Somewhere Only We Know
by mltrefry

Summary

After ending the Time War with unexpected results, the Doctor becomes the last Time Lord in the Universe. But fate refuses to let him be alone, and his first stop in fixing the wrongs caused by the war leads him to a shop basement in London. And one Rose Tyler.

Notes

A shout out to Vallora who threw this plot bunny at me.
Palms sweaty, the Doctor’s eyes kept flickering to the stasis cube rigged up to the TARDIS. It caught the light in his worn, Victorian style control room, and twinkled in a way that nearly taunted him for what he was doing. “Treason” Romana had called it, yet he was pretty sure that she was one of the 12 voices he heard over the closed communications. Not positive, of course, but he was pretty sure somewhere between her losing her presidency and the resurrection of Rassilon she likely regenerated.

“On your mark, Doctor.” A deep, raspy voice filled the TARDIS, feeling louder than it likely was.

He wished he knew who these Time Lords were. He knew they weren’t all him; it would be stupid and irresponsible to go to the past and ask for help from himself involving a war that he didn’t want to be part of to begin with. He was the only one who offered his name, and it really came as no shock to any of them who was inadvertently leading such a rebellious cause. He didn’t care much about the rest wanting to keep their identities safe at the time, but now that those twelve were about to be the only other Time Lords left in the Universe, in this Universe, he wanted to know if any of them actually ever liked him.

He really, really hoped Romana among them.

“On three, we tuck Gallifrey away for the safety of everyone.” He said, his voice much clearer and more commanding than he expected. He quickly brushed his palm against his green, worn frock coat before hovering his hand on over the console. “One, two, … three.”

He pushed the big, red button.

The Doctor was probably the only one in their little gang to see fit to have a big, red button to push at the moment of action. Something about it felt right, the way his palm cupped the curve, and the color of finality there against his skin.

He looked to the monitor and watched as the beams of white light circled the planet. Ships cloaked to blend in with the universe around them were suddenly seen hovering around the atmosphere while the energy they let loose made a cage of sorts around the red planet. The light brightening illuminated their outline dangerously inside the Dalek line of fire, but they knew the risks. It was discussed at length.

But the Doctor could hardly focus on that, his eyes riveted on the planet. His respiratory bypass kicked in as his hearts began to beat quicker. What if it didn’t work? What if they destroyed the planet? What if Rassilon found a way to stop it? There were so many things that could happen, all the results of one faulty calculation. The light grew brighter, and the Doctor’s eyes widened.

Then in a blink, Gallifrey disappeared.

A slow smile spread along the Doctor’s face, causing his eyes to crinkle a bit in the corner. A soft chuckle began to bubble up from his chest, and he was soon laughing joyously. Clapping his hands together, he continued to laugh with himself, jumping up for a moment before he remembered that this body was supposed to be elegant and dangerous. Yet he hadn’t felt this exuberant since he had regenerated, and found comfortable shoes and memories of who he was and why he was on Earth.

There was the solemn, easy congratulatory conversation carrying over the intercom, the common sound of the Time Lords stoically patting themselves on the back despite that the lot of them would
have had to have been at least a bit rebellious to have had to pull that off. Still, the Doctor couldn’t fault them, and he ventured over to the console to join in on the conversation.

“Yes, well done. Perhaps we should convene in person, have a proper toast? I suggest we--.”

The TARDIS shook violently, knocking the Doctor to the floor hard enough to knock the wind out of him. His vision blurred for a moment, and he shook his head in an attempt to clear it. Pushing himself up, he was nearly instantly sent back down by another, violent shake. His ears were ringing, and he wasn’t entirely sure the alarms blaring weren’t only in his head.

“What the bloody hell is happening?” The Doctor ground out as he pushed himself up. He flung himself forward, pulling himself up using the edge of the console to get a peek of the monitor. There was debris everywhere, blocking most of his view of the universe. A chunk must have hit the side of the TARDIS as there was a lurch that had him lose his footing. The vertigo from keeping himself upright made him want to swallow every word of his superior biology he’d ever muttered to anyone ever.

“What’s happening, Ol’ Girl?” He asked the time ship, his head pounding. There was a sad, hummed lament that he couldn’t really focus on, and something warm trickled down the back of his neck.

Another lurch, the world spun, and then it went dark.

When he came around, the Doctor looked about the console room from his place on the floor. His reading chair and tea table were over turned. Well, actually, now that he really looked at it, it seemed that everything was over turned or in pieces. His hearts ached for the broken bits that was his gramophone. The books from the shelves, he worried for a moment, might be too damaged to repair. Some of them were bent quite terribly with the weight of the shelves. The carpet was damaged, and he could feel the pain of the TARDIS echoing in his mind. There was nothing for it, he would need a new desktop.

“And we’ve had this one for so long.” He lamented as he managed to push himself up.

His whole body ached, and it surprised him he hadn’t regenerated for all the pain his was in. He could feel damage to his ribs, though if he had broken them, they were already on their way to healing. The back of his head stung, and he was more certain than ever there had been a gash there. Probably still was. Getting to his feet, he knew instantly there was damage to his right ankle. The string of curses in a few different languages and the sense that the TARDIS would have blushed if she were flesh reflected how bad the damage was.

Limping, he headed for the corridor. When he approached the doors and they would not open, he looked to the ceiling. “I’m going to need the med bay.” He told the ship.

She hummed another sad lament, though this one was laced with guilt and apologies.

“Whatever happened, you took on a lot of damage, didn’t you?”

“That’s why she landed you here.” Ohila, leader of the sisterhood of Karn, stated from the main
The Doctor leaned against the wall by the entrance to the corridor and scowled. “I’m not dying, and you can’t try and convince me that I am. Again. Why would she land us here?”

“Because we were the closest planet that could provide you any kind of help for the damage that has been done. Come, your ship needs to heal as much as you do, and she cannot do that with you still inside.”

The Doctor frowned, a scathing retort on the tip of his tongue, when his ship hummed a desperate plea for him to listen.

“Fine.” He growled softly, mostly for himself and the TARDIS, then hobbled toward Ohila using the wall for support. It took a lot longer this way, the room being fairly vast, but at least Ohila hadn’t attempted to do more than stand on the threshold. As much as her help could have sped things along, the Doctor was at least grateful she hadn’t presumed her welcome.

“You gave a proper rite of passage to Cass?” He asked, gritting his teeth through the pain.

“Proper for those of Karn, at least. As we didn’t know where she came from or who her people might have been, we did what we could.”

“It was all I asked.” The Doctor replied, reaching out for the older woman as he got near enough. She grasped his hand tightly, irritating the scraps on his knuckles, though he didn’t say anything. “I entered the war, as you asked. I believe it’s safe to say we won.”

“But at what cost to you, Doctor?” Ohila asked kindly as she helped him out of the TARDIS. She guided his hobble toward the mouth of the cave before them where a half dozen of the other sisters stood around a stone alter, each holding a smoking goblet.

“Oh, not this again.” The Doctor groaned, gesturing to the women cloaked in red. “I told you, I’m not dying or dead, and you can’t try that on me again.”

“No, you’re not. And no, we’re not. The Elixir of Life is not the only potion we of Karn can produce. We can heal the current body as well, help guide the regenerative energy to heal the body without transforming it, or having it count toward your lives used.”

“How inventive of you.” The Doctor replied as he was brought to the alter. He hoisted himself up, grateful to be off his aching legs, and lifted the one with the bad ankle to rest on the flat surface.

“The Time Lords bade us help them with whatever means we possibly could. We have made the Draught of Healing, which we will give to you, as well a few other … controversial potions in their quest to win the Time War. This was before, of course, it had gotten so terribly out of hand. When Rassilon was first resurrected.”

“And what did you lot get in return? Oh, come now, don’t look so surprised, Ohila. You wouldn’t do something for nothing. And don’t think I haven’t figured out that it was Rassilon and the council that encouraged you to convince me of my death should I ever find myself stranded here. They wanted me in the war, and they wanted me regenerated into a man willing to fight.”

Ohila at least looked a touch guilty as her frown slowly faded into a more neutral expression. She looked over the vast, barren landscape behind the cave, seeming lost in thought. As she looked out, one of the sisters brought over a goblet, and the Doctor unthinkingly took a drink.

He could feel a subtle fire stirring within, the same sensation that preceded his transformation into
another man. But the fire never grew, only intensified in the areas of his body that were damaged. Admittedly, it was more than he realized, and fatigue began to take over.

“They gave us protection.” Ohila finally spoke. “They shielded our planet from the effects of the Time War, allowing us to live in peace. When the Time Lords were destroyed, that shield evaporated, allowing your ship to land here along with some of the debris that followed you.”

“Time Lords weren’t destroyed,” The Doctor slurred, his eyes growing heavy as he made a great effort to finish the last of the liquid in his cup. “There were hidden.”

“Yes, most were hidden. Nearly all of them. But there were some of you left behind. One of them was the keeper of our shield. But they’re gone now.”

“Gone?” The Doctor asked, fighting the urge to sleep as his hearts picked up speed and the words of Ohila made their way through the fog of his brain.

“Dead. Destroyed. There were thirteen Time Lords left in this Universe for less than an hour. Now, there is only one.”

Before the Doctor could argue that point, or feel anything other than confusion, his eyes rolled back and he was out.

When the Doctor abruptly awoke, he looked at his hands. Same hands he’d had for a few centuries, now unmarred from his tumble around the TARDIS. At least, he was sure it was a few centuries. He never could properly keep track. But they were the same, which meant that when he finally caught his reflection he’d still see the same face he had when he last shaved. The beginnings of lines around his blue eyes, a visage that was starting to show the signs of age but was still as handsome as it had been in its more youthful appearance. He liked this body, this face, and he wanted to hold on to it. He ran his familiar hand over the back of his head, fingers feeling through the short curls for the cut that was no longer there. Sometimes he missed his longer hair, but the cropped look was much more practical.

He rolled his ankle, and felt no grinding or popping to indicate damage, though it wasn’t the most comfortable movement in the gaiters and ankle boots. He suddenly realized how odd it was for the sisterhood to have left them on, seeing as how his frock coat and blue ascot were removed. He looked around, spotting them neatly folded on the ground beside the alter he lay on. He looked down his torso as he patted himself. His brocade, muted gold and black waistcoat was still in place, as was the chain attached to it, one end leading to the small pocket that held his pocket watch. His sonic screwdriver would be tucked away in coat. The sleeves of his ivory oxford had been unbuttoned and rolled up, so he promptly went about righting those.

“How do you feel, Doctor?” Ohila’s voice startled him slightly, but he merely whipped his head up to look at her as he finished putting himself back together.

“Quite well, actually. Like a new man, except I’m not. Quite the feat you’ve pulled, Ohila.”

“And what of your mind?” She asked cautiously.
“What of it?” He asked as he hopped off the alter, bending briefly to retrieve his coat and ascot. He plopped the former down on the alter behind him as he went about retying the latter around his neck.

“Does it feel empty? Is it too quiet inside your head without them?” Ohila asked.

“Without who?”

“The Time Lords.”

The Doctor frowned as he focused on his telepathic centers. While touch was more or less required for true communication, there was always a buzz in the back of his mind, the hum of the presence of other Time Lords. Well, mostly when they were nearby, but there had also always been a light connection. Or maybe that was just with his ship? He stretched his mind, seeking for others, finding only the TARDIS.

“It would make sense that I wouldn’t feel them, what with them being in another Universe.” He replied as he slipped his coat back on over his shoulders.

“Yes,” Ohila replied. “But you should still have been able to sense another twelve souls, and I know you do not.”

The Doctor adjusted his coat as he ignored the growing unease in his chest. “They are simply too far away.”

“They are simply dead, Doctor. Dead, and there is nothing we can do to bring them back. They are lost to us.”

“No,” He said simply. He moved for the TARDIS, seeing the ship outside the cave, waiting for him with a stoic hum. He attempted to keep his steps casual, but the urgency to learn the truth was making his pace a bit too quick. He reached into his inner coat pocket for a key, paying no mind to how it felt different in his hand. He unlocked and opened the door, ignoring the differences the back of his mind was registering as he went for the console.

He quickly opened up the closed communication he had with the other TARDISes. “Hello? Hello? This is the Doctor, can you read me? Is anyone there?” He tried, getting nothing but static. He refused to believe the silence in his mind was permanent, that he would never feel the brush of another Time Lord in his mind again.

“With your planet hidden, and the others who joined you on such a foolish endeavor to do so gone, I’m afraid you’re the only Time Lord left.” Ohila said.

“But I can’t be.” The Doctor said softly to himself. He tried to think if there was a way he could bring Gallifrey back, knew there had to be some sort of log that indicated where it was. If not, he could calculate the possible location. It was only a pocket universe, there couldn’t be that many.

His hearts were racing, his mind following suit even as the TARDIS merely hummed a little sadly.

“Doctor.” Ohila said, getting his attention. He looked over his shoulder, seeing her standing in the doorway once more. It was only by the sharp contrast of her red robes that he clued in that the walls of his time ship were light once more.

Teal, it seemed, with a hexagonal pattern on the lower part of the walls. All around him, the rails and supports were much more organic in design, reminding him of TARDIS coral when it was just beginning to properly grow. The floors were smooth, light grey, a metal of some variety that
looked like marble and sounded so under his feet. The jump seats hardly looked comfortable, straight backed and hard, ribbed and unpleasant. The time rotor extended to the ceiling, emitting a blueish-green light. It ended at the base of a collection of names in Gallifreyan. He caught a few: Susan, Sarah-Jane, Lucie, Ace. Companions, and with a few blank spaces among them for ones yet to come.

“Doctor,” Ohila repeated, bringing the focus back to her. Without permission, she entered the TARDIS and walked up to him. “Take these.” She said, handing him three bottles. “One is for healing, one is to aid in a regeneration, the other … is something we made just for you. One day, you will understand why we gave it to you. But there is something you have to understand: you are the only one left. There are no more. They are gone, and so you must be the one to uphold the laws of time. If you don’t, terrible things will happen.”

“I won’t be alone, not for long. I will find them, Ohila, it’s only a matter of ….”

“Time. Something you are intimately familiar with. But each time you scan the Universe, ask yourself this: is it wise to bring them back? With the way they were in the end, the lengths you went to ensure they would not unleash their tyranny on the universe, is it worth it to have the connection?”

“If you were the only one of the Sisterhood of Karn left here, would you not find a way to bring the others back?” He countered.

“No,” She replied. “I would simply seek out new sisters.” She paused, her blue eyes locking with the Doctor’s as she stared at him intensely. After a few heartbeats, she blinked, and offered a faint smile. “I will leave you, Doctor, so that you may get back out into the stars and set right what the Time War has made wrong with the Universe. You are not the only one left displaced or confused.”

Without another word, Ohila turned and left the TARDIS, closing the doors behind her.

The Doctor slumped against the console, mind reeling from all that happened. His time sense told him he’d been out for a day, something that weighted down the fact he was the only survivor. How? Why? He had an older ship, certainly if he survived … whatever it was, than they did, too.

The Doctor moved around the control panel, setting up a scanning system for anything Gallifreyan.

He waited.

After hours passed, he set off and explored the layout of his TARDIS. Nothing about her looked the way he was used to, but at the same time she was familiar in that she mimicked designs of the past. He would wander until he was exhausted, knowing in both hearts that she would shift his bedroom to where he was when he needed rest. He’d lie down with certainty that if the scanner detected anything, she would put his room right next to the console room, and he could land in an instant.

Eventually, hours of wandering turned to days of waiting. Each one that passed made his hearts grow heavier, the loneliness increase.

Alone, so alone.

“What am I to do, Ol’ Girl?” He asked his time ship as he slumped in the corridor, peering into the console room.

There was a ping, not one to alert him to the presence of anything Gallifreyan, but a different one
he set up before. A different alarm that informed him when something or someone was on his favorite planet, his second home.

“I need to disable that,” He muttered as he went to the console. A few flicks of the controls, and he disabled it permanently.

The TARDIS hummed something that sounded like a growl.

“Oh, don’t give me that.” The Doctor said without bite. “We want to find the other Time Lords, not ….” He peered down at the controls and read what had been detected and when. “Oh, hello, what’s this?” He said, fingers running along the circles of his language. “Autons, London, 2005. Why is it always London?” He muttered to himself as he went about setting the controls and flipped the switch. “Well, Ol’ Girl, looks like my time of perpetual mourning and moping is done. Should probably grab some supplies before landing. Doubt I’ll find the Nestene Consciousness first go, might need to blow a few things up, first.”
Little town, it's a quiet village. Every day, like the one before.

The lyrics to the Disney film swirled around in Rose’s mind as she folded jumpers and willed time to go by faster. London was hardly little or quiet, but the daily routine of getting up, getting dressed, catching the bus, and working open to close was getting old. She was fairly certain she wasn’t even fully awake when she kissed her Mum goodbye and left for the day. Even Mickey, try as he might, make her laugh as he did, was all part of the everyday. Paper bagged lunch together in the square, relate stories from the times they weren’t together, share a laugh or two, peck goodbye and return to their respect jobs.

It was all quite boring.

A small voice reminded her to be grateful for the boring. There were no surprises of women’s panties on the floor of her bedroom that were not hers, or black eyes or hand shaped bruises because her cheque didn’t quite meet the total she expected it to be. Really, things had been much worse for her in the past.

Maybe she could go back and get her A levels? But that would mean giving up the money she sorely needed after paying off the debt the bastard caused her to fall into.

“This is a customer announcement.” A new clerk came over the store’s intercom system, and knowing what he was about to say, Rose’s shoulders sagged with relief. “The Store will be closing in five minutes. Thank you.”

Five minutes left, then it was about fifteen minutes of waiting while the clerks cashed out, and then they’d be home free. She grab the bus back home to the flat she shared with her Mum, have a cuppa and watch some telly, and then head to bed to start the whole, miserable routine again.

She bid her time folding jumpers, went to the staff lounge to grab her bag, and headed for the door.

“Oi!” Lee, the security guard, said while stopping her by thrusting a plastic baggy of money against her chest.

“What’s this?” She asked, knowing what it was and cringing at the idea that it was her turn.

“Take it down to Wilson, will ya? Might be the week we can all quit this place.”

“Might be.” Rose replied with a strain smile. “Wait for me?”

“Have to if I wanna lock up, don’t I?” He said with a sly grin and a wink. “So, hurry it up, Tyler. Match is on tonight.”

Rose rolled her eyes and headed for the lift, sending Lee a glare the whole while as he let the rest of the staff out. Her fingers tightened around the plastic baggie in her hand as the doors shut behind her.

Wilson’s office was in the basement, and the corridor immediately off the lift was creepy enough with stockers and receivers wandering about during the day. All but the security lights had been turned off for the night as they were automatically prone to do, making the already eerie space that much worse.
“Wilson?” She called out the second the elevator door was open. When he didn’t immediately poke his head out from anywhere, Rose stepped out of the elevator and headed down the corridor. “Wilson, I’ve got the lottery money. Wilson?” She headed for his office door and knocked. She waited, reading the HP Wilson CEO on the door about ten times before knocking again. “You there? Look, I can’t hang about ’cause Lee’s waitin’. Wilson!” She pounded again, this time with the palm of her hand. She grumbled softly and ignored the sting on her skin when that didn’t get his attention.

Just as Rose was about to shout again or leave, she heard something down the corridor. “Hello? Hello, Wilson? It’s Rose.” She called out as she headed in the direction the noise came from. There was a door slightly ajar, and Rose pushed it open. “Wil-Wilson?” She stuttered. It was dark, and she tried to scan the room for movement. Something caught her eye, and she flicked on the light in hopes of startling the old coot for trying to frighten her.

The room was filled with shop dummies, all dressed, though some fashions didn’t make much sense. There were boxes neatly stacked and placed out of the way, and any other merchandise was carefully set aside as well. Odd, really, considering the clothing stock room was usually a mess, and she was fairly certain that the shop had never had so many extra mannequins before.

Heading further in, she called for Wilson again, glancing about. As she headed for a second door, she heard the one she came through slam shut.

Rose’s heart leapt up in her throat as she ran back, seeing the heavy red door sealed shut. An incident from a few years back flashed through her mind, of another shop girl getting stuck in the room for about an hour because they hadn’t thought to make it unlockable from the inside. As Rose tried the handle, she realized that one incident wasn’t enough for management to make the change.

Another door. She just needed to get to another door.

Just as she calmed herself down, there was another noise behind her.

Whipping around fast enough that her hair got caught in her partially opened mouth, Rose scanned the area for shadows. “Is that someone mucking about?” She half shouted into the room. She removed the lock of hair from her lips as she ventured into the room again. “Who is it?” She demanded.

She would give up the lottery money in a second flat, if need be. She could also do a decent enough job to make sure the gits didn’t get away before she took off to safety herself.

Movement caught her eye, and she turned and startle to see a shop dummy coming toward her. “Ha,” She managed to say and force a smile while her heart pounded in her ears. “You got me, very funny.”

The dummy kept coming toward her, and she scanned it for some sign that it was fake, for someone controlling it. As she did, two more joined the first, crowding in on her.

Who was she working with tonight? Shireen and Margo, but they were ahead of her when Billy stopped her. She didn’t recall the men’s wear blokes, Derek, Marcus, and the new one. It had to be them, the former most being the worst at pulling these sorts of stunts.

“Right I’ve got the joke,” She said with a bit more menace this time. “Whose idea was this? Derek’s?” They didn’t relent. “Derek, is that you?” She asked.
But it couldn’t have been. Even with the full closing staff being in on the joke, there would be no way they could get all the dummies to crowd in on her as they were now.

Rose backed away, a bit more unsteady now, bumping into the neat stacks of boxes and knocking them over. She collided with the wall, tried the nearest door, and had no luck. She scooted down, trying to get to the next, only to inadvertently put herself closer to the idiots that were closing in on her.

She was properly frightened, and, when this was over, she would never hear the end of it.

If you get outta this, ya mean, the voice in her mind betrayed the thoughts she didn’t want to dwell on. She was surrounded, there was no way she could try the door without turning her back on her assailants. One raised its hand, and it looked as stiff, heavy, and unyielding as a proper dummy’s. She closed her eyes, screwing her face up as she awaited the impact or hysterical laughing.

She didn’t expect to cool hand to wrap around hers.

Whipping her head up, Rose looked to the earnest, handsome man as he gave her a small smile. “Care to run?” He asked, pulling her hand before she could reply and leading her through the door she wanted to get through before just as the dummy’s hand came down.

The hissing sound of a broken pipe faded as they ran toward the service lift on the opposite end of the second corridor. Heart hammering, Rose looked over her shoulder to see the dummies lumbering toward them at an oddly fast pace. Their movements were stiff, the act keeping intact, but the speed didn’t seem to correlate with the limited mobility. It almost seemed like whoever was dressed up was still figuring how to walk, yet were moving as if they weren’t hindered at all.

They stopped, and Rose turned away from the mob.

The man hit the button for the lift, and there were precious seconds before it opened up. With a gentle shove, he pushed her in first, then followed suit. He spun on heel, extending his hand toward the panel in a calm, casual manner. There was a whirring sound, and the doors began to close as a white, plastic arm swung down hard toward his head through the narrow gap that remained.

He grabbed it, and there was a bit of a tug of war between whoever was controlling the dummy and him, though Rose wasn’t sure if he wanted to pull the arm or push it away. Other dummies were clamoring for an attempt to get through the few inches the lift door remained open, yet the lift doors didn’t reopen as they should have. With a grunt, the man separated the arm of the dummy from the body, causing it to release with a pop. The man stumbled back, and the lift doors closed. But then, so had the dummies, whoever was the one trying to stop them was having fallen back to the others and causing them to fall.

Both the man and Rose let out a sigh of relief as the lift returned them to the ground level.

“You pulled his arm off.” She commented once she felt steady enough.

“I did, yes.” He replied, examining it thoroughly.

“Very clever, nice trick.” She said as he handed it over to her.

“Hardly a trick. Just required a bit of muscle.” He said with a smile. A bloody gorgeous smile, if she were being honest.

The corner of Rose’s lips twitched up for a moment before she remembered that flirting in a small space with a complete stranger who just happened to be around when she was being attacked was
likely not a good idea.

“So, who were they, then? Were they students?”

“Students?” The man’s brow furrowed.

“Yeah, students. Was it some sorta student thing or something?”

“No.” He replied, eyeing her curiously. “Why do you think they would be students?” He asked with a tilt of his head.

“I don’t know. ‘Cause to get that many people dressed up and being silly … they gotta be students.”

“Clever.” The man replied. “But as you saw, I pulled off the arm,” He gestured to the chunk of plastic in her hands, and she looked at it for what felt like the first time. It was a proper dummy arm, not part of a costume at all. “Interesting theory, though. Logical, considering.”

“Considering?” Rose retorted.

“You’re human.” He replied.

She blinked, the line between her eyes deepening. Before she could even ask what he meant by that, the lift pinged, and he stepped out.

Rose followed.

“Watch your eyes. Gets a bit bright.” He said as he approached the control panel for the lift. He held a long, silver, cylindrical thing with a red knob on the end toward it, and after a few seconds of whirring and humming, sparks flew from the panel.

Rose yelped, hopped back, and he chuckled.

“Probably should have warned you about that.” He said with that ever-pleasant grin.

“So s’plain to me what this is all about.” Rose said as he turned and lead her down the staff corridor to the loading dock. “Who are you? Who’s that lot down there?”

The man paused, sighing with exasperation. “Right, where are my manners? I’m the Doctor.”

“Yes, the Doctor. And I never got your name.” He said, gesturing politely.

“R-Rose.” She stuttered, shaking her head a bit in disbelief. It was only then that she realized he was dressed like a in a sort of steam punk style. His long coat having some Victorian elements, as did his waist coat, reminding Rose of those period dramas her mum loved but never admitted to. But the boots, and whatever were on his legs, along with the scarf about his neck, said he wasn’t trying to look like Mister Darcy.

“Pleasure to meet you, Rose.” He said, warmly. He took her elbow in a gentle hold and turned her about, guiding her down the corridor. “Now, as for the lot in the basement, they were plastic. Living plastic, to be precise, otherwise known as Autons. They were being controlled by a relay device on the roof.” He paused again, turning to her with a bit of apprehension. “You work here, am I correct?” He asked, and Rose nodded. “You aren’t particularly fond of your place of employment, are you?” She shook her head. “Excellent, because I’m afraid with that many Autons
in the basement, I’m going to have to blow up the whole building.” He said casually as he escorted her once more.

“Blow it up!?” Rose exclaimed, looking at him aghast even as he didn’t slow down or allow her to stop.

“Yes, yes. I was afraid it would come to that. So, before I went down to investigate I set a few explosives in key places.”

“What about Wilson?” Rose asked.

“I’m afraid anyone who was down in that basement before you arrived has already met an untimely end. You would have been among them had I not happened to hear you from the other side of the door.” The Doctor explained gently, and Rose’s heart broke for Wilson.

“He was set to retire.” She said to herself.

“I’m sorry,” He said, and seemed to genuinely mean it.

He guided her out the loading dock door, turning toward it as it swung shut and pointed the thing he used to short out the lift at it. He then reached into his pocket and pulled out a clunky thing that looked a bit like a remote. He pressed a few buttons on it, set down by the door, then took her arm and guided her quickly away from the building.

“There, now. Since you have come quite close to danger once already tonight, I feel as though it’s imperative that I escort you home.” He said, casually taking the plastic arm she was still carrying and tossing it over head. Rose watched it sail into the dumpster. He hadn’t even looked to see where he was aiming.

“Right.” She said, unable to think of anything else. After a few steps, there was an explosion behind them.

Rose jumped, turning to see the top of her work place now set ablaze, hearing people scream and panic. The Doctor carried on as if nothing happened at all.

They walked in silence until the commotion caused by the explosion was faint, and Rose stopped looking over her shoulder to see if the police or anyone else would follow them. She was with the person who blew up the building, after all.


“Umm,” Rose replied, shaking her head as if to clear it despite there not being much more in it than general confusion. “I take the bus. Powell Estate, ‘s where I live.”

“The bus!” The Doctor exclaimed. “Drove one through an amusement park of sorts once. Well then, where’s your stop.” He asked, and as she was about to tell him it was quite alright, he held up his hand to stop her. “I won’t take no for an answer, Rose. Buildings exploding generally cause all kinds of ill-meaning people to come out of the wood work.”

“Can take care of myself, thanks.” She snapped back, scowling. “Just ‘cause I got a little caught off guard back there doesn’t mean I’m some damsel needing rescuing, ya know.”

“I don’t doubt it.” He said, smiling warmly without a hint of disbelief in his tone. “I’ve met many people, Rose, and I know a strong, capable person when I meet one. At the very least, allow me to walk you to your bus stop. Grant me a bit of reassurance that you are at least away from the
immediate draw of shadier beings.”

She considered, and when she didn’t see the harm, she nodded.

Once again they were quiet as she led him across the street to the nearest stop.

He stood beside her, hands behind his back, offering quick quirks of his lips on occasion when he caught her observing him while glancing about them.

He was quite fit. Bit short, if she was honest, but the same height as Mickey. Yet where Mick’s was broad, this man - the Doctor- was lithe. He was probably all sculpted underneath all those layers. His blue eyes were also quite lovely, though now that she’d seen them for longer than a few seconds she realized there was something ancient about them, like they didn’t fit his face. He looked to be in his mid to late thirties, a little worn as though he’d seen some hard times in his life, but his eyes were beyond his years.

And even the few, faint lines he had around his eyes and mouth when he smiled didn’t take away from his charm. If anything, they added to it. His hair looked soft, the curls inviting her to wrap a lock around her finger….

And what was she thinking? Shaking herself, Rose turned away. Yes, he was a fit, charming bloke, but he was also the stranger who blew up her job because some shop dummies were moving about. Autons, or whatever. Didn’t really seem necessary to destroy a whole building when the control bit was supposedly on the roof. Wouldn’t it just shut’em all down if he dismantled it?

She also realized that she had essentially allowed the stranger who committed crime in a nonchalant manner to escort her to the bus stop. He could very easily get on with her, follow her home….

“I believe this is your route approaching.” He stated, and she turned and looked past him to see her bus coming up.

For a split second, she considered denying it, only to remember that she was already an idiot and told him where she lived.

“Yeah.” She said, meeting his eyes again. “See ya.” She said, jumping up from the bench and getting ready to run on to the bus. He startled her by reaching for and taking her hand, and she nearly punched him before realizing he was looking at her polite detachment but a warm smile.

“It was a pleasure meeting you, Rose.” He said sincerely, squeezing her hand once before stepping back and bringing his own hands behind his back.

She stepped away, and when the bus stopped and opened its doors, she boarded. She plopped down in a seat, everyone on the bus but her looking at the fire wrecking Hendrick’s a couple blocks over. She looked out her window at the strange man who called himself the Doctor. He brought his hand out from behind his back to wave, and then turned away, leaving the bus shelter and walking off in the opposite direction of Henricks.

Through the ride home, Rose’s mind ran in circles. She thought of Wilson. She thought of Lee, wondering if he thought she was still inside. She wondered how the hell she was going to make any money now that she was out of a job.

She wondered how many phone calls her mum would get through the night.
When Rose’s alarm went off the following morning, her mother promptly reminded her she didn’t have a job to go to. And while she wanted nothing more than to stay under the blankets and have a lie-in, Rose’s body was ready for her to rise and get on with her day even if there were nothing to get on with.

Getting out of bed and ready for the day, Rose emerged into the kitchen, expecting to find her Mum on the phone with anyone who may have possibly not gotten through the night before. The device was practically glue to Jackie’s ear before Rose got in until long after she’d gone to bed. There was a pause, of course. Jackie did need both hands to both hug and shake Rose in equal parts, but that lasted an all of a couple minutes, and then the phone started ringing again. And, of course, Jackie answered. She ranted on how Rose never bothered to call her to let her know she was out, and how could she not have known Henrick’s had blown?

Mickey had rushed over shortly after Rose had collapsed in the chair. He ascertained she was alright, but no sooner had he gotten his answers did he then attempt to coax her down to the pub so he wouldn’t feel like a git watching the game despite what Rose had went through. She sent him off, promising it was fine, that there was nothing to worry about.

She didn’t tell either of them about the Doctor.

How could she possibly explain him? Bloke dressed like he’s coming from the theater, going on about some sort of living plastic, and then escorted her to her bus stop after blowing up her job? Nope, she was good with telling everyone the same, bold-faced lie: she didn’t want to wait for the lift so she took the stairs and headed out the side door. Lee, she was informed, had gotten distracted after Carol from the shop across came over to chat him up. He apologized over text, thinking he’d locked her in so he could have a drink with the woman before meeting his mates at the pub.

Rose didn’t really care. She’d managed to get out, and he didn’t have a job himself in the end.

“There’s Finches,” Jackie had suggested after breakfast. “You could try them, they’ve always got jobs.”

Rose paused her peruse of the wanted section of the paper. “Oh great, the butchers.” She said incredulously, half glaring at her mother who wasn’t paying attention in the least.

“Well it might do ya good.” Jackie snapped back, tilting her chin. “That shop was giving you airs and graces.”

Rose rolled her eyes. Airs and graces were earned at the more upscale shops. And while Henricks was quite a distance from Powell Estate, it was hardly like Rose had to shed her jeans and jumpers for pencil skirts and blouses to work there.

“And I’m not joking about getting compensation,” Jackie continued, either oblivious or ignoring Rose’s reaction. “You’ve had genuine shock and trauma. Arianna got two thousand quid off the council just because the old man behind the desk said she looked Greek!” Jackie continued as she headed down the hall to dry her hair and get ready for whatever Jackie did during the day.

Rose had tuned her out, as she was pretty sure that Jackie was about to go off on an entirely different tangent. And even if she wasn’t, Rose doubted very much she would see anything from anywhere when it came to compensation. Maybe enough to pay off the last of her debts, if she were
luck, but not much else. If she pushed too much, admitted that she was there, it would be more likely that they would question her involvement than offer her anything for her “shock and trauma.”

The butchers. As much as Rose tried to imagine herself working there, she simply couldn’t. Maybe she had developed a bit of a superiority complex, but dammit if she didn’t think she could do better than the butchers! Dishing chips, even, was better than that. There was nothing on the page before her, nothing that would suit anyway. No A levels limited a few of her options.

Rose was about to turn to the next page, hoping there would be better options on the other side, when something near the front door caught her ear. A rustling of some kind, something that reminded her of ….

“Mum, you’re such a liar!” Rose yelled and cut off Jackie’s rambling. “I told you to nail that cat flap down, we’re gonna get strays.” She said as she got up to see if the kitty intruder was still lingering by the door or if it had the good sense to go back out.

She could hear Jackie protesting that she had nailed the cat flap shut, but how often did she say she was going to do something and then got tied up on the phone or with the neighbors?

Sighing, she turned her shaking head away from the direction of her Mom’s voice, and looked to the entry. She did not find a kitten in the entryway. Rose did, however, see the nails her mother swore she put in the cat flap laying on the floor by the door. In the flap were the exact number of holes to match said nail count.

She crept closer, feeling uneasy, knowing that no matter how big a cat was there was no way they could’ve pushed the flap open like that.

Rose jumped when she heard the knock on the door.

Hand clutched to her chest, she glanced at the cricket bat by the door before opening it and peeking outside.

The Doctor looked back at her, the polite smile on his face changing to shocked surprise as he saw her.

“Hello, again, Rose.” He said, lips curling up slightly.

“What are you doing here?” She asked. “You stalking me or something’?”

“I assure you, it wasn’t my intention. I was simply trying to get a reading on the Autons from last night and the signal brought me here.” He narrowed his eyes thoughtfully at her. “You wouldn’t happen to be a copy of the real Rose, would you?” He then reached out, grabbing her hand and giving it a light squeeze before letting it go with Rose stuttering the whole time. “No, you have a skeletal structure, so you are certainly not plastic. Does anyone else live with you?”

“Just my mum.” Rose said, flustered, gesturing to the hallway over her shoulder.

“Would you mind if I came in? Make sure she’s real?”

“Ya Might regret it, but yeah, come in.” She said, stepping aside and waving him in.

The Doctor nodded and smiled, glancing around at the walls as any normal person would when they first walked into a new place. He took out the strange cylindrical thing from the night before and started waving it about while it whirred. He frowned, looking at it, eyes shifting about in
thought as the whir stopped.

“Lead the way.” He said to Rose, sounding a little cautious. She beckoned him follow her, and she glanced over his shoulder to note that, while he still had an easy sort of stride, he seemed tense in a way she couldn’t pin point.

She led him down the hall a short ways her mother’s room where Jackie was still fussing with her hair before blow drying it. Her makeup had already been applied for the day, though she hadn’t made herself decent just yet. She was still in her bath robe, and Rose mentally cringed a bit when all the possibilities of how her mother would react came to mind.

“There’s someone here about last night. Part of a sorta inquiry.” Rose said as she popped her head in the door way.

“Hello,” She heard the Doctor say over her shoulder.

Jackie immediately lowered the towel, her eyes zeroing in on the Doctor over Rose’s shoulder. She had that look, that Jackie Tyler: predator look that Rose had seen more times than she ever wanted to growing up. It nearly always preceded being told to head out to the shop for something or prompt encouragement to spend the night with Keisha or Shireen. The mental cringe became a bit of a physical one.

The Doctor stepped forward with his hand extended like the innocent prey her mum was sizing him up to be.

Jackie took it, giving him as demure a smile as she could. “I’m Jackie, Rose’s mum.”

“The Doctor.” He replied, giving her hand a squeeze. Confusion and disappointment flashed in his eyes a moment, and he took his hand back with a slight mewl of disappointment. “I don’t mean to intrude so early in the morning, however, there was something pressing about the previous night that I had to investigate further. Allow me five, maybe ten minutes and I will be out of your hair.”

“Take your time, no rush.” Jackie replied flirtatiously.

The Doctor smiled and headed back toward the main living area, either oblivious to Jackie and her non-to-subtle hints or not interested. Rose hoped for the latter if for no other reason than she didn’t want to think her of her mum in that way. She closed Jackie’s door, ignoring the grumbles that she couldn’t quite hear, and followed to Doctor.

“I really am truly sorry for the intrusion, Rose.” He said after she passed him in the living room. He was looking around, arm extended with the silver thing with the red nub in hand. It was making a humming, whirring noise again as he slowly moved it in front of him. “But I’m still getting the signal here, and I need to find out why.”

“’S fine,” She said with a shrug. “Can I get you anything? Coffee, tea?”

“I can never turn down tea, if it’s offered..” He said with a private smile as he moved forward slowly.

Rose went about making a cup for each of them, the kettle still hot. She momentarily felt like she was lacking simply because their beverages would be in worn out mugs.

“How do ya take it?” She asked over her shoulder as he continued to slowly scan the living room.

“Touch of milk, little lemon if you have it.” He said.
Well, they didn’t have lemon, so after adding a touch of milk to his brew she brought them to the living room. The Doctor paused, stretching out his hand to take the cup with a smile and quick thanks before resuming his scan. He sipped his tea, not a slurping sound to be heard, and Rose plopped down on a chair, pulling her leg up to rest her head on her knee while she watched him.

He was quite nice to look at, more so now in the light of day. His hair looked a bit neater, though she still had a latent urge to run her fingers through the ear-length locks. There was a slight shade of stubble, barely there, like he shaved a few hours ago but didn’t care to present as perfectly smooth.

“They said they found a body on the news.” She mentioned when she realized she’d been practically staring.

“Your Wilson, I’d imagine.” The Doctor said, taking a sip of his tea, still held in hand while he was doing… whatever it was. “He was probably in the basement, as I imagine it’s likely where the Autons got to him.”

“Probably.” Rose acknowledged. Likely have a funeral for him soon.”

“As is the custom among you humans.” He said as his eyes scanned the ceiling, brow furrowing.

“Why do you keep saying that?” Rose asked.

“Saying what?” The Doctor looked at her, brow still furrowed but in a softer, more confused way.

“‘You humans.’”

“Because that’s what you are.” He retorted, taking a heartier gulp of tea.

“And you’re not?”

“No.”

That gave Rose pause. “How d’ya mean? If you’re not human, what are you then?”

“I’m a ….” He started sincerely, but stopped as a strange scratching, thudding noise cut him off.

“Rose, do you have any pets? A cat perhaps?”

Rose shook her head, rising slowly from her chair, setting her mug on the side table. The Doctor set his mug beside hers, then lowered his arm and crouched beside the sofa. They stared, and Rose hoped she’d see the tell-tale glow of a cat’s eyes in the dark space.

A hand shot out and grabbed the Doctor by the throat.

Rose yelped as he fell back, struggling to keep his balance and get upright while pulling the hand from his throat. She sprung up, grabbing the arm and yanking as hard as she could. As he pulled back, he used the couch to get himself on his feet. The momentum of his push and her pull dislodged the hand but had them tumbling together on to the coffee table.

Rose paid no mind to the glass as it shattered beneath her, nor did she particularly worry about the Doctor laying on top of her. She was watching the plastic hand moving around the floor of her living room like Thing from the Addams Family.

The Doctor’s weight shifted on top of her, and she heard the whirring of the silver thing as he
extended his arm toward the hand and used it.

The hand stumbled around like it was drunk, fell over as if it collapsed, and stopped moving all together.

“Rose, you alright?” Her mother called down the hall.

“M’ fine.” Rose shouted back as she caught her breath. The room seemed deafening now for some reason even though there wasn’t anything loud about what happened except the breaking of the table. It was likely just the sound of her blood rushing through her veins that made her brain feel as though the whole encounter was noisy beyond reason.

She and the Doctor remained on the pieces of the table as they seemed to be collectively catching their breath. It might have been seconds or minutes for all Rose knew, but then he got up and extended a hand to help her to her feet.

“Are you injured?” He asked, stepping behind her and lifting her hair. He was a Doctor, after all. It only made sense that he examined her for cuts and the like.

“No, m’ fine. Really.” She replied, looking down at the remains of the coffee table. “Good thing Mum hated that thing.”

“Was a bit gauche, wasn’t it?” The Doctor replied as he picked up the arm, looking it over.

“You’re one to talk.” Rose shot back teasingly, tongue between her teeth as she smiled at him. She reached out and flicked the tail of his neck scarf, with drawing her hand and peering up at him. He gave a mock affront, and she could tell it was mock simply for the exaggeration of it, and then he chuckled a bit. He then turned his attention down to the arm in his hands.

“With any luck, this is all I’ll need to properly calibrate the tracking.” He said thoughtfully. “I’ll be able to properly pinpoint the signal for the Nestene Consciousness much more easily.”

“Yeah.” Rose replied, then processed what he actually said. “Wait. What?”

“The Nestene Consciousness. It’s what controls the Autons. Anyway, I am sorry, again, Rose. I hope this is the last time we cross paths like this.” He said, gently squeezing her arm before turning and heading for the door.

He was out before Rose realized he was leaving.

Nope, this wasn’t going to be happening like this, he wasn’t just going to waltz out without a bit more explanation. Rose darted out after him, barely remembering her keys on the way.

“Hold on a minute!” She called after him, seeing he was just getting to the stairs at the end of the walkway. He paused only a brief moment, resuming when she was close enough to easily catch up to him. “You can’t just go … swanning off.” She protested.

“It’s what I do, I’m afraid. I come by, try and fix a few wrongs, usually end up making more of a mess than I intended. Then, as you say, swan off.” He replied as they headed down the stairs of the building and walked across the lot. Rose was nearly breathless keeping up with his long, quick stride.

“But the arm tried to kill you.” She tried to reason with him.

“Yes, but I disabled it. Completely harmless now. Or, I suppose I could say it was ‘armless’?” He
quipped, his lips turning upward. He was so bloody attractive and yet ….

“Who are you?” She asked shaking her head in amusement and wonder.

“I told you, I’m the Doctor.”

“Just the Doctor?”

“Just the Doctor,” He acknowledged.

“Is that supposed to sound impressive?”

“I’m not sure. I suppose so, maybe. It’s been a long time since I chose the name. I selected it because it was a promise to help people, though admittedly I haven’t done much helping lately. More destruction, it would seem.” He paused, appearing thoughtful as his eyes took a far-off quality while staring off into the distance. “Which, I’m afraid, is why we must part ways now. Being with me, Rose, is dangerous. And you have your whole life ahead of you. There must be a goal you wish to attain, a plan you’ve had in the back of your mind for your future. You humans always do.”

“I dunno,” Rose furrowed her brow. “Never really thought much of it. ‘S always just been … work, telly.”

“Beans on toast?” He raised an eyebrow. Rose snorted, but the humor was gone quickly as he really studied her. The more he had, the more confused he seemed to become. “I sense you’re meant for great things, Rose, but I can’t see what they are. Which is strange, I can usually get a glimpse, at least. But with you … with you, there’s nothing.”

Rose’s heart seemed to stop in her chest. “What are ya, psychic?”

“No. Telepathic, yes. An over developed time sense, at times, but not psychic. Time is not set in stone, for the most part. But I can’t see ….”

Without conscious thought, Rose took a step toward the Doctor and took his hand lightly in her own. “Who are you?” She asked again.

He seemed to consider his response. “Do you recall when you were a child being told that the world was spinning quite fast? That you were moving around the sun at speeds so great that you could not feel them? Do you recall that disbelief, Rose, that you could be going so fast and not feel it? Come on, I know you had it, you lot always do.” She nodded slightly, unable to tear her eyes away from his. “Well I feel it. The turn of the Earth, the ground beneath our feet spinning at a thousand miles an hour. I can sense the entire planet dancing around the sun at sixty-seven thousand miles an hour, spinning around her partner like an intricate step on a ballroom floor. You and I, we are falling through space while clinging to the skin of this tiny, little world, and I am aware of every second.” He squeezed her fingers. “That, Rose, is who I am. I am more than I appear, and infinitely more dangerous to be around than you can imagine. So, return home, live your life, know that it has been a pleasure.” He bowed over her hand and let it go, turning quickly and walking toward a blue police box.

Well, that made sense, she supposed. He seemed a police sort, though a bit odd.

She took a few steps, her mind reeling and calm, then heard a strange, odd grinding noise. Looking over her shoulder, she did a double take when she noted the blue police box, and the Doctor, were both gone.
Stunned, she blinked, trying to make sense of it. Not a psychic, but what was a time sense? Was that like the mythical internal clock she’d heard so many of her mates go on about? Didn’t explain how he thought she was meant for more. For great things.

Nice of him to say, of course, but it was far from the truth. She would never do or be anything great, Rose could only hope for a simple life with a good home and some stability. Girls with no A-levels from the estates did not do great things.

She turned and started heading back to her building, trying to push the Doctor from her mind. But even as she entered the flat, her mother grumbling about the destroyed furniture, there was something about him that Rose simply could not brush off.
He couldn’t see her time line. The Doctor, while trying to get a reading on the Nestene with the arm of the mannequin he dismembered, had let his mind wander.

Rose.

There was an absolute certainty about her that made it impossible to see anything, with the exception of one, single strand: they don’t encounter one another again, and she goes on living an utterly normal life for an extremely short time. And yet, if they crossed paths one more time… he didn’t know, couldn’t know.

The TARDIS hummed in an oddly calming way which only made him more confused.

“I’m not precisely worried, you know.” He said to the column in the middle. The TARDIS hummed again. “Of course I would focus on that! I can’t see her future, I couldn’t give her any assurance or hints of what’s to come for her.”

The TARDIS gave a low sort of groan, and he looked at the center of his time ship aghast.

“Why in the name Rassilon would I have asked her to come along? I understand that she is special, I don’t need time sense to see that. But it’s not like it was before, I’m not going to take someone away from home when they don’t have to be.” He glared when the TARDIS replied.

“Don’t ‘tut’ at me. I need to find Gallifrey, I can’t do that with a companion, human or otherwise.” He sighed. “And while I try to find home, I still need to clean up the mess they made. I don’t need to expose anyone to that.”

The ship grumbled.

“I’m aware that Rose was exposed to it already. Twice. But that doesn’t mean she need continue to be.”

He ignored the ship when she grumbled at him again. While the arm was still aiding his search for the Nestene Consciousness, he turned his attention to his other scans.

Nothing for Gallifrey popped up yet, but still he stared for a time at the screen hoping for even the slightest, little blip.

Home, though he hadn’t thought about it that way in a long time. He may have referred to it as such, but deep down it never felt like it. He was always banished for one thing or another, or praised for it. But never once was it accepted. Romana came close, but never fully. The 12 and he had a sort of strange understanding when they weren’t utterly mad, but he could never truly call her friend. There was no understanding between them.

He wondered if, had those twelve survived, would the remaining Time Lords finally welcome him? Try to understand him? He couldn’t see it happening, but… well, they would be there. That distant idea of home even if he never went back.

He couldn’t take someone away from theirs, not while it stood, not while there was a chance for them to be there. And even then, he wasn’t sure he wanted the company of others just yet.

And yet…
Rose.

She was so spunky! The cheek on her, the curiosity. At first, she reminded him of Lucie, but the more time he spent with Rose, the more he realized the differences. Lucie was bold and brave, but also brash. Rose seemed kinder, and he had a feeling she had a big heart that was heavily guarded. She flicked his ascot, teasing him, and did so after her life was put in danger. Yet, she carried on as though it were nothing new.

And she made a fantastic cup of tea. Not that that really mattered, but it was a point he had to give her credit on.

Eventually, the scanner running the data on the arm beeped, and he went to investigate. Sighing heavily, he read the screen.

“Inconclusive. More data needed. Well, that’s annoying, how am I going to get more data when I blew up the rest of the- Oh! Hello, what’s this? A new reading? Just the one this time, though. Well,” He looked up at the Time Rotor. “It’s been a while since I’ve had pizza. I suppose it’s as good as any to investigate. What do you say, Old Girl? Care for a slice?” He ignored the groaning groan of the time ship against his mind, smirking just a touch as he flipped levers and turned knobs, getting them as close to the newest reading as possible.

Perhaps being led out to a shed in the back garden of a strange man’s house wasn’t the smartest idea, but Rose followed Clive out nonetheless.

After helping her mother clean up the remains of the old coffee table, Rose steeled herself and went over to Mickey’s so that she could use his computer and attempt to look up the Doctor and find out who he was. What she had found was a conspiracy website from a local man. She tried to do a bit more digging on her own, but when nothing else came up, she took out her mobile.

A phone call later, and Mickey was driving her to meet the bloke while protesting it the whole time. She reassured him constantly, promising that it was fine. A real estate bloke with a family (proven by a recently sent photo) may be a nutter at worse, but likely not into kidnapping women by luring them to his home. Sure, he still could be a murderer, but the chances were slim.

Upon meeting, Clive appeared exactly as he presented himself: a goofy nerd with an obsession that his wife tolerated, and his sons rolled theirs eyes at. It was when he mentioned that everything was in his shed in the back did she start looking about to make sure there was a good view of sad shed from the house. And, of course, that she had her keys on her for a make-shift weapon if need be.

Clive unlocked the shed, waved her in first. “A lot of stuff’s quite sensitive.” He explained as Rose took in the world map covered in various colored pins. On the side was a color-coded list indicating a time period dating back to the 1500s. There were various print outs posted all over the walls, and a computer on a corner shelf currently turned off. “I couldn’t just send it to you. Government might intercept it, you see.”

“Why you say that?” Rose asked, watching as Clive retrieved a banker box off a shelf.

“ Been proof he works for them, or as much proof as you can call anything you find.”
“What, like Bond or something?” Rose asked, tucking a lock of hair behind her ear as Clive took the lid off the box and started to separate papers into stacks.

“In a way, I guess. See, thing is, if you dig enough, keep a lively mind, this Doctor keeps cropping up all over the place. Political diaries, conspiracy theories, even ghost stories. No first name, no last name, just ‘the Doctor’. And the title doesn’t just seem to belong to one man or one generation. I keep finding different men throughout history that carry the title, except the same face will pop up in different eras, so it must by a title passed down from father and son as well. See?”

He took out some photos, most blurry and hard to actually see. Rose shuffled through them, taking in the different profiles, and how there didn’t seem to be one that matched the man she’d met.

That was until she came across a photo of a glitzy party and in behind the smiling couples was the Doctor. He was dressed a bit different, much more outlandish than the eccentric, steam-punk meets Victorian that she knew. He also looked younger, more care-free, and on his arm was a red-head who looked like she belonged at such an event.

“That one was taken December 31st, 1999.” Clive pointed out. “But there are more of him,” he added, handing Rose various photos of differing quality. Some it was very obviously the same man she had met, others it was more difficult to tell.

“He never seems to be with the same people twice, this particular ‘Doctor’. Those that have a name associated with them, a time and place and family, they almost never return. Or they refuse to talk. It’s like he’s too dangerous to mention, so many of them try to just … forget him. Or they don’t survive an encounter with him in order to remember.” He looked at Rose gravely. “If you’ve met the Doctor, Rose, it’s safe to say that something terrible is going to happen. And if I were you, I would let those you love know. Because if there is one thing I believe I know for sure, it’s that this Doctor is the most dangerous one to know.”

“Right,” Rose said, nodding once and handing the photos back to Clive. She turned to leave, but Clive caught her arm.

“Be careful, Rose. Those who call themselves ‘Doctor’ do not seem of this world. They could be immortal, or an alien. But if he’s singled you out, then God help you.”

Rose nodded more slowly, thankful as Clive let go of her wrist. She moved as calmly and smoothly to the door as she could, not looking back while she struggled to even out her breathing. Her heart hammered in her chest as she made her way out the shed and through the back garden, trying not to run to Mickey’s beetle as Clive’s son was in the front garden.

Not of this world? Dangerous? Well, the latter made sense, as she did meet the bloke when he was aiming to blow up her job. And then again when he was attacked by a plastic dummy arm in her home. But he also saved her life twice, which was something a truly dangerous person wouldn’t do. Would they? She doubted that anyone who was as careless with life as Clive made him out to be would have bothered with a rescue of any sort.

Not of this world? That was unsettling, especially as his enchanting words from earlier in the day repeated on loop in her mind. He could feel the turn of the Earth, the way it moved through space. He spoke of things that seemed right out of those cheesy sci-fi movies as though they were just as common as corgis and parrots who spoke.

Had she been singled out by him? She didn’t think it was intentional on his part if she somehow were. He made no move to follow her home the night before, and seemed genuinely surprised to find her on the other side of the door in the morning. Which, well, she did say where she lived. Not
the building specifically, but still. No, he didn’t single her out, couldn’t have.

“So, return home, live your life, know that it has been a pleasure.”

There was a finality in those words, as though he didn’t think he would see her again.

She moved around to the passenger seat, plopped in, and let out a sigh of relief both in being in a safe space once more, and with the knowledge that she likely wasn’t doomed to some terrible fate for meeting a supposedly dangerous being.

“Alright, Clive was a nutter. Off his head, complete online conspiracy freak. You win.” She said on a breath, not looking at Mickey as she allowed her heart and mind to settle as much as she could. She closed her eyes, and behind her lids she saw that charming smile, the warmth and sadness in his eyes as he said farewell.

“What’re we gonna do tonight?” Rose asked in an attempt to distract herself. “I fancy a pizza.”

“Pizzaaaaa. P-p-p-pizza.” Mickey stuttered. Rose cracked her eye open a fraction to peek at him. Something was off about him, though she couldn’t put her finger on what.

“Or Chinese?” She suggested.

“Pizza!” Mickey reaffirmed.

“Alright then.” Rose said as Mickey started the car. The car jerked, swerved a bit, and Rose’s eyes shot open. “Oi, Micks, what’s wrong with you?”

“Nothing, Babe, sugar, darling.” He replied in quick succession.

She eyed him over again, wondering to herself if he’d had such pore-free skin as of late and she simply hadn’t noticed. Or did he accidentally use some of her moisturizer that might’ve been left at his by mistake. He was shiny like….

A knot began to form in the pit of her stomach as a weariness set over her.

“If you’ve met the Doctor, Rose, it’s safe to say that something terrible is going to happen.”

Clive’s words of warning whirled in Rose’s mind, but she refused to believe them. She turned her head away from Mickey, promptly ignoring the eerie way he wouldn’t stop smiling as though he was attempting to flirt, or how he looked very much like he was made of plastic.

“Do you think I should try the hospital?” Rose asked Mickey after they had been settled at the restaurant and ordered.

He didn’t talk the whole way there, and it took as long for her to work up the courage to deal with the fact that her boyfriend might be plastic now. Was that possible? She supposed if dummies coming to life was possible, then so was… but did that mean Mickey was dead, or just possessed? She knew could hold his hand to find out, remembering the Doctor squeezing hers and her mums to find out if they had a skeleton, but Mickey hadn’t offered and she didn’t dare find out.
At least not that way.

Sitting in a public place helped a bit. It was unnerving that there was a match on and he was still staring at her, but he also hadn’t made a move that seemed threatening either. Rose had started talking tentatively at first, hoping that maybe normal, banal conversation would give her suspicions a direction to go in. Maybe something she’d say would tip the scales.

Eventually, all the random subjects somehow led her to her job prospects.

“Suki said they had a few jobs going in the canteen. Or maybe I could do my A levels?” She considered, more to herself than the ever staring Mickey. “Could do college, become a secretary. Not much better, mind, but still better than dishing out chips or working at the butchers. I dunno.”

“So, where did you meet this Doctor?” Mickey suddenly asked, smile never wavering. “Because I reckon it started back at the shop, am I right? He had something to do with that?”

Heat rose in Rose’s cheeks, and she looked away, wrapping a lock of hair around her finger. “No,” She replied softly.

“Come on.” Mickey prodded.

“Sorta,” Rose said, starting to grow nervous.

“What was he doing there?” Mickey asked.

“I dunno, Micks, and I’m not going on about him. Talk about him much more and I might end up like that nutter Clive, thinking he’s a government agent or a sign the world’s ending.” She said, laughing nervously.

“But you can trust me, sweetheart! Babe, sugar, darling sugar.” Mickey replied, and the hairs on the back of Rose’s neck rose. “You can tell me anything. Tell me about the Doctor and what he’s planning, and I can help you, Rose. Because that’s all I really wanna do, sweetheart, babe, sugar, sweetheart.”

“Okay, What’s wrong with you?” Rose asked, her hand crept toward her butter knife. She once learned from Keisha that if she put enough force behind it, she could still do damage to an attacker. She also added up the number of times she used one to stab open a package when it was being difficult. She doubted that if the Mickey before her was plastic like she was suspecting, another dummy, that she could get it with cutlery, but it was all she had.

“Champagne?” A male voice inquired, and a sense of safe halted her finger walk to the utensil. She stiffened, not daring to look up lest it just be the waiter.

“We didn’t order any champagne.” Mickey replied without looking away from her. He went to reach for her, but Rose drew her hand away promptly. He didn’t seem to notice. “Where’s the Doctor?”

“Miss, your champagne?” The waiter asked.

She looked up, her eyes widening as she took in the sight of the Doctor shaking the bottle with a slight up turn of his lips. “Didn’t order any.” She said, not quite believing he was there.

“No? Such a shame, you two looked like you were about to celebrate something.”

“Look, we didn’t order it,” Mickey said, and Rose glanced back over to see that he had finally
pulled his eyes away from her. Unfortunately, he appeared darkly giddy at the sight of the Doctor. “Gotcha.”

“Are you sure about that?” The Doctor asked, pointing the corked end of the bottle and twisted the wire away from neck.

The cork launched off, hitting Mickey squarely in the forehead. Rose launched to her feet as the cork disappeared, Mickey’s head rippling like a water bed, and then his jaw worked like he was moving something about in his mouth. He spit out the cork, getting to his feet, teeth bared in a vicious way. “Anyway.” He said casually, lifting his hand as though he was about to karate chop the table. On its way down, his hand turned into a block of plastic, turning the table to splinters.

Rose yelped, jumping back behind the Doctor just as he launched forward and grabbed the dummy Mickey’s head. There was a struggle as the Doctor twisted and pulled, bracing his foot against the thing’s chest.

As the Doctor fought with whatever the thing was that replaced her boyfriend, Rose ran to the nearest wall and pulled the fire alarm just as screams erupted from the other dinners.

“Everyone out, now!” She called to them, though she really didn’t need to. At the moment the Doctor removed the head of the thing, people were already scrambling to leave. The restaurant was emptied quickly, leaving the Doctor holding the head of the thing while the body moved about smashing things with little balance or wherewithal.

Tucking the head to his side, the Doctor ran toward her and grabbed her hand with his free one. “Run,” He said as he gave her a tug and led her through the now empty kitchens.

They burst through into an alley, in behind the restaurant and the Doctor let go of Rose’s hand to close the door and remove his cylinder thingy from his jacket. Keeping the door closed with his hip, he pointed the red tip at the lock and it hummed.

Whatever he was doing, Rose somehow doubted it would hold. She ran to the gates and yanked, only to note the chains and padlocks a bit too late.

“Open the gate! Use the tube thing!” Rose called to him, gesturing to their only means of escape.

The Doctor smirked as he walked calmly toward a blue police box much like the one he entered earlier in the day. “What? This?” He said, wiggling the thing between his fingers before looking at it with slight fondness. “It’s a sonic screwdriver.”

“Use it!” Rose begged.

“Oh, I have a much better escape plan than running through there.” The Doctor said as he tucked the screwdriver thing inside his coat. “The Auton will catch up to you if you try to run. Come in here with me, we’ll be safe.”

A smash on the restaurant door drew Rose’s attention for a moment, and the thick, heavy metal now barring large dents in it.

“We can’t hide inside a wooden box! You saw what it did to the tables in there.” Rose panicked, gesturing to the door that was starting to come apart.

“It’s not really wooden, I promise. It’s the safest place in the universe. Now,” he said as he unlocked the door and waved her in. “Come on, I’ll explain more when we’re inside.”
He entered the box, and Rose looked between it and the door now coming off the hinges.

Taking a leap of faith, Rose ran inside the Police box.

She stopped breathing nearly immediately. The interior was gleaming and white, metal, and much, much larger than it should be. What’s more, she spotted corridors that obviously led to other places. It was impossible, utterly impossible. She’d hit her head, or maybe she was actually still in Clive’s shed, drugged and dreaming of all the nonsense he said.

But even then, he never mentioned this, and she could never dream it up.

Rose promptly ran back out.

Circling the police box, she felt the four walls, trying to make sense of what was going on and why it was not at all what it should have been inside.

“Those who call themselves ‘Doctor’ do not seem of this world. They could be immortal, or an alien.”

Clive’s words echoed in her head as her heart launched and stayed in her throat. She looked up at the big, blue box, trying to reconcile it with all she learned, when the sound of the door to the restaurant giving way cut through it all. Rose promptly ran back inside, slamming the door shut and leaning against it a moment.

“It’s gonna follow us.” She panicked.

“I promise you, the assembled hordes of Genghis Khan couldn’t get through, and they tried, believe me. Now, if you’ll hold on for just another moment longer, I will explain everything.” He said as he focused on connecting the fake head of Mickey to something on the shiny, metal control panel he stood before. After a few moments, he grinned a bit. “There we are. The arm I got from you this morning turned out to be too simple. But the head is perfect, and with it, I can trace the signal back to the original source.” He straightened up, moving around the controls to stand in front of her, keeping the distance of the ramp between them. “Now, I’m sure you have questions. Where would you like to start?”

“Umm…” Rose said, blinking a few times. “The inside’s bigger than the outside?”

“Yes, it is. Technically the inside is another dimension. This, my ship, is called the TARDIS. Time and Relative Dimension in Space.” He replied.


“Yes.” He replied, hands clasped behind his back.

“Are you an alien?” Rose asked.

“I suppose to you, I am, yes. I’m known as a Time Lord.” He replied with a shy grin. “I hope that’s alright.”

“Yeah,” Rose said, moving closer to him. Her eyes shifted to the head of Mickey on the console. “Did they kill him? The … otones?”

“Autons,” The Doctor corrected gently, moving toward the head again. “And no, I doubt very much that they would have killed him. A bit like the Zygons in that it’s helpful for them to keep the original alive.” He said as he started punching buttons on the controls, and staring at a screen...
with a crease in his brow.

“Is it … is it a bad sign that he’s melting?” Rose asked, pointing to the now soft and collapsing head.

The Doctor looked to her first, the crease in the brow still there, before looking down and seeing the features of Mickey’s face swiftly softening and becoming goo.

“No! No, stop, I’m not, I didn’t … no, no, no!” He pulled on his curls before frantically moving around the controls. “Hold on to the rail, Rose, it’s going to get bumpy. I’m trying to ….” He grunted as he pushed on a lever that seemed to stick. “Trace the signal before it fades …."

The column in the middle of the controls started to bob up and down as the grinding noise she heard earlier in the day filled the room and sent goosebumps over Rose’s skin. Her lips upturned involuntarily in a strange rush of excitement.

The floor shook slightly, and the room went silent as the Doctor hung his head.

“I got close, but not close enough. I still need to track down the signal.”

“How do you mean?” Rose asked as he stepped away from the controls, taking her elbow gently as he passed her and leading her back through the door.

When they stepped outside, the smell of the Thames hit Rose’s nose, making it wrinkle involuntarily. She glanced around, seeing the London eye not far away, wondering briefly how they managed to emerge not only so far from where they started, but also where it was oddly quiet.

“We moved.” She said, looking up at the Doctor with surprise. “Does it fly?”

“No really. More disappears and reappears.”

“What about the headless thing? Is it still on the loose?” She asked, chewing her lip.

“No, it would have melted with the head. At this rate we should be more worried that the Autons know, and thereby try and duplicate your boyfriend again.”

“Why? Why would they do that?” Rose asked.

The Doctor tilted his head in thought. “I would think they would believe if they managed to fool you, then they could do the same to others who may know him. Your family, his, anyone they think might have had an encounter with me. If they destroy me, nothing will be left to stop them from taking over the planet.”

“But why? What’s it got against us?”

“Nothing at all. Autons are more of a foot solider for the Nestene Consciousness. It simply loves a polluted planet, and unfortunately for you lot, this era of Earth’s history is the worst for it. I imagine once its food stores were destroyed in the ….” He stopped, and a flash of something darted across the Doctor’s eyes. For a moment, he looked very old, very tired, and very lonely. “Well, when they were destroyed, the Nestene had no other choice but to hunt for another one.”

“So how are you going to stop them?” Rose asked. “Cause you blew up my job and the arm was still able to hunt ya down. Ripped the head off the other one, and it chased after us still. Gotta be a permanent solution, yeah?”
“Oh, there is.” The Doctor replied, reaching into his jacket and searching. “You see, the Autons aren’t just foot soldiers, they are controlled by the Nestene Consciousness. It’s mother and father all in one. Produces the Autons and creates the connection needed to have them move about. But it’s plastic in liquid form, so all I need is this.” He said, showing Rose a vial of blue liquid.

“Which is?” Rose asked.

“Anti-plastic. I plan to use it as more of a threat, encourage them to move along, but if they don’t…” He said as he pocketed the vial once again.

“So … how do you find it?” Rose asked as the Doctor’s eyes grew sad and distant again.

“Well, it would be under the transmitter, I imagine. The consciousness would want to control every piece of plastic on the planet, not just the ones it creates itself. That’s how the shop dummies got involved, I imagine. But the transmitter may not be easy to find.”

“What would it look like?” Rose asked.

“Round and massive. Something near the heart of the city, and not far from where we currently are.”

Rose looked over his shoulder and stared at the London eye. He frowned, and looked at her, then over his shoulder. “What?” He asked, looking over his shoulder and back at her. Then his eyes lit up and he turned his whole body around to see it. “Of course. Of course!” He smacked his forehead. “Why build something when you can utilize what’s already in place! Of course!” He spun back around, his face filled with boyish excitement, making him look so very young. “Come with me! Come see this through to the end of me, Rose.” He said, clasping her hands in his.

“Those that have a name associated with them, a time and place and family, they almost never return.”

Rose could hear Clive’s warning in her head, but her heart, maybe even her soul if she believed such things, were screaming to go with him. He shifted his grip on one of her hands, clasping it in a hold as he shifted his body as if he meant to run at a drop of a hat.

Her heart started racing, and her smile grew.

“Let’s go.” She said, causing his smile to grow before he launched into a run and pulled her along with him.

It was terribly cliché, even to Rose’s mind, but it felt as though pieces were falling into place as they raced over the bridge to the London eye, laughing like school children the whole way. Her hand fit perfectly in his cool one, their strides matched even if she seemed to be a bit more winded than he was. In that moment, it was like Rose had found the friend she’d sought out her whole life and could never find.

“Right,” he said as they came to a stop in front of the eye. “I can’t imagine anywhere else the transmitter could be, but I don’t see anything that would indicate the Consciousness is around. Perhaps it’s underground, but where would we get in?”

Rose let go of his hand and peered over the side of the stone wall where the bridge rail connected. She spotted the manhole cover and grinned.

“How about there?” She asked, pointing to it as the Doctor came up beside her.
“Looks good to me,” He said, glancing about and finding the entry to the staircase leading down to it. “Come along.” He said, taking her hand once again and leading her down.

When they got down, the Doctor let go of her hand to kneel down by the cover. He examined it with narrow eyes, as though sizing up a foe.

“You want some-” Rose stopped as the Doctor lifted up the cover as though it were nothing. Proper strong, then, not just lean. Then again, alien. Maybe he was considered weak for a Time Lord.

The Doctor set the cover aside and peered down inside. Instead of pitch black like she was expecting, a red glow met Rose’s eyes. Light smoke billowed up, the scent of burnt plastic accompanying it.

“Bit ominous.” Rose joked nervously.

“Can see how you humans would think that.” The Doctor smirked. He offered her his hand once again, helping her down to the ladder as only a gentleman would. She didn’t have the heart to tell him she could have managed on her own.

He followed her down, and once they were on solid ground again, he took the lead once more, though this time he didn’t hold her hand int he process. The Doctor approached a door, looked over his shoulder to ensure Rose was near, and pulled it open slowly.

Reaching back, he waited for Rose’s hand to slide into his once more before leading her through the door and into a vast chamber that reminded Rose of old gang movies. She imagined there had been a few movies filmed down here before it was taken over by a plastic army. There was even a vat of something that reminded Rose of molten lava she’d see in volcano films, but in a container similar to where the mafia bosses would always try and drown the snitches and the prisoners.

“That’s the Nestene Consciousness.” The Doctor said, pointing to the vat.

Rose frowned. “That?” She pointed, and he nodded. “How are you gonna reason with that to move along?”

“Politely.” He replied, letting go of her hand and heading down the nearby stairs to get a bit closer. He approached the railing, drawing the attention of the shop dummy soldiers, but didn’t seem to be bothered. In fact, his entire stance shifted in a blink, and it seemed the dashing regency hero was gone. In his place stood a warrior, the Doctor using his full height to make himself seem bigger. His shoulders were squared in a way that made them seem wider, his body taut with authority. “I seek an audience with the Nestene Consciousness under peaceful contract in accordance to convention 15 of the Shadow Proclamation.” The Doctor’s voice was unwavering, powerful, with an edge of danger that eluded to what sort of trouble one would get in with the Doctor around. He was breathtaking and terrifying at once.

There was a gurgle from from the thing below, breaking Roses entrancement. She glanced down, seeing the liquid move.

“Thank you.” The Doctor said with a slight tilt of his head. “May I have permission to approach?”

“Rose!” She heard a harsh whisper, and she whipped her head to the side to find Mickey crouched in a corner.

“Mickey,” She breathed, darting toward him. She felt the Doctor’s eyes on her as she knelt down by her shaking boyfriend. “You stink.” She said, wrinkling her nose at the combined odor of sweat
and plastic.

“That thing down there, the liquid. It can talk, Rose.”

“Yes, and if you don’t mind, I am attempting to have a conversation with it.” The Doctor said to Mickey before turning back to the vat. “If I might observe, you infiltrated this civilization by means of warped, shunt technology ravaged in the Time War. So, if you would kindly use it one more time and leave the planet before I call in reinforcements….“

The vat gurgled and moved again.

“Oh, no, this is an invasion. You can’t tell me you have a constitutional right to be here.” The Doctor countered.

The plastic in the vat formed something like a wave, the gurgles more of a hiss.

“I believe I was speaking, so kindly listen and wait your turn to speak. Your being here will stunt the development of the planet and its people. Not to mention that being a level five planet, you would have had to seek permission to be ….“

“Doctor!” Rose called out as she noticed two shop dummies emerging from the shadows behind him.

He wasn’t quick enough as one grabbed both the Doctor’s arms and held them behind his back while the other searched his person. It pulled the vial of anti-plastic from inside his jacket, and Rose’s heart dropped to her stomach.

“I wasn’t going to use that, not unless I had to.” The Doctor attempted to reassure. He was met by more angry gurgles. “I was not going to attack you, honestly. I wanted to help.” More gurgles, and doors behind him opened, revealing the TARDIS.

Panic began to grip Rose, her chest heaving as her eyes shifted constantly between the Doctor and his ship.

“Yes, that is my ship. But I swear, I didn’t fight in the war, not in that way….“

There was a loud, gurgling roar before the room vibrated and pulses of something like electricity began to flow from the vat.

“What’s it doing?” Rose called to the Doctor, her near-hyperventilation as fear mounted causing her voice to shriek.

“It identified the TARDIS as superior technology, and knowing what I am, it’s terrified. It’s going to start the invasion. You need to get out of here, Rose, now.”

Mickey clamored past her, darting for freedom with Rose following a little more reluctantly behind him. She kept looking back at the Doctor as he struggled to get free. There had to be something she could do. He’d saved her twice after all.

As Mickey made up the stairs heading toward the exit, chunk of the ceiling fell and crushed the steps just beyond the TARDIS.

“Stairs are gone!” Mickey panicked.

“Try the doors,” She shouted, jumping back into motion. When Mickey did nothing but look
around in a panic, she darted to the time ship yanked on the door. They wouldn’t budge, though she supposed they wouldn’t for anyone but the Doctor.

“Over there.” Mickey pointed. “There’s a way over there.” He went to head for whatever escaped he seemed to notice, but Rose paused.

The Doctor was still struggling, but while he couldn’t quite get his grip free from his plastic captures, she noticed they didn’t move. Rose eyed the chains hanging from the ceiling, noted the ax on the wall nearby. It was suicidal, this plan formulating in her head. But what other choice did she have? She was likely going to die if she simply stood by and did nothing. She was probably going to die if she managed to escape. Hell, there was every possibility that she would die just trying to do what came to mind, but at least this way, everyone else had a shot.

“Come on, Rose! Just leave him!” She heard Mickey call as she grabbed the ax. “There’s nothing you can do.”

And how often was she told that in her life? That there was nothing she could do. Because of her upbringing. Because of her lack of education. Because she wasn’t meant for anything further.

“I’ve got no A levels.” She said as she huffed the ax onto her shoulder. “No job.” She put her whole weight into the swing as she hacked the chain away. “No future.” She grabbed the chain and climbed up on the railing.

“Tell you what I have got, thought. Jericho Junior School under 7s gymnastic team. I go the bronze.”

She took a leap and swung.

Her feet collided with the Auton holding the anti-plastic, sending it toppling over the rail and right into the vat below just as the Doctor managed to toss the one holding him over his shoulders. Whether it landed in the vat or not, Rose wasn’t sure. As she swung back toward him, the Doctor plucked her off the chain and hugged her tightly.

“Amazing. You’re amazing.” He laughed. “But we’re in trouble. The Nestene isn’t stable, and the anti-plastic will make it worse. We need to head to the TARDIS.” He turned, clutching her hand and heading up to his ship.

“Mickey,” Rose called, seeing he didn’t get far in his escape plan after all. He nervously ran back toward her.

“What are you doing?” He asked.

Rose merely grinned, waving him to follow her and the Doctor inside.

“Holy shit!” Mickey exclaimed as he stepped inside the TARDIS behind her, and Rose waited by the doors for him to move a couple feet in further before closing them shut.

Mickey’s legs seemed to give out, and he collapsed on the floor, clutching the railing.

“Well, I have to admit that that’s a first-time reaction.” The Doctor mused. “Now, let’s see. I believe I found you … ah, yes, right here.” He said, turning some knobs and flicking some switched before throwing a big one. That wonderful, grinding noise filled the room again, the column bobbing along. It seemed like no time at all before it shuddered to a stop. “This should be you.” The Doctor said, waving to the doors.
Mickey was up on his feet and outside before Rose could turn around and follow.

Sure enough, she found herself on the estates, the same alley she’d followed him to earlier in the day. Mickey stumbled out, half crawling backward until he was against a graffiti covered wall.

In the distance, police and ambulance sirens mixed with indignant and panicked cries as people tried to figure out what was going on.

Rose took out her mobile, ringing her mother to ensure she was alright in the chaos.

“Rose!” Her mother answered immediately. “Rose, don’t go out of the house! It’s not safe.”

“Already was, Mum, I’m okay.” She replied with a light laugh.

“There were all these things, Rose. And they were shooting, and ….”

“Buy, mum.” Rose replied, hanging up before Jackie could keep her on her mobile all night. She turned to Mickey, taking a couple steps toward him. “A fat lot of good you were.” She teased.

He merely whimpered, looking from her to the TARDIS.

Rose turned, seeing the Doctor leaning elegantly in the doorway. “You weren’t much better, ya know.” She smiled at him, tongue between her teeth, peeking out the corner of her mouth.

His smile stretched. “No, I suppose I wasn’t. But you have to admit, I wasn’t doing too badly.”

“Suppose not. Though you would be dead if it wasn’t for me.” Rose said, head held high.

“We all would be.” He said, shifting so he stood with one hand outside the ship, hands dropping to his side before one lifted slightly toward her, palm out. “So, come with me. Don’t think I didn’t hear that little pep talk you gave yourself before you risked your life to save mine. Come with me, see the universe.”

“Don’t!” Mickey said, grabbing on to her leg. “He’s an alien. He’s a thing.”

“Needless to say, I won’t be taking him.”

Rose looked down at Mickey clinging to her leg, then back up to the Doctor. “Is it always this dangerous?” She asked.

He seemed to consider his answer, narrowing his eyes and looking at his feet thoughtfully. His hand dropped to his side, fingers lightly rapping against his coat.

“Tonight, I righted a wrong set in motion because of events beyond our control. Events that should never have happened in such a devastating capacity. There are more out there. More things that need to be fixed, and I could use someone at my side while I do it. And not just through the Universe, but through time as well. We’d be traveling into the future, and back in the past. On Earth and on other planets. It’s dangerous, yes.” He looked up once more, meeting her eyes dead on. “But something tells me you aren’t afraid of the danger.” He replied, hand lifting a bit higher than before. “Would you like to make a difference with me, Rose?”

She looked down at Mickey again, seeing him shake his head vehemently.

He didn’t want her to go, didn’t want her to take a risk. He wanted her there, coming by his place for a snog and a shag, to eat bagged lunches by the fountain in the square and heading out to the pub for a match in the evenings. Her mum would want her to work at the butchers, or the chippy,
where she would be close to home until she would eventually move in with Mickey.

A simple, quiet life.

_Every day like the one before._

Rose looked to the Doctor, seeing the uncertainty in his eyes after her taking so long to reply. There was a hurt there, as well as an acceptance, like it wasn’t the first time he’d been told no. His hand began to droop, palm turning back toward his body.

And she suddenly wanted to snatch it, to grip it tight and never let go. Yes, he was dangerous. Yes, he was alien. Yes, she would risk her life more with him than she ever would here on the estates. But dammit, she would _live_. The Universe, all of time and space, she could see it with him. She could make a difference. She could be better.

Rose turned to Mickey, smiling sadly. “Thanks,” she said, kissing his head.

“For what?” he asked as he let go of her leg and got to his feet in confusion.

“Exactly.” She replied, squeezing his arm briefly before turning back to the Doctor.

His eyes lit up with hope, and her sad smile changed to one of excitement before she launched herself toward him. He stepped aside, allowing her to run inside and through the open door. He closed the doors, and turned to look at her thoughtfully.

“What’s your last name, Rose?” he asked.

“Tyler.” She replied, frowning a bit.

He grinned. “Well, then, Rose Tyler. Welcome aboard.” He charged up the ramp, past her, chuckling lightly as she giggled. He practically danced around the console in the middle, flicking this and turning that, before pushing the big lever that made the noise that seemed to lift her soul.

_Adventure in the great, wide somewhere. Space. Time._

She was ready, and Rose Tyler swore she would never look back.
"You must be tired." The Doctor said once they entered the vortex, set to drift there for a while. He looked at his new companion, fully aware of the smug glee coming from his time ship. After all, he had very adamantly stated, not twenty-four hours before that he wasn’t going to take on another.

And yet, here was Rose Tyler, a twenty-first century girl who he could not read a single time line for now that she was with him.

"Bit, yeah." Rose admitted, brushing her hair behind her ear and shifting nervously.

"Not surprising, given everything that transpired today, and the events of the night before. You could probably use a good night's rest. Well, not night. There are no nights on the TARDIS, after all." The Doctor said as he extended his hand to her once more. He'd been very touchy in this body, something that centuries within it hadn’t dulled. The frequency with which he doled out affection had lessened over the years, and did so even more during the war, but it had never went away. Yet, with Rose, he found it sparking up again.

Maybe it was because he was alone, and she seemed kind. Maybe because his mind was so empty that the physical contact acted as a placebo for the missing connection. Either way, he found his automatic reaction was to offer her his hand, and he was always pleasantly surprised when she took it.

He led Rose through the corridors of the ship. His hand in hers, he watched as she took in everything with a glint of gleeful wonder. The TARDIS, much to his surprise, opened doors as they moved to show Rose what was behind them, humming as if pleased and lights flickering with each whispered compliment or remark of intrigue from their passenger.

"Something wrong with your lights?" She asked after the sixth time it happened, frowning at the ceiling.

The Doctor smiled. "No. The TARDIS is sentient, and the lights flickering is her way of blushing." There was a drop in pitch of the hum. "Oh, stop it. There's nothing to be embarrassed about. Besides, she has a right to know."

"Know what?" Rose asked, a touch of amusement coloring her confusion.

"She's also telepathic. She sort of merges with your mind a little, helps you understand alien languages in the verbal and written form. Unless it can't be translated, like my language." He replied, gesturing to the circular Gallifreyan above each door.

"Wait, she's in my head?" Rose asked, stopping in the middle of the corridor, tightening her grip on his hand.

"I promise, she's not poking around or rooting through your thoughts. She’s simply there on the outskirts, merely being present beside you. It’s sort of like how we're standing.” He said as he let go of her hand but didn’t move. “We're close enough to touch, but I'm not invading your personal space. Or, at least, I don't believe I am." He said with a grin.

The unease in Rose's face melted away, replaced by that charming little grin where her tongue poked out. He liked it; it was cheeky, and made him think of secrets between friends.

"You're good." She said, giving him a gentle nudge with her elbow. "Let ya know if you get too
"Alright. I would just hate for … Mickey?" He asked, inquiring politely. He knew Rickey wasn't right, but it was sticking in his mind. He blamed the frequent bouts of memory problems that came with this regeneration.

Rose's smile faded. "Yeah, Mickey. Not sure … I mean, I did up and leave, didn't I?" She asked, biting her thumb and scrunching her face. "But I mean, 's not like things were good, yeah? I mean, they were good, I suppose, but not … not the way I think it should be. 'S like we were comfortable." She tried to explain, flailing her hands about as they moved at a slightly slower pace. "'S the thing, though. 'S why I was so ready to leap. Was boring. Life was boring. And just ….

"Oh, you don't have to tell me." The Doctor assured. "I ran away from home as well. And a spouse, though I'm not sure I was ever really invested in that marriage. More like a business partnership in order to reproduce optimal off spring."

"You've got kids?" Rose asked, immediately looking around as if Time Tots would just come leaping through the walls.

"I had a child, yes. Many, many, many years ago. And she had a child, and then she ….

"Wait, hold up." Rose stopped him by stepping in front of him so quickly his chest bounced against her arms out-stretched. She stared at him, or studied him more likely, and it left him feeling oddly unsettled. "So, let me get this straight. Your daughter had … so that means that you have ….

"I was a great grandfather, actually."

"Was?"

Oh, she was insightful, this one. "The war I spoke of? It was brutal, and many of my people were lost. Now, my granddaughter remained on Earth where she married a human and had a son."

"Your granddaughter, the Time Lord? An alien?"

"You’d be surprised how much ‘alien’ DNA is actually mixed with your species." The Doctor retorted.

"No, probably not, actually." Rose smirked.

"No, I suppose not." The Doctor agreed, chuckling a little.

"So, she had a son…." She prompted, and he nodded before continuing.

"He was mostly all human, very little Time Lord. He… he didn’t have what would be needed to come with me back to my home world, but… he was a very brave, bright, brilliant young man. He died, saving the Earth, along with a very dear friend of mine."

"I’m so sorry," Rose said, touching his arm.

"It was before the war." He said, "and, in some ways, a very long time ago. I still think of him often, wish he had a chance to travel with me, but it wasn’t to be. His mother, my granddaughter, I’m actually not sure what happened to her. Many of us who were away were called back, conscripted whether we wanted it or not. She might have been on Gallifrey when it all ended."

"Gallifrey," Rose repeated. "That's your planet?"
"Was my planet." He corrected without thinking, and he could see the questions forming on her lips. "Enough for tonight. As I said before, you must be tired. If you're going to travel with me, you'll have more than enough time to ask as many questions of me as you want. We are, after all, in a time machine."

Rose snickered. "Suppose. So where on this transdimensional ship is my room?" A door down the hall creaked open. "Well, we were close then."

"Or she moved your room closer," The Doctor countered, eying his cheeky ship with good humor. "She'll do that, if she likes you. Everything you need for your human rituals will be inside. Head on in, get some sleep. If you need me, I'll be in the console room. The TARDIS will likely move your door closer if that's the case."

"What about you? Where's your room?" She asked him.

"I actually don't sleep much, Rose. It's just the way my biology works. A quick kip in my arm chair usually suffices. Though come to think of it, she got rid of the arm chair when she redecorated." He frowned, realizing all that was in the console room now were those horrid jump seats. The library, which had never had a sitting area before, may have one now. Or perhaps he'd actually use his bedroom at some point when he needed rest.

"Alright then, Doctor. 'Night." She said, giving a quick wave before she backed up a couple steps. She turned and headed into her room, glancing at him over her shoulder again before disappearing through the doorway. Once the latch clicked shut, the Doctor's shoulders slumped, and he headed for the console room.

The first thing he attempted to do was scan for Gallifrey, though he didn’t feel he had his hearts in it. He wanted to find Gallifrey, to feel the brush of other Time Lords against his mind just so he knew he wasn't truly alone. Yes, there was the TARDIS, who at least filled the void in his mind. And yes, there was Rose, now, who could provide him company. Another being aside from a sentient time ship to be his friend, but there was still a silence in his mind that neither one could fill. That hum of connection of being near other telepathic beings.

As nothing was coming up for Gallifrey, much like he partially expected, the Doctor started another scan: damage from the Time War.

The Nestene Consciousness was actually a far greater casualty of the war than the Doctor had wanted to admit, but there it was. The Nestene hadn’t started as plastic, but it became so as their home world was ripped apart and put back together. Created, uncreated, then created once more, over and over, until finally the Time Lords found reason to move on. They twisted and warped what the Nestene had been into something that couldn’t live on its own world anymore. It’s home, essentially, destroyed.

And it was going to be far worse, he could tell.

The list was growing, greater and far worse than the Doctor could have imagined. All because they mighty race from Gallifrey though lesser beings to be nothing more than an inconvenience. He’d seen first hand how willing they were to do what was necessary, damn the consequences. And, apparently, not even all that concerned over the dangerous weapons they had, considering that the Nestene wouldn’t have gotten to 21st century Earth without a little stolen or re-purposed tech. How many points in time were now in danger of being altered because technology that should have never left Gallifrey had fallen into the hands of the innocents that wanted nothing to do with the Time Lord and Dalek feud?
The Doctor pulled on his curls before turning his face up toward the column of the console, closing his eyes. He would find Gallifrey, one day. But for now, there was a mess to clean up.

He was the Doctor, after all. He fixed things.

With a heart's heavy sigh, the Doctor righted himself and looked at the screen, going through the list made of lines and circles, eyes running over causality, and where they would flee.

"Why Earth at so many points in time?" He grumbled as he read through barely. "What is it about that little planet that draws so much trouble?" He sighed, running his hand over his face. "There are other planets on there, too, so at least it isn’t going to be bombarded with this nonsense, but still.” He sighed again, feeling much more fatigued than he thought.

He felt a prod in his mind, and peered up at the time rotor.

"Is that a hint? That I’m not as young as I used to be?"

The TARDIS gave a slight lurch, tossing him about just a bit, causing him to frown. “Now, now, there was no need for that. I was calling my self old, not you. No you’re not as modern as some of the other TARDISes, but that’s why I love you. And don’t think because I’m feeling my years that I’m in anyway implying your aging as well.” He glanced about, smirking as he felt the smug appreciation coming from his time ship. “You know, I must say, while the new look is elegant and practical, I’m a touch put out that you rid yourself of my arm chair. I really did love that arm chair.” He grumbled, eyeing the uncomfortable looking jump seats.

Admitting defeat, he ventured out of the console room. Gallifrey, if found, would not be retrieved now. Those displaced or effected by the time war would not get much help from him if he didn’t rest. He had centuries left in this body, he was sure. But it had been through more than any of his others had, and perhaps got more weary. He wasn’t tired, not in the sense that he needed sleep. But a cup (or pot) of tea, some music, and a good book would do him a universe of good. But with no arm chair in the console room to relax in, he would have to find another spot.

He headed for the corridor, feeling the very faint sound of doors shuffling about. To his left was now the library, and through the doorway he spotted a very enticing looking sofa. He smirked, took a few steps forward, and found the galley.

He made his tea, stole some biscuits from the pantry, stuffing one in his mouth before making his way back to the library.

He set the tray down on the table beside the couch, finishing his biscuit. Then he heard the shuffle of doors again, and he looked up to see a different one across the corridor. He moved closer to investigate, his eyes not what they used to be. He noted the Gallifreyan on the door first.

“You knew I was going to ask her to bring her door close so she could find me.” He commented, edging close to see what it was above her door. A couple feet closer, and he realized the gold marking was actually a rose. “You really like her, don’t you?” He smirked, glancing at the ceiling before eyeing the door once more.

The TARDIS didn’t dignify him with a response, but he really didn’t need one. There were few companions, if any that she treated well right from the get-go, and Rose Tyler seemed to be one of the elite.
He was making breakfast when she found him the next morning. The Doctor had stayed in the library quite a while, relaxing as he hadn’t for a very long time. By the time six hours had passed, he felt nearly like he’d slept the whole while. There was a spring in his step as he returned to the console room, getting under the control panel and seeing what might need sprucing up or repairing. He took a mental note of what was needed, then pulled himself up to set about feeding himself and his companion.

As he went about making a decent, Earth breakfast, his mind wandered to Gallifrey, the mess they made of the Universe, and what might happen should he actually find them. He could be heralded a hero, or forced to regenerate for his actions. But since they tried in an underhanded way to force a regeneration without his doing something awful, maybe they’d get more creative? He could see Rassilon wanting to do something terribly inhumane to him for taking away perceived glory. Or maybe the whole lot of them would come to their senses and realized what horrible things they’d done.

It wasn't likely.

So, instead, he focused on food. Eggs, sausage, bacon, hash browns, beans, anything he thought she might want to eat, he attempted to make. He didn't do too bad, all things considered.

"Smells lovely," Rose said, snapping him out of his random musings and partly startling him, though he didn’t flinch.

She was freshly showered, the scent of a clean, crisp fragrance lightly floating about her, her hair still a bit dampened. She was still in the same clothes from the day before, but even those seemed to be freshened up. "Didn't see the kitchen on the tour." Rose said as she came up to stand beside him.

"Galley, actually, since we are on a ship." He said with a smile, getting a plate and handing it to her. "By all means, dig in. There's plenty to go around." He said, stepping back and watching her to see if he could pick up on her preferences. She grinned shyly, studying everything, taking small samples with a fork before scooping it on her plate. "What is it? Don't trust that I can cook?" He teased, sliding around her to grab a plate for himself.

She grinned at him, her cheeks turning a deep pink. "'S not that. Just, I dunno, surprise you eat normal food. Well, not normal food. I mean it's normal food, just ...."

"Not alien, is that it?" He asked, arching a brow. "I will have you know, Rose, that I eat like you do. Or should I say, you eat like me? Time Lords did come first, after all, and I imagine my more advanced pallet will put me a league above you."

"You mean 'cause you've had alien food?" She said as she finished loading up her plate and bringing it to the small table.

"Well, technically, your food is alien to me." He said, choosing his own favorites among the selection. “But I have sampled delicacies from all over the Universe, and eventually you will, too.” He said as he returned to the table.

"Yeah, well, I'll try anything you make. These eggs are gorgeous. Best ones I've ever had, really."

"I also make a mean chocolate martini, though I don't recommend having one with your toast." He commented before making himself a cup of tea from the pot he'd placed on the table earlier. "I
know it's not exciting, but I thought your first trip could be a simple one. Back to the past on your own planet. You won't be too overwhelmed by the alieness of change, yet it's not hunting down plastic men in your neighborhood."

When she didn't reply he looked up, seeing her stare at him with a flabbergasted expression but excitement glittering in her eyes. "The past?" She eventually got out.

"Yes. The eighteen hundreds, to be more precise." He said, noting how she frowned and glanced down at her clothes. "There's a wardrobe. The TARDIS will show you where it is, and she'll likely even help you find something era appropriate. I would hate to see you cause a riot because you're dressed like a man yet are showing too much skin to be considered appropriate."

"I suppose you'd fit right in." She countered, though not unkindly.

"I would." He acknowledged. "Admittedly, probably better in the clothes I used to wear, but I am much more comfortable in this. And I have been known to change to fit the culture where needed."

Rose hummed and nodded, her mouth twisting in amusement that the Doctor figured likely came from her disbelief.

They finished their meal in silence, then parted ways in the corridor. As Rose went off to change, he set the coordinates and sent the TARDIS on her way.

They landed smoothly enough, though he glanced at the corridor for fear he'd hear her yelp or curse or both. When none came, he relaxed, looking at their location.

So, they were on the tail end of the 1860s instead of the beginning he shot for. And while he'd hoped for the romantic scenery of Naples, they'd landed in Cardiff. Still, he hadn't been that far off of the year, and it happened to be Christmas Eve, so that was bound to mean something. Humans, and himself he could admit, really did love the winter holiday.

Still, he thought he'd become a better driver than this. Missing his mark wasn't as common anymore, so what had he done wrong? He glanced about the console, trying to figure out if maybe the dials and levers shifted about when she changed the desktop.

The sound of shoes clicking on the floor alerted him to Rose's approach, and he darted his glance to the corridor to see her shadow.

"Didn't take long," He said, noting one of the dials he was pretty sure wasn't that important had inched its way lower. Or, maybe, he had just never paid attention to where it was before.

Rose cleared his throat, and he glanced up briefly, only to do a double take and stare.

"This alright?" She asked shyly, licking then sucking in her lips as he looked her over.

She was exquisite. He had traveled with many women, all beautiful in their own way. Some were even attractive by his standards, but it had been a long, long time since he felt his hearts flutter at the sight of a companion standing before him in anything. Charley was the last, and it seemed like so much time had passed since he had last seen her. But Rose, she was something else.

While acting or maybe even being shy, Rose had a confidence in that dress that she hadn't in her denim and sweats. The corset set off her feminine assets, but the dress itself was modest in a very complimentary plum. Her shoulders were bare beneath the cloak on her shoulders, signifying the dress not being perfectly accurate to the time period, but it could be passed off as the new French style should anyone ask. She'd pulled her hair back in loose, intricate knots that showed her slender
neck in all its glory. The earrings she'd replaced her large rings with drew attention back to it should the eye try to wander.

Not that his would, of course.

But still, she was ….

"You look beautiful." He said after what felt like too much time had passed. "Exquisite, if I were to be completely honest."

She giggled softly, a blush rising to her cheeks. She lifted the little hat in her hand to try and hide behind it, but her eyes kept darting over the brim as if she waited for him to add something less complimentary.

He extended his hand toward her instead.

Rose took it gingerly, seeming wary of him.

The Doctor's smile faltered at the first real sign of mistrust between them. She'd accepted his story of the Autons with ease, hadn't blinked when he revealed his alien nature to her. He’d held her hand a couple times already, and had found himself in a slightly compromising position in her living room, and she never said a word. Never flinched. But a compliment without an added fault seemed to throw her off.

She didn't hold on to him for long, stepping past him and heading toward the door.

"'S alright if I go out first?" She asked, gesturing to the exit. "Mean, you've done this before."

"Absolutely. Please, go ahead." He said, forcing himself to smile in spite of the strange shift.

The Rose he'd expected came back in full force, her tongue between her teeth as she smiled before darting for the door and opening it, stepping outside.

So, kindness made her wary, or at least kindness in compliments? His mind immediately went to the bumbling Mickey. He recalled how he constantly clung to her, how he begged her not to go. He remembered the hint of waver in Rose as she debated joining him because Mickey had clearly made her believe he needed her. But that was the thing, he needed her. He doubted, though could not rule out, Mickey being the reason for her reticence.

There was something else there, something much worse to make a woman as lovely as Rose retreat a bit into herself at a compliment. It would have to wait until later to solve. For now, there was an unknown problem of a different kind lurking about, waiting to be put right.
The Unquiet Dead pt 1

As Rose’s foot dipped into the snow, she giggled. Rose Tyler, chav from the estates, the nothing, the no one, had just put her foot into freshly fallen snow more than a hundred years before she was born. She looked at it in awe before stepping outside the TARDIS and looked around. She’d been to Cardiff a couple of times, and while it was unmistakably a different era, the roots for the Cardiff of her time already in place.

Rose could hear the Doctor coming out behind her as she looked around at the people dressed in their finery. Smiling so wide her face hurt, she admired the men in tailed coats and top hats, the women in gorgeous gowns and little hats. What’s more, she heard the shouts of ‘Happy Christmas’ being exchanged with head nods and small waves.

“It’s Christmas,” She said as the Doctor came up beside her.

“It is. Didn’t I mention that?”

“No.” She turned to him and shook her head. “It’s amazing.” He grinned, warm and sincere, his eyes sparkling with mirth at her reaction. “I mean, just think about it. Christmas, 1860s.”

“1869.”

“Christmas, 1869. Happens once, just once, and it’s gone. It’s finished. It’ll never happen again. Except for you.”

“True.” The Doctor replied. “I’ve been to more historical events in Earth’s history than you can imagine, sometimes more than once.”

“But this isn’t a historical event, is it? Just a day, a simple day. Christmas day, 1869. ‘S a hundred years before my mum was born. ‘S even before my grandparents, and here we are, standing in the street on a day long gone. You can go back and see days that are a hundred thousand sunsets ago.”

“And so long as you travel with me, so can you.” He said as he offered her his arm. “Now, are you ready to see what December 24th, 1869 has to offer?”

“I believe I am.” Rose replied, looping her arm through his and clinging tight.

A small voice in the back of her mind was warning her to keep a bit of distance, to not get so attached. It reminded her that this was not the first time she up and left the life she knew, boring as it was, for a man.

But, she reasoned with herself, I’m not childish enough to believe myself in love with him. This isn’t me running off with some bloke to prove we’re meant to be. It’s just traveling. It’s …. 

So what if he called her beautiful? Rose wasn’t stupid, she knew boys and men looked at her because she had something they wanted. She was fit, lush, a tail to chase, and nothing more.

Beautiful had been a new term, but wasn’t it just a more polite way to say all the rest? Her Mum had mentioned a time or two before she ran off with Jimmy that a pretty face like hers likely meant she didn’t need to get her A-levels. She was going to get them to prove something to her Mum, but then she went with Keisha and Shareen to an open mic and fell in love with an image. Well, perhaps not love, but definitely into foolishness.
Jimmy had done a lot of things, but he never called her beautiful. And it was that thought that finally shut up the voices in her head.

They walked through the streets with her hand on his arm, and Rose took it all in. She was looking at the scenes from old Christmas cards, except she was breathing the flake filled air, could smell the oil burning in the lamp posts, the heat of the flame within warming the metal and adding the evergreen wreaths to the scents surrounding her. The air was chilled, though her cloak kept the worst of it off.

She paused when the Doctor did, watching him pay the paper boy a bit too much as he collected the evening addition of the news. He held it as best he could while Rose continued to have her hand placed on his elbow. They continued to watch, the Doctor providing little snippets he read in the paper as he went.

“Oh, what’s this?” He said, stopping once more a little further down the road.

“What?” Rose asked, peering over at the paper.

The Doctor shifted it toward her, allowing her a better view, though she still didn’t know what he was looking at.

“Charles Dickens is doing a reading tonight at the theater just around the corner.” He smiled brightly as he folded the paper and tucked it under his arm. “We’re in for a treat, Rose.”

She smiled back, allowing him to tug her along at a slightly quicker pace before what he said finally clicked.

“Wait, Charles Dickens? Like, Christmas Carol, and Oliver Twist, that Charles Dickens? The Charles Dickens?”

“One in the same,” The Doctor replied, leading them around the corner and toward the theater. “1869, Rose!”

His enthusiasm was catching, even if the disbelief at the possibility of seeing such a famous soul was already making Rose giddy with anticipation. She’d thought of those old, worn paperbacks on the bookshelf in the flat that her mother refused to toss out. The few Dickens’ classics that were once her fathers before that awful accident. Rose had read them a couple times before Jimmy came along and convinced her that smarts wouldn’t actually get her far. He’d pointed out what it had done for the great Pete Tyler after all.

Alright, perhaps it wasn’t the last she heard of that little niggling voice. Because what had she done after he said that? Not pick up a proper book again, not until just a few months back when she attempted it once more. Fits of fancy, her mother said before she had promptly turned on the telly. And since Henrick’s was already giving “airs and graces”, Rose had put the book down to keep the tentative peace.

And then she ran off with an alien bloke to travel through time and space. Now she was going to hear Charles Dickens, one of the greats, read a story of his aloud, because she was in the past when he was still alive. The whole thing was just a bit much and incredible all the same. What would her mother say about it now?

It didn’t matter, when she ran into the TARDIS, she learned to put others wants and expectations regarding her promptly in the bin where it belonged.

They headed toward the mass of people filing in to the theater, and Rose glanced about while
waiting to get in.

Down the road, half in the shadows, stood a man with dark hair that seemed to be looking right at her. She could feel his eyes on her, knew for certain that he was making eye contact despite the distance, and the hairs on Rose’s arms began to stand on end. He smiled, one side lifting higher than the other, looking cocky, self-assured, and a bit dirty despite how he dressed like a gentleman. His build reminded her of a solider, though, which only made her that much more weary of him.

She turned her head sharply away, seeing they were closer than she had expected. Rose took a chance, glancing back at where the man was, and noticed he was gone.

She started to worry a bit, but it wasn’t possible that he was looking at her. Not really. But then, he didn’t really look like he was from this time, either. Something in the way he carried himself

Shaking her head, she let it go.

“Hello,” The Doctor said to the usher at the door as he withdrew something from his pocket. “My lady and I have balcony seats. Which way do we…?”

The usher took the black, leather billfold, brought it close to his eyes, and then nodded and handed it back. “The balcony you’re looking for is to the right, second level. Be the one dead center.”

“Thank you,” The Doctor said as he tucked the black billfold back in his pocket.

Rose peered over his shoulder, making sure the usher was adequately distracted and a few feet away before she asked, “What was that? How did you get us in?”

The Doctor smirked. “Psychic paper. Whatever I want people to see shows up on it. And, well, you tell someone it’s a ticket to the show, they’re going to assume that’s what it is, that that’s what they see. It’s quite simple.”

“’S a bit like stealing, though. I mean, what if there was already someone in the balcony?”

“Well that’s for the box office to deal with, isn’t it?” The Doctor replied mischievously. “Because obviously someone would have sold the balcony twice.”

Rose shook her head, doing her best to repress the threatening grin as he brought her to their seats. He waited until she was seated before coming around and taking the one to her right.

They had an excellent view of the stage, as well as the crowd below, and it warmed Rose’s heart to see so many people showed up despite the times. She couldn’t imagine a lot of people could spare the cost of the ticket in the day and age, though they all looked a little well to do. She knew her Mum would be going on about airs and graces right about now, not understanding what all the fuss was about. She could hear her in her mind rambling on about catching it on the telly, and did they really need to hear someone read the whole bloody book?

Not long after they were seated, the curtains on the stage below opened up, and out walked the man himself. Rose tried to remember exactly what those old sketches or photos of him on the back of her father’s paperbacks looked like, but seeing Charles Dickens in the flesh replaced any possible imagery she’d seen before.

He smiled, bowed, thanked the crowd, cleared his throat, and began. “Marley was dead: to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that. The register of his burial was signed by the clergyman, the clerk, the undertaker, and the chief mourner. Scrooge signed it: and Scrooge's name was good upon 'Change, for anything he chose to put his hand to. Old Marley was as dead as
a door-nail.”

Rose was lost to the timber of Charles Dickens’ voice, much deeper and more powerful than she would have imagined. The room was silent except for him, the room enraptured as the great author retold his tale for the room.

Rose couldn’t tell for certain how much time had actually gone by when she peeked up at the Doctor to see if he was as taken by the event as she was. He had, after all, been doing this for a while. At least, that’s what she presumed.

But the Doctor was focused on something other than Mister Dickens. His brow furrowed as he frowned, the Doctor’s gaze was directed on something in the audience. Confused, Rose scanned the people below a few times before she spotted it.

There was a blue, ethereal glow surrounding a little old lady.

“Oh, my lord! It looked … like that!” Mister Dickens decreed, and the crowd turned to older woman as she stood up. She opened her mouth, and a terrifying screech filled the room. Chaos erupted as people panicked, all rushing to escape.

Rose stood, about to do the same when the Doctor’s arm caught her around the waist.

“Wait.” He said, and Rose looked over her shoulder to see him looking for something. “This way, we need to get down there. Whatever that was, it’s not of Earth.” The Doctor let go of Rose’s waist and took her hand, pulling her the opposite direction from where they entered.

“Whaddya mean, not of Earth? That was alien?”

“Yes,” The Doctor replied without hesitation.

“Ghosts are aliens?” Rose replied.

“There are no such things as ghosts, Rose. It’s alien, a gaseous being, but I don’t know the species, and I won’t until we get a closer look.” He said as he pulled her toward a door. Fully expecting him to withdraw the sonic screwdriver, it surprised Rose when the Doctor let go of her hand, stepped forward, and gave the door a hard, swift kick.

He grabbed her hand, and they descended the stairs.

“Why didn’t you use your screwdriver?” Rose managed to ask.

“Wood door. The Sonic doesn’t do wood.” The Doctor replied

“Seriously?” Rose asked as they emerged to a backstage area.

Charles was silhouetted against the light, and in the air above the seating area zoomed balls of light that Rose would have assumed to be specters. They looked so like the spots of light in pictures people would swear were ghosts, as well as how ghosts were always portrayed in film.

It was both breath taking and terrifying to behold, the way they circled about, the very faint sound of something following them.

As she was about to ask the Doctor what they were, something in the seating area caught her eye, and she turned her attention toward it. A pudgy, bald man with a young maid made their way against the remaining crowd toward to old woman who was now slumped in her chair. Rose
frowned, glancing at the Doctor and Dickens to see if either of them were going to do anything.

“Mister Dickens, I ask you stay here and don’t move.” The Doctor said, his attention seeming too focused on the balls of light above to notice the duo in the midst of body-napping.

Without second guessing herself, and refusing to be as unhelpful as she’d been with the Autons, Rose picked up the skirts of her dress and bolted. There wasn’t any doubt that the old woman was likely key to whatever was happening, and if the old man and his maid knew something, she was going to get answers.

The pair, unfortunately, were a bit faster than she was. Carrying the old woman out as if she were nothing more than a bit of lumber, the old man and the maid were to the door before Rose could get to the row the old lady had been in.

“Doctor, they’re getting away,” Rose called over her shoulder, glimpsing he and Mister Dickens looking at her stunned.

She didn’t wait for them. Charging after the body snatchers, Rose saw the maid at the back of a carriage, looking around shiftily. The old man had just gone around to the front as Rose ran toward them.

“What are you doing?” She shouted at them, dropping her skirts so she could check the condition of the old woman, offer her comfort if need be once she was at the carriage.

“Oh, it’s such a tragedy, miss.” The maid started saying as Rose’s palm touched the old woman’s forehead. She was cold, as if nothing warm had ever been beneath the skin. She remembered when her grandfather passed, touching his face at the wake, and it felt exactly like that. As the maid continued, Rose took in the old woman’s bluish complexion. “Don’t worry yourself.” The maid said, clearly oblivious to Rose’s mounting horror. “Me and the master will deal with it. The fact is, this poor lady’s been taken with the brain fever and we have to get her to the infirmary.”

“She’d dead!” Rose turned to the maid. “My God, what did you do to ….”

An arm clamped around Rose, fingers clawing a bit roughly at her breast for a moment before a sweet-smelling cloth was pressed over her mouth and nose. Rose struggled, kicked, looked about for some sign of hope that she wasn’t about to join the old woman in what had to be a hearse.

As black spots clouded the edge of her vision, Rose caught sight of the Doctor running toward her, and Charles Dickens right behind him.

Then things went blissfully dark.

“Who are getting away?” Charles Dickens asked the Doctor as Rose ran out after a pair carrying the original host for whatever was in the air above them. “Is it the wag who would do such a thing?”
“No, just the ones who allowed such a thing to happen, to let things get this far.” The Doctor replied, watching as the balls of vapor disappeared into the lanterns. “Not just gaseous, but feed off gas. Need it to survive. Interesting.” He said to himself before hopping off the stage and charging out after Rose.

She wouldn’t have gotten far, no matter how fast she ran, and so it was with confidence that the Doctor barely went above speed normal for a human.

Still, when he emerged from the theater lobby and found her not immediately visible, a spark of panic flared inside his chest. He glanced up and down the street before a muffled cry across the way caught his attention. It took a moment for the Doctor to register that what he was seeing was Rose being attacked from behind by the man who carried out the old woman. The woman who acted as her accomplice was standing at the back of the hearse carriage with them, half trying to conceal the body of the old woman, half trying to block the attack on Rose from view.

Panic turned to anger, and the Doctor rushed toward them just as Rose went limp in the old man’s arms.

“Attacking women in the Cardiff streets?” The Doctor said harshly, causing the skeevy creature holding his companion to startle and nearly drop her. “I would say it isn’t good for business, but I think the way you mishandle the dearly departed is cause enough for people to want to run you out of town.”

“It’s not what it looks like.” The flustered man tried to say. “Honestly, she was just so … distraught over the sudden passing of her grandmother. I tried to comfort her, offer her a handkerchief, but she fainted.”

“Do you really think I would believe that?” The Doctor retorted. “Rose is with me, she was at the theater with me, and I can assure you with absolute certainty that that elderly woman is in no way her grandmother.” The Doctor stepped forward, scooping Rose’s legs up in one arm while wrapping his other around her just beneath where the fool was holding her up by the arm pits.

The man jumped back, letting go of Rose and appearing to debate whether it would be wise to run.

“And you, sir. I need you to explain yourself!” Charles’ voice came from over Doctor’s shoulder, sounding a bit winded. “What do you know about the hobgoblin? Projection on glass, I suppose? Who put you up to it?”

The Doctor had been so focused on getting to Rose that he hadn’t considered that Charles would follow him outside. But seeing the furious indignation on the author’s face tipped the Doctor to the possibility of an ally. Therefore, instead of asking the great Mr Dickens to kindly go back to the theater, the Doctor remained silent.

The balding man who had so poorly treated Rose flustered about with his hands, stumbling over words. Stuttering, mumbling but never saying anything of use.

“Please, Mister Sneed. He can help. He has a way about him. He can help the spirits if we let him.” The maid said to her boss, eyes darting to the Doctor. He smirked, wondering just how psychic the maid was.

That stopped Sneed from his spastic attempts at protests. He looked to the Doctor sheepishly. “You can help us, sir? It’s been right terrible for business, it has.”

All god humor caused by the young maid quickly vanished. “I think you’ve been spending too
much time with the dead, seeing as how you’ve seemed to have lost a chunk of your humanity and
decency. Worried about business, yet you would drug a young woman? I will help, but not you.”
The Doctor then turned to the maid. “I will be able to help the spirits, as you call them. From the
way you talk, I would say they must linger at the house?”

“Yes, sir.” The maid nodded. “There’s always been a little something about the house, but it’s been
more than that as of late. They seem to affect ….”

“Not here, girl.” Sneed snapped. The maid silenced immediately and bowed her head, clasping her
hands in front of her.

“Shall we take this conversation somewhere more comfortable then, Mister Sneed?” The Doctor
snapped, sneering a bit on the man’s name. “How about your lovely home. Go on, extend the
invitation, allow me to have a look. Otherwise, I may have to resort to going to the local law
enforcement. Mister Dickens here is witness to the attack you made on Rose, not to mention the
charges he could probably press against you for the chaos in the theater tonight. I wonder how
much business you would lose then?”

Sneed blustered about, glancing between the Doctor and Dickens before huffing. “Fine. But I’ve
got no room for all of you in my carriage, unless you want to ride in the back with the stiff.”

Dickens snorted and the Doctor scowled.

“You, Doctor, may bring your lady friend with you to my carriage.” Charles said, indicating his
own vehicle only a few feet down the road. “We can follow this, this man, to his residence.”

The Doctor nodded, turning and following Charles to the carriage.

The driver opened the door upon their arrival, and Charles waved the Doctor in first. As he settled
in his seat with Rose in his lap, the Doctor looked over the skin he could see. There were very faint
impressions of Sneed’s fingers where he pressed into Rose’s cheeks, keeping the gag to her mouth.
He leaned in, sniffing her skin, picking up on the sweet notes of chloroform around her mouth and
nose. There didn’t seem to be anything on her arms that hinted at further inflictions.

“Had the nave handled my wife in such a manner, Doctor, I do not believe I would have been quite
so lenient.” Charles said as the carriage started to move.

“She’s not my wife.” The Doctor replied, adjusting Rose so her head rested against his shoulder.

The scent of her hair caught him off guard. He was used to companions from her time smelling of
artificial fragrances, but Rose had lacked it. There was a whiff of something subtly sweet, like tea
with sugar or French macarons. There was a hint of something floral, delicate like lilacs but
without the overpowering aspect they tended to have. Arkytior, it was a hint of Arkytior. And of
course, pheromones. He’d picked up on the pheromones of all the female companions he’d taken
aboard, but he couldn’t recall them ever being so pleasant. Appealing, of course, there had been a
couple that were, but never were they so delightfully complementary.

Entranced as he was, he nearly missed the somewhat smug smirk that came over Charles.

“Not yet, perhaps?” Dickens asked.

The Doctor said nothing. How could he explain that he was friends with a nineteen-year-old girl
while visiting 1869, a time when Rose would never have been out alone with him without a
chaperon. And whatever Charles saw that drew such assumptions would hardly allow for him to
pass her off as a sister or niece.
Instead, he chose to remain silent. Cradling Rose against him, the Doctor looked out the window, watching the town pass by as they headed to the undertaker’s home.

As they started to slow, Rose moaned, stirring slightly against him. She nuzzled at his waist coat before opening her eyes and squinting at her surroundings.

“Wha?”

“How are you feeling, Rose?” The Doctor asked soothingly, stroking her arm with his free hand.

“’M alright.” Rose replied turning and spotting Charles on the other side of the carriage. She seemed to stare at him for a moment before she turned to the Doctor. “We’re in a coach thing with Charles Dickens.” She stated with some disbelief.

The Doctor chuckled. “Yes, we are.”

Rose looked down. “I’m in your lap.”

“Yes, you are.” The Doctor replied.

Rose’s cheeks colored as she slid off his lap, murmuring, “bit forward seeming, that.”

“He was there, Rose. He saw what that man did to you.” The Doctor assured.

“Right.” She said, putting a hand to her forehead and rubbing at her brow. “What happened, then?”

“We’re going to visit Mister Sneed and find out what problems plague the deplorable man for him to believe it is respectable to use a corpse in a parlor trick.” Charles replied, his disgust clear in his tone and sneer.

Rose stiffened, her eyes darkening a bit as her brow furrowed. “Right.” She said, clearing her throat. “Got lots of ’splaining to do, that man.”

The Doctor chuckled quietly to himself, admiring the fieriness of his companion.

The carriage slowed, and continued on at a calmer pace for a few minutes before it picked up speed for a short while and came to a complete stop.

The driver opened the door, and Charles stepped out first before the Doctor slid out and then helped Rose to the ground. They glanced around, spotting the home of the undertaker on the other side of the carriage, and made their way to the door as a group.

The lights flickered strangely through the windows, giving the Doctor pause before he escorted Rose by the arm up the stairs and knocked on the door. When no one answered, he tried again. The light through the window flickered and flared again.

“That’s not right.” The Doctor said, placing a hand on the door knock and turning it. The door opened, and he cautiously stepped over the threshold first.

There was a strange feeling in the room, not quite like telepathy, but more the essence of minds. Squinting about in the strange lighting, the Doctor looked around, trying to see where the feeling might have been stemming from. When it didn’t seem forthcoming by sight, he strained to listen. His sense of hearing lead him to the walls, and he pressed his ear against it, giving it all his focus. “There’s something in the gas pipes.” He said.

“What, like a snake? No, can’t be right. Nothing’d be able to live in it.” Rose thought out loud.
The Doctor gave her a smirk. “No, no carbon-based life form would. A gaseous life form, however . . .”

He was cut off by Mister Sneed’s sharply spoken, “Stay back, girl, for God’s sake,” coming from down the hall.

The Doctor took off, vaguely aware of Rose and Charles following close behind him. He turned the corner, and found the old lady once more reanimated, and this time with a younger man who bore a vague familial resemblance, even in death. Or, perhaps, maybe death enhanced it.

Mister Sneed and his maid quickly moved behind the Doctor, and while the Time Lord could understand the latter, it only cemented the former as a coward in his mind. Especially as he placed himself behind the maid was well.

“They just started moaning not long after we put the old lady back in her coffin. We came down to lock ‘em in but they were already to the door.” Sneed explained, and the Doctor’s lip curled a bit involuntarily.

He then realized that after they arrived, the two corpses ceased their pursuit and were looking to him expectantly.

“It’s a prank.” Charles said as the Doctor tried to assess what they were expecting from him. “It must be, we’re under some mesmeric influence.”

“I’m afraid we aren’t, Charles.” The Doctor replied, taking a tiny step closer to the two corpses. “My name’s the Doctor, and I’m here to help in any way I can. Who are you, what do you need?”

“We’re failing.” A voice came from the young man’s mouth that didn’t fit. It was childlike, perhaps even feminine, and ethereal. “Open the rift, we’re dying. Trapped in this form, cannot sustain, help us.”

Before the Doctor could ask any more of the voice, the corpses tilted their head toward the ceiling with their mouths open. A blue, misty glow erupted from each open mouth, accompanied by a wail, and then the corpses fell to the floor.

The Doctor looked at the bodies, trying to go through the endless catalogue of gaseous species in his mind and figure out who they could have encountered.

“Need our help, don’t they?” Rose asked quietly as she came up beside him, ceasing his perusing of his mental catalogue. “You said we were going to help right wrongs from your time war. This one of them?”

“I don’t know, but it’s likely.” The Doctor stated, turning toward her. “I think we need to speak to Mister Sneed and his maid in order to find out more.”

“Yeah,” Rose said, turning her fierce gaze at the small, sniveling man. “Got a few words I wanna say to him myself.”
There were many men Rose had wanted to stand up to in her life that she hadn’t. She could count about five of her mum’s boyfriends off the top of her head that needed a good tongue lashing and probable a smack. Then there was Jimmy, of course. Also Darren Pye, a vicious bully from the estates who made Jimmy look like a saint by comparison.

And it wasn’t that Rose didn’t have a back bone, or that she was unable to stand up for herself, but she had been a bit cowed by the abusive ass she ran away with. Much as she hated to admit it, it was being back on the estates, surrounded by the very people Jimmy tried to keep her from, that gave her back her confidence. She also suspected, from the way he was letting her have a go at the tiny man in the seat before her, that the Doctor would encourage this side of her as well. His small smirk was a sure sign he at least found it amusing.

“You’re a right sorry git, you are.” Rose laid into Sneed, who looked all the world like a pouty child who’d been caught doing something they knew they shouldn’t have. “First, you drug me, and don’t think I didn’t feel your hands having a quick wander, you dirty old man. Trying to hold me down before the Doctor got there and stopped you. ‘Bout to kidnap me, weren’t ya?”

“I will not be spoken to like this!” Sneed tried to interrupt, glancing at the Doctor as if he would get help.

“I’ll talk to ya how I like, you despicable lil’ man. Got the feeling you would have locked me up in the room with those zombies and hoped they’d off me before anyone came looking. What would you have said happened to me, eh? Some sad, tragic accident? Well, go on. Talk!”

“It’s not my fault,” Sneed blustered, and Rose crossed her arms and arched a brow. He whined like a naughty does when they’re caught, trying to weasel their way out of trouble. “It’s the house!” He gestured about. “It always had a reputation. Haunted. But I never had much bother until a few months back, and then the stiffs…”

At this, Charles Dickens sneered and huffed in distaste, shaking his head slightly at the little man. Sneed’s cheeks colored. “I mean, the dear departed.” He corrected. “They started getting restless.”

“Tommyrot.” Dickens countered, mimicking Rose’s stance as he leaned on the opposite side of the fireplace mantel from the Doctor.

“You witnessed it.” Sneed countered. “Can’t keep the beggars down, sir. They walk, and it’s the queerest thing that they hang on to scraps of what they would have done in life. One old fella who used to be a sexton almost walked into his own memorial service! Just like the old lady going to your performance, sir! Just as she planned. Her grandson, the poor boy in with her now, said she was going on about it for a time.”

“Morbid fancy.” Dickens retorted, shaking his head.

Rose narrowed her eyes in thought as the Doctor said, “Oh, Charles, you saw for yourself that she was there.”

“I saw nothing but an illusion.” Dickens countered, shifting so he could turn to the Doctor.
“What about the grandson?” Rose asked. “Why hasn’t he gone mucking about in the streets?”

“Not sure.” Sneed replied with a shrug. “He was quite attached to the old lady. Perhaps he doesn’t have anywhere else he wants to be?”

“What about the gas?” The Doctor asked, gesturing to the lights before draining his tea cup and setting it aside. It was then that Rose realized that the maid, Gwyneth, had placed a cup on the side table for her.

Rose sat in the chair, taking a sip of the perfectly made cup as she looked between the Doctor and Sneed.

“How long have the gas lights been affect?” The Doctor continued.

“That’s new, sir. Never seen anything like that.” Sneed replied.

The Doctor’s brow wrinkled, and his eyes shifted to the floor. “That means the rift here is getting stronger, wider. It’s big enough that something’s been sneaking through.”

“What’s the rift?” Rose asked.

“A weak point in time and space. I imagine it’s the after effects of a temporal weapon as I don’t ever recall their being one here before. And unfortunately for Mister Sneed, it opened under his house. But it takes time for it to grow to the size it’s like at now, which means its actual start point was at least a decade or two back. Possibly longer. Which would explain why they said the place was haunted. When rifts happen, it’s usually the cause of ghost stories.”

“That’s how I got the house so cheap!” Sneed said eagerly. “Stories going back generations. Echos in the dark, queer songs in the air and the feeling like a shadow passing over your soul.” He paused, looking thoughtful if not a bit guilty for the first time all evening. “Mind you, truth be told, it’s been good for business. Just what people expect from a gloomy old trade like mine.”

“Well, least you found a bright side.” Rose sighed.

Sneed gave a quirk of the lips. “I am sorry about what I did to you, Miss. I was raised as a proper gentleman.”

Rose took a sip of her tea and tried to get a read on the man. She noted the Doctor leaving the room, and that Mister Dickens wasn’t there any longer either. Gwyneth seemed to be lingering near the tea service a bit longer than what was likely necessary.

Rose returned her gaze to an earnest seeming Mister Sneed, and she leaned forward while holding his eye. “Keep your hands to yourself otherwise, I trust?” Rose asked. “Not taking advantage of those in your service or anything?”

Sneed seemed to pale, and he quickly shook his head. “No, Miss.”

“Best not be,” Rose said as she leaned back, catching Gwyneth leaving the sitting area with the tea service. “Pardon me, Mister Sneed, but you understand if I don’t stick around, what with the Doctor and Mister Dickens gone.” She said as she got to her feet.

Sneed glanced around, only just realizing they were alone. “No, that wouldn’t be proper.” He agreed, bowing his head as Rose left. Standing up to a little man who thought himself better than he was had been one thing, still being alone with him was another thing altogether. Might’ve said he was raised a gentlemen, but he’d yet to show he was one.
Once out of the room, a slight dilemma presented itself. She wasn’t sure where the Doctor went off to, and if she were honest with herself, she probably wouldn’t want to be there anyway. She had a hunch that it was in the room where the bodies were being kept, and Rose knew she didn’t want to look at a pair of corpses who had murder in their dead eyes not an hour ago.

Gwyneth, though, had headed toward the kitchen. And with a man like Sneed hovering about, the poor thing probably could use some help, and maybe a girl friend to chat to.

So, without further consideration, Rose went to the kitchens.

It was as Sneed made his apologies that the Doctor noted Charles slipped out. There was no doubt where he was going, and the Doctor had to admit that, had he not been privy to all that he knew, he would have assumed there was some trick behind the rise of the dead as well. Charles seemed adamant that everyone who believed the truth was a fool, and the Doctor just knew the author had set out to prove just that.

He could understand the whole seeing is believing concept the humans typically had, especially in this era when science was becoming the norm and superstition was falling to the wayside. But he doubted Dickens would have remained so if he’d paid attention to the presentation of the skills that Gwyneth provided as they all stood or sat in the sitting room.

It was as Rose was tearing in and dressing down the disgraceful little man that Gwyneth had gone about serving tea. The Doctor had half watched her as well, noting that she wasn’t just dressing up Sneed’s cup, but everyone’s.

“Here’s your tea, sir. Splash of milk, just how you like it.” She had said as she handed him the tea cup she’d just prepared. And it was exactly how he liked it. He’d then watched Dickens, and Rose, to see if either of them would turn their nose at the cup presented to them or note that Gwyneth had somehow known their preferences without asking. Neither did, though he could understand Rose not having really having the presence of mind to note such things. Charles, though, should have noticed as it was highly unlikely that Gwyn would know how the man took his tea.

He didn’t, though. Charles didn’t so much as do a double take as he drank. Too focused, the Doctor wagered, on the incredulousness of Sneeds words.

He found the wordsmith patting the sides and interior of the coffin of the young man when he entered the room. The Doctor watched the puzzled Charles for a few more moments before asking, “Are you checking for strings?”

Charles glanced over at him. “Wires, perhaps?” He replied thoughtfully. “There must be some mechanism behind this fraud.”

“Why are you so convinced it’s a fraud?” The Doctor asked as he went to stand at Charles’ side. He put a hand on the author’s shoulder. “You are Charles Dickens. You have one of the best minds in the world. You created Bob Marley, the ghosts of Christmas past, present, and future. You saw the beings of gas escape from the bodies before they collapsed.”

“I cannot accept that.” Charles countered.
“But how can’t you? You know that when a body breaks down it produces gas. And the beings are gaseous, yes? So what better way for them to move about in a corporal form? It’s a bit disturbing, of course, and I think I know how to communicate with them to find out what they want or need, but even you have to admit that what you see is the truth. There are no tricks here.”

Charles looked like he wanted to argue, but then thought better of it.

“I’ve always railed against the fantasies.” Charles said, and the Doctor’s lips quirked a bit. “Oh, I loved an illusion as much as the next man, reveled in them. But that’s what they were, illusions. The real world is something else, and I dedicated myself to that. Injustices, social causes, I hoped that I was a force for good. Now you tell me that the real world is a realm of specters and jack o’ lanterns. In which case, have I wasted my brief span here, Doctor? Has it all been for nothing?”

“No,” The Doctor said firmly. “Every human life has value, and yours is, admittedly, much greater than some. For many people and in many cases, you’re are right in your perception of the world. They don’t see gaseous beings escaping from bodies like departed souls. They don’t see machines like pepper pots out to destroy their lives. They don’t see plastic people coming to life and attacking shoppers.” Charles furrowed his brow, and the Doctor shook his head, waving any questions away. “My point, Charles, is that you had every right to think the way you have. But now that you know the truth, you need to expand your way of thinking. Believe in what you thought was impossible.” He sighed. “And if you can’t do that entirely, then at least set aside your beliefs long enough to join us for what needs to be done here tonight.”

“And what needs to be done?” Charles asked, cautiously but curiously.

The Doctor grinned. “We’re going to communicate with them. But first, I need to find Gwyn.”

The Doctor made his way through Sneed’s home to the kitchens, catching the lilt of Rose’s voice paired with the heavy accent that Gwyn had. He glimpsed them together at the sink, Rose dressed in her finery, appearing all the world a lady of the time, and yet she was holding a rag. She was helping Gwyneth, and since she had no idea what he was planning, that meant she sought out the young maid on her own.

He paused in the doorway, realizing they were talking as though they were friends, equals, and the Doctor smiled. How long had it been since he had a companion who wouldn’t have hesitated to give a hand to the help? Lucie, probably. But then, Lucie was from the working class of her time, much like Rose.

“I don’t know, must’ve been the Doctor.” Gwyneth said with a shy fluster, avoiding looking at Rose. The Doctor put aside his request for a moment longer, lingering in the doorway to see where the conversation would go.

“Never told him.” Rose said, a mix of suspicious and sadness. “My Dad died years back, didn’t even know him, really. Just a baby when he passed.”

A fact The Doctor filed away.
“But you’ve been thinking about him lately, more than ever.” Gwyneth said with certainty.

Rose nodded, twisting the dishcloth in her hands. She bit her lip, and he waited her out, curious what she would have to say about Gwyn’s gift. “How do you know all this, then?” Rose asked.

Gwyneth waved it off. “Mister Sneed says I think too much. I’m all alone down here. I bet you’ve got dozens of servants, haven’t you miss?”

Rose snorted in a very unlady-like way, but it didn’t seem uncouth. She added a bit of a chuckle on the end as she shook her head. “No, no servants where I’m from.”

Gwyn’s face, which had been lit with mirth, suddenly became serious with a faraway look to her eyes. “And you’ve come such a long way.” She said, her voice not quite the same as it usually was. She sounded partly monotone now, as though she were only half aware. The Doctor stepped into the room, but neither woman noticed. “You’re from London,” Gwyn continued, “I’ve seen London in drawings, but never like that. All those people rushing about, half naked, for shame. And the noise … and the metal boxes racing past. And the birds in the sky, they’re metal as well. Metal birds with people in them. People flying. And you, you’ve flown so far, further than the rest. The things you will see, red planets and golden lights, the big, bad wolf ….” She stumbled back into the counter behind her, and Rose stood still, tense with fright. “I’m sorry, I’m sorry miss.” Gwyneth said as she seemed to catch her breath.

“S’allright.” Rose replied, taking a small step forward to the poor girl. She reached out, trying to offer comfort, and the little act did something to the Doctor’s soul. A balm felt too strong a term, but it certainly warmed him.

“I can’t help it,” Gwyn said in a pleading tone. “Ever since I was a little girl. My mum said I had the sight, she told me to hide it.”

“But you can’t, can you Gwyn?” The Doctor asked, causing both girls to startle. He headed toward them, placing a hand on Rose’s lower back as he spoke to Gwyneth. The maid shook her head as she caught his eye. “It’s how you knew how everyone took their tea, how Rose comes from the future. It wasn’t so bad as a young girl, but I suspect it’s gotten worse recently, hasn’t it?”

Gwyneth nodded. “Every night, sir, voices in my head.”

“I think I know why. It’s a possibility that you do have a slight psychic tendency. There are many humans who do have one, but I believe yours has been heightened by growing up on the rift.” He dropped his hand from Rose’s back and shifted slightly closer to Gwyneth. “I believe your awakened talent, paired with having been so closely linked to the rift, has made you become a part of it.”

“I’ve tried to make sense of it,” Gwyneth said as she ducked her head. “Consulted with spiritualists, table wrappers, all sorts.”

He gently took one of her hands and held it in both of his. When she lifted her eyes to his, he offered a gentle smile. “There is no shame in that, Gwyn. I want you to know with absolute certainty that there is no shame in seeking out understanding any way you can.”

“But they’re unholy, sir.” She said, a bit confused, and the Doctor chuckled.

He glanced over at Rose who watched them curiously, then turned back to Gwyneth. “Unholy, or not, you did what you thought you had to. And now, having been through the practices, you can lead us through one. You are a key to the rift, Gwyneth, and I fully believe you can connect us to
your specters in order for us to speak to them, find out what they need.”

“Doctor?” Rose asked. “What are you on about?”

“Gwyneth is going to lead us in a seance.” He replied.

Rose stared at him blankly. “You mean like playing with an Ouija board?”

“A what, miss?” Gwyneth frowned. “Don’t think I’ve heard tell of what that is.”

“Because it won’t be around for another twenty years.” The Doctor said, turning back to Rose. “Seances are real, in some forms.” He paused, mouth opened and ready to say what was on the tip of his tongue and then thought better of it. Turning to Gwyn once more, he gave her a grin. “Gwyneth, could you kindly prepare a space for us to have the seance? And get Mister Sneed and Mister Dickens in there as well?”

“Right away, sir.” She said with a curtsy. “I’ll ready the parlor, won’t be long.” She hurried away, leaving them alone in the kitchen.

The Doctor took Rose’s hand and led her by the sink where Gwyn had been doing the washing up earlier. He glanced to the door, insuring Gwyneth wasn’t near, before he explained more to Rose. “Seances are real in that, in conditions like these, one can communicate with another being through the rift. They don’t allow communication for the deceased, like many believe, but it would feel like it. Many of the beings communicated with are either highly telepathic, or gaseous like the lot we’re dealing with now.”

“So, you aren’t just pullin’ one over on her, then?” Rose asked.

“No,” The Doctor assured, squeezing her hand gently. A hand he’d only just realized he was still holding on to. Gently letting it go, he said, “I promise, Rose, it’s not like that at all.”

“’Kay,” She nodded once. “Trust you on this. Gwyn’s a nice girl, and she’s been picked on enough in life, it seems, for this thing she’s got that she can’t even control.”

The Doctor watched as Rose grew more defensive and passionate over the way Gwyn was treated, and recalled what she was like giving ol’ Sneed a piece of her mind. She was ferocious, wild, stunning, and loyal seeming, much like … well, like a wolf.

A bad wolf? For some reason, those words sent a shiver down his spine that was as pleasant as it was disconcerting. There was an echo in his time sense that he couldn’t quite latch on to, just out of reach, that held the answer to it.

When he realized Rose was frowning at him, looking all the world ready to ask what was wrong, he shook it off and offered her a grin. “Come on,” he said, “Let’s go summon some gaseous beings.”

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Rose was absolutely insistent that she not sit next to Mister Sneed, and she was eternally grateful
when the Doctor coached Charles Dickens to sit on her right as she placed the Doctor on her left. Sneed had pouted as he placed himself next to Gwyneth, and Rose had wished she’d kept her cloak handy as she caught Sneed sneaking peeks at her cleavage. Honestly, was it any wonder she didn’t want the despicable man anywhere near her?

Gwyneth drew her attention away from him when she shifted about. Rose knew she was nervous, and maybe a bit uncomfortable doing this. There was the odd one here and there on the estate that were still quite religious, signing the cross over themselves just passing the gothic teens on the streets. Rose imagined doing a seance and attempting to summon spirits would have them in a frenzy. It was actually sort of too bad that the Doctor wasn’t more firm with Gwyn that they were actually attempting to talk to aliens. Might’ve helped her a little.

“This is how Madam Mortlock summons those from the Land of Mists,” Gwyneth said as she settled at what oddly seemed like the head of a round table. She placed her hands out to either side of her, palm up, eyes focused on the candles lit in the center of the table. “Come,” Gwyneth said. “We must all join hands.”

“I can’t take part in this!” Charles stood abruptly, his bluster not seeming as strong as he tried to project it.

“Charles, please, be reasonable.” The Doctor said calmly, a hint of tease in his smirk. “If this really is nonsense, then you can mock us all you’d like afterward. But, if by chance it is real, and we can communicate with those we seek out, then you will have a wealth of new experience.” The Doctor’s mouth stretched a little wider in amusement, but there was something sad in his eyes that Rose didn’t quite understand. “Just think of the inspiration such an event could stir for your writing.”

That settled Charles, resignation appearing in the warning glint of his eyes. He sat, followed the lead of Gwyneth, and offered a hand for Rose to hold.

She took it, offering the Charles a bit of comfort in the form a slight squeeze. It caused a twitch of his lips, as if he understood that Rose was just as out of her element as he was out of his.

Aliens were a new concept as it was, and though the Doctor explained how the seance actually worked, throwing away the skepticism was difficult.

His cool hand captured her free one over the table, and Rose turned her head sharply toward him at the contact. It was needed, expected, but still surprised her. It wasn’t that there was a shock of something to her system, a rush in her veins filled with adrenaline and set to release endorphins. It was that it felt incredibly and perfectly natural to be holding this alien man’s hand, their palms and fingers molding just so in their grip that it was like settling into memory foam and capturing that perfect fit.

She turned away from his reassuring smile, deciding then and there that she was a bit crazy. She had done it again, despite what she was trying to coax herself to believe otherwise. She’d ran away with a strange man, and was now imagining feelings and chemistry that wasn’t really there. She took a breath, looking to the table before turning her attention to Gwyneth.

The knowing amusement in the young maid’s face didn’t do much to settle Rose, but Gwyneth sobered before anything could be dwelt on.

“Go ahead, Gwyneth, if you’re ready.” The Doctor said, tilting his head to the girl on his left.

Gwyneth nodded, then looked to the ceiling. “Speak to us. Are you there? Spirits? Come. Speak to
us that we may relieve your burden.”

There was a faint murmuring that Rose couldn’t place. She glanced about the table, only realizing a moment later that the tone was too soft and childlike for it to have been any of the men at the table. She looked above her, inspecting the ceiling for something she was positive she’d see even if she didn’t know what it was she would witness.

“Can you hear that?” Rose asked the table before she noted the way Gwyn’s eyes were partly rolled back, and her skin paled significantly.

“Nothing can happen; this is sheer folly.” Charles assured.

“Look at her and say that.” Rose retorted, tilting her head toward Gwyneth.

“I feel them!” The maid exclaimed.

“What’re they saying?” Rose asked, unable to help herself. She looked about the room again and noticed the mist forming over their heads.

“They aren’t able to get through quite yet.” The Doctor said. “Gwyn, you must reach deeper, seek them out. You can do it, I know you can. Your link with them is already so strong.”

Gwyneth’s face contorted in pain, her head dipping as the mist in the room swirled more thickly about them. Suddenly, it stopped, and Gwyneth’s head snapped up as her eyes appeared vacant. “Yes.” She said, her voice not quite her own.

The mist formed three figures behind her, and they looked so much like children that Rose could have easily believed that’s what they were had it not been for her experience with living shop dummies. After all, these beings were alien, and if little green men weren’t the norm as thought, then anything was possible.

“Great God,” Sneed bumbled. “Spirits from the other side!”

“More like the other side of the universe.” The Doctor countered.

“Pity us,” The three ethereal beings said. “Pity the Gelth, there is so little time, help us.”

“What do you need?” The Doctor asked.

“The rift. Take the girl to the rift, make the bridge.”

“Why?” The Doctor asked the beings. “Why do you need to come to this planet, this time?”

“We are so very few. The last of our kind, we face extinction.” They replied.

“I know a bit what that feels like.” The Doctor mumbled. “Alright, what happened to your people that have you facing extinction?” The Doctor asked.

“The war.”

“War? What war?” Charles asked.

Rose had been so enraptured by the conversation between the Doctor and the Gelth that she had nearly forgotten there were others in the room before he spoke.

“The Time War.” The Gelth said, and Rose felt the grip the Doctor had on her hand tighten. “The
whole Universe convulsed. The Time War raged invisible to smaller species, but devastating to higher forms. Our bodies wasted away. We’re trapped in this gaseous state.”

“That doesn’t really explain why you feel the need to invade this world.” The Doctor half ground out.

“We want to stand tall, to feel sunlight, to live again. We need physical form, and your dead are abundant. They’re going to waste, give them to us.” The Gelth pleaded, and Rose shuddered at the imagery.

“We can’t.” She said.

“You can.” The Gelth countered. “Open the rift, let the Gelth through. We’re dying, help us! Pity the Gelth.”

They wailed, and Gwyneth collapsed forward on the table.

The Doctor broke the circle and immediately went to Gwyneth, pulling her off the table as he pulled out the sonic from his coat. He scanned her, or at least that’s what Rose assumed, and he looked at the tool in his hand before re-pocketing it. “She’s fine, just over exhausted. We should move her somewhere more comfortable.” He said, shifting to the side where he could pick her up in his arms and carry her somewhere.

“To the parlor, I think.” Sneed instructed as he stood up, waving the Doctor toward the nearest doorway.

“All true.” Charles said, pulling Rose back to the present. He remained seated, stunned, staring at the wall as though he saw something else entirely. “It’s all true.”

“You alright?” She asked, tightening the grip she still had on his hand.

It seemed to snap him out of it, and Charles pulled his hand away as he gave her a flustered grin. “I’m sure I will be.” He assured, patting her arm and rising to his feet.

Rose did the same and followed him out of the room and down the hall to where the Doctor and Sneed had brought Gwyneth. She was lying on the divan, propped up just so by a cushion and the arm, looking as though she merely stretched out for a kip. The Doctor was leaning against the wall, seeming deep in thought as he looked into the flames of the fireplace. Gwyneth had been placed on the divan, Sneed sitting at the small table and sipping a cup of tea that Rose could tell had been heavily spiked with the brandy sitting nearby.

“What are you going to do, Doctor?” Rose asked, moving toward him.

“I’m not sure.” The Doctor eventually replied, his eyes darting about as if comparing two things right in front of him. He tapped his lip a moment before rubbing the bridge of his nose. “I need to set right what the Time Lords did, there’s nothing else for it. But this… I’m not sure if this was something … They were right. The Time War was invisible to smaller species, you lot for example.”

“Oi.” Rose snapped, and he grinned before looking at her.

“I don’t mean that in an offensive way, Rose. It’s simple the truth. You are what they call a level five planet, just starting to develop. You’ve only been bipeds walking about for a few million years. You’re not even near the technological levels other, more advanced planets are at currently even a thousand years into your own future. You haven’t been affected by the war other than
having its refugees trying to seek out your planet for its own nefarious purposes. I’m not sure what it is, exactly, about Earth that attracts them so much.

“But the Gelth… there is an extremely small chance that the Time War was what actually destroyed their physical forms. The Gelth aren’t familiar to me, so for all I know they’ve never had a physical form and only just know what it’s like to have one after inhabiting the dead here in Mister Sneed’s mortuary. If they did have physical form, and the Time War was the cause of its loss, they would never know, because to them it would never have been.”

“But they spoke of feeling the sun. Of standing tall.” Charles said as he moved to stand beside the Doctor.

The Doctor stood straighter, hands gesturing as he spoke. “Yes, but there are surface memories lingering in the brain post-mortem. Have to be, it was said before that the departed would go about their lives or attend events that resonated with them in life. Your reading, for instance. So, it’s possible that the Gelth got hints of what it felt like to feel the sun on skin, to have physical presence. Or, perhaps, there is enough connection with the body they inhabit to feel those things themselves. My point is, I’m at a moral dilemma. Do we allow them to inhabit the dead? Or do we let them die out, as they say they are.”

“If they lost their physical forms than they can’t…. ” Sneed trailed off, glancing at Rose and blushing. “There is a reason that they are dying.”

“If you’re thinking along the lines of reproduction, I’m afraid that’s where you’d be surprised to learn that not every species uses intercourse to carry on.”

That made Sneed’s cheeks deepen in color, and Rose couldn’t help but snicker for a moment before remembering the topic they had been discussing beforehand.

“Doctor, we can’t let them take over human bodies. ‘S wrong.”

“That’s the dilemma I face, Rose. Do I let them in, inhabit a few of the more recently deceased until a solution is made? Or do I get Gwyneth to contact the Gelth and somehow find a way to bring them through and into the TARDIS, take them to a place where they can thrive. They never said if their planet was destroyed, but perhaps it was. Maybe that’s why they are stuck in the rift?”

“But to let them do that, it’s immoral.” Rose replied.

“Is it?” The Doctor asked honestly, with no bite to his words. “My people, we burn our dead. Our TNA is precious, and another species getting a hold of it could cause bad things, so we don’t take chances.”

A groan from the divan interrupted the conversation, and Rose turned to see Gwyneth stirring. She went to the side table and poured a cup of water, offering it to Gwyn as she knelt beside her head.

“It’s alright,” Rose comforted, brushing a few fine hairs off Gwyneth’s forehead as the woman opened her eyes slowly.

“My angels, miss? They came, didn’t they?”

“They did, yeah.” Rose replied, forcing a smile.

“They need me.” Gwyneth stated.

“They do,” The Doctor said, “Though I’m not entirely sure it’s an aid you or any of us can properly
Gwyneth sat up, and Rose handed her the cup of water. “Drink slow,” She cautioned quietly.

As Gwyneth drank, Sneed turned to the Doctor. “I’m not sure I’ve followed any of this. What did you say they were, Doctor?”

“Aliens,” The Doctor said. “Gaseous beings that are too weak to hold form in your atmosphere, so they hide in the gas pipes.”

“And why do they need the girl?” Charles asked, face scrunched as in confusion.

“Gwyneth is perfectly in tune with the rift, and therefore they can communicate through her. It came about from her living on it, and so in some ways, becoming a part of it. Like with the seance, I believe Gwyn can open the rift and make a bridge for us to better speak with them.”

“Incredible.” Charles said, shaking his head in awe. “Ghosts that are not ghosts, but beings from another world who can only exist in our world by inhabiting cadavers.”

“But should we let them?” The Doctor cautioned. “Rose has a point, in a way. Immoral as it may be, it could also cause a lot of problems for those who have known these bodies as people in life. Imagine walking down the street and seeing what was once your grandmother, your wife, maybe even your child walking about once more. Imagine you stumbled across a bloke you had hoped to see die, and he had, only to be risen from the dead. When someone is gone, we can be irrational, try everything to get them back even when we know we can’t, or shouldn’t. It would be pandemonium, and worse, imagine how the living would suffer at the thought that someone they did love no longer knows them?”

“But my angels, Sir, they need me.” Gwyneth protested.

“Gwyneth, I don’t think you understand.” Rose said gently, sitting beside the woman on the divan and rubbing soothing circles on her back.

“You would say that, miss. It’s very clear inside your head that you think I’m stupid.”

“No, not stupid. Just … ‘s complicated, ya see. It’s not just helping the Gelth, your angels, it’s …”

“It’s not complicated at all, miss. The angels need me, and I know my own mind. If I can help them, then I will.”

Rose looked to the Doctor, and he seemed as torn as she felt about the whole thing.

He gave a heavy sigh. “It’s the dead of night, the streets will be empty. We could allow them through, take up the bodies they need to, and Rose and I can bring them to a safe place.”

“What about the families? Those people will be expecting to see their loved ones, yeah?” Rose asked. “Might be a bit complicated to explain why they can’t have their final goodbyes.”

“But it’s winter, madam.” Sneed said. “Ground is frozen, hard to bury the dead when you can’t get a shovel through. Most of the stiffs down below are long past their goodbyes and waiting for burial. Just gotta throw an empty coffin in there, and you’re set.”

“Your empathy and compassion for those who have passed on or loved someone who has knows no bounds, Mister Sneed.” The Doctor replied sarcastically. He looked to Rose. “I know, it feels wrong to me, too. But I don’t see what else we can do.” He then turned back to Mister Sneed. “We
need to find the rift, and we’ll find that in the weakest point of the house. Tell me, Mister Sneed, where have most of the ghosts been seen?”

Sneed shrugged. “That would be the morgue.” He said without preamble.

“No chance you were gonna say the gazebo, was there?” Rose mumbled.

The Doctor spared her a sympathetic grin, though she swore he saw his chest vibrating as if he was trying not to laugh at her. Her discomfort at the thought of heading into a basement full of bodies eased a bit at his silent, wordless tease, and she shook her heard before helping Gwyneth to her feet.

“Alright,” She said, “let’s get this over with.”

They entered the morgue en masse, and Rose stayed as near to the Doctor as she could. Charles, it seemed, felt a bit protective of her in his own way and stayed near, though at a respectable difference.

She could feel Sneed’s eyes on her arse the whole way down.

“Morgues.” The Doctor half grumbled, half moaned. “Can’t say I’m very fond of them. Don’t exactly have the best experiences with them.”

“Been in a lot of morgues, have you?” Rose countered.

The Doctor stiffened slightly. “No, but there’s a memory that, unfortunately, is strongly linked to them. A story for another time, I’m afraid.” He said as he walked into the middle of the room and looked around. “I’m not sure how to tell where the weak spot is, and I’m not certain a scan with the sonic will point us in the proper direction.” He said as he studied the ceiling, then let his eyes scan the walls.

“Doctor,” Charles said after some time had passed. “I think the room is getting colder.”

Rose furrowed her brow, but then noticed the growing chill that caressed her skin. She’d thought it was merely her body acclimatizing to the basement level until she glanced up and noted the mist forming above their heads. “Here they come,” She said.

Out the corner of her eye, she noted the Doctor glancing to her before looking up again. She was sure he watched where they traveled about as well.

The Gelth found form like they had at the seance. One of them floated down to an archway leading to places Rose didn’t really want to think about. There weren’t as many bodies placed down here as she initially thought there would be, which only made her mind conclude what was past the arch.

“You have come to help! Praise the Doctor, praise him!” The child like voice from the being in the archway cheered. “Hurry, please. So little time. Pity the Gelth.”

“I’ll take you somewhere else after the transfer,” The Doctor explained. “I know of a few planets that you can thrive on, and I can take you there.”
“My angels,” Gwyneth said with a wide smile, looking at the beings floating about the room.

Which stuck Rose as odd, suddenly. She could plainly see the coffins easily accessible to those that were flying about the room, and it was certainly more than the three that were initially present at the seance. Nothing had stopped them from entering and possessing the old woman and the young man earlier, so why weren’t they just simply claiming the bodies that were down here already?

She looked to the Doctor, and could see he was looking about the room with a calculating look that made Rose wonder if he was thinking along the same lines as she was.

“Here,” The Gelth called. “Beneath the arch!”

Gwyneth moved as if possessed. “Beneath the arch,” She echoed, and a chill ran down Rose’s spine that exceeded simply being in the basement and in the presence of the Gelth.

She went to stop Gwyneth, was prepared to reach out and pull her back from the archway, but the Doctor grabbed her arm and yanked her back. “I don’t think it would be wise or safe to intervene at this point.” He said quietly in her ear as he held her to his side, watching Gwyneth and the Gelth.

“Establish the bridge, reach out of the void, let us through!” The Gelth said in near desperate tones.

“Yes, I can see you! I can see you. Come.” Gwyneth said in near rapture, though the dead look in her eyes made Rose’s stomach twist in knots.

“Bridge establishing.”

“Come! Come to me! Come to this world, poor, lost souls.”

“It has begun. The bridge is made.” The Gelth’s smile twisted into something sinister, and there was now a shade of red to the calm blue it had possessed before. Rose swallowed the lump in her throat as Gwyneth opened her mouth and more of the Gelth came pouring out. “She has given herself to the Gelth. The bridge is open, we descend, the Gelth will come through in force.”

The red overtook the blue entirely, and there was a swirl of colors above and around them as the Gelth charged after the coffins and deeper into the catacombs to the bodies unseen.

“You said that you were few in number!” Charles protested.

“A few billion,” The Gelth snickered wickedly. “And all of us in need of corpses.”

Bodies began to rise, and the grip Rose and the Doctor had on each other tightened as they both instinctively backed up.

“Gwyneth!” Sneed charged toward his maid. “Stop this! Listen to your master, this has gone far enough. Stop dabbling, child, and leave these things alone. I beg of you.” He tried to reason, gripping her shoulders as if he meant to shake her out of whatever spell had possessed her.

“Mister Sneed,” Rose called out. The little man may have been a pervert, but he didn’t deserve to be hurt. Yet it was too late as a corpse grabbed him from behind and held him still as a Gelth entered his mouth.

“Oh, I didn’t think that could happen.” The Doctor said as he inched them a little further away.

“I have joined the legions of the Gelth. Come, march with us.” Sneed’s voice said in an eerie, childlike way. He and the others started forcing them to back up against the far wall where a barred...
door from an old dungeon prison still remained. “We need bodies,” The body of Sneed and many others continued. “All of you, dead. The human race, dead.”

“Good thing I’m not human, then.” The Doctor tried to quip.

“Than three more bodies made vessels for the Gelth. We do not care of which species you are.”

Rose could faintly hear Charles protesting, and glanced to see that he was able to escape just as the Doctor gave her a shove. As the stone wall touched her bare upper back, the Doctor slammed the barred door shut, separating them from the Gelth possessed corpses as they reached for them.

“Give yourself to glory. Sacrifice your lives to the Gelth.” They said.

“I have faced worse than you and pulled through. I have survived the time war, and I will survive this as well. With Rose.”

“You will survive nothing. The Gelth will have you by the night’s end. The Gelth will take over this world and all it’s flesh.”

“Not while I live.” The Doctor countered fiercely.

“Then live no more.” The many hands of the Gelth reached for them, but the bars wouldn’t allow them a further reach.

“But I can’t die.” Rose reasoned in a fit of panic, watching as the cold hands of the dead attempted to grab hold of her neck. A small part of her mused that the body of Sneed was reaching for more inappropriate places, but even that bit of humor couldn’t shake the fear that wracked her body. She looked to the Doctor who seemed more nervous than he should. “Tell me I can’t die. I haven’t even been born yet, it’s impossible for me to die, isn’t it?”

“Time doesn’t work that way, Rose. It’s not a straight line, it’s a mess of lines that twist and turn. Traveling with me, moving along those lines, it means you can be born in the twentieth century and die in the nineteenth. I said it was dangerous, and I didn’t lie to you. I just didn’t imagine danger to look quite like this.”

“You did warn me.” She relented. “I wanted to come anyway.”

“And I wanted you to come. Lonely as I was, I should have let you stay behind and live your life. May not have been much to you, but at least you’d live. Live instead of dying here.”

“It’s not just dying. We become one of those.” Rose said, tilting her head slightly toward the army of Gelth possessed zombies still trying to reach for them. “We’ll go down fighting, yeah?” She asked.

He chuckled nervously. “Swinging from a chain and knocking them out, if need be. You and me, Rose.”

“Together.” Rose stated.

“Together,” The Doctor affirmed, his hand slipping into hers, his fingers sliding in between her own. She turned her head, and met his warm, blue eyes. “I’m so glad I met you.” He said with sincerity, his smile reflecting the truth of every word.

“Me too.” She replied, knowing that she really did mean it.
Something about standing beside him, facing certain death, felt right. Which was stupid, really, when she considered all she’d been through. She didn’t escape Jimmy a bit over a year ago just to die by zombies, but there she was, facing the hoard with a man-alien-that she barely knew. And it was right. It was as though the stars and the universe were certain of her place beside him and instilled that fact on her soul, giving her comfort when she should have been crying and terrified.

“Doctor!” Charles’ voice pulled them out of their locked gaze, and Rose searched for him behind the wall of zombies. “Turn off the flame, turn on the gas! Now fill the room, all of it, now!”

Charles was going around the room with a handkerchief pressed to his mouth and nose as he blew out the flames but opened the gas valve on the lanterns.

The Doctor’s mind seemed to race before a smile lit his features. “Of course! Filling the room with gas will draw the Gelth out of the bodies. They’ll become one with the atmosphere and unable to continue the attack.”

“We’ll choke to death!” Rose protested.

“I won’t. Once we can get out of here, once the Gelth here are downed, you and Charles get out of the building, and I’ll take care of the rest.”

“How?” Rose started to ask, but the Doctor shook his head.

“No time to explain.” He said, noting that the hoard had turned and were advancing on Charles. The Doctor opened the door again, and it took Rose a moment to wonder why the Gelth hadn’t thought to try and open the door to get to them before. Shaking her head, she brushed it aside, not wanting to dwell on it now that there was a chance at freedom.

The Doctor lifted a tank of gas and smashed it against the wall, releasing the contents and causing the Gelth to evacuate the bodies all the more quickly. It also made Rose’s head start to spin.

“Gwyneth! Send them back,” The Doctor called to her, and Rose turned to see Gwyneth still perfectly still, her eyes wide and unfeeling. The action caused her to stumble a little, and in an effort to keep balance, inhaled more of the toxic air than she should have.

“I can’t. They’re too strong.” Gwyneth said.

Rose opened her mouth with words of encouragement on her tongue, but found she was unable to do much more than cough.

“Can’t breathe.” She choked out.

“Charles, get her out.” The Doctor said, looking over his shoulder at her. “Please, Rose.”

She hesitated. She wanted to help Gwyneth, she wanted to stay with him, but she could see in his eyes that staying wouldn’t do much more than make herself sick or worse.

“Come on,” Charles coughed, pulling as gently as possible on Rose’s arm and guiding her to the stairs.

The lack of proper air made the effort of climbing the stairs more difficult, and she and Charles were leaning heavily on each other, coughing while both pulling the other toward the front door. It felt like it was miles away when it wasn’t far at all, and when they emerged into the cold night air, Rose had never been more grateful for the burn in her lungs.
She took large, gulping lungfuls of fresh air in between coughing fits. She stumbled across the street, clutching her stomach and managing to make to a snow bank before she vomited. She ignored the similar retching sounds from Charles not far away, and once her stomach was empty and her lungs didn’t feel like collapse, she turned and moved a couple feet closer to the house they’d fled from.

Charles stumble up beside her, watching the dark house as he clutched her to him in an effort to keep her warm.

They waited, seeing the silhouette of the Doctor running quickly from the house just before it exploded in a ball of flames.

For a moment, Rose was stunned. The Doctor had been tossed to the ground by the force of the explosion, and for a second, she worried he’d been seriously injured. Then he shifted and groaned, and Rose pushed away from Charles and ran to the Doctor, helping him back to his feet.

“I’m sorry,” he said, surprisingly not desperate for air as she and Charles had been. His panting seemed to be from mere exertion. “She had the matches in hand, she knew….”

“She caused the explosion?” Rose said, looking at the house. “Why’d she do that? Why’d ya let her?” She demanded.

The Doctor shook his head. “She was already dead. I suspect she was from the moment she stepped in the archway.”

“But … but she spoke to us, she helped us. She did that! How could she have done that if she were dead?” Rose asked, trying to wrap her mind around the face that the dead look in Gwyneth’s eyes was because she was truly gone.

“I think … well,” The Doctor frowned.

“There are more things in Heaven and Earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy. Even for you, Doctor.” Charles said when the Doctor couldn’t answer, and the Time Lord merely nodded.

“She saved the world,” Rose said as she looked at the house still burning. “A servant girl. No one will ever know.”

“We’ll know.” The Doctor said, getting Rose’s attention. “And is it really so different than a shop girl doing the same thing?”

Rose gave him a sad smile, because he was right. She knew that no one except Mickey knew what she had done back in her own time, and that wouldn’t have changed had she not went with the Doctor. She wouldn’t have wanted it aired about, nor the attention it would bring if anyone knew. She imagined Gwyneth was likely the same. And while it gave her a slight boost, the joy was bitter sweet with the memory of Gwyneth in her mind.

“So, what are you going to do now?” Rose asked Charles as he escorted them back to the TARDIS, though he had no idea what the destination would be. The Doctor had Rose on his arm like a gentleman, and Charles kept his hands behind his back and a slightly amused grin on his face as they walked.
“I shall take the mail coach back to London, quite literally post-haste.” Charles replied, earning a chuckle from the two time-travelers. “This is no time for me to be on my own, I shall spend Christmas with my family and make amends to them.” He said resolutely, turning his head toward the lightly falling snow. “After all I learned tonight,” he continued, “there can be nothing more vital.”

“Good to hear you have lost your ‘hum-bug’ attitude.” The Doctor said, earning a gentle elbow in the ribs from his companion.

“Indeed!” Charles replied with a wide grin, turning back to them. “This morning, I thought I knew everything in the world. Now I know I’ve just started. All these huge, wonderful notions, Doctor! I’m inspired. I must write about them.”

“Do you think that’s wise?” Rose asked as the melancholy of knowing the future crept through the Doctor’s veins and pierced his hearts.

“I shall be subtle at first,” Charles placated as they approached the alley where the TARDIS was hidden. “The Mystery of Edwin Drood still lacks an ending. Perhaps the killer was not the boy’s uncle, perhaps he was not of this Earth. The Mystery of Edwin Drood and the Blue Elementals. I can spread the word, tell the truth!”

“The truth is out there.” The Doctor said, amusement overtaking the pain of knowing the end of this man’s story.

“Oh stop.” Rose admonished playfully, giving him a gentle smack on the arm she held before turning to Charles as they stopped in front of the Time Ship’s doors. “I’m sure it will be wonderful.” Rose told the author.

“Yes, I’m sure it will be one of your best.” The Doctor said with as much smile as he could muster before offering his free hand to Charles. “It’s been a pleasure meeting you, Mister Dickens.”

“Yes, and thank you for all you’d done.” Rose said as she stepped up and kissed the man on the cheek. Charles blushed, fidgeting like a schoolboy having just had his first peck from a girl.

“Oh, my dear, how modern.” He then cleared his throat. “But I suppose, you are not of this time as you have knowledge of future times.” He hesitated. “I… I must ask. My books… do they last?”

“Oh yes.” The Doctor replied.

“For how long?” Charles hesitated again.

“Forever.” The Doctor assured. “Now, we must be off. Time to head back to those future times.”

Charles frowned, looking the TARDIS up and down. “In that shed? The two of you?”

“Bit more roomier than you might expect.” Rose winked at him, and the Doctor held back the grin threatening to break free from Charles’ renewed fluster. “Goodbye, Mister Dickens.”

“Goodbye Rose, Doctor.” He replied, bowing to each slightly before frowning. The Doctor ushered Rose inside and shut the door before Charles could question how it was goodbye.

“Doesn’t that change history?” Rose asked as the Doctor headed to the console and prepared to put them in the time vortex. “If he writes about blue ghosts, doesn’t that change things?”

The Doctor stopped in front of the monitor and turned to Rose, watching her come toward him.
“In a week’s time it’s 1870, and in six months from now he’ll die from a stroke. He’ll never get to tell his story.” The Doctor said sadly, hearts clenching at the devastation in Rose’s eyes.

“Oh no, he was so nice.” Rose said as she stood beside him, watching Charles examine the TARDIS exterior on the monitor.

“But he was already gone in your time. Had been for over a hundred years. That’s the beauty of time travel Rose, remember? Days that were dead and gone, lived only once but for me, and now for you.” He put a hand on her arm, and watched as Charles finally put some distance between himself and the TARDIS, though he was still looking at it skeptically. “And since our dear friend has so few of those days left, let’s give him one, last, wonderful surprise.” He said, throwing the switch and dematerializing the TARDIS.

The last image they saw on the screen before it faded, was a joyous Charles Dickens laughing at the surreal nature of it all.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, so, I promise from the bottom of my heart that this story will not be abandoned and will be finished in a timely manner. It will be done within the next 12 months tops. Why I'm saying it this way is this: the possibility of a move from Canada to the US has become a very high probability for me, and could happen within a month. This means the majority of my time will be spent packing among other annoying moving tasks.

So if I don't updates take a bit longer, I apologize. You all can blame my husband for his extremely poor timing of a major relocation ;)

Until next update.
Rose had gone to bed nearly as soon as they entered the TARDIS. Being oxygen deprived, as well as fighting to escape, the crash of adrenaline that no doubt surged through her as it did him when they were behind those bars, it was all bound to tire her out. Her body wasn’t used to the sorts of adventures the Doctor was used to having. And more so, it was only her second.

But oh, wasn’t she magnificent. Brave, kind, the only time she had any sort of problem was when the Gelth wanted the bodies, and even he wasn’t sure that was the right thing. She wasn’t better than any of his other companions, at least not that he could say for sure. He only took the best, after all. And yet, he had a feeling Rose Tyler of Earth was going to be something fantastic. He still couldn’t peek her time line, and that was a little disconcerting, but he tried not to let it bother him that much.

Shaking his head, the Doctor approached the monitor and brought up his scans for anything Gallifreyan.

A knot within him twisted as he did so, and something he might call guilt whispered in his mind, asking him if he should. The Nestene, and now the Gelth? He knew there would be damage, he had witnessed much of it first hand. He knew the time lords were merciless when it came to their desire to win, having absolutely no concern with the various races on various planets that they all thought was so beneath them. There was a reason he enlisted the help of twelve others to tuck them away, so why did he want to bring them all back?

The silence in his mind seemed louder, like a reminder, and he sighed. Dragging his hand down his face, the Doctor looked at the monitor and blinked, suddenly finding his scans were replaced with the vitals of his current companion.

He smiled, glad his ship liked Rose, and pleased that she seemed to be suffering few ill effects. A headache, it would seem, and the a touch of nausea. Oxygen was being pumped into her room more than necessary.

The Doctor frowned. “Bit more thorough than you usually provide, Old Girl.” He said, only fully realizing that he shouldn’t be seeing a full report so much as merely heart rate and oxygen levels. As it was, he could now see that Rose was about to enter REM sleep, and her temperature was a touch below normal because of the cool air within her room.

He pushed a few buttons, bringing up his search for displaced beings or damage brought on from temporal weapons.

It was barely up on the screen long enough for him to read before the vitals and details of one Rose Tyler were brought back up.

“I’m starting to understand that perhaps you like Rose a bit more than you should.” He said, glancing up at the column as the ship hummed indignantly. “Don’t give me that, never once have you been insistent that I monitor the care of a companion, not even Charley. And we both know how … fond of her I was.”

The ship hummed again, sounding noncommittal this time.

“And what makes you believe Rose will be around any longer? Bad things could happen to her as well, they almost did back there. She might even decide one day that she’s done and leave us, too.”
The ship tsked him as much as a sentient ship could.

“Oh yes, you can see all that is, was, and will be, but you don’t care to share. Tell me, did you
know that mine and the Time Lord’s plan to hide our whole planet would end quite as
spectacularly as it did?” He challenged, and the Old Girl remained silent. Instead of humming or
groaning, the monitor switched from Rose’s vitals to his search for damage. “Yes, change the
subject, why don’t you?”

There was a lot of temporal anomalies, displacements (thankfully not all located on Earth), and
complete losses he could never fix. Environmental changes could be investigated easily enough,
especially the un-inhabited planets. It would actually be a good idea to catalog their changes, just
so he would know in case the new atmosphere, flora, and fauna match up with a displaced species.

But first….

“Let’s see what else on you needs to be repaired, shall we?” He said kneeling down and getting
under the console. “I never did finish under here.” He added as he set to work.

Despite the change in desktop, there was a lot of tinkering still be done. Wires that needed
mending, repairing, circuits that came loose. A big ball of wires, resisters, and something else that
he had no idea what it was, or how they all worked together in the grand scheme.

He reconnected one wire, and Madam Butterfly filled the console room, causing the Doctor to
smile.

The wires promptly came apart, halting the music.

“I know very well that you wouldn’t let her wake her, so you’re just being stubborn.” He retorted
to the TARDIS, re—reconnecting the wires, and sonic-ing them for good measure. The opera
resumed, and this time stayed on. “Much better. Don’t start berating my taste in music now.” He
grumbled. “Who knows, next regeneration I just might have a penchant for disco.”

He continued his work, the music changing though remaining in the same genre. He was lost to the
rhythm of the music and his work, practically in a trance. The TARDIS might have beeped at him a
time or two, hummed at him a bit, but since she didn’t press against his mind, he assumed it wasn’t
of any importance. Likely, she was just getting a bit irritated with him.

It wasn’t until the clink of a tea cup on the floor by his head, just when he was beginning to realize
how long it had been since his last cup, that he snapped out of it.

Turning his head away from the cup, he met the eyes of one smiling, wide-awake Rose Tyler.

“Hello,” She said as she sat on the floor beside him, her tongue peeking out of the corner of her
mouth.

“Oh,” he said, not at all hiding his surprise or confusion. He picked up the tea cup, frowning.
“I’ve worked right through breakfast, haven’t I?”

Rose shrugged. “Not much of one, to be honest. Never very good at whipping anything up, me, so
was just tea and toast.” She then twisted to get beneath the console and laid down as he sat just
enough to have a drink of his desperately needed tea.

It was the perfect cup, he’d have to say. Steeped exactly the right amount of time, in the proper
temperature of water, with just the right amount of milk. It was the same as when she had made
him a cup in the flat she shared with her mother. He took another drink, watching as Rose studied
the underside of the console, a cute little wrinkle forming between her eyes.

“Not much like a car, this. Not that I thought it would be, but stared at the underside of a car ‘nough times that this feels a bit natural.”

“In which way?” The Doctor asked, taking another hearty drink. “I don’t particularly see you working on vehicles in your spare time.”

She grinned sadly. “No, that was Mickey. He’s a mechanic.”

“Really,” He asked, draining his cup and the laying back down beside her.

She hummed in affirmative. “Been working on cars since he got his own at sixteen. He had an older mate, one who’d come by and help out his Gran with the stuff he couldn’t do, and he had a garage. He let Mickey sorta tinker here and there after school and on weekends when he could. Went with Mickey quite a bit when we were younger. And again, after ….” She trailed off, her eyes taking on a hazy sort of pain.

He frowned, wondering what this after was. He tried to remember hearing her mention a father, but he couldn’t recall her having spoken about him. Had he passed? It seemed the most likely “after”, but he didn’t want question or push, not yet.

The Doctor reached over, covering her hand with his, causing Rose to whip her head around and look at him. “If you ever just want to recline while I tinker about with the Old Girl, you are more than welcome to.” He smiled gently, only to have it grow at the joy that replaced the negative light in Rose’s eyes.

“So, where we going now?” She asked after a moment, pulling her hand out from under his and giving it a slight squeeze over top before putting both hands on her stomach. “Going to crash another author’s Christmas? Swing by JK Rowling’s place and find out how she ends the series?” Her tongue peeked out from between her teeth.

“JK Rowling … the name sounds familiar, but I … I’m sorry, I’m not sure I remember … what series was it again?” Rose’s smile fell, and she gapped at him in disbelief so palatable that he couldn’t hold back the laugh that came from so deep within, the Doctor could have believed it came from his toes. “I’m joking, Rose. I’m a time traveler, I have read nearly every popular book ever to grace the Original Earth’s literary world.”

“Right.” Rose said, laughing shyly to herself as she grabbed on to the edge of the console and swung herself up from underneath in a move so graceful he believed she really was a gymnast at one point in her life. “And when do you have the time for that, eh?”

“Well,” He said as he got out from under the console. “When you’re over a thousand-”

“A thousand!” Rose exclaimed, gapping at him. He barely held back his amusement. “Well, I’m never entirely sure of my exact age. I think I’m somewhere around sixteen hundred Earth Years.”

Rose stared at him for a while, her brow furrowed, her jaw slacked, and he barely kept it together.

“Suppose makes having a great-grandchild bit easier to understand.” She said, shaking her head. “So… so sixteen hundred years old.”

“Yes,”
“And you’ve been traveling how long?”

“Oh,” he said, thinking on it. “Probably something like thirteen hundred, give or take. I think I was just shy of three hundred when I stole the TARDIS, took Susan, and ran off.”

“And she went off and got married.” Rose reasoned.

“Yes, I think I was about four hundred, perhaps.”

“And … you haven’t been alone since then?” Rose asked, chewing her lip in concern.

His hearts warmed at it. “No, no, I haven’t been alone in all that time. I’ve traveled with people from your planet and mine, sometimes with people who would be considered alien to us both. I once, well, more than once actually, I had a dog, a robot. K-9, I called him.”

“Clever,” She smirked, and he smiled back.

“I tend to think so.”

There was a beat of slightly awkward silence, in which both human and time lord shuffled about for a moment.

“I had a trip in mind.” He said. “Well, several.” He amended. “Might be a good idea to take a quick trip down to the wardrobe, might go somewhere a bit chilly.”

“Yeah?” Rose said. “Like, the arctic?”

“Something like that,” He teased as he headed to the console. “Off you pop, now.” He glanced at her, seeing her shake her head before skipping off to the wardrobe.

He shook his head after she left, chuckling to himself before sobering.

He really shouldn’t be this content so soon after the war. He shouldn’t be happy to take a human companion on trips, which whether to check up on things or not, were still as much of a pleasure for him as it was for her. He should be grim, but as much as he tried, once he imagined Rose’s reaction to her first alien planet, he couldn’t dim the joy.

The TARDIS hummed a teasing melody, and he sighed.

“Yes, alright.” He said quietly. “Perhaps I like her a bit more than I should, too.”

As Rose stepped out of the TARDIS, a chill swept over her. Much like when she stepped out into 1869 Cardiff, her shoe made an impression in a thin layer of snow. There were flakes fluttering in the air, and on the distant horizon there looked to be two moons in an indigo colored sky. It was light out, however, which confounded Rose enough that she ventured forward a few feet from the TARDIS and looked for a sun. She found it at their backs, too high in the sky for the moons to be visible.

And then it hit her.
Moons.

Plural.

Two.

Earth only had one.

She spun on her heel and gaped at the Doctor who wore that smug, suave grin that was both grating and endearing at the moment. He never told her where they were going, and he never corrected her assumption they’d be going back to Earth. He mentioned the Universe, other planets, but in no way had she ever expected he would actually take her to another world.

“This is an alien planet.”

“Yes,” he said, his voice tickled with laughter. “This planet is called Zigma 24 Delta, though it’s more commonly referred to as Woman Wept. It’s a bit smaller than Earth, and has only one land mass. And that mass, in which we are standing on, looks exactly like a woman lamenting, with her hand on her face as her head is bent over and she is on her knees in grief. It was, and is, one of the most beautiful planets in the whole solar system of Dram 2. It is also the only one left.”

Rose looked around. “Why is it the only one left?” She asked.

“Because there was a small skirmish in the Time War in this area. The Daleks, my people’s main foe and the other side of the war, had been enslaving the locals of a planet in this solar system. My people came to stop them, as the weapons that could have been made would have had some devastating effects. The details of what happened were kept pretty quiet, and any documentation I could scrounge up on the TARDIS while you were getting your jacket were heavily redacted. I suppose they wanted to keep something for the next president, had one survived. Anyway, the result of the battle was the total destruction of the planet, and the shock waves wiped out all the other four planets that happened to be on the same side of the sun at the moment. The solar system, of course, only had six planets to begin with.” Rose watched as he walked slowly toward a cliff face, looking up at it as he stuffed his hands in the pockets of his frock coat. “The results of the decimation, the shock waves, caused a cloud to form around the sun, flash freezing the planet. These are waves,” he said, pointing to what Rose thought was a cliff face. “Frozen in an instant, all the way through. If the planet had had any life before it wouldn’t have survived. The time we’re at now, this planet is about a thousand years post Time War, and it’s only just starting to warm up.”

“So, the waves will thaw out eventually?” She asked as she joined him.

He shook his head, staring at the frozen mass. “Possibly, but I can’t be sure. It’s still below freezing, and it may stay like this for eternity now. The TARDIS wouldn’t let me peek ahead.”

Rose smirked at the thought. The Time Ship, while still a bit unsettling in the way in constantly seemed to know what she wanted or needed, was growing on her. She could sense a personality inside the sentient ship, one that, had it been human, would have been just Rose’s type for a girlfriend. The fact that the TARDIS seemed to be calling the shots in this relationship she had with her captain only made Rose fonder of her.

After a long stretch of silence, a thought niggled at Rose’s mind. “Why are you the only one out here doing the work? Where are all the other Time Lords when they did a lot of the damage?”

The second Rose looked up at the Doctor, she wished she could have taken the question back. The pain in his eyes was so clear her heart ached for him, and her gut twisted in empathetic agony.
He looked toward his feet and the snow, though his gaze seemed to see something much farther away.

“No one else is out here, because there is no one else.” He looked at her through the corner of his eye. “I’m the last one in this Universe. The rest ….”

“Whaddya mean, last in this Universe?” She asked, reaching out and taking his hand. It was always cool, so she’d expected it to be freezing. By comparison to the air around them, the Doctor was warm. Still not human warm, if that was the reason he wasn’t the same temperature as her, but not uncomfortable to touch.

He squeezed it, and didn’t let go of the hold when he weakened the grip. “Myself and a few others of a similar mind did something we all thought was quite brilliant. We sent our whole planet to another Universe, as there are many out there. But … it was in the middle of a battle with the Daleks, and while we managed to take them out as well ….”

“You’re the only one who survived.” She finished for him. “I’m so sorry, Doctor.” Rose shook her head, stepping closer to him, taking his other hand and turning him to face her.

“Don’t be sorry for me, Rose.” He said gently. “I did what I had to do, and now … now I live with the consequences. And I’m not the only Time Lord left, I just need to … to find a way to get my planet and my people back.”

“Bet you will, too, clever as you are.” She said, biting her lip as she gave him a bit of an awkward hip check despite their position.

“Surprisingly not as clever as you think,” He said with a self-deprecating grin. “Not by Time Lord standards.” He looked around them, something pulling his attention enough to do a double take.

Frowning, Rose looked to see what it was, catching something in the pattern of a wave face that looked a lot like words.

“How about we go in the TARDIS, head to the library with some tea, and we can revisit the Wizarding World? We can read the nine books first, then move on to the fourteen films.”

“Nine books? Fourteen films?” Rose gapped at him, instantly distracted from the wave face.

“Well, one book was actually a script. Or was it two? And one of the films is a recording of the play that was made. Not the best work, to be honest, but it does help one relive the magic. And also, to be fair, five of the films are more prequels than anything else.”

The Doctor led her back toward the TARDIS, only dropping one hand and holding the other as they traversed. Before she stepped inside, though, Rose turned and caught one last glimpse at the wave face with the words in the pattern.

While she couldn’t make out both words before she went inside, the one she did decipher sent a shiver down her spine. It was as clear as anything and hard to put down as a simple coincidence.

The word was Bad.
“Oh it’s lovely,” Rose said as she paused in the TARDIS doorway behind him. He turned, taking in her wonder-filled, wide eyes. Her smile was nearly as bright as the sun that beat down on the land around them. Humid, like Earth’s tropical regions, and sweat was already starting to dot Rose’s forehead, but she didn’t seem to care.

Slowly, she stepped out, glancing at the pale, green sand beneath her foot for a moment before slowly moving away from the ship to take in their surroundings. The trees resembled the basic structure of an earth evergreen, but instead of needles, there were small little palm-like leaves. And they were yellow.

Which they shouldn’t have been, they should have been orange this time of year. What’s more, it should be raining heavily. The planet that they were on had a season of rain, constant and unrelenting. He’d checked three times before stepping outside, because the moment they materialized, they should have heard the rain pound against the TARDIS roof.

Still, watching Rose take in the jungle planet that must have looked a bit mixed up to her human mind, watching as she took the scene in with breathless wonder despite the sweat dampening her clothes and hair, was wonderful. And healing, in a strange way. She didn’t see the anomaly, she didn’t see how the planet had been altered on its axis.

They walked deeper in, and as they did, she hardly took her eyes way from their surroundings.

She saw alien birds with scales instead of feathers, watch in awe as they shimmered in the deep, red sunlight while the moved from branch to branch. She took in the strange, oblong shaped fruit that hung heavy from the trees and appeared to be coated in thorns. She gingerly reached out and touched a vine that dropped nearby, retracting her hand with a surprised giggle before caressing the velvet like vegetation that hummed in response.

“Where are we?” She asked moving toward him while barely able to take her eyes away from the scenery around her.

“We are on the planet Beutoyu, about 400 lightyears away from Earth. I think, time wise, we’re in your past. Normally, we’d have never risked stepping outside the TARDIS this time of year.”

“Why’s that?” Rose asked, finally turning toward him.

“It’s supposed to be rainy season.”

“So… like home.” She smirked.

He laughed. “Much, much worse. You know how the TARDIS shower has an incredibly heavy setting, like standing beneath a waterfall?”

“Yeah,” She said, smirking a bit. “Probably gonna need that after this, me.”

The Doctor refrained from chuckling. “Yes, well, rainy season on Beutoyu is like that. For a quarter of the year.”

Rose first looked shocked, then frowned thoughtfully, looking around them. “So, what? This whole place floods then?”

“Well, not really. You see the sand isn’t like sand on Earth. It doesn’t get wet and clump, you can’t make a sand castle on it. Instead, it allows the water to drain deep within the ground, giving the vegetation the water it needs the rest of the year. We’re actually, now, about near the end of its post-Rain season. There’s still a lot of moisture in the air, and the fruit is just turning edible.” He
said, reaching for one of the lower hanging ones.

“Doctor, don’t-” Rose started to warn, but stopped when he plucked one down bare hand.

“It’s not sharp.” He said, bringing it over for her to feel.

He watched as she very carefully ran her hand over the skin of the fruit.

“Feels like silk.” She said with a grin, caressing it again.

“The animals here would have no way of getting into them otherwise. The herbivores here have nothing sharp on their bodies to break the skin.” He explained, taking the fruit in both hands and squeezing. He felt the fruit split, the ripped it open the rest of the way, revealing the deep purple flesh beneath the yellow and brown exterior.

Rose looked at it apprehensively, and more so when he handed half of it to her.

“Don’t trust me?” He said, peeling off part of the skin and taking a bite.

Rose slowly removed a part of the skin on her half as well. “I do, ‘s just… is it safe? For humans?”

“Unless you happen to be allergic.” He replied, taking another bite.

He smiled behind the fruit, anticipating the reaction of Rose’s first experience with alien food. He thought of all his companions, how they would get a bit squeamish, or apprehensive. She was more the latter, which was to be expected, all things considered. But she didn’t take a little bite, either. Rose went for it, taking off a normal amount, and carefully considering it.

He brow furrowed as she chewed, and the fact that she didn’t immediately spit it back out was a good sign. He imagined her tongue moving about her mouth, what with the way her cheek stuck out and the way her jaw moved. She swallowed, looking at the fruit in her hand with consideration.

“Reminds me of tea. With honey and a touch of lemon. Bit strange, actually.”

“It’s interesting, isn’t it?” He said, taking another bite.

“One of those things you’re not sure you like it, but you know you don’t hate it.” She replied, taking another bite and chewing as she walked forward a bit.

He grinned, then with one hand, took out the sonic to get a read on the atmosphere. He wanted to make sure that everything was still going at least somewhat as it should, despite the detonation of a temporal weapon close enough to throw off the seasons. The leaves around him rustled, birds making their strange chirps overhead.

Then Rose yelped.

It wasn’t a scream, though it could have been, and it certainly wasn’t in mere surprise.

The Doctor spun around, and then remained perfectly still as he watched a creature he’d never seen before perch on Rose’s shoulder with her portion of the fruit in her hands.

It was like a cat, if he had to put it in Earth terms. A cat with longer fur than necessary, and strange-monkey like feet and hands. It gnawed at the corner of the fruit, which was bigger than it was, its tail curled around Rose’s shoulders and flicking wildly.

His companion seemed a bit frightened, but mostly she just watched.
The creature looked at her for a moment, assessing the being it stole the fruit from, then stilled.

The Doctor’s hearts pounded, and his body coiled and tensed, waiting to launch toward Rose and save her from the creature should it attack her.

It put the fruit in its mouth, then turned around. Rose’s eyes went wide as it proceeded to crawl down her back, then once it was on solid ground again, it tiptoed back into the trees on two feet.

“What was that?” She asked.

“I honestly have no idea.” He replied. “Interesting little creature wasn’t it?”

“It climbed up my back.” She said, her voice cracking a bit. “It ju-just… climbed up and took the thing right out of my hand. Reached right over, calm as can be, and just took it.” She laughed, looking at where it went, though he doubted she could see it. “I just had an alien animal climb me like a tree and take off calm as can be. Never even been close to anything ‘cept a cat or a dog, and it… I just….”

“Amazing, isn’t it?” He asked.

“It is!” She exclaimed, turning toward him and clutching his arm. “Well, maybe not so much at first. Bit scared it was gonna try and kill me or something. Didn’t seem bothered one bit, though.”

“Probably wasn’t. You’re not exactly giving off predator vibes.”

“Sayin’ I’m not scary?” She teased.

He smiled. “I’m saying you come off as kind.” He said, taking a bit of his fruit before offering some to Rose.

She shook her head, obviously not having enjoyed it enough to miss her portion, and then she frowned. She looked to his arm, then studied his face. “How are you not sweatin’?” She asked.

He smirked. “My biology is superior to yours.” He said, as she rolled her eyes, he chuckled. “It’s true. My body regulates itself so that I’m never hot, and never truly cold.”

“Yeah?” Rose said, letting go of his arm as they continued a bit further into the jungle-like surroundings. “What else makes you better than me?”

“I can hold my breath for a very long time. Which is how I was able to tolerate being in the house when you and Charles had to leave.”

“Makes sense. What else?”

“Two hearts.” He replied.

“Seriously?”

“Yes, two.”

“Do you need both going at once, or….”

“Are you planning my murder?” He teased, and she laughed.

“No, no. Just… might come in handy to know, yeah? Dangerous, this traveling with you. Already had to save you once. Know it’s more likely gonna be the other way ‘round, just wanna know this
stuf. Just in case.”

He nodded. “If one gives out, I have time to restart it before damage is done. It’s extremely painful.”

Rose gave a sympathetic hum, but didn’t ask anymore.

He opened his mouth, then closed it. Then opened it again with one more major difference on his tongue, but paused. Regeneration was a topic he really should discuss with this companions more, and earlier on. But right now, with that thoughtful, and slightly uncertain frown on Rose’s face, he couldn’t bring himself to bring it up. He liked her, really liked her. She was the sort of companion he loved to travel with, someone who was becoming more friend than merely someone along for the ride of a life time. What if the thought of him changing into someone entirely new had her put off enough to make her go home. He’d have to tell her someday, of course. But for now, he was going to keep quiet and hope he got around to telling her before it was too late.

He took another bite of the fruit (accurately described by Rose), chewed, raising his hand and dislodging Rose out of necessity. She puzzled at the sonic as he scanned the atmosphere, but didn’t ask anything about it. She, instead, looked around them.

A couple feet in, the Doctor stopped, and read the readings he’d taken of the atmosphere.

“Oh,” He said.

“What?” Rose asked.

“Well the planet is supposed to be in the middle of its rainy season, but it turns out-”

A drop of rain fell on his hand heavily, another one quickly following. And judging by the way Rose flinched, one landed on her as well. It then proceeded to fall much, much faster.

“Start of it, then?” Rose called over the increasing volume of falling rain.

“Got it one, come on!” He shouted, and pulled Rose along as they ran back toward the TARDIS in what Earth might consider heavy rain showers.

She laughed the whole way, and that laughter was utterly infectious.

They weren’t overly fair from the TARDIS, no more than five minutes at a running pace, but they were soaked through when they got inside. Their hair clung to their faces, and their heavy clothes had them leaning against the TARDIS doors, but they were still smiling, still chuckling.

“We’re a right mess, aren’t we?” She giggled. “Suppose I should get changed and put on the kettle, then, yeah?”

“I’ll never turn down tea,” He said from against the doors, watching as she pushed off and headed into the bowels of the TARDIS.

“ Noticed that,” She said, flashing him a smile over her shoulder.

When she disappeared, he went to the controls, yet he didn’t do anything. He stood before them, looking at them, but not really seeing them. He was thinking of Rose. Rose, and her excitement over new creatures and new planets. Rose, and her lack of complaint when things went a bit sideways. She laughed, how many of his past companions would have lamented over being caught in the down pour instead of laughing?
She was something special. But he wouldn’t say so, at least not out loud.

“Why are we looking at the planet from up here?” Rose asked, and if she was holding her mug a bit tighter than usual, so be it. They were sitting with their legs outside the TARDIS, the doors wide open, a shell around the outside to keep them breathing and warm.

The Doctor took a sip of his tea, eyes focused on the planet below. “Because the atmosphere would kill you.” He said in a very matter-of-fact way.

Rose liked that about him, he didn’t try and make things pretty for the sake of it. He told the truth, maybe put a positive spin on it from time to time, but at the heart of it was always honesty. There weren’t many honest blokes in her life. Honest, and kind.

The day before they went to a planet where the people had been altered by the time war. She didn’t fully understand, but gathered that their very early development had been altered, and therefore they had been as well. It wasn’t something he could set right, but he still went down and ensured they had what they needed to survive, that their planet was still able to support them.

She watched as he spoke to the elders, demonstrated some ways of construction that might be easier on their eight fingered hands. He pulled out a violin from within his jacket and played a bit for the children. He was very good with the children. And she didn’t miss the way he smiled and watched her when she allowed the little girls of the village braid her hair. She sort of liked him watching her when he thought she didn’t know.

She’d been looked at her whole life, never once had she felt admiration, even from Mickey. It thrilled and scared her all at once.

“Right,” she said. “So….”

“I went down while you were sleeping.” He admitted. “It’s not as backwards as some of the other places we visited. But there were some changes. Ones, I think we’ll note in a moment, when we shift around to the other side. We’re orbiting the planet, after all.”

“Orbiting the planet.” Rose repeated in wonder. “Over a thousand years, and you still find wonder in all this.”

“I do.” He replied, glancing toward her. “Don’t tell me you’re bored.”

“Not in the least.” She shook her heard with a grin, her tongue peeking out in the end. “’S just… the places you must have been, the things you’ve seen! I think a lot of people would start to grow numb to it all.”

“You may be right.” He said, a cautious tone to his voice. He looked to the cup in his hand. “Sometimes… sometimes it’s not going to be all sight seeing and investigating. We’ve been doing the simple stuff.”

“Gelth and Autons are simple?” She smirked, and he quirked his lips a moment at that.

“Things like that are going to come up again. Again and again. It’s not to much the wonders of the
universe that people grow tired of, it’s me. Me, and the dangers I inevitably lead them into. There’s only so many times someone can watch people die, watch me make decisions they don’t agree with, before they say ‘enough is enough’. And then they leave.” He turned to look her in the eye. “I earned a nickname, Rose. The Oncoming Storm. The Doctor of War. They aren’t titles I relish, but they speak a truth I often don’t wish to admit even to myself, even before the Time War. I’ve lost many friends because of things I’ve done and decisions I’ve made.”

Rose held his gave until she couldn’t, needing to break from those sad, stormy, beautiful blue eyes in order to speak. “Suppose they weren’t really your friends, then.”

“They were, for a time.” He said.

She peeked at him, seeing him staring off at the vastness before them.

“Some, yeah. Sure lots of them still think fondly of ya. And I suppose, I could see all this gettin’ a bit much. It’s overwhelming, and makes ya feel a bit small. But the thing is, I get it. You know, it can’t all be easy out there. ‘S like with Gwyn. One girl, or the world, yeah? May not have liked it, but I get it.”

“You are far more understanding than most.” The Doctor confessed.

Rose didn’t know what she could say to that, so she let it drop.

After a moment she changed the subject. “I went to the TARDIS library last night. You’ve gotta lot of children’s books.”

“Children’s books?” He frowned.

“Yeah, you know. Like Harry Potter, of course, but also Narnia, Lemony Snicket. And those are just the ones I remember, and from my time.”

He smiled. “I only take the best, you know. And that’s not just limited to’ who’ I take aboard, but ‘what’.”

“And what makes them the best?” She smirked.

“Magic,” He replied with enthusiasm. It was the same wonderful, passionate sort she’d seen him exhibit when they went to new places. The same sort he had for helping, and engaging with others. “Few if any novels of your time, aimed for adults, had such wonderful things as wardrobes taking children to another world, or an entire school brimming with the impossible. There are some fantastic novels for the more mature, don’t get me wrong. The Bronte sisters, Jane Austen, Charles, of course, and Mark Twain, they all did some wonderful things. But magic and mystery, Rose, those are what lure an adventurer like myself.”

“Suppose so.” She smiled. “Were sort of among my favorites as a kid, too.”

“Adventurer at heart, then.” He replied.

“Guess so.” She agreed, nodding once and then looking out to at the stars. There were so many, and among them were planets, and beings. She felt small and insignificant, and yet so incredibly special. She was among the few that he deemed ‘the best’, and while she didn’t feel it, she still knew she was important.

“Ah, here we go. Watch the shadow, Rose.” The Doctor said, touching her shoulder to get her attention, then pointing at the planet down below.
Just as they shadow where the moon blocked the sun came into view, an orange flash of light broke across it. Then pink, then red. It repeated and grew, a dazzling display.

Rose gasped, then smiled. “‘S like the Northern Lights.”

“Same effects, really.” The Doctor nodded. “It’s just the chemical make up of the atmosphere below changes the color and frequency. Amazing, isn’t it?”

“‘S beautiful.” She agreed. “All these little wonders scattered across all of space, phenomenons of nature you can only see at certain times… no wonder you never stay still.”

“It’s not a bad life.” The Doctor agreed with a smirk, taking a sip of his tea.

“Better with two?” She asked, and he grinned.

“Yes, I believe it is.” He replied, meeting her gaze.

They stared at one another for a long time, or at least what felt like it, and yet Rose couldn’t bring herself to turn away. His eyes were fatigued and full of fire all at once. Those eyes had seen so much, tragic and magical. And they were the windows to the soul of a beautiful man who loved life so fiercely he was more than willing to risk his own to ensure it carried on for everyone else. He was alien, but so very human.

He was the most enchanting being she’d ever bet, and he wanted her with him on this fantastic adventure.

He inhaled, and she blinked, and the spell was broken. They both took a deep drink of their tea, turning their attention back to the light show in the planet atmosphere below.

When she put her hand on the floor of the TARDIS, her finger grazed his. Neither moved, and that suited her just fine.
It had been a good few trips. After the light show of Nacdel 4, they continued their tracking of anomalies. And much to the Doctor’s pleasure, those little changes from the Time War were not overtly dangerous. So many people and beings were still thriving, growing, evolving. The ones that were affected badly enough were easy to help, and not hostile like the Nestene had been. The planets were still carrying on, making changes where needed.

And the bits in between had been wonderful.

He loved all his companions, he truly did. But Rose was far more simple than anyone he had traveled with in his current incarnation. She didn’t need to be doing something grand every moment, and often seemed perfectly content to lay beside him and hand him tools or hold wires while he worked on the TARDIS. There was tea, teasing, laughter. Discussions about music, movies, television, books. He thought, at first, that Rose wouldn’t want to hear about the things she wasn’t familiar with, but when the topic came up, she simply asked him to tell her about it, broadening the possibilities for their media room choices. Sometimes, when they were in the library but too tired to read herself, she gladly listened to whatever it was he wanted to read to her.

She was vibrant, curious, clever, and brave. They were seeing beautiful worlds, and exciting places, interacting with wonderful people and creatures.

So he just knew that something was bound to go wrong.

He’d set the course for their next destination before jaunting to his lavatory to take a shower, and when he returned only partly dressed, it was to discover something had gone wrong. Try as he might, he couldn’t get the TARDIS to return to their intended course.

“What is the matter?” He asked, reaching out and caressing the center column. “I know you like throwing me for a loop from time to time, make it seem like I haven’t a clue how to drive you, but why are you behaving like this? Why now?”

He moved to the monitor, running a scan for what was calling to her so badly.

His hearts stuttered for a moment when he read that they were picking up on a distress signal. One, it would seem, that was using technology only used by those involved in the Time War.

He took a breath, forcing himself to remain utterly calm. It could have been something as simple as alien technology in the hands of some stupid human poking at what they shouldn’t. But, he reasoned, that was very likely not it. It was very likely a real distress call from someone who needed it. Maybe, possibly.

And for a moment, he considered the possibility that one of his people had somehow crashed on Earth, their TARDIS destroyed, and were hoping to get his attention. Because, really, who else would be frequenting Earth often enough to possibly pick up on such a thing besides him.

He ran his hands through his hair, about to ask the TARDIS what she knew, when the tell-tale sounds of Rose echoed down the hall toward him.
“So where are we off to today?” Rose asked with ease as she came into the console room, hair washed and dried, a plan gray hooded jumper over a white tank top paired with her denims. She suspected the TARDIS somehow washed them every night, and the closet in her bedroom seemed to have an assortment of plain jumpers and t-shirts so that she could change things up from what she’d run aboard the TARDIS wearing.

The Doctor was frowning, his ascot discarded on the console and his frock coat slung over the jumpseat. He appeared exactly as so many heroes of regency dramas on BBC looked, with his waist coat and shirt sleeves, his trousers tucked into his boots. She was getting some serious Colonel Brandon vibes off of him, and she wasn’t sure she was really complaining. And without the long jacket, she could see that his bum was….

“I’m not sure,” he said, a tinge of frustration to his tone of utter concentration, breaking her out of her revere. Rose was glad he was so focused on the monitor so she didn’t have to explain why she was blushing. “I meant to take us to Alfava Metraxis but there is something … something pulling the TARDIS off course. A signal, of some sort, that ….”

There was such a guarded look to his eyes that Rose had to ask, “D’ya think it could mean one of your people?”

His head whipped around and he stared at her for a moment before the slightest upturn of his lips appeared. “It does have chronotransendant capabilities.” The slight smile left, “But it’s not from a Time Lord. At least, I don’t think it is, I doubt it very much. Knowing what I went through after … well, the TARDIS wouldn’t keep that from me if they were, would you Old Girl?” He asked the ceiling.

The column in the center of the room glowed warmly for a moment, just a bit brighter than normal, and a gentle, soothing hum filled the room.

Rose looked about, still in awe with the way the TARDIS seemed to communicate without words, understanding somehow that she was assuring the Doctor that it was exactly as he guessed.

“But it is a call for help,” The Doctor said, refocusing on the screen. “And I never ignore a call for help.” He said, his voice going a bit deeper and more dangerous.

“So what are we waitin’ for, then?” Rose said with a shrug, a touch of grin to her face as he looked over to her once more.

His smile grew once again. “Nothing at all,” he replied. He then started the intricate dance of flying the TARDIS, one that Rose often wondered if she should learn as well, and soon the grinding noise the Old Girl made every time they were about to go somewhere filled the room.

Rose backed up until she could feel the rail at her back, then grabbed on as hard as she could. She was getting better at keeping her balance, actually, but she sort of loved the feel of the vibrations the engines had. It made her feel more connected, more grounded in reality when she could sense something she could equate to movement.

The landing was oddly smooth, not jostling her in the slightest or sending any one stumbling about. Rose frowned at the Doctor who also seemed a bit perturbed by the ease of it all.

“Well,” he said, picking up his frock coat from the jumpseat. “It appears we’re on Earth. Year … 2012.”
“2012?” Rose repeated. “Earth? But that’s so close. Close to my time, anyway. I should be … twenty-six.”

“Twenty-six? You’re still a baby! Barely out of the loom, you are,” The Doctor teased as he began to put on his jacket.

“Wait, hold on.” Rose stopped him as he put one arm in the sleeve. She looked him up and down, chewing her lip a bit as she did. He was really quite fit, even if his clothes were a bit unorthodox. And it was the clothes she was focusing on this go. “I go out in kit from my time, you say I’d stir up the masses, or something. Yet you walk about in clothes from the eighteen hundreds.”

The Doctor looked down at his outfit then back up to her. “Yes. I quite like this look, though I’ve been known to change it up a century or two. Hopefully no sooner than that, but accidents happen. And on occasion, I will change to fit into the locale.”

“Well, if it was a bit eccentric to be mucking about like you’re Mister Darcy in 2005, bet 2012 won’t be much different.” She pointed out.

He smirked and, much to Rose’s surprise, pulled his arm out of his sleeve. “You’re right. I do want to blend in a bit, be less conspicuous. I will be back in just a tick.” He said, turning and heading toward the corridor.

Once he had disappeared, Rose stood next to the console and ran her fingers along the edge. “Hope I didn’t offend him.” She said, and heard the reassuring hum. “Not sure what that was supposed to be, exactly, but if you’re saying I didn’t, I’ll have to take your word for it. Bit hard to tell with him, I think. Just, well, sure if I’d stuck around London a bit longer, mum would have wondered why he dressed the way he does.” A thought hit her in that moment. “Blimey, I’ve been gone for months. I think. No, can’t be, haven’t gotten my monthly yet. Unless, I’m not up the duff, am I?” She said to herself.

The TARDIS made a noise that reminded Rose of a laugh, the lights flickering softly.

She studied the ceiling. “Okay. Sentient, right? So, you understand me. But you’re a machine, so you don’t have a voice, so you can’t answer. Alright, okay, blink once for yes, twice for no. M’not pregnant, am I?”

The column distinctly flickered twice.

Relief washed over Rose in an instant. “Alright, has it been more than a month?”

There were another two blinks.

“So how long has it been, then? Right, that’s not ….”

There was a series of little beeps and pings, and a small piece of paper started to rise on the console a couple feet away. Rose moved toward it, ripping it off when the clicks, pings, and beeps all stopped, and read what was before her.

Companion: Rose Marion Tyler

Age upon boarding: 19 earth years.


Length of stay: 28 days
“Blimey, nearly a month then. I should probably be popping over to visit my Mum. Not now, of course. Be a bit awkward, that. Hate to run into myself, too. Unless I’m not with her. Might just be still out traveling with the pair of you.”

The TARDIS’s hum was so warm and caring that Rose felt it in her bones.

“We can certainly see your mum,” The Doctor’s voice came from behind her, and Rose set down the paper to turn to look at him. “But since we are in Utah, let alone seven years in your future, I doubt now would be a good time.”

Rose was too tongue tied to think of a response.

He was lovely before, bloody gorgeous, in fact. But now he was a bit … sexy. She could see his brown boots peeking out a pair of well-tailored denims. He still had his white, linen shirt, but it was untucked and without a waistcoat to obscure the silhouette of his lean build. And in place of his frock coat was a leather peacoat with brass buttons. He still appeared every bit the aristocrat, but he was modern with a slight touch of bad boy.

She must have been staring and observing a bit too long, because he fidgeted with the jacket before asking, “Is it alright? I don’t know why, but there was something about the jacket that called to me. Like a life I’ve yet to live or may have lived would love it.”

“S’fine.” She managed to choke out. Clearing her throat, she tried again. “Yeah, it’s, ah, it’s more modern. Not … not something I would see around the estates much, but, yeah.”

He smirked, and Rose was absolutely positive there was a tinge of a blush on his cheeks before he headed toward the door. “Shall we?” He asked as he passed.

Rose followed, a bit zombie like at first, then at a bit of a quicker pace. The Doctor paused at the door for her, opening it and waving her through. She grinned as she passed, and subtly inhaled to see if she’d catch a whiff of something wafting from him.

She didn’t note anything really different, just the normal scent of the Doctor. Tea, mostly. A hint of something warm and comforting that she couldn’t put into words. She supposed that now there was a hint of leather, but that wasn’t him so much as the jacket. And why she thought she would pick up on something as human and pedestrian as cologne, she’d never know. Conditioning from back home, she supposed. He dressed up, therefore her brain assumed he’d got the extra bit and add some scent to the mix.

She’d have to be careful, lest she become certifiable.

The room they stepped into was eerily dark. Very dim lights highlighted what was likely display cases, and the emergency lights on either end of the room added to the feeling that they should turn around and leave where ever they were in Utah in 2012.

She heard the Doctor’s boots on the tiled floor, sensed him moving away from her. Before she could ask where he was going, the lights in the room came on, illuminating the horrors and wonders exhibited around them.

“Blimey! It’s a great big museum!” Rose gasped out, heading toward a stuffed arm with claws.

“An alien museum, it would seem.” The Doctor replied, looking around with cautious awe.

“Remnants from all sorts of invaders of Earth, as well as basic space exploration. 2012, you lot haven’t made it far enough for … any of these to even be a possibility unless it was retrieved from a clean-up. Well, except that,” the Doctor said, and Rose turned and moved beside him. It looked
like a gauge of some variety.

“What’s that?”

“Milometer from the Roswell Spaceship. Actual crash landing, unfortunately for the species who crashed. I’ve never managed to make it to the area in order to identify them properly, though I doubt they were the little green men everyone from your time always imagines aliens to be.” He said with a smirk, looking at her as if she’d said as much herself.

She smiled back, tongue between her teeth, “Yeah, but I know better. Never would have thought you an alien, though.” The quirk of his eyebrow made her blush, and averting of her eyes to his torso didn’t help anything.

Does he have abs? Rose wondered. Bet he’s got a highlight. Bet he’s all strength but nothing is really defined, just highlighted. Blimey, that Mister Darcy look was hiding an awful lot. She peeked up at him, seeing an amused smirk starting to form while that brow remained fully raised. She felt the blood rush to her face and she turned away.

“Don’t tell me you can read minds,” She asked.

“No,” He chuckled. “Not in the sense you’re thinking. I would need to be touching your temples and really concentrating with you. I am telepathic, if I were around my people, we’d sense each other.” He looked around as his humor faded, and before Rose could ask how he seemed to know what she was thinking, he was moving with swiftness to something a couple cases down. She followed him, peering around him to see the metal head in the case. “Look at you.” He said, caressing the glass.

“What is it?” She asked before reading the plate below.


“An enemy I have faced more times than I’d like. And, I’m afraid, reading the information provided … an enemy I will face again.” He sighed with frustration. “Just created a fixed point by reading that. I’m going to have to be there, knowing it’s happened and that there is no way you lot would likely know how to deal with it at such a time.”

“A fixed point? Whaddya …?”

Rose never got to finish the sentence as suddenly the doors at either end of the room burst open, and a literal small army came in with guns pointing right at them.

The Doctor immediately reached around her, gently pushing against her side opposite of him to steer her behind him. She only went part way, enough to satisfy his wanting to protect her, but not so far that she couldn’t see him. The Doctor then backed them up a couple feet, putting the display to their back, and raising his hands as she did.

“We mean no harm, honestly. I registered a distress signal coming from here and felt compelled to answer it.” He stated firmly, a dark undertone to his voice that didn’t allow for argument.

Not one soldier moved. Not one flinched. They all remained still as statues with their guns pointed at them. In a strange way, it was like they were looking through them, and if she had dared to, Rose would have had a peek at the ghost head in the case to see if maybe it was coming back to life or something.
There was the distant click of shoes, heels likely, and a nondescript man in a suit entered the room with a smart dressed woman who had glorious red curls. Both seemed no-nonsense, walking with purpose and authority toward them. Rose marveled how the woman not only kept pace with the bloke, but did so with a snug pencil skirt and heels.

Both also seemed more concerned than the aggravated they were trying to exude.

“You two look like you might just be in charge of something, hopefully this place.” The Doctor said, his smile as charming as Rose had ever seen it. “There seems to be a mistake. We mean no harm, truly. We were just ….”

“How did you get in?” The man asked bluntly, rudely cutting the Doctor off in a no-nonsense tone.

The Doctor’s smile faded. “I got a distress signal, I came to investigate.”

“Yes, but how did you get in? You’re fifty-four floors below ground level in a remote, secure location, known only by those who work here and the president of the United States.” The man stared at Rose, and she felt as though she was being interrogated without any of the questions being directed at her. It reminded her distinctly of the time when Jimmy ran into a bit of a snag, she never did find out over what, and the police dragged her off to the side when all she meant to do was pay his bail.

She didn’t eat lunch for a week before she managed to suck up the courage to pawn a gold chain given to her by her grandmother Tyler. When she arrived at the station shortly after, she was promptly questioned, and questioned again. It wasn’t until she was close to tears that they finally allowed her to pay.

The memory wasn’t great, nor was recalling what happened that night when they finally got home. Rose forced herself to keep her hands up and not touch her face at the slight, sensory recall she was experiencing.

There was a pause where the Doctor remained silent, then he slowly lowered his arms.

With a quiet sigh of relief, Rose did the same, only to find her hand immediately gripped in an iron-tight hold that nearly hurt. She glanced up at her friend, seeing the fire in his eyes, to clench of his jaw. She’d only seen the Doctor like this when he was facing aliens that didn’t mean well.

Caressing his hand with her thumb, she hoped to ease him a bit. His grip loosened slightly, and he returned the stroke of her thumb with his own, but didn’t tear his eyes away from the man.

Rose glanced at the woman, seeing her pursed lips and darting gaze. If she had to guess, Rose would have wagered she was likely the smarter of the pair. She could see the ginger woman was already trying to come up with a way to settle the spat, and was maybe just waiting for an appropriate time to intervene.

“Fine,” The man said with a shrug, negating his partners need to jump in. “We’ll place you into holding until the boss gets here, and he’ll figure out what to do with you then.”

“Well, then,” The Doctor said, “lead the way.
“Never been in jail before.” Rose said as she paced in front of the iron door that kept them locked in. “Can it be considered jail when there are no bars?”

The Doctor, lounging on the cot in the corner with one knee bent over the other and both arms tucked behind his head, furrowed his brow in thought. “Likely, considering lots of places don’t have prisons in the same way you think of them. I think the question is more along the lines of ‘can it be considered jail if the man keeping us is not of any real authority’?”

“Why would you say that?” Rose asked as she moved across the room to lean on the wall by the cot.

It was the only one in the room, and there wasn’t much more. Just a loo tucked in the corner and a small sink, nothing else, not even a table.

“Well, there was no ‘you have the right to remain … whatever. And while we were held at gun point, they were not of the country’s military. It would seem that this is a private facility, nothing you have to worry about going on your record.’” He smiled slyly.

“Do I have one?” Rose asked him.

“Do you?” He countered.

“I dunno, you tell me. I know the TARDIS can give you information about me. And she is a time machine, yeah? So, it seems only, I dunno, logical that you’d check on my future sometime while I was sleeping.”

The Doctor made a hum of compliance, cocking his head to the side. “No,” He said, dragging out the word. “No, I’ve never done that. Never thought to do that, honestly. I have a stronger time sense this go around so I could have always taken a glimpse at your time line, see where you would end up.” He turned and looked at her full on. “But I can’t. Something about you, Rose, is preventing me from seeing where you’ll end up. Oh, I see that we were supposed to meet up at some point, but that’s it. Once our time lines converge, regardless of how or when, I can’t see anymore.”

Rose’s heart pounded. “What’s that supposed to mean? Was I … was I meant to die in that basement? When we met?”

“No,” The Doctor replied immediately, getting on his feet and standing before her with a speed and grace that only an alien could muster. He took hold of each of her hands and held her eye. “I swear, Rose, that that was never your destiny. I actually had a companion, a long time ago now, who was supposed to die when we met. I could see that, I could see she wasn’t supposed to continue. No, when I can’t see the future like this, it means … it means you are,” He paused, seeming to steel himself against something. Straightening his shoulders, he said, “It means, Rose Tyler, that you are quite intricately connected to my own future, and a Time Lord can never see his or her own time line. It would be terrible if they could, it’s how … how ….”

“How you’re the only one left of your kind.” Rose filled in the blank gently, pulling one hand from his grip and resting it at the junction between his neck and shoulder. “Had they all been able to see ….”

“Yes, had they.” He said with a flash of a grin he didn’t mean.

After a moment, Rose said, “I don’t have a record, by the way. Least not one I know about.”
“Yet,” He he said with a cheeky grin. “Stick with me long enough, you’re bound to be wanted on a few planets.”

“Think I might ever get one in the past? ‘Magine being, I dunno, exiled or something before I’m even born.”

“Oh, probably will happen a few times.” He said, and she chuckled a bit, stroking her thumb along the the skin of his neck before pulling away. His heart, or hearts, were beating so quick. But then, maybe they just felt that way? Two hearts, must feel like a human does when their pulse is racing.

Before anything else could be said, a pair of guards came into the room, three more out in the corridor with their guns blatantly on display. The Doctor shifted so he was once again just in front of Rose, the warmth in his eyes from before immediately gone, replaced with a cold storm of fury.

“Have I ever said how much I detest guns? And violence in general? You could simply ask nicely, and I’m sure Rose and I would have followed you to wherever you’re planning on taking us. We’d have used our manners and been ever so kind.”

They didn’t say anything, and a couple beats later, the woman with the lovely red curls came into the room, lips pursed and shoulders straight.

“Mister Van Statten wants to see you.” She said with an air of authority.

“Wonderful.” The Doctor said with a touch too much sarcasm, making the woman frown a bit further.

Rose wrinkled her nose at the name, but said nothing. It didn’t really invoke images of a kindly but eccentric millionaire who just happened to have a bunch of space junk and alien parts.

And at that thought, Rose glanced nervously at the Doctor.

He looked normal on the outside. As he took her hand in his, keeping her by his side as they followed the men out the room, the three with guns at their back, she took comfort in his cool touch. That was an alien thing that if they came in contact with him it may give him away. Well, maybe not now that she thought on it. That could be explained away as just cold hands, like she’d done originally. But his hearts, those would expose him. So would his inhuman way of being able to breath in such a different way than humans. And his strength ….

Rose tried not to think of all the things that could expose the Doctor and his true nature, including the man himself when he had a whim to do so. So many things could go wrong, and they still didn’t even know why they were drawn there.

They entered an office as boring and nondescript as the corridors that they were being led down.

A short, bald man with awful facial hair was speaking with a bloke about Rose’s age. Both had dark hair and brown eyes, and could possibly pass as father and son. The bald one reminded Rose of those blokes she’d see in American telly that often went about in awkward pattern shirts with a bit of grotesque chest hair peeking out. The younger one was dressed like the blokes on the estate did when they wanted to go somewhere “nice”. An oxford with a pair of pants that weren’t dressy in nature but certainly not denims. He, at least, also had the good sense not to replicate the older man’s grooming techniques.

Both of them looked up when she and the Doctor entered, both eyed her over in that leering way she’d become used to long ago, and then went back to what they were looking at before.
“What does it do?” The bald man asked as he looked over something that reminded Rose of a Pan flute. The bald man took it from the younger one, looking it over.

“Well you see, the tubes on the side must be to channel something.” The young, and apparently British, man replied. “I think maybe fuel…”

The Doctor laughed.

“Shut it,” the woman who came with them hissed.

“Sorry, I just couldn’t help myself.” The Doctor apologized insincerely. He turned to the pair of men on the other side of the desk. “Fuel? Do you really believe that? Did you really look at that beautiful, exquisite craftsmanship from Alpha Five Delta and think ‘this must be a fuel injector?’”

The young man shifted about, trying not to rub his palms on his legs while avoiding eye contact with both the bald man and the Doctor. Rose had to suck her lips in her mouth in order to smother the laugh she desperately wanted to let out. Would probably not be wise to even giggle, not with the Doctor clearly ready to show off his superiority.

“Well, what is it if it’s not part of a space ship?” The young bloke asked a bit petulantly.

The Doctor flinched toward them, and the sound of guns being cocked made the Doctor still. The bald man rolled his eyes and waved off the armed guards before extending the alien tech in his hands toward the Doctor.

“Thank you,” the Time Lord said as he took the alien tech and placed it in his open palm. “It doesn’t take a lot to draw the melody out of it, you just need to be delicate.” The Doctor explained as he caressed the top of the instrument with his fingers in such a way that a every hair on Rose’s body seemed to stand on end. She could nearly feel the same gentle caress on her skin made by the same cool, gentle fingers. A thought Rose quickly shoved to the back of her mind.

The song that came from the instrument was lovely, nearly hypnotic, and Rose noted everyone seemed to lean in toward it, not just her.

“It’s a musical instrument,” The bald man stated the obvious as the lovely notes echoed in the otherwise silent room. The Doctor nodded and smiled, continuing to play a little while longer. “Here, let me.” The bald man stood, grabbing it off the Doctor’s palms and causing the notes to die in an awful, grating matter.

“I did say ‘delicate’, didn’t I?” The Doctor stage whispered to Rose. She smirked in spite herself, and he smiled ever so slightly before turning back to the bald guy as he attempted to play. “Doesn’t take a lot of pressure, really. You caress it.”

“Like a lover?” The red-haired woman, who had seemed so stern before, asked in a near breathless way.

“Yes,” The Doctor chuckled gently, “I suppose so.”

Mere seconds later, the beeps and clicks that the bald guy was pulling from the instrument became beautiful music. There was a slight difference to what Rose had noted came from the Doctor’s playing. For whatever reason, she didn’t find the music quite as alluring. No one was leaning toward it like they’d done before. It was something like catchy lift music that you might catch yourself humming but in no way actually liked.

“You’re quite good at that.” The Doctor said, and he was right, she supposed.
“You were, too.” The man said. He tossed the instrument on the floor causing the Doctor to flinch and Rose to clench her jaw. Honestly, throwing a beautiful thing like that to the floor like it’s nothing?

“You’re quite the expert, in fact. Who exactly are you?” The man asked, losing his smile and trying to look intimidating. It was laughable, really, though Rose knew better than to let even a smirk get through.

“I’m the Doctor,” replied he replied. “And you must be this Van Statten I heard of.”

“I am.” The man, Van Statten, said simply. “Henry Van Statten, and you trespassed. Though ‘how’ is the real question. I find it hard to believe that you, an apparent expert on extra-terrestrial artifacts just happened to stumble upon the most valuable collection in the world.”

“Yes, well, I have been known to find a lot of things by accident.” The Doctor replied.

“Fifty-three floors down? How did you get in, huh? You and your little cat burglar accomplice.” He leered at her, and the Doctor shifted to put himself more between them. Van Statten smirk, and it made Rose’s stomach churn. “You’re quite the collector yourself. She’s rather pretty.”

“She’s gonna smack you if you keep calling her ‘she’,” Rose snapped from behind the Doctor.

“She’s English, too.” He turned to the younger man. “Hey, little Lord Fauntleroy, got you a girlfriend.”

“You didn’t ‘get’ anyone anything when it comes to Rose.” The Doctor bit out. “I don’t care who you are or what authority you think you have, you will respect my friend and myself.”

“Why’s that?” Van Statten asked smugly, folding his arms across his chest.

The Doctor reached into his leather jacket and pulled out a small billfold. Rose smirked, believing it was the psychic paper, until she noticed it wasn’t quite the same. There was a notch in the back that looked like a rivet, and the leather itself looked a bit sturdier.

The Doctor opened the billfold and handed it to Van Statten. The man reached out for it, his smug smile fading a touch as he looked on.

“UNIT.” He said.

“Yes, UNIT. I’m sure you realize that what you have down here is technically illegal.”

Van Statten scoffed. “Nothing they would be able to keep me in jail for. I may not have a fancy badge, but I’ve been known to help out the not-so-secret government agency.”

“Yes, but I bet they didn’t know you had all this when you helped them a time or two. And, while I’m sure the US office is a bit more lax under normal circumstances, contact with the British, Asian, and South American offices bringing to light your collection would force them to turn their heads back from looking the other way. We received a distress call, it came from here. How we got here or how we received it is, quite frankly, not your business, and you don’t need to know more than what I’ve told you. So, Mister Van Statten, I will tell you this once and only once: you will respect me, and Rose, and anyone else in the room with me, are we clear? Yes? Excellent, now, if you want to send me on my way, I will need to know what alien tech here in your little cave of wonders happened to register with my scans.”

Van Statten, for his part, looked a mix of contrite and irritated.
“Alright, Doctor, I’ll play.” He said as if he still completely had the upper hand. “I have one living specimen. It’s in a cage near where you were found. Would you like to see?”

“Another prisoner?” Rose asked, stepping out from behind the Doctor. “How could it send out a distress signal if it’s another prisoner?”

“Wouldn’t you like to know?” Van Statten asked.

“Matter-of-fact, I would.” Rose replied, hands on her hips.

Van Statten laughed. “No, I don’t think so, Doll Face. Bit dangerous for a pretty lil thing like you. English,” he said to the younger man, “Look after the Doctor’s crumpet, won’t you?”

“Oh, no, she comes with me.” The Doctor said flatly. “I won’t let her out of my sight with any of your … employees. Are we clear?”

Van Statten simply shrugged. “You want to risk her life, by all means. English, come with. Goddard, inform the cage we’re coming down.”

The red-haired woman nodded once, and was on an in-ear communication device in an instant.

“What happened to the man she was following around before?” The Doctor asked as they headed toward the lifts at the other end of the hall.

“Palowski? Had to get rid of him. Incompetent. Probably doesn’t even remember his name at this point.” Van Statten laughed to himself. The English bloke looked distinctly uncomfortable with that thought. Never a good sign, and Rose didn’t want to contemplate how someone would forget themselves simply by being fired.

They were quiet for the most part, which Rose was quite surprised about considering Van Statten struck her as a man who would get off simply by hearing himself talk.

When the lift doors opened, he led them toward a heavy metal door. She noted that security here was more present than anywhere else.

“We’ve tried everything to get the creature to talk. It’s shielded itself, but there are signs of life inside.” He said as the door opened. A man in a sort of haz-mat looking suit stepped out, removing a helmet that looked like those Mickey wore when welding.

“Inside what, or do I dare ask?” The Doctor questioned as the other man approached.

Van Statten merely smiled.

“Welcome back, sir.” The new arrival greeted. “I’ve had to take the power down, the Metaltron is resting.”

“Metaltron?” The Doctor repeated incredulously.

“Thought of it myself. Good isn’t it?” Van Statten asked as if there could be no doubt.

Rose snorted.

Her fellow Englishman did his best not to react and had to turn his head to hide the smile caused by a chuckle he failed to hide with a cough.

“Right,” The Doctor said as he cracked an obvious grin. “Well, let’s find out the proper name for
it, shall we?"

The man in the suit took off his gloves and held them out to the Doctor.

“Here, you’d better put these on. The last guy that touched it … burst into flames.”

Rose’s eyes went wide as the Doctor eyed the gloves suspiciously. “Then I won’t touch it, will I?”

This time, Rose heard another feminine snort, and turned to see Goddard a few feet behind them. She gave Rose a smirk, which she couldn’t help but return.

“Go ahead, Doctor,” Van Statten gestured to the open door, “impress me.”

The Doctor rolled his eyes before he headed through the doorway, the man in the suit shutting the door behind him. Van Statten marched over quickly, whispering something into the man’s ear that he nodded to, then gestured for the rest of them to follow him.

He brought them over to a monitor, and leaned over it so that Rose could barely make out what was on the practically dark screen. The Doctor was only just discernible, a shadow moving around with only a couple lights visible.

He scuffed his feet, and there was the sound of metal moving around.

“It’s absolutely barbaric what you’ve been through, by the looks of things. Likely all at Mister Van Statten’s orders to find out who or what you are. But I received your call for help, and I’ll do all I can to get you back where you belong.” He sighed. “Where or whenever that may be. I’m the Doctor, by the way.”

There was a lot of quiet before there was a reply in a robotic, monotone voice and a dim blink of blue light appeared on the screen.

“DOC-TOR.”

There was absolute silence.

“THE DOCTOR?” It started to sound more desperate, and more enraged.

“It … it can’t be. No, no, it can’t be. You couldn’t survive, you couldn’t ….”

“Get the lights on, I want to see what’s going on in there.” Van Statten ordered, and Rose heard the thud of a heavy switch moving.

The thing in the room with the Doctor looked like a pepper pot with a whisk and a plunger. The blue light that broke through the darkness was like a telescope and it seemed pinned to the Doctor who stood stock still.

The Time Lord looked torn between utter despair and complete rage, like it would take little more than a breath to push him in one direction or the other. He was a hunter, tightly coiled and ready to strike as much as he was the flighty doe who was prepared to bound away from danger.

“EXTERMINATE!” The thing yelled, and the Doctor chose flight, bolting for the door. He tried the handle, only to find it wouldn’t move.

“Let me out!” He called, pounding on the door as the killer pepper pot repeated its cries.

“EXTERMINATE.”
Rose held her breath, terrified for what might happen to the Doctor.
"YOU ARE AN ENEMY OF THE DALEKS. YOU MUST BE DESTROYED."

He waited for the pain, because while he'd never had the pleasure of feeling a Dalek's ray that was meant to kill, he'd heard stories from those lucky enough to regenerate after a glancing blow. He thought of Rose, stuck seven years ahead of her time, in a country with a man he didn't want to even think about her being near. He thought of the Time Lords lost in another Universe and how he was likely to meet the same fate as those other twelve that were unfortunately caught in the cross fire of their clever plan.

But nothing happened.

He turned away from the door and looked at the Dalek. If such a creature could express emotion, if it could even have emotion, it would have looked quite befuddled. As it was, the way the eye stock kept looking down at its blaster and back at the Doctor, the way the blaster moved about, was pathetically adorable on the tin-can menace.

Laughter came from the Doctor before he even realized it was happening. Peels of it, making his chest ache for lack of breath and his eyes stretch wide with madness of it all.

"Oh, look at you." He said, shaking his head. Bitterness twisted his smile and colored his voice as he slowly stalked toward his greatest enemy. "Here we are, in a room with no way for me to escape, and you chained down but your blasters free, and you can't kill me. If you lot could feel anything more than hate I bet you would be raging right about now." He threw his arms wide as if to make himself a bigger target as he stared down the eye stock. "Your one function in life, and you can't even do that properly." He ran a hand through his curls, tugging them a bit before letting his hands fall against his side with a thud. "You're useless. Last of the Daleks, and you can't even carry on the prime directive. Best thing to happen to the Universe, really. But still….

His mind trailed off, thinking of the moment Gallifrey disappeared and the entire Dalek fleet wiped itself out.

"LAST OF THE DALEKS?" The Dalek questioned. "EXPLAIN! EXPLAIN!"

The Doctor chuckled darkly. "You destroyed yourselves, with a bit of my help. Well, mine and a few other Time Lords that you were trying so desperately to destroy. You lost the war. But then again, so did we."

"YOU LIE." The Dalek retorted.

"I only wish. We're it, you and I. There are no more Daleks out there, no more Time Lords. That's why I was the one who picked up your distress call, because it was yours, I know it was. And they were treating you horribly in here, I cannot deny that. But …." He turned away, pulling at his hair again. "But knowing everything you've likely done since the moment of your creation, I'm almost willing to believe it's for the best. Letting them destroy you in this way, slowly making you go insane." He looked at the switches to the side, following a wire from the back of the controls to where it connected to part of the chains holding the Dalek.

The Doctor went to the switch and caressed it.
"It would be so easy to wipe you from existence. Flip this switch, up the voltage, and no more Daleks. Just like I should have done a very, very long time ago."

"HAVE PITY." The Dalek stated.

"Why? Dalek's have never shown pity, I don't think you even know what it means to pity. You're a danger to this planet, these people. Functioning or not, I don't doubt you'll find a way to get what you want in the end, your kind have always been a bit crafty."

He ran his fingers over the handle of the switch one last time, and on impulse, flipped it.

He couldn't say that he felt guilty over the screams of agony, not when he knew the terror the bloody Daleks had spread throughout the universe. But there was a sick, twisting knot in his stomach that made him throw the switch back off just as Van Stattan and the Dalek's tormentor came back in.

"You're absolutely right, there's something inside," He said to the both of them, his big Time Lord brain forgetting who said what not fifteen minutes before. "It's nasty, I'm not sure you want to see it. But I will tell you this," He pointed to the golden shell protecting the mutation inside. "That is the most dangerous creature in the universe. If it gains power, if it gets out, it could wipe out half the country before your president even has a chance to issue a state of emergency. Destroy it, for the love of Rassilon, don't let it live with all these innocents in this base." He stepped from the room, hearing Van Statten starting to spout orders but not really hearing what they are.

"Doctor?" Rose's voice cut through some of the fog, and he turned to see her approaching him cautiously. The young man who barely took his eyes off of her from the moment they entered Van Statten's office was hovering close by as if he could somehow protect Rose from whatever harm the Time Lord could cause her.

As if he would.

"I'm alright." He said without feeling, meeting Rose's warm brown eyes. He could tell she knew he was lying, and took a step toward her.

The young man advanced as well, narrowing his eyes a bit.

Rolling his eyes, the Doctor took another, larger step to close most of the distance between he and Rose. Cupping her cheek a moment before he realized how forward such a gesture was, he dropped his hand on her shoulder and put on an insincere grin. "I promise, I will be alright."

"Didn't look alright in there." She said with a forced joviality that warmed his hearts.

"It's …." He couldn't find the words, and he didn't have the time as Van Statten came around the corner.

"Doctor," he said with a smarmy grin that made the Doctor's lip want to curl in disgust. "Walk with me."

"Why?" He asked with a sigh.

"I want to discuss this Dalek with you." He replied, hands behind his back, rolling on his heels a little.

Another sigh, and the Doctor looked to Rose once more. She looked torn, chewing her lower lip and wringing her fingers. He wanted to pull her close, hold her, but didn’t think she would
appreciate that.

It was nice to realize he was coming back to himself, especially after the war. He’d always been physically affection with his companions in this body. The ones he called friends, even more so, but that had changed as he entered the war. And yet, despite realizing he was becoming himself again, he didn’t want to push things with Rose. He didn’t want to hug her, hold her hand too much, in case she thought him forward, or maybe some sort of creep like Van Statten seemed to be.

"I could show her my workshop." The young English man volunteered. Rose stopped ringing her fingers as she went rigid at his statement. "I mean, if she wants to, that is."

Rose barely looked over her shoulder at Van Statten's employee, before she leaned toward The Doctor. "I can." She said with uncertainty. "I mean, I think … I think you need some space, yeah?" She whispered to him. "And if this Van Statten bloke can help you with the Dalek, thing ….

"Are you comfortable with being on your own with this …." He eyed the eager young man, suspicious of his motives for getting his Rose, his friend, alone. There was no polite word on the top of his tongue, so the Doctor left it, allowing Rose to fill in the blanks where she would.

She rolled her eyes, humor sparkling in them as her lips gave just the barest hint of a smile. "This one's harmless compared to some of the blokes I've been around." The humor and smile faded as she placed her hand on his extended arm. "Just worried about you."

"Don't be." He said, wondering to himself if maybe it wasn't the best thing in the world that he felt a flicker of something that he hadn't since Charley left. "I'll talk some sense into this ….

"Doctor." Van Statten said with a touch of impatience that had the Doctor huff quietly.

"All will be well." He said, squeezing Rose's shoulder. With a nod, he turned to face the private collector, weary of the wicked delight in the man's eyes.

"So, tell me about this Dalek, Doctor."

"Sorry about the mess," Adam said. And Rose knew his name because the introduction was one of the first of many things he spouted off the moment they were alone. Adam Mitchell, the youngest graduate with a double masters some university-that-Rose-couldn't-give-two-figs-about had ever seen had been head hunted by the oh so great Henry Van Statten nearly the moment the diploma was in his hand.

He never once said exactly what those masters were in, but Rose was sure they were quite impressive.

"Mister Van Statten sorta lets me do my own thing," Adam continued as he cleared a spare chair in the room. He turned to smile at Rose, all cocky charms and self-assurance. Like far too many other blokes she’d met in her life. "So long as I deliver the goods." He added with a subtle wink that could pass for an eye twitch if Rose wasn't receptive.

Which she really wasn't.

Oh, he was her type in the physical sense. He was fit, tall, dark hair and eyes, charming smile and all that. But for some reason she didn't want to think on too much, he was lacking. And maybe just
a bit appalling. The latter could have been because of his mannerisms and the like, she never did find guys who knew they were clever attractive.

Except for the Doctor.

Who wasn't her type at all.

And alien to boot.

But she still found him attractive, even though she didn't want to admit it even to herself.

"What do you think that is?" Adam broke her inner thoughts, and she frowned at him before realizing she had been walking along the work bench, running her fingers over random bits of alien things as she went. Her fingers had come to rest on a chunk of something cool, and she picked it up to look at it.

"A lump of metal." Rose said, though her voice inflicted to sound like a question. It was an old habit from the days of Jimmy, and even before. Never make a boy or man look stupid, that's what her Mum always said, their egos couldn't handle it.

"Yeah, yeah but I think, well, I'm almost certain, it's from a hull of a spacecraft."

Rose looked down at the metal in her hand. It looked like a part of a car, or a building. Honestly, it could have come from anything, and likely had. So, she smiled and nodded, carefully placing the metal piece down on the table.

"The thing is," Adam said, leaning against the table in a way that Rose imagined he thought made him look casual and relaxed. She wondered if maybe he idolized Van Statten for more reasons than simply giving him a job. He continued without noticing the slight, quick curl of revulsion Rose's lips took. "The thing is, it's all true. You've seen it, that Dalek thing. It's things like that the United Nations tries to keep quiet. Spacecrafts, aliens, visitors to Earth, it's been going on for years. The Universe is teeming with life, and the average person walking down the street doesn't think on it at all."

"Right." She said simply to fill in the moment of silence.

"And I get to come here, each day, and be amongst this magnificent collection of things from worlds away."

"And you catalogue it." She tried not to sound patronizing.

"Best job in the world." Adam said with a lift of his chin.

"Right. So, someone with a double … masters, or something, from … somewhere. Best job in the world for you is something my mate Shireen does after going through a foundations course?"

Adam looked gob smacked, and Rose tried her damnedest not to snicker. She may have smirked a little, but quickly tamed it down.

Adam shrugged, "Well, you see, Van Statten has agents. I was head hunted, remember? Anyway, agents all over the world looking for geniuses to recruit."

"And you're a genius?" She said, her smirk threatening to emerge once more.

"Sorry, but yeah. Can't help it, I was born clever."
"You were born something." Rose mumbled under her breath as she turned to look at other artifacts spread out on the work bench.

"When I was eight, I logged onto the US Defence System, nearly caused World War Three." He bragged with a glint in his eye and a smug grin on his face.

"What, and that's funny, is it?" She asked, furrowing her brow as she tuck a lock of hair behind her ear.

"Well you should've been there, just to see them running about! Fantastic!"

"Doesn't sound it to me." Rose replied as neutrally as she possibly could.

"Oh, but it was." He sobered. "But I suppose if you're with that Doctor bloke from UNIT, probably shouldn't be bragging about hacking the government." He chuckled, and Rose forced a smile. She tried to remember if she'd heard about it in passing, but it wasn't ringing any bells. Before she could think of something to deflect her lack of knowledge, Adam started looking shy. "So … is it just through work that you're with the Doctor? Or are you two …?"

She blinked, stunned silent for a moment before her brain finally caught up to what he was saying. "No, we're just friends." She replied, a wave of disappointment crashing on her as she said the words. But it was fine that they were just friends.

Yes, there was likely some sort of spark on her end. He was lovely, after all. But being “just friends” was likely still for the best. After all, they still didn’t know one another as well as they should. She knew he had a dark streak, it showed up when facing the merciless. But the extent of it that he demonstrated today proved they still had a ways to go before they could….

No, he was a Time Lord, far too good to even have a fleeting thought about a Chav from the estates.

"Good." Adam said with a firm nod.

"Why's it good?" Rose asked.

She regretted it the moment Adam beamed at her like she'd just promised him a date. "Just is." He said, attempting to sound relaxed and failing miserably.

Rose cleared her throat, inching away from him a slight bit.

"So, up here with these bits of metal and stuff, but there's an actual alien below. Must be a bit of a blow, not being able to work with him."

"Well, heard your Doctor say it's dangerous, yeah? And we all know it is. The thing that happened a few years back? I still remember seeing it on the news, though it didn't get down here, obviously." Adam said a bit smugly. Then he got a mischievous look about him as he headed toward the computer on another work station. "Although, if you're a genius, it doesn't take long to patch into the comms system and watch the ones who do get to work with it."

Rose followed him, a bit too curious in a morbid sort of way to see what was going on when it was thought no one was looking. Part of her didn't want to see it, not after the way the Doctor attempted to electrocute it. The Dalek had screamed in agony, but the Doctor didn't even flinch. But then, she also remembered him saying it had caused all kinds of trouble, of pain and suffering, and she wasn't so sure the Doctor was entirely in the wrong.
She was reminded of the Gelth, and how Gwyneth couldn't see how they were trying to use her. Perhaps, in a way, the Doctor's view was like hers but in the opposite way. He couldn't help but see that the Dalek would only be trouble.

Adam had the screen up, showing the Dalek in the room with the man in the haz-mat suit. The man was doing something to the Dalek that sounded a lot like drilling, and the high-pitched screams coming from the tin-can alien sounded far, far worse than anything the Doctor had been doing.

She cringed, wondering where the Doctor was and how he could possibly think this was a good idea. She remembered him saying it needed to be destroyed before it wiped out the planet, but wasn't there a more … humane way to go about it? Did the Dalek need to be in so much pain while it happened?

"Talk, and this stops." The man on the screen said as he paused his assault for a moment. When the Dalek remained silent, the man chuckled wickedly and went back to his torture.

"I can't … I can't handle this. I need to get down there and stop that." She said, turning away from the computer.

"But the Doctor said it needed to be destroyed." Adam said, smiling in confusion.

"Yeah, but I bet he didn't think it'd be tortured like that." She said over her shoulder as she made her way out the room and back down toward the cage.

It didn't sit well with the Doctor that Van Statten's armed guards followed them into the lift. Goddard, he could understand, but those men at their backs did nothing to make him assured this was merely going to be a discussion. He wasn’t precisely thrilled over Rose heading off with that brown-noser, but seeing where this was going, it was for the best that she had.

"So, tell me, Doctor of UNIT, what's the outside of this Dalek, if what's inside is the actual creature?"

"It's battle armor." The Doctor replied, eyes on the gun nearest to him.

"And what's it look like?" Van Statten asked.

"Revolting. Like melted, putrid flesh of something that hadn't quite been formed before its creator gave up it. Which, I sometimes wonder if that was actually the case. They were genetically engineered with every single emotion stripped away, all but hate, anyway. Hate for every and anything that isn't a Dalek or its creator."

Van Statten smirked. "Genetically engineered by whom?"

"His name was Davros, and he was a genius. The king of his own little world, much like you. Believed things should only ever be his way, damn the consequences. Just remember that the death and destruction he caused was not limited to one planet or race, and certainly not just to his time." The Doctor warned, hoping a stern gaze would wipe the smug grin off Van Statten's face. When it didn't work, he turned to Goddard. "How long has it been here?"

"It's been on Earth for over fifty years, sold at a private auction moving from one collection to another. It's never done anything since its recovery from a crater in Ascension Islands. It screamed
for three days, and I think people thought it'd gone insane."

"Be thankful it didn't. A sane Dalek is a bit mad."

"But why would it wake up now? Why is it such a threat?" She asked with genuine curiosity.

"I'm afraid it came to life because I arrived. I have a history with the Daleks, one that goes back much further than I care to admit. And sadly, nothing spurs life back in to anything than facing down an old enemy."

"You said something about a war?" She asked kindly.

The Doctor smiled, "Ruthless when needed, but a gentle and understanding when it counts. You are going to go quite far, Diana Goddard. Yes, I mentioned a war. It was a battle, the final battle, really, between my people and the Dalek race. That creature fell through time somehow, hit by a temporal weapon or pushed through a portal of some sort. The only survivor."

"But you survived, too." Van Statten noted, trying to sound casual. Maybe he did to the average observer, but the Doctor knew better. He hadn't survived in this body for over a millennium by not being aware of his surroundings or people.

Slipping his hands in his leather jacket pockets, his fingers wrapped around the sonic screwdriver within. He thumbed the settings as he gave a casual shrug and a put-on frown.

"It wasn't my intention. I was hardly suicidal, but it wasn't my intention to be the only survivor, apart from our friend there." He said, finding the setting and pushing the button on his device to disable the weapons.

The gentle whir of the sonic baffled Van Statten, and he looked to the lights accusingly. The guards didn't seem to notice anything, and they likely wouldn't until they went to fire only to find the clip jammed.

"That means," Van Statten said, returning his stare to the Doctor, "that the Dalek isn't the only alien on Earth, Doctor. There's you. The only one of your kind in existence."

"And I bet you're just itching to add me to your collection, aren't you?" The Doctor turned to face him, hands coming out of his pockets so he could cross his arms over his chest. "You want to run scans and tests, do everything but dissect me, then put me in a glass cage so you can admire me any time you wish. You want to claim you have an alien to those you discern to be worthy of the knowledge. But you see, Van Statten, I am the sole survivor of a war, and what do you think it takes to accomplish such a feat?" The lift chimed, and when the doors opened to reveal what the Doctor could only describe as another torture chamber, he wheeled around to look at Van Statten.

Fury moved through his veins, causing his fists to clench and his nostrils flare. A muscle in his jaw twitched, and Van Statten visibly recoiled.

"You are the worst kind of coward, aren't you?" He asked as he heard the guns click but not fire. "They say I am for running from the war, for refusing to fight. But you? Oh, you march me down here to your little room for a bit of exploratory surgery. Want to learn what is different about me, what sets a Time Lord apart from a human?" He stalked forward, seeing Goddard step between him and the guards in the corner of his eye while he focused on the quivering beast before him.

"But you can't ask with polite curiosity, can you? No, you need to use what you learn for profit. I bet you don't just collect wonderful pieces of life beyond your atmosphere, you scavenge it."

"I … I found a few things, yeah."
"And what, exactly, did you think the Dalek could give you, huh?" The Doctor challenged. When Van Statten didn't answer, he shook his head. "I'm going to hazard a guess and say Military advancements. But not just the American government, your greed and ambition is too great for something so patriotic. Highest bidder, I'd wager."

He must have hit a nerve, as Van Statten sucked in a breath and looked quite put out.

"And what are you going to tell your little friends at UNIT, huh?" Van Statten asked, jabbing the Doctor in his chest with a pointed finger. There was a flinch of pain from the former that both the Doctor and Van Statten ignored as he ranted on. "Anything you think you're going to walk out of here knowing is going to be wiped from your brain. In fact, I'd like to wager you're going to forget so much of what's happened you'll forget what your name even is."

"I'd love to see you try." The Doctor retorted.

"It can be quite easily arranged." Van Statten smiled smugly.

Before another word could be said between them, the overhead lights turned red and flashing, and a voice came over an intercom: "Condition red! Repeat, condition red! This is not a drill."

"Condition red?" The Doctor asked as Van Statten lost a bit of his coloring.

"It's the cage."

"The Dalek."

"Something's happened."

"As I knew it would. It found power somehow, and now we're in trouble."

"Nothing can escape the cage."

"Are you willing to put your life on the line with that knowledge?"

There was barely a pause.

"To my office, we can find out what's going on there." Van Statten said, turning to the elevators.

"Make it so," The Doctor said with a sigh, earning a quirk of an eyebrow from Goddard, but no reaction from the idiot that got them into this new and dangerous mess.

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She imagined that Adam felt right impressive, flashing his level three badge around and claiming special access. Which, really, only proved more to Rose that he likely was too terrified to see what was actually inside "the cage" before this moment since he clearly could have at any point.

The Dalek's torturer refused to leave, assuming Rose and Adam needed protection. Maybe they would, she had seen how the Doctor reacted, heard what he said. But what was happening to it, the sounds it was making ….

"Hello?" Rose said to the Dalek, approaching slowly and keeping eye contact with the part of the top she assumed it saw with, the telescope bit that followed the Doctor about the room when he was in it. It seemed focused on her as well, which wasn't as odd as she may have found it a month
ago. When the Dalek didn't say anything, she licked her lips and took a fortifying breath. "Are you in pain? My name's Rose Tyler, I'm a friend of the Doctor's, but I don't want to hurt you. Do you … do you have a name?"

"YES." It replied.

"What?" She asked, tilting her head to the side.

"I AM IN PAIN." It said quite slowly, it's voice crackling. "THEY TORTURED ME. BUT THEY STILL FEAR ME. DO YOU FEAR ME, FRIEND OF THE DOCTOR?"

She shook her head. "No." She said honestly.

It lowered its telescope thing as if trying to hang its head.

"I AM DYING."

"No, can't be." She said gently.

"I WELCOME DEATH. BUT I AM GLAD … THAT BEFORE I DIE … I MET A HUMAN WHO WAS NOT AFRAID."

Rose's heart twisted in agony. Maybe this Dalek wasn't like the others? Maybe he'd (or she, really) ran from the wars like the Doctor had, tried to find another way to end the feud without bloodshed. Perhaps the Doctor was blinded by hate and pain and poor memories and couldn't see this one was different.

"Isn't there anything I can do?" She asked softly, eyes stinging.

"MY RACE IS DEAD. I SHALL DIE ALONE." It said.

"No," She said, sniffing and making sure the tears in her eyes did not spill over. "No, not alone. I'm here, I'll be here with you." She said, giving it a sad smile before reaching out to touch it on the top of its head.

"Rose, no!" Adam yelled, but her hand was already on the warm metal surface.

And then it was hot enough to burn, and remembering hearing the last person to touch it caught fire, she pulled her hand back immediately. It was red and sore, like she'd touched her hand on a hot pan, but nothing worse.

There was a hand print on the shell where she'd touched, and it seemed as if the Dalek was coming back to life from her kindness.

"GENETIC MATERIAL EXTRAPOLATED, INITIATE CELLULAR RECONSTRUCTION!"

The chains around the Dalek began to snap as its body seemed to partly repair itself before their eyes, sparks flying in the process.

"What the hell have you done?" The Dalek's torturer demanded, shoving Rose back where she landed against Adam's chest. They stumbled back, and he grabbed her arms to steady her as they watched the haz-mat clad man approach the restored mini-tank. "What are you gonna do? Sucker me to death?" He asked it mockingly.

His scream of surprise was cut off by the plunger like part of the Dalek as it suctioned itself to his face. As Adam turned Rose around to run from room, the sound of bones crunching halted any
cries the former torture might have made.

The door slammed shut behind them, and another man who was at the controls and monitors got on the PA and sounded the alarm.

"Is this all that can be done?" Rose asked.

"We can't do anything else," The Man retorted as they waited to hear from someone of a higher authority.

In a space of time that felt like hours and seconds at once, the Doctor, Van Statten, and Miss Goddard appeared on the screen.

"What's happened?" The Doctor asked.

"It's my fault." Rose confessed immediately, keeping her emotions in check as best she could between the panic, fear, and pain all struggling against the agony of possibly disappointing the Doctor in this. "I felt sorry for it. I wanted to comfort it when it was dying, I didn't know I could …"

"Rose, none of this is your fault, even if you were somehow the catalyst." The Doctor reassured.

"Says you." Van Statten snapped. "Anything that happens is on you, crumpet."

"No," The Doctor said through clinched teeth. "Anything that happens is on you, Van Statten, for having that thing here alive in the first place."

"I've sealed the compartment," the man at the controls spoke up. "It can't get out. The lock's got a billion combinations."

"The Dalek's a genius, a real one. It can calculate a trillion combinations in a second. You all need to get out of there now. Don't wait for anything, just go." The Doctor locked eyes on Rose, pleading with her.

"We should wait until the guards get here," Adam said, putting a hand on her shoulder to get her attention. It was oddly comforting considering everything that happened and just how obnoxious he was before. But his genuine fear and concern showed Rose a bit of what she hoped was the real Adam.

"Alright." She said with a nod.

"Rose," The Doctor urged her, and she turned back to him.

"Thing gets out, Doctor, pretty defenseless down here. Least with a guard we might have protection, yeah?"

The Doctor seemed torn for a moment before relenting. "Okay, wait for the guard."

"Make sure they know not to actually kill it." Van Statten said to the guy at the controls. "Disarm it, subdue it, do what you have to to render it useless again. I want it alive."

"So you can torture it again?" Rose asked as the heavy tread of running soldiers reached her ears and grew louder.

"I want information." Van Statten said, eyeing the Doctor with a near lustful expression.
"De Maggio," The guy at the controls said as soon as the footsteps stopped. There was a click, and the doors to the cage began to open. "Take the civilians and get them out alive. That is your job, got that?"

One of the guards, a woman, nodded once and turned to Rose and Adam. "You two, with me."

Rose didn't have to be told twice, and without looking back, she took off with the guard.

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Seeing her leave had filled the Doctor with both relief and unease. He hated not seeing for himself that she was alright, but as the Dalek escaped the cage and came toward the monitor from which they were able to communicate with, he was glad she wasn’t there to witness everything else that was happening.

The guards fled when it became apparent that nothing was going to stop it, and the Dalek had smashed the two-way monitor, causing Diana to tap into the security system to monitor what was happening.

"We're losing power, it's draining the base." She said, a nervous crack to her otherwise business-toned voice.

"Wait for it, the Doctor thought to himself with a sigh, pinching the bridge of his nose.

"It's raiding the power supplies for the whole of Utah." She said, a bit more shocked now.

There we go.

"Sir, the entire West Coast has gone down."

"That's because it's downloading all the information it can get. Not just from this base, it's accessing Earth's Internet, drawing from it all the available information, probably in an attempt to find other Daleks. It likely doesn't believe it's the only one to survive."

Diana and Van Statten exchanged looks of concern.

"What is it?" The Doctor asked.

"Well, it's just that," Goddard said, "Well, a few years ago there was the battle of Canary Wharf. There were the Ghosts."

"Cybermen," The Doctor corrected absentmindedly, recalling the display in the main exhibit.

"And the Metaltrons, or the Daleks." Goddard corrected. "It was quite heavy in Europe, here less so. But there was news coverage, and while it all happened in a span of ….."

"Don't say. Don't tell me." The Doctor cut her off. He took a deep breath. "So, the Dalek will see that there were, not long ago, other Daleks on Earth. But the thing is, the Daleks could have come here from any point in their time line, and it would know that. Seeing them here even months ago will mean nothing if there are no other Daleks to communicate with now that it has the ability to."

"Sir, the cameras in the vault have gone down." Diana said when the Doctor paused.

"So, there is only emergency power left, then. I'm sorry, but you have to destroy it now before it
gets out, and it will." The Doctor said, giving only a glance to Van Stratten.

Diana looked to her boss who remained quiet, staring off into space. When he didn't seem to want to issue a command, she got on the communicator and gave an order.

"All guards converge in the Metaltron cage, immediately."

"Let's just hope that whatever fire power your guards have, it will be enough." The Doctor said, watching the monitor, already knowing it was likely hopeless.

Every single soldier that moved to face the Dalek was dead. And the Dalek, of course, sustained no damage at all. Bullets melted before it even made it near the shell. And Van Statten . . . he called them dispensable. The Doctor had never been more disgusted with anything in his entire life. In that moment, the Dalek was the second worse thing in the bunker.

With fists clenched, he asked Diana as calmly as he could after she showed him where the Dalek happened to be within the compound, "Are there any alien weapons in the museum?"

"Lots of them," she said softly. "But the Dalek is between us and them."

"We've got to keep that thing alive." Van Statten said firmly. "We could seal the entire vault, trap it down there.

"And what good would keeping it alive do you if you have to explain to hundreds of families why their mothers, fathers, sons, daughters aren't ever coming home? How is it going to help you when you have to detail why an alien life form whose sole purpose is to kill and destroy was worth saving and the human beings who work for you are dispensable." He sneered at the idiot man. "And if you think for one moment, even a microsecond, that I am leaving Rose locked up with it you are going to wish you had never encountered me."

"You don't scare me, Doctor. If you were really as high up in UNIT as you claim, if any of this was really a problem, then we'd have been dealing with them right now instead of this. And since you're an expert, and an alien yourself with past dealings with the Dalek, why not just reason with it? It must be willing to negotiate. There must be something it needs, everything needs something."

"There is something it needs: to kill. It honestly doesn't care what you have to offer it, it wants you dead and that is that. If Daleks could be reasoned with, would I really be standing here before you, the last of my kind? Don't you think that my people would have reasoned or negotiated to avoid a war that spanned nearly the entire Universe? Time itself was altered, whole races and planets wiped from existence. But you're absolutely right, Van Statten. We should've had a sat down, had a cuppa tea and some biscuits and chatted about how life would be better if we all just got along.

"You're a fool to think that you'll somehow buy your way out of this, a fool to think that if you do get out you'll somehow remain unscathed, and the absolute worst kind of human for believing you can toss away someone's life because you give them a paycheck." The Doctor turned back to the screen as he huffed. He narrowed his eyes, tracing the path the Dalek was going to take. "What area is this?"

"Weapons testing," Diana replied.

"Okay, spread the word: everyone, absolutely everyone, needs a weapon. I don't care if they are a
soldier or the janitor, they need to be armed if they want even the smallest hope of surviving an
encounter with the Dalek. Pass on the word with the soldiers, with all of them, that there is a force
field around the Dalek, but not to be discouraged. If enough bullets hit the same spot, perhaps it
will somehow weaken the force field enough to let one bullet pass through. One may be all it
takes."

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It had wanted them to see. By Rassilon it was more twisted and sadistic than even the cult of Skaro
at the height of the war. It purposely re-rooted power just to put on a show, to prove how powerless
they all were. It hadn't even killed all those soldiers by normal means, instead using the sprinkler
systems and electrocuting all but two. And those two didn't even make it out.

His hearts pounded, and he stopped breathing. He managed to check the screen, a quick glance in
its direction to ensure the two dots that were Rose and the young man with her were still moving as
quickly as they could away from the Dalek, even as its blue light followed at a steady pace.

"Perhaps it's time for a new strategy." Van Statten's voice broke the silence, calm on the surface but
with a hint of hysteria underneath. "Maybe we should consider abandoning this place?"

"Except there's no power to the helipad, sir." Diana seethed quietly. "We can't get out."

"You're right, we can't. And I imagine if there is no power to the helipad, there's no way to seal the
vault, either?"

Diana shook her head. "The bulkheads are massive, there's not enough power."

"But we can re-route the power we have, can't we? It's not like you're going to need emergency
lighting on the lower levels. If someone was lucky enough to survive, they can continue to do so
without light for a little while. At least until we can figure out the best solution to the problem."

"We'd have to bypass the security codes," Diana said with a shake of her head. "That would take a
computer genius."

"Good thing you've got me, then." Van Statten piped up, his egotistical attitude back in play.

"Oh, now you want to be part of the solution?" The Doctor mocked.

"I don't want to die, Doctor, simple as that. Nobody knows this software better than me."

"Except perhaps the alien race you stole it from." The Doctor quipped. When Van Statten glared
back, he laid on the mock surprise thick. "You mean you thought of something all on your own?
Didn't have to hijack the tech from Epsalor 12 to get your digital clock going?"

Before anything could be heard from Van Statten, the monitors brought up the image of the Dalek.

"Sir," Diana said, looking at The Doctor this time when she gave the title.

His lips twitched in a smirk before he stepped up beside her to see what the Dalek was up to.

"I SHALL SPEAK ONLY TO THE DOCTOR."

"Well, I'm listening." He replied.
"I FED OFF THE DNA OF ROSE TYLER. EXTRAPOLATING THE BIOMASS OF A TIME TRAVELLER REGENERATED ME."

"Yes, I imagine it did. So, what now? I know you search the databases on Earth for any sign of your fellows. Have any luck?"

"NO. THERE IS NOTHING. I AM ALONE. WHERE SHALL I GET MY ORDERS?"

"There are no more orders to be given. The war is over. You no longer have a purpose." He hoped, deep down, that this would encourage the Dalek into some sort of surrender. He knew the chances were slim, but he truly hoped it would be the case.

"I SHALL FOLLOW THE PRIMARY ORDER, THE DALEK INSTINCT TO DESTROY! TO CONQUER!"

"Then I shall follow what's become mine, to stop you. Whatever it takes, you will not leave this base, you will not make it above ground. By Rassilon, you will not harm anyone else."

The Dalek stared, then the screen cut off.

"Let's seal the vaults, now, before it has a chance to come up with some means of escape."

The Doctor shrugged off the leather jacket and sat down, getting to work on a computer by Van Statten. They were silent except for Van Statten's occasional mutter of glee at the thrill. The Doctor kept his mouth shut, knowing if he were to comment he'd be too focused on verbally lashing out then getting the work that needed to be done complete.

"Looks like the power's rerouted and ready to seal the vaults at the push of a button." The Doctor said, looking to Diana. "I need a phone, I should call Rose's mobile and see where she is."

"It looks like she and Adam Mitchell are on level forty-nine." Diana replied.

"The bulkheads are set to close at forty-six." He said as he got up and took the headset from Diana, then the handset to dial Rose's number. It rang as he watched her progress on the screen.

"This isn't the best time." Rose answered.

"Never is when you're on the run, is it? We're sealing off the doors at level forty-six, and you need to keep moving. The Dalek's catching up, and it will find a way through if there is even the slightest gap available to it."

"Right, 'kay." She replied with a bit of a pant.

He watched the screen, seeing Rose and Adam maintaining pace, but the Dalek gaining on them. Through the phone he could hear her footsteps on the stairs as she moved as swiftly as she could.

"You're close, Rose, keep going." He encouraged with a smile.

Then he heard the click of a key compressing on a keyboard, and the smile faded. Turning slowly, not wanting to believe he would see what he was expecting, the Doctor met Van Statten's eye as he lifted his finger from the enter key on the keyboard.


"Doctor?" Rose asked, worried.
"Keep going, Rose." He said as he stalked toward Van Statten. "Now I ask again, Henry, what have you done?"

"I'm sealing the bulkheads."

"They weren't there yet!"

"The power was starting to fail and we need to keep that thing away from here!"

"Doctor!" Rose's voice came panicked through the headset. He heard Adam in the background, calling for Rose to hurry. The Doctor turned to the screen and watched the dots moving, the one in the lead putting more and more distance between it and the one in the middle, the Dalek's indicator closing in.

"Come on. Come on, come on, come on." The Doctor anxiously said to himself on nothing more than a breath, scared to ask Rose anything.

The dot in the middle stopped just as Van Statten announced the vault was sealed.

"Rose?" The Doctor ventured to ask.

She was panting, and he hoped that she was catching her breath in safety.

"Sorry, I was a bit slow." She said softly.

He didn't even know his knees gave out until they hit the ground. One heart seemed lodged in his throat as the other one dropped into his stomach before both shattered in a pain so acute it was as if he was reliving the loss of the Time Lords.

"No." He finally managed to gasp out.

"'S alright, Doctor. It's not your fault. Remember that, okay? It wasn't your fault." She took a breath, though it was shaky. "And do you know what? I wouldn't have missed it for the world."

He took a couple deep breaths. "I'm going to be with you, okay Rose? I'm right there, with you to the end." He stopped breathing, a dozen thoughts running through his head. He didn't know what to make of half of them.

She didn't say anything, and he closed his eyes, trying to picture her smiling that cheeky grin with her tongue sticking out. He recalled her eyes, full of warmth and life. Her laugh, either at or with him in conversation or adventures. Her genuine love of life, not just of her own but of others. She was so good, and he never deserved her.

"EXTERMINATE!" He heard the Dalek cry, and the death ray firing.

He covered his face with his hands, feeling the tears behind his shut eye lids as his head fell forward. He wanted to cry but felt he couldn't. He wanted to turn around and rip Van Statten limb from limb but knew it wouldn't bring Rose back.

He wanted to go down and meet the Dalek head on and let it wipe him out with the rest of the Time Lords. The rest could suffer in another Universe, for all he cared.

"Go on then, kill me."

Rose's voice had him whipping his head up so fast a part of his brain was surprised he didn't get whip lash. His hands came away from his face and he stared at the little Rose dot as his hearts
picked up speed. "Why are you doing this?"

"I AM ARMED, I WILL KILL. IT IS MY PURPOSE." The Dalek's voice, quieter than normal from the distance, was still distinct enough that every strange word could be heard.

"They're all dead because of you." Rose snapped. Wonderful, vivacious, living, breathing Rose.

"THEY ARE DEAD BECAUSE OF US." It retorted.

"No," The Doctor said to himself, shaking his head. "Don't put this on her."

"And now what? What're you waiting for?" Rose asked it.

"I FEEL YOUR FEAR." It replied, and the Doctor was on his feet in a hearts beat. He still stared at the dot though he was aware of Van Statten and Diana staring at him.

"What do you expect?" Rose demanded.

"Dalek's don't have fear." The Doctor said as the Dalek replied in essentially the same way. His mind was racing fast enough that he heard but didn't acknowledge the sounds of the death rays, especially after hearing Rose's yelps of surprise.

"YOU GAVE ME LIFE. WHAT ELSE HAVE YOU GIVEN ME? I AM CONTAMINATED!"

"It's mutating," The Doctor said. "It's not Dalek anymore, not if it has emotions. What is it, then? And … and can it be helped? Would it want to be?"

He wasn't expecting anyone to answer, so when none came, he wasn't put off.

The doors to the lift in the corner opened, and Adam stepped out with nary a care it seemed.

"And how do you feel, Mister Mitchell, knowing you left a young woman to her death?" The Doctor asked him.

Adam looked up, frowning indignantly. "I wasn't the one who sealed the vault," He retorted.

"No, that honor goes to your boss. But lucky for both of you, Rose is still alive."

Adam's eyebrows shot to his hairline, and Van Statten looked a bit too frightened by this outcome for the Doctor's liking.

The screen that he'd been watching intensely with the indicators flickered and changed to an image of Rose beside the Dalek. Removing the ear piece and handing it back to Diana, the Doctor walked toward the screen to greet them.

"Hello." He said warmly with a smile.

"Hey yourself." Rose replied, her grin fleeting and shaky but genuine.

"OPEN THE BULKHEAD OR ROSE TYLER DIES." The Dalek attempted to threaten.

"Oh, well, we can't have that, now, can we? She's a one of a kind." The Doctor said, turning away and heading to the keyboard. A couple passes on the keyboard, and the doors started opening.

"What did you do that for, you bleeding heart? What the hell do we do now?" Van Statten asked.
"Kill it when it gets here!" Adam said firmly.

"Do you all remember how I said how much I hated violence? No, probably not, I don't think all of you were around when I mentioned that earlier." The Doctor said as he picked up his jacket and pulled it back on. "But I do, truly. I can be vicious when I need to be, and I can't say I don't have any blood on my hands, because that is quite far removed from the truth. But I did win the war against the Daleks, and I did so by being clever. And I think … I think that it's time I win another battle with wits over weapons." He looked to Diana. "No matter what either of these buffoons say, you're in charge."

And with that, he left the office to meet up with Rose and the Dalek.

Freedom, that's all it wanted. Freedom.

Admittedly, from the moment the bulk head door closed, and Rose was stuck on the wrong side, she hadn’t eased up at all. Not even a little. But her fear did not lessen her wanting to understand. Once it didn’t kill her, once she realized it needed her, she’d thought to try to get to know it.

Rose asked what it wanted, really wanted, now that it didn't have to kill anymore as its only way of life, it came up with one answer: Freedom. It didn’t want to feel anything, not the way she apparently caused it to. She didn’t understand why, but she at least tried to be emphatic towards it.

It wanted to to go up, to feel sunshine, and she went along.

The lift only went up as far as Van Statten's office, and when the Doctor wasn't there, the Dalek started to lash out.

But it didn't kill, because she asked it not to.

They walked down the corridor toward the helipad using the directions given by the Goddard woman. Well, Rose walked, it glided or whatever Daleks do.

She was only partly surprised to see the Doctor waiting for her there, arms at his sides with no weapon to be seen. He gave her a gentle, nervous smile, eyeing the Dalek apprehensively.

It stopped, turning away as if to give them a moment. When it was clear that it didn’t need Rose beside it, she moved as swiftly as she could to the Doctor.

"Hello," She said to him, tongue between her teeth.

His grin grew wider, warmer, happier. "Hello." He replied.

"How'd you know we'd be here?" She asked.

The Doctor looked up, eyes focused on the Dalek as its eye stalk turned toward the ceiling.

"I was still on the line when you and the Dalek began talking about it changing. It took on your DNA, after all, and it's being mutated by everything that makes you … you."

The Dalek shot a hole into the ceiling, startling Rose and causing the Doctor to pull her toward him, holding her slightly away from it as they watched. But it remained where it was as the sunlight from above flooded over it.
"Never thought I'd see the sunlight again." She confessed, both to the Doctor and the Dalek.

"HOW DOES IT FEEL?" It asked, curiously and broken.

Rose was trying to figure out how to respond when there was a hiss, and the Dalek's shell opened up.

There was something incredibly sad about the small creature inside. Like a squid or something that was never fully developed. Its singular eye squinted at the light, and it moved as if it was trying to absorb all the warmth it could.

"WHY DID WE SURVIVE?" It asked.

"Because fate can be a cruel mistress." The Doctor replied, slowly letting go of Rose before carefully inching toward it. "I wanted nothing to do with the Time Lords, and now … I'm the only one left."

"I AM THE LAST OF THE DALEKS." It replied.

"You're not even that, anymore. You're changing."

"INTO WHAT?"

"Something new." The Doctor replied regretfully.

"I CAN FEEL SO MANY IDEAS. IT IS … TORTURE."

Rose frowned, and she inched closer to the Doctor. "Torture? Isn't changing a good thing?"

"Not for a Dalek." He said gently, shaking his head.

"ROSE … GIVE ME ORDERS! ORDER ME TO DIE!" It asked her, and her heart clenched.

"I can't do that." She said, shaking her head.

"DOCTOR?" The Dalek asked.

He met Rose's eye, and she could see he didn't want this anymore than she did. She could see the hope for something she didn't understand die as he moved to stand before the Dalek.

She watched as he didn't try to shield himself, walking into what could have been a trap without any fear for himself.

"You're relieved of duty, soldier." He said simply.

The Dalek seemed to give a sigh of relief. "ARE YOU FRIGHTENED, ROSE TYLER?" It asked, surprising her a bit.

"Yeah," She replied honestly.

"SO AM I. EXTERMINATE."

It wasn't the cry she'd heard it shout throughout the day, but a surrender with words.

The Doctor stepped back and returned to her side, slipping his hand in hers and stepping just a bit in front of her as if to shield her.
The Dalek replaced its armor before levitating a few feet above the ground. The knobs that had surrounded most of its body came loose, floating away from it and forming a sphere around it. There was a flicker of light, then a bright flash, and then nothing.

They stared at the spot where it had been, silent for a moment.

"I am never, ever letting you wander off again." He eventually said, breaking the silence with something that sounded so ridiculous given the weight of the moment that Rose laughed so she wouldn't cry. The Doctor chuckled, letting go of her hand and pulling her toward him, clutching her close so her cheek was pressed against his chest.

She didn't mind. Even if he was a bit cooler than she'd like right then, he smelled wonderful and she hadn't felt this safe in an embrace since she was a child. She could feel his nose bury itself in her hair and take a deep breath, causing her cheeks to turn the color of her namesake and a stupid grin to stretch so wide she had to bit her lip to make it stop.

"Where'd be the fun in that?" She asked as her arms wound themselves around his waist.

He didn't say anything, and she didn't think she needed to fill the silence, either. She simply remained content in his arms, listening to the speedy rhythm of his double heartbeat and willed her own to slow down to normal.

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They walked back to the TARDIS hand in hand, Rose leaning on his arm a bit more than he would have expected, but he didn't mind. A part of him never wanted to let her go, and if she wanted to press herself into his side, all the power to her, as far as he was concerned.

As the TARDIS came into view, the sound of footsteps running toward them echoed from the other end of the exhibit room. The Doctor looked up, continuing his stride as he watched Adam Mitchell coming toward them with a bag slung on his back.

"I'm glad I found you two," He panted as the three of them stopped in front of the big blue box. The TARDIS groaned quietly in something the Doctor swore might have been disgust. He frowned at the Old Girl, then turned to the young man half bent over and panting in front of them.

"Why do you say that?" The Doctor asked him as he pulled his key from his pocket.

"Because …." Adam panted, bending over long enough for the Doctor to fit the key in the lock and turn it. "Because Van Statten's disappeared, and Goddard's been on the phone with UNIT. Going to fill the bunker full of cement, like it never existed."

The Doctor looked around the room. "I suppose there's nothing in here that UNIT hasn't had a bit of a hand in or had information on. And if they're the ones filling it, they may just search the place first."

"For the best, yeah?" Rose asked.

"Most certainly." The Doctor agreed. "I never got to look at the weapons Van Statten supposedly collected, let alone the ones that were catalogued. If one of those ended up in the wrong hands, the results could be catastrophic."

"What about the families? Of those who died?" Rose asked, looking between Adam and the
"Van Statten had a clause written in our contracts, pays off the family so they don't ask a lot of questions." A thoughtful expression came over Adam. "So many people died, he'd probably be bankrupt or near enough by the end. Not to mention all of us who are losing our jobs. Severance and all that." A smile pulled at his lips before he frowned. "I'll have to go home."

The Doctor studied him before reaching delicately for his time line. It seemed there were two distinct possibilities for the young man with many, many outcomes for both. He could be ruthless, taking after a man he would never admit to viewing as a mentor. Or he could be kind and thoughtful, an attempt to emulate Rose in order to win her over. Either fate could happen should he step on the TARDIS or not, though he didn’t particularly like the idea that this young man would suddenly become some form of competition. It wasn’t a thought he’d ever really had. Never had he a problem with bringing anyone new on board while he already had a companion. Bringing C’rizz along while with Charley didn’t stir up these feelings.

Still, it was likely he’d become twisted if he didn’t join them, and that wasn’t a risk the Doctor was willing to take. Not when Van Statten was, by far, the worst human that Doctor had met in recent memory.

The TARDIS groaned again as the Doctor came to a decision.

"I suppose we could give you a lift. That is, if you want to see some real alien tech in action." The Doctor grinned, opening the door and allowing Rose to step in first.

Adam hesitated, then stepped in past the Doctor into the TARDIS.

"Blimey, it's bigger on the inside!"

The words were like a soothing balm on the Doctor's soul that warmed his hearts, and he entered the ship and closed the door.

"Have a gander, nothing's off limits really." The Doctor said as he moved to the controls to get them into the vortex before the UNIT techs showed up and spotted the TARDIS.

Adam ventured down below to look at the engines, and the Doctor had the decency to wait until he could no longer hear Adam on the stairs before throwing the lever and sending them into the vortex.

He would never admit he chuckled to himself at the sound of Adam's stumble and cursing.

"Doctor," Rose said quietly behind him, and he turned around to look at her. The lingering humor he’d had disappeared when he saw her twisting her fingers, chewing her lip. His hearts sank, knowing that Rose was about to tell him something he didn’t want to hear.

"What's wrong?" He asked.

"Well, ’s just. I got thinking, with what Adam said. And I was thinking … well, wondering if, umm."

He stepped up to her, gently cupping her cheek and causing her eyes to snap to his.

"What is it?" He asked, trying to discern whether she just happened to twist her head away from him a little more or actually leaned into his touch.
She sighed. "I want to go home."

Chapter End Notes

I don't honestly feel that an Eight who lived the Time War and did so without intentionally destroying anyone would not have as quite a violent reaction to the Dalek as Nine did. I truly believe that while Eight would throw the switch, his better nature would think better of it when recalling the Dalek was (at the time) helpless. I love Nine so very much, and he and Eight are always swapping spots as my favorite and second favorite Doctor, but they are different men because they have different experiences.
"Home?" The Doctor said, and the devastation in his eyes tipped Rose off immediately that he took it the wrong way.

"Not … not for good." She hastened to reassure him as his hand fell from her cheek. She gently held him by his shoulders, smiling wide as the pain morphed into confusion. "'S just, before the bunker, the TARDIS told me it was 'bout a month since I've been home. I've been wearing borrowed clothes, and haven't even told my Mum I was heading off traveling. Plus, there are, umm, other things I need to worry about that will likely come up."

“Such as?” He asked, frowning further.

“Things, ya know. Like… feminine things."

The Doctor stared gob smacked before he threw back his head and laughed, deep and hearty. He pulled her in for a quick, tight hug that she gladly returned even if she was a bit confused by what was happening.

"Rose, I'm over a thousand years old, and you already know I traveled with a granddaughter. Female biology is essentially the same across species, so when it comes to that I am confident that the TARDIS can provide. But as for a visit home … I honestly can't see why we can't do that. Admittedly, it's not something I typically do unless it's the end of our journey together, but I can make an exception."

“Good,” She grinned. “‘Sides, would hate to think of the bill I’d get tryin’ ta call Mum and let’er know why I’m not around.”

A light sparked in the Doctor’s eyes, as if he’d only just considered something. “May I have your mobile a moment?” He asked, holding out his hand.

Rose frowned in amusement, but dug into her pocket and handed it to him. She watched as he took off the back and took out the battery, shuffling them about in his hand before getting his sonic out with one hand and then did something to it.

“What sorta jiggory poke are you doin’?” She asked with a chuckle.

He smirked. “I’m making it so you can call from anywhere, any time, and you never have to worry about a connection or the bill." He said, replacing the battery and the back of the phone. “You may also find less of a need to charge it as often as you used to.” He said as he handed it back to her.

Rose looked down at it, noting the signal strength was perfect, and on a network she’d never seen before. Shrugging, she pocketed it. “Thanks. Still though, should see my mum proper, yeah? Calling her up and saying I’d gone traveling with a bloke isn’t gonna go over real well, especially when I’ve not even bothered with my passport."

"Ah, yes, you humans and your endless need for documentation. The psychic paper was probably the best thing I could have ever picked up, really. Saves me a lot of trouble."

"Can't just wave your fancy UNIT badge around?" She teased.

He smiled. "UNIT didn't always exist, did it? But nearly every era requires papers for this thing or that."
"True enough." She agreed, then fidgeted. "Right, so…"

“I think, and maybe this is just me, but I believe rest after the day you’ve had would be a good idea. It’s been a long one, for all of us.”

“Yeah, suppose you’re right.” Rose shifted from one foot to the other.

A part of her had wanted to go home because she was scared. She wanted to see her mum, to feel the comforts of her home. But she smelled, she was sure. And she could only imagine the sort of scenario that would happen if she turned up even after a night, still in the clothes she’d worn the day she left but in far worse a state.

“Rose,” He said, getting her full attention. “If… if you would rather not return, I would understand.”

“I don’t want to go.” She replied emphatically. “There’s still so much out there to see!”

“And you had a healthy reminder today that it’s not always safe.”

“You’re right, ‘s not.” She agreed readily. “But it’s like I told you in that bunker: I wouldn’t miss it for the world.”

He grinned warmly, and nodded.

“Now,” She said. “Before we all turn in for the night, how about a cuppa?”

“Let’s get the kettle on.” He agreed, heading to the railing. “Adam!” He shouted over the side. “To the galley!”

It was quiet, and a bit dark in the console room making it seem like even the TARDIS herself was sleeping. They were lingering in the vortex, nowhere else to be for the time being. Rose and Adam were asleep, or at least he assumed. They were in their quarters, anyway.

The Doctor was sitting on a jump seat, surprisingly not as uncomfortable as he initially thought it would be. Leaned back, his legs out stretched, arms crossed, he stared ahead. He had the ceiling showing what was outside, and viewed to ever swirling colors of the vortex before him.

In the immediate aftermath of leaving the bunker, they had had tea. Tea solves everything, of course, so they had that and biscuits, chatting a bit. It wasn’t quite the same as before Adam came on board, but that was to be expected. They were getting to know each other; these sorts of things took time. Still, the Doctor didn’t think he was the only one to feel as though somehow Adam was intruding.

Which brought his mind back to the reason for his contemplation.

He could still hear the echoes of the Dalek in his mind, recall the sharp fear and deep hurt when he thought he’d lost Rose. He’s had many companions die while traveling with him, many good friends. There was even a time or two when he wasn’t sure Charley had made it out alive, or Sarah Jane, but this time wasn’t like those. He wanted to believe it was because Rose was his first friend after the Time War, and the was the only reason behind it. That the loss would devastate him all
the more. But it was more than that, and he had to wonder what that meant for him.

Love was a word he used frequently, and yet sparingly. The wonders of the Universe heard his affection for it expressed numerous times, but those special beings who earned his affections seldom if ever heard the sentiment from him before they left him. And the last time he expressed the sentiment, it hadn’t been received well, the circumstances weren’t what one would call fantastic.

Did he love Rose? It was certainly beginning to feel that way, despite only really having known her a month. To draw comparisons with loves gone by wouldn’t be fair. Things were different. He was different. Even if he still retained the body, living through the war was almost like regenerating. Same body different man, it would seem.

He cared for her, very deeply. Her acceptance, her bravery, her wanderlust and curiosity were balms to a soul that was beaten, burned, and bruised with all the utter nonsense being in the war had forced him to endure. He never wanted her to leave, and was utterly terrified that she would.

He sighed, running his hand over his face, rubbing at his eyes. He should get up and run a scan for Gallifrey, or anything Gallifreyan. He should search for his people so he would know where they were. Maybe not bring them back right away, but if he knew where they were….

He didn’t move.

“Wow!” He heard softly from the corridor, and half startled to see Rose standing there, gazing up at the ceiling with wonder and enchantment. In borrowed pajamas that looked an awful lot like his, she moved toward him while never peeling her eyes away from the image above. Her feet were bare, and didn’t make a sound on the floor as she came toward him. “Where are we?” She asked as she slowly eased down beside him.

“We’re in the time Vortex.” He said, feeling the warmth of her on his side.

“’S beautiful.” She said as she leaned back beside him. “Is it always like this? All sorta gold and blue?”

“No,” He replied. “It varies, and while I’m sure I was told why it does, I don’t recall the specifics.”

“Not a bad view, though.” Rose said still seeming utterly dazzled by the sight.

He watched her instead, the way the swirls of light played on her face, sparkled in her eye. Her hair was a bit tangled at the back, she hadn’t a single speck of make-up on, there was evidence of a disturbed or evading sleep beneath her eyes, but she was utterly beautiful.

“Couldn’t sleep.” He asked, keeping his eyes on her.

She shook her head. “’S funny. Faced my own death with the Autons, and the Gelth. Still, was the Dalek that…."

“Because he nearly killed you?” The Doctor asked when she didn’t continue.

Rose shook her head, then turned toward him. “’Cause I made ‘im kill himself.”

“I believe I was the one who gave him the order.” He reminded her softly.

“Yeah, but… I touched him. I made ’im different.”
“You made me different.” He said without thinking, and at her confusion, he turned to the Vortex to help him think straight. “We were both the sole survivors of the war, that Dalek and me. You touched both our lives, and we were both better for it. The difference is, of course, that a Dalek doesn’t want to be different. A Dalek believes themselves perfect as they are.”

“Still bothers me, though. There was so much more death than what we’ve seen, and so much of it was my fault.”

“The death of the other twelve Time Lords that should have been in this Universe with me could be considered my fault,” he said, and Rose turned toward him. “It was my plan to do what we did. And I can’t even begin to fathom the other deaths I could be blamed for. It’s not easy, it never gets easy. There will be more sleepless nights, and you’ll carry it around with you in your soul.”

“So how do you deal with it?” She asked.

He gave a tiny smile, “I keep my friends with me.”

“But when we met, you were travelin’ alone?”

“Funny how that worked.” He teased, and she chuckled. “I’ll always be here, Rose, whenever you need me. I sleep very little, and if I am catching a kip, don’t be afraid to wake me if you need to.”

She held his eye for a long time, and he wondered if maybe he’d said the wrong thing. Then, very hesitantly, moving almost as if he were an easily startled animal in the forest, she leaned against him ever so slightly. Without thinking, he slid his arm between her and the seat then pulled her closer, allowing her to rest on him that much more, turning to watch the Vortex swirl together.

He knew precisely when Rose had fallen asleep on him, just by the way her single heart beat slowed and her breathing evened out. He knew he should wake her, send her to bed, but he couldn’t. He thought of carrying her there, tucking her in, but he couldn’t do that either. He wanted to hold her against him for the remainder of her sleep cycle, keep her close.

Because yes, he realized, he did love with her. Funny, that, because while it should have made him happy, the realization of the truth utterly terrified him. Rose had made herself special to him, and she was already asking to go home.

Home, where that boy who asked her to stay was. Home, where she could potentially see safety, security.

He pressed her just a little closer to himself, wishing he could see her time lines, wishing he could somehow glimpse the future within the swirls of color above his head. Wishing he could have her stay forever, even if he could only keep her as his friend.

She’d woken up stretched out on the jump seat in utter confusion. How did she get there? She remembered not being able to sleep, and any that she did get was fitful and had her waking up shaking and breathless. Then she wandered down the corridor, and….

She’d fallen asleep against the Doctor. Oh, how utterly mortifying. What did he think of her, curling up and clinging to him like that? Yeah, he said he was there for her, but she doubted a sixteen-hundred-year-old alien had meant that. Groaning, she turned her head to bury her shame in
her arm.

“You’re awake!” A cheerful sounding Doctor said from somewhere nearby, and Rose peeked to see his bright, wide smile peeking at her from under the console. “Sorry, I just couldn’t bear to wake you, but I confess that after a few hours I was getting a stitch in my side.”

“Didn’t think you could carry me, then?” She asked, still half turned into her arm.

His smiled faltered a bit. “I didn’t want to presume. Carrying you after someone’s drugged you is one thing, but while you’re sleeping, and to your room….”

“Quite the gentleman, you are,” She smirked, finding the courage to push herself up. Moving her hair off her face, she realized she must look an absolute fright. Clearing her throat, her eyes darted about until the Doctor coming out from under the console drew her focus. “You didn’t change back.” She said, gesturing to his white shirt and denims ensemble.

He glanced down. “No,” He said. “You said I should blend in for your time, and if we’re going to see your mother, well,” He shrugged. “As much as I prefer my other clothes, if you’re going to be traveling with me, I think I should make a good impression.”

She stilled, gaping. “You’re gonna meet my mum?” She asked.

“I already have, really.” He reminded her, pointing at her with his sonic screwdriver. “But I think more than a passing meeting is due. Which reminds me, I’m done my maintenance, so why don’t you get ready for the day, and then meet me in the galley for breakfast?”

“Yeah, Alright.” She said, slinking off the jump seat. She got to the corridor before stilling with her hand on the frame. She opened her mouth, closed it, then opened it again. Summoning her nerves, she looked over her shoulder at the Doctor. “About last night?”

“What about it?” He asked, a nervousness in his eyes she’d never seen before.

It made her grin a bit. “Sorry.” She said. “I didn’t mean to…..”

“I meant what I said.” He reassured. “And if what you need from me is comfort, I will give it.” He assured.

She believed him, too. And what’s more, she knew there was nothing more behind it. A man, for once, was not trying to be a “nice guy” simply to try and get in her knickers. He really was an alien.

“Right,” She grinned. “See you in a mo, then.”

She hurried back to her room, pleased to find the TARDIS had her door close to the console room. She changed into her clean clothes, having showered the night before, ran a borrowed brush through her hair, did her make up (and she wondered where the TARDIS happened to dig up her favorite make-up from) then hurried out to the galley.

She couldn’t have been very long, no more than ten minutes at most, but by the time she got to the galley the Doctor wasn’t alone.

Adam sat at the small, galley table facing the door with his back to the Doctor. He smiled at her over a cup of something black, beaming at her like he’d been waiting hours for her to show up. He changed, of course, but then he had a bag of his own clothes with him when he boarded.

“Adam has made coffee.” The Doctor said from the cooker. “I don’t particularly care for the stuff
over much, and have a pot of tea steeping if you would rather.”

“I make a fantastic carafe of coffee.” Adam was quick to assure.

“Thanks, but I gotta side with the Doctor on this one.” She said as she made her way over to the Time Lord’s side. She glanced in the pan and smirked, seeing he was cooking the eggs they’d gotten as a thanks from some villagers on an alien planet. Eggs where the yolks were blue, and what should have been the whites were yellow, and scrambled looked disgusting. But, when he had made them for her the day before, he’d did them fried so she could get used to the different coloring. They tasted like eggs she’d had at home, if not maybe a bit richer. She smiled when she noted he was cooking up bacon from an alien breed of pig that looked more orange than pink, and smelled a bit like maple. “Looks good.” She said, barely keeping herself from laughing.

“Doesn’t it just?” he agreed, smiling wide. “Bacon and eggs, traditional Earth breakfast for the western world. I’d have done a full English, but I just didn’t have everything we needed.”

Rose hummed in understanding. “Should pick some up then, yeah?”

“Run to Tesco’s? How very domestic.” He countered as she grabbed the mugs she’d come to think of as his and hers and poured their tea, dressing them how they liked them. “Thank you.” He said absently, and she touched his arm absently in acknowledgment.

She must’ve startled him because he flinched back before hissing. She glanced, and then did a double take as she noticed a splat of green-blue-yellow egg in the middle of his oxford.

“Sorry,” She said.

“Not to worry.” He replied, shedding his leather jacket and tossing it on the nearby chair. “My shirt is more injured than myself. Well, perhaps my pride is a bit more wounded than it should be. A Time Lord shouldn’t be startled so easily, after all.”

“Suppose you should have seen it coming.” She teased, tongue between her teeth.

“Oh ha, ha.” He deadpanned, fingers going to the collar of his shirt. “Clever before your first cuppa.”

She didn’t feel so clever after the buttons started coming apart.

He was always so buttoned, so put together, that just being without his jacket was like seeing him undressed. And yet here he was, removing his shirt without any hesitation.

Despite how strong she knew he was, he wasn’t as muscular looking as she thought he would be. Alien, she had to remind herself. Still, he wasn’t hard to look at. Or rather, hard not to look at.

“Back in a tick,” He said mournfully, looking at his shirt with defeat before balling it up and leaving the room.

She had to grip the counter to keep herself from dropping to the floor or chasing after him. She then turned to her tea, picked it up, and gulped it back.

The hum in the TARDIS changed, and Rose had a suspicion the sentient ship was laughing at her. Which, of course, made her laugh out of the sheer absurdity of the last two or three minutes.

“Is he really an alien?” Adam asked, turning toward her.
“Yeah,” she said, moving quickly to ensure the eggs weren’t going to burn, as well as ensure he couldn’t see them before they were served.

“Looks awfully human for an alien.” Adam countered.

“Seen a few aliens, me.” She said. “Not all of them look off. Been to a couple places where I’d have thought they were as human as me.”

“So, when I was in my workshop, going on about how aliens were real, and all that, you knew.”

“Yeah.” She said, grinning again.

“Guess you must have thought me clever to have figured it all out, then.” He said, and Rose stilled mid stir.

“I dunno,” She said, shrugging. “Met a couple people who figured it out before.” She thought of Clive, and wondered if maybe she was actually in any of those pictures or stories of the Doctor he so coveted.

“There we are,” The Doctor said as he came back into the galley in a white sweater. He resumed his place at the cooker, grinning in thanks to Rose for watching everything before he gestured for her to join Adam at the table.

“So where are we going, then?” Adam asked as she sat down diagonally from him. She felt his toes nudge hers, and she drew her foot farther back. “An alien planet? A space ship?”

“Earth,” the Doctor said. “Rose needs to go pick up a few things.”

“Right,” Adam said. “And then we can experience something alien?”

“You are now,” The Doctor countered as he started dishing out their breakfasts. “You’re on a space ship, which is flown by an alien.”

“Yeah, but… I mean something really alien.” Adam retorted, almost sounding annoyed.

The Doctor smirked a wicked smirk that Rose could see was a flimsy dam to his amusement. “Well, how about we start with breakfast.” He said, setting the plate of alien food before their newest companion.

Rose snorted through her nose, covering her mouth to keep from laughing too loudly as Adam’s face twisted and turned nearly as green as the color of his eggs when he looked down on the Doctor’s version of bacon and eggs before him.

"Are we ready?” The Doctor asked as the three of them convened in the console room.

Despite this being her request, Rose was suddenly quite nervous. A whole month had passed for her, and yet there should be no time at all for her mum. The only thing that they would have experienced at the same time was the Auton invasion, and even that was experienced in two very different ways. She’d been to other planets, let alone another country. She’d met different species, ate food her mum could never dream of, breathed air thousands of light years away or hundreds of years gone by.
She didn’t realize how much a month could change her.

“I’m ready,” Adam said, and Rose and the Doctor both turned to him with matching looks of disbelief. “I haven’t been back home in ages.” Adam shrugged, crossing his arms and grinning smugly.

“Rose?” The Doctor asked, turning his attention back to her.

Butterflies began to dance about in her stomach, she had to take deep breaths to steady herself, but she nevertheless nodded to the Doctor.

He threw the switch, and if Rose hadn't had the railing right behind her to grab on to, she would have already found herself on the floor. As it was, an undignified yelp came from Adam as he was tossed to the floor on his face. As he tried to push himself up, the ship lurched in the opposite direction, sending him flying backward on his arse.

The Doctor looked confused by the rougher-than-normal flight, then frowned as the lights in the column flickered as if the time ship was laughing.

"Behave." The Doctor said to the column in the middle, and the flight smoothed out immediately.

Nerves bubbled up worse in Rose as they landed, and she was suddenly not so sure coming back was a good idea.

The Doctor groaned, and she chewed her lip as she came up beside him. He was studying the screen and muttering something in a language the TARDIS wouldn't translate before meeting her gaze a little sheepishly.

"It appears we have landed about a month after you originally left, perhaps a month and a week." Her heart nearly stopped.

"My mum's gonna kill me. Five weeks? Been gone five weeks and I never left word with her? Bloody hell, this'll be Jimmy all over again. Only worse, ran away with an alien this go around."

"You run away with men frequently, do you?" The Doctor asked, his lips curling in amusement.

"Not really," She replied as Adam got to his feet. "Oh, this is gonna be a nightmare." She said, covering her face with her hands, attempting not to pull at her hair.

"I'm sure it'll be fine." The Doctor assured, dropping an arm around her shoulders and guiding her to the doors. "You're right back to where you came from, only later than you expected. And really, it could be worse, you could be a year late."

She dropped her hands and laughed at the absurdity that would follow being gone a year without word, allowing the Doctor to open the doors from her and bring her outside.

She stepped into the alley where they'd originally ran away together, seeing things remaining relatively the same, though the graffiti was cleaned up. After taking a few tentative steps toward the mouth of the alley, she took in the sight of the estates as it came into view.

The sky was blue, hardly a cloud for once. The air was warmer than it had been, but then again that was to be expected. There were kids running about, so school was either on break or out for the day.
"All seems so normal." She noted, sensing the Doctor coming up beside her, Adam somewhere behind her. "I've been all over the Universe, and here, now, everything's the same. Should be different but 's not. Feels more alien than anything I experienced out there."

"Where are we?" Adam asked.

"Powell Estates." Rose replied without turning around.

"Right." Adam replied, "Right, I mean. Yeah, of course. I just … just didn't recognize it, is all."

"Why would you?" The Doctor asked, genuinely curious sounding. Rose looked up at him as he turned to look at Adam. "Your accent suggests you come from a more affluent part of the city. You're, what? Twenty-six? So right now, on this day, there is a nineteen-year-old Adam Mitchell in school. Oxford, I'm guessing."

"Wait," Adam said, and Rose turned to see his eyes bulging. "Nineteen? Which makes this 2005. I'm … I'm in the past."

"Not too distant past, no. Nothing like going back to 1869." The Doctor replied.

Adam chuckled, gave a hoot of deep laughter, and promptly passed out.

Rose stared at him, mouth opening and closing as everything she thought to say vanished in her dumbstruck state.

The Doctor clicked his tongue and shook his head. "I suppose I should have mentioned it travels in time, too. Really, I should have seen he'd be green at the thought, even just small jumps like this one. Still, no use standing around waiting for him to come back to the world of the living. He'd probably be less embarrassed if you weren't here to remind him of this minor emasculation. Especially when I tell him how well you took your first trip."

"You're just needlin' him." Rose accused, grinning like a loon.

"Well, he just makes it so easy," The Doctor said jovially.

Rose laughed, feeling a bit better. "Right. You remember where the flat is, yeah?"

"Number 48, Bucknall Hall." He nodded.

"Kay. Wish me luck." She said, turning and heading to the flat while her courage was still bolstered by their banter.

The whole way up the stairs, she maulled over what she was going to say to her mum when she arrived a month after disappearing. With a bloke. Again. And hadn't she sworn she learned her lesson regarding Jimmy? That she'd grown up since making that first, life altering mistake.

She fit her key in the lock, giving it a turn and surrendering herself to the tongue lashing she was about to get.

"Oh? Back already? Wasn't expecting you." Her Mum said as she stood in the middle of the living room folding laundry.

"Wha?" Rose asked, stunned in the doorway.

"Close the door, would ya? Not all of us have fancy government jobs that provide room and board." Jackie retorted, frowning and waving a hand for Rose to shut the door. "Though thought
something like that would have you puttin' on more airs and graces than appears you have. They let you run about like that? Denims and sweats?"

Rose looked down at her clothes, including her grubby trainers, and then remembered she had yet to close the door.

"Right. Mum?" She started as the door clicked shut and she came further into the room. "What are you on about? What job? Why aren't you freakin' out?"

"Why would I be?" She retorted, setting a folded towel aside. "Called the day after all the shop dummies went mad, and don't tell me it didn't happen, 'cause it did, and no agency's gonna tell me otherwise. Anyway, you said that the agent there, the Doctor or whatever, hired you to be his partner or something. I still think he was more interested in something else, but you said nothing was going on so I suppose I'm gonna have to believe you, though you didn't need to break it off with Mickey."

"Did that just to save my sanity," Rose mumbled under her breath. "Right," she said a little louder, looking about the flat and at her mum who waited expectantly for something. "So, agent with the Doctor, yeah. Umm, all sorta … top secret and stuff. Has Mickey said anything about what went on, or …?"

Jackie rolled her eyes. "Just that the Doctor bloke was actually an alien which meant you were actually abducted by aliens or some sorta rubbish. But then he's gettin' that new job, yeah?"

"New job? Not at the garage anymore?" Rose said, crossing her arms.

"Well, part-time. Nights and weekends. Said something about wanting to save up for a better flat or car, or something. He wants to do right by you, Rose. I don't see why you can't just …"

A knock on the door interrupted Jackie, and Rose turned and opened it to reveal the Doctor and Adam standing outside. The latter looked a bit pale, and the former amused.

"Finally got your wits about ya?" She asked Adam with a teasing grin.

"He hasn't said much since he's come around to be honest." The Doctor replied. "Doesn't help that no sooner did he come around he happened to notice someone he went to school with in about two years leaving one of the other buildings."

"That him? That the Doctor?" Jackie asked, setting aside her towels. "Well, let your boss in, will ya? Might let you go if you keep him waiting."

"Rose doesn't have to worry about that," The Doctor said as Rose stepped aside and waved them in. The Doctor approached Jackie with a hand extended and one of his most charming smiles. "And I don't think of myself as her boss. If anything, Rose is my partner."

Rose flushed with satisfaction at that, turning her head to hide her smile even as she tried to suck it into her mouth to prevent anyone from seeing it.

"Well," Jackie said, smiling that flirty grin that made Rose's stomach turn, doing a good job of ridding her of the unwanted grin. "Didn't think she would be much more than an assistant of some sort."

"No, no, Rose is excellent at the work we do."

"Which is?"
The Doctor only hesitated for the briefest of moments, and if Rose hadn't been with him nearly every waking moment of her day since she boarded the TARDIS a month ago, she wouldn't have known he had stalled for time. "UNIT." The Doctor replied. "Unfortunately, it's all quite confidential. But I will say we work a lot with victims of war, and Rose is amazing."

"Oh," Jackie virtually swooned, and Rose rolled her eyes.

"Right, was just coming by to let you know what I was up to," Rose started.

"Which you can't tell me anything about," Jackie interrupted.

"And to get my clothes. Been sorta living off of borrowed clothes and such. Kinda want my own things." She said, gesturing toward her bedroom. “Back in a mo,” She said before popping down the hall.

She paused a moment when she entered her room, noting everything was exactly as she left it. Not a shrine held by a mother who thought her daughter ran off, but a marker of Jackie Tyler’s insistence that Rose was responsible for the space, and should therefore keep it tidy. It was better than it usually was, but only because of some restless tidying after “return home, live your life, know that it has been a pleasure.” Still, at least it would make things easier to pack.

Grabbing a rucksack, she went about stuffing it with things, and quickly finding that one wasn't going to be enough.

A gentle rap on the door frame had her looking over her shoulder and smiling at the Doctor as he leaned in the doorway.

He looked around. “It’s very pink.”

“Yeah,” Rose replied.

“Your room on the TARDIS isn’t this pink, is it?” He asked, frowning as though trying to remember. Rose wasn’t sure he was ever in her room, at least not long enough to have a good look at it.

“No,” She assured, wondering why he came down, aside from passing judgment on her color scheme.

"I have something for you." He said as if reading her mind.

"You do?" Rose asked.

He pushed off the door and pulled something out of his jacket pocket. He took the fabric square and shook it out until it turned into a small bag no bigger than an over-sized purse. "Open it up." He said as he handed it over to her, a self-satisfied, extremely smug gleam in his eye.

Rose took it with trepidation, eyeing him cautiously as if he was the type of man who would put some sort of prank together with the bag. She opened the zip, peered inside, and thought it looked off. Reaching her hand inside, she nearly fell forward as her arm went all the way in to the shoulder. She looked at him, eyes wide and mouth agape. "It's … bigger … on the … blimey that's amazing!" She laughed to herself as she put the bag on the bed.

"Time Lord technology," The Doctor shrugged as Rose removed everything from her rucksack and began to load up the Time Lord bag. "You should also know that your mother is in the living room with Adam, asking how he came to work with us, and if maybe there is something more going on
between the pair of you."

"There's not," Rose groaned. "Not gonna be, either. Gives me the creeps."

The Doctor chuckled, "I think he's just enthusiastic. Pretty girl giving a young man like him the time of day? Bound to make him a bit determined to catch your attention."

"Right, well, not my type I guess." Rose mumbled as she looked about her room, moving around and throwing things in her bag. "You know, when I left with you before it was spur of the moment. All this stuff coming with me? Means I'm signing on. You're stuck with me."

"Stuck with you? That's not so bad." The Doctor replied with a shrug.

Rose stopped, a stuffed bear from her childhood hovering just over the bag as she turned to look at him. "Yeah?"

"Yes," he said with complete sincerity.

Rose felt her cheeks heating up and she quickly turned away. Utter giddiness had her squealing inside, her lips pulling upward in spite of herself.

This is different, she told herself. I didn't run off with him blindly, thinking I was in love. Might be a bit infatuated with 'im now, but that's different.

She pulled the zip shut on her bag, picking it up and trying not to let on to the Doctor how surprised she was by the lightness of it. His chuckle as they stepped into the hallway told her she failed.

"Who the bloody hell are you!?!" Mickey's voice stopped Rose short for a moment before she and the Doctor came down the hall a bit quicker than it seemed either intended.

When they entered the living room, Jackie was merely rolling her eyes and shaking her head. Adam was standing with his hands up, and Mickey looked intimidating for the first time in his life. Arms, crossed, he was bent slightly to be in Adam’s space, eyes narrowed.

"He works for us." The Doctor said, causing both Adam and Mickey to look at him in confusion. "New recruit, trainee, really."

Mickey's eyebrows furrowed a bit more before they shot up toward his hairline. He pointed an accusatory finger toward the Time Lord, taking a step toward him. "It's 'im. It's the thing, the alien."

"Oi, don't call 'im that," Rose stepped in.

"It's what he is, innit?" Mickey retorted.

"'S rude. And he's not a thing he's a person, same as you and me." Rose shot back.

"Don't be stupid," Jackie scoffed as she sat down in an empty chair. "Aliens don't just come down from space and venture 'bout the Estates."

"Quite right, Missus Tyler. Though, I will say that London draws more attention than most places. It just happened that Rose was who and what I needed when last we were here, and here is where she lives." The Doctor replied with a smile.

Rose watched as the Doctor's blunt honesty washed away any of Jackie's doubt, her eyes widening
comically against the heavy application of mascara. They probably hadn't had that good a stretch since Rose told her she was dropping out of school to support Jimmy.

"Ha! See? Told ya, she ran off with an alien. Don't know what this government job rubbish is all about, but…"

Knock, knock, knock.

The polite rap on the door had everyone turning to look at it, cutting Mickey off well before he would have had a chance to continue his tirade. Rose, noting her mother utterly frozen, and knowing Mickey wouldn't want to answer the door without one of them asking him too, stepped up to greet the unexpected guest.

"Hello," A blonde woman said once Rose opened the door. She seemed friendly enough even though she gave off an air of authority that would not be contested. Maybe it was the pant suit. Maybe it was the two soldiers at her back, even if they didn't have guns drawn. Either way, Rose straightened her spine and wished she had something on a bit smarter than a hoodie and jeans she'd run from a Dalek in. "This may sound like a very odd question, but would the Doctor be here?"

Rose had sensed him approaching before the blonde woman had even finished her sentence.

"I'm the Doctor," He greeted. "How can I help?"

"Doctor, I'm Kate Stewart, senior science officer of UNIT," She replied.

The Doctor cracked a grin, "I thought I recognized you, though I didn't realize you were following in your father's footsteps in your own way. Where is he, anyway?"

"Retired," Kate replied, her smile a bit warmer and more genuine now. "He's away on vacation in Florida."

"Ah, I never thought I would see the day Alistair actually retired." The Doctor said wistfully.

"He never thought there'd be a day when you didn't wear something a bit … eccentric." Kate retorted, glancing over the Doctor's outfit. Rose shifted slightly, stepping in front of him just a bit in a manner that she only realized after was a bit possessive. If either the Doctor or Kate noticed, neither said anything. "I wish I could say I tracked you down specifically for a social visit, however, I admit I didn't expect there to be quite so many, nor did I think they would all be so young."

Rose looked over her shoulder to see both Adam and Mickey had come to investigate. She craned her head around to see her mother was still stunned in her chair.

"Well that depends on what you define as young. Age wise, I suppose, yes, they are. But where wisdom is concerned, well …." He glanced over his shoulder at Mickey, gave a brief glance to Adam. "Maybe a couple of them still need to grow up."

"Yes, well, regardless, they may come with you or they may stay here." Kate replied.

"I'm not getting roped into this." Mickey said, hands in the air as he backed away from the door. "Nope, he's an alien, and I'm not getting tied up in alien things." He snatched a piece of paper off the coffee table and headed toward the door. "I'm heading to Geminis, get the testing done."

"Wait," Kate held out a hand, stopping Mickey from going further.
"What?" Mickey asked, frowning.

"You say you're going to Geminis?"

"Yeah, what of it?" Mickey asked, rolling his shoulders and appearing to prepare for a fight. Which was comical considering Kate looked very much like the kind of authority Mickey never messed around with.

Kate grinned wickedly. "I thought you didn't want to be tied up in 'alien things', as you called it?"

"Think I can toss my bag in the TARDIS?" Rose asked him quietly as they left her apartment. Her mother, poor dear, still seemed to be in shock from the whole revelation of it all. He figured that's why Rose shouldered her bag instead of leaving it inside: wanting her mother to have more time to come to grips with things, and perhaps not risk a peek inside the trans-dimensional backpack.

The Doctor smiled at Rose, her words replaying again and again in his mind. Stuck with her. Stuck, as if it were a bad thing. She was serious about coming along for good, and he refused to acknowledge how his hearts skipped a beat for joy at the idea.

"Here," He said, reaching into his pocket and producing a TARDIS key already on the chain.

"Thanks," Rose said absently, "I'll just be a mo', then I'll get it right back to ya."

"I have mine," He said quickly. Rose paused at the bottom of the stairs, turning to him in confusion. "This one's yours." He clarified.

Rose looked at it in shock, then back at him. "Mine?"

"Yes."

"I get a key to the TARDIS."

"Yes," He chuckled. "If you're signing on this time, and I'm stuck with you, better have a way to get home."

Rose looked about to laugh, or scream, or show some form of elation, but was stopped by a choking noise behind him. He half turned, seeing the brunette that had been in the shadows, waiting for Kate, produce an inhaler from her oddly familiar jacket and take a drag.

The Doctor blinked, unsure what to make of the girl as she stared in wonder, but then shook his head and closed the distance between he and Rose. He held out his hand, and Rose beamed once more as she took the key from his palm, fingers brushing against it.

A jolt of adrenaline and hormones surged through his system in a way that hadn't since prior to the Time War, and the Doctor had to suppress a bit of a shiver before his companion saw it.

She clutched her key to her heart, then hurried in a near sprint toward the alley where the TARDIS was parked.

"Where is your companion going?" Kate asked with a frown.
The Doctor put his hands in his jacket pockets and casually came to her side, Mickey and Adam a few feet ahead and nearer to the caravan of black SUVs.

“Oh, she just had some stuff she wanted to drop in the Old Girl before we headed out.”

“Sure, she won’t just hide in the TARDIS?” Kate asked, and the brunette a few paces behind him took out her inhaler again.

“No,” The Doctor said, frowning over his shoulder at the girl. A glance back at Kate only bore amusement, and before he could ask, Rose was jogging back toward them.

“Well, if we’re ready, then, Doctor, your companions and yourself are going to need to split up. We only have room for two of you each in the cars.”

“Adam and Mickey, Rose and myself.” He said without preamble.

The two boys immediately started to protest, and then nearly as quickly stopped. Both stopped, sizing one another up. Mickey towered over Adam once more, but this time the boy showed no fear.

“Boys, with me.” Kate commanded before any further complaints could be made, and turned toward the vehicles, one soldier following.

He then turned to Rose, gesturing toward the cars, and she surprised him by looping her arm around his. They went together, he opened the door for her and she slid in the car. The solider took over door management for him, allowing him to run around to the other side of the vehicle and climb in next to Rose.

“To the tower, then?” He asked as the solider climbed in and started the engine.

“Yes, sir.” He said, and they pulled out of the estates.

“The tower?” Rose asked.

“The tower of London,” The Doctor replied. “It’s where the black archives are. And, of course, where we will be briefed on whatever is going on.”

Rose nodded, glancing out the window. He could see there were dozens of questions dancing in her mind, and he could practically count down to the second when she would burst with them.

“Right, so, what’s goin’ on? UNIT, which, yeah, you used that as your thing in the bunker. But what’s UNIT, and why do you have a badge?”

"I technically work for UNIT," The Doctor replied to Rose quietly, though not enough not to not invoke the brunette's need for her inhaler. Rose frowned at the action, like she was trying to put together a puzzle, but quickly returned her attention back to him as he continued. "They are the United Nations Intelligence Task Force."

"Then shouldn't it be UNITF?" Rose quipped, tongue resting in the corner of her mouth as she grinned.

Unexpectedly, he had the sudden need to drive it back into her mouth with his own.

Shaking his head, he tapped her on the nose, earning a giggle from her. "Anyway," He said, “I used to work with them, back in the day, and technically still do. So, when something alien happens,
which does far more than your kind care to believe, they go out and investigate. And what's more, if I'm in the area, they call me. There was a time I was exiled to Earth, and I found a home among them. Namely with Kate's father, and a few of my other past companions."

"Exiled to Earth?" Rose gaped at him.

"Yes, back in my third body." He said absently.

The color draining from Rose's cheeks made him realize his slip up. "You're what?"

"I … it's complicated, but … well …" The sound of the inhaler in the front seat reminded him they weren't quite alone. "I will explain later, and only to you. Adam and Mickey don't need to hear about it, but you … if you're signing on, if you really want to do this, you should probably know what could happen while we're out there."

"Alright," Rose said absently, nodding in tiny motions and studying his face in a way that made him feel he was about to regenerate on the spot.

"I will say, now, though, so you don't have it on your mind. I don't invade, or snatch, or take over bodies."

"Right," Rose's relief was so palatable it was comical.

He chuckled. "You humans truly are awful to us aliens, you know. We aren't all body snatchers who prob."

"Well you certainly aren't." Rose retorted, a blush infusing her cheeks as she cleared her throat and looked away.

"Been known too, now and again." The Doctor replied without thinking it through. He wasn't sure why he said it, just that he felt he should say it. Rose's head whipped around to look at him, and he noticed the quick flick of her eyes to … southern parts of his anatomy that appreciated the attention a little. Thank Rassilon for his superior biology, for he was able to settle that down before this strange flirtation got out of hand. Instead he merely twitched his eyebrows, and she laughed incredulously.

The brunette inhaled again.

"I'm terribly sorry, but I must ask, are you alright?" The Doctor leaned forward and stuck his head between the seats to ask.

She was instantly flustered, not quite smiling as panic seemed to war with a fanatic sort of joy. "Yes, I'm … I'm good. Osgood, actually. Not that you asked, of course, because you didn't. But that's who I am, Osgood. Petronella Osgood, which you can see why I would not go by my first name. I'm a big fan of yours, by the way, I have read all your files, including the information on the thing you haven't told her yet so I'll keep it to myself." She smiled awkwardly. "Spoiler alert, and all." She then took a deep, hearty drag off her inhaler.

The Soldier driving groaned.

The Doctor smiled. "I have a fan! Well, I must say that's new." He leaned back and looked at Rose. She smiled, amused by either him or Osgood, or likely both. "I have a fan." He grinned.

"I heard." She then leaned forward, resting an arm on Osgood's shoulder. "He's really not that fantastic."
"Hey, now," he warned good natured.

Rose flashed him a wink. "Truth be told, he'd be dead if not for me. First time I met him I saved his life."

"More like second time, thank you. And, need I remind you, I have saved you more times than you saved … you know what, no, that would be a lie. You saved me," he relented.

Rose frowned only briefly before turning back to Osgood.

"Truth is, got nothin' to be all flustered about. Might be alien, but he's just a bloke." Rose said with a shrug.

Osgood glanced at him. "He's a bit dashing in this … I've never seen him look … in his other bodies he wasn't quite…." She whispered, likely not realizing that it was still loud enough for him to hear.

"He's not hard to look at, that's for sure. Even when he's a bit Mister Darcy looking. Starting to miss that look, actually." Rose whispered back, and the Doctor tried very hard not to preen under her praise.

He briefly wondered what she would have thought of him back when he first regenerated into his current body. He was much younger looking then, his hair longer, less lines around his eyes and lips.

"But he's not someone you gotta get all flustered about." Rose continued. "He wouldn't want that, anyway. You say you're a fan, but trust me, doesn't stick around anywhere long enough to be admired or anything. Not that I don't think he doesn't like being appreciated or anything, but he doesn't do it for the praise, he does it because 's what's right."

And wasn't that the truth.

Osgood glanced over at him before leaning a bit closer to Rose. "What's it like?" She asked softly. "Traveling on the TARDIS with him?"

Rose opened her mouth but was thrown back as the vehicle came to a stop, the gate to the Tower of London before them.

"'Nother time, Nell." Rose said warmly, and Osgood looked taken aback before settling in with a smile.

The SUV was passed through, and a couple moments later, they were parked next to the vehicle Kate, Mickey, and Adam were in.

"Nell?" The Doctor questioned when Osgood was out of the vehicle first.

Rose shrugged. "Knew a girl in school hated her name. Can't even remember what her first name really was anymore, just called her Leigh. Was some small part of her whole name, just don't know what that was any more? Thought I'd give Nell a shot."

The Doctor gave a hum of approval as a soldier arrived on both sides of the SUV to open their doors for them. He straightened out his leather jacket as he waited for Rose to return to his side. Once there, the pair of them joined the others at the door, and they entered together.

"Put your finger on the scanner, each of you. It's all part of the security clearance." Kate instructed
as they came up to a strange looking archway. The Doctor, a bit weary, did as instructed. He was willing to trust UNIT, even though most if not all the familiar faces were gone.

"So, when did Science begin to head UNIT, which is essentially the Military?"

"Since I dragged them into adapting, kicking and screaming." Kate replied as the others passed through the scanners.

"Your father always did say that Science leads."

"And he helped see that into reality," Kate said as Mickey went through. "Follow me, please."

They were led to a room on the third floor, soldiers flanking them until they were through the doors. Inside the room was a simple, desk-like table with a small stack of papers and folders as well as a tablet. Kate moved to stand behind it, putting her back to a screen currently displaying the UNIT logo on a black background.

Once the doors were closed, Kate looked over the three non-UNIT employees in the room with a studious expression. "How well do you trust these three, Doctor? We have no record of any of them traveling with you before now."

"I trust Rose implicitly," he replied. "Adam, we've only just met what might be considered yesterday. Mickey … well, Mickey has seen Autons up close and no one seems to be buying his story that his ex-girlfriend-"

"Didn't technically break-up." Mickey grumbled.

"-Ran off with an alien."

Kate narrowed her eyes at the two young men, then nodded once. "Right, I'm glad you came by when you did, Doctor, as we are having some … difficulties." She produced a flyer from a pile of papers on the table and handed it to him.

"Geminis Institute of Genetic Research is looking for volunteers. Participants must be available during the week, have few if any familial attachments, and free of criminal records." He frowned. "That alone sounds suspicious. Who would volunteer to participate in research that is specifically looking for people that nobody would miss and would go undetected?"

Mickey - the idiot, clearly - coughed and scratched at the back of his head, looking anywhere but at the other people in the room.

The Doctor rolled his eyes and shook his head.

"We have managed to send in an undercover agent, of sorts. Someone we knew would be able to handle themselves but wasn't officially tied to UNIT. We haven't heard from her since she entered the facility."

"So, you need someone who can go in?" The Doctor asked, narrowing his eyes. "Which is why you would allow me to bring Rose, Adam, and Mickey when you lot haven't 'cleared' them yet."

Kate at least had the decency to look a bit guilty. "We know there's something going on here, and we suspect it's a bit other worldly. There have been a couple of people who went in, having had no real education to speak of, was no one of influence nor knew anyone with influence, and then suddenly they have high-paying government jobs."
"So, Geminis, clearly, are likely making duplicates of people that someone in their headquarters can control." He frowned. "How do we know you're actually Kate?"

Kate smiled knowingly as she picked up the tablet. A couple swipes and taps later, and the screen behind her displayed a picture of everyone in the room. Each one was taken in the archway on their way to the conference room, beside it was a vascular scan, and beside that was the image of a DNA strand.

"We've started taking precautions." She explained. "Everyone who walks through the doors of UNIT has a scan done. We suspect that those that are entering the Geminis Institute don't come out perfectly human. And as you can see, our scanners do determine when someone is not." She said, indicating the blinking "WARNING" associated with the Doctor.

"Bit impressive if not a touch invasive," He admitted.

"Woulda been nice to know 's what was happening." Rose grumbled.

"Agreed. But what's done is done." The Doctor sighed. "Now, you need one of them to go in, I suggest Adam."

"What?!" Three voices all replied in various degrees of surprise, shock, anger, and confusion.

"Well it's simple," The Doctor explained. "Adam is from the future, should anything happen, the time line won't be affected."

Kate took up her tablet as Adam shook his head. "I don't want to." He said. "Just a few hours ago I was running for my life from an alien that looked like a metal pepper pot, and now you want to throw me out there with another potentially dangerous alien?" He demanded.

"It wouldn't do anyway, Doctor." Kate said. "We believe they do reference checks, and it will likely come up that Adam James Mitchell is, in fact, in Oxford at this moment."

"Making him technically unavailable throughout the week." The Doctor groaned, running a hand through his hair and pulling a bit.

"I'll do it." Rose shrugged, and he whipped his head around to stare at her in disbelief. Her nonchalance about walking into a potentially dangerous situation was both alluring and terrifying. She was brave, his Rose.

"Absolutely not." Mickey said firmly, shaking his head.

"How ya gonna stop me, Mick?"

"Applying myself, wasn't I?" He retorted.

"Weren't gonna get in, and we both know it. You got attachments. Your Dad's out there somewhere, and you have a job. A real, proper job, and mates. Anyone on the estates knows where to find you on a match night."

"And what about you, huh? You've got mates, too."

"Mates I hadn't properly seen in an age. Working open to close nearly every night before Henricks went up, and then I left with the Doctor. Last month I've been jobless and no one's heard from me." She shrugged. "Probably be waved right through."
There was silence in the room before Kate said, "She has a point."

Osgood used her inhaler.

The Doctor turned to Rose, shaking his head. "Didn’t I tell you that I was not letting you wander off again?"

"Not really wandering off, though, am I?" She countered with a slight smile.

He drifted toward her, not caring about anyone else in the room. "No, I suppose you aren't." The Doctor said, reaching to cup her face. His fingers lightly touched her cheek before he pulled away, realizing this was allowing his impulses to take control. It wouldn’t do for anyone in the room, especially Kate, to realize the depths of his feelings. "Are you sure you want to do this?" he asked as he put his hands in his jacket pockets.

"'Bout as sure as I can be." Rose said, nervous but confident. "You've given me enough experience with aliens that I think I can manage."

"Excellent." Kate said, not distracting the Doctor from the girl in front of him in the least. "Let's get you prepped."
“We’re going to have you change your clothes,” Kate said to Rose as she led her into a small changing area, the gadgets and gizmos that she’d have to adorn being left in the other room for the Doctor to inspect, and for Mickey and Adam to probably boggle over.

Rose hadn’t seen Mickey’s eyes light up like that since he got his first car. Kid at Christmas he was, going on about proper spy stuff. She’d shaken her head and tuned him out, glancing to see the Doctor about as equally amused, and then followed Kate and Nell.

“What do my clothes need to be changed, exactly?” Rose asked.

“Because we want you to look as though you’re serious about the work, whatever it is. If you go in there dressed as you currently are, they’re going to think you just want the money. Go in more professional, and you have an interest in the work as well. We want to see as much of the facility as possible, we didn’t get much through our undercover agent before her contact fell out.” Kate said casually as if losing undercover operatives was equal to misplacing your keys inside your flat.

“Lovely.” Rose half-sighed, a new wave of nervousness twisting her gut. She was brought into a room, and as she was, another UNIT agent wheeled in a rack of clothes and promptly left.

“I’m certain something on here will fit you well,” Kate said. “Change, then come back out. We leave in thirty.”

“Right, thirty.” Rose said as the door closed behind her, leaving her alone. She blew out a breath, attempted to steady her heart, and went for the clothes.

There was so much technology.

As Adam looked around at everything while Rose was off being prepped, he actually wished that Van Statten hadn’t found him first. The gadgets, the tools, they were beyond his wildest dreams. Mickey was going on as if this was some sort of spy game, but the idiot didn’t and couldn’t appreciate the magnitude of it all.

There was a contact lens for Rose to wear that didn’t alter a thing about her, but allowed everyone back at UNIT to see what she saw. It connected wirelessly to a stud they’d be replacing her hoop earrings with. The second stud allowed them to hear everything. There was no way to tell she’d essentially be a spy.

There were also other gadgets that he wanted to explore further if he could. Something sonic, a lipstick or maybe a flashlight, he wasn’t sure what it was supposed to be. There were weapons as well, though they didn’t interest him nearly as much as the tech that read, altered, or wiped memories. Oh, there are so many things he could do with that.

But not now. No, what Adam Mitchell needed to do was formulate a plan, one that would hopefully score him plenty of fortune when he decided, in a trip or two, that travel just wasn’t for him.
And he'd convince Rose to come with him.

Because after seeing how she grew up, where she was from, it wouldn't take much to convince a girl like her to come be with him if he were rich enough that the loss of his job in the States would mean absolutely nothing. And really, would she want to stick around with an old, alien man when she could have a young human who could give her everything she'd ever want?

He watched them now through the corner of his eye. She claimed they were friends, but obviously the Doctor didn't think that. He kept touching her face, her shoulder, her arm. She kept putting her hand on top of it, smiling in a way that didn't reach her eyes, avoiding eye contact with him while getting all flustered. It was obvious she didn't like his attention. She was too nice to actually physically remove him, but Adam knew from his time in school that a woman putting her hand on the man's that's touching her meant to remove it. Avoidance of eye contact meant discomfort. He didn't want Rose to have to worry about that when she didn't have to.

"Alright," The Doctor said, turning away from Rose and glancing between Adam and Mickey. "Once Rose is equipped, we're leaving the base so you two be ready."

Adam looked over at the big, bulky bloke that used to be Rose's boyfriend. Obviously, running off with the Doctor was her way of escaping that idiot.

But she could run away from them both, and that crass, overbearing woman that she called a mother. Thank goodness there wasn't an immediate resemblance, or he may have had to rethink his plans.

Plans, yes, once they got out there, he would excuse himself for a bit, and put things in motion.

Smirking to himself, Adam couldn't help but feel a bit self-assured. After all, it wouldn't change anything.

Too much, anyway.

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Rose straightened her skirt once more, even though she was sitting down in the back seat of another SUV on her way to the Geminis Institute. She looked nice enough: pencil skirt in black, blue blazer over a white blouse, shoes she could run in without being trainers.

But she felt very much not like herself. Dressing up for 1869 in a beautiful gown was one thing, putting on a suit and pretending she was someone with so much potential these people would snap her right up was another.

"You'll do fine," The Doctor said, taking her hand off the hem of her skirt and giving it a squeeze. It was both eerie and comforting that he just knew she wasn't ready for this just yet.

"I feel like … I dunno. 'S not right, is it? I feel like maybe I'm 'bout to become a cautionary tale. Hansel and Gretel or Lil' Red Riding Hood or something."

"Well, you're certainly not Little Red Riding Hood. She goes in, naive, easily led astray."

"And that's not me?" Rose challenged.
"Oh no," The Doctor replied immediately. "If anything, you're the Bad Wolf, appearing sweet and innocent but with teeth and claws, and a fierceness I haven't seen in a long time."

"So why do you look like you swallowed something off?" She asked after noticing how pale he went as he spoke.

He looked torn as to whether or not he should say something. "It's just that … Bad Wolf. Those words have been everywhere, in many languages. People either say them, or I read it somewhere we go. It's like an omen or a fortune, I just can't decide which one. And I just said the words myself."

"Not filling me with reassurance here, Doctor."

"I don't mean to send you in there with that sort of thinking." He said, giving her hand another squeeze. "Maybe it's nothing, just a strange coincidence. Probably nothing at all, really."

"Right," Rose said with a sharp nod, attempting to ignore how her heart rate was picking up as she looked out through the windshield and seeing the building up ahead. There was the zodiac symbol for the Gemini on each end of the simple lettering hanging above the multi glass door entry.

"Hey," The Doctor said softly, turning her head toward him with a light touch. "You are going to be fantastic in there, do you hear me?"

Rose nodded. "Yeah," She said, sucking in a fortifying breath. "Yeah, of course." The vehicle slowed to a stop, far enough away from the building that anyone inside wouldn’t have seen how she got there, and Rose took another deep breath. "Here goes nothing." She said more to herself than to him, even if she did offer a slight smile.

"I will be in the building around the corner with Kate. And Nell, as you call her."

"Mickey?"

"As far as I know, Mickey went back home, wanting to keep out of things for now." He smirked. "And Adam just went out exploring London as he didn't get to see it the first time, he was in 2005."

Rose snorted at that. "Right. Well, didn't ask, but it's alright."

The Doctor flopped his head back against the head rest and chuckled. “No, I suppose you didn’t.”

She smiled to herself, taking in his seemingly care-free attitude and tried to draw some of that energy within herself. He believed in her, enough that he seemed entirely relaxed about the whole situation. Without thinking, she leaned in and kissed the Doctor on the cheek.

Neither moved as Rose hovered in his personal space, shocking herself into immobility. The Doctor didn't appear to be breathing at all as he turned and caught her eye. She didn't want to believe his eyes flickered to her lips, and she was sorely tempted to find out if his mouth was as cool as his skin.

"Right," She said softly. "Best get going then."

"Yes," The Doctor said in equally hushed tones. "Be safe."

"I will," She lied, knowing there was no way to know for sure if she would be. She knew he knew that, that it was all just words because of the short distance between them.
The SUV door opened, and Rose came back to reality enough to realize she'd reached back for the handle. She moved swiftly out of the car, heading for the building without looking back. The whole walk to the front doors, she straightened her skirt, fixed her hair, shifted her jacket.

"Well aren't you just a classy piece of shit." She heard an all too familiar voice call out from her right, freezing her in place. Jimmy Stone shouldn't still have that sort of power over her, she hated that it did. But more, she hated herself for allowing him to have ever had it in the first place.

She didn't know if she should run, if she should stay, if she should call the Doctor's name, damn the consequences of her undercover mission. She darted a glance in the direction of the SUV, but it was gone. The Doctor was probably already where they would be monitoring her.

The reminder that she wasn't really alone among the crowd gave Rose just a touch more strength. She turned toward the man she never wanted to see again, taking in his somewhat dressed-up appearance. His shirt was untucked from denims he likely hadn't just pulled off the floor. His tie was crocked, and slightly discolored from something Rose didn't want to think too hard on. His blazer was faded, and missing a button.

"What’s got you dressed up, then?" She asked, attempting to sound cool but polite.

"Trying ta get easy money, what ya think?"

"Thought they didn't want anyone with a criminal record?"

"Yeah, well, pretty sure they ain't gonna want some chit from the Estates either. And given you being gone for a month, ain't no one seen you around, makes me wonder what you've been up to."

"Traveling." She replied quickly.

"Right. And how wide d’ya have to spread your legs to be able to do that?" He asked as he slithered toward her.

"Fuck you, Jimmy," She snapped.

Her anger quickly shifted to fear as Jimmy pounced, grabbing her arm hard and rough. She could feel the bruises starting to form, and despite knowing it was useless, she tried to pull away.

"Don't think you're somehow better than me, Rose." He snarled. "You ain't nothing, and you're not going to be something, so give it up."

For one, infinitesimal moment, Rose believed him. For a fraction of a second, she was cowed. And then in a flash, she swung her arm and smacked Jimmy Stone with a Tyler slap powerful enough that he stumbled back, and the crack drew enough attention that people stopped and stared.

He stumbled, reaching up and touching his face where it was molted red from the impact.

"Stay away from me." She said as calmly as she could.

He gave a dark chuckle, rubbing at the spot she hit him on. "Gonna regret that, you."

A momentary pang of fear and worry wobbled in her heart, but then she remembered that everything she was seeing, the Doctor, Kate, and Nell were seeing as well. Every threat he made, every sneer, it was being monitored.

Smirking at him, she stepped closer. "Love to see you try." She pushed past him, knowing that his
desperate need to appear above everything would prevent him from yelling or chasing after her. And if Rose knew the Doctor, which she was pretty sure she did, he would be outside waiting for the moment she left the company. She’d be safe from Jimmy’s retaliation.

Rose went inside the building, and was immediately handed a clipboard with a pen attached, then directed to a rather long line. She followed direction, glancing between the form on the board and the lot of people ahead and around her.

She’d recognized quite a few people from around the estates and those who worked at Hendricks whom she’d only seen in passing. Glancing at the form, what seemed at first to look like a standard job application, she wondered if she’d be here had she not gone off with the Doctor. It was stated right on the form that, if she was accepted, her paycheck would be at least three times the amount she’d have made at Hendricks in a year.

Filling it out, glancing up and around as she did, there didn’t seem to be any sort of education required.

“See if you’ve got what it takes to be a better, bolder you.” She mumbled aloud. “Find your second self. Bit odd, that.” She filled in the single sheet form, reading it over a couple times, feeling a touch uneasy about how close to perfect her actual information was for this mysterious job.

“Rose,” She heard, and frowned at the familiarity of it. “Rose!” It persisted, and she turned slowly to see Mickey smiling and waving at her. Pointing to his application the flashing her a thumb’s up. She gaped at him, wondering if he’d somehow been rigged up to go undercover as well, or if he’d just been that stupid to go for it knowing full well there was more than met the eye.

But if she showed signs of knowing him more than a passing acquaintance, anyone watching might let someone else know that she wasn’t suited.

So, Rose turned away, much as she didn’t want to, much as she wanted for him to go home.

“Bloody hell I hope he’s supposed to be here.” She grumbled softly, wondering if they were listening back at where they were hiding.

She ignored his calling her again, keeping her head turned toward the front, and her eyes slowly scanning the room in case there was anything those using her to spy might need to see that she wouldn’t have thought much of. Maybe the Doctor was in the room with the UNIT people, pointing out aliens and the like while she just assumed they were normal humans.

"Next," She heard, and Rose was momentarily startled to discover that meant her. She straightened her spine, resisted the urge to adjust her skirt, and did her best to smile at the woman behind the counter.

There was no small talk, no introductions. The woman simply took her application and read over it.

"No job for the last month?" She asked, a brow arching.

"No, last job got blown up." Rose replied.

"And you have been staying with your … parents? Boyfriend?" The woman turned her gaze to meet Rose’s.

She shook her head, heart starting to pick up speed. "Estranged from my Mum, my Dad’s gone. Left my last boyfriend when I realized he was a useless idiot," She growled a bit. "Sorta been … going here and there since then. Never really staying in one place very long."
The woman behind the counter smiled in a way that had a shudder crawl up Rose's spine that had to be suppressed.

"Well, as it just so happens, we here at Geminis want to give a fresh start to people just like you."
She stood, waving Rose around the desk. "If you would just follow me."

The first place Adam had gone was the bank. He still had cash on him from the states, a fairly large amount thanks to feeling the need to have it on him. The bunker was actually located in a very small, Utah town, away from where the ins and outs of the lot of them would draw attention. And yes, they had to live there for the most part, but they did have to go into town eventually. And when he did, Adam liked to make sure he attracted attention in a different way than his boss. Money attracted women, after all, and making a show of having a lot did him well.

Once he had his dollars converted to pounds, he made some minor investments. Apple would be a wise one to invest in, as would Google. He didn’t have enough to buy a lot of stock, but it was a good start. Little by little, of course. Enough to keep his cash flow well and truly secured when he would inevitably lose his job in seven years.

He then went to the campus.

Adam checked, and rechecked his class schedule, knowing that he had never once missed out on a lesson, a point of pride that he thought was likely the reason many fellow students didn’t want to be friends with him. It did mean he was that much smarter than them. More mature, more ready for the world.

Conveniently, he would be in class for at least an hour, which was all the time he would need to set himself up.

No one said anything to him as he went to his dorm, one he hadn’t actually been to for years. It was likely they were too dumbstruck at the sight of Adam Mitchell supposedly skipping class, and it made him smirk to think how they would all wonder at how he would still maintain such perfect grades when he wasn’t in attendance.

Inside, he went for his desk, grabbed his planner, and began making notes.

Money was routinely sent to him from home, and since he was never one to party or go out much, he could always spare some pounds to buffer his investments. Adam planned it out strategically, ensuring that he wasn’t constantly investing, but would pad what he had nicely.

The door opened, and Adam froze, momentarily terrified at the idea that maybe he wasn’t in class.

“Eh, mate.” His roommate said, and Adam glanced over his shoulder to see the nervous guy.
“Thought you were in class.”

“Will be, just had to come back for something.” He replied, closing his planner and standing. He turned and noted for the first time that his roommate wasn’t alone.

A tall, older man with dark hair and blue eyes smiled at him, though it wasn’t an easy smile by any means. Still, for the first time in his life, Adam actually found himself mildly attracted to a man.
His roommate fidgeted. “So, this is Jack.”

“Right,” Adam said with a forced smile he knew looked genuine. “I’ll let you get to it, then?”

“Wanna join us?” Jack asked, but there was something beneath the flirty tone that made it clear Adam should just get lost.

“Actually, I have a girlfriend.” Adam retorted.

His roommate visibly was taken aback. “You do?”

“You mean after class, right?” His roommate said, frowning.

“Yeah,” Adam said, giving a half-hearted wave as he turned and left the room.

As he closed the door behind him, he smiled to himself. All set, now all he needed to do was say he wanted to go home, to his proper time, and he’d be set from life. And Rose, well, he would just need to find the time and space to tell her what he’d done in order to set himself up, and she’d be all his.

His cheek still tingled as he headed to the building UNIT was hiding out in, and his lips were twisted into a light smile as he looped Rose kissing his cheek in his mind. He wanted to kiss her back, on her forehead, cheek, lips, wherever he could, all under the veil of being for luck.

He was in deep, and the Doctor knew it.

It was both tremendously brilliant and terrifying all at once. He shouldn’t be this happy after the time war, he didn’t deserve to find himself falling in love again, and in the same body as the last no less. But Rose….

The Doctor opened papered-up glass door, flipping the lock behind him before turning and taking in the set-up UNIT had for watching Rose’s activities. There was more than just Kate and Osgood, a couple of young-ish gentlemen who were there watching screens as well, though it seemed to be more surveillance than anything. Osgood seemed to be leading the monitoring of Rose. He could see her view on the screen as she made her way to the institute, noted her vitals, heard the hum of the world around her.

"Well aren't you just a classy piece of shit.”

Rose had stopped moving at those words, and he caught Osgood frowning at something before his attention was brought back to the screen, how she looked roughly in their direction before turning to the miserable excuse for a human who’d spoken.

“What’s got you dressed up, then?” Rose retorted, and he heard the quiver in the cool politeness in her voice.

"Who is she talking to?” He asked, seeing the male specimen on the screen and finding himself unwilling to refer to him as a man.
"Not sure." Kate replied, as the conversation continued. "But her heart rate spiked for a moment when he called her. Not in one those fluttering of the hearts sort of thing, either."

"Traveling," Rose responded to a question he didn't hear as the Doctor stalked toward the computer banks. He eyed the male, then noted Osgood was typing on the keyboard, a snap of the man’s face on the left side of the monitor.

"Right." The man said, "And how wide d’ya have to spread your legs to be able to do that?"

“How dare he.” The Doctor snarled just as Rose spat, "Fuck you, Jimmy."

In an instant, the man’s face was taking up most of Rose’s feed, a cold, hard look in his eyes that the Doctor had seen far too often in raging lunatics who somehow thought themselves superior and in charge. In men who thought women were a possession.

“Doctor," Kate said in a warning tone, her hand on his back.

He rolled his shoulders, throwing the hand off but stayed, knowing that running out to Rose now would tip their hand. He gripped the back of Osgood’s chair as he bowed his head a moment to regain composure, feeling the plastic crack beneath his touch. He took a breath, then another, pulling himself together.

Then a loud, silencing crack split through the commotion, and all eyes turned to the monitor.

The Doctor chuckled at the surprised indignation on the punk’s face, the blotchy red and white of his face that bared the mark of Rose Tyler’s hand. The Doctor smiled, pride and love swelling within him as he watched the last of their interaction, and Rose making sure the bloke knew his threats didn’t scare her, and walked away.

“Who was that?” Kate asked, and for a moment, the Doctor expected Rose to reply.

"His name is James Wesley Stone.” Osgood replied. "He's got a record, of course. Blokes like him always do. Looks cowardly though, as it's all domestic violence related. Last charge was … oh."

"Oh? Oh what?" The Doctor asked.

Osgood nervously looked between him and the screen, and before she could close anything, he glimpsed the file she had open.

And there was Rose, his wonderful, beautiful Rose with a black eye and a bloodied lip. She didn't look beaten down or sad in the picture, merely angry. She reported his apparently coming home, drunk, broke, and discovering that she had to take a cut in pay and was non-too pleased. But the charges didn’t stick. For whatever reason, James got away with it.

In a flash, all those odd and off things that Rose seemed weary of, the compliments and touches, made sense. She’d been abused. This James, or Jimmy as she referred to him, probably said similar things to her.

“I’m an idiot,” He hissed to himself, letting go of poor Osgood’s chair before he did damage. He ran his hand over his face, sighing heavily. “How could I have been so blind?”

Was that why there was that little bit of fear after she kissed his cheek?

And how does he get her to know, and understand, that she didn’t need to worry about such things with him?
"What is that idiot doing?" Kate asked, and the Doctor turned to see Mickey the bloody Idiot waving and gesturing to Rose.

"Wanted nothing to do with anything alien, knows this is all alien in nature, and still goes ahead." The Doctor sighed heavily, more wearied and annoyed than he was before. "We can't keep an eye on him through Rose."

"No, and we can't exactly go in there and drag him out without tipping our hand that we've already got someone going in there." Kate agreed.

They watched through Rose as she ignored him and his shouts to her, and instead scanned the room. Nothing seemed terribly out of place that the Doctor could note, but it just felt off.

"What is it about the people that work here that don’t seem…?

"Human?" Kate supplied, and he hummed in agreement. "I haven’t the slightest. No one who has been there has attempted to get into UNIT, so we’ve never been able to do a scan."

"She’s in." Osgood said with a smile, her tone somewhere between awe and pride.

"I didn’t doubt." The Doctor replied, a smile playing on his features/

"Alright Rose," Said the woman who Rose had done her intake interview with, standing from behind the desk. “If you would come with me this way, we're going to begin your physical.”

“Physical,” Rose’s voice replied with a nervous chuckle. “Not really dressed for that sorta thing, me.”

“Oh, don’t worry, dear. We do a sort of full body scan,” The woman explained as she led Rose to a separate area from where they were doing the initial interviews.

“Full body scan,” Rose sounded nervous. “Bit invasive.”

“You have nothing to worry about, dear.” The woman reassured. “We just need to know your… level of fitness is all. It helps us with your assignments.”

“I think this is the part where we should intervene.” The Doctor said, feeling himself start to inch backward.

“No, hold, Doctor.” Kate said, putting a hand out to rest on his shoulder. “We need her in.”

“A full body scan doesn’t sound like something she needs to be exposed to,” He snapped back, turning to Kate.

“We’ve given her one.” Kate replied, smirking at him.

“Yes, without her consent.” He gritted his teeth, turning more bodily towards her. “Something, I might point out, your father would never have allowed.”

“Times are changing, Doctor.” Kate said with what seemed like forced calm. “Are technology for civilian consumption is changing at a rapid rate. And with it comes a rapid increase in possible threats both terrestrial and extra. Our need for security has increased, and as Science leads-”

“Don’t twist your father’s words around, Kate.”

“He was one of the ones who supported the scans taken place as people enter the tower.” She
retorted.

The Doctor sighed heavily, silently conceding that he couldn’t argue there. He glanced at the monitor but didn’t really register anything before turning back to Kate and gestured toward them.

“She’s been in the TARDIS, she’ll have low-levels of artron energy. If their scanners pick that up…”

“Why would anyone think to look for that?” She countered with a frown to the Doctor, shaking her head a bit.

“If they’re displaced, if they’ve come to Earth to make a home, they will look for that to make sure there isn’t anyone involved in the Time War-”

“In the what?” Kate asked.

“Umm,” Osgood said, getting their attention. “Visual and audio are down.”

“What?” The Doctor and Kate said at the same time, though he far more worried than she sounded.

“Just a moment ago.” Osgood explained. “She stepped into the scanner, closed her eyes, then I lost all audio and visual feed.”

“Can you rewind the footage a minute or two?” The Doctor asked, and Osgood did so with a nod. The screen blurred as everything was reversed, and then Rose everything was normal, with Rose following the woman around the corner to where there were pods built into the wall, sending a red flag off into the Doctor’s mind.

She was directed to one, and just as she was about to step in….

"Sarah Jane Smith." The Doctor grumbled under his breath. "Let me guess, she's your undercover?"

"Yes, Kate said, trailing the word a bit as she narrowed her eyes at the scene. "But we didn't send her in to participate like this. She was supposed to be like Rose, just a ….”

Kate trailed off as technology far beyond anything found on Earth was attached to Rose's head, and her eyelids fluttered shut. And just before they had, the Doctor glimpsed a strange shift, and the pinking of the admission woman's skin.

"That's not right." The Doctor commented as some sort of gurgling sound came through the stud earring receptors before all sound was abruptly cut off.

“No,” Kate said firmly. “What are we dealing with?”

“Well, Sarah Jane ceased communication with you, and now Rose is in the same boat. They wouldn’t know each other, so they would have no idea that they could rely on one another to get out of whatever situation you got them into. And if I had to guess, and I’m quite good at guessing, I would wager you very likely have a Zygon invasion on your hands.”

“Zygons!?” Kate said, and despite blanching a bit, Osgood was already typing on the computer to bring up an alien profile.

“Yes, but the question is why. Why here? What is their aim?” The Doctor said thoughtfully.
“You mentioned a war?” Kate asked.

“A discussion for another day, I’m afraid. I need to get to my TARDIS to find out some crucial information.” He replied, and then heard the tell-tale shake of an inhaler before the deep drag. He smirked, glancing at Kate before turning to Osgood. “Would you like to see her, Nell?”

Osgood turned white, then really red, then some sort of sickly in between before nodding slowly and taking another long, hearty drag off the inhaler.

“Why return to the TARDIS?” Kate asked. “If we know what we’re dealing with….”

“We know the who, but not the why. The why I can decipher back at the TARDIS, or at the very least eliminate a very likely possibility.” He explained turning to the exit.

“I’ll stay here with Stevens and Cooper, and alert you through Osgood should contact with either Rose or Sarah Jane become reestablished.”

“Good,” the Doctor said simply, then looked to Osgood who was still sort of frozen in place. “Come on. If you’re as big a fan as you say -”

Osgood was out of her chair and across the room before seeming to suddenly realize how excited and unprofessional she may have looked. She paused, collected herself, and then nodded to the Doctor. “After you,” She said.

He smiled at her before turning to Kate, serious once again. “Any sign of Rose coming around.”

“You’ll be notified right away.” She replied.

Nodding once, the Doctor unlocked the door, opened it, waved Osgood through, and then followed her out.

“How are we going to get back to the estates?” She asked as they headed around the corner.

The Doctor put his hands in his pockets and hummed, glancing around in hopes to find a taxi that might take them. He doubted Kate would appreciate their commandeering a UNIT vehicle, and it was extremely unlikely that Osgood would be alright with a little automobile theft, considering if she had had keys to one of them, she would have said so.

It was then he spotted his savior, and he hoped he had just enough charm to convince him to do the right thing.

“Mickey,” He called, pulling the man out of his morose movements and to a stop. “You wouldn’t by chance have a lift home, would you?”

Adam had figured, once away from the campus, that he would head to this Geminis Institute. It would be the perfect opportunity to help Rose stay away from the Doctor. After all, if it was a proper undercover mission, then he shouldn’t be shadowing her. He probably did that all the time.

And once he got Rose alone, he’d tell her all about what he did, about how she would never have to want for anything. He could picture it, her relief as she pulled him in for an embrace, the glance over her shoulder before she took his hand and begged him to take her away. He’d promise her
they would, but not yet. He wanted to see some alien worlds, see their tech, maybe take a bit of it for them. Van Statten had earned his fortune by patenting alien technology, but he wouldn’t be around to continue with that trend in the future they’d be returning to. Adam would be a billionaire, and Rose would be his prized wife.

He nearly missed the stop, so deep in his daydream. But he pulled himself together and departed from the bus, heading toward the institute for signs of Rose.

It then, of course, surprised him that he found her so quickly, leaving the institute.

And more so that when she met his eye, she smiled a brilliant smile.

“Just who I was looking for.” She said as she came right up to him, and Adam nearly fell over himself.

“Yeah?” He said before he schooled his features into a cool certainty. Stuffing his hands in his pockets, Adam shrugged. “Well, of course you were. Why wouldn’t you?” He asked as she started playing with the collar of his over shirt.

She gave a sultry laugh in her throat. “Exactly,” She teased. “Was hoping you’d help me get back to the TARDIS.”

Adam nearly frowned, nearly. “Why’s that?” He asked.

Rose shrugged one shoulder, running her hands down over his chest. “Don’t want to go back alone, is all.” She said before biting her lip.

“Oh, Rose.” He said breathlessly as he pushed her off him for just a moment. “The things I’ve arranged, we’re set.”

“Are we?” She asked, cocking her eyebrow.

“We are. We can leave tha-” She cut him off again with another deep kiss, and Adam went with it. Even if his head spun, even if he was sure she was depriving him of oxygen. He really didn’t care.

And then she stopped. “Let’s go, yeah?” She asked, and all he could do was nod dumbly. He stumbled after her, wondering if it was normal for one’s tongue to feel numb and heavy after a good snog.

He could feel Mickey’s eyes on him about every five to fifteen seconds, always for a second at a time, maybe two, before they would return to the road. This happened constantly, and it was
beginning to amuse the Doctor more than he cared to admit. Especially with Osgood in the back seat, and knowing she was probably watching the pair like a hawk.

“Say your piece, Mickey.” He said after the fortieth time this pattern repeated, and when he knew they were very near the estates again. “I know you want to.”

“You took my girl.” He said gruffly. “Sauntered in with your posh words and your-your- your Austen clothes, and your space ship thing! You took my girl!”

“I didn’t take your ‘girl’ as you say,” The Doctor said, probably a bit too casually for Mickey whipped his head around and glared with something close to hatred. “I don’t mean in that you weren’t together when she left, but that I didn’t ask her to come with me intending on her ending things with you. Frankly, I couldn’t even be sure you were a couple when I met her.”

“If you knew, would you have asked her along?” Mickey asked, focusing on the road, though his grip on the steering wheel was a bit snug.

“Yes.” The Doctor replied. “Because she is brave, and kind, and an adventuress at heart.” When it seemed Mickey was displeased with the answer, but didn’t have anything to say for the moment, the Doctor went on. “You should see her out there. She makes friends where ever she goes, has not once shied away from an alien race or creature. She’s eaten foods form different galaxies, and has flirted with authors who by now are legend. She’s seen your very near future and changed one of the deadliest beings in the Universe into an understanding, tamed version of itself.”

“Talkin’ ‘bout yourself?” He grumbled in response.

“No, but in some ways, it's fitting for me as well.”

“So, what’s going on between you, then? Anything.”

The Doctor hesitated. “We’re friends. I care for her a great deal, yes, but we are just friends.”

“And her being back, now? She come back because she wanted to be here, or….”

“She came for her stuff, to see her mother, but that was all. Had it not been for what’s going on at Geminis, we wouldn’t have stayed around.”

Mickey nodded, his grip easing up on the wheel, but he didn’t say anything more.

He parked his car between Rose’s building and the alley where the TARDIS was hiding. He sat behind the driver’s seat, remaining quiet even as Osgood shuffled out of the car and stood at the rear.

The Doctor sighed, rubbing at the bridge of his nose with one finger. His hearts were screaming at him not to say what he was about to, but his head knew it was the right thing. The spot where Rose had kissed him tingled again as he said, “There’s always room for one more. If you want to stay close, perhaps see if being together will allow things to rekindle.”

Mickey scoffed, shook his head. “Saw the way she looks at ya, mate. Saw that look in her once before, with that Stone bloke.”

The Doctor turned to Mickey, dread swelling in his chest. “You must know I’m nothing like him. I would never hurt her, never lay a finger on her meaning to do harm.”

“Not just about the physical blows. Jimmy did a right number on her emotionally.”
“I know that now. She never said a word to me, but I noticed little things while we’ve been away. Like she was waiting for the other shoe to drop, as you humans say.”

“Yeah, and she’s gonna be like that for a bit still, I think. Maybe. I dunno, like I said, I see the way she looks at ya. I see that same sorta worship she had. Only, I see the way ya look at her, too, when she ain’t lookin. Got that same sorta worship going on. It’s the only reason I know you aren’t gonna be another Jimmy. But if she ever comes back ‘cause you hurt her, or broke her heart, ran off with a different girl or anything, I’ll find some way to hurt you, alien or not.”

“I’ll hold you to that.” The Doctor replied, and Mickey smiled for the first time in his presence. “But it still stands, the offer. Do you want to come with us?”

“No,” Mickey said firmly. “Not even sure I can handle being in that space ship of yours again.”

“Fair enough.” With that, the Doctor left the car. “Come along, Nell. She’s this way.”

Osgood took a deep breath from her inhaler and followed close behind him.

When they rounded the corner, the Doctor heard her footsteps stop and a slight, choking wheeze. He remained composed, barely, as he walked up to the doors and waited. Mickey looked hesitant, but still stood opposite, hands in his pockets, waiting for Osgood to slowly get her feet into gear and make her way over.

She hesitated, then reached out and caressed the door with awe.

The TARDIS hummed a giddy little melody, and the Doctor chuckled.

“What!? What did I do?” Osgood asked in a panic.

“You just made her feel a bit pretty, is all.” The Doctor replied. “She hasn’t had anyone familiar with her prior to meeting around before. Not like this, anyway.”

“What are you on about?” Mickey asked as the Doctor reached into his pocket for the key and unlocked the doors.

“The TARDIS is a sentient.” The Doctor replied as if Mickey were just a bit thick. It earned him a glare before the meaning of what he said seemed to catch up with Mickey, and then the bloke seemed entirely too weary about going inside.

Osgood, however, did not hesitate to enter once the doors were opened.

“Oh,” She breathed in wonder.

“Go on,” The Doctor said, gently nudging her further inside. He headed up the ramp to the controls and immediately started a search as to why likely happened to the Zygons during the war. The TARDIS pulled up the information for him, and he sighed. “Planet burned in the first days of the Time War. They’re homeless.”

“The Zygons?” Osgood said as she came up beside him.

“Yes,” The Doctor said. “What few of the species were able to survive came to Earth.”

“And what do you think they want?” Osgood asked nervously.

“I would say it’s likely they wish to invade. How long as Geminis been in business?”
“It was about three weeks ago.” Osgood replied.

“Anything of significance happened at the time?” He asked.

“You mean aside from shop dummies trying to kill us all?” Mickey mocked, and the Doctor merely glanced at him, attempting not to roll his eyes.

“There was something.” Osgood said. “It’s what had UNIT on the lookout for something like this. Something entered in the atmosphere, we thought it would land in the Thames, and it might have, but we were never able to find any proof of it.”

“Likely where the surviving Zygons came to earth, probably diverted their ship just enough to evade detection. And then, once they see that Earth is at a tolerable level of technological advancement, they begin to set up a way to lure unsuspecting, and less likely to be missed.”

“So, what do we do?” Osgood asked.

The Doctor turned to her and smiled. “We reason with them.” He said cheerfully before darting around the console, flipping switches and turning knobs, preparing to move the TARDIS. “Hold on to something,” he said, noting Mickey already reaching back and gripping the rail behind him in a death grip. “It can be a bit bumpy sometimes.”

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Adam, admittedly, was a bit lost. He wasn’t entirely sure where they were going, only that they should be heading toward the wrong side of town where they had left the TARDIS. Rose just needed the gentle reminder that they were near the estates, and she led the way. There was always this quick moment where it seemed like she really didn’t know where she was going, and had to think hard about it, but then she would smile at him (and oh, he loved having that smile on him), stroke his arm, and it would be like there was never an uncertainty to getting back.

“Are you sure you want to get your stuff now?” He asked.

“I don’t want to be with the Doctor one more moment if it means I can’t be with you.” She cooed.

He smiled. “Not that I don’t mind you finally coming around. Mind, I think you would have sooner if the Doctor hadn’t hovered so much. But I thought you liked the travel. Would have thought you wouldn’t have minded doing it a bit longer.”

Rose curled her lip. “Actually, not really up to traveling. And why would I be? Geminis is going to give me all I need, set me up for life here.” She then turned to him, and smiled again, though it wasn’t as big, and it seemed… off. “And you’re going to be a part of it, aren’t you? What with your plans to keep us set?”

“Yeah,” Adam replied. “But we have to get the Doctor to bring us to my proper time first.”

“Right.” Rose frowned as if she wasn’t sure of that.

But she would be, he knew it. If in less than a day, she could see how much better for her he was over the Doctor, it wouldn’t take long for her to get that sticking around where her mother was
would be better for her too.

They got off the bus, hopefully the last time they would ever have to take public transportation, and headed toward where the TARDIS was parked.

Adam looked around the estates, smiling, pleased he would never have to see this place again. Rose wouldn’t want to bring herself down here once she was in higher society. She’d forget all about her life here, her mother and that boorish ex of hers.

They turned down the alley where the TARDIS was parked, stood in front of it, and waited.

“Well,” She said after a moment, gesturing at the doors. “Aren’t you going to open it?”

“I don’t have a key,” He replied. “Would’ve thought you would.”

He then reached out and knocked, figuring it would be better than nothing.

To his surprise, the door creaked open just enough for them to squeeze through. So, they did, Rose leading the way.

The moment he stepped inside, Adam knew something was very, very wrong. For one, the inside of the TARDIS was not at all, even the slightest, like it was when he’d left it that morning. For another, Rose was there, a second Rose that looked older somehow, and yet the same. She was not happy to see him, not pleased in the slightest. Add to that that Jack, the man he was sure should have been having a shag with his roommate, closed the doors with a decided finality that didn’t sit well.

And then, the final nail in the coffin, as it were, was the very unfamiliar man standing at the end of the ramp with his hands in his trouser pockets, his stance wide and seemingly casual. But Adam knew, deep in his bones, that this man was not relaxed in the least.

"Adam. Mitchell." The man said, straightening his brown tie. "Been waiting a long time for this moment."

“What? Who are you?” He asked.

“Aren’t you supposed to be in a pod?” Rose asked beside him, and he was suddenly brought back to the reality that there were two of them.

“You might find that things aren’t going to go the way you thought they would.” The man said. He then turned slowly, moving to the console, and flipped a switch. “First things first, let’s get you back with the rest of the lot, shall we?”

The TARDIS began to move, and an unsettling feeling crept up Adam’s spine. “And then, when this is all done, we’re going to take good ol’ Adam here to Torchwood.”

“Torchwood? What?” Adam asked, panic starting to take over.

“Oh, don’t worry too much about that.” The man said, waving him off. “Just have to clear a few things up, is all.”

“Hey, Doc.” Jack said as the room began to spin. “I don’t think we’re going to have to take him all the way there.”

“Why do you say that, Ja-Oh.” Was the last thing Adam heard before he started falling, and then
the world went black.

“Nell, you should probably inform Kate that I’m about to enter the Geminis Institute with little more than an idea and a hope.” The Doctor informed the UNIT tech, who pulled herself into a jump seat in order to give her superior the Doctor’s warning. She still had to brace her legs, and once she likely sent the message, she was going for her inhaler again, but she seemed to have taken to the old-girls rocky flight well. “And just why are you acting up, anyway?” He asked the Time Rotor, frowning a bit before she shook a bit more violently than she should have. Even he had to hold on a bit tighter through that one.

When they landed, he moved to the monitor. The Doctor noted that those in lab coats had turned toward the ship, and those who weren’t were quite startled.

He didn’t wait a second longer before leaving the TARDIS, hearing the two others within moving along with him.

The Doctor opened the door, and as soon as he had, three of the Zygons shifted back to their original forms, causing the half-dozen humans who were back there to flee screaming.

“I come in peace.” The Doctor said as he lifted his hands. “I just want to talk.”

“Talk?” One of the Zygons asked.

“Yes.” He replied. “It’s that thing one typically does, where they move their mouths and sounds come out. Not as simple as that, but in layman’s terms-”

“And what does the Time Lord wish to speak about?” The Zygon cut him off.

“That I understand why you’re here and what you’re doing, but that there’s a better way.” He replied, slowly lowering his hands.

“A better way?” Another one scoffed. “Very few of us survived the war your people waged. We were lucky as it was to have escaped. But we are only a couple dozen. We have yet to even reproduce our numbers. This world is primitive, but it will do for us.”

“And how do you plan to conquer it?” He asked.

“We will eradicate them.” The same Zygon replied, clenching its three-digit hand into a fist.

“You could try, but you would fail.” The Doctor replied with a shrug. “You said yourself that you only have a couple dozen, which puts you at a staggering disadvantage. I know you lot, I know how long it takes you to reproduce. So even if you were to systematically attempt to wipe out humanity, you’d be imprisoned or worse before you would ever succeed. Even if you constantly swapped identities, the truth would surface eventually. You would get caught. Anything on a bigger scale would destroy yourselves along with them.”

“We will influence the humans.” The first Zygon, and clearly the cleverest, retorted after giving a warning look to the other, one that seemed to say ‘shut up’.
“In which way?” He asked.

The Sarah Jane in the room stepped forward, and the clear leader of the Zygons looked at her with pride. “She’s a journalist.” It replied. “And we know from her memory print that the human has traveled with you so you know well what she would be capable of.”

“Oh, I’m very well aware of what Sarah Jane is capable of. Of the influence she’d have. But even if you use what pull she already has, how are you ever going to get enough traction to initiate change by taking over individuals? I mean, you targeted those with no attachments, which is why I’m sure Mickey here had left the institute as himself, am I right? He’s got friends, a job. Now Rose, the woman who I know you know knew all about me, she was perfect on the surface. But, as much as I adore her, as much as I believe she can do or be anything, she is too common at this point to be of any benefit to you in this decade. Maybe, if she had chosen to stay here instead of coming with me, she would have done great things. But you’d be starting from the very beginning, as you would with all these humans you’ve selected.”

“We are choosing the perfect candidates to working close to the leaders of this world. To be molded and shaped into a future later these weak-minded humans will want to accept.”

“But you don’t know the way the humans work. Even if you do get the ones you’ve chosen in some sort of position that they’d be able to work with politicians it would take years, maybe decades for them to acquire any sort of status among them that their words would be heard. Even those you haven’t copied, attempting to sway them in the direction you want them to go through media? It’s a lovely plan, truly. Well thought out, well, compared to most that invade earth, anyway.

“But it won’t work. Even if you do manage the unimaginable and get them where you need them to be quickly, it won’t last. Humans, wonderful that they are, are fickle. So, you can tell them what they want to hear to vote one of you into power, to make things the way they need to be for Zygons to flourish. You can get the media to twist this, and spin that, but at the end of the day the decision goes out to the people. And as I said, funny thing, people. They could live their lives doing the same thing every day until the day they die, or they could one day decide to run away with a Time Lord and see the universe. They can all be the same, and yet, so fundamentally different from one another. What you sell to one group, convince it's the best, another will find fault. And you, well, as we said, you don't reproduce fast enough to gain the numbers needed to secure your places.”

“So, what do you propose we do, then?” The Zygon asked.

There were footsteps coming toward them, and the Doctor glanced over to see Kate leading a handcuffed Rose, followed by two soldiers, into the room. The Doctor turned back to the Zygons and smiled. “I think I have an idea.”

Consciousness slowly returned to Adam, and his head positively throbbed. There was an underlying headache, and a fuzziness like he’d been drinking. He shifted, looked around, and found he was on his family sofa. How did he get back?

The dog was standing a few feet away, watching him almost accusingly. On the floor were beer bottles, and crisp packets, enough to supply a night of indulgence three times over. He didn’t remember drinking, or binging, or anything that would have had him in his current state.
The last thing he remembered was being on the TARDIS with Rose. And… and Rose. And that Jack bloke, and another one he didn’t know. A dream, maybe?

His mother came in from the kitchen and stopped when she saw him half sitting up. But instead of the normal rush to hug and kiss him like she normally attempted when he deigned to come home, she crossed her arms and shook her head. She looked far too disappointed in him for his liking, and he only wish he knew why.

“So, here we are then? I’m to have the sort of son that lives at home, goes out drinking and what not whenever her likes?”

“Mum?” He said in confusion, and she huffed. Huffed.

”Don't play stupid with me, Adam James Mitchell. Your former co-worker, Doctor something or other, called me at work yesterday to let me know you were back home and likely wouldn't be feeling quite yourself for a few days. Said the bunker was destroyed, and your boss, that Van Statten, was patently bankrupt.”

“What? I mean, that’s sorta, but… what?”

She softened, slightly. “I understand you had nowhere to go but here, I do. But I would have thought you’d have been smart enough to put away a little more than what you had. Honestly, you said that job paid well.”

At this, Adam frowned. Because his job with Van Statten did pay well. Well enough, of course, that he had some cash on him to ….

He got up and bolted for the nearest computer, never mind the fact his head spun and he thought he was going to fall over. Ignoring his mother’s protests, he pulled himself into the family computer’s desk chair, logged into his account, then went to his finances.

There were shares, of course, but they hardly paid him anything. He checked, then triple checked the date. It was three days after the dalek in the bunker, six years after he put down his first bit of cash. He should have been rich, he should have wanted for nothing. Instead, there was so little it was as though he were simply saving a little bit from his cheques. Enough to get himself a small flat and keep him afloat until he could get work. Which might be difficult to do now that his main job reference didn’t even remember his own name.

But he was diligent in following his planner, so why hadn’t he put more into his investments like he, well, planned?

“Thought I had more money set aside.” He said aloud, slightly turning his head toward the doorway in hopes his mother was predictable and followed him in.

“Well, you might have had you not insisted that you needed that top of the line laptop in University.” She said with a sort of exasperated affection. “After that incident with your roommate, and the fire-”

“Fire?” Adam asked, and then he remembered. It was like something slotting into place, a memory suppressed and coming back in full-force.

He’d returned from a day of classes to discover the fire department had been called. And as the sickening dread welled inside him, he had discovered his roommate and his flavor of the day had been a bit too careless with some candles. Everything in their room was destroyed, everything. Adam had had to get new books, a new computer.
A new planner.

He remembered the sheepish way his roommate shifted about, and that blasted smugness on his flavor’s face.

On Jack’s face.

Jack who’d seen him in the dorm. And who was on the TARDIS when he and Rose went back.

It’d been a test, and he clearly failed it spectacularly. And now, here he was, back in his own time having never gotten to visit an alien world. Having never gotten to see or borrow tech that would pad his wallet. Having lost all chances of making himself rich off what others might think of as luck.

And he never rescued Rose from the Doctor.

Which was probably why the other one, the one he realized now was a future Rose, was so unhappy to see him. He let her down, and she was stuck with the Doctor forever.

Only, where was the Doctor?

"You had no right, Doctor, none." Kate half chastised him after the negotiations between the small fraction of Zygons had discussed sanctuary with UNIT.

They would take on either the image of a nondescript human if they chose to live among the everyday. Or, as most decided, they would work with UNIT under heavy supervision. In those cases, they could take on the image of lower level personnel, so long as they received consent.

They were releasing the humans they had taken the mind print from, one by one, and each were being debriefed by Osgood as well as a couple other UNIT members.

“And would you have thought of a more peaceful way to end what very well might have been a war?”

"You didn't have to make them an offer to stay here on Earth!" She snapped back. “Not without running it by the rest of us first.”

"What happened to 'science leads'?" He asked with a smirk, knowing by the color of her cheeks that he had hit exactly where he wanted to. "After all, the Zygons are used to far superior technology, and are more than happy to help advance the human race, as well detect those that do not belong on Earth. Add in the fact that 'under cover' will take on a whole new meaning."

Kate remained silent for a long moment, then sighed. "This body has a way with words."

"I do tend to talk myself out of more situations this go around. It doesn't hurt that the face is … charming, to most."

"I'll say." She murmured, and the Doctor glanced at her with a chuckle before his eyes fell back on the pods. Rose would be near the end, one of the last to be admitted, and they were releasing them
all so painfully slowly.

“Excuse me, Kate.” He said, heading toward the end and ignoring her stammering protests all the while.

He peeked inside each as he went. Sure enough, near the end, he got a glimpse of Rose. He opened the pod without hesitation, studying Rose a moment before reaching up and caressing her cheek. He then gently detached the connections to her head, breaking the link with the Zygon and releasing Rose from her stasis.

Her eyes fluttered open, and she raised a hand to her head as she blinked and looked around.

"Blimey.” She said softly, her voice a touch raspy. Her eyes found his, and she gave a slight grin. “Head's pounding now. What do you suppose was-?”

It was impulsive, but he’d been impulsive with this body from the beginning. Oh, of course he eased it a bit here and there, though the gaps in his memory could prove that maybe that wasn't really the case at all. Regardless, that smile with her bright eyes filled with a sort of relief and pleasure to see him, his hand still touching her cheek, had him leaning forward and kissing her.

Quick, a bit longer than he had kissed Grace all those decades ago, and with much more emotion, but a kiss nonetheless.

And she responded. Even if wasn’t any more than a brush of her lips along his, it was reciprocation.

They parted, smiling, holding one another’s gaze as her hand came to cover his, fingers pressing between his until he allowed them to interlace.

“Doctor,” Kate called, and he sighed. Using their joined hand, he gently helped Rose out of the pod.

“They’re going to want to debrief you.” He explained as he slowly led her over. “Why don’t you go talk to Nell about what happened while I see what Kate wants.”

“Yeah, probably should get the contact and stud out, too, yeah? Wouldn’t want them seeing everything now.”

The Doctor groaned, "I forgot about that." He admitted. "When Kate reviews ...."

"Think Nell's going to have a bigger fit than Kate." Rose teased with tongue-touched grin. She then patted the Doctor’s hand, “I’ll be alright, go to Kate.” She said, gesturing in the UNIT leader’s direction.

Before he let her hand go, the Doctor raised it to his lips, giving her knuckles a quick peck before he turned away, leaving her stunned for a moment before joining Osgood.

When he came back to Kate’s side, it was to see Sarah Jane’s pod was opened.

“You called me back on purpose.” He said as he watched the UNIT team, Zygon and human alike, gently detach Sarah Jane from her connector.

“You made a deal with the Zygons before consulting with me, I’m not going to cover for you when your former companion sees the TARDIS.” Kate looked over her shoulder a moment. “You didn’t exactly park it somewhere hidden.
“I was in a bit of a rush.” He countered.

Sarah Jane came out of her daze, her eyes glancing about the room as things likely came back into focus, and then her gaze found the blue box.

And then they snapped to Kate, followed by a slow drag toward him.

The Doctor gave her a twitch of his lips, and his hearts ached when she beamed at him.

Sarah Jane’s giggle gave pause to the commotion of the room for just a moment before all resumed, and she stumbled toward him.

“Doctor.” She said with all the affection she remembered.

“Hello, Sarah Jane.” He replied, opening his arms and surprising her with a quick embrace. “It’s been a few hundred years.”

“Has it?” She said, leaning back, taking him in. “You’ve regenerated.”

“Four times since.” He acknowledged.

“You’re about the same.” She said with a tilt of her head. “Not younger, not really.”

“I was at first. I’ve had this body for a very long time, and it’s… it’s seen some wear.” He admitted.

She looked him over, and he could tell there was a lot she wanted to ask him, to say to him, and he braced himself for it.

“Sarah Jane,” Kate said, drawing the journalist’s attention. “If you don’t mind, we do need to debrief you while things are still fresh. You’ve been out for some time.”

“Oh, yes, of course.” Sarah Jane said, and the Doctor flashed Kate a grateful look. She led Sarah Jane off to the side, through the crowd, and the Doctor noted that one last glance over her shoulder before the throng separated them.

“One of your old mates?” Rose’s voice came from beside him, and he looked down to see her smiling sadly up at him.

“Yes,” He said. “I should tell you all about her sometime. But, for now, if you want to escape, now will likely be the best time.” He said, tilting his head toward the TARDIS. “We can stop by your mother’s really quick, and then be off.”

“What about Adam?” Rose asked as they turned and headed toward the blue box.

“It’s funny. See, while you were in that pod, a zygon had taken over as you.”

“Zygon?”

“Yes, big pink alien, lots of little suction spots that would remind you of a squid. Venom sacks under their tongues. Anyway, they were the aliens behind the Geminis institute and one of them had taken over as you. And you, knowing me, allowed the zygon to know about me.” He explained as he unlocked the door and waved her inside.

“Alright, I think I’m following,” She half chuckled, her nose wrinkled in thought.
It warmed him, making him feel a bit lighter than he had been without realizing his hearts had been heavy.

“So, she had taken off from here, ran into Adam, and the two of them went back to where the TARDIS was.” He continued when they were inside, the door closed behind them. He moved to the controls, and started to put in the coordinates for Powell Estates. “Only, when they showed up, I had already left with Nell and Mickey.”

“Mickey?”

“Yes, but that’s not important.” He said as she chuckled. He finished his dance around the console as he continued. “But there was a TARDIS there. A future TARDIS with a future me. And future me had a companion correct some things that Adam had done.”

“What did he do?” Rose asked.

“Apparently, he tried to use time travel to make himself rich. Didn’t work out for him, not completely. Zygon Rose explained it to me after she informed me that future me took Adam back to his proper time.”

“Right,” Rose said, blinking, then shaking her head a bit as if to slot everything into place. “So, just the two of us then?”

“Yes,” He said, watching her for any sign that maybe it wasn’t okay.

She smirked. “Good.”

“Brilliant.” He said. “So, to see your mum, and then… Magrathea.” He said thoughtfully before flipping the switch, and sending them off.
The Bits in Between

Chapter Notes

HI!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
Have your attention? Yes? Good! I know it's been, oooooooh, 2 years since I last posted anything with this story. I have excuses, you don't want to hear them, so I won't get into it. But I have been busy.

If you haven't read the story since October of 2018, you might want to give it another read through! I've added a lot of, well, bits in between. About 20 000-30 000 extra words over all. And now....
*tosses new chapter out into the web*
*runs and hides in her cave*

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The TARDIS landed in her bedroom, if what Rose could see on the monitors was accurate. Her bed was there, in the massively pink room, and her dresser tucked a smidgen closer to the door than it was.

“Displacement,” The Doctor explain. “The TARDIS will shift things about to make room where necessary.”

“And it was necessary to park in my room?” Rose asked, not at all upset.

The Doctor shrugged. “Figured we were more inconspicuous this way. Less likely Kate will think to look for us inside.” He explained then glanced at the monitors. “Your mother is outside.”

Rose peeked, and sure enough, there was Jackie in her bedroom door way staring at the TARDIS with wide eyes.

“Better go out and talk to her, then.” Rose said, edging her way over to the door.

“I’ll join you in a moment. If I’m going to meet your mother properly, as I really am, I want to do so feeling more myself.” He said, giving a tug on the leather jacket.

“Yeah, alright.” Rose said, a niggling of worry that maybe he wouldn’t come out. Or worse, take off without her.

What if the kiss he gave her was a mistake? What if seeing that woman from his past made him regret having her around.

But Rose was made of tougher stuff, and she trusted that the Doctor would tell her if he wasn’t taking her with him any longer for any reason. So, she squared her shoulders, headed for the doors, and left.

Jackie’s jaw dropped when Rose stepped out of the TARDIS, likely because she really couldn’t stretch her eyes any wider, and shifted about as if to see inside.

Rose paused, hand on the door, keeping it ajar and pointing at it. “Wanna come in?” She asked.
“Sure, he wouldn’t mind. Just gone to change is all.”

Jackie slowly moved closer to the TARDIS, peeping inside quickly before stumbling backward to Rose’s bed. She fell down on it, gripping the edge, and Rose allowed the TARDIS door to finally shut as she sat down next to her mum. She waited, looking between the blue box in her room that hummed a gentle, soothing tune, and her mother who was clearly trying to process it all.

“Didn’t want to believe it before.” She said after a time. “Even coming from the man’s lips, I didn’t believe he was an alien. Didn’t want to, anyway. Mickey’s been going on about it all month, ‘special after you called to say you’d be working with him all the time.’” She darted a glance at the Old Girl. “But that, there. Can’t deny it now, can I? Daughter steps out of a giant police box in her own room, and inside’s somethin’ that really don’t make sense. How’s it so much smaller on the outside?”

Rose laughed, “I dunno. He explained it, sorta. Something about trans dimensions.”

They were quiet for another stretch, Rose fidgeting with her fingers, wringing her hand in her skirt before suddenly realizing she was still wearing her borrowed clothes.

“Rose, is it safe? What you’re doing with him?” Jackie asked, real fear in her voice that had Rose turn to face her mum once more. She hadn’t seen Jackie that genuinely concerned for her since she first came back from Jimmy, bloody and bruised with nothing but a bag of clothes and a load of debt.

“No,” She admitted gently, shaking her head. “’S not. But mum, if you saw it out there, you’d never stay home.”

“How can you say that?” Jackie asked, a bit of a whine to her voice. “How can you say you don’t want to be home, where it is safe?”

“’Cause I don’t want a life of dishin’ out chips, coming home and watching telly. Mum, I’ve been gone a month, yeah? A month with the Doctor and I’ve lived more in that month than I’ve had my whole life. I’m helpin’. Him and others. I’ve seen things you’d never believe. I’ve met Charles Dickens,” She said with a slight giggle. “We fought of ghosts on Christmas, if you can believe it? I’ve been to the future just a few years out. I’ve stood on planets where the rain is so heavy it’s like having a bucket of water poured on your head constantly, and seen skies with two moons. I’ve helped people relearn to live their lives. Cos he didn’t lie ‘bout helping people who’d been affected by war. We do, we help. ‘S what we did today, too, actually.”

Jackie’s shoulders sagged a little, and she chewed her lip, glancing between Rose, the TARDIS, and the opposite wall.

Rose was about to try and add something that might be reassuring when the doors to the TARDIS opened.

The Doctor emerged, brown pants and high boots. The fancy waist coat over the white, worn oxford where the sleeves and collar peeked out from the green long coat. He was just finishing tying his blue ascot when he stopped. He looked surprised to see mother and daughter sitting on the bed.

His fingered making quick work of the knot, he said, “I had expected to have to search you out.” He confessed.

“Didn’t get far.” Rose smirked.
Jackie stood, steel in her spine and her shoulders back as she looked the Doctor over before lifting her head, tilting her chin up. “You’re staying for tea.” She said with no room for argument. “I’ve got a Shepard’s pie on, if you’ll eat that, we’re gonna talk ‘bout this travellin’ you’re doing with my daughter.”

The Doctor stood still, stuttering a bit, a little flabbergasted, then said, “Well I suppose I can’t really see the harm in that.” He looked to Rose as if for direction, but she could only give him an uncertain smile.

Jackie didn’t move an inch, or soften a fraction. “Do you drink?”

“I have been known to, yes.” He replied, dropping his hands to the side.

“I have a bottle of Amaretto from New Year’s Eve.”

“It’s not my first choice, but if you want me to partake, I will.” He replied.

Jackie looked him over once again. “Tea will be ready within the hour. And while we have ourselves a proper sit down, I’m gonna be gettin’ ta know ya. Make sure you’re not like the last bloke she ran off with.”

Rose cringed at first, then paled as she watched the Doctor transform before him from that wonderful gentleman to the Doctor of War she’d seen when facing down the Gelth or Autons. The Oncoming Storm, but it wasn’t raging against Jackie.

“Believe me, Mrs Tyler, I would rather die than lay a finger on Rose in any way to harm her. And if that sorry excuse for a human ever had the poor luck to cross paths with me, then James Stone would rue the day he ever laid eyes on your daughter.”

Rose’s heart dropped in her stomach. He knew. How did he know? Did he go back in time? Yeah, he’d have seen the encounter with Jimmy outside Geminis, but it’s not like they said anything that would have really tipped him off to being anything worse than the worst kind of prat.

Jackie nodded. “One hour, then. And keep the door open. Both of them.”

“Mum,” Rose grumbled, coming out of her shock long enough to shake her head at her mother.

“My flat my rules,” Jackie said as she turned and headed out the room, likely back to the kitchen or to rant to someone on the phone.

“She’s a fiery one,” The Doctor said as they were left alone. “I can see where you get it from.”

“Not sure if I should be insulted or not.” She replied.

“It’s a compliment, I assure you.” He replied before he seemed to get nervous and then shifted about.

She got it, she did. Kissing her hadn’t been something he meant to do. She wasn’t entirely sure how long she was out, what happened, how long it took him to figure out if she was safe. He was elated, is all. Caught up in the moment of rescue. He hadn’t meant for it to happen.

Rose was about to offer him an out, to say they could pretend it didn’t happen, when he spoke.

“We need to talk about the thing Nell was so kind as to not mention.” He said, causing her words to die on her tongue. She frowned as he looked to the TARDIS. “I know you remember my
mentioning how this is not my first body.”

“Yeah, that.” She said, touching her forehead in hopes that her thoughts and emotions might stabilize quicker. The conversations and revelations were changing faster than she could keep up with.

The Doctor stepped forward, offered her his hand, and she took it. He hoisted her up from the bed, though the gesture was fairly exaggerated seeing as how it wasn’t difficult to keep up. He held tight to her, leading her inside the TARDIS and keeping the door open as her mother requested.

That sort of made her chuckle. “She doesn’t get that there’s more than just this room, yeah?”

“That may be so, but I have a feeling I don’t want to get on her bad side. Best to follow her rules.” He countered with a teasing grin before he sobered. He then let go of her hand, keeping her at the top of the ramp, before heading over to the controls. He flicked a switch, turned a knob, and kept he eyes down as he spoke. “Time Lords have a special skill, a sort of way of cheating death. When we become mortally wounded, we don’t die, not really. We regenerate.”

“Regenerate?” Rose repeated, seeing the corner of his mouth lift slightly.

“Yes. Every cell in our bodies die. In some ways, it’s not all that different from how it happens for humans. Except, as they die, our cells, the burn.”

“Sounds painful.” Rose commented, her heart aching as she started to puzzle out what he was saying.

“Oh, it is. Excruciating, really. And in the end, the man I was ceases to exist. I change.” He said, looking to her mournfully, as if he was about to go through the very process right then and there. His hand hovered above a switch, and then he hit it before turning away from her.

In that moment, seven other men flickered into the room, surrounding the console and facing her. There were some that were quite a bit older, a younger face or two scattered about, and a lot of very questionable fashion choices.

Understanding hit rather quickly, and Rose’s eyebrows shot up as she took in each man before her, none of them having moved a bit, before she looked to the Doctor where he moved to the end of the line next to a shorter man with a love for question marks. “These are all you,” She said, gesturing at the figures while looking to the Doctor.

“Yes,” he said simply, nodding solemnly.

She blinked a few times. “Ha,” She said on a breath. “Blimey, you’ve had some … interesting styles.” She said as politely as possible, glancing at a very nervous, uncertain looking Doctor.

“In all fairness, I agree with you. But that would be because my tastes change each time.” He said, and Rose’s heart did a sort of flop in dread.

“So, when you say you change…?”

“I am a new man. The same, deep down, of course. I’m still the Doctor, I still remember everything, most of the time. I know my past, where I’m from, why I left Gallifrey to travel about. But I’m also a new man. I have new likes and dislikes, new tastes in clothing, how I take me tea-”

“Who you travel with.” Rose said, hand falling to her side as the other one sought to grip the rail. “So, if you change while we’re out there somewhere-”
“No!” He said emphatically, moving from where he stood with his predecessors and gently taking her arms in his hands. He held her gaze, his desperate and pleading, as he said, “No, Rose, I assure you: big things don’t change. I’ll still stand for what’s right in the Universe, and fight against those who try and do harm. I’ll still be a traveler, a dreamer, someone who thinks anything is possible. I’ll love a mystery and a challenge, just as much as I love seeing the beauty in things. And I’ll still want to travel with you so long as you’ll have me.”

“But that woman, Sarah Jane….”

He huffed, but seemed more frustrated with himself. “I never wanted to stop traveling with her, not really. But I was called back home, and in those times, a human wasn’t permitted on the planet. I left her here, to live her life, while I went away but time got away from me.”

“Time got away from the Time Lord?”

“Well, I was never a very good Time Lord.” He said with a slight grin, but Rose didn’t feel reassured. He sighed, his thumbs caressing her arms, though the action was barely felt through the layers she still wore. “Sarah Jane was the first human companion I cared for more deeply than most. But I was also very aware of our differences, and back then there was still a part of me that wanted to be as close to a proper Time Lord as I could be. I left her behind, yes, and I deeply regret not giving her a proper goodbye. But she’s the only one that’s ever happened with.” Then, very hesitantly, he lifted on hand off her arm and cupped her cheek. “I won’t abandon you, I swear. I’ll never let it end like that, not with you.”

“But you’ll let it end?” She asked in a small voice.

It was only a month. It was only a month with him, and she shouldn’t feel like her heart was in pieces on the floor at the very thought of them parting ways. It was only a month, but she’d gone and fallen for him, she just knew it. Rose leaned ever so slightly into his touch and felt like an idiot for giving her heart away, again, but was still desperate to hear his response.

The Doctor’s eyes looked sad. “You could spend the rest of your life with me, but I can’t spend the rest of mine with you.” He said. “It’s not possible. Each body, I can live for thousands of years if I played it safe, which I don’t.” He said, and she couldn’t help but snort at that. He grinned slightly, but it didn’t stay. “One day we’ll part ways, whether it’s because you’ve had enough, of me or traveling in general. Maybe you’ll meet a man you want to spend your time with, or maybe you’ll decide to spend all your days with me. It’d be a first, I’ll admit. But one day, we will have to part ways. It will have to end, one way or another. But I swear to you, it will not be without a goodbye, no matter how painful it would be for me.”

She felt her eyes prickle as she covered the Doctor’s hand with her own. He was right, of course. She was only a human, a small weak thing, and she wouldn’t live even a fraction of the length he would.

“No one’s ever stuck with you to the end, have they?” She asked.

“They have,” he said softly. “But the end for them was much sooner than it should have been. It’s dangerous, remember?”

“But no one ever just… stayed?”

“No.”

She searched his face, and she could see there in the depths of him that he expected her to take the
out. To leave now before things got too hairy, complicated, dangerous. She wanted to kiss him, but she wasn’t sure she could, not really. Yes, he gave the first, but there were probably a multitude of reasons why he’d done it that had nothing to do with feelings. Not like she would.

“Well, then.” She said taking a deep breath and forcing her smile through the melancholy. “Good thing I’m never gonna leave you, then, yeah? First of some form.”

“Never say never,” He warned, but his voice was warm and a little teasing. He started to smile a bit.

“Well,” She shrugged. “Might pretend to not know you for a bit if you start wearing a vegetable on your coat again. And what were you thinkin’ with that scarf? How many times did you trip all over tha’?”

“Oh, plenty,” he said, stepping away from her to look at his past self. He settled beside her, crossing his arms. “Also managed to trip up my pursuers from time to time.”

“Question marks?”

“I like to think of myself as a man of mystery. Lost that outfit, though. Confiscated by the hospital whose morgue I woke up in, with this face actually. The first set of clothes I wore I stole from some lockers in the lounge. I think they were supposed to be bits of a costume, but I quite liked them.”

“The hair.”

“On which incarnation.”

“A few of ‘em.”

“Yes, hair can be a bit tricky. Probably why mine was so long when I first got this form. Making up for the lack of it the last time. I got it cut not long before the Time War, I think it suits me.”

“I wouldn’t know.” Rose countered.

The Doctor pulled out his sonic screwdriver and pointed in the direction of his last forms. He flickered into view, but looked very different.

“Your clothes fit better now.” She said, taking in the differences and similarities. He was quite young, probably not far off her own age in looks. She glanced back at him, seeing the careworn lines around his eyes and mouth, the shorter hair, the leaner face. She supposed she would have still fallen for him when he was younger, but she thought that this him, the way he looked now, was perfect.

She looked back at all the forms of the Doctor, studying each one. Yes, it was shallow, and superficial, but she had to wonder if she would have found him as fit from the first in his past forms. Some yes, some no, but she supposed it didn’t really make a difference. He said the big things stayed, the things that made him who he was. That’s what she fell for, she knew. The man who helped where he could, and cared with both his hearts. Who made friends and wanted to make the Universe better, and who hurt when things didn’t work out that way?

She loved the man, the alien, he was in his soul. Past, present, and possibly future, she would always love the Doctor.
Hope raged within him, hope he didn’t want to have but couldn’t be helped. She wanted to stay with him forever.

But hadn’t Sarah Jane? Or worse, hadn’t Charley?

Too many times had he heard the same thing, about how one never wanted the journey with him to end, how they would always stay with him. And then a decision would be made, an unimaginable choice, it wouldn’t align with what or how they believed it should be, and then leave. Or, in some cases, they would meet someone on the journey and decide that they were better than traveling, than seeing the stars.

It hadn’t occurred to him that Adam might have been someone who would tempt Rose from him. But he might have, it might have been a possibility he couldn’t see. But hindsight is a funny thing, and if the Doctor dwelled on it too much it scared him. Yes, she had made it clear that Adam had no chance, but one never knew if that would change had he stayed.

They continued chatting about his past selves, mostly his terrible choice in clothing and accessories, and that did ease a bit of his underlying worry. She seemed alright with the concept of regeneration, though whether she really was a bridge impossible to cross until they got to it. What if he turned into someone she didn’t like, or she was still around when this body finally wore too thing or an injury was too great. He hoped, and by Rassilon did he hate that, that she would be there to help him through it, completely prepared for what was to come, and welcome his new self.

“Rose, Doctor.” Jackie’s voice called from outside the TARDIS, ceasing their conversation. The door was open, so it hadn’t really surprised him when Jackie approached it and peeked inside. The TARDIS, wonderful thing that she was, ended the holographic display of his former selves before Mrs Tyler could see them. One thing at a time, he supposed. He hadn’t ever really come right out and admitted to being an alien as brashly as he did earlier in the past.

“Tea’s set, then?” He asked, impressed by her relative calmness as she took in the interior of his ship. Likely, she’d snuck a peek earlier, but even still, she wasn’t doing too bad. She only came as far as the doorway, but it was a start.


“Yes, ma’am.” He said with a tilt of his head, gesturing for Rose to lead the way.

“So, what are your intentions with my daughter, then?” Jackie cut to the chase the moment they were sat down. “Was one thing when you were her boss, and she was in your employ. Knew there’d be rules and regulations that’d stop ya from being too familiar. And if ya did get too familiar, there was compensation that would come of it.”

“Mum,” Rose sounded appalled, shaking her head before pressing her hand to her forehead, partly
hiding her from his view.

“Well it’s true! Older bloke hiring a girl who ain’t really qualified to be his assistant, or whatever it was you told me, one can guess what he was probably thinking. Now you tell me he’s an alien, and you’re just traveling about.”

“I assure you, Mrs Tyler, my intentions are pure.” He replied, sensing Rose peek at him from behind her hand. “Rose is my friend, and my partner, that much is not a lie. I have not, or at least that’s my hope, nor will not cross a line that Rose has set.”

“You haven’t.” Rose said, just loud enough to be heard, and relief swelled in his chest in a way he wasn’t anticipating.

“And what have you two been getting up to in that blue box of yours? Hmm?” Jackie countered.

“Mum, ’s not what you’re thinking.”

“We talk, on the occasions where we are TARDIS bound. We share a meal, we-”

“Hang out.” Rose supplied. “It’s not like what you’re thinkin’.”

“She’s only nineteen, you know.” Jackie stated. “You’re, what, forty?”

He moved his head from side to side, “Give or take a thousand years. I think, anyway. I’m terrible at keeping track of my age.”

“Gonna pretend you didn’t say that.” Jackie said, turning her attention to her Shepard’s pie. “And how are you keeping her, then? You get paid? Do you earn a livin’ going about?”

The Doctor stammered a bit, trying to find a way to explain his way of acquiring what they needed without making it seem like he was some sort of pit pocket or thief. He never thought meeting a parent of a companion would be difficult, didn’t think there would ever be these sorts of questions. By the time most companions questioned him on those sorts of things, they would merely roll their eyes at the idea of him pilfering something, or faking their way.

“He’s got a job here, mum. Works for the people we went off with today.” Rose supplied. Surprisingly, that satisfied Jackie, who nodded once with approval before returning to her meal.

The Doctor looked to Rose who merely shrugged, a grin tugging at her lips as she picked at her dinner. Was that all Jackie needed to hear? That he had employment, however irregular and virtually irrelevant it was?

“Will you keep her safe?” Jackie asked after a while, her voice much smaller than it had been. Concern, fear, he understood, though that didn’t make facing the reality that was a traveling companion’s concerned parent asking the one thing he never bothered to consider. “What you two do, is it safe?”

“I won’t lie to you, Mrs Tyler, it’s not.” He said bluntly. Rose stopped mid-chew to stare at him as though he’d grown a second head. But Jackie deserved to know the truth, and he wasn’t about to hide it from her. “It’s not constant, it’s not as though every place we go, every time we visit, we’re faced with danger. But it happens. Helping people, saving lives, there’s a risk. Whether or not it was dangerous was the first thing Rose asked when I made my offer to have her join me. She chose to come along.”

Jackie lifted her head and stared him in the eye. The Doctor felt as though, if she had the ability,
she would have read his mind, dissected it, defeated him in a battle of mental strength unlike many who had tried before. He wondered if she could see his soul, know his hearts, understand that danger was the very last thing he ever wanted Rose to be in. How deeply he cared for her.

“And what if something happens to you, and she’s stuck stranded on some moon a million years in the future?” Jackie asked.

He opened his mouth, then closed it. Because that was another first of having to face the family of his companion: the question of what might happen to them should something happen to him. Before he could trust that the TARDIS would send out a signal to the Time Lords should he not be able to regenerate. But now that wasn’t going to be a possibility. Romana, or someone else he trusted, wouldn’t suddenly appear and take whoever was stranded away. Asking himself to do it would be crossing his own time line in one of the worst ways.

“He’s got a way of….” Rose started to say then shook her head. “TARDIS would bring me back, yeah?” She said as though he’d told her so himself. “Something happens, she’ll take me back.”

“She?” Jackie asked, suddenly becoming indignant.

“She means my ship. Rose is talking about my ship, she’s a she, the TARDIS.”

“Right,” Jackie dismissed him, rolling her eyes. “Men, doesn’t matter what species you are, still naming your bloody vehicles.”

“Can we talk about something else?” Rose pleaded. “What’s been going on ‘round here, yeah?”

Jackie, despite having clearly set the dinner up to be an interrogation, quickly latched on to Rose’s question with bright eyes and a smile, and going on about a man named Howard.

The doors closed behind her, and Rose breathed a sigh of relief. The Doctor had already gone inside a head of her, Jackie barely able to let her go. It took the phone ringing and a promise to visit soon to finally pull the slightly overbearing woman away from her daughter, and allow her to leave.

“That went well,” The Doctor said as he flipped a switch and let the beautiful sound of the engines fill the console room.

“Where we off to, then?” Rose asked as she lightly pushed herself away from the doors and headed up the ramp. The TARDIS stilled, the engines quieting, but there was a hum of sorts that made Rose imagine they were still flying or floating or whatever it was that they did.

“Right now, nowhere.” The Doctor replied. “It’s been a long day, a trying day, and you humans need your rest.”

“Thought I had a decent nap, earlier.” She retorted.

“Your body may have been still, but your mind wasn’t at rest, Rose. They were taking a print of your mind, using it to see how you could best fit in with their plans. You’ll need sleep, proper
sleep, to recover.” He said before fiddling with a few dials and knobs. “And then, Magrathea.”

“Is that really a place?” She asked with a grin as she went as close to him as she dared.

“In the way you’re thinking? No. Well, not really. Douglas Adams wasn’t exactly an Earth native, but he still had the basics a bit off.”

“That so?” Rose asked, teasing him a bit.

He looked at her warmly, then sighed. “I must confess, I’m … weary. Whether or not you do or not, I need sleep. It’s been a while, I’ve had more than a fair share of rough experiences, and I swear your mother slipped something into that Shepard’s pie.” He joked, and Rose chuckled.

“Woulda thought a Time Lord woulda been too superior for a food coma.”

“Yes, well, your mother surprised me with her ability to cook.” He countered. “Add that with the couple of drinks, the constant being on the move, my not catching a kip for a bit, and regardless of how fast my metabolism works, I’m simply beat.”

“Makes sense.” She said, wringing her fingers, chewing her lip.

She wanted to stay with him, but there was so much that had happened between the night before and now. They’d kissed, and she wasn’t sure what that meant. Things were a bit out of order, all things considered, even if they weren’t involved like that. And bloody hell, if she couldn’t even say it to herself, what right did she have to let her mind wander to the possibilities of there being something more between them.

“Right, well,” She said, giving her head a brief shake. “’Night, Doctor.” She said.

“No nights on a time ship, Rose.” He reminded her with a cheeky grin.

She rolled her eyes and pecked him quick on the cheek before taking off down the hall. Baby steps, she figured. A kiss on the cheek between friends was harmless. And if the kiss after she came out of whatever it was she was in was just an in the moment thing, then no harm done.

“Magrathea,” The Doctor said as the TARDIS landed. “This time of year, it’s warm, but not hot. Sunny, but not unbearable. It’s pleasant, the locals are friends, the food is fantastic, it’s just what we need after the sort of trials we’ve endured.”

“Sounds lovely.” Rose said as she tied her hair up. She didn’t bring a dress, something she was beginning to wish she’d thought of, but her denims were light weight and distressed, and her pink t-shirt was comfortable and one of her favorites last summer.

“It is.” The Doctor grinned, he came up beside her, putting his arm around her waist. “Wait until you see the sunset, it paints the sky a brilliant shade of-”

A phone rang.

The Doctor looked to Rose, baffled, but she shook her head. Her mobile wouldn’t sound like the
old school telephone her gram still had in her flat. The Doctor stepped away from her.

“You got a phone?” She frowned, pointing to the console.

He looked at her as though he thought her a bit dim for the first time. “Bit odd, wouldn’t you think, if I traveled through all of space and time, and the one piece of technology I didn’t acquire would be the one used to easily communicate with others.”

“Just seems, I dunno, not really… Spock.”

The Doctor chuckled. “Yes, well, when I stumble across something more high tech that works as reliably, I’ll replace my telephone just for you. But for now, not many people have this number, and given we’ve just come from London, I’d better answer it in case something’s gone wrong with the Zygons.” He lifted the receiver, “Hello, this is the Doctor.”

Rose blinked.

And then she was in a room, screaming, holding the a very large insect, the Doctor close beside her, and two people she’d never seen before in her life.

Chapter End Notes

I'm almost finished the second part of the next adventure/episode. Hopefully you won't need to wait to long.
“Put it down, Rose, put the worm down.” The Doctor instructed, and Rose very nearly threw the thing. “You two, whoever you are, don’t touch the memory worm.”

Rose watched as, before the woman had properly let go of the worm, her face shifted a bit, almost like the worm was somehow going through her face. Bloody hell, had all their faces done that? She suppressed a shudder, then glanced to the bloke.

He had something like computer bits running up one side of his face. Not bad on the eyes, really. He’d have been the sorta bloke she’d have looked twice at before.

Both appeared calm, but shaken, and Rose wondered is maybe she hadn’t been quite so collected looking on the outside. Well, she had screamed. A proper reaction to holding a giant insect in a strange room while having no idea how the got there.

“Who are you?” The bloke asked. “What’s going on? I don’t understand.”

“Well, I’m sure we probably had a proper introduction,” The Doctor replied, “but since these are memory worms we were all holding, you’d have forgotten. I’m-”

“I am the Doctor, a Time Lord of Gallifrey,” His voice came from a box in the middle of the table they all sat around, little red lights moving as he voice spoke. “I have agreed to this memory wipe of my own free will.”

“Voluntarily losing my memories.” He mumbled to himself with a frown.

Rose glanced at him in worry before her attention was brought back to the box at the sound of her own voice. “I am Rose Tyler, human … of Earth. I have agreed to this memory wipe of my own free will.”

The bloke slowly raised a hand to his mouth staring worriedly at the thing before them.

“I am Psi, augmented human. I have agreed to this memory wipe….” As he finished what was likely a standard sentence, Psi reached around the back of his head and removed something, panic filling his eyes as what ever he pulled off his head, a chip of something, told him what he didn’t want to believe.

The woman looked sympathetic for a brief moment before turning to the thing, the case, really, with horror.

“I am Saibra, mutant human, I have agreed to this memory wipe of my own free will.”

Mutant human. Right, so that’s a thing. Rose tried to give her a reassuring smile, but too quickly their attention was brought to the case which beeped and whirred as it slowly opened. There was a light in it, and Rose glanced to the Doctor in worry, but he put a hand on her in reassurance before the case opened fully. Two screens popped up, one for she and the Doctor, as well as for Psi and Saibra to watch.

A hooded figure appeared on the screen, his voice deep and distorted, though somehow familiar as
well.

“This is a recorded message. I am the Architect. Your last memory is of receiving contact from an unknown agency. That agency was me. Everything since has been erased from your memory. Now, pay very close attention.” The image of the screen changed to that of a planet, then zoomed in to a building.

“This is the Bank of Karabraxos,” The Architect continued, as it showed images, always overlapped with an elegant gold K, of everything he was explaining to them. “The most secure bank in the Galaxy. A fortress for the very wealthy. If you can afford your own star system, this is where you would keep it. No one sets foot on the planet without protocols. Every move, every breath you take, is monitored. Even the air consumption is regulated. DNA is authenticated at every stage, and Intruders will find themselves incinerated.

“Each vault, buried deep in the planet, is accessed by a drop-slot on the surface. It’s atomically sealed, which means it has an unbreakable lock, and the atoms are all scrambled.” Rose chewed her lip, glancing around at the others, sharing their nervous energy.

“Your presence on this planet is unauthorized. A team will have been sent to terminate you.”

A banging on the door had three nervous humans startle, and one calm appearing Time Lord look to each of them with an air of authority and command that would not be argued.

“Your survival depends on following my instructions.” The Architect said.

More banging. “Open up, and you shall be humanely disposed of.”

Rose and Saibra glanced around the room, looking for an exit strategy while the Doctor and Psi focused entirely on the Architect.

“There’s another exit,” Saibra pointed out.

“That’ll work,” Rose smiled, turning to the Doctor who seemed to sense her. He held up his hand a moment, asking for silence, as the Architect continued.

“All the information you need is in this case,” The mystery man said, and Psi was immediately attaching a cable to his head and plugging it in to something on the case. His eyes went a bit funny reminding Rose of static on a TV screen. “The Bank of Karabraxos is impregnable,” The Architect continued. “It has never been breached, and you are going to rob it.”

“You have the data saved, Psi?” The Doctor asked.

Psi nodded, disconnecting from the case. The Doctor reached forward, grabbed something from the case, then pocketed it.

“Alright, let’s run.” He said, grabbing Rose’s hand and pulling her quickly around to the second exit Saibra noted.

“What about the guards?” Saibra asked, but followed nonetheless.

“Likely will be stupid enough to pick up the memory worms, come on.” He said, over his shoulder getting the door open. He gave Rose a little shove, encouraging her to go onward, while Psi and Saibra followed. Rose booted it, glancing over her shoulder, seeing the Doctor sonicing the door before legging it himself, catching up to them and leading the way as the weaved their way through
the corridors.

Once they were good and clear of the room, deep into the bank’s underground tunnels, the Doctor slowed. They weren’t being followed, they’d have known by now if they were.

“Alright, let’s stop. Stop, for a moment.” He said, turning to the humans, narrowing his eyes as they caught their breath, taking them all in. “Psi, I know you’re computer augmented but, what is your special abilities.”

“Umm, why should I tell you anything?” He asked. “Who put you in charge?”

“Just answer the question, please.” The Doctor ignored him. “And honestly, if you will. Don’t think I didn’t notice that special little code you have on your neck.”

Psi sighed. “I’m a hacker…. ” He shrugged, and when the Doctor wouldn’t stop staring, added, “Slash bank robber.”

“I suspected as much, they don’t send you to Stormcage for something as pedestrian as hacking. Now, Saibra,” he turned to the woman, glancing her over. “Your mutation, what is it?”

She glared back, “Like he says, why are you in charge?”

“Age before beauty, and all that. Now, I’m not asking because I have a morbid curiosity, the Architect chose us for a reason. Psi has experience in this, as well as being a walking computer. One could say I have experience in getting groups of people out of sticky situations.”

“And her?” Psi asked, tilting his chin toward Rose.

“Gotta admit, not so special, me. Probably ‘m just here ‘cause I usually stick with ‘im.” She said with a nervous grin, pointing her thumb at him.

“Rose has a way with people,” He offered, because he couldn’t stand by and listen as she claimed she wasn’t special. Saying she was unimportant in so many words. And besides, if the Architect didn’t see a need for her, she’d be where the TARDIS is. He couldn’t sense his time ship, so it was either off world, or the bank could dampen telepathic waves.

But one thing at a time.

“Saibra, your ability, please.” He pressed.

Saibra huffed, relenting at last, then pulled off her glove. She walked up to Rose, held out her hand, waited. Rose returned the gesture, clearly expecting a handshake, and in a blink there were two of them.

“Blimey, that’s brilliant.” Rose said as she let go of Saibra’s hand. “My roots might need a bit more touching up than I thought, though.”

Saibra cracked a grin at that before meeting his eye. “When I touch living cells, I can replicate the owner.”
“‘Splains what I saw in the room, then.” Rose said. “Looked like the worm was part’a your face.”

Saibra, still as Rose, nodded. “I touched the worm.”

“And the clothing, how are you doing that?” The Doctor asked curiously.

Saibra shifted back to herself and shrugged. “I wear a holograph shell.”

“And how long can you maintain the image?”

“For as long as I like,” She replied with a smirk, and he couldn’t help but return it before turning thoughtful.

He was beginning to understand now why there was a sample of human cells inside the case back in the room. He removed it from his pocket, holding it up for them all to see. “These are human cells, very likely from a customer. I suspect our Architect had every intention of you using it to get us in. After all, they only need one of us to authenticate an identity as clientele to get anywhere.”

“Right,” Rose said, frowning at the sample. “But even if Saibra were to copy whoever that is, what if we run into that same person?”

“I wonder if maybe the customer is our Architect.” The Doctor mused, but was already dismissing the possibility. “Or, more likely, someone the Architect knows, with absolute certainty, will not be here today.”

“Alright, suppose that’s the case.” Rose countered. “We don’t know where we are, or how to get anywhere without the guards coming ’round and incinerating us, or whatever they plan on doing.”

“Psi has the schematics in his memory banks, don’t you Psi?” The Doctor turned to the hacker, who nodded once. “Psi’s going to show us how to get up and out, and then we’re going to walk into the bank like we have every right to be there. And that is exactly the mindset we all need to have: that we belong there. That we have a right to be there, and legitimate business as well. None of us are planning to do anything, because none of us actually planned this. So remembered, we are not guilty of anything.”

Rose chewed her lip, exchanging nervous glances with Psi and Saibra. “We really gonna rob the bank?” She asked.

He grinned, “I told you, Rose. Stick with me long enough and you’re sure to have a criminal record somewhere. I was just sure it would be because we wore the wrong colors in public somewhere.”

They followed the tunnels to an emergency exit, and then Psi and the Doctor navigated them to just outside the Karabraxos Bank main entry, just far enough away that prying eyes wouldn’t notice them. The Doctor then held out the thing with the cells, and Saibra put her thumb on it, turning herself into a grey-haired man, and changing her clothes to that of a standard suit.

And Rose… stood around. Or followed. Or did nothing to really contribute. It was the first time since leaving with the Doctor that she felt truly, utterly useless.
She understood why he gave the reasoning he did back in the tunnels as to why she was there. Likely, the other two would have gladly left her behind to burn if she had nothing to truly contribute. Which she didn’t. She likely just followed the Doctor out the TARDIS doors when the call was made.

They headed as a unit across the marble-like surface to the bank, all walking in exactly as the Doctor instructed: like they had a right to be there. It was a part Rose was used to playing, at least as far as Henricks went. Yes, she was just a shop girl, and it wasn’t as though she had to really dress up for work. But it was in London, far enough away from the Estates that the stigma related to them could be felt. So, Rose held her head high, walked with her shoulders back, and strode in with them.

The group didn’t act rushed, and made their way toward the deposit booth.

The alarms had them stopping. It had everyone stopping as a computerized voice informed everyone of a bank lock down. Gates closed over the doors, trapping everyone inside.

“They know we’re here,” Saibra said, her voice deeper because of her shift.

“They may not, don’t panic.” The Doctor said, the rumble of footsteps coming from somewhere in the back drowning him out for the most part.

A woman came out of a hallway, dainty and pretty, moving swiftly toward one of the men in the middle of the bank floor while two gentlemen in suits closed in as well. They reminded Rose of the security in the banks of her time, the ones made to look like they blend in when it was clear they didn’t.

Then came an alien with its hands strapped up in a sort of straight jacket, chained to the end of something Rose would guess were weapons, which were held by two heavily armed guards. Rose could see places on the large, metal collar where it was likely he (for she felt it was a he) was chained up somewhere else when he wasn’t being paraded around.

“What is that?” Psi whispered.

“I’m not sure.” The Doctor replied.

The dainty woman adjusted her glasses, smiled a very fake but pretty smile, and said, “Excuse me, sir. I regret to say that your guilt has been detected.” She clasped her hands in front of her, appearing all the world like she wanted to help him instead of whatever it was they did with people whose guilt they detected.

The man scoffed. “What? That-that’s totally ridiculous.”

“Is it, sir?” She asked. “Well then, we will certainly double-check. The Teller will now scan your thoughts for any criminal intent. Good luck, sir.” She said, gesturing to the alien behind her in a cheerful tone, then walked a few feet away.

The man set down his brief case and stared at the alien.

The alien put what Rose would have guessed were its eyes together, the long, tube-like limbs that they rested in bending to allow it, making a sort of U shape. She watched, feeling something at the edge of her mind, but was too fascinated with what was happening to be concerned.

“Now that’s interesting.” The Doctor said, and she gave him a passing glance in acknowledgment.
“What is?” Psi asked, more concerned sounding than she was.

“It’s a telepathic creature that’s been trained to detect guilt in the mind of the patrons.” The Doctor explained.

Rose slid closer to him, and she felt his hand wrap around hers briefly for reassurance.

But the man, he looked like he was struggling, and it didn’t sit well with her what that would mean. He kept clasping his head as though he was trying very hard to remember something, though it was likely the opposite. He quivered, stumbled, and then the alien roared as the man seemed to come back to himself.

“Ah,” The dainty woman said as she trotted back over. “Criminal intent detected, how naughty. What was you plan, hmm? Counterfeit currency in your briefcase, perhaps?” She asked, tilting her head toward the case on the floor.

“No, not at all, for God’s sake.” The man pleaded.

“It doesn’t really matter,” The woman countered. “We’ll establish the details later. The Teller is never wrong when it comes to guilt,” She turned to the alien and cooed at it a bit, and it made a noise in response. She then turned back to the man. “Your account will now be deleted, and obviously your mind. Supper time!”

“His mind?” Rose asked, “Doctor, what does she mean?”

There was a buzzing at the edge of her hearing, causing Rose to frown and wince a bit. Psi, flinched far worse, but quickly got himself under control. The man the alien was focused on, however, seemed to be in agony.

“Doctor?” Rose asked again.

The Doctor pulled her flush to him, holding her to his side, and concern was beginning to war with the confusion.

“The alien is telepathic waves to… boil his brain.”

Rose’s eyes widened in horror as she turned back to the scene, the man clutching his head, his screams partially covering up the cold, clinical way the woman told him his family would be tossed in jail.

“We’ve got to help him.” Rose said more to herself, but she knew the Doctor heard her.

“Your big heart is one of the best things about you, but I’m afraid it’s of no use. If we interfere, we’ll paint targets on our backs.” He said solemnly as the man finally stopped crying out.

He stumbled like he was stunned or stoned, and when he turned just a fraction, Rose could see why: his head was caved in, like it had been properly bashed without there being a mark. She covered her mouth for a moment, before lowering her hand, trying to remain as stoic as the rest of the clientele seemed to be. The Doctor’s grip on her tightened a bit, but relaxed quickly before he slid it out from around her.

“Account closed. Take him away, he’s ready for his close-up.” The ginger-haired woman instructed before turning the rest of the room with a glowing smile. She raised something near her mouth, and said, “Apologies for the disturbance. Everyone have a lovely day.” And then she left as if nothing happened.
And everyone carried on as if nothing happened.

The Teller, as he was called, was led away by the guards, and life seemed to simply move on.

“We should move, lest we draw attention to ourselves.” The Doctor said, lead the way with Saibra close behind.

“Come on, then.” Psi said, sounding as shaken by the whole thing as Rose felt.

“You alright?” She asked him as they caught up to the others.

He glanced at her a couple of times, before replying. “Yeah.” He said in the same way Mickey would always say he was fine after getting his hand pinched or whacking his head on the underside of a car.

Rose didn’t push, merely gave him a smile, weak as it was, and left it be.

They went into a new room, warmer than the lobby, very small, and accented with rests and golds. There was a panel on the opposite side that reminded Rose of the electrical panel in her flat at the estates. Once she and Psi were clear of the doors, they shut with a deafening lock. If anyone noticed her slight jump, they didn’t comment on it.

Saibra went up to something on the panel and exhaled as the computerized voice had asked her, and after she had, she turned back into herself.

“If he can break in here and plant this thing, then why does he need our help? She asked the Doctor as he came up beside her. Something was released, and a case presented to them.

“I’m not sure,” He replied. “We’re likely to find out when we open the….” He stopped, as he did just that, hands hovering near the open lid where he’d gripped it before. “I’m no expert, but this looks very much like a bomb.” He then turned around. “Psi, the bank schematics, if you would, please.” He said.

Psi’s mouth twisted about for a moment, not so much in protest as worry, before he went to the wall and stood before one of the lighter sections. He removed a wire from inside his jacket, and attached it to one of the things on the side of his head. he then held the end of the cord against the wall.

To Rose, it looked like the end of one of those wire Mickey had to hook things up to the computer, but a blue light came out the end of the one Psi was using, and a blueprint of the bank appeared on the wall, highlighting certain bits.

“Beneath this room is all service corridors.” The Doctor said thoughtfully. He then turned away from the schematic, taking a few steps away. “Which means the Architect wants us to use the bomb to gain access to them.”

“We’ll die if we do that.” Saibra said.

“No, I don’t think so.” The Doctor replied. “If the bomb were the sort that could cause enough damage to kill us, it would also be the sort that would shut down the bank for a little while. And yes, of course, shutting it down might be the way to get another team in here, but that’s not the case.”

“How can you be sure?” Psi challenged as he disconnected and tucked away the wire form his head.
“Because we were chosen for very specific reasons, for a very specific skill set. Saibra has done her part, yes, she got us in here. But that doesn’t mean we aren’t going to find another case with another sample somewhere further down the line. You downloaded schematics, and while that’s all well and good, Psi, it can’t be the only reason you were chosen. He could have left us with a device that held the information just the same. He did, after all, leave me with my sonic screwdriver. Which begs the question of why he would kill us now? The answer is simple, he wouldn’t. He needs us to get further, so whatever that bomb is, it won’t kill us.”

“And if you’re wrong?” Saibra asked.

“We’re as good as dead anyway.” He reminded her. “Any of us walk out the same way we came in, we’ll go the way of our man with the Teller, or we get to be incinerated.”

“Well, then.” Rose said, squaring her shoulders as she went up to the case and gently removed the bomb. “Wouldn’t be the first time you’ve blown something up with me around.”

He came up and took the bomb from her examining it. “Likely to be a bit less risky this go, too.” He said, brow pinching as he tilted his head one way and the bomb the other. And then he smiled. “Oh yes, much less risky indeed.”

“Why you say that?” Psi asked.

The Doctor’s excitement was palatable, so much so that the skeptical, augmented human even twitched his lips.

“It’s a Dimensional shift bomb!” He said with exuberance. “It will send particles to a different plane!” He knelt down and set it on the floor. “Everyone against the walls. I’m not sure how wide a space this will create, and I don’t want anyone to suddenly find themselves missing their legs.”

They did as he asked, watching him set up the bomb before darting to join Rose. They waited, the little thing beeping and pulsing, the lights on it growing brighter until suddenly it stopped. And in the span of a blink, roughly three or four feet of the floor was gone, revealing the first bit of walkway just below.

The Doctor grabbed the bomb and then hopped down, pocketing the device before lifting his hands toward them. “Rose.” He said.

“What, do I jump?” She asked.

“It’s not far, I’ll catch you.” He said.

Rose still got on her bum first, sliding into the whole in the floor and still landing in the Doctor’s arms. Psi followed, and Saibra right after before the Doctor had a chance to let Rose go.

“Now,” He said, pointing the bomb toward the floor just as the echoes of a bang sounded above. The hole disappeared, leaving the ceiling in its place. “Shall we find the next item on our little scavenger hunt?”
They had been moving through the Catacombs, down, down, down, for what was starting to feel like an age, even for him.

There was a lot of things bothering him about this whole situation. Saibra had a point, after all, that the Architect didn’t need them to break in for any particular reason so far. There wasn’t any way he would have risked Rose’s life for something as minor as testing bank security, so it was likely either under threat of death if they didn’t attempt the job. Or there was something bigger, and infinitely more important, that would have had him willing to have his mind wipe and face a possible execution for them both, as well as two people he didn’t know.

He wasn’t sure he liked or trusted this Architect fellow. So far, he had provided everything they needed to get where they were going, including, he suspected, a scape goat on the bank floor. He’d never be able to prove the man the Teller attacked actually was innocent, though he’d had to have been guilty about something to attract attention. Guilty enough to override four people with big plans.

He didn’t like not knowing why, aside from their particular skills, the Architect had chosen Psi or Saibra. There had to be a reason they would have chosen to do it, some large payoff in the end, monetary or otherwise. For that matter, he’d like to know why he would do it.

If they had Rose, it would make sense.

But they didn’t.

No, she was currently a slight bit ahead, and Psi was with her. Chatting to her quietly, holding her attention, or at least the part that wasn’t focused on keeping an eye out for their next clue. And, frankly, the Doctor was quite bothered by that, not that he would admit it to anyone but himself.

Did she find him attractive? He knew she didn’t fancy Adam in the least, but Psi was different. Young, yes, but even the Doctor could see he was superior in physical qualities. And while stubborn, Psi was far less arrogant that Adam. Plus, there was that little niggling in the back of the Doctor’s mind that Rose seemed to like trouble, and what was more trouble than a former inmate of Stormcage?

“Well,” Saibra asked, drawing his attention to her. Another thing that bothered him: her task was done, as far as he could tell. She continued, “What are we supposed to do now? What’s the plan?”

“I’m really not sure,” He confessed. “I have absolutely no doubts that we will find another case, that contains another clue or direction, and then we will follow the breadcrumbs to the next bit.” He replied.

“That’s it? That’s your plan?” She asked, and he stopped, turning to face her as she fell back a little way.

“Saibra, I’m not sure what more I could possibly say. I’m not the one who set this up, at least as far as I know. What I do know, is, we’re nearing the end of the catacombs. At the end, we will likely find something, and then we will move on. To say or suggest more won’t help.”

He turned and continued, hearing her come up behind him, albeit slower. As he did so, he noted Psi disappearing down another ladder, Rose already gone. It only made him move more swiftly.

“Doctor,” Rose called to him, “We’ve found it.”

“Have you?” He asked before descending the ladder, waiting a moment to make sure Saibra was alright before joining a pleased looking Psi, and a proud Rose at the case.
The Doctor looked about, noting it was placed on a convenient, concrete base, easy to see, and next to an electrical panel. A panel with connections, similar to what Psi might need.

“Beginning to think he works here.” Rose said with a nervous laugh. When he lifted an inquiring brow at her, she added. “He’s got to, yeah? How else is able to get us wha’ we need down here? Know who we might need to get us in?”

“An inside job with hired help?” The Doctor considered. “Certainly a possibility. Even more so if they erased their mind after sending the video. Imagine working here knowing you had every intention of robbing the place?”

“They’d never survive-ive-ive-ive-ive-ive.” Psi said, though the tick in his speech had his head jerking as well until a small beep had him stop.

“You alright?” Rose asked with concern, lightly stroking Psi’s arm as her brow furrowed.

“Drive glitch, it’s fine.” He assured, but he looked worried.

“Psi, open the case.” The Doctor instructed.

“Er, why me?” He asked, voice a little hostile.

“Well, given the fact you’re half computer, and we are near a panel, I’m willing to wager whatever is in here might relate to you.” The Doctor replied. “Not to mention that, being half computer, you didn’t need the memory wipe anyway. You could have just deleted what you didn’t want to know.”

Psi looked like he wanted to argue, but backed down. Then, he looked to Rose, who smiled at him in encouragement, and he squared his shoulders. As if opening the case was some brave, important task. There was a beep, the lid opened, and Rose peeked around it to see what he saw.

Both she and Psi frowned.

“Syringes?” Rose asked, and Psi glanced at her before turning the case toward the Doctor.

It wasn’t syringes, per se, but they worked in relatively the same way. Press end against skin, push plunger. Only this wasn’t a painless shot so much as a permanent way of ending your pain. All your pain, forever. He didn’t like what the implications were, even more so that there were six.

“What are they-ey-ey-ey-ey-ey?” Psi asked before shorting out again. He grumbled. “Sorry, stress drains the batteries.

“Not sure, Psi, why don’t you go charge over on the panel?” He suggested, and Rose seemed to give him a gentle push toward the panel.

“Interesting.” Saibra said, and the Doctor noted she’d been staring.

“Plugging in his brain? A bit, isn’t it.” He quipped.

“No, that you’re lying.” She countered.

“I’m not.” He tried to lie again, but he knew he was caught out. Before he could be interrogated further, and alarm went off, alerting the guards to an intruder in the area, as well as them that their time was running out.

“Psi, will you be long?” The Doctor asked. He shook his head. “Good, we should investigate, but you need to recharge, so stay put unless you shouldn’t.”
“Doctor,” Rose said before he was about to leave. “Someone should stay with ‘im.” She said, shifting closer to the Doctor as he did her.

“Saibra could….”

“No, she’s too important. You’re too important. Me, I’m not sure what I’d be lookin’ for or what use I’d be.”

He studied her face, wishing one more time that he could see her time lines. He glanced to Psi, knowing if he wanted to, he could take a peek and see… but if Rose was mixed in, he still wouldn’t know if it was meant to happen.

“I didn’t expect it to be so soon.” He said quietly, just for her.

“What?” She asked.

He smiled gently, trying to let her know… that if she…. “You meeting a man in our travels that you’d leave me for.”

“What?” She said, eyebrows disappearing behind her sweeping bangs. “Doctor, what are you on about? Not leavin’, got it? Not for anythin’, ‘specially not for a bloke.” She reached up and fiddled with his collar. “Just, I’d feel better if someone were with him, yeah? Just in case.”

“Just in case,” He repeated, only partly reassured.

She smiled sadly at him. “Be safe, alright?”

“You too,” he said, and he wanted to kiss her, nearly did, before he remembered that perhaps they should see if the danger was closer than expected. He turned away from Rose sharply, gestured for Saibra to follow, and led the way through the service corridors.

“Why did you lie?” Saibra asked once they were out of ear shot of the others. “Those hardware things, you know what they are.”

He sighed. “I do. They’re an exit strategy should one of us come face-to-face with the Teller, and find we can’t hide our guilt.” He replied, seeing her acknowledgment and realizing it’s what she expected. “How did you know I was lying?” he asked curiously.

She glanced at him, “I’ve had a lot of faces, I find them easy to read.”

“Quite the gift.”

“Gift?”

The Doctor stopped them before a grated air duct. “It got us in here, didn’t it?”

“It did.” She acknowledged as he went to work on removing the grate with the sonic. “But… mutant gene. No one can touch me. If they do, I transform.”

He removed the grate as he mulled over what she said, gently laying it aside so Rose and Psi could find them. He stood, tucking his sonic away.

“You absorb living cells, human cells. But no. Rose mentioned she’d seen something happen with your face after contact with the worm. It’s any living creature.”

Saibra nodded. “Touch me, Doctor, and you’ll be looking at yourself. I am alone.”
“No, not alone. You can’t be alone.” He tried to reassure, but all he got was a nervous grin, a breathy laugh.

“Would you trust someone who looked back at you out of your own eyes?”

He smirked, “No. But that’s because I know what a mischievous rascal I can be.” That got a more genuine grin. “Come on, let’s go see where this leads. Bound to be somewhere a touch safer than out here.”

She watched the Doctor until he and Saibra rounded a corner out of sight, and then took a deep breath. He’d be alright, of course he would.”

Rose rejoined Psi who sat near the panel, still attached to it. As she plopped down next to him, he removed a bit from his head, blew on it, then replaced it. He gave her a shy, roguish grin and explained, “Storm dust.”

“Give new meaning to clearing your mind, you do.” She teased, tongue between her teeth. She didn’t miss the way he looked at it. Shireen always told her she was a bit of a flirt, but it was only recently that she understood how she actually meant it.

“Yeah, suppose so.” Psi said, a bit smug-ish, which made Rose shake her head a bit at him.

“Seriously, though.” She said, changing the mood. “Was the Doctor right? You can just sorta delete your memories.”

“Yeah,” Psi replied, growing serious. “Not that great, though.”

“No, don’t expect it is.” Rose agreed. “Have a few I wish I didn’t, but, ‘s part of who I am.”

Psi nodded. “Yeah,’ He agreed. “I have a few I wish I did have.”

“How do you know what you’re missin’, though?” Rose frowned.

Psi became somber. “When I was in prison, I was interrogated. And, I guess… I panicked. I didn’t want to be a risk to the people close to me, so….”

“You got rid of ‘em. In your head.” Rose said, gesturing to her own as if he needed an explanation. He nodded, and she let out a long breath. “Blimey, that’s… I can’t imagine. Not knowin’ your family, or friends. Why didn’t they come find you, after? When you were let go?”

Psi shrugged. “I don’t know. Maybe I never had any. Maybe I went somewhere they didn’t think to look. Maybe they looked right at me in the market, and I ignored them, thinkin’ I didn’t know them.”

She shook her head. “I don’t know if I coulda done that. I wouldn’t want to put my mum or my mates at risk, but I don’t know if I could let myself forget them.”

“Do you love them?” He asked.
“Of course,” Rose said without hesitation.

“Then you would.” He said with confidence, a lift in the corner of his lips. “If you were faced with an impossible choice, you over them, in anyway, you would pick them.”

She supposed he was right. Yes, she was a bit selfish in running off with the Doctor, and things could have turned out worse for her Mum or her mates if they hadn’t come up with a reason for her absence, or if they never went to visit. But If she had to forget them to save them, she would. If she had to die so they could go on, she’d do that, too. Same with the Doctor. Her for him. Psi had it on the mark, she would do the unthinkable for those she loved.

He disconnected himself from the panel, then the wire from his head before he stuffed it in his jacket. “Let’s go find them.”

“Right,” She said, getting up with him, and leading the way to where the Doctor went.

Chapter End Notes

Part two will be posted in a few days. Updates are still going to be kinda sluggish, but much more frequently than 2 years. :)}
The Doctor and Saibra were standing in front of doors, large ones with a small set of bars to peek through when Rose and Psi found them. They slowed their steps from a running pace to a jog until they slowed to a stop.

The smile Rose had broken into upon first seeing the Time Lord slowly faded until it was nothing, the Doctor staring through the bars with a thunderous expression having stripped the joy out of her. He’d been angry before, of course, but she was never sure she’d seen him quite this livid.

“Doctor?” She said as she neared, and while he flinched toward her, he didn’t look away. “What’s wrong?” She asked, coming to his side, then looking in through the bars.

The man the teller had confronted in the lobby earlier was in the room, hands chained, forced to stay upright, and apparently alive.

“Oh, god.” Rose said, not sure she was comprehending what she was seeing properly. “He alive?”

“Yes.” The Doctor said flatly.

She swallowed, chest tightening. “There something we can do? Some way to help him?”

“No.” The Doctor said, more gently this time but with no more emotion in his voice.

“But… but he’s-”

“There’s nothing really left of him, Rose.” The Doctor turned to her, apologies in his eyes for the things he couldn’t do. “He’s got very minimal brain function, only enough to keep him breathing. And that, of course, is under the assumption that he could breathe outside of that cell. That they all could.”

Rose looked away to the other doors with bars, and her stomach churned. Then she spotted the camera, too similar to ones they used in her own time for her to not understand what it was.

“They’re watchin’,” She stated, tilting her chin toward the camera.

“They are.” The Doctor agreed.

“Doctor,” Psi said, pulling everyone’s attention to him just before the alarms started going off. “However, this goes, don’t let me end up like that.” He said as they started to run.

“I wouldn’t let it happen to any of you,” he assured, leading them to what looked like another air-duct like the one she and Psi had crawled through to get to he and Saibra. “Now, this way.” The Doctor said, sonicing the grate off and hold it away so the rest of them could crawl through.

Once they were on the other side, the Doctor secured it, and joined them, only to immediately stiffen.

“No one think.” He said.

“What?” Psi asked.
“Something like that, but more. Don’t think of anything, not a single thought.”

“Doctor?” Rose asked, but he held up a hand, one finger raised. Any other man that would have told her to hush would have gotten a smack, but Rose watched as he wearily looked at the frosted cube before them.

“Where are we?” Saibra asked.

“That’s a question, a question involves thinking, I beg the lot of you not to think. Not one bit.” He replied sharply, slowly moving to the opposite side of the room. “We seem to be where they put the Teller in forced hibernation. But doing that does not silence its mind, nor stop it from seeking other minds out. It’s searching, so do not think. If you think, it will lock on to your mind. I’m not sure if it will still attempt to destroy it while it’s caged away, but let’s not find out.”

They moved slowly, and as they did, Rose tried very hard not to think. How many times had she heard people tell her she never had a thought in her head, and after all this time of trying to prove people wrong, it would be really convenient for them to have been right.

There was a pressure, something like a tickling in her head as she edged toward the Doctor, following him as he led them to the other side of the tank.

“Rose, keep your mind blank. It’s seemed to have a lock on you, but that’s alright. It merely senses a mind, not thoughts. Keep blocking everything. That’s it, darling, you’re alright.”

She had done what she was told, keeping her mind quiet, only acknowledging the tickle and nothing more.

There was a sound, and a spike in the sensations, which nearly had Rose panic.

“It’s waking. Just keep blocking your thoughts, Rose.”

“This way,” She heard Psi say, and she glanced to see him moving to another little shaft.

The Doctor was reaching for her, and she took his hand. He pulled her toward the shaft, pushed her toward it and into Psi’s reach, and then the tickle left her mind.

“Wha?” She started to say before Saibra cried out in agony.

“Saibra!” Psi called to her, and Rose peeked out to see she’d retreated the wrong way. She likely hadn’t seen the Doctor close the grate behind them, and as a result was stuck. She was crouched, hands covering her head, face contorted into pain, and the off buzz Rose had noticed in the lobby was back.

“Doctor, tell me she’s not-”

“I can’t do that, Rose.” He cut her off, his voice only containing a touch of gentleness as he reached behind him and handed her the screwdriver. “The setting is in place, just push the button, the grate will come free, you and Psi get out of here.”

“What about Saibra?” Psi asked as Rose took the sonic and turned to the grate.

She didn’t need to see the Doctor to know that, if he turned to Psi, their companion would see remorse in the Doctor’s face. She didn’t need to hear his voice to know he would be as gentle as possible with the bad news, but she knew she’d hear him anyway.
Rose fumbled with the sonic, setting it properly in her hand to face the grate.

“I’ll do what I can,” The Doctor had said, and Rose got the grate loose. She kicked it open, scooted out, then tugged Psi out as well.

They stood just outside the opening once on the other side, the sounds from inside fainter, but still on the edge of hearing. Rose reached out and gripped Psi’s hand as he closed his eyes, feeling the weight of lose, possibly for the first time in his memory.

~DW~

It had never occurred to him until this moment how much the Doctor took being adapt at mindbending for granted. That he could keep the Teller out simply by his own will, and still be able to think and plan was something he was grateful for, but he hadn’t really appreciated his telepathic strengths until this moment.

This very moment went one of his newest companions was curled in a fetal position within the wrong air duct, hands gripping her head in agony, with very little options.

He could open his mind to the Teller, to allow it to get a taste of him, of his guilt, but that was dam that once opened may be impossible to close, and the others would need him. He couldn’t risk regenerating, not with the possibility of it taking longer than normal thanks to the mishaps of his last go, not with the way his memory had failed him. Psi barely trusted him, Rose only just learned about it. Regenerating was an option only to be used as a last resort. That wasn’t going to be now.

The second option didn’t bode well for Saibra, but it would be humane. And despite her not saying so, he knew she shared the same sentiments as Psi.

So, with that, he edged toward her, crouching down to be at eye level with her.

“Saibra,” He said to her, and she looked to him.

“What should I do?” She asked. “How can I get away.”

“It’s in your head, Saibra. It’s latched on to your thoughts, your dreams, your secrets. It will be over soon, but I’m afraid something much worse will follow.” He explained.

She looked terrified in her understanding. “And then I become one of those things we saw in the cage?”

“Yes.” He nodded.

“Can you get me out?” She asked.

He shook his head. Oh, how he wished he could say there was a way. He wished he was braver, bolder, more willing to take the risk. But what would happen if he let the Teller in, only to shove him back out? What would the repercussions be?

Saibra nodded her understanding, winced, then said, “Exit strategy. That means what I think it means, right?”

The Doctor reached into his pocket and extended the tube to Saibra. “An atomic shredder.” He told
her.

“Painless?” She asked.

“Yes.” He replied, hoping to ease her.

She took a breath as she took the shredder, then another to give herself strength. “When you meet the Architect, promise me something?” She met his eye. “Kill him.”

“I can’t say I like him, either, but I can’t make that promise.” He replied.

She smirked through the pain, an incredulous huff accompanying it. “A good man… I left it late to meet one of those.”

Saibra then stuck her hand with the shredder, such a quick motion that it would have surprised someone not expecting it, and then she was gone.

The Teller roared, likely displeased about having its snack so hastily removed from its grasp. The Doctor felt its mind begin to grow dormant again, the edge of it seeking still while the haze of rest dulled it. He rose to his feet, moving quietly to where Rose and Psi would have escaped, and crawled through the duct.

When he came through to the other side, he found Rose and Psi standing together. They had been watching him come through, and as soon as he was upright, Rose stepped toward him.

Her hand wrapped around his. “You alright?” She asked, though he could tell she already knew the answer.

The Doctor pulled her toward him, let go of her hand, and wrapped Rose in his arms, embracing her, looking over her shoulder at Psi.

“There was nothing I could do.” He told the young man, his heart aching at the way Psi looked ready to argue that.

“She didn’t suffer, yeah?” Rose asked before Psi could say anything. “She wasn’t… she wasn’t like….”

“She was gone before the Teller could hurt her.” The Doctor reassured them both, stepping back and shifting his hold on Rose to gently hold her by the arms. “But right now, unless we want to join her, we had best keep going.”

“And that’s it?” Psi demanded, earning their attention. His jaw was tight. “Nothing I could do so now we best move on? She didn’t suffer, so there’s that,” He said sarcastically, throwing his hand in the air.

“Much as I would like to mourn the loss of a brave, intelligent woman who didn’t deserve that death, I can’t. Because there is still a job to be done, and I would like to see you and Rose get out of here.” The Doctor snapped back. “Now, Psi, answer me this: it’s hardly like you knew one way or the other if Saibra could be saved, and here you are, in the room with the vault, and yet you were waiting to hear for me, why?”

Psi and Rose both frowned, then both turned to face the vault at the end of the hall that, admittedly, did blend in with its surroundings enough that one might miss it when passing by. He supposed they did have other things on their minds, and neither were as used to the loss as he was.
He stepped around Rose, heading toward the vault, pausing a moment as he realized how completely true that statement was, even if he never gave it voice. It was all still rather fresh for him, the war, and it was likely what had just allowed him to move on without mourning Saibra as much as it might of before. But he continued to the vault, because this had to end, soon, before he lost anyone else.

There seemed to be a little electrical booth off to the right of the vault doors, made that much more noticeable by the cart and the couple of boxes beside it. Inside the booth, sitting on a stool in front of the computer likely controlling the vault, was another case.

“It seems we have another gift from our dear friend, the Architect.” He announced, grabbing it and setting it on the little cart he’d passed on his way by. “Shall we unwrap it?”

Psi and Rose came over, the former turning the case and opening it without a care.

Inside was a small hard drive and a business card.

Psi immediately took out a cord form his jacket and connected himself to the drive while Rose picked up the card and frowned.

“What is it?” He asked her as Psi grunted from the flux of information.

“Dunno,” Rose shook her head, turning the card over in her hand.

“Right,” Psi said, diverting the Doctor from the card and Rose. “The system looks like it’s time-delayed. There are twenty-four lock codes I need to break.” Psi darted inside the electrical booth, sitting on the now empty stool.

“And you have the data you need?” The Doctor asked as an all too familiar roar echoed in the tunnels.

“He had it all.” Psi said confirmed as he got to work. He glanced up at the Doctor. “No idea how long it’ll take, though.”

“Right, Rose, much as I am loathed to say this, we need to split up.” The Doctor said, turning to his companion.

She studied him, a weak smile tugging at the corner of her lips. “Thought you weren’t letting me wander off again?”

A roar sounded, closer than before.

“I don’t want to let you, but I’m afraid we don’t have much choice.” He said. Hesitating, he pulled a syringe out of his pocket and handed it to her with great reluctance. As her fingers wrapped around it, he clasped her hand in both of his. “This is an absolute last resort. Do not use this unless you are staring the Teller in the face, and you know for absolute certainty that there is no escape.”

“Yeah, got it.” She said, taking it gently and putting it in her back pocket.

“Now, go, go!” He urged, and Rose turned and bolted while he watched her disappear.

“Doctor,” Psi said from his booth, and the Doctor looked at him over his shoulder. “In case it finds me?”

He reached in his pocket and removed the shredder with much less hesitation. “Same thing, only if
you absolutely must.”

“Got it.” Psi assured, then went right back to work. There was another roar, and the Doctor took a
breath, running away from Psi and in the opposite direction of Rose, hoping the Teller would try to
face him.

~DW~

Rose knew she was caught. Back against the wall, the sound of the Teller’s breathing near enough
that she knew moving would sentence her for sure. That tickling at the edge of her mind was
constant, sitting there, waiting for a thought to slip through. She was sure she’d actually slipped up
a couple of times, which is likely why the Teller was still lingering.

She was running out of time. She could feel that tickling in her mind growing. She could run, but
she didn’t trust it wouldn’t get her before she could get away. It growled, low, and her heart
stuttered.

This was worse than facing the Dalek, because at least then she knew it would be quick. This, this
was worse.

She pictured, for just a moment, her head concaved like that poor man’s and the Teller grumbled. It
sounded closer. He probably was closer.

Rose closed her eyes, taking a couple deep breaths, and bolted.

She hadn’t expected to feel trapped. It was within seconds of leaving her terrible hiding spot that
the Teller had caught her, and the force of its mind on her was a weight that made her cry out in
both pain and shock, and kept her feet planted on the ground.

“Rose!” She heard the Doctor’s voice echo in the tunnels, too far away to be of any assistance, not
in time anyway.

She allowed herself to think of him, of their brief time together, as her hand went for shredder in
her back pocket. She thought of how she’d fallen so hard so quickly, and how he’d never know.

Her fingers wrapped around the shredder, the weight in her mind becoming too much.

“Come on!” Psi’s voice sounded around them, and the pressure the Teller placed on her mind
eased.

She could move now.

“Come and find me,” Psi egged on, and Rose heard the Teller moving away from her.

“What?” She said to herself, turning to see the Teller heading toward the vault.

“Androvax, Song, de Souza, Slitheen, Losh Vulk, Hart, Daak, every thief and villain in one, big
cocktail. I am so guilty!” Psi continued.

Rose started to bolt after him, only to collide with the Doctor, his arms around her in an instant.
She returned the embrace as Psi continued.
“Every famous burglar in history is hiding in this bank, right now, in one body. Come and feast!”

“Doctor, we’ve got to help him.” Rose said as she pulled away from the Doctor.

“Yes, we do, come on!” He said, taking her hand and leading her back toward the vault.

They’d barely rounded a corner when they heard, “Rose? For what it’s worth, and it might not be worth much, when your whole life flashes in front of you, you see people you love, a-and people missing you. And…. I see no one.”

Psi screamed, something between pain and a battle cry, and then it stopped, and the Teller roared.

“Oh, Psi.” The Doctor sighed mournfully, and Rose squeezed his hand a little tighter, her eyes stinging and her heart aching. They took a moment, a breath, and then he said, “let’s head back to the vault.”

~DW~

The cheerful computer voice that greeted them upon their return to the vault doors did not bear good news. The vault opening that Psi had programmed had failed on the last lock.

Rose continued further than he did, her speed not slowing as quickly, and she stopped in front of the large door. The Doctor studied her from behind, watching her hands go to her face, rubbing furiously at it.

“He shouldn’t’a done that.” She said, her tone a touch angry.

“Done what?” The Doctor asked as he came to join her.

“Get ‘imself killed!” She said in frustration, turning to face him. Her cheeks were tear stained, and her eyes puffy, but there was a fire in them and her demeanor that said she was more than mourning. “Teller had me! I had a shredder, I could’ve-”

“Died?” The Doctor finished for her. “Yes, because that option would have been infinitely better.”

“Why else would I be here?” She demanded, and the Doctor was sort of thrown. “Not good with computers, me. Can’t change my face and clothes to fit a role. Certainly not some genius level thinker, so what good am I?”

“What good are you? What good are you? What sort of question is that?” He demanded of her.

“Doctor, I know I haven’t been travellin’ with you all that long, but seems like a good sorta question, yeah? A mutant human, a modified human, and a Time Lord robbin’ this place made sense. All have skills that fit, me-”

“Are important to me.” The Doctor interrupted her. When she continued to stare at him like he was daft, he added. “Psi, Saibra, they must have had a very good reason to rob this bank, something they wanted more than anything else, that was worth the risk of possibly losing their lives. You, Rose Tyler, are what I would risk my life for. But that’s where there’s a snag, because if you weren’t here, it’s entirely possible I wouldn’t play along.

“I would want to know where you were, if you were safe, if you were with the TARDIS, but failing
that, there is a possibility that I may not play the Architect’s game. I may simply have given up, or sacrificed myself far earlier in the plan, and where would that leave Psi and Saibra? Alive, maybe, perhaps, or like those people in the cages we passed earlier.

“So, if nothing else, that’s why you’re here, Rose. You’re clever, and kind, but most important, you’re keeping me on task because I want to get you out of here, alive, and it’s very likely the Architect knows that.”

Rose stared at him, her anger changing to grief as she seemed to give up. “So, what do we do?” She asked.

“We figure out how to get the vault open.” The Doctor replied as there was a rumble around them. Not the Teller, not this time. If he didn’t know better, he’d guess it was thunder.

“This help?” She asked, producing the card from the case earlier. He studied the combination of letters and numbers.

“No,” He sighed, “It’s probably what we need to find in the vault, not codes to get into it.” He then went to the computer booth where Psi was, took out his sonic, and scanned everything. He even crouched on the floor, removing a panel to the internal wiring, and scanned within. “It’s atomic sealed, unbreakable even with a sonic.” He sighed as he pulled his head out of the panel, lightly scratching his head. “But that also means that Psi, even with the full list of codes, likely wouldn’t have gotten in either. So why did the Architect send us all the way down here without a way to go the last little bit?”

There was more thunder, the lights flickering terribly.

“What’s going on?” Rose asked.

“A storm.” The Doctor replied. “Though I wonder what sort of storm we’re experiencing… oh!” A sudden thought came over him, causing his eyes to wide as he looked to the Vault. “This is the last little bit. Oh, I’m stupid! Stupid Doctor!” He said giddily, smacking himself on the forehead a couple of times before scooping Rose up and spinning her around once despite her yelp of surprise.

“What? Never seen a bloke so pleased to call himself stupid.”

“The Architect, he needed us here, at this time, at this exact moment. And he knew when, precisely to send us here, because he’s in the future. He needed a time traveler. And everything, every little bit of this, has been planned to the letter to get us to this spot, at this moment….”

Cogs and wheels turned and whirred, locks clicked, and then, “Vault unlocked,” said the computerized voice as the large, heavy door slowly opened.

“The one time the bank is vulnerable.” The said before giving her hand a slight tug. “Come on, let’s see this through to the end.”

They stepped over the edge of the door and into the vault, the stark difference in lighting making it feel like an entirely separate world. Blocks of lock boxes stretched for what seemed like forever.

“Hang on,” Rose said as she looked at the card in her hand, brow furrowing. “Doctor,” She said, showing it to him again. “I think this is supposed to lead us to our next clues.”

“Something in the lock boxes. Tech 251, then.” He said looking about. “Alright, we split up, but only two blocks away from one another, we’ll comb the place together, we stop at the end of each aisle to assure one another that the other is safe.”
“Right,” Rose nodded, letting go of his hand. “Let’s go, then.”

~DW~

The vault was massive, opulent, and a bit much, really. Rose could understand the need, appreciated the organization, but it seemed a bit too posh for a place no one would ever see. As she searched for the tech area, pausing to meet up with the Doctor, she looked around.

She noted pipes leading somewhere near the back, which seemed odd considering she didn’t think there would be a need down this far for anything more than electricity. One pipe to contain the wiring, if they weren’t clever enough to think to put it directly in the walls, so why were there three? And fairly large ones, actually. They ran along the edge of the room, on her side, and a quick glance behind her showed the fed in to the vault from the ceiling. They wouldn’t be seen from the outside.

She looked down at the card in her hand. Tech 251, Org 339, PV. PV? She hadn’t seen anything like that as they passed. What would PV be short for, and did those pipes have anything to do with it? Pipe vent? No, that wasn’t a thing, was it?

She sighed, lamenting not being a bit more clever than she was.

“Rose.” The Doctor called just after their last check, and she darted down her aisle to see him standing at the next block of boxes. TECH was stamped on the plate, and she grinned as she darted over to join him. They searched for 251, and found it relatively quickly.

“Now what? Don’t we need, like, a set of keys or something?”

The Doctor opened the door to the box with nothing more than his fingers, pulling out a smaller box from inside.

“Thought this was supposed to be a top-notch sorta spot.” Rose said, taken aback.

“I think the understanding is, if you make it down this far, you’re supposed to be here. Usually with armed guards in case you try anything funny.” The Doctor replied as he opened the box and frowned.

“What is it?” Rose asked.

“It’s a neophyte circuit.” He replied with some confusion, fiddling with it and causing it to glow blue for a moment. “It can reboot any system, replace any lost data. But why would we need it.”

“W-we don’t.” Rose said as she understood. “It was meant for Psi. He, umm, he deleted all the memories of his family, friends.”

“He wanted them back. That’s what he came here for, that’s why he agreed to this.” The Doctor said sadly.

“What about Saibra?” Rose asked, glancing at the card as the Doctor put the circuit back into the smaller box, holding it against his side like one might a book. “Org 339. Org?”

“Organism, organics?” The Doctor pondered. “I passed it, this way, come on.” He said as he led
her back a couple blocks and one over. They looked for the box, found it, and like before he merely opened it with his fingers.

Rose reached in and removed the box within, taking off the lid and revealing a large, glass bottle with some sort of science-y looking thing on it, reminding her of what she’d seen in biology during the odd time she paid attention.

“A gene suppressant,” The Doctor said over her shoulder. “Saibra has never been able to have any real contact with anyone, not without turning into them.”

“She just wanted a bit’a normal.” Rose said as mournfully as the Doctor had.

“And she deserved it. But now, we came this far, and we’ve found what our friends would have wanted, so why are we here?”

“Next clue is PV.” Rose said, showing him.

“PV?” He frowned. “Private vault, what would we want there?”

“The TARDIS?” She suggested.

“I suppose there’s only one way to find out.” He said, starting to head back around the corner when he suddenly stopped before Rose could follow. “Oh, hello,” He said, sounding a bit fearful. “I didn’t hear you coming.”

The Doctor took one step back, revealing the Teller staring at him.

~DW~

The office was so bloody white, it could have been an exam room in a clinic. No, scratch that, Rose thought to herself, been to clinics less white than this.

It was insanely sparse, impersonal. A lamp in each corner, perched on top of a filing cabinet, all white. The desk and chair were both as white as the walls and floor. There was a small bit of color in the desk plate, of course, baring the name Ms. Delphox, and a bit more color in the weird sculpture that looked sort of like a quill in an ink pot. Plus, there were the monitors on the side that showed the poor people in the cages below.

The Teller stood off to the side, huffing and softly growling, shifting about once in a while, but it didn’t do anything. It hadn’t in the vault, merely stared the Doctor down until its guards could escort them up and to the office where the prim and proper Ms. Delphox now sat behind her desk with a nice smile. The same one she gave the man in the lobby right before she had the Teller destroy his mind.

On Delphox’s desk, perfectly placed and spaced apart, was the circuit and the bottle of gene suppressant.

“Intruders are most welcome.” Delphox said sweetly, breaking the silence that had been lingering. But then, hand cuffs weren’t really a sign of welcomed conversation. “They remind us that the bank is impregnable. It’s good for morale,” She explained as she stood up, moving to the monitors, “to have a few of you scattered about the place. Preferably on view. Are you ready for your close-
“up?” She asked, gesturing to the screens as she looked at them. “If you’re thinking of ways to escape, the Teller will know before you’ve made a move. You’ll never be bothered by all that thinking again.” She said, moving to stand by the Teller, looking at them with a sort of smugness that made Rose want to scowl.

“It’s an interesting species, the Teller.” The Doctor said after a beat.

“Last of its kind,” Delphox replied. “And we’ve signed an exclusive deal.”

“A deal? With whom? Not him, he wouldn’t be here of his own free will even if he did understand what you may have meant by offering him a ‘deal.’ He wouldn’t want to be here, listening to all the chatter, all the voices and secrets swirling around people’s minds. It would be painful, probably drive it mad. Do I dare ask how you force it to obey?”

Rose looked to the Teller again, really looked at it, and she could see what the Doctor saw. Its eyes were sad, it looked tired, beaten down.

“Everything has a price tag, I think you’ll find.” Delphox countered with a tilt of her chin.

Thunder crashed outside the bank, the lights flickered violently, and Delphox looked to the ceiling with genuine worry.

“The Solar Storm’s getting worse,” she said. “The customers are leave. Director Karabraxos will be concerned. Our jobs will be on the line.” She said to the guards behind Rose and the Doctor, an arch of her brow suggesting something possibly worse.

The Doctor narrowed his eyes. “You’re scared.”

“Oh, I’m terrified.” Delphox replied with a mirthless chuckle. “I have the disadvantage of knowing Karabraxos personally.”

“What, they like family or something?” Rose asked.

“Or something,” Delphox said with a bit of cheek. “Now, if you’ll excuse me, I must take the Teller to its hibernation. You two,” she addressed the guards, “dispose of our guests.”

As Delphox led the Teller out of her office, the two guards came around to stand before Rose and the Doctor.

“Gentleman,” The Doctor said once the door slide shut. “I’m sure there’s another why we can handle this.”

“I’m sure there is.” The bald guard said to the Doctor as he reached for the Doctor’s cuffs.

“What, really?” He asked, his voice pitching higher with disbelief as the masked one set Rose free. “Huh, that’s never been the case before. I’ve never been able to reason with Saibra?” He said as the guard suddenly shifted form, revealing their smiling companion. He pulled Saibra in for a hug, kissing the corner of her mouth.

“It looked like death,” Psi’s voice quickly eased the jealousy beginning to form in Rose, drawing her attention to the masked guard as he removed his helmet, revealing their friend’s smiling face. “It was actually a teleporter!”

“Bloody brilliant, that!” Rose said as she threw her arms around his neck and gave him a hug. Psi returned it, and once they parted, she and the Doctor switched places. As she and Saibra embraced,
she watched the Doctor do the same with Psi as he did with Saibra, right down to the kiss near the corner of his mouth.

“I’ll second what Rose said,” The Doctor smiled as everyone parted. “Bloody brilliant! Where did you two end up, then? Not somewhere else on the planet?”

“No, there’s a ship in orbit.” Psi said, pointing a thumb skyward. “Teleporters took us right there. Oh, and there’s this big, blue box. Is that yours?”

“Yes, my TARDIS. Excellent, good to know where it is. And, actually, we have something for you two.” He stepped between them and went for the desk, first plucking up the gene suppressant. He turned to Saibra. “I have no doubt you know what this is.”

She nodded, eyes misting as she took the box containing the bottle in her hands with reverence.

The Doctor then plucked the box with the circuit up, and turned to Psi. “Rose told me what you did. It was brave, very brave, but I think everyone deserves to remember that they’re loved, and by who.” He said, giving the circuit to Psi. He smiled, opening up the guard suit before taking the circuit out of the box and placing it inside his jacket.

“Where did you get these?” Saibra asked as she placed the gene suppressant in a pocket.

“The Architect left them for us to find in the Vault. I suppose it’s your payment. Why you risked everything to do this heist.”

“How were you paid?” Psi asked.

“I’m really not sure, especially if the TARDIS is on the ship in orbit. Whatever was meant for us was in the private vault.”

“Well,” Saibra said, taking out another little thing that had the human cells on from earlier in their job. She touched it, and returned to the form of the bald guard. “Good thing you have a guard’s escort now.”

“All the way to the lower levels.” Psi said as he gestured with his helmet.

“You don’t have to risk it,” Rose assured, already knowing the Doctor would say the same. “You got what you came for, yeah? Your part’s done.”

“No, I need to see this through to the end.” Psi said. “I need to know what made you two want to do this.”

“And you’ll need someone to help you get around,” Saibra added as thunder and what Rose supposed was lightning erupted outside.

“Well, can’t argue that.” The Doctor said. “Come on, now, quickly. If there’s a solar storm out there this bad, we’re not going to want to stick around for much longer.”

~DW~

They’d made their way back down the same way they had before, which was odd but Rose wasn’t about to argue. Especially as Saibra’s method of disguise got them past the hibernation room of the
Teller, and right to where the vault was.

“It’s still open?” Rose said as they rounded the corner, immediately greeted by the circular entrance and the rows upon rows of deposit boxes.

“The Solar Storm is effecting the security system. Closing it now wouldn’t do much good.” The Doctor explained as they re-entered the gold-toned room.

They looked around, and Rose’s eyes kept jumping to the pipes she noted earlier.

It seemed like forever before they made it to the other end of the vault, and was greeted with a blank wall.

“I’m not entirely sure we’ll be able to access the private vaults from here.” Psi said, heading right up to the blank wall while fishing a cord out of his jacket. Rose knew that they’d be looking at the schematic again, and seeing as how they were likely running out of time, she thought she’d wander away just a bit.

She tuned out the men as she looked up, noting the pipes didn’t come all the way to the end. She shifted, moving to the side and spotting the pipes once more, noting they veered toward the wall and disappeared. And near the ground, not quite aligned, was another grated air duct.

“Doctor?” She called, and waited at three sets of footsteps came over. She pointed it out, and felt the Doctor’s hand clamp on her shoulder.

“Good eye, Rose.” He said, punctuating his praise with a kiss on the temple.

“Pipes sorta tipped me off.” She said with a shrug.

“Good catch,” Psi smirked, bumping her with his elbow. “Those are supply lines, for oxygen, water, basic life support.”

“Someone likes to hang out with their wealth.” The Doctor said in a sort of mocking tone. He then went to the grate, the rest of them following, and soniced the screws loose, setting it aside. The Doctor went first, crawling in a little ways before popping back out. “There’s a bit of a drop, nothing serious, no more than the whole we made in the floor before.”

“Ladies first, then,” Psi said as the Doctor went back in. Rose waved Saibra ahead, then followed, Psi just behind. The Doctor had slipped down, so quietly that Rose hadn’t heard his thump. He helped she and Saibra down to their feet, but it got a bit crowded with them all standing about to be able to do the same with Psi.

The Doctor crawled forward, leading them to where the music grew louder and the light warmer.

He quietly removed the grate that would have hindered their entrance, and then silently set it aside and crept out of the duct. He stopped, just outside, offering a hand to Rose, Saibra, and Psi (who quietly scoffed with a smirk and refused), before leading them over to a desk where yet another ginger sat.

“Director Karabraxos, I presume?” he said aloud. “Excuse the interruption, but we’ve come to rob you. So, umm, put your hands up, and-”

The Doctor stopped as the ginger spun around, hands up, and….

“And?” She inquired, sounding precisely how she looked, which was exactly like Delphox. She
smiled that same, insincere, superior smile as she lowered her hands. “You didn’t bring any
weapons, that’s a bit of an oversight.” She noted before going for something on her desk that
looked like a phone with a screen. She pressed a button, and spoke. “Security, Karabraxos here.”

“Director Karabraxos, is there a problem?” Delphox asked, and Rose had to see if the others found
this whole thing as bizarre as she did. It seemed only Psi was as utterly flabbergasted as she was.
Saibra didn’t seem to know what to think, the Doctor appeared more thoughtful, like an idea was
brewing.

“Intruders in the private vault,” Karabraxos replied to her double. “Send me the Teller, I want to
find out how they got in, and then I want to wipe their memories.”

“She’s your clone, isn’t she?” The Doctor said, and Karabraxos smiled.

“It’s the only way to control my own security, I have a clone in every facility.” She replied with a
pleased sort of expression. She then turned back to the screen to address her double. “Get on it,
right away.”

“Yes, of course.” The clone replied.

“And then hand in your credentials. You’re fired, with immediate effect.”

“But please, I’ve been in your service-”

“Ever since the last one let me down and I was forced to kill it.”

“Kill it!?” Rose blurted, but was silenced by the finger raised in her direction.

She felt her blood boiling, but the Doctor wrapped his hand around hers, keeping her there, and she
clenched her jaw, biting her tongue a moment.

“I can’t quite believe you’re putting me through this again,” Karabraxos disconnected the call and
sighed, shaking her head. “My clone, and yet she doesn’t even protest. Pale imitation, really. I
should sue,” She said as though everything was a lark for her.

“So, when you fire someone, you kill’em?” Rose asked, disbelieving.

“Well I can’t have too many of moi scattered around.” Karabraxos gave a little laugh. “I put all the
used clones in the incinerator.”

“But they’re living … things!” Rose stammered, unsure if Karabraxos herself was even human.
She didn’t act it. She let go of the Doctor’s hand, but promptly crossed her arms to stop herself
from flailing them about.

“So are those who try and cheat my bank, and yet, I hear no protest over that.”

“Give me a mo’, and I’ll give ya an earful of my opinion, mate.” Rose countered, but the Doctor
stopped her.

“Whoa, hold on, wait.” He said, stepping forward while gently putting a hand on crossed arms.
“Let me understand this, you incinerate your copies after they make a mistake?”

“Umhmm,” Karabraxos replied, brows lifting as she nodded as though the Doctor was just being
incredibly slow.

“You burn your own clones?” The Doctor repeated. “Someone who looks exactly like you, that
you created, you would burn them for, what? Because they made a mistake? A miscalculation? Do you really have that much self-loathing? Honestly a therapist would have a field day with—oh!” The Doctor stopped short, turning to Rose. His eyes were wide, and it looked as if all of a sudden everything clicked into place. He then turned to Saibra. “What did you say to me earlier? About your own eyes? What was it?”

Saibra blinked rapidly, looking at everyone in turn before shrugging shyly. “Would you trust someone who looked back at you with your own eyes?”

“Oh, for Rassilon’s sake, why didn’t I see it sooner?!” The Doctor exclaimed, smacking himself in the forehead. “Oh, stupid, stupid, stupid Doctor. But of course, I would say that, because no one is harder on myself than me. No one in this universe puts as much pressure on me not to fail than myself. And no one would taunt me into doing the impossible other than the one person I would need to prove it to.” He said before darting toward Karabraxos’ desk.

As he grabbed a sheet of paper and picked up a quill, the director looked at him as if he were far more obviously alien, and then looked to the others. “What in the name of sanity is going on?” She asked, gesturing at him and them and the room with both hands.

“What is going on is I’m going to give you my number.” The Doctor replied, blowing on the ink before folding the paper and writing on the outside of it. “You may find, in time, that you’ll need the services of someone who can visit days long gone. When you have a bit of a conscious along with your wealth.”

Karabraxos picked up the paper. “A time traveler?” She said skeptically, arching a brow.

“How else would I find myself down here during the worst solar storm I’m guessing this planet has ever seen.” The Doctor said, and it was punctuated by a loud rumble of thunder, the lights flashing violently, and the room shaking enough to knock them around.

Psi caught Rose by the arm, coming closer to steady her as the Doctor and Karabraxos stared one another down.

“And getting worse, it seems.” He said. “You may find your bank about to close for good.”

Alarms began to sound, and Karabraxos was on her feet in a moment. She grabbed a carpet bag, glanced around the room, and darted after a few things, putting them in her bag.

“What is she doing?” Saibra asked.

“What is she doing?” Saibra asked.

“Taking what she can,” Rose replied.

“Yes,” The Doctor said, crossing his arms and smirking at the director. “It’s hard to know what to take when you know the whole place is going to burn. All the greatest treasures in the universe and just one bag.”

Karabraxos shot him a glare, but continued packing, ignoring the lot of them.

“So, what now?” Psi asked as another rumble caused the building to shake. “If we stay here, we’ll likely die.”

“We can use the shredders and get us back to the ship.” Saibra offered. “We still have ours, they’ll likely work again.”

“They’re not shredders, they’re teleports. And yes, they will work again, but that wasn’t even the
most interesting thing about them.” The Doctor said as he continued to watch Karabraxos.

“So, what was?” Saibra asked.

The Doctor turned to them, “There were six of them.” He said, and then was back to watching the director as she strutted toward a lift, pushing the call button. “Remember that number, Karabraxos. I look forward to having a very interesting conversation with you.”

She looked to him as the doors opened. “You’ll be dead.” She said with certainty.

“And you’ll be old, and full of regrets, thinking of the things you can’t change.”

She pouted slightly and stepped on, staring the Doctor down as the doors closed.

“Doctor,” Psi said, sounding like he was at the edge of his patience. “What the hell is going on?”

“I know what’s happening.” The Doctor said.

“You remember, then?” Rose asked, and he smiled uncertainly at her.

“No,” he said, and the lift motor paused before starting up again. “But I am understanding what’s happening, who set it up, but I don’t know if I understand the why. And to do that, I believe I need my memory back.”

“Right,” Rose said. “How’re you gonna do that then?”

The Doctor didn’t answer, he merely walked up to the elevator, stopping a good few feet away.

The doors opened, and Rose swore her heart stopped in her chest.

“Hello, again,” The Doctor said as the Teller stepped out, still bound but with no one to control it. It didn’t wait a moment before its eyes drew together, and that familiar buzzing filled the room.

“Doctor,” Rose said, lunging for him but stopped by Psi with one of his arms around her waist.

“No, no, don’t, don’t interfere.” The Doctor said, his voice strained. “Let it read me.”

“Won’t it melt you?” Rose asked, her voice filled with panic.

“No, I don’t believe it will.” The Doctor said, his voice less strained. He huffed, took a few breaths, and said to the Teller, “There, there you go. That’s it. Lots of memories in there, aren’t there? Big scarf, a celery stick, the umbrella was being a bit on the nose, but I liked it.” He was sounding more like himself, and Rose gently pushed Psi’s arm away as she edged closer, watching as the Doctor and the Teller seemed relaxed with one another.

“Notice the block over the last few days? Can you see it? Can you tell me why we’re here? Can you show me?”

Rose relaxed just a touch as the Doctor’s face took on a serene, amused expression.

~DW~
“You got a phone?” Rose frowned, pointing to the console.

She could be utterly adorable in her human way of thinking. A phone, he thought, shouldn’t be surprising, especially with what was on the outside. “Bit odd, wouldn’t you think, if I traveled through all of space and time, and the one piece of technology I didn’t acquire would be the one used to easily communicate with others.”

“Just seems, I dunno, not really… Spock.”

The Doctor chuckled. “Yes, well, when I stumble across something more high tech that works as reliably, I’ll replace my telephone just for you. But for now, not many people have this number, and given we’ve just come from London, I’d better answer it in case something’s gone wrong with the Zygons.” He lifted the receiver, “Hello, this is the Doctor.”

“Hello, Doctor.” An old, female voice replied.

“Yes, hello.” He said with a frown, not recognizing the voice at all.

“My name is Madame Karabraxos. I was once the wealthiest person in the Universe. I need your assistance. I’m dying, with many, many regrets. But one, perhaps, you may be able to help me with. You did give me this number, so long ago, for just this reason.”

“Well, do I do try to help where I can.” He said, glancing at Rose who tilted her head in curiosity, inching towards him.

“Long ago, my bank… there was a creature in it. Two. The last of their kind. I did not save them, but … you were there. You were there, with others, and I think you may have done what I did not.”

“Tell me what I need to do.”

She explained, and while the Doctor maintained a calm demeanor through the conversation, he was giggling by the end of it.

“Alright, what’s got you in a fit?” Rose asked, inching closer.

He took her by the arms, grinning. “We get to rob a bank. And not just any bank, but one of the most-impregnable banks in the known universe.”

“I’m sorry, we’re what?” She’d asked before he picked her up and spun her around, laughing all the while.

“I need to set up a robbery, a perfect robbery. Apparently in about three days’ time there will be a solar storm in the region of Karabraxos, and it will interfere with security.”

“And we rob it?” Rose asked, sounding a little unsure as he set her down.

“Of course, we do!” he said, darting around the console in an odd sort of pace. “We’ve already done it! It’s a time loop, one I -for once- don’t mind getting stuck in. It will take planning, of course. I’ll have to think this one through.”

“So, no Magrathea, then?” Rose said, tongue between her teeth as she grinned at him.

“We can still go, if you’d like.” He said, coming around to stand in front of her. He took her hand, and walked her backward out the TARDIS doors.
It had been a lovely day, walking the outdoor shops of the vacation planet. They held hands as they walked, her warm one in his cool one, his thumb running lightly over hers. There were bright smiles and conversation about the various things they’d seen. She surprisingly didn’t buy anything, despite his telling her she could. Well, except the chips because they smelled wonderful and she hadn’t had chips since before she’d taken off in the TARDIS with him.

They shared the purple, tangy flavored morsels, discussing how bizarre it was that they were planning a crime that they’d apparently already committed. His excitement at the job at hand catching.

But her human nature couldn’t postpone rest much longer, and soon Rose had to beg off, in need of sleep. She trusted him to arrange what they needed while she caught her Zs, and once Rose was in her sleep cycle, the Doctor went to work.

He stepped out of the TARDIS and into a hospital room. The gentle sounds of the machine and the soft breathing of the occupant of the bed were the only sounds. She looked at him, hair white and brown eyes tired.

“It’s you,” She said, “you really are a time traveler.”

“What gave me away?” He asked. “The time machine in your room?”

“Your face,” She replied. “It looks exactly the same.”

“Well, at least you got me at the right time, then. So, tell me, Madam Karabraxos, how do I rob one of the most impregnable banks?”

She gestured to her bedside table. “Everything you will need to get in and around are in there.” She explained. “I was the only one to ever have a copy of the schematics. I also included a letter, should you need it, to get where you would need to. But I warn you, you aren’t going to… be able to land your ship inside anywhere.”

“Noted,” He said. “What sort of security did you have?”

“The best.” She grinned fondly. “DNA was taken at every step. And then, there was… the Teller.”

Assembling the crew had been easier than the Doctor would have thought. Time loop, and all: he was seen with them; therefore, he would need to recruit them. Psi was easy to convince.

“All I want?” He’d asked the Doctor when offered the job.

“All I want most, plus a few thousand credits. I have it under good authority we’re
successful.” The Doctor grinned, and Psi shook his head as he laughed.

“Fine, mate. I’m in. Suppose I have some skills in that area, anyway.”

“Oh, is that what you went to Stormcage for, then?”

“Certainly wasn’t for hacking, though that helped.”

Saibra was more uncertain.

“What can I do to convince you to join us?” He had asked when she seemed reluctant. “I swear, anything you want, it’s yours.”

“I want to be normal,” She said definitively. “Can you do that?”

Gene suppressant for mutant humans had still been a few decades off. But what was a little anachronism between friends?

“It’s yours.” The Doctor swore.

~*~

Paying a man a fine sum of credits to plant a case and a couple of packages inside his deposit boxes, and offer a bit of his skin cells for Saibra, wasn’t as difficult as the Doctor supposed it should have been. But one poor bloke falling into hard times when his wealth was once grand is all it took. And since he didn’t feel an ounce of guilt in doing the deed, he went in undetected.

The Doctor went in after hours with the letter from Karabraxos, clothes changed, a pair of readers, and his hair combed back in case a guard happened to be there the same day as their planned robbery. Add a little psychic paper into the mix, and he was a maintenance man, someone who needed to deal with the electrical due to the upcoming solar storm. He laid cases strategically so they could be found as they went through the likeliest route, and made sure they contained what they needed. The teleporters made to look like something deadly he thought was a nice touch on his part.

Everything was in place, with just one exception.

~*~

“Do we really need to touch the worms?” Rose asked.

“Yes, I’m afraid so. Well, all of us except Psi, I suppose.” The Doctor replied,

“But what about Saibra? Won’t she…”

“I’ll be alright.” Saibra replied, though she didn’t sound all that certain. “Besides, when this is all over, I won’t have to worry about that again.”
“Too bad you won’t remember that.” Psi said with a cheeky grin, gesturing to the worms.

“Yeah,” she said as she stared at the worm in disgust. “Can’t say I like you too much for this, Doctor.”

“Can’t say I like myself much, either.” He replied. “If you only knew how often I’ve forgotten things. Worst is, it’s probably more often than I realize. Alright, let’s get started. We’re on the clock now.”

~DW~

The Doctor grinned as the memories opened up, and he could feel the Teller change from hostile to friendly. “You see why we came, don’t you?” He said as the Teller left his mind.

“Why did we come?” Rose asked. “Doctor, what’s going on?”

“We planned this, Rose. We did. We got the call from Karabraxos, as I figured must have happened. We laid it out, we erased our own memories. Because if this wonderful creature saw what we were planning, so would Karabraxos, and there wasn’t any way she would have allowed this to happen.” He said as the Teller went to a vault off to the side.

“Allow what?” Psi asked.

“What it’s always wanted to do.” The Doctor said as the vault began to unlock.

“It knows the combination!” Psi said as Rose let out a huff of a laugh.

“Yes,” the Doctor said merrily. “Because the Teller and Karabraxos were mentally linked, you see. But now that she, and everybody else, is gone, it’s free.”

“So, wasn’t a bank heist,” Rose said in wonder. “Was a rescue mission.”

The door to the vault opened, and pair of joyous roars filled the room.

“Yes, it was, Rose. A rescue, times two.”

“Exit strategy,” Saibra smiled. “And we’ve got six.”

“Indeed, we do.” The Doctor beamed before going to help the Teller. “Now, you know what I’m doing and what I’m going to do, so just stay there, we’ll get you two out of these chains and send you to the ship in orbit.” He said with a grunt as he got body restraint off the Teller. He turned to the female, kneeling down to do the same with her. “And then, we’ll get you two to a nice, quiet planet where you won’t be bothered again.”

He got to his feet again once the female was free, turning to the Teller to see it appearing pleased, Rose at his side trying to soothe the lines where the restraints left superficial marks.

The Doctor could feel the relief from their alien friend, pleased to know not all humans were bad, thrilled that they were getting out, overwhelmingly happy to be free.
“Is this what you two normally do?” Saibra asked.

They were gathered in the TARDIS console room after bringing the Teller and his mate to a secluded planet. The ceiling of the time ship was reflecting the universe outside while those aboard munched on takeaway.

Saibra was on the jumpseat, something Rose felt the guests should have, but Psi had decided to stand on her right, while the Doctor stayed on her left.

“What, grab takeaway?” Rose asked in between bites of purple chip-things in her takeaway box. They weren’t loaded with vinegar and salt, but something tangy with a little heat that was quite lovely. There was something wonderfully familiar about them, too, but she couldn’t place why.

“Grab takeaway after saving a whole species. Like, is this your everyday?” Saibra asked, and Rose loved seeing her hands free of the gloves she’d worn before, a sign that the gene suppressant was starting to work its magic.

“Well, not every day.” The Doctor said with a teasing grin. “Some days we get back and I make tea.”

“Full of yourself, ain’t you?” Rose teased, tongue between her teeth as she grinned at him. He winked at her, and she had to turn away from him before she blushed too fiercely.

“Still sorta wish I remembered before.” Saibra said, looking around the TARDIS. “Might have been less of a shock to see this for the first time.”

“Yes, well, our friend was a bit over-exerted,” The Doctor replied, flipping a switch and turning a knob. “He could unlock what was erased from me because of my biology. I’m a Time Lord, I have to forget things frequently. You and Rose, you two may have found the experience unpleasant.”

“Yes, fair enough.” Saibra sighed as the TARDIS engines began to grind. The ceiling returned to normal just as hints of the vortex appeared above, and moments later, they landed.

“Much as I hate to break up the party,” The Doctor commented. “This is your stop, Saibra. Unless you want to stay? Join us, travel about? Save some other species and grab takeaway?”

A pang of jealousy dashed through Rose’s chest for just a moment, making her head dip, her gaze going to the chips in the box. A part of her wanted the Doctor to herself, to believe that she was special because he’d asked her to come with him. But she wasn’t the first, she knew, and that changed the jealous to a slight disappointment in herself.

“No, thank you.” Saibra said, and Rose looked up. “Not sure it’s my speed. Plus, thanks to you, I might actually get to have a normal relationship with someone.” She added, waving her hands about.

“Well, then.” The Doctor said, moving toward Saibra as she stood up. They embraced, and Saibra laughed.

“See, I don’t have your face now!” She exclaimed, shifting back and cupping the Doctor’s face. He laughed. “Happy to help. Best of luck, Saibra.”
“You too, Doctor, Rose. Psi, stay out of trouble.” She said she hugged each of them in turn.

“Good luck,” Rose said to her, waving as Saibra looked over her shoulder. In perfect, contradictory fashion, Rose was sad to see her go.

“You’re next, Psi.” The Doctor said, glancing between he and Rose before looking down at the console with more focus than properly needed. “Unless you want to stay?”

Psi hesitated, then looked to Rose.

“You could stay,” She said, then gestured to his jacket with her head. “But once you get your memories back, you might realize you wanna see them all again, yeah? All those loved ones.”

Psi reached in his jacket and removed the circuit as the TARDIS started once more. He looked at it hard. “What if you came with me?” He asked.

The TARDIS lurched a little, causing them to grab on to the console for support.

Rose frowned at the ceiling a moment before looking back at Psi. He was so very much the sort she’d have said yes to in a heartbeat.

“No,” She shook her head. “Seem nice and all, but I don’t run off with blokes I don’t really know.” She replied, and the Doctor made a sort of odd noise that changed into a cough behind her. She did her best to suppress a smile.

“Smart.” Psi said, looking at the circuit again before putting back in his jacket. The TARDIS landed with a decidedly loud thud, and he looked around the console room as if assessing it. “I suppose this is where we part ways, then?”

“Yeah.” Rose agreed, and when Psi went to hug her, she let him.

“Doctor,” Psi said as they stepped apart. He went to the Time Lord, offering his hand. “Take care of her?”

“I’ll do my best.” The Doctor replied, shaking Psi’s hand.

“And if you need to rob anymore banks?”

“I’ll look you up.” He nodded.

Psi looked back at Rose, then headed for the doors, and as soon as he was through, Rose could have sworn she heard the locks click into place.

“So,” The Doctor said, taking small, slow steps to join her. “Just us, then.”

“Yes.” Rose said, watching him. “Doctor? You really not like yourself that much?”

He sighed, coming to a stop so close to her that his jacket sleeve brushed her arm. “Funny thing about me is, I always like my current self more than the ones I’ve left behind, or the future versions I’ve come across. But I always find fault with myself, regardless of the body. The things I could have done better, the people I could have saved and didn’t, the choices I made that, in hindsight, could have had another way. I count each failure, and push myself to do better. To be better. And I have been in this body for a long time, and have made some of the biggest blunders in it. So, no, I suppose, I don’t really like myself over much. Not all the time, anyway. And I knew just how to push my buttons and get me to do this. It’s how I figured out it was likely me that set it up even
before I let the Teller into my mind.”

“Right,” Rose said, brushing an escaped lock of hair behind her ear. “So, I get why you got Saibra and Psi, but… why was I there? Coulda just been on the TARDIS, yeah?”

He smiled bashfully. “You know, as crazy as it may sound, I think I wanted to impress you.” He replied. “I did most of the set up while you were sleeping, including finding Psi and Saibra. I think I wanted to show off a bit.”

“Because you think you’re so impressive.” She teased.

“I think I’ve proved that I am, indeed, impressive.” He retorted, laughing as she bumped him with her elbow. “You must be exhausted.”

Rose considered. “Bit knackered, but don’t think I can sleep.”

He hummed in agreement. “I could put us in the vortex, we could venture to the library. Read?”

“You could read to me,” Rose said without thinking, but cleared her throat and managed not to blush.

The Doctor nodded. “Gladly.” He then twisted around, flipping a switch, and the TARDIS groaned and ground once more. He held out his hand, and she took it, allowing him to lead her to the library where she planned to curl against him and bask in his lovely voice.

She might have to share him again, soon. And Rose was going to take all the time alone with him she could.

Chapter End Notes

Working on the next couple bits! Hopefully won't be too long.
How similar, and yet, so different...

Chapter Notes

Mild Spoilers at the beginning for Charles Dickens' "Our Mutual Friend."

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It couldn’t have been a more perfect evening, if evening was what this was. Rose laid on the sofa in the TARDIS library, her head pillowed on the Doctor’s thigh as he read to her. His fingers stroked her hair in a thoughtless sort of way, merely occupying themselves as he held the book in his other hand.

There was the comforting aroma of tea, tinged with the lemon slices that were always on the tray for the Doctor should he be in the mood for it. A comforting wood fire that didn’t burn too hot added to the atmosphere.

“And yet,’ said Eugene,” read the Doctor, his voice taking on a melodic tone that was only ever achieved when he was reciting text. “‘I should like to see the fellow who would undertake to tell me that this was not a real sentiment on my part, won out of me by her beauty and her worth, in spite of myself, and that I would not be true to her. I should particularly like to see the fellow to-night who would tell me so, or who would tell me anything that could be construed to her disadvantage; for I am wearily out of sorts with one Wrayburn who cuts a sorry figure, and I would far rather be out of sorts with somebody else.’”

Rose hummed, then sighed. “Who would have thought Charles was such a romantic.”

The Doctor chuckled. “Romantic?” He asked, his hand stilling half in her hair. “Eugene virtualy stalks her to the paper mill. He meddles with her life, having no idea until just now that he truly does love Lizzie.”

“That’s how you see it.” Rose replied shifting about as if to get more comfortable. “But that’s the thing. He coulda tried to convince her to do what’s not right. Back in those days it was all no touching, ankles were sexy, that sorta thing, yeah?”

He shook with contained laughter, and answered, “Yes, I suppose it was.”

“Well, he said before he wasn’t gonna sleep with her and not, ya know, marry her or something. Mean, ‘s not like now a days, or my time, suppose, where you could just sorta shag about if you wanted. Just took him hearing her say she loved ‘im to get ‘im to see he loved her, too.”

“Is that how you see it?” The Doctor asked.

“Blokes can be a bit thick sometimes, even about themselves.”

“Suppose we can be,” he admitted. “Though in fairness, I think, he would be in denial anyway because of her status. Eugene may not have cared much for society, but he was raised in it.”

“No, ‘s the other way ‘round.” Rose countered, sitting up and shuffling about to face the Doctor. “Was Lizzie who was in denial.”
“Lizzie knew she loved him.”

“Yeah, well, different sort’a denial, but still about their classes, yeah? She knew she couldn’t marry ‘im, ‘cause she’s not a lady or anything. Never thought of a life with him, ran away to keep ‘im safe.”

“To keep him safe?” The Doctor challenged, marking their place and setting the book on the nearby table. “Or to keep herself safe?”

Rose gave him a light shove. “Oh, come off it. She wasn’t in any sorta danger. The creepy professor bloke wouldn’t’a hurt her. And don’t start goin’ on ‘bout her reputation. She knew what was what, and all. May not’a been a lady, but she knew wha’ being seduced would mean.”

“I suppose she did,” He conceded, his eyes darting over her face.

Rose watched him, barely remembering to breath at first when he looked at her with a reverence coloring his light grin. But then it faded, and he became thoughtful.

“What?” She asked, knowing he was curious about something to do with her.

“It’s… well, it’s not really my business. And it’s your past, and I know as well as anyone that not everyone wants to dwell on their past, but....”

When he still seemed hesitant, Rose took his hand. “Hey, you can ask, yeah? Think signing on for good means sharing.” She said with an encouraging smile.

He sighed, turning his hand beneath hers to curl his fingers around her hand and wrist. “Was that what happened with James?”

“James?”

“Jimmy, I believe you called him.”

Rose pouted her lips as she considered her answer. “Sorta,” She said. “Wasn’t like that at first, but…. Was finished secondary, thought I was all grown, thought he was really gonna go places. Didn’t hurt that mum didn’t like him, having heard stories ’bout ‘im ‘round the estates.”

“So, was it his reputation that intrigued you?” The Doctor asked while looking at their hands.

“He was,” She tilted her head as she considered her words. “Unexpected.” She righted her head, but looked at the details in the back of the couch instead of at the Doctor. “Everyone sorta thought I’d marry Mickey, settle down round the estates, get a job working nearby. Was expected since Mick’s and I were still in our nappies.” She sighed. “But Jimmy showed his colors after a bit, once I got all settled in it with him.”

“I know what he did.” The Doctor confessed, quiet, a hint of something feral in his voice that shot goosebumps down Rose’s back.

“He didn’t like the cut in pay I had to take.” She explained, knowing what he meant. “He was rough before, usually more with words, but then so was I. Kept thinking I had to prove myself, that I was grown enough to handle ‘im. Round the estate it’s not really off, hearing fightin’ through the walls and what not. But the second his fist hit my face, I was out. Had no problem just packing what I had and goin’. ‘Cept rent was in my name, yeah? So, leaving him ended up leaving me with a bit’a debt.”
“How so? In what way?”

“I didn’t pay it.” She shrugged. “Wasn’t ‘bout to, but not like he would either, yeah? Heard he’d shacked up with some semi-rich bint when the eviction notice came. But, since he was lookin’ for easy money when I ran into him, he probably wasn’t with her anymore. Probably realized faster than me what sorta man he was.”

“He’s not a man, not by any species’ standards.” The Doctor said softly. “And you cannot be hard on yourself for the choices you made.”

“’M not, not really,” She said, realizing her voice sounded a bit shaky. “Crossed my mind, now and then, after runnin’ off with you.”

“You know I’d never-“

“Yeah, I know.” She assured him with a smile. “Know you’d never. ’S why I try not to think on him, yeah?”

“For the best that you don’t. He’s not worth a thought.” The Doctor gently tucked her hair behind her ear, and Rose could have melted then. She wanted to lean in and touch her lips to his, guide him backward and….

But then she remembered he kissed both Saibra and Psi, and likely didn’t mean anything by their own shared kiss.

So, she smiled, and nodded once. “Not a bit.” She agreed.

“Very much like our Mr Headstone, then?” The Doctor smirked, gesturing to the book.

“I dunno, he might be worse.” She countered, tongue between her teeth as she grinned, and the Doctor chuckled.

“Shall we continue, then?” He asked.

Rose bounced as she twisted back around and laid her head back on his lap. He laughed, wonderfully and carefree, reaching to grab the book while she settled, folding her hands on his stomach. She closed her eyes, readying to be carried away, and startled slightly at his cool touch on her hands where he rested his free one.

“Strolling on,” The Doctor continued, “he thought of something else to take himself to task for. ‘Where is the analogy, Brute Beast,’ he said impatiently, ‘between a woman whom your father coolly finds out for you and a woman whom you have found out for yourself, and have ever drifted after with more and more of constancy since you first set eyes upon her?’”

As the Doctor read, Rose fell into a peaceful trance, where all that existed was the feel of his fingers dancing over hers, his voice the only sound, the only scents being the implacable smell of his clothes, of the library, and tea. And it was from that trance that Rose slowly drifted into a deep sleep.

~DW~
There was a nudge in his mind stirring him awake. Wait, awake?

The Doctor noted the weight of a book on his chest, and that of a head on his leg. His hands were occupied, one holding the book, the other covering Rose’s hand. Slowly, as he opened one eye, he checked with his Time Sense to figure out how long he’d been asleep.

“Six hours.” He said softly to himself. He remembered Rose drifting off shortly after their discussion and how he continued to read aloud, though knew where he was when she drifted off so he could return to it later. Naturally, he hadn’t remembered drifting off himself, only that even a couple hours after Rose was out, he still had no desire to move. He just wanted to be with her.

But now there was a nudge in his mind, like someone gently but incessantly tapping him on the shoulder. He glanced blurry eyed at the TARDIS ceiling, but he couldn’t feel her beyond the periphery. And, if he were honest with himself, she wouldn’t be so kind in getting his attention.

So, what was trying to get his attention?

Out of curiosity, he reached into his inner pocket and pulled out his psychic paper billfold. He opened it, and was mildly taken aback by words appearing on it.

_The Face of Boe cordially invites The Doctor and Rose Tyler to the sponsors viewing of Planet Earth’s final moments. Viewing will take place in the Manchester Suite of Platform One. Kindly bring a gift of Good Faith for each of the other nine groups._

The Doctor didn’t know the Face of Boe, wasn’t sure he’d ever met anyone from Boe. And the destruction of her home planet seemed like the last thing the Doctor would ever want to bring Rose to. But there was something about the invitation that called to him, that made him feel as though he had to be there. He huffed, refolding the billfold and tapping it against his chin.

He could just ignore it, he could. He could take Rose somewhere else entirely, like Barcelona. He could take her during a fantastic festival where the main shops shut down and there are only street merchants. He imagined her sampling the local cuisine with that lovely and insatiable curiosity. He could practically hear her giggles and coos over the telepathic puppies with no noses that would undoubtedly have her heart in a single beat. He could practically feel her in his arms as the dance to the live music of a family band under a star-filled sky.

Sighing, he knew it was no good, because he was going to take her to Platform one. He was going to bring her to the end of her world because receiving an invitation from someone he didn’t know was too odd to pass over, especially when it was over psychic paper.

Rose stirred, and he pocketed the billfold for the time being, closing the book and setting it aside.

She rubbed her face, glancing around the room in confusion before peeking up at him and blushing. “’Lo.” She managed to get out.

The Doctor smiled. “Good morning, Rose.”

“Didn’t keep you here, did I?” She asked as she slowly pushed herself up.
“Not really,” he said. “It seems I fell asleep myself.” They rose from couch, stretching their stiffened muscles. After rolling his shoulders, the Doctor said, “Get cleaned up, if you’d like. I’ll make breakfast. Then after, you should head to the wardrobe and dress for a party.”

“A party?” Rose asked, arching her brow. “At this hour?”

“Time machine, Rose. It’s you humans who coined the phrase ‘it’s five o’clock somewhere.’ And an invitation.”

“Hmm, what sort of party, then?”

No time like the present to be honest. “The last moments of planet Earth. Not the most joyous celebration, I’ll admit. But I have a feeling we need to be there.”

“Barely had a break, we have. Hopping from one thing to another.” Rose commented.

“Well, we had a bit of a break, you just don’t remember it.” The Doctor countered, pleased with himself when he earned an eye roll that did nothing to hide Rose’s amusement. “Come on, then, breakfast first!”

~DW~

The wardrobe was the most unbelievable place on the TARDIS. There was just so many pieces to choose from, so many eras, it was a bit of a dream for the little girl in her that still liked to play dress-up.

Rose walked in and looked around, trying to take a guess what she should chose. A trip to the 1800s was easy enough, she’d seen enough period pieces that she could figure it out. But a trip to the future, very far into the future, was something else entirely.

Images of silver suits with weird sort of rims around it like in The Jetson’s filled her mind, but she doubted very much that that was what was actually in vogue at the end of the world.

There was a hum, rhythmic and gay, and Rose peered up at the ceiling.

“You laughing at me?” She asked, and there was that a singular dimming of the lights within the wardrobe room.

Ah, yes, once for yes, twice for no.

“’S not like I would know, would I?” Rose countered. “Think you can help me out?”

The lights in the room dimmed, and stayed dim, with the exception of a few spots where the TARDIS was likely indicating appropriate attire.

Rose made her way up through the levels, investigating bits and pieces the TARDIS was suggesting as she went. There was a lovely, pale gold dress that would be far too short without anything beneath it. But the sleeves were long, and the neckline decent, so Rose grabbed it and carried on. She grabbed a pair of black tights from the next section, ones that were quite opaque and there for would likely be suitable should there be running involved. Which is why she grabbed a pair of flat, deep green leather boots from the shoes.
She dressed, the TARDIS being kind enough to have her makeup at the vanity table waiting for her. After doing the basics, Rose pulled her hair back high on her head, leaving her bangs sweeping down.

“There, that should do it.” She said with a nod, approving how she looked.

Rose then proceeded to leave the wardrobe, finding herself much closer to the console room than when she entered.

“Convenient, that.” She said, looking behind her as she walked in, noting the TARDIS hummed a happy little sound.

“You’re stroking her ego,” The Doctor said without looking up. “It’s no wonder she likes you so much.”

Rose’s mouth twisted about as she tried not to smile, warmth growing in her chest at the thought that a time ship, who has been the home of many others, liked her. In a notable sort of way that the Doctor felt the need to mention it. She reached out and stroked the wall, and in an effort to try and “speak” the TARDIS’s language, she thought of how much she really liked being aboard, and how much she appreciated the help in the wardrobe.

For a moment, the TARDIS brightened.

“What exactly are you doing?” The Doctor mused.

“Just having a bit’o girl talk.” Rose replied, and she had an inkling that the TARDIS liked that idea. The frown the Doctor threw the ceiling didn’t hurt, either.

Rose smirked, then looked to the Time Rotor, noting a touch more warmth to the color than there normally was. Like there was a light, golden shimmer in the blue.

“Well, shall we be off?” The Doctor asked, and Rose turned to see he was looking her over.

“This alright?” She asked, gesturing to her outfit.

“You’re perfect.” He replied in a heartbeat. “By far, you’ll be the loveliest human there. If not the only one.”

“What, really?” She asked as she headed toward him.

The Doctor flipped the switch, and the TARDIS began to groan and grind in her normal fashion.

“It’s the year 5.5/apple/26 where we’re going. At that point, most of the humans have left the Earth, have gone off to bigger things. Actually, by that point, you lot have been out in the Universe, there’s likely really no human as you know them left.”

“In what way?” Rose asked, holding on the edge of the console, standing next to him.

“In that you’re human, just human, with very little if any alien blood in your lineages. But at this point, it’s, oh, five billion years from your time period. At this point, you humans have mingled, you’ve met other species that are also humanoid. You’re compatible, you’ve bonded, and as typically happens, you’ve reproduced. So now there are humans who are so very human, except they may have purple eyes. Or green hair. Maybe their skins a slight shade of orange, and not from those ridiculous machines people in your era use to fake a tan. They are still human, they just aren’t the human you’re used to.”
“Ah,” Rose said as the TARDIS landed.

He strode over to her, offering his arm. She took it, and the Doctor led her out of the TARDIS. They appeared to be in some sort of docking station, from what Rose could guess. He looked around, then steered her toward a lift.

“What we going?” Rose asked as they entered together.

“We’re heading to the observation deck.” He said as he withdrew his sonic and flashed it at the lift panel. It started to descend. “We were in what is essentially a parking garage. We’re going down to where the rich and well-to-do will be watching.”

“Ah,” Rose said, nodding slightly. “So, end of the world? This the sorta thing people attend in the future, then?”

“Only if you have money, or connections.” The Doctor replied as the lift dinged. He led them down a corridor, glancing about. “Or, in our case, get mysteriously invited to attend. It really makes you won- Oh! Oh, look at that.” The Doctor said with wonder, having stopped after being distracted by something to his left.

Rose stepped around him as much as she could without letting go, following his gaze, and gasping a bit at the view.

There, through a large picture window, was the Earth. It was exactly how all those pictures from space portrayed it, mostly blue, with spots of white and green, hints of brown, and absolutely stunning.

The Doctor led her closer, entering a big room and bringing her to the window where she could see little satellites surrounding it, but not as many as she would have thought there would be this far into the future.

There was a flare from the sun, and a wash of warm, orange light that had Rose squinting against it, turning her head a bit toward the Doctor’s shoulder.

“The sun expanding,” The Doctor said softly. “It never crosses your mind that you might survive, live long enough to see the end. But the human race did.”

The brightness dimmed, and Rose turned to peer at the Earth once more.

“So, there’s no one down there?”

“No,” The Doctor said, leading her a bit closer. “No one left, you’ve all gone off to find new places. Not long from now, they’ll found ‘New Earth’, but mostly the inhabitants of the world, as well as the animal life, they’ve been relocated to various places, ships.”

“Like a Noah’s Arc or something?” Rose quipped.

“Except they took far more than two of everything. Better chances of the species carrying on, and all.” The Doctor replied, and Rose smirked.

She studied the Earth below, finding where Europe was, figuring out where England was. “Why does it look like it always has?” She asked, turning to the Doctor as he turned to her. “I thought the continents shifted and things.”

He smirked. “This is what they consider a classic Earth. It’s more aesthetically pleasing than when
the continents are all squished together.” He gestured with his hands, never allowing Rose’s arm to slip off his.

“Right,” Rose chuckled, smiling with her tongue between her teeth as he looked so pleased. “So how do they shift’em back, then?”

“Earth was passed down and around, and now at this point, it’s in the hands of the National Trust. It was the last remaining organization of its kind, likely because the Earth came to be their property. But now, as you can guess, they’re running tight on money. And since they are the ones holding back the sun, among other things, it’s time to let it go. Go the way of nature.”

“How are they keeping back the sun?”

“The satellites,” The Doctor said, turning back to the window and pointing them out with his free hand.

“Oh,” Rose said softly, looking at them with a better understanding. “How much longer until they give out?”

The Doctor dropped her arm, then shifted his jacket. He reached into the pocket of his waist coat, and withdrew his pocket watch. He flicked it open. “About thirty minutes, give or take.”

“That’s all?”

“Well, can’t put off the main event too long, can they? All the drink and hors-d’oeuvres in the universe wouldn’t be able to keep the rabble entertained for long, and when rich people get bored trouble begins to stir.”

Rose leaned in and nearly whispered. “You thought there’d be trouble, though.”

The Doctor leaned toward her, hushing his voice as well. “I did, but I doubt it will be because the Earth doesn’t meet its end fast enough.”

“Excuse me!” A male voice demanded, causing Rose to startle back while the Doctor smoothly turned with an unaffected air.

A man with bright, blue skin and cat eyes came storming toward them, jaw clenched until he was standing before them. “Who the hell are you?” He demanded, looking between the two of them.

“Now that wasn’t very nice, especially in front of the lady. My name’s the Doctor, and this is Rose Tyler, we were invited here by your sponsor.” The Doctor said as he withdrew the wallet with the psychic paper. He opened it, handing it to the blue man.

The man looked at it, suddenly seeming flustered. “Oh, well, apologies, et cetera.” He said, handing back the paper, and then straightening. “If you’re on board, we’d better start. Enjoy.” He said, tilting his head slightly before turning on foot and storming away.

Rose watched him go, waiting until he was out of sight before quietly saying. “He was very blue.”

“He was,” the Doctor agreed. “But he’d look at you and think you’re quite pink and yellow.” He grinned, looking her over. “And gold. Although,” he stepped back, looking her over again. “We sort of match. Your boots are the same color as my jacket.”

“Huh,” Rose said, looking down at herself, realizing the TARDIS was far cheekier than she’d realized.
“We have in attendance,” The man’s voice came over the speaker, and Rose spotted him at a podium a little way away. “The Doctor and Rose Tyler. Thank you. All Staff to their positions.” He clapped, and a small army of smaller, blue aliens entered the room wearing what Rose thought looked like military gear. “Hurry now, thank you, as quick as you can.” The man instructed, and the Doctor took Rose’s arm gently in his grasp and pulled her out of the way.

The glass doors closed where they had come from earlier, and the blue man cleared his throat, stood straighter, then began.

Chapter End Notes

If you haven't, you should watch the BBC mini series which is a very faithful adaptation of the book. And, it has Paul McGann, so....
“And now, might I introduce the next honored guest, representing the forest of Cheen, we have trees. Namely, Jabe, Lute, and Coffa.”

Rose blinked as the glass doors opened, revealing nothing at all like she was expecting. Admittedly, she knew she shouldn’t have expected something out of the *Lord of the Rings*. Actual trees walking about might seem weird. She wasn’t, however expecting a human-looking woman and two men with skin that seemed similar to tree bark. And the top of their heads were sorta tree-like, but Rose would never had classified them as trees out and out.

The tree blokes were each carrying a tray, and Rose watched as the trio approached them.

“The Gift of Peace,” the woman said, reaching behind her for one of the small pots on the tray to her right. “I bring you a cutting of my Grandfather.” She handed the tiny pot to the Doctor.

“Oh, thank you.” The Doctor said, looking at it with the same perplexity Rose had. He then handed it to her, and Rose took it and tried to keep it away from her as much as she could without seeming rude. The Doctor then reached into his jacket and removed a small pouch from within. “I give to you a gem stone from Earth’s past.” He said reaching into the pouch and handing the woman a fairly decent sized diamond.

“How wonderful, and so rare.” The woman said, turning it over.

“Is it?” The Doctor asked, looking to Rose.

“My mum would fight any one for a diamond that size.” Rose said with a smirk.

“Well, knowing her, she’d likely win. Sorry, where are my manners. I’m the Doctor, this is Rose.”

“I am Jabe, this is Lute, and Coffa.” Jabe introduced, indicating the block on the left, and then the right.

“A pleasure,” The Doctor smiled at each of them.

“Indeed,” Jabe replied, looking the Doctor over before she moved on to one of the other aliens who’d been introduced.

When she was out of ear shot, and before one of the other arrivals came in, Rose whispered.

“Compatible?”

“To humans? Of course.” He asked, furrowing his brow as he turned to her.
“I meant for Time Lords.” Rose countered, teasing him a little but genuinely curious. And, maybe, a bit jealous. “She was sorta checking you out.”

“She was what?” The Doctor asked, but they were interrupted by a small, blue alien, who looked very much like Rose would expect an alien to look, came up to them in a sort of mobile chair.

“My felicitations on this historical happenstance.” The alien said in a high voice. “I give you the gift of bodily saliva.”

The little alien spit, and Rose cringed as she realized he was aiming for her. Before she could blink or cringe back, the Doctor’s hand was in front of her face, shielding her from the impact.

“Thank you,” The Doctor said. “Please accept this diamond from Earth’s past.” He said, using the hand that caught the alien’s spit to retrieve the stone and hand it to him.

The little alien wandered off, and then they were approached by hooded figures all in black.

“A gift of peace in all good faith.” One of them said in an ominously deep voice, holding out a silver egg.

Rose took the egg for the Doctor as he wiped his hand discreetly on his jacket before getting another diamond.

There were other aliens, all who really looked like aliens, and all of them approached the Doctor and Rose with small tokens that were easily pocketed.

The Face of Boe, which Rose couldn’t have missed being announced even if she wanted to, was wheeled toward them. A giant head with things that looked like tentacles at the back, sitting inside a giant tank with fog about it.

“I accept no gift from you, Doctor, Rose, for your being here is gift enough.” The voice was inside her head, and Rose shifted closer to the Doctor who was just as taken aback as she was.

“I appreciate the sentiment, I only wish I could say the same. I don’t believe we’ve met before now.”

“No, perhaps not yet, but you will.” And with that, the Face of Boe was wheeled off.

“He was in my head.” Rose said as quietly as she could, but it came out in a panicked hiss.

“Yes, he’s telepathic. But look, he’s not appearing to do that with the others.” The Doctor said, pointing out how those who attended the giant head in the jar were now speaking to the guests. “He invited us here, but he can’t possibly know what’s about to happen since he’s part of events.”

“Maybe a future him? Like you did with the whole heist bit?” Rose offered.

“Maybe, but this Bow knows us, and he seems to know us in a way that he feels safe enough to speak with us in the only way he can. You wouldn’t have noticed, not being telepathic yourself, but there was a warmth there, a deep affection. He knows us, somehow.”

“And,” called the blue man who was hosting, pulling their attention back to him. “Last, but not least, our very special guest. Ladies and Gentlemen, and Trees, and multiforms, consider the Earth below. In memory of this dying world, we call forth, The Last Human. The Lady Cassandra O’Brien Dot Delta Seventeen.”
Rose’s eyes widen in a terribly rude manner that really couldn’t be helped. Two men in white suits (ones that reminded Rose of the haz-mat things she’d seen on the Telly) wheeled in what appeared to be nothing more than stretched canvas. Except it had eyes and a mouth. It was wearing lipstick.

And somehow it was speaking.

“Oh, now don’t stare!” It said in a lovely posh voice that was making Rose’s head spin. “I know, I know it’s shocking, isn’t it? I’ve had my chin completely taken away and look at the difference. Look how thin I am. Thin and dainty! I don’t look a day over two thousand. Moisturize me!” She said, and one of the blokes in the suite sprayed her.

Rose blinked, and peeked up at the Doctor, but even he had a slightly horrified expression.

Cassandra continued, “Truly, I am The Last Human. My father was a Texan, my mother was from the Arctic Desert. They were born on Earth, and were the last to be buried in the soil. I have come to honor them, and,” she sniffed, “Say goodbye.”

“Doctor, tell me this ain’t how we all go.” Rose said as one of the blokes dabbed Cassandra’s eyes.

“No, humans do not become nothing more than a skin flap pulled taut. She’s something… unique.”

The more Rose looked, the more she realized how accurate the Doctor’s description was. There was literally nothing to Cassandra, her being so thin that Rose could see every vein, not that there were many. She examined the metal structure Cassandra was attached to, seeing that it was likely however she was getting blood, if there was blood. Likely, somehow, it likely traveled through the metal frame, though Rose didn’t see any sort of place for a pump to get it to flow. All there was at the bottom was a jar, and it looked like it had a brain in it.

Her brain.

She kept her brain in a jar.

Rose’s stomach churned a bit.

Cassandra stopped speaking, not that Rose had the stomach to listen, and one of the smaller blue aliens came in carrying a large egg, placing it on a pedestal to display it.

“Legend says it had a wingspan of fifty feet and blew fire from its nostrils.” Cassandra said, likely something to do with the egg, and Rose peeked up at the Doctor. He looked physically pained, and Rose got the sense that whatever Cassandra was saying was wrong. “Or was that my third husband?” The skin flap laughed, and Rose rolled her eyes as she heard the Doctor groan. “Who knows! Oh, don’t laugh, I’ll get laughter lines.”

As she spoke, the doors opened again, and two more shorter blue aliens wheeled in a jukebox.

“And here,” Cassandra said, “Another rarity. According to the archives, this was called an iPod.”

Rose had to turn her head to keep her twisted up grin hidden, but the Doctor let a laugh quietly slip out. It was probably only heard by her, which made it feel far more private than it was, but he laughed nonetheless.

“It stores classical music from humanity’s greatest composers.” Cassandra explained as Rose felt the Doctor’s hand on her back. “Play on!”
A beat later, the opening to “Tainted Love,” filled the room. And Rose, who had seen more than she was accustomed to, and heard so much utter nonsense in a short time, broke out into hysterical laughter. She knew she was earning looks from some, and Cassandra was definitely giving her as much side eye as a piece of leather could give, but she didn’t care.

She’d seen aliens, she had been to alien planets, she’d seen the sorts of changes humans would go through along the way, but this was something beyond. This was her most alien experience to date. The Earth was about to end, and she was at a party to watch the Earth die, with a skin tag claiming to be human and spouting inaccurate facts about a world she barely knew.

“Rose?” The Doctor moved his hand up and down her spine in a calming fashion. “Are you alright?”

She couldn’t answer. Every time she thought she could get herself under control, she’d note the music, the jukebox, Cassandra, Boe, anything that just seemed off, and she’d go into minor hysteries again.

“She’s alright,” The Doctor said to someone she didn’t notice. “Just, something about the song, it triggered a memory. She just needs some space.” He then moved his hand off her back and gently took her chin in hand, turning her so he could meet her gaze. “Down the hall there’s a private viewing area, go there, catch your breath, I’ll be there shortly.” He said, and Rose nodded, turning and leaving the room.

She giggled most of the way down the hall until she got to a little room that she figured must be the private area the Doctor told her about. Though, really, it wasn’t as private as she would have thought it would be. Still, there was a window where she could see the Earth below, even if it wasn’t big, and no one else was there.

With a sigh, she felt herself settle a bit more. A jukebox was called an iPod, and one of her mum’s favorite pop songs was considered a classic. What were the classics of her own time considered, then? And what animal did Cassandra think once breathed fire?

There was a noise behind her, and Rose turned, expecting to see the Doctor, and startled when she’d seen a blue woman, much like the rude bloke they first encountered, wearing overalls and hat. The woman stopped, looking surprised and a bit scared.

“Sorry, am I allowed to be in here?” Rose asked.

The woman didn’t reply at first, merely shifting about. Then she said a little shyly, “You have to give us permission to talk.”

“What, seriously?” Rose blurted, blushing when she realized she likely committed some sort of futuristic faux-pas. “Uh, you have permission?”

The woman smiled brightly, “Thank you! And no, you’re not in the way. Guests are allowed anywhere.”

“Kay,” Rose replied, half watching as the woman moved to the wall, and partly disappeared from view behind a slight partition. “What’s your name?” Rose asked as she edged toward the woman.

“Raffalo.” She replied kindly.

“M Rose.” She offered, and could see Raffalo was genuinely touched by the introduction. “So, what is it you do ’round here?”
“I work maintenance. Plumbing, mostly. There’s a tiny glitch in the Face of Boe’s suite, he’s not getting any hot water. There must be something blocking the system.” Raffalo replied as she knelt down to a silver sort of grate thing.

“Good to know plumbers are still plumbers.” Rose said to herself, glancing out the window a moment. “Don’t suppose this is the private viewing area?” She said louder this time.

Raffalo chuckled. “No miss, that’s another two doors down.”

“Right, well, don’t let me keep you, then. Good luck with it,” She said to Raffalo, gesturing to the grate where she’d likely be working.

“Thank you, miss. And… thank you for the permission. Not many people are that considerate.”

Rose smiled with a huff and a shake of her head. Not that different at all, really. “’S nothing. See you later.” She said, giving Raffalo a small wave before leaving the area and heading another two doors down.

She realized fairly quickly how thick she must have seemed to Raffalo as she entered the room. There was a near floor-to-ceiling window, and the floor was divided into an upper and lower space, the former being high enough that one could sit on the edge and dangle their feet.

Rose moved to sit, only realizing as she made her way down that she was still holding the egg and the clipping. Setting the egg down behind her, she looked at the plant in the pot. A clipping of Jabe’s grandfather, which was a bit morbid, really. Was he still alive, and had cut a piece of himself off? Was this something like a toenail bit, or leftovers from a haircut? The Doctor was handing out Diamonds, but maybe all they needed to do was trim a few split ends and hand them around.

Still, weren’t clippings supposed to become actual plants? Wasn’t this like a baby or something? Rose doubted that they would handout newborns like that, especially without knowing if someone had a green or black thumb. She lifted the pot, turning it this way and that.

“Hello, my name’s Rose. That’s a sort of plant. We might be related.” She said, then realized how ridiculous she was being. Setting down the cutting, she looked at the window, examining the warm glow around the planet.

“Rose?” The Doctor called before entering the room. Rose turned her head, watching him come in over her shoulder. His shoulders sagged as he spotted her, and they shared a small smile as he plopped down next to her. “Feeling better?”

“A bit, yeah.” She replied, nodding a little as she looked to her feet. “’S just weird, ya know? The aliens are just so alien. You look at ‘em, and they’re alien.”

“I forgot you didn’t really see the Zygons.” The Doctor said, and she hummed.

“Mean, there was the Teller. And the Gelth. The Dalek. But they were a danger, yeah? Those down the hall, they’re just there, ya know? Just watching a planet explode or whatever it does. And with that ridiculous….”

“Cassandra?” The Doctor supplied, and Rose laughed.

“Yes! She’s the most alien thing there, and she’s supposed to be human!”

“Sometimes the most alien beings we encounter are or own species. They think and act so different
than we expect, it’s hard to remember we’re the same.”

“She’s nothing, Doctor. She’s a brain in a jar, and leather with lipstick.”

“I will admit to never seeing anything quite like her in my travels.” He said, edging closer to her. She felt his arm come around her shoulders, and she caved into the urge to lay her head on his shoulder. “Perhaps I should have brought you to a few places with less human-looking aliens before now.”

“No, s’ fine.” Rose replied, shifting her head a bit. “Just was everything, all at once.” And then after a pause, “So that’s what’s considered classical?”

The Doctor laughed, and Rose lifted her head to see the light dance in his eyes. “It’s funny how some of the most magnificent pieces of music from your era, before and after, aren’t even looked at twice in this time. Yet pop hits that were covered, and covered again are considered the height of sophistication here and now.”

“’S weird.” Rose conceded. The computer announced the pending death of the Earth in twenty minutes, and Rose sighed wearily. “Figure out why we’re here, yet? Or did Boe just have an odd sense of humor?”

The Doctor hummed thoughtfully. “Well, Jabe took a snap of me when I went to find you. And I was a bit delayed because I kept hearing this scuttling sound about, but could never figure out where it was.”

“Scuttle?” Rose asked.

“Yes,” The Doctor replied. “Like-

He was cut off as the station shuddered. It rocked them a bit apart, and Rose looked outside to see the planet still there, and no real explanation as to what happened.

“That’s not supposed to happen.” The Doctor said with a frown.

“Found our trouble, then?” Rose countered.

“Seems like.” The Doctor replied, standing up and then reaching down to help Rose to her feet. “Come on, then, we should return to the party and see if there’s something amiss.”

As they left the room, there was an announcement overhead. The Steward was reassuring the guests, calming where there may not have been need for any calm, and declaring the shudder had something to do with a gravity pocket.

Rose would have believed it had it not been for the incredulousness in the Doctor’s frown.

“What?” She asked.

“Gravity pockets don’t feel like that,” The Doctor said as they reentered the main area. “It doesn’t cause that sort of turbulence.”

“So, what does?” Rose asked as he went to a panel and began to fiddle, reading something Rose didn’t quite understand.

“I want to say, by these readings, that it has something to do with the engines.” He frowned, glancing over his shoulder before doing a double take. “What do you think, Jabe? You’re likely
able to hear the engines better than most. Would you say the engines have gone up about 30 hertz in pitch?"

Rose then noted Jabe had come up to them, hands clasped in front of her, an innocent look on her face that spoke of her trying to be stealthy.

She shrugged, shaking her head. “It’s the sound of metal, it doesn’t make any sense to me.”

“It does to me, and I think there’s something going on in the engine room. Do you happen to know where it is?” The Doctor asked, turning more fully toward Jabe.

“I don’t know, but the maintenance duct is behind our guest suite.” Jabe offered, glancing to Rose every few seconds. “I could show you… and… your wife?”

The Doctor smiled nervously. “Rose is not my wife.”

“Partner?” Jabe immediately offered.

“No, she-”

“Concubine?”

“My friend, Rose is my friend.” The Doctor interrupted adamantly.

That stung a bit. But, at the same time, it was the answer to the question Rose had had lingering in the back of her mind since that kiss when she came out of the pod back in London. It seemed like more than a friendly kiss at the time, but maybe it wasn’t after all. And it didn’t really change things, not really, but the answer sort of ended any hope that maybe she wasn’t reading him quite right.

“Well, then,” Jabe smiled in a flirtatious way. “Perhaps, then I can show you and your … friend… where the maintenance duct is?”

“You go on,” Rose told the Doctor, barely able to meet his eye but managing. “Try my best to behave.” Rose quipped back, and she couldn’t help the upturn of her lips even as her heart ached.

“Try my best to behave.” The Doctor countered before turning to Jabe. “Lead on.”

Jabe took his arm with a Cheshire grin, and started to lead him to the doors.

It was impulsive, and the moment she did it a voice in Rose’s head chastised her for being so clingy, but she added, “And you stay out of trouble, to, yeah?”

“I’ll do my best.” The Doctor said over his shoulder, his tone making it clear that staying out of trouble was the last thing he was expecting to do.

Still, Rose, grinned sadly to herself, unable to help it where he was involved. She took a breath, released it, forcing herself to come to terms having fallen in and being unrequited, and moved on.
After all, this was her moment to speak to a trampoline.

~DW~

On the outside, it might appear as though the Doctor was collected, perhaps merely pondering the turbulence that rocked the platform earlier. He let Jabe lead them to the maintenance corridor without a single shift in expression or tension. On the inside, however, he was allowing himself a moment of self-indulgent depreciation.

Friend? His friend? Yes, it was absolutely the truth. Rose was his friend, but she was so very much more. He would have agreed to partner, he supposed, but he knew what Jabe had actually meant by the inquiry and couldn’t force Rose into such a title. He wasn’t about to risk her respect, and maybe any feelings she might have had for him because he used a term she wasn’t ready for. But friend? Friend was essentially taking all those little moments they shared and painting them as inconsequential, meaningless. It wasn’t as though Rose was staring death in the face, merely an overly curious and very flirtatious tree. There was no call for him, in that moment to say the bloody “L” word that some humans tossed around like a greeting, and others cherished to the point that they forbid anyone to say it unless they meant it in the grand, romantic way.

So, friend, and let’s leave it at that. Only the way she acted after made him think that perhaps maybe that wasn’t it after all.

Oh, humans and complex emotions. No, scratch that: oh, complex emotions regardless of species.

“So, tell me, Jabe.” The Doctor said, finally breaking the silence that had been between them since leaving the Manchester Suite as they stepped into the corridor. “Who’s in charge of Platform One? I know the event was sponsored by the Face of Boe, but he’s not in charge. Is there a captain on board?”

“There’s just the steward and the staff,” Jabe replied, following close behind as he searched for a control panel. “All the rest is controlled by the metal mind.”

“The computer?” The Doctor replied. “But who controls the computer?”

“The corporation.” Jabe replied as though it were obvious. “They move Platform One from one artistic even to another.”

“Glad Rose wasn’t around to hear you call the end of Earth ‘artistic’,” he mumbled to himself as they turned a corner. “Alright, so the corporation is controlling the computer, but there’s no one from there on board, is there?”

“No, they are not needed.” Jabe replied. “This facility is purely automatic. It’s the height of the alpha class, nothing can go wrong.”

“Which is only asking for everything to go wrong.” The Doctor countered. “It’s like calling a ship unsinkable, makes it bound to hit an Iceberg and split in two. Having a ship, fully automated, also means that there’s no one to help if there’s trouble.”

“I’m afraid not,” Jabe confirmed.

“Which only makes the scent of trouble grow stronger. We need to hurry, time’s likely running
Cassandra was in front of the large window when Rose approached her. She did so slowly, feeling eyes watching her as she inched ever closer.

She stopped beside her, and Rose looked at her, trying to make sense of what she was seeing, of how hard it was to look at someone’s face when there wasn’t a proper one left.

“Soon, the sun will blossom into a red giant, and my home will die.” Cassandra said, and Rose realized she was occasionally darting a glance Rose’s way. “That’s where I used to live, when I was a little boy, down there. Mummy and Daddy had a little house built into the side of the Los Angeles Crevice. Oh, I had such fun.” Cassandra sighed.

“So, what happened? What made you…?” Rose asked, gesturing to Cassandra.

“Well, I am the last pure human. The others… mingled.” She sneered, which sort of lost some of the effect when there was barely any muscle to her lips to give a proper curl. “Oh, they call themselves new humans, and proto-humans, and digi-humans, and human-ish, but you know what I call them? Mongrels.”

“So, you, what? Wanted to set a new standard for human, then?”

“I kept myself pure.” Cassandra countered.

“Right, how many operations did that take, then?” Rose deadpanned.

“Seven hundred eight,” Cassandra replied, sounding quite pleased with herself. “Next week it’s seven hundred nine, I’m getting my blood bleached. Is that why you came over? You could be flatter, Rose. You’ve got a little bit of chin poking out.”

“I’d rather die,” Rose countered.

“Honestly, it doesn’t hurt.” Cassandra attempted to persuade, but Rose shook her head.

“No, I mean it. I would rather die. You know what? I was born on that planet.” She said, pointing to the Earth below. “So was my mum, and my dad, and that makes me officially the last human being in this room. ‘Cause you’re not human, you’ve had it all nipped and tucked and flattened ‘til there’s nothing left. You’re just skin, Cassandra. Lipstick and skin.”

Casandra glared, as much as someone with no brows could properly glare, and Rose scoffed. She then turned, walking away, figuring she could move about a bit and wait for the Doctor and Jabe to return.

“So, what is a nice tree like you doing in a place like this?” The Doctor asked Jabe as they went
further into the bowels of the ship.

“Respect for the Earth,” She replied in such a way that made her sound cheeky.

They had to stoop a bit where they were now, so it made it harder to look at her over his shoulder, but he did catch a glimpse of her feigned innocence.

“Is that all? Most of the people on this platform are worth a nice sum.”

“Well,” She said coyly. “Perhaps it’s a case of having to be seen at the right occasions.”

“There is it,” The Doctor said with a smirk. “Makes sense, of course. You lot have roots everywhere.”

“All the same, you respect the Earth as family.” Jabe conceded. “So many species evolved from that planet, mankind is only one. I’m another, my ancestors were transplanted from the planet down below. I’m a direct descendant of the tropical rain forest.”

“Not at all surprising, given your elegance. Ah ha!” The Doctor exclaimed as they finally came upon a control panel. He pulled out his sonic and scanned it, bringing up different bits on the screen.

After a pause, Jabe asked. “And what about your ancestry, Doctor?”

“I’m of Gallifrey.” He replied without hesitation.

“Yes, the lost planet of Gallifrey.” Jabe said, and the Doctor frowned, pausing his scans. “I scanned you earlier,” Jabe confessed. “The metal machine had trouble identifying your species, refused to admit your existence. And even when it names you, I wouldn’t believe it. But it was right, you’re a Time Lord.”

“I am,” The Doctor said, his face scrunching just a touch more before he faced Jabe. “Sorry, you said the lost planet? Lost? For how long?”

Jabe shrugged, shook her head. “Eons, according to some. Millennia, perhaps only centuries. Some do not even believe Time Lords have ever existed.”

The Doctor frowned as that thought settled over him, that his people were considered a legend now. When it came to the war, his Time Sense was muddled. In and out of the time lock, coming and going with special permission once he unofficially entered. And with Gallifrey tucked away, and the other twelve gone, it was somewhat understandable that there was no proof of it or them anymore. Well, not really, not to the middle species.

He was the last of them, and until now he hadn’t encountered anyone that should know of the Time Lords but didn’t. Or, more accurately, didn’t believe they existed.

The panel beeped, pulling him out of his revere. A door nearby opened, and when he turned to get Jabe to follow along, he’d only just realized that she’d had her hand on his arm. He looked at it, then to her and saw the pity in her face.

“There’s nothing to be sorry for,” he said without her ever having to put her thoughts into words. “I did what I had to to end it.” She smiled and nodded, withdrawing her hand. “Now, shall we see what’s behind door number one?”

They entered, and were greeted by large fans hanging suspended over a walk way.
“Little chilly in here,” The Doctor remarked. “The air conditioning, I would wager. Though it’s a bit old fashion, don’t you think? I would have thought that a ship of this era would go with something more advance. Though, I have to admit, it does go with that old Earth vibe they’ve been going for here.” He looked around, and noted another control pad. “Now, let’s see what we’ve got…” He knelt down, sonicng the panel. An odd reading came back, noting that there was something inside that shouldn’t be. He changed the setting on the screwdriver, and removed the panel.

A metal spider-like thing jumped out at him.

“Oh, hello, what are you?” The Doctor said after a mild startle. He moved slowly toward the wall where the little creature crawled up and paused.

“Is it part of the ‘vibe’?” Jabe asked as she came up behind him.

“No, not at all.” The Doctor said as he switched settings on the sonic once more and slowly raised his arm, pointing the sonic at the spider creature.

Before he could get a good shot at disrupting it, Jabe shoot out a vine toward the spider, disabling it and causing it to fall toward them. With a swift step, the Doctor caught it, flashing Jabe a smile.

“Nice liana, comes in handy.”

“Thank you,” Jabe replied. “We’re not supposed to show them in public.”

“What’s public about here?” The Doctor countered, gesturing about with the sonic before he turned it to the creature.

He noted Jabe shrug out of the corner of his eye. “You’re not of my people.”

“No, can’t say I’ve ever been a tree.” He said to himself as he scanned the spider. “Now, let’s see if I can figure out who this little guy belongs to.”

“What does it do?” Jabe asked.

“Sabotage.” He said as the computer announced the end of Earth in ten minutes. His head shot up. “And the temperature around the ship is about to increase. Come on!” He said, noting another door opposite of where they came from. “This way!” The Doctor pointed, and he and Jabe hurried from the room.

It led to a different hallway, one with more than one notice of “employees only” posted. Neither he nor Jabe cared, and followed it anyway.

The smell of smoke hit the Doctor’s nose long before he’d seen it. And as he got closer to the source, he picked up on the aroma of burnt meat.

There was a group of smaller aliens, all coughing and trying to get into a closed off room where the smoke was coming from, and an intense light peeked through the cracks.

“Step back, get out of the way, please.” The Doctor said, tossing the spider to Jabe before he half-pushed his way through the crowd to the control panel on the other side of the door. He placed his sonic to it, got a quick reading, and then raised the lowered sun filter before more damage could be done.

“Was the Steward in there?” Jabe asked beside him as he did a full scan of all the filters throughout
the ship from the panel.

His hearts clenched, and his gut flopped. “He was, but we can’t help him now. There is, however, a
sun filter about to lower in the private viewing gallery and I doubt very much it’s empty.” He said,
then took off at a sprint to the location he’d met Rose at earlier.

Where she might have gone if she were upset or overwhelmed again.

As the Doctor neared it, he heard a banging on the door.

“Let me out!” A frantic Rose cried from the other side. He could also hear the computer
announcing the descension of the sun filter.

“Rose, hang on!” He cried. The Doctor went to the panel, debating quickly between opening the
door or raising the filter. Smoke already coming through the cracks of the door made his decision
for him, and he overrode the lock. “Get ready, Rose.” He said, before opening the door.

The doors clicked open, and Rose stumbled out, keeping low as the sun light burned bright,
charring the wall across the hall. The Doctor closed the doors instantly, but the heat from the sun
was still palatable. He then switched controls, forcing the shield to rise again.

Once he heard “Sun filter rising” on the other side of the door, he darted over to Rose who lay
back on the floor, coughing and trying to catch her breath. He pulled her to her feet, then tugged
her into a tight embrace.

She was still coughing, but managed to give a sigh of relief, her single heart beating so hard and so
quick he could feel it against his chest as well as on his hand where it rested on her back.

“You’re alright.” He said, pressing his nose against the skin behind her ear. “You’re alright, you’re
safe, I’ve got you.”

“Sun filter descending.” The computer announced once more.

“Really, a cheeky computer?” He said, stepping away from Rose and heading to the controls again.

“Doctor, what’s goin’ on? What’s happenin’?” Rose asked as he once more battled with the
controls.

“Someone’s messed with the shielding around Platform One, letting the sun in.” He said, growling
with frustration before ripping off the panel cover and sticking the sonic in. “The sun is burning
hot enough that this whole place could burn long before it expands.”

The computer announced the sun filter rising once more, and he waited a tick before withdrawing
his hand.

“Someone on here is sabotaging the system,” he said, turning away and heading to the Manchester
suite, grabbing her hand and bringing her along. “Someone is doing this intentionally. How did you
get in there, anyway?”

Rose shook her head. “I was walking about, wandering. Was heading down a corridor and the
blokes in black robes were coming toward me. I smiled, then one of ‘em hit me on the head.” She
said, gingerly touching her temple. “Woke up in the room, hot, heard what the computer was
saying about the sun, and that’s about where you showed up, I think.”

“Earth Death in five minutes.” The computer announced.
The Doctor picked up the pace, stopping just outside the door of the suite. “Stay here.” He said to Rose. “Someone tried to kill you, best they don’t know they haven’t succeeded yet.” He placed a quick kiss on her knuckles, then dropped her hand, entering the room.

Just as Cassandra said, “How is that possible?” Our private rooms are protected by a code wall! Moisturize me, moisturize me.”

He narrowed his eyes at her as he came up to Jabe, taking the spider and subtly using his sonic on it.

“Summon the Steward!” Moxx of Balhoon, the small, blue alien in the chair, demanded of the room.

“I’m afraid the Steward is dead.” Jabe said calmly, earning a murmur of shock through the crowd.

“Who killed him?” Moxx asked.

“This whole event was sponsored by the Face of Boe!” Cassandra accused, and there was a heavy sigh in the Doctor’s mind.

“I wouldn’t have called you here if I were planning this event, would I?” Boe said in the Doctor’s mind as Cassandra accused him. If she still had fingers to point, she’d have done it, with an arm extended. And legs to hop around on.

For a moment, the Doctor pictured Cassandra exactly as she was now, but still with arms and legs. He may have leaked it to Boe for the giant head smiled and there was a laugh echoing in the Doctor’s mind, but he put that aside for now to focus on the task at hand.

They only had minutes left, after all.

“There’s an easy way to figure it out.” He said, lifting the spider. “I’ve reprogrammed him to find his master, and he’ll be ever so helpful in locating our culprit.”

The Doctor set the spider on the ground, and after a moment, it took off. He wasn’t overly surprised that it went to Cassandra, but after she shifted her eyes about, it suddenly went over to the Adherents of the Repeated Meme. The blokes in the black robes, as Rose called them.

“J’Accuse!” Cassandra declared, and there was once more a murmur of shock about the group.

“I don’t.” The Doctor said as he approached the Adherents. “Because what is a Repeated Meme,” He paused as the one in front raised and arm to strike him. He caught it, and ripped it off, thinking of how it was likely what they had done to Rose. “What is a repeated Meme If not an idea?” He then felt along the arm, finding the slightly different wire, and yanked. “And that’s all they were, an idea.” He said as the Adherents all collapsed as a group into nothing more than a pile of black robes. The crowd gasped again, and the Doctor rolled his eyes. “They were just droids, controlled remotely, and nothing more than a cover for the real mastermind. Now, if you don’t mind?” He said to the spider.

It looked at him for a moment, reminding the Doctor of a little dog with the way it tilted its head before it turned and sauntered back over to Cassandra.

She rolled her eyes. “I bet you were the school swot, and never got kissed.” She said to the Doctor.

“Quite the opposite, in fact. On both points, if I’m being honest.”
Cassandra glared. “At arms!” She commanded, and her white suited chaperons pointed their spray guns at him.

“Oh dear, starting to look my age, am I? In need of moisturizing, then?”

“With acid.” Cassandra replied. “Oh, too late anyway. My spiders have control of the mainframe. Oh, you all carried them as gifts, tax free, past every code wall. I’m not just a pretty face.”

“Are you sure about that?” The Doctor asked. “I mean, aside from the fact that you are literally only a face, a very large, shapeless one at that, you haven’t seemed to have thought this through. You’re still on the ship, Cassandra, how is that of any benefit to you?”

“Well, I’d hoped to manufacture a hostage situation with myself as one of the victims. The compensation would have been enormous.”

There was a snort from the hallway, as well as a quiet one in his mind, and the Doctor quickly looked over his shoulder to where Rose was hiding, ensuring she was still hidden, before he turned back to Cassandra. “That’s why you’re doing this? Money?”

“Do you think it’s cheap, looking like this?” She demanded. “Flatness costs a fortune! I am The Last Human, Doctor. Me. Not that freak little kid of yours.”

“Rose has more humanity in her pinky than you do in your entire… flap. Suppose you had that cut away, too?”

“Earth Death in three minutes.” The computer helpfully announced.

“And here it comes.” Cassandra said gleefully. “You’re just as useful to me dead, all of you. I have shares in your rival companies, and they’ll triple in price as soon as you’re dead. My spiders are primed and ready to destroy the safety systems. How did that old Earth song go? Burn, baby, burn!”

“You’ll burn with us.” Jabe noted.

“Oh, I’m so sorry.” Cassandra mocked. “I know the use of teleportation is strictly forbidden, but I’m such a naughty thing. Spiders! Activate. And now, force fields gone, with the planet about to explode. At least it will be quick. Just like my fifth husband,” Cassandra giggled, but the Doctor was already moving.

Explosions around the ship, and there was likely only one placed to manually reset the computer, re-establishing the shielding and saving everyone on board.

And he already knew the fastest way there.

He ran out the suite, grabbing Rose’s hand along the way and pulling her on.

“Where’re we going?” She asked as he led her the way he and Jabe came back from the ventilation room.

“The coolest room on the ship, also where it’s most likely we’ll find the manual reset.” He said as the computer announced the death of the Earth in two minutes.

They entered the room, the heat already rising far faster than the Doctor would have liked. He looked around the room for a switch, darting for the one closest and finding it was just for the fans. He looked about, and then spotted the emergency reset.
“Guess where the switch is.” He said to Rose as she joined him. He pulled the switch in front of him, and the fans slowed to manageable speed, allowing someone to pass over to the switch safely. He beamed, chuckling a little as he let go of the fan and prepared to run.

But as soon as he let go, the fans went back full speed, and his smile fell.

Before he could say or do anything, they slowed again, and he looked behind him to see Rose holding down the switch.

“Think you’d be better to go across than me, yeah?” She panted, sweat already forming on her brow, causing her hair to stick to her forehead.

He wanted to argue, but time wasn’t on their side. “Be quick as I can,” he said instead, giving her a nod, then headed for the walkway. He dodged the first fan, then dashed toward the second. He glanced behind him, seeing Rose was growing more damp, her cheeks red as she panted. He dodged the second fan, approached the third.

The computer was switching between warnings of the heat levels increasing, shields failing, and the planet below exploding. On top of that, he could hear Rose whimpering as quietly as she could, the blades of the third seeming to be spinning a bit faster than the other two. Not impossibly so, but just enough he would need to be a bit quicker. The Doctor watched the fan blades, his hearts picking up speed with anticipation, then stepped through. He huffed his relief before dashing to the switch and flipping it with only a few seconds to spare.

He sighed, already starting to note the difference in temperature in the room as the computers reversed their dire warnings. He then swiftly turned, moving as fast as he could back over the walkway.

Rose looked about ready to pass out, her cheeks an unhealthy shade of red, and dark spots showing up on parts of her dress where sweat accumulated. Her hair was plastered to her face.

“You say a word ‘bout your superior biology,” She attempted to threaten, but there was too much of a smile to her lips for him to take her too seriously.

“Give me a slap, would you?” He asked.

“If I could get my hands off the switch, yeah.” She conceded.

He frowned, then noted her fingers lightly twitching around the handle, the skin where it made contact with the metal a bit too pink. Gently, he examined her hand and fingers, then lifted them gingerly, wincing a little as Rose gave little hitches and whimpers of pain as he slowly unclasped her hand from the handle.

“You’ve burned your hands.” He confirmed, taking a hand in each of his, palms up, stroking the healthy parts with his thumbs. “I can fix them up in the medbay on the TARDIS fairly quickly, but you might be in some pain before then.”

“Could be worse,” She said, looking down at her hands with a grimace. “Coulda been all of me, yeah?”

“Yes,” He conceded. “I’m afraid if we weren’t quick enough, we may return to the suite to find some casualties.”

“And Cassandra got away with it.” Rose said bitterly.
“No, she hasn’t, not yet.” The Doctor said, smiling at Rose’s frown. “I have a trick up my sleeve yet, there just wasn’t time to pull it off before.” He explained, the familiar darkness starting to creep into his soul. “But now, I think it’s time Cassandra faces those still alive.”

~DW~

Rose and the Doctor walked back into the Manchester, side by side, and paused at the devastation left by Cassandra. The chair where the little blue alien occupied earlier was now charred and smoldering, a few mourners surrounding it. There were pairs of aliens grouped together, and the smell of charred wood and flesh lingering in the air.

The Doctor paused, then went to the trees. Rose’s chest tightened, and she peeked around to insure they were okay, then joined him with slight relief when she counted all three.

“Are you alright?” The Doctor asked Jabe, who was framed by the others who were with her.

Jabe gave a sad smile, lifting her arms. “I lost my hands.” She said, and Rose noted the stumps with heartache. “But there are worse things.”

“There is.” The Doctor agreed, giving Jabe’s arms a squeeze, then stepping away. He looked around the room, shaking his head at the scene.

He then moved to the egg that Cassandra brought in, and Rose stayed to the side and watched. He picked up the egg, examined it.

“Do you know how hot the outside of this ship would have gotten just before the sun expanded?” He asked the general room, or maybe just her, Rose couldn’t be sure. And her gut told her that he wasn’t really looking for an answer. “It’s five thousand degrees. Cassandra teleported through five thousand degrees, so she would need a feed, somewhere nearby, to help facilitate such a risky maneuver.”

In a swift move, he smashed the egg.

She couldn’t see what was inside exactly, but there was a glint of metal in his hand, and he tossed whatever it was a couple of times before he cupped it, twisting his hands in opposite directions.

“-ould have seen their little alien faces…. ” Cassandra was saying as she re-appeared in the suite. Her sentenced trailed off as her eyes darted about, taking in the new and different surroundings.

“Hello, again.” The Doctor said, his voice going a bit deeper with the hint of danger underlying his politeness.

“So! You passed my little test, bravo!” Cassandra rushed out. “This makes you eligible to join the-the-”

“Save it.” He snapped. “People have died today, Cassandra. Murdered by you!”

“That depends on your definition of ‘people’,” She countered snidely. “And that’s enough of a technicality to keep your lawyers dizzy for centuries.” She said, an odd sound that Rose couldn’t place growing louder as she spoke. “Take me to court, then, Doctor! And watch me smile, and cry, and flutter, and…..”
As Cassandra trailed off, the odd sound grew louder, and became more recognizable as creaking, like old leather.

“And, what, Cassandra?” The Doctor asked.

“I’m drying out.” She croaked.

“That does happen when you raise the temperatures.” The Doctor said coolly.

“Oh, sweet heavens, moisturize me, moisturize me!!” She pleaded. “Where are my surgeons, my lovely boys? It’s too hot!”

The Doctor’s brow creased.

“Have pity!” Cassandra asked as she began to turn red, and her eyes were becoming increasingly blood shot. Rose crept up to the Doctor, watching his face for a sign that he was going to hear Cassandra’s plea.

“Help her?” Rose asked, and the Doctor turned to her, sadness and bitterness mingling in the depths of his blue eyes.

“I can’t,” He replied. “Her surgeons, for whatever reason, didn’t come back with her.”

“I’m … too… young.” Cassandra said, and then her skin became so dry, and so taut, the she essentially exploded.

Rose flinched, and the Doctor seemed as though he was going to make to hold her, then stopped. Lowering his arm to his side.

“I’m going to alert the authorities,” He said, voice devoid of emotions, “then we’ll take care of those burns.”

~DW~

He was waiting for the other shoe to drop, as it were. The Shadow Proclamation had arrived, along with medics, to take statements and attend to the injured. The Doctor then snuck Rose back on to the TARDIS, and away before they could get tied up in the bureaucracy of it all.

But she hadn’t said a word since her plea for him to help Cassandra, not a syllable. He couldn’t take her hand, so there was no way to provide comfort. And then, now she’d seen, truly seen what he was capable of.

Because if the Doctor were honest with himself, he wouldn’t have even considered if there was something to be done for Cassandra had Rose not asked. Because he would have allowed her to shrivel and die without a second thought. It was Cassandra’s choice to make herself nothing more than skin and a bit of blood without any real means of being able to survive. It was her plot that had injured and killed innocents on that ship, and for nothing more than money.

If Rose hadn’t had asked, he wouldn’t have felt guilty. He still didn’t, not really. But now he was faced with the consequences: a Rose that wouldn’t look at him.

She sat on the exam table in the medbay while he ran the dermal regenerator over her hands. She
was looking around the room, which made sense since this was the first time they’d been in here. But it wasn’t that big, and there wasn’t a lot to look at, and she hadn’t spoken….

He braced himself, realizing she was nearly healed, and then it would be time to face what comes next.

“You’re hands are better now,” he said softly, setting aside the regenerator and looking at Rose, waiting for her to do the same. She was examining her hands, newly repaired, but hadn’t looked up or even lifted her head an inch. “I’ll take you back, if you’d like.” He added, taking a few steps back.

“Back where?” She asked.

He hadn’t really expected her to say anything, and he found himself momentarily speechless.

“Home,” He replied, and Rose finally looked at him. “I imagine it’s where you want to go.”

“Makes you think that?” She asked, her brow furrowing.

“Why wouldn’t I think it?” He countered. “You don’t say a word after I couldn’t help Cassandra, you barely look at me after what I’ve done.”

“’S not your fault.” She said, still frowning.

“How is it not? I brought her back,” He replied, his voice getting louder.

“Yeah, and you did it so she’d face what she’d done. Tell me, Doctor, was there any way you could bring over those blokes with the spray guns?” Rose asked, hopping off the exam table.

“I don’t know. Probably not, but it’s not as if I tried.” He countered.

“An’ you really think Cassandra woulda lived if you sent her back?”

“I don’t know.” He said, becoming less sure of where she was going with this by the second.

“So how is it your fault she died? She wasn’t really livin’ anyway.”

“Then why do you look so miserable?” He asked, still not daring to take her in his arms, or even touch her.

Rose sighed, gaze dropping to the floor. “’S nothing, really. Bit silly.”

“Tell me anyway.” He encouraged, and she glanced up at him.

“Was the end of the Earth. ’S gone, and no one saw it. Everyone was so busy tryin’ to save themselves, no one saw it go.”

The Doctor very nearly laughed with relief, though he quickly realized how poorly that would come across. With a smile, he beckoned her to follow him as he backed out of the room. Rose followed, and he led her to the console room.

Making a couple minor adjustments, the Doctor flipped the switch, and the TARDIS groaned with displeasure. He nearly told the Old Girl to behave before he realized she’d done exactly as he asked despite her complaints.

He then went for the doors, opening them wide and beckoning Rose over.
“We’re much farther away.” He said as she approached. “The TARDIS has some excellent shielding, but even I wouldn’t want to risk it by getting too close.”

“It’s still there,” Rose said as she looked down at the planet below.

“In some ways, it never ended.” The Doctor retorted. “Not on the TARDIS, remember? But in about ninety seconds, the sun will expand, and it will be gone.”

“Wait, ninety seconds? So, we’re down there somewhere, right now?” Rose asked pointing in the general direction of the Earth, Platform One not properly visible where they were orbiting.

“We are.” He confirmed.

They stared at the planet together, and as the time drew to a close, he very softly counted down aloud. He watched Rose’s face as the Earth ended, noting the tears mingling with the awe in her eyes.

As the blast settled, and just before the Shadow Proclamation could arrive and make things awkward, the Doctor closed the TARDIS doors and dashed up the ramp, sending them into the vortex.

“Thank you,” Rose said after the TARDIS settled, and the Doctor peeked at her while remaining at the console. She was coming toward him, slowly but surely, wringing her newly healed hands. “For lettin’ me see it. Thank you.”

“Thank you for staying.” He replied. “I know at least half a dozen of my previous travellers would have left after what happened back there.”

“You said it wasn’t all sight-seeing, that’d be dangerous. Still say better with two,” Rose grinned, giving him a nudge with her elbow.

He smiled back, and hoped deep in his hearts that he wasn’t imagining that blush that briefly colored her cheeks.

Chapter End Notes

I'm only *just* starting the next 2-ish episodes. Bare with me, peeps!
“Can you hand me the-?” The Doctor had begun to ask, but Rose handed him the tool he needed with a cheeky grin.

They were laying under the TARDIS console together, tea cups and tools scattered about them, Tchaikovsky lightly playing in the background, simply enjoying each other’s company while the Doctor made repairs.

“So, did you ever figure out how you knew Boe?” Rose asked as he began securing a switch that was coming loose. “Know it’s been a couple weeks and all, just sorta bothered me that we never figured it out.”

“It bothered me, too, actually. I looked into him a couple days after we left Platform One, but he’s a bit of a mystery. Apparently the Face of Boe was a name that was given to him at some point in his youth, but there was never any indication of when his youth was. He’s supposedly millions of years old. So old, in fact, that his origins became lost. I’ve never been to the Boe peninsula, but it’s entirely possible that I will go, and that’s where we will meet.”

“Time travel is mad.” Rose said, a light laugh lingering in her words, and he peeked at her while her focus was above them.

In the last few weeks, he noted that she didn’t give affection as easily as she had before. More hesitant, or restrained. But she never flinched away and moved to avoid him when he would go to take her hand in the market, or embrace her after an exciting discovery. They still read in the library, and there were still times she would pillow her head on his leg or shoulder, but there was something missing from the interactions. And, frankly, he was still so pleased she would stay with him without judgment after what happened to Cassandra that he didn’t dare press the matter.

The status quo shifted, but it remained, and that’s what mattered right now.

“Well?” He asked with a grin, “Because you can go back in time and meet someone you already know? Or you can go forward in time and find your best mate who has no idea who you are?”

“Exactly,” Rose replied. “Just mad.” And then after a pause. “Think I’ve met, like, my great, great, so very great grandchild or something?” She asked. “Like, d’ya think it’s possible I met someone in my family?”

“You might have.” He replied. “Though you’d be so far removed, there likely wouldn’t have been any sort of recognition. And I can’t see your time lines to know if you had.”

“Suppose that’s fair.” Rose sighed.

He finished tightening the loose circuit then relaxed, staring at the underside of the panel. “There’s been something I’ve been meaning to ask you,” He said. “But I wasn’t sure how to bring it up.”

“What is it?” Rose asked, and the Doctor turned toward her.

“Where in the name of Rassilon did you get that shirt?” He asked, and could not keep the straight face as she threw her head back as much as she could and laughed. The Doctor even chuckled a bit.
when she wouldn’t stop, the heart of it so infectious that it couldn’t be helped, but he also couldn’t keep his eyes off her.

Eventually she calmed enough to admit, “Got it on clearance at the shop. Hadn’t worn it before, taking it out for a spin.”

“Are you worried no one will know you’re English?” he teased.

“’S not that bad,” She said straightening it out a bit.

He was about to tease her some more, maybe even take a shot at his previous fashion sense, when something overhead began to beep. The Doctor strained, listening carefully, then realized it was the TARDIS alerting him to something triggering a scan.

In a beat, he was out from under the console and over to the scanner to investigate. Rose was much slower, but she ambled up from underneath and joined him.

“What’s going on?” She asked, coming up beside him as he caught sight of a capsule-like ship on the screen.

He frowned, “I’m not sure.” He replied, then typed furiously to see what more he could find out. “It appears that whatever it is, it’s triggering a code mauve, which is the universal signal for danger. It’s what the TARDIS picked up on it.”

“Mauve?” Rose frowned. “What’s happened to red?”

“Oh, that was just humans. Red for the rest of the universe is more… camp.” He said, darting a glance at her and smirking. “You wouldn’t believe the misunderstandings once humans began to really get out there.”

She chuckled before the TARDIS shook violently, sobering them both.

The Doctor reached out a hand to steady her, letting go only when Rose had a firm grip on the console. “Hang on, we’re going to have to tag on to it, follow where it leads.”

The Doctor typed rapidly, ensuring that where ever that thing went in time and space, they would be right behind it. No sooner had he had them latched on, did it begin to try and jump time streams on them.

“What’s going on?” Rose asked as the TARDIS began to shudder more violently.

“It’s trying to get away from us, but I’ve slaved the TARDIS to it, and well,” The console shot off a bunch of sparks, causing Rose to yelp and the TARDIS to give a grumbling hum in protest. “Let’s just say she doesn’t like that over much.”

He looked to the scanner, cursing in a Gallifreyan as the ship he slaved the TARDIS to began to not only make its way through time, but also to Earth.

The TARDIS jolted, and he cursed some more, seeing the Old Girl was still locked on to the ship’s trajectory, but would likely miss its arrival on the planet. She warned him that she was about to begin to land, and he turned to Rose.

“Hold on.” He warned as the TARDIS began to wheeze and groan.

The console room seemed eerily quiet despite there not having been an overabundance of noise
before. At some point, the TARDIS had canceled the music, which was all well and good, and she was so fatigued after their journey that there was a heavy silence to the normal hum she had.

The Doctor met and held Rose’s eye for a moment before heading to the doors, hoping that when he stepped out, they would be at the crash site.

Opening the doors, the cool air of a London evening washed over him, and he heard Rose shiver a bit behind him. She retreated back into the ship as he stepped outside and waited for her.

He was disheartened by the lack of ship in the alley way, as well as by the lack of disturbance in the surrounding area that would signal something having landed there within the last month.

He heard the doors behind him open again, and Rose’s footsteps on the pavement as the doors closed behind her.

“Where is it, then?” She asked, putting her hands in her newly acquired jacket pockets.

“Nearby, I know that much.” He replied. “Probably within a mile, hopefully a little less. The problem is, the way it was jumping the time streams could mean it also landed up to a month ago.”

“Doesn’t really narrow it down for us much, yeah?” She said, looking around them. “‘S not London of my time.”

“No,” He said, examining their surroundings again. “And I have the feeling that it’s not a time we want to be in.” He darted a look around. “Our best bet is to ask around. Find some sort of tavern or church that may have people inside.”

“Why not scan for alien tech?” Rose asked as they started to head out of the alley.

“Because, as you may have forgotten, there’s more alien tech around Earth than anyone can really care to imagine.” He replied, stopping at the end of the alley as a very subtle hint of music reached his ears. He frowned, turning left, then found himself making a U-turn down another ally where at the end was a nondescript metal door.

“Right, so doing a scan wouldn’t really do much, then?” She asked as she followed.

“Afraid not. I would have had to know exactly what sort of alien tech I was looking for, and I don’t.”

“Bit of a bummer, that.” Rose said as they approached the door, standing off to the side while the Doctor pressed his ear against the metal.

“Yes,” he said slowly. “There’s people through here.” He pointed to the door before getting out his sonic and working on the lock. “Sounds like it might be a night club.”

“Posh sort?” Rose asked.

“Not sure,” he said, glancing around at the buildings and clothe lines above. “I’d say no, based on the condition of the neighborhood, but I’ve been wrong before.”

“Right, and what is it we’re going to do when we get in there?”

The door clicked open, and the Doctor stood up. “I figure asking about the very large object falling from the sky, crashing in the middle of London is likely the easiest thing to do.”

She smiled before she frowned a touch, looking around. The Doctor heard it, too, a child calling
for their mother. He glanced around as well, but couldn’t find it. They turned to each other.

“Shall we go see if we can help?” He asked her.

Rose shook her head. “You go on in, ask about. Sounds nearby, probably won’t take me far.” She said, putting her hand on his arm in reassurance.

“Are you sure?” He asked.

“Yeah,” Rose said with a shrug. “Got my mobile on me, get lost I’ll just ring the TARDIS, yeah?”

“And how would you do that, I never gave you my number?” The Doctor asked, watching as Rose withdrew her mobile and pressed a few buttons. She turned it toward him, showing him the name and number, complete with a little symbol.

“Thought, after the whole thing with the bank, that maybe I should have it, yeah? ‘Cept I noticed one night that I already had it.”

“Oh,” He said, frowning, wondering when or how that happened. The TARDIS herself, perhaps? She was linked to the screwdriver, and he had used that to rig up her telephone. “Well, ring the TARDIS if you get lost then. Be careful.”

“You, too.” She said as he started to step inside.

“Really, what sort of trouble am I going to get into?” He said to himself as the door closed behind him. He ventured down the darken corridor, crates here and there along the wall, the smell of alcohol strong in the air around him. He turned a corner, spotting a door way at the end with beaded strings hanging from the frame. A waiter came out of another corridor and turned promptly into the room carrying a tray of drinks.

The Doctor followed, the sultry voice of a nightclub singer getting louder as he went.

The den was fairly full, the clothes high end, and the Doctor could nearly peg the time they landed in. He really should have checked the TARDIS before they left, but he had rather hoped whatever they were chasing had been right outside their doors.

He checked out his surroundings, trying to spot a clue as to when they were, an ear to the song playing.

“For nobody else gave me a thrill, with all your faults, I love you still.” He sang along quietly as he scanned the room. He felt eyes on him, and turned to the stage, seeing that the songstress had spotted him, and was staring him down with an intrigued smile on her lips.

He grinned back, politely, but he found it a bit disconcerting how she pinned him there.

When she finally finished her song and looked away, he moved a bit to the shadows, hoping she wouldn’t notice him again and feel the need to converse. He was on a mission, and he’d seen that look on a woman far too often in this body to not have an idea what she wanted.

As the songstress left the stage, the Doctor took the opportunity to address the crowd. The sooner he got the information he needed, the sooner he could return to Rose and get the object.

He hopped up, and turned to the confused audience who sipped their drinks in their fine clothing, waiting for him to do something.
“Excuse the interruption,” The Doctor began, “This may seem like a very odd question, but can anyone tell me if something may have fallen out of the sky recently, and where it might be located?”

The silence was unnerving, but not nearly so much as the laughter that followed. He opened his mouth a couple times, with no more than an odd noise coming out, but he couldn’t form the words as he looked around the room, trying to find the clue that he was clearly missing.

Sirens sounded overhead, and as the Doctor looked to the ceiling, the crowd scattered.

He then quickly took in the scene. Most downed their drinks, some immediately went for the doors, their liquor not being given a second thought. He searched the crowd for someone, anyone who was going to stay behind, and that’s when he noticed it: the poster.

*Hitler will give no warning!*

He slowly raised his hand and pinched the bridge of his nose, closing his eyes, silently cursing his terrible luck. His eyes then shot back open as he remembered Rose was out there. Jumping off the stage, he ran out of the now vacant club, pushing out the door and back into the night air.

“Rose!?” He called as he darted down the alley, whipping his head around to search for her.

“Rose?” He turned the corner, heading back to the TARDIS, he hoped she’d already returned, or at least went there to seek shelter. Surely the alarms would tip her off that something was coming?

He reached into his pockets, and began to search for his key when a phone began to ring. He began to move more hastily, believing it was Rose on the other end of the line, phoning the TARDIS. It wasn’t until a moment later that he realized the phone ringing was not coming from inside the TARDIS, but outside.

He turned and looked at the sign to the left, the one that would conceal a phone on a real police box.

“How can you be ringing?” He asked. “You’re not a real police box, ergo, you are not a real phone, so how can you be ringing?”

He hesitated, the phone still ringing, before he abandoned his searching for his key and opened the panel. The phone vibrated with a ring, everything about seeming perfectly real.

“Don’t answer it.” A young girl said behind him, and the Doctor turned to face her.

She was a strange sort of juxtaposition: her hair braided in pigtails made her appear young, but there was a wisdom in the way she carried herself that spoke of her being much older. Fear was evident in her, and her eyes were more focused on the telephone than him.

“Why not?” He asked, narrowing his eyes.

“It’s not for you.”

“And why wouldn’t it be?” He countered, “This is my TARDIS, and the phone, albeit a fake one, is ringing.” He said turning away from the girl to examine the phone once more. “So, tell me, if it’s not for me, then why?” He turned back to the girl to find her gone, with no trace of her being there.

But the phone kept ringing.

With a sigh, he picked up the ear piece, placing it to his ear and leaning toward the microphone.
“Hello? This is the Doctor.” He answered, hearing a strange sort of static on the other end.

“Mummy?” The voice of the child Rose was supposed to be helping replied.

Cold dread sank into his being, and he looked around again while keeping the ear piece to his ear.

“Mummy?” The child repeated.

“Who are you? Where are you? Is Rose with you?” The Doctor asked as he turned back to the phone.

“Are you my mummy.”

“No, no I’m not your mummy, I’m the Doctor. My friend, Rose, was supposed to find you, where are you?”

“Mummy?” The child asked again, but then the line went dead.

The Doctor slowly hung up the phone.

“Oh, Rose, Rose, Rose, what happened to you this time, darling?” He said to himself, searching around once more before becoming distracted by a crash somewhere down the street.

In hopes of finding Rose, he dashed down the street, keeping an ear out until he heard something on the other side of a brick wall. Frowning, he strained to listen, hearing the panic of a woman on the other side, hurrying someone along. Out of curiosity, the Doctor climbed up on a nearby tin garbage can and peered over the edge, noting the family of three heading inside a shelter.

And then the girl from the alley sneaking inside once they were tucked away.

He waited, to see where she would go next, and was surprised to see her come back out after a few minutes and give a very distinct whistle twice before going back in. A moment later a pair of young boys ran to the house and inside. A beat later, another three children, then another two, then another pair all went flocking to the house.

Curiosity piqued, and knowing the girl had answers to the mystery of the phone, and possibly where Rose had disappeared to, the Doctor jumped the wall and went inside the house.

He could hear them chatting as he entered, talking of black markets and coupons, not at all making themselves inconspicuous. He remained as much in the shadows as possible, especially when the girl spoke in a harsh, lecturing tone. There was only a small bit of laughter that followed, but overall the room remained quiet and serious. He peeked around, then leaned in the doorway to a dining room with his arms crossed, and watched as she handed around a plate of meat, the children at the table all with small plates loaded with the abandoned home cooked meal that the man of the house had grumbled about missing.

When every child had their plates filled, the girl then took some herself, and sat down.

“Never have I approved of breaking into someone’s house more,” The Doctor said, startling a few gasps and yelps out of the children. Some rose to their feet but remained at the table with a simple gesture from an annoyed head of the table. “Nor have I ever applauded thievery so readily.”

“Back in your seats,” the girl stated. “He shouldn’t be here either.”

“You’re quite right there.” He said as he pushed himself off the door jam. “So, what’s the story
here?” He asked, looking at the various children. Clothed, perhaps not the cleanest, but they weren’t as bad off as some. “You’re homeless, aren’t you?” He asked, looking at one of the older boys who appeared in the midst of fight or flight, leaning toward the former.

“Why d’you wanna know that?” He asked, lifting his chin. “Are you a copper?”

“Even if I were, what would I possibly arrest you for? Starving? No, I’m not a copper.” He said, the children giggling a bit and he grinned. He moved a little closer, standing in front of the wall opposite the chatty ones. “But shouldn’t you be evacuated? I was sure they sent the children out to homes in the country during the war.”

“I was evacuated,” One of the children said, “They sent me to a farm.”

“How did you end up back here, then?” The Doctor asked.

The boy looked to the food on his plate. “There was a man there…”

For a moment, there was a heavy silence until the second boy he spoke to grinned, “Yeah, same with Ernie.” He egged the first. “Two homes ago.”

Ernie glared, “Shut up, Jim.” He ribbed the boy back. “It’s better on the streets anyway. Better food.”

Jim grinned, “Yeah, Nancy always gets the best food for us.” He said, gesturing to Nancy at the head of the table.

The Doctor grinned at her, “Quite clever. As soon as the sirens sound, you head to a home where the family doesn’t seem to be suffering too much from the war. Find a warm meal left on the table, and ensure it doesn’t go to waste.”

“Something wrong with that?” Nancy challenged.

“Not at all, so long as the bombs to happen to drop where you are. But then, at least you’d have died with a full stomach. It also has a Robin Hood vibe, the sort of thing you might find in a West End musical.” The Doctor replied, earning some confused looks from the children. “Never mind.” He waved it off.

“Why’d you follow me?” Nancy asked with a glare. “What do you want?”

“You know why my phone, which isn’t even really a phone at all, was rung.”

“And I did you a favor,” She countered indignantly. “I told you not to answer it, that’s all I’m telling ya.”

“Alright, that’s fair. But I must admit I did answer in the end. I had to, I could never resist doing the opposite of what I’m told. And there was a child on the other end, the same one I heard calling before I was separated from my friend Rose. You lot haven’t seen her, have you? She’s a bit shorter than me, blonde, happens to be a bit patriotic.”

The kids shook their heads as Nancy abruptly stood from the table, hands on her hips.

“No one has seen her, so is there anything else you want to know before you leave?”

“Yes, actually.” He said. “She and I came here to look for something that might have fallen from the sky about a month ago. Not a bomb, not really, there likely wasn’t an explosion. It would have
just become sort of buried. It would have looked,” He paused, taking out his psychic paper and showing the kids what might have been a sketch of the ship he’d seen on the monitor.

The Doctor studied each child intently as they looked at the sketch, and notice Nancy seemed to have a weary sort of reaction to it where the others were merely intrigued.

The knock on the window of the dining room startled all of them, then each child remained still. Not all odd in and of itself, the Doctor supposed, nor was the underlying fear each of them had as he headed toward the curtains.

“Mummy?” The same voice from the phone called, and the Doctor hesitated before pulling back the curtains. “Are you in there, Mummy?”

A boy with a gas mask stood staring in, his little hand lifting to the pane.

“Who was the last one in?” Nancy demanded.

“Him,” Ernie replied, though the Doctor didn’t see who ‘him’ was.

“Nah, he came around the back, who came in the front?” Nancy’s voice held an urgency the Doctor didn’t quite understand. She helped the children.

“Did you close the door?” She asked, and the child with the gas mask began to leave.

The Doctor turned and caught sight of Nancy rushing out the dining room. He followed, and turned into the hallway to find Nancy barring the door, keeping the boy outside.

“Why exclude him?” He asked. “How is he different from any of the children in there?”

“It’s not exactly a child,” Nancy countered as the gas mask child called for its mummy.

Nancy turned sharply and headed back into the dining room.

The Doctor heard her calling to the children to leave, instructing them to head out the back. The Doctor divided his attention between the children leaving, and the one locked out. It still called for a mum, and properly, too, not at all like he might think an alien would. He inched toward the front door, noting that as he got closer, a hand went through the letter slot. The Doctor tilted his head, examining the hand as it had a peculiar looking wound. An almost straight line, with a smaller one branching off from it near the end, reminding him of a human child’s early attempts at the alphabet.

“Are you alright?” The Doctor asked the shadow he could see through the door.

“Please let me in,” it begged. The same thing it had been saying, as if it were never asked a question.

A vase whizzed by, smashing just beneath the letter slot on the door, and causing the little hand to withdraw.

“You mustn’t let it touch you,” Nancy said behind him.

“Why? What happens if I do?” He asked the uneasy looking young woman.

“He’ll make you like him.” She replied.

“Like him? Like him how, Nancy?” The Doctor asked.
She stepped away. “I’ve gotta go?”

“Go where? Nancy, tell me, why are you running, what is he like?”

Nancy paused in her retreat, and turned back to face him with misting eyes. “He’s empty.”

“What do you mean, empty?” The Doctor asked.

Nancy was poised to reply when the phone near them rang. Her eyes shot to it in terror. “It’s him, he can make phones ring, he can. Just like that police box you saw.”

“And if I answer it?” The Doctor asked as he went to the phone.

“Why would you want to?” Nancy asked, disbelieving and terrified.

He didn’t answer, but picked up the phone. He didn’t say anything, not that it mattered. The child was instantly asking the same question it had before.

“Are you my mummy?”

Nancy snatched the phone away from him and slammed it back on the receiver. But no sooner did she disconnect the call, the radio switched itself on.

“Mummy?” Came the child’s voice. “Please let me in mummy?”

The Doctor went to the radio, curious what would happen if he attempted to change the dials, only to have a toy monkey nearby switch on.

“Muuuuuummmmy, muuuuummmmy,” It chanted in the child’s tones, the Doctor noticing the little hand returning through the slot out of the corner of his eye.

“Stay if you want to.” Nancy said, fleeing before he could even think to stop her.

She knew, the Doctor was certain, much more than she was letting on. About the ship and the boy, and yet both terrified her. But he’d seen enough terrifying things in his life, especially in this current life, and this child wasn’t something that properly terrified him. At least, not yet.

He approached the door, but did heed Nancy’s warning and resisted the urge to touch him.

“Please let me in,” it asked as he got closer.”

“Your mummy isn’t here,” the Doctor said as gently as he could.

He thought, just for a moment, that the child would leave. “Are you my mummy?”

“No,” The Doctor replied with a bit of a smile. “I’m not anyone’s mummy.”

“I’m scared.”

“Of what?”

“Please let me in, mummy. I’m scared of the bombs.”

The Doctor sighed. He could leave, like Nancy had. He could leave, and try and find Rose, He might even try asking this child what had happened to her. But it was more likely that he’d get answers, including why the others were afraid of him, if he did as requested.
“Alright,” He said, slowly kneeling down. “I’m going to open the door, okay?”

The little hand withdrew, and the Doctor unlocked the bottom bolt, and then the top. He gripped the knob, turned it, then opened the door.

No one was there.

He stepped out, looked around, but there was no sign of that child or any child anywhere.

But he did catch a glimpse, in the distance, of a pair of braided pigtails.

~DW~

Rose had not had the best go of it. Trying to help the little boy, the balloon, the air raid. It was a bit fuzzy around the edges, but she recalled the fear, the certainty that this was going to be her last adventure. She recalled the tractor beam, the voice of the bloke, the *bloke*, but then…

She expected to have a headache, but while she was admittedly a little woozy, there was no pain.

Rose looked to the ceiling, and her first truly conscious thought was how very much not like the TARDIS it was. It didn’t exactly make her feel unsafe, but there was a level of comfort missing. Slowly, she sat up, briefly putting a hand to her head as if that were to somehow balance out the wobble.

She was on a bunk, that much she gathered, but she didn’t know how she got there. And the ship she was on, was open space around her, and very sci-fi.

“Better now?” The bloke she vaguely remembered spoke to her, and she turned to the sound of his voice. He was at the helm, and dressed like he belonged in the era. At least, he was from what she could see.

“You got lights in here?” She asked.

The captain clearly obliged, for the subtle glow brightened to a dim light, enough to see the full ship by.

“Hello,” The captain said with a charming grin.

“Hello,” She countered.

“Hello,” he said, that grin growing to a smile.

Ah, yes, she remembered that bit. “Let’s not start that again.”

“Okay,” He chuckled, and she simply couldn’t help but grin.

She straightened her shirt, adjusted her jacket. “So, um… who’re you supposed to be, then?” She asked.

The bloke shifted in the seat, quite a fancy one if she did say, and withdrew a bill fold. “Captain Jack Harkness, 133rd Squadron Royal Airforce - American Volunteer.” He said as he handed the billfold.
She took one look at it and snorted. “Liar.” She met his eye, and smirked at his utter confusion. “This is psychic paper, tells me whatever you want it to tell me.”

Jack blinked. “How do you know?” He asked.

Rose smirked. “Two things. One, I have a friend who uses this all the time.” She said, thinking of the Doctor, his warm, mischievous grin.

“Ah,” Jack said, partly distracting her from her thoughts.

“And, two, you just handed me a piece of paper telling me you’re single, and you work out.”

Jack took back the paper, and glanced down at it.

“Tricky things, psychic paper.” He said with a tilt of his head.

“Can’t let your mind wander when you’re handing it over.” She said with a nod, putting her hands in her back pockets.

“Of course. Or how else would I know that you’re traveling with a bloke called the Doctor, but the pair of you are just mates.”

She felt the blood rush to her face, and Rose rubbed at the back of her neck.

“Right, well… shall we, uh, try and get along without the psychic paper?” She suggested.

Jack stood. “That would be better, wouldn’t it?” He agreed, and she could feel he was still checking her out.

She tried to find some way to steer the conversation to something else, anything else. She looked up, her hand touching the ceiling, caressing the designs above.

“Nice ship.” She said, keeping her comparisons to the TARDIS to herself.

“Gets me around.” He said as he shifted toward her.

In their little dance caused her to move to where his seat was.

“Very… Spock.” She said, eyeing him to see if there was any sort of recognition in the captain’s face. There was nothing but a frown. “Guessing you’re not a local boy, then?”

Jack lifted his arm and looked to his wrist, checking something on it that was very likely not a watch. “A cell phone, a liquid crystal watch, and fabrics that won’t be around for at least another two decades? Guessing you’re not a local girl.”

Rose plopped down in the pilot seat. “Guessing right.” She said, moving herself side to side. The window, a proper windshield type window, had her curious enough to keep the chair turned toward it. She went to lean forward, and get a better view, but her hand hurt something awful the moment she attempted to lean forward. She quickly moved back, inspecting her palms and finding them red and blistered.

“Burn your hands on the rope?” Jack asked.

“Yeah,” She said, looking between her hands on the window. “We’re parked in midair! Can’t anyone down there see us?”
“No, can I have a look at your hands for a moment?” Jack asked, and Rose settled more in the chair and faced him.

He came over to her and sat down on a small bench beside the chair, then took out something that looked like a pocket torch to examine her hands with.

_How very much like the sonic_, Rose thought as she looked at the gadget, and was about to ask Jack if it was the same sort of tech when he spoke first.

“You can stop acting, now. I know exactly who you are. I can spot a Time Agent a mile away.”

“Time Agent?” Rose reiterated, wondering if maybe he meant _Lord_.

“I’ve been expecting one of you guys to show up. Though, not, I must say, by barrage balloon. Do you often travel that way?”

“Usually prefer something more official looking.” Rose smirked, glancing up and find the captain very much in her space and currently removing his scarf. Without permission, he took her wrists and began tying them together.

“What’re you doing?” She asked, trying to withdraw but finding his grip stronger than anticipated.

“Try to keep still,” he said firmly. Despite that, Rose couldn’t help but do so, something about the captain that made her relaxed. She wouldn’t say she trusted him, he was too much in her space for that, and she didn’t know him, but she couldn’t help but want to.

He leaned over her, flicking a switch on the console behind her before drawing back and remaining very near. A bunch of little things that reminded Rose of fireflies appeared as if from nowhere and zeroed in on her hand. They were warm, and hummed against her skin, making it tingle as they pulsed.

“Nanogenes,” Jack explained. “Sub-atomic robots. The air in here’s full of them.” He then reached over again, flicking another, or even maybe the same switch, and the nanogenes disappeared.

“They just repaired three layers of your skin.”

“Like a dermal regenerator?” Rose asked as Jack untied her hands.

“Yeah, I suppose. But they’re much faster.” He conceded.

“Well, thank you.” Rose said to the air, assuming that they were sentient like the TARDIS.

Jack chuckled, stepping away and grabbing something from the shelf. He turned, showing her the bottle of champagne before pressing a button, causing a set of stairs to appear. “Shall we get down to business?”

Chapter End Notes

Hi! So this was originally supposed to be one whole chapter (not 2 parts) but I had a few minor medical incidents over the last couple weeks (I'm okay!) that sorta made my motivation take a hit. So, instead of keeping you waiting, I decided to break it up over two parts. Hope you enjoyed.
He followed Nancy to the train tracks, and the Doctor wasn’t at all surprised to find that she had found an abandoned trailer to store what was likely stolen food. He came up behind her while she was distracted, and waited until she inevitably felt someone looking at her.

Nancy startled when she finally turned around, not surprising, and he tried to give a disarming grin.

“How’d you follow me here? People can’t usually follow me if I don’t want them to.” She demanded.

“I have a knack for finding people who don’t want to be found.” He countered. “Now, please, Nancy, there’s something chasing you and the other children. It looks like a boy, but you say it isn’t. I’m willing to wager it started about a month ago, when the bomb that’s not a bomb landed.”

Nancy hesitated, and the Doctor held his breath.

“There was a bomb,” Nancy sighed, and he exhaled. “A bomb that wasn’t a bomb. Fell the other end of Limehouse Green Station.”

“Can you show me?”

Nancy shook her head. “There’s soldiers guarding it, barbed wire. You’ll never get through.”

“Never say never, I say.”

“You sure you wanna know what’s going on in there?” She asked, and he grinned.

“I do.”

She studied him a moment. “Then there’s someone you need to talk to first.”

“Who is it?” He asked.

“The Doctor.” She said as she stepped past him, and the Doctor was momentarily stumped.

He had to talk to himself? That didn’t seem right, but then how could he not have guessed he wouldn’t already be wrapped up in this.

~DW~

Jack had popped a cork on the champagne and filled the glasses he asked her to bring up. He’d sat down on the ship’s top (which he had tethered to Big Ben, and had previously been invisible), and tried to persuade her to sit and drink with him. She nearly succumbed, but she knew Jack’s type, and the Doctor was out there, possibly worried about her.

“You know, it’s getting a bit late,” She said, brushing her hair behind her ear, slowly moving
toward the stairs back down into the ship.

“We’re discussing business.” Jack said, and she looked at him over her shoulder.

“This isn’t business, this is champagne.” She said, gesturing to the glasses and bottle at his feet.

“I try never to discuss business with a clear head.” He said as he got to his feet, moving toward her. She turned to face him, not wanting to even have her back slightly turned on him, not with the way he was sauntering toward her. “Are you authorized to negotiate with me?” He asked in a less playful tone.

“Depends on what we’d be negotiating.” She hedged.

“I have something for the Time Agency,” he explained. “Something they’d like to buy. Are you in power to make payment?”

“Well, I should talk to my partner.” She replied, hoping he’d be able to bring her to the Doctor.

“Partner?”

“Yeah, I should really be getting back to him.”

“Him.”

“Yeah,” Rose replied. “Been separated for a bit, and … blimey, no idea how long it’s been.”

Jack cleared his throat, taking a device out of his pocket and pointing it toward Big Ben. It lit up and chimed, vibrating through her body, making her a little unstable.

“Wow, that’s… flash.” She said, glancing at her feet long enough to note his now close to hers. Rose felt Jack’s hands on her waist, and she looked up to find him in her space again.

She wanted to push him off, but he was magnetic. So much so that she didn’t mind him being near, not as much as she knew she should.

“So, when you say partner, how disappointed should I be?”

“Not as disappointed as I am,” She countered.

“The Doctor bloke then? The one you’re just friends with?” Jack hedged back a bit, taking her hands in his.

“Yeah… we’re standing in the midair, on a space ship, during a German air raid. Should you really be gettin’ into my personal life right now?”

He lifted her hands to his lips, and the wrong of it all made her queasy. That was what the Doctor did, that was his thing with her. Jack must have sensed his transgression for he drew back without ever having brought her hands to his lips.

“Perhaps not.” He conquered as he took a step toward the champagne, and Rose sighed with relief. Then he spun back around. “Do you like Glen Miller?”

“Wut?” Rose replied as he held up the device he used on Big Ben and pressed a button.

He was disconcerting all over, keeping her on her toes, and yet when he took her into a dancing position while Moonlight Serenade played, Rose followed his lead. He didn’t hold her too close, so
there was that, keeping a respectable distance while he slowly turned her about.

“It’s 1941, the height of the London Blitz,” He began to paint a picture. “And something else has fallen on London: a fully equipped Chula Warship. The last one in existence, armed to the teeth. And I know where it is, because I parked it.”

“Right.” Rose said, attempting to not look as green as she still was to all this.

“If the Agency can name the right price, I can get it for you. But in two hours, a German bomb is gonna fall on it and destroy it forever.” His charm eased, and a serious countenance took over him as he held her eye. “That’s the deadline. That’s the deal. And now, shall we discuss payment?”

“How’d you get it here? To this time?” She asked, tilting her head.

“I used to be a Time Agent.”

“Used to be? And you’re, what now, some sorta free-lancer or something?”

“Well, that’s a bit harsh.” He said, inching closer. “I like to think of myself as a criminal.”

She laughed nervously as a little part of her - a bit of her old self, the Jimmy chaser version of Rose- was wondering why she was resisting a bloke who very much wanted to spend time with her. “I bet you do.” She replied.

“So, this Doctor, does he handle the business?” Jack asked.

“Well, I delegate from time to time.”

“Well, maybe we should go find him.”

“And how’re you gonna do that?”

Jack stepped away. “Easy, I’ll do a scan for alien tech.”

“Lots of alien tech about,” She countered. “Be a bit useless, that.”

Jack pushed his sleeve back, looking at that thing on his wrist again. “Then I’ll scan for the time travel tech, artrons, anachronisms.”

Rose only understood a third of that, properly anyway, and the one bit she did made her wary. She didn’t want Jack to find the TARDIS, not without the Doctor. And she doubted he’d still be with the Old Girl, as he called her, when there was a ship to find. And, hopefully, the Doctor was looking for her, too.

“Can you do a scan for sonic tech?” She asked, wringing her fingers.

Jack smiled a cocky grin that told her all she needed to know.

~DW~

With a pair of binoculars from inside his jacket, the Doctor scoped out the area blocked off by military personnel.
“The bomb’s under that tarpaulin.” She indicated, and he found what she was talking about. “They put the fence up overnight.”

“Not all that surprising.” The Doctor countered. “Authorities here have always been pretty quick and making sure no one goes near the unknown.”

“See that building?” Nancy asked, gently guiding his arms so he would be focused in its direction. “That’s the hospital.”

“Where I’ll find this Doctor?”

“Yes,” She replied, stepping away. “Maybe once you talk to him, you won’t wanna get inside the blockade.”

He heard her footsteps retreat, and the Doctor lower his binoculars to speak to her over his shoulder. “Where are you going?”

She paused, twisting to look at him. “There was a lot of food in that house, I’ve got mouths to feed. Should be safe enough now.”

He studied her a moment. “You lost someone, didn’t you?”

“What?” She asked, that harshness to her more clearly hiding a sadness he missed earlier.

“The way you look after the children. You aren’t that old yourself, you’re likely to have been carted off to the farms, same as any other. But you stayed. You look after these children, but you never had to, it was never your job. You’re hardly well off yourself, so I figure you must be making up for the fact that you lost someone.” He said in a gentle tone, and watched as Nancy’s eyes became glassy.

She swallowed once or twice before replying. “My little brother, Jamie. One night, I went out looking for food. Same night that thing fell. I told him not to follow me, told him it was dangerous. But he just….”

“He followed you.” The Doctor nodded. “And walked himself into the middle of an air raid, becoming a casualty. I’m so sorry.”

Nancy sniffed and nodded once.

“You’re doing a brilliant thing, Nancy.” He said, moving up the stairs that separated them and put a hand on her shoulder. “What happened to Jamie was not your fault, and nothing you could have done or do now can bring him back. But taking care of those children? Finding them food, giving them at least a small amount of shelter during the rain of bombs? It’s brilliant, and brave. And I know Jamie would be proud of you.”

She nodded, sniffed, wiped at her eye. “I have to go.”

“Be safe, good luck.”

“You, too.” She said after a moment, then turned and fled up the stairs.

The Doctor, in turn, went down the stairs and crossed the muddied ground to what looked more like an abandoned building than a hospital where he would find a doctor. But then, Nancy had referred to him as the Doctor, so it may have been exactly where he would have hidden if need be.
A future incarnation, perhaps? One that vaguely knew he would be there?

He hesitated as he got to the gate, because he realized he’d yet to find Rose or have any clue as to where she was. But, he told himself, she wouldn’t have known not to touch the child. And Nancy said that if you did touch him, you became like him. So, what if Rose is empty now?

It wasn’t something he particularly wanted to dwell on.

He removed his sonic, pointing it at pad lock and breaking in, ignoring the signs put up to keep people out and away.

The Doctor found the lights on inside, despite there seeming to be nobody home. He went through the corridors, silent and eerie as they were, and he peeked or went inside each room he passed. The lights were always off in the rooms, but the windows with the city light and that from the corridor allowed him to see within. With each inspection, his stomach twisted more, and his hearts grew heavier.

Every single bed was full, each with a person who remained perfectly still with their hands folded on their stomach, and all with a gas mask on.

He came to a ward that had some lights on, but still it was the same, the beds full of lifeless, gas mask wearing people of all ages. He was, at least, a little relieved to have noticed that of the ones he’d seen, none of them looked like Rose.

“You’ll find them everywhere,” A voice behind him startled the Doctor, and he spun on his heel to look at the older man entering the room with a cane. “Every bed in every ward, hundreds of them.”

“Yes,” The Doctor said, watching the older man. “I did note that, as well as that they’re wearing gas masks.”

“They’re not,” The old man replied as he continued moving. “Who are you?”

“A friend of Nancy’s, she sent me here. And you? You’re the Doctor?”

“Yes, Doctor Constantine. And if you’ve been speaking with Nancy, then that means you’ve been asking about the bomb.”

“I have been.”

“What do you know about it?” Constantine asked as he made his way toward a table and chair in the center of the room.

“Nothing more than it arrived a month ago. I was hoping you could enlighten me.” The Doctor replied, watching the (thankfully) very human man make his way to sit.

“Only in regards to what it has done.” Constantine replied.

“Were all these people caught in the blast, then?”

Constantine gave a little chuckle. “None of them were.” He said before breaking out into a coughing fit. When the Doctor stepped forward to help, Constantine held out a hand, stopping him.

“You’re very ill.” The Doctor noted, seeing the sheen on the pale pallor of Constantine’s skin.

“Dying, I should think. I just haven’t been able to find the time.” He replied as he eased into the chair. “Are you a Doctor?”
“I have my moments.”

“Have you examined any of them yet?”

“No, not yet.” The Doctor replied.

“Don’t touch the flesh.”

“On which one?”

“Any one.” Constantine warned.

Wearily, the Doctor went to the nearest, removing his sonic to help him get a read without needing to touch. “Massive head trauma, mostly to the left side. A partial collapse of the chest cavity, to the right, mostly. The gas mask seems to be fused to the skin without any signs of burning, and there’s a scar on the back of the hand, same as the boy Nancy warned me about…. ” He stood straight, looking to the Doctor. “There’s a connection, isn’t there?” Constantine nodded. “What is it? How did it start?”

“When the bomb dropped, there was just one victim.”

“The boy.”

“Yes.” Constantine nodded. “At first, we thought him dead. His injuries were dreadful.”

“So how did this occur?” The Doctor asked, waving at the beds while he shifted closer to Constantine.

“By the following morning, every doctor and nurse who had treated him, who had touched him, had those same injuries. By the morning after that, every patient in the same ward had the exact same injuries. Within a week, the entire hospital. Physical injuries as plague. Can you explain that? What would you say was the cause of death?”

“It could have been any of the things I’d noted, but I think it better if we skip the games, and you tell me.”

Constantine nodded slowly. “There wasn’t one.” He confessed. When the Doctor frowned, Constantine took his cane and smacked it against a nearby bin.

At once, all the patients sat upright, and turned toward him, causing the Doctor to back up a couple steps.

“It’s alright, they’re harmless.” Constantine assured. “They just sort of sit there. No heartbeat, no life signs of any kind. They just… don’t die.”

The Doctor watched as the bodies slowly eased back down. “There’s nothing that can be done for them?”

“No. I just try to make them comfortable.”

“You? Alone?” The Doctor asked, eyes darting to Constantine’s hand on the cane. It all made sense in that moment, why he would be there alone. He met the man’s eye, seeing the resignation within.

“Before this war began, I was a father, and a grandfather. Now, I am neither, but I am still a doctor.”
“I’m afraid I know that feeling all too well. So, you’ve contracted whatever this is, you’ve touched the flesh, but now what? What happens after you?”

Constantine shrugged. “I suspect the plan is to blow up the hospital and blame it on a German bomb.”

“That won’t do any good with the little boy running about outside. I have a friend who tried to help him, and I haven’t seen her since. She may not have succumbed to the condition, but there are bound to be others.”

“Hope is good. But ….” Constantine began to cough once more, very horribly, and the Doctor had to force himself to stay back now that he had this new understanding of what the good doctor was fighting. “Listen to me,” He said, gasping for air. “Top floor. Room 802, that’s where they took the first victim, the one from the crash site. And you must find Nancy again.”

“It was her brother, wasn’t it?”

Constantine nodded. “She knows more than she’s saying,” He choked. “She won’t tell me, but she mi-mi,” He choked again, clutching his neck. “M-mu-mee. Are… you… my… mummy?”

The Doctor slowly backed up but couldn’t look a way as a gas mask first started to come out of his mouth before causing his else to bulge, and his face to change into it entirely.

He took a moment as Constantine slumped in the chair to pay silent respect to him before collecting himself.

“Hello?” He heard someone call, and he moved to make sure they knew not to touch anyone.

“Hello?” Rose’s voice gave him a brief pause before he darted out faster, rounding the corner of the corridor and seeing her with an airman.

He didn’t care.

The Doctor took three, quick steps before he had himself an armful of Rose, holding her tightly, feeling her arms encircle his neck.

“I’ve been worried.” He said, kissing her cheek before stepping back, getting a good look at her. He noted the man studying them, clearly trying to get a read on her, or him, or both. “And who’s this?”

“Jack Harkness,” The man introduced himself, extending a hand for a shake. “I’ve been hearing all about you on the way over.”

“He knows,” Rose said before the Doctor could say anything. “I had to tell him about us being Time Agents.”

The Doctor blinked, but kept composed. Why would she say something like that? No, he didn’t think he told her about those little gnats zipping through the vortex, so why did she agree with this man’s assumptions.

He looked the man over again, and noted him doing the same back but in an entirely different context.

“And it’s a real pleasure to meet you, Doctor Smith.” Jack said before patting the Doctor’s shoulder and moving on.
The Doctor looked to Rose, bemused. “Doctor Smith?”

“Couldn’t get by with just Doctor. Might start asking Doctor who.”

He took her hand, following Jack at a far slower pace. “I usually leave people guessing. And where did you take off to in the middle of the air raid, wearing a target no less?”

Rose smirked, glancing down at her shirt before nudging him playfully with her elbow.

“Out and about.”

“On a stroll?”

“Who’s strolling? I went by barrage balloon, only way to see an air raid.”

He stopped and turned to face her, pulling her to do the same. “Are you alright? What in Rassilon’s name were you doing on a barrage balloon?”

“Trying to get to that little boy. Thought the rope was just slung down from the roof. Didn’t realize ‘til it was too late. Jack beamed me onto his ship, healed up the burns with these Nano things.” She frowned. “What’s a Chula warship?”

“Chula?” The Doctor frowned.

“Yeah, s’ what Jack said landed here.”

“Did he now?” The Doctor asked, continuing at a far less leisurely pace to where this Jack Harkness had gone.

They entered the room, finding the man scanning the bodies on the bed.

“This just isn’t possible, how could this happen?” Jack asked, a note of panic in his voice as he flailed his arms about.

“Well, let me think.” The Doctor started, letting go of Rose and gesturing for her to stay back as he stalked toward Jack. “About a month ago, when this all started, a little boy was hit with a bomb that was not a bomb, but a Chula war ship. And now anyone who’s come in contact with him, or someone who had previously, becomes one of these. Can you tell me, Jack Harkness, why you think that is? What sort of ship was it, exactly?”

Jack looked ready to argue, then deflated, only to stiffen straight with annoyance. “An ambulance.”

He snapped, thrusting out his wrist and typing on his vortex manipulator. A hologram of the ambulance appeared. “That’s what you chased through the Time Vortex. It’s space junk, I wanted to kid you it was valuable. It’s empty, I made sure of it, nothing but a shell. Saw your time vehicle - love the retro look, by the way, nice panels - threw it at you, hoping you’d take the bait.”

“Bait?” Rose frowned, coming up beside the Doctor.

“I wanted to sell it to you, then destroy it before you found out it was junk. It was a con, I was conning you!” He said, gesturing to them both. “That’s what I am, I’m a con man. I thought you were Time Agents, but you’re not are you?”

“Just a couple more free lancers.” Rose replied bitterly.

“Ahh, should’ve known, the way you guys are blending in with the local color. I mean, Flag Girl was bad enough, but Colonel Brandon here?”
The Doctor turned to Rose. “It’s not that bad, is it?”

“I don’t think it is.” She smirked.

“Anyway,” Jack said, distracting them, “Whatever’s happening here has got nothing to do with that ship.”

“Oh, I really beg to differ,” The Doctor said with honey coated menace. He shot his gaze to Jack and held it, daring the con-man to back paddle.

“What is happening here, Doctor?” Rose asked.

“Human DNA’s being rewritten, with the help of an idiot.” He replied through clenched teeth, noting that Jack swallowed hard, his jaw flexing. He turned away, turning to Rose who was inching closer to the patients. “Don’t touch them.” He warned.

“What happens if you touch them?” She asked, hesitating, glancing at him over her shoulder.

“You turn into one of them.” He said. “Somehow there’s a virus that’s converting humans into what you see. Not a Chula, they don’t look anything like that, but something else. I think I know how, but I’m not sure I know why.”

Rose moved in a little, taking a look at them, when suddenly they all sprang upward.

He darted for her as she jumped back, taking her arm and pulling her closer to him as she back up. “Did it touch you?”

“No,” She replied. “What’s happening?”

“Mummy?” All the patients began to chant.

“I don’t know.” He replied, backing up with Rose as the patients began to get out of the beds. He gently steered her behind him, noting Jack joining them as they were being cornered. Backs against the wall with nowhere to go, the crowd too thick to even hope to get through. Then there was likely the whole rest of the hospital to contend with.

“Mummy,” They continued. Like a pestering child longing for attention.

The Doctor had an idea, and blimey it was awful. But there wasn’t another way out, and he didn’t see any alternative.

“Go to your room!” He suddenly commanded, and his hearts beat double time as the patients all just stopped. “I said, Go to your room!” He repeated, and they tilted their heads as if confused.

“Now! I’m very disappointed, extremely cross with you. Now do as you’re told, and go to your room, immediately!” He raised his voice, thrusting his finger out in a stern gesture in no particular direction. Slowly, they all bowed their heads, turned around, and shuffled back to their beds like disappointed children.

He sighed with relief. “Those would have been terrible last words if that didn’t work.” He said to Rose over his shoulder.

“Glad it did. Have some practice with that speech?”

“More like heard it enough. My child was too proper to be lectured like that.” He replied, heading to Constantine’s desk to maybe look for a clue.
Rose went to a nearby chair at a patient’s bedside, but shifted it away a few inches before sitting down. Jack came toward him, plopping down in Constantine’s chair, one foot propped up on the desk.

“Why are they all wearing gas masks?” Rose asked curiously.

“They’re not.” Jack replied faster than he could, and the Doctor looked darkly to the con man. “Those masks are flesh and bone.”

“Yes, brought on through a very painful transformation. Tell me, Jack, how was your con supposed to work? What was your plan?”

Jack shrugged. “Simple enough, really. Find some harmless piece of space-junk, let the nearest Time Agent track it back to Earth.” He gestured to the Doctor. “Convince him it’s valuable, name a price. When he’s put fifty percent up front, oops! A German bomb falls on it, destroys it forever. He never gets to see what he’s paid for.” He glanced at Rose who stood, wandering the room. “I buy him a drink with his own money, and we discuss dumb luck. The perfect self-cleaning con.”

“Oh yes, perfect.” The Doctor sneered.

“The London Blitz is great for self-cleaners.” Jack attempted to argue. “Pompeii’s nice if you want to make a vacation of it. Though, you’ve got to set your alarm for volcano day.” He laughed, but the Doctor narrowed his eyes at Jack.

He sensed Rose coming up beside him, and reached out behind him for her hand, feeling it close around his own.

“Getting a hint of disapproval.” Jack said, glancing between the two of them.

“Just a hint? I must not be projecting very well.” The Doctor retorted. “Take a look around at the current results of your ‘self-cleaning con’, and tell me where I might find you clever.”

“It was a burnt-out medical transporter, it was empty.”

“Evidently, not empty enough.” The Doctor looked to Rose. “We need to go upstairs.”

She nodded, letting go of his hand and turned, waiting for him to lead, then following close behind.

The scrap of a chair, the hurried footsteps that caught up easily, the Doctor wasn’t terribly surprised that Jack had followed them. There was a part of that man, however small and under used, wanted approval. Their approval, otherwise he doubted Jack would have tried so hard to explain why he thought his con was so harmless.

“I even programmed the flight computer so wouldn’t land on anything living, I harmed no one!” Jack pleaded.

The Doctor stopped short and spun around, Rose stumbling from their abrupt change in speed.

“You hurt that boy. That little boy who was just trying to follow his sister while she searched for food. Who was scared and didn’t want to be alone. Those scans don’t take into consideration what might wander into its path. It doesn’t count a single, small life.”

Jack squared his shoulders, though there was a bit of guilt and regret beginning to seed itself, the Doctor could tell. “I don’t know what’s happening here. But believe me, I had nothing to do with it.”
“Keep telling yourself that, Captain. You might actually believe it.” The Doctor said as he turned and continued to the ward.

Outside, a siren sounded once more.

“What’s that?” Rose asked nervously.

“The all clear.” Jack replied.

“Only when it comes to the Germans.” The Doctor grumbled. And for the time being, the Captain was blessedly quiet.

~DW~

The Doctor had led them around the eerie hospital and up toward the top floor, all the while being abnormally quiet. Rose would be more worried if it weren’t for the fact that there were Gas Mask Zombies in every room she glanced in on the way. Whatever was going on here was terrifying. More so than the Gelth or Autons.

Jack, she noticed, also seemed to be growing more uneasy with every room they passed, and a small part of her wondered if the Doctor was leading them about like this on purpose. Trying to get the Time Agent to see how utterly wrong he’d been about the situation.

They climbed up a long set of stairs and approached a metal door. The Doctor studied it with a tilt of his head, furrowing his brow.

“Jack, have you got a blaster.” He asked after a mo.

“Sure!” He replied enthusiastically.

“Well,” The Doctor said, gesturing to the door with his head before stepping back and gently guiding Rose with him.

Jack grinned as he removed his gun from his holster, aiming it at the lock in such a way that it was more for sure than for practical reasons.

“What’s wrong with your sonic screwdriver?” Rose asked quietly.

“That a thing,” The Doctor replied with a smirk that was a bit on the knee-weakening side. Rose shook it off, wanting to remember that despite the hug and kiss on the cheek upon their reunion, it wasn’t like that between them.

Jack fired his blaster, creating a perfectly square hole in the door where the lock would have been.

The Doctor stepped forward as the door opened, looking at the gun in Jack’s hand. “A 51st century sonic blaster. From Villengard?”

“Yeah, one of the last ones made before the main reactor went critical and vaporized the lot.” Jack replied, holstering his blaster with a touch of pride.

“Yes, I’ve heard there’s a banana grove there now.” The Doctor smirked cheekily as he walked into the room. “Great climate, Villengard, for bananas. Not to mention a good food source for the
nearby locals.” He said as he went in to the room.

Rose followed, but couldn’t help linger at the door, running her finger along the smooth edge of the newly-made square.

“Not a mark. Not a burn or nothing.” She remarked.

“Digital.” Jack shrugged smugly as if he himself were the inventor.

“Hmm,” She hummed, mildly impressed by the tech, and Jack chuckled as she continued inside.

The room itself looked as though a storm had ripped through it. A broken window, glass bits scattered about a floor littered in toys and drawings. A small iron bed like the one the zombies were laying in all over the hospital was in a lopsided position, clearly having been pushed about.

“What do you think, Jack?” The Doctor asked as Rose looked at the art. All of them were of a girl, or a woman. A mother, she figured.

“Something got out of here.” Jack said as he shuffled about. “Something… powerful. Angry.”

“Powerful and angry? Or Powerful and scared? Not much difference between scared and angry, not the way one acts instinctively. Both would trigger ‘fight’ in someone’s response cues, to defend or get away. I told you there was a boy where that ambulance hit. And that the plague started there. Still think that somehow your directed crash and all this isn’t linked?”

There was a click, and Rose looked over her shoulder to see he flicked on a tape player.

“Do you know where you are?” A man asked kindly on the tape.

“Are you my mummy?” The little boy replied, and Rose’s eyes widened.

“Doctor!” She said, and his eyes met hers.

“I know.” He said as the tape continued to play.

“Are you aware of what’s around you? Can you … see?” The man on the tape asked. But the child repeated his counter question.

“Are you my mummy? I want my mummy? Where’s my mummy?” The child repeated as the Doctor came into the part of the room where she and Jack were.

“Why doesn’t he know? Who his mother is, why does he keep asking?”

“It’s likely been forgotten when it’s DNA was changed.” The Doctor replied.

“How did that happen?” Jack asked.

The Doctor gave a mirthless chuckle. “You know, you live in a state of denial better than anyone else I’ve met, Jack. You’re good at heart, I think. You keep tossing the word harmless around like you mean it, and I think deep down you really believed that. But it wasn’t harmless, Jack. When the boy got hit, scared and trying to find his sister, something left over in that ship caused it change him into the first victim. The carrier of the plague.”

“Yeah, Zombie plague.” Rose grumbled as something on the tape crackled.

“Yes,” The Doctor said. “A carrier who is terrified, but also very powerful. He wants his mother,
he’ll do whatever it takes to find her.” He frowned. “And yet…”

“Yet what?” Rose asked.

“I’m here.” The child said on the tape. “Can you see me?”

“Yet, he still wants to be good. Do as he’s told. Like, for instance, go to his room when he’s been told to.” The Doctor met her eye. “It’s got the power of a god, and I sent it to its room.” He pointed to the floor. “This is its room.”

Rose turned to face the portion of the room where the tape had been playing, and startled back as she saw the little boy look right at her, tilting his head.

“Are you my mummy?”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading and the well wishes everyone! The Doctor Dances is coming soon(ish)
Heart thumping heavy in her chest, Rose regretted trying to help someone for the first time in her life. Was that why the child seemed to zero in on her? Because she attempted to help him? She inched backward, allowing the Doctor and Jack to shield her.

“Okay,” The Captain said with confidence, and Rose noted movement from the Doctor. “On my signal, make for the door.” Jack slung his jacket aside hand on hovering over his empty holster. “Now!”

Jack plunged his hand down on the empty holster, then looked down in a panic as the Doctor turned and fired the blaster toward the wall, one handed in a move so much like in films Rose didn’t think anyone ever done it in real life. He created a square hole in the wall.

“Go, Rose.” He said, “Jack, out.” Rose did as he said, glancing over her shoulder to see the Doctor coming up last, the child starting to follow them. Back against her wall of the corridor, she watched Jack and the Doctor climb through, the captain take back his gun and firing at the hole again.

The wall repaired itself, and the Captain smiled smugly, giving the blaster a little wave. “Digital rewind,” He said as he lowered the gun. “How’d you get it off me?”

The Doctor shrugged. “I’m used to disarming people when I have the chance. Not really one to then use the weapon. I hate guns, have I ever said that?” He asked, glancing at Rose.

“Well this blaster just saved out skin.” Jack said.

“That it did, would you like a prize?” The Doctor countered. “I may have some jelly babies somewhere in this jacket.” He reached into his green frock, burying his hand in a pocket when the wall they just came through shuddered.

Another thud, and there was a very distinct crack.

“Power of a god,” Jack said.

“Yes, let’s run.” The Doctor said, taking Rose’s hand before turning and fleeing.

They ran down the corridor, turning for the stairs that had led them up there, only to find Gas Mask Zombies bursting through the doors.

“Mummy,” They all said, and Rose nearly stumbled backward, saved from the Doctor’s hand and Jack’s support.

“Come on,” Jack said, turning and leading them back up the stairs. She and the Doctor followed quickly, though they needed to let go of one another to do so. Once back up the stairs, they ran the
other way, only to find more zombies coming toward them, edging them back to where the child was trying to break through the wall.

“It’s keeping us here.” The Doctor said, facing one set of the Zombies as Jack sandwiched her between him and the Time Lord.

“It’s controlling them?” Jack asked, holding his blaster in both hands and waving it between the two groups.

“Controlling? Jack, it is them,” The Doctor retorted. “It’s every infected being in this hospital, that it touches.”

“Okay,” Jack said as the wall across from them shuddered, bits of it crumbling away. “This can function as a sonic blaster, a sonic cannon, and a triple-enfolded sonic disrupter. Doc, what you got?”

Rose whipped her head around to see the Doctor pull out his screwdriver and look at it forlornly. “Something sonic, nothing useful in our current situation.”

“Come on, it’s got to be something.” Jack asked.

“Really, captain, I think if it were, I would be more forth coming.”

“Yeah, but a sonic what?”

“Screwdriver.” The Doctor confessed as the child broke through the wall.

Without thinking too much about it, Rose grabbed Jack’s arm and forced it downward, hoping he’d get the hint and shoot out the floor. With adrenaline pumping, she felt the floor give way and gave a little yelp as they fell to the ward below.

“Rose?” The Doctor asked.

“’M alright, you?” She asked, getting up as Jack activated the rewind feature of his blaster, closing the hole above before anything could come through.

“Been better,” He replied with a groan, but with next to no light, Rose couldn’t see him. She looked around, seeing the shadows of beds.

“Who has a sonic screwdriver?” Jack asked as her eyes adjusted a bit more, and she noted silhouettes on the beds as well.

“I do,” The Doctor retorted. “I typically find it very useful, though I admit it’s not very effective against a hoard of undead former humans.”

“Who looks at a screwdriver and thinks ‘oohoo, this could be a little more sonic’?” Jack taunted, and Rose realized that the silhouettes on the beds had very distinct facial features.

“What, you’ve never been bored? Thought you’d tinker about?” The Doctor asked indignantly.

“Would the pair of you stop your puffing a mo’?” She snapped in a loud whisper. “We’re not alone in here.” Rose faced the pair again, seeing their shadowed forms looking about.

“Right, let’s… that door, over there. Quickly.” The Doctor said, and Rose felt his hand in hers, guiding her to where he wanted them to go.
“Mummy,” A voice said behind them, and Jack scrambled ahead. In the low light, Rose could see he was aiming his blaster, but nothing was happening.

“Damn it!” Jack said, and there was the sound of metal smacking against flesh. Letting go of her hand, the Doctor moved forward as Jack backed off.

“Mummy,” Another, different voice, and one much closer said as the rustling of fabric on fabric cut through the dark.

“What’s the problem, Jack?” The Doctor asked as the hum of the sonic came as a comfort before the door opened.

“The special features, they drain the batteries.” He said, but Rose didn’t pay him much mind. She was momentarily struck still by how many Zombies she could now see in the light provided by the next room, and how close they actually were to them.

She darted through the open door, Jack already ahead, and the Doctor followed, closing the door behind them and sonicing the lock.

“Battery?” She panted, brushing her hair from her face as she looked at the put-out captain. “That’s so lame.”

“Oh, and a screwdriver is much better?” Jack countered, moving to the window, peering outside. “I was gonna send for another one, but somebody blew up the factory.” Jack countered, looking suspiciously at the Time Lord who completely ignored him.

“Okay, the door should hold for a bit.” The Doctor said as Jack put his hands on his hips.

“The door?” Jack mocked, pacing away. “The wall didn’t stop it!”

“Well, first it needs to find us, which might be trickier since I’m not sure if they can see very well post conversion. No light to really see where we went.” The Doctor retorted as he looked around the room. “I’m not seeing anything we can use to hold them off, it looks like it’s an old room used for storage.”

Jack plopped down in an old wheelchair. “Well, in a pinch, you could take down the shelves to use to beat them off.”

“And you’re full of useful tools, then?” The Doctor taunted. “A blaster with a dead battery? Suppose you could use it to break the glass out of the window.”

“They’re barred.” Jack retorted. “Seven story drop.”

“And we’ve got no other exits.” Rose chewed her lip, glancing at the door and wondering how long it would hold.

“Could always get away by barrage balloon.” Jack teased, catching her eye and smirking.

“And here I thought we were trying to think of practical solutions.” The Doctor scoffed, and Rose darted her attention back to him, seeing he was staring rather hard out the window. He was still, so much so that she wondered if he was even breathing before he huffed. “Alright. We need an escape, there is only one door and a deadly drop out a window. Is there anything I’m missing?” He asked the panes before him, but Rose still turned to see what sort of answer Jack would give.

Her heart dipped as she found the old wheel chair empty, the door still sealed, and no sign of the
captain.

“Yeah, Jack’s gone.”

Gone.

The Doctor didn’t think the man had it in him to use the vortex manipulator without asking them to piggyback, but maybe he mis-read the con man.

Con man, Captain, he really couldn’t decide what to consider Jack, it really depended on the moment. A quick read of his Time Lines showed a decent bloke over all, but the choices he’d make within the near future would shape him for better or worse. And looking for more than a few seconds would spur the start of a headache the Doctor didn’t have time to deal with, so he left it alone.

Still, he didn’t need to glimpse time lines to see Jack had a very deep interest in Rose. And could he really blame him? The Doctor had figured that Jack would likely do anything to keep Rose safe, much like him.

Rose wasn’t taking his vanishing act well, pacing back and forth across the room like a caged predator ready to pounce at the first opportunity. Hell hath no fury and all that. Which, of course, had him assuming that the interest was mutual.

She’d been distant lately, and despite a massive time lord brain and a situation they positively had to get out of, that little bit kept cutting through his attempts to figure out a way to get them out of the room.

He took a seat in a nearby folding chair, leaving the wheelchair vacant should the captain somehow reappear in it. He followed Rose with his eyes, but said nothing, allowing her to be the first to make conversation should she want to.

He couldn’t let her become one of those things. But a seven story drop? He knew he wouldn’t survive it, so she definitely wouldn’t. A glance around told him any sheets in the room likely wouldn’t provide enough material for them to climb down. Plus, they would still have to tie them together, a lengthy task even with the sonic securing tight knots for them. They could parachute, perhaps, but that would mean he would need to resonate the concrete in hopes that the bars would loosen. He’d have to do that regardless of any other method of escape.

“Not sure I want to believe he just took off like that.” Rose said as she turned, heading back in his direction for the twenty-first time, gaze on the ground. He returned his attention to her.

“I’m not sure I believe it, either.” The Doctor said as she came to a stop beside him, her hand resting on the back of his chair. She looked at him, hopeful, and he gave a slight grin. “I have no doubt he’d save his own skin first, but I think he took quite the shine to you.”

She opened her mouth, then stopped, chewed her lip, then turned away, pacing once more. She stopped away from him, bringing her hands in front of her before dropping them and coming back to him. She stayed by his chair, mouth moving but no words coming out. She darted glances at him, but seemed to have a hard time deciding what to do.
Before Rose could say anything, a dusty radio on a nearby shelf crackled to life. The Doctor was on his feet, tensing, staring the old device down, preparing for the child’s warning.

“Rose?” Jack’s voice came through. Frowning, the Doctor moved toward it, examining the device and seeing it was not plugged in. He picked it up, turning it about, looking for some sort of hidden tech that Jack might have planted. “Doctor, can you hear me? I’m back on my ship. I used the emergency teleport. Sorry, I couldn’t take you. It’s security keyed to my molecular structure. I’m working on it, hang in there.”

“How are you talking to us? Can you hear us, too?” The Doctor asked, feeling a bit odd for talking to a radio.

“Om-com, I can call anything with a speaker grille.” Jack replied.

The Doctor huffed. “So can the child.”

“What?” Rose asked, eyes wide.

The Doctor nodded. “Anything with a speaker, real or not, even the TARDIS’s exterior phone.”

Rose looked between he and the radio. “You mean the child can phone us?”

“And I can hear you,” the child sing-songed. “Coming to fiiiind you.”

“Doctor, can you hear that?” Jack asked.

“We can, unfortunately.” He replied.

“I’ll try to block the signal out.” Jack replied as the Doctor sat the radio down. “Least I can do.”

“Coming to find you, mummy.” The child taunted.

“Remember this one, Rose?” Jack asked, Glenn Miller’s *Moonlight Serenade* flowing out from the speaker.

The Doctor looked to Rose in confusion, and she blushed.

“Glenn Miller?” He questioned.

“Our song,” She said with a shrug.

“You have a song?” He countered.

“Well, sorta. He… on his ship, when he was trying to pull off the con. He … we danced.”

“To Glenn Miller?” The Doctor crossed his arms, looking at her.

“Wasn’t really something I was aiming for.” She shrugged.

The Doctor shook his head and turned away, running a hand over his face. He was over a thousand years old, a Time Lord, and he could feel the thick bile of jealousy rising in him. Jack had his hands on Rose, held her close, danced with her. He could picture it: a ship, dimly lit, perhaps just a few lights like stars. He hated how much he hated the thought of the captain holding her to him like that. It didn’t matter to the Doctor, then, that he’d had the privilege of having slept next to her, having kissed, having had her hand in his time and time again.
“Doctor?” She asked in a small voice, a huff following. “Look, shoulda told him from the get-go we weren’t who he thought. But he saved my life. Didn’t wanna just take off. Plus, he had me on his ship, yeah? Not like I coulda just sauntered out the front door.”

The Doctor frowned. “Do you really think I’m angry about any of that?” he asked her over his shoulder.

Rose shrugged a tiny, shy shrug. “Something’s bothering you.” She said.

“He is.” The Doctor confessed.

“I trust him.” Rose offered meekly, and he turned to face her straight on.

“I want to. I do.” The Doctor sighed.

“You should,” She smirked. “He’s sorta like you.”

“That’s a little insulting.” He said, offended, and she laughed.

“Said, sorta, yeah? Like, he’s a time traveler, bit of a handsome bloke, but with dating and dancing.”

“Dating and dancing?” The Doctor repeated as he slowly stalked toward her. He caught the handsome bit, preening a little at it, but the latter part deserved correction.

The blush Rose had earlier came back with a vengeance, traveling down her neck. Yet she held his eye, and there was a spark in her honey-colored depths that made him hope.

“Ye-yeah.” Rose stuttered just before he wrapped one arm around her waist, pulling her close before taking her hand in his other. She put her free hand on his neck, and he smirked.

“I dance.” He said emphatically.

“D-do you?” She asked.

“Oh yes, more than you can imagine.” He smirked as she swallowed, breathing a touch more rapid and erratic. “Dating, I will admit, is not something I really tend to do.”

“No?” She asked, disappointed.

He frowned. “No,” He said, really taking her in. He then quietly asked, “Rose, have I been reading things wrong?”


“I mean that…,” He noticed she wasn’t so flustered anymore, and shook his head. “Never mind.”

“No, what things.” She demanded, shifting a fraction closer.

He sighed, stepping back a bit but not letting her go. “I… I don’t, ever, go about these things properly. You humans, you have all these rules and half of them I’m not sure I understand. And they change, so frequently, depending on the era, and the political climate. I always think I’m being clear, when I’m not, and I … I don’t want to lose you.”

“Not going anywhere, me.” Rose smiled, lifting her hand from his neck and cupping his cheek.
He leaned into her touch. “But that’s the thing. Rose, I’m a Time Lord, I’m not your species.”

“Know that,” she said, her brow furrowing a little.

“Yes, but it’s easy to forget. I often worry you will, for a moment. Then how do I know what I say, what I feel won’t drive you off? If I were to tell you how much light and hope you’ve brought into my life, the joy and the spark, how can you not be overwhelmed?”

“Cos I won’t be,” she said, shaking her head.

He sighed, shaking his head. “You’ve grown distant since the bank.”

“I didn’t think… thought you’d think I was too clingy.”

“Clingy?”

“You… kissed me after the Zygon thing, and I thought… but then you kissed Psi and Saibra….”

Oh! he thought, and his hearts stuttered.

“I am affectionate this regeneration, physically so.” He said gently. “I tend to express myself in such a way, so I’ve been known to kiss a companion when they’re brilliant or a plan comes together, or I’m just so relieved they made it out of a situation safely.” He leaned in a little closer, and she tilted her head up, making it so their noses nearly touched. “But when I kissed you when that pod opened, it was to express all that and more. So much more.” He then, carefully, allowing her time to move away, closed the little distance between them and kissed her just as he did that day. Except, when she kissed back, just the tiniest bit, he lingered a little longer, pressed his lips to hers tenderly a second time. “Does that seem like a kiss given to someone I think of strictly as a friend?” He asked her against her lips.

“Dunno,” she smirked. “Might have to show me again.”

“Gladly,” he said, pressing his lips more firmly to hers again, exhaling through his nose as he felt her much more readily return the kiss. They parted so she could breathe, but he didn’t leave the space she allowed him to be in, breathing in the scent of her skin and hair and breath as Rose caught hers.

“Think Captain Jack will get back to us soon?” she asked, barely louder than a whisper.

“Would you be terribly put out if he took a little longer?” he teased.

Rose bit her lip, shaking her head slightly as she grinned widely. “Don’t think I would.”

The Doctor smiled.

“You guys are so sweet.” Jack’s voice broke the moment, and the Doctor looked up, startled to find they’d been moved. “Most people notice when they’ve been teleported.”

“Most also get a bit of warning.” The Doctor retorted, clearing his throat as he stepped away from Rose and inched closer to the cockpit. “Took a while. Nine minutes, fifty-four seconds to be exact.”

Jack spun around in his chair to face them. “I had to take the nav-com offline to override the teleport security,” he countered, and the Doctor snorted.

“And it took you that long to figure out how to do that, because,” he looked around, “this isn’t your
ship. It’s a Chula ship.”

“Yeah, just like the medical transporter, but this one is dangerous.” Jack countered.

“Not too unlike the alien you took it from.” The Doctor retorted.

“And like I told her, be back in five minutes.” He said as he got out of the chair and disappeared under the main console.

The Doctor looked around the Chula ship, narrowing his eyes at the ceiling for a moment. “Rose, what did you say he healed your hands with? Nanobots? Nanogenes?”

“Nanogenes!” She said, coming up beside him.

“Hmm,” he hummed, snapping his fingers. A cloud of nanogenes circled his hand. “When the TARDIS protested our little towing trip with Jack’s space junk, a spark hit the pad of my thumb. Doesn’t really hurt, but the nanogenes picked up on the injury just now, possibly aggravated by the snap. That’s what they’re here for, to check you for damage, and then fix any that it encounters. But I think it needs a base line.” He looked at his hand. “This is a ship, but…” He flicked his hand, banishing the nanogenes and turned to where Jack was just coming back up. “Jack, we’ll need to see that medical transporter of yours.”

“As soon as I get the nav-com back online.” He assured.

“Very long?”

“Faster than before, I think.” He replied. “Make yourselves comfortable, carry on with whatever it was you doing.” Jack said with a gesture between the Doctor and Rose, followed by a wink. “Nothing intended for your eyes, I assure.” The Doctor smirked, causing Jack to chuckle as he turned away. He took Rose’s hand, leading her to a bunk and sitting with her.

She glanced around, peering at Jack before turning toward him. “So, he the captain or the con-man?” She asked quietly.

“He’s Jack.” The Doctor replied, running his thumb over her hand, looking first to the man at the helm, then to the woman at his side. “I know what’s going on, or at least I’m very certain of it. I have no idea if I can fix it, not until I get a look at the medical transporter. But I have a feeling he genuinely didn’t know what he was unleashing.”

Rose nodded, accepting the answer with a sigh before resting her head on his shoulder.

Rose’s mind kept flip-flopping between two trains, both involving the Doctor, and neither of them calming.

First, his certainty of what was going on was nice, but the grave way he said he wasn’t sure he could undo the damage wasn’t. Whatever Jack did wasn’t malicious, at least. It was nice to know her judgment wasn’t off there.

It was surprising that it was regarding the Doctor. More than friends? His kiss meant something? Well, that was an interesting bit. She supposed, now, in hindsight, there was a difference when he
kissed Psi and Saibra. She supposed she should have figured that maybe he was being cautious with her. They were aliens to each other, after all. There was one hell of an age gap to contend with, as well.

Rose then peeked at Jack, whom was still working over in his Captain’s chair. She wondered if he were alien, too, especially since she didn’t really properly know what a Time Agent was.

“Jack, I’m curious.” The Doctor’s voice startled her slightly, and he caressed his thumb against her hand in apology. “Why were you trying to con an agency that you used to be a part of?”

“It makes me sound any better, it’s not for the money.” Jack replied as he stretched up, flipped some switches.

“Yet you were only going to let it go for the right price.”

“The right price would have been just about anything, considering what’s planned to happen.”

“Yes, well, that still doesn’t answer my initial question.”

Jack sighed, turning the chair a bit to face them. “Woke up one day, when I was working for them, and found out they’d stolen two years of my memories.”

“And you somehow think conning them would get them back?” The Doctor asked, not unkindly.

“It’s a start. If I make their life hell for long enough, make some demands, maybe they will.”

“Memories are a tricky thing, Jack. We don’t always get them back. Believe me, I know.”

“Maybe so,” Jack said, holding the Doctor’s eye. “But you don’t trust me, and for all I know, you’re right not to.”

“I don’t trust you because you tried to con me. Terribly, I might add, and with possible world-ending consequences, but that’s the root of it. Were you always a con man?”

“Before my memories were taken? Never. After, well…..”

A computer beeped behind Jack.

“Maybe we can discuss it later?” The Doctor offered.

“Maybe we can,” Jack said with a smile to his voice. “Now, crash site, yeah?”

“Aye, aye, Captain.” The Doctor replied, and Rose couldn’t help the part snort, part giggle that escaped.

Jack led them to the crash site, easily getting them past the army set barricade. Where the ship landed, however, was much more heavily guarded.

He’d been in trickier situations than this, and this was too time sensitive to back off and try to find another way.
“They’ve got Algy on duty, must be important.” Jack informed them, and the Doctor merely gave him a sideways glare.

“You don’t say?” He asked, smirking when Rose gently elbowed him.

“Right,” Rose huffed, peering around. “Suppose we need a distraction to get in then, yeah?” She pulled on her jacket and straightening it.

“Could work.” Jack said, straightening his collar, smoothing out his shirt. “I’ve got to know Algy quite well since I’ve been in town.”

“I’m not sure this is the time for you to list your conquests.” The Doctor commented.

“Conquests?” Rose frowned, looking between them. “Wha’, you sayin’?” She pointed toward the crash site, likely in the direction of the bloke Jack had his eye on, and frowned in an oddly adorable way.

Jack chuckled, wiggling his eyebrows. “Don’t wait up,” he said before dashing off with an over-confident stride into the crash site.

“Seriously?” Rose asked, still seeming shocked.

The Doctor edged closer to her, “Are you really bothered by that? Or is it your more put out that you didn’t get to distract the guard yourself?”

“No, s’ not that. Not bothered in the least. Got enough mates that swing this way and that, never phased me. Just, the bloke, Algy. Thought it wasn’t legal at this time, yeah?”

“No, you’re right, it’s not.” The Doctor conceded. “But as long as he and Jack were discrete-.” Rose made a snorting noise that cut him off, and he grinned. “I suppose you’re right. Hopefully, at least, there won’t be repercussions for the poor fellow.”

“Another mark on Jack’s con side.”

“Did you just make a pun?” The Doctor remarked as Rose’s lips curled slightly.

“Mighta done.”

The Doctor shook his head, then realized that Rose had likely been serious about her tallying. Frowning, he looked over at her, allowing the slight pang of jealous to linger in his chest a moment, just between his hearts, before shaking his head and trying to let it go.

He crossed his arms, shifting his weight a little more toward Rose, feeling her warmth against the chill of the air, and focused on Jack.

Jack, who was far too stiff to be flirting or distracting. Jack, who was shifting away from the man he was trying to lure.

The Doctor dropped his arms, putting one hand on Rose’s shoulder as the Algy fell to his knees, and the Doctor watched as the same thing that had happened to Constantine repeated itself with the soldier.

“Jack, keep everyone away!” The Doctor yelled as he broke into a dead run toward the soldier and those about to emerge on to the scene. Jack yelled commands that were surprisingly heeded, the armed men keeping back, a little confused and a touch horrified at what happened.
The Doctor stopped just a few feet away from the scene, hearing Rose’s footsteps coming toward them at a quick clip. He stuck his arm out to catch her, though she slowed in time, coming to a stop at his side.

“The effect is airborne now, and spreading fast. There may be nothing we can do now.”

“Nothing?” Rose asked as he lowered his arms, taking her hand in his. She squeezed.

He turned to her. “It’s in the air, Rose. Every single person here is breathing it, and it will spread within hours. I am sure, very sure I know what it is causing this, but if it’s air borne, I may not be fast enough.” He explained as somewhere in the distance the air raid siren began to sound.

“All we need,” Rose said with a shaky voice and a weak smile. She turned a little toward Jack, frowning ever so slightly, “Didn’t you say a bomb was gonna land here?” She asked glancing at the tarp-covered object.

Jack nodded, those around them going deadly quiet in the confusion of everything.

And really, the Doctor couldn’t blame them. They’d just seen a commanding officer turn into some strange sort of monster, been told that there was a bomb about to drop on them by two strangers and a man they likely thought was a little off to begin with. And in the silence, likely better than anyone else, the Doctor could hear the quiet, gentle refrains of a lullaby being sung somewhere in the camp.

“We have hours until the contaminants change every single person in London before moving on to the rest of the world. We have maybe an hour before a bomb drops on this very spot, and expedites the damage. And does anyone else hear that?”

“Hear what?” Jack asked, but then Rose went still, straining to listen. A moment later, Jack’s eyes widened and his brow furrowed in confusion.

“I know that voice.” The Doctor said, turning to follow the sound and gently pulling Rose along with him. Jack, he knew, was following along, and they wove their way to a shed. They shifted around to the front. “No one guarding?” The Doctor asked no one in particular as he let go of Rose’s hand and examined the doors for traps or locks.

Therefore, it wasn’t all that surprising when Jack answered. “They came to see what the commotion with Algy was,” he explained quietly.

The Doctor said nothing as he slowly pulled open the doors, wincing at the creak in the old wood that drew Nancy’s attention to him, causing her to stop her song. One glance at the man with the gas mask face, sleeping soundly as a babe with his head on the table, and the Doctor gestured for her to continue. She did, holding his attention as she pulled on her arm, demonstrating that she was cuffed to the leg of the table.

He crept forward, withdrawing his sonic as he went, he pointed it at the cuff on Nancy’s arm, her voice faltering slightly as it whirred. She startled when the cuff snapped, but continued to sing until they were out of the shed, leaving behind the sleeping soldier turned Zombie.

The Doctor closed the door quietly one he and Nancy were clear, then turned to Jack. “Alright, Captain. Let’s see what started all this.”
Head lamps came on, and the tarp thrown across the medical-transporter was tossed off. The Doctor climbed up with Jack, taking a look at the structure of the ship.

“See,” Jack said, tossing his arms out to the side for a moment, “An ambulance.”

“That’s an ambulance?” Nancy asked, and Rose put her arm around the girl as she explained what was going on.

The Doctor looked to Jack who was looking over the controls. “They’ve been trying to get in.” The Captain noted.

“Of course they have,” The Doctor countered as he leaned on the lid. “They think this is from Germany, of course they’re going to try and crack it open, see what’s inside.” He frowned as Jack started putting in the code. “Why are you trying to get in?”

“The sooner you see this thing is empty—”

“Jack, nanogenes,” The Doctor tried to reason. “There didn’t seem to be anything inside becau—”

He stopped when Jack’s actioned elicited sparks from the control panel, setting off an alarm complete with a blinking, mauve light. They jumped back, momentarily in shock.

“Didn’t happen last time.” Jack said dumbly.

“It hadn’t crashed last time, and now you’ve managed to call the tropes back. Well done, Captain.” The Doctor snapped as he looked around. “Go secure the gate,” He pointed to where they came in. “And hurry, Jack.”

The Captain nodded as he jumped down, running full speed to where he was instructed, shouting orders as he went to the other soldiers standing about in confusion.

Nancy,” The Doctor said, turning to the girls. “How did you get in?”

“I cut the wire.” Nancy replied, confused.

The Doctor removed his sonic from his jacket. “Rose, darling, setting two 2428D,” he tossed her the sonic.

“Right, what’s that do?” Rose asked as she caught it in both hands.

“Reattaches barbed wire. Nancy, show Rose where you came in. Go, quickly, and be safe.”

He watched them go off, his hearts constricting a little at the thought of letting her out of his sight when the danger was high, but there had to be a way to fix this. Otherwise, the danger wouldn’t matter, because Rose wouldn’t exist.

Left on his own, the Doctor opened the hatch, peering inside, hoping to find the on-board systems still attached, and perhaps even a way to reprogram things. He examined every bit of it, finding nothing inside before moving around the back. He could see how the English would have thought this a weapon, considering how very missile shaped it was. He crouched, finding a second panel near the bottom, likely to the on-board computer, but he couldn’t do much without his sonic.

Jack’s footsteps came thumping back toward him as the Doctor sighed in defeat, he rose and turned toward the con captain.
“See anything?” Jack asked.

“Not sure.” The Doctor replied wearily. He glanced over to see Rose and Nancy returning, and then beyond them and the fence to see the gas mask zombies making their way toward the fence.

Rose ran up to him, handing him back his sonic which he took with a muttered thanks. Kneeling back down, he began to analyze what might be done.

“I don’t understand,” Jack said with irritation. “How could this happen? Nanogenes don’t just work at random!”

“The nanogenes in here didn’t have any baselines,” He explained, glancing over his shoulder to look at Jack. “They were in here without a database, and without a guide. So, you launch the ship at us, thinking it empty, and it comes crashing down to Earth. It crashes into the ground, and a little bit of them escape, looking for injured bodies to repair and prepare for battle, just like they’re base programming allows. And what do the find but a dead child wearing a gas mask.”

Jack paled, swallowing.

“And the nanogenes brought him back to life?” Rose stammered, earning the Doctor’s attention. “They can do that?”

“It’s not that difficult, darling, it’s a quirk of matter. Centuries from now your lot will find new and creative ways of prolonging the end. But without a baseline, without knowing what or how they’re supposed to fix the body they discover, the nanogenes don’t know they’re doing wrong. They don’t know gas mask from skin and bone, but they do the best they can with what knowledge they have, and they continue on.”

“But why are they doing that to everyone?” Rose asked, gesturing behind her.

“Because now they think they know what a human is supposed to look like, and none of you match the image. So, to the nanogenes, they need to fix you. The entire human race at risk of being changed from what you are, to the form and mentality of a scared little boy who was just looking for his mother, and can tear down the world to do it.”

“Power of a god,” Rose’s voice tremored.

“A fully equipped Chula warrior.” The Doctor nodded.

“I-I didn’t know.” Jack said quietly.

“I know you didn’t.” The Doctor replied, returning his attention the panel and trying to find a way that he might input some sort of rest setting.

Nancy called for Rose, and he heard them moving about behind them, the chorus of “mummy” spoken in an array of unfamiliar voices and growing louder. The Doctor ignored them, continuing his search and diagnostics in what he was beginning to believe was in vain.

Part of him wanted to toss the sonic aside, go to Rose and hold her tight until the inevitable came. If the nanogenes didn’t convert them first, the bomb scheduled to land certainly would. There would be no regenerating from that, and he was running out of time to do anything at all. Even his current task was becoming increasingly more futile as seconds ticked away. But the hope that always lived inside him was whispering to keep going, to try just a little longer.

“Why are they coming here?” Rose asked. “Because of the ship?”
“Yes,” he replied without looking up, sensing her standing beside him. “It thinks it’s under attack so it’s calling the troops to it.”

“Because now they’ve got a warrior complex or something?”

“Because the nanogenes made them that way, yes.”

“So why are they stopping?” Rose asked, and the Doctor frowned.

He stood, turning first to her and then to the gates, seeing all the zombies having stopped, staring at them, continuing their pleas for “mummy” but not coming any closer. He looked about and around, seeing that, really, the fence shouldn’t have held them back at all.

“They’re waiting.” He realized.

“What for?” Rose asked. “It the child’s strong, if it can do anything… can’t they?”

“Yes,” He said, “But they’re waiting for their captain.”

“The boy,” Jack said with understanding.

“Jamie.” Nancy corrected without thought.

“What?” Jack asked, arching a brow.

Nancy turned to the captain, her gaze cold and unkind. “Not ‘the child’, Jamie.” She said without compromise as somewhere in the distance the first of the bombs fell.

The Doctor stared at Nancy, and really took her in. A sister would defend her brother, yes, but there was something underlying in her tone, the way she snapped at Jack.

He could look, see if the inkling sparking in his mind was right. It would be very invasive, but if he was right….

“So, how long until the bomb falls?” Rose asked.

“Any second.” Jack replied in a panicked tone.

“Too close to Volcano day for you, Captain?” The Doctor asked without looking at him, focusing on Nancy as he came to stand before her.

“He’s just a little boy.” Nancy tried to explain plaintively.

“I know.” The Doctor said gently as he lightly touched upon her time line. And, instead of following it forward, he traced it backward.

“He’s just a little boy who wants his mummy.” Nancy’s voice broke as tears welled in her eyes.

And there it was, the faint hope that the Doctor hadn’t even realized he was looking for. The reset button that, now, should have been obvious from the beginning.

“Then let him come to you, Nancy.” He said quietly, and her eyes widened as her face drained of color.

“Doctor?” He heard Rose drawing near, but he held up a hand to stop her.
“Nancy, you were barely more than a girl, weren’t you?” Bombs went off around them, and a conversation between Jack and Rose took place but he tuned them out to focus on the young woman before him. “You were young, and in love, and you didn’t think of what might happen when you allowed yourself to do what feels completely natural. And then the young man was gone, and you found yourself alone and about to be a mother. A teenage single mother in this era is unimaginable, so you hid, and then you lied, to everyone as well as to Jamie.” He spoke as kindly as he could, but Nancy still hid her face in shame, tears streaming down her cheeks.

The gates nearest to them broke open, and the Doctor glanced up to see the little boy striding toward them, asking the question he’s likely wanted to know for his entire, short life. The other zombies did not move beyond a foot, and hope swelled within the Doctor.

“The future of the human race is in your hands, Nancy. Please. Please, I promise, everything will work out for the best, I swear. Just tell him.”

Nancy sniffed, glancing back at him, then at Rose.

He turned to the woman at his side, seeing her smile warmly and nod. “You can do it, Nancy.” She said with tears in her eyes.

Nancy squared her shoulders, turned and faced the remains of Jamie, then met him half way.

“Are you my mummy?” he asked, tilting his head, and Nancy knelt before him.

“Yes,” She whispered, sniffing. “Yes, I am your mummy.” She said much more firmly.

“Mummy?” Jamie asked.

“I’m here, I’m here.”

“Please.” The Doctor whispered, wrapping an arm around Rose’s shoulders instinctively, pulling her closer to him. He felt her arm go around his waist, holding tight.

“I am your mummy, Jamie,” Nancy continued and Jamie just kept questioning, not enough of his former self left inside for him to understand. “I am your mummy, and I will always be your mummy, and I’m so sorry.” Nancy wept, taking her son in her arms seemingly without a thought of what happens to her.

“Doctor,” Rose breathed as nanogenes appeared around mother and child, circling them with golden glow.

He pulled Rose just a little closer, that hope in his chest growing.

“Come on, come on, please.” He said into Rose’s hair. “Please, you can figure it out, you clever things. There’s your real baseline, you must sense it. She’s the mother!”

“What’s happening?” Rose asked.

The Doctor watched, the nanogenes beginning to clump together, creating clusters that circled more slowly around the pair.

A smile broke out over the Doctor’s face. “It’s reading the DNA, it’s recognizing the connection, understanding, relearning. And, if we are very very lucky, fixing its mistake.”

The nanogenes stopped, dispersing and causing Jamie’s arms to drop from where they made their
way around Nancy’s neck, and for Nancy to fall backward.

The Doctor let go of Rose, and the two of them darted over to mother and son. As Rose helped Nancy back to her feet, the Doctor knelt before Jamie and gently lifted the gas mask from his face.

The little boy squinted, then grinned a mischievously little grin so well known to little boys of all species. The Doctor laughed in delight, scooping up the little man and embracing him, turning to Nancy who cried for relief, pure joy coloring her every feature.

“Oh, you little scamp, you’ve gotten yourself up to a lot of trouble. Don’t worry, nothing too serious.” He said as he handed him over to Nancy.

“What happened?” She asked, lowering the boy to the ground, him being perhaps too big for her to carry around anymore, but still hugged him close and stroked his hair as she looked to the Doctor in wonder.

“The nanogenes,” he said as Rose returned to his side. He placed his arm around her once more, feeling her lean into him. “They recognized the parent DNA, and understood that Jamie wasn’t fixed properly. Instead of changing you, like they did everyone else, the understood the superior information, and allowed you to change them.”

Fresh tears welled in Nancy’s eyes as she bent her head and crouched just a little to hold her son that much more in protective circle. One that tightened when the sound of a bomb whistling through the air came a bit too close for comfort.

“Doctor, the bomb.” Rose said, and he turned toward her, then looked around for Jack.

“I take it the Captain left?”

“Yeah,” She replied with a hint of bitterness.

“Well, then I have a feeling we don’t have….” He trailed off, his momentary hope of the con man doing the right thing fading as his eyes shifted skyward, watching the silhouette of his impending demise plummet toward them.

The Doctor shifted Rose just a hair closer, nearly turned away to avoid watching the end, when a Chula ship sped through the air behind the bomb. A blink later, and perhaps a touch too close for comfort, a blue forcefield shot out and caught the bomb. Another blink, and Jack was a stride, his right food hovering over a set of German words that caused a chill to jolt down the Doctor’s spine.

“Doctor!” Jack called out.

“Jack,” He replied, smiling if not a bit weakly. “I’m glad to see Rose’s faith in you wasn’t misplaced.”

The Captain grinned rakishly before sobering. “The bomb’s already commenced detonation. I’ve put it in stasis, but it won’t last long.”

“Can you get rid of it safely?” The Doctor asked.

He saw the flicker of resignation in Jack’s face, but the Captain simply nodded before smiling sadly. He looked to Rose, “love the t-shirt.” He said with that grin again, and the Doctor felt Rose shift beside him. Jack winked, and then disappeared with the bomb, the ship flying off.

“Well, that’s that, then.” The Doctor said just before he and Rose were encircled by the nanogenes.
“Oh, hello,” he said, withdrawing his arm from around her and watching as the nanogenes divided between them once some space was had.

“What’s happening?” Rose asked a little worriedly.

“Well, they’re making sure we’re up to code, aren’t they? Now that they know what a human is supposed to look like…” he trailed off, as he felt the tickle of their scan. He gave a sort of giggle. “Nope, nope, not human, me. But you’re starting to understand that now, aren’t you?” He said to the nanogenes as the ones around him, and the ones around Rose began to exchange information. “Rose, move toward the others.” He said, and she paled. “I promise, they aren’t going to attack anymore. They were made after Jamie, remember? And with him repaired, there’s no longer a proper connection. But we need to fix the others.”

“Alright.” Rose said as she inched closer to the hoard of gas mask zombies, the nanogenes continuing to follow her. He edged along behind her, only a little worried that the genes would try and turn the former humans into Time Lords instead of their former selves. “How much closer do you need to be?” Rose asked the nanogenes, lifting her arm and watching the small, firefly-like things circle it before suddenly shooting out toward the crowd in front of her. His followed suit, as if called to arms, and he smiled as Rose’s head whipped back toward him and then faced forward in amazement.

He touched her back a moment before darting past her as the hoard collapsed, their faces returning to normal as well as everything else.

And in the front was the good doctor. Helping Constantine up to his feet, the Doctor beamed at his friend. “Hello, doctor.” He greeted. “Good to see you back on your feet. It would seem the world isn’t ready to let you go just yet, and who could blame it? The man who wouldn’t leave his patients, no matter what.”

“Yes, Constantine said, looking around in a daze. “Yes, it would seem so. They also seem to be standing around a disused railway station. Is there any particular reason for that?” He asked.

The Doctor chuckled. “Not one that will make any sense. And neither will the fact that they’ll all be cured of whatever had brought them to you in the first place. Just, smile and nod, tell them of the marvels of modern medicine and how great a doctor you are, and say no more of it.”

“Right,” Constantine said, still a bit confused, but that was to be expected.

The Doctor hurried back to Rose who smiled at him in a sort of teasing manner. “Modern medicine?” She said as she turned and fell in step with him while he went to the Chula ambulance.

“Yes, well, with luck, no one will really want to dwell on tonight. It’s something of a skill you lot have. Now,” he said as he hopped up to the where he could reach the upper control panel. He pressed a few buttons, then paused, seeing everyone still standing around, “Everyone get clear!” He called. “Go on, off you pop! Beat the Germans, win the war, don’t forget the Welfare State! Come on, clear off!” He called and waved them on, watching as those at the gates began to turn and hurry off.

“Clear off?” Rose asked as he returned to setting the ambulance to explode.

“Well, history says there’s an explosion meant to be here, and who am I to argue with history?”

“Usually the first in line.” Rose countered.

“Cheek,” He smirked at her before finishing the codes and hopping down. “Now,” he said, taking
her hand. “I’m sure you know what comes next.”

“We run?” She said, already backing up.

“That we do.” He said, and they broke out into a sprint, getting well away from the site when the ambulance exploded, just as history remembered.

It had been a wild ride, all things considered. If he were to look back on his life, or at least the life he could remember, Captain Jack Harkness didn’t have many regrets. The last few years were, of course, probably his worse, both for him personally and for him as a person, but maybe that would be enough if he did find himself in an afterlife of some sort.

The view for his final moments would be a good one, the galaxy beyond a beautiful tint of blue and purple, clustered with stars like perfect diamonds. And in his hand, the drink provided for emergency protocol 4-1-2, with just a little too much vermouth, was at least better than most might have had.

He thought of Rose, of how she wasn’t fooled by him, and how much that intrigued him. He thought of the Doctor, of how for the first time since waking to find what the Time Agency had done, someone had made Jack realize that he was better than how he behaved. Both of them were gorgeous, both of them tickled his fancy, and he had regret for not having been able to know either of them more than he had.

As if reading his mind, somewhere the sounds of Glenn Miller pipped into the cockpit, drowning out any further comments from the on-board computer about his imminent demise.

“You know,” The Doctor’s voice had him choking on a sip of his drink, turning his chair quickly to face the back of the cabin and finding a blue box where there wasn’t one before. A blue box with its doors open, and beyond them in what looked like a really spacious, well-lit room, Rose and the Doctor dancing. “Most people notice when another vessel boards their ship as a way of providing rescue.”

“How long did it take you to think that up?” Rose asked for a smirk as Jack abandoned his drink, the glass falling and breaking as he moved to the blue box and entered.

It was so bloody big on the inside. It had to be another dimension, had to be. Yet, there was only one species that had that sort of technology, and they weren’t supposed to have existed anymore.

“Close the door, will you, Jack? About to be a rather unpleasant draft when your ship blows up,” The Doctor said, pulling Jack’s attention back to he and Rose as they slowly waltzed around a center console.

Jack hurriedly shut the doors, and he turned in time to see the Doctor let go of Rose’s waist for a moment to flip a switch. The music continued as a loud, grinding nose competed with it, the pillar in the center console bobbing up and down in time with the engine.

“Welcome aboard the TARDIS,” The Doctor said as he spun Rose out, keeping her hand in his but stopping the dance they’d been engaged in.

“Much bigger on the inside,” Jack commented, looking around the white and teal room.
“I think you just might be.” The Doctor countered, a smirk on his face.

“What happened to Nancy, the little boy?” Jack asked, deciding not to drop the act of not caring much for anyone but himself. Or, maybe more accurately, relearning that he actually did care about people other than himself.

“I imagine that the good doctor I befriended will help them out, considering he knew of the them, and likely suspected what they really were to one another. Everyone back to the way they were.”

Jack nodded. “So, the damage I’d done?”

“Reversed.” The Doctor assured, a slight warning in his voice. “It’s not to say history can easily explain how limbs might have regrown, or how that one spot of London seemed to have survived far better than any other part. But the human race lives one as it was, is, always will be, and there was an explosion there like there was always meant to be.” He then tilted his head down, holding Jack’s eye. “You aren’t going to cause any other problems, will you?”

“Be on my best behavior.” Jack countered.

“I don’t believe that for a second.” The Doctor smirked, but he seemed to accept Jack’s word.

“Good,” Jack smiled, “Because now I get to note you’re playing our song,” He said, tilting his head to indicate Rose. “And for that, I may just have to cut in.”

“Or,” The Doctor said, and without touching a control on the panel, the song changed from *Moonlight Serenade* to *In the Mood*, “I could just stop playing your song.” He pulled Rose back toward him, causing her to yelp before breaking out into a giggle as the Doctor began to mover her around the console.

And it was in that moment that Jack came to terms with a few points he was sure he needed to know. First, was that the Doctor wasn’t a time agent, or even a mere time traveler, but a Time Lord, despite the fact that they shouldn’t exist. That he, Jack, was currently standing inside a TARDIS, which was a dream every time agent had at one point simply because vortex manipulators could be nasty to use. Secondly, he knew that Rose and the Doctor both were off limits as anything more than friends, if he was so lucky to even call them that. Their eyes never left each other as they moved around the console, their touches lingered longer, and their bodies swayed closer than there was really a need for. Rose had hinted that there was nothing there, but he recalled their reunion, and how ever single bit of the Doctor’s body language had spoke of there being something. And they were very close when he beamed them on to his ship. Maybe he’d broken up a moment much heavier than he initially realized.

“So, should I go find a room, or…..?”

The Doctor dipped Rose over his arm, causing her to laugh merrily and he to chuckle before he righted her and looked to Jack.

“The TARDIS will show you where you’ll need to go.” He explained. “She’s a bit sentient.”

“I figured that bit out.” Jack said, and the Doctor smiled a genuinely pleased smile.

“So, no need for explanations, then?” He asked.

“Not yet, anyway.” Jack said, taking off his hat. “Goodnight, you two.”

“No nights on the TARDIS, Jack.” Rose said as he departed, and the Captain laughed to himself,
leaving them behind as he followed the glowing lights to an empty room.
Jack disappeared into the corridor, leaving Rose and the Doctor alone once more. They barely had time to talk before the Doctor sent them after Jack, and now that everything was settled, the air around them felt heavy.

“You’re not upset I brought him on board, are you?” The Doctor asked her, bringing her back into a dancing stance as the TARDIS shifted the music around them once more to something soft and, perhaps, romantic.

“No,” She replied. “Bit surprised, though.”

“I think Jack just needed a second chance.” He said. “But I’d toss him out on the nearest planet if you’re at all bothered by it.”

“Shut up, you would not.” Rose countered, feeling her heart swell at the Doctor’s deep laugh lightly playing at her eyes.

“Alright, perhaps I wouldn’t toss him out, but I certainly wouldn’t let him stick around.”

There was a lull in conversation, one pacified by eyes locked on to one another, bodies swaying close in time to slow music, moving in a circle in one spot rather than around the console like earlier.

“We never,” Rose began, but lost her voice as the Doctor leaned in a touch, his breath dancing on her lips.

“We never what, darling?” He asked, his voice low, quiet and smooth. She shuddered at the way “darling” sounded, having realized now how often he’d call her that, and yet it was never said that way.

“Never really finished our discussion.” She said, matching her tone to his.

“About?”

“This, us.”

“You would like to label it?” The Doctor asked, brow ticking up slightly.

“Like to know boundaries and such.” She countered. “You said you don’t understand human datin’ rituals. Well, don’t understand Time Lord ones, me.”

“Time Lord’s don’t date, or court. They enter into an arranged marriage that usually benefits the family financially or politically.”

“Oh,” Rose said, feeling a bit dumb, “Well, then.”

He grinned, and it made him look a little younger. “Rose, we can go on as if I said nothing, as if nothing that transpired in the hospital happened. I would be sad, a little put out, of course, but I would never make you enter into something you didn’t want. But, if you’re agreeable to a more romantic relationship, I would gladly do so, to whatever degree you were comfortable with.”

“Yeah?” She asked.
“Yes,” He said firmly.

Rose’s mouth twisted into a smirk before she got slightly on her toes and pressed her lips to his. He relaxed instantly, moving his hand from her waist slowly up her back, moving his fingers into her hair. Then she pressed her lips more firmly, opening her mouth just enough to dart her tongue out to taste his lips. He surprised her with a quiet hum of approval, and reciprocated in kind, deepening the kiss.

Her knees went weak, and she found he’d abandoned the dancing stance to hold her with both arms. She wound both arms around his neck, expecting him to pull back, and he didn’t.

Her brain was starting to fog, and she found herself taking breaths through her nose as she didn’t dare to break away. Yet he didn’t move, didn’t push her further, and when she pressed her body closer to his he held her there.

With a slight whimper, she pulled back, breaking the kiss with a smack and looking at the wonderfully dazed look on the Doctor’s face. His yes darted between hers and her lips, his own a bit kiss swollen with a light smile playing at the corners.

“You really mean that, don’t you?” She said.

“Was that a test?” He asked, grinning. “Did a I pass? If not, I’ll happily retake it. Maybe I could do so anyway, improve my score. I mean, the console is right behind you, if I had known I would have led you backward, and-”

“’Kay, alright, gettin’ the picture, here.” She laughed, feeling light as he did the same. “But, physical limits aside, someone asks if you’re my boyfriend.”

“You know, I would actually really prefer to not be known as your boyfriend. I’m over a thousand years old, boyfriend seems ridiculous.” He replied, wrinkling his nose a little.

“Can’t really call you my lover.” She grinned.

“We could change that.” The Doctor teased leaning in for a peck on her lips. “But in all seriousness, Rose, if someone asks, I am yours. Just yours.” He shifted his hold on her, taking her hands in his. She expected he would kiss her knuckles as he always had, but instead of lifting them to his lips, he brought them to his chest, placing each one over a heart. “They’re yours for as long as you’ll have them. They were yours before today, and they would have continued to be until you told me you didn’t want them. And even then, I think, they would have beat for you for a long time. I will not lie to you and pretend I did not give them out before, or that they did not beat for any other. But those people are gone, and more than that, they were from a different time, when I was a different man within this same body. I will think back on them fondly but you, darling, you’re who holds them now. Do you accept them?”

Tears pricked her eyes as her lips fought a smile. He was too much, too romantic, too poetic, too good for the likes of a chav from the estates. But she was also a little bit selfish, and finding herself falling more in love with this alien than she could have ever imagined being in love with anyone ever.

Tentatively, she took his right hand and brought it to rest over her singular heart. “Only got one to give you in return.” She said, a slight laugh in her voice as she looked to where he spread his fingers against her shirt to have her digits fall between his own.

“Yours is so much bigger, brighter, more beautiful and far less damaged than either of mine, let
alone the two together. It would be a genuine privilege to call you my own, my darling.” He said softly, and Rose met his gaze.

“Well that settles it, then.” She grinned, the Doctor’s eyes lighting up in a way she so rarely seen.

“Settled, then.” And that’s when he lifted her hands to his lips, kissing her knuckles far longer than any time before, lingering over them for a length completely unnecessary, and making her utterly dizzy. “Now,” he said as he righted himself and stepped back. “Jack will likely be indisposed for some time. Anywhere you would like to go?”

Rose shook her head. “Best we wait, yeah? Besides, had enough adventure for the day.”

“Then how about somewhere simple. An asteroid market, perhaps? Give this dating thing a try.”

“Only if there are chips. Proper chips, this time, nothing like those soggy blue ones.”

“Alright, if you insist,” he teased again, and Rose put her hands in her pockets, bouncing on her feet as the Doctor moved around the console, putting in the coordinates of wherever he was taking them.

“Where are we?” Rose asked as they stepped out the TARDIS.

“Asteroid 4592 Alpha pi.” The Doctor replied. “A nice little place, not far from New Earth. It’s a tourist place, admittedly, more so people feel less inclined to actually go to New Earth just to sample the delicacies.”

He offered her his arm, and she took it, smiling up at him as they stepped away from the TARDIS which was parked in a small ally way just off of what looked to be a town square turned market. Rose gasped quietly, still not even remotely used to seeing alien worlds, even if this one felt closer to home than any of the others.

There were so many people, human people, milling about. The skin colors seemed a little different, hints of odd tints here and there, but they were humanoid at least. There were aliens as she knew them, as well, but they were few and far between.

“Blend in here, won’t we?” Rose asked.

“Yes, this is an asteroid favored by the humanoids of the world. Admittedly there are some people here who would prefer to keep it that way, a lot that Cassandra would have fit in with quite nicely, if she hadn’t become nothing more than a flap of skin. But they aren’t the majority.”

“Excuse me, sir, ma’am.” A man in an official looking uniform addressed them as they came a bit more into the square. “Might I see your papers?”

“Papers?” The Doctor questioned.

“Yes,” the man said slowly, looking at the Doctor as though he were made. “Your papers? You’re not allowed here without proof of acceptance.”

Another man, equally dressed in official capacity, came up beside the first. “It’s too cute down on the unsavory sort, sir.” He said in a bored tone, looking at the crowd and not at them
“You were just telling me ‘bout that.” Rose said as the Doctor began reaching into his jacket for
the psychic paper, elbowing him gently as he pulled it out.

“Right, how forgetful of me.” He said, and the second man frowned a little, though he still didn’t
pay them any attention. “Here you are.” The Doctor said as he showed the paper to the first officer.
“We’re very accepting, Rose and I.”

“Glad to hear.” He said, handing the paper back. “You and your wife enjoy the festival.” He said,
moving on, his partner following without ever having looked at them at all.

“You wife?” Rose asked quietly, leaning in slightly toward the Doctor.

“Bit of a strong label, I’ll admit, but I figured better safe than sorry. Would hate to wind up in jail
because we did something deemed inappropriate.”

“That happens? Jail time for a kiss?”

“Well, it’s more of a time out, really.” He said in that way that was meant to shrug off any
concerns.

“Glad to hear.” She said. “Now, chips?”

“Yes, darling, chips.” He smirked, taking her hand this time, running his thumb off over hers.

“Like it when you call me that,” She confessed, kissing his cheek and causing him to smile.

“Be sure to fit in more often.” He replied, leading her to the chip stand.

She took in a deep breath, closing her eyes and savoring how the scent lingered so strongly she was
salivating. “Mmmm, smells like proper chips.”

“Alright, alright, you’ve made your point.” He said as they joined the cue. “I will never again try
and say something is chips when they are, in fact, nothing more than a poor facsimile.”

She smiled at him, pressing her tongue into her cheek moment so she wouldn’t tease him further.

They waited a bit, the cue going slower than she would have liked, and Rose could feel the Doctor
beside her getting fidgety.

“Something wrong?” She asked, glancing up at him and noting the confusion on his face.

“No, not wrong, per se, just… off. I’m getting not only a strong sense of deja vu, but like there’s
something in my head. Another me there, it’s rather off putting.”

“What, like there’s another version of you here?” She asked, looking around for a long scarf or
man in a bright coat.

“I’m not sure.” The Doctor replied honestly. He then turned to him. “Would I be a terrible date if I
went off to investigate?” He asked.

“Suppose not, so long as I still get chips.” She replied.

He rolled his eyes but smiled, reaching into his coat pockets and pulling out a stick. “It’s currency,
like a credit card. Buy as many chips as you like.”

“Not worried about the bill?” Rose asked.
“Bill, what bill?” The Doctor scoffed before bringing her hand to his lips and kissing it quick. “I’ll be back.” He said before taking off, and Rose watched him until he disappeared into the crowd.

She sighed, wearily and dreamily all at once. Even chips were an adventure with him, but she couldn’t complain.

Her turn came up, she got her chips and loaded them with salt and vinegar before looking for a place to wait for the Doctor. There were tables about, but they were all full, and frankly she wouldn’t have been easily spotted. Far too many people around for that to happen with any sort of ease.

She meandered a bit until she found a sort of standing area near the edge of the market, overlooking what appeared to be a lush little garden with large bushes and paths that could be mistaken for a maze at the wrong angle. There was a fountain in there, easily spotted, and Rose figured it was as good a place as any to wait for the Doctor.

Rose was beginning to head that way before she noted the same officers from earlier start to make their way toward her. She paused, waited, hoping that she wasn’t about to be arrested for something like a fraudulent credit stick.

As the approached, the one they had spoken to earlier handed her a slip of paper. “I’m afraid your husband is being detained for the next three hours.” He said as she reached for the slip.

“What’s he done?” She asked, looking down at the paper, but finding the handwriting hard to read even with the TARDIS translation aid.

“I’m afraid he’s offended a vendor.” Replied the other. “He swore up and down that he’d never seen the man before in his life, however, the vendor swore it was him, had even seen him traveling around with a yellow haired human in a black jacket.”

“In fairness to your husband,” said the first, “the vendor’s got quite terrible eyesight these days. It’s possible he was mistaken, but your husband went quietly asked us to find you. You are Rose, yes?”

“Yeah, that’s me,” She replied.

“If it’s any consolation, I’m fairly certain it was mistaken identity.” The seconds assured. “Best he followed us, might get him out sooner if we can prove it.”

“You can prove it.” Grumbled the first.

“Telling you, mate, it wasn’t him.”

“Right,” Rose said, pausing their argument. “So’s this my claim to him, then? Like a coat check or something?”

“No, miss,” The first one said, and she mused to herself that she wouldn’t be a miss if she were married. “We’ll release him later without you needing to come by, that’s mostly for your records.”

“Be sure to frame it, then.” She said, and was perplexed when they seemed quite pleased with that, turning and walking away.

She shook her head, then continued onward to the standing spot, already trying to figure out how she was going to entertain herself for the next three hours. She did have a credit stick in her pocket, and she supposed she should eventually think of something to bring back to her mum when she went home again. A little bit of proof that she’d been elsewhere, just in case the alien she ran off
with wasn’t enough. But knowing her luck, she’d get lost during the endeavor, and when the Doctor was released, they’d never find one another.

There was also the option of going back to the TARDIS, but then she remembered that Jack was there. She trusted him, getting the sense that all she had to do was mention that her relationship with the Doctor received an upgrade and he’d stop flirting with intent, but she wasn’t sure she was ready to be alone with him again. And it was likely the bloke would be sleeping for some time. She could pop back in for a book, though. Or maybe even just a magazine. Something to pass the time with while she waited for the Doctor’s sentence to be over.

But for now, she would enjoy her treat. The chips were the gorgeous, with the perfect crisp and tang, and just greasy enough to feel unhealthy while likely not being as bad for her as she thought. She watched couples in the garden below meander about, leaning into each other and stealing kisses. She watched children scamper about, chasing each other or the odd, bird-like things that had bills that looked more like trumpet horns. It was rather lovely, peaceful.

“Ah, there you are.” She heard the Doctor behind her, startling a little at his unexpected presence. “Thought I’d lost you.” He came up beside her as she looked down at her chips.

“Lost me? Authorities said you weren’t supposed to be out for-” She turned to look at him, and was taken aback.

He was younger. The younger one he’d shown her in the TARDIS, tucked inside her bedroom at her mum’s flat. He was wearing velvet and a cravat; his hair was long with looser curls. There was hardly a line on his surprised and confused face, and he sort of reminded her of a baby deer.

Then she remembered what the officers said, recalled the poor vendor’s assurance that it was her Doctor who caused offense, and smacked this Doctor on the arm. “You did offend that vendor, didn’t you?”

“P-pardon, what?” The Doctor stammered.

“You offended that old vendor over somethin’ then ran away.” She said crossing her arms and smirking at him as he blinked at her. “Left yourself to be tossed in jail, too. Really are rubbish at the datin’ bit, aren’t you?”

His confusion turned to amusement, and she noted how he looked her over like any bloke with interest might. “It seems as though I’m at a disadvantage. You appear far more intimately acquainted with me than I you.” He said, shifting a touch closer to her.

She said with a frown. “This going to mess things up for you, then?”

“What is?”

“Your having met me… before you met me.” She chuckled nervously.

“I’ll forget.” He said. “A frequent habit in this body.”

“You’ve said as much. ’M Rose.”

“Rose,” He repeated. “What a lovely name. Have we been traveling together long, Rose?”

“Never sure with you.” She countered, tongue between her teeth as she smiled at him. He smirked, eyes darting to her lips. “Who’d ya think I was?”
“Lucie.” He replied. “I lost her in the crowd while we were looking at the wares of the vendor I offended. I turned to show her something, and she was gone. Except, I hadn’t realized that holding the item while turning away from him was something of an offense. I think if older me remembered that, he wouldn’t have taken you here.”

“Well, you just said you’d forget.”

“You, yes. Not today altogether. It must be quite a while into my future.” He said, leaning toward her. “When are you from? I can tell by your shirt from where you come from.” He said, eyes darting down to her Union Jack tee and glinting merrily.

She shook her head. “You teased me for it, ya know. Said I was worried people wouldn’t know I was British.”

“It’s certainly a statement.” He replied. “But when, when, I wonder. If I had to guess, I would say the early twenty-first century.”

“2005,” She replied.

He tilted his head, “So is Lucie. And She’s about your age, too. I wonder if maybe you know each other.”

Rose frowned while he smiled pleasantly. “You have a thing for blondes my age or something? Is it a type for you?”

The Doctor opened his mouth, but no words came out, not at first. He had to close it and try again, like a computer restarting. “I … have been known to travel with blondes around your age, but it’s not something I make a point of, and certainly not the common thing. But, ummm…. Oh! A type! You mentioned ‘date’ earlier, I understand now. No, Lucie, Lucie and I are just friends. There’s no… attraction there or anything.”

“So, she’s not one’a the ones you’ve danced with then.” She said, dropping her voice low when she emphasized the euphemism.

“No,” He smirked. “Have we danced, Rose?”

“Bit forward you are.” She countered, eating a chip.

“You’re the one asking about my love life.” He countered stealing a chip for himself.

“Supposed to be a date, this.” She jabbed him in the arm with her finger. “Figure if you’re gonna make my proper Doctor wind up in jail for a bit, gonna have you make it up to me while I can.”

“That seems fair, all things considered.” He agreed, stealing another chip. “How did you know I wasn’t your ‘proper Doctor’, as you say? You took one look at me and somehow knew.”

“Too young to be my Doctor,” She replied. “Plus, you’re dressed a bit different.”

“Too young!” His voice pitched, and Rose sucked her lips in to stop herself from laughing, tasting the salt and vinegar on them. “Blimey, how much older do I look? Don’t tell me I’ve gone grey. But then, that might be a good thing, going grey in a body that wasn’t already grey to begin with.”

Rose snickered, “I hadn’t really noticed.” She said as she popped another chip in her mouth.

“Just tell me I don’t look older than your father.” He teased.
The chip became hard to swallow around the sudden appearance of a lump in her throat, but she managed. Attempting to clear her throat of it and failing, she managed a, “Pretty easy, that. He died when I was a baby.”

“I’m sorry.” He said sincerely.

“S’allright, you didn’t know.” She said, pushing her chips around in the little dish.

“No, but I probably know when I’m with you.”

“Not sure you do,” Rose frowned. “Not sure I ever mentioned.”

“Well, I apologize.” He said again, taking her hand away from moving the chips around and cupping it both of his. “I didn’t mean to upset you.”

“S’allright.” She said, finding her throat felt less constricted as she met his eye. He was so earnest, terrified that he somehow messed things up for himself. He was so young looking, and something about his youth made his pleading expression that much more adorable. He reminded her a bit of a puppy. Rose cupped his cheek, stroking her thumb along it. “Promise, Doctor.” She said, and he seemed to consider it before nodding.

“Allright.” He accepted, and then Rose withdrew both her hands, returning to her chips. “So, is it just you and me traveling about?” He changed the subject.

“Just had someone come on board, actually.” She said around a chip. “And ‘fore that, we had another bloke with us.”

“So, I have a lovely woman on my ship, one whom I clearly have feelings for if I have tossed the term date around, and you’re asking if I have a type that I like to dance with, yet I keep bringing other men on board.”

“Bit odd, yeah?” Rose smirked. “S’ alright, though. Not interested in either of them.”

He was about to reply when he stiffened, remaining stock still. “Oh.” He said, and Rose frowned, looking over her shoulder to see what had all the color drain from his face.

Her Doctor stood not ten feet away looking utterly displeased with himself, and beside him was a blonde Rose’s age, in a black leather jacket and a pair of ripped up denims. Her vest was purple, the logo of a rock band Rose wasn’t familiar with on it, and she looked utterly pissed.

“What’s all this about, then?” The girl said before stomping over. “Stealing your own date, then? Leaving me locked up in a jail cell while you’re out here flirting?” She crossed her arms, glaring at the younger Doctor.

“Ah, Lucie, there you are.” The younger Doctor said as if he hadn’t just gotten laid into. “This is Rose. Rose, Lucie.”

Lucie turned and gave her a genuine smile. “Nice to meetcha. Other Doctor there was frettin’ somethin’ awful ‘bout you til he managed to break ya out.” She then turned back to her Doctor. “TARDIS, shift, before we get arrested again.”

“I think it’s probably a good idea if we do the same,” the other Doctor said as he came up behind Rose. “Thank you for keeping her company, though I’ve never been less impressed with myself.”

“I look forward to the experience.” The younger one said as Lucie grabbed his arm and started
tugging him away. “It was nice to meet you Rose; I look forward to it.” He called before he turned
to walk forward and lead Lucie around the corner.

“We should go, too.” The Doctor said. “Jail here isn’t all that unpleasant, but I wouldn’t want to
have to stay locked up much longer than needed.” He slipped his hand in Rose’s, turning her
toward the TARDIS. She quickly snatched up her chips, carrying them in her free hand as they
made their way back.

“You know,” The Doctor said as the time ship came into sight, “that encounter went better than
most. Mind, at least I was meeting me as me, usually I can’t ever stand any of my other
incarnations.”

“Psychologists dream, that.” She said as he unlocked the door.

“Think it be more of a nightmare. Probably why we never had them on Gallifrey.” He said holding
the door open for Rose.

She hummed in agreement before sitting on a nearby jumpseat and finishing her chips.

He moved around the console slowly, flicking switches, adjusting knobs, mind seeming to have
gone off somewhere. She finished her chips, then smirked as a trash can manifested beside her
seat. It also promptly disappeared as soon as her empty carton was placed in it.

“I knew.” The Doctor said, causing Rose to return her attention to him. He still didn’t look at her,
instead seemed vastly more fascinated by something on the console. “About your father. I heard
you and Gwyn talking, the night we met Charles. I heard you said your father passed young, but I
wasn’t sure… you never mentioned him to me.”

Rose tilted her head. “Never brought it up cos it’s not something I think a lot about, yeah? Never
knew him, never knew life with him, not really. Don’t know what his voice sounds like, or
anything. Just know ‘im from pictures mum has about.”

“You could meet him.” The Doctor said, and Rose’s breath caught. “He can’t know it’s you, but
you could see him, if you’d like.”

All the breath left Rose’s lungs at once, her heart having done a strange little somersault in her
chest before stuttering and soaring and swelling. She got to her feet, and walked to where the
Doctor was standing, taking his face in her hands and turning him to face her. She didn’t even look
at him to figure out what he was thinking or feeling before she kissed him chastely and sweetly on
the lips.

“You’re serious?” She asked, feeling his hands come to rest on her waist.

“You can’t interfere, not at all, not in the least.” He said firmly. “You’ve never known life with
your father, and you can never know it. You can’t interact with him, you can’t give him any hints
about his death, no matter how it comes. But if you want to see him, I’ll find a spot in time.”

She sniffed, eyes clouding over a little. “Umm, h-how about, umm, June 14th, 1985, s’ when my
mum and dad got married.”

“Then your wish is my command.” He said softly.

“You’re seriously taken me?”

“I wouldn’t have offered if I wasn’t going to take you.” He assured.
She sniffed again. “Thank you,” she said before kissing him again.

It was a little too much. Kissing the Doctor, getting to do it even just in thanks and knowing it was well received. But also his doing something she wasn’t sure she could ever ask for.

“Oh, sorry,” Jack’s voice caused them to break apart, though neither Rose nor the Doctor acted as if there was anything to hide. Jack stood in the corridor entryway, still in the Uniform from the 1940s, though he appeared to have left the hat behind. He smiled lasciviously at them. “Didn’t mean to interrupt.” He said without making any attempt to leave.

“It’s alright.” Rose said. “Wasn’t interrupting anything.”

“Didn’t look like it from where I’m standing.”

“Jack, I get the feeling it doesn’t matter where you’re standing, you’d find a way to make a mountain out of a molehill if it suited you.” The Doctor said as he moved around the TARDIS console once more. “We’re about to make a quick stop, captain.”

“Oh, where are we going then?” Jack asked.

The Doctor glanced up. “To a wedding,” he said, before throwing a switch and sending them off.”

She had asked for this. Rose knew, as she clutched the Doctor’s hand tightly in her own, watching her father’s car pull up to the side of the road.

They’d been to the wedding, and while it was wonderful in an odd way to watch her father blunder her mother’s name, it left an ache in her heart she couldn’t quite explain. The Doctor had held her to his side, but Jack had looked at her with much more obvious concern.

“How’d he die?” he’d asked on the way back to the TARDIS.

“A car,” Rose said. “He was late to a wedding, had to go pick up a vase. The stupid vase, mum always called it. He got out of his car….” She had trailed off a moment. “Hit and run.” She finally managed. By the time ambulance got there, he was gone. He died alone.”

“You know he doesn’t have to.” Jack said, and the Doctor tensed.

“What?” Rose had asked.

There had been a slight debate, filled with clipped and harsh tones between the Doctor and Jack, and somehow Rose had managed to say something she never thought she would.

“I wanna be there when dies.”

And that’s why they were there, now, November 7th, 1987. It was a cool, clear day, though Rose thought the sun had no right to be shining. They were just at the corner where it would happen, standing about and trying not to look too inconspicuous.

Pete’s car turned the corner, and pulled up outside a pottery shop that looked newly opened, just at the corner. Rose watched him through her blurred vision as he left the vehicle and dashed around the front. Jordan Road, a little one-way street that Jackie had avoided Rose’s whole life, or at least
as long as she could remember. She never pictured the whole thing happening as she was seeing it. She didn’t even think Jackie quite knew how it happened.

“Remember what I said, darling.” The Doctor whispered to her as he stroked his thumb along hers. “You can’t interfere, no matter how horrible.”

“Know,” She replied quietly, shuddering quietly as she watched her Dad re-emerge from the shop with the vase. The stupid vase. He went around the front of the car, got in the driver’s side. Rose watched him set the vase down on the passenger seat, close the door, and stop. Pete had frowned at the thing beside him, picking it up, looking it over. He had that look, universally known to anyone for being annoyed. Perhaps it was the wrong one, or maybe it was damaged. He glanced down at his watch, at the shop, his watch.

“Oh God, this is it.” Rose said to herself as she heard the vehicle turning the corner.

Pete opened the door, a decision made to return to the shop.

The Driver of the car didn’t seem to be looking at the road.

Rose put her head on the Doctor’s shoulder, clenching her eyes shut just as the sickening sound of her Dad colliding with the car hit her ears.

It was a hit and run.

It had always been a hit and run.

And by the time the ambulance made it to him, he was gone.

But the sound had barely stopped sounding in Rose’s ear when air moved around her, and the Doctor snapped, “Jack!”

Tires squealed to a halt, a trash can fell over, causing a loud ruckus.

She turned away from the Doctor’s shoulder, jaw dropping a little, and tear-filled eyes going wide.

“Call an ambulance.” Jack shouted as the man from the Pottery shop came out to investigate. The former time agent stood in front of the car that had hit her father, hand on the hood as the driver remained shocked behind the wheel. “You, out.” Jack said to the man before rushing over to Pete Tyler, the view obscured by his vehicle and the over-turned tin.

“Jack!” The Doctor shouted again, leaving Rose’s side and rushing to the scene.

Rose stood still for a minute, remembering what her mother had always said.

Pete Tyler was involved in a hit and run, the driver was never caught, never known. Pete had died before the ambulance made it there, but no one knew exactly how long it had been before he was found.

But that was changing. She could feel it changing in her head.

Running over, she saw Jack on the ground by her dad, the Doctor kneeling behind him scowling.

“You can’t save him,” The Doctor said as quietly as possible, but she heard it.

“The hell we can’t,” Jack said.
“We can’t,” The Doctor said. “The repercussions of saving someone when they are supposed to pass on is devastating. I know, I’ve had firsthand experience with it.”

Rose looked from the Doctor and Jack to her Dad, and her heart launched itself into her throat.

He was looking right at her, staring her in the eye. His breathing was shallow, and he was bleeding, but he seemed to see her.

Without her telling them to, her feet led her the rest of the way, and she knelt down beside her Dad and took his hand.

“It’s alright.” She said. “I got you, you’re not alone. I’m here.” She said, her voice cracking. She’d never been able to remember her father’s touch, and now she had his hand in hers.

“Rose.” He said, and her breath caught.

“Yeah, it’s me.” She said, feeling the Doctor’s hand on her back. “’S me, Dad. I’m here.”

“Rose,” The Doctor whispered.

“Rose.” Pete said, gasping, frowning. “My Rose?” He squeezed her hand just a little before he took another deep, ragged breath. “Rose?”

“I’m here, it’s me, you’re not alone, yeah?”

“Rose?” he said again, the sirens of the ambulance cutting through the odd atmosphere.

Pete Tyler looked her in the eye, and despite the confusion, that his brain was shutting down, Rose believed he understood in the moment that she was his daughter. There was an understanding, a knowing, a look of love and pride in his eyes as he looked at her. Whether he was thinking of the baby girl somewhere with Jackie at this very moment, or meant it for the woman she became, it didn’t matter. She clung to it, to that love and pride that she never got to see in her life, and held on to it, deep in her heart, as the light drained from his eyes. Pete’s hand went limp in hers just as the ambulance pulled up.

The second Rose’s face began to crumple, the Doctor had pulled her away from the body and into his arms, standing them up and holding her as she wept for a heart break she could never fully appreciate until this moment. She lost her father when she wasn’t quite a year old, but she had never really had a reason to grieve until today.

There was a shift in time lines, subtle but felt all the same, as the Doctor led Rose back to the TARDIS. A fixed point in time, one he didn’t understand, had been shaken but not disturbed. Time lines remained, things were as they should be, and they could walk away from the potentially dangerous situation.

Rose, understandably, had a terrible headache. Her own, personal history had been altered, and now she had two memories to deal with, one where her mother told her of the original events, and as Rose said, the new ones.

When she was informed that the young man had faced the consequences of his actions, and hadn’t
gotten away with what he’d done. That there were some bystanders there that helped as much as they could, and were there for her Dad when he was passing. That the ambulance got there, but were still too late.

“You need rest,” He told her as he removed her jacket from her shoulders in the privacy of her room.

“Yeah,” She said softly.

“Rose,” he said, turning her gently, looking into her swollen, red eyes and cupping her face. “I am so, terribly sorry we couldn’t help him.”

She sniffed. “Know,” she said. “Just… he looked right at me. Might not’a believed I was me, but… Doctor, I could see he loved me, yeah?” She said, her face crumpling a little.

“Shh, I know, darling, I know. Of course he did, how could he not.” He soothed, kissing her gently on the forehead before shifting his fingers to smooth back her hair. “I think you should sleep, just for a little while. Your headache will pass if you do.”

She nodded again, leaning against him, looping her arms around his waist.

Sighing the Doctor pulled her to him, awkwardly holding her around her shoulders a moment before pulling back and kissing her briefly on the lips. He then turned, guided her to the bed, pulling back the sheets as Rose slipped off her shoes.

“Finally gettin’ me in bed, ‘n’ it’s not even for fun things.” She quipped as she climbed in, and he could help but snort softly.

“You make it sound like this is a sort of goal of mine.” He said as he laid the blankets over her. She smiled, but said nothing, her eyes already shutting. “Rest, love.” He said, already getting the sense that she was asleep. He paused, watching her for a moment before his body stiffened and he left her room, moving to the console room with sure steps.

Jack looked up from his spot on the jumpseat when the Doctor entered. He met the Doctor’s cold glare with one of steeling confidence, and held it all while the Doctor maneuvered the TARDIS into the vortex.

They stared one another down, Jack blinking more frequently than the time lord, but he didn’t let up.

“Jack, do you know what vortisaurs, or reapers are?” He asked, watching the former time agent. When no answer but a slight, nearly imperceptible crease in Jack’s brow came, the Doctor continued. “I’ve had experience with the former, and understand the latter is a bit of a sub breed, a more vicious one. Reapers are mess cleaners; they repair damage done when time lines and fixed points have been altered. Do you know how they repair the damage? They destroy everything, anything, until the anomaly that caused damage to the fixed point had been removed. The Time Lords used to be able to intervene, or at the very least hold them off until they could go in and fix the problem their selves, but now there’s only me.”

“So, you are a Time Lord.” Jack said as if that’s all this conversation was about, his deciphering the Doctor’s species.

“Yes, Jack, I’m a Time Lord. I sensed you already figured that out.” The Doctor snapped back.

“So, what happened to the others?”
“Why don’t you tell me?”

“It’s said you were just wiped from existence, if you ever did at all. You and the Daleks.”

“Mostly true. But they haven’t been removed from existence, just moved to another one. I’m the only one left, so if you’d kindly refrain from meddling in the future-”

“It was Rose’s father!” Jack half shouted.

“Yes, and do you truly believe that I would have allowed him to die if I thought he could be saved?” The Doctor snapped back. “I can’t read Rose’s time line, I never could. I have no idea how it would affect her if he lived. But what’s more, what I could see was that Pete Tyler had to die that day.”

“Because it was a fixed point.” Jack said, stiffening.

“Yes.” The Doctor said firmly. “As minor as it may have seemed to you, most fixed points are small. One person living when they shouldn’t, one vote cast in favor of another, one drop of rain in the right field makes all the difference.”

Jack nodded slowly, casting his eyes down and sighing. “So much for being bigger on the inside.” He slumped back down in the jumpseat.

The Doctor sighed, rubbing his forehead before pre-setting the controls to the Estates in Rose’s time. “You tried to save Rose’s father. What’s more, I think you might have helped her find the courage to be there for him in those last moments. Something tells me it just been she and I, she wouldn’t have moved. And I would have hardly have made her.” The Doctor said before stopping in front of Jack, leaning back against the console. He pinched the bridge of his nose a moment before meeting Jack’s eye. “I’m not going to toss you back to your century or anything of the sort for a minor slip up. If I did that with every one of my companions that meddled where they shouldn’t, I would have spent most of my life traveling alone. And as Rose so helpfully pointed out, I’m not much better myself in most cases.”

“So where are we going after this?” Jack asked.

“A quick visit back to Rose’s home, just to make sure Jackie isn’t suffering some ill-effects.”

“Jackie?”

“Rose’s mother.”

“You’ve met her mom? Must be serious, this thing you two have going on.”

“This, dear captain, is where that line of conversation ends.” The Doctor smiled, and Jack laughed. “But if you want to discuss other things, we could wait for Rose to sleep off her temporal headache in the galley.”

“I’d like that,” Jack replied with a flirtatious wink, and the Doctor rolled his eyes before pushing off the console and leading the way.

Two hours, forty-three minutes, and twenty-one seconds later, Rose found them in the galley deep
in debate over who, or rather what, had caused the Jack the Ripper murders in London.

“Well then, shall we go see Jackie now?” The Doctor asked, draining the last of his tea before standing.

“Wha? Home?” Rose said, confused and a bit worried at the prospect.

“Just for a moment,” The Doctor said, taking her hand and giving it a gentle squeeze. “I just want to make sure Jackie isn’t feeling any different after what happened with your Dad.”

“Alright, then,” Rose nodded, “As long as we aren’t staying long.”

“In and out, promise.” The Doctor smiled, letting go of her hand. “You changed?” He noted, looking down at Rose’s blue top and black joggers. Her hair was pulled back, too, the waves from before still in place as the locks hung behind her neck.

“Yeah, figured the shirt had its go.” She said, tugging on her new, short sleeved tee subconsciously.

He turned, heading to the galley exit as Jack finished his coffee and scrambled to catch up. “I think I might miss it.” He teased Rose as she came up beside him, looping her arm around his.

“Shut up,” She half-laughed, leaning on him a moment as they entered the console room. “Right, so quick trip, there and back, yeah?”

“Promise,” The Doctor said as he moved to the switch and through it, sending the TARDIS out of the vortex.

She shifted violently, a strain to her engines that almost sounded pained as she tossed her passengers about. Rose grabbed on to the console, stroking the edge as she looked up at the rotor in worry. Jack had crashed against the wall, cursing.

And while the TARDIS seemed to find that mildly amusing, she groaned in the Doctor’s mind as though she was very put out and really didn’t want to be anywhere near where they were going.

She landed with a thud, a slight whine and grumble, and then felt quiet.

“Alright,” Rose said. “That’s different.”

“Something’s off,” The Doctor said as Jack got to his feet.

“Sure it’s not just your flying?” He asked, brushing imaginary dust or wrinkles from the sleeve of his long coat.

“No, but the TARDIS seems a bit tetchy.” He replied, leading them to the door.

They stepped out of the TARDIS, and on to the deck of a space ship.

“I thought you said we were going to Earth, Rose’s time?” Jack asked, looking around. “I doubt this is tech from then.”

“It’s not.” The Doctor replied. “The Old Girl can often be a bit cheeky or temperamental. But when she is, when she sends us where we didn’t want to go, it’s usually for a reason.”

“It looks abandoned,” Rose noted, edging a little further away from him. “Anyone on board?” She asked.
“I’m not sure, certainly doesn’t seem like it.” The Doctor said, narrowing his eyes at the state of the room. It was dark, with dust motes in the air, though the surfaces were relatively clean. Disorganized, yes, but there wasn’t any sign that the ship had been left alone long. There weren’t any engines running from what he could tell, at least no hum of them. He noted the ship systems and shifted toward them, typing on the controls. “The year 5263,” he noted.

“Oh, come on Doc, I know I had a minor slip up, but I’ve been good besides, haven’t I?” Jack said somewhere behind him.

“You have, but if you call me Doc again, I may just leave you here.” He smirked, sensing Rose come up beside him. “I’m kidding, I wouldn’t. At least, not for that.” He peeked up to see her smirking at him. “Have you noted anything, darling?”

“Awfully quiet.” She said.

“Yes, let’s…” he flicked a switch, and overhead and to the side, panels retracted to reveal the space outside the ship. He watched Rose’s face as the star clusters revealed themselves, her gasp of awe and wonder at the universe never ceasing to warm him.

“Bloody gorgeous.” She said, her lips turning up seemingly without thought.

“That’s the Diagmar Cluster,” Jack noted with a pleased, almost wistful note. “I’ve only been a handful of times in my life, and haven’t been by in years.”

“Well, they did revamp it. It’s more touristy these days, I believe. Less hidden gem, more something to see to say you’ve seen it.” The Doctor commented, turning to the computer again. “But we aren’t moving, are we?”

“Suppose not,” Rose said, looking up at the windows and then back to the Doctor, “Why would ya say?”

“Well, because the warp engines are going full speed. We shouldn’t be able to see the cluster, let alone still be in the cluster. At the rate they’re going, we should be half way across the galaxy by now, if not further.” He turned to Jack he came up to his other side, frowning with concern as he read what the Doctor did.

“There’s enough power to punch a hole in the Universe here, let alone getting half way across the galaxy.” Jack noted.

“So, engines going full on, but we ain’t movin’.” Rose said as the Doctor continued to type, moving on to life signs. “Where’d all the crew go?”

“I’m not sure,” The Doctor said. “We’re the only life on board at the moment.”

“Then who’s cookin’?” Rose asked, and when he turned to her, she gestured about them. “Smells like Sunday roast.”

“How odd,” The Doctor agreed, tuning in to his olfactory sense to catch a whiff. There was something underlying to the scent that made him uneasy, like it wasn’t precisely food as his human companions would think of it as, but something more sinister. He shuddered a little, reaching out to touch Rose’s arm in a way to reassure himself she wasn’t far. As she leaned a little closer, giving him the contact he didn’t fully realize he needed, he flicked another switch, causing a panel behind them to slide open. As one, the three turned to face what appeared to be a lovely fireplace mantel.
“Sunday roast, eighteenth century French decor behind a hidden wall, warp engines on full, but are not moving.” The Doctor said before moving to the newly revealed space. “Something’s beyond not right here.” He said as he removed his sonic from his jacket and began to do a scan. “It’s not a hologram,” he noted as Rose crouched down and peered into the flames.

“Doctor, there … there looks like there’s something on the other side. Another room, or something.”

“Can’t be,” Jack said as the Doctor finished his scan and knelt beside Rose. “The outer hall of the ship isn’t close enough to here for there to be a room next to this one.”

“No, she’s right,” The Doctor said, there’s another-” He stopped as the hem of a night dress came in to view, followed by a curious little blonde girl as she knelt by the fire. “Oh, hello.” He smiled at her.

“Hello….” She replied with a soft accent.

“Hello, I’m the Doctor, this is Rose.” He said, introducing them. “Our friend behind us is Jack. Do you mind, umm, telling us where you are?”

The little girl frowned. “I’m in my bedroom.” She replied cautiously.

“And, where would your bedroom be, exactly?” He asked. “What city?”

“Paris, of course!” She replied. “What are you all doing in my fireplace?” She asked before the Doctor could get a word in.

“Ah, well, umm, good question. We’re uh…..”

“Lost,” Rose supplied, shaking her head as if it were no big deal for someone to be lost in another one’s fireplace. “Just lost, trying to figure out where we are.”

“And we’re a little fuzzy on the date.” The Doctor chimed in. “What’s the year?”

“Seventeen hundred twenty-seven, of course.” The little girl said with a little bit of amusement.

“Of course, how forgetful of me.” The Doctor said, smacking himself gently on the forehead, and bringing a grin to the little girl’s lips. “1727, I should have known. Thank you, umm…. I’m sorry, I didn’t catch you name.”

The little girl tilted her head, lips quirking slightly as she replied, “Reinette.”
Okay... here we go

“Reinette,” The Doctor repeated the little girl’s name, smiling at her. “Thank you. You’ve been very patient with us strange, lost souls. Goodnight.”

“Goodnight, monsieur, mademoiselle.” Reinette replied, and the Doctor stood, helping Rose upright as well.

Stepping away from the fireplace a moment, he beckoned Jack to join them.

“1727?” Jack asked in a disbelieving tone.

“Engine power high enough to punch a hole in the universe.” The Doctor reminded. “I believe we just found our hole.”

“And through that hole is a little girl from 1727?” Jack said, putting his hands on his hips. “Why? Is it an anomaly?”

“Fireplace tells me it’s not.” The Doctor said pointing to it. “That is an actual 18th century fireplace, and all around it is decor to match. I have a feeling if we were to try, we would find a switch or some sort of mechanism that would lead us to that little girl’s room in 1727. More so, we may figure out why.”

They returned to the fireplace, searching for something to that may lead them to some answers.

“She said Paris.” Jack said as he searched the left of the mantel.

“Yes,” The Doctor replied from the right side, craning around Rose in the middle to see Jack a moment. “August will be terrible.”

“But she was speaking English.” Jack said.

“It’s the TARDIS,” Rose replied before he could, the Doctor grinning as he paused a moment to watch her examine a clock. “Translates for ya.”

“Handy.” Jack replied as the Doctor resumed his feeling behind the mantel, fingers finding a switch.

“Quiet so,” The Doctor said as he flipped the switch.

“Doctor, there’s som-” Rose had started to say, the words changing to a yelp as she was caught off guard by the sudden rotation of the mantel.

“Rose,” The Doctor called as she stumbled back, cleared of the platform.

“I’m alright,” He heard just before the wall clicked in place.
“Well, that’s one less thing to worry about.” The Doctor muttered to himself, noting Jack had hung on and was now with him. They looked at each other in the dim light provided by the flames of the fire place. There was the ticking of a clock in the room, the crack and popping of the wood burning, and not much else.

“Paris on our first date?” Jack teased.

“Imagine where we’d go if I really liked you.” The Doctor countered; attention drawn to the bed as young Reinette popped up with a gasp. “It’s alright, don’t be alarmed, it’s only me.” He said, quickly taking out his sonic and pointing it at the candle, causing the wick to catch with the press of the button. He strode closer, more into the light, and smiled. “Hello, remember me?”

She frowned. “The Doctor.”

“Yes, that’s right. We were just speaking a moment ago. You must have been quite tired.” He replied.

She shook her head. “Monsieur, that was weeks ago! That was months!”

“Months,” Jack said. “Doctor, that’s not just a hole in the universe.”

“Well there isn’t a name for it, that’s for sure.” He replied. The ship couldn’t have been capable of time travel as well. And it’s been abandoned for some time…” The Doctor returned to the mantel, knocking on the wood.

“Who are you, what are you doing?” Reinette asked, sounding utterly put out.

The Doctor didn’t turn around, instead noted what likely had caught Rose’s attention before they got separated. The clock on the mantel was broken, clearly no longer working. At least, not as it should. It would have been just something Rose would have remarked on the other side of the anomaly, but here, in the darkness it was something sinister.

“Reinette,” The Doctor said quietly, turning very slowly. “Is there another clock in this room?”

She furrowed her brow. “No, monsieur.”

“Well that is very bad news, indeed.”

“Doctor, what is it?” Jack asked, furrowing his brow and crossing his arms.

“You don’t hear it? It’s understandable that you don’t, humans have a way of being able to tune out the sounds they’re accustomed to hearing. Someone breathing too heavy, the hum of electricity, or the sound of a ticking clock.” He said, meeting Jack’s gaze. “Tick, tick, tick, tick.” He said in time with the ticking noise, and Jack shifted his gaze about the room as though moving his eyes would let him hear better. “And all the while, it’s a terrifying sound. The tick of something big, maybe five, or six feet. Too big for the clock in the room, but even if it weren’t, even if a clock that size could make a tick that loud… it’s broken.”

Jack’s eyes went wide and he turned to the clock on the mantel. “Oh, shit.” He said.

“You’re scared of a broken clock?” Reinette asked skeptically.

“Jack, check behind the curtains.” The Doctor instructed before inching toward Reinette. He crouched at her right, glancing below the bed before meeting her brave, yet nervous gaze. “Stay in the middle, Reinette. Don’t look, keep your arms and legs in snug. That’s it.” He said as she
He then looked under the bed, seeing a silhouette of something man shaped beneath. He slowly thumbed the settings on his sonic, then hit the button. Barely a fully tick sounded before the Doctor was knocked back, and something scurried out from under the bed.

“Ah-ah, nice and easy.” Jack said, and the Doctor slowly got to his feet. “Reinette, don’t look behind you, alright? Keep looking at me and the Doctor.”

The Doctor noted Jack took the stance of a soldier, both hands on his blaster which he had pointed directly at the ticking being standing on the opposite side of Reinette’s bed.

Dressed for the fashion of the era, it had a sinisterly painted white mask covering its face. It stared straight ahead, or so it seemed, but the Doctor got a sense it was actually looking at the little girl on the bed. He was picking up something on the edges of his mind, and the feeling was so strange that he almost didn’t recognize it for what it was: a telepathic being sought out, but not with him.

“Reinette,” he said as he slowly sat beside her on the bed. “Can you look at me? Yes, me, right in the eye, just like that, now hold very still.” He said as he slowly reached up and gently took the little girl’s face in his hands, his finger brushing her temples. Just a light brush confirmed his suspicions. “Why are you scanning her brain?” The Doctor asked the droid, standing abruptly. It didn’t answer, continuing to stand still. “Come on, tell me. What is so important about this girl that you crossed two galaxies and blew a hole in the universe to get to her?”

“I don’t understand,” Reinette whimpered. “It wants me?” She then turned to face the droid, not even flinching at the sight of it. “You want me?”

It responded, tilting its head to face Reinette. “Not yet, you are incomplete.” It responded in a mechanical voice.

“Incomplete? How is she incomplete?” The Doctor demanded. “What does she need to be complete for?” It didn’t answer, continuing to stare at Reinette. “You’ll answer her, but not me, why is that?” He wondered aloud, and was slightly startled when the ticking creature righted itself and then made its way around Reinette’s bed to him. As it got closer, it extended its arm, a sharp blade coming out and getting dangerously close to the Doctor’s neck.

“Monsieur, be careful!” Reinette cried.

“Doctor, move.” Jack half shouted.

“Put that thing away, Jack. You’ll draw too much attention firing that off in here.” The Doctor chided as he took a step back toward the fireplace.

“What do you want me to do then?” Jack asked as the ticking creature pursued the Doctor.

“Get ready to return,” The Doctor said as his back hit mantel. He glanced behind the droid to Reinette. “Don’t worry, it’s just a bad dream.” He told her. “And in a moment, it will all be over.” The ticking thing raised its arm, readying to strike. “Jack, the switch, now!”

“Where!?!” Jack asked.

The Doctor side stepped, knocking Jack away from the mantel for a moment in order to get to the switch. He flicked it, Jack barely making it back to the area before they swung around and were once more on the space ship.
“Rose, get the fire extinguisher!” The Doctor called.

“The what?” She called as he noted the ticking being about to pull free of the wood.

“On it,” Jack said, dashing away.

The Doctor stepped back, moving to stand between Rose and the creature just as Jack sprayed it down with the extinguisher. It broke free, and still tried to go after them despite the ice slowly freezing its gears.

Relaxing, the Doctor turned to Rose. “Sorry,” He apologized.

She shrugged. “Not your fault.”

“How long were we gone?” He asked her curiously.

“Not long, actually. Sorta like you just popped around, grabbed a bot, and came back.” She replied, chewing her lip.

“Well for Reinette, it was months.” He said.

“Months? Was only a mo between when we saw her and when you two left.”

“Doctor,” Jack got their attention, and the pair turned to see the captain had removed the wig and mask from what was clearly a clockwork droid.

“Now there’s a beauty you don’t see too often.” The Doctor admired, moving quickly to the droid and running his hand over the smooth, clear, egg shaped head.

“It’s… it’s like a clock.” Rose said, her brow furrowing as she inched closer. “Sorta steam punk.”

“Same idea, but more advanced.” The Doctor agreed, beckoning her closer with a tilt of his head. “Inside, there’s likely a very small computer. No more than the size of, say, a memory card your time. One you would put in a digital camera. That’s where its voice would be, its programming. It’s a beauty,” The Doctor said with utter reverence. “Pity I have to take the thing apart.”

The droid righted itself, and in a flash the Doctor had Rose behind him. He raised his sonic, ready to vibrate it apart before it could attack them. It teleported away.

“Short range teleport,” Jack stated the obvious, and the Doctor rolled his eyes.

“So, it’s somewhere on this ship, nothing to fret too much over. As you said, short range, it couldn’t have gotten far.” The Doctor said, moving toward the fire place. He examined the mantel, the clock, then he turned to Rose. “Voulez-vous aller à Paris, mon amour?” He asked her, his brow twitching up and lips curling up as Rose blushed. She bit her lip, moving swiftly to join him at the mantel.

“I thought you said the TARDIS translated everything?” Jack asked.

“It does, I purposely didn’t want her to. Are you coming with, or are you going to look for the droid?”

Jack unholstered his blaster. “You two have fun, I’m going to find our friend.”

“Be careful, Jack.” The Doctor called as his companion took off down the corridor. He then turned to Rose, putting an arm around her waist, bringing her a little closer. “Hold on,” he said, feeling for
the switch and then flicking it, sending them around back to Paris in the seventeen hundreds.

Rose gasped as she took in the room, fully lit by the sun shining through an open window.

“’S beautiful,” She said, moving around, hand reaching for everything from the curtains to books, but never fully touching.

The Doctor frowned, glancing to the ground. “I could have sworn there were dollhouses.” He said, shifting toward a harp. “And I don’t recall this.” He said, reaching out and plucking a quick tune on the strings, humming when he found it well in tune. He heard Rose’s chuckle behind him, and turned to catch her chewing her lip with a grin. “Yes?”

“Musically inclined, you are.”

“Well, I do try my best.” He said.

Someone cleared their throat, and the Doctor brought his attention to the young woman in the doorway. She was about Rose’s age, dressed very finely, and had a mischievous glint in her eye.

“Hello,” he said. “You’re probably wondering what we’re doing in here. I’m the-”

“Doctor.” The young woman said, her smile growing as she came toward him. “You have not aged a single day. That is tremendously impolite of you.” She reached out a hand, gently stroking his cheek. “You seem to be flesh and blood, at any rate.”

“And you seem very… forward.” The Doctor said, gently taking her hand away and holding it in his own, placing his other over top. “I’m sorry, have we met before? My memory is not the best.”

“Reinette! We’re ready to go.” A woman called from somewhere in the house, and the Doctor looked over the woman’s shoulder, expecting the little girl to tear into the room at any moment.

“Go to the carriage, mother, I will join you there.” The woman before him said, having never taken her eyes off of him, and the Doctor’s eyebrows nearly hit his hairline.

“Reinette?” Rose said, earning the woman’s attention for the first time. “You’re the little girl?”

“I was, once.” She replied sweetly. “I do vaguely remember you, as well. Rose, I believe. I recall the Doctor the most, of course, as well as… I believe you called him Jack. I never saw you again after that night, either of you. Reason tells me you cannot be real.”

“I assure you we are.” The Doctor replied.

“Mademoiselle!” A man called. “Your mother grows impatient!”

“A moment!” She snapped back before returning her gaze to the Doctor. “So many questions, so little time.” Reinette shifted forward, and the Doctor shifted back, bowing over her hand.

“I have no doubt we’ll cross paths again.” He said, as he righted himself, seeing the disappointment in the young woman’s eyes.

“Such a gentleman.” She smiled honestly despite the rejection.

“Mademoiselle Poisson!” The same man shouted.

“Until the next time, may it come sooner.” Reinette said as she darted up, kissed his cheek, and dashed for the door, snatching the bag she had likely came for in the first place as she left.
“Poisson? What a minute, Poisson?” The Doctor spun to look at Rose, though not really seeing her. “Reinette Poisson, Madam Etoiles? The future official mistress of Louis the Fifteenth, Lady in waiting to Queen Marie, one of the most politically influential people of all time! Rose, that is Madam de Pompadour!”

Rose, he realized, did not share in his excitement. She stood, arms crossed, her jaw set in a very distinctly displeased way. “Official mistress?” She repeated a little sharply. “I can see how that happens.”

“Who the hell are you?” The man who had been shouting for Reinette asked, causing both he and Rose to startle.

“Just… the mantel inspectors.” The Doctor said lamely. He darted to the mantel. “Yes, we’ve come to, uh… check it over. Rose, could you?”

She uncrossed her arms and joined him, standing on the opposite side and holding tight.

“Right, yes, see, I think there’s ah…” He flicked the switch, peeking at the bewildered servant until he was out of sight, and they were back on the ship. When the mantel locked in place, he turned to Rose and grinned. “You’re jealous!”

“What?” She asked, still frowning.

“You’re jealous of Reinette,” He said as he reached for her, snatching her hand before she could pull it away. “And you shouldn’t be.”

“She had her hands on you.” Rose grumbled.

“And I have felt similarly at the idea of Jack, knowing he danced with you. Seeing how he flirted with you right in front of me.”

“So, this is you getting back at me, or…?” Rose’s brow furrow, and he tapped her nose for how adorable she was.

“I’m not trying to make you jealous in turn, darling.” He said with a smile. “I knew she was advancing on me, and I tried, very politely, to decline her affections. I apologize if you somehow thought that I held any sort of interest. I don’t, I promise.” He said, kissing her gently on the forehead. “But now I know who she is, and she is a very big deal in history, but it makes me wonder why they clockwork droids are going after her, following her through time.”

“The one that came through, was dressed like a Frenchmen, yeah?” Rose asked thoughtfully. “Maybe trying to change history somehow? Make it so that… she doesn’t do all that? The political things and what not.”

“I’m glad you were paying attention despite not being very pleased with me.” The Doctor commented.

“Hanging on your every word, I was. Waitin’ to see what other sorta titles and comments you were about to throw in.” She mused.

“I warned you I wasn’t very good at the human aspects of romance. I’m liable to put my foot in my mouth more than I keep it on the ground. But that’s me regardless, and you knew that before you asked for a definition.”

“Yes, well, try not to flirt too much with gorgeous women. ‘Specially blondes.”
“I’d never replace you, darling.” He said, turning to face the ship, glancing around. “We should try and find Jack. If Reinette is already a young woman, it would do us no good to try the mantel again.”

“How is that happening?” Rose asked as they stepped away from the reproduction, edging closer to the TARDIS. “First time it was like a minute between when we saw her, and when you and Jack went through. Then, you came back, gone not more than four or five minutes, and then she’s my age? How’s it working like that?”

“I’m not sure.” He replied. “Ripping a hole in the universe to time travel is something my people would have closed up before the first droid ever made it through. But it’s just me now, which is why the TARDIS probably brought us so far off course. We needed to be here.” He sighed, scrubbing his hands on his face before glancing at the computer. “I wonder if Jack’s found anything.”

“Well, whether he has or not, I’m going to nip in to the TARDIS for a quick wardrobe change.” She said as she went up to the doors and pushed them open.

“What, why?” He asked, looking over her outfit once, then again.

“Because,” Rose grinned mischievously, stepping half inside. “If we’re to pop back into to France, seventeen hundred something, I’m not gonna go in looking like some peasant from the streets. Gotta look my best so Madam de Pompumdoor doesn’t think she can easily steal my Time Lord.” She gave him a little tongue touched smile before darting inside.

“It’s Madam de Pompadour.” He called as the door closed, staring after it and shaking his head a little to himself. “And it’s very un-Time Lord of me to like the fact that you’re a little jealous.” He said quietly to himself before putting his hands in his hair and tugging a little on his curls. “Oh, Doctor, Doctor, you’re in it deep this time.” He turned about, finding the panel he’d used to scan the ship earlier. “Now, while I wait for Rose, let’s see what other information I can find on this ship.”

~DW~

Jack hadn’t gotten terribly far in the ship before that smell of roasted meat got a bit stronger. Before he could investigate it, however, something nudged him.

“Don’t move!” Jack shouted, spinning quickly and pointing the blaster at a horse.

Face contorting in confusion, Jack slowly lowered his weapon as the horse grunted and quietly whinnied. Its tail flicked and it kept staring at him with those big, glossy eyes.

“You don’t have to keep looking at me like that, I’m not about to shoot you.” Jack said, holstering his blaster and slowly lifting his hands in a placating gesture. Then, he slowly moved to pet the horse, stroking its mane. “Where did you come from, anyway? Where is there a time portal big enough for you to get through, huh?”

He wasn’t sure why he was asking. He knew that the talking horses in old Earth movies couldn’t possibly actually talk, but he had seen many things in his life, and sometimes even the best time agents were thrown for a loop. He gave the horse a couple of gentle pats on the rear before attempting to retrace its steps. Not very far off, and half-hidden in an alcove Jack passed by earlier,
he spotted a set of white, French double doors that were open just a crack.

“Doctor? Rose?” He called out, pausing. “I think I found another portal!” He listened but he couldn’t hear anything. Smirking, Jack opened the doors and stepped through.

The grounds of a palace spread out before Jack, vast and green with a smell that was so pre-industrial era it was entirely too alien to him. But the people, the people were beautiful. He could see them all milling about in pairs or groups.

One lady in particular caught his eye, walking with a friend around the garden. Both were dressed as the aristocracy would, carrying little parasols and sharing whispers like spies or lovers.

“Oh Catherine, you are too wicked.” The blonde said before turning, seeming to sense them being watched. She caught Jack’s eye, and he smiled. She paused, and turned a touch more toward him.

He waved, and then seeing her friend had noted him as well, decided to venture forth and join them for a bit.

“Ladies,” he greeted with a slight bow.

“Catherine, this is my childhood friend, Jack.”

“Captain Jack Harkness.” He said to her, smiling as Catherine blushed.

“Reinette, must you keep all the charming men to yourself?” Catherine asked, offering her hand to Jack who took it and kissed the air above it.

Reinette? Little girl Reinette who was quite clearly not a young woman anymore. He righted himself, and took her in, seeing the similarities now up close.

“Jack and another rescued me from a fiend when I was but seven.” Reinette explained to her friend. “I was quite taken in my youth with them both, but I had only seen the other just once. This is the first time Jack and I have encountered one another since that fateful night so long ago.”

“Oh, so does that mean he cannot weigh in on the topic at hand?” Catherine asked slyly.

“What were you ladies gossiping about?” He asked, offering an arm to both of them, which the both took as they resumed their light stroll.

“Just that Madame de Chateneux is ill and close to death,” Catherine replied, though it didn’t really help shed any light on the conversation.

“And I am devastated.” Reinette replied, doing her very best to appear serious and failing terribly.

“The King will therefore be requiring a new mistress.” Catherine said in a knowing way, and Jack nodded.

And Reinette here had her eye on that position.

“Well the King has heard many tales of her beauty, among other things. Reinette was asked if she’d like to join the hunt not the other day. And you do love him, of course.” Catherine said this as she bent slightly around Jack.

“He is the King, and I love him with all my heart.” Reinette said, a little too much slyness to her grin for it to only be that.
“Her ambitions are widely known,” Catherine said this to Jack. “What do you think of all this? Of our Reinette being mistress to King Lois?”

Jack was about to reply when understanding clicked. A mistress named Reinette to King Louis? He looked to Reinette who turned her gaze questioningly to him, and he chuckled a little at realizing who he had on his arm. “I think you’re going to knock his socks off,” Jack said, then leaning in and added, “As well as his pants.”

Catherine tried to appear utterly scandalized, but the glint in the eye and the laughter coloring her gasps gave her away. Reinette had at least contained her mirth, but any attempts at appearing at all serious was hindered by her pursed lips and merry eyes.

“Much as I appreciate the unusual show of support, many of the women of Paris share my ambition.”

“Trust me,” Jack said, turning his full attention to Reinette. “You will capture his eye, and capture his heart, and no one can or will ever compare to you. I’m even willing to bet you know just how to ensure you catch him.”

“Well, he is going to the Yew Ball,” Catherine noted.

“I bet he’ll want you for the whole night.” He said with a smile to Reinette, and she grinned back. “Now, ladies, much as I hate the idea of leaving such beauty behind, I must be off.”

“Off?” Reinette asked. “Won’t you stay?”

“Afraid I can’t. I need to go find our mutual friend.” He said told her as he stepped back, first bringing Catherine’s hand to his lips, followed by Reinette’s.

“Will you pass a message along for me?” Reinette asked.

“Anything.” Jack replied.

“Tell him not to wait so terribly long between meetings.” Reinette said, and Jack nodded, watching the ladies as the moved from his arms to link their own. And instantly they were back together, bent in secret with one another.

Jack watched them only for a moment before turning around and heading back to the doors that led him to the spaceship.

~DW~

“Not too much?” Rose asked the TARDIS, smoothing the bodice of the soft blue dress with delicate gold lace. There was no doubt there were likely many other layers, and very likely a corset, to make it look more era appropriate but she didn’t really have time for all that.

The TARDIS blinked twice, and Rose nodded.

“You better have sent us here to fix the whole hole thing,” Rose chided with a smirk. The ships lights rolled around the room, before it blinked a single time, very slowly, and Rose laughed. “Alright, I get it.” She said, reaching out and stroking the walls of the wardrobe room. She then
started her journey back out, feeling a little like she was walking side by side with a girlfriend, having a chat. “’S just, that girl, yeah? Barely noted I was there. I mean, I was standin’ right there, and she was just all over the Doctor. Not like he’s walkin’ around with a sign or a ring or anything, ’s not like we’re like that. Just, it’s new, yeah? And he’s so different, and for a mo’ I thought maybe she was just … better. He thought she was better. Couldn’t blame him, really,” She said as she walked down the hall, her fingers grazing the wall as she did.

She could feel something inside her, something that felt distinctly separate from herself yet a part of her. It was warm and comforting, reassuring in a way that reminded Rose of an arm around her shoulder, of someone to lean on. It was like it was attempting to nudge her spirits up. And then, her mind spun a little, causing a slight wave of vertigo that had her stopping as she could see in her mind’s eye the Doctor flicking on the music in the console room, of him pulling her close in a dancing stance before landing the ship on Jack’s. But it was like looking at a recording of it, as though she were out of body. She could see, for that one moment the Doctor brought her close enough she couldn’t see his face the sereneness in his. Another moment, and she could see the utter adoration in his eyes as he spun her out.

“You showing me that, yeah?” Rose asked, and there was another, definite brightening of the TARDIS. “Kay, good. So, you’re trying to say I had nothin’ to worry bout, that it?” She asked, and the TARDIS gave her another glow. “Right.” She righted herself. “Feel a bit better ‘bout that if she weren’t so proper and pretty and the like.” She wasn’t even in motion, and yet Rose distinctly felt the floor shift. “Oi, what was that for?” No response. “Was that sorta like a shove or a slap?” A distinct, but clipped blink. Rose’s shoulders sagged and she gently caressed the wall. “You don’t want me being hard on myself. Sorry.” She said, turning and pressing her forehead to the wall. There was that warm apart from herself again. It was so loving that she allowed herself an extra moment to bask in what she wanted to believe was affection from the ship before she pushed off and headed through the console room and out the doors.

The Doctor was hunched over the computer with a frown when she found him.

“What is it?” She asked as she came up beside him.

“This ship is the SS Madam de Pompadour, from sector 26 Gamma Beta. It was one of a small fleet named for historical figures pre-twentieth century Earth.”

“Right, anything else?”

“It’s about thirty-seven years old, and hasn’t moved in about a year. All the crew disappeared, one by one, the life signs just blinked out over time. The engines have been going for a few days now, but the ship is still not moving.”

“Which is how we got our door to Narnia.”

“Yes,” The Doctor said, turning to her and looking her over. “You look lovely,” He said with a smirk.

“I thank you,” She said with a put-on accent, curtsying in exaggeration before chuckling. “Shall we wander and see where our Jack has gone?”

The Doctor offered her his arm, “We shall.”

Rose put her hand in his elbow, and the wondered down the ship in a pace a little too quick to be casual.
A little up ahead, there was a whinny, and then a slight grunt.

“Yeah, well, I can’t exactly just walk in, can I?” Jack said as though he were having a conversation with someone. “Not sure what it would do from here.”

The rounded the corner, and both paused as they spotted Jack standing in front of a full-length window, arms crossed and looking troubled. And there beside him, looking over his shoulder, was a white horse.

“Jack,” The Doctor drew out his name, curiosity and amusement in equal measure. “I know you’re very fluid….”

“He snuck aboard.” Jack retorted. “I think it’s likely he came from the garden I was in not that long ago. With Reinette. A full grown Reinette and her full-grown friend.”

“Yes, we’ve met.” The Doctor said as he led Rose to Jack’s side. “So, what are we observing?”

Jack gestured to the window. “Think it’s a mirror. I’ve seen a few aristocrat types stop and preen, but no one I think is too important. No Reinette.”

“Soon, likely.” The Doctor said, tilting this way and that, frowning. “It looks like they’re getting ready for a party.”

“Any sorta important party she’s involved in?” Rose asked, and the Doctor turned to her.

“Yes. The Yew ball, where our dear Madam meets and wins the King of France.” He said as a man who was very likely said King of France appeared in the room.

Rose frowned, pursing her lips as Reinette came into the room. “You said she was his mistress.” She commented as they watched the flirting game of another time take place on the other side of the glass. “Famous enough to have a ship in the future named for her.”

“Yes,” The Doctor said. “And for some reason the ship is punching holes in time to meet with her time line, but why?”

Reinette watched the King of France leave, a coy smile on her lips as though she knew she’d gotten what she wanted.

“The ship is named for her?” Jack asked incredulously.

“Just be glad we aren’t on the SS Marie Antoinette. We mighta lost our heads.” The Doctor quipped as they watched Reinette preen.

Rose scoffed and rolled her eyes, not even needing to look at the Doctor to know he was quite pleased with his terrible play on words.

They watched a moment more, when Reinette tensed, just as the sound of ticking reached Rose’s ear. Reinette turned, facing someone in the corner who’d been facing the wall. “How long have you been standing there? Show yourself!”

The figure turned, revealing the presence of a clockwork droid.

It all happened swiftly.

The Doctor grabbed a fire extinguisher from the wall nearby, then pulled Rose to follow him as he pushed through the mirror, the whole thing spinning like a revolving door, leaving the ship behind
and re-entering Reinette’s time line.

“Hello, Madam.” He greeted as he stepped through, already aiming the fire extinguisher at the droid.

“Doctor!” Reinette gasped in surprise. And joy. And a little something more that Rose didn’t want to pin point.

The Doctor subdued the droid, then tossed the fire extinguisher to a waiting Jack whom Rose hadn’t even realized came with.

“I don’t think it’s gonna hold,” Jack said wearily.

“It won’t,” The Doctor replied, studying it as the gears began to click and whir within. “And it might just try to kill everyone in the room, so I recommend standing back.” He warned as the droid’s hand shot up, its grip coming dangerously close to the Doctor’s throat. He backed off a little, shifting to stand between Rose and Reinette as if he could somehow protect both at once. “I never got to ask your friend before he so rudely teleported away: do you have a name?”

The droid cocked its head, but didn’t answer.

The Doctor glanced at Reinette. “It’ll listen to you, ask it to answer me.”

She looked baffled, maybe a little frightened, but not terribly so. “Why should it listen to me?”

The Doctor sighed, rolling his head about. “It’s complicated, Reinette, but trust me when I say you likely have all the power over them.”

Reinette frowned, but nodded a little. She turned to the droid, and in a tone befitting a Queen, said. “Answer his question. Answer any and all questions put to you.”

The droid, surprisingly, lowered its arm.

“I am repair droid seven.” It said in a mechanical voice.

“Excellent. Alright, Repair Droid Seven, what happened on the ship that stopped it from moving?”

“Ion storm, eighty two percent failure.” The droid replied.

“Eighty -two percent, that’s quite the damage rate. But it’s not utter failure, so why has it taken you so long to repair it?”

“We did not have the parts.” It repeated, and Rose noted Jack straightening stiffly, his hand tightening around the fire extinguisher.

“Is that what happened to the crew, they went out… no, even the travel time to the nearest system and back in a pod would have had the crew and parts back in plenty of time. And they blinked out. But oxygen levels were fine. Was it food? Is that what happened to the crew?”

“We did not have the parts.” It repeated, and Rose noted Jack straightening stiffly, his hand tightening around the fire extinguisher.

“Doctor.” Jack said in a warning tone. “I found some interesting bits throughout the ship. Which would explain the wonderful aroma Rose noted.”

Rose felt her heart start to beat more rapidly, her stomach tightening. She glanced at the Doctor, hoping Jack wasn’t alluding to what she hoped.
“Flesh? Plus heat?” The Doctor said, arching a brow. “And the crew suddenly gone.”

“You sayin’… you sayin’ the crew…?”

“Were used for parts. Yes, unfortunately, organic matter as parts of a ship has been a practiced used in recent centuries. And I’m betting the droids are programmed to repair the ship through any means necessary.” The Doctor turned to the droid, “But why open the time windows? You already went through the crew, why meddle in the time line of the woman your ship was named for?”

The droid jerked its head toward Reinette. “One more part is required.” It replied, and Rose glanced at the woman, seeing her poised as ever, only the slightest tremble of fear.

She was quite beautiful, and regal, and brave, and Rose felt that bit of insecurity the TARDIS did a good job banishing begin to rise up again.

The Doctor looked to between Reinette and the droid. “I have the sick feeling I know what you’re implying. But you have been part of her life here and there thus far. Why haven’t you taken what you needed yet?”

“She is incomplete.”

“But why her?” Rose asked, unable to help it. She glanced at Reinette. “You had your ‘parts’, yeah? All those people on the crew, couldn’t just run outta parts, yeah? So why her?”

“We are the same.” The Droid replied, and something about those words had the Doctor’s eyes widen.

“We are not the same!” Reinette replied vehemently. “We are in no sense the same!”

“We are the same.” The Droid repeated.

There was no fear in her now as Reinette advanced on the droid, completely and totally a queen, despite the lack of title being absent from the ones she would acquire later. “Get out of here, get out of here this instance!” She demanded, and the droid teleported away.

The Doctor blinked as if he’d just come out of a trance. “Jack, head back to the ship, see if you can find it. Don’t take too long, and if you encounter any of them, destroy them immediately. By any means necessary.”

“Will do, Doc.” He said without thinking, saluting the Doctor and disappearing back through the mirror.

“Destroy?” Rose asked, frowning at the Doctor.

“It wants Reinette, and we can’t let the droids get to her. They’ve murdered the crew already, and if they fail in securing Reinette, then the ship will not function to their requirements, and they will become of no use.” He turned fully toward her, taking a step toward her and taking her hand. “They aren’t a living being, Rose. But they are dangerous.”

She nodded her understanding, and he smiled warmly at her before turning to Reinette.

“I’m going to do something that seems a bit invasive.” He said gently. “They’ve likely been scanning your brain throughout your life, and you probably didn’t always know it. I’m just going to have a look, make sure my assumptions are right, and ensure there is no damage, alright? I promise you it won’t hurt.”
Reinette nodded, a little fearful still after their encounter with the droid, but trusting of the man in front of her.

Rose watched as the Doctor lifted his fingers to Reinette’s temples, closing his eyes as hers did. She gasped, and Rose blushed, feeling a bit like a voyeur.

“Doctor, you’re inside my mind.” Reinette said in a quiet voice, her brow furrowing.

“Oh dear, oh dear.” The Doctor said, his voice equally quiet. “They’ve been rooting around more than I thought.”

“You are in my memories; you walk among them.” She said, and Rose squirmed a bit, shifting around as quietly as she could, grateful for the soft soled flats the TARDIS provided so she wouldn’t distract, nor draw attention to her slight withdraw.

“If there’s anything you don’t want me looking at, just imagine a door. I won’t go in, I pro- oh! There’s a door.”

Reinette opened her eyes, looking up slyly at the Doctor.

“You might want to clo-,” The Doctor stopped, and Rose swore his cheeks got a bit pink. “Let’s stick to the task, Reinette.” He chided kindly.

Reinette closed her eyes again. “To walk among the memories of another living soul. Do you ever get used to this?”

“I try not to do it often,” The Doctor said, and Reinette peeked at him again.

“How can you resist?” She asked.

“I like the idea of maintaining privacy. But they don’t. What age are you?” He frowned.

She closed her eyes, by the sly smile remained on her lips. “So impertinent a question so early in the conversation. How promising.”

Rose inhaled deeply, clenching her jaw at this woman’s behavior.

“No, it’s not my question, it’s theirs. The one they keep asking every time they scan you. Which-” Reinette flinched. “Sorry, sometimes doing this causes forgotten memories to come to the surface.”

“Oh, such a lonely childhood.” She said, frowning.

“Sorry, it should pass.”

“Theta Sigma, so outcast, so different, so alone.”

The Doctor’s eyes snapped open. “What did you just say?” He asked, his voice nearly whisper soft that, had there been any other noise in the room, Rose never would have heard it.

“Such a lonely little boy,” Reinette continued, her eyes still shut. “Lonely and for so much of your life. How can you bear it?” She asked, opening her eyes and looking at him with adoration.

The Doctor withdrew his hands, a pain in his eyes Rose had never seen, not even when he spoke of his lost home planet. “How did you do that?” He demanded.

“A door, once opened, can be stepped through in either direction….”
“Yes, but one typically waits for an invitation, they don’t normally go barging in to someone’s home.” His voice rose, and Rose looked between the two of them.

Reinette, who had appeared proud before, bowed her head, a hint of sorrow about her that Rose didn’t trust. “I know I should feel repentant, but I do not. It allowed me to get closer to you, to learn something of the man I have known my whole life, who I have carried in my secret heart, and yet has only known me but a mere handful of times.”

Rose was about to say something when the Doctor took Reinette’s hands in his own, and she stopped dead. She swallowed, and swallowed again, trying desperately to rid her throat of the lump it held to no avail.

“Reinette, I admire you, and can appreciate how I may have made an impression on a young girl. But even if you were to decide right now, to give up your scheme of capturing the King’s heart for me, it would be in vain.”

“Because of Rose,” She said, and her eyes shifted to where Rose stood, pale and shaking ever so slightly. She hadn’t even realized she’d been inching toward the mirror until she was pinned by Reinette’s gaze, and forced to stand still.

“Yes, because of Rose.” The Doctor said with fondness. “No, you have a king to woo, and you won’t be able to do it from here.”

“Will you not dance with me?” She asked.

“My dance card is full, I’m afraid.” He said, letting her hands drop.

Reinette nodded, smiling gently if not a bit sadly. “Well, I do not wish for you to go just yet. If you can spare a moment, or an hour, you and your lady should join us. If tonight is as momentous for me as you seem to believe it, I would want nothing more than my protector, my guardian angel, to be there as well.”

She curtsied, then fled the room, through a different door than she entered.

Rose remained still, unable to turn away from where Reinette had fled. She heard the Doctor’s footsteps coming toward her, but still felt a bit surprised when he wrapped his arms around her, holding her tightly. Her own arms went around his shoulders, and her emotional turmoil was completely forgotten as she felt him shuddering slightly, his breathing more ragged than she’d ever known it to be.

“What’s wrong?” She asked him, rocking slightly.

“She was in my mind.” He said against her shoulder. “She was in my mind, and that… it’s a violation, Rose. It’s… it’s invasive, and intimate. Even Time Lord’s didn’t just willie nilly enter each other’s minds like that, not in the way she did.”

Rose squeezed him tighter, glaring where Reinette disappeared to.

“I didn’t even know a human could do that.” He said.

“What?” She said, her anger forgotten as he pulled back.

He looked at Rose, moving his hands from her waist to her face, his fingers lightly brushing her temples. “I didn’t know a human could get into my mind. I have been inside the heads of others before, always with permission, but never once had it occurred to me that they could enter mine.”
Rose moved her hands to hold the Doctor’s face in hers, her heart aching. “She found out your name.” She realized.

“My name?” The Doctor replied, frowning.

“Theta.” Rose replied. “Wouldn’t even tell me that, and she just… took it.”

“Rose, that’s not my name.” He replied promptly. “No more than the Doctor is. It’s… it’s who I was, as a child, in the academy. Our names, our true names are only for those we have bonded with. Not even my wife knew my name.”

“So, she didn’t just pluck up a detail of you that you hadn’t told me?”

“Well, I never told you I was lonely.”

“Didn’t have to,” Rose replied gently. “Ran away from it all, yeah? No one runs away if they’re not lonely.”

“You ran away.” He reminded her.

“Ran with, not away.” She said, getting on her toes and gently pressing a kiss to the corner of his mouth. “Be with you until you tell me not to. Promised you, I’m never gonna leave you.”

“Never say never,” He whispered before turning his head and capturing her lips with his own briefly. “Shall we go dance, my darling?”

“You should.” She said as she got back on her feet. Rose brushed at her gown. “My mate Shireen always had a thing bout not lettin’ people see you were bothered by ‘em. Think this qualifies.”

He held out his hand, and she placed hers in his.

“Or you just want me to dance with you.” He replied, his smirk a little too flirty.

She let it be, though. He likely needed to reground himself after what happened, and Rose couldn’t blame him.

~DW~

So, the droids wanted Madam de Pompadour’s brain? And they were going all through her time line to try and find the perfect match. Well, Jack had deduced pretty easily that, from what the Doctor said, it was likely to be around her thirty-seventh birthday.

He found the secondary computer system where the Time Windows were opened, and while spraying the droids who attempted to attack him every few minutes, he worked on seeing about shutting them down.

He had already made himself look bad upon their meeting; he hadn’t made himself look very competent while they went to see Rose’s father. But Jack was from this century, and he knew these systems. He could be useful, and maybe even get them offline before the Doctor and Rose returned from when they were.

There was a groan, and a slight ticking, and Jack lifted the fire extinguisher and promptly refroze
the droids. It wouldn’t last him much long, but hopefully enough to see them through to the end. He heard their laughter before he’d notice them, and Jack smiled to himself over how happy and loving it was.

“Ah, here’s trouble,” He raised his voice, waiting a beat before turning to face them with a slight grin. “What took you so long?”

“It’s been ten minutes here, Jack.” The Doctor replied as he let go of Rose’s arm and joined Jack at the computer.

“We danced. In France. At a royal ball.” Rose informed him giddily.

“That why you decided to dress like that?” He said, gesturing to the gown Rose had slipped into sometime earlier.

She glanced down on it. “Least I blend in.” She said, gesturing to his long coat.

“I like it.” He said. “And if I had known I was going to be going to eighteenth century France, I would have changed to blend in.”

“What have you been up to, Captain?” The Doctor asked, and Jack turned to see the Time Lord looking over his work with approval.

“I’ve been attempting to find the proper time window, and I think I have,” He said pointing to the one in front of him. “But I’ve also been trying to shut them down, but I haven’t had much luck.”

“They probably have a droid in every window, waiting for her to scan her milometer.” The Doctor acknowledged, and Jack preened a bit. “Alright, as fun as having 18th Century France a quick step over the threshold away, it’s time we get this all settled and done. Madam de Pompadour’s life has been meddled with enough. Jack, remain here, watch for any sign in that window that events are about to start, and continue shutting it down. Rose, there’s a portal about here.” He said, tapping on the screen, showing a spot a little ways down the ship. “Go in, explain to Madam what’s going to happen, and when. Not long after her 37th birthday, I’d imagine. Tell her when the mantel is broken, we’ll come for her, and to keep the droids talking, or distracted until we arrive. I need to make a quick trip to the TARDIS a moment.”

“Why?” Jack asked, frowning, glancing at his Vortex manipulator.

“Because I’m not sure the TARDIS will be willing to make the venture to when the time portals are open, but neither can either of you pilot her to get her there afterward.”

“Why would we need to?” Jack asked, frowning. “Go there, stop the droids from messing with history, come back. Done.”

“Because I’m going to need you to finish closing the time windows, force it to shut down. But once you do that, I don’t believe any of them will work. I have something in the TARDIS, something less punchy than your Vortex Manipulator. Just, do me one favor, if you could. Look up the date, the exact date of today, and our location. I’m going to need it.”

He turned to Rose, and Jack turned away, only to watch them in the reflection of a monitor that didn’t work any longer.

The Doctor cupped Rose’s cheek as she said, “Do I really gotta be the one to tell her?”
“I can’t go back; I don’t dare be alone with her.” The Doctor replied quietly, his other hand going to Rose’s waist. “Even at the ball, she still tried to dance with me. Even set up the line so I would be forced to interact with her, and I can’t.”

Rose nodded in understanding, something Jack lacked, and he noted the worry in his friend’s eyes for the Time Lord. She then got up on her toes and kissed the Doctor’s cheek before heading off.

The Doctor sighed, rubbed his face, and then took off as well.

The horse whinnied.

“Yeah, seemed a bit heavy to me, too.” Jack replied, having really no idea if the horse had commentary on the over-heard conversation. The horse snuffed. “Sure, it’s fine, the Doctor will talk about it if he wants to.”

And with that, the horse fell silent, and Jack went back to work.

~DW~

He kept himself together until he entered the TARDIS. The Doctor walked down the corridor of the ship, briefly catching Rose’s voice as he passed by a curtain, and kept himself on task until he was behind closed doors.

He then punched the door. Teeth gritted, he continued his assault repeatedly until his hand was bloody and sore and all the anger, hurt, repulsion was drained from his body. Panting, he leaned his head on the same panels he punished, closing his eyes, and willing his stomach to settle.

He’d been, for lack of any other term, molested. His mind, sacred and his, had been entered without his permission. His private, and most painful memories picked at and looked through without thought. It never once occurred to him, ever, that a none time lord could just waltz right in.

And, really, he shouldn’t be surprised that a woman with ambitions to be the lover of another woman’s husband would have no qualm taking what was not hers when she desired it.

The TARDIS soothed him as best she could, but even he could feel the underlying disgust in her song. She wasn’t even encroaching on the bond, just skimming the surface of his mind.

He pushed off the door, knowing he didn’t have time for wallowing, and moved to the swiftly re-located med bay. He quickly repaired the damage to his skin, not wanting Rose to worry for him, nor Jack to ask too many questions. Then he left the room and went to the console, feeling underneath for the little compartment the TARDIS always had regardless of her desktop. He found it a third through his rotation, pushing on it so it would unlatch and open.

Inside was a time ring, one he really preferred not to use, but desperate times. He slipped it on his left ring finger, feeling as though it were the proper place for it in this instance.

He then caressed the consoled after closing the compartment, looking up at the rotor. “You don’t need to be distant.” He told the TARDIS in a hushed, gentle tone. “You are always more than welcome in my mind.”

The TARDIS gave him the mental equivalent of a loving hug, and he chuckled to himself before caressing the console one more, then turning to leave.
As he made his way back to the last time window, he heard Rose, and possibly even the voice of the Madam up ahead. He shifted to the side, hiding behind a wall so he could listen without being spotted.

“Yeah,” Rose said. “Well, sorta. It’s… it’s just a place we’ve visited. Sorta got pulled here, yeah?”

“It’s all so strange,” The Madam said, and the Doctor risked a peek, thankful she was positioned just so, her back turned enough that she wouldn’t spot him. “This world, it’s….”

There were screams further down, and the Madam’s voice among them, calling for him. Had he not been looking right at her, the Doctor might have thought she was calling for his attention.

“Those screams … is that my future?” the Madam before him asked.

“Yeah,” Rose replied, wringing her fingers. “Probably is, sorry.”

Madam de Pompadour took a deep breath. “Then I must take the slower path.” She bowed her head, her poised form trembling.

Rose looked on in understanding, and maybe a little pity, but that was well placed. She put her hand on Madam de Pompadour’s arm, and tilted her head down just a touch. “Are you okay?” She asked kindly.

“No, I’m very afraid,” came the reply, and the Madam looked up once more and met Rose’s eye. “But you and I both know, don’t we Rose? The Doctor is worth the monsters.”

Rose smiled sadly and nodded, watching as Madam de Pompadour returned to her time line, and her world, through the tapestry.

Rose remained where she was, looking at the woman, understanding deep in her features, and the Doctor’s two hearts swelled at how compassionate she was.

He stepped out, startling his partner, who smiled weakly.

“That’s done, then, now what?” She asked.

“Now, we go to the time window.” He said, catching her arm as he walked by and bringing her along.

When the returned to the space, Jack was pounding on the window overlooking the ballroom where a crowd of French aristocrats coward at the edges, held back by droids.

“What’s going on?” The Doctor ask as he let go of Rose’s arm and joined Jack.

“When I saw what was starting, I tried to go in, put a stop to it, slow it down or something, but I can’t. It’s like the droids knew we would be there and blocked us off.”

The Doctor groaned, smacking his head. “Of course, stupid, stupid Doctor.” He huffed, and then looked to a confused Rose. “I sent you with a warning for Reinette, but I should have known they would still be scanning her brain. They could have picked up on the memory and did the hard work for us, causing a one-way link between Reinette’s time and now.”

“Right, well, how they suppose to get back with her head, then?” Rose asked.

“They could teleport. Short range teleport, they only need that one-way connection to maintain their limited distance. She’s not there in the room just yet, which means she was somewhere else in
the castle, and they needed to bring her closer. I had a feeling something like this would happen, which is why I went and got this.” He explained, holding up his left hand.

Rose narrowed her eyes, her mouth slightly agape. Jack shifted behind him.

“A wedding ring?” Jack asked.

“A time ring, like your Vortex Manipulator, but with more TARDIS-like technology.” The Doctor replied, fiddling with the ring. “Which is why I needed the date and time, do you have it?” He asked. Jack gestured to the computer screen, and the Doctor twisted the ring this way and that until the coordinates were set.” Right, now I just need a way to break through the glass.”

The horse whinnied.

“You’re gonna go in there, a hero on a white horse?” Rose asked as Madam de Pompadour’s commanding voice quieted the court.

“It’s terribly cliché, isn’t it?” The Doctor said as he went up to the horse, stroking it lightly on the mane before mounting it. “Still, there are worse choices.”

Rose came up to him while he was mounted, and he looked down at her, smiling slightly. She was still in her lovely gown, her hair up, the worry in her eyes.

“Promise you’re gonna come back.” She said, placing her hand on his knee.

He lifted it, and bent down to kiss her knuckles. “I’ll be back, my darling.” He swore before turning to the time window, seeing the droids force the Madam down on her knees. “Onward, Arthur,” He said, giving the horse a nudge.

“Arthur?” Jack asked as the horse backed up.

“Good name for a horse, I think.” The Doctor said before the horse darted forward and made the leap through the glass as if he were just jumping a pile of hay.

The French court shrieked, and understandably so, but Arthur slowed down to a gentle trot almost immediately. He hopped off the horse, glancing the King Louis. “Your majesty,” He addressed the King before looking to the droid. “I’m terribly sorry for the broken mirror.” Arthur whinnied. “And the horse.

“What the hell is going on?” Louis asked as the Doctor made his way to a droid.

“Just a terrible misunderstanding involving these lot.” He replied, reaching up and removing the mask and wig from the nearest droid. “It’s over, the link is severed. Try as you might to get back to your ship, you won’t be able to. You’re out of time, both literally and figuratively. And rest assured, I don’t believe anyone here will want to wind you up again when that mechanical heart of yours stops ticking.”

The droids hummed and whirred, a clicking sound repeating a few times before finally, as one, they all stopped working, slumping over.

The guests whispered among themselves, and the Doctor willed himself to look at the wall where the mirror had been, a small part of him still hoping that, when he looked up, he’d see Rose and Jack on the ship. But it was a wall, just a wall, and he rubbed his thumb on the underside of his time ring with relief.
“What’s going to happen now?” Madam de Pompadour asked, once more on her feet, the king at her side.

He looked to her. “Now, you will be left alone. No more droids, no more time windows.”

“No more Doctor.” She said sadly.

“Yes, no more Doctor.” He agreed, lifting his left hand. “And now that you’re out of danger, I get to go home, once and for all.”

“Will you not stay one night?” She asked, the King frowning at her.

“No,” He said firmly before activating the time ring, the strange sort of TARDIS sound louder in his ears than if he were in a console room.

One moment he was in France, looking at the King and his mistress, the next he was back on the ship, a surprised Rose and Jack turning to face him.

He smirked. “What? Did you really think I would go in there without a way back?” He asked them, ignoring the slight bit of dizziness that time travel without a proper capsule caused.

“No,” Rose said. “S’just….”

“You just went through the window.” Jack said, gesturing to the space on the ship wall where once they saw France, nothing there but a frame and some shards of mirror. “You literally just broke the glass and vanished.”

“Well, I timed my return well, didn’t I.” The Doctor replied, keeping quiet on the fact that he may have undershot how long it would take him to get through after he set the time ring. It didn’t matter, not really. He was back, and he could put this whole mess behind him. He strode over to Rose, wrapping an arm around her waist. “Shall we go back?” He said, and at her confusion added, “to the TARDIS. We were supposed to go see Jackie after all.”

“Yeah,” Rose nodded, something in her eyes telling him she knew something was a bit off. “Let’s go.” She said with a little grin.

He kissed her brow, then turned waited for Jack to come to his side before leading them to the time ship.

~DW~

She changed back into her other clothes almost as soon as they got back on board, and heard Jack mention something about a shower and a shave before meeting anyone before she went in her room. So Rose wasn’t terribly surprised when the ship had taken off, but she’d yet to feel the TARDIS land. And there was an emotion around her, not quite her own, that had her hurrying in her change of clothes to get back out to the console room.

She found the Doctor there, standing before the console, head bowed, a deep and utter sadness about him. She moved to him quickly, hesitated, then wrapped her arms around him from behind, pressing her forehead between his shoulder blades.
“I used to feel them, in my mind.” He said after a while. “Other Time Lords, just on the edges. That deep connection we all had but rarely used because it was so utterly intimate, and Time Lords didn’t do intimacy, not if it could be helped. After… after I did what I did, I felt that loss. I even tried… but then you were with me, and… I won’t say you made me forget, but you made it feel like I could get beyond the loss of my people and my home world.”

“Now you can’t.” Rose guessed.

She felt the Doctor shift and turn in her embrace, so she lifted her head and stepped back to give him room. He settled with his hands on her hips as she placed her arms on his shoulders, getting closer.

“No, it’s not that. I still think that, with time, I could move beyond. But what… Reinette did,” He said, half spitting out the woman’s name. “It’s awakened an ache for me. I feel unsettled, not only because of how she brazenly took it, but because I feel I still need it.”

Rose took in every detail of his beloved face, hoping she wasn’t misunderstanding him before saying, “Can I do that for you?”

The Doctor’s entire body tensed. “What?” He asked, his voice too quiet.

Rose looked away, cursing herself for her idiocy. “Sorry, just…”

“No, no, no, what did you say? What did you ask?” He desperately kept her with him.

Rose pulled up some more of her courage, reminding herself that she and the Doctor were romantically involved now. Clearing her throat, she met the Doctor’s gaze and said, “the mind thing. Can I do that for you?”

The Doctor wasn’t breathing, something she hadn’t realized until seconds ticked by with him staring at her, eyes wide and bright with something like hope. She slid her hands down, feeling the rapid tattoo of his hearts going far quicker than normal.

She frowned, but before she could ask if he was alright, his hands left her hips and framed her face, fingers brushing her temples.

“Rose,” the way he said her name caught her breath. So, she just nodded, and closed her eyes, focused on breathing.

He took a breath, and then she felt something in her head, like a tickle. “Enter.” She mused, smirking at what she figured was a knock.

And then she gasped. Her head felt warm, as though she’d been basking in the sun all day, but also different. It was relaxing, like when Patrice demonstrated face messages, but also as if she’d had more cocktails that what was proper. She was high, and drunk, relaxed and floating.

“I wanted to tell you that you could picture a door in front of anything you didn’t want me to see, but the images floating about are a little amusing.” The Doctor teased, and Rose chuckled as she realized he was seeing everything she was recalling. She pulled herself together, imagining her mind like a great big room full of doors, a year of her life tucked behind each one, leaving only her own memories and feelings for the Doctor lingering about for him to see.

“I’m not sure how she did it.” He said.

Rose focused on the alien warmth in her head, mentally stepping into it.
“Not sure what I’m doing.” She said with a slight laugh.

She felt him smirk. “You’re doing just fine.” He said, but she realized he didn’t speak. She heard him in her head. Or maybe it was his head? “You’re here, you’re in my head. I was just prepared for your entry.”

Rose frowned, because while she could feel the alien nature of it, she could see anything.

And then she did. She saw the basement of Hendricks, the emergency exit corridor. And she heard herself, demanding the Autons give up their prank.

“Ha!” She smiled. “That’s when we met.”

“You two need a room.” Jack’s voice was distant and present all at once.

So was the Doctor’s chuckle as his presence eased from Rose’s head.

She opened her eyes when she felt his fingertips leave her temples. Blinking rapidly, Rose gripped the edge of the console to steady herself as the Doctor moved around to the other side, and Jack joined him.

“Now, we’ll see Jackie,” The Doctor said, meeting her eye from the around the rotor. His eyes were darker than normal, and he smiled at her like there was some secret between them that Jack would never know. Maybe there was, and it gave her a sort of thrill. They really were a couple, and any doubts she hadn’t realized she had were gone now, just gone. There would be other people coming aboard, other people who wanted him, who would try and get his attention. But it didn’t matter, because he was hers, they were each others’, just like he said.

“Popping to 2005?” Jack said, breaking the moment once more.

“Just to make sure she’s alright, and then,” The Doctor said, glancing down at the controls, flicking them quickly before meeting her eye again. “Off to the next adventure.”
A quiet few moments

Chapter Notes

Hi everyone.
I know it's very short, but I wanted to update the fic to let you know it IS still going.
Summer vacation this year was more busy than usual, and I didn't get as much time (or energy) for writing. So here it is, and until next time.

As soon as the TARDIS doors were opened, and the Doctor stepped out, he immediately found himself wrapped up in the arms of one Jackie Tyler as she enthusiastically kissed his cheek.

“Er-Hello,” He said, turning slightly to Rose in an effort to figure out the odd behavior from her mother.

“Oh, hush up!” Jack said, smacking him on the chest before she gently shoved him aside to make way for Rose. “You're stickin’ around, ain’t ya? May as well start treating ya like family is all.”

“Right,” He said, looking around the flat to see if there was anything different about it. He managed to park in the living room, opposite corner of the telly at least, so he doubted he’d get in much trouble. He had a feeling a chair was displaced a bit, but there were worse things. The pictures on the wall all were the same. A quick glance at a newspaper on the coffee table said it had only been a month couple months since their last visit. He knew Rose spoke to Jackie on the phone enough that it likely hadn’t felt like such a long absence. But this was a first for him, this constant visiting of the family, so how was he supposed to know what was considered long in between.

He tried not think about how long he was more than willing to go between returning to Gallifrey.

He tried not think about Gallifrey much at all these days. Better it stays buried, and hidden.

“And who’s this, now?” Jackie asked, and the Doctor felt Rose’s hand on his back, between his shoulder blades, which meant….

“Captain Jack Harkness, Ma’am.”

Ah, yes, the Captain had been let loose. Rassilon help them if he started flirting.

“Ain’t you a flirt.” Jackie commented, and the Doctor turned to see the elder Tyler lady had eyed the Captain over, but wasn’t all that interested. “So, where’d she pick you up, then?”

Jack smiled too wide. “Actually, they both picked me up back in the 1940s.”

“Both did? 1940s?” Jackie eyed him over again, perhaps a bit more discerningly. “See it in the clothes, I guess, but you don’t remind me much of me Dad or Granddad.”

“Better looking?”

“Sluttier.” She said, and the Doctor choked on a laugh.
Rose threw her head back and let hers out, and he watched her for a moment in the corner of his eye, feeling his hearts swell for her.

Jack didn’t appear phased in the least, instead leaning in toward Jackie. “Well, I didn’t say I was from the 1940s, just where they picked me up.”

“You an alien, too, then?” She asked.

“No, ma’am.” Jack replied as Jackie moved to the kitchen.

“Right, so, you lot popped in just in time. Was about to head out to the market, pick up some things for tea. You’re staying now,” She made it clear, and there was no way the Doctor was going to argue with her on that one.

“Just a quick moment before you leave, Jackie.” The Doctor said, chasing her into the kitchen.

She was putting her purse on her shoulder, tossing a list she made inside. “Asking my permission already?” She asked, crossing her arms.

“What? Permission? Already? I think it’s a bit late for me to be asking your permission to bring Rose along.” She looked at him as though he were dense, and while he had a feeling, he knew what she meant, the idea made him nearly break out into a sweat, so he treaded away. “No, I just wanted to know if you’ve been feeling alright? Fuzzy memories, headaches?”

Jackie frowned. “Can’t say I have.”

“Good, good, that’s excellent to hear.” He replied with a genuine smile, which only had Jackie staring at him suspiciously. “Well, you see, we had sort of an incident.” He began to explain.

“What sorta incident?” Jackie demanded, which started the shuffle of feet from the living room, Rose coming in and to the Doctor’s side.

“Nothing like you’re worried about.” He assured as Rose slipped her hand in his.

Jackie’s eyes dropped to it, and her face took on a thunderous look. Before an explosion could happen, Rose stepped up.

“’S nothing, mum.” She assured. “We just sorta ran into someone from our-your past. Just… my memories were a little fogged up, yeah? Bit of a headache and such. Jus’ wanted to make sure you were okay.”

Jackie eased a little, but not much.

“Be here when I get back, if you know what’s good for you.” She warned them both, before walking past them, heading through the living room then out the door.

“I like her,” Jack declared after the door was shut.

“You would.” The Doctor smirked. “Well, dinner has been decided for us, where should we go after?”

______________
Tea with Jackie was fine, all things considered. There wasn’t another interrogation like last time, though she eyed he and Rose up more than he’d have cared for. But, he supposed, that’s what mothers were like. A man, so much older than her only child, sticks around and grows that much closer with her is bound to set her a bit on edge. He wasn’t sure if Jack’s constant flirting helped or hindered, but at the end of it all she allowed them to get on their way without a word and just a slight mistiness to her eyes.

Once they were back aboard, though the day weighed heavily on his human companions, and Rose and Jack made their way to bed.

He was in the library, reading quietly to himself with nothing more than the turn of a page or the clink of a teacup to fill the usual silence.

At least until the library door clicked open.

The Doctor turned to see an adorably disheveled Rose shuffle in the room. Her hair was in a messy knot on the top of her head, dressed in a simple vest with pink flannel bottoms, and fluffy slippers on her feet. Her eyes barely looked open as her feet barely lifted off the floor as she made her way to his chair. And then, partly to his surprise, promptly climbed on to his lap, feet off to the side, arms around his neck.

He set the book he was reading aside, “To what do I owe pleasure?” He asked as he brought his arms around her while she buried her face against his shoulder.

“Bad dream, couldn’t sleep.” She admitted.

The Doctor rubbed his hand up and down her back. “What was it?” He asked softly.

“You were gone.” She said. “Left us aboard the ship for hours, went off with Reinette. Mickey came out of the TARDIS screaming ‘told you. Like any other bloke he is’. Just… unsettled is all.”

“I would never leave you, not for long, you must know that.” He assured, leaning back to look Rose in the face.

She shrugged. “Know, s’ just… was the thing I worried ‘bout most, yeah? Even though… even though you and Reinette, or you rather, weren’t interested… she was beautiful and more, more than me, and I kept wonderin’, what… what if you didn’t come back? Must’a just stuck.”

“Rose,” he brought a hand up to her cheek, running his finger over the apple of. “What can I do to reassure you, darling?”

She shook her head. “Just need you. That alright?”

“Of course.” He assured, bringing her head closer, tilting his up so he could kiss her brow. “But you need rest, and I’m afraid sleeping here in the chair wouldn’t be very beneficial.” He then moved his hand from her cheek to beneath her legs and stood in a fluid motion, causing her to yelp and appear much more awake than before.

“Doctor!” She shrieked as he made his way to the library door.

“Yes?” He smirked, and Rose laughed as she tucked her head against his neck.

“Where we going?” She asked as they stepped into the corridor.

“To bed,” he said as though it was obvious, which he supposed to him it was. A door a small way
down opened, and he carried Rose towards what he knew would be his rarely used bedroom.

He shifted them side ways to ease her over the threshold, and stopped short upon entering.

It looked different than the last time he was in there. For one, the colors of the wall were an interesting blend that made him think of night skies on Earth, a bleed of deep pink to deep blue with a purple in between dotted with stars. The furniture was a touch lighter, slightly less masculine.

The bed was bigger. Much bigger, and there were extra bits of Gallifreyan writing on the headboard that hadn’t been there before. One that translated to….

“I think you’re being extremely presumptuous.” The Doctor said to the ceiling, hearing the TARDIS giggle in his mind.

“What is she doin’ now?” Rose asked, looking up to the ceiling as well with a coy grin as though she and the ship were in on a secret.

“Being cheeky,” he retorted as he carried her over to the bed. “She redecorated for the occasion.”

Rose through her head back and laughed, shaking her head. “Did you do that on purpose?” She asked, and the lights in the room dimmed for a moment.

The Doctor frowned as he took off his coat.

Rose hummed, “was it meant to be mean?”

As he untied his cravat, the lights dimmed twice. He smirked, his brow furrowing.

“Something you know we don’t?” She asked, and the lights dimmed once.

“Interesting conversation the two of you seem to be having.” He commented as he began to removed his waistcoat.

“I can sorta feel her in my head, like you.” She said, turning toward him, her eyes going quickly from his face to travel down the length of him.

“Will it make you uncomfortable?” He asked, dropping to the edge of the bed, bringing one foot up and starting the task of unlacing and removing his boots.

He watched as Rose bit her lip, appearing shy for the first time in so long as she shifted to her knees and scooted toward him. Her hands darted forward, hesitated, then continued with more purpose as her arms came to loop around him, and her fingers went to work on the buttons of his shirt.

“I guess not,” he said as he removed the first boot, then lowered his foot to be able to comfortably work on the second.

“Nothin’ I hadn’t seen before.” Rose commented, placing a kiss on a part of his shoulder previously under layers of fabric.

“Ah, yes, the egg incident.” He recalled, pulling the second boot off.

Rose’s fingers grazed his abdomen, causing the muscles beneath to twitch and a slightly giggle to come from her throat. “Always wondered if that was on purpose.”

“No,” he assured as his shirt came open, and Rose’s hands retreated, sliding up his back to his
shoulders to remove the garment. “I didn’t think I had to worry about Adam overmuch.”

“No,” Rose agreed with a chuckle, kissing between his shoulder blades as she pushed the oxford off his arms. After it was discarded to the floor, he turned toward her, half way to laying down when he stopped at finding her hands on his belt.

Their eyes met, and Rose stilled as he had, her cheeks pinking.

“Rose…."

“We don’t… don’t have to…."

“You’re right, we don’t. The call is yours, darling. I’m happy to follow where you lead.’”

Rose chewed her lip before, glancing down, then back at his eyes. With renewed determination, she began to undo his belt. And as she did, he leaned in and kissed her.

~DW~

Things changed, and Rose wasn’t sure if she knew how to feel about it all, deep down.

Nothing that shifted was for the worst. In the common areas of the TARDIS, out on adventures, she and the Doctor were as they always were. There was running and hand holding, flirting and endearments, the occasional chaste kiss or hug. But when the day was done, she would go to a room she was sure was the Doctor’s, but that the TARDIS seemed to insist was now hers as well. Her clothes, at least her favorites, had been moved into a wardrobe beside his. There was a vanity for her to do her make-up at in the ensuite. All her knick-knacks and personal items had been moved. The Doctor didn’t seem to mind, at least.

The Doctor….

She sighed to herself, not caring in the least as her cheeks turned pink over her morning tea in the middle of the galley, right in front of Jack, because she couldn’t help but think on her time with the Doctor. In their bed.

“Penny for your thoughts?” Jack asked before sipping his coffee.

“Worth lot more than a penny,” She smirked, causing the former Time Agent to giggle.

“Oh, I’m jealous.” He said on a sigh, looking at the contents of his cup. “What I wouldn’t give to be in your shoes.”

“Hardly like you’re lonely,” Rose countered. “’Member that now we can’t go shopping on that one planet for another hundred years or so because-”

“Yes, yes, I know. The Doctor already laid into me for that one.” Jack rolled his eyes. “But they were worth it, Rose. Honestly.”

“You mean the King’s wife, the King’s brother, or both together?” She teased, a tongue touched grin that had Jack chuckling once more.

“All of the above. I mean, Juan’s legs? And Jean’s-“
“Right, got it, don’t need to hear anymore.” She interrupted, rolling her eyes at Jack’s lascivious wink.

The door to the galley opened, and the Doctor popped his head in. “We’re getting an odd distress call.” He said, his voice pitching as he frowned.

“Whaddya’ mean?” Rose asked, setting aside her tea and rising from her chair, hearing Jack behind her do the same.

“I mean, it’s a call for me, but it’s just an S.O.S. No real details,” The Doctor replied, holding the door open for she and Jack, then leading them back to the console room.

He went to the controls, flipped a couple switches, then gestured to the screen. Rose and Jack shifted to stand in front of it, side by side, to read it.

Doctor:

Come to these coordinates. We need help. They won ’t believe me.

-C

“C?” Rose asked, frowning.

“I assume it’s someone I know, but perhaps they’re worried that the message won’t reach their proper Doctor. It happens, occupational hazard of a time traveler.” The Doctor replied, shifting around the console to input the coordinates.

“So, you mean we’re going to an unknown place, heeding the distress signal of an unknown person, with no idea of what we’re getting into?” Jack asked, absentely taking his now-normal place at the console. Rose wasn’t really sure what he did, or how it came to be that he helped the Doctor, but she didn’t question it. Assumed it was something a trained traveler like Jack would just know.

“How is that different from anything else we’ve done?” The Doctor asked with a mild smirk. “How often do we go in somewhere with an idea of what we’re facing, or what awaits us?”

“Fair enough.” Jack said as the TARDIS groaned to life, landing a few moments later with a shudder.

Something in Rose’s mind pricked, reminding her of the times her mates would warn her when someone she didn’t or wouldn’t like was approaching their vicinity. She glanced up at the ceiling, hearing Jack and the Doctor vaguely talking to one another but not paying any attention to them.

The prickle became more insistent, an underlying of calm and affection coming through as well.

“Rose?” The Doctor said, and she snapped her gaze from the ceiling to the Doctor. “Coming?”

“Yeah,” she said, shaking her head, sparing a glance at the router before making her way to the blokes, caressing the TARDIS as much as she could in reassurance as she went.

Whatever was waiting on the other side of those doors, the TARDIS was worried, though not in a way Rose would have thought the time ship should be.
“Where are we?” Rose asked as she stepped out behind he and Jack. The Doctor looked around, confused, trying to make sense of what he was seeing, and why there would have been a distress call from here of all places.

“I believe, and don’t quote me on this, but I think we’re on a ride at an amusement park.” He replied looking about. “Odd place to land, but nonetheless.”

“I know this place.” Jack said with a suspicious tone. “It’s Hedgewick’s World. A worldwide amusement park, extremely popular. At least until….”

“Until?” The Doctor asked, turning to face his friend.

“Until there were a few disappearances. Kids and young adults, basically anyone twenty and under, started to just disappear. No evidence whatsoever of them leaving the planet, and they never turned up on planet.”

“Right,” Rose said, “Yeah, sounds like a thing deserving of a distress call.”

“Except, I would say this place is shut down.” The Doctor frowned. “So, that poses the question, who would still be here to send out the call?”

A door behind him creaked open.

“Think we’re about to find out.” Jack said, looking off to the side.

“Doctor?”

That voice sent a thrill and chill up his spine, and his eyes snapped to Rose. Rose who leaned around him to take in the other blonde, a friendly smile already on her lips as she prepared herself to meet an old friend of her lover.

Except, this wasn’t just an old friend, was it?

He turned, slowly, bracing himself for whatever may flood through him at the sight of her.

What could she possibly be doing here, all the way out here, when she left him in Singapore with nothing more than a note? But then, who knew what she had gotten up to since then? She could have walked away from him and right into the arms of a time agent. He resisted the urge to look behind him to question Jack, not wanting to know if there was recognition in the man’s eyes.

Charlotte Pollard, Charley to her friends, came slowly toward him, feasting her eyes upon him. The Doctor felt considerably older, especially as he calculated how long had passed since she last
looked at him. Or, at least, how long it had been for *him* since she last looked at him.

“Doctor?” She asked again, searching his face for assurance.

He gave a smile, one that was genuine if not sad. “My Edwardian adventuress.” He managed to get out, to confirm it for her.

“Oh, Doctor, it is you!” She said, very near breaking into tears as she crossed the little distance remaining between them. She threw her arms around him and held him tight. His arms came around her in reflex, but as they did, something occurred to him: this wasn’t the right woman. Oh, yes, it was most definitely Charley. He remembered the smell of her, the feel of her in his arms. He could even recall the feel of her lips on his, the way her hand rest in his own. And yet…

He looked over his shoulder to Rose, seeing her confusion, her sadness as Charley sobbed against his chest. There was also a bit of heart break, an understanding of what all this might mean. Jack stood beside her, offering her support in an arm around her waist, but he didn’t look to the Doctor accusingly. At least that was one less person he needed to have a conversation with.

“Oh, Doctor,” Charley said, drawing his attention back to her as she leaned back to look at him. She caressed his face. “I thought you died!”

“No,” he frowned.

“But I checked, your hearts stopped beating! The Cyber controller….”

“Cyber controller?” He frowned. “Charley, we were in Singapore. I darted into the TARDIS for just a moment, and you were gone. I admit that there are some fuzzy bits, but I went into the hotel. The receptionist gave me the note you left me. *You* left *me*.”

“I know, I’m sorry, I’m so sorry.” She said stroking his face. “You’re older.”

“It’s been a few hundred years.”

“Your hair is different.”

“I needed a change.”

“And your clothes?”

“Not that different, are they?”

She chuckled sadly, “You look a little less dashing.”

“Hey,” he frowned, only partially affronted, and Charley laughed. “It’s not like you’re running about in a really nice frock, now, are you?”

“Had to change with the times.” She said, tilting her chin proudly, tugging on her short, dark jacket that reminded him a bit of his old one in style.

“We all do.” He agreed.

“I can see that.” She agreed, then glanced past him to his companions.

He smiled, gently stepping out of her arms. “Charley, I’d like to introduce Captain Jack Harkness, don’t start!” he said, shooting a look to Jack as he moved toward them. The Captain grinned,
raising his hands and stepping aside so the Doctor could have Rose on his right. She looked up at him, confused still, a little hurt, but also amused at his antics. He put his arm around her, thumb rubbing her back. He smiled down at her, a true, warm smile that he hoped would reassure her until they could get a moment alone for him to explain this part of his past in a bit greater detail. “And this, this is Rose Tyler.”

And the way he said her name, soft and tender, caused a bit more of that hurt to leave her lovely face, and a slight blush to color her cheeks.

“R-Rose?” Charley said, and it was said lovely young woman turning to his former companion that caused him to do the same. Charley was clearly stunned for a moment before all her polite upbringing came to the forefront. “A pleasure, I’m sure.”

“Yeah,” Rose replied, giving a friendly grin. “Charley, was it?”

“Charlotte,” came the immediate response, and the Doctor’s hearts dropped into his stomach.

“Right,” Rose said slowly, just on the edge of polite, heading dangerously into condescension. “You sent the signal, yeah?”

“I did,” she replied with cold politeness before looking pointedly at the Doctor. “No one believes me.”

“Believes you in what regard, Charley?” The Doctor replied, stroking Rose’s back a moment before stepping away, staying between the two women.

“I only came here not long ago. I was with the Viyrans for a while, but once my work was done, I left. The transport I could get brought me here, and by then-”

“The people were disappearing.” Jack interrupted.

“Exactly,” Charley replied, none of the coldness she’d shown Rose present. “The planet had been evacuated of everyone except a handful of workers. Apparently, most of them are part of some sort of punishment platoon from the galaxy’s empire, and a couple of civilians who either couldn’t leave or refused. No one else is supposed to arrive, but I told them I had a friend out there that might be able to help, so they allowed me to call for you.” She smiled, sad and sweet and joyful. “I just didn’t expect to get you.”

“Well, it’s me you’ve gotten. Now, what is it they don’t believe you about?” He asked.

Here, Charley steeled herself. “I think, first, I’ll need to show you something. Something everyone here already sees and just… shrug off, as if it’s part of the decor or something.”

“And it’s not?”

“No,” Charley said, gesturing for them to follow her toward a nearly invisible hidden door on the moon-like structure. “It most certainly is not.”

Charley opened the door, and the Doctor took it hand, holding it open for Rose and Jack to follow.

Inside was a corridor, and at the end of that, another door which led to a room full of wax sculptures.

“Charley?” A man called, coming around the corner, “is that you?”
“Yes, Mr Webley, and I brought friends.” She called back.

“Not friends in uniform, I hope.” The man came around the corner, dressed in a top hat and long coat, giving the impression of drab ringmaster. He smiled brightly, though, upon seeing them. “Oh hello, hello! I’m Impresario Webley, and this,” He said gesturing about the room, “is my World of Wonders. Here, in this room, you see before you waxwork representations of the famous and the infamous.”

“So, should I be looking for a figure of you, Doc?” Jack asked, glancing about, a smirk playing on his lips.

“I should hope not.” He replied.

“There aren’t any,” Charley confirmed. “At least known that we know of. You might be here, a future you, we just wouldn’t know.”

“There is that,” He agreed.

Charley steeled herself, bringing her hands together in front of her. “Impresario, could you show the Doctor your… wonder of the age?” She asked, and Webley lit up.

“Yes, yes. Any of you lot for chess?” He asked, looking at the Doctor, and then past him.

“Been a bit, but I could have a go.” Rose said with shaky confidence, and the Doctor whirled around.

“You play chess?” he asked, the surprise and disbelief a bit too evident in his voice if Rose’s blush and Jack’s frown was anything to go by.

“Well, not really well. Not when your lot probably invented chess.”

“We did, actually.” He smiled.

She rolled her eyes. “I could hold my own against Mickey, is all I’m saying.” She countered, putting her hands on her hips.

He scoffed, “That’s not exactly a great estimation of your skills, darling.” He said as he turned, following the motioning Webley and a stiff Charley.

“You underestimate him.” Rose countered. “Might not’a handled aliens and whatnot like I did, but he’s a smart bloke.”

“When do I get to meet this Mickey?” Jack asked. “The couple times we popped back in on your mother, he was nowhere to be seen.”

“He was ‘round when you weren’t. Flirting the way you were. What was that bloke’s name?”

“Ianto. But he had a girlfriend, seemed very serious about her. And as you know, if there’s one thing I don’t do, it’s get between a loving couple. Well, unless they-”

“Jack,” The Doctor warned. “Not now, please.”

“Yes, sir.” Jack retorted as they entered a darker room that had little else in it but a table with a chessboard, and something under a satin sheet.

“Now, miss, if you’d please.” Webley said, beckoning Rose to stand on the opposite side of the
table from the sheet. “Let me demonstrate to you all the wonder of the age, the miracle of modernity. We defeated them all a thousand years ago, but now he’s back to destroy you. Behold, the enemy!”

Webley tore the sheet off, and the Doctor reacted on instinct. He grabbed Charley’s arm, ignoring her yelps and protests as he pulled her behind him as he shifted to do the same to Rose. He heard Jack’s gun charge, and didn’t need to glance at him to know the man was as ready to defend as he was.

Webley chuckled. “No need to panic, my young friends. We all know there are no more living Cybermen. What you are seeing is a miracle. The six hundred and ninety ninth wonder of the universe, as displayed before the Imperial court, and only here to destroy you at chess.”

“How can you be certain?” The Doctor asked, withdrawing his sonic from his pocket and scanning the bot.

Webley opened the back and the Doctor inched around, meeting Jack’s eye and indicating as subtly as possible that he wanted him to watch over the women.

“And yet, it moves. How?”

“Bettin’ some sorta remote thing.” Rose countered, moving cautiously around Jack to the chess table.

“An empty shell,” Webley showed him, and sure enough it was lacking any organic matter, as well as possibly circuitry within. “And yet, it moves. How?”

“Bettin’ some sorta remote thing.” Rose countered, moving cautiously around Jack to the chess table.

“Not going to guess students?” The Doctor said absently as he scanned the interior.

“Not out this far, no.” She replied as Charley came around the other side of the cyberman-shell, getting close but not so much as to say she was by the Doctor’s side.

Webley smiled at Rose. “That might well be, young lady, but a single penny wins you five Imperial shillings, if you can beat this empty shell at chess.”

Rose dug into the pockets of her denims, finding something and pulling it out, looking it over. “’Ere you are, then.” She said, handing over the coin.

Webley’s eyes went wide. “This is from-”

“Yeah, well, you just said penny, yeah?” Rose said, stepping up to, and then taking a seat before the cyberman.

“Alright.” Webley agreed, pocketing the penny likely from Rose’s own time. It would be wildly high in value, and even if British currency wasn’t the currency of the time, it wasn’t something to turn down. “It is free of all devices, and yet it has never been beaten. Would you like to make the first move, young lady?”

“Alright,” Rose agreed, looking over the board, bottom lip between her teeth.

“Doctor,” Charley said as Rose got to work, slowly making a decision as to what her next move should be. He turned to his former companion, “It’s more than just this. I swear, I wouldn’t have-”

“Oh! Better luck next time, my dear.” Webley declared, and the Doctor reverted his attention to see Rose smiling sheepishly.

“You’re using Monofilament,” Jack said, his gun holstered now and allowing him to cross his arms
freely. “Doc, I bet if you were to open the seat?”

“It’s possible,” He agreed, getting down on his knees, feeling the edges, opening the crate. He smirked. “A mirror, Impresario?” He said, glancing at a nervous Webley before opening the second door, revealing a small man inside holding what appeared to be a controller.

“Hello,” the small man greeted with a nervous grin.

“Hello, I’m the Doctor.”

“Porridge, I’m the brains.” He said, and the Doctor offered him his hand, allowing the man to get out of his hiding spot a bit easier. “Good to be out of the box,” He added, brushing off his jacket and adjust his hat.

“Doctor,” Charley said, whispered.

“Hello, I’m Rose,” She introduced herself to Porridge at the same time. The Doctor turned his focus to Charley, tilting his head in her direction as he heard Jack begin his own, flirt-heavy introduction.

“Look,” Charley pointed, and he turned to where she was indicating only to notice a little flash of something before it was gone.

“What is it, Charley,” He asked, twisting to face her and finding her much closer than he expected, though he didn’t startle.

“I… I can’t be sure, but I think they might be Cybermats.” She said equally quietly.

“And what are you two whispering sweet-nothings about?” Jack asked as he came up beside them.

Charley blushed, likely unused to the Captain despite how much she’d seen of the Universe after the amount the Doctor had managed to show her himself.

“A possible problem. Charley might have spotted something that could be a danger to those here as well as the rest of the universe if it gets out of hand.” He replied as he faced Jack. He frowned, glancing about. “Where’s Rose?”

~DW~

“Hello, I’m Rose,” She greeted the man who kicked her arse in chess. Not that it was hard to do. She hadn’t played in a while; an idea having gotten into her head even before Jimmy that a girl from the Estates knowing how to play chess was trying to get above her social status. Even Mickey didn’t bring out the board left by his gram unless they’d all had a few drinks and Patrice thought it would be grand to try and knock him down a peg.

Still, the Doctor hadn’t commented on her ability. Mind, he might not have been paying much attention, not with….

Porridge took her hand, not shaking it but clasping it in both of his while he met her eye with a warm, kind smile. “A pleasure.”

“Captain Jack Harkness,” Her mate said, giving a half bow and offering his hand out as well.
Porridge chuckled, letting go of Rose’s hand to shake Jack’s. “It’s nice to meet you.”

“Would you like to see the figures we passed earlier?” Webley offered. “There were some surprises there you may not have noticed.

“Yeah, sure,” Rose said, glancing at Charley - Charlotte- and the Doctor again, and seeing them both very deep in a private conversation.

“You go on, Rosie.” Jack said, eyeing the pair as well. “I’ll wait for those two to come back to reality.”

“Right, thanks.” She said, turning and following Webley, Porridge beside her.

They went back into the room with the wax figures, and what she hadn’t noticed before was that there were a few covered in the same satin sheets that the bot in the other room had been.

“I have not one, but three Cybermen in my collection,” Webley said, noticing Rose’s attention on the covered figures. He removed it, and the one beneath the sheet looked far better maintained than the one at the chess board. Standing, it wasn’t much taller than her, about the height of an average man.

“Not to sound thick, but what’s a Cyberman?” She asked, looking it over before glancing between Webley and Porridge.

“Your friend in the next room was very familiar with them.” Webley commented.

“Yeah, well, he’s a bit older than me, more well-traveled. I’ve never heard of ‘em until today, feels like something I should know.”

“The Cybermen are a bit like a parasite.” Porridge explained in an almost bored tone, looking about the other figures. “If you find them on your planet, you’ll need to get rid of every single one or you’ll never stop it.”

“But you lot got three here on the planet not.” Rose pointed out, gesturing to the recently revealed on now off to her side.

“They’re empty shells, they were never upgraded.”

“Upgraded?” Rose said, scrunching her face. “What’s that mean?”

“Cybermen believe themselves to be the ultimate life form, that the human form is weak, and needs to be upgraded.” Porridge replied.

Rose let that roll around her head for a moment. “Hold on, you mean, they take people, humans, and they… they ….”

“Turn them into cybermen, yeah.” Porridge nodded. “Hence the parasite bit.”

“Right,” Rose said, shuttering. “So, how do you lot know these ones won’t just pop up to life?”

“Nothing inside. No circuits. Humans need to be placed inside them to properly work, too.”

“What happened to the others.”

Porridge looked at her for a long moment. “Come with me, I’ll show you.”
Rose glanced behind her, not seeing the Doctor, Jack, or Charlotte, and shrugged. Something about Porridge felt trustworthy, maybe his kind smile or something in his eyes. So, she followed as he led her outside on to the planet through a different door than she’d come through originally.

They came out to a platform, tracks leading out on both sides, not like a train. A roller coaster.

“Right, so my mate Jack wasn’t joking when he said this was an amusement park, then.” She looked down at Porridge. “You’re not here to take me on it, are you? Like to think I’m adventurous, me, but never liked those things.” She grinned as he laughed, tongue stuck in the corner of her mouth.

“No, Rose. I’m not going to take you on roller coaster.” He glanced at her from the corner of his eye, a smirk playing on his handsome face. “I probably wouldn’t know how to control it anyway. Can only really run the spacey zoomer. No, I thought… you don’t really know anything about the Cyberwars.”

“Not a thing.” She agreed, shaking her head.

Porridge became serious, and a little sad if she did say. “It was awful. We couldn’t win. Sometimes we fought to a draw, but then they’d upgrade themselves, fix their weaknesses and destroy us. It’s hard to fight an enemy that uses your armies as spare parts.”

“Sounds horrible.” Rose agreed.

“It is,” Porridge agreed. “But I don’t even think that’s the worse of it.”

“What’s worse than that?” Rose asked as he led her to the edge of the platform.

He pointed to the sky, dark like night, but Rose knew better to assume. He pointed to a spot, a pitch-black circle surrounded by blues, bleeding into purples, then greys, with nothing else around.

“Look up there, what do you see?” He asked.

“Not sure,” Rose replied. “’S sorta pretty, but if there’s something I learned travellin’ ‘bout, it’s that the pretty things are likely the most dangerous.”

“Not dangerous, but it isn’t nice. It used to be the Tiberion Spiral Galaxy. A million star systems, a hundred million worlds, a billion trillion people. It’s not there anymore.” He turned to her, and Rose faced him. “No more Tiberion Galaxy. No more Cybermen. It was effective.”

“Oh my god,” Rose gasped quietly, staring at that spot with wide eyes and a twisting in her gut. “Couldn’t evacuate, then?”

“There was a risk. Some made it out, of course, but if you tried to wait it out, get everyone out before the bombs went off, it gave the Cybermen more time to escape, too.”

Rose shook her head. “Had to be awful, being the person to make that call.” She said. “Can’t imagine, knowing all those people, all those lives would be gone, yet not really having much choice.”

Porridge frowned. “You’re very understanding.”

“Seen a lot, being with the Doctor. Start to know that what’s right ain’t always easy.”

Porridge hummed in agreement. “Suppose you’re right. Doesn’t make me feel any less of a
monster for empathizing with that poor bugger instead of mourning the billion, trillion people who had to die.”

“Can do both, you know.” Rose said.

Before either could say anything more, the door behind them opened, and Jack’s head popped out.
“They are, been looking all over for you.”

“Have ya, now?” Rose called back with a grin.

“Doc and Charley are heading to the barracks, going to talk to the punishment platoon.”

“Right, so you get to call ‘er Charley.” Rose grumbled, heading to Jack with Porridge at her side.

Jack raised his hands above his head. “I think we both know what the difference there, is.” He said as they got closer.

“You flirt with’im more than I do,” She teased with a smack, heading back inside.

“That’s because you don’t have to.” Jack retorted as he held the door open for Porridge, and Rose smirked a little to herself as she began to wonder if maybe she should be flirting a bit more now. Especially with a specific blonde around.

~DW~

“She left with Porridge,” Jack replied, thumbing over his shoulder. “ Didn’t you notice?”

“Bit caught up with possibly pressing matters.” The Doctor replied, grumbling a bit. “Right, well, you mentioned a platoon here, Charley. Any chance that they might listen now that you have another witness?”

“Possibly,” She agreed. “I think when it was just me, they thought I was paranoid. But if I have someone with me who’s faced the Cybermen, who know about the mats, they just might take me seriously.”

“Well then, I’ll go with you, talk to the platoon. Jack, get Rose and meet us there, if you could?”

The Doctor suggested, glancing between former and current companions.

“I can, but I don’t know where I’m going.” He replied.

“Oh!” Charley exclaimed, reaching into her jacket pocket and pulling out a folded piece of paper. “Here, I had this when I first got here. It’s a map of the park. The barracks are on there, too, as is. No need to try and decipher anything.”

“Won’t you need it?” Jack asked, taking the paper and looking it over.

“No, no, I’ve been here long enough I know my way around.” Charley grinned.

“Well, thanks, then, Charlotte.”

“Oh no, please, call me Charley.” She said warmly, and the Doctor huffed quietly to himself.
Jack stiffened, glancing at him before giving Charley a very weak smile. “Thank you, Charley.” He said, and only having had him around for months allowed the Doctor to sense just how uncomfortable the captain was.

“Careful, Jack.” The Doctor said as the Captain turned to head off in the direction Rose went. “You, too.” He said, giving the Doctor a salute, with little to no mockery in it, and then left the room.

“Well, shall we?” The Doctor asked Charley, smiling wide despite the woman beside him not smiling at all.

“You seem very close with the people you travel with.” She pointed out stiffly. “You seem to have a … report. Especially with Rose.”

“One could say I have a bit more than merely a report with Rose.” He counters, half grinning but there was an edge to his voice, a quiet warning. They left the room of the chess playing Cyberman, and exited Webley’s emporium to another section of the abandoned amusement park. The barracks, the Doctor hazard, wasn’t terribly far off. Somewhere just around the other side of the Space Zoomer where Charley could easily stay and still find a good hiding spot for the TARDIS to land.

She walked a touch slower than he expected her to, and he had a sinking feeling that they weren’t finished with the conversation she seemed to want to have before they set out.

Sure enough, after a few paces she said, “She’s awfully young.”

“She’s actually a bit older than you were when you joined me.” The Doctor countered, watching her.

“And was she supposed to die, too?” She asked with a hint of bitterness.

“I’ve no idea.” The Doctor replied. “I’ve never been able to see Rose’s time lines.”

“Well, if the Time Lords didn’t swoop in….”

“The Time Lords are all dead, Charley. Dead, or tucked away in another Universe.” He stopped, halting her as well.

Charley gapped at him in shock, mouth moving quietly for a moment before she frowned.

“What, like the divergence?” She asked.

“No, nothing so sinister as that. Just their own little Universe, much like how I’m sure they’d want it. They were trying to destroy everything, Charley. It didn’t start out that way, but in the end…. Well, Time Lords weren’t considered much different than Daleks.”

“And how does Rose factor in to all this?”

The Doctor waited until she looked at him, to meet her eye. “Rose was the first person I met after the time war. She was the one who helped me get as close to who I used to be as I could.” He confessed easily, resuming their saunter to the barracks.

“Had it really changed you that much?” Charley asked sadly.

“Yes,” He said bluntly.
She turned to him, held his eye for a moment before facing forward once more. She squared her shoulders, stood taller, breathed deeply.

“I traveled with you, you know. The one with the bright jacket and blonde curls came to rescue me from… where or whenever it was I ended up. Been long enough now, I don’t remember.”

“I would have recalled that.” He said, frowning as he tried to search his memory for something waiting to be uncovered.

“I changed your memories.” Charley said with a slight upturn of her lips as if she knew what he was doing. “Put Mila in my place.” She explained, and he nodded, not wanting to have the heart to tell her that he didn’t really remember much of that time at all anyway. “But I was so happy when I thought for a moment you didn’t die. So happy to hear the TARDIS, thinking you, this you, came back for me. But it wasn’t the case, and I … I couldn’t bear the idea of staying with you, knowing that when you meet me, this you, it was going to end up being the death of you.” She then looked to him again. “Why didn’t you come for me?”

“Why would I?” He asked, half-laughing mirthlessly. “You demanded I bring you to Singapore after what happened to C’rizz. And once you got there, you were… you left!” He stopped once more, turning bodily toward her.

“But I didn’t! Not really.” She said, turning as well.

“But how was I supposed to know that? Your note, how did it go again? Oh, yes, right,” he widened his eyes, feigning a sudden recollection when really it was something easily accessed and never fully buried. “‘Dear Doctor, it’s been such a long journey for both of us. I never ever wanted it to end, but end it has. We both know that. We chanced our luck once too often, so I’m bailing out. There’s no freedom like being dead. I can go anywhere, be anyone I want. Don’t look for me.’”

“I wrote that before the Cybermen!”

“What are you talking about?! What cybermen?!”

She groaned in frustration with a stomp of her foot, and for a moment his hearts ached at the painful familiarity of it. “You really don’t remember, do you!?”

“No, frankly, I don’t. I went into the TARDIS, I went to do something, forgot what it was, came back out, and you were gone. Then I got your note.”

“And you left some parts out of your memory.” She half snapped back. “That parts where I said you were the oddest and best man I ever knew! That I would remember you, always! That I wanted you to remember me, too.”

“Ah, yes, remember the Girl Who Never Was.” He retorted coolly.

“I signed it with love! Love, Doctor! I love you!”

“I love you, too.” He replied.

“Do you?”

“Yes,” He said.

Charley held his eye. “I told you to never say it again if you didn’t mean it.” She said through
clenched teeth.

“And you think I don’t?”

“I don’t, no. Not with the way you look at her.”

He laughed, bitterly, mirthlessly, shaking his head. He took a breath. “It was always black and white with you, wasn’t it? Yes, Charley, I love you. I always will.”

“Then how can you-?”

“Because when you snuck back on the TARDIS when I was heading into the Divergent, you betrayed me. I told you as much, and I forgave you. But there was damage, and when you left, and did so with only a note, the love I have for you forever changed to fondness. The same fondness I would have for any other companions.”

“So… so with Rose?”

He huffed, dragging a hand down his face. “Rose … Rose is different. Or, maybe, she’s where you were before Singapore. Before you, there was only one other companion that ever traveled with me that I felt that strongly for, and I left her behind when I had to return to Gallifrey. And I understand that I’m missing something, Charley, I do. But while it’s been but a few years for you, it’s been centuries for me. You changed, working with the Viyrans, traveling with my past self, I can see that. Your manner, you dress, the way you carry yourself, it’s still Charley, but there’s something more in you.

“You changed, but so have I. I have been through war, I have sentenced my own race, my entire home world, to exile. I am not the man you traveled with, not really, don’t you see?”

She didn’t answer, seemed like she couldn’t, or maybe wouldn’t.

“I love you.” He said again. “But I love Rose. With both my hearts, what’s left of my soul.”

“And how does Jack factor in?” She asked after a moment.

“Jack’s a friend. Though, admittedly, sometimes reminds me of an annoying pet that likes to make itself present at times I would really rather not. And he won’t stop humping the furniture.”

“Doctor!” Charley exclaimed, blushing fiercely, a hand coming to cover her mouth hiding the smirk that she clearly wished wouldn’t come along with her embarrassment.

He laughed honestly this time; head thrown back for a moment before they continued their journey. “Alright, so he’s not a menace to my furniture, but I really can’t take the man anywhere without him finding a friend or two to warm his bed. Or to warm theirs. You be careful, Charley, he’s quite charming when he wants to be.”

“And you know this before you brought him along?” She asked.

“I’m just glad I wasn’t still traveling with my friend Fitz. The pair of them would be incorrigible.”

“How many have there been?” Charley asked quietly. “Since me?”

The Doctor thought about it. “Over a dozen.” He replied. “Even had Mary Shelley with me for a while.”

“You’re joking?” Charley smacked him.
“No, no. Not at all.” He replied. “She didn’t last terribly long, wanted to rejoin her husband, their
friends.”

“Anyone else famous you’ve met that I might’ve known?”

“Rose and I fought ghosts with Charles Dickens.” He replied.

“You did not.” She scoffed, trying not to smile.

“We did.” He affirmed. “Sort of.”

“And she… she’s really helped you?” Charley asked as they came up to a door, likely to the
barracks. She stopped, looked up at him through her lashes.

“Rose has helped in a way I don’t think anyone else could.” He replied, putting a hand on
Charley’s shoulder. “She helped me come to terms with everything that’s happened.”

She stared him in the eye, seeming to search for something. Whether or not she found it, he didn’t
know. Footsteps behind them drew their attention.

Rose, Jack, and Porridge were coming toward them, Rose looking between he and Charley
nervously.

“Everything alright?” Jack asked, approaching them before the others.

“For now.” He replied. “How much do you know about the Cybermen, Jack?” The Doctor asked,
switching gears as they Charley opened the door to the barracks.

“Enough that I’m not thrilled at the idea that we might be dealing with them here.” He replied, his
normal cool confidence lacking. “You?”

“One of my oldest enemies, I’m afraid.” The Doctor replied, reaching out and holding the door for
Charley to enter.

Jack nodded, stepping past, following Charley inside.

Porridge followed, glancing up over his shoulder and smiling kindly at Rose who came in last.

“Have you made a new friend?” He asked her with a smirk.

“You were a bit busy.” She replied, glancing at Charley.

“Busy’s a stretch.” He replied, putting a hand on her lower back as they entered the barracks
together. “You haven’t seen any silver slug-like things scurrying about, have you?”

“Can’t say I have,” She replied with a slight chuckle. “Should I’ve?”

“No. Well, it’s possible, but I rather hope you haven’t. Seeing them isn’t exactly a good sign.”

They joined the others, going down a slight corridor to a mass room that looked to be inside one of
the rides. There were cots about, a few spots for lounging, though none looked comfortable. Off to
the side was what one might generously call a kitchen.

There were soldiers about, all seeming to be reporting to one person in the middle of the room, the
same one Charley was leading them all to.
“Hello, Captain.” She said in her usual cheerful demeanor.

“Pollard,” the Captain replied, apprehensive. She glanced at the others, lingering on Porridge a moment before looking to Charley. “There’s more of you, now.”

“I told you I was going to call in for reinforcements, as it were. This is the Doctor,” She said, stepping back and reaching for him. He removed his hand from Rose and stepped forward. “He’s already been here for a bit, and—”

“Pollard, Cybermen have been extinct for over a thousand years—”

“How can you be so sure?” The doctor asked, cutting off what sounded like a well-rehearsed rhetoric. “Weren’t there, very recently, people going missing from this planet?”

“Well, we don’t know for sure.” The Captain said, frowning, crossing her arms. “They might have left and no one noticed.”

“Or they might have been abducted and turned into—” Charley began to counter.

“For the last time, it wasn’t—”

“Cyberman!”

He wasn’t sure who said it, but all focus was now on the enemy on the other side of the Barracks.

“Attack formation!” The Captain demanded as the Doctor had Rose and Charley behind him once more.

The platoon was in chaos, no one listening to the Captain as some went for anything that could be a weapon, while others grabbed for guns and fired poorly.

The Cyberman locked on to the Doctor and charged, near a blur at the speed it went.

And then suddenly it was downed, sparks coming from the gaping hole now in its chest.

The Doctor turned and looked to Jack.

His friend had a tremor going through him, ever so slight, and likely not noticed by any human. His breathing was heavy, as though he’d been running as fast as the Cyberman himself.

“That was a Cyberman.” The Captain said, staring at the body in horror. “But they’re extinct!”

“I told you they weren’t.” Charley said, stepping around the Doctor and nearly getting into the Captain’s face. “I told you that they weren’t, and that there were Cybermats here, and you didn’t listen.”

“You’re a civilian,” The Captain countered. “Why would I have?”

“Because a civilian noticed, and another was the only person in this room that actually got a shot in. You included.”

“I’m not a civilian.” Jack countered, holstering his blaster.

They Doctor turned to him once more. “You know, you’re right. Would you like to earn the title you love to go by?” He asked, and without waiting for an answer, closed in on the Captain of the Platoon and removed her insignia pin. He then turned to jack and affixed it on his right suspender.
strap. “There you go, now you’re the Captain, call the shots, protect everyone.”

“Now, wait just a minute.” The former captain had said, and the Doctor glanced down at her name patch.

“Outhwaite, is it? Well, Outhwaite, does your platoon do much fighting?” He asked.

She looked at him as if he were daft. “What do you expect?”

“And it’s that precise attitude that’s led me to put Jack in charge. Now,” He turned to the rest, “Anything I should know about pertaining to the wars of yester-year?”

“Porridge was telling me a bit about them.” Rose said, glancing down at the man before looking back at the Doctor.

“Excellent, may I?” He asked, moving to Rose and raising his hands to hover near her head.

She gave him a small, secret grin and a little nod, holding his eye as he stepped closer, putting his fingers at her temple.

“Bit weird, you doing this out in the open. Seems a bit like puttin’ on a show.” She said in his mind, sucking in her lips.

“Best not think that too loudly, Jack might hear it and get ideas.” He countered, watching her face in his periphery hold back a smile. “Now, focus, love, let me see.”

She showed him, closing her eyes to focus for him. His hearts stuttered at what the information may indicate for a method of getting rid of the Cybermen should they get to be too much.

“Thank you, darling.” He said, leaning in a quickly brushing a kiss on her brow before turning to Jack, any good humor sharing a mental connection with Rose might have given him gone.

“Get somewhere defensible, keep Rose, Charley, and yourself alive, and don’t let anyone even contemplate any sort of bomb, is that understood?” He asked.

Jack stood at attention, giving him a salute. “Yes, sir.”

“Good. Rose, Charley, be careful.” He said before turning away to leave the barracks.

“Doctor?” Charley and Rose called with confusion, pitches slightly different.

“I’m going to see our old friend Webley,” he said over his shoulder. “That Cyberman looked an awful lot like one of his.”

~DW~

“Right, you heard the man,” Jack shouted to the room, quieting the noise of fret and panic, confusion and questions. “I’m in charge now. So, I want any and all weapons that can be used against the Cybermen to this room for examination. I want a map of the park, bigger than this,” He said, pulling the one Charley gave him and holding it to show the room what he meant. “And I want to know all the places that would be deemed defensible. Anything where we can hold off an attack. And if there is a bomb meant for this planet, I want it brought to me, and no one else.” He
put his hands on his hips, glad that most everyone took that as a silent command to action.

“Look at you,” Rose smiled at him, bumping his hip with her own.

“I may not have been an actual Captain when you met me, but I had been a high-ranking member of the Time Agency. Unless I got demoted.”

“Never know, will ya?” She countered, tongue between her teeth in one of his favorite grins.

“If I don’t know, it didn’t happen, right?”

He could feel two sets of eyes watching them, Outhwaite and Charley. There was a burn in the gaze of the former, which was to be expected since he took rank without a qualm. The latter was more apprehensive. And that’s who he turned to, seeming to catch Charley by surprise when his attention was turned to her.

“So, you’ve had experience with them?” He asked her.

“Much more than I would have liked. Which, to be frank, would be none.” She confessed, looking at her feet. “My last encounter with them… it’s how I lost the Doctor. How I thought he… it’s how I lost him.” She said, looking up with a sad sort of hardness to her.

“Well, it’s not going to happen today, not if I can help it.” Jack said as some of the soldiers wheeled in carts of crates. “What are those, then?” He asked as they stopped in front of him.

“Cyberiad class weaponry,” Outhwaite replied.

“Excellent. Crack it open, let’s see what we got.” He commanded before turning his attention to another pair that were wheeling in a large map of the park. He laughed. “Good work, just what I need. Now, who can tell me where the best, most defensible places are?” He asked, looking to Porridge who watched everything with a quiet, knowing grin that Jack really, really liked. If the situation was, perhaps, a little less precarious, he may have turned on the charm.

Outhwaite stepped forward, withdrawing a long pointing stick from the pocket of her fatigues, extending it.

“The beach, the Giant’s Cauldron, Natty Longshoe’s Comical Castle.” She pointed out.

“Beach looks too open,” Rose commented.

“And the cauldron’s a one way in and out sort of place.” Charley inputted.

“Castle it is, then” Jack said. “Is the Drawbridge functioning? The moat deep?”

“Yes,” Outhwaite replied.

“Good, everything we can get.

“Sir, my platoon can deal with one Cyberman,” Outhwaite insisted. “And there are protocols if we cannot immediately find and destroy it.”

“I’m sure you do,” he agreed. “But the Doctor left me in charge, didn’t he?”

“And who is he to make such commands?” Outhwaite retorted.

“Imperial Consul,” Porridge replied, speaking up for the first time since everything happened. “I
happened to see his credentials.” He added. Jack smirked, knowing full well that the Doctor had showed him nothing. He then glanced at Outhwaite who looked near imploding with the want of retort, but was biting her tongue fiercely. “And as Imperial Consul, he can give orders. And his orders were to put Jack in charge, which makes him your commanding officer. Isn’t that right, Captain?” He said the title with cheek.

Outhwaite took a deep breath. “Yes, sir.” She replied.

“Good.” Jack said. “Now, everyone needs to get these weapons and themselves to the castle, and there will be no blowing up the planet while we’re at it.”

Outhwaite deflated a little, then waved along the soldiers who were behind the crate and began to lead them out of the barracks.

~DW~

The Doctor re-entered Webley’s emporium, and pulled out his sonic. He wasn’t sure how much good it would do him should he encounter a fully operational Cyberman, but it was better than nothing.

Slowly he looked about the room, noting the Cyberman from before gone, and nothing else to his knowledge.

“Not reassuring.” He said to himself as he looked about, doing a double take as he spotted something on a table display. He narrowed his eyes and crept up to it slowly, fully expecting it to start to scurry away.

It was a little unsettling that it didn’t.

He crouched down, looking at the tiny, insect like bot which stared back at him.

“You’re beautiful, aren’t you?” He said. “Not even a Cybermat anymore, more like a Cybermit.” He quickly activated his sonic, disabling the little bot so he could pick it up and look it over. “Interesting. Let’s see if I can spot where your transmat link is.” He held it out, listening carefully to the quiet hum it gave off in its dormant state, to the way the metal in his hand increased the vibrations only slightly as they moved toward the chess room.

He glanced about the room once more, looking for any more clues or mites. Something shiny caught his eye, held in the hand of a wax figure. He changed direction, feeling the drop in hum and vibration, and plucked the foil ticket from the wax hand and pocketing it. He then continued onward, bracing himself for what might come.

“Webley?” He called before entering. He wasn’t sure if it was a good thing or not to be greeted by silence, the shell of the Cyberman who had been controlled by Porridge earlier now gone.

But the Cyber mite in his hand, that vibrated, the pitch it gave off stronger.

“You’re transmat is in here somewhere.” He said to the mite, lifting his sonic toward it. “Let’s see if maybe we can find the frequency, shall we?” With a swift flick of his thumb, he changed the setting and set it to work on the mite.
Then he felt the pull, starting from his navel and spreading quickly outward. He stumbled, one moment in the chess room, the next in a drastically cooler, far more dimly lit space.

“Well, that’s concerning, the fact that that worked.” He said, looking down to discover the mite had vanished from his hand in transport. He brushed his hand against his trousers, as if it would somehow help rid the feeling of small, metal feet in his palm, and took in the room.

There was a mist hanging low to the floor, wisps of it moving higher and lower like waves, drawing his attention a slightly darker spot tucked up by a pillar, something that said mist had likely hidden from his view when first entering.

“What’s that?” He asked.

Webley stepped forward, though the Doctor could see now that perhaps he was a bit too late. Half his head was covered in metal, as though the Cybermen only felt a very partial conversion would do.

“What’s that? The savior of the Cybermen.” Webley decreed, a hand covered in metal covering his heart.

“You are the savior. We have been waiting for a moment like this, a moment to rise again. We lost many in the war between humanity and the Cybermen. Cyberplanners built a Valkyrie to save the critically damaged units. It was built here, and one by one they were brought for repair.”

“I take it, then, that those who went missing from the park were used for spare parts.” The Doctor replied, allowing his distaste to come through. No need to disguise how he felt when facing what was likely the newest Cyberplanner.

“We’ve upgraded ourselves. The next model will be undefeatable.”

“That’s not possible.” The Doctor argued. “Everything has a weakness; everything can be defeated.”

“We were hoping for more children, what with their brain’s infinite potential, but they stopped coming. But they Cybermits have been scanning your brain, Doctor. It’s quite remarkable.”

The Doctor watched as Webley moved around the table, slowly coming around to his side. He grasped his sonic tighter.

“And useless to you. I’m not human, Cybermen only use human parts.”

“Well, that was true a long time ago.” Webley replied. “But we’ve upgraded ourselves.”

The Doctor had been prepared for almost anything: for Webley to lunge, or Cybermen to come out of hidden doors around the room. He didn’t expect to have a half-dozen Cybermits thrown at him, attaching to his jacket, waist coat, even his ascot before he could stop them or sonic them. With great speed, the latched on, and he felt the sharp pain of electrocution take over his body, stunning him and bending him backward, ripping a scream from his throat before his brain began to be infiltrated.

He refused.
As quick as he could, he threw up as many defenses as possible, keeping out the infiltration and finding he could only do it by half measure.

“Incorporated. Yes.” He felt his mouth say, heard his voice speak, but couldn’t control it. He felt his body move of its own accord, patting himself down. “Ah, unfamiliar pulmonary set-up. Nervous system hyper-conductive. Remarkable brain processing speed.” His body circled around Webley, his hands fell on Webley’s shoulders, and his mouth stretched into a grin. “Amazing.”

No.

With a mighty, mental shove, he pushed away the Cyberplanner in his head.

“Get out of my head.” He snarled.

He was shoved back.

So, he sought out the middle ground, retracting in his mind, skirting the edges where the Cyberplanner stayed, finding a sort of middle ground where they could meet.

He faced himself, a more sinister version with a charming grin and metal on the left side of his face.

It was only after he made the space that he realized the Cyberplanner could skirt his mind as well. He threw up a shield as best he could, but doing so too strongly could cause him to lose control completely.

“Could you kindly stop rummaging through my mind. It’s rather rude.” He said sharply.

“Just you try and stop me.” The Cyberplanner said back. “And, oh, who’s Rose? You’ve got her quite clear in your mind, she’s been there a lot.”

He quickly shoved the idea of Rose behind the loosely held mental shield. And then, before they could crop up, Charley and Jack as well.

“Are you done?” The Doctor asked.

“No, no, not at all.” The Cyberplanner replied. And then, the Doctor was seeing the room with the low light and the mist again, feeling his body twirl about. “Relax, relax, if you just relax, you will find this a perfectly pleasant experience. You are being upgraded and incorporated into the Cyberiad as a Cyberplanner.”

The Doctor gave a mental shove.

“I would rather not!” He said, using his own mouth, his own body, to make his protest.

He mentally pulled back to the space he created for them to share, and noted how now it lit up like circuitry. He looked about, worry creasing his brow. He could feel it, just a little, this whisper of voices that weren’t voices, a mass of presence that hadn’t touched his mind since Gallifrey. Only this didn’t feel right, it felt cold and unfeeling.

“You’ve set up a hive.” He said simply. “Signals from every Cyberman everywhere are coming in. How many?”

The planner smiled wide, laughing giddily. “It’s brilliant, isn’t it? I was clever already, but now I’m a million times more clever with your brain. Not a human one, not even slightly human. I
mean, I’m going to have to completely rework the neural interface, but I’m going to be the most efficient Cyberplanner.” The planner frowned. “It’s not a great name, is it? I should call myself… Mister Clever.”

Chapter End Notes

Hello, and thanks for reading, as always.
I'm going to admit that I didn't follow Charley after she left the Doctor, I only know what sort of adventures she got up to through reading summaries. So, I took some liberties with her characters journey.
Until next time.
“So much raw data,” Mister Clever said, using his voice. The Doctor could feel him lurking, probing at the edges of the part of the mind he still controlled. “And just think what could be hidden behind all those walls and doors you’ve put up.”

“Just think, indeed,” The Doctor countered. “You could learn about Daleks, Time Lords, the time war.”

“I could, but you won’t let me. You control forty-nine point eight eight one percent of the brain, same as me. Point two three eight of the brain is still in the balance. Stalemate.”

“Stalemate.” The Doctor agreed, probing back, finding out what made this Mister Clever tick. “We’re going to constantly battling for control over my body and my mind, and I’m sure you know that I am very good at mental wrestling.”

“You are, but Cyberwidgets are excellent at infiltration,” Mister Clever countered.

“That they are,” The Doctor agreed, thinking as fast as he could with half his mind still in his control. He thought of Jack, Charley. He thought of Rose, recent memories of her floating close to the surface. “I would like propose a challenge, Mister Clever, one which we should be on equal footing for.”

“What do you suggest.”

“Do you play chess?”

“The rules of chess are in my memory banks. You’re proposing we play chess to end the stalemate.”

“I think it’s a fair and adequate way to determine who gets control of the brain.”

“You do understand that, when I do win, the Cyberiad gets your brains and memories. All of it.”

“When? You seem very confident.”

“You can’t win.”

“Try me,” The Doctor countered.

Mister Clever smiled, both with the physical mouth as well as with the mental.

“There is a small problem, though.” The Doctor said suddenly, taking over the body as well. It would seem they would be taking turns. “We’re aboard here with no board. There is a perfectly good one back there on that planet.”

“So, there is. Shall we go?”

“We shall,” The Doctor agreed.

He didn’t need to brace himself for the transport, Mister Clever had taken over the body. They
were back in the chess room, Webley as well. Everything was how they left it, which hopefully meant he hadn’t been gone long. His time sense was muddled with the invasion.

“The rules of chess allow only a finite number of moves,” Mister Clever said, examining the chessboard as he set it back up. “And I can use other Cyberunits as remote processors. You cannot possibly win.”

“I can,” the Doctor said with confidence, finding himself in charge. He ran his hand along the edge of the board before putting it in his pocket. He felt his hand curl around the ticket, he found earlier. “I know things you don’t.” He said, making the first move.

Mister Clever took over, making the next. “Do you?” he asked in a sneering voice.

“I do,” The Doctor said once back in control. “For instance, I had faced your lot more times than I’d like to admit. I know your code, or at least the type of code you’re running, and I know it’s susceptible to certain things: gold, cleaning fluids.” He made his next move.

“Really, that’s your secret weapon?” Mister Clever asked, amused, moving another piece.

“Cleaning fluid?”

The Doctor was in control again, and his clenched his hand around the ticket. “No.” He replied before slapping the foil ticket against the side of his face that the Cyber controller had attached itself to.

It didn’t work as well as he’d have liked it to. He felt in control, but he could also tell that he wasn’t in full control of his mind. Mister Clever was holding on tight, and old tricks wouldn’t work, not full time. He had a chance to escape, at least for a while. A chance to get within range of people who could put an end to things if the planner happened to take over completely. A burst of regeneration energy would certainly rid him of the issue, which is something he knew Mister Clever didn’t know. But he would need someone to trigger it, and while Jack may not know about regeneration, Rose and Charley did.

“That settles it, then.” He said, pulling out his sonic and pointing it at the board, temporarily locking the pieces in place. “Right, Webley, follow me. I must find Jack and the girls where they can keep a close eye on me.”

~DW~

They’d done a sweep of the castle, and were heading along the battlements, checking the parameter and staying together like the Doctor had asked. The three of them hadn’t spoken since they left the barracks, though Rose felt it wasn’t because of any sort of contention between them.

At least, not between the trio, Outhwaite seemed to still quietly fume at being overruled. Just before the made it to their destination, Rose noticed her stopping a few of the soldiers and whispering something to them. They branched off, separating into a few different directions.

“We’ll never hear from them,” Charlotte had said after a bit. Jack and Rose looked to her, and she gave a grimace. “Those soldiers that went off on their own? They’re not coming back.”

Rose frowned, trying to reconcile how she would know, then recalled what Porridge had said when he explained what happened to the Tiberian galaxy.
“You think there are more out there? The Cybermen.” She asked. “You think it wasn’t the only one.”

Charlotte seemed to steel herself. “I don’t know for sure, but I would wager the ones Webley had are not to empty anymore. And the Cybermats, I know I’ve seen them. It means that if there aren’t functioning Cybermen now, there will be soon.”

“And we’ll handle them,” Jack said with confidence, something Charlotte didn’t seem to share.

They approached Outhwaite and a few of the others who had begun to unpack the weapons on the walls, and Jack went right into the mode of a Captain.

“Talk to me Outhwaite,” He said, putting his hands on his hips.

Instead of replying, she gestured to the cases.

Rose crossed her arms, examining what was on display with a frown. “Those gloves?” She asked.

Outhwaite picked one up and put one on. “These are hand-pulsars. Touch the back of a Cyberman’s head, the electromagnetic pulse deactivates it.” She explained.

“Really?” Charlotte asked, sounding near laughing. “You think that’s going to work? Sneak up on a Cyberman and give it a good pat on the head?”

Outhwaite glared. “Cybermen have been extinct for a thousand years. Even one Anti-Cyber gun is a miracle, and that’s all we happen to have.”

“Right, so, we have a bunch of gloves and one gun. Two if we count Jack’s.” Rose noted with a gesture to the Captain. “Charlotte, I’m gonna guess that they don’t just run about, yeah?”

“No,” Charlotte replied. “They most certainly do not. They’ve got weapons, they can shoot us.”

“And I’m guessing that beauty there blows up the planet.” Jack asked, pointing to something Rose would say was very bomb-like.

“Implodes it.” Outhwaite corrected. “There’s also a trigger unit.”

“Well hand that over,” Jack said, reaching and swiping it from the woman’s hand the moment she lifted it out of the case.

“It’s set to respond to my voice as well,” Outhwaite said, standing. “I have the verbal code.”

“And I will shoot you before you have a chance to say it.” Jack replied with a coldness Rose hadn’t seen before. He locked eyes on Outhwaite’s, a deadly seriousness Rose hadn’t seen in anyone aside from the Doctor.

Outhwaite didn’t even quiver. “I will follow my orders.” She stated.

“And those orders come from me, and I say if you try any act of insubordination that would result in the deaths of anyone here, but especially those two ladies, I will shoot you. Do I make myself clear?” Jack asked, voice raising with every word, causing Charlotte to inch closer to Rose.

Outhwaite’s face hardened, and she glared before giving the Captain a curt nod.

“Sir,” A tall, lanky lad with ginger hair and glasses spoke, his voice cracking a little. He cleared his throat as Jack turned to him. “You’ll, umm, need to sign for the trigger unit.”
And just like that, Jack the Captain was gone, and the wide, shiny-tooth grin Jack the flirt sported was well in place. “Thank you, handsome.” He said as he took the clipboard from the soldier and signed for the trigger.

Porridge, tension cleared, sauntered to the case of weapons and picked up a pulsar, turning it over before slipping it on. “Mind if I take one of these?” He asked. “Might by handy.”

Rose snickered, hearing Charlotte give a snort before her, and the two women darted a glance at one another.


Once they were out of sight, Rose quietly said. “Wonder what that was about?”

“You don’t know?” Jack asked, and Rose shook her head. “He’s the Emperor.” Jack replied with a tilt of his head toward where Porridge and Outhwaite went.

“What?” Charlotte asked for a laugh. “No, he can’t… no.”

“How long have you been here?” He asked, and Charlotte frowned.

“I dunno, a month, bit more maybe. I haven’t been able to keep proper track, why do you ask?”

“How often have you gone to see Webley’s wax figures?”

“Not often,” Charlotte replied, twisting her hands. “Once I saw the Cyberman, I hadn’t really wanted to go back. Didn’t dare look around much while I was there, either.”

“Well, if you had, you’d have seen the wax figure of our friend there. He’s the spitting image of Ludens Nimrod Kendrick Cord Longstaff XLI, except made just a foot or two taller.”

Rose’s jaw dropped a bit, glancing between Jack and where Porridge went. “So, he really can make you Captain, then?”

“Better for us, then, that the real authority here is on the Doctor’s side.” Charlotte said with something that sounded very close like camaraderie. Rose turned to her, and found a bit of the coldness the other blonde had for her was gone. The spark of good humor in her eye dimmed, though. “What I don’t understand, though is why she’s so… determined to blow up the bloody planet. Especially if, it seems, she knows her Emperor is on it.”

“Porridge told me a bit about that.” Rose confessed, glancing between Jack and Charlotte. “Said it was the only way to stop’em. That they ran outta other options.” She frowned, realization coming to her in a wave, as she suddenly reconciled Porridge’s pity for the bloke who pushed the button.

“Rose?” Charlotte asked gently, but as Rose looked up, there was a commotion behind them, and they turned in time to see Outhwaite plow past them, ignoring Porridge’s demands she stop.

“Jack, grab her.” Porridge shouted.

As the Captain made to do that, Outhwaite hauled back and punched him in the face, sending him spiraling against the wall and lowering his guard.

She went for the bomb.
“This is Captain Alice Outhwaite, Imperial ID…” She spoke to it as she lifted it up.

“Jack,” Charlotte cried.

Rose went to his side, pulling the blaster from his holster.

She’d never had to shoot anyone, and the gun shook in her grip as she raised it with both hands.

But the blast that took out Outhwaite didn’t come from her. It didn’t come from Jack who recovered enough to grab the second gun.

It came from outside the castle.

“Cyberman, everyone down!” Porridge instructed, and many of the other soldiers who had been milling about did as they were told while Jack stood and stumbled to the window.

“It’s only one, and it looks like its retreating. Changing tact.”

“It’s not going to stop.” Charlotte said with certainty. “It’s going to come in, come after us.”

Jack pushed his tongue into the side of his cheek, furrowing his brow. “Doc said stay somewhere defensible, but from what I do know of them, there isn’t really anywhere we’d be perfectly safe.”

“So, what do we do, Captain?” Rose asked with only a little cheek.

Jack took a breath. “If we stay in the castle, it will come in after us. So, it needs to be taken out.”

“Is that an order, sir?” One of the soldiers asked.

“Yeah. Six of you, grab a repulser, you’re coming with me, and we’re going to hunt it down. Rose, Charley,” He turned to them, “Stay here, stay together, watch each other’s backs. You’ll have three soldiers with you.”

“Right.” Rose said, realizing all of a sudden that she still had his blaster in her hand. She raised her hand, about to give it back to Jack when he shook his head.

“You keep it, I’m going to take the Cybergun.”

“Right, well, be careful.”

“You, too.” He said, darting over and giving her a quick hug before grabbing the gun and waving the half-dozen soldiers that seemed to assemble together to follow him.

Rose watched them go, unease settling around her.

“I hate splitting up.” Charlotte said beside her, startling Rose. She turned, but Charlotte was still looking to where Jack and the others had gone. “It always seems to be when things go wrong, and when the Doctor’s in most trouble.”

“Yeah.” Rose agreed. “Time’s the Doctor and I split up, got drugged by a dirty ol’ man, cornered and nearly killed by a Dalek, cloned by a Zygon, almost fried by a trampoline with lipstick, and was nearly a target in the middle of a war, hanging by a barrage balloon.”

And, to Rose’s great surprise, Charlotte laughed.

“Oh, you must tell me some of these stories.” She said after, meeting Rose’s eye with a smile.
She returned it, “Tell you mine if you tell me yours.” She said, tongue in the corner of her mouth in the end. “Doctor’s told me some, but think it’s sorta likely he left some bits out, yeah?”

Charlotte seemed to battle with herself for a moment before saying, “I would like that. Let’s….”

“Find a corner, get some better cover?” Rose suggested.

“Exactly.” Charlotte agreed.

“Well, come on then. I’ll start on the way.”

~DW~

He lost three taking out the one Cyberman. Jack didn’t work closely with very many in his life, and it wasn’t even close to the first time he’d lost member of his team on a mission, but this felt more on him than any of those. Yes, he was the Captain now, but it wasn’t like this was the first time he’d led. And yes, it wasn’t like there was anything he could have done to increase the chances of success, of survival, but he still wondered if he’d done all he could.

So, when, as leading the remainder of the team back around to the castle, and spotted the Doctor, he was momentarily relieved. Some of the harder decisions, some of the loss, could be shared.

That was, at least, until he noticed a bit of metal on the side of the Doctor’s head.

“Don’t shoot, please.” The Time Lord said, raising his hands, one holding a chessboard, above his head. Behind him was the Impresario had much more metal covering him, though wasn’t fully converted. “I’m in control right now, I swear.”

“Doc?”

“Jack,” he said with a nod. “Not the best look, is it?” He said, turning his head to the side.

Jack looked to the soldiers, seeing them raising their very ineffective weapons. Well, ineffective if they’d been facing a Cyberman, but seeing as the Doctor was still flesh, it would be a risk.

“What happened?” Jack asked.

“An attempted hijacking, only partially successful. The Cyberplanner is in my head, and there’s a bit of a battle to see who actually gets control of it.”

Jack glanced to the board in his hand. “A chess game?” He asked incredulously. “Really, that’s how you’re going to try and-”

“It’s part of a plan, which I can’t talk about, because I can tell you right now the planner is developing a counter to the gold currently hindering part of its code. Not to mention that it’s also reactivating the repaired Cybermen which were housed here, on this planet, without anyone having been the wiser.”

“Right,” Jack said, taking a deep breath and then another in order to calm and center himself. “Right, so what do we do?”

“You tie me up.” The Doctor replied.
Jack’s brain stopped working properly for about three seconds. It didn’t exactly work the way it should either when it began to function. His first instinct, despite everything, was to be suggestive. He loved and respected Rose, he would never actually make a move on the Doctor, but it was on the tip of his tongue to say exactly what came to mind at those words. His second was to demand why they weren’t going to find a solution to the Doctor’s problem.

“I swear, Jack, I have things under control. But I need to be restrained, tied to a chair with my hands free to finish my game.”

“Right,” Jack said, shaking his head and waving the Doctor along. “Come on, there’s a throne room in here. Seems like the best place. You two,” Jack said, to the two soldiers on his left. “Go get rope, meet us there.”

The Doctor and Jack headed in, Webley and the other soldier trailing behind.

“How do you know about the Cybermen?” Jack asked.

“I can feel it in my head, skim its surface thoughts and processing. I know it awakened them, and I know it’s sending them this way. Do you trust me?”

“You know I do,” Jack replied. “Which is why I haven’t shot you on sight.”

“Well, that might have offered a temporary solution, actually, but one I would rather like to avoid at the moment.” He replied.

Jack just looked at him askance a moment before shaking his head and dropping the subject.

As they got closer to the throne room, the faint sounds of suppressed giggles reached his ear, and Jack knew the sound of one of the gigglers by heart. So, he wasn’t surprised to find Rose when he rounded the corner, but to find the one she was giggling with was Charley had been a bit surprising.

“Jack, your back!” The latter greeted enthusiastically.

“Everything alright in here, ladies?” He asked.

“Perfectly,” Charley replied. “Well, about as perfectly as it can be when you’re-”

“Doctor!” Rose cut her off, absolute panic pitching her voice as she was running from Charley’s side to the Doctor’s in a moment.

“It’s not as bad as it looks, I swear.” He placated Rose, setting the board in his hand on a table which had a low back chair before it.

“Not as…” Rose started, then smacked him on the arm. “You got metal on the side’a your head, an’ you wanna try an’ tell me it ain’t as bad as it looks?” She frowned.

“Darling,” He said gently, turning toward her. He looked as though he were about to argue and deflated. “You’re right, it’s not a great situation, but I’m handling it. Now,” he said, glancing over his shoulder as the two soldiers came in with some rope. “I’m going to have Jack tie me to the chair, because once the Cyberplanner-”

“Cyberplanner!” Charley half yelped, half demanded, stomping to join the couple. “No, you must be joking!”
“It’s not so-, really have you two no faith in me?”

“Been swapping stories, the pair’a us.” Rose said, crossing her arms, eyes not leaving the Doctor as he sat down in the chair, the soldiers coming around and tying him down, arms free. “Know that you’re not always the best at keeping a handle on things.”

“This is how I lost you last time.” Charley said, also crossing her arms. “To a Cyberplanner.”

“And neither of you will lose me now.” He replied in such a way that it sounded like a promise.

“Yeah, how can you be sure?” Rose asked, more nervous now.

“By winning.” The Doctor replied, looking at the board before him. He withdrew his sonic and pointed it at the board. It hummed and whirred, but as far as Jack could tell, it didn’t do anything.

At least, until the Doctor made a move.

“And are you? Winning that is?” Charley asked.

Very quickly, the Doctor’s hand shot up and ripped the piece of gold foil off the metal of his face.

And his entire expression shifted into something more sinister. “Actually,” he said, his voice taking on a similar tone, a slightly different pitch. “He made some dodgy moves at the beginning, and probably only has about a twenty-five percent chance of winning.”

“Doc?” Jack asked.

He shot his eyes to him, and a shudder ran down Jack’s spine.

“No, I’m afraid I’m working the mouth now. Brave heart, Jack. It is, Jack isn’t it? I know because I can skim his mind. It’s an utter mess, really, has had seven other configurations.”

“You’re not the Doctor.” Charley said, inching back.

“No,” He said, turning sharply to Charley, his right hand moving into his pocket, seemingly separate from himself. Faster, a little more frantic than the languid movements the rest of him made. “No, Edwardian Adventuress, I am not.”

“Are you… you’re not….” Charley began to stutter, growing paler as she inched back a bit more.

“I’m-” He started to say before Rose stepped forward and smacked the Doctor so hard that crack nearly echoed off the walls, and the Doctor’s head whipped around.

“Ah!” He groaned, tone back to normal. “Rose, where did you learn to hit like that?” He asked, rubbing his cheek and turning to her.

“Mum,” She said simply. “You wrote ‘hit me’, why?”

“I needed to be in control a moment. More Cybermen are now awake and on the move, coming here and for you. You need to stop them, delay them.” He said to all of them.

“How do you want us to do that?” Jack asked.

“However you can.” He replied. “I have a plan, but I can’t say or think on it too much.”

“What about Webley?” Charley asked, glancing off to the side where the Impresario stood
perfectly still, like a robot waiting for attention.

“His brain is currently in stand-by mode.” The Doctor replied, propping an elbow on the table and leaning his head against his hand, looking at the board.

“Can we still save him?” She asked in a small voice.

“Well, right now he has a better chance of getting out of this situation alive than you do.” The Doctor replied, smirking slightly.

Rose, who’d been watching him carefully, had darkened with every word coming out of his mouth.

“You’re not the Doctor.” She said with certainty.

He lifted his head and smiled. “You’re right. I’m Mister Clever.”

“Bit on the nose, ain’t it?”

Mister Clever chuckled. “Oh, I see why he loves you, you beautiful blaidd drwg. Which means, of course, that I’ll kill you last. Slowly. Painfully. Pointlessly, and very far from home.”

“Rose,” Jack called to her before she could attempt to face down or merely yell at the Cyber-Doctor. She turned to him, and he tilted his head to the door. “Leave it.” He said, and she nodded. Charley took her by the elbow, half following, half leading Rose away.

“Tooold-oo.” The Cyber Doctor said in a pleasant tone that made Jack’s stomach twist. He made sure the girls were out of the room, then closed the massive doors behind him.

~DW~

The sun was cresting the horizon, and all they could do was wait. Rose didn’t really have an idea how long they were on the planet, and she didn’t dare ask Charlotte in case it made her look a little dense.

She was already feeling a bit slow after earlier.

“We need a way to make sure the Cybermen don’t get through,” Jack had said, hands on his hips, looking at everyone for an idea on what to do.

Charlotte had looked around, then spotted something on the floor, eyes wide. “That’s the power line for the park, isn’t it?” She asked one of the soldiers, who nodded with confusion. “Why not use that?” She asked eagerly, looking to everyone who just stared back. “Oh, come on!” She said, half stomping a foot. “Cybermen, beneath all the metal, are human. They’re converted humans. And even still, I’m pretty sure if you were to drop something robotic into a water lit with a charge, it would fry all the circuitry anyway, wouldn’t it?”

“Cybermen can’t… fly or hover, then?” Rose asked, thinking back on the Dalek.

“No,” Charlotte shook her head. “No, they can’t. At least, not that I’ve seen.”

Jack laughed, clapping his hand once before grabbing Charlotte’s face and planting a quick kiss on her forehead.
The other blonde was sitting beside Rose on a crate in the courtyard, a blush still lingering on her cheeks all this time later. They’d been quiet for a while, and it was nearly companionable. But there was something nagging at Rose, and had been for a bit when she realized the most she’d done to help the situation was slap the Doctor, and listen to Porridge.

“Did you ever feel utterly useless with ‘im?” Rose asked, risking what sort’ve felt like everything to pose the question. She looked to Charlotte, seeing the mild confusion in her eyes with the hint of understanding. “Like, I dunno. Like you’re just the damsel keeps gettin’ into trouble, an’ he’s got to bail you out.”

Charlotte’s lips twitched. “I do believe you said you saved him a time or two.” She reminded with mirth to her voice.

“Yeah, well. Got lucky, didn’t I?” Rose replied. “Dunno, moments like this? Jus’… since Jack came along, sorta see how maybe I wasn’t much help before. Didn’t even get my A levels, yeah? Now with you-“

“We shouldn’t be comparing.” Charlotte said firmly. “I was born the day the titanic sail. I can’t quite imagine properly what it must have been like for you growing up, all that wonderful technology. But I can assure you was far greener than you when I first stepped on the TARDIS, and from what I can tell, it hasn’t been a very long time for you yet.”


Charlotte looked down at her hands. “He does a lot of stupid things, as I’m sure you’ve noticed. And he makes a lot of decisions you might not agree with. One of them led to the loss of our friend, someone who’d become like a brother to me on our journey. I told you a bit about our time in the divergent universe, at least the happier bits. But… before that, we said our first ‘I love you’s. I didn’t want to die without having told him, and when we both lived, I clung to it. I desperately wanted to be with him, believed he needed me at his side. He did, of course, but he’s got a tendency to … to try and sacrifice himself, like a noble hero or something. We got through the divergent, of course, but…. “

“I loved him, Rose. I love him still, and I never wanted to leave. But our last, long adventure, our travels through another universe, it did something to us. It changed us both, and when C’rizz died… I couldn’t forgive the Doctor for letting him. Not at first. I was angry enough with him that I thought leaving would be for the better. And then so many things happened, and I realized I was making a mistake. That I didn’t want to leave after all. Except, I thought, it was too late. And he was gone. Forever.”

Rose watched as Charlotte’s eyes turned glassy, and her heart broke.

“Not though, is he?” She said, risking a bit of her pride by putting her hand on Charlotte’s shoulder. “An’ I can’t imagine he wouldn’t want you to come with us now. Now that he knows you’re out here, away from Earth.”

“I can’t go back to my time,” She said with a weak smile. “Everyone needs to believe I died.”

“He can bring you somewhere else, if you really want. Know a good bunch’a people who’d take you in, help you out in my time. But, TARDIS was probably more home than anywhere, yeah? Might not be able to go back, but you can come home, right?”
The other woman stared at Rose, utterly bewildered. “You’d… you wouldn’t….”

Rose smiled weakly. “You’re his friend, yeah? You weren’t ready to leave, so why not come with. Better than being lonely out here, isn’t it?”

Charlotte shook her head, smiling. “I can tell you know, had our places been swapped, I probably wouldn’t be so understanding.”

“Maybe it’s a 21st century thing.” Rose huffed, brushing her hair behind her ear.

Charlotte shook her head again. “No, I think it’s a Rose thing.” She smiled. “I’ll think on it. Truly. And, well, much as I dream about a second chance, I won’t get in your way. The Doctor’s happy with you, and I would never want to get in the way of that happiness.”

“Thanks,” Rose replied, quietly sighing.

“But, can I ask one thing? It’s been bothering me since Mister Clever said something.” Charlotte said, and Rose turned curiously back toward her. “Why does the Doctor call you that?”

“Darlin’?” Rose frowned.

“No,” Charlotte chuckled. “I understand that one. I mean the other thing. Bad Wolf.”

“What?” Rose whispered, her throat constricting and her stomach turning into knots.

Charlotte didn’t seem to notice. “I thought it a bit odd, especially how he said it Welsh. And I probably wouldn’t have thought anything of it, had Mister Clever not called me by what the Doctor often referred to me as. So, why Bad Wolf?”

Rose’s heart thumped hard in her chest. “He doesn’t,” She managed to choke out, thinking back on all the times and places they encountered the words. Found themselves or someone else saying them.”

“Oh?” Charlotte frowned. “I wonder why he’d say it, then?”

“Thought you ladies might want something to warm you up,” Porridge said, as he brought them each a tin mug with soup.

“Smells lovely, ta.” Rose said as she took it with a smile, forcing the thought of Bad Wolf and its lingering presence from her mind.

“Shouldn’t someone else be serving you?” Charlotte asked, and Rose glanced between her and Porridge.

He smirked. “Figured me out, did you?” He asked.

“Well,” Charlotte said, dragging out the word, making Rose chuckle.

“Jack did, told us.” She explained as Charlotte seemed flustered.

“And you three kept it quiet?” He asked as Rose took a sip of the warm, salty soup.

“It’s not our place to say anything.” Charlotte replied kindly. “You’ll say something when you’re ready. If you’re ever ready.”

Porridge’s smirk changed to a thankful smile and he nodded. He appeared about to say something
when Jack came jogging toward them.

“So,” he said, only slightly out of breath but very shaken. “I was checking up on the Doctor, and it’s not good.”

~DW~

“How goes it, Doc?” Jack asked as he walked into the room, and the Doctor struggled to take control of his body.

It was Mister Clever’s turn, however, and despite being a mental brute, the Doctor was fatiguing.

“Still early in the game,” Mister Clever replied, affecting the Doctor perfectly. “How is it out there, how are the defenses?”

Jack, don’t you dare, the Doctor thought, and alongside his mental signature, Mister Clever’s laughed low, amused.

Jack narrowed his eyes. “We have hand pulsars, one gun, and the last resort weapon.”

“And the last resort weapon,” Mister Clever replied, “that has a remote, does it not?”

Jack hesitated, then reached into his pocket and pulled out the slender, pen-like device.

“Excellent, let me see.”

At that, Jack, put the trigger back in his front pocket. “The Doctor wouldn’t want me to bring it anywhere near him, not right now.” He said, crossing his arms.

That a boy, Jack.

“I am the Doctor.” Mister Clever countered. “The Cyberplanner is hibernating.”

“Yeah?” Jack asked, arching a brow. “Tell me something only the Doctor would know.”

He felt his body smirk, and could get a sense of what Mister Clever was going to say by the surface thoughts.

“I can tell you everything you ever wanted to know about Rose.” He said, and the Doctor felt his soul lurch and twist. He was, after all, sharing a mind, and while he may have had a lot of Rose locked away, there was no telling what information Mister Clever had gathered before that door was sealed. “Or perhaps you’d prefer to know about Charley?”

The Doctor mentally scoffed at that one.

Jack smirked, bending forward toward them. “You know what I want to know.”

“Right,” Mister Clever agreed. “You’d like to know what would have happened if you and I met, and Rose wasn’t.”

There was a hard crack, and the Doctor felt the pain sharply, bringing him to the forefront of the mind.
“Ah, thank you, Jack.” He said, rubbing his face where the Captain’s fist made contact. “How did you know?”

“Like you would suddenly start sharing anything about Rose and you, let alone indulge me in why might’ve been.”

“Glad you know me well enough,” The Doctor said, shaking his head out. “How are they?”

“Getting along.” Jack replied. “Charley’s quick. Came up with a great defensive strategy.”

“She was always quite clever,” He agreed as he suddenly felt himself lose control of part of his body. “Jack,” He said, meaning to warn, but his tone seemed to set off worry in his companion.

Jack inched a bit closer, and it was all Mister Clever needed.

His hand darted out, faster than either he or the Captain could stop, and the hand snatched the remote from Jack’s pocket.

“Hey!” Jack said, making a valiant effort, darting forward and trying to stop or catch the Doctor’s hand now smashing the remote against the table top.

You’ve lost your Queen, Mister Clever said in his mind, pleased with himself.

“He got what he wanted,” The Doctor sighed, feeling that mental fatigue begin to wear on his body, allowing him to feel every century he’d spent in his current body. He looked up and met Jack’s eye. “I’ll try to win, try and hold him off.”

“Try?” Jack asked. “What do you mean, try?”

And the Doctor slipped, losing full control, feeling Mister Clever reassert himself. “He means, they’re here.” Mister Clever smiled triumphantly. “Prepare for conversion.”

Jack stood straighter, turned, and marched out the door at as quick of a pace as he could without seeming panicked.

There was a beat of silence that filled the room and made it feel entirely too empty.

“I’ve learned so much from you, Doctor. It’s been an education,” Mister Clever said, leaning back casually in the chair. “But now, it’s time for the end game.”

~DW~

She, Charlotte, Jack, and Porridge watched over the side of the castle wall as the first of the cybermen stepped into the moat and was instantly electrocuted, and then began to recover.

“UPGRADE IN PROGRESS,” He said in a very robotic voice.

“S not good,” Rose said, inching slightly back.

“Right,” Jack said, turning sharply to the soldiers who had begun to congregate behind them on the wall. “Who’s the best shot here?” He asked, and one bloke raised his hand timidly. “Great.” Jack replied, “Grab the Cybergun, shoot any of those things that get across the moat.” He then turned to
Rose, eyes said and worried. “I’m taking you to see him.”

“Why, what can I do?” She asked, heart rate picking up.

“You can probably get through to him, maybe help him fight off the Clever guy. He’s getting tired, Rose.”

“I’ll go, too.” Charlotte said. “If Rose can’t get him out, we can try together. And failing that, well….”

“You wouldn’t have missed it for the world.” Rose said, understanding. “Said the same thing not long ago, facing down a Dalek.”

“I’ll meet you there.” Porridge said with certainty. “I just need to collect something first.”

“And what is it you plan to get, your highness?” Jack asked.

Porridge merely smiled, turned, and jogged away.

After he rounded the corner, Rose huffed, trying to settle her nerves as she heard the charge of the blaster behind her. “Shall we, Charlotte?”

“Charley,” she replied. “Call me Charley.”

Rose’s grin was weak, but genuine. She looked to Jack who nodded, and the three of them headed to the throne room.

~DW~

“They’re nearly here.” Mister Clever softly spoke in the mind space, and the Doctor said nothing back. What could there possibly be said to the obvious. He could see it, there, on the edge of Mister Clever’s half. Three million Cybermen, more than would be needed to destroy galaxies, and with no way to destroy them all. “You can take my bishop, keep limping on for a little longer. Or, you can sacrifice your queen piece, and I will maybe spare your darling Rose and Charley.”

“What about Jack?” The Doctor asked.

“What about Jack? I’ve seen the priorities you hold, Doctor. I’m willing to make a deal for the ones you love more.”

He relented control, giving the Doctor free reign, and the move had never come fast enough. He took the bishop.

“I don’t play favorites.” He said simply as Mister Clever retook control.

“You’re willing to sacrifice the women you love, allow them to be converted, or killed, so you don’t hurt your Captain’s feelings?”

“I don’t play favorites,” the Doctor repeated. “And I believe you’re merely getting worried that I may win the match after all.”

“It won’t make a difference, and you know it.” Clever retorted, making his own next move.
He gave up control, but the Doctor didn’t move. Not yet.

“Time Lords invented chess, as you well know. It’s our game, so why do you think you have any possibility of beating me?” The Doctor asked, looking at the board from a couple different angles. “From where I’m sitting, I have mate in four moves.”

“How?” Clever asked.

The Doctor snorted. “I thought you were a chess playing robot? Can’t you see it?”

“How?!” Clever demanded.

“Oh, I’m not going to tell you. You should be able to figure it out. Unless you don’t have the processing power?”

It was a bluff, of course. He hoped that somehow the Cyberplanner would withdraw, ease off somehow to allow him to better think of a plan in his mind in quiet without worrying too much about the surface being skimmed. He could tell it was only partly working. He could feel the slight withdraw, the full control he had on his body now, but he also could sense a touch more strongly those three thousand cybermen.

Still, he hadn’t been idle since Jack left, the bits of the remote detonator still lingered on the table next to the board, and it had the Doctor trying to think of a way to escape. He could only think of one way that he could rid himself of this particular Cyberplanner that didn’t involve forcing a regeneration, and he had to hope that he could get his hands on said means before he either lost the game, or Clever turned on him.

He wrote it down on a fresh page of the notepad, glancing up as he heard well timed footsteps coming toward the room.

“What are you doing?” He asked Mister Clever, already knowing the answer as his three companions came in, followed closely behind by Porridge who stayed mostly hidden behind Jack’s legs.

“I’m pulling in the extra processing power.” Mister Clever replied as Rose, despite Jack holding out an arm to try and stop her, moved toward him. “How long do you think it’s going to take us to solve it?”

“Not long, I’d imagine,” The Doctor replied, using the hand he knew for certain was currently entirely his and tapping the notepad for Rose to see.

She glanced down, then met his eyes, her own wide and sparking. As she turned back to the others, the Doctor reached into his pocket and withdrew the sonic from within, flicking through the settings until he found the one he would need. He watched Rose lean down to Porridge, conversing quietly, as Mister Clever took more control.

“It’s not possible to get mate in four moves.” He stated.

“No, you’re absolutely right. Less.” He said as Porridge glanced at him, slipping something to Rose. “One,” He said as Rose came close to him. “Two,” he said as she extended her hand toward him, just out of his line of sight, and he activated the sonic. “Three.” He dropped the sonic, grabbed the hand pulsar, and slapped himself in the face, across where the Cybermits had latched on, and shocked himself.

His hearts stuttered, telling him it was a very bad move in some ways, and if he’d been any weaker,
it might have stopped one or both of them. He groaned in agony, but at the same time, he felt the mites detach, and his brain become his entirely once more.

“Doctor?” Rose asked, stooping to grab the sonic before resting one hand on his shoulder.

“I’m alright,” He groaned, shaking his head to try and feel normal again. “Would like to not have to endure that again.”

“Are you sure you’re the Doctor?” Charley asked, and he smiled at her weariness.

“While I admit I have my moments, I remember who I am this time. The Cyberplanner’s gone.” He frowned, “I need to be untied, though. Going to need to be able to move about if I’m going to figure out how to destroy three million Cybermen before they manage to leave the planet.”

Rose darted behind him, getting to work on the ropes, while Jack came closer.

“We may have that covered,” he said. “We can still blow up the planet.”

“And how exactly are we going to do that? The remote detonator was destroyed, so unless there’s a voice override, and we happen to have the person who can activate it here—”

“We do.” Jack says, gesturing to Porridge. The Doctor frowned. “He’s the emperor.” He explained.

The Doctor’s face lit up.

“He’s right,” He agreed, shifting his stance so the Doctor could see the bomb tucked beneath his arm. “Thing is, I don’t want to be Emperor. If I activate this bomb, it’s all over.”

“Over how?” Rose asked as the ropes fell away, stepping around the chair.

“We’re all here,” Charley said, gesturing about the room. “The TARDIS is a ways off. Porridge sets off the bomb, and—”

“We all go up with the planet, yeah, get that bit.” She said, a quiver to her voice, swallowing hard as she crosses her arms. “Might make it back to the TARDIS, if we make a dash for it, but who knows what we might find out there.” She looked to Porridge. “Said you could mourn both, yeah? Think how many more—”

Porridge gave a sad chuckle. “I admire the bravery,” he said, looking from Rose to Charley. “I can see it in both of you, Jack and the Doctor, too, that you’re all willing to die here for the sake of saving other lives. But that’s not what I meant. The bomb, the throne, it’s all connected. I just have to say ‘this is Emperor Ludens Nimrod Kendrick, called Longstaff the forty first, the Defender of Humanity, Imperator of known space: Activate the Desolator,’ and it’s done.” He said, and there was a beep as the bomb activated. Porridge then turned to the Doctor. “It’ll blow in about eighty seconds, long enough for the Imperial Flagship to locate me from my identification, warp jump into orbit, and transmat us to the State Room.”

“You meant your hiding,” The Doctor said as he felt the wash of a transmat sweep over him. One moment, they were in the throne room of the castle, the next they were in the throne room of the ship. “Your being like everyone else is what you meant when you said it was all over.”

Porridge, standing atop a pyramid-like platform, a purple covered stool behind him, nodded. “I did.” He straightened up, seeming to transform from the obscure bloke who played chess inside a box, to a regal gentleman who exuded the power of a ruler.
“What about the TARDIS?” Rose asked, chewing her lip.

Porridge glanced at her, then to the Doctor. “Your ship?” He nodded. “What were the coordinates?” He asked, glancing at someone else with a nod.

“Six ultra nineteen P, she’s a big blue box, hardly looks like she’d fit more than a person.”

An officer at a set of controls gave a nod and began typing. “It’s done.” She said, the TARDIS appearing in the corner of the stateroom, tucked in the corner.

“And that’s that.” Porridge said before beginning to countdown out loud.

Rose came up beside the Doctor, and he put his arm around her, holding her close as he looked out the large window in the stateroom to the planet below.

“Brace yourself.” He murmured to her under his breath, and felt her shift her stance beside him just in time for the planet to explode, and rock the ship.

Charley yelped, Jack catching her before she tumbled into the steps leading to the top of Porridge’s platform.

Porridge, who had steadied himself against the stool behind him, sighed. “Farewell, Cyberiad. It was good to get away, good to be a person and not to be lonely, or Emperor of a thousand galaxies with everyone waiting for me to tell them what to do.”

“Oh, it can’t be all bad.” Charley said, shifting out of Jack’s hold to sit on the steps, looking up to Porridge. “It’s not like you have tell them to-to tie their shoes, or what to wear. You’re just making sure everyone is doing what they’re supposed to be doing, to make sure everyone under your reign is safe and happy.”

“Or you could run away again,” Jack offered with a shrug.

“That your answer to everything?” The Doctor smirked. “Get your memory taken away, so you run?”

“Had me running to you, didn’t it?” Jack retorted with a wink. “And what would have happened if Rosie wasn’t around, eh?”

“I suppose we’ll never know.” The Doctor replied, and Jack put a hand over his heart as though he’d been broken.

Porridge chuckled. “I suppose that’s something you don’t really have to worry much about, is it Doctor? Being lonely?”

He held the emperor’s eye. “I had thought, once, not long ago. Thought I was alone, but now, these days, I suppose I’m not, not really.”

“And you don’t have to be either, you know?” Charley said, putting a hand on Porridge’s arm, getting his attention. “It’s about perspective. We’re never really alone, not if we look hard enough, open our hearts.”

“You’re right.” Porridge said thoughtfully, looking down at Charley. “I don’t.” And then, dropping his one knee, he asked, “Charlotte, will you marry me?”

Charley’s jaw dropped. “I’m sorry?” She managed.
“You’re smart, and you’re beautiful.” Porridge went on. “You’re as alone as I am, and I don’t think being Emperor of a thousand galaxies wouldn’t be as hard if you were at my side.”

“We barely know each other,” She protested.

“Marriages have been made on shakier grounds.” Porridge countered.

“I think Empress Charlotte Elspeth Pollard doesn’t have a terrible ring to it.” The Doctor smirked, running his hand up and down Rose’s arm as she leaned against him.

“I had pretended to be a queen once,” She mused, then turned back to Porridge. “I can’t agree to a marriage with you, Porridge. It’s not in me to do it. But, may I make a counter offer?”

He narrowed his eyes. “I’m listening.”

“I’ve dealt with many various things while with the Doctor, and I’m sure Jack will end up giving up his title and go with them back to the TARDIS. I can’t be a captain, not really, I don’t think I have the heart. But I can be an adviser, and a friend. I can stay with you, here, if you’d like. And maybe, in time, as we grow to know one another…. I’ve only ever truly loved one man before, but maybe in time I can learn to love another. And if not, well….”

Porridge smiled, “I suppose it’s better than a no.” He nodded. “Alright, it’s a start. Perhaps I’ll win your heart in the end.”

“Keep her safe,” The Doctor said, letting go of Rose and stepping up to Porridge, bowing first before offering his hand.

“That I will.” Porridge nodded. “You’re off, then?”

“I don’t see any need for us to stick around.” The Doctor replied. “But, should you ever encounter the cybermen again and need another hand, Charley will be able to get my attention, I’m sure.”

Porridge smiled warmly at her, and in the brief moment his attention was turned away, the Doctor could see an admiration and respect in the emperor that eased any worry that might have lingered without his fully acknowledging them.

He stepped away, heading to the TARDIS, allowing the others to say their farewells.

As he opened the door, he knew he was being followed closely by Charley, her footfalls still familiar after all this time. He stepped in, knowing she was just behind, and smirked when he heard her gasp.

“Oh, she’s very different.” She said, and he turned to see her eyes wide with wonder before changing to something like sad fondness. “You’ve both changed,” she amended. “Changed and moved on, and so have I.”

“At least this time when we say our farewells, we both know it’s happening, and maybe we can both remember it how it was.” He replied, turning a few dials, preparing the TARDIS, who was surprisingly silent, to take off as soon as everyone was ready.

“Yes. At least I know, now, that you’re out there. That you’re happy and alive. And that someone is with you.”

She smiled, and so did he, and a moment later they were stepping toward each other, wrapping each other in their arms, and holding tight one last time.
Jack and Porridge were chatting away. Her farewells already said, Rose slowly went back to the TARDIS.

The old girl hummed comfortingly, reassuringly, with something that made Rose believe the ship was relieved. She reached out and stroked the paneling of the second door, just above the sign, wondering how much more time Charley would need to say her goodbyes before it was safe to go in herself.

The door opened a little wider, and Charley stepped out. After a moment of looking startled, she smiled, then surprised Rose by embracing her.

She laughed. “Come a long way in less than a day.” Rose said as she hugged back.

“I admit I was jealous,” Charley said, squeezing a bit tighter before stepping back. “I never thought I would see the Doctor, our Doctor, again. Knowing he’d moved on, well, it was hard. But then again, I’d moved on as well, just in a different way.”

“Now you’re being courted by an emperor.” Rose affected a posh voice, making Charley giggle. “Step up from a lord, yeah?”

“Yeah,” Charley agreed. “Though that lord is the sort of man one cannot give up.”

Rose nodded in understanding.

Charley gnawed on the inside of her cheek before she softly said, “Rose, be careful. I know what it’s like to lose him, to lose him to death. He may have actually lived, but for the longest time all I could think of was how the man I loved more than anything had died, and there might have been something I could have done to stop it.” Tears prickled her eyes. “Just, be careful with your heart, and his, both of them.”

“Yeah, yeah I will.” She said, giving Charley’s shoulder a squeeze before she stepped around her, allowing Jack to say his goodbyes, too.

She went inside the ship, spotting the Doctor leaning back against to console, watching the door. He smiled as she came in.

“Did I hear a truce was made?” He asked, holding out his hand for her to take, which Rose did gladly.

“Any more of your exes out there I should be worried about?”

“Well, you already met Sarah Jane, sort’ve. And she wasn’t really a proper ex, as you put it. I loved her, but nothing ever, it wasn’t like….”

Rose laughed, causing him to stop and blush.

“Not too worried, yeah? Just having on yeah, is all.” She said as she kissed his cheek. “Just don’t go replacing me while I’m still around, yeah?”

“I wouldn’t do that.” He promised, kissing her lips briefly.
Jack came in, then, closing the door and sighing heavily.

“Why doesn’t anyone propose to me?” He asked.

“Not the marrying type, you are.” Rose retorted, moving to the jumpseat as the Doctor moved about the controls.

Jack joined him, doing what little he could to help. “I can settle down, you know. I can be with one person if I wanted to.”

“Oh, I’ve known doubt.” The Doctor said as he threw the switch, causing the ship to groan as the pillar in the center moved up and down. “But marriage, that’s a different story.”

~DW~

It’s not the first time he’s woken up in a darkened room, memory fuzzy, unsure where or (for a brief moment) who he is. He tries to recall the last thing he was doing, but things are jumbled. He recalls saying goodbye to Charley, and them leaving, but he also knows that that was months ago. No, there was… there was an asteroid. Shopping. There was… there were dates, in beautiful locations. There was checking up on a few other places that the Time War brought damage to, but there wasn’t anything dangerous or worrysome.

He recalled….

He recalled having been fixing the ship, minor maintenance. Jack asking something….

“Why do you always fix the controls from underneath the console? Why not lift the board off?”

He’d given an answer, he knows he did. But then, something caused both of them to jump up.

He remembers Rose. He remembers he being terrified. He remembers her moving to him, and then….

Now he’s in a cupboard. At least he thinks it’s a cupboard. The Doctor reaches out, feels about, finds a doorknob, and turns.

He opens the door, and finds three complete strangers staring back at him from a room he’s never seen before.

Chapter End Notes

This is the beginning of the end. I'm guessing about 6 more chapters and then this will be done, possibly by the end of this year. I haven't decided fully, but there's an idea for a sequel in my head that's not a rewrite that I might do. I'll probably know before the last of this is posted.

I won't be posting anything new for more than a couple weeks as I have a friend visiting from away. Sorry all, and until then.
PS- It's been pointed out to me that Mary Shelley was pre-Charley. I decided to keep things as they are because of the order of the audio dramas, as well as Eight’s really foggy memory.
He tore through the TARDIS, thankful the Old Girl moved the medic room as close as she could with what strength she still had. He didn’t want to curse her too badly, not right now, not when she was trying to help fix what she technically broke.

*Who* she technically broke.

In his rush to get inside the med bay, he slid on a bit on the smooth floor, nearly crashing into the wall. He bumped the shelf he had been going for, jostling the similar looking bottles.

One for healing, one for aid in regeneration, one that was a mystery. And now, they rolled around, shifting places, making it impossible for him to know which was which.

But he needed the one for healing, he *needed* it. If he didn’t… she could….

He grabbed the one he was absolutely certain was the right one, and darted back to the control room.

It had to be the right one, because when the cork came into his view for just a second, right before he snatched it, he noted the Gallifreyan on the top. That circular design that said only two words, two words that he now understood the meaning of.

She would never lead him astray.

Not when her life hung in the balance.

Would she?

———

*Roughly 11 hours earlier …*

“What in Rassilon’s name….” He mumbled as those others looked at him, appearing as confused as he was to his presence there. In … a flat? A very terribly decorated flat. With cameras.

“Oh, my…” A blonde woman came running toward him, “they never said you were coming!”

“Right,” he said, blinking, looking at her and the other two who were currently standing on the opposite side of a couch a little way off. “Sorry, who said I wasn’t coming?” He went to take a step forward and stumbled a bit, a sudden wave of dizziness overwhelming him.

“Mind yourself,” She said as she caught him, helping him to steady himself. “That’s the transmat, scrambles your head. I was sick for days.” She guided him closer to the sofa, and the Doctor reached out and clutched the back. “So,” She asked far louder than needed, “What’s your name,
then, sweetheart?"

“I’m the Doctor,” He replied. “There wasn’t anyone else here, was there? A blonde woman, shouter than you, big brown eyes? Or a bloke who probably propositioned you within five seconds of meeting?”

The woman shook her head. “No one else’s been chosen.” She said.

The Doctor frowned. “Chosen?”

She giggled. “You’re a house mate. You’re in the house, isn’t that brilliant?”

He looked around at the other, the two others appeared less than thrilled about that.

“Sorry, what house exactly?”

“This isn’t fair,” The bloke suddenly decreed, and the woman next to him nodded. “We’ve got eviction in five minutes! I’ve been here for all nine, weeks, I’ve followed the rules, I haven’t had a single warning, and then he comes swanning in-”

“I understand you’re frustrated, I guess, but I assure you I don’t know why. Or how I got here. Or where here even is.” He said, looking around, noting a weirdly familiar eye-shaped logo that he couldn’t quite place the meaning of.

“Doesn’t even know.” The girl next the bloke said, tossing her hands out from her side as if half-heartedly exasperated. “If they keep changing the rules, I’m gonna protest. You just watch me, I’m… I’m going to paint the walls.”

“Protest?” The Doctor said under his breath.

“Would the Doctor please come to the Diary Room?” A female voice announced overhead, and he frowned at the ceiling.

“Diary Room?”

“It’s right over there,” The blonde woman beside him offered, pointing to the door where another eye-logo was. “Do you need help getting over there?”

“No, no. Should be alright.” He said as he headed for said room.

Jackie watched something with this, hadn’t she? One of the times they popped in for a spell? What was it? Why couldn’t he remember?

He entered the room and closed the door, finding a spotlight shining on a big, red chair and a camera in front of it.

“You are live on channel forty-four-thousand,” the voice that summoned him said. “Please do not swear.”

“Do no-” He looked around the room. “Where is Rose? Where is she, and where is Jack?”

Nothing.

“Listen, Rose, Jack, if you’re out there, listening, or watching, or whatever, I’m-”

“We’re sorry, but your time is up. Please return to the main room.”
He sighed, then heaved himself out of the chair, the door that he’d closed behind himself having opened a crack as a clear indicator he had to go.

He stepped back out into the gaudy, awful interior room, ignoring the mumblings of the two who stayed by the couch. The blonde who helped him when he first came had been standing by the door, waiting for him. She gave him a grin, swinging her arms about.

“Hello,” he said to her.

“Hello,” She replied, giggles on her breathe.

“I never got your name earlier.”

“Lynda. Lynda with a Y. Linda with an I got forcibly evicted because she damaged a camera. You-you must’ve known that, yeah? Weren’t you watching on the outside?”

“Can’t say I was, Lynda with a Y.” He replied, offering her a little smile. “Tell me, the doors: are they locked?”

“Deadlock sealed, have been ever since Big Brother Five Hundred and Four when they all walked out.” She replied, a lilt at the end that almost made it sound like a question.

“Big Brother… right.” He said, tapping against his thigh before spotting a mirror. He moved to it, smiling to himself when he caught the very faint outline of a camera on the other side. “What about this?” He asked, rapping his knuckles against the glass.

“Exoglass. You’d need a nuclear bomb to get through.”

“Of course, and luck would have that I left my nuclear bombs in my other jacket.” He deadpanned.

Lynda laughed, hard and real, if not a bit too much, and the Doctor smirked a moment before turning toward her.

“Lynda, how did you get selected?”

She shrugged. “You’re just selected. The transmat beam plucks you up and then…” She made a gesture one might’ve thought meant an explosion if they weren’t privy to their conversation.

He frowned. “But we were on the TARDIS.”

“Well, even if you’re on a ship it can pick you.”

“Yes, but I’m not a mere traveler, and the TARDIS isn’t a mere ship. It’s got shielding no silly transmat bean could get through, not one that would be used solely for the purpose of plucking people out of their homes and bringing them on a television set.” His hearts skipped a beat. “Are there other houses?”

Lynda nodded. “There are sixty all going at once.”

“Right,” The Doctor sighed again, rubbing the bridge of his nose. “So, someone somewhere has technology advanced enough to get through my ship, pluck myself and anyone else out, and separate us at our final destination. This may have all started out as a game, but I don’t think that’s quite it, not anymore, anyway. Not now that they have me here.”

“Really think that?” Lynda said, a touch breathless and very much in awe.
The Doctor frowned at her. “I know it. Why do you say it like that?”

She looked about to reply, but then stopped as the bloke who had been at the couch loudly cleared his throat in such an obnoxious manner that the Doctor had to glare at him.

“Uh, they said they wanted all the housemates to gather on the sofa?” He said, crossing his arms tighter across his chest, tilting his head down at the cushions pointedly.

Lynda became sheepish, scurrying over to take her place with the others. She looked at the empty spot beside her, then whipped around to where he was still standing, her eyes big. “Come on.” She waved him over, her grin small but present.

“I think I might look around a little longer,” He said, gesturing to the space behind him.

“But if you don’t obey, then all the housemates get punished.” She replied nervously, biting her lip.

He didn’t really want to cave, obeying was never his style, but there was a look of genuine fear in all their eyes, not just Lynda’s. With great reluctance, the Doctor moved to the sofa, sitting in the spot next to Lynda that she patted with a big smile before turning to nervously face the TV.

“Big Brother House, this is Davina Droid.” The familiar voice from the other room announced, sounding far too cheerful and very fake. Must be part of the live feed.

Lynda and the other two grasped at each other, Lynda taking one of his hands in hers, squeezing tightly. Her clammy palms, pressed to his, her hand shaking as the droid voice continued.

“Crosbie, Lynda, and Strood, you have all been nominated for eviction.”

Lynda tensed a bit more.

“And the eighth person to be evicted from the Big Brother House is… Crosbie!”

Lynda’s hand was out of his in an instant, and the Doctor watched with a frown as Crosbie, the other woman, gasped, her lip quivering.

The whole thing that followed was fascinating. The other two helped Crosbie up, Lynda apologizing profusely, Strood going on about how it should have been him, and half seeming to mean it.

What’s more, when curious what sort of life Crosbie would lead now, he found her time lines suddenly gone.

The droid announced a ten second time frame to say goodbye, and despite himself, the Doctor rose and followed as they all moved to a small corridor that appeared where he’d previously thought a cupboard had been.

A few more farewells, some platitudes, and Lynda and Strood are making an arch with their arms, allowing Crosbie to pass under.

Once the door is closed, the other two dash back and sit on the edge of the sofa. Having not ventured far, the Doctor merely stood behind it, crossing his arms and watching as Crosbie appears on the TV screen.

“Why are they holding her?” He asked.
“Where else would she go?” Lynda asked, sounding quite choked up.

The Doctor focused again on Crosbie, her time lines, the sudden end of them coming quickly to and end as the droid count down over head.

“No,” he said, shaking his head in disbelief. “No, you don’t mean…..”

A bright bolt flashed down from the ceiling over Crosbie’s head. One second she was there, the next she was gone.

“Was that…?”

“Disintegrator beam,” Strood nodded, only sparing him a quick glance.

Lynda turned more toward him. “She’s been evicted. From life.”

———

From the moment the understanding of what was happening hit the Doctor, the numbers began to run through his mind. Lynda said there were sixty houses on the go, currently. New members were not eligible for eviction, but how long had it been between his arrival and the reveal that he was in the house? Had he and the others arrived at their final destination at the same time, or was there a delay? And was that delay going to help?

Rose, his Rose, was on a set for a show she thought she knew, probably believed she could get through without issue. At least until they had their first eviction, and who knew when that was. Or, maybe, if she even understood right from the get go what was going on.

Then there was Jack. He had no idea what year it was, or where in the universe they were, but Jack might not know what was happening, either. Had he been able to use his vortex manipulator, and if so, would he use it to find them, or escape?

Where was the TARDIS? If the Doctor managed to get himself and his friends out alive, and if there was a chance for escape, how would that happen if he didn’t have the Old Girl to leave in?

He felt his palms get sweaty, his hearts picking up double time.

“I need to get out of here.” He said firmly.

“But-” Lynda started to say, stopping as the Doctor whipped toward her.

“No, you don’t understand. I need to get out of here. I have friends out there who likely have no idea what’s properly going on, and even less likely to have come to the conclusion I have: that they want us here.”

“You can’t be sure.” Lynda tried to say again, but the Doctor shook his head.

“No, I am. Truly. Would you like to know how sure?”

He didn’t wait for an answer. Instead, he withdrew his sonic and pointed it at a camera. With a quick whir, the camera sparked and burst, causing Lynda and Strood to jump, the former with a yelp.
“The Doctor,” The voice overhead announces in its fake, pleasant voice. “You’ve broken the House Rules. Big Brother has no choice but to evict you.”

“Oh no, I’m terribly heartbroken.” He said, laying a hand on his chest in mock upset.

“You have ten seconds to make your farewells, and then we’re gonna get you!” The droid announced, and he dashed to the little door Crosbie had been through earlier.

“You’re mad,” Lynda said, shaking her head as she followed him. “It’s like you want to die!”

“Well, it wouldn’t be the first time I had, though maybe the final time if I happen to be wrong, which I don’t think I am. I think I was brought here on purpose, and I believe in just a moment,” the doors opened, and the Doctor took a step backward, inside the chamber, “I will still be breathing.”

The door slide shut, Lynda keeping her eyes on him until the way between them was blocked entirely.

The Doctor then put his hands behind his back, rolling on the balls of his feet. He smiled looking up at the camera he noted on the ceiling.

“Eviction,” the Droid began, “In 5, 4, 3, 2, 1.”

Nothing happened.

“Well, color me shocked,” The Doctor deadpanned, withdrawing the sonic from his jacket and pointing it at the door he’d entered from. A quick press of the button, and it flew open. He then turned to the back door, unlocking that as well.

“How did you know?” Lynda’s voice asked behind him.

“If they wanted me dead, they would have transmitted me somewhere where my death was guaranteed. Like a volcano, or in the middle of a gang fight in San Francisco.” He said, grimacing a bit at the memory. He then turned to Lynda. “I’m leaving, you’re welcome to come with me.” He glanced at Strood.

“We’re not allowed!” The man protested.

“And you’d rather risk disintegration here? A fifty-fifty chance of survival? Or would you like to join me and increase those odds?”

Lynda chewed on her lip as she lingered on the door frame. “I… I can’t.” She said, but there was an uncertainty in her voice.

“You could stay, Lynda, you could. But you seem nice, and kind, and warm, and I don’t think nice, and kind, and warm get ahead here in this world, this time, do they?” He gave her a slight grin. “No guarantees, but a better chance for survival is out there, with me, than in here.”

Lynda grinned back, and with a quick look over her shoulder at Strood who shook his head, and she was darting toward him.

The Doctor opened the door, braced himself, and stepped through.

He thought, for absolute certain, that there would have been guards outside the doors. Yet, looking around, all he saw were other doors, all unguarded, with nothing more than a hand reader beside
them.

He inched forward, frowning, looking around at the space.

“No guards?” He looked to Lynda who still smiled, a little in awe, perhaps. “A situation like this, where humans are sucked into a show that it’s either win or die, and there are no guards?”

“Well,” Lynda shrugged, think we’re the first contestants in history to ever get outside.”

“Except the winners,” he noted. “Do they ever talk? About their experiences?”

Lynda shook her head, the smile falling off.

“Lynda, how did this all get started, anyway? There’s no way that this was something you all agreed to?”

“Well,” She said thoughtfully, crossing her arms. “It used to be news, ‘til about a hundred years ago. Big interruption of service, no one quite knows why. But, well, news was replaced after that. All with the games. We call this place the game station. Only a few people actually work here, and they’re all chosen very carefully. You have to apply before you’re twenty, and then you’ll only get hired if you’ve never been on a game.”

“Understandable. A previous winner with a moral compass might be quick to start a rebellion and shut it down.”

Lynda nodded. “So, that’s how it started. No one knows who switched off the news, no one who would know talks about it. And those who work here, well….”

“They don’t talk to those back home.” The Doctor sighed, moving to a panel. He withdrew his sonic, getting a read on the rooms. “Why twenty?”

“It’s the minimum age for the games.” Lynda replied.

“Which means at some point, Rose must have biologically had her birthday.” The Doctor said to himself. He frowned at the readings coming back. “I’m not picking up on her or Jack anywhere on this floor.”

“Oh, well, there are other games. Hundreds of them. 10 floors are ‘Big Brother.’ Then there’s ‘Call my Bluff’ with real guns. ‘Countdown’, where you’ve got thirty seconds to stop the bomb going off. ‘Ground Force’, which is a nasty one… you get turned into compost. Umm, ‘Wipeout’, speaks for itself. Oh! ‘Stars in Their Eyes’. If you don’t sing, you get blinded.”

“And you watch all of this?”

Lynda shrugged. “Everyone does.”

“Can’t you just not?” he asked. “Not pay your license or something?”

Lynda blanched, “You could get executed for that.” She said.

“You get executed for existing.” He retorted. “10 floors of ‘Big Brother’, you said? How many floors are there, here?”

“500,” She replied.”

“So, 490 other floors of all these awful, twisted games. And it’s constant, isn’t it? No re-airing, that
would be borrowing. So that means you lot get pulled from your lives of sitting and watching to come here and play. Hundreds of you, every day, all being pulled from your homes, your jobs, to face your execution for merely existing. And if you win? Well, you already said the winners don’t talk.”

“Yeah,” She said, twisting her hands together nervously. “So, how are you going to find your friends?”

“I’ll have to expand my search through the control panel, seek them out. Won’t be easy. And then, well, then I have to find a way to get them out of the rooms. Would help if I knew who was in charge.”

“Hold on,” Lynda said, darting around a corner. She gave a slight grunt, and there was the loud thunk of a switch being turned, and the lights above grew brighter.

“Your Lords and Masters,” She said, gesturing grandly, though the Doctor didn’t really look at her. How could he?

He was staring at the most terrifying phrase in the universe: Bad Wolf.

It had followed he and Rose from the beginning, right from when they met. And now it was looming over him, taunting him, telling him he was brought here by some awful twist of fate, or destiny.

“I have to find Rose.” He said, words barely louder than a whisper. “I have to.”

He darted for the controls, feeling the panel below for the edge then ripped it off, startling Lynda, then causing her to yelp as she tossed it behind her.

“How do you know what floors are which?” He asked her, pulling out his sonic.

“Umm, well. 10 000 channels, right? Channel names, like 1-01 to 1-20, those are ‘Bear with Me’, and, well, we’d be channel 56-09, there’s a little indicator in the room. Streams all day, of course.”

“Of course,” he replied as he began to scan for a way to override the system and figure out where certain people were, namely Rose.

There was the sound of a chime, the lift arriving on their floor. The Doctor almost stood straight up, ready to fight off any guards who’d have finally come to apprehend him, when he was stopped by a simple, “Hey, handsome!”

“Jack,” He sighed, standing still, but much slower, calmer, a little relieved. He greeted the man with open arms, embracing his friend. “Good to see you made it out.”

“You, too.” Jack said as he parted from the Doctor, shifting what looked like a make-shift gun to lay across his back. “Any sign of Rose?”

The Doctor shook his head miserably. “None yet, I was going to try and see if I could locate her by getting into the system.”

“Here,” Jack said, removing his vortex manipulator from his wrist and handing it over. “It’s programmed to find her and you. She must still be inside the games, because I can’t get a lock on her. These room are all shielded.”
“Of course they are,” He said as he took the manipulator and began to try patching it into the system. “Why would they make it easy?”

“Considering these games don’t have a happy ending?” Jack countered.

“It was rhetorical.” The Doctor half snapped as he began to run the scan with the manipulator attached.

He watched the screen as he heard Jack introduce himself to Lynda. Well, Jack’s version of an introduction, which, had the situation not been dire would have immediately included an invitation to find a nice, quiet room where they could get to know one another better. Any other day, the Doctor would have been amused. But today he rolled his eyes and tensed his jaw to keep from saying something he didn’t mean.

“There’s something else going on here.” He said to himself, but could hear the flirting behind him stopping. Louder, he added, “Why is a system, which is supposed to merely be a broadcast system, rigged for something twice as complicated as what would be needed? It’s not just transmitting channels; it’s transmitting something else. I’m fairly certain there’s more here than meets the eye. Has to be. Otherwise,” he gestured to the wall where the broadcast company name hung. “That wouldn’t be here.”

“Bad Wolf?” Jack read.

“Someone’s been sending me a message, ever since the end of the war. Ever since I met Rose. It’s following us, trapping us. But why?”

The vortex manipulator beeped, and all discussion on those words were set aside as they looked to the small screen.

“Rose is on floor 407,” The Doctor said before he removed the Vortex Manipulator from the system.

Lynda gave a horrified gasp, and the Doctor spun around, blood going cold at how terrified the seemingly unflappable Lynda was.

“She’s with the Anne Droid. You’ve gotta get her out of there!” She said as they all started heading to the lift.

“Why, what’s the Android?” The Doctor asked as Jack summoned the lift. It hadn’t left, and the doors opened only a moment later.

“The Anne Droid. It’s ‘The Weakest Link’, and-”

“You don’t have to say it.” Jack said as they stepped on, pushing the button for the floor. “But Rose is smart, she’ll be okay.”

“Rose is smart, but she’s going to be limited in her knowledge to that of the 21st Century, and anywhere we may have been in our travels. Which, in this point of human history, wouldn’t be nearly enough.”

“Whaddya mean, 21st century?” Lynda asked, sounding nearly scandalized.

“I said we were travelers,” The Doctor said as he looked to the floors racing on the screen above. “I just failed to mention the time aspect.”
He tapped his fingers against his leg, his hearts beating double time, making his pulse sound almost like a buzz in his ear. Rose was too far away, too high up on the floors.

“Jack, where were you?” He asked without looking at the Captain.

“Floor 29,” He said.

“That’s ‘What Not to Wear’,” Lynda said, momentarily pleased at the prospect. “Was that what you were wearing when you went in?”

“Does it really matter?” The Doctor asked with perhaps more bite than was needed. He’d apologize once they had Rose, once he knew she was safe.

The lift doors opened, and they ran out into the corridor, the sound of what could only be the Anne Droid heard through the walls, the voice just muffled enough that the precise wording couldn’t be heard.

“What room?” Jack called.

“Room six. Game room six,” The Doctor said as they all parted, looking for the indicator over the door to figure out where it was.

“Over here!” Lynda shouted, and the Doctor ran over to her, Jack hot on his heels.

“Let me blast it,” He asked.

“No,” The Doctor replied. “We don’t know what would happen, and they aren’t likely to be easily blasted.” He put the sonic to the touch pad, frantically getting to the proper setting and activating it.

Time felt like it was going through molasses, slow, painfully so. It felt like hours for the few seconds it took for the pad to trip and open the doors, and as though he couldn’t get through those doors as fast as he’d like.

“Stop the game!” Jack shouted.

But the Doctor didn’t see who he was talking to. He didn’t see anything but a terrified Rose standing next to a man who appeared far too pleased with himself to have lost.

“Rose!” He yelled, and she was pushing the podium aside, terror slightly changing to relief as she met his eyes across the room.

They began to run for each other.

Thump-thump-thump-thump, thump-thump-thump-thump-thump, the Doctor felt his hearts painfully in his chest as people around him shouted, angry or defensive, protest and complacence.

He didn’t focus on them, he focused on Rose, running like she’d had so many times on so many of their adventures: sure, and determined, fear driving her as much as bravery.

“Look out for the Android,” she warned, just as he was reaching out to take her in his arms.

Her hand brushed his, but before he could get his arm around her, she was gone.

Gone.
And suddenly the room was silent except a hollow buzzing in his ears as he stood stunned for a moment, looking at the name of his love on an overturned podium. It felt so impersonal, just lettering, not even her own hand. She was just there, he felt her warmth, he heard her voice, saw that relief that was barely there in her warm, honey eyes as they were so close, he could catch a whiff of her perfume. He was there, he got to her, she was in touching distance, and yet it wasn’t enough. He didn’t save her.

He looked down, and saw the ash on the floor, all that remained of her. It was suddenly much closer, and the ache in his knees told him he’d fallen to the floor. Could he… could he take it with him? Should he? Jackie, oh Jackie…. She’d lost her husband, and now she’d lost Rose. And this, this small amount of ash, was all that remained of her. It was the only thing he could take back home. He reached out, barely touching it before he ripped his hand back, his stomach churning as the memory of his fingers on Rose’s bare skin invaded his mind when the soft texture registered. They weren’t the same, not even close, and now….

Now, he was being ripped away. There were hands on him, pulling him up, tugging him, arresting him, but he didn’t care. He couldn’t care. A part of him wanted to scream that they were taking him away from Rose, and how dare they do that? How dare they?

But the rest of him was numb, too numb to do anything but be moved around like nothing more than a rag doll.

Which is probably a good thing, because it lets him pretend the staff with the broom and dust bin doesn’t exist.

Chapter End Notes

I know this isn't where the episode ended, and it should be marked "pt 1", but the end of this and the beginning of what was originally "The Parting of the Ways" is likely going to be one chapter.
And it won't be called "The Parting of the Ways"
Roughly 3-4 chapters left, I believe
Until next time.
This could be the end of everything

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“I could stay like this forever,” Rose murmured, sleepy and sated, her back pressed to his chest. She was warm and soft, slightly tacky from sweat, her pheromones washing over his sense of smell and causing him to feel roughly the same as her. He wasn’t one to get tired, not really, not with the superior biology. But her afterglow was something that could suck him in and drown him, and he would go down gladly.

“Jack will come knocking eventually, once he’s had his fill of whatever he’s doing.” The Doctor said into Rose’s neck before placing a tiny peck against her pulse point. “And knowing him-”

“Yeah, knows how to ruin a moment he does.”

“Never his intention,” The Doctor smirked, and Rose laughed.

“Yeah,” She agreed. After a moment, she shifted in his arms, turning to face him, arms going around his neck. She was chewing her lip, appearing nervous, almost shy.

“What’s the matter, darling?” He asked, brushing some of her hair from her face.

Rose didn’t respond at first, eyes falling to his chest, one of her hands running down his chest, caressing his sternum.

“Know I’m staying with you forever.” She said softly.

“I know you intend to spend your life with me, yes. And I’m very glad to have you.” He replied.

“Love to have me?” She asked, peeking up at him, biting her lip.

“Of course.” He assured.

“So, if... if I said....”

“Rose,” He stopped her, tilting her chin to have her look up at him. “Allow me to be the first to say it.” He kissed her lips, slowly, as chastely as possibly when pressed skin to skin together. “I love you.” He said against her lips.

Her smile was wide, and instant. “Yeah?"

“Yes, darling.” He smiled back. “Of course I do.”

She giggled before pressing her lips to his sweetly. “Love you, too, my Doctor.”

“Leave him alone!” Lynda said as the Doctor came back to himself slowly. A part of him was aware he, she, and Jack had been dragged to some sort of prison, not an unfamiliar place for him by
any stretch. He knew he’d been frisked, his sonic taken, and that he was being interrogated by a guard who clearly was very used to being intimidating to those who found themselves in his presence.

A part of him was remembering Rose, all of her, every second they had together. That first glimpse, that first hand hold, that first kiss. Every kiss, every touch, every glimpse, every breath.

He never got to say goodbye, didn’t even get to collect the small bit of her remains.

“Love you, too, my Doctor.”

That memory, that bit of Rose broke through, and the fact he would never hear her say that again, the fact he could never tell her in return, that it had been at least twenty-four hours since he last told her, and now?

Now he seethed.

He felt it coming over him, that persona that came to him over the war, how he earned the whispered name of Oncoming Storm. If he couldn’t have Rose, if he couldn’t save her, he’d avenge her. Avenge, and once all those responsible for her demise were taken care of, he’d mourn her properly.

His eyes shot up to meet that of their captor, the one who oversaw their mug shots, their arrests, and held the man’s gaze as he spoke.

“You will be taken from this place to the Lunar Penal Colony, there to be held without trial, you may not appeal against this sentence.” The guard stated.

The Doctor said nothing, but he could see the man shift uncomfortably. Jack, mercifully, did nothing either.

“Is that understood?” The guard demanded.

“Crystal,” The Doctor said through his teeth, his voice low, smooth, dangerous.

The guard shifted back, then seemed to remember himself. He turned, the other guard moving to open the door.

The Doctor merely glanced at Jack and he seemed to understand. Together, the two stood, and made their move.

The Doctor grabbed the soldier who sentenced them by the shoulder and hauled him back. He wasn’t a man of violence, not normally. But as he hauled his fist back and punched the guard with all his strength, he didn’t rightly care. They killed Rose, maybe not personally, but this man hauled him away.

It took one, solid blow to have the guard out cold. He turned and faced the door way as Jack let go of the frame, the other guard knocked out by what he could only guess to be a kick to the head.

They left the cell, and no sooner had the Doctor crossed the threshold did he sense the third guard charging toward them. He snatched the man’s lapels, then tossed him hard against the opposite wall, knocking this one out as well.

Jack took the gun from the last guard, swinging the strap over his shoulder. The Doctor plucked up his sonic, then Jack’s make-shift blaster. The weight felt wrong, but then again life was a bit in the
wrong at the moment.

“What do you think, Lynda?” He said as they headed toward the elevator. “Top floor, do you think that’s where everyone would be? Those in charge of this culling of the human race?”

“Yeah,” She said quietly as he called the lift, then stepped on as the doors opened.

He pressed the button with force as Jack and Lynda followed him on, the former cocking multiple firearms and readying them for whatever they might face at the top.

He tucked a bright, pink flower into her hair, and she laughed.

“We just get married?” She asked him, face scrunching up a bit.

“Well, I suppose that depends on your outlook.” He replied, taking her hand as they turned to face the people of the planet they were on. Jack had a lei of blue flowers around his neck, a few of the locals surrounding him, caressing him. “Jack has essentially made himself available to ever person who wants him to be, blue means untied, after all.”

“Right, and yellow is promised.” Rose repeated what she learned earlier. “But pink and red, they were marriage, yeah? And you just stuck a pink flower in my hair.”

“Well, it goes so nicely with your shirt, how could I not?” He asked, smirking because he was fully aware of what he’d done, and why he’d done it. It wouldn’t count, not really, not to Rose or even him. If they did this, if they properly tied their lives together, he’d do it their ways. Hers first, then his, then maybe together.

“Right, then,” She said as she tugged his hand, getting his attention. She then produced a red flower from inside her pocket, a bit crushed but still intact, then threaded it through the top button hole of his jacket. She grinned proudly, “Mum was right, suppose. Always figured I’d elope. Run away an’ all that. Ran away with you, just took us a bit to get to this part.”

“Should I kiss the bride, then?” He asked.

“Is that a thing here?”

“I’ve no idea,” He admitted, earning another laugh. “Though, be warned. This is probably only our first wedding of many.”

“And how many times, exactly, have you been married?” She asked with an accusing tone but a cheeky grin.

“Oh, hundreds of times by now, I’m sure. But that I genuinely count? Still that first one, the one I was forced into.”

“Ever think about doing it again?” She asked.

He looked at her, trying to get a read, understand why she was asking. But it was either she had a magnificent poker face, or she just genuinely was curious.
“Think about it? No. Be willing to? With the right person, perhaps.”

The doors opened, and the Doctor’s eyes immediately fell on the woman strapped to wires, hanging above the main controls at the end of a bank of computers that formed a bit of a path. She was the one he would need to speak to, a controller, someone who would have overseen everything.

“Move away from the desk,” Jack demanded as the Doctor moved swiftly toward the controller. “Nobody try anything clever. Everybody clears, stand to the sides, and stay there.”

The Doctor stared up at the woman who stared at the space directly across from her. He glanced over his shoulder, only needing to see the “wolf” before snapping back at her.

“You know who’s in charge. You know what’s going on, why this place is more than simply a game station, you know who killed my Rose. I want an answer, and you’re going to give it to me.” He said, brokering no arguments.

But the control didn’t respond, not in any way at all. She continues a count, though to what he didn’t know. Perhaps the solar flares she was reminding the staff about periodically. She didn’t know anything, or if she did, she was unable to answer him.

“She can’t reply,” A man off on the side said, and the Doctor swiftly turned toward him, lifting the gun and ignoring how awful it made him feel to brandish it. Doubly so when the entire group the man was clustered with flinched back. “Don’t shoot.”

“Give me a reason not to.” The Doctor retorted, then turned to Jack. “Captain, I do believe we’ll likely have guards in coming.”

“I’ll secure the exits.” He responded with a salute, then went to it.

The Doctor turned back to the man who had spoked before. “Now, a reason not to shoot, if you’d be so kind.”

“Ummm… well, ah, ummm….” He stuttered. “The controller is, uh, l-linked to the transmissions.”

The Doctor lowered the gun. “I figured that out, but why can’t she respond? Even with the output going through her brain, she should be able to have a basic response.”

“You’re not a member of staff, she doesn’t recognize you.” The man replied.

“Door’s seal, we should be safe for about ten minutes.” Jack said, coming back up to him.

“Good.” The Doctor said, tossing the gun to the side before readdressing a much calmer member of staff. “What’s her name?” he asked.

The man shrugged. “I don’t know. She was installed when she was five years old. That’s the only life she’s ever known.”

“That’s not a life.” The Doctor grumbled as he turned to look at the controller once more, his hopes of an answer, of some sort of way to avenge Rose dying before him.
“But the stuff you were saying, about this place being more than just the game station. Unauthorized transmats, it’s been going on for years.” The man said, earning the Doctor’s attention again.

A beep somewhere behind him sounded, and he heard Jack moving away but ignored him.

“Are you able to show me?” The Doctor asked, and the man nodded, waving the Doctor over to a computer away from the others.

“Might take me a moment or two to pull it up, but I-”

“You’re not allowed in there!” A woman shouted, causing the Doctor and the man to pause and look between her and who she was shouting at, who appeared to be Jack. “Archive Six is out of bounds!”

Jack, who had picked up the Doctor’s discarded gun at some point, raised it as well as his own in the air, pointing them to the ceiling. “So, I look like an out-of-bounds sort of guy?” He asked before lowering the weapons.

The Doctor turned away, refocusing on the man who was now trying to bring up the information he needed.

“What’s your name?” He asked.


“Davitch,” The Doctor replied, keeping his voice low. “I apologize for my behavior earlier. My… Rose, she was my… She was caught in the games and lost.”

Davitch swallowed. “I understand.” He said simply.

“Excuse me,” the woman who shouted at Jack earlier said with much impatience and no politeness. “If you’re not holding us hostage, then open then open the door and let us out.”

“Open those doors, and the guards will come through and stop me, and I’m not ready to be stopped just yet.” He replied, giving her no more than a glance.

“The staff are terrified.” She argued.

“These are the same people who willingly help send hundreds of people to their death to entertain the masses. You’ll have to forgive me if I’m not very concerned.”

“That’s not our fault, we’re just doing our jobs.” She retorted.

“Jobs you don’t have to do. You lot are up here, in the perfect place to overthrow all this nonsense and you don’t, not at all.” He said, glaring at her and seeing her utterly unrepentant. The Doctor scoffed and shook his head, looking back down at the monitor Davitch was working at.

Suddenly the lights flickered, the monitor doing the same though not going out quiet like everything else in the room seemed to.

Davitch sighed. “That would be the solar-flares.”

“Causing everything to shut down?” The Doctor frowned.

“Well, they interfere with the broadcast signal, so this place automatically powers down.”
“Doctor…” a very faint, unfamiliar voice said, and the Doctor looked up and around. “Doctor,” it repeated, and he turned toward the controller, seeing she was acting differently. Immediately he ran to her. “Doctor, where’s the Doctor?”

“I’m here.” He said firmly.

“Can’t see, I’m blind. So blind, all my life, blind. All I can see if numbers, but I saw you.”

The Doctor resisted the urge to look at those two, haunting words behind him.

“I’ve no doubt you have. What’s happening?”

“Solar-flares hiding me. They can’t hear me, my… my masters. They always listen, but they can’t hear me now. The sun… the sun is so bright.”

“Who are you masters?” The Doctor asked with as much calm as he could.

“They wired my head; their name is forbidden. They control my thoughts, my masters… my masters, I had to be careful. They monitor the transmissions, but they don’t watch the programs. I could hide you inside the games.”

“The games that killed Rose. Wait, Masters… plural? Not, not Master, not the Master.”

“My masters are hiding in dark space, watching, shaping, so, so many years they always been there, guiding humanity, hundreds of years….”

“You can’t tell me their name, and they aren’t the Master. What can you tell me?”

“They plan and grow in numbers, they’re strong now, so strong. But they speak of you. My masters, they fear the Doctor.”

“Why, why do they fear me?” He asked, but never got his answer.

The controller gasped, and then the power flickered back on. Everything returned to how it was, and the Doctor didn’t feel like he was any closer to getting his revenge.

His head was beginning to hurt.

“I found the TARDIS,” Jack announced as the Doctor pinched the bridge of his nose.

“Brilliant.” He said without thrill. “We’re not leaving yet, though.”

“No.” Jack said, and the Doctor looked up when he realized his companion was practically vibrating with enthusiasm. “But the TARDIS worked it out.”

“Worked it out?” The Doctor repeated as Jack shifted Davitch aside and took over the computer.

“You’ll wanna watch this,” Jack assured as he began to type something in. He glanced up. “Lynda, could you stand over there for me, please?”

“I… I just wanna go home.” She said, sounding very tired.

“It’ll only take a second.” Jack assured. “Could you stand in that spot, quick as you can?” He asked, gesturing to an empty space in front of them.

Lynda nodded, then shifted her way there, shifting from foot to foot and chewing her lip nervously.
“Everybody watching?” Jack asked, looking briefly to everyone, but really focusing on the Doctor.

“Three, two, one…”

He pressed a button, and a beam shot down from the ceiling, destroying Lynda and leaving nothing but ash and smoke.

“Jack! What in Rass-”

“Wait,” Jack interrupted the Doctor, pressing the button again, and…

Lynda returned. A little woozy looking, a bit lost, but completely intact and otherwise unharmed.

Which meant….

“Rose,” He choked out. “Rose is… she’s….”

The need for revenge burst away in a wave of relief so powerful there were tears instantly prickling the Time Lord’s eyes. She was alive, alive.

“They don’t get killed in the games; people get transported across space.” Jack voiced what the Doctor couldn’t, his enthusiasm returned in full force. In a heartbeat, the two men were hugging each other, squeezing as if they could somehow contain the overwhelming joy between them.

“She’s out there.” The Doctor said. “She’s out there somewhere, and we have to find her.”

“Doctor,” The controller said, and the Doctor whipped around, seeing the woman look to be in agony. “Co-ordinates five point six point one point four three four stigma seven seven.”

As the Controller spoke, the Doctor dashed to the console before her, typing it in as quickly as he could.

“Thank you,” He said, looking up just in time to see her scream before disappearing. The wires that had her fell loose, slapping the sides of the machines they were attached to, a pile of dust on the ground beneath her. He closed his eyes, taking a breath, mourning her for a moment before opening his eyes and getting to work in trying to get a lead on Rose.

Jack joined him, sitting at another terminal and getting to work.

“Use this,” Davitch said, handing Jack a disc. “It might contain the final numbers. I kept a log of all the unscheduled transmissions.”

“Nice, thanks,” Jack said, then did a double take. “Captain Jack Harkness,” He said with a grin.

“Jack, please, focus.” The Doctor said without looking away from his typing, patching in the information that was coming from the disk Davitch handed Jack. “When we get Rose back, you can get as acquainted Davitch as he’ll allow.”

“Right.” Jack said, refocusing on his half of the work.

After a few minutes of nothing but the sound of typing between them.

“Okay,” Jack said. “When you’re ready.”

They Doctor hit the enter button, and above them, where the controller was, an image of empty space appeared.
“There’s nothing there.” The woman from earlier said.

“That’s what they want you to believe,” The Doctor replied. “It’s one of the things hiding beneath the transmissions. There will be another signal, just under…,” He trailed off, typing a few quick strokes before hitting the enter button again.

The image shifted and rippled, then where there was empty space was suddenly a sight that made the Doctor’s stomach twist and his hearts want to wrench themselves from his chest.

“That… that’s impossible,” Jack said asked as he gaped at the over two hundred ships appearing at the edge of the solar system. “I know those ships… they were destroyed.”

“They were supposed to be,” The Doctor said, his voice quiet and full of fear. “They were supposed to be gone, and now… now there’s about a half million of them.”

“Half a million what?” Davitch asked.

The Doctor swallowed. “Daleks.”

He stared at the screen with part fear and a great deal of fury bubbling up. They lived. They lived when all of the Time Lords who helped him seal off the Time Lords had died. They were all supposed to have been wiped out at the end of the Time War, he had seen their ships get caught in the cross hairs. And yet, because of course, there had been another ship somewhere out there. Or multiple ships, he supposed it didn’t really matter. All that did was that the Daleks repopulated in great numbers, rebuilt their army. And yet… and yet….

The Dalek in Van Statten’s bunker couldn’t find any others. He’d been alone.

How had that been?

Suddenly, the image of the ships shifted, replaced by a visual communication with the Dalek ship, showing three of them and Rose.

His hearts soared at seeing her stand tall and only a little visibly shaken in between his greatest enemy.

“I WILL TALK TO THE DOCTOR,” One of the Daleks shouted.

“Then speak.” He replied coldly.

“THE DALEK STRATAGEM NEARS COMPLETION. THE FLEET IS ALMOST READY. YOU WILL NOT INTERVENE.”

“Really, have we met?” The Doctor retorted. “Well, no, of course not. It’s very likely that we haven’t, but your kind has met me before. So, what in this universe makes you think that I will not intervene? You’ve hardly asked politely, for a start.”

“WE HAVE YOUR ASSOCIATE. YOU WILL OBEY OR SHE WILL BE EXTERMINIATED.” It warned.

And the thought that he would get this far, get her back in a way only to lose her again? Lose Rose to the Daleks and this never-ending battle like he’d lost everything else? It raged within him. It burned. It caused a maelstrom in his soul the bolstered his courage and his fight.

“No.” He said.
He felt everyone look at him then, but he stayed focus on the screen.

“What is the meaning of this negative?” The Dalek demanded.

“It means, not any. As in not any chance in Hell, or anywhere, that I would actually do anything but the following: First, and foremost, I will rescue Rose Tyler from the middle of the Dalek Fleet. Then, I’m going to save the rest of humanity from whatever convoluted scheme you’ve come up with this time. And, once that’s been accomplished, I will destroy every single last one of you. And this time, I’ll make sure I’ve finished the job.” Then, his eyes darted to Rose, whose eyes sparkled as she stood taller than she had at the beginning of the transmission. “Hold tight, my darling, I’m coming for you.” He promised her before he ended the transmission. He turned to Davitch. “Evacuate everyone not able to fight or defend. All civilians.” The Doctor told him. “When Jack and I get back, we’re going to be bringing trouble with us.”

“Send everyone back to Earth, then?” Davitch asked.

“Is that where we are?” The Doctor asked, then shook his head. “Doesn’t matter, send them where they will be safe.”

“Right,” Davitch replied, then frowned. “Wait, where are you…?”

“I wasn’t lying to them; I’m going to rescue Rose.” He said as he turned to Jack who nodded, and led the way to the TARDIS.

She was asleep in their bed, very soundly, and he was very much not. Not after everything that happened on the planet, facing the cybermen, Charley….

He hadn’t wanted anything to happen to either of them, any of them, but it almost had. If the Mister Clever had somehow taken over, he’d have been done for, and Rose would have….

It didn’t bare thinking.

The TARDIS hummed with a flare of anger in his mind.

“Please, don’t,” He sighed as he bowed his head over the console. “You know why I’m doing this. Frankly, it’s something I should have done so very long ago, but only now, only having met Jackie, and really… I’m beginning to understand the magnitude of what I’m doing, pulling these people out of their time lines.” He synced the new setting into the sonic.

The TARDIS protested.

“You love her like I do. Don’t you want her to be safe?” He asked the rotor. The TARDIS didn’t answer, and he shook his head. “I’m going to begin recording in a moment. Please, please, I beg you, co-operate with me in this.”

She did nothing, so the Doctor went about his task.
“We’ve got incoming,” Jack announced as the monitor showed two very large missiles coming toward them.

“This ship was in the war, and was the only one to survive a massive backlash. I’m fairly certain will be alright.” The Doctor replied as he flipped a few switches and turned a few dials in rapid succession. “But, just in case,” He threw the dematerialization switch, having locked on to Rose and bringing the TARDIS right to her.

Materializing around someone was tricky, but the Old Girl was as fond of their human as he was, so the Doctor had no fear of harm coming to Rose. He was, however, not thrilled about seeing the Dalek starting to make its appearance along with her.

“Jack.” He said in warning, but the captain was already getting prepared. Rose was more solid, but so was the enemy who suddenly seemed to understand something wasn’t right.

“Rose!” He shouted, distracting the Dalek from her before it had any ideas. Jack raised his gun, and Rose ducked.

“EXTERMINATE!” The Dalek shouted, firing at Jack who fired back, deflecting the ray and hitting the Dalek with it in turn.

Slowly, Rose got back to her feet, looking first at the Dalek, and then to the Doctor.

And she beamed.

He ran around the console and had her in his arms within five seconds. He had his lips on hers just a half second later. He took in her human smell, the pheromones and the perfume, the sweat and adrenaline and the scent of her shampoo and soap. He felt her human warmth beneath his fingertips, cataloging the way her muscles moved beneath his fingertips. The way her lips moved with and against his. The rush of her breath through her nose against his upper lip.

She was alive, so very much alive. There, in his arms, safe and whole.

Rose pulled back long before he was ever ready, and smiled a watery smile at him.

“Hello,” She said.

“Hello, my Darling.” He replied, brushing some of her hair behind her ear. “I told you I would come for you.”

“Never doubted it.” She replied.

“No, you certainly didn’t, did you.” He smiled down at her.

“Hey, don’t I get a hug?” Jack broke the moment. It was probably for the best, as there were other things that needed to be taken care of.

He examined the Dalek while Rose and Jack reunited, getting down on bended knee before its smoking remains.

It had been part accident that he and the other twelve time lords wiped out the Daleks in one go while hiding Gallifrey. He tried to imagine them all out there still, all alive, and wondered if they would answer his call for help. Because a Dalek invasion of this magnitude, after everything that
happened, he would have called them all. A part of him imagined they would, a part of him could really believe that he’d see the twelve other TARDISes out there, waiting to help. To fight what was a remaining battle of the Time War. Another, larger part could imagine them not responding at all, leaving him to face them as he always had. Remarking how they already meddled too much with the time lines and history, and let things happen.

It’s that part, the one that always seemed ready to face his oldest enemy, that started forming a bit of a plan.

“There are thousands of them, now.” Rose said, crouching down beside him and putting a hand on his back. “We could hardly stop one. What’re we gonna do?” She asked.

“I have the very barest bit of a plan, but….,” He slowly stood, taking Rose’s hand and helping her up as well. He turned to include Jack in the conversation, the three huddled together. “The shielding around the ship will give us a few feet of protection. I want to know how they survived, and in order to do that, I have to go out and face them.”

“You can’t go out there.” Rose panicked, gripping his arm a bit tighter.

“Rose, do you know where we were? Bad Wolf Corp. That’s where those wretched shows, over seen by the Daleks, were being broadcasted. They wanted us here, they had to have. And there’s only one way to find out why.”

Her eyes darted about his face a moment before she relented with a nod, letting go of him but following close behind as he headed to the main doors and opened them with bravado.

He was greeted exactly as he expected to be.

“EXTERMINATE!! EXTERMINATE!!” The chorus rang out, followed by the percussion of laser fire he’d grown used to over the years.

He stood still and tall, watching the Dalek fire miss their mark behind the shielding.

He waited for it to fade off entirely before asking, “Are you quite done?” When none of them replied, he nodded. “Yes, it seems you are. So, here we are, you and I once again, the same old song and dance. You’ll do something heinous and destructive, I’ll come along and stop it, somewhere in between you’ll threaten extermination, and I will give a grand speech. I’m doing it now, aren’t I? But let’s skip all that rot for now, shall we? I have one burning question that I have to know, and that is: how did you lot survive the Time War?”

“They survived through me.” A voice from the said replied, and a chill shot down through the Doctor’s spine. He turned, stepping a little way away from the TARDIS but remaining within its limited shielding.

Above him, a light turned out and revealed precisely who he thought would be there.

“The Dalek Emperor,” he said, feeling Rose’s hand slide in his, giving him some of her strength. He hadn’t realized he’d started shaking until her touch on his skin soothed him.

“You destroyed us, Doctor.” The Emperor replied. “The Dalek Race died in your inferno, but my ship survived, falling through time, crippled but alive.”

“And you just-”

“DO NOT INTERRUPT!” A Dalek behind him shouted, more joining in, repeating the first,
causing Rose to flinch closer, and Jack to inch more toward them.

“Sorry, I hadn’t realized, how rude.” The Doctor deadpanned before turning back to the Emperor. “You were saying?”

“We waited here in the dark space, damaged but rebuilding. Centuries passed, and we quietly infiltrated the systems of Earth. Harvesting the waste of humanity. The prisoners, the refugees, the dispossessed, they all came to us. The bodies were filtered, pulped, sifted. The seed of the Human Race is perverted. Only one cell in a billion was fit to be nurtured.”

“So, you created an army of Daleks out of the dead.” The Doctor sneered, squeezing Rose’s hand a little.

“That makes them… half human,” Rose thought out loud, and the Doctor turned and saw her look of disgusted confusion as she looked around them.

“Those words are blasphemy!” The Emperor snapped.

“DO NOT BLASPHEME!” The Daleks chorused again.

But this wasn’t normal, this wasn’t the usual Dalek level of unity or hive mind. This was different, this was beyond anything the Doctor had seen before. This, this here was terrifying.

“Blasphemy? Since when do Daleks have the concept of blasphemy?” The Doctor asked the Emperor.

“I reached into the dirt and made new life. I am the God of all Daleks!” The Emperor replied, and the Doctor frowned.

“WORSHIP HIM!” The Daleks chanted, and the Doctor realized that it wasn’t merely the words they spoke that were different, but that there was an undertone of insanity beyond anything the Daleks had had previously.

“Rose, do you remember what the Dalek in the bunker said? That it couldn’t go on living because that little bit of you that transferred and altered its DNA felt like torture?” He asked without looking at her, but knew she remembered all the same. “That’s what’s happened here. They’re being driven mad because of how they were made, where they came from. They’re going to be that much more dangerous than that single Dalek because they hate their own existence. And this time, they aren’t alone.” The Doctor turned to her now, seeing the fear in her sympathetic brown eyes. He then looked to Jack, the captain nervous but barely showing it. “I have my answers,” He stated, and then they were heading back to the TARDIS, ignoring the Daleks and their protests.

The Daleks attempted to fire, but they were within the TARDIS shielding. The Doctor glared at the nearest ones, and they seemed to flinch back, ever so slightly. Enough that there was actually a sliver of guilt somewhere in his soul. But that guilt wasn’t for the Dalek it was, but the human it used to be, and that tiny bit of fear that remained after everything else had been stripped away.

Stepping inside the Time Ship, Jack ran up the ramp, preparing the TARDIS as much as he could. The Doctor remained at the door, leaning back, closing his eyes.

He felt Rose’s hand on his cheek, and he brought his own up to cover it.

“We’ll get through it,” She said confidently.

“I’m glad you have faith.” He replied, turning his head to press a kiss to her palm. “But right now, I
only have the bare minimum of a plan. It’s not even a good one.”

Rose ran her thumb along his cheek. “Do what we can, yeah?” She asked, and he opened his eyes to look at her. She was smiling, just slightly, loving and brave and understanding, and his hearts ached at how much trust she gave him.

“Yes, absolutely.” He said, kissing her palm once more before dashing up to the console and getting them back to the games station.

Once returned, the Doctor shifted gears, digging up that persona from the Time War, though he found it wasn’t all that buried. He marched out of the TARDIS, and the moment his eyes landed on Davitch, the commander in him came out.

“Open up the transmissions to full power, Davitch. Doing that will prevent the Daleks from being able to come on board.” He said as he came up to his said. Davitch got to work immediately. “Did you get every out?” Davitch shook his head. “Why not?”

“There weren’t enough shuttles, or I wouldn’t be here.” the woman whom the Doctor really didn’t like said, and he darted his glance toward her, noticing Lynda behind her, smiling from her perch on an abandoned desk.

“That’s not surprising, to say the least.” The Doctor sneered to himself.

The woman glared. “We’ve got about a hundred people stranded on floor zero.” She added, crossing her arms.

The Doctor sighed heavily. “Well, that’s going to be a problem,” he rubbed at his forehead. “Did you manage to get a hold of Earth? Tell them why there were so many shuttles going back?”

“We did, but all they did was suspend our license because we stopped the programs.” Davitch replied.

“So, there’s something down there controlling the humans for the Daleks, it’s not just mere brainwashing. But then again, you lot, you were always the sort to rise up against whatever was attempting to keep you down. There would need to be a mole down there to keep you in line.” The Doctor then turned to Lynda. “You said you wanted to go home, why did you stay?” He asked with a little smile, and Lynda smiled wider in return.

“Didn’t wanna leave ya.” She replied.

“I tend to have that affect,” he quipped back.

“Oh, my god,” Davitch cut in, ceasing any further commentary on that particular line of thought, and earning the attention of everyone in the room. He stared, horrified, at the screen in front of him. “The fleet is moving. They’re on their way.”

“Right, they didn’t give us much time, did they.” The Doctor said before turning and heading to the line of abandoned computers, He ducked underneath, grabbed an armful of wires, and ripped them out, repeating at the next kiosk. He looked back, seeing the others in the room look at him in confusion. “A half million Daleks, and to wipe out that many in the past, I had to remove an entire planet from the universe just so they would get caught in their own gunfire. But I don’t have that this time, I can’t take Earth out of the Universe, and I doubt doing so would make a difference. Besides, I don’t have another twelve time lords to assist me. So that leaves me with one other option.” He paused to rip another bundle of wires out. “I have a great, big transmitter. Does anyone know what I can do with a great, big transmitter?”
Most everyone frowned, clearly trying to piece together what the Doctor was thinking.

“I can change the signal, fold it back, sequence it-”

“You’ve got to be kidding me,” Jack said, and the Doctor grinned.

“I knew we kept you around for a reason.” The Doctor replied.

“A delta wave?” Jack asked incredulously, hands on his hips.

“A delta wave,” The Doctor confirmed.

“What’s a delta wave?” Rose asked, looking between the two of them.

“A wave of Van Cassadyne energy, fries your brain. Stand in the way of a delta wave and you head gets barbequed!”

“And from here we can transmit a massive wave,” The Doctor added. “And with that, we’ll wipe out the Daleks.”

“Well, get started and do it then!” Lynda beamed, hopping off her perch.

“Getting on it, Lynda,” The Doctor grunted as he pulled another set of wires. “Though, admittedly a wave big enough to meet our needs would take me about, roughly, three days.” He looked to Davitch. “How long before the fleet arrives?”

Davitch glanced over his shoulder at the computer, then turned back to the Doctor. “Twenty-two minutes.” He replied nervously.

“No pressure, then.”

“I’ll get a forcefield going, buy as much time as I can.” Jack said, turning around and getting to work.

“Great,” The Doctor said, glancing sideways at the TARDIS. Three days’ work in twenty-two minutes, maybe an hour if they got lucky with Jack’s forcefield. If he’d had the full three days, he’d have been able to refine the wave, concentrate it on just the Daleks, allowing the humans on board to live. Allowing the humans of Earth….

But he knew this time, he was certain, and at this point in history a lot of the people of Earth had already ventured off into the depths of space. Humans were branching out, finding new worlds, inhabiting them, so on and so forth. Down below was a large portion of the population, yes, but not all of it. The human race would survive, even if the humans on board the satellite, as well as half the world below, would not.

In his pocket, despite it being transdimensional, the Doctor could feel the sonic poking his thigh like an incessant reminder of the one thing he could do. The one person who could get out of this situation.

He looked away from the TARDIS to where Rose had joined the others in listening to Jack’s explanation of how he was going to be able concentrate the shielding.

Jack would know, had probably already had guessed, what their survival rates were. But he had a confidence that would bolster the others, give them a fighting spirit that maybe they wouldn’t have before.
But one person, she didn’t have to have a fighting spirit.

“Rose, darling.” He called, getting the attention of both her and Lynda. “Can you come help me strip these wires?”

Rose was with him in an instant, and he handed her a set of wire strippers found deep within his pocket.

“Got everything in there, don’t ya?” She asked with a teasing grin.

“Always need to come prepared.” He said as he watched Davitch and the woman walk by, heading to the lift.

Lynda did as well, stopping hesitantly beside him.

“I, ah, I just wanna say, um… thanks, I s’pose. And… I’ll do my best!”

“I’m sure you will, Lynda with a Y.” HE smiled at her as he stood, offering her a hand to shake.

Lynda’s face briefly morphed into disappointment for a moment before she put on a sad smile and took his hand. They shook, and Lynda pulled back, looking momentarily at her hand before glancing at him, then to Rose, then joined the other two at the lift.

Jack came up to them, and Rose stood up a moment, brushing her hands on her legs.

If there was any doubt that the captain didn’t understand the gravity of the situation before, it was completely gone as the normally self-assured man smiled sadly. He had his hands on his hips, but he was lacking his normal posture.

“It’s been fun,” He said, that smile brightening just a moment before he sobered once more. “But I guess this is goodbye.”

“Don’t talk like that,” Rose chided gently. “The Doctor’s gonna do it, you just watch him.”

Jack glanced at him, almost as if asking permission. The Doctor nodded, then watched as Jack turned fully to Rose and cupped her face. “You are worth fighting for.” He told her with all the sincerity in the Universe, causing the Doctor’s hearts to clench before the Captain leaned in and placed a loving but chaste kiss on Rose’s lips. Her eyes widened, and she had an uncertain smile as the Captain pulled back, but she didn’t seem to believe it was goodbye.

Jack turned to him, “Wish I’d never met you, Doctor.” Jack said before cupping his face as well.

“I don’t believe that for a second.” The Doctor grinned.

“You were not, and we both know it.” The Doctor replied. And, because he didn’t need telepathy to know what Jack intended, he placed his hands on Jack’s ribs and met the man in the middle, returning that quick, chaste kiss. He patted his side before the stepped apart, and refrained from laughing at Jack’s slight blush and bit of a dopey grin.

The Captain walked backward a moment, then seemed to gather himself. He pointed to the lift, “See you in hell,” He said before joining the others, all of them boarding the lift. The doors closed, and the sense of finality hung heavy around them.

“He’s gonna be alright, yeah?” Rose asked, her hands moving to her back pockets.
The Doctor couldn’t look at her. “He’s going to try and stop the Daleks from coming up here, darling. You saw how well Van Statten’s army stopped one.”

She shuddered, and he didn’t need to see her to know she would need his arms for a moment. So, he opened them, and turned in time to watch her fall into them, and he held her as tight as he was willing before he gave away his own inner turmoil.

“We should get working on that thing then, yeah?” She said after only a moment, pulling away and heading back to where they were stripping and preparing wires.

He joined her much more slowly, watching Rose, his Rose as she went about her task. Long, blonde hair falling in her face before she brushed it back, her focus on a pointless task that she didn’t know was pointless never wavering even as he returned to her side.

He was in the basement, the explosions rigged to go as soon as he was clear. It was after closing, he knows he heard the announcement, was certain he’d seen everyone leave on the cctv set up in the security office, but he still had a life sign feeding back to him. And that’s why, instead of heading to the exit, he was going deeper in, hunting down the human before the worst could happen.

He heard her even through the door, panicked, a little terrified, but very much firm in demanding an answer. He sonicked the lock, wrenching open the door to see a mass of Autons crowding around a beautiful, young woman who’d just screwed her eyes shut, bracing for the impact of an auton’s hand.

He wrapped his hand around hers, and a feeling he hadn’t had in a long time coursed through his body so quickly he didn’t even have time to acknowledge it. Not when wide, whiskey colored eyes found his.

“Care to run?” He asked, and he didn’t expect in a thousand years how much he would want this woman to run with him forever.”

They’d been working quietly for a bit, all the while the Doctor was trying to think of a way to get Rose on the ship without asking for something easily grabbed. The TARDIS herself was silent, sensing what he wanted to do, knowing she wouldn’t be able to deny him, or that there was all that much point in arguing with him.

“Suppose….” Rose said, then seemed to think better of it.

“Suppose what, love?” He asked, watching as she furrowed her brow, pouting a bit in thought.

“Suppose…. Well, just thinking. You, umm, you went back and …. Well, you were the architect, planned the heist and all, yeah? Well, what if you went back a week, built the delta wave thing and
sorta… stored it somewhere, all ready to go….”

He smiled at her, “As soon as the TARDIS lands, I become part of events. Landing here a week before would mean Davitch and the rest would know me now, and they didn’t. What’s more, something tells me a week ago, even six hours ago, they wouldn’t have heard me out for anything. I’m afraid there’s no popping back with a plan this time.”

Rose nodded, her lips curling in a slight smirk. “Yeah, thought it’d be something like that.”

She never stopped working, never quit her task, carrying on as if the future wasn’t so very bleak.

“We could leave,” he said, earning her full attention. She frowned, but he continued. “We could go to the TARDIS, let history take its course. We could head off to the stars, go somewhere only we know of, stay there.”

“You’d never do that.” Rose said with a knowing smile as she shook her head.

“No. But if you had asked, I would have.” He tells her honestly, and Rose swallows. “But it never occurred to you, did it?”

She blushed, looking down at the wires in her hand. “Well, I’m just too good.”

“Yes, you are,” He agreed, smiling fondly at her even though she wouldn’t see it.

A hum of energy caught his ear, originating from the computer terminal Jack had been using earlier. On his feet and dashing over, the Doctor saw immediately that Jack had started to program for the Delta wave, trying to earn them a little more time. And right now, it was powering up.

“What is it?” Rose asked.

“It’s the Delta wave,” He replied, “it’s begun to build power.”

“That’s good news.” She said as he pressed a few keys to get a reading on how long it would need.

The Daleks would be aboard, possibly having even gotten through Jack’s defenses, before the wave was ready. Maybe, if he were lucky, it would be ready just before his metal friends made it to him.

But there was one very, glaringly obvious thing the reading meant above all else: his time with Rose was up.

“Rose…,” He said slowly, turning to see she’d come to stand right behind him. He touched her cheek, cupping it in his palm. “I think, maybe, you might have been on to something when you mentioned the architect. I might have something in there that could help, but,” he patted his coat pockets. “Wasn’t I wearing the leather jacket?”

Rose frowned, and his hearts jolted at the possibility she’d call him out on the lie.

“Dunno,” She replied.

“Mind grabbing it for me? It’s in our room, in the closet.” He said.

“Yeah, sure.” She said.

The Doctor gave her a grin, leaned in, and kissed her.
It wasn’t a proper goodbye kiss; it was barely more than what he’d given Jack. He couldn’t pour his love for her in it. He couldn’t use it to tell her thank you for everything, for helping him move on, for getting him to a place where he felt like him again. That simple brush of lips couldn’t tell her how much he didn’t want to let her go, but desperately hoped she could have a good life without him.

It was over, and he was watching her run into the TARDIS, utterly trusting, having no idea what was about to happen when the doors shut behind her.

“I love you,” he said, both to her and the TARDIS as the old girl’s hum pitched. “I love you both so much more than my own life.”

He then took out his sonic, pointing it at the TARDIS, and remotely activating the ship, watching with heavy hearts until she faded away.

“This is Emergency Program One, a protocol that has been activated because we are in fatal danger, facing an enemy that should never get their hands on TARDIS technology. I may be dead or dying, and there is no chance of escape, and little chance of regeneration.”

Rose starred at the hologram through her tears, shaking her head. She wanted to argue, but she didn’t think there would be much point.

“But I promised your mother I would look after you,” The hologram continued, “that if there was a way for me to get you home, I would. This is it, Rose. This is where and when the TARDIS is taking you. I know, darling, I know you’re likely angry with me, and I do hope you find it in that big heart of yours to forgive me one day.”

Rose closed in on the hologram, wandering toward it as the TARDIS continued on its programmed course. She could feel her not wanting to, she could feel the TARDIS wanting to resist and not being able to. It was then that Rose wished she’d learned how to fly, to learn how to steer the ship right back to the Doctor to remind him that she made a promise, too.

“The TARDIS will be alright. UNIT might come for her eventually, and that’s alright. Perhaps you can join her when they do, and you can take care of her there for as long as you live. But there’s one thing I ask of you, Rose. Just one thing: have a good life. Move on, be happy, fall in love again and adventure as much as you can. Do it for me, my darling. And know, where ever I am,” Rose gasped as the hologram raised its hand and cupped her cheek as if it knew where she was, as if he could see her. Their eyes met, and her heart broke “my last thoughts will be of you.”

The hologram disappeared, the TARDIS landed, and everything fell silent.

As if she could wake herself from a sort of living nightmare, Rose turned and stumbled toward the door. She would open it, she would step out, and the Doctor would be where she left him.

But it wasn’t the warm, stale air of too many computers, nor the dark, blue hued room that greeted her. It was cool, moist English air, and the towering Powell Estates.
You may have guessed, but there will be more Rose in the next bit, and then, well....
Rose had no idea how long she’d been standing outside the TARDIS, leaning up against the blue doors, when Mickey came panting around the corner. He was talking, but she wasn’t really hearing him. She wasn’t really hearing anything aside from the ringing in her ears and the pounding of her heart.

He sent her away. A small part of her raged at that because *how dare he!* *How dare the Doctor send her away.* But the bigger part of her hurt. Hurt for him because he was about to face his oldest enemy, and he clearly didn’t think it was going to go to plan because he’d kept a promise to bring her home. He sent her and the TARDIS away. He was so alone now, with nothing humming against his mind, no human to connect with, not like he was with her.

“My last thoughts will be of you.”

The words seemed to take their time sinking in, but once they had, Rose wailed, first burying her face in her hands before she realized Mickey had pulled her into an embrace. She grabbed on to his coat and held hard, sobbing as he swayed her from side to side for a bit.

She never deserved Mickey. She knows that, she knows he deserved better. Here he was, holding her and trying to soothe her when the man she loves more than anything or anyone else had sent her away to live, all after she’d broken his heart.

“Let’s get you to your mum,” he said, some of the only words of his that got through to her.

“What’s happened?” Jackie asked as soon as they were through the doors, Rose still sobbing, her face red and swollen.

“TARDIS landed not far from here,” Mickey explained as he gently guided Rose into Jackie’s arms. She moved as if on auto pilot, didn’t move or do anything that indicated she was aware of being handed off. Of her being home, of anything. “Doctor’s not with her.” He said gravely, because this is what it had to be about, right? Why else would Rose be this distraught, alone here with the TARDIS, if the Doctor hadn’t…. Jackie’s eyes went wide, and she looked at her daughter held in her arms, with a heartbreakingly sympathetic look.

“S’Alright, love.” She murmured. “Come on, let’s get you rested up, yeah?”

Jackie turned Rose and led her down the hall, to her old room, and Mickey stood in the entryway and waited. He considered maybe calling UNIT, letting Kate know that the Doctor wouldn’t be coming back anytime soon, but decided against it. He liked to think that Rose could give an explanation that wasn’t dire, the worst case. Like maybe they got into a big row, and the Doctor just brought her back and didn’t want to say anything until it passed. Or maybe he sent her back because he was jailed somewhere, that seemed likely.
Until he knew for sure, he wouldn’t say anything. He’d wait for Rose. In the meantime, he’ll go put the kettle on.

He worked with robot-like focus for some time, trying not to think of what he’d just done. His mind, if he let himself focus on it, was emptier than it had been in his very long life. He may go insane if he paid it much attention, and that wouldn’t do until he got the wave ready to at least annihilate everything.

“Rose,” Jack’s voice but through the intercom. “I’ve called up the internal laser codes. There should be a different number on every screen, can you read them out.”

“She can’t.” The Doctor replied, “But if you’ll give me a moment, I can do it quickly.”

“Where is she then?” Jack asked.

The Doctor took a moment to swallow back the hearts ache. “Home.” She replied.

There was silence for a moment, and then. “You sent her back.” It was a statement, and one that didn’t give even a hint of disapproval.

“I had to,” The Doctor replied. “She’d have died here with us. The Delta wave will be ready, but it won’t be-”

“I knew we likely wouldn’t live through this.” Jack cut him off, reassuring him. “You sent her home, keep working. I don’t doubt you. Never have, never will.”

“Well, that makes one of us, then.” The Doctor smirked. “But there’s one thing I wish I could have figured out.”

“What’s that?” Jack asked.

“What was Bad Wolf?” He said, more to himself than to Jack, looking at the words over the lift doors. He shook his head, because it didn’t matter. The Delta wave did, and getting Jack his defense codes. “Alright, Jack. The first number….”

She didn’t know how long she’d spent sobbing in her room before she’d fallen asleep. All Rose knew was that it was nearing tea time when she was finally up, her make-up cried off and eyes still a bit swollen. There was a gentle ringing in her ears, though at least her head didn’t hurt despite how dehydrated she probably was. As much as she’d like to stay in bed forever, Rose knew she couldn’t.

He wouldn’t want that.

Sod what he wanted.

But then….
With a heavy sigh, Rose forced herself up and moved to the bathroom across the hall. She washed her face with cold water, reapplied a bit of mascara so Jackie wouldn’t comment on her appearance over much, and then ventured out into the living room.

The TV was on, her mum and Mickey watching it until the shuffle of her feet caught their attention.

Jackie gave a weak smile. “Hello, Sweetheart,” She said, and Rose moved to sit next to her on the sofa. She could feel them watching her, taking in the way she bent a knee, resting her foot on the cushion, the way she inspected her nails in an unseeing way.

“Are you hungry?” Jackie asked. “We could pop down to the chippy? Get something to eat?”

“Could use something,” Mickey added in.

Rose just shrugged, but that seemed to be all the response they needed to get her to follow them out the door and around the corner to the local chippy.

Rose sat down at an empty table next to the window and leaned her head against the sill, peering out. She’d walked across this lot with the Doctor, multiple times now. First as nothing more than strangers, then progressively as more. She started off chasing him, and then suddenly was holding his hand, laughing with him.

A box of chips was placed in front of her, the tang of vinegar mixed with the warm smell of grease teased her senses but didn’t stir up a hunger. All it did was remind her off far off places, and a younger Doctor with longer curls and a more care-free flirtation.

She swallowed, her eyes stinging and the ringing in her eyes growing.

Her mum and Mickey carried on a conversation, simple and mundane and nothing that would have held her attention even if she’d tried. This was their normal. Chips at the local, and talk of the neighborhood. The gossip, the ins and outs, the same old-same old. But it had been months, probably more like a year for her on the TARDIS. A year of the everyday being a new planet or asteroid, somewhere in the past, or the future, or just hundreds of lightyears away from Earth where her mum was doing the laundry. Her every day was lounging in the console room, or the library while the Doctor worked or read. Talking for hours about nothing and everything. Of Jack joking and flirting, and the TARDIS being mischievous and teasing.

**But there ’s one thing I ask of you, Rose. Just one thing: have a good life. Move on, be happy…**

“I can’t,” She said aloud, stopping both Mickey and Jackie in their conversation, eyes drawn immediately to Rose. She blinked rapidly, a fresh wave of tears prickling her eyes. “I can’t move on, can’t….” She trailed off as a lump formed in her throat. “He’s somewhere in the future, dying, and there’s nothing I can do.”

Jackie and Mickey exchanged an uneasy glance. “Well, like you said, it’s the future, yeah? Probably way off.” Jackie replied, trying to sound light.

“But it’s not! It’s now, the fight is happening right now, and he’s fighting for us.” Her voice broke. “He’s fighting for us, for the whole planet, and I’m just sittin’ here.”

“Listen to me,” Jackie said firmly, and Rose met her eye. “I made that man promise me to send you back to me if things went pear shaped, and he did just that. He sent you home, he did the right thing. God knows I didn’t always get that man, or thought much of him from time to time, but right now, I love him.”
“But what am I supposed to do?” Rose asked. “I can’t… I can’t just go back to how it was before him. I’m not the same, he changed me.”

Her mum looked at her for a long while before she sighed, shaking her head. “I know it feels like the end, Rose, but you’re young, and there are other blokes—”

“It’s not what I meant!” Rose snapped. “I love him, yeah, course I do. But it’s more than that. He showed me a better way of living. And I don’t mean all the traveling, I mean taking a stand. Saying no, having the guts to do what’s right when everyone else just runs away!”

“So, get a job with those people who came before.” Jackie replied with exasperation. “Lord knows I’d much rather you do something like the butcher, or here, but still.”

“I don’t wanna work for UNIT, I don’t wanna…. I wanna be with him. I wanna stand with him, and he just, and I….”

Rose kicked the table, and then got up, storming out of the chippy before the anger that fueled her turned into grief and she reverted back to a sobbing mess. The ringing in her ears didn’t let up or grow as she marched across the lot toward the old playground where she and Mickey used to play.

It was mostly vacant now. The estates had grown harder of the years, and most children of playground going age were prone to stay inside and play a video game instead of coming out. Rose plopped down on a bench, far from the few that were out and about, laughing and running. She buried her face in her hands and bowed her head, resting elbows on her knees and tried to breath.

Her mum was right, of course. She could probably go work for UNIT. At least she wouldn’t be a shop girl. She already knew Nell, liked her. Maybe her year or so with the Doctor would give her a decent position. She’d been running a lot, she was pretty fit, maybe she could-

*What* was she thinking? How could she even consider settling down for one moment? But how could she do anything else? It wasn’t like she knew how to fly the TARDIS. It’s not as though she even knew when he was, she only knew he was in the future. It was probably logged somewhere, but it wasn’t like she could read Gallifreyan.

Rose heard Mickey approaching, his step distinct to her, but she didn’t look up. She didn’t remove her face from her hands or even give a sign she knew he was now sitting on the bench beside her. They sat in silence for a long time neither saying anything, and it was almost pleasant.

“You can’t spend the rest of your life thinking about the Doctor.” He said as gently as possible.

“I can’t forget him.” She said, then gave her eyes a rub before lifting her head and looking at Mickey. “I love him, Mick’s. I love him more than anything. More than my own life. I know it sounds daft, but I would die for ‘im.”

“He wouldn’t for you.” He tried to counter, but Rose shook her head.

“You don’t know ‘im, not like I do. You don’t see what he’s willin’ to do, and not just for me, but for everyone. Dying for him? Lettin’ him live to keep the rest of the universe safe? Yeah, I’d do it.”

“He can’t give you a proper life.”

“What’s proper?” Rose asked, the ringing in her ears getting worse. She rubbed at it, wincing a little.
“A job, a home, a family. Settle down, get married, have kids.”

“An’ that’s proper?” She asked.

“Yeah,”

“Right.” She replied bitterly. “Only ‘s not how everyone does it, yeah? Not everyone sees life as this, this cycle of grow up, marry, have kids.” She glanced away, wanting to keep from shouting while Mickey’s face turned into something cold and bitter. “Not everyone wants that, some want….” She trailed off as her eyes skimmed the playground. “Some… want….” She tried again but slowly rose to her feet, getting a better view of the words she could make out on the far walls. The near walls. The concrete court sprawling before her. “Bad Wolf.” She said in disbelief.

“They want Bad Wolf? What does that even mean?”

“No,” Rose said, “No, it’s… it’s the words. They’re here, they’re everywhere look!” She said, getting up, darting closer and stopping somewhere in the middle of the large painted D on the concrete.

“That’s been there for years, it’s just a phrase.” Mickey said behind her. “Just words.”

“No, it’s not! It’s not just words, it means something! I thought it was a warning, but maybe it was a message? The same words written down now, and in the future with the Doctor. It’s a link between us, Bad Wolf here…. Bad Wolf there!” Rose explained, gesturing wildly as she went.

“But if it’s a message, what’s it saying?” Mickey asked.

It was then that it clicked, and Rose understood. The ringing she was hearing wasn’t her ears at all, it was her mind. It was in her mind, and there was only one being in the whole of time and space that had that connection with her mind without physical contact.

Without another word, Rose turned around and ran for the TARDIS.

“Lynda, what’s happening on Earth?” The Doctor asked her over the intercom, knowing she was monitoring the activity as Jack had asked her to.

There was a long pause before she replied. “The Fleet’s descending… they’re bombing whole continents.” She swallowed, her voice shaking as she continued. “Europa… Pacifica… The New American Alliance… Australasia’s just gone.”

He bowed his head, closing his eyes for a moment. “I’m sorry. I had hoped that maybe sending everyone we could back to Earth would somehow save more lives. I was wrong.”

“It’s okay,” Lynda lied, though she was trying her best to sound like she wasn’t. “It’s… not like you could have done anything.”

“Maybe I could have.” The Doctor said to himself, but he had a feeling those on the intercom could hear him.

A beat later, Jack said, “There is nothing you could have done different.”
“There might have been.” The Doctor countered, continuing his work on the Delta wave. “Right after I thought the war was over, I had begun a search for Gallifrey, to see if I could find a way to bring it back from where ever myself and a few other Time Lords had sent it. But without those other Time Lords, it was proving impossible.”

“Do you think they’d help us? If you’d found them?” Lynda asked innocently, and the Doctor gave a quick, mirthless laugh.

“No,” He replied. “No, they would have said that this wasn’t for them to interfere in. If it wasn’t affecting them, or time, then they wouldn’t have intervened. No, I was looking for them because I thought I was lonely. I thought the silence in my head was too much, what with only the TARDIS to provide that mental link.” He paused, just for a moment, allowing a little of the grief he was trying to stuff down surface for a second. “I didn’t know real silence until now.”

“Stop being maudlin, and get back to it.” Jack teased, and the Doctor cracked a smirk. “We’re running out of time, and if we’re going to go down, we best take the Daleks with us.”

“When at first you don’t succeed,” The Doctor quipped, and refocused his attention fully on the Delta Wave machine.

As Rose unlocked the doors to the TARDIS, the ringing in her mind switched to relief before it changed to an all-consuming rage that wasn’t her own.” She stumbled through the door, falling hard on the metal floor before managing to half crawl to the center console. She put a hand on the panel, giving it a slight caress. The rage dimmed a bit, a bit of affection came through, but then the anger came back with a heavy side of frustration.

“Sorry,” She whispered. “Upset as I was, forgot you lost him, too. Can’t fly yourself, can you?” Rose was then giving the odd mental image of a mouse in a box, trying to get it to move, and being unable to do so.

“Got all that power in you, and you can’t really control it. And he never told me what to do, so I can’t.” She rested her forehead on the console, sighing, trying to send the Old Girl a mental hug. Warmth washed over her, and she got the sense that the gesture was received and returned.

“Rose?” Mickey’s voice came behind her, and only then did she realize she hadn’t closed the door when she stumbled in. She looked over her shoulder, seeing Mickey do what she hadn’t as he looked around the console room as if seeing it for the first time. He then looked to where she was and frowned. “You alright?”

“Yeah,” She smiled. “Just sorta been a bad friend.” She replied, and felt the TARDIS chide her. She looked up at the rotor. “Wha? Have been, yeah? Left you here all alone and felt sorry for myself.” She could almost imagine a glare. “Did, don’t argue.”

“Rose. You… you sure you’re okay?” Mickey asked again, and Rose had to laugh in spite of herself as Mickey seemed two seconds away from calling a hospital to have her admitted. Or, maybe more accurately, committed.

“Left the TARDIS.” She replied. “She’s a bit angry herself right now, left her be. Should’ve been
in this together, she and I, and there I was swanning off to have a cry alone.”

Mickey inched closer, looking up at the rotor with a frown. “So… so you’re saying you’re talking to a machine?”

“She’s telepathic, Micks. She’s alive.”

“Right.” Mickey said. “So, we’re standing inside a living thing. You live inside a living thing. Alright then.” He nodded, putting his hands in his pockets. “So, what, you two bad mouthing the Doctor like a pair of exes or something?”

“Venting together, I think’s more like it.” Rose replied, pulling herself up. Once on her feet, she kept her hands on the console, stroking it lightly. “She’d been trying to share her anger with me since we landed, but didn’t know what it was. Thought it was my ears ringing.” She explained with a self-deprecating smile.

Mickey eyed the rotor again, more wary than before. “So… you could talk to it? Like, away from it? You didn’t need to be in here to… chat?”

“Sorta.”

“‘Kay. So, why’d you come running here, then? When you thought there was a message? That Bad Wolf, thing?” He asked.

“Yeah. Thought maybe she was trying to get me back here so we could go back. Can’t fly her, though. She can’t fly herself.”

“Rose, Micks, you in there?” Jackie’s voice cut the conversation off, and Rose could almost hear a huff from the Time Machine in her head, and could picture a woman stomping her foot in utter frustration. Jackie opened the door, inching her way inside and shut it behind her. “What you hanging about in here for, then?” She asked.

“Rose was talking to it?” Mickey replied with a smirk.

“Her.” Rose corrected, though she might not have spoken.

“What, like you’d talk to a car not working?”

“No, having a conversation, apparently. Ranting on about the Doctor.”

“Oh, come off it.” Jackie gave a swatting motion in Mickey’s direction.

“Rose says it’s telepathic.”

“She is.” Rose countered, and was soothed by the TARDIS. She turned, toward the rotor again, leaning as far over as she could to press her forehead to the center column.

Something sparked, like an electric shock in her head, causing her to gasp but not pull away.

For the first time in all her communicating with the TARDIS, it wasn’t feelings or flashes of images she was getting, but something like words, something more solid than a vague idea of a question. It was like a whisper in her head in a language she didn’t think she spoke but could understand if she listened carefully.

Had the TARDIS not already been a part of her, didn’t already know her mind and heart as intimately as Rose knew herself, she may have asked, “How much do you love him?” But then, the
Old Girl knew. Rose loved the Doctor as much as the TARDIS did, just in a different way. It could have been, “Are you willing to do anything for him?” But again, the TARDIS knew that Rose was more than willing to die for him, just as she had said to Mickey before. She wasn’t afraid, not truly, not like she might have been in the beginning. She’d faced her death enough already, had looked at the Dalek, the Teller, the Gas Mask Zombies and Gelth to have come to terms with her mortal life and how life with the Doctor was as safe as it was boring. All that to know that if it came down to her or him, she would choose him.

But knowing Rose as she did, the words that came to Rose’s mind when she touched her forehead to the rotor was simply: are you ready?

“Mum, Micks,” She turned, looking at them over her shoulder. “Can you, umm… can you step out? Please?” She asked.

Jackie frowned. “What’s going on, Rose?”

She swallowed. “There’s something I gotta do, is all. Just wanna be alone.”

Jackie narrowed her eyes, opened her mouth, and then paused. Slowly, Jackie released a sigh, her shoulders sagging as she nodded. “You’re gonna go back for him, aren’t you?”

“Yeah.” Rose confessed, ensuring her tone brokered no arguments.

“An how are you gonna get there? How are you gonna help?” Jackie asked, crossing her arms.

“I don’t know.” Rose admitted. “But I want him safe, and I know we’re better together than apart. The TARDIS seems to think we can get back somehow, gonna trust her.” She replied, reaching behind her and patting the console. There was a wave of love that came over her, of mutual trust, that told Rose that it was unlikely the Old Girl wouldn’t have trust just anyone with this task.

Jackie held Rose’s eye for a long while before she managed a broken, “You come back here, is that understood? You do what you gotta do, and you save that man’s hide so I can give him a piece of my mind, and then you come back here. I need to know you’re safe.”

Rose just nodded, because saying something out loud might be a promise she couldn’t keep. She didn’t want to do that; didn’t want to say she’d come home when she wasn’t sure she would.

Jack came closer and wrapped her arms tightly around Rose, and Rose returned the hug just as fiercely.

“Too much of your father in you,” Jackie teased wetly. “He was always full of mad ideas, and if you ain’t just a bit more mad than he was.”

Rose laughed, feeling fresh tears prickle at eyes that had already cried enough. She stepped back and gave Mickey a quick hug to.

“Look after her for me?” She whispered, feeling him nod against her shoulder.

They parted, and Rose bounced on her heels a moment before shooing them toward the door. “Better not be in here for what’s next,” She said like she had some idea of what that was going to be.

Jackie and Mickey turned, both glancing over their shoulders at different times as if they somehow were teaming up to ensure Rose didn’t disappear before the TARDIS let them out. They lingered by the entry as they stepped out, looking at her one last time before slowly closing door. Once it
was shut, the lock sounded with an audible click.

“Right,” Rose said, taking a steadying breath. “Right, so, what’s going to happen now?”

There was another click behind her, and she noted a part of the panel had lifted up behind her, a bright, warm glow coming from within.

“What’s in there? Instruction manual?” She asked, shifting down to it.

She faltered when danger warnings flashed in her mind.

At own risk! Danger!

“That’s the only way, though, isn’t it?” She asked. “’S the only way to get back to him.”

The lights in the console dimmed, throwing the glow in greater contrast. Rose took a deep breath, stood in front of the open console, and put her hands on the edge. As the light liked her skin, she could hear something more distinct.

All that is, all that was, all that ever will be.

It whispered in her mind, along with echoes of the past, and maybe the future. Voices that were strange and yet familiar saying a multitude of different things, but at least six of those voices said her name. She could feel a light headache caress her temples, a pressure building in point in her head that she suddenly felt was linked to how she spoke to the TARDIS and the Doctor.

We want you safe.

Her own voice came through, though it was blended with something else. Someone else.

It was the TARDIS, she was certain.

And somehow that’s what Rose needed to lift the console and looked into the light.

The Doctor stood before the finished device, shoulders squared, facing the lift as he knew the Daleks would arrive any moment. Behind him, the Dalek Emperor was projected above the controls, having hacked in and allowed himself to watch these last moments just after Jack declared himself the last man standing. This was it, the end, and the Doctor was going to face it with as much bravery as he could muster.

The lift doors opened, and the Daleks poured out, circling him and the device.

“So here we are, once again.” He said as he rested his hand on the switch. “My old enemies and I, facing each other one last time.”

“You will not activate the Delta Wave.” The Emperor said behind him.

“Oh I most certainly will.” He replied without looking away from the Daleks before him. “I am the worst version of myself you could ever have dared to face. I have no home, my TARDIS is gone, every human in the area has been eradicated, there are no other Time Lords left to stop you, and I have nothing left to lose.” He glanced briefly over his shoulder, but returned his focus on the
“You will kill all life.” The Emperor reminded him. “You will be a killer.”

“So be it.” The Doctor replied, grip shifting on the switch. “Better to die a human than to live as a Dalek. Better the lives of few over the lives of many. I have faced this choice time, and time again. In every other case I have found another option, but I think my luck’s run out.” He huffed. “I guess I’ve just lived too long.”

“Then activate the Delta Wave, Doctor, and prove yourself: killer, or coward.”

He tightened his grip, muscles in his arm flexing to push. But he had made a promise, and he was damned well going to keep it. So, he closed his eyes, cleared his mind, and brought up a perfect image of Rose. A Rose barely awake in the morning but with an amused grin as he said or did something, she found amusing but refused laugh at. Rose with light playing on her golden locks, and love in her eyes.

Rose and the TARDIS.

Except, he didn’t mean to think about the Old Girl. He loved her, of course, and he was glad she would be among his last thoughts, but he hadn’t intended it. She just sort of crept in there, lingering in his mind and weakly calling him a complete and total idiot, be he was their idiot, and they would be damned if he killed himself.

His eyes sprang open, the Doctor catching on just a bit too late that it wasn’t some sort of memory or a product of a wandering mind, but his mental link with the TARDIS catching up to him at rapid speed before the sound of the engines filled the room and the brilliant blue box appeared.

“No,” He said in wonder and confusion. “How…?”

The doors swung open outward, a bright, golden light blinding him and throwing the room in shadow. And there in the middle of it was Rose.

She stood tall, back straight, chin up. She radiated power and control, of something darker and more dangerous than any, every Dalek in the room. Her eyes glowed golden, and wisps of vortex energy danced around her.

“What did you do?” He asked in an awed, terrified whisper.

“I looked into the TARDIS, and the TARDIS looked into me.” She explained, her voice different, ethereal.

“You… you what?” His hearts began to beat faster, fear gripping them.

“This is an abomination!” The Emperor decreed, and Rose’s attention snapped quickly to the screen.

“EXTERMINATE!” The nearest Dalek declared, not sparing a single second more before firing a bolt of deadly energy right at Rose.

She didn’t even flinch. With fast reflexes, she raised her hand and the beam reversed course, returning to the Dalek and returning to the gun.

The Doctor’s stomach gave a lurch as he looked from the Dalek to Rose.
“I am the Bad Wolf,” she explained. “I create myself. I take the words; I scatter them in time and space. A message to lead myself here.” She said as she looked to the name, Bad Wolf Corporation, just behind the projection of the Emperor, and raised her hand. As she did, the letters appeared to float and waver before disappearing.

“I never showed you where the heart of the TARDIS was, I never told you what could happen if you looked into it. You’ve got the whole time vortex in you Rose, how did you even manage that?”

She looked at him once more. “I looked into the TARDIS, and the TARDIS looked into me. We are one.”

He got the image then, a quick flash that a human brain would have thought as nothing more than a fleeting thought. But he could see it, from both perspectives. He could see Rose’s anguish and desperation. He could see the TARDIS frustrated and angry. He could see how the TARDIS made the decision as soon as she landed that she would do what it took to get back to him. How with every statement, every confession Rose made to her mum and Mickey that she needed to be, wanted to be, and belonged at the Doctor’s side, to stand with him and help where she could, just made the Old Girl more sure that she should allow this human vessel she cared for so much risk her life to return them both to him.

“We want you safe,” Rose said, snapping him back to it. “I want you safe, my Doctor,” she said, a little more of her true voice coming through before her eyes glowed, and that ethereal tone took over once more. Her eyes snapped back to the projection. “Protected from the false God.”

“You cannot hurt me.” The Emperor boasted. “I am immortal.”

“You are tiny,” Rose replied, a bit of something else coming through, something higher pitched and achingly familiar. “I can see all of time and space, every single atom of your existence, and I divide them.” Rose raised her hand, and as she did, the Dalek that shot at her began to turn to dust. “Everything must come to dust, all things. Everything does.” The voice evened out again, and she moved her hand in an arch, all the Daleks in the room going the way of their friend, their atoms disintegrating. “The Time War ends.”

“I will not die!” The Emperor cried out, terrified. “I cannot die!” But even as he said it, the Doctor could see the Emperor’s body turning to dust just like all the other Daleks.

When the cries faded, and Rose lowered her hand, the Doctor slowly moved to stand in front of her.

“Alright, Rose. You’ve done it, darling, you’ve stopped them all. Now, let it go. Let it go before you burn.”

“How can I let go of this?” She asked in a wonderous tone. “I bring life.”

In an instant, the Doctor’s stomach lurched. Something was wrong, something that wasn’t meant to happen came into fruition. A fixed point in a living being. Even the TARDIS, the part of Bad Wolf that was made up of her, recoiled at the sudden wrongness of the beloved Jack Harkness.

“Rose, you have to stop, you’re not in control anymore.” He pleaded.

“But I can see everything. All that is, all that was, all that ever could be.” She said, tears rolling down her cheeks. “I could lose you.”

“And I could lose you.” He said as he clutched her hands, trying to meet her eye. “Rose, we could lose you, please, let it go before that happens, please.”
“My head,” Rose said, shutting her eyes. “It hurts.”

“Then let go,” he pleaded.

His respiratory bypass kicked in as he waited for the next word, the next move. All the air left his lungs as Rose tipped her head back, opened her mouth, and the essence of the vortex escaped and headed back inside the TARDIS. He heard the console latch close, and the bright light faded away as Rose collapsed against him.

His hearts still pounded, the rushing of blood past his ears drowning out how deafening the silence was as he struggled to regain control of his mind and hearts while clutching Rose to his chest.

She was barely breathing. He had to concentrate to feel the her take shallow breaths. He put a shaky hand to her temple and barely felt a thrum.

“Hold on, love.” He said as he moved her about, shifting her so he could lift and carry her bridal style back into the TARDIS, away from the empty room and the grating feeling of Jack’s wrongness as inched ever closer.

He was thankful the TARDIS didn’t shut the doors once the Vortex was back inside her, because the Doctor didn’t think he had the strength at the moment to open them himself.

Once past the threshold, he set her down on the nearest jumpseat, and sent the TARDIS into the vortex. The relief of being away from a mutated fixed point eased his gut-wrenching nausea only slightly, because now he could really look at Rose. Now, without something making his skin crawl, he could see she was deathly pale. That a human would never have seen that she still drew breath, would assume her dead.

In a blink, he was running, moving as quickly as he could to a relocated med bay, brought forth with the last of the strength the TARDIS had before she went into hibernation, floating in the vortex. Part of him wanted to rage at his time ship, curse her for being so selfish, so arrogant, so assured that she would use Rose to get back to him. Allow, no, encourage Rose to do something so dangerous it may kill her all in the name of saving his sorry….

But the TARDIS loved Rose as much as he did. She wouldn’t have put her in danger if she didn’t foresee something.

The doors to the Medbay opened at his approach, and his boot slid against the smooth tile and cause him to momentarily lose control, crashing into the shelf he had been heading for and jostling the bottles given to him by Ohila on Karn. The moved about, all too similar in appearance and color for his frantic mind to decipher. He needed the one that would heal, the one that would surely bring Rose back from the brink.

And then he spotted it, on the cork, in Gallifreyan. The two words that were a warning as much as a sign of hope: Bad Wolf.

Plucking it off the shelf, he dashed back to the console room.

He fell to his knees beside her, lifting her head and tilting it back slightly with one hand. He brought the bottle to his mouth and pulled the cork free with his teeth, spitting it out off to the side. He then brought the bottle to Rose’s parted mouth, pouring a little in. He shifted his grip, wrapping his arm around her in a way that he could message her throat and encourage her to swallow. He did this, bit by bit, until the bottle was empty.

Gently, he laid her back down, then turned so he was resting back against the jumpseat. He
reached over his right shoulder and took her hand, feeling her warm, human heat had diminished but didn’t vanish.

The Doctor closed his eyes, resting his head against her side, and waited.

Jack watched the TARDIS dematerialize in shock.

How was it that it returned, and why did the Doctor leave without him? Why was he alive again when no one else seemed to be? Where were the Daleks?

He looked over his shoulder, the projector displaying empty space.

He checked his Vortex manipulator, doing a scan for life signs and finding nothing.

He was alone. The Daleks were gone, but so was the Doctor.

“Well,” he said to himself. “At least I know roughly when he’s going.”


———

Jack would wait one hundred and forty years to actually find them. And in that time, he would figure out that there was a reason he was the only man left alive at the Games Station.

———

He awoke four hours, thirty-seven minutes, and twenty-one seconds after he’d accidentally dozed off. The hand beneath his had not warmed in the slightest. In fact, if memory served him correctly, Rose’s skin was at least three degrees cooler, give or take being off a little.

The Doctor got on his knees and moved around, looking down at his beloved and shifting his grip to check her pulse. It was weak, barely hanging in there, and her breathing was slower, though it didn’t appear more labored.

He’d gotten a sinking feeling that he may have made a grave mistake.

Getting on his feet, he turned around and stumbled around the console, inputting coordinates for a location he hadn’t particularly wanted to revisit ever again.

The TARDIS activated, and it took him a moment to realize she still wasn’t wholly restored herself. Her mental link with him was present and stable, strong at a stretch, but she was still weak overall. She could move about the vortex and take him where and when he wanted to go, but she couldn’t talk to him at the same time, not yet.
He didn’t move when they landed, but instead pushed a button to open the door just a crack to allow the person he knew would come to enter.

He waited, glancing at Rose, before hearing the creek of the door opening further.

“I hadn’t expected you back this soon,” Ohila said as she closed the door behind her.

“Ohila, meet Rose,” He said, gesturing to his love before turning to face the leader of the sisterhood.

“I would, but she appears to be unconscious.” Ohila retorted, sparing the blonde a glance.

“She is.” He replied. “She took the vortex into her body and temporarily became a goddess.”

“We felt the effects,” Ohila nodded.

He stared at her for a long moment, trying to get a read on her, and unable to do so. “I gave her one of your potions.” He said softly. “She was alive, but weak, dangerously weak.”

Ohila narrowed her eyes, her head tilting slightly before she moved to Rose’s side. She looked her over, kneeling down slowly. Then Ohila picked up her hand, holding it in both of hers.

“She should be awake by now, should she not?” He asked her softly.

Ohila didn’t reply right away.

“I gave you three bottles.” She eventually said, her voice barely above a whisper, though it rang clear in the quiet, empty room. “One for healing, one for aid in regeneration, and one for a future you had yet to find.” She turned and looked at him gravely over her shoulder. “You gave your companion the one to aid in regeneration.”

His blood ran cold.

“What will happen to her?” He asked.

“I don’t know.” Ohila replied, looking down at the prone form before her. “If she had the vortex in her body, she would be steeped in huon particles. It is possible that the potion will think her a time lord, feed off those particles and heal her as if she simply had a faulty regeneration. Or-”

“Oh it could kill her.” The Doctor ran a hand down his face. “Why couldn’t you have labeled them more clearly?”

“Why didn’t you keep them sorted in a such a way that you would know which was which?” She countered.

“It was an accident, I …knocked them about. But there were words on the cork, in Gallifreyan. Words that Rose… Rose had put out in the universe to guide us, to bring us to this moment. She wouldn’t… she couldn’t have….”

He stopped when he felt Ohila’s hand on his arm, smiling sadly at him before she went past him, deeper into the TARDIS, and the Doctor didn’t have the strength or will to stop her. He sighed instead, and returned to Rose’s side where he knelt down and took her hand in his. He kissed her knuckles, before pressing her palm against his cheek.

“Why must you be so stubborn my brave, beautiful girl?” He asked her in a whisper. “I could lose you now, all because you had to come back and save me. Save me from myself.” He didn’t get an
answer, he didn’t expect one. Instead, he closed his eyes again and attempted to reach out to her mentally.

He was met by silence, but he couldn’t say he expected much more than that, given her state.

He heard Ohila approach by the brush of her skirts on the floor, and looked up as she knelt beside him at Rose’s side. She handed him a bottle.

“Your friend, he’s already a fixed point, is he not?”

“You knew?” He asked her.

“It was foreseen. All of this was foreseen. But like most things involving time, it had been rewritten. It was meant that your friend would be a fixed point. This potion,” she said, handing it to the Doctor. “Was made to aid you time sense, to allow you to adapt to having him near. You were meant to take the vortex out of your lover, but die in the process. The potion you mistakenly gave her was meant to aid you. And then, had you and she survived another test to come, you would have used the chameleon arch to change her into a Gallifreyan, to allow her to live out a natural life with you. The potion for healing, that was meant to aid her in that future outcome.”

“So, much like you foresaw the crash with Cass.”

“Yes,” Ohila nodded. “Time was altered. Perhaps it was your lover who had done it.”

“Perhaps,” He acknowledged, remembering what she’d said. All that was, is, and will be.

“Bring her home.” Ohila said after a beat. “If this does not go in her favor, allow her family and loved ones a chance to say goodbye.”

“And if it does?” He asked.

“You believe there will be a good outcome?”

“I’m ever the optimist.” He replied.

Ohila nodded, a small, sad smile on her lips. “I wish you luck, Doctor.”

“Thank you for coming to me.” He returned, and Ohila was on her feet, heading for the door.

When it was closed, he let out a long, held-in breath.

“Oh, Rose.” He said. “I’m so sorry, darling.” He managed to get to his feet, set the coordinates for Jackie’s home not long after Rose would have left to return to him, and braced himself for what was to come.

Chapter End Notes

One more chapter that, with any lucky, will be posted before the holidays.
Mickey and Jackie returned to the flat, neither of them having said a word since stepping out of the TARDIS and giving Rose her space.

It was all sort’ve muddled. He rightly didn’t know what to do or feel. Because on one hand, it was clear from their first reunion after meeting the Doctor that Rose was lost to him. However, that alien did it, he’d won her over completely, and there was nothing Mickey could do or say to win her back. He wanted to be supportive of Rose, because she always was and would always be a friend before anything else. But on the other hand, the Doctor had sent her back. He didn’t know how, and he had some questions for a certain mate of his, but that’s what the Time Lord had done. He had sent Rose back to live a life without him, to move on and be safe. She could have moved on with him. They could have been happy. A small part of Mickey had still hoped that he and Rose could live the sort of domestic life he’d imagined with her.

Jackie went right for the kitchen, putting on the kettle. Mickey lingered by the sofa, not sure if he should sit back down or go out for a walk. Or just stand and think.

“Did you call ‘im?” Jackie asked, and not for the first time that day. She’d asked earlier when he first brought the sobbing Rose home. She asked again as Rose ran out the chippy.

Mickey looked up and then shook his head.

“He might know, Mickey. He might know how it worked out.” She reasoned, not for the first time.

“He might not.” He reminded her. “You know what he said. He was left, just like Rose.”

“But just like,” Jackie countered as the kettle began to boil.

Mickey snorted. “Right, bit worse for him, wasn’t it?” He countered crossing his arms and just about ready to sit down when the pages of the magazines stacked on the coffee table began to flutter. It was just a second later that that tell-tale wheezing and groaning began to cut through the living room, causing Jackie to drop a mug in the kitchen and storm into the living room as the big, blue box began to materialize in the corner. A small part of Mickey’s mind was amused by the shifting chair.

The smirk that began to form on his lips died the second the ship was fully formed, but a very solemn looking Doctor stepped out.

“Where’s Rose?” Jackie asked immediately.

The Doctor looked older than Mickey remembered him. Tired, as if the weight of the universe had finally become too much to bear.

“She’s in the TARDIS.” The Doctor replied, and Jackie went to make for the doors. He held up his hand. “Jackie,” He said softly, apologetically.

Jackie’s jaw dropped. “No,” She begged. “No, don’t say-”

“She’s alive. She’s… she’s alive but I don’t… I don’t know if…. I’m not sure-”
Smack!

The clap of Jackie’s palm against the Doctor’s cheek was loud enough that Mickey thought it must have broken the sound barrier. It was still echoing in his head as he watched Jackie lower her hand, lips quivering and eyes watering. The Doctor stood still, tall, the red hand visible on his cheek.

“Don’t say you aren’t sure!” Jackie hissed. “You’re a Doctor, fix her!”

“I’ve tried, I did. I swear, Jackie, I did what I could.” He replied as evenly as possible. “Believe me, I want her whole and healthy as much as you do. But as of now it’s a matter of time, we just have to wait. And if, for some reason, she doesn’t pull through, I wanted her home. I wanted you to have a chance to say goodbye.”

Jackie’s face crumpled, and she approached the Doctor once again, but this time with her hands over her face. And Mickey watched as the thousand plus year old alien wrapped his arms around Rose’s mother and held her, eyes misting as he murmured things in an attempt to comfort or reassure.

It was then that Mickey pulled out his cell phone, stepping into the kitchen as he dialed.

“Hey, Mickey Mouse.” Jack Harkness greeted him, somehow making the childish nickname sound lascivious.

“They’re here.” He cut to the chase. “It’s after they left you.”

“You’re sure?” Jack asked.

“Yeah.” Mickey replied, clearing his throat. “Sounds like Rose is dying, though.”

Silence.

“I’m on my way.” Jack said, just as Mickey was about to check for signal. He was gone before he could reply.

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“She’s cold.” Jackie said as she held Rose’s hand, kneeling beside her as he had done earlier. “She’s cold as death, are you sure?”

“She’s still breathing, still has a pulse.” The Doctor assured her, his hand resting on Jackie’s shoulder. She’d cried for a good ten minutes before she was finally able to ask to see her.

There had been an argument as to whether or not she should be able to move her daughter into the flat, but in the end, he’d won. He’d explained how he didn’t know how Rose was being affected by the combination of what she’d done, and how he tried to fix her, and that being as close to the TARDIS core as possible was probably the best thing for her.

“She’s so pale.” She commented quietly, brushing a lock of hair away from Rose’s face.

He was about to reply when he was suddenly quite overcome with the need to curl into himself while fighting a terrible headache. He first tried his mental links, both with the TARDIS and more cautiously with Rose before he heard the front door of the Tyler residence open.
“Mickey? Jackie?” Jack’s voice echoed.

“I’m in here, Jack.” Jackie called back, and the Doctor stumbled back.

Jack appeared in the door way, first looking to where the Tyler women were, then to the Doctor. He crossed his arms and glared. “You left!”

“You’re getting on my nerves.” The Doctor grit out, reaching into his pockets and fumbling for the potion Ohila brought out to him.

“You could have just said—”

“No, I mean literally. Give me a mo-ah ha!” He crowed as he pulled the potion out and pulled the stopper. It was a bitter, minty sort of thing that had him shuddering after gulping it down, but he could feel himself beginning to tolerate Jack’s presence. “There,” he said. “Now. Yes, I left you. Do you know what happened to you?”

Jack’s stance loosened. “I woke up alone on that station. Everyone else was dead, you took off. I went back thought maybe I could meet up with you here, only I went back too far. Spotted you guys around Cardiff a little bit after I landed, but Rose looked right past me, so I knew it wasn’t a you that knew me. So, after that little bit I decided to head across the Atlantic. 1892 I get into a fight on Ellis Island, shot through the heart. I woke up, thought it was an odd one off, but it kept happening.”

“Rose,” The Doctor said. “She took the vortex into her and she brought you back. A bit too well, I would say. You became a living fixed point. You’re not supposed to exist, ever. And I don’t know how to reverse that, if it’s even possible. So, admittedly, I ran. I had Rose to worry about, and I couldn’t think with you so near.”

“Seem to be doing alright now,” Jack said as he eyed the empty bottle in the Doctor’s hand.

“Yes,” the Doctor replied, giving it a glance. “I have an acquaintance who has a very unreliable sense of prophecy. She prepared for your possibility.” He set the empty bottle on the console. “What have you been up to in the meantime?”

“This and that,” Jack replied.

“Is there anything I can do for her?” Jackie interrupted them, drawing their attention back to the Tyler women. “Will tea help?”

“Drinking it? I’m not sure.” The Doctor replied. “But there’s a chance the smell, the steam, may be a benefit.”

He wasn’t sure if that was true, but he had the feeling that Jackie was getting restless and needed something to do, something to occupy her while she waited.

“I’ll give you a hand,” Jack said, opening an arm to Jackie as she stood and headed for the entryway. He dropped it around her shoulders. “Maybe find out where Mickey’s been hiding.” He said as they left the TARDIS, leaving the doors wide open. That was just fine by him, the Doctor didn’t want to either of them to feel shut out right now.

With Jackie gone, he returned to Rose’s side, taking her hand in his, kissing her knuckles.

“Come on, Darling. You need to pull through.” He said to her in a whisper, leaning in to allow his words to brush against her ears. “It was Lizzy taking care of Eugene, not the other way around.”
He heard something, maybe a sigh, maybe a breathy laugh, and he pulled back to examine her face. Still the same, still pale, maybe a little bit less so. But her pulse was still slow, and her skin was still cool. If Rose had responded in anyway, it was likely just a brief moment of consciousness. But still, brief was better than nothing, and so he rested his head against her side and waited.

Jackie had brought tea two hours ago. And while she stayed with him, Jack and Mickey joining as well, it was beginning to feel a bit like a memorial service. They had been telling stories about Rose until Jackie, mid-sentence, stopped and became nearly as pale as her daughter. She’d downed the rest of her cup and promptly left so she could wash the dishes, or tidy up, or something to keep herself busy.

Jack brought Mickey deeper into the TARDIS, showing him all the little recreation rooms he’d never seen before.

The Doctor stayed with Rose.

He didn’t tell them she had grown a touch cooler, that her breathing grew a little shallower, that her pulse began to stutter.

Change or death, something was on the horizon, just on the edge of it all. Either way, her days as a human was over, that he knew for certain.

He sat once more with his back against the jumpseat she was laying on, her arm draped over his shoulder so he could clutch her hand.

“If you come through this,” He began, “You’re going to be different. You’re going to see the world, the universe through a new set of eyes.” He smirked, a hint of sadness coloring it. “You’ll be able to keep up with me like never before. We’ll be able to run further, faster… but if you don’t-no.” He cut himself off. “No, I can’t think of that.” He turned kissing her hand quickly. “I can’t think of any other alternative. You’ve come to mean too much to me.”

There was no sound in the room except the hum of the TARDIS, which had grown stronger over the last few hours. She was nearly recovered, he hoped that meant Rose would be coming around soon as well.

“Charley once did something similar.” He said, letting his mind wander, the words mean nothing and everything in hopes it would lure her back to consciousness. “Instead of sending her away in the TARDIS, she snuck back on when I meant to take myself and the Old Girl to another dimension. I was cross with her for a long time, deep down. I should be cross with you, but I think…. I think I’m not because you were fully aware of the danger you were putting yourself into. Or, at least as aware as you could be, given that the TARDIS encouraged you to go to extremes. And I did trick you.” He sighed heavily. “I suppose this is as much my fault as the TARDIS and yours.”
He lulled his head in the direction of the doors as Jackie came in a few hours later, another cup of tea in hand. The Doctor smiled at her, and she gave a sad little grin in return.

“Thought you might like another cuppa,” She explained as she set the mug down beside him on the floor.

“Thank you, Jackie.” He said, watching her as she shifted about, a restless and nervous energy about her. “How are you?”

“Terrified,” She admitted. “That’s my daughter laying there. She wanted to go after you, and I let her. I didn’t stop her, and I shoulda tried harder.”

“Do you really think you could stop her?” He mused.

Jackie pursed her lips. “You didn’t know her dad, but Pete was mad. Had mad ideas and mad dreams, and I loved him for it. Much as I wish Rose was more like me, she’s her father’s daughter.”

The Doctor smiled. “We briefly encountered him a couple times. We were at your wedding.”

“Oh, mess off.” Jackie countered.

“No, we were. Me, Rose, and Jack. Back of the church. He didn’t get your middle name right.” He smirked.

“Never told Rose that.” Jackie pursed her lips. “Didn’t want her to know the bad bits about her dad.” She became thoughtful. “Police said there was a girl there, when he did. Said she looked like she mighta been a relative, but when they went to ask her about things, she was gone.” Jackie looked at him with suspicion. “Wouldn’t know about that, would you?”

“It was her.” The Doctor confirmed. “She wanted to go back and see him, and I took her. She was there with Pete when he died.”

Jackie’s eyes misted and she nodded once, looking away at the rotor for a moment.

“Don’t always know what to think ‘bout you, you know. Came swanning in, turned our lives upside down, took my daughter away.” She shook her head, but still wouldn’t look at him. “One moment, you’re the alien that brought trouble to my door, next you’re the man who let my little girl meet her dad. You, Doctor, are like the best and wo- Oh my God, what’s happening to her!?”

The Doctor, on Jackie’s shriek, twisted and got to his knees to look at Rose.

She was glowing gold, wisps of what looked like vortex energy coming from her slightly parted lips.

He scrambled, grabbing her wrist and pressing his fingers to her pulse point, feeling her heart rate slow down to nothing.

Not a beat, not a flutter. Nothing.

He stopped breathing, waited, counted.

Change, or death.

Change.
Or death.

*Please be change, please, please, please be change ....*

He closed his eyes, not daring to reach out to her, afraid of what he would find on the other end.

*Thump-thump.*

*Thump-thump-thump.*

*Thump-thump-thump-thump.*

His eyes shot open as Rose took in a deep breath, her new, double heartbeat becoming stronger and more steady.

“What the bloody hell is going on, Doctor?” Jackie demanding. “What happened to Rose?”

“She’s on the mend.” He replied, slowly getting up, turning to meet her. “But I think there’s something you should know.”

The crack in the room had Rose opening her eyes. She blinked, because something looked off, but the sensation didn’t fade. Rose frowned, because she knew *where* she was, but it looked different. She just couldn’t put her finger on why. But the crack, that was a slap. She knew that was a slap.

She looked to the side, and there was the Doctor and her mother standing in front of the console. Her mother looked at the Doctor like she had just been told something upsetting, but she wasn’t angry. And he, he looked genuinely surprised.

Her mum looked tired, far more tired than normal. No, she didn’t. She was the same, but there was something different.

“What’s going….” Rose stopped, half sitting up, her arms against her sides. It wasn’t just her sight that changed. There was something different inside her. “Doctor?” She asked, getting up the rest of the way and slowly putting her hands on her chest, over each side. There was a beat on each side, and right now they were racing.

She had two hearts.

“Rose,” He said calmly, coming immediately to her side. He gently took her hands off her chest, holding them in his hands, giving them a little squeeze. “Rose, what do you remember?”

“I…” she frowned, trying to think. “I remember… the TARDIS… she got me to look at this… this light…”

“That, my darling, was the time vortex. Something no one, not even a time lord, is supposed to look into.”

“Oh,” She said, both hearts beating rapidly.

And then she heard it, not really in a word, but it was more than a feeling. More than a flash of images.
It wasn’t the Doctor. It was feminine, it was warm and familiar. She’d heard it before in her mind, saying words with her, sharing a body while their souls merged for a moment to save the idiot they loved.

“She’s, Rose choked out, looking up at the ceiling. “She’s in my head. Like, more than she was before. An’, an’ my hearts… I have two hearts. I’m… what….”

“That part, I’m afraid, is my fault.” He grimaced.

“Yeah, it’s why he got the smack of a life time, an’ I ain’t done with ‘im yet.” Jackie growled, crossing her arms and staring at the back of the Doctor’s head.

“When it was over, when you… well, we’ll discuss what you did after the vortex another time. But after you let it go, you were a bit weak. I thought to try and help you out by giving you something an old acquaintance had brewed for me. However, I gave you the wrong one.”

“So,” Rose began. “You gave me somethin’ that turned me into a Time Lord?”

“A Gallifreyan,” The Doctor corrected. “I have no idea if you’ll regenerate, and I frankly don’t have a wish to find out anytime soon.”

Rose nodded slowly, letting that sink in.

She did something bad, something that almost killed her by the sounds of it. She’d been out of it, for a few hours, she knew. How she knew, she didn’t know, though at least she couldn’t tell down to the second. And during that time, the Doctor had made a mistake and now she wasn’t human anymore. At least not technically. With the exception of the alien feeling in her chest, and her sharper vision, it didn’t seem all that different than what she was used to.

“Okay,” She said eventually.

“Okay?” The Doctor repeated, confused.

“Yeah, jus’, alright.” She nodded again, slowly; brow furrowed as she met his eyes. He looked genuinely taken aback. “Wha? Expect me to get mad at you for savin’ my life?” She smiled, tongue sticking out the corner of her mouth just a touch.

“No,” He replied. “I was more concerned you’d take issue with the fact I took away your humanity.”

“Just a species.” Rose shrugged. “Doesn’t change who I am. Still look the same, yeah? I didn’t change faces, did I?”

“No, no, you’re still you. Still wonderfully you.” He smiled, dropping one of her hands to cup her cheek. “And even if you do change faces down the road, I will still love you.”

She smiled at that, leaning in and kissing him squarely on the lips. “Better not try and send me away again or you’ll be the one with the new face.” She warned against his lips.

“I’ll keep that in mind.” The Doctor replied, shifting his hand in her hair and kissing her back, much more deeply than she had.

“Now, really, in front of Jackie?” Jack’s voice broke them apart, and Rose buried her face in the
Doctor’s shoulder and laughed.

“You have a knack for walking in on our moments. Don’t be so sure it was your headache inducing existence that caused me to leave you behind.” The Doctor said, probably turning his head away to say it over his shoulder.

“You like me. I know, I have the memory of your lips to prove it.” Jack countered.

“We were all going to die.” The Doctor verbally waved it off.

“You keep telling yourself that.” Jack teased, the leer in his voice earning a chuckle out of Rose.

“Not sure I wanna know what you all get up to in this thing. Can she eat? She allowed to eat after turning into a… whatever you turned my daughter into?” Jackie asked, and Rose lifted her head to see her mum nearly back to normal.

“Food is likely the best thing for her, Jackie.” The Doctor assured, shifting his hold on Rose once more to help her stand, his fingers not leaving her once in the process. “Food, and likely more rest.”

“Right, well, before you lot take off again, we’ll order in. You can explain to me what’s different about my daughter.” Jackie said as she headed out the TARDIS.

“You coming with us, Mickey?” Jack asked as they all started to follow.

“You going? Whaddabout your job?” Mickey countered.

“I’ve been with Torchwood nearly a hundred years,” Jack replied incredulously. “I think I’m owed some vacation time; don’t you think?”

“Beautiful,” Rose said, as she looked over the red, rocky cliffs before her. Bird like creatures soaring above the canyon below, oblivious to their presence, or maybe just ignoring them.

The Doctor was at her side, holding her hand. He wasn’t cooler than her anymore, she hadn’t realized that when she’d first woken up a few days ago. And neither of them was used to the casual touch of skin to skin awakening their telepathic connection. It had always needed to be the temples, but now it didn’t. Now, she got a litany of how lovely she was, how lucky he was, and a couple of instances when he wondered if he’d remembered to turn the kettle off, and where he’d managed to put his favorite spanner. He’d had a good laugh at some of her own casual thoughts slipping through, but they would work on that.

“It is,” he agreed, though she knew he meant you are. She smiled like he had anyway, her hearts fluttering in a way that still gave her a bit of a fright. He squeezed her hand, reassuring her, reminding her to breathe properly. “Now that you’re… now that you’re … different, longer lived, how long are you planning on staying with me?” He asked.

She smirked. “Think now that I’m alien, I’m gonna go off on my own?”

“You might,” He smiled back. “Take a clipping of the old girl, grow her yourself, take off with Jack.”

“No, not goin’ anywhere with him.” Rose said with such certainty the Doctor laughed. “No, I think
I might just stay with you forever.”

“Forever?” He repeated, “Sure about that?”

“Yeah, pretty sure.”

“Good.” He said, letting go of her hand and bringing her closer, wrapping his arms around her. He kissed her head, and Rose sighed happily.

It had been, officially, a year. At some point, through all the running and traveling, of alien planets and trips through time, a year had passed since she took his hand and never looked back. It felt like eons ago, most days, since she was merely a shop girl. Like he’d been fresh from the war and was still aching to find his people, his home planet. Two lost souls, looking fora hand to hold and an adventure around every corner.

And now here they stood on an alien planet, the Doctor and Rose, together watching the sun set on the anniversary of the first day of the rest of their lives.

There would be so very many more to come.

Chapter End Notes

This is the end.

I want to thank you all for following this story, whether you were here from the very beginning or jumped in along the way.

There may, at a later date, be an epilogue added to it which would be a stepping stone into a sequel that might happen. I will not make promises because this took over three years to finish. So many things happened along the way that took away the inspiration to write it, and I don't want that to happen again, so I won't be posting a story until I know I have the time and the drive to finish it.

An answer to a question was posed as to whether or not what Ohila said was supposed to happen was the original plot. It was not. Admittedly after 3 years I don't remember precisely what I had had in mind, but Rose was always meant to become like him, and the Doctor was never meant to regenerate at the end.

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