

# **NEW BORN**

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“Doctor?”

The slight urgency in Grae’s voice pulled Tamara’s head up from the chess game she was losing to the Doctor. Grae was standing on the other side of the TARDIS wearing a green chenille top, the shade and texture of moss. Tamara felt the color contrasted well with Grae’s red hair. Seeing that red hair again popped a bubble of surprise in Tamara’s head and she wondered when she would get used to her friend’s new shoulder-length bob. The blunt-cut edges swung forward as Grae tilted her head. Her eyes were downcast, trained on a readout; her eyebrows pulled together in a frown.

Tamara turned back to her chess partner. The Doctor had one hand hovering over his queen. He’d been like that for a full five minutes and Tamara was beginning to wonder if he could hold that pose indefinitely. His face, however, was more animated. She noticed he was chewing his lower lip, as his eyes repetitively scanned the board. He was the epitome of concentration, although why he bothered to be so serious in a game against her, Tamara didn’t know. Grae was the chess player, not her.

“Doctor,” she prompted.

“Huh?” His gaze lifted, revealing green eyes that did not seem to focus properly. Tamara felt that he was staring straight through her, and fought an urge to turn around and see what on the back wall might have caught his attention. He blinked and the strangeness disappeared. A smile spread on his face. “Taking too long?” he asked.

Tamara’s attention flicked to the console. “Ah, Grae was calling you.”

“Oh,” he said, straightening up and swiveling at the waist. “Is everything all right, my dear?”

“The TARDIS won’t accept my commands.” Irritability tinged Grae’s tone. “The destination coordinates seem to have changed.”

“Won’t accept your commands?” he asked, rising from his seat.

Tamara stared at the vacated lime-colored plastic stool. It resembled two plastic cones joined at the apices, and she wondered if some ‘70s swimming pool was missing some furniture.

The Doctor joined Grae at the console. “The TARDIS should recognize you by now.” He leaned over the controls. Their heads were practically touching, red hair to brown.

Compared against Grae’s sleek hair, the Doctor’s locks needed a trim, Tamara decided. His fringe was in his eyes and the ends of his hair were curling untidily against his shoulders. She was thinking about fetching her scissors when his face changed. The laugh lines fled and his mouth firmed. His features became cold, like a staring bird of prey.

Tamara shivered. Just how much did he control the face he showed her - the charm, the warmth, the happiness? Tamara looked at Grae and felt relief. There were times when Grae’s reactions and emotions were just too naive to be faked. Perhaps it was age, Tamara thought. A nine-hundred-year-old Time Lord would have better control over his emotions than a mere thirty-seven-year old.

He was frowning. “The TARDIS won’t recognize me either; I’ve been locked out as well.”

“How?” Grae asked.

“Knowledge of a Type 40 TARDIS and access to my bio-data, I suspect.”

“That’s impossible,” Grae blurted. “Those records should be sealed back home.”

The Doctor raised an eyebrow and said softly. “It’s been done before, Grae.”

Grae’s emerald eyes had widened and her mouth formed a silent ‘O’. In a small voice, she asked, “Bramahl?”

Tamara leapt to her feet at the sound of their enemy’s name.

The Doctor shook his head. “Possible. Or it could have simply been a misuse by someone with authority to access it.”

“Only Councilors have the authority to access it officially...Coordinator Jossa? I’d hate to think that others might have turned traitor, too.”

The Doctor sighed. “Councilors are just people, Grae, and sometimes power corrupts them.”

Tamara saw a grimace pass over the Doctor’s face, and he added softly, almost below hearing, “Corrupts even the best.”

The Doctor’s regret seemed genuine, but Tamara didn’t have time to dwell on it. Her mind was sifting through her friends’ conversation. “Doctor, if you don’t have control of the TARDIS and, and neither does Grae, then who does?”

“Another one of my people, I suppose.”

Tamara felt a prickle up her spine. She wanted her back to a wall, a knife in her hand and all the doors in clear view. She settled for a quick scan of the room. “Where would they be?”

A smile tweaked the corner of the Doctor’s mouth. “*Outside* the TARDIS, Tamara.” He looked up and flashed her a grin. “The signal’s external.”

Tamara shrugged and let her muscles relax. “Grae mentioned something about changed coordinates?”

“True. We’re now heading for a region of barely-inhabited space.”

Grae’s color was back. From past conversations, Tamara knew that Grae was more trusting of those in charge back on her home world, holding them in high regard. That regard was more ambivalent in the Doctor, although he did say he had more confidence in the latest group.

Grae’s eyes narrowed. “I’ve studied your life from the moment you left home, Doctor. Who could have had access to your bio-data and covered up their tracks so well we wouldn’t have noticed?”

Tamara thought the Doctor wasn’t going to answer. He just stared at Grae, and continued that deliberate eye contact as he said, “Well, there are a number who are capable of doing something like this. Our history is littered with renegades and what not.” The Doctor looked over at Grae, who had raised her eyebrows at him.

Grae then smiled. “And you’ve faced just about all of them, Doctor. Surely, from your extensive rogue’s gallery, you’d be able to discern someone capable of doing something like this.”

The Doctor’s face softened. If she ignored the trimmed moustache and goatee, Tamara thought he looked almost boyish, particularly with a fall of dark fringe veiling an eye.

“I really don’t know,” he said.

\* \* \* \* \*

“There’s nothing here,” said Grae.

The view screen showed blackness, pin-pricked by the faint light of distant stars.

Tamara looked at the Doctor who stood with his arms crossed over his chest. As she watched, one of the stars on his midnight-blue waistcoat flared, then dimmed back to normality. Tamara’s initial wonder simmered into irritation. She was convinced that the vest’s star pattern changed but could never clearly recall the previous design to be sure. Now, she had the distinct impression that the damned thing had just winked at her. The Doctor, concentrating on the view screen, seemed oblivious to his clothing’s vagary.

“And yet, this is from where the signal controlling the TARDIS is emanating,” he said. A blinking light on the TARDIS console caught his attention and he leaned closer to the readout. “I’m performing a scan.”

Tamara was blinded by a flash of bright light that whited out the interior of the TARDIS control room. She was blinking her sight back to normal when she heard Grae’s voice.

“What was that?”

“According to the scan, a Kronton crystal discharge,” the Doctor replied.

“Kronton crystals?” Grae crossed to the Doctor. “But they’re used to manufacture time loops.”

Tamara pointed at the view screen. “Doctor, look!”

The Doctor looked up at the view screen, which showed a luminescent square lying against the black backdrop of pinpricked space. The glow came from a bright yellow sun lying inside the square. The star bathed everything in a soft light and Tamara saw the blue hemisphere of a planet peeking above the square’s lower edge. It was like peering through a window.

“It can’t be,” murmured the Doctor. He returned to studying the scan details.

Grae read over his shoulder, and whistled through her teeth. “Kronton crystals couldn’t achieve *that*. We don’t even have anything that can do that back home!”

Tamara sneaked a look at the readout. It was gibberish. Worse, she realized even if the characters were in English, she would remain just as ignorant. She found it frustrating and was hard-pressed to keep the sarcasm out of her voice. “What exactly are you two talking about?”

The Doctor raised an eyebrow at her and Tamara felt herself blush. Maybe the sarcasm hadn’t been totally absent.

“An entire solar system has been time-looped, Tamara.” His voice had adopted a schoolteacher’s inflection. Tamara could have kicked him.

“Time-looped?” she asked levelly.

“Well, to time-loop a planet is to take it outside of time,” Grae advised. “The High Council uses time-looping against races that threaten the harmony of the space-time continuum.”

Tamara frowned. “You permanently banish races from time?”

“The time-loop can be deactivated if the race becomes more...enlightened,” the Doctor replied. “It’s a nasty business.”

“And this time-loop -”

“Is around an entire solar system,” interrupted the Doctor.

“Why’s that significant?”

Grae responded, “It would take a great deal of energy to time-loop an entire solar system.” Grae hesitated. “I didn’t think one this big was possible.”

“And what does that tell you, Grae?” the Doctor asked softly.

“Whoever created the time-loop wanted to make sure whatever’s inside stays hidden. So they time-looped the whole system.”

“Precisely.”

Tamara ground her teeth. “Well, I still don’t understand.”

“Time-looping a planet doesn’t totally conceal it, Tamara,” the Doctor advised. “The orbits of nearby planets stand testimony to its existence. By looping the solar system you remove that evidence.”

Tamara nodded at the screen. “Well, how is it that we’re aware of it?”

“The Kronton crystals,” Grae explained. Her face became wistful. “Whoever aligned them must have been quite adept. It would have been difficult to get the correct pitch to generate the feedback.”

“In English, Grae.”

Grae’s face became apologetic. “Sorry. Kronton crystals are used to generate a small, temporary time-loop. Whoever did that,” Grae nodded at the screen, “used the temporary loop to set up interference in the larger time-loop.”

Tamara felt none the wiser. The Doctor was grinning at her. “Think of it as the temporary loop punching a hole in the larger time-loop,” he said.

“The square is the hole?” Tamara asked.

“Yes,” said the Doctor.

Tamara frowned. “Is it my imagination, or is that square getting bigger?”

“No, it’s the same size,” replied the Doctor. “We’re just getting closer to it. I expect we’ll pass straight through before the temporary loop collapses.”

“Collapses.” Tamara paused thoughtfully. “You mean we’ll be trapped *inside* the time-loop?”

“Well, yes,” replied the Doctor, “but cheer up.” He waved a hand at the view screen. “Someone obviously figured out a way to circumvent the time-loop, so it should be repeatable.”

She stared at him, open-mouthed.

Grae smiled and turned her attention back to the scan information. “Judging by the coordinates, our destination appears to be the fifth planet. That’s also where the signal controlling the TARDIS is coming from. The signal’s point of origin is inside an artificially generated time field located three point six miles beneath the eastern edge of the northernmost continent.”

Tamara watched as the world on the view screen magnified, revealing increasing levels of detail. It zoomed in on a settlement on the eastern seaboard of the northernmost landmass. Wisps of smoke curled from the rooftops of square-shaped buildings that were haphazardly huddled around the perimeter of a larger structure. Edging the settlement were the colossal remains of shattered green towers.

“Humanoid life is present within the small settlement but not beyond it in the larger green structures. The green material appears to be an alloy of titanium and verdium. The settlement has traces of copper, tin, iron, calcium carbonate and aluminum silicates. Atmosphere of nitrogen, oxygen, carbon dioxide, trace of suspended carbon particles...” Grae looked up at the view screen. Puzzlement etched her brow. “They’re burning wood?”

The Doctor ran a thumb along the trimmed edge of his moustache. “Is there astralidium in the atmosphere, Grae?”

Grae turned her attention back to the scan. “Yes, small traces. The isotope ratio is point two three.” Grae frowned and looked back at the settlement. “Time travel hasn’t occurred on this planet for thousands of years.”

“Nine thousand two hundred and forty years, to be exact,” the Doctor said. He caught Grae’s remonstrating glance and cleared his throat. Tamara hid a smile - Grae could do mental arithmetic too.

“And astralidium is?” Tamara had nearly let the query go, but found not knowing was more irksome than feeling like a child with twenty questions.

The Doctor turned to her with relief evident on his face. “It’s a by-product of time travel,” he said happily, but his eyes sneaked a look at Grae. “It’s faintly radioactive and decays with a half-life of six thousand years. As only twenty-three percent of the astralidium molecules in the planet’s atmosphere are radioactive, time-travel ceased here um...thousands of years ago.”

Grae chuckled and the Doctor visibly relaxed.

He looked at the view screen. “Grae, what about the time field?”

“It’s located in an underground cavern measuring 392 cubic yards with a breathable, if somewhat stale, atmosphere. The dimensions are too perfect for it to be a natural formation and it’s lined by the same titanium/verdium alloy found on the surface.” Grae suddenly became startled, and sought out the Doctor. “It shows ohm particle contamination!”

Tamara noted Grae’s distress. “What are ohm particles?”

“They’re an antimatter particle.” The Doctor’s voice was grave.

Tamara tried to understand the solemnity that had gripped her two friends. Her heart started pounding. “The underground site is contaminated? With something like nuclear fallout?”

The Doctor shook his head. “A burst of unshielded ohm particles will render any piece of equipment with a conventional power source inoperable.”

Bewildered, Tamara asked, “Can they damage the TARDIS?”

“Ohm particles are found *only* in the console of a TARDIS,” the Doctor replied. He looked bleakly at the settlement still shown on the view screen. “For that kind of contamination to occur, it had to be deliberate.”

Grae shook her head. "I can't believe the High Council would sanction such an action."

"It may not have been the High Council," said the Doctor. "Why time-loop a planet *and* render its technology inoperable? But, there is definitely another Time Lord involved here. One who presumably came onto the scene after the initial time-loop was put in place."

Grae looked coldly at the view screen. "The penalty for such an action would be much greater if the sabotage resulted in the decline of an advanced civilization to this medieval level."

"But, who are we after and what do they want with the TARDIS?" Tamara asked. "It must be Bramahl. Destroying the TARDIS would put her at quite an advantage."

The Doctor bent his head and rubbed a hand across the nape of his neck. "That I don't know. It's not really her style, is it?" He looked thoughtfully at Grae, then ran a knuckle along his moustache. "What about the time field itself?"

"It's small, encapsulating a volume of 157 cubic yards. The time field's in phase-shift and we're yet to check inside."

"But the signal controlling the TARDIS is coming from inside?"

"Yes."

Twenty questions, Tamara thought. "Phase-shift?"

"The field is shifting through different time periods." Grae frowned at the readout. "But there doesn't seem to be any pattern. It's random." A flashing light caught Grae's attention. "Coordinates are changing," she advised, edging around to the readout. "Hmm, we're going underground."

The TARDIS materialized and Tamara glimpsed at darkness before the view screen shut down like a TV tube that had suddenly lost power. The blackout extended to the TARDIS and the room went dark. Before she had time to say anything, soft yellow lighting bathed the control room. The view screen remained black.

The Doctor pushed a couple of buttons on the console. "Dead as a Dodo," he muttered. "Main power's been cut."

"Well something's still working," Tamara commented. "We're not in total darkness."

"Emergency systems have activated and I suspect..." The Doctor pulled a lever and smiled as the doors bent inwards. "I suspect that the door mechanism still works."

"Surely, you're not planning on going out there, are you?" Tamara asked incredulously. "Whoever brought us here could be waiting out there."

"There may be no-one waiting out there, Tamara." The Doctor crouched and unhooked a panel from the console pedestal. "A signal brought us here, and is currently holding us here." He removed a z-shaped component and put it in the pocket of his waistcoat. "That signal is out there, but the person who set it may not be. They may have left centuries ago." The Doctor straightened up and Grae raised a questioning eyebrow at him.

"The temporal interface," he explained. "Wouldn't want the old girl leaving without us."

"It's dark out there," Grae commented. "We'll need torches."

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The Doctor turned the particle integrator over. It was shaped like a small, handheld laser-drill, and in the stock rested the power cell. The cell was crystalline, opaque and inoperable. There were symbols stamped into the stock that he didn't recognize. He replaced the worthless piece of equipment beside its partners on the bench.

Tamara walked into the room and caught him in the beam of her flashlight. "Find anything?"

"Appears to be an equipment room," the Doctor said. "All rendered useless by the particle burst."

Tamara panned her flashlight around the room. “The elevator shafts to the surface also appear damaged,” she said. “I jimmied open one of the doors and there’s just a mass of that green stuff inside. Looked like it had melted and then hardened again.”

The Doctor shook his head. “That alloy’s virtually heat resistant. Even a solar flare couldn’t melt it.” He walked up to a piece of machinery that, to Tamara, resembled a machine-gun. “However, a molecular disrupter would weaken the covalent bonds of the molecules. The whole thing would basically sag.”

“So the elevators were made inoperative before the ohm blast inactivated the equipment. Why?”

The Doctor looked out the door towards the TARDIS. “To keep people out of the time-fielded room.”

“The room the signal’s coming from.”

“Yes.”

“But that room’s impenetrable. You said so yourself.”

“*Virtually* impenetrable.”

The Doctor followed the beam of his flashlight out the door and into a large cavernous space, which reminded Tamara of an aircraft hangar. Ahead was the TARDIS and directly to its left a solitary rectangular room, the outline of which wavered as if viewed through water. “I expect that time field is the final barrier to keep people out.”

An arc of light expanded along the floor beside the room, and Grae walked into view. Grae was circling the small building, studying the walls. She saw the Doctor and Tamara, and waited for them to reach her. “There’s a matter transmitter on the eastern wall,” she advised, indicating the structure with a flick of her chin. “It’s inside the time field, so is probably operational.”

Tamara looked at the wavering air. It shimmered like a heat wave hovering above the road.

“Transmitting what to where?” the Doctor mused.

“The transmitter can’t swivel. It’s fixed in place,” Grae advised. “The matter beam would go in a straight line in one direction.” She illustrated the movement with her hand. “If the destination lies as far as the surface, it’s within the left tower fringing the settlement.”

“Providing it doesn’t stop in some other underground room before reaching the surface.”

Grae nodded. “But no other subterranean vaults were noted on the scan.”

“Curiouser and curiouser,” muttered the Doctor.

“There’s something else you should see.”

Grae began retracing her steps but moved away from the time-fielded room towards a green pillar that reached up into the darkness overhead. She shone her flashlight up the smooth surface following a line of golden symbols. They looked similar in form to the ones the Doctor had seen stamped into the stock of the particle integrator. Grae’s light beam was hovering on a symbol that had the Doctor hissing an intake of breath.

“It’s Faroseen,” he whispered.

“I believe so, but this is the only recognizable character I’ve been able to find.”

The Doctor raised the beam of his own flashlight up to the symbol. “Not surprising. The archives have no more than half-a-dozen of their symbols on record.”

“Who are *they*?” asked Tamara.

“*They* were the Farosee, Tamara,” the Doctor advised. “A technologically advanced race that developed time travel.” He was passing his flashlight beam slowly over the other symbols. “Unfortunately, their social development wasn’t as advanced as their technology. They were tyrants who subjugated the lesser races they encountered.”

“You said ‘were’. What happened to them?”

“The Farosee attempted to alter the time lines of a number of other time faring civilizations including that of our own people. According to the records, they took us by surprise and we wouldn’t have prevailed against them without the support of the Elhalland.”

Tamara found her interest piqued. “Who were the Elhalland?”

“Kin of the Farosee. A weaker house, but more enlightened than their cousins. They joined their fleet to ours and the Farosee were defeated. The details of the story are somewhat sketchy. The time-line had been interfered with and information was lost when it was re-established. We’re not even sure when it occurred.”

“Nine thousand two hundred and forty years ago,” Grae suggested.

“It’s possible,” said the Doctor. He swept his flashlight in a broad arc. “This may be the planet of the Farosee. It would explain the time-looping.”

Tamara was still caught up in the past. “What of the Elhalland?”

The Doctor’s flashlight picked out the transmitter and its faintly gleaming outline snared his attention. Tamara watched as he wandered away, oblivious to her question.

“Do I ever do that?” Grae asked.

Turning to studying her friend’s softly lit profile, Tamara answered. “Sometimes.”

Surprise flickered on Grae’s face, but she quickly shook it away. “The records say that after the war the Elhalland sought a new home in another galaxy. I used to think that perhaps their planet had been destroyed, but it may lie inside the time-loop.”

Grae took a step to follow the Doctor and Tamara moved with her.

“Don’t your people know where the Elhalland went?”

“We searched but we never found them. Some believe the Elhalland sought anonymity.”

They reached the Doctor who was staring at the transmitter. “You said the surface coordinates lie in the settlement.”

“In one of the green towers,” corrected Grae, “surrounding the settlement.”

“Uh-huh.” He trained his torch on the base of the transmitter. “I think we should try to go there. It may be possible to reverse the transmission flow at the receiver and gain access to the room.”

He said it mildly, as if it was some inconsequential thought. Tamara knew it wasn’t and she rolled her eyes. He was about to show off. The stunned look on Grae’s face showed the young Time Lord was falling right into it.

“How?” Grae asked. The forgotten flashlight in her hand was illuminating her booted feet and blue jeans up to her knees. “There’s no way to can gain access to the transmitter to send us to the surface and the TARDIS can’t transport us there.”

He smiled in the dim light. “Ah, but the TARDIS can take us.”

Grae’s mouth opened but no sound came out.

“Stop teasing, Doctor,” Tamara admonished. “And just tell us what plan you’ve thought up.”

His face fell and he looked like a little boy whose older brother had blurted the punch line to the joke he was telling. It was a disturbing sight to see on a grown man’s face and Tamara felt remorse.

“I’m sure it’s brilliant,” she offered tentatively. He looked sullen. Even the stars seemed to dim on his waistcoat “Please?” When he looked over at her, she gave a weak guilt-ridden smile.

“Very well,” he said in a conciliatory tone. The stars on his waistcoat flared and Tamara had the distinct impression he was playing with her just as that damn vest did. “We can move the TARDIS by tying your wristcomms into the navigation controls.”

“Of course, the wristcomms having their own power source would bypass the power blockage.”

Grae frowned and Tamara suspected the young Time Lord was wondering why she hadn’t thought of it.

The Doctor nodded. “It should supply enough power to let the TARDIS make the short hop to the surface.” He smiled again and the sullenness was gone, making Tamara think it had never truly been.

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The TARDIS materialized in a small, square, green room. Glass or crystal-covered candles cast the room in soft diffuse light. The floor, Tamara noted, sloped gently towards a grate under a perforated metal table that occupied the room’s center. Tamara spied what appeared to be a curled hose, fixed to the wall opposite the door.

“What is this place?” she murmured.

Grae was studying the contents of a recessed shelf. “The purpose of the room may have changed from its original usage. I have found towels, robes and what appears to be non-powered medical equipment.”

The Doctor joined Grae. He picked up a hollowed-out, curving piece of shiny stainless steel.

“A mortuary?” he asked himself. “But there are no cutting implements here.” He turned to survey the room. “Some sort of ceremonial room to dress the dead, perhaps.”

Tamara eyed the metallic table with a mental shudder. To quell the images that threatened to overpower her, she quickly sought a less threatening puzzle. “The candles would need to be regularly checked.”

“Part of the ritual,” the Doctor suggested.

Tamara swallowed. “What about the receiver?”

The Doctor’s ran his eyes over the ceiling and around the room. His face turned thoughtful. Tamara had come to recognize the slightly vague expression and the distance in the green eyes.

“It’s possible,” he said, “that the original contents of the room were moved elsewhere.”

Grae joined them. “The floor has always sloped, and appears designed for drainage.”

“Maybe whatever was transported here, needed to be cleaned upon arrival,” Tamara suggested. “Perhaps it was foodstuffs that needed to have some kind of protective layer removed.”

“Matter transportation doesn’t cause cellular damage,” the Doctor responded. “There’d be no need for a protective layer.” Resting a hand on the metal table, he bent to look underneath. “Ah, found it,” the Doctor said enthusiastically. “And it’s shielded by TARDIS console material.”

“The receiver still works?” asked Grae.

“I expect so,” replied the Doctor. “But it’s only a remote receiver. We can’t send from this end.” He stood up, leaning back against the table’s edge.

“Now what?” Tamara asked.

The Doctor eyed the door. “The legends of the locals may fill us in on what happened here in the past. Perhaps, give us enough information to work out who this other Time Lord is.”

“A name may let us work out why we’ve been brought here,” said Grae.

“So, we meet the locals,” Tamara said hesitantly.

“Yes,” said the Doctor, pushing himself off the table and moving towards the door. “We meet the locals.”

\* \* \* \* \*

The door opened into a corridor that stretched to an archway leading into sunlight. A guard stood rimmed by the bright light; his back was to them. Tamara saw no other doors or rooms along the corridor. The noise of their shoes echoing off the green floor made the guard turn around.

Beneath a dented helm, his eyes showed white in a dirty, stubbled face. He lost hold of his spear, and it clattered loudly to the floor. The guard stared at the spear, and then slowly turned his head and stared at Tamara and her friends. He stumbled backwards. Another glance at his weapon - it was now beyond arm's reach. He turned and fled.

Tamara let out a guffaw. "So much for meeting the locals."

The Doctor hurried to the end of the corridor and raised a hand against the glare. On arriving at a slower pace, Tamara observed that the archway didn't actually lead outside. Shards of the green material lay over the ground like huge pieces of broken glass, stretching across to a remnant of curving green wall. The guard could be seen dodging between the shards as he ran for the distant wall. Tamara realized she was looking at the middle section of a tower, where the roof and wall had shattered, revealing blue sky and streamers of white cloud.

"Where's he going?" Tamara asked.

From the inner breast pocket of his waistcoat, the Doctor pulled out a pair of sunglasses. He studied the lenses before slipping them on. "I expect, to the settlement."

The Doctor turned to find Grae crouching over the spear. She gingerly picked up the head and flicked a fingernail against the metal. "Well?" asked the Doctor.

"Iron," she said. "Fits with the candles in the room but not with the medical equipment."

The Doctor looked back towards the room. "I doubt the current society is responsible for the medical equipment. It probably dates from an earlier era."

Grae stood up. "And a guard on the door who didn't expect anyone to be coming out of that room."

"Perhaps, because he didn't see anyone go in," suggested Tamara. "There was only one door."

"I still think it's ceremonial," said the Doctor. He walked into the sunshine, following the path the guard had taken. Grae joined him and Tamara bent to retrieve the spear. "Better to leave that where it is, Tamara," he said. "Who knows how they'll react if we turn up armed with one of their spears."

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Ten minutes later, Tamara wasn't so sure. On clearing the shattered tower, the path they followed had turned to dirt. The dirt progressed to cobbles where the pathway threaded between ramshackle buildings of stone and wood. As they neared the settlement's dominating feature, a square-shaped castle of black stone, a squad of armed men came into view and rushed them. Hedged by spearheads and sword points, there was little the TARDIS crew could do, and Tamara allowed her hands to be tied behind her back. She hoped her face mirrored the stony indifference displayed by the Doctor and Grae. Time Lords would make a race of great poker players, she thought. Although the first guard had been unprofessional in leaving his post, this squad appeared more disciplined to her trained eye. The clipped orders, issued by a gray-haired, stocky man with a scar along his cheek, were precise and readily obeyed. When she tested her bonds, Tamara found them to be quite secure.

They were led into a room richly draped with pennants and tapestries. It reminded Tamara of a throne room, and the raised dais with a gilded chair holding a heavy-set man in velvets, strengthened her suspicions. The man's small, dark eyes glared at them from under bushy gray brows. He had a thick mouth that carried the message of his displeasure in downturned severity. However, for all his presence and obvious importance, Tamara's attention was glued to the man standing behind the throne.

He had a slighter build and was dressed in nondescript navy. Long limbed, his lower legs were molded by black, shiny, boots. Younger, with a head of raven-colored hair, he had a pale face that blanched whiter as he looked upon the Doctor. Impassive features resettled into a mask of hatred. Tamara glanced at the Doctor and saw his awareness was focused on the seated man;

the Doctor had missed the younger man's reaction. By the time she turned back, the young man was staring straight at her. Gone was the hatred, replaced by - loss? Tamara swallowed. The stare was so intense, so intimate, and quelled in a heartbeat. The man blinked and looked away.

"These are the ones you saw?" The seated man had directed the question to a guard standing apart from the group of men currently watching them. Tamara recognized him as the guard from the corridor.

He clutched the metal rim of his helmet with whitened fingers. Sweat slicked curls were plastered against his skull. "Ye...yes, my Lord Aramus. They come from the birthing room."

"And you didn't see them enter?"

The guard shook his head. "No, my Lord."

"How long had you been on duty?" The softly spoken question came from the man behind the throne.

"Four hours, Sir."

The Doctor cleared his throat. "Perhaps, if we introd..."

"Silence!" roared Aramus. His dark eyes glinted with disapproval.

Tamara heard movement at her back as the guards crowded closer. The skin prickled up her spine as if she wore itchy wool. All eyes settled on the Doctor, who adopted an air of impassivity. Out of the corner of her eye, Tamara saw a heavy hand clamp the Doctor's shoulder and a sword point was pressed against the small of his back.

The man behind the throne returned his gaze to the hapless guard. "Four hours is a long time to be on duty," he said. "In all that time you didn't leave your post?"

The guard swallowed and nervously looked at the prisoners. He wore a stained tabard over a shirt and rough-spun pants of brown. The other guards in the throne room were dressed in blue with spotless tabards. The guard's face reminded Tamara of a dog cowering from an expectant kick.

"I...I did briefly relieve myself, Sir. Left my post for no longer than a couple of minutes."

"Giving them opportunity to enter the corridor," concluded the dark-haired man. "They must have been hiding. Biding their time, perhaps?"

Aramus relaxed into the padded back of his throne. "But *why* break into the birthing room, Gavrin?"

"Because it was guarded, my Liege," answered the jet-haired younger man. "A guarded room would be expected to contain something of value."

"They are thieves then?"

"They don't appear to have taken anything, my Lord."

"If not thieves, what then?" demanded Aramus.

"What indeed," Gavrin murmured. Cold eyes found the Doctor. "Who are you? Why are you here?"

The Doctor hesitated. Tamara saw the grip tighten on his shoulder. His body arched slightly and Tamara guessed pressure was being applied to the sword point at his back. "I'm the Doctor," he said, then indicating his companions with a nod, "And these are my friends, Tamara and Grae. We're travelers."

"From where?" Gavrin asked. His face was indifferent and bored.

"Far away. I doubt you would have heard of it."

"Perhaps not. But a name and direction?"

"Ludlow."

"Direction?"

"Somewhat west."

"We have enemies to the west, Doctor."

"Only to the west?" the Doctor asked drolly.

Gavrin smiled. "What were you doing in the birthing room?"

“We’d got lost.”

“Convenient, that you entered the corridor when the guard was,” Gavrin paused mid sentence and looked at the guard, “indisposed?”

The guard flushed, but Tamara doubted Gavrin’s emphasizing pause was to draw attention to the guard. No, his target was the Doctor.

“We encountered no guard until we left the room and were moving down the corridor. We made no attempt to conceal ourselves.”

“And we’ve established you are not thieves,” Gavrin said. “So what *were* you seeking in the birthing room, Doctor? Information perhaps?”

An angry red suffused Aramus’s face. “Spies!” he spat.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Doctor moved to follow Grae and Tamara into the cell but Gavrin pulled on his arm, sending him stumbling sideways towards the next cell. A guard opened the door and Gavrin propelled him inside. Then came a frightening rasp of metal but the Doctor felt his bonds loosen and fall away. With his hands free, the Doctor turned to speak. The edge of a hand slammed into his throat. Coughing, his head dropped forward exposing the back of his neck. His body tensed, anticipating the next blow and unable to defend against it. It arrived: a sharp, hard impact across the nape that spread into numbness. The Doctor felt his knees buckle and blackness was crowding his vision. He was kneeling on all fours and losing the battle to retain his wits. Noise faded, his sight failed and consciousness deserted him.

Gavrin pushed against the Doctor’s shoulder and rolled the unconscious Time Lord partly onto his back. Searching through the pockets of the waistcoat, Gavrin removed the temporal interface and then unlooped the TARDIS key from around the Doctor’s neck. Beyond the gleam of the key chain, Gavrin’s attention was involuntarily drawn to the Doctor’s impassive face. Tentatively, he reached out and pushed back a fall of dark fringe from closed eyes. He grasped the goateed chin and gave the head a slight shake before delivering a stinging slap to the cheek. It left a red imprint of fingers but the Doctor didn’t stir.

“So Doctor,” Gavrin whispered. “We meet again.”

\* \* \* \* \*

“Doctor, can you hear me?”

The voice buzzing in his ears was low, urgent and insistent.

“Doctor? Wake up.”

Wake up? Had he been asleep? He opened a bleary eye and after an inordinate amount of time managed to work out that he was looking at sticks of straw close up. It took even longer to realize that his cheek was resting on the floor. He groaned and it almost shattered his head.

“Doctor? Is that you?”

He managed an inaudible “yes”.

“Doctor, please answer.”

“It’s me,” he croaked. Rolling onto his back, he tried to swallow past a restriction. He frowned and raised a hand to probe his tender throat.

“Doctor, what happened? Are you all right?”

He pushed himself up into a sitting position and, using a wall for support, climbed unsteadily to his feet.

“Doctor!” intruded the persistent voice.

The Doctor edged closer to the door. “I’m here.” He rubbed the back of his neck. “Gavrin attacked me.”

Tamara's voice came back. "Be careful Doctor. That man seems to have taken an instant dislike to you."

The Doctor massaged his neck. "I noticed," he said wryly.

"I'm serious Doctor," Tamara replied. Offence tinged her tone. "I would almost guess that Gavrin wanted you dead."

Peering through the grate in the door, the Doctor checked the guard's reaction. He could only see an arm and lower leg of the guard beside his door, but the guard standing vigil outside of the women's cell was stoical, appearing uninterested in their conversation.

"Believe me, Tamara. If Gavrin wanted me dead, I'd be dead." He grimaced at the stiffness in his neck. "The man is a consummate fighter."

"And strategist," advised Grae. Her voice held its usual air of deliberation. "He manipulated that entire meeting and led Aramus to the decision that we were spies."

The Doctor tipped back his head to rest against the solidity of the door. "A very dangerous man, indeed," he mused.

But Grae hadn't finished. "If Gavrin stayed his hand, Doctor, it's because he wants something from you."

\* \* \* \* \*

He was being led back to the throne room, hands retied behind his back. This time the Doctor was alone and he felt the loss of Tamara's and Grae's presence as a shiver of vulnerability rippled through his body. There was comfort in the knowledge that whatever threat may lie ahead was not directly aimed at his companions. But, his hearts were beating unsteadily and he found his body's physical response puzzling. If he put a name to the emotional state he was experiencing, it would be dread. He found it unsettling that his body was reacting to a threat his mind had yet to perceive. Perhaps it was instinct.

Surprisingly, he walked in on a heated argument. His own fear was forgotten, as he tried to understand the scene before him. Gavrin was speaking but the Doctor couldn't quite make out the softly uttered words. The tone, however, was brittle, indicating a tightly reigned-in anger that held the young man's body rigid.

Whatever Gavrin had said, the effect had Aramus puffed-up like a popped kernel of corn - hot to touch and spitting oil. He admonished his subordinate. "Do not retry my patience, Gavrin, or you will find yourself back under the headman's axe."

Gavrin looked away to the floor. The reprimand drew the muscles taut along his jaw and his cheek hollowed. The Doctor wondered if the young man had bitten the inside of his mouth to avoid a retort. Gavrin's hooded gaze swept along the floor until it encountered the Doctor's brown shoes. The dark head lifted, and the Doctor braced himself as he saw oppression abate and malice burn in the brown eyes.

"Perhaps, it is the Doctor who should be facing the axe."

Aramus centered his attention on the Doctor. "You have proof, then, that he is a spy?"

"Oh, the Doctor is more than a simple spy or traitor," Gavrin advised conversationally. "His people were the sworn enemy of your forebears; responsible for seeding the decay that reduced a mighty civilization to the point of barbarism."

The Doctor felt a chill go down his spine. He locked eyes with Gavrin.

"The Doctor, you see, is a Time Lord."

Shocked, Aramus's mouth gaped. "Are you certain?"

"A Time Lord's anatomy is different to our own. They have two hearts. You can distinctly hear them beating in their chests."

Aramus signaled to a guard who reluctantly approached the Doctor. The guard was forced to relinquish his spear in order to unbutton the waistcoat.

“Tell me, Doctor, do you deny that you’re a Time Lord?” Gavrin’s tone was relaxed, confident.

The Doctor didn’t answer. He knew any explanation he gave would be purposely misconstrued. Instead, he trained his attention on some indeterminate spot on the wall as the guard pressed an intrusive ear against his chest. The guard straightened and nodded an affirmative to Aramus. Retrieving his spear, the Guard stepped away without bothering to rebutton the vest.

A proprietary smile blossomed on Aramus’s face. “A Time Lord,” he said softly. He chuckled. “I have captured a Time Lord.”

The Doctor looked away and felt the corner of his mouth pull into a half smile - it was ironic. He had hoped that these people kept a knowledgeable record of their past. He just hadn’t expected that knowledge to place him in peril. And there was indeed peril. How had Gavrin worked out that he was a Time Lord? The man probably had the TARDIS key and the interface circuit. Did he know what they were? Was that how Gavrin knew him to be a Time Lord? The Doctor noticed silence and upon looking up was drawn back into eye contact with Aramus.

“How my ancestors dreamt of exacting revenge against your kind, Time Lord. You will, of course, die.” Heavy-lidded eyes half closed. “If only continued death were mine to give,” he growled. “Then, you would experience the full extent of my people’s wrath for the crimes your kind have committed.” Aramus frowned and he sought out Gavrin. “What about the women?” he asked. “Are they also Time Lords?”

Gavrin replied, “No.”

The Doctor felt relief flood through him.

“They are just women.” Gavrin appraised the Doctor with mocking eyes. “I suppose even Time Lords get lonely.”

Ignoring the intended slur, the Doctor concentrated on the fact that Gavrin hadn’t revealed Grae’s heritage. Either, he didn’t know - which was unlikely, twin hearts being easy to detect - or, Gavrin was following his own agenda. Grae’s warning surfaced in his memory, but no longer was it himself that Gavrin needed alive. It was Grae.

Aramus’s voice interrupted his thoughts. “What of his time traveling machine?”

“We’re still looking. It probably lies beyond the settlement.”

“Humph.” Aramus was measuring the Doctor with detached interest. A knuckle was pressed against his lips. “And when you’re dead Time Lord, what then?” he mused. “Sometimes justice is all too swift. Our victories short lived and quickly forgotten.” Aramus chewed at the knuckle. “I do not want this moment forgotten,” he stated angrily.

Gavrin made a suggestion. “Perhaps the Doctor’s corpse could be preserved. The apothecary has animals and even unborn infants preserved in jars. It may be possible to preserve the body of a full grown man.”

“If not the body, then the at least the head.” Aramus swung his attention to Gavrin. “Prepare the execution and check with the apothecary if it’s possible to preserve the body.” Aramus signaled to the guard squad. “Take him away.”

\* \* \* \* \*

A guard pulled Tamara by the arm, leading her up the green corridor towards the birthing room. Neither she nor Grae had their hands tied, and Tamara found that rather insulting. Still, there were too many guards for her or Grae to try anything and there was Gavrin to consider.

Gavrin led the group. Tamara had a view of his back as they moved down the corridor. A part of her mind noted the shape of that back: broad at the shoulders and tapering down to a firm waist. He wore a short jacket that reached no further than his waist, below which he wore pants of a tight-fitting, finely woven material. The cloth clung to him, and she glimpsed the contours of a leanly muscled buttock and a nicely shaped thigh before a guard blocked her view.

It brought her back to her senses and she berated herself. This was hardly the time to be drooling over the man's physique. She looked at him again with a more critical eye. Although his jacket was tight fitting, it was slashed under the arms to allow him easy movement. He wore no sword at his hip, which she thought odd. Even Aramus had carried a ceremonial sword and the guards all wore functional ones. Gavrin's back was a little rigid but all his joints were loose. His step: measured and light, was mainly weighted over the balls of his feet. It was a fighter's walk and one that mirrored her own. She couldn't refute the Doctor's assessment. Gavrin was an experienced fighter, and that was why his next action dumbfounded her. On reaching the birthing room, he dismissed the guard, and alone ushered Grae and herself into the room. The odds were close to perfect. Tamara could have crowed. But still, a large part of her was waiting for the proverbial shoe to drop.

Gavrin had a light hold on her upper arm and Grae was walking a couple of paces in front of them. Tamara locked her hands, yanked her held arm across her body then shunted the elbow back, aiming to drive it into Gavrin's solar plexus. She never connected. Gavrin's hand cracked against her forearm and broke the lock of her hands. Her elbow was beyond the line of her body and Gavrin caught it, and with his other hand swung her forearm up behind her back. He let go of the elbow and snaked his arm around her shoulders, clamping her against his chest. Tamara grunted through her teeth. She was left with the uneasy feeling that he had expected her attack.

Grae had turned at the sound of the scuffle, but Tamara knew it had been over too quickly for her friend to offer any help. Gavrin's arm cinched tighter about her shoulders and he let go of her hand: effectively using her own body to pin her twisted arm against his chest. With his free hand, Gavrin tossed a weighted silver chain and a small item at Grae. The young Time Lord fished the TARDIS key and the temporal interface out of the air without a qualm.

"Open the door."

Grae flicked her gaze to the TARDIS and then back to Gavrin. Grae's eyes widen at the thin, shiny dagger Tamara felt pressing into her neck. With the calm resolve that Tamara admired, Grae crossed to the TARDIS and opened the door.

Inside, Gavrin showed only cursory interest in his surroundings. The TARDIS's larger interior didn't appear to faze him. Tamara was unable to detect any change in the strength of the arm holding her or in the pressure of the blade point at her neck.

"What's wrong with the lighting?" he asked impatiently.

"It's the emergency lighting," Grae replied. "The main power systems are off-line."

"Bring them on-line," Gavrin said forcefully.

As Grae hesitated to comply, Tamara felt the skin on her neck dimple as Gavrin pushed the blade point deeper.

He informed Grae, "Although the TARDIS controls won't work for me or probably this lady here, I'm guessing the Doctor has extended control to you - another Time Lord."

To Grae's credit, Tamara noted no change in her friend's demeanor following Gavrin's revelation. It brought a smile to Tamara's face that twisted into a grimace as Gavrin screwed the blade deeper.

"Don't make me test my theory," Gavrin said, a hint of sarcasm in his voice.

"I would comply," Grae replied. "But the TARDIS will not recognize me. The controls have been over-ridden."

"Over-ridden. How?"

"An external signal."

Tamara felt a tremor pass through the arm holding her.

"Coming from where?" Gavrin asked angrily.

"Underground," Grae replied quickly.

Gavrin cursed. "Can you access the signal location?"

"Not without full TARDIS control. It's shielded by a time-field."

Gavrin laughed softly. "Damn you, Doctor."

He was slowly shaking his head and Tamara felt the brush of his hair against her cheek. More importantly, he wasn't holding her as firmly. She sought Grae's eye. The young Time Lord was intently watching them both.

"The Doctor may be able to help you," said Grae.

Gavrin let out a short, hard, bark of laughter. "Like he's *helped* me before? I don't need *his* help."

It was like hitting a nerve. Anger shuddered through his body and his grip weakened. Tamara struck her heel against his shin and used her free hand to deflect the knife from her neck. As his hold loosened, she spun away from him, using the momentum of her spin to deliver a kick to his ribs that backed him up against the wall. He retained the knife.

Gavrin's recovery was instinctive and her next attack met a solid cross-armed defense. In her bones, she felt her follow-through was too slow. As her body returned to center, she was immediately forced on the defensive. Grae joined her and they fended off Gavrin's attack. He skipped out of reach, holding the knife but not using it. What Tamara would have given for a knife, or better still a gun. Then she remembered a gun wouldn't fire in the TARDIS.

Gavrin smiled, as if he knew what she was thinking. Tamara fainted to the right but he was there and a foot clouted her in the shoulder sending her spinning. He swept her feet from the front and she fell forward catching herself on hands and toes in a push-up. She used the position to spring over to the left and maneuver for a leg sweep by dropping her right elbow to the floor. The elbow became a pivot and she ran her feet in an arc along the floor. As her body turned, she saw her error. Grae was about to fell Gavrin on top of her.

Grae was flying through the air with her legs drawn tightly to her chest. She barreled into Gavrin's back and rode him down. Her weight shoved him forward into a full-bodied fall that would have slammed him against the floor if Tamara hadn't been there. The blade was angled down in front of his body. He'd stab her. Tamara's heartbeat quickened.

Tamara ran the arc hoping to move through the landing area before Gavrin's body hit. She wasn't going to make it. He was looming over her, his face a mask of horror. Light glinted off the dagger as he flicked his wrist up. He impacted her stomach and winded her. She lay there for an eternity, staring at the roundels on the TARDIS ceiling, unable to breathe.

Grae's face came into view. "Tamara, are you hurt?"

"Winded," Tamara wheezed.

"Then the blood is Gavrin's."

"What blood?"

Gavrin hadn't moved since his awkward landing. He was lying on top of her but more along her right side. She could hear him breathing heavily. Tamara edged to the left and Grae clasped her arm pulling her gently from under Gavrin's bulk. He groaned as her movements buffeted his body. When she was free, blood stained her T-shirt and jeans.

It wasn't hers.

Gavrin was lying prone on the floor. His left arm was curved around his head, face turned into the elbow. Tamara's efforts to free herself had left him spent. His breath was a ragged whisper and his eyes were closed. Tamara's attention was drawn to the seeping pool of blood spreading from his left side.

"We need to roll him over," she said to Grae.

Gavrin's right arm lay under his body. Tamara lifted his left boot and placed it over the right. She saw a grimace cross his face as the movement transferred to the muscles around the wound. She steeled herself. She was about to cause him a lot of pain.

"On three," she said to Grae who had taken hold of his shoulders.

At the count, Tamara twisted his torso as Grae pulled his shoulder back. Gavrin gave a strangled cry, his breath hitching in a sob. By design or perhaps happenstance, his left arm lay across his face when he finally rested on his back. Tamara observed the knife blade was wedged just below his rib cage.

Grae inspected the wound. "We need to move him to the Zero Room."

A weak command issued from the floor. "No, don't move me."

A little surprised, Grae and Tamara looked down at the floor. Gavrin was panting. Below the arm shielding his eyes, sweat glistened on his lower face and ran in rivulets down his neck. It pooled, delicately, in the small hollow between his collarbones. Tamara felt the dampness of his coat under her hands. The blue fabric had darkened over the expanse of his chest.

"You'll die if we don't move you," Tamara said.

"Believe me," he panted. "You'll do me...no service...by...moving me." His voice was faltering, growing weaker.

"We need to move him, *now*," Grae yelled.

With a grunt, Gavrin pushed his arm up his forehead. Opening dark eyes framed by spiky wet black lashes, he squinted against the sting of sweat. His eyes found Tamara's face. "Please don't," he whispered.

"B-but you'll die," Tamara stammered. His gaze had become so intense: boring into her eyes, delving for her soul. Her mind replayed the look of horror on his face just before he turned the blade up. "You spared me. Why?"

Gavrin sighed and closed his eyes. "How I've missed you."

"W-w-what?" Tamara stuttered.

She stared down at his closed face. His breathing was labored; it rattled and sounded preternaturally loud. He was struggling to draw air into his lungs. For some reason, she didn't want him to die feeling alone. She placed a hand against his cheek. It felt damp. A small smile painted itself across Gavrin's face. It was short lived. Gavrin's body stiffened and his breath escaped in a groan. When his body relaxed, his mouth was slack; the smile was gone.

"Gavrin?" Tamara felt tears pricking her eyes. It was ludicrous. The man had held a knife to her throat. Why would she be feeling this way towards him?

Grae felt for a pulse at his neck. "He's dead."

Tamara felt the spill of tears. She wiped her face on the sleeve of her T-shirt.

"Tamara, have you met Gavrin before?"

"What?" Tamara composed herself. "Of course not," she said, attempting to keep only a hint of annoyance in her voice.

It came out harsher than Tamara would have liked. She peeked at Grae, but the Time Lord's face had adopted that impassive distant look. On Grae, it was more an imperious British queen, than a bird of prey. The look softened - Grae's mouth relaxed and her eyes warmed to the green of a summer meadow.

She focused on Tamara. "We need to find the Doctor."

\* \* \* \* \*

The Doctor was kneeling in the dirt with his hands roped securely behind his back. Slivers of rock gouged his knees and he sensed the hovering presence of the axeman, just beyond his peripheral vision. Irritatingly, his fringe was in his eyes and the setting sun was making him squint. A guard moved kicking up dust. The Doctor found himself too close to the ground. Dust entered his nose and made it itch. His only levity came from observing Aramus sweating heavily under his court velvets.

Aramus sported an angry scowl. "You searched the birthing room?" he demanded of a guard.

The guard fidgeted, his feet stirring up more dust. "Yes my Lord; it was empty."

The Doctor sniffed and felt dust coat his throat. It tickled slightly.

"But Gavrin entered it?" The question directed to another guard who swallowed nervously before answering.

“Yes my Lord and he took inside the Time Lord’s two companions.”

“And none came out again?” prompted Aramus.

“No-one came out, my Lord,” the guard responded, more nervously this time.

Aramus growled through his teeth. He clasped his hands and slowly spun the heavy signet ring on his forefinger.

The Doctor’s eyes watered and he felt a telltale tingle in his nose. He sneezed.

Aramus’s attention was cued back to his prisoner. With a flick of his eyes, Aramus judged the sun’s descent. He nodded to someone the Doctor couldn’t see. Dirt crunched and the air stirred at the Doctor’s back. Cold metal touched the nape of his neck.

“It looks like your execution will need to go on without my adviser’s presence.”

“I can wait,” the Doctor replied drolly.

Aramus didn’t reply, but instead watched the sun’s arc grow thin. As the Doctor braced himself for a sharp blow to the neck, Aramus’s signet ring began to pulse with blue light. Staring at his hand, Aramus began to chuckle. In a jovial mood, he surveyed his surroundings and his gaze came to rest on the Doctor. The stare was calculating.

“You’re in luck Time Lord. There’s something I want you to see.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Aramus led a reduced party of the Doctor, his two flanking guards, and the apothecary into the birthing room. The TARDIS was missing; it would have been cramped otherwise. The Doctor had met the apothecary, briefly. The man hadn’t given his name or said a word, but had quietly measured the Doctor’s weight, height, and breadth, recording it all into a notebook. In that same silent manner, the apothecary now busied himself about the room. He set up a small table, on which he placed some of the medical equipment from the shelf along with a bottle and some cups from a bag he carried. He walked to the wall and tested that the hose was working.

The activity distracted the Doctor from his burning wrists where the rope had chafed the skin. The prolonged restraint had also set his shoulder muscles aching and he shrugged, trying to lessen the discomfort. The movement brought a wary glance from a guard, but all other eyes in the room were on the apothecary’s preparations.

Aramus watched the proceedings with interest but kept an expectant eye on his blue pulsing ring. The color changed to red and his manner became anticipatory. “Not long now,” he muttered. His eyes focused with keen intent on the perforated metal table.

Suddenly, a flash of bright white light swept the length of the metal table. It was bright enough to leave spots before the Doctor’s eyes, and the Doctor quickly attempted to blink the spots away. The light came again and as his eyes adjusted the Doctor noticed something had been deposited on the table. A head shape that widened into shoulders and narrowed down to feet. It reminded the Doctor of an Egyptian mummy but instead of cloth, the body was covered in thick, opaque mucilage.

The apothecary moved over to the body. He used a towel and his hands to wipe away some of the thick viscous jelly from around the lower part of the head. The Doctor observed the pinkish tone of flesh and the sharp rise of a chin. The apothecary cleaned out the mouth, then moved over to stand behind the head. There, he slid a hollowed-out stainless steel tube down into the throat. He poured a liquid out of one of his cups into the tube and then promptly removed it. The curve of the tube had lost its metallic luster and appeared greasy. With the help of a guard, the apothecary rolled the body onto its side. There were patches of smooth unblemished skin where their hands had gripped the body.

The mucilage thinned on contact with water. The delicate spray of the hose was revealing a man’s face judging from the bluish tinge to cheek and chin of potential beard. The man’s eyes were shut. His lashes were black matching his eyebrows. The apothecary was rinsing

gel from ebony hair that glistened. The Doctor recognized the face. He stifled his shout of surprise.

It was Gavrin on the table.

“A clone?” the Doctor murmured. He had no doubt the body had been cultured and sent from the time-fielded room.

Aramus heard. “You are correct, Time Lord.” Aramus turned back towards the body lying on the table. “A clone.”

Even with the confirmation, it was hard not to search the face for some small variation to the other Gavrin. There was none, although the Doctor had to admit this Gavrin was a lot more artless when compared to his ‘brother’. The clone’s face was soft, slackened by sleep into something that looked almost innocent. He was breathing softly. Without warning, the clone coughed and it turned into a gag. A frown marred his features. Instinctively turning over, he coughed again and this time vomited up fluid. His eyes had opened but recognition had not stamped his face.

The apothecary quickly wiped the clone’s mouth and rolled him onto his back again. The clone, Gavrin, blinked at the ceiling. A moment later his head was being lifted and a cup brought to his lips. With some coaxing words from the apothecary, Gavrin drank the cup’s contents and was again turned on his side. His face was one of bewilderment. The spray of warm water returned, soaking him and melting away the mucilage from his chest and turned his face sleepy. The eyes started to close then flew open as a shudder passed through his frame. Understanding darkened his features. The innocence drained away.

“Do you know who you are?” Aramus asked. He had folded his arms across his chest.

“Yes.” It was a weak whisper.

“Can you recall what happened to you?”

“Does it matter?”

Aramus moved to the head of the table. He placed a hand on Gavrin’s head and started to draw away the strands of hair that had slicked against the young man’s cheek. Gavrin tolerated the attention. The Doctor doubted he had the strength to do otherwise.

“It might,” Aramus advised.

The clone closed his eyes and compressed his lips. His throat convulsed and he swallowed. Choking, he started to cough and vomited again. Aramus wiped his mouth this time and helped roll him onto his back. The apothecary handed Aramus the cup. Gavrin refused to drink from it.

“Do you really want me to force this down your throat?” Aramus asked softly.

Gavrin stared momentarily at Aramus, and then consentingly drank from the cup.

“That’s better,” Aramus chided. “You’ve become very reckless lately. Your last rebirth was less than six months ago.”

“How many clones have there been?” asked the Doctor. He wasn’t sure if he’d get an answer or a sharp prod in the back from the guard.

Aramus looked over at him. “It’s difficult to say, the life spans vary.” Aramus signaled to the guard who helped roll Gavrin onto his side. “I’ve had three in my reign, none of which reached middle age.” He said the last with a scowl at the clone. “However, my grandfather told me that when he was a boy, Gavrin was an old man. It was quite a shock to everyone when he died and returned young like this.”

Aramus collected a towel. He picked up Gavrin’s wrist; dried the hand, then the forearm progressing up to the shoulder. He ran a hand over the relaxed biceps. “He has beautiful skin when he’s born. Flawless.”

“Who was he?”

“Why Doctor, haven’t you recognized the name.” Aramus caught his hand in Gavrin’s hair; gave the man’s head a gentle shake. “This is Gavrin Elhalland, of House Elhalland.”

The Doctor gasped.

“So you recognize the name.”

“Yes.”

“Your people betrayed the Elhalland. Sacrificed them to win the war.”

The Doctor shook his head. “You’re lying.”

“Why would I lie?”

“The Elhalland relocated to another galaxy after the war.”

“No they didn’t,” Aramus said softly. “Gavrin can tell you what happened to his people.”

Aramus paused, a smile curling on the sides of his mouth. “He witnessed their fate.”

There was truth in the words? The Doctor’s mind twitched. What was the fate of the Elhalland? Why had they never been found? He had to find out.

“What happened to the Elhalland?” he asked, hesitant. He was afraid to know the answer.

“They were hunted down and slaughtered. All except one.”

The Doctor’s attention was drawn to the man on the table. He was lying on his side, knees slightly drawn up. His damp skin glowed pale and unblemished. He was exhausted and falling asleep, but his eyes alighted briefly on the Doctor. “You avoided your execution, Doctor.”

The Doctor was startled. “You remember me?”

Aramus look puzzled. “Why shouldn’t he remember you?”

“Because this clone hasn’t met me before. It shouldn’t know me, or you.”

“Gavrin is Gavrin.” Aramus’s confusion was deepening.

The Doctor swallowed. “Does he recall the previous lives and deaths of all the clones?”

“It fades,” Aramus advised. “We give him sleeping draughts to head off the nightmares during the first couple of weeks.”

The Doctor studied the sleeping form on the table. He was appalled at the cruelty visited upon the man. It was sustention cloning. Cloning from a suspended progenitor that retained its awareness. The progenitor sensed and learned through the clone. As you seeded from the progenitor, a growing racial memory was incorporated into each successive clone.

“My greatest regret is that we no longer have access to the cloning process,” Aramus said. He placed a hand on Gavrin’s shoulder. It was almost fatherly, the Doctor noted. He looked up at the Doctor. “If we could, Time Lord, then you would be partaking in Gavrin’s fate.”

A weak chuckle issued from the table. “If you have the Doctor, you have access.”

The TARDIS was materializing in the birthing room. *Great timing*, thought the Doctor. Grae’s timing couldn’t have been worse.

“Threaten the Doctor and they won’t leave,” Gavrin whispered.

Aramus had to peel his eyes off the flashing blue police box before Gavrin’s warning penetrated. “Do it,” he yelled at the guards.

A guard reacted. From behind, he cupped the Doctor’s chin and forced his head back. The Doctor felt the strain arching through his neck as his throat was exposed. Hard, sharp, coldness touched his larynx.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Oh, bloody typical*, thought Tamara. “What do we do?” Tamara expressed verbally.

She didn’t quite understand what she was seeing. Lying on the perforated table was a man’s naked body. She could see his muscled back, buttocks and feet. His skin was an alabaster monotone, no scars, tan lines or bruises: a man with perfect skin. The hair on his head was dark. He wasn’t moving. Apart from the hair, he could have been a carved statue. Maybe it wasn’t a man at all but some sort of effigy.

The Doctor, however, was clearly in trouble. He swallowed against the blade at his throat. Aramus was waving and gesticulating at the TARDIS. He pointed to the Doctor and the

guard yanked the Doctor's chin up. It brought the rings of his windpipe into relief against his skin.

"They mean business," Grae advised.

Tamara sighed. "We stay and surrender then."

Grae placed her hand on the door control and pulled the lever. "I will surrender," she said. "Tamara, listen. Go and hide in the TARDIS. Find a good spot where they won't find you."

Tamara glanced at the Doctor's stressed bodyline. "You're taking a gamble," she said wearily.

"If we keep delaying, they may kill the Doctor," Grae said. She was walking towards the doors. "Aramus will now have me and the TARDIS as well as the Doctor. Hopefully, that will be enough for now."

"Hopefully," Tamara repeated quietly.

Grae smiled from the door. "Go, Tamara."

Tamara wondered if she had enough time to fetch her knives from her room. She decided against it- if the guards were fast enough and lucky enough they could trap her in the corridor.

No, she would head towards the Cloisters. There was a utility room on the way that might yield something useful.

\* \* \* \* \*

"We've been here before, Doctor."

The Doctor opened his eyes, but left his head tilted back against the wall. His wrists still burned, but the rope had been removed when he and Grae were put in the cell. She had filled him in on Gavrin's death in the TARDIS and he had told her of the clone's rebirth.

He stared at the ceiling. "In our future, but the planet's past."

"In Gavrin's past," she said.

They were sitting next to each other on the floor. He could feel her watching him.

"He thinks you're responsible for the signal that brought us here."

"I think he's right."

Grae shifted. She sat side-on, trying to see his face better. He shut his eyes.

"You set the time-field."

"Yes."

"Why?"

The Doctor tipped his head forward and hugged his knees to his chest. "To prevent sustention of a clone when the progenitor seed material was no longer viable."

"But the progenitor would be viable for thousands of years."

"Yes, I know." He rested his forehead against his knees.

Grae became quiet. The growing silence gnawed on the Doctor's nerves. He heard her draw breath.

"It has been thousands of years since the field was set," she concluded.

"Yes."

"You didn't return?"

"No."

"The signal..." Grae began hesitantly.

"A failsafe," he interrupted. "Set to activate as a last resort."

He felt some relief. She hadn't asked *why* he had not returned. His mind had thrown up an ugly answer to that question.

"Is the progenitor nearing extinction?" she asked.

"I expect that's why Gavrin has become so reckless of late. He senses an end."

Grae went quiet again. "His hatred of you is founded on your not returning earlier?"

The Doctor turned his head to look up at her from the corner of his eye. "That, and the fact I locked everyone, including *him*, out of that room."

Her eyes became troubled. "He... he wants to commit suicide?"

"Against the alternative, of being the perpetual property of some petty dictator," the Doctor began, his voice low and soft. Then, finally, "Yes."

He watched her frown.

"Could he not have attained ascendancy over the society?"

"Perhaps, for short periods, but he's vulnerable when he's born." The Doctor settled his back against the wall. "Anyone with a bit of ambition could exploit that weakness and subjugate him."

"His purpose on entering the TARDIS was to destroy the progenitor?"

"It's still his purpose. He wants it over - *now*." The Doctor picked at some straw on the floor.

"But why would Aramus allow Gavrin access to the progenitor if he intends to destroy it?"

"I doubt Aramus truly understands what's in that room. He has only a rudimentary comprehension of cloning, probably stemming from written sources and what Gavrin may have told him about the process."

Grae nodded. She was chewing on some straw. "What of the ohm particle contamination? Was that done to protect Gavrin?"

The Doctor shifted against the wall. "It seems excessive," he admitted. He rolled a piece of straw between thumb and forefinger. "Perhaps, if the society was advanced enough to undermine the time-field, I may have felt the contamination was necessary." The excuse sounded weak in his ears.

Grae took the straw out of her mouth and began to fidget.

"I know that you have to inform the High Council of the ohm particle contamination, Grae," the Doctor said, a hint of understanding in his voice.

Grae's face reddened. "Following the judgment, the sentence would be suspended pending retrieval of the information. You would be free until the TARDIS was recalled."

The Doctor laughed softly. "I think we need to solve our current problems, before worrying about the ones coming up next." The Doctor paused, then drew in a sharp breath. "Gavrin needs to be freed."

"We can't reverse the cloning process," Grae advised. "If we free him, there'll be two of them, provided the progenitor can be restored."

The Doctor felt guilt course through him. Restoration of the progenitor would have been much easier a thousand or so years ago, when the deterioration would have been less. "And if the progenitor can't be restored but dies before the two of them are consciously separated, the shock will kill the clone. We could kill them both!" he said bitterly.

"First things first, Doctor," Grae said, wisely.

He caught himself breaking into a smile - it was a term he often used with her.

Grae smiled back. "We need entry to the room where the progenitor is kept. Gavrin said you could provide the access."

"Yes he did." The Doctor chewed on his bottom lip as he stared at the straw-littered floor. "Grae, you saw the scan of the time-field's oscillation pattern. Can you recall it?"

"There was no recognizable pattern to it," Grae responded.

The Doctor cleared an area of straw and started to break some of the long sticks into smaller pieces. "But can you reconstruct the sequence you observed?"

She picked up a handful of the straw pieces and set the sticks into groups of various sizes and orientations. When she was finished, she stood up and looked down on her creation. Beside her stood the Doctor, an arm clasped loosely across his waist that supported the other arm raised to his face. He had pushed his thumbnail between his teeth.

“The pattern’s not any alien syntax I recognize.” Grae walked around the cleared spot on the floor. “Hey, maybe it Faroseen?” she said excitedly.

“I hope not,” said the Doctor. “I set this, remember, and at this point in time I’m not familiar with the Faroseen language.”

“Do you recognize it?” she asked.

He shook his head. But then he wouldn’t want something that was easily recognizable. The time-field was like a door and this was the lock. He’d want a unique lock, something no one else would think of. Where had he been that was remote and might yield something rare? *E-space*, he thought, *I’d choose something from E-space*.

A soft query in a woman’s voice floated on the air. “Doctor?”

He blinked, sucked in a hiccup of air. Grae was looking at him worriedly.

“Doctor, are you all right?”

“Yes.” He breathed in a shaky lung-full of air. “Just thinking of someone I knew.” The Doctor stopped talking and stared at the pattern on the floor.

“Doctor?”

He raised a hand but didn’t answer. Crouching beside the pattern, he trailed a finger from straw group to straw group. From the pile of leftover pieces, he started to add another group and then another. He stood up, dusting his hands on his pants.

“Pentameric sequence with a non-sequential consecutive modifier based on the formula for Lsamier distribution.”

“Lsamier distribution?” asked Grae.

“A chaotic distribution.”

“Can you forecast the sequence?”

The Doctor nodded.

\* \* \* \* \*

Gavrin was back in navy. In the confines of the TARDIS’s control room, he slumped against the wall near the main doors. It had been two days since the Doctor last saw him and judging from the dark smudges under his eyes, Gavrin had not been resting comfortably.

On entering the TARDIS, the Doctor quietly warned. “If Aramus gains entry to the sustention room, he and his descendants can clone you indefinitely.”

Gavrin kept his own voice pitched low. “Perhaps, but I suspect you are a bigger prize.”

“He won’t accept me in your place, Gavrin.”

The clone frowned and looked away. A muscle tightened along his cheek.

The Doctor pressed further. “I sealed you in that room to protect you.”

The dark circles beneath Gavrin’s eyes made his stare more ardent. It smoldered. “So, you’ve worked it out. That was seven thousand years ago, Doctor,” Gavrin said softly. “You never came back. You betrayed me, like your kind betrayed my people.”

Gavrin pushed himself off the wall; Aramus had started to notice the exchange. The King eyed them suspiciously.

“You say my ring can get us into the room?” Aramus said.

“Yes it’s coded for the door.” Gavrin went to stand beside Grae. “And the Doctor’s companion can take us there.”

Grae held momentary eye contact with the Doctor and then set the coordinates for the underground chamber.

“The time field won’t allow you to access to the door,” she said matter-of-factly.

As the TARDIS materialized, Aramus cried out, “What is she talking about?”

Gavrin remained unperturbed. “The time field is in phase shift. When it is in sync with our own time, the barrier will no longer exist and we’ll have access.” He paused and looked at the Doctor. “The Doctor can predict when that will be.”

Aramus turned and looked at the Doctor impatiently. "When?" Aramus asked, testily. The Doctor kept silent.

Aramus searched the Doctor's eyes, then raised a hand. "Bring the girl here."

"All right, all right," said the Doctor. "A three second window will appear in seven minutes; in thirteen minutes a ten minute window will appear. A five second window in twenty-four minutes. A thirty-two minute window--"

"The ten minute window should suffice," interrupted Gavrin. His voice sounded shockingly normal.

\* \* \* \* \*

Gavrin fitted Aramus's ring into the circular indent in the door. It slid open silently with a soft expulsion of air that smelt faintly metallic. There was a blue hue to the subdued lighting in the room and it was quiet. Very quiet.

Gavrin entered and started to cross the room, but the rest of the party stopped just inside the door. There were two large sarcophagus-like cases: partly metallic and partly clear, dominating the room. The further case was empty but the nearer one contained an amber fluid with glimpses of something brownish-blue and tendinous floating inside. Each sarcophagus was hooked to a squat bank of monitors by leech-like black cords. A chair sat before the nearest monitor. Gavrin picked it up and hammered it into the monitor bank. The sound of shattering plastic and screeching metal was deafening after the hushed overtone of the room. With a stride, Gavrin crossed to the sarcophagus containing his progenitor. His face resolved into a mask of horror. He swung the chair and the lid fractured: fell inwards into the tank slopping fluid over the sides.

Aramus found his voice. "Gavrin stop!"

The clone ignored him: continued its hell-bent path of destruction.

"Stop him!" Aramus yelled at the guards.

Gavrin fended off the first guard. A second and a third fell by the wayside. From behind, an arm snaked around his neck, and Gavrin dealt the owner a sharp blow to the ribs. The clone possessed all of Gavrin's fighting skills, but the Doctor observed a lack of stamina and speed. Two days just wasn't enough time for Gavrin's muscles to build up strength. The guards began to find holds he couldn't break. Under a straining weight of bodies, Gavrin was forced to his knees.

Aramus stalked over to the clone and with a closed fist struck him across the face. One of Aramus's rings caught Gavrin's mouth, tearing the soft flesh. Blood welled from the cut down the side of his chin.

"What are you doing?" Aramus screamed.

Gavrin eyed him belligerently. "You don't need me any more," he said with cold determination. "The Doctor can serve you now."

Aramus stepped closer. Gavrin braced himself for another blow, but the King sought his chin. He tipped it up, so that their eyes met. "And what makes you think I have any interest in the Doctor, Gavrin?"

The clone's eyes flicked to the Doctor and back again. There was uncertainty in them. "He is the greatest enemy of your people." He paused, and then spoke again with some more desperation. "Your greatest enemy!"

"You may remember that war, Gavrin. I do not."

An alarm sent up a keening wail from the damaged monitor. Gavrin tried to free his chin but Aramus held on.

"It doesn't matter, now." Gavrin's dark eyes were glaring with anger. "The original is dying, and when it does, I too will die. It is finished."

Aramus swung his head to the apothecary. "Is this true?"

The man shrugged, stammering. "I-I don't know my Lord."

The King sought out the Doctor. "Is it true?"

The Doctor eyed the kneeling clone with sadness. "Yes, it's true."

"Then fix it, Time Lord. Save the original."

"I can not. The damage is too extensive."

"The second chamber. Can it save the original?"

"No."

"But this Gavrin can be put into the second chamber and cloned, like you would have been cloned?"

"No," Gavrin whispered.

Aramus turned back to the clone. When he spoke, his tone was soft. "I will not be without you, Gavrin." His fingers tightened on Gavrin's chin. "And when you are reborn and can stand, I will personally take the whip to your back." Aramus' voice exploded. "You will not defy me!"

Aramus released the clone, turned and addressed the apothecary. "Prepare him for the second chamber."

"No!" said the Doctor.

"Concerned for him are you, Doctor?" Aramus asked.

"Aramus, please, let him be," the Doctor pleaded.

Aramus narrowed his eyes. "Would you take his place, Time Lord?"

The Doctor swallowed. Gavrin had borne the mistakes of his people for long enough. "Yes," he said, closing his eyes, not wanting to see Grae's expression, Gavrin's or anyone else's.

Aramus's voice sounded in the room. "I actually believe you." There was a pause. "But I'm sure you realize, I'm not prepared to lose him." Aramus nodded to the apothecary. "Proceed." The blare of the alarm was increasing in tempo.

"Gavrin, I'm sorry." Even to the Doctor's own ears, the apology sounded trite.

The apothecary turned his attention to the kneeling Gavrin. "Strip him," he said to the guards.

Their weight bore him to the floor. "No." Gavrin struggled and the hands restraining him turned keener. One of the guards contended with the delicate task of laces and ties but realized there was no need. He produced a knife and began to slice Gavrin's clothing away. Another guard pulled on his left boot. It finally gave. "No," the clone repeated.

Aramus looked on with indifference. "How long will it take?"

"Difficult to say," the apothecary replied. "All we know is that once he's put naked in the chamber, he will be reborn in the birthing room."

Aramus looked around himself in irritation. He ground his teeth: the alarm had become a nerve jarring cacophony.

\* \* \* \* \*

Gavrin put up a fight until one of the guards clouted him behind the ear. His eyes closed and his unblemished body went limp. They lifted him and laid him in the tank.

The Doctor strained against his bonds and his guards. But it was a useless, futile effort. He couldn't help Gavrin. Grae was also being restrained.

A cord extended from the inside of the tank and attached to Gavrin's neck. His eyes opened and his body jerked once. His mouth opened, and his chest trembled. He seemed to be gasping for air. The tank started to fill with amber fluid, and as it filled the Doctor noticed that Gavrin's chest seemed to no longer move. Gavrin's eyes stayed open.

The alarm had become a flat-line monotonic scream. It made the Doctor's ears vibrate and had finally ruptured Aramus's temper. He picked up the chair and repeatedly slammed it into the section of smashed monitor where the noise originated. The wail wound down into an

electronic gurgle that shuddered into silence. Chest heaving from his exertions, Aramus stepped back and fetched up against the side of the damaged tank. He was breathing heavily; weight supported by a hand on the tank's rim. In the other hand, he still held the chair.

Aramus was turning his head to speak to the apothecary when the Doctor observed a flash of brownish-blue movement in the tank near the King's hand. Aramus's torso started to overbalance towards the tank as if his hand had slipped off the rim. He let go the chair but was unable to catch himself. His upper body tipped into the tank as his feet swung up from the floor. He landed on his back, against a sloping panel of lid. Off balance, he slid down the panel into the fluid. Most of his body was in the tank except for his lower legs, hanging over the edge.

Through the clear sections in the side of the tank, the Doctor saw the amber fluid slosh and the remains of the progenitor waver under Aramus's bulk. The king appeared tangled with the original Gavrin's remains. A withered arm devoid of skin and most of the flesh: just corded, white sinew and bone, laying about Aramus's neck. The King's booted legs began to thrash the air.

Guards went forward to assist their liege but froze as the thing in the tank partially surfaced. Aramus released a scream that was cut off as his head was pushed back under the surface. Barely visceral, there was no doubt that the thing in the tank was animated - alive. One of the Doctor's guards vomited. Those closest to the sarcophagus gave ground to the nightmare apparition. Aramus's body was flailing, stirring the amber fluid to froth.

The apothecary's face was slack with terror. His mouth was moist and moving but no sound emerged. He spied the door and fled. For a moment no one moved, until finally discipline broke. No one was left to give orders. One of Grae's guards ran for the door, which started the mass exodus.

Grae moved to the Doctor and began to pull at the rope binding his hands.

"We don't have time for that," the Doctor said pulling away from her. He was trotting toward the door. "We need to deactivate the signal and get back to the TARDIS."

"I expect the TARDIS will be full of guards," Grae warned. She found the signal generator and turned it off. She looked at the tank. "What of Aramus? Shouldn't we check to see if he is alive, along with the progenitor?"

"We can't save the progenitor, but Gavrin *is* alive, Grae. He must be our first priority." The Doctor peered out into the underground chamber. "Grae, seal the door. I don't want anyone in here."

\* \* \* \* \*

Grae was wrong. The TARDIS wasn't overcrowded with guards, because Tamara had locked the door.

"Come on, Tamara, look at the view screen and let us in," the Doctor said. He turned around to spot a couple of surly looking guards with drawn swords advancing towards the TARDIS. "Now might be a good time to free my hands, Grae."

She was jiggling the door.

"Grae, that won't do any good," he called over his shoulder. "Tamara won't hear it. Can you...huh-" He found himself being choked by his shirt as Grae pulled him backwards into the TARDIS.

"Door," she called to Tamara who had run into the room.

Tamara pushed the lever. "Figured you'd be coming back when the lights came on. I've been chasing guards."

The Doctor looked bewildered. "But how...," he began.

Grae swung the TARDIS key-chain from her finger. "Lifted it off the guard." She had crossed quickly to the controls. "Where are we going?"

"Back to the birthing room," the Doctor replied.

Grae entered the co-ordinates and Tamara freed the Doctor. Even as the Doctor was thanking Tamara, he was pushing her towards the door. When the TARDIS materialized, he shoved her out with the instruction to lie on the table. Her look was perplexed but she was wriggling onto the table as he started to pull his head back inside.

"Oh Doctor," she yelled. "I've got six guards locked up in there, so be careful what doors you open."

He hurried back to the console. "Be on the lookout for guards. Tamara's been stashing them away."

Grae ignored the comment. "The clone can't be sent through if something occupies the table?"

The Doctor was preoccupied and took a couple of seconds to reply. "It may delay the cloning."

"The growth perhaps, but not the removal of seeding material." He felt her frown over his shoulder before she continued. "If that's already occurred it may be impossible to free Gavrin without the equipment growing a replacement." She hadn't moved from his shoulder and he could feel her frown deepening. "What *are* you doing?"

"I'm going to do an inverted materialization."

"You're going to *what*?" she exclaimed.

"We need to isolate the sustention chamber from space/time, so that Gavrin can be freed without tripping that sub-routine you just mentioned."

"But an inverted materialization could permanently lock us out of space/time."

"No, that hardly ever happens." Grae wasn't sure if she heard doubt in his voice. Perhaps she imagined it.

Grae's mouth was close to his ear. Her murmur traveled. "Only because inverted materializations are hardly ever performed." He could tell, however, by the way she pored over his calculations that her interest was piqued. "You'll use the Zero Room?"

"It already exists in isolation. We'll just materialize the Zero Room around Gavrin's chamber and cut the connection to space/time. Like so." He pressed a button and held his breath. A materialization sounded *within* the TARDIS. He smiled and expelled his breath. So did Grae.

\* \* \* \* \*

Tamara stood next to the sustention chamber in the Zero Room. Inside, the liquid had drained and the cord had disconnected from Gavrin's neck. His eyes were closed and he looked to be sleeping peacefully. The amber fluid clung to his skin like syrup. Tamara suddenly noticed she was staring at a naked man and blushed. She concentrated on his face. It was handsome but marred by dark circles under his eyes and his lip was cut. Grae had thoughtfully wiped his face clean of the syrup before she and the Doctor had gone back to the time-fielded room. It effectively left her alone, to deal with Gavrin when he woke up.

He stirred - a flutter of eye movement behind bruised lids followed by a shuddered intake of breath. His eyes opened and slid to one side and then the other before resting on her. He lay there, breathing softly through his mouth and blinking those eyes at her. She felt like looking away, but couldn't afford to let her guard down. She decided to try conversation.

"Can you talk?"

He waited a few seconds before answering. "Yes." He sounded a little hoarse and she thought he could probably use a glass of water.

"Not planning on doing anything foolish, are you?"

He smiled. "Foolish?"

"Like fighting? You're really in no condition to be fighting me."

His smile widened. "No fighting."

She cleared her throat. "Aramus is dead."

“Good.”

“Unfortunately, the progenitor could not be saved.”

Gavrin nodded, face unreadable.

“There are no other clones of you. You’re it, so to speak.”

“I’m it,” he repeated numbly.

“You’re free Gavrin,” she said gently. “The Doctor will take you where ever you want to go.”

His face was unreadable, but he shut his eyes and lay very still for a number of minutes. Tamara wondered if he was falling asleep, but his eyes opened.

“Can I sit up?”

“If you behave yourself.”

He placed a hand on the edge of the tank and used the other hand to slowly lever himself up. He bent a leg and rested his arm across its knee. His nakedness didn’t seem to bother him. It bothered her. His face seemed too close to hers and Tamara quickly straightened up.

He watched her move away and grinned. “I’d like to stand up, but I might need help getting out of here.”

She nodded and brought a chair closer to the chamber. He crouched, extending a leg over the edge of the tank onto the chair. He was a little unsteady and he leaned on her getting down to the floor. He stood beside her with an arm around her shoulders. She had her arms looped around his chest.

“That’s better,” he said.

She looked up at him. His face was close to hers again. He smiled.

Tamara removed a syrupy hand from his chest. “I think you need a shower.”

He laughed. It was a warm sound that rolled over her. “Yes, I suppose I do.”

\* \* \* \* \*

The Doctor was setting up the power burst to activate the Kronton crystals and generate the temporary time-loop. Grae was studying how he balanced the harmonics. They were both being watched by Gavrin who in turn was being observed by Tamara.

The man still puzzled her. Since waking, his manner toward the Doctor had been polite but awkward. Tamara guessed Gavrin’s long-held hatred sat uncomfortably beside his gratefulness. He was finally free.

Gavrin was dressed in 15<sup>th</sup> century Florentine garb. His shirt contained a thin scallop of lace at collar and cuff, and his coat tabs were fur. He had the legs for hose, Tamara decided, and his hat made him look rakish. But he had never been to earth before, let alone 15<sup>th</sup> century Italy. So, why had he chosen it as his destination - the Medicis were *her* passion? It was disturbingly fishy.

“Gavrin?” He turned around to look at her with those dark eyes. “You never did say why you chose 15<sup>th</sup> century Florence?” she said

“No?” he queried, with an innocent arch of his eyebrows.

“No,” she replied.

A burst of bright light indicated generation of the time-loop. Grae gave an appreciative whistle.

“Next stop, Florence,” the Doctor said cheerfully. He keyed in coordinates with the regard a musician may hold for a treasured instrument. Tamara had been regaled a number of times on how well the TARDIS had handled the inverted materialization.

“Gavrin?” Tamara pushed.

The TARDIS was materializing.

“Yes.”

Tamara groaned and looked to the ceiling. “Why 15<sup>th</sup> century Florence?”

“Oh that.” But he became distracted with saying goodbye to the Doctor and Grae. He gave her a courteous goodbye.

“Why here Gavrin?”

He smiled at her. “I’m meeting someone.”

Tamara gawked. “Meeting someone?” She followed him to the door. With a parting wave, to the Doctor, Grae and herself: he stepped out into the sunshine. “Who?” she demanded of his retreating back. There was a decided jaunt in his step.

His laughter drifted back to her. “My wife, Tamara. I’m meeting my wife.”