Antiqua Praetorii et Juvenis Hospes

by underoriginal

Summary

During the Year That Never Was, Martha meets a strange young man who just might become her closest ally. It's a shame he has no intention of surviving.
Meetings and Mysteries

Martha stifled a cry of horror. Even after three months of wandering the Earth, evading the Toclafane, and spreading the Doctor’s message, she knew should would never get used to this.

She stood on an ancient hill, looking over at the city below. Beneath her, Rome burned. The Underground had gotten word of the Master’s plan and the city had been evacuated before the bombing started. Mostly. Even half a mile away, she could still hear the faint screams of those too foolish to leave.

“You know this isn’t the first time,” a soft voice murmured.

She spun around, raising her pistol. “Who are you?” she demanded.

The speaker, a young, fairly handsome man gave her a look she couldn’t decipher. “That’s the question, isn’t it.”

Martha had gotten used to people who were too scared to give their name. She’d used an alias herself, although it was extremely rare. “Who’s side are you on?” she asked instead.

“Her’s,” the stranger replied matter-of-factly. “Actually, not. I was on her side. ‘Cept, she’s dead now. I’m on no one’s side any more.”

“How can you be neutral in a war like this?” Martha wondered aloud.

“Oh, it’s a war? There isn’t all that much fighting. Slaughter doesn’t really count,” the stranger stated mildly. “To answer your question, the trick to it is not fighting. It’s not all that difficult.” He gave her a wry smile, then looked up at the night sky, ignoring Martha’s gun. He furrowed his brow like something was confusing him. “Are those supposed to be there?” he asked.

“What?”

“The stars. Are they supposed to be there?” he repeated.

“Um, yeah,” Martha replied.

He nodded absently. “Good to know. I forget sometimes. She used to remind me. Then he killed her. He killed me too. I just haven’t found the time to die yet. Work to do, and all that. Not to mention it’s a bit of a process. I want to do it properly this time. It doesn’t usually stick, not with me. It’s a bit annoying, really.”

Trying to ignore the talk of his impending suicide, it was just a bit too much to wrap her head around at the moment, Martha asked the important question. “Who killed her?”

“The Master. I heard that’s what he calls himself.”

Martha lowered the gun and grinned. “I’m trying to take him down-”

“I knew that. Miss Martha Jones isn’t it? You’re a bit of a legend. So was I, but that was a while ago. No one has time to remember me now. All for the best, in the end. I never wanted to be remembered.”

“-and I was wondering if you cared to join me.”
The stranger gave her another indecipherable look. “You’d trust a man to help you save the world and you don’t even know his name.”

“I don’t trust you,” Martha informed him. “But I don’t think you’d have a reason to harm me.”

“How can you really afford to take that chance?”

“How can you?”

The stranger raised an eyebrow.

“You claim neutrality,” Martha explained. “No one is going to care if you don’t want to fight, they’re just going to care that you’re not helping them. Any one who doesn’t help them is an enemy. Both sides think that way.”

“Not if they were wiser. I’m a dangerous enemy to make,” the stranger said nonchalantly. “I’ll help you.”

“Really?” Martha asked skeptically. “It would be nice if you gave me a name.”

“Call me Rory.”

“Call me Martha.”

Rory’s face broke into a genuine grin. “Come with me. I know the caves around here like the back of my hand. You can hide until morning.”

“I prefer to move by night,” Martha pointed out.

“Yeah,” Rory said, taking her hand and pulling her deeper into the hills. “Of course you do. It’s the logical thing to do. Everyone knows that. So everyone knows when you’ll be moving. People, and psychotic Time Lords I suppose, plan based on what they know. Do something unexpected now and then. Safer that way.”

Martha conceded that logic and they continued on the way to safety. Suddenly, something occurred to her. “How did you see me? I’m wearing a perception filter.”

“Oh, is that what it was? It’s quite simple really. I’m a trained soldier. I can take in the terrain in a place I’ve never been before in a matter of seconds. I’ve learned to notice everything. So, when I don’t notice something, it becomes particularly noteworthy.”

“I’ve spent too much time with the Doctor,” Martha mumbled. “That actually made sense.”

“He does have that effect on people,” Rory mused.

“You know him?”

“Travelled with him. Or rather, will travel with him. Time travel’s odd like that. Don’t tell him we’ve met, it could screw up the timelines. Any more questions? You do seem to be asking a lot of them.”

“Yeah, actually. Could you be any more obvious?”

In the starlight, Martha saw Rory blink. “Huh?”

“How old are you?”

“Twenty-seven,” he said, a touch to fast.
“You cannot seriously expect me to believe that. I spent months traveling with the Doctor, and I’ve met Jack Harkness. There is no way you could possibly be as young as you look. You couldn’t be more obviously immortal if you wore a tee-shirt that said ‘Hey Look! I’m Immortal!’”

“I’m not immortal!” Rory said indignantly. Martha raised an eyebrow. “Any more.”

They had arrived at the mouth of a cave. It was completely dark, but Rory seemed to know his way around, and he led Martha through it to an open area lit by veins of phosphorescent crystals. As they sat down in the dust the eerie light and shadows emanating from the walls made Rory look ancient.

“So, how old are you really?” Martha asked

Rory didn’t reply immediately. He looked up at the ceiling, doing the math.

“It depends,” he finally replied slowly. “I’d like to say I’m only...1,921, but if you count all my alternate childhoods, you could say I’m as old as...1,999.” He looked slightly shocked. “Didn’t realize my bimillenial was next year.” He laughed wryly. “Didn’t think I’d live long enough to have a bimillenial. Oh well, not like I’ll live to see it.”

“Why’s that, then?” Martha asked. Her brain had filed away the information on his age to be reviewed when she was running on more than two hours of sleep in as many days.

“She’s dead. Told you that already. Don’t have anything to live for.”

“Then why are you helping me? Why haven’t you killed yourself? I mean, I’m glad you haven’t, don’t get me wrong, but-”

Rory laughed again, this time with more genuine humor. “You really don’t get it, do you?” He surged to his feet, a grin on his face. He didn’t look quite human. It reminded Martha of the Doctor and the look he got just before he destroyed another threat to the universe, like their pitiful attempts at conquering were just the cutest, most endearing thing he had ever seen. “I don’t have anything to live for, but there’s a whole world out there full of innocent people in terrible danger. There’s a whole world full of injustice, oppression, terror. There’s a whole world full of people who need a hero. There’s a whole world out there to die for. I’m not wasting a perfectly good death on my own problems. Though, I suppose most people would. I’m not most people, and neither are you. Most people don’t travel with the Doctor.”

Suddenly, he flopped down onto his back. “Go to sleep. No one but me knows this is here. We can move on in the morning.” Then, so quietly that Martha nearly didn’t catch it, and was sure she wasn’t meant to, he whispered, “The Centurion takes up arms and goes to war. That hasn’t happened in a while.”

Strangely reassured, Martha slept well for the first time in three months. The apocalypse could wait until morning. And so could Rory’s tale. There was no way she was letting that one go.
The Tomb of the Last Centurion

Martha jerked into full alertness in a matter of seconds. She had been a slow riser before the Toclofane attacked. She missed the days when she could sleep in a bit. She also missed the days when she couldn’t sleep anywhere except in a bed. She was lying fully clothed on the floor of a cave. She quickly scanned her surroundings. Empty, except for Rory, who was sitting cross legged, facing the mouth of the cave.

“Sleep well?” he asked.

“Well enough.” She opened her pack and took out two sets of rations, offering one to Rory. He waved her off.

“I’m not hungry. Don’t need to eat much.”

Martha nodded and started eating. She was relieved that she wouldn’t have to stretch her rations quite as far. There was only so much she could carry.

“What’s the plan?” Rory inquired absentmindedly.

“This isn’t the first time the Master has come to Earth,” Martha explained. “Nor is he the only Time Lord that has been a threat to us. UNIT created a weapon capable of killing a Time Lord without him regenerating.”

Rory nodded. “Why haven’t you used it?”

“The Doctor…is a bit irritating sometimes.” Rory smirked. “UNIT decided that having a weapon that could kill him around oversensitive military men wasn’t the brightest idea, so they took the gun, which is loaded with four unique chemicals that aren’t found anywhere else in the world and scattered them across the globe. My job is to find them all and kill the Master.”

“Lemme guess, you don’t know where they are,” Rory replied.

“Pretty much.”

“Wonderful. Let’s go.” Rory sounded honestly enthusiastic.

“Wait!” Martha called. “You don’t have a perception filter.”


Martha gave him an exasperated look. “Rory. You are human.”

“What? Oh yeah, that’s right, I am. Sorry. Keep forgetting. She used to remind me you know. Then he killed her.”

“Look,” Martha stated firmly. “If I’m going to travel with you, I need a bit more to go on than you keep forgetting you’re human.”

“It’s a long story,” Rory said gravely, “and we don’t have the time to tell it. All you need to know for the moment is that I spent two millennia unable to sleep, eat, or drink; and I had superhuman strength, stamina, senses, and reflexes. Two millennia is a hard habit to break. Sometimes I forget that I need certain things. You just have to remind me, is all.”
Martha pinched the bridge of her nose. “Alright, fine. I can work with that. That still doesn’t tell us what we’re going to do about the perception filter.”

“Oh, don’t worry about it. If the Toclofane come for me, I’ll distract them for long enough for you to get away.”

“And where does that leave you?” Martha demanded.

“Exactly where I want to be.”

Martha started Rory down for a few moments. Then she shrugged. “It’s your life, I suppose.”

“And my death,” Rory returned.

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Rory insisted that they go back to Rome before moving on. As he claimed that he had left his supplies there, Martha, despite her annoyance, couldn’t refuse him. The two walked in silence until they were at the city’s edge. Seeing the carnage, Rory decided it would be best to distract Martha.

“How did you meet the Doctor?” he asked.

Martha knew what he was trying to do, but she appreciated it nonetheless. “He was a patient during my residency.”

“You’re a physician?” Rory asked.

“Student. And, you know, most people just say doctor.”

“It’s less confusing when you say physician. It’s weird though; I was a nurse.”

“Really.”

“Yep.” There was silence for a few moments. “You going to tell the rest of the story?”

“Sure. It’s quite a story.” Martha stepped over the body of an old man as she spoke. “I liked to walk to the hospital every morning because it’s not far from the house and it’s good exercise.”

“And you don’t get enough of that out here,” Rory said ruefully, peering around a street corner. The Toclofane were rarely subtle, but it didn’t hurt to check.

“This was before then, obviously. Anyway, I’m on my way to work and I see a man in a pinstriped suit. He catches my eye, takes his tie off, and says ‘Like so.’ Naturally, I was a little confused, but you know, work to be done. Dr. Stoker wasn’t really known for his stellar beside manner.”

“I know what you mean. I don’t think he can be as bad as Dr. Hartigan was, though.”

“I’d have to meet Dr. Hartigan, but I doubt it.”

“So then what happened?”

“I see a couple patients, nothing out of the ordinary, except for a few weird sparks here and there. Then, we get to a patient by the name of John Smith.” Martha had to pause for a few moments to climb over rubble. She would have gotten hopelessly lost by now, but Rory seemed to know exactly where he was going. “Turns out, John Smith is the man I saw outside earlier, and when I examined him, I found two hearts!”
They walked in silence for a few moments more before Rory spoke. “That it, then?”

“After that, it was all blood sucking aliens, and rhinoceros aliens, and pretty much human aliens, and we were on the moon. You know, normal stuff.” She stopped walking and ran over the last sentence in her head.

“Is it a problem that I don’t think that was a strange statement?” Rory mused.

“I should be institutionalized,” Martha whispered.

“We probably all should. We’re here.”

Here turned out to be an old stone house that had most likely been crumbling even before the bombs fell.

“What’s in here?” she asked.

Rory looked distant and his voice took on a dreamlike tone, as though he was telling a fairy tale. “The Tomb of the Last Centurion.” He shook himself and seemed more normal. “Actually, that’s not really an accurate name. Historical records indicated that the Last Centurion died in the Blitz, and the people of Ancient Rome referred to him as the Lone Centurion. He wasn’t the Last Centurion back then.”

Martha decided that Rory most definitely was the Last Centurion, but she kept her thoughts to herself. Rory opened the door and stepped aside for her with a small bow and a small grin. It was really quite charming.

“After you, milady,” he said.

“Thank you, good sir,” she replied with an excessively posh accent. His grin widened just a little bit.

There were torches lining the walls of the hall the house had opened into. Rory lit one with what Martha thought might have been a flint stone, then used the first torch to ignite the rest. He handed one to her and led her down the hall into a tunnel off the far end. Luckily for Martha, the tunnel wound around itself a few times, but there were no other passageways.

At the end of the tunnel was a massive stone box with intricate circular carvings on each face. She stared at it in wonder.

“It’s just a replica,” Rory said, leaving his torch on one of the metal fixtures on the wall. Martha quickly put hers in another. “Much easier to open.”

He grabbed one edge of the box and pulled. Nothing happened. He grinned self-deprecatingly. “Human. Right. Gimme a hand, would ya.” She grabbed the edge and they managed to open it a crack. A few minutes, and a few more muffled curses, later and it was open.

Inside was a statue of a seated man in Roman dress who looked uncannily like Rory. Rory placed a hand on its cheek and said, “Ego sum qui est in custodia matris ex tempore. Dona mihi media et fortitudine ad suscipiet eam trans meo ultimo postremum spiritum.” The rolling power in his voice was unlike anything Martha had ever heard before. Even the Doctor barely compared. The Doctor’s power was at its height when the odds against him were the worst. Rory was unleashing his power on a statue. The effect was awe-inspiring.

The statue creaked and groaned as it rose to its feet. Martha kept her eyes wide open. It didn’t look like an angel, but it couldn’t hurt to be sure. Its armor brightened into metal and seemed to fall away
from its body. Its cloak turned red and began to sway. The sword in its hand gleamed silver. Beside her, Rory fell to his knees, gasping for breath.

Martha was at his side in an instant. His pulse was weak and thready and about three times too fast. He was taking huge gulps of air, but his fingertips were turning blue. He groaned and clutched his head, fisting his hands in his hair. She wasn’t sure what to do, except wait and pray.

Finally, his breathing slowed and his heartbeat returned to normal. He blinked a few times as he returned to himself, seeming surprised to find himself on the ground.

“What happened?” he asked.

“I think that was my line,” Martha said shakily.

“I don’t see a script.”

“Hardly my fault you lost it.”

They shared a relieved grin. “So, what did happen?” Martha asked.

“I have too many memories,” Rory replied. “In order to unlock the statue, I had to go deep into my memories. I guess I lost control. It’s like a bad flashback, almost.” He stood up, swaying for a few tense moments. Then he started to take the armor off the statue and put it on himself. “You have questions,” he stated.

“You’re stating the obvious.”

He rolled his eyes. “The statue is quantum locked,” he explained. “Certain natural phenomena, including Weeping Angels are naturally quantum locked, but it’s possible to induce artificially. A certain passcode by a certain voice with a certain inflection breaks the lock.”

“Why would you go to all this trouble to keep you wardrobe safe?” Martha wondered.

He gave her an exasperated look. “It keeps it from rusting, aging, falling apart. It’s much more durable than anything human made, but I like to be sure.” He strapped the sword on, completing the outfit, except for the cape. He held it in front of him and said, “Color niger luctum. Ostende mihi meum dolorem.” The cape turned black. This time he seemed fine.

“This one doesn’t need inflection,” he explained. “I didn’t have to go too deep in my memories.”

“Why turn the cape black?” Martha asked, although she was fairly certain she knew the answer.

“Two reasons. First, it’s great for stealth—”

“Of course, the glittering armor exudes an aura of stealth and subtlety that can be felt from a mile away,” Martha snarked.

He sighed like an annoyed parent. “Second, black is the color of grief.”

That ruined the good mood.

After putting his cape on, Rory unsheathed the sword and examined it, running a finger gently across the blade. “It’s still sharp. Lovely.”

The sword had some sort of engraving on it and she leaned closer to examine it. Then she raised an eyebrow. “Really?” Rory blushed.

“Okay, fine. The inscription’s in Elvish script. What’s wrong with that?”
“Nothing, nothing. It’s just a bit...different.”

He glanced at her wryly, sheathing the blade. “Yes, I am a nerd. Yes, it tends to surprise people. No, I don’t know why.”

“What does the inscription say?” Martha tried to change the subject.

“I am Sting; the spider’s bane.”

“Why do I find myself not believing that?”

“Probably because it isn’t true,” Rory conceded. “It says Spes homini diligere et protegere servo.”

“Do I get a translation?”

“No.”

“Does it have a name?”

“I call it Elisium in Morte. Mostly to be ironic.”

Martha decided it would be better not to comment on that one. “We’re heading towards Venice, but I’d like to stop in towns as much as we can. Seeing us fighting gives people hope.”

“Sounds like a plan. Let’s go. It’s bad luck to stay too long among the dead.”

“Not for you, I suppose,” Martha said.

“It’s not me I’m worried about. I’m not the one with the fate of the world on her shoulders,” Rory pointed out.

“And thank you for that lovely, encouraging reminder,” Martha muttered as she led the way out of the Tomb.

When they reached the surface, another question occurred to her. “If that’s the Tomb of the Centurion, then why don’t you die down there?”

“Told you already. Don’t do what people expect. That’s dangerous.”

“There’s nothing worse than post mortem danger,” Martha said sarcastically.

“Precisely,” Rory said sincerely.
Immortal Immaturity

Despite the glistening armor, Rory managed to draw surprisingly little attention to himself. He also seemed to know the Roman countryside better than Martha had ever known London. They made good time towards Venice, stopping every evening, or morning as the case may be, in one enslaved village or another. Rory also spoke Italian fluently. He noted that his dialect was somewhat archaic, but Martha preferred not to use local translators. It was too hard to tell who’s side they were on, and if they were the only ones who spoke the language, deliberately mistranslating her words became all too easy.

Rory also helped put the people she met at ease. The Last Centurion was an old legend, but many people still believed it. Seeing their hero come to life gave them hope. It gave Martha hope too. In fact, Martha had started to regain some optimism about the whole endeavor.

Then Rory collapsed.

Three days into their journey, they had left a small town in the middle of Italy and were heading northeast. The villagers had been surprisingly hospitable, as they actually had supplies to spare. Martha had been very grateful, and had barely noticed that Rory refused to take any food for himself. She had never seen him eat before, so it wasn’t as though it was anything out of the ordinary.

A few hours from the town, Rory started to falter. At first, it was just a small stumble here and there. Soon, he was practically tripping over his own feet. Martha had asked if he was alright a few times, but he just said he was fine and refused to say anymore. An hour after he had started lagging, Rory lay down and stopped moving.

Martha rushed over to his side, immediately checking his vitals. He seemed to have collapsed from exhaustion.

Just then, she saw a group of Toclofane over the horizon. She put the perception filter around Rory’s neck and prayed. The perception filter worked best in a crowd. Between the empty plain, and Rory’s shining armor, there was no guarantee the device would work.

The Toclofane flew over the land, giggling madly. Martha held her breath as they passed overhead. She thought she saw one slow, but if it had it hadn’t noticed anything. She waited for a few tense heartbeats after they passed out of sight before she moved.

She shook Rory gently. She wanted to let him sleep, but they had to move on. Toclofane were unpredictable at best, and they might come.

Rory moaned, “Don’ wanna get up.” Martha shook him again.

“C’mon, Rory. It’s time to go.”

“Don’ wanna. Lemme sleep.”

“We need to go now. They might come back.”

“Amy, lemme sleep.”

Martha was just about to respond when Rory’s eyes shot open. He sat up on his elbows. “You’re not Amy.”
“No, I’m Martha. C’mon we need to go.” She pulled him to his feet. He started to walk, then noticed the perception filter around their necks. He raised an eyebrow. “There were a couple Toclofane around and you were kind of out of it,” she explained.

He nodded a couple times and took the perception filter off. He stumbled as he stepped forward. Martha put an arm around his waist to steady him, then froze. The armor hung far too loosely off his shoulders.

“Rory? When was the last time you ate?”


Martha rolled her eyes. “Yes, that’s a problem. You need to eat to keep your strength up.”

“No, I don’t.”

“Yes, you do.”

“No, I don’t.”

“Yes, you do.”

“No, I don’t.”

Martha couldn’t believe she was even having this conversation. “Then why did you collapse back there?”

“My circuitry malfunctioned. That happens sometimes. Rarely, but it’s usually really inconvenient.”

“Rory, you’re human. Remember?”

A look of dawning comprehension spread across Rory’s face. “Oh, yeah. I am, aren’t I? I’m starving. D’you have anything to eat?”

Martha was tempted to bash her head against a hard surface. Unfortunately, the only hard surface available was Rory’s breastplate, so she resisted the urge. Instead, she pulled out one of her rations and handed it over.

“Next place we stop, you pick up your own food.”

“Fine. Where is our next stop?” Rory asked.

“There’s a little village about a quarter day’s walk from here,” Martha said.

“Who’s the contact?”

“What?”

“Do you have a contact in the village?” Rory elaborated.

“No. Do I need one?” As a matter of fact, it was the first village where she didn’t have a specific contact. Usually, she was told what the closest town was, and who to talk to when she got there.

“Not really, but it’s better to stay away from places full of strangers.”

“Why’s that?”
“There are quite a few people who think their lives will become easier if they capitulate to the Master’s rule. There would be no better way to gain his favor than to turn you in. Let the people you’ve already spoken to spread your story there.”

Martha couldn’t deny that it was good advice. “Of course, turning me in would gain the Master’s attention. I wouldn’t want that.”

Rory smiled grimly. “You already have his attention, Martha Jones. He’s doing everything he possibly can to find you.”

Martha sighed; she kept her sanity by not thinking about thinks like that. “Well, if I didn’t already have his attention, I wouldn’t try to get it.”

Rory’s smile became a bit friendlier. “There are quite a few people who aren’t as smart as you. It can be just as dangerous to overestimate people as it is to underestimate them.”

“In other words, never assume the Doctor knows what he’s doing.”

Rory laughed. “He does occasionally. He once took down an army in three minutes forty-two seconds.”

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Rory laughed. “He does occasionally. He once took down an army in three minutes forty-two seconds.”

“Impressive,” Martha noted, not really sure what else to say.

“Quite.”

“Now, we just need to figure out where we’re staying for the night.”

“Same place.”

“What?” Martha demanded.

“It just so happens that I have a contact,” Rory explained smugly.

Martha barely resisted the urge to punch him. “Why couldn’t you have told me that?”

“I just did.”

As they walked, Martha let her mind wander. Rory was far more observant than her, and she was relieved to have the opportunity to just think without having to worry about being attacked by floating balls of doom.

Her mind led her back to Rory’s collapse.

“Rory, if you don’t mind me asking—” she trailed off, unsure of what to say.

“Yes?” Rory prompted.

“Who’s Amy?”

Rory’s face became completely expressionless. Martha though the statue in the Tomb of the Last Centurion displayed more emotion than Rory did now. “She was my wife,” he said solemnly. “And the only woman I ever loved who was not my own blood. I waited for her. Two thousand years I waited for her. We were supposed to be happy, have a long, happy life together. Then the Master killed her. Because he felt like it. Because he could.” He shook himself. “That bastard will die for his crimes,” he stated cooly. “Not by my hand; I won’t live to see him defeated. But someone. Someone out there will suffer so much by his hand that even the Doctor will not be able to help him. The
demon who calls himself Master will die, and Amy will be avenged. Does that answer your question?”

It took Martha a few moments to form a response. Hoping to steer the conversation to safer waters, she asked, “How did you meet the Doctor?”

“He was the stripper at my stag party,” Rory said in the exact same tone of voice.

“I don’t think I want to know.”

“It’s actually not as dirty as it sounds.” Rory sounded much more jovial now. Martha admired his ability to tuck away memories he couldn’t face. She had a feeling she would need it very soon.
The village that Martha and Rory were staying in was nearly empty. Only a few dozen people, all adults, were living there. Rory’s contact, an old man named Arduino Calligaris, explained that the children had been killed in the first few attacks.

Arduino was a pleasant, gentle man. Although he was a bit caught up in his grief, Martha understood entirely. He spent a great deal of time reminiscing about his deceased wife, children, and grandchildren. Rory was bored with this surprisingly quickly and stopped bothering to translate the stories. Instead, he seemed to have an endless list of word salads and nonsense phrases. Martha thought that was a shame; she didn’t mind a distraction every so often. Still, some of what Rory said was pretty funny.

Despite the small population, supplies were running low. The village made some of the smaller, simpler parts of whatever the Master was building, so it wasn’t as critical that they were kept well fed. However, even the local enforcer, the man responsible for ensuring the Master’s will was carried out, felt the effects of near starvation, and turned a blind eye to their presence. The fact that the enforcer, Gregorio Donati, was Arduino’s nephew also helped.

Martha told her story as she always had, stopping every few sentences to let Rory translate. His voice had taken on that tone she had heard in the Tomb; its power transfixed the people more surely than her words alone ever could have. They stared at him in open awe.

When she had finished her story, Arduino offered them a place to sleep.

“We have little,” Rory translated, “but it would be our pleasure to share what we have with you.”

“Thank him,” Martha told Rory, “and tell him that we will take him up on his offer.”

Rory relayed the message. Arduino smiled pleasantly and showed them to two empty cots tucked away in a niche. The only real bed left went to Gregorio, of course. Enforcers always got preferential treatment, but the cots were far enough out of the way that Martha and Rory could sleep through the day without being noticed. Hopefully.

Rory said something in Italian and waved Arduino away.

“What did you say?” Martha asked.

“I told him I didn’t need a cot.”

“Yes, you do.”

“No, I don’t.”

Martha refused to be dragged into an argument this time. “You’re human, remember?”

Rory blushed and called Arduino back, speaking in unmistakably sheepish tones. Arduino looked as annoyed as Martha felt. Still, Martha fell into a light sleep easily enough.

At around noon she was shaken awake. She reacted on instinct, throwing the person off her and shoving him into a wall, her arm pressed against his throat. She blinked a couple times to focus and looked at her captive. It was Gregorio. His eyes were bloodshot and he looked pale and terrified.

Behind her, Rory woke up far more slowly and walked over to them.
“What are you doing here?” Martha demanded of Gregorio. Rory repeated it tonelessly.

Gregorio choked out a reply. “You have to get out of here. They are coming for you.”

“Who are?”

Rory struggled with the translation for a few moments. “I believe he is referring to the Toclofane.”

“How did they find us?”

Gregorio hesitated a few moments before he answered. “Uncle Arduino betrayed you. He thinks he can bring us prosperity if you die.”

“You’re lying,” Martha accused. Rory didn’t translate that.

“I’m fairly certain he is not lying.”

“How do I know you aren’t working with your uncle? You are the enforcer here.”

Gregorio swallowed. “I never wanted to be the enforcer. Uncle made me. He thought I would be safer, but I’m not. If there is any dissent at all, I am blamed. I am always afraid that I will be the next to die. Now that you are here…” He made a sound dangerously close to a sob, and Rory’s voice wasn’t quite steady when he continued his translation. “Now that you are here, he is coming and he will find out that I helped hide you. We will be punished. No matter what happens, I die. I would not die betraying our last hope.”

Martha released him. She didn’t want to believe that Arduino was an enemy, but she was used to being betrayed by now. Gregorio took a few moments to steady himself and catch his breath. He really did look pitiful.

“We must leave at once. Follow me.”

Martha followed, but she eased her pistol out of its holster and clicked the safety off, making sure to do it quietly enough that he wouldn’t hear. Rory walked three paces behind her and to her right; she could just see him in the corner of her eye.

Gregorio led them out into the main hall. It was deserted. The rest of the village was at work.

“We should be safe for a bit,” Gregorio explained. “We are a small enough village that the Toclofane rarely come by.”

Clearly, he had never heard of tempting fate because at that moment the door opened and Arduino entered brandishing a revolver. He said something that was probably along the lines of “try anything and I’ll blow your brains out.” Martha wasn’t sure because that wasn’t what Rory translated.

What Rory said was “He only has two shots. I’m willing to bet he’s pretty good with that thing.”

Martha made a split second decision. She grabbed Gregorio and held her own pistol to his head, clicking the safety back on then off again to make sure Arduino got the message. This elicited a raised eyebrow from Rory, but Arduino also went deathly pale.

She could feel Gregorio shaking, and felt a bit guilty, but she had more important things to worry about. Namely Arduino, who was now pointing the gun directly at Rory’s head. He made some demand that caused Rory to laugh out loud, startling everyone.

“What did he say?” Martha asked.
“Let my nephew go or I shoot your friend.”

“No one’s getting shot if I have anything to say about it,” Martha said firmly. “But if that gun fires, so does this one, and I think I’m a bit more likely to make the shot.”

Rory couldn’t keep the contempt out of his voice when he translated Arduino’s reply. “Do you not care if I kill your friend?”

“Do you not care if you kill the Last Centurion?” Martha questioned.

“The Last Centurion is a myth. He is merely an impersonator.” Rory switched to his own words. “And he got used to talking about himself in third person surprisingly quickly.”

Martha spared a quick glance at him. “Really not the time.”

Rory grinned smugly.

Martha turned her attention back to Arduino. “I don’t really care if you shoot Rory; he’s only with me to find a good time to die. On the other hand, you care if I shoot your nephew. So, the way I see it, you get out of my way and I let Gregorio go. Everyone wins. Or you could stay where you are, I shoot Gregorio, and Rory kills you before you can shoot me. I know he can. Choose wisely.”

Arduino smirked. “Your choice. Choose quickly.”


Martha had been bluffing when she had said Rory would kill Arduino. She never imagined that someone, even the Doctor, could move as fast as Rory did then. In an instant he had crossed over to her side and snatched the gun out of her hand. Before she could blink, a shot rang out and Arduino lay dead, a bullet hole precisely between his eyes.

“Let’s go,” Rory said, giving the gun back to her and stalking off.

“Aspetti!” Gregorio called. Rory stopped and looked back. Gregorio pulled a rosary out of his pocket and handed it to Martha. He turned to Rory and said something in Italian. She really needed to learn the language. Rory replied in a slightly friendlier tone than he usually used with people other than Martha.

The whirring in the distance was louder, closer. Gregorio went even paler than before and his next words were barely above a whisper, but he looked determined. Martha knew she was looking at a man who knew he was about to die. Rory’s face became grim and hard.

“Vale amicus,” he said. “Habeas faciles pax vestra.”

A flicker of confusion passed over Gregorio’s face, but he nodded solemnly. The whirring was nearly on top of them now.

“Time to go,” Rory said.

“What about Gregorio?” It was a token protest, and they both knew it.

“It’s his time to die,” Rory looked pensive. “That’s not a bad way to go, protecting the last hope this world has.” He glanced at her. “No pressure or anything.” An odd cheerfulness came over him, belying his next words. “I’d rather like to die like that. A good death, one that will be remembered.”
He nodded to himself.

“Let’s focus on the here and now instead,” Martha suggested, speaking as much to herself as to Rory. They didn’t speak again until they were a mile from the village and they were sure the Toclofane had lost their trail.

“Where to now?” Martha asked.

Rory took out the rosary and turned it over in his hands a few times. Then he held it out to her, pointing out an inscription.

“At a guess, I’d say we look for Favianna Donati.”
Their chosen path meandered north along a small, nameless stream. The countryside would have looked idyllic in better times, but now the water ran black and there were burnt patches from laser blasts cratering the grass.

They had stopped in a couple villages along the way, asking for Favianna Donati, but no one seemed to have heard of her. In the third village they had visited since Gregorio’s death, Rory pulled Martha aside as the villagers prepared the night meal. There was not enough food to really call it a meal, so it was not afforded the title of dinner or supper. Strangely, this slight didn’t seem to teach it a lesson.

“We really should be moving much faster,” Rory said. “We can get out of Italy and over the Alps in a week if need be. We don’t have much time to finish this.”

But Martha would have none of that. “No. We need to find Favianna.”

“Why?” Rory demanded. “Why is Favianna so important that we risk our whole mission to find her? We’re racing against the clock, remember?”

“I just have a hunch.”

“You have a hunch,” Rory repeated incredulously.

Martha leaned in close, making sure they couldn’t be overheard. It was a bit paranoid, given that she, Rory, and a half-deaf old woman named Amalia were the only ones who spoke English with any fluency. Still, better paranoid than dead.

“I never said it was my hunch,” she whispered.

Rory’s eyes widened in shock, then he nodded.

“Amalia say food is done,” Ilaria said, just as Rory picked up on Martha’s message.

Ilaria was a young woman of about seventeen, and had learned a little English in school. Apparently, she was much better at French. She wasn’t traditionally pretty, but she had a sharp mind and had already picked up a few useful English phrases. As well as a few more colorful ones courtesy of a highly amusing incident involving Rory and a less-than-cooperative frying pan. The skills picked up over two millennia evidently didn’t extend to cooking.

Martha nodded her thanks and the pair went over to the table where the food was set up. She spent the next fifteen minutes alternately waving off seconds that the locals really couldn’t afford to give away and making sure Rory didn’t wave off the firsts.

Despite her refusal to take extra food, she was still hungry when the food had disappeared entirely into the stomachs of hungry workers, but at least Rory had gotten some food into him.

Martha had quickly discovered that he could be ludicrously stubborn at times. They eventually compromised on Rory eating three meals in two days. He claimed that was a sufficient amount, and Martha rarely had the energy to argue on top of everything else that had to be done.

After the night meal, Amalia pulled Martha and Rory aside to talk to them. Rory looked vaguely uncomfortable, putting Martha on edge.
“You two seem to be becoming great heroes,” Amalia chuckled gently. She was a very grandmotherly type of woman, the kind who you would expect to always have hugs and fresh baked cookies ready when the mass of grandkids came over, even she hadn’t been expecting company.

“If that’s what you want to call us,” Martha said ruefully.

“A man who thinks himself a hero rarely is,” Amalia replied firmly.

“That doesn’t mean anyone with any humility is a hero,” Martha returned. She didn’t want to be a hero; she had enough pressure as it was. Besides, she was just a medical student, not some Olympic athlete with a tragic past and inspiring tale of overcoming hardship and adversity.

For no other reason than because the universe loved proving her wrong, it was at that moment a young boy who had been playing with a rubber ball managed to fit the thing down his throat. It was his mother, Mirabella’s, scream that drew their attention.

Naturally, the scream sent everyone into a panic. There must have been someone there who knew how to perform the Heimlich Maneuver, but no one was thinking straight. No one except Martha.

When she was fifteen, she and a few friends had been at the mall browsing the stores. Next to Martha’s favorite store was a fancy jewelry store. Just as they were walking out of the store, armed robbers broke into the jewelry store. Martha hadn’t even realized what was happening until she heard gun shots. Before her brain had time to react, she had grabbed her friends and gotten as far away as she could, notifying a security officer she had almost run into.

It hadn’t been until that night, when the implications of what had happened finally sank in, that she had felt afraid.

Soon, she discovered that she had an astonishing ability to keep her cool under pressure. When she had been unable to decide between a career in medicine or a career in astronomy, that ability had been the deciding factor.

Now, it played to her advantage yet again.

Within seconds of figuring out what was going on, Martha rushed over to the boy and started the Heimlich. By the time any one else had time to react, the boy’s throat was clear. Rory had started forward just enough so that the rubber ball somehow ended up in his hand.

Martha snatched up the ball and held it out to the boy.

“Don’t go putting things in your mouth like that,” she said. Rory translated dutifully.

Mirabella let out a sob, thanking Martha over and over again while her husband, Lorenzo, comforted her. Just when Mirabella’s hysterical gratitude was starting to make Martha uncomfortable, Rory broke in. He said something very pointedly and Mirabella blushed.

Martha glanced over at Amalia. The old woman was smiling serenely, and winked when she caught Martha’s eye.

“D’you think Amalia’s, you know, up to something?” Martha whispered to Rory a couple minutes later. They had been given a room with real beds in the basement of Amalia’s house. The enforcer’s house was on the other side of town, and, despite her age, there were very few who would dare cross Amalia. Or maybe they would just feel too guilty about hurting a kindly old lady and Amalia used it to her advantage. It was kind of hard to tell.
“Amalia? No.”

“Then why are you so uncomfortable around her?”

They were sitting on the beds facing each other. The beds weren’t all that comfortable, but Martha was still almost overwhelmed by the fact that she had a blanket.

Rory gave her one of those horribly sad looks. “Amalia, Amelia. Too many memories.”

“Oh.” There wasn’t anything else to say.

“Something’s bothering you,” Rory observed a few minutes later.

“Is it that obvious?” Martha asked sardonically.

“No, something else. Nothing to do with Amalia.”

Martha considered that. Come to think about it, there was something weighing on her mind.

“Why didn’t you help Mirabella’s son?” she asked.

Rory sounded amused when he replied. “You looked like you had it covered.”

Martha rolled her eyes. “I meant, why didn’t you get there first? You’re a hell of a lot faster than I am.”

Rory sighed, and the weight of the world settled on his shoulders. “Only when it comes to killing.”

“Sorry?”

“I worked at a walk-in clinic. No major emergencies. Austin gets stuck in his toilet with alarming frequency, but that isn’t really something that has to be dealt with fast. All of my reflexes, my muscle memories, they’re all geared towards killing. I was afraid that if I moved too fast, instinct would take over. Or, at least, the sword would.”

“What do you mean by that?”

Rory took a deep breath, turning to stare at the walls. “I don’t consider myself a swords master,” he began. “As far as I’m concerned, swords masters don’t exist.”

“How does that work?” Martha asked.

“It’s kind of hard to explain,” he said ruefully. “Actually, it’s easier to explain to you than it would be to most people.”

“Why’s that?”

Rory faced Martha directly. “You’ve met aliens,” he explained bluntly. He took another deep breath and continued. “Swords aren’t inanimate objects, really. Not if you know them as well as I do. They’re objects, yes, but they have a life of their own and a story to tell. Always.”

He unsheathed his sword and stared at it, lost in the past. The flickering lightbulb overhead glinted off the cold steel, and it did seem almost alive.

“Swords are weapons and nothing else,” Rory said, sounding uncannily like one of Martha’s history professors. “You cannot use a sword to sow a field, or build a house, or make music. Swords are
used to threaten, to injure, or to kill. As such, they are extremely bloodthirsty.”

He ran his hand along the blade and gave it a few experimental swings.

“Now, a newly forged sword, while far from harmless, is usually quite docile. Otherwise, it would be far too dangerous to the maker. A new sword will serve its wielder well, but a new sword is only as skilled as the man who wields it. However, once the sword has tasted blood—”

He grinned madly and moved. Suddenly, he was on his feet and the point of the sword was barely a centimeter from her throat. She somehow managed not to flinch. Rory seemed pleased by her reaction and sat back down on the floor opposite her bed, allowing Martha to loom over him. He sat cross legged and balanced the sword on his knees, fingers gently resting on top of it.

“—it’s a whole lot less friendly. A blooded sword always craves more. It cannot move of it’s own accord, but that does not mean that it has no power. Those who you would say have mastered the sword might find themselves moving just that little bit faster, landing blows just that little bit harder, being just that little bit better that can decide who lives and who dies on the battlefield. It is often said that this is because they know the weapon better, that they are more familiar with its weight and its quirks than they would be with a new weapon. This is not false. It is not wholly true either. The whole truth is that the wielder allows the sword a modicum of control, just enough to turn the tide of battle. However, the wielder rarely is able to regain control, and once his hand goes to a blooded sword, he is far more likely to strike down a man in anger.”

Rory sheathed his sword and stood up in the same motion.

“Elisium in Morte has tasted more blood than you have ever seen spilled, and I have been wielding her since long before the oldest of your ancestors that can be found in any of your records was born.”

He crossed over to the bed and lay down, still in full armor. As far as Martha knew, he never took it off.

“I am always careful when I wear her.”
Sleep was not Rory’s favorite place to be. Waking, he could shove the memories aside, lock them away and hide the key where even he couldn’t find it. But burglars came in the night; they came and picked the lock and opened the doors and he couldn’t control the memories.

He always dreamed, even when he knew he shouldn’t. He dreamed of Rome. He dreamed of Rome burning when the Goths and the Franks and the Saxons came. He dreamed of Rome burning when Mister Saxon came.

He dreamed of Clovis, so strong in whatever faith he chose. He dreamed of Charles Martel, Charlemagne, and his first time on a horse, when he was but a lad. It hadn’t gone very well.

He dreamed of war, war lasting for a hundred years. He dreamed of peace, fragile peace that could never last.

He dreamed of the Popes, so sure in their authority. It wasn’t pronounced like that and he knew it. But they wouldn’t listen. Why should they? They had God on their side, so they had to be pronouncing things right. Even when they weren’t.

He dreamed of Empires. Empires rising, empires falling. He dreamed of Emperors. Each and every one of them thought he would be remembered forever. He could barely remember their names.

He dreamed of a young woman, dark skinned and bright eyed, calling his name. Over and over.


That wasn’t a dream. He opened his eyes.

“Good morning, Martha. D’you have any breakfast? I’m starved.”

Martha let out a relieved sigh. She had been so worried when he had started tossing and turning, caught in some dream. It had taken her a few minutes to wake him up. His eyes had opened just a few moments before panic would have set in.

“Sorry,” she said. “Today’s your lunch day. You had breakfast and dinner yesterday.”

Of course, she wouldn’t deny him the food if he was really that hungry, but she doubted he was. He was an alarmingly skilled actor. The only reason she trusted him at all was because his masks had slipped when he talked about Amy. The problem was he was, despite all logic, even better at pretending to be fine than the Doctor. She could tell that he wasn’t fine, but very little beyond that. Definitely not enough to help.

Fortunately, Rory’s endurance easily outstripped anyone Martha knew, short of the Doctor and maybe Jack. As long as he took care of himself well enough to stay alive, she didn’t have to worry about his condition too much. On the other hand, he was a friend, so she worried anyway.

Rory grimaced, but didn’t complain; that was one of the rules of the system. Martha didn’t want to deal with Rory whining about food when he had chosen not to eat. She idly wondered when her job description had expanded to include babysitting two millennia old death seekers.

A soft knock on the door caught her attention. She opened it just a crack. Ilaria was standing outside,
looking a bit nervous.

“Breakfast is prepared,” she said, turning and running off without waiting for a response.

Martha looked at Rory.

“That’s a bit fishy,” he said mildly, confirming her suspicions.

“You think we’ve been double crossed?” she asked.

“Perhaps not intentionally, but I find it rather unlikely that the friendly neighborhood Gestapo knew about our presence.”

“Gestapo?” she asked, amused in spite of herself.

“Or oprichniki, if you prefer. One secret police is much like another. Anyway, the point is that someone with loose lips may have mentioned us where they shouldn’t have. We can leave without any trouble from here; I noticed a few passageways that could get us away safely.”

“No,” Martha said firmly.

“No?”

“No. People need to see us fighting. It gives them hope. Fleeing from something that might be a threat is exactly the opposite of what we’re trying to achieve. If it turns out to be nothing, there won’t be any problems.”

“What if it isn’t nothing? What if it’s a whole army of Toclofane?”

“The Master wouldn’t send Toclofane after me personally,” Martha replied. “He’ll want to kill me himself. Toclofane are excellent for mindless destruction and decimation,” she tried to ignore Rory’s flinch at the word ‘decimation’, “but leaving people alive isn’t really their strong suit. If he sends anyone, they’ll be human.

“So?” Rory demanded angrily. “What if it’s an army of humans?”

Martha scoffed. “You’re telling me the Last Centurion can’t take on an army of half-trained, brainwashed idiots?”

Rory stepped closer, radiating anger. She had a feeling the clenched fists and gritted teeth had looked ridiculous on him at some point, but that most definitely was not the case now.

“Of course I can. That’s not the issue. What happens if there is an army, and I draw my sword, and I cut them all down, and I don’t stop there? What will you do then?”

Martha didn’t hesitate to reply. “Then I’ll wait until you’ve gotten rid of the army and if you go for innocent people, I’ll shoot you in the head. That way everyone’s happy. Except the soldiers.”

Rory stepped forward again, into her personal space. He was a few inches taller than her, so he loomed over her. He locked his gaze with her and she found she couldn’t look away. His chest was only an inch from hers, and he was breathing deeply and furious. It was enough to terrify anyone else, but she had travelled with the Doctor. She had seen the wonders and the horrors of the universe. She had seen the Oncoming Storm. And she was not intimidated.

“Except the soldiers,” Rory repeated with a sneer. “And their families. And their friends. But that’s not all. What if you miss me? What if you don’t? Could you really do it?” he asked, his voice
dropping to nearly a whisper, but it held more power than the loudest shout. “Could you really take that gun and end a life? Could you really kill a friend? In cold blood?”

“Would I have to?” Martha replied coolly. Her face betrayed none of her emotions, but she couldn’t deny that Rory’s questions had shaken her.

At her answer, Rory seemed to deflate, and he stepped back.

“I’m sorry,” he said sincerely. “I don’t know what came over me. I just-”

“It’s alright,” Martha said. “We’re all just a little on edge. Tempers flying; it happens. Don’t worry about.”

He smiled a little. “Shall we be off then?” he asked, holding the door open for her with a grand hand gesture and a small bow.

“We shall,” she said grandly. “Into the lion’s den we go.”

He laughed lightly and followed her in his customary spot; three paces behind and to the right. It was rather like having a body guard. In a sense, she supposed that was what Rory was. At any rate, he only took that position when there were other people around.

When they reached the sitting room, Amalia was there waiting for them in an old wing-backed chair. She had a small packet wrapped in brown paper and twine in her lap. The chair was in front of a glass coffee table and opposite a comfy looking armchair. Martha didn’t see anyone else in the room, and Rory’s lack of reaction confirmed it. On the coffee table was a metal platter with breakfast on it. Three months ago, Martha would have considered the breakfast pathetic. These were different times.

“How did you get eggs?” she asked wonderingly.

“Ilaria’s mother had two more hens than the Master saw fit to use. It just happened that it is my day for eggs today. Come, sit.”

Martha settled herself in the armchair and picked up a tea cup. The expensive china held only water. Rory stood behind the armchair, always watchful.

“You can pull up a chair if you like,” Amalia said cheerfully.

“I’ll stand.”

“We can speak freely here,” Amalia told Martha. “The enforcer will not trouble us.”

“What is that?” Martha asked suspiciously.

Amalia smiled mysteriously. “The enforcer is otherwise occupied. I am given to understand that you are looking for a certain artifact that you believe could turn the tides in our favor,” she said.

“That is correct,” Martha confirmed, every muscle going on full alert.

“I may be able to assist you there.”

“How so?”

Amalia handed over the packet. “An old friend of mine passed away a few days ago. It was most unfortunate, but not altogether unexpected.”
“I’m sorry for your loss,” Martha said politely.

“There is no need to be. My friend, before her death, was able to have this delivered to me. I have not opened it; it is not for my eyes, but she indicated that the information in this packet would be useful to you in your endeavor.”

“It’s not booby trapped or anything, is it?” Martha asked.

“Not that I’m aware,” Amalia replied.

“Oh, sorry. I was asking Rory,” Martha clarified.

Rory took the packet and turned it over in his hands. Then he held it up to the light and examined it from every angle.

“It appears safe.” He slipped it under his cape. Martha assumed his cape was bigger on the inside, because that was the only way to explain how he fit anything under there. She wasn’t even sure that the cape had pockets.

“Thank you for your help,” Martha said graciously. “We really do have to be moving on though.”

“Don’t worry dear, I understand. I wish you the very best of luck.”

“Good luck to you too.”

With those words, Martha and Rory left, slipping out just as the sun started to rise. They would move by night again in a few days. Since they had already decided on their next stop, it wasn’t until they had been walking for twenty minutes that either of them felt the need to break the silence.

“You’re human, remember?” Rory said suddenly.

“What?”

“You need to eat to keep your strength up,” he elaborated.

That was when Martha realized she had forgotten to finish breakfast. It must have showed on her face, because Rory pulled an egg out from under his cape with a flourish and held it out to her.

“Where did you get that?” Martha asked incredulously.

“Amalia’s house. When your back was turned. You really should pay more attention. It can be dangerous out there.”

Laughing, Martha took her egg.
They had decided to avoid villages for a few days and head straight for Venice. Rory had theorized that Favianna Donati was likely to be found in a larger city. Martha didn't really believe him, but she would be grateful for the opportunity to sneak onto a train. Those opportunities were surprisingly lacking in the countryside. Also, Martha wanted to open Amalia's mysterious packet away from prying eyes, and Rory agreed that was a wise idea.

They were camping, if it could be called that, on the slope of a hill. Rory had insisted that it was too dangerous to sleep in the valley, because if they were attacked by soldiers it would be nearly impossible to fight their way out, and the soldiers would probably spot them before they had time to react. Rory had also insisted that sleeping on top of a hill would leave them too exposed. He had been happy with the slope either, and had to walk around the entire hill three times before he was satisfied that he had chosen the safest side.

The sky was just starting to lighten when he was finally placated. Martha watched in amusement as he settled down, still grumbling in Latin under his breath.

"So," Martha said. "Should we open it?"

Rory gave her a confused look. He didn't do too well when he was tired. Martha was just glad he didn't get tired easily.

"Amalia's little present. Should we open it?" she clarified.

"In the morning," Rory yawned. He had taken the second watch the day before.

Martha glanced at the sky. "It is morning."

Rory glared. "Oh, all right. Let's see what we got."

He handed over the packet and Martha carefully untied the twine. She rolled it up and put it in her pack. You never knew when twine might come in handy. She carefully unwrapped the brown paper.

Inside was a carved wooden box and a yellowed envelope. The envelope was addressed to Favianna Donati. Underneath the name was a family crest. Rory, who had been peering over her shoulder, grabbed the envelope and stared at it.

"What's wrong?" Martha asked.

"This is my crest," Rory said faintly.

"Why would Favianna be using your crest?" Martha asked.

"I don't think the letter is to her," Rory explained. "I lost my shield in the French Revolution, long story, and it's possible that someone else found it."

"How would they have known it was your crest?"

"Well, for one thing, it was probably the only scutum in the battlefield."
"Scutum?"

"That's what the shield is called. For another thing, any one who knows the legend of the Centurion and anything about heraldry shouldn't have too much trouble figuring it out."

That sparked Martha's interest. "What do the symbols mean?" she asked.

Rory sat down next to her. "This type of shield is called a chevron. It stands for protection or faithful service. Azure stands for loyalty, which is why it's on a blue field. The 'stripe' is sable, which is pretty obviously for grief. The tortoise symbolizes invulnerability and the dog, loyalty. The eagle, of course, stands for power, but it is also the sign of a protector. The oak branches stand for antiquity and strength. The crown stands for regal authority."

Martha blinked a couple times. "Someone else could have those symbols," she pointed out.

"Someone else who just so happens to contact us now? I doubt it. Anyway, look at this." He turned the envelope over. On the back was an infinity sign with six dots on each side. "That is my personal symbol. Back when people knew me as more than a legend, it was punishable by death for anyone but myself to use my symbol, not that I approved, and there are all sorts of cultural taboos against it now. No one would dare use this symbol unless they are trying to contact me."

Martha nodded. "Let's open the box first," she suggested.

"Any particular reason?" Rory asked.

"I guess it's another hunch."

Rory nodded and opened the box. Inside, resting on TARDIS blue velvet, was a dagger about twenty-four centimeters long with a leaf shaped blade. The blade didn't look anything like steel. Instead, it was made of some shimmering material in shades of dusty pink and orange. The material looked organic, like some sort of a plant. The hilt was the color of ivory, and the pommel looked like solid gold. When Rory saw it, his jaw dropped. He lifted it off the velvet with just his fingertips, as though afraid to touch it any more than that.

"What is it?" Martha whispered. The dagger seemed sacred somehow, and it felt wrong to raise her voice.

"This is impossible," Rory whispered. He barked out a quick laugh. "Completely, utterly, and totally impossible."

 Completely, utterly, and totally. That was a lot of impossible. "So, what is it?" Martha repeated.

"It's a Cyllenian Rose pugio."

"A what?"

"The pugio is the name of this type of knife," Rory explained, not really answering her question. "I lost mine in Switzerland. We should go there."

Martha was not to be distracted. "What's a Cyllenian Rose?" she inquired.

Rory thought for a moment. "No one's really sure, but it did evolve, if it did in fact evolve, around this time."

"Can you ever just answer my questions?" Martha sighed.
"I am answering your question," Rory replied. "It originated on Mercury, hence Cyllenian." Of her look he added, "Cyllenian is a more obscure term for Mercurian. It sounds more dramatic and mysterious." Martha snorted at that. "Anyway, the Cyllenian Rose is probably a plant," Rory continued, "but some people have hypothesized that it's a type of stone that forms very quickly, or even that it's an animal. It looks, as the name suggests, almost exactly like a rose, but it's usually twenty to thirty times bigger than a Terran rose. The thorns of the Cyllenian rose are virtually impossible to get to and are naturally sharper than anything on Earth, but if you can shape it..." He held out the pugio for her to examine. "This is an unblooded Cyllenian Rose pugio. It does not get any better than this."

Martha wisely decided not to ask how he knew it was unblooded and instead asked, "Why is unblooded a good thing? You were going on about how you should never fight a war with an unblooded weapon earlier."

"So I was," Rory agreed. "But if I am the one to blood this blade, I can ensure that it will be loyal to me. How do I know it was not blooded by one who wants me dead?"

"Wouldn't that be a good thing for you?" Martha pointed out sardonically.

"I want to die," Rory said. "I don't want to die now. I'll know when it's my time, and my death will not come by this blade."

Desperate for a topic change, Martha said, "Let's open the letter."

"That seems wise," Rory said. He pulled the velvet aside, revealing a simple leather sheath. He slipped the dagger into the sheath and attached it to his belt. Then he handed Martha the letter.

Martha opened the envelope and pulled out three folded pieces of paper. One was addressed to Favianna Donati, and she set it aside. One had no name, but it did have the mark of the Last Centurion. The third was a map of Venice. It had twelve points scattered across it, seemingly randomly. Each was a different color.

Rory looked at it and a look of dawning comprehension passed over his face.

"Lemme guess," Martha sighed. "There's some secret, ancient code that tells you exactly where we need to go."

"Yep," Rory said. "You see-"

"I don't care!" Martha exclaimed. When he gave her a wounded look she elaborated, "It's not relevant and we don't really have time. Just tell me where I need to go and I'll be happy."

"Fine," Rory acquiesced.

Without further ado, Martha opened the letter. To her surprise, it was written in English.

"To whomever is reading this letter," she read, "congratulations on finding it. I did not realize until far too late that the clues I left were ones only the Centurion himself could have hoped to follow."

"I am sure you are interested in my story, but I am also sure that you have little time to defeat the demon that calls himself Master. I would tell you in person, but I do not intend for this letter to reach you within my own lifetime. Call me a coward if you will, but I would rather not be on the receiving end of a demon's rage. Suffice to say that I am, or rather was, an old woman with a passion for older tales."
"No doubt you are wondering how I got my hands on a Cyllenian Rose. I once had friends in high places, in more ways than one.

"I rather hope that you have not opened the letter for Favianna. I assure you nothing in that letter is dangerous to your mission, but it is quite private. I dare not tell you any more in writing, for letters are far too easily intercepted. I am sure you will decipher the rest of the message.

"The only thing I can say plainly is that it is essential that you do not trust this letter unless you received it from Amalia personally. She is the only person I trust with my life, and its ending.

"I wish you the very, very best of luck.

"Signed: S. F."

Chapter End Notes

I have now posted everything I have posted on FanFiction and Teaspoon and an Open Mind. From now on, the plan is to update on the 1st, 11th, and 23rd of every month.
Explanations

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The hill Rory had chosen proved to be a sufficiently safe place to sleep. Much to her chagrin, Martha fell asleep halfway through her watch, but no one found them. She still managed to be up before Rory, who invariably took at least fifteen minutes to wake up completely, and decided not to tell him.

On the road to Venice, they passed the time by talking. Rory had been to Venice before, but that had been in 1580; Martha doubted they would run into any fish-vampires. Still, it was an engaging story that he told with numerous unnecessary gesticulations. When he had finished regaling her with the tale, Martha asked a question that had been bothering her for a while. This was the first time she had gotten the opportunity to ask.

"Isn't your Doctor older than mine?" she asked.

"Yeah, why?"

"He's already lived through this." She waved a hand to indicate their surroundings.

"I suppose he has," Rory said neutrally.

"Wouldn't he know to keep you away from this?"

"He tried," Rory sighed. "But I think the TARDIS decided we had to be here. Amy had wanted to go to Venice again, because she wanted to actually just sightsee for once. She figured that it was the Doctor who attracted trouble, so if we went without the Doctor, there wouldn't be any trouble. After one of our adventures, the Doctor agreed to drop us off in Venice instead of London. As soon as he dropped us off, he dematerialized, and it wasn't until he was already gone that we realized he had dropped us a few years early. Since we, or at least I, were reasonably experienced at avoiding our past selves, we decided to just hang around in Venice for a while, maybe contact Jack if we need some cash."

"Jack Harkness?"

"Yeah."

"Why him?"

"We first met in 1869 and met up on and off ever since then. And given that he's had a bank account with a great income and decent interest rate since then, he's the kind of guy you want to borrow money from."

"I find it hard to believe that you met Jack Harkness in 1869," Martha laughed.

"The entire universe is just a bitch to Jack's sex drive," Rory replied firmly. Then he considered what he had just said. "See what I mean?"

Martha laughed. "Did you and him ever, you know?"

Rory chuckled. "No. He asked me to, though. I told him that I was in love with someone else and would never be unfaithful to her."
"What did he say to that?"

Rory gave her a wry look. "That's why they invented threesomes," he quoted dryly. He shrugged and continued. "At any rate, we settled down in Venice, got a nice little flat. Then the Toclofane attacked." The weight of the world settled on his shoulders. "I think you can figure out the rest."

"Yeah, I guess so," Martha said softly.

They walked in silence for a while, until Martha couldn't bear the soft breathing any more.

"Tell me a story," she said.

Rory looked at her like she'd grown a second head. "Pardon?"

"I dunno, just something to pass the time. What was it like being a Centurion?"

Rory shrugged. "I don't really know what to say. I can barely remember what it's like not to be." He paused. "A Centurion, I mean."

"Then tell me a story of your time as the Centurion."

"What sort of story?"

Martha thought for a few moments. "Tell me how you got your 'Mark of the Centurion' thing."

He gave her an indulgent smile, like the kind her grandfather had given her. It made her feel like a small child.

"There isn't really much of a story to it," he said. "Occasionally, mostly in Rome, people who had been abused came to me for help. Usually, it was women by their husbands or slaves by their masters, but I listened to everyone who came to me.

"Most of the time, I was able to help them get away from their abuser, but sometimes the abuser was clever. Sometimes he, and it usually was a he, would manage to close off all the loopholes. Sometimes I would have no choice but to send them back to their abuser." He paused for effect. "As if I would ever do that," he scoffed. "Instead, I came up with my symbol and whenever someone needed me that desperately, I would tattoo that symbol onto their arm, or occasionally, if I was in a hurry, I would brand it on. It became very well known very quickly that whoever wore that mark was under my protection. It became equally well known that anyone who got the mark from someone other than myself would die very soon afterwards."

"You killed people for using your symbol?" Martha demanded.

"Personally, no. I did, however, imply that it would anger the gods to wear my symbol without permission, and there are always those who seem to think they have a right to act on behalf of their gods. I merely used it to my advantage."

They walked in silence again for a few more minutes. This time it was Rory who spoke first.

"Don't I get a story?" he asked, almost petulantly.

"What sort of story?" Martha asked with a smirk.

Rory considered it. "Why did you choose to become a doctor?" he asked.

"A couple reasons, actually," Martha said. "First, you have to agree with me that the human body is
the most fascinating thing ever."

"Actually, I've met a couple aliens that-

Martha shoved him playfully. "You know what I mean. Second, I already knew I was good at staying calm in a crisis and I figured since I had the ability I should use it to help people. That and I like a challenge. Why'd you become a nurse?"

"Doctor was already taken," Rory deadpanned.

"Oh, come on. Give me a better answer than that." Martha gave an exaggerated whine.

"It was a power play."

Martha just stared at him incredulously.

"You know, both of those are technically true," Rory said defensively.

"Oh, really?" Martha asked skeptically.

"Yeah," Rory said. At first, it looked like he would keep on refusing to answer, but then he sighed. "Amy met the doctor when she was eight. He crash landed in her backyard and fixed a crack in her wall that turned out to be a crack in reality. She wanted to travel with him, but the TARDIS was still repairing, so he said he'd just jump five minutes into the future. Well, you know how the TARDIS is. He didn't show up for another twelve years.

"Amy was completely obsessed with him. She used to make me dress up as the Raggedy Doctor so she could pretend he had finally come back for her. When I was thirteen, I fell out of a tree and had to be hospitalized. It was there I realized how much of what most people think the doctors do is actually the nurses' job. When I decided to go into medicine, I chose to be a nurse because I like to be closer to people, and because Amy already had a Doctor in her life. Not one I could hope to compete with either. Then I realized how much power the nurses have. I'll admit I was being a tad vindictive." He shrugged sheepishly.

He had been watching the path as they talked, but suddenly his head shot up.

"Oh, look," he said vaguely, almost sleepily. "It's Venice."

Martha followed his gaze. "So it is."

Chapter End Notes

Okay, the dates I chose to post on really aren't working out. I'll leave it up to you guys to choose better times to post. No more than every five days, please.
Martha couldn't help but notice that Rory looked slightly nervous as they neared the city. Even a mile away, he was already falling into place behind her.

"What's wrong?" she asked, knowing that he would probably spot any danger long before her.

"It's nothing," he said. "Don't worry."

"Give me one good reason why I should believe any of that," Martha shot back.

Rory sighed. "Little villages and big cities play by different rules. I've only been in little villages since..." He shook himself. "I like to know what to expect. That's all."

Martha nodded. "Yeah, I've been in a few; Paris, Barcelona, and Rome."

"The city Barcelona or the planet Barcelona?"

"The city. Anyway, larger cities don't have a single enforcer. The Master pays a lot more attention to them, so they have a whole police force. The entire police force will be carefully monitored and loyal only to the Master. There is also a regiment of Toclofane about. The perception filter keeps the Toclofane from noticing me, and works most of the time with the police force. You'll have to figure something out for yourself."

"Is there anywhere that isn't closely monitored?" Rory asked.

"Religious centers. I believe the reasoning is that people are easier to keep in check if they can still worship. They would likely revolt if their religion was compromised, and the Master needs manpower. Hospitals are also relatively free, but the police force keeps track of who goes in. Transport by ship, train, or plane in and out of the city is nearly impossible for people who haven't been directly brainwashed."

Rory considered this carefully. "Given that Gregorio gave us the rosary, I'd be willing to bet that Favianna is a nun."

Martha gave him a strange look. "Just because she has a rosary, that doesn't mean she's a nun."

"Well, no," Rory agreed. "However, we're looking for a woman who is related to Gregorio, significantly older, and shares the surname. Probably a much older sister who joined a convent."

"First, when did you become Sherlock Holmes? Second, why couldn't Favianna be Gregorio's aunt or wife or something."

"First, I spend too much time thinking. Also, I speak Italian. I don't know if you noticed, but Arduino talked. A lot. Among the things he talked about were his wishes that Gregorio would find a nice girl and settle down. He also mentioned that his wife was an only child and his sister, his only sibling, died giving birth to her second child, Gregorio. Since the mysterious S. F. sent a letter that I'm certain was written fairly recently, given that the Master only showed up less than two years ago, it can be safely assumed that Favianna is still alive. Or at least, she was alive after Arduino's sister had died. Therefore, the only possible relation, and it is a relation if he has her rosary, is sister."
"Then there's the rosary. Presumably, it was given to Gregorio as a means to remember his sister, since it has her name on it. If it is being as a means to remember her, than religion must be very important to her. So, and older, unmarried woman who considers religion to be important above all else. It has to be a nun."

"I'm still not seeing where you got older and unmarried from," Martha said.

"Well, Arduino didn't really stop talking about his family. He would have mentioned it if he had another nephew. As for older, she is close enough to S. F., who outright said that she was an old woman, that S. F. would try to contact her after her death. Of course, she could just be a beloved granddaughter, but once again, Arduino runs his mouth. He didn't stop talking about his sister's pregnancy with Gregorio, but he never once mentioned her first pregnancy. This implies that the first child was born without any trouble. Complications in pregnancy are more likely to arise in older women, indicating a fairly significant length of time between Favianna's birth and Gregorio's. Does that answer your questions?"

Martha considered it. "I suppose so. What can you deduce about our mysterious S.F., Mr. Holmes?"

"Absolutely nothing," Rory replied promptly. "My last name isn't Holmes, by the way."

"What is it, then?" Martha asked, realizing for the first time that she didn't actually know.

Rory paused. "You know, I'm not entirely sure. See, it could be one of two names, and after I married, I was never quite certain which name was my last name."

"So pick one," Martha said.

"It's not that simple," Rory answered. "But if I have to pick, let's go with Ianaurius. It's a good, Roman name. Obviously, I just chose it now, but I think it'll do."

"Rory Ianaurius," Martha said. "I think it works."

"Now," Rory announced. "On to business." He took the Cyllenian dagger off his belt and handed it to Martha, along with the map and the letter to Favianna. "We should stick together, but just in case something happens, Favianna should be at the Calvierri House. It used to be owned by the Calvierri family, those fish-vampires I told you about, but it was turned into a convent after the family's death. For some reason, just about everyone knows it as the Calvierri House. I think it has something to do with the legend surrounding it. If we get separated, wait for me there. If I don't show in four hours, I'm probably dead. Don't worry about me and just keep going. Got it?"

Martha nodded. "Stay away from the alleyways. That's where people expect to find trouble makers. Don't bother with stealth; looking like you have something to hide can get you killed. Also, in places like this, there are usually feuds between different groups of workers. Don't get involved. We can't afford to take sides."

"I'll just follow your lead, then." Rory had what could have been called a grin on his face, if Martha hadn't learned to see the darkness underneath it. He gestured grandly, something Martha assumed he did to hide his nervousness. "Lead on, Miss Martha Jones."

She obliged. The pair ventured into the city under cover of darkness. There were armed patrols everywhere. Martha's perception filter kept her safe, and Rory seemed to have an uncanny ability to know where people wouldn't be looking. She suspected that any perception filter would have been redundant where he was concerned.

They had to go slowly so Rory could stay hidden, and thus they reached the front gate of the
Calvierri House, a grandiose door with a three-tiered arch, day was breaking. The gate itself was locked with a chain and massive padlock. Martha picked the lock with practiced ease, and silently thanked Leo for stealing her toys as a child and her parents for installing a lock on his door.

Rory and Martha slipped through the gate and into the shadows of the courtyard.

Suddenly, they both realized that neither of them knew what to do once they got there. An awkward silence descended for a few moments.

"So," Rory said. "Now what?"

A flash of inspiration hit Martha. "We try the domestic approach." With that, she strode confidently up to the door and knocked on it. No one answered. She pocketed her perception filter and tried again. This time, she heard movement from inside.

"The domestic approach seems like a good way to get killed," Rory noted, sounding somewhere between amused and irritated.

"You should make a note of it," Martha replied playfully. Rory just rolled his eyes.

The door was opened by a young woman in a nun's habit. Her eyes widened when she saw Martha, and nearly bugged out of her head when she saw Rory, who greeted her politely.

After a few words, the nun beckoned them in. Inside the doors was what Martha assumed to be an antechamber, but it was as large as the lobby of a three-star hotel. The floor was covered in pallets, most of them occupied by the injured or sick.

"Why are so many people not in the hospital?" Rory asked.

"These people probably weren't the strongest workers to start with. If someone isn't deemed useful, they aren't allowed into the hospitals," Martha replied, deceptively calm.

The nun who had greeted them turned down a side hallway, again beckoning them to follow.

"Where are we going?" Martha asked. Rory shrugged. He translated her question. At the nun's reply, he raised an eyebrow slightly and his lips curled into a barely perceptible smile.

"She says we must speak to Mother Favianna."

Chapter End Notes

Starting next month, I'll update every six days.
Favianna Donati

The only private room left in the Calvierri House was an underground chamber that held Favianna's office. The nun, whose name Martha still didn't know, led Martha and Rory to the door of the office, then left. They shared a glance.

"I think it's my turn for the domestic approach," Rory mused. He knocked on the door twice.

After a few moments, it was opened by a fairly pretty, middle aged woman. She smiled warmly when she saw them. It reminded Martha of Amalia.

"You are Martha Jones," the woman said. Martha wasn't sure if it was a statement or a question, so she just nodded. "And you are The Last Centurion," the woman continued.

"I am," Rory replied.

"I am Mother Favianna," the woman said.

"That wouldn't happen to be Favianna Donati by any chance, would it?" Martha asked.

Mother Favianna's gentle smile grew wider. "It is indeed. Why?"

Martha took out the letter from S. F. "I was asked to give this to you," she said, handing it over.

Mother Favianna opened it and read it carefully. "Dear me," she murmured.

"What is it?" Rory asked.

Mother Favianna sighed. "You had best come in. This should not be explained where certain people can overhear."

Martha and Rory shared a suspicious glance, but they entered the office behind Mother Favianna.

The furnishings were extremely austere; a wooden desk that had seen better days, two identical chairs, a filing cabinet, and a simple silver cross behind the desk. The room itself, however, had a certain grandeur to it that Martha suspected was left over from the fish vampires who had built the place.

Mother Favianna sat down behind her desk and Martha sat across from her. Rory stood behind Martha's right shoulder.

"My father was a very private man," Mother Favianna began. "He never really spoke much of his family. In fact, I did not find out that I had any aunts or uncles until his elder brother showed up for his funeral. However, I soon became close friends with his wife. I thought of her as a second mother, since my own mother had passed on. For reasons she never explained, she and my uncle could not have children, so she thought of me as a daughter.

"She used to tell me the most marvelous stories. Stories of far off worlds and great deeds. She told me that they were all true, but I never believed her until two years ago."

"What happened two years ago?" Rory asked.
"A series of alien invasions, each more destructive than the last. Since then, I have payed far more attention to my aunt's stories."

They sat in silence for a few moments. "What did you need to tell us that badly?" Martha asked. "The fact that your aunt knew about aliens isn't that big a deal."

"My aunt did not merely have knowledge of aliens," Mother Favianna replied cooly. "She also-"

The door burst open. A young man in a work man's clothes stood there. He was deathly pale and he looked like he hadn't slept for a week.

He said something frantically and Mother Favianna rose to got to him. As the left, she called over her shoulder. "We will talk later. Come see me after evening prayer." The door slammed shut behind her.

Martha and Rory sat in silence for a few moments.

"Let's get back to the antechamber," Martha finally said. "They could use our help."

Rory nodded and led the way.

It wasn't until they returned that Martha realized how awful the place was. The smell of death hung in the air and the moans of the sick and injured were a twisted accompaniment to the frantic motions of the nuns, many of whom barely knew what they were doing. She paused for a moment on the threshold until she could get control of herself. In record time, she felt an eerie calm wash over her and the world faded out, leaving only what was absolutely necessary in her perception.

Calmly but quickly, she strode over to the nearest patient, an adult male, approximately thirty-five years old, with a severe laceration on the upper left arm. It was unbandaged, presumably the dressings were being changed, and badly infected. She tapped the nurse tending to him and took her place.

Within minutes she had settled into an easy rhythm, treating injuries and illnesses to the best of her abilities, asking simple questions when necessary that Rory dutifully translated. For a few moments, she wondered why Rory was translating instead of seeing to her own patients, but that thought was irrelevant and she ignored it.

She was uncertain of how much time had passed, but suddenly there was a hand on her shoulder.

She spun around to face a young, blonde woman in a simple brown dress. "You can rest now, Miss Jones," the girl, because she was really to young to be a woman, said.

"Who are you?" Martha asked. She was annoyed. She didn't need to rest, she had barely started. Strangers didn't have a right to be her minders.

The girl blushed. "I am Isabella," she said. "I have been translating for you."

"Oh," Martha said, bemused. "How long have I been working?"

Isabella glanced at the clock on the wall. "Seven hours, Miss Jones. It is now three in the afternoon."

"Oh," Martha said again. "I don't suppose you saved me any lunch."

Isabella smiled shyly. "We only were able to save a little for you. But you must speak to the Centurion. We offered him lunch, but he is refusing to eat anything." She sounded so desperate that
Martha took pity on her.

"Where is he?" she asked. "I'll talk to him for you."

"I'll show you," Isabella said.

"Lead on then."

Rory turned out to be in a room that must have been a dormitory when the Calvierri family owned it. It was on the third floor, so Martha was a little worried to see Rory sitting in the window, one hand dangling over the edge, especially once she caught sight of the mournful look on his face.

"What's up?" she asked, trying for nonchalant.

He sighed. "This place has a lot of memories," he said. "Not the sort of memories any one wants to remember." He climbed out of the window and leaned his whole body forward until his head rested against the wall. "The house is old. Old and angry. But I don't know who he's angry at." The last sentence was a plaintive cry. Martha mentally swore.

"I can't calm him down if I don't know why he's angry." He placed the palms of his hands flat against the wall, but not his fingers. "He wants someone to drown, but I don't know who. I don't think even he knows. But he whispers words of vengeance all the time, words of floods swallowing the city, and there's no fire left to burn them away." Rory's fingers had started to tremble; never a good sign.

"Rory?" Martha asked cautiously, creeping towards him like one would a wounded animal. "You with me?"

In a fraction of an instant, Rory righted himself. His head snapped up, and his hands closed into fists, dropping to his sides. He shook his head violently, still facing away from her. He turned around and started when he saw her.

"Hello Martha," he said. Then his brow furrowed. "How long have I been here?"

Martha shrugged. "I dunno. I just found out I've been working for seven hours straight."

"Really?" Rory said. "Well, I went for five hours, so I must have been here for two." He shrugged. "You tend to lose track of time in places like this."

"Places like what?" Martha had learned that asking him about his episodes directly rarely helped.

"Old places. Places that have had many different people live in them. Places have souls too, you know."

"I'll take your word for it," Martha said. "Come on, how about a late lunch."

"Sure," Rory said, seeming grateful for the distraction.

He seemed more human once they had eaten, and Martha knew he was unlikely to speculate on places and their souls any time soon. It was a relief. The Doctor was an alien, so he had an excuse for being so, well, alien. Rory, on the other hand, was human, and it was so much more disturbing.

It turned out that Martha and Rory had somehow managed to treat everyone in the Calvierri House, so they wandered the grounds while they waited for evening prayer.

Martha ended up sitting on a balcony overlooking the courtyard, swinging her feet over the edge like
a schoolgirl, enjoying the warm afternoon sun. Rory was sitting cross-legged next to her in the shadows. Below them, the Master's "soldiers", although thugs was really a better word, milled about, enjoying the break. They didn't have a uniform or anything else to identify them, but the fact that they had a break was telling enough. For some reason, they made her laugh out loud.

"What's so funny?" Rory asked.

Martha grinned. "He's trying so hard to find me, but here I am, right under his henchmen's noses, and he has no idea where I am."

Rory chuckled at that. "The harder you look for something, the harder it is to find."

They chatted idly until the clock tower rang out six times. Martha was pleased to note that Rory was still walking beside her. As they neared the dining hall, Martha heard angry shouting. She tried to rush forward, but Rory's hand on her shoulder brought her back to her senses.

"Let's see what's going on first," Rory suggested. To the untrained eye, he seemed perfectly calm, but Martha saw the tension in every line of his lean body.

She nodded. They crept forwards carefully, Rory sticking to the shadows, and Martha clinging to her perception filter.

In the dining hall, two armies were drawing battle lines. On Martha's right, the workers had banded together, each holding whatever was available as a weapon. On the left, a gang of the glorified thugs that the Master called soldiers stood in ranks, awaiting the order to attack.

The leader, a young woman who seemed slightly insane, was talking.

"We know you hide Martha Jones," Rory translated in a whisper. "Turn her over to us and you will be rewarded. Continue to hide her and you will suffer greatly."

One of the workers replied.

"How do we know you'll keep your promise?"

The leader rolled her eyes. She gestured to one of her thugs. The thug grabbed Isabella, who had been standing on the sidelines, and held a gun to her head.

"Turn Miss Jones over or the girl dies." Rory's voice had become strained.

There was stalemate for almost a full minute. Then the leader, who had grown impatient, pulled out her own pistol and shot Isabella in the head.

"Don't make me ask again."

Rory didn't seem to realize he was still translating; he had already drawn Elisium in Morte. The leader's next hostage was a boy with a twisted leg. Rory went completely still. Then he raised his sword.

"Rory, wait!" Martha shouted, a fraction of a second too late. Rory had already attacked.

Chapter End Notes
Thanks so much for the continued support, but I really need your suggestions. I can't keep writing this without a plot, and I'm only a couple chapters away from running out of ideas.
The Wrath of the Last Centurion

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was unlike anything Martha had ever seen. One moment, the leader of the thugs was threatening a little boy's life, and the next the Last Centurion had attacked.

Adrenaline slowed time as Martha watched the Last Centurion cut down thugs so quickly that he still looked blurred. She counted three corpses in five seconds before her brain caught up with her body.

"Stop!" she commanded stepping out into the hall and pulling off her perception filter, amazed when her voice stayed steady.

The Last Centurion froze, his blade glistened with blood inches from the throat of one of the thugs. The poor man was white as a ghost and trembling uncontrollably where he had fallen.

"Don't kill him," Martha ordered. Even in the late afternoon sun streaming in from the windows, Elisium in Morte looked hungry for blood. Martha thought she understood what Rory had said when he said the sword was alive.

The Last Centurion straightened up, pulling a blue silk handkerchief with a sunflower on the corner out of his cloak and started to clean the length of his blade. He was just as pale as the man he had spared, but his hands were perfectly steady and his face was utterly calm.

It was a stark contrast to the rest of the room. Most of the workers, both those that sided with the Master and those still hoped for freedom, were frozen in shock. A few of the younger nuns had overcome their shock and were clinging to their elders, some weeping. At the Last Centurion's feet, blood seeped from the throats of three of the Master's men, staining the floorboards.

The Last Centurion finished cleaning the blade and sheathed his sword. Rory surveyed with an impassive eye. Then he stepped back to Martha's side.

The man who had nearly died stood up carefully.

"Thank you, thank you," he said. He sounded grateful, but Rory's translation was somewhere in between absentminded and a monotone.

"What are you thanking me for?" Martha asked coolly.

"For your mercy." Rory's translation was tinged with amusement. At least someone knew what was going on.

"I wasn't being merciful," Martha explained. "Mercy would have been killing you."

"What do you mean?" one of the nuns asked.

Martha raised her voice so it carried throughout the room. Rory's translation carried the quiet power he usually reserved for Latin. "Every one of you is living as a slave. The Master claims that he will show some of you mercy if you turn against your friends, your neighbors. But this is a lie. The Master is no more than a demon, and demons always lie. You turn against your friends, your neighbors, perhaps even your family, and maybe for a while you get a few pretty little perks. Maybe your work day is a bit shorter, maybe your work is a bit easier, maybe you get an extra ration, maybe
your family is spared. But it's only temporary. One day, the Master will have no need of you. Then you will die knowing that you betrayed everyone you ever cared about for nothing."

The Master's men were looking at each other fearfully, yet not quite able to tear their glances away from her.

"That's not all either," she continued, feeling a manic grin rise to her face. "He's creative, he's dangerously insane, and he's bored. When he does decide he has no need of you, you will be rewarded, but only as a traitor deserves. He will make it hurt for a long, long time. Of course, you could always try to defect now. Then he'll do it sooner.

She shook her head and began to pace. "I like to think of myself as a compassionate, caring person. Turns out I can't afford to be that anymore. However, despite the horrors that inevitably await you, compassion is ultimately why I spared you."

Everyone turned to her in confusion. "It wasn't compassion for you," she clarified. "It was compassion for the people you tormented, and beat down, and even killed. Because they are just as much slaves as you are. The Master does not tolerate any unfortunate delays in schedule. If he loses half his workers, he just makes the other half work twice as hard. Even if you get some pretty little favors, you still have to work. Any work you do is the work that the people who actually deserve favors don't have to do. That is why I spared you. If you would call it mercy, then you have my pity."

She took a deep breath and returned to herself. Then she glanced at Rory. "Let's go." Those simple words broke the spell hanging over the dining hall. The workers Martha and Rory had helped treat put down their makeshift weapons and went about their business. A pointed look from Rory sent the Master's soldiers running.

He followed her back out into the courtyard.

"Are you going back for dinner?" he asked.

"Nah," Martha replied. "I'll be fine if I miss one meal. Besides, going back would ruin the dramatic exit."

Rory laughed. "Thank you," he said.

"What are you thanking me for?" she asked.

"For stopping me."

"Oh. You're welcome." She gave him a small smile.

They didn't talk again for the two hours until their meeting with Mother Favianna. Instead, Martha took a catnap on the corner of the outer wall, amazed at how secure she felt at the height. Rory nodded off in the bell tower, ostensibly so he wouldn't miss the eight o' clock bell that could be heard throughout Venice. Martha didn't bother to question it.

When the eight o'clock bell did ring, Martha woke and hopped down from the wall. Rory wandered out of the bell tower looking very dazed. He was also half deaf because he didn't seem to hear Martha's giggles. He did see her grin and gave her a very annoyed look. It just made her giggle harder.

Soon, his hearing returned to normal and the pair returned to Mother Favianna's office.
Mother Favianna was sitting behind her desk looking supremely unruffled despite the events of the day.

"Where did I leave off?" she asked politely.

Martha thought for a few moments. "You said your aunt did not merely know about aliens."

"Ah, yes. My aunt was, in fact, a member of UNIT and she had the opportunity to meet a number of aliens including the Doctor you speak so highly of."

Martha raised an eyebrow. "Really?"

Mother Favianna smiled. "Indeed she did. He held her in rather high esteem. The commanders of UNIT did as well and when she retired she was given... an item for safekeeping."

"And this item would be?" Martha prompted.

Wordlessly, Mother Favianna got up and removed the silver cross from the wall. Behind it was a stone half a shade lighter than the rest of the facade. Mother Favianna pushed it aside and pulled a simple mahogany box out of the hidden compartment.

She placed it on the desk, the latch facing Martha and Rory and lifted the latch. Inside was a vial of a yellow chemical. Martha and Rory looked at each other then back at Mother Favianna.

Her small smile grew wider.

"Is this what I think it is?" Martha asked. Mother Favianna nodded once.

Immediately, Martha removed her backpack and pulled out the gun in four parts. She fitted the vial into the gun and put it back in her pack where it wouldn't be in danger of breaking. "Thank you," she said sincerely.

Mother Favianna nodded in acknowledgement but didn't otherwise respond.

"We should probably leave now," Rory said, sounding slightly on edge.

"What's wrong?" Martha asked.

"He's... he wants to... we need to leave now. Before he gets control."

"Who? The Master?"

Rory shook his head, one hand over his forehead. "No. Not him. Somewhere else."

"I think we're going to leave now." Martha addressed Mother Favianna. "Thank you. For everything."

"Good luck. God bless."

Martha and Rory were halfway to the gate when a little girl came out of one of the side hallways.

"This way," she whispered urgently.

"What's wrong?" Martha asked.

"His armies are here," the girl replied. "The real armies."
"Show me," Martha said. She turned to Rory who moved his hand to Elisium in Morte.

The girl lead them up to the wall by the bell tower. Sure enough, about three hundred soldiers in proper uniform with real weapons were standing at the gates.

"Oh, lovely," Rory said blankly.

Chapter End Notes

For those of you who are interested, most of what I've extrapolated about Rory's character was based on one observation. After 'The Big Bang', there is only one time in the series that Rory really acts like the Last Centurion. Yeah, he's a BAMF fairly often, but the only time that he's the Last Centurion is in the opener of 'A Good Man Goes to War'. What sets this apart from the rest of his appearances on the show is this is the only time he is A) In mortal peril and B) Away from Amy. Make of that what you will.

Cookies to anyone who can tell me why Rory's handkerchief has a sunflower on it. Hint: The answer has nothing to do with 'Vincent and the Doctor'. That was just an awesome coincidence.

I have also decided not to reveal who S.F. is in the narrative. She is a canon character and most of what Favianna says about her is half truths. I don't know that she was UNIT in the show, but I see no reason why she couldn't have joined. If anyone figures out who she is, I will let everyone else in on the secret in the A/N for the next chapter.
Martha looked out over the Master's troops, hoping she managed to keep her expression blank.

"I'm really hoping you have a good idea pretty soon," she remarked, clutching her perception filter like a lifeline.

Below her, the Master's soldiers stood waiting. Their commander, a young man whose confidence could only have been artificial, delivered the ultimatum.

Rory didn't translate, but he didn't have to; the message was clear: Surrender Martha Jones or be destroyed.

Martha glance over at Rory, who was as still as a statue. She wasn't even sure that he was still breathing. He was surveying the army on their doorstep, but Martha was certain that his mind was somewhere else. After a couple seconds he spoke.

"No good ideas. Sorry. I do have a very bad one though." He spoke in a perfect monotone.

"Civilian risk?" she asked. That was the most important thing, after all.

"Negligible."

"Go ahead," she replied, and started praying.

He nodded once. "Leave now," he said. "Walk right out the front gate. You have a perception filter, you'll be fine."

"Rory," she said warily. "If they're looking for me specifically, the perception filter won't be enough. They'll see me."

"No, they won't." His voice held the same level of simple fact that most people used when explaining that the Earth was round or that the Sun was bright. Once upon a time, it would have been enough to convince her. Those days were long gone.

"How can you be sure?" she asked.

"The soldiers will be distracted," he replied. He was starting to become impatient, Martha was sure of it. His monotone had gone distinctly icier and he seemed subtly inhuman.

"If you're sure." Unable to suppress a wave of foreboding, Martha turned and left the bell tower.

By the time she reached the gates, nothing had changed. The soldiers still stood motionless. Evidently, the Calvierri House had more time before they attacked. The Calvierri House itself was silent. Everyone had made themselves scarce. She felt like she was walking from a tomb to the gallows.

That all changed the moment she set foot outside the gates. Thick, black clouds started to spew out of the bell tower. The earth shook beneath her and rain began to pour. She looked up at the tower and saw Rory standing on the outside roof. He had climbed up to the spire and somehow had activated the rain machine the Calvierri Family had left behind.
She only allowed herself a moment to stare, then she forced her gaze and her attention on to the matter at hand. Ducking and weaving expertly through the soldiers, she came to the rendezvous point.

It was probably a great deal less surprising than it should have been when it only took Rory three minutes to join her, and they started walking towards the train station. With the soldiers and townspeople distracted, no one seemed to notice they were there. Even Rory was unnoticed, despite his gleaming armor and lack of perception filter.

A few moments later Rory stopped and grabbed Martha's arm. Martha looked back to see that he was as white as a ghost.

"You have to stop it," he said in a strained whisper.

"Stop what?" Martha asked.

"The rain," he replied. "The rain. He wants Venice to drown. The rain won't stop until he has what he wants. Not unless you stop him."

"Why can't you stop him?" Martha demanded, wondering why she had ever let herself trust Rory 'Ianarius', who apparently couldn't even tell her his real surname.

"He can get inside my head. He can't touch you."

"What the hell do you mean?" Martha shouted. Already, the canals were spilling over into the streets.

"I can't explain now," Rory said earnestly. "We don't have time. I promise I'll explain everything later. Go. Now." Martha stayed where she was. "Please."

With one last, searching look, Martha turned back towards the Calvierri House.

Nothing seemed quite real as she strode purposefully through the halls. People were running to and fro in panic. More than a few were praying desperately. Not a one took any notice of her. Despite the panic around her, and a seething anger over Rory's betrayal, she was perfectly calm. Now was not the time to let emotions rule her.

Soon, she found herself standing in the bell tower. She climbed up to the wooden platform under the bells and doffed her pack, leaving it in what she hoped would be a secure corner. Then, she unsheathed the Cyllenian dagger and removed the length of twine from her pack. She tied the dagger to her wrist so that it swung freely, but she didn't have to worry about cutting herself accidentally.

As quickly as she dared, she climbed the outside of the tower, using the dagger to anchor herself. The dagger pierced the shingles as easily as if she had tried to cut through water, but seemingly could not be removed accidentally. Far below her, there was nearly an inch of water covering all of Venice.

Finally, she reached the top. The off switch was almost laughably easy to locate and within twenty seconds the skies had cleared. Since she had climbed up the side facing the inside of the Calvierri House and the majority of people had taken refuge in their homes or wherever else was available, no one notice her at all and she was able to return to the rendezvous point with ease.

Outwardly, she remained perfectly calm as she and Rory snuck onto a cargo train headed for Athens. She continued to be perfectly calm as the train started moving. In fact, she didn't say a word until the train was clear of the city, speeding through the countryside. The trains were one of the first things upgraded under the Master's rule. Journeys that would otherwise have taken weeks now took only
Once Martha was sure they were safely in the Alps, she pulled out her pistol and aimed it at Rory. He blinked when he saw it, but didn't otherwise react.

"I think you owe me an explanation," she said calmly.

Rory's eyebrows drew together and he blinked rapidly in confusion. "I suppose I do." He sounded detached, and slightly distracted. He sighed heavily and looked directly at her. "Places have souls," he said. "Old places. Old places have souls. Old places absorb emotions, you see. They spend their days steeped in all the thoughts and emotions and hopes and dreams and fears and prayers of the people who live in old places. Eventually, after years and years and years they become alive. The old places become alive." He shook himself to try to order his thoughts. He knew he was rambling. "The Calvierri House was born out of fear." He looked down at his hands, lost in the past. After a few moments he continued. "But that does not mean that he thrives on fear. It means that the Calvierri House is afraid.

"The Calvierri House is old, but only by human reckoning. His mind is that of an infant, and yet he is more powerful than anything a human could comprehend. Maybe a decade ago he was calm, maybe even a year ago. But now?" Rory laughed. He couldn't help it. "Now, a mind born afraid is filled to the brim with even more fear, and pain, and grief. He's not a fool. He knew what, or rather who, had caused it. He wanted to make the fear, and the pain, and the grief stop. He didn't much care how he went about doing it."

Throughout Rory's speech, Martha had remained motionless, reserving judgement.

"What does that have to do with you trying to drown Venice?" she asked.

"I told you," Rory said, now sounding slightly annoyed. "He can get inside my head. He can't touch you. I'm nearly ninety times older than you. I'm much, much more open to minds like his. He got inside my head, made me do what he wanted."

"He possessed you."

"Not quite," Rory explained. "It would be more accurate to say he suggested a course of action that I could take, and helpfully pushed away any other ideas. I admit the fault is partially my own; I could have done more to keep him in check, but, as cliche as it is to say, it seemed like a good idea at the time."

Martha holstered her pistol. "Please give me a little warning next time. I'd rather not shoot you for something that isn't your fault."

"I can't promise that," Rory replied. "But I can promise that if you ask I will give you a truthful answer."

"So promise," Martha ordered. Rory smiled and promised.

Chapter End Notes

And thus we come to the end of this story arc. Thanks to everyone who reviewed, faved, or followed. I'm taking a brief break to plan out the next arc of this story. I'll still
post on the 18th, but it will be an interlude instead of a proper chapter. Depending on my muses, it might even be the start of a subplot. We'll just have to wait and see.

Congratulations to everyone who took a guess on the identity of the mysterious S.F. Apparently, I wasn't that mysterious; no one got it wrong. For those of you who still don't know, S. F. stands for Susan Foreman, the Doctor's granddaughter.

On an unrelated note, I've become slightly obsessed with finding symbols for Rory. If anyone wants to send me some, that would be extremely awesome. Please continue to enjoy this humble fic of mine and I will see you all on the 18th.
If there was one thing the Master loathed, it was silence. He loathed quite a few things. The Doctor, the drums, humans, sentient creatures other than Time Lords, boredom, waiting, and Time Lords were just a few things he loathed. But among the myriad things he loathed, he loathed silence most of all. In the silence, the drums were always so much louder.

Without background noise to stifle the drums, they grew louder and louder until nothing existed except the four constant beats in his mind. He did everything he could to fill the silence, but it was never enough.

That was before the Time War. Now, it was even worse. The constant chatter from the imbeciles that had called themselves Time Lords was gone, and the drums were agonizing in their absence. Even the Doctor's mind was closed to him.

Somehow, the bastard had managed to shutter his thoughts from everyone, even his Master. The Master would have tried to figure out how it was possible, but the drums beat too loud for him to think about that. Instead he turned his mind to a much more pressing problem in his quest for interstellar supremacy: Martha Jones.

He ignored the Doctor completely; the other remaining Time Lord was annoyingly tight-lipped about the whereabouts of his human pet. Instead, he decided to pay a visit to the only other person on the Valiant who could help him locate the troublesome Miss Martha Jones.

The lower decks of the gunship were hot and stuffy even to the Master. They had to be agonizing for the servants on board. The thought made him smirk. He idly tapped the drumbeat on the walls as he journeyed to the place where he had the Freak chained up.

On the way, he grabbed the black briefcase that held all his torture equipment. No reason not to have a little fun.

To the Master's surprise, the Freak grinned widely when he saw him approach.

"Good day, Saxon," he said cheerfully, then grimaced. "You know, it wouldn't kill you to put a clock down here. Good day sounds like I'm saying goodbye, which is kinda awkward when you just got here." He shrugged as best he could with his arms chained. "So, what can I do for you, your Lordship?" The sarcasm on the last word could have killed at least three species that the Master knew of.

The Master grinned evilly. "I'm just going to ask you a few questions."

Harkness didn't even blink. He did, however, leer. "Is that right? And what if I don't answer?"

Deciding to ignore everything he said for the moment, the Master pulled a long, serrated knife out of his briefcase in reply.

"Kinky," Harkness remarked. "Then again, I already noticed you have a thing for chains." He rattled said chains for emphasis.

He quirked his head to the side like he was pondering an especially intriguing puzzle. "What about
"the Doctor?" he asked.

"What?" the Master asked.

"He doesn't really seem the type, but you never know."

"What?" the Master repeated dumbly.

Harkness rolled his eyes. "I'm just asking if the Doctor is into chains. Simple question."

"I'm asking the questions," the Master snarled.

"Actually, that was really more of a statement," Harkness retorted. "Also, you know 'I'm asking the questions' is ridiculously cliche, right?"

The Master buried the knife in Harkness' trachea. It was extremely satisfying. It took forty-two seconds for Harkness to revive. It took forty-four seconds for him to start talking.

"So, were you and the Doctor a couple?" he asked.

"Not to repeat myself," the Master stated.

Harkness rolled his eyes. "Are you ever going to ask me any questions, or are you just going to stand there saying you're going to ask me questions. If you just want to kill time, I can think of plenty of more entertaining ways." The leer was back.

"So can I," the Master said evenly, removing a scalpel from the briefcase.

Harkness was unfazed. "I kind of meant like sex. Friends with benefits?"

"We aren't friends," the Master pointed out, thrown off balance by the sudden topic change. "Besides, psychopaths don't have friends."

"I meant you and the Doctor. There's no way you two haven't shagged. Also, I've had seventeen psychopathic lover; you can make it work. But not a one was as pathetic as you are."

"Who the hell do you think you are to call your lord and Master pathetic?" the Master sneered, seizing Harkness by the throat.

Harkness looked at the hand around his neck and raised an eyebrow, not even trying to respond. Irritated, the Master released him.

"You know," Harkness mused as soon as he could speak. "The Doctor is kind of oblivious when it comes to love. And by kind of I mean ridiculously oblivious." He fixed the Master with a look that almost be called concerned. "Was he ever actually in love with you?" He sounded concerned too.

The Master didn't respond. Instead, he carefully gouged Harkness' eye out. To his credit, Harkness only screamed once. Then the Master started breaking bones. That got him a few more screams. At thirteen fractures and three bones jutting out of the skin Harkness went into shock. Since shock was supremely boring to watch, the Master slit Harkness' throat.

When the freak revived, the first words out of his mouth were "You are such a drama queen."

The Master sighed in resignation. "Let's just cut to the chase." He refused to react when Harkness rolled his eyes.
"Where is Martha Jones?"
"Earth. Probably."

The Master dislocated Harkness' shoulder.

"Where is Martha Jones?" he repeated.

"Why should I tell you?" Harkness asked, sounding more curious than defiant.

"Because it will make the pain stop," the Master crooned. The promise of an end to pain worked almost every time.

Apparently, this was not one of those times. Harkness laughed in his face. "You can't possibly expect me to believe that kind of bullshit."

The Master dislocated Harkness' other shoulder and smashed in his kneecap. It left Harkness with an agonizing choice; slump in his chains and put all the pressure on his dislocated shoulders, or try to stand up straight and put the pressure on his broken kneecap.

"Just tell me where Martha is, and I'll stop. Tell me where she is and the pain will go away." The Master made sure to keep his voice soft and gentle, almost seductive.

Harkness was now in too much pain to laugh, but he still managed to chuckle softly.

"Three reasons I don't believe that," he said. "One: seventeen psycho exes. I know how you think. You aren't just gonna stop playing with your favorite toy."

The Master kept his face carefully blank, curling his lips into a gentle smile. Harkness was perfectly correct, but no need to tell him that.

"Two: I can't even begin to tell you how many times I've used that exact same promise," Harkness continued. "I was the best interrogator the Time Agency had for at least a decade. No one ever keeps that promise."

The Master raised an eyebrow. A professional torturer, even one who had supposedly 'reformed', was the last person he expected to travel with the Doctor. He would have to look into this. He wondered just how much of the Freak's knight-in-shining-armor attitude was an act.

"Three: Even if you weren't a psycho, and even if you planned to stop, you can't make the pain go away," Harkness concluded. "I've been craving death for longer than most humans have been alive. Don't make promises you can't keep."

The Master's second eyebrow joined the first. Of course the Doctor would want to travel with someone just as broken as himself. That explained why he would travel with the abomination known as Captain Jack Harkness.

"But, seriously, I know you're not over him, believe me I sympathize entirely, but isn't this a little much?"

The Master was starting to get seriously annoyed with the Freak's random changes of topic. "Why are you so sure me and the Doctor were a couple?" he asked, wondering what had given it away.

"Because he's still alive," Harkness replied bluntly. "You could have killed him three months ago. In fact, that would have been the smart thing to do. He's your very worst enemy. He always foils your
evil plans. I'd be willing to bet that, more often than not, he's the only one who can stop you. So why haven't you killed him?"

The Master faked a grin. "I want him to watch as I destroy everything he loves."

"Well, yeah. That's kind of my point. He broke your heart-sorry, hearts. You want to prove to him that you can destroy him the same way he destroyed you. Of course, I don't think he even realizes he hurt you. Why is that? I'm getting a major spurned lover vibe, here."

The Master couldn't even formulate a reply. A part of his mind wondered why he was still here, talking to the Freak. He broke the Freak's other kneecap to make himself feel a bit better. It didn't help as much as he hoped.

"Wait, I think I got it." Harkness was actually smirking, despite the pain. "He didn't leave you. You left him. You probably broke his hearts just as badly as he broke yours." Harkness caught the Master's gaze directly. The blood running down his face from his empty eye socket caused him to look slightly demonic. It made the Master feel slightly uncomfortable, but he told himself that it was just because the Freak was a fixed point.

"That's not why you hate the Doctor, though. You obviously hate him just as much as you love him. You hate him because he moved on. He can function without trying to destroy you. You can't. You want to fix that. You want to make him loathe you, so you don't have to love him anymore. It doesn't work, you know. You're stuck with him."

The Master wasn't used to his victims giving him pitying looks, nor was he used to them picking apart his worldview in minutes. Jack Harkness was intriguing, that much he was certain. He would have to see what it took to break the man. This might prove to be fun. At the very least, it would distract him from the tedium of global domination.

He buried the serrated knife in the Freak's heart and walked off, idly tapping the drumbeat.

Up on the bridge, he ran through the Freak's words again. *Was he ever actually in love with you?*

If there was one thing the Master loathed more than silence, at that moment it was Captain Jack Harkness.

Chapter End Notes

Someday, someday I'll be able to write something without angst, but I fear that day is yet far off.
Despite the new and improved speed of the trains, Martha calculated that it would take another three days for them to reach Athens. She wanted to find out a more precise number, but there was no way for her to sneak to the front of the train safely. Even with the perception filter, it would be too much of a risk. Rory might have been able to, but he vetoed that idea on the grounds that it would leave her, however temporarily, without her best protection.

Martha no longer trusted Rory as completely as she had before, but she worried less that he might intentionally betray her and more that some outside consciousness might do that for him.

It was three hours into the first day when she finally posed the question, breaking the silence that had enveloped them for the past two hours.

"Could the Master possess you?" she asked bluntly, having long since given up on finding a polite way to ask.

Rory considered it. "I doubt it," he replied. "I'm older than him, and psychic abilities tend to increase with age. Also, as far as he knows I'm just a legend. That is, if he has even heard of me. He has no reason to try."

"Could he, I dunno, trace your psychic signal or something?"

"Psychic signal?" Rory asked, sounding amused.

Martha rolled her eyes. "Mind reading really isn't my area of expertise."

"Evidently. He would have to be looking for me specifically, and even then I would have to be actively doing something psychic. I'm always shielded."

"Then how did the Calvierri House get into your mind?" Martha demanded.

It was Rory's turn to roll his eyes. "Does a wooden shield keep you safe from a nuclear bomb?"

Martha shook her head. "Trying to protect yourself from a genius loci is not dissimilar."

They were silent for a few more hours, seeing no real need to make conversation. Martha would have watched the landscape fly by, but the cargo car had no windows. Instead, she played with the Cyllenian dagger, watching with fascination as it caught the dim light. By unspoken agreement, the dagger was now hers.

Eventually, Rory spoke.

"I think it's my turn for a story," he said wryly.

"Pardon?"

"I get to tell you all about my life," Rory explained. "When do you get to tell me about yours?" After a moment he added, "When did you first go with the Doctor?"

"Strange, isn't it?" Martha mused. "That's actually a logical question. We went to 1599 to see William Shakespeare."

Strange, isn't it?" Martha mused. "That's actually a logical question. We went to 1599 to see William Shakespeare."
"And how did it go horrifically wrong?"

Martha laughed. "Witches. Well, technically they're called Carrionites. Anyway, they were trying to take over Earth."

"Seems to be a popular hobby," Rory noted.

Martha snorted. "Yeah. That or destroying it."

"Or taking over, then destroying it," Rory added.

"Now that's just greedy," Martha laughed.

"So, Carrionites?" Rory prompted.

"Right. Carrionite science relies on words instead of numbers, so they were trying to use Shakespeare to open up a portal to our world."

"Sounds like fun," Rory said, half sarcastic.

"It probably would have been," Martha explained. "Except the Doctor was too busy thinking about Rose."

"Who's Rose?" Rory asked.

Martha stared at him. " Seriously? He's never mentioned Rose to you? She's practically the love of his life."

"Never heard of her," Rory said.

Martha wasn't sure if she was disappointed or relieved. "She used to travel with him, just before she met me. From what I understand, they were madly in love, but they, or at least he, only realized it when she got trapped in a parallel universe. I'm pretty much her replacement."

Rory looked perturbed by this. "He doesn't actually treat you like a replacement, does he?" he asked gently.

Martha sighed. "I don't think he does it on purpose."

Rory gave her a fatherly look. Oddly, it didn't look at all out of place on his young face. "Have you talked to him about this?"

"No," Martha said. "He has enough of a guilt complex as it is without worrying about me."

"That's not entirely false," Rory said, "But you're implying that you don't matter."

"Compared to him, does anyone?"

"According to him, everyone" Rory shot back. "Be careful. He can show you all the wonders of the universe. He can make things that that would have been unimaginable in your wildest daydreams seem like no more exciting than walking to the store. Just being in his presence can turn you into a legend. But, even if he is not a human, he is still a person. People can destroy your life without even realizing what they're doing. And even if he's a person, he is not human. He doesn't quite understand the effect he has on humans. He can be far more dangerous to his closest friends than to his worst enemies."
"You know this from experience, don't you?" Martha asked, not really willing to accept what Rory had said.

Rory stared off into the space beside her. "The only thing I ever wanted was to be a normal nurse, with a normal house, in a normal town, with a normal life. I would say I wanted a normal wife too, but I've always loved Amy. She waited twelve years for the Doctor, and two more after that. I can't really get upset at her for running away with the Doctor, even if it was the night before our wedding-"

"Wait! The night before your wedding?" Martha cried.

"Yep," Rory replied casually. "For a Time Lord, the Doctor has pretty terrible timing. Anyway, as I was saying, I can't really get upset at her for running away with the Doctor, but I can be upset with him for leading her into danger. When you travel with the Doctor, you don't get into trouble because you're suddenly careless. You get into trouble because, even if it's only subconsciously, you're trying to impress him. I have lost so much over the years because of that, and that's not even the worst part of it. The worst part is you can't be mad at him, because even if you don't recognize who you are after you stop traveling, whoever it is you've become is always a better person than the person you left behind."

Martha could have denied what he was saying if she really wanted to, but she preferred to be logical.

"The point I was trying to get to," Rory finished, "is that no matter how wonderful traveling with the Doctor seems, it's not worth the heartbreak of being in love with someone who can't let go of someone else."

"In other words, he deserves to be lonely because he's grieving," Martha said icily. What Rory was saying made sense, but she didn't have to like how he said it.

Rory sighed. "Just think about it, okay?"

"What about you?" Martha asked. "Seems to me like Amy was a lot closer to the Doctor than she was to you."

That made Rory extremely defensive. "Don't be ridiculous," he practically snarled. "Yeah, she was interested in him for a while, but can you blame her? He's a knight-in-shining-armor except without the violence. He's a legend. He's smart and funny and occasionally even charming. He's the perfect fairytale hero. She's going to be interested in him. It's just human nature."

"And how could you possibly compete with that?" Martha asked. "Trust me, I know how it feels."

"It's not like Amy has a chance with him anyway; he's married."

"Married? To who?" Martha laughed.

Rory gave her a singularly unamused look. "To our daughter. Our daughter who, incidentally, is older than Amy." Martha opened her mouth to respond but Rory cut her off. "Don't ask. Just...don't ask."

"If anyone, I thought the Doctor would marry the TARDIS," Martha noted with no small degree of amusement.

"Well, yeah," Rory conceded. "Her too. I'm still trying to figure out if it's incest or not. Probably not, because River and the TARDIS aren't...well, you know. I'm still not completely sure, though. Whenever I try to think about it, I get this pounding headache that I can't even blame on Hitler"
anymore."

Martha decided right then and there that she really didn't want to know.

Chapter End Notes

It's entirely possible that I'm addicted to Rory monologuing.

I'm currently also in the prewriting stages of another story which I'm writing with an RL friend. I would tell you guys about it, but it currently has neither title nor summary. It will feature the metacrisis Doctor, Rose, and alt!Jack and Ianto. I'm also doing a couple things with various characterizations that I am amazed that I've never seen anyone else use (my goal in life is to not live up to my username. how am i doing?). I have no idea when it will be posted; I'm just telling you guys this as an excuse if I get a little behind in posting.

Please continue to send your ideas and feedback. A single good review can put me in a good mood for the rest of the day, and I definitely have plans for incorporating some of your ideas.
As much as Martha enjoyed finally having a confidant, talking with Rory had started to remind her how much she missed her family. She knew her parents and Tish were on the Valiant at the Master's mercy, and she had no idea what had happened to Leo. Up until now, she had miraculously managed to avoid thinking about it too much, but Rory was bringing the worries back.

Unfortunately, she couldn't even get annoyed at him for it because the same thing seemed to be happening to him. Rory would spend hours staring off into space, and whenever he did this he didn't seem to hear anything she said to him. A day away from Athens, Martha finally got tired of the silence.

"Can you teach me how to fight?" she asked.

Rory looked up at her in shock. "What?"

"Well, I've been pretty much relying on stealth up until now, and if that fails me, I'm dead. I figured you could teach me some self defense." It had been bothering her how reliant she was on Rory every time fighting broke out.

"Of course," Rory replied. "In fact, let's start now."

"Do we have enough room?" Martha asked. It was a valid concern. The train car was half full of crates. There was barely enough room for the two of them to have a modicum of personal space.

Rory looked around, considering. "I think the next car down isn't as full," he replied. "If we move everything over there into here, we should have enough room to practice."

In theory, it was an incredibly simple idea. In practice, it was the exact opposite. The process of moving boxes from one car to another on a moving train required strength, skill, and no small degree of good luck. One false move, and either of them could fall to their deaths to be crushed under the rails of a train going hundreds of miles per hour. Eventually, though, they managed it without even losing limbs.

When they were finished, Martha was too tired to move. Rory didn't particularly care.

"D'you think the Master's soldiers give a damn if you're a bit tired?" he demanded when she tried to make an excuse. He wasn't looking any better than her. "D'you think they're just going to wait around for you to be peachy before they slaughter you? This isn't Star Wars, Martha. We aren't fighting stormtroopers. If you can't fight tired, we might as well just kill you already."

Martha was mildly impressed at how quickly he managed to switch from mopey, depressed, and relatively pleasant to the stereotypical Nasty Drill Sergeant. Once she was back on her feet, Rory returned to pleasant.

"Alright. Do you have any self defense training at all?" he asked.

"I took karate for a couple years when I was a kid," Martha replied sheepishly, expecting Rory to be disappointed.
He only nodded. "How much do you remember?"

"Not much."

"Do you know how to throw a punch properly?"

"Yeah."

"Show me."

Martha demonstrated. It felt sloppy, but apparently it passed muster, because Rory nodded approvingly.

"Good," he said. "Do you know how to take a hit without going down."

Martha was sure she had known at some point, but it was long since forgotten. "No. Sorry."

"Don't be. Here, I'll show you. Punch me. Hard as you can."

Martha's fist contacted Rory's jaw, but he rolled with it smoothly and almost playfully, spinning around to grab her by the elbow. He held onto her for a moment before releasing her and stepping back.

"You don't need to spin," he said dryly. Then he held up a fist. "You ready?"

"Can you show me again?" Martha asked nervously.

"Once. We need to work quickly. Much more quickly than I'd like."

Martha hit Rory again, this time making sure to watch what he did carefully. The exact moment her fist made contact, he turned his face to follow it. As soon as her fist left his face, he snapped back to face her directly, once again grabbing her elbow. Again he held her for a heartbeat, just enough for her brain to catch up to her eyes.

"Now are you ready?" he asked.

"As ready as I'll ever be," Martha replied. Immediately, Rory swung at her.

Martha was completely certain that he was pulling his punches, but they still stung. It took three tries before she could roll with the punches to Rory's satisfaction and three more to ensure that it wasn't just a fluke.

Martha was actually starting to feel a little bit of confidence build when Rory spoke again. "It's usually a bad idea to punch someone in the face with a closed fist. You're more likely to be up against gut punches. Those are a bit trickier. Watch me."

Before he demonstrated, and much to Martha's astonishment, Rory removed his armor for the first time since he'd put it on in Rome. At her questioning, or possibly dumbfounded, look, Rory said "I don't want you hurting yourself trying to punch my armor. The idea here is to help you not to protect me."

Learning how to both give and take gut punches took nearly an hour. Learning how to block punches took another half hour. Learning how to get out of a hold and to grapple brought their practice time up to an even three hours.

Despite how sore she was becoming, Martha was almost enjoying herself. Even if she wasn't, she
was sure that if they were attacked again that she at least stood a chance. Then Rory reached into her pack and pulled out the dagger with a manic grin that reminded her painfully of the Doctor.
"Weapons!" he said gleefully. Martha groaned.

After another two hours Martha had miraculously managed to retain all her limbs and Rory called a halt. She pulled a ration out of her pack and started eating. Rory sat down next to her and placed a water bottle in her lap. She stared at it dumbly. She had reached the level of thirst where you actually stop feeling thirsty about an hour ago.

"Drink up," Rory said gently. "It wouldn't do for you to get dehydrated when you've been doing this well."

Martha gave him a disbelieving look. It took him only about half an hour to start criticizing her every move.

He sighed. "Sorry. I got a bit nasty, I know. I never really learned any of this," he explained. "When I was just a nurse, I didn't need to know self defense. When I was just a Roman soldier, I'd known it all my life. Then it turned out it wasn't even really my life. It's hard not to get impatient when other people don't know things that come to me as easily as breathing."

"As easily as breathing? I thought you only wanted to be a nurse," Martha pointed out.

"True," Rory acquiesced. "But I'm not only a nurse. I can't forget the Centurion. Honestly, I don't think I really want to. It's who I am now. What I was trying to say was sorry. I didn't mean to snap, but..." He trailed off.

"Apology accepted," Martha said.

Rory gave her a genuine smile. It lit up his whole face, making him actually look his physical age. No matter how young his body was, it was usually painfully easy to see the weight of years in his eyes.

"Thank you, Martha," he said.

They shared a companionable silence for a few moments. For once, it was Rory who broke the silence.

"So, who's our contact?" he asked. It had been Martha who had arranged the meeting, a task she was surprised to find she had actually missed. However, she hadn't gotten a chance to tell Rory until now.

"She's a British archaeologist who was on a dig in Greece when the Master attacked," Martha told Rory. "Her name is Dr. Song."

Rory looked stunned. His jaw actually dropped. "That wouldn't happen to be Doctor River Song by any chance, would it?" he asked numbly.

"Actually, yeah. I'm pretty sure that's her name," Martha replied, wondering what she had gotten herself into this time. "Why does it matter?"

"Doctor River Song, archaeologist, is my daughter."

Chapter End Notes
Across three sites, this fic now has a total of 85 reviews. You guys have no idea how ecstatic I am. Definitely ecstatic enough to post a day early. Seriously, I love you guys. I'm always open to suggestions, advice, and even complaints. See you all in May.
"Your daughter?" Martha asked, stunned.

All accounts of River Song told of a fiery, flirty, mysterious woman who was in every way Rory's opposite. Except for the mysteriousness.

"Yes," Rory confirmed. "My daughter. I didn't know she was here. She should be millennia away."

He fell into a pensive silence that Martha didn't dare break, knowing all too well the fear of losing family that should have been kept safe.

Eventually, Rory shook himself. "Where are we meeting her?" he asked. He had reverted back to the polite interest that the Doctor used to mask his fears. At least Rory wasn't nearly as manic as the Doctor tended to be. It made life much easier for her.

"We're meeting in the crypts. I know the closest entry point."

"The crypts? That's ominous." Rory sounded amused, but it was the sort of amusement that sent shivers down Martha's spine. At any rate, she had the same reservations about the crypt, even if she was disinclined to voice them.

"It'll be safer, though," she pointed out hopefully.

Rory's face darkened and a glimmer of the Centurion showed in his eye. "Oh yes, we'll be safe. Who looks for the living in the realm of the dead? It is not for no reason that wise men fear graves."

An hour later, the train finally stopped. Martha had to be especially careful sneaking off because the guards were unusually alert to any odd movement. After a few painstaking minutes, she was clear of the train and standing on the streets of Athens. With a jolt, she realized that she hadn't seen Rory since she got off the train, but when she turned to go back for him, he was there in the shadows of the train station, somehow innocuous in Roman armor.

"I always feel weird when I'm in Greece," he admitted wryly. "Back in my day, they were never too happy to see a Centurion."

"You look a little young for the whole 'back in my day' thing," Martha noted.

Rory grinned. "Back in my day, youngsters didn't talk back to their elder like that." He shook his head in mock disappointment, but wasn't quite able to keep a straight face.

Martha drifted through the crowds, keeping her head down. Rory trailed her from the shadows. When she turned into a side street, he slipped out next to her.

"We here?" he asked.

"Just about."

Martha ducked into an abandoned house and made her way to the basement. The basement was wood floored and covered with what looked like at least a centimeter and a half of dust.

"There's supposed to be a trap door around here somewhere," she said, looking around. The dust
effectively hid anything resembling a handle.

Rory scuffed his boots on the floor, throwing up massive clouds of dust.

"What are you doing?" Martha coughed.

"Looking."

Martha couldn't see three feet in front of her.

"Found it," Rory called. When the dust finally settled and she stopped coughing, Martha saw a metal ring bolted to the floor. Underneath, the ring was an ancient-looking keyhole.

"Got a key, or will I need to break this open?" Rory asked.

"Key," Martha said succinctly. "Favianna gave me one." She took the key out of her pack. It was a needlessly large iron affair.

Rory took it and fitted it neatly into the lock, then he heaved the door open, revealing a worn, stone staircase descending into inky blackness. It was illuminated a second later by Martha's flashlight. Once they were inside, Rory shut the door behind them. Martha couldn't help but feel that he was sealing the lid on their coffin.

They walked through the cavern for a few minutes until they reached a fork in the path. Martha paused uncertainly.

"Well, this certainly makes life interesting," Rory said idly.

"Any ideas?" Martha asked, inwardly cursing River Song's apparent inability to give directions.

Before Rory could reply, a loud crash sounded from somewhere to their right, startling them. Rory blinked twice.

"That way," he said, gesturing towards the sound.

"Yeah, probably," Martha agreed nervously.

Rory stepped around her, leading the way. He had unsheathed Elisium in Morte and now held the sword loosely at his side. Martha was painfully aware of how minimal her training was. She wasn't sure whether to be grateful or fearful that there were no more forks in the road.

They continued forward steadily, but carefully, always on the alert for random, hidden pockets of soldiers. Luckily, there were none. Not that Martha had expected any, but it never hurt to be careful.

It took a few more minutes for anything to happen. The path widened into a mausoleum. A few of the skeletons had fallen out of their cubbyholes and were now strewn across the floor. A middle-aged woman with shockingly curly, blonde hair was standing with her back to them, trying to put a skull on the very top shelf, just barely out of her reach.

The room was well lit by candles around the ceiling, so Martha turned off and stowed her flashlight.

"Doctor Song, I presume?" she said.

The woman-Doctor Song-turned around. "Hello, Doctor Jones," she said with a flirty smile, putting the skull on the ground so she could shake Martha's hand.
"Could you please not flirt in front of me?" Rory said tiredly.

"Dad!" River exclaimed. "I didn't expect to see you here." Her tone implied that she was waiting to see the flying pigs.

"Well, you know, spoilers," Rory didn't really explain.

Apparently, it was an explanation to River. "Honestly," she said, leaning towards Martha conspiratorially, "using my own words against me. The nerve of the man." Martha could see why the Doctor liked her.

"I know," she said dryly. "He's a bloody awful person."

River laughed. Then she pulled out a TARDIS-blue diary.

"Lake Silencio," Rory said, before she could open it. "Second time around. Broken timeline."

River put the journal away looking oddly sad. "Big Bang Two," she replied.

"Okay, is anyone going to tell me what you two are talking about?" Martha asked.

Father and daughter-and wasn't that a weird thought-looked at her like they'd only just realized she was there.

"We're both time travelers," Rory explained.

"We tend to meet in the wrong order," River continued.

"So we use diaries to keep of where we've been in relation to each other," Rory said.

"Because if we accidentally tell each other about our futures, we could cause a paradox," River finished.

"Right," Martha nodded.

There was an awkward silence.

"So... fighting the Master?" Martha prompted.

"Ah, yes," River said cheerfully. "Funny story really. I was in Rome in 1513 a few months back, no particular reason, just sightseeing. Anyway, I'm in this tavern, drinking one of the lords' sons under the table, because I've got nothing better to do-" Rory rolled his eyes fondly. "-and I hear someone mention the Last Centurion. Of course, I'm a bit curious about the exploits of my dear old dad-" Rory's eye roll was a bit more exasperated now. "-so I head over to the table and strike up a conversation. After a few drinks, and honestly medieval alcohol is terrible, they let slip that the Order of the Last Centurion is in town."

"The Order of the Last Centurion?" Rory asked incredulously.

"My thoughts exactly," River said. "Turns out you have a whole flock of devotees collecting all your weapons and 'other artifacts' over the years and storing them in a safe location in the Himalayas."

"Look, that's great," Martha caught in, "but I don't see how that would help us fight the Master. This was centuries ago, how do we know they're still around? Anyway, no offense Rory, but I don't see how swords will help us."
"I didn't just have swords," Rory said ominously, but he too seemed unconvinced.

"You haven't heard the best part yet?" River said enthusiastically.

"Tell me," Rory ordered, sounding utterly unimpressed.

"I talked to the Order and tracked down this hidden location, and, well, two words: temporal bubble."

Martha's jaw dropped. "You're sure?"

"Definitely. Time does not move in the Armory of the Last Centurion. You could spend years in there planning and training without losing any time outside."

"The most important thing right now is to find the parts of the gun," Rory broke in. "I don't want to stick around any longer than I have to."

River looked stricken, but she spoke anyway. "Where better to hide it? Only a handful of people even know the place exists."

"So you don't know for sure that it's there?" Rory demanded, but Martha was convinced.

"We're headed for the Himalayas anyway, and I need more time to train. It can't hurt to check." She turned to River. "How do we get there?" she asked determinedly.

"Follow me," River said with a wolfish grin.

Just as they started to leave the mausoleum, Martha heard the crack of a gunshot and screamed as hot lead buried itself in her stomach. Then the world went black.

Chapter End Notes

River is hard to write. Please let me know how I did. I feel like a ruined her.

Anyway, just so we're clear, this is not a Martha/Rory fic. They are very close friends, yes, and in very different circumstances they might fall in love. However, Martha thinks of Rory as a father figure or an older brother, and even if she didn't, she is perfectly that Rory is not in a healthy state of mind for a relationship. On the other hand, Rory's sex and romance drives have Martha neatly classified as Not-Amy, Not-Interested. I might have shades of Martha/River, but it's not gonna go further than that. Despite what everyone everywhere will tell you, the end of the world is not a good time to start dating.
As soon as Martha fell, River struck. She whipped out her pistol and fired three shots down the corridor the attacker was firing from. Barely a heartbeat after Martha hit the ground, a scream echoed from the hall. She ran after it, combat instincts assuring her that there had only been one gunman.

Rory dropped to his knees at Martha's side, applying basic first aid. His mind was clearer than it had been in months. Even his grief was barely a dull whisper in the urgency of the moment.

"We need to get Martha out," he said calmly, pulling a length of bandages out of her pack and wrapping them around her midsection. The important thing now was to stop the bleeding. They could worry about the bullet later.

"I have a Vortex Manipulator," River replied, reappearing in the mausoleum dragging the hapless gunman behind her. He couldn't have been much older than sixteen and was white as a ghost, clutching his bleeding forearm. "We can probably make one jump. No more. What do we do with the boy?"

Rory looked at their captive impassively. The boy shuddered. "Bring him. Martha dies; so does he. Martha lives; so does he."

River nodded once, flipping open the cover of her Vortex Manipulator. "I'll take us to the hangars," she said. "It's easiest to reach the Armory by air."

"Can we get there in time?" Rory asked. Martha was stable, but unconscious. She needed proper treatment and soon.

"Sure we can. Do you know how to fly a plane?"

"It's been a while, but I'm sure I'll remember. Can you keep Martha stable in the meantime?"

"Probably. I'll fly though. I just wanted to make sure, in case something happened."

"Of course, I'll- Where do you think you're going?" The boy had tried to make a run for it while they talked. Now he froze.

"N-nowhere, s-sir," he stammered.

"Thought not," Rory said. "Come here."

The boy approached slowly and warily, looking at Rory like he was a dangerous animal. Rory neatly bandaged his forearm, then used the remaining bandages to bind his hands. He held Martha in a bridal carry and got to his feet painfully. River held the boy by the sleeve to ensure he didn't try to escape again.

"Alright," she said. "I've set the coordinates for the nearest hangar. The best plane for our purposes is an old army troop transport. Third on the left, two rows down. We should be near it. It will be guarded, so we'll have to fight our way on, but they have a med bay. Once we're off the ground, I should be able to put it in stasis until we reach the Armory. That should buy Martha all the time she needs, but I have no idea if the power will last that long. The stasis might last only minutes."
"Do the best you can," Rory said. He placed his hand on the Vortex Manipulator and River placed the boy's hand on top of Rory's. Then she pressed the all-important Big Red Button.

Rory absently noted the sensations as being not unlike being disassembled atom by atom and being rebuilt again somewhere else. The captive had a much more dramatic reaction; he vomited.

River had brought them to a small room just off the main hangar.

"That's the one," she whispered, pointing out the plane she had mentioned earlier.

Just as she had said, two guards were stationed at either wingtip. That wasn't the only issue.

"River?" Rory asked.

"Yeah, Dad?"

"Would it have killed you to mention the snipers?"

"Right. Knew I was forgetting about something."

"How do you forget about snipers?"

"You tell me. It's your fault anyway."

"And just how are snipers my fault?"

"Not the snipers. Forgetting about snipers."

"And how is that my fault?"

"It's your genes."

Rory rolled his eyes. "Lovely." He carefully laid Martha down. "Give me your gun." River handed it over. Rory stepped out into the hangar and fired three times. Both snipers and one of the guards fell down dead. He stuck his hand back into the small room and River handed him another gun. Three more shots and three more deaths. "Let's go." He picked Martha up again and River pulled the boy along.

The boy hadn't made any more attempts to escape and looked slightly dazed. Rory didn't blame him, remembering his own first experience with Vortex travel, but the fury boiling just below the surface would have to make itself known soon so he didn't have any sympathy to spare.

They reached the plane just as reinforcements entered the hangar. River closed the doors behind her.

"Thank Bad Wolf the doors are armored," she said.

"You swear by Bad Wolf?" Rory asked, amused.

"She's the only deity who I know gives a damn."

"Fair enough. Get us in the air."

River went up to the cockpit to do just that and Rory took Martha to the med bay, beckoning the boy to follow him.

Inside the med bay, Rory hooked Martha up to the necessary monitors and started searching for
"What's your name, son?" Rory asked. He didn't ask kindly, but it wasn't cruel either. That was really the best he could do. He turned to really look at the boy for the first time. Sixteen might have been overestimating a bit. He was tall, but too thin. Thick black hair fell nearly to his shoulders. It wasn't a fashion choice; the boy probably hadn't been able to cut it for months. One of his eyes was hazel and the other was blue. He had a latticework of shallow scars along his arms and a few more on his neck and collarbone. The boy had been through too much; that was obvious, but it didn't forgive what he had tried to do.

"M-mihail, sir. Mihail Dimitrios Simonides."

"Mihail. Are you from Athens?" River must have set up the stasis after she took off, because blood had stopped oozing from Martha's wound. The monitors paused, but Rory was sure she was still alive.

"Yes, sir."

"How did you learn English?"

"I learned in school, sir. I wanted to teach Greek in other countries, sir, before He took over."

Mihail's face was guileless. Rory doubted the boy could lie to save his life. Not that lying would save his life now, if Martha died. He stepped out of the med bay, trusting that Mihail would follow him. He need to know what was happening, and that was impossible within the stasis field.

"How old are you, Mihail," Rory asked curiously.

"Seventeen, sir. My birthday was last week. "Congratulations," Rory said neutrally. "What were you doing in the mausoleum, Mihail? The truth, if you don't mind. I don't really have the patience for liars right now." He seriously doubted that threats were necessary, but they made him feel slightly better.

"Hiding, sir. The Master's monsters, the Toclofane, came to Athens on the day he took over. T-they, they k-killed my mother, and my f-father. They killed Nikoleta-" he broke off with a sob.

"Who's Nikoleta?" Rory asked. Mihail shook his head wordlessly. "Mihail, who is Nikoleta."

"My sister," Mihail whispered brokenly. "She was about to turn five. I ran. I could have saved her, but I ran."

"Mihail." Rory's voice took on the tone of command. Almost against his will, Mihail looked up at him. "There was nothing you could have done. If you had stayed, you would have died. Tell me what happened next."

"I went to Mister Dimitriou. He owned the house that you entered the crypts from. When I got there, he was dying. He told me to hide in the crypts until I could find his son, Kyriakos. He said Kyriakos would help me, but when I found Kyriakos, he was dead too. I've been living in the crypts ever since."

Rory walked over to stand directly in front of Mihail. He unbound the boy's wrists, but didn't let go of them. Mihail met his eyes unflinchingly, but Rory could feel the tremor in his hands.

"Why did you try to kill Martha?"
"I was scared," Mihail confessed in a whisper. Rory didn't understand the tendency of youth to treat fear as something to be ashamed of. In fact, he occasionally felt himself missing his ability to fear. "I thought, I thought that if I killed her, then the Master would let me live. I don't want to die." He was crying now. "I just want to live."

Rory released him and stepped back. "There's nothing wrong with wanting to live," he said gently. "But your life should never come at the cost of another's life, unless that other gave their life for you. Death's debt books do not account for human debts. She reaps those who must dies and it is not your place to choose another's reaping time. Do you understand me."

Mihail nodded miserably. "What will you do to me now?" he asked.

Just then, River's voice broke in over the speaker system. "Hey, Dad, not to alarm you or anything, but we've got incoming."

Chapter End Notes

Many thanks to my real life friend, Isobel, for helping me with this chapter. Love you, dear.

I didn't realize it at the time, but last post marked the three month anniversary of this fic. Wow. Just...wow. I love you guys.

Once school is out, I plan to start posting every four days, but I'll be away for a month during the summer and unable to post. I'll let you know the dates once I know them.

In case anyone was wondering, Mihail has mismatched eyes for Important Symbolic Reasons that I'm sure I'll figure out eventually.
"This is starting to get irritating," Rory said calmly. He turned to Mihail. "Wait in the med bay until I come for you. Remember; if Martha dies, so do you. Don't do anything rash."

Mihail nodded hastily and ducked back into the med bay.

Satisfied, Rory ran up to the cockpit and swung into the copilot's seat.

"What do we have?" he asked.

"Two bandits on our five." River was no more perturbed than her father. "Where's the boy?"

"Mihail," Rory corrected. "He's in the med bay. Do we have any guns in this plane?"

"It's a troop transport," River said. "It's meant to have fighters protecting it. Oh look, they're on our six now."

"That's not what I asked."

River turned to stare at her father. "Are you bloody serious?" she demanded.

"Yes."

"You'll get yourself killed."

"Yes."

"And then Martha will probably die too."

"No."

The plane jolted as machine guns tore into it. They didn't do much damage. Yet.

"If you're sure," River relented with a sigh.

"I am."

"There should be guns in the cargo hold. I can buy you two minutes."

"That's all I need," Rory said firmly.

For the next two minutes, River did her best to shake the bandits off her tail, but they were locked on. Luckily, they didn't seem to have missiles. Precisely one hundred and ten seconds after her father had left the cockpit, River dove until the plane was barely clearing the treetops. The enemy planes followed, strafing the plane from above before they too dropped.

River turned on the speaker system and hailed the bandits simultaneously. Then she began the countdown.

"Ten-nine-eight-"
She pulled up just a bit, maybe four meters above the tree line.

"Seven-six-

She slowed carefully, allowing the bandits to get closer. Under any other circumstances it would be suicide.

"Five-four-

The bandits also slowed, keeping their distance. Her countdown was unnerving them, she was sure. They had stopped shooting.

"Three-

She lowered her landing gear. There was nowhere to land. That didn't matter. Landing wasn't the point.

"Two-

She could practically feel the nervousness transform into fear. Nothing like a countdown to breed anxiety. Her hand hovered over a nondescript grey button.

"One."

She pressed the button. The cargo ramp lowered, skimming the treetops and throwing up huge clouds of dust in their wake. Rory opened fire.

River had no idea how he managed to get all five Gatling guns firing simultaneously, but she really didn't feel the need to question it. Don't look a gift horse in the mouth, and all that.

She heard the frantic screams of dying men over the radio, begging to live in a language she couldn't understand. She didn't need to know the language; the words were always the same.

Once she was sure the planes had gone down, she switched off the radio, closed the cargo hold, and ascended to a more reasonable altitude.

Her father rejoined her in the cockpit exactly fifty-one seconds later.

"Anyone else?" he asked.

"Nope," River said cheerfully. "We're all clear."

Rory settled down in the copilot's chair, staring pensively over the horizon. They were flying over the Mediterranean Sea while the sun set behind them. The sea was blazing with the light of the setting sun. It looked almost like the magma seas of Koriasis, a planet that, to her knowledge, hadn't even begun to form in this century.

"Something on your mind?" she asked lightly.

Rory sighed and the weight of the world settled on his shoulders. "Do you know any of Edgar Allan Poe's poems?" he asked.

"A few. Why?"

"He wrote a poem called Annabel Lee. It's been on my mind recently. Nothing to worry about."
River had heard the poem. During her brief stint as a Time Agent, she had found out that it was one of Jack's favorites. At the time, she had tried not to think too hard about what that said about him. As far as she was concerned, it was definitely something to worry about.

"Dad," she said softly, "you know this isn't the end of the world, right? Just because Mom's dead, doesn't mean you have to die too."

"Don't lie to me," Rory sighed. "I existed only for Amy for longer than you can imagine."

River started to reply, but Rory cut her off.

"Don't tell me how long," he ordered. "You might know it down to the second, but you only know numbers. You have no idea what those numbers mean. I live only for Amy. Amy is no longer alive; there is no reason for me to be alive either."

"Stop being so bloody selfish," River said angrily. "What about the people who need you?"

"No one needs me," Rory stated calmly.

"I need you!" River shouted. "Did it never occur to you that maybe your own daughter might be upset if you died?" she demanded.

Rory looked at her like he was seeing her for the first time. "No. No it didn't. You've never given me any reason to believe that before."

River stared at him. Then she sighed. "Look. I'm trying to fly a plane here. Let's talk about this later."

"Fine by me," Rory said, sounding relieved.

"I take it you talked to the boy?" River asked, hoping to change the subject.

"His name is Mihail. I've told you that already," Rory said, annoyed but somewhat more...human.

"So, what's his story?"

"Nothing special. Parents killed, baby sister too, blames himself, thought he could survive if he killed Martha."

"That is pretty boring," River noted. "Although, you've get to give him credit for surviving this long. What I want to know is how did he get ahold of that gun?"

"I didn't even think of that," Rory said. "I guess however he got ahold of everything else."

"We just going to keep him around, then?" River asked.

"For the moment. At least until we know if Martha's going to make it."

"Oh, she will," River assured him.

"How do you know?" Rory asked.

"I'm here, aren't I?"


"I know," River said smugly.
"Except for the part where there's already a paradox machine in place," Rory pointed out.

"A paradox machine that's trying to hold together a paradox that affects the entire known universe," River pointed out. "How much more do you think it can take?"

"I guess we'll see. In the meantime, Mihail probably knows a thing or two about the current state of affairs with regards to our Lord and Master," Rory said. "Besides, he has potential. I want to see how much of that potential can be realized."

River glanced at her father. "A random kid who was lucky enough to get ahold of a gun shoots the world's last hope, nearly killing her. You look at that kid and think 'Maybe I should train him'."

"Pretty much," Rory said. "Anyway, it wouldn't hurt for Martha to have a sparring partner who won't accidentally kill her. That rules out both of us."

"So instead of merely training the random kid who shot the world's last hope, you're going to make sure that if he tries again he actually has a chance of killing her," River clarified. "The safest thing for everybody is to leave him. He's too much of a risk."

"Mihail's not a bad kid," Rory argued. "He's a desperate, lonely seventeen year old who's scared to die. He's been through hell, and we can help him out of it. You know as well as I do that if we leave him, he'll die. Tell me, River, why should we leave him to his death because he happened to make a stupid decision?"

"Because his stupid decision put the entire universe at risk."

"Says the woman who broke a fixed point in time."

Father and daughter stared at each other for a few moments, then Rory said, "I'm going to go check on Martha. Let me know when you're ready to take a break. We can switch places every two hours until we reach the Armory, but I'll let you land. Mihail stays. That's final."

Chapter End Notes

The title for this chapter comes from the poem Annabel Lee, by Edgar Allan Poe. I think it describes Rory's outlook in this fic a bit too perfectly.

Bandit, in this context, is a military term for a hostile aircraft in case anyone was wondering.

In canon, River is never stated to be a Time Agent, but the opportunity was too awesome to pass up. As far as I'm concerned, she was a Time Agent for a while, then the Time Agency collapsed so she became an archeologist.

On the one hand, I'm really annoyed that there weren't any real River/Rory father-daughter moments in canon, but on the other hand, I get to write it however I like. Between Rory's recent Death Seeker tendencies and Mels' demonstrated lack of respect for Rory, I think they have a pretty rocky relationship. They do love each other, but they're kinda bad at showing it and not really thinking straight.
Mihail sat on the floor the unnatural stillness of the med bay, leaning back against the whitewashed cabinets and staring at the woman in the stasis field. Martha Jones, that was her name. That was the woman he had tried to kill. She looked dead now; the stasis field had stopped her breathing and her heart. He didn't know how she was still alive, but she obviously was because so was he.

He shuddered. She had been frozen the middle of an inhale. It was, on a primal level, so much more disturbing than if she had been dead. He tried to ignore it and turned his thoughts instead to the Last Centurion.

He had read the legends of the Last Centurion avidly when he was a child, never quite able to get enough of the tales of the truest guard of the Pandorica. It should have been ridiculous to imagine that he had ever been in the presence of a character of myth, but he was certain the man in Roman armor was the real thing. He had never heard of the Centurion having a daughter, though. Especially not one who was older than him.

A few moments later, the door opened and the Centurion entered. Mihail scrambled to his feet. The Centurion ignored him completely and went over to Martha Jones. He took a stethoscope out of one of the drawers and carefully listened to Martha Jones's lack of breathing. Mihail didn't know why it would make a difference, but he didn't dare speak.

Soon, the Centurion nodded to himself and opened a new drawer. He pulled out a length of bandages and a bottle of what Mihail assumed was an antiseptic of some sort. He carefully unwrapped the bandages and cleaned the wound. Then he pulled out a needle and thread. "You might not want to watch for this part," he said. Mihail didn't watch. When he was finished sewing Martha Jones back together, the Centurion re-bandaged the wound with fresh bandages.

Suddenly, the Centurion spun around, driving a fist into the wall with an angry shout. He stayed leaning against the wall for a few moments, breathing heavily. Slowly, he straightened up.

"Where'd you learn to shoot?" he asked, eerily calm once again as he cleaned up the blood and bile.

"Sorry?"

The Centurion sighed audibly.

"Where'd you learn to shoot?" he repeated.

"My father taught me," Mihail replied. "Sir."

The Centurion nodded, turning to face Mihail. "You're a pretty good shot," he noted.

"Thank you sir." Mihail dropped his gaze to the floor. "What happens now?" He was unable to raise his voice above a whisper.

"Now?" The Centurion rolled his head over his shoulders. "Now, we keep flying. We'll reach the Armory in about eight hours. When we get there, I start teaching you."

"Teaching me?" Mihail asked. "What do you mean? I thought-I thought you'd be, I dunno,
"I'll be teaching you my trade," the Centurion said. "The sword, the bow, the staff. Everything from fists to rocket launchers. Military tactics. Philosophy too. And art. I'm actually quite skilled at mandolin playing, though I prefer the lyre. I'm going to make you into a warrior poet, like in the days of old. Like there were when there were still men older than me. I will make you into an echo and a call to the future. It is a great gift, and a terrible burden. You may yet wish you faced my wrath."

Mihail shivered. "Why me?" he asked.

"Because you're there and I wish to teach someone," the Centurion replied. "I think you'll find that no other reason is necessary."

Mihail nodded. The Centurion turned back to Martha Jones with a steady gaze. It would have been a gentle gaze, if gentleness was in the Centurion's nature.

Just then, the intercom crackled to life.

"This is your captain speaking," River said, her voice thick with tension and forced cheerfulness. "I regret to announce that we are experiencing some slight malfunctions with our stasis field. It will cease functioning entirely in ten, nine, eight-"

The Centurion didn't move, but his eyes sharpened, analyzing his patient and mentally listing what would need to be done.

"Seven, six, five, four, three, two, one. Stasis field failure. Have a nice flight."

Martha Jones exhaled.

~(*)~(*)~(*)~(*)~

The first thing Martha noticed was the pain. It felt like her stomach was on fire. The second thing she noticed was the light. It had been dark before, she was sure. So where was the light coming from? The third thing she noticed was that she was laying on a bed. She cracked her eyes open.

"Welcome back," a voice to her left said softly and kindly, though she thought she caught an undercurrent of fear in it.

She turned her head and saw Rory leaning against the cabinets. There was a strange boy standing next to him, but she ignored the boy for now.

"What happened?" she choked out.

"Mihail shot you," Rory explained tersely, nodding his head towards the boy. "We took him along with us, hijacked a plane, and are currently flying to the Himalayas. One to ten, how's your pain."

Martha considered it for a moment. "Seven," she replied. "Do you know where the Armory is, exactly?" she asked.

"I suspect it isn't exactly anywhere," Rory reasoned, checking the expiration date on a bottle of morphine and returning it to the cabinet with a grimace. "Can you manage without painkillers for now?" he asked.

Martha gritted her teeth against a wave of pain. "I suppose I'll have to. What's my condition?"

"Damn lucky," Rory sighed. "The bullet went straight through the stomach and lodged itself just shy
of the spine. I couldn't remove the bullet, but I sewed your stomach back up. You should probably stick to small meals for a while."

"That won't be a problem," Martha groaned. With a jolt of panic, she realized she didn't have her pack with her. She tried to sit up, but a wave of agony washed over her. Black dots wavered in her vision and then Rory's hand was on her back, helping her lie back down.

"Don't worry," he soothed. "You're pack's in the room. No one touched it but me, and I never opened it. Rest."

Martha was only too glad to rest, but she doubted she could. She laid her head back on the pillow and closed her eyes. Before she could even begin to try to relax, if it was even possible through the pain, the intercom came on.

"Hey, Dad," River's voice said. "It would be nice to know what's going on in there." She sounded precisely half way between annoyed and panicked.

Rory pressed the intercom button. "We're fine," he said into the microphone. "Martha's stable and conscious, but we could use some painkillers."

"Sorry, can't help," River replied. "Tell her I said hi." The intercom clicked off.

"River says hi," Rory said dryly.

"Yeah, I got that," Martha groaned. The pain was quickly becoming unbearable "Sure there's nothing for the pain?"

"I'm sorry," Rory said. "There's nothing here that's safe to give you. I don't know what kind of plane doesn't have usable medicines, but apparently we're on one."

"I think most planes don't have great medical facilities."

"But this one has medical facilities," Rory whined. "Why even bother having a medbay if you aren't going to stock it properly?"

"I dunno," Martha hissed through gritted teeth. Rory's next words seemed to come from very far away.

"I might be able to put you to sleep. Pain's easier to deal with when you're unconscious."

"Go ahead," Martha ordered. She felt Rory's hands on her temples and the world fell away, replaced with an ocean of blackness.

Chapter End Notes

I am so sorry for not updating in almost three months. As soon as summer break hit, I just lost all motivation to write. Now that school's started again and I have things to procrastinate on, I should be able to get back into a regular posting schedule.

Should the worst happen, and I want to stop this story entirely, I have the lastish chapter written already, so I promise this won't become a dead fic. I just might end up wrapping it up a bit early. Hopefully, it won't come to that.
Thank you to everyone who stayed with this story through the accidental hiatus.

I am desperately in need of your suggestions; I really only have vague ideas of where this is going and I will definitely consider your suggestion and probably even use it.
When Martha woke up, she was alone. Just as Rory had promised, and to her great surprise, her pain had lessened to a manageable level. Carefully, she sat up and swung her legs over the side of the bed. Her head was spinning, but nothing too bad. She briefly considered trying to stand, but quickly changed her mind. After all, she did still have a bullet in her stomach.

The automatic door slid open and Rory entered holding a bowl of soup in one hand and a walking stick in the other. God only knew where he’d found that. He was smiling naturally, but Martha saw the tightness around his eyes.

“How are you feeling?” he asked.

“Better,” she said. “Still got a bullet in me though.”

“I’d noticed,” Rory replied dryly. “We’re landing in ten, and from there it’s a half hour walk. You should probably eat something before we land.” He handed her the bowl of soup. It was more water than broth, but Martha couldn’t complain.

“Shouldn’t there be a tiny bag of pretzels or something right about now,” she joked.

Rory chuckled. “Sorry. We ran out.”

“Shame.” She finished the soup and handed the bowl back to Rory.

“River said the safest place for us to be when we land is the cockpit,” Rory said. “Think you can make it up there?”

Martha gritted her teeth. “I’ll try.” She slid off the bed, bracing herself with both hands until the dizziness and waves of pain subsided. Her legs felt like pudding and her stomach felt like a fire. “Might need help,” she added ruefully.

Rory was at her side in an instant, slipping his arm around her waist. She awkwardly reached up to put her arm on his shoulder. It wasn’t easy, considering how much taller he was. On the way out, he grabbed her pack.

They made their way up to the cockpit carefully. Martha was sure her side would be bruised from bumping into Rory’s armor so many times, although he did the best he could not to hurt her.

When they reached the cockpit, Mihail was already sitting in the copilot’s chair. There were two extra seats just behind them. Rory helped Martha into the seat behind Mihail then sat down across from her.

River glanced back at them, unable to take her eyes off the Himalayas for longer than a few seconds. “You alright, Martha?” she asked.

“I’ll live,” Martha replied.

“That bad, huh.”

“River,” Rory chastised gently.
Martha could practically hear River roll her eyes.

“Will you be able to walk once we land,” River asked.

“No,” Rory answered for her.

“I’ll be fine,” Martha protested.

Rory looked at her kindly. “Martha,” he said softly, “I know you don’t want to be seen as weak, but you really can’t walk that far and you’re our only hope. What would we do if you’re attacked and you can’t back? We have a stretcher. You’ll take that.”

“That’s my point,” Martha replied coolly. “We’re headed for a safe place. I get that you don’t want me to strain myself, but here’s the deal: I’ve got a bullet in my stomach. I can’t fight even if I’m rested. Now, Mihail can’t carry the stretcher on his own, so no matter what at least one of the people who can actually fight we be tiring themself out carrying me and not at full capacity. What if we’re attacked and you or River can’t fight back?”

River laughed. “I like you,” she said. “Listen to Martha, Dad,” she added sternly. “She knows what she’s talking about.”

“Fine,” Rory sighed. “But I don’t have to like it.”

Martha smiled winningly. “I’ll be fine.”

Rory massaged the bridge of his nose. “Why do I put up with you people?” he complained rhetorically.

River managed to land the plane in a valley between two towering peaks. There really wasn’t enough space to land a biplane, let alone the troop transport they had been flying, but River didn’t seem to care.

As they disembarked, River supported Martha, who felt as weak as a newborn kitten. Surprisingly, she barely felt any pain. “I can walk on my own,” she said.

“No you can’t,” River replied bluntly.

“I’ll be fine. Just give me Rory’s walking stick,” she insisted.

River looked at Martha. “Fine,” she said. “Dad! Give Martha your staff,” she called to Rory, who was scouting ahead. He gave his daughter a withering look.

“It’s Ascalon,” he corrected. “Or it used to be, anyway.” He handed it to Martha. “Be careful with that,” he warned. “That’s our key.”

Martha nodded. “I won’t lose it,” she promised.

Rory inclined his head once, sharply. “See that you don’t.”

“Is it just me, or did your dad wake up on the wrong side of bed this morning,” Martha asked River under her breath.

“It’s much easier to wait if you know how long you’re waiting,” River replied.

Martha stared. “Does crypticness run in the family?” she asked.
“Probably,” River shrugged. “We haven’t found the genetic link, but that’s kind of optional in our family.”

Martha sighed. She turned Ascalon over in her hands. It appeared to be made of oak, but it was bone white. Symbols were burned into the surface, some flowing and random, others seeming to tell a story.

Almost exactly one hour after they had landed, Rory stopped in front of an unnaturally smooth cliff face.

“Give me Ascalon,” he ordered.

River supported Martha as she gave it back to Rory. He took it and tapped the cliff face in a specific pattern. The cliff face split open silently just a crack. Rory very carefully placed Ascalon in the crack. The cliff face snapped shut and then slowly opened again into a dark tunnel.

Rory led them inside, seeming to know exactly where he was going despite claiming to have never been there before.

Soon, they entered a large cavern that was as well lit as if it was daylight, although Martha couldn’t see a light source. The cavern was about forty feet tall and 200 by 300 feet on the floor. The wall to the left was covered floor to ceiling with swords of every description. On the far wall were bows. The wall to the right had a massive variety of firearms and bullets. She turned around. The wall behind was covered in every other type of weapon she could name. In the very center was Ascalon.

“Welcome,” Rory said, and his voice echoed off of every corner of the room and yet seemed no louder than a whisper. He was grinned widely, madly. “Welcome to the Armory of the Last Centurion.”

“What are all these?” Mihail murmured.

Rory looked ecstatic for a fraction of a second, then his gaze hardened. “Lesson one.” He glanced at Martha. “You might want to sit down,” he advised.

Martha wasn’t complaining. She sat down in a chair that probably hadn’t been there before, although she tried not to worry about it.

“I’m going to make sure the bedrooms won’t try to kill us,” River said, walking out another door. “Try not to kill them before I get back.”

“Is that an issue?” Mihail asked. “The bedrooms trying to kill us, I mean.”

“Why would it be?” Rory asked.

“That isn’t really a no,” Martha pointed out.

“Lesson one,” Rory repeated sharply. “Names matter. A weapon without a name is just a weapon. Not terrible, but you could do so much better. A weapon with a name is destined for greatness. Take, for example, that one there.” He pointed to a brilliantly white sword with diamonds and red stones embedded in the hilt. “That was one of my finest works. I named it Caliburn. And, yes, it has quite the history. Or that one.” He gestured to a hand and a half sword whose blade was covered with runes barely darker than the steel. “That one I called Gram. I did always like the name.”

He went on to tell the names of the rest of his weapons: Durandal, Mac an Luin, Moralltach, Naegling, Arondight, Galatine, Tyrfing, Joyeuse, Colada.
It was an impressive and imposing list. As it went on, Rory seemed to flicker away and the Centurion returned. The Centurion began to grow more and more energetic about his swords, pacing back and forth, occasionally picking up a sword and spinning it a few times. He didn’t always put it back right away. Sometimes, he laughed wildly, like one caught in blood lust and too wild to do anything but laugh.

He stopped speaking of names, and turned to speaking of what each sword had done and in whose hands, and from there to describing battles, blood flying from his swords.

Suddenly, he went silent and turned to them, looking at them like a predator does hapless prey. Martha was suddenly acutely aware of the bullet in her stomach and the tremor in her hand. He started towards them slowly and Martha wondered oddly calmly if the being that had been Rory could smell fear. She wasn’t really afraid, per se, just unnerved, but Mihail was trembling enough for the both of them.

A few feet away from them, the Centurion shook his head violently and Rory returned.

“Are you alright?” he asked.

“We’re fine,” Martha said. “What just happened?” she demanded.

He looked at his feet sheepishly. “I’m sorry. I should have reminded you.”

“Reminded me?” Martha repeated incredulously. “When exactly did you tell me anything like this would happen?”

He smiled ruefully. “That little village outside Venice,” he said. “Swords speak to me. And sometimes I listen to them a lot more than is probably wise. I should have been more careful.”

River walked back in, her arm bleeding. “We should probably stay out of the east wing,” she warned. She looked around at the scene. “Did I miss something?”

Chapter End Notes

Just because Rory’s swords, except for Elisium in Morte, are named after mythological swords doesn’t mean they are the same swords. Probably. Maybe.
Martha never did find out what had happened in the east wing, but that didn’t really matter. She was more concerned with Rory. Over the last week, he had been almost normal, save for the occasional grin that was a bit too wide to be completely trusted. That worried her more than anything. She didn’t like the thought of him having something buried so deep he couldn’t even let hints of its existence slip without fear. Not that she didn’t have secrets of her own, but she wasn’t the one who almost accidentally killed Venice.

Despite her reservations, she went through life more or less normally. As normally as was possible under the circumstances, anyway. Rory had assured her that the Armory was completely outside of time, so they could stay inside for as long as they needed without having to worry about any pesky little problems like aging.

Still, she wanted to move on as soon as possible; she doubted that the Armory’s defenses would stand up to a truly determined Time Lord. Because of this, Rory had a computer monitor ready to turn on at all times that would alert them to any attempts from the outside world to contact them. It hadn’t so much as flickered.

Martha spent nearly all of her time training or planning. A long table had been erected in one of the many unused rooms with a map that contained all the information they had, and a bit they didn’t. When she asked how he had gotten it, Rory had just shrugged as if he was just as surprised as her and told her to get back to work.

She and Mihail usually trained in a padded courtyard of sorts deep inside the Armory. In fact, they hadn’t actually been in the Armory proper since that first day. She had asked how big the Armory was once, too. Rory had said it was “just as big as it needs to be.” He had also said “theoretically finite” and “only conditionally possible”.

At any rate, she was doing extremely well and was confident that they would be able to move on in another week and a half at most. Her favorite weapon was her pugio that, at Rory’s insistence, she had named Carnwennen. He had also managed to get River to make another perception filter out of her precious Vortex Manipulator. For reasons known only to himself, he had embedded it in Carwennen’s hilt. Rory had lately been reaching levels of crypticness she hadn’t known were possible. It was starting to get on her nerves. In fact, that was the only time he had talked to River for the past three days.

After one especially irritating practice session, Martha tracked down Rory, who was running a whetstone down Naegling’s edge. How that was humanly possible, Martha wasn’t quite sure.

“What is it with you lately?” she demanded.

Rory very calmly set down the sword and turned to fix all his attention on her. “What do you mean?” he asked calmly.

She raised an eyebrow at him. “You’ve been avoiding everyone unless it’s to chew us out for something or other, you refuse to explain anything and I have no idea if the roof is going to try to eat me because apparently that’s a real possibility, you put a perfectly good perception filter in, of all things, a dagger, you couldn’t give me a straight answer if your life depended on it. What the hell is
going on?”

Rory gave her a small, bitter smile. “You tell me I can’t give a straight answer if my life depended on it, and yet you expect to receive one?” He shook his head tiredly. “Very well. I will answer you, but it may be difficult for me to answer plainly. I will do my best. Pull up a seat.”

Martha sat down.

Rory inhaled deeply, gathering his thoughts. “Do you know the difference between you and me?” he asked. “It lies in the old ways. Old names, old titles. Obsolete, perhaps, in this overcomplex and yet oversimple age, but far from lost.” Martha could see the gleam in his eyes and knew that he was lost in the past. So much for a straight answer.

“We must look at our lives in the context of the gods,” Rory continued, “for that is how they see us. To explain the difference between you and I, let us start with my daughter.

“River, dear River, is a poet, an artist. Strange, I know, to think of her this way, but it is the truth. She sings the gods’ praises in one breath and mocks them in the next, but she is no hypocrite. Capricious is perhaps the best word for it. She is not so much a follower of the gods as she is their lover, though she serves them in her own way. This is by her own choosing, of course, for what god could order her life? Death alone can lay claim to her, and when he comes, her final breath will be without lamentation. This is who she is, my dear daughter.

“As for myself, I am a priest. I am utterly devoted to the one goddess I have left. There are those who would call me obsessed. They are not wrong. There are those who would call me blind. That could not be farther from the truth. My devotion allows me to see the gods with unshrouded eyes, and their faults are laid out before me, but it only strengthens my worship. When Death comes for me I will follow him willingly, for who am I to deny the will of the gods? But he will not come soon, for he has no need of me and, for now, I am content to wait. This is who I am.

“Now you, Miss Martha Jones, you are a prophet. You speak for the gods but they are wary of you for as much as you have their favor, your words have power even over them. You could twist the words they have gifted you to your will, even spew falsehoods, and they would be able to do nothing without grave consequences. They have plenty of reason to be less than fond of you. But make no mistake; you are blessed and burdened far beyond a poet or a priest. I envy you as much as I pity you. Death will come for you as soon as he can, perhaps out of fear, perhaps out of necessity, but he can not take you unless you allow him. In time you will. You are the only one who truly understands that the true sorrow in Death is that there are still those left living. That is our difference, Martha. Those are our burdens. May you bear yours well.”

With that he turned back to Naegling. Martha sat in silence for nearly a minute, contemplating his words.

“I don’t understand,” she finally said. “What does that have to do with putting a perception filter in Carnwennen?”

“You speak the words of the gods,” Rory replied, not glancing at her. “I carry them out. Don’t ever let yourself become fool enough to think they tell you everything.”

Martha sighed. “Is that also why you’ve been avoiding River?” she asked.

The weight of the world settled on Rory’s shoulders. “No.”

“Why then?”
He looked up at her and his eyes were as horribly sad, blank even, as they had been the day Martha met him.

“I am old, Martha. So impossibly old. I have known Death long enough to know his habits. He is coming, and soon. Tell me, Martha, who among us, poet, priest, or prophet, do you think he will come for?”

Before Martha could answer, not that she would have known what to say, an alarm sounded. “The computer,” Rory said, surging to his feet, “Someone’s here.”

And then another sound entered the room. A drumbeat. One-two-thee-four. One-two-three-four. The Master had found them.

Chapter End Notes

To be perfectly honest, most of this chapter is just an excuse for the cliffhanger. Sorry about that. Next chapter should be up early, though. Please take the time to leave a review.
Rory swept out of the room towards the alarm. Martha followed close behind, swallowing down her fear. Even if the Master knew where she was, he couldn’t actually get in. Probably. On the way, River fell in behind them.

“I left Mihail to get dinner ready,” she said. “He knows it’s bullshit, but I wanted to keep him out of harm’s way.”

“Good,” Rory said. “Martha, it should go without saying that I want you out of the way too.”

“It should go without saying that this is my fight, and I’m going to fight it,” Martha retorted.

“I’m not so sure that it is,” Rory replied.

“Once. Just once,” Martha sighed. “Just give me one straight answer. That’s all I ask.”

“What’s the fun in that?” Rory asked. “But, please. There’s no guarantee he’s hailing us because of you. This could very well just be about me. Stay out of sight until we know what’s going on. Please.”

“Alright,” Martha sighed.

They came to a small antechamber where the computer was set up. River and Martha waited in the doorway while Rory stood directly in front of the screen. The Master’s gleeful face filled the monitor, and it only brightened when Rory came into view.

“Centurion!” he crowed.

“Mister Saxon,” Rory replied evenly. “How may I help you?”

“You can start by calling me the Master,” he sneered darkly, joy already having given way to anger.

“So I can.” Rory’s voice didn’t falter. “But let us not stand on ceremony. Call me Mr. Ianarius.”

“Ianarius,” the Master said, rolling the name around on his tongue. “Is that your real name?”

“As far as you are concerned, yes. Now, why did you call me, Mr. Saxon? I am a very busy man. I’d like to get back to work.”

“Do you have any idea who I am?” the Master demanded.

“The latest in a very long line of thorns in my side,” Rory shot back. “Although I hear you lot prefer to be called emperors. Why did you call?”

“I should have you executed,” the Master snarled.

“Undoubtedly. Could you do it yourself?”

The Master hesitated.

“Thought not.” Rory was in his element; his spine had straightened, his whole body radiated
command, and he was casually inspecting one of his swords. Joyeuse, Martha noted, and reveled in the irony. “I will ask you only once more: Why. Did. You. Call. Me?”

“You don’t know?” the Master asked, trying to regain a hold on the situation. “I saw what you did in Venice. You killed three men in seconds.”

“I know. I was there,” Rory replied idly, running a whetstone down the blade. “Why does it concern you?”

“It doesn’t matter why it concerns me,” the Master said. “The point is you were stopped by Martha Jones.”

“Would you please get to the part where you aren’t just telling me what I already know?” Rory asked.

“Would you have kept killing if you hadn’t been stopped?” the Master asked.

“Clearly you are unfamiliar with the concept of inertia,” Rory smirked.

“I really should kill you,” the Master said.

“Why haven’t you?” Rory asked. He looked supremely unconcerned.

“Because I have a job for you,” the Master said.

“I’m not really looking for work right now,” Rory stated, twirling Joyeuse casually around in a manner that even the most experienced swordsman would find difficult.

“I think you expect me to care,” the Master replied, now confident he had the upper hand.

“What’s the job?” Rory asked.

“Bring me Martha Jones,” the Master ordered.

Rory’s eyebrow rose. He chuckled. “It seems like there’s a lot of competition for that position. There had better be one hell of a paycheck.”

“Oh there is,” the Master purred. “I will give you use of any weapon I could possibly want and your pick of Earth. Any man or woman you desire will be yours.”

Rory actually laughed, a desperate choked sound that still carried an impossible amount of mirth. “That’s it? A weapon and a concubine? Do you really think you can convince me with these paltry toys?”

“What’s wrong with them?” the Master asked. He was slightly confused but mostly offended. “This location, at the largest I have ever calculated it, is approximately three quarters of a million meters squared,” Rory explained “Do you know what this place is? This is my Armory. I have 365,742 unique weapons here. This tally does not include arrowheads, spearheads, or ammunition and throwing knives are counted in sets. What weapon can you possibly give me that I do not already have?”

“I could let you keep them,” the Master said, sounding sure, but Martha noted that he moved on a bit more quickly than strictly necessary. “My other offer still stands. Any man or woman you want.”

“There is only one woman I have ever loved, and I will be faithful to her as long as I live.”
“Where is she?” the Master asked. “I will safeguard her for you, if you bring me Martha Jones.”

“It is far too late for that. I have had more than enough of your false promises and empty words, Mister Saxon. You tell me of gold, but all I see is sawdust. You killed her. You killed me. You killed you. I will see to it that you burn. You will never find Martha Jones. She is under my protection.”

The Master sighed exaggeratedly, but Martha saw his hand twitch. “I tried to do this the easy way, Mr. Ianaurius, but you leave me no choice. If you do not bring me Martha Jones, I will break you. I will tear down you world and set the ruins alight. I will kill everyone you’ve ever loved in front of you, slowly, painfully. When I get my hands on you, you will wish you had never been born. I will destroy you.”

“Don’t be so sure of that,” Rory said, his voice laden with suppressed wrath. For a moment Martha thought that the air around him shimmered with some unknown power, but the next second it was gone. “I know who you are, but do you know who I am?”

“Enlighten me,” the Master commanded in the tone of someone who has no idea what the answer to a question is, but is trying to trick you into telling them by acting like they know.

Rory’s lips formed into a smile as sharp as a knife’s edge and twice as deadly.

“I am the Last Centurion and the First Paladin. I am the Great Smith of Avalon and the Guardian of the Pandorica. I am the Unsleeping Watch, the Ageless Sentinel, the Keeper of the Secret’s of the Gods, and the Warden of the Trickster’s Cage. I slaughtered four thousand Saxons at Verden and had no tear to shed. I healed the Black Death and felt no jubilation. I forged by my own hand Caliburn, whom you name Excalibur, and Durendal, Gram and Naegling, Joyeuse and Colada. All of these swords became legend, but none were ever so great as in my hand. What you know of the achievements of these swords is only what they are capable of when diminished.

“I was born in the destruction of the universe and I died in its birth. I have whispered in the ears of kings and commoners alike and bought them glory and graves in equal measure. I have raised up empires and brought them to ruin. I have fought more battles than you knew existed and saved more lives than you have seen lived. All this I have done for one woman who is dead by your hand and will never know the extent of my devotion even if we should live another thousand lives together. So tell me, what can you possibly do to me that you think will break me?”

“I don’t know,” the Master admitted. “But I can’t wait to find out. This is going to be so. Much. Fun. See you soon.”

With that, he ended the transmission.

Rory sheathed Joyeuse. “I don’t think he likes me very much.”

Chapter End Notes

King Charlemagne once ordered the massacre of 4,000 Saxon rebels in Verden because they refused to convert to Christianity. Joyeuse is Charlemagne's sword. That's why Rory’s making sure to show it off to Mister Saxon.

Also, when I was doing some research for this chapter, I learned that, according to some legends, a single man named Wayland the Smith forged all of the swords Rory mentions
in his speech. That was just too perfect a coincidence to pass up.

Has anyone else noticed Rory's lack of pretentious titles? Personally, I think it's a travesty. One that I intend to fix.

For reasons impossible to explain, credit for helping me with this chapter goes to my RL friend Alex, who has never seen the show.
River laughed in desperate relief. “You think?” she demanded.

Rory gave her a stern look. “Allow me a moment of levity, my dear,” he requested. “I have a feeling we will be getting little more than a moment soon enough.

Martha took that as her cue. “Alright. Question of the hour is: does the Master know we’re here?”

She looked at Rory.

“He likely knows our general location,” Rory admitted. “But it won’t be anything specific.”

“He doesn’t need anything specific,” River cut in.

Martha snarled under her breath. “Wonderful. Just wonderful. Question two: How soon will the troops be here?”

“Three days,” someone said from the door.

As one, three heads turned to face the intruder. It was Mihail. He was leaning against the door jam, smirking a bit, but also shaking.

Rory’s eyes hardened and narrowed. “How do you know that?” he asked suspiciously. Martha’s fingers tightened around the pistol strapped to her thigh, just in case.

Mihail shrugged. “I sent a message to the village down the mountain,” he explained, his voice barely shaking. Martha had to give him credit for that, seeing as Rory was looming over him. Rory was good at looming. “They’re about four days from here, and they said the army was a day away from them.”

“That’s excellent,” Martha said, forestalling Rory’s reprimands. “Question three: Toclofane. How close are they? How fast can we get away?”

“I don’t believe there will be any,” Rory asserted. “The Master is coming after me, not you. He is insane, yes, but not stupid. Until he knows, or believes he knows, what I am capable of, he will not send Toclofane.”

Martha nodded. “In that case, I think our best option is to leave tomorrow. That way, we’ll have time to prepare and still be able to stay ahead of the army.”

Rory wrinkled his nose. “No point leaving if we don’t know where we’re going,” he pointed out.

Martha clapped her hands and grinned enthusiastically. “Well, we’ve got plenty of time to find out.”

That proved to be the easy part. Somehow, without any of them noticing, Mihail had managed to set up a communications network with the Resistance. Their de facto leader was a middle aged British woman by the name of Sarah Jane Smith.

She had managed to patch into Archangel Network and contact any other potential freedom fighters mere weeks after the Master had taken over. Martha had only been able to contact her sporadically, but Sarah Jane’s ability to get her where she needed to be as safely as possible was utterly flawless.
Martha owed Sarah Jane her life.

Now, Sarah Jane was more than willing to help out yet again. She gave them an impossibly large wealth of information; troop movements, progress on the rockets, even news from the Valiant. They knew a lot of it, but not even Rory’s mystery sources could spy on the Valiant. To Martha’s relief, although Leo had finally been captured, her family was safe. That knowledge lifted a weight that Martha had forgotten she carried and she was bursting with excitement for the next move.

After a few hours deliberation, it was decided that Mihail would travel south into India alone while the others would spread the word in China. Rory was convinced that Mihail was ready to go his own way, and the fewer mouths they had to feed, the better. Martha might have been upset at how callously Rory had made the decision, but it was actually Mihail’s suggestion.

He left soon afterward with as many supplies as he could carry, hoping to take advantage of the predawn hours to sneak past the scouts sent ahead.

Martha wasn’t religious, but she still prayed to anyone who would listen to help him. The kid had grown on her, even if she barely saw him.

“You really ought to go to sleep,” Rory advised after Mihail had left. River had already taken that advice, although she slept with one eye open. Martha wasn’t quite sure how, given the bright lights of the main room, but she decided not to question it.

Martha snorted. “I’m fine. I just woke up a couple hours ago. Besides, since you’re the only one who actually knows where we are, I’d rather you not sneak off just yet.”

Rory looked like he’d been caught with his hand in the cookie jar. “What makes you think I’d do something like that?” he inquired.

Martha gave him an incredulous look. “You mean you aren’t convinced that you’re bringing danger down on my head by your mere presence and if we split up the Master will be more concerned about tracking down the guy who irritated him than the person who could topple his empire?” she asked sweetly.

Rory grimaced. “That was a bit...presumptuous of me,” he conceded. “How did you guess?”

Martha shrugged. “You’re getting all Roman again. As I recall, they’re not quite as egalitarian as our society is today.”

Rory shrugged. “Fair enough.”

“So will you stay?” Martha prompted.

Rory nodded once.

“Wonderful,” Martha said, plopping down into the velvet armchair that most definitely had not been there earlier. “Since we’ve got time to kill, and I don’t really feel like sleeping, why don’t you explain to me how this place works?”

Rory sank down into a matching love seat, stretching out over the full length. “What do you mean?” he asked.

“How exactly that a place is ‘only conditionally possible’?” Martha asked. “Even the TARDIS most definitely exists.”
“Ah, yes, that,” Rory commented. “The Armory in and of itself is nothing particularly peculiar. It is simply a place to put weapons. What makes it unique, even dangerous, is my presence.”

“Oh?” Martha prompted, leaning forward.

Rory took a moment to collect his thoughts and went on. “As I am sure you are aware, this reality is but one of many, all lined up next to each other.”

Martha nodded. “Continue.”

“Most of these realities are only very slightly different. Most of them contain some version of me and, by extension, some version of this room.” He paused for a moment. “Now, of course, that wouldn’t be a factor if it weren’t for my temporal mass.”

“Temporal mass?” Martha asked when it became clear that Rory had no intention of explaining further.

He smiled sheepishly. “The older a being becomes, the greater their temporal mass. I am just shy of two thousand years old in the universes I remember and who knows how old in the ones I don’t. Anyway, the temporal mass created by such individuals as myself presses into the walls between dimensions. Normally, it is barely enough to create any sort of impact, but with as much temporal mass as I have, and in a place where I frequent in all of my universes, as far as I am aware, the walls between dimensions can stretch to the point where they are touching, allowing for the overlap that manifests as extra information or a change in size.”

Martha mulled over his explanation briefly. “So why doesn’t the TARDIS have that much temporal mass, then? I’ve never run into anything like this with her.”

“First of all, she does,” Rory explained. “But you never see the results because she never stays in one place for very long. The dimensions are meant to stay separate, you know. Crossing over rarely ends well, especially after the damage done in the Time War. Second of all, the TARDIS and the Doctor are still within a normal age for their respective species. Temporal mass is measured in relation to a typical lifespan; a mayfly that had lived for a month would have more temporal mass than me.”

That explanation more or less made sense, except for one small flaw. “So what did you mean by ‘conditionally possible’?”

Rory looked confused for a few moments. Then his face cleared. “It exists only on the condition that I need it to. You see, I never actually built an Armory in this timeline. The timeline the Armory is from was erased a long time ago. There are Armories in other, nearby universes, but I never got around to having one built here. Thus, I can only call the Armory into existence when it must be found.”

“But you didn’t bring up the Armory,” Martha pointed out. “River did.”

“River doesn’t experience time in the same way most people do,” Rory went on. “She was conceived in the TARDIS and born with Time Lord DNA from fully human parents. There is no doubt that she knows a great many things that the rest of us cannot remember ever existing. Before she mentioned the Armory, it did not exist. Once I had recalled it, it had always existed.”

Martha buried her head in her hands. “Wibbly-wobbely timey-wimey,” she groaned. “Don’t tell me anything else. I don’t want to know.”

Rory stood up in one fluid motion. “In that case, I’ll wake River and we can start preparing to leave,” he said graciously.
River jerked twice and stood up herself. “I’m awake,” she said.

Martha’s mind refocused on the mission. She wasn’t looking forward to traveling with someone else who had a target painted on the back of his skull, but Rory wasn’t the only one who had walked through time and Mihail wasn’t the only one with connections. She picked up Carnwennen. A Cyllenian Rose dagger. How fitting.

Chapter End Notes

I know, I know. This really doesn't make up for how long I've gone between updates and I really don't have an excuse. Honestly, I just lost most of my inspiration for Doctor Who a while back. Who knew a crippling hatred of Moffat could be so... crippling. Anyway, the 50th brought it back, and I am ready to go. I even know where I'm going with this now. Sadly, I'm going to be ending this sometime soon, but this is the longest thing I've ever written, the biggest project I've ever undertaken, and the only one I've ever come close to finishing. This started as a one shot with room for more and it turned into...this. There's a whole lot more I wanted to do, but really I just can't. I've got maybe three or four more chapters at most. So. Thanks to every single one of you for being amazing. I couldn't have gotten here without you.

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