

The Heart of the Navigator

by

neaf

Crisscolfer || AU || PG-13

Chris lives alone in his home town of Clovis, California, where he spends his nights staring at the stars - until the night a blue box appears in his back yard.

If there's one thing Chris knows when he meets the Doctor, it's that nothing will ever be the same again.

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PART ONE

One of a Kind

Chris stared up at the sky, watching the stars glitter silently in the web of the Milky Way. The night was clear, too clear, and moonless. A chill pressed in around him, but he remained unmoving in the frosty evening air with only a burner heater for warmth. Some nights, he just needed to see the stars.

The quiet gave way to the rattle and whistle of a whirring noise, repeating itself, and in the space beyond his back porch a blue box materialized slowly in throbbing, fading lights.

Chris's eyes grew wide as he watched, dumbfounded and shivering. *Police Public Call Box*, he read the sign across the top and narrowed his eyes. "What on *earth*?"

The door swung open violently, caught by a fast arm shooting out to stop it. The arm was followed by a body, tipping forward at an awkward angle. The man who emerged glanced around quickly, taking in his surroundings before his gaze landed on Chris and his face lit up in a broad grin, eyes flashing with excitement.

Chris's mouth fell open.

"Earth, is it?" The man asked, and Chris couldn't help but notice how bright that smile was, like everything around the man gave off waves of warmth. His hair was dark and messy, curls falling every which way, but his face was kind and beautiful in a way Chris hadn't seen before.

"Y- yes," he answered at last, teeth chattering. "Are you lost?"

The man's grin grew wider. "What an amazing question."

"Sorry?"

"Well." He stepped out of the blue box at last, and Chris could see the long lines of his dark clothes, cut with grey and black, and a bright red and white scarf wound around his neck. He was wearing bright red shoes. "In my experience, when people see a blue box appear out of nowhere and someone steps out, the first response is ... well: *aaargh*!" He waved his hands dramatically and awkwardly, and Chris suppressed a laugh at the ridiculous expression on his face.

"I just figured I was dreaming," Chris shrugged.

The man's brow shot up, but his smile didn't fade. "I look like something that came out of your head? That's good, I like that." The man nodded, almost as if he was filing it away for future reference. "But you're not in the least bit surprised; that's interesting. You're unflappable, aren't you? Can't be flapped. Well," he said, watching Chris as he moved closer, eyeing the blue box behind him, "I like that, too."

"It takes a lot," Chris said softly, still staring at the Police Box.

The man grinned again. "Then it's a good thing I have plenty," he said simply. "I'm the Doctor."

"Chris," he replied, before his eyes narrowed again. "Just 'the Doctor'?"

"Just 'the Doctor'." The man inclined his head, turning and sliding back into the doorway of the box.

"Wh- why," Chris began confusedly as he glanced between the Doctor and the giant blue contraption. "You have a British Police Box. But you *sound* American?"

The Doctor shrugged. "I'm trying something new."

Moving around the heater for a better view, Chris watched him carefully. Something in his chest was tightening, pulling him forward. Something was so familiar about this and he had no idea why. There was a crazy man in his back yard in a blue box, and it all felt ... normal. Right.

The Doctor held out a hand, and there was that grin again, so bright it was almost blinding. His eyes shone somehow, even in the dim light. "Come on. What are you waiting for?"

Chris smiled to himself, and felt his heartbeat quicken. His body moved without him, knew what to do, and he took the Doctor's hand before he even realized he had.

Inside the blue box was a cavern of bright lights and strange whirring instruments and sounds. He peered around the giant room in fascination as the door drifted shut behind him. None of it was strange, or out of place. None of it was unsettling, like he knew it should have been. It wasn't *something*, though, something it was supposed to be. He couldn't put his finger on what.

"Excellent!" The Doctor shouted and climbed up to the panels, darting back and forth like an excited child.

"What... this isn't..." Chris tried to find the words he was looking for. "It's not-"

"New," the Doctor called back to him. "It's not a surprise," he said with a wink. "Because it's not *new*."

"But it *is* new," Chris swallowed.

"To some people," the Doctor said. "Not to you."

It seemed to be making less and less sense by the second. "Why me?"

"Oh," the Doctor stopped his frantic pacing movements and rushed back down to him, hands coming up to cup Chris's face. "Oh, oh, I thought you knew. But you don't, do you?" The fingers were blissfully warm on his skin, and those eyes stared into him, wide and stunned and beautiful in the neon lights. "You don't know who you are? What you are?"

"I'm nobody," Chris uttered quietly, hands pressed to his chest where his breath had caught.

"Okay, that's ridiculous." The Doctor wheeled around as he spoke, racing away again and playing with various gadgets on the console. "Everybody's somebody, and everybody's special, but not everybody that's somebody," he skittered down the stairs and stopped absurdly close to Chris again with a broad smile, "is special like you."

"I feel like I just walked into *Sesame Street*," Chris deadpanned, trying to ignore the way his heart stuttered.

"You, Christopher," he said slowly, "are one of a kind. Literally, in fact."

"One of *what* kind?"

"You'll find out soon enough." The Doctor flipped a switch dramatically and swung his body around, arms wide like a plane on a diagonal spiral. "And awaaaaaaay we go!"

"Away where?"

"Everywhere," the Doctor said, bouncing like a puppy. "*Anywhere*. The universe? Is yours. I'm giving it to you, right now."

Chris wet his lips absently and glanced around. "How is this real? I thought you were a dream," he tried to slow his breathing down. "I thought I'd just ... I thought I'd gotten so lonely, I'd imagined you."

The Doctor glanced at him with huge, sad eyes - and Chris stopped dead. The expression was too real, as if the Doctor's heart were breaking, and Chris knew somehow - he *knew* - that those eyes should never look so sad, but still they had ... so many times before.

In a flash the expression was gone, and he was the bright-eyed Doctor again. Chris wondered if he'd imagined that, too.

"You dreamed me here, that much is true," the Doctor said as he inclined his head with a grin. "But I am absolutely, completely and utterly, one hundred percent real. And you know that. In the bones of you, you *know* it."

"I dreamed you here?" Chris asked, confused.

"You did, and that-" The Doctor waved a finger, his own intrigue showing in his expression, "-that's something new entirely, that's something - special all on its own."

"It doesn't happen often?" Chris asked, trying to fight back tears as the reality of the world beneath his feet finally sunk in. "People dream of you. People you've never met dream you'll come and you just - show up?"

"No, it's never happened before," the Doctor said, glancing up at the ceiling as he thought about it. He looked back over to Chris with a fond smile, eyes bright and alive with a strange kind of magic. "But like I said:

"Not everybody is special like you."

PART TWO

Dark Moon

“So the question is...”

Chris stirred from his trance, staring at the blinking consoles of the center panel as they whirled and thumped out their own alien song, and looked to the Doctor.

“What do you want to see?” the Doctor spread his hands, face alight with barely disguised excitement. “I can show you anything. We can go *anywhere*.”

Chris studied him carefully.

“What do you want?” The Doctor bounced with a clatter across the metal plated floor, his tone growing slightly more serious. “Is what I’m asking.”

“Why?” Chris asked.

The Doctor smiled at him. It was barely a smile, but somehow it was still stunning, and knowing, and completely genuine. “Because you want so much more than this... *provincial* life.”

Chris laughed. “Are you seriously quoting Disney? That’s *Beauty and the Beast*.”

The Doctor fidgeted with his coat for a moment, “No, I mean. I could - show you the world. Shining,” he waved a hand. “Shimmering. Splendid.”

Chris quirked an eyebrow. “That’s *Aladdin*.”

“Of course it is! Awesome movie, I always wanted a magic carpet - the point is,” the Doctor shrugged. “You gotta tell me. What do you want?”

“I don’t know,” Chris said softly, gaze falling to the panels at his feet. His fingers worried at the ring on his left hand, spinning it over and over.

The Doctor squinted at him for a moment. “Yes, you do. You’ve always known.”

Chris stilled. Here was the universe, laid out in front of him, and for the millions of things he'd always imagined he could do in a moment like this, now he couldn't think of a single one. "I honestly don't," he murmured, feeling the heat rise in his cheeks.

"You do," the Doctor countered again, moving fluidly around him and placing both hands on his shoulders. They walked together in stunted steps with Chris moving backwards, eyes wide and unsure as the Doctor led him in strange circles around the console. "You've always known, deep inside, there's something you always wanted more than *anything* - it's the reason you dream what you dream, it's the reason you were on that porch tonight, sometimes it's *everything* in your head. What do you want? What do you *want*?"

"The stars!" Chris blurted, exasperated and unable to find another answer.

The Doctor rocked back on his heels, letting go. "Ahh," he said softly, seeming almost impressed.

Chris blinked, stunned at the force in his own voice and the words that had come out of him.

With a spring in his step the Doctor flew back over to the center column and rolled his hips along the console, flipping switches and pulling levers as he swung around. "The stars!" he announced grandly, with one last tug of a hanging cord. "The stars it is."

They both stumbled as the entire room shook and trembled around them, grinding and ringing out that same whooshing noise Chris had heard from his front porch. Just as he regained his balance, Chris jolted again and staggered when they came to an abrupt halt.

Clinging to a railing to keep himself upright, he glanced around hesitantly to make sure they'd stopped completely. "Are you sure you know how to fly this thing?"

"Of course I know how to fly her, it's a TARDIS, it's *my*," he stroked the console, "TARDIS."

"TARDIS?"

"Time and Relative Dimension in Space," the Doctor explained quickly, distracted by blinking lights on his monitor.

"*Time*?" Chris glanced around, wandering down the steps slowly as he tried to understand. "This is a time machine, too?"

"Now you're getting it. Didn't I mention that part? We do time, here. And space." He turned his attention back to Chris and winked. "And stars."

Chris swallowed, still trying to process everything going on around him. His expression clouded over, and he pointed a finger gently at the console. "And that crashing noise and the shaking, that was meant to happen?"

"Okay, yeah, it was a rough landing," the Doctor admitted. "But it's worth it, I promise. And I don't break promises," he wandered down the stairs and met Chris's eyes. "Cross my hearts."

As the Doctor swept past him towards the TARDIS doors, Chris wheeled around, astounded. "*Hearts?*"

"Oh, right," the Doctor turned on his heel. "Hearts. Yes. I have two, it's a long story," he said, glancing sideways. "I'm a Time Lord. We have - two hearts. Okay, so it's not that long a story. Ready?"

Trying to keep up with the barrage of new information, Chris blinked at him. "Ready for what?"

The Doctor grinned as he threw the length of his scarf over one shoulder. "To see stars."

Chris couldn't help the curious smile that pulled at the sides of his mouth, or the surge of excitement in his chest as the Doctor reached out and opened the door.

Beyond lay a dark stretch of paved stones, lined each side with glittering golden lights that swirled in patterns and spirals off into the distance. Eyes wide with wonder, Chris stumbled out and down the twisted runway, leaving the Doctor grinning in his wake.

Everything glittered and hummed in different harmonies, a haunting symphony coming from an orchestra of voices on the air. Even the gnarled branches of trees, interwoven and alight with a dark golden glow, seemed beautiful in the hazy lights of the night. As his eyes adjusted slowly, Chris's mouth fell open at the sight - the sparkle and flicker of the streets making the ground itself look alive beneath him.

"Welcome," the Doctor said with a sweeping slide beside him, arms thrown akimbo, "to Dark Moon!"

"It's ..." Chris felt the air go out of him, and he shook his head in astonishment. "It's *incredible*."

The Doctor glanced between Chris and the roads that peeled away from where they were standing. “This? This is just the street. We’re not even inside yet!”

Chris stared openly at his surroundings, still lost in the hypnotizing glow.

“But what I *really* wanted to show you is out here,” the Doctor said with a teasing smile, taking both of Chris’s hands and leading him along the path.

“I – where – what?”

“Trust me,” the Doctor said reassuringly as they made a quick right turn and he pulled Chris up against his own body in a sharp rush of movement, hands resting on his waist, “I’m a Doctor.”

Chris laughed, gaze now fixed on the man pressed against him. A shiver shot down his spine as those huge, hazel eyes searched his face unrelentingly, and he suddenly felt heat flush him from head to toe.

The Doctor was smiling at him, lips curled into a gentle bow with a quirk at the edge that spoke volumes of more to come. Chris felt his heart quicken, and swallowed thickly as a strange prickling sensation washed over his skin. He realized after a long moment that he was staring at the Doctor’s mouth.

Gently, without looking away, the Doctor whispered: “You can look up now.”

Chris jerked lightly, but the hands at his waist held tight. “Wh-what?”

“Since you stepped through those doors you’ve been staring at the ground,” the Doctor informed him, child-like amusement playing behind his eyes, “and then when I lead you out here you were looking at me. You didn’t even notice the lights disappearing. You haven’t looked up at the sky.” His pupils flashed with barely checked excitement. “You can look up, now.”

Nervously, Chris tilted his head and took in the endless, tumbling sprawl of countless stars above them, blanketing the sky like spilled diamonds and shattered glass, close enough to reach out and touch. There were so many, so very many more than he’d ever seen, and they swept across the air in waves of glittering silver and purple and red, cascading off into the distance and down immeasurable depths underfoot in an unending stream. Chris followed the lights down with his eyes, and jumped nervously when he realized they weren’t actually standing on anything.

The Doctor gripped him tighter as Chris wrapped both arms around his shoulders frantically, heart pounding. "It's alright," he said softly. "I've got you. You can't fall."

Trying to swallow the heart-shaped lump in his throat, Chris stared on at the incredible waterfalls of stars around them, unable to close his eyes to the wonder. It was breathtaking, and mind numbing, and he tried his best to process actual words to get across just how much he couldn't believe what he was seeing.

"I told you," the Doctor said, teasingly. "We do stars, too."

Chris laughed, a loud and disbelieving laugh held long in his chest because his body couldn't find another sound to make. It was unreal. It was a dream, and with that a flood of calm washed over him. It felt familiar, like the moment he stepped onto the TARDIS. Somehow, standing in the cascade of blackness and diamond stars, he finally felt at home.

"It's," he managed through sharp bursts of air as he gazed all around them. "It's just - so *beautiful*."

Lost in his amazement, Chris hadn't noticed that the Doctor wasn't looking out at the stars.

"Yes," the Doctor whispered gently, eyes locked and lingering. "It is."

* * *

In the shadows of the Dark Moon, a tiny slithering figure slipped into a darker hole in the pavement, scrambling tiny claws along the gritty surface and pushing through dusty velvet curtains to the antechamber.

"My lady," the creature bowed so low its nose scraped the polish floors of the oubliette.

Above the tiny purplish creature a woman in white stared darkly into thick black pool, watching the flickering visage of two men play across the surface.

"They're here," she said smoothly.

"Yes, Mistress," creature hissed.

The woman in white smiled, red lips splitting over perfect ivory teeth. "Excellent."

“Shall I detain them for you, Mistress?”

“No.” She stared at the two smiling figures in the star field. “They will come to me, when it is time.”

“Both of them?”

“Both of them,” she insisted. “It was always two.”

“But the Heart,” the creature began, but he was silenced with a flick of her hand.

“When it is *time*,” she repeated sharply. “He will bring it right to me: The Heart of the Navigator. He won’t even know it when he sees it.”

“Yes, my lady,” the creature stooped once again, claws flat against the polished ground.

She smiled to herself, and reached out a finger to pass ripples through the dark liquid. “Oh, dear Doctor. Poor, trusting Doctor. How tightly you cling to your own undoing. How dearly you’ll pay for your mistake.”

With a flick of a long fingernail, she severed the image in half.

“Two shall falter. *Two shall break.*”

PART THREE

The Night Carnival

Chris could have spent days in the cascade, lost in the sea of stars and blissfully numb to any needs beyond seeing. It was only when the Doctor dragged him back, excited and chattering on about bigger things, brighter things, that he finally tore his eyes away and found the paved stone streets again, lit shining and gold, but so much more dull than before. When he closed his eyes, even just to blink, he could still see the stars.

They made their way quickly up the path beyond the row of mangled, curling trees, down to a long straight road where the lights faded into blues and hung from lanterns in masses up either side of the street. As the harmony grew louder, Chris realized the voices were coming from the lights.

With a skip and a step the Doctor jumped onto a stone outcrop and hooked a lantern in his hands, bringing it down with his scarf flicking in the breeze behind him.

“Lightsource!” he announced cheerily, tapping the glass of the lantern. “Serves as their power and their illumination: renewable organic energy, completely environmentally friendly.”

Chris eyed the glowing box warily. “Is it - alive?”

The Doctor blinked at him, and glanced to the lantern in his hands. “Technically... yeah, I guess you’d say, but about the same level of awareness as moss. Nice moss. *Kind* moss. Perfectly friendly power.”

Still unsure, Chris studied the glowing blue globe carefully, watching little silver sparks trickle across the surface. It was all so strange, so alien, but so familiar at the same time. He knew he should have been frightened, or at least awed at such a thing.

With a giant child-like grin at his companion, the Doctor swung the lantern around his wrist and hooked Chris’s arm, dragging him off down the road towards what appeared to be a pair of giant doors surrounded by nothing. “Now the best thing about Dark Moon is the attractions, which I have a feeling might be of interest to you.”

“Oh really?” Chris laughed at his presumption, but as they stepped up to the doors and watched them part, untouched, his mouth fell open.

Beyond the doors, in every imaginable color and shape and stretched across a seemingly unending plain were rides and booths and carnival games. Twirling, glittering bodies moved around the laneways stretching past each attraction, darting and dancing beneath rainbow lanterns strung low between giant steely posts. Chris let out a long, shuddering breath, unable to blink or speak as he took in row after row of candy booths and painted faces and spinning machines.

“The Night Carnival,” the Doctor intoned seriously, a smirk to his voice. “Think of it kinda like Disneyland in the dark.”

Chris’s brow lifted, his mouth still hanging open as he stared. It was like nothing he’d ever imagined; untethered kites flying in loops around trees, and children with strings of candy jewelry clattering like beads around their necks, racing each other to the next ride. The Doctor led him carefully into the throng of excited tourists, and Chris stumbled to avoid a passing plastic carousel pony that turned and blew a raspberry at him before it bounced away.

“Wh- what?” Chris wondered aloud, dumbfounded.

“Well you were in his way,” the Doctor offered. “Don’t take it personally. They get pissy when they can’t find the merry-go-round.”

“Huh,” Chris honked in disbelief.

“You can close your mouth now,” the Doctor suggested gently, grinning from ear to ear.

Suddenly aware he’d been gaping, Chris let his mouth snap shut and shot the Doctor an amused glare.

“Well,” said the Doctor, with a mischievous smile. “I think it’s about time you had some fun.”

* * *

After the fifth ride they’d stumbled dizzily back down the open laneway to the main concourse, laughing all the way and clinging to each other’s shoulders to keep upright. The Doctor stooped to scoop up his Lightsource lantern, nearly falling over in the process.

“Ohh, that was insane,” Chris groaned, closing his eyes as he tried to will the world to stop spinning.

"I think it was the..." the Doctor paused, looking a little green, "...lack of gravity. Or being upside down. Or maybe both."

"I think it was both," Chris agreed.

"Let's just... stay grounded, for a little while," the Doctor suggested, free arm wrapped firmly around Chris's waist as he tilted his head towards the booths along the main street. "Try something a little less daring."

Chris nodded and let the Doctor guide him, leaning into the steady and comfortable embrace.

They wandered past lamps and paved sidewalks, littered with posters and paint, down the main stretch to where the thick, sugary smell of baking sweets hung on the air. Chris smiled as a small group of excited children scurried past, stuffing their faces with syrupy cakes.

After a moment his smile faded, and he sighed quietly into the cool night air.

"What is it?" The Doctor asked gently.

Chris's mouth pulled tight in an attempt at a reassuring smile. "Nothing, I just..." He twisted his thumb under his hand, playing with the ring on his finger distractedly. "I just keep wondering when I'm going to wake up."

"You won't," the Doctor said simply, gazing at him. "Because you're not asleep."

Staring back into those eyes, Chris suddenly realized the hand at his waist was flat against his skin where his shirt rode up, thumb stroking gently at his side. He straightened, and stepped back a little, shocked at the unfamiliar spark that rode up his spine. "I'm okay now," he said quickly, tugging at his shirt. "Not dizzy."

The Doctor blinked at him, brow furrowing for a moment before his smile returned anew. "Hungry?"

Chris jolted at the abrupt change of subject, and his stomach sounded off before he could get a word in. Embarrassed, he laughed softly.

"That'd be a yes," the Doctor ventured, and took Chris's hand, tugging him back down the pathway. Chris's embarrassment fled him at once, and he let out a loud giggle at the instant and absurd transition the Doctor seemed to be able to make between serious, brooding time traveler and five-year-old boy.

They'd sampled a variety of buttery, hot foods mostly picked out by the Doctor (here, try this, it's like a pancake and a cookie had a baby), and wiped their hands clean again before wandering slowly past the vendors to the gaming booths beyond, lost in easy conversation that had come out of nowhere.

He told the Doctor about his home, about graduating college. Talked about his job and staying in his home town for his family, and he was sure he'd bored him to death until the mention of teaching singing lessons made the Doctor's eyes light up like stars.

"Singing?" he asked, grinning.

Chris shrugged. "It's good money."

"How's your pitch?"

He glanced sideways at the smiling Doctor, amused. "Well, I don't want to brag, but it's pretty near perfect."

"Perfect," the Doctor echoed. "Perfect!"

Without warning he broke away, skipping over to one of the gaming booths and waving a hand at the attendant. The thick-necked man gave a curt nod, and pressed a few small buttons on the dash of the booth. A huge metered scale sprang to life behind him.

Chris blinked at it curiously as he wandered over.

"Hit the perfect note, hold it for as long as you can with perfect pitch, and you win the prize," the Doctor explained, pointing to the array of stuffed animals dangling over the attendant's head.

With a sly smile, Chris eyed the hanging prizes and folded his arms. "Easy."

The attendant scoffed quietly, and mashed the keypad. "Ready."

Across the top of the scale, a symbol lit up in blazing red to tell him the note he needed. Chris blinked at it, stunned that he could suddenly read what had appeared as hieroglyphics just a second before.

“TARDIS translation matrix. You get used to it,” the Doctor explained, seeing his confused expression.

Chris had no idea what that meant, but either way, he knew he could reach a high F.

“You get ten seconds to scale up, then hold it,” the attendant mumbled dully, like he was reading from a script. “Start at the bell. If you hear two chimes, you’re out for pitch. If you hear a ringing noise, you win.”

With a nod, Chris closed his eyes and cleared his throat, remembering all those years spent singing in the shower. When the bell chimed he began at C, and counted in his head as he moved up the scale. At ten, he hit the note, and held.

The Doctor watched him, smiling softly, as the bar in the meter slowly filled in hues of silver and gold and reached the top.

When ringing filled the air, Chris opened his eyes and cut off the note, beaming.

“Winner,” the attendant grumbled. “We have a winner.”

“Your enthusiasm is inspiring,” Chris said with a smile.

The attendant glared, swinging his metal pike to hook down one of the hanging animals before he thrust it into Chris’s arms. “Congratulations,” he said in the limpest monotone Chris had ever heard.

As they wandered away, the Doctor swung his lantern around his wrist. “Well he seemed *lovely*.”

Chris chuckled. “He was so unimpressed.” He shook his head. “But then, nobody really expects my voice when I open my mouth.”

The Doctor waved a hand. “It’s designed so nobody wins. This area is mostly populated by Themestrians, who sing a lot like... hungry cats.”

With a bark of a laugh, Chris hugged the bulky toy to his chest. “Cats?”

"Cats," the Doctor nodded. "It's universally accepted that any invitation to listen to a Themestrian choir is usually politely declined with grandiose excuses as to needing to wash your hair or feed your ... pet dinosaur... or something."

Chris was laughing, his eyes scrunched up and mouth buried in the soft fur of the toy.

"But I'm pretty sure our friend back there is as charming as he is from listening to that all day, every day," the Doctor admitted with a shrug. "It's funny, really. They sing like dying animals but when they cry, they sound like angels."

Chris nodded, distracted and inspecting his prize. "I think it's hilarious that they have llamas in space."

The Doctor glanced at him. "It's a llopterix," he corrected. "Farm animal. They're used for wool and carrying things and – things," Chris fixed him with a dubious look, and the Doctor rolled his eyes with a smile. "Okay, it's a llama."

"Yes it is," Chris said cheerfully, a slight skip to his step. "I used to have one just like it, actually. When I was a kid." He drifted into a trance as he ran his hand through the soft fur of the toy, fingers lingering over the ribbon tied around its neck. He narrowed his eyes curiously at the little silver ring that held the ribbon together, thumbing over it gently.

Lost in his daze, he slowed to a stop by the painted sidewall without realizing, and the Doctor paused a few steps ahead to glance back at him.

"Everything alr-" his voice cut off, and he stared over Chris's shoulder.

"Hmm?" Chris stirred from his trance when he realized the Doctor had brushed hurriedly past him, and wheeled around, disoriented.

The Doctor fisted a handful of paper into his pocket, torn at the edges like a poster that had been ripped from the wall. "It's nothing," he said calmly, face splitting into that familiar smile. "We should go. So many wonders, so little time. Well," he conceded instantly. "That's a lie. We have all the time in the world, I'm just impatient."

"You don't like to stand still for very long, do you?" Chris asked, amused.

"I like to think of it as dapper enthusiasm," the Doctor countered with a mocking jut of his chin, and looped Chris's arm once again.

As they wandered back down the main path to the carnival doors, Chris yawned loudly.

The Doctor glanced at him sideways and tipped his head. "Carry your llama, good sir?" he offered in a mock British accent.

With a tired chuckle, Chris shook his head. "I'm fine."

"I'll trade you," the Doctor offered out his lantern.

Shrugging, Chris accepted.

The lantern was lighter than he expected, and the handle almost vibrated in his palm. It was a pleasant sensation, and his arm was relieved for no longer being wrapped around the awkwardly sized stuffed toy. He could hear the lantern's melody again now that he was touching it, and it soothed him like a lullaby.

Outside the doors and down the lantern path the song grew louder still, and he smiled up at the stars above, now unmarred by carnival lights. Low on the horizon, a silvery globe burned in the sky. "What's that?" he mumbled sleepily.

The Doctor lifted his head, and followed Chris's eye-line. "That," he said, "is Bright Moon. They're twin moons, technically."

"Well if this is *Dark Moon*, I can only imagine what that would be like," Chris wondered aloud.

"Oh, no, no," the Doctor warned quickly. "Very, very bad place. Nasty. Total opposite."

Chris shot him a dubious look. "Maybe they should rename it."

The Doctor laughed. "They probably should," he agreed. "It's hard to explain, but Dark Moon is bright, Bright Moon is..." his voice trailed off.

"So it's kind of a Greenland-Iceland thing?" Chris ventured.

“Exactly,” the Doctor nodded, grinning.

After a long silence, just as they reached the edge of the tree line, Chris unhooked their arms to find the Doctor’s hand, and squeeze it. When the Doctor glanced at him curiously, he smiled.

“Thank you,” he said, voice barely above a whisper. “Even if this is a dream, I think it’s the best one I’ve ever had.”

The Doctor grinned back at him, eyes fixed and flickering in the dim light. “It’s not over yet.”

Chris’s heart stuttered as their gazes locked. He sucked in a quiet breath, unsure of why he suddenly couldn’t bring himself to look away.

A familiar churning noise filled the air, and Chris finally blinked. “Is that...?”

The Doctor’s eyes grew wide, and he jerked straight. “No, no, no!” he called out, snatching the lantern from Chris and racing down the darkened path to where the TARDIS was grinding out sound, lights flashing and trembling. Chris had given chase just as soon as his feet remembered how to move, and he barreled along behind the Doctor as the TARDIS door flew open ahead of them.

The Doctor stumbled through, spinning around to crash bodily into the other door and reaching out his free arm to Chris.

Chris could hear his name being called, could hear the desperation in the Doctor’s voice, but could do little to speed his flight as the last of the blue box faded from view and he stumbled through the empty space it left behind.

Breathing hard, Chris turned in desperate circles, searching the empty roads around him. “Doctor!” he called out, mentally wincing at the crack in his voice.

The quiet pressed in. The TARDIS was gone. The harmony of the streets began to sound like a dirge.

Chris pressed his lips together tightly, trying to push the panic down, and in a tiny, pleading voice he said:

“D...Doctor?”

* * *

“What are you doing?!” the Doctor cried, discarding the lantern and stuffed animal to pull at levers and flick every switch he could find. “Go back!”

The TARDIS remained infuriatingly silent.

Punching at the console with the back of his fist, he leaned heavily on his arms, and bowed his head.

The view screen above him flickered in a bright haze he barely caught with his peripheral vision. He glanced up, brow set in a glare. “Where?” he growled.

The little read-out flickered over two pictures: the stars, and a familiar face. The Doctor’s expression fell into shock.

“Oh.”

* * *

In the fading evening light over his small town, a little boy of twelve sat by the roadside on an over-packed bag that was almost as big as he was.

He played with a small gold disc in his hand, tipping it to and fro, watching the little needle spin around in the liquid. Suddenly the needle stilled, and he blinked down at it, shaking the compass curiously. The needle didn’t move.

He only looked up when a loud, grinding noise filled the air.

After the blue box appeared, he watched with large, surprised eyes as a man stepped out and smiled at him.

“Hello, Christopher.”

PART FOUR

Carta Vendra

No sooner had the tiny, frightened question left his lips than the cranking and whirring noise started up again, and Chris sighed. With a relieved laugh, he folded his arms and let his shoulders slump.

As the TARDIS faded into reality on the streets of Dark Moon, Chris fixed it with an annoyed glare.

The door flew open, and the Doctor tumbled out, staggering and straightening before he glanced around.

“Very funny,” Chris drawled.

The Doctor’s eyes landed on him at last, wide and slightly wild. His hair was messier than usual, and his clothes were different – brown and navy instead of grey and black, but he still wore the familiar scarf.

Chris had opened his mouth to ask, but was met with a mouthful of fabric as the Doctor launched at him, wrapping him tightly in his arms. “Oh, I’m sorry,” he said, voice strange and strained. “I’m so, so sorry.”

Shifting his chin to rest on the Doctor’s shoulder, Chris let out a breathy laugh. “It’s alright, jeez. You weren’t even gone a minute.”

The Doctor pulled back in a rush, hands coming up to cup Chris’s face as he stared intently into his eyes. Chris tried not to squirm under the intensity of that stare, boring into him, like the Doctor was searching for something.

There was that sadness again, that horrible and harrowing sadness behind the Doctor’s gaze that Chris knew all at once had been there for a long, long time.

“It’s nothing,” the Doctor broke away, putting on a reassuring smile. “TARDIS trouble. She gets jealous.”

“I’ll bet,” Chris said dryly. “Where did you go?”

After a pause, the Doctor glanced at him carefully. “Nowhere, really. I came back as fast as I could,” he insisted, moving in closer again. “Just – remember. I’ll always come back.”

Chris shrugged and gave him a weak smile. "Don't go doing that again, if you can help it. That was new for me. I didn't – really like it."

"New?" the Doctor asked, curious.

"I've never been left behind before," Chris admitted softly.

"It's not a lot of fun," the Doctor said. His smile was sad, and knowing. "Trust me."

Chris didn't have the heart to tell the Doctor that he'd never really had anybody to be left behind by.

"Off to see the universe then?" The Doctor offered quickly, his sad expression melting effortlessly into that broad and eager grin Chris had grown accustomed to.

Shivering, Chris glanced around at the golden lights that left a soft haze on the streets around them. "I should probably go back."

The Doctor's eyes lingered over him, considering.

"One more," he said with a devious smile.

Chris squinted. "One more...?"

"One more amazing place. Maybe just one adventure," the Doctor ventured with a shrug, as if it were the most harmless suggestion in the world. "Then if you want to, I'll take you home. Right back to the moment you came with me. I promise."

Chris eyed him for a moment, and nodded. "Deal."

With a sweeping step back, the Doctor grinned and waved an arm at the open door. "After you."

Rolling his eyes, Chris stepped past him and into the bright, waiting lights of the TARDIS.

* * *

With a whoop of laughter and a leap, the Doctor bolted through the doors and up the stairs, swinging around the console and flipping a dozen switches and levers. Chris had tumbled in right behind him, slamming the door shut and pinning his back against it as they took off.

“That was close,” he breathed.

“That was *awesome*,” the Doctor called back. “Nothing like a little excitement to start the day.”

“Excitement?” Chris laughed in disbelief, pacing over to the stairs and leaning on the rail. “The guards had spears. We were almost killed,” he insisted, but his tone was more amused than scolding. “*Again*.”

“Hey,” the Doctor raised both hands. “It’s not my fault.”

“You gave the Prince a belly rub!” Chris cried, trying to hold back his laughter.

“He was fluffy!” the Doctor argued stubbornly. “And he had four legs! I thought he was their pet.”

Chris folded his arms over his chest, shaking with quiet laughter.

“How was I supposed to know it was a marriage proposal?” The Doctor asked, flipping another lever and twirling a crank absently.

At that, Chris lost it completely and doubled over in fits of giggles. “Oh,” he breathed, “you’re an *idiot*. What am I going to do with you?”

The Doctor watched him fondly as he came down from his bout of laughter.

Chris didn’t notice the Doctor’s lingering gaze, or the way his hands stumbled over switches blindly when he completely forgot what he was doing.

He sighed with a high, relaxed sound riding on the air behind it as he dropped gracefully into one of the leather chairs on the platform. His legs crossed instantly, hands resting on the highest and playing absently at the ring on his finger.

It'd been months since their one-more-time had turned into two more, and then three more, and then just another week. Somewhere in between another galaxy and a visit to the Moulin Rouge in the nineteenth century, Chris had stopped needing to say it aloud.

Somewhere after meeting the Romanovs, he'd stopped using the word 'home' to describe anything that wasn't that ridiculous blue box.

He didn't know what they were now, but he was surprised to find he didn't really care. Every time they stepped out of those doors there was always something new, something incredible – so often beyond his imagination.

After twenty-one years of waiting for *anything*, suddenly he had everything. All the wonders of the universe at his feet, and his best friend's hand in his. Sometimes, even with all the fear and danger he'd lived through in those months, Chris still felt that tiny twinge of dread in the back of his mind. That maybe one day, he'd wake up.

He glanced up to find the Doctor staring at him, eyes bright and a little lost, but still so stunning under the golden lights. He glanced away quickly when Chris caught his gaze, focusing on the panels under his hands. "Where to now?" he asked excitedly, biting at his lip as he pondered over the seemingly endless list of magical worlds and moments in his mind.

"We could always go back to Carta Vedra," Chris replied teasingly. "I've always wanted to be friends with a royal. And you two did make a stunning couple."

"Oh, stop," the Doctor waved a hand and rolled his eyes. "You're just saying that."

Chris eyed him for a moment, curiosity drawing lines in his brow. "Have you ever been?"

The Doctor glanced up. "Royalty? Sure. Few times, actually. It's not as much fun as it sounds."

"Married," Chris clarified.

Swallowing hard, the Doctor stopped still. After a long moment staring down at the console, his mouth pulled into a thin line. He shook slightly, tugging his jacket tight around his waist and moving along the panels to adjust the view screen. "Yes."

Chris arched an eyebrow, amused by the proverbial song and dance that lead up to such a tiny answer. "What was she like?"

The Doctor glanced over to him at last, eyes a little darker than usual. They drifted down to where Chris's hands were folded on his knee, and flicked back up again. "She was brilliant," he said gently. "In a very ... intense and slightly terrifying way."

Chris chuckled.

After a moment, the Doctor focused on the controls again. "You?" he asked softly.

With a snort of laughter, Chris shook his head. "Oh, no," he said. "Not a chance in that town."

The Doctor blinked at him, confusion playing on his features.

Chris shrugged, propping his elbow on the back of the seat and leaning on his hand. "Although I don't know if it's any better out here, considering we just got chased with spears and called demons for your accidental proposal to the fluffy prince."

Laughing under his breath, the Doctor folded his arms.

"It has to be better somewhere," Chris said gently, staring at nothing in particular. His mouth twitched at the bitter taste on his tongue, and he glanced up. "What do Time Lords call gay marriage?"

The Doctor met his eyes. "*Marriage.*"

Chris's mouth split into a broad smile.

"So I'm thinking," the Doctor announced, rubbing his palms together excitedly. "Maybe the Green Seas of Syrus. Beautiful this time of year, and if we're lucky there'll be pirates."

"Pirates?"

"Actual real pirates with parrots and *everything*," the Doctor enthused. "Sound good?"

Chris nodded, smiling. "Sounds perfect."

With a spin and two-step dance, the Doctor tripped a dozen switches and tugged a hanging lever, singing along to his own made-up song while Chris tapped his knee to the beat.

* * *

Through the glossy pool of dark liquid on a distant moon, the White Lady watched, and waited.

PART FIVE

The Takers

Pushing through the TARDIS doors into the stark sunlight of another new world, Chris swayed and looked around at the steely gray of the city. For a garden planet, it had an incredibly unpleasant and unexpectedly industrial air to it.

“I thought you said we were going to see an eclipse over the Gardens of Videon?” he called back.

The Doctor stumbled through the doors, swinging his Lightsource lantern around his wrist. “I did, we should be – oh,” he glanced around, making awkward gestures with his free hand. “I... Well... *Crap.*”

Chris chuckled gently, fixing the Doctor with an amused look.

“This is... it’s... this isn’t Videon.”

“You don’t say,” Chris teased.

“But ooh, look, a glowy thing! I like glowy things!” The Doctor announced, racing past Chris to a large hanging sphere that was dangling on a silver chain from an outcropping in the stony alley wall. It was a light shade of purple, and even in the too-bright afternoon sun still managed to cast a soft lilac haze. The Doctor waved a hand over it, and the sphere sprang to life.

Welcome to the third moon of Themestra, a voice announced warmly.

The Doctor grinned. “Themestra! Oh, well, now that makes sense,” he said cryptically.

Chris narrowed his eyes. “It does?”

The Doctor passed his hand over the globe again, and watched it spark and dance in pink and purple shades. “Lightsource!” he replied, waving his lantern at Chris. “This is where it began. This little guy,” he pointed to the purple sphere. “Is like the great, great, great granddaddy of this guy.” He waved the lantern around again.

Chris nodded his understanding, sliding up to stand by his side. “So how did we end up here?”

“Not a clue, though this guy might have had something to do with it. Something about the ... convoluting... harmonic energies,” the Doctor said, peering at his lantern. “But it’s fascinating here, there’s a whole byzantine history of struggle and triumph and adversity. Stories of terrible wars, yes, but it’s the people that matter – the people who *stopped* the wars, and became heroes,” he grinned, and Chris couldn’t help but grin back at that excitable puppy face.

Without a word, the Doctor took his hand and pulled him down the paved stone pathway to the main streets, bustling with people. He glanced around, wide-eyed, at the silvery towers of the buildings all around them.

“The most infamous story is about a girl, who saved Themestra and ended the world war. She was just a shopkeeper’s daughter, nobody important – except that *everybody’s* important,” the Doctor ranted, passing a market stand and playing with a display of what looked like apples. “She sacrificed herself and brought down the war machine, single-handedly. Saved thousands of lives – and even more in the centuries that followed, because not only did she stop the war, but she found *this* in the process.” The Doctor tapped his lantern with a finger.

“Lightsource,” Chris surmised.

“Exactly,” the Doctor threw him an apple, and Chris caught it with a laugh. He dropped it back onto the cart and followed quietly as the Doctor practically skipped along, spinning around passing hovering carts and small groups of nervous-looking people shuffling on the sidewalks.

Chris eyed them for a moment before he realized he was falling behind, and hurried to catch up, tuning back in to the Doctor’s voice.

“...And managed to power everything in the galaxy, really, including Themestra and both its moons.”

The Doctor froze, and wheeled around. They’d stopped at the entrance to another alley, empty and gusting with a chilled wind.

Chris blinked. “What is it?”

“I think I know why we’re here, and oh, this one is completely new, how did I not see that before?” he wondered to himself.

“Doctor,” Chris tried to pull his attention back.

“I should’ve noticed right away, but I didn’t.” His eyes flicked up to Chris. “Something is very, *very* wrong.”

Chris felt the hairs on the back of his neck prickle as a group of locals shuffled past, shoulders hunched, eyes darting around in fear.

“Themestra has two moons, Bright Moon and Dark Moon,” the Doctor explained.

Chris nodded. “Yes. So?”

“So why did it say ‘welcome to the *third moon* of Themestra?’”

Chris felt a shudder ripple down his body, and he glanced back to see another group of strangers staring at them awkwardly, jolting when they saw him looking, then moving on in quicker steps.

Glancing back to the Doctor, he stiffened as a ripple of shadow took form across the street.

“Doctor,” he said carefully. “We should go.”

“I’ve gotta find out what’s going on,” the Doctor said in a low voice, eyes searching over the too-normal streets and the nervous market goers.

“No, I mean we should *go*,” Chris warned in hushed tones.

The Doctor narrowed his gaze. “Why?”

“Because we haven’t passed a single person who didn’t look absolutely terrified to see us,” Chris said slowly. “And there are soldiers in gray heading straight for us.”

The Doctor straightened, his free hand fisting something in his pocket. “Right. Yeah, time to go,” he agreed quickly, squeezing Chris’s arm as he slipped past. They moved down the alley as fast as they could without drawing attention, speeding up into a jog halfway. The light shining at the opposite end was suddenly blocked with bodies.

The Doctor skidded to a halt, bracing as Chris collided with him. He grappled at Chris's waist while they turned. "Not good, not good!"

They'd only staggered a handful of steps before the other end of the alley was filled with another group of figures, all dressed in steely grays and moving stiffly towards them.

Chris could feel the Doctor's hand clinging protectively at his hip, and he stumbled back, desperately searching for any other path of escape.

"Hey!" a tiny, feminine voice called from above.

They both looked up to see the silhouette of a crouching woman on the top of the wall. "This way!"

She bent over, reaching down an arm in invitation. Without hesitation the Doctor took her hand, yelping slightly as he was hauled up and over the wall.

"Doctor!" Chris hissed, shooting a panicked glance towards the descending masses. His stomach sank with a sharp twinge of terror as they grew closer, and the sheen of their glossy heads lit up in the sparse sunlight.

They didn't have any faces.

"Chris!" the Doctor barked, as if he'd been saying it over and over.

Jumping slightly at the sound, Chris glanced up at the Doctor's outstretched hand and took it, kicking off the crumbling stonework to clamber over the divide.

On the other side, he dropped into a pit of dirty cloths and broken wooden boards, crying out as his leg twisted on impact. Before the shock wore off, the Doctor's arms were scrambling at his back, hands slipping under his armpits to support him and lift him to his feet. The girl waved the Doctor's lantern out in front of her, lighting the gaping entrance to a dark and wet corridor. "This way," she repeated, and took off down the slippery tunnel.

Exchanging a glance, they staggered forward, left with little choice but to follow.

The corridor went on for what felt like miles, twisting and curving around through pipes and old stone archways. Chris clung to the Doctor's shoulders, limping and cursing under his breath whenever a sharp bolt of pain shot up his injured leg.

"Who were they?" the Doctor asked, arm still curled tight around Chris's bruised back.

"Takers," she answered simply, skip-stepping over puddles.

Chris coughed, and winced. "What did they want?"

"Information. Or your energy – they take people with bright souls," she explained. "For the machine."

The Doctor paused, readjusting his grip on Chris's waist. "The machine? There's Lightsource on the street – the war's over."

"The war's never over," she replied flatly, as if it were obvious. "We keep away. Stay safe underground. Even the fear of getting caught is too dangerous."

"What does that mean?" Chris asked quietly, and the Doctor met his confused glance.

"I'd heard that Themestra and its moons had an undercurrent of energy running through them. Energy that had a very specific way of," he closed one eye, trying to think of the right words. "I suppose, making you feel what you're feeling to the largest degree."

Chris's confusion only grew. "I don't get it."

"Your body feels what your mind does," the girl explained calmly. "So if you're scared enough, you have a heart attack. If you're angry enough, you can boil your blood," she shrugged. "If you're sad enough, you can die from a broken heart."

"Well that's only completely terrifying," Chris mumbled dryly.

"That's the machine," she said.

Chris eyed the Doctor, who explained: "It amplified everything. Which was useful, for war: use your enemy's fear against them."

Chris's stomach lurched at the thought.

"We don't get many visitors here any more," she said ahead of them, glancing back and letting her gaze wander over their alien clothes. Her eyes lingered on the Doctor's bright red and white scarf. "They draw too much attention."

"Thank you," the Doctor said gently. "What's your name?"

"Yllyandra," she replied.

"Illy-andra?" Chris repeated.

"Close enough. Call me Yllya. Everybody else does."

"Thank you, Yllya," the Doctor repeated, "for saving us back there."

"You're welcome. I was lucky I heard you, if I'd been on the west corner any longer they would have caught me."

"There were other people up there, why aren't they taking them?" Chris asked, staggering over a broken pipe.

"They only want the strongest souls. The empaths, like me," she explained.

"Empaths?" Chris mouthed at the Doctor.

"She can read your emotions," the Doctor whispered back. "She knows what you're feeling."

"Oh," Chris's brow shot up in surprise.

She slowed to a stop and twirled around suddenly, thrusting the lantern towards them. "Your Lightsource is broken."

The Doctor blinked, and stared at the darkened globe. He let go of Chris's hand where it was still draped over his shoulder to take the lantern off her.

A purple haze lingered above them, and the Doctor realized they'd come to a small open space, with broken furniture strewn across the floor and exposed pipes on the walls.

"We're here. This place is safe, and your blue box machine is just up above us. You should be able to get to it after night fall," she informed them.

Chris eyed her carefully. "You've been watching us."

"Big flashing blue box in a gray city. Hard to miss," she shot back.

The Doctor lit up with a cocky grin. "I like to think of it as making an entrance."

"Which will probably get us killed some day," Chris rolled his eyes, and hissed suddenly as he'd accidentally put weight on his leg.

"Rest here," she said. "They'll be looking for you until curfew."

The Doctor nodded, and smiled pleasantly when she fixed him with a curious stare.

"What's your name?"

He opened his mouth to answer, but felt a sharp finger dig into his collarbone in warning. Chris flashed him an intense look, and he caught his meaning. Name-dropping probably wasn't the best idea with soldiers chasing them. Especially *his* name.

"Chris," he answered.

Yllya narrowed her eyes, and pointed between them. "But you called *him* Chris."

"Right," the Doctor lifted his head. "Different spelling. C-R-I-S-S. Gets really confusing. Mail is a nightmare."

She seemed to consider it for a moment, eyes thin and skeptical, before she turned around and searched for a place to settle in the mess.

Once her back was turned, Chris clipped the Doctor up the back of his head.

“What?” he mouthed.

“CRISS?” Chris hissed a whisper in reply. “Millions of names in the universe, and you pick *Criss*?”

The Doctor waved an arm, lantern jangling about at an awkward angle. “It was the first thing I thought of!”

Chris rolled his eyes. “Flattering, but not exactly stealthy.”

“The sun will fall soon,” Yllya interrupted them sharply. “Rest your leg, it’ll be difficult getting out.”

Following her gaze over to a steel ladder by the far wall, Chris peered up to the flat rectangular panel opening up on to the street and winced. That was going to hurt.

“I’ve never seen them out in such large numbers before,” she said absently, moving to the base of the ladder.

“Why did they come after us?” Chris asked.

Gently, the Doctor began to untangle their bodies, helping Chris rest on a broken seat pushed up against the wall.

Yllya swung gracefully around, arm anchored on the steel of the rungs. “They’re searching,” she said. “Every visitor gets interrogated.”

“Searching for what?” the Doctor asked, putting down his darkened lantern. “Interrogated for *what*?”

“To see if they know anything about the Heart.”

Chris blinked. “The Heart?”

The Doctor rocked on his feet. “Heart of the Navigator. But that’s just a myth.”

“They don’t think so.” She stopped swinging and pressed her back against the cool metal.

“Slow down,” Chris held up his hands, voice high and confused. “What’s the ‘Heart of the Navigator’?”

"He who owns the Heart of the Navigator, owns the universe," she quoted in a singsong voice.

"It could be anything," the Doctor sighed. "A jewel, a stone, a device. Nobody really knows. It's just an old fairytale, told to children. The one thing that holds the key to all the universe."

"Why do you think they want it so badly?" She cocked her head. "Just imagine what they could do if they had a key to every living thing. The power they could feed their machine, with all the worlds they could find. The *souls* they could find."

The Doctor swallowed hard, eyes flashing in the dim light. "It's a fairytale."

She met his gaze, and stared at him sadly. "I hope you're right. Light help us all, if you're not."

There was a long, agonizing silence, and Chris rubbed absently at his bruised back. In the distance he could hear a soft, quiet singing, like a hymn on the gusts of wind pouring down the tunnel.

"They're crying," Yllya said softly, and Chris realized she was talking to him.

"Sorry?"

"The others, the empaths," she nodded to the corridor. "That's who you can hear. They're crying."

A vague memory prickled at Chris's mind from all those months ago on Dark Moon. *It's funny, really. They sing like dying animals but when they cry, they sound like angels.*

"That's interesting," the Doctor said suddenly, head tilted back and looking up at the wall behind Yllya. She glanced around, following his eye-line to the hanging Lightsource globe on the wall, still flickering with a purple glow.

"What is it?" Chris asked.

The Doctor dove a hand into his pocket, pulling out his sonic screwdriver and flicking it open.

Chris watched him, brow creasing in confusion.

"It makes no sense that *that*," he pointed the screwdriver at the darkened lantern, and the air filled with sonic whistling, "has gone out while the other one is still going. If I can extrapolate the variants in harmonic frequencies, I can augment ours to co-operate and help light a path for us back to the surface, and," he gestured emphatically, "therefore, the TARDIS, without using the ladder for the sake of your leg."

As he raced over to the other Lightsource, Yllya fixed Chris with a baffled look. "What?"

Chris smiled. "He likes big words."

The Doctor leapt up onto several boxes, reaching out for the purple globe that was fixed to the wall.

"And climbing on things?"

"And climbing on things," Chris agreed. "You get used to it."

"Got it! Twelve point variation," the Doctor announced with a grin, and threw a wink over his shoulder. "Not just a pretty face with a big vocabulary."

Chris laughed under his breath, shifting in his seat to support his injured leg as the Doctor jumped down and came to crouch by their darkened lantern.

"Yllya," he said as he worked. "Just curious – how many moons does Themestra have?"

"Three," she said without hesitation. "But everybody knows that."

"Yeah, of course, of course," he replied, still looking down. "Just... checking."

After a moment he and Chris exchanged a quick, concerned glance, and he huffed out a sigh. "This should be working."

Chris looked down at the lantern. "Maybe the batteries ran out."

The Doctor pulled a sarcastic face and mouthed a mocking laugh at him. Chris smiled.

"How's your leg?" he asked, returning to his task.

Chris rubbed at his thigh gingerly. “Not broken. But not fun,” he admitted. “Let’s just not do Pamplona anytime soon.”

The Doctor grinned. “Spoil sport.”

The afternoon pressed into evening, and even with the fading sun the Doctor’s lantern remained dark and unwilling. Yllya had disappeared up the ladder to check the streets above, leaving them to the stillness and the sad song still peeling down the walls of the corridor beyond.

Cursing quietly under his breath, the Doctor stood and paced the tiny space, burying his hands in his hair.

“You really hate waiting, don’t you?” Chris asked, amused.

“Yes,” the Doctor whined, and his shoulders slumped at the sound of Chris’s laughter.

“It’s alright, I can use the ladder,” he assured him gently.

The Doctor gave him a soft, adoring smile, eyes lit up with concern.

“Thank you, though,” Chris said, their gazes locking, “for trying.”

Before the Doctor could speak, she reappeared down the steel ladder by the opening leading up to the surface. “It’s time,” she called down. “The street is clear.”

Moving quickly, the Doctor pocketed his screwdriver and gathered the lantern, curling his free arm around Chris’s waist to brace him as he stood.

Standing was painful, but getting up the ladder was harder still. As he pushed up into the open air of the darkened grey and purple streets, Chris rolled onto his back and breathed out a gutted whimper of relief as the pain subsided slightly.

The Doctor followed soon after, and Yllya close behind, clambering to their feet and pressing into the walls of the city as they made their way back to the first alley and melted in with the shadows.

There, still waiting, was the TARDIS.

“Oh, I missed you,” the Doctor sighed with a dopey smile, and Chris rolled his eyes.

“Run away from this place,” Yllya warned once they’d reached the TARDIS doors. “Don’t come back.”

“Will you be alright?” Chris asked, eyeing her concernedly. He barely knew the girl, but she had gone out of her way to save them.

She gave a sharp nod. “I’ve made it this long. They want me and the others pretty badly, but I’m not that easy to catch.”

The Doctor eased Chris through the doorway, and glanced back at her with large and serious eyes. “If you need us, just – concentrate. Really hard. Ask for the Doctor.”

“I *knew* it!” She jabbed a sharp finger in his direction, grinning. “I knew you were him!”

He smiled. “I’ll repay you for this, some day,” he told her.

She let her eyes wander past the doors of the TARDIS to the gleaming, warm interior where Chris had disappeared.

“I know how you feel about him,” she said suddenly.

The Doctor stiffened.

“Even if you don’t really know yourself, yet,” she added. “If you want to repay me, then just...” She slid backwards, slowly blending with the shadows of the street. “Take care of him. He’s special.”

She’d disappeared completely before he could answer, but he smiled all the same.

“I know.”

PART SIX

The Blue Rains of Lidyard

Chris yawned and stretched as he wandered down the steps, still half awake and blurry-eyed as he came to lean against the rail. “Morning.”

“Morning!” the Doctor replied cheerily, and slid smoothly past him. He twirled a crank on the console, spinning to perch on the edge of the control panel with a mischievous grin.

Chris eyed him suspiciously. “What?”

The Doctor’s grin widened.

“You have that look on your face,” Chris said, gaze narrowing. “That *I’ve found a planet and it’s perfectly safe but wear your sneakers* look.”

“Nope,” the Doctor said lightly. “No sneakers. Maybe a picnic blanket.”

Chris hummed his approval. “Picnic. Nice. Where are we going?”

“Lidyard!” the Doctor exclaimed excitedly, waving his arms wide for emphasis.

Stunned and slightly amused, Chris blinked at him. “Lidyard?”

“The blue rains of Lidyard,” he explained, swiveling the monitor around so they could both see. “Supposed to be one of the most spectacular sights in existence. It’s only ever happened three times in all of history – in the entire universe, just *three* times.”

“Wow,” Chris breathed, watching the glittering images spill across the screen over and over.

“I’ve been saving them up, can’t go more than once each time without risking a paradox by crossing myself - but today, Chris, *today*,” he spun in a circle, half dancing-half walking over to take both of Chris’s hands. “We get to watch the sky falling.”

Chris grinned, stirred by the Doctor's infectious enthusiasm, but still curious as to the cause. He squeezed his hands. "It sounds amazing, but ... why today? What's so special about today?"

The Doctor let go, bringing his hands up to cradle Chris's face gently. It was something so quick, and immediately intimate, and Chris's breath caught in his throat. He hadn't done it since the day they met.

"Because," the Doctor said, smile still playing across his lips. "You can't be twenty one forever."

Closing his eyes and letting out a laughing sigh, Chris relaxed into the Doctor's hands. "How did you find out?"

"That it's your birthday? I'm *offended*," he said teasingly, pulling him to his chest. "You always underestimate me."

"Apparently," Chris replied, voice muffled by the Doctor's scarf.

He had the sinking feeling that he'd stayed too long, held on too tight to the Doctor's warm frame as his mind still sluggishly tried for anything resembling consciousness. There was something addictive about the safety of the hands pressed into his back, the contact. Suddenly his mind sparked with embarrassment when he realized he was still hanging on – that he had no idea how long he'd been there, wrapped around the Doctor, so hesitant to let go.

Chris pulled back quickly, shooting the Doctor an awkward smile and rocking on his heels. "Sorry. We should... I should get dressed ... properly."

As he pivoted and darted back to the stairs, he didn't see the Doctor's expression fall into stunned confusion, or the way his hands lingered in the air where Chris was missing.

* * *

Lidyard was nothing like what Chris had expected. The buildings were sweeping, twisting hollowed trees racing each other up to the sky in every shade of cream and silver. White lights lingered in the air like fireflies, and the ivory decks looking out across the water were filled with packs of different races, alien and human alike, all gathering for the spectacle. There was a bar set up on the far side with beautiful men and women carrying trays of refreshments, swishing in and out of the throngs of people at tables and seated on the brightly colored sea of blankets spilling across the hillside.

As he lay back into the plush quilt of their picnic blanket, Chris smiled lazily up at the glittering stars overhead, mind swimming in contentment. There were certainly worse ways to spend his twenty-second birthday than warm in the open air, sipping wine from alien planets he'd never heard of and laughing with his best friend.

He tipped his head to the side, studying the line of the Doctor's profile as he stared out into space with that endless, childlike wonder he carried wherever he went. It completely baffled Chris as to how someone so old, so very wise and so sad at heart could still revel in the magic of the universe so easily.

The Doctor's head lolled on the blanket, rolling to catch Chris's eyes and smiling gently when they met. Chris felt a strange clenching in his chest, an old familiar shift; the ghost of sensation that washed over him whenever someone stared directly into his eyes. This time it faded just as fast as it had risen, taking with it all the tension in his body. He melted into the blanket, and barely registered the fingers twining with his own in the space between them.

Music drifted on the air, hollow pipes and soft strings gliding under the hum of conversations carried with the breeze. Chris blinked slowly, still caught up in the Doctor's eyes and the sensation of being cradled by the earth below. His breath fell away from him, a long rise and fall that grew slower and slower with every passing moment, until it felt like time itself stood still in the whispering haze of the night.

He wet his lips absently and swallowed, sparks of blue registering in his peripheral vision. The edges of his mouth curled into a lazy smile. "You're missing it," he whispered, realization pouring in. "We're missing it!"

Finally turning away, he glanced up to the cascade of light above – where sparks of blue and turquoise rained down around them in a pounding rush. His mouth fell open, eyes wide with amazement as he stared into the flickering, glittering spectacle. The sky began to fall in waves of pure light.

The Doctor didn't move, his gaze drifting over Chris's face, and his voice dropped to a barely audible whisper. "I'm not missing anything."

As the rains came down, Chris pushed himself up to lean back on his hands, staring at the droplets spitting and sparking off of every surface. It wasn't wet at all, just light that looked and felt a lot like rain, but every drop that struck him left a tiny tingle in his skin, and he laughed aloud at the sensation.

With a grin, the Doctor shifted and pulled himself to his feet, offering a hand to his companion.

Chris glanced between the Doctor and his outstretched fingers, smiling in turn as he took the hand and stood.

“Dance with me,” the Doctor said, lacing their fingers together and stepping off the blanket. Chris followed where he was led, but his expression was a mix of curiosity and doubt.

“You dance?”

“I do,” the Doctor insisted with a coy smile, drawing their bodies together and looping an arm around Chris’s waist.

They began to move to the faster beat of the music, laughing and spinning with curls of pale blue light still clinging to their clothes and their hair. Even as the music slowed and the Doctor cradled him closer, Chris laughed and wrapped a strong arm around his back. They moved between the swarm of couples all around that had taken their cue, and danced along under the still-falling rains. The wind turned cool, but they barely noticed, curled up in each other’s arms and swaying to the melody.

Chris leaned back, and inspected the Doctor’s expression for a moment with a fond look. “Thank you,” he said softly.

The Doctor gave him a puzzled smile. “What for?”

“For this.” Chris looked up. “For all of this.”

Squeezing the hand in his gently, the Doctor inclined his head. “Well, it’s certainly worthy of an anniversary.”

Chris blinked at him, brow creasing. “Birthday?”

“Yes, birthday,” the Doctor corrected himself quickly, “is what I meant. Anniversary of your – birthday.”

Laughing and shaking his head, Chris leaned in closer, pressing their bodies together completely and sinking into his arms. “You know, just when I think I get you, you turn around and surprise me again.”

The Doctor rested his head against Chris's temple, still clinging tightly to his waist.

"This is – it's just..." he sighed blissfully into the Doctor's shoulder. "This the best birthday I've ever had. I thought I'd be home on that porch, staring up at the stars. I never imagined..."

"You did," the Doctor countered. "You *imagined*. That's what's so amazing about you. You just never thought it'd be real."

Chris smiled, closing his eyes. "And now, I'm here – on my birthday, on another planet. With my best friend," he laughed. "I never thought I'd have a best friend. Ever. But here you are."

The Doctor's face fell, and he swallowed. "Here I am."

"When we met," Chris began carefully, "you said I was one of a kind. You said I'd find out one day. What did you mean by that?"

Pulling away, the Doctor gave him a tiny, devious smile. "You will find out..."

Chris shot him an amused glare. "And the next words out of your mouth are going to be *in good time*."

"See, you *do* know me," the Doctor teased, stepping back and bowing slightly.

Chris huffed out a laugh. "Where are you going?" he asked, crossing his arms tightly over his chest at the sudden lack of contact.

"More wine." The Doctor pointed to the empty bottle on the ground, propped up against the pile of his scarf.

"Don't be long," Chris warned playfully, shivering in the breeze.

Shucking his jacket and swinging it around Chris's shoulders, he held up a hand and smiled as he backed away into the crowd. "Five minutes."

The Doctor turned and wandered down the hill, crossing the ivory decks and avoiding several smaller aliens hurrying past his feet. Sliding up to the bar, he caught the eyes of the first waitress he could, and waved her over.

“Wine, thanks.”

“You again!” She grinned at him, her dark skin glistening under flickers of blue light. He met her intense stare, curious and searching for something he recognized, but couldn’t place her face. Her cat-like eyes flickered appreciatively.

“Me again? Well yeah, I guess that’s appropriate,” he wondered aloud. “Actually if I do die, and I do wind up with an honest-to-god gravestone, it’ll probably say ‘you again’, come to think of it, and sorry, do I know you?”

She flashed her bright grin at him, and he realized the soft rumble he could hear was her purring. “Back again, third time. And here I thought I wouldn’t see you at the last one.”

“Ahh,” he said, brow shooting up. “I’ve been to the last two rains, have I? That’s good. Good to know. Probably a good idea to *not* tell me about it, though.”

There was a flash of movement whipping around behind her, and he realized it was the lashing of her tail.

“Fine.” She tipped a shoulder in resignation, fishing around behind the counter and pulling out a red bottle, lined at the bottom with orange sparks.

“That’s the one,” he said. “One of those. Thanks.”

He looked over his shoulder while he waited, eyes trailing back up the hillside to where he’d left Chris wrapped in his jacket.

“Ah, *nihn*,” she clucked. “He’s beautiful.”

The Doctor’s head jerked to look at her. “Sorry? Oh,” he flushed slightly. “He’s a friend.”

“Mmm.” She let her eyes trail up and down the Doctor’s body. “If that’s what you think.”

“Right.” He reached out for the bottle, but she snatched it away quickly.

“You met me in reverse,” she told him sternly. “I’m not the first person you’ve met in reverse, so you know, I know better than you.”

The Doctor fixed her with a puzzled stare. "Go on."

"You see me every time you come here," she began. "Every time. You know I am telling the truth. You get the same wine."

His eyes flicked to the bottle in her hands, and he realized she'd never asked what he wanted.

"Last time," she leaned on her elbows on the counter, eyes trailing up the hill, "you told me about every single one of your people."

The Doctor's throat went dry. "Every ... single one?"

"*Nihn*," she confirmed. "You loved them all. You had so many, and you loved them, you told me. Generals and Captains. Nurses and waitresses and *Professors*," she enthused, almost mockingly.

"What about it?" he asked, growing more and more uncomfortable.

"You told me the first time," she went on, "that you saved these." She waved a hand up at the still-falling rains. "For the most special moments of your life."

The Doctor glanced around, still unsure. "Yes."

"So why is it, sweet boy," she said, waving the bottle at him. "That of the three times you have stood with me under the blue rains of Lidyad, I haven't seen any of the others?"

He felt the lump stall in his throat, and looked away, fingers curling around the edge of the counter.

"Tell him," she instructed, and held out the bottle.

The Doctor took it carefully, nodding his thanks. "What's your name?"

"Zoh." She grinned.

The edges of his mouth curved into a tiny smile. "I'll see you next time, Zoh."

"I'll see you last time, sweet boy." She winked, and slipped away to serve another customer.

Making his way back past the deck and up the hillside, the Doctor studied the bottle in his hand, the tiny orange sparks ricocheting off the insides of the glass. He smiled, breathing deep in the cool breeze, suddenly more sure of himself than he had been in a long time. He moved faster, jogging up the hill, unable to keep the ridiculous smile off his face.

“Chris!” he called out when he got closer, bouncing up to the edge of their blanket. Chris didn’t move, or look up from where his eyes were locked on a crumpled piece of paper now unfolded in his hands.

The Doctor blinked, and came to a sharp stop, nearly tripping over his scarf.

“What’s this?” Chris asked, holding up the torn poster. The Doctor felt his hearts sink in his chest, and a raw burn clawed at the back of his throat.

“It’s nothing,” he lied. “Just an old ... souvenir. It’s not-”

“Don’t lie.” Chris glanced up, blue eyes sharp and cold. “This is from Dark Moon, isn’t it? You tore it down and put it in your pocket. I remember.”

“Chris, it’s not-”

“I’m not an idiot,” Chris cut him off. “We’ve been ... wandering around the universe for almost a year now. I know what your name means to people. I know there are some places we can’t go, but I didn’t know why. Till now.”

“It’s not what you think,” he gestured bodily. “Please, let me explain.”

“This is a warning. It says you killed someone.” Chris thumbed over the worn paper, unable to look back up.

The Doctor swallowed hard. “It’s not-”

“Who was it?”

Heaving a sigh, the Doctor presses his fingers to the bridge of his nose and let his eyes drift closed. “I don’t know.”

Chris boggled. “You – you don’t *know*?”

“I haven’t killed them yet!” the Doctor fired back in frustration.

“Could you try it with a little more *vague*?” Chris snapped.

The Doctor’s shoulders slumped, and he searched Chris’s face desperately, brows knitting together. “Please, you have to trust me.”

Chris studied him for a moment, trying to work it through in his mind.

“You know me,” the Doctor pleaded, moving in a little closer.

After a long, drawn out pause Chris gave him a single nod. “You’re right. You’re right, I’m sorry,” he said softly. “Just – don’t ... hide things from me.”

“I won’t,” the Doctor agreed. “We’ll fix this, Chris. I promise.”

“Well that’s easy, just don’t kill anybody,” he shot back dryly.

The Doctor breathed out a laugh in response, but it was humorless. They stood in stillness for a moment before Chris peeled off the jacket, and held it out. The Doctor took it from him, reaching down for the folded pouch that fell out. He eyed it curiously, thumbing over the psychic paper and wincing.

“What is it?” Chris asked, gathering up their blanket.

The Doctor hesitated, eyes darting over the remnants of their slowly disappearing evening. “Uh,” he mumbled over a few broken words before he managed to speak. “Yllya. Themestra. She ... she needs us.”

Chris nodded, his face serious and drawn tight. “We should go.”

Following Chris up the hill to the TARDIS, the Doctor watched his rigid shoulders move under the still-falling sparks of blue light, now less wonderful with every passing moment. They pushed through the doors, and Chris dropped their things by the coat rack, peeling off his tie and casting it casually over one of the hooks.

The Doctor caught his eyes and smiled as he walked up the stairs, and he brushed Chris's arm gently as he passed him by. The flinch on Chris's features was barely there, but there all the same. The Doctor felt his chest squeeze tight, like a fist around his ribcage.

He moved his hands over the console weakly, flicking at switches and pulling a long lever as the TARDIS wheezed and shook, and disappeared, leaving sparks of blue rain in its wake.

PART SEVEN

Lightsource

Chris braced himself against the rail as the room around them shook, and they came to land on the third moon of Themestra.

“It’s night,” the Doctor said quickly, flipping several switches to park. “So we should be able to sneak around undetected.”

“Well *that’s* handy,” Chris said bluntly, a hard edge to his voice.

The Doctor looked up and followed Chris’s gaze to the old Lightsource lantern hooked by the door, giving off a faint blue glow once again. His face clouded in confusion. “That doesn’t make any sense.”

“There’s a cliché here about gift horse and its mouth, but it’s just too easy,” Chris said, clattering down the stairs.

The Doctor followed in silence, winding his scarf around his neck and watching his companion with heavy lidded eyes.

Chris tried not to liken him to a kicked puppy in his head, forcing himself to look away. It was made that much easier by the memory of the sharp twinge in his chest when he’d pulled the poster out of his coat pocket. *Wanted for murder*. And what else hadn’t the Doctor told him?

One of a kind, a bitter voice in the back of his head reminded him.

He gathered the lantern, and held it out.

The Doctor gave him a nod, taking the Lightsource and pushing through the door. No sooner had he disappeared from sight than the TARDIS gave one last pathetic cough, and the lights flickered.

Chris glared up at the ceiling. “Are you done?”

There was no answer.

With a sigh, he stepped through the open door and stilled as it closed behind him. There were no dark streets, no stone walls. There were no glowing purple globes, or faceless gray figures. There was no Doctor.

Down a smooth path of jet-black tile, light faded into nothingness. The little illumination coming from the TARDIS only let him see a few feet in front, if that, and he pressed himself back against the doors bodily. "Doctor?"

"He's not here," a hissing voice replied, and Chris looked down as a tiny purple figure emerged from the shadows carrying a small lantern. The creature was twisted and hunched, with sharp features and a comically long nose poking out from under a heavy hanging brow.

Chris watched it tip its bulbous head back and peer up at him. "Mistress is expecting you. Come."

With a quick, frightened glance around him, Chris rubbed absently at his arm. Even if he turned around, even if he knew how to fly the TARDIS, he had no idea where the Doctor was now. Chris blinked at the tiny creature waddling down the corridor away from him, weighing his options.

He lifted himself carefully away from the TARDIS, thumbing the ring on his finger nervously, and followed down the tile path.

* * *

Spinning in circles, the Doctor searched the empty streets, eyes wide and stunned. The TARDIS was gone, and Chris with it.

Footfalls echoed in the distance and he dropped low, covering his lantern with his jacket and peering around for any sign of the rigid gray figures outlined against the night. The streets were narrower than he remembered, lined with grates and stone outcroppings like benches or markers.

Carefully, he slipped back against the nearest wall, moving along it silently under cover of shadow. The footfalls faded into a soft, melancholy melody, a sad song hanging on the air. He peered through the grate in the ground by the wall's end, searching for any escape route down into Yllya's tunnels, and safety.

The song rose up from below, but as he lifted the blue glowing lantern out from under his coat he could see open space beneath the grate was small, and cubed, like a tiny cell. He was much closer to the tower,

and likely the machine, than he'd realized. The footfalls were coming from outside the barrier gate. He wasn't on the streets they'd landed on before.

This was a prison.

"Doctor," a soft voice called. "*Doc-tor*."

He lifted his head and moved quickly along the slant of the road, peering in each tiny grate. She looked up at him when the blue light hovered overhead, her huge eyes strange and unfocused. "You came."

"Yllya!" He dove onto his chest, trying to reach a hand through the bars to find a catch. "I'm here, I'll get you out."

"You came," she said again, and in the glow of the lantern he could see the long tracks down her face where her tears had washed away the dirt. "I knew you would. I hoped and wished so very, very hard."

He flinched, struggling with the metal and trying to make as little noise as he could. "I'll get you out, just hang on," he whispered roughly.

"I was a star," she whispered. "A bright, shining star."

He met her gaze, his expression shifting into barely checked horror when he realized. "They put you in the machine."

She smiled madly up at him. "I was so good," she said, her voice child-like and distant. "I was a *star*."

Swallowing hard, he renewed his efforts to open the heavy iron grate. "I'll get you out," he said again, his voice cracking slightly. "You won't have to go back."

"They said I shone the brightest," she boasted, her eyes wild. "They said I was the brightest they'd ever seen. That I could light the galaxy."

He froze. "What did you say?"

She was humming now, a strange and strangled sound.

His eyes flicked up to the line of hanging globes that littered the path up to the tower of the machine, each Lightsource dangling on a long silver chain. In every one of them, the purple haze had changed to a soft blue. His gaze fell on the lantern in his hands.

“It’s not just the current. It’s Lightsource. It’s *you*,” he whispered brokenly. “Oh, I’m so sorry.”

She smiled up at him. “Not long now.”

* * *

Chris followed the tiny purple thing down the twist of the corridor into an open sphere of a room, walls glistening black and coiling up to what appeared to be an opening above his head. He glanced around nervously and tried not to let his hands shake.

She slipped out from behind a black curtain that looked more like liquid than fabric, gliding across the floor smoothly. Her dress was white, and her face was sharp and cold in a way that made him shiver down to his bones.

“I’ve been expecting you.” She smiled wolfishly.

Chris flinched.

“Oh now,” she cooed. “None of that. I’m not going to hurt you.”

“What do you want?” he asked quickly. “How did you bring me here?”

She chuckled. “I didn’t bring you here,” she insisted. “You came to me. As I knew you would, when you were ready.”

He eyed her warily, arms folding tightly across his chest. “I didn’t – I mean, I can’t fly...” his voice trailed off. A warning in his mind stole the words away. *Don’t let her know about the TARDIS.*

“You can, you know,” she said. “Fly that blue time machine of his. There’s a world of things that you can do, and you haven’t even realized it yet. You don’t even know what you are.”

“What am I?” he asked bitterly.

She laughed aloud, tipping her head back. "He hasn't told you a thing, has he? Well, that's not so surprising."

He glared at her this time, anger rising in this throat.

"Careful," she warned. "This place has a way of using your anger against you."

Chris's eyes darted around the room. *Still near Themestra, then*, he thought. He drew a deep, careful breath.

"We're the same, you and me," she said. "We want the same thing."

"And what's that?" he asked.

She spread her arms wide. "The stars."

He scoffed. "Thanks, but I'm ... good."

"Really?" she asked, amused. "You're perfectly happy, right where you are. He's been completely honest with you, and- oh!" She made a tiny, delighted noise at the involuntary wince on Chris's face. "There it is." She grinned.

"He's protecting me," Chris said defensively, and cursed inwardly at the waver in his own voice.

"You don't believe that," she countered quickly. "If you do, you're a bigger fool than he is."

"Yeah, well, you have a ... stupid... face," he spat back, and his expression pinched in distaste at the jab. Apparently, for the first time he could remember, his wit had abandoned him.

Her brow lifted.

"You know what I mean," he snapped.

"He will betray you," she said coldly.

Chris stiffened. "You're lying."

“Am I?” She moved a little closer, and he backed up a step. “He will leave you,” she warned. “He’s already done it once before.”

Confused, Chris searched the walls absently, trying to remember if the Doctor had ever left him. “He was gone for thirty seconds,” he said, remembering their first night on Dark Moon. “Once. A long time ago, it was nothing.”

“Oh, the things you don’t remember,” she smiled, red lips peeling back over ivory teeth. “You will. In time.”

Chris’s skin prickled into goose bumps, and he backed up slowly. “Let me go.”

She watched him, her expression unchanging. “You are always free to leave,” she waved a hand to the tile path where he’d entered. “You can jump in your blue box, and fly away. You can probably even find your Doctor, if you wish it hard enough.”

Chris eyed her skeptically.

“But you will come back,” she insisted.

He huffed out a breath, turning away. “Not likely.”

“Remember,” she said sharply. “He’s not who you think he is. He will leave you. And I will be waiting.”

Chris forced himself to move faster, shoes clattering on the tile as he stumbled back through the darkness, blindly searching for any sign of home.

* * *

The Doctor pulled his arm back through the grate, staring silently down at the mad face of his friend with a sick and sinking feeling in his gut. The whirring sounds of the TARDIS slowly filled the air, and he shifted on the stony ground as Chris burst through the doors and scrambled dizzily, falling down to meet him. “You’re alright? Oh, thank god,” he said, wrapping his arms around the Doctor’s shoulders.

“We have to go,” the Doctor uttered brokenly into Chris’s shirt. And then again, more urgently: “We need to get *out of here*.”

Chris pulled back to agree, but the sound of strangled music caught his attention, and he dropped his gaze to the grate at his feet. “Yllya!” he cried, shifting frantically to fumble at the grate. “Oh, god, we’ve gotta get you out.”

“No,” the Doctor pulled at his shoulder. “It’s too late.”

“What?” Chris asked, distracted. “What are you talking about, she’s right here. We just need to-”

“You!” she shrieked so loudly it made Chris jolt and fall on his side. “Oh, it’s you,” she sang. “I can see it. I can see *all of it*. Oh, don’t you know what you *are*?”

Chris gaped down at her, shocked and struggling for words. He glanced up to the Doctor.

“She’s mad,” he explained, trying to loop Chris’s arm and pull him up. “They put her in the machine, we can’t save her now.”

“We can,” Chris insisted, twisting out of the Doctor’s grasp and reaching for the iron bars. “We can at least set her free, she saved us!”

“Chris,” the Doctor urged, gripping him tightly and dragging him to his feet. “Come on, we have to get out of here.”

They both stilled in their struggle at the sound of pounding footfalls growing closer and closer, marching to a beat and the wailing noises of Yllya’s song below their feet.

“Doctor’s made a big mistake, two shall falter, two shall break.”

Wide-eyed and shaking against the Doctor’s grip and the lantern digging into his side, Chris stared down at her as she sang it over and again. Before he could break free, the Doctor wrapped both arms around his chest, dragging him back to the doors of the TARDIS and hauling him inside while he struggled.

The doors slammed closed, and finally the Doctor let him go, staggering past to the stairs and climbing them quickly.

Chris was on his feet in seconds, thrashing at the TARDIS doors. "Open the door!" he screamed. "We can still save her!"

"No," the Doctor said simply. "We can't."

Chris slumped against the wood, panting and staring at the Doctor. "What is *wrong* with you?"

"We can't save her, Chris," he said gently as the room shook, and the TARDIS took off. "We never could."

Chris slid down the door into a heap on the floor. "You killed her," he whispered under his breath.

"She was already dead," the Doctor said. His voice was still gentle – controlled, like Chris had never heard before.

He reached out and touched the lantern where he'd set it down on a chair. "You remember I told you about the girl, that girl that ended the war ... who sacrificed her life? The reason Lightsource ever was?"

Chris narrowed his eyes. "Yes."

"It was Yllya," he said simply. "It was always meant to be her. It's why the lantern went out last time. Why it lit up again on Lidyard, when she was caught. We saved her the first time. And we were never meant to." His voice was different, serious and low in a way that frightened Chris. "She didn't bring down the machine, she became it. She *is* Lightsource. Her soul lights this entire galaxy, keeps people alive in the darkness."

Swallowing, Chris took a moment to consider. His hands tightened into fists. "Not good enough."

The Doctor glanced up in surprise.

"We can go back," Chris said eagerly, moving forward. "We can, we can go back and we can save her, before all of this."

"No," the Doctor cut him off.

"Why not?" Chris demanded.

“Because some things can’t be re-written,” the Doctor’s eyes dropped to the console. “We can’t play with this planet’s history any more than we could play with yours.”

“This-” Chris was breathing hard now, anger burning in his veins. “This doesn’t make sense. This is what you *do*. She’s a person, she’s alive, and we can save her.”

“At what cost?”

“So you’re willing to sacrifice her, then?” Chris asked sharply. “For others. For strangers. For anybody else? Tell me, Doctor, what makes any given one of us so easy to *throw away*?”

“ENOUGH!” the Doctor roared.

Chris stilled. “We are standing in a time machine,” he uttered slowly. “You’re the *Doctor*. It’s what you *do*. If you cannot save one innocent girl then what is the *fucking point of you*?”

The Doctor raised his hands in defeat, and dropped them just as quickly. His head bowed, and his throat clenched for a short moment before he regained his composure. His voice was steady. “I’ll take you home,” he said simply.

Chris blinked. “What?”

The Doctor tried not to shake. “I’ll take you back home,” he said again, this time meeting Chris’s gaze sadly. “I’ve done enough to you already.”

A strange cold rushed through Chris’s veins. *He’s not the man you think he is. And he will leave you.*

His mind numbed, and his body shook. Behind his eyes, the stars began to tumble and burn, just like they had the moment he’d stepped back into the TARDIS earlier that night. When he needed to find his Doctor.

“It’s happening again,” he breathed. The world began to fall away, and infinite spectrums of gold hue crept into his blood. “Doct-”

“Chris?”

He was on the floor before the Doctor could catch him.

PART EIGHT

The Machine

The Doctor held tightly to Chris's body, cradling his head in his arms as the TARDIS landed with a violent shudder and crash. Sparks flew from the console, and the Doctor ducked his head instinctively, glancing around to see the damage. The dangling, broken monitor flickered, and showed the outside of the TARDIS where masses of steely, faceless figures waited.

He let out a shuddering sigh. The pounding echo on the doors sent a chill down his spine as four long knocks ran out.

"Oh, come on," he groaned. "Did it have to be *four*?"

"Come now, Doctor," a woman's voice called from beyond the doors. "I haven't got all day."

Glancing around frantically, the Doctor shifted Chris's limp body in his grip, easing him down gently and bundling his scarf to use as headrest.

"Chris," he whispered.

The knocking came again.

He gritted his teeth. "Chris, listen to me, when you wake up," he rested his forehead against Chris's gently. "When you wake up, you have to run. Run away from here. Do you hear me?"

Chris's head lolled to the side, and his eyes stayed closed.

The Doctor swallowed hard, and pressed a kiss to his forehead. "I'm sorry."

Dragging himself to his feet, he stumbled to the door, and pushed it open.

She was waiting in a white dress, past the sea of faceless bodies that seized him the moment he stepped out.

"Careful," she warned. "I want him in one piece, for now."

The Doctor watched her, his face expressionless. The TARDIS door closed behind him, and a sharp clunk let her know it was locked.

“How sweet,” she smiled. “You really were protecting him.”

He didn’t answer.

She smiled, and waved a hand. The small army of Takers receded, melding back into the stone of the walls.

The Doctor stretched casually, glancing around the large room. It was a chamber of some kind, akin to a medieval throne room. He realized at once that they were in the tower.

“You knew it was me, then?” She cocked her head, amused.

He inclined his head just slightly.

“What gave me away?”

“The posters,” he said casually, pressing a hand to the cold stone wall and appearing completely bored. “And your little nursery rhyme.”

She grinned.

“It all just – smacked of revenge, really,” he said, fixing her with a cold stare.

She shrugged. “And here we are.”

“You control the machine, now,” he surmised.

Her mouth pulled into an ugly smile. “They had no idea,” she boasted. “When they put me in their war machine, oh, the things I could do. The power they gave me. And now,” she waved an arm. “It’s mine. All of it. The Takers under my control, even the miserable, pathetic swarms of people on the streets are my foul and toadying minions, it’s *delicious*.”

The Doctor watched her with sad eyes. “You’re just an avatar,” he said, observing the borrowed body she walked around in. “You’re not even real.”

"I live *forever*," she spat. "In the heart of the machine. I can walk on all three moons with these bodies. I can take whatever souls I want."

"And burn them," he finished for her bitterly. "In your place."

"I keep this galaxy *alive*," she countered, eyes wild. "What's a few million souls?"

"You knew where all the empaths were," he said, remembering the melancholy songs of the corridor. "You betrayed all of them. Your people."

The flash of delight in her eyes was all the confirmation he needed.

"I always wondered why nobody set foot on Bright Moon," he said. "The horror stories I'd heard. But that's just it, isn't it? There were only ever two moons of Themestra. Dark Moon and this one." His eyes darted to the hovering ghost of a silvery sphere, hanging in the sky outside the window. "Bright Moon *is* the machine."

"Well done," she purred, and made a show of clapping.

He buried his hands in his pockets. "What do you want, Yllya?"

She didn't answer.

"I can't save you," he said carefully. "Not here. Not from this."

"You saved him," her eyes flicked back to the TARDIS.

The Doctor rocked on his heels. "He's different."

"...Because you love him?"

"Because he wasn't meant to die."

She squinted at him, her mouth still curved into a dark smile. The silence broke with her laughter. "He has you wrapped around his finger, doesn't he?"

The Doctor stared at her, expressionlessly.

“He’s done much better than I gave him credit for,” she said with a playful sigh. “I never thought he’d get this far.”

He swallowed, flinching before he could stop himself.

She waved a hand. “He came to me, before,” she said. “I had hoped for simple revenge. Just killing you would’ve been fine, but this? It’s so much sweeter.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Who do you think brought you here?” she asked, folding her arms. “The power he has over that contraption of yours, I’m stunned you didn’t figure it out sooner. Truly, Doctor, I’m disappointed in how absurdly easy this was.”

“He wouldn’t,” the Doctor breathed.

“Really?” she asked, inclining her head.

“He’s a man,” the Doctor reasoned aloud. “From earth. He’s not-”

“Special?” she finished for him with a smirk.

The Doctor shifted on his feet.

“Or have you forgotten, dear Doctor,” she said darkly as she moved in closer. “Who pointed you to him in the first place?”

The Doctor’s blood ran cold. “No.”

Her eyes flashed, flickering silver over blue. “All the companions in all the galaxies,” she said smoothly. “All your fear of loving someone *too* much, and there you are. Struggling against it. Wishing you didn’t.”

His jaw set tightly. “Stop.”

"When all this time," she laughed softly. "The funniest part is, Doctor, the *tragedy* of you. That you would go and fall in love with the *one* companion who never loved you back."

He felt it in his skin, coiling up like fire: the sweeping, clawing ache that filled him and tore at his senses. His fingers flexed instinctively, remembering the feeling of fabric and skin underneath, holding tight under glittering stars. His mind stuttered with bright shocks of memory and sensation; the cascade, fireworks over bright cities, fingers intertwined under blue rains... the press against his chest, and arms around his shoulders, holding him close and lingering in the silent need to not let go.

The smell of skin, dizzyingly warm and comforting like nothing else had ever been before it, and the immeasurable *blue* of those eyes staring at him. Eyes that would never look at him the same way again.

Chris.

A sharp pain caught in his chest, bleeding into his veins and sending shocks down his body. He dropped to his knees.

She laughed, and moved over to him smoothly, gliding in a circle around his heaving figure.

"Dear, poor Doctor," she reached out a hand and stroked his hair. "You always did *feel* too much."

An agonized groan ripped from this throat and he shook violently, sinking down to the floor and clutching at his chest.

"And you know how *dangerous* that can be," she taunted. "Oh, and when you regenerate? The very energy will be stripped from your bones and coiled into the machine. Life after life, fuel for the fire."

He screamed through gritted teeth, unable to help the sound as the pain overwhelmed him.

"The best part is, you had it," she laughed. "You had it all along, right there, and you never even knew. The Heart of the Navigator. But now," she leered at the TARDIS, "it's all mine. And you watch me, Doctor," she knelt down and gripped his chin fiercely, staring into unfocused eyes. "You watch me tear this universe *apart* for the souls I need."

She waved an arm at the heavy gray figures around the room, and they descended, seizing the Doctor's shaking frame.

“So fitting, really. You left me there. And now,” she smirked, “it’s your turn to die alone.”

Bruising hands pulled him across the floor, dragging his shaking figure down the hall.

“Not long now,” she called after him, and locked her eyes on the blue box.

* * *

When Chris woke, he stared blearily around at the gold hues of the ceiling, lost for a moment as to exactly where he was. As the room came into focus, he rolled onto his stomach, pushing himself up and staggering into the wall as he came to his feet.

“Wh- What happened? Doctor?”

There was no reply, and he glanced around, searching for the Doctor’s face or frame somewhere among the controls. His gaze landed on the scarf by his feet.

“D- Doctor?” he called out again, and was met with more silence.

He shuffled to the dangling monitor, narrowing his eyes at the strange view of the outside. The woman was there again, still dressed in white, but the room was bigger and made of stone.

“You can come out,” she called. “It’s safe. I won’t harm you.”

Chris glared at the monitor. “Sure, I’ll get right on that,” he grumbled sarcastically, turning away.

“I have your Doctor.”

He froze, eyes wide. After moment finding his breath, he glanced back to the flickering screen, and steeled himself.

The TARDIS doors unlocked and opened with a creak, and he stepped out into the bright stone room slowly, eyeing the gray faceless figures that lined the walls.

“They will do you no harm.” She smiled at him sweetly. “I told you you’d come back.”

He fixed her with a disinterested stare. “Congratulations,” he said. “Where’s the Doctor?”

Her smile didn’t fade. “Steady hands. Calm voice. Look who found a backbone, very nice.”

Chris gave her a deprecating look. “Are we doing this again? Because your face is still stupid.”

“Cute,” she said. “It’s true, though, you look different. Stronger, this time. Very brave.”

A strange kind of fire surged in his veins, but it wasn’t anger. He knew he could fly the TARDIS, regardless of the unfortunate side effect of getting painfully dizzy or passing out cold – he could fly it. He could feel it, in his skin. He didn’t know how or why, but it gave him a strange sense of power.

“You’re learning,” she arched an eyebrow. “That’s very good, very good indeed.”

“Where,” he repeated slowly, “is the Doctor?”

“Oh, I’m afraid you’re too late,” she said lightly, waving an arm.

“Funny thing,” he gestured over his shoulder with a thumb. “It’s really difficult to be late when you have a time machine.”

“It doesn’t matter,” she said nonchalantly. “You were never the prize. You were just the bonus.”

“If we’re doing riddles I have a great one about a raven and a writing desk,” he offered dryly.

“You must be wondering how you got here,” she said, waving an arm. “Here of all places. That this is where you brought yourself, right back to me.”

Chris’s eyes narrowed.

She smiled, taking it as confirmation. “You can control it, yes. But you can’t control *yourself*. Not yet. So it goes where your heart wills it.”

“Could I get some *English* with that vague?”

"You wanted the Doctor, it took you to the Doctor." She cocked her head. "You wanted to save me," she held out her hands, palm side up. "Here I am."

"Why would I want to save y-" Chris stopped, mid-sentence. It wasn't her face. It wasn't even her voice, but the eyes were the same. *Lightsource*. He remembered the fight they'd had just before he'd felt it taking over again.

"Yllyandra."

She smiled. "Well done."

He felt his muscles tense, felt his body stiffen against the realization flooding him. "It was you," he whispered. "The warning. He never killed anyone, you just wanted to get him here. The... oh, god." He felt his stomach churn. "The music. All those lanterns singing, they weren't singing at all. All those people. They were *crying*."

"But none of that matters, Chris," she assured him in a sickly sweet tone of voice. "*He* doesn't matter. You don't need him anymore. I have more power in this machine than any blue box can conjure. I can give you every star, everything you ever wanted..."

"Where," he asked in a low and dangerous voice. "Is the Doctor?"

"Except *that*," she finished. "Really, this obsession is getting old."

"I won't leave without him."

She considered for a moment, watching him carefully. "All this loyalty," she said. "After everything he's done. After he left you."

"He never left," Chris argued.

"You still don't remember," she sighed. "How terribly sad."

"Remember *WHAT*?"

She smirked. "What do you see when you close your eyes?"

He thought for a moment, confused. “Stars,” he said tentatively.

“Have you ever tried to look past them?” she asked, as if it were the simplest question in the universe.

He stilled, eyes searching the floor to make sense of what she said. “I don’t-” almost against his will, his eyes drifted closed, and there it was, waiting for him. All the stars he’d known half his life, there behind his eyes.

The sensation of falling rushed over him, and he shook bodily, hand gripping the TARDIS for balance. The stars washed past him, twisting in patterns of nebulas and far off suns, galaxies curling by in waves until finally a planet grew closer, and closer.

And there, by the roadside, in a small town in California – a little boy waited in the dark.

PART NINE

Twelve

(Clovis, California, 2002)

“Hello, Christopher.”

Chris blinked at the man and the strange blue box that had appeared by the roadside, but didn’t move. He knew he should probably be scared, but for some reason, he wasn’t.

“Who are you?”

“I’m the Doctor,” he said, crouching down and tugging at his coat under the length of a red and white scarf.

Chris eyed him for a moment before his gaze fell. “I – I missed my bus.”

The Doctor nodded his understanding, stroking his chin exaggeratedly. “I see.”

“I was supposed to go to camp. I should go home but...” Chris’s voice trailed off as he played with the zip of his overstuffed bag shyly, squeezing his compass tight in his other hand. “They’ll just take me to camp.”

The Doctor smiled sympathetically. “Well,” he said. “I can take you back home, but – then there’s camp.” He pulled a disgusted face, poking out his tongue and grimacing comically. Chris laughed.

“Or,” he ventured, pivoting on his feet to face the other way and point at the blue box behind him. “We can take that space ship, and we can go see the stars – and I can take you back home after camp is over, like nothing ever happened.”

Chris swallowed, eyes flickering between the Doctor and his strange blue box. He arched an eyebrow. “That’s a spaceship?” he asked skeptically.

The Doctor scowled. “Of course it’s a spaceship, what else would it be?”

“It says Police Box,” Chris tilted his head. “Why would a doctor have a police box?”

“I’m not *a* doctor, I’m *the* Doctor,” he corrected amusedly, “and it’s a long story. But it *is* a spaceship.”

"I'm not supposed to talk to strangers," Chris intoned in a slightly rhythmic voice, like he was repeating something he'd been told a hundred times.

"Well, I am strange," the Doctor conceded, "but certainly not a stranger."

Chris considered him carefully, unsure but still unafraid.

The Doctor stood again, stretching up to full height and jerking slightly as his arms were caught up in his scarf. He wriggled for a moment, and began to spin in awkward circles as he wrestled with his tangled scarf and jacket, arms flailing. Chris stared.

Finally breaking free, the Doctor panted and grinned dopily down at him. "I think I won."

"Well you were right about the *strange* part," Chris said under his breath, looking him up and down. His curly hair was messy and sat in a mop on his head, and the grin and bright eyes underneath made Chris want to smile right back.

The Doctor simply grinned wider, throwing the ends of the scarf over one shoulder as if it were a victory dance.

Amused, but unwilling to show it just yet, Chris pulled himself to his feet and managed his best sarcastic expression. "I was warned about 'stranger danger' but nobody said anything about a muppet with a spaceship."

With a quiet laugh, the Doctor buried both his hands in his coat pockets. "Hey! You have a big attitude on your for – wait, how old are you?"

"Eleven," Chris said automatically, then shook his head quickly. "I mean, twelve. Today."

"Oh, Happy Birthday!" the Doctor said, pulling his hands from his pockets awkwardly to hold them out. "Twelve, that's huge! My favorite number, actually. Twelve."

Chris shrugged. "It's just a birthday. Thanks for the offer, it's nice of you, but since I'm thinking at this point you're probably just an imaginary friend, I should probably stop hallucinating and go home."

“There you go again, thinking you’re making me up. I’m gonna be insulted one day,” the Doctor said, rolling his eyes.

“What?” Chris asked, his brow creasing.

Before Chris could ask what he’d meant by ‘again’, his palm flashed with a rush of warmth, and he glanced down to the compass he was still clutching. The needle wasn’t moving, just trembling on a diagonal. He tipped it, and turned it as the Doctor rambled on.

“Okay, probably not insulted, but I’m a little worried about what it is about me that screams delusion – is it the scarf? It’s the scarf, isn’t it?”

Chris glanced from the compass to the ranting man in front of him, and back down to the compass again. It was still pointing to the Doctor.

“Alright,” Chris said suddenly, and the Doctor’s babbling speech cut off.

The Doctor blinked at him, dazed.

Glancing at the blue box, Chris smiled. “Let’s go.”

* * *

Chris leaned back against the TARDIS as the memories spread out in his mind, blanketing all conscious thought and tearing him back in time to watch each of them unfold. He was twelve, only twelve years old and there had been weeks he’d lost with the Doctor, flying around every corner of the universe and floating among the stars, playing games and chasing comets, and seeing so many wonders long forgotten.

He gasped as the memories drew him down deeper still.

* * *

“You didn’t!”

"I did," the Doctor insisted. "But in my defense there's not a lot of wiggle room if someone says aloud to you that the custom is to *khiss* to the Queen, you hear *kiss the Queen* and you," he waved an arm, "kiss the Queen. How was I supposed to know that *khiss* meant bow?"

Chris hiccupped and giggled, spluttering over his soda and jabbing the Doctor in the ribs. "You're an idiot!"

The Doctor chuckled, and dipped his head. "Well, that's not news."

Chris laughed so hard he snorted, and rolled onto his side on the tiled roof.

"Whoa! Hey, careful!" The Doctor caught his arm as he began to slide. "I have to take you back in one piece, at least. No roof-diving."

Getting a firm grip on the rough tiles with his sneakers, Chris pushed himself back up to sit by the Doctor's side. "Oh," he sighed as another rain of fireworks exploded overhead. "This is cool, I like the view up here."

The Doctor smiled, and sipped his drink.

Chris scuffed the toe of his shoe against a tile absently, eyes cast down. He was elbowed gently.

"Hey, buddy, what's going on – you're missing it."

Chris blushed.

With a smile, the Doctor shifted to face him. "What is it?"

He shook his head in embarrassment, but didn't look up. The blush crept to the edges of his ears.

"You know you can tell me anything, jeez." The Doctor rocked against his side.

Chris gave him a playful shove. "Sometimes I wonder if I'm the grown-up and you're the kid, you know."

He laughed. "You and me both."

Chris sighed again, leaning against his shoulder. "I just. I've never had a – best friend before," he said softly. "I've never even had a friend before."

The Doctor watched him fondly, and a little sadly.

“I just – I don’t want to go home.”

Wrapping an arm around the boy’s shoulder, the Doctor smiled. “I know, but hey.” He caught Chris’s eyes as he looked up. “You’ll see me again. I’m not going anywhere. Not forever.”

Chris blinked at him, eyes teary. “You promise?”

“I promise,” he said seriously. “And I keep my promises.”

* * *

Each time he felt himself clawing back to the surface, the memories would drag him down again.

* * *

Yawning, Chris clambered down the stairs. The control room was dark, and the Doctor had long since retired for the night, off to some distant room in the back of the TARDIS.

He climbed up to the console carefully, and ran his fingers across the cool metal. Sometimes, he just needed to remind himself that it was real. That the nightmares would go away.

“Chris?”

He jolted at the sound. “I didn’t touch anything, I promise,” he said quickly.

The Doctor laughed, and skipped down the stairs. “You okay?”

Chris shrugged. “Bad dream.”

Winced in sympathy, the Doctor wandered over to his side. “You wanna talk about it?”

“Not really,” he said, eyes drifting over the muted lights. “Just ... kids at school.”

Collapsing bodily into the leather-covered seats along the rail, the Doctor raised his brow, inviting Chris to continue.

He shrugged again, folding his arms protectively over his chest. "It's nothing."

The Doctor cocked his head.

Chris shuffled across to the couch, and slumped down beside him. "It's just, the last place we went..."

"The one with the giant plants that ate bugs the size of people?" the Doctor asked.

"Yeah," Chris laughed. "That was cool. But, there was that garden, and those people getting married."

"Ah," the Doctor nodded.

"There were these idiots... in my class ... and these girls," he said in little bursts, like it was hard to get out.

"And they just kept saying things. Like... I don't know."

"Idiots like me, or idiots like that guy who tried to pat the giant man-eating plant?"

Chris shook with laughter. "Like that guy."

"Good, right, that helps." The Doctor nodded seriously. "Go on."

"I don't know," Chris said again, shifting uncomfortably. "I just... what if they're right? What if nobody ever wants to marry me?"

"Jeez, you're twelve and you're worried about marriage? I was at least two hundred before that came up," the Doctor mused, and copped an elbow to the ribs for it.

"I'm serious!" Chris whined. "What if no girl ever wants to marry me?"

The Doctor laughed, rubbing at his side. "Trust me, with your eyes that's never going to be a problem."

Chris paused, and opened his mouth to say something before quickly closing it again. The Doctor noticed, and watched as he slowly found the words.

“What ... what if no... *boy* ever wants to marry me?”

The Doctor blinked, and the edge of his mouth curved into a tiny smile. “Chris,” he said softly. “Oh, the things I could tell you that I couldn’t possibly tell you.”

Chris shot him a puzzled look, but his eyes were still sad. The Doctor’s chest clenched tight, and his mouth drew into a thin line.

“Well, here,” he said, reaching behind the seat and fumbling around for the toy that had fallen there weeks ago when the TARDIS had first stolen him away from Dark Moon. He found it, and yanked it up, dropping it on Chris’s lap.

With a laugh, Chris scrunched up his nose. “It’s ... a llama.”

“Actually it’s a llopter- okay, nevermind. You’re right, it’s a llama,” the Doctor rambled, playing with the cord around the toy’s neck. “And you can keep it, that’s yours, but this,” he peeled away the ribbon, and drew the tiny silver ring off the end of it, “is what I was looking for.”

Chris eyed it, brightening immediately.

“I’ll make you a deal,” the Doctor said, holding it out. “On the *billion* to one chance some awesome guy doesn’t come along before then, I will marry you... when you’re-” he waved a hand, “-two hundred or so.”

With a laugh, Chris swayed back into the chair, llama clutched to his chest. “I won’t get that old!”

“Fine.” The Doctor grinned.

“When I’m grown up,” Chris confirmed.

“When you’re grown up,” the Doctor agreed, and handed it to him.

“Deal,” Chris beamed, turning the ring over in his fingers.

Huffing out a laugh, the Doctor pulled himself to his feet, ruffling Chris’s hair in the process. “Now go back to bed, cause tomorrow? *Dragons*.”

* * *

Chris swayed and shuddered under wave after wave of memory, all flashing by in seconds. Everything was right there, under the surface. Every moment he never knew he'd always remembered, burning and leading on to the searing white glow of a moment that changed him forever.

* * *

He was supposed to go home that day, Chris remembered thinking. He had to go back to his real life, outside of the dream.

The Doctor had never been so careless before, but it was one mistake, one tiny lapse and they were inside the TARDIS with rocketing waves of solar energy tearing at the seams.

His last day, the Doctor had said, they were going to watch a sun burn out. Then Icarus flew too close.

Violent shocks of pure energy bled through the walls, not breaking the skin of the TARDIS but pushing past it and slowly engulfing everything inside. The Doctor clung tight to the console, keeping Chris safe in the cage of his arms, keeping him away from the bolts of energy that could easily kill them both.

Chris saw it coming before the Doctor did. He didn't even think, just shoved him as hard as he could to push him out of its path, too late to move. It washed over him, and flung him back through the shattered glass of the TARDIS' heart, and the gaping maw of the time vortex.

All of time and space came rushing in, and stood still. He could see everything, feel *everything* – every spinning planet and every soul that stood on it, twisting out through endless galaxies and spinning the patchwork pattern of the universe. He could feel every inch of it, mapping it into his bones.

Everything was darkness for so long. Everything was just the universe in his mind, behind his eyes and in his blood.

He remembered waking up. He remembered not remembering, just clinging tightly to the stuffed animal on his chest and dragging his bag behind him as he wandered back home. He knew how it had felt, the strange sensation of a black hole in his mind – where he didn't remember camp, and he didn't remember the bus ride, or the other students. But it never bothered him that he didn't remember.

He never wondered about where he got that strange stuffed toy that he clutched for so long whenever he slept. He never wondered about the compass from his childhood, that he'd always kept in his pocket and played with when he had to pass the time. That always pointed in a different direction, no matter where he was.

He never, ever wondered about the ring on his finger.

But he never took it off.

PART TEN

Two Shall Break

Chris stirred and tipped forward as the rush of memories finally stopped, and he was hit with the sudden silence of the room. He could hear a pounding sound, like a hammering under the din, and it took him a moment to realize it was his heart in his ears.

Yllyandra fixed him with a knowing smile. “There you are. The Navigator, at last.”

His throat was dry, and his head still swam in the dizzying descent from the bombardment of memory. His thumb absently stroked at the ring on his finger.

It was real. All of it had been real. The universe, mapped into his body and his soul, and he could feel every inch of every star if he just concentrated hard enough.

“How did you- how did you know?”

She beamed at him. “I was with you,” she said. “That harmless little lantern he carried around. My eyes and ears.”

Chris swallowed thickly, trying to steady his mind. “I can feel *everything*.”

“One of a kind,” she intoned gravely. “No human should be able to know what you know, feel what you feel, and withstand it. But the right place, the right time – the right *energy*.” Her eyes trailed up and down him slowly. “That one moment rewrote your entire genetic code. And here you are. The myth made man.”

He felt his breath even out, and his heartbeat fade down to a steadying rhythm.

A strange sense of calm washed over him, thrumming in his veins. *The Navigator*. He knew what he was, now. Why the TARDIS had come for him every time he’d called, even in his dreams. The Doctor had come for him, whether he was twelve or twenty-one. *His Doctor*.

“Where is he?” he breathed.

"We're back on this again?" she asked, annoyed. "He left you! You were just a boy." She tried for a soothing tone of voice. "Just a child, and he left you behind."

"I won't ask again," he said darkly.

She shot him a condescending look. "Now, Chris. He made his own bed. He betrayed you, dragged you away when all you wanted was to save me. He *killed* me. He left you." She waved a hand at the TARDIS. "Left you behind even just minutes ago, and marched out here to meet his fate without a care to yours."

Chris heard a frantic and familiar whispering in his head. The Doctor's voice in the dark. *When you wake up, you have to run. Run away from here. Do you hear me?*

"What *fate*?" he growled.

"His death," she said simply.

Chris's jaw set. "I don't believe you."

She sighed. "Nobody ever does."

"Why would you even *want* to kill him? What purpose does that serve?"

"Because he left me!" she screeched suddenly, hands curling into fists. "He said he would come back for me, and he left me. To be thrown to the machine."

Chris eyed her carefully. "So it's revenge, then."

"Of course it's revenge," she hissed. "It's always one of two things. Love, or revenge. And sometimes, if you're really lucky," her eyes flashed with venom, "they work in tandem."

"What are you talking about?"

"I have my revenge," she said. "*Two shall falter, two shall break.*"

"I'm not broken yet," Chris growled.

“Oh, poor boy.” She slinked towards him and stilled. “What *ever* made you think I was talking about you?”

He backed up slightly, cold realization stinging in his veins. “It was always about him. What have you *done?*”

“That’s the thing about this place, about the *machine*,” she glanced up at the arching ceiling lovingly. “Your body feels what your mind does. So if you’re scared enough, you have a heart attack. If you’re angry enough, you can boil your blood,” she quoted herself calmly.

Chris felt his body grow perfectly still.

“You can even die,” she smiled, “from a broken heart.”

He felt his mouth go dry.

“It’s astounding, really.” She shrugged in delight. “How easy it was to convince him you’d never come for him. How quickly he believed.”

Chris could feel the tiny gasps of air, sharp and fast in his throat. His eyes flicked around quickly, playing over their lasts moments together in his mind. The anger that had burned in his chest, the way he’d looked at him. He could hear his own voice, deep and unfamiliar. *What is the fucking point of you?*

His mouth trembled around a broken breath.

“And truly, I’m a little proud,” she went on smugly. “First time in the universe, two hearts slowly faltering, and breaking.”

“It’s not the first,” Chris uttered shakily. “Two hearts break all the time.”

She fixed him with a dark smile.

“In the same chest?”

* * *

His feet were flying before he even realized he was moving, tearing down the corridor and swerving to avoid the outstretched and angry arms of the Takers. He could hear her laughing behind him, but it faded into the distance as he came to a junction in the twisting hallways. Heaving for air, he bent slightly, glancing around to see if he'd been followed. The stunted footsteps echoing behind him were too slow to be an immediate threat, but he knew he had to make a decision soon.

He closed his eyes, searching for anything, any memory or map that could lead him the right way. A spark of heat trickled across his palm, and his eyes shot open as he burrowed around in the coin pocket of his jeans for the compass he'd carried everywhere without ever knowing why.

The needle spun once and locked like an arrow, guiding him down the west passage. He took off again, legs pumping battery acid and burning as he slid through the open doorway at the end of the hall on his knees to clutch at the unmoving figure of the Doctor.

"I'm here," he breathed. "I'm here, oh god, please be okay."

The Doctor's fixed and open eyes were distant, and lines on his face marked the path of dried tears.

"Oh, please no." Chris fisted handfuls of the Doctor's jacket, hauling his body up to cling him tightly to his chest. He rocked gently. "I'm here."

He tried to still his hands, fisting handfuls of the Doctor's coat painfully tight under white knuckles.

"You said you'd never leave. You said you wouldn't," he whispered. "Come on. Come on, you promised."

The Doctor's frame sagged in his arms.

"Come on, no," Chris begged quietly.

Silence buzzed in his ears, broken only by the scrape of his feet and knees on the stone floor.

"You're an idiot," he hissed through his teeth. "You're an *idiot*, and you can't leave me, not now, not after all this. Doctor? DOCTOR!" he screamed, angry now and shaking hard. His heart sent out a sharp shock of pain in warning.

The body beneath him was still.

He was sobbing, arms trembling out of his control as he cradled the Doctor to his chest.

“No, no, no. You promised me,” he uttered wetly around tiny, broken sounds, fighting the rising ache. “You were gonna marry me, you remember? You *promised*, you said you always keep your promises.” He peeled the ring off his finger and scrambled frantically for the Doctor’s hand, pushing it over the knuckle of his ring finger.

“You promised,” he whispered around the tears that had gathered at his mouth. “And you have to. You *have* to.”

“I love you.”

PART ELEVEN

Bright Moon

"I love you."

"Nghh."

Chris rocked back at the tiny sound, and his breath caught in his chest at the gentle flutter of the Doctor's eyelashes.

"Ow," he groaned.

With a loud, awkward noise of surprise and relief, Chris pressed his fingers through the Doctor's hair and bowed their heads together. "Oh god, you scared me."

"That?" the Doctor slurred. "That was... nothing, just a... nap."

"You *died*," Chris growled playfully.

"All in a day," the Doctor mumbled.

Chris laughed, still too loud and awkward around the sobs that were trapped in his throat, but he didn't care.

"You remember." The Doctor smiled up at him dopily, playing with the ring on his finger.

"I remember everything," Chris confirmed softly, smiling back.

"I'm sorry," he said.

"What for?"

"Well," the Doctor eased himself up gingerly, with Chris's arms braced against his back for support.

"Technically I made you the most wanted man in the universe."

Chris fixed him with an adoring smile. "I think that's the other way around."

The Doctor looked at him quizzically, and Chris rolled his eyes. “He who *owns* the Heart of the Navigator.”

“Huh,” the Doctor honked quietly. “All of time and space. You think I would’ve figured out it was a metaphor.”

“It’s okay, you’re not that bright,” Chris teased, rubbing gently at his back.

The Doctor laughed, and quickly winced. “Ow, okay, still sore.”

Chris grimaced as he helped him to his feet, supporting most of his weight and making sure he could stand on his own. “Steady?”

With a nod, he rested both hands on Chris’s chest. “Steady.”

Smiling gently, Chris brushed at the curls on his forehead, twining them between his fingers. “My Doctor,” he whispered.

The Doctor smiled back, dropping his hands to press at Chris’s waist. “My *universe*.”

He huffed out a tiny laugh. “Okay, that’s gonna get old.”

“Hey, I just died,” the Doctor grinned, pulling him closer. “Indulge me.”

Splaying fingers across his cheek, Chris leaned in and kissed him, dragging their lips together slowly. He let it last, pressing in tighter as sparks of electricity shot up his spine and the Doctor’s fingers curled into the fabric of his shirt like a promise.

Finally, he broke away, breathing heavily. “We can-”

“Right,” the Doctor managed.

“Soon, but first-”

“Right, yes...”

Unable to stop himself, Chris pressed in again, kissing him harder this time and cradling his face in both hands. The fingers clutching at his hips gripped tighter, and Chris whimpered softly.

He broke away just as violently as before, scrambling for control over the urge and the desperation. "Okay, we have to-"

"-fix this first," the Doctor agreed breathlessly. "What are we gonna do?"

Chris's eyes grew wide for a moment, and a smile tugged at the edge of his mouth. "I have an idea. But," he swallowed and met the Doctor's eyes. "You really, really have to trust me."

The Doctor thumbed the ring on his finger. "With my life."

"That," Chris scrunched his nose up, "and your TARDIS."

* * *

The grinding and whirring noise caught her off guard, this time. Yllyandra spun on the spot, watching the blue box fade away, leaving the chamber empty.

She peered across the open space. "What are you up to?"

"The usual," came the smiling reply.

Her head snapped around, and her eyes widened at the sight of the Doctor leaning casually against the doorframe.

"You-"

"The funny thing," the Doctor cut her off, "that nobody seems to get, is that it's actually really, unfathomably, *ludicrously* hard to kill me."

Her fists balled instantly, eyes burning with rage.

"So many people keep trying, though, which is a little disheartening – get it, disheartening? Never mind." He waved his arms dismissively. "I suppose I can't really take the credit, though. This time it wasn't me, it was him." He tipped his head to the side, and her eyes darted to where Chris hovered behind him quietly.

"The Takers," she growled. "They-"

The Doctor drew a small circle in the air with his sonic screwdriver, cutting her off with a whistle. "Made of metal," he said. "Good old trusty metal setting. Try wood next time."

"You're still trapped," she spat. "Even your ridiculous blue box fled from the power of my machine, and now I get to kill you all over again."

"Not exactly," the Doctor countered, pocketing his sonic. "What was it you said? The two most important things, what were they? Revenge and love?"

Her eyes flashed with confusion.

"You took revenge, Yllya," he said softly. "I got the better side of that coin."

"Sweet sentiment," she said mockingly. "But it doesn't change anything."

"No, but it has distracted you long enough that you didn't notice the black hole that just opened up over your machine."

She jerked, twisting to stare out the window at the shadow of Bright Moon, slowly crumbling in the sky. "NO!"

"There's enough Lightsource out there that the lanterns will burn a little longer," Chris said calmly. "Keep people going, but they'll have to find a new source of power soon."

"We can help with that," the Doctor added. "But it had to end. Even you knew one day it would."

She paced frantically, wringing her hands and shaking as her grip on the avatar began to slip. "H-How?" she demanded.

"It helps to share a genetic relationship with the universe, and a time machine that has the power and energy to create and collapse a black hole," Chris said seriously.

The Doctor smiled, and leaned back a little. "Did I mention that I love that you can do that?"

Chris elbowed him in the ribs.

"No," she seethed. "You wouldn't. Your stupid machine will be destroyed in the process."

"Not if I pull it out right about..." Chris narrowed his eyes, staring out the window, "... *now*."

A slow whirring echoed through the room, and the blue box began to fade in slowly around them.

"How can you do this?" she screeched.

"I'm doing exactly what you asked me to," the Doctor replied. "I'm *repaying you*."

The stone room slipped away from them as the inside of the TARDIS took shape.

They both sprinted as soon as the ground was solid beneath them, clambering to the control panel and pulling at levers in tandem. As fast as it had appeared, the TARDIS took off again, spinning out into space.

Chris pivoted and stretched both hands up to press against the smoky glass that held the heart of the time vortex, closing his eyes and feeling the last pieces of Bright Moon descend into blackness out beyond the stars. With every muscle taught and straining he reached out again, bleeding energy into the event horizon and shaking with the shockwaves of the impending explosion.

"Go, go, *go*!" He shouted, and the Doctor threw more switches and levers along the lower bar.

In the wake of the collapse, Chris slumped exhaustedly against the plates of the control panel. He'd cushioned the blow as best he could for the planet, and for the other moons, but it had nearly torn the TARDIS apart.

The Doctor dropped to sit beside him, curling an arm protectively around his head.

"Urgh," Chris moaned. "I could sleep for a month."

With a smile, the Doctor brushed his fingers through Chris's hair. "You can, now," he said. "You can sleep for a century, if you want. We have all the time in the world."

Chris laughed at the phrase, tucking his head against the Doctor's neck.

They sat in stillness for a long time before Chris shifted, pressing his cheek to the Doctor's shoulder and wrapping an arm around his waist. "I have to go back home."

The Doctor blinked. "Sorry?"

"And tell my parents," Chris chuckled. "I have to tell them I'm – moving away. Or something. Somewhere where there are no phones."

"I can sonic your cell," the Doctor insisted.

"Seriously?"

"Mm-hmm," he hummed in confirmation.

There was another long pause, and the hum of the TARDIS vibrated through both of them.

"Later though," Chris added, snuggling down.

"Later is good."

"We did just save the universe."

"We did."

Chris opened his eyes, amused. "You know all the weirdest words. Is there a word for that?"

"For what?"

"Saving the universe."

The Doctor chuckled, and pressed a kiss to Chris's forehead. "*Saturday.*"

Shaking with laughter, Chris rolled against him, and they collapsed onto the floor of the TARDIS in a giddy, exhausted heap.

PART TWELVE

Begin

There was a damp chill riding on the breeze over the west park, but it was still breathtakingly beautiful, caught in the crisp and clear winter air like a photograph. Chris smiled over the steam of his coffee, and curled into the Doctor's side for warmth.

"Y'know," the Doctor began, "even after seeing thousands of worlds, and wandering around galaxies like playgrounds watching stars... *burn out* – I'll never grow tired of this place."

Chris hummed his agreement, burying his cold nose in the Doctor's jacket sleeve for a moment and nuzzling against his shoulder.

"Earth," the Doctor said, matter-of-factly. "Human beings. You never cease to amaze me."

"We are pretty amazing," Chris remarked dryly.

The Doctor turned his head with a smile, and gently kissed the tip of Chris's nose, eliciting a huffed laugh. Chris wiped at his nose with a gloved hand and sighed, melting against the Doctor's frame as an arm curled around his back.

He pressed his cup of coffee into his other palm and shifted to twine their fingers together, gently thumbing at the ring on the Doctor's hand.

It had been six years – six years that went by like a whirlwind. Six years of time and space, and everything in between, and there was still so much more out there. Their days were numbered, but it was a number Chris was fairly sure that neither of them could count to, now his body was infused with the energy of the universe. Like the Doctor, he'd barely aged a day in those six years, and sometimes just the realization that they had this side of forever left together was all it took to leave him numb and reeling with joy.

Chris wondered if he'd ever stop being surprised by the vast and immeasurable wonders of the universe, not the least of which was the man in his arms.

His Doctor.

“How do you think it’ll end?” he asked suddenly, sipping at his coffee.

The Doctor thought for a moment, eyes trailing over the line of the hills and the light snow that had just begun to fall over the city beyond. He turned again to look at his companion, a knowing smile playing at his lips. “The way it was always meant to,” he said. “You and me, at the end of the world.”

Chris’s mouth quirked at the edges, and he rolled his head against the shoulder beneath it. “It’s a date.”

The quiet set in, and the snow grew closer as Chris finished his coffee, now shivering gently from the new press of cold. The Doctor leaned back, arms unwinding the scarf around his neck to wrap around Chris, all while ignoring his objections.

“You’re freezing.” He breathed out a plume of steam as he spoke, and pulled himself sharply to his feet.

Chris laughed, jolting slightly from the sudden loss of heat. “Wh- where are you going? I was just getting warm!”

“This is why you should listen when I say bring your coat!” The Doctor called back as he jogged away, heading for the TARDIS parked around the corner. “But since I’m perpetually burdened with a face nobody listens to, I’ll just get it and be right back.”

Still laughing gently, Chris watched him disappear around the blocky stone fence that marked the edge of the hillside park. He wrapped his arms around his chest and the scarf that tumbled down it, trying to hold in whatever warmth he could while his mind drifted off into daydreams.

Suddenly, the TARDIS whirred and coughed, and appeared before him out of thin air.

Chris shook his head, amused. “Now you’re just getting lazy.”

The Doctor stepped through the doors and stopped still, blinking at him. His hair was a giant mess, like it used to be years ago, and he wore a suit cut with gray and black, and bright red shoes. There was no scarf around his neck, and no ring on his finger. No familiar warmth to his gaze.

Chris measured him carefully. *Not my Doctor.*

“Hi!” the Doctor announced excitedly, grinning from ear to ear.

Past, Chris decided. *Not future*. He smiled at the young Doctor with a knowing gleam in his eyes. "You're going to cross yourself," he warned kindly. "If you stay."

The Doctor's eyes grew wide, and he patted down his jacket awkwardly as he shuffled back towards the door. "Really? I'm already – here? Another me. Future me? Well..." he pulled an exaggerated face, trying to decide what to do. "That's ... odd."

Chris's smile didn't falter. "What are you looking for?"

The Doctor shrugged bodily. "Nothing in particular. New things, unique... things. One of a kind things."

After a sharp flare of realization hit him, Chris's mouth fell open in delight. He pulled himself to his feet, wandering over towards the TARDIS and fondly resting a hand on the mirage of blue painted wood. "Right person," he said softly. "Wrong time."

There was something stunning and dark in the Doctor's gaze as it fixed on Chris and lingered there.

Chris turned to face him. "He's out there, dreaming of you," he said, reaching up to unwind the scarf from his neck. With a single stride he closed the gap between them, throwing the loop over the Doctor's head and winding the ends together over his chest.

The Doctor smiled, eyes bright with amusement at the random gesture as he fingered the frayed edges of his new scarf.

Resting a hand on the Doctor's shoulder, Chris fixed him with a fond look.

"One of a kind?" the Doctor asked with barely checked eagerness. "Oh, I can't wait to find out about you."

Chris laughed gently. "All in time."

"Just like everything else," the Doctor groaned comically. "But really, who are you?" his tongue flicked out and wet his bottom lip as he caught sight of stars in the black of Chris's pupils. "*What* are you?"

Chris reached out his arm; pushing open the TARDIS door and guiding him back through it.

The Doctor turned at the threshold, hands planted on either side of the door as he stared out curiously.

Chris placed a flat palm against the side of the TARDIS and watched it spring to life.

The Doctor glanced up, startled, and locked Chris with a wide-eyed gaze of pure wonder. “What *are* you?”

With a knowing smile, Chris buried both hands in his pockets, fingers tracing the outline of a compass. “I’m yours.”

As the TARDIS faded into nothingness, a voice came calling from over the hill. Chris folded his arms, eyes wandering over the drifting and melting snowflakes as they tumbled down. He felt the warm rush against his back as his coat wrapped around him, followed by two strong arms pulling him tight against the Doctor’s chest.

“You’re frozen,” he scolded. “Where’s my scarf?”

“I never liked it,” Chris teased, tipping his head back to rest on the Doctor’s shoulder.

The Doctor laughed, and Chris shook at the blissful warmth of the breath tumbling down his neck.

After a long pause, he pressed a quick kiss to the curve of Chris’s jaw, and rested his chin on the thick, furry collar of his jacket. “That was me, wasn’t it?”

Chris smiled. “Yes.”

A comfortable quiet washed over them again before Chris’s brow creased. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I couldn’t,” he replied simply. “If you’d known it was coming, you would have doubted what to say, what to do. It could have changed everything.”

Chris made a tiny noise in acknowledgement, folding his arms over the hands that were pressed into his chest.

The Doctor’s expression folded into one of confusion. “But what I still don’t understand is, where did the scarf come from?”

With a chuckle, Chris closed his eyes, sinking into the warmth of the body behind him.

“No, I mean it,” the Doctor continued. “If I got it from you, and then gave it to you, and then you gave it to past-me, then where...?”

“Maybe that’s another adventure entirely,” Chris murmured.

The Doctor pressed a grin into the fabric of Chris’s coat, glittering with fallen snow as they held each other in the silvery winter sunlight. “Maybe it is.”

With a sly smile, Chris lifted a hand to his mouth, pulling the glove off with his teeth. The Doctor watched, amused, as he dove his free hand down and burrowed into his pocket, pulling out a tiny gold disc.

“I haven’t seen that in a long time,” the Doctor breathed softly.

Chris pulled his glove back on and watched, waiting for the needle to point back towards his chest. It didn’t even take a second.

“It’s broken,” the Doctor said.

“I don’t know,” Chris wondered aloud. “A compass is supposed to guide you. Help you find your way by showing you where your constant is. The thing that anchors your world.”

“The constant being North?” the Doctor asked.

A relaxed smile spread across his features, and he leaned back to press a kiss to the Doctor’s mouth softly.

“Not for me.”

(FIN)