I See From My House on the Side of the Road
by saavik13

Summary

Relationships are complicated things for anyone. For the last Time Lord they are particularly dense. For one pink and yellow companion, they are even more so. When circumstances give them only one realistic way forward, the Doctor and Rose have to navigate what it means to be more than bystanders in each other lives.

Notes

The House by the Side of the Road
by Sam Walter Foss (1858-1911)

There are hermit souls that live withdrawn
In the peace of their self-content;
There are souls, like stars, that dwell apart,
In a fellowless firmament;
There are pioneer souls that blaze their paths
Where highways never ran;-
But let me live by the side of the road
And be a friend to man.

Let me live in a house by the side of the road,
Where the race of men go by-
The men who are good and the men who are bad,
As good and as bad as I.
I would not sit in the scorners seat,
Or hurl the cynics ban;-
Let me live in a house by the side of the road
And be a friend to man.

I see from my house
by the side of the road,
By the side of the highway of life,
The men who press with the ardor of hope,
The men who are faint with the strife.
But I turn not away from their smiles nor their tears-
Both parts of an infinite plan;-
Let me live in my house by the side of the road
And be a friend to man.

I know there are brook-gladdened
meadows ahead
And mountains of wearisome height;
That the road passes on through the long afternoon
And stretches away to the night.
But still I rejoice when the travelers rejoice,
And weep with the strangers that moan,
Nor live in my house by the side of the road
Like a man who dwells alone.

Let me live in my
house by the side of the road
Where the race of men go by-
They are good, they are bad, they are weak, they are strong,
Wise, foolish- so am I.
Then why should I sit in the scorners seat
Or hurl the cynics ban?-
Let me live in my house by the side of the road
And be a friend to man.
Chapter 1

“So what exactly are your intentions with my daughter?” Jackie Tyler crossed her arms and glared at the Doctor and he fidgeted in response. Rose was settling some of her affairs that had been left hanging by her accidental year away, and the least the Doctor could do was to give her a chance to apologize to those affected by her absence after his mistake. Of course, he hadn’t intended to do that, but Rose had glared at him, something she obviously inherited from her mother, and … he’d caved.

He was getting bad about that – caving to the whims of his companion. It had to be a form of delayed regeneration sickness.

“It’s just it’s lonely.” He responded more to himself than to Jackie but once the words were out he couldn’t take them back and as he looked up at the woman he saw some hint of understanding in her eyes. She deserved his honesty at least. He always tried to stay away from the families of companions, to keep things simple, but nothing about Rose or this regeneration was simple. Sometimes it was hard to even form words, to reach out to anyone in a meaningful way, and when he could piece a sentience together he could not bring himself to lie, not to Rose and not to this woman whose pain he could see.

He didn’t want to have this conversation with Jackie. He didn’t want to have this conversation at all. Every molecule in his body was screaming at him to run, run, run… but the woman before him – he could see in her eyes the pain of loss, the pain of having your world ripped apart at the seams. Even a single loss could do that to a person; he’d seen it so many times. How to explain what he’d gone through to someone that hadn’t at least had that experience was incomprehensible. Rose, no matter how she tried, couldn’t really grasp it. Jackie, he sensed, might at least be able to understand the edges of it; and while he did not want to have this conversation, part of him knew he needed to have it. For Rose. For himself. And because not having it would make the woman with the sad eyes even sadder and she’d done nothing to deserve that.

He sat down on the worn sofa and stared at his hands. “I was married once.” He began, his voice only slightly less firm than usual. “Had a daughter and granddaughter. Everyone’s gone now.” He glanced up to find Jackie perched on the chair, an unsure expression on her face as her sympathy warred with her concern for her daughter. “I’ve been travelin since I was barely more than a boy, never stopin, always on the move. I’ve never had a proper home ‘cept the TARDIS. And I love it – I do. Never been able to sit still have I. But, after long enough, you’ve seen pretty much all there is to see, and the only thing that breaks up the monotony is to show it to someone who hasn’t.”

“So Rose isn’t your first…”

“Companion.” The Doctor offered with a weak smile. “Haven’t even told her all this yet, Jackie. She hasn’t asked many questions and I’m … I’m not really ready to talk about everything that’s happened. There was a war…” He trialed off and grimaced. “I’m the last of my kind, Jackie Tyler. All alone in the universe, and sometimes it’s almost enough to drive me out my mind. It’s so quiet without the others – so empty and I never really noticed them until suddenly they were all gone.” The Doctor rubbed his neck and sighed. “My people are telepathic. It’s mostly dormant unless I’m attacked but I could always feel them hoverin. Even before the war I liked to have others in the TARDIS, like a background hum, and now… now it’s like I can’t breath for all the quiet.”

“You read her thoughts all the time!” Jackie exclaimed and he quickly shook his head.

“No, no. I’d never do that without her permission. That’s like raping someone, Jackie, only worse. No, it’s like…” He paused to think of an explanation. “It’s like holding a cup of tea and smelling it.
You get some comfort from just that without having to drink it. Just feeling another mind near by is… better. S’not so lonely.”

“So you just fly around with these companions and sniff their minds?” She asked, looking rather disgusted.

“Look, you asked. Is it really so strange to just want company? Do you like eating all your meals alone? Going to the cinema by yourself? Waking up and going to bed and never saying a word to anybody?”

Jackie grimaced. “No. I…don’t think anyone does.”

“My point.” He crossed his arms and glared back. “So my intentions, as you asked, are to show her the universe. To see life and people through her eyes, to give her joy and laughter and adventure and to live for just a little while like I’m not some broken man just waiting to die.”

Jackie looked like she wasn’t sure she believed him. “Rose says you two are just friends. That you haven’t even tried anything with her. Is that because you honestly aren’t interested in that sort of thing, or because you think she’s like some kind of pet, like a walking cup of tea?”

“Rose is not my pet – I’ll admit, when I was young and foolish I treated a companion or two with less respect than they deserved.” Oh he was not going to go down that road, not now. If the war had taught him anything it was that life was precious no matter what shape it took. Any of the lingering superiority complex of his people that he’d had left had burned away with them. “But Rose is my friend and even if I don’t always show it in ways you humans notice, I do appreciate her, and think very highly of her. I don’t take idiots on the TARDIS. I left Rickey behind didn’t I?”

“Mickey.” Jackie corrected with an eye roll. “My daughter could make something of her life. She doesn’t have to stay here and work in a shop and have babies until her brain goes numb. She’s got potential. I don’t want you going and messing up her life any more than it’s already been with that Jimmy Stone.”

“I have no intentions of keeping her from her dreams, Jackie. Rose is brilliant and so… so alive.” He smiled at that. “So very alive, Jackie. She’s like a bright light shining in all the dullness, glittern for anyone wise enough to see it. I’d never try and dampen that, in fact I want to encourage it. There’s no telling what she can do if she puts her mind to it.”

“That’s the problem, she doesn’t have anything here to put her mind to.” Jackie sighed, defeated. “I haven’t seen her this focused since she was a little girl workin’ on her tumbling. After she had to quit she’s never been the same. You bring that light back into her eyes, and for that reason only I’m not running you off.” She said the last part with a glare.

“Why did she quit?” The Doctor asked, suddenly curious.

Jackie grimaced. “We don’t have a lot of money. There was a program down at the community center, with a fancy coach retired from the national team. Kids from all over this part of London did try outs for it. Rose was one of the three dozen they took in. And she was good, Doctor. She won all kinds of metals at first. And she was fearless, all that zipping around on the bars and cartwheels on the beam, the higher and faster she went the bigger her smile.” Jackie got up and walked to the shelf and pulled down an album. She cradled it to her chest before handing it over.

“She’s the brown haired girl in the purple just there.” She pointed to a little girl grinning widely from a balance beam while an older man held an arm out to steady her – only Rose didn’t seem to need it. “It was so much work for her. Everyday after school, every weekend. I couldn’t go to most of it, I
had to work. She was too little to be doing it all by herself but it made her so happy and I trusted Coach Richards.” Jackie turned the page in the album and there was another photo of an older Rose with a much younger man spotting her on the uneven bars. “He died when she was ten and the program found a new volunteer coach.” Jackie glared down at the photo. “Stephan never smiled at them, always yelled. Most of the kids dropped out. But Rose, she wanted to be in the Olympics. She tried harder, practiced more, even started going before school as well as after. Stephan would yell and she’d just get up and try again.”

The Doctor turned the page and for an instant one of his hearts malfunctioned. There was a photo of Rose bandaged in a hospital bed, a sour look on her face and a cast covering most of her left leg. “She fell.” Jackie touched the picture and shook her head. “Stephan kept pushing and pushing and pushing her and she wasn’t ready for the new move on the vault. She went up and… and they said she came down on top of it. Broke her leg and her wrist. They didn’t know if she’d ever wake up she hit her head so hard.” Jackie wiped several tears from her eyes. “When she regained consciousness the first thing she asked was how long until she could go back. It broke my heart to tell her she couldn’t.”

“Were the injuries that serious?” The Doctor asked, mentally going over the medical scan he’d done when she’d first come on board.

“The doctors said she’d damaged the growth plate in her wrist. They didn’t know if it would heal right at first but that wasn’t the real reason.” Jackie sniffed. “That damn Stephan had been stealing money from the program. Instead of buying the proper mats he’d cut corners and there was four inches less padding under the vault than regulations. After the accident when the investigators checked out the facility they found all kinds of safety violations. They shut down the entire program and we didn’t have the money to pay for private coaches. Rose was good, but she wasn’t old enough yet for the big competitions and nobody wanted to take on a poor girl with two bad breaks and a head injury for free.”

The Doctor flipped through the rest of the album, watched Rose grow older in the photos. None of them had a smile like the first one, the smile he recognized, the one that said “happy Rose – excited Rose – amazing Rose”. The more she aged the more resigned she looked and by the time he reached the blank pages at the end he’d seen enough.

“I can’t promise she’ll never get hurt.” He said it softly, one hand firmly placed on top of the album. “You saw the kind of work I do, what this life is like. We go places and fix things no one else can. But I can promise you I will do what I can to protect her. I would lay down my life for a companion, Jackie. It’s my duty to protect them and while I have failed in that duty more than once it was not because I cut corners for a profit. Rose’s life is more important than mine.”

Jackie did not look happy. “You are taking my only baby out there where I can’t protect her. I’ll never be alright with that.”

“I know.” The Doctor nodded. “And I’m a selfish ass for doing it. But I need her Jackie, I can’t do this alone anymore. Rose doesn’t just keep me company, she saves the world. Without her Earth would be dead a dozen times over and we’ve only been traveling together for a few months our time. Your daughter is amazing, Jackie Tyler, and she’s wasted on a shop.”

“On that we agree.” Jackie took the album back and hugged it tightly. “And don’t you forget it.”

Later, when Rose was done doing whatever it is that a human does when they apologize to random people, and they were loading a few bags of her things into the TARDIS, Jackie pulled him aside again.
“You didn’t answer my other question. Are you not sleeping with her because she’s human or because you don’t like sex? Or wait, are you into blokes?” Jackie asked, eyes darting around to make sure Rose couldn’t overhear them.

The Doctor sighed. “I’m not human, Jackie. My people don’t… we can’t do things like a human. We don’t have the same drives or desires. And even if I did want to mate with Rose, which I don’t, I wouldn’t. Our species aren’t easily compatible in that way.”

“Parts don’t fit?” Jackie looked down at his trousers with a raised eyebrow.

“Tab a into slot b is a fairly common configuration.” The Doctor sniffed. “The mechanical bits aren’t the issue. I’m a Time Lord. What you are suggesting is a very bad idea. We didn’t mate in the physical way, not for millennia, and when we did bother to get close to someone it was a mental connection. I could never risk that kind of thing with a human, it would damage their brains after a fairly short time. Besides, I have no interest in Rose like that.

She snorted. “Men only take young girls as ‘companions’ for one reason, Doctor. Either you are fooling me or fooling yourself.” Jackie nodded in Rose’s direction where she was shuffling the last bag into the TARDIS. “She thinks you aren’t interested because she’s not good enough for you. I can see it in her eyes. She’s head over heels for your daft self and while you might be above having a sex drive she isn’t. How’s that going to work for ya both?

The Doctor frowned. “Rose and I have an understanding. I don’t do domestic.”

“Sex isn’t domestic,” Jackie countered, “it’s primal. And my Rose is under the delusion that she’s not good enough to warm your bed. While I’d much rather you two weren’t involved, especially if you say it’s dangerous, I’m not about to let her go on thinking it’s because you’re better than her, than us. I don’t care what kind of Lord you are, my Rose is better than you deserve. Understand?”

The Doctor nodded. “I do. I don’t want her to ever think something like that Jackie.”

“Than you’d better talk to her. Tell her the real reason you two can’t have that kind of relationship.” Jackie’s expression lightened. “And you need to talk to someone about what’s happened to you. You can’t keep going as if it isn’t pulling you apart at the seams, any fool can see it is. Loss, it eats you at. You can’t close yourself off from everyone and you can’t make Rose your only link to life, Doctor. It’s not fair for her. She’s got her own life to live. Neither of us can use her to live ours. Pete’s death broke me, I admit, but I learned early on that I couldn’t put the weight of it on her. We have to carry our own dead, Doctor. She’ll have her own to carry soon enough.
Chapter 2

The Doctor was uncharacteristically silent after he’d hit the dematerialization switch and Rose watched him with trepidation. He wasn’t a great talker, until you got him going on some alien tech topic or a point of obscure cultural reference and then usually only in fits and bursts as if he was breaking in muscles that had atrophied, but he hadn’t said a single word since she’d hugged her mother goodbye and Rose could recognize a brooding sulk coming on if ever there was one. They hadn’t been together long but any idiot could see he was in pain, terrible pain, and Rose wanted nothing more than to ease some of it. Usually a perky question or a silly comment would chase away some of the haunted look in his eyes but when he went totally silent Rose knew there was nothing she could do but hover on the sidelines and wait. Sometimes he’d go off on his own for hours or days, into the bottom of the ship, and sometimes he’d quietly ask her if she wanted a cuppa and they’d sit in the kitchen and just not be alone for a while. Once she’d woken up to find him slumped against her bedroom wall, head in hands, eyes moist. She’d reached out a hand and he’d taken it like a desperate man and they’d spent the rest of the night like that.

Sometimes Rose wished she had a little more experience of the world before she’d met him. Maybe then she’d know how to help the damaged genius. She’d spent most of her visit home picking up books on PTSD and talking to the bloke that ran the veterans group down by the pub. Sure, she’d told the Doctor she was saying apologies and cleaning up her paperwork from her missing year, but in truth she didn’t care if her friends were mad at her – she’d not really had many good ones anyway – and her mum had done all the paperwork bits. She’d just needed time to see if there was anything more she could do for her Doctor.

Listening to some of the others at the support group had been a wake up call. At least she hadn’t been accidently flung across a room or strangled in the middle of the night. Love and support they said. Company when needed, space when required. Well she could give him all that, the problem was she wasn’t sure he was in the right head space to accept the first two.

Finally after an age he turned away from the rotor and looked her. His eyes weren’t the dark haunted ones she knew accompanied memories of the Time War, but rather a cool calculating look she typically saw directed at invading aliens.

“Your mother said something and I think it’s best we clear up any misconceptions.” He said stiffly. “I’m fairly gruff, as I’m sure you’ve noticed, and I’m not going to apologize for it.”

“I don’t think you are *that* gruff.” Rose whispered. “Just a little brisk.”

He ignored her. “I don’t take just anybody in the TARDIS, Rose. I only take the best and the brightest. If things aren’t…how…how you’d expect them to be,” He trailed off to rub the back of his neck. “Look, I’m not human.”

Rose grimaced. “Ga, what did my mum say?”

“She questioned my intentions, and then questioned why I didn’t have any.” The Doctor heaved a sigh and sat down on the grating in front of the seat. “I’m rubbish at this. Never had to explain this to any other companions.”

Rose’s heart clenched. She’d known there had to have been others but he never talked about them. “Look, my mum is a bit overprotective, ya? Don’t worry about it.”

“She said you thought I wasn’t interested because you were human.” The Doctor looked up sadly.
“Rose, I don’t care what species you are. But Time Lords don’t… we just don’t. It’s not that I think you are somehow not worthy. I don’t ever want you to think that.”

Rose quirked an eyebrow. “Are we talking about sex, Doctor?”

His ears turned red. “For the most part.”

“My mum thought you weren’t having sex with me because you thought I was a stupid ape?”

“I probably should stop saying that. It sounds much worse out loud than in my head.” He rubbed the back of his neck. “And she said you thought that.”

Rose laughed. “Ga, I figured you just weren’t interested. You aren’t even human, for all I know we don’t have the right bits.”

“Why is it humans always jump to that being the reason for species incompatibility? Lesbians get along just fine without penises and that’s just the simplest example.” He huffed. “It’s not equipment that’s the problem, Rose. Dangly bits that go into moist bits is a fairly standard configuration for most humanoid life forms. It really is more complicated than that. My species just doesn’t have sex as you’d understand. We didn’t even procreate that way and we certainly don’t engage in sexual intercourse for fun. Not every species does for Rassilon’s sake!”

Rose smiled softly “You don’t have to give me all the details Doctor. We are friends, right? I mean sure, I’d be daft if I didn’t find you attractive, but I don’t have to shag every person I find attractive. Nothing would ever get done.” She smirked. “Besides, a good friend is much harder to find. I wasn’t pining away over here from lack of you trying to get in my pants. Mum’s got a pretty myopic view of what’s possible between men and women that’s all. She jumped to a conclusion.”

“Myopic. My vocabulary rubbing off on you?”

Rose snorted. “I’m not an idiot. I know lots of words I don’t use often. Aren’t too many people on the estate talk posh, and if I start rattling off big words I get funny looks. It’s nice for once not to have to pretend to be dumb.”

The Doctor smiled softly. “Rose you never have to pretend to be less around me. That at least I can give you.”

Rose shook her head in amusement. “So, since we are on the topic – if you Time Lords don’t procreate with the bits, why you got them?”

He groaned. “Really? That’s your question?”

“Well, you are always reminding me how you aren’t human. But other than two hearts, living for ages, and your world spinning, time sensing, big word usingness everything else looks and sounds pretty human.” Rose shrugged. “Can you blame me for being curious?”

“I suppose you knowing something about my biology could come in handy. If I’m injured or unconscious you should have at least a first aid knowledge.” He stared off for a second before continuing. “Don’t give me aspirin. Deathly allergic, for starters. And don’t ever let someone do surgery. More damage than help I promise you.” He started down the corridor. “I’ve a book around here someplace…and, I should probably warn you about regeneration…”
Giving Rose a tome on basic Gallifreyan biology did turn out to be useful. Within the last forty-eight hours he’d been stabbed, hit with a toxin, and electrocuted. The trip to the medbay was a blur of pain and if it hadn’t been for her frantic pleading for him to stay with her he’d probably have given into the pull of regeneration. But it was too soon to do so, his energies not built back up from the last time, and they were too far from the TARDIS when it started for any energy transference from the ship. By the time they’d gotten back inside and Rose was dragging his limp body towards the medbay he’d been too low on blood and incoherent in thought to start anything. Protocol should have meant the TARDIS jump starting his regeneration for him, but evidently the old girl had more confidence in Rose’s crash course on medbay equipment than he did. That or she knew how badly he fared during rushed regenerations and didn’t want to have to deal with a temporarily insane Doctor.

And apparently Rose had studied quite a lot more than the simple book he’d given her if he could believe what the monitors were telling him. She’d managed to get him hooked up to the blood replenisher, sealed his wound and put the regenerative patch on it that would stimulate his own cells to fix it at five times their already vastly superior to human rates, and she’d jump started his left heart that the electricity had compromised. His remarkable human was slumped still in her blood spattered clothes on the small med-bed next to him, one hand resting over his hearts as if she had to feel them beating for herself. She’d changed him out of his ripped and mangled clothing and into a hospital smock, all the various small cuts on his body showing the orange of disinfectant over their healed lines. Another few hours and there’d be no outward trace of his brush with death.

Except in her eyes he wagered. That would take much much longer to go away.

Rose woke with a start as he tried to remove the fluid IV she’d placed in him and she slapped his hand away. “Oi, that took me three tries to get set don’t you go and just rip it out. You aren’t healed yet, even with that super biology.” Rose growled at him. “And you are welcome.”

“Well, you were right, I should know some basic first aid. But that thirty-minute crash course you gave me was hardly enough. So, I ah… asked the TARDIS if there was a training video or something. And the next day I was looking for the kitchen because she moved it and I walked into some kind of hollodeck or something and it queued up med simulations.” Rose shrugged. “I’ve been spending most of my down time there for the last few days just in case. Apparently it was not wasted time.”

“Apparently not.” The Doctor laid back reluctantly and gestured towards the cabinet on the far wall. “There’s a purple bottle in there with a bright green label. Can you fetch it?”

Rose jumped up and ran to the cabinet. It took her a moment to find the right one and she sprinted back. He smiled at her. “Draw out three ccs and put them into the IV line. Give it five minutes and my blood count will back to normal. It speeds up the replenisher.” He paused to watch her do as he asked before explaining. “It only works on me.” He offered softly. “So if there’s someone else in here we are treating it’s useless. Keyed to my species.”

Rose nodded as she pressed the syringe into the line. “Right. Probably why it wasn’t in the videos. Of course I didn’t get past triage care anyway.”

“Battlefield nurse in the making.” He cringed as he said it but she smiled at him anyway. “I’ll be fine
Rose. Why don’t you go get cleaned up?”

She seemed reluctant to leave him but with a reassuring smile and another shooing motion he finally convinced her to leave long enough to change. She stopped at the door to glance back, just to be sure, and he gave her another little wave.

He felt like hell.

As soon as she was gone he took out the IV and climbed slowly to his feet. While his body may have healed from the outside and his blood volume was now back up, there was still extensive internal damage from the electricity and it would be some time before things were fully returned to normal. Every joint ached. His left glutinous muscle was spasming in rather awkward and weird ways. There was a very decidedly not-good murmur in one of his hearts and if he didn’t concentrate the world slide slightly to the right and out of focus.

He managed to limp his way into the console room and get them safely parked in the Vortex before he staggered back to his room. It was nice and dark there, the TARDIS lowering the lights and temperature from her normal human friendly levels to the sick-Time-Lord ones she so rarely had a reason for. He hated this part of recovery, hated being unable to function like normal. He needed a healing trance but he couldn’t just leave Rose alone…

He’d managed to crawl into his bed and was just contemplating whether or not he could see straight enough to write her a note when his door creaked slightly and a wet blond head poked in.

“You need that trance thing I read about don’t you?” She asked, softly, tip toeing into the room and shutting the door behind her so the light from the corridor wouldn’t aggravate his condition. “Book made it sound like a human migraine when you delay it.”

“Light hurts.” He admitted and grimaced at the too loud sound of his own voice. “Need quiet and dark and cool…”

She nodded and set down a bowl and cloth he’d just noticed her carrying on the nightstand. “Go ahead. I’ve got you Doctor.” She smiled softly and wet the cloth before ringing it out. “Might help the burning a bit ya?”

She placed the wet cloth on his forehead and it felt fantastic. He sighed as the cool dampness beat back a small bit of his discomfort. “Don’t want to leave you alone.” He murmured, reaching for her hand.

“You put us in the Vortex. We’re safe as can be. You need to rest.” She advised gently, her fingers combing through his short cropped hair ever so softly. “I’ve got a jacket and a book and I’ll keep watch.”

He knew he should tell her that he didn’t need her – that it wasn’t proper for a woman to sit at his bedside during a trance… at least one that wasn’t a healer or wasn’t a member of his household. People would talk! But then who was there left to talk? No one left who even knew what was proper or not. What was done or not. And it’s not like he’d cared that much when they were around, not enough to bother with their silly rules most of the time anyway. But he didn’t like the idea of Rose compromising herself for him and…

Oh. He’d said that out loud. Rose’s eyes were wide and her mouth parted at that revelation but she firmed her expression quick enough and rewet the cloth. “Book said you’d run a fever during a trance and it was best to keep your head cool. So that is exactly what I intend to do, Doctor. Seeing
as I’m not exactly a virtuous maiden anyway what’s one more compromising position, ya?” She smiled at him and took his hand in her small one again. “Now, do whatever it is your biology does. I’ll be here when you wake up.”
Watching the Doctor sleep was a disturbing experience, Rose Tyler admitted to herself silently, as she rung out the cloth once more and took the bowl into the ensuite to refresh the water. He was utterly still on the bed once he’d started the trance and if she’d not read the chapter in the book he’d given her she’d have thought he was dying. He was running such a high fever she’d worry about brain damage if he’d been human and that alone was concerning given his typically lower body temp. But the book said that was perfectly normal, and not at all harmful during the trance, but that even though he appeared to be asleep he was very much aware if trapped inside his own body and he could feel everything that was happening. The fever was highly unpleasant if left untreated and the general recommendation had been cold damp cloths to offer some respite.

Ten hours in Rose was too tired to care anymore about what was considered ‘proper’. It was only taking about 20 minutes for the heat of the fever to dry out her cloths and she’d set her phone for 17 minutes intervals. In between rewetting the cloth she curled up on the far side of the bed and tried to cat nap. The room was frigid and even in her coat her fingers were icy from the tepid water. She had to keep them tucked into her arm pits as she tried to doze. Fairly soon it all resolved into a rather crushing cycle of doze, wet cloth, doze, wet cloth, doze, change water and wet cloth, doze, grab a cup of tea and wet cloth, doze, wet cloth, doze, wet cloth…

Eventually his fever seemed to lessen and it was 30 minutes than 40 before the cloth needed changed. She was utterly exhausted by the time it finally broke, nearly 24 hours after he’d first started the trance. Both hearts were beating normally again, for which she thanked every deity on every planet they’d ever stepped foot on, and given the subtle changes to his facial expressions he’d drifted into a normal sleep instead of the healing trance. When he turned onto his side and sought out the warmth from where she’d been lying on the edge of the bed she didn’t question her motives at all when she gratefully laid back down and pulled the thick blanket over them both.

At some point he must have woken up because when Rose finally blinked her tired eyes open some time latter she found she was properly tucked into the bed instead of lying on top of the covers on the very edge. Her jeans were missing too, a fact she blushed about but didn’t think meant anything it would normally. He’d probably only been making her comfortable. His side of the bed was empty, the bowl and cloth she’d used tending him all cleaned up. She debated the merits of getting out of his bed and going back to her own, but the temptation to just roll over and go back to sleep was too great.

She’d done just that, at least the roll over part, when the door to the bedroom creaked open and the Doctor’s head poked in. He smiled at her tiredly when he saw her awake and edged into the room. “Sorry – I didn’t mean to wake you.” He whispered. To her surprise he was wearing a rather uninspired set of grey pajamas. “I just had to check to make sure the TARDIS wasn’t having any problems in holding our position.” He lifted the covers and climbed into the bed without seeming at all concerned about sharing it. “You must be exhausted. You didn’t need to tend me the entire time.”

He smiled at her with that guilty smile of his that said he clearly didn’t think he was worth the effort. Rose reached towards him with one hand, patting the bed a few times until she found his hand. “S’ all right Doctor. You needed a little looking after. Only fair considering how often you end up nursing me.” Rose yawned and pushed her face sleepily into the pillow. “But I don’t think I’m moving for a while.”

He chuckled. “We both need a rest I think. I may be out of the trance but I’m still remarkably exhausted.”
“Nearly dying does take it out of a person.” Rose agreed. “Sleep?” She asked hopefully. He shifted further down the bed and the meager light from the glowing rundle on the wall blinked out.

“Fantastic idea.”

Without a time sense Rose had no idea how long they slept but it was at least several hours. When they both did get up they didn’t make any comment about the fact that they’d slept next to one another. In fact, given the way he was acting, the Doctor didn’t seem to think anything of it at all. It wasn’t as if he was ignoring it, or pretending it didn’t happen, it was as if it was such a non-thing it didn’t even warrant comment.

It was times like this Rose really saw the alien in him.

Of course it wasn’t the first time she’d slept next to him, come to think of it. It had happened many times on planets where accommodations weren’t exactly the Hilton. And a few jail cells. At least one closet. But normally it was because there weren’t other options. He never wore anything other than his usual daily outfit and she never did more than toe off her sneakers. And normally she slept and he kept a weary sort of watch while she used his shoulder as a pillow.

It was only because it was his bed that she was having issues, she told herself. She knew the lines, knew he didn’t do… stuff.

The book hadn’t included much on reproduction, nothing but a basic overview of their Looms. It was kinda sad in a way that his people had mechanized and standardized infancy so much. It rather explained a lot actually, when you thought about it. No mother child bonding or such since they popped out of the Looms around age 7. Very efficient if unemotional. Rose could definitely see the appeal of not actually having to carry a child though. It had always seemed a messy and rather distressing thing to her, no idea at all why anyone would want to do it in fact. Rather like having a parasite grow in you….

People were always telling her she’d change her mind about that but Rose was firm on how not-interested she was in the entire childbirth experience. Kids were all well and good, but babies were little shit factories and the more she thought about it the better the idea of donating an egg and getting a 7-year-old sounded. Maybe not that great for the child, but the benefits from the parenting side of things did sound very appealing.

So when he’d said his people didn’t do sex like humans, maybe what he meant was they didn’t at all. At least not anymore. Rose knew he looked fairly close to a human male even down there, but just cause he had one didn’t mean it worked… What if it was like…like an appendix or wisdom teeth? Just a useless holdover? The biology book had diagrams and while they showed a phallus like bit there wasn’t any other dangly bobs so…

Rose shook her head. None of it mattered. He’d explained, gently, that it just wasn’t an option and she’d told him that was perfectly fine. Because it was. Traveling with him was amazing. If she had to deal with some sexual frustration that was fine. Truly.

Not for the first time Rose wished she’d had the courage to buy a toy or two, just something to help keep the edge off. But with her job gone she was running low on funds and while out traveling with the Doctor he bought her things all the time but she was not about to ask for that. And back home he usually forgot that she didn’t have money and it was rather embarrassing to bring it up… although the next time they went for chips he’d have to cough up the payment because she had exactly four pounds left in her account and no hope of more until she got a job – which was not an option when traveling.
So it was fingers or nothing and maybe if she angled the shower head….

-BREAK-

The Doctor paused in the hallway, his nose tingling. There was something coming from Rose’s room… his brain finally identified the mix of hormones and pheromones and he turned red. Oh. Yes, that… that was probably something she needed…

Not as if she was the first companion to…do…that.

He’d gotten so used to traveling with companions from earlier in the time period, when there was a little more restraint on that angle… not that Rose’s time was all that uninhibited when compared to later humans, but she was post birth control era and the sexual liberation and … she’d been in relationships. She was probably used to having sexual intercourse regularly… Most of the Earth women he’d taken as companions hadn’t…. well, they weren’t familiar with that sort of thing yet. Rose was much more flirty, more aware, and that made it easier to take her certain places and times, places and times he’d never have dreamed of taking a girl from say 1905 for example. But it also meant that he should probably do something about her needs.

It was always easier with the males. They were usually perfectly happy after finding the media room and being left alone. The Doctor sighed.

A few hours later a rather flustered looking and not relaxed Rose met him in the kitchen for tea and he could tell that whatever she’d been doing it had not accomplished anything productive. She’d washed off the scent of her activities as best she could but he could still smell it and he wished there was something more he could do for his poor little ape.

“I was wondering…” his voice was a little odd to his own ears and he knew he was blushing a bit. “I was thinking maybe you’d like to… get a few things?”

“Shopping?” She asked with a raised eyebrow. “There’s plenty of clothes in the wardrobe and I know you aren’t that keen on going somewhere just to shop. We out of milk?”

“Rose,” he wasn’t sure how to say this without making her embarrassed. Human females were usually embarrassed about this kind of thing, in his experience, and after their rather awkward conversation after her visit to her mum’s he was even more reluctant to bring it up. “It’s just… well, you seem a little… frustrated. I thought, maybe, you’d like… something that could assist with that.”

He looked back down into his tea.

“Frustrated?” Rose tilted her head in confusion until her eyes went large. “Oh my God. You know!”

“I couldn’t help it!” He exclaimed and grimaced at her. “I was walking down the corridor and… and it was rather oblivious with the hormones flying all over the place… but you seem to not have gotten anywhere…”

Rose was bright red. “I won’t do it again on the TARDIS.” She apologized, her expression mortified. “I’m soooo sorry I…”

“No,” he rubbed his neck and tried not to look too sheepish. “It’s natural for you humans and it’s better for you if you can, releases all kinds of beneficial neural chemicals. I just thought maybe you’d… appreciate a stop at a store for that kind of thing?”

Rose took a deep breath. “Are you offering to take me to a sex toy shop, Doctor?”
“Maybe?” He offered with an awkward grin.

Rose looked at him with a funny expression on her face before she burst out laughing. “Oh God, I can’t believe we are having this conversation.” She giggled into her hand and her eyes held genuine mirth. “Take all your companions to sex shops, Doctor?”

“You’d be the first.” He admitted, very glad that she’d settled on humor as the reaction to all of it. “But my understanding is that there are a lot of options out there, probably aim for 31st century Earth…”

Rose blushed red but kept her smile. “Thank you Doctor but I’m not sure I can accept. It’s, well it’s rather intimate buying someone else a toy and, well, it has connotations to it I’m sure you don’t mean.” She wasn’t quite looking him in the eye.

“What connotations?” He asked gently, trying to figure out what she was thinking.

“Well,” Rose took a sip of her tea to gain time to compose a response. “Normally, when a man buys a woman something like that it’s because he wants her to think about him when she’s using it. And it would be very difficult not to.” She admitted the last part with her nose buried in her tea cup.

The Doctor froze at the idea of Rose, thinking about him, and… Oh that was rather a primally appealing thought. Which ought to bother him. He hadn’t lied when he said that it was too risky for them to ever consider an intimate relationship, and impossible to have one that looked like a human was used to. Still he was male, and even his species rather enjoyed the idea of a female being interested; on an evolutionary base level it was rather satisfying to think his companion would want to use him as the basis for a sexual fantasy.

He coughed. “I have to confess I’m not an expert on all the details of human sexuality beyond the biology.”

Rose smiled, her tongue poking through her teeth just slightly. “You, not an expert in something?” She shook her head. “The universe just ended.”

“Haha.” He grinned back at her before turning serious again. “Rose, while I know there’s nothing like that between us, that doesn’t mean I want you to suffer. You haven’t had anyone to pay that kind of attention to you since Adam.”

“I did not sleep with Adam.” Rose denied with a glare. “I hadn’t been broken up with Mickey that long yet – it wouldn’t have been right. Besides he was an idiot. Didn’t last past the first hour of vetting.”

That earned a bark of laughter from him. “Vetting?”

Rose smirked. “What? You think a girl doesn’t have criteria for potential blokes to warm her bed?”

It was rather fun having such an open conversation about aspects of human culture he still didn’t fully understand and he leaned forward. “Is that a formal term or something you made up?”

Rose raised an eyebrow. “Are you asking me to fill you in on missing bits of information on human sexuality?”

“From your era.” The Doctor admitted. “It might explain a great deal of things I don’t understand about you apes. Later centuries are much more open and flexible about things than you lot, all pre-alien and Earthbound. But you’re far enough out not to get offended. I hope.” He muttered the last part.
Rose looked slightly uncomfortable but finally shrugged. “I guess it’s rather like girl talk, this, mates comparing notes down at the pub.” She sipped her tea and shrugged. “Well, what do you want to know?”

He considered for a moment. “You had a pretty strong negative reaction to my suggestion. Is it just because of the connotation?”

Rose bit her lip before answering. “Well, to be honest I’d thought about getting something but anything worth having is expensive and I don’t have the money back home. We pretty much tapped out my bank account last visit.” She looked down as she admitted it. “And I wasn’t going to ask you to fund that.” She glanced up and smiled. “Besides, the handful of things I’ve used were bloody useless anyway.”

“Why?” He couldn’t help but ask and she blushed.

“I have a really hard time – you know – achieving the desired result?” She said it almost like a question, not meeting his eyes. “It’s almost impossible actually even when I’m really in the moment, and even harder by myself. There’s no surprise you know? I know what’s going to happen and it kind of ruins it. My first boyfriend used to say I was frigid or something but…”

The Doctor reached a hand across the table and took hers. She was trembling slightly. “Rose, you don’t have to explain to me. I was just curious and I’m certainly not one to judge.” He rubbed the back of her hand gently. “I’ve never understood how humans managed it solo anyway.”

Rose looked up at him, eyes wide. “You mean you don’t…at all?”

The Doctor shrugged. “My people are telepathic… were telepathic.” He grimaced and she squeezed his hand. “We were never big on physical intimacy anyway and it’s literally impossible to have telepathic sex with yourself. Even if I wanted to try for a physical only release I couldn’t. Any physical response is tied directly to the mental stimulation and frankly not all that interesting in comparison. I’m pretty sure most of us tried something physical at least once, like a form of teenage rebellion but it’s just… boring.” He finished with a shrug.

Rose blinked at him. “Boring? Blimey.” She giggled. “So that big old Time Lord brain really does rule the day.”

“Pretty much.” He agreed with a small smile. “And telepathic joining isn’t done nearly as lightly as a physical union. There’s no way to hide in it, no way to pretend. It’s all encompassing and can have long lasting repercussions.”

“ Minds getting tied up together?” Rose guessed and he nodded.

“Brilliant you are.” He smiled back and dropped her hand reluctantly. “After experiencing something like that, the physical side just diminishes. We only ever bothered with it for procreation and even that fell out of favor pretty fast once we had the Looms.”

Rose took a deep breath. “I can’t help but find that all rather sad, Doctor. Don’t you miss having someone like that?”

The Doctor took up his mug of tea and stared at it for a long moment. It hurt to talk about his past, hurt to even think about it, but if Rose was going to be open with him the least he could do was to be open in response. And this, at least, was an old hurt – mostly healed from long before the war. “I had a wife once, Rose. While all Time Lords are Gallifreyan, not all Gallifreyans are Time Lords. When I was a young man I was tested to see if I had the potential – I did, but then as I progressed
through the Academy it became clear I wasn’t an ideal candidate. When no TARDIS bound to me, we just assumed despite my schooling and my early tests I just didn’t have enough talent for it. So I settled down, and resigned myself to living a conventional life. I got a job as a scientist and when my House selected a woman for me I did what I was told. Marriages were all about strengthening inter-House alliances, politics – you get the idea.”

The Doctor looked up and gave a gentle smile to try and stave off the look of sadness in Rose’s eyes. “Oh it wasn’t that bad. Graylemexia was a wonderful woman really and we got along quite well. After a time I grew to appreciate her company a great deal. We only joined a few times over the years but it was… nice.” He sighed and looked away. “We had three children via the Looms, to replace members of the Household that had passed, and I thought that was all there was. When she died suddenly in a lab explosion, I mourned her for the required time and then returned to work. I’d lost a good friend but of all the things I miss about Grayle, I can’t say the mental connection part was even in the top 100. It had just never been important to us. We had lives and duties and that was that.

“Imagine my shock when my own granddaughter leads me to the TARDIS wanting me to examine an unusual reading on the console before she finished the work of decommissioning her and as soon as I touched her the old girl bonded with me. Of course no one was going to just give her to me, terrible lot of bureaucracy, so instead of risking them scrapping her while I filed all the paperwork, I just stole her. Susan, my granddaughter, came with me.” He smiled sadly. “Grayle always thought I’d been robbed of having my own TARDIS by the Council, she suspected it was some well conceived conspiracy to punish me for my outspokenness. I don’t know if that was true, or if the TARDIS was just the only ship daft enough to have me. It saved her from being turned into scrap and it made me a full Time Lord just a few years before my natural life span would have ended. You see, regeneration requires a link directly to the Vortex and that can only happen after bonding to a TARDIS. No TARDIS, no Time Lord, no regenerative abilities. That I think was the worst part of losing Grayle, she was gone before she knew. And she would have loved to study such a late TARDIS bonding.” He couldn’t help but smile wistfully.

Rose didn’t seem to know what to say so the Doctor finally continued, forced levity in his voice. “I did have a few escapades in the years that followed but I’ve never been good at trusting others and that’s rather a requirement when you are linking minds. Hard to let go if you aren’t sure of each other.”

Rose sipped her tea before responding. “I imagine there aren’t a lot of compatible telepathic species either.”

“Oh it’s theoretically possible with non-telepaths,” He admitted reluctantly, “but it’s dangerous for most them. It can actually change how the brain functions and create a dependency on the telepath. Highly unethical. And even with another telepathic species there are differences that have to be adjusted for. Not just language either, but the actual structure of the neural pathways and so forth. Even doing surface scans can take a lot of practice on alien minds. Some of my regenerations were rather good at that kind of thing, this one not so much.” The Doctor grimaced. “In fact, I’m rather useless in this body – can’t do a bloody thing without touch and even then it feels like I’m swimming in syrup in my own head. Probably damage from…” He trailed off, unable to finish that statement out loud.

Rose reached back for his hand. “I’m sorry.”

He squeezed hers. “Not your fault, Rose. And, I’m not sure I miss it. Sometimes its very loud being able to hear people. Non-telepaths don’t know how to keep from projecting and even if you are trying to be polite and not listen in it can be hard not to pick up on things. And if I was that sensitive
even this,” he squeezed her hand again, “would be something I’d shy away from. I’d have to for your privacy.”

Rose frowned. “I never really thought about that. Can you…..?” She bit her lip and her hand went limp in his.

The Doctor shook his head and smiled gently. “Nah, not in this body unless I actually tried and even then I don’t know how much I’d be able to do.” She relaxed slightly. “Most I can get without working at it is something of your mood. And I try not to do that if I can help it. I know you aren’t comfortable with telepathy.”

“It’s not that.” Rose laced their fingers together on the table top. “I just didn’t know it was happening, ya? I didn’t like having the TARDIS in my head and not knowing it. Scary that she can do that and I wouldn’t even have a clue. What else could people do, mucking about with me, and I’d be powerless to even know. You I trust, Doctor. I even trust the TARDIS, especially now that I know her.” Rose smiled up at the ceiling. “But I’m clueless what else is out there and while I’m not concerned about being physically hurt the possibilities…..”

“I won’t let anyone hurt you like that, Rose.” The Doctor promised, his eyes dark and swirling. “Your mind is yours alone and the TARDIS and I will always keep it that way.”

Even from ourselves, the Doctor added silently.
Chapter 4

Rose prided herself on a lot of different things; a great deal of which she’d learned in her long lost gymnastics classes: how to work in a team, adaptability, determination, a keen physical awareness of her body and the environment – but most importantly for the current situation, a very very high pain tolerance.

Because it hurt. Oh God did it hurt.

Rose shifted her weight and snapped the bone back into place, biting down on the piece of wood she’d pried from the bedframe to keep her scream muffled. It was a clean break at least, hardly her first, but the first time she’d ever had to set it herself. Her shoulder, now that she’d dislocated more than once and knew exactly how to pop it back in. It ached, but it was almost a familiar pain, something she knew exactly how to handle. The unnatural bend in her leg was not. It hadn’t broken skin but how much internal damage there was to the tissue was anybody’s guess.

The bed slats made a servable splint and the ripped sections of sheet would have to do. The wall between her cell and the next was barley there planks of wood. She could feel the eyes of her fellow prisoner watching her through the slats and Rose blew a chunk of hair out of her eyes as she attached the last wrap. Her vision was swimming from the pain and she could tell there was some kind of infection already starting on the wounds on her back. She was probably in the first stages of shock, Rose realized with a sinking feeling, and there wasn’t a damn thing she could do about it. They hadn’t even left her a bucket of water. They’d taken everything out of the cell as punishment except the bed and the cover sheet.

She had to keep her head. It could be days before Jack or the Doctor could get to her, assuming either of them had avoided capture or were in any condition to escape. Given the beating she’d taken, among other things, she wasn’t sure how either of them would have faired.

She’d been a prisoner for a little over 48 hours that she was aware of, but there were large gaps in her memory, from being drugged and from losing consciousness due to her injuries. She’d already stopped counting the number of times someone had entered her cell – and never with good intentions.

Rose shook her head. She could fall apart later. Right now she needed to do everything she could to keep alive. Given her physical condition escape was now not an option, not that it ever had been. While the walls between the cells were cheap recycled wood, the bars on the front and back were real, a heavy mesh imbedded directly into the concrete. There was no window and the floor was some kind of hardened mud that several hours of attempts had barely made a scratch in. Before they’d broken her leg she’d tried to see if there was a weakness in the ceiling but she hadn’t gotten too far before they’d pulled her down and ….

She wouldn’t think about it now. She’d think about it later, when it was safe. When it was safe and she could fall apart in peace and solitude probably huddled in her bath on the TARDIS…

She’d considered busting through to the next cell over but a quick peak through the slates had revealed an identical cell and in whispers it had been confirmed up and down the line.

Twenty of them in all, all female, and all blonde.

At first Rose hadn’t know what the plan was, but some of the others had been here months, two women so long they’d stopped even trying to whisper to the others and the woman next to Rose
quietly speculated it might have been years for them. She’d advised Rose to stop fighting, to just let them get on with it. They just wanted the babies…

Well they’d be rather shocked when her hair grew out if what they wanted was little blonde babies because Tylers were most definitely not natural blondes. She sent a silent thanks to Jack for talking her into that 43rd Century bleach treatment that got all her hair. For some reason that small little victory kept Rose from going mad – even if she knew that when it inevitability wore off, and they realized, they’d likely kill her.

Of course given the amount of injuries she’d had that was likely anyway. Rose was not going to stick around long enough to have her roots show, one way or another, and certainly not long enough to let the bastards impregnate her like some kind of fucking brood mare and make off with the the thing, probably to sell to the highest bidder.

Not that they hadn’t been trying.

She licked her dry lips and longed for her bucket of water – even if it was laced with drugs as she suspected. It was at least water and without that she wouldn’t last long at all. And she had to stay alive. The Doctor would never forgive himself if he got her killed.

Alright – that was just a bit messed up, Rose admitted to herself. The Doctor’s emotional wellbeing might be important but she had to stay alive for herself too.

She gripped the bed for support and slowly maneuvered herself to standing, testing the splint. Her vision swam and she gritted her teeth forcing the pain to the back of her attention. She couldn’t bare much weight at all on that leg but if she had a good pole, or shoulder, to lean on she could at least hobble away. Assessment of mobility complete Rose lowered herself down onto the bed and turned a weary eye towards the woman still peaking at her through the narrow gap in the cell slats.

“Did you just set your own leg?” The woman hissed, eyes wide. “Are you even human?”

“Sometimes my mother wonders.” Rose admitted in a weak voice. “I have to be ready.”

“No one is coming for you, Rose.” The woman said sadly. “The only ones who come are the slavers. We all are going to die in here.”

Rose laid her head down on the meager filthy mattress, trying to keep the whip marks on her back from making contact with the grime of the wall or the bed. “Perhaps – but I’m not about to accept it without a fight.”

Jack looked at the Doctor and sighed. It had been days since Rosie had been captured by the marauders and while they were getting closer and closer to finding her they were also figuring out exactly the kind of people that had kidnapped her. When they did find her, and Jack had no doubts they would, it was questionable what condition she’d be in. Tales of the slavers were wide spread and it was pretty clear that they specialized in a certain type of merchandise.

Mostly human women, all blonde, had been going missing from the three colony worlds in the sector for a little over three years. Once the pattern had been noticed women all over the sector had starting doing everything from shaving their heads to dying their hair to try and escape notice. Humans that hadn’t mixed with any other species genetically weren’t very common these days, and the blonde
ones were very very rare. There had been an underground market in trafficking anyone with the recessive gene traits for ages, but a new kind of offer was being made for people who knew how to arrange such things.

Little blonde babies, pureblood human babies, were being ‘adopted’ to discerning couples – for a price. There were a lot more two and under blonde children running around the elite sections of every colony world they’d visited looking for the slavers than any normal genetic distribution would warrant. If Jack’s hunch was right, and he knew with almost certainty it was, the slavers were taking pureblooded human blonde women and forcibly breeding them to produce the designer stock. It would be cheaper than paying for a genetically manipulated fetus from one of the clinics on Earth in this time era, and if you didn’t care about incorporating your own genetics it was a good way to get a status jump. While everyone was smart enough to know that just having a blonde pureblooded child in the house didn’t mean you were a pureblooded human, it did convey a certain air of poshness—however fake.

It was disgusting.

Jack had never cared for this era, with all it’s sudden concern for ‘pure humans’ and all that resulting bull shit. At this point there weren’t any real ‘humans’ anymore anyway, just a mix of different humanoid species all jumbled together surviving in any one of a million colonies and worlds scattered across the universe. Earth was still the basis of the Human Empire such as it was – a cultural and economic hub of activity and innovation. Being Earth born was to be elite but even then the vast majority of the population had at least one alien in the woodpile somewhere even if they didn’t want to admit it.

If they’d tested Rose’s DNA and found it completely human – Jack wasn’t sure if the hair color would matter. He hoped it wouldn’t because if they noticed and weren’t willing to make an exception… Well at best they could hope they sold her on to another group for another seedy purpose rather than just kill her. That dye job he’d talked her into was certainly better than anything they had here, and in this time, and it would last a couple months before it started to weaken at the roots, but it wasn’t going to last forever and it wouldn’t pass if they actually thought to check her DNA for the trait.

They’d taken her off world, which was a good sign actually. It meant they were willing to invest in this little operation. That was the only good part about any of it. They’d found one stable of women already and while Rose hadn’t been among them it was pretty clear the kind of treatment she was probably experiencing.

The women were kept in small cages spaced around a large warehouse. Their food and water was pumped full of fertility drugs to stimulate their ovaries and keep them fertile. Blonde human males were recruited to do the actual deed, which is how they found them – they tried to get Jack to join their little operation, after he’d guessed what they were up to and dyed his hair. The men were paid a flat fee and were encouraged to rape as many of the women as they could in a 24 hour period. They were picked up in bars and spaceports all over the sector and then taken to the secret location once they’d agreed to the deal. Most of the men recruited were nasty pieces of work, uncaring about how the women had gotten to the warehouse or what would happen to them afterwards. When they’d done their bit they were taken away again never knowing the location of the women. There had been five total on the transport with him and based on their jovial comradery the others had all done this several times.

Putting a tracker on him and having the Doctor follow hadn’t been difficult at all. The men running the show had tested his DNA, found him to be almost completely human, and hadn’t thought to check that he was actually blonde. Jack was thankful that they were sloppy, it meant a chance that
Rosie was still alive. But sloppy also had bad ramifications.

The warehouse was filthy and freezing. The women were all suffering from various illnesses and harsh treatment. Anyone caught speaking was beaten, any attempts to fight off the men resulted in brutal punishment. Even the women already pregnant were treated with very little regard. They were only fed enough to keep them and the fetus alive, and their hollow sunken eyes showed how their bodies were wasting away as all their strength went into the pregnancy. A pregnancy none of them actually wanted…

But worse than all that was the low level telepathic field that they’d cobbled together out of illegal alien tech. It was subtle, and if Jack hadn’t had that smidge of telepathic ability from his great-great-grandmother’s people and the training from the Time Agency he’d have missed it. They’d rigged the equipment to give off a depression field, like a giant psychic wet blanket, to keep the women too mentally weak to fight, too depressed to even care what happened to them. And the effect was cumulative. The longer the women were held the more the field affected them. The first 12 hours or so Rose probably just shook it off. But with her purely human 21st century mind- Jack expected that by now she’d be non-functional, probably even having a hard time remembering her name. When the Doctor entered the facility and felt the field he’d gone rigid and when his eyes found Jack there had been something close to madness in them.

There had been 23 women at that facility and most had been there for at least a year and could barely communicate, drug down as they were by the telepathic field. They’d been forced to bare child after child with accelerated growth formulas pumped through their systems to take the gestation from 9 months down to three. The Doctor had been in such a rage Jack had been hard pressed to keep him from killing the two men who had recruited the males and transported them there. They needed them for information – to find the other facilities. They had to get Rosie before it was too late.

That was the only thing that saved those men’s lives, Jack was sure. The list of other facility locations was short, but disturbing. There were four locations total – three of which were in full operation. The fourth was still being built and didn’t have any women yet, thank the Maker. Of the two remaining locations neither man could tell them which was most likely to have Rose. Jack’s gambit to gain access wasn’t likely to work again, his DNA was now logged in the computer system the group used and it would raise flags if another recruiting team picked him up after the first facility had gone down. And the Doctor couldn’t pose for a human when there was actual genetics involved. They needed the two men to lead them to the others.

The closest location was the oldest of their bases and had the fewest women. It was mostly used as the showroom for the designer babies and while it was tempting to stop there just in case, since it was so close, Jack and the Doctor agreed it was unlikely Rose would be there. Knowing their Rosie she hadn’t gone quietly and they wouldn’t have wanted to risk her causing an incident when all the rich bastards were there picking out their trophy babies and pretending they didn’t know how they’d been conceived and born. No, only the most broken and compliant of women would be at that facility. Which left the most remote of the bunch, on a small moon at the very edge of the sector.

The two men they’d captured provided scant information on the fortifications and security. Only one had even been there and it had been for a quick visit to drop off one of the women that had been causing problems at their facility. This base was for the trouble makers, he said, the ones that fought too much or were resistant to the telepathic field. The women there, he said, were there to kick out one maybe two more infants before they sold them off or they died. While the other facilities had at least some medical care on site and a trained doctor on call, this one was nothing more than a dank prison designed for nothing but warehousing walking corpses.

Jack figured Rose wouldn’t end up laying back and thinking of England. No – their Rose would
have been labeled a trouble maker from the go, that was for sure. He just hoped that whatever punishments they’d given her hadn’t been life threatening. If the goal was to produce infants for sale killing their incubator wasn’t good business – but given the way the man talked the women at this last facility weren’t considered valuable merchandise anymore. There was no telling what condition she’d be in when they found her. And given the Doctor’s dark expression Jack wasn’t sure he could stop him this time.

If Rose was dead the moon would burn.
Chapter 5

Rose slipped in and out of consciousness for several hours. At some point one of the keepers had come into the cell and sprayed her back with a stinging disinfectant and given her an injection that in her weakened state she’d been unable to fight off. Given the fact that her fever seemed to have broken, Rose was pretty sure it was an antibiotic for the infection that had settled into the whip marks on her back. Maybe something to keep her from dying of shock too – although that seemed a little doubtful. They’d tossed a blanket over her at least. Apparently they didn’t care if her leg healed or not – they hadn’t paid any attention to it or the makeshift splint at all.

The water bucket was back and drugged or not Rose was too thirsty not to drink all of it. A tentative hand to her damaged back came away without the puss that had been present sense the previous day and she breathed a little easier knowing that the disinfectant and the injection had probably been enough to stop the spread of the infection – or at least slow it down. She couldn’t reach her own back to clean the wounds and no matter what fancy treatments the TARDIS had concocted when she first came on board to protect her from alien viruses, she was still just as likely to die from sepsis as anyone else if things went long enough.

There was a slight buzzing in her head, something that had been steadily if slowly growing since she’d been brought here. Rose wasn’t sure if it was from the drugs in the water or if she was just getting sicker. It made her brain feel slow, like it took extra effort to do anything at all. All she really wanted to do was roll over and go back to sleep, pretend she was somewhere else for a while, but that wasn’t going to get her out of here. Rose gritted her teeth and took a deep breath. Whatever it was, it wasn’t like her to just lay down and take it, and that meant it wasn’t her thoughts, it wasn’t her mind, and with considerable effort she pushed back the lethargy and forced her tired brain to work.

Rose crawled over to her shared wall and poked a finger through the broken slat. The woman on the other side, who had refused to tell her name, had actually seemed confused when asked, was there in seconds, her own filthy finger touching Rose’s cautiously. “You’re alive.” The woman whispered. “Thank the Goddess. I was afraid they came too late to treat you.”

“They cut it pretty close.” Rose agreed with an equally tiny whisper. “They still here?”

“They left and came back again. You were out for a long time.” The woman responded softly. “But they are down at the other end now. She’s due any day now and it sounds like they might take her away.” The woman’s finger tightened on Rose’s. “I hope they don’t. We never see each other again when they take someone away.”

There was a loud bang from down the corridor and the sound of footsteps. The woman backed away from the wall quickly but Rose stayed where she was. They didn’t want the women talking but they also didn’t seem to pay any attention to what they did unless it could be heard. They didn’t care if she laid on the floor or the bed or paced the cell – as long as it was silent.

The two men who had been their captors since Rose was brought to the facility passed her cell dragging a heavily pregnant woman without even turning to look and left through the fortified door at the end of the hall. The combination to the door was 749262. Rose had memorized it hours after arriving for all the good it did. They must have realized how little chance any of the women would have to punch it in; they didn’t even try to hide the keypad when they typed.

“They’ve been really active for the last couple hours.” The woman was back, whispering slightly louder now that the two men were gone. “Something is happening but I don’t know what.”
Rose frowned. “Did they say anything?”

“Something about Megrif not answering.” The woman replied, slipping a small piece of bread through the gap. “Here, eat this. They didn’t leave you any.”

“Thanks.” Rose took the bread gratefully.

“Megrif was the bastard that kidnapped me.” A weak voice from across the corridor spoke up. “He ran the place I was before they took me here.” Rose could just make out an older woman’s face from between the bars. “Apparently I wasn’t good enough or something and they shipped me here.”

Rose chewed her bread and thought. “They must have more than one facility and they’ve lost contact with one of them. That’s good.”

“Good?” The older woman hissed. “They get mean when something doesn’t go to plan. You and I are the only two here not pregnant. If they want to hit something it will be us!”

Rose shrugged. “They’ll hit me either way because I’m not going to stop fighting. But if they lost contact with the other facility it’s probably because of the Doctor.”

The woman next to her laughed bitterly. “Rose, there’s no one coming for you. No one coming for any of us. Pretty soon you’ll be swelled up like the rest of us and there won’t be a damn thing you can do about it.”

Rose finished her bread and crawled back to her bed with a small smile on her face. They’d see. A storm was coming – she could feel it.

It was some time later when she awoke to find the entire row of women in a quiet panic. It took a few moments to figure exactly what had them all in a tizzy.

The room was hotter than normal and when Rose pulled herself awkwardly to her feet she found the air at the top of the cell was tinged with a hint of smoke. The facility was on fire – and they were trapped in the cells!

The other women were all talking now, not bothering to whisper, and Rose had to yell to get their attention “Oi! Which one of you has the most smoke or heat? We need to know where the fire is.”

There were murmurs up and down both sides of the cell block and finally one of the women that had been there the longest, and that had never talked, said in a very tiny voice. “I can see the ceiling heating up, it’s glowing red.”

“Right.” Rose thought quickly, calculating how far the woman was from her own cell and their options. The buzzing in her head was gone but in it’s place was a horrible ache that made it hard to think. The fire was at the far end and the other side of the corridor. That didn’t give them much as far as options but some kind of action was better than just sitting there. “You need to pry off the boards between the cells – everybody start.” Rose ordered in a sure voice fighting through the pain in her leg and her head. “We all need to get as far down to this end as we can. We may not be able to get out of the cells but we can get between each one.”

“They will be mad.” The woman whose ceiling was glowing argued in a meek voice. “They killed Mags when she took the boards down.”
“Either we get as far from the fire as we can or we die anyway.” Rose advised. “That smoke is going to get worse fast enough. If anyone has water left make sure to bring it with you. We may need to wet the blankets.”

The wall between Rose and the next cell over gave a creak and a board was pried off from the other side. The woman who had given Rose the bread peeked her head through. “I’m with Rose.” She stated firmly, working the board the rest of the way off. “They can’t expect us to sit here and just burn to death!”

That spurred the others into action and soon the sound of dry wood braking as they pried the cell dividers off filled the small corridor. The smoke was getting heavier and Rose used the sharp edge of the broken wall board to make a rip in the blanket to start turning it into strips. There were three women in her cell now and only one had brought a bucket of water but it was better than nothing. Rose wetted the strips and started tying them around each of their mouths and noses. “Might keep some of the smoke out.” She explained.

There were actual flames at the end of the hall now, where the first woman’s cell had been. By the time all 10 women from her side were gathered in her cell the hall was too full of smoke for Rose to see the other side. She could hear them coughing over the sounds of the crackling flames and Rose prayed they had enough sense to wet the blankets too. There was very little air left and Rose was laid out as low on the floor as she could get, the other women huddled around her. There was ash starting to fall and Rose did the only thing she could and used the last of their water to wet a blanket to drape over them hoping that if something fell the damp wool would stop it from igniting.

The sound of the ceiling collapsing across the corridor made them all jump and Rose cringed at the ungodly scream that came from the women across the way. There was nothing she could do to reach them and she did her best to cover her ears as they screamed and cried for help. The whole world seemed to be on fire and there was nothing at all she could do…
Chapter 6

The Doctor slammed through the facility door, his respiratory bypass kicking in as the smoke billowed out. They’d arrived at the moon to find the facility abandoned and in flames. Their two prisoners did not seem at all surprised and he suspected they’d had a scorched earth policy in place should any of the facilities fall. Somehow, despite his and Jack’s best efforts to keep their activities quiet, word had reached the others that they’d been found out.

It was disturbingly quiet in the abandoned warehouse and as he made his way through the burning building the Doctor could only hope they’d taken the women with them when they’d fled. If not … he didn’t let that thought bare out. Jack, with a respirator fitted tightly to his face was next to him, his wrist computer whirring and throwing off a bright blue light in the thick smoke. Jack pointed down and the Doctor frantically scrambled to find a hatch. There were life signs below them. The building was still burning, the structure unstable, and whoever was down there did not have long.

They found the hatch to the subbasement just as another support beam from the roof fell and the Doctor motioned for Jack to go back out but the con-man shook his head. Whatever was down there Jack wasn’t going to leave the Doctor alone to try and handle it.

The smell of burning flesh greeted them as they descended and it took only moments to see where the ceiling had collapsed in on a section of cells. The flames had burned out but the gaping hole into the upper structure made it clear what had happened. Twisted and blackened limbs from people trapped below when it fell were in a mangled pile. The Doctor’s hearts stopped for a moment at the sight but Jack’s frantic tugging on his sleeve pulled him past the gruesome sight.

Across a narrow corridor was another row of cells and inside it he could see another pile of limbs, some moving sluggishly, under a wool blanket. A quick application of the sonic had the door open and Jack was inside and ripping the blanket back before the Doctor could move.

Rose! He recognized her instantly and his hearts leapt. Jack was lifting her, her leg in a crude splint and her head hanging limp over his arm. She was mumbling a number string, 749262, over and over again, incoherent and weak. The Doctor wanted badly just to take her and run. But there were others there with her, half of them unconscious. The women that were still conscious were trying to crawl towards the open door and the Doctor shrugged out of his leather coat to wrap it around the woman who seemed the most able-bodied.

“Go up the stairs and to the right.” He hastily instructed her, using up most of his saved oxygen. “We’ll get you to safety.”

The woman nodded, her eyes lighting on his face with a strange expression. “Doctor?” She croaked and looked towards Rose, slumped in Jack’s arms. “Rose…”

“Yes.” He confirmed. “Hurry –fire.” He pointed up towards the ceiling. They had to get out before the entire thing collapsed.

Of the ten women only three were still able to move of their own power. With Rose in Jack’s arms the Doctor slung one woman over each shoulder and started towards the exit. The fire was worse as they climbed out of the basement. The women that were walking cried in pain as their feet blistered from the heated concreate but they kept going. They made it to the outside door just as the entire roof collapsed.

There would be no going back for the other four.
They moved quickly to get the five women and Rose into the TARDIS. Smoke was billowing from the collapsed building and making the entire area fill with a thick haze. Once inside the TARDIS the traumatized women were ushered quickly through the console room to the medbay, those awake staring about in wonder. Jack set Rose down on the main exam bed and the Doctor hurried to take a fast assessment. He could hear Jack behind him, reassuring the other survivors, and with quick harsh instructions he told him where to find oxygen and basic inhalation treatment supplies. The burns they could treat later but they had to address the smoke first.

Rose’s readings were not as bad as he’d feared. She was dehydrated, her lungs struggling with the smoke and the heat. The break on her leg was set rather crudely but the splint he suspected she’d made herself had done the job and kept the break from being made worse during their frantic flight. She’d drifted into unconsciousness before Jack had gotten her to the medbay and that was the larger worry. He fitted a mask to her nose and mouth, pumping medicated air into her damaged lungs, and started fluids and an antibiotic drip.

The other women were mostly human – probably all 80 percent or better if he had to guess. But Rose was the real thing, no alien DNA at all. She had none of the evolutionary protection that came from mixing species, where typically the strongest traits were the ones past on. The woman that he’d wrapped in his jacket, for example, he suspected she was part Morak given her eyes. That would explain her being less affected by the smoke. She was currently moving to help Jack with the others and seemed to be at least physically in the best condition of the lot. He suspected that all of the others, all the trouble makers, had some natural ability to fight off or limit the effect of the telepathic field they’d used to control their prisoners. Rose’s poor little ape brain had no defenses at all. She’d been under the control of the slavers for nearly two weeks! Exposure like that could have damaged her, made her brain dependent on the outside stimulus as harmful as it had been.

Readings showed unusual activity in several areas of her brain and the Doctor swore. They hadn’t bothered to take even the most basic precautions to keep from inducing neural damage! A few more days and Rose would have been nearly brain dead. Which, given the condition of the women at the other facility, had probably been their goal. A mindless lump of flesh that they could breed over and over and over…

The monitor bleeped and the Doctor slumped into the chair next to the bed. She was pregnant.

A moan of pain behind him brought him out of his misery. There were other women here, others that needed help. He couldn’t do anything more for Rose until decisions were made, decisions he couldn’t make for her.

For the next several hours he and Jack worked to do what they could for the other survivors. The Doctor quickly confirmed his suspicion, all the others were at least mildly telepathic, like Jack, just enough to have a natural defense against the telepathic field but not enough to fight it off. Several of them had succumbed to it already but now that they were away the effect was wearing off. Their brains weren’t damaged like Rose’s, and he was confident that with time and therapy they’d at least not have any lasting neuralgic deficits. All of them were in various stages of pregnancy, all of which had been accelerated. It was too late to terminate any of their pregnancies, the fetuses were all viable with the tech of the time, and none of them were really in a fit condition to make that choice right now anyway. Some were barely verbal. The Doctor hated having to make that call for them, after all they had been through, but as he went from bed to bed he reassured the ones that were aware enough to understand that once they had everyone stable and cared for he’d help them figure out what to do and where to go. They had options, he told them gently, and he’d gladly take them anywhere they needed or wanted to go. Calls to family members could be arranged, he assured them, just as soon as
the medication for the smoke inhalation had some time to work. It would be better if they would rest for now.

They managed between him, Jack, and the part Morak woman, who he learned had been housed next to Rose, to get the others cleaned and treated. The TARDIS supplied a large bedroom with soft beds in a dormitory style for all of them and they transferred them there. The part Morak woman was mobile, and thinking mostly clearly, but was still struggling to shake off the affect of the field. The Doctor had to work with her for several minutes to help pry her name out of her long term memory. It was the first time he’d touched another mind since the War and while he was reluctant, he couldn’t let the poor woman struggle so much with something so simple when it was within his ability to help. “Allis,” She said finally, a smile of wonder on her face. “My name is Allis.”

The Doctor slowly dropped his hands from her temples and smiled gently at her. “Hello Allis.” He pushed his own pain down, his mind screaming at having had contact with another after so long. The low level field the TARDIS produced to help him wasn’t enough to take the place of the full species link, and just that brief contact with Allis was enough to remind him painfully of the gap in his mind.

She eyed the others, all tucked into their beds, crisp clean nightgowns on their tired bodies for the first time in ages, and her eyes teared up. “I told Rose you wouldn’t come, that no one would come.”

The Doctor took her trembling hand in his. “There was a telepathic field there, it was messing with all of you. Making you feel hopeless and depressed. You fought it, Allis, even if you didn’t know it. You beat them.”

Allis shook her head. “No, it was Rose. She, she refused to give up.” Allis flinched as her hand went unconsciously to the bump on her abdomen. “What is going to happen to us? To Rose?”

The Doctor looked over to Jack where he was trying to soothe another of the survivors, one of the two the Doctor had carried out who had finally regained consciousness. “I’ll take care of Rose. I won’t let anything happen to her. And the rest of you, we’ll figure out what you want to do after you’ve rested. You are safe here.”

Allis eyed the walls with wide eyes. “Is this a ship? Are we in space?” The TARDIS hummed and Allis’ hand flew to her mouth. “Did it just….”

“Allis, my ship, she’s slightly telepathic and mildly sentient.” The Doctor explained gently. “She’s creating a minor telepathic field to try and ease everyone off the other one. But it’s just there – it’s not going to influence you.” He didn’t mention that she was always creating one, to help him since the loss of his species wide link. It was specially calibrated to be safe for Rose and other non-telepaths but it would be noticeable to someone like Allis. He was surprised they’d taken her, after he’d confirmed her genetics. She was less than three quarters human, one of her grandparents having been Morakan as he’d suspected. Jack had called the group sloppy – and they clearly were. Although given Allis’ vibrant golden hair and her startling green eyes it could be they’d made an exception.

Allis closed her eyes, feeling out the field, and finally she smiled. “I thought there was something there, when they transported me to that place. But there were drugs in the water and it made it hard for me to sense anything.” Allis admitted, slowly opening her eyes. “She’s beautiful Doctor, your ship. It’s like she’s wrapped us all in sunshine.”

“She’s very special.” The Doctor admitted, reaching a hand to the nearest bit of wall to give it a grateful pat. “She and Jack will be watching over all of you. I have to see to Rose now. She’s… she doesn’t have your abilities, Allis. She had no way to fight the field and it’s left her brain a little… bruised.”
Allis’ eyes grew sad. “She’s really human isn’t she, like completely? They said something, when they brought her, about her being very valuable. If any of us had fought them like she had they’d have killed us.”

The Doctor nodded. “She’s not from this time, Allis. You see, the TARDIS, it travels in time and space. Rose, she comes from the 21st century.”

Allis blinked at him for a moment and then laughed softly. “Well she certainly showed all of us up. If not for her we’d have all burned to death back there. I don’t know how she did any of it. She set her own leg!”

With that Allis rolled over and pulled the blanket up to her chin. The Doctor took that as his cue to leave her be and with a nod to Jack he left for the infirmary.

BREAK

He’d double checked all the readings and there were very few options. Rose had done remarkably well under the influence of the field. By all accounts she’d never given into the hopelessness and despair it was supposed to inspire, had in fact been attempting escape the entire time, fighting off her captors as best she could. Even in defeat she’d managed to hold it together. While remarkable, her ability to will herself past the imposed emotions of the field were one thing, but her poor little human brain had taken a beating worse than her body. The field did extensive damage to her neural pathways. Her falling unconscious was likely due to the collapse of the field during the fire, and even now, on the TARDIS, she was suffering the withdrawals from it. Her brain was firing signals in an altered pattern, one it developed to compensate for something that was no longer there.

She wasn’t going to wake up until something corrected the pattern.

Jack finally found him an hour or so later and sat down wearily across the bed. “What are our options?”

“None are going to be good.” The Doctor rubbed a tired hand over his face. “Jack, I need you to do something for me.” He looked up, his expression grim. “There’s an emergency override on the TARDIS that’s set to take us back to the Powel Estates. I programmed it in case I was ever incapacitated and Rose needed to get home. You won’t have to pilot it, just hit the dematerialization button and hold down the third mauve key from the right on the aft panel at the same time.”

“I can do that.” Jack agreed, standing back up. “What do I do when we land?”

“If I know Jackie, Rose’s mother, she’ll come runnin’. ” The Doctor sighed. “Let her in and bring her back here. I’ll explain what’s happened. Jackie deserves to have a voice in this since Rose can’t tell us what she wants at the moment. I hate to ask you to do this, but her readings are fluxing and if the brain activity goes critical I need to be here. Can’t afford the delay it would take to get back here from the console room.”

Jack nodded. “The others are all down for the night. Allis is watching over them like a mother hen. You take care of Rose and I’ll find her mother.”
Jack had a little trouble figuring out which was the third mauve key when he reached the console room, but the TARDIS apparently knew and while he was searching she powered herself up and one of the keys depressed without his pushing it. All he had to do was hold down the dematerialization circuit.

The trip was nearly instant, just the whirring of dematerialization followed by the fastest trip through the Vortex that Jack had ever felt. The Doctor had been meticulous in programing this emergency return option and the TARDIS was highly motivated. They landed without even a shudder. When he checked the monitors it appeared that rather than materializing in the street as he was used to them doing, they were inside an apartment of some kind. There was a worn couch and some really terrible wallpaper...

Jack cautiously opened the door. He didn’t get a chance to take any more of it in than the living room, when an older blonde woman came out from the kitchen, already yelling.

“What are you doing parking that thing in here, Doctor!” She screeched, stopping short at the sight of Jack. “Oi! Who are you?”

“Jack Harnkess, ma’am.” He replied, trying for kind and professional – it felt odd. “I travel with the Doctor and your daughter. I’m sorry for dropping in on you like this, but there’s been an accident.”

Jackie’s hand flew to her mouth and she nearly knocked Jack over pushing her way inside. “Rose, oh God Rose!”

Jack caught her arm before she could rush into the main part of the TARDIS. “Mrs. Tyler, please, let me explain. Rose is okay – she’s in the infirmary with the Doctor. She’s going to be okay.” He explained, firmly sitting her down on the jumpseat before closing and locking the doors. He engaged the internal lock as well just to be sure none of their guests went for a wander in the wrong time. He turned back to Jackie. “Let me explain what’s happened before we go in there.”

Jackie sniffed, her eyes filled with tears as she kept glancing towards the open door. “Please, I need to see my daughter.”

“She’s unconscious.” Jack explained, moving closer and dropping down to his knee so he was eye level with her seated on the jumpseat. “She was taken prisoner and it took us some time to find her. Mrs. Tyler, she will be fine.” Jack said it again, just to try and get that thought firm in the poor woman’s mind before she saw the battered form of her daughter. “Rose is a fighter and she didn’t go down easy. She’s got some injuries from that.” He explained softly. “A broken leg, lots of bruises. The Doctor’s got all that taken care of, another few hours and it will be like that never happened.”

Jackie sniffed angrily. “If that were all it was Rose would be awake and calling me pretending none of it happened.”

Jack winced at that, knowing it was likely true. “There’s more, but ma’am, I need you to stay calm. Rose is what’s important here and we’ve got to keep it together for her.”

Jackie paled. “Oh God what’s happened?”

“She was raped.” He said it bluntly knowing there was no way to ease someone into that knowledge. “The people that took her were running a racket selling babies to the highest bidder. They took Rose for breeding stock.”
Jackie looked murderous and started to rise but Jack put a steady hand on her shoulder. “That is not the biggest problem, ma’am. There’s something else.”

She slide down boneless into the chair. “How long did they have her?”

“Only a few weeks, but they accelerated the pregnancy. We don’t have long to decide what she wants to do before it will be too late to terminate it.” Jack advised softly. “But the larger problem is what they did to her mind.”

“You said she’d be okay!”

“She’ll recover, but it’s not going to be as quick as her physical injuries.” Jack explained calmly. “The Doctor will explain this better, but the slavers were using telepathy to control everyone. Rose is fully human, she had no defense against what they were doing and the strength of the telepathic field caused some damage to her brain. It’s treatable, but she can’t wakeup until we address it. And how we treat it is going to have a major impact on her for the rest of her life. The Doc didn’t want to make that choice for her without talking to you.”

He could see Jackie pulling herself together, the idea of having to make a life choice of some kind for her daughter forcing her to keep from losing it. “What are the options?”

Jack stood up. “I can guess but I think it’s better if we go see Rose and the Doctor now.” Jack gestured towards the interior of the ship. “Just so you are aware, we have two of the men responsible in holding several decks below. And there are a handful of survivors on board. We came right here after the rescue. I just triaged them and came to get you. I don’t want you to be shocked if you see one of the other women.” Jack paused. “They were all there a lot longer than Rose and it shows.”

Jackie nodded. “Did their minds get damaged too?”

“No.” Jack cringed. “This happened near the 44th century. By then most of the human race has at least a little non-human blood in the mix. The others were protected from the full affect of the telepathic field by their mixed heritage – all of them have at least some telepathic abilit. Rose, you see, she fought them so much they’d moved her in with all the women that they couldn’t control very well.” Jack smiled ruefully. “You know our Rosie.”

“Yeah.” Jackie sighed, a bitter smile on her face. “That does sound like my Rose.”

The Doctor looked up from the monitor as they entered the medbay and Jack noticed with relief that he’d healed most of Rose’s bruises with the dermal regenerator in the time it took for them to travel and fill Jackie in on the basics. Rose looked considerably better than she had, and if it wasn’t for the fact that he knew how serious the situation was he’d have thought she was just sleeping off the pain meds for her broken leg.

Jackie approached the bed slowly. “It’s like when she kid all over again. Waitin’ to see if she’d ever wake up.” She whispered.

The Doctor moved so that Jackie could take the chair closest to Rose. “I hope Jack told you she will recover. It’s just a matter of what that recovery process looks like.”

Jackie nodded and took Rose’s limp hand. “What are the options then? He said I needed to make a decision?”

The Doctor sat down opposite. “The telepathic field acts a bit like a drug.” He started to explain, simplifying it so that hopefully she could understand. “It gets into the human brain and starts rewiring how it works. If it’s strong enough or goes on long enough it makes so many changes to how the
brain functions that the victim can’t cope without it. Rose is lucky that we got to her before it started to affect non-voluntary systems. Another few days and she’d be much much worse.” He rubbed tiredly at his neck. “As it stands we have three options for how we deal with this.”

Jackie looked at him, her mouth turned down in a grim determined line. “Which do you think is best?”

“I can’t decide that for her – I’m not impartial.” The Doctor admitted with difficulty. “Do you remember that conversation we had, about how it could never be like that between us?”

Jackie’s forehead wrinkled. “Yeah, because it would be dangerous for her. You said it could hurt her brain.”

“This is exactly what I was talking about – this type of damage. One option,” The Doctor turned to look at Jack before moving his eyes back to Jackie. “One option is for me to go into Rose’s mind and form a link, her to me. My mind would replace the telepathic field. But if I do that it wouldn’t be for just a minute. I’d have to make a complete link, what my people call a bond. It’s not reversible.” The Doctor’s head dropped. “Before the war, I might have been able to fix this from inside her mind without the bond, but my own mind isn’t stable enough now. If I go into hers long enough to repair the damage the bond will form whether I intend it or not – every instinct I have is constantly in search of another mind since the death of my people and I don’t have enough control to fight it – not with Rose.” The Doctor closed his eyes in pain. “I had to touch the mind of one of the others today, just for a second, and pulling away from her, a total stranger, nearly killed me. I’d never be able to do that with Rose and I’m so so sorry.”

Jackie looked at Jack, her eyes begging for answers to questions she didn’t even know how to form. Jack cleared his throat. “That sounds pretty close to a marriage, Doc. Isn’t that what most telepathic species would call a bond?”

“Yes and no. There are different kinds of bonds, different levels. But I don’t think I’d be able to keep it superficial forever. Eventually it would widen to that point.” He admitted softly, still not looking up at either of them. “Which is why I can’t make this choice for her. If I could risk waking her up to discuss it with her I would. If I wasn’t so bloody unstable I could touch her mind and ask but I can’t even do that!” He bolted from the chair and slammed his closed fists into the wall. “I can’t even do anything that simple without risking taking more advantage of her then she’s already endured.”

Jackie took a calming breath. “And the other two options?” She asked in a controlled voice.

Jack stepped in. “The Doc can correct me if I’m wrong, but I think the other option is the TARDIS.” He looked to the Doctor who was resting his head against the wall. He nodded tightly and Jack turned back to Jackie. “The ship has been creating a low level field for the Doctor for years – to try and help with the emptiness in his head from where all his people used to be. It’s a very low field, designed so it wouldn’t hurt Rose or any other non-telepaths on board. We could increase it some, but not a lot without risking it affecting anyone else that came on board. It wouldn’t be as seamless an option for her as a bond with the Doctor – she’d likely be in some pain from not having the full strength. But with therapy and time she could probably start to function as normal within the ship. Maybe, if the Doctor can rig up a signal relay, she could even go certain distances away.”

The Doctor heaved himself away from the wall and turned around, his jaw stiff. “It’s possible that if Rose really works at it we could retrain her brain to live without the field entirely but it would take years, possibly decades. She might never manage it and if she did it could significantly affect her. It would be a constant effort, a distraction. She’d probably seem slower. It’s very similar to a stroke victim relearning how to talk.”
Jackie’s faced paled even more. “And the last option?”

The Doctor leaned against the counter trying to seem unaffected and failing. “There are telepathic species out there that are as strong or stronger than my people. We could try and find a mind healer that would be willing to take on Rose’s case, to do for her what I can’t. They could go into her mind and work to try and repair it from the inside without having a bond form.”

“How long would that take?” Jackie asked.

“I don’t know.” The Doctor admitted. “It would be faster than if we used the TARDIS’ field and I tried to do it from outside, but with the extent of the damage and the trauma involved it could still be several years. And in that case she’d never be able to leave the side of the mind healer until her mind had reworked itself. She’d have to stay wherever they are unless I could convince them to travel with us. I can almost promise you they would never agree to move to Earth. Most of these species are very obviously alien and 21st century London is not going to be a place they can visit without causing a ruckus. If you wanted to see her I’d have to take you wherever it was, or if we were lucky and the world was suitable for human life I might be able to get them to agree to let you stay with her during the treatment.” He didn’t sound very hopeful.

Jackie took a shuddering breath. “And would she be suffering like she would if you used the ship? Would she be in pain?”

“Not if the mind healer was worth the money I’d be shelling out.” The Doctor angrily bit out. “I’d never let some hack into her mind.”

“Doctor,” Jack broke in. “Jackie wasn’t saying you would.” He tried to soothe, “She just wants to know all the facts and telepathy is new to her.”

The Doctor deflated and almost fell back into his chair. “I’m so so sorry for all this, Jackie. I promised I’d protect her and I failed.”

Jackie didn’t say anything for a long moment. “You promised you’d bring my baby home and you have done. She’s hurt, but you could have just left her there and I’d have never known what happened to her. Whatever it takes, Doctor, I’m there for my little girl and you’d better be too. You got her into this, I need you to help me get her out again. Don’t you dare abandon us now.” Jackie clutched Rose’s hand tighter. “This bond with you – is it the only option that doesn’t mean Rose has to spend years relearning everything, possibly in pain?”

“Yes.” The Doctor admitted softly. “And it wouldn’t be a marriage, not the way you’re thinking. I’d never take advantage of her sexually. Even with a bond I don’t have a sex drive like a human. But it would be a link – a two-way bridge. And it would tie her to me in ways you can’t quite comprehend. I’d always be able to feel her, to find her no matter where or when she is. Given time she’ll be able to learn to do the same to me so long as I’m conscious. But because she’s not a telepath I’ll be carrying the full weight of the bond. If I lose consciousness or die Rose will feel it – the bond will cut out of her awareness. And she’ll be in even worse shape than she is in now. If I actually died it would probably kill her. Her brain would keep changing under the influence of the bond and after a short time she’d be completely dependent on it, her brain would just collapse without it.”

“If you regenerate?” Jack asked.

The Doctor turned to look at him. “It would blink out as far she is concerned the instant this body died but reform as soon as the regeneration was complete. It would hurt her – significantly – but the process doesn’t fully break the bond. It just weakens it temporarily to the point where her non-telepathic mind wouldn’t be able to feel it. The same if I was unconscious. I don’t know for sure
exactly what it would do. There has never been a full bonding between a Time Lord and a human. I suspect she’d lose consciousness at best, at worst it could induce a heart attack from the shock.”

“Would she be stuck being close to you like the ship?” Jackie whispered. “Never have anytime by herself?”

“No,” the Doctor sighed. “She’d be able to go as far away as she liked. The bond transcends space and time. She could physically go anywhere but she’d never actually be alone, she’d never really be alone again as long as she lived.”

Jackie eyed her daughter’s still flat stomach. “And how long do you think it would take to find one of these mind healers? Would it be fast enough for Rose to decide what to do for herself with the baby?”

“No,” The Doctor admitted bitterly. “They aren’t common and all the ones I knew that I’d have trusted died in the Time War.”

Jackie bit her lip. “Could we make the call for her, about the baby? And then see about a healer? And then when they got Rose awake, she could decide if she wanted to stick with them or bond with you?”

The Doctor actually looked surprised. “I suppose we could. That might work. That’s actually a good idea, Jackie.”

“What, you think Rose got all her brains from my Pete?” Jackie sniffed. “I need time to think about this, Doctor. Can I have a few minutes alone with her?”

The Doctor nodded and pointed to a monitor next to the bed. “That is keeping an eye on her brainwaves. If they get too unstable we won’t have an option. I’ll go see if I can boost the TARDIS’ transmission field enough to buy us some time. If that goes off, I’ll be here as fast as I can. I won’t go far.”

Jackie nodded. “Thank you.”
Chapter 8

Jack and the Doctor didn’t go far at all, just to the next room over where the ship had moved the axillary control for the telepathic field. They got to work quickly, neither comfortable leaving Rose’s side.

“You know she’d choose you.” Jack said quietly a few minutes later. “There’s no way she’d ever agree to some stranger poking about in her mind for god knows how long. And this,” Jack slammed a lever into place. “is not a viable solution and we both know it. If we cranked the field up high enough to substitute for what was done, I’d have to leave – it would scramble my brain faster than an egg on a Vegas sidewalk. Even you, you’d have problems after a while. It would be stronger than your species link ever was and I’d bet my vortex manipulator that within a year you’d be having your own addiction problem. That’s even if the TARDIS could hold a field like that stable long enough for it make a difference.”

The Doctor gripped his screwdriver so tight his knuckles turned white. “The TARDIS could hold the field, but I don’t know what it would do long term. She’s not a regular machine, she’s sentient. I have no idea what prolonged exposure to a TARDIS at that level would do to Rose. I’d be fine – I already have a bond with the TARDIS, but it would make certain things more difficult.” The Doctor cringed thinking about it. At a low level the field was calming for him. At a higher level it would be a constant reminder of what he didn’t have. “If Jackie thinks that’s the best option we’ll have to figure something out.”

“Right.” Jack closed his panel. “Well, that’s as much as we can boost it with Jackie on board. Might get a little more when she leaves. After that you’ll have to wait till you drop the rest of us off somewhere. Even with my training I’ll have trouble if we do too much more.”

The Doctor nodded. “At least this will help the other women some until we can get them to a qualified hospital. Even without the field causing damage it’s still affected them like psychic heroin.” Rather than return to the infirmary the Doctor took a seat on the floor and motioned for Jack to join him. “You do know that the only way I’d leave you behind, Jack, is if we have to boost the field. And then I’d only do it because I’d have no choice.”

Jack gave a tiny smile. “Thanks, Doc. I know you keep saying things like that, but I still feel like I’m on borrowed time. One day you’re gonna realize you’ve got a conman on board and I’ll have out lived my usefulness.”

The Doctor looked slightly uncomfortable. “I’m not known to keep companions on board for any great length of time. A year, maybe two, and off they go. I try not to get attached. But you and Rose, you are both different. Or maybe I’m different. I don’t know.” He rubbed tiredly at his neck. “I’ve never kept anyone around long enough to see them grow old, Jack. I never thought I could stand it. Such short little lives you humans, even enhanced, and… and I don’t know how much more loss I can take.” He looked down and away. “But I know for certain I can’t just drop you off and leave, either of you. I can’t go back to doing this alone, and the TARDIS, she’s been so happy with you both on board. She wasn’t designed for a single person you know, supposed to have whole families on board – an entire crew. She’s lonely too, both of us the last. I guess what I’m trying to say is, you are welcome to stay as long as you’d like. And if we have to part ways because of the field, it won’t be forever. I don’t think I could just leave either you or Rose behind and not come back for you, eventually.”

Jack’s expression went through shock and disbelief to something the Doctor thought looked an awful lot like indigestion. It finally settled on a serious and intent look before he found the words to speak.
“Doc, I… I’ve never had a place I was really welcome, even my own home planet, not anymore. Thank you.”

“Least I can do.” The Doctor grunted. “Besides, it takes two of us to keep track of Rose she’s so bloody jeopardy friendly I can’t even take her grocery shopping without backup.”

Jack laughed. “I don’t know, Doc, between the two of you it’s a contest for who attracts the most trouble.”

The Doctor actually smiled at that. He started to reply back when a cough from the hall attracted their attention. Allis was standing there, looking a little pale and shaky but much better than she had a few hours earlier. “I’m sorry to interrupt,” She said in a tiny voice, “but I went to the infirmary a few minutes ago to see if there was a pain medication Clarca could take, her feet are still very painful. The woman in there with Rose asked me to see if I could find you?”

They both stood up quickly. Jack took Allis’ arm to steady her. “I’ll get some medication for you and help you back to bed. The Doctor can talk to Rose’s mum in private that way.”

“That was Rose’s mum?” Allis asked, a look of wonder on her face. “I thought you said Rose was from the 21st century?”

“She is.” The Doctor admitted with a little extra bounce in his step. “We’re parked in 21st century London. Once we get Rose sorted we’ll go back to your time and no one will ever know we were gone.”

Allis looked suitably impressed and turned wide eyes to Jack. “Do you three do this all the time, hop from time to time and planet to planet?”

“All of time, all of the time.” Jack winked at her and she blushed.

“Jack, now is not the time.” The Doctor advised and the Captain grinned unrepentantly.

Jackie looked calm as they entered the infirmary and the Doctor sorted out the pain medication for the other two to take back to the women. Once Jack had escorted Allis out again he turned to the older woman. “Jackie.”

“I know what Rose would want.” Jackie’s voice was trying for firm but it came out slightly wavering. “She’d want to choose you, but she’d be afraid of becoming a burden. If you do this, if you bond with her, you can’t let her go on thinkin’ that. And we both know she would to.”

The Doctor’s hearts hammered loudly in his chest. “It would be an honor, Jackie, never a burden. I’m afraid I’d be the burden, too much of a weight on her, my past…”

“Bugger your past.” Jackie huffed and glared, her hand twitching like she longed to slap him again. “You go on and on about your bloody past like it matters to her. It doesn’t except that it hurts you. That girl doesn’t care one ounce what horrible things you think you’ve done. She knows you, Doctor, and she believes in you, trusts you.” Jackie’s voice dropped, her eyes starting to moisten. “She loves you, you daft git.”

He sat down heavily in the chair on the opposite side of the bed. “We don’t have to do this now, we could do as you suggested and try and find a mind healer – let Rose choose.”

Jackie snorted. “I know what she’d want to do, even if she chose something else because she wanted to protect you, this is the life she wants, a life with your ugly face. She told me once she’d rather spend a week with you than a lifetime on the estates and I couldn’t argue with her about it no matter
how much it hurt to think of her out here riskin’ her life. I can see in her eyes she’s not going to stop, not now. She’s found meanin’ and a purpose and how can a mother argue with that? All I ever wanted for my baby was to be happy and she’ll never be happy with me and EastEnders and dying cheap women’s hair.” Jackie sniffed and dabbed at her eyes with a corner of her sweater. The Doctor dug in his pocket to hand her a handkerchief. “I know what she’d want, Doctor, at least ’s far as this bonding goes. What I don’t know is the baby. I know Rose never really wanted to be a mum but I know she’d feel terrible getting an abortion. I think she’d do, but I don’t know for certain, and while I’d rather her hate me than feel guilty, I just don’t know what she’d want. If she wants to have it, but doesn’t want to raise it, we can find a family can’t we? Or I’d take it, I’m still young enough we could even pretend it was mine. Whatever Rose wants, I’ll do whatever she wants.” Jackie sniffed into the handkerchief.

Jack returned and sat next to Jackie. “I take it you decided.”

“She’d want him.” Jackie waved the handkerchief towards the Doctor. “Right? She would wouldn’t she?”

“Yes.” Jack agreed, his eyes holding the disbelieving gaze of the Doctor. “I’m certain she would.”

“See.” Jackie sniffed once hard and drew herself up. “I told you. Even this one here agrees with me and he’s been wanting in her pants since they met.”

Jack choked. “She told you that!”

Jackie rolled her eyes. “She said they’d picked up this fellow that flirted with lampposts. She said you were like an inappropriate older brother with Flowers in the Attic notions.”

The Doctor burst out laughing and at Jack’s confused expression he mouthed the word ‘incest’ between bouts of uncontrolled chuckles.

Jack blushed red and looked away. “I do have some standards you know.” He ran a hand guiltily through his hair. “And I won’t say I wasn’t interested in your daughter, but she made it perfectly clear where her interests were, and they weren’t with me.” He looked pointedly at the Doctor. “She said you couldn’t be that for her, but that she wasn’t going to play around under your nose in any case. She thought it would hurt your feelings if she took up with someone else traveling on the TARDIS, even if you’d told her she could.”

“Jack, when you came on board…”

“It doesn’t matter, Doc.” Jack smiled like he meant it. “I don’t get between two people who actually love each other and I don’t care what the reasons are that you can’t or won’t have that kind of relationship with her, sex isn’t everything. And if I’m understanding this bond thing correctly, this will help you as much as it will her. Give you a little more stability telepathically. She’d probably have volunteered for it if she’d understood it – damage to her brain or not. She’d walk through hell for you Doctor.”

The Doctor eyed them both critically. “Are you certain this is what Rose would want? I can’t undo it. Even if I leave her here with you Jackie, she’ll still feel me in the back of her mind for the rest of her life.”

Jackie snorted. “She’d like that, I can promise you. Go on then.” She waved towards Rose’s too still form. “Or do you need privacy? It isn’t… it isn’t naked kinky stuff is it?”

The Doctor rolled his eyes. “Honestly, humans. No it’s not ‘naked kinky stuff’. If it were an actual
marriage and not a life saving function there’d be some pretty horrendous robes and far too much talkin’ but if there’s anything good about being the last of my species it is that I can skip the hideous headdresses.”

“Headdresses?” Jack and Jackie asked simultaneously.

The Doctor shuddered. “You have NO idea. And the huge neck pieces – honestly, it was like bad horror movie costumes! I ran away from the place just so I didn’t need my neck vertebra fused.” His flippancy was covering the pain of not having the ceremony, of not being able to give her even that, stupid though it was, and he knew it. He suspected they knew it too, but laughing off his people’s ridiculous costumes was a good distraction while it lasted.

He looked at the monitor. Rose’s brain patterns were holding steady but they weren’t good – weren’t going to get better unless he did something. “Are you sure?”

“You keep stalling, Doctor, and I’ll think you don’t want bonded to my Rose.” Jackie eyed him. “And we both knew how much you longed for that even when you told me it was impossible. It was in your eyes and your voice and in that sad droop to your shoulders. Now get on with it before I change my mind.”

He approached Rose’s temples cautiously, glancing back at his audience several times as his fingers neared her. “I should warn you, I don’t know how she’ll react to this. She’s never been keen on having things mucking about in her head. I have no way to warn her it’s me.”

Jack offered his hand to Jackie who clutched it gratefully. “We know you’d never do anything to hurt her, Doctor.” He paused and smiled gently. “Would it be easier for you if we left? I can take Jackie to a guest room, let her rest for a little while you do…whatever it is.”

“No.” The Doctor smoothed a strand of Rose’s hair back from her forehead and dropped his barriers. Even that simple touch let him feel the edges of her. “Once I make the bond the change will be instant. She’ll want to see you both.” She’ll want her mum, he added silently.

Gathering himself he reached out slowly with both hands…
Chapter 9

Rose was floating in nothingness, the darkness a constant clawing, grating, scratching, biting… The faint hint of gold that shimmered just out of reach was like a cruel torture. She desperately wanted to reach it but every time she thought she was close it shimmered and blew apart like fog. Wherever this place was, it was horrible, and she just wanted to go home- to the TARDIS, to the Doctor. If this was death she felt very cheated.

At one point she thought she heard Jack, could have sworn she saw him silhouetted against flames, but that had to have been a hallucination. Not a minute after the roof had collapsed her head had burst into agony and ever since she hadn’t been able to string two words together and even opening her eyes had become impossible. Rose is fairly certain she lost consciousness, although how she knows that, knows anything, is confusing.

She’d like to ask the gold if it would hold still. There’s something about it that feels familiar, like she’s met it before, or will meet it, but it’s all so wispy and ethereal and she can’t figure out how to move without a body.

She’s not sure how long the nothing goes on for, its impossible to tell time in a universe where nothing exists but her and gold dust, but it’s long enough she’s pretty sure she’s going insane. At some point the gold gets stronger, a little less like mist and more like a proper cloud, but still she can’t grasp it. At least it’s something different, and she chases it around the darkness as best she can for amusement if nothing else.

Come back here! She tries to scream at it but it slips away again and again.

She’s about to give up on her game when there’s a change in the darkness. Suddenly there’s heat and light and music, such glorious music… Rose turns around and around looking for the source, calling out into the nothing, not really expecting an answer, but desperate to at least try.


They aren’t words, she’s not sure how she understands them, but it’s different, its not nothing, and when she surges towards them it doesn’t dissolve away like the gold. It meets her, envelopes her, and then she knows.

There’s leather there, and wool jumpers. There’s engine oil and close cropped hair and sadness, such terrible sadness. There’s blue eyes and ozone and joy. It’s like coming home and finding heaven and plunging head first into the icy sea. The Doctor’s found her, wherever she is, and he’s all around her, inside her, and he’s there and she’s not alone and she’d cry if she still had eyes.

You are crying. The Doctor tells her. I can feel it, Rose. This may take a minute but I’m going to fix things, so you can wake up. Rose doesn’t understand what he means but she trusts him, tries to tell him so, and he must understand because even though she can’t feel her arms she’d swear they were hugging.

I’m building a bridge, between you and I. He explains and Rose can almost see it – a silver line like a spider silk in the darkness, growing longer and stronger, weaving through the gold and binding it in places so the thread glows and shimmers. The TARDIS is here too, trying to help, you’ve been noticing her.

The gold is the TARDIS. Rose finds that oddly comforting. She likes the ship, thinks it’s home, but
it’s always mysterious, always just outside her understanding, so it reasons that she wouldn’t be able
to catch it. Of course she only feels slightly less like that about her Doctor, but he’s managed to catch
her it seems.

*Something happened, Rose, and it damaged your brain.* The Doctor sounds so sorry, so sad, and
Rose wishes she could take that pain away. *I can make it better but there will be consequences.* He’s
trying to warn her, trying to give her a choice but Rose can tell there isn’t one. The thread that’s
building is too solid, too tangible, and even she can see that it won’t go away when he’s done. The
bridge he called it – the bridge will stay and she won’t ever be alone in the darkness again.

She’s so grateful for that, so pathetically grateful, she thinks she might have already gone mad so
powerful is her relief at that idea.

*Oh I know, Rose, I know.* She can feel it, how relieved he is too, how he’s been in the dark for years
and years and oh how did he do it without going mad? She wants to help, wants to make that thread
as strong as and as fast as and as sure as it can be and she hears him chuckle, hears his laugh with real ears ,
and with the ones she’s grown in the dark, and then there’s light and air and oh – oh she’s awake!

She can feel him in her mind, linking her eyes back up to her brain, feels as he puts everything back
into place and the world swims in to fill in the darkness. She can hear the TARDIS hum, feel it in her
bones, and sense it in her mind now too -and it’s different, as if the ship is *there* in a way it wasn’t
before, like she’s got a new sense to add to the original five, and there’s the Doctor too, and he’s
guilty and happy and desperate and very very angry but never at her...

She can’t move yet, he’s still patching everything in for her, skirting along her neural pathways and
rebuilding links and it’s a very odd feeling. But all her senses are working and she can smell her
mother’s hairspray and she can hear Jack saying calming meaningless things.

*Jack’s got your mom, keeping her calm while I work.* The Doctor explains, his blue eyes holding her
gaze as he flirts through her mind like a joy rider on a zipline. Rose is shocked as pain blooms back
into being, parts of her she’d quite forgotten about suddenly back online and protesting. She’s certain
she should be feeling something, that horrible terrible awful things happened, and she should be
angry and mortified and scared to death, but she’s still just so thankful to not be floating alone in the
dark she can’t do anything but stare up at him and try and project how wonderful he is back at him.
She’s pretty sure this is how a drowning person feels after someone pulls them from the water and
gives them mouth to mouth.

Her hand twitches and she’s able to lift it. It’s shaky and it hurts, like she hasn’t moved it in ages and
ages but she needs to touch him, needs to know he’s real outside her head, outside the darkness that’s
now become silver and gold and him. His cheek is rough and slightly cool against her palm and she
can feel him smile under her hand and in her head. *Almost done.* He tells her, his mouth moving but
the words come to her before her ears make them out.

She should probably wave at her mother, or something, but she can’t look away from his eyes, his
endless sad eyes. He’s boundless, she can feel it, endless and timeliness and so very vast. He ought
to be cold, like space, he’s so huge- but he’s not – he’s like warm milk and Harry Potter and tea with
too much sugar. His forehead scrunches at that, likely trying to figure out how any of those things go
together, but Rose knows they do – like comfortable socks and a warm blanket and spring rain.

The thread is done now, solid and shimmering in the former darkness, a beacon and lifeline and the
gold is still a mist, still beyond her reach, but it hovers around the thread now, attracted like metal
shards to a magnet. Rose likes that idea, likes that the Doctor is connected to her now, and that the
TARDIS is wrapped around them both like a big incompressible bear hug from something so much
larger than even him that neither of them can actually hold her in their hands.
I’m finished, Rose, but there’s so much we need to talk about. This thread you see, it’s… She can see in his eyes it’s got a meaning, a meaning he doesn’t want to force on her but he wants, so very badly, and she doesn’t care what it is she’ll give it to him. He doesn’t have to ask, he can just take whatever it is because she’s given herself to him a long time ago, she’d offer up her very soul to make him happy if she could, lifted up on a platter with a grateful smile for the privilege.

His blue eyes are moist and he’s thinking how it’s too much, how he doesn’t deserve that, how he’s ever going to explain to her… and she can sense it because he’s letting her and she knows he’ll never let her in this way again, he wouldn’t now if he could stop it. But the bond is new and he’s been alone too long and he can’t close his end, can’t dampen it even though he’s trying – he just can’t close it yet.

It’s alright. Rose tries to say with her eyes and with her mind. If you’ve got me, I’ve got you, and neither of us has to float alone.

He’s sobbing, his head fallen to her chest and his fingers slip away from her temples. She forces her arms up around him, forces weak muscles to try and hold him. She wants desperately to wrap him in her like he wrapped her in him, but she can’t – she doesn’t have that kind of a gift. She can’t travel that thread back to him like he can travel it to her – she can sense that. What should be a two way connection is stifled by her humanity and she’s so very sorry she can’t be more for him.

You are everything. He cries out in her mind. Everything, Rose Tyler, and I don’t care if you can’t meet me half way. I’ll travel to you gladly and never notice the trip. He won’t either, she can feel how strong he is, how he can find her now no matter what, no matter when or where.

She’s so tired, and she wants to stay awake and enjoy this openness while it lasts, to explore what she can of him, but there’s a pain starting between her eyes, a strain from the strength of all this on a brain not designed for it, and he’s urging her to sleep – to recover. She turns her head and tries to smile at her mother, thinks it’s odd how Jack is holding her up, it’s a pairing she’s not at all used to seeing. Nor is she used to the concerned and not at all flirting expression on Jack’s face.

The Doctor is still crying into her chest, clutching her body and her mind in a way that make Rose feel apart from the universe. Like she’s got a new role now, to hold him together, and she can’t say she likes the feeling because she’d rather the universe not keep tossing things at him that means he needs someone to help hold him together. But she’s very glad she can be that, she’ll be his rock in the storm, she thinks back, knows he hears her. She can be solid and real and knowable when the rest of reality shifts and beats at him. She can do that – she can offer that. So she holds him tighter even as she drifts to back to sleep.
Chapter 10

Jack never thought he’d see the Doctor cry. But the man is doubled over Rose on the bed, his head pressed to her chest and tears racking his frame.

Jack doesn’t know what happened when the Doctor pressed his fingers to Rose’s temples, what had to be an hour ago, but as soon as he did her brain waves started to spike all over the monitor and her entire body twitched then seized. After that the first few minutes had been silent and quiet and he and Jackie had held their breaths waiting for some other outward sign of what was happening in her head. Then Rose had started to cry, trails of tears without even a muscle moving. Jackie had of course tried to move forward, to comfort her daughter, but Jack held her back. Whatever the Doctor was doing it wouldn’t help to add either of them into the mix – touch telepathy was fairly easy to screw up if you added extra people into the contact loop. It was horrible to watch the silent exchange, seeing Rose’s body so still with tears running down her cheeks, but at least it was some indication there was more going on in her brain now.

The entire thing lasted probably 45 minutes before her eyes opened and found the Doctor’s. Her hand had finally lifted, slowly, as if she had trouble making it work, to touch his cheek. They’d stayed like that, gazing into each other, for another fifteen or twenty before he’d fallen onto her and Rose had gathered him into her exhausted arms as best she could.

Jack had expected the reaction to the bonding to come from Rose. Maybe some thrashing about, or even screaming, as she came back to awareness. But all she’d done was finally look towards them, let them know she knew they were there, before she’d drifted to sleep still clutching the Doctor as he broke down. In hindsight Jack should have expected the stronger reaction to be from the Doctor. He’d been alone in his head for far too long – and the strain of that had been a constant source of agony.

He could feel Jackie testing his hold on her and rather than let her go and have her fly over to the bed and disrupt whatever it was that was happening, Jack pulled her from the room. Jackie’s mascara was running from crying and she looked like she was going to start hitting people any second.

“Let me go! I got to get back in there!” She cried and Jack hit the lock on the door.

“No you don’t.” He countered and started steering her towards the kitchen. “What you need is a drink. And a shower. Maybe a few hours sleep.” He half drug her down the hall, ignoring her protests. “They need some time, Jackie.”

“But the Doctor said the change would be immediate!” Jackie argued and kicked at him.

“Stupid alien.” Jack agreed affectionately. “He’s always bottling everything up and this time it got to him. Give them some time, Jackie, and he doesn’t need an audience!”

She deflated slightly. “He wasn’t expecting it to hit him that hard was he?”

“Stupid alien.” Jack agreed affectionately. “He’s always bottling everything up and this time it got to him. Give them some time, Jackie. After all they’re technically newlyweds.”

She snorted. “Crying all over each other like that was hardly romantic.”

“I don’t know.” Jack argued softly and got out two cups and the tea pot. “I think for them it was.”
He prepared a strong pot of tea the way he knew Rose liked it and set it on the table to steep. “Can I get you something to eat? A sandwich or some soup?”

Jackie stared at the worn table top, picking at the edge of a spot with a nail. “I always knew I’d lose her to him. She goes off for a year comes back and it’s me that’s in the wrong for being upset and not his lordship in there whose to blame for bad drivin’. She’s only been gone a few days she says, not a year – well it was a year to me!”

Jackie’s crying now herself and Jack doesn’t know what to do. She’s closed down physically, a hand on her shoulder would likely get him smacked now, so when she looks up at him he nods for her to go on. He can listen at least.

“She’s changing, every time she comes home there’s less and less Rose.” Jackie puts her head in her hands. “Less and less of my little girl. I know she has to grow up, I know that’s natural her finding herself and falling in love – and I know it be the same if he was human and she was going off to his flat and not his spaceship. I know that but the way she’s changin’ is so… it’s not same. It isn’t. She doesn’t care about the things she used to – can’t sit and watch tellie and gossip anymore. She tries, bless her, but it’s like her mind is already back out there with him. She can’t sit still, can’t stop moving, and everything is so serious and she won’t ever tell me the whole truth about anything!”

“What is it you want to know?” Jack asked, softly. “She’s probably afraid you’ll worry too much, or won’t understand the things she does.”

Jackie busied herself with pouring them both a cup of tea before responding. “All this traveling, what’s the point of it? What’s the real reason he’s always taking her places and getting them in trouble – and don’t deny it. I can read between the lines.”

Jack took the offered cup. “Where would he settle? His home world is gone, entirely gone. There’s no colonies, no outposts- nothing. Even the allies of his people, those that are left, have no memory of them. He’s a ghost and a legend and a god left all alone in the universe, Jackie. And the Time Lords, you have to understand what they did. They created time travel – stabilized the vortex and made things possible and now that they are gone there’s this giant hole in the universe that even though most everyone can’t see it, it’s there. A gaping wound in the fabric of existence. They were too big, too powerful, too important to just snuff out like a candle and yet they did,” Jack fiddled with the sugar dish. “When I was in the academy I heard the legends of them the for the first time. Just stories, told like you’d talk about the Greek gods- just silly myths that had been handed down from Time Agent to Time Agent for so long that no one actually knew anyone that had known one. An urban legend and a dead religion and so much more. I loved every story, ate them up like candy, but I never believed.”

Jack shook his head trying to shake his thoughts into order. “The Doc claims his people mostly kept to themselves, that they were never supposed to interfere but they interfered all the time, Jackie. They were the one thing that kept a whole slew of really really bad things at bay. Sure, to them living outside Time like they did it probably seemed like they only very rarely got involved but from out here, to the rest of us, if the legends are all true, they did an incredible amount. The Time Agency that I used to work for, we tried to keep a lid on the worst abuses, tried to keep people from creating anything that could damage the timelines more than nature can repair. But we were like kids playing at doctor, not the real thing. We had no idea what we were doing and very little of the technology it would take to do it right. We were nothing compared to them – ants next to giants. We barely even noticed the Time War. And now there’s just him – just one Time Lord left in all of creation. And he’s got to do the work of all his people. It’s up to him to protect all of TIME, Jackie. All of it – from the instant the universe was created to the very second of it’s collapse and beyond – because this is just one universe out of an impossible number and he’s one single man.”
“You make him sound like God.” Jackie snorted. “God doesn’t burn toast.”

“He’s not God, but by every definition that matters, and no matter how he hates it, he’s pretty much a god.” Jack admitted with a grimace. “You have no idea the scope of that man’s power. He pretends he doesn’t have it, downplays what he’s capable of. He keeps a lot of it under wraps and some of it I doubt Rose even knows he can do. Did you know he can manipulate time without the TARDIS? Slow it down or speed it up just for him – just around him. I’ve seen him do it – subtly. It’s like breathing for him to move it just a bit. It’s why he wins most of the physical fights he might get into. He’s got the advantage of being able to manipulate his speed by controlling time itself. There are limits of course, I doubt he can get more than a half second out of it, but that’s all it usually takes. And with the TARDIS, the things he and this ship can do working together are so beyond comprehension… If it wasn’t for the laws and limits he keeps himself to he could rule everything, Jackie, and I mean everything. Not just Earth, not just this time, but all of it.

“And what does he do? He wears himself ragged fixing other people’s mistakes.” Jack clutched his tea tightly. “He and the TARDIS go where they are called, floating along through time streams and space, and land where there’s something about to go down that shouldn’t. They land and they fix it, and they offer second chances to the idiots that were about to cause the apocalypse. And that’s why he can’t settle down. It’s not a choice, Jackie. If he doesn’t keep moving, if he doesn’t do this impossible job, then everything is lost.”

Jackie was pale and shaking as he finished and Jack felt guilty for being so honest with her. But she had to understand – had to see at least the edges of it. The Doctor wasn’t just a man with a fancy toy, he wasn’t just anything. And yes, it was pretty certain that traveling with him would eventually mean the death of any companion if they stayed long enough – but that that sacrifice was so much larger than just serving one man’s agenda. Rose was part of something so important and he knew she didn’t know it, didn’t see the scope of it, and that the Doctor would never tell her. But Jackie needed to know that it wasn’t just a man taking her daughter – it was the universe drafting her.

“If he’s so powerful why can’t he protect her?” Jackie finally asked, fear and anger waring in her eyes.

“He could.” Jack admitted. “He could rip apart everything to keep her safe and stop anything bad from ever remaining in her life. But he’d be breaking things – Jackie. Big things. Making more holes in the universe, making more rips and tears and weakened parts. If it got too weak it would collapse and then everything, everything, would just end. He limits his own powers because even gods have rules they have to follow. He does the impossible daily but some things are a step beyond impossible. And because he loves her, because he knows she’d never want him to put her before the universe, he won’t. And if he forgets that, that’s what I’m here to remind him of.”

Jackie took a shakey breath. “So you are telling me that he needs her? But he can’t save her.”

Jack took a slow sip of his tea. “I’m saying that someday he’s going to be alone again, Jackie, and that for him this time with your daughter is barely a blink of an eye. Doing this, saving her like this, he’s doing it because he loves her but he knows at the same time that when she goes it will break him. He can’t lose her, he won’t be able to function, but he’ll have no choice. Just like after the war, when he was left all alone, he’ll have to pick up and keep moving no matter how much he just wants to die. He’s done this knowing that for the rest of eternity his mind is going to be constantly looking or hers and it will be a never ending torture, a pain that he will never be able to end for the rest of Time. And he still did it, still wanted to do it, because she’s Rose and he loves her. Your daughter is worth that to him, Jackie Tyler. No matter what happens to her, no matter what way her story ends, the Lonely God will never forget her, never stop loving her or missing her or needing her. Rose is that important to him, to the universe. You aren’t losing her, Jackie. The rest of us are gaining her,
forever. Because even when she’s been dead for thousands of years he’ll still be thinking about her, still be doing things because he knows they are what she’d want him to do.” Jack sat down his empty cup. “Rose is now outside Time, Jackie, in a way no human has been or ever will be.”
Chapter 11

Rose woke up slowly. The weight of the Doctor’s head on her chest was gone but the heavy feeling of him in her mind was only partially dulled. She could feel him there, like a mental hug, but it was calm, undemanding. Unlike earlier she had no idea what he was thinking, or feeling, yet she got the distinct impression he could tell her emotions if not her thoughts…

“I can.” He answered softly and she turned towards his voice. He was perched on the edge of a counter, his leather jacket firmly back in place like a shield. “I’ll be able to strengthen the barriers soon, I promise. But yes, for now I can hear you.” He grimaced. “Much more than I expected, actually. Rose, I’m sorry. I don’t want to invade your privacy.”

“I know.” Rose cautiously levered herself up to sit against the head of the biobed. “This entire situation is not at all what you’d want.” She half smiled, letting some of her irritation at herself come out in her expression since she knew he could read it in her mind. “If I hadn’t wandered off,”

He cut her off. “You did not wander. Not this time.” He unfolded himself from his position against the counter and collapsed into the chair by her bedside. “I left you in that shop because I thought it was safe, Jack thought it was safe. We were only going next door… if we had been better prepared….”

“Hey,” Rose admonished, reaching out to take his hand. The awareness of him strengthened with the physical contact and she caught a wisp of his guilt. “It was a dress shop, Doctor. On a planet that wasn’t currently at war with anybody, made up almost entirely of humans, in a fairly peaceful period of time. No way could you expect what came next. And you two found me, that’s the important part.” Rose’s hand flickered toward her abdomen. “Did they…”

“Yes.” He answered, his eyes dark and sad. “Jackie wasn’t sure what you wanted so we waited. But you’ll need to decide in the next couple hours.”

Rose didn’t even need to think about it. She’d had plenty of time during her capture. “I want it out. I’m not going to give them the satisfaction of carrying this damn thing.” She let go of his hand to grip the blanket. “I’m not going to go nine months with… with a piece of them clinging inside me.”

“Only three actually, they accelerated everything.” The Doctor rubbed a tired hand through his hair. “We can terminate the pregnancy now, or we can wait a few more hours and transfer the fetus to an external womb and put it out for adoption. Whichever you prefer.”

Rose looked at him. “What would you prefer I do?”

“I don’t get a vote, Rose.” He grimaced. “It’s your body.”

“Yeah but you have this saving people thing.” Rose gestured around. “If there’s the option of not killing it you’ll want me to take it, won’t you?”

The Doctor reached for her hand and she let him take it. She could feel his uncertainty once their skin touched. “Can you feel that?” he asked. “Can you feel what I feel, when we touch?”

“Yes, a little.” She frowned and looked down at their hands. “It’s muted.”

“It’s because I’m not actively projecting it. I could, but it would mean taking down some of my barriers I just put back up. And trust me, Rose, you don’t want to get my emotions lobed at you all the time.” He looked slightly sheepish. “My emotions don’t always line up exactly with a human
either, so it might not always make sense. But I want you to feel as well as hear this.” He took a deep breath. “I won’t think less of you no matter what you choose, because I have no idea what I’d do if I were in your place. The idea of there being a bit of you, out there, even if it’s just a handful of DNA strands is appealing, I admit. But just because we might end this pregnancy doesn’t mean you can’t choose to have a child at some other point. And the idea that this was forced on you, that the other half of that DNA wasn’t from someone nearly worthy of you, well, that makes me rather angry.” His eyes burned and she could feel a hint of that anger even though he tried to block it. “So whatever you want to do, I stand with you.”

“I really don’t want to keep it another second.” Rose whispered back, holding his eyes. “I will if you ask me to, but not because I want to.”

He reached into his pocket and took and out the sonic. “You sure?”

“Absolutely.”

He clicked through the settings with one hand, never letting go of her other. He settled on one, aimed, and waited for her last nod. One whirl and…

“It will induce a miscarriage.” He explained, settling the sonic back into his pocket. “Be like your monthly only maybe a little heavier. Humans at this developmental stage are sensitive to sonics. Even with the acceleration you were very early into this; shouldn’t be any complications.”

Rose nodded. “Thank you.” She meant it for more then the sonic induced abortion.

“Thank you, Rose. For being here.” He replied, still gripping her hand. “For however long you can be.”

BREAK

Walking hurt her still mending leg, but Rose couldn’t take one more second of confinement. Her mother was hovering, the way only Jackie could – both insanely close yet far enough away Rose felt like an ungrateful daughter if she said anything, and the TARDIS was getting too small for her comfort. They needed to get the other survivors home, but the Doctor didn’t want to rush them, and several of the women had yet to figure out what they wanted.

Allis was content to keep her baby, to Rose’s shock. She had two children at home, she said, and despite the origins of this one she was prepared to give them a younger sibling. Her husband had died not long before she was taken so there wasn’t anyone to complain it wasn’t theirs, Allis said softly. Rose knew she was worried about her other kids, and even after the Doctor arranged a call to the planetary government agency that had them Rose knew it had to be a new kind of torture to wait to get back to them. When Allis hadn’t returned from work, the babysitter had called social services and they’d put the two little boys in that planet’s version of foster care. While they looked healthy, Allis confessed she was worried. All kinds of things could happen to kids in care, and the bastards that had taken them were still out there. What if they started stealing children instead of women?

Jack and the Doctor seemed to have plans on that front, as well, and the only thing holding up their quest to bring the last of the criminals to justice, and see Allis home, was what the other four women wanted to do. There was a bit of an economic depression happening in the majority of that sector during their time, and the women all had very little to return to. One of the women was married, but her wife’s reaction to her call hadn’t been particularly warm. She was leaning towards staying on Earth, in Rose’s time, if the Doctor would allow it. She was nearly entirely human, and he saw no reason not to let her if she really wanted to. Jackie had offered her the use of Rose’s bedroom for a few weeks, until she was settled – if Rose didn’t mind. Rose didn’t mind in the least.
Leaving the TARDIS, leaving the Doctor, seemed particularly painful, more so than her still not entirely healed leg. It wasn’t that her bond with the Doctor weakened when away from him, it was just that her anxiety increased. In the three days since she’d woken up, he’d managed to patch together his mental shields enough he couldn’t read her every thought, but for some reason the idea of being outside the ship, without him there, made her terrified. It was irrational. It was paranoid. This was her London, in her own time. Rose could handle herself here just fine, thank you very much.

Yet…

Things happened to girls here too; Rose had friends that had fallen prey to a spiked drink or a man that had very flexible definitions of consent. One girl she knew growing up had had a funny uncle… Things happened.

It wasn’t like she was jumping anytime something with a penis got near her.

Okay, maybe it was slightly like that. Jack and the Doctor were safe. Mickey was okay, just a little extra gitters around him when his hand wandered a little too close to her knee when he visited… something he noticed and stopped right away.

But the new neighbor that moved into the apartment below her mother – not okay. The teenager riding his bike slowly down the sidewalk – highly questionable. The older man with the heavy jacket in the spring air – positively hinky.

Rose took a deep breath and forced herself to keep walking. Gallacy, the girl that wanted to stay in London, needed to get a feel for things to make an informed choice. Rose needed out of the TARDIS. Taking Gallacy on a walk down to the local daycare to see what she was in for was not beyond her ability.

She needed to exercise the leg anyway. She couldn’t let herself get out of running form. The Doctor had healed the bone but she needed to move the muscles to stretch out the bits he’d pieced back together.

Rose stumbled slightly when three blokes rounded the corner, laughing and jostling each other. They paid no attention at all to Rose or the heavily pregnant woman beside her. Gallacy seem unaffected by them, chattering on about how green the run down and mostly dead park by the estate was – Rose made a mental note not to visit Gallacy’s home world – and it wasn’t until they were well past that the woman stopped.

“Rose, can we take a break? Maybe sit down?” Gallacy asked.

Rose nodded and led the way into the park to a little bench. Gallacy sat down slowly, her balance off from the extra and ever growing weight on her front. “Gah – these bastards and their accelerated growing.” She grimaced. “I can’t get used to anything before there’s another two inches girth on me! I don’t even want to think what these stretch marks are going to look like.”

Rose returned the grimace. “Maybe the Doctor will have something that will help?”

Gallacy shrugged. “This is the fourth one I’ll have spit out, Rose, by this point I doubt anything short of a skin transplant is going to help. At least this one is mine to keep.” Gallacy placed a hand over her abdomen and smiled. “I always wanted kids you know. But my wife, she wasn’t interested in raising anything that wasn’t hers genetically. We couldn’t afford that kind of thing and she didn’t want to have one herself. I was actually on the way to see the magistrate about a divorce when I was taken.”
“Oh.” Rose looked away. “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be.” Gallacy sighed and leaned back, her eyes gazing happily up at the sky. “I never thought I’d be somewhere like this again – with grass and sunshine and clean air.”

“If you think this is clean air I really don’t want to see your homeworld.” Rose replied back, her nose wrinkling as a particularly foul lorry sped past.

Gallacy’s expression darkened. “Versi 6 wasn’t my homeworld. The colony I grew up on doesn’t exist anymore.” She turned sad eyes towards her companion. “Most of us starved to death when a supply shipment failed to arrive before winter season. Then the insects came in huge swarms and ate what crops we had managed to plant. There were waves after wave of disease. We started out with 7,000 colonists, my parents in the first batch. By the time the last of us left when I was 22, there were only 234. I was one of three kids born on the colony to make it out. My parents didn’t. I married Jane and moved to that hell hole looking for work. We got there and there wasn’t any and we didn’t have enough money to get back off it. We stayed together because we were the only thing either of us had, two kids from a failed colony world with no education and no patron.” Gallacy huffed. “I’m better off here, Rose. Your time might not have the technology we did, but at least I might be useful.”

Rose turned to face her, pulling one leg up onto the bench. “What kind of work do you do?”

Gallacy’s expression brightened. “I’m good with animals. See, it was my mother’s gift. She had just enough Catkind from her grandfather, and she could hear normal Earth cats in her head. When I was little she taught me how to do it too, and then I realized I could hear other animals as well if I tried. People are harder but then, I’m not terribly interested in what most people have to say.”

“That probably explains why you survived under the telepathic field.” Rose speculated. “You must have some pretty strong telepathy.”

“The Doctor told me I did.” Gallacy shrugged again. “If I’d been born on a big world they probably would have tested me as a kid and I could have been trained. Apparently there are all kinds of jobs for folks like me if you know where to look. We can tell when people are lying, if they have bad intentions. Lot of good that did me.”

“What happened, if you don’t mind me asking?”

“I thought he wanted me.” Gallacy smirked. “He wouldn’t have been the first man, you know. I have a feline grace.” She winked. “And I was mad at Jane so… I thought I’d go off with this guy, get a little entertainment. Got more than I bargained for.” Her tone changed. “You see, my gift isn’t without blind spots. I knew he wanted me, just not what he wanted me for. By the time I did, it was too late to get away.” She eyed Rose. “So what happened to you?”

Rose bit her lip. “Quite a bit different. I was in this little shop, and I remember a man coming in. I didn’t pay much attention. The shop girl was showing me this pink silk dress and I was trying to calculate how much it was, doing the conversion in my head. Next thing I knew there were arms grabbing me and something injected into my arm. I tried to fight but it was only seconds until I was out cold.”

“Seems like they had all kinds of ways of grabbing us. Shop was probably working with them.” Gallacy stretched. “We were lucky.”

“Yeah.” Rose agreed softly. “You seem to be taking this all fairly well.”
Gallacy shrugged. “Cats are pragmatic creatures, Rose. I may look human, and pass for human biologically, but I’ve always felt more kinship with Catkind than homosapiens.” She smirked. “You, you’re much more canine than feline.”

“What?”

Gallacy waved off Rose’s indignation. “It’s not an insult, just an observation. Cats, we tend to face any given situation with a ‘how best can this serve me’ attitude. Canines, well, you lot are optimists and depressingly selfless. You survive on hope and faith and companionship. Cats thrive on a wariness and calculation.” Gallacy nodded towards the group of teenage boys that had circled back around. “Take them. You jumped when you saw them, because your optimism has been shaken. You feel guilty that you fear them, think there’s no reason you should be anxious, that they haven’t done anything and you’re being silly. So you’re acting extra skittish because you want to trust them – it’s in your nature – but you can’t because of what’s happened. I, on the other hand, never would have thought them harmless; I never trust anyone. So my trust, my core sense of how the universe works, wasn’t violated. I’d have always kept a weathered eye on them, and so… I’m comfortable suspecting them and moving on. You have to get used to not trusting.”

“I’m not part dog though.” Rose denied, crossing her arms. “You might be part cat, but the analogy stops there.”

“I don’t know.” Gallacy cocked her head to study Rose. “There’s something about you that’s positively dog like, Rose. And it’s not just because you look at the Doctor like you want him to pet you.”

“Gallacy!”

“You do you know.” The other woman snickered. “And that link you two have now, I can sense it. He’s being so careful with you, poor man. What you both need is a good shag.”

Rose crossed her arms across her chest. “I don’t know that I’m for that right now. And he and I aren’t like that. He’s not interested in that kind of thing.”

Gallacy stood up. “Well, curl up at the foot of his bed then and lick yourself. It’s always worked for me. Got Jane’s interest right away.”

“I…” Rose trailed off, her mind breaking slightly at that mental image. “I don’t think I even want to try and respond to that.”

BREAK

“She’s that flexible?” Jack asked, his voice clearly conveying his awe.

Rose rolled her eyes. “Jack! Focus.”

He smirked and flopped back to lay on the grass. The TARDIS had helpfully provided Rose with a lovely garden scene for the talk and she curled her toes in the long apple scented grass with a sigh. “Jack, please, there’s not exactly a lot of other people I can talk to right now. Allis is wonderful, but she’s focused on getting back to her kids. Gallacy is clearly not understanding where I’m coming from, and the others are still too traumatized to really talk about anything.”

Jack took a long moment to formulate a reply. “I don’t think you’re handling it badly at all, to be honest. I’m not exactly an expert on this stuff, but I know how a person deals with having their body violated is a personal thing. The first time I was in a situation and things happened that I hadn’t consented to I was confused. I mean, I’m not exactly a guy that says no a lot, so when I do, I really
mean it.” Jack turned to look at her for a moment before going back to staring at the projected sky. “The fact that it was another guy from the Agency, someone I trusted, it made me wonder if it was my fault. I mean, with my reputation maybe I didn’t have a right to complain and I was drunk. And then I saw him start in on the same thing with this young recruit and that’s when I reported him.”

“What happened?”

“You mean after my commander stopped laughing?” Jack smiled ruefully. “He took the full report, started asking around, and Mark had apparently done the same thing to several other people. He was slipping extra hypervodka into people’s drinks and getting us totally shitfaced in a quarter of the time it would normally take. I barely even remember it.” Jack rolled over to face her, propping his head on his hand. “And lets’ not even start on the number of times I’ve done something to get something. That started long before the Agency, Rose. Some of these women, the colony worlds they come from, it wouldn’t surprise me if they hadn’t done the same things I did. When it comes to putting food on the table and you’re starving, you trade whatever you’ve got. These men could probably have talked a lot of the women into doing this voluntarily for a cut of the profit.”

“That’s horrible.” Rose shivered. “Are things that bad?”

“It’s not unheard of here in your time, Rose. There are women in lots of places that have children for money.” Jack advised softly. “I’m not saying that it makes all this okay, or that it wasn’t traumatizing for anybody, but it makes their situations a lot different than yours. You have options, places to go. Gallacy may not be the only one that asks to stay here. Allis is lucky, her husband had family money and she’s got a house and a skill. She can provide for her kids and herself. Betty and Laci, they were single and alone, vulnerable. No one even reported them missing. Hamla is sick, her brain suffered some damage like yours, but not as bad. The Doctor’s not sure if she’ll ever fully recover from the effect of that telepathic field. Her family wants her to come home, but they don’t have the means to get her treatment. Last I heard, she was talking with Laci about the feasibility of them selling the babies themselves.”

“Oh God.” Rose’s eyes teared up. “That’s horrible.”

“Is it?” Jack shrugged and laid back down. “They can’t afford to keep them. If they just give them up for adoption they won’t know who gets them, but it will likely be someone that bribes the agency for the mostly human blonde baby because it’s so much in demand. Why let some government lackey make money under the table off their work when they could select the best family they could find themselves and profit off it? At least they know their child will be with a family that can financially provide for them.”

“What about Betty?”

“She doesn’t want to know what happens to it.” Jack said softly. “She wants to have it here, in the TARDIS, and not even see it. She’s asked the Doctor to drop her off anywhere but where she had been so she can just pretend it never happened.” Jack hesitated. “Rose, I probably shouldn’t tell you this, but Allis and I have both caught her trying to hurt herself. The Doctor doesn’t have the equipment on the TARDIS to remove the fetus and incubate it or he would have by now. We’ve got her sedated until he finishes rigging something up. She was just barely past the point where he felt comfortable terminating the pregnancy so this is the only real option that keeps her from having to carry it.”

Rose hugged her knees. “So he’s going to take it out and then, what? Drop her off at a mental hospital somewhere and let her think she dreamed the whole thing?”

Jack took a shaky breath. “I suggested we whip her memory. Neither of us knows exactly what we
should do. Let’s face it, we don’t normally stick around for the clean up after an adventure.”

“No we don’t.” Rose looked up the TARDIS made sky and let out a controlled breath. “I can’t say I’m that fond of it if this is any example.”
“Are you sure you have to leave?” Jackie asked, knowing the answer before she even got the words out.

Rose nodded, her eyes sad but determined. “It’s time, mum. Gallacy will be fine here with you, and we’ve got to get the others back to their lives. It’s not fair to make them wait just because we’d like a little more of a visit.”

Jackie bit her tongue to keep from saying what was on her mind and instead pulled her daughter in for a hug. “You call me if you need to talk. Anytime, Rose, you hear me? I don’t care where you are or what I’m doing – you call your mother if you need anything.”

“Will do.” Rose’s smile wasn’t nearly as bright as Jackie was used to but it was there and that was probably better than could be expected given the circumstances. “And you call us if you need anything, or if there’s a problem with Gallacy.”

“Oh,” Jackie waved off the comment, smiling brightly at the thought of the plucky woman. “That woman is a total gem, Rose. She’s got nine lives, that one. She’ll be just fine.”

Rose chuckled. “You do know she’s part cat, right?”

Jackie blinked. “Seriously? Well, with you lot around odder things have happened. We’ll be fine, Rose. Truly. The Doctor transferred a whole fortune into my bank, did he tell you? There’s enough there to buy a bleeding house!”

Rose eyed her mother. “Why don’t you?”

“What?” Jackie asked, already having moved on to double checking Rose’s room for any forgotten items.

“Why don’t you buy a house? Get out of the estate.”

Jackie looked at her daughter in confusion. “Me? Own a house? Rose, I’m not the sort to own a house.”

“You could be.” Rose argued softly. “You and Gallacy, you could get a place somewhere away from the city. Set up your salon in some little village and make a fortune off the tourists. Make a real life for yourselves.”

Jackie frowned. “And you thought the gossip was bad here, Rose. Trust me, girl, you haven’t lived gossip until you lived in a village. My great aunt lived in a right museum out there in the middle of no-where and it made her all funny in her head. No, I’m city born and city raised and I’ve lived in this flat since the month before your father and I got married and I intend to die in it. Besides, that money is to set Gallacy and her little one up somewhere. It’s not for me.”

At some point in the conversation the Doctor had come into the flat and Rose caught his eye over her mother’s shoulder.

“It could be yours.” The Doctor said softly and Jackie jumped, turning to look at him with wide eyes. “I often forget about money.” He admitted, looking slightly guilty and rubbing the back of his neck. “It’s just not something I have to worry about most of the time. But I’ve got mountains of it, Jackie. Whatever you need.”
“I don’t need charity.” She insisted, crossing her arms and glaring.

“It’s not charity. Consider it Rose’s wages.” The Doctor offered, looking to Rose for her confirmation that what he was saying was fine. “Even if you want to stay here a little extra funds to help out might make things easier. And Rose needs a place to come home to, so if you did decide to move just make sure there’s space for her.”

“There’s always space for her.” Jackie’s look softened slightly. “You really have loads?”

“Tons of tons.” The Doctor grinned. “I’ll set it up that if the account goes down too far it will fill back up at the end of the week. Sound alright? I promise I won’t miss it.”

Rose cut in with a smirk. “Trust me, mum. I’ve seen ‘im drop a fortune on a banana milkshake – enough to buy half the bleeding crown jewels. He’s got so much he doesn’t even bother looking at prices. I’m the one that’s always trying to figure out if we are paying too much.”

“We didn’t really do money.” The Doctor shrugged. “On Gallifrey – it just didn’t exist. You’d think after 900 years I’d have gotten used to humans and capitalism but frankly it’s just confusing and too much bother. Rose does all the accounting for me.”

“By accounting he means haggling with shopkeepers. Most of the time I’m arguing over something that doesn’t even look like money.” Rose rolled her eyes. “And he carries around little bags of gems, mum. Diamonds in his pockets like pennies. It’s nutters.”

Jackie looked around her daughter’s room. “I don’t want to leave here.”

“Then don’t.” The Doctor shrugged. “But you’ve got options, Jackie.” He eyed the worn carpet with a hint of distaste. “And you could upgrade.”

“You are one to talk, always wearing the same clothes and with a ship that looks like it’s three minutes from the junkyard.” Jackie complained, waving them towards the door. “All right you two, out with you before you say something I have to hit you for.”

BREAK

Getting the other women settled, and the fetus in the make shift incubator to a proper facility, took several hours. Allis and Rose both cried, and exchanged telephone numbers, but everyone else just seemed glad to have that part of their story close. Betty hadn’t even looked back as she exited the ship for the last time. The two men they’d captured were turned over to the authorities and Jack handed over a pile of evidence that could be used to close down the rest of the operation. It was an anti-climatic ending if there was one.

Once they were gone the TARDIS felt empty and Rose admitted in the quiet of her head that it wasn’t really an ending. She wasn’t sure if it was going to end, at least not for her.

She could feel the Doctor hovering in the back of her mind, like a soft hum. No matter how hard she concentrated she couldn’t do more than sense his presence though. Her lack of telepathic ability made it impossible for her to contact him. He claimed he could always feel her, could sense her attempts when she made them and open the connection if it was safe to do so, but it was rather like a faint whisper. It was easy for him to get distracted and not hear her calling. It was hardly reliable. Jack and the Doctor both assured her that if she was in danger the bond would activate without her trying and her panic and distress would register like a cannon blast in the Doctor’s head. It had done so the previous evening when she’d had a nightmare at least, but it wasn’t quite enough to reassure her.
Rose wasn’t used to being scared. Leaving the ship to see Allis home had been almost too much even with the Doctor and Jack by her side. And it was killing her. There were worlds out there to explore, places to see, people to meet, and Rose wanted to do all of it just like before. But there was this rolling pit of fear in her stomach that made each step an effort.

She managed it, managed to see Allis off. Managed to make a statement against the men that had taken her and violated her. She did it all and everyone looked so proud of her for doing it.

Rose hoped the Doctor couldn’t sense how very close to not doing any of it she’d come. And now, with him and Jack whirling around the console room bantering about where to next she felt the unreasonable need to scream. She wanted to just carry on but she felt too thin, too stiff – everything was just too much.

She must have made some kind of a sound because the two men froze in place and then there was too many arms and too many voices and not enough air…

Rose didn’t stop running until she hit a wall. When her breath finally stopped heaving and she could get her brain to stop screaming Rose closed her eyes and tried to gather herself together. It was an effort, it seemed, to not fly apart into a billion pieces and it was only the ever present hum of the TARDIS and the cool metal of her walls that gave Rose any grounding.

The thereeness of the Doctor in her head was greater, as if he was poised just at the edge of her mind – leery to come into it without her express permission, not when they were safe on the TARDIS, but also deeply concerned. Rose couldn’t stop a hysterical laugh from bubbling out of her throat. She was deeply concerned herself.

When she finally calmed down enough to try and figure out where she was, Rose found the corridor unfamiliar. The TARDIS was enormous, infinite even if she had enough power, so that was not terribly shocking. When she’d first come on board Rose had practically begged for a few days just to explore the ship but the Doctor always found some excuse to cut her downtime short. This had resulted in a little game between her and the TARDIS where whenever Rose had even a few spare minutes the ship would move some new room or hallway into her path. It was like the ship respected her more for wanting to know and was giving her chances to whenever possible.

This, however, felt different and Rose found the corridor rather cold. Most of the ship felt lived in, as if the Doctor had at some point poured part of himself into the space, taken some effort in the long hours when his travel companions slept to personalize the space, care for it. Most rooms felt oddly human, as if the Doctor was unconsciously more comfortable in a human centered environment than he was in his own people’s. That was the only explanation Rose could see for the many many rooms that seemed, except for the rundle lighting, as if they could be found in her own London more easily than a spaceship.

This hallway, however, was different. The walls were a stark white, not as if clean but as if they’d been sterilized of personality. The doors were unmarked and so nearly a part of the wall Rose had to feel them out with her fingers to be sure they were actually there. She could only guess their locations by the rundle placements. Most were locked, the few that opened to her touch were empty and Spartan – only a raised platform like a bed at one end and silver rods that she supposed were for hanging clothing or other items from. A darkened doorway at the side of each proved to hold a sonic shower and waste receptacle, the kind of futuristic bathroom Rose had expected on a spaceship instead of the marble and brass that she’d found in her own room.

The layout, however, was familiar. It was the exact same as her room and Jack’s – as if this was the blank template that the TARDIS had for a bedroom before there was a person to live in it.

And the corridor was endless – Rose lost count after thirty or so rooms opened to the blank template.
The locked doors – those Rose suspected were not so blank.

The TARDIS was built for a slew of people to live in her, Rose knew that. But somehow the meaning of that had rather escaped her till now. The emptiness of the corridor, the sadness that seemed to radiate out from it, was like she was seeing into a bit of the TARDIS’ soul. If it hadn’t been for the presence of the Doctor in the back of her mind Rose would have felt very similar to when she’d been trapped in the darkness. ‘I wonder if this is what the TARDIS feels like, so empty but so glad of having him inside her,’ Rose thought to herself.

Eventually she gave up exploring the rooms to settle on one of the blank platforms. The room was so stark it was like a prison cell and Rose rested her head against the wall and tried to ask the TARDIS what it meant. Instead of answering Rose heard boots on the grating.

The Doctor peaked his head inside and seemed relieved when he saw her. “I’ve been looking for you for hours. How did you find your way down here?”

“I didn’t.” Rose answered with a shrug, not bothering to move. “After that little melt down, when I managed to pull myself together, I was in this corridor and it just keeps going and going. I get the idea the TARDIS wants me to learn something but I’ve no idea what.”

The Doctor stepped inside and sneered at the white walls. “Well it’s hardly likely to come to you in this forsaken place. The unclaimed crew quarters are dismal.”

“Is that what they are?”

The Doctor nodded. “When she was constructed it was expected that several Time Lords and their families would all travel at once. She actually predates the Looms, if you believe it or not.” He smiled fondly at the wall. “Still, she was retro fitted over the years and what you see here is the last remodel they did to her before she was decommissioned. The stark personalityless aesthetic was all the rage on Gallifrey for, well, about as long as ever I suppose. At least as far as technology went, they liked it all flat and no flash.”

“Gah – I’m glad you changed my room up then. This is awful.” Rose acknowledged. “Tell me you didn’t live like this.”

“Nah.” The Doctor shrugged. “Back home there was more color and pattern. They just liked to make the ships as utilitarian as possible to keep up with the idea of being apart from everything. Susan and I…” the Doctor trailed off with a pained look. “My granddaughter was the one that started to redo rooms.” He admitted softly. “She liked the Earth’s 1960s quite a bit and begged me to take her there. We lived there long enough she started bringing bits and bobs home.” He got a funny expression on his face before he held out his hand. “Come with me?” He asked.

Rose unhesitatingly took his hand and let him pull her to her feet. He walked them out into the corridor and after taking a quick peak around lead them several doors down to one of the locked panels. It opened after he spoke a soft lilting phrase.

The room was still white but the platform was covered with a bright pink bedspread and a mountain of purple and green pillows. There was a hideous shag green yarn rug on the floor and a lava lamp of all things was propped up on a low bookcase made from old boards and several pieces of iron. A record player sat next to it on a rickety wooden chair that was missing a spindle. The silver rods did indeed hold clothing, an array of garish looking mini dresses and a plethora of empty hangers told Rose that someone had taken their favorite bits with them.

“I parked us in a junk yard and Susan often picked up broken bits she liked to remake into things.”
The Doctor explained with a thick voice, his eyes glued to the bookshelf. “When she left she only took a few clothes and some books with her – I kept everything just like she left it in case she ever came back.”

‘She won’t ever come back now’ was the silent addition to that statement.

The room was so much like Rose imagined a teenaged female version of the Doctor would make it, if she didn’t have psychic paper and endless credit, that it made a part of her heart clench.

The Doctor continued. “Her name really wasn’t Susan of course. We all had impossibly long names and when we went to Earth it just didn’t suit. I told her we had to pick new ones. She said I should be a Doctor, because I was always lecturing on things and my specialty back home had been molecular biology. She picked Susan because when we went to look for clothing the nice lady in the shop had been named that. It was the first alien she’d ever met and my granddaughter made a friend and then named herself after her.” He smiled, looking both proud and sad. “She took the last name Foreman as joke – before man. Since our species had been around so much longer than you lot. She had a sense of humor, Susan.”

Rose touched the hem of one of the dresses with careful fingers. “Why do you only use her human name?”

“Because she chose it.” He answered, sitting heavily on the edge of the bed. “She wanted that name and I gave her anything she wanted. Even when she wanted to leave.” He looked up, his eyes dark and haunted. “Do you want to leave Rose?”

“And have my room become another locked panel in this hallway?” Rose shook her head. “Not in the least. I just… I just feel like I’m breaking, slowly, and I don’t know what to do to stop it. Like there’s this bomb exploding inside me and I’m barely keeping it together.” Rose sat down next to him. “I don’t mean to be so unstable. I’ll try harder, I swear. I’ll get stronger.”

“Oh Rose.” He pulled her closer to him. “You are the strongest person I know and you do not have to pretend you’re okay when you aren’t.”
Chapter 13

Things did get easier. Slowly.

Rose found that the more she ventured out, the less the choking feeling seemed to overtake her and even though she worried she was being a burden to them, neither Jack nor the Doctor complained when she’d ask in a tight voice to go back to the TARDIS. Even fate seemed to be kind and while they did plenty of exploring they didn’t run into any more trouble for a miraculous month (by Rose’s estimation – it was a bit hard to judge accurately.)

Trouble when it finally came was familiar, almost a relief actually. Running from invaders, fermenting rebellion, it was all a great distraction from the constant nagging of her own mind and Rose suspected it was what kept the Doctor going. If you are too busy running for your life you don’t have time to think about the previous times you’ve run for your life.

And helping people felt good, like she was making a difference again. That there was a reason for her to be there, that she had a job to do. Purpose, Rose decided, was the best medicine.

The bond with the Doctor was something Rose felt mildly guilty about. For all the Doctor’s worry and concern it didn’t seem to affect her any at all. Sure, she could sort of feel him there, particularly when they were separated during the dangerous bits and he was obviously checking up on her, but that felt like… it felt like he cared not like he was interfering. He obviously still trusted her to manage her part of the plan. So far it was just comforting having someone to look after her. A part of her wondered if this is what having a father might feel like.

But this was obviously not a paternal sort of thing and a little reading up on telepathic species and bonding, and a few quiet conversations with Jack, and she felt terrible. The Doctor had essentially married her, to save her life, and she couldn’t give him the support a wife should. Her human brain just wasn’t equipped for transmitting back along the bond – it could barely receive a signal even. Sure he could feel her, because he was constantly putting in effort to keep the bond active. How much of a strain it was on him was anybody’s guess. The books were all on other species, not Time Lords, and how strong he really was seemed to be debatable. He claimed to lack much of any ability in his current body but Jack insisted that what he’d seen from the Doc indicated a pretty powerful telepath.

Rose knew the Doctor was lonely, knew that he craved company in that big head of his, and here she was the only creature other than the TARDIS to be granted access and she couldn’t do a damn thing for him.

Of course he insisted that wasn’t the case. He told her in clipped words and with tender gestures that she was making him feel alive again – the constant ache in his head nearly gone just by having her linked there. But how could that really be true when she couldn’t even reach for him properly?

And God did she want to reach for him, in any way possible.

Which was only highly embarrassing given he was in her head.

Being attracted to him was nothing new. But feeling him back there, hovering like that ready to protect her every second of every day… Rose was incredibly and horribly aroused.

And given the fact that she felt like ants were crawling on her whenever she was alone with any male other than Jack or the Doctor… she now had zero chance of doing a damn thing to mitigate the
tension even if she wanted to.

Jack insisted she’d eventually be ready for intimacy, that it was totally normal to be jumpy around people after going through what she had. He said it was even common for people to crave sex, looking to exert control over themselves, after such an event. Rose read the same canned words in the self-help manuals too, thank you very much. It did not help at all considering the only living person she wanted that way was the one she couldn’t have.

Who was in her head, likely picking up on every single thought and had to think her the most pathetic creature to have ever walked the halls of the TARDIS.

She was eternally grateful that he was kind enough not to say anything and pretend it wasn’t happening. She didn’t know what she’d do if he looked at her with pity in his eyes.

The fact that he was slowly letting her in on his life before the war was… well it was amazing. Little things, a name here, a small story there, nothing like when he took her to Susan’s room, but still. It was all so much more than she’d ever hoped to get from him and it made her feel a little bit like she belonged.

Of course since she was bonded to him, she rather did belong. It wasn’t like he could just drop her off like he apparently had other companions. No, even if he did leave her off somewhere the bond would stay until she died. Maybe, he’d whispered one night after she’d found him in a particularly depressed mood, even after.

All the talking he’d done to her mum about what the affects would be for her, and not a word about what it would do to him.

He could live with her ghost in his head forever.

Which, he’d claimed in a small strained voice, was actually the best option because the idea that she’d die and leave him all alone again… Rose had never seen such a haunted look in his eyes, not even with the Dalek in Utah.

Patience, Jack insisted, was what she needed with herself. The Doctor it seemed had it spades when it came to her and for some reason that was making her want to snap at him constantly. The kinder the boys were, the more she wanted to smack them both and… Rose screamed into her pillow in frustration.

Still, in the morning, she got up, showered, got dressed, and went to the kitchen. She ate her breakfast, attempted small talk with Jack when he staggered in and handed him his coffee, and dutifully delivered a banana to the Doctor’s feet that were sticking out from a grating down a rather dark and slightly odd smelling hallway.

“No traveling today.” He’d warned her, his voice distorted by his cramped position in the nondescript hatch. “We blew a relay last night.”

“And what were you doing that blew the relay?” Rose asked, rubbing tiredly at her eyes as she said it. Some hint of her irritation must have been in her voice because the Doctor backed out of the hatch to look at her. His nose was covered in grease, his jacket off and tossed next to him on the floor. It wasn’t that long ago that the image would have made Rose sigh and smile at him, thinking it all so endearing. Now, now she just felt irritated at everything and it was showing.

He regarded her for a long moment. “I know you didn’t mean that, Rose. And I know you are aren’t really mad at Jack or I. I’m sorry I can’t do more.”
She gritted her teeth. “Will you stop being so bloody careful!” She growled out slowly, her words picking up speed as she let them loose. “You both dancing around me like I might break. Go ahead, snark at me! Yell some! Do something, anything, to at least pretend we’ve gone back to normal!”

“I don’t think we have.” He answered quietly. “I don’t think we will ever be quite the same, Rose. Master of pretending that I am, even I can’t act like there’s not a change happening here.” He stood up slowly from the floor and reached for her hand. Even though his was covered in TARDIS grease she took it – that at least hadn’t changed. He squeezed her hand. “I want to give you whatever you need, but I don’t know what it is. Neither does Jack. So we are doing the best we can, just being here and trying to go on.”

“Saving the universe.” Rose did smile at that. “I love traveling, even with all our running.” He smirked slightly. “And I do not want any of it to stop,” She added, some of the light dimming in her eyes.

The Doctor frowned. “We aren’t stopping. The TARDIS really does need repairs. The relay blew when I tried to set the programing for Adrianis 12. Jack was up half the night trying to help me put in a patch but I decided it would be safer to just sit in the Vortex until I could do it properly. We don’t want to risk landing somewhere and have the patch fail and not be able to take off again. I’m not trying to keep you grounded, I swear.”

“And all that time we spent without anything happening?” Rose asked.

The Doctor tugged on his ear. “Well, I might have been trying to keep things a little less stressful for the first couple weeks. TARDIS must have agreed with me since she landed us properly each time.”

“I knew it!”

“But I needed a break.” The Doctor added, his blue eyes serious as he locked them with hers. “I nearly lost you, Rose. And the bond is so new, and I haven’t had anybody in here for so long,” he tapped his head. “I needed time to adjust. It still feels jittery up there – like we are both out of sync still. It’s probably the cross species compatibility. I’m compensating for it, of course, but it’s taking effort to tune it in properly for long term and, to be totally honest with you, I was spending most of my energy on that at first. I just didn’t have it in me to take on more problems.”

“Oh.” Rose suddenly felt terrible. “I thought you were…”

“I know.” The Doctor sighed and ran a hand over his cropped hair, adding a layer of grease to it. “But not everything I do is always about you, you know.” He smiled as he said it, clearly meaning it to be a joke and she felt a little more tension drain out of her. “Want to give me a hand with this?” He offered, gesturing towards the open hatch. “If we can get the burned out components replaced the TARDIS can handle the recycling by herself.”

“Sure.” Rose offered, eying the mountain of blackened tubing the Doctor had pulled out of the hatch, and the array of new looking hoses laying on the other side. “I hope you mean for me to just hand you stuff. I have no idea what any of this is.”

He grinned and plopped back down on the grating, wiggling himself inside with a little difficulty. “I’ll talk you through it.”

It was a pleasant couple hours, even after the Doctor gave up trying to fit his broad shoulders into the final impossibly small spot and Rose had to take over. By that point she’d figured out that whatever it was they were doing it was basically like plumbing but with some kind of cellular based tubing. Apparently it was part of the TARDIS, like blood vessels, and she needed help to get the damaged
parts replaced. “Rather like how a human might need a bypass.” The Doctor explained as they finished up. “Only instead of build up in the arteries, it’s a slow decay of them. When my people added all the technology to the organic it created a few weak spots. The relay couplings are one, the tubing another.”

“And the wiring?” Rose added, eyeing the rather iffy looking bundles they were working around.

“That too.” He admitted with a grimace. “Of course, when she’s fully operational a lot of this she can repair herself. But a lot of her systems were compromised and I’m doing the best I can to find ways to repair her but without a proper TARDIS shipyard there’s a lot I can’t do. She’s regrowing things as fast as she can, but there was so much damage.” The haunted look flickered through his eyes but shut itself away again with a shake of his head.

Rose could feel him through the bond for just a split second, his despair leaking through as his mind remembered the Time War and the state his precious ship had been in. “Doctor?” she asked cautiously, moving to hug him from behind, trying to will some of her support to him both physically and mentally.

“You are getting good at that.” He said quietly, his own hands reaching down for her arms to pull her tighter. “Feels like you’re hugging me in both places.” He closed his eyes and leaned back into her. “I don’t want you to feel obligated to do it though.” He admitted quietly. “But I do appreciate it.”

“I wish I could do more.” Rose sighed into his shoulder. “You do so much for me and I can’t even be there for you like…” She trailed off.

He turned around and raised her chin with his finger to look at him. “You Rose Tyler are always what I need. Don’t ever sell yourself short.” His eyes were dark and serious and she swallowed thickly. “I haven’t exactly been teaching you either.” He frowned at himself. “I’ve been so busy working on my own head I haven’t thought what it must be like for you. I can reach out to you any time I need to without much effort but you have a hard time reciprocating and I’m sorry. I can’t leave the connection open wide without being constantly distracted.” He looked down and slightly away. “And you don’t want me that far into your head without warning. I wish it was easier for you but your brain just wasn’t built to receive that kind of input and while it won’t do any actual damage I’m told it’s very overwhelming for a non-telepath, almost impossible to sort out what’s input and what’s native.”

Rose eyed their grease covered hands where they were clasped together. “But you felt me trying just now?”

“Touch helps.” He admitted, glancing back up. “I can feel you pretty clearly when we are physically in contact, even with the bond tamped down, especially if you are trying to get through to me.” He flushed. “I almost gave in and answered you just now.”

“Why don’t you?” Rose asked, keeping his hand firmly in hers. “I know you could use that couldn’t you? Jack told me that you’d probably feel better if you could spend some time connected without trying to keep everything controlled. And I’m sure I can handle it for a little while even if it is overwhelming.”

He blushed bright red. “Remember how I said my people were intimate?”

“Oh. I…rather guessed it might be like that for you.” Rose blushed as well, silently adding that she’d hoped it might be. “But it can’t hurt me anymore can it, the damage is already done ya? And we’re already bonded so, I suppose I don’t understand why you wouldn’t want it.” God she felt like a slag,
almost begging him to mind fuck her… but she knew, somehow knew he needed it even if he was being so damn careful.

“No, I suppose you don’t.” He admitted. “But you can’t possibly want me like that Rose, you can’t possibly be consenting to it because you can’t conceive of it.”

“Why not?” She asked, feeling slightly defensive. “I know we can’t do things like either of our us would if we were both the same species, but for God’s sake we’re practically married, Doctor, and I want to do something for you. Not like you can get off with a fantasy 31st century vibrator like other people on this ship.”

He laughed, leaning his head down to rest on top of hers. “Oh Rose, you are positively radiant when you are irate.” His eyes were much lighter as he looked into hers. “But I don’t want to take advantage of this. I didn’t do it for myself; I did it to save you.”

“So you don’t want me like that?” Rose asked, trying to fight down the butterflies in her stomach.

“Rassilon,” he cursed, his fingers slipping from her hands to cradle her head, heedless of the grease he was working into her hair. “It’s all I can do at times not to go into that magnificent head of yours and just lounge there like an indolent cat. But I won’t ‘get off’ on it like you mean, and neither will you.” He pulled back and his nose twitched. “Which you clearly need to do.”

“oy!” She protested, thumping him lightly in the chest. “Not my fault if the combination of you lurking in the back of my head and touchin’ you makes me horny. You’ve known for ages that I have a thing for your ancient self.”

He took a deep slow breath. “I won’t stop you from finding someone, Rose.”

“I have someone.” Rose protested. “And you know it, you can feel it.” She held his eyes and took his hand in hers once more. “I know we have a few differences but I can’t forget how it felt that first few hours when I woke up and you were there and… is it so wrong that I’d like to feel that again?”

“Really?” his voice cracked. “You liked it?”

Rose nodded. “Course I did you silly alien. You did too I think?”

“Immensely.” He admitted, his eyes glistening. “So you really would like to do it again? Open the bond for a little while?”

“Yeah.” She agreed. “I would.”

Apparently that was all the consent he needed for in the next second the floodgates opened and Rose staggered. His hands caught her and they were both falling to the grating in a heap of limbs and burnt out tubing. He laughed slightly embarrassed, and made to help her get up but she pulled him till he was laying next to her in the pile and she closed her eyes as the feel of him in her mind just kept intensifying.

“Rose?” he asked softly and she squeezed his hand.

“I can feel you in there but it’s weird, seeing you and feeling you.” She peaked one eye open and the doubleness of seeing him and feeling him gave her a lurch in her stomach like motion sickness so she quickly shut it again. The feeling of him started to back away but she leapt after him as best she could. Get back here! She huffed at him in her head and his arms tightened on her.

Are you alright? he asked inside her head.
Perfectly. Rose’s forehead scrunched as she thought back at him, trying to relax into it. A little warning next time might keep me from falling over. She gave a mental sigh as she felt him move closer to her, the bond opening even wider still. What do I do?

Just what you are doing. he advised, his mind’s voice caressing her and she felt an answering tingle in her body that she tried to ignore. It’s probably too much for you to concentrate on both the mental and the physical. Why don’t you just… let me take over for a while? he asked and when Rose gave nonverbal affirmative her entire body shuddered before she lost awareness of anything but him.

It seemed like they must have laid there in the pile of burned out tubing and busted relays for hours. When Rose finally felt her awareness returning and the Doctor’s presence backing away her body was stiff and… “Fucking hell I’ve wet myself.” She realized with a start.

“Opps.” The Doctor’s ears turned red. “I forgot to control that bit… I got a little lost for a moment…”

Rose glared at him. “You took over control of my body and forgot about…” She poked him the chest. “You mister are a terrible driver of TARDIS’s and human bodies.”

He looked suitably sheepish as he climbed to his feet. “At least we needed a shower anyway?” He offered, holding a still grease covered hand out to her.

Rose wasn’t sure if she was more angry or more mortified as she took it and let him pull her to her feet. She quickly decided on mortified as her legs gave out and he had to pick her up, pressing her soiled body against his. “I’ve got you.” He stated needlessly. “I’m so sorry, Rose. I let us merge far too long.” His eyes crossed slightly. “Seven hours – far too long. And it’s exhausted you.”

“I’m fine,” Rose tried to lie, although she realized it was futile when she could hardly keep her head from falling into his chest. She was mentally wide awake but her body was long past exhaustion, her muscles stiff and cramping as if she’d run miles. “I just need a bath.”

“Coming right up.” He offered, carrying her swiftly through the TARDIS. They passed Jack, who looked up from his own pile of tubing to regard them with a concerned look which Rose tried to downplay with a shake of her head. She must have convinced him it was all okay because he went back to what he was doing without commenting.

The Doctor took her to his own room and Rose was not at all shocked that when he carried her into the bathroom his tub was already full of hot steaming water. What did shock her was that instead of depositing her on the chair next to the tub he instead stood her on her wobbly legs, half leaning against him, as he started to pull her clothing off.

“What!” She half protested but her arms were too weak to do more than shove ineffectually at his hands.

He smiled at her, cupping her check in his callused hand. “You haven’t even the energy to get undressed, Rose. Let me help. I was just in your head – seeing you naked can’t be any more of a violation.”

“Wasn’t a violation.” She argued softly. “And I’ve messed myself, this hardly how a girl wants to end up naked in a bloke’s bath.”

He waved off her concern, stripping her of her clothing with an actual doctor’s detachment. “Technically it’s my fault for not keeping that function in check, almost as bad as if I’d peed on you. My fault.” His face twisted into a grimace. “That’s not exactly a mental image I ever wanted… Let
me at least try and make this up to you.”

“Next time I’m going to the bathroom first.” Rose muttered as he lowered her gently into the fragrant water. Her body gave a spasm as the hot water hit her beleaguered muscles. “Offf,” she moaned, “Why does it feel like I’ve run a bloody marathon?”

“Your body translated my mental presence into physical sensation.” The Doctor explained as he, to her shock, stripped off his own clothes to climb into the enormous bath with her. “I hadn’t expected that. It complicates things a bit.” His dark eyes looked at her apologetically. “Probably better if we don’t do that again.”

“No.” Rose protested, slapping his naked thigh. “We do that again and again and again – only we don’t do it for so long. And we let Rose potty first.” She lay back against the back of the tub tiredly. “And preferably when we both aren’t covered in grease or laying in a pile of burnt out parts.” She opened one eye and couldn’t help it as it traveled over his body.

He always wore so many layers, likely to keep from accidently touching people skin to skin, and Rose had had very few opportunities to see anything more than his neck and hands. One memorable occasion she’d gotten to play with his toes… This was an unprecedented opportunity and she felt cheated to be so tired she couldn’t appreciate it properly. In fact, now that she was considering things, all of her felt worn out and she frowned, glancing down at her own body in confusion.

The Doctor was doing something to the water with his sonic, making it swirl around them before he set the gadget down on the ledge next to the tub and reached for a bottle of dark purple crystals. Rose recognized them as the muscle relaxing mix he’d given her after Cardiff. He poured some in and the water fizzed for a second before the smell of liliacs drifted to her. “That should help some.” He offered, his mouth quirking slightly.

Rose hmmmmed at him, still a little disconcerted by the new sort of ache she was feeling.

“What is it?” He asked, moving closer to her to start to was the grease from her skin with a clean flannel. She let him move her limbs for her, too tired to protest or bother being embarrassed at this point.

Rose frowned and leaned towards him, letting his body support her instead of the tub wall. He stiffened for a second then relaxed, likely adjusting to the increase in put so much skin contact would grant him. Rose liked how he felt, solid and real and hers. He made a small sigh as the thought passed through her and she knew he picked up on it.

His large hands pulled her closer and she shivered as he kissed her temple. “You spoil me, Rose Tyler.” He whispered in her ear. “But something is bothering you.”

Rose grimaced. “I think…. I think I did more than just manifest that experience physically, didn’t I?” She asked, her hand ghosting over her stomach, not daring to reach lower with him there. “I feel like… like parts of me are more tired than others, parts we didn’t exactly use.”

He smiled, his blue eyes sparkling. “My people, that was how we enjoyed each other, Rose. We open a link wide and with touch we make the bridge stronger. I can’t tell you what it means to me that you took pleasure in that even if it manifests physically for you. I enjoy having the bond undamped too, and touching you, feeling you this close, I get a great deal of pleasure from it.” His arms tightened around her. “But I don’t want to do it if it distresses you, and you weren’t able to actually enjoy any of it since it was so overwhelming for you. If I had shut down the mental aspect and let you stay in the physical than I wouldn’t have been able to stay in your mind like that and the entire point of it would have been moot.” His head rested on top of hers. “I don’t know what to do to make it equal.”
Rose turned slightly so she was sitting in his lap. She could feel his manhood against her leg, soft and not at all what she’d hope from a human man in the same position and she tried not to let that bother her. “Can we meet half way? Maybe open the bond not quite so far? Would that do anything for you?”

“Even dampened it does something.” The Doctor admitted, his hands lazily running over her body. “And I will admit, having you this close with this much contact, I can feel you buzzing about the edges of my senses and it’s rather hypnotic. I’ve never felt anything like it before.” He smirked proudly. “You, Rose Tyler, are amazing. Have I told you that today?” As he said it he let just a portion of the bond flare back to life and it was perfect, like holding hands inside her head.

“No.” Rose leaned more into him, closing her eyes against the competing sensations. “And why am I amazing?”

His breath ghosted over her ear and she shivered. “Because you translate my mental presence into physical sensation in that wonderfully complex little ape brain of yours.” He practically purred and her exhausted core gave a weak twinge. “I’ve been tapping down the link, to keep from overwhelming you, except when I’m too tired to keep it up and of course just now in the corridor. You’ve probably felt something like what I’m doing now whenever I’ve been sleeping?” he asked.

“I don’t know.” Rose admitted, trying to reign herself in and pay attention. “It’s not this intense without the physical contact.”

“Touch telepathy is easier for me.” He answered gently, pulling back just a small bit. “It’s perfectly natural that the bond would feel stronger for you when we touch. And since I’m not weakening it as much, it’s unusually strong compared to what you are used to. I can take it down a notch if you want?”

“No!” Rose argued, clutching him back to her despite her exhaustion. “I like this, Doctor, a lot.” She blushed. “If I hadn’t just apparently came, repeatedly, I’d probably be well on the way now.” Her cheeks had to be flaming.

His eyes were bright as he processed that. “Rose, if…” He trailed off, taking a moment to chose his words carefully. “If you can reach a sexual climax from the bond being fully open, and this barely there state gets you aroused…” his hand gently skirted over her breast and she gasped. “Perhaps if we combined the lower level of telepathic contact with physical stimulation it could be enough, if I linked your pleasure center to mine…” He leaned down and kissed her, a quick eager kiss that was more excitement than sensuality. “Given your reactions we might get a loop!” He crowed, clearly elated at the prospect.

“What’s a loop?”

“Pleasure feeding pleasure back and forth and around and in and through…” he explained between peppering her face with kisses. “Your pleasure feeding mine and mine feeding yours, the bond opening wider and wider until neither of us knows who is who. A telepathic orgasm, Rose. I didn’t think it could happen with us, not with you being so overwhelmed by the full bond, and not with me being unable to physically, but I suspect we might just if we combine methods and do a little telepathic jiggery pokery.” He nuzzled her neck. “If your reactions to this, Rassilon Rose, you smell so aroused, and I’ve barely done a thing for you but open the bond just a bit. It’s a very good sign.”

Rose felt her entire world tilt. “Are you saying there is a way we could… we could be intimate? Together? At the same time?”

He hugged her tightly in the lilac scented water. “I’m saying there’s a very good chance.”
Chapter 14

After he’d washed her hair he helped her out of the bath into a positively decadent gown that the TARDIS made appear on the hook next to his towel. His face had hardened in pain at the sight of it but he’d shaken it off to slowly ease her into it. It was draping and floor length, with a swooped neck and nearly no back – the kind of thing she’d always pictured Hollywood starlets in from the old black and white moves. If she hadn’t been so exhausted she’d probably have appreciated it for the lovely creation it was, but as tired as she felt Rose would be happy to crawl into bed starkers just to save time. Rose let him carry her to the bed, which had been turned down to reveal sheets of a soft cream color, the fabric appearing to be the same lovely material as her pale pink gown.

The Doctor went to rummage in his dresser, scowling as he looked for something that wasn’t there. Instead when he finally turned he was holding a set of dark blue boxers that reflected the light in the same way as the sheets and the gown. “What is it?” Rose asked, her finger lingering on the smooth textured material. It felt glorious to her skin, like iridescent silk.

“Gallifreyan linen.” He replied, his voice carefully controlled as he put them on. “I didn’t even know there was any on board and she brings out an entire wedding package.”

Rose’s hand stilled. “Wedding package?”

The Doctor sighed as he climbed into bed next to her, pulling her towards him as if it was second nature. “When marriage bonds are new they can be unstable. The linen was used with newly married couples to help with transmission. It…” he swallowed and Rose felt his body tense slightly. “It acts like a telepathic regulator, smoothing out the touch signals.”

“It increases them?” Rose asked, relaxing into him as best she could.

“No, more like… more like a converter on an electrical line – it makes the signals the same strength instead of jagged, a constant steady flow. I’m not very good at explaining this.” He huffed, his breath blowing her damp hair slightly. “It makes things more empathic instead of telepathic as a side effect. It should help us both sleep actually, even though I’m holding you.”

“You can’t sleep if you hold me?” Rose asked in a tiny voice.

He kissed the top of her head and pulled her closer so he was spooning her tightly from behind. “No I can’t, not deeply anyway. Even without the bond I could sense too many thoughts floating around in your head as you dreamed. Not reading them of course, but they were always whooshing past like cars on a freeway. With the linen and the bond it’s like…” he struggled for a moment. “It’s like floating, bobbing softly on a… on a Rose ocean.” He shrugged slightly as if to apologize.

Rose closed her eyes. “So does this mean we are married?”

“On any planet that recognizes mental bonds, yes.” He answered gruffly. “But you aren’t under any obligations, Rose. Please, you have to know…”

She cut him off. “Yeah yeah, your lot didn’t have sex, not even fun kinky mental sex happened often and marriage was more about other things and blah blah blah.” She peaked an eye open and smirked at him. “But you still have marriage sheets.”

His smile was genuine. “Go to sleep you silly ape.”

“Your silly ape.” Rose responded with a yawn.
He pulled the covers over them both. “My silly ape.” He agreed softly. “And your Doctor.”

Neither of them knew later whose nightmare started it. With the bond and the sheets it all got rather blurry very quickly. The fires of Gallifrey merged with the fires from the human traffickers’ compound and soon the Time War and Rose’s ordeal were playing out in tandem, oddly aligned and knit together in a way that made such total sense that neither was certain they’d ever think of one without the other again. The TARDIS was the one to wake them, her golden presence bursting into their minds like a triumphant blast of sheer power – Rose would later say it reminded her of Gandalf cresting the hill in the Two Towers, which made Jack laugh and the Doctor smirk, but when it was happening it was just as scary as the nightmare.

Consciousness was a jolt to both their senses and they sat up tightly clinging to one another, terror in both their eyes. It took several long moments before either could speak. It was the Doctor that finally opened his mouth, only a long string of curses the TARDIS refused to translate managing to fall from his lips.

“Yeah, that.” Rose agreed, rubbing her tear streaked face. “I think that just scared a couple years off my life.”

“Decade or two off mine.” The Doctor agreed, backing away slightly so they were no longer touching. “Let’s officially declare this idea of the TARDIS’ to pull these damn things out a bad one.”

Rose fingered the sheets with a look of consideration. “I don’t know, maybe it would have been worse without them.”

“Rassilon I can’t imagine that.” He muttered, his face still unusually pale. “I need a drink – a really really strong drink.”

“I could use a walk.” Rose stood up from the bed on shaky legs. “I’ll go get us something from the kitchen.”

“Green bottle, top shelf, left side.” He offered, getting up himself to strip the bed. They’d both sweated through the sheets to the mattress and he tossed the offending items to the side.

Rose left him to it, making her way to the galley with her heart in her throat.

The Doctor never talked about the war. What she just saw, it was no wonder. And he saw… he saw the things she never wanted him to see, let alone talk about. And knowing the Doctor, he’d want her to talk but refuse to say anything himself and maybe getting drunk was the best idea he’d had in this regeneration.

Jack was in the galley, which only made sense because Rose was not in the mood to talk so of course he’d be in the galley. He eyed her gown and messed hair and slid a shot of hypervodka across the table. She downed it in one gulp before grabbing the Doctor’s bottle of whatever the hell it was that Time Lords used to get drunk. Jack’s bottle found its way into her other hand and she tucked two glasses between her elbow and her side.

“You look like you need that more than me.” He advised. “Whatever it is, I’m here for you both Rosie, you got that?”
“Yeah.” She smiled gratefully at him, “but things are rather messed up at the moment, Jack, and I’m really utterly exhausted.”

“Don’t drink that green bottle.” He advised with a hard look. “That stuff would likely kill a human. Hell, it will probably knock the Doc for a loop.”

“I think that’s the idea.” Rose confessed and started for the door. “I wouldn’t look for either of us for a while.”

“Noted.” He saluted her. “Now get back there before he gets desperate for his alcohol.” He stood up to follow her to the door. Just before she managed to escape his hand reached out for her elbow. “I’m not going to ask – you don’t need my prying. But I heard you both screaming.” Jack admitted softly. “And not in the fun way. Rose, I know you have to be really hurting, both of you. Don’t keep pushing it down or even that vodka is gonna stop working. I know from experience.” He let his hand fall away from her arm. Rose kept walking.

Nightmares were nothing new for the Doctor. In fact it was a blessing he didn’t sleep often, since most attempts ended in some remembered horror – either the Time War or one of the many chances he’d had to stop it before it began, if he’d only known. Faces of those he’d lost would swim accusingly through his mind like rabid specters and it was all he could do to force himself to get the minimum amount of rest that his superior biology needed.

He’d never wanted Rose to see his nightmares. He hadn’t intended to even fall asleep, but rather to bask in her closeness, to feel her there in his head, drift along with the light connection he’d been overjoyed to realize they could share without compromising her awareness. He’d thought he’d always have to tap down the bond, never even open that tiny bit, and he’d gotten careless in his euphoria. There was a reason telepaths never bonded with non-telepaths and it wasn’t just concern over the non-telepathic brain.

He could handle it – he knew he could. It just… it was so hard. So very hard. She was right there and he’d been so alone and she liked it.

But she can’t control it – he reminded himself as he put new and decidedly not Gallifreyan linen on the bed. He knew the TARDIS had been trying to help, celebrating the union of her two favorite lifeforms, but… Oh who was he kidding, he sighed angrily as he stuffed the last pillow into its case. The disaster wasn’t because of the sheets. It was because he’d let himself go, let himself believe for just a little while that the universe wasn’t out to torment him specifically.

He felt her approach before he heard her, the bond still slightly more open then he’d have liked, mostly because after the nightmare they both needed it that way. Of course, they dare not attempt to sleep in such close contact again, not without risking round two.

Rose seemed to sense his unease as she handed him the bottle. “You ran into Jack.” He observed, nodding towards her own bottle. He took a swig of his own. “Don’t drink too much of that or you’ll regret it in the morning.

Rose took a long drink from it, not bothering with either of the two glasses she’d brought – it was going to be one of those drinking nights, the Doctor thought with a heavy heart. He hadn’t had one of those since the Reapers, and never with Rose – never with company.
They were both quiet, Rose sitting in the armchair near his dresser, he on the edge of the bed. Finally, when both the bottles were half empty, Rose capped her’s and set it aside. “We are going to figure this out.” She stated firmly, her words only slightly slurred. “I’m not going to have survived what I did, kept myself alive in that hell hole, only to lose you now because neither of us can keep our own shitty pasts from infecting each other’s unconscious.”

“I’m not going anywhere.” He replied, impressed with her ability to be both drunk and speaking coherently – a talent he’d never realized she had. He took another long drink and let the rather hideous cocktail of chemicals wind it’s way into his nervous system. It was more bottled drug than alcohol and it was one of the few things left in the universe that could compromise his system. It didn’t make him drunk per say but it dulled all his senses so that the universe didn’t spin, time didn’t flicker, and Rose didn’t feel like a warm beacon in the back of his brain. “But I don’t know how to fix it.”

“It isn’t broken.” Rose replied and managed somehow to move from the chair back to the bed, flopping down on it to lie next to him, staring up at the ceiling with a look of anger and determination wrinkling her brow. “We aren’t broken, Doctor, we just… we have a few dents. That’s all. My gran used to say that nothing worth doing was easy.”

“Cheerful woman.”

Rose snorted. “You’d have liked her. Worked at Bletchley Park during the war as a code breaker. Married a Russian prisoner of war that stayed behind when it was all over. I always suspected she’d kept up some kind of government work but she’d never talk about it. Taught me a few words in Russian though, just so I could curse without the teachers knowing what I was saying,” Rose smirked.

The Doctor looked at her sprawled out on the bed still in the elegant nightgown the TARDIS had left out. “I didn’t know you were part Russian.”

“I’m not actually. Gran was in the family way before they met – never would say by who.” Rose flipped over, rested her cheek on his leg, playing idly with the hairs there. “Gran was my great-grandmother. Mum’s mum’s mum.” She smiled softly and the Doctor could feel a fondness for this gran filter through to him at the contact, even with his deadened senses. “She died when I was eleven but she meant the world to me. Always told me I could be whatever I wanted to be – that growing up on the Estate didn’t have to define me. She said nothing that happens to me mattered – only what I did with what the universe threw at me could define me.” Rose looked up at him and he could feel her solid determination. “I come from a long line of fairly action oriented independent women.”

“Couldn’t tell.” He smiled down at her and reached a hand out to ruffle her hair. “So you saying that our current situation is something that just happened to us, not something we did?”

Rose’s slightly glazed eyes held his. “You did not cause the Time War, Doctor, never wanted it and never asked for it and you fought because you had no choice. You haven’t had a choice in a lot of things that haunt that big head of yours. I certainly didn’t have a choice about those bastards kidnapping me or those other girls. Even with a time machine we can’t undo any of it but we can control what we do now that it happened.” She reached for his hand and clasped it tightly in hers. “And I am not about to let the universe’s sick sense of humor spoil this.”

“But I did cause the war, Rose.” He admitted softly, dropping her hand so she wouldn’t feel the swirling pit of his emotions as keenly. “I didn’t know it at the time, but it was my actions that let the Daleks be born and when I had the chance to destroy them I… I didn’t do it. If I hadn’t been so caught up in being the Doctor, if I’d used common sense… any idiot could have seen how dangerous they were!”
Rose sat up. “You had a chance to kill an entire race of sentient life forms who I’d wager at that point were not the giant multiverse threat they became and you didn’t do it.” Her mouth quirked as she shook her head. “Doctor, that’s not something to feel guilty over. You did NOT know that they would become what they became – you gave them a chance. Isn’t that what we do, give people chances?” She moved to lean against the headboard, resting her head on his shoulder. “When you look at people, how many timelines do you see?”

He frowned at the change in topic. “It depends on the person. Sometimes there’s just a few, sometimes more than I can count.”

Rose hummed. “And if you look at an entire species what do you see?”

He could feel the direction this was going. “Infinite amounts.”

Rose reached for his hand again and he let her take it. She played with his fingers. “I can’t see timelines, obviously, but when I look at people I have a choice. I can see the bad or I can see the good or I can try and recognize both. When I look at you yeah, I can see the Oncoming Storm and all those other things people call you. But your temper is not the sum of you, Doctor, it isn’t even half. And I’ve never seen you let it loose on anyone that hadn’t done something so horrible it was… it was justified.” Rose shivered slightly. “I still can’t believe you didn’t unleash it on me after the reapers…”

“Oh Rose, I forgave you for that; it was just a mistake.”

She looked up at him, her eyes dark and serious. “No it wasn’t. I saved my dad knowing it was wrong, knowing that what you said was true. I could feel it and I still did it. And you forgave me instead of doing whatever the hell it is that a Time Lord should do with a stupid human who fucks with a fixed point.” She smiled crookedly. “And that bastard in Utah that tortured you, that kept a Dalek chained and dying in a basement – you were so angry at him and yet you didn’t kill him.”

“I let them mind wipe him and dump him in the desert.” The Doctor argued, feeling his stomach twist.

“Most people would have killed him.” Rose argued softly. “He was too dangerous to just leave running around. Mind wiping him was the only other option. And those men, that had me, you didn’t kill them – you turned them over to the authorities just like I asked you to.”

“Who executed them about a week after the trial.” He admitted. “I didn’t know if you’d feel better about that or not.” He looked away. “I saw that outcome was likely and to be honest, Rose, that was the reason I was able to do it. I knew they’d die.”

“I’m not above feeling a little vengeful.” Rose bit her lip. “Actually I feel kind of relieved in a way. But guilty because I don’t feel guilty… but all those women, all those babies… lives ruined. I was the lucky one.”

The Doctor turned to her, his blue eyes full of something she couldn’t name even with their hands clasped and the bond somewhat open. “They could have killed you, and they violated you in nearly every way a human can be. And when we asked you what you wanted, you told me a trial, Rose. That is… I’m not capable of that anymore. I can’t, I can’t be that good, I never was.”

She snorted. “Liar. You are inherently that good, better even, because you have all this power, all this… this possibility around you all the time and you don’t use it.” She gestured around the TARDIS with a grim expression. “You could set yourself up to rule just about any planet out there – entire solar systems – with the snap of your fingers and you don’t. There’s no one left to stop you.
Doctor, you’re the last Time Lord, you could be a god and you choose every single day not to be. You see beauty and joy and wonder everywhere instead, going about saving people and rescuing idiots and forgiving London shop girls. I see you,” she emphasized the point by poking him in the chest. “I see the good and the bad and the dark and the light and all the swirling navy and gray and pain and regret, I see it, I recognize it. Even when you scare me, Doctor, I know what you are capable of and I know what kind of man you are.”

His voice cracked slightly, “And what kind of man is that?”

“The kind that is capable of anything but chooses to reign himself in.” Rose held his eye. “And that, Doctor, is why we will get through this. Because you and me, neither of us is helpless without the other but together, together we are better.”
Chapter 15

The Doctor frowned at the readout on his screen. There was something off about Rose’s test results but he couldn’t quite figure out what. Her brain chemistry was understandably altered after the telepathic field and the initiation of the bond, but there was something else going on there too. Something that looked familiar… It had been bothering him for weeks now and he was no closer to resolving it. She was healthy, physically fine, and doing remarkable well mentally as far as he could tell, but the slight deviation in neural connectivity from what he’d expected along with the strange chemical traces was making him anxious.

In the five months since he’d been forced to initiate the bond with her, they’d found a sort of even ground between them in their new roles. Rose actually seemed to be happier and more herself when he kept the bond lightly open, something he was only too happy to do for his own sake. While she couldn’t do much other than feel him, and would likely never be able to, it gave her a great deal of security to know he was there and after everything she’d been through he suspected she needed that more than she was letting on. Her timidity in the days following her rescue had broken his hearts and anything he could do to help her regain her confidence he’d do.

Touch was still something they had to be careful of, however. Physical contact increased the strength of the bond transmission exponentially and it seemed the longer they were in contact the greater the affect. This wasn’t a problem snuggled on the couch with a movie, or holding hands in a market – but it did create a problem in other areas. The nightmare episode pretty much meant an end to any attempts to sleep in proximity to each other. Not that he’d assumed they would – Gallifreyan marriages rarely included sharing of a bed platonically or otherwise after the bond had settled. He and Grayle had on and off because they both liked the security of having their bondmate near, like a slumber party in their heads, a relaxing tranquil sort of thing. Which is why he’d put Rose into his bed that night, foolishly thinking it might have a similar affect especially after having opened the bond completely as he’d done. And, if he was honest, the thought of not having her near had been rather physically painful after that experience. He’d had the species wide link during his first marriage that made his link to Grayle rather like chocolate sauce on the banana – unnecessary but lovely to have. He’d been a daft fool to think that without the species link his bond to Rose would still behave the same way.

It certainly wasn’t. It was wild, uncontrolled – unpredictable.

Rose didn’t seem to care about the random thoughts or emotions she’d get assaulted with whenever his control lapsed. She actually seemed to enjoy them for some insane reason. Her only complaint about the instability of the bond was that they couldn’t both sleep when in physical contact with one another without risking a repeat of the nightmare merger. Not that they’d done a lot of that prior to the bond… Depending on how you defined a lot…. He could make excuses for it, if he tried: Rose needed comforting, there was only one bed in the room they’d been given, they’d fallen asleep in the middle of a conversation and he didn’t want to move her… there were a hundred excuses but the truth was simply that he’d enjoyed sitting next to her in her bed while she slept. He of course didn’t sleep, and he never invaded her mind, but it was nice to feel sleepy contented human on the edges of his awareness. He’d gotten in the habit of it between the Dalek and her father. Rose and he had never actually discussed it but sort of just fallen into the pattern. Now that pattern was disrupted. With the bond it shouldn’t matter that much where either of them slept, or how far apart they were, but it seemed to matter to Rose a great deal. She kept trying to figure out ways to make it work and the Doctor finally settled on a compromise of having the TARDIS combine their bedrooms into one large room with two beds. It didn’t make Rose happy, but so far it was the best he could do.
The idea that the bond equaled marriage, which he’d thought would have been what caused her some angst, seemed to in fact amuse her. She was constantly joking around, calling him her husband. Even Jack had taken to the farce, introducing them to people as a unit rather than separate individuals. The Doctor went along with the joke because it was wonderful to see Rose smile whenever it came up. Why she thought it was so funny he couldn’t comprehend but it made her eyes light and that was all he could really ask for.

His lack of physical sexual responses, something he’d also thought she’d find unworkable, didn’t seem to bother her any either. In fact, ever since he’d explained the situation to her after Jackie’s intervention there’d been a release of tension between them. They had grown considerably closer as friends. Now with the bond in place, Rose seemed content to explore the sort of mental satisfaction that he enjoyed. Although for how long that would continue he did not know. Eventually she’d desire some sort of physical release, she was only human, and at that point he expected there would be some difficulty.

Rose would not even entertain the idea of seeking out a lover and had made a few statements that sounded as if she was too embarrassed to attempt self-pleasure with the bond in place, knowing he’d be able to tell. He’d tried to explain that it would not bother him in the slightest. But Rose had not responded well to his attempts, had in fact smacked him rather hard. There was of course the possibility of utilizing a feedback loop between them, to give her some physical sexual pleasure while maintaining the mental connection but he was reluctant to bring it up again after the horrible way the first bond joining had ended. The nightmare merger side affect was, to use human terms, a rather large bucket of icewater dumped on their heads. Rose had asked once since if he wanted to open the bond wide again, but he’d politely deflected her. He did not want to risk it again this soon, with the bond so new, not until he could figure out a way to stabilize it more so he could control it. She’d even seemed to understand.

No, it was not any of those things driving a haunted and forlorn look into her eyes, a look he’d move entire galaxies to try and dispel. Oh no, it was something so simple, so Rose… She desperately wanted to be able to reach for him inside the bond the same way he could her. Which he could not do a damn thing about.

At least not without wiring her brain with highly illegal and ethically questionable technology.

Or injecting her with a retrovirus that might give her telepathy or might cause her to turn green and grow feathers.

Or he could overwrite her DNA and completely genetically reengineer her. Which while tempting, was a very bad idea for a lot of reasons that he had to keep reminding himself to listen to. Because while possible it was an ugly painful solution to something that really ought not to be such a big deal in comparison to other more important things.

Taking that kind of a risk just so Rose could playfully poke him in his head now and then was not worth it.

Even if he really wanted that too.

“Hey Doc, whatcha working on?” Jack’s cheerful voice broke him out of his melancholy. The former Time Agent leaned against the doorway to the lab, his hair still damp from a shower. “Rosie said you wanted a day off to tinker. Need any help?”

“No working on the TARDIS.” He admitted and gestured behind him towards the screen showing Rose’s test results. “Trying to solve a mystery.”
Jack frowned and entered the room, squinting to read the screen. The Doctor hit a button and turned the swirling Gallifreyan script into English. “Huh.” Jack muttered, tapping the screen to toggle between results. “Is this Rose’s bloodwork?”

“And neural scans. There’s something off about them, and familiar at the same time but I can’t place it.”

Jack’s eyes narrowed. “Have you cross referenced it with the readings from the TARDIS?”

The Doctor sat up straighter. “What?”

Jack brought up the chemical signature from Rose’s last scan. “This here, this trace, it’s the same thing as the residue from the last round of burned out tubing. Remember, I was working on trying to synthetize some artificial replacements since we are running out of the emergency stock? The TARDIS can’t grow her own fast enough to replace them but I thought if I stripped out the organic compounds from the compromised tubes I might be able to regrow them for her in a stem bath. Double the effort so to speak.”

“I remember. I couldn’t believe I didn’t think of it first.” The Doctor moved around Jack to search for his notes on the project. “But the TARDIS is primarily crystalline based, not biological in the same way we are so the typical stem cell bath won’t work.”

“Right.” Jack agreed. “Which is why I tried to genetically splice the two together with a carrier agent. That section that we lost last week, it was from the fourth of my test batches that we’d put in.”

The Doctor nodded. “It lasted longer than I thought it would. With a little more work we might actually have a solution.”

“I was just running the analysis on it to figure out what made it last longer than the other batches and that exact chemical trace came up.” Jack pointed to the scan from Rose. “And the only thing different I did with that batch than the first three was that instead of using the artificial stem lines for the graft I used live ones.”

The Doctor’s head snapped up. “You didn’t tell me that. I thought you’d just tweaked the formula.”

Jack shook his head. “I tried but I wasn’t getting anywhere. Then Rose suggested we try it with real stem cells since the artificial ones were so simplistic and neutral genetically. She thought maybe if we had a little more to work with the graft would hold better. And she said something about you telling her human DNA was crazy flexible. I thought it was ridiculous but we’d tried about everything else so I said what the heck.”

“You used cells from Rose didn’t you?”

“She offered. I took the blood sample and started the stem extraction the night before we lost her.” Jack pulled up the results of his analysis of the TARDIS tubing. “Why would we be seeing the same chemical trace in Rose’s brain that we find in burned out tubing? The only common link are the stem cells I used from her.”

“And it wasn’t in any of the other tubing samples?” The Doctor asked, calling up the other tests they’d run.

“No.” Jack pointed to that section of the results. “See? It’s like it only appears when Rose is in the picture. It’s got to be something to do with her.”

“And you took the stem cells before she was captured? You’re certain?”
“Positive.” Jack scratched his head. “This doesn’t make any sense.”

“Wait.” The Doctor took a second look at Jack’s results. “This is a stronger concentration in the TARDIS and there’s a slight alteration in the electron…” His jaw dropped. “Rassilon’s balls.”

“What!” Jack asked, pushing the Doctor over to look at the screen. “I don’t see anything significant.”

“What could that possibly mean?” The Doctor banged his fist on the table. “That’s just insane, it can’t possibly be.”

“What!” Jack asked again, growing agitated.

“That chemical, it’s a byproduct that I’ve seen before, a long long time ago.” The Doctor’s hand shook slightly as he pulled up a nearly forgotten file. “Back before I had the TARDIS my first wife and I, we worked in a research lab on Gallifrey that experimented with developing new hybridizations of the travel capsules, what you know as TARDISs. Grayle wanted to make a fully sentient TARDIS, but what we didn’t know at the time was that in their natural state they are fully sentient, they just exist so far out of our plain of understanding that we have very little we can do to communicate effectively with one another. When the Time Lords started modifying them for vortex travel they were essentially lobotomizing the poor things, crippling them, turning them into little travel capsule zombies, caught between life and death in eternal slavery.”

Jack’s eyes widened. “Doc, are you saying the TARDIS is… I think I’m gonna be sick.”

He shook his head. “She’s regrowing herself slowly, you’ve seen it. I refused to let them touch her after I got her, she was so old Jack by the time we found each other she’d managed to rewire parts of her brain so that she had just a hint of independence. I didn’t realize till centuries later what was actually going on and what we’d inadvertently done to her kind. The Time War destroyed a lot of her systems but they were mostly the artificial controls that were wired into her – not her organic components. She’s slowly regressing to her natural form and I’m doing what I can to help her. That tubing we are trying to replace is not inherently part of her, it was a synthetic graft to start with, used to pump the fuel around the non-organic sections. She’s able to repair some of it herself because it was designed to mimic her organic structures and thus be serviced by her self-repair mechanisms. It’s one of the very few upgrades I’ve given her over the years because it lets her have a smidge more control over the imposed parts. Greyla invited it ironically, a little while before she started on her last project.”

“Which was?”

“A hybrid TARDIS, what would eventually become the Type 103.” The Doctor sighed. “Which, I came to find out later was created from a sample taken from Compassion. There was an enormous loop in my Timeline that Compassion had hidden from me. I only realized it during the war.”

“You are losing me here Doc.”

“Compassion started as my companion, a human woman named Laura. There were unforeseen complications when I tried to use the TARDIS to protect her.” The Doctor swallowed thickly. “Jack, I turned her into a TARDIS.”

Jack blinked. “That’s possible?”

“Apparently. I did not intend for that to happen, obviously, but that’s where I’ve seen this before.” His mouth turned down. “This chemical residue was a byproduct of slightly unstable organics that
came from the hybrid grafting on the prototypes of the Type 103. It caused the lab explosion that killed Grayle when she accidentally destabilized it during an experiment.”

“Are you saying Rose is turning into a TARDIS?” Jack asked, alarmed.

The Doctor stared at the screen. “I… she can’t be. You created the stem line before she was exposed to the higher levels of the TARDIS telepathic field. There hasn’t been any other event that could come anywhere near causing enough interaction between her and the TARDIS to replicate what happened with Compassion. I mean, I could see the TARDIS wanting to replicate what happened with Compassion, especially as she’s the last of her kind, but she doesn’t have the ability to do that without something acting as a bridge.”

Jack sat down heavily. “Doc, you said the thing with Compassion and the Type 103s was a loop?” He looked up at the Doctor, his eyes hard. “What if this is a back echo of another loop?”

“And the event hasn’t happened yet.” The Doctor finished, his face pale. “If it’s a back echo…”

“Then it’s a fixed point.” Jack stated grimly
“Seriously I’m fine.” Rose argued as Jack and the Doctor poked and prodded her for the hundredth time. “If that chemical residue was that dangerous I’d have died wouldn’t I?”

“It’s unstable.” The Doctor argued. “It’s not dangerous as long as we leave it alone, but it shouldn’t be there at all is the problem. You aren’t manifesting any other symptoms that mirror Compassion’s results so I don’t think you are evolving into a TARDIS.”

“Gawd that sounds so insane when you just say it like that.” Rose kicked her feet as she dangled them off the exam table. “What happened to her? After she mutated?” She finally asked, curious.

“Evolved, not mutated. There is a difference.” The Doctor corrected before returning to his story. “She let me travel with her for a time when the TARDIS was seriously damaged.” He smiled at the wall and patted her. “I was overjoyed when Compassion found her mum and returned her even though it took ages for her to recover.” He shook his head and went back to scanning Rose with whatever it was he’d been waving over her for a half hour. “She and Fritz, another companion of mine, went off together and that’s the last I saw of them until ...” The pained expression made it clear when he’d last seen them, and Rose sent him a wave of comfort, or tried to.

“What happened to her? After she mutated?” Rose asked, her jaw dropping. “Like, the TARDIS gave birth to her? I thought she was human.”

“She was.” The Doctor sat down the scanner and leaned against the opposite biobed, crossing his arms. “When the TARDIS altered her biodata and forced Laura to evolve into Compassion, she essentially became the mother to the Type 102 TARDIS series. I knew as soon as I realized what had happened that the Time Lords would want to use Compassion as breeding stock for a new line of TARDISs. I tried to help her escape. She was free for a very long time Rose, and she was very very powerful.” The Doctor tugged an ear. “The Council was rather upset about that actually, installed failsafes to keep that from happening with other TARDISs. Tried to get in here to do it too but she was so damaged at the time they couldn’t, and later I kept them out.

“Compassion may have survived. I don’t know for sure.” The Doctor rubbed at his neck. “She was so apart from everything, could see events and timelines we couldn’t and she thought the entire thing was all a farce of some kind, that there was a greater threat. I knew she’d finally given a sample of genetic material to the Time Lords, but it wasn’t until the War that I connected it to Grayle. Compassion admitted to me the last time we saw each other that she had crossed my timeline to deliver the sample to Grayle personally. She’d made her promise not to try and graft the control mechanisms onto the Type 103s and Grayle apparently gave her word. The explosion was a result of experiments that broke that promise.”

“The residue, it’s a failsafe isn’t it? Some kind of built in protection?” Jack asked, joining Rose on the biobed.

“I don’t know,” the Doctor admitted. “Compassion never explained it but I’d guess that it is. Some kind of tamper proofing maybe?” He gave a long sigh. “I really don’t know, Jack. I wasn’t on the research team for that project, and the notes were all classified. I broke a considerable number of laws getting my hands on what little I showed you, even though she was my wife. After Grayle died it took considerable efforts to finish her research. When the Type 103 was finally developed they had found a compromise that gave the ships a great deal more freedom but maintained some Time Lord control. They weren’t very popular – not many were grown. The others didn’t like having a ship that could think.” The Doctor said it with as much loathing as Rose had ever heard in his voice.
Jack cocked his head to the side. “Doc, bear with me on this, but do you know what all Compassion did between when she left you and the War? Or even after the War?”

“I don’t know if she made it through at all.” The Doctor’s face contorted in remembered pain. “I can’t feel her like I would another Time Lord and she didn’t have any of the synthetic controls a TARDIS grown on Gallifrey would have had that would have tied her to a Time Lord. She was completely her own person. She was hunted, I know that. Entire worlds were destroyed trying to capture and contain her and she escaped every time that I know of.”

Jack nodded. “But she was human. Was she from Earth?”

“No but she’d been there.” The Doctor looked at Jack curiously. “Why?”

Jack held up a hand. “So, it’s quite possible she might have gone to Earth at some point? Either to hide or looking for somewhere to recover from the war?”

The Doctor nodded and Jack continued. “Did she still look human?”

“She could look however she wanted, but she usually took the form of a human yes. Frequently mimicked her old body, ginger, freckles.”

“And she’s totally outside linear time?”

The Doctor frowned. “I think I said that.”

“Right.” Jack nodded. “So, assuming some of the human companion remained after the evolution, emotionally at least, and assuming she might have gotten a little lonely at some point in eternity… Doc, is it possible Compassion may have had her own little TARDISs?”

The Doctor froze. “I… I don’t know? She was a hybrid – I have no idea if she could reproduce. She was from a colony that was sterile, she couldn’t reproduce naturally as a human, in fact I doubt she would have ever thought to try. But it is possible she could have attempted to recreate what happened between her and the TARDIS.”

“Wait, are you thinking she went to earth and had a bunch of human/TARDIS babies?” Rose asked, eyes wide.

Jack nodded. “It’s possible. That residue is in your blood from before, in your actual stem cells, Rose. What I’d like to know is was it there before you stepped into the TARDIS? If so, is it a back echo from a fixed event in your future or was it always there? If it was always there, then it had to get there somehow.”

The Doctor huffed. “I never ran this level of scan on you until recently – I don’t have any samples of your brain chemistry from earlier.” He looked slightly ill. “We should test Jackie. If her mum’s got the same trace, then it’s inherited.”

“What if it was dad’s side?” Rose took a long deep breath. “I have a couple second cousins but no direct relations left to even look at.”

“We’ll start with Jackie. If we don’t find anything there, we’ll hop back in time and see if we can catch a scan from your dad without him noticing.” The Doctor’s eyes were serious and apologetic. “And Rose, I don’t think you should go if we have to do that.”

“I’ll stay with mum.” Rose agreed softly, looking down. “I know you trust me not to repeat that mistake, but right now I don’t think I want to go through seeing him again.”
Jack put a comforting hand on her shoulder. “It’s okay, Rosie. We’ll figure this out.”

Jackie didn’t look pleased as she climbed nervously up onto the biobed. “You just gonna run a scan then? Like an MRI?”

“Not even that invasive.” The Doctor offered with a comforting smile. “Just take a second here, Jackie.” He waved a long metal stick like thing around her head a few times and then turned to the terminal to work out the results.

Rose watched from the side, chewing nervously on her thumb nail.

The Doctor’s machine beeped and he frowned at it. “Well that’s rather different.” He motioned for Jack to come forward and he pointed the screen. “What does that look like to you?”

Jack read the results, his forehead narrowing. “That’s… Okay that’s very weird.”

“What!” Jackie bellowed, hopping off the biobed to knock them both out of the way. “Something wrong with my head?”

Rose joined them and read the results herself. “That means mum has the same chemical traces, doesn’t it? But in a lower concentration?”

“Right.” The Doctor agreed, running a hand over his short hair as he tried to figure out the cause. “The highest concentration was in the tubing, a little less in your most resent results Rose, then a lower amount from the sample Jack took of your stem cells which I would have expected anyway since we aren’t looking at the concentration in the brain. Jackie’s got the same traces in her head, but at very small levels, nearly undetectable.”

“Is that bad?” Jackie asked, her voice cracking. “I don’t want to have weird alien chemicals in my brain!”

“I think you were born with them.” Jack replied, frowning. “My guess is this has been in your family for a while but how it got there is the question. I don’t think it’s gonna do you any harm.”

“Actually may be doing good.” The Doctor maneuvered Jackie back onto the biobed. “It should actually increase neural connectivity slightly, help you see patterns and make decisions faster, and at the same time provide just a hint of awareness against someone tampering with your mind. Not enough to protect you or Rose, obviously, but enough that it might explain how she even recognized that something was happening to her when she was taken. I’d like to try something Jackie, with your permission.”

Jackie eyed him suspiciously. “What?”

He looked at Rose first, then Jackie before replying. “I want to see what happens if I give you a little mental jostle. Nothing too invasive just a little prodding, see if you can feel it. I won’t go into your head, I promise. It won’t damage you.”

Jackie’s hand reached for Rose’s. “Sure it isn’t dangerous?”

“No, it shouldn’t be.” He smiled, trying to look reassuring.
Jackie looked at Rose and then nodded slowly. The Doctor closed his eyes. A second later Jackie jerked. “Hey! That hurt!”

The Doctor opened his eyes and cocked his head to the side. “You felt that?”

“What the hell did you do?” Rose asked, her tone not at all happy.

“Just tapped her mind, like a knock on the door.” The Doctor pulled out the sonic and started buzzing it around Jackie’s head. “She’s got no mental barriers to speak of, no telepathic abilities latent or otherwise, but she could feel it. I think it’s allowing you to notice mental stimulation that wouldn’t typically be possible in a human, although if that was the point or not is still a mystery. It could be an unintentional consequence of it just being there.” The Doctor frowned. “But why is it a lower concentration in your mother? It should increase the closer we get to the source, not dissipate. And if it was an echo from a future event, it should only affect the person in the event, not their relatives.”

“How far back does it go?” Rose asked, hoping up to sit next to her mother on the bed and holding her hand. “Is it just mum or do you think it’s even further?”

“And which branch of the family?” Jack asked, clearly trying to figure out the next course of action. “It could be either parent.”

“Wait.” The Doctor paced for a moment, thinking. “Rose, did you say your great-grandmother was a code breaker?”

Jackie perked up at that. “Gran was brilliant, she was. Rose takes after her quite a bit.”

“Tell me everything you know about her.” The Doctor demanded, stomping out of the medbay and towards the console room, motioning for the others to follow him. “History, background, schooling… all of it. If that substance is boosting pattern recognition and other similar skill sets, it could easily manifest as code breaking.”

Jackie looked a little frightened as they followed. “I don’t know much really. She never talked about anything from before the war. She said she was from London but her accent wasn’t right. When I asked her she just said it was because she traveled a lot as a girl. My mum told me once she thought Gran might have come here fleeing the Nazis and just didn’t want to admit to being a refugee.”

Rose shook her head. “No, it wasn’t a German accent, not Eastern European either. It was more subtle, like just a step or two off of a good old fashioned Yorkshire but not.” The others looked at her. “What? I got good at figuring out where people were from working in a shop. We’d make a game of it on slow days.”

The Doctor nodded. “Anything else you can remember?”

“Lots of things but don’t know what would be useful.” Jackie sighed. “She loved roses. Had ’em all around her house, hundreds of ’em. And they were funny things too.”

Rose giggled. “Use to drive the neighbors crazy trying to figure out what she did to make them grow like they did. They’d bloom constant for months and months and then nothing for a year or two.”

“And you’d swear they changed color.” Jackie smiled. “Remember that one by the back door? She caught that horticulturist bloke from the university trying to take a clipping ’cause he’d never seen one with five different colors of orange on the same bush before, and if the light was right you’d have sworn they changed right in front of your eyes. He’d crawled right over her fence after the neighbor told him about it and she caught him and ran him off and down the street, her in her house.
dress at ninety chasing a man in his prime with a hoe.”

Rose clutched her side she was laughing so hard. “I remember! We were staying there for a couple weeks while they did some work on the plumbing at the estate. She added electrics to the fence after that. Wired it all in herself, muttering under her breath and cursing him the entire time. He came back a few days later and got the shock of his life.”

“Second shock.” Jackie agreed, chuckling. “God I miss her.”

Rose nodded and then stilled. She could feel something from the Doctor, something frightened, and Rose turned to look at him. He’d gone pale and his hand was shaking slightly where it gripped the edge of the console. “Doctor?”

“Did she ever say what the variety was?” He asked, softly. “Of the five colored orange one in particular?”

“Funny name wasn’t it?” Rose asked her mother, almost dreading the answer.

Clearly not picking up on how distressed the Doctor was, Jackie grinned. “How could I forget? I wanted to name you it cause it was special and lovely and I thought it be the perfect thing to name my little girl after, but your father said it was too hard to pronounce. And Gran cried when I told her that and insisted on calling you it every time you visited. Said your great-granddad would have approved. It was the only time she ever mentioned him to me or mum.”

“Arkytior” they both said at the same time, Rose with a sinking feeling and her mother still smiling.

The Doctor’s fingers where white. “I think I know some of what might be going on.” Jack stepped closer to him and Rose put a hand on his shoulder. The Doctor turned to Jackie. “Arkytior is a Gallifreyan rose, Jackie. Only grew native on one planet and it wasn’t Earth.”

It took Jackie a couple seconds. “What, it was alien? You saying my gran was an alien?”

“Or she just knew one.” Jack offered, voice very serious. “A very specific type of alien.” He turned to the Doctor. “Accent variation – probably not her actual time. That would explain her not wanting to talk about anything before her arriving there. She couldn’t.”

Rose could feel the Doctor’s hearts beating faster, the bond open just enough his anxiety was palpable. “We need to talk to her.”

“She’s dead.” Jackie countered, looking between them all, clearly thinking they were nutter. “She’s been dead since Rose was little. Died in her sleep while Rose and I were sleeping in the next room over. Blood cancer.”

“What happened to the roses?” The Doctor asked, voice oddly calm for all the emotions Rose could feel swirling in him.

Jackie shrugged. “She left the house to some trust. Turned out she owned the entire block too, left it all to some organization that literally built a wall around her house can you believe it? Right in the heart of London and my Gran owned an entire block.” Jackie shook her head. “Mum was so mad, we could have really used the money from selling all that. And then they just put up a wall around the house like it was Buckingham Palace and a big lock on the gate. It’s abandoned near as I can tell. No one’s ever allowed in there – I tried to break in once, to see if I could get Rose something to remember her by, but it was all shut up like a bloody bank vault.”

“We’ll start there, see if I’m right first before we risk crossing timelines to talk to her.” The Doctor
took a shaky breath. “You know the address?”

Jackie shook her head but gave him the cross streets and with a couple turns of the dial the TARDIS dematerialized and rematerialized across the street. Jackie kept her mouth tightly locked, clearly unhappy to be traveling in the TARDIS, but not about to argue either given the circumstances. Rose took the Doctor's hand as they stepped outside.

Her Gran’s street looked exactly like it had when she’d been little, Rose thought. The houses were small, pre-war things, that had somehow escaped the modernization of London and the destruction of the Blitz. Some were actually made of stone and lime, the kind of thing you’d expect to see in the country not the heart of a modern metropolis. The entire block was like it had been plucked out of time and dropped here, untouched. There was a marker on a lamp post and the Doctor walked over to it. There was some meaningless drivel about historical value and national pride, a brief history of the place and then at the bottom a tiny little note “Homes on this street are maintained and managed by the New London Society, a private trust.” He read out loud.

“That’s the trust Gran left everything too.” Jackie replied before turning and pointing to a tall ivy covered wall. “That’s the bloody wall they built. Popped up overnight.”

There was a small iron gate in the wall and the Doctor headed towards it. It was solid, and had a large antiquated lock that when he scanned it with the sonic was definitely of Earth origin, exactly what it looked like. One whirl of the sonic and it opened. It was total darkness inside, like a blank space, until Rose took a tentative step forward.

“It hasn’t changed,” Rose whispered, seeing something the others couldn’t. “I mean it’s exactly like it was, the grass is even clipped.” As she moved inside the view changed to show a small house with tidy path and dozens of blooming rose bushes. The Doctor’s senses went to high alert.

The Doctor was stiff next to her, his hand clenched tightly in hers, making her stop a few feet in. “That’s because this isn’t a normal garden, Rose. It’s been tampered with. There’s a modified Time Lock on this house, walling it off from the rest of the universe, a little bubble of stopped time.”

Jack followed them inside and gently closed the door. “It’s temporally isolated is that what you mean? Locked into this moment?”

The Doctor nodded, his eyes flickering over every detail. “Those are not Earth roses.” He moved to touch one slowly, reverently. “These are from my planet.”

Jackie finally seemed to catch on and she looked at Rose with large eyes. “You mean Gran knew another of you? I thought you were the last one?”

“Why’s it still here?” The Doctor asked, his voice nearly breaking. “Everything my people touched disappeared when the planet was destroyed, ripped right out time, even a modified Time Lock should have been sucked into the larger Moment.”

“Except you.” Rose offered softly. “You’re still here. Things you affected stayed. Is it possible you’re somehow tied to Gran?”

“I’d remember transplanting a garden, Rose, and putting a delayed temporal lock on it.” He huffed, his hand backing away from the leaf he’d been stroking. “Whoever set this up did so with enough care that this single moment would last until the end of the world.” He looked down at Rose and clutched her hand tightly. “It’s a kind of memorial, something my people did for grieving the loss of a loved one. They’d lock a small thing away, like a blossom from a flower or maybe a single room in a house or a TARDIS. I’ve never seen anything on this scale that wasn’t for a founding Time Lord.”
“We should show you the house.” Rose offered quietly. “It all got locked away the day after we spread Gran’s ashes in the back garden. Mum and I came back and that wall was there.”

The inside of the house was as perfectly preserved as the outside. Not even a micron of dust. The utter stillness of the stopped moment was eerie and Rose shivered slightly. The Doctor pulled her closer into his side.

“God it’s creepy in here.” Jackie broke the silence and picked up a bit of embroidery from the side table in the living room. “Like she just stepped out and could be back any second.”

Rose kept walking, past the kitchen and into the little sun room at the very back. It had been her favorite room as a child, her Gran had spent nearly all her time there even in winter. The orange rose that she’d been named after grew large and proud just outside the glass and filled the view as it wound over the stonework, climbing it like ivy. The blooms would fill the edges of the windows like frames and Rose opened one expecting to smell the familiar perfume. “Oh.” She sighed as nothing changed. “I was expecting…”

“There’s no smell, no anything really in a temporal locked moment.” The Doctor explained, his voice thick. “It’s like walking into a picture. It’s real but it’s not real – it’s stopped, removed from existence. There’s a heavy modification on it that’s allowing us to be here. Very hard to do, very dangerous. Whoever set this up was an expert.” He turned around and frowned at the room. “The lock was a plain Earth lock but there has to be other protections on this place to keep kids from wandering in. When I opened the door I didn’t see anything at all in here, not until you stepped inside, Rose. It must be coded to you specifically.”

Just as he said it, a flickering image appeared in the corner of the room. “Hello Arkytior.” Her Gran’s voice floated out of the hologram. “If you’re here then you must be looking for answers. I knew you were the smart one and would figure me out. I’m glad.” The elderly woman was bright eyed and sat upright in blue and cream chair that still sat in the corner of the room. Rose stepped forward, for a second forgetting the image wasn’t real, it looked and sounded so much like her Gran. She was wearing the deep rose colored dress she’d always favored, the one with the pearl buttons and silver embroidered leaves on the hem line. Her navy and red cat eye glasses were perched as ever on the tip of her nose and her bright white hair was perfectly curled around her ears in a bob that had gone out of fashion before Jackie had been born but that Gran refused to even consider updating. Try as they might they could never get Gran to update anything, as if she’d been frozen in her own time lock. Her aged face was just as Rose remembered it, from her last visit, and she suspected her great-grandmother must have recorded it not long after she and Jackie had left after taking her to the doctor. It hadn’t been good news.

“I don’t know what trouble has given you enough of a push to break the lock on the gate,” her gran continued, “but if I know my little Arkytior at all you’ll figure it all out in time and come out a head for it.” Jackie stepped next to her daughter and took her hand, the Doctor clutching firmly to the other. “You have to be wondering how I left this, how any of this is still here.” Her Gran said with a chuckle. “Well, I must confess there was a lot about me you didn’t know. And if you’re here, the biolock will have released and let you in. Hopefully you aren’t alone, little one. But I must ask that you and whoever you’ve brought with you on this little escapade keep this place a secret.” Her Gran’s voice broke at that and the Doctor stared at the woman as her pain became clear on her face. “I don’t know if he’ll come back, I can’t feel him anymore. He set this place up for me before he was called away, to keep me hidden and safe should his people find out what he’d been up to. Oh my girl, it’s been a long long time since I saw him, your real great-granddad, but he’s the key to all my secrets. And the burden that I’m afraid you’ll have to carry now that you’ve discovered all of this.” The woman sniffed and wiped her eyes with a lace handkerchief. “If you haven’t figure it out yet, he wasn’t from here and his people, well, they would have been furious if they’d found out about him
and I. He told me they’d have likely made me forget everything and probably have killed him. I don’t know what they’ll do if they discover you, sweetheart, so please be careful with what I’m about to tell you.

“I’m recording this message because I know I’m dying. I won’t be here when he comes back and this place is going to end up locked down. I managed to fiddle with the programing enough to put in an exception for you, since I knew you’d eventually have questions and it wasn’t fair. You, you’re so much like me, with your quick thinking and inability to sit still, that endless curiosity you have for learning anything new, that I suspect will get you into trouble just like me.” The woman laughed and Rose laughed along with her, hugging the Doctor’s arm for support. “And I see so much of him in you, you think like him, looking around corners he called it, and you do it sometimes when you aren’t paying attention. Everyone writes it off as you just being observant and making connections, which I know you are good at love, but there’s more to it than that. Even with all the precautions he took, there’s something different about you, Arkytior, something inside you that your mum and your grandmum don’t share, just barely hidden, and I know someday it will come out.”

The Doctor looked at her with a new and assessing look. Rose could feel him, opening the bond slightly, as if he was looking for something. She let him do it, trying to pay attention to her gran’s message. He’d explain eventually.

“I’m sorry I won’t get to see you grow up,” The hologram continued. “I’ve been pretending so long that everything was normal and then you came along. You looked up at me when I picked you up in the hospital and I could see it in your eyes. You have potential.” The woman leaned back into her holographic chair and winced, rubbing absentmindedly at the plaster on her inner arm from where the doctors had drawn blood. “If he ever returns he’ll know I died as soon as he enters here – he set it up to stop Time if anything happened to me. Said it was too dangerous to have this place fall into the wrong hands. If he comes back,” the woman sighed. “Oh Arkytior, he’ll be devastated that he missed me. He’ll know I tampered with the programing and he’ll look you up. I left a message for him too, just in case, and told him to find you – assuming you are still alive. I don’t know when or if he’ll make it back. I stopped feeling him so long ago now and that may mean he’s dead. I don’t know.” The woman looked down and gripped the edges of her handchief tightly, her weathered fingers turning white from the pressure.

“My real name was Helen Partslane. I was born in 2458 on a colony ship at the edges of known space.” The woman looked up and smiled. “No, I’ve not gone senile, and when this message is done go look in the trunk in my bedroom- the one you could never pick the lock on.” The woman winked. “Your great-granddad, he showed up one day because something that ought not to happen was happening and we got to talking and, well, the rest is my history even if half of it happened in the future. It’s all rather twisted around.” Helen picked up a picture frame from the little table and held it up. “I traveled with him for a long time and we went to so many places, magical places, and eventually we ended up here. He was being called home and humans weren’t allowed to go there. He didn’t know how long he’d be gone so he set up this house for me to keep me hidden and safe. The last thing we did together was plant the garden. I was seven months gone and he was so worried about me and the baby.” Helen’s eyes teared up. “The only reason he left is he was more worried what they’d do if they found out what he’d done than he was worried about leaving me alone. Bad enough he was involved with a human, even worse that he’d purposefully genetically engineered a child with me. Oh he broke so many laws, Arkytior, just by loving me. It wasn’t fair the way they wanted him to live, without any attachments, just doing what they told him to and not interfering in anything. But that’s his story to tell if he ever finds you.” The elderly woman looked away from the camera for a moment then back down, clearly trying to compose herself before going on.

“He knew it could be years for me before he got back so he did something to us.” Helen clutched the picture tighter and the Doctor leaned forward to try and make out the image. “Changed the genetic
structure of your grandmother so she’d be human, completely human even though he wasn’t. Did something using the travel capsule to alter her inside me. And he spent a long time in my mind, to adjust my head just a bit so we’d have a way to communicate without anyone back home knowing, and the capsule sort of amplified it. It tickled.” the elderly woman chuckled, “Oh he wasn’t human Arkytior, I can promise you that. He was so very much more than a human, and so smug about it; I couldn’t believe it when he suggested such a thing, his being the ‘superior species’ he was always claiming to be. But he knew it was going to be hard enough for me stuck as I was in the wrong time without him, and a war about to start. He’d wanted to take me back to my own time but the Council had a lock on his capsule. If he traveled in the vortex it would have sucked him right back home automatically. I suspected they were calling him home to punish him for something but he’d never say. I’d hoped it wasn’t ‘me.’” Helen looked down. “We couldn’t risk someone realizing the baby wasn’t normal. And I wouldn’t have been able to raise it anyway, if it had been like him. They have senses we don’t have Arkytior, and it would have been more than I could have handled. We both knew it but it broke both our hearts. He promised he would love the baby no matter what, that he’d see if he could reverse what he’d done, but he never came back. I eventually married Grisha so people would stop talking about me but we were never actually a married couple, sweetie. Grisha didn’t go that direction if you catch my meaning.”

Jack chuckled at the saucy wink the woman gave the camera.

“The first few years weren’t so bad.” The woman confessed. “I could still feel him, in my head, and it made things easier. We even talked sometimes, even though I knew it was a strain for him to reach me. Then something happened, something bad. I could tell he was in trouble and then he got quiet. There but not there.” Helen took a shaky breath. “I think he was blocking me from feeling what was happening to him. Then this woman came, she knew my name. Told me he’d asked her to come, to protect me.”

Helen wrapped her arms tightly around herself, letting the photo fall down into her lap and the picture was revealed. It was of an elderly looking man, with silver hair, tall and imposing with the rather haughty way of holding his head the Doctor recognized as a rather annoying habit of his people even if the man was unfamiliar. The Doctor could identify the background as a type 41 TARDIS console room, an even more unpredictable and loathed model by the control freaks on the council than his own 40. Something the Council would surely have tried to decommission long before the Time War deeming them too dangerous to let wander. He recalled that there had been some kind of a controversy, a handful of Time Lords refusing to turn their capsules in for modern replacements, but he’d been busy at the time, caught up in the situation with Ace, and by the time he’d resolved that the Council had already enacted their ruling, stripping the wayward Time Lords of their capsules by force and exiled them on a distant outpost as dissidents and troublemakers. In the first days of the war they had been offered pardons if they returned and fought, and all of them had down to a man. He told Rose as much, through the bond, and she squeezed his hand tighter.

The message continued. “She said her name was Compassion, and that she’d met my husband on Gallifrey. The Council had taken his capsule and decommissioned her, denying him authorization to ever leave the world again as punishment for inferring in events and refusing to turn over his capsule.” Helen dabbed at her eyes. “Oh love, he couldn’t have given them his ship without ripping a part of himself out, they’d been together so long and they were both connected up here.” She tapped her head. “That ship was alive, and not something they should have ever tried to just decommission.” She huffed, her anger making her eyes dance. “He’d tried to get back to me other ways, tried all kinds of things, but they kept catching him and each time they did they’d force him to change bodies. They were looking for me, knew he’d been consorting with a human, but he’d hidden me so well they couldn’t find me. Compassion said that he’d begged her to come check on me, sneaking around their traps, to make sure I was okay.”
Rose looked up at the Doctor. “She was married to a Time Lord? And Compassion that was your friend?”

“Yes.” The Doctor couldn’t look away from the recording. “But I don’t recognize him. Either I didn’t know him at all, or I knew him with a different face. There weren’t many of us that had the guts to defy the council like that.” He frowned. “I’d have liked to have known him.”

It continued. “Compassion said that something dark was happening, something that even the protection he’d built on this place wouldn’t be enough to stop. She wasn’t human, Arkytior, I’m not sure what she was. I think maybe she was a capsule that just looked human part of the time. But capsules didn’t talk…” The woman trailed off to rub at her eyes in exhaustion and confusion. “She sort of materialized around us. Your grandmother was five and it took days before she released us. I’m sure she remembers the time we played the ‘inside’ game, she hated it.”

“Mum talked about that all the time. Days and days where her mother wouldn’t let her out of the house and all the curtains were closed tight.” Jackie whispered. “Mum always wondered what bad thing was happening that her mum was trying to protect her from. Said Gran cried and cried the entire time.”

“I was a wreck.” The image added, almost as if it knew what they’d been saying. “Three days in I felt this horrible ripping in my head and he was just gone. I couldn’t feel him anymore at all. Compassion wouldn’t tell me what happened, said it was too early to tell, whatever that meant. Next day she turned back into a woman and told me that the worst was over for now, but that she had to go back. That there was a war happening and she was needed other places. Said if they won he might come back. That they all might come back, whatever that means.” Helen sighed. “I don’t know if they lost or if maybe he forgot about me. I have to hope, Arkytior, that he’s not dead. I just… I have to hope.”

“Compassion shielded them from his being ripped out of Time.” The Doctor explained with a pained expression. “Must have been sometime during the first part of the war. There were these Time bombs…”

Helen continued, her voice getting weaker. “I’ve spent my life trying to find a way back to him, or to contact him, and I’ve never been able to, not since that day with Compassion. I’m telling you this so you know, Arkytior, that you’re special. I know growing up on that estate has been terrible for you, and I tried to get your mum to move in with me after your dad died, but she didn’t want to leave the flat they shared. I rather understand that.” Helen sighed. “There’s entire worlds out there Arkytior, and by all rights you should be out there in them but I can’t do that for you any more than I could your mum or your grandmum. But I can at least let you know why you’re special. I hope he finds you, love, I hope you have a wonderful life. This place, it will be here if you ever get desperate, but it’s locked in Time. Nothing here changes. Nothing ever will again, once I’m gone. But if you ever need a safe haven, the garden will be here even if I’m not. And I’d like to think some of your great-granddad lingers here with his prized roses.” Helen smiled. “I love you my Arkytior.”
The hologram of her Gran slowly faded away and Rose stood next to her mother and the Doctor in stunned silence. Jack, not knowing what to say, quietly left the room to see if he could find the trunk mentioned in the message while giving them all some space.

“That poor woman.” Jackie finally said, her mascara running as she dabbed at her wet eyes. “Was it really that forbidden, what they did?”

“Jackie, I was once forced to regenerate just for traveling with human companions and having visited Earth. There’s no telling what they’d have done if they’d found her with a hybrid infant, but it would not have been pretty or merciful.” The Doctor heaved a large sigh and let go of Rose’s hand to sink down onto the same chair the hologram had been sitting in. “He was a damn fool for putting her in that kind of danger! And a bloody genius to set all this up. Mad, but a genius.” He ran a shaky hand over his head. “She never said his name in the message. Did she ever mention it to either of you?”

“No.” Rose walked over to the window and stared out at the back garden where she knew her gran’s ashes had been spread. “She told me once he’d had a thousand names, but only one that mattered. I asked her what it was, but she had this funny sad expression on her face, like it hurt to even think about it, so I let it go and I never brought it up again.” Rose sat down on the window seat, not moving her gaze from the glowing orange blossoms. “She’d tell me stories for hours about Bletchley Park, and being a single mum for the six years she waited until she married Granddad Grisha. Lied to everyone at work that she was a widow, had a fake marriage license done up she said, and wore a ring she’d nicked from a shop so it couldn’t be traced. She loved to tell stories but never a word about him.” Rose paused and touched the glass, stroking one of the blooms. “But you’d catch her sometimes, sitting in the garden at night, cryin’, and you knew it was him she was cryin’ for.”

“When I lost Pete, it was gran that held me together.” Jackie admitted, joining Rose on the window seat. “She came in like a bloody storm, picked up the flat, got Rose all settled when she’d cry, cooked for me and kept the gossips back. I was so upset I lost my milk, and gran took one look at me and went off to the store, came back with bottles and formula and never said a word to me about it. She paid our rent for the first six months because I was too upset to work. I don’t know what I’ve have done without her. She was a rock, that woman. When everyone starting asking me when I was going to marry again, and telling me I just had to get over Pete and move on, she’d put ‘em in their place. ‘Love doesn’t have a time limit you festering lot of worthless gossips! The woman’s mournin’ not on the rebound!’ she’d shout at them. Mum and her never got along, probably because of all the secrets. That and how often gran would go after anyone she thought was threatening her girls even when we told her we could take care of it ourselves.”

Rose laughed softly. “You should have seen her in a temper, Doctor. She was a lion when she needed to be and you’d have sworn she could have taken on the entire army herself if she’d had cause. I remember there was this bloke that kept hitting on mum down at the market, wouldn’t take no for an answer, even followed us home once. Gran found out about it, and she came sneaking in during the night and did something to his car so it blew purple smoke whenever he started it, and wouldn’t get out of 1st gear. No mechanic in the city could fix it.”

“That was her?” Jackie asked with a chuckle. “I remember it happening but you were only four. How come you know about it?”

Rose blushed. “I may have been awake when she came in to get a screwdriver. She saw me up and well, I may have held the torch for her.”
“You were four!” Jackie protested. “What the bloody hell was she thinking?”

“Probably that Rose needed a little adventure.” The Doctor offered softly, his head still in his hands. Rose could feel his conflicting emotions and she wished there was more she could do to comfort him but the set of his shoulders told her that going over to him now wouldn’t help any. “May have wanted to test her motor reflexes and cognitive functions.” He finally looked up. “What was that about corners?”

Jackie waved the question off. “Nothing, just this thing Gran used to say whenever Rose got lucky.”

The Doctor looked at Rose and she felt him in her mind again, like he couldn’t let go after the story they heard. His eyes narrowed. “Was it luck, Rose?”

“It had to be, right?” Rose shrugged and hugged her knees. “I mean, it was just little stuff. Sometimes I’d come out of my room wearing my raincoat when the weather report said it be sunny all day. Mum would make me change and then in the afternoon it would start raining out of no where. I had pretty good luck picking which team would win a football match, that kind of thing. I grew out of it eventually, or my lucky streak ran out or something.”

“Oh there was other stuff too, like that time you knew Mickey was lying about taking Mathew’s bike apart, even though we’d been at Gran’s for the week and you couldn’t have seen him. That one was always a little odd, I’ll admit that. You were so sure about it, and you wouldn’t let it drop until he admitted it.” Jackie shook her head. “But then you knew Mickey so well, telling he was lying had to be easy for you specially at seven.” Jackie frowned. “Of course, there was the thing with the library and the book report, although I still have my doubts about that one.”

Rose curled her lip in disgust. “That was not the same thing; it was totally different. And I read the entire book, mum, for god sake! And you saw me write the report sitting at our kitchen table!”

Jackie frowned. “You still won’t admit to cheating; it’s not like I care sweetheart.”

“I did not cheat!” Rose fumed. “I read the entire thing by myself, and I wrote the report by myself. I didn’t download it from the internet or copy it from a college kid or find it lying in a dust bin. Just cause we’re from the estate doesn’t mean I’m stupid.”

“Oh, Rose honey, I didn’t say that. I never said that.” Jackie tried to reason.

“Gran never doubted me.” Rose muttered, and turned to the Doctor. “You wouldn’t have either.”

“What happened?” The Doctor asked, standing up and moving his chair to her side, sensing her frustration.

Rose leaned into him. “I was, what eight maybe nine?” Rose asked, looking to Jackie for confirmation. “Somewhere in there anyway.” Rose sighed. “The teacher said we could pick any book we wanted over holiday break and we were to read it and write a report about it – what happens in it, was it a good or a bad book, does it relate to our lives any, that kind of thing. I’d never had to write a book report before, and I was really excited about it actually. This was when I still liked school; I grew out of that.” Rose looked down. “Anyway, mum was working too much to take me to the big branch library and I’d read pretty much everything I wanted to from the small one near us, so when mum left her Oyster card out one morning I grabbed it. Mickey and I were supposed to be at his gran’s but she let us go to the park sometimes by ourselves since she could see it out the window of her flat. I talked Mic into going with me to the big one a few stops away. Mic went off to look at the kids books but I wanted something that would take me the break to finish, so I headed to the adult area.”
“Picked up a copy of *Gone with the Wind* of all things.” Jackie huffed. “It was over a thousand pages!”

“I wanted a challenge.” Rose defended herself. “And it wasn’t a hard read compared to some of the stuff I looked at. It was just long. So I took it, and the librarian helped me find a book about doing literary criticisms, because I didn’t just want to write a stupid little report like the others kids, I wanted to do it right, and we came home. Nobody even knew we’d gone. The librarian didn’t seem to think anything was odd. In fact she told me I was brilliant!”

“She comes marching into the flat, all proud of herself, as if a normal little girl goes to the library and gets a thousand page book. It’s no wonder the other kids bullied her.” Jackie responded, ignoring Rose’s indigent huff. “She come in and sits down on the couch and starts pretending to read the bloody thing, acting like she can barely put it down to eat. Spends about a week carrying it around everywhere even to her gymnastic practices. Next thing I know she’s got the table covered in paper and says she’s making notes.”

Rose blushed. “I may have gone back to the library for reference material for the report. The librarian was really nice, even taught me how to cite it all. She even set me up in the back room so I could watch the movie on the little TV. She bought me lunch and proof read the report when it was done.”

“‘You were eight. You didn’t need references for your book report. That woman wasn’t doing you any favors.’ Jackie rolled her eyes and looked towards the Doctor with a small frown on her face. “Started getting airs this one. Going around after that with pamphlets for different universities trying to pick one before she even got out of primary. What happened next was her own fault. She should have known that talking like that wouldn’t sit well with the other kids.”

The Doctor could feel how upset the story made Rose and he took her hand. “Let me guess, no one believed you wrote the report?”

Rose sniffed, blinking back tears. “Sorry, I don’t know why this still gets to me. It was ages ago.” She turned a watery smile to the Doctor. “The teacher thought I bought it from a college student or something and copied it out. She gave me a zero, even after I told her all about the book out loud to prove I read it. I even told her what made the book different from the movie, all of it. No one believed me. The other kids started teasing me, calling me ‘professor’ and knocking my books out of my hands in the hallway. Eventually I went back and got the librarian that had helped me and she called the school. They ended up giving me my points for the assignment but… I never tried that hard again on anything for school. I just did exactly what they asked, which was usually pretty borin’. It wasn’t worth it to do more, not when everybody acted like I was a freak or something.”

“Maybe.” Rose admitted softly. “I mean, no body cares too much if they see you reading one of
those romance things, but if anybody saw me reading a journal or something classic they’d start in
with the teasing. So eventually I started hiding it. I got really good at pretending I liked all the stuff
the other kids did. Mum would yell sometimes, about me using too much of our travel money getting
to the library though. After Gran died, and after I couldn’t do gymnastics anymore, I stopped reading
as much. It just felt like more effort to fight everyone all the time than to just give in and be what they
all expected me to be. I mean, what good was going to uni going to do for me really? I’d still have
probably ended up stuck in some job I hated just to have money for my rent.”

“Gran got her a lifetime membership to the London Library after all that.” Jackie shook her head.
“She was eight, what she need a lifetime membership for? We were barely scraping by, even with
Gran’s help, and she spends money on that. It was all I could do when Rose was that age to keep her
from spending all her free time either practicing her gymnastics or reading. Not that I didn’t want her
reading, that was good for her, but I just wanted her to have a bit of a childhood.” Jackie looked
guilty. “I didn’t realize how much I hurt you, Rose, I just didn’t think it was healthy, that’s all. And I
knew how the other kids were treating you, and how bad you wanted to fit in. I thought I was doing
you a favor encouraging you to be more like them. I should have listened to your Gran. She always
told me I was being thick and you weren’t meant for the estate.”

The silent ‘not like me’ was there and the Doctor gave Jackie a sympathetic smile. “Parenting is
never easy. You did what you thought was best for her. You never expected this daft alien to land
and offer her another way of living.” Part of him wondered what Jackie would have been like, if
she’d had more encouragement from her own mother, and a better education. The Tyler women
weren’t unintelligent, but Jackie’s priorities often made her seem that way. Whether that was a
product of environment or choice he didn’t know. He was just glad Rose hadn’t lost all her curiosity.
Being mad at Jackie for not encouraging her daughter to be different wasn’t going to help anything.

Rose looked up almost shyly at the Doctor. “I thought I’d died and gone to heaven when I saw the
TARDIS library,” she admitted softly. “And the first time you walked in, and I was reading Science,
and you didn’t say anything, didn’t even look at me funny…” She gave a little laugh. “You nearly
gave me a heart attack when you left that stack in my room with the note for me, how you thought I
might like them since I seemed to like physics. God, I knew I wanted to stay with you forever after
that.”

He stroked the back of her hand and smiled, the smile Rose was used to seeing only when they were
alone. “Been ages since I got to recommend a good book. I may have gone a little overboard. Half
hour after I left them I was pacing the console room sure you’d think I was some kind of nutter.”

“Well,” Rose smiled, her tongue poking out slightly despite the tears still hovering in her eyes, “half
of them I couldn’t understand a word of, but the other half were lovely.” That caused a very different
kind of smile from the Doctor.

“Excuse me.” Jack interrupted softly from the doorway. “But is this the chest she mentioned?”

Rose wiped her eyes and nodded, glad for the change in topic. “Yeah, let’s see what other secrets
Gran had.”

Jack set the chest down in front of Rose and backed away. It was about the size of two milk crates,
and made of a soft purple wood that smelled slightly sweet. There was a beautiful grain pattern to it,
that rather than running in straight lines seemed to create swirls and circles. When Rose had first
started traveling with the Doctor and seen the circular script he used to write notes for himself, she’d
been oddly reminded of her Gran’s box. Now it made sense why.

The Doctor’s hand reached forward to softly caress the polished surface. “This is from Gallifrey.” He
said, his voice thick as he confirmed Rose’s suspicion. “Made from the trees that used to grow on the
mountains where I lived as a child. The monks would train the trees to grow in spirals to mimic the flow of Time. I only have one example of it myself; it was very rare to have enough of it to make something this size. The trees grew very slowly."

Rose placed her hand on top of his. “Can we take it back with us? Even if this place is locked?”

The Doctor nodded, pulling his hand back and composing himself behind his usual mask. “Actually, I think we can take the entire house, move it directly into the TARDIS if you’d like. Be safer there than left here. I’ve seen some species that use time locks like this one as bolt holes or smuggling dens. I’d hate to see that happen here. Besides, if we put it in the TARDIS we can unlock the garden and let the plants grow like normal. The TARDIS will take care of them just like the other ones in garden room and the arboretum.”

“You can do that?” Jackie asked. “Just pick up an entire house and stick it in your closet?”

That brought a tight smile to the Doctor’s face. “Oh yes, Jackie. I have things much larger than a house in my closet.”

Rose just shook her head at them and reached for the latch. As a child she’d tried everything she could to get the box to open, fascinated by the intricate gold lock and the silver latch that looked like a leaf. It had captivated her ever since she’d found it playing in her Gran’s room but she’d never had luck getting it. This time, as soon as she touched the leaf, the lock clicked and the lid opened on smooth hinges.

“It’s bigger on the inside!” Her mother gasped, staring over Rose’s shoulder. And it was bigger, a lot bigger. Rose started pulling out the smaller boxes inside and by the time she gave up there was a stack six times the size of the box sitting next to her and no end in sight. The boxes were solid, no latch or lid that she could see and made out of some kind of plastic instead of cardboard. They were heavy too, but solid. Nothing moved when she shook one.

The Doctor buzzed the sonic at the pile. “This is fantastic! Do you know what this is?”

“Barty Crunch Jr.’s trunk? Or is Mary Poppin’s bag?” Rose joked, eyeing the growing pile with amusement.

“Whose?” Jack asked and didn’t look surprised when they all ignored him.

The Doctor looked like Christmas had come early. “This, Rose Tyler, is a compressed download of your grandfather’s TARDIS capsule. Those smaller boxes are the ‘rooms’ essentially. He must have known there was a good chance they were calling him back to decommission her. This is like… like a backup! I’d heard that it was possible to do this, but I’d never seen it. He left everything he could here, in case the worst happened, so a part of her wouldn’t be lost.” The Doctor reached in and pulled out a tiny piece of coral that had been strapped to the lid of the box. “This,” he breathed in awe, “this is a baby TARDIS. It’s been growing in here all this time, starving half to death but holding on.” He stroked the coral and it glowed slightly. “It’s okay, little one,” he cooed at it. “We’ll get you out of here. I think I know a foster mum that’d be overjoyed to meet you. Aren’t you a cute little thing?”

The tiny bit of coral gave a pulse and a shudder and doubled in size.

“What?” Rose asked, reaching unconsciously towards it but stopping before she could touch it.

“Go on.” The Doctor offered, holding it out. “It’s responding to positive thoughts. It’s been lonely trapped in here, waiting for someone to give it a little attention.”
Rose stroked it lightly with one finger. It felt alive, and warm, to the touch. There was a little niggle, in the back of her brain, and her eyes widened.

“She’s trying to reach anything she can telepathically.” The Doctor explained, sadness in his voice. “She was meant to grow up in a field of other TARDIS’s all linked up to one another, looked over by an adult or two. Even the ones the Time Lords messed with still had that. She’s a quarter the size she should be, stuffed in that musty old box all by herself.”

Jackie eyed the coral with a skeptical frown. “How do you know it’s a she?”

Jack, Rose, and the Doctor all stared at the coral with confusion. “You know,” the Doctor admitted, “that is actually a good question.”
“How long is this gonna take?” Jackie asked as she watched the Doctor crawl into her grandmother’s bedroom closet. A few scans with the sonic had uncovered the elaborate, and obviously alien, control panel that apparently ran the house. Jack was back in the TARDIS getting some kind of equipment ready, and Rose was setting up a line of sensors along the edges of the wall, all in preparation to somehow have the TARDIS absorb the house.

“Don’t know.” The Doctor huffed as a dress fell off it’s hanger and got tangled in his arms as he tried to pry a wire loose. “This entire house is built with a complex security system tied into the Time Lock. I’ve got to disable it first before we can move it, but if I don’t do it in the right order I risk it rejecting the override program and expelling us right out of the lock. If that happens, we won’t be able to get back in unless I can collapse the lock from the outside.” He poked his head out of the closet and wagged the sonic at her. “And that, Jackie Tyler, is a very bad idea.” He retreated back inside and cursed as something sparked.

“Don’t pay any attention to him.” Rose advised, rejoining her mother and setting the empty box on the bed. “Sensors are all out, Doctor.”

Jack stuck his head inside the room. “I’ve got the TARDIS primed. I may be imagining it, but I think she’s excited. It seemed twice as bright in there as usual and she didn’t shock me once.”

“Probably senses the coral start.” The Doctor finally emerged from the closet. “I think I’ve got it ready.” He looked around the room with a slight frown. “Rose, Jackie, just in case this doesn’t go to plan why don’t you grab anything you know you are going to want to keep. I’ll deactivate the lock remotely from inside the TARDIS just to be on the safe side. If the house security system expelled us out of the lock it could get ugly and I’d rather not risk it.”

Jack’s shiver told Rose more than she wanted to know about what exactly ‘ugly’ meant. “Mum?”

Jackie looked around the room. “I’d like to have something to remember her by but it doesn’t seem right to just take any old thing. This place feels almost like a tomb and I don’t want to grave rob.”

Rose picked up the box. “We’ve got pictures of her at home, and all the tablecloths she embroidered for your wedding.” Rose thought for a moment. “Why don’t you take a few of the roses? We can press them and put them in the frame with her picture.”

Jackie brightened. “Oi you were always the smart one.” She hugged her daughter tightly around the box before running out the backdoor.

The Doctor had a funny look on his face. “What?” Rose asked, feeling self conscious.

“Nothing.” He said briskly. “Let’s get going.”

Rose could feel it wasn’t ‘nothing’, but she wasn’t going to press. She hadn’t had time to process her
Gran’s revelations herself, and for the Doctor… well, Rose wasn’t sure what it meant for the Doctor. What she could feel leaking from his end of the bond suggested he didn’t know either.

Jackie met them at the door with two perfect roses clipped from the garden. The Doctor was cradling the small piece of TARDIS to his chest, almost as if it was an actual child, and when they passed through the gate and out of the time lock he paused on the sidewalk to look down at it.

The little thing pulsed brightly and he smiled. “There you go, welcome back to the flow of things. ‘Course, for you, you probably didn’t notice time wasn’t passing, did you?” He stroked it and walked to the TARDIS without even looking up. Rose rolled her eyes and followed him, glad he hadn’t walked right out into traffic.

The console room did look brighter, Rose noted, as they entered. The ever present hum of the ship was louder too, as if she was so excited she had to manifest it somehow. The Doctor smiled. “Here you go old girl, I know you know what I found.” The Doctor set the little start down on the grating in the corner of the console room and stepped back.

The TARDIS vibrated and the most wonderful song started to sound through the room.

“What is that?” Jackie breathed, looking around in astonishment.

“They’re talking.” The Doctor replied, smiling ear to ear – his ‘everyone lives, Rose’ smile. “Not enough for a symphony, but Rassilon it’s good to hear something other than a solo, isn’t it?” he patted the support beside him before leaning his head against it and closing his eyes. Rose suspected he was somehow communing with the two TARDIS, elder and baby, and she didn’t want to interrupt. After a long moment the Doctor held out his hand and opened his eyes. Rose slid her hand into his and joined him. He nodded towards the support and Rose copied him, putting her head directly onto it and closing her eyes. The Doctor opened his side of the bond but rather than going into Rose’s head as he had before, he purposefully made a bridge between her and the TARDIS.

The golden presence of the ship filled both their heads and the song grew from a sweet melody to an encompassing wall of sound. Two voices merged and spun around one another, spiraling and dancing to the flow of the universe itself. It was amazing, and Rose couldn’t help it when tears sprang into her eyes. It was beautiful, but so sad… both overjoyed at finding one another but both devastated by their isolation.

When the song finally started to ebb, the Doctor pulled back from the bond slowly, easing Rose out of the connection gently. She sighed and opened her eyes.

The little baby TARDIS was no longer small enough to fit into the palm of the Doctor’s hand, but rather the size of a basketball. “Does it always grow that fast?” Rose asked in wonder.

“No.” The Doctor kneeled down to pet it gently. “But our TARDIS gave it a large dose of her energy. It’s big enough now that if it had to it could escape into the vortex on its own. It was too little before, and too vulnerable. She wasn’t about to leave anything to chance, not when they are such an endangered species.”

“It won’t hurt the TARDIS to do that will it?” Rose stroked the console, worried.

“Nah.” The Doctor smiled at her concern. “But we’ll need to refuel after this.”

“Will it stay with us?” Jack asked, kneeling down next to the Doctor to give the little thing a closer
look. When he touched it the coral gave a little shiver and grew ever so slightly towards him as if leaning into his touch.

“Oh it likes you.” The Doctor’s eyes widened. “Jack, why don’t you pick it up?”

The former Time Agent looked unsure but did as he was told. The baby TARDIS gave a satisfied hum and pulsed with a happy golden light. “What in the world…”

“Congratulations, Jack.” The Doctor couldn’t stop smiling. “You just bonded with a TARDIS. Course it’s too small and weak to carve so you’ve got several centuries to wait but I don’t believe a human has ever bonded with one before.”

Jack set it back down carefully. “Doc, you do know that even with my enhanced biology I’m not going to live that long, right?”

The Doctor’s eyes grew serious. “The bond with a TARDIS isn’t something to take lightly, Jack. I don’t know what this means, but I suspect somehow you’ll be there to see it fully grown. They see things even Time Lords can’t, and that is a pure TARDIS – there’s some genetic manipulation that my people did lingering in the there but otherwise it’s its own creature. A free TARDIS is incredibly powerful and not subject to the same kind of laws we are. They don’t see the universe the same way we do and cause and effect aren’t linear to them. And it bonded with you – I’d know that flash of light anywhere. Either it knows you’ll be here when it’s ready, or it plans to make sure you are…. Which, for a free TARDIS, is probably the same thing.”

Jack looked down at the pulsing mass of coral. “I’m honored.” He said, his voice a little thick. “I feel like I should warn you that I’m not exactly a great person. Terrible influence for any kid. Good thing you’ve got auntie TARDIS here.”

“It can’t just stay here and keep growing can it?” Jackie asked, edging around it like she was afraid it would bite.

“Nah.” The Doctor closed the doors to the ship and started setting the necessary systems up for the absorption. “It’s still just a toddler and it doesn’t want to be alone. When it get’s tired of being told what to do it’ll go off and have a few wild years before it comes back and find’s Jack. At that point we can see if it even needs carved.” The Doctor flipped a dial. “I’ve always suspected that if given free will, any TARDIS that would bond would likely willing integrate in the necessary structures rather than having to have them twiddled out. It’s supposed to be a symbiotic bond rather than an exploitive one, or at least that’s my theory.”

“I suppose we’ll find out.” Jack offered, moving to sit next to the coral, putting one hand on it absentmindedly. The Doctor smiled down at him knowingly and Jack blushed. “I feel responsible now, for the little guy.” He explained, looking sheepish.

“Quite right.” The Doctor replied, clearly pleased at the situation. “Now,” he began, turning back to Rose and her mother. “I’m going to flick that switch and if everything goes right, the TARDIS will absorb the entire house.”

They all stood there.

“So?” Rose gestured to the switch. “What’s stopping you?”

The Doctor shifted uncomfortably. “Would you like to do it?”

Rose bit her lip. “Really?”
“Why not?”

Rose walked over and with a significant look at her mother, flipped the switch. The TARDIS rotor made a grinding sound and the lights dimmed for a moment. Rose looked at the monitor – her Gran’s house was…. Gone. The wall was just not there – and instead of the house there was a little community garden full of raised beds of vegetables.

“Okay, I assumed the house would disappear. I didn’t think you’d replace it with squash.” Rose murmured.

The Doctor smirked. “The TARDIS removed the house from Time, Rose. It’s not just absorbed in, it’s been taken. Only those of us in the TARDIS will ever know it was even there.”

“What about Gran?” Jackie asked, eyes flashing dangerously. “People won’t forget her will they?”

The Doctor turned sympathetic eyes to the older woman. “No, I wouldn’t do that Jackie. Only took the house. Everyone will still remember her, and her roses, they just won’t be able to remember where she lived if they try to find it. Not much different than it was with the wall actually. I suspect its only those of you that shared genetics with her that could even find that much.”

Jackie sagged in relief. “She worked hard to help people. I’d hate it if her entire life was just erased.”

Rose felt the pang of pain that statement caused the Doctor. “Believe me, Jackie, I understand.” The Doctor sighed, visibly pulling himself back together. “Let’s check and see where it landed shall we?”

He turned without waiting for a reply and stomped off into the TARDIS. Jack stood up with a shrug and held an arm out for Jackie. “Shall we, Mrs. Tyler?” He asked with a smile. Jackie shook her head, smiling back at him.

“Oh you’re a dangerous one, you are.” She started down the hallway and made a point to glance behind them and down before meeting Rose’s eye and mouthing ‘nice bum’.

Rose giggled into her hand before following.

Rooms tended to move in the TARDIS, but if she wasn’t feeling ornery, or there wasn’t an emergency, the garden rooms all tended to be around the same spot. What Rose thought of as the kitchen gardens were across the hall from the galley (she would probably always think of it as the kitchen, but the Doctor would get pouty if he heard her say it). These gardens were utilitarian and while neatly arranged they lacked the feel of a real garden, mostly stacks of hydroponics and artificial lighting. It was nice to have fresh produce, but both the Doctor and Rose were convinced that the TARDIS grown items were never quite as flavorful as the items grown in their native environments. It was likely psychosomatic, but it was as good an excuse as any for frequent stops at various interesting looking markets.

But the ornamental gardens –that was where the TARDIS shined. They were all connected together, each room holding its own climate and simulated sky, but open to the next and the next and the next. You could spend days wandering around them and never even know you were on a spaceship. Some Rose could recognize – a Japanese garden from Earth, a rainforest, a desert scape. Others were harder to place. One, that she’d found the Doctor in on several occasions, was nothing but a prairie of red grass, with mountains in the distance, that while projections, seemed almost real. Rose never asked where that garden came from. She hadn’t needed to. The look on the Doctor’s face told her everything she needed to know.

She was a little shocked to find that as the Doctor lead the way to her Gran’s house’s new home, it
was not only in the ornamental garden collection, but right next to his red grass prairie. In fact, the way the house was placed, you could see the projection of the mountains over the top of the roof. Surrounding the little house and garden was an even bigger rose garden, and several beautiful trees with silver leaves that made a semi-circle around the edges, leaving only the side open to the mountain free from obstruction.

“Oh that’s gorgeous it is.” Jackie breathed, standing on the path and looking up over the house towards the mountain.

“I grew up on the side of that mountain.” The Doctor admitted, his eyes far away. “There was a hermit there, behind our home. While everyone else talked about how superior we were to all the other species, how apart we were, he taught me to see beauty in everything, joy in every moment, and that there was worth in every life.” His hand twitched and Rose stepped forward to take it. He smiled down at her softly. “He’d have liked you, Earth’s best Arkytior.”

They dropped Jackie off at her flat with a promise to visit again soon. Jack, little baby TARDIS in tow, had retired for the night, which left Rose and the Doctor alone in the console room. He put them into the vortex and then just stood there.

Rose didn’t know quite what to say, so rather than say anything she took a seat on the grating and leaned against a pillar to wait.

It took several minutes for the Doctor to start talking.

“At least I know what caused the chemical residue.” He leaned against the console, staring into the glowing pulse of the rotor. “I believe it’s a symptom of TARDIS interference with human DNA. Happened with Compassion when she was evolved, and in your Gran when their TARDIS altered the TNA of the fetus. It’s been lingering in your family’s genetics like a signature. It was stronger in the tubing Jack created from your stem cells because it was a fresh combination of TARDIS and human DNA interacting. Still don’t understand why you have more than your mum, but at least I know why it was there to start with.”

Rose chewed on her nail for a moment. “Could my traveling with you and spending all the time on the TARDIS have triggered it somehow? Made it more concentrated or something?”

The Doctor still didn’t turn around. “Might be. Could be it’s activated some lingering recessed abilities that weren’t wiped out along with the third strand on the helix. Given what Jackie said, it sounds to me like you were born with some vague Time Sense, which you probably learned to suppress in order to fit in. Could explain how well you held up under that telepathic field too, and how quickly you’ve adapted to our bond. I thought we were just lucky, that you were just exceptional for a human.” His fingers tightened on the edges of the console. “I’m sorry.”

“Because you liked it better when you thought that?” Rose snorted and he finally looked up. She smiled, a little bitterly. “I know you are upset, I can feel it. You’re not clamping down on the bond nearly as well as you’d like to be at the moment. And I don’t mind, so don’t go getting defensive. I can’t imagine what you’re thinking given all this, but I can tell you are feeling pretty conflicted. I don’t know what to think myself, but I do know talking to each other might be a good start.”

“I can’t undo it.” He slumped down to the floor at the confession, defeat in his shoulders. “I might
have been able to with your grandmother since it was her genetics that were tinkered with in utero, but you are two generations down the line. I can’t take human DNA and turn it into Gallifreyan TNA without risking killing you. Even if it was successful it would be enormously painful, and slow, and I wouldn’t do that to my worst enemy, Rose.”

“Did I ask you to?” Rose shook her head. “I love you, Doctor, but I haven’t developed an urge to change species. Is that what’s got you worried?”

“I’m worried because for a second I let myself consider it.” The Doctor grimaced. “I’ve been looking into ways to extend your life, I admit it. I’m a selfish bastard and I want you for as long as I can have you and… and for just a moment I thought I might be able to make your forever longer than mine.” He looked up, tears glistening in the corner of his eyes. “And I considered it, Rose. I even tried to look down your timeline, to see what would happen if I tried, but I can’t because we’re too close and yours is too caught up in mine. Rassilon help me, I wanted to try it. I wanted to change you! I wanted to put you through that just so I wouldn’t have to be alone. What kind of a selfish bastard does that make me?”

“It’s a lovely thought.” Rose admitted softly. “You and me, the same. Wouldn’t have to worry about the bond being unequal. You wouldn’t be the last of your kind anymore.” She caught his eye. “Even have the option of kids, wouldn’t we?” She asked rhetorically. “It’s a pretty little daydream. We even have the house now to go along with it.” She waved towards the interior of the ship where her Gran’s house had been placed. “But we both know it’s just a dream, and I can’t fault you in the least for having it.” Rose glanced down. “For a second back there I had it too. But then I remembered who we are, and what we do, and that’s just not in our cards is it.”

“No.” He shivered. “No, it’s not. I’ve told you before you deserve that kind of a life, and I wouldn’t fault you for going and having it. But I won’t try and talk you into it again, I Know you’ve made your choice and I respect it. I just wish… I just wish I could be the type of man to give it to you.”

“You’ve given me everything.” Rose crawled forward to lean against him. “I wish I could give you something.”

He put his arm around her and brought her closer. “Right here is everything I could ever need, you, the TARDIS… It’s fantastic Rose, and more than I ever thought I could have, more than I deserve that’s for certain.”

“I think we will have to agree to disagree on how much you deserve.” Rose muttered, turning her face into his jacket.
Chapter 19

The Doctor had to time it exactly, but the TARDIS seemed to know what he wanted, and why, and was being helpful. Rose was asleep finally, settled into her room, and Jack was safely locked in his. This was as good a time as any, and besides if he gave himself too long to think about it he wouldn’t risk it.

He had her death date from the paper, and from Rose and Jackie’s stories and what he’d found in the computer, he knew that while not alone in the house on her last night alive, Helen had spent her last hours in her room quietly setting up the house’s security systems, employing programing her bondmate had laid out as a worse case scenario for her years before. Helen had known it was her time.

He’d lied slightly. He hadn’t removed the house from Time exactly, just from memory. A slight difference, one that would seem academic if you didn’t have a TARDIS. Even Jack’s vortex manipulator would have trouble with locating a place that was as heavily shielded inside time as he’d made the house – building on the defenses the other Time Lord had laid down. It was a delicate web of overlaid Time Lines, a distraction within a code, within a deflection. The other Time Lord had been brilliant, but the Doctor was too, and their combined effort was an entirely different type of protection than anything he’d come across. He was fairly confident it wouldn’t be detected by anyone else. He felt a bang of regret. Had it not been for the war he would have loved to have met this fellow outcast.

The arkytior were just starting their evening bloom – the inner petals opening to absorb the rays of reflected moonlight, when the TARIDS materialized in the back garden. It wasn’t the same light spectrum as what they’d have gotten on Gallifrey but it was enough to keep them alive, and he wished Rose could see what they really looked like. But human senses were too limited to perceive the full spectrum, and he didn’t have the words in her language to describe it. They didn’t just have multiple colors, they had all colors, shifting and swirling as they reacted to cosmic rays that humans in Rose’s time were just figuring out existed with theoretical science and a vast array of oversized equipment. Arkytior, having developed on Gallifrey’s unique environment, could do the same thing but in brilliant splashes of floral glory. They only looked like Earth roses because humans were sadly limited to five meager little senses. It was the one thing he rather pitied them for.

Helen was awake when he entered her room, propped up on pillows with a very not time period appropriate tablet on her lap. Her eyes were wide, and hopeful, and for a moment it looked like she’d try and stand to greet him. He held a hand out to her and sadly shook his head.

“I thought….” She breathed then let out a long sigh, tears glistening in her eyes. “I thought for a moment you were him, when the security system said a TARDIS was landing. But you aren’t, I’d feel our bond even if he’d regenerated. You can’t be him.”

“No.” The Doctor stepped inside and gently shut the bedroom door. “No, I’m not.”

“Come to arrest me then? Or whatever it is you people do when someone stands up to your idiotic rules.” She sat up as straight as she could and glared. “I’m dying, so it’s hardly going to matter now. And if he hasn’t managed to get here in time, then he must be gone too. He’d never let me pass alone. So you go right on and do your worst because I don’t care anymore.”

“I just want to talk.” The Doctor gestured to the chair sitting next to the bed. “May I?”

“Be my guest.” She waved towards the chair. “I’d offer you tea, but my legs aren’t working well
these days. You’re free to go make yourself a cuppa.”

“I can get you one if you’d like.” He offered. “I’m not here as an enemy, in fact…” The Doctor pulled out a slim photo album. “I thought you’d like to see something. I thought it might help.”

She took the album and opened it. Her eyes went large. “Is this my Arkytior?”

“Rose is my travel companion.” He hesitated and then confessed in a soft voice. “And my bondmate. I just learned about you because I went looking for the source of a slight irregularity in her brain chemistry. Found out a lot more than I’d been expecting.” The Doctor shook his head sadly. “I’m sorry I can’t do anything for you. But I can’t change Rose’s past.”

“I die tonight.” Helen stated bluntly, flipping through the album, her eyes drinking in all the pictures. “You’ve crossed the timelines at the only weak spot. I’m not a fool. You must need something or you wouldn’t be here, wouldn’t risk something like this just to comfort an old woman. And you probably know Arkytior and her mother are asleep in my guest room.”

“Yes.” He admitted. “I need to know a few things, things only you can tell me. And you deserve to know what really happened. We both know you haven’t long left, but the more I learned about you, and your bondmate, I had to do what little I could.”

“Can you undo what he did, for her?” Helen asked, clutching the book to her chest. “Can you make Arkytior what she should have been if he hadn’t had to hide us?”

“No.” The Doctor grimaced. “I would if I could; she would find our life so much easier if she had my abilities. But there’s nothing much left of his TNA to work with. I’d have to manufacture a graft and alter cell by cell – it would probably kill her. If it didn’t, it would be months of agony.”

“You care about her.” Helen eyed him critically. “You care a great deal about her, don’t you?”

“She’s my universe.” The Doctor admitted freely. “I love Rose Tyler, give my lives for her if it came to it. Knew that before I learned about you and your secret. But you should know what happened, that it was my fault he never came back. It wasn’t because he didn’t want to return.”

“He’s dead isn’t he?”

“They all are.” The Doctor looked away. “I’m the last of my kind, Helen. The only survivor of the Time War. I don’t know who your bondmate was, your message didn’t say, but I do know that his not making it back here was my fault and while Rose seems to think nothing of it, you should know.”

A wrinkled hand reached out for his. “Tell me what happened.”

The next two hours were filled with the truth of the war, things he’d never even hinted at to Rose, and stories about how brilliant her great-granddaughter was. Helen was incredibly proud of her great-granddaughter and it showed as she flipped through the album asking for details on every adventure she saw chronicled in it. Finally, when he’d run out of things to tell her, Helen grew serious.

“It wasn’t your fault. None of this you’ve told me is your fault. You’ve done everything you could to keep people safe, and I promise you even though it cost him his life, Aonaran wouldn’t fault you for that choice. You did what you had to do to save the universe Doctor, and it was impossibly hard. Now you’ve given Rose the life she’s always dreamed of, even if she didn’t realize exactly what it was she was dreaming about. I knew she was meant for more than this life. Thank you.”
“Aonaran? That was the name of the Time Lord…” The Doctor trailed off. “How did you know my name? You hadn’t asked and I haven’t offered.”

Helen smiled, looking mischievious. “Well, Aonaran mentioned you fairly often. Liked you considerably. Always told me if I got into trouble and couldn’t find him, you were the only Time Lord he’d trust to assist us. Told me your TARDIS was stuck as a police box. I figured there could only be one Time Lord who’d let his TARDIS stay stuck like that!”

“I don’t know anyone named Aonaran…” The Doctor frowned, something niggling the back of his mind. “Aonaran, that’s Scottish Gaelic isn’t it? For hermit?” Helen nodded and the pieces fell together. “But he died! Before the Time War had even started!”

“He wanted you to think that, wanted all the Time Lords to think that.” Helen admitted softly. “He’d been hiding me for some time and he thought it would be safer if everyone believed he’d been on his last regeneration. It didn’t work. The Council figured it out eventually and called him home. If you saw the video I left for my little one you know the rest of the story. Aonaran would be pleased to know that you and Rose are bonded. He’d have given it his blessing.”

The Doctor sat there for a long moment trying to process. “Why didn’t he tell me about you? I’d have helped…”

Helen smiled sadly. “Even you would have bulked at a Time Lord and a human falling in love in those days, having a child. He knew how you felt about the dangers of such a thing, that you’d consider it a crime against me to subject me to the telepathic bond. He knew you’d never have put me or the baby at risk knowingly, but he couldn’t take the chance that the Council would find out about us through you by accident. He whipped the memory banks on his own TARDIS, downloaded everything here and left a bit of it behind, to start over if he could get away from them. Of course he didn’t. They stranded him out there on that rock and it was only when they needed help for the war that they brought him back. Compassion told me he chose to stay, to fight, but none of the details. Thank you for telling me the truth of what happened. A part of me wishes he had just chosen to forget us, rather than what did happen, but it is a comfort to at last know.”

“He may be the largest influence on my life I had as a child.” The Doctor confessed softly. “So much I didn’t know about him.”

“I met him after you did.” Helen clarified. “He’d left the life as a hermit on the mountain behind, after hearing of your adventures. You gave him back a thirst for life that he’d lost. You were as big an influence on him as he ever was on you.”

The Doctor grew quiet. The smell of the blooming arkytior drifted in the window and he breathed it in for several long moments before turning sad eyes to the dying woman. “Rose and I didn’t bond by choice; I still think it’s a terrible burden to put on a non-telepath. I didn’t want to put her in the position of having her brain affected, or risking her life if something happened to me.”

Helen sighed. “Aonaran had the same concerns, I assure you. Took me ages to wear him down.” She chuckled. “What finally convinced him was you actually. After he faked his death he came back and told me he didn’t want to love without having loved. Said he saw how much you cared for your companions, but how you kept your distance, even more distance then he kept. It made him sad. ‘Even if they are mayflies to him, Helen, even if it hurts him, he ought to be free to love them while they are there. One should not love the bloom less because it is lasts for such a short time, but more,’ He should have been a poet.”

“I’ve loved all of them, Helen, but I’ve only ever been in love with Rose.” The Doctor paused and lowered his head. “Although I have to admit it was close once or twice. I probably wouldn’t have let
myself care for her that deeply either if I hadn’t been so compromised when we met. She came into my life just weeks after the war ended. I wasn’t sure I even wanted to go on and then there she was."

“I nearly died when I lost Aonaran.” Helen admitted, her hand reaching for a necklace that the Doctor recognized as a TARDIS key on a chain, very similar to Rose’s. “Both when he left us, and when the bond went silent. I physically ached without him, and the only reason I held onto life and sanity was my little girl. It’s never stopped hurting – one long unending migraine that reminds me every second of everyday that half of me is missing, cut off like a lost leg and sending phantom pains that nothing can help. I’ve long suspected that if it hadn’t been for whatever he did to change the baby, that I think changed me too in some part, I would have died regardless. He’d warned me that a human brain probably couldn’t handle the end of a bond, and while I’m alive it’s not…. It’s not been easy. Even with that, even after everything that happened, I wouldn’t trade the handful of years we had for anything, Doctor. It was worth the pain. My daughter, her children…. Arkytior, they made it worth it. But I can’t say I’m upset that I’m dying. I’m tired of being alone.”

“I wish I could tell you he’s waiting for you on the other side, but even after all my centuries I haven’t any greater an idea than you what awaits us.” He put a comforting hand on her weathered one. “But you aren’t alone, Helen, I’ve no intention of leaving this chair till dawn.” He reached up with his other hand to brush her temple, ghosting his presence through her mind easing the strain of the broken bond as much as he could.

“Bless you.” She smiled softly and leaned back into her pillows. “You have to ache so badly yourself, missing all of them. Comforting me can’t help you any.”

“Doctor?” A soft voice interrupted them and he turned to see a startled looking Rose standing in the hall. “The TARDIS woke me up and then I felt… She trailed off, noticing her Gran alive in the bed, tears in her eyes. “You crossed the timelines.”

“Oh come here!” Her Gran held out her arms. “You can yell at him later. Give us a hug, you all grown up.”

Rose ran to her Gran and enveloped the older woman in a tight hug. “I never even considered that this might be possible.”

“Just the once, love.” Her Gran offered in a tired but pleased voice. “He found one little crack to let us have a few moments. He’s been telling me all about your adventures.”

Rose eyed him and he shook his head. “Just the highlights. I left out a few things.” Unspoken was that he’d left out the cause of their bonding. “I’d give you time alone but I’m blocking her pain.” He squeezed the hand he’d taken up as soon as Rose had finished hugging the older woman. “If I break contact for more than a few seconds I’ll lose the connection.”

“No secrets left anyway.” Rose offered with a shrug and a smile. She sat down next to her great-grandmother on the bed and curled into her slightly, like she had as a child. “You really did a number on us, Gran, hiding all this.”

Helen smiled, the same tongue in teeth smile the Doctor had always found so unique on Rose. “Well, what can I say. It seems seducing Time Lord’s runs in the family.”

Helen’s smile was real, but she seemed tired, and the Doctor could feel her failing through the weak connection. “Is there anything we can do for you, Helen?” He asked.

“Stay.” She asked softly, eyes locked on her great-granddaughter. “I haven’t long left, and I slipped something into their dinner tonight so I knew they’d sleep and give me a chance to finish this.” She
held up the pad. “So we won’t have a paradox.”

Rose blinked back tears. “Of course we’ll stay.”

Helen leaned back into her pillows. “Good. Now, let me tell you about your great-grandfather…”

Helen slipped away quietly, with the Doctor on one side and Rose the other. When she was gone, he quietly moved her tablet into the secret cupboard where he’d found it, and lead Rose out of the house to the TARDIS. He’d been on the edges of her mind as she went, still blocking the pain of her broken bond and what he could from her body, and it left an ache in him that seemed to make the world shimmer a little on the edges.

Rose was quiet as he piloted them back into the vortex. When they were safely away she reached out a hand for his and gripped it tightly. With a tug to his arm she got him to follow her to her bedroom and without much conversation they ended up laying together on her bed, Rose’s head tucked under his chin.

“Thank you.” She whispered. “Thank you for giving me that time with her.”

He put a tender kiss to the top of her head and said his on thanks in the silence of his mind, where his people once were. Thank you, old friend, for this one last gift.
Jack and the baby TARDIS were inseparable for the next few weeks. When they refueled in Cardiff, Jack bought a large backpack, that he took to carrying the TARDIS around in like an infant sling. Much to the Doctor and Rose’s amusement, they’d caught him singing it lullabies and stroking it softly on several occasions.

“Sara likes to be sung to.” He defended in an injured tone when Rose finally called him out on it.

“Sara?” the Doctor asked, cocking his head to the side. “You named it?”

“After my mother.” Jack admitted, with a sad sort of smile. “She’s in my head a little bit, you know? And she kept bringing up memories of my mom. She picked it.”

“I think it’s sweet.” Rose stroked the coral gently and smiled down at it as it pulsed happily under the attention. “Does our TARDIS have a name?”

“Not that I’m aware of.” The Doctor eyed the console critically. “Do you have a name, old girl? Something I’ve missed?” he put a hand gently on the rotor and closed his eyes but the hum of the ship remained the same and after a long moment he pulled away. “I’m not getting any impressions.”

“I think it’s harder for her to communicate than it is for Sara.” Jack frowned down at his own little TARDIS. “Sara sometimes seems sad after talking to her, like she wants to help somehow but can’t. I don’t know. She may have chosen me but Sara isn’t naturally supposed to bond with a human. She’s having to do a lot of translations to make it work and she’s just a baby.”

“I can’t communicate with her like you can, with the bond.” The Doctor admitted. “So I’ll have to take your word for it. But with such an early bond, it’s quite possible she’s adapting to you as she grows.”

“It’s crazy, how much I’m coming to care for this thing.” Jack sighed and slowly put it back into the backpack. “It’s like I can’t stop thinking about it, worrying about it, if it’s not right there with me. Is that how you feel about the TARFDIS?”

The Doctor shrugged. “She’s grown, Jack, and was old when we first met. She can mostly take care of herself so there’s less there for me to worry about. But the couple times we’ve been separated, yeah it’s been like that.”

Rose smiled gently. “I think that’s what it feels like to be a parent, Jack.”

He looked startled. “I… yeah, I guess you’re sort of right. Although it doesn’t feel quite that way… it’s not paternal exactly, just… Almost like she’s a part of me. I’ve never had anything like this happen before, Rosie. I don’t have a frame of reference.”

“Don’t need one.” Rose shrugged and patted the backpack gently. “You don’t have to justify how you feel to me.”

“Or me.” The Doctor returned with a dopey grin. “Trust me, Jack, I’ve seen Time Lords go doe eyed over a TARDIS bonding many many a time. You are handling it rather well in comparison.”

Rose plopped down in the jumpseat. “So how did you do when you and the TARDIS bonded?”

“Bit different for us.” The Doctor shrugged and put them into the vortex. “TARDIS was in the
junkyard, scheduled for decommission. She’s a Type 40, which were designed for a full crew, so she wasn’t ever able to bond with a single person like she would have if she’d been grown as a solitary vessel. Not that the solitary ones couldn’t hold a crew, mind you, but the Type 40 were specifically carved to handle multiple Time Lords. She bonds, all TARDIS do, but it’s not the same level of symbiosis that Jack is likely to experience. She’s supposed to have bonds with several people, all at once. There’s a primary pilot of course, which is me.” He grinned at them, trying to hide how much this conversation hurt, “but since I’m not her first pilot we didn’t form a full bond right away. It took a century or two.”

The TARDIS gave a hum, and Rose felt a warm brush of air. The Doctor did smile then, a real one, as he caressed a coral strut. “Oh we are quite fine now, aren’t we my old girl? Just took us a while to work out the frequency so to speak.”

“I wish I could understand her.” Rose lamented softly. “I mean, I know she’s alive, and I talk to her – hard not to. But I wish I could do more. She understands us so well and we can barely tell if she’s hurting.”

The Doctor took a seat next to her. “Jack’s got more psychic ability than you were born with, which is helping him and Sara. But you’re bonded to me, and I’m bonded to the TARDIS, and she’s there, in both our heads.” He tapped her playfully on the forehead. “You can sense her; I saw her in your mind when I bonded us. She likes you, Rose, and from what I can tell she’s got more of a bond with you than she’s ever had with any of my past assistants. Some of them were like family, actually one or two were.” He smiled ruefully. “But expect for Susan, you’re the only person I know that she’s actually developed a full bond with. Of course, as ‘crew’ you aren’t as connected to her as I am, but it’s no less legitimate. I’m positive that if it were an emergency she’d respond to you just like she would to me. She’s very protective of people she considers part of her crew.”

“Well I’m very protective of her.” Rose eyed the ceiling. “Brilliant ship you. Thank you for being so magnificent.”

The TARDIS hummed again and the lights brightened slightly. The smell of fresh baked bread suddenly filled the console room.

“I believe that means ‘you’re welcome’.” The Doctor chuckled as Rose’s stomach growled. “Let’s go make good use of her gift.”

Rose bounced to her feet. “It smells like my favorite oatmeal honey!”

Jack chuckled. “Rose, you two girls have each others backs that’s for sure.”

Rose raised an eyebrow. “Well we both have to put up with him.” She gestured over her shoulder at the Doctor. “You never know if you want to kiss him or hit him. Probably why she shocks him so much.”

“Oi!”

The TARDIS increased the smell of the warm bread. “Yeah, girl.” Rose smirked. “Tell me about it.”

“I want us to try opening the bond again.” Rose blurted out about a week later. They had just finished up a rescue of a science vessel that had run out of fuel during an ion storm. It hadn’t been a
particularly stressful adventure, but it had given Rose some time to think about the situation between
her and the Doctor. The two lead scientists were a married couple, in their mid-fifties if Rose had to
guess. And while they’d both been at each other’s throats over whose fault it was they’d run out of
fuel, their devotion to each other had been clear even past the yelling.

Rose hadn’t a lot of good examples of what marriages were supposed to be like. Her mother still
mourned her father, even from other men’s beds, but it wasn’t like she could model her behavior off
that. And her grandmother, well, three divorces pretty much said it all. Gran, well… Rose could
remember her great-grandfather, the non-biological one, but only vaguely. He’d died when Rose was
only five. He’d been a kind man, a funny man. He’d made Gran laugh. They’d obviously been close
friends but Rose knew they’d never actually been more than that. Her father’s family hadn’t been
much better, what she knew of it. Jackie had tried to keep in contact with the Tylers but Pete’s family
hadn’t been very big and were apparently where Rose got her jeopardy friendly tendencies from –
they all died fairly young. Mickey’s grandparents, that was who Rose thought of when she thought
of happy families, and solid homes, and the way things were supposed to be. They’d married when
he’d gone off to the war, and stayed together through thick and thin. When his gramps had gotten
cancer, his grandmother had been there for every treatment. When their daughter got herself arrested
for drugs, and their son-in-law ran off, they’d raised Mickey and cared for him and never said a bad
word about either of his parents even though the entire estate knew every sordid detail. When he died
she carried on, for Mickey, but Rose hadn’t been surprised when six months later she passed as well.
Mickey blamed himself, but the truth was his gran just couldn’t live without her husband. The fall
had just been the excuse she needed.

Growing up Rose had thought a lot about families and relationships. It wasn’t that unusual to have a
single mum, not in that day and age, but it was unusual to be raised by a widow. It gave Jackie a bit
more respect, in a weird way, but it didn’t change anything for Rose. She still didn’t have anyone for
the father/daughter dance. It was Mickey’s gramps that taught her to ride a bike. Harry from 2D that
beat up the older boy that had tried to peak in the windows to catch her naked. Pete Tyler was a
picture and a few stories and a sad look on her mother’s face. Not that Jackie didn’t do a wonderful
job as a mum, Rose wouldn’t trade her mother for a thousand posh TV mothers. No, it was just…
Rose had promised herself that if she ever did marry it would be for love, for life. That she’d be like
Mickey’s grandmother, not like her own. And if the worst happened, she’d survive like great-
grandmother Helen had with dignity and grace.

The bond with the Doctor was like a marriage and it was for her life. And she loved him – with
every fiber in her being.

But there was still a distance there, still a weight between them and Rose did not care for it one bit.

The Doctor looked uncomfortable with her suggestion but Rose pressed on. “I know last time wasn’t
exactly without problems, but if we plan it out a bit I don’t see why we couldn’t.” She hesitated a
second before adding in a quiet voice. “You look like you could use it.” And he did, eyes all
shadows and memories and his back stiff as a rod.

“I can’t ask you to do that for me, Rose. I’m fine. We could try that feedback loop though, if
you’re… well, you know.” He finished lamely, waving towards her in the vague direction of her
nether regions.

Rose rolled her eyes. “You are not going to distract me with offers of half hearted sex. You don’t
even want sex. You want to open the bond fully. Let’s see if we can do that before we try and
manage to keep it half open while you get me off with the sonic.”

“Been thinking about that a lot?” he asked, smirking slightly, and still trying to deflect the
conversation. “I’m not sure I have a setting pre-programed.”

Rose didn’t say a word just looked at him.

“You aren’t going to let this go are you?” He finally realized, his shoulders bowing. “I hurt you last time.”

Rose moved forward and took his hand. “You didn’t hurt me. You just… exhausted me. Neither of us really knew what to expect. Let’s try it again but not in the corridor.”

He shifted uncomfortably. “Rose, I know you want to do this because you know I…enjoy it. But you need things to, and well… why won’t you let me help you? Is it so hard to believe I want to bring you pleasure as much as you apparently do me?”

It wasn’t but it just was hard to imagine… Rose tried to think of how to explain. “I know you do, and… it’s not that I don’t want you to either. It’s just that, well, you are always saying how superior your biology is, and mine certainly can’t keep up with yours, I feel like it must seem silly or stupid for you to try and do things like a human.”

“Well I can’t, not exactly. I mean I could.” the Doctor’s face scrunched slightly. “I’m not explaining this well. Can we take this somewhere else? Where Jack isn’t likely to walk in on us?”

Rose nodded and the Doctor took her hand to lead her to his quarters. A small sitting room had appeared there out of the blue, and he lead her over to the mass of pillows in front of the fireplace. It was comfy and Rose sank down onto them and waited for him to pick the conversation back up.

“I do have most of the same general external organs as a human male.” The Doctor admitted, not looking at her. “And I can cause an erection. I could, in theory, mate with you just as a human male would. I could even fake most of the reactions you’d expect.”

“But it would be a lie.” Rose said softly. “I’m not asking you to do that.”

“Part of me wants to.” The Doctor admitted, staring into the fireplace. “With the bond in place, I could do it and feel your enjoyment and it might be fun even. But I know that’s not what you want. You want us both to experience something together that’s meaningful and I just… I don’t know how to make that happen, Rose. I need the bond fully open to have a full release and while your body might interpret the stimuli and transfer it to a physical reaction, you aren’t conscious of it. I keep thinking that if I can give you physical pleasure maybe… maybe it will be enough.”

“Enough for what?” When he didn’t answer Rose moved over next to him and took his face in her hands, turning him to look at her. “Enough for what, Doctor?”

“Enough for you to never regret me.” He whispered.

“Oh Doctor, how could I ever regret this? Regret you?” Rose bit her lip. “I just can’t do this if you aren’t going to enjoy it. It’d be like… like using you.”

“I want you to use you me, rather the point.” The Doctor huffed. “And I will enjoy it, just not physically. But I’ll feel your enjoyment through our link and that will be more than enough. I’m not human, Rose. I don’t need to ejaculate to enjoy something. And I will enjoy a feedback loop, I promise. It’s just not going to look like a human male’s enjoyment.”
“It’s weird, ya? For me – to have a guy want to,” she blushed, “do things for me, like that, and not asking for anything in return.”

The Doctor’s look softened. “I’m asking for quite a lot, Rose. I’m asking for permission to be inside your head, to feel what you feel – to link your pleasure center to mine. That’s incredibly intimate. I’ve never felt human arousal and pleasure directly; I have no idea what this will be like for either of us. But I imagine it will be incredible. We make a fantastic team after all.”

“You realize I’m absolutely mortified and terrified and all other kinds of fied.” Rose admitted softly. “I’m horribly self conscious, I get easily distracted by weird random thoughts, I may quite possibly no matter how much I want you end up thinking about some random fictional character right in the middle of it…” She trailed off. “Have you ever done this? Gotten a human woman off with or without a loop?”

“No.” The Doctor actually looked fascinated at her hysterical rant and Rose’s heart dropped into her stomach. “It sounds so complicated and messy.” He grinned. “Oh Rose, I won’t judge. I really won’t. You need this and I’m curious and after everything we’ve been through honestly what is there to be embarrassed about?”

“You’ll be in my head but I’m not really in yours, and you’ll be messing about with my bits and your bits won’t be coming out for the party – I think I have a right to be embarrassed about my own brain thank you very much.” Rose grumbled.

He lifted her chin with a finger and kissed her gently. “Rose, do you enjoy things even if you don’t orgasm?”

“Yes.” She did too, “Of course or I wouldn’t want this so badly.”

He nodded and kissed her again softly. “Then I don’t understand the problem. I’m happy if you are happy – quite literally in this case since I’ll be feeling what you feel. If you are satisfied that’s the only concern I have. What that satisfaction looks like, well,” He gave a sheepish shrug. “I wouldn’t even know the difference to be honest.”

Rose bit her lip and tried to calm the irrational flutter of desire and mortification that was still churning in her stomach. “I just don’t want you to get your hopes up and then have me fail at it and then you think it’s because you did something wrong when really it’s that I’m just not right.”

“Oh Rose.” He sighed and pulled her tightly to him. “You are perfect. If you don’t want to try this, we certainly don’t have to. But it’s not worth getting you upset over by any means.”

Rose breathed in the smell of leather and engine oil that her brain instantly recognized as “Doctor” and closed her eyes. “I won’t be able to stop thinking and wondering about it if we don’t. Now that you’ve planted the idea in my head it’s not going to just go away. I’m just scared.” Rose admitted softly, speaking into his jumper “I trust you, Doctor, I don’t trust myself.”

He rubbed her back and held her for a long moment before pulling away and cupping her chin to force her head back up. “If you trust me, Rose, and if you let yourself tell me what you like and don’t like, I promise nothing too awful can happen.” He smirked and brushed the fingers of his other hand slowly over her temple. “I’ll feel what you feel but I’m not going to try and actively read your thoughts. You may still need to guide me, especially if something feels good but you have conflicted emotions about it. Just like everyday life, I’ll try very hard to leave things alone unless you invite me in.”
She took a deep breath. “All right. I… what do I do?”

The Doctor leaned back slightly and his hands settled on her waist. “Maybe we start by getting you a little more naked?”

Rose blushed. “What about that pleasure thing? Do you have to do something for that to happen?”

It was the Doctor’s turn to blush. “Actually it’s always there, I just have to let myself notice it. I’ve been actively repressing it so you wouldn’t have to worry about me picking up if you, well, you know.”

“And just when I think this couldn’t possibly get more awkward.” Rose muttered under her breath.

The Doctor pulled away. “I know this wasn’t your choice, Rose. I can’t tell you how sorry I am that we had to make such a decision for you and if I’d thought we had any other option that would have been better for you I’d have taken it. I’m so sorry.”

Rose shook her head and moved closer to him and took him into a tight embrace. “Oh Doctor, please, we’ve been over and over this. Mum was right – this is what I’d have chosen. All of it – everything you did, I’d have given you permission if I could have. This, us together, it’s not so bad is it? I mean I know I’m not enough for you but…”

The Doctor cut her off with a swift and almost brutal kiss. “Don’t you dare,” he breathed out against her lips before kissing her again. “You are everything to me, Rose Tyler. Everything, do you understand? Selfish bastard that I am I’m actually happy that I had an excuse to link us like this. After everything I’ve done, after all the death and the pain and the suffering, I have you. I don’t care how or why, but I have you, and I’m sorry for your pain, Rose, but Rassilon help me I don’t know if I’d take any of it back if it meant not having you here.” He tapped his head before resting it against her forehead. “I’ll do anything I can to make it up to you, to give you the best life I can now. As long as you chose to stay with me I’ll be whatever you need me to be. And if you just need me to give you some space now and then, to find someone that can…”

“I don’t have to have sex.” Rose reminded him. “I’d like to, sure, but I don’t need it. And it wouldn’t mean anything if I just ran off and shagged some random bloke. I wouldn’t get what I needed from that.” Rose trailed off, biting her lip. She chose her next words carefully. “It’s not the physical sensations I crave as much, as much as you – having you with me. For me, for most humans I expect, it’s… it’s about, at least when it’s between two people that care about each other, it’s… well, it’s…” She struggled to explain. “We don’t have mental links, so the best we can do is the physical, right? And, well,” She blushed. “Sometimes, when I feel you in my head, it’s a little like what it would be like if you were, you know…”

“What?” he asked, curious.

“Well,” she could feel her cheeks heating to a bright red. “Emotionally it makes me feel like I do when, well… when I a man I love is inside me, physically. And holding me.” She continued, in a rush. “Arms tight around me and I’m safe and held and it’s all I can feel… sometimes, when you let go and let yourself be, and you aren’t controlling so much… it feels the same way.” Rose bit her lip. “Only not, because my body still wants the rest of it but emotionally I’m there and…” she let out a sharp breath. “It’s very confusing.”

The Doctor frowned slightly. “I don’t want this to be stressful.”

Rose shook her head and sighed. “It’s stressful because it’s new, we’re new, and I do not want to mess this up.” She smiled, “So why don’t we just jump in like we usually do with new things and
end this god awful wait?”
“If you are sure.” The Doctor hesitated slightly then sighed. “As you’ve probably realized, the more skin contact we have the greater the connection inside the bond. Would it bother you if we were both unclothed? I don’t want to risk the transmission enhancement of the sheets again, but just having a greater surface area for contact will probably make this easier.”

Rose raised an eyebrow. “If getting me off is your goal, you naked is a good start.” She held up a hand to stop him from commenting, “however, can you hold that thought? I want to make sure we don’t have a repeat of last time.” He nodded, looking a little guilty at the reminder of what transpired the last time the bond had been opened. Rose chuckled, and blushed, “better preparation has to help.” She muttered, standing up and heading for the bathroom.

While she was gone, the Doctor lowered the lights and lighted a few of the mediation candles he had left from his last incarnation. Anything that could help his concentration for the next few hours was probably a good thing. At least, he thought it might be hours. He wasn’t quite sure how humans worked, and with the bond things could be unpredictable.

Rose returned and smiled at him. “I’m guessing you aren’t trying to be romantic and the entire setting-the-mood scene here with the fireplace and the candles is totally by accident.”

“Ah,” he shifted slightly. “This is romantic?”

Rose laughed and reached for his hand. “Yup.” She grinned at him, a happy grin, and he couldn’t help but open the bond slightly to feel her joy. It fizzled over him like seltzer water and he returned the affection just a bit. Rose’s eyes widened and she let out a happy sigh. “That feels more meaningful than when you kissed me.”

“Because it is.” He admitted, brushing a strand of hair behind her ear. “My people didn’t place much meaning in a kiss. We tended to show affection more privately, like this.” He sent another wave of feeling to her, and smiled at how her face brightened as she received the message.

She sent a wave back to him, a little awkwardly but he could feel it.

“I can’t return it can I?” She asked softly, sadly.

“You just did.” He replied, confused. “Didn’t you mean to?”

“I…” Rose’s breath hitched. “It worked?”

“Course it worked. Why wouldn’t it?”

“Because I’m not a telepath.” Rose looked away, her shoulders drooping. He could feel her sadness through their joined hands. “You can come my way but I can’t go to you.”

“Doesn’t matter when we’re like this, when the bond is open, especially if we are touching.” He explained gently, sending her another wave of affection. “When we’re touching it’s exactly like an open doorway, Rose. You can walk through, or toss me things, or whatever you want to do. You may not be able to open the door, but once I open it, it makes no difference if you’re a telepath as far as sending me anything. Your brain has to learn how to receive, but sending is pretty easy especially if I’m listening. And given how much time we’ve spent together I can keep that door slightly cracked.
even if we aren’t in physical contact, if we ever need to. The more times we open it, the harder it will
to close it actually.”

She tried again and it was a little less muddled than last time. “Did it work?” She asked, her forehead
a little scrunched.

“Yes, yes it worked.” He could feel tears in his eyes. “You are amazing, Rose Tyler. Is this what has
been bothering you? Did you think you weren’t able to reciprocate at all?”

“Well how was I supposed to know!” Rose huffed. “You never explain anything, just state
something ambiguous and then look guilty. I don’t know anything about you hardly, you never open
up about anything unless you absolutely have to. You know all there is to know about humans, and I
barely even know your specie’s name. Of course I don’t feel like I can reciprocate!”

She was rolling in emotions, all jumbled up together and he wasn’t sure what half of them were. But
she was shaking, and he could tell she was barely holding herself together. “Have you been feeling
this the entire time?” He asked softly, mentally chastising himself. “Oh, Rose. I’m sorry I haven’t
been more open. I just… I didn’t want to presume too much. I don’t have to keep the bond as locked
down as I have been since it stabilized. Would it help if I left the door open more?”

She blinked at him, tears just barely held in check. “I don’t want to be a constant distraction.”

“You wouldn’t be, not if I just left it slightly cracked open. Actually takes concentration to hold the
bond back as much as I have been.” He frowned. “If I’d realized it was worrying you I’d have been
more open. I just, I thought, you being human, you wouldn’t want a big open door into your head.”

“Only for you.” Rose muttered. “I only want you in my head. Nobody else.”

He brushed a strand of her hair back so he could bend and look her in the eye. “I won’t let anybody
else in there. I’ve got walls around you so tightly now, Rose, that it would take an army of telepaths
a year to breach your defenses. Only the TARDIS and I are getting in this brain.” He leaned forward
and kissed the top of her head.

Rose blushed. “So, ah, are we still, you know?”

“Yes, the naked part.” He frowned. “I watched a film once, out of curiosity, and it seemed humans
preferred a less direct approach but I don’t know how to do that.”

Rose chuckled, stepping back far enough she could move more freely. “Well, I will admit I’ve
dreamed about stripping you, but I think for both our sakes let’s just skip the porno and get to the
actual loop thingy. It’s not as if we haven’t seen each other naked before.”

The Doctor nodded, looking a little relieved. They both unceremoniously stripped and he lead her
over to the cushions by the fire. Even in the warm air her nipples hardened in anticipation and Rose
blushed as his gaze flickered down to them before returning to her face. He sat down with his legs
spread and pulled her down so she sat with her back to his front, his large frame warming her back
while the fire heated her front. His legs wrapped around hers, and his arms hugged her to him tightly.
“First, let me open the link a little more and then let the pleasure centers align.” He murmured, his
words stirring the hair on her head.

Rose shivered. “Alright.” She could feel her heart pounding in her chest, so fast compared to the
steady double beat of his. The bond opened slightly wider and Rose’s awareness of the room
flickered momentarily. She closed her eyes and tried to concentrate on the feel of him physically
grounding her. It helped. There was a slight pinch and a new sensation joined that of the bond.
“Oh…” The Doctor breathed out and she felt his hearts shudder slightly. “That’s, that’s quite strong. You feel that much? Just from me holding you?”

Rose knew her face had to be beat red. “Uhm, yeah? I mean, if you’re asking about me getting aroused by this – yes.”

“It’s incredible.” His enthusiasm was bubbly against her senses. “Your entire body is awake to it, like it’s humming. So that’s why humans have so much sex.”

“This is just arousal.” Rose warned. “We haven’t even started on anything that’s actually pleasurable.”

“But you feel so….” the Doctor seemed to struggle for words. “You feel so achy and it nearly hurts. Your entire body is craving touch. It’s fantastic!”

Rose squirmed slightly. Fantastic it might be but he was right. He wasn’t like a human bloke at all because there wasn’t even the slightest hint of arousal happening behind her. “What do I do for you?”

“Oh just let me feel you.” He advised, pressing a kiss to the top of her head. “If we do get a loop it will happen because my brain starts interpreting your physical pleasures as mine. I’m already very very happy, just having the bond open a bit and knowing that my presence is making you feel so much, that’s incredible.”

Rose shifted slightly again. It was almost like torture being so surrounded by him and yet not having any intimate contact. “Do we need to widen it more?”

“No.” The Doctor hummed into her hair. “I need you coherent to tell me what to do. Once I get that part down I can open it wider.”

“Ah…” Rose faltered. “You need me to talk you though…” She knew she was blushing. “Can’t you just, I don’t know, sense it?”

“I can sense a need.” He admitted, sounding somewhat confused. Rose could feel it through the bond, his uncertainty. “I’m not sure what it is. I don’t have a reference for it. It’s like, it’s like you’re hollow.”

Rose grimaced. “My body wants you inside it.” She admitted, eyes tightly closed as if it would somehow make it less embarrassing. “Biologically I’m programmed to want penetrated.”

“And your arousal is the process that prepares for that?” He asked, his hand running over her body almost clinically before it stopped just above where she wanted it. “You’re creating lubrication.”

“I can’t help it.” Rose admitted, in a pinched voice. “That’s my body’s response. I know you can’t do that but I can’t stop the desire for it.”

“Well I can.” He hummed into her neck. “Just redirect a little blood flow. Would you want to try it sometime? If we do we can’t get the loop – I won’t be able to maintain an erection since it takes concentration and the loop would prevent that. We could use something else for now. I’ve a banana around here…”

She couldn’t help but laugh. “No banana’s in the sexy bits, Doctor. Ever. And you wouldn’t actually enjoy it if we did it that way, right?”

She felt him shrug behind her. “I’d enjoy it, like I enjoy lots of things, and I’d still feel you enjoy it,
but no I wouldn’t get the same pleasure from it as I can from the bond. But I don’t think it would be bad.”

“Just boring?”

“Maybe?” He admitted but then kissed the top of her head. “Or maybe not. Could be fantastic. Wouldn’t know until we tried.” He paused and then asked in a small voice. “Why couldn’t we use a banana?”

“I’m not putting fruit up my lady bits, or vegetables.” Rose had some lines she wasn’t going to cross. She could feel her blush heating her cheeks. “there’s toys that are, you know. Built for that.”

“Do you have one?”

“In my purse. I thought we might need it.” Rose admitted, embarrassment flowing freely despite her efforts to control it.

“Hey,” He turned her head so he could look at her over her shoulder. “Nothing to be embarrassed about. You have needs and I want to help you, Rose. You do so much for me. Nothing about your body is anything you need to be ashamed or embarrassed about. I promise. Just because I’m not human doesn’t mean I’m going to find a fault with it.”

“Human men can get pretty funny about this stuff.” Rose admitted. “Women too. It’s, touching yourself is still considered pretty dodgy by lots of folks.”

“Well they aren’t in our bedroom.” The Doctor stated firmly, rubbing his hands up and down her arms. “Just us in here and don’t think there’s a thing wrong with you bringing yourself pleasure.” He leaned closer to her ear. “Besides, I was planning on doing most of the work.”

Oh that did it – shivers right to the right places, like a zip line of arousal straight to her core. Rose let out a little whimper at the feeling and he purred. “Oh that was quite a strong reaction.”

“Yeah.” She admitted, her breath a little labored. “But I thought you needed to concentrate on the loop?”

“We’ll get you going, then open the loop, by which point you probably won’t need the toy anymore.” He let his hands slide down her body before he leaned away to grab her purse. “Oh it has settings.”

“Uhm…” Rose knew she had to be as red as a tomato. “It vibrates.”

Of course he had to turn it on, and the next five minutes was spent not on her arousal but satisfying his technical curiosity. Which, Rose could admit was both hilariously Doctor and also rather an unexpected turn on. Seeing him bent over a vibrator, pushing buttons and attempting to do something to it with the sonic was frankly the stuff of both girlish fantasy and nightmares – she wasn’t sure which.

“You know I could probably build something…”

“Later.” Rose finally plucked it out of his hand. “We were going to try something and this is just a prop, remember? You can build me the best sex aid in the known universe after we actually engage in something that sexual – together.”

“Well technically we did, only you lost consciousness.”
“Something sexual and naked.” Rose clarified. “With at least your fingers connecting to my sexual organs.” Sometimes being blunt was the only way to go with the Doctor. “While your brain can get busy with my brain all it likes, I still want at least that much physical contact in the mix. Call me selfish.”

“Never.” He grinned at her, happy she was less nervous, her natural courage taking over. “So,” he eyed the vibrator and the looked down at her. “Do I just stick it in?”

Rose took a slow steadying breath. “This is gonna be a long afternoon.”

Chapter End Notes

So I was going to write out this entire scene but it just won't write. Sexy keeps get derailed by the Doctor and finally it's been FOREVER and I just need to move the story on. Please use your imagination for how they actually finally do something lol.
Chapter 22

That first attempt at creating a loop was… less than successful. Rose was too nervous, the Doctor too fascinated by human biology and apparently sex toy engineering, and eventually it ended in a pillow fight while the little vibrating bunny worked its way across the floor, twitching its little ears all by its lonesome.

Which, to be truthful, was perfectly fine with both of them. They needed the laughter, and the cuddles, as much or more than anything else. Eventually the Doctor gave in and opened the bond fully, and Rose sunk into him like she had the first time.

When she woke up, this time it was in his bed, the two separate ones the TARDIS had given them having merged back into one, and the Doctor was making an odd noise, his chest rumbling where it was pressed up behind her. He felt content, a kind of bone deep contentment floating to her through their bond that she'd never felt before.

“Hello.” He breathed into her hair, the odd sound stopping with his words, and the rumbling gradually slowing till it petered out.

“What was that?” Rose asked, turning over to look at him.

‘Hmm?” He made a sleepy sound of question before he dipped his head to rest it between her breasts, his ear pressed to her chest.

He rested for a long moment before he seemed to remember himself and he blushed slightly, embarrassment floating over their link. “Sorry.” He moved to pull away but Rose put a hand on his head to hold him there, softly running her hand over his short hair.

“No need to apologize. Just curious.”

“It’s ah, a thing.” He buried his nose back into her breasts. “I think that happens when, you know.”

“No, I don’t, which is why I was asking.” Rose smiled down at him. “You just spent hours poking my bits. Share.”

His breath was warm on her skin, but dryer than a human’s would have been. “My respiratory bypass makes that noise when it’s completely relaxed.” He finally admitted, softly. “The muscles sort of flutter. It’s, it’s a side effect.”

“Of being relaxed?”

“Of being very relaxed.” His arms tightened around her slightly. “It’s never happened for me before.”

“Is it a good thing?”

The Doctor finally pulled back and looked up at her. “Oh Rose, it’s the side effect of telepathic orgasm. It’s about the only physical outward sign I…”

“Oh.” Rose cut him off, blushing herself now. “So, you… you know.”

He nodded. “We were in the bond for quite a while.”

The familiar ache from last time was back, but Rose must have slept for a while after. She was tired, but not as incapacitated as last time. “I’m glad. Wait, you said that was the first time…”
“I never went deep enough with anyone else.” He admitted, eyes shining brightly. “Never felt safe enough. My late wife managed it once but I could never.”

“Damn it, and I slept through it.” Rose could smack herself.

“Oh you were right there, Rose. In here,” he tapped his forehead, “and quivering in my arms.” He frowned slightly. “I Just wish you could experience it consciously.”

“We’ll try the loop thing again. We were just too hyped last night.” Rose stretched slightly. “I’m starving.”

“We were out for nearly 12 hours.” The Doctor reluctantly let her go. “Why don’t you freshen up and I’ll find us some breakfast?”

BREAK

“Is that a physics book?” Jack asked, sounding shocked, and Rose slowly lowered the heavy tome to look at him. He and the Doctor had been repairing something in the TARDIS and she’d been bored, but wanting company, so she’d crawled onto the jumpseat with her latest light reading.

“Yeah.”

The Doctor poked his head out from under the console and looked at the cover. “Oh that’s a good one for the era. Working your way up from Earth 21st century?”

“Into the 25th.” Rose smiled slightly and hefted the tome. “I’ve been keeping notes on what doesn’t seem to make sense compared to all your lectures. Was hoping later you could tell me what’s gibberish.”

“Sure.” He dropped back down, as if it wasn’t unusual at all to find his companions reading science books centuries ahead of their knowledge, and left Jack standing there with a confused expression on his face.

“Rosie,” he started and then shook his head, memories of conversations at her grandmother’s house stopping him. “I…”

She looked so hesitant about it and she put the book down to tuck some hair behind her ear. “You didn’t expect me to read physics books did you?”

“I don’t expect anyone to read physics books voluntarily – for fun.” Jack sat down next to her and tried to ignore the feeling of the Doctor’s reproachful gaze drilling into him from under the grating. “That’s my problem not yours. You don’t need to be shy about liking what you like, honey.”

Rose nodded, still subdued. “I always liked physics. It, it explains things you know? How everything goes together. I like that. And the maths are fun sometimes. I can’t do them in my head like the Doctor but if you get me paper and a pencil…”

Jack bumped her shoulder. “I think I saw some of the Time Agency texts in the library that we used in training. I’m sure they aren’t as good as his,” he pointed towards the Doctor, “but you can at least read the human version instead of his swirly stuff. And I can talk you through some of the developments between then and now on the human side.”

Rose’s eyes widened. “You’d do that? You don’t mind that I…”

“Of course not.” Jack smiled and bumped her shoulder again. “I’ll let the Doc handle all the really
advanced stuff but I can totally get you to the 51st century. Not my favorite subject but I was more than decent at it."

“I’d like that.” Rose smiled, still looking slightly nervous. “It would be good to not feel so left out when you to get talking.”

The Doctor backed out from where he’d half buried himself. “Anything you want to learn, we’ll help, Rose. Learning is valued here.” His eyes were serious, heavy, and the feel of him over the bond was tightly wound. “And if I ever hear someone say anything negative about you wanting to know more about something, I’ll make them regret it.”

“No need for the Oncoming Storm.” Rose joked, and slide off the jumpseat to pat his shoulder. “I’ll go get us some tea, ya? You almost done?”

“Just a few more tweaks. I know we just refueled but we should stop off soon in Cardiff. She’s banking up power in all her reserve cells for some reason, squirreling away far more than is normal, and drawing down her actual operational pool. Whatever is making her do it, I trust her judgement, but at the rate she’s going we don’t have enough for more than a trip or two.”

Jack frowned. “That’s a lot of power. Why would she need to store that much?”

“I didn’t even know she could.” The Doctor admitted. “She’s created an entirely new bank of power reserves.”

“That doesn’t sound good.” Rose placed a hand on the rotor. “What’s going on, girl?”

The TARDIS didn’t respond but baby Sara glowed for a moment and Jack frowned. “Sara’s upset, and angry. But I can’t tell why.”

“Something is coming.” Rose muttered, her eyes slightly unfocused where they rested on the rotor. “Clouds are gathering.”

“Rose?” The Doctor covered her hand with his. “Is it the TARDIS?”

She shook her head as if to clear it and then turned to him, her eyes clear once more. “Can’t you feel it? I can almost taste it on my tongue, like, like lemons and rain.”

“There are timelines merging.” The Doctor admitted. “Some sort of convergence. There’s a fixed point that we are approaching – have been for a while. I should have known you’d feel it.”

Jack drew in a sharp breath. “How often does that happen?”

The Doctor lowered his hand so Rose could take her’s off the rotor. “Last time was when we found you. Time before that was when I picked up Rose.”

“So someone new is coming on board?” Rose asked.

“No.” The Doctor’s hearts clenched. “I don’t think this is as positive an event.”

“Well, we can’t change it.” Jack advised, his own voice strained. “Best to not think about it too much. Let’s just go refuel and have a nice dinner and give the old girl plenty of time to soak up all the energy she can.”

“TARDIS knows best.” The Doctor agreed, a worried look pinching his face.

Rose eyed the console and then the Doctor, biting her lip. “Why do you think I could tell something
was off this time? I couldn’t when Jack came on board.”

Something dark passed over the Doctor’s expression. “Some fixed points are larger than others, and they leave a larger signature. Jack meeting us was a fairly large fixed point, actually, especially combined with the bomb and the war. There was so much going on I couldn’t tell what was what unless I was on top of it. But whatever is coming, it’s larger and more solid. It’s been following us for some time.”

“But why now, why can I only tell now?”
The Doctor shook his head. “It could be you’re picking up on something via the bond.”

He didn’t sound very sure of that answer but when no more speculation was forthcoming Rose decided to leave it there. She could feel his apprehension enough in the back of her head. She didn’t need to hear it too.

BREAK

Cardiff was… very Cardiff, Rose thought. She’d never been sure why the Doctor didn’t seem to be impressed by it. It certainly wasn’t as exciting to her as an alien market place, but for him it was an alien city, so it should have at least been mildly interesting. It wasn’t London, which frankly made it perfectly fascinating to Rose. Anywhere that wasn’t the Estate was worth spending a little time exploring. Sure, she’d rather be alien spotting on a moon 3,000 years into the future, but every day can’t be that exciting.

It was slightly overcast, and just a little chilly but no drizzle so Rose had begged off dinner plans to take a walk. The last time they’d been here had been sort of a rush, just a top up really, and Rose wanted to get more of a feel for the place. If this was going to be the main stopping point for fuel than they’d be here frequently. Of course, they could land at any point in the history of the city, but the Doctor did like to give her a chance now and then to get her bearings in somewhere familiar, or somewhen.

Catching site of the date on a display, it was only a few months since Downing Street, and only weeks since… she’d rather not think about that. Her mum was still sending periodic texts with updates on their house guest, and the little one she’d had just a few days ago by their timeline, months ago for Rose, almost a year. Still too soon.

Rose turned down another street and stopped. There was a fancy restaurant on the ground floor of a big office building, with huge widows looking out onto the square. The Doctor and Jack were at a table inside, laughing with each other, a big plate of something between them. They looked happy and at home in the upscale restaurant, somewhere Rose doubted she’d have ever set foot inside before the Doctor. Maybe, if Mickey had saved up, it would have been the kind of place he took her to propose, or for a big anniversary… She’d stand out if she tried to join them.

She turned away and wandered down another street.

Eventually she found a little hole in the wall place, with tile so old the dirt was ground into it and a counter to order at instead of a waitress. This was more her speed, she thought with a sigh, and ordered a curry. It actually tasted fantastic, the family behind the counter argueing with each other good naturedly as they filled what looked like a mountain of take-out orders. The man, probably the father, was loading up a cooler on the back of a bicycle so the younger male probably his son, could deliver them. The little girl, who couldn’t have been more than ten, was sitting at the next table over frowning down at her homework. Rose, unable to help herself, took a peek.

“Oh, fractions.” Rose smiled. “That was always fun.”
The girl, a little wide eyed, looked at her in alarm. “Fractions, fun?” she wrinkled her nose. “Girls don’t like math.”

“This girl does.” Rose argued. The mother glanced up from behind the counter and Rose gave her the best disarming smile she could. “Math isn’t for one type of person you know – it’s universal. Doesn’t matter if you are a boy or a girl, everyone, every person, every species.”

The girl laughed at that. “Only humans do math. The cat doesn’t – I asked.”

Rose smiled slightly. “Don’t be so sure. I know a few cats that might give you a run for your money.” The little girl giggled and Rose, with a quick glance towards the watchful mother, moved her chair slightly so she could face the girl but not get any closer. “Do you need help?”

The little girl shook her head. “I’m not supposed to bother customers.”

“You aren’t bothering me, and I’m asking.” Rose gave a small shrug. “My friends are off eating a fancy dinner and I’m all on my own for a few hours. Happy to help if you need it.”

The little girl glanced at her mother, who gave a slight slow nod, as if unsure why a stranger would offer to help with her daughters homework but unwilling to turn it down, so long as things didn’t look to be getting weird. “I just don’t understand how you add them.”

“Well,” Rose glanced around the restaurant until her eyes fell on a bowl of nuts the girl was snacking on. “Let’s use this bowl. So you see, the entire bowl is 1 whole bowl...”

Time must have gotten away from her as she helped the little girl with her homework. At some point her older brother came back from his deliveries and joined them, spreading his geometry homework out and soon Rose was going back and forth between them. The parents, still looking a little confused, watched from behind the counter.

“See, all you have to do is add up the angles.” Rose advised, eyeing the teen’s homework.

“That’s not how the book says to do it.” The boy frowned. “But it makes sense.”

“There’s more than one way to get at the answer.” Rose advised with a shrug. “Some people get a little stuffy about it. I had a teacher once who failed you if you did anything differently than the example but he was all method over result. If you want to do it like the example...” She was just finishing up explaining when the door chimed. She looked up to find the Doctor standing there with Jack, an amused expression on his face.

“Thought you’d eventually join us but I see you found something more interesting.”

The little girl, now done with her math homework, had moved on to her spelling and was trying to memorize a list of words. The Doctor, seeing that, gave a small sigh. “Why they keep making kids memorize spellings is beyond me. If you know what the word means you can always look it up.”

The little girl giggled. “Daddy was champion at the spelling bee.”

“Good on him.” The Doctor agreed with a small shrug. “I’ll happily let him keep the title.”

Jack, sniffing the air, sidled up to the counter. “Can we get one of everything? That restaurant we were in had the tiniest portions and that man can eat. If we don’t feed him soon he’ll implode.”

The woman behind the counter smiled, clearly falling for the infamous Harkness charm, and took down the rather lengthy order Jack started rattling off.
“You about ready to head back to the TARDIS?” The Doctor asked, as Rose finished up her explanation.

“Sure.” She picked up a pencil and scribbled her mobile number on the side of the geometry notebook. “If you run into anything and need a hand I’m happy to talk you through it. I’ll be in and out of Cardiff I expect but you should be able to get me on that.”

“Thanks.” The boy grinned as he packed up his things. “You explain this way better than my teacher. I don’t think he even enjoys it.”

“That’s because Rosie is insane. She reads physics for fun.” Jack joked good-naturedly. “I caught her reading the biggest book the other day…”

“She’s a genius.” The Doctor growled out. “And that’s not something to pick fun of.”

Rose nudged him. “He’s just joking, Doctor. He’s not being nasty about it. He can’t be a slouch himself, after all.”

“True.” Jack admitted with a wink. “But then I have a few decades of learning on you, Rosie. Give you some time and you’ll make me look like a drooling idiot.”

The three said goodbye to the family, and carrying three large bags of take out headed back towards the TARDIS. It was dark now, and the moon was bright enough to shine through the light pollution from the city. Rose’s hand found its way into the Doctor’s and they were happily discussing the state of Welsh math education when the Doctor froze.

“Rose,” he muttered almost too quiet to hear. “Is that who I think it is?”

Following his line of sight, Rose found herself staring at the retreating form of Blon Fel-Fotch. “Bugger,” She cursed.

“Who?” Jack asked, already on alert.

“Nobody good.” The Doctor muttered and started off after her.

“I’ll explain on the way.” Rose promised as they jogged after him, their take out bags hung on her arm.
Much later, after a great deal of excitement, Rose sat in the galley and waited on some of their take-out to reheat in what passed for a microwave. The egg that had been Blon was sitting across from her in a little nest of blankets looking far more innocent than the contents had ever proven to be.

“Jack’s in bed.” The Doctor advised from the doorway. “I’ve got the coordinates set to take her back.”

“Eat something first.” Rose pointed towards the counter where she’d made up a plate for him. “It’s been a long day and if Jack’s rants about that restaurant were accurate you haven’t nearly enough calories for that super metabolism of yours.”

“I can actually go weeks without food. I don’t like to,” he admitted with a tired half smile, “but I can.”

“Eat.” Rose didn’t bother dignifying that statement with an argument. “We need to keep our energy up.”

“So you are thinking like the TARDIS, build up a surplus?” He only half joked, something in her words holding a weight they normally wouldn’t.

“I can’t put my finger on it.” Rose admitted, pulling her own plate out of the microwave and sitting down to pick at it with her fork. “I just… I have a feeling.”

The Doctor, choosing to eat his cold, sat down across from her, moving the egg to the floor and out of sight. “You have some sort of Time Sense, if what your mother said was true. You’ve been suppressing it for years, but traveling with me, the bond, it has probably been drawing it out of hiding. How much you have is anyone’s guess, but exposure to artron in time travel can increase anyone’s latent abilities.”

“Not sure how I have any, what with all the genetics being stripped down to base human.” Rose shivered slightly. “But I can’t shake this feeling, like, like there’s something breathing down my neck. Like I should be running, really running, only I can’t figure out where to, or from what.”

The Doctor nodded, his eyes stormy. “Bad Wolf – it’s been following us since you came on board. Whatever it is, there’s a connection between you and it. Things are moving towards a fixed point, something very very big.”

“Time War big?” she asked, dreading the answer.

The Doctor nodded and poked at his own food. “I can drop you off at your mother’s, come back when it’s over.”

“Like that would work. How do you know whatever it is isn’t about to go down in mum’s living room? Knowing our luck it’s got to be something to do with Earth – probably London.”

“Your entire planet is jeopardy friendly.” The Doctor agreed, with a tired attempt at a smile. “Still, I want you safe.”

“I want you safe.” Rose reached across the table for his hand. “You and I, we’re linked yeah? No leaving each other behind. If something happened to you there’s no Compassion around to shield me. I like my chances by your side better than I do eating chips with mum.”
“I can’t do this without you.” The Doctor admitted softly, his eyes downcast. “I can’t lose you too, Rose. You and the TARDIS, that’s all I have left. I can’t…”

Rose reached across the table and took both his hands in hers. “You can. And if it comes to it you will.” She waited till his eyes raised to catch hers and she nodded, her eyes holding his firmly. “You are the Doctor. And I know it’s not fair, none of what’s happened to you is fair, and certainly not what the universe keeps asking of you. But if you do lose me, you will go on, do you hear me? You’ll find someone, two someone’s, to travel with and you will keep going.”

“Rose…”

She shook her head and interrupted him. “You will. Just like Gran went on no matter how it hurt – because people need you. You won’t let them down, Doctor. You never have and you never will. I’ll be here as long as I can be, but when that time comes, you’ll keep going.”

“It’s not now. It can’t be. We haven’t…” He stopped talking, his voice cracking slightly.

“Come here.” She advised, tugging on his hands until he stood up and met her. “Whatever is coming, it’s not here yet. Let’s make sure we take whatever time we can, yeah?”

He nodded, his head falling onto her shoulder. Words in his language chimed softly into her hair where he pressed his face, musical and sad, longing as deep as an ocean and Rose just held him.

BREAK

“You okay?” Jack asked. They were watching the Doctor deliver the egg from the monitor inside the TARDIS. The amount of methane in the hatchery was too much for human lungs.

“I’ve been better.” Rose admitted, her eyes sliding back to the rotor. For some reason she couldn’t keep from looking there, like there was something… “I have a really bad feeling, Jack. I haven’t felt anything like this since right before Gran died.”

“Time senses seem like a real bitch.” Jack pronounced, one hand moving to gently pet Sara where she rested on the console in her special backpack. “You get all the warning panic and none of the ability to dodge it.”

Rose snorted. “Pretty sure if they are fully functional they exist to help you dodge things – like Reapers. Just not things like this.” She moved over to the jumpseat and sat down heavily. “I feel like I can’t draw a full breath, like there’s this weight and it’s just pressing down on me. Every instinct I have is screaming at me but I can’t do anything.”

“What’s the Doc say?”

“Pretty sure he’s feeling the exact same thing only about a thousand times worse.” Rose rubbed at her eyes. “He’s locking down the bond, closing himself off.”

“Does that help or hurt?”

Rose gave a bitter laugh. “You know, I have no idea. At least I’m not feeling his growing panic anymore, and he can’t feel mine. I suppose that’s an improvement.”

The Doctor’s key rattled in the lock and with a wave of highly unpleasant air he slipped back inside. “Well that’s done.” He eyed the two of them and frowned. “What has both of you looking like the cat died?”
“We haven’t got a cat.” Rose stood up. “It’d get lost and then we’d forget to feed it. Or change the litter.”

“I like cats.” Jack chimed in. “Mind you, I prefer them five feet six wearing…”

“Jack!” The Doctor and Rose both cut him off, but a small smile had finally settled on both their faces.

“Look,” Jack started, moving Sara off the console onto a safer position hooked onto the handrail, “I know exactly what we need. A nice calm trip to some beautiful gardens, some cherry blossoms, sake. I know a guy…”

Rose and the Doctor exchanged looks. “We haven’t let him pick.” Rose admitted.

“Because he’s always wanting to go to some pleasure planet or nightclub.” The Doctor groused.

“None of that.” Jack promised with a sincere smile. “Feudal Japan. High on culture, low on depravity – at least where I’ll take you two. Rose can get all dressed up. It’ll be fun.”

“Alright,” the Doctor agreed. “But if I catch sight of one single orgy I’m leaving you there and taking Rose to a deserted island.”


“Stop calling me that.”

It was, Rose admitted several hours later, exactly what they needed. The air was clean and touched with spring. The people were friendly. The food was fantastic. Kyoto was rather pleasant for a city in the 1300s, much cleaner than some of the places they’d visited in that era. They parked the TARDIS on the outskirts near Jack’s friend and were quickly offered hospitality and their own quarters nestled in the gardens. Jack, being Jack, had disappeared off to whatever depravity had cemented his friendship with their host, which left her and the Doctor to themselves.

The tiny house was simple by any standards, with large dark wood posts and beams with a minimum of walls. But it was beautiful and with the large sliding doorways thrown open to the spring air it was incredibly peaceful. The TARDIS was parked in sight, her brilliant blue blending with the soft pink of the cherry blossoms like it belonged there. A gentle spring bubbled away next to the house and even though they were fairly close to the city the only noticeable sound was of the bamboo leaves and the running water.

The Doctor was scanning the water with the sonic screwdriver, more out of boredom Rose suspected than any actual concern over the contents of the water. For her, a break was a welcome comfort. For him – well, the Doctor’s idea of a break involved vastly more amounts of chaos. Rose, and she suspected the TARDIS, were for once not feeling it, if the exact landing that Jack had asked for was anything to go by.

The Doctor scowled and gave up, flopping back to lay on the mat in the entryway, his arm going over his eyes. “Rose,” he sighed and then angled his head to crack one eye open to look at her. “How are you managing?”

“Doing nothing?” She asked with a slight grin and wiggled her toes, playing with a fallen petal off the nearby tree. “I’m basking in it.”

He sighed. “I suppose a small break is warranted.”
“Hmm” she agreed. “I know you don’t do well with the quiet.”

“You need it every now and then.” He admitted with a slight grimace. “I used to be much better at this. I could spend hours watching a sunset. Now we’re here for less than two and I’m ready to set the place on fire just to have something to do.”

The itching feeling of something coming was nagging her too, so Rose could guess at the cause of his abnormally high level of agitation, even for the Doctor. “Please don’t. I rather like it here, and Jack seemed particularly fond of that fellow.”

“Jack’s particularly fond of everyone.” The Doctor turned over onto his side and propped his head on his hand. “Did you at least bring a book?”

“No.” Rose pointed over at the TARDIS lazily. “There’s an entire library in there. Go get one.”

The Doctor huffed. “She shocked me when I tried to open the door. I think she wants me to relax – out here. Or regenerate from boredom.”

“You sound like a petulant teenager.” Rose sat up. “We could go explore the city. I know nothing about Japan, let alone 1300’s Japan.”

“Where’s your shoes?”

Rose flopped back. “The TARDIS didn’t give me any.”

“I think that’s supposed to be our clue to stay here.” The Doctor let out a long slow breath. “She’s trying to tell us something.”

“Well you are the telepath. Let me know when you figure it out.” Rose joked, reaching over to poke him in the side with her unshod foot.

“We’ll be here for weeks in that case.”

Rose couldn’t help but giggle at that. “Oh come on. Centuries together and you haven’t gotten better at figuring her out?”

He just looked at her for a long moment, his eyes laughing and ruining his attempt at being serious. “She’s in a mood, Rose. I’m no good with domestics.”

“I don’t think a sentient time ship can in any way be described as domestic, even if she does manage most of the cooking and cleaning and washing up.” Rose moved closer to him and he opened his arms so she could snuggle in. “I suppose, if we’re stuck here with nothing to do – and Jack’s off being Jack… the house is pretty secluded from the rest of the estate. We’re all alone.”

“I feel like you are hinting at something but I have no idea what.”

Rose buried her face in his leather jacket and just laughed.

“Ah, so you are hinting at something.” He smiled softly. “Please?”

“I was going to suggest we try the loop again.” Rose raised her head enough to look at him before dissolving into giggles again. “No wonder all my early attempts at flirting didn’t work. You didn’t even know we were flirting!”

“Oh I knew, I just had very little idea the ah, practical applications?” he suggested, struggling for the words on the end. “But I have a better idea. I want to try it your way first.”
The Doctor nodded and ran a hand over her hair, gently detangling it from the neckline of her kimono. The TARDIS had laid out a fairly simple option for Rose, one with the least amount of frills or complications, and he was beginning to suspect why. “Your way. I’ve had my fun, so to speak, but you haven’t. Only fair if we make sure you are taken care of this time.”

Rose shifted slightly, turning her face so it wasn’t visible. “What if I can’t?”

“What do you mean, can’t?”

Rose sighed heavily. “I’m not good at it.” She admitted, grimacing as she spoke. “You bought me that stuff, back before we were together, and even with what Jack tells me is the best rated female pleasure vibe that was ever invented, I still can’t – you know. The last time, when we tried for the loop, I just couldn’t. I wanted to, I always want to, I just can’t. I get really really close and then it just fizzles. I can count on one hand the number of times I’ve actually managed it, and only with a partner.” She paused and then admitted in a tired voice. “It used to make Mickey really upset. He thought he wasn’t doing something right when it was just me, I’m broken or something.”

“Oh.” The Doctor’s brain turned that realization around. “That…that might be your great grandfather’s fault, actually.” Rose twisted around to look up at him. He blushed slightly. “You remember when we talked, before we bought you the toys? I told you I couldn’t solo? Well, we know there are some lingering after effects even without the extra strand of TNA. You aren’t telepathic but it could be you are still hard wired to need some kind of a connection. I wonder if your mother…”

“Oh!” Rose smacked his arm, hard. “No discussing my mother and anything sexual at the same time. That’s squeaky.”

The Doctor shrugged as if unbothered. “Well, it could be hereditary. Might explain why your grandmother was so cranky.”

Rose couldn’t help a slight chuckle. “Gran never could figure out how her own daughter was such a prude. But I’m damn sure mum doesn’t have this problem. I’d rather not be so sure of it but the walls are damn thin.”

“It would explain why you respond so physically to mental stimulation. Your brain is just slightly off from human standard. It should make the loop easier though.” The Doctor squeezed her tighter to his side. “Is that why you were so anxious before? You were worried you wouldn’t manage it?”

“It’s okay when it’s just me. Still takes the edge off even if I don’t, you know.” Rose admitted, taking a deep breath to breath in his scent. “But when I’m with someone and they expect it, and I know I’m not going to, I hate that feeling.”

“Well I’m certainly never going to judge you for not having a physical orgasm.” The Doctor joked, running his hand over her head and opening the bond enough she could feel his amusement. “If we try it, it’s not more serious than if we decided to go ice skating. Sure we’ll probably fall on our arses a few times but we’ll laugh about it, right?”

“Only you would compare sex to ice skating.” Rose shook her head and pulled away enough to eye him. “You really want to do this?”

“I admit I’m somewhat curious.” He sat up onto his elbows. “I’ve never had an erection, in any body. Probably something I should at least see if I enjoy.”
“Might be like pears.” Rose warned. “You might hate it.”

“Or it could be like bananas.” He offered back, grinning manically. “Or maybe it’s like walnut loaf, good for you but utterly boring. Or caramelized onions – tasty but needs something to go with it.”

“You are a nut.” Rose admonished with a shake of her head, but unable to hid her answering grin. “Try anything once?”

“At least once.” The Doctor supplied and wiggled his fingers. “I know you want to. I can feel it, Rose. Come on.”

“Someday I will learn to say no to you.” Rose took his hand and let him tug her back into his side. “Are you sure we’re far enough away from the main house?”

“Promise.” The Doctor took the sonic out of his pocket and tweaked a few settings. “There, it will give a warning sound if someone gets too close.”

“Close the door. I know it’s not exactly sound proof but at least it’s something.” Rose drew back and watched as the Doctor slide the door shut. Her hands hovered over the ties on her outfit. “You do know that no matter what I want you, right?”

“Rose, I can literally feel you wanting me in my head. And I can smell the puddle that’s rapidly forming under you.” He glanced meaningfully towards her.

“Naked?” She sighed. “Naked.” She agreed and they both stripped. The sleeping mat was shifted slightly to give them a little more room. Rose eyed the Doctor and the mat. “How do you want to do this?”

The Doctor, looking slightly lost, grimaced. “tell me what to do?” He offered.

“Is there a position you want to try or something?” Rose asked instead. When he looked even more baffled Rose motioned for him to lie on the mat. “If this works I’ll get you a book with pictures.” Once he was laid out she glanced down at him. “Anything I need to know? Like any other biological quirks?”

The Doctor glanced down at himself. “Well, in theory I just redirect blood flow and it should rise to the occasion.”

Rose pinched the bridge of her nose. “I’m not going to accidentally hurt you if I move funny or something? And can this get me pregnant?”

He frowned. “Unlikely. I did just have a telepathic orgasm, which did start up seminal production, but if I’m remembering my ancient history correctly it should take a few months for that to build to a point it would be concentrated enough to have a chance. And I’d need to have another one, while erect, and inside you. Even with a loop I doubt I can go deep enough for that to happen.”

“When’s the last time one of your species did that?”

“Thousands and thousands of years before I was loomed.” The Doctor admitted with a tiny shrug. “And even if by some enormous alignment of fates we did manage that, there’s only the smallest of traces of your great-grandfather’s DNA left, none of his TNA. Without some rather dodgy genetic engineering I don’t think we’d be able to conceive. Your great-grandmother said there was genetic engineering involved to create your grandmother – this is probably exactly why.”

“A girl has to worry about this stuff.” Rose explained. “I don’t want to end up with morning sickness and you acting shocked. I’m not ready for that yet, if ever. Be happier with your loom things if you
wanted kids.”

He smiled softly at her. “Good, because that would be much easier to manage than trying to have you carry them. Doable too, if you ever do want them. But if we did somehow manage the impossible, and given it’s you I think there’s always that possibility, I wouldn’t be upset. Would you really?”

“No.” Rose moved closer and placed a hand between his hearts. “I wouldn’t. I figured any kind of barrier would interfere with telepathic transmissions but I want to know what the risks are. I’m trying to be a responsible rider.”

“Rider?”

Rose smirked slightly and hitched a leg over him and sat on his thighs. “Redirect that blood flow and I’ll demonstrate.”

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