Justify My Thoughts Of Flight

by impossiblesongs

Summary

She's River, but not his River. Her name is Melody Pond-Smith. - 11/River AU(parallel universe)

Notes

AN: This happened because I have way too much time on my hands. This is like a walking paradox that's not really a paradox with a lot of the companions snuggled right inside of the story. Sort of. Hopefully this goes somewhere. Title from Edmund's "Thoughts Of Flight" because Arthur Darvill is friggin amazing and that song is brilliant. Unfortunately no beta.
One.

Doctor: "I just want to say, you know you have never been very reliable."

Tardis: "And you have?"

Doctor: "You didn't always take me where I wanted to go."

Tardis: "No, but always took you where you needed to go."

(6x04 "The Doctor's Wife")

One.

He's running. He's had no companion for quite some time and his wife is gone. Darillium has happened quite a long while ago as well. So he doesn't do it anymore. He's done with searching the universe and space seems like the proper isolation if he just wanders. He doesn't let the worlds around him burn though, if he has any say in it that is. The world always gave him places to go and especially Earth. It gave him companions that he will never forget and no matter how much it hurts he will defend those worlds until his last breath.

He's travelling aimlessly and without care now. He's reached the depths of unreachable territory when it comes to space. A long endless travel with nothing in sight because when you're this far out it seems it takes centuries to even graze past another living life form.

He's okay with that. He's done with trying to find new land and new adventures and new reasons to try.

It's no surprise that he doesn't sense when things are going a bit wrong anymore. It's comes as secondary nature to ignore signs of danger but the Tardis definitely shouldn't be making that noise.

It definitely shouldn't black out and he shouldn't suddenly feel her drained of all her power.

He hasn't landed anywhere in a very long time so the silence and lack of motion the Tardis hums as she travels through space feels much too still. Gravity. Yes, he feels gravity.

It's dark, not entirely pitch black for a faint glow remains yet he can feel warmth piling from outside the closed wooden doors. He's not sure he wants to be blinded by warmth when he has taken to the cold so intimately.

Still, he's already pressed against the doors and can feel the warmth radiating. It's the sun, he's sure. And it's definitely Earth.

He doesn't want to need anymore. He doesn't want to be where River is not going to be anymore, to where he isn't able to follow, to where she will never again follow him.

But defeat is defeat and he can't fight anything anymore.

He pulls open the doors and he feels it then. Something is off. Something is off and very not good. This is earth but it's not earth. Air the same, land the same, humans are humans and yet it's… not the
same.

The doors shut just as he steps out. He decides he should find out where he is so he turns and tries to get back into his blue box but the doors don't budge.

He uses the key, it doesn't turn. Sonic, doesn't do wood. He lets his head thud against the doors with a sigh.

He finds a shop and picks up a newspaper, the only logical source at this point. The aroma is full of caffeine and sweets.

*Leadworth.* His jaw tightens and he goes stone stiff, his hands almost taking to tearing the thin paper from stark anger.

Then it's all gone. It's all gone because he knows that sound clouding up inside his brain; he's far too familiar with it.

He waits for the recognition but it never comes. So he finally turns in the direction he knows the sound came from.

Her hair is in a lazy ponytail, curls unraveling from their hold because they are as wild as she is, and she's sitting across a child. She's there, his River. So young, so, so young. He can't look away because the more he watches the more it is evident that it's not *his* River.

This isn't good. This isn't remotely okay because he's feeling the dread pool at his stomach and its startling clear where he is now.

It's another world. Literally. This dimension is not possible to be in right now and yet here he stands. This could be causing the whole of reality somewhere else to rip itself apart.

He should be running towards the Tardis, breaking down the doors no matter how long it takes because this alternate reality is going to obliterate any of the other parallel worlds out there simply by his presence in it. He's not even sure how many there are, he's only been to one and it did come with a cost.

He's suddenly taken with nausea because this could also be the exact universe Rose is in and like a cruel taste of fate that is his life it has a River in it too.

"Are you alright?"

And the Doctor recognizes *that* voice.

Rory is several years older, grey haired and looking at him with a worried brow, glasses hanging low on his nose. "You look like you're about to faint, here," Rory pulls out a chair from the closest table, "sit down, I'm a nurse. Mickey, can I get some water over here?"

If the Doctor wasn't already pale he must look like death as another man appears from behind the counter with a fresh glass of water.

"You alright, mate?" Mickey asks, handing him the glass. Mickey Smith. Right in front of him.

The Doctor has to swallow the lump in his throat before nodding, "I'm fine."

"Okay, I'm not buying it." Rory sighs, "You look like you've seen a ghost."

"You could say that." The Doctor downs the whole glass in three gulps.
"Right, I'm taking you to the hospital, Mickey tell my daughter I'll call her later yeah?" Rory places a comforting hand on the Doctor's arm.

"No problem, Mr. Williams. I'll go tell Mels right now." Mickey flashes a quick smile before wandering off on his way.

"Okay, come on." Rory helps the Doctor stand and he's too dazed to protest.

XXX

Melody watches Jack enjoy his hot chocolate. He has a moustache of foam tracking above his lip. Her little Jack, only five years old today.

"Hi Mickey!" The child smiles wide as Mickey walks towards them.

Mickey smiles back, "Hey, little man. How's your hot chocolate?"

"It's brilliant!" Jack giggles.

"Pleased to hear it." Mickey ruffles at the small boy's dark brown hair.

"And what brings you to our side of the table, Mr. Smith?" Melody smirks.

"Your dad had to take some bloke to the hospital. The guy seemed pretty out of it, said he'd ring you later." Mickey nodded.

"That's dad, always taking to the wounded." Melody mused, sipping at her own warm coffee.

"How are you holding up?" Mickey sunk down on the seat next to her.

He had that look in his eye. The look everyone around her kept throwing in her direction for the last five months.

"I'm fine." She sighed. Those two words are almost all she seems to say lately. People keep asking and that is the only answer she is willing to give.

Mickey smiled, "You need anything just ask. Catch you later, Jack."

Melody watched her friend walk back to help the awaiting customers. "I'm absolutely fine." She mumbled.

"Mummy, are we going to see nan after this?" little Jack licked at the foam on his lips.

"I'm sure your grandmother would love a visit since you're grandfather has run out on us yet again." Melody smiles, napkin in hand as she wipes at her son's lip. "Come on, then. Finish up."

XXX

The Doctor is sitting down as Rory puts his stethoscope against the Doctor's chest. He can tell by the raised brow Rory is finding more than one heartbeat.

Rory slowly pulls away and lays his stethoscope on the nearby table. "Sounds like you're having an anxiety attack. That or you've got more than one heart." Rory muses, a smile working its way onto his face.

"Some say even one heart is too many," the Doctor replies.
Rory's face, although aged, is still fierce with expression as his eyes soften and a hand comes to rest on the Doctor's shoulder. "What's your name?"

He contemplates making up a name but Rory's standing in front of him. Rory Williams, the last centurion.

"People just call me the Doctor."

Rory grins, "I don't think I can put that down on paper."

"No need," The Doctor pops up from his sitting position, "I'm fine. Really, I am. Thank you for your kindness. But I should be off. I don't belong here."

"Well no one really belongs anywhere, do they? You just sort of land someplace and either you move on or you find something worth sticking around for." Rory shrugged, "Then sometimes you're dragged back to places because you need something familiar."

Rory dug into his pockets and pulled out a picture before handing it to the Doctor, "That's my daughter, Melody."

River, the Doctor felt his hearts grow tight as his finger traced over her face in the small photo.

"She moved off to London but she lost her husband five months ago so she and her son are back in Leadworth." Rory's voice trailed off. "I'm sorry I'm not sure why I'm telling you all of this."

"She's beautiful." The Doctor handed the photograph back to Rory, hearts breaking ever more potently as soon as it was out of his hands.

"She really is." Rory agreed, his voice fond and full of love. "But don't let that fool you she can hold her own better than most blokes."

"I can imagine." The Doctor could feel his voice tremble.

He can feel Rory watching him.

"I shouldn't even be at the hospital my hours are up. My wife is going to do my head in." Rory shook his head.

"A real firecracker, eh?" the Doctor smirked.

"To put it mildly, yeah." Rory chuckled. "Why don't you pop over for a cup of tea?"

"Oh, no. No. I really should get going."

"You'd be doing me a favor. Amy can't kill me if I bring home witnesses."

He really should refuse. He doesn't belong here.
Two.

Just as Rory pushes the door open the ruckus is heard from the kitchen, pans clanking and the familiar voice of Amelia Pond a sore blessing to the Doctor's ears.

"Roranicus, that better be you! What did I tell you about leaving Melo-" The woman that had faded before him stopped dead in her feet at the sight of joint company.

"Bringing home strays again?!" Amy griped.

Rory only grasped firmly at the Doctor's shoulders and pushed him forward as if to use him as a shield. "This is the… uh, the Doctor."

"He'll be staying for dinner I suppose?" Amy inquired.

"If it's not too much trouble." The Doctor added.

"Of course not," Amy waved a hand, "we've got a plate permanently set for Mr. William's guests since he seems to drag them home anytime he has some explaining to do. Rory, kitchen, now."

"Just take a seat, won't be long now." Rory motioned over to the couch before following his wife.

Rory almost smacked right into Amy when she spun around once in the kitchen, the usual raised brow eyeing him, "Explain."

"Okay, it's not what you think." Rory started.

"Oh, really?" Amy frowned, "Rory, I told you to take Melody out of the house for a reason. She needs to leave the house and she needs to start dealing with what happened. For her sake and for Jack." Amy turned back towards the stove, "So, the Doctor, eh? Doctor who?"

"Just the Doctor." Rory explained with a shrug.

XXX

The Doctor wandered around the Pond's living room, his eyes growing so much more tired as they landed on various family photos that his Ponds never got to have. Photos of River as an infant and aging in time as it should be with a family that has memories and moments shared in the right order.

The life his Ponds never had because of him.

A certain photo causes him to pause, he picks up the frame and stares in disbelief.

It's River. A wedding photo obviously but…

It's his tenth.

River married his Tenth incarnation. Well not his tenth obviously, but…

The picture starts so blur and he realizes it's because his hands are shaking.

"You look sad."
The Doctor jumps and finds a small child looking up at him, eyes too old and knowing for a boy his age and the Doctor almost thinks he's looking into a mirror. He places the frame back on the spot he found it, shame bubbling up underneath his skin.

"So do you." The Doctor manages to rasp out. "What's your name?"

"Jack." The boy tilts his head, "What's yours?"

"I'm the Doctor." And he finds himself starting to smile.

"You're different." Jack says.

"How so?" The Doctor has moved closer to the boy, kneeling down in front of him.

"You just are." Jack's hand reaches out and tugs at his bowtie. "And you're funny."

"Well thank you. I think." The Doctor smiles again, realizing that it almost hurts his cheeks to do so because he's not smiled in a very long while.

"Okay, Jack," Amy's voice breaks the silence that has taken up the room, "stop bothering the poor man. Off you go. You, raggedy man, help me set the plates."

Raggedy man.

He can only nod blindly because Amy, this Amy, has never met him before and yet she calls him what his Amelia use to.

"Well come on now, the plates aren't going to set themselves." Amy called back to him.

It seems he hadn't moved an inch so he wills his legs to move and he follows her into the kitchen.

Rory's eyes widen slightly at the sight of him as he follows Amy into the kitchen and the man smiles sheepishly as if he had forgotten the Doctor was here.

Amy brings down some plates from the cupboard and hands them to the Doctor, "I imagine you know what to do with these."

A small little smirk and a twinkle in her eye giving him a reason to smile back, "I'm sure I can figure it out."

So the Doctor sets the plates on the table and takes to placing the utensils in proper order. As he does so he's reminded of the last dinner he had with River at Darillium. It comes to him then that River is probably going to join them for this dinner. Well, not River, not his River, but this River.

He realizes he should probably be muttering apologies to the Ponds about having to be somewhere and take off but it's all too much.

Then his thoughts are being confirmed from behind him.

"Rory, go get Melody will you? She's been her room since you decided to play nurse earlier." He hears Amy say and he can't help himself. He wants to have it all for one last time.

The Doctor glances at Rory just as he leaves the kitchen and then lets his attention go back to Amy.

"So, Doctor, what kind of near death symptoms did you experience that my dear husband had to go and save you from?" He could hear the smile in Amy's tone, her back to him as she tended to the
dinner cooking on the stove.

"He does that often, does he?"

Amy chuckled, "He can't help himself most of the time and sometimes it's a nuisance but it's nice having people around when your loved ones move out or away. This house gets too quiet sometimes."

"Quiet is very bad." The Doctor mutters.

"So it is." Amy sighs and turns to him, "I mean Rory and I are well off into our fifties now and we should be glad to have the free time for just us but it gets lonely. We have a small family, just a daughter. And this house just isn't as lively as it used to be. Melody was a challenge, there's no other way to put it but she's a grown girl now. It's still hard nonetheless, though."

He nods in agreement, "Well, when you have someone around and they become a fixture in that space you occupy life shifts a bit. Little by little this person starts adding life lines of their own and it takes a while but one day you find you can't remember a time when they weren't there and then you can't imagine them not being there. Then that one day comes along, without warning, and things change. Then lives change and people change, people grow or they leave or some of them…"

His voice catches in his throat, he swallows away the thick tremor his voice wants to strangle him with and continues, "Some of them get taken away. There was life before them and there will be life after them but it hurts all the same."

He meets Amy's eyes and he sees warmth there and it's enough to make him feel half-whole again. "It seems you've been through quite a hardship too." She comments, almost all too knowingly.

Jack pops into the kitchen and Amy jumps a bit. "Jack, you're going to give me a heart attack!" Amy shakes her head, "He's always doing that, coming in out of nowhere." Amy grimaces and turns her attention back to the food.

"Sorry gran." Jack settles into a chair at the table.

The Doctor smirks at the young boy.

Rory makes his way back into the kitchen, "She's on her way down." Rory sounds relieved, victorious even.

The Doctor gets a feeling he's not the only one who's been cutting himself off from the living. Even when they don't belong to the same universe he and River seem to be somewhat in sync.

The moment she comes into his sight it's like breathing for the first time after being drowned. His throat constricts and his lungs gasp silently in his chest, body going stiff and exhaustion taking claim on him.

"Melody, this is the Doctor." Amy chimes in.

"Another one of father's play dates. How lovely." She offers the Doctor a small smile before taking a seat next to her son.

Her voice is like music to his ears. He feels Rory's hands on his shoulders guiding him into the seat next to Melody's.
"Everyone in their assigned seats, then?" Amy asks, maneuvering herself around the table, dropping off two plates filled with food onto the center of the hard surface. Rory helps her with the other three plates.

Rory falls into his chair and smiles, "Let's get this dinner started, shall we?"
"What is it exactly that you do, Doctor?" Amy asked. "Mr. Pond, pass the salt."

"This and that mostly I try to keep myself busy, that usually leads to me getting tangled up in shenanigans but not all the time. Well... most of the time but definitely not all the time." He nods but Amy keeps looking at him funny.

"Most of the time you say?" the redhead raises a brow.

"Okay," the Doctor huffs, "all of the time."

"Mother," Melody scolds.

"Oh, I'm just weighing him out! He's a big boy he can take care of himself, can't you Doctor?" Amy grins, taking yet another sip of her wine (third glass, actually). "Even if you do look like a toddler." She adds, giggling.

"Okay, I think that's enough for you." Rory pulls the glass out of her hand.

The Doctor notices Riv- Melody, he reminds himself - Melody hasn't even touched her food.

Rory and Amy have taken to arguing over the wine bottle Amy is holding out of Rory's reach so the Doctor takes that as an opportunity to try and talk to her.

He racks at his brain for something inconspicuous and something to be passed off as conversational and not to sound as if he's prying.

He finds the obvious right in front of him. Of course. The Last Centurion and The Girl Who Waited, he's never going to be able to stop marveling at them. "They are something, aren't they?"

Melody seems startled by his attention. "Oh, yes." She hurriedly agrees. "Mum and dad have always been quite a sight."

"I imagine it runs in the family." He muses; the sound of her voice makes his chest tighten unbearably.

Her expression is quite torn. "That's very nice of you to say."

"Going on what I've seen and what I've heard it's not exactly me being nice it's just finally being confirmed as a fact."

He could tell she was puzzlement with his kindness. He's not sure if she hasn't experienced it enough and that why she's suspicious or it's something else but it bothers him deeply in any case. It's almost as if she doesn't know she's the most brilliant thing to have ever soared across the sky.

Then he remembers she probably doesn't know. He doubts this River (Melody) has jumped out of spaceships and into a blue police box like it's a taxi. He doubts this River (Melody!, his inner voice screams, a sort of mental scolding which really isn't helping) would trust him enough to catch her when she falls. He doubts he can even try to be anything but a stranger to her now.

One thing he is sure of is that she's lived a stable life with her parents like she should have because
here she lives without him.

"Forgive me for saying this but you look immensely sad." Her voice pulls him out of his thoughts.

"Eh, rough decade." He tries to make it sound light and casual but he can see she's not buying it. She nods anyway but her eyes tear away from him and he misses the attention already. "I lost someone."

Melody's eyes widen and almost sparkle when she looks at him and it's heartbreaking because it's genuine sadness that shines behind them. Not the doe eyed love struck sparkle, the pain of loss and recognition that someone else out there knows what it feels like.

"I'm sorry." She mumbles. "I didn't mean to…"

"Not at all." He smirks, letting his hand reach out and simply brush his fingers against her own.

Amy and Rory watch their daughter and their guest conversing. The two can't seem to keep their eyes off of each other.

Rory nudges Jack gently to follow him out of the room and Amy follows in suit, one more look back at her daughter seeming to finally be opening herself up to someone.

XXX

Amy has just tucked in Jack and she meets Rory at the end of the hallway.

"I don't know how you found him but you need to get him to stick around." She whispers fiercely, poking his chest with one firm finger.

He winces and shoos her hand away, "Amy, I can't exactly make him do anything now, can I?"

"Oh, of course you can." Amy insists.

Rory gapes, "Amy-"

"No, look Rory, Melody doesn't speak to anyone and she's talking to him. A guy she barely met. She's been seeing that wacky therapist for weeks now and she hasn't even said a word to him about what happened, god knows she doesn't talk to us either!"

"He's not a therapist! We can't pay him to get Melody to talk." Rory snaps.

"Keep your voice down!" Amy smacks his shoulder. "And who says we can't?!"

"Oh, God," Rory pinches at the bridge of his nose, he feels a headache coming on, "Nope, too much. I'm going go to rake leaves."

He disappears towards the front lawn and ignores his wife's threats.

XXX

By the time the Doctor and Melody notice everyone else has discretely left the dinner table she offers to make some tea.

When it's ready she hands him a cup and sits back in the chair beside him.

"It was my wife." He reveals to her.
"What happened?"

The Doctor smiles, he feels it the only thing he can do because it seems like the proper response to give. He doesn't want to acknowledge why but deep down he knows it's because he wants to hide behind that smile a little bit longer. Just try to shove it down and bury it one smile after another.

"Time." He finally says and notes that her hands have started shaking.

She places her cup on the table and offers a smile of her own, "I lost my husband. It's sort of ironic." She chuckles, "Two strangers occupying a mirrored residency in grief. Small world we live in."

"Quite the contrary. The world is anything but small. It's old and worn and full of disasters, but new and reborn and beautiful all at the same time. It takes footsteps to pave way to wondrous and devastating things that come hand in hand with each other, both life lines that need to exist to carry on functioning. You have to sail the oceans and even fight the darkest of gods to find that piece that is missing. The world isn't small, life is just impossibly short and most of us don't get a chance to see how big it is until you meet that someone who expands everything around you. Makes the journey never-ending so long as they are there by your side and nothing is impossible. And then sometimes the world closes in and it's too late to prologue the inevitable."

"His name was John."

"Her name was River."

XXX

The Doctor had finally been able to drag himself away from her, from this. Or more accurately she pulled away from him. Time had stretched on and it was late now, time for bed. The sky had turned from the light pinkish-yellow sky of earlier to a deep blue, the only consolation the bright stars shining in small bursts of light as if paving way from the darkness.

It was time, he reminded himself.

It's no help that just as he is about to reach for the front door another reason to linger is placed in front of him with the voice of Amy Pond stiling his escape.

"And where exactly do you think you're headed off to?"

He turns around to find her standing with a hand on her hip, not exactly cross but definitely ready to give out a scolding.

"I believe I've worn out my welcome." The Doctor replies. "It was a lovely dinner I can't thank you enough for it, I haven't sat down with a family for dinner in a long time."

"Rory told me you're new in town, is that right?" Amy asked.

"Oh, I'm just passing through."

Amy ignores that, "So you don't have any current housing then?"

"No, no, just passing through, me." He repeats, and if he wasn't nervous before (which he had been because this is just not supposed to be happening) he is definitely nervous now.

This isn't his Amelia but he knows enough to know that that particular face means Amy is plotting away in that impossible ginger head of hers. That face is up to no good because his Amelia knew
how to use it to get her way and he's positive this Amelia knows how to use it as well.

"Nonsense! Stay and smell the roses, Doctor."

She's smiling now and, oh god, he should start running away now.
Rory's been outside for a while now. Raking leaves was a much more favorable option than Amy badgering him into holding the Doctor hostage, which let's be honest that's exactly where that conversation would have been headed.

He's sliding back inside the house from the backyard and that's when he hears it. That sly 'closing in on your prey' tone.

"So you don't have any current housing then?"

"No, no, just passing through, me." the Doctor's voice holds a slight tremble.

"Nonsense! Stay and smell the roses, Doctor." A pause, "We have a guestroom set and everything Rory insisted on making me get it ready for you!"

He slams the door and charges straight into the living room, disbelief not even close to what he's feeling right now, "Oh, dear God Amy!"

His wife turns to him, mouth agape and a slight guilt sets on her expression now that she's been caught.

"Doctor, I am so sorry, forgive my wife. She's set in her ways and most of the time it's not her place at all." He sends a glare Amy's way and that silences her from the obvious retort she was about to make.

"It's fine, really." the Doctor insists.

"No, it's not fine!" Amy shouts.

"Amy-" Rory starts.

"No, Rory!" she turns her attention to the Doctor now. "Doctor, please you can't go. You're the first person Melody's seemed to trust in a very long time and I can't just let you walk out of that door like Mr. Pond over here can. I know I don't know you and you don't know us and it's not on you to help us but the fact is we need you. We need your help, please, please, I'm begging you."

The Doctor glanced at Rory and could see that Amy was saying everything he wouldn't allow himself to.

"You haven't even told us your real name, just that you're called the Doctor." Amy adds. "I have half a guess that it's not necessarily for medical reasons and yet from the moment I saw you I couldn't think of anything else to call you that would sound more appropriate. I literally don't know anything about you but I get the feeling that you've saved so many lives already, of that I am certain. No one can be that kind and yet look so alone unless they have had to carry several lives on their shoulders. Please, stay."

XXX

Rory had excused himself and Amy into the kitchen.
The Doctor collapsed onto the sofa. He ran a hand over his face and shut his eyes tightly. He should have known something like this would happen. He should have known better but he never lets things be, does he?

And Amy, Amelia Pond. Even in a world where he doesn't belong his dear Pond has faith in him, faith that never wavers. Faith that in the end does nothing but lead them into his own messes.

XXX

Rory pulls a chair out and sits down at the table, head falling into his hands. His silence is unnerving and it seems to stretch forever and he won't look at her.

"Please say something." Amy begs.

"This was our problem. Ours, Amy."

"You know he can help her." She slides into the chair beside him. "You know it, you felt it didn't you? There's something about him. He just fits, here, with us."

"Rory." Amy pulls at his hands hiding his face away from her.

"I know." He admits. "And this is going to make me sound like a nutter but she looks at him like… like she looked at John. Not even like he's a replica, just… and the way he looks at her…" Rory shakes his head, not even knowing how any of this could possibly make sense.

They both look up as the Doctor walks into the kitchen.

"I'm going to need to get some things sorted out."

Amy stands, "Of course, Doctor. Anything you need to do."

"I won't be long." He nods, "Perhaps by morning..."

He doesn't finish the sentence and with that he leaves the room and they both hear the front door a shut a few moments later.

XXX

He walks his way back to his Tardis, the night silent and skies fogless and startlingly clear. The night is almost too silent which only leaves every thought in his head sounding impossibly loud.

Finally a few feet away from his beloved blue box he falls forward, sliding down to the concrete beneath his feet. He would cry, he would… he should but he just stays slumped there on the ground. His only support holding him together was the hard surface of his Tardis that he's scrunched up against, limbs starting to ache beneath his skin as time passes.

It is with great surprise that finally as he reaches up to lay a hand on her blue doors that the door falls open against his palm, creaking a bit at the hinges.

Scrambling up to his feet is difficult but he does so quickly and is soon shutting the doors behind him. He locks them.

On the steps leading up to the console he eyes two suitcases. He maneuvers around them and starts pulling at levers and pressing buttons hoping for some sign of life so he can run.

_You watch us run._
The memory of River's voice rings so clear in his head. Clearer than it has since he lost her and the texture of how real it sounds takes his breath away. Tears start to sting against his eyelids but he keeps them shut tightly, refusing them a chance to bring forth his grief.

He's cried once since she died. Once. Letting himself do it again has been avoided spectacularly since he traded those feeling in for fake smiles and loneliness.

The Tardis makes no sound. Not even a fragment of a ghost lingers in the room.

He allows himself a single breath of defeat, accepts it and picks up the suitcases. He steps out of the Tardis knowing that she probably won't open her doors for him again. Not for a very long while.

The Ponds thank him again when they've led him to the spare room across from theirs, shutting the door behind them.

For the first time in months when he shuts his eyes he falls asleep without nightmares but instead a voice chiming comforts that starts to settle in his bones.

"Oh, my beautiful idiot. You have what you've always had." His Tardis had said, "You've got me."

XXX

Amy and Rory are having their morning coffee when Melody walks in. They stiffen considerably.

"Morning." Their daughter mumbles.

Amy kicks at Rory's foot from underneath the table.

"Uh, morning." He squeaks out.

Amy's face then brightens considerably. "Got a few errands I'd like you to run, Melody."

Melody's eyes widen, "Mother dear, can't dad do it he's going out anyways."

"Full time shift at the hospital." Rory adds quickly, clearing his throat. "I have to do... medical things."

He shrugs at the look Amy throws him. Melody fills her own cup of caffeine and mutters several complaints before walking out of the kitchen.

Amy swats Rory's arm with the newspaper in her hand, "Medical things?!"

"It's what sprang to mind!" He says in his defense.

"Way to go stupid face now go get ready so you can drop her off before she tries to find a way out of it."

XXX

"Hah! Melody Smith. You're a sight for sore eyes today." Mickey says as she leans against the countertop. "Figured you'd be hibernating for the rest of the season."

Melody grins, "Cheeky. I'll have the usual."

"Vanilla Latte, coming up." Mickey shakes his head as she starts to rummage inside her purse for money. "On the house Mels."
"Mickey…" she starts.

"Just sit yourself down, woman." He smiles.

"Cheeky and demanding!" She laughs and does as he says, sitting at her favorite table up front where the windows are and she can distract herself with the people walking by.

Mickey never takes long with preparing orders, so he's setting her latte down on the table a few moments later. "There you go."

He pulls out the chair opposite her and sits down.

"Anything on your mind?" she asks, knowing that face of his too well to know he's probably going to try to drag her into something. Possibly something sociable, with people and right now she hates people.

They are always going on about how sorry they are for her loss and how she's doing and it had grown to be the only thing ever talked about anymore.

He grins. "My gran's birthday is coming up and I wanted to know if you'd help me with the planning."

"What's in it for me?"

"I don't know, I mean," he sighs, "You've just been feeling poorly, I know that. You don't talk about it but I know. I know you and it's completely up to you but I wouldn't mind spending quality time with one of my best mates."

Melody bites her lip. Hesitant. "Fine." She agrees trying to pull off a grimace but only ends up with a silly grin plastering itself on her face, "When do you need me?"

XXX

The Doctor steps out of his room, finally, and is hit him then. The sudden reality of what he's gotten himself into when the voice of Amy Pond reaches his ears. He follows the sound.

"Not the egg yolks Jack!"

Still, a tiny smile starts to form. When he peeks into the kitchen he sees egg shells on the floor, Jack with flour on his nose and Amy smiling down at her grandson. She turns her attention to the Doctor then as if she sensed him the moment he appeared.

"Well get in here raggedy man I made you breakfast."

Her smile is enough to calm his nerves. For now.
"Well I finally got her out of the house. Twice in a week, that's a record." Amy smiles.

"I haven't exactly been in anyone's company in ages either." The Doctor relays. He doesn't think elaborating on how long it's been would help in any way.

Well, Amelia, it's been 648 days since I saw any form of light that didn't come from inside the Tardis walls, by the way that's my time machine. Tardis – time and relative dimension in space. Actually another version of you created your daughter in that Tardis, possibly on a bunk bed I didn't exactly work out the details, but pack your bags, get the Centurion lets go see some more planets, come along Pond!

Yeah, he smirks, that wouldn't go over well at all.

"So," Amy glanced at Jack, who had busied himself up drawing on several blank sheets of paper with deep concentration, before turning her full attention back to the Doctor, "have any family around these parts?"

"I… did. I lost them. All of them, actually." He smiles, once again taking those feelings of loss and pushing them back down into his own little box of oblivion with one gesture. A gesture that should be made with happiness in the heart and light in the eyes but for him it's always served as a façade for every passing year he continues to live through.

"How did you lose them?"

The question leaves the pain growling at his continued stubbornness. It's taken to simmering gently, overflowing and begging to be released with every second that passes him by. It has aged and grown inside of him, festering beneath the skin.

"By keeping them too close. Not letting them go when it would have been the only thing to save them all." He blinks away the tears. Stubborn to the bone is what he is.

"You don't really believe that do you?" Amy frowned, "Family is keeping them too close. It's never letting go because time eventually runs out, for all of us, and you have to hold onto each other until the very last breath because in the end that's all you'll ever have. Each other."

"Oh, Pond." The Doctor took Amy's hand in his, just out of habit.

To his surprise she didn't pull away or stiffen from the sudden action but instead squeezed back gently.

The telephone in the living room started going off.

Amy excused herself.

"Well then Jack, what have you got here?" The Doctor leaned over to glance at the boy's drawing.

He pales at the sight.
It was a field. Not just any field, a field he and many others spent chasing after one other once a lazy afternoon presented itself.

A field the Doctor remembers from his childhood

Jack had drawn a field from Gallifrey.

XXX

Melody unlocked the front door.

"Mum? I'm back." She called out, leaning against the door as it shut. God, she's glad to be back. Too much sunlight and too many people are out there in the world. Chattering about and smiling at each other, it's not decent to be so happy, is it?

The house was still too silent. "Mum?"

Melody made her way into the kitchen and set down the bags of groceries she was sent out to get. There was a note on the table.

_Mels, went out for some ice cream with Jack and our new friend the Doctor. We'll have a talk when we get back. Love, mum._

Melody felt a smile spread on her face, an unnamed feeling stirring. She started putting away all of the stuff she bought to pull away from whatever that feeling was. She didn't want to think about it. Too much thinking is always a bad idea.

Not to mention she'd sort put herself in a position to deal with more people by helping Mickey plan for his grandmothers birthday party. She's dreading it already.

Perhaps some sort of medical emergency will help get her out of it. She could very well convince her father to help, she knows how persuasive she can be and her dad never could resist her of anything if she played her cards right.

She sighs. This is what it has gotten to. Planning a fake injury to get out of helping a friend. She feels horrible now for even thinking up such a plan.

XXX

"How do you do that?" Amy finds herself asking the Doctor once they've sat down at a bench near the ice cream shop; the three of them enjoying the small treat.

"Pardon?" The Doctor frowns.

"That, this… I don't even know what to call it." Amy chews on her bottom lip for a moment. "It's been two days and it already feels like I've known you for years. Which is impossible since you're all baby faced and I'm well enough to reaching ancient."

The Doctor grinned, "Oh, believe me Amelia Pond I am more ancient than you could ever be."

Amy grinned, "See! That's what I'm talking about. You say the daftest things and yet somehow I have a feeling that you're telling the truth!"

A few moments of silence passed until Amy spoke again.

"And nobody calls me Amelia. Not in ages."
He watches this Amy happily enjoying her ice cream even if it is rather cold out. His smile fades as his hearts ache at the memory of his Amelia.

He remembers one night Amy caught him sneaking around in the Tardis, asking if he did this often. Running around having adventures while she and Rory slept. She was worrying herself over her memories since they were all a timey-wimey mess in that ginger head of hers.

He told Amy to think about her saddest memory as a child. It was in 1994 and she had dropped her ice cream cone. Amy recalled what happened in her younger years and how some funny woman with red hair who was in her nightie bought her another one.

"This nice lady what did she say?" he had asked.

"Cheer up, have an ice cream." Amy had answered.

"Amy, time and space is never, ever going to make any kind of sense. A long time ago you got the best possible advice on how to deal with that. So I suggest you go and give it."

So they went to 1994 and Amy bought her younger self an ice cream cone.

Amy, this Amy, laughed and it brought him back to where he was now. Sitting at a bench with Amy and her grandson.

"It's mad isn't it?" she asked, cheeks rosy from the cool air. The wind was picking up and she shivered slightly.

"Would it be wrong to believe, in another life perhaps, that you and I did many things together?" the Doctor smiled. "You and me, Amy. Like a fairytale."

"I could believe that." Amy smiled, casting a glance at Jack. "We best get back. It's getting way to cold out here. C'mon Jack, don't want you getting a cold now do we?"

The Doctor realizes as they make their way back that every smile he had given that day was genuine. He'd forgotten how they felt, how they warmed his hearts. Smiles with actual happiness.

XXX

Melody is making some soup for dinner when she hears the front door click open and assumes it's her mother.

"Amy?" the voice calls out.

She gasps, leaving the soup and marching into the other room. There he stood, her father. "You said you had a full day of work at the hospital!"

Rory winced, "Sorry, sweetheart. It's just… you've been cooped up here for weeks. It's not healthy."

"Dad," she took a deep breath in an attempt to calm herself, "it's not your place to decide what is good for me and what isn't."

"That's not fair. My place is taking care of you, I'm your dad. That's my job. You haven't even talked about it. That's not healthy. Not for anyone."

Melody feels herself start to feel dizzy so she sits down in the armchair a few feet away. Rory is by her side immediately, kneeling down and taking her shaking hands in his.
"I don't want to talk about it." She mutters, her voice shaken and tired. "If I talk about it, it's real."

Rory wipes a tear away from his daughter's face. The first tear he's seen fall since her husband's funeral. She had cried that entire day but the next day, and the day after that, and the days following she hadn't let herself do it again.

"Why don't you go off to bed I'm sure you're tired. I'll make you a cup of tea." He offers.

She nods, "Okay."

When she stands Rory takes his little girl into his arms and wonders how she got to this. How did everything in her life go from being wonderful and happy, married to a man who loved her so fully and completely to a life full of loneliness and misery and loss?

He just doesn't understand it. He sends her off and when he takes her a cup of tea kisses her forehead and tells her to sleep. He tells her it will all be better when she wakes up. He really hopes it will be.

On his way back he sees Amy, Jack and the Doctor coming in through the front door.

Amy's smile fades when she looks at Rory properly.

"Where is she?" she asks.

Rory sighs, "Sent her upstairs."

Amy nods, turning to Jack, "Okay little man, why don't you go watch something on the tv for a bit, I'll come get you soon." Jack nods and sprints up the stairs to his room. Once he's out of sight Amy starts with the questions.

They end up in the kitchen, Amy tending to the abandoned soup, and the Doctor can only listen as Rory relays everything that had happened.

"I don't think she's going to get over this." Rory says.

"Oi, shut it Rory." Amy snaps. "Don't say that."

"Amy, she can't even say it! Even thinking about it… she's not well." he argued.

"We're just going to have to try harder." Amy insisted.

The Doctor finally spoke, "Perhaps she needs time away. From here. From everything."

Amy and Rory looked at each other.

"She won't even leave the house unless you force her to," Rory pointed out.

"You don't force her." The Doctor could feel a plan forming in his head.

"I think we went over that bit with the whole she won't leave without being forced to."

That earned Rory a smack upside the head.

"Let the Doctor finish." Amy declared, pulling out the chair beside her husband and sitting down. Both Ponds eagerly listened to what the Doctor had in mind.
FYI: The flashback/reference of the Doctor and Amy buying young Amy an ice cream comes from the minisode on Series 6 called 'Good Night'.
Melody was up early the next day. Too bloody early the sun hadn't even come up yet just grey dusky clouds. Morose and already feeding the daily overwhelming dread.

Rory was securing his bathrobe and jumped at the sight of her in the kitchen. The lights weren't even on so catching a glimpse of a shadowed figure sitting in his kitchen at four thirty in the morning isn't a usual routine for him.

The mass amount of hair that can only belong to one person gives her away though.

"Christ. You do know your dad's prone to get heart attacks pretty easily these days?"

Rory waits for a witty retort but it never comes. He sighs, doesn't even bother flicking on lights and just heads over to pour himself some of the already made coffee.

The chair beside his daughter scrapes loudly against the floor's tile when he pulls it out and takes a seat.

"We didn't mean to lie to you." He starts. "We just wish you to stop hurting and in that we will do anything and everything to make that happen. There are no limits to what me and your mum would do. You need to let this go. Not him, not John. This. This refusal to let yourself feel what is rightly yours to feel."

Melody's voice doesn't hold the usual complacent confidence when she finally does decide to speak. Even if she's not confident at all her voice never, ever fails to stay steady and sure.

"Jack needs me to be strong."

Rory want to reach over and hold her hand but knows better when to leave some things alone. "Sometimes the strongest act is to let yourself be weak when you need to. How can you be any stronger if you don't take time to acknowledge what your weaknesses are? You need to know what you're up against and sad thing is most of the time it's you against yourself."

There is silence for a good long while. When the sun finally starts to reveal itself and Rory can see Melody's features a little better he thinks what he said is sinking in bit by bit.

Knows it actually now that she looks at him.

Rory finally takes a sip of his coffee and it is horrid. It has gone cold and he spits it back into the mug immediately.

Melody chuckles and takes the mug from him, "I'll make you another."

A smile breaks out across his face. Hope fills him up. Hope that she can move forward instead of staying at a standstill and burying herself alive.

The mug is soon placed in his hands and it's warm and perfect and amazing, "Oh, bless you."
His daughter then slides back into her chair, "By the way," Melody's sly tone makes him freeze. Now there's the unwavering confidence. This however is a very Amy-like tone. The Amy-like tone of entrapment.

"When were you going to tell me you've taken a lodger and have let him move in across your room?"

Rory grins sheepishly, "Right. That was your mum's doing."

Melody nods but she doesn't seem one bit convinced even though technically he was telling the truth. Amy did in fact corner the Doctor and Rory had no part in that.

"Of course it was." His daughter mutters before leaving the kitchen.

He's not sure who he should be more afraid of, Amy or Melody.

Both.

Both is always the right answer.

XXX

The Doctor knocked on Melody's door. Amy had busied herself getting Jack ready to go out so the Doctor could set the plan in motion. He remembers Amy's voice, strong and determined last night.

"Rory will be at the hospital, Jack and I will be off and that way she'll not be able to have an excuse."

The door is flung open then and he is greeted with her face. "Yes?"

He's stunned. Can't quite still get use to her living and breathing and so very real.

He catches himself staring and offers a smile, "I was just wondering if you'd like to join me."

Melody looks away. He can tell she's thinking up some way to turn him down lightly so he speaks before she can come up with something.

"I know we barely know each other but I find myself very at ease when I'm with you and I really would love it if you would accompany me out for a stroll." He pauses before laying out the final piece of… bait. Because that's exactly what it is there is no way around that. He pushes past his growing guilt and continues.

"I haven't talked about my wife with anyone. I did for the first time. With you. I was hoping… no. No, I'm sorry. I shouldn't be putting this on you, just forget I popped over I'll be on my way."

He starts to walk away.

"Wait!" she calls back.

He cringes. Yes, very guilty indeed.

He turns round and she smiles, "Of course I'll accompany you, Doctor."

XXX

Melody spread out one the blankets they had packed for the sort-of picnic at the park without said
picnic basket and some very cold weather.

The huddled up together and draped the other two blankets on top of them.

"How did you meet your wife?" Melody asked, hoping for the warmth to start settling in between them. "I mean, only if you want to talk about it." She rushed to point out.

"No, of course, it's fine. River and I met in one of the most difficult circumstances imaginable. In fact even when I sorted it out I'd still get headache thinking about it." He shakes his head at the ridiculousness of it all.

"Still, it was the most terrifying moment when she walking into my life. Terrifying because she was just so…" he tried to find the words to properly explain it in a way that didn't make him sound certifiably mad in this world's standards.

It's not like he could go on about mixed timelines and the alien races that stole her away from her parents, or how he use to wear her husband's face, the whole re-booting the universe and Rory dying on that Saturday before Halloween (or was it Sunday? It was definitely on a Saturday, the fourth time he died or was it the fifth?), or how she had to watch him die while she was killing him while Amy was pregnant with her all at the same time. No. No, there is no way of explaining all of that and not sound like a complete and utter madman. He's the madman with a box not the madman with a straight jacket.

"She was my future and it was obvious just by the way she was standing right in front of me. I didn't feel it at that time but deep down I knew it to be true and it scared the living daylights out of me. Then the more I saw her, the more glimpses would reveal themselves and she was mad and clever and utterly impossible. Unfathomable, even."

He glanced over at Melody and her face was gleaming.

"Just by the look on your face I can tell she changed everything, didn't she?"

"Rewrote possibly everything in the book, I dare say." He nods. "Not to mention her parents were my best friends." He winces, thinking back to Berlin in Hitler's office.

Mels regenerating into River. River glowing with glee at her new appearance then taking to pressing flush against him as she wiggled her way in-between his legs. The warmth of her body invading his personal space sending a heated shiver down his spine and thoughts, his own most secret thoughts he'd been having about her future self since the Byzantium, well… those thoughts were pulled out of his denial box that day.

Rory's hand had clasped at his shoulder just moments after River had dashed out of the room only to have a gun in her hand when she had returned.

That was a really stressful first date but he guesses he deserved it after his idea of a first date with Rose was to take her to the end of the world.

"What about you? How did you meet this John Smith?"

He expects this is going to be interesting because the first thing Melody does is roll her eyes. It's a fond but utterly ridiculous sort of mannerism and he loves those kinds of stories that accompany it.

"I met John at college. He was the genius know it all on campus, practically taught Professor Ingraham's physics class even though he hadn't even graduated yet, took over half a year for some of
Professor Dana's chemistry class, not to mention he was always sitting in on various biology classes he had already taken just because he thought he was clever."

"You don't sound impressed." the Doctor smiles.

"Not in the slightest." Melody grinned, "He was tall and thin and had ridiculous hair and he dared comment against one of my zoology papers which wasn't even in his line of study he was just trading affectionate barbs with my teacher as I handed it in. Of course everyone on the staff was so fond of him. No one could get a word in edgewise when he was going on about something."

Melody picked at the blanket, wide grin fading to a fond smile, a private smile, "Until I came along, that is."

"Had him under your thumb after that I expect."

Melody laughed, "Quite the contrary, Doctor! He drove me mad and I often wanted to strangle him with that idiotic blue tie of his. He graduated a year later and that was that, or so I thought. It wasn't until I ran into an old roommate I had when I first got to London later in the Christmas holidays that I'd run into him again."

Melody sighed, full on grinning now.

"Anyway, she invited me over for Christmas dinner and I was mad at mum for some odd thing or another so I took her up on it. I arrived, we had some wine until there was a knock at the door and low and behold he walks into her living room and I couldn't help spitting out my wine in shock. I mean, how in the world could this have happened?! And why me?!" Melody chuckled.

"Does this roommate have a name?" he asked, highly engrossed in her story and the spirit behind every word.

"She does. Did. She passed away a few years ago, was working at a shop and it exploded. Her name was Rose."

Melody feels her memories taking hold of her which doesn't let her notice that the Doctor had gone white as a sheet.

Chapter End Notes

Next part will have flashbacks of Melody & John Smith (10th Doctor)
Seven.

Chapter Notes

AN: So, this part is solely based on recollecting John Smith (10th Doctor) & Melody's story beginning exactly from the last part's revelation on how John & Melody met.

Seven.

Rose was by her side immediately offering her a napkin, "My god, Mels, you alright?"

"Fine, fine, the wine just got caught in my throat that's all." She quickly brushed Rose away, excusing herself into loo.

Melody splashed some cool water in her face and took a few deep breaths. Really? No, really? What exactly was life playing at here? If life is set on ruining Christmas then it's got a marvelous head start.

She avidly avoids John Smith for the first hour and a half until he is suddenly by her side as she's enjoying watching the snow fall from the window.

"So, Melody Pond, archeologist. That's still the title you're going for isn't it? Welll-, archeologist in training you can't be that clever to skip a few grades up. It's not like you're me after all." John's tone was mocking.

"And you're still an asinine knob. Good we've got our titles out in the open. Ready for the sword fight or are you not up for battle? Being an arse can take a lot out of a bloke."

John's smile stretched a mile wide, hand taking to scratching at the back of his neck absentmindedly.

That smile really shouldn't have been able to take her breath away.

"Haven't quite had anyone insult me in such a venomous manner in a while, miss me much then?" His grin is far too cheeky and eyes could almost pass off as... affectionate.

She scoffed, "Oh, yes dear. So much in fact that I'd like to run you over with my car so that I'll have a piece of you for myself always."

John's eyes alight, "Touché."

Melody finds she's not so set on being difficult tonight, not on Christmas. She decides to make at light conversation. "So, how do you know Rose?"

"Oh, typical human interaction for the most part of it. She was out looking for jobs and my aunt Sarah Jane offered her one part time. She's a journalist, slash investigator don't tell anyone. Anyway Rose did some research for background stories and... stuff. We ended up travelling across to the states and back. We were inseparable for a very long time."

"Well I can't help but say she deserves better." Melody smirked.
John laughed, genuinely glowing with amusement. He shook his head and caught his breath before saying, "You are a different breed Melody Pond."

"Someone has to put you in your place." She glances up at him, surprised that he's watching her intently.

"No one's ever managed to do that so effortlessly. Well done." With a small nod John walks on over to Rose and Mickey chatting away beside the Christmas tree.

Jackie's voice then comes blustering in, "Pictures, pictures, everyone gather 'round! Oh, come now, I'm having none of that bad hair nonsense Rose. Melody, come on love, you as well, get in here."

XXX

The third time Melody Pond comes across John Smith it is under the worst circumstances imaginable. It had been two years since that unexpected Christmas and she'd be lying if she said his ridiculous face hadn't come to mind more often than not during that time. She was visiting her parents in Leadworth that weekend.

XXX

"Bullocks" Rory frowned, "I use to be better at this, hold on, new game."

Melody sighed as her father, yet again, rearranged the chess pieces for another go (seventh game, actually).

She could hear the phone ringing in the distance before her mother, she assumes, answered it. The silence that followed didn't sit well in the air. Melody is up and out of her chair once her mother walks into the room.

"Oh, Melody, I'm so sorry. That was your friend Mickey. The friend that we met when we went to London to see you, he called abou-"

"Rose." The name slipped out without a thought. For some reason or another Rose's name came forefront just by the nerves building in her chest, Melody's heart racing.

Amy nodded, "Melody, I am so sorry."

"Mum spit it out!" Melody snapped, knowing it was bad news. It could be nothing but bad news by the look on her mother's face.

"There was a gas leak in the building she worked at. She didn't make it."

XXX

Mickey was the one who rushed into her arms the moment she walked into the memorial service.

"Can't believe it. Never gonna get anything done without her." Mickey mumbled against her neck.

"I know." That was the only response she could find that would be of any comfort.

She holds Mickey a bit tighter until he excuses himself and goes to get some fresh air. She offers what she can to Jackie, lets her friend's mum keep her by her side during the service.

It's only when she catches a glimpse of John sliding out through the front doors that she pardon's
herself from Jackie's side. She hadn't even thought he would have been here, but of course he would. He and Rose had been undoubtedly intimate in every sense of the word.

It's colder than it was when she got here. She tugs her coat closer around her and wanders towards the side of the building. She pauses when she sees John sitting at a bench nearby, head in his hands and shoulders shaking. He's crying.

She knows she should go. Leave him some privacy but she finds herself sitting beside him. She lays her hand out and soon he's taken it in his. Grasping it tightly, perhaps a bit too tight and his silent tears turn into full on sobs.

She takes him in her arms then. He holds onto her.

He feels like an oncoming storm and yet she feels herself strong and steady like a river.

They fit.

When they get back inside they go their separate ways. No words were spoken between the two of them but they didn't really need to be spoken to be heard.

Jackie hugs her for the millionth time and keeps going on about how Rose always had only good words about Melody. Always a smile on her face when she talked about her. She tells Melody to come around for tea soon. Even makes her promise too.

XXX

The fourth time is not fate. It's deliberate.

XXX

It's been a good six months or so since Rose had passed. She had visited Jackie and Mickey had stuck to her like glue and vice versa.

Melody is making her way to her flat and she spots a too familiar brown overcoat and the lanky man who owned it leaning against her door.

"Well this is a little daring." She said, trying to keep her surprise hidden.

John raised the bottle of wine he had in his hand. She hadn't noticed that.

"Heard you got an 'A' on an exam, figured it was a chance to celebrate your success."

She was sort of stunned. She’s gotten an 'A' mostly on everything, how was that reason to celebrate? And with him of all people?

"And how exactly did you find out about my gleaming academic achievements?" she walked until she was right beside him, him staring down at her with that stupid face of his.

Melody turned to unlock her flat. "Then again it's not exactly like you paid attention enough to notice the first time around that I'm quite exceptional at many things that even you couldn't possibly hope to compete against."

John followed her inside and shut the door while Melody fetched them some glasses.

"Mickey may have mentioned it a while ago."
Melody grinned, taking the wine bottle and pouring each of them a glass. "Oh, stalking? I see, sorry to say but you do look the type sweetie."

"It's not stalking, it's research." His eyes softened then, no longer teasing.

The look scared her so she made an attempt to steer the conversation elsewhere.

"So then, where are you? What have you been up to?"

"Other than stalking?" he grinned, his tone light again, "Let's see... how much time do you have?"

Melody threw her head back and laughed.

"Oh, you are just..." she was cut off because there he was. With that look again. Eyes no longer weightless but holding so much meaning behind them and they're focused on her. It's a bit too much coming from him.

"Melody Pond, I never thanked you for what you did that day."

She remembers then, holding him as he cried. It almost came as instinct and he drew her in no matter how infuriating he was at first.

At first.

Meeting him and then free of him when he graduated and then joined again by fate and then by a horrible circumstance and now he's just turned into something that's been there, stayed with her, whether he is or he isn't.

He takes a drink of his wine and finally takes his eyes off her. "Would you believe me if I told you I fancied the pants off you way before you handed in that zoology paper?"

Neither of them says anything for a few seconds and Melody decides she is having none of that, not after what he's just told her.

"You have a really crap way of showing affection has anyone ever told you that?"

And he laughs at that.

"Annoying you was the only way you'd spare a glance my way."

Melody grinned, "Oh, pretty boy, for a genius you are so very much a daft, obtuse idiot."

He points a finger at her, so ready to defend himself. "Now, wait right there, I am no -"

She takes hold of his tie and pulls him forward, shutting him up with a kiss before he can in any way defend himself because he is a complete half-wit.
They were walking in silence, blankets in hand, on their way back to the Ponds.

They both spare a glance at each other every so often, small smiles and a feather light feeling building in their bones every moment they are near each other.

"I dare say this was actually not made up of a complete disaster as I thought it would be." Melody huffs out a laugh.

Through the haze that is his mind still reeling over the information about Rose he somehow manages to be quick at a retort. "Are you saying you assumed I was bad company?"

"Not at all, I meant me. I'm the bad company these days and you made me feel for the first time in months that I'm not that dreadful."

The words are out before he can stop them, "You really have no idea what you are, do you?"

His tone is far too intimate and knowing and it is in no way a tone one should be able use when talking to a complete stranger. To her that is. Because he is just that, here, in this place. A stranger.

They've stopped walking and are looking at each other. Her eyes look at him, curious orbs at first. They fit all too well. Such a simple and yet unbreakable connection pulling them together and he sees when she realizes that.

Her eyes widen, trying to understand how he feels like the earth itself and she the root that is entwined with it.

She swallows, eyes watering and voice shaken as she asks, "Who are you?"

"A very long time ago I would have known the answer to that question." He says. "But you… you're here and I shouldn't be but it all went wrong."

The Doctor reaches a hand out. Her breath catches when he brushes a loose curl from her temple and his hand caresses her cheek.

"I shouldn't be here." He starts to pull his hand away but she drops the blanket in her arms and moves his hand back as it was.

His touch is warm against her cheek and the world seems to be written in his eyes. Old eyes, more than ancient but they look so familiar. He looks at her like she's a part of him. She believes it too. And she doesn't understand why.

"We should probably get back." He says, finally pulling his hand away and picking up her blanket.

"Amy." Rory calls at his wife for the millionth time. She's been perched beside the window, glaring out for any sign of them.

Amy scowls but pays him no attention.
"You know, this is all going to come back to you in one way or another. You and your meddling."
Rory warns.

"Me and my meddling." Amy huffs, "As if you don't do your fair share of meddling! Wandering about the hospital like the gossip queen you are."

"Now, that was uncalled for. And it's not gossip! I called the Harold Saxon and Harriet Jones affair and got 200 quid from that bet. Where do you think your anniversary present came from?"

"Oi! Shut it, you. I think that's them coming from around the corner."
Rory joined his wife at the window. It was indeed the Doctor and Melody approaching. "We should probably look like we're doing something productive. Something other than peeping out of the window like stalkers."

Amy smiled sweetly at her husband, a brow raised. "Want to put on your old Halloween costume I bought you for our second anniversary and be caught in a compromising position?"

Rory grimaced, "I hated that Roman costume."

"I don't remember you complaining! Nine months later your daughter was born so you shouldn't be whining. Oh crap, they're at the door." Amy shoved Rory away and they barely managed to reach the couch just as the front door was being opened.

Amy smiled, "Ah, Melody, Doctor. Where did you kids run off to then?"

Melody narrowed her eyes at her parents. Her mother looked way too pleased with herself and father dear looked as if he was waiting to be accused of murder.

"Just popped out for a stroll." The Doctor said, setting the blankets on the floor.

"Good, yes. Strolls are good, aren't they Rory?" Amy asks.

Rory looked from Melody to Amy, "Oh, yeah. Strolls. Good clean fun."

"Where's Jack then?" Melody asked.

"He's watching something or other on the telly. You should probably go in and check on him and we'll sit here and chat." Amy nodded.

"I'm sure you will." Melody gave one long look at her parents before heading up the stairs.

Amy listened out for the familiar creak when someone reached the last step at the top of the stairs before she spoke.

"Okay, what happened?!"

"Amy…" Rory groaned.

"No, no," the Doctor sat down on the nearest armchair, "it's fine. We got some fresh air, had a chat. It went well I think."

"Oh, god, I don't think you even know how glad I am to hear that." Amy slumped back into the couch.

Rory watched the Doctor carefully. "What about you then, Doctor? You look a bit shaken up."
"I haven't been around people in a very long while I'm probably just tired. Nothing a cup of tea can't solve, eh?" He smiled.

"I'll start that up for you." Amy stood and made her way for the kitchen.

"You know," Rory started, "you're doing us a world of good. Doing this. Helping Melody. What I'm about to say might be out of order but I'm her dad, you see… it's my job to keep sure she's okay. If I didn't know any better I'd say you are way past fancying my daughter." Rory shook his head, "She's nowhere near ready for that."

"I know what you're getting at, Rory and I have no int-"

"Let me finish." Rory slid up from the couch and started pacing. "God, okay, this is going to sound mental given I just said what I did but I'm torn on where I stand here because I think, no. I know actually just by the sight of her when she's near you that she feels the same way. Part of me wants you to go away before anything gets started because it's too soon and the other part sort of wants to make you stay forever."

The Doctor ran a hand through his hair and hates himself now more than ever because everything is going to end up as it always has. Badly, and he can't stop it. He can save worlds but he can never seem save the ones that matter to him more than anything. The people that matter to him always get hurt or lost and that's just how it is. How it will always be.

"But I can't stay forever, Rory. Even if I wanted to, I can't."

Rory smiled. A sad smile. "I knew you'd say that. You're running from something, I know the look, and I can't see you stopping any time soon."

It was silent for a few moments until they heard Amy calling from the kitchen.

Turns out a cup of tea doesn't solve anything at all.
"You will never guess what."

Is what Rory says when Amy picks up the phone. It's midday and Rory's shift is nowhere near over and yet he's calling Amy anyway.

"Skipping out on the nursing duties. How rebellious of you." She comments.

"Gloat on my fallen halo later you will not believe what's been going on down here for the last hour."

Amy smirks, "Do tell, Mr. Pond."

"Okay. You know how Melody's had an off feeling about Mr. Finch? Kept going on about how he's dodgy and how she's sure he eats children for lunch when no one is looking."

"Finch the shady shrink, yep." Amy replies, "Who could forget him?"

"Turns out he's been messing around with those anti-psychotic pills he gives his patients and using them as lab rats. And Mr. Wagner, the chemist that was hired suddenly a few days short from Finch, was in on it too."

"Jesus, Rory! What is going on with that hospital?! First that creepy Kovarian woman gets positioned a head of hospital and now this?!"

"Yeah." a long pause, "About her."

"Oh, gods no." Amy shakes her head, "Don't tell me I don't want to know. Nope, wait! Tell me. I don't want to know but tell me anyway."

"Turns out she's not exactly who she says she is." Rory sighs, "Yvonne Hartman's taken over hospital for now."

Amy snorts, "Well she's not exactly a bed of roses either."

"She's not entirely evil. I hear she's quite nice actually… when she's not directing her attention on you."

"Keep telling yourself that Rorianicus."

"She less cross on Saturdays. I think that's when her favorite show is on the telly. That really old one, the one that is sort of… the one you can't explain to anyone and not sound like a nutter."

"The one about space and stuff?" Amy guesses.

"Yeah! That one! Vastra was saying how her wife Jenny watches it and how in the show they can travel anywhere or something but for some reason everyone is always British."

"You are such a gossip queen." Amy laughs.

Rory then proceeds to deny it profusely until Amy stops her teasing, they say their I love you's and
The Doctor is creating a setting for wood on his sonic since he has a bit (or a lot) of free time but it's not going as he'd hoped. He suspects the Tardis has something to do with that going on how she herself is made of wood. That would give him the power to make her do anything he bloody well likes and even he knows that's a scary thought. He may be able to fly her but he is rubbish with certain responsibilities if his habit of creating paradoxes are anything to go by.

His sonic starts to pick up a frequency and it's tip starts glowing from green and fading into red. He presses the retrieval button and that's when he hears it. A child's voice.

tick tock goes the clock and what now shall we play?

He moves quickly to his door and pulls it open, sticking his head out. His sonic starts to ring louder, the voice much clearer.

tick tock goes the clock now summer's gone away.

The closer he gets to the sound the more his sonic buzzes. He's off down the hall towards the kitchen but his sonic starts to fade from red to green so he steps back and heads up the stairs, when the sonic starts blinking it tells him he's going the right way.

tick tock goes the clock and all the years they fly.

The Doctor nears the door at the far end. It's slightly ajar.

tick tock goes the clock and all too soon ...

His sonic goes out when he reaches the door and gently pushes it open.

your love will surley die.

It's Jack. He's sitting on the carpeted floor, television muted, as he draws and sings to himself.

The Doctor is startled when Melody says, "He's quite fond of that old nursery rhyme."

He turns around and she's smiling at Jack.

"A bit morbid for a nursery rhyme." The Doctor comments.

Melody shrugs, a sad smile spreading on her lovely face, "It's the only one he cares to remember. John made it up when Jack would have sleep troubles and it stuck in Jack's head ever since."

"He likes to draw then, eh?" The Doctor motions to Jack.

Melody nods, "He's obsessed. Again, quite like his dad. John had this little mad idea in his head the last months..."

Melody takes a deep breath and shakes her head as if trying to shake her emotions away from her.

"I'm sorry." she says and pointedly looks down at her bare feet in order to hide her face away. Half ashamed and the other half embarrassed and a whole other joint halves scared of being seen through.

The Doctor brought a hand to her cheek and hoped it provided some reassurance.
He knows it does when she willingly chooses to look back at him.
"You don't ever have to say sorry to me." he promises.

He knows she is placing an act of trust in the palm of his hand and the hearts in him wishes that she hadn't.

_Trust me, I'm the Doctor._

XXX

Amy sneaks up on Rory as he's putting the bins out and he nearly jumps out of his skin when he turns around and she crowds into his space.

"I've got a solution to our little problem." she informs.

"Would you not do that?!" Rory says, trying to catch his breath from the genuine fright.

"Do what?" Amy questions, completely ignoring the state of him.

Rory rolls his eyes, "Oh, nothing! Creeping up on a bloke while it's late out is just brilliant. Startled me half to death but that's just fine. I'm sure I'll just come back to life anyway and it'll save you the trouble of burying me."

Amy remains unaffected, "Okay, Mr. Sarcastic man, are you done?"

Rory groans and Amy only stares.

"Yes, I'm done." he confirms in a huff.

"Good." Amy nods, "I just got off the phone with my mum and apparently a friend of a friend mentioned this new therapist and how she worked wonders on her. Re-wrote her entire history in no time, so she says."

"Okay. What's the bad part?"

Amy grimaces, "Why would there be a bad part?"

"It's too good to be true therefore there is a spectacular chance of something bad in the works."

"You are a ball of sunshine, Rory. Has anyone ever told you that?"

Rory smirks, "Now who's being sarcastic."

Amy acquiesces, "I've yet to do more digging but she sounds nice and I have a good feeling about this one."

"Okay, alright. Find out more and we'll see how it goes."

Amy smiles brightly and takes Rory's hand as they walk back inside their home.
Mickey and Melody had gone shopping for party supplies very early. When they came back to Mickey's flat they settled down on the carpeted floor and arranged all their purchases across from them so they could go by them one by one.

"So when did you adopt him?" Mickey grinned at Melody. "I knew you're dad brought home strays but I've never seen you put a collar on one and keep him."

"Oh, don't you start." Melody threw a paper hat at him.

Mickey laughed, "Honestly, Mels! You don't tell me anything anymore."

"It's no big deal. You know how my parents are."

Mickey nodded. "So the Doctor, then. Doesn't he have a real name?"

Melody paused, realizing she's never thought to ask. She smiles then and says, "He's the Doctor."

"You seem happier." He adds but Melody doesn't reply to that.

Mickey wasn't blind. He had taken notice to his dear friend's interaction with this Doctor bloke, whoever he was, and knew enough about her to know that she was positively smitten.

"You should bring him to nan's party."

Melody shrugs, "I don't think he'd feel comfortable in a room full of strangers."

"Something tells me he wouldn't mind."

"I… I don't know." Melody looks at him and then grins. "Did you ask Doctor Jones to join us?"

Mickey gapes. "Why would I do that?!"

"Oh, sweetie, you really need to just ask her out already. One of these days Google won't come up with any more 'medical problems in the elderly' suggestions just so you can go pretend you're asking for your gran's health issues."

"Ha, ha. Very funny, Pond."

"Honestly, the worst she can do is say no."

"Yeah," Mickey says, "But it would still be the worst though."

As luck would have it the new therapist Amy had heard about had just been taken on by the hospital Rory worked at. Amy tries to look past the hospital's recent reputation and just go with it and take it as a sign. She rings up an appointment for Melody that same day. It takes some convincing but Amy manages to play the whole do it for your mum trope perfectly and her daughter agrees.

Amy decides to wait around in the lounge area for Melody and worries some over leaving Jack with
the Doctor. He's a clumsy idiot but she has a feeling of trust that runs deep when it comes to him. She's not sure why that is.

She has a good conversation when Vastra comes around the corner and tells her own version of the hospital's latest transgressions but that's about all the amusement she gets. She thinks about getting a fellow nurse to page Rory but decides against it.

She's never been good at this. Waiting. She's waited for many things but that never meant she had to like it.

She's half asleep when Melody steps out of the session room. She doesn't seem bothered and she doesn't say much, even on the ride home Melody is eerily quiet.

"So," Amy starts, "Good talk then?"

"Mother." Melody frowns.

"Hey! I'm just asking. A mother can ask, can't she?" Amy gives a big, childish huff.

Melody grins at that.

"Like her?"

Melody sighs and offers, "Significantly better than Mr. Finch. I'll give you that."

Amy smiles, "You know I have a good feeling about her."

Melody shrugs and thinks, 'So do I.'

XXX

At first, The Doctor panicked when Amy had asked him to watch Jack and before he could stop himself and be sensible he had agreed.

"What could possibly go wrong, eh?" He had muttered under his breath as he and Jack waved at Amy as she drove off. The Doctor had overheard Amy on the phone with her daughter, all hushed tones and pleas.

Mickey had come by for Melody earlier to help him ready for his Nan's surprise party. She had sulked the entire while before Mickey showed up and the Doctor had to fight the urge to scoop her in his arms and snog her silly.

Mickey had greeted him happily and was glad he was doing better than the last time he saw him. Watching Melody walk out that front door gave birth to a new kind of hurt in his old, raggedy hearts.

But now here they were, just the Doctor and Jack. They had started out watching telly but soon ended up on the floor, Jack drawing avidly while the Doctor only stared on in amazement at the boy's imagination and tried to make sense of him. He looked so very ordinary but the Doctor knew he was anything but.

The Doctor thinks back and reminds himself he knows another certain someone who is also very much in that same category.

"You know I had a friend named Jack once." He says and the boy seems to brighten up at that but there is skepticism there. Smart lad.
"Do you really?"

"I swear it. Cross my hearts."

Jack seems satisfied with that. "I've never met anyone with my name."

"We have that in common, eh?" The Doctor grins. No one had ever heard his name, not in a very long time, until one day someone did. And she was gone.

Jack simply focuses back on his drawing and sighs, "I had a dream last night. You were there."

"Was I?"

Jack nods. "My dad was there and the stars sang to him."

We will sing to you, Doctor. The Universe will sing you to your sleep.

"He burned brighter than the sun."

This song is ending.

"And you were made of fire."

But the story never ends.
Amy walked up the familiar path to her home, Melody right behind her. Melody had given her a skeptical look when she told her the Doctor was watching after Jack. Seems both Pond women were on the same thought process when it came to the Doctor and handling any sort of responsibility. They braced themselves for what they would find.

Amy unlocked the door and they stepped inside. The sight warmed Amy’s heart. The Doctor and Jack were on the floor, backs being supported against the sofa. They had dozed off side by side. Amy looked back at her daughter to find a troubled expression.

"Melody," Amy's voice gentle, "Why don't you go ready Jack's bed for him? Yeah?"

Melody nodded and made her way to the hallway and up the stairs. Amy lay down her bag and keys before nearing the two. She knelt down to Jack first and brushed the fringe from his face, smiling. "Jack." She whispered. "Jack."

The boy's eyes opened sleepily. "Up the stairs, little man. Come on."

She helped him up and let him slouch against her, his eyes not quite able to stop from falling shut. "All I need is your legs to move Jack, I've got you."

She felt a small nod. She held him up beside her and helped him climb the stairs. Melody was already waiting at his bedside. She left her daughter to tuck the boy in. Amy momentarily damns her aging bones because Melody simply lifts Jack up into her arms like he's light as a feather. Amy would probably break a hip with all that effort. To be young, she muses to herself before getting back downstairs.

Her raggedy man is still in dreamland. She pauses. Her raggedy man. Where the hell did that come from?

She pushes away from that thought, leaves it as an unknown, before making her way over to the Doctor.

"Doctor." She calls quietly. "Doctor."

But he doesn't stir.

She sighs and suddenly finds herself taking Jack's place. She feels so young next to him. Which is bloody ridiculous! She's well into her early sixties and he's all baby-faced, downright toddler aged compared to her. But it's there, it's him. He's not from here and she starts to wonder if he's even from anywhere.

She sees something sticking out from the inside of his tweed jacket. She reaches and pulls it out. It's black, leathery. It's like a wallet but its light and it flips open. There's nothing there, it's blank.

She closes it and looked back at his tired face before slipping it back into his top pocket. She lets herself lean against him and lays her head on his shoulder.

XXX
Melody watches Jack as he moves his body to a more comfortable position once she's tucked him into bed. The night light in his room is so dimmed it hardly lights the room at all. Her son has always been polite and inquisitive but never quite so trusting with anyone since his father died. It did quite a number on Jack, the last times he'd had with his father. It got bad in the end.

John had lost much of himself when he had the accident. He had been working on god know what, it was all equations and so many parts, so many words and theories that Melody lost count of where and what John was trying to accomplish in the first place. But she knew he was right. He had come up with something brilliant and if he had finished what he started…

But he didn't.

She remembers getting the phone call. The same gut feeling turning her insides out just as it had when Jackie phoned her mum's to tell her Rose had passed away.

She can't even remember exactly what they had told her about it, what happened to him, just that he was in hospital. There was deterioration in memory. His mind, so vast with knowledge and light and heart slowly diminished before her eyes. Slowly month after month it started to take him away from her, every last bit.

One day he would look at her as he always did, as if she was the sun and the stars and the core of the universe was made of her smile. Worse days came, days where he would be looking at her confused, skeptical, as if what she was saying to him was true but it seemed inside his heart he knew it was even if his mind couldn't fathom it.

Then he couldn't, wouldn't. Their time was being unwritten, slowly his life reverted to the days where he was Rose's and she was his. At that point he would look at her, his wife, and his stare would cut right through her.

Who are you?

Over and over again, that question, until it was the only thing he knew. All of his memories, all of their life together, erased from him day after day.

It was never supposed to be like this.

XXX

When Amy wakes up she's in her bed and the sun is pouring in from the shutters. Rory's already gone off to the hospital no doubt. She slips on her robe quickly, tying it at her waist, before stepping out of her bedroom.

She finds the Doctor in the kitchen and it's like the world lights up again.

"Burning down my kitchen, are you?"

And the idiot almost drops the spatula he is holding.

"Er, right." He flushes, "I, uh, couldn't sleep that much. Figured I'd make myself useful and make you breakfast this time."

"Breakfast?" she asks.

He nods and she walks over to inspect the so called 'breakfast'. Eggs and bacon.
"I'll be the judge of that." She says with a smile.

"Oh, you always are." He mutters happily, then stills. She sees his expression change. His jaw clenches and his posture turns stiff.

"Doctor? Are you feeling okay?"

"No. I mean yes. I'm fine. Just... lack of sleep perhaps." His excuse sounds weak, he knows it, but he hands her the spatula. "Take over for a bit, Pond. Be back faster than you can miss me."

With that he's off. She blinks after him as he vanishes from the kitchen. She shrugs it off and keeps the eggs and bacon from burning. Much.

XXX

The Doctor steps out of the Pond residence and takes a long, deep breath. He woke up last night with Amy asleep beside him, head on his shoulder. He had smiled at the sight before scooping her up in his arms and carrying her off to her bed. His sweet little Amelia. But she isn't. She's not his Amelia.

Then it came. It all came like a current, his memories. Swirling around him, tugging him down. A whirlpool that refuses to be refused. He remembers a little girl slumped on her suitcase, waiting. Carrying little Amelia Pond up to bed and telling her a story. The only story. And that's all he has now. She's a story in his head. A memory seared in both his hearts and the ache there is the only proof he has that she was real. That Amy Pond wasn't just a fairytale, Rory Williams wasn't just a boy who waited and River... his River. Gods, he thought. Gone, all his mad impossible Ponds.

And he wept.

He couldn't find sleep after that but he tucked himself away in his room. He heard Rory get home a while after and get ready for bed himself. And he thought of River. River, River, River. And he wanted, oh, he wanted. And he couldn't have it.

The Doctor comes back to where he is now, the bright green grass grounding him. He's in Amy Pond's front yard. He takes a few more deep breaths, and heads back inside to help Amy finish breakfast.

XXX

"You seem tense." Mickey commented as they hung a 'Happy Birthday Nan' banner he'd hand painted himself the night before.

"Just tired." Melody answered.

"Nah, I've seen you tired. That's a whole different kind of monster." He jests.

She can't help laugh at that.

"Honestly?" she looked at him, uncertain.

He walked over and placed an arm over her shoulder. "Lay your problems on me, Pond. You may not be a Smith from my blood but you were made a Smith by marriage. I'm pretty sure we can figure it out together."

She was so very hesitant but could only deny him a reason for so long. If she couldn't talk to Mickey,
then who else really? Hesitance won though. She gave him a half-truth. John's birthday would be in a few months and he gobbled that up with open ears and so much comfort she felt so guilty for lying to him, even if it wasn't entirely a false reason, that wasn't all of what was troubling her.

The truth is, last night, the sight scared her. Her son and the Doctor had fallen asleep side by side and she wants to feel all warm and fuzzy about it, part of her did, but it was one thing for her to get attached. Jack on the other hand, he already lost a father and the Doctor couldn't possibly even for one second be entertaining the thought to actually being there, actually staying. Could he?

She tries to shake those thoughts from her, tries to put on a smile so Mickey can feel comforted that he's helped in some way, like he's taken a weight off of her shoulders. And he does. He really, really does but right now she's lying to him and that's her own fault, not his.
Melody and Mickey made quick work of the decorations and soon she was on her way back home to get changed for the party.

Amy was already gathering her keys, grinning and kissing Melody on the cheek just as she walked through the door.

“Where are you going?” Melody questioned.

“Your father finally got some stones and worked himself up to asking for the evening off.”

Melody smiled, “Impressive.”

“I know!” Amy laughed. “I’ll see you at the party, dear.”

“Wait!”

Amy turned back to her.

“Where’s Jack and the Doctor?”

“Oh, right. Jack and I went to the market around lunch time, we saw Sylvia with her grandson and I figured since she’ll be at the party later anyway there’s no harm in letting the boy tag along with his friend and the old bat.”

Melody frowned, “Mum, you really need to stop calling her that behind her back.”

“I’d tell it to her front if only your father would let me.” Amy pointed out and shut the door after her.
Melody sighed. She realized when she was halfway up the stairs that her mother hadn’t said where the Doctor was. She walked back downstairs and down the hallway before stopping in front of the Doctor’s door. She raised a hand to knock but she couldn’t bring herself to do so.

“What’s the matter with me?” she muttered quietly. She stared at the door for a few seconds before shaking off her anxieties. Determined, he walks closer and finally knocks. They sound is firm against the wooden door.

When the door is pulled open his head pops out and it’s so sudden and unexpected that his face ends up a few inches away from hers. He’s startled then by the close proximities, so is she, but neither make to move away.

“Ri-” but he stops, eyes wide and suddenly he looks utterly terrified.

Whatever he was about to say dies in his throat, cuts off, before it can be finished. It sounds like he’s choked on the word not said before swallowing it down. His voice hard and expression pained when he finally permits himself to speak again.

“Melody. Hello.”

“Doctor.” She nods.

His face is so close.

“What’s wrong? Did you need anything? Are you okay?”

With every question it seems as if he’s moved even closer. The worry on his brow makes her want to cry. Of joy or sadness she isn’t sure.

“No, no. I’m fine.” She assures. “I was just wanting to know if you were going to join us at the party.”
She mentally kicks herself for forgetting to invite him. Personally, that is. With everything in her head it hadn’t even occurred until now.

“Oh,” he takes a few steps back then, finally allowing them both some distance. “I didn’t know if I was wanted to join.”

Melody smiles and feels guilty. “Of course you are, Doctor. You know it’s no trouble for anyone.”

“No.” His expression changes from worry to such a sadness. “I didn’t know if you wanted me there.”

“I need you there.”

It came out of her mouth before she could even register what exactly it was she said let alone stop it. But he smiled and she found it hardly mattered to try and explain or possibly deny it.

“Well then Melody Pond.” He fixed his ridiculous bowtie. “Ready when you are.”

XXX

The Doctor is a very good distraction. She hardly pays attention to the other guests and there really isn’t any point in trying to garner her attention now when he’s gotten himself fully surrounded by the children.

He’s telling them utterly ridiculous stories about vampires in Venice and rescuing dinosaurs on a spaceship with old friends of his, Annie and Roman, who she isn’t even sure are actually real themselves.

“Picture perfect, eh?”

It’s her mother’s voice. She turns and finds Amy smiling at the Doctor with nearly as much fondness
she has for her own husband.

“Well I can’t very well argue against that.” Melody nods.

“You know I’ve been thinking…”

Melody braces herself.

“Perhaps your father and I will go off this Christmas. We could go to Scotland for holiday. Maybe I’ll finally be getting your father to wear a kilt.”

Melody chuckles but still waits for it because it is something her mother is getting at no doubt.

“Oh my, a clever thought just popped in my head.” Amy’s eyes go wide and from the expression on her face Melody knows she’s faking this sudden realization of hers.

“Funny how that works.” Melody mutters.

Amy either ignores her daughter’s dry tone or is too dedicated to veer from her goal because she doesn’t comment, just keeps on with her so called idea. “We could take Jack with us! Show him where his nan originally came from.”

“Oh, mother.” Melody scowls and walks away from her without another word.

“Melody!” Amy shouts after her.

XXX

The Doctor’s head snaps up at Amelia’s voice. She’s following after someone. His eyes search to
seek for whom and finds its Melody marching away. By the looks of it angrily.

He excuses himself from the children and stands before making his way around some of the guests. He stops right where he is when sees her.

“Martha Jones.” He says quietly. It really shouldn’t surprise him, really it truly shouldn’t. But it does. He can’t look any longer.

It’s when he glances away that he notices Mickey is staring at Martha. His expression says it all, bless him. The shock of it eases from the Doctor slowly and a smile spreads over his face. He approaches the younger man.

“Fancy her, don’t you?” he asks.

Mickey’s head turned abruptly, wide eyed and becoming more than slightly embarrassed. He looks about to deny it but instead his shoulder sagged and he groaned.

“That obvious then?”

The Doctor fully grinned now, “Oh, Mickey. Leave it to the universe to wibble and wobble every which way, flopping the basics just to end up keeping everything exactly the same.”

Mickey’s brow furrowed. “Come again?”

The Doctor shook his head, chuckling, “Nothing, nothing. Musings I relay to myself, utter nonsense. Anyhow, you should go talk to her.”

“Nah,” Mickey waved off the notion, “She’s a doctor, she’s well outta my league.”

The Doctor smirked, “Well you never know until you try. Who knows, maybe someday you’ll save the world together.”

Mickey doesn’t really seem to be fully listening though.
“She really is something, isn’t she?” Mickey watched Martha, the complete state of awe as he looks at her making his eyes twinkle. “I mean, she’s kind. Generous. Always puts her family first. She’s a beautiful, strong, intelligent woman. What the hell would she get from a guy like me?”

“Mickey Smith. You’ve just answered your own question.”

Mickey looked at a loss and the Doctor’s hearts felt warm. The feeling spread kindly through him. He sighed happily before explaining.

“You can notice someone but it’s a whole other thing to see them as they are. You’ve just described Dr. Jones as she is, and you see her as she is. I had a friend very much like her once.” The Doctor frowned, “She was always hoping to be noticed by this bloke but he never saw her as she deserved to be seen. Trust me, Mickey, there’s nothing more anyone could hope for than to be seen for who they really are and to be appreciated as such.”

Mickey blinked and looked away. His smile gone when he looked back at the Doctor.

“Like the way you look at Mels?”

Mickey was readying to apologize but the Doctor wouldn’t have it. Mickey didn’t deny his feelings when the Doctor called him out on it and the Doctor knows very well Mickey would have liked to. But he didn’t. The Doctor decided he owed Mickey the same respects.

So he smiled back sadly and nodded. “Like the way I look at Melody.”
Thirteen.

The Doctor finds Amy upstairs with her ear against what he would assume is the bathroom. She’s knocking insistently.

“Melody, open the door. I’m sorry, okay? Open the door for you mum would you?”

She straightened up when she saw him.

“Trouble?” the Doctor asked.

“Buggered things right up, I have.” She explains, sighing heavily.

“Care to let me give it a go?” he offered.

Amy considered him before nodding and patting his shoulder. “Good luck.”

The Doctor took up the space Amy had occupied and knocked gently.

“Go away!” came Melody’s voice.

“She has.” The Doctor informed. “Mind letting me in for a bit?”

“I’m sorry to say I mind quite a bit right now.”

The Doctor looked down the narrow hallway and tried to find some other way to comfort her that wouldn’t agitate her more. There was quite a bit options in his head but they could all be received differently. He finally decided on one.

“Allright. Compromise then?” he offered. She didn’t answer. “I’m not going to leave but that said I’m also going to respect that you mind and I’ll leave you to your space. The loo is now Melody’s space, yeah?”

Still no response. He went on.

“This door between you and I keeps your space from extending out here and vice versa. I won’t push nor prod, I promise you that. I do have an idea that is rather pleasing. I’ve decided to make this space outside the loo mine. Doctor’s space.” He grins.

“This door, right,” he knocks on the wood lightly and slides down to the carpet, back against the door then tries awkwardly to position his gangly legs in the narrow space. He gives up on finding a comfortable position and instead continues, “This door is all that connects us and keeps us apart at the same time. Rather brilliant and convenient. I’ve sat myself down with my back against it and I’d like you to do the same. Keep in mind you don’t have to but I have and I’m staying right here in my space, not yours.”

He doesn’t hear a thing, not a movement, but he still hopes for some cooperation.

“Allright.”

Her voice is nearer from the other side of the door. He smiles at that.
“Back against the door.” She informs.

“Space is good yeah?” he asks.

She doesn’t answer but he doesn’t mind. They stay in compatible silence, both of them with their backs against either sides of the door.

XXX

Rory spots Amy coming from upstairs with a sour look on her face. He sets his drink down and intends to follow after her but just as he was about to do so a familiar patient of his blocked his way.

“Oh, gods. Sylvia, hi.”

“Hello Rory!” she gleamed. Apparently it was no secret Sylvia Mott quite fancied him and Amy of all people was the one who pointed it out to him.

Sylvia was a good thirty years his senior and he brushed it off to Amy being jealous. He was flattered by his wife’s concern but Amy’s jealousy became tiresome very quickly.

He remembers one conversation in particular. He had just finished writing up Sylvia’s information chart for Dr. Moon when Amy startled him by shutting the door to the exam room. It rang loudly from being shut with such force. Before he knew it their voices had raised in volume and tempers were being tested.

“You,” Amy had poked his chest with her well-manicured fingernail, “Mr. Oblivious, only encourage her!”

Rory shook his head. “That’s rubbish. Sylvia is just being nice. She’s a nice lady.”

“Sylvia is nice, eh?” Amy’s Scottish accent grew thicker when in anger. “Sylvia is nice?! Well you go be nice with her then oblivious man!”

And then Amy stormed out, leaving Rory to deal with the stares of every single person that was unlucky enough to overhear them from outside of the exam room.

“Listen, Sylvia,” Rory tried to maneuver himself around the elderly woman, “Can we talk later I’ve got to go see if my wif-”

“Rory, Rory, Rory,” Sylvia cut in, waving a hand and smiling even wider. It’s pretty scary. He sees now what Wilfred would go on about before he’d passed away two years back. He’d be there from six in the morning to four in the afternoon, Donna’s work hours.

Rory would spend his time in-between shifts with Wilfred in the lounge area or cafeteria hearing the man tell all sorts of stories until Donna showed up and it was safe to go home. Rory does miss him.

“Rory,” Sylvia continued, “You do know I have a hip surgery in the morning? You do, I know you do, you are so thorough! I was hoping you would take care of me when I go home. I’ve got no one there to care for me.”
Rory was about to remind her that that wasn’t even true. Donna, bless her, lived right next door with her husband Lee.

“Sylvia, I’ve really got to see to something. Can we talk at another time?” Rory pleaded.

“You most certainly can!” came a familiar boisterous voice.

“Oh, thank the gods.” Rory muttered at the sight of Sylvia’s daughter approaching.

He slipped away without hesitation. Donna’s voice raising all other sorts of scoldings at her mother dimmed down the further he got away. Rory decided to look out back where Jack was with the other kids just to make sure his grandson was alright before he went on searching for Amy. By chance he didn’t even have to look further.

Amy was sitting in a side chair nearby with a frown on her face watching Jack play but not really watching him play. She was sulking in that ginger head of hers.

He approached warily. He wasn’t sure the mood she’d be in, whether she’d need comfort or someone to yell at so he braced himself.

“Hello.” He said, sounding out the letters in a sing-song voice nervously.

Amy didn’t have any comeback or comment.

“Amy, what’s wrong?” he asked and sat down next to her.

She threw her arms around him unexpectedly. It took a moment for him to register the sudden movement but then he relaxed in her arms and hugged her back.

XXX

He startles into waking when he hears a small click. He starts to blink awake but before he can properly do so he feels his back come in contact with the floor. He looks up and finds Melody is looking down at him.

“Oh god, I’m sorry.” She kneels down.

He must have dozed off. He remembers then that he was sitting against the bathroom door. The door that separated then. He smiles up at her. “You came out.”

She nods very slowly. “The loo loses its allure once you’ve counted all the tiles around fifty times or so.”

“I imagine it would.” He sits up.

“I’m sorry.” She says again.

“I told you once, Melody Pond, you don’t ever have to say that to me.”

“Keep saying it I might actually have to believe you.” She jests.
“I won’t stop saying it then.” He promises.

Melody frowns. “Mickey is going to do my head in for spending the entirety of his gran’s birthday locked in his upstairs toilet.”

“For what I saw he’s got his hands full trying to avoid talking to a certain someone when he really should do just that. I doubt that struggle has changed from then to now.”

Melody smiled. “I sort of have a burning need to lock him up somewhere with Martha so he’d just get to it already.”

He nods his head inside the bathroom. “Melody’s space looks quite free at the moment.”

She laughs wholeheartedly.

“Come on, let’s help you up.” She stands and holds her hands out for him. His legs wobble from being sat in such an uncomfortable position for however long he’s been there and Melody has to hold him upright until he can do so himself. She chuckles at that.

“Your legs really aren’t made for narrow hallways, Doctor.”

“It’s good to have things bigger on the inside that’s for sure.” He muses. He misses his Tardis dearly.

Melody’s brow furrows, “Pardon?”

“Nothing. Silly old Doctor. Now,” he clasps his hands together and grins. “We should get back to the festivities.”

As they descend the stairs his hand reaches over to hold hers without thought. She doesn’t pull away but instead entwines her fingers with his.
Rory had accompanied his daughter to see her off at her session that morning. Just as they arrive Melody’s therapist lights up at the sight of her.

The woman is more than a bit peculiar looking but she is also, if Rory is honest, quite a beauty in a way that is all her own. There is a certain aura about the woman. It rolls off of her like a silent thrum of life and energy that extends around him. There is a calm and stability about her. It makes him feel at ease and he imagines she has that effect on everyone.

“You must be Mr. Williams.” She walks forward and extends hand. “I’m Dr. Idris Blue.” Her attention switches to Melody.

Rory sees a flash of fierceness in Dr. Idris while she looks upon his daughter. A protectiveness akin to that of a mother. It comforts him, that. If that’s anything to go by this woman is going to take good care of Melody.

“Very well, I’ll leave you girls to it.” And he did just so.

“That father of yours, he is a pretty one.” Dr. Idris grinned.

Melody wrinkled her nose at that but walked in with Dr. Idris towards the session room.

“You’ve a new air about you, Melody.” Was what her therapist said once they’d settled in and had seated across from one another. “If you don’t mind me commenting so, that is.” The woman finished, her smile fond.

“I don’t mind. I may not agree but I don’t mind.”

“That is exactly what I’m referring to. You’re able to take compliments now despite how you disfavor them.” The doctor smiled. “The reasons people resort to therapy varies. People sometimes don’t have the tools to face things on their own let alone acknowledge them. Sometimes a person
isn’t alone at all and have many around who care and want to help but feeling alone isn’t solely about who is there, it is a feeling.

“Many professionals in my league place subtle light hints for their patients to encourage them to talk about their troubles. I’m not particularly fond of that method. I leave my patients to choose that for themselves and whether they do open up or not. Even if they don’t it doesn’t make a session any less or more valuable.”

Melody knew that wasn’t all her doctor was getting at, so she waited for Dr. Idris to continue.

“I know what’s been your troubles. Your mum’s told me what is you reason to come here, what has happened to you, but you have yet to tell me. Melody, I am going to ask you something. I’m not asking it of you, simply asking you.”

Her doctor paused and shut the file in front of her, the file that documented Melody’s progress after every session. In all honesty the sight of that file, of Melody’s problems being documented in ink, was a huge part of her reluctance to open up. If she spoke of it, it would be let out the open ears and heard and that was terrifying. But if it is put down in ink that makes it definite and there for all to see with their own eyes. Seeing and hearing are two very different things.

Her doctor had now shut it and pushed it away from her gently.

“I don’t intend on marking this down. I won’t do that. All I ask is to name it. Name…”

“Him.” Melody finished.

Dr. Idris nodded. “Can you? See, that question is tricky because you can, we both know this. But will you? Will you let yourself do so? And that my dear, is up to you.”

Melody looked down at her hands. They were on her lap. She still had her wedding ring on. She could never work it off her fingers because it symbolized so much. It sealed a reality that was now gone. After it all happened she couldn’t bear lose that too.

“It will reach six months in little less than two weeks.” Dr. Idris said, simply stating a fact. There was no coaxing behind it.
Melody messed with her wedding ring and lost herself in it until Dr. Idris took her hands in her own.

When she looked back at Dr. Idris there was no expression on her face. It was vacant and somehow it didn’t come across as uncaring or uninterested. It was highly comforting. Melody sees then that the woman could have no face, she could have no physical form and yet she would still be felt. Like she is a force that needs no shape or form. She’s simply alive.

Melody cannot only feel what she is feeling but she can see an image that would describe her feelings. She feels her pain like a river that was once harsh and violent, a destroyer. The current had formed from a storm, angry and owning and devouring. Now, at this moment, those waters seem to have calmed. The flow is not harsh, it has steadied. The river flows without violence, but with strength. The river was born to destroy and now the river is of her own making.

Melody pushed past her fears and found she felt brave.

“John,” she says, “His name was John.”

Dr. Idris smiled then. “John.”

The Doctor stood in front of his beloved blue box. When he reached up and placed a hand against its sturdy wooden doors he felt the old girl reaching back. His hand ran over the hard edges of her sides and stroked her lovingly. Somewhat as he did with her console. He missed her indeed.

“In the ends it’s you and me, eh?” he says and reluctantly steps back, away. He walks away from her and fights the urge to look back. If he does he’ll stay beside her all day and that would help no one. He doesn’t feel like he can be of any help though. To anyone. Least of all Melody. He can’t stay. He just can’t and she’ll be just as torn up in this world as she was in the other one and it’s all of his doing.

“Doctor?”
It was Mickey. The Doctor looks up and notices he’s ended up at the hospital without intention. He takes notice back to Mickey who is looking more than distressed.

“Mickey, is something troubling you?”

“I just… I don’t know. I…” Mickey is in a panic.

“Calm down. Come now,” The Doctor pulls Mickey down to a bench not far away from the hospital doors. “What’s happened?”

“I…” Mickey let his head fall in his hands, his shoulders sagging. “I was going to go. I was gonna tell her.”

The Doctor nods understandingly. “You were going to tell Martha how you feel.”

“Yeah! I was. But I’m rubbish at it.” Mickey frowns. “I was there, at the doors of the hospital and I couldn’t go in. I’m just a coward and a fool. I’m not the man she deserves.”

“Alright I’ve had enough of that in this universe.” The Doctor mutters. “Mickey Smith, look at me!”

Mickey looks alarmed and the Doctor realizes maybe he said that with a bit too much frustration.

“Sorry.” the Doctor says and tries again, speaking softer this time. “You need to stop all of this talk about how insignificant you feel you are. You are capable of so much.” The Doctor frowns. “You all are. That’s always the problem. You never realize your worths until you’re faced with the impossible.” The Doctor gripped Mickey’s shoulder, strong and with intent. “And Mickey Smith, I have got to tell you, you may feel like a tin dog always being overlooked by the world around you but you are so much more than that. In your heart of hearts there lies a man with so much courage and strength. You don’t need to reach inside yourself to find it, it’s already there. So just go in there and use it.”

Mickey looks from the Doctor and over to the hospital doors.
“Yeah. Alright.” Mickey stands up and takes a deep breath. He looks back at the Doctor and smiles. “See ya, boss.”

And in he goes.

XXX

Melody steps out of Dr. Idris’s office and finds her father dear nowhere in sight. She sighs and makes her way down to the first floor. She’s sure to find him at the nurse’s station and if not she can catch up with Vastra and Rita.

She runs into a familiar face on the way.

“Ah, miss Pond.” The large man says with a smile. “Always a pleasure.”

“Hello Dr. Maldovar.” Melody smiles.

“How many times have I told you to call me Dorium?” he chuckles.

Melody smiles back, “Right. Yes, I’m sorry. Hello, Dorium.”

“And how is that son of yours?” Dorium asks. “I’ve not seen him in quite some time. I hope you’ll assure me he’s bigger since then or we’ll have a bit of a problem.”

Dr. Dorium Maldovar was a friend of the family for many years. He’d delivered Jack when he was a baby and even delivered Melody herself.

“Then I will assure you he is growing splendidly.” Melody replied.
“Good, good. Always a pleasure to see you, Melody Pond. Make sure to say hello to that mother of yours.”

“Indeed I will.” Melody nodded. Dorium cackled joyously as he continued his way down the hospital corridor.

As soon as she reached the first floor she caught sight of Mickey walking by, or more marching by. She saw he was headed straight for Martha who was filling out a chart at the front desks.

“Doctor Jones.” Mickey called out.

Martha looked up and smiled. “Mickey, lovely to see you. How’s that gran of yours? Did you have more questions?”

“Nah, I’m not here about my gran.” He smiled. “I’m here for me. I came to talk to you.”

Melody could hardly believe the confidence radiating from her friend as he stood there talking to Martha Jones. He usually turned into goo at the mere thought of the woman. He was so ridiculously smitten and for so long it was just positively sad that he could never bring himself to act on it.

Mickey took a deep breath. “Would you let me take you out to dinner sometime?”

Martha placed down the pen she was holding and turned to face him entirely.

“Mickey Smith,” Martha didn’t look too keen on the idea and Melody dreaded that she could possibly outright reject him but then she broke out in a grin, “I really thought you’d never ask.”

Mickey laughed, relief echoing from the sound. “I almost didn’t.”

“Well I’m glad you did.” Martha said before reaching up and kissing him on the cheek. “You saved me the trouble of doing it myself. Walk me to my office?”

Mickey nodded. “I can do that.”
As they walked by Mickey caught her eyes and Melody chuckled, mouthing *I told you so*. He rolled his eyes at her before he reached down and pulled Martha’s hand in his.
Fifteen.

The Doctor watched Mickey and Martha as they walked away hand in hand. Some things manage to be kept even if they’re worlds apart and he’s glad for that.

He searches the room, not looking for anything in particular but catches sight of Melody making her way over to where he’s standing. She’s stops in front of him and her voice curls around his hearts when she speaks.

“You had a hand in that didn’t you?” she says, smiling and knowing.

He smiles back. “Where on earth would you get that idea?”

“It’s what you do.” She replies. “Isn’t it?”

He wants to say no. That he keeps his head in the sand and leaves things be but he doesn’t even know how to do that. He takes on choices so others won’t have to because they can’t and they don’t know how to but he does. He’s built a world on the weight he’s carried from years of choosing. He couldn’t look away and leave things be even if he tried, even if he should. Especially when he should. It’s damned him more times than not. If he can interfere he certainly will. So he just nods.

Melody takes one of his hands in hers. “Thank you. For helping.”

The Doctor smiles sadly and wants to correct her for assuming he’s actually capable of helping without inflicting some sort of damage himself.

“Melody Pond.” He says instead and raises her hand to his lips. He kisses her palm gently and pushes away some of those maddening curls from her face. “You are very, very welcome.”

XXX
Amy’s readying some clothes to put in the wash while Jack sits coloring on the kitchen table. Sometimes she worries about the little lad. His mother refuses to deal with the world constantly whereas Jack just seems to be off in another one. He’s always quiet. Too quiet.

Amy decides to take his attention back to the actual world.

“So000.” She drawls, approaching her grandson and peeking over his shoulder at his drawing. She raises a brow at it. He’s filling in a very detailed embroidery on what looks to be a big box and there is a shadow of what looks like a man but he looks like he’s wearing a dress. She raises a brow at that. The shadowed figure sits beside the oversized box. No, no, that’s not right.

“He’s guarding it.” Jack says and breaks her from more wondering.

“Guarding a box?” Amy snorts. “The bloke obviously needs to get out more and so do you. Come on.” Amy tugs gently at the boy’s ear and points him in the direction of the backyard. “Out with you. Sunshine will do you good.”

Jack smiles the tiniest of smiles and nods. Just before he’s out the door he turns back and says “He waited. The boy waited for her.”

And then her grandson is out of sight. She’s puzzled but soon shrugs it off as Jack being Jack. All full of wonder and strange mannerisms that only come across as ridiculously endearing and he’s always jabbering on about what sounds to be far past nonsense, bless him.

“Just like his father.” She mutters and gets back to her chores.

XXX

It’s at dinner where Rory gets a scolding.
“Honestly, Rory! It worries me at times that you have people’s lives to care for when you go prancing around and forget your daughter! She was a floor above you, stupid! And you call yourself a nurse!” Amy rants.

“I did not forget!” Rory defends himself. “It just slipped my mind.”

“Slipped my mind is forgetting, moron!” Amy shouts back.

“It is not!” Rory argues.

“Parents!” Melody interrupts and Jack lets out a giggle.

Both Ponds stare at their daughter, grandson, and the Doctor. They had obviously forgotten they had an audience.

“Is this dinner or are we auditioning for the Jeremy Kyle show?” Melody asks with a smile.

Amy and Rory’s mouths both snap shut in unison.

“Thank you.” Melody says.

There are no further raising of voices at the dinner table that night but that’s mainly because Amy and Rory are too busy studying their daughter and her smile. By the time they’ve all cleared their plates Melody even offers to do the dishes and the Doctor offers himself to help her.

Amy is all smiles until she gets the chance to drag Rory over into their bedroom.

“Did you see that, Rory?!?” Amy squeals once she shuts the door and starts jumping excitedly. She grabs at him and shakes him quite forcefully for someone so tiny. “She’s smiling! A real one. A proper smile! Did you see?!!”

“Amy!” Rory takes a hold of his wife and attempts to stop her bubbling energy. “You’re not in your twenties anymore, you’re going to fall over and break something if you don’t watch it.”
“You’re a nurse.” She reminded, her voice gone flat. Unamused. “Besides, don’t you like women with broken hips? Namely older ones named Sylvia Mott. She dropped the Noble, her married name, a month ago. Do you want to know why?”

“I have a feeling you’re going to tell me.” Rory mumbled.

“To get your attention. To let you know she’s on the market again because you lead her on.”

“Amy,” Rory frowned, “You don’t really believe that do you? Hey, look at me.”

“Yeah, well maybe I do.” Amy grumbled and stubbornly refused to look at him.

“Amy, come on. Look at me. Please.” Rory nudges her arm gently. Amy wouldn’t budge. “Do you remember the day I asked you to marry me?”

“No.” Amy lied and attempted, very poorly, to hide a smile.

“I spent the entire night before and all the next day worrying myself over it. I almost didn’t ask you I was so scared. We went out for scones and you made fun of my nose. You laughed and your eyes lit up like tiny stars. And then I wasn’t scared anymore.” Rory pulled Amy close, “It’s you and me, Amy. You and me, always.”

Amy’s answering smile was tiny and even a bit shy. “I bet you say that to all the girls you marry.”

“Only the ones who make fun of my nose.”

“Oh, Rory.” Amy snuggled against him. “He’s not going to stay, is he?”

Rory didn’t answer.

“What are we gonna do then? Can we even do anything?” Amy wondered. “I didn’t think it through,
Rory. She’s attached now. What are we gonna do?”

“I don’t know, Amy.” He said honestly. “I really don’t know.”
Amy hears Melody come back into the house. Her daughter walks into the kitchen moments after. She’s going through the mail.

“Anything not money related come in the post?” Amy inquired.

Melody hummed, still sorting through the small bunch. “Oh! Look.” She sets the other mail down on the table and holds up a very fancy looking envelope. Amy over walks towards Melody and takes the letter when handed to her.

“Pond-Williams family.” Amy reads aloud before she tears it open. The card inside is just as elegant as the envelope was. Amy flips it open. “Dear Amy and Rory and family,” she starts but reads the rest silently. Amy finishes and tosses the card onto the table with the other pile.

“Well?” Melody prods.

Amy sighs, “Some sort of fancy gathering for the adults at that new religious hall thing or whatever.”

“Father Octavian Center?”

“Yeah, that one.” Amy confirms.

“It’s not exactly religious, mother. It’s in honor of him and the good deeds he had accomplished while he was alive. He was a good man.”

“The Christmas Lighting ceremony is that night but no, no, no. They have to make some special adult party for adults the night before Christmas.” Amy sneered, “I bet that Cassandra woman is behind this. She married old Edwin Bracewell for his money and now she’s spending a pretty penny with all her extravagant little parties.”
Melody frowned, “What’s wrong?”

Amy shakes her head and smiles, “Nothing. Nothing’s wrong. You go have a good time and when you see people we know say nice things that I wouldn't say.”

“You don’t want to come along?”

Amy scowled, “I’d prefer the lighting ceremony. It’s Christmas Eve and it’s more sensible to light up a Christmas tree than drinking martinis with a woman made of plastic.”

Melody rolls her eyes, “Something’s wrong. You’re just trying to deflect from whatever it is.”

Amy shook her head once again and pulled a chair from the table. She sat down. “I’ve been feeling a bit down lately. I think I’m getting a cold or something.”

Melody placed the back of her palm against her mother’s forehead. Amy grumbled and batted her daughters hand away.

“Mum!” Melody scolded. “You could have a fever.”

“I don’t need coddling.” Amy proclaimed, “I need a good day’s rest. And I suppose making your father carry out my every whim will help too.”

Melody laughed.

“Listen,” Amy reached out and took her daughter’s hand in hers, “Maybe, after Christmas, we should go on holiday. Just you and me and Jack. We could travel for a while. Turn it into a month long vacation of adventures that will give us enough memories to last a lifetime.”

“Aren’t you forgetting someone?” Melody smiled.

Amy hoped Melody wouldn’t name the person she was trying to get her daughter away from.
Melody’s eyes widened, “Dad, mum. Dad, what about dad?”

Amy let out a breath of relief, “He’ll fit in the boot of the car obviously.”

Melody gasped, “Mother!”

“You know he won’t come willingly.” Amy pointed out, “Might as well put him in a place he can’t run off from.”

“You are very, very funny.” Melody kissed her mother on the cheek before she walked out of the kitchen.

Amy sighed. She had hopes of getting her daughter out and away from Leadworth. It seemed that the best way to make letting go of the Doctor easier for Melody would be to put some space between them. That perhaps some distance would help. Hopefully, the further away they were from each other Melody would feel less attached to him. If Amy could accomplish that then maybe the strings they’d both entwined in each other would unravel kindly and the loss of him would be easier to deal with. She can’t think of any other way to protect her daughter from the inevitable. Either that or finding a way to make the Doctor stay with them. With all of them because she’d just started realizing that she doesn’t want to lose the Doctor either.

XXX

The Doctor’s been sitting on the carpeted floor with Jack. He’s holding up another one of Jack’s drawings and trying to figure out what’s gone wrong with this universe. Has something even gone wrong? Why here? Why now. Why?

“Did you dream about these, Jack?” he held the drawings up to the boy.

Jack shook his head vehemently. “They’re not dreams.”
And, well, the Doctor knew that. Gallifrey, Appalapachia, Daleks, Rory’s nose. They’re all very real.

“Then what are they, Jack?” the Doctor frowned. There’s a silent desperation that’s slightly driven him mad. He’s got no Tardis to give him an inkling of who or what Jack is. Also, his screwdriver has apparently lost its level of efficiency the longer he’s been in this world. There is nothing at all for him to go on. Where does he start? What are the signs? Are there signs? Could they be right in front of him plain as day?

Nothing. There is nothing.

“Knock, knock.” He turns around to see Melody leaning against the doorframe. “Jack, is it alright if we leave your Gran to take you to the lighting ceremony on Christmas Eve?”

Jack considered his mother. “Why?”

“There’s a gathering I’d like to attend that is not at all child friendly by the looks of it.” Melody fixes a look at the Doctor, “And I’m going to be dragging you along with me.”

“Me?” The Doctor points to himself.

“I don’t see any other adult in this room. Well, I say adult...” Melody grins.

“Will there be dancing?” he asked, “I’m rubbish at dancing haven’t been to a wedding in centuries.”

“Is the party at the Father Octavian Center?” Jack said suddenly.

Melody nodded. “That is exactly correct, my love.”

“Good.” Jack replied. “It needs to be there.”

Before the Doctor can question Jack on why Melody is holding her hand out to him. “Come on. If your dancing turns out to be truly horrifying we have a lot of work to do if we want to fix that.”
He smiles. She is literally the mightiest of all distractions. When she’s near he has to focus everything on her because if he doesn’t keep himself in order he’ll do something monumentally stupid. It’s gotten close. So, so close. Sometimes it's a look that says too much. They don’t hold hands but there is intent when their hands brush against each other’s and fingertips touch. That’s dangerous enough. If he reaches out, if he takes hold, he won’t let go. He did so already, he let River go. He can’t do it again. If he doesn’t keep control of himself there will be no saving anyone at all. If she lets him in, lets him love her in every sense of the word then when he leaves, and he will, this goodbye won’t be the death of him. It will be the end of him. And it will not end well.

The Master had refused to regenerate and so can he.
It had been snowing like mad. The streets were covered, every flat surface, every roof, everything white as sheets. So many things were happening all around him. It left him having little to no time for himself which meant he had to put off trying to figure out why he had been sent to a place he doesn’t belong. Sent and stuck. It was one thing after another, days gone in a blur. A month even faster. He keeps his worrying to himself. Sharing his anxieties and paranoia would do no one any good. Besides, it’s Christmas time. A Christmas with the Ponds. A Pond Christmas. He loves the sound of that.

There was Rory keeping the ladder steady while he, clumsy limbs and all, attempted to hang up the Christmas lights outside. There was Amelia deciding they were both rubbish at it and wisely sent them both inside to ready some hot chocolate while she and Melody took their place. There was helping Melody buy a Christmas tree and then helping Jack decorate it. Making snow angels and snowmen and having snow fights. He and all of his Ponds making smores by the fireplace, snug warm blankets draped over themselves while he read them *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens.

And doesn’t that just bring back memories of lives once lived and never again. He cringes at the fact that he’d almost died. In a dungeon. In *Cardiff*. That would have just been plain embarrassing.

Laughter became a constant presence, an endless joy. There was secret present shopping with Amy in the middle of the night while everyone else slept. And, more importantly, there was secret engagement ring shopping with Mickey.

There was nothing but happiness. Always. And everywhere.

Christmas Eve wastes no time to appear either. He doesn’t even properly catch up by the time it does come. So he’s unprepared. But then, but *then*… he’s ready to tear his hair out because there absolutely had *not* been a suit packed along with him when the Tardis had readied his luggage. He’d checked. The Old Girl put all his favorites and even added a very familiar scarf he hadn’t worn in ages. Literally lifetimes ago. It was as if she’d known he’d be needing it. But a black tux with a matching bowtie? No. It’s there nonetheless.

It’s new. He hasn’t worn it before. The last time he wore a suit the Towers were singing and he gave
River Song used his screwdriver when he kissed her goodnight. No, not goodnight. He kissed her goodbye.

He hadn’t worn one since. It feels wrong. He knows it mostly is. If River were around she’d have slapped him silly by now. She’d be dragging him out of this universe and back into his own. He’d have gotten very good scolding for lingering as he always does. She’d probably have shot him on the way out as well. It would’ve be well deserved and it’s not like she hadn’t done it before.

He’s positive she’d most definitely have no regrets if she did end up killing him for this one. He’d be lying if he said the thought didn’t fill both his hearts with warmth. River was right. River was always right. There’s only room for one psychopath per Tardis indeed. She would’ve helped him do the right thing. He’s lost now. He can’t find his way back without her.

“Don’t you look sharp?” Amy’s spoken appraisal startles him from his heartache. She’s leaning against the doorframe to his room with a fond smile on her face. “You’ve got your bowtie all sideways. Come here.”

He does. Amy makes quick work of fixing his bowtie. She tugs at it affectionately when she’s done.

“There. Bowties are still quite ridiculous.” she says, “But you pull them off just fine.”

“Are you sure you won’t be joining us?” He asks.

“Nah, you don’t need these bag of old bones slowing you down. Anyway,” she grins excitedly, “Rory’s asked for the night off!”

“Rory?” He was surprised at that. “Rory?”

“I know right! I didn’t even have to coerce him. He actually lied willingly.” Amy shakes her head happily, as if she can’t quite believe it herself. “It’s like he’s transitioned into some sort of awesome elderly rule breaker lately. I’m loving it!”

The Doctor laughed. “Given time, Rory is rather legendary all on his own.”
“Yeah.” Amy quiets, “We’re going to take Jack to the Christmas Lighting ceremony. It’ll be nice. Almost like a proper date.”

“Proper date.” The Doctor repeats.

“Yes.” Amy nods, “Like yours.”

“Mine?” he frowns.

“Yes, yours. You numpty.” She shoved at his chest gently. “You’re going to go and you’re going have fun. So stop being Mr. Frowny Face.” She ordered.

“Mum?! Doctor?!” they heard Melody calling.

“And when the clock strikes twelve,” Amy continued, taking a grip of both his shoulders and looking him straight in the eye, “you kiss the girl, yeah?”

The thought of doing so terrified him because Amy was insisting he do what he absolutely cannot allow himself to do.

“Mum?” Melody sounded closer. Then she came into view and any thoughts he’d been struggling over disappeared.

“And here she is.” Amy smiled proudly.

Melody’s dress was strapless and flowed down to her feet. Long and elegant and but very simple. It was a dark, dark shade. So dark it could very easily have been overlooked as black. He himself wouldn’t have be able to see its true beauty had he not heard it described once before.

“It’s not dark and black and without character.” Vincent Van Gogh had described to he and Amy, hand outstretched and pointing into the night sky, painting out the magnificent world he saw through his eyes, “The black is in fact deep blue.”
And deep blue it was. It clung dearly to her every curve.

Melody’s hair fell down past her shoulders. They’re longer than River’s had been. Soft, golden, perfect curls that he so beloved. Maddening is what they were. In his case he went more than mad trying to find out how exactly her hair came to be as it was. It was just there. Everywhere.

In the early days, though he’d never admit it, he hadn’t exactly become lovesick of her presence but in many ways, yes. That’s exactly what he was. A woman he didn’t even know. He had then convinced himself it was her hair that did it. He’d become infatuated and her hair was to blame. No one had hair like River and it was annoying only because the more she appeared in his life the more he wanted her around. As magnificent at her hair was it had nothing to do with his growing fondness for her.

River was made as no one else ever had. She was extraordinary. Special. She was made of everything he’d ever loved sown together and housed in one body. Of time and space, human but plus-Timelord. She was the closest thing he’d had to an actual living being of his own race. And best not forget the most important bit of her. His Ponds. The last of his Ponds.

His Tardis had mothered River since the beginning. Far before any of them knew who River was the Tardis had. The one and only time his beautiful blue box had been able to speak to him, with a voice and with words, even then her chosen last breaths she spent not only on him but in behalf of River as well.

“The only water in the forest is the river.” She’d repeated to Rory, again and again. “She said we’d need to know that someday.”

The Tardis responded to River in a way she’d never done with him. Not in a bad way just… just different. When River would fly his Tardis it was entrancing to watch. It was a conversation that didn’t need words. River would touch the console and his Tardis would radiate with joy. The Tardis was his home and River, Child of the Tardis, was exactly that. Home.

He should have smelt it on her from the very beginning. Timelords had a certain air about themselves. Not so much a smell but a sense of gravity. It sticks to the skin as humans stick to solid ground. He’d been so long without his people he’d forgotten what the sense felt like. Humans cling to the earth but River, like him, could let go and watch and feel it turn like a part of their own skin.
Of all the beauties in the universe, and he’d seen them all, he’d never come across one that surpassed that very definition only because it was so rare. She was beautiful but it was so much more than that and therefore so much more complicated.


It’s a pain that can’t be numbed or forgotten. It comes with an agony that spreads and spreads, it never stops spreading. It’s everything that accompanies a broken heart. In his case you’d just have to multiply it by two. It, she, would still always be worth it.

Melody was gleaming at him with amusement. It’s when Amy’s hand cups the bottom of his chin in her palm and pushes upward that he realizes he’d been gaping, mouth wide open, since he’d caught sight of her. His mouth snaps shut immediately and he tries to regain some sense of dignity.

Amy taps her finger to her chin and hums. “I think it’s safe to say he likes what he sees.”

“Only one way to really find out. Doctor,” Melody bit her lip, “How do I look?”

He already knew the answer to that.

“Amazing.”

Chapter End Notes

(This) is the dress Melody is wearing. It looks better on her obviously because YOWZAH!
The Father Octavian Center was massive. Overwhelmingly so. It was made of white marble stone and engravings were etched onto every wall. The archeologist in River would have died from the sight alone. It doesn’t surprise him when he hears a familiar boisterous laughter. Lady Cassandra is at the other side of the room surrounded by many and entertaining them all as if she were born to do so.

“At least she’s not a flap of skin this time.” He says and looks beside him to Melody. She’s watching him with a very peculiar smile on her face.

“Something funny?” He asked.

He’s so oblivious that Melody can’t help laughing at him. “Oh, sweetie. I’ve long learned to stop asking when brilliant men leave the real world and go to their mind palace. I especially stay out of it when you boys start talking to yourselves.”

He felt slightly affronted. “What do you mean talking to myself?!”

She laughed again. “Well you obviously weren’t talking to me. Didn’t even ask for my input in your little private discussion. You also failed to respond when I tried talking to you. That all constitutes as talking to yourself.”

“Melody Pond,” he gaped, “I was not talking to myself!”

Melody shakes her head happily, “If you say so, dear.”

“I wasn’t!” he insisted, “I was mentioning aloud.”

“Of course you were.” She replied, reaching for his hand before pulling him along with her. He went willingly of course. It didn’t take them long to make their way to the middle of the dance area.
“Now,” Melody turned to face him properly, “shut up and dance, will you?”

He smiled and nodded. “Yes. Yes, I believe I will.”

“Good.”

“Very.” He agreed.

Her hands gripped at his shoulders before sliding up and resting at the back of his neck. She closed the distance between them with one quick movement. A sudden wave of shyness overtook him. He cleared his throat and placed his hands on her hips. He stood unsure and tense. He barely moved to the music. It took but a few seconds before he heard her sigh. He fought flailing about when she took a firm hold of his hands and placed them flat against her body then curled herself against him once more.

If there was ever a reason for a *yowza* needing to be said aloud her magnificent curves were more than reason enough. He found it best to fight that urge for now.

He decided to let go of his inhibitions a bit. To loosen the leash he tied himself with and to enjoy it. After all, there really was nothing wrong with dancing, eh? When his body lost some tension and his hold on her grew more confident she smiled against his neck. He relaxed into her arms entirely after that.

XXX

Some of the townspeople were hurrying to prepare for the ceremony. It was the same every year at Christmas. Most all of Leadworth would all gather to watch the lights being lit. A canvas of Christmas colors lighting the dark night as it fell over them.

The Ponds and their grandson had found a nice spot to lay back and watch that was far off and away from most of the crowd. Amy was fond of being an outsider when it came to these kinds of things. Sociable things otherwise known as normal things. Rory couldn’t rid her of it no matter how he tried. She was a leader, never a follower. Then Amy has a ridiculous wonder as to where their daughter gets it.
“It’s colder than it was last year.” Rory shivered, puffs of air forming as he spoke. He took the blanket Amy threw over to him gratefully.

“No it’s not.” Amy settled down next to her husband. “You’re an old and skinny unnatural being, Roranicus. *That’s* why you’re freezing your little bony backside off.”

Rory scowled at her and tucked himself more securely with the now three blankets he had covered around himself. Amy looked so completely warm and content sitting with just her long dark blue winter coat, red hat and red mittens. He cursed.

“What’s that Rory?” Amy turned her attention away from watching Jack playing footie with some mates to face her husband.

Rory sighed, “I didn’t say anything.”

“You were muttering. I know those shivering whimpers when I hear them.”

“Dammit. Amy, I’m *cold.*” He pouted.

“Oh, come here you big baby.” Amy scooted closer and threw her arms around Rory. “Better?”

“You’ll do.” Rory answered.

“Oi!” She swatted Rory’s side.

He laughed. “I’m joking, I’m joking! You’re lovely.”

“Damn right I am.” Amy grinned and Rory kissed her rosy cheek. His cold lips made her nose wrinkle. He kissed her nose next.

They were silent while Jack played and the crowd slowly started gathering with more people.
“Hey, look at that.” Amy tipped her head towards four creepy looking Santa Clauses holding trumpets.

“Ha.” Rory grinned, “Robot Santa’s. That’s new.”

“Yeah.” Amy felt a shiver go through her that had nothing to do with the chill of Christmas Eve. She held onto Rory tighter. “It is.” She mumbled.

“They look absolutely rubbish.” Rory chuckled.

Amy tore her eyes away from the weird Santa Clauses and felt anxiety building up inside of her. A bad feeling in her gut was telling her something wasn’t right. She was ready to call for Jack but then stiffened with worry.

“Rory?”

“Hmm?”

“Where’s Jack?”

XXX

“See. You can dance.” Melody whispered a few songs later.

“I’m glad you think so.” The Doctor replied.

“I do.” She sighs contently. “The Doctor dances. Who would have known with those ridiculous legs of yours?”
He chuckles. “Miracles happen at Christmas time, remember?”

He feels her laugh against his chest and her hair tickles his chin. His hearts break at the familiar feeling. A handful of memories spring up ranging from River’s hair to River’s voice to her lips and her tears and her hearts, two, like him, and then the memory that hurts the most comes to mind.

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*The list.*

Darillium was still a long way away in those days. It hadn’t even been able to touch them yet, either of them.

It was a ‘what if’ list and they made it just because they were together and River was bored so she asked his thoughts and they wrote them down. A list with a line drawn in the middle. Names. Baby names. Girls on the left side and boys on the right. From quite a few of them two survived as final favorites. The first name was Jessica because it was Amelia’s middle name. The second happened to be Adric. They had entirely lost track of time while they made up that list. It was fun to pretend for a while that it was possible. A little girl of their own or a little boy. Maybe their little girl would have space hair like River and their little boy would have been ginger. He’d have liked that. No, actually he’d have *loved* that. He wanted that. Wants it still.

Miracles.

If only.

A tear slips down his cheek before he can stop it. He wipes it away quickly. Melody doesn’t catch on and for that he’s thankful. He tries to calm his thoughts the longer they dance. He manages to pull himself together by the time they stop and go sit down to rest their legs.

Now that they were seated at a table Melody fought the urge to toss her shoes aside. She could feel the strain already. “God, I haven’t worn heels in ages.”

“Well, dear,” the Doctor grinned, “you wear them well.”

“Oh, shut up.”
A silent chuckle rumbled deep in his chest. “You, Melody Pond, would absolutely have to make me.”

“You think?”

“You must’ve had a good flirting partner in the past.” She guessed.

The first thought that comes to mind is ‘I had the best.’

His second thought only confirms the first ‘Even better than Harkness.’

“Melody, my sweet girl!” The soft voice of a woman called out and interrupts his nostalgic idiocy. In seconds the woman is standing beside them in all her ethereal beauty.

“Doctor Blu.” Melody rose and hugged Idris tightly.

“My beloved child,” Idris tuts, “I’ve already told you to call me by my first name.”

Melody rolled her eyes fondly. “Yes, mother.”

“You look absolutely gorgeous!” Idris gleamed at Melody with pride and affection.

“As do you.” Melody returned, “Blue really is your color.”

“For the both of us. You’d think we were stitched from the same cloth.” Idris’s eyes turned watery as if the sight of Melody was enough to make her want to cry with joy. She blinked and only then noticed the Doctor still seated.
“Oh, Doctor B—,” Melody stopped, “I’m sorry.” She amended, “Idris, this is the Doctor.”

“How rude of me. Hello.” Idris’s calm, soft eyes made him smile widely. Somehow they were still shining and all-knowing as she looked upon him. “Hello, Doctor. I’ve heard so much about you. It’s so very, very nice to meet you.”

She extended her hand and he took it. Held it as if it was precious which even in this upturned world it absolutely was.

“Likewise.” He replied.

A voice suddenly echoed throughout the room. The voice even managed bluster over the band playing music for the gathering. It rendered them silent.

“WHERE IS SHE?! WHERE THE HELL IS SHE?! CASSANDRA! CASSANDRA, YOU BLOODY TART!” The headstrong redhead appeared soon enough. Donna Noble pushed through every guests in her way while her husband Lee continuously tried to catch up beside her. “WHERE IS THE LADY CASSANDRA?! I WANNA HAVE A WORD WITH HER!”

Donna spotted the blonde casually leaning against the bar side. “Oi!” she headed towards her, “Move! Move!” she pushed aside more people standing in her path, “You! Blondie!”

“Gods, have we managed to offend the help already?” Cassandra laughed obnoxiously and those around her joined in.

“I’d wipe that smile off your face if I was you!” Donna’s fury was so pungent it was practically sending shock waves through every person who was in the room.


Melody anxiously glanced at the Doctor. “Should we do something?” she asked him.

“No, no, no.” He laughed nervously. He knew better than to do anything of the sort.
“Not now, Lee!” Donna snapped at him before turning her attention back to Cassandra. “Listen you trashy minx you keep your filthy mongrel paws off of my husband!”

“Doctor.” Melody hissed.

“Listen, ginge, no one wants to taste your sloppy leftovers!” Cassandra mouthed back, waving a self-important hand in the air while the other held her drink.

The Doctor shrugged. “Cassandra brought this on herself. Donna’s wrath could match a timelord’s fury.” He said fondly. “I bloody miss her.”

He realized he probably shouldn’t have let that out. If Melody was to ask of it she quickly lost the opportunity because Cassandra continued.

“That said, your husband is quite a catch!” And she had the audacity to wink at Lee.

Donna gasped. “Catch this!” She grabbed Cassandra’s drink from her hand and threw it directly into the other woman’s face.

“You beast!” Cassandra cried.

“I’ll show you a beast you bit-” Donna didn’t get to finish because the too familiar sound of trumpet playing sounded in the distance.

One by one, seven Santa Clauses appeared through the front doors of The Father Octavian Center.
Amy’s pushing past the crowd with Rory hurrying along after her. They’ve called and searched only for Jack to remain unfound. The ruckus works up around them. Cheering and celebrating as the ceremony goes on. The more they look and the more panic arises. Somehow, she can’t help but feel like she always knew this was coming.

Amy’s slowly suffocating with dread. Once lighted, the Christmas lights draped around the tree are shining so bright that they turn blinding and the noise deafens everything around her. She’s clouded so heavily that when Rory reaches for her arm she pulls away angrily. She can’t stop. Jack’s missing. She can’t. Rory forces her to stop, grabbing at her arms and willing her to look at him. Her eyesight has become bleary, tears long past gathering make it hard to focus on him but she tries. She doesn’t really have to though. They’ve been together for years. She knows his hold on her, which means which, and she knows the look in his eye. Rory’s hair has lightened and greyed, the wrinkles and creases have taken to mark them both but there is no mistaking her husband at that moment.

Their youth faded ages ago but beautiful, gorgeous Rory was all she ever saw. There were times though when they were kids that Rory would look at her and there was something ancient behind those soft, kind eyes. She saw history and a heartache in him, a longing as if time had kept him in its grasp longer than is humanly possible. There’s never been another look like it and she’s always had an inking that he’s the last very of his kind. Perhaps his soul was aged to a thousand years. Or more like two thousand.

She’s still pushing away at him. He isn’t about to relent and succeeds at dragging them out of eyesight.

“Amy!”

He’s literally right in front of her but she can hardly hear him. Not with her current state. The noise carrying on around them is no help with that. He somehow catches onto it because his hands grab at her shoulders and shakes her forcefully in hopes to bring her out of it.

“We won’t get anywhere like this, Amy!”
She hears that better, closer.

“We need to stay calm!”

“He’s gone, Rory!” She quavered, legs wobbling and ready to give out.

“He’s not gone he’s just somewhere!”

“Where?!” She shouted furiously. “Where’s somewhere, Rory?!”

She pushes him again and that throws him off balance but he’s quick to react. His hands come to cradle her cheeks gently and she nearly topples down onto the ground from his loving gesture. Rory has to pull her close and wrap an arm around her waist to keep her vertical. She sags against him and begins to sob uncontrollably.

He hears someone calling for him and turns his head. Mickey and Martha are making their way over.

“What happened?” Mickey’s asks worriedly. “What’s wrong?”

Amy’s sobs start catching at her throat.

“Jack. It’s Jack.” Rory replies, “He’s disappeared, we can’t find him.”

Then the explosions started.
The well-known foes from his past don’t wait for words or second thoughts to be had. It does not take long this time for the room to break into chaos. The damage is being done before he has a say in it and the injured are already falling. The screams and the cries are of no matter to him. He can’t think to do anything to help them, not this time. For once in his many lives he only has one priority. One thing, the one of most importance that has to keep safe. He’s got the most precious cargo by his side and he can’t lose her again. He’s readied for a refusal against the universe before only this time he’s not letting her go until his dying breath.

He grabs her hand in his own and there has only ever been one word to say.

“Run!”

The Doctor pulls her with him without a second thought. He barely manages to catch her from slipping onto the floor and then they’re finally running. Its utter hell pushing his way past everyone as quickly as he can. The humanoid robots continued to aim their weapons, firing without mercy.

“Doctor! Over there!” She points to a door far away on the other side room and the fact that it is in such distance is downright annoying.

“Oh, isn’t that just our bloody luck!” He mutters testily. They’re off again. It feels like forever before they are in reach. So very, very close now. The next explosion hits at the roof a few feet above them. Two more follow at their heels. That’s when he knows.

So they did come for me.

There’s a loud cracking sound before the roof starts collapsing. A rumble shakes the ground and Melody loses her balance the exact second hard stone marble comes tumbling down.

“Doctor!”

Her hand slips out of his grasp and she falls.

“RIVER!”
And the name echoes as loud as the shots being fired.

Chapter End Notes

So this was really, really, reallyreallyreally short.
Twenty.

Twenty.

“Open your eyes please.” The Doctor called gently, moving stray curls from Melody’s face. She’s still got a pulse, still breathing, but she’s unconscious. Once again she’s managed to take on the worse of injuries that were meant for him. So far, all he had to show for the trouble was a lightly sprained ankle.

It should’ve been hard to see her in the dark room he’s barricaded them in but it’s not. He’d had to dig her out from under the ruins that fell over them and drag them both to safety. The way he managed to do so wasn’t something he was about to pass off as luck or coincidence. It was all too well structured to just have happened out of the blue.

The ceiling of the Father Octavian Center was coming down on them both, it did. Then two Roboforms were at his side. They were looking down at him and ready to finish him off when his top pocket started to feel warm. Too warm. He reached into his jacket and was surprised to find his Sonic Screwdriver fully charged. It was already set to detonate the Roboform function patterns. It only took a push of a button for the robots to self-destruct and fall motionless onto the floor. Unfortunately, it didn’t do the same for all the other robots causing terror in the room but it was his chance and so he took it to save her. He can still hear the screaming in the other room.

“You know this happens every Christmas.” The Doctor said quietly. “Every bloody Christmas. Always on Christmas.” He reached out for Melody’s hand and let out a silent breath of relief to find it still warm. She was still alive, no thanks to him.

“It shouldn’t surprise me, all of this happening now.” He went on, “There was one Christmas where all I wanted was a cozy post-regeneration nap but instead I lost my hand fighting for the fate of planet while wearing another bloke’s pyjamas. Oh, and there was that time I was a Caretaker. I had to save Madge Arwell’s kids from giant wood people. Well, I didn’t so much save them as she did the actual saving bit. She’s sort of the reason I spent Christmas with my… family.”

He smiled, remembering how that was looking to be his loneliest holiday. Truth is, if Madge hadn’t ordered him off to go spend the holiday with Amy and Rory he probably wouldn’t have done it. He’d ‘died’ and the Ponds were supposed to be under that impression only it turns out River told them of his little escape act. Of course she did. River was River and she did as she liked. For once he was glad she had. Turning up on Amy and Rory’s bright blue front door and being welcomed with open arms was one of his fondest memories. The Ponds even had a place set for him already to which he couldn’t fathom why.
“Oh, because we always do!” Amy had said, “It’s Christmas, you moron!”

River showed up fashionably late that night, long after the eggnog and presents. For the first time in their timey-wimey lives they were all together without any massive sized spoilers in the way. That Christmas served as a first in the many more that would follow after that as a legitimate Christmas with the wife at the in-laws.

“Christmas time, for me, always entails shenanigans of the dangerous variety but that Christmas…,” the Doctor shook his head, “That Christmas was different. We sat down as a family and had dinner. Then, we simply enjoyed each other’s company for the rest of the night. No one tried to take over the world. There was no running. We didn’t even go into the Tardis, it was so boring. And I absolutely loved it.” He confessed. “You’d think years of it happening I’d get used to things blowing up in my face, eh?”

With still no reply the Doctor finally moved away from Melody. In doing so it was almost as if he were removing himself from a bubble. Sitting beside her, being able to reach for her, made everything else surrounding him silent. Now, several feet away, the distance is breaking him back into reality. He nears the door he carried her in through. It’s now buried behind various objects, barely spotable behind some spare chairs, file cabinets, etc.

It comes forefront what is on the other side of that barricaded door. The many lives he’d chosen to ignore saving in hopes to save one Melody Pond Smith. As of now it’s not looking good to rely on hope. If River could see him now she’d probably end up wishing she’d never looked. He wonders if he looks anything like the man she married. If that man is still in there, in him. Should he bother trying to be? New screams start echoing from outside. Terrible, anguished cries.

“I might as well find a new name.” He says to no one in particular. “I’ve long stopped being a doctor for years now.”

“Self-doubt, my love?” says a familiar voice.

The Doctor turns his attention back to Melody who is still unconscious. They are not alone in the room anymore. The figure standing beside Melody only smiles.

“River?” He asks and rubs at his eyes. Mind games, perhaps madness is at his wits, finally knocking him down. If this is madness, well, he can’t argue he likes the sight of it. Or…
The Christmas Lighting Ceremony was far from over. A fire had been started several explosions ago from the Christmas lights hanging on the giant eight foot tree. That scene unfolded like a firework show gone wrong. After the Roboforms started firing from their trumpets the lights on the tree started exploding monumentally and carrying with them a flame that seemed to have a mind of its own, as if the fire were alive by its own right. It spread throughout the air and made a blockade of the entire ceremony so no one could get out. With all the ruckus the Ponds had been separated from Mickey and Martha and there had still been no sight of Jack anywhere.

When the lively fire spread out it exploded against anything it came in contact with. It would ricochet against anything and everything. A distance away from the actual tree there had been a small mausoleum built for Billy Shipton and his wife Sally for being the founders of the ceremony in the late 1960s. It had cracked and damaged when the fire hit but it was still standing somewhat vertical. Rory counted that as a blessing enough and had dragged them both he and Amy inside the second he got the chance.

“Amy!” Rory screamed, barely managing to hold onto his wife by her coat before she dashed from the safety of their hideaway. He’s thankful that even in his old age he still had a hell of a grip.

“He’s out there!” Amy cried, “Jack is out there! We can’t just leave him!”

“It’s chaos out there, we’ll never find him like this!”

“I’m not leaving him!” Amy screamed back.

“Amy! Jack is a smart boy, he’ll have gone for cover!” Rory reasoned, “You are no use to either of us dead!”

“I won’t leave him, Rory. Don’t make me leave him.” Amy said quietly. Rory frowned.
“I don’t think we’d have a chance of leaving either way.” He replied sadly. “I know, Amy. I know.”

“My god, what if he’s…” But she clasped her palm over her mouth before she could finish. Rory quickly reached out and wrapped his arms around her.

“Don’t think that.” Rory muttered, his breath warm against her temple. “Don’t even start to think that.”

A child’s voice startled them.

“I could help if you like?”

The Ponds turned to find a little girl with long, straight hair well past her shoulders. She was sitting on a piece of stone that had broken off from the top side of the mausoleum before they got there. She smiled up at them happily as if she didn’t have a care in the world. Amy and Rory only stared until Amy cleared her throat.

“Um,” Amy tightened her grip around her husband and whispered, “Rory, are you seeing what I’m seeing?”

“A little girl appearing out of nowhere?” Rory offered, “Yep, I’m getting that as well.”

“You think the stone caved in on us and now we’re dead and seeing things?” Amy asked.

“It’s likely.” Rory answered, to which Amy elbowed him.

“We need to be alive to save Jack, stupidface!” She roared.

“Ow! Amy!” Rory patted his now sore ribs. “I’m 68, I bruise easily!”

The little girl snickered excitedly, bringing both of their attention back to her. “You’re just like the fairytales!” She said.
Rory gave Amy a sidelong glance. “Erm, fairytales?” He directed to the little girl. She nodded fiercely.

“I’ve heard tons of fairytales about you! Only,” The child looked regretful then, “Oh, I got it wrong, it’s not you. I forgot you’re not, but you’re just so real. But… but you are real.” She smiled again, brighter this time, as if the thought brought her the upmost joy.

“I’m sorry,” Amy interrupted suddenly, “But who exactly are you?”

“Oh!” The little girl sprung up from the broken piece of stone and flattened the flowery dress she was wearing. She faded in and out of sight with the action being so abrupt. “Oops, sorry.” She apologized sheepishly. “I shouldn’t use so much power so quickly. I’m Charlotte Abigail Lux. I’m here to help you so you can help the Doctor.”
To say the Ponds had been bewildered by the presence of Charlotte would have been an understatement. The strange little girl told them of a passage way right beneath their feet that they could use to escape. Amy was hesitant to leave, still not knowing the whereabouts and safety of her grandson made her even less willing, but Rory had taken it upon himself to point out they were lacking of any better options. So they went. All three of them, traveling beneath the ground. Rory and Amy following after Charlotte as she led the way.

The passageway beneath the mausoleum wasn’t very spacious. Amy and Rory had to huddle beside each other as Charlotte let the way. The child was now glowing, lighting the darkness of the path while they walked. Charlotte had occupied herself humming a tune both Ponds had never heard of. Amy decided now the proper time to tuck herself even closer to Rory.

“Rory,” Amy whispered very quietly, “Did you notice how she just… flickers in and out of thin air?”

Rory only nodded calmly.

“Yup.” He replied. “And she’s glowing too.”

“Why is she doing that?” Amy wondered, “I mean, how exactly does a little girl learn how to flicker?!”

“Out of everything that’s happened today that’s what you’re questioning?” He mumbled.

Amy frowned and shoved her shoulder into his abruptly. He stumbled slightly, having to steady himself with the brick wall beside him. The movements caught Charlotte’s attention and she looked back at them.

“Everything alright back there?” Charlotte asked.
“Everything’s fine.” Rory reassured her with a friendly smile.

“He just tripped.” Amy supplied, “Happens all the time. Old bones of his aren’t what they use to be. Right Rory?”

Rory sent a glare his wife’s way before deciding to take up the silence with some conversation.

So.” He attempted, “You know the Doctor then?”

“Oh, yes.” The little girl nodded back at him vigorously before turning her attention forwards again, “It’s been such a long time now really. So much has happened.”

“Long time, eh?” Amy spoke up, “What are you like twelve?”

“Amy.” Rory started, a warning in his tone.

“It’s been ages.” Charlotte continued, unaffected by Amy’s apparent frustrations. “I guess you could say it’s been a proper lifetime ago. He’s different now though. He’s not the same man anymore. He’s sillier but sadder still. She said so.”

“I don’t understand.” Rory rubbed at his shoulder. “Who said?”

XXX

“River?” the Doctor continued to stare at his dead wife in front of him. “But…but how?”

River shrugged, the secretive smile on her face apparent as ever. “Spoilers.”

“Isn’t there always.” He replied, wanting nothing more than to go to her. To run to River and then
Keep running together but his feet don’t move an inch. There’s a fear in him that worries any movement would disrupt whatever illusion this was. One wrong move could make River fade from him again and he’s not so fond of that idea. He stays put.

River watches him quietly for a second or two before her smile turns softer and knowing. “It keeps you interested, sweetie.”

The Doctor exhaled slowly, “Are you real?”

“I’m not here, not really.” River said sadly before turning her attention to Melody’s unconscious form. “She’s why I’m here. You need her.”

“I need you.” The Doctor corrected suddenly. River’s head snapped up at his admission and she met his eyes. Her smile was gone now and she looked pained.

“I know.” She said softly, moving away from Melody and approaching her husband. Once standing in front of him River looked him over. “You’re thinner than when I last saw you. How’s that even possible?”

The Doctor only stared. River, his River. There only not really. He reached a hesitant hand out and brushed a finger over her cheekbone. There was a ripple of static with his action, her image blurred. “You’re a hologram. Hologramish, rather. A shoddy one too, you’re not supposed to disrupt so easily.”

“Always have to kill the mood, don’t you?” She quipped. That earned her a small smile from him. “But yes, my love. You hit the nail right on the head. And I’m sorry but I don’t have long.”

The Doctor flinched at her words as if stricken. She actually looked guilty.

“I don’t like it either,” River said much too airily, “But it’s my last chance to see you and… well, how can a girl resist a man in a bowtie?” She tugged at the piece of cloth affectionately. Though her fingers technically couldn’t grab hold of the fabric it did indeed warm his hearts to see the action done. By her. By River.

“River, what do you mean last chance?”
She knew he’d catch that part. Instead of answering she backed away from him, returning to Melody’s side and kneeling down beside her unconscious form.

“What are you doing?” The Doctor asked warily, a slight panic starting to fill his senses.

“Helping.” She answered. That only fueled his panic more.

“Don’t start that.” She pointed at him knowingly, “I’ll not have my husband cock up saving Christmas because of a pretty girl. History repeating itself does no one any favors, my love.”

River’s hologram started to glow brighter.

“River.”

She looked back up at him and there were tears in her eyes. She smiled sadly, “Goodbye, sweetie.”

The room filled with light, momentarily blinding him.
Twenty-Two.

Martha Jones had to blink more than a few times to become fully aware of her surroundings. It took a few more moments to realize she was lying flat on her back, her eyesight losing the blurry haze of waking soon enough. When she glanced around she noticed first the bodies. Countless, lying beside her, none showing any sign of life. And there was fire.

She tried to sit up but a pain shot through her entire body. It was when she looked down on herself that she noticed a large chunk of the Christmas tree had fallen atop of her. Martha let her body fall limp again, as it was when she’d awakened. She decided it best to try and locate Mickey first thing. Perhaps he was here somewhere. He had to be. The last thing she remembers was separating from the Ponds and then taking his hand as they ran for safety. She remembers a loud explosion. The Christmas tree exploded entirely, yes. She remembers that now. But after that? Nothingness.

She tries calling Mickey’s name aloud yet her voice only served to come out as a broken whisper. She tries again but this time her voice cracks and breaks off entirely. Tears of frustration build behind her eyelids but she takes two deep breaths in a forced attempt to calm herself. She has to focus in order to get this piece of wood off of her and search for Mickey. She has to.

Martha once again forces herself to try and move. She has to bite at her lip to stop from crying out in agony, a few tears manage to slip free though. It’s when she tries to push off the piece of tree trunk on top of her that she sees the true extent of the damage. The large chunk of broken wood wasn’t lying on her, it had plunged right through her. The explosion must have propelled it out and she’d been unlucky enough to be in its way. It was literally keeping her body pinned to the snowy ground. She imagines the process being something to the likes of a thumbtack pressing through paper when pinned to a wall, if not a more violent version of course.

“Martha.” A woman’s voice interrupts her thoughts. The sound of her voice is shaken and heavy but she’d recognize it anywhere. Martha looks up to see the familiar face of her dear friend and private secretary Donna Noble. Her orange hair is covered with ash particles, face dusted with it as well.

“Oh, Martha.” The redhead falls to her feet beside Martha. “Oh, God. Oh, God.” The woman
mutters, reaching a hand to Martha’s wound. “Martha, you’re bleeding. Don’t worry, I’m going to get you out.”

“Don’t.” Martha barely manages to say. “Don’t touch it.”

“But it’s gone right through you!” Donna cries. “It’s pinning you to the ground!”

Martha only nods, “But if you take it out… it’s the wood. It’s lodged into my abdomen. It’s what’s keeping me from bleeding out entirely. If we take it out I’ll lose blood and fast.” Martha swallows down another pang of pain in silence. “I thought you were at the fancy party at the Father Octavian Center tonight.”

“I was.” Donna shook her head despairingly, “But things happened, horrible things. They were dressed like Santa, people. The looked like people.”

“Yes, happened here too.”

“Lee… Lee’s dead.” Donna blurted, fresh sobs overtaking her.

“I’m so sorry.” Martha whispers, allowing her eyes to fall shut momentarily.

“I ran away.” Donna adds, “He was lying there on the floor, blood gone cold. It happened so fast. And I left him there.”

“But you had to.” Martha said firmly. “You’d have died if you didn’t.”

“I feel dead already.” Donna confessed.

“Donna,” Martha says, voice hard and forced, “Donna, listen to me. I need you to find Mickey. I need you to go get help.”

“But I can’t. Everyone’s… everyone is…” Donna trails off.
“You can.” Martha urges, reaching out and grabbing one of Donna’s hands in hers. “You’re not injured are you?”

“No.” Donna answers, “No. But Lee… and you’re… I can’t leave you like this. You’re bleeding.”

“But there are still others out there.” Martha reminds. “Your mum and your son, you need to see if they’re okay.”

Donna stares at Martha, grief-stricken and terrified. “What’s happening? Martha, it was Christmas. This has never happened before. Why is this happening?”

“I don’t know.” Martha answered. “But you need to go. You need to get help. Donna, please. I’m... I need you to find Mickey. Donna, please. Find him. For me.”

“Marth-”

“Go!” Martha shouted pleadingly, tears falling freely now. Donna nodded once and disappeared from her sight in moments. Martha shivered, knowing the loss of blood was sure to hit her sooner than later. Donna was right about one thing, nothing like this ever happened before. This level of catastrophe was just not possible. It was otherworldly. She’d only ever seen things like this in films or telly. Her only hope was that Donna would find Mickey before it was too late.

XXX

The Doctor had to shield his eyes from the absolute force of brightness River’s hologram had produced. His heartshammered in his chest, nerves turning him frantic and fearful. The light was harsh and had torn his sight momentarily from him so every second standing idle felt more unbearable than the last. Eventually, the light River had bathed around the room started to dim and the more it dimmed the more anxious he got. Anxious to see.

And see he did.
He and Melody were alone in the room again. He stepped closer to Melody and took to the exact spot River had knelt down. He dug into his pockets and reached for his Screwdriver, sonicing the area for any trace of residual energy. Because River had been a hologram and holograms carried energy from somewhere. Wherever she’d been transferring from had to still be linked to the room somehow.

His concentration is broken when he hears Melody let out a soft groan.

“Doctor?” She asks weakly, eyes opening in seconds.

He by her side in an instant.

“How do you feel?” He asks, taking her face in his hands and quickly examining her irises. There’s a faint glow in them. “Of course.” He mutters.

Melody blinks before waving him away with a hand.

“Of course!” He says again at full volume, standing and pacing rather urgently.

Melody sits up easily and starts to grow dizzy with his movements.

“You’re muttering to yourself again.” She comments only to receive no response.

“Doctor.” She tries again. Nothing.

He’s waving his hands around in the air now, still in private conversation it seems. He doesn’t even notice her stand all on her own.

“Doctor!” Melody gabs a hold of him, direly resisting the urge to slap the man.

He gapes at her, eyes wide and staring – the look is highly comical, really.
“You’re fine.” He breathes out. “Look at you. She… she fixed you.”

Melody’s brow creases, “Who fixed me?”

“She said last chance, she… no.” He shakes his head angrily. “No, there’s another way, there has to be.”

Melody watches him wordlessly.

“What do you remember?” The Doctor asks her.

She finds his attention quite daunting this time around. There’s a look to him now, an edge she hadn’t seen before. Almost like a spark of something. It’s as if he’s caught fire and he’s ready to spread the flames. His eyes. They look older than her mum’s.

“Melody?”

Concern pours from him. It’s then that she remembers he’d just asked her a question.

“I… oh.” Melody reaches up to feel at the back of her head. There’s a very sizeable bump there. Then she notices the bruises on her sleeveless arms.

Fear. That’s the first thing The Doctor notices. He’s struck with the facts. She is not River Song. His dear wife had poured healing energy into Melody Pond Smith and nothing more. This has never happened to her before. She doesn’t know what to do. She’s human.

“We need to get out of this building before it collapses.” He says softly, reaching to grab her hand in his. “I’ve a feeling we don’t have long to do so either.”

Melody gives him a very nervous smile. “Then I suppose you better lead the way.”
“There’s only one way out and that’s the way we came.” He gives her the most confident smile he can muster. “Come along, Pond.”
Amy was only half listening as the little girl Charlotte and her husband discussed various topics along their seemingly ever-lasting tour travelling beneath the grounds of Leadworth. Both man and child were getting a long swimmingly but that didn’t surprise Amy one bit. Rory had always been one for children. The little ones did the trick best, turning him into that big-nosed softie he really is. That husband of hers would do anything to make a kid smile. Not for the first time does Amy start wishing they’d been able to have more.

After Melody they’d figured to raise her first before trying again but life caught up and it happened without pause. Their dearest daughter Mels had been enough trouble to keep them chasing at her years after she’d long been grown. The window of time to have another baby simply shrunk smaller until it was too late to try again.

The finality of aging caught up with them both and Amy had been at peace that, Rory too. Now though, watching Rory talk with Charlotte there was such an ease there. Seeing him in the spotlight of being a father figure again gave her more of an ache than she’d known she could have.

It was Rory’s soft laughter that did it. Brought it all back, from their lost grandson to their too empty house now being filled with a grief-stricken daughter. All of her frustrations took to crumbling the last of her patience, not that she’d been overly gifted with it in the first place. Amy decidedly had her far share of waiting and she was done.

“Alright enough!” Amy broke in, moving to stand in front of Charlotte and blocking the child’s way.

“Amy!” Rory gasped.

“Listen, Char,” Amy spoke quickly and fiercely, “I’m all for life-stories but how long exactly does this ‘Indiana Jones’ styled tour last, hmm? I’ve got a daughter and a grandson out there, god knows how they’re holding up, you said you’d get us out and I’ve yet to see that happen. Where exactly are you taking us?”

She felt Rory’s arm at her shoulder, “Amy she’s a child.”
“She’s not Rory!” Amy snapped, voice echoing in the cramped area. Amy looked Charlotte square in the eye, stare demanding of answers. “Are you?” Amy inquired evenly.

Charlotte had shrunken considerably underneath Amy’s questioning.

“Answer me!” Amy demanded.

Charlotte straightened up slightly and swallowed.

“I can see where mummy gets it now.” The little girl uttered.

“Jesus!” Amy scowled, backing off finally. “I’ll get nowhere with this one! What are you on about this time?!”

Rory strategically placed himself between Amy and Charlotte before asking the little girl a question.

“Charlotte,” He started, “Excusing my wife’s outburst for a bit, you’ve mentioned your mum before. Where is she?”

“She got stuck.” Charlotte answered solemnly, “If I don’t find the Doctor she’ll be gone for good. And your right, Amy. I promised I’d get you out, but there’s this rule you see, Rule 1. It’s rather important right now to follow it because if I know the Doctor he can’t fix everything if he’s worried about you. So I’ve removed you from the problem. You’ll be safe down here.”

Rory gaped at Charlotte. “You don’t honestly plan on leaving us down here, do you?”

“My grandson is out there!” Amy cried in outrage.

“I’m sorry.” Charlotte said again, “It’s for your own good.”

The child disappeared then, leaving Amy and Rory completely in the dark.
The building would only stay upright for an hour at most. At least that’s the information he’d read via his Screwdriver. The Doctor got to work quickly.

It took him exactly thirty minutes to figure out how to re-engage detonation for the Roboform Santas on his Screwdriver. Trouble with that was it could only detonate one Roboform at a time. That wasn’t going to work as he’d hoped so plan B came along.

“We’ll just have to hide on our way out.” He’d said.

“And that’s your plan?” Melody had asked skeptically.

“Lacking of any better ones, dear.” He’d replied with a winning smile.

And that was that.

The next part was trickier. Getting out of the barricaded room he’d hid them behind. There’d been no air vents or spare doors so there was no other option but to make a run straight through the dance hall. It was probably littered with casualties but since now, with Melody fully healed, they could make a run for it they indeed had to try.

He’d burst out from the door, waving his screwdriver around for an added diversion whilst shouting for the Robot Santa’s attention so Melody could make her getaway first. That had also taken some convincing. She’d been against leaving him behind in any way, shape or form. It was a long argument. So very familiar and, dammit, *fun*.

Running and hiding turned out to be a smart plan. Hiding and waiting for a Robot to show up all on its lonesome, detonating said Robot, running again, and repeat. It got them nearer and nearer to the front doors without much difficulty. Of course, difficult arrived soon enough.
With only one more corridor to get through before reaching the doors to the Father Octavian Center a noise goes off that stills the Doctor right where he stands. The noise was unmistakable, a *zing* echoing throughout the walls.

“**NEXT.**” The thing garbles loudly.

There’s shuffling, footsteps. Various footsteps. Another long *zing* penetrates the air. It’s not long before the Doctor can smell burning bones.

“**NEXT.**” Is followed by another *zing*-ing.

“Doctor, what is that?” Melody whispers and the Doctor is quick to place a hand to cover her mouth. With his other hand he motions for her to wait there and he doesn’t move until she nods. She does. He very slowly removes his hand and starts tiptoeing towards the end of the corridor. The Doctor chances a look. The remaining humans are all in a straight line. They’re being called forth for extermination.

“**NEXT.**” The Dalek at front commands. A man, late fifties, takes to walking forward. He’s shaking, tears falling down his wrinkled face. The Doctor has to look away then.

*Zing.*

He looks around. Looking everywhere for something. Anything. There’s nothing, just him. It’s always like this in the end, isn’t it? Now or never, he decides.

He carefully makes his way back to Melody’s side and pulls her along back the way they came, further even, so they won’t be heard. When he finally turns, he reaches out to grab her hands in his, kissing both of her palms gently.

“Okay, I need you to listen to me very carefully.” He starts, “I need you to trust me.”

“You know I do!” She whispers harshly. Scared. She’s so scared.

“I’m not who you think I am. I’m not just some… no. No that’s not right.” He cursed, “Okay, listen
to me, I’m a time traveler from Gallifrey. Melody, I’m a Time Lord. My time machine crashed here, in this world. Your world. It’s a parallel universe opposite to my own. This is all happening because of me. These things, they came here for me.”

“Doctor, this is not the time for jokes!” She knew he was ridiculous but she didn’t expect that. Of all the times he should choose to be funny and this is one he chooses.

“I’m not joking!” He insisted, “Right outside the shop where Mickey works is my time machine. The Tardis. She’s right there, right in front of all of you, but she has a perception filter. It’s like a cloak hiding away what’s underneath. You wouldn’t notice her unless you knew her. The connection to those who do know her are strong and they stay that way. She brought me here. To you. I don’t know why but please, just please, I need you to believe me.”

“But if you… you’re a…” Melody stopped, eyeing him up and down. “If you’re a Time Lord then does that mean you’re not…not…”

“Human? No.” The Doctor shook his head regretfully, “No, Melody, I’m not.”

Melody smiled nervously, “Sweetie, please. I’m not in that much need of a laugh.”

“I’m not lying to you, I swear.” The Doctor promised. “I’ll cross both hearts. I have two, swear it, I do.”

“Doctor.”

His eyes looked upon her so pleadingly that she was starting to waver on her doubts but…

“I… no. No, this is ridiculous. Doctor, I can’t believe that. I’m sorry but that’s just not possible.”

“Melody Pond, absolutely everything is possible. Tonight is proof enough of that. I need yo-”

Zing.
Pain. Unimaginable pain is what comes next.

"THE. DOC. TOR. HAS. BEEN. EX. TER. MI. NA. TED."

The last thing he hears before everything turns black is Melody’s screaming for him, her voice terror stricken.

Black. Everything goes black.

Chapter End Notes

So. I don't think I did the Dalek here justice but I tried.
"Doctor."

He hears Melody tearfully calling through the haze. He hasn't opened his eyes again but he listens.

"Doctor, please." She begs. She sounds so far away.

"THE DOCTOR IS DEAD." A Dalek interrupts.

The Doctor can tell by it's voice that it's a different Dalek, not the one who fired at him. It's voice is too loud, too near. It gives him a sense of awareness, quite chilling. But then that might just be the hard marble floor he's collapsed on. He's in shock, he knows this much. If he weren't there'd be pain, there is none. Yet. Still, he hisses in discomfort anyway.

Going by the distinct crack he felt go through him when the Dalek fired he's betting on a few broken ribs as his injuries so far, at least two of them if not three. He's had worse but then again he's had better. Oh, and the bruising. There will be a bruise in the works later, he's sure of it. Internal bleeding is most definitely added to the list.

When the Dalek speaks again it breaks him from his contemplation at listing more unpleasant thing he will face in the near future once the shock wears off.

"YOU ARE AN ASSOCIATE OF THE DOCTOR." Says the Dalek, presumably addressing Melody. "YOU WILL BE EXTERMINATED."

And now, that won't do.

"Wanna bet?" The Doctor answers back weakly, hand sneaking into his top pocket to retrieve his Sonic. But he's too weak and too slow. The Dalek fires.

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Martha blinks awake at the sound of static. A smell comes to her senses. Something peculiar, she
can't quite figure it out. She wants to lift her head but find she can't. She's gone absolutely numb from the cold.

"I really don't fancy vortex travels, ma'am." Says a voice suddenly. A woman, Martha figures, since the voice is quite dainty and soft.

"I'll relay that to Captain when we get back." Says a much different voice. "I fear it's worst that we thought, my dear."

This woman sounds more slithery, if that's even possible. Martha has to wonder how much blood she's lost by now. Oh, how she wishes she could simply lift her head and look at whomever these two strangers happened to be. She'll have to settle for eavesdropping it seems.

"Oh, my." The woman with the soft voice sounds more than worrisome. "What do you suppose happened, ma'am?"

"Why, trouble of the most dire, of course. You and I both know that man will stay put for little else. Pass me the scanner will you?"

"Oh, quite right." A pause, "Here you are."

"Thank you, Jenny." Comes the reply.

Well, Martha has a name for one of them now.

"All dead." Says the nameless, slithery-sounding woman, "Correction. All but one. This way."

Martha instinctively panics. She shuts her eyes quickly and tries to hold her breath. Footsteps in the snow are heard, they start to get nearer.

"Well, now." The nameless woman says, she sound so close now.

"But she looks like..." The soft-spoken Jenny woman started but didn't finish.

"I believe we've found the added allure to this universe." The nameless woman added. "Is your name Martha here as well?"

Martha's eyes blinked open and widened at the two being who were looking down upon her. One was a woman only the other was what looked to be a lizard creature wearing a black Victorian gown.

"Don't be scared." The woman, Jenny, said. "We've come to help."

XXX

When the Doctor opened his eyes he was met with a sight he'd not expected. He'd been too late in
reacting, he knows that. The Dalek had fired, in fact it's still firing, but it seems he and Melody were now being shielded by a force field.

"Well, that's new." He muttered, leaving his Sonic be and instantly letting his limbs go weak again. Melody is there in seconds, taking him into her arms and holding him close. There are tears running down her cheeks.

"Doctor."

"Oh, Melody Pond." He breathes out, a smile working on his face. "Such a comfort to see your face before I die."

Because he was, is, dying. He can't make a quick fix with no regeneration energy left in him so there really is no way out of death this time around. Melody's hovering over him and he feels his hearts growing heavy. A woman with his wife's face only she isn't his wife, it seems cruel on many levels but her face is a comfort nonetheless.

"Doctor, stop your nonsense and tell me what I can do!" Melody demands.

Broken ribs and bruises are nothing like the pain of her sadness. He shuts his eyes tightly and suddenly wants nothing more than to wish her away.

"You can't." He's surprised that his words come out nearly a sob.

"My father is a nurse," Melody argues, "I'm sure I can make do."

"Nothing." He insists.

"There must be something!"

And there it was. The demanding fury his River would revert to particularly when he was being senseless and especially when he was wrong. The sound grips at him like claws and widens the tear that both his hearts have bled through for years now.

"Nothing." He replies, adamant, "You can do nothing."

"Why on earth not?!"

"Because you're River but you're not!" His voice sounds monstrous to his ears and Melody flinches. Anger, pain, and bitterness. All aimed at himself and not at her. He's been holding it in. Every moment when Melody has been near he's been putting it off. The comparisons and the similarities to River because she is only she isn't.

There are more tears falling from her face. He feels her cradle his face in her hands and his mind slips to Berlin.

"River, no. What are you doing?"

"Hello, sweetie."

The claws of his agony dig deeper, twisting and carving away at him with all their might. He knows they're not entirely metaphorical. The shock was wearing off, running its course and devouring his senses bit by bit.
"Doctor, you're not making any sense!" Melody says desperately.

He wipes away at her tears and takes a deep breath.

"Close your eyes." He says.

She looks ready to argue but he shakes his head.

"Trust me."

May the gods help her she does. Her eyes fall shut. She stills when his hand cups her cheek, surprised with the action only for a slight second before she leans into his touch. Its familiarity is astounding. He kisses her. Nothing but a feather-light press of his lips, barely there before they're gone. She rests her forehead against his.

"I'm sorry." He says before pressing the tips of his fingers to her temple, shuts his eyes, and lets it all go.

Her mind doesn't even reject his presence when his history flows inside, his memories spreading like fire. Fast and swift, engulfing and resonating. Slithering its way into every space her mind occupies. As he prods her consciousness bits of her life flow back to him. Her life with John and her life that now revolves so resolutely around him. And he regrets making her bear such a burden again. And something else, something in her mind is hard as bricks, a shield of sorts. He can't worry of that now though.

His lives accumulate one by one into her consciousness. Each one of them appearing forefront, digging themselves out from one life to the next and pouring into her own mind. From leaving Gallifrey to leaving Susan, onto to his Second, Third, Fourth, and on and on. Even him. The one that's not called The Doctor. He let's that through, let's her see. All the way to the Library. He hears Melody cry out, pained, when his memories get to her, or more accurately River. He knows the weight of them. He's carried them all this time. He can only imagine what it's doing to her but he can't stop.

Every thought, every feeling that lays claim and rests in the crevice of his existence when it comes to River Song and his Ponds, all three of them, blossoms and sings as every memory he's ever had becomes Melody's to bear.

Then the hard floor is shaping away and he feels the change in the air. He feels time.

That sound brings hope wherever it goes.

To anyone who hears it, Doctor.

Anyone, however lost.

The familiar wheezing groan comes next.

Even you.
Twenty-Five.

When the Doctor pulls away he's being surrounded by the walls of the Tardis. Melody's gone limp against him. She's passed out and there is no doubt that the Tardis herself has lulled her to rest. The fact that the Tardis cannot materialize on its own and yet she has done sparks a bit of fear in him.

The Doctor slowly maneuvers Melody's limp body in his arms, wincing at the pinch of pain his injuries are now fully awakening with. He rests her on her back carefully and then pushes himself into sitting up. Bit by bit he moves to stand before limping over to the steps of the console, grabbing at the railings for leverage. He tries to keep steady as he walks up and does manage to somehow. Pulling along the monitor screen to face him, he notes his breathing is starting to fail him and types away with a shaky hand. Though he knows it won't help, his other arm wraps around his torso in an act to cradle at his broken ribcage. When he finishes typing he presses enter on the keyboard and waits.

The Tardis scanner relays inconclusive information. It adds no help to him.

"Come on, come on." He glares at the screen, "Who's moved you?"

The screen does not change and he's not in the mood for waiting, he's not exactly got time on his side. He ignores his injuries entirely and reaches to pull a lever up high on the console. The sharp pinch of pain he inflicts on himself makes him cry out and shrink away in agony. The pain nearly staggers him to his feet. Sparing a glance over at Melody he finds she's still out cold.

A rumble rips through the Tardis and he feels the motion stutter, feels the Old Girl take flight until she stills once again. Whoever had sent the Tardis did not do so from the inside. The Tardis is locked, he has the key. There is no one else. The scanner beeps twice and he pulls Amelia's glasses, his Amelia's, from his top pocket and slips them on.

His brow furrows. "No, no, that's not right." He takes off the glasses to look at the screen without them, as if his sight was the problem, only to shake his head and put the specs back on again. "No." He repeats. "No life forces. None at all! Who moved you?" Another frown appears on his face before he hurries to type in another command. The scanner was quicker this time. He tenses immediately.

"No." He shakes his head yet again and places Amy's glasses back in his pocket. He turns around lets the weight of his body rest against the console. He cannot stand any longer so he allows his body to slide down until he's fallen completely, surrendered, onto the Tardis floor.

There's an audible click and his head snaps straight to the door. The Tardis doors have unlocked.

The Doctor can only stand and stare as the Tardis doors are pushed open. He's been holding his breath and it catches in his throat as the person behind it is revealed.

XXX

"You - you're a - but -" Martha gapes up at the Lizard woman looking down at her.
"I take it she's not seen your kind before, ma'am." Jenny supplies to Madame Vastra.

"I take not." Vastra then kneels down to Martha's side, "Do not be afraid. We are here to help a friend. He's called the Doctor."

Martha blinked rapidly, still too flabbergasted to reply.

"So you do know him." Vastra concluded.

"How can you tell?" Jenny asked.

Vastra looked up at her and smiled sweetly, "They all have a look to them, my dear." She turned her attention back to Martha. "All who meet that man have a look. Do me a favor Martha, don't move an inch."

Vastra held up what looked do be a slim metallic box with tiny sized knobs lined on it's side. She twisted and turned on them before light shined from the box and onto Martha's stomach.

"What are you doing?!" Martha squeaked nervously.

"I said don't move." Vastra repeated stiffly.

"She's fixing you." Jenny informed helpfully but it did not serve to calm Martha's nerves.

"How?" Martha heard herself ask.

"I am dislodging the piece stuck inside of you," Vastra offered, "But if you move I could very well erase something important as well, so please, stop fidgeting. The sooner I locate the exactitude of your injury, the sooner I can have you well again."

"Why?!" Martha blurted, unable to help her babbling.

"Oh, for goodness sake! Because the Doctor would thank me later." Vastra looked to Jenny, highly agitated now, "Must humans always react so skeptical of my intentions?!!"

"Alright, Miss. I think I'll just take over from here." Jenny reached for the gadget in Vastra's hands and the lizard woman complied without argument, handing it over. "Why don't you go see we aren't to be ambushed?" She offered.

Vastra nodded once and did just that. Jenny noticed Martha relax visibly once Vastra was out of sight.

"She don't mean no harm." Jenny said kindly, doing exactly as Vastra had only Martha didn't feel so terribly scared now. "It was a long trip here," Jenny continued, "Makes the missus a bit cranky."

"You," Martha paused, "You look exactly like a woman I know. Her name is Jenny too. She's married to...\to..."

"Oh," Jenny smiled brightly, "Are there a version of us here too then? Fancy that. Wait," Jenny stilled, "Is your Vastra human?"

Martha swallowed, "Is that an option where you come from?"

"I think you've seen with your own eyes, Miss." Jenny reminded.

Martha instantly felt idiotic. She's just seen a woman who was literally a lizard; of course it was an
option wherever these strangers came from.

"Sorry." Martha said.

"Don't be." Jenny replied, "Takes getting used to is all."

The light coming from the gadget in Jenny's hand turned bright red and Martha's stomach started to feel weird. The sensation almost felt like when her hand would fall asleep only the entire sensation was on her abdomen.

"There." Jenny grinned happily and stood. "Sorted. Up you get." She held out her hand for Martha to take.

Martha looked down at her fatal wound to find she'd been completely healed.

"Oh my gosh." She exhaled breathlessly. "I'm... I'm okay. I'm absolutely fine."

Vastra soon interrupted. "I doubt you'll stay that way unless we move."

"Trouble?" Jenny asked her.

Vastra only smiled. "Always."

XXX

"You." The Doctor nearly chokes on the single word; it's clawed its way out of him. He's half in disbelief and yet the other half of him knows he should have expected it.

"You need to heal." The boy shuts the Tardis doors and moves over to his mother.

"Jack." The Doctor calls out. The boy looks back up at him. "How?" He asks Jack, wheezing slightly. His lungs are being thoroughly defeated quicker than he'd expected. Or they could be failing perfectly on time, he's not died in a long while so he can't really recall. "How did you access the Tardis? She hasn't been handled from the inside, how did you do it?"

"You need to heal." Jack says again and nears.

"Jack how?" The Doctor insists.

Jack doesn't answer. Instead he holds his hand out and closes his eyes. The Doctor watches as nanogenes appear out of thin air and gather in the boy's palm. The Doctor can't deny himself the grin that appears across his face. Even if he doesn't know what Jack is yet and though he is a tiny bit afraid of the boy he can't deny the rush that runs through him. The thrill of discovery and the thrum of wonder that has always made his hearts race. A good mystery fits that description spectacularly well. He's come to learn how to treasure every one of them, even the bad ones.

"Ready?" Jack asks.

The Doctor nods.

"Geronimo." He mutters before letting his eyes fall shut.
It's warm as it spreads. The tiny little bits of matter sowing and mending, tying him together beneath the skin. His age has been tested and he's almost grown to his limit. He feels it. His skin, however young it looks, is older because of such youth. Once it was worn strong, new, but now it's grown thin and tired. The warmth of healing pushes through, sowing him back together as much as it can, as well as it can.

At last, he feels that warmth wrapping around the cracks that had broken inside him, soothing out the edges his burdens have picked away at. He knows that's more Jack's doing than the nanogenes. The boy is focusing and tending to those wounds just to help him carry the weight, to let him breathe easier. He's thankful for the kindness.

Moments pass until he gasps suddenly, limbs feeling giddy and craving movement. He stands immediately and rushes over to Melody, kneeling down and checking her pulse.

"I can't leave her here like this I need to move her somewhere." The Doctor starts to gather Melody in his arms but Jack's voice stops him.

"No." The boy says, "She won't wake. Not soon and you need to hurry. She'll be fine. You need to go back."

The Doctor considers Jack before placing Melody back as she was. He moves away from her and warily approaches the young boy.

"How did you access the Tardis, Jack?" he asks again and reaches into his pocket to retrieve his screwdriver. "What are you?"

Jack stays silent. The Doctor is hesitant to look away from him. Not even the familiar sound of his screwdriver scanning the boy takes his attention away. He does have to look away though. That is, unless he wishes to remain nonplussed. If he wants any information his screwdriver is his only hope since the Tardis is choosing to stay inconclusive about what's going on and Jack doesn't look to be telling him what he wants to know any time soon either.

With a sigh he looks down at his screwdriver and hopes it gives him inkling at least.

All is silent until he mutters of course under his breath.

The Doctor allows himself to gather his thoughts. He walks past Jack and hovers over the console pensively. He flicks a switch and walks around to the other side of the console, dragging the monitor along with him. He presses several buttons with ease and looks up to check the monitor. He reads the information on the screen and decides on his plan of action and he thinks what the hell and goes for it before he has sense enough to change his mind. This is no time for common sense, not with this.

He turns on the blue stabilizers so the Old Girl will stay nice and steady instead of wibble and wobble as they take off. In one fluid motion his hand reaches out and with a firm pull the Tardis comes roaring to life again.

"You." The Doctor spins around and points at Jack, "You're somewhat of a link, Jack." He states and then he's back to messing with the console. "An inhabitant link of sorts, in a way. You are an open window. A doorway where there should be no doorway, and not just to my world but to me personally. It explains everything. How you know things you shouldn't, how you remember without having been there. A history, my history."

The Doctor moves his way around the console, twisting and turning buttons and knobs with familiarity.
"You may have noticed I said inhabitant, and you are. You are occupied and maintained by data."

The Tardis monitor blinks with new information.

"Finally deciding to help, are you dear?" The Doctor directs that question to the Tardis while he reads what's on the monitor. She rumbles a bit as a reply. "Ah, and here we are."

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*** TARDIS DATABASE ***

Jack Arthur Smith

- DECEASED -

Cause of Death: car accident; Age: 4

Mother: Melody Pond Smith

Father: John Smith (Deceased)

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"You died just a few months before your father did, Jack. You're not even a proper echo, you're more of a parasite data ghost slithering your way into people's lives and memories. Someone's fabricated you to do so. To implant your existence as still existing, allowing them to exist in their own right. You are bait. Never could resist bait, me. I do have one suggestion though."

The Doctor pushes himself away from the console and waves his Screwdriver at the boy again.

"If you're going manipulate me with an original character you'd best get rid of the original coding first before I can trace it back."

Jack's visage starts to break down and away. Bit by bit, a new visage starts to compile from the broken data.

"There you are." The Doctor says to the little girl now standing in front of him. "Hello again, Charlotte Abigail Lux."
Deep beneath the grounds of Leadworth, the Ponds only source of lighting was that shining from Amy's mobile phone. There was, unfortunately, no signal.

"Absolutely priceless." Amy muttered grumpily. "Trust the little girl who glows in the dark, really one of your best ideas Rory."

"She was a little girl!" Rory cried in his defense. "Little girls aren't supposed to be evil!"

"Erm, have you never seen *The Shining*?" Amy replied, "Because those little twin girls were definitely evil."

Rory sighed heavily, "Point taken."

"Well what do we do now?" Amy demanded.

"If I say wait it out will you hit me again?"

"I'll probably hit you either way, moron." Amy answered.

"Elderly abuse," Rory muttered, "that's all I'm saying."

"Oh, hush. We really need to get out of here, Rory." Amy waved her phone to light the path further down. It didn't help much.

"How much battery is left?" Rory inquired suddenly.

Amy glanced at her phone. "Not enough. Why?"
"I think I might have an idea." Rory replied, "Hand it over."

Amy did. Rory had to blink away at the brightness of the screen at first but then he narrowed his eyes and started pressing at buttons.

"What are you doing?" Amy questioned, "There’s no signal down here, genius."

"Not texting." Rory said, "Turning your GPS on."

"Oh, no!" Amy tried to reach back for her phone, "Rory, you know I hate that thing. It makes me feel like I'm being tracked."

"Exactly." Rory replied, nodding. "And our daughter has an alert for whenever you go off the radar so that means she must also have one for when you turn it on as well."

Amy gasped. "Oh."

"Mhmm." Rory smiled proudly.

"See," Amy leaned over and kisses his cheek, "This is why I keep you around."

Rory smiled at his wife adoringly.

"Oh," Amy fell forward unexpectedly.

"Amy!" Rory cried out, dropping the mobile in hand. He gathered his wife in his arms. "Amy, what's wrong?!"

"I feel dizzy." She said, "I feel... oh god, my head. Something's... I feel like..." Amy tried to blink away the daze starting to overcome her. "It doesn't make sense." She mumbled. "He's dead, I remember but... but he's alive."
"Amy!" Rory pushed away at the hair that had fallen into her face.

"Something's wrong, Rory." She managed to say before falling completely limp in his arms.

The Doctor eyed the little girl in his Tardis curiously before taking a hesitant step forward.

"Okay," He announced, his voice bouncing off the Tardis walls in a way that sprouted joy through him. Oh, he'd missed this. A communication of sorts with his ship that required no second parties. Only right now there was and there the little girl stood. A shade of his past.

"Here's the part we've all been waiting for, eh?" He continued, arms extended on either side of him in gesture. "I'm going to skip the part of why you're here and go straight to the one that needs my attention most at the moment, and that is: do you know what you've done? Because now that I know what, who, you are, there are things that need to be taken care of."

"You're not pleased to see me." The little girl stated, her shoulders hunching with the fact.

"You've toppled onto another universe with a thread tied to your shoe, Cal. That thread carries every bit of information you have with it. It's spilled in and has now poured into this universe just as you have. You've given way for consequence and knowledge to slip through worlds, so I'll ask you again." The Doctor said, "Do you know what you've done?"

Charlotte stood in silence, watching him with big round eyes. He pressed on.

"This place, this universe has been disrupted. Things are happening in this universe that had not even existed before you came along. This tear you've created between our worlds, you've bled an entire new life into this world. Enough to give life to some things, even." He has to shake away the image of River when she comes to mind. He will find no strength there, just pain.
"The Daleks," He brings up, "for instance, that's because of you."

"I was only trying to get your attention!" Charlotte answered desperately, her face scrunched up in a helpless manner.

"Pick up a phone!" He unintentionally snaps and the little girl flinches. He apologizes before moving himself back over to the console to properly brood.

"You never answer your phone anyway." Charlotte says sadly. He can't very well argue against that so he doesn't.

"People," He says, gentler this time, "innocent people, they are dead because of what you've done."

"And I should let her die too, then?" The child's voice is small and scared. When he looks back he finds Charlotte with tears dripping down her virtual cheeks.

But she is dead, he thinks.

"You really don't ever look back, do you?" Charlotte questioned, an anger stirring by the sound of her tone. "Even now. You can't look at me. Well, I'm not like you! I can't let her die! I won't!"

"Charlotte." He starts, intending to talk her down and explain how River is in fact already dead. How nothing can harm her, them, now.

"No!" The child shouts, infuriated. "They're in my library! They've taken her away from me!"

The Doctor blinked at Cal's image. It was now crackling and growing more vibrant. That is indeed something it should not be doing. The energy alone could sprout so much more damage the more the child fussed.

"Alright, okay, just calm yourself." The Doctor said, "You're going to start an electrical blow out if you don't."
"I don't care!" Charlotte shouted.

"Please, listen to me. The shadows, they're in your library but they are not in the computer. I made sure of that long ago." He assured.

"No, you're wrong." Charlotte said sadly, "And besides, that was a very long time ago. I tried to call for you, truly I did. The time passed and Doctor Moon tried, and then when he was erased I tried to get her to try but she wouldn't budge. Not with you. She said she wouldn't drag you back no matter how I begged her to."

"What do you mean erased?" The Doctor interrupted, "That doesn't happen, it can't happen. Not there."

"Haven't you been listening?!" Cal cried, the child's visage starting to crackle with static. "They're in my library, all of my library. They've eaten away at the books first and when they did away with them they started on the planet. I'm all that's left."

The Doctor turned away from Cal and hurried to type up for a recent report on The Library. The Tardis worked quickly and efficiently. In seconds, the monitor was spilling over with updates.

Dates showed in which the planet was sealed off from the public by Mr. Strackman Lux, only days after the Doctor had visited it seemed. Praising's of Professor Song and her expedition, now since having become legend. Even a few instances in time where another Lux family member had hopes to re-open The Library but the request was ultimately denied by offices of Torchwood. Given fact that the Torchwood office number on the reports were not in service at that date in time the Doctor assumes someone to have pulled some timey-wimey favors. He'd have to send Captain Jack a thank-you note for that one, maybe even give it to the man in person this time.

Then came the worst of it...

**Lux Family database fully breached.** Said the headline. The Lux family has long held onto their silent Library and the planet had its final breach today. The Library mainframe has been overwritten by a virus, all data logged inside the computer has been corrupted. No word yet of exactly what virus has broken through the mainframe but sources close to the Lux family say it has wiped more than 80% of the computer hard drive, wiping years and years of memory clean.

The article went on in further detail but the Doctor had read enough.
"I don't understand." He said quietly, "Why didn't I get word of this while it was happening? I would have gone back."

"She refused." Charlotte's voice popped up again, reminding him of her presence. "She said you've been through enough and that she wouldn't pull you back into a past long dead."

He didn't want the answer but he knew he had to ask.

"What happened to my wife?"
Martha Jones just couldn’t realistically piece together what had taken place. She’d had a hole ripped right through her abdomen and was dying of blood loss but now when she reaches to feel at her there-just-moments-ago wound she comes up with healthy, unbroken flesh. The blood on her shirt is the only proof she has that it was real. That she had indeed been at death’s door. But then something miraculous happened. She had been healed by a Lizard Woman and her companion. There really is no making sense of any of it. She should give up even trying.

“Do you happen to have a residence nearby, Doctor Jones?” The Lizard Woman inquired.

It threw Martha off, still, even after everything.

“Sorry?” She mumbled nervously.

“A place we can hide for the time being.” Jenny offered with a warm smile.

“I…” Then Martha remembered what was missing at that moment, “No.”

“No?” Madame Vastra blinked at her. “We can’t stay here. These fires aren’t done with you and your kind yet. They’re recharging as we speak.”

“I can’t leave without knowing if my fiancé is safe.” Martha said.

“Fiancé, eh?” Jenny shared a look with Madame Vastra.

“Well, he will be.” Martha said, trying to assure herself more than the two strangers beside her. “If he ever gets to ask. He was going to. Tonight. He’s not that good at hiding things.” She smiles at the memory that comes to mind. “I found the box with his things, I didn’t open it, but I knew. He was going to ask me to marry him and now I don’t even know if he’s alive.”
“I’m sure he’s just fine.” Jenny offered kindly.

“Be that as it may, I’m afraid we can’t stay here.” Vastra maintained. The technology she had in her hand started blinking. She glanced at it and her brow furrowed. “What on earth…”

“What is it, ma’am?” Jenny moved to her side to inspect whatever was causing such ruckus on the small gadget. “Numbers.” She said.

“I don’t know what they mean.” Vastra admitted before reading the digits aloud.

“Oh my gosh.” Martha uttered before she too moved to look down at the strange technology. “That’s Missus Pond’s mobile number!”

“Pond.” Vastra repeated solemnly and looked to Jenny. “That explains everything then.”

Jenny only nodded, a frown appearing on her pretty face. Martha watched the interaction silently. Working in a hospital meant she knew that look well. It was the look of loss.

“But look, there.” Jenny pointed to the left side of the tiny screen.

Martha noticed what the woman was getting at.

“Those looks like coordinates to me.” She supplied helpfully.

“Indeed they are.” Vastra agreed, sounding somewhat surprised. She glanced Martha from head to toe and smiled. “You always did have quite the brain on you, Martha Jones.”

The Lizard Woman did not specify her comment further, leaving Martha baffled as to how this creature could know anything about her. Instead, Vastra turned to Jenny entirely.

“I’m very sorry, my dear, but those vortex travels you mentioned disliking earlier?” She flipped open the gadget tied around her wrist and started typing, “It would seem we have another trip ahead of us.”
As far as Martha could tell, Jenny didn’t seem too pleased with that.

“There.” Vastra finished typing. “Coordinates all set. A trip for three. All aboard?” She held an arm out for Jenny.

Martha however didn’t miss that last bit. They were the only three standing and she, for one, had no intentions to leave without Mickey.

“Oh, no. No.” Martha panicked. “I already said no. I’m not lea—”

“Just close your eyes, deep breaths.” Jenny suggested, wrapping an arm with Vastra before quickly doing the same to Martha.

Any and all of Martha’s protests were then swallowed by the push of a button.

XXX

Silence filled the Tardis as soon as he’d asked the question.

“Well?” The Doctor prodded when Charlotte failed to answer. The child couldn’t even meet his eyes. “What happened to her, Cal?”

“I don’t know entirely.” The little girl admitted. “She was protecting me. She said it’s what mothers do.”

“Go on.”

“I saw Doctor Moon erased with my own eyes.” Charlotte said. “It was nothing like that. With her gone I knew my only hope was you, but you never came so… so I improvised.” When the Doctor
didn’t lecture her on that, she went on. “Mummy, River - I mean, she told me of other universes. She said she’d even been to one once.”

“She said what?!” The Doctor interrupted, blinking in disbelief.

“Oh,” Charlotte went wide eyed, “I probably shouldn’t have told you that.”

The Doctor shouldn’t be surprised, really he shouldn’t. He beckoned for her to go on with a single nod. The child continued.

“The Library had everything in it. Certain places were off limits, Doctor Moon made sure of that. With him gone and River too, there was no one to stop me from overriding the coding. The creatures in my Library helped with that, breaching date made it easier for me to break security as well. So I did.” Charlotte looked over to where Melody was. She was still unconscious but very much alive.

“You know,” the Doctor began, “Just because you can do something doesn’t mean you should. But I suppose you had little else to choose from.”

“There’s only one person who would know what happened to her, to River.”

“And who would that be?” The Doctor questioned.

“You have to go back.” Said Charlotte. “You have to save John Smith.”

XXX

Donna must have been wandering the town for hours by now. At least it felt like it. She still caught no sight of her mother Sylvia or her son. She hadn’t found Mickey either, as Martha had asked of her. It was probably the last thing Martha would ever ask for and Donna hadn’t been able to pull through for her. She felt such a lousy friend and even more horrible of a person.
Christmas was supposed to be the time of happiness and gifts and full of annoying relatives. Lee. Her poor Lee was gone now. Taken from her. What had she done wrong to have this happen to her? Why had any of this happened at all? For once, she finds herself glad her sweet Granddad Wilfred wasn’t around to live through the catastrophes taking place that night.

“Alright, pull yourself together.” Donna muttered to herself, knowing her Granddad would have said it if he were there with her right now. She still had a son to look for, she reminded herself. She’d be damned if anything was going to get in her way this time around.

Donna warily approached the street side nearest to her and looked both ways before crossing. She hurried past various buildings and tried to shy away from any windows, just in case. She made it around to the main shops without incident. She was just a few feet away from the small duck pond placed at the center of the marketplace before she smelled something peculiar. It smelt like something burning. Then, not but ten steps away from where she stood, three figures appeared in a crackle of static.

Donna couldn’t believe her eyes.

“Martha?” She asked, reaching a hand for her friend.

“Donna!” Martha Jones cried, removing herself from the woman beside her and running to Donna. She enveloped the redhead in a bone crushing hug.

“Martha, you’re alive!” Donna said excitedly, hugging her dear friend back. “But, but how?” She pulled away and looked at Martha properly.

“I-” Martha shook her head and seemed at a loss for words.

Someone cleared their throat and stole Donna’s attention away.

“Oh. My. God.” She shrieked.

“This is Jenny and Madame Vastra.” Martha introduced. “They saved me.”
“But that’s… that’s… but it,” Donna sputtered, “The face of a lizard - a lizard face!” Donna shouted, backing away from them all.

Madame Vastra rolled her eyes, obviously taking offense to Donna’s outburst.

“Now, that’s just a tiny bit racist.” Jenny pointed out.

“It’s a mask. It has to be a mask.” Donna blabbered. “Oh, god. Oh, this can’t be real. No. I’m dreaming, hit my head, I have. This isn’t happening. It’s not.”

“Would it be terribly rude of me to ask you to silence your human friend?” Vastra directed at Martha. “We’ve got work to do here and I’d prefer we get to it. I assume that to be the duck pond?” Vastra pointed to the small decorative structure at center.

Martha nodded. “It’s been there since… actually I can’t recall since when.”

“That doesn’t surprise me.” Vastra replied, “Since it’s not actually a duck pond.”

“I beg your pardon?” Martha raised a brow, watching Vastra pass another foreign technology to Jenny. She wonders where they keep coming from since she’s spotted no luggage along with these two strangers. Jenny took the object and worked at it as if she’d been doing it for years.

Jenny let out a tiny gasp, “You’re right.”

“Turn it back to its real visage, Jenny.” Vastra instructed.

Jenny did. The duck pond disappeared immediately, revealing a circular metal door built into the ground.

“I can open it, ma’am.” Jenny told Vastra, “If you wish.”

“Please do.”
A silence passed while Jenny did as she was bid.

“Got it.” Jenny announced only moments later. Martha is yet again stuck wondering just where these strangers came from.

Small clinks and clangs could be heard as the metal door started to shift around itself, unlocking itself in sections.

Donna spoke up then.

“We don’t even know what’s down there.” She said.

Vastra looked at the redhead and smiled. “Why, a real Pond, obviously.”
Rory brushed back Amy’s hair from her face, or he assumed he was. Her mobile had run out of battery and so now they were stuck in complete darkness. He’d taken to sitting down in the cramped space they’d been left in, his knees weren’t what they used to be, and set Amy across his lap so he could cradle her properly.

“You don’t get to just pass out on me during the most awful night of our lives, you know.” He muttered somewhat resentfully.

There came no reply but he let the fact that she was still breathing keep him hopeful. He remembered the last time she passed out on him, so many years back. That had without a doubt been the scariest yet ultimately best night of their lives. Amy was a little over six months pregnant when she’d suddenly fainted and went into early labor. A sunrise later and she was cradling their little bundle of joy in her arms. He had looked down at them both in awe, as every proud father should. Amy had lost a lot of blood delivering their baby and Melody was too little to have been able to survive yet they had. Thinking back at it now it’s no less peculiar then when it had happened. No one quite knew how both of them pulled through and Doctor Maldovar certainly didn’t give away any clues but the point was they did make it out alive. Both his girls. He has to wonder where his little girl Melody is now. Only she’s not so little anymore, he reminds himself.

“Come on, Amy.” He whispered fiercely, “You don’t get to do this to me. Not again.”

In the following silence Amy’s last words creep up on him.

*He’s dead, I remember but… but he’s alive.*

“What did you mean by that?” Rory wondered aloud and got nothing in response but more passing silence.

It wasn’t long before he started to feel particles falling along his face. He noticed that it was dirt coming from above followed by small ticking noises. It sounded somewhat like a clock except more mechanical. Suddenly a bright light started blinking right above him. It blinked a few more times as if it were slowly regaining power after being switched off for years. When the light grew steady enough he could see a circular object right atop from where he and Amy were sat.
“I’d say now is the proper time to do the waking up bit, Amy.” He suggested, finally able to look down at his wife and actually see her face. She didn’t stir. The circular object above them then started to swirl. It was unlocking, that much he could tell. The circular object then sprang open, leaving him a bit blinded from the light that he’d been staring up into. Rory waited patiently for his eyesight to come back, if only so he could see whom was probably going to kill them.

XXX

“John Smith?” The Doctor repeated somewhat stiffly. “You want me to go back in time in a universe where time travel is not even known to be anything but a wishful possibility for future generations and save Melody’s…”

He didn’t even finish that sentence. Couldn’t. Cal answered him anyway.

“Yes.” The child said.

The Doctor shook his head and started pacing around his console, “That’s madness. Utter lunacy. Not possible.”

“No,” Cal shook her head as well, “I believe the words you’re looking for is almost impossible.”

“Clever.” Even he had to admit that, “But ultimately wrong. This universe doesn’t work that way.”

He stole a glance at Melody’s unconscious form and wondered if there was anywhere he could teleport her that would be safer.

“Once.” Cal countered, “Before we showed up. We’ve… what’s that saying…” She paused before a smile broke over he face, “We’ve timey-wimey’d this universe. We’ve got nothing else to lose.”

“Charlotte Abigail Lux,” He said sternly, “This is not a game. We will not tarnish this universe more
than we already have.”

“Not even for her?!” Charlotte stared at him almost in horror. An anguish was let loose through the Tardis with her question. Even the Doctor could feel the Old Girl rumble in protest to his stubbornness.

“After all she did for you!” Charlotte raged, the light in her hologram crackling and static grumbling noisily. Her fury echoed around him. “You’re going to let her die!”

“She is already dead!” This time it’s his own voice roaring in echoes inside the Tardis. The moment he realizes what he’s said his hands reach up to cover at his mouth. He didn’t intend to say that out loud, he never intended to…

“She’s already dead.” He whispers to himself and with the realization setting in he sinks to his knees. “My… River…”

He name leaves him full of misery and loss and for the first time since the one time he allowed himself, he cries. In his hearts he knew but he’d never dared speak it out loud, the truth of it, and his limbs ache with the energy of facing his denial.

“Please.” Cal begs and he can hear the tears in her plea. “You have to save her.”

XXX

“Oh, thank god.” Said someone. Rory recognized that voice. A few more blinks and his sight returned somewhat. He could make out who’d spoken now. Martha was smiling down at him. Donna was there too.

“As I said,” Rory followed that voice to find a reptilian looking creature alongside the two familiar faces, “A Pond.”

Rory gulped.
“Just hold on!” Martha called down, “We’ll get you out!”

Rory could only nod his response, his eyes remaining on the Lizard Lady.

“Try not to move.” Called the woman next to the Lizard Lady. Rory hadn’t noticed her, even now he barely did except for her voice.

_Lizard Woman_ his brain added silently as explanation and he nodded, more to himself than to anyone else.

“Don’t move an inch Rory.” Martha instructed. “Vastra’s maintaining your exact location if you move she might misplace something important.”

Rory wondered exactly how that could happen if the most important thing anyone could misplace was in his arms right that second. He had to mention that, or at least he’s sure he should.

“Amy’s out cold.” His voice actually squeaked. He’d cringe if he weren’t so taken aback with the company Martha and Donna had with them.

“Just a few more seconds!” Martha said in return.

Indeed Martha was right. The next blink of his eyes and Rory was set right in front of the two people he knew and the two unfamiliars.

Martha rushed to his side and started inspecting Amy, lifting her eyelids to check her possible state. Rory let her. He was too busy staring at Lizard Lady.

“It is rude to stare, you know.” Lizard Lady said to him.

Rory blinked and honest to god tried to look away but instead he kept on blinking.
“S-s-sorry.” He offered.

Vastra only smiled warmly. “I have missed that nose.” She directed that to the woman beside her.

“Jenny?!” Rory spluttered, eyes wide.

“Not our Jenny.” Martha answered him, “But just as good.” She assured.

He noticed the smile of thanks on Jenny’s face as she looked to Martha. Then there was a low groan coming from Amy and that snapped Rory out of his shock.

“Rory.” Amy called for him. His name came out slightly slurred.

“Amy.” He placing a warm hand on her cheek. “Amy, we’re out. We’re...” He glanced at the company around them, eyes lingering on Not Their Jenny and the Lizard Woman before continuing, “We’re safe.”

And he really, really hoped they were.
So, if going by the various mentions in past chapters had anyone questioning WHERE THE F*** IS MICKEY SMITH?! then hopefully this chapter answered that question. And, I also wanted this chapter to delve into a certain someone I've been wanting to address.... (cont. in End Notes)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Twenty-Nine.

When Mickey Smith woke, he woke slowly. He remembers being in and out, blinking and breathing mostly, but even at his weakest he felt a presence with him. Being both dazed and weary he wasn’t sure to trust his eyesight when he’d properly come back to the waking world but he soon learned to. The presence he had felt was confirmed and the sights he met were not to be ignored. After going over all that had happened before he’d awoken in such an odd, unimaginable place there was only one thing he found to be true. There was no denying anything anymore. But, best start at the beginning: his awakening.

XXX

Mickey Smith felt himself groan more than he heard it. His body felt stiff and his head felt lacking of coherence. His skin felt funny too, almost like fleeing kisses were dusting over his flesh. It tickled.

“Ah, and he lives.” Interrupted a woman’s voice at his first signs of life.

Mickey thinks there’s a northern edge to her accent but he can’t be sure. Images are blurring before him and he’s not even properly opened his eyes yet.

“About time too,” she continued, “you’re missing all the fun.”
No matter how he tries to place her voice his brain feels dense and heavy. It’s as if connecting the dots requires too much effort. Panic settles in and he can feel his instincts start to kick in, or try to anyway. The sudden urge to run is nothing but a ghost of a feeling. An ill pointed blade poking at his back yet it’s not ignorable. Even as he tries to move he soon finds his body is unresponsive to his own wants. When both eyes finally crack open and adjust to the lighting he’s under Mickey takes to noticing the difference in scenery with an alarming sense of dread.

He realizes that someone’s placed him on a stretcher of some sort. He can tell it’s of a medical kind but he’s never seen one of it’s like in his life. He’s also much too naked for his own liking. What looks to be various wires lie strewn across him but they are so thin they remind him more of veins that hide beneath the skin than actual medical equipment. A circular aura seems to be fitted precisely all around the area he occupies but no further. The color of light that shines down on him is of a dim pinkish color. It’s so bright that it makes the rest of the room look dark in comparison.

The rest of the room, that is a dark thing indeed. The walls, if that is what they are, seem to be half chewed away. They look more like a garden of badly kept bushes decorating a maze than actual pieces of a building. But they are, or were, a building. There’s an abundance in shelves too. Empty shelves that carry a silence louder than it has any right to be.

“Sleep well?” The voice chimed in again. Her voice carried through the silence and Mickey almost gets a sense that the sound chases away at something. Such a notion strikes a nerve that gnaws awake a frightful thing. The feeling takes to setting deep in his gut. Another look around the room and he can’t help but imagine that the quiet in the room had its own pair of eyes and ears. Mickey then came to the realization that he had had yet to see any proper sight of this mystery voice and how she could very well be the cause of his current status. The uncertainty was almost too much to handle.

“Oh, no.” The girl sounded fretful. “I know that look and don’t even think about it mister. I’m nearly done healing you but if your body even thinks of struggling it’ll reject all of the work I’ve done so please, do us both a favor, and don’t.”

“Where am I?!” His voice sounded broken, even to his own ears.

“Hush, now.” The voice tried to soothe. “You’re fine. Safe. Or, very nearly safe. You’re in a med-bubble. There’s only so much space that’s not contaminated so I’ve constructed it around you.”

“Why?”

“Well, because you were dying and I couldn’t let that happen.” Her reply was a tad bit snippy, as if
he were a simpleton to ask such a question. Either way, her answer caused him to still because it was well enough news to him.

“Where am I?” He demanded again, “And who are you?!”

“Why?” She sounded amused. “Scared?”


This time when he attempts to struggle free his body reacts but only allowing him a flick of his wrist. A feeble attempt, but it was enough to drive him forward with purpose. With that thought at heart, he tried to force himself to sit up only to find himself incapable of doing so. He felt as if a ton of bricks were atop his chest and he at the bottom of the pile.

Mickey Smith was no stranger to panic attacks and he could feel the beginnings of a proper one building up.

“Oi, stop that!” The woman shouted at him but Mickey ignored her and tried again.

Suddenly, a visage appeared beside him in the blink of an eye. Her image seemed to be still gathering itself but she wasted no time and prodded at the various wires attached to him. He can only think to describe what was happening before his eyes as pixels from a graphic gathering, all static and fuzzy until the hues and the shape gathered perfectly, joining to show the final masterpiece.

Mickey might have stopped breathing for a second or two because she was there but a moment ago she most definitely had not been. It was enough to render him motionless. She seemed pleased of that.

She was a very beautiful, he noted, and very young. She had long brown hair tied up in a ponytail and was wearing a dress of bright red that fit snug on her tiny frame. He also noticed the gun strapped at her midsection. She stopped her fussing and stared down at him, brow raised disapprovingly. With a skillful glide of her hand a see-through virtual screen appeared.

Mickey swallowed and stared. There was nothing holding the screen and he could see right through it but it was still there. Hovering.
“See this?” She pointed to the screen. His eyes followed to the image she was indicating. It appeared to be a graph chart documenting all sorts of technical things he had no idea of. “This is your life expectancy rate.” She informed him. The bar on the graph wasn’t even halfway full. Maths had never been his best subject but he could figure what that meant easy enough. He felt himself pale with the realization.

“I’m going to die.”

“Yeah,” The pretty brunette nodded surely, “Unless you quit being such a little scaredy-cat and let me do my job. What say you?” She asked, “Deal?”

Mickey wanted to say no. He wanted to say he had to go find Martha but it seems whoever this woman was didn’t intend to give him the chance. She tinkered with the virtual screen again and then he felt a haze surrounding him. He watched on as she snapped her fingers and the virtual screen evaporated into thin air.

“Now,” the stranger said to him with a bright smile, “You get your rest and when you wake up, whatever you do, don’t freak out and leave the med-bubble.”

Whatever she dosed him with hadn’t taken him yet so he had to ask, “Why?”

She smiled, “Because you’re not me, so there’s nowhere to run that the Shadows won’t catch you.”

Mickey wants to ask more of what she means but he’s out like a light before he can utter another word.

XXX

To be sure, the first thing he heard was singing. No music was provided, the performance was full acapella.
The voice stopped abruptly before muttering a curse. All fell silent again.

Mickey took the chance and opened his eyes, automatically seeking to catch sight of the tiny brunette whom the voice belonged to. He found himself alone for she was nowhere in sight. He’d been so sure by the sound of her being so close.

He found himself able to sit up now and did so but he didn’t hop off from the surface he had awoken on. For some reason he found himself trusting in the mysterious warning the girl had given him before he’d slipped back into unconsciousness. He did glance around properly thought.

He found his brain feeling clearer and so all the things that had spooked him before he now found terribly frightening. Outside the lighted area he was under (the med-bubble, she’d called it) the rooms were dark and deserted. He was stuck in a wasteland, it seemed. At least he was fully clothed now.

The longer he sat, waiting, the more unsettled he became. The darkness outside of the bubble seemed to shift and move around him. He felt like prey.

“Good of you take my warning to heart.”

Mickey jumped at the sound of her voice and almost fell from the stretcher. She giggled and then appeared, steadying him with one helpful hand.
It felt so impossible. She had gathered out of thin air and yet she felt as solid as he was. She then reached to check at his pulse point and nodded, appearing satisfied with what she found.

“Who are you?” Mickey asked her.

She ignored the question. “You’re back at full health. Bravo, me. I’d have been a hell of a nurse, I tell you.”

She hopped onto the stretcher and sat beside him, her legs swinging idly. Given the state of wherever they were and whatever was in the dark, the nonchalance of her every action was so odd. Mickey had never felt more confused in his life. He decided on trying to find where exactly they were.

“What is this place?”

The girl looked to him and smiled. “Mine. I’m the Keeper of the Library.” She extended a hand to him and he shook it. “And you, don’t belong here.”

“I’m Mickey.” He offered back to her.

She laughed at that. “I know that much. We already have one of you in this universe.”

Mickey didn’t know how to reply to that. Instead, he said, “Is Martha alright?”

“I don’t know.” The girl answered honestly. “I can’t see through worlds but I do know one thing, he’ll fix it. He always does.”

“Who?”

“The Doctor.” She answered.

“Please,” Mickey begged, “Tell me where I am.”
She seemed to consider him for a very long time.

“Oh, what the hell. When the cracks between our separate worlds close you won’t remember a thing.” She hopped down back onto her feet and started pacing. “You are in a separate universe to your own. Some of the Doctor’s friends crossed over to get him back to where he belongs, here, because the longer he’s away the more trouble for everyone involved. And since those friends of his are using vortex travels for hopping universes the transfer is dodgy at best. If you were anywhere near their touchdown spot you get caught in the crossfires. They transported there, so you get transported here. Its rubbish, I know, but once they do come back you’ll pop right back to your own world as well. The balance depends on it.”

“But, but Martha. She was with me. Everything exploded.” Mickey shook his head. “I have to know if she’s okay.”

“You will. I’m planning on sending you back earlier than I should. I need you to carry a message to the Doctor’s friends for me.” The girl placed a firm hand on his shoulder, “Besides, The Doctor will make sure it’s alright.”

“How can one man do that?!!” Mickey cried. “You weren’t there. You didn’t see what I saw.”

She beamed at him as if she knew something he didn’t. “He’s the Doctor, and believe me, if anyone can set things right, it’s him. It won’t be long now. So you just sit tight and ready your strengths. This transfer is going to take a lot out of you. Oh, gods, with all this excitement I almost forgot. I have someone else I have to check in on. I’ll be right back.”

She was gone before Mickey could stop her, her image sliding away into the air like mist. Stuck in such a place had him wondering who else she could possibly be looking after but she was well enough prepared, she'd proven that much.

*Ready your strengths.*

She also mentioned a transfer. Mickey didn’t know what that entailed but if it got him back to Martha, he’d do it.

Chapter End Notes

Ever since [THE SCENE] of her (Clara, or one of the many versions of her) watching on as the Tenth Doctor lingered around the Library on the 14th episode of Series 7 (*The
*Name Of the Doctor* happened I've wanted to play around with that idea and so that's what this chapter allowed me to do.

Oh, and please keep in mind/remember that this story IS an AU so this is going somewhere, I promise.
Thirty.

Thirty.

Amy suffers Donna’s retelling of events in silence. She feels she should offer the woman more than that when she tells of losing Lee but she can’t. Donna had no confirmations of whether Melody or the Doctor got out safe and the whole not knowing shakes her to her very old bones. She realizes the chill of fear has her shivering when Rory places a warm arm around her.

Next is Martha. It seems so grotesque to Amy’s ears having to hear the details of Martha’s injuries. She can’t quite figure out why it’s affecting her so profoundly. She’s never exactly been squeamish over a little bloodshed, so why the sudden upset? She settles on perhaps because it’s real.

When Martha is finished all eyes turn to the Ponds. Rory, as it turns out, isn’t exactly in the most sharing mood. Martha’s telling that it was Vastra and Jenny who saved her life just didn’t seem to be enough of a reason to extend trust for Mr. Pond. Further insistence didn’t sway him one bit and Amy soon found herself growing impatient with something she couldn’t name.

They’d literally been going around in circles with the whole to trust or not to trust discussion. Vastra and Jenny seemed content to stay out of it. Amy, unlike her husband apparently, could appreciate that.

Rory could be a stubborn old goat when he wanted to be and for some reason he had decided that now was the perfect time to act as such. Amy however did not favor suffering through such nonsense. She sighed noisily, interrupting Rory right in the middle of making some point or other.

“Just tell them what happened, Stupidface.” Amy said and decided to state the obvious while she was at it. “It’s not like we have the luxury to be denying any help that comes our way.”

Rory may have glared but Amy was past caring. There was a massive amount of feeling building inside of her. She would name it dread only it felt like so much more than that. Worse somehow. She could feel it there, inside, trying to claw its way out.

To her relief Rory listened to her suggestion and began telling the others exactly what had taken place since being separated at the Christmas Lighting Ceremony.

Amy fell silent to her husband’s storytelling, knowing he had it all under control. She had passed out
after all so Rory would be the proper choice to rely upon to deliver information on exactly what had taken place.

If Vastra and Jenny shared several haunted glances at the mentioning of a little girl named Charlotte Abagail Lux, well, Amy was too busy in her own thoughts to notice.

Something wasn’t right. Something specific. If only she could remember…

“Are you alright?”

Amy turned her attention to the source of the question. It was the Lizard Woman. Vastra.

The lie came out easily. Too easily.

“I’m absolutely fine.” Amy assured her.

The Lizard Woman’s eyes focused on Amy’s face and for a quick second Amy thinks she sees a sadness there but then Madame Vastra blinks. Her eyes are composed and shielded when they meet Amy’s again.

Vastra smiles, “Of course you are.”

And what the hell is that supposed to mean? Is what Amy wants to say but for once she keeps quiet.

It feels odd, keeping an outburst in. She’s not used to the sensation of holding her tongue so it kind of tickles in an unpleasant way.

No. Amy shakes her head slowly and closes her eyes. That’s not right.

A sudden certainty that this unpleasantness has nothing whatsoever to do with these circumstances starts to cloud her focus. A wave of empty longing accompanies such certainties. A longing that feels more like a wound and it’s been bleeding endlessly. A loss of some kind… almost too much to bear.
Rory calling her name softly is what brings her out of it. When she opens her eyes he is standing beside her, eyes concerned and his already wrinkled brow wearing even more wrinkles from worry. She also notices she’s taken to clutching at her head. It hurts.

“Amy,” he said again, reaching out and wiping away at a tear. She hadn’t even realized she was crying. “What is it? What’s the matter?”

“I…” She couldn’t continue. She knew what it was, sort of. Deep down she could feel it but something had her incapable of comprehending it. Something stopped her from saying the words. From remembering.

“Oh my god!” They heard Martha exclaim. “It’s Mickey!”

Amy wishes her eyesight had been what it used to be because she has to squint to notice where exactly Martha was indicating.

Two blocks away someone was lying face down on the pavement.

“He most certainly was not there before.” Vastra said, voice grave and distrustful.

Just as Martha was about to move forward Jenny took hold of her arm gently.

“How can you be sure it’s him?” She inquired.

“Because I know.” Said Martha before starting off in a run towards the body.

XXX

“If you go back, if you change the past you can change the future and she won’t get hurt.” Charlotte
took a glance at Melody before strategically adding, “Either of them.”

The Doctor pointed an accusing finger her way and warned, “Stop it.”

“You fix it and then this universe will surely owe you.” Charlotte continued.

If she was trying to play coy she was horribly off. The Doctor paced angrily around his console, stifling the urge to just sonic her out of there. He could, he very well could. He had the coding.

“That will be how many worlds now?” Charlotte feigned counting on her fingertips.

It would be easy to destroy Cal’s data ghost, he reasoned. Responsible to, even. All he had to do was reverse the signal and send her right into the ether and back to wherever she had come from. Then he’d block the signal from returning. Just like that: Poof! And she’d be out of his hair, so to speak.

“Good karma like that could come handy for later, don’t you think?”

Later. He snorted bitterly. Foolish girl. Sooner or later matter little to me. She’s gone.

“So, when you find John Smith he’ll tell us what we need to know and-”

“Enough!” the Doctor shouted, spinning around to look at the child lingering in his Tardis. “Stop that, stop talking! There is no ‘we’ in this equation! You have absolutely no idea what you are asking me to do!”

Charlotte’s eyes went wide with surprise. “I’m asking you to save her life!”

“I already have!” The Doctor answered back angrily.

“Liar!” The little girl shrieked, stomping on the Tardis floor along with her tantrum. “Liar! Liar! Liar!”
The Doctor watched on, utterly lost on the workings of how best to deal with the likes of an angry child. There was a time he had been prepared and seasoned in such challenges. Children. Grandchildren. Those times were in the past and too long ago. He hasn’t the patience for it anymore. Speaking of children…

His eyes gravitate towards Melody. She’s very much the Tardis’s own version of Sleeping Beauty. Whatever the Tardis is doing to keep her at bay, to keep her from waking, he’s grateful. If Melody wakes he’s not sure he’s strong enough to deal with the fall out. Having to explain that Charlotte Abagail Lux has been rearranging herself into Melody’s life and her loved ones by using her dead son’s face to do so is not something he’s eager to tackle. This has turned into an even bigger mess than he’d expected, and that’s saying something.

The little girl is still blabbing on about it. All sorts of mad, eager little manipulations come out of her mouth that it’s hard to remember she’s supposed to be a child only, really, she isn’t. She hasn’t been for a very long time. He would damn whoever taught her such things but deep down he knows exactly the person responsible for Charlotte’s corruptions. Himself.

“SHUT UP!” He roared unexpectedly, surprising himself just as much as Charlotte. “Just…” his hands were shaking. “Just shut up!”

He eyed Cal and then Melody. He knew all too well what loss of a child did to a parent. Even if his own experience was too far to reach at the moment he’d seen it happen with Amy. His Amy, that is.

The Doctor took a deep breath. It did nothing to calm him but with an exhale he stood decided.

“And stay shut up.” He ordered at Cal before moving over a few paces and typing in coordinates.

XXX

Rory had begrudgingly left Amy’s side to help Martha with Mickey. Doctor Jones would have need of Rory strengths to help her carry Mickey back to them, after all. It was a whole other argument to get him to do so, he was adamant to stay by Amy’s side but she reminded him of his nursing abilities and what that meant.
“You have to help him.” Amy told him, “Martha is a doctor, you’re a nurse. It’s your duty to help the wounded, isn’t it?”

That softened his resolve and off he went.

In truth, Amy would have rather he not leave her side. With whatever was going on with her she found herself wanting of Rory’s over-protectiveness but she also knew right from wrong. She knew that if Rory could help in saving Mickey’s life then that’s where he should be. Besides, no matter how off she felt, she had never been useless all on her own. She could take care of herself, thank you very much.

Amy huffed at that. The reminder made her feel almost ten times better. She’d be fine.

“Are you sure you are alright?”

It was Madame Vastra again. Amy wonders if the Lizard Woman had been waiting around for Rory to leave her side just so she could get her alone.

“You do look a bit paler than usual.” Jenny, who came to join at Vastra’s side, added.

Annoyance filled Amy from head to toe.

“How do you know what my usual paleness is? I hardly know either of you.” She snapped.

Vastra made a soft ticking noise with her tongue and shook her head, looking amused more than insulted.

“The fierceness just doesn’t die in this one, whatever version she takes.” She addressed to Jenny. “Does it, my dear?”

Jenny smiled at the reptilian creature with affection. “I reckon she wouldn’t be a Pond without it, Ma’am.”
“Are you two done?” Amy blurted. She had grown weary of their cryptic undertones.

She was an old woman now, for crying out loud! Her body had passed the point of being made for the activities that had followed all of today. Her joints ached at every turn and her head was pounding like never before. If these two expected her to receive their talk of nonsense with grace, a nod and a nice little old lady smile they were wrong.

“Madame Vastra.” Rory called, Martha following after him. “Mickey is asking for you and your wife.”

“Forgive us if we’ve offended you.” Vastra offered Amy before retreating, taking Jenny alongside her.

Rory replaced them immediately at Amy side and Amy was grateful.

“What’s going on?” Amy wondered aloud. Martha only shrugged.

They watched as Vastra and Jenny neared Mickey. When they reached him they knelt down to his level. Lips moved and curious looks were exchanged.

It was Jenny who stood and walked back to them.

“What is it?” Rory inquired, an arm circling around his wife. With her stomach twisting and turning in knots it was definitely the right source of comfort Amy needed.

Jenny looked startled, eyes moving from Donna and Martha to Rory. Finally, as Amy feared, they rested back on her. “I just wanted to say that we are so very sorry.”

“For what?” Donna asked.

Jenny only shook her head and smiled sadly. “It was awfully great to meet every one of you again. A true pleasure.”
Vastra called for her and Jenny went. The Lizard Woman looked just as miserable as her wife did.

“What are they doing?” Donna said, voicing every one of their thoughts for them.

Jenny linked her arms with Vastra and with the push of a button the strangers were gone.
“Hello.” The Doctor greets the woman at the front desks. If the familiar face sitting behind the desk spooks him he doesn’t show it, instead reads her nametag and smiles. “Lorna Bucket. Hello there, Lorna. I’m the Doctor. I need the entire third floor evacuated of staff and visitors, all but the patient in room 10D, I need his room vacant of visitors. It sounds mad, I know, but,” He reaches for his psychic paper and flashes it in front of her, “as you can see, I know what I’m doing.”

The woman, Lorna, nods and turns to call the Head of Hospital.

“You mind if I?” he points to the spare computer on the desk beside her.

“Go right ahead.” She says, turning away for more privacy in her phone call.

He slips into the free chair and works quickly at entering a coding system Charlotte had given him. The Tardis would receive it immediately and do some of the work for him while he’s executing the plan (though, technically, the word plan should be replaced with kidnapping – now is not the time to dwell on such things).

The Doctor’s mind casually drifts, it does that when partially idle, back to only an hour ago where he’d been eleven months in the future. He had no trust in the little girl Cal and yet to do as he was bid she was the only one to leave Melody with. Cal guaranteed Melody’s safely in River’s name and he granted her that duty, warning her that if any harm came to Melody Pond while he was doing as she pleaded him to that there would be consequences.

He had work to do and by the time all was done everything would be rearranged. There had been no time for goodbyes. The future he’d just come from would no longer exist and they wouldn’t have remembered him anyway.

When Lorna turns around he’s already standing, waiting.
“The third floor is being cleared and there are no visitors in room 10D. The patient’s wife went out to lunch with her parents a few moments ago.” Lorna informs.

“Thanking you.” He bows his head in thanks and walks towards the lift. The doors slide open when he gets there and already people are being ushered out. He waits for them all to walk past him before slipping into the lift himself, sonic screwdriver now in hand. With the press of a button the doors of the lift slide shut and he’s in motion.

When he reaches the third floor there is still a good amount of people being escorted out but he doesn’t bother over it. His destination is room 10D and he keeps his focus on that.

It takes him almost to the last few rooms left on the floor to find it.

10D – says the label beside the door. In the small paper holder beneath it are, by the looks of it, patient notes John Smith’s doctor left behind for the nurses in staff.

The Doctor swallows and looks around. His hand is shaky when he reaches for the doorknob. He wraps his hand around it tightly to steady himself. He hesitates, just for a second, before pushing the door open and closing it behind him. With a buzz from his screwdriver the door locks and he cautiously approaches the hospital bed.

The man, the one who happens to wear one of his faces, is in sitting position with his back resting against several propped pillows. He looks like he’d been sulking only now his frown is directed at the Doctor. It’s a bit weird.

“Hello, John.” Said the Doctor.

The man raises a perfect brow at him and asks, “Who are you?”

The Doctor pales. “Oh, no. Did I get the timing wrong again?” He’s in John’s face then, looking closely, studying, searching. The other man startles with the sudden invasion but the Doctor breaks out into a grin, self-satisfied. “No, no. Still the early days. Good. This means y–”

“Erm,” John interrupts, “Do you think I can have my personal space back? I quite like it if I’m being completely honest.”
John is trying to lean away from the Doctor’s scrutiny as much as is possible while trapped in a hospital bed.

“Right, sorry.” the Doctor moves away quickly, clearing his throat nervously with the sudden reality of that moment. The man before him wore a face of his past but there had been so many and once is a very long time ago. “How often do you forget, John?”

John Smith eyed him curiously. “Do I know you?”

The Doctor stares and considers. He slips into the chair that’s beside John’s hospital bed. “I think you know exactly who I am, look closer.”

The Doctor waits and sure enough John’s brow loses its tension. The realization is plain to see on his face. Dread. Resentment. Sadness.

“It wasn’t an accident.” John states knowingly.

“Do you remember now?” The Doctor asks, the knowledge of what exactly had happened to John Smith had been relayed to him in detail by Charlotte. “Do you remember how you worked it out?”

John shuts his eyes and his hand reaches up at his forehead, remembering the sharp pain that jolted through him the day he woke up in the hospital. How the doctor attending him had explained there had been an accident yet couldn’t explain to him, or themselves for that matter, what that accident had actually been. There was nothing amiss from where they found him at his workplace, nothing that indicated the cause of his injury. They were at a loss. The only thing the medics seemed to agree upon was that the deterioration of his memory was irreversible.

Yes. He remembers.

“It kept spilling and spilling. All of it, everything. All of time itself. You’re what makes me forget.” John opens his eyes. “Because I have to.”

“You worked it out, John.” The Doctor said. “Time travel. You’re not supposed to know that, not in this universe. Things here aren’t made for the way mine is. For one, there’s no me. When you made
your discovery you unhinged the ordinary of your world. You tore through the fabric of this world and in doing so you’ve disrupted one of the most dangerous things in all the cosmos.”

“Which is?” John inquired.

“Me.” The Doctor answered. “My timeline. That disruption was enough to attract a link between us. My timeline has been pouring into your head. You know what everyone else mustn’t and that knowledge has been breaking away at you ever since.” The Doctor stopped, stood and paced.

“Time is burning you out,” he explained, “erasing you and it won’t stop until there’s nothing left, not a shred of knowledge. That knowledge would have the power to eradicate existence as we know it. You know too many secrets, more importantly my secrets. They’re too much for you to bear and you won’t be able to. You’re not made that way. You’re human.”

John’s frown deepens, realization taking its toll.

“I’m dead, aren’t I?”

“You have three months left.” The Doctor told him. “I’m so sorry.”

“But…” John seems puzzled, as if trying to remember something. The rest of it comes out in a whisper. “Time can be rewritten.”

It’s the Doctor’s turn to frown. “It doesn’t work that way. It never works. I know from experience.”

“Oh. Oh!” John full-on grinned, a manic energy suddenly alight in him. He started pulling the various wires attached to him from his arms and chest.

The Doctor winces because it’s probable that one of those wires is very much keeping the man stable.

“What are you doing?” He asks as John gets out of his hospital bed and walks to the small closet that has his belongings. He pulls it open and starts rummaging through it.
“Time being rewritten is applicable to you. You’re the Doctor.” John states and tosses a few hospital gowns onto the floor. John reaches inside, seemingly having to reach towards the very back of the closet.

“And if I was the Doctor,” he continued, “I’d have a very…” he clenches his jaw and the Doctor wonders for a second exactly how far back this closet actually goes. “I’d have a very big paradox on my hands but…” John pauses, pulling back out of the closet and glancing back to the Doctor.

The Doctor can only watch on as John proceeds to duck his entire top half into the closet for a better look.

When John bends forward the fact that he is fully nude beneath his hospital gown has the Doctor looking away, his own face reddening in embarrassment. He knows it’s foolish. It’s not like he’s not seen it before, he had that very same body once, but still. A man deserves some privacy, eh?

“But?!” John calls out from inside.

He seemed to be implying something but the Doctor found himself at a loss. “But what?”

“Ah, found you!” John exclaims. He’s pulling out a very familiar blue pinstripe suit and looking at it fondly. He eyes the Doctor, expectant. “Come on, now. All that stuff that poured into my head about you. You’re not telling me you can’t keep up with little old human me, are you?”

The Doctor squints, reviewing all John had said quietly in his head.

*And if I was the Doctor…*

“But?” John says softly once more.

“But… you’re not the Doctor.” The Doctor finishes.

“I’m not.” John agrees. “Your time isn’t the one that needs rewriting, it’s mine. And yours, well, it
could do with a little fixing. I remember. I know exactly what I was doing and why I was doing it. Just as I know why you’re here now. Do you deny it?”

The Doctor sighs. It’s enough of an answer for John Smith.

XXX

They sneak through the hospital unnoticed. For the time being, at least. It’s amazing really. John looked a fragile, broken human being in his hospital bed but now he was moving around as if he’d never been in his previous state.

“I guess I have you to thank for the various amount of suits I have in this shade.” John comments.

“It was cool, wasn’t it?” the Doctor marvels at the suit. The color, the trainers, the hair. Nostalgia takes its grip. They tiptoe their way around a wall and John peaks around the corner. “Tiny bit noticeable though,” the Doctor adds, “with the alarming shade of blue and all.”

“Well, it’s less conspicuous than walking around in a hospital gown now, isn’t it?” John snapped. “At least I’m not walking around looking like a five year old in my great-granddad’s outfits.”

The Doctor gaped at the insult. “A bit snippy today are we?”

“According to you I’m going to be dead in three months and alienate my wife every step of the way.” John reminded. “So yeah, I think I’ve earned the right to be a bit lippy about the whole thing.”

The Doctor nodded his head, “How’s it look out there?”

“No, no way. Too many people. There’s no way we’d get out without notice. Unless…” John looked back at the Doctor, “Purple settings?”

“Purple?” the Doctor’s eyed John warily, “On the sonic? No such thing.”
“Oops. That might have been a spoiler. Anyways. As far as I understand, Doctor,” John very rudely reaches into the Doctor’s jacket and retrieves the sonic screwdriver.

The Doctor is too surprised to stop him. He has to wonder if John’s not only seen his past but also glimpsed at his future.

“Pointing and thinking, yeah?” John asks before doing just that.

The entire building rumbles and the Doctor watches as his screwdriver blinks purple. There’s a bloody purple setting. Not red. Purple. It really shouldn’t surprise him when the impossible has become his life as of late.

Suddenly an alarm goes off and the lights go out, the room is pitch black except for what seems to be a flicker of small sparks flowing through the air. They’re sorting through fast enough that any normal person wouldn’t notice that they formed numbers but he does. It’s the code he wrote into the computer at the front desks.

The Doctor recognizes in an instant the way the wind starts catching and the sound that accompanies it. The Tardis is materializing by herself. Purple settings will come in very handy in the future, he thinks.

“Come on!” He hears John yell and then a hand is tugging at his tweed jacket, pulling him to stand.

They run towards where the glowing code has gathered on the other side of the room. In seconds they are taken from the dark and are being sheltered, swallowed, by the inside of the Tardis.

Chapter End Notes

So, this fic has been amazing to write and it's with a heavy heart that I inform you it will come to a close on part 33. Thank you all for sticking with me this far.
Thirty-Two.

The Doctor wastes no time and heads straight for the console.

“Thank you, dear.” He directs to the Tardis quickly. “We only have a window to work with, John. That window is going to close sooner than later and I need you to tell me what you were working on exactly. John? John-” the Doctor turns around to see John still standing at the same spot.

The man is taking the Tardis in. The Doctor suddenly remembers that John isn’t him. They are unrelated in every sense. A world apart, except for this rip in time that has bled into John’s world and, more importantly, into his mind. A concept can be imagined but seeing it first hand is entirely different.

“She’s called the Tardis.” The Doctor offers. “But I think you already know that.”

“Time And Relative Dimension In Space.” John nods. “I remember. I just didn’t think it would feel like this. Endless and… lonesome.”

The Doctor lets John take his time and thankfully he doesn’t take long.

“Is my wife alright?” he asks, blinking away his tears. “You say when I… when I died that it was just a few months after Jack. How is she, Mels?”

“She is very much alive.” The Doctor assures. “She’s safe.”

“River.”

The Doctor stills because that’s not a question, it’s a statement. “I’m sorry?”
"The last few months before Jack…” John swallowed, trying to compose himself. “Before everything, right, I was only drawing a hypothesis up on time travel. It was only a hobby. I wasn’t even serious about it. It never crossed my mind what would happen if it actually worked. I just got an idea and it worked.” A sloppy grin spreads across John’s face and his eyes lit up.

The excitement of discovery, the Doctor knows it well.

“And it worked.” John repeats, his voice gone thick with emotion. The excitement is now replaced with shame. “I went back and I saw Rose. A week before she died. At that point in time, her time, I was supposed to be settled down in Prague so as you can imagine my appearance was a surprise to her. It was lovely. Hearing her laugh again.”

John got caught up in his memories momentarily before blinking them away and continuing.

“Anyway, I got back to my time and went home and Mels…” John was visibly shaking now, “Jack was in a car accident with his Gran. He bled out in Amy’s arms. I have never seen the great Amelia Pond so shaken.” His following laugh was haunted with grief and self-hate. “And Mels, god. She was torn to bits. A light went out in her that day. She’s… she’s my whole heart. My family was my whole life. And I left them to go back in time and…”

The Doctor stayed silent, listening.

“You know, I’ve never felt guiltier in my whole life.” John confessed. “So I tried to go back again. To fix it. To save him. My son. I don’t exactly recall what I did or didn’t do but my efforts proved useless. I realized it a month later that something was wrong. Something was terribly, terribly wrong. Then it started. Memories, your memories.” He clarified. “I suppose that one visit to Rose was enough to light a spark. The tear I created in the universe. Sliced it right open.”

“I’m sorry.” The Doctor said once it became apparent that John was finished. “What’s River have to do with any of this?”

“Everything.” John answers. “When I realized something was wrong I looked into it. A girl named Charlotte reached out to me. She said you’d know her better as Cal.”

The Doctor felt sick instantly. He was beginning to see where this was going.
“She told me she needed my help.” John recalled, “She said if I helped her save her mother, River, that she’d help me find the one person who could save my son.”

“You know how to get River out.” The Doctor guessed quietly.

“I know how to get her out.” John confirmed.

“River’s already been saved onto the data core,” The Doctor said, “Nothing more can be done.”

“She’s been downloaded.” John corrected. “She hasn’t been saved. Charlotte had me look you up first. In her library, I mean. She told me that over time it would all be too much and I wouldn’t be able to control it, that it would destroy me. She also said that when that happened you would come and you would fix it. All of it.”

“She told you all of that?” The Doctor questioned. He found himself unable to be completely angry with Cal. If the child was to be trapped inside the Library for all of eternity then River was the closest thing to a mother the girl was like to get. Of course she would move even the heavens in order to keep her mum safe. Any child would.

“Yes,” John answered him, “I believed her. Apparently, I’ve died to help her. To help you. Like River did.”

And those last three words did indeed leave their mark.

“I took Charlotte’s word for it. So go on then, Doctor.” John said. “Fix it. Just this once, maybe time can be rewritten and everyone can live.”

The Doctor considered John in silence. The deal had been to come back for him, not for Jack too. Cal had neglected to mention the boy at all but the Doctor should have figured it would come to this. One life for another, that was fair, but two? That was past pushing their luck.

“I’m curious.” He said finally, “Did Charlotte by any chance mention the worlds and the people, innocent people, who have perished at my hand?”
He watched John’s face for any sign of alarm.

“Did she mention the true reason as to why my wife is dead in the first place, hmm? Where the blame lies?” the Doctor smiled wanly. “Or did our dear Charlotte just paint you a pretty picture she thought you’d like because if so I’m sorry to say you’ve been misinformed. I’m no hero.”

“I did my own homework.” John informed. “She painted that picture, yes, but I always do my research. I don’t need a hero. I need someone willing to do what others can’t. I looked you up, Doctor. It doesn’t matter to me what kind of man you brand yourself so long as you can bring my son back to my wife.”

The Doctor didn’t miss that implication. The lack of care for self-preservation lingering in John’s words. The man had no intentions of delivering himself to his wife without their son.

“I see.” The Doctor muttered.

John wore one of his faces yet, unlike the Doctor, he was not willing to yield to the plate destiny had served him.

“You know, I once knew a girl who stopped her father from dying.” He told John. Glimpses of that day flashed in his memory. Rose saving her father had effected them both. It had showed them both how stubborn they could be and how regardless of their disagreements they had needed each other. It had been a marvelous beginning, now that he remembers it.

“And?” John prompted, pulling him back to his present dilemma.

“He died.” The Doctor answered. “But he didn’t die alone, she made sure of that.”

John hadn’t liked that answer. “My Jack didn’t die alone either but that doesn’t change the fact that he’s dead!”

“Exactly! I am breaking every rule I have to save you.” He couldn’t seem to stress that enough. “The promises I made myself so many years ago, they’re being broken right now. I came back for you. I cannot go back for him.”
“You mean you won’t!” John spat back at him.

“You’re right!” The Doctor shouted, “I won’t!”

The heartbreak on the other man’s face broke his hearts but he couldn’t afford to fold.

“I’m sorry,” He said, gentler. “But I will not. We are changing the future as we speak. The Tardis is running her course through this timeline and rewriting your death as non-existent. It won’t be long now.”

The Doctor pushed in another set of coordinates. “You might want to grab a hold of something.” He suggested.

John did as he was told and took a hold of the railings. His hopes had extinguished entirely. If there’s anything Charlotte should be held accountable for, it’s the loss of light in John Smith’s eyes.

“If you don’t want to tell me how to get River out, I understand.” He added before pulling a lever downward. The Tardis vibrated with life.

The rest of the journey was filled with silence and so the Doctor is glad it was a short hop forward in time. He’d made the Tardis invisible and parked her inside John’s hospital room.

The Doctor checked the Tardis monitors to double-check that they landed at the right date. The information on the screen revealed that the hospital had closed down the third floor to visitors so sneaking John back into his hospital bed would be easy. When he finished triple-checking he turned to address John properly. The Tardis fixing up hospital data wasn’t the only thing she’d been rerouting.

“Do you feel any different?” He asked but John didn’t answer. The Doctor took that as a telling sign and went to John’s side. The man was in a bit of a trance so he’d need the Doctor to guide him back out of the blue box. The Doctor swung one of John’s arms around his shoulder. “Can you walk, John? Well we’ll find out soon enough, eh?”

When he took a step forward John followed his lead. That meant he was still comprehensive of the world around him. The Doctor had to disrobe John and place him in another hospital gown before he stuck him back in his hospital bed. He tried to be as quick as possible. If John was still
comprehensive, which he was, he’d not be liking this one bit.

“The Tardis is locking away any insights you had to time travel in your brain, a psychic firewall of sorts.” The Doctor relayed to John in an attempt to fill the silence. “I didn’t ask, I know, I’m sorry but I’m sure you’d have objected. Unfortunately, she can’t erase me entirely so you’ll remember this. I’m trusting you with my secrets, John.”

The Doctor tucked John in properly and made sure the wire’s torn off his arms and chest the day before were placed correctly. The hospital staff would find John Smith at full recovery when they came to check in. The Tardis had hacked into the computers and placed John as receiving treatment in a restricted area, documenting that as the reason of his sudden disappearance. Melody would be worried sick and pitching a fit over not being able to see him but at least John would be alive for her to keep this time around.

Thinking of it now, it would generally be a pretty unremarkable recovery story. Vitamins, John’s chart would say as his cure. Humans would call it a miracle nonetheless and be done with it, of that the Doctor is sure.

Right before the Doctor steps back into his Tardis he offers John the only wisdom he knows.

“You are being given this chance to be back at your wife’s side, John, and she at yours.” The Doctor says, “Don’t waste it on stories. They don’t last. Make it real.”

The Doctor closes his Tardis doors and leaves John Smith’s hospital room.

XXX

He summons Cal back to the Tardis when he’s done overseeing all the technicalities. The recovery went well and John had been discharged from hospital two days later.

The Doctor does not ask after Melody when Cal appears. The Melody that had existed in his Tardis before he’d saved John was now non-existent since the timeline of their time spent together had been erased so there was no point in asking. Charlotte however has questions of her own.
“Did he tell you?”

The Doctor ignores it. “Ready to go home?”

“I’m not going back.” Says the little girl and it causes him pause.

“I did as you said.” He said tiredly. “We are going home.”

“But I have no more home.” Charlotte pointed out. “My Library is in ruins and the only way to save mummy is to take her away from me. Now that you know how to take her from me, you will. I know you will.”

The Doctor doesn’t bother mentioning that John Smith hadn’t told him how and he’s far too tired to argue with anyone, least of all with her.

“What do you suggest?” He asks.

“Leave me be.” Said Charlotte. “Here.”

“I think you’ll have a little problem convincing John Smith to trust you again.” The Doctor informed. “You told him things. You gave him hope and then I had to crush it.”

Charlotte was quiet for a moment. “You didn’t save his son?”

His silence was her answer.

“I don’t want John to be my dad.” Charlotte told him. “If I can’t have River, I want Rory and Amy.”

“Cal,” The Doctor shook his head slowly and finally turned to look at her. He thought it would be harder, facing her. But she was a tiny little thing. The look of her was fragile and harmless. Childlike. “They’re people, not objects. Don’t you think you’ve done enough harm?”
“Don’t you?” she threw back at him.

He sighed. “When I go back the links from our world to this one will close. Your power source will be cut off. If I leave you here eventually you will die.”

“No.” Charlotte shook her head, “If you leave me here I get to live.”

“I can’t make any promises.” He warned her just as the Tardis landed. “Wait here. I have unfinished business.”

She nodded and so the Doctor stepped outside into the world he didn’t belong for one last time.

The Tardis had parked herself exactly at the spot he’d first arrived exactly eight months in John Smith’s newly written future. Before starting out in the direction of the Pond residence, the Doctor soniced a barrier around the Tardis so Cal wouldn’t escape the ship and cause more damage. After everything that had happened, walking around in this world was a familiar thing to him now. He was going to miss it dearly.

The Doctor passed by the shop Mickey worked at during the day and spied the young man taking orders. He lingered to watch as Mickey took Martha Jones’s order. The man was pining once again. All the hard work the Doctor had accomplished in the life that had been written over had been lost. Mickey was back at square one with the love of his life and it left the Doctor feeling rotten. He swallowed those feelings and pushed forward to his final destination.

Once reaching the Pond residence the Doctor heard music coming from out back so he took the long way around to see what the fuss was about. Friends were gathered there in the small backyard. He smiled at the sight of Donna arguing with her mother Sylvia while Rory and Lee were busy hanging a hand-painted sign that read Congratulations! Amy’s handiwork, the Doctor bets. A few presents were also sitting on a table they’d brought outside and balloons were tied to the ends of party chairs. Some with exclamations such as It’s a girl!

“No, Mum,” came a voice he knew from behind him. “I’m just arriving. Yes, I’ve got the party hats.”

In hopes to catch a last sight of Melody he turned abruptly only to slap body first right into her.
“Oh, god!” She shrieked and almost toppled over but the Doctor steadied her.

“Are you alright?!?” The Doctor asked worriedly. It was then than the Doctor let his eyes travel. They rested at the sight of her very round and pregnant belly.

Chapter End Notes

Be sure to keep an eye out on the next and final chapter for a big surprise. :)

Thirty-Three & EPILOGUE.

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

Thirty-Three.

Melody was clutching at his tweed almost painfully. “I’m… I’m okay.” She looked to the ground and caught sight of her cell phone lying in a puddle. At least the party hats she’d been carrying had landed on dry land. “That’s what I get for not paying attention of my surroundings.”

“No,” the Doctor shook his head. “This was my fault. I was in the way.”

He tries not to balk at how true those words were.

“You’re too kind.” Melody smiled beautifully. She seemed to realize her death grip and released him, much to his disappointment. “Really, I should pay more attention.”

“No, no. It’s fine. Absolutely fine.” The Doctor assured before catching sight of John slowly making his way over towards them.

“And exactly what have you managed to turn upside down this time?” John directed at his wife.

Melody glared at him yet the Doctor could see the affection there.

“That’s not my trait, sweetie. But now that you mention it, I may have been talking on the phone and not watching my feet again.” Melody motioned to her drowned cell phone. “I ran into…” she looked to the Doctor, “I’m sorry I didn’t catch your name.”

He tried to ignore how much that hurt. In so many words she was saying exactly what had haunted him like nothing ever had before. Who are you? It’s their own sort of irony, he and River. Now it’s extended to him and Melody.

“This is an old colleague of mine.” John supplied helpfully. “The Doctor.”
“Oh, really?” Melody eyed her husband warily. “I’ve never heard you mention him before.”

“We parted on rough circumstances, love.” John said. “You could say we’ve suffered through hell and back together. Isn’t that right, Doctor?”

“Indeed.” The Doctor nodded once and came up with a backstory on the spot. “I, uh, came back to make amends for my behavior. It was a rough day indeed and, well, you have a baby on the way by the looks of it. I figured, what better time to pop in and wish you the best.”

“Oh, that’s so sweet of you!” Melody grinned, a warm hand reached to rest on his forearm. “After all we’ve gone through, that really means a lot. Doesn’t it, John?”

“Of course.” John agreed.

“I figured I owed you an apology up front.” The Doctor said truthfully. “Since no one really knows me better than John does now.”

“Well,” John drawls, “There is one person who knows you infinitely better than I ever will. In fact, I reckon you should probably go catch up with her.”

The Doctor’s jaw dropped at what John was possibly offering him. “Are you… sure?”

John smiled warmly, “You’ve kept her waiting long enough, I think. You tend to do that quite frequently by the way.”

“Yes,” the Doctor could feel tears want to gather in his eyes, “I really do.”

Melody watched them both quietly before interrupting. “You boys continue your staring contest, I’ll be telling Mum what happened to the party hats. Wish me luck, dears.” She kissed John’s cheek before waddling away.

John chuckled. It rumbled from deep in the man’s chest, his shoulders shaking gently with
merriment.

“I have been waiting for you, Doctor. Hoping you’d show up.” John said, digging into his pocket and handing over a small flash drive. “It’s all there.”

The Doctor looked at the information passed onto him. It fit impossibly small in his palm. “John, you don’t have to. I don’t deserve this.”

“And I don’t deserve this.” John said. “A second chance, but you gave it to me. You didn’t want to but you did. The bottom line is my wife and I are having a little girl because of your kindness. This is my way of saying thank you. Whether you deserve better isn’t for me to say but I do know you don’t deserve worse. You’re a good man. Take your second chance, Doctor.”

“Thank you, John Smith.”

“You are very, very welcome.”

He gave one long, last look at John Smith. “Have a fantastic life, John. Do that for me?”

John made a face, “Oh, no. I do remember certain bit of your lives, you know. You’ve definitely said that line before. A hand-me-down goodbye. A bit rude, considering all I’ve done for you.”

“It’s a good line!” The Doctor defended.

“Doesn’t matter if it’s good.” John grumbled, “Line from a past life said with a different mouth. Tacky. Might as well pin a vegetable to your lapel while you’re at it.” John eyed the bowtie on his neck. “Although it’d be an improvement to be honest.”

The Doctor’s hand automatically reached for his bowtie in offense but then John grinned.

“The bits I can remember though, it really is quite brilliant.” John said. “Your life.”

“It’s been a long one.” The Doctor replied. “Too long.”
“It’ll work.” John assured, nodding to the flash drive in the Doctor’s hand. “You’ll get her out.”

He wanted to believe John. Truly he did, but if he hadn’t found a way in all these years passed he didn’t dare hope. Instead he smiled sadly and patted John’s shoulder with his free hand. A ruckus heard inside distracted them.

John sighed, “That’ll be the mother-in-law. I better go help with that or the wife will never forgive me.”

The Doctor laughed and nodded in agreement. He moved away, giving them both some distance. Even standing just a few feet away both men knew they were farther apart than they seemed. In technical truth, a whole world away.

Without another word the Doctor turned and started walking. No words and definitely no goodyes. Beginnings had been erased and re-written and therefore no end was needed. His time in this universe had literally turned into a never-was.

The Doctor tucks the flash drive into his top pocket and is surprised to find that every step forward feels lighter, not heavier. He’d most definitely collapse onto himself later only there wouldn’t be a single sign of ruin. He’s too tarnished and has no spare room for new marks.

He gives the Leadworth from this universe one last stroll and reaches the Tardis just as the sun is going down. He doesn’t snap his fingers to open her doors this time. He rather fancies using the key. It’s been too long. He needs to hear her unlock for him, just like the good old days. Before he can even take a step inside a voice stills him where he stands.

“Thank you.”

He turns around to find none other but Amelia Pond. A Pond that isn’t his, true, but she’s a Pond that’s worked her way into his hearts just the same. He barely registers that she’s thanked him. He cannot fathom why. He’s been erased from their timeline, all of their memories have been wiped of his presence. He is a no-one to all but John.

“For what?” He holds his breath.
“For saving him.” Amy says, “Saving her. Us.”

His hearts feel tight and strangled. He can’t breathe right with such constriction.

“Raggedy Man,” Amy smiles, tears gathering in her eyes. “I remember you.”

The Doctor shakes his head at the madness of it and this time tears do escape him.

“You’ve not got to worry, I won’t say anything. John and I will keep that to ourselves until our dying day, I promise you that. I remember our time together but he did tell me some other things, though. Tales of another Amelia, yours. I hope you don’t mind.”

“I don’t mind.” He says and nearly chokes on his next question. “How?”

“I don’t know how. I’ve got two different memories in my head and it doesn’t make any sense to me but I’m positive things were the same with the ginger on your side. What’s that thing you said once?” Amy walks closer. “Mad, impossible Pond? I suppose it holds true on both sides of both universes.”

_Of course, he smiles. You can see what others can’t. You can remember things that never happened. My Sweet Little Amelia._

Only this Amelia is all grown like he never got to see his be. Hair turning grey and wrinkles lining her face. It’s a beautiful sight. He pushes forward and presses a kiss to her forehead. “Bye, bye Pond.”

“Goodbye, Doctor.” She watches him go and disappear behind the doors of his ship. _The Tardis_, John said it was called. As she watches the Tardis dematerialize she thinks she would have liked a life with the Doctor properly in it. She sort of misses the idiot already.

_Amy Pond and Rory Williams in the Tardis, next stop everywhere._

She smiles at that thought and the fact that in another side of life she and Rory had done such things. It pleased her.
“Goodbye, Raggedy Man.” She says, “Goodbye.”

Suddenly a gust of wind is around her and the Tardis is materializing again.

The Doctor’s head pops back out, “Amelia, would you by any chance fancy doing me a great big favor and be a mother again? I do have to warn you, you’ve met before.”

Charlotte slowly emerges from behind the Tardis doors. Amy could see the fear of rejection on her face plain as day.

“She’s a manipulative little beasty, granted,” the Doctor said, “but I believe if anyone is up to setting her straight it would be you.”

Amy reminded herself that the Doctor probably wouldn’t ask unless it was important.

“She’s not long for this world, Amy.” The Doctor added and that certainly did the job of clearing any ill thought she had for what the little girl put her and Rory through. Amy decided the past, re-written or not, could be forgiven.

“I may be in my olden years but they’re still early-olden ones.” Amy said,” I suppose I could use a challenge.”

She smiled and held out her hand. Charlotte rushed over and took it happily. Both watched as the Tardis dematerialized for the very final time.

“Now, first things first.” She glanced at the child beside her. “Since only John and I can remember you, how in the name of sanity am I going to convince Rory I didn’t steal you?”

Charlotte beamed at her new mother figure and said, “I’m sure we’ll think of something.”

“Aye, that’s the spirit!” said Amy as she threw an arm around the virtual child. “You’re going to fit in just fine.”
EPILOGUE

Meanwhile, light-years away, somewhere in the Doctor’s side of the universe…

The small, petite brunette tapped her fingernails against the table impatiently as she waited. She went by Oswin. Just Oswin. If need be, she could also be identified as Oswin 27810 but the mentioning of numbers in place of a name kind of left people her giving weird looks afterward so she left those details out every chance she could. Truth be told she didn’t exactly have a proper name or a surname. In fact, she didn’t have much but the cause she served and… well, her.

“What is taking so bloody long?!” The brunette grit out angrily when another ten minutes passed and there was still no sign of her associate. If the pair of them could even be called that, anyway. The person whom Oswin sat waiting for was late. Typical.

By the laws of the planet she could technically shoot J and get away with it. The planet honored time and frowned upon it being wasted. A blood payment would be permitted for such a since time is not something you can get back, as is a life. Perhaps that’s why Oswin chose it. Deep down maybe she just wanted an excuse to shoot somebody. She should probably be worrisome over such an urge, and she would be, if she could manage a feeling other than deep seeded annoyance. Really, it was so very like J to leave her waiting.

It was then that she noticed the bloke a few tables over was eying her appreciatively. Oswin frowned when he stood and made straight for her. She checked her side to make sure her gun was still there. She didn’t need unwanted attention but if this didn’t go well she wasn’t going to suffer a drunken fool’s advances either. When he finally stood in front of her she decided to beat him to it.

“Sorry, mate.” Oswin stated, tossing back the last of her drink, “I play for the other team.”

To her complete relief the man turned out to be a proper gentleman. He gave her a courteous nod and ordered her another drink before bidding her a lovely evening.
The one Oswin awaited came sauntering into the building a good while later. J’s shoulders carried their typical confidence and that breathtaking smile of hers was in place, as it always seemed to be.

_Not getting away with it this time cutie_, Oswin thought to herself as the blonde neared the table she occupied.

“You’re late.” Oswin accused as the woman slipped into the seat across from her.

The blonde one smiled brighter. “Saving universes takes time. I happen to have a lot of that and so much to see. Besides, you only just summoned me this morning.”

Oswin shook her head angrily, “Excuses. Do you think it’s easy for me to hop from place to place? I shouldn’t even be here. Unlike some lucky person,” She glared at J, “I don’t got any fancy stolen ship that I hijacked to take me ‘round the universe as I bloody well please. So, no, is the answer. It’s not easy for me yet I get the job done, don’t I? Don’t I?”

J looked slightly guiltier then. Pleased with that, Oswin collected her fury together and put it away before going on.

“This is it, Jenny.” Oswin said softly. The blonde met Oswin’s eyes at the mention of her full name. “The moment we’ve talked about for years.”

“You mean it?” Jenny asked, her own blue orbs were wide and full of so much hope. “Truly?”

Oswin pulled an object from the rucksack that sat at her side. It was a medium-sized wooden box. She slid it over the table to the woman across from her. Jenny’s hand brushed her own when the blonde reached for it. Oswin only hoped the warmth she felt spread across her cheeks wasn’t too obvious. Going by Jenny’s answering smug and _adorable-when-it-totally-shouldn’t-be_ smile, it was.

“Oh, and this.” Oswin dug back into her rucksack and handed over some written notes and an envelope. “All the data you need is on those papers and the letter is your key, don’t lose it.”

Jenny took them and placed them in her own bag. She turned her attention back to the wooden box. “May I?”
Oswin shrugged and placed her hand atop the box. It lit up beneath her palm before unlocking. “Knock yourself out.”

Jenny flipped the box open and smiled. She picked up the vortex manipulator and strapped it around her wrist.

“I always wanted to try it on.” Jenny admitted. “Ever since I met Professor Song all those years ago. She said I’d have my chance. Didn’t think it would come quite like this.”

“Well, you know the plan so off you pop.” Oswin dismissed airily but Jenny only smiled. A knowing smile. She moved over a few spaces until she was only an inch away from Oswin.

“I’ll be back.” Jenny promised her before placing a kiss on the other woman’s lips.

Oswin grinned fully and tugged at Jenny’s long blonde hair. “You best be back with what I’m sending you for or I’ll be overly cross with you. For good too. It matters this time.”

Jenny pouted, “You’re always speaking to me as if I’m a child.”

“With good reason!” Oswin insisted. “You take after your father too much to be trusted not to get into trouble, G.I. Jane.”

Jenny wrinkled her nose at her old nickname.

“So,” Oswin continued, “what you do is you go, you pick up that precious cargo and you run. Alright? You run until I tell you to stop.”

“Yes, silly girl.” Jenny giggled, “Yes.”

“Brilliant.” Oswin stood and swung her rucksack across her shoulder. “I’m off. Got some clean-up I’ve got to deal with. Some routers have short circuited again. They’ve been chewed through. Damn Shadows.”
“You should come with me.” Jenny blurted. “Just this once.”

“You know I can’t.” Oswin smiled at her sadly. “I’m not even supposed to be here. I have a service to uphold, remember?”

Yes, her service. *Keeper Of The Forest*, some said. Or *The Data Ghost* others had named her. She had watched over the Library long before the Vashta Nerada invaded and she was pretty much the only one that stuck around long after. Oswin was technically a myth to all but one: the woman beside her.

Of course, Jenny herself was a myth in her own right as well. Being born from a skin sample of the one and only Theta Sigma on a planet named Messaline left many without doubts that she’d actually existed at all, let alone was a Time Lord in her own right. But she was. She had too hearts and everything, Oswin would know. She’d stay up listening to them on those lucky nights she and Jenny had all to themselves. There were so very few moments where she could actually sustain herself and keep to Jenny’s side before The Library would call her back.

Oswin noticed instantly that some of Jenny’s happiness had flooded out at the decline to her offer. Oswin didn’t like that look. She never had but every time they came together it was always the look she was met with in the end.

“Hey,” She called Jenny’s attention. Blue eyes met her own. “What do you reckon you’ll say to him this time around? You know, after all these years gone by with him thinking you’re dead.”

Jenny smiled brightly enough for her that Oswin ignored it being a false one.

“I’ll say what I said the first time.” Jenny replied. “Hi, Dad.”

“Original.” Oswin gave a huff of laughter. “Aren’t you Time Lords supposed to be the clever lot?”

Jenny laughed at that.

“Right then.” Oswin could feel the magnetic pull gnawing at her skin. The Library was calling her back. It needed it’s Keeper, after all. She pulled Jenny upward to stand without another thought and
kissed her, all passion and longing and all that other good stuff.

They pulled away breathless.

“Run, you clever girl.” Oswin whispered, feeling herself start to disintegrate. “And remember me.”

Jenny kept her eyes on Oswin until she disappeared entirely, not a trace of her left behind.

*Just like a ghost,* Jenny noted. She did not cry but instead left to go over the things Oswin had given her in private. She had set her shuttlecraft invisible but she found it easily and climbed in. She left the planet and it was a long while before she stopped.

Jenny parked her shuttlecraft among the stars in the middle of nowhere before pulling out the papers Oswin had given to her. She read them over carefully before destroying them and then send her current location to Oswin at the Library. Jenny trusted that the brunette would transport her shuttlecraft to safety once the power shut off.

Once securing the envelope entrusted to her and typing the information she needed into the vortex manipulator that now hugged around her wrist, Jenny’s finger hovered over the *enter* button. Excitement and uncertainty were both at her side.

“Well, Minerva Katerina Song.” Jenny said to herself, “Your big sister is coming to get you. New York, here I come.”

With one push Jenny disappeared in a fit of static and the shuttlecraft lost all power.

**XXX**

Back at the Library a sound went off, alerting Oswin of Jenny’s departure.

“Ah, and there she goes.” Oswin relayed to the motionless figure lying on the medical bed. “She’s
off to get your little one. Thought I suppose she’s not so little anymore. Either way, we can’t chance leaving that kid all on her lonesome. Especially now, when everyone is so close to the truth. No doubt, that husband of yours is going to be well livid about you hiding a kid from him all these years. But that’s marriage, eh?” Oswin smiled sadly, thinking of Jenny. “Must be nice.”

Oswin waved her hand and a keyboard appeared in front of her. She typed into the mainframe and transported Jenny’s ship to a safe warehouse for the time being.

“The Doctor’s just gotten back from his ventures to other worlds, I hear.” Oswin informed. “Charlotte’s stayed behind but I’m sure she’ll be much happier there. You grow tired of computers after long.”

Oswin found herself blinking away tears and had to take several deep breaths to remain calm.

“And when Jenny gets back with your little songbird,” Oswin’s voice trembled a bit as she moved to looked down at a stabilized River Song, “I can bring you back too. You’d like that, wouldn’t you? Ah, course you would.” Oswin made herself smile, “Now, if you’ll excuse me, I have to go deal with nasty Shadow creatures. Be back for tea.”

Oswin checked River’s stats once more before the Keeper of The Library disintegrated to another room so she could fix those broken routers.

THE END

(surprise!) Keep both eyes out for the Sequel:

They Tumble Blindly As They Make Their Way

Chapter End Notes

Yes, I totally did just bring back the Doctor’s daughter Jenny and reveal River&the Doctor have a daughter too whilst announcing a sequel. You’re welcome. And to be continued.
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!