved when you called?” Rose’s voice was a bit heated.

“You wouldn’t have come if I had,” Martha shot back. “Besides I wasn’t even sure you would answer your phone. God knows you didn’t the first thirty times I called.”

And there it was. Rose looked away, her shoulders hunching up a bit. “It’s easy enough for you, isn’t it?” Martha didn’t sound as annoyed when she spoke, but the irritation was still clear. “You can take off, you can run away, you can turn off your phone and ignore it all. But I’m still here. And I’m still fighting for change here. So yeah, I have to stay on the inside. I have to work with these people. I have to fight for change here.”

Rose kept her gaze on the floor for a moment before closing her eyes. “I’m sorry I didn’t answer your calls,” she said finally. Martha sighed a bit.

“I don’t know, I guess I knew you wouldn’t until you were ready.” Which didn’t mean it hadn’t hurt. It just meant she’d expected it.

Which probably said a lot about Rose, honestly.

“You got me this job, Rose. Yes or no?” Rose lifted her head to look at Martha again, nodding slightly. “Am I carrying a gun?” Rose shook her head. “I have to stay on the inside. But I’m not going to turn into them. Give me a little more credit than that.”

Rose sighed. “I’m sorry.”

“I’m sorry I didn’t warn you UNIT was involved,” Martha returned softly. She’d felt guilty about it, but she also knew that Rose wouldn’t have come otherwise. She hadn’t a choice.

“Oi, you lot.” Donna swept in with a binder, Mace right behind her. “All your storm troopers and your sonics. You’re rubbish. Should’ve come with me.”

“Why, where have you been?” Rose asked.

“Personnel.” She held up the binder. “That’s where the weird stuff’s happening, in the paperwork. Because I spent years working as a temp, I can find my way round an office blindfold, and the first thing I noticed is an empty file.”

She tossed the binder onto the table. “What’s supposed to be in there, then?”

“Sick days,” Donna said triumphantly. “There aren’t any. Hundreds of people working here and no one’s sick. Not one hangover, man flu, sneaky little shopping trip, nothing. Not ever. They don’t get ill.”

“That can’t be right,” Mace said in disbelief. Donna smirked at him.

“You’ve been checking out the building. Should’ve been checking out the workforce.”
“I can see why she likes you,” Martha said with a smile. “You are good.”

Donna beamed proudly. “Super temp.”

“Dr. Jones, set up a medical post,” Mace ordered. “Start examining the workers. I’ll get them sent through.”

Martha nodded, standing up. “Come on Donna. Give me a hand.”

Rose shoved her hands into her pockets as she followed Mace out. “So this ATMOS thing,” she ventured curiously. “Where’d it come from?”


That meant absolutely nothing to Rose. “And himself would be?” She questioned. They stepped into the mobile headquarters, and Rose saw that his file was already up on the computer screen.

“Child genius.” Oh that was just what Rose wanted to deal with. “Invented the Fountain Six search engine when he was twelve years old. Millionaire overnight. Now runs the Rattigan Academy. A private school, educating students handpicked from all over the world.”


Donna helped Martha set up and step back as the doctor got to work with the examination. “Do you think I should warn my mum about the ATMOS in her car?” She asked after a moment, and Martha nodded.

“Better safe than sorry.”

“I’ll give her a call,” Donna decided, digging her mobile out. Martha hesitated for a moment.

“Donna,” she said finally. “Do they know where you are? Your family. I mean, do they know you’re traveling with Rose?”

“Not really,” Donna admitted. “Although my granddad sort of waved us off. I didn’t have time to explain.”

“You just left him behind?”

Well when she put it like that it sounded awful. “Yeah…”

Martha turned back to focus on the worker she was examining. “I didn’t tell my family. I kept it all so secret, and it almost destroyed them.”

Donna sucked in a bit of a breath. “In what way?”

“They ended up imprisoned.” They would still barely talk about it, and Martha hated that. “They were tortured. My mum, my dad, my sister. It wasn’t Rose’s fault, but you need to be careful. I love Rose, I really do, she’s my best friend. But she’s like fire. You stand too close, and people get burnt.”

Donna frowned, looking away.

* * * * *

“I’m gonna check out this Rattigan Academy,” Rose said as she and Mace walked through the
factory. “You’re not coming with me. I want to talk to Luke, not point a gun at him.”

“It’s ten miles outside of London.” Mace sounded frustrated. This wasn’t what he had been expecting when Martha had mentioned bringing Rose in. “How are you going to get there?”

“You want to help? Get me a jeep.”

“According to the records, the Doctor traveled by TARDIS.” Rose bristled a bit at that. “I assume you do the same?”

“Yeah, but if there’s a danger of hostile aliens I think it’s best to keep a super-duper time machine away from the front lines.”

“I see,” Mace returned with all the hostility Rose was showing him. “Then you do have weapons, but you choose to keep them hidden.”

Rose whirled on him, eyes flashing. “The TARDIS is not a weapon, she’s a ship.”

Mace raised an eyebrow, but didn’t argue further. “Jenkins,” he called, and a soldier hurried over. “Sir.”

“You will accompany Ms. Tyler and take orders from her.”

“I don’t do orders.”

Mace ignored that. “Any sign of trouble, get Jenkins to declare a code red. And good luck, ma’am.”

He saluted, and Rose sighed. “I said — oh forget it.”

He walked away, and Rose turned to Jenkins. “What’s your name?”

“Private Jenkins, ma’am,” he replied at once. Rose sighed.

“Okay, drop the ma’am thing. What’s your first name?”

“Er…Ross.”

“Ross.” Rose smiled. “Good name. Alright then, Ross. Let me just find Donna and we can—”

Right on cue Donna came out. “Oh just in time!” Rose said happily. “Come on, we’re going to the country. Fresh air and geniuses. Try not to slap anyone — what’s wrong?”

The look on Donna’s face said it all. “I’m not coming with you.” Rose’s stomach dropped to the floor. “I’ve been thinking. I’m sorry. I’m going home.”

“…Ah. Really? It’s okay, it’s okay, don’t be selfish, let her go, it’s okay…”

“I’ve got to.”

“Right. Right.” Wow this had to be a new record. Just a couple weeks. A few adventures. Maybe the Ood had really been too much? She had said she wanted to go home, but then she said no… “Well then.”

There was a beat of silence. “Oh stop looking at me like that,” Donna said finally. “I’m just going home for a bloody visit.”
“Oh.” Rose blinked. “Oh!”

“Honestly, getting all puppy-eyed at me—”

“I wasn’t—”

“Like I’d let you go off without me, you’re a mess by yourself and you know it.”

Well she was right about that. “Do you want a ride home, Donna?” Rose asked with a small smile.

“As a matter of fact yes, yes I do. Thank you for offering.”

The TARDIS was wholly amused in the back of Rose’s head as they climbed into the jeep.

*Shut up.*

Chapter End Notes

Please review...?
“I’ll walk the rest of the way,” Donna said as they pulled up to the end of her street. “I’ll see you back at the factory, yeah?”

“Sounds good,” Rose said with a smile. “Have a nice visit.”

“I will. You be careful.”

“Always,” Rose said happily, and they pulled away. Donna sighed as she started down the street.

“Haven’t seen you for days,” one of the neighbors called.

“Yeah,” Donna said distantly. “Been away.”

It all seemed like such a vivid dream now, walking down her totally normal street to her totally normal house. None of it seemed real. The Adipose, Pompeii, the Ood…it was like they were dream. Horrible, wonderful dreams.

She paused a few feet away from her house, seeing her grandfather putting the trash. He caught sight of her and waved, and that spurred into her action — she ran forward, tackling him and pulling him into a tight hug.

“Oh it’s so good to see you,” she murmured, and Wilf chuckled as he hugged her back.

“It’s good to see you too. Come on, come in. Tell me all about it.”

“Oh, it’s incredible,” Donna said with a sigh as they walked into the kitchen and sat down. “It’s like nothing I’ve ever seen.”

“I said so, didn’t I,” Wilf crowed. “Aliens. I said they were real. I just didn’t expect them in a little blue box.”

“It’s bigger on the inside,” Donna said distantly. “And she’s not really an alien.”

“Right, right. But is it safe? This Rose, are you safe with her?”

“She’s amazing, Gramps,” Donna said with a smile. “She’s just…the things she does, the people she helps. It’s incredible. I’d trust her with my life.”
“Hold up, I thought that was my job,” Wilf grumbled, and Donna smiled.

“You still come first.”

“Well, for God’s sake, don’t tell your mother.” Wilf shuddered at the thought of what his daughter would say. Donna hesitated, remembering what Martha had said.

“I don’t know. I mean, this is massive. Sort of not fair she doesn’t know.”

“Doesn’t know what?” Sylvia walked in right on cue, balancing a laundry basket. “And who’s she, the cat’s mother? And where’ve you been few days, lady, after that silly little trick with the car keys? I phoned Veena and she said she hadn’t seen hide nor hair.”

“I’ve been traveling,” Donna replied without thinking. Maybe she didn’t want to tell Sylvia about all this. She didn’t know.

“Oh, hark at her, Michael Palin.” Although she certainly made the choice easier to make. “Are you staying for tea, because I haven’t got anything in. I’ve been trying to keep your granddad on that macrobiotic diet, but he sneaks off and gets pork pies at the petrol station. Don’t deny it, I’ve seen the wrappers in the car. Oh, I don’t miss a trick. Now then, what were you going to tell me? What don’t I know?”

“Nothing,” Donna said after a moment, sighing. No, she couldn’t tell Sylvia. “It’s nothing.”

“Good,” Sylvia said, grabbing a couple of newspapers and tossing them at Donna. “Right, then you can sit there and cut out those coupons. Every penny helps. This new mortgage doesn’t pay for itself. Dad, kettle on.”

“Yeah, kettle on,” Wilf said with a sigh as he exchanged a look with Donna.

* * * * *

“UNIT’s been watching Rattigan Academy for ages,” Ross said as they drove along. “It’s all a bit Hitler Youth. Exercise at dawn and classes and special diets.”

“Turn left,” the ATMOS GPS said, and Rose raised an eyebrow.

“Ross, one question. If UNIT thinks ATMOS is dodgy…”

“Go straight on.”

“How come we’ve got it in the jeeps? Yeah, tell me about it. They’re fitted as standard on all government vehicles. We can’t get rid of them till we can prove there’s something wrong.”

“Turn right.”

“Drives me around the bend,” Ross muttered as they drove around a bend, and Rose laughed.

“Nice one.”

“Timed that perfectly,” Ross agreed, grinning.

“This your final destination.”

That was slightly ominous, Rose thought as they climbed out of the car. A group of students were running around the building, and one young man was standing by the door, watching them.
“What’s this got to do with being a genius?” Rose asked as she and Ross walked across the lawn, toward the one who wasn’t running.

“I suppose you’re Rose?” The boy — Luke, Rose assumed — said as they approached. Rose smiled, giving him a wave.

“Hello.”

He didn’t smile back. Oh it was going to be one of these, then. “Your commanding officer phoned ahead.”

“Don’t happen to have one of those, actually,” Rose replied kindly, looking back at Ross. “Oh, this Is Ross by the way, since you didn’t ask.”


“May we have a look inside, then?”

Luke nodded, leading Rose and Ross inside. The walked right into what looked like a laboratory, and Rose’s eyes zeroed right in on everything that didn’t belong.

Even I know this kid is way passed his time.

He is getting help from somewhere, the TARDIS agreed as Rose stepped up to the work bench, picking up a thin strip of fabric.

“Single molecule fabric?” She guessed, grateful for the TARDIS’ help. She had a feeling if she couldn’t talk to the kid on his level she wasn’t going to get anywhere. “Oh that’s thin. You could pack a tent in a thimble. And gravity simulators. Terraforming, biospheres, nano-tech steel construction. Blimey.” She turned back to Luke, raising an eyebrow. “Funny, you know. With equipment like this you could you could, say, move to another planet or something.”

A thin smile pulled at Luke’s lips. “If only that was possible.”

“Were,” Rose corrected without thinking. “If only that were possible. Conditional cause.”

Luke raised an eyebrow, doing a poor job at concealing the death glare he was giving her. “I think you’d better come with me.”

He led Rose and Ross into what looked like a recreational area. Rose didn’t miss the big hulking machine in the corner.

Transmat, the TARDIS said quietly.

Yeah he doesn’t have any alien help at all. Rose had to resist the urge to roll her eyes.

“You’re smarter than the usual UNIT grunts,” Luke said, jarring Rose out of her thoughts. “I’ll give you that.”

“Oi, be nice,” Rose said, a bit harshly. She had no patience for spoiled, self-important brats. “You just called Ross a grunt. Don’t call Ross a grunt. We like Ross.”

Luke stopped, looking back at Rose. “What exactly do you want?” There was no amusement in his voice. He didn’t like that Rose was poking around. Well that was fine. Rose didn’t care much for him.
“I was just thinking,” Rose said casually. “What a responsible eighteen year old. Inventing zero carbon cars? Saving the world.”

“It takes a man with vision.” He sounded so proud of himself. Or full of himself. Or both.

“Mmm, blinkered vision.” Rose took grim joy in pointing that out. “Because ATMOS means more people driving. More cars, more petrol. End result, the oil’s going to run out faster than ever. The ATMOS system could make things worse.”

“Yeah.” He didn’t seem too put out, unfortunately. “Well, you see, that’s a tautology. You can’t say ATMOS system because it stands for Atmospheric Emissions System. So you’re just saying Atmospheric Emissions System system. Do you see, Miss Conditional Clause?”

Rose had to resist the urge to roll her eyes again. “It’s been a long time since anyone said no to you, isn’t it?”

“I’m still right, though,” he protested.

_Can I strangle him?_

_No, My Wolf._

“Not easy, is it?” Can’t beat them, join them. “You look at the world and you connect things, random things, and think, why can’t anyone else see it? The rest of the world is so slow.”


“And you’re all on your own.”

“I know.”

“But not with this.” Rose waved a hand around. “Because there’s no way you invented this thing single handed. I mean, it might be Earth technology, but that’s like finding a mobile phone in the Middle Ages. No, no, I’ll tell you what it’s like. It’s like finding this—” She waved a hand at the transmat, “in the middle of someone’s front room. Albeit it’s a very big front room.”

“Why, what is it?” Ross asked, curious. Rose wandered over.

“Yeah, just looks like a thing, doesn’t it? People don’t question things. They just say, oh, it’s a thing.”

“Leave it alone,” Luke snapped, and Rose could tell she was riling him up. _Good._

“Now see, I make connections.” Rose wandered into the transmat. “And this, to me, looks like a teleport pod.”

And with that, she pushed the button.

The trip was a bit rough, though nothing like a vortex manipulator, which she was grateful for. She stumbled a little when she landed, picking herself up to see the armor clad figures standing before her.

“Oh.”

They all turned to look at her. Oops. “We have an intruder,” one of them called in a loud, booming voice.
“Intruder? Where?” Rose made a show of looking around. “Oh did you mean me? No, sorry, took a wrong turn trying to find the loo. I’ll go now.”

She hit the button and ran back into the machine. She ran back into Luke’s rec room, calling, “Ross, get out! Luke, you’re coming with me.”

As she spoke she fumbled with the sonic screwdriver but before she could do anything one of the armored aliens appeared.

Damn it, damn it, damn it—

Sontaran.

“Sontaran!” Rose called, and the alien stopped. “That’s your name, isn’t it? You’re a Sontaran. How did I know that, hey? Fascinating isn’t it? Isn’t that worth keeping me alive?”

Ross, meanwhile, raised his gun. “I order you to surrender in the name of the Unified Intelligence Taskforce.”

“Well that’s not gonna work,” Rose murmured. “Cordolaine signal, am I right? Copper excitation stopping the bullets.”

The alien was clearly surprised. “How do you know so much?” Rose just glared back, and the alien turned to Luke. “Who is she?”

“Her name is Rose,” Luke said quickly.

“Nobody you know,” Rose added. “But I know — I know this isn’t typical Sontaran behavior, is it? Hiding? Using teenagers, stopping bullets? A Sontaran should face bullets with dignity. Shame on you.”

“You dishonor me, ma’am.” He sounded offended.

“Yeah? Then show yourself,” Rose hedged.

“I will look into my enemy’s eyes!”

He pulled his helmet off, revealing the potato-like head underneath. “Oh, my god,” Ross breathed. Rose had a feeling this was the first time he had seen an alien.

“And your name?” She prompted.

“General Staal, of the Tenth Sontaran Fleet. Staal the Undefeated.”

“Bit of a pompous nickname, isn’t it? And dangerous. What if you do get defeated? Staal the Not Quite So Undefeated Anymore But Never Mind?”

“He’s like a potato,” Ross finally said. “A baked potato. A talking baked potato.”

“Now Ross, don’t be rude,” Rose chastised Ross without taking her eyes off Staal. “Think about what you look like to him.”

As she spoke she stooped down, picking up a squash racket and a ball. “The Sontarans are the finest soldiers in the galaxy, dedicated to a life of warfare,” she said as quickly as the TARDIS could feed her the information. “A clone race, grown in batches of millions with only one weakness.”
“Sontarans have no weakness,” Staal snapped, and Rose had to smirk a bit.

“No, it’s a good weakness.”


“No, but the Sontarans are fed by a probic vent in the back of their neck,” Rose continued, flaunting the information just a bit. “That’s their weak spot. Which means, they always have to face their enemies in battle. Isn’t that brilliant? They can never turn their backs.”

“We stare into the face of death,” Staal declared proudly. Rose raised an eyebrow.

“Yeah? Well stare into this.”

She threw the ball into the air and smashed it with the racket. It bounced into the back of the teleport and hit Staal right in the probic vent. “Run!” Rose called, grabbing Ross’ arm and dragging him away as Staal slumped over.

“What was that?” Ross was bewildered. “What did you do?”

“Bought us about five minutes before all hell breaks loose.” They ran to the jeep and Rose shoved Ross into the driver’s side before running around. “Come on, we need to get back to the factory, now.”

As Ross peeled out of the parking lot, Rose grabbed the radio. “Greyhound Forty to Trap One. Repeat, can you hear me? Over.”

Static. No answer. Rose smacked it, annoyed. “Why’s it not working?” Ross asked, and Rose shook her head.

“It must be the Sontarans. If they can trace that, they can isolate ATMOS.”

Oh…that would be a problem. “Turn left,” the system said suddenly.

“Try going right,” Rose ordered. Ross made a face.

“It said left.”

“I heard it.” Rose really didn’t have the time or the patience for this. “So go right.”

Ross jerked the wheel, trying to turn it, but it was no good. “I’ve got no control. It’s driving itself. It won’t stop.”

Rose dug the sonic out of her pocket, zapping it. Nothing happened. “The doors are locked,” Ross reported, sounding a bit panicked.

“This thing is deadlocked,” Rose muttered, thoroughly annoyed. “I can’t stop it.”

“Turn left.”

Rose ran a hand through her hair, sighing heavily. “Oh blimey this is not how I want to die.”

I do not think this will actually kill you, my Wolf.

Yeah well. Help. Help would be nice right about now.
Give it an order.

…What?

“Wait!” That was out loud, and Ross jumped.

“We’re heading for the river, ma’am.”

“ATMOS,” Rose addressed it directly. “Are you programmed to contradict my orders?”

“Confirmed.”

“Anything I say, you’ll ignore it?”

“Confirmed.”

Rose beamed. “Then drive into the river. I order you to drive into the river. Do it. Drive into the river.”

The jeep skidded to a halt right at the edge of the river. Rose and Ross breathed a sigh of relief as they scrambled out of the car.

“Turn right. Left.”

“Oh it’s having a melt down,” Rose muttered, dragging Ross away.

“Left, right, left, right, left, right, left, right—”

There was a bang as the sat-nav exploded, and Rose and Ross jumped back.

“…So now what?” Ross asked after a moment. Rose sighed.

“Now, my dear Ross, we walk.”

And walk they did, all the way back to Donna’s place. Rose had never appreciated the TARDIS more than she did in that moment.

I’ll never take you for granted again, she promised, and the ship gave an amused hum.

Finally they found Donna’s house. Ross stayed on the sidewalk while Rose went up and knocked on the door. Thankfully it was Donna who answered.

“You would not believe the day I’m having. Can I see your car?”

“Nice to see you too,” Donna mock-grumbled, leading Rose to the sidewalk where the car was parked.

“If you hurt the car Mum is gonna kill you,” Donna informed the blonde as she popped the hood open to examine the ATMOS device.

“I’ll requisition us a vehicle,” Ross spoke up, and Rose nodded.

“Anything without ATMOS.” She was pretty sure that didn’t need saying though. “And don’t point your gun at people. Donna can you call Martha? Oh, here.” She dug her phone out of her pocket and tossed it to Donna as Ross left and an old man made his way out of the house.

“Is that her? Is that her?” He asked eagerly as he hurried down the walkway. Rose peeked out from
under the hood.

“Is who what?”

“My grandfather,” Donna murmured to Rose. “Sorry about him.”

He stopped, staring at Rose in disbelief. “Oh, look at you, you’re so young.”

“Not as young as I look,” Rose assured him with a small, sad smile as she held her hand out. “Rose Tyler, sir. Nice to meet you.”

“Wilf,” the man said, shaking her hand. “Wilfred Mott. You must be one of them aliens.”

“Oh, not really,” Rose said quickly, cringing inwardly a bit. “I’m from Earth, just like you. Donna, any answer?”

“She’s not picking up,” Donna reported, a bit frustrated. “What is it, Sontorans?”

“Sontarans,” Rose corrected, going back to work. “They can’t be just remote controlling cars. That’s not enough.”

“Martha!” Donna said suddenly, and Rose looked back to see she was on the phone again. Good. “Hold on, she’s here.”

Rose grabbed the phone, rattling off, “Martha, tell Colonel Mace it’s the Sontarans. They’re in the file. Code Red, Sontarans. But if they’re inside the factory tell them not to start shooting. UNIT will get massacred. I’ll get back as soon as I can. You got that?”


“Brilliant. Please stay safe.” She hung up, tossing the phone back to Donna and getting to work again, buzzing the device with the sonic.

“But you tried sonicking it before,” Donna pointed out. “You didn’t find anything.”

“Yeah, but now I know the origin,” Rose pointed out. “I have a better idea of what to look for.”

“The thing is, Rose,” Wilf spoke up, and Rose’s eyes dodged to the side for a moment before refocusing on her work, “that Donna is my only grandchild. You got to promise me you’re going to take care of her.”

“She doesn’t need taking care of,” Rose muttered. “She takes care of me.”

“Wild laughed. “ Oh yeah, that’s my Donna. Yeah, she was always bossing us round when she was tiny. The Little General we used to call her.”

“Oh don’t start,” Donna grumped. That didn’t stop Wilf, of course.

“And some of the boys she used to turn up with. Different one every week. Here, who was that one with the nail varnish?”


Rose jerked back as spikes popped out of the ATMOS device. “Well. There’s that. It’s a temporal pocket. I knew there was something else in there. It’s hidden just a second out of sync with real time.”
“But what’s it hiding?”

“Oi, what’re you doing to my car?!” A loud voice snapped, and Rose looked around to see Donna’s mother making her way out of the house. “Oh, it’s you!”

“Oh hullo,” Rose said with a sigh. Wilf looked between them, raising an eyebrow.

“You two know each other?”

“Dad, it’s the woman from the wedding,” Sylvia explained impatiently. “When you were laid up with Spanish flu. I’m warning you, last time she turned up it was a disaster.”

“Oh, I’m not—”

Right on cue smoke started spewing out of the spike. Rose jumped back, sonicking it quickly.

“That’ll stop—”

There was a loud bang as the entire thing seemed to go up in smoke. “See, now she’s blown up the car!” Sylvia railed, and Rose rolled her eyes.

“Oh, not now, Mum,” Donna snapped, sharing Rose’s sentiments. Sylvia shot her a look before walking away.

“That wasn’t just exhaust fumes,” Rose murmured, leaning in closer to examine the device. It was no longer spewing smoke at least. “Some sort of gas. Artificial gas.”

“And it’s aliens, is it?” Wilf asked excitedly. “Aliens?”

Rose sighed, tugging at her hair. “But if it’s poisonous,” Donna said slowly, “they they’ve got poisonous gas on every car on Earth.”

*This is not the way Sontarans work,* the TARDIS spoke up. *Something is wrong here.*

“It’s not safe,” Wilf said, running around to the driver’s side. “I’m going to get it off the street.”

No sooner had he closed the door and started the car than gas started pouring out of the exhaust pipe.

“Hold on!” Donna called. “Turn it off! Granddad, get out of there!”

Wilf struggled to get the door open, panicking. “I can’t! It’s not locked! It’s them aliens again!”

“What’s he doing?” Sylvia called, running out of the house again. “What’s he done?”

All around them, smoke started coming out of all the cars on the street. “They’ve activated it!” Rose called. Donna was more preoccupied by Wilf, though.

“There’s gas inside the car! He’s going to choke! Rose!”

Rose ran to the door, trying desperately to sonic it open, but it was no good. “It won’t open!”

“Help me!” Wilf called. Rose ran back around to the engine, yanking out all the connections she could find, but it didn’t help anything. Damn it, damn it, damn it!

“Get me out of here!” Wilf called, choking. Donna panicked as he collapsed.

“Rose!”
Rose crawled under the car, trying desperately to do something to get the device to stop. It was no good though.

“He’s going to choke, Rose!”

Yeah Rose was well aware of that. “I’m tryin’!” She grunted, hitting the underside of the car. It wouldn’t do any good but she was frustrated.

The sound of shattering glass reached her ears, then Sylvia saying, “Well don’t just stand there. Get him out!”

Rose crawled out to see Sylvia standing poised with an ax and Donna pulling Wilf out of the car. “I can’t believe you’ve got an ax,” Donna said, gaping at her mother. Sylvia shrugged.

“Burglars.”

“Right, get inside the house,” Rose told the Nobles. “Just try and close off the doors and windows.”

A black cab pulled down the street, with Ross behind the wheel. “Rose!” He called, sticking his head out the window. “This is all I could find that hasn’t got ATMOS.”

“Works for me.” Rose turned to look back at Donna. “Donna, you coming?”

The redhead didn’t even hesitate. “Yeah.” She started forward, but Sylvia grabbed her arm.

“Donna, don’t go. Look what happens every time that woman appears. Stay with us, please.”


“Dad!”

Wilf ignored her. “Don’t listen to her. You go with Rose. That’s my girl.”

That was all the encouragement Donna needed. She whirled on her heel, running to join Rose.
The drive back to the factory was slower than Rose would have liked, but the smoke was so thick in
the air it was impossible to see. News crews had gathered when they arrived.

“Right, Ross, look after yourself,” Rose said as they hurried out of the car. “Get inside the building.”

“Will do,” Ross said, grabbing a walkie-talkie off his belt and speaking into it as he walked away.
“Greyhound Forty to Trap One. I have just returned Rose Tyler to base safe and sound. Over.”

“God the air is disgusting,” Donna said, coughing. Rose wrinkled her nose, taking the deepest
breath she dared.

“Yeah. Go on, get inside the TARDIS.”

“What about you?”

“I’ll be fine. Here.” Rose dug through her jacket pocket, coming up with a key. “TARDIS key, you
might be needing one. Be safe, alright?”

“Yeah, you too.” Rose needed the sentiment more. “Where are you going?”

“To stop a war.”

Rose ran back into the mobile headquarters while Donna hurried to the TARDIS. “Right then, here I
am,” she announced herself, going straight for Mace. “Whatever you do, Colonel Mace, do not
engage the Sontarans in battle. There is nothing they like better than a war. Just leave this to me.”

Mace didn’t look overly impressed. “What are you gonna do?”

“I’ve got the TARDIS. I’m going to get on board their ship.”

She whirled to look at Martha — and froze at the sight of her. “Something wrong, Rose?” Martha
asked gently, and Rose shook her head.

“No. Nothing. Come on, let’s—”

The entire world went sideways very suddenly and Rose staggered, grabbing a table edge to keep
herself upright even as her knees threatened to give out.

“What the hell?” She hissed through gritted teeth as people moved to help her. She waved them off.

I’ve been teleported, my Wolf. I believe I am aboard the Sontaran ship. Two UNIT soldiers attached
teleportation devices to me.

Rose switched hurriedly to telepathy. Why would they do that?

I do not believe they are themselves. Something has happened to them — and to your dark woman
as well.

Rose raised her eyes to focus on Martha, who was putting on a good show of being concerned.

“What’s wrong, Rose?”

“Somethin’s happened to the TARDIS,” Rose muttered, forcing herself upright again. It wasn’t so
bad now that the shock of the teleportation had worn off. The distance hurt a bit but Rose had felt
worse with the Master. “The Sontarans have her.”

“You’re joking,” Mace said in disbelief, clearly unimpressed by all of this. When Martha had said
she knew an expert this wasn’t exactly what he had been expecting. Rose ignored him, keeping her attention on Martha.

“Have you phone your family and Tom?” She asked curiously, keeping her voice light. Martha made a face.

“No. What for?”

“The gas. Tell them to stay inside, you know. You want them safe.”

“Oh, right,” Martha said quickly. “Course I will yeah, but, what about Donna? I mean, where’s she?”

Rose made a split-second decision not to trust Martha right then. Something told her it was a good one. “Oh, she’s gone home. She’s not like you, she’s not a soldier. Anyways there was a problem with her granddad so she wants to take care of him.”

* * * * *

As soon as the TARDIS settled Donna peeked out, eyes wide when she saw that she was on a spaceship.

Oh that was just bloody wonderful.

* * * * *

Rose turned back to Mace, taking a deep breath. “Anyways, change of plan.”

Mace nodded. “Good to have you fighting alongside us, Ms. Tyler.”

“I’m not fighting,” Rose snapped. Her patience was thin right then. “Not-hyphen-fighting. Got it?” She would find a way to solve this without bloodshed. Especially since most of the blood that was shed would be UNIT’s. “Now, does anyone know what this gas is, yet?”

“We’re working on it,” Martha reported, and Rose nodded.

“It’s harmful,” another a woman spoke up, stepping forward, “but not lethal until it reaches eighty percent density. We’re having the first reports of deaths from the centre of Tokyo City.”

Rose turned the woman, giving her her full attention. “And you are?” She asked kindly. The woman snapped into a salute.

“Captain Marion Price, ma’am.”

“Oh don’t salute please,” Rose groaned. God she hated this stuff.

“Jodrell Bank’s traced a signal, Ms. Tyler,” Mace cut in, “coming from five thousand miles above the Earth. We’re guessing that’s what triggered the cars.”

“Yeah, that’ll be the Sontaran ship,” Rose muttered, running a hand through her hair.

“NATO has gone to Defcon One.” Oh that sounded really, really bad. “We’re preparing to strike.”

“You can’t do that,” Rose snapped. “Nuclear missiles won’t even scratch the surface. Let me talk to the Sontarans.”
Mace scowled at her. “You’re not authorized to speak on behalf of Earth, Ms. Tyler.”

Rose dug the sonic screwdriver out of her pocket, stepping toward the communications system. “Then try and stop me.”

When nobody did, she jammed the sonic in. “Call the Sontaran Command Ship under Jurisdiction Two of the Intergalactic Rules of Engagement. This is Rose Tyler.”

* * * * *

The screen on the console turned on, and Donna heard, “…This is Rose Tyler.” She ran to the screen, grabbing it.

“Rose, I’m here! Can you hear me?”

No response, though. Damn it.

* * * * *

Staal appeared on the screen above them, with his entire army behind him, looking quite smug. “Breathing your last, Rose?”

“My God, they’re like trolls,” Mace muttered. Rose shot him a look.

“Oi, if you don’t have anythin’ constructive to say then clam up.” She didn’t have time for this. Back to the Sontarans. So tell me, General Staal, since when did you lot become cowards?”

“How dare you!” Staal raged as everyone behind burst out in similar outrage.

“Oh and I suppose that was constructive?” Mace muttered back. Rose ignored him.

“You impugn my honor,” Staal informed Rose. She rolled her eyes a bit.

“Yeah, I’m really glad you didn’t say belittle, because then I’d have a field day.” She moved on quickly. “But poison gas? That’s the weapon of a coward and you know it. Staal, you could blast this planet out of the sky. And yet you’re sitting up above, watching it die. Where’s the fight in that? Where’s the honor?”

She paused for a moment as the pieces settled into place — surprisingly without the TARDIS’ help. “Or are you lot plannin’ somethin’ else? Because this isn’t normal Sontaran warfare. What are you lot up to?”

“A general would be unwise to reveal his strategy to opposing forces,” Staal replied stiffly.

There is a war, the TARDIS said quietly, trying to minimize her presence in her Wolf’s head for the moment. But she needed this information.

“Ah!” Rose said out loud, snapping her fingers. “The war’s not going well, then. Losin’, are we?”

“Such a suggestion is impossible,” Staal snapped.

“What war?” Mace asked, raising an eyebrow.

“The war between the Sontarans and the Rutans.” Rose smirked when she saw Staal’s eyes widen.

“How does a simple human know of our affairs?” He demanded, and Rose could tell she had caught
him off guard. Good.

“I know it’s been raging far out in the stars, for fifty-thousand years. Blimey what an awful waste of time. Fifty-thousand years of bloodshed and war and death. And for what.”

“For victory!” Staal declared. “Sontar-ha! Sontar-ha! Sontar-ha! Sontar-ha! Sontar-ha!”

“Oh give me a break,” Rose muttered, pointing the sonic screwdriver at the screen and switching it over to a cartoon. Mace looked highly annoyed.

“Ms. Tyler, I would seriously recommend that this dialogue is handled by official Earth representation.”

Rose turned to Mace, raising an eyebrow. “I’m sorry, Mace, but has your ‘official Earth representation’ have any actual alien experience? Has your ‘official Earth representation’ saved this bloody planet over and over? Has your ‘official Earth representation’ ever even seen an alien?” Mace didn’t answer. “That’s what I thought.”

She turned back to the screen, switching back to the Sontaran transmission. “Finished?” She asked patiently.

“You will not be so quick to ridicule when you see our prize,” Staal taunted. “Behold.” He stepped aside to reveal the TARDIS. “We are the first Sontarans in history to capture a TARDIS.”

Rose raised an eyebrow. The TARDIS was inside the transmission field. Oh that made it so much easier. “Well, as prizes go, that’s noble.”

Donna perked up at the sound of the word noble. “As they say in Latin, Donna nobis pacem.”

“That’s me!” Donna said excitedly. “I’m here!”

“Did you ever wonder about its design?” Mace gave Rose a look that clearly said he thought she was insane. “It’s a phone box. It contains a phone. A telephonic device for communication. Sort of symbolic. Like, if only we could communicate, you and I.”

“All you have communicated is your distress,” Staal sneered.

“Oh!” Donna said as the pieces fell into place. She dug through her pocket, finding her mobile phone. But who was she supposed to call? She didn’t know Rose’s number. Oh that was useful. What was she supposed to do?

“Big mistake though,” Rose taunted back, “showing it to me. Because I’ve got a remote control.”

“Cease transmission!” Staal ordered, and the screen went blank.

“Ah well,” Rose sighed, leaning back in her seat.

“That achieved nothing,” Mace snapped, looking highly annoyed. Rose looked back at him, raising an eyebrow.

“There’s always a method to my madness, Colonel Mace. Give me a little more credit why don’t you.”

Donna, meanwhile, was in a bit of a frenzy. “Who do I call? Who am I supposed to call?” She demanded of the now blank screen. “Fat lot of good you are Blondie!”
She finally gave up and just called home. She wanted to find out how her grandfather was doing
anyways. “Hello?” Sylvia answered after two rings.

“Mum! Are you alright?”

“Donna.” Sylvia sounded relieved. “Where are you, sweetheart?”

“Is that her?” Donna heard Wilf ask in the background, and she smiled a bit.

“Oh, just finish the job,” Sylvia told Wilf before saying to Donna, “Your granddad’s sealing us in. He’s sealing the window. Our own house and we’re sealed in. All those thing they said about pollution and ozone and carbon, they’re really happening aren’t they?”

“People are working on it, Mum,” Donna assured her mother gently. No matter what happened, she believed in Rose. Rose would fix this. She would. Somehow. “They’re going to fix it. I promise.”

“Oh, like you’d know,” Sylvia snapped. She was just stressed, Donna reminded herself with a silent sigh. She was lashing out because she was stressed. “You’re so clever.”

“Oh don’t start,” Donna snapped back before her voice softened a bit. “Please don’t.”

“I’m sorry,” Sylvia said after a moment, and she at least sounded it, no matter how annoyed Donna felt in that moment. “I wish you were here.”

“Now come on, Sylvia,” Donna heard Wilf rebuking his daughter. “Look, that doesn’t help.” There was a shuffle, presumably as Wilf took the phone, because a moment later it was his voice on the line. “Donna, where are you?”

On a spaceship orbiting miles and miles above Earth, Donna thought, a bit bitterly. But that wasn’t going to accomplish anything either. Except worrying her family. “It’s sort of hard to say,” she said instead before changing the subject. “You alright?”

“Yeah,” Wilf assured her gently. “Fighting fit, yeah.” He’d say that on his deathbed, though. Donna wasn’t entirely reassured. “Is she with you, Rose?”

“Oh Rose,” Donna heard Sylvia scoff in the background.

“No.” Donna sighed heavily, tugging at a lock of hair. “I’m all on my own.”

“You promised she would look after you,” Wilf reminded Donna.

“She will, Gramps.” Of that Donna was entirely sure. “There’s something she needs me to do. I just don’t know what.”

“Well, I mean, the whole place is covered,” Wilf said. “The whole of London, they’re saying. The whole, the whole world. It’s the scale of it, Donna. I mean, how can one man stop all that?”

“Trust me,” Donna said fiercely. “She can do it.” She needed to believe that. Even if it didn’t seem possible she needed to believe that.

“Yeah.” Wilf sighed. “Well, if she doesn’t, you tell her she’ll have to answer to me.”

Donna laughed a bit. As if her grandfather would ever seriously go after a young woman like Rose. “I will,” she assured him all the same. “Just as soon as I see her, I’ll tell her.”
She hung up before she could start crying. She needed to stay strong. She had a job to do.

Even if she didn’t know what it was.

* * * * *

Rose leaned forward on the desk, reading over the clipboard Martha had handed her. “There’s carbon monoxide, hydrocarbons, nitrogen oxides, but ten percent unidentified,” Martha reported as Rose read. “Some sort of artificial heavy element we can’t trace. You ever seen anything like it?”

“It must be something the Sontarans invented,” Rose murmured. “This isn’t just poison. They need this gas for something else. What could that be?”

“Launch grid online and active,” Price announced, and Rose’s head snapped up.

“Positions, ladies and gentlemen,” Mace called. “Defcon One initiatives in progress?”

“What?” Rose said in disbelief. “I told you not to launch.”

“The gas is at sixty percent density,” Mace informed Rose coolly. “Eighty percent and people start dying, Ms. Tyler. We’ve got no choice.”

“Launching in sixty, fifty nine, fifty eight, fifty seven, fifty six. Worldwide nuclear grid now coordinating. Fifty four, fifty three…”

“You don’t understand,” Rose snapped. “You have no idea what you’re messing with—”

“With all due respect, Ms. Tyler,” Mace snapped back, turning on her. “You were brought in as a consultant on alien technology. You’ve already overstepped your boundaries quite enough, you have no say in how we run a military operation.”

“With all due respect, Colonel Mace.” There was a slight snarl on Rose’s voice now. “You brought me in because of my experience with alien matters. You are about to engage with a race that literally does nothing but fight and go to war, do you think something as simple as a bloody nuclear missile is going to take them down? You’re an idiot.”

Mace glared at her before stepping back.

“North America, online,” Price called. “United Kingdom, online. France, online. India, online. Pakistan, online. China, online. North Korea, online. All systems locked and coordinated. Launching in ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five…”

“God save us,” Mace murmured. Rose clenched her fists.

“Four, three, two, one, zero.”

There was a beat of silence. Rose held her breath…and the world map on the screen went blank. “What is it?” Mace asked, looking around. “What happened? Did we launch?” No one answered. “Well, did we?”

“Negative, sir,” Price reported. “The launch codes have been wiped, sir. It must be the Sontarans.”

“Can we override it?” Mace demanded.

“Trying it now, sir.”
“Missiles wouldn’t even dent that ship,” Rose murmured, shooting a sideways look at Martha. “So why are the Sontarans so keen to stop you? Any ideas?”

Martha caught the look. “How should I know?” She asked, sounding defensive.

“Didn’t think you would,” Rose replied smoothly. “Just trying to bounce ideas around. You know, like we always would.”

Martha’s expression softened a bit. “I don’t have any ideas,” she replied. “If I can think of anything though you’ll be the first person I let know.”

“Right, then.” Rose returned her attention to the blank screen, frowning a bit. None of this made sense. And she still wanted to know what they had done to Martha.

That was bothering her more than anything.

“Greyhound Forty declaring Absolutely Emergency,” a voice announced on the intercom. Rose’s eyes went wide. It was Ross.


“Get them out of there,” Rose snapped. She was ignored, of course.

“All troops, open fire!”

Damn it!

“Guns aren’t working!” Ross reported in, sounding a bit panicked. And with good reason. “Inform all troops, guns aren’t working.”

There was a pause. Rose’s heart pounded away in her chest the entire time. “Tell Rose it’s that cordolaine signal,” Ross said suddenly. “She’s the only one who can stop them—”

He cut off quite suddenly, and Rose squeezed her eyes shut to hide the tears that threatened to flood them.


“He wasn’t Greyhound Forty,” Rose whispered, forcing her eyes open. She couldn’t even pretend she wasn’t crying for the young man who had sacrificed his life for this idiot. “His name was Ross Jenkins, and you just killed him. Now listen to me, and get them the hell out of there!”

Mace gave Rose a long heard look for a moment before saying, “Trap One to all stations. Retreat. Order imperative. Immediate retreat.”
Rose was shaking as she listened to the soldiers try to retreat, only to be massacred. “You should’ve listened to me,” she snapped at Mace. He ignored her.

“They’ve taken the factory,” he reported, and Rose closed her eyes for a moment, taking a deep breath. She needed to calm down. She needed to reason all this out.

“Why?” She finally asked after a moment. “They don’t need it. Why attack now? What are they up to? It doesn’t make any sense.” One more thing to add to the ever-growing list of oddities.

“Launch grin is back online,” Price called. No sooner had she said that did the screen go blank again. Price set to work quickly, tracing the problem. “They’re inside the system, sir. It’s coming from within UNIT itself.”

“Trace it,” Mace ordered. “Find out where it’s coming from, and quickly.” Rose’s eyes flitted to Martha for a brief moment. “Gas levels?”

“Sixty-six percent in major population areas,” Price reported. “And rising.”

Mace looked over at Rose and jerked his head. She followed him to his little office.

“Why are they defending the factory only after we were inside?” Mace asked when they were closed inside. Rose pressed her lips thin, thinking.

“Because they wanted UNIT here.” It was the only explanation that made sense. “You gave them something they needed. Something now hidden inside the factory. Something precious.”

“We’ve got to recover it,” Mace determined. “This cordolaine signal thing, how does it work?”

Good question.

The TARDIS hummed as she gave Rose the information. It hurt a bit — the distance made it rough — but Rose worked through it. “It’s the bullets. It causes expansion of the copper shell.”

“Excellent.” Mace made his way out of the room. “I’m on it.”

Rose rolled her eyes, absolutely exasperated. “For the billionth time, you can’t fight Sontarans!”

It was no good. Mace was already gone. Rose poked her head out of the room to look around, eyes landing on Martha. After a moment she dug her mobile out of her pocket, finding the number she was looking for and hitting call.

Donna picked up after two rings.

“Rose?”
“Hullo,” Rose said as brightly as she could manage, sitting next to the window that looked out onto the floor.

“How did you get my number?!”

“Called myself from your phone after the whole thing with the Ood. Meant to add my number to your phone too, completely forgot. Sorry."

“Oh that’s helpful,” Donna said with a sigh. “What’s happened? Where are you?”

“Still on Earth.” Sadly. “But don’t worry, I’ve got my secret weapon.”

“What’s that?” Donna asked, hopeful.

“You.”

“Oh.” She sounded so disappointed. “Somehow, that’s not making me happy. Can’t you just zap us down to Earth with that remote thing?”

“Yeah…I haven’t got a remote,” Rose admitted. “That was a bluff. I really should try to make one though. But I need you on that ship. That’s why I made them move the TARDIS.” Rose closed her eyes, taking a deep breath. “I’m sorry…but you’ve got to go outside.”

“But there’s Sontaruns out there!” Donna protested. Rose would’ve smiled if the situation hadn’t been so horrible.

“Sontarans. But they’ll all be on battle stations right now. They don’t exactly walk about having coffee. I can talk you through it.”

“But what if they find me?” Donna’s voice was small. She was scared. Rose didn’t blame her.

“I know.” And god did Rose hate herself for this. “And I wouldn’t ask, but there’s nothing else I can do. I’m stuck. The whole planet is choking, Donna.”

Donna took a deep breath, apparently steeling herself because she said, “What do you need me to do?”

Rose smiled a bit, so very proud. “The Sonatarans are inside the factory which means they’ve got a teleport link with the ship, but they’ll have deadlocked it. I need you to reopen the link.”

“But I can’t even mend a fuse!” Donna said, appalled. Rose tugged at a lock of her hair.

“Donna stop talking about yourself like that,” she ordered firmly. She need the redhead to be confident now. “You can do this. I promise.”

There was a pause, and then Donna was back, hissing into the phone, “There’s a Sonterun. Sontaran.”

Rose’s stomach dropped. “Did he see you?” She demanded.

“No, he’s got his back to me.”

Oh that was some good luck right there. “Right. Donna, listen. On the back of his neck, on his collar there’s a sort of plug, like a hole. The Probic vent. One blow to the Probic vent knocks them out.”

“But he’s going to kill me!”
Rose couldn’t have hated herself any more in this moment if she tried. “I’m sorry. I swear, I’m so sorry, but you’ve got to try. Find somethin’ to hit him with him.”

There was another pause. “I’ve got a mallet. Why do you have a mallet?”

Rose would have laughed if the situation hadn’t been so dire. “It’s the Doctor’s. That’ll do, though.”

Another moment of silence, and Rose heard a thud. “Back of the neck,” Donna reported, sounding so proud. Rose grinned.

“Now then, you got to find the external junction feed to the teleport.”

“What?” Donna sounded bewildered. “What’s it look like?”

That’s a good question. Help?

The TARDIS gave her an image. “A circular panel on the wall. Big symbol on the front like a…a… a letter T with a horizontal line through. Or — Or two F’s back to back.”

“Oh.” That didn’t seem to help much. “Well, there’s a door.”

“Should be a switch by the side,” Rose told her gently.

“Yeah, there is. But it’s Sontaran shaped, you need three fingers.”

“You’ve got three fingers,” Rose reminded Donna patiently.

“Oh. Yeah.” A pause. “I’m through.”

Rose beamed. “Oh you are brilliant, you are.”

“Shut up.” She imagined Donna was rolling her eyes. “Right. T with a line through it.”

Rose saw Mace coming toward her. Damn it. “Got to go,” she murmured. “Keep the link open.”

She stood up, tucking her phone in her back pocket as Mace walked in. “Counter attack,” he announced. Jesus Christ was he an idiot?

“I said you don’t stand a chance. Did you not learn the first time?” Her stomach dropped at the thought of Ross. She couldn’t let anyone else die like that.

“Positions,” Mace said as if Rose hadn’t spoken. He tossed her a gas mask. “That means everyone.”

“You’re not going without me,” Martha announced as she walked in. Rose smiled thinly.

“Wouldn’t dream of it.”

They made their way outside, pulling the gas masks on as they went, and Mace led Rose over to a table of weapons. “Latest firing stock,” he announced as he held up one of the guns. “What do you think, Ms. Tyler?”

“Are you my mummy?” Rose asked, trying not to laugh. She couldn’t help herself.

“If you could concentrate.” Mace sounded less amused. “Bullets with rad-steel coating. No copper surface. Should overcome the cordolaine signal.”

“But the Sonatarans have got lasers.” How thick was the man? How had he been promoted at all?
“You can’t even see in this fog. The night vision doesn’t work.”

Thank you, Ms. Tyler,” Mace snapped. “Thank you for your lack of faith. But this time, I’m not listening.”

“Then you’re an idiot,” Rose snapped back even as he turned around, pulling his gas mask off to call to the troops.

“Attention, all troops. The Sontarans might think of us as primitive, as does every passing species with an ax to grind. They make a mockery of our weapons, our soldiers, our ideals. But no more. From this point on, it stops. From this point on, the people of Earth fight back, and we show them. We show the warriors of Sontar what the human race can do.” He raised a walkie talkie to speak into it. “Trap One to Hawk Major. Go, go, go.”

A sudden downdraft whipped through the area, and Rose looked up to see a ship bearing down on them. A horribly, horribly familiar ship.

“It’s working!” Mace sounded pleased. “The area’s clearing. Engines to maximum.”

“It’s the Valiant,” Rose whispered, her stomach dropping to her toes. That bloody ship.

“UNIT Carrier Ship Valiant reporting for duty, Ms. Tyler.” Mace was clearly quite proud of himself. “With engines strong enough to clear away the fog.”

“Brilliant enough.” Though Rose could have happily gone the rest of her life without seeing that god damn ship again. She pulled the mask off, looking over to see Mace watching her smugly.

“Getting a taste for it, Ms. Tyler?”

“Not even a little,” Rose informed him coldly. She wasn’t about to get into her issues with the Valiant right then, though.

“Valiant, fire at will,” Mace ordered into a walkie-talkie. Rose watched, cringing, as the Valiant fired, six laser beams coming down to destroy the factory.

After a moment she turned away, finding the phone in her pocket and putting it back to her ear. “Donna, hold on. I’m comin’.”

“Shouldn’t we follow the Colonel?” Martha asked curiously as she followed Rose into the factory. Rose scanned with the sonic screwdriver, shaking her head.

“Nah, you and me, Martha Jones. Just like old times.” She paused. “Ah. Alien technology, this way.”

They started off, heading down into the basement. “No Sontarans down here,” she murmured. “They can’t resist a battle. Here we go.”

She pushed open a pair of double doors, walking in. And there was Martha, submerged in liquid with a device attached to her head. Rose sighed.

“Oh Martha. I’m so sorry. I’m so, so sorry.”

There was a click, and she turned to see the clone pointing a gun at her head. She raised an eyebrow. “Am I supposed to be impressed?”

“Wish you carried a gun now?” The double taunted.
“Not at all.”

“I’ve been stopping the nuclear launch all this time.”

Rose had to resist the urge to roll her eyes. “Doing exactly what I wanted,” she said calmly. “I needed to stop the missiles just as much as the Sontarans. I’m not having Earth start an interstellar war. You’re a triple agent.”

The clone raised an eyebrow. “When did you know?” She demanded. Rose sighed. “About you? Please, I’ve known right from the beginning. Reduced iris constriction, slight thinning of the hair follicles on the left temple and honestly, you’re not that good at pretendin’ to be Martha. I know my best friend and no offense, but you’re not her. You’ve got all her memories though, don’t you? That’s why the Sontarans had to protect her, to keep you inside UNIT. Martha Jones is keepin’ you alive.”

And before the clone could stop her, Rose grabbed the device off of Martha’s head. Martha gasped as she shot up, and the clone collapsed. Rose kicked the gun away quickly before going back to her friend.

“It’s alright, I’ve got you.” She held Martha tight, ignoring the slime of the liquid. She didn’t care. “I’ve got you, you’re alright. I’ve got you.”

“There was a thing,” Martha gasped out, clearly only half with it. “This alien, with this head—”

Rose’s mobile went off and she jumped, grabbing it. “Really not a good time Donna — do you got it?”

“Yes.” Donna didn’t sound too happy herself. “Now hurry up.”

“Right. Take off the covering. All the blue switches inside, flick them like a fuse box, and that should get the teleport working.”

“Oh, my god,” she heard Martha breathe, and she turned to see her staring at herself on the floor. “That’s me.”

Rose moved to rest a hand on Martha’s shoulder, giving a reassuring squeeze. She found a pair of scrubs for her to change into and handed over her jacket to keep Martha warm before setting to work with the teleport. Martha dressed quickly before kneeling down beside the clone.

“Don’t touch me,” the second Martha snarled.

“It’s not my fault,” Martha murmured. “The Sontarans created you, but you had all my memories.”

“You’ve got a brother,” the clone gasped, “a sister, mother, and father.”

“If you don’t help me, they’re going to die.”

“You love them.”

Martha nodded urgently. “Yes. Remember that?”


The clone gave her a disgusted look. “She’s the enemy.”
“Then tell me,” Martha pushed gently. “It’s not just poison, what’s it for? Martha, please.”

The clone hesitated for a moment. “Caesofine concentrate. It’s one part of Bosteen, two parts Probic five.”

Rose blinked, putting it together slowly. “Clonefeed. It’s clonefeed!”

Martha looked back at her. “What’s clonefeed?”

“Like amniotic fluid for Sontarans,” Rose explained as fast as the TARDIS could tell her. “That’s why they’re not invading. They’re converting the atmosphere, changing the planet into a clone world. Earth becomes a great big hatchery. Because the Sontarans are clones, that’s how they reproduce. Give them a planet this big, they’ll create billions of new soldiers. The gas isn’t poison, it’s food.”

“My heart,” the clone gasped suddenly, and Rose refocused on her. Ah. Right. “It’s getting slower.”

Martha looked helpless. “There’s nothing I can do.”

“In your mind,” the clone rasped, “you’ve got so many plans. There’s so much that you want to do.”

“And I will,” Martha said with a nod. “Never do tomorrow what you can do today, my mum says, because…”

“Because you never know how long you’ve got.” The clone let out a long breath. “Martha Jones. All that life.”

Her eyes fluttered shut as she went boneless. Martha swallowed hard, taking her engagement ring back.

“Rose!” The blonde put the phone back to her ear. “Blue switches done, but they’ve found me.”

“Damn it, right, hang on.” She whirled around, zapping the teleport with the sonic screwdriver, and a moment later Donna appeared.

“Have I ever told you how much I hate you?” Donna gasped even as she flew at Rose, hugging her tight.

“I know, I know, hang on—” Rose muttered, trying to hug Donna and bring the TARDIS back at the same time. She could tell the moment the ship was back on Earth — the tension in her mind eased and she relaxed.

“Right,” she said as she pulled away from Donna. “Martha, you comin’?”

Martha looked down at her phone. “What about this nuclear launch thing?”

“Just keep pressin’ N. We want to keep those missiles on the ground.”

“There’s two of them,” Donna said in disbelief, finally seeing the clone.


“Hang on, what are you doing?” Donna demanded even as she and Martha joined Rose. “We’re not going back to that ship!”
“Of course not, but there’s more than one teleport on Earth right now. Nope, we’re going to—”

They teleported before she could finish, landing in the academy common room. “Rattigan
Academy.”

Her eyes narrowed when she saw Luke coming at them, pointing a gun.

“Don’t tell anyone what I did.” He was almost begging. “It wasn’t my fault, the Sonatarans lied to
me, they—”

In the blink of an eye Rose was out of the teleport, grabbing the gun from him and getting very close
to his face.

“Don’t you ever point a gun at me, or anyone else, again, got it?”

Martha and Donna both winced — they’d heard that darkness in Rose’s voice before. Luke stared at
her, wide-eyed, before nodding.

“Good.” Rose tossed the gun away and walked to the lab.

“She gets scary sometimes, doesn’t she?” Donna murmured. Martha nodded slowly.

“Yeah.”

By the time they followed Rose was she was hard at work. “This is why the Sontarans had to stop
the missiles,” she explained as she worked. “They were holding back. Because caesofine gas is
volatile, that’s why they had to use you to stop the nuclear attack. Ground to air engagement could
spark off the whole thing.”

“What, like setting fire to the atmosphere?” Martha questioned, and Rose nodded.

“Yeah. They need all the gas intact to breed their clone army. And all the time we had Luke here in
his dream factory. Planning a little trip, were we?”

“They promised me a new world.” His voice was small. Rose didn’t even spare him a glance.

“They were using you, Luke. They needed someone on Earth building their machines and getting
them out in the world and you were convenient. That’s all it is.”

She finished building and hurried outside with the others following her. “That’s London,” Donna
said quietly as they stood on the hillside, looking at what should have been the city — if it hadn’t
been covered in a blanket of gas. “You can’t even see it. My family’s in there.”

Rose knelt down with her device, fiddling with the dial. “If I can get this on the right setting…”

“Rose, hang on,” Martha said suddenly. “You said the atmosphere would ignite.”

Rose looked back at Martha, raising an eyebrow. “I did, didn’t I?”

And with that she pressed the button. An energy pulse zoomed up into the air, through the clouds,
and exploded. Rose held her breath as she watched the fire spread.

_Come on…_

She couldn’t help but let out a victorious cheer when the clouds burned off. “It worked!”
“She’s a genius,” Luke breathed.

“Just brilliant.”

My Wolf…

Rose sighed. I know.

“Not over yet,” she said as she collected her atmospheric converter and went back inside with the others following her.

“Right,” she sighed as she walked to the teleport. “So. I’ve got somethin’ I have to do now.”

“What’s that?” It was, understandably, Martha who questioned her, clearly suspicious.

“Oh, just a little thing.” Rose made sure the device was secure as she turned to look back at the others. “I…” She didn’t want to say it. “I’ll be back soon.”

“What are you doing?” Martha demanded. She knew Rose’s reckless streak better than anyone. She didn’t trust her. Rose sighed.

“Sontarans are never defeated. They’ll be getting ready for war. So…I’ve recaliberated this thing for Sontaran air. I’ll go up…”

“And ignite them,” Martha finished flatly. Donna made a noise.

“You’ll kill yourself!”

Rose sighed. This was exactly why she hadn’t wanted to tell them. “I have to go. All of you just…take care of yourselves, alright? Be good. Luke…do something clever.”

“Just send that thing up on its own,” Martha protested. “I don’t know. Put it on delay.”

Rose shook her head. “I can’t. I need to give them a chance.”

“Why?”

“Because it’s what the Doctor would do.”

And she teleported up.

She appeared on the Sontaran ship, squaring her shoulders. “Oh, excellent.” Stall sounded pleased.

“General Staal.” Rose’s voice carried. “You know what this is. But there’s one more option. You can go. Just leave. Sontaran High Command need never know what happened here.”

“Your stratagem would be wise if Sontarans feared death, but we do not. At arms.”

Rose took a deep breath as the guns were brought up to point at her. “I’ll do it, Staal. If it saves Earth, I’ll do it.”


You are not a warrior, my Wolf. The TARDIS sounded terrified.

No. I’m a defender.
“I am giving you the chance to leave,” Rose said calmly, trying to reason with them.

“And miss the glory of this moment?”

“All weapons targeting Earth, sir,” a voice called. “Firing in twenty—”

“I’m warning you,” Rose snapped.

“And I salute you. Take aim.”

The guns readied to fire. “Shoot me, I’m still going to press this,” Rose informed them coldly. “You’ll die, Staal.”

“Knowing that you die too.”

“Firing in fifteen!”

*My Wolf, please,* the TARDIS begged, and tears tugged at Rose’s eyes as she gripped the plunger.

*It’s what he would do.*

“Ten, nine, eight, seven…”

Everything went black for a moment…and suddenly Rose was stumbling out of Luke’s teleport on Earth. She looked around, wide-eyed and stunned.

What—

“You idiot!”

Rose was stunned, to say the least, when Martha was suddenly in front of her, shoving her back.

“What was the last thing I said to you?! The one thing I asked of you before I left? I told you to take care of yourself! I thought that implied don’t do anything to get yourself killed!”

Donna stood back, thoroughly impressed. She’d wanted to yell too, but Martha had it covered.

Rose felt utterly small as she shrunk back from Martha’s fury. After a moment the anger drained from Martha and she stepped forward, wrapping Rose in a tight hug. Another moment and Donna was there too, hugging them both.

* * * * *

Eventually they picked themselves up and went back to the factory to get the TARDIS. None of them bothered finding Mace — they just went to Donna’s.

While Donna was talking to her family, Martha went to find her room — right where she had left it with all her possessions — and change.

Rose finally ventured to break the ice when Martha returned.

“I’m sorry.”

Martha sighed, shaking her head. “I know you do what you think you have to, Rose. But sometimes what you think you have to do and what has to actually be done are two totally different things. Could you have found a way to stop the Plasmavore without letting her drink your blood?
Absolutely. Could you have found a way to rescue me on New Earth without jumping through miles and miles of car exhaust and fumes? Yes. Could you have found a way to take care of the Dalekanium in New York without electrocuting yourself? God yes. You jump in headfirst without thinking, and before I was there to catch you before you hit the concrete and right now Donna is here to stop you and today you just plain got lucky but what happens to you when you’re alone? Who’s going to save you from yourself when there’s nobody here?”

Rose didn’t have an answer for that. Thankfully she was spared by Donna’s return. “How were they?” Martha asked, turning to the redhead. She shrugged.

“Oh, same old stuff. They’re fine. So, you going to come with us? We’re not exactly short of space.”

Martha smiled a bit. “Oh, I have missed all this, but, you know. I’m good here, back at home. And I’m better for having been away. Besides, someone needs me. Never mind the universe, I’ve got a great big world of my own now.”

The world spun out under Rose’s feet, and for a moment it felt gravity had turned off — but she was just falling.

“Rose!”

Martha dove to grab her before her head connected with the console. “What’s going on?” Donna asked, panicked, as the TARDIS doors slammed shut and the time rotor activated, sending them all crashing the ground.

“Rose, what’s happening?” Martha demanded as she helped the blonde sit up. She felt strangely out of her body.

“I…don’t…” What’s happening? She asked the TARDIS desperately.

She was a bit stunned when she didn’t get an answer. Not even a hum.

“Where are we going?” Donna asked as she grabbed the railing to hold on tight. Rose dragged herself up, trying to pull the TARDIS back under control. But it was no good.

She couldn’t do a thing.
"What the hell’s it doing?" Donna demanded as Rose tried desperately to pull the TARDIS back under control. But it was no good.

"The controls aren’t workin’!"

The TARDIS bucked, sending Rose crashing to the ground. "Ow! Oh blimey," she groaned as she dragged herself up. Pain shot through her temples as something exploded in the console, sending sparks flying everywhere...

And then nothing.

"Oh god," Rose groaned, cradling her head as the pain echoed through it. A pair of hands rested on her shoulders, helping her up.

"It’s the TARDIS," Martha explained to Donna. "When something happens to the ship it effects Rose too.”

"M’alright.” Rose shook it off, pushing herself up with a deep breath and heading for the door. Donna and Martha exchanged looks before shaking their heads and following.

Rose made a face as she stepped out into what looked like a junkyard. "What’re we doin’ here, then?" She murmured, looking around.

“Oh, I love this bit,” Martha sighed as she and Donna stepped out as well.

“I thought you wanted to go home?” Donna asked, raising an eyebrow.

“I know, but all the same. It’s that feeling you get…”

“Like you’ve swallowed a hamster?”

“Don’t move!” They whirled to see three men with rifles bearing down on them. “Stay where you are! Drop your weapons!”


“Look at their hands,” one of the soldiers said. “They’re clean.”

The one who looked like the leader nodded. “Alright, process them. Her first.”

He nodded at Rose and the soldiers grabbed Rose, hauling her forward. “Oi, oi!” She yelped, struggling. “What’s wrong with clean hands?”
“What’s going on?” Martha demanded, following.

“Let her go!”

The soldiers pulled Rose to a machine, shoving her hand inside.

“What’s this, then?” She asked, bewildered, as something inside grabbed her hand. “What are you — aaahhh!”

She didn’t mean to scream but the feeling of a blade digging into her hand was enough to cause a bit of pain.

“What are you doing to her?” Donna demanded.

“Everyone gets processed.”

“I think it’s taking a tissue sample,” Rose forced out as pained tears filled her eyes. “Ow, ow, ow, ow, ow, ow, ow…what’s it for, though?”

She was released and stumbled back. Martha grabbed her injured hand to examine it. “Are you alright?”

“Ow, god what was that for?” Rose demanded of the men. Her answer came a moment later, however, when a nearby pair of glass and metal doors opened and a skinny, blonde haired woman stepped out, wearing combat boots and trousers and a khaki t-shirt.

“Arm yourself,” the leader said, handing her a rifle.

“Where did she come from?” Martha asked quietly. The TARDIS hummed in the back of Rose’s head for the first time since they’d landed here.

“From…From me. I think.”

“From you?” Donna repeated. “How? Who is she?”

“Ah…well…ah…I…I think…she’s my daughter.”

Martha’s and Donna’s mouths dropped, and the young blonde turned to focus on them, smiling.

“Hello, Mum.”

The TARDIS gave another small hum in the back of Rose’s mind — she almost sounded amused. At least one of them was.

“You primed to take orders?” The man asked the girl. “Ready to fight?”

She nodded. “Instant mental download of all strategic and military protocols, sir. Generation five thousand soldier primed and in peak physical health. Oh, I’m ready.”

She stepped up to take her place with the soldiers at the barricade, leaving three rather stunned women behind her.

“Did you say daughter?” Donna demanded. Rose nodded distantly.

“I…I think so, yeah. Technically, yeah.”
“Technically how?” Martha demanded, bewildered.

“Uh…P-Progenation. Reproduction from a single organism. Means one parent is biological mother and father. You take a sample of diploid cells, split them into haploids, then recombine them in a different arrangement and grow.” Rose eyed the blonde’s back for a long moment. “Very quickly, apparently.”

“Something’s coming,” the girl said suddenly, and they looked to see shadows on the tunnel wall. As soon as the figures came into view, they started firing.

“It’s the Hath!” The leader yelled as they returned fire.

“Get down!”

Rose, Martha, and Donna hit the floor, ducking their heads. “Bloody god damn guns,” Rose hissed, raising her head a bit.

“We have to blow the tunnel,” the leader said, looking back at them. “Get the detonator.”

“I’m not detonating anythin’,” Rose informed coolly. She saw one of the soldiers go down and scrambled to help him. The leader and the young blonde tried to hold off the Hath, but one got through and grabbed Martha.

“Martha!” Donna called. “Rose!”

Rose’s head snapped around to see Martha being dragged off. “No you don’t!” She scrambled up to hurry after them.

“Blow the thing!” She heard the leader call, and whirled back to see the girl holding the detonator. “Blow the thing!”

“No, don’t!” Rose shouted, but it was too late. The girl pressed the button, and the tunnel blew, the roof caving in. Rose stumbled back to avoid having a rock come down on her.

As the dust settled she whirled back to the young woman. “Why did you do that?!” She demanded, furious.

“They were trying to kill us,” the girl replied calmly.

“They’ve got my friend!”

“Collateral damage. At least you’ve still got her.” She pointed at Donna. “He lost both his men. I’d say you came out ahead.”

Thankfully Donna stepped in before Rose could lose it. “Her name’s Martha,” she informed the girl coolly. “And she’s not collateral damage, not for anyone. Have you got that, GI Jane?”

“I’m going to find her,” Rose said, turning away, only to find herself stopped by the leader.

“You’re going nowhere. You don’t make sense, you two. No guns, no marks, no fight in you. I’m taking you to General Cobb. Now, move.”

Rose squared her shoulders, eyes dark. “Who died and left you in charge? Who the hell do you think you are?”
“My name is Cline and yeah, I’m in charge.” He cocked his gun. “Now move.”

“You wanna stop me, you’ll have to shoot me.”

Donna grabbed Rose before she could move away. “Don’t you think this is one of those things that falls into the category of don’t get yourself killed?” She asked in a low voice, and Rose clenched her first for a moment before sighing.

“Fine. Lead the way.”

On the other side of the wall, Martha stirred with a groan, picking herself up. She blinked when she heard a bubbling sound and turned to see an injured Hath with her.

“Hold on, I’ve got you,” she said quickly, crawling over. “Is it your arm, yeah?”


The Hath nodded, showing it understood. Martha sighed. “Half fish, half human? How am I supposed to know?” She probed along the arm, finding what felt like the injured area. “Is that a shoulder? Feels like a shoulder. I think it’s dislocated.”

She looked up at the sound of footsteps and saw more Hath arriving, with guns. “I’m trying to help him,” she said quickly, loudly. “I am a doctor and he is my patient, and I’m not leaving him.” She turned her attention back to the Hath on the ground “Now, this is going to hurt. One, two, three.”

She jerked the shoulder back into place, and the other Hath cocked their weapons, but the one she’d been helping stopped them quickly. After a moment they all relaxed. Martha took a deep breath, pushing herself up.

“Now, then. I’m Doctor Martha Jones. Who the hell are you?”

* * * * *

Donna and Rose walked in sullen silence for a bit, both rather unhappy about what had happened. It was Donna who finally extended an olive branch to…Rose’s daughter.

Blimey that was weird.

“I’m Donna,” she said quietly. “What’s your name?”

The girl shrugged. “Don’t know. It’s not been assigned.”

Well that was weird. “Well, if you don’t know what, what do you know?”

“How to fight.”

That…was a little sad, Donna thought. “Nothing else?”

“The machine must embed military history and tactics, but no name,” Rose spoke up distantly. “She’s a generated anomaly.”

Donna tilted her head, thinking about it. “Generated anomaly. Generated. Well, what about that? Jenny.”
“Jenny,” the girl repeated, and nodded. “Yeah, I like that. Jenny.”

“What do you think, Mum?” Donna asked with a grin, and Rose groaned.

“God I’m a single mother. It’s all my mum’s worse nightmares come true.”

That caught Donna off-guard a bit. Rose never talked about her mother. “Well I’m sure she’d be happy for grandchildren.”

Rose snorted at that. More likely Jackie’s reaction would be *I’m thirty-nine I’m too young to be a bloody grandmother.*

“You have a mum too?” Jenny asked, curious. “Were you created like me?”

Rose shook her head. “No I was…born. My mum was pregnant with me and everythin’.”

“What does pregnant mean?”

Donna choked as she tried not to laugh. “Er…I’ll explain later,” Rose said with a sigh. Thankfully Jenny was distracted by their arrival at the campsite, which seemed to be in a great big domed room.

“So where are we, anyways? What planet is this?”

“Messaline,” Cline replied. “Well, what’s left of it.”

“Six six three seventy five deceased,” a computer announced overhead. “*Generation six six seven one, extinct. Generation six six seven two, forty six deceased. Generation six six eight zero, fourteen deceased. Generation six—*”

“But this is a theatre,” Donna murmured to Rose. She shrugged.

“Maybe they’re doing Ms. Saigon.”

“It’s like a town or a city underground,” Donna said as she looked around. “But why?”

Rose didn’t have a chance to answer before they were approached by a man with a neatly trimmed beard.

“General Cobb, I presume,” Rose said with a sigh, and he nodded.

“Found in the western tunnels, I’m told, with no marks.” He looked them over with a frown. “There was an outbreak of pacifism in the easter zone three generations back, before we lost contact.” Rose had to resist the urge to roll her eyes. He made pacifism sound like a disease. “Is that where you came from?”

“Eastern Zone, that’s us, yeah,” Rose said quickly. “Yeah. I’m Rose, and this is Donna, and that’s Jenny.”

“Don’t think you can infect us with your peacemaking,” Cobb said coldly. Dear god what was wrong with peace? “We’re committed to the fight, to the very end.”

“I would never dream of infectin’ another person with, er, pacifism.” Again, the urge to roll her eyes was strong. “I can’t stay, anyway. I’ve got to go and find my friend.”

“That’s not possible,” Cobb informed her. “All movement is regulated. We’re at war.”

“Yeah, I noticed.” It was Rose’s turn to be cold. “With the Hath. But tell me, because we got a bit
out of circulation, eastern zone and all that. So exactly what are the Hath?"

They started walking as Cobb explained. “Back at the dawn of this planet, these ancient halls were
carved from the earth. Our ancestors dreamed of a new beginning. A colony where human and Hath
would work and live together.”

Rose nodded slowly. “So what happened?"

“The dream died. Broken, along with Hath promises. They wanted it all for themselves. But those
early pioneers, they fought back. They used the machines to produce soldiers instead of colonists,
and began this battle for survival.”

The passed a window, and Donna turned to look out, making a face when she saw nothing but packed dirt and rocks. “There’s nothing but earth outside, why’s that? Why build everything underground?”

“For protection,” Cobb said simply.

“Well then why build windows in the first?” It was a reasonable question. She saw when she saw a plaque with the numbers 601707 on a plaque. “And what does this mean?”

“The rites and symbols of our ancestors. The meaning’s lost in time.”

“How long’s this war gone on for?” Rose asked. It all seemed quite of pointless she had to say.

“Longer than anyone can remember,” Cobb replied. “Countless generations marked only by the dead.”

“What, fighting all the time?” Donna asked in disbelief. “Why?”

“Because we must.” It was, surprisingly, Jenny who answered. “Every child of the machine is born with this knowledge. It’s our inheritance. It’s all we know. How to fight, and how to die.”

Rose frowned at her before taking a step closer to the girl (almost protectively, Donna noted). She didn’t like that at all.

They approached a holographic map, and Rose stepped closer to examine it. “Does this show the entire city, including the Hath zones?” She asked Cobb, and he nodded.

“Yes. Why?”

“Because it can help me find Martha.”

“We’ve more important things to do.” Rose bristled at that. “The progenation machines are powered down for the night shift, but soon as they’re active, we could breed a whole platoon from you two.”

“Listen close, General,” Rose said angrily. She was so sick and tired of military people trying to tell her what to do. “Right now nothing is more important finding my friend? You got that? And I don’t need your permission to do it.”

“And I’m not having sons and daughters by some great big flipping machine,” Donna added. “Sorry, no offense,” she added to Jenny, “But you’re not…well, I mean. You’re not real.”

Jenny scowled at that. “How am I not real? I have a body, I have a mind, I have independent thought. What makes you better than me?”
“Well said, soldier,” Cobb said proudly, and Rose shot him a look. Something about him rubbed her the wrong way. “We need more like you, if ever we’re to find the Source.”

That peaked Rose’s interest a bit. “Alright, what’s this Source then?”

“The Breath of Life.”

*Oh bloody hell it’s easier to get answers out of you*, Rose grumbled at the TARDIS, who hummed back indignantly. She had been so quiet this entire time. It worried Rose a bit. “And that would be…?”

“In the beginning, the great one breathed life into the universe. And then she looked at what she’d done, and she sighed.”

“She,” Jenny repeated with a smile. “I like that.”

Rose was much less impressed. “Right. So it’s a creation myth.”

“It’s not myth,” Cobb replied, indignant. “It’s real. That sigh. From the beginning of time it was caught and kept as the Source. It was lost when the war started. But it’s here, somewhere. Whoever holds the Source controls the destiny of the planet.”

Rose shook her head, tapping something on the map, and it buzzed. “Ah! I thought so. There’s a suppressed layer of information in this map. If I can just…”

She sonicked the map, and poor tunnels and chambers popped up. “What is it?” Donna asked curiously. “What’s it mean?”

Rose leaned in closer. “See? A whole complex of tunnels hidden from sight.”

“That must be the lost temple,” Cobb spoke up. “The Source will be inside. You’ve shown us the way. And look, we’re closer than the Hath. It’s ours.”

He turned to talk to Cline. “Tell them to prepare to move out. We’ll progenate new soldiers on the morning shift, then we march. Once we reach the Temple, peace will be restored at long last.”

God this was madness. “Call me old-fashioned,” Rose said, “but if you really wanted peace, couldn’t you just stop fighting?”

“Only when we have the Source,” Cobb said, as if it were obvious. “It’ll give us the power to erase every stinking Hath from the face of this planet.”

What?! “What?” Rose balked. “A second ago it was peace in our time. Now you’re talkin’ about genocide!”

“For us, that means the same thing.”

Rose stepped in front of Cobb to stop him from moving, eyes dark. “Then you need to get yourself a better dictionary. When you do, look up genocide. You’ll see a little picture of me there, and the caption will read *over my dead body*.”

“And you’re the one who showed us the path to victory,” Cobb replied calmly. “But you can consider the irony from your prison cell. Cline, at arms.”

Cline brought his gun up and Cobb did the same, pointing it at them. Jenny watched, torn.
“Oi, oi, oi,” Donna grumbled as she was pushed along. “Alright. Cool the beans Rambo.”

“Take them,” Cobb ordered. “I won’t have them spreading treason. And if you try anything, Rose, I’ll see to it that your friends die first.”

“Come on,” Cline said, nudging them along. “This way.”

Rose wouldn’t be quite as threatened by the gun, however — she stopped and turned back to Cobb. “I’m going to stop you, Cobb. You need to know that.”

Cobb didn’t seem as threatened. “I have an army and the Breath of God on my side. What’ll you have?”

“Common sense.”

Definitely not threatening. “Lock them up and guard them.”

Cline nodded. “What about the new soldier?”

“Can’t trust her,” Cobb said. “She’s from the pacifist stock. Take them all.”

Jenny was grabbed before she could fight back and they were all pushed along.

Cline brought them downstairs by gunpoint, shoving into a large cage numbered 60120716. “More numbers,” Donna murmured as she eyed them. “They’ve got to mean something.

“Makes as much sense as the Breath of Life story.” There was just the slightest sneer on Rose’s voice.

“You mean that’s not true?” Jenny sounded shocked. Donna shook her head.

“No, it’s a myth. Isn’t it, Rose?”

“Yes,” Rose said firmly. “But there could still be something real in that temple. Something that’s become a myth. A piece of technology, a weapon.”

“So the Source could be a weapon, and we’ve just given directions to Captain Nutjob?” Donna asked.

“Oh, yes.”

“Not good, is it?”

“Oh no.” Rose ran a hand through her hair. “That’s why we need to get out of here, find Martha and stop Cobb from slaughtering the Hath.” She paused when she saw Jenny watching her intently. “What — what are you — what are you — what are you staring at?” She stuttered, a bit bewildered.

“You keep insisting you’re not a soldier, but look at you, drawing up strategies like a proper general.”

Rose’s stomach dropped at that. “No, I’m not.” Her voice was a bit cold. “I’m trying to stop the fightin’.”

“Isn’t every soldier?”
Rose had her doubts about that in this place. “I don’t have time for a philosophy discussion,” she informed Jenny, pulling her mobile out of her pocket.

“And now you’ve got a weapon.”

“It’s not a weapon, it’s a phone.”

“But you’re using it to fight back,” Jenny argued. “I’m going to learn so much from you. You’re such a soldier.”

“I’m not,” Rose snapped. “I’m not a bloody soldier, okay? I don’t want to fight, I don’t want any part of this war. I just want to stop it and find my friend and get out of here. Alright?”

She’d feel bad about snapping later but right then she was on edge. All of this bothered her. She found Martha’s number and hit call.

It took Martha moment to pick up. “Rose?”

Rose breathed a sigh of relief. “Martha! Thank god.”

“Oh I am so glad to hear your voice,” Martha said happily. “Are you alright?”

“Yeah, I’m with Donna and, er, Jenny. We’re fine. What about you?”

“Jenny?”

“Machine, blonde, daughter.”

“Oh right.”

“Where are you?”

“I’m in the Hath camp,” Martha explained. “I’m okay, but something’s going on. The Hath are all marching off to some place that’s appeared on this map thing.”

Rose could’ve smacked herself. “Yeah, that was me. If both armies are heading that way, there’s going to be a blood bath.”

“What do you want me to do?”

“Just stay where you are,” Rose said firmly. “If you’re safe there, don’t move, do you hear?”

“But I can—”

The call cut out suddenly, and Rose pulled the phone back to look at it. “Damn it.” She hit call again, and it went straight to voice-mail. “Her battery must have died. Bloody wonderful.”

“Too war!” They heard soldiers shouting.

“They’re getting ready to move out,” Rose said, turning to look out the cell. “We have to get past that guard.”

“I can deal with him,” Jenny volunteered, and Rose shot her a surprised look.

“You want to help us?”

“Of course I do.” She said it so matter of factly, like she was surprised Rose had to ask.
“But why? They’re your people.”

“And she’s your daughter, idiot,” Donna spoke up, giving Rose a bit of a nudge. Rose watched Jenny for a long moment before nodding.

“Alright. Go for it.”

Jenny smiled as she bounced over to the bars to talk to Cline, who was guarding them. “Hey,” she said cheerfully.

“I’m not supposed to talk to you,” Cline informed her. “I’m on duty.”

“I know,” Jenny sooth. “Guarding me. So does that mean I’m dangerous, or that I need protecting?”

“Protecting from what?” Cline asked, confused.

“Oh, I don’t know. Men like you?”

And with that Jenny reached out, grabbing his face through the bars and kissing him good and thoroughly. While he was distracted, she grabbed his gun and pointed it at him.

“Keep quiet and open the door.”

Donna raised an eyebrow, shooting Rose a look. “Where do you think she learned that?”
The Tyler Girls Part Two

Chapter Summary

(Part 2/3)

They crept along the hallway, stopping at the top of the stairs and peeking around to look down. There was a guard waiting there.

“That’s the way out,” Rose murmured, and Jenny raised the pistol. “Don’t you dare,” Rose hissed, shoving it down again.

“Let me distract this one,” Donna volunteered. “I have picked up a few womanly wiles over the years.”

“Let’s save those for an emergency,” Rose suggested, rummaging through her pocket to dig out a small clockwork mouse toy. She wound it up and set it off, letting it run in front of the guard. When he bent down to pick it up, Jenny darted forward, hitting him and knocking him out.

“I was trying to distract him,” Rose grumbled, and Jenny looked back with a bright grin.

“Well it worked, didn’t it?”

Rose sighed, stepping forward and kneeling down next to the unconscious guard, digging through his pockets. “They must have a new copy of the map…ah!” She pulled it out, smiling a bit. “Right, here we are. Come on, then.”

They started walking, Rose half-focused on the map, half-focused on something else. Are you there? She asked quietly, poking the glowing part of her mind where she knew the TARDIS normally resided. The ship had been so quiet — it was so disconcerting. Even the glow, which Rose could sometimes see in her mind’s eye, seemed to be dimmer than usual.

It was frightening.

The TARDIS just hummed back in return. Rose scowled — she didn’t like this.

“Everything alright?” Donna asked, catching the look on Rose’s face.

“Yeah…oh!” She stopped, looking around. “This is it. The hidden tunnel. There must be a control panel.”

Donna sighed — god Rose always did that — and cast a look around, frowning when she saw another plaque of numbers. 60120714. “It’s another one of those numbers. They’re everywhere.”

“The original builders must have left them,” Rose said distantly, finally zeroing in on the control panel. “Some old cataloging system.”

“You got a pen?” Donna asked. “Bit of paper? Because, do you see, the numbers are counting down. This one ends in one four. The prison cell said one six.”
Jenny watched as Rose dug a pen and a piece of paper out of her pocket, handing it to Donna, and she started scribbling the numbers down. “Always thinking, both of you,” she said, a bit of admiration in her tone. “Who are you people?”

“Just travelers,” Rose murmured, working away at the panel. The TARDIS wasn’t talking but she was still helping, guiding Rose’s movements.

“Travelers who know how to be soldiers?”

“We’re not soldiers,” Rose reminded her. “We’re travelers. That’s it. We travel through time and space.”

“She saves planets,” Donna jumped in. “Rescues civilizations, defeats terrible creatures. And runs a lot.” She paused for a moment. “Seriously, there’s an outrageous amount of running involved.”

“I like running,” Jenny piped up. A small smile pulled at Rose’s lips.

“Of course you do. You’re my daughter.”

The door opened and Rose took a step back, quite proud. “Got it!”

“Squad five, with me!” They heard Cobb call, and Rose winced.

“How…what were you sayin’ about runnin’?”

And with that they took off down the hall, turning corners, their feet slapping against the floor.

“Whoa!” Rose called as they turned another corner — and found themselves face to face with a series of criss-crossing red laser beams.

Oh boy.

“That’s not mood lighting, is it?” Donna asked. Rose found the toy mouse in her pocket again and tossed it into the lasers. It disintegrated as soon as it touched a beam.

“No, I don’t think so,” Donna answered her own question.

“Arming device.” Rose found a blue box on the wall nearby and set to work quickly. Donna followed, eying another set of numbers on the wall. 60120713.

“There’s more of these,” Donna said as she scribbled the numbers down. “Always eight numbers, counting down the closer we get.”

“Right, here we go,” Rose murmured as she worked, poking at the box with the sonic screwdriver.

“You’d better be quick.”

Like Rose needed the reminder. She also didn’t need Cobb’s voice calling, “Corridor,” echoing ever closer to them.

Jenny looked down at the gun still clutched in her hands. After a moment she started toward the voices. “Where are you goin’?” Rose demanded, distracted.

“I can hold them up.”

“Not like that.” Rose turned away from the work completely, grabbing Jenny’s arm to hold her back.
“There’s been enough death today, Jenny. There’s been enough loss. Please.”

“But it’s them or us,” Jenny insisted, her eyes flashing with what could only be called the Tyler stubbornness.

“This isn’t the way,” Rose informed her, holding her arm tight. “Killing is never the way. And if you go down this road, it’s not one you’re going to come back from.”

Jenny looked conflicted — but still determined. “I’m trying to save your life.”

“I’m not askin’ you to kill for me.”

The voices came closer, and Jenny relaxed a bit. “You’re not asking me to do anything.” And she pulled her arm out of Rose’s grip and kissing the older blonde’s cheek. “I’m sorry, Mum.”

And with that she took off around the corner. “Jenny!”

“Rose, you gotta get these down,” Donna said quietly. The sooner she took out the lasers, the sooner they could run.

Rose made a face as she got back to work.

Jenny hurried around the corner, readying the machine gun as the soldiers approached.

“There she is!” One of the soldiers hollered. “At arms.” Jenny raised the gun, preparing…

And her finger hesitated on the trigger.

“Fire!”

As soon as the gunshots rang out she ducked back behind the wall, breathing hard. She couldn’t fire. She couldn’t stand the thought of going back and Rose being disappointed in her.

She couldn’t.


“That’s it!” Donna said happily as the lasers finally went out.

“Jenny, leave it!” Rose called, pushing Donna down the hall. “Let’s go!”

Jenny closed her eyes for a deep moment before swinging back around, firing at a pipe on the ceiling. Smoke billowed down on the soldiers, distracting them and giving Jenny a chance to run, and she took off.

Rose and Donna were at the other end of the hall. “Come on, come on,” Rose breathed, bouncing on the balls of her feet. Jenny made it halfway down before the lasers snapped back on. She gasped, skidding to a halt.

“No, no, no, no, no, no!” Rose cried. “The circuit’s looped back.”

“Zap it back again,” Donna insisted. Rose shook her head.

“The controls are back there.”
Footsteps reached Jenny’s ears and she whirled around. “They’re coming.”

Rose ran a hand through her hair. Help, help, help, help… But there was nothing. She knew there was nothing. There was no way to fix this. “I can’t…”

“It’s okay,” Jenny assured her with a small smile. “I’ll have to manage on my own. Watch and learn, Mum.”

And with that she tossed the weapon away, jumping and somersaulting her way through the lasers. Rose grinned as she watched.

“No way,” Donna breathed as Jenny landed in front of them, beaming. “But that was impossible.”

“Not impossible,” Rose disagreed. “Just a bit unlikely.” She pulled Jenny into a tight hug. “Brilliant! You were absolutely brilliant.”

Jenny hugged Rose for a moment before pulling back to say, “I didn’t kill General Cobb. I could have killed him, but I didn’t. I found another way, just like you said.”

Pride unlike anything she’d ever felt welled in Rose. She didn’t have time to comment, however, before Cobb and his soldiers rounded the corner on the other side of the lasers.

“Go,” Rose said firmly. Jenny hesitated, but Donna grabbed her hand, dragging her away.

“At arms,” Cobb called. Rose turned to face them, standing her ground.

“I warned you, Cobb,” she called, her voice dark. “If the Source is a weapon, I’m going to make sure you never use it.”

“One of us is going to die today,” Cobb informed her. “And it won’t be me.”

The soldiers opened fire, and Rose took off. Donna and Jenny were waiting at the end of the hall for her. As soon as she caught up Jenny threw her arms around her, hugging her tight. Rose kept an arm around her shoulders as they started down the hall again.

“So you travel together?” Jenny asked curiously, looking between Rose and Donna. “Are you together?”

Rose laughed as Donna went-wide eyed. “No way. Blondes aren’t my thing.”


“And what’s it like, traveling?” She was so curious.

“Oh, never a dull moment,” Donna sighed. “It can be terrifying, brilliant and funny, sometimes all at the same time. I’ve seen some amazing things though. Whole new worlds.”

Jenny sighed wistfully. “Oh, I’d love to see new worlds.”

“You act like you’re never going to,” Rose said, raising an eyebrow. It took Jenny a moment to connect what Rose was saying.

“You mean I can come with you?”

“Of course, silly.” Rose gave her a tight squeeze. “Can’t very well leave you here, can I?”
“Oh, thank you thank you thank you!” Jenny said happily, throwing her arms around Rose again. “Come on, let’s get a move on.”

“Careful,” Rose called as Jenny hurried ahead. “There might be traps.”

“Kids,” Donna said with a small smile, “They never listen, do they?” Rose blew out a long breath, her heart pounding in her chest. “What?” Donna knew that look on Rose’s face. She had seen it so many times right when they’d met. The clear, screaming panic of I have no idea what I’m doing. “What’s wrong?”

Rose shook her head. She felt a bit dizzy for some reason. Why was she dizzy? “Rose, breathe,” Donna said firmly. Oh, that could’ve had something to do with it. Rose sucked in another breath. “Talk to me. What’s going on?”

“Just…” She shook her head faintly. “This is a lot.” She leaned rather heavily against the wall, closing her eyes for a moment.

“At least you don’t have to raise her,” Donna pointed out, trying to be reassuring. Rose shook her head.

“I haven’t had a family in a long time,” she said quietly, trying to breathe deep. Sure, she’d had people — Martha and Sarah Jane— but she was always highly aware of how she did not belong in their world. And sure she had Donna now…but Donna would leave eventually. For her own safety, she’d have to. And Rose didn’t blame her at all.

With Jenny, though…Jenny could be family. Real family. Jenny could be permanent. Until she died, at least.

And that scared Rose more than anything.

“You’re thinking too much, Blondie,” Donna informed her, squeezing her shoulder tight. “Take a step back for a moment. Stop worrying about the future. Think about right now. Think about, for once, what you want. What do you want, Rose?”

Before she could answer, gunfire rang through the air, and Jenny rounded the corner again. “They’ve blasted through the beams,” she reported. “Time to run again. Love the running. Yeah?”

Rose grinned despite herself. “Love the running. Let’s go!”

They took off — only to find themselves at a dead end. “We’re trapped,” Donna groaned. This was not where she wanted to die.

“Can’t be,” Rose disagreed. “This must be the Temple. This is a door.”

Donna caught sight of another set of numbers. 60120712. “And again. We’re down to two now…”

Rose wasn’t paying attention — she was focused on the door she’d found, trying to get it open. “I can hear them,” Jenny reported as the soldiers got closer.

“Nearly done…”

“These can’t be a cataloging system.” Donna was still focused on the numbers.

“They’re getting closer,” Jenny insisted, peeking around the corner.
“Get over here,” Rose said. She didn’t want Jenny that close to them.

“They’re too similar. Too familiar…”

“Oh!” Rose finally got the door open. “Come on, both of you, in.”

They hurried inside. Jenny closed the door, and Rose locked it. “Oh, that was close,” Jenny murmured. Rose grinned.

“No fun otherwise.”

Donna turned in place, looking around. “It’s not what I’d call a temple.”

“It looks more like…”

“Fusion drive transport,” Rose finished Jenny’s sentence. “It’s a spaceship.”

“What, the original one?” Donna asked. “The one the first colonists arrived in?”

“Well, it could be,” Rose said doubtfully. “But the power cells would have run down after all that time. This one’s still powered up and functioning. Come on.”

They found a flight of stairs, pausing when they saw someone cutting through another door. “It’s the Hath,” Jenny breathed. “That door’s not going to last much longer. And if General Cob gets through down there, war’s going to break out.”

“Not if I can help it,” Rose muttered, moving to a computer. “Look, ship log.”

Rose opened it and started reading. “First wave of Human/Hath co-colonization of planet Messaline…”

Her eyes skimmed the screen, taking the words in. “So it is the original ship,” Jenny concluded.

“What happened?” Donna asked curiously.

“Phase one, construction,” Rose reported. “They used robot drones to build the city.”

“But does it mention the war?” Donna prompted, and Rose scrolled.

“Final entry…mission commander dead. Still no agreement on who should assume leadership. Hath and humans have divided into factions.” She let out a long breath. That must be it. A power vacuum. The crew divided into two factions and turned on each other. Start using the progenation machines, suddenly you’ve got two armies fighting a never-ending war.”

“Two armies who are now both outside,” Jenny pointed out. Donna looked around, catching sight of a screen that showed the whole planet — and a digital display above it, flashing the numbers 60120724.

“It’s like the numbers in the tunnels,” Rose said as she looked over. Donna shook her head.

“No, no, no, no. But listen, I spent six months working as a temp in Hounslow Library, and I mastered the Dewey Decimal System in two days flat. I’m good with numbers. It’s staring us in the face.”

“What is?” Jenny asked curiously.
“It’s the date. Assuming the first two numbers are some big old space date, then you’ve got year, month, day. It’s the other way round, like it is in America—”

“Oh!” Rose exclaimed as it finally settled in. “It’s the new Byzantine Calendar!”

“The codes are completion dates for each section,” Donna continued. “They finish it, they stamp the date on. So the numbers aren’t counting down, they’re going out from here, day by day, as the city got built.”

“Oh you’re brilliant,” Rose said happily. Donna shook her head again.

“Yeah. But you’re still not getting it. The first number I saw back there, was sixty twelve oh seven seventeen. Well, look at the date today.”

Rose looked back, her heart sinking as realization settled in. “Oh seven twenty four. No…”

“What does it mean?” Jenny asked, frustrated. She didn’t get it.

“Seven days,” Rose said quietly.

“That’s it,” Donna agreed. “Seven days.”

“Just seven days.”

“What do you mean, seven days?” Jenny prompted, looking between them.

“Seven days since war broke out,” Rose finally explained.

“This war started seven days ago.” Donna sounded disgusted. “Just a week. A week!”

Jenny looked shell-shocked. “They said years.”

“No, they said generations,” Donna corrected. “And if they’re all like you, and they’re products of those machines…”

“They could have twenty generations in a day,” Rose finished the sentence. “Each generation gets killed in the war, passes on the legend. Oh Donna, you’re a genius.”

“But all the buildings,” Jenny protested, clearly in denial, “the encampments. They’re in ruins.”

“No, they’re not ruined,” Rose disagreed. “They’re just empty. Waiting to be populated. Oh, they’ve mythologized their entire history. The Source must be part of that too. Come on.”

They started along, Jenny still processing this information. They turned a corner — and found a rather dirty young woman waiting for them.

“Martha!” Rose said happily, throwing her arms around the woman and pulling her into a tight hug that Martha eagerly returned.

“Oh am I happy to see you.” Martha grinned at Donna over Rose’s shoulder. “Hey Donna.”

“What happened to you?” Donna asked as Rose and Martha pulled apart. “You’re filthy.”

“Yeah, I uh…took the the surface route.”

“Positions,” they heard Cobb called. Rose scowled.
“That’s the General. We haven’t got much time.”

“We don’t even know what we’re looking for,” Donna pointed out. Martha sniffed the air, making a face.

“Is it just me, or can you smell flowers?”

Rose paused, sniffing at the air as well. “Yes. Bougainvillea. I say we follow our noses.”

“Squads seven to ten, advance,” they heard Cobb call as they hurried away. “With me.”

A little bit ahead they found a large room filled with pants. They walked in, looking around in surprise.

“Oh yes,” Rose breathed. “Yes. Isn’t this a brilliant?”

“There was a glowing globe on a pedestal in the middle of the room, wires running to it. A control panel and a screen were nearby.

“Is that the Source?” Donna asked as they approached.

“It’s beautiful,” Jenny said quietly.

It was Martha who asked the question. “What is it?”

Rose leaned in, frowning. “Terraforming. It’s a third generation terraforming device.”

“So why are we suddenly in Kew Gardens?” Donna asked with a frown.

“Because that’s what it does,” Rose explained. “All this, only bigger. Much bigger. It’s in a transit state. Producing all this must help keep it stable before they finally—”

She cut off as the two armies — humans and Hath — ran in from opposite sides.

“Stop!” She yelled, holding her hands up. “Hold your fire!”

“What is this,” Cobb demanded, “some kind of trap?”

“You said you wanted this war over,” Rose reminded him.

“I want this war won.”

“You can’t win,” Rose said. “No one can. You don’t even know why you’re here. Your whole history, it’s just Chinese whispers, getting more distorted as it’s passed on. This is the Source. This is what you’re fighting over. A device to rejuvenate a planet’s ecosystem. It’s nothing mystical. It’s from a laboratory, not some creator. It’s a bubble of gases. A cocktail of stuff for accelerated evolution. Methane, hydrogen, ammonia, amino acids, proteins, nucleic acids. It’s used to make barren planets habitable. Look around you. It’s not for killing, it’s bringing life. If you allow it, it can lift you out of these dark tunnels and into the bright, bright sunlight. No more fighting, no more killing.”

She turned, grabbing the globe and holding it over her head. “I declare this war to be over.”

And with that she smashed it onto the ground, releasing the gasses and energy. Everyone watched in awe as the smoke rose into the air, and after a moment they all put their weapons down.
Most of them, at least.

“What’s happening?” Jenny asked, looking at Rose, who was beaming brightly.

“The gases will escape and trigger the terraforming process.”

“What does that mean?”

“It means a new world.”

She looked so happy. Jenny smiled in return — until she looked past Rose and saw Cobb pointing his gun at her.

“No!”

The next few moments passed in a blur — Rose heard a gunshot, felt herself being pushed…and when she looked around Jenny was stumbling back, clutching her chest.

“Jenny!”

She caught the girl as her knees gave out, lowering her to the ground and cradling her gently. “No, no, no, no, no,” she begged, seeing the bullet hole in Jenny’s chest, seeing the blood. “No, Jenny, talk to me. Please, Jenny.”

Donna and Martha were horrified as they knelt down beside Rose. “Is she going to be okay?” Donna asked in a hush voice. Martha shook her head. Not with that wound she wasn’t. Even if medical attention was possible…

“A new world,” Jenny breathed in a pained whisper, her eyes still bright despite everything. “It’s beautiful.”

“Jenny, you need to be strong now,” Rose told her, tears burning in her eyes. “You need to be strong, and hold on, okay? We’ve got things to do. I’ve got so many places to show you. We’ll go wherever you want. Anywhere you want. Just name it.”

“That sounds good,” Jenny said quietly, her eyes fluttering shut.

“No, no! Look at me, Jenny, look at me please,” Rose begged. “You’re my daughter, we’ve got so much ahead of us. You’re going to be amazing. Do you hear me, Jenny?”

It was no good, though. Jenny let out one last, soft, stuttering breath…and she was gone. A broken sob slipped off Rose’s lips as she clutched the girl, face pressed into the top of her head.

She was gone.

Rose held Jenny for another moment before setting her down gently. She wiped her eyes, looking around to see that Cline and another soldier had wrestled Cobb down, forcing him to kneel on the ground…with his pistol abandoned in front of him. Rose’s expression turned hard, and before Martha or Donna could stop her she few up, grabbing the pistol and jamming it right against Cobb’s forehead.

“Rose, stop!” Donna protested. She knew, no matter how angry the woman was now, she would regret shooting Cobb later.

“Why should I?” Rose’s voice was dark, unlike anything Donna or Martha had heard before. It was frightening. “He had his chance. He blew it. He only has himself to blame.”
Oh, that was unsettling, Donna thought, flashing back to under the Thames. Rose had said the same thing about the Racnoss.

“You’re not him, Rose,” Martha said quietly, taking a step forward. “You’re better than that. You’re better than this. You know you are.” No reaction. Martha hesitated for a moment before saying, “What would the Doctor do?”

*That* finally got Rose to hesitate. After a minute she took a step back, putting the safety on the pistol and kneeling down to look Cobb in the eye, her expression still dark.

“I never would. Have you got that? I never would. When you start this new world, this world of Human and Hath, remember that. Make the foundation of this society as someone who *never would*.

She tossed the pistol away, her stomach dropping when she turned and saw Jenny laying on the ground.

Another one lost.

* * * * *

They moved Jenny’s body to a place to rest, setting her down where the sunlight could stream in, lighting up her face.

“It’s happening,” Martha said quietly, her arm around Rose’s shoulder as the woman cried. “The terraforming.”

“Build a city,” Donna said, “nice and safe underground, strip away the top soil and there it is. And what about Jenny?”

“Let us give her a proper ceremony,” Cline said. “I think it’d help us. Please.”

It took a moment for Rose to nod, sucking in a shaky breath. It made sense to let Jenny rest here.

Oh god that hurt.

* * * * *

“Jenny was the reason the TARDIS brought us here,” Rose said quietly as they walked back into the ship. “We just got here too soon, which then created Jenny in the first place. Paradox. An endless paradox.” She looked back at Donna and Martha, her eyes red. “Time to go home?”

Martha nodded. “Yeah. Home.”

Rose sent them off. The trip home was much quieter than the one to Messaline had been.

“Are you sure about this?” Donna asked as she and Martha stepped out of the TARDIS.

“Yeah, positive.” Martha sighed. “I cant do this anymore. You’ll be the same one day.”

“Not me,” Donna said firmly. “Never. How could I ever go back to normal life after seeing all this? I’m going to travel with that woman forever.”

Martha smiled, pulling Donna into a hug. “Good luck.”

“And you.”
Rose finally stepped out of the TARDIS, walking along with Martha. Donna stayed back to let them say their goodbyes.

For a moment they walked in silence. “I don’t try to die,” Rose said finally. Martha sighed, looping her arm through Rose’s.

“I know you don’t, Rose. But honestly? That makes it scarier. You don’t try to die, but you still almost kill yourself on a daily basis. And the worst part is you don’t see it. You think your life is so disposable, you don’t hesitate to throw it away. I thought maybe…if you had something, someone… if you had Jenny, maybe you’d stop seeing yourself that way.”

Rose smiled a bit, stopping and pulling Martha into a tight hug. “World isn’t going to get rid of me that easily. Don’t worry.”

“You’re impossible not too worry about.” And the fact that she didn’t understand that was a bit scary in and of itself.

“I’ll be okay,” Rose assured her, pulling away again. “Take care of yourself, Doctor Jones.”

“You too, Rose Tyler. You too.”

Martha watched Rose walk back to Donna, watched the two step into the TARDIS.

And she went home.

“Are you alright?” Donna asked quietly as she watched Rose walk to the console. Rose nodded once.

“Yeah. Yeah. I’m always alright.”
Chapter Notes

After tomorrow I’m going to be gone pretty much until next week, so have an update tonight I suppose!

“No, bring it back! Bring it back!”

The idiot scientists working at the computer tried desperately to recapture the signal, but it was no good - the screen remained snowy and silent.

“Damn it!”

Mickey jumped as the Doctor hit the side of the screen with his fist. They had seen the inside of the TARDIS, they had been so close…

The Time Lord’s frustration was understandable.

The Doctor fell back in his seat, dragging his hands through her hair, gritting his teeth, absolutely and positively furious. He hadn’t seen Rose but there had been another woman in the TARDIS – why couldn’t she have just looked?! She could’ve told Rose, Rose could have…

Could have what? The thought processes all ground to halt. What exactly did the Doctor think Rose would be able to do? He was the one with the universe-hopping technology. There wasn’t much for Rose to do – or, he suspected, much Rose would be capable of doing.

But he didn’t know, did he? He didn’t know what Rose could do anymore.

And that bothered him.

It took an hour for the Doctor to concede that whatever had happened before wasn’t going to happen again – they weren’t going to be able to reconnect with the TARDIS. He reluctantly let Mickey drag him home. Probably for the best – he hadn’t been around in a week.

Jackie had been too preoccupied to notice, however – Tony’s third birthday was in a couple days and she was in full-swing with party planning.

Luckily for the Doctor.

Still he knew he wouldn’t get away with it forever – Jackie wasn’t that oblivious. He managed to get inside and escape up to his suite without her seeing, however. It was the little things.
He didn’t really want to tell her how close he had been anyways. It would only break her heart.

He had seen the TARDIS. He hadn’t seen Rose yet, unfortunately, but seeing the TARDIS was such a big step in and of itself. He had been closer still once - so close he could’ve kicked himself for not realizing it until he heard the sound of the TARDIS fading away.

And now he had actually seen the inside of it.

They were so close. If he could just nail Rose down…

She was still traveling, though – that much was obvious. It wouldn’t have been nearly this difficult to find her if she had just been staying in one place. She was still out there. And that scared the Doctor. He hoped she wasn’t alone. He’d caught a glimpse of someone for the brief moment he had seen into the TARDIS, maybe she had someone…?

“Ugh!”

He dug the heels of his hands into his eyes, groaning loudly. God he hated this. He just wanted to find Rose and get back to the TARDIS and fix whatever the hell was going on with the stars going out.

He just wanted to be home.

And it was absolutely maddening that he had been so close but it had slipped through his fingers.

He had about an hour of peace before Jackie knocked on the door, peeking in. The Doctor sighed as he sat up to face her.

“What’s up?”

“Mickey told me what happened today,” Jackie said quietly as she moved to sit on the edge of the bed. The Doctor frowned. He hadn’t wanted Jackie to know.

“It’s good, though. It means we’re close.” In theory, at least. Jackie fidgeted for a moment, clearly uncomfortable.

“You… you didn’t see her at all, then?” The Time Lord shook his head; he could practically see Jackie’s heart plummeting in her chest. Oh this was exactly why he hadn’t wanted to tell her.

But at the same time he knew why Mickey had.

“I saw someone else though. There was another person on the TARDIS, they never could’ve gotten in without Rose. So she’s still out there. Still fighting the good fight.”

Jackie nodded, wiping her eyes. “I just wish I could see her… just once, you know? Make sure she’s okay, she’s not hurt… maybe see if she’s happy…”

The Doctor nodded, swallowing hard. Yeah. He wished for all of that too. “I’m going to get back to her,” he said firmly. “We’re so close. We have the exact coordinates for that dimension now, it’s just a matter of pinning Rose down when she’s on Earth. We’re going to find her. I’m going to find her.”

That just got him another nod, and after a moment Jackie started crying in earnest. The Doctor couldn’t just sit there – he shuffled closer, wrapping Jackie in a tight hug, and she pressed her face into his shoulder, tears streaming down her cheeks.

“I miss her…”
“I do too,” the Doctor whispered, squeezing his eyes shut. “I do too.”

* * * * *

Donna stood in the door of the console room, watching Rose sadly. She had been so quiet since they’d left Martha on Earth – since they’d lost Jenny.

She knew the young blonde’s death had hit her hard.

“Hey,” Donna said, finally announcing herself as she moved to the jump seat where Rose was laying. “Budge up, let me sit.”

Rose drew her legs up so Donna could sit comfortably, and the redhead settled down, resting her arm on Rose’s knees. “How are you?”

Rose shrugged, closing her eyes. She felt a bit numb, to be honest. She couldn’t stop thinking about Jenny. Donna rested her chin on her arm, watching Rose carefully.

“Does it hurt?”

She was almost afraid Rose would say it didn’t.

It took Rose a long, long minute to answer. “Yeah.” That was something of a relief. “Yeah, it does.” She blew out a long breath, squeezing her eyes shut. Donna gave her knee a gentle squeeze. “I just… it’s been so long since I had a family. I thought maybe…” Her voice drifted off, and she shook her head. “It doesn’t matter anymore.”

Oh but it did. It mattered so much. “You’ve never talked about your mother before,” Donna pushed gently. “What was she like?”

Rose was quiet for so long, Donna was sure she wasn’t going to answer. “She was amazin’,” Rose said finally, and Donna blinked in surprise. “My dad died when I was a baby… so it was just me and her. Things were rough, but she always made it work. Somehow. At one point she worked three jobs just to keep a roof over our heads. It was mad.” It made Rose smile sometimes, to think about how now Jackie was probably living in a mansion, where she’d never have to work a day in her life again.

She had earned that.

“She was scary too, though. God never make her angry. She slapped the Doctor once.” That memory definitely still brought a smile to Rose’s face. “Big old, nine-hundred-year-old, powerful alien, slapped by Jackie Tyler. She didn’t think twice about it either – he made her mad and she just railed off and hit him.”

Donna laughed. “I would’ve liked to meet her.”

“Oh she would have liked you.” Rose had no doubt about that. Jackie would have liked Donna. “You remind me a lot of her sometimes.”

Considering the way Rose sounded when she spoke about her mother, Donna took that as a compliment. “How long has it been?” She asked quietly. Rose shrugged.

“I don’t know. Years? I spend a lot of time just floatin’ around in the TARDIS, I’ve kinda lost track. I don’t even know how old I am anymore, to be honest.”
“What? Really?” Donna asked, raising an eyebrow. “You’re joking.” Rose shook her head. She really had no idea what her age was at that point. “Alright, come on Blondie.” Donna hopped up and grabbed Rose’s arm, pulling her up and out of the console room.

“Oh, what’re you doin’?” Rose grumbled. Donna just grinned over her shoulder.

“You’ll see.”

They ended up in the kitchen, Donna sitting Rose down at the table and setting to work getting everything she needed. “Are you… baking?”

“Oh, don’t sound so surprised. I know how to bake. I make Gramps his birthday cake every year. Chocolate or vanilla?”

“Er… chocolate. Donna, what–?”

“Shush.”

Rose shook her head, just watching as Donna started making a cake. She wasn’t allowed to ask or question it – Donna shushed her every time she tried.

“Here we go!” Donna said finally as she got the cake out of the oven. It looked and smelled delicious, Rose had to admit. “Give it a bit to cool, I’ll put the frosting on, and we can dig in.”

“Not gonna sing happy birthday, are you?” Rose asked with a slight smile.

“Oh god no. But if I can find some candles you’re definitely blowing them out.”

The TARDIS seemed to want to help – a box of candles and a lighter appeared on the counter almost before Donna finished speaking. “Ah!” She grinned as she grabbed them up. “Brilliant.”

Rose rolled her eyes, but she was smiling a bit despite herself. This was fun, she would admit.

Donna frosted the cake and stuck twenty-one candles in – twenty-one seemed like a good number. She lit them and brought the cake over, setting it in front of Rose.

“Make a wish!”

Rose smiled sadly, blowing the candles out. The only wish she had wouldn’t come true.

“Brilliant. Let’s cut in.”

Donna cut out two big slices for each of them, and Rose smiled as she took a bite. “Mmm. Tastes delicious.”

“Told you I could bake,” Donna boasted happily. “Gramps has certainly never complained.”

“I can see why.” Rose smiled. “Mum tried to bake me a cake once. She nearly burned our building down.”

It had been the night before her fifth birthday. Most of the memories were a blur, but Rose did remember waking up in the middle of the night to the sound of the fire alarms and the smell of something burning while her mother yelled at her to get out of the flat.

Jackie had gotten a store-bought cake the next morning.
“Doctor Doctor Doctor Doctor!”

It was one of the few times the Time Lord had actually fallen asleep – so of course it was interrupted early the next morning by thirty-one pounds of tiny boy dropping on his stomach.

“Oof!”

“Wake up Doctor!” Tony said happily, bouncing up and down. “Wake up!”

“I’m up, I’m up,” the Doctor groaned, cracking an eye open to look at the bouncing, giggling blonde. “What’s up Tony?”

“Get up!” Tony insisted, bouncing again. The Doctor groaned as a tiny foot pressed into his stomach.

“I am up.”

“You’re not out of beeeeed.”

“That’s because you’re on top of me silly.”

Tony’s eyes went wide, and he scrambled off the Doctor quickly. “Sorry. Get up now?”

The Doctor laughed, climbing out of bed at last and scooping Tony up and carrying him downstairs. The mansion was abuzz with activity - people preparing for the big party. “Hmmm. The Doctor made a show of thinking. “Is something happening today?”

The look Tony gave him was fill with as much offense as a three year old could possibly muster. “It’s my birthday!”

“Is it?” The Doctor gave him a mock shocked look. “No. Surely you’re confused. It’s next month, isn’t it?”

“Noooooooo, today!”

“I don’t think so…”

Tony was positively pouting as they walked into dining room. Pete was at the table, finishing his breakfast. “Daddyyyyyy, Doctor forgot my birthday.”

“Well I guess I owe Jackie ten quid,” Pete muttered as he put his fork down, and the Doctor’s mouth dropped.

“I was joking!”

“Oh, really?” Pete looked pleased at that. “Brilliant, she owes me ten quid then.”

That was mildly insulting.

Tony’s friends began arriving around nine, much to his bouncing excitement. The Doctor stayed out of the way, hanging in the background with Pete, who was watching everything in amusement. Jackie was in her element as she ran around, keeping everything organized and moving the kids from activity to activity, making sure everyone was happy and entertained.
The Doctor suspected there was more than one reason for that.

She finally took a break when Tony set about opening the pile of presents waiting for him. She sat down with the Doctor and Pete, sighing wistfully as she watched her son.

“He’s just like Rose sometimes.” And there it was. “She’d run into my room at three in the morning and jump on me until I woke up. I could never give her anything like this though.”

She waved a hand at the mountain of presents. “I’m sure she loved it anyways,” Pete said quietly, and Jackie smiled.

“She did. Even when I couldn’t give her everything she wanted she always loved what she had. Of course sometimes what she had just sort of appeared… never did figure out where some of those presents came from. It was odd.”

“I left a bike for Christmas when she was twelve,” the Doctor said off-handedly. Jackie swiveled around to look at him.

“What? Really?” He nodded. “Blimey she nearly broke her neck riding that thing down the hall!”

The Doctor snorted a bit at that. “Did you leave her the creepy little fur toy too?”

“…The what?”

“When she was eleven all she wanted more than anything in the world was this toy… Furby! That’s what it was called. Anyways I couldn’t really afford one, but the morning of her birthday I woke up and there was one sitting on my front step.”

“That wasn’t me.” Okay that was a little weird. Jackie made a face.

“Some mysteries were never meant to be solved, I guess.” Tony gave a delighted shout as he opened one of his presents, and Jackie smiled. She loved seeing her son so happy.

Even if she wished more than anything that her daughter could be there as well.

Pete wound an arm around her shoulders, hugging her tight, and she leaned into him, resting her head on his shoulder.

It was all incredibly bittersweet.
“So where to now?” Donna asked. They’d floated around in the vortex for a few days until Rose finally started to bounce back. Donna would have given her more time, but she’d sprung into action the moment the redhead had walked into the console room.

“Not sure!” Rose said happily, hitting a lever, and the TARDIS bucked. Donna grabbed the railing quickly to keep from falling over. They landed with a bump, and Rose bounced to the door with Donna right behind her.

“Oh, smell that air,” Rose sighed as they stepped out into the crisp air, blue sky and sun over head. “Grass and lemonade. And a little bit of mint. A hint of mint. Must be the nineteen twenties.”

“You can tell what year it is just by smelling?” Donna asked in disbelief. Rose smiled meekly.

“Yes?”

“Right, I’m sure it has nothing to do with the great big time machine in your head,” Donna scoffed. “Or maybe that big vintage car coming up the drive gave it away.”

Rose pouted, eying the car. “Come on.”

She pulled Donna over, and they hid behind some shrubbery to listen as the car pulled up to the front of the house, honking its horn. Two men stepped out of the house, going for the car.

“The Professor’s baggage, Richard,” the butler said. “Step lively.”

The driver climbed out of the car, pulling off his goggles. “Good afternoon, Professor Peach.”

“Hello Greeves, old man,” the man greeted him joyfully. A young man on a bicycle rode up the drive. “Ah, Reverend,” Professor Peach said, turning to him.

“Professor Peach.” The Reverend smiled. “Beautiful day. The Lord’s in his heaven, all is right with the world.”

“Reverend Golightly.” Greeves gave a small bow. “Lady Eddison requests you make yourselves comfortable in your rooms. Cocktails will be served on the lawn from half past four.”

“You go on up,” Peach said. “I need to check something in the library.”

“Oh?” Golightly said curiously.

“Alone,” Peach added. Yeah that was suspicious.

“It’s supposed to be a party,” the Reverend teased. “All this work will be the death of you.”

“Never mind Planet Zog,” Donna said quietly as they watched the men disperse. “A party in the
nineteen twenties, that’s more like it.”

“Yeaaaaah,” Rose said, fumbling with the psychic paper. “If only we had an invitation.”

The women exchanged looks — and laughed. “Come on, let’s go back to the TARDIS and put on something a little more time appropriate.”

* * * * *

Donna ended up finding a dark, beautiful beaded dress to change into, while Rose went for something a bit more pink. “Very nice,” Donna said when she saw Rose’s dress. Rose beamed.

“You too. Come on, we don’t wanna be late for cocktails.”

They made their way out of the TARDIS and across the lawn. Rose had to admit, she felt a bit weird — it had been so long since she had left the TARDIS without the comforting weight of her jacket on her shoulders. Longer still since she’d dressed for any occasion.

It was odd.

“Look sharp,” someone called as the women walked onto the lawn. “We have guests.”

“Good afternoon,” Rose said with a smile, waving to them. Donna watched as one man tripped over himself at the sight of it, hurrying forward. Blimey, Rose really did have a way of dazzling men. And she didn’t even realize it.

“Drinks, ma’ams?” He asked, looking between them.

“Sidecar, please,” Donna requested.

“And a lime and soda,” Rose added with another stunning smile. Donna rolled her eyes as the butler blushed. “Thank you.”

“May I announce,” a voice called across the lawn, “Lady Clemency Eddison.”

Rose and Donna turned to see a petite older woman making her way across the lawn. Ross hopped into action, strolling forward with an air of command. “Lady Edison,” she greeted the woman with a small curtsy. The woman looked understandably confused.

“Forgive me, but who exactly might you be and what are you doing?”

“Oh I’m Rose Tyler, of the London Tylers. My father and I met you at the Ambassador’s reception. This is my cousin, Ms. Donna Noble, of the Chiswick Nobles.”

Donna dropped into a curtsy as well, putting on a posh accent. “Good afternoon, my lady. Topping day, what? Spiffing. Top hole.”

“Oi,” Rose mumbled, shaking her head. “Don’t do that.” She held up the psychic paper to show Lady Eddison. “My father and I were honored to receive your invitation, my lady. Unfortunately he’s out of town on business, and Donna was visiting so I thought I’d bring her in his place.”

“Yes, of course!” To Donna’s pleasant surprise, Lady Eddison accepted it all. “I’m so sorry Ms. Tyler, how could I forget you? But one must be sure with the Unicorn on the loose.”

“A unicorn?” Rose repeated, looking around. Maybe this could be fun after all. “Brilliant, where?”

“Funny place to where pearls,” Donna commented, and Rose bit down a snort.

“May I announce,” Greeves called, distracting them, “Colonel Hugh Curbishley, the Honorable Roger Curbishley.”

A young man made his way across the lawn, pushing an older man in a wheelchair. “My husband, and my son,” Lady Eddison told Rose and Donna as the men came up to next to her.

“Forgive me for not rising,” the colonel said with an apologetic smile. “Never been the same ever since that flu epidemic back in eighteen.”

Roger gave Donna an appraising look. “My word, you are a super lady.”

Donna kooked quite pleased. “Oh, I like the cut of your jib. …Chin. Chin.”

Rose rolled her eyes a bit, still managing to smile as she said, “Hello, I’m Rose.”

Roger gave her a smile in return. “How do you do?”

“Very well.”

The drink butler joined the small group, handing Rose and Donna their drinks and saying, “Your usual, sir?” As he handed Roger a glass as well.

“Ah, thank you, Davenport,” Roger said, taking a sip. “Just how I like it.”

“How come she’s an Eddison,” Donna murmured to Rose, “but her husband and son are Curbishleys?”

“The Eddison title descends through her,” Rose replied in a low voice. “One day Roger will be a lord.”

“Robina Redmond,” Greeves announced as another woman made her way across the lawn.

“She’s the absolute hit of the social scene,” Lady Eddison said happily. “A must.” She strolled forward to greet the woman. “Ms. Redmond.”

“Spiffing to meet you at last, my lady,” Robina replied. “What super fun.”

“Reverend Arnold Golightly,” Greeves announced the reverend. Lady Eddison smiled as he approached.

“Ah, Reverend. How are you? I heard about the church last Thursday night. Those ruffians breaking in.”

“You apprehended them, I hear,” Curbishley added, and Golightly nodded.

“As the Christian Fathers taught me, we must forgive them their trespasses. Quite literally.”

“Some of these young boys deserve a descent thrashing,” Roger spoke up, and Rose raised an eyebrow at him. That sounded suggestive.

“Couldn’t agree more, sir,” Davenport said, and Rose saw them exchange look.
“Typical,” Donna sighed, catching the look as well. “All the decent men are on the other bus."

“Or Time Lords,” Rose muttered wistfully.

“Now, my lady,” Roger said. “What about this special guest you promised us?”

Lady Eddison beamed, indicating another woman walking across the lawn. “Here she is. A lady who needs no introduction.”

Everyone turned to see her — and instantly broke into applause. The woman looked horribly embarrassed.

“Who is she?” Donna muttered to Rose, who shrugged.

“No clue.”

“No, no, please, don’t,” the woman said as she joined the group. “Thank you, Lady Eddison. Honestly, there’s no need.”

She turned to Rose and Donna, who were obviously confused, and smiled. “Agatha Christie.”

“What about her?” Donna asked, confused.

“That’s me.”

It took another minute for to click. “No,” Donna finally said, stunned. “You’re kidding.”

“Agatha Christie.” Rose beamed, stepping forward to shake her hand. “Oh, that’s brilliant, you’re brilliant. You fool me every time. You’ll have to excuse my cousin, she can be a bit slow sometimes — ow!” Rose yelped as Donna stepped on her foot, and Agatha laughed.

“Cousins, of course. And not married, good for you. I’d stay that way if I were you. The thrill is in the chase, never in the capture.”

“How could you tell?” Donna asked, surprised.

“No wedding ring.”

Rose laughed. “Brilliant, I knew it. You don’t miss a trick.”

“Mrs. Christie, I’m so glad you could come,” Lady Eddison spoke up, getting the other woman’s attention again. “I’m one of your greatest followers. I’ve read all six of your books. Er, is, er, Mister Christie not joining us?”

“Is he needed?” Agatha asked blithely. “Can’t a woman make her own way in the world?”

“Don’t give my wife ideas,” Curbishley said with a chuckle. Rose frowned when she saw the newspaper on his lap.

“Excuse me, Colonel, can I borrow that?”

He handed it over as people started asking Agatha about her book. Rose pulled Donna off to the side.

“Ms. Chandrakala,” she heard Lady Eddison say to the maid. “Would you go and collect the Professor?”
“The date on this newspaper,” Rose said quietly as the maid hurried off. Donna was understandably confused.

“What about it?”

“It’s the day Agatha Christie disappeared.” Rose’s eyes glowed just slightly — Donna recognized that well. The TARDIS was actively in her head. “She’d just discovered her husband was having an affair.”

Donna looked back at Agatha, who seemed quite enthralled and happy. “You’d never think to look at her, smiling away.”

“Well, she’s British and moneyed,” Rose muttered. “That’s what they do. They carry on. Except for this one time. No one knows exactly what happened. She just vanished. Her car will be found tomorrow morning by the side of a lake. Two days later, Agatha Christie turns up in a hotel in Harrogate. Said she’d lost her memory. She never spoke about the disappearance till the day she died, but whatever it was…”

“It’s about to happen,” Donna finished the thought, and and Rose nodded.

“Right here, right now.”

“Professor!” The frightened cry of the maid echoed across the lawn as she ran back to the party. “The library! Murder! Murder!”

Oh this was definitely going to be interesting.

* * * * *

Rose bullied her way into the library with Donna at her side and Agatha right behind her. Professor Peach’s body was on the floor; she knelt down beside him. “Oh, my goodness,” Greeves breathed at the sight.

“Bashed on the head,” Rose murmured, looking him over. “Blunt instrument.” She picked up his wrist, turning it over. “Watch broke as he fell. Time of death was quarter past four.”

She stood up, going to the desk to dig through the papers, while Donna investigated the room, finding a pipe. “A bit of pipe.” She held it up for Rose. “Call me Hercules Poirot, but I reckon that’s blunt enough.”

Rose nodded, finishing her search. “Nothing worth killing for in that lot. Dry as dust.”

“Hang on.” Donna gave the body an incredulous look. “The Body In The Library? I mean, Professor Peach, in the library, with the lead piping?”

Before Rose could question it, the other guests forced their way into the room. “Let me see,” Lady Eddison demanded.

“Out of the way,” her husband added, though they all froze at the sight of the body.

“Saints preserve us,” the reverend breathed.

“Oh how awful…” Robina sound a little sick.

“Someone should call the police.” Agatha said exactly what Rose was hoping she wouldn’t say.
“That won’t be necessary,” Rose announced loudly, whipping the psychic paper out. “I’m authorized to do investigations on behalf of the police. My father is the commissioner.”

“That’s ridiculous,” Curbishley said curtly, and Rose had to resist the urge to roll her eyes. Yay rampant sexism.

“Well my qualifications say otherwise.” She waved the psychic paper in his face. “So if you all don’t mind, go wait in in the sitting room and I’ll be along to question each of you in turn.”

Everyone shuffled out uncertainly, clearly not very confident in Rose’s credentials. Donna raised an eyebrow at her.

“Authorized by your police commissioner father?”

“Hey it worked.”

“Right. So what should I be called Uncle Police Commissioner? And more importantly, why aren’t we calling the real police?”

“Uncle Police Commissioner is Pete. And we’re not calling the real police because the last thing we want is PC Plod sticking his nose in, especially now I’ve found this.” She knelt down, scraping up a bit of gunk off the floor and holding up her finger for Donna to see. “Morphic residue.”

“Morphic?” Donna repeated. “Doesn’t sound very nineteen-twenties.”

“It’s left behind when certain species genetically recode,” Rose explained, wiping her finger off. Donna raised an eyebrow.

“The murderer’s an alien?”

“Rose nodded. “Which means one of that lot is an alien in human form.”

“Yeah, but think about it. There’s a murder, a mystery, and Agatha Christie.” Donna still couldn’t believe all this.

“So?” Rose was a little less bothered. “Happens to me all the time.”

“No, but isn’t that a bit weird? Agatha Christie didn’t walk around surrounded by murders. Not really. I mean, that’s like meeting Charles Dickens and he’s surrounded by ghosts at Christmas.” Rose looked away, pressing her lips thin. Donna recognized that look — it happened when she thought about the Doctor. “No. Really?”

“Just once.”

“Oh come on!” Donna sounded exasperated. “It’s not like we could drive across country and find Enid Blyton having tea with Noddy. Could we? Noddy’s not real. Is he? Tell me there’s no Noddy.”

“There’s no Noddy,” Rose assured Donna as they made their way out of the library. Donna still seemed shocked.

“Next thing you know, you’ll be telling me it’s like Murder On The Orient Express, and they all did it.”

“Murder on the Orient Express?” Agatha spoke up, and they jumped, turning to look at her.

“Ooooh, yeah,” Donna said happily. “One of your best.”
“But not yet,” Rose reminded her in a low voice, and Donna cringed. Right.

“Marvelous idea, though,” Agatha said thoughtfully.

“Yeah. Tell you what. Copyright Donna Noble, okay — ow!” Donna yelped as Rose stepped on her foot.

“Anyways!” The blonde said loudly. “Agatha and I will question the suspects. Donna, you search the bedrooms. Look for clues.” She dropped her voice low so Agatha wouldn’t hear her. “Any more residue.”

Donna nodded and they split, Donna heading upstairs while Rose and Agatha made their way to the sitting room.

“Solving a murder mystery with Agatha Christie,” Rose said happily. “Brilliant.”

“You seem to be finding a lot of joy in this disaster, Ms. Tyler,” Agatha pointed out, and Rose winced.

“Sorry. I’m not. Really.” Except maybe she was a little.

She wasn’t sure how she felt about that.

* * * * *

Agatha settled down in the corner to take notes while Rose did her interviews, starting with the reverend.

“Now then, Reverend. Where were you at quarter past four?”

“Let me think…” Golightly frowned. “Why yes, I remember. I was unpacking in my room.”

Rose nodded. “No alibi, then.”

“You were alone?” Agatha confirmed. Golightly smiled a bit.

“With the Lord, one is never truly alone.”

Rose sighed deeply. Next.

Roger came in next. “And where were you?” Rose asked. Roger tilted his head.

Let me think. I was. Oh, yes. I was taking a constitutional in the fields behind the house. Just taking a stroll, that’s all.”

“Alone?”

“Oh yes, all alone.” Rose didn’t believe that for a minute. “Totally alone. Absolutely alone. Completely. All the time. I wandered lonely as the proverbial cloud. There was no one else with me. Not at all. Not ever.”

…Next.

Robina came in, sitting down. “And where were you?” Rose prompted.

“At a quarter past four. Well, I went to the toilet when I arrived, and then er. Oh, yes, I remember. I
was preparing myself. Positively buzzing with excitement about the party and the super fun of meeting Lady Eddy.”

“We’ve only got your word for it,” Rose pointed out. Robina raised an eyebrow.

“That’s your problem, not mine.”

She didn’t seem too concerned with proving herself. Rose sighed as she moved on. Curbishley wheeled himself in.

“And where were you, sir?”

“Quarter past four? Dear me, let me think. Ah, yes, I remember. I was in me study, reading through some military memoirs. Fascinating stuff.” He was as honest as his son. “Took me back to my days in the army. Started reminiscing. Mafeking, you know. Terrible war.”

He was starting to reminisce. Rose snapped her fingers in front of his face. “Colonel, snap out of it.”

“I was in me study—”

“No, no, no,” Rose said quickly. “Right out of it.”

Curbishley shook his head. “Oh, sorry. Got a bit carried away there.”

Rose waved him out of the room. Next was his wife.

“And where were you, my lady?” Rose asked politely. Lady Eddison tilted her head, thinking.

“Now, let me see. Yes, I remember. I was sitting in the Blue Room, taking my afternoon tea.” Why did Rose feel like every single person in this family was a liar? “It’s a ritual of mine. I needed to gather strength for the duty of hostess. I then proceeded to the lawn where I met you, Ms. Tyler, and I said, who exactly might you be—”

“Yes, yes, I know this part,” Rose cut her off quickly. “I was there for it.”

“Of course.” Lady Eddison hiccuped slightly. “Excuse me.”

And that was the last of them. Agatha and Rose paced the room together, thinking.

“No alibis for any of them,” Agatha said. “The Secret Adversary remains hidden. We must look for a motive. Use ze little grey cells.”

Rose smiled a bit. “Oh yes, little grey cells. Good old Poirot.” She sighed, wishing she had a jacket with pockets to shove her hands in. She still felt naked with the weight of the leather.

“For such an experienced detective,” Agatha said slowly, turning to look at her, “you missed a big clue.”

Rose raised an eyebrow. “What, that bit of paper you nicked out of the fire?”

Agatha’s mouth dropped. “You were looking the other way,” she protested.

“Yeah, but I saw you reflected in the glass of the bookcase.”

That got her an impressed look. “You crafty woman.” She pulled the piece of paper out of purse, handing it over. “This is all that was left.”
Rose took the piece of paper, examining it. It said aiden. “What’s the first letter?” She murmured, squinting. “N or M?”

“It’s an M,” Agatha said confidently. “The word is maiden.”

“Maiden,” Rose repeated. “What does that mean?”

Agatha shook her head. “We’re still no further forward. Our Nemesis remains at large. Unless Ms. Noble’s found something.”

* * * * *

So far, Donna had nothing. She frowned as she tried another door, finding it locked.

“You won’t find anything in there.”

She jumped, whirling to see Greeves standing behind her. “How come it’s locked?”

“Lady Eddison commands it to be so.”

“And I command it to be otherwise,” Donna informed him. “Scotland Yard, pip pip.”

Greeves stepped forward obediently, unlocking the door.

“Why’s it locked in the first place?” Donna asked as she let herself in.

“Many years ago, when my father was butler to the family, Lady Eddison returned from India with malaria. She locked herself in this room for six months until she recovered. Since then, the room has remained undisturbed.”

As Greeves spoke, Donna looked around, taking the room in. The curtains were drawn, casting a shadow around the small room. “There’s nothing here,” Greeves said with a hint of superiority.

“How long’s it been empty?”

“Forty years.”

Blimey, that was a long time. “Why would she seal it off?” Donna turned back to Greeves. “Alright, I need to investigate. You just butle off.”

She closed the door to investigate in peace. As she looked, she heard a buzzing noise. “Nineteen-twenties, they’ve still got bees.” She tried to keep working, but the buzzing just got more incessant. “Alright, busy bee, I’ll let you out. Hold on, I shall find you with my amazing powers of detection.”

She pulled back the curtains — and her stomach dropped when she saw a giant wasp fluttering about outside.

An actual, giant wasp.

She stumbled back with a shriek as the wasp smashed through the window. “That’s impossible!”

The wasp swooped in on her and she ducked away, and she grabbed a piece of broken glass, holding it up to the sunlight and letting it shine in, hitting the wasp. While it writhed in pain, Donna ran out of the room, yelling, “ROSE!”

She slammed the door shut behind her, screaming Rose’s name down the stairs. Rose and Agatha
came running up just as the wasp’s stinger broke through the wooden door.

“It’s a giant wasp!” Donna informed them. Rose raised an eyebrow.

“What do you mean, a giant wasp?”

“I mean a wasp that’s giant!”

“It’s only a silly little insect,” Agatha dismissed Donna, who scowled.

“When I say giant, I don’t mean big, I mean flipping enormous! Look at its sting.” She pointed at the stinger still stuck in the door. Rose made a face, stepping forward.

“Let me see.”

She looked into the bedroom…but it was empty. “It’s gone,” she reported as Agatha peeked around her. “Buzzed off.”

“But that’s fascinating,” the other woman said, slipping in to examine the pile of gunk on the floor.

“Don’t touch it,” Rose said quickly, digging through her purse, finding a test tube and a pencil. She got some of the gunk into the tube.

“Giant wasp. Well, tons of amorphous insectivorous lifeforms, but none in this galactic vector.”

Agatha gave Rose a look that said she clearly thought the blonde was mad. “I think I understood some of those words. Enough to know that you’re completely potty.”

“Lost its sting, though,” Donna pointed out. “That makes it defenseless.”

“Oh, a creature of this size?” Rose murmured. “Got to be able to grow a new one.”

“Can we return to sanity?” Agatha asked impatiently. “There are no such things as giant wasps.”

“Exactly,” Rose agreed. “So. The question is. What’s it doing here?”

A scream echoed from outside and they ran out quick to find Ms. Chandrakala on the ground, a stone gargoyle laying next to her. It looked as if it had fallen on her. “The poor little child,” the woman breathed before her eyes fluttered shut. She was gone. A buzzing reached Rose’s ears and she looked up to see…

A giant wasp.

“There!” The thing swooped down and flew away. “Come on!”

They took off running.
“Hey, this is a change,” Donna said as they ran up the stairs after the wasp. “There’s a monster, and we’re chasing it.”

“It can’t be a monster,” Agatha insisted, and Rose sighed inwardly. The geniuses were always so closed minded. “It’s a trick. They do it with mirrors.”

They came out in the upstairs corridor to see the wasp hovering there, waiting for them. “By all that’s holy,” Agatha breathed. Rose took a step forward.

“Alright, no just stop. Stop there, alright? Let’s — whoa!”

She ducked as the wasp lunched at them, the stinger scratching against the wall. “Oi, fly boy!” Donna called, holding up the piece of glass she’d used to hurt it earlier, and the wasp flew away.

“Nonono,” Rose called as she straightened up. “Don’t let it get away!” If it went back to human form they had no chance. “Where are you? Come on, there’s nowhere to run. Show yourself!”

Her heart dropped to her toes when every door in the corridor opened, and someone stepped out.

“Oh, that’s just cheatin’.”

Everyone moved to the drawing room, Rose standing in the background watching. “My faithful companion,” Lady Eddison said sadly. “This is terrible.”

“Excuse me, my lady,” Davenport spoke up uncertainly, “’But she was on her way to tell you something.”

Lady Eddison shook her head. “She never found me. She had an appointment with death instead.”

“She said, the poor little child,” Rose spoke up, arms crossed. Now more than ever she wished she had her jacket. It made her feel comfortable. “Does that mean anything to anyone?”

“No children in this house for years,” Curbishley said. “Highly unlikely there will be.”

Lady Eddison turned to Agatha, clearly desperate. “Mrs. Christie, you must have twigged something. You’ve written simply the best detective stories.”

“Tell us,” Golightly spoke up, “what would Poirot do?”

“Heaven’s sake, cards on the table woman! You should be helping us!”

“But I’m merely a writer,” Agatha stuttered out. Donna recognized the look on her face well — it
was the look of someone who was clearly in over her head. She saw that look on Rose’s face a lot.

“But surely you can crack it,” Robina pointed out. “These events, they’re exactly like one of your plots.”

“That’s what I’ve been saying!” Donna piped up. “Agatha, that’s got to mean something?”

“But what?” Agatha asked desperately. “I’ve no answers. None. I’m sorry, all of you. I’m truly sorry, but I’ve failed. If anyone can help us, then it’s Ms. Tyler, not me.”

She walked out without another word. Donna raised an eyebrow, shooting a look at Rose. “She’s got more faith in you than you do.”

And she hurried after the author.

She found Agatha standing in the gazebo, arms wrapped tightly around herself. “You know what I think?” Donna said gently as she approached. “I think? Those books of yours, one day they could turn them into films. They could be talking pictures.”

Agatha made a face, bewildered. “Talking pictures? Pictures that talk? What do you mean?”

Whoops. “Oh blimey, I’ve done it again,” Donna murmured, shaking her head. Thankfully, Agatha was already moving on.

“I appreciate you trying to be kind, but you’re right. These murders are like my own creations. It’s as though someone’s mocking me, and I’ve had enough scorn for one lifetime.”

“Yeah.” Donna sighed. “Thing is, I had this bloke once. I was engaged. And I loved him, I really did. Turns out he was lying through his teeth. But do you know what? I moved on. I was lucky. I found Rose. It’s changed my life. There’s always someone else.”

“I see,” Agatha said, a bit stiffly. “Is my marriage the stuff of gossip now?”

Okay, admittedly that had been a bit stupid for Donna to say. “No, I just…sorry,” Donna said in a small voice. Agatha shook her head.

“No matter. The stories are true. I found my husband with another woman. A younger, prettier woman. Isn’t it always the way?”

“Well, mine was a giant spider,” Donna murmured, “but, same difference.”

Agatha gave her a bemused looked. “You and Ms. Tyler talk such a wonderful nonsense.”

Yeah, it probably did all sound mad to anyone who didn’t know. “Agatha, people love your books,” Donna said firmly. “They really do. They’re going to be reading them for years to come.”

“If only,” the woman said wistfully. “Try as I might, it’s hardly great literature. Now that’s beyond me. I’m afraid my books will be forgotten, like ephemera.” She looked over the edge of the gazebo, and frowned. “Hello, what’s that? Those flowerbeds were perfectly neat earlier. Now some of the stalks are bent over.”

She walked down, kneeling to pick up a small case. Donna beamed. “There you go. Who’d ever notice that? You’re brilliant.”

They started back up the mansion. “So, you and Ms. Tyler…?” Agatha asked curiously. Donna’s eyes widened.
“What? No, of course not. Definitely not. No.”

“It’s nothing to be ashamed of—”

“She’s hung up on some bloke. Besides, she’s not my type. Too tiny, I’d be worried about breaking her.”

Agatha laughed at that.

They found Rose in the sitting room, and Agatha handed the case over. She popped it open, tilting her head. “Lock picks. Someone came here tooled up. This is the sort of stuff a thief would use.”

“The Unicorn,” Agatha realized, wide-eyed. “He’s here.”


Greeves walked in with a tray of drinks. “Your drinks, lady.”

“Thank you,” Rose said politely as they took their glasses, and he left. Rose raised her drink to sip—

Wait, My Wolf.

And paused, frowning. “How about the science stuff?” Donna asked, not noticing Rose’s expression. “What did you find?”

“Hmm? Vespiform sting. Vespiforms have got hives in the Silfrax galaxy.” Why can’t I drink my drink?

“Again, you talk like Edward Lear.”

Something is wrong with it.

What, did Greeves put in too much tequila?

Rose sniffed the drink cautiously. It smelled…weird. “Come on, Agatha,” Donna pushed. “What would Ms. Marple do? She’d have overheard something vital by now, because the murderer thinks she’s just a harmless old lady.”

“Clever idea,” Agatha said thoughtfully. “Ms. Marple? Who writes those?”

“Er, copyright Donna Noble. Add it to the list.”

“Agatha,” Rose said, holding her glass out. “Don’t drink, just smell this.”

Agatha took the glass, sniffing the contents uncertainly. “Bitter almonds. It’s cyanide. Sparkling cyanide. Did you drink it?”

Rose shook her head. “No, I could tell somethin’ was off.”

You could tell.

Well I’m not gonna tell her the magic ship in my head told me somethin’ was wrong with my drink. Blimey your ego is amazin’ sometimes.

“This is incurable though. I believe someone is trying to kill you, Ms. Tyler.”

“Gee, that’s such a change from the usual,” Rose mumbled, and Donna snorted.
Everyone gathered for dinner as a thunderstorm started overhead, thunder crashing and lightning flashing.

“A terrible day for all of us,” Rose said thoughtfully as they sat down to eat. “The Professor struck down, Miss Chandrakala taken cruelly from us, and yet we still take dinner.”

“We are British, Ms. Tyler,” Lady Eddison pointed out. “What else must we do?”

Rose’s eyes swept up and down the table before she said, “There’s somethin’ else, though. Someone tried to poison me. Unsuccessfully, obviously, as I’m still here. Of course, I have no idea who could’ve done it — any one of you could be guilty, but I don’t have time to worry about that. I should be thankful, really — it gave me an idea.”

“And what would that be?” Golightly asked, raising an eyebrow as he sipped his soup, following suit with the others. Rose smirked a bit.

“Well, poison. Drink up. I’ve laced the soup with pepper.”

Everyone paused, exchanging looks. “Ah,” Curbishley finally said. “I thought it was jolly spicy.”

“But the active ingredient in pepper is piperine,” Rose continued smoothly. “Traditionally used as an insecticide.” She paused to let that sink in. “So. Anyone got the shivers?”

A loud clap of thunder crashed overhead, and the windows around them blew open, blowing out the candles.

“What the deuce is that?!” Curbishley demanded.

“Ssshhhh,” Rose scolded. “Listen, listen, listen.”

A low buzz filled the room. “No, it can’t be,” Lady Eddison breathed as lightning illuminated the room.

“Show yourself, demon!” Agatha called bravely.

“Nobody move,” Rose ordered them. “No, don’t!” She could see them shifting to run. “Stay where you are.”

Another flash of lightning, and the wasp appeared. Chaos erupted as everyone screamed, and Rose changed the plan on the fly.

“Out, everybody out! Out now!”

Everybody scattered — Rose, Donna, Agatha, and Greeves gathered outside the dining room.

“Well, we know the butler didn’t do it,” Donna muttered. Greeves looked offended. Rose had bigger worries though.

“Then who did?”

They peeked back in, and Rose groaned when she saw nobody had actually run out. Idiots. The colonel was on the floor, his wheelchair overturned.

“Roger,” they heard Davenport breathe, and everyone turned to see Roger with his face in his soup bowl, a large knife in his back. Lady Eddison paled.

“My son. My child.”

Rose slipped out of the dining room, with Agatha following, and they took up in the drawing room. After a moment Donna joined them. “That poor footman,” she said quietly. “Roger’s dead and he can’t even mourn him. Nineteen-twenty-six? It’s more like the dark ages.”

“Did you inquire after the necklace?” Agatha asked curiously. Donna nodded.

“Lady Eddison bought it back from India. It’s worth thousands.”

Rose had more important things to worry about than a petty thief, though. “This thing can sting, it can fly. It could wipe us all out in seconds. Why is it playing this game?”

“Every murder is essentially the same,” Agatha said thoughtfully. “They are committed because somebody wants something.”

“What does a Vespiform want?”

“Ms. Tyler, stop it,” Agatha said impatiently. “The murderer is as human as you or I.”

Rose frowned for a long moment. “You’re right,” she said finally. “Ah, I’ve been so caught with giant wasps that I’ve forgotten. You’re the expert.”

“I’m not,” Agatha protested. “I told you. I’m just a purveyor of nonsense.”

“No, no, no.” Rose shook her head. “Because plenty of people write detective stories, but yours are the best. And why? Why are you so good, Agatha Christie? Because you understand. You’ve lived, you’ve fought, you’ve had your heart broken. You know about people. Their passions, their hope, and despair, and anger. All of those tiny, huge things that can turn the most ordinary person into a killer. Just think, Agatha. If anyone can solve this, it’s you.”

Agatha looked a little less confident.

* * * * *

They gathered everyone else in the drawing room. They all sat while Rose stood over them. “I’ve called you all here on this Endless Night,” Rose said slowly as she looked around, “because we have a murderer in our midst. And when it comes to detection, there’s none finer. Ladies and gentlemen, I give you, Agatha Christie.”

Agatha stood, and Rose stepped back. “This,” Agatha started, “is a Crooked House. A house of secrets. To understand the solution, we must examine them all. Starting with you, Ms. Redmond.”

Robina blinked, bewildered. “But I’m innocent, surely?”

“You’ve never met these people,” Agatha said. “And these people have never met you. I think the real Robina Redmond never left London. You’re impersonating her.”

Robina looked offended. “How silly. What proof do you have?”

“You said you’d been in the toilet.”

“Oh, I know this,” Donna piped up. “If she was really posh, she’d say loo.”
Agatha picked up the case of lock picks. “‘Earlier today, Ms. Noble and I found this on the lawn, right beneath your bathroom window. You must have heard Ms. Noble was searching the bedrooms, so you panicked. You ran upstairs and disposed of the evidence.”

“I’ve never seen that thing before in my life,” Robina protested.

“What’s inside it?” Lady Eddison asked.

“The tools of your trade, Ms. Redmond. Or should I say, the Unicorn. You came to this house with one sole intention. To steal the Firestone.”

There was a beat of silence, and when Robina spoke again her accent shifted. “Oh, all right then. It’s a fair cop. Yes, I’m the bleeding Unicorn. Ever so nice to meet you, I don’t think. I took my chance in the dark and nabbed it.” She threw the necklace to Rose. “Go on then, you knobs. Arrest me. Sling me in jail.”

“So, is she the murderer?” Donna asked.

“Don’t be so thick,” Robina snapped. “I might be a thief, but I ain’t no killer.”

“Quite,” Agatha agreed. “There are darker motives at work. And in examining this household, we come to you, Colonel.”

“Damn it woman,” Curbishley said impatiently. “You with your perspicacity. You’ve rumbled me.”

He pushed himself up, and everyone gasped. “Hugh, you can walk,” Lady Eddison said, astonished. “But why?”

“My darling,” Curbishley sighed, “how else could I be certain of keeping you by my side?”

“I don’t understand.”

“You’re still a beautiful woman, Clemency. Sooner or later some chap will turn your head. I couldn’t bear that. Staying in the chair was the only way I could be certain of keeping you.” He turned to Agatha. “Confounded it, Mrs. Christie, how did you discover the truth?”

Agatha looked stunned. “Er, actually I had no idea. I was just going to say you’re completely innocent.”

Curbishley blushed a bit. “Oh. Oh.”

“Sorry.”

“Well.” The colonel rubbed the back of his head. “Well, shall I sit down then?”

“I think you better had,” Agatha agreed, and he sat again.

“So he’s not the murderer,” Donna said, tilting her head.

“Indeed not. To find the truth, let’s return to this.” She took the Firestone from Rose, holding it up. “Far more than the Unicorn’s object of desire. The Firestone has quite a history. Lady Eddison.”

“I’ve done nothing,” the woman protested at once.

“You brought it back from India, did you not? Before you met the Colonel. You came home with malaria, and confined yourself to this house for six months, in a room that has been kept locked ever
since, which I rather think means—”

“Stop, please,” Lady Eddison protested, but Agatha continued on.

“I’m so sorry. But you had fallen pregnant in India. Unmarried and ashamed, you hurried back to England with your confidante, a young maid later to become housekeeper. Ms. Chandrakala.”

Curbishley looked stunned as he turned to his wife. “Clemency, is this true?”

“My poor baby,” Lady Eddison breathed, horrified. “I had to give him away. The shame of it.”

“But you never said a word.”

“I had no choice.” She shook her head. “Imagine the scandal. The family name. I’m British. I carry on.”

“And it was no ordinary pregnancy,” Rose spoke up for the first time, stepping forward. Lady Eddison shot her a look.

“How can you know that?”

“Excuse me Agatha, this is my territory.” To Lady Eddison, “But when you heard that buzzing sound in the dining room, you said, it can’t be. Why did you say that?”

“You’d never believe it,” Lady Eddison said, shaking her head.

“Ms. Tyler has opened my mind to believe many things,” Agatha said. Lady Eddison was quiet for a long moment.

And finally she spoke.

“It was forty years ago, in the heat of Delhi, late one night. I was alone, and that’s when I saw it. A dazzling light in the sky. The next day, he came to the house. Christopher, the most handsome man I’d ever seen. Our love blazed like a wildfire. I held nothing back. And in return he showed me the incredible truth about himself. He’d made himself human, to learn about us. This was his true shape.”

She paused, taking a deep breath. “I loved him so much, it didn’t matter. But he was stolen from me. 1885, the year of the great monsoon. The river Jumna rose up and broke its banks. He was Taken At The Flood. But Christopher left me a parting gift. A jewel like no other. I wore it always. Part of me never forgot. I kept it close, always.”

“Just like a man,” Robina scoffed. “Flashes his family jewels and you end up with a bun in the oven.”

She was ignored. “A poor little child,” Agatha said quietly. “Forty years ago, Ms. Chandrakala took that newborn babe to an orphanage. But Professor Peach worked it out. He found the birth certificate.”

“Oh, that’s maiden!” Donna said, snapping her fingers, remembering the piece of paper. “Maiden name.”

Agatha nodded. “Precisely.”

“So she killed him?”

“I did not,” Lady Eddison protested.
“Ms. Chandrakala feared that the Professor had unearthed your secret,” Agatha continued. “She was coming to warn you.”

“So she killed her,” Donna said.

“I did not!”

“Lady Eddison is innocent,” Agatha said. “Because at this point…Ms. Tyler?”

“Thank you.” Rose stepped back in. “At this point, when we consider the lies and the secrets, and the key to these events, then we have to consider it was you, Donna Noble.”


“No, but you said it all along. The vital clue. This whole thing is being acted out like a murder mystery.” Rose turned to Agatha. “Which means it was you, Agatha Christie.”

“I beg your pardon, ma’am?” Agatha was clearly offended.

“So she killed them?” Donna was so last.

“No, but she wrote,” Rose said. “She wrote those brilliant, clever books. And who’s her greatest admirer?” Rose turned. “Lady Eddison, of course.”

“Don’t,” Lady Eddison begged. “Leave me alone.”

“So she did kill them.”

“No,” Rose said, and Donna gave a frustrated sigh. Rose was doing this on purpose and it was driving her mad. “But just think. Last Thursday night, what were you doing?”

Lady Eddison looked bewildered at the question. “I was — I was in the library. I was reading my favorite Agatha Christie, plots, and how clever she must be. How is that relevant?”

“Just think,” Rose pushed. “What else happened Thursday night?”

She turned to Golightly. “I’m sorry?” He asked, confused.

“You said on the lawn, this afternoon. Last Thursday night, those boys broke into your church.”

“That’s correct.” The priest nodded. “They did. I discovered the two of them. Thieves in the night. I was most perturbed. But I apprehended them.”

“Really?” Rose raised an eyebrow. “A man of God against two strong lads? A man in his forties? Or, should I say forty years old, exactly?”

There was a beat of silence. “Oh, my god,” Lady Eddison breathed as the realization set in.

“Lady Eddison,” Rose questioned gently, “your child, how old would he be now?”

“Forty.” She sounded stunned. “He’s forty.”

Rose looked back at the reverend. “Your child has come home.”

“Oh, this is poppycock,” Golightly scoffed.

“Is it? You said you were taught by the Christian Fathers, meaning you were raised in an
orphanage.”

“My son,” Lady Eddison said faintly. “Can it be?”

“You found those thieves, Reverend,” Rose continued quietly, “and you got angry. A proper, deep anger, for the first time in your life, and it broke the genetic lock. You changed.”

She paused to let that sink in for a moment. “You realized your inheritance. After all these years, you knew who you were. Oh, and then it all kicks off, because this isn’t just a jewel. It’s a Vespiform telepathic recorder. It’s part of you, your brain, your very essence. And when you activated, so did the Firestone. It beamed your full identity directly into your mind. And, at the same time, it absorbed the works of Agatha Christie directly from Lady Eddison. It all became part of you. The mechanics of those novels formed a template in your brain. You’ve killed, in this pattern, because that’s what you think the world is. It turns out, we are in the middle of a murder mystery. One of yours, Dame Agatha.”

“Dame?” Agatha repeated.

“Oh, right, not yet. Sorry.”

“So he killed them, yes?” Donna asked, looking at Rose, who nodded.

“Yes.”

“Well, this has certainly been a most entertaining evening,” Golightly said, annoyed. “Really, you can’t believe any of this surely, Lady Edizzon.”

Rose raised an eyebrow as his voice buzzed a bit. “Lady who?”

He tried again. “Lady Edizzzon…”

“Little bit of a buzzing there, Vicar.” Rose said quietly, straightening up. This was going to go bad quickly.

“Don’t make me angry,” the reverend said through gritted teeth.

“Why, what happens then?”

“Damn it, you humanzz,” his voice buzzed again, “worshiping your tribal sky godzz. I am so much more. That night, the universe exploded in my mind. I wanted to take what wazz mine. And you, Agatha Christie, with your railway station bookstall romancezz, what’zz to stop me killing you?”

“Oh my dear God,” Lady Eddison said faintly. “My child.”

“What’zz to stop me killing you all?!?”

And they watched, in horror, as the Reverend’s body convulsed and caved in on itself, transforming into the wasp.

My Wolf—

*I know, I know. I’m workin’ on it.*

“Forgive me,” Lady Eddison, stepping forward, but her husband grabbed her hand, trying to pull her back.
“No, no, Clemency, come back. Keep away. Keep away, my darling.”

“No,” Agatha said suddenly, fiercely. “No more murder. If my imagination made you kill, then my imagination will find a way to stop you, foul creature.”

And with that she turned and ran out of the room. Rose and Donna hurried after her, with the wasp on their heels.

“Wait, now it’s chasing us!”

Rose and Donna burst out the main doors just in time to see Agatha pulling away in a car, honking the horn. The doors flew open and the wasp came barreling out, and Agatha skidded to a halt.

“Over here!” She called. “Come and get me, Reverend!”

“Agatha what are you doing?” Rose demanded.

“If I started this, Ms. Tyler, then I must stop it.”

And with that she drove off, the wasp following her. “Come on,” Rose said, grabbing Donna and dragging her to a nearby car.

“Can you drive?”

“We’ll find out.” She used the sonic to start the car and they took off.

“You said this was the night Agatha Christie disappeared,” Donna said as they drove along. She clung to the door for dear life. Rose could not drive.

“Time’s in flux,” Rose said through gritted teeth. The timelines were grinding on her mind, causing a hell of a headache. “For all we know, this is the night Agatha Christie loses her life and history gets changed.

“But where’s she going?”

They passed a sign post that said Silent Pool. “The lake,” Rose said. She’s heading for the lake. What’s she doing?”

They found Agatha standing on the lake’s edge, holding the Firestone above her head with the wasp hovering over her.

“She’s controlling it,” Donna said in wonder as they got out of the car, approaching slowly.

“It’s mind is based on her thought processes,” Rose explained. “They’re linked.”

“Quite so, Ms. Tyler,” Agatha agreed. “If I die, then this creature might die with me.”

“Don’t hurt her,” Rose begged the wasp. “You’re not meant to be like this. You’ve got the wrong template in your mind.”

The wasp didn’t even acknowledge her. “It’s not listening to you.” Donna eyed the necklace in Agatha’s hand. And without a second thought she grabbed it, throwing it into the lake. The wasp followed, diving in after it.

“How do you kill a wasp?” Donna asked rhetorically, stepping back. “Drown it, just like his father.”
They watched as the water bubbled purple. “Death comes as the end,” Agatha said quietly, “and justice is served.” She looked back at Rose. “Just one mystery left, then, Rose Tyler. Who exactly are you?”

Thankfully, Rose was saved from answering as Agatha doubled over, clearly in pain. “Oh, it’s the Firestone,” Rose said as Donna grabbed Agatha to keep her from falling over. “It’s part of the Vespiform’s mind. It’s dying and it’s connected to Agatha.”

Suddenly the woman glowed purple, just for a few moments. It faded, and Rose breathed a sigh of relief. “He let her go. Right at the end, the Vespiform chose to save someone’s life.”

“Is she alright, though?” Donna asked as she lowered Agatha’s unconscious body to the ground.

“Of course.” Rose nodded. “The amnesia. Wiped her mind of everything that happened. The wasp, the murders.”

“And us,” Donna said regretfully. “She’ll forget about us.”

“Yeah,” Rose admitted. “But we’ve solved another riddle. Thy mystery of Agatha Christie. And tomorrow morning, her car gets found by the side of a lake. A few days later, she turns up in hotel at Harrogate with no idea of what just happened.”

“And I’m guessing we have something to do with that?”

Rose winked.

* * * * *

Two days later — in real time — for Rose, Donna, and Agatha it was only five minutes — Agatha Christie woke up in the woods near Harrogate Hotel. She didn’t even notice the wooden box nearby as she pushed herself up and started walking.

“Lady Eddison, the Colonel, and all the staff,” Donna said quietly as she and Rose treated back into the TARDIS. “What about them?”

“Shameful story. They’d never talk of it. Too British. While the Unicorn does a bunk back to London town. She can never even say she was there.”

“What happens to Agatha?”

Rose smiled. “Oh, great life. Met another man, married again. Saw the world. Wrote and wrote and wrote.”

“She never thought her books were any good, though. And she must have spent all those years wondering.”

“I don’t think she ever quite forgot though,” Rose said thoughtfully as she pulled up a bit of grating and jumped down, pulling out an old wooden chest. “Great mind like that, some of the details kept bleeding through. All the stuff her imagination could use. Like Ms. Marple.”

“Ah, should’ve made her sign a contract,” Donna sighed. “What are you doing?”

“Hang on, hang on…ah.” Rose pulled out a book, smiling as she held it up. Death in the Clouds with a wasp on the cover.

“She did remember,” Donna said with a small smile.
“Somewhere in the back of her mind,” Rose said, “it all lingered. And that’s not all.” She held the book out for Donna to take. “Look at that copyright page.”

Donna flipped it open, eyes widening. “Facsimile edition, published in the year five billion!”

“People never stopped readin’ them,” Rose said, putting the chest back and climbing up above the grating again. “She is the best sellin’ novelist of all time.”

“But she never knew.” That made Donna sad.

“Well, no one knows how they’re going to be remembered. All we can do is hope for the best. Maybe that’s what kept her writing. Same thing keeps me traveling.” Rose shot Donna a smile. “Onwards?”

Donna smiled back. “Onwards.”

Chapter End Notes

My apologies for forgetting the Sunday update. I'll still update on Sunday as normal.
“Blimey,” Rose said as they stepped out of the TARDIS. She hadn’t meant to land here — at all. But the TARDIS had decided they had somewhere to be that was more important than the beach. Unfortunately.

“Fifty-first century,” she told Donna as the woman stepped out with her. “By now there’s holovids, direct to brain downloads, fiction mists, but books still serve an important purpose in the world. Everyone needs a good book.”

They walked down the staircase, looking around. “The Library,” Rose said. “So big, it doesn’t need a name. Just a great bit The.”

“It’s like a city,” Donna breathed as she looked around.


They came out at the end of staircase, onto the balcony, seeing the sprawling world of bookcases before them.

“Blimey, it’s huge,” Rose said, looking around. She caught Donna picking up a book, and grabbed it away quickly. “Oi, no. Spoilers.”

“What?”

“These books are from the future.” Rose waved it at her. “Your future. You don’t want to read ahead. Spoil all the surprises. Like peeking at the end.”

“Isn’t traveling with you one big spoiler?” Donna balked.

“I try to keep you away from the major plot developments,” Rose defended herself. “Which, to be honest, I seem to be very bad at, because you know what? This is the biggest library in the universe. So where is everyone? It’s silent.”

She found an information screen nearby, sonicking it to bring it online. “The library?” Donna asked, confused.


“Maybe it’s Sunday.”

Rose shook her head. “No, I never land on Sundays. It’s a rule.”
“Why?”

“Sundays are boring.” That was what the Doctor always said. Donna raised an eyebrow.

“Rose, why are we here?”

“Just passing,” Rose murmured as she worked. Donna didn’t buy that for a damn minute.

“Really? Because twenty minutes ago we were in the wardrobe trying to find bikinis now suddenly we’re about as far from the beach as we could possibly get.”

“Now that’s interesting.”

Donna huffed. She hated when Rose did this. “Don’t start with that Blondie—”

“No, Donna, this is important. I’m scanning for life forms. If I do a scan looking for your basic humanoids. You know, your book readers, few limbs and a face, apart from us, I get nothing. Zippo, nada. See? Nobody home. But if I widen the parameters to any kind of life…”

The screen flashed Error 1,000,000,000,000 life form number capped at maximum record.

“A million, million,” Rose said. “Gives up after that. A million, million.”

“But there’s nothing here,” Donna said, looking around. “There’s no one.”

“And not a sound,” Rose added. “A million, million life forms, and silence in the library.”

“But there’s no one here,” Donna repeated. “There’s just books. I mean, it’s not the books, is it? I mean, it can’t be the books, can it? I mean, books can’t be alive.”

They exchanged looks before looking at a book, and reaching for it.

“Welcome.” The sound of a voice echoing through the library made them jump, and they whirled around.

“That came from here,” Donna said.

“Yeah.”

They returned back to the first room they’d landed in, seeing a vaguely humanoid sculpture by a curved desk turn its head, and it spoke with a female voice from a small face on the surface.

“I am Courtesy Node seven one zero slash aqua. Please enjoy the Library and respect the personal access codes of all your fellow readers, regardless of species or hygiene taboo.”


“Yeah, don’t worry about it,” Rose muttered.

“A statue with a real face, though?” Donna pushed. “It’s a hologram or something, isn’t it?”

“No, but really, it’s fine,” Rose assured her.

“Additional. There follows a brief message from the Head Librarian for your urgent attention. It has been edited for tone and content by a Felman Lux Automated Decency Filter. Message follows. Run. For God’s sake, run. No way is safe. The library has sealed itself, we can’t. Oh, they’re here. Argh.
“So that’s why we’re here,” Rose said with a sigh. “Any other messages, same date stamp?” She asked the mode.

“One additional message. This message carries a Felman Lux coherency warning of five zero eleven —”

“Yeah, yeah, just play it,” Rose said impatiently.

“Message follows. Count the shadows. For God’s sake, remember, if you want to live, count the shadows. Message ends.”

Oh that was…ominous. Rose took a step back from the node, looking around.

“Donna?”

“Yeah?”

“Stay out of the shadows.”

Donna raised an eyebrow. “Why, what’s in the shadows?”

“I haven’t a clue but I’m not about to screw around with it. Come on.”

They started walking, and Rose felt the psychic paper burn in her pocket again. “Blimey, what’s with this thing?” She muttered, digging it out. “It’s been going off all day…”

She flipped it open, frowning when she saw a message waiting for her. The library come as soon as you can — R.

She held it over to Donna for her to see. “What do you think?” She asked. “Cry for help?”


“I don’t think my future self would call for help from me,” Rose said, though the R was certainly throwing her. She didn’t know anyone who would ask for help this way. Certainly no one with a name that started with R.

“Why did we come here, Rose?” Donna asked again. Rose shook her head.

“I…don’t really know,” she finally admitted. “The TARDIS brought us here. Probably because of this.” She waved the psychic paper. “I don’t—” She froze when she saw the lights behind them going out.

“What?” Donna looked back. “What’s happening?”

Rose wasn’t sticking around to find out. “Run!”

She grabbed Donna’s hand, dragging her to the nearest door. “Come on!” Rose said desperately, trying to get the door open, but it was stuck.

“What, is it locked?” Donna demanded.

“Well, sonic it!” Donna said. “Use the thingy!”

“I can’t, it’s wood. Fatal flaw really, the thing can cut through the sharp steel with enough time but it can’t bloody—”

“Oh, get out of the way!” Donna snapped, shoving Rose to the side. And she kicked the door open.

“Blimey, anyone ever told you you’re a little frightening?” Rose said as they ran into the room, slamming the door behind them. “Phew.” She turned to see a metal orb floating in the air. “Oh. Hello. Sorry to burst in on you like this. Okay if we stop here for a bit?”

The orb fell to the floor with a thud. Rose raised an eyebrow, moving forward.

“What is it?” Donna asked.

“Security camera. I think.” Rose started buzzing it with the sonic. “Switched itself off. Nice door skills, by the way.”

“Yeah, well, you know.” Donna shrugged. “Boyfriends. Sometimes you need the element of surprise. What was that? What was after us? I mean, did we just run away from a power cut?”

“Possibly,” Rose admitted. She didn’t really no to be entirely honest. She didn’t know about any of this. It bothered her.

“Are we safe here?” Donna asked. She seemed to sense that Rose was nervous.

“Of course we are.” Rose gestured to a nearby sign. “There’s a little shop.”

Donna made a face at Rose. “Is that a Doctor thing?”

“Oh yes.”

The camera lens snapped open and suddenly, and Rose moved back.

“There we go. Hello there.”

There was a brief pause, and then words started scrolling across the screen. No, stop it. No. No.

Rose’s stomach dropped. “Oh. I’m sorry,” she said mournfully. “I really am. I’m sorry. I’m so sorry.” She looked back at Donna, who was clearly bewildered by all this. “It’s alive.”

“You said it was a security camera,” Donna protested.

“It is. It’s an alive one.”

Others are coming. The library is breached. Others are coming.

“Others?” Donna repeated as they read the words on the screen. “What’s it mean, others?” She walked to a nearby node. “Excuse me. What does it mean, others?”

“That’s barely more than a speak your weight machine,” Rose said as she pushed herself up. “It can’t help you.”

“So why’s it got a face?” Donna asked, jumping when the node spoke.

“This flesh aspect was donated by Mark Chambers on the occasion of his death.”
Donna’s mouth dropped. “It’s a real face?!”

“It has been actualized individually for you from the many facial aspects saved to our extensive flesh banks. Please enjoy.”

“It chose me a dead face it thought I’d like?” Donna asked, shocked. “That statue’s got a real dead person’s face on it.”

“It’s the fifty-first century,” Rose pointed out, not nearly as bothered. Which probably didn’t say anything good. “That’s basically like donating a park bench.”

“It’s donating a face!”

Rose cast a look around, eyes sweeping the floor for a moment — and she hissed out a swear in a language the TARDIS refused to translate. “No, wait, no.” She grabbed Donna’s hand, pulling her back.

“Oi, what’s wrong with you?” Donna demanded.

“The shadows,” Rose said. “Count the shadows.”


“Yeah,” Rose agreed, eying the triangular shadow. “But what’s casting it?”

Donna looked around the room, stomach dropping when she realized there was nothing that could be casting a shadow of that shape.

“Oh.”

The light in the adjoining corridor went out, and they snapped around to look at it.

“The power must be going,” Donna said reasonably. Rose shook her head.

“This place runs on fission cells. They’ll outburn the sun.”

“Then why’s it dark?” Donna asked.

“It’s not dark.” Donna shot Rose a look — her eyes were glowing faintly. Oh that wasn’t good. Donna looked around, noticing something off-putting.

“That shadow. It’s gone.”

“We need to get back to the TARDIS,” Rose said firmly. Donna shot her a look.

“Why?”

“Because that shadow hasn’t gone. It’s moved.”

“Reminder,” the Mark node announced. “The library has been breached. Others are coming. Reminder. The library has been breached…”

Before they could move, the door was blasted open, and they whirled to see six figures in spacesuits walking in. The one at the front adjusted something on her helmet, and the black glass faded so they could see the face — a woman.
“Hi Aunt Rose.”

Rose’s mouth fell open. “What?”

Donna shot her a look. “How much family have you got running around the universe?”

Rose shook her head, tugging at her hair. “Right. Okay. All of you. Turn around, get back in your rocket and fly away,” she told them all firmly. “Tell your grandchildren you came to the library and lived. They won’t believe you.”

The woman ignored that completely. “Pop your helmets, everyone. We’ve got breathers.”

“How do you know they’re not androids?” Another woman asked. The leader pulled her helmet off.

“Because I’ve dated androids. They’re rubbish.”

“Who is this?” A man demanded. “You said we were the only expedition. I paid for exclusives.”

“I lied,” the leader said easily. “I’m always lying. Bound to be others.”

She turned to Rose and Donna, beaming brightly. “So what’d they do, kidnap you again? And where’s himself anyways?”

“What?” Donna said, a bit stupidly. She had certainly never seen this woman — Rose’s niece? — before.

“Listen, I think you’ve got me confused with someone else,” Rose said patiently. “Please, just leave. I’m asking you seriously and properly, just leave.” She paused. “Hang on. Did you say expedition?”

“My expedition,” the man spoke up. “I funded it.”

“. . .Right okay.” Rose shook her head, turning to look at the woman. “Sorry, I didn’t catch your name.”

She was surprised at the way the woman’s face fell. “You don’t know me.”

“Should I?”

The woman closed her eyes for a moment, taking a deep breath. “Time traveler. Of course. You’re not…” She sighed, taking a deep breath. “Sorry. I’m Professor River Song.”

“River Song, lovely name.” Rose nodded. “As you’re leaving, and you’re leaving now, you need to set up a quarantine beacon. Code wall the planet, the whole planet. Nobody comes here, not ever again. Not one living thing, not here, not ever.” She caught sight of another woman moving close to the shadows. “Stop right there,” she snapped. “What’s your name?”

“Anita.”

“Anita, stay out of the shadows. Not a foot, not a finger in the shadows till you’re safely back in your ship. Goes for all of you. Stay in the light. Find a nice, bright spot and just stand. If you understand me, look very, very scared. No, bit more scared than that. Okay, do for now. You.” She pointed to a man. “Who are you?”

“Er, Dave.”

“Okay. Dave—”
“Oh, well, Other Dave. Because that’s Proper Dave, the pilot, he was the first Dave, so when we—”

“Other Dave,” Rose interrupted, “the way you came, does it look the same as before?”

“Yeah.” Other Dave turned to look. “Oh… it’s a bit darker.”

“How much darker?” Rose prompted, and Donna shot her a look. What was she on about?

“Oh, like I could see where we came through just like a moment ago. I can’t now.”

“Exactly.” Rose tugged at a lock of hair. “Seal up this door. We’ll find another way out.”

“We’re not looking for a way out,” Lux snapped, talking over Other Dave. “Miss Evangelista?”

Another young woman shuffled forward with some paperwork. “I’m Mister Lux’s personal everything. You need to sign these contracts agreeing that your individual experience inside the library are the intellectual property of the Felman Lux Corporation.”

Rose and Donna exchanged exasperated looks. “Right, give it here,” Rose said, holding a hand out.

“Yeah, lovely,” Donna added, and they took the contracts. “Thanks.”

They ripped them up without a second thought. “My family built this library,” Lux snapped, furious. “I have rights.”

“You have a mouth that won’t stop,” River informed him, and Rose had to smirk a bit. She liked her.

“You think there’s danger here?” River asked, Rose and she nodded.

“Something came to this library and killed everything in it. Killed a whole world. Danger? Could be.”

“That was a hundred years ago,” River informed her. “The Library’s been silent for a hundred years. Whatever came here’s long dead.”

“Would you bet your life on that?” Rose asked, and River nodded.

“Always.”

There was a moment of silence, and then Other Dave moved to start blocking the door. “What are you doing?” Lux demanded.

“She said seal the door.”

“You’re taking orders from her?”

“Spooky, isn’t it?” Rose asked, grabbing Lux’s flashlight and shining it around the room. “Almost every species in the universe has an irrational fear of the dark. But they’re wrong, because it’s not irrational. It’s Vashta Nerada.”

“What’s Vashta Nerada?” Donna asked.

“It’s what’s in the dark. It’s what’s always in the dark.” She turned to River. “Lights! That’s what we need, lights. You got lights?”

“What for?”
“Form a circle. Safe area. Big as you can, lights pointing out.”

River nodded, turning to her group. “Oi. Do as she says.”

“You’re not listening to this woman?” Lux asked in disbelief.

“Apparently I am. Anita, unpack the lights. Other Dave, make sure the door’s secure, then help Anita. Mister Lux, put your helmet back on, block the visor. Proper Dave, find an active terminal. I want you to access the library database. See what you can find about what happened here a hundred years ago. Au – you,” she pointed at Rose. “You’re with me. Step into my office.”

“Professor Song, why am I the only one wearing my helmet?” Lux asked as Rose moved uncertainly to walk with River.

“I don’t fancy you.”

Lux scowled as he pulled his helmet off. “Don’t let your shadows cross,” Rose informed them all firmly. “Seriously, don’t even let them touch. Any of them could be infected.”

“How can a shadow be infected?” Other Dave asked. Rose just went with River, not bothering to answer.

“Don’t mind her,” Donna told the group. “She gets a little one-track minded sometimes.”

“Excuse me,” Evangelista piped up. “Can I help?”

“No, we’re fine,” Anita rebuffed her quickly.

“I could just, you know, hold things…”

“No, really we’re okay,” Other Dave added. Donna raised an eyebrow.

“Couldn’t she help?”

“Trust me,” Other Dave said quietly. “I just spent four days on a ship with that woman. She’s er…”

“Couldn’t tell the difference between the escape pod and the bathroom,” Anita finished. “We had to go back for her. Twice.”

River pulled a small blue book out of her bag, playing with it as she eyed Rose uncertainly, and Rose fidgeted a bit. “I don’t suppose you’re just pretending to not know me for some reason,” the woman finally asked, and Rose shook her head.

“No, sorry. Sure you don’t have me confused with someone else?”

“Someone else whose name just happens to be Rose?” River laughed a bit. “Blimey, you’re as bad as him sometimes.”

“Him who?” Rose asked impatiently. “Who’re you talkin’ about?”

The amusement faded from River’s expression. “Oh god… you haven’t found him yet. Oh that explains so much…”

“Found who?”

River looked at her for a long moment before quietly saying, “Spoilers.”
A buzzing sound went off and they jumped, whirling around. “Sorry, that was me,” Dave said from the computer. “Trying to get through into the security protocols. I seem to have set something off. What is that? Is that an alarm?”

Rose tilted her head, listening. No, not an alarm. “Is it just me,” Donna said slowly, “Or does that sound like…”

“A phone,” Rose finished the thought. “It’s a phone. Here.”

She stepped forward, nudging Dave out of the way. “I’m trying to call up the data core,” Dave explained, “but it’s not responding. Just that noise.”

“But it’s a phone.”

“Yeah, I know. I’m workin’ on somethin’, just give me a minute to…”

She typed something out, hitting it with the sonic, and Access Denied flashed back at her. “Ookay, it doesn’t like that,” Rose murmured, frowning. “Something else, then…”

She worked for another minute before something shifted on the screen. “Okay, here it comes,” she said happily. And a picture popped up on the screen. It looked like a living room… with a little girl sitting on the floor. “Hello?” Rose called, and the girl looked up, wide-eyed.

“Hello.” She was surprisingly calm, however, so that was good. “Are you in my television?”

“Well, no, I’m, I’m sort of in space.” Yeah that wasn’t too weird. “Er, I was trying to call up the data core of a triple grid security processor.”

“Would you like to speak to my dad?” The girl asked, and Rose smiled.

“Dad, or your Mum. That’d be lovely.”

The girl watched them for a moment. “I know you. You’re in my library.”

Rose raised an eyebrow at that. “Your library?” She repeated, and the girl nodded.

“The library’s never been on the television before. What have you done?”

“I just rerouted the interface—”

The screen blinked out suddenly. “What happened?” River asked, looking at Rose. “Who was that?”

Rose shook her head. “No clue. I need another terminal. Keep workin’ on the lights, got that? We need those lights.”

River looked back at her group. “You heard her, people. Let there be light.”

Rose found another terminal to work at – and saw River’s book sitting on the table next to it. She picked it up uncertainly, but before she could try to open it River snatched it out of her hands.

“Sorry, you’re not allowed to see inside the book,” the woman informed her. “It’s against the rules?”

“What rules?” Rose asked, bewildered.

“Your rules.”
Before Rose could question that, books started flying off the shelves, and everyone let out a cry of surprise. “What’s that?” Rose asked, looking around. “I didn’t do that. Did you do that?”

“Not me,” Dave said quickly, holding his hands up. Rose looked back at her terminal, which was flashing _Cal Access Denied_.

“What’s Cal?”

Finally the books stopped. Donna saw Evangelista curled in a corner, clearly scared. She made her way to the young woman, gently asking, “You alright?”

She nodded, shaking. “What’s that? What’s happening?”

“I don’t know,” Lux said, shaking his head. Donna rested a hand on Evangelista’s shoulder, squeezing reassuringly.

“Oh, thanks, for er, you know, offering to help with the lights.”

“They don’t want me,” Evangelista sighed. “They think I’m stupid, because I’m pretty.”

“Course they don’t,” Donna assured her quickly. “Nobody thinks that.”

“No, they’re right, though.” Evangelista sounded miserable. “I’m a moron, me. My dad said I have the IQ of plankton, and I was pleased.”

Donna laughed. “See, that’s funny.”

“No, no,” Evangelista argued. “I really was pleased. Is that funny?”

Oh. Whoops. “No, no,” Donna said quickly. Thankfully books started flying again, distracting everyone.

“What’s causing that?” River asked, looking around. “Is it that little girl?”

“But who is the little girl?” Rose asked reasonably. “What’s she got to do with this place? How does the data core work? What’s the principle? What’s Cal?”

“Ask Mr. Lux.”

Rose rounded on the man. “Cal, what is it?”

“Sorry, you didn’t sign your personal experience contracts,” Lux replied snidely. Rose nearly slapped him.

“Mr. Lux. Right now, you’re in more danger than you’ve ever been in your whole life. And you’re protecting a patent?”

“I’m protecting my family’s pride,” he argued. Rose took a deep breath.

“Well, funny thing Mr. Lux. I don’t want to see everyone in this room dead because some _idiot_ thinks his pride is more important.”

“Then why don’t you just sign his contract?” River asked, then paused. “I didn’t either. God I’m getting worse than you.”

Rose shook her head. “Okay, okay, okay. Let’s start at the beginning. What happened here? On the
actual day, a hundred years ago, what physically happened?”

“There was a message from the Library,” River explained. “Just one. The lights are going out. Then the computer sealed the planet, and there was nothing for a hundred years.”

“It’s taken three generation of my family just to decode it and get back in,” Lux added.

“Er, excuse me?” Evangelista spoke up uncertainly.

“Not just now.”

“There was one other thing in the last message,” River continued, but Lux cut her off.

“That’s confidential.”

“I trust this woman with my life,” River informed him coolly. “With everything.”

“You’ve only just met her!” Wow Lux liked to argue. Although he had a point. Sort of.

“No, she’s only just met me,” River disagreed.

“I’m right here,” Rose muttered. She hated when people talked about her like she wasn’t in the room.

“Er, this might be important, actually,” Evangelista pushed.

“In a moment.”

River turned to Rose, handing a small device to her. “This is a data extract that came with the message.”

Rose read the words that flashed across the screen. “Four thousand and twenty two saved. No survivors.”

“Four thousand and twenty two,” River repeated. “That’s the exact number of people who were in the library when the planet was sealed.”

“But how can four thousand and twenty two people have been saved if there were no survivors?” Donna asked reasonably.

“That’s what we’re here to find out,” River told her.

“And so far, what we haven’t found are any bodies.”

A scream shattered the air, and they all whirled around, hurrying toward it with Rose in the lead.
They froze at the sight of a skeleton in rags.

“Everybody, careful,” Rose snapped, backing up. “Stay in the light.”

“You keep saying that,” Dave pointed out. “I don’t see the point.”

Rose ignored him. She didn’t have time for this. “Who screamed?”

“Ms. Evangelista.”

“Where is she?”

“Ms. Evangelista,” River spoke into her comm. “Please state your current…”

Her voice drifted off as she heard an echo nearby.

“Please state your current position,” she finished, frowning as the echo repeated her words.

She knelt down, digging a lit comm unit out of the skeleton’s rags. “It’s her,” she said quietly. “It’s Ms. Evangelista.”

“We heard her scream a few seconds ago,” Anita said faintly. “What could do that to a person in a few seconds?”

“It took a lot less than a few seconds,” Rose murmured, and Anita turned to her.

“What did?”

“Hello?”

Everyone jumped as Evangelista’s voice echoed out of the comm. “Er, I’m sorry, everyone,” River said, paling slightly. “Er, this isn’t going to be pleasant. She’s ghosting.”

“She’s what?” Donna asked.


“I don’t want to sound horrible,” Dave said quietly, “but couldn’t we just, you know…?”

“This is her last moment,” River snapped. “No, we can’t. A little respect, thank you.”

“Sorry, where am I? Excuse me?”

“But that’s Ms. Evangelista,” Donna spoke up again.
“It’s data ghost,” River explained quietly. “She’ll be gone in a moment. Miss Evangelista, you’re fine. Just relax. We’ll be with you presently.”

“What’s a data ghost?” Donna asked Rose, who was a bit white herself.

“There’s a neural relay in the communicator. Lets you send thought mail. That’s it there. Those green lights. Sometimes it can hold an impression of a living consciousness for a short time after death. Like an afterimage.”

“My grandfather lasted a day,” Anita said quietly. “Kept talking about his shoelaces.”

“She’s in there.” Donna seemed stuck on that.

“I can’t see. I can’t. Where am I?”

“She’s just brainwaves now,” Dave spoke up. “The pattern won’t hold for long.

“But she’s conscious,” Donna insisted. “She’s thinking.”

“I can’t see, I can’t. I don’t know what I’m thinking.”

“She’s a footprint on the beach,” Rose said. “And the tide’s coming in.”

“Where’s that woman? The nice woman. Is she there?”

“What woman?” Lux asked, looking around.

“She means…” Donna’s voice cracked, and she swallowed. “She means me.”

“Is she there? The nice woman.”

Rose rested a hand on Donna’s shoulder. The redhead was clearly shaken. “Yes, she’s here,” River said gently, holding the comm out to Donna. “Go ahead. She can hear you.”

“Hello? Are you there?”

“Help her,” Rose said quietly. Donna shook her head.

“She’s dead.”

“Yeah. Help her.”

“Hello? Is that the nice woman?”

Donna took a deep breath before speaking. “Yeah. Hello. Yeah, I’m — I’m — I’m here. You okay?”

“What I said before, about being stupid. Don’t tell the others, they’ll only laugh.”

Donna stomach dropped to her toes. “Course I won’t,” she said quietly. “Course I won’t tell them.”

“Don’t tell the others, they’ll only laugh.”

“I won’t tell them,” Donna assured her. “I said I won’t.”
“Don’t tell the others, they’ll only laugh.”

“I’m not going to tell them.”

The green light on the comm started blinking. “Don’t tell the others, they’ll only laugh.”

“She’s looping now,” River explained. “The pattern’s degrading.”

“I can’t think. I don’t know, I, I, I, I scream. Ice cream. Ice cream. Ice cream. Ice cream.”

River sighed, fingerling the off button. “Does anybody mind if I…?”

“Ice cream. Ice cream.”

River switched the unit off. Donna was trembling. “That was… that was horrible. That was the most horrible thing I’ve ever seen.”

“No, it’s just a freak of technology,” River said, and Donna scowled at her. “But whatever did this to her, whatever killed her, I’d like a word with that.”

“I’ll introduce you.” Rose’s voice was hard. That was never a good sign. They started back to the room. “I’m going to need a packed lunch.”

“Hang on.” River went to her bag to find one. Rose saw the book sitting on the table again.

“What’s in that book?” She asked. River shook her head.

“Who are you?”

“Professor River Song, University of–”

“To me,” Rose interrupted. “Who are you to me?”

“Again, spoilers.” River handed her a paper bag. “Chicken and a bit of salad. Knock yourself out.”

Rose sighed, taking a bag and turning back to the group. “Right, you lot. Let’s all meet the Vashta Nerada.”

She dug the sonic screwdriver out of her pocket, scanning the floor. River stepped back to stand with Donna. “So the two of you are together?”

“Not like that,” Donna said quickly. River laughed.

“Oh I know not like that. I just meant you’re traveling together.”

“Proper Dave, could you move a bit?” Rose asked.

“Why?”

“Over there, by the water cooler.” Rose ignored the question, of course. “Thanks.”

“You knew us,” Donna said as they watched Rose work. “You asked if she’d kidnapped me again.”

River smiled sadly. “Yeah. I sent a message, but it went wrong. It arrived too early. Far too early. She doesn’t know who I am yet, and he’s not with her…it’s all wrong.”

“Do you two mind?” Rose snapped. She didn’t mean to be angry, but she was tired of River’s
vagueness. The woman winced, looking quite like a chastised child.

“Sorry.”

They leaned back against the wall, watching Rose for a long moment. “You called her Aunt Rose,” Donna said quietly, and River winced.

“Yeah. I messed up. That was pretty stupid of me. They’re always telling me to be careful, I just didn’t realize…”

“Okay, got a live one,” Rose announced, stopping. “That’s not darkness down those tunnels. This is not a shadow. It’s a swarm. A man-eating swarm.”

She pulled a chicken leg out of the bag, tossing it into the shadows. It was a bone by the time it hits the floor.

“The piranhas of the air,” Rose murmured, taking a step back. “The Vashtra Nerada. Literally, the shadows that melt the flesh. Most planets have them, but usually in small clusters. I’ve never seen an infestation on this scale, or this aggressive.”

“What do you mean, most planets?” Donna asked. “Not Earth?”

Rose shook her head. “Earth, and a billion other worlds. Where there’s meat, there’s Vashtra Nerada. You can see them sometimes, if you look. The dust in sunbeams.”

“If they were on Earth, we’d know,” Donna protested. Rose shook her head.

“Nah, normally they live on roadkill. But sometimes people go missing. Not everyone comes back out of the dark.”

“Every shadow?” River confirmed.

“No. But any shadow.”

“So what do we do?”


“Run?” River repeated. “Run where?”

Rose looked around. “This is an index point. There must be be an exit teleport somewhere.”

All eyes turned to Lux. “Don’t look at me,” he said. “I haven’t memorized the schematics.”

“What about the little shop?” Donna asked. “They always make you go through the little shop on the way out so they can sell you stuff.”

Rose beamed. “You’re right. Brilliant! The little shop, always the answer.”

“Okay, let’s move it then,” Dave said, starting to move. Rose winced.

“Actually, Proper Dave, could you stay where you are for a moment?”

He paused, looking around. “Why?”
“I’m sorry,” Rose breathed, closing her eyes for a moment. “I am so, so sorry. But you’ve got two shadows.”

Dave twisted to see the two shadows standing at right angles of each other. “It’s how they hunt,” Rose explained. “They latch on to a food source and keep it fresh.”

“What do I do?” Dave asked, panicked.

“You stay absolutely still, like there’s a wasp in the room,” Rose said. “Like there’s a million wasps.”

“We’re not leaving you, Dave,” River assured him.

“Of course we’re not,” Rose agreed. “Where’s your helmet? Don’t point, just tell me.”

“On the floor,” Dave said. “By my bag.”

Anita went to get it for him. “Don’t cross the shadow,” Rose said as Anita came back. “Thanks.” She took the helmet, going to put it on Dave. Now, the rest of you, helmets back on and sealed up. We’ll need everything we’ve got.”

“We don’t have any helmets though,” Donna pointed out.

“Yeah, but we’re safe anyway.”

“How are we safe?”

“Well… we’re not. I was sort of hoping you wouldn’t call me on that. Professor, anything I can do with the suit?”

“What good are the damn suits?” Lux demanded. “Ms. Evangelista was wearing her suit. There was nothing left.”

“We can increase the mesh density,” River piped up. “Dial it up four hundred percent. Make it a tougher meal.”

Rose sonicked the suit with a frown. “Eight hundred percent. Pass it on.”

“Gotcha.”

Rose froze when she saw River fish something out of her suit – a sonic pen.

“What’s that?” She demanded, and River turned to look at her.

“It’s a sonic pen,” she said, as if it was obvious. Which… okay it was. But that wasn’t the point.

“That’s my sonic pen.” It was a very souped version of the sonic pen she had taken from Ms. Foster after the Adipose disaster.

A small smile pulled at River’s lips. “No, it’s mine.”

Donna looked between the pen and Rose – who was definitely pale now. “Who the hell are you?”

River was still smiling as she set to work on the other suits. Rose took a deep breath, looking back at Donna.
“Come on. Come with me.”

Rose walked away, with Donna following. They made their way to the shop. “What are we doing? We shopping? Is it a good time to shop?”

“Sorry,” Rose said quietly, pulling Donna into the middle of a trio of three roundels, leaving her there.

“What is this?” Donna demanded, looking horribly annoyed.

“I can’t let you stay, Donna.”

“What?” Donna demanded, furious as she tried to step out of the circle, but Donna stopped her.

“Since when do you care about whether I’m in danger?”

“I always care,” Rose snapped, eyes flashing. “I just don’t usually have the option of sending you somewhere safe. This time I do, and I’m not letting you stay. You don’t have a suit, you’re not safe. I can get you back to the TARDIS.”

“Now just you hold on—”

She teleported away before she could finish yelling at Rose, however. Rose sighed.

“Rose,” River called, and Rose made her way back. “Dave’s second shadow is gone.”

Rose blinked, looking down at the floor. Sure enough, Dave only had one shadow. “Where did it go?” She asked, looking around. Dave shook his head.

“It’s just gone. I looked round, one shadow, see?”

“Does that mean we can leave?” River asked. “I don’t want to hang around here.”

“I don’t know why we’re still here,” Lux said, a bit rudely. “We can leave him, can’t we? I mean, no offense.”

“Shut up, Mr. Lux,” River snapped. Rose smirked a bit. She did like her.

“Did you feel anything?” She asked Dave gently. “Like an energy transfer? Anything at all?”

“No, no, but look, it’s gone.” Dave started to turn.

“Stop there,” Rose said quickly. “Stop, stop, stop there. Stop moving. They’re never just gone and they never give up.”

She stepped over, sonicking the floor near Dave. “Well, this one’s benign,” she murmured.

“Hey, who turned out the lights?” Dave said suddenly. Rose didn’t even look up.

“No one, they’re fine.”

“No, seriously,” Dave protested. “Turn them back on.”

“They are on,” River said.

“I can’t see a ruddy thing!”

Rose froze, looking slowly at Dave’s back. “Dave, turn around.”
Dave turned slowly. The visor of his shield was completely dark. “What’s going on?” He demanded. “Why can’t I see? Is the power gone? Are we safe here?”

“Dave, I want you to stay absolutely still,” Rose said gently. “Absolutely still.” Right on cue the man gave a hard jerk, as if something had hit him. “Dave? Dave? Dave, can you hear me? Are you all right? Talk to me, Dave.”

“I’m fine,” he said quickly. “I’m okay. I’m fine.”

“Yeah, you are,” Rose assured him. “Just try to stay still.”

“I’m fine,” he said again. “I’m okay. I’m fine.”

“Please try to stay still,” Rose said again, trying to be gentle.


Rose’s mouth went dry when she saw Dave’s comm unit lights blinking. “He’s gone,” River said quietly. “He’s ghosting.”

God damn it. “Then why is he still standing?” Lux asked. Oh… that was a good question.

“Hey, who turned out the lights? Hey, who turned out the lights?”

Rose took a careful step forward. “Rose, don’t,” River warned her. She ignored her.

“Dave, can you hear me?”

“Hey, who turned out the lights?”

Dave’s hand flew up suddenly, grabbing Rose by the throat, and a skull became visible in his helmet. Rose struggled against the grip, fingers clawing at the suit. Damn it, damn it, damn it…

“Who turned out the lights? Hey, who turned out the lights?”

The sound of River’s sonic pen hit Rose’s ears and suddenly she was free, stumbling back. “Useless without me,” River said as she caught Rose, holding her steady.

“Back from it!” Rose called as soon as she could breathe again. “Get back, everyone back, now!”

The skeleton lunged at them, and everyone jerked back. “Not very fast, is it?” River commented as she watched the thing move jerkily.

“It’s a swarm in a suit. But it’s learning.” Rose’s eyes flitted to the floor. There were four shadows coming off the thing now – and counting.

“What do we do?” Lux asked, panicking. “Where do we go?”

River pulled a gun off her belt. “See that wall behind you? Duck.”


They scrambled out hurriedly. “You said not every shadow,” River said to Rose.
“But any shadow.”

“Hey, who turned out the lights?” They heard Dave’s voice say right behind them.

“Run!” River called, grabbing Rose’s hand and dragging her along.

They ran through the stacks, trying to put as much space between themselves and Dave’s suit as humanly possible. Thankfully the swarm still hadn’t quite worked out how to move yet – they lost him easily enough.

“Alright, I think we’re clear,” River said as they finally stopped, gasping for breath and looking around. “Everyone okay?”

Okay might’ve been a strong word. They were all horribly aware that they were two people short now. But still everyone nodded. Rose found a nearby chair, pulling it over and climbing up to start working on a lighting fixture.

“What are you doing?” River asked, looking up at her.

“Trying to boost the power. Light doesn’t stop them, but it slows them down.”

River couldn’t help but notice that her eyes were glowing. Oh that was great. She really hoped the rest of the group didn’t see. “Rose?” Rose looked down, and River tapped the skin under her own eye. “Careful.”

Rose looked away quickly. “You don’t seem too surprised by it yourself,” she commented as she worked.

“Well I’ve seen it before.” River sat down on the edge of the chair, tilting her head up to watch Rose work. “So what’s the plan? Do you have a plan?”

“You know me, you know I don’t have a plan.”

“Well I can dream.”

Rose worked in silence for a long moment. “Where did you get that sonic pen?”

“Where do you think?” River asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Why would I give you the sonic pen?”

“Well it was just sitting in a drawer collecting dust.”

Rose finished working, jumping down to face River. Her eyes were still glowing just slightly, but nothing noticeable. Who is she? She asked the TARDIS.

I have no idea, my Wolf.

Do you think I can trust her?

She has not done anything yet to hurt you…

Oh you’re helpful–

“I know that look,” River said with a laugh. “Bickering with the TARDIS again?”
Rose gave River a long, hard look. “Who are you?”

“Spoilers.”

“No, that’s not—”

*My Wolf, there is something else.*

“Not now,” Rose snapped out loud without thinking. River raised an eyebrow, knowing that wasn’t directed at her.

*Yes, now. There is a problem. The loud one did not make it back to the TARDIS.*

Rose’s mouth fell open at that.

“What? What do you mean Donna didn’t make it back? *She is not here. Something intercepted the teleport and pulled her away.*

“What’s going on?” River asked. That wasn’t Rose’s bickering face. That was her “something is really wrong” face.

“I sent Donna back to the TARDIS,” Rose said slowly. “But she never made it back.”

“Maybe the coordinates slipped,” River suggested gently. “She could’ve landed somewhere else.

Rose nodded, going to a nearby node. “Donna Noble. There’s a Donna Noble somewhere in this library. Do you have the software to locate her position?”

The node turned… and Rose’s stomach dropped to her toes. It had Donna’s face. “No…”

*Donna Noble has left the library. Donna Noble has been saved.*

“How can it be Donna?” River asked, standing up.

*Donna Noble has left the library. Donna Noble has been saved.*

“Donna,” Rose whispered, feeling sick. That had backfired completely.

*Donna Noble has left the library.*

Dave’s voice echoed through the library. “Hey, who turned out the lights?”

“Rose!” River called. Rose barely heard her.

*Donna Noble has been saved.*

“Hey, who turned out the lights?”

*Donna Noble has the left the library.*

“Rose, come on!” River insisted, grabbing Rose’s hand and dragging her away from the node. “We’ve got to go, now!”

*Donna Noble has been saved.*

“Hey, who turned out the lights?”

River dragged Rose away, and the group started running down the corridor with Dave behind them
and Donna’s voice echoing.

“Donna Noble has left the library. Donna Noble has been saved.”

“Hey, who turned out the lights?”

The two voices echoed over one another as they ran along, trying to escape. They turned a corner – and found themselves facing a shadow. They turned back to find another one behind them.

“Rose, what do we do?” River asked, panicked, as she turned to look at Rose.

“I… I don’t know.”

“Hey, who turned out the lights?”

“Donna Noble has left the library. Donna Noble has been saved.”
Dave’s voice echoed ever closer, the call of Hey, who turned out the lights? seeming to reverberate on all sides. But Rose could only stare at Donna’s face on the node.

She had failed.

“Hey, who turned out the lights?”

River shook her head, blasting the wall to their left. “This way, quick,” she said, ushering her team through the hole and grabbing Rose’s arm, dragging her away. “Move!”

“Hey, who turned out the lights?”

* * * * *

Donna sat on the bed, staring sadly at herself in the mirror. She was so confused. She didn’t understand what was going on, or why she was in the hospital. She assumed it was the hospital, anyways. It seemed like a hospital.

She jumped when the door opened, and a man walked in. “Who are you?” She demanded.

“I’m Doctor Moon,” he explained gently. “I’ve been treating you since you came in two years ago.”

“Oh… god,” Donna breathed, shaking her head. “Doctor Moon, I’m so sorry. What’s wrong with me? I didn’t know you for a moment.”

“And then you remembered,” Doctor Moon assured her gently. “Shall we go for a walk?”

~*~

“No more dreams, then?” Doctor Moon asked as they walked. “Rose and the blue box, time and space?”

“How did we get here?” Donna asked, looking around. Why didn’t she remember walking down here?

“We came down the stairs, out the front door,” Moon reminded her. “We passed. Mrs. Ali on the way out.”

“Yeah.” Donna shook her head. “Yeah, we did. I forgot that.”

“And then you remembered. Shall we go down to the river?”

~*~

“You said river,” Donna said, looking around slowly, “and suddenly we’re feeding ducks.”
None of this made sense.

“Doctor Moon,” a male voice called. “Morning.”

Donna looked back to see a man with fishing gear walking toward them. Doctor Moon smiled, introducing them. “Donna Noble, Lee McAvoy.”

Donna smiled. “Hello, Lee.”

Hello D-D-D…” Donna smiled a bit as he started stuttering.

“Oooh, you’ve got a bit of a stammer there. Bless.”

“D-D…”

“Oh, skip to a vowel. They’re easy.”

~*~

“How did we leave it, him and me?” Donna asked as she and Moon made their way across the grounds. She couldn’t quite remember.

“I got the impression he was inviting you fishing tomorrow,” Moon said with a smile.

~*~

Donna smiled as she walked into Lee’s room wearing a sequined dress. A date. She was excited.

“So. Fishing.”

~*~

“D-D…”

They were sitting out by the lake, Lee stuttering Donna’s name. Or trying to at least. She smiled fondly. “Gorgeous, and can’t speak a word. What am I going to do with you?”

~*~

“Welcome home M-Mrs. McAvoy,” Lee said with a wide grin as he carried Donna over the threshold of their house. Donna laughed, beaming. Everything was perfect.

~*~

“Stop it, stop it now!” Donna said firmly as the kids ran through the living room. “We’ve got a visitor.”

The visitor was Doctor Moon, sitting on the couch looking through the family album. “You’ve done so much in seven years, Donna.” He sounded so proud. Donna beamed.

“Sometimes it feels more like seventy. Mind you, sometimes it feels like no time at all.”

The doctor smiled as he picked up his briefcase, preparing to leave. “Can I just say what a pleasure it is to see you fully integrated?”
Doctor Moon fritzed out suddenly, and was replaced with a blonde woman fiddling with something — Rose! The name clicked in Donna’s head.

“No,” she heard the woman grumble, “the signal’s definitely coming from the moon. I’m blocking it, but it’s trying to break through.” Her eyes swiveled to look at Donna. “Donna!”

And then she was gone, and Moon was back. “Sorry.” He patted his stomach. “Mrs. Angelo’s rhubarb surprise. Will I never learn?”

Donna’s breath hitched a bit. “Oh, Rose. I saw Rose.”

Moon nodded slowly. “Yes, you did, Donna. And then, you forgot.”

For a moment Donna felt like she was floating. She shook her head, smiling when she saw the doctor standing before her. “Doctor Moon. Oh, hello. Shall I make you a cup of tea?”

* * * * *

“Oh, we’ve got a clear spot,” River said as she blasted their way into another room. “In, in, in! Right in the center. In the middle of the light, quickly. Don’t let your shadows cross. Rose?”

Rose ignored her as she scanned around, trying to find something. “There’s no lights in here.” River’s voice was a bit anxious. “Sunset’s coming. We can’t stay long. Have you found a live one?”

“Maybe,” Rose said, looking back at River with a frown. “It’s getting harder to tell. What’s wrong with you?”

She ignored the question completely. “We’re going to need a chicken leg. Who’s got a chicken leg?” Other Dave pulled out his lunch bag, handing it over. “Thanks, Dave.” River dug the chicken out of the bag and tossed it into the shadows. Just like before, only the bone hit the ground.

“Oh, okay,” River breathed. “Okay, we’ve got a hot one. Watch your feet.”

“They won’t attack until there’s enough of them,” Rose said, backing up a bit. “But they’ve got our scent now. They’re coming.”

“Oh, yeah, who is she?” Rose heard other Dave ask. “You haven’t even told us. You just expect us to trust her?”

“She’s Rose,” River said, as if that explained everything. Which of course it didn’t.

“And who exactly is Rose?” Lux demanded.

“The only story you’ll ever tell, if you survive her.” Rose shuddered a bit at that wording.

“You say she’s your friend,” Anita spoke up, “but she doesn’t even know who you are.”

“Listen,” River said, a bit impatiently, “all you need to know is this. I’d trust that woman to the end of the universe. And actually, we’ve been.”

“She doesn’t look like she trusts you,” Anita pointed out. River sighed.

“Yeah, there’s a tiny problem. She hasn’t met me yet.”

And with that she walked over to where Rose was still scanning the shadows — or trying to at least. The sonic screwdriver wasn’t working well. “What’s wrong with it?” River asked. Rose shook her
“There’s a signal comin’ from somewhere, inteferin’ with it.”

“Need a hand?” River asked, holding up her sonic pen. Rose eyed it for a long moment before taking it from her, looking it over.

“You said I gave this to you.”

“You did.”

“Why would I do that?” She’d completely forgotten about this to be honest — she’d tossed it into the Doctor’s old lab after showing Donna to her room and hadn’t given it a second thought since.

“Spoilers.”

“That’s startin’ to get on my nerves. You keep actin’ like I can trust you but how do I know you haven’t killed me in the future?”

River let out a long sigh. “Listen, Rose, I know you’re upset. But you need to be less emotional, right now.”

“Don’t tell me what to do,” Rose snapped, losing her patience for a bit. “And don’t you dare tell me not to be upset about losing Donna.”

“There are five people in this room still alive,” River shot back. “Calm down and focus on that.”

“I’m not losin’ Donna,” Rose said firmly. “So you can just bugger off, alright? I don’t know who you think are but I don’t take orders from you.”

River gave an exasperated sigh. “Dear god you’re hard work when you’re young.”

“And stop with those comments!” It was just aggravating to hear her talk like that.

“Oh, for heaven’s sake!” Lux burst out, throwing his hands in the air. “We’re all about to die and you two are… bickering!”

River shook his head. He was right, at least. “Rose, listen. One day I’m going to be someone that you trust completely, but we don’t have time right now to get to that point. So I’m going to prove it to you. And I’m sorry. I’m really, very sorry.”

And she leaned, resting a hand on Rose’s shoulder as she whispered in the blonde’s ear. Two words.

“Bad Wolf.”

Rose’s stomach dropped to her toes as the air left in her a rush. Bad Wolf. Evelina had said those words too, back in Pompeii. They were still following her after all this time.

But why? It didn’t make any sense. The words were a trail, to lead her back to the Doctor. So what were they leading her to now?

She didn’t understand.

“Rose!” She jumped as River called her name, jerking her back to reality. “Are we good?”

Rose nodded faintly. “Yeah. Yeah we’re good.”
River smiled a bit, plucking the sonic pen from Rose’s hand and giving her room to work.

“Know what’s interestin’ about my screwdriver?” Rose asked rhetorically. “Very hard to interfere with. Practically nothing’s strong enough. Well, some hairdryers, but I’m working on that. So there is a very strong signal coming from somewhere, and it wasn’t there before. So what’s new? What’s changed? Come on!” No one answered. “What’s new? What’s different?”

“I don’t know,” Other Dave said impatiently. “Nothing. It’s getting dark?”

“It’s a screwdriver,” Rose said. “It works in the dark.” She looked up at the sky, frowning at the moon. “Moon rise.” That was what had changed. “Tell me about the moon. What’s there?”

“It’s not real,” Lux explained. “It was built as part of the Library. It’s just a Doctor Moon.”

Rose raised an eyebrow. “What’s a Doctor Moon?”

“A virus checker. It supports and maintains the main computer at the core of the planet.”

“Well, I think it’s still active,” Rose said, fiddling with the sonic. “It’s signaling. Look, someone somewhere in this library is alive and communicating with the moon. Or possibly alive and drying their hair. No, the signal is definitely coming from the moon. I’m blockin’ it, but it’s tryin’ to break through.”

“Rose!” River called, and Rose’s head snapped around to see Donna standing there.

“Donna!”

The woman almost immediately disappeared again. “Damn it!”

“That was her,” River said, looking back at Rose. “That was Donna! Can you get her back? What was that?”

“Slow down, slow down, just wait,” Rose said, working with the sonic. “I’m trying to find the wavelength but I’m being blocked.”

“Professor?” Anita said quietly.

“Just a moment,” River waved her off.

“It’s important.” Anita’s voice was small. “I have two shadows.”

Rose whipped around to look at Anita, her stomach dropping to her toes when she saw the parallel shadows attached to Anita.

“Okay.” River was calm, at least. “Helmets on, everyone. Anita, I’ll get yours.”

“It didn’t do Proper Dave any good,” Anita pointed out, panic in her tone, tears slipping down her cheeks.

“Just keep it together, okay?” River said gently.

“Keeping it together. I’m only crying. I’m about to die. It’s not an overreaction.”

River settled the helmet on Anita’s head, trying to give her a reassuring smile.

“Hang on.” Rose stepped forward, sonicking the visor black.
“What’s that? Have they gotten in?”

Rose shook her head. “I just tinted her visor. Maybe they’ll think they’re already in there, leave her alone.”

“Do you think they can be fooled like that?” River asked. Rose shook her head.

“Maybe. I don’t know. It’s a swarm. It’s not like we chat.”

“Can you still see in there?” Other Dave asked Anita curiously.

“Just about.”

“Everyone just stay back for now,” Rose ordered, gesturing for River. “Professor, a quick word, please.”

And she crouched down. River raised an eyebrow. “What?”

“Down here.”

River settled down into a crouch with her. “What is it?” River murmured.

“You said there are five people still alive in this room.”

“Yeah, so?”

“So…” Rose looked around. “Why are there six?”

“Hey! Who turned out the lights?”

Proper Dave had caught up to them. “Run!” Rose called, and the group took off.

* * * * *

“Mummy, I made you!” Ella announced, holding up the little plasticine figure she’d created. Donna smiled.

“Oh, that’s nice, Ella. Where’s the face?”

Ella looked at it, tilting her head. “I don’t know.”

“Did you see Doctor Moon? Did he leave?”

Lee walked in then, distracting the kids. “Daddy!” They called, running for him. Lee laughed.


“Look what I made,” Ella said proudly, holding up the figure for her daddy to see.

“Oh, it’s Mummy.”

“Er it hasn’t got a face,” Donna pointed out. “Did you see Doctor Moon?”

Lee tilted his head. “No. Why, was he here?”

“Yeah, just a second ago…” She’d thought. “You must have passed him.”

She went to look out the window, catching sight of a woman in a long Victorian dress walking
away.

“You alright?” Lee asked, looking out as well.

“Yeah,” Donna said quickly. “Yeah, I’m fine. It’s just…”

“Just?”

“Nothing. It’s been a long day, that’s all. I’m just tired.”

~*~

Donna blinked, looking around in confusion. They were in the bedroom. “You okay?” Lee asked, seeing the look on her face.

“I said I was tired and…and we put the kids to bed, and we watched television.”

The letterbox rattled downstairs, and they looked around. “Was that a letter?” Donna asked.

“It’s midnight.”

“Go and see what it is.”

Lee climbed out of bed, making his way out of the room, and Donna moved to look out the window, frowning when she saw the woman in black.

“The world is wrong.”

Donna whipped around to look at Lee. “What?”

“For you.” He held up the letter. “ Weird, though. ‘Dear Donna, the world is wrong. Meet me at your usual play park, two o’clock tomorrow.’”

Donna looked back to see the woman walking away.

“Nutter.”

~*~

Donna smiled as her children ran along in front of her. “Alright, you two, off you go,” she said, nudging them toward the swing set. “No fighting!”

She swept her eyes through the park, seeing the veiled woman sitting on a bench. After a moment she went to join her.

“I got your note last night,” she said without preamble. “The world is wrong. What’s that mean?”

“No, you didn’t,” the woman said. Donna tilted her head. Her voice sounded familiar, and her words were bewildering.

“I’m sorry, what?”

“You didn’t get my note last night,” the woman said. “You got it a few seconds ago. Having decided to come, you suddenly found yourself arriving. That is how time progresses here, in the manner of a dream. You’ve suspected that before, haven’t you, Donna Noble?”

Donna’s mouth dropped. “How do you know me?”
“We met before, in the library. You were kind to me. I hope now to return that kindness.”

“Your voice,” Donna said slowly. “I recognize it.”

“Yes, you do. I am what is left of Ms. Evangelista.”

* * * * *

“Professor, go ahead,” Rose called as they ran across the walk away. “Find a safe spot.”

“It’s a carnivorous swarm in a suit,” River protested, skidding to a halt to look back at Rose. “You can’t reason with it.”

“Five minutes.”

River shook her head. “Other Dave, stay with her. Pull her out when she’s too stupid to live. Five minutes, Rose.”

The rest of the group took off. Other Dave looked terrified but stood her ground.

“Hey, who turned out the lights?”

“You hear that?” Rose asked the being evenly. “Those words? That is the very last thought of the man who wore that suit before you climbed inside and stripped his flesh. That’s a man’s soul trapped inside a neural relay, going round and round forever. Now, if you don’t have the decency to let him go, how about this? Use him. Talk to me. It’s easy. Neural relay. Just point and think. Use him, talk to me.”

“Hey, who turned out the lights?”

Rose scowled. “The Vashta Nerada love on all worlds in this system, but you hunt in forests. What are you doing in a library.”

“Rose, we should go!” Other Dave insisted.

“In a minute.” Rose waved him off before refocusing on the zombie-like being. “You can to the library to hunt. Why? Just tell me why?”

There was a moment of silence. “We…did…not.”

Oh that was new. “Oh, hello,” Rose said pleasantly.

“We…did not.”

“Take it easy,” Rose coaxed gently. “You’ll get the hang of it. Did not what?”

“We…did not…come here.”

That made no sense. “Well, of course you did,” Rose protested. “Of course you came here.”

“We come…from here.”

Okay…this was interesting. “From here?”

“We…hatched here.”

“But you hatch from trees. From spores in trees.”
“These…are our forests.”

“You’re nowhere near a forest.” Rose waved a hand around. “Look around you.”

“These are our forests.”


“Rouse, we should go!” Other Dave said again. Rose ignored him.


“Rose, we should go!”

“Not now Dave. The forests of the Vashta Nerada, pulped and printed and bound. A million, million books, hatching shadows.”

“Rose, we should go!”

“Dave not — oh.” Rose’s heart dropped to her chest when she turned to Other Dave and saw that he was just a skeleton now as well. “Oh god Dave…I’m sorry. I’m so, so sorry.”

“Hey, who turned out the lights!” Proper Dave was back to his loops.

“Rose, we should go!”

“Okay, but just…” Rose backed up as they closed in on her. “Here’s the thing about me. You might’ve noticed I talk a lot. I could take some time to explain where it came from, but I doubt you’re interested. Point is, I like to talk and I know it gets me into trouble and by all accounts I should probably be dead. Know why I’m not? Because I know that the number one rule of staying alive is always stay near the door.”

And with that she sonicked the trapdoor beneath her and dropped, catching herself on support strut with one hand. My Wolf! The TARDIS protested, clearly distraught at the horrible life choices Rose was currently making.

It’s fine, I got this, Rose assured the TARDIS as she stuck the sonic screwdriver in her mouth, holding it between her teeth as she started inching along.

That does not assure me.

I would hope not. Considering it was a hold-faced lie.
“I suggested we meet here,” Evangelista said, “because a playground is the easiest place to see it. To see the lie.”

Donna raised an eyebrow at that. “What lie?”

“The children. Look at the children.”

But Donna had more pressing concerns right then. “Why do you wear that veil? If I had a face like yours, I wouldn’t hide it.”

“You remember my face, then?” There was a hint of a smile in the young woman’s voice. “The memories are still there. The library, the Doctor, me. You’ve just been programmed not to look.”

“Sorry, but you’re dead.” The words came out of nowhere.

“In a way, we’re all dead here, Donna,” Evangelista said morosely. “We are the dead of the library.”


“Your children were never alive.”

Fury flared to life in Donna. “Don’t you say that,” she snapped. “Don’t you dare say that about my children!”

“Look at your children,” Evangelista implored. “Look at all of them, really look.”

Donna hesitated for a moment before daring to look around — and her stomach dropped to her toes when she saw copies of Ella and Joshua running around — all just little clones.

“They’re not real,” Evangelista said uselessly. “Do you see it now? They’re all the same. All the children of this world, the same boy and the same girl, over and over again.”

“Stop it.” Donna’s voice cracked. “Just stop it. Why are you doing this? Why are you wearing that veil?”

She grabbed the veil, yanking it off — and screamed when she saw the skewed, distorted mess the veil was hiding.

* * * * *

River sighed as she checked the shadows with her sonic pen while the remnants of her team gathered in the center. “You know, it’s funny,” she said after a moment. “I keep wishing Rose was here.”
“Rose is here, isn’t she?” Anita asked, confused. “She is coming back, right?”

River went to join them. “You know when you see a photograph of someone you know, but it’s from years before you know them, and it’s like they’re not quite finished? They’re not done yet. Well, yes, Rose is here. She came when I called, just like she always does. But she’s not…she’s not my Aunt Rose. Her and my uncle together, they’re…fearsome. I’ve seen them make entire armies turn and run with just a wave of their hands, and then they swagger back off to the TARDIS, and Rose opens the doors with a snap of her fingers—"

“Spoilers.” Rose’s voice rang across the room, and they looked up to see the blonde making her way down a nearby staircase. “Nobody can open a TARDIS by snapping their fingers. It doesn’t work like that.”

“It does for you.” River sighed, looking away. “Someday.”

“And who’s this bloody uncle you’re on about?”

“Spoilers,” River reminded Rose, and she sighed.

“How are you all doing?”

“Where’s Other Dave?” River asked. Rose shook her head.

“He’s not comin’. I’m sorry.”

There was a moment of silence. “Well,” Anita finally spoke up, “if they’ve taken him, why haven’t they gotten me yet?”

Rose shrugged, a bit helplessly. “I don’t know. Maybe tinting your visor’s making a difference.”

“It’s making all the difference alright.” Anita sighed. “No one’s ever going to see my face again.”

Rose pressed her lips thin. She felt awful about this, she really did. “Can I get you anything?”

“An old age would be nice.” Anita’s voice was dry, but Rose could hear the fear underneath it. “Anything you can do?”

“I’ll figure it out.” As long as they didn’t take her, it would be fine.

“Rose.” The blonde refocused on Anita. “When we first met you, you didn’t trust Professor Song. And then she whispered a word in your ear, and you did. My life so far. I could do with a word like that. What did she say? Give a dead girl a break. Your secrets are safe with me.”

Rose blinked, her brow furrowing. “Safe,” she repeated slowly.

“What?”


“Four thousand and twenty-two people saved,” Lux recited. “No survivors.”

River could see the wheels turning in Rose’s head. “Rose?”

“What happened to your face?” Donna demanded.

“Transcription errors. Destroyed my face. But I got something else in translation.”

“Where are we?” Donna asked, a bit panicked. “Why are the children all the same?”

“The same pattern over and over,” Evangelista explained. “It saves an awful lot of space.”

“Space?”

“Cyberspace.”

Rose tapped away furiously at the computer. “See, there it is, right there. A hundred years ago, massive power surge. All the teleports going at once. Soon as the Vashta Nerada hit their hatching cycle, they attack. Someone hits the alarm. The computer tries to teleport everyone out.”

“It tried to teleport four-thousand twenty-two people?” River asked in disbelief.

“It succeeded,” Rose corrected. “Pulled them out, but then what? Nowhere to send them. Nowhere safe in the whole library. Vashta Nerada growing in every shadow. Four thousand and twenty two people all beamed up and nowhere to go. They’re stuck in the system, waiting to be sent, like emails. So what’s a computer to do? What does a computer always do?”

The pieces connected in River’s head. “It saved them.”

Rose stepped back from the computer, mind working a mile a minute. “The library. A whole world of books, and right at the core, the biggest hard drive in history. The index to everything ever written, backup copies of every single book. The computer saved four thousand and twenty two people the only way a computer can. It saved them to the hard drive.”

“Your physical self is stored in the library as an energy signature,” Evangelista explained. At some point they had moved to a gazebo. “It can be actualized again whenever you or the library requires.”

“The library?” Donna repeated. “If my face ends up on one of those statues…”

“You remember the statues?”

“Wait, no, just hang on.” Donna waved her off. “So this isn’t the real me? This isn’t my real body?”

“What you see around you, this entire world, is nothing than virtual reality.”

Donna shook her head, forcing herself to refocus on Evangelista. “So why do you look like that?”

“I had no choice. You teleported. You’re a perfect reproduction. I was just a data ghost caught in the Wi-Fi and automatically uploaded.”

“And that’s how you learned all this?”

“We’re only strings of numbers in here. But it works for me. If I hadn’t been able to explain, if I hadn’t been able to show you, you never would have believed me.”
“If this is all a dream, whose dream is it?” Donna asked.

“It’s hard to see everything in the data core, even for me, but there is a word. Just one word. Cal.”

“Mummy!” The cry echoed across the playground. “My knee!”

“Oh!” Donna ran back to Ella, who was on the ground crying. “Oh, look at that knee. Look at that silly old knee!”

“She’s not real,” Evangelista said regretfully as she approached. “They’re fictions. I’m sorry, but now that you understand that, you won’t be able to keep a hold. They are sustained only by your belief.”

“You don’t know,” Donna snapped. “You don’t have children.”

“Neither do you. Donna, for your own sake, let them go!”

* * * * *

Rose jumped as an alarm sounded overhead. “What is it?” Lux demanded. “What’s wrong?”

“Auto destruct enabled in twenty minutes,” a computer announced. Oh blimey.

* * * * *

“Mummy, what did the lady mean?” Ella asked as Donna pulled the children along. “Are we not real?”

“Where are we going?” Joshua added.

“Home!” Donna said fiercely.

~*~

And then they were in the living room. The entire room was glowing red, alarm sounding overhead. “That was quick, wasn’t it Mummy?” Josh asked.

“Mummy, what’s wrong with the sky?” Ella added.

* * * * *

“What’s maximum erasure?” River asked.

“In twenty minutes, this planet’s going to crack like an egg,” Rose explained as she tapped away at the computer.

“No,” Lux protested. “No, it’s alright. The Doctor Moon will stop it. It’s programmed to protect Cal.”

Right on cue, the screen went blank. “No!” Rose shouted in disbelief. “What’s happening?”

“All library systems are permanently offline. Sorry for any inconvenience. Shortly—”

“We need to stop this.” Lux spoke over the computer. “We’ve got to save Cal.”

“What is it?” Rose asked. “What is Cal?”
“We need to get to the main computer. I’ll show you.”

“We don’t have time to get there, it’s at the core of the planet,” Rose protested. River helpfully pointed her sonic pen at the library logo in the middle of the room, and it opened.

“Gravity platform,” she explained, and Rose had to smile a bit.

“I like you, don’t I?”

“I think you’re fond of me.”

They stepped onto the platform and made their way down.

* * * * *

“Mummy,” Joshua protested as Donna squeezed his hand, “you’re hurting my hand.”

“You just — you just stay where I can see you, alright? You — You don’t get out of my sight.”

“Is it bedtime?” Ella asked.

~*~

“Okay,” Donna said as she tucked the children in. “That was lovely, wasn’t it? That was a lovely bedtime. We had warm milk, and we watched cartoons, and then Mummy read you a lovely bedtime story.”

“Mummy,” Ella spoke up, “Joshua and me, we’re not real, are we?”

Donna’s stomach dropped to her toes. “Of course you’re real. You’re as real as anything. Why do you say that?”

“But Mummy,” Joshua said, “Sometimes, when you’re not here, it’s like we’re not here.”

“Even when you close your eyes, we just stop,” Ella added.

“Well, Mummy promises to never close her eyes again.”

And just like that, the children vanished.

“No!” Donna cried, jumping up. “Please! No, please! No! No, no! No, no!”

* * * * *

“Auto destruct in fifteen minutes.”

Rose’s head snapped up to see a globe with swirling energy hovering over their head. “The data core. Over four thousand minds trapped inside it.”

“Yeah, well they won’t be much longer,” River pointed out unhelpfully. “We’re running out of time.”

Rose ran to a nearby access terminal, typing away furiously. “Help me,” a voice said suddenly, and Rose jumped. “Please, help me.”

“What’s that?” Anita asked.
“Was that a child?”

Rose had more important things to worry about though. “The computer’s in sleep mode. I can’t wake it up. I’m trying.” She hit a few more buttons, annoyed. River leaned in to look at the screen.

“Rose, these readings…”

“I know,” Rose said quietly. “You’d think it was dreaming.”

“It is dreaming,” Lux spoke up suddenly. “Of a normal life, a lovely dad, and of every book ever written.”

“Computers don’t dream,” Anita protested.

“No. But little girls do.”

Lux flipped a breaker suddenly, and a door opened. They ran in as a node turned to face them. It had the face of a little girl.

“Please, help me,” it begged. “Please help me.”

“Oh, my god,” River breathed.

“It’s the little girl,” Anita spoke up. “The girl we saw in the computer.”

“She’s not in the computer,” Lux corrected. “In a way, she is the computer. The main command node. This is Cal.”

Rose turned on him, furious. “Cal is a child? A child hooked up to a mainframe? Why didn’t you tell me this? I needed to know this!”

“Because she’s my family!” Lux shot back. “Charlotte Abigail Lux. My grandfather’s youngest daughter. She was dying, so he built her a library and put her living mind inside, with a moon to watch over her, and all of human history to pass the time. Any era to live in, any book to read. She loved books more than anything, and he gave her them all. He asked only that she be left in peace. A secret, not a freak show.”

Rose took a step back, pressing her lips thin. “So you weren’t protecting a patent, you were protecting her.”

He nodded. “This is only a half a life, of course. But it’s forever.”

“And then the shadows came.”

“The shadows,” the Cal node repeated. “I have to…I have to save…have to save…”

“And she saved them.” Rose turned back to the node. “She saved everyone in the library. Folded them into her dreams and kept them safe.”

“Then why didn’t she tell us?”

“Because she’s forgotten,” Rose explained. “She’s got over four thousand living minds chatting away inside her head. It must be like being…” The Doctor. Rose shook that thought off though. Now wasn’t the time to miss him.

“So what do we do?” River asked. Rose turned on her heel, walking back out of the room.
“Auto destruct in ten minutes.”

I don’t have a choice.

I know, my Wolf.

It’s four thousand lives or—

I know.

“Hey.” River grabbed Rose’s shoulder, jerking her back to reality. “Stop talking to the bloody TARDIS and talk to me. What do we need to do?”

Rose blew out a long breath between her teeth. “We beam all the people out of the data core. The computer will reset and stop the countdown. Difficult. Charlotte doesn’t have enough memory space left to make the transfer. Easy. I’ll hook myself up to the computer. She can borrow my memory space.”

“Difficult,” River argued. “It’ll kill you stone dead.”

“Yeah, well, no plan is perfect,” Rose muttered as she turned away.

“It’ll burn out your body and I don’t think even the TARDIS will be able to save you,” River protested.

“I’m gonna do my best not to die here, promise. Besides, I have faith in the TARDIS’ ability to keep me alive.”

You might give me too much credit.

You’ve created miracles before.

“Rose—!”

“I don’t have time for this,” Rose said, a bit impatiently. “You and Luxy boy, head back up to the main library. No, listen! Prime any data cells you can find for maximum download, and we really don’t have time to argue right now so go!”

“God I hate you sometimes!” River burst out, and Rose grinned a bit despite herself.

“Yeah, that happens. Go on!”

River shook her head, stepping back. “Mr. Lux, with me. Anita, if she dies, I’ll kill her!”

The two of them left. “What about the Vashta Nerada?” Anita asked. Rose pressed her lips thin, turning away for a moment.

“These are their forests. I’m going to seal Charlotte inside her little world, take everybody else away. The shadows can swarm to their hearts’ content.”

“So you think they’re just going to let us go?”

“Best offer they’re gonna get.” Rose’s voice was flat.

“You’re going to make them an offer?”
“They’d better take it, because right now, I’m finding it very hard to make any kind of offer at all.” She paused, turning back to look at Anita. “You know what? I really liked Anita. She was brave, even when she was crying. And she never gave in. And you ate her.”

She held out the sonic screwdriver and cleared Anita’s visor to reveal a skull. “But I’m going to let that pass,” she continued, voice dark, “just as long as you let them pass.”

“How long have you known?” The Vashta Nerada asked.

“I counted the shadows. You only have one now. She’s nearly gone. Be kind.”

“These are our forests. We are not kind.”

“I’m giving you back your forests,” Rose informed the being, “but you are giving me them. You are letting them go.”

“These are our forests. They are our meat.”

The shadows stretched out from the Vashta Nerada, creeping toward Rose. She took a deep breath but didn’t move.

“Don’t play games with me,” Rose said darkly. “You just killed someone I like. I may not be an all-seeing Time Lord, but if what River says is true then at some point in the future I make a difference. So go on. You’re in the biggest library in the universe. Rose Tyler. Look me up.”

The shadows paused, and then receded. “You have one day.”

And the space suit collapsed.

“Oh Anita.” Rose looked up to see that River had returned.

“I’m sorry,” Rose said quietly. “She’s been dead for a while now. What are you doin’ here?”

“Lux can manage without me,” River said as she stepped closer. “But you can’t. I’m sorry.”

The last thing Rose felt before she blacked out was a burst of pain in her temple as River nailed her in the head.

* * * *

“Auto destruct in two minutes.”

“Oooohh,” Rose groaned as she slowly came around, lifting herself. The first thing she noticed was that she was handcuffed to a railing.

The second thing she saw was that River had strapped herself to the hard drive. “What are you doing?” Rose demanded, furious.

“What does it look like? Really, you’re a bit dim when you’re young, aren’t you?” River’s voice still somehow managed to be amused, even if she was shaking. Rose tugged angrily at the handcuffs.

“Why do you have handcuffs?”

“Spoilers. And trust me when I say that’s a secret I don’t want you finding out.” River smirked. Rose swallowed hard.
“Seriously, this isn’t a joke. Stop it, now. This is gonna kill you! I’d have a chance—”

“Oh who are you kidding?” River interrupted. “You wouldn’t have a chance, your heart stops beating and that’s it — even the TARDIS can’t save you anymore. And you need to live. I’m timing it for the end of the countdown. There’ll be a blip in the command flow. That way it should improve our chances of a clean download.”

Rose strained against the handcuffs again, desperate. “River, please,” she begged. “Don’t do this.”

But River wasn’t even listening. “I guess I should be mad at you, huh? Because this…this means you knew. You always knew, all along, how it was going to end. You knew this was what I was coming to. I should be so mad at you. But I’m not. Funny, isn’t it?” There were tears in Rose’s eyes as River finally refocused on her. “Funny thing is…you were looking at me exactly like that last time I saw you too. You and my uncle just popped up like it was nothing and dragged me off to Darillium to see the Singing Towers. And he didn’t know what was wrong and you wouldn’t tell us, but you kept looking at me and crying.”

“Auto destruct in one minute.”

“And this is why. Because you knew I was coming here.” River gave a small, sad laugh. “I even said when I was done here I’d spend some time with you guys. I needed a vacation anyways. But you knew I wouldn’t be coming home.”

“Please,” Rose begged. “Please let me do this.”

River shook her head. “If you die here, it’ll mean I never met you. Hell I might not even exist.”

“Time can be rewritten.”

“Not those times,” River said fiercely. “Not one line. Don’t you dare. It’s okay. It’s going to be okay. Just…do me a favor. Please. When the time lines up right…when you say goodbye to me for the last time…give my parents a message. Let them know that I love them…and that I don’t regret one single minute of this life.” There were tears working their way down River’s cheeks now. “I don’t regret anything.”

Auto destruct in ten—”

“You knew Bad Wolf,” Rose said quietly, tears slipping down her cheeks as well. “How did you know about that?”

“Eight, seven…”

“Hush, now,” River said with a sad, gentle smile.

“Four, three…”

“Spoilers.”

“Two, one…”

River connected the cables, and Rose slammed her eyes shut as light filled the room.

* * * * *

“Donna!” Lee called, hurrying down the stairs. “What’s happening?”
Donna flew at him, clinging to him. “I don’t know, but it’s not real. Nothing here’s real. The whole world, everything. None of it’s real.”

Lee looked horror struck. “Am I real?”

White light filled the room, washing them out. “Of course you’re real,” Donna said fiercely. “I know you’re real. Oh God, oh God, I hope you’re real.”

A force ripped them apart, pulling Donna away. “I’ll find you,” she promised. “I promise you, I’ll find you!”

* * * * *

The light faded away…and the chair River had been sitting in was empty. Rose curled up on herself, tears sliding down her cheeks.

“…give my parents a message. Let them know that I love them…and that I don’t regret one single minute of this life.”

_We will not forget, my Wolf_, the TARDIS said gently, and Rose nodded.

_No. We won’t_. She’d engrave those words in her mind. And when the time was right, she’d make sure River’s parents got the message.

It was the least she could do.

Eventually Lux and Donna came down to let help Rose get out of the handcuffs, and they all headed upstairs together. Rose sat back against the wall, rubbing her bruised wrists while Donna looked for Lee.

Finally the redhead returned to Rose, leaning against the wall with her. “Any luck?” Although the answer was obvious.

“There wasn’t even anyone called Lee in the library that day. I suppose he could have had a different name out here, but, let’s be honest, he wasn’t real, was he?”

“I don’t know,” Rose admitted. “Maybe not.”

“I made up the perfect man,” Donna sighed. “Gorgeous, adores me, and hardly able to speak a word. What’s that say about me?”

“That people don’t listen to you nearly as much as they should.”

Donna looked at Rose, giving her a small, sad smile. “What about you? Are you alright?”

Rose nodded slowly, still watching the crowd. “I’m always alright.”

Donna sighed. “Is alright special Tyler code for really not alright at all?”

“Why?” Rose finally turned to look at Donna.

“Because I’m alright too.”

It had been one of those days. One of those awful days we’re nobody lived and nobody came out unscathed. Rose shifted closer to Donna, wrapping both of her arms around one of the older woman’s.
“Come on.”

They walked back to the staircase, and Rose pulled out River’s diary and sonic pen, setting them on the balcony.

“She knew me too,” Donna said quietly. “When do you think you’ll meet her for real?”

Rose eyed the diary for a long moment. “Her diary is my future. I could look it up. Find out what happens to me. To you. Find out who this uncle is she kept talkin’ about.” She looked back at Donna. “What do you think? Shall we peek at the end?”

Donna shook her head. “Spoilers. Right?”

Rose had to smile at that. “Right. Come on. Next chapter is this way.”

They started back up to the TARDIS. Rose paused at the top of the stairs. “What’s wrong?” Donna asked, looking back.

“I know River in the future,” Rose said slowly. “I knew she was coming here today. I knew she was coming here to die. I wouldn’t just let her do that though. I wouldn’t let her go off to her death, screw timelines. I was ready to break them all here just to save her and I don’t even know who she is. But she…she called me Aunt Rose. I’m important to her. She’s important to me. I wouldn’t let her come here without a way to save her. I wouldn’t.”

She turned on her heel, running back downstairs and grabbing the sonic pen. “I gave this to her. I mean, fine, it’s just a little trinket, I actually completely forgot about it until I saw her with it. But I didn’t just give this to her, I upgraded it. See, it’s different? I did somethin’ to it. There must have been a reason.”

She turned it over in her hands — and her heart soared when she saw two green lights. “That’s it!” Rose cheered.

“What is it?” Donna asked, bewildered. “What did you do?”

“I saved her.”

And with that Rose ran, all the way back down. “No, you don’t,” she said fiercely as one light went out. “Stay with me, sweetheart. Stay with me please. Stay with Aunt Rose for just a little while longer.”

The run was a bit of a blur — at one point Rose was pretty sure she dove into a gravity well, but she couldn’t remember. All that mattered was that she got down to the data core, and plugged the sonic screwdriver into the core. She looked over to see the Charlotte Node smiling.

It had worked.

“Give her a good world,” Rose said quietly. “Make sure she’s never alone. Do that for me, please.”

“I will.”

* * * * *

It had been a long, strange day. Rose was dragging a bit as she walked back to the TARDIS, and for a moment she just stared at the wooden ship — at the wooden doors.

And on a whim, she snapped her fingers.
To her great surprise, the doors creaked open. Donna was already waiting inside, smiling gently when she saw Rose.

“Ready to go?” Rose asked as she stepped inside. Donna nodded.

“Definitely.”

Rose snapped her fingers again…and the doors closed once more.

Chapter End Notes

Two things:

1) I kind of just want to end this experience, so if I remember before Sunday, I'm going to post an update. And I'll still update on Sunday. So hey, maybe two updates a week if I remember? Life is kind of hard sometimes so I might not always.

2) I've decided to post the sequel, A Journey Through Time, just to say I posted it all. So that'll be going up once this is done. Anyways during the writing of this story originally, I started writing season five, and actually write the entire first episode, The Eleventh Hour. I was thinking at the end of A Journey Through Time I'd post that episode just to share it - it's written and I really liked it. Would people be interested in that? Let me know.
“I said no.”

“Oh come ooooooon,” Rose whined, pouting. “Sapphire waterfall. It’s a waterfall made of sapphires. This enormous jewel, the size of a glacier, reaches the Cliff of Oblivion, and then shatters into sapphires at the edge. They fall a hundred thousand feet into a crystal ravine.”

“I bet you say that to all the girls.”

“Pleeceeease?” Rose begged, bouncing up and down. “They’re boardin’ now. It’s no fun on my own. It’s just four hours.”

“No, that’s four hours there and four hours back,” Donna protested. “That’s like a school trip. I’d rather go sunbathing.”

“In Xtonic sunlight? Good luck with that.”

“Oh, I’m safe. It says in the brochure this glass is fifteen feet thick.”

“Oh alright,” Rose huffed. “I give up. I’ll be back for dinner. We’ll try that anti-gravity restaurant. Apparently they give you bibs. Not sure how much use it’ll be though.”

“That’s a date,” Donna agreed. “Well, not a date. Oh you know what I mean. Oh get off.”

Rose laughed. “See you later.”

“Oi! And you be careful, alright?”

“Oh, taking a big space truck with a bunch of strangers across a diamond planet called Midnight?” Rose beamed brightly. “What could possibly go wrong?”

She hung up and headed for the bus. Donna could be boring all she wanted but this was going to be brilliant.

She was excited.

She found her seat on the bus and settled down, watching the other passengers file on and the Hostess walk up and down the aisle. Rose curled her legs up under herself as the dark-skinned woman approached.

“That’s the headphones for channels one to thirty six,” she said as she handed stuff to Rose. “Modem link for 3D vidgames. Complimentary earplugs. Complimentary slippers. Complimentary juice pack and complimentary peanuts. I must warn you some products may contain nuts.”

“Oh let me guess, is it the ear plugs?” Rose asked brightly. The Hostess just raised an eyebrow at her.
“Enjoy your trip.”

“Oh I can’t wait,” Rose said happily as the Hostess turned away. “Allons-y.”

The woman raised an eyebrow, looking back. “I’m sorry?”

“It’s French,” Rose explained. “For let’s go.”

“Fascinating.” The Hostess clearly couldn’t have been less fascinated if she tried. Rose settled back down as the woman walked away, and two people sat down behind her – an older man and a young woman.

“Headphones for channels one to thirty six.”

“Oh no, thank you,” the man said, “not for us.”

“Earplugs, please,” the woman added.

“There you go.” The Hostess handed them over and moved on.

“They call it the Sapphire Waterfall,” the man said. “But it’s no such thing. Sapphire’s an aluminium oxide, but the glacier is just compound silica with iron pigmentation.”

Well he was a kill joy. “Have you got that pillow for my neck?”

“Yes sir.” The woman must have been an assistant.

“And the pills?”

“Yes, all measured out for you. There you go.”

Rose leaned back, clothes her eyes. “Are you alone?” She jumped, turning to see the young woman leaning around to look at her.

“Oh, yeah. My mate decided she’d rather sunbathe. No fun.”

“Oh, that’s a shame,” the man spoke up, leaning in as well (and nudging the woman away, Rose noticed with a slight frown). “Hobbes. Professor Winfold Hobbes. Nice to meet you.”

“Rose,” she introduced herself politely before looking at the other woman. “What’s your name?”

“Dee Dee. Dee Dee Blasco.”

“It’s my fourteenth time,” Hobbes spoke up. Rose had to resist the urge to make a rather inappropriate joke.

“Really? My first.”

“Mine too,” Dee Dee said excitedly. “The professor says it’s brilliant though—”

“Now, now, don’t bother the woman,” Hobbes chided his assistant. “Where’s my water bottle?”

They leaned back, and Rose settled back down, sighing and closing her eyes again.

“Don’t be silly,” she heard a woman further back saying. “Come and sit with us. Look, we get slippers.”
“Jethro, do what your mother says,” a man – her husband, likely – added.

“I’m sitting here,” Jethro replied sullenly.

“Oh, he’s ashamed of us,” the man said, “but he doesn’t mind us paying, does he?”

“Oh, don’t you two start. Should I save the juice pack or have it now? Look, peach and clementine.”

Family. Rose smiled sadly at that. She still missed having a family.

“Ladies and gentlemen, and variations thereupon,” the Hostess said as she made her way back down the aisle, “welcome on board the Crusader Fifty. If you would fasten your seat belts, we’ll be leaving any moment. Doors.” The doors slid shut. “Shields down.” Shields slid down over the windows. “I’m afraid the view is shielded until we reach the Waterfall Palace. Also, a reminder. Midnight has no air, so please don’t touch the exterior door seals. Fire exit at the rear, and should we need to use it, you first. Now I will hand you over to Driver Joe.”

“Driver Joe at the wheel,” a voice announced over the intercom. “There’s been a diamond fall at the Winter Witch Canyon, so we’ll be taking a slight detour, as you’ll see on the map. The journey covers five hundred kliks to the Multifaceted Coast. Duration is estimated at four hours. Thank you for traveling with us, and as they used to say in the olden days, wagons roll.”

The shuttle shook a bit as they started down the rails. Rose shot a sad look at the closed windows. She had been hoping for a view. Oh well.

“For your entertainment,” the Hostess said, “we have the Music Channel playing retrovids of Earth classics.” Screens came down, showing a music video. “Also, the latest artistic installation from Ludovico Klein.” Rose winced as a hologram came to life. Jesus. “Plus, for the youngsters, a rare treat. The Animation Archives.” A projector of a cartoon hit the driver’s cabin door. “Four hours of fun time. Enjoy.”

Well this certainly wasn’t going to happen. Rose slid the sonic screwdriver out of her pocket, buzzing it real quick, and suddenly everything turned off. Rose relaxed back into her seat, smiling.

“Well that’s a mercy,” Hobbes said. At least someone appreciated her effort.

“I do apologize, ladies and gentlemen, and variations thereupon,” the Hostess said as she tried to fix things. Yeah that wasn’t happening. “We seem to had a failure of the Entertainment System.”

“Shame,” Rose murmured, slipping the sonic screwdriver back in her pocket.

“But what do we do?” The woman asked.

“We’ve got four hours of this?” Her husband added. “Four hours of just sitting here?”

What would the Doctor do?

Rose tilted her head before plastering on a smile and popping up. “Tell you what. We’ll have to talk to each other instead.”

Everyone exchanged bewildered looks. Clearly they weren’t too keen on the idea. “Come on, then,” she said, standing. “Have at it. Names, introduce yourselves. Don’t make me do an ice breaker.”

The woman alone up front rolled her eyes, as did the teenage boy. “Well… I’m Val,” the boy’s mother said after a moment. “This is my husband Biff, and our son Jethro.”
“And I’m Professor Winfold Hobbes,” the professor added. Rose had to resist the urge to roll her eyes – why did he have to attach his title to everything? “And this is my assistant Dee Dee.” Dee Dee waved a bit awkwardly.

“Brilliant! Oh, I’m Rose by the way. Sorry, that was rude.”

It took a bit for everyone to warm up to the idea, but before long they were settling in, exchanging stories and laughing.

“…So Biff said, I’m going swimming.” Val and Biff were currently regaling them with tales of another vacation they had taken.

“Oh, I was all ready,” Biff added. “Trunks and everything. Nose plug.”

“He had this little nose plug! You should have seen him.”

“And I went marching up to the lifeguard. And he was a Shamboni. You know, those big foreheads?”

“Great big forehead.”

“And I said, where’s the pool? And he said…”

“The pool is abstract!” Val and Biff finished at the same time, and everyone laughed.

“It was a concept!”

Rose shook her head, smiling as she looked over at Jethro. After a moment she went over, plopping down next to him. “You could not look any more miserable if you tried,” she told him conversationally. “Good job.”

“They tell that story every single time they meet someone.” Jethro rolled his eyes. “It’s stupid. They leave out the part where every single hotel worker laughed themselves sick at Dad behind his back.”

“Hey, cut ‘em some slack.” Rose shot a look at Val and Biff, who were still laughing and telling another story. “It gets harder once they’re gone.”

Jethro shot Rose a look, his expression softening a bit. “Are your parents…?”

“Might as well be.” It wasn’t like she was ever going to see her mother again. “I miss them.”

Jethro looked past Rose to his parents, and sighed. “Yeah. Well they’re still embarrassing.”

“Well yeah. But that’s their jobs as parents.”

* * * * *

While everyone was talking, Rose slipped into the back to get a drink. “Oh, sorry,” Dee Dee said as she walked back and nearly ran into Rose.

“Oh, it’s okay. Here.” Rose poured her a glass of water, handing it over. “Hey, mind if I ask you somethin’?”

“Sure.”

“How’d you end up with the professor?” It didn’t seem like a great match, honestly. The professor
obviously didn’t appreciate Dee Dee. At all.

“Oh. I’m just a second-year student, but I wrote a paper on the Lost Moon of Poosh, Professor Hobbes read it, liked it, took me on as researcher, just for the holidays. Well, I say researcher. Most of the time he’s got me fetching and carrying. But it’s all good experience.”

Rose sipped her drink, tilting her head. “And did they ever find it?”

“Find what?”

“The lost Moon of Poosh.” That was a fun word to say. Dee Dee laughed.

“Oh, no. Not yet.”

“Ah, well. Maybe that’ll be your great discovery, one day.” Rose raised her cup. “Here’s to Poosh.”

“Poosh.” Dee Dee tapped her cup against Rose’s, laughing.

* * * * *

“Hullo,” Rose said cheerily as she sat down next to the other woman – the lonely looking one who hadn’t spoken much. “Brought you food.”

“You take the Hostess’ job?” The woman asked, raising an eyebrow as she took one of the trays from Rose.

“Nope. Food is just a great reason to approach someone. What’s your name?”

The woman sighed, unwrapping her food. “Sky.”

“Sky. Nice to meet you Sky.” Rose unwrapped her own tray, examining the food curiously. “You’re alone, then?”

“So are you.” She sounded a bit defensive.

“Well, sorta. My friend Donna decided sunbathin’ was a better use of her time than seein’ somethin’ amazin’. Her loss though.”

“Suppose so.” Sky speared a bit of food on her fork. “I’m not used to this. Being alone, I mean. Found myself alone rather recently, not by choice.”

Rose tilted her head. “What happened?”

“Oh, the usual. She needed her own space, as they say. A different galaxy, in fact. I reckon that’s enough space, don’t you?”

“Yeah.” Rose sighed, looking at the food again. “I had a friend who went to a different universe.”

Sky held up a bit of meat to examine it. “Oh, what’s this, chicken or beef?”

“I think it’s both.”

* * * * *

Professor Hobbes had happily set up his presentation to educate everyone on their destination. “So, this is Midnight, do you see, bombarded by the sun. Xtonic rays, raw galvanic radiation. Dee Dee,
next slide. It’s my pet project. Actually, I’m the first person to research this. Because, you see, the history is fascinating. Because there is no history. There’s no life in this entire system. There couldn’t be. Before the Leisure Palace Company moved in, no one had come here in all eternity. No living thing.”

“But how do you know?” Jethro spoke up. “I mean, if no one can go outside.”

“Oh his imagination,” Val sighed. “Here we go.”

“He’s got a point though,” Rose pointed out with a slight frown.

“Exactly!” Hobbes said excitedly. “We look upon this world through glass, safe inside our metal box. Even the Leisure Palace was lowered down from orbit. And here we are now, crossing Midnight, but never touching it.”

Everyone jerked forward quite suddenly as the bus ground to a halt. “We’ve stopped,” Val said as we straightened up. “Have we stopped?”

“Are we there?” Biff asked.

“We can’t be,” Dee Dee disagreed. “It’s too soon.”

“They don’t stop,” Hobbes said. “Crusader vehicles never stop.”

*What could possibly go wrong?* The TARDIS asked, echoing what Rose had said earlier. Rose scowled.

*Shut up.*

“If you could just return to your seats,” the Hostess called calmly. “It’s just a small delay.”

She picked up an intercom phone to call the drivers.

“Maybe just a pit stop,” Biff suggested.

“There’s no pit to stop in,” Hobbes protested. “I’ve been on this expedition fourteen times. They never stop.”

“Well evidently we *have* stopped,” Sky snapped. “So there’s no point in denying it.”

“We’ve broken down,” Jethro spoke up. Val shot him a look.

“Thank you, Jethro.”

“In the middle of nowhere!” Jethro finished dramatically, and Rose snorted quietly.

“That’s enough,” Biff snapped. “Now stop it.”

“Ladies and gentlemen, and variations thereupon,” the Hostess called. “We’re just experiencing a short delay. The driver needs to stabilise the engine feeds. It’s perfectly routine, so if you could just stay in your seats.”

Rose pushed herself out of her seat, heading for the driver’s door. “No, I’m sorry, ma’am,” the hostess said quickly, trying to stop her. “Could you please—”

Rose flashed the psychic paper. “Engine expert, if you don’t mind.”
She opened the door, stepping in. “I’m sorry, ma’am, if you could just sit down, you’re not supposed to be in there—”

The door slid shut, and the two men in the cockpit looked back. “Sorry, if you could return to your seat, ma’am—”

“Company insurance,” Rose said, flashing the psychic paper again. “Let’s see if we can get an early assessment.” She flashed Joe an award winning smile. “So, what’s the problem, Driver Joe?”

“We’re stabilizing the engine feeds,” Joe assured her. “Won’t take long.”

Rose looked at a screen, raising an eyebrow. “Er, no, because that’s the engine feed, that line there, and it’s fine. And it’s a micropetrol engine, so stabilizing doesn’t really make sense, does it? Sorry. No offense, Joe, but I’m very clever. So, what’s wrong?”

“We just stopped,” the other man said, clearly bewildered by it all. “Look, all systems find, everything’s working, but we’re not moving.”

Rose scanned the systems over with her sonic screwdriver. “Yeah, you’re right. No faults. And who are you?”

“Claude. I’m the mechanic. Trainee.”

Rose smiled at him. “Nice to meet you.”

“I’ve sent a distress signal,” Joe spoke up. “They should dispatch a rescue truck, top speed.”

“How long till they get here?” Rose asked curiously.

“About an hour.”

Rose looked toward the shielded windshield. “Well, since we’re waitin’, shall we take a look outside? Just lift the screens a bit?” She asked, a bit eagerly.

“It’s a hundred percent Xtonic out there,” Joe protested. “We’d be vaporized.”

“Nah. Those windows are Finitoglass. They’d give you a couple of minutes.” She gave Joe a nudge. “Go on, live a little.”

Joe hesitated for a moment. “Well…” And finally he raised the screen. Rose’s lips pulled into a wide grin when she saw the sparkling landscape waiting for them. “Wow,” Joe breathed.

“Oh that is beautiful,” Rose agreed in awe. Blimey she couldn’t wait to get to their destination.

“Look at all those diamonds,” Claude said quietly. “Poisoned by the sun. No one can ever touch them.”

“Joe, you said we took a detour?” Rose asked curiously, looking at the driver. He nodded.

“Just about forty kliks to the west.”

“Is that a recognized path?”

He shook his head. “No, it’s a new one. The computer worked it out on automatic.”

“So we’re the first.” Rose couldn’t help but be awed and a bit humbled by that. “This piece of
ground. No one’s ever been here before. Not in the whole of recorded history.”

Claud jumped suddenly. “Did you just…?” He hesitated before shaking his head. “No, sorry, it’s nothing.”

“What did you see?” Rose asked gently.

“Just… there.” He pointed out the window. “That ridge. Like, like a shadow. Just, just for a second.”

“What sort of shadow?”

Something beeped on the console. “Xtonic rising,” Joe said, hitting a button. “Shields down.”

“Look. look!” Claude yelled as the shield slide down. “There it is, there it is. Look, there.”

“Where?” Rose leaned in. “Where is it?”

But it was too late, the shield was down. She sighed wistfully.

“Like just something shifting,” Claude said quietly. “Something sort of dark, like it was running.”

“Running which way?”

“Towards us.”

Well that wasn’t too ominous.

“Right, ma’am,” Joe said suddenly. “Back to your seat. And, er, not a word. Rescue’s on its way. If you could close the door. Thank you.”

“What did they say?” Sky ambushed Rose as soon as she walked back through the door. “Did they tell? What is it? What’s wrong?”

“Oh, just stabilizin’,” Rose said casually. Tension was already high in the small box. She wasn’t going to add to that. “Happens all the time.”

“I don’t need this.” Not that Sky seemed to want the comfort. “I’m on a schedule. This is completely unnecessary.”

“Back to your seats,” the Hostess spoke up, ushering them both off and going into the cabin. Rose sighed as she sat back down, closing her eyes and preparing to just wait.

“Excuse me, Ms. Rose.” She turned to see Dee Dee leaning over to talk to her. “But they’re micropetrol engines, aren’t they?”

“Now, don’t bother the woman,” Hobbes scolded his assistant.

“My father was a mechanic,” Dee Dee continued. “Micropetrol doesn’t stabilize. What does stabilize mean?”

Whoops. “Well, bit of flim-flam,” Rose said as reassuringly as she could manage. “Don’t worry, they’re sortin’ it out.”

“So it’s not the engines,” Hobbes confirmed, and Rose winced.

“It’s just a little pause, that’s all.”
“How much air have we got?”

Blimey he needed to shut up. “Professor, it’s fine,” Rose insisted, but the damage was already done.

“What did he say?” Val spoke up.

“Nothing—”

“Are we running out of air?”

“I was just speculating,” Hobbes insisted as the Hostess returned. Biff turned to her.

“Is that right, Miss? Are we running out of air?”

“Is that what the captain said?” Val added.

“If you could all just remain calm—”

“How much air have we got?” Val’s voice raised a pitch in panic.

“Mum, just stop it,” Jethro spoke up, clearly exasperated.

“I assure you,” the Hostess called, “everything is under control.”

“Well, doesn’t look like it to me,” Hobbes snapped at her.

“It’s fine,” Rose heard Dee Dee trying to say. “The air is on a circular filter—”

But everyone was talking now, panic rising, and Rose sighed. This was just lovely. It hadn’t even been ten minutes. She stuck her fingers in her mouth and blew — everyone winced as the ear-piercing whistle echoed through the air.

“Everyone good now?” She asked as they quieted. “Thank you. Now, if you’d care to listen to my good friend Dee Dee.”

The young woman looked surprised as she said, “Oh. Er, it’s just that, well, the air’s on a circular filter, so we could stay breathing for ten years.”

“Alright?” Rose asked the ground. “And I’ve spoken to the Captain. I can guarantee you everything’s fine.”

*Thump, thump.*

Of course, Rose thought with a sigh as the noise echoed through the bus. Of course.

“What was that?” Val demanded, looking around.

“It must be the metal,” Hobbes said reasonably. “We’re cooling down. It’s just settling.”

“Rocks,” Dee Dee added. “It could be rocks falling.”

“What I want to know is, how long do we have to sit here.” Biff was starting to grate on Rose’s nerves.

*Thump thump* from another part of the hull this time, and they all turned to the noise. “What is that?” Sky this time, her voice high pitched and scared.
“There’s someone out there,” Val insisted.

“Now, don’t be ridiculous,” that was the professor of course.

“Like I said, it could be rocks,” Dee Dee suggested it again.

“We’re out in the open,” the Hostess argued. “Nothing could fall against the sides.”

*Thump thump.*

“Knock, knock,” Rose murmured.

“Who’s there?” Jethro added helpfully, and Rose almost smiled.


“I’m sorry,” Hobbes spoke up. “But the light out there is Xtonic. That means it would destroy any living thing in a split second. It is impossible for someone to be outside.”

*Thump thump.*

“Well, what the hell is that, then?!”

Rose moved to the wall, examining it curiously. “Ma’am, you really should get back to your seat,” the Hostess insisted. Rose ignored her.

“Hello?” She called, resting a hand against the metal.

*Thump thump.* This time faster than before. “It’s moving,” Jethro said quietly. They all jumped as the emergency exit rattled.

“It’s trying the door,” Val said, panicked.

“There is no *it,*” Hobbes insisted. “There’s nothing out there. Can’t be.”

The exit rattled again, then there was a *thump thump* on the roof, and then at the entrance door.

“That’s the entrance,” Val said uselessly. “Can it get in?”

“No,” Dee Dee assured her. “That door’s on two hundred weight hydraulics.”

“Stop it,” Hobbes snapped at her. “Don’t encourage them.”

“What do you think it is?” Dee Dee asked as Biff approached the door.

“Biff, don’t,” Val rebuked him.

“Mr. Cane, better not,” Rose warned him.

“Nah, it’s cast iron, that door.” And with that he rapped his knuckles against it three times.

They all jumped when three thumps came back in reply.

“Three times,” Val gasped. “Did you hear that? It did it three times.”

“It answered,” Jethro added.
“It did it three times!”


“No but it answered,” Sky protested. “It answered. Don’t tell me that thing’s not alive. It answered him!”

*Thump thump thump.*

“I really must insist you get back to your seats,” the Hostess tried to say, but Sky cut her off.

“No, don’t just stand there telling us the rules. You’re the hostess. You’re supposed to do something!”

Rose knocked on the door four times, and waited. There was a long pause before *thump thump thump*.

“What is it?” Sky’s voice hopped up a few octaves. “What the hell’s making that noise? She said she’d get me. Stop it. Make it stop. Somebody make it stop! Don’t just stand there looking at me. It’s not my fault!”

“Calm down!” Dee Dee insisted.

“And she made it worse!”

“You’re not helping!” Val was as panicked as Sky. Talk about not helping.

“Why didn’t you leave it alone?” Sky cried. “Stop staring at me. Just tell me what the hell it is!”

“Calm down!”

The thumping started again, and Rose whirled around, trying to follow it.

“It’s coming for me,” Sky whimpered as she backed up against the driver’s door. “Oh, it’s coming for me. It’s coming for me. It’s coming for me! *It’s coming for me!*”

She screamed, and Rose ran to her, shouting, “Get out of there!”

And then everything went sideways.
Everyone screamed as the shuttle rocked from side to side, sending them all flying. It was a few moments before everything settled and the lights flickered out.

*Ooooow*, Rose groaned inwardly.

*My Wolf?*

*I’m alright.*

Rose picked herself up as everyone else did the same, checking themselves over. “Everybody okay?” She asked, rubbing her neck.


“But that’s impossible,” Dee Dee protested. “The ground is fixed. It’s solid.”

“We’ve got torches,” the Hostess called as she fished one out. “Everyone take a torch. They’re in the back of the seats.”

“Oh Jethro,” Val said, going for her son. “Sweetheart, come here.”

“Never mind me.” Jethro held up his torch, pointing it toward the front of the bus. “What about her?”

They all turned to see Sky hunched up among the remains of the front row, which had been ripped out of the floor.

“What happened to the seats?” Val asked faintly.

Biff stepped up next to his wife, holding his own torch up to see them. “Who did that?”

“They’ve been ripped up.”

“It’s alright,” Rose tried to assure everyone as she looked around. “It’s alright. It’s over. We’re still alive. And look.” She swiveled her flashlight to point it at the dented wall. “Look, the wall’s still intact. Do you see?”

The Hostess went to the intercom, pressing the button. “Joe? Claude?”

“We’re safe,” Rose said, trying to reassure everyone as well as herself.

“Driver Joe, can you hear me?” The Hostess tried again, frowning. “I’m not getting any response. The intercom must be down.”

She opened the door — and everyone yelled as light flooded the room. It took a moment for the Hostess to get the door shut again.
“What happened?” Val asked when they were safe. “What was that?”

“Is it the driver? Have we lost the driver?”

The Hostess just stared at the door, stunned. “The cabin’s gone.”

“Don’t be ridiculous.” Hobbes was really starting to grate on Rose’s nerves. “It can’t be gone. How can it be gone?”

“Well, you saw it,” Dee Dee stuttered out.

“There was nothing there.” The Hostess’ voice was faint. “Like it was ripped away.”

While they spoke, Rose moved to a nearby panel, kneeling down to work on it and get some light.

“What are you doing?” Biff demanded, swinging his torch around to look at her.

“Ah, that’s better,” she murmured as she worked. “Little bit of light. Molto bene.”

“Do you know what you’re doing?” Val asked. Rose rolled her eyes, not bothering to grace that with an answer.

“The cabin’s gone,” Biff added. “You’d better leave the wall alone.”

“The cabin can’t be gone,” Hobbes insisted. Rose rolled her eyes again. Blimey what was it with this lot?

“Well, Professor, it is gone so why don’t you save some breath and stop denying it. Anyways any rupture would automatically remove itself.”

She got the panel off and started working on the wiring. “But something slice it off. The cabin’s gone.”

“But if it gets separated?” The Hostess asked.

“It loses integrity,” Rose murmured. “I’m sorry, they’ve been reduced to dust. The driver and the mechanic. But they sent a distress signal. Help is on its way. They saved our lives. We are going to get out of here, I promise. We’re still alive, and they are going to find us.”

“Rose,” Jethro called. “Look at her.”

Rose turned to see where Jethro was looking, then followed his torchlight to look at Sky, still huddled in the corner.

“Right. Yes. Sorry. Have we got a medical kit?”

“Why won’t she turn around?”


“That noise from outside,” Jethro said quietly. “It’s stopped.”

“Well, thank god for that,” his mother declared. She was missing the bigger picture. But Jethro wasn’t.
“But what if it’s not outside anymore? What if it’s inside?”


“It was heading for her.” Jethro waved his torch at Sky. Rose took a step closer to Sky, frowning.

“Sky?” She called. “It’s alright, Sky. I just want you to turn around, face me.”

The woman turned slowly to look at them, eyes wide. The TARDIS hummed nervously in the back of her head.

My Wolf…

“Sky?” Rose questioned, ignoring the ship.

“Sky?” The word came off of Sky’s lips, slow and clumsy. Rose blinked.

“Are you alright?” She tried again.

“Are you alright?”

What the hell. “Are you hurt?”

“Are you hurt?”

“You don’t have to talk,” she tried again, bewildered. 

“You don’t have to talk.”

“I’m trying to help.”

“I’m trying to help.”

Rose sighed, frustrated. Well, Sky didn’t repeat that at least. “Okay,” she pushed. “Can you stop?”

“Oh, can you stop?”

“I’d like you to stop.”

“I’d like you to stop.”

“Why’s she doing that?” Hobbes spoke up.

“Why’s she doing that?” Rose winced a bit why Sky repeated him too. Okay, it wasn’t just her then.

My Wolf, please be careful. Something is wrong.

Gee, what a shock.

“She’s gone mad,” Biff said.

“She’s gone mad.”

“Stop it,” Val snapped.

“Stop it.”
“I said stop it!”

“I said stop it!”

“I don’t think she can,” Dee Dee said quietly.

“I don’t think she can.”

“Alright now, stop it,” Hobbes insisted. “This isn’t funny.”

“Alright now, stop it. This isn’t funny.”

“Shush, shush, shush!” Rose called. “All of you.”

“Shush, shush, shush! All of you.”

“My name’s Jethro.” There was a faint tone of amusement in Jethro’s voice.

“My name’s Jethro.”

“Jethro, stop,” Rose scolded him lightly. “Just leave it.”

“Jethro, stop. Just leave it.”

Rose turned back to Sky, making a face. “Why are you repeating?”

“Why are you repeating?”

“What is that, learning?”

“What is that, learning?”

“Copying?” Rose knelt down in front of Sky, watching her carefully.

“Copying?”

“Absorbing?”

“Absorbing?”

Rose sighed, taking a deep breath. Quick, give me somethin’ clever and complicated. The TARDIS complied. “The square root of pi is 1.772453850905516027298167483341…” As she rattled off the numbers Sky repeated, perfectly. She didn’t miss a number.

“But that’s impossible,” Hobbes said, shocked.

“But that’s impossible.”

“She couldn’t repeat all that,” Dee Dee insisted.

“She couldn’t repeat all that.”

“Tell her to stop.” Val, no surprise, was starting to sound hysterical.

“Tell her to stop.”

“She’s driving me mad.”
“She’s driving me mad.”

“Just make her stop!”

“Just make her stop!”

Everyone started talking at once, and it quickly devolved into chaos. Somehow Sky still managed to repeat them all.

“Everyone, everyone just be quiet!” Rose called, trying to pull things back under control. She was losing ground quickly.

“Everyone, everyone just be quiet!”


“Her eyes. What’s wrong with her eyes?”

“She can copy anything.” Jethro sounded a bit fascinated by it all.

“She can copy anything.”

“Biff, don’t just stand there, do something! Make her stop!”

“Biff, don’t just stand there, do something! Make her stop!”

Rose squeezed her eyes shut. Her head was starting to hurt. What do I do? What is this? I…am not sure.

That caught Rose off guard. What do you mean you’re not sure?

I have never seen anything like this before, my Wolf.

I thought you knew everything!

The lights flicked back on finally, and the chaos around Rose died down as the people relaxed. “That’s the back up system,” the Hostess said. Rose frowned when there was no echo.

“Well, that’s a bit better,” Biff said, relieved.

“What about the rescue?” Val demanded. Where was Sky? “How long’s it going to take?”

“About sixty minutes,” the Hostess said gently. “That’s all.”

“Then I suggest we all calm down.” That was rich coming from the professor. “This panic isn’t helping. That poor woman is evidently in a state of self-induced hysteria.” Rose’s eyes widened when she finally heard the voice speaking with Hobbes. “We should leave her alone.”

“Rose,” Jethro said quietly. He was watching Sky.

“I know.” Rose turned back to look at Sky as well.

“Rose, step back,” Hobbes ordered. Sky’s lips moved at the same time. “I think you should leave her…” His voice drifted off for a moment as he realized what was happening. “Alone. What’s she doing?”
“How can she do that?” Val demanded. “She’s talking with you.” She paled when she saw Sky’s lips moving with hers as well. “And with me. Oh my god. Biff, what’s she doing?”

“She’s repeating,” Jethro spoke up, with Sky talking along. “At exactly the same time.”

“That’s impossible,” Dee Dee said.

“There’s not even a delay.”

“Oh man, that’s weird,” Jethro murmured. Sky didn’t miss a beat with anyone. Rose turned back to the group, breathing deeply.

“I think you should all be very, very quiet. Have you got that?”

“How’s she doing it?” Val demanded, terrified.

“Mrs. Cane, please be quiet.”

“No, I won’t be!” The woman snapped, turning on Rose. “I want to know what’s going on! She’s got my voice! She’s got my words!”

“Come on, be quiet,” Biff coaxed, wrapping his arms around his wife. “Hush now. Hush.” He paused, staring at Sky. “She’s doing it to me.”


“Next stage of what?” Dee Dee asked, voice shaking.

“That’s not her, is it?” Jethro asked quietly. “That’s not Sky any more.”

“I don’t think so, no,” Rose said slowly. “I think the more we talk, the more she learns. Now, I’m all for education, but in this case, maybe not. Let’s just move back.” She pushed herself up, going back to the group. “Come on. Come with me. Everyone, get back. All of you, as far as you can.”

“Rose, make her stop,” Val demanded. Rose rested a hand on her shoulder, nudging her along.

“Val, come with me. Come to the back. Stop looking at her. Come on, Jethro. You too. Everyone, come on. Fifty minutes, that’s all we need. Fifty minutes till the rescue arrives. And she’s not exactly strong. Look at her. All she’s got is our voices.”

“I can’t — I can’t look at her.” Val sounded terrified. “It’s those eyes.”

“We must not look at the goblin men,” Dee Dee murmured. Biff looked back at her.

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“It’s a poem,” Rose responded without much thought. “Christina Rossetti.”
“We must not look at goblin men. We must not buy their fruits,” Dee Dee recited with Sky speaking along. “Who knows upon what soil they fed Their hungry, thirsty roots?”

“Dee Dee, I don’t really think now is the time for that,” Rose told the young woman gently. It was just encouraging Sky. Every word they said encouraged Sky. Exactly what Rose wanted to avoid.

“She’s not a goblin, or a monster,” Hobbes said impatiently. “She’s just a very sick woman.”

“Maybe that’s why it went for her,” Jethro spoke up, and Rose looked over at him. Sky was vulnerable. She’d mentioned her partner had just left her…

“There is no it!”

“Think about it, though,” Jethro insisted. “That knocking went all the way round the bus until it found her. And she was the most scared out of all of us. Maybe that’s what it needed. That’s how it got in.”

“For the last time,” Hobbes snapped. “Nothing can live on the surface of Midnight.”

And Rose lost her patience. “Professor, listen, I’m glad you think you know everythin’ but honestly, the universe doesn’t answer to your rules and there’s a good chance it has its own ideas. So please, try to open your mind a bit. I think there might be some consciousness inside Sky, but maybe she’s still in there. And it’s our job to help her.”

“Well, you can help her,” Biff snapped. “I’m not going anywhere near—”

“No, I’m stayin’ back,” Rose said firmly. “If she’s copyin’ us, then maybe the final stage is becomin’ us. And I’m not havin’ her become me. That’ll just make things worse.”

“Oh, like you’re so special,” Val sneered. Rose blew out a breath between her teeth.

“I am, actually. Just a bit. So that’s decided. We stay back, and we wait. When the rescue ship comes, we can get her to hospital.”

There was a bit of silence, and Rose thought maybe she’d finally gotten through to everyone.

“We should throw her out,” the Hostess hissed suddenly, and Rose’s mouth dropped.

“I beg your pardon?” Hobbes asked in shock.

“Can we do that?” Val, on the other hand, sounded more…thoughtful.

“Don’t be ridiculous,” Rose tried to say, but the Hostess spoke over her.

“That thing, whatever it is, killed the driver, and the mechanic, and I don’t think she’s finished yet.”

“She can’t even move!” Rose insisted.

“Look at her,” the Hostess snapped, and they all turned to look. “Look at her eyes. She killed Joe, and she killed Claude, and we’re next.”

“She’s still doing it,” Biff said, shoving past Rose. “Just stop it. Stop talking. Stop it!”

“Biff, don’t, sweetheart,” Val begged.

“But she won’t stop! We can’t throw her out, though. We can’t even open the doors.”
“No one is getting thrown out!” Rose said. She was ignored.

“Yes, we can,” Dee Dee spoke up hesitantly, and everyone turned to look at her. “Because there’s an air pressure seal. Like when you opened the cabin door, you weren’t pulled out. You had a couple of seconds, because it takes the pressure wall about six seconds to collapse. Well, six seconds exactly. That’s enough time to throw someone out.”

“Thanks, Dee Dee,” Rose snapped. “Just what we needed.”

“Would it kill her outside?” Val asked.

“I don’t know,” Dee Dee admitted. “But she’s got a body now. It would certainly kill the physical form.”

“No one is killing anyone.” Rose might as well have been invisible.

“I wouldn’t risk the cabin door twice, but we’ve got that one.” The Hostess pointed to the back door. “All we need to do is grab hold of her and throw her out.”

“Would you all listen to yourselves?!” Rose snapped, losing her patience. “For all we know that’s a brand new life form over there. And if it’s come inside to discover us, than what’s it found? This little bunch of humans. What do you amount to, murder? Because this is where you decide. You decide who you are. Could you actually murder her? Any of you? Really? Or are you better than that?”

“I’d do it,” the Hostess said, and Rose’s stomach dropped.

“So would I,” Biff added.

“And me,” Val stepped up next to her husband.

“I think we would.”

Rose rounded on Dee Dee, shocked most of all by her. “What?”

“I want her out.”

“You can’t say that.”

“I’m sorry.” The young woman sounded close to tears. “But you said it yourself, Rose. She is growing in strength!”

“That’s not what I said—”

“I want to go home. I’m sorry. I want to be safe.”

“You’ll be safe any minute now.” Rose tried to be reassuring. “The rescue truck is on its way.”

“But what happens then?” The Hostess asked. “If it takes that thing back to the Leisure Palace, if that thing reaches civilization. What if it spreads?”

“When we get back to base I’ll take care of it—”

“You haven’t done much so far,” Val spoke up, cutting Rose off.

“You’re just standing in the back with the rest of us,” Biff added, and Rose nearly groaned. Blimey
she hated them.

“She’s dangerous,” the Hostess said. “It’s my job to see that this vessel is safe, and we should get rid of her.”

“Now, hang on.” Rose had never been so happy for Hobbes to speak up. “I think perhaps we’re all going a little bit too far.”

“Yes, thank you,” Rose said, relieved. Someone was on her side.

“Two people are dead!” The Hostess cried.

“So don’t make it a third,” Rose snapped. She turned to Jethro, who had been quiet through all of this. “Jethro, what do you say?”

He hesitated for a moment before shaking his head. “I’m not killing anyone.”

Rose smiled a bit. “Thank you.”

“He’s just a boy,” Val spoke up.

“That doesn’t mean his opinion doesn’t count,” Rose shot at the woman. “Anyways if you lot want to throw her out, you’re gonna have to go through me.”

There was another beat of silence. “Okay,” the Hostess said.

“Fine by me,” Biff added, and Rose pressed her lips thin, stomach dropping. Biff was big. She couldn’t fight him.

“Please, just think about it for a minute. Could you actually take hold of someone and throw them out of that door?”

“Calling me a coward?”

“Who put you in charge anyways?” Val snapped at Rose. “You’re standing there acting like you know so much better than us, who are you?”

“She wasn’t even booked in,” the Hostess stepped up, voice suspicious. “The rest of you, tickets in advance. She just turned up out of the blue.”

“Where from?” Val demanded.

“N-Nowhere. I’m a traveler. I just travel.”

“Like an immigrant?”

“Who were you talking to before?” The Hostess demanded. “Before you got on board, you were talking to someone. Who was that?”

“My friend Donna—”

“And what were you saying to her?” Biff asked.

“I was tryin’ to get her to come along, thought it’d be borin’ on my own—”

Help, she begged the TARDIS. She had no idea what to do.
She was a little surprised when she didn’t even get a hum in reply.

“Thing is, though, Rose,” Jethro spoke up quietly, “you’ve been loving this.”

And there went what was Rose was pretty sure had been her last support in this bus. “Oh Jethro, not you.”

“No, but ever since all the trouble started, you’ve been loving it.”

“It has to be said,” Hobbes agreed, “you do seem to have a certain glee.”

“Yeah, fine, I’m interested,” Rose finally ceded. Maybe giving them this would help. “Yes, I can’t help it. Because whatever that is inside it’s brand new and yeah, I want to know more.”

“What, you wanted this to happen?” Rose was going to strangle Val.

“Of course not—”

“And you were talking to her, all on your own, before all the trouble,” Biff cut in. “Right at the front, you were talking to that Sky woman, the two of you together. I saw you.”

“I was talking to all of you—!”

“And you went into the cabin,” the Hostess said.

“What were you saying to her?” Biff demanded.

“I was just talkin’—”

“Saying what?!”

“You called us humans,” Jethro said, “like you’re not one of us.”

“Of course I am—”

“Your eyes were glowing earlier,” Val said suddenly, and Rose winced. “After the bus stopped shaking, they were glowing gold. What was that?”

“I-It’s a genetic disorder—”

“I’ve never heard of genetic disorder that makes your eyes glow,” the professor interrupted. “What’s it called?”

“And the wiring,” Dee Dee said. “She went into that panel and opened up the wiring.”

“That was after!”

“But how did you know what to do?” Biff demanded. Rose ran her hands through her hair.

“I just know things—”

“You know things? What kind of answer is that?!” Val asked.

“Do you think you’re smarter than us? Are we idiots?”

“I did not say that—”
“You’ve been looking down on us from the moment we walked in, haven’t you?”

“Just wait—”

Even if she goes,” the Hostess cut Rose off again, “she’s practically volunteered.”

“Please.” Rose was nearly begging now. “Just listen to yourselves.”

“Do you mean we throw her out as well?” Biff asked. They certainly weren’t listening to her anymore.

“If we have to.”

“Just stop!” The desperation was fairly clear in Rose’s voice, she knew. “Just hold on, please. You’re scared. I get that. Look at me, so am I. I’m terrified. But we have all got to calm down and cool off and think.”

“Well why don’t you tell us a bit about yourself?” Hobbes asked. “You were asking for all our stories but we don’t know a thing about you. Where are you from?”

“What does that matter?”

“Tell us,” the Hostess demanded.

*Planet, need a planet.* Again, no answer. “I don’t have a home.” Jesus Christ the TARDIS chose a funny time to take a nap. “I was born travelin’.”

“She’s lying,” Biff said at once. “Look at her face.”

“Her eyes are the same as hers,” Val added, jerking her head at Sky.

“Why won’t you tell us?” Apparently the entire Cane family had decided to gang up on Rose.

“It’s a simple enough question.” And Dee Dee.

“She’s been lying to use right from the start!”

“Where are you from?” The host demanded.

“Fine, Earth,” Rose snapped. “I was born on Earth but we left when I was baby—”

“Come off it, no one’s lived on Earth in nearly sixty years!”

“I look good for my age!” She was losing them — no. She’d already lost them. “Please just…listen to me, all of you. If we are going to get out of this, then you need me.”

“So you keep saying,” the professor said. “You’ve been repeating yourself more than her.”

“If anyone should be in charge, it should be the Professor,” Val said. “He’s the expert.”

“I never asked to be in charge—”

“No but you keep acting like you’re—”

“Mum stop, just look—”

“You keep out of this, Jethro,” Biff snapped.
“Look at her!”

At Jethro’s insistence, everyone turned to look at Sky. “She’s stopped,” Dee Dee said quietly.

“When did she—” Rose cut herself off when Sky spoke with her. “No, she hasn’t. She’s still doing it.”

“She looks the same to me.” Val let out a long breath when Sky didn’t speak with her. “No, she’s stopped. Look, I’m talking, and she’s not.”

“What about me, is she…?” Biff looked relieved when he realized he was free as well. “Look. Look at that. She’s not doing me. She’s let me go.”

“Mrs. Silvestry?” The Hostess asked — alone. “Nor me. Nothing.”

A cold feeling settled in the pit of Rose’s stomach. “Sky, what are you doing?” She asked cautiously.

“She’s still doing it to her,” Dee Dee said quietly.

“Rose, it’s you.” Oh thank god the professor was there to point that out. “She’s only copying you.”

“Why me?” Rose asked. “Why are you doing this?”

“She won’t leave her alone.”

“Do you see?” Val insisted. “I said so. She’s with her.”

“They’re together.”

“How do you explain it, then?” Hobbes asked Rose. “If you’re so clever.”

“I-I don’t know.” There was a buzzing in Rose’s ears. She was starting to panic now. “Sky, stop it. I said stop it. Just stop it!”

“Look at the two of them.”

Rose walked closer to Sky, kneeling down in front of her. “Sky, I’m trying to understand,” she said gently, trying to ignore that Sky was speaking with her. “You’ve captured my speech. What for? What do you need? You need my voice in particular. The cleverest voice in the room. Why? Because I’m the only one who can help? Oh, I’d love that to be true, but your eyes, they’re saying something else. Listen to me. Whatever you want, if it’s life, or form, or consciousness, or voice, you don’t have to steal it. You can find it without hurting anyone. And I’ll help you. That’s a promise. So, what do you think?”

“Do we have a deal?”

“Do we have a deal?”

The entire bus went deathly silent for a long moment. Rose felt as if the entire world was spiraling out from beneath her. An almost mind-numbing cold flooded her entire body as her eyes widened.

W-What…

“Oh look at that,” Sky said silkily. “I’m ahead of you.”

“Oh, look at that.” The words were slow and clumsy as they tumbled off Rose’s lips. “I’m ahead of
“Did you see?” She heard the professor say. “She spoke before she did. Definitely.”

“She’s copying her.”

“Rose, what’s happening?”

Rose tried to fight, tried to answer — tried to scream for help — but she couldn’t. “I think it’s moved,” Sky said.

“I think it’s moved.”

“I think it’s letting me go.”

“I think it’s letting me go.”

HELP! Rose begged the TARDIS. She wanted to scream, to cry, to beg… but she couldn’t even move.

But she was still repeating everything Sky said.

“I’m coming back. Listen.”

“I’m coming back—”

“It’s me.”

“Listen. It’s me.” Rose struggled desperately, but other than her lips, nothing was willing to move. Like her entire body had locked up.

“Like it’s passed into Rose,” she heard Jethro say. “It’s transferred. Whatever it is, it’s gone inside her.”

“No, that’s not what happened,” Dee Dee insisted.

“But look at her.”

“Look at me,” Sky said. “I can move.”

“Look at me—”

“I can feel again.”

“I can move. I can feel again.”

“I’m coming back to life.”

“I’m coming back to life.”

Rose felt as if something was opening up in her mind — like a hole that she was quickly tumbling into. Falling. Falling. Falling.

“And look at her. She can’t move.”

“And look at her. She can’t move.”
“Professor?”
“Professor?”

“Get me away from her.”
“Get me away from her.”

“Please.”

“Please.”

Rose managed to make her eyes focus enough to see Hobbes helping Sky up.

*Help me, help!* Where the hell was the TARDIS? Why wasn’t she answering? Where was she?

“Oh, thank you.”

“Oh, thank you.” Rose tried desperately to stop talking, but she couldn’t. The darkness was starting to take over the golden glow in the back of her mind.

“They’ve completely separated,” Jethro said faintly.

“It’s in her,” Biff added. “Do you see? I said it was her all the time.”

*Shut up, shut up, shut up!*

“Oh, it was so cold,” Sky said as the group gathered around her.

“Oh, it was so cold.”

“I couldn’t breathe.”

“I couldn’t breathe.”

“I’m sorry.”

“I’m sorry.”

“I must have scared you so much.”

“I must have scared you so much.”

*SHUT UP!*

You are mine, now. Hearing the voice was like being plunged into icy water. It wasn’t the TARDIS. It wasn’t even close.

Who are you? What are you?

“…Rose can’t move.” She tuned back in to hear Hobbes speaking. “And when Sky was possessed, she couldn’t move, so…”

“Well, there we are, then,” Biff said. “Now the only problem we’ve got is Rose.”

“It’s inside her head,” Sky said.
“It’s inside her head.”

“It killed the driver.”

“It killed the driver.” Rose could feel tears welling in her eyes, completely involuntarily.

“And the mechanic.”

“And the mechanic.”

“And now it wants us.”

“And now it wants us.”

Get out of my head. Get out of my head!

It’s not your head anymore. It’s mine.

“She’s waited so long.”

“She’s waited so long.”

“In the dark.”

“In the dark.” The tears slid down Rose’s cheeks, feeling amazingly warm against her cold skin.

“And the cold.”

“And the cold.”

“And the diamonds.”

“And the diamonds.”

“Until you came.”

“Until you came.” A dim part of Rose’s mind noted that the pauses in Sky’s speech sounded deliberate. Like she wanted to give Rose time to copy.

Like she was encouraging it.

“Bodies so hot.”

“Bodies so hot.”

“With blood.”

“With blood.”

“And pain.”

“And pain.”

“Stop,” Val gasped. “Oh my god, make her stop. Someone make her stop.”

“But she’s saying it,” Dee Dee insisted. She was still defending Rose.
“And you can shut up!” Val snapped.

“But it’s not Rose, it’s Sky. Rose is just repeating.”

“But that’s what the thing does,” Biff said. “It repeats.”

“Just let her talk.” Hearing the Hostess step in was a bit of a surprise.

You’re going to die. You’re going to die and your voice will be mine.

Shut up!

“. . . from what I’ve seen, it repeats, then it synchronizes, then it goes on to the next stage and that’s exactly what Rose said would happen.”

“What, and you’re on her side?” Biff demanded.

“No . . .”

“The voice is the thing,” Jethro spoke up uncertainly.

“And she’s the voice.” Dee Dee gained confidence from that. “She stole it. Look at her. It’s not possessing Rose, it’s draining her.”

“She’s got her voice,” the Hostess breathed.

They’re going to kill you.

What are you? Rose cried in her mind. Why are you doing this? I was trying to help you!

You are helping me. More than you’ll never know.

Get out of my head!

“Everyone saw it,” Biff was saying when Rose tuned back in. She’d missed part of the conversation, but she had a feeling it wasn’t going anywhere well for her. “Everyone.”

“You didn’t,” Dee Dee argued. God bless Dee Dee. “You’re just making it up. I know what I saw, and I saw her stealing Rose’s voice.”

“She’s as bad as her,” Val sneered. “Someone shut her up.”

“I think you should be quiet, Dee Dee,” Hobbes said.

“Well, I’m only saying—”

“And that’s an order!” This time Hobbes was yelling. “You’re making a fool of yourself, pretending you’re an expert in mechanics and hydraulics, when I can tell you, you are nothing more than average at best. Now shut up.”

That was cruel. “That’s how she does it,” Sky said suddenly.

“That’s how she does it.”

“She makes you fight.”

“She makes you fight.” The darkness was expanding in Rose’s mind, taking her over completely.
“Creeps into your head.”
“Creeps into your head.”
“And whispers.”
“And whispers.”
“Listen.”
“Listen.”
“Just listen.”
“Just listen.”
“That’s her.”
“That’s her.”
“Inside.”
“Inside.”

I was tryin’ to give you a chance!

You have, though. You’ve given me the best chance I could ask for.

“Yes.”
“Yes.”

“Throw her out.”
“Throw her out.”
“Get rid of her.”
“Get rid of her.”
“Now!”
“Now!”

Rose cried out mentally as Biff grabbed her from behind. “Don’t!” She heard Dee Dee cry.

“It’ll be you next,” Val informed the young woman cruelly.

“Don’t think we should do this,” Rose heard the Hostess insist.

“It was your idea!” Biff snapped. “Professor, help me!”

“I can’t — I’m not—”

“What sort of man are you? Come on!”

“Throw him out!” Val yelled out.
Help! Rose begged again, trying desperately to find the TARDIS, to find the golden light that always glowed in the back of her mind. But it was gone. It was all gone.

Just her and the entity.

“Cast her out,” Sky called. Rose hooked her foot on a chair, holding on desperately.

“Cast her out.”

“Into the sun.”

“Into the sun.”

“I want her out!” Rose heard Val yelling.

“And the night.”

“And the night.”

“Come on,” Biff insisted as he struggled to get Rose’s foot off the chair. “Don’t just stand there. Do something.”

“Get her out!”

“Do it.”

“Do it.”

“Do it now.”

“Do it now.”

“Faster.”

“Faster.”

Rose’s foot slipped off the chair as Biff dragged her along with the professor helping now.

“That’s the way!” Sky encouraged.

“That’s the way!”

“You can do it!”

“You can do it!”

“Allons-y!”

“Allons-y!” The tears slipped faster down Rose’s cheeks. Unwittingly, her mind turned to the Doctor. God she missed him.

“The starlight waits.”

“The starlight waits.”

“The emptiness.”
“The emptiness.” She really would never see the Doctor again. Or her mother. Or Mickey. Donna would be stuck here forever. She had broken her promise to Martha.

She was going to die.

“The Midnight sky.”

“The Midnight sky.”

“She’s taken her voice!”

The shout caught Rose by surprise — and suddenly light was filling the room. Everyone screamed, for a moment it was chaos…

And then golden light flooded through Rose’s mind. She hit the floor, gasping and staring at the ceiling as the hum of the TARDIS echoed through her head once more.


Dee Dee crawled over to look down at Rose. “Your eyes are glowing,” she said quietly. Rose squeezed her eyes shut, grabbing a seat to pull herself up.

For a moment, no one spoke.

“I said it was her.”

Val was lucky Rose couldn’t stand in that moment. Or she might’ve slapped the woman.

* * * * *

No one spoke for a long time. They all sat down, huddling in their seats. Rose didn’t bother getting off the floor. She just leaned back against a chair, staring at nothing and hoping her eyes weren’t glowing anymore.

Not that anyone was looking at her.

“Repeat. Crusader Fifty rescue vehicle coming alongside in three minutes. Door seals set to automatic. Prepare for boarding. Repeat. Prepare for boarding.”

Rose took a deep breath, forcing herself to speak. “The hostess. What was her name?”

There was a long moment of silence. It was Hobbes who finally said what they were all thinking.

“I don’t know.”

* * * * *

Donna had been amused, to say the least, when she’d heard the bus had broken down. She’d dodged a bullet with that one, clearly.

All amusement faded, however, when she went to greet Rose and saw the look on the blonde’s face.

Oh god, something had happened.

Donna gathered Rose up in her arms, hugging her tight. For a minute Rose just stood there, as if she didn’t know how to react.
Finally she brought an arm up, wrapping it around Donna as she pressed her face into her friend’s bathrobe-clad shoulder.

* * * * *

“What do you think it was?” Donna asked quietly when Rose was done relaying the story. She shook her head.

“I have no idea.”

“Do you think it’s still out there?” Rose didn’t answer. No, she didn’t think it was still out there. She knew it was. “Well, you’d better tell them. This lot.”

“Yeah.” Rose sighed heavily. “They can build a Leisure Palace somewhere else. Let this planet keep on turnin’ ‘round an Xtonic star, in silence.”

“Can’t imagine you without a voice.”

Rose let out a long, shuddering breath, shaking her head. “Do my eyes look alright?” She asked suddenly.

“Yeah, they’re fine.”

“Not glowin’ or anythin’?”

“You’re fine,” Donna promised gently. Rose nodded looking away.

“Yeah. I’m fine.”
You are mine…
You will die…
You’ll never be free…

“Rose, wake up! *Rose!*”

Rose shot up, gasping for breath as her head snapped back and forth. She was safe. She wasn’t on the bus. She wasn’t being possessed. She wasn’t about to die.

She was fine.

Donna shifted to sit on the jump seat with Rose, wrapping an arm around her shoulders. Rose hadn’t talked much about what had happened on the bus since they’d left Midnight, but the nightmares had plagued her basically every time she closed her eyes.

“Ssshh, you’re alright.” Donna smoothed Rose’s hair back gently. “You’re alright, see? You’re okay.”

Rose leaned against Donna, still shaking a bit. “It…It was in my head,” she whispered after a moment. “It was talkin’ to me…tauntin’ me…”

Donna held her tighter, sighing. Rose usually bounced back from things pretty quickly but this…this had shaken her badly.

And Donna didn’t really know what to do.

“Sorry I woke you,” Rose said after a moment. Donna shook her head.

“It’s absolutely fine. I wish I could help you.”

“I’m alright—”

“I swear to god if you say that one more time I’m gonna slap you.” It was an empty threat, of course. “You don’t have to be alright all the time, Rose. It’s okay to not be okay.”

“Yeah,” Rose muttered, closing her eyes and sighing. She was so tired.

Eventually Rose decided it was a good time to get chips and set to work with landing them on Earth. “Why Earth for chips?” Donna asked curiously.

“No better place for chips than twenty-first century London.”

Donna highly doubted that but it was clear Rose wouldn’t be swayed on that. They landed and
stepped out of the TARDIS…and found themselves on what looked like a university campus.

“This definitely isn’t Cardiff,” Rose said with a frown. “Why are we—?”

“Rose?”

She jumped at the sound of the voice calling her name and turned to see a dark-skinned woman making her way toward them. She looked…familiar. Hang on…

“Dee Dee?”

She was older, definitely older — but that smile was definitely Dee Dee. “I don’t believe it!” She threw her arms around Rose, hugging her tight. “God, look at you, you haven’t aged a day. How are you?”

“I-I’m good.” Stunned, but good. “How are you?”

“I’m great!” Dee Dee beamed. “I’m a professor now!”

“What? Oh my god, that’s brilliant! Congratulations! Oh.” She looked back at Donna, who looked bewildered. “Sorry, Dee Dee this is my friend Donna. Donna, this is Dee Dee.”

“Nice to meet you,” Donna said politely, shaking Dee Dee’s hand.

“And you. You were the one who stayed behind at the spa, right? Good choice.”

It clicked in Donna’s head then. Dee Dee. She had been on the bus. “Yeah. Yeah I guess it was.”

“How long has it been for you?” Rose asked suddenly. If Dee Dee found the question at all weird, she didn’t let on.

“About ten years. Come on, I was just on my way home, you should come with me.” She didn’t give Rose much of a chance to protest, simply grabbing the blonde’s hand and dragging her along. Donna followed, amused. “Jethro will be happy to see you too.”

“Wha — Jethro?” Rose repeated stupidly. “Are the two of you—?”

“What? Oh, no, definitely not. I’m not his type. Wrong anatomy.” Dee Dee laughed. “We moved in together a few years after everything happened. His parents threw him out.”

“Gee, what a shock,” Rose muttered.

“Yeah neither of us were really surprised when it happened. He’d wanted to get out for a while anyways, they just sorta…expedited the process.” It sounded like they’d stayed in touch after it happened. Good. They’d both needed the support.

“So you’re a professor now?”

“Yeah. They actually fired Professor Hobbes to hire me.” Dee Dee grinned. “Should’ve seen the look on his face when he was packing his office and I walked in with my stuff.”

Rose burst out laughing at that. She couldn’t help herself. “That must’ve been brilliant.”

“It was! I quit being his assistant, you know. After we got back. Finally realized I deserved better than how he was treating me.”
“Good for you,” Rose said fiercely. She’d realized that early on. Thank god Dee Dee had seen it too.

“What about you? What’ve you been up to? I’m…guessing it hasn’t really been ten years for you.”

More like a week. If that. “Time’s kinda funny around me.”

“A lot of things are funny around you,” Dee Dee pointed out with a small smile. “It’s really good to see you again, though. You just sort of disappeared, I didn’t get a chance to make sure you were okay.”

She let them into the apartment, calling, “Hey, I brought guests!”

“I told you I’m going out!” Rose smiled as Jethro called back. “You’re on your own for food!”

Dee Dee winced a bit. “Oh yeah…we’ll order take away.”

Jethro walked out, pulling his jacket on — and paused when he saw who his roommate had brought home. “Rose?” She waved, smiling a bit. “Blimey!”

He crossed the room in two long steps, hugging her tight. “I don’t believe it, what’re you doing here?”

“Oh, I was just passin’ through.” She pulled back to look Jethro over. He was no longer the black-wearing, sullen teen from the bus — ten years had been good to him.

Jethro ended up canceling his plans despite Rose’s protests. “I can go out any night,” he insisted as he hung up and took his jacket off. “Besides, I’m not gonna let Dee Dee cook for you.”

“Oh I give one friend food poisoning…”

Jethro smirked as he went to get started on dinner. “So what are you up to?” Rose asked curiously. “Dee Dee told me about your parents…”

“Yeah, screw ‘em,” Jethro said, shrugging. “They actually got divorced last year, probably better I got out of that train wreck when I did.”

Somehow, that didn’t surprise Rose either. Their marriage had seemed good on the surface, but once the cracks were revealed there had probably been no turning back. “Anyways I’m a social worker,” Jethro continued as he flipped the chicken. “Working with kids from bad homes, kids who were tossed out…you know, the usual. Figured I had the experiences, might as well put them to use.”

Rose smiled at that. “That’s brilliant, Jethro.” She felt so guilty about telling him to give his parents a chance now. She was glad he hadn’t listened.

While Rose and Jethro talked, Donna pulled Dee Dee into the sitting room. “I know it’s probably not something you want to think much about,” the redhead started apologetically, “but she won’t really tell me what happened. She gave me the bare details — the thing possessed her and she nearly got thrown out — but there’s more to it than that, isn’t there?”

Dee Dee’s eyes darkened for a moment and she looked away. “Everyone turned on her long before she got possessed,” the younger woman said quietly. “It’s stupid, looking back, I felt awful, but at the time…she didn’t do herself any favors. Everyone thought she thought she was better than them, and she just…she acted different, you know? The Hostess said she just turned up out of nowhere, and she wouldn’t really give us any straight answers, and her eyes…she said it was a genetic disorder but what kind of genetic disorder makes your eyes glow?”
Ah. Well that explained why she had been so worried about her eyes after she’d gotten off the bus. “Yeah, she’s a bit odd sometimes,” Donna said with a sigh. “It was only a matter of time before it came back to bite her, I suppose.”

“I really did feel horrible after,” Dee Dee said quietly. “I wanted to find her and apologize but…she was already gone by the time I went to look.”

“Yeah, we got out pretty quickly after you all came back. She didn’t want to stick around.” And with good reason, apparently.

“It took them a year to shut the resort down,” Jethro was telling Rose as Dee Dee and Donna walked back into the kitchen. “We actually picketed the place, Dee and me. Chained ourselves to the door and made it impossible for anyone to get in.”

“We had brochures too,” Dee Dee added with a laugh. “Ten Reasons Why This Leisure Palace Should be Bulldozed.”

“I don’t wanna say we single-handedly ruined their business, but…”

“We single-handedly ruined their business.”

Rose laughed. God she was so proud of both of them. They’d made such good lives for themselves, despite everything that was against them.

And they were amazing.

“We found out the Hostess’ name,” Jethro said quietly as they sat down to eat. Rose’s head snapped around at that.

“Yeah? What was it?”

“Ruby. We went to see her family, we’re actually still in touch with her brother. Him and his family have us over for holidays.”

“Jethro totally has a thing for her nephew,” Dee Dee added with a sly smile. Jethro rolled his eyes.

“I do **not**, shut up.”

“You absolutely do, we can all see it.”

Jethro blushed faintly, ducking his head. “Shut up.”

This was, Donna thought as they walked back to the TARDIS a few hours later, exactly what Rose needed. Seeing how Dee Dee and Jethro had turned out, seeing that they were happy.

It was good for Rose — she felt a lot lighter when they stepped onto the TARDIS again, taking off. But it didn’t fix everything. Once they were back in the vortex Rose disappeared into the library, settling down on the couch and staring at the ceiling.

“You left me,” she informed the ceiling after a moment. She had avoided having this conversation — mostly because she didn’t want to — but it needed to be said. “I thought it was just the entity drowning you out, but you disappeared before that.”

The TARDIS hummed mournfully. *I am sorry, my Wolf.*

“Why? Why did you leave?” Rose was trying really hard not to feel abandoned — and failing
miserably.

I had to close our connection. I could feel the entity trying to get into your head, if it had taken control of me as well…

It would have been a disaster. Rose understood that. A murderous, psychotic entity in control of a ship that could travel through time and space? It was a nightmare come true.

Rose understood that. Really, she did.

But the feeling of abandonment still stung quite badly.

* * * * *

“It’s not your fault,” Rose said with a sigh. “I got myself into that mess.”

“You called us humans…like you’re not one of us.”

When had that happened? When had she started seeing herself as separate from humans?

When had she started considering itself not human?

The thought of it scared her.

* * * * *

“Nononononono — noooooooooo!”

The Doctor let out a loud wail of despair as Tony’s Mario crossed the finish line right before the Doctor’s Yoshi. Tony yelled happily, jumping up and down on the couch in victory.

“I won I won I won!”

“You cheated!” The Doctor protested.

“Oh don’t be a sore loser,” Jackie scolded the Doctor as she walked into the room. “Come on Tony, it’s time for your bath.”

“One more race!” Tony said with a pout. Jackie turned off the Wii, scooping Tony into her arms.

“No more races. Say good night to the Doctor.”

“Night Doctor,” Tony sighed. Jackie leaned in with Tony in her arms so the boy could press a kiss to the Time Lord’s cheek.

“Sleep well, Tony.”

They left, and after a few minutes the Doctor decided to climb up to the roof. Star gazing didn’t share nearly the same appeal anymore — most of the stars were gone at this point.

But that was fine, really. The Doctor could stare at the blank, velvety canvas and imagine the consolations from his own universe.

And think about all the places he never got take to Rose.

He settled down on the roof and laid back, hands pillowing his head as he looked up. He knew he should have been worried about the lack of stars.
But really all he could think about was getting home and finding Rose.

He loved living with the Tylers. He really did. But he was always aware of how out of place he was. Jackie went out of her way to make him feel at home, but this wasn’t home. Home was a little blue box that was bigger on the inside. Home was the stars.

No matter how hard Jackie tried, this was just a pale comparison of everything he’d once had.

He wanted the TARDIS back. But more importantly, he wanted to know how Rose was doing. He was going spare, not knowing. It would’ve been different if he knew there was still someone for her in the other universe — maybe then he wouldn’t have been so scared.

But she was alone there. And he knew better than anyone what loneliness could drive a person to do.

He needed to get back to her.

The next day was business as usual at Torchwood. “Try to stay out of trouble,” Mickey said with a bit of a smirk as the Doctor prepared to leave. That was nearly impossible.

“Yeah, yeah.” The Doctor waved Mickey off, and the young man laughed as he stepped back.

“Commencing in three…two…one…”

The Doctor pressed the button — and everything turned sideways. He would’ve yelled if he could have, but all the air seemed to have been squeezed from his body as he tumbled around, slamming into invisible walls. It was worse than traveling through the vortex without a capsule.

He hit the ground with a thud, groaning as he picked himself up. Oh god that had hurt.

He turned, rubbing his head, and saw a gathering of flashing lights and trucks in the distance. UNIT. He’d recognize them anywhere. He hurried forward, catching sight of redhead walking away.

“Oi, hang on,” he said, grabbing her arm. “What’s going on here?”
“I’d rather just have water,” Donna protested as Rose passed her a mug of foaming liquid.

“Go on Donna, live a little.” Rose beamed. “You’ll love it, I promise. One, two, three!”

They sipped deeply. It tasted warm and wonderful. “Lovely!” Donna said happily, and laughed when she saw the foamy mustache on Rose’s lip.

They finished their drinks and moved on, examining the marketplace stalls.

“You want to buy shukina?” One saleswoman called to Donna. “Or peshmoni? Most beautiful peshmoni in all of Shan Shen?”

“Er, no thanks.” Donna looked back to see Rose wrapped up at another stall, so she went on by herself, looking around.

“Tell your fortune, lady.” She looked to see a woman in black and gold robes standing a few feet away. “The future predicted. Your life foretold.”

“Oh, no thanks,” Donna said with a polite smile. That was a load of hocus pocus, she knew.

“Don’t you want to know if you’re going to be happy?”

“I’m happy right now, thanks.”

She started to walk away. “You got red hair. The reading’s free for red hair.”

Donna stopped, raising an eyebrow at that. Well if it wasn’t going to cost anything…

“Alright, then.”

They settled down in the fortune teller’s tent, the woman examining Donna’s palms. “Oh, you fascinating,” she murmured as she worked. “No, but you good. I can see a woman. The most remarkable woman. How did you meet her?”

“You’re supposed to tell me,” Donna pointed out.

“I see the future.” Well that was a fair point. “Tell me the past. When did your lives cross?”

Oh god. “It’s…sort of complicated. I ended up in a spaceship on my wedding day. Long story.”

“But what led you to that meeting?”

“All sorts of things,” Donna sighed. “But my job, I suppose. It was on Earth, this planet called Earth, miles away. But I had this job as a temp. I was a secretary at a place called HC Clements.”
Images flashed through Donna’s mind at a frightening speed, and she swayed when they disappeared. “Oh. Sorry.” She shook her head.

“It’s the incense,” the fortune teller said. “Just breathe deep. This job of yours. What choices led you there?”

Donna frowned, trying to think. “There was a choice…six months before, because the Agency offered me this contract with HC Clements, but there was this other job. My mum knew this man…”

“Jival, he’s called. Jival Chowdry? He runs that little photocopy business and he needs a secretary.”

“I’ve got a job.”

“As a temp. This is permanent, it’s twenty-thousand a year Donna.”

“HC Clements is in the City. It’s nice, it’s posh, so stop it.”

“Your life could have gone one way or the other.” Donna shook herself out of the memory as the fortune teller spoke. “What made you decide?”

“I just did.”

“But when was the moment? When did you choose?”

“It won’t take long. Just turn right. We’ll pop in and see Mister Chowdry, so Suzette can introduce you.”

“I’m going left. If you don’t like it, get out and walk.”

“If you turn right, you’ll have a career, not just filling in.”

“You think I’m so useless.”

“Oh, I know why you want a job at HC Clements, lady. Because you think you’ll meet a man with lots of money and your whole life will change. Well let me tell you, sweetheart. City executives don’t need temps, except for practice.”

“Yeah. Well, they haven’t met me.”

“You turned left.” Once again, the fortune teller brought Donna back to the present. “But what if you turned right? What then?”

“Let go of my hands,” Donna said quietly. She didn’t like this. She wanted to leave. “What if it changes? What if you go right? What if you could still go right.”

“Stop it,” Donna insisted. She jumped as something pressed her back. “What’s that? What’s on my back? What is it? What’s on my back?!”

“Make the choice again, Donna Noble,” the fortune teller insisted. “And change your mind. Turn right.”

The world seemed to spin out beneath Donna’s feet. “I’m turning…”

“Turn right. Turn right. Turn right!”
“Well let me tell you, sweetheart,” Sylvia said fiercely. “City executives don’t need temps, except for practice.”

Donna sighed heavily. “Yeah. Suppose you’re right.”

“Turn right, and never meet that man. Turn right, and change the world!”

She flipped the blinker to turn right.

“Come on then, get out of the way!” Donna called as she pushed her way through the pub with the tray of drinks. “Get out of the way! Here we are!” She set the tray down with a flourish. “Feed at the trough.”

“Mooky says let’s go to the Boardwalk,” Veena said, grabbing her drink. “It’s two for the price of one.”

“Christmas Eve?” Donna said in disbelief. “It’ll be heaving.”

“Well, exactly!” Mooky said. “Get in and grab them.”

“Hey, that’s the second round of drinks you’ve bought,” Veena said suddenly. “It’s my turn.”

“I can afford it,” Donna assured her. “Promotion. You are talking to Jival Chowdry’s Personal Assistant, I’ll have you know. Capital P, capital A, twenty three thousand pound per annum, merci beaucoup.”

“Here’s to Mr. Chowdry,” Veena said, raising her glass.

“Mr. Chowdry!”

They toasted and drank. Donna frowned when she saw Alice staring at her. “What’s wrong?” She asked, lowering her glass. “What is it?”

Alice blinked, shaking her head. “Sorry?”

“Did someone spill a drink on me?”

Alic looked confused. “Why?”

“Why do you keep looking at my shoulder? What’s wrong?”

“I…don’t know.”

Donna rolled her eyes. “Oh, don’t tell me you’re getting all spooky again. It was bad enough when you saw the ghost of Earl Mountbatten at the boat show. What are you looking at? What is it?”

“It’s like…” Alice hesitated. “It’s like there’s something I can’t see.”

The door burst open before Donna could question that, and a man ran in. “Come on, shut up, all of you. Come and see. Just look at the sky! It’s a star! It’s a Christmas star!”

Everyone jumped up to follow the man out. “Well, come on then,” Veena said, and the women
followed, running out onto the street to see the star hovering overhead

“What the hell is that?” Mooky asked.

“Ken Livingstone, that’s what! Spending our money on decorations! I mean, how much did that cost?”

“Don’t be stupid,” Mooky told Veena. “It’s flying! It’s really flying!”

“That’s not a star,” Donna breathed. “That’s a web. It’s heading east. Middle of the city.”

As they watched, the web started shooting energy, and everyone screamed and ran — except for Donna and Alice. Donna looked over at her coworker to see that she was still staring at her.

“Alice! There’s a great big web star thing shooting at people, and you’re looking at me?”

“There’s something on your back!”

And with that Alice ran away. Donna turned back to the star, watching it with wide eyes. Something about it was… familiar.

She started forward, ignoring Veena yelling after her.

Soldiers were opening fire on the star as Donna approached the barricade. “Everyone stay back,” One soldier called. “The Thames has been closed. Return to your homes. Keep away from the river, and that’s an order.”

Donna snuck around to the back, looking around the army trucks. “Trap One to Greyhound Fifteen,” she heard someone say over a walkie talkie. “What is your report? Any sign of him?”

“No sir, we’ve recovered his ship but there’s no sign of him. There was a young woman though. From the evidence, I’d say she managed to stop the creature. Some sort of red spider. Blew up the base underneath the barrier, flooded the whole thing. Over.”

“And where is the young woman now? Over.”

“We found a body, sir.” As he spoke, two men walked by with a covered body on a stretcher. “We’ve identified it as Rose Tyler, of London. Still trying to figure out what she was doing down there and where he is. Over.” To the men rolling the stretcher along, “Escort the ambulance back to UNIT base.”

Donna watched them load the stretcher up and turned away, starting down the street. She barely noticed the man running by her, at least until he grabbed her arm.

“Oi, hang on. What’s going on here?”

“I’m not really sure,” Donna admitted. “Something about a giant red spider and a body…”

“Body? What body? Who was it? Did they say a name?” He fired off the questions in quick succession, and Donna blinked.

“Uh…yeah. They said her name was Rose. Rose Tyler.”

She couldn’t help but feel bad as the man’s face fell. “No.” He dropped her arm, taking a step back. “No…that can’t be right.”
“I’m sorry,” Donna said quietly. “D-Did you know her?”

He turned away, running his hands through his hair and murmuring, “I came so far… I was so close… Oh Rose…”

“I’m sorry.” It was all Donna could think to say. He just sounded so heartbroken.

He turned back to look at her, looking her up and down. “What’s your name?”

“Donna.” Why had she responded. “And you?”

“Oh, I was just passing by…” He tilted his head, trying to peek around Donna. “I shouldn’t even be here. This is wrong. It’s wrong. This is so wrong. S-Sorry, what was it? Donna what?”

“Why do you keep looking at my back?” Donna demanded. He blinked in surprise.

“I’m not.”

“Yes, you are.” Donna turned, trying to see for herself. “You keep looking behind me. You’re doing it now. What is it? What’s there? Did someone put something on my back?”

She looked back…and the man was gone.

~*~

“You can’t sack me,” Donna insisted angrily. “I’m your personal assistant!”

“You don’t have to make a scene,” Chowdry said, pleading a bit. “Just come downstairs and we can have a little talk.”

“Oh I’ll make a scene alright, right in front of the tribunal,” Donna shot back. “And the first thing I’m going to say is wandering hands!”

“Now come on, Donna. You know what it’s been like for the past few months, ever since that Christmas thing. Half my contracts were on the other side of the river and the Thames is still closed off. Look, I can’t deliver. I’m losing a fortune.”

“Well, sack one of this lot!” Donna waved her hand around the office. “Sack Cliff. He just sits there. Don’t know what he does all day. Sorry, Cliff. Actually, I’m not sorry. What do you do all day?”

A loud boom echoed through the air, and the building shook. “What the hell?” Chowdry said as he tried to hold himself steady. “Like an earthquake.”

Everyone was gathered around the window to watch the black cloud gather in the sky. “That’s weird. Funny sort of clouds.”

Donna was more concerned with the sacking letter in her hands. “Who typed this?” She demanded. “I’m your PA. Did you get somebody else to type this? Beatrice?”

She was ignored, of course. Someone turned on the TV.

“It sounds impossible, but the entire hospital has vanished. The Royal Hope no longer exists. It’s not been destroyed, there’s no wreckage. It’s simply gone. Reports from bystanders say that the rain lifted up around the hospital…”

While they watched TV, Donna packed her desk. “Hole punch. Having that. Stapler, mine. Toy
cactus. You can have that, Beatrice. Catch. Cliff, I’d leave you the mouse mat, but I’m worried you’d cut yourself.”

“Alright, Donna, have some respect,” Chowdry scolded her. “There’s two thousand people in that hospital, and it’s vanished.”

“Oh, I’ll show you vanishing.” Donna snapped back. “Thanks for nothing. Oh, and you know when that money went missing from the kitty? Anne-Marie, that’s all I’m saying. Anne-Marie!”

Another boom rattled the office.

“Don’t tell me, the hospital’s back,” Donna said sarcastically. “Well, isn’t that wizard.”

* * * * *

The news was playing when Donna got home. She dropped the box and went to sit with her grandfather to watch it.

“To confirm, the Royal Hope hospital was returned to it’s original position, but with only one survivor. The only person left alive is medical student Oliver Morgenstern.”

The camera switched to a young man. “And there were these creatures, like rhinos. Talking rhinos, in, in, in black leather…”

“Rhinos?” Donna repeated in disbelief.

“Rhinos could be aliens,” Wilf pointed out.

“Shush.”

“There were hundreds of them. We couldn’t breathe. We were running out of air. A colleague of mine gave me the last oxygen tank. Martha. Martha Jones. And she died.”

Sylvia was going through Donna’s box. “At least you got a hole punch and a raffle ticket.”

“Yeah, well, they can keep the raffle,” Donna said flippantly. “I won’t take a penny off that man.”

“Honestly, you two.” Wilf sighed. “There’s aliens on the news. They took that hospital all the way to the moon, and you’re banging on about raffle tickets.”

“Don’t be daft, Gramps. It wasn’t the moon. It couldn’t be.”

“Yes, well, I am telling you it’s getting worse, these past four years,” Wilf insisted. “It’s like, all of a sudden, they suddenly know all about us, and there’s keen eyes up there and they’re watching us, and they’re not friendly.”

“This stapler says Bea.” They were ignoring Wilf now.

“I can’t believe how well you’re taking it, getting me sacked,” Donna said as she watched her mother. “Thought you’d hit the roof.”

“I’m just tired, Donna, what with your father and everything. To be honest, I’ve given up on you.”

Well, that stung. Donna looked back at the TV, no longer paying attention to the newscast. What did it matter anyways?
“What’s for tea?” She asked after a moment.

“I’ve got nothing in.”

Donna sighed, pushing herself up. “I’ll get chips,” she said, going to get her jacket. “Last of my wages. Fish and chips, yeah?”

She left, making her way down the street with her hands in her pockets. Yesterday she had been on top of the world. Today she was unemployed and hospitals were being transported to the moon.

How the mighty had fallen.

She jumped as light flashed in a nearby alley and hurried forward, freezing when a man in a pinstriped suit came running out.

“Blimey!” Donna gasped, approaching him. “Are you alright? What was that, fireworks or…?”

“I don’t know!” He said brightly, straightening up to face her and grinning. “I was just walking along. That’s weird.”

Hang on, he looked familiar. “You’re the one. Christmas Eve. I met you in town.”

The smile faded for a moment before he forced it back into place. “Donna? Isn’t it?” He asked. She made a face.

“What was your name?”

“How’re you doing?” His eyes drifted to her shoulder as he spoke. “You’re looking good. How’s thing, what have you been up to?”

“You’re doing it again,” Donna said, and the man blinked.

“What?”

“Looking behind me. People keep on doing that, looking at my back.”

The man tilted his head. “What sort of people?”

“People in the street. Strangers. I just catch them sometimes, staring at me. Like they’re looking at something. And then I get home, and I look, and there’s nothing there.” Donna turned, feeling ridiculously like a dog trying to chase its own tail. “See? Look, now I’m doing it!”

The man was quiet for a moment. “What are you doing for Christmas?” He asked suddenly.

“What am I what?”

“Next Christmas. Any plans?”


“Just, I think you should get out, you and your family. Don’t stay in London. Just leave the city.”

“What for?” Why were they even having this conversation?

“Nice hotel, Christmas break?”

“Can’t afford it.”
“What about that raffle ticket?”

That brought Donna up short. She stared at him for a long moment. “How do you know about that?”

“First prize, luxury weekend break.” The man’s voice was flat. “Use it, Donna Noble.”

Donna backed up from him, unsettled. “Why won’t you tell me your name? I think you should leave me alone.”

And she walked away.

~*~

“Cor blimey, that’s what I call posh,” Wilf said brightly as they pulled up to the hotel. “I said you were lucky, didn’t I? I always said, my lucky star.”

Donna had been surprised, to say the least, when she’d gotten the call about the raffle. But she certainly wasn’t about to complain. They stopped in front of the hotel, and two men came to unload the car.

“Look,” Sylvia said as they climbed out, “for God’s sake don’t tell them we won it in a raffle. Be classy. Dad, take those things off.”

“No, I shan’t;” Wilf said, fumbling with his antlers. “It’s Christmas. Oi, I’ll have that one, thank you.” He took one of the suitcases. “It’s got my liniment in it.”

“I reckon we deserve this,” Donna said with a smile. “It’s been a hell of a year.”

“You dad would have loved this.” Sylvia sighed.

“Yeah. He would have.”

* * * * *

“Oi, Gramps, get that,” Donna called from the bathroom as someone knocked on the door. “That’ll be breakfast. We’ve got croissants.”

Wilf groaned as he picked himself up. They’d made him sleep on the old couch. “Why can’t you get it, Lady Muck?” He asked his daughter, who was still in bed eating chocolate.

“It’s Christmas Day, I never get up before ten. Only madam there was up with the dawn chorus, like when she was six years old.”

“I’m not wasting a second in this place,” Donna said. It was too beautiful here. “How was the sofa?”

“Oh, yeah. Oh, not so good really.” He stretched and groaned when something popped. “Oh god. You know, we could have paid for a second room. Oi! Merry Christmas.”

Donna laughed as she made her way back into the room. “Merry Christmas!”

Sylvia shook her head, smiling. “Merry Christmas, Dad.”

The person on the other side of the door knocked again. “Yeah, alright.” Wilf sighed as he went to answer. “Come on in, my darling.” He stepped aside to let the maid in. “Grub’s up. Merry Christmas!”
“Merry Christmas, sir!”

The maid stepped in, setting the tray of croissants down.

“We have interrupted your program to bring you breaking news.”

Sylvia frowned as her show switched to the news. “Have you seen this?”

“We will now return to the BBC news studio.”

Donna wasn’t paying attention. “Because I thought, nice early breakfast and then we’ll go for a walk. People always say that at Christmas. Oh, we all went for a walk. I’ve always wanted to do that. So, walk first, presents later, yeah?”

“Donna come and see.”

Donna moved to sit with her mother. The maid something in Spanish, and Donna turned back to her.

“What?”

“Donna, look at the telly,” Sylvia insisted.

“Tienes algo en tu espalda,” the maid repeated.

“Replica of the RMS Titanic…”

“What does that mean?” Donna demanded. “I don’t know what you’re saying.”

“Donna, look at the TV!”

“Tienes algo en tu espalda!”

Donna thought she saw something moving on her shoulder and she jumped, hurrying into the bathroom to check her back. But there was nothing there.

“For God’s sake, Donna,” Sylvia said impatiently. “Don’t just stand there, come and look!”

Donna finally went to sit with her mother.

“Not sure how this is possible, but this footage is live and genuine. The object is falling on Central London. I repeat, this is not a hoax. A replica of the Titanic is falling out of the sky, and it’s heading for Buckingham Palace. We’re getting this footage from the Guinevere range of satellites…”

“Is that a film or something?” Donna asked curiously as she watched the news footage.

“The Royal Air Force has declared an emerg—”

The picture cut out quite suddenly, and at the same time a shock wave shook the building. Sylvia grabbed the remote, flipping through the channels but there was nothing.

“It’s gone dead. All of them.”

“No, but the Titanic?” Donna rolled her eyes. “Don’t be daft. Is that like a sequel?”

Wilf shifted to look out the window, his face falling. “Oh. Oh, God rest their souls.”

Everyone rushed outside to get a better look, standing on the edge of the property and watching the
mushroom cloud rising into the air.

“I was supposed to be out there selling papers,” Wilf murmured. “I should have been there. We all should. We’d be dead.”

“That’s everyone,” Sylvia said faintly. “Every single person we know. The whole city.”

“Can’t be,” Donna insisted weakly.

“But it is. It’s gone. London’s gone.”

“If you hadn’t won that raffle…”

Donna shook her head, turning away…and saw the maid pointing at her with an accusatory expression.
“Leeds,” Donna said in disbelief as the officer handed her the folder. “I’m not moving to Leeds.”

“I’m afraid it’s Leeds or you can wait in the Hostel for another three months,” the man informed her, a bit rudely. Donna scowled.

“All I want is a washing machine,” Sylvia said.

“What about Glasgow? I heard there was jobs going in Glasgow.”

“You can’t pick and choose. We’ve the whole of Southern England flooded with radiation. Seven million people in need of relocation, and now France has closed its borders. So, it’s Leeds or nothing. Next!”

* * * * *

The bus bounced and bumped along, not that there was any room for them move or be effected by it. The entire bus was packed. Donna pressed into Wilf, closing her eyes as the soldier called off names.

“…The Noble family, billeted at number twenty-nine.”

“That’s us,” Wilf said as he collected his telescope. “Come on, off we go. Alright?”

He helped his girls down and they started toward the house.

“Used to be a nice little family, number twenty-nine,” one of the neighbors said. “They missed one mortgage payment. Just one. They got booted out. All for you lot.”

“Don’t get all chippy with me, Vera Duckworth,” Donna snapped at the woman. “Pop your clogs on and go and feed whippets.”

“Sweetheart, come on,” Wilf said gently, pulling Donna back. “You’re not going to make the world better by shouting at it.”

“I can try.”

They approached the door…and found themselves at a loss. “What happens?” Sylvia asked. “Do we get keys?”

“I don’t know, do I?”

“Who do we ask? The soldiers?”
The door opened before they could move, however, revealing a cheerful, dark-skinned man. “Hey, hey. Is a big house. Room for all. Welcome! In you come.”

“I thought this was our house,” Donna said in disbelief.

“Is many people’s house,” the man said, ushering them in. “Is wonderful. In, in, in.”

Donna was a bit stunned as they walked inside. The man was talking a mile a minute.

“We’ve been here for eight weeks already. I had a nice little paper shop in Shepherd’s Bush. All gone now. So, upstairs, we have Merchandani family. Seven of them. Good family. Good kids. Except that one. You be careful of him. I’s a joking! Where’s that smile, eh? Rocco Colasanto. I’m here with my wife and her sister and her husband and their kids and their daughter’s kids. We’ve got the front room. My mother, she’s got the back room. She’s old. You forgive, eh? And this? This is you. This is your palazzo.”

He led them into the kitchen, and they looked around. “What do you mean, this is us?” Sylvia asked.

“You live here.”

“We’re living in the kitchen?” Donna demanded.

“You got camp beds,” Rocco said, as if that made it better. “You got the cooker, you keep warm. You got the fridge, you keep cool. Is good, eh?”

“What about the bathroom?” Sylvia asked. Rocco chuckled.

“Nobody lives in the bathroom.”

“No, I mean, is there a rota?”

“Is pot-luck! Is fun.” Rocco beamed. “I go wake Mamma. She likes new people. Mamma!” He left the room as he called. “Mamma! Is people! Nice people!”

“Ah, well.” Wilf sighed. “We’ll settle in, won’t we? Make do? Bit of a wartime spirit, eh?”

“Yeah, but there isn’t a war,” Donna pointed out. “There’s no fight. It’s just this.”

“Well, America, they’ll save us. It was on the news. They’re going to send Great Britain fifty billion quid in financial aid. God bless America.”

Of course that dream fell flat when they saw the news later on.

“America is in crisis, with over sixty million reported dead. Sixty million people have dissolved into fat. And the fat is walking. People’s fat has come to life and is walking through the streets. And there are spaceships. There are reports of spaceships over every major US city. The fat is flying. It’s leaving…”

“Aliens,” Wilf breathed. Donna couldn’t even deny it anymore.

“Yeah.”

“The fat creatures are being raised into the air…”

* * * * *
Donna laid in bed, staring at the ceiling. Sylvia’s bed was head to head with hers. “Mary McGinty,” her mother said after a moment. “Do you remember her?”

“Who was she?” Donna asked quietly.

“Worked in the newsagent on Sunday. Little woman. Black hair.”

“Never really spoke to her.”

“She’ll be dead. Every day I think of someone else. All dead.”

“Maybe she went away for Christmas,” Donna suggested, trying to be optimistic.

“Maybe.”

Donna sighed. “I’ll go out tomorrow. I’ll walk into town. There’s got to be work. Everyone needs secretaries. Soon as I’m earning, we’ll get a proper place. Just you wait, Mum.”

“What if it never gets better?” Sylvia asked quietly.

“Course it will.”

“Even the bees are disappearing. You don’t see bumble bees anymore.”

“They’ll sort us out,” Donna said confidently. “The emergency government. They’ll do something.”

“What if they don’t?”

“Then we’ll complain.”

“Who’s going to listen to us? Refugees. We haven’t even got a vote. We’re just no one, Donna. We don’t exist.”

Donna opened her mouth to answer — and was cut off by loud singing from the front room.

“I am going to kill that man!” She growled as she flew out of bed and crashing through the curtain.

“Now listen, Mussolini! I am telling you for the last time to button it! If I hear one more sea shanty —”

She froze when Rocco stepped aside to show a sheepish looking Wilf. “I always loved a sing song,” he said meekly. Donna sighed.

Ten minutes later she and Sylvia were singing along as well. If you couldn’t beat them, join them, right?

“I’m just a poor boy. Nobody loves me. He’s just a poor boy from a poor family. Spare him his life from this monstrosity. Easy come, easy go, will you let me go? Bismillah, no—”

They were cut off by gunfire echoing outside. Donna jumped up automatically to go investigate, but Rocco stopped her.

“No, you stay here,” he said. “Everyone stay here.”

Of course, Donna still followed as he left.

“Hey!” She saw him yelling at a soldier who was firing at his exhaust pipe — which was pumping
out thick exhaust gas. “Hey! Firing at the car is not so good. You, you crazy or what?”

“It’s this ATMOS thing, it won’t stop!” The soldier called. “It’s like gas, it’s toxic.”

“Well, switch it off,” Wilf said as he slipped out behind Donna.

“I have done. It’s still going. It’s all the cars. Every single ATMOS car, they’ve gone mad.” He
looked back at the group, and froze at the sight of Donna, swinging his gun up. “You, lady! Turn
around! Turn around now!”

“Are you crazy, boy!?” Rocco asked, aghast.

“Put the gun down!” Wilf added angrily.

“I said turn around! Show me your back!”

Donna was too shocked to react. “Do what he says!” Sylvia begged. She didn’t want to see her
daughter shot.

“Show me your back!”

“Turn around!”

“Turn around, now! Show me your back!”

Donna raised her arms finally, turning around. After a moment the soldier lowered his gun.

“Sorry, I thought I saw…”

“Call yourself a soldier?” Wilf chastised him, clearly furious. “Pointing guns at innocent women?
You’re a disgrace. In my day, we’d have had you court martialed!”

A flash of light from around the corner caught Donna’s eye. She frowned. Walking toward it slowly.
“Donna?” Sylvia called, clearly shaken. “Where are you going? It’s not safe at night. Donna!
Donna!”

Donna turned around the corner…and there he was. “Hello,” she said quietly.

“Hi.”

* * * * *

They walked in silence, finding a park to sit in. “It’s the ATMOS devices,” the man explained
finally. “We’re lucky, it’s not so bad here. Britain hasn’t got that much petrol. But all over Europe,
China, South Africa, they’re getting choked by gas.”

“Can’t anyone stop it?” Such a stupid question. Who was left?

“Yeah.” The man’s answer surprised her. “They’re trying right now, this little band of fighters, on
board the Sontaran ship. Any second now.”

Right on cue the sky lit up. They squinted against the fiery burn, watching until it faded away. “And
that was?” Donna asked.

“That was the Torchwood team,” the man said. “Gwen Cooper, Ianto Jones, they gave their lives.
And Captain Jack Harkness has been transported to the Sontaran home world. There’s no one left.
Oh Jack, I’m so sorry.”

“You’re always wearing the same clothes,” Donna pointed out. “Why won’t you tell me your name?”

He didn’t answer that, of course. “None of this was meant to happen. There was a…a woman. A wonderful, wonderful woman. And she stopped it. The Titanic, the Adipose, the ATMOS, she — well no, actually, she didn’t stop the Titanic, that’s an anomaly in this time line, no idea where it came from — but she stopped everything else from happening.”

“That…Rose girl, right? Rose Tyler?”

The man closed his eyes for a long moment, sighing deeply. “You knew her,” he said finally, looking at Donna again.

“Did I? When?”

“I think you dream about her sometimes. A young woman, blonde.” For a moment his eyes went distant as he murmured, “Beautiful…”

“Who are you?” Donna asked, and he refocused on her.

“I am…complicated. Rose and I used to travel together. She was you, and I was her.”

“What the hell does that mean?”

“It means you’ve traveled with Rose, Donna. In a different world.”

“I never met her,” Donna argued. “And she’s dead.”

Pure, undiluted pain ripped across the man’s expression for a split second before he trained it back into one of apathy.

“She died underneath the Thames on Christmas Eve, but you were meant to be there. She needed someone to stop her, and that was you. You made her leave. You saved her life.”

“Rose come on, you can stop now!”

Donna jerked as the memory, the fire, the water, flashed through her mind.

“Stop it.” She flew up, storming away. “I don’t know what you’re talking about, leave me alone!”

“Something’s coming, Donna!” The man said as he jumped up, walking after her. “Something worse.”

“The whole world is stinking!” Donna snapped, whirling back around. “How can anything be worse than this?”

“Trust me,” the man implored. “We need…I…the world needs Rose Tyler.” If Donna hadn’t been so riled up she might have felt bad for the choked tone of the man’s voice when he said her name. “It’s coming, Donna. It’s coming from across the stars and nothing can stop it.”

“What is?” Donna asked despite herself.

“The darkness.”
Well that sounded ominous. Donna sighed. “Well, what do you keep telling me for? What am I supposed to do? I’m nothing special. I mean, I’m, I’m not. I’m nothing special. I’m a temp. I’m not even that. I’m nothing.”

The man smiled a bit despite himself. “Donna Noble, you’re the most important woman in the whole of creation.”

“Oh don’t,” Donna scoffed. “Just don’t. I’m tired. I’m so tired.”

The man sighed, running a hand through his hair. “I need you to come with me,” he said finally. Donna rolled her eyes.

“Yeah. Well, I suppose pinstripes and skinny work on most people but you’re not shifting me, mate.”

He laughed a bit. “That’s more like it.”

“I’ve got plenty more,” Donna assured it.

“I don’t doubt it. Then you’ll come with me, only when you want to.”

“You’ll have a long wait, then.”

“Not really,” the man said as Donna turned away again. “Just three weeks. Tell me, does your grandfather still own that telescope?”

That stopped Donna cold. She turned back slowly. “He never lets go of it.”

The man nodded. “Three weeks time. But you’ve got to be certain. Because when you come with me, Donna, sorry, so sorry, but you’re going to die.”

While Donna was too stunned to answer, the man faded away from view.

* * * * *

“And you!” Rocco said happily, grabbing Donna and kissing her cheek. “I’m going to miss you most of all. All flame-haired and fiery.”

“Oh, but why do you have to go?” Donna said sadly. Rocco just smiled.

“It’s the new law. England for the English, etc. They can’t send us home. The oceans are closed! They build labor camps.”

“I know, but labor doing what?” Donna was confused. “There aren’t any jobs.”

“Sewing, digging.” He kissed her cheek again. “Is good. Now, stop before I kiss you too much.”

Two more kisses — one on each cheek — and then he turned to Wilf. “Wilfred. My capitano.”

He saluted Wilf, and the man saluted back, looking like he was about to cry. And then Rocco climbed into the truck with his family.

“Labor camps,” Wilf said quietly. “That’s what they called them last time.”

Donna turned to her grandfather. “What do you mean?”

Wilf watched the truck, barely concealing his grief. “It’s happening again.”
“What is?” Donna whirled around to look back at the truck as it was pulling away. “Excuse me? Excuse me, where are you taking them?” She started to run after the truck. “Where are you going? Rocco, where are you going? Where are you going? Where are you going? Where are you going?”

But it was no use.

* * * * *

Donna was utterly dejected as she made her way back inside to see Sylvia sitting at the table.

“I asked about jobs with the army,” Donna said quietly. “They said I wasn’t qualified. You were right. You said I should have worked harder at school. I suppose I’ve always been a disappointment.”

“Yeah.”

That hurt. But it wasn’t unexpected.

* * * * *

Later that night, Donna sat outside with Wilf as he looked through his telescope. “You know,” the man said thoughtfully, “we’d get a bit of cash if we sold this thing.”

“Don’t you dare,” Donna said fiercely. “I always imagined, your old age, I’d have put a bit of money by. Make you comfy. Never did. I’m just useless.” She paused. “You’re supposed to say, no you’re not.”

Wilf wasn’t paying attention though. “Ha, it must be the alignment,” he muttered as he peeked through his telescope.

“What’s wrong?”

“Well, I don’t know. I mean, it can’t be the lens, because I was looking at Orion. The constellation of Orion. You take a look. And tell me, what can you see?”

Donna leaned through, but everything was black. “Where?”

“Well, up in the sky.”

“Well, I can’t see anything.” Donna pulled back. “It’s just black.”

“Well I mean, it’s working,” Wilf said, frustrated. “The telescope is working.”

“Well, maybe it’s clouds,” Donna suggested reasonably.

“There is no clouds,” Wilf argued.

“Well, there’ must be.”

“There’s not!” Wilf went back to the telescope. “It was there. An entire constellation. Look. Look there. They’re going out. Oh, my God! Donna, look. The stars are going out.”

*The stars are going out.*

Donna’s stomach dropped. After a moment she turned to see the pinstripe-wearing man standing behind her.
“I’m ready.”

* * * * *

There was a truck waiting for them at the bottom of the hill. They road in silence to a warehouse, and the man led Donna into the warehouse. She looked around in shock, taking everything in. It was mad.

A woman in a uniform approached them, saluting. “Sir.”

“Oh I’ve told you not to salute,” the man said, rolling his eyes as he walked to a console.

“Well if you’re not going to tell us your name…”

Donna looked over at the woman, surprised. “What, you don’t know either?”

“I’ve crossed too many different realities,” the man said as he worked. “Trust me, the wrong word in the wrong place can change an entire causal nexus.”

The woman looked at Donna with a small, patient smile. “He talks like that. A lot. And you must be Ms. Noble.”

“Donna,” Donna corrected automatically. The woman nodded, holding out a hand.

“Captain Erisa Magambo. Thank you for doing this.”

Donna shook her hand, confused. “I don’t even know what I’m doing.”

“Is she awake?” The man asked suddenly, clearly uninterested in the conversation.

“Seems to be quiet today,” Magambo reported. “Ticking over. Like it’s waiting.”

“She,” the man corrected as he made his way to a big blue box. “How’d you like it if someone called you an it?”

Magambo rolled her eyes, sighing. The man looked back at Donna, smiling a bit. “Do you want to see?”

“What’s a police box?” Donna asked as she stepped closer.

“They salvaged her from underneath the Thames.” The man rested his hand against the surface. “Just go inside.”

“What for?” Donna asked, scoffing a bit.

“Just go in.”

Finally Donna walked in — her mouth dropping when she saw what was waiting on the inside.

“No. Way.”

She backed out in shock while the man watched, thoroughly amused, and then went back in. Then out. Then in again. Then out again.

“What do you think?”

Donna turned back to the man, blinking rapidly. “Can I have coffee?”
“Time And Relative Dimension In Space.”

They walked around the console, Donna holding on to her coffee cup like it was her last thread of sanity. “This room used to shine with light.” The man sighed. “I think she’s dying.”

He reached out, brushing his hand against the middle column, and it moved a little with a light wheezing sound.

“Still trying to help. I think she’s holding on for me, but I didn’t find her in time. She lost both her pilots and just sort of…gave up.”

He was talking about the ship like it was alive. Absolute nutter.

“And…this belong to that Rose girl?”

The man sadly. “Sorta. She inherited it when the first pilot…disappeared. God she did brilliantly though. She was absolutely amazing.”

Donna frowned a bit. “But if she was so special, what was she doing with me?”

The man looked back at Donna, tilting his head. “She thought you were brilliant,” he said, as if it was the most simple thing in the world, and Donna scoffed.

“Don’t be stupid.”

“But you are. You just needed someone to show you. Rose was always really good at that.”

The way he talked about her… “Were you and she…?”

But her voice drifted off at the look on the man’s face. The pure, undiluted pain.

Yeah. Yeah they were.

The man reached out, resting a hand on Donna’s shoulder. “Do you want to see it?”

“No.” Donna sighed. “Go on, then.”

The man led Donna out to a circle of mirrors and an arc of lights. “I’ve given these people enough technology from the TARDIS to show you the creature.”

“You know how it works?” Donna asked. “It’s a creature?”

The man smiled a bit, settling Donna in the middle of the circle. “Just stand in here.”

“Out of the circle, please,” Magambo called strictly. The man rolled his eyes.

“Yes ma’am,” he muttered, walking away. Donna swallowed hard.

“There’s a creature?”

“Can’t you stay?”

“Ready,” Magambo called. “And activate.”

The lights flipped on, and Donna squeezed her eyes shut. “Open your eyes, Donna,” the man called
“Is it there?” Her voice hopped up a pitch.

“Open your eyes. Look at it.”

“I can’t!”

“It’s part of you, Donna. Look.”

Finally Donna opened her eyes — and she saw the reflection of the giant beetle clinging to her back. She screamed.


“What is it?” She demanded.

“I’ve got some theories.”

“Well that’s useful!”

“It feeds off time, by changing time. By making someone’s life take a different turn, like er, meetings never made, children never born, a life never loved. But with you, it’s — ”

“But I never did anything important!”

“Yeah, you did,” the man insisted. “One day that thing made you turn right instead of left.”

“When was that?!”

“Oh, you wouldn’t remember. It was the most ordinary day in the world. But by turning right, you never met Rose Tyler, and the whole world just changed around you.”

“Can you get rid of it?” Donna asked, panicked. The man shook his head.

“No. I can’t even touch it. It seems to be in a state of flux.”

“What does that mean?!”

“Well…” He rubbed his eye with his finger. “It’s complicated.”

“You liar!” Donna cried. “You told me I was special. But it’s not me, it’s this thing. I’m just a host!”

“No, there’s more than that,” the man insisted. “The readings are strange. It’s — it’s like reality’s just bending round you.”

“Because of this thing!”

“No, no! We’re getting separate readings from you. And they’ve always been there, since the day you were born.”

“This is not relevant to the mission,” Donna heard Magambo say. The man ignored her.

“I thought it was just Rose we needed, but it’s the both of you. Rose Tyler and Donna Noble together, to stop the stars from going out.”

“Why?! What can I do?!” Donna was nearly in tears. “Turn it off, please.”
“Captain,” the man said quietly.

“Power down.”

The lights switched off, and the man walked back into the circle to make sure Donna was okay.

“It’s still there, though.” Donna nearly whimpered. “What can I do to get rid of it?”

The man smiled a bit. “You’re going to travel through time.”

* * * * *

“The TARDIS has tracked down the moment of intervention,” the man explained. Donna looked down at her jacket, covered in wires. “Monday the twenty fifth, one minute past ten in the morning. Your car was on Little Sutton Street leading to the Ealing Road, but you turned right heading towards Griffin’s Parade. You need to turn left. That’s the most important thing. You’ve got to go back, turn left. Have you got that, Donna? One minute past ten, make yourself turn left, heading for the Chiswick Highroad.”

“Keep the jacket on at all times,” Magambo added. “It’s insulation against temporal feedback.” A scientist strapped a watch to Donna’s wrist, and the captain handed her a cup of water. “This is to combat dehydration.”

The man walked Rose back to the center of the circle. “This is where I leave you.”

“I don’t want to see that thing on my back,” Donna said, her voice hopping up a bit.

“No, the mirrors are just incidental. They bounce chronon energy back into the centre which we control and decide the destination.”

“It’s a time machine,” Donna guessed. The man beamed.

“It’s a time machine.”

“If you could,” Magambo called, and the man stepped away while Donna took her place, preparing. “Powering up.”

“How do you know it’s going to work?” Donna asked suddenly.

“Hmm?” The man blinked. “Oh, well, you know, there are a lot of variables—”

“You have no idea do you?”

“No idea is kind of an overstatement…”

“Oh shut up, spaceman.”

The man laughed at that. “Just remember, when you get to the junction, change the car’s direction by one minute past ten.”

“How do I do that?” Donna asked. The man shook his head.

“It’s up to you.”

Donna took a deep breath. “Well, I just have to run up to myself and have a good argument.”
The man grinned. “I’d like to see that!”

“Activate lodestone.”

Another flip was switched.

“Good luck,” the man said. Donna nodded.

“I’m ready.”

“One minute past ten.”

“Because I understand now. You said I was going to die, but you mean this whole world is going to blink out of existence. But that’s not dying, because a better world takes its place. The Doctor’s world. And I’m still alive. That’s right, isn’t it?” The man didn’t answer. “I don’t die. If I change things, I don’t die. That’s right, isn’t it?”

The man was quiet for a long, long moment. “Good luck, Donna Noble.”

“Activate!”

There was a flash of light…and Donna felt like she was being sucked up into a straw. The sensation only last for a moment, however, before she was deposited onto a sidewalk, outside a cafe.

“But hold on.” She looked around, eyes wide. “But this is — I’m not — this is Sutton Court. I’m a half mile away. I’m a half mile away!”

She checked the watch. 9:57. “Four minutes? Oh my god.”

She stumbled up and started running.

She didn’t make it far, however, before she ran out of breath, the jacket weighing heavily on her. She stopped and looked at the watch. 9:59.

“I’m not going to get there,” she gasped. It was all for nothing. Nothing.

You’re going to die.

She paused, looking at the truck coming down the street. Oh god.

“Please,” she whispered. And she stepped in front of the van.

It didn’t hurt, surprisingly. If anything Donna’s body went numb when the truck connected and she hit the ground. She supposed she should be grateful for that. She didn’t want to be in pain.

She could hear people yelling around her, but she knew it was too late. She could feel herself dying.

And then the man was there, leaning over her. “Tell her this,” he said quietly, leaning in. “Two words.”

He whispered in her ear…and then Donna spun away.

“I’m going left. Left. Left.”

Donna screamed, jumping up, and the beetle fell off her back. “What was that?!” She demanded of the stunned fortune teller.
“You were so strong. What are you? What will you be? What will you be?”

She ran out. A moment later a young blonde woman stepped in. Rose. Rose Tyler. Oh god.

“Everything alright?”

She was quite surprised, to say the least, when Donna flew at her, hugging her tight. “Oh hello!” Rose laughed, hugging Donna back. “What was that for?”

Donna pulled away to look at her, wide-eyed. “I don’t know.”

* * * * *

Rose poked the beetle, frowning a bit.

“I don’t remember,” Donna said quietly. “It’s slipping away. You know like when you try and think of a dream and it just sort of goes.”

“Just got lucky, this thing,” Rose murmured. “It’s one of the Trickster’s Brigade. Changes a life in tiny little ways. Most times, the universe just compensates around it, but with you? Great big parallel world.”

Donna blinked. “Hold on. You said parallel worlds are sealed off.”

“They are. But you had one created around you. Funny thing is, seems to be happening a lot to you.”

“How do you mean?” Donna tilted her head. Rose looked up from the beetle.

“Well, the Library, and then this.”

Donna shrugged. “Just goes with the job, I suppose.”

“I don’t know,” Rose murmured thoughtfully. “So much coincidence bringing us together. It’s almost like somethin’ is bindin’ us together.”

“Don’t be so daft,” Donna scoffed. “I’m nothing special.”

“Oh shush, you’re brilliant,” Rose said with a grin, and Donna laughed for a moment.

“She thought you were brilliant…”

Donna frowned. “Hang on. He said that.”

“Hmm?” Rose tilted her head. “Who did?”

“That…man. I can’t remember.”

“Well he never existed now.” Rose shrugged, looking back down at the beetle.

“No, but he said the stars…he said the stars are going out.”

“Yeah, but that world’s gone,” Rose assured Donna. She didn’t get it.

“No, but he said it was all worlds,” Donna insisted. “Every world. He said the darkness is coming even here.”

That caught Rose’s interest a bit. “Who was he?”
Donna shook her head. “I don’t know. He never told me.”

“What did he look like?”

“He…he was wearing a pinstripe suit.” Rose’s heart simultaneously dropped like a stone and soared. “Nice hair. Bit skinny though.”

“What was his name, Donna?” Rose had to force the words out.

“I don’t know. He never said.” Donna focused on Rose, frowning a bit when she saw how pale the blonde had become. “What is it? What’s wrong?”

“Did he say anything? Anything at all? Anything weird or out of place or kind of mad sounding?”

“I…” Donna shook her head. “No — wait a second. He told me…a message. Two words.”

“What two words?” Rose demanded. “What were they? What did he say?”

Donna closed her eyes, trying to remember. “Bad Wolf,” she finally said, and she opened her eyes again to see all the remaining color drain rapidly from Rose’s face. “Well, what does it mean?”

Rose didn’t answer; she flew up and out of the tent, skidding to a halt on the street as she looked around. Bad Wolf. Everywhere. On the signs. Even on the TARDIS. Bad Wolf. Bad Wolf. Bad Wolf.

The TARDIS hummed loudly in the back of Rose’s head. Bad Wolf.

She ran inside the TARDIS with Donna right behind her. The red emergency lights were flashing, the cloister bell going off overhead.

“Rose, what is it?” Donna asked over the alarms. “What’s Bad Wolf?”

Rose’s head was spinning as she looked back at Donna, eyes glowing just slightly.

“It’s the end of the universe.”

Chapter End Notes

Just a head's up, I might not update on Sunday. I'm moving to another state on Saturday - it's a ten-hour drive with an anxious cat who gets car sick so I'm not looking forward to it. Not sure what state of mind I'll be in on Sunday. So we'll see.
Chapter Summary

(1/2)

As soon as the TARDIS landed Rose was out the door, with Donna close on her heels. The street they had landed on was so normal it was boring.

Good.

“It’s fine,” Rose breathed, looking around. “Everything’s fine. Nothing’s wrong, all fine.” She caught sight of a nearby milkman. “Oi, sorry, excuse me. What day is it?”

The question was obviously bewildering but he replied all the same. “Saturday.”

“Saturday,” Rose repeated, sighing. “Good. Good, I like Saturdays.”

“So… I just met your Doctor?” Donna asked as she came up behind Rose.

“Not mine. But yes.”

“But he’s locked away in a parallel world.”

“Exactly.” Rose ran her fingers through her hair, turning to look back at Donna. “If he can cross from that parallel world to yours, that means the walls of the universe are breaking down, which puts everything in danger. Everything.” She looked back at the street, mind spinning with possibilities. “But how?” She shook her head. “Come on.”

They headed back inside and Rose went straight for the console, preparing to send them off. “But the thing is…” Donna said slowly. “No matter what’s happening, and I’m sure it’s bad… the Doctor’s coming back.” Rose froze with her hand hovering over a lever. “Isn’t that good?”

Was it? Well of course it was, it was all Rose had dreamed of for so, so long now.

But what would he think when he saw her? When he saw what she had become? Would he be proud of her? Ashamed?

The possibilities terrified her.

Still, she looked up at Donna, a small smile pulling at her lips. “Yeah.”

Donna smiled back – and then a large boom shattered the silence, shaking the TARDIS and nearly sending them both toppling over.

“What the hell was that?” Donna asked as they reoriented themselves. Rose blinked rapidly, squinting. Something felt… wrong.

“Don’t know. It came from outside.”

She ran to the doors with Donna right behind her, throwing them open… and they found themselves
looking at nothing but darkness and stars.

“...But we’re in space,” Donna said in disbelief. “How did that happen. What did you do?”

“Nothing, I… hang on.” Rose ran back to the console, reading the screen. “We haven’t moved. We’re fixed. The… the TARDIS is still in the same place, but the Earth has moved. The entire planet. It’s gone.”

~*~

Martha groaned as she picked herself up off the floor, blinking rapidly. What the hell had happened?

“Give me a Sit Rep right now,” she heard someone calling. “Confirm all stations still online. Can anyone hear me? Have we got contact with UNIT base Geneva?”

“What was that?” She asked, looking around. No one seemed to have an answer, though.

“Emergency systems online,” someone else called.

“Was it some sort of earthquake or…?” She looked around to see a young security guard picking himself up, and went into doctor mode. “Jalandra, you alright?”

“Yeah, I’m okay,” he said, rubbing the back of his head, and Martha looked around to assess everyone else.

“Is anyone hurt? We’ve lost power. Someone get the lights back on. DaCosta, see to it right now. Suzanne? Are you okay?”

Suzanne was standing at the window, staring out in shock. “Martha, look at the sky.”

“Why, what is it?” She didn’t really have time for this.

“Just… look at the sky.”

* * * * *

“Whoa, what happened?” Jack groaned as he picked himself up. The Hub was a bit of a mess. “Was it the Rift? Gwen? Ianto? You okay?”

“No broken bones,” Ianto said dryly. “Slight loss of dignity. No change there then.”

“The whole city must have felt that,” Gwen said, looking around. “The whole of South Wales.”

“I’m going to take a look outside.”

Ianto booted up a computer screen as Jack left, trying to get an idea of the damage done outside. “A little bit bigger than South Wales.”

* * * * *

“Luke, are you alright?” Sarah Jane called as she hurried into the living room, helping her son stand.

“Felt like some sort of cross-dimensional spatial transference.”

Sarah Jane started to answer, but her eyes fell on the window – specifically on the dark sky outside. “But it’s night,” she said faintly. “It wasn’t night. It was eight o’clock in the morning.”
She snapped around, calling, “Mr. Smith, I need you,” and the brick fireplace transformed into a computer. Oh they didn’t have time for this. “Can you just stop giving that fanfare? You just tell me what happened.”

“Sarah Jane, I think you should look outside,” the computer said simply. “I think you’ll find the visual evidence most conclusive.”

* * * * *

“It’s gone dark,” Wilf called as he hurried outside. “It’s them aliens, I’ll bet my pension. What do you want this time, you green swine?”

He brandished a cricket bat around, ready to fight. Sylvia hurried out to stop him, freezing when she saw the sky. “Dad…”

“Look, you get back inside, Sylvia. They always want the women.” No alien swine was getting his daughter.

“No, Dad, just look. Oh, my God. Look at the sky.”

* * * * *

People ran down the suddenly dark street, screaming in fear. Nobody noticed the flash of light or the pinstriped-wearing man who appeared out of nowhere.

The Doctor watched everyone run for a minute before looking up, blinking when he saw the planets filling the sky.

“Well. Now we’re in trouble.”

* * * * *

Rose looked over to see Donna paling a few shades. “But if the Earth’s been moved, they’ve lost the Sun. What about my Mum? And Granddad? They’re dead, aren’t they? Are they dead?”

“I don’t know,” Rose said quietly. “I don’t know, Donna. I’m so sorry.”

“That’s my family.” Her voice was faint. “My whole world.”

Rose closed her eyes for a moment, trying to stave off tears. Earth wasn’t her home anymore, but that didn’t mean she didn’t have people she cared about. Friends from school, aunts and uncles, Jack, Martha…

And she had no idea if they were alive or okay.

She needed to focus, though. She went back to the computer, scanning desperately, but there was nothing to be found. “There’s no readings. Nothing. Not a trace. Not even a whisper. Oh, that is fearsome technology.”

“So what do we do?” Donna tried to pull herself together, taking a deep breath. Rose made a face.

“We need help.”

“Who the hell can we ask for help with this?”

My Wolf…
“I know,” Rose said out loud, hitting a button. “Guess I was gonna have to face them sooner or later, huh?”

“Face who?”

Rose looked back at Donna, trying to force the best smile she could. “Donna Noble, I’m taking you to the Shadow Proclamation. Hang on.”

And she sent them off.

* * * * *

Jack was staring at the computer screen as if he could somehow magically will it to change what it was showing him. – the planets in the sky. Ianto had turned on the TV, and was laughing at something.


“He’s funny.”

Jack sighed. He couldn’t be too mad about it. Everyone dealt with things in their own way after all.

“Gwen, come and see.”

Gwen was on the phone with Rhys. “Rhys, I have no idea. Just stay indoors. And can you phone my mother? Tell her, er, oh, I don’t know. Just tell her to take her pills and go to sleep. I’m going to come home as soon as I can, I promise. I love you, you big idiot.”

She hung up, going to join Jack at the computer. “Someone’s established an artificial atmospheric shell, keeping the air and holding in the heat.”

“Whoever’s done this wants the human race alive,” Ianto guessed. “That’s a plus. Twenty seven planets, including the Earth.”

As they watched the planets moving, a flashing red dot suddenly appeared in the middle. “No, but what’s that?” Gwen asked. “That’s not a planet.”

* * * * *

“The reading seems to be artificial in construction,” Mr. Smith reported. Sarah Jane frowned.

“Some sort of space station sitting at the heart of the web.”

“They’re fine,” Luke reported as he came out, putting his phone back in his pocket. “Maria and her dad, they’re still in Cornwall. I told them to stay indoors. And Clyde’s all right. He’s with his mum.”

“Sarah Jane, I have detected movement,” Mr. Smith announced. “Observe.”

He switched his screen to a picture of the sky. “Spaceships,” Luke said quietly.

* * * * *

Martha scowled at her phone, hitting the button in frustration. All she wanted to do was call Rose but apparently that was impossible. “Doctor Jones, if you’re not too busy,” she heard Sanchez say, and she looked up.

“I’m trying to phone Rose, sir.”
“And?”

“There’s no signal. This number calls anywhere in the universe. It never breaks down. They must be blocking it, whoever they are.”

He nodded, turning away. “We’re about to find out. They’re coming into orbit.”

* * * * *

The Doctor made his way down the street, hands in his pockets as he watched everyone running and panicking – and looting shops. Why was the knee-jerk reaction in a crisis always to loot high-priced electronics? What good would high-priced electronics do in a crisis?

“End of the world, mate,” the Doctor heard someone call, and turned to see a man waving a bottle at him. “End of the stinking world!”

“Sure looks that way, doesn’t it?” The Doctor asked lightly before continuing on. He heard a window shattering an alarm going off and hurried over to see two men stealing a television.

“Really?” He sighed, stepping into the door and sliding his sonic screwdriver discreetly out of his pocket. “Look, I don’t particularly have time for this, so why don’t you two just put those down and be on your way like good lads?”

They just stared at him before going back to their looting. The Doctor pointed the sonic at a computer close to one of their heads and activated it – and the computer exploded. The boys jumped, whirling around again in shock.

“Gonna listen now?”

They took off without another word. The Doctor zeroed in on a TV showing the news and went to see what was being said. Approaching spaceships.

* * * * *

“We’re now getting confirmed reports of spaceships. The Pentagon has issued an emergency report saying that two hundred objects…”

“Dad?” Sylvia called, voice shaking. “Come and see.”

Wilf came out, rather upset. “They’re saying spaceships. Did you find her?”

He shook his head mournfully. “No, there’s no reply. Where are you, Donna?” He looked out the window, swallowing hard. “Where are you, sweetheart?”

* * * * *

“Three thousand miles and closing,” Gwen reported. “But who are they?”

Jack jumped as his phone went off. He smiled when he saw Martha’s name on the caller ID. “Martha Jones, voice of a nightingale,” he answered with a grin. “Tell me you put something in my drink.”

“No such luck,” Martha sighed. “Have you heard from Rose?”

“Not a word.” Which worried him to no end. “Where are you?”

“New York.”
“Oooh. Nice for some.”

“I’ve been promoted. Medical Director on Project Indigo.”

Jack raised an eyebrow at that. “Did you get that thing working?”

“There was a pause, and when Martha spoke again she sounded suspicious. “Indigo’s top secret. No one’s supposed to know about it.”

“I met a soldier at a bar,” Jack replied easily. “Long story.”

“When was that?” Ianto asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Strictly professional,” Jack assured him.

“Fifteen hundred miles, boys, and accelerating,” Gwen called. “They’re almost here.”

* * * * *

“I’m receiving a communication from the earthbound ships. They have a message for the human race,” Mr. Smith reported, and Sarah Jane straightened up.

“Put it through, let’s hear it.”

The words that came through had her blood running cold.


“No…”

~*~

“Exterminate.”

Jack paled at the word, memories flashing through his mind. “No… Oh no…”

“What is it?” Gwen asked. “Who are they? Do you know them, Jack?”

Jack pulled her and Ianto against them, kissing their foreheads and holding them tight. “There’s nothing I can do.”

“Exterminate.”

“I’m sorry. We’re dead.”

~*~

Sarah Jane wrapped her arms around Luke, holding on tight. “Oh god,” she breathed, burying his face in the top of his head. “You’re so young.”

And he was going to die.

~*~

“Exterminate!” The Doctor jumped when the familiar call echoed out of the speakers. Daleks. It was always the Daleks, wasn’t it?
He walked out of the shop and looked up to see a spaceship flying overhead.

*Here we go, then.*

~*~

“Battle stations!” Sanchez yelled. “Geneva declaring Ultimate Code Red. Ladies and gentlemen, we are at war.”

The building shook and Martha ran to the window to see ships opening fire on them.

*Rose where the *hell* are you?*

* * * * *

“So go on then,” Donna said as they landed, “what is the Shadow Proclamation anyway?”

“No clue.” Rose ran a hand through her hair, sighing. “But I’ve got bigger things to worry about right now. So let’s go.”

They stepped out – and were greeted by a platoon of armed Judoon. Oh that was wonderful.

“No bo ho sho ko ro to so. Bokodozogobofopojo.”

Donna watched, shocked, as the Judoon lowered their weapons and stood at attention. What was Rose saying? Why wasn’t the TARDIS translating?

“No bo ho sho ko ro to so. Bokodozogobofopojo.”

They were led into a large, spacious room, where a silver-haired woman in a black gown was pacing. She stopped when they walked in and dismissed the Judoon with a wave of her hand.

“Moho,” Rose concluded, and the Judoon turned to lead them somewhere. As they walked, the glow faded from Rose’s eyes and she stumbled just a bit.

“Gotcha,” Donna said quietly, holding her upright and helping her steady herself. “Alright?”

“Yeah. Yeah.” Rose shook her head as she attempted to re-find her equilibrium. “That was just… intense.”

They were led into a large, spacious room, where a silver-haired woman in a black gown was pacing. She stopped when they walked in and dismissed the Judoon with a wave of her hand.

“Rose Tyler.” Rose stood up a bit straighter, keeping her face as impassive as possible. “You’ve been causing quite a bit of trouble, haven’t you?”

“Well if you called saved planets and species *trouble*…” Rose waved her hand as well, dismissing
that. “Look, I don’t want a scene, alright? I just need help. Earth is missing.”

“The picture is far bigger than you imagine, Ms. Tyler,” the woman informed her. “The whole universe is in outrage. Twenty four worlds have been taken from the sky.”

Rose blinked at that, surprised. “What? Which ones? Show me.”

The woman went to a computer screen and Rose hurried to join her. Donna hung back uncertainly.

“Locations range far and wide, but all disappeared at the exact same moment, leaving no trace,” the woman explained. Rose made a face, examining the screen.


She shook her head. This didn’t make any sense.

“All different sizes. Some populated, some not. But all unconnected.”

“What about Pyrovillia?” Donna asked suddenly, and the silver-haired woman looked back at her.

“Who is the female?”

“Donna Noble,” Donna introduced herself, head held high. “I’m a human being. Maybe not the stuff of legend but every bit as important, thank you.” Rose grinned proudly. Oh Donna. “Way back, when we were in Pompeii, Lucius said Pyrovillia had gone missing.”

“Pyrovillia is cold case,” a Judoon spoke up. “Not relevant.”

“How do you mean, cold case?”

“The planet Pyrovillia cannot be part of this,” the woman interjected. “It disappeared over two thousand years ago.”

“Yes, yes, hang on.” Rose watched, amused, as Donna waved the woman off. “But there’s the Adipose breeding planet, too. Miss Foster said that was lost, but that must’ve been a long time ago.”

It clicked. “That’s it!” Rose exclaimed happily. “Donna, you’re brilliant. Planets are being taken out of time as well as space. Let’s put this into 3-D.”

She tapped a few buttons on the keyboard, and holograms of the missing planets filled the room.

“Now, if we add Pyrovillia and Adipose Three…” Rose murmured to herself as she worked. “Something missing. Where else, where else, where else? Where else lost, lost, lost, lost. Oh! The Lost Moon of Poosh.”

She added the moon, and the holograms started moving, reorganizing themselves. “What did you do?” The silver-haired woman asked. Rose shook her head.

“Nothing. The planets rearranged themselves into the optimum pattern. Oh, look at that. Twenty seven planets in perfect balance. Come on, that is gorgeous.”

“Oi, save it for later,” Donna said, snapping her fingers in front of Rose’s eyes. “What does it mean?”

“All those worlds fit together like pieces of an engine,” Rose murmured thoughtfully. “It’s like a powerhouse. What for?”
“Who could design such a thing?”

_Something has tried to move the Earth before, my Wolf_, the TARDIS said quietly, and Rose’s breath caught.

_Don’t tell me…_

* * * * *


“We’ve lost contact with the Prime Minister’s plane,” Gwen added. “Jack! Manhattan.”

Jack grabbed the phone – Martha was still on the other line. “Martha, get out of there,” he snapped.

“I can’t, Jack,” Martha replied. “I’ve got a job to do.”

“They’re targeting military bases and you’re next on the list!”

~*~

“Dr. Jones.” Martha looked up from her work to see Sanchez standing over her. “You will come with me. Project Indigo is being activated. Quick march.”

What? Martha scrambled up, hurrying after Sanchez. “But we can’t use Project Indigo. It hasn’t been tested, sir. We don’t even know if it works.”

They walked into a storage area, where a soldier was pulling out a backpack with a keypad on it. “Put it on,” Sanchez ordered. “Fast as you can.”

“Martha, I’m telling you,” Jack spoke up, “don’t use Project Indigo. It’s not safe.”

“You take your orders from UNIT, Dr. Jones,” Sanchez reminded her. “Not from Torchwood.”

Martha took the backpack, putting it on. “But why?”

“You’re our only hope of finding Rose Tyler,” he replied. “But failing that, if no help is coming, then with the power invested in me by the Unified Intelligence Taskforce, I authorize you to take this.” He handed her a small computer chip. “The Osterhagen Key.”

Martha’s stomach dropped. “I can’t take that, sir.”

“You know what to do, for the sake of the human race.”

She swallowed hard and took it, tucking it in her pocket, and the building shook. She could hear Daleks approaching.

“Dr. Jones, good luck.”

Martha took a deep breath. “Bye, Jack.” she said quietly before hanging up, ignoring his protests. And she pulled the rip cords, disappearing in a flash of light.

~*~
Jack hung up the phone, resisting the urge to throw it against a wall. “What’s Project Indigo?” Ianto asked quietly.

“Experimental teleport salvaged from the Sontarans. But they haven’t got coordinates, or stabilization.”

“So where is she?” Gwen asked. Jack shook his head.

“Scattered into atoms. Martha’s down.”

* * * * *

Donna sat on the stairs, watching Rose talk to the woman with almost no interest. She had no idea what they were on about. But it didn’t matter if it didn’t help find Earth.

“Come on Donna, think.” And then Rose was there, sitting next to her. “Earth. There must’ve been some sort of warning. Was anything happening back in your day, like electrical storms, freak weather, patterns in the sky?”

“Well, how should I know?” Donna snapped back. “Er, no. I don’t think so, no.”

“Anything at all? Come on, you did all that research, all those conspiracy websites, none of them said anything?”

“I don’t…” Donna shook her head for a moment. “Wait. There was that thing. About the bees disappearing.”

“Bees,” Rose repeated quietly. “Bees. The bees are disappearing.” She blinked, eyes widening. “The bees are disappearing!”

She flew up, back to the computer, writing furiously. “How is that significant?” The silver-haired woman asked.

“On Earth we had these insects,” Donna explained. “Some people said it was pollution or mobile phone signals.”

“Or they were going back home,” Rose added. Donna raised an eyebrow.

“Back home where?”

“Planet Melissa Majoria.”

“Are you saying bees are aliens?” Donna scoffed.

“No. Well. Not all of them. But if the migrant bees felt something coming, some sort of danger, and escaped? Tandocca.”

The silver-haired woman blinked. “The Tandocca Scale.”

“Tandocca Scale is the series of wavelengths used as a carrier signals by migrant bees,” Rose explained to Donna as she worked. “Infinitely small. No wonder we didn’t see it. It’s like looking for a speck of cinnamon in the Sahara, but look, there it is. The Tandocca trail. The transmat that moved the planets was using the same wavelength, we can follow the path.”

“And find the Earth?” Donn’s heart soared. “Well, stop talking and do it.”
Rose beamed. “I am.”

They ran to the TARDIS, and Rose went straight to the console. “We’re a bit late. The signal’s scattered, but it’s a start.”

She went back to report to the woman. “I’ve got a blip. It’s just a blip, But it’s definitely a blip.”

“Then according to the Strictures of the Shadow Proclamation, I will have to seize your transport and your technology,” the woman said. Rose raised an eyebrow.

“Oh really? What for?”

“The planets were stolen with hostile intent. We are declaring war, Rose Tyler, right across the universe, and you will lead us into battle.”

Rose had to struggle not to laugh at that. “Right. Yes. Course I will. I’ll just go and get you the key.”

She slammed the door shut and ran back to the console, sending them off. “What’s going on?” Donna asked.

“Just hold on.”

* * * * *

Wilf stood at the end of the street, watching as the Daleks gathered everyone up.

“All humans will leave their homes! The males, the females, the descendants. You will come with us. Resistance is useless.”

“Where are you taking us?” One man demanded.

“Daleks do not answer human questions. Stand in line.”

“Dad, please come home,” Sylvia begged. “They’re leaving our street alone.”

“Yeah, I’ve got a weapon.”

“It’s a paint gun!”

“Exactly. Them Dalek things, they’ve only got one eye. A good splodge of paint, they’d be blinded.”

“Good theory,” a new voice said, and they jumped to see a man in a pinstriped suit standing behind them. “But I’m afraid it won’t work. Donna Noble’s family, yeah?”

They straightened up at that. “That’s right,” Wilf said. “Who’re you?”

“I’m the Doctor. I’m a… friend of Rose Tyler’s. You want to find your daughter and I want to find Rose so what do you say we all stay alive long enough to do that?”

They hurried back to the house, managing to stay safe. It was a relief to get inside. “I’ve tried calling her,” Wilf said, “but I can’t get through. But she’s still with Rose, I know that much, and the last time she phoned, it was from a planet called Midnight, made of diamonds.”

“What the hell are you two on about?” Sylvia asked, raising an eyebrow. Wilf sighed.
“Look, she’s out there, sweetheart. Your daughter. She’s traveling the stars with Rose. She always has been.”

“Don’t be ridiculous,” Sylvia scoffed.

“Oh, come on, open your eyes. Look at the sky. Look at, look at the Daleks. You can’t start denying things now.”

“Look, I’m sorry, but we really don’t have time for this,” the Doctor said as patiently as she could. “If we can’t find Donna, we can’t find Rose. So can we do the convincing thing later, maybe?”
Rose’s head snapped up as the time rotor ground to a halt. “It’s stopped,” she said unnecessarily.

“What do you mean?” Donna demanded. “Is that a good or bad? Where are we?”

“The Medusa Cascade,” Rose murmured, examining the screen. It was beautiful. Donna didn’t care much about that though.

“So, where are the twenty-seven planets?”


“So what do we do?” Rose didn’t answer. “No, what do we do?” Donna watched, horrified, as Rose simply backed away from the scanner, expression going blank. “Now don’t do this to me. No, don’t. Don’t do this to me. Not now. Tell me, what are we going do? You never give up. Please!”

Rose didn’t answer. There was nothing to be done.

They’d lost.

* * * * *

Jack held Gwen and Ianto close as they listened to the announcement. “This is the Commander General of the United Nations calling the Dalek Fleet. We surrender. Repeat, we surrender. Planet Earth surrenders.”

Come on Rose, Jack thought desperately. Where are you?

“The Daleks reign supreme. All hail the Daleks.”

~*~

“You will obey Dalek instructions without question.”

It was taking every bit of the Doctor’s self control not to let out a shout of frustration. Bloody Daleks.

“You will obey your Dalek ma—”

Beep beep beep beep beep…

The Doctor jumped as a low beep echoed through the room, static-y picture appearing on a nearby laptop screen.

“Can anyone hear me? The Subwave Network is open. You should be able to hear my voice Is there anyone there?”
“Hang on,” he said slowly. “I know that voice.”

~*~

“Who’s that?” Luke asked, looking at Sarah Jane. She shook her head.

“Some poor soul calling for help.”

“Can anyone hear me?”

“There’s nothing we can do.”

“But look at Mr. Smith,” Luke insisted, and Sarah Jane turned to the computer. The screen was working overtime.

“Processing incoming Subwave.”

~*~

“This message is of the utmost importance. We haven’t much time. Can anyone hear me?”

“Someone’s trying to get in touch,” Gwen said quietly. Jack shook his head.

“The whole world’s crying out. Just leave it.”

“Captain Jack Harkness, shame on you!” Jack jumped, whirling around to see the outline of a person appearing on the screen. “Now stand to attention, sir.”

“What?” He gaped. “Who is that?”

The picture solidified – and Harriet Jones held up her idea. “Harriet Jones, former prime minister.”

Jack could have laughed. “Yeah. I know who you are.”

~*~

“Harriet Jones!” The Doctor said excitedly. “And – was that Jack? Harriet, Harriet! She can’t hear me. Blimey. Have you got a web cam?”

“No, she wouldn’t let me.” Wilf jerked his thumb at Sylvia. “Said they’re naughty.”

The Doctor sighed, hopes dashed. “Then I can’t speak to her.” He could build one, he was sure – but he didn’t have the time.

~*~

“Sarah Jane Smith, thirteen Bannerman Road. Are you there?”

Sarah Jane’s eyes widened as she hurried forward. “Yeah! Yeah, I’m here. That – that’s me.”

“Good. Now, let’s see if we can talk to each other.”


“The fourth contact seems to be having some trouble getting through…”

~*~
“That’s me!” The Doctor said impatiently, hitting the laptop and ignoring Sylvia’s protests. This was so frustrating. Sarah Jane was there, and Jack – how had Jack ended up twenty-first century England?

“I’ll just boost the signal…”

The Doctor’s hearts dropped a bit more when a young, dark-skinned woman appeared on the screen.

“Hello?”

“Ha ha!” Jack said happily. “Martha Jones!”

“Who?” The Doctor asked in disbelief. “Hang on a tick, she looks familiar. Who are you?”

Not that anyone answered, of course.

“Martha, where are you?” Jack asked.

“I guess Project Indigo was more clever than we thought. One second I was in Manhattan, next second… Maybe Indigo tapped into my mind, because I ended up in the one place that I wanted to be.”

“You came home,” the woman standing behind Martha – her mother from the looks of it – said. “At the end of the world, you came back to me.”

Martha smiled back at her mother before focusing on the computer once more. “But then all of a sudden, it’s like the laptop turned itself on.”

“It did,” Harriet spoke up. “That was me. Harriet Jones, former Prime Minister.”

“Yes, I know who you are,” Martha assured her.

“I thought it was about time we all met given the current crisis,” Harriet continued. “Torchwood, this is Sarah Jane Smith.”

“I’ve been following your work,” Jack told Sarah Jane. “Nice job with the Slitheen.”

“Yeah, well, I’ve been staying away from you lot. Too many guns.” The Doctor grinned proudly. That was his Sarah Jane.

“All the same, might I say looking good, ma’am?”

“Really?” Sarah blushed, and the Doctor rolled his eyes.

“Not now, Captain.” Harriet sighed. “And Martha Jones, former companion to Rose Tyler.”

“What?” The Doctor said in disbelief. “Former companion to who now?”

“Oh, Rose told me about you!” Sarah Jane spoke up. “You’re brilliant.”

“But how did you find me?” Martha asked.

“This, ladies and gentlemen, is the Subwave Network. A sentient piece of software programmed to seek out anyone and everyone who can help to contact the Doctor. Or, in your case Dr. Jones, the Doctor stand-in.”
“Oh, don’t call her that,” Sarah Jane sighed. “She’s got enough of a complex.”

“What if the Daleks can hear us?” The Doctor already liked Martha Jones. She asked all the right questions.

“No, that’s the beauty of the Subwave,” Harriet assured her. “It’s undetectable.”

“And you invented it?” Sarah Jane asked, impressed.

“I helped develop it.”

“Yeah, but what we need right now is a weapon,” Jack said, and the Doctor had to resist the urge to roll his eyes. Typical Torchwood. “Martha, back there at UNIT, what did they give you? What was that key thing?”

“The Osterhagen key.”

“That key is not to be used, Dr. Jones,” Harriet said firmly. “Not under any circumstances.”

“But what is the Osterhagen key?” Jack asked, confused.

“Forget about the key,” Harriet said. “And that’s an order. Right now what we need is Rose.”

“And that’s why you’ve called us all,” Sarah Jane guessed. “Only I haven’t seen Rose in months, not since all that stuff with the Adipose company.”

“Yeah that was about the last time I talked to her too,” Jack said.

“I saw her a while back, made her come help with the Sontaran thing,” Martha added. “I haven’t talked to her since, she’s really bad at answering her phone. And now I can’t even get through.”

“That’s why we need the Subwave,” Harriet explained. “To bring us all together. Combine forces. A secret army.”

“Wait a minute,” Jack spoke up as things started clicking. “We transmit that telephone number through Torchwood itself, using all the power of the Rift.”

“And we’ve got Mr. Smith,” the boy standing with Sarah Jane added. “He can link up with every telephone exchange on the Earth. He can get the whole world to call the same number, all at the same time. Billions of phones, calling out all at once.”


“That’s my son,” Sarah Jane sounded so proud. Another man forced his way onto Jack’s screen.

“Excuse me. Sorry. Sorry. Hello. Ianto Jones. Er, if we start transmitting, then this Subwave Network is going to become visible. I mean, to the Daleks.”

“Yes,” Harriet agreed with a nod. “And they’ll trace it back to me. But my life doesn’t matter. Not if it saves the Earth.”

“Oh Harriet,” the Doctor murmured as Jack saluted.

“Ma’am.”

Harriet smiled a bit. “Thank you, Captain. But there are people out there dying on the streets.”
“Marvelous woman,” Wilf spoke up. “I voted for her.”

“You did not,” Sylvia balked. The Doctor ignored them both.

“Now, enough words. Let’s begin.”

With those words, the Torchwood trio and Sarah Jane and her son flew into action.

“Rift power activated.”

“All terminals coordinated.”

“National grid online. Giving you everything we’ve got.”

“Connecting you to Mr. Smith.”

“All telephone networks combined.”

Oh they were brilliant, the Doctor thought as he watched them all, so incredibly proud. They were all brilliant.

“Sending you the number now,” Martha Jones said, and a number popped up on screen. Rose’s mobile number.

“Opening Subwave Network to maximum,” Harriet said.

“Mr. Smith, make the call,” Sarah Jane ordered after only a moment’s hesitation.

“Calling Rose Tyler.”

The Doctor dug through his pocket, finding his sonic screwdriver. “You two call her too,” he ordered Sylvia and Wilf as he started trying to find the right wavelength. If he could sync the sonic with it, he could help them boost it.

“And sending,” Jack reported. Everyone held their breath, waiting.

* * * * *

Donna was sitting on the jump seat, trying not to cry. Rose was leaning against a coral stalk. She looked over to see the Doctor’s jacket draped over in its usual place, and she reached to brush her hand against it.

*I tried. I’m sorry.*

She nearly flew out of her skin as her phone started ringing in her jacket pocket. “Phone!”

“Phone?” Donna repeated, head snapping up. Rose fumbled to pull the mobile out, answering the call.

“Martha, is that you?” Nothing but static came back. Rose blinked. “I think it’s a signal.”

“Can we follow it?” Donna asked, daring to hope again. Rose grinned, running to the console.

“Just watch me.”

* * * * *
The Torchwood trio jumped as things started exploding. “I think we’ve got a fix!”

“Mr. Smith now at two-hundred percent,” Sarah reported. “Come on Rose…”

The Doctor let out a triumphant yell as he finally found the signal and held his sonic screwdriver over his head while Sylvia and Wilf dialed desperately.

“You can do it Rose,” he murmured, grinning. “You can do it. You can do it.”

* * * * *

“I’ve got it!” Rose called, grinning a bit maniacally. “Donna, grab that lever and hang on for dear life!”

* * * * *

“Harriet,” Gwen called, “a saucer’s locked on to your location. They’ve found you.”

“I know. I’m using the Network to mask your transmission. Keep going.”

* * * * *

Rose winced as something on the console exploded. Oh god that hurt. “We’re traveling through time. One second into the future. The phone call’s pulling us through.”

* * * * *

“Captain, I’m transferring the Subwave Network to Torchwood,” Harriet said. “You’re in charge now. And tell Rose… tell her she grew up well. And the Doctor would be proud. It’s been an honor.”

The Doctor looked back at the screen to see Harriet disappear. A moment later he heard the familiar call of “Exterminate!” and Harriet’s square went blank.

You were a good person, Harriet Jones, The Doctor thought as he watched the static. I’m so sorry.

* * * * *

“…Three, two, one.”

Everything went sideways for a long moment, and Donna clung to the console, holding on desperately.

And then it was over. Rose grabbed the screen and Donna ran to see. “Twenty-seven planets,” she breathed. “And there’s the Earth. But why couldn’t we see them?”

“The entire Medusa Cascade has been put a second out of sync with the rest of the universe. Perfect hiding place. Tiny little pocket of time. But we found them.” The screen started blinking, and Rose tilted her head. “Ooo, ooo, ooo, what’s that? Hold on, hold on. Some sort of Subwave Network…”

* * * * *

Harriet’s corner of the screen shimmered for a moment – and there she was. The Doctor’s hearts soared in his chest at the sight of her. Her hair was a bit longer, a bit lighter, her face a bit older… but god it was Rose.

“Rose Tyler!” Jack said happily. “Aren’t you a sight for sore eyes.”
“Where’ve you been?” Martha added. “It’s the Daleks!”

“Oh she’s cute,” Gwen spoke up, leaning around Jack. “A bit young, isn’t she?”

“Not that young,” Ianto said.

“Alright, alright, everyone slow down,” Rose said, and a redhead leaned in to examine the screen as well.

“That’s Donna!” Sylvia said, shocked. Wilf beamed.

“That’s my girl.”

“Look at them all,” Donna said in wonder. “Hello Martha! Who are the others?”

“Sarah Jane Smith and her son Luke,” Rose supplied names. “She traveled with the Doctor. Captain Jack Harkness – don’t, just don’t – and I’m guessing his Torchwood team.”

Oh god she even sounded older. The Doctor took a deep breath, closing his eyes for a long moment.

“Everyone except the Doctor.”

His eyes flew open again, just in time to see the pain that flashed across Rose’s expression. Oh Rose…

“That’s alright,” Jack said, putting on a grin. “We can do it without him, right Rosie?”

Rose nodded, steeling herself, expression turning hard. “Yeah. Yeah we can. So come on then, one at a time. What the hell is going on? Someone said Daleks?”

“It’s not just Dalek Caan,” Martha spoke up. “There’s tons of them, Rose.”

“The Earth has surrendered,” Sarah Jane added.

Rose ran a hand through her hair, sighing heavily. “Yeah, okay. That’s brilliant. Right then—”

And the screen went blank. “What?!” The Doctor yelled, hitting keys, trying to bring the picture back. “What happened?!”

* * * * *

“We’ve lost them.” Donna sounded crushed. Rose shook her head.

“No, another signal is comin’ through.” She buzzed the screen with the sonic. “There’s someone else out there. Hello? Can you hear me?” She dared to hope for a moment, “D-Doctor?”

The voice that replied was not the Doctor’s. “Oh how the mighty have fallen.”

~*~

“No,” Sarah Jane breathed, her face paling. “But he’s dead.”

~*~

The Doctor watched, fists clenched, as he appeared on screen. Davros. “You would survive,” he hissed.
The TARDIS hummed furiously in the back of Rose’s head, making her feel a bit nauseous. *Not a friend.*

“*Rose Tyler,*” Davros said silkily as the TARDIS worked on transferring as much information as she could to Rose. “Welcome to my new empire.”


“You’ve heard of me, then.” He sounded vaguely impressed. “*What a shame it is, though, that the Doctor can not bear witness to the resurrection and the triumph of Davros, lord and creator of the Dalek race.*”

Donna looked at Rose to see her eyes glowing brightly – brighter than she’d ever seen. “Rose, it’s alright,” Donna tried to reassure her. “We’re… we’re in the TARDIS. We’re safe.”

“But you were destroyed,” Rose said, fists clenching against the edge of the console. “The Doctor saw it. He tried to save you.”

“*Your knowledge is impressive. But it took one stronger than the Time Lord. Dalek Caan himself.*”

Rose’s stomach dropped as the memories flashed through her mind of Dalek Caan teleporting away. “*Emergency Temporal Shift took him back into the Time War itself.*”

“But that’s impossible,” Rose protested. “The entire War is timelocked.”

“And yet he succeeded. Oh, it cost him his mind, but imagine. A single, simple Dalek succeeded where Emperors and Time Lords have failed. A testament, don’t you think, to my remarkable creations?”

Rose scowled. “And you made a new race of Daleks.”

“I gave myself to them, quite literally. Each one grown from a cell of my own body.”

Rose’s stomach turned as Davros opened his tunic to reveal his bare ribs with just a few nerve endings over them, and his internal organs inside. *Oh my god…*

“*New Daleks,*” Davros taunted. “*True Daleks. I have my children, Rose Tyler. What do you have?*”

Rose took her deep breath. “I have my humanity,” she said simply. “And the fact that you don’t understand that is exactly why we will win. Bye!”

She hit lever, and the TARDIS took off.

* * * * *

“Gwen, Dalek saucer heading for the Bay,” Ianto called. “They’ve found us.”

Jack called Martha quickly, not even waiting for her to respond when she picked up. “Martha, open that Indigo device. Now, listen to me. Lift the central panel. There’s a string of numbers that keeps changing, but the fourth number keeps oscillating between two different digits. Tell me what they are.”
“It’s a four and a nine. We could never work out what that was.”

“Yeah, that’s the teleport base code.” As Jack spoke he worked on his vortex manipulator. “And that’s all I need, to get this thing working again.” He hit a button and the manipulator glowed to life. “Oscillating four and nine. Thank you, Martha Jones.”

He hung up, and Gwen handed him a gun. “I’ve got to go,” he told his remaining team apologetically. “I’ve got to find Rose. I’ll come back. I’m coming back.”

“Don’t worry about us,” Gwen said firmly. “Just go.”

“We’ll be fine,” Ianto added. Jack grinned.

“You’d better be.” And he teleported away.

~*~

“TARDIS heading for vector seven,” Mr. Smith reported as Sarah Jane went to the door. “Grid reference six six five.”

“But there are Daleks out there,” Luke protested.

“I know,” Sarah Jane replied. “I’m sorry, but I have got to find Rose. Don’t move. Don’t leave the house. Don’t do anything.”

“I will protect the boy, Sarah Jane,” Mr. Smith assured her. Sarah Jane smiled, kissing Luke’s forehead.

“I love you. Remember that.”

And with that she ran to the car, driving off.

~*~

“Yeah, I need another shift. Yes now. Lock me onto the TARDIS.” The Doctor hung up without another word, turning back to Wilf and Sylvia. “Well, I’m going to find her. Wish me luck.”

“Good luck,” Sylvia said. “And tell that daughter of mine to bloody call.”

“Good luck, mate,” Wilf added with a grin. And the Doctor disappeared in a flash of light.

* * * * *

Rose was white as sheet; she leaned over the console, breathing deeply as the glow faded from her eyes.

“Rose?” Donna rested an uncertain hand on the blonde’s shoulder.

“M’gonna be sick.”

And with that she dove for a small trash can in the corner, grabbing it and heaving. She hadn’t eaten much in the last day, but that didn’t stop her stomach from twisting and rebelling against her.

The worst of it passed, and she became aware of Donna kneeling beside her, rubbing her back. The TARDIS hummed gently and sadly in the back of her head, aware that she had contributed to Rose’s current situation.
“Alright?” Donna asked after a moment. Rose shook her head.

“I don’t know what to do, Donna. I can’t fight him.” For all her talk, she was terrified. She couldn’t take on the creator of the bloody Daleks.

“You’re not alone,” Donna reminded her gently. “You’ve got me, Martha, Sarah Jane, that handsome captain…”

Rose nodded warily, pushing herself back up. “Yeah. Right. Come on.”

She went to land them.

Rose and Donna hurried out of the TARDIS, looking around. The street was deserted, cars abandoned, planets filling the sky.

It would’ve been beautiful – in an eerie sort of way – if not for the circumstances.

“Like a ghost town,” Donna breathed. Rose shook her head, closing her eyes.

“Sarah Jane said they were taking people. What for?” She whirled back to her companion. “Think, Donna. When you met the Doctor in the parallel world, what did he say?”

“Well he was kind of vague–”

“Yeah, he’s good at that, but he must’ve given you something.”

Donna sighed, frustrated. “Just, the darkness is coming.”

“Anything else?”

Donna shook her head, looking around – and then paused, staring at a point past Rose’s shoulder. “Why don’t you ask him yourself?”

Rose’s heart jumped into her throat. No. No it wasn’t possible. Right? Just a cruel joke. He couldn’t really be…

She met Donna’s gaze and the redhead nodded. And finally she turned around.

And there he was, bathed in the glow of a street lamp, wearing the same damned pinstripe suit he had been in the last time she had seen him, standing on that god forsaken beach, buffeted by the wind that couldn’t touch her.

He was there.

Tears stung in Rose’s eyes as he stopped, seeing that he had her attention, and he practically beamed. Oh god that smile. How often had she dreamt of that smile? This wasn’t real. This couldn’t be real. Just another dream…

It is real, my Wolf.

It was the TARDIS’ words that finally spurred Rose on. She took off down the street, trainers slapping against the pavement. She barely noticed that the Doctor was running to her as well.

Real, he’s real, he’s real, he’s real–

She saw the movement out of her corner of her eye and jerked to see a Dalek coming out from
behind a car. It swiveled to point its laser at the Doctor.

“Exterminate!”

“NO!”

Rose skidded to a halt, unaware of the golden glow burning in her eyes, encasing her hand. The Doctor stopped as well, watching in shock as the Dalek disintegrated before it had a chance to fire. For a moment he just stared at Rose, completely stunned.

What the hell had just happened?

Jack appeared on the sidewalk and they both winced as they turned to look at him. “Sorry. Am I late?”

Donna hurried forward as well, calling, “Are you guys alright?”

Rose shook her head, turning back to look at the Doctor. The look on his face as he slowly approached her was… far from encouraging. “Eyes, sweetheart,” she heard Jack murmur.

“Can’t help it.”

The Doctor stopped a few steps away, clearly uncertain. Rose opened her mouth to try and say something – but what could she say, really?

Thankfully the Doctor saved her from having to figure it out. “So. I came back.”

She laughed weakly at that. “Yeah, you did. Mr. It’s Impossible.”

“Yeah, well… I guess my definition of the word needs to be a bit looser.” He grinned tentatively. A beat of silence – and they moved at the same time, Rose flinging herself at the Doctor at the same time he moved to grab her, pulling her into a hug so tight he lifted her off the ground.

“You’re here,” Rose whispered. “You’re here, you’re really here, oh my god you’re here.” She pressed her nose into his shoulder, breathing deep. God he was here.

The Doctor held her tighter, squeezing his eyes shut to hide the tears.

“I’m here. I’m here.”

Jack was rue to break this up, but he knew he had to. “Uh… we should probably get back to the TARDIS now.” They didn’t even acknowledge him. “Uh, guys?”

Donna shuffled forward, poking Rose’s shoulder, and she jumped as she pulled back to look at the redhead. “What? Sorry. What?”

“We should probably get inside,” Donna said gently.

“Oh. Right. Right. Come on.”

They hurried back to the TARDIS, Rose clinging to the Doctor’s hand the entire way.
Sarah Jane Smith had lived a good life. She’d seen the stars, traveled through time, she had good friends, a son she loved…

But that didn’t mean she wanted to die at the hands of the Daleks that had cornered her on the street.

“Exterminate! Exterminate!”

There was a flash of light, and two people appeared on either side of the car, blasting the Daleks. Sarah Jane scrambled out of the car, gaping when she realized she recognized the one who had appeared next to her door.

“My?”

Mickey Smith grinned, pulling Sarah Jane into a hug. “Us Smiths gotta stick together!”

“Excuse me, hello,” the blonde woman who had appeared on the other side said as she walked around. “Jackie Tyler, Rose’s mum. Now where the hell is my daughter?”

Sarah Jane gaped at her for a moment before beaming. Oh this was just brilliant.

* * * * * *

The Doctor looked around the console room, grinning stupidly. Home. He was home. He was finally home.

The small hand wrapped tightly around his was further testament of that.

“Oh this is amazing.” He walked to the console, looking it over. “She looks great! Where’d you learn to care for a TARDIS so well?”

“Had a lot of time,” Rose said simply, brushing her hand against the console.

“She spends most of her time hiding under the gratings,” Donna spoke up, and Rose shot her a look as the Doctor grinned.

“Oh, really now?”

“Shut up.”

The Doctor laughed, turning to look at Jack. “And how did you end up here anyways?”

“Oh, it’s a long story.”

“Yeah and don’t think I’m not askin’ about that when we’re done with this whole world endin’ thing,” Rose spoke up, and the Doctor winced. Ah. So she knew about Jack. That was going to be
quite the conversation.

“Sounds like you’ve been busy, then,” the Doctor commented lightly. Rose shrugged.

“Well I’ve had a lot of time to kill.”

The lights went out suddenly, and everyone looked around. “What the—?”

The Doctor felt Rose’s hand go slack in his, and looked over just in time to see the blonde’s knees go out. “Whoa!” He caught her quickly, cradling her against his chest as she struggled to hold on to consciousness. “Rose? What is it? What’s wrong?”

“She’s connected to the TARDIS,” Jack explained, realizing Rose wasn’t able to. “Something must have happened.”

“Chronon loop,” Rose managed to force out, though it clearly took a lot of effort. “They’ve got us.”

The Doctor helped her to the jump seat and sat down with her. She slumped against him, breathing deeply and holding her head. “Oh god that hurts…”

Before the Doctor could ask what was wrong, the TARDIS tilted.

They were being transported.

* * * * *

Sarah Jane, Jackie, and Mickey crouched behind an abandoned van, watching the TARDIS as it was slowly lifted away.

“Transferring TARDIS to the Crucible,” one of the Daleks said. Sarah Jane looked at Mickey.

“Those teleport things. Can we use them? If they’ve taken the TARDIS to the Dalek spaceship, then that’s where we need to be.”

Mickey shook his head, holding up the trigger. “It's not just a teleport, it’s a dimension jump. Man, this thing rips a hole in the fabric of space.”

“But can we use it?”

“Not yet. It burns up energy. Needs half an hour between jumps.”

Plan B, then. Sarah Jane sighed. “Then put down your guns.”

Jackie and Mickey gaped at her. “Do what?”

“If you’re carrying a gun, they’ll shoot you dead.”

And with that she stood up, walking out into view. “Daleks, I surrender!”

“She’s bloody mad,” Mickey hissed as the Daleks surrounded Sarah Jane. Jackie shook her head.

“Yeah, but Mickey, if they’ve got the TARDIS, they’ve probably got Rose and the Doctor.”

She set down her gun and stepped out.

“And us. We surrender.”
Mickey sighed, kissing his gun and putting it down before following.

* * * * *

"Now Jack’s explained the base code, I know how this teleport works.” As Martha spoke she pulled on the Indigo backpack. “I think. But you just stay indoors. There’s no Daleks on this street. You should be all right. Just er, keep quiet.”

“But where are you going?” Francine asked, clearly scared. Martha didn’t blame her there.

“I’m a member of UNIT, and they gave me the Osterhagen Key. I’ve got to do my job. I’m sorry.”

“Martha.” Francine grabbed her arm. “What’s an Osterhagen Key? Tell me. What does it do?”

Martha closed her eyes for a moment before gently pulling her arm out of Francine’s grip.

“Love you,” she said quietly. And she pulled the cords, disappearing.

She landed on the edge of a wooded area.

"Exterminieren! Exterminieren!”

She lifted her head to see a Dalek patrol overhead. “Halt! Sonst werden wir Sie exterminieren! Sie sind jetzt ein Gefangener der Daleks!”

Well. That had worked at least.

* * * * *

“There’s a massive Dalek ship at the center of the planets,” Jack explained. “They’re calling it the Crucible. Guess that’s our destination.”

Rose was sitting on the jump seat with her head on the Doctor’s shoulder. Donna hesitated before sitting on the other side, carefully brushing her hand through Rose’s hair. “You said these planets were like an engine,” she said quietly. “But what for?”

The blonde took a deep breath before raising her head to look at the Doctor. “You’ve been in the parallel world. That world’s running a head of this universe. What happened?”

The Doctor blinked, a bit surprised. “It’s just…darkness. The stars were going out one by one. We looked up at the sky and they were dying. I saw it first but no one believed me. I was trying to build a dimension cannon to get back here, but it wouldn’t work. Not until the stars started going out. Then the dimensions started to collapse. Not just in that world, not just in this one, but the whole of reality. Even the Void was dead. Something is destroying everything.”

That wasn’t very helpful. Rose’s head felt too heavy — she dropped it back down to rest on the Doctor’s shoulder, closing her eyes once more. Donna looked over Rose’s head at the Doctor.

“In that parallel world, you said something about me.”

The Doctor nodded. “I can…see time lines, so to speak—”

“Like seeing fixed points?” Donna guessed. Rose gave her a thumbs up and she grinned, proud of herself for remembering.

“Yeah, exactly. I can see and measure time lines, and it’s weird, Donna, but they all seem to
converge on you.”

That didn’t make any sense though. “But why me? I Mean, what have I ever done? I’m a temp from Chiswick.”

The screen on the console beeped and Rose’s eyes flew open. She stumbled up and over before the Doctor could stop her.

“The Dalek Crucible,” she announced uselessly as the Doctor stepped up behind her. “All aboard.”

The Doctor looked toward the door and sighed. “We’ll have to go out. Because if we don’t, they’ll get in.”

“You’ve got extrapolator shielding,” Jack pointed out. The Doctor shook his head.

“Last time we fought the Daleks, they were scavengers and hybrids, and mad. But this is a fully-fledged Dalek Empire, at the height of its power. Experts at fighting TARDISes, they can do anything. Right now, that wooden door is just wood.”

Donna…

Donna’s head snapped around as the whisper hit her ear. No one else seemed to hear it though.

“What about your dimension jump?”

“It needs another twenty minutes, and I can’t take anyone with me. Unless someone wants to leave alone?” No one answered that. “What about your teleport?”

Jack shook his head. “Went down with the power loss.”

“Right, then.” Rose took another breath and shook her head, trying desperately to focus past the pain in her head. The absence of the TARDIS felt like an ice pick being driven into the back of her skull. “All of us together. Yeah. Donna?”

Donna was staring off at nothing. Rose frowned, resting a hand on her shoulder. “Donna?”

Donna jumped, blinking. “Yeah.”

“I’m sorry.” Rose’s voice was heavy with regret. “There’s nothing else we can do.”

“No, I know,” Donna said quietly. “It’s okay. Don’t worry about me.”


“Oh, god,” Jack said with a grin, and Rose and the Doctor laughed.

“S’been good, though? Yeah?” Rose looked at Donna. “Been good. We met Agatha Christie. That was fun.”

Donna had to smile a bit. “Yeah. That was fun.”

“Oh, did you really meet her?” The Doctor asked excitedly. “I bet she’s brilliant. Is she brilliant?”

Rose turned back to look at him, momentarily losing herself in his smile, his depthless eyes…

After a minute she leaned into him, hugging him tight — almost clinging. “I love you,” she whispered into his neck, tears burning in her eyes. The Doctor held her tight, burying his face in the
top of her head and breathing deeply.

She didn’t expect him to say it back. He didn’t have to, though.

She knew.

“Let’s go, then.”

The Doctor took Rose’s hand, leading her to the doors with Jack right behind them. Donna started to follow as well.

*Don’t go…*

And she stopped, blinking. What the hell was that?

They stepped outside, and were instantly greeted with calls of, “*Daleks reign supreme. All hail the Daleks!*”

*Stay…*

Donna looked around, a bit frightened now. What was that voice?

Rose leaned a bit more on the Doctor than she would have liked, examining the scene in front of them. Hundreds and thousands of Daleks. It was like a nightmare come true.

“Behold, Doctor,” the red Dalek said. “Behold the might of the true Dalek race.”

Rose scowled, looking away — and realized Donna was still inside. “Donna,” she called warily. “You’re no safer in there.”

She jumped when the TARDIS doors slammed shut. “What?”

Donna flew at the doors, pounding them uselessly as she tried to get out. “Rose? What have you done??!”

Rose hurried to the door as well, trying her key, snapping her fingers. Nothing was working. “It wasn’t me, I didn’t do anything!”

“Oi! Oi, I’m not staying behind!”

The Doctor rounded on the Daleks. “What did you do?!”

“This is not of Dalek origin.”

“Rose!” Donna called through the doors. Rose looked back at the Daleks, desperate.

“Stop it, she’s my friend! Now open the door and let her out!”

“This is Time Lord treachery.”

“Me?” The Doctor was a bit offended. “The door just closed on its own.”

The Red Dalek didn’t seem to care. “Nevertheless, the TARDIS is a weapon and it will be destroyed.”

A trapdoor under the TARDIS opened on cue, and the ship dropped. “NO!” Rose cried.
“What are you doing?” The Doctor demanded. “Bring it back!”

Donna screamed as she was thrown backwards. “Rose!”

“What have you done?” The Doctor asked furiously. “Where’s it going?”

“The Crucible has a heart of Z-neutrino energy,” the red Dalek explained. “The TARDIS will be deposited into the core.”

The Doctor and Rose both paled a few shades. “You can’t. You’ve taken the defenses down. It’ll be torn apart!”

“But Donna is still in there!” Rose protested.

“Let her go!”

Rose knew the moment the TARDIS touched the core. White-hot pain burned through her entire body and she screamed, losing all control — her legs went out and she slammed against the floor, curling up in a tight ball.

“Rose!” Jack hurried to her side, kneeling down. “Doctor!”

The Doctor ran over, helping Rose sit up. She slumped against his chest, trembling and crying. “She’s connected to the TARDIS,” Jack told the Doctor quietly. “If it dies…”

“The females and the TARDIS will perish together,” the red Dalek announced. “Observe. The last child of Gallifrey is powerless.”

An image of the TARDIS in the core appeared on a nearby screen. Rose cried out again, the pain still pulsing through her without relent.

Jack watched in horror as Rose’s eyes flared gold for a moment before rolling back in her head. The tension drained from her body all at once.

“You are connected to the TARDIS. Now feel it die.”

Donna clung to a rail as the TARDIS exploded around her. This was it. She was really going to die.

Golden light burst to life before her, and she squeezed her eyes shut, only daring to open them when the light faded.

“What the hell?!”

And there was Rose, standing in front of her and looking just as bewildered as Donna felt.

“Total TARDIS destruction in ten rels,” another Dalek announced. “Nine, eight, seven, six…”

There was no time to question it. Rose flew into action wordlessly, hitting a button on the console.

“Five, four, three, two, one.”

The Doctor and Jack watched as the TARDIS disappeared. “The TARDIS has been destroyed,” the red Dalek announced uselessly. Jack looked back at Rose. Her chest was no longer moving, no longer showing any signs of breathing. He reached a shaking hand out, pressing two fingers to the pulse point in her neck. Nothing.
“Doctor…”

He didn’t need to say it, though. The Doctor had felt the moment Rose’s body had succumbed to the stress of the TARDIS’ destruction.

She was dead.


The Doctor swallowed hard, holding Rose’s body tight. “Yeah.”

“Then if emotions are so important, surely we have enhanced you.”

Jack growled, whipping his revolver. “Yeah? Feel this!”

He shot at the red Dalek, who called, “Exterminate!” and fired at him. Jack was dead before he hit the ground. The Doctor just watched blankly. Jack wouldn’t stay dead for long, he knew. They could use that later.

“Escort him to the Vault,” the Red Dalek ordered. The Doctor pushed himself up, cradling Rose’s body against his chest.

He couldn’t leave her behind.

* * * * *

“What the hell is going on?” Donna demanded as Rose set to work with fixing the TARDIS.

“No clue,” Rose responded honestly, stopping to look down at her hands. “I don’t feel…right. Real. I don’t feel real.”

*That is because you are not, my Wolf.*

Rose jumped at the voice. “What?”

“What?” Donna repeated. “Oh wait — talking to the ship, right?”

“What do you mean I’m not real? I can touch you. I can touch the console.”

*Because those are a part of me. Try to touch the loud one.*

Rose would’ve smiled a bit at Donna’s nickname if she hadn’t been so preoccupied. She reached out to touch Donna’s shoulder — and nearly screamed when her hand went right through.

“Oh my god!” Donna shrieked, jumping back. Rose stumbled back as well, shocked and a little sick.

“I…I’m a ghost?”

*More of an…astral projection. Though while you are here your body is, for all intents and purposes, dead. Rose’s stomach dropped at that. Everything will be fine once you return to it. But this was the only way to save your life. If I had been lost, you would have died as well. So I took your mind and made it part of me.*

“Well?” Donna asked, jerking Rose back to reality. “What’s it saying?”

Rose took a deep breath. “She brought my mind into the TARDIS so I could save her from being
destroyed in the core. Which in turn also saves my life so ya know. That’s not too bad. Win win.”

Donna nodded. “But…you’ll be able to go back to your body, right? You’re not gonna be stuck like this forever?”

“Shouldn’t be, no.” Rose went to the scanner, leaning in to examine it. “In the mean time we’re just gonna stay here for a bit. They think we’re gone, and we can use that.”

“I kept hearing a noise,” Donna said quietly. “Words. Like someone was talking to me.”

That was me, the TARDIS spoke up. Rose made a face.

“The TARDIS was talking to you. But why?” It took a lot of effort for the TARDIS to even connect with someone who wasn’t a pilot. But to talk?

She needed to stay. She needed to be here.

“The TARDIS says you need to be here.”

“Why? Why me? Why not that captain or the Doctor?”

Rose looked away from the screen to meet Donna’s gaze. “Because you’re special,” she said simply. Donna rolled her eyes.

“Oh, I keep telling you, I’m not.”

“And I keep telling you you are.” Rose straightened up. “But you really don’t believe that at all, do you? All that attitude, all that lip, because all this time you think you’re not worth it.”

“Stop it,” Donna snapped.

“No, but — I get that. I was the same way. Still am sometimes. Looking at the world and wondering if anyone would even notice if you were gone. If it would even matter.”

That caught Donna by surprise. “Don’t be so daft. You’re special.”

“But I wasn’t,” Rose insisted. “Not before the Doctor. I was a stupid shop girl, didn’t have any A-levels, didn’t even have a job for a bit, the Doctor blew it up. I wasn’t special at all. But I met him, and he changed me. And then you met me — and something changed for you. The Doctor said the timelines are converging on you. It’s like somethin’ has been steering us here, bringin’ us to this moment. You appeared on the TARDIS. And you found me again. You parked your car right where the TARDIS was going to land. And I don’t think that’s a coincidence.”

“So what do you think?” Donna asked in disbelief. “This is destiny? There’s no such thing.”

“I’m not so sure there isn’t,” Rose disagreed, looking around. “It’s like somethin’…wants us to be together. You and me, here in the TARDIS together. She wanted you to stay behind. Not Jack. Not the Doctor. Whatever’s goin’ on, it’s still not finished. It’s like the pattern’s not complete. The strands are still drawing together. But heading for what?”

Rose met Donna’s gaze. The poor woman was so confused.

So was Rose, for that matter.
Martha took a deep breath as she walked closer to the building. A woman was standing outside. “Hier ist niemand. Was immer Sie wollen, gehen Sie fort. Lassen Sie mich in Ruhe!”

“Ich heisse Martha Jones. Ich komme von UNIT. Agentin fuenf sechs sechs sieben eins, von der medizinischen Abteilung.”


Martha was a bit relieved. “I thought this place was supposed to be guarded.

“They were soldiers. Boys. I brought them food every day. But when der Albtraum came from the sky, they went home to die. But not you.”

Martha nodded. “I’ve got a job to do.”

The woman let Martha inside and followed her through the dusty rooms. She watched as Martha pulled down a hanging and entered a code into a keypad before pressing her palm to hand print scanner.

“London,” the woman said. “In those days, to see it. So much glamor. I was so young. I heard the soldiers talking many times. They would speak of the Osterhagen Key. I think London must be changed now, yes? But still, the glamor.”

As a secure door slid open, she heard the click of a gun and turned to see the woman aiming at her. “You will not go.”

“I’ve got no choice.”

“I know the Key. What it does. Sie sind der Albtraum, nicht die anderen, Sie! Ich sollte Sie umbringen, am besten gleich jetzt!”

Another update? You say. But why?

Basically, I want to be done posting this story, and there’s no reason to drag it out. So I’m posting this chapter now, and I might post the last one today, or I might wait until a later in the week, I’m not sure yet. But there’s no reason to drag it out. I’ll figure out later if I want to post the sequel or not.
Martha swallowed hard. “Then do it,” she called her on her bluff. When the woman didn’t fire, she stepped into the lift.

“Martha, Zur Hoelle mit Dir!”

Martha closed her eyes, taking a deep breath. “I know.”

She rode the lift up to the roof, going to the computer and pressing a button.

“This is Osterhagen Station One. My name is Martha Jones. Is there anyone there? Over.”

~*~

“Prisoners now on board the Crucible. They will be taken for testing.”

Sarah Jane looked back at Jackie and Mickey. They’d been lumped into a large group with a bunch of other prisoners.

“One step closer to the Doctor and Rose.”

* * * * *

The Doctor held on tight to Rose’s body as he was led along. “Release her,” one of the Daleks said suddenly as they stopped. The Doctor just held on tighter.

“Like hell. It’s not hurting anyone if I’m holding her.”

Six Daleks pointed their stalks at him. They were going to fire if he didn’t listen. Part of him would have preferred that — he could have joined Rose — but the universe needed him alive now that it had lost its greatest defender.

He set Rose down and stepped away.

“Activate the holding cells,” a familiar voice called. He turned to see Davros approaching as a spotlight shone down on him. “Excellent. Even when powerless, a Time Lord is best contained.”

“Still scared of me, then?” The Doctor couldn’t help but taunt.

“It is time we talked, Doctor. After so very long—”

“No, no, no, no, no,” the Doctor snapped. “We’re not doing the nostalgia tour. I want to know what’s happening right here, right now, because the Supreme Dalek said Vault, yeah? As in dungeon, cellar, prison. You’re not in charge of the Daleks, are you? They’ve got you locked away down here in the basement like, what, a servant? Slave? Court jester?”

“We have an arrangement,” Davros said simply. The Doctor scoffed.

“No, no, no, no, no. No, I’ve got the word. You’re the Dalek’s pet!” He laughed darkly.

“So very full of fire,” Davros observed. “A false bravado, perhaps, considering you are responsible for the death of your precious companion.”

“I didn’t kill her,” the Doctor snapped. “You did. You’re the one who dropped the TARDIS into the core.”

“And you are the reason she is connected to the ship in the first place.”
The Doctor’s jaw clenched, teeth coming together with an audible clink. “So cold and dark,” a high pitched voice announced suddenly, and the Doctor looked to see the twisted remnants of a Dalek nearby. “Fire is coming. The endless flames.”

“Dalek Caan, I presume.” The Doctor refocused on on Davros. “You said he flew into the Time War. That’s impossible.”

“And yet it happened. But Caan did more than that. Its infinite complexity and majesty, raging through his mind. And he saw you.”

“This I have foreseen,” Caan continued, “in the wold of the wind. The Doctor will be here as witness, at the end of everything. The Doctor and the Bad Wolf and their precious Children of Time. And one of them will die.


“Oh, that’s it,” Davros said, almost joyfully. “The anger, the fire, the rage of a Time Lord who butchered millions. There he is. Why so shy? Show your companion. Show her your true self. Dalek Caan has promised me that too.”

“I have seen,” Caan added. “At the time of ending, the Doctor’s soul will be revealed.”

“What does that mean?” The Doctor demanded.

“We will discover together,” Davros said. “Our final journey. Because the ending approaches. The testing begins?”

“Testing of what?” The Doctor demanded.

“The Reality bomb.”

* * * * *

The group came to a halt. Jackie, Mickey, and Sarah Jane looked around. “Prisoners will stand in the designated area,” the Dalek leading them announced. “Move! Move!”

They shuffled along, and one woman fell to her knees. “You will stand!” The Dalek ordered her.

“I can’t,” she sobbed.

“You will stand!”

“I can’t. Please!”

Sarah Jane spotted a nearby door and hurried over. “On your feet. On your feet!”

Jackie dropped to help the woman while Sarah Jane got the door open, hissing, “Mickey! Mickey!”

“Jackie!” Mickey hissed in return, hurrying to the door without realizing that Jackie wasn’t following.

“Prisoners will stand in the designated area.” Jackie helped the woman back up.

Mickey stopped mid-run, realizing Jackie wasn’t there. “We can’t leave her,” he insisted, running back to the door.
“No, Mickey.” Sarah Jane hurried after him. “Wait!”

“What do they mean?” The woman asked Jackie, terrified. “What are they testing? What are they going to do?”

Jackie looked up to see a great big glowing thing above them.

“I reckon it’s that thing there.”


A screen turned on, showing the holding area where the prisoners were being held.

“It’s the planets,” Rose whispered as she and Donna watched on the screen. “The twenty-seven planets. Oh my god.”

“That’s Z-neutrino energy, flattened by the alignment of the planets into a single string,” the Doctor said, horrified. “No, Davros. Davros, you can’t! You can’t! No!”

“Single string Z-neutrinos compressed.” Rose’s voice was strangled. “No way.”

Mickey jumped as something beeped in his pocket. “Thirty minutes. It’s recharged.” He banged on the window in the door. “It’s recharged!” He called to Jackie. She jerked around to see him pointing at the dimension cannon trigger in his hand. “It’s recharged! Use it!”

Jackie pulled her button out of her pocket, looking over at the woman beside her. “I’m so sorry.”

She teleported, reappearing right next to Mickey, who hugged her tight. On the other side of the door, the prisoners dissolved from the head downward.

“What was it?” Donna asked. Rose looked so horrified. She didn’t understand. “Rose, what did it do?”

“Electrical energy,” Rose breathed. “Every atom in existence is bound to an electrical field.”

“The Reality bomb cancels it out,” Davros explained to the furious Doctor. “Structure falls apart. That test was focused on the prisoners alone. Full transmission will dissolve every form of matter.”

“The stars are going out,” the Doctor murmured. “The twenty seven planets. They become one vast transmitter, blasting that wavelength.”

“Across the entire universe,” Davros boasted. “Never stopping, never faltering, never fading. People
and planets and stars will become dust, and the dust will become atoms, and the atoms will become nothing. And the wavelength will continue, breaking through the Rift at the heart of the Medusa Cascade into every dimension, every parallel, every single corner of creation. This is my ultimate victory, Doctor! The destruction of reality itself!

~*~

“God,” Rose whispered, backing away the console. She felt…hollow.

“What? Rose hey,” Donna went to rest a hand on Rose’s shoulder — and winced when it went right through. “Oh. Right. Come on Blondie, focus. What do we need to do?”

Rose bit her lip, thinking for a long moment. The TARDIS wasn’t actively talking to her anymore, but Rose could still hear her — she was talking without talking. It was the weirdest feeling.

“I need your help, Donna. It's not gonna be pleasant.”

“Never mind it,” Donna said fiercely. “What do you need?”

Rose smiled weakly. “Oh Donna Noble. You are brilliant.”

~*~

Jack groaned as he rolled out of a panel in the wall. He was getting too old for this. He straightened up to find himself facing three people, and groaned.

“Just my luck. I climb through two miles of ventilation shafts, chasing life signs on this thing, and who do I find? Mickey Mouse.”

Mickey Smith raised an eyebrow, clearly unimpressed. “You can talk, Captain Cheesecake.”

The men laughed, hugging. “Good to see you,” Jack said honestly. “And that’s Beefcake.”

“And that’s enough hugging.” Mickey pulled away, and Jack turned to the two women.

“We meet at last, Ms. Smith.” He grinned. “And you must be Jackie Tyler.” The resemblance to Rose was striking. It hurt a little.

“Yeah, she’s married,” Mickey spoke up. As if Jack would ever flirt with Jackie, Rose would kill— Wait. His smile dropped completely. Oh god they didn’t know.

“There is something we can do,” Sarah Jane spoke up before Jack could figure out what to say. “You’ve got to understand. I have a son down there on Earth. He’s only fourteen years old. I’ve brought this.” She held up a sparkling gem on a chain. “It was given to me by a Verron Soothsayer. He said, this is for the End of Days.”

“Is that a Warp Star?” Jack asked, stunned. Sarah Jane nodded, her face serious.

“Going to tell me what a Warp Star is?” Mickey asked, raising an eyebrow. Jack blew out a long breath.

“A warpfold conjugation trapped in a carbonized shell. It’s an explosion, Mickey. An explosion waiting to happen.”

~*~
“This is Osterhagen Station Five,” a voice reported, and a young Chinese woman appeared on screen. “Are you receiving, Station One?”

“I’ve got you,” Martha said. “That makes three of us, and three is all we need.”

“My name is Anna Zhou,” the woman said. “What’s yours?”

“Martha Jones.” Martha turned her attention to the other woman she’d contacted. “What about you, Station Four? You never said.”

“I don’t want my name on this, given what we’re about to do.”

Well…that was fair. “So what happens now?” Anna asked. “Do we do it?”

“No,” Martha said firmly. “Not yet.”

“UNIT instructions say, once three Osterhagen Stations are online—”

“Yeah, but I’ve got a higher authority way above UNIT,” Martha interrupted. “And there’s one more thing Rose would do.”

~*~

Rose was sitting on the floor, frowning and thinking hard. “So what do we do?” Donna asked, sitting with her. “Tell me what we need to do.”

“We need to get into the Vault,” Rose said slowly. “I need to be in two places at once and I don’t think I can manage that.”

“Really?” Donna’s voice was weak but amused. “All the amazing things you can do and you can’t clone yourself?”

“Well I could chop off a limb and see what happens, maybe I’d spontaneously grow another body,” Rose joked back. “But I’m quite fond of all my limbs so I don’t think I’ll try that.”

The amusement faded from her expression, however, as she re-focused on Donna. “I have…one idea. But I need you. And it’s going to hurt.”

Donna didn’t seem too scared. “Just tell me.”

~*~

The Doctor’s mind was going a mile a minute as he tried to think. He needed to get out of here. He needed to get out of this cell. He needed to stop the Daleks.

He needed to stop thinking about Rose’s body.

The screen flickered suddenly, switching to a young, dark-skinned woman. Martha Jones. The Doctor recognized her from the Subwave Network.

“This is a message for the Dalek Crucible. Repeat. Can you hear me?”

“Put me through,” the Doctor ordered.

“It begins as Dalek Caan foretold,” Davros said thoughtfully.
“The Children of Time will gather, and one of them will die,” Caan said gratefully. The Doctor scowled.

“Stop saying that,” he snapped. “Put me through!”

The image finally solidified. “State your intent,” Davros ordered before the Doctor could speak.

“I’ve got the Osterhagen Key,” Martha said, holding up the chip for everyone to see. “Leave this planet and its people alone or I’ll use it.”

“Osterhagen what?” Doctor said, bewildered. “What’s an Osterhagen Key?”

Martha focused on the Doctor, making a face. “Who are you?”

“I’m the Doctor.”

Her mouth dropped. “Oh my god,” she breathed. “She found you. Where’s Rose?”

She must not have been able to see Rose from her angle. “What’s the Osterhagen Key?” He prompted again.

“There’s a chain of twenty five nuclear warheads placed in strategic points beneath the Earth’s crust. If I use the key, they detonate and the Earth gets ripped apart.”

“What?!” The Doctor yelped, stunned. “Who invented that? Well, someone called Osterhagen, I suppose. Martha, are you insane?!”

“The Osterhagen Key is to be used if the suffering of the human race is so great, so without hope, that this becomes the final option.”

“That’s never an option!” The Doctor insisted.

“Don’t argue with me Doctor!” Martha snapped back. Oh she was fiery. “Because it’s more than that. Now, I reckon the Daleks need these twenty-seven planets for something? But what if it becomes twenty-six. What happens then? Daleks? Would you risk it?”

Okay she was pretty brilliant, the Doctor had to admit. Another screen flickered, and this time it was Jack who appeared on screen, with three very familiar people right behind him.

“Captain Jack Harkness, calling all Dalek boys and girls. Are you receiving me?” He held up a gem, attached to wires. “Don’t send in your goons, or I’ll set this thing off.”

“Jackie, Mickey!” This day really couldn’t get any weirder. “What’re you two doing, I told you to stay—”

“Like we were just gonna sit here while you went to find Rose,” Jackie scoffed. “Where’s my daughter?”

Oh that was not a conversation the Doctor was looking forward to. “Captain, what are you doing?” The Doctor asked, determinedly looking away from Jackie.

“I’ve got a Warp Star wired into the mainframe,” Jack explained. “I break this shell, the entire Crucible goes up.”

“You can’t!” Blimey what was with people trying to blow things up? “Where did you get a Warp Star?!”
“From me,” Sarah Jane spoke up. “We had no choice. We saw what happened to the prisoners.”

For the first time, Davros looked surprise. “Impossible,” he breathed. “That face. After all these years.”

“Davros,” Sarah Jane replied flatly. “It’s been quite a while. Sarah Jane Smith. Remember?”

“Oh this is meant to be,” Davros said. “The circle of Time is closing. You were there on Skaro at the very beginning of my creation.”

“And I’ve learned to fight since then. You let the Doctor go, or this Warp Star, it gets opened.”

“I’ll do it,” Jack added. “Don’t imagine I won’t.”

Davros looked rather smug as he turned back to the Doctor. “And the prophecy unfolds.”

“The Doctor’s soul is revealed!” Caan added. “See him. See the heart of him.”

“The man who abhors violence, never carrying a gun,” Davros continued. “But this is the truth, Doctor. You take ordinary people. And you fashion them into weapons. Behold your Children of Time, transformed into murderers. I made the Daleks, Doctor. You made this. You created this legacy, and you passed it on to Ms. Tyler.”

“They’re trying to help,” he insisted weakly.

“Already I have seen them sacrifice today, for their beloved Doctor. The Earth woman who fell opening the Subwave Network. And of course Ms. Tyler’s own death.”

“What?!” The Doctor couldn’t look at Jackie as she cried out.

“How many more? Just think. How many have died in your name?”

The Doctor just glared at Davros, refusing to answer. He didn’t have, to though. Everyone knew.

“The Doctor.” His name sounded like a taunt on Davros’ lips. “The man who keeps running, never looking back because he dare not, out of shame. This is my final victory, Doctor. I have shown you yourself.”

The Doctor didn’t answer.

“It’s the Crucible or Earth,” Martha spoke up, bringing them back to the subject at hand. The Doctor looked up at her. He had never traveled with Martha Jones. That had been all Rose.

Had Rose turned into him?

“No!” Martha cried suddenly, and then she vanished. Jack, Jackie, Mickey, and Sarah Jane all disappeared as well, and moment later all five of them appeared in front of the Doctor.

There went the leverage.

The Doctor was disgusted with himself for thinking that.

“Don’t move,” the Doctor said quickly as they all straightened up, looking rather dazed. Teleportation without a time capsule. Always a killer. “All of you, just stay still.”

Jackie was the first to see her daughter. “Rose!”
She forced her way out of the group, but Jack grabbed her quickly, holding her back. “Let go, let me go! Rose!”

“Guard them!” Davros ordered. “On your knees, all of you. Surrender!”

“Do as he says,” the Doctor said as firmly as he could. But the sight of Jackie struggling to get to her daughter’s body had basically robbed him of any authority.

Everyone but Jackie and Jack got on their knees. “What’s wrong with her?” Martha demanded. Rose was chalk-white, and as far as Martha could tell there was no movement at all — not even the movement of her chest to indicate breathing.

The Doctor didn’t answer.

“Jackie, c’mon,” Jack murmured, carefully lowering Jackie to the ground so they could kneel with the others. Jackie didn’t fight, but she was crying quietly, and Jack kept her in his arms as she sobbed.

“The final prophecy is in place,” Davros said. “The Doctor and the Bad Wolf and their children, all gathered as witnesses.” Mostly, the Doctor thought bitterly. “Supreme Dalek, the time has come. Now, detonate the Reality bomb!”

“You can’t, Davros!” The Doctor insisted. “Just listen to me! Just stop!”

Davros laughed. “Nothing can stop the detonation. Nothing and no one!”

~*~

“I’m going to disappear now,” Rose explained as she prepared to go. “I need to go back to my body. I’ll be in your head though. It’s going to hurt. I’m sorry.”

“I’ll live,” Donna said firmly. “Get back to your body. That beanpole is probably going spare thinking you’re dead.”

Rose laughed a bit that, hitting a lever on the console to send them to the Vault.

“See you soon, Donna.”

And she disappeared.

~*~

The first thing they heard was the familiar wheeze of the TARDIS. The Doctor’s eyes widened.

“But that’s…”

“Impossible,” Davros insisted.

And then Rose gasped, shooting up, her eyes wide and glowing.

“Rose!” Martha, Sarah Jane, Mickey, Jackie, and Jack cried at the same time. Rose looked around for a moment, blinking rapidly.

“Oh blimey, that’s weird.”

She stood hurriedly, glowing eyes fixed on Davros as the TARDIS appeared a few feet behind her.
“R-Rose?” The Doctor stuttered, stunned. But she was dead. No heartbeat, no pulse, no breath. Dead!

“That’s impossible,” Davros insisted again as the TARDIS solidified.

“Not impossible,” Rose corrected him. “Just a little unlikely.”
The TARDIS doors creaked open, and there was Donna. She ran out, and Davros fired.

“No!”

The beam of energy stopped halfway to Donna, however. The Doctor looked back to see Rose holding a glowing hand out to it.

Move, Donna.

*I am!* Donna insisted, only to be stopped as she was surrounded by Daleks. *Rose—!*

Everyone watched, stunned, as the Daleks surrounding Donna disintegrated into golden dust.

“Rose, stop,” the Doctor insisted, his mind flashing back to Platform Five. She was going to die if she kept doing this.

“Relax, my Doctor.” Her voice reverberated just slightly. “Everything will be fine.”

Under the cover of golden Dalek dust, Donna hurried to the panel. *Rose, what do I do?*

There was no time for words — Rose and the TARDIS just shoved the information at her, helping her sort it out quickly.

“*Nine, eight, seven*,” the countdown announced overhead. “*Six, five, four*—”

“Aaaand,” Donna announced suddenly, figuring it out, “closing all Z-neutrino relay loops using an internalized synchronous back-feed reversal loop. That button there.”

She pressed the button with a grin, clearly proud of herself. The Doctor gaped at her, absolutely stunned. “How…?”

“You’ll suffer for this,” Davros snarled, but before he could fire Donna threw a lever, and he zapped himself instead, yelling in pain.

“Oh, bio-electric dampening field with a retrograde field arc inversion,” she said happily. The Doctor just gaped at her in disbelief. How the hell did she know how to do that?

“Exterminate her!” Davros yelled, and more Daleks closed in to try and attach her. Donna was already working away furiously at the panel, however.

“Phwor. Macrotransmission of a K-filter wavelength blocking Dalek weaponry in a self-replicating energy blindfold matrix.”
“But how did you work that out?” The Doctor asked as the Daleks struggled to attack her.

“I’ve got a big old time ship in my head!” The redhead said exuberantly. “Well no, technically I’ve got Rose in my head, but she’s basically a big old time ship—”

The Doctor whirled around to look at Rose, who was still staring down Davros, her eyes glowing brightly.

“You’re connected,” he realized. “A mind meld. But how?”

“Holding cell deactivated,” Donna announced, the spotlight shining down on the Doctor disappeared.

“Stop them!” Davros yelled.

“And spin!” Donna retaliated, flipping a lever and sending the Daleks spinning.

“Come on.” Rose pushed the Doctor along and they ran to the control panel as the Daleks yelled for help. It would’ve been funny if not for the situation.

“What did you do?” The Doctor asked as they approached, and Donna sent the Daleks spinning to the other day.

“Trip switch circuit-breaker in the psychokinetic threshold manipulator,” Donna said proudly. Rose raised an eyebrow.

“How much information did I give you?”

“I don’t know! But it’s brilliant isn’t it?” Donna laughed. “I can think of so many things, so many ideas. Now, let’s send that trip switch all over the ship. Did I ever tell you, best temp in Chiswick? Hundred words per minute.”

She wiggled her fingers, grinning. Rose laughed.

Around them, meanwhile, everyone else was jumping into action. Jack got his gun and ran out, tossing it to Mickey. He didn’t need the defense nearly as much as the young man, after all.

“You will desist!” Davros insisted. Mickey pointed his gun at him.

“Just stay where you are Mister.”

Martha and Sarah Jane shoved one spinning Dalek out of the way while Jack gleefully sent one spinning down the hall. Jackie was trying to fight her way through to get to Rose but there was too much chaos.

“Ready?” Donna asked. “And reverse!”

And they set to work with sending the planets back. “Off you go, Clom,” Rose announced happily. “And back home, Adipose Three.”

Shallacatop, Pyrovillia and the Lost Moon of Poosh. Sorted!” Donna added happily.

“But you promised me, Dalek Caan,” Davros snarled, turning on the mangled Dalek. “Why did you not foresee this?”

“Oh, I think he did,” Rose said thoughtfully. “Something’s been manipulating the timelines for ages,
getting Donna Noble to the right place at the right time.”

“This would always have happened,” Caan said. “I only helped, Bad Wolf.”

“You betrayed the Daleks,” Davros hissed.

“I saw the Daleks,” Caan disagreed. “What we have done, throughout time and space, I saw the truth of us, Creator, and I decreed, no more!”

“Heads up!” Jack called, and everyone looked up to see the red Dalek descending up on them.

“Davros, you have betrayed us.”

“It was Dalek Caan!” Davros yelled. It was useless though.

“The Vault will be purged. You will all be exterminated.”

The red Dalek fired at the control panel, and it exploded. Rose, Donna, and the Doctor jumped back in surprise.

“Mind if I borrow this?” Jack asked, grabbing the gun back from Mickey. “Like I was saying, feel this!” And he fired at the red Dalek; it exploded on contact.

“Oh, we’ve lost the magnetron,” the Doctor said as he examined the panel. “And there’s only one planet left. Oh, guess which one. But we can use the TARDIS.”

“I’ll take care of things here,” Rose said. “You go.”

He nodded and ran back to the TARDIS. “Holding Earth stability,” Rose muttered as she worked. “Maintaining atmospheric shell.” Her head was starting to pound. “You alright, Donna?”

“Yeah, I’m fine. Not even a headache.” Well that was good for her, at least.

“The prophecy must complete,” Caan said suddenly, and Rose snapped around to look at him.

“Don’t listen to him,” Davros snapped. Caan continued despite that.

“I have seen the end of everything Dalek, and you must make it happen, Bad Wolf.”

Rose’s heart dropped to her toes. “He’s right,” she said quietly. “Because with or without a Reality bomb, this Dalek Empire’s big enough to slaughter the cosmos. They’ve got to be stopped.”

“No,” Donna said quickly. “Just wait for the Doctor, Rose.”

Rose shook her head though. “No. It’s not his choice. It’s mine.” And with that she started working. “Maximizing Dalekanium power feeds. Blasting them back!”

Everyone jumped as Daleks started exploding all around them, and the Doctor ran back out. “What have you done?!” He demanded. Rose looked back at him, eyes glowing still, expression impassive.

“Fulfilled the prophecy.”

The Doctor let out a long breath, his stomach dropping. There was no time though. “Everyone in the TARDIS. Now!”

Everyone ran for the TARDIS. Rose stopped outside the door with the Doctor, however, watching
Davros as his ship came down around him.

“Davros,” the Doctor begged. “Come with me. I can save you.”

“Never forget, Doctor, you did this,” Davros informed him. “You and the Abomination. I name you — forever you are the Destroyers of Worlds!”

Rose shook her head, turning away from Davros. “Let’s go.”

They hurried into the TARDIS together, Rose going straight for the console and sending them back into orbit.

“But what about the Earth?” Sarah Jane asked. “It’s stuck in the wrong part of space.”

“Working on that,” Rose assured her, grabbing the screen. “Torchwood Hub, this is Rose. Are you receiving me?”

The Doctor peeked over Rose’s shoulder as Gwen and Ianto appeared on screen. “Loud and clear. Is Jack there?”

“Can’t get rid of him,” Rose grinned.

“Jack, what’s her name?” The Doctor asked curiously.

“Gwen Cooper.”

“Right. Tell me, Gwen Cooper, are you from an old Cardiff family?”

Gwen made a face. “Yes, all the way back to the eighteen hundreds.”

“Ah, thought so. Spatial—”

“Genetic multiplicity,” Rose finished, and the Doctor raised an eyebrow at her.

“Show off.”

“Look who’s talking. Now, Torchwood, I want you to open up that Rift Manipulator. Send all the power to me.”

“Doing it now, ma’am,” Ianto said, setting to work.

“What’s that for?” Donna asked.


Luke appeared on screen a moment later. “Rose! Is Mum there?”

“Course she is, perfectly fine and dandy. Now, Mr. Smith, I want you to harness the Rift power and loop it around the TARDIS. You got that?”

“I regret I will need remote access to TARDIS base code numerals,” the computer said. Rose looked back at the Doctor, who blew out a long breath.

“Oh blimey that’s going to take a while.”

“No, no, no.” Sarah Jane pushed her way in beside them. “Let me. K9, out you come!”
A moment later the metal dog beamed in next to Luke.

“Affirmative, Mistress.”

“Oh! Oh ho!” The Doctor laughed. “Oh, good dog! K9, give Mr. Smith the base code.”

He had that covered. Rose stepped away to prepare. “Donna, I’m breaking the connection now. It’s gonna hurt. I’m sorry. Mum, do me a favor and take care of her. Ready?”

Donna took a deep breath, nodding, and Rose severed the mind meld. As soon as it was broken Donna cried out, nearly hitting the floor, but Jackie was quicker, holding her upright and pulling her over to the jump seat to sit. Rose shook her head, trying to think past the blooming migraine.

“Now then, you lot.” She blinked rapidly, focusing on the group. And she started firing off directions, running around the console. “Sarah Jane, hold that down. Mickey, you hold that. Because you know why this TARDIS always is always rattling about the place? It’s designed to have six pilots. Martha, keep that level. Jack, there you go. Steady that. Now we can fly this thing. No, Mum, no. Stay sitting. Sorry but I have an invested interest in making sure the TARDIS doesn’t crash.” Jackie looked highly offended at that. “Sorry.”

“Right then!” The Doctor called. “We’ve got the Torchwood Rift looped around the TARDIS by Mr. Smith, and we’re going to fly Planet Earth back home. Off we go!”

And they took off. It was a bumpy ride, for sure. Rose took on the fifth pilot’s spot while the Doctor alternated between being the sixth pilot and supervising to make sure everyone was doing alright.

It was brilliant.

They flew the Earth back to its place, and a roar of celebration went up around the console as everyone clapped and yelled in celebration.

“Oh god loud,” Donna groaned, and Jackie rubbed her back for a long moment. “Oi, don’t sit here with me. You’ve got a daughter who deserves a good hug.”

Right. Jackie fixed her eyes through the yelling group and found Rose hugging Jack. She barreled through without another word, shoving Jack away and wrapping Rose in the tightest possible.

“Mum!” Rose gasped, hugging her back tight and burying her face in her mother’s shoulder. “Mum, oh my god.”

“God I missed you,” Jackie breathed, arms tightening around Rose. “I missed you so bloody much. Are you okay?”

“Yeah.” And other than the pounding bloody headache it was true. “Yeah. I’m brilliant.”

Martha went to check on Donna, and the two of them went to talk to the Doctor. The Time Lord was just stepping away from a hug with Sarah Jane, and turned to see them standing behind him, each giving him an appraising look.

“Erm...hello?”

“So you’re the Doctor,” Martha said, raising an eyebrow. “Not much to look at, are you?”

“He’s a bloody beanpole,” Donna agreed. “Honestly. And what’s with the hair? All...foofy and stuff.”
“Oi!”

Rose looked over Jackie’s shoulder to see Martha and Donna ganging up on the Doctor, and she laughed a bit despite herself. God she loved them so much.

Jackie turned to see what Rose was focusing on and smiled, kissing Rose’s cheek.

“Go on, sweetheart.”

Rose took a step toward the Doctor, barely noticing when the noise around her started to die down.

Donna and Martha looked past the Doctor, smiling, and he turned to see Rose stepping toward him. Oh Rose. He let out a long breath. God she’d been dead. She had been dead.

And now she wasn’t.

Before Rose could take another step she was in his arms and he was hugging her so tight he lifted her off the floor. Rose held on tight, burying her face in his neck and nearly crying in relief.

He was real.

She was alive.

Everything was going to be okay.

* * * * *

They landed in a park and stepped outside, all beaming at the sight of the blue sky. Sarah Jane beamed as she looked back to look at the Doctor. “Oh it is so good to see you again.” She hugged the Doctor and he laughed. “Welcome home, tiger.”

He grinned as he pulled back to look down at her. “It’s good to be home.”


“I will, I promise,” Rose said, smiling. “Say hi to Luke for me.”

“I will. Bye!”

And she took off the down path, waving over her shoulder.

“Oh, hold on.” Rose grabbed Jack’s wrist, twisting it so she could get to his vortex manipulator and disabling it. “Told you, no teleport.”

“And Dr. Jones,” the Doctor added, “I’d rather appreciate if you got rid of that Osterhagen thing. Save the world one more time, yeah.”

Martha grinned. “Consider it done.”

“Oster what?” Rose asked, confused. Martha just pulled her into a tight hug.

“Never mind it. Thank you for not dying.”

Rose hugged Martha back, laughing a bit. “Come on Martha, you know as well as I do I’m impossible to kill.”
“Yeah, not for lack of trying.”

“Oh, Dr. Jones,” the Doctor said suddenly as she started to walk away with Jack. “One more thing. Have we met before?”


“You just…you look familiar.” Rose looked between them, raising an eyebrow. “Are you sure?”

“Yeah, pretty sure.”

The Doctor squinted for a long moment before his eyes widened. “Wait! No, I remember. It was when I was trying to find this universe, I found one that was a bit post-apocalyptic, met a version of you—”

“Oh my god,” Martha breathed, interrupting him. “You helped me fix my ankle.”

“What?!” Jack and Rose said at the same time as the Doctor’s mouth dropped.

“Wait that was this universe? What the hell happened to it?”

“Just a bit of a paradox,” Rose said quickly before Jack or Martha could mention the Master. The Doctor didn’t need to know about him. “We took care of it, though.”

The Doctor shot Rose a look, then looked back at Martha. “You said you and your friend were fixing it…”

Martha smiled a bit. “And we did.”

Jack and Martha saluted Rose and the Doctor and turned to walk away. “You know,” Jack said as they walked, “I’m not sure about UNIT these days. Maybe there’s something else you could be doing?”

Rose looked over to smile at the Doctor — and made a face when she saw Mickey making his way out of the TARDIS. “Oi, where are you going?”

“Well, I’m not stupid,” Mickey shrugged. “I can work out what happens next. And hey, I had a good time in that parallel world, but my gran passed away. Nice and peaceful. She spent her last years living in a mansion. There’s nothing there for me now.”

“What are you gonna do?” The Doctor asked.

“Anything. Brand new life. Just you watch.” He pulled Rose into a quick hug and saluted the Doctor before turning to go after Jack and Martha. “Hey, you two!”

“Oh, I thought I’d got rid of you,” Jack sighed.

“Mickey, right?” Martha asked. “You’re the other cat!”

“What?”

“Yeah she never explained it to me either.”

“It’s not worth it,” Rose called after them, smiling, and Martha laughed.

“I don’t know, I think I’d like to hear it,” the Doctor said as they made their way back onto the
TARDIS. It was just Jackie and Donna left.

“So what happens now?” Donna asked quietly. Rose focused on her mother.

“You were pregnant,” she said, and Jackie smiled weakly.

“Yeah. Had a boy. C’mere, I’ve got pictures.” She pulled her mobile out of her pocket and Rose went to look at the pictures of the little blonde boy.

“Oh god he’s so big. How old is he?”

“Just turned four. He’s growin’ like a weed. Name’s Tony by the way.”

“Tony Tyler.” Rose smiled. “I like it.”

The Doctor hated to break this up, he really did, but…

“Jackie if you’re going back we have to go now. The walls are going to close soon.”

Jackie’s expression fell, and she looked back at Rose, eyes pleading. “Come back with me, sweetheart,” she begged. “Please.”

Rose smiled sadly, shaking her head. “I can’t, Mum. You saw the way my eyes were glowin’ earlier. I’m connected to the TARDIS. If I was cut off from her…”

A small, pained noise slipped off Jackie’s lips as she hugged her daughter tight. Sure, all kids left home someday.

But not like this. Not for another universe.

The Doctor took over piloting, steering them back to the parallel world. Jackie held on to Rose tight as they stepped out. “Oh, fat lot of good this is,” Jackie sighed when she saw where they had landed. “Back of beyond. Bloody Norway. I’m gonna have to phone Pete now.”

“I did the best I could,” the Doctor insisted as he stepped out with Donna right behind him.

“Yeah, brilliant.”

Jackie refocused on Rose, tears in her eyes. “God…look at you. You’ve grown up so much.”

Rose hesitated for a long moment before saying, “Is…Is that okay?”

Jackie pulled her into a tight hug, brushing her hair back. “It’s absolutely brilliant,” the older Tyler whispered. “You are brilliant. I am so, so proud of you, sweetheart.”

That was all Rose had dreamed of hearing for years.

“Right, then.” Jackie took a deep breath as she stepped back. “You take care of my daughter, Doctor, do you hear me? No bloody universes are gonna stop me if I ever find out you’ve hurt her.”

“If anyone could manage it, it’s you,” the Doctor said with a weak smile. Rose was quite surprised when he stepped forward, pulling Jackie into a hug that she readily returned. “Thank you for everything.”

“Oh shush, you’ve nothin’ to thank me for.” Jackie patted his back, stepping back. “Go on then. Oh wait, hang on actually.” She pulled out her phone quickly. “Smile, sweetheart.” And she took a
picture of Rose. “For Tony. He’s always beggin’ to see a picture of you.”

That caught Rose off guard. “You…You told him about me.”

“Of course,” Jackie replied as if it was the most obvious thing in the world. “Never shuts up about his hero big sister, defendin’ another universe.”

Oh god. Rose had to struggle not to cry. She threw herself at Jackie for one last hug. “I love you, Mum,” she whispered thickly as Jackie brushed a hand through her hair. “I love you so much.”

“I love you too, sweetheart. So very much.” Jackie pulled back to clasp Rose’s face between her hands. “And I am so proud of you. Don’t ever forget that. Whatever you’re doin’, whatever trouble you’re gettin’ into, I will always be proud of you and I will always love you.”

Rose closed her eyes, bringing her hand up to grasp her mother’s for a moment. She could touch her mother. It felt wonderful.

“Goodbye, Mum.”

Jackie kissed her forehead and stepped back. “Take care of yourself, Rosie. And you Doctor. No regeneratin’, this face is a good one.”

“I’ll do my best,” the Doctor said with a smile, taking Rose’s hand and squeezing tight.

It was nearly impossible for Rose turn away, but she managed, tears slipping down her cheeks as they stepped into the TARDIS, the doors swinging shut behind them.

And the Doctor sent them off.

“How’s your head?” Rose asked Donna quietly. She smiled weakly.

“Been better. I’ve had worse hangovers though.”

Rose laughed a bit at that. “So what now?” She asked, looking between the two. It was Donna who spoke up, timid this time.

“I…I need to go home and check on my family but if it’s okay…I’d like to keep traveling with the two of you. If I’m still welcome.”

“Of course,” Rose said without thinking — and then immediately regretted it. It was the Doctor’s ship again, not hers. She had no say.

“Any friend of Rose’s is a friend of mine,” the Doctor said with a smile. “Let’s get you home for now though. Your family’s pretty worried about you.”

They landed outside Donna’s house, and Donna made them go inside with her. She was almost immediately tackled by her mother and grandfather.

Rose smiled weakly as she watched the reunion. After a moment she leaned, rather heavily, on the Doctor. Her head was spinning and she was starting to feel sick. The adrenaline was dying fast.

“Are you alright, sweetheart?” Wilf asked, seeing how pale Rose had become.

“Yeah,” Rose managed to force out. “Yeah, I’m fine. We should get goin’, though.”

“Maybe you should sit,” Sylvia suggested gently. She wasn’t completely heartless, and the young
woman was clearly sick.

“I’m alright—”

“I’ll take care of her,” the Doctor assured the small family as he wrapped an arm around Rose’s shoulders. Donna went with them, walking them out.

“Three weeks,” she said firmly at the door. They looked out to see rain pouring down.

“Ah,” the Doctor said, peeking outside. “You’ll have quite a bit of this. Atmospheric disturbance. Don’t worry, it’ll pass. Sorry, you were saying?”

“Three weeks. If the two of you aren’t back here in exactly three weeks I’ll hunt you both down myself.”

“She’s not jokin’ either,” Rose said with a small smile, and Donna grinned proudly.

“Go on, get off your feet Blondie.” Donna hugged her quickly. “You look like hell.”

“Always the flatterer.” Rose laughed weakly. “See you soon, then.”

“Three weeks.”

“Three weeks,” Rose promised, and they left. They were soaked within moments, and shivering when they got back in the TARDIS. The Doctor laughed, throwing a few levers and sending them into the vortex.

“Right then, let’s get changed and—”

The words died in his throat when he turned to see Rose staring at him as if he was a ghost.

“Rose?”

She let out a long, shuddering breath. “You’re here,” she breathed. She was trembling now, everything crashing down. “You’re here. You’re here. Oh god you’re here. You’re really here.”

The Doctor darted forward, catching Rose as her knees gave out and she sagged against him, burying her face in his chest. “You’re here,” she whispered over and over. “You’re here. You’re here. You’re here.”

The Doctor lowered them both to the floor, rocking Rose lightly, smoothing her hair back from her face. “I’m here,” he responded to every whisper. “I’m here. I love you. I love you. I’m here.”

Eventually it registered what he was saying and she pulled back to look at him with wide, red eyes. “You…” Her voice cracked a bit. “You love me?”

He smiled weakly. “Of course, Rose. How did you think that sentence was going to end?”

Rose stared at him for another moment — and then she pressed her lips against his in a desperate kiss that he happily returned.

The road to recovery would be long and difficult, there was no doubt about that and neither of them were stupid.

But they were together. The stuff of legends.
And they could handle anything.

Chapter End Notes

So, I'm going to get real and intense and a little sappy here for a moment if you don't mind. If you're not interested, just skip to the last paragraph, where there will be info on the second (final) story in this series.

I started this story almost three years ago, exactly - the idea was first conceived on September 26, 2014, when I was bored at work and requested entertainment. A friend sent me "what do you think Doomsday would have been like if the Doctor had gotten trapped in Pete's World?" And the idea spiraled from there. I posted the very first chapter on Tumblr on September 28. This story has caused me a LOT of grief and some pretty intense mental problems.

But during the good times, it was FUN. It was so much fun to plan this story, to think about Rose's reactions, to talk for hours with the friend who originally sparked the idea. It was fun to hear from the people who were kind enough to review, to hear their reactions to certain parts or even just to get incoherent screaming. I hate to say that I've largely fallen out of my DW obsession since writing this story (thanks Moffat; although I'll be giving Chibnall and Jodie a chance because I can't say no to a female Doctor), but looking back over this story as I've been posting has reminded me how much fun it's been. That's why I continued posting it on AO3 after a year-long hiatus (anyone remember that?). Because at least at one time, this story was fun for me. Even if it didn't end well (mentally; obviously the story itself ended well), and even if I do still have moments of "why do I even bother this is stupid," I'm glad I pushed through and kept posting it here to the end.

So... thank you. Thank you to those of you have read, and left kudos, and good god thank you to those who have reviewed. I know I don't always respond, and I hate that (there's a myriad of reasons I could get into about why I don't but the tl;dr is no time + crippling anxiety + assorted mental health issues), but I hope you know I appreciate everyone who's taken the time to leave even a few kind words on this silly story. And I swear to god I'm going to try and reply to every single person who reviews this chapter. I'll do my best.

ANYWAYS. I'm going to start posting the second story, A Journey Through Time, on Sunday. So, ya know, keep an eye out. And thank you <3 -Sam

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