

Once, in another time and another place there was a purple galaxy filled with purple suns around one of which orbited a purple planet filled with purple people who lived in their purple cities in purple houses, and drove each purple day in purple pods to their purple work, where most of them spent many purple hours digging purple crystals out of the purple mines for their purple Lords and Masters. It was not, on the whole, the most satisfying purple existence and so, one day, a single, brave, purple person - a minor purple miner - decided that the proper purple time had come for a proper purple revolution: purple freedom for all! But his purple plans came to nothing for, no sooner than he had stood up on his purple cart of purple crystals to make his purple speech, he was set upon in a purple second by the purple Lord's purple guards, dragged before the purple courts, and declared a traitor to the entire purple world by the purple guards. He would never again see the outside of the purple prison for the rest of his purple days, the purple judges insisted, and as they threw the purple miner into the purple cell, the purple guards yelled,

Nope Jr

# INDIGO

Visit the TARDIS Big Bang website (<http://tardisbigbang.com>) to see the art full-sized and to leave feedback for the writer and artists.

# Indigo

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*by Nope (nopejr@nopespace.com)*

New Who | PG-13 | Martha/Tom, Mickey/Rose | 29,000 words

*Where Tom Milligan ended, where he began, and what it had to do with Doctor Martha Jones.*

Betaed by: K & J

Warnings: scenes of violence, sexual swear words, character death

Spoilers: None

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# INDIGO

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## 1. GENESIS

"It's funnier in English," Tom Milligan insisted.

Hakim stared up at him with huge, round eyes, legs kicking idly against the underside of the high cot he was sat on. He made no sound as Tom carefully depressed the plunger on the syringe until it was empty, nor when Tom withdrew the needle from his vein.

"It's the way I tell them, right?" Tom pressed cotton to the dot of welling blood. "You just hold that there a second while I clean up, okay?"

He lifted the boy's hand to his arm, to make sure he understood. Hakim nodded solemnly and Tom smiled. The boy watched him as he carefully cleaned up, making sure the used needle was safely disposed of, the empty vial marked and returned to its container. It was hard enough to get even their meagre resources, and they had to account for every medicine in triplicate.

"Every box ticked, every t dotted, every i crossed," he said, crossing his eyes at Hakim. "No? No smile? Not even a small one? Not even a teeny, tiny smile?" he wheedled, grinning and gently poking the boy in his side until he squirmed away with a silent giggle. "There we go! Laughter is the best medicine, my friend."

Checking the bleeding had stopped, he lifted Hakim down from the table with a grunt of effort. "Off you go, then."

The boy was gone in a flash, dodging around Doctor Hagos's legs, ducking under the white tent-flap, and vanishing into the glaring light beyond.

"You are good with children, I think, Doctor Milligan," Hagos said. "No tears, yes?"

"They're brave kids," Tom agreed.

"We are done for the moment. You will join us for refreshments. I have seen you Englishers; always underestimating the heat. Besides," Hagos added, grinning, "once again our young Gabra is having difficulty with your vehicle. Ah, Western ingenuity!"

"They say ATMOS was designed by a genius," Tom said, with his own amused smile as he locked the last of the equipment up.

"There is genius, Doctor Milligan," Hagos said with satisfaction, "and then there is Africa."

"I'd like to see some of that genius put to getting us more vaccines. Hell," Tom said, waving the first aid kit box at him, "a steady supply of antiseptic wipes, gloves and sterile dressings would be a godsend."

Hagos chuckled mirthlessly, lifting the tent-flap and motioning Tom out. "Feel free to complain to the bosses. I'm sure they'll be much more likely to listen to you than us."

"Mostly they're just very, very slightly more polite when they tell me to go to hell," Tom sighed, wiping his forehead on the back of his sleeve.

You didn't realise how much of the heat the tent kept off until you stepped out into it. He was instantly drenched, clothes sticking to his skin, and he pulled a disgusted face as they walked. Hagos chuckled at him, handing Tom a water-flask and leading the way up the dusty path with equanimity. The cooking tent had been set back a way from the hospital. In the gap between, off to one side he could see Gabra working on their van's engine, cursing a blue stream. In the other direction, the broad stretch of scrub-land and dry fields towards the yellow of the distant horizon was broken only by a couple of twisted trees and the low bumps of the dig.

"Reckon they'll find anything?" he asked Hagos.

Hagos gave the works a disparaging glance. "The bone hunters? I doubt it. Typical, really: you ask them to dig a well and, six months later, they send you a broken shovel and a bill; you find one toe bone and they're ten feet down before you can say Barosaurus."

"I understand fossil remains are extremely rare in Ethiopia," Tom said.

"It's the things we have too much of that hold my attention," Hagos said. "Too much sickness; too much disease; too much death. You know we have one of the fastest growing economies in the world? Up there, in the heights-- Really," he interrupted himself, "Addis Ababa is a most wonderful city. You must visit before you leave."

"I'll certainly try to," Tom allowed.

"Still, even with the Land Reform... Everyone who can goes to the cities. Everyone who can't..."

The end of that sentence was self-evident. Tom had been trying to treat children here for a while now, in one annoyingly temporary camp after another, and while he could say he'd learned a lot -- Hagos had proved to be an expert at coaxing miracles out of practically zero resources -- he didn't feel like he'd actually achieved anything of real value. It wasn't like England, where he could have a reasonable expectation that a kid with a broken arm set, say, would go on to have a happy life; that a kid with cancer had a good fighting chance.

You can't keep score, Martha would say. Every little thing counts. Every moment is important.

And here they were, working on opposite sides of the world again.

"--got that look again," Hagos grinned, his whole face crinkling with the force of it.

"Sorry." Tom smiled sheepishly. "You were saying?"

"You are thinking of that fiancée of yours, I can tell," Hagos said, chuckling. "Always so happy and so sad, all at once. A home without a woman is like a barn without cattle, my friend."

"I don't think Martha would appreciate being called a--"

There was a scream, high, piercing. Tom swung around wildly, automatically tying the flask to his belt while his eyes searched for the source; he saw Gabra stumble away from the van and took a step towards her before realising she was reacting to the sound too.

"Where--?" he called, and she pointed, and then all three of them were running to meet Hakim as he came charging back up the path towards them, yelling wildly.

"Someone's fallen," Hagos said for Tom's benefit as Gabra caught the boy, making calming noises, trying to ask questions. "A hole."

"At the dig? We've told the kids over and over--!"

"He says the ground just opened up," Gabra said, shooting a glare at them.

Hakim let out another stream of words, of which Tom only recognised the name, "Amara!" and the tacked on "Come come, Doctor Tom!" as Hakim squirmed out of Gabra's grip and went running.

For a moment Tom thought Hakim had meant the dig after all, but they veered away, and he lengthened his stride to grab up the boy before he could go tumbling after Amara. The ground dipped abruptly and then fell away down a rapidly steepening slope. Amara cried out as the edge crumbled under Tom's feet, sending dirt raining down on here. Only Gabra grabbing him from behind and pulling him back kept him from going after.

"We need--" He dropped Hakim away from the edge, waving vaguely. "To spread the weight."

"Boards," said Hagos and Gabra together, and Hagos added, "I can grab some from the dig."

"There's rope in the van," Gabra said, spinning on the spot and streaking back the way they had come.

"Right," said Tom nodding, trying to follow her.

Hagos pushed him back. "Talk to the girl."

"My Amharic is useless!"

"Then use your English, yes?" Hagos called, heading off the other way.

"Right, right," Tom muttered to himself.

Waving Hakim back, he got down to his knees, and spread himself out flat, so he could lean over the edge. Dirt rained down despite his care, and Amara cried out again.

"Hey, hey," Tom called down, as gently as he could. "It's going to be okay. Amara? Amara, honey, can you climb--" She can't understand you, idiot! "Hey, Amara. It's me, Doctor Tom. You remember? Doctor Tom?"

She nodded at him, face streaked with tears, everything streaked with clay, her leg streaked with blood. He couldn't catch any of the words she said, but the frantic tone was pretty clear.

"We're coming to get you," Tom said and, because the universe liked to mock him, there was a loud bang from the van and Gabra choking and cursing. He risked a glance back to see foggy smoke belching from the engine and cursed in turn. Next time he was getting a damn tank. Martha's lot could spare a tank, right? Did they even have tanks?

Hagos came charging back, boards precariously balanced on a wheelbarrow. While he and Hakim spread them out, Tom waved at Amara. "I'm coming right back, okay? Try not to move." She wailed when he moved back from the edge, but he kept calling down. "I'm coming, I promise."

"Rope," Gabra managed as she joined them, coughing, eyes streaming. She tossed it at him, doubling over and coughing harder, waving Hagos off when he went to her.

"I'll go down," Tom said, wrapping the rope around himself, keeping one worried eye on Gabra. "I can pass her up, and you can pull me out."

"Yes, yes," Hagos agreed. "Hakim!"

While Hagos ordered the boy around, coughing a little himself as the stench from the van -- what the hell was that?! -- drifted towards them, Tom returned to the edge of the hole.

"I'm coming down, Amara. It's going to be okay. Everything's going to be fine, honey. You know," he added cheerfully, "it's lucky you can't speak English, because how cliché was that? Hagos--"

"We have you, Tom." Hagos took the strain on the rope and Hakim gamely held on behind.

"Here we go, then." Trying to keep the run-off as far away from Amara as possible, Tom pushed himself backwards off the edge, skidding a little on the slope. "It's okay. I'm coming to get you, see? Just hold on a little more, Amara."

It was a tight-fit until well past the half the way down point, which worked in his favour; braced against both sides, he could let himself down smoothly. Further down, the loose topsoil became thicker clay, letting him safely kick himself a few footholds. He dropped the last few feet to the bottom.

"Got to say," he told Amara, smiling at her, "it didn't look that deep from the top. Bit dark down here, isn't it? Not to worry though. Doctor Tom is always prepared."

He dug in his pockets and pulled out his keys, sorting through them -- van, kit boxes, building door, flat door, Martha's flat door -- until he found the little flashlight and turned it on. Amara blinked at him, smiling a little when he grinned.

"Da-dah! Now, let's have a look at that leg of yours, hey?" He gently coaxed her around so he could see, testing it lightly. She winced and whimpered when he moved her foot but, when he wiggled her toe, she got the message and wiggled the rest. "Nothing broken," Tom decided. "Gave your ankle a bad bang and there's that scratch, but that's nothing. Something to show off to the other kids, right?"

He untied the rope from his waist as he spoke and began tying it around her in a makeshift harness.

"Boy scout training," he informed her, holding his smile until she smiled back. "Now, I'm going to lift you as high as I can, and my good friends Doctor Hagos and Gabra and Hakim will pull you out, okay?"

She looked at him blankly.

"Right. With the no speaking English thing. What I wouldn't give for a universal translator, let me tell you." Carefully picking her up, he called out, "Are you guys ready up there?"

There were answering coughs, and then what he assumed was Hagos's head sticking into view, although he was just a shape against bright haze from where Tom was standing. Still he could feel Amara get jerked up in his hands as the strain was taken on the rope. Using the footholds he'd made, he pushed himself, and then Amara, up as far above him as he could. Dirt came pouring down around them in thick streams; Tom held his breath, pushing up until the weight was gone from his hands and he saw Amara vanishing over the edge.

"Got her," Hagos called.

Tom took a relieved breath. A thick, foul stench instantly filled his mouth, burning down into his lungs. Coughing and hacking, he lost his already precarious hold on the weak wall and went tumbling backwards into the hole. His head smacked into something so hard the world went away for far too long, coming back in throbbing red-black pulses. He scrambled at the dirt and clay, trying to get his head back up, trying to catch a proper breath. His scrabbling hand caught something bright and, thinking it his torch, he grabbed hold as he wrenched both it and himself free.

Even dusty air was sweet. Tom panted as best he could until the hole stopped swimming around him. His focus seemed to be still off, but not so much he couldn't tell it wasn't the torch after all. It was the wrong shape, for one, all geometric, polyhedral; for another, it was cool and smooth under his fingers, hard like glass, like crystal; for a third, it was translucent and fluorescing with some inner violet-blue light, now bright, now dim, now bright again, pulsing, hypnotic...

And then the sky caught fire.

## 2. EXODUS

It didn't get easier. How much of a kick in the teeth was that? You thought you were getting over something, moving past it, moving on -- getting bloody married for Pete's sake -- and then there he was: the Doctor, in his TARDIS, with his companion.

"We all think it's forever," Martha Jones muttered to herself. Donna Noble. Brilliant. Doomed. Probably.

She hadn't told them about the Hath, about her Hath, dying to save her, to save everybody. Of course not. They'd been mourning Jenny. The Doctor's daughter. Had he had family, Martha wondered, back on his home planet? Had they burned up with everything else?

Martha had her own family, at least, however broken they were now, however slowly mending. She had that much at least. And the Doctor, in his eminent wisdom, had landed them right down the road from her mum's house. Really, she could smack him some times.

Well, most of the time.

"The sky caught fire," Francine said.

"Hello, Martha," Martha said, closing the front door behind her. "How was your day?"

"Hello, Martha," Francine repeated dutifully, reaching past her to put the chain on the door. "How was your day? The sky caught fire. And your father's car tried to kill him, but it'd hardly be the first time that ever happened." They smiled at each other. "Can I make you a cup of tea?"

"That's the best thing anyone has said to me all day," Martha said, giving her a quick hug. "But put your feet up; I can get it."

Francine followed her into the kitchen, though after insisting on getting the good biscuits down, she just sat quietly at the table, watching. Martha did her best to ignore it, fiddling with the kettle, picking out the right mugs and tea bags and the proper spoon. Tea was a ritual. Tea was normality.

"He came back, then," Francine said. It wasn't a question, and when did her mum turn into the discerning one?

Martha nodded. She opened her mouth to say -- something; platitudes, maybe, or half-lies; what came out was, "Can I crash here tonight?"

"Your room's made up. Midsommer Murders is on a bit," Francine said, rising, box of biscuits in hand. "Bring the tea through when it's done."

"Sure." Martha nodded. "Thanks, mum."

Francine managed a wan smile as she swept from the room. Martha's sigh was drowned out by the kettle's squeal.

-----  
She dreamed of mud, wet, sticky, stinking mud, oozing up around her, cold, thick mud, oozing up and pulling her down. She dreamed a man whose face was a mask, a smiling mask on something old and deep, dark and hard. She dreamed a flock of rare birds, flashing feathers, pinks and blues, wings beating like drums, like silence.

"Hurry," it said. "There's so little Time."

-----  
"It's for you," Francine said sharply, pulling her gown tightly around her with one hand, the other holding a phone out. "It's UNIT."

Martha, still half-asleep, gaped at her for a long moment, blinking over and over until her mother came into proper focus.

"What--?" she managed. "What time--?" The clock caught her eye and she swore, grabbing for the phone. "Yes, hi, this is Doctor Jones, I was--"

There was a chuckle from the other end. "It's fine, Doctor Jones. Your mother has already read me the riot act on the need to let people sleep."

"I'm sorry, sir," Martha said, throwing a glare at Francine who accepted it with equanimity. She pushed herself out of bed. "I'll be--"

"Let's say debriefing at fourteen hundred? I'm sure you can quote medical statistics at me about the need for good nutrition. I might even have some lunch myself; despite UNIT's best efforts, man still can't live on coffee alone."

Martha really had no idea what to say to that, but it seemed her part of the conversation wasn't particularly needed as a flurry of directions and goodbyes followed without pause, leaving her listening to an empty line.

"I'll make you some eggs," Francine said, deftly taking the phone back. "I put the hot water on; there'll be plenty for your shower."

"Uh, thanks," Martha managed. "I'll--" To the empty room, she finished, "--just go and do that then."

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When Martha was -- she doesn't know, eight maybe, or nine -- Leo had had a major wipe out on his new skateboard. Tish had screamed blue murder, Leo had thought the whole thing hilarious, her parents had blamed each other, and Martha had ignored them all and carefully wiped Leo's leg down and put a big plaster on his scrape. Later, when people asked her when she knew she wanted to be a doctor, she told them that story, though it wasn't really true. She'd wanted to be a super-model spy astronaut super-hero in those days with a pretty, sparkly dress and a red leather jacket.

Colonel Mace was saying something that went somewhere along the lines of "blah blah aliens blah blah technology blah blah clones blah blah Doctor blah blah rhubarb blah."

And why, she wondered to herself while nodding at appropriate junctions, did the background noise always consist of people saying rhubarb? Whose idea was that?

"--impressed with your performance in the field; they've asked for you to take up a position as medical director for the project."

Martha nodded automatically and then, as her brain caught up with her ears, gawped at him. "I'm sorry? Sir?"

"You have a strong background in emergency medicine, a good analytical mind, and prior experience with a broad range of human and alien technology," Mace said. "I'm sure you're more than qualified for the job."

"Right," said Martha nodding. "Thank you; only, I'm a little unclear -- what project sir?"

"It hasn't been named yet," Mace said, paging through his reports. "The details are all being finalised at the moment. Essentially, I believe the idea is to retro-engineer the matter-transmitter technology from, ah, from the Sontarans."

"You want to fix Rattigan's teleporter?" Martha asked.

"Oh, we're thinking much more ambitiously than that." Mace chuckled. "UNIT never does anything small when it can be large. Anyway," he added, leaning forward a little to address her, "I know you've been wanting to refocus more on the medical side of things."

Martha nodded. "It's not that I don't like my work, sir, but--"

Mace waved this away, sitting back. "I know, I know. I'd transfer myself back to Tactical if I could get away with it. No, the right skills in the right place, that's the way to do things. We might even be able to wrangle you a bit of a raise to go with the new title."

"Wow." Martha chuckled uneasily. "What's the catch?"

"Ah, well." Mace shuffled papers awkwardly. "I'm afraid General Sanchez has muscled his way into the hot seat, and he does like to keep his eggs all in one basket."

"San-- New York?" Martha said. "Am-- Sir, am I being punished for something?"

"Punished?" Mace said with surprise.

"You're sending me out of the country -- out of the continent! If this is about the Doctor--"

"Really, Doctor Jones," Mace said sharply. "Not everything is about the Doctor. Unless you consider being talented as part of the conspiracy, I can assure you that this is no more than it appears."

"Yes, sir. Sorry," said Martha, resolutely not squirming under his glare. "Point taken, sir. It's just-- My family--" She took a deep breath and let out it. "What I mean is, might I have some time to think this over, sir?"

"As I said, the details are still being finalised. You can have a few days. But really, Doctor Jones," Mace sighed. "Do try to give some thought to what you need, not everyone around you. Career opportunities like this are rare, and you'll be remembered as much for not taking it as you would for accepting. Consider your options carefully."

"Yes, sir."

-----

Airports were very temporary places, Martha thought. Everyone just here to go. Arriving and departing and never stopping; always better somewhere else.

The plane in was showing up as delayed on the flickering electronic board, so she'd found herself a seat at one of the many opportunistic food bars. Six quid for a doughnut and milkshake was blatant robbery, but it gave her something to do with her hands while she sat and pretended not to be people watching, just like everyone else around her.

New York! Bloody hell-fire. Pig people and Daleks and lightning and-- God!

The milkshake was too thin, too sweet. The doughnut was dry. It crumpled under Martha's restless fingers into a plateful of crumbs.

"I'm sure before I left we actually ate our food in this country."

Martha gasped, almost falling off her stool as she jerked back in surprise; in the next second she'd burst into a huge smile, lunging up and across the space to be swept up in Tom's arms and spun around, the both of them laughing together, hugging tight.

"God, but I missed you," Tom said, and caught her mouth in a long, slow kiss.

She smiled up at him when they finally broke and then, catching sight of the cuts and bruises, she frowned and took a half-step back to examine him properly. "What happened to you?!"

"I fell down a hole."

"A hole," Martha repeated in a mocking tone.

"I fell down a hole heroically," Tom said blithely.

She grinned back at him. "I'm sure you did."

"Then our van tried to kill us and the sky exploded and -- and you already know all about this," he added accusingly.

Martha shifted awkwardly. "Tom--"

"I know, I know. UNIT stuff." He waved this off, half-yawning and rubbing at his stubbly chin. "You can fill me in, or not, later. Tell me you have a car. Tell me it isn't your dad's roadster."

Martha laughed. "I borrowed Leo's. Come on; you've got your luggage, yeah?"

It wasn't far to the car, and not far to her flat, even winding through London traffic. Tom didn't talk on the drive, but sprawled out as best he could in the passenger seat, watching her with soft eyes and a lazy smile.

"What?" Martha asked, smiling self-consciously.

He just grinned, laughing when she repeated the "What?" in rather more scandalised tones.

When they arrived, Tom gamely lugged his bags up and then promptly dumped them in the hall, staggered into her bathroom, dropped to his knees, and gave obeisance to her shower.

"Oh, blessed hot running water." He kissed the edge of the tub.

Leaning against the door-frame, Martha chuckled. "I'll just leave you two to it, then?"

"That's certainly one option," Tom agreed, pushing himself back to his feet, and turning to face her. He smirked a little as he toed off his shoes and started slowly undoing his shirt. "But it's so roomy, and sharing is so environmental."

"Is that right?" Martha asked, amused, letting him draw her into the room.

"Incredibly green," Tom agreed and, as she draped her arms over his shoulders, he leaned down to find her mouth again.

-----

Afterwards--

after the water had long run cold unnoticed; after they'd snacked in the flat's poor excuse for a kitchen, giggling and stumbling around each other in the closed space, ending up splattered with sauces and kissed clean; after they'd stumbled back over his dropped bags to claim the bedroom for rounds two and three

--Martha lay, sated, sore, and happy, half-on and half-off Tom, only half-listening to his meandering tales of Africa while his fingers stroked through her hair, and thought, this is what I want. This is what I want.

It didn't last, of course. Nothing ever did.

-----

Afterwards, Martha couldn't have said what started the fight. She couldn't even remember clearly what they had been talking about, how they had stumbled over the subject of the Doctor, how that had somehow become a row about wedding dates, and then Tom had snapped--

"Do you even want to get married?!"

and she'd snapped right back,

"Right now I bloody don't!"

and the stunned silence had rung out across the distance between them, filling the room, loud and suffocating.

"Th-that," she managed, swallowing against the lump in her throat. "That's not what I-- I do want to marry you, Tom."

"I know," he said, sounding very tired. "I know." He sighed heavily and flopped back onto the bed. "And I want to marry you."

"Okay," Martha said with something like relief. "Okay, that-- That's good." She sat down next to him and Tom shifted around so he could look at her.

"But," he said.

"Does there have to be a but?" Martha asked, trying not to wince at the uncharacteristic whine in her voice.

"But," Tom repeated slowly. "Maybe you-- I don't know. Maybe you need to think things over. Maybe there's something you want more."

"I told you, travelling with--"

"I'm not talking about the Doctor," Tom snapped, and then sighed again, rolling onto his back and rubbing at his face. "Or, I don't know, maybe I am. That's the thing, see. I don't know. And sometimes I think, maybe, that you don't know either. What are you doing with UNIT, Martha?"

"It's," she started automatically, and he chimed in on the "classified."

"Not what I was asking," Tom said.

Martha found herself thinking of the clone the Sontaran's had grown of her, thinking of it -- of her -- saying, you've got so many plans. There's so much that you wanna do.

Thinking of herself saying, I will.

"I want to help people," she said, and then, stronger, "I do help people. I'm good at what I do, Tom."

He gave her a wan smile. "I believe you."

"I'm a doctor," Martha insisted. "I earned my title and I--"

"Martha!" Tom reached out to catch her hand. "I know, love. And you deserve it, you really do. You know I wouldn't question that. I've seen you work. That's how I met you, remember?"

She managed to smile back.

"Look, I, I wasn't going to mention this until-- Well, I'm not sure I was going to--" Tom made an annoyed noise.

"To what?" Martha prompted.

"Doctors-without-Borders have offered me a temporary tour. Middle or South America. Brazil, maybe. I was going to turn them down," he said to the ceiling. "I'd have to leave in less than a week."

"Oh."

"But it doesn't have to be-- You could come with me," Tom said, still not looking at her. "You said it yourself. You earned your title."

"Tom--"

"There's nothing wrong with saving the world one life at a time," he said, heat beginning to come back into his voice.

"It's not--" It was Martha's turn to make a frustrated noise. "UNIT's offered me a promotion. New York. A proper medical job, on technology that could revolutionise--"

"You get that sound in your voice," he interrupted sadly. "Even when you're-- You don't even notice it, but you do."

"Sound?"

"Wonder," Tom said. "Other people run in terror, but Martha Jones--! And it's brilliant," he added, before she could more than open her mouth. "It really is. It's part of what makes you you. But it just, it makes me think... Would Brazil be enough for you? Would any one, permanent place?"

Martha wanted to say it would be. She really wanted to say it. She couldn't. Because, when it came down to it, she honestly didn't know if it would be.

"Are you going to take the position?" she asked instead.

"I don't know," Tom said. "Are you?"

"I don't know," she echoed.

The room drowned in silence. Eventually, Tom shifted, turning towards her, stretching out his arms; and she went into them, more than willingly, almost desperate; and he pressed a kiss to her forehead,

like a promise, like benediction; and she curled up tight against him as the night slipped past, clinging to his warmth, listening to the slow single beat of his heart.

-----

When she woke in the morning, she was alone. He'd left her phone on his pillow.

### 3. ARMAGEDDON

Leaning over the sink, Mickey Smith cupped his hands under the tap and then splashed tepid water in his face. It dribbled uselessly down through his stubble and dripped from his chin even after he'd scrubbed his face with his hands. He searched around for a towel, sending something unseen clattering down before giving up. Resting his weight on his hands on the sink, he blinked blearily at his exhausted looking reflection. It sighed back at him, eyes red, face lined.

"Fuck I'm old," he muttered.

He took a deep breath in and let it out again, just as slow.

Little footsteps clumped outside and the bathroom door rattled. Others followed and, muffled, he heard Jackie say something and Tony's protesting noise. Time to face the music then. He took another look in the mirror, forced himself to straighten his black tie, to smooth out the lines of his suit before turning away.

As he reached for the door, his foot clipped something, sending it spinning. It was what he'd knocked down before, an electric toothbrush with a yellow handle. He bent slowly to pick it up. It was cold in his hand, plastic, lifeless. He almost put it back on the shelf next to his own black-handled one and then, with sudden anger, threw it at the bathroom bin instead. It hit the edge and bounced out, but he'd already shoved his way out of the bathroom before it reached the floor.

Tony was making aggrieved sounds now, squirming in Jackie's arms. She was sat on the edge of the King-size bed in their -- in his -- usual guest room. All the rooms had big beds. Even the singles. Tony saw Mickey first and twisted around to wave at him.

"Little terror," Jackie said with affectionate exasperation.

"Down," Tony complained. "Unca Mickey!"

"Uncle," Jackie corrected. "And don't think I don't know you're just saying it that way to be cute."

Tony blinked at her in affront and then, clearly deciding that was a lost cause, went back to making grabby hands at Mickey.

"I'll take him," Mickey said.

Jackie frowned at him but, after a second, she handed the boy over without question. He went happily and promptly started messing with Mickey's tie.

There was a soft laugh from the doorway, and they all turned to see Rose smiling faintly at them.

"Little brat," she said, and Tony giggled, clapping. "Yeah, you."

When she looked up at Mickey, her eyes filled with pity. He shifted Tony in his arms, looking away.

"Are you--" Rose started, and over her Jackie asked, "Is the car here, then?"

"Yeah." Rose nodded. "They're waiting for us. You should take--"

"I've got him," Mickey said. "Tony's okay with me, aren't you, champ?" Tony nodded emphatically.

Rose looked for a second like she was going to argue, but then she just nodded and moved aside to let them go down. Pete was waiting with the car, large, black and sombre. They travelled together in silence. Mickey watched the streets blur by beyond the tinted windows. Tony buried his face against Mickey's neck. Jackie's hand crept into his, and he managed a smile for her.

Gravel crunched under the wheels as they drew up to the small church. There were flashes as they got out, journalists pushed back beyond the churchyard walls by Torchwood security officers. Mickey ignored them, tightening his grip on Tony until the boy complained, forcing himself into the church, one step after the other.

There were others there, friends and co-workers, family of a sort, he supposed, but he couldn't see them. He couldn't see anything. Even the priest was a blur of white and red as he stepped up to the podium, opened his book, and began to address them in a deep, solemn voice.

"Dearly beloved, we are gathered here today to lay our brother, Jake Simmonds, to his eternal rest..."

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"--isn't it supposed to look like that?"

Laughter exploded around the room, buffeting Mickey. Pete raised his glass in toast and, as glasses and mugs went up all around the room, Mickey raised his own automatically. He didn't drink. Someone started up another anecdote, others chiming in in agreement or to correct or expand on details. The words went in one ear and out the other, leaving only vague impressions of their passing.

A hand clapped his shoulder. He felt his lips twitch up into something he hoped was more smile than grimace. Whoever it was mumbled something of a condolence and slipped away. Laughter again. The clink of glasses. The burble of conversation. The sounds of life going on.

Life went on.

"Poor little blighter's dead to the world," Jackie said, sitting down next to him.

Mickey frowned at her and then, following her gaze, realised Tony (now in his pyjamas) was still in his lap, curled up against him and sucking a thumb in his sleep.

"He doesn't really understand what's going on, bless him." Jackie reached out to gently brush Tony's hair away from his face.

"Makes two of us," Mickey said. He ruffled Tony's hair again, just to hear Jackie tsk at him; she obliged, lightly slapping his arm with mock annoyance. Normal as anything.

When he looked up, Rose was watching him from the other side of the crowd. He quickly looked down again, but not fast enough to keep her from starting in his direction.

"Why don't you put him to bed," Jackie said, rising without waiting for an answer and going to intercept. Mickey threw a grateful smile at her back anyway and, being careful not to wake the boy, stood himself.

There were a few visitors chatting on the stairs but no-one on the second floor. Mickey used his hip to open the door to Tony's room. The sounds of the wake faded away. The plush carpet ate the sound of his footsteps. He carefully lay Tony down in the quiet, pulling the blanket up and tucking it in.

"Sleep tight," he whispered.

Tony huffed softly in his sleep. Mickey absently rubbed his eyes on his sleeve, sniffing a little as he turned on the boy's night-light, filling the room with slow turning stars.

When he stepped out of the room, he kept on down the corridor, away from the front stairs. Jackie and Pete's room was there, and there the room that had been his Gran's; Rose's was in the other wing, along with their -- with his usual guest suite. All those empty rooms. Far too many.

He stumbled on the rear stairs and a hand came out of nowhere to grab him.

"Careful there."

Mickey blinked at the vaguely familiar face, dark eyes and stubble. It took him a moment to place it as belonging to Tony's paediatrician. Jackie really had invited everyone. "Milligan, right?"

"Everyone calls me Doctor Tom," he said, smiling a little. "I'm sorry for--"

"Yeah," Mickey said. "Thanks."

He looked passed Tom to the open door back into the main hall, and the lounge beyond, from which light and music and the rumble of conversation was escaping. Rose laughed. Mickey flinched despite himself.

Tom gave him an understanding look. "You know, if you want to cut out for a bit, I'll cover for you. Trick of the trade; everyone believes a doctor."

"I don't," Mickey started and then, nodding, "I mean, yeah. Thanks. I'm gonna--" He waved a hand vaguely at the back door.

Tom clapped him on the shoulder in a friendly way and ambled back towards the party.

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Mickey only realised he was heading back to the graveyard when he was already there, pushing his way through wrought iron gates that had been left open despite the lateness of the hour. The sun

hand long since set and now, through the slow swaying branches of the yews, he could see stars sprinkle the sky, Tony's night-light writ large.

Jake's grave was covered with tarpaulin. It'd probably had to be filled in or topped off or patted down or whatever the fuck people did in these sort of situations. There was a marker to go in, a marble stone, Mickey knew that at least. They'd tried to make him help with the inscription. He'd broken a cup and then sulked in the garden like he was six again.

He walked slowly and at random, picking first this way then that between the stones and dying glowers and stone angels with hands-covered faces. His jacket thumped heavily against his leg and Mickey found he was carrying a bottle of Jack Daniels, though he couldn't for the life of him remember picking it up. For that matter, he wasn't entirely sure when he'd put his jacket on. He stared at the bottle for a while and then shrugged and took a hit, coughing a little as it burned its way down.

Rita-Anne Smith, said the gravestone, giving him a stony look.

"Sorry, gran," he said, and startled at how loud his voice sounded in the quiet surround.

There was a -- whatever. A big stone box thing that probably had a corpse in it, but dead was dead, mostly, and there was no one else around to care, so Mickey sat on it, taking another drink. Was it darker than before? He peered up at the sky. All those stars, almost but not quite exactly like his home universe. Looking up was looking into the past, was time-travel. Ten billion years to reach the Earth, just to get lost in the haze of street-lamps, in the pilot lights of zeppelins and surveillance drones. Fantastic.

"Living the sci-fi life," he muttered, and took another drink.

It had made so much sense to start with. Him and Jake, in a van, against the Cybermen. And then Pete had come, and they'd taken Torchwood, and that had been -- well, it had been weird, but it had seemed to work out. More gear, better plans, more aliens stopped and even sometimes helped. Then Rose. Rose, of course. And that trip to Norway; what the hell had that been? The funny thing was, Jackie being here had actually made things better for a while. You couldn't really get more normal than Jackie Tyler. But then-- Gran, of course. And Jake, the poor bastard. Like Mickey hadn't fucked his life up enough.

He really couldn't get the whiskey down fast enough.

"I thought you might be out here," Rose said out of nowhere, and he almost choked on his drink. She smiled wanly as she came around into view. "People are starting to leave. You should come back."

"Yeah," Mickey said without moving.

After a long moment, Rose came and sat next to him, nudging him playfully until he rolled his eyes and handed her the bottle. She lifted it in silent toast and then took a deep, long swallow.

"Ugh." Rose pulled a face. "I swear this used to taste better."

Mickey snorted, noting she didn't bother giving the bottle back. He sat back on his elbows, looking up. Somewhere, high above him, a bright star went dark.

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They made it back to the house in time for one goodbye after another as, in twos and threes and dribs and drabs, the guests slowly departed. Mickey accepted hugs and kisses and condolences with rote replies and sneaked drinks, and he was quite pleasantly buzzed by the time Jackie took Pete up to bed, leaving Mickey alone in the lounge. Almost alone.

Rose poured them both another drink. "Night-cap."

"I think I've drunk a whole milliner's worth already."

"If you can still remember 'milliner' it probably wasn't enough," Rose assured him, pressing the glass into his hand, dropping onto the sofa next to him.

When he didn't move, she clinked her glass against his. "To the good old days."

"The good old days," he agreed sipping at his, while she threw hers back.

They sat in silence, Rose a warm weight down his side. He took another sip. She found the remote and turned the room lights off, and then the porch lights too. Stars outside again. Fewer and fewer with every passing night. Whole universe going to shit. So what's new there? He emptied his glass.

Rose sighed and took it out of his hand, turning to drop it on the side-table. When she turned back, she didn't stop, crawling into his lap and leaning down to kiss him.

"For old time's sake," she said. "No strings."

"There's always strings," Mickey said, but he kissed her anyway. She tasted of -- whiskey, mostly. They probably both did. Whiskey and comfort and old, bad habits.

"It's just us," Rose said, "It's," and her voice caught, broke, and Mickey thought, she too, she was Jake's-- and he kissed her again, harder, to drown it out, to drown everything out. The benefit of friends.

It was slow; lazy; heartbreakingly familiar. They knew how to touch, to coax, to comfort. Their problems had always been outside the bedroom or the kitchen, the hall, the garage, the car, that one time on the roof. And if, sometimes, in the deep of it, he found himself thinking of other people, just in flashes, well, maybe so did she. Comfort was found, was the point. Comfort was found, and the cosy quiet of the afterglow.

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And then, some interminable time later, Rose said, "I have an idea. About the stars going out. About what we could do. There's a -- there's this thing. We've been talking about it, based on those old yellow hopper things and some of that Sontaran tech we found in Irongron castle. I mean, just theoretical, but... We need him, Mickey."

"Yeah," Mickey said.

"And we could do it. I'm sure we could really do it. A travel machine to cross parallels. A Dimension Canon." She watched him carefully. "We can make a difference, Mickey. You'll help, won't you?"

He stared at the ceiling, thinking about cracks and darkness, about Jake and Gran, and how Jackie had Pete and they both had Tony, and how Rose had her faith, and how he had -- what?

"Yeah," he said, to the ceiling, to her, to -- just -- to everything. "Yeah, of course I'll help."

## 4. REVELATION

Smothering a yawn as best he could, Tom carefully stitched the deep slash in the young girl's arm. Maria was barely more awake herself, given the painkillers and the hour -- already Saturday, a glance at the clock told him, and had been for a couple of hours. He kept her with him by asking questions in halting Spanish. The language he'd learned in a class in England didn't exactly match the way the street kids of Tegucigalpa spoke it, but Maria seemed to find it amusing, so he got by, nodding along to her stories of stealing oranges and hiding in the local shrine as he worked.

Street violence was on the rise. A buoyant economy did well for the middle-classes, but it just widened the gap for the poorest. Corruption hampered the well-meaning mayor. Resentment built up. And then you got little girls like Maria who would talk about pretty dresses one moment and how she broke the hand of the boy who knifed her the next, without a shift of tone or blink of eye.

"There," he said. "All done." He grinned as she blinked sleepily at her arm. "Why don't you kip on one of the cots here?"

"Do the doors lock?" she asked.

"From the inside," he promised, reaching out to help her down from the bench. "You can--"

Something took the floor away, the lights. Equipment crashed down around them, paintings from off the walls, the paperweights off his desk. Pain burst in his shoulder as something hit, and he wrapped his arms around Maria automatically.

"¡Terremoto!" she wailed, struggling against him.

"It's okay! Stay down--"

The shaking stopped. The lights didn't come back on. No, that was wrong, there was light, a faint pink-blue glow. He could make out shapes, a little. He touched Maria's arm automatically, checking the stitches hadn't been opened, then let her up, following after.

When she ducked immediately, he thought for a second she'd hurt her legs in the -- the whatever it was -- but she straightened immediately too, now holding his crystal paperweight, the one he'd found in Africa. It pulsed with light in her hand, reflected in her wide eyes.

Radiation, he thought, something sick turning in his stomach. Radiation makes phosphorous glow.

There were cries from outside and, for the first time, he remembered the rest of the hospice. As best he could, he explained to Maria that they were going to check on the others and she should stay close. She nodded but he caught her rolling her eyes at him and grinned back, accepting the crystal when she handed it back.

It wasn't quite a torch, but it got them out of the room -- stepping gingerly over medical equipment and damn but was that a lot of really sharp things for no reason -- and into the hall, which had the benefits of huge windows. The -- shake, he forced himself to think, not bomb impact, no dirty nukes, just an earthquake -- the earthquake had clearly started a few fires. The flickering light was enough to see by, but also the only visible light. Power had to be down across the whole city. He could hear shouting, but none of the expected sirens.

Electromagnetic pulse would do that, that little traitorous voice in the back of his head peeped up.

Maria grabbed his arm, dragging him closer to the window, pointing. "¡Mire el cielo!"

For a moment, all he could see was smoke; as he leaned further out, it twisted away from a moment and only Maria's hold on him stopped him falling out completely.

They sky was-- There were planets. Planets! Lots of them! In the damn sky! And the stars--! Planets in the sky!

"Holy fu--!" He bit the expletive off, though Maria had already gone, running down the corridor now, calling out for her friends.

Tom followed after, not realising what he was doing until the crystal was in his pocket and, instead, he had his phone, already dialled, pressed to his ear.

"Come on, Martha," he muttered over the interminably slow rings. It clicked. "Martha!"

"The number you have called can not be completed as dialled. The number you have called can not--"

"International roaming, my arse," he muttered, stuffing it back into his pocket as he went to join the others.

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Someone had dug out an old generator and, though it made constant complaining noises, it gave them at least vaguely workable lights. They'd taken less damage than Tom had expected and there didn't seem to be any aftershocks. Whatever had happened -- had moved them! -- was also clearly compensating for there being planets in the sky and almost certainly no sun. They didn't seem to be getting particularly colder or being ripped apart by all that extra gravity. Astrologists were probably shitting themselves across the entire planet -- planets, even -- but they were relatively okay.

Luis started coughing again, trying to get up, and Tom pushed the boy back onto the bed. He looked around for help, but there were only three of them on site, and the other two were occupied with scrapes and bruises and keeping kids calm.

"Maria," he called instead and, when she appeared at the bedside, sent her to the store-box. "In the red -- En la caja roja. Hay un cuadro en el lado."

She brought two boxes back. While he talked Luis through using the inhaler, watching to make sure the boy's colour and breathing improved, Maria opened the other curiously.

"¿Esta es una radio?"

"Sí, es--" Tom tried to work out the spanish for 'clockwork powered radio' and gave up, waving his hands in circles instead. "You turn the crank to make power, see?"

Maria gave him a bemused look, but her fumbling fingers managed to pull the lever out and it only took her seconds after that to work out what he'd meant.

Tom had gotten Luis settled and was discussing what else to do with the other doctors when she got it up to speed in a loud burst of static. She let out a started giggle, fiddling with the tuner. There was a brief burst of music, and then another, both quickly dissolving back into static.

"Está roto," she complained.

"Maybe the smoke is causing interference," Tom mused and then, off her blank look, tried it in Spanish. Since she still looked blank, he just waved her over. "Maybe on the other frequency band--"

Before he could press a button the radio started shrieking, a rasping, metallic, inhuman voice. "EX-TER-MIN-ATE! EX-TER-MIN-ATE!"

They both jerked back. The radio fell, crunching when it hit the floor and spinning around. Through the crackling, that voice kept screaming.

"EX-TER-MIN-ATE!"

"¡Apagúelo!" Maria cried.

Tom stumbled forward, trying to get his hands on it. Buttons clicked under his fingers, but the voice wouldn't stop, and in a sudden fit of anger and panic, he stomped on it. The speaker broke with a loud crack; when the screaming continued, he stomped again, and again, until it was just pieces.

Panting, he straightened up to find everyone staring at him. After a long, silent moment, Maria burst into hysterical laughter, clapping her hands over her mouth and shaking with the force of it.

Tom took a step towards her and then the whole room shook, dust raining down through the thunder that followed. The children cried out. He exchanged horrified looks with Maria and then they both turned and darted for the nearest window, pushing the others aside so they could look out. The planets were still there. So was something new: bronze saucers descending over the city, blue light searing around their edges and leaping from their bellows. As each blast hit, their building, the whole city, everything shook.

"El diablo," Maria moaned, clutching his arm. "¡El diablo ha venido para nosotros!"

Tom couldn't bring himself to disagree.

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"We can't stay here," Christine insisted. She'd slung her stethoscope around her neck, now tangled in the chain of her St. Christopher medallion and was filling her pockets with all the loose drugs she could carry. "Everyone trying to leave the city is going to come right through here, and they're not going to care about the kids while they're doing it."

Tom, hovering in the window, made vague noises of agreement. He could hear Alejandro, the other doctor, mumbling prayers from where he was curled up in the corner. He knew he should be paying attention to those around him but he couldn't bring himself to look away from the metal monstrosities gliding up the distant streets.

They moved with a grace that was disturbing in its deliberateness. Neither fast nor slow, just sure; perfectly, inhumanly sure, as they commanded people out of their homes and herded them through the streets. To where? And why? Nothing good, though; Tom was sure of that at least.

"Yeah," he said to Christine. "Getting out of here sounds good."

"¡Podemos luchar!" Maria announced defiantly, standing up tall.

"Knives won't do any good against death-rays," Tom pointed out. She didn't look like she cared. He tried another tack. "Usted tiene que proteger los otros." He waved a hand around them. "These children, they need our help."

That earned a sharp nod, and then Maria was going among the beds, barking out orders. Luis followed her around like a puppy, clutching his inhaler like it was a magic protection charm. Tom almost went to stop her, but she seemed to have good grasp of who could move themselves and who would help, so he went to help Christine instead, getting as many supplies together into portable form as possible. Alejandr? didn't move out of his corner, or respond to them in any way, and with no way to carry him and keep the kids together, they elected to leave him behind. They left him as much water as they could spare. If he was lucky, he would be overlooked completely.

The metal monsters -- alien tanks -- whatever they were, seemed to be concentrating on the main population, leaving the shanty town aside for the moment. Now was as good a time as any to go and so Tom, carrying Luis despite his protests, lead the way out of the back of the hospice, through the grove, and down the backstreets. Once they were in the maze of quick-built huts and homes, he quickly became confused, but Maria took the lead, finding a route with old familiarity, keeping them away from both hiding people and roving gangs.

Nothing like an emergency to bring out the extremes in people, Tom thought.

He couldn't help remembering Martha's stories, the way she'd slide around details, play things up or down. What would the Doctor be doing now? She would have called him, of course. He'd come and save everything, like he did, and people would die along the way, like they did, and Martha-- Brave, strong, determined, irrepressible, beautiful Martha.

Aliens invading the Earth gave you all sorts of understandings.

"Here," Maria said, interrupting his reverie, and pointing. There was a white stone building on the hillside, a small place, surrounding a well, with a single, empty bell-tower to one side. An old shrine.

Good, Tom thought. A bit of otherworldly assistance wouldn't go amiss right now.

It was a much better place than the hospice and, really, if the aliens didn't kill them all, Tom was going to see if they couldn't rent it, maybe even buy it. He liked the idea of permanency. The well had water, and they had a clear view in every direction. Even better, there were old (what he presumed were) smuggler's tunnels under the place, extending (Maria insisted) for miles. Not quite the ideal for patients, admittedly, but for refugees? Excellent.

Congratulating Maria on her find -- she beamed smugly in response -- Tom set a squirming Luis down. Shaking off the boy's grabbing hands with a quick word of comfort and a promise to return, he went with Christine to help set up beds and check people's bandages and condition. He'd only been gone a few moments when Maria came charging back and grabbed him, pulling him back across the square and pointing down the slope. From the vantage point it was clear the aliens were moving through the shanty town towards them.

"They might not even come this far," Tom tried to assure her. Still, preparation for nothing was better than being unprepared for everything. "Go and help Christine -- Doctor Brown -- get the others in the tunnels. We'll--"

There was a sudden loud beeping. He swore, digging in his pockets, scratching his fingers on that damn crystal before he managed to get his phone out. He stabbed the cut-off button to no avail. The call wasn't coming in. For some unknown reason, the phone was actually calling out, all by itself. He hit the buttons again while Maria danced in frustration from foot to foot; when that didn't help, he banged it against the nearest wall until he could get the battery out.

It wasn't fast enough. The aliens had heard it, sensed it, something. They were definitely turning towards the shrine with sinister intent. Tom swore, grabbing Maria and pulling her back with him.

"The tunnels," he told her, pushing her ahead of him, and she went, running. She'd already corralled the kids by the time he'd caught up.

Christine rose from where she was re-bandaging a boy to look uncertainly at them. "Are they coming? My phone--"

"Yeah, mine too," Tom said. "They might have been using them to tell where we are; I don't know. I'm hoping they won't search much. Get the kids--"

"¡Doctor Tom! ¡Doctor Tom!" Maria yelled. "Luis no está aquí!"

Tom swung around, looking frantically, but he had a sudden, clear memory of Luis squirming, trying to go back for something, of the boy grabbing him with both hands -- empty hands. Luis had dropped the inhaler. He'd dropped it and--

"Oh, no. He went back to look for-- No," he said, grabbing Maria when she tried to leave. "You look after these. I'll go."

He ignored their protests and went running back out. It only took a moment for him to confirm his horrible suspicion, but much longer to get back down the slow to where a panting Luis was frantically searching the ground.

Tom tried to grab the boy, but Luis ducked away, darting further down the path. Diving forward, Tom managed to grab him again, but Luis pointed frantically, and Tom say that the inhaler was just ahead of them. He hurried to it, crouching to pick it up and started to stand.

"HALT," came the mechanical screech. "YOU ARE A PRISONER OF THE DALEKS."

It'd come out of nowhere, moving impossibly quietly. The eye-stalk fixed him with its baleful gaze. Tom closed Luis's hands around the inhaler, and pushed the boy behind him.

"It's okay," he said, raising his hands. "I surrender. I'm surrendering."

To Luis, he whispered. "Run. Don't look back." He gave the boy a push. "Run!"

The alien's eye-stalk swung towards the boy, but Tom jumped to his feet, putting himself in way.

"You don't need him. He's not important. I'm a doctor! I, I can help you." Without looking around, he reached back and shoved Luis. After a moment, he could hear racing footsteps. The alien swung again and Tom moved with it once more. "He's nothing! He doesn't matter to you, okay? Take me -- Take me to your leader or something."

The eye-stalk swung back towards him. It stared blankly.

"YOU ARE ALL UNIMPORTANT," it announced, and its gun came up.

"No!" Without thinking, Tom jumped forward, so the gun was pressed against him, knowing it would make no difference but trying anyway. There was a clunk as the crystal in his jacket pocket swung to hit the weapon. "He's just a kid!"

"MINOR ARTRON ENERGY CONTAMINATION DETECTED," it screeched flatly. "CONTACT WITH TIME-TRAVELLER POSSIBLE. TEMPORAL THREATS MUST BE ELIMINATED. EXTERMINATE!"

Martha, Tom thought, and everything burned away.

## 5. TIME'S CRUCIBLE

Martha stopped at the gate and frowned. "Wait -- which direction?"

"You know," said Jack, "I don't think this is London after all."

"Don't look at me," Mickey said, shrugging. "I spent years on a parallel world. London looks different there. It has Zeppelins for one thing."

Jack shuddered.

"You don't like hot air ships?" Martha asked incredulously.

"I was here -- or, well, there, when London was filled with barrage balloons," Jack said. "In fact, I was there a few times over for time-travel reasons which we shall never mention again."

"Because they're secret," Martha suggested.

"Because explaining temporal loops makes my head hurt," Jack corrected. Mickey rolled his eyes. Jack grinned at them unrepentantly.

"Sarah Jane seemed to know where she was going," Mickey offered. "We could catch up with her. I bet she has tea. God, real British tea!"

"Weren't you just in Britain?" Martha asked and then, realising, added, "Damn! I'm supposed to be in New York. My passport is in New York!"

"I probably don't even have a passport now," Mickey mused. "I bet my old flat's gone as well."

"You really didn't think this through, did you?" Jack said. He smirked. "You could always--"

"No."

"I didn't even say anything yet!"

"Yes," Mickey agreed, "and my answer is still no."

Martha ignored them, stopping a passing woman. "Excuse me," she said. "I know this sounds daft, but where are we?"

She chuckled. "Tourists are you? Gotten a bit lost, no doubt."

Martha smiled. "Something like that, yes."

"Well, this would be Tremorfa Park, see, and--"

"Oh!" Jack interrupted, beaming. "Are we in Splott?"

"That's right," the woman agreed, smiling up at him, her cheeks reddening. "Oh, my. American. Aren't you the handsome one?"

"Well, thank you," Jack said, giving her an appreciative look from head to toe. "I'm Captain Jack--"

"Leaving now," said Mickey, giving him a push. "Stop hitting on the natives."

"Oh, I don't mind," she called after them.

"We're in Cardiff," Martha said. She idly smacked Jack's arm. "I knew he liked you best."

"It's my jaw," Jack agreed. "No one can resist the jaw."

"I can," Mickey muttered.

"I did," Martha pointed out.

"You're both on my list," Jack said, waggling a finger at them.

Mickey ignored this. "So, Torchwood base, then?" They stared at him. "Parallel world? I practically ran the place which, before you say, Jack, no, I'm not doing that again. I'd love a cuppa, though. Seriously, parallel world tea? Just does not taste right."

"I wasn't going to ask you," Jack huffed. Mickey just grinned.

"I should call in," Martha said, but, when she tried her radio, it wouldn't even crackle. "I guess it didn't survive all those tele--" She broke off as another realisation hit her. "Project Indigo! I've only gone and left the harness behind in bloody Germany."

"He never cleans up after himself, does he?" Mickey asked.

"Like the hurried lover, he comes and goes," Jack said sadly. Martha grinned. Mickey rolled his eyes again, but Martha could see a smile sneaking out despite himself.

"Come on," she said. "Lead the way, Jack."

"The bay's not far, ah--" Jack looked around and then picked a street. "This way. And then you can watch Gwen and Ianto kill me for leaving them behind."

"You'll come back," Martha pointed out.

"Yeah," said Mickey. "What's that all about."

Jack casually draped an arm over each of their shoulders as they walked. "It's a long story..."

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"--and he says 'That's not my leg'," Mickey finished with a triumphant grin.

Martha laughed despite herself, smacking his arm. "I don't believe a word of it!"

"True story," Mickey insisted, finger drawing an X on his chest. "Swear to god."

"I met an Ebullian once," Jack said as he unlocked the door to the tourist office. "It was--"

"And then you done sex," Mickey said dryly. "Oh, sorry, did I spoil the end?"

"Actually, we robbed a secret data facility out of Proxima 9," Jack said. Martha smiled at him, and he grinned back. "And then we 'done sex'."

"You're a harassment suit waiting to happen," Mickey said as they went in. He stopped just inside the door and whistled.

The tourist office looked like a bomb had hit it which, Martha supposed, wasn't all that far from the truth. She absently crouched to pick up the maps and leaflets that had fallen on the floor but, when she stood again, she realised there was nowhere to put them. The rack was in pieces and the desk covered in debris. She tried wedging them into a gap, but they just slid off again.

"Holy shit!" said Mickey. "It's a fucking Dalek."

Martha dived for the inner door in a panic, but one glance told the thing was dead. Nothing could look that exploded and live.

"Half a Dalek, anyway," she said, and Mickey grinned.

There was a grinding noise as the inner door slowly cycled open. Jack winced.

"It's just your winch," Mickey said. "Ten minutes, a spanner and a bit of oil and I can fix that."

"Engineer?" Martha asked.

Mickey shrugged a little. "Worked on cars, mostly; but I'm good with my hands. Watch it," he added, without looking at Jack, who closed his mouth with a mock pout.

"So much innuendo, so little time." Jack pushed through the gap inside, calling, "Gwen! Ianto! Come and meet--"

He bit off a gasp. Mickey, half a step behind him, just over the line into the Hub proper, suddenly wobbled. Martha jumped forward and

*everything wrenched and she was standing outside, somehow, under a pale sky. The air was clean and sweet, a soft, dry breeze swirling around her before going on its way. To one side, a scrubby plain fell away to a sprawling, tree dotted horizon. On the other, scattered beige and brown rocks became outcrops, joining the ragged grey-brown mountain face behind. Clinging ivy-like plants spread from them to frame something of a crack, or a narrow entranced cave. There was a light inside it, faint, and,*

*just for a second, Martha thought she saw an almost familiar figure silhouetted against it before everything wrenched again and*

caught Mickey before he could fall.

"W-what just-- Did either of you see that?" she asked.

"See?" Mickey blinked blearily at her. "See what? I feel like I just kicked in the teeth. Like an electric shock or -- are your security systems on the blink, Jack?"

"Jack!" came a happy scream and Jack staggered back, laughing, his arms suddenly full of a cheering Gwen. She beamed at him and then suddenly pulled back and smacked him, hard. "Next time, bloody take us with you!"

"I'll keep that in mind," said Jack dryly, rubbing his arm. "Wh--"

"Martha!"

Martha just had time to brace herself before she got tackle-hugged as well. Laughing, she squeezed back, seeing, over Gwen's shoulder, Ianto come forward all prim-and-proper only to get pulled into a big Jack-hug.

"I'm Mickey, by the way. Mickey Smith. Just helped save the whole of Creation, don't mind me." He squeezed past them to wander into the Hub. "Nice place. Bit cluttered. Security systems, on the blink?"

"How did you stop the Dalek?" Martha asked.

"Tosh built a time-lock," Ianto told Jack. "It turns out she'd never mentioned finishing it because it had never been tested."

"You're all time-travellers," Gwen put in. "You're probably a bit sensitive. It should wear off though; we've got one of those scanner dohickey's tracking background rift energy and it's fading."

"Dohickey'," Jack repeated. Gwen smacked him again. "You seem to have developed a violent streak, Gwen Cooper. I like it."

"Oi!" said Ianto.

"You can handcuff me later." Jack grinned at him.

"The Dalek exploded on its own -- the Doctor's doing?" Gwen asked.

"Sort of," Martha said. The whole two Doctors thing required a good sit down and some food before she attempted to explain it.

"And then we shot it a bit and dumped a couple of implosion grenades in it, just to be sure," Ianto finished. "The removed weapons are in a White Vault on one of the lower sub-levels for safe-keeping. And I've put the coffee on."

"You are a god among men," Jack said, pulling him into a hug again.

"I'll take tea if you've got any," Mickey called, from where he was casually going through the computer system. "Artron levels are a bit high, but I don't think we're going to explode or anything."

"Mickey Smith: computer whiz kid?" Jack teased.

"Mickey Smith: Defender of Earths," Mickey shot back. "I've really got to get my own tin dog."

"Tin dog," Martha repeated, lost.

"It's a long story," Jack and Mickey both chorused.

"You'll leave out the important bits and lie about the rest," Gwen said affectionately.

"Here," said Ianto, pressing a mug into Martha's hands. "Just the way you like it."

"Thanks." She smiled at him and took a sip, sighing happily as the warmth spread through her. "Perfect."

"Do we need to start clean-up?" Gwen asked.

"A little breather is fine," Jack said, throwing himself down on the sofa. "How's Rhys?"

"Bloody livid," Gwen grinned. "Nothing injured but his pride."

"Go sweet talk him down," Jack said, waving her away. "You can take a couple of hours."

"You're so generous."

"Though there is the--"

"Going, going," Gwen laughed. "Great to see you, Martha."

"Yeah," Martha said, hugging her carefully with the coffee still in her hand, "You too."

"Nice to meet you, Mickey Smith," Gwen called, waving as she headed for the door.

"Yeah, you," Mickey said and then the phone next to him rang and he startled away from it, overturning his stool and staying upright only by grabbing the edge of the desk. "Uh. Phone?"

"Mister Smith must have finished repairing the system," Ianto said, while Gwen changed directions at the door and grabbed up the nearest phone with a cheery, "I've got it."

"Your tea," Ianto said to Mickey, handing him a cup.

"Ta, mate," Mickey said, taking it and blowing on the surface a little before drinking. "Mmm."

"Who?" asked Gwen sharply, and they looked up in time to see her go pale. "I-- No, she's here. Yes--" She turned, holding the phone out. "Martha. It's for you."

"It's not my mum, is it?" Martha asked, taking the receiver. "Hello?"

"Martha," said the voice at the other end, and she felt her stomach drop away.

"Yes," she said, hearing herself as if from a great distance. "This is Martha Jones. Who--?"

"It's Marion -- Price? From UNIT--"

"I know." Martha could hear Gwen whispering urgently to Jack, see Mickey looking her way with concern. "I mean, I recognise your voice. Is, is something--?"

She knew though. Long before the reply, he knew, somehow, what was coming; knew it with dreadful, sickening certainty.

"It's Tom," Marion said.

There was more, details, but she didn't hear a word.

-----

It was a nice day, out here in the plaza. Bright. Sunny. Warm and clear. The Dalek's shell had done something to cancel out the atmospheric disturbance of piloting a planet through space and time. Science so advanced it might as well be magic. And, like magic, it always came at a high price. No miracles without monsters, she supposed. No Doctor without death.

"Here." A steaming cup pushed into view.

She took it, looking up, expecting Gwen, Jack maybe, and finding Mickey instead. "Thanks?"

"No worries," he said.

Where she'd sat, he stood, resting his elbows on the railing she'd set her back against, looking around them.

"You know," Mickey said after a while, "the last time I was here -- this Cardiff, I mean -- there was a big green monster running around in the Mayor's skin and a rift in time and space opened up right about..." He pointed. "There."

Martha sipped her coffee, both hands wrapped around the cup for warmth. The sun was bright. People were chattering. Happy noise. A pigeon cooed. She heard herself say, "It's a lift, now."

Mickey huffed something that might have been a laugh. "That's progress for you."

She could hear water splashing; herself, breathing; her heart beat in her ears. (A stupid, romantic notion. She couldn't. Of course she couldn't.)

"We'd split up," Martha said. She felt Mickey shift next to her. "Only, we hadn't split up at all. We both-- I don't know."

"Wanted what you had and wanted something more at the same time?" Mickey offered. When she glanced up at him, he smiled a little, wryly. "I know how that goes."

"It hurts," she said, forcing herself to drink, to swallow. "And it hurts that it doesn't hurt more and I just--" She broke off, wiping angrily at her eyes. "I'm sorry, I don't-- I don't know why I'm telling you this."

"It's easier with strangers." Mickey half-shrugged and turned around to lean the other way on the railing, looking out towards the bay.

Her coffee didn't taste of anything. She idly tipped the cup, watching dark rivulets run down the gutter, black tears disappearing down the drain. Tom had nice hands. He'd had nice hands. An intelligent mouth in so many ways. Stubble on his cheeks that had tickled her thighs. And he had never really understood the Doctor but he'd known how to hold her tight in the dark and to grab her up in the light and send them both spinning and laughing and giggling and sometimes they'd sat, in the kitchen, with their legs touching, while he tried to do the crossword and she mocked him and did all the hard ones and--

Daleks and the Doctor.

But how could she blame him when the first thing, the first real, important thing you learned was that you couldn't save everyone? The first thing, and you learned it over and over because the lesson would never stick and you'd always try--

"I don't know what I do now," she confided in Mickey. "Everything's different."

He sighed. "Brand new life."

"Brand new life," Martha agreed, and poured the rest of her coffee away.

## 6. LOVE AND WAR

It had been -- Mickey didn't like to use the word convenient, not when a man had died for it, but it had been easier on Pete's world. He'd stepped, legally speaking, into Ricky's spot, and everything else had been fiddled from there. (Pete had shown a dubious talent for data manipulation that Mickey had been careful not to ask too much about.) Here, even with his old driving licence (and he looked so much older, given he'd been running faster than this Earth for years, which was a problem in itself) it had taken him two days just to get his old accounts opened (six-to-eight weeks for new cards -- what do you mean temporary address?) and then they'd been almost empty.

On the upside, unlike Rose, he'd never been declared dead. Jackie had just told everyone he'd won a bit of money on the pools, gone travelling; meeting Chris again in the pub he'd spun a story about getting sick in some foreign jungle and only just making it back. Chris had just nodded, informed Mickey he looked like shit, and invited him to stay in the back-room of the flat Chris shared with his girlfriends until Mickey sorted himself out.

He said yes, of course. There was "doing your own thing" and "being an idiot" and he was pretty good at telling them apart these days.

And so here he was, Mickey Smith, universal traveller and defender of planets, plural, at the start of his brand new life, lying on his back and staring at the crack in the ceiling. He should start job-hunting. He should, at the very least, look up everyone he used to know and catch-up, except he'd have to lie about, oh, his entire life.

"Fuck it," he said, and went to the pub to watch the game.

They did a report after, on the aftermath of the Daleks (and he could see everything edging back into 'hoax! fake! marsh gas!' territory, which, come on, human race!) and he found himself staring at (a rather unflattering photo of) Harriet Jones (former prime minister).

He raised his glass in toast and, since it was empty, had another pint.

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"And that," Mickey explained to Mister Copper, "is when I decided to look you up."

"While you were drunk," Mister Copper said uncertainly.

"Yeah, don't say it like that," Mickey complained. "Anyway, Harriet Jones and I went way back -- sorry, which planet are you from again?"

"Sto," said Mister Copper automatically. "I-- I mean, I'm from Stoke. Stoke-in-Tent."

"It's '-on-Trent'. Sto -- that's in the Cassavalian Belt, right?" Mister Copper went pale. Mickey quickly shook his head. "Oh, no, no, I'm not with anybody. No, nothing like that. I was just curious. That sub-wave network thing, that's a bit of alright, ain't it?"

"W-well, I made do, with the technology to hand. Earth is, after all, only a Level Five civilisation -- but it is astounding how much you can achieve with what you have," Mister Copper added, looking more cheerful that he had at any point since Mickey showed up on his doorstep. "I'm really quite impressed. I only had to sneak in a few things to the manufacturer's research database and they built the transponders with quite amazing accuracy."

"You stuck alien blueprints in a shop database?" Mickey asked.

"It's all just data," Mister Copper said with a small shrug. "The security on your infonets are really quite appalling -- no offence."

"None taken," Mickey said, leaning forward with interest. "Please, tell me more."

-----

Okay, so technically, technically, it was really bad form to take advantage of the nice old man / alien, and it was definitely bad form (not to mention all kinds of illegal) to fix all the weird spots in his (electronic) history and siphon money from other people's illegal off-shore bank accounts into his own, uh, illegal off-shore bank account. But, Mickey insisted, he would totally pay it all back eventually, either as actual money or through services rendered saving the world which, let's face it, needed doing on a disturbingly regular basis.

(The Earth, by virtue of being in the middle of nowhere, was also roughly equidistant from dozens of massive galactic empires and, as such, a perfect place for (a) hiding secret horrific experiments from each other and (b) spying on each other's secret horrific experiments.)

Mickey bought the garage where he used to work. (Mister Clancy, to Mickey's equal parts annoyance and relief, hadn't recognised him at all.) He liked to keep his hand in and, what with the ATMOS debacle, people liked small, friendly, personal service, especially when Mickey proved a dab hand at making sure their cars wouldn't turn evil and kill them. It was simple work -- or, at least, it was complicated work but in a simple way where, at worst, you just took the engine apart again and, failing that, swapped in a whole new one and quietly hoped no-one noticed.

Still, he found himself with time on his hands. After a while, you got used to the constant adrenaline highs and crashes and then being woken up after maybe four hours of sleep in time for another round of holy-shit-its-a-Jagrafess-get-in-the-car. He ran a couple of jobs for Torchwood, mostly because Ianto caught him hacking in, and he managed to re-establish his back door into UNIT with Mister Copper's help, but there were still long, empty evenings to fill.

(He'd tried building a sonic screwdriver and damn but windows were expensive.)

Mister Copper had been happy to fill Mickey in on everything he knew about non-human technology, in return for Mickey explaining some of the finer points of British culture. Between them, they managed to knock up an approximation of a temporal scanner, which was basically a black box that beeped when there was stuff (to blatantly steal from Martha Jones). It sat on his bedside table and

warbled and, also, it fed data to an app on his iPhone, so he could wander around London at night like a crazed intergalactic vigilante.

(You made your own fun, okay?)

And there were bloopers aplenty, not least because Torchwood London had rubbed the local fabric of reality down to thread-bare thinness, which attracted all sorts. Mickey liked the student tourists best, because they generally liked a drink and a bit of a laugh and it was easy for him to convince them he had actual authority to back up his "don't litter, stay off the grass" speeches. The worst bloopers weren't actually the ones that turned out to be dangerous homicidal things, but the ones that turned out to be indeterminable, where you couldn't tell if you were chasing sneaky aliens or just cosmic background -- whatever the hell the space-time ripples equivalent of radiation was.

Mickey tracked one repeating signal, something in the 435 nm frequency range, for three straight weeks, this way and that way across London, and found nothing, right until he turned a corner in Chiswick (of all places!) and found himself facing a squad of armed, uniformed people.

"Aren't you guys UNIT?" he asked, and the pretty boy in the red cap said "Yes," and shot him with a stunner.

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"--say your name is Mickey Smith?"

"Yes. Yes, I do," Mickey insisted. "You know why? Because it's my bloody name!"

"Mm," said the interrogator.

"It was my name the last time you asked, it is my name now, and it will still be my name the next time you ask. Mickey Smith!" He gave a 'da-dah!' wave.

"Mm," said the interrogator.

"Did UNIT get replaced by robot duplicates again?" Mickey asked, eyeing the guards and the interrogator with suspicion. "Klaatu barada nikto!"

"Is that your native language?" the interrogator asked, still in that same, flat, emotionless tone.

Mickey sighed. "It's from *The Day the Earth Stood Still*."

The interrogator wrote this down. "Is halting the Earth's orbital progression part of your plan?"

"It's a film! In fact, it's two films; they did that shitty remake with Will Smith and--" He frowned. "No, hang on, you had Keanu, didn't you? Sucks to be you. Look--"

"Do you deny that your technology has a basis of non-human origin?" The interrogator asked blandly. "Do you deny that its operation could potentially compromise the security integrity of officially sanctioned UNIT missions?"

"No, to the first; yes, to the second." Mickey nodded, bemused. "I think. What does that even mean? 'Compromise the security'--! It's a weird shit detector!"

"Mm," said the interrogator.

"Okay, see, I can tell you're doing that on purpose," Mickey said. He leaned back in his chair to address the guard's. "It's on purpose, right? Interrogation technique, very smooth."

The interrogator just stared at him blankly.

Mickey sighed again. "It doesn't even interfere with Wi-Fi signals, man. It's not going to compromise anything. Can I go now? What am I even under arrest for?!"

"You're not under arrest," the interrogator said, writing something else down.

"So I can leave?"

"No."

"That sounds like arrest to me. Or kidnapping. You probably call it something suitably vague. Voluntary detention? Temporary internment? No? Anything?" The interrogator just looked at him, and Mickey nodded. "Yeah, you're a robot."

"I see." The interrogator leaned forward with something approaching interest. "Do you often believe people to be androids or disguised aliens?"

"If I didn't still have a headache from being zapped, I'd be banging my head against the table." Muttering, Mickey added, "It'd be more enjoyable."

"Tendency towards self-harm," the interrogator said and stood. "Have him placed on suicide watch."

"What? No, really, what? Hey," Mickey called as the interrogator swept from the room, "can I get a phone call at least?"

"Back to the cells," said Pretty Boy. "We have to cuff you again."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah." Mickey huffed, holding his wrists out. "It's all a bit secret bondage kink-- ow! Oi! Watch it!"

He glared at Mister Silent who glared readily back. Mickey snatched his arms away before the cuffs could be tightened any further. They were heavy and exceedingly uncomfortable, pinching his skin at every move. Mister Silent gave him a shove to get him moving and, when Mickey took a step, Pretty Boy's hand casually dropped to the butt of his gun.

"Fine, fine," said Mickey, lifting his hands in surrender. "I'm coming. I don't know how you find your way around this place," he added as they set off towards the cells in line. "All the corridors look exactly the same. It's like being stuck in a Scooby Doo -- what's that?!"

He grabbed Pretty Boy, swinging him around into Mister Silent's way. Sadly, Mister Silent just tackled the both of them, and they went crashing together into one of the doors, knocking it open and tumbling inside. Trying to struggle free of the scrum, Mickey looked up and found himself staring into a rather familiar and extremely startled face.

"Martha Jones!" he crowed. "Tell these--!"

And then the floor came up out of nowhere to smack him in the face.

-----

"You're fine," Martha assured him. "Medical doctor, remember?"

Mickey rubbed at his forehead, certainly not pouting at all, thank you very much. "Pretty Boy punched me into the ground!"

"His name's Nathan," Martha said with a small, amused smile, "and you were trying to escape custody at the time."

"Right. Yes. Sorry," Mickey said. "Thanks for the whole vouching for me thing."

"No problem."

Mickey took a look around the lab. The tables were covered in tools and electronica, devices and detritus surrounding a large circular machine being constructed in one corner. The other scientist, Malcolm something, was bustling around, trying to find Mickey's scanner which, he had been assured, was almost certainly in the room somewhere.

"Is your interrogator a robot, by the way?" Mickey asked.

Martha gave him a weird look. "Not as far as I know?"

"Oh, blimey, no, we don't do artificial intelligence here," Malcolm said. "Huge problems with robots back in seventies and eighties and, well, nineties, and, you know, robots just don't work out very well for UNIT."

"Right." Mickey stared. "Anyway." He looked back at Martha. "I thought you'd gone back to New York?"

"And Germany," she agreed. "The pieces of Project Indigo are being rounded up, though no-one knows if there's anything actually salvageable; but I'm mostly back here for the--"

"Osterhagen hearings," they chorused together.

Martha smiled wryly. "You've been keeping tabs."

"World destroying weapons make me tetchy."

"Malcolm's one of the expert witnesses," Martha said, nodding at him.

"Oh, yeah?" Mickey asked, looking the little man over. "For or against?"

"Stupid project, should never have been built," Malcolm said, not looking up from his sorting. "There's always a way! No, no, science should be used for good."

"Couldn't agree with you more," Mickey said, nodding along. "So come on, then. What's all this stuff?"

"Don't look at me," Martha said, holding her hands up. "One super secret project at a time, that's my motto. This is all Malcolm."

"Highly classified, top secret, couldn't possibly tell you," Malcolm said, emerging from a pile of junk. "Okay, no, it's a Time-Space Visualiser!" He beamed at them, waving his hands enthusiastically. The fingerless gloves were a nice touch, Mickey thought. "You can use it to view any point in time and space or, well, you will be able to once I get it to work. I'm having trouble with the focus, you see, and the gain, and there's the power cost of course."

He took a quick look at the door, and then shuffled closer to them and grinned conspiratorially. "Want to see?"

Martha and Mickey exchanged a look and then grinned back.

"Yes," Mickey said.

"Absolutely," Martha said.

"Brilliant!" Malcolm crowed loudly before clapping his hand over his mouth. Mickey and Martha exchanged smiles behind his back. "Here," he called to them in a loud whisper. "Hold it steady for me. Yes, yes, one on either side, like that. Now, watch the screen and -- no, wait, yes, watch the screen, waaatch it--"

There was sudden, sucking heat under Mickey's hand that reminded him of something he couldn't quite place. He saw Martha could feel it too and he was just about to suggest letting go when static burst across the screen and suddenly he couldn't see Martha at all.

"What did you do?" he yelled at Malcolm. "She vanished!"

"I didn't do anything," Malcolm wailed. "Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear. That can't possibly happen, or, well, no, it must be possible, because we just saw it. But it isn't very probable at least which--"

Mickey let go of the visualiser and took a step towards him and then, with another crackle, Martha popped back in. She stumbled away from the machine, gasping for breath, and Mickey dived forward to catch her.

"What happened?" he asked. "Are you okay? Martha?"

"I saw--" she managed, eyes wide and wild.

"Saw what?" Mickey demanded. "Where did you go?"

"There was light and, something, something familiar and then -- I saw him. Mickey!" She grabbed him tight, a blinding smile bursting on her face. "I saw Tom!"

## 7. TRANSIT

And so here was Thomas Daniel Milligan, age not even one day if you count from the moment the umbilicus is cut, twenty days early if you count from the Doctor's estimate, but doing fine, swaddled up in blankets and monitors in his little crib. His mother napped restlessly in the crib-side bed while, outside the window, Cardiff went on its merry way -- knowing, perhaps, but hardly caring. The rift was having a tizzy and all of Torchwood were distracted coddling it back to sleep which was, perhaps, how the visit went unnoticed.

No one, at least, saw the woman appear in the room and look around confused. No one saw her reach for clipboard hanging from the end of the bed and curse when her fingers ghosted through it, or crouch to read. If either mother or child heard the startled laugh or the half-annoyed "We've gone backwards again" they gave no sign; nor did they stir when the woman stood and, standing, faded away.

-----

Thomas was born in Cardiff by something of a logistical accident. His father, Russell, an engineer for the Marine Corps who specialised in bridge construction, had been called in by a friend to give their repairs to the Severn bridge a quick going over. His mother, Mary, had seen this as a good opportunity for a week's holiday on someone else's pay and talked them into letting her tag along.

"You're technically Welsh," his dad told him once, bouncing a year-old Thomas on one knee while he giggled and sucked at the head of his purple toy dragon. "Don't worry. We won't tell anyone."

They moved a lot, his father going where the Corp sent him and the two of them tagging along where they could. Thomas had no siblings, but he mingled readily with the kids of his dad's co-workers' partners. People came and went regularly, but there was always some crowd for company, clouds buffeting around the permanent fixtures of his parents. Except--

Except, one day, not long after he'd started at school (in Germany, but in an international school so he could be taught in English), his dad didn't come home. It took him a year before he would cross bridges again; a couple before he could do it without feeling his heart squeeze hard in his chest.

Later, the only clear memory Thomas would have of his father would be lying on his dad's back, giggling and counting off Russell's push-ups -- and of his mother, making him promise over and over that he wouldn't join the Army when he grew up.

-----

"Mickey said, but-- You can see me, right?" the woman asked. She was pretty, dark-skinned, dressed in a modern way his mother would have tutted over. She sounded worried, or maybe excited. Thomas couldn't tell.

"Uh, yeah?" he said.

"This is so weird."

Thomas frowned at her. "Can people not normally see you, then?"

"No," she said, and then, "well, yes, but not like this. I mean-- It's complicated, and I probably shouldn't be telling you about-- Listen, this is going to sound a bit odd--"

"A bit?" Thomas scoffed.

She smiled. "How old are you?"

"Old enough to know I shouldn't be talking to strangers," Thomas said.

"I can't tell you my name," she said. "I know yours, though, Tom Milligan. You're, what, seven?"

"Nine," Thomas complained. "And it's Thomas."

"Okay." She grinned at him. "So, Thomas, just one question, okay? Have you ever been in a cave? More like a crack, in a mountain side."

"What?" Thomas said. "In London? Not likely. You're a bit mad, aren't you?"

She gave him a rueful smile. "Just a bit, yeah. I'm too early again. We need to go forwards, not backwards."

"Who are you talking to?"

"My invisible friends," she said. "I have to go now. Bye, Tom!"

He opened his mouth to say "Thomas!" except he'd only managed the "T--" when she faded away, right before his eyes.

-----

"And Kyle kissed Sarah," Johann added.

Tom nodded. Lots of their friends were going around kissing people these days and then bragging about it at the scouts' camp-outs. Kyle was the worst, because he was already thirteen, which meant he was a real live teenager, and Tom would still be twelve for another seven whole months.

"Have you ever--?" Johann asked.

"Nah," Tom said. He might have lied to the other kids. Through the gaps in trees, down the slope, he could see them playing in the park. None of them ever came up here, though, to the Cave. Okay, it was more of a dip in the hillside, grown over a bit with trees and whatnot, but they called it the Cave, him and Johann. "Have you?"

"No," Johann said. "I'd like to."

"Yeah." Tom nodded. "Me too."

There was a long silence, while Johann shifted nervously next to him. "Um," he said, in a small voice. "We could. You know, for practice."

It was a hot day. Tom could feel sweat running down his arms, feel his heart pick up. "For practice."

"So we know what to do when we get a girl," Johann said.

Tom heard himself say "Okay," and then, "How do we--?"

Johann shuffled around until they were facing each other. Tom couldn't stop the giggle that escaped him and Johann laughed nervously back. They both leaned in together tentatively, needing a few tries to get the position right, to stop either one of them jerking back at the last moment.

It was -- weird-good, this hesitant press of lips, in a way that half made him want to laugh again, and half made him want to do something else, something huge he couldn't quite explain, a feeling too big, too adult for his body, scary and exciting all at once. And then something moved out of the corner of his eye and he pushed Johann away, wincing when the other boy's eyes went wide with shock and something like disappointment.

"You," Johann started, breathless. "You wanted to--"

"There's someone there," Tom insisted. "I heard someone--"

"I have to go," Johann said abruptly, shoving himself to his feet and bursting through the screen of vegetation before Tom even knew what was happening.

Swearing, he followed, only to find there was a man standing outside. Johann must have run right past him, but he hadn't said anything.

"We weren't doing anything wrong," Tom said defiantly.

The man -- dark skinned, rough bearded, in a bulky blue jacket -- blinked at him. "Er. Are you talking to me?"

"Who else?" Tom snapped, feeling unaccountably mad. "You scared my friend off."

"I-- What? No," said the man. "You shouldn't be able to see me. No one else has ever seen me. I'm not even here!"

Tom stared at him. "Uh. You're standing right there, dude."

"You can see me. You can hear me! How is that even-- Guys, Tom can see me!"

"Invisible friends?" Tom asked, feeling an odd sense of a déjà vu.

"They're not invisible, they're outside the viewer," the man said. "Look, I'm not really here." He waved a hand through a tree. "See? I'm a projection."

Tom stared. And then he stared some more. And then he said, "You just waved your hand through a tree. Like a ghost!"

"Temporal projection," the man corrected. "Like a -- a hologram or something. Sorry, I have to-- This is too weird."

He fumbled around himself, hands pushing at the air. No, Tom thought, not the air; at something I can't see.

"Wait," he called, "how do you know my name? Who are you?"

"That's a really long--"

The man faded out mid-sentence, leaving Tom to kick the ground in frustration.

-----

"Is she watching?" Tom hissed at Chris, who rolled his eyes.

"Dude, everyone is watching." He stretched out lazily on his surfboard, bobbing slowly up and down with the waves. "They're waiting for you to wipe out."

"I'm not going to wipe," Tom insisted. "I've been practising."

"Mooning over Kim Park isn't practising, man. Seriously, just ask the girl out. This whole seduction from afar thing is creepy, if you ask me."

"I didn't ask you, so, shut it," Tom said.

Chris laughed. "Whatever, dude. This wave is mine. Catch you on the flip side."

"What does that even mean?" Tom yelled after him. Chris just laughed harder, taking his board on a slow, lazy ride in to the beach.

Tom had bigger plans. Oh, yes. So she was going off to University in the fall and he'd only just started his A-Levels; that still left them a summer for loving. (Which he was never actually going to say to her face, because he liked breathing.) First thing? To get her to notice his totally manly physique and awesome boarding skills, by riding that huge-ass swell that was coming in right now, shit!

He lurched awkwardly up onto the board as it hit, the swell lifting him higher and faster than he expected, making him wobbly alarmingly before he managed to get his feet positioned and turn the board. Whooping as the rush hit, he risked a glance at the beach and grinned when he saw Kim looking his way, a hand shielding her eyes. She waved, Chris too, and he lifted a hand in response before realising that, no, that wasn't a 'hello' wave, it was a 'look out!' wave. He jerked back around,

caught a glimpse of something orange and then somehow the ocean was above him and his board punched him in the stomach and whacked him over the head for good measure as, choking for breath, he crashed back into the waves.

Everything was roaring, cold and thunderous, battering him this way and that. I'm gonna die, he thought wildly, struggling against the weight, kicking and swinging his arms. He couldn't see clearly, no up or down, just light and shadow, the pain in his chest, arms and legs, lungs burning. He had to breathe. He couldn't. He had too. His mouth opened despite himself-- and the beach came out of nowhere, scraping itself down him as he choked on a breath thankfully as much air as water.

"You gotta move," someone said. "I can't touch you. You have to keep moving. Come on Tom."

He pulled himself towards the sound, the voice, half-familiar, coughing and gasping for breath. He still couldn't see. His side hurt, and his fingers came away sticky when he touched himself. Bleeding. He was bleeding. Water sloshed around him, dragging him back.

"No, no! Your friends are almost here. Tom! Stay with me!"

He tried, scrabbling against rocks and sand, shells and slick seaweed, pulling himself up, inch by agonising inch, until he was clear of the swell and breaths came in dry.

"That's it. Almost here. Don't worry, you're going to be fine, I promise."

Oh, good, thought Tom, and tried to say it, but his tongue wouldn't work. The last thing he heard before everything went black was, "Though you'll totally lie to me about how you got that scar."

-----

He dreamed of bridges, of an impossibly complex edifice of crystalline bridges from which everything that had ever been or was or might ever be hung. He dreamed of a crack in a wall that was a cave, and of swirling tattoos or mottled skin. He dreamed of a laboratory, with a half-familiar man and a woman and another man, smaller, hyper, glasses and gloves, all of them working around a big circular machine, like a giant eye, that watched him wherever he went. He dreamed of tunnels, of red swirling into blue, of the place where they met.

"Charge cycle complete," it said. "Retrieval protocols activating."

-----

Afterwards, he didn't remember the accident at all. In fact, for the first two weeks, he didn't remember a thing. Even talking was hard. It had, thankfully, gotten better. First the aphasia, then his memory, returning in dribs and drabs until it was mostly back, until he could paper over the holes and vague places with other people's recollections, with photos and postcards from old albums. After a few months, the nagging feeling that he'd missed something important had faded into the background completely. Anyway, Kim had been very impressed with his new scar.

-----

Tom hadn't meant to end up volunteering at the hospital. It had just been one of those things that had come up while chatting with the nurses and then, somehow, it had gone from a topic of conversation to "Fill these forms out" to "Sit in with Mrs Bagley, would you? Grumpy old cow." to "Nice bedside manner, Doctor Tom". Except it had been interesting, and challenging, and he'd found himself talking about how he was taking all three sciences and an extra in maths for his A-levels and suddenly he was having serious conversations about going pre-med, dropping physics and shifting out modules so he could add in more calculus and an AS in English and doing practice MCATs. Even then, he'd actually been at University for three months before he stopped dead in the middle of the Student's Union with the realisation that, "I want to be a doctor."

"You picked the right course for it then," said Chris, shoving him. "Now, go buy me a pint."

"Blimey," said Tom, and did.

After a while you got used to the limited sleep and the constant cramming, to the point where he ended up spending his holidays doing research just because not having to do so was weird as hell. The size of his outstanding loans was as scary as anything and he worked what few free hours he could find, refusing to let his mum re-mortgage the house to pay for him (she did it anyway), selling everything he owned for cash and living on baked beans in shit-hole bed-sits.

"Just so you know," Chris said, "I've gotten laid more times in the last week than you have in the last four years. Also, people pay me to cause explosions. Industrial chemistry, man."

"I think I'm going to take paediatrics as my speciality," Tom said.

Chris gaped at him. "You see what happens when you don't have regular sex? You go completely mad. Sick kids are the worst!"

"I know," said Tom. "So I should help them get better."

"Bonkers," said Chris. "So, wanna shag?" Tom blinked at him. "What? You're clearly crazy; worth a try. And Pam's totally up for a threesome. You can be in the middle," he added, generously.

"...yeah, okay," Tom said. "But I'm not bringing the stethoscope."

"Spoilsport."

-----

"What?" said the man at the other end of the phone.

"Well, someone called me," Tom said. "From this number, while I was at work."

"What?"

"Asked for me by name and everything. Doctor Thomas Milligan."

"What? Oh, no, no, no, that wasn't me. This isn't my phone, sorry. It's a -- It belongs to a friend. Martha Jones. She left it with me. I don't have her number. Well, I do have her number, but I have her phone, so I'd just be calling myself and that's always awkward."

"Right," said Tom. "Well. Sorry to bother you."

"No problemo," said the man and, just before he hung up, Tom heard what sounded like "And I'm never saying that again."

-----

"Doctor Jones?"

"Like the song?" Tom asked before he could stop himself.

There was a startled pause and then a hesitant, "Who is this?"

"Oh, uh. Tom. Thomas Milligan? Doctor Thomas Milligan. Sorry, you tried to call me. Um, a few weeks ago. Maybe. Did you? Your friend, with your phone, he gave me your name."

"Oh, did he now?" she said, sounding amused and exasperated at the same time. "Wait, have you been trying to call me for weeks?"

"Um." Tom frowned. "Yeah, actually, that's kind of creepy, isn't it?"

"Just a tad." He thought he could hear laughter in her voice.

"To be fair," he pointed out. "You called and hung up on me first. After asking for me by name, and I'm sure I don't know a Doctor Martha Jones -- lovely name, by the way."

"Thank you." Definitely laughter.

"All very mysterious," he added. "I like that. So you really called me?"

"I did," she agreed.

He waited, but nothing followed it. "Are you going to tell me why?"

"I don't think so, no," she said.

"Oh." He considered this. "Well, you know, if you want to call me again and not say anything, now you've got my direct number. Or you could say stuff. I'm okay with the whole conversation thing. You have a very pretty voice. Uh, I don't mean that in a creepy way and, okay, now I seem to be monologuing, which is always bad."

"I've heard worse," she said. "But I have to--"

"Right, right, yes, sorry."

"It was good to hear your voice," she said, and hung up before he could ask why.

-----

He was grabbing a cup of coffee and just happened to glance up at the right moment and he saw her, both a stranger and somehow incredibly familiar in her red leather jacket. Tom frowned, trying to place the face, but then her dark eyes suddenly filled with tears, her hands went to her mouth and, turning on the spot, she darted out. Instinct moving him before his brain had caught up propelled him after her, barging his way through the A&E crowd and into the hospital lot. He thought he saw her for a moment to his right, but, no. There was no-one there.

And then, as he turned back, she was there again, coming in on his left, except she'd, somehow, in those few seconds, completely changed her outfit and how her hair was done and, apparently, turned into G.I. Jane.

"You were just," he started.

She startled, clearly recognising him, but, before he could say anything further, she was saying, "I work for UNIT and I need you to trust me and do everything I say or lots of people are going to die."

"UNIT," said Tom blankly and then, as his brain caught up with the rest of what she said, "I mean, yes. Okay. Tell me what to do."

She smiled a little. "Just like that?"

"Just like that," he agreed, and then, realising, "Wait, I know--"

"I'm Martha Jones," she said. "Now, run for your life."

-----

"Aliens, though," said Tom. "In my hospital."

"It's more common than you'd think," Martha said.

"Do they always try to eat people?"

"I'd like to say 'no!'."

"Huh," he said. He frowned at their milkshakes and burgers. "Is this a date?"

"No," she said. "This is 'thank you for helping me to save the world, Doctor Milligan!'."

"Tom," he corrected. "It's Tom. Or Doctor Tom. My kids call me that. At the hospital, my patients, I don't have any kids of my own. Or a wife, or girlfriend. Or a boyfriend. I'm babbling, aren't I?"

"Yes," Martha agreed.

"Why did you call me?" She just smiled. "Okay. Do you like films?"

"What sort?"

"The ... cinema sort? Okay," Tom admitted, "I have no idea what's on. But we could go."

"Now?" she said sceptically.

"Some time. I-if you wanted."

She considered him, smiling a little. "I have your number."

"Yes," he said, beaming. "Yes, you do."

-----

Some time around the sixth date, she said, "You've never thought of settling down? Get a wife or a husband?" and he said, "I guess I've never met the right man," and she added, "or woman," and he just looked at her, and she said, "oh," in a small, pleased voice and then, later, she'd smacked his arm and said, "You better not use that line on everybody," and he'd laughed himself sick.

-----

It wasn't that it turned sour. All the bits that were good were still oh, so very good. It was just that, the longer they were together, the more there were other bits, greater contexts that made everything more complicated, until there were days where they were suddenly shouting at each other in the park over the remains of what should have been a romantic picnic and was actually Clash of the Careers, take three hundred and something.

"I've been talking about it for weeks!"

"You've been considering it for weeks! You never actually said you were going to accept the position!"

"I'd be an idiot not to!"

"And when were you even going to tell me? Tomorrow? Next week? While you were boarding the plane?"

"I told you! I am telling you! Right now!"

"Only by accident!"

"It's only--"

"That's not the--"

"Then what--"

"If you--"

And on until they were both throwing their hands up and Martha was storming off and Tom was banging his head against a tree and calling himself an idiot. When he looked up, a man in a bulky blue jacket was standing there, a boot right next to the coleslaw, looking embarrassed at having stumbled into the middle of a row.

"Help yourself." Tom sighed.

-----

The impulse that had made him shove the crystal into his pocket as he was leaving had earned him twenty minutes with airport security while he tried to explain that it was just a paperweight and that it had sentimental but not monetary value, probably. He'd never actually had the thing checked by any mineralogists or anything, admittedly, but he was pretty sure it was nothing more than a chunk of shiny quartz-equivalent. Eventually he'd been let on with a stern warning about what counted as hand-luggage that he'd pretended to listen to while nodding and hopefully looking contrite and not constipated.

Now, as England fell away behind him, he found himself playing with it, turning it over and over in his hands. It remained cool under his fingers and he thought about how people said doctors always cold hands -- cold hands, warm heart, his mother would say. When it caught the light from certain angles, it seemed almost to pulse. He found himself thinking of waves, of surfing again, and had a sudden moment of breathless panic before he forced it back down. Old story. Long done now. Nothing to cling to. He turned the crystal again, and again, and again, and, just for a moment, he thought he saw Martha reflected in a shimmering face, but she was gone between one blink and the next.

Sighing, he shoved the crystal back in his pocket, leaned back in his seat, closed his eyes, and fruitlessly tried to sleep.

-----

The Dalek's eye-stalk swung back towards him. It stared blankly.

"YOU ARE ALL UNIMPORTANT," it announced, and its gun came up.

"No!" Without thinking, Tom jumped forward, so the gun was pressed against him, knowing it would make no difference but trying anyway. There was a clunk as the crystal in his jacket pocket swung to hit the weapon. "He's just a kid!"

"MINOR ARTRON ENERGY CONTAMINATION DETECTED," it screeched flatly.

Behind it, the air shifted. A figure faded in, now an outline, now translucent, now solid as anything. A woman, the woman, his only, familiar as anything.

"CONTACT WITH TIME-TRAVELLER POSSIBLE." She gasped. The Dalek didn't pause. "TEMPORAL THREATS MUST BE ELIMINATED."

"No!" she screamed, throwing herself uselessly forward.

"EXTERMINATE!"

Martha, Tom thought and dissolved away into hideous purple light.

## 8. THE PIT

Martha wrenched herself from the viewer, biting at the scream struggling to escape her. She could see the words start to form on Mickey's lips and had already snapped a contradiction before he'd got even a quarter way through "You can't blame yourself." He tried to start again, and Malcolm chimed in, and she yelled over the both of them, "You heard the Dalek!"

They exchanged a look that made her want to punch them both in their stupid little faces.

"W-well, yes," Malcolm said, "I mean, we did--"

"It killed him because he knew me. That's what it said. Contact with a time-traveller."

"Yes, but its a Dalek," Mickey pointed out. "Killing people is what Daleks do. They don't know anything else. You can't--"

"It was me," Martha insisted. Why weren't they getting it? "I thought I-- But all I did was infect him with this, this stupid life!"

"You didn't bring the Daleks to Earth," Mickey said.

"UNIT have had encounters with the Daleks since it was first formed," Malcolm added. "Even before the Doctor first worked--"

Martha rounded on him. "Don't you bring him up. Don't you even dare. The Doctor is--"

"An arse," said Mickey. "What? He is. Okay, I will admit, he has his good points, but the guy is an arse, in any incarnation."

"I-- You-- What?"

Mickey shrugged, lifting his hands in surrender. "I'm just saying. Brilliant; bit of a twit."

"He hung up on me," Malcolm said and then frowned and added, "although I think I hung up on him twice, so, actually, he came out ahead."

"This isn't helping," Martha snapped. "This isn't--"

"Sorry," said Malcolm, looking sheepish, and Mickey too, as he chimed in, "Yeah, sorry."

Martha sighed, finding Malcolm's chair and slumping into it. She couldn't think about the Doctor right now. She couldn't think about anything right now. She could still hear the Dalek screeching in her head, screaming every word.

Mickey said her name. He sounded so far away. Standing in some other universe.

"He wouldn't have been there if it wasn't for me," she said. "I could have asked him to come to New York. Or I could have gone with him. We could've stayed in England and actually tried to fix our problems--"

"You could have picked law instead of medicine in college, and you'd never have met him at all," Mickey suggested.

"I know. I know, okay." "What if's were pointless. You couldn't change things. Can't cross your own timeline, not without a paradox machine, and. God. "Just a bit of effort. Just a bit more--"

"I don't believe for a second that you didn't try," Mickey said.

"If I'd just thought, if I'd just waited, if Tom hadn't-- And that's twice, because of me! Twice!"

"He died twice?" Malcolm asked, confused. Mickey threw a glare at him and Malcolm quickly retreated to his work bench.

Martha opened her mouth to say she wasn't sure what, to explain to Malcolm or apologise, or something, and heard herself say "I showed him the watch!" before she could clamp her hands over her traitorous mouth. The lab blurred around her, worse with every blink, and the chair was shaking, everything was shaking, and then Mickey's arms were tight around her and she buried the sobs escaping her clenched teeth in his shoulder.

-----

The Osterhagen Principle, when stripped of strategic outcome probability mappings so complicated they'd required the invention of two new branches of mathematical and sociological theory, could be reduced to a simple precept: if there is no hope, suicide is preferable to genocide. Especially, went the military opinion, if you can take some of the bastards with you and maybe help prevent galactic destruction while you're at it.

Martha was here to argue, using the Daleks stealing the Earth as an example, that there was always hope. It would have been easier if she actually believed it. She should have taken Mickey up on his offer, let him come and be goofy and a little stupid and kind of sweet at her.

"--resonance patterns in the concrete suggests a projected stream of two point seven Bernards," Malcolm was saying. Martha tried to pay attention -- it had something to do with why the Daleks had been able to snatch her out of the Osterhagen station despite UNIT's transporter baffles -- but her mind kept wandering.

One of UNIT's people, features so bland as to be completely unmemorable, kept staring at her. The Woman Who Almost Blew Up The World. Now there was a legacy. What happened to your oath, Doctor Jones? "First, do no harm." Right. Like you could ever tell what harm you were doing until it was too late.

"Doctor Jones?"

"Yes, sorry." She sat up straighter, casting her mind back, trying to work out what she'd been asked. When the silence stretched, she forced a smile. "I'm sorry, could you repeat the question?"

"Do you agree with Mr Taylor--"

"Professor Taylor," Martha and Malcolm both corrected automatically, earning a wry smile.

"With Professor Taylor's assertion?"

Malcolm nodded frantically at her and then pretended he hadn't been.

"Yes," she said slowly. What the hell had he been talking about? She really should have brought Mickey. Constant interruptions were, okay, still kind of aggravating, but better than dwelling. She really had to stop dwelling. Malcolm was waving his folder a little. Transportation technology. Right. "It's been my experience that Daleks are both advanced and tenacious. They would be able to access the Osterhagen stations regardless of additional teleport countermeasures and they would use it against us without hesitation."

"I see. I'd like to take a moment, if you'd allow, to go back a little and reconsider..."

Martha did her best not to sigh. A dull ache had started up in her head and she did her best to rub her temples discretely, trying to ease it, while the drone went on around her. Odd words caught her attention, "timeliness" and "surrender" and "temporal", but she couldn't see to concentrate enough to pick up whole sentences. It was more like, like buzzing, or, no, like rustling, rushing whispers, like

*wind through the grasses, bending them this way and that in great waves. As she turned to watch she saw a man in tattered clothes rise suddenly, a makeshift bow in hand, tracking movement, coming around as he released the arrow. Their eyes met with matching shock and she*

jerked back, almost falling out of her chair. There was a loud, startled silence around her. Martha mumbled apologies as she straightened up, glad it was hard to tell she was blushing.

"Perhaps we could, um, take a break?" Malcolm asked. "One of those recess things."

"I would not be averse to finishing our session for today here," someone else put in, and there were murmurs of agreement.

Official announcement swiftly followed; a gravel was pounded, minutes were closed, and everyone started packing up their files. Martha managed a grateful smile at Malcolm, swiftly rose and fled for the nearest door before anyone could try and engage her in conversation.

She felt eyes on her as she left. She didn't look around to see whose.

-----

"Okay, Doctor Jones," she muttered to herself, fingers poised over the keyboard. "Either you're going mad which, let's face it, isn't that improbable." She was talking to herself for one thing. "Or there's

something actually wrong with you, so! Proper diagnosis, like you were taught. Physical symptoms first, then mental."

She was also taught to never try diagnosing herself, but there you go. First things first, which meant medical history, which meant first getting a copy of her records from Torchwood after that business with the Reset. An email to Ianto took care of that with his usual impressive efficiency. Next, her own UNIT records for comparison. As medical director, she'd made everyone, including herself, get proper physicals at the start of the project, using every piece of alien medical scanning technology she could get her hands on. You never missed something by being too thorough after all.

File not found, said the computer primly.

Martha cursed at the screen, trying again. Like Torchwood, UNIT used their own proprietary operating systems and so, just like Torchwood, it had its own unique set of quirks and annoyances, not least of which was its tendency to not work properly at inopportune moments.

File not found, the computer repeated.

"It's right there on the damn screen," Martha snapped.

She tried logging out of the local server, opening a secure VPN to the New York server directly, and accessing the files there. Picking a Project Indigo file at random, she double clicked. Nothing happened. She tried again. Nothing continued to happen. She clicked repeatedly, watching the icons turn blue and back again, but still: nothing.

"I hate you," she informed it.

File not found, said the computer implacably.

"Right then." She wasn't beaten yet. If you couldn't do it with your hands, you found the right tool for the job, be it a scalpel or a giant organ or a man in wooden box. Or, as in this case, you stuck your head around the door of the IT Support department and said, "Amy, sorry, couldn't give me a minute, could you?"

-----

"Looks like an attributes and permissions problem," Amy said, absently straightening her glasses. Sat cross-legged in her chair, she typed with thumbs and two fingers faster than Martha could with both hands. "Hidden files that shouldn't be and all that. Lots of them, actually; are you sure you're supposed to have access?"

"To my own project?" Martha asked dryly.

"Point," Amy agreed. "I have super-user privileges -- we're still trying to fix the mess the Daleks left us in -- so I should be able to unlock th-- Oh. Hmm."

She frowned at the screen. Martha looked as well, but the text was blurring past too fast for her to read. After a few silent minutes of Amy hammering at the keys, she cautiously asked, "Is something wrong?"

"No, no, it's." Amy rubbed at the buzzed spikes of her hair. "I can only get some of these open for you. You get your medical files at least. But a lot of these, especially the older files... I have code-word clearance and they're still classified over my head."

"That can't be right," Martha insisted, peering at the screen. "It's not a side-effect of the Daleks, is it?"

"I don't think so. Sure, some of them are old," Amy admitted, "but, look, see the modification dates on these? That was barely a few weeks ago. The Daleks were long gone by then."

Martha knew that. She recognised the date. It was the day she and Mickey had started working with Malcolm on the Time Viewer in their own spare time.

"It's deliberate," she said.

"Seems like," Amy agreed. "Chain of command and all that. I'll get you what I can."

"Thank you," Martha said absently, but she was thinking about hearings and being watched and how being the one to not turn the key would be as bad in some people's eyes as being the one who turned it. She was remembering Sanchez saying 'You don't answer to Torchwood'.

Chain of command indeed.

-----

"I'm starting to wonder why the Doctor recommended me for a position at UNIT," Martha told Mickey.

(He'd turned up in her office unannounced -- or, rather, announced by his ongoing argument with the guards which seemed to require him waving his visitor's pass in their faces a lot -- and insisted she needed to take a break and come down the pub with him. They'd somehow ended up in a club instead, at an upper bar overlooking the dance floor, where they could see the people writhe but talk to each other without having to bellow over the music.)

"They were probably a bit different back in his day, whenever that was," Mickey said.

Martha rolled her gin-and-tonic between her palms, the glass cool and wet against her skin. "I don't even really know if it was him. I mean, I assumed, but he was annoyed when he came for the Sontaran business... I was sure I could make a difference, but I really don't know any more. Maybe it's lingering Saxon interference, maybe it's just office politics. I don't know." She sipped at her drink. "Jack said he didn't like UNIT these days. I thought he was just trying to recruit me for Torchwood, but maybe there was something more to it than that."

"Yeah, you should quit," Mickey said. She gave him a wry smile. He grinned back, toasting her with his beer. "Seems a perfect solution to me."

"It's not that simple," Martha said. "It's-- I know it's stupid, but I feel responsible for the Osterhagen Project, somehow. I need to see the hearings through. There's always hope, right?"

"Yes," Mickey said, firmly. "Now shut up about work and come and rock out on the dance floor."

Martha smiled despite herself, repeating "Rock out" mockingly.

"I'll have you know, I have sweet-ass moves," Mickey said, draining the last of his beer as he stood. "And also some sweet ass-moves; it works either way."

He wiggled his hips and Martha burst out laughing, laughing even harder at his hurt expression, but letting him pull her up with them.

At the bottom of the steps, he stopped abruptly, eyes caught by something -- then he frowned, turning his head way this way and that, trying to see something.

"What?" she called over the music.

"I thought I saw that creepy robot from UNIT," he yelled back, tugging her out onto the dance-floor.

"We told you, UNIT doesn't have any robots!" she said, but he clearly couldn't hear, and she just smiled and shrugged at him instead.

He grinned back, tugging her deeper into the crowd, finding the beat instantly and pulling her to follow until they were moving together, drum beats pounding through her, knocking the dust off and her cares away and she laughed as Mickey spun her and

*her feet came down on dusty earth, red in the crackling fire-glow, and drums were playing still, and something acoustic, plucky, like a guitar but not, and people were singing or chanting, a whole crowd around her, and she went with them, caught up in it, until the whirling brought her almost into the arms of a bearded man who startled and said "Martha!" and she said*

"Tom?!"

Except it was Mickey, reaching out to grab her as she staggered, ignoring the complaints of the crowd as they were jostled, demanding, "Where the hell did you go?!"

"Go?" Martha managed, through the dizziness. "What?"

"You vanished! Literally, pop! And then back! What happened?"

She honestly didn't know; but it was becoming clear that she seriously needed to find out.

## 9. THE HIGHEST SCIENCE

"You know what's weird?" Mickey asked, sighing and leaning back in his seat. "I wish Rose was here."

"Rose," repeated Martha, over Malcolm's snapped "Stay still!" and the hum of the scanning wand.

"Turns out, she had a surprising knack for all this dimensional bollocks." That was definitely the flicker of a smile on Martha's lips. He grinned. "Now, me? Everything I know about teleporters I learned from old episodes of Star Trek."

"You built the scanner," Martha pointed out, earning another tut from Malcolm.

"Mr Copper built the scanner," Mickey corrected, "and our man Malcolm here had the idea. I'm not saying I don't have the mad jury-rigging skills, but, seriously, you guys are the brains."

"You really do show an absolutely impressive degree of temporal exposure, Martha," Malcolm announced with rather inappropriate glee, typing with one hand and waving the scanner with the other.

"Time travel, paradox machine, reversed year, dimensional teleporter," Martha said. "I'd expect to; but look--" She clicked the remote at the far screen. Malcolm made a complaining noise and subsided at Mickey's pointed glare. "--I'm healthy. In fact, I'm healthier than I have any right to be."

"Apart from the random temporal hopping thing," Mickey pointed out.

"Apart from that," she agreed, smiling wryly.

"Four hundred and something," Malcolm said, absently dropping the wand as he darted from keyboard to keyboard. They both watched him for a bit, but he didn't say anything else.

Mickey picked the scanning wand up, idly waving it at himself. "It's got to be a side-effect of that project Indigo thing, right? Because I've been on the TARDIS and in parallel worlds and through matter transmitters and I'm not all blinky-blinky."

"Blinky-blinky," Martha scoffed.

"It happened first with the time viewer, right? And Malcolm said -- Malcolm!"

Malcolm looked up, blinking at them. "What? Yes?"

"You said the time viewer technology was partly Sontaran, right? From Irongrun or whatever."

"Oh, yes. Osmic projector, from Irongron castle. Old UNIT thing, disappearing scientists and, oh!"

Mickey waved a hand at him all "See? See?"

"It started before then," Martha objected. "Remember, with the time lock?" She frowned. "Or was it..."

Mickey waited a bit and then, when it seemed like she wasn't going to continue, said, "Well, never mind that; how do we stop you doing it, is the point?"

"I need to be grounded," Martha said. "Bleed off all the excess temporal energy." She looked at Malcolm for confirmation. "That would work, right?"

He nodded. "No." Off their looks, he added, "Well, maybe. There seems to be some sort of temporal, dimensional, psionic hook thing -- this, here."

Mickey frowned at the screen. The pulsating patterns seemed familiar. "Hey, that's the signal I was trying to track the first time UNIT arrested me."

"It's Indigo," Martha said. "It must be. I was sure there was some kind of telepathic component to it. First time I used it, it ignored the set co-ordinates completely and took me home."

"If we just break the connection, temporal snap-back could send you anywhere and anywhen," Malcolm said.

"Or do nothing at all," Mickey tried.

"I know which option I prefer," Martha chimed in dryly.

Malcolm, who had gone back to his keyboards, muttered something unintelligible.

"So," said Mickey eventually. "Magic wishing teleporter. Subconsciously powered magic wishing teleporter, even. That'd explain why you keep, well..."

"Jumping back to Tom?" Martha offered. "Yeah."

"Maybe the Doctor knew this was coming, somehow, and arranged for you to join UNIT so you would do it, to avoid the paradox?" Martha pulled a face and Mickey shrugged apologetically. "It's not the worst idea."

"Maybe it was the crazy Dalek," Martha said. "Have to get the 'Children of Time' together somehow."

"Don't," Mickey cautioned. "Once you start thinking like that, everything becomes a trap. Time travel or not, we still have free will. I might not have understood half the stuff the Doctor and Rose babbled on about, but I got one thing: the future isn't fixed. Big events, maybe, but not for individuals. Not the small choices, the ones that really matter."

He frowned at the screen showing the scan of himself, and then at the one of Martha, noting the parts that matched, the parts that didn't. History laid down in radiation rings. Like bark. Not so easy to rub off.

"Do you really think so?" Martha asked.

"Huh? Oh." Mickey considered the wand for a moment, and then waved it over an oblivious, still typing Malcolm. "Yeah."

"Mickey-- Mickey?" A poke in the shoulder got his attention. "Okay, you just zoned out on me completely in the middle of a pep speech about how people have free will. Appropriate, I'll grant you, but-- what?"

"Malcolm barely shows up," Mickey said, waving the scanner at him again and pointing at the screen.

"He's never travelled in time," Martha said reasonably and then her face scrunched up in confusion -- Mickey mentally slapped himself for thinking it was cute -- but smoothing out in sudden revelation.

"Wait, he doesn't?"

"No," said Mickey, grinning and poking Malcolm with the wand. "You don't show up."

"Of course not," Malcolm said with some annoyance.

"Ah, but, right," said Mickey, "you've been around both of us and the time viewer for ages, and you've been near the TARDIS, and you still don't show up. It wasn't Martha."

Malcolm looked between them, still confused. "What wasn't?"

"Tom!" Martha said. "The Dalek said it scanned temporal energy, but it wasn't me."

"Because if it was, and now there's two of us, you'd be stinking of the stuff," Mickey finished triumphantly.

"Then what?" Malcolm asked. "His time sensitivity? If it was caused by the rift then--"

"That crystal," interrupted Martha, smacking her own forehead. "I knew it looked familiar when he first showed it to me, but we never-- But, no, that can't be right."

"What can't?" Mickey asked. "Glowy things are always magic."

"Magic doesn't exist," Malcolm said.

"Super clever alien science-y stuff, then."

"Project Indigo is supposed to be Sontaran technology," Martha said, cutting across them. "Why would Sontarans have been dropping stuff in Africa?"

"They're aliens; I don't think they really care where they are."

"And Tom just happened to come across it?" Martha asked.

"Actually," said Malcolm, "it's funny you should say that, because I've long held this theory that coincidence, or synchronicity, if you will, happens far more often around time-travellers than is statistically plausible."

"And in my experience, there's usually some evil nasty lurking in the dark," Martha said. "Or in Whitehall."

"There's really no way of," Malcolm started, and Mickey quickly cut across him with a "You said the crystal was familiar," directed at Martha.

She nodded and grabbed the nearest keyboard, ignoring Malcolm's protests as she switched away from his work to access the Project Indigo files. "Here's an internal schematic. I was more involved on the people side than the engineering side, but I couldn't resist having a look."

Inside, behind the central panel, under the digital display that encoded their signal into a constantly changing numerical string, six indigo crystals were neatly nested in an array.

"Project Indigo," Mickey said. "They put a lot of thought into that, I see. They found this stuff on the Sontaran ship?"

"That's what I was told," Martha said. "I never had any reason to doubt it. There are more files, files I can't access."

"On your own project?" Malcolm said indignantly. "You never keep data from a scientist! Here, let me." He tugged the keyboard away from Martha and tapped at it with increasing speed and irritation. "Why won't you open?!"

"Let me have a go," Mickey said.

"You only have guest clearance," Malcolm said, trying to stop Mickey stealing the keyboard and failing spectacularly. "I probably shouldn't even be letting you in the same room as that, you know!"

"Yeah, yeah." Mickey grinned at them both, bringing the password prompt back up. "You know how UNIT have their very own operating systems and all that? Well, they also have one very specific flaw in them, which I like to call Buffalo."

His grin got wider and a great deal more smug as the directory suddenly filled with file icons.

"The Doctor told you that," Martha said.

"Let's see what they were hiding then," Mickey said pointedly, ignoring this.

"There," said Martha, leaning over him to touch the screen. She was wearing perfume, Mickey noticed absently, something flowery. "What's that?"

"Two-oh-fours are retrieval reports," Malcolm said. "We get them with all the gear that isn't nabbed by Torchwood. Like a receipt -- you know, found on the so and so at such and such."

"Matter transmitter framework," Mickey read. "ATMOS -- that was the Sontaran's right?"

"Yeah, but look, that's just the focusing array." Martha nudged him out of the way so she could use the mouse. "If we sort these -- here, this one's the crystals. They came earlier, before I even joined UNIT."

"Source, HAV-15-X. Well, that can't be right," Malcolm said while Martha said, simultaneously, "It can't be!"

"Can't be what?" Mickey asked, looking from one to the other. "Where's this HAV-whatsit when it's at home?"

"It's the Valiant," Martha said, sitting heavily. "The crystals were found on the Valiant, after the Master--"

"He's dead," Mickey reminded her, while Malcolm took advantage of the interruption to have his own fiddle with the files. "You told me. Shot, died, burned to ashes."

"And still," Martha growled. "Dust in the wind and still."

Mickey reached out a comforting hand, thought better of it, and let it drop.

"Nothing unusual in the retrieval video," Malcolm announced. "There's some footage of the early tests, too, but it looks standard." He tutted at the screen. "Oh, that's sloppy work. I would have done much better. Electron microscope -- pah!"

Martha, who had been frowning at the screen in an absent sort of way, clearly lost in thought, or memory, suddenly sat forward again. "Play that last bit back?"

Malcolm did. Mickey frowned at the screen. "It's just a bit of laser scanning. I don't see anything."

"Show me the retrieval video again," Martha snapped. Malcolm frowned at her, but clicked the file. "There, see? Watching?"

"No," said Mickey and then, when she tapped the screen, noticed there was another figure at the back, kind of blurry. UNIT really needed to get better resolution cameras. He realised Martha was staring expectantly at him, and blinked back. "What?"

"You forgot again." She tapped the screen, more videos up now, her finger moving from window to window. "Look harder."

"At what?" Mickey said. "It's just-- No, hang on, there's-- In all of them, that guy or woman or-- Hey, that's the one who interrogated me! The robot!"

"It's not a robot," Martha said. "It's a perception filter."

"It's not the Master," Mickey said immediately. Martha just looked at him. "It's not. I'm pretty sure piles of ashes can't just regenerate; I mean, he's not Dracula!"

"No," said Malcolm slowly, peering at the screens. "I still don't see anything."

"You have to be impressed that it works even on a recording," Mickey said. "That's some primo technology right there."

"Definitely alien," Martha said.

"Not necessarily Time Lord," Mickey countered.

"We could find out," Martha offered.

"It did show up awful fast when I was trying to find that indigo signal," Mickey said slowly, feeling a plan coming on in the back of this head. Martha smiled back, conspiratorially.

"I still have no idea what the pair of you are talking about," Malcolm complained.

-----

Given how much time he ended up spending hanging around UNIT -- and he was definitely not thinking about the reasons for that, because there were a few, and they all made him look like a sad tosser -- it wasn't surprising that Mickey had managed to make a few friends among the soldiers. Saturday five-a-side at the park was a primal bonding experience between manly men, after all, as were the beers that followed. It was simple enough to get the word out -- the completely fake word, admittedly, but he'd told the guys it was for a prank, so it wasn't like he'd really lied to them -- about Mickey Smith and his secret crystal lab of mad science-ness, which was why, just a few hours later, the door to sub-basement slid quietly open to let a blurry figure in.

It was weird; now Mickey knew there was a perception filter, he could see how the figure had no details at all; it made him think, disquietingly, of Rose's descriptions of the Cybermen before they pushed their whole way through. Later, he blamed this thought on why he didn't wait for the figure to get close before he started in on his, "Oi, oi; game's up, son! You're nicked!" routine.

The figure considered him calmly for a second and then lashed out a hand so fast Mickey didn't even see the move, just fell back feeling like he'd been whacked in the chest with a baseball bat. The figure dodged through the gap, back out the door with a fluid ease Mickey would probably have been jealous of if he hadn't been coughing and gasping for breath. He stumbled out into the corridor after it, eyes still watering, and found himself face to face with a sonic blaster.

"Ho shit," he managed, and then a weight slammed into him and the screaming blast went right over his head. He crashed into the wall and got pulled into the relative shelter of a support strut, finding himself pressed up tight against a panting Martha. Gardenias. She definitely smelt of gardenias. He was really glad people couldn't see him blush. "Thanks."

Martha blinked at him a couple of times, before suddenly pulling back a little. "Don't, uh," she said, and then seemed to collect herself. "Don't mention it. You go low."

"Right," said Mickey. "On three?" She nodded. "One. Two. Three!"

They threw themselves back out into the corridor, Mickey ducking as he charged, feeling the air heat up over him as the blaster fired. As he crashed into the figure's legs, Martha grabbed its arms, forcing the gun up. Sparks and dust rained down on them as it fired into the ceiling; then Martha and momentum ripped the gun out of the figure's hand. Mickey and the figure crashed into the ground together, Mickey on top, holding it down before it could do that super-fast punching thing again.

"Move and I might shoot," Martha yelled. "Seriously; I really don't know how this gun works."

"Then perhaps you should stop pointing it at me," the figure said.

"Can you stop being all don't-look-y?" Mickey asked. "You're doing my head in."

"You're sat on me," it pointed out.

Mickey considered this. "Right." He started moving back, then stopped. "If you try anything, I'm just going to tackle you again."

"I surrender," it sighed.

Mickey moved all the way off. It reached up and touched something and then -- it wasn't so much like it came into focus as it was like suddenly remembering what it had looked like all along. Still androgynous, but definitely humanoid, pale skin and white hair, delicate features save for the intelligent, and rather annoyed, sharp red eyes.

"Who do you work for?" Martha asked. "Are you one of Saxon's?"

"Or Sontaran?" Mickey offered. "Rutan?"

It gave him a long, disparaging look. "Hardly. I am an agent of the Shadow Proclamation, and I demand--"

"You have no jurisdiction on Earth," Martha countered. "You might be all big, high and mighty space police up there, but down here, I'm all that's standing between you and the rest of your life in a UNIT jail."

It gave her the same disparaging look it had given Mickey. "Your technology is primitive at best; you can hardly expect--"

"Yeah, yeah," Mickey interrupted. "How about instead of the posturing, you just tell us what's going on? Short and simple, that's how we like it." He grinned at Martha. "Aliens love the expositional monologue."

"Don't I know it." She grinned back.

"Fine," it said. "However, I refuse to conduct this conversation in a corridor. We can use my office, like civilised sentients."

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"There is a species," it said, "whose name I will not tell you for reasons I will also not be explaining."

"That's a good start," Mickey muttered.

"This is a Level 5 planet," it said. "You have no formal interstellar contact, despite numerous incursions, a great many of which were caused by the wilfulness and arrogance of your species -- and a great many more of which were brought about in no small part due to the interference of the being who calls himself the Doctor."

"Lifetime, prison," said Martha in a bored tone.

"There is a species," it repeated, "who live on a planet that happens to naturally produce a form of psi-active chronon crystals. In the main, the crystals are used in the engines of bias drives of warpships and their equivalent; however, they are also capable of direct temporal transport when highly energised as you, Doctor Jones, are no doubt aware."

"Project Indigo," Martha said.

"It is this quality that made them particularly useful in disposing of political enemies."

"Like shipping your criminals off to Australia," Mickey nodded. "Except, instead, you dump them in the past."

"Into the primitive ages of other planets, yes," it agreed.

"What was the Master doing with them, then?" Martha asked. "How did he even get them? He was confined to Earth and Utopia."

"Ah, the Master." It considered them for a long moment. It didn't blink enough; it could almost have passed for human, an albino human admittedly, but human, if it hadn't been for that. The unbroken stare was clear and alien. "My species are time sensitive."

"What species is that, then?" Mickey asked. Martha shot him a quelling glance.

"One morning I woke up with the clear memory of having ordered an interstellar exclusion zone around Sol 3--"

"Earth," Martha corrected.

"Earth, then. A terminal extinction notice. I also had a very clear memory of *not* doing this. Investigation discovered--"

"The Master's paradox machine," Martha finished. "The year that never was, turned back on itself."

"Indeed. I can not say how the Master acquired the crystals. Certainly, he would have done his utmost to remove any temporal threats to his power. It is quite possible he simply had his servants dig them up."

"Dig--? Ohhh," Mickey nodded. "I get it. Earth: land-fill of the universe." It stared at him. "You're a humorous lot, I can tell."

"Potential temporal technology in the hands of a minor species was worthy of further observation," it said, pointedly ignoring this.

"Further observation," Martha said, disbelievingly. "You should have taken them and left."

"I could not be certain that there weren't more of the crystals left undiscovered on the planet; a fear time proved well founded, you will note." It sounded just a touch smug. Martha's expression darkened. Mickey manfully resisted the sudden urge to punch it in the face. "When the discovered crystal was destroyed, and with the Indigo project set to be derailed by the Osterhagen hearings, I assumed my work was done. However, Mister Smith turned up."

"Wait, what?" Mickey stared. "What did I do? I was in a parallel universe for most of this!"

"You discovered the signal," Martha said. "The Indigo frequency, still active. That connection, between me and Tom, maybe because I'm a time-traveller and he's time sensitive, maybe because we were both thinking about each other and the crystals tapped into our minds the way it tapped into mine that first jump, sending me home. Holding us together, despite everything."

"Ironic, isn't it?" it asked.

Martha's lips tightened.

"I will hit you, don't think I won't," Mickey snapped.

"At first I believed more crystals had been found; then, your experimentation with the time viewer gave a much better explanation for the signal's continuing existence. Professor Taylor's notes were quite extensive."

"I told him not to keep notes," Martha grouched.

Mickey grinned. "I bet he put that in the notes, too."

"You follow yourself," it mused. "A rather neat ontological paradox that I believe, now that Mister Smith's ruse has been revealed for the falsehood it is, has resolved itself. I am not certain your career will survive the Osterhagen hearings, should you even wish it too. Project Indigo has been effectively abandoned. Your dimensional shifting will fade and eventually cease as distance from the causal event increases and the psionic link inevitably decreases, though I do recommend you avoid too much temporal energy in future, Doctor Jones. My observations are--"

"It was you," Martha interrupted. "Not the Doctor. The woman who called me up out of nowhere to give me a position with UNIT, that was you -- this Shadow Proclamation. So you could keep an eye on me, because I'd walked out of the paradox."

It started blandly back.

"You can't help interfering, can you? None of you!" She let out a sharp laugh. "Typical!"

"Well," it said. "I believe I shall be leaving now. Unless you still wish to shoot me with my own weapon?"

"No," said Martha. It started to stand. "No, you're not leaving yet. There's still something that hasn't been resolved." It arched an eyebrow. "Something that you're going to do for me, with all your clever alien technology and know-how."

"I hardly think you're in any position to request anything from me," it sneered.

Mickey blinked as Martha handed him the blaster, then half-shrugged and idly aimed it at the agent, who glared back. From her pocket, Martha pulled out a small sheet of digital paper, covered in non-human writing, and spread it out on the desk in front of the agent.

"I'm Martha Jones," she said brightly, "and I think you'll find you owe me compensation."

## 10. THE DIMENSION RIDERS

Everything was -- it was like for a moment, for an age, that he was stuck in a police car convention, everything flashing red-and-blue, red-and-blue, and a sound like ten thousand, ten million, ten billion sirens, buffeting him and drum-hard, all pounding pain; and Tom thought, for the first time in forever, of giant iron bridges collapsing around him, of breaking swells rolling him over and over and down into the frostfire deep. Then he was falling (or he'd always been falling, always would be) and there was air and ground and hitting and bruising and scraping and scratching and bouncing down a god-damn cliff of a hillside, felt like, and a final, bone-jarring halt.

"ow" Tom managed, and opened his eyes.

The dinosaur slow blinked at him.

Big, thought Tom blankly. Big long neck. And tail. Big long tail. And body. Huge body. Huge everything. Also: dinosaur. Big long heavy lizard. Barosaurus. Huh. Rather more blue than he'd expected. More graceful too.

Also: dino-fucking-saur. What the fucking fuck fuck?

It was still staring.

"Hello," he said. "I think you should know, despite my calm exterior, that I am actually freaking out quite a bit on the inside."

It stared at him some more and then went off to eat some trees. Well, not so much 'went' as 'bent its really long neck around'. The body of the big heavy long dinosaur was still right there.

"Holy fucking fuck," said Tom with feeling, and sat the rest of the way up. "It's a fucking dinosaur!" He smacked himself. "Okay, move past the dinosaur, Doctor Milligan. Also, stop swearing."

Talking to himself out loud probably wasn't the sanest of responses either.

It was day. Anyway, there appeared to be a sun in the sky, and it was warm, so it was probably day, unless he was in some kind of hologram or alien satellite with artificial environment or something. The ground under him certainly felt real. Trees. Rocky slope behind, plain in front. Sparse, rubbery leaved grasses in the thick, clay-riddled soil. Somewhere tropical, maybe. Equatorial. Well, that narrowed it down to the middle two-thirds of Earth.

"Still," he reminded himself. "Not dead of Dalek."

He checked himself over, finding sore points and a couple of scratches that really needed cleaning out, but nothing apparently broken or sprained. He'd be a multi-coloured mess before the week was out, admittedly, but so far so good. It took him a few tries to get to his feet, and a bit longer to stay on them steadily, but walking made his head clear a little. He could hear water nearby. Bonus. Except he'd probably die if he drank it, so.

Remembering suddenly that he'd filled his pockets with anything he could lay his hands on, back when they'd left the hospice, Tom dug through them. Not only did he actually have water purification tablets on him, he also had a lighter, which was awesome because it had been at least a decade since he'd last tried to start a fire solely by hand. Tugging the rest of the haul out to see, he found himself instead looking into the pulsing light of the crystal.

The reflections in its red-blue shimmering surfaces failed to match the surroundings in disconcerting ways and, if he closed his hand tight around it, he could feel a slightly tugging, like it wanted to go somewhere.

"I wish I was back home," Tom said, shaking it hopefully.

The crystals inner light pulsed a little. Nothing much else happened.

Okay, then. Stuck in the past with pockets full of medicine and hazy memories of survivalist skills. And a giant friendly vegetarian dinosaur. Right. Okay.

Fuck.

"I really hope this isn't the afterlife," Tom said, and set off to find the water.

-----

For all his care, it took him less than a week to give himself food poisoning. It's not as bad as it could be; it's not even as bad as it should be, and if he wasn't losing it from both ends and mildly delirious, he'd probably wonder about that more. All those viruses and bacteria people carry around with them all the time, modern ones in a prehistoric setting. He's imagining them, modern and prehistoric diseases, meeting up to fight it out in his body. Lucky he arrived in the middle of nowhere. If he'd shown up in -- where were people these days? Were there even people?

Maybe he was why the dinosaurs all died out. Future Plague Man. Shit.

The crystal tugged at him. He went where it lead because lying in a hollow, shivering and feeling sorry for himself just lead to having to fight off those stupid tiny dinosaurs that looked like ferocious mutated chickens and tasted oddly like very mild, watery fish. Life in the prehistoric: long periods of boredom followed by moments of screaming terror. Fun times. Fun times.

He so needed to work out a way to carry more water. He'd clearly forgotten more about clay working then he'd remembered because his makeshift flask leaked and made the water taste bad. Drinking crap water was probably why he was sick. Not drinking the water at all would kill him much faster. Definitely should have taken more survival lessons. And carried more medicines. And.

Hallucinating your ex while stumbling into a mountain was probably a very bad sign. A very, very bad-- what?

Tom squinted against the light, trying to focus on where Martha was, or had been, or he'd hallucinated she'd been; then he frowned and squinted at the light instead because, why was light coming out of a mountain? Weird familiar light. He looked down to find his own crystal pulsating to match, and he grabbed for it a couple of times before managing to hold it up, stumbling along in its wake. Crack in the mountainside. No, a cave, between the ivy looking stuff. Why was this so familiar?

Down, then, or in, or up and for an even floor he was having a great deal of trouble with, with the moving thing. And thinking. Thinking was. The light was really annoying. If it'd just stop pulsing. If.

There was a man. Something like a man. Man shaped, but feathery. Wearing feathers? Blue-reds and pink-greens. And skin, leathery, mottled. Tattoos maybe, swirling tattoos. A red-blue purple man-bird-thing, and it was holding a crystal just like his, except dull, not lit at all and, as Tom stumbled to a halt, the man-bird-thing nodded its tufted head and calmly dropped its own crystal into a hole in the ground.

"This is yours, I think," Tom said, trying to hold his own out and finding himself instead following the other down to the floor and into the thundering dark beyond.

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He dreamed of an Emperor, vicious and self-centred, crowing from a pile of plenty while the workers starved. He dreamed a man with a sharp beard and a sneering countenance, of cunning whispers in the fields and great speeches in hidden rooms, of power to the people, of revolution, of the tidal rise and the crashing defeat. He dreamed of crystals, burning, bound, and being tossed, like concrete shoes into the ocean, dragged down and away, and of more, of secret hopes and twisted plans, of a long, long game, laughing in the dark.

He dreamed of a web, stretching through time and space, catching everyone up in itself, shifting them here and there until it looped back on itself, back and back in endless, knotty spirals, grabbing him, pulling him on, returning always to the beginning. He dreamed of a freighter, plunging backwards into a small blue-green planet, of death and fire and ice and thaw and life. He dreamed of a present that was the future, but still the past, of being washed up on a shore and crawling to safety.

He dreamed a thing that wasn't a man or a bird but something of both saying, "Thank you," and, "I'm sorry; I'm so sorry," as it was carried away home.

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It was Spring when Tom woke up. He felt great. No fever, no chills, no being dead from dehydration. The bed he was on was surprisingly comfortable for being a few furs and pelts on dry grasses. He sat up to find himself in a narrow, long cave about the size of his old student rooms; more cosy than cramped though, since it had practically nothing in it save for the bed.

Tom pushed himself to his feet, stretching, and frowned when he realised he could hear water not from outside, but from deeper in the cave. There was little illumination, but enough leaked back from

the entrance crack to glint off the water dripping out of the rock, into what appeared to be a ceramic filled clay tube, and out again into a clay collecting pot. The drip at the bottom was much slower than at the top, but perfectly clear, and enough had gathered to more than half fill the bowl. Throwing caution to the wind, Tom drank it greedily, sighing at the clear, sweet taste.

Someone else had definitely been here. Tom half expected it to be some native Neanderthal and that he'd hallucinated the whole man-bird thing, even despite the impressive water-filtration system, until he discovered the crate. He couldn't work out what it was made of: though it looked like simple grey plastic, it felt more like burnished steel under his fingers. He gaped at the contents, at tools and medicines, at salt and proper carrying bags for water, and especially at the survival manuals which made up for being in an unreadable language by being full of simple, straight-forward illustrations. Everything someone stuck in the middle of nowhere might need, and there it was. A good six months, if not a year, worth of supplies.

It was so lucky, it couldn't be luck, and he found himself thinking about what you could do if you had a time to prepare and time enough to prepare it. Like the architects of pyramids, building themselves secret exits in case they were locked up inside by jealous Pharaohs.

"Not that dropping me back in my own time instead of yours wouldn't have been a much better deal," he added to the empty air, "but thanks anyway, Mister Bird."

Right, then. Now what?

-----

It was deep summer by the time he'd gotten his hunting to the point where he didn't have to spend all day doing it. Making a bow had proved a lot easier than actually using it and now, at some point, he was also going to have think about making himself new clothes. That would end well. Half-crouched, he inched now through the long grasses that swished and swayed in the breeze, moved this way and that in great whispering waves. The boar-rabbit-goat things, whatever they were (tasty but vicious, basically) were out there. He knew them, now. The way they moved. Where they'd come from. Which way they'd go. Which means there would be one running right about--

Tom rose smoothly, turning to track the grasses bending against the wind, and found himself face to face with Martha. His hand loosed the arrow of its own accord, already half-way towards her before he could think to speak; her saw her eyes widen in shock, her mouth start to move; then she was gone, the arrow falling into the grass beyond as if it'd popped her like a balloon.

There was a moment of perfect stillness, then the warning screeches went up and a dozen boar-things crashed away through the grass. Swearing, he raced after them, grateful to forget Martha for a moment in the thrill of the chase. The herd twisted before him, racing for the tree-line, and he notched another arrow, still running, aimed, pulled, released -- hit only dust. He grabbed up the fallen arrow as he passed (waste not, want not) and plunged after them under the trees.

It was by no means cooler in the shade, just thicker. He slowed, moving with more care and cursing silently at every rustle of grass and crack of twigs. His boots weren't made for subtlety. Slinging the bow over his shoulder, Tom drew his knife instead. There were smaller animals in here that would do for a day or so; monkeys, even, if he got really desperate, although he hadn't gone that far yet.

There was a soft rustle; he edged around a tree to peek into the clearing beyond and found himself abruptly belly to face with a dark-skinned boy of maybe ten, trying to corner one of the boar-things with his javelin, unaware of a second closing in behind. The boy gaped at him, freezing. The boar-thing lunged. Tom did too, getting slashed with the spear for his trouble but knocking the boy clear enough that the boar-thing's horns only cut a leg instead of impaling a belly.

He rolled, shoving the boy clear -- the boar-thing already at him, hitting Tom's water-bag by pure fluke -- knife already in hand he struck in and up without thinking -- and they crashed together into the yellow grass. The boar-thing gurgled, thrashed, lay still. He rolled it off himself, caught up the boy's fallen spear and threw it, all on instinct, scraping the second animal and sending it running off into the trees.

After a long moment, he remembered how to breathe.

"Blimey! Couldn't do that twice," Tom said, grinning. The boy just stared. "Right. No one ever speaks English. Which probably hasn't even been invented yet."

The boy tried to stand and slipped back, silent but grabbing his leg, face twisted. Tom approached him carefully, making soft noises, taking a drink from the water-bag and then offering it. After a second, the boy took it and drank, flinching back when Tom touched his leg.

"It's fine," Tom said. "Trust me; I'm a doctor. There, there, that's it. Let me just clean this-- hey!" He smacked the boy's swiping hand away. "Stay still!"

It took him a while, talking randomly all the time in what he hoped was a friendly way but was probably just convincing the kid he was a mad babbling fool, but he managed to get the boy cleaned up and bandaged. Since the water-bag was gored and leaking, he made the boy drink the rest of the water and then used the bag for a makeshift sling to carry the dead boar-thing in. The boy retrieved his spear and then blinked when Tom offered him the kill. After a long moment, he took it, slinging it over his shoulders with annoying ease considering the boy's small stature and the animal's weight. Using the spear as a walking stick he moved off, stopping after a few paces to look pointedly back at Tom,

"Bye?" Tom offered. The boy made an annoyed noise, came back, and tugged him. "Oh! Follow! Okay."

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The boy, Khune, effectively adopted him. Initial hesitation on the part of Khune's tribe turned into a sort of amused acceptance. His medical skills, at least, helped off-set how generally useless he found

himself to be, having to be shown things the others knew practically from birth over and over. The adults and most of the children treated him like a rather dim-witted kid much of the time. Khune even took to calling him beard-boy, a nickname that had stuck long before he learned enough of the language to work out what it meant. He tried to protest after, but they just laughed.

Khune took him hunting and despaired at teaching him to move silently, though he did manage to drum basic tracking skills into Tom's head. Surgery electives didn't seem to help all that much with skinning, but he was deft enough with the knife to help prepare the animals for cooking so that, more often than not, he ended up with the grandmothers, preparing the meals, while the hunters watched and laughed (and then complained when they too were roped in to help). In turn, he hoped he managed to impart at least a little useful medical knowledge, if only the "don't drink crap water" part.

Thus, the seasons passed; and with each mid-winter and mid-summer festival, Tom found himself thinking less and less of his old life and more and more of this place as home.

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And then, at one evening's dance, pulled around on the red dust in the crackling fire-glow, drums and lyres and song-chants thundering around him, Khune laughing and mocking his dancing and pushing Tela his way, her hands on his, feet too, and them whirling, everybody whirling and--

At one evening's dance, Tom turned to find Martha's ghost in his arms.

He said her name and she was gone. He stumbled and fell, pushed away Tela's hands as he scrambled up, looking around wildly. Tela asked him what he saw and Khune too, and others; he tried to explain, but they told him they had seen nothing.

"Memory lingers," Khune said, finding Tom later where he sat away from the festivities, his heart still pounding. "Ghosts are not always in the world." He tapped Tom's forehead gently with a knuckle. "Sometimes they are in here, and you must let them out."

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For the first time in years, he dreamed of Johann, and of the man who wasn't there, of faces, scattered in time and space.

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The next morning, Tom went out hunting by himself and, without any real surprise, stepped around a tree to find her there.

"Hello, Martha," he said.

"Hi," she said back, tears in her eyes and smiling like anything, and he couldn't do anything but stare.

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"The Daleks--?" Tom asked eventually.

"Defeated," Martha nodded. "You're looking good. Tanned. I like the beard."

Tom rubbed it absently. "You haven't changed at all. How long--?"

"Seven, eight months," Martha said. "It's been longer for you."

"A few years," Tom agreed. "...this is so weird. I, I, I mean, good weird," he added quickly, "but weird. ...It really is good to see you."

"You too," Martha said with a watery smile. "I wish I could hug you properly."

They'd tried. He could feel her, a little, but it was like water, or maybe treacle, there but slipping away around him.

"How long--?"

"I don't know. The Shadow Proclamation are -- well, I'm not sure I followed the science, but we're using up our residual artron energy, and once that's gone, so am I."

"Back to the future," he said and then, realising, "wait, you've talked about that before, the artron stuff. Do I have that now?"

"Probably." Martha nodded. "You haven't been getting sick so much, right? Or giving people colds? That's why."

"I didn't get the translation though," Tom mused. "I could have done with that before."

"TARDIS only," Martha said, and then, eyes widening, "oh, god, I didn't even think-- Tom, I can call the Doctor! Do you have -- I don't know, star charts or something, we could work out what the year is and - We could get you home!"

"I am." Tom was as startled as Martha to hear the words come out of his mouth but they felt right. "I like it here. It's -- okay, it's kind of humbling to come down from being the cool doctor, but. No. It's been good, like a permanent posting. I've been good here."

"Tom," Martha started and didn't seem to know what to finish it with.

Tom shrugged a little. "I-- You know, I know how this sounds? But I honestly hadn't thought about ever going back before now. Or not, not where I could really think about it. Not up top, you know?"

Martha nodded.

"And I'm not saying there aren't things, people that I've missed, some of whom have been popping in and out of my life for years as temporal ghosts," he added pointedly.

"You remember?"

"Some. There was a guy, too. Good looking."

"Mickey Smith," Martha said, and then, "You think he's good looking?"

"I liked the beard," Tom said, and Martha laughed a little. "I don't know, my memory is still a bit fuzzy on the whole... thing. But. That part of my life is over. Things changed. I changed. I'm not sure I could go back even if I could go back. Or well," he frowned. "That was a terrible sentence."

"I get what you mean," Martha said, nodding. "I-- Oh--" She lifted a hand, and Tom realised she was slowly becoming translucent. "Oh, Tom--!"

Tom smiled weakly. "We always had terrible timing, you and me."

"Are you sure?"

"I'm sure."

"If you ever--"

"I know. I'll work something out." He managed a proper smile. "I'll be okay, I promise."

"I know." She smiled, bright as anything, despite the tears. "I believe you."

"Trick of the trade," he said, smiling back. "Everyone believes a doctor. And I love you, Doctor Martha Jones, and I always will, and I want you to go and do something brilliant with your life, the way you always wanted. Free and fearless, that's my Martha. Now, say goodbye."

"Tom," she said, voice fading with rest of her, so that the "I love you," was barely a whisper and the "goodbye" was just a fading shape in the air.

"Goodbye," he said to the empty place she had been.

He wasn't sure how much time passed before he felt a nudge and turned to find Khune had sneaked silently up on him.

"Poor hunting?" he asked. "What are you looking at?"

"Yesterday," said Tom and then, realising by the blank look that he'd spoken English, repeated it properly.

Khune huffed a laugh. "You can't eat yesterday, beard-boy."

"No," Tom agreed. "Come on then. What are we hunting today?"

"*I'm* hunting wild-cat," Khune sniffed. "*You* can hunt frogs."

He grinned up at Tom, who grinned back, slinging an arm across the boy's shoulders as they walked. "You know, there's a story my people tell on occasions such as these."

"Oh?" Khune asked, in his usual humour the crazy-man tone.

"Once," Tom said, "in another time and another place there was a purple galaxy filled with purple suns around one of which orbited a purple planet..."