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**REFLECTIVE DISSONANCE**



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*The House was a place of shadows and silence, dust and devastation.*

*Quiet slippers disturbed the grime of years as she walked out into the darkness of the once-bright ballroom. She could remember it as it was, back when light danced beside the joyous couples that had once graced the large chamber amid laughter and shining happiness.*

*But nothing was left now.*

*She stopped in the center of the ballroom, the train of her faded green gown swishing through the accumulated dust. She could hear it, the music of the long-gone quartet, and her feet itched to follow the steps of the waltz she could recall so very vividly despite however long it had been since songs had once echoed through the now-silent halls.*

*Curtseying to her non-existent partner, she positioned her arms and feet in the proscribed positions, and with an imagined swell of perfectly played notes she began the waltz she'd once danced so happily, losing herself in the glittering past.*

*Time no longer had any meaning for those in the House. She had no notion of it and for how long the silent music carried her through the intricate steps she'd learned from her mother. The older woman had been a belle of society, loved and admired by anyone who had seen her. As her daughter, she had been expected to follow in her mother's footsteps, to marry and to continue the family traditions. It had been all she'd ever wanted or aspired to, and she had been proud of being the one entrusted with that destiny.*

*Until the end, of course.*

*When the end had come, they had lost all that they had ever thought inviolate. Her chest felt empty from that heartbreak.*

*"May I have this dance?"*

*She ceased her measured movements, dropping her hands as she turned to see who had spoken. Her smile felt stretched, like rotting cloth. "Of course, brother."*

*He returned the smile, but on his handsome face it appeared much more genuine. He stepped into the circle of newly-dusted floor, his shoes squeaking on the once-polished wood. His tattered blue-purple finery was a contrast to her own as he bowed as manners dictated, and then he took her into his arms and began the waltz anew.*

\* \* \* \* \*

Valentina Rossi had thought she'd been through all sorts of turbulence on the TARDIS.

That was before the floor dropped out from underneath her feet as she was heading toward the console room.

She fell what felt like a great distance but was actually closer to two feet, coming down awkwardly and glad she was wearing her most comfortable shoes, or else she could have ended up with a twisted ankle or something equally embarrassing. Val steadied herself against the wall...

This felt a little like cold custard under her palm for about two seconds, and then sprung back into its usual shape.

That wasn't right at all.

She continued on her way to the console room, this time a bit faster than the casual walk she'd adopted before the floor had vanished beneath her. If the Doctor was messing around with things again without warning them of what he was doing, she was going to have words with him.

Val threw the door to the room open, to reveal the Doctor, calmly making his way around the central console as if nothing at all was wrong.

"Is there a reason why the TARDIS just tried to buck me off the floor out in the hallway and into a nearby wall?" she asked, watching his careful meander.

"Hm?" came the reply.

That Val interpreted as, *'I have no idea and I'm acting nonchalantly because it's expected of me.'*

She was kept from saying anything out loud by Tom's sudden appearance in the console room.

He was soaking wet.

"What happened to you?" Val asked, her eyes widening in surprise.

"Yes," the Doctor added, glaring. "And why are you dripping all over my console room?"

"I was walking past the bathroom when the TARDIS dumped me onto the floor," Tom growled, irritated. "The thing is, someone left the bathroom door open and when the TARDIS decided to give its imitation of an earthquake it caused the water from the pool to overflow...out into the hallway, giving me an unexpected bath."

Val barely hid her smile behind her hand. At least she'd only gotten shaken up a bit. She wasn't in the mood to participate in an unexpected wet t-shirt contest...although she had to admit Tom looked pretty good in soaked white cotton.

"Well, stop making a mess and go change," the Doctor ordered. He made a shooing gesture and began his perusal of the console once more.

"Not likely," Tom snorted. "Not until I'm sure I'm not gonna get dumped on my arse and get drenched with something worse than chlorinated water."

The Doctor gave a put-upon sigh, and Val couldn't tell if it was aimed at Tom, or the TARDIS. "It's nothing serious. The TARDIS' dimensional transducer is acting up, causing the internal dimensions to vacillate just a bit."

"So you're saying it *will* happen again," Tom said, apparently looking for something a bit more concrete. Val couldn't blame him since she wanted the same sort of thing herself.

"Yes, but it's easily fixable." The Time Lord began his trip around the console yet again, on this circuit working the controls instead of simply glaring at them. "In equivalent of Earth's 30<sup>th</sup> Century, the planet Corian had the premier dimensional engineers in the Twelve Galaxies. It won't be a problem getting a replacement if I can hit the correct time zone."

The TARDIS shook again, and Val could have sworn the room stretched away into the far distance before snapping back like a rounded rubber band. It made her eyes itch and her head ache. "Well, as long as it's not something serious..."

“No, not at all. The poor girl might get a little twisted up, and we’ll be grounded until the transducer is replaced, but nothing too dangerous will occur. Well, unless it completely gives out while we’re in the vortex, then that could be a bit of a mess, but since the transducer just began acting up there’s hardly any chance of that.”

Somehow, Val wasn’t relieved by that.

Neither was Tom, it appeared, but he simply rolled his eyes and headed back into the TARDIS, most likely to change out of his drenched clothing.

“Don’t walk past the bathroom again!” she called out, getting an irritated grumble in return. She grinned at that and then turned her attention back to the Doctor. “You seem pretty certain about this planet.”

“At the height of its power, Coriani scientists came close to rivaling the Time Lords in their manipulations of various dimensions. They would create exquisite pocket dimensions for any sort of occasion, which really was a waste of their talents.” He twisted a dial, which Val thought was one of the coordinate stabilizers but wasn’t entirely certain. “However, inasmuch as they sometimes did frivolous work, they really were quite brilliant.”

Val shook her head at the compliment within the insult because, if there wasn’t anything more frivolous than having infinite dimensions within a time machine then she didn’t know the meaning of the word.

The TARDIS did another sort of twisting, shivering movement, and it made Val feel slightly motion sick. “How soon will it be before we get there?” she asked, wanting to lean against something more stable but knowing that most likely didn’t exist until the Doctor managed to fix whatever was wrong with the TARDIS.

“Time is relative...time travel more so. We should be there in the time it takes for our Mr. Brooker to get changed.” He went back to work...

And the TARDIS did something that made Val *really* want to lose her lunch.

It couldn’t be too soon.

\* \* \* \* \*

Of course, they would have to land in an alley, but at least this one was relatively clean.

The TARDIS had managed to wedge itself between two towering walls made of a yellowish-colored brick that felt smooth under Val’s fingertips. The air was cool, but not too cold that she’d need to go back inside and get a coat, for which she was very grateful.

“I feel like falling to my knees and kissing the ground,” Tom grouched.

The Doctor shut the TARDIS door behind them. “You really are making far too big a deal over a simple malfunction.”

“Still,” Val interjected, wanting to avoid what might have ended in a conversation that would have ended with the Time Lord getting the last word, “it is good to be back on solid ground. Even you have to admit that, Doctor.” She knew he’d do no such thing, even though the worst of the instability had sent the Doctor slamming into one of the walls with enough force that it most likely had left bruises on his arm and side.

The Doctor completely ignored her, instead taking a look around. “Ah, we seem to be in the Citrine Section of the capitol. I’ll just need to pop over to Indigo and get what we need. Shouldn’t take long...why don’t you two take a look around? Citrine is the jewelry area, and you should be fine to window shop.” With that, he began to stride away.

“Doctor!” Val called, and something in her voice must have communicated just how irritated she was about being dumped in a strange city on an alien planet because he stopped and turned around.

Not that he hadn’t done that very thing before, but by now both of them were used to it.

“The city is broken up into seven sections,” the Doctor answered the question that was on Val’s tongue. “Each is named after the Color that controls it.”

“Color?” Tom asked.

“Yes. The Colors – also known as the Glitterati – are the ruling families of Corian. The city itself is in the shape of a circle, so you shouldn’t be able to get lost. It’s like a huge color wheel, really.” He reached over and tapped the brick wall. “This is Citrine. You can tell by the bricks. Next to Citrine are Titian, then Beryl, then Sapphire...etcetera, etcetera. I think you get the picture?”

Val nodded, and Tom said, “Like the color spectrum, then. Only instead of red, yellow, orange, and all that, they’ve got fancier names.”

The Doctor smiled. “Exactly. Indigo is the Science Section, which is where I’ll find what we need for the TARDIS. Oh, and Corian is a fairly peaceful planet, so you shouldn’t get into too much trouble without me.” With that, he turned once more and before Val could react, he was gone.

“Famous last words, Doctor,” Tom muttered under his breath.

“You know, he just jinxed us,” Val commented as she and Tom followed a bit more sedately.

“You’re not kidding.” Tom rolled his eyes.

It wasn’t that they were trouble magnets, but traveling with the Doctor had taught both of them that it didn’t matter where they landed; something was always bound to turn up. It was like an unwritten law of the universe.

The alley opened up onto a wide thoroughfare, both sides of the street lined with buildings made of the same yellow brick that marked the area as being in the Citrine Section. People were making their way along wide walkways in front of the rows of buildings, while what passed for cars motored along the two-lane street. Tom had a grin on his face as he watched some of the vehicles, and Val wondered what it was about cars that changed men into little boys wanting a shiny new toy. She had to admit, they were pretty much like what she’d driven back on Earth, and it was a bit of normal.

Of course, there were the aliens that took that notion of normal and stamped on it with both feet.

The Coriani had snow-white skin, and three eyes. They were bipedal like humans but were taller and thinner, with long, three-fingered hands and delicate features. To a being they all had dark hair, in shades of black, brown, and even a couple that were a very dark blue, and done up in various styles depending on the wearer’s gender. Their clothes were bright and colorful, and made of light-weight material that flowed when they walked.

They were a very attractive race, Val had to admit.

“At least we won’t stand out too much,” Tom commented, jerking his head toward another human – or human-like alien, it was sometimes hard to tell – who was making their way along the walkway toward them.

“Not that that ever made any difference before,” Val chuckled. She linked arms with him, glad that he was there. “Let’s do some window shopping, shall we?”

“Yeah, I heard the Doctor saying this was the Jewelry Section, which means I’m gonna be stuck with watching you ‘ooh’ and ‘aah’ over everything, aren’t I?”

“I think I resent you assuming that I’m just like any other woman.” She tugged him out into the foot traffic.

“C’mon, Val. You know you like all the pretties.”

She laughed fully. “Okay, yeah...you know me that well. I should be concerned by that.”

“Nah. You still retain your air of womanly mystery, don’t worry.”

Tom suddenly stopped, and Val was pulled up short. A couple of the pedestrians had to go around them, and Val ignored them in favor of finding out what was wrong with her companion.

“Well,” Tom said, answering her question, “if you wanted to do window shopping, you’re gonna be out of luck. There don’t appear to be any windows to shop in.”

Val glanced around, and had to admit that Tom was correct. None of the shops lining the street had windows in them. Instead, where the windows would have been, were painted murals of the wares that the stores had.

She looked closer, and could tell that the murals had been painted over the actual glass, as if the shopkeepers on the street had wanted to block out the interiors of their shops.

That didn’t make sense.

“How weird is that?” Tom said, echoing her thoughts. “Why would you want to paint over the window? Wouldn’t someone want people to see what they actually have on sale?”

“It’s an alien planet,” Val answered; although she was curious herself about the reasons why an entire section of the city would have their windows covered up. “Who knows what their reasons are? I’m sure, to them, they’re good ones.”

Tom nodded. “Yeah, you’re right. Still, it’s really bizarre.”

Val had to agree with that. “Come on,” she said, tugging on his arm, “let’s go and see what’s on sale around here.”

The Citrine Section wasn’t all jewelry, they discovered. Judging from the murals over what had once been windows; there were exquisite timepieces, walking sticks of all shapes and sizes, vases and bottles and every sort of container in between. Anything that could be fashioned of metal and gemstones was on display, and Val finally pulled Tom into a shop that advertized earrings of all sorts.

Once inside, there were more strange differences.

For one thing, there were no display cases. Everything in the shop was either laid out on long tables or hanging from elaborate earring trees, as if the merchant wasn’t afraid of thieves grabbing and running. And maybe they weren’t; Val had no idea what the crime rates of Corian were, so it could simply be that there wasn’t anything the shop owner needed to protect his stock against.

But, then there was the complete lack of mirrors.

Surely there would be some way to check the look and hang of any of the earrings. Val didn’t understand it. However, this was an alien world, and if she’d learned one thing travelling with the Doctor was that not everyone acted the same.

She shook her head and, releasing Tom’s arm, decided it was time to shop in earnest. Val knew that he’d become bored pretty quickly, and hid her grin by perusing one of the taller of the earring displays, which actually resembled a tree, earrings hanging from the branches. She was

certain he'd find some way to entertain himself, and was touched that he was willing to accompany her even knowing that shopping wasn't his thing.

The workmanship was exquisite, she had to admit, but Val frowned slightly as she noticed that none of the various colored metals were actually shiny. Every piece had a brushed finish, and even the gemstones adorning them didn't have any sort of sparkle to them.

Still, she liked what she was seeing, especially one pair that was a silver tone without any sort of jeweled ornamentation on them. They were two strands of metal, twisted one around the other, and Val gently removed them from where they were hanging, wishing she could see what they looked like on.

"Excuse me," she said to the Coriani who was obviously the salesbeing on duty, "do you have a mirror or something so I can see these on?"

The alien, who had been wearing a pleased smile, suddenly frowned. "I can assure you those will look wonderful with your skin tone."

Val rolled her eyes. "Yes, I'm sure, but I'd like to judge that for myself."

The Coriani didn't look at all happy, and it worried Val. Why would someone act that strangely just because she'd asked for a mirror? Okay, yes...she hadn't seen one anywhere in the shop, but surely they had to have one around someplace?

"I'm sorry," the salesbeing answered, "but I will have to ask you to leave." He then made a strange gesture with his hand...first and second finger outstretched and pointed at Val, as if warding off something.

Val's mouth dropped open in surprise, even as Tom was saying, "Now, look here...she just asked to see what these looked like on. It only makes sense that she sees them before she buys them."

The Coriani shook his head. "You should go before I call the authorities."

Tom was going to argue, but Val put a hand on his arm to stop him. "It's fine, I didn't need them anyway." She carefully replaced the earrings in their place on the display then pulled Tom from the shop and out onto the walkway.

"That was weird," Tom exclaimed, turning back to stare through the open doorway.

"It really is fine," Val assured him. "But you're right...it was really strange. All I did was ask for a mirror."

"Well, maybe it has something to do with they're not being any windows or shiny things. I mean, there are no reflective surfaces anywhere."

"True." Val looked out over the street, once again noticing the lack of anything that could be used to reflect things. "And did you see that motion he made toward me?"

"Yeah, like you gave him the evil eye or something." Tom then smirked. "Of course, you have been known to do that with the Doctor..."

She punched him in the arm playfully. "Shut it, you." Then she grabbed his hand. "Come on, I want to see if it happens again somewhere else."

"I always knew you were a glutton for punishment." But Tom followed willingly.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Doctor had passed through Citrine Section and was well on his way through Vermillion, when it struck him that something wasn't right.

He stopped on the corner he found himself on, getting a good look around at the street. Certainly, it looked much like any other city he'd traveled to, with people bustling about and vehicles clogging the streets, but there was something off...

Ah yes, the windows.

The Doctor thought back on his last time on Corian. Yes, there had been windows involved. He could recall being given a tour with the then-ruling Lord Indigo, and he remembered being impressed with the people and the capitol, seeing the advanced state of their science and their culture. His memories of Corian had been good ones.

But there was something wrong, and he couldn't put his finger on what it exactly was, but it had something to do with the missing windows.

He felt a sudden concern for his companions. He'd left them to their own devices, and while both of them were perfectly capable young people, they did have a propensity for getting into trouble. Not that that had anything to do with traveling with him, of course.

Still, none of them would be able to leave the planet without a new dimensional transducer, and the sooner he found one, the sooner they could depart.

The Doctor started forward once more, dodging both foot traffic and ground vehicles in order to get across the street. The capitol had been constructed like a wheel, and had 'spokes' leading between sections, and it was by using these crosswalks that the Doctor hoped to get to his destination quickly.

However, there was a very large part of him that wanted to find out exactly how Corian had changed since his last visit. His curiosity was eating at him as he passed from Vermillion with its red bricks and into Amaranthine with its purple hues, his mind working as he tried to figure out what was going on just by observation.

It wasn't just the lack of windows; there was a strange taint on the air, like an old lightning strike, and the Doctor could swear he'd sensed something like it before but nothing came to mind. There was also a general feeling that the city itself was running down. Certainly it looked as vibrant as ever, with the Coriani and various alien visitors scurrying around on their own business, but there seemed to be a sort of frantic nature to the movements of the residents.

Then it struck the Doctor: it was as if the people were waiting for some sort of bad news, or perhaps an invasion.

That stopped him in his tracks, surrounded by people who muttered at his sudden halt in the middle of foot traffic. He frowned as he considered that particular thought, ignoring how pedestrians parted around him and cast him strange – and some almost unfriendly – looks. In this time period this sector of space had been at peace for centuries, mostly down to the various treaties and alliances among the inhabited systems. The Daleks were another three hundred years out from invading, and the Cybermen, Draconians, and other war-like races were nowhere near this region of space, and so they would not be rattling their proverbial sabers and threatening violence.

No, this was something else entirely.

The Doctor shook himself and began walking once more. Perhaps he'd get some answers when he reached his destination.

\* \* \* \* \*

*The library had always been her favorite room in the House. That was before everything had been lost, and then this once-place of safety and peace had become as empty and desolate as the rest of their house.*

*And yet, she found herself there, seated on one of the rotting chairs, surrounded by dust and mold of thousands of dying books. One such was on her lap as she read the familiar words to her cousin, who curled up at her feet, her head resting on the dirty cloth, blonde hair fanned out around her.*

*She reached down and stroked the straw-dry hair, and continued to read aloud, the fairy tale nature of the story letting her mind wander to better times, when sunshine glowed through the blackened windows, and laughter filled the dead hallways. Now, only her dust-infused voice disturbed the emptiness of the walls around them.*

*“And, once he saw the Tower before him, he spurred his mount forward, knowing that his quest would soon be over, and that the princess would once again be free.”*

*“Rylla,” her cousin murmured, her child’s voice interrupting the flow of the story, “do you think there’s a prince out there who will rescue us some day?”*

*She couldn’t help but smile, although it was a brittle thing and did not last long. “Perhaps, little Phyre,” she answered, her fingers pulling teasingly on a lock of hair.*

*Her cousin giggled, slapping her hand away. “Stop it,” she exclaimed.*

*“Am I interrupting something?” a voice said from the doorway.*

*She looked up. “Not at all, brother,” she answered. “I was simply reading.”*

*He came into the library, his red clothing a little less dusty and stained than anyone else’s. He was trying to smile, but she could see it was false, that something was wrong under his handsome features. She frowned up at him, and he nodded, acknowledging the silent question.*

*“It is our uncle,” he said.*

*She closed her eyes, not wanting to see the sudden rush of anguish in his face. She knew, oh goddess, she knew...*

*“What’s wrong with Uncle Rantha?” her little cousin asked, her voice no longer young, but as old as anything else in their House.*

*No one should have to give up their childhood in this way.*

*No one.*

*“He has taken to his rooms,” her brother answered. “The door is locked and he does not answer. My husband and our aunt are trying to get him to respond...”*

*She knew there would be no answer.*

*“Just like Aunt Tishy,” little Phyre said, resigned. “We couldn’t get her to answer, either.”*

*Their aunt had succumbed to the loneliness and the memories...well; she didn’t know how long it had been since their aunt had locked herself in her own room, mourning the loss of everything she’d once held dear. She had not been seen since.*

*No one even knew if she was still alive.*

*She didn’t know if this had been the punishment that their banishers had planned, but each and every one of them were fading away, lost within the darkness and silence of the one place that should have held happy memories for them all.*

*The same memories that were destroying them.*

\* \* \* \* \*

Tom had to admit, when Val got something into her head she just wouldn't let it go.

This was why the two of them were currently in what passed for a jail on Corian, sitting on uncomfortable chairs and being glared at by all three eyes of the copper who had arrested them. Tom wanted to fidget a bit; he hated the whole being arrested thing, even though it happened with frightening regularity since they'd been with the Doctor. It was never really their fault...all right, so the first time he'd ever been arrested it had, in fact, been his fault, but he couldn't help that he'd been bored and hacking Heathrow had proven to be just the challenge he'd needed. Getting caught though hadn't been in the cards.

And then there was the Doctor, who really was a police magnet if there ever was one.

This time it really was Val's fault. She'd dragged him into other shops, and had asked each and every salesperson for a mirror, which had gotten them, kicked out as well as gestured at in that weird way that reminded him of his grandmother's warding off of the evil eye.

It really had only been a matter of time before the local police had shown up.

They'd been escorted to the nearest jail, which was in a plain-looking building constructed out of white brick, which made it stand out amid all the yellow buildings on the main street. Their 'escort' also wore all white, a uniform that was quite different from the flowing and colorful fabrics that everyone else wore. What looked like a blaster hung from a belt at his waist, and he didn't look afraid to use it.

"All right," the copper began, "I've had several complaints about the pair of you, asking questions that you should know better than to ask." He settled into another one of the uncomfortable chairs, looking at them as if he was somehow reading their minds.

Tom thought that the whole three-eyed thing was going to get strange after a bit, because it made the Coriani really good glarers.

"I don't know what you mean," Val answered, giving him an innocent expression that Tom knew that she'd worked on for a while in order to get it right. It said, *'No Doctor, I didn't accidentally touch any of the TARDIS controls, and it's not my fault we ended up in the gravitational pull of a black hole.'*

Tom had been impressed the first time he'd seen it. He'd been even more impressed when it actually seemed to work on the Time Lord.

The Coriani rolled his eyes, which was impressive since he did have the three of them. "You were accosting shop workers, asking for a mirror. Didn't the starliner you came in on give you the basic visitation packet?"

"Well," Tom admitted, "we didn't actually come by starliner. Our ship is...unique."

"But still, there should have been some sort of orientation done by the captain of your vessel." The policeman stared at them both as if he thought they were both full of it.

Val snorted. "You don't know our *captain* at all then if you think he'd tell us much of anything."

She did have a point; sometimes the Doctor was extremely close-mouthed about where they'd ended up. And, judging from the information he'd given them about Corian, Tom thought he must have been woefully out of date on the state of affairs on the planet.

"Look, we really don't have any idea what we've done wrong," Tom said, trying the innocent look and most likely failing at it.

Or maybe not, given the gesture that the copper made, which was really universal for, *'I'm getting a headache'* but could also mean, *'Why am I the one who has to deal with the idiots?'*

“All right,” he sighed, slumping a little in his seat, “suppose I believe that you really don’t have a clue what you did wrong –“

“We really don’t,” Val put in.

“Then I’ll need to explain why any and all reflective surfaces are against the law here on Corian.”

Of all the things the cop could have said, Tom wasn’t expecting *that*. From the expression on Val’s face she was just as surprised.

“All right, I believe you didn’t know. But yes, anything reflective is not allowed on Corian...this includes mirrors, and since you were asking for one you were technically breaking the law. I’m going to have to put in a complaint against your ship’s captain for not preparing you to visit our planet...”

“But why?” Val asked. “What’s wrong with having a mirror?”

Tom was curious about that as well, and echoed her question.

The cop sighed. “This is the short version. About three hundred years ago, a very affluent family decided it wanted to live forever. So they used some sort of arcane science to summon what is believed to be a demon. However, the demon escaped and killed a lot of innocent people. The family was tried for their crimes and was put to death...but their shades can reach through reflective surfaces and steal a person’s very soul. This is why mirrors and such are not permitted on Corian, because we can’t risk any more lives that have already been lost.”

Tom wanted to laugh, he really did. Yes, they’d seen a lot since traveling with the Doctor, but he was having a difficult time believing that a scientifically-advanced world such as Corian would willingly accept some sort of supernatural fear of reflective surfaces.

Of course, he couldn’t explain it, but there had to be another reason for the outlawing of mirrors.

Val, though, looked vaguely convinced by the copper’s story. “What happened to this demon they summoned?”

“It was sent back to whatever hell it came from.” He stood. “Now, you can see why even mentioning something like a mirror is against the law. I’m going to let you off with a warning this time, but we can’t have visitors breaking the laws even if it’s through ignorance. Do your research next time you go traveling, yes?”

Val was nodding, and Tom found himself doing the same thing. He might not agree with what they’d just been told, but he knew enough to obey planetary laws when they stared them in the face.

Still, there was a really large part of Tom that wanted to test the story they’d heard. And he was pretty sure Val must have felt the same way.

Tom stood. “Thanks for that,” he said, offering his hand to shake. The policeman looked at it for a second, then accepted. “We’ll just head back to our ship and wait for our pilot. You don’t have to worry about us anymore.”

“Exactly,” Val echoed. She got out of her own chair and linked her arm with Tom’s. “We don’t want any more trouble.”

The Coriani looked gratified. “Thank you for your cooperation.”

“Not a problem,” Tom assured him, tempted to childishly cross his fingers behind his back.

“We’ll be going now,” Val said, smiling.

She tugged on Tom's arm, pulling him along with her. He followed gladly, wanting to be out of the building as quickly as possible.

Really, because he didn't want the copper to realize he was totally lying.

\* \* \* \* \*

Once the Doctor reached Indigo Section, where the majority of the world's technology was bought and sold, he found that he had a serious problem.

He couldn't find what he was looking for.

The shops were marked with very artistic murals, but they weren't helping him in locating one that sold the requisite dimensional technology he'd need to repair the TARDIS.

It was very irritating.

The Doctor hated asking for directions, but he really didn't have a choice, not if he wanted to get his time ship fixed. The dimensional transducer was a very important device for the running of the TARDIS; it was part of the circuit that kept the interior dimensions stable, and without it the interior interface would eventually crumple in on itself very much like a singularity. The exterior would stay intact; only everything controlled by the dimensional stabilizers would crash.

The Doctor really didn't want that to happen, because he didn't want his best friend and time ship to become a police box-shaped singularity.

And so, the Time Lord found himself entering a random shop and marching himself up to the front counter.

He didn't let the fact that there were absolutely no reflective surfaces inside the shop distract him. He'd come to that question later.

The Coriani there smiled at him. "Good day, gentle being. How may I help you today?"

"I'm looking for a dimensional transducer for my time machine," the Doctor said, not wanting to beat around the bush.

If he'd expected the shopworker to be cooperative, he was in for a surprise.

The Coriani lost the smile, and his face went pale. "I'm sorry, but I cannot help you."

The Doctor frowned. "What do you mean, you can't help me?"

"As I said, I cannot help you. Now, if you would please leave..."

This was confusing, to say the least. "But Corian is known throughout this galaxy as having the premier dimensional engineers available! Indigo Section is where the best advances are made!"

The alien's face went stony. "Indigo Section is indeed where the very nest in technology can be found, however dimensional engineering is illegal per Directorate ruling 12.43B. I must ask you again to leave my shop, or I shall be forced to contact the security services."

"The Directorate?" The Doctor needed to know more. He'd noticed the strangeness of the city as he'd walked to this section, and he felt he might be on the right track. "What's this Directorate?"

The Coriani looked at him as if he were insane. "The Directorate is the ruling council of Corian. Did you not learn that before you arrived here?"

"But what about the Glitterati? What happened to them?" The last time he'd been there, he'd been a guest of the Glitterati, and had particularly gotten on well with Indigo and Vermillion...

The Coriani was moving toward some sort of communications device, and the Doctor backed away, holding his hands up in a gesture of surrender. “All right, I’m going.” While he wanted his answers, he really didn’t want to get arrested before he discovered just what was going on.

He made his way outside, completely confused by what had just occurred. Why had the Coriani outlawed dimensional technology? And just what had gone on in the three hundred years since he’d last been on the planet?

And where were the Glitterati?

He stood on the walkway, tapping his upper lip with his finger. He needed to get the TARDIS repaired, but he needed answers before he could do just that. He very much doubted he’d get those answers from the shopkeepers lining the street, and while it was tempting to stop one of the passers’ by and ask, he believed he’d have even less luck than he’d had with the Coriani he’d just tried to speak to. No, he had to find another source of information...

The Doctor suddenly smiled. Of course. He knew exactly where to go.

It would mean backtracking to Vermillion Section, but that was where he needed to be. He began striding toward the nearest crosswalk, determined to find out just what was going on on this world, dodging pedestrians almost without thinking about it.

Each section specialized in different goods and services. Citrine, where he’d left the TARDIS and his companions handled the gemstone and precious metals market on Corian; Indigo was the scientific center. Vermillion though...Vermillion was where knowledge was bought and sold.

The Doctor needed history books. He needed to know what had happened to Corian, and to the ruling family. A part of him was angry, and another worried; he’d genuinely liked the Colors and their families – well, Amaranthine had been a bit of an old bear, but he hadn’t been all that bad once he’d gotten past his suspicion – and if something had happened to them, he wanted to know.

Plus there was the notion that dimensional engineering being against the law. What had caused that? If the TARDIS was to be repaired, then the Doctor definitely needed to find out what went wrong. He needed that technology; without it, they were stranded.

He turned down one of the crosswalks heading toward Vermillion Section, completely lost in thought. This was why he completely failed to notice someone pulling a gun and shooting him at point-blank range.

\* \* \* \* \*

Val let Tom pull her along the walkway, heading back in the direction they’d been taken when they’d been arrested. He had that stubborn look that spoke volumes, and she knew he was up to something.

“All right,” she finally said, tugging them to a stop and out of the flow of foot traffic, “just what do you have in that head of yours?”

Tom grimaced. “C’mon, Val...did you honestly believe all that stuff about demons?”

She sighed. “I’m not saying I did, but there are so many things out here in the universe...maybe it was something else? Something they thought were demons but was maybe...I don’t know, another alien race? One that looked like what they thought a demon would? Tom, we’ve seen a lot of things, and we can’t discount Corian history just because we

don't personally believe there were actual Judeo-Christian demons being summoned by some sort of magical spell and running amok on an alien planet."

"Okay, you have a point. But this thing about mirrors...seriously?"

"Tom –"

"Look, I'm not saying they're lying. Just that...that there's something more going on around here. Don't you want to know what it is? You know you want to."

Val could admit to herself that yes, she did. "All right, yeah. I do. But you have to admit this could be really dangerous if there is something lurking around out there."

"We deal with dangerous all the time," Tom shrugged his expression almost bashful. It really was a cute look on him, not that she was going to tell him that. "What's once more?"

It really was sad what he could talk her in to just by appearing adorable. "All right, but we'll need to find..." She looked around, not wanting to actually say the word 'mirror' out loud. They couldn't risk getting arrested again.

"That's why we need to head back to the TARDIS." Tom was excited, she could tell by his grin. He grabbed her hand and began threading his way through the crowds, back toward the alleyway they'd materialized in.

"What about the problems with the dimensions?" Val was concerned that, even though they were parked, that something could go wrong. It wasn't that she didn't trust the Doctor – she had to, in order to have traveled this long with him – but she wasn't completely convinced that he really knew what all went wrong with his own machine.

"We'll cross that bridge when we get to it," Tom called back over his shoulder.

Val shook her head fondly and went with him without any further complaint.

Part of her felt this was going to be a really bad idea, but she couldn't stop the prickle of curiosity from blooming into something larger. The story of demons just sounded so far out there, and the former editor of her paranormal journal was once again coming out. The unknown was a fantastic, black space in front of them, just begging to be explored.

She completely ignored the little voice that kept trying to speak to her, since it would only try to dissuade her from actually trying something this monumentally stupid.

It didn't take them long to find the TARDIS again, and Val used her key to let them inside. Immediately she couldn't help but notice the odd perspective her eyes were giving her, as if the console room had gotten slightly twisted out of shape. The headache began almost immediately, and Val rubbed her temple in an attempt to stave off.

"I'm sure we can find what we're looking for in the wardrobe," Tom said, skirting the console and heading deeper into the TARDIS interior. "Why don't you stay here and I'll be right back?"

Val wasn't about to argue. She was starting to feel slightly nauseous at the new dimensions and it was all she could do not to step outside once more.

It gave her time to think as she waited, and to worry. If the TARDIS dimensions shifted once more, Tom could become lost. That was the main reason she didn't leave, despite having to stifle the urge to vomit all over the floor: she wanted to be inside in case something happened to Tom. He might need her to pull his butt out of the fire...again.

Nothing changed as she stood there. The time machine was silent; the hum that seemed to come from somewhere deep within was absent, and it gave Val the creeps. It wasn't natural for the TARDIS to be this quiet, even having landed.

She shivered, but it wasn't cold.

A thumping sound caused her to jump, and she laughed breathlessly at herself as Tom reappeared, dragging a large mirror with him. She'd let the silence get to her, and she berated herself even as she was moving to help Tom with his burden.

"I was right," he said as she took some of the weight of the mirror. "It was in the wardrobe."

The mirror had an ornate frame, looking like something from the Renaissance or a time period equally overblown. It was heavily carved and yet smooth under Val's hands as she and Tom carried it toward the door. "Have you checked it yet?"

"Yeah," he answered. "But all I got was my own reflection. We probably need to take it outside to make it work."

Val's heart began beating faster as adrenaline kicked in. Did she really want to see if there was something in the mirror, something that would prove or disprove that strange story about demons?

Oh, hell yeah.

Together they wrestled the mirror outside the TARDIS, propping it up against the yellow bricks of the wall. Val saw her reflection in it, and of the wall behind them.

Tom brushed his hands on his trousers. He stood to the side, breathing a bit heavily. "I had to find the one that weighed a ton," he quipped.

Val's doubts came back as she watched herself in the mirror. "Are we sure this is a good idea?"

"Probably not," he answered. "But do we honestly think you can steal someone's soul by looking into a mirror?"

"To be honest, there are legends about reflections and mirrors on Earth that pretty much say that very thing."

"And you couldn't volunteer that information before we dragged that thing out here?" Tom asked incredulously.

"Oh, come on," she scoffed, "you've seen that movie, right? The one where someone says 'Bloody Mary' three times and something comes out of the bathroom mirror to kill everyone? And breaking a mirror brings all sorts of bad luck, doesn't it? There are so many different myths about mirrors and souls..."

"Like I said, why did you wait to bring all that up now?" Tom swallowed nervously, giving the mirror a side-eyed look.

Val couldn't help but laugh. "I never pegged you as superstitious."

"I'm not!" he denied hotly. "You're the one bringing up all this crap at this specific moment of time!"

She couldn't help it, winding him up like that. "You should see your face, it's hilarious."

"Val, you're not taking this seriously!" But he was laughing, too.

She punched playfully him in the arm. "I'm taking it as seriously as I possibly can. It's not like I particularly believe those stories. Besides, proving it's fake is just icing on the cake."

"You've always been a bloody skeptic, Val, although you've gotten better lately."

"I think I resent that! I'm as open-minded as the next person."

"If you say so."

Val wanted to smack him again, but movement out of the corner of her eye stopped her. She turned to look directly into the mirror.

Her mouth fell open in shock.

The mirror was gone.

In the glass was a room.

It was gloomy, dust motes dancing in a strange light that seemed to come from anywhere and nowhere. She could make out furniture and a large fireplace, but there was no fire within it, only what looked like ashes.

It made Val sad.

“What is it?” Tom asked.

“It’s...”

And then there was a hand, draped in dusty green fabric, and it was grabbing Val by the arm and dragging her toward the image in the mirror...

She heard Tom shouting, and then nothing.

\* \* \* \* \*

“Rylla!”

*She turned, and her cousin was running into the room, her fair hair flying about her and with a frightened look upon her face. “What is it?” she asked, putting her pen down.*

*Writing kept her from closing her own door forever, although she never pretended to be a poet and would have been mortified if anyone read her writings.*

*“One of the windows! It’s come alive!”*

*For the first time in what felt like forever, her heart began to race. She jumped from her chair and followed her cousin as the child led her toward the source of the disturbance. She couldn’t remember when the last time one of the mansion’s windows had come alive, and had thought such a thing impossible.*

*She was very afraid, and yet at the same time...*

*Was that hope she was feeling?*

*Her cousin darted into the main parlor. No one had really been within this room in...well, that, also, she couldn’t recall. She wondered what her cousin had been doing there, but thought it could wait.*

*“There!”*

*The window had, indeed, come alive.*

*It was showing Outside.*

*Memories of Outside raged through her, and she stepped toward the window, the breath sharp in her lungs and her heart hammering out an impossible beat within her chest. “Go and fetch the others,” she whispered, not certain if her cousin had even heard her.*

*The sound of footsteps running off proved that she had.*

*The window was a sirens’ call, and she had to answer. Was that actual sunlight? Of course, it had to be. She wanted to bask in that light, to feel it on her delicate skin and to dance within its beams. She remembered...oh, she remembered...*

*But this was their prison, and there was no escape.*

*Her hope died within her.*

*And then a woman appeared in the window.*

*She was alien, and she was speaking to someone outside the view of the window. Two eyes, dark hair...a kind face. It made her want to reach through the window and touch her, just to prove that what she was seeing was real.*

*Without thinking, that was exactly what she did.*

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\* \* \* \* \*

The Doctor hated being shot, even if it was just from a stun gun.

He came to quickly, his entire body jerking as consciousness returned. He sat up abruptly, and judging from the gasp he heard he'd managed to surprise someone by the sudden movement. He blinked, willing the stun gun headache to subside, and began glaring at the Coriani who was sitting in a chair against the far wall.

At least he wasn't tied up. That was a positive.

Instead, he'd been dumped onto a pallet on the floor, the rough stone gouging a sore place on his left shoulder. He found himself in a bare room, with the only source of light a bare light bar in the ceiling. The only place to sit was on the floor, so he simply remained there. He couldn't tell where he might have been taken, but by the color of the bricks it he was still somewhere in Indigo Section.

The Doctor rotated his arm slightly to relieve the pain of being unconscious on it as he continued staring at the woman, who was also busily staring back at him from where she was seated.

"You could have simply asked me to come with you," he grouched, pulling himself up until he back was against the wall. Even though his shirt and coat he could feel the dampness of the brick, and guessed they were in a basement somewhere.

The woman shrugged gracefully, one hand resting on the sleek gun holstered at her hip. "We couldn't take the chance that you'd try to raise the alarm," she answered. "We also couldn't take the chance that you'd go around asking others questions about illegal technology."

"Now that I don't understand," the Doctor mused, setting aside the question of 'we', who for a bit later. "Dimensional technology used to be Corian's forte. Why would it be illegal now?"

She looked at him as if he was insane, and the Doctor bristled at it. "You didn't think to check the planetary literature before you came here?"

"Excuse me if the information I have on your planet is a little over three hundred years out of date," he snarked back.

The woman nodded. "Yes, Charish claimed that you'd mentioned a time machine. I take it your ship doesn't keep you updated on galactic events?"

She must have meant the shop owner that he'd spoken to; since he'd been the only person the Doctor had spoken to before being shot. He wasn't about to admit that yes, the TARDIS did, in fact, keep up with that sort of thing, and that he'd simply chosen not to read about the current state of Corian in the TARDIS' computer system.

"That's neither here nor there. I want to know just why it's against the law for your scientists to deal in dimensional technologies...especially since it used to what Corian was known for. Even the Time Lords respected your people for their knowledge."

His captor looked uncomfortable, her eyes blinking slightly out of synch with each other. "Those days are long past, thanks to the Directorate."

Yet another mystery. "Just what is this Directorate, and what happened to the Glitterati?"

"The Glitterati no longer exist, and it's also against the law to mention the Colors as well."

The Doctor frowned. "The last time I was here, everything seemed all right. I even spent a majority of my time with the Colors, and found them quite agreeable. What changed?"

The woman sighed. "It's a long story. Perhaps we should begin with introductions? I am Glisanda Toranda, a scientist of the First Caliber."

"I'm the Doctor," he answered, going along with it for now. "A scientist of the First Caliber? That's impressive." The First Calibers were the scientists and technicians who held the most power among the different cabals and cliques in Indigo Section.

"That title is not as it once was," Glisanda answered somberly.

"I get the feeling a lot isn't what it once was."

"And you would be correct." She suddenly looked very tired. "Much has happened in the time since your last visit, Doctor. It has been a...superstitious time, if I might be permitted to say."

The Doctor's eyebrows rose in surprise. "For a race that prided itself on having its feet firmly planted in logic, that doesn't make much sense."

"It has been what the Directorate has made of a vast majority of my people in order to hide what they had really done."

"Just what is this Directorate anyway? I take it they had something to do with the reason the Glitterati aren't in power any longer."

Glisanda nodded. "A little under three hundred years ago, the Directorate overthrew the Colors and took control of the planet. The Directorate claimed it was because the Glitterati were stifling scientific growth, and as such didn't deserve to be in power any longer."

"That's totally wrong. The Glitterati completely supported the scientific community, as they did every other discipline on Corian." In fact, he could recall that Lord Indigo had been particularly proud of their advances, and had been quite pleased to show off the various labs and think tanks in his section. "Just what were they accused of stifling, anyway?" He couldn't keep the anger out of his voice.

The scientist sighed. "Weapons research," Glisanda admitted.

"Whatever for?" Now, this was getting ridiculous. "Corian is in a sector of space that hasn't seen conflict in...I don't know how long! What possible reason would this so-called Directorate want weapons for?"

"What does anyone want weapons for? To conquer, to gain power over others." She shifted uncomfortably in her chair. "From the records we've managed to keep hidden, the scientists who would form the Directorate wanted to have first-strike capabilities, in order to expand Corian space. They believed that, with our technical superiority, that we should go out amongst the stars and conquer those planets deemed lesser than Corian."

Something of the Doctor's disgust must have shown itself in his face, because Glisanda held up a hand in capitulation. "I didn't say it was a good idea, did I?"

The Doctor had to admit that no, she hadn't. "All right, but I don't see any signs that they actually got anywhere."

"They didn't. The Directorate descended into paranoia and nothing really happened with their plans. Scientific discovery stagnated, and Corian became a backwater tourist planet. The city might look as if it was thriving, but underneath all that...our world is decaying, and I don't see an end to it."

The Doctor should have felt sorry for Glisanda and her people, but he couldn't. The Glitterati had been a benevolent family of rulers, and they would have bent over backwards to do anything to make things better for their race. "So, what happened to the Colors? Were they killed?"

"No, Doctor. It was much worse than that."

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Tom had no chance to react.

One moment, Val had been joking with him, and the next, she'd stopped, and had stared at the mirror they'd propped up against the brick wall. Tom turned to look, managed to catch a glimpse of a dusty room and an arm reaching through the glass...

And then, Val was gone.

The mirror's glass exploded outward, and Tom barely had time to duck before what should have been shrapnel hit him. Except, the surface of the mirror seemed to have powdered, and Tom simply was showered with what felt like a fine grain sand instead of the sharp pieces he'd been braced for.

He spun around toward where the mirror had been, and only the frame remained.

Tom couldn't breathe.

Val had been dragged into the mirror by *something*, and with it disintegrated he couldn't go in after her.

He simply stared at what remained, his heart hammering in his chest. This was his fault. He'd been the one who'd wanted to see if that policeman's story had been real, or if it had been so much hokum. He'd talked Val into coming back to the TARDIS and helping him drag that mirror out, where they could disprove what they'd been told because it just sounded too ridiculous to believe.

And Val was gone.

Tom wanted to scream, but he held himself back. Losing control wasn't the way to get her back, although there was a voice in his head that sounded suspiciously like hers telling him that he couldn't reach her, that there was no way to repair what had been broken. That Val was gone for good, and there wasn't a damned thing he could do about it.

Tom growled, felt the urge to slam his fist against the wall. No, he couldn't do that. He had to be calm, and think.

He had to get Val back, because leaving her to whatever had been in that glass simply wasn't an option.

Then he turned to the TARDIS, the idea of finding another mirror sliding into his mind like a landslide. Of course! That was it! All he needed to do was to get another mirror, and he could follow her where she'd been taken...

He patted his pockets, looking for his key...then he cursed, realizing that he hadn't taken it out of his wet jeans when he'd changed after the pool had jumped its sides. His world collapsed once more, because there was no way for him to get back into the time ship.

There was no way he could go to her rescue.

Tom fell into the wall, sliding his back down it until he was sitting on the ground, amid the sand-like grains that had once been the mirror's glass. He raked both hands through his hair, stifling yet another growl that wanted to escape, and tried to get his whirling thoughts into some sort of order.

It wasn't the first time that they'd been separated, either by misadventure or kidnapping or choice. This shouldn't be like any other time they'd gotten into trouble, and Tom had to treat it like one. They'd always managed before, but there was something different about this one, and he realized it was because he couldn't do anything personally about it.

That Val had gone somewhere he couldn't follow.

But no, it was more than that; he just didn't want to admit that part to himself because it would make things so much worse than they already were if he did.

He knew he should get up and find the Doctor. The Time Lord had a key to the TARDIS, and he could figure out some way to reach Val. But Tom didn't, not for a moment, wallowing in his guilt and fear and hoping that Val hadn't been hurt when she'd been pulled through the mirror's surface.

Tom had to get help. That meant finding the Doctor.

He wrangled his thoughts back under control, as he rose to his feet. The Doctor had said he was going to Indigo Section, where he believed he could find a replacement part for the TARDIS. He'd explained how the city was laid out, and all Tom had to do was find the correct area and he'd be one step closer to locating the Doctor. Once he got there, he really had no idea where to search, but he could ask. The Doctor stood out just fine without even trying.

Yes, this would work. A spark of hope flared within Tom's despair, and that was enough to get his feet moving.

Find the Doctor. That was the best plan he had, and if there was anyone who would be able to work out where Val was, it would be him.

Tom nodded to himself, and set off down the alley and out into the crowds, trying to locate a way to get to where he needed to be.

He had a Time Lord to locate.

\* \* \* \* \*

Val must have blacked out for a few seconds, because the next thing she remembered she was lying on what seemed to be a wooden floor, encrusted with ancient dust.

She rolled over quickly, and away from whatever had yanked her through the mirror...

The mirror!

Val scrambled to her feet, ignoring the body that had fallen beside her, and turned toward the direction she had fallen. Her breath caught in her throat when she saw a simple window, looking as if it had been blacked out by unrelieved dark paint of some kind. She rested her hand on it, and shivered at the horrible chill that made her palm tingle.

A moan caused her to spin and press her back against the window. She did her best to ignore the chill that ran down her spine. Adrenaline surge through her veins, the fight or flight response tearing her into two different directions at once.

And so, Val simply stood there, staring down at the being that had dragged her literally through the looking glass.

It was a woman; in fact, it was a Coriani.

But something was horribly wrong with her.

She was wearing a long, brocaded gown, heavily caked with dust and grime. There were tears in the material, and the lace that peeked out of the sleeves had frayed beyond repair. Once it would have been beautiful; now it was a wreck of its former glory.

The woman herself had such a look of terror on her face that Val wished she could retreat just a bit further away, but she was frozen in place and not just because of the coldness at her back. Her skin was almost translucent, her face and neck painted in tiny blue veins that made her look even paler. Her eyes had a faded look about them, and the third eye was leaking tears even though the other two were yet dry. She sat on the floor still, her long-fingered hands held over

her mouth, as if she was trying very hard to keep any sound she might make trapped within her throat.

She looked ill, Val thought.

“What happened here?” a voice demanded, and Val turned to follow the sound. There, in a doorway she hadn’t noticed – being too focused on the woman at her feet – stood four others: two men, an older woman, and a child.

They all had the same look as the woman on the floor did; a horribly unnatural paleness, wearing clothes that were ancient and worn. One of the men wore what resembled a red topcoat, with matching breeches and a shirt that had to have been white at one time, over which sat a waistcoat that was brocaded in metallic thread, now tarnished green.

The other man had on a long, purple-blue colored coat that brushed to tops of his black boots. His trousers were the same color, as was his shirt. He had light brown hair whereas the other man’s hair was darker, and he stood in front of the man in red, as if somehow protecting him.

The woman wore another long dress, this one in a pale yellow that was in slightly better condition than the others’ clothing. She was also draped in jewelry, which had also tarnished, and the gemstones set in her pendant and earrings no longer glittered. Her long brown hair had once been styled immaculately, but had lost its battle with the prevalent dust a very long time ago.

The child, though, was a changeling among the Coriani. She had the same three eyes, but while every other one Val had seen since she’d arrived were dark, the girl’s was a pale blue, the same shade as the dress she wore, eggshell colored pantaloons showing under the knee-length skirt. Her pale hair was tied over her shoulder into a braid that was better kept than anything Val had seen so far. She would have guessed the girl was about twelve, but Val knew that alien races had different ways to tell age.

The four newcomers wore various expressions of shock, but the girl moved first, darting toward Val with a welcoming smile on her face. “Hello,” she greeted, curtsying politely. “I’m Phyre.” She turned toward the others, pointing them out as she introduced them. “Those are my Cousins, Leon and Indi,” she gestured toward the Coriani in red and purple-blue respectively, “my Aunt Trina,” waving at the older woman, “and my Cousin, Rylla,” and lastly to the woman in green, still sprawled on the dirty floor.

“I’m Val.” She couldn’t help but give her own name.

“It is nice to meet you, Lady Val,” Phyre answered, smiling wider. A dimple appeared in one extremely pale cheek. “Welcome to the House.”

“Niece,” the woman – Trina – snapped, taking a step forward. “You shouldn’t be speaking to strangers!”

The girl cocked her head toward her. “Anyone coming here now is a stranger, Aunt,” she pointed out, “and besides, she gave me her name. That means I know her now.”

“It doesn’t quite work that way, Cousin,” Leon answered, trying to hide a grin behind his hand.

“Aunt,” Indi ordered, “go and see to our Sister. She needs you.”

Trina moved forward, and knelt beside the still in shock Rylla. The moment the older woman touched her, Rylla gasped, “I’m so sorry, I didn’t mean to, I didn’t think...”

“It’s fine, Niece,” Trina comforted her.

“No,” Indi said, “it really isn’t.” He looked angry, and trying not to let it get the best of him. “Bringing someone here...it’s too dangerous. And now this poor woman is trapped in our prison with us...”

“I just wanted the sunlight!” Rylla exclaimed, sounding upset, possibly at what she’d done. “I saw it, and wanted to touch it, it’s been so very long...”

“How did this happen?” Indi ran his hand through his hair, and the action didn’t even dislodge any of the grime that had collected in it. Val wondered vaguely if they’d ever heard of showers or washing machines.

“I told you!” Phyre stamped her foot. “The window came alive. I went to find someone and saw Rylla first. She told me to get the rest of you.”

Val wanted to laugh at the girl’s sincere indignation. “My friends and I are visitors to this planet,” she explained. “We’d heard stories that didn’t quite make sense, and so we decided to investigate. We had a mirror in our spaceship, so we used it...and here I am.” She felt a pang in her chest, thinking about Tom; she wondered how freaked out he’d been at her sudden disappearance, and what had happened to the mirror, since it was obvious that she’d been dragged through the black window.

Tom would most likely go and fetch another mirror out of the TARDIS, and if she waited long enough, perhaps she would see him soon.

She really hoped so. This place was dismal, and Val wondered how anyone could live there without going mad. Of course, she had no guarantee that that they weren’t already insane, a thought that made her shiver. Still, they seemed relatively harmless...even if one of them had dragged her against her will into this hell.

Leon joined Trina, and together they helped Rylla to her feet. She seemed honestly upset at what she’d done, but Val wasn’t quite ready to forgive her yet even though it hadn’t been completely her fault. How would Val have reacted if suddenly a window had opened onto somewhere else besides this awful place? How long had they even been there, anyway?

She asked just that question, and got various looks of confusion from the inhabitants of the House, as Phyre had called it. “We don’t know,” Leon answered, nodding to Trina as she began leading Rylla out of the room. “And we’re truly sorry for our sister –“

“She shouldn’t have done it, no matter what she was seeing,” Indi growled. Rylla, who had been passing him at the time, cringed away, and Val took offence on the poor woman’s behalf.

“Look,” she said, standing away from the wall and piercing Indi with a glare of her own, “it wasn’t her fault. I can’t imagine what it would be like to be trapped here, but she didn’t mean anything by it. Besides, I have friends, and they’ll be looking for me. I’m not as stuck here as you might think.” She thought once again of Tom, and wondered why he hadn’t shown up in the window yet.

“She’s right, husband,” Leon replied. “Our sister meant no harm, and I also sincerely doubt she even knew what would happen when she drew Lady Val here.”

“Still,” Indi said, chastened, “it doesn’t change the fact that what she did was dangerous. The dimensional walls of this prison are damaged, and she could have brought the entire House crashing in on us by puncturing the barriers. We could have died.”

“Would that have been so terrible?” Leon’s voice was soft, but it carried a weight that Val was certain shouldn’t be there.

Her heart clenched at plight of these poor peoples. If these were the so-called demon worshippers that the Directorate had locked away, then this was really a fate worse than anything she could think of if death didn't mean anything to them any longer.

Even little Phyre looked exhausted and drained. It wasn't right that a child should wear that sort of expression.

Indi looked as if he'd been slapped, and his belligerent posture folded into itself. "Perhaps not, but now the Lady Val is trapped with us." He turned to look at Val, and his eyes were tired. "And I apologize, but even if you have friends out there, I doubt they would be able to reach you. This dimension is inherently unstable, and it's a miracle it's lasted as long as it has. That instability is what allowed our sister to reach out to you, and was most likely responsible for closing the window. I don't want you to get your hopes up, but there really is no escape from here. You are now as much a prisoner as the rest of us."

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"They did *what*?" the Doctor shouted, jumping to his feet, and causing Glisanda to rear backward in her chair, looking as if he'd punched her in the stomach.

Glisanda held up both hands in a warding gesture, her eyes wide. "They didn't want the blood of the Colors on their hands! This was the only way they could be rid of the Glitterati and not dirty themselves more than they already had."

"So, let me get this straight," the Doctor growled, stopping in front of the seated woman with his hands on his hips, looming over her, "the Directorate, who thought that making weapons was a good thing so they could go out and conquer other worlds, decided simply to imprison the Glitterati instead of executing them? And they locked them in a pocket dimension, away from everything they'd known, family and friends and their own people, the people they'd sworn to protect over anything else? The Colors did nothing but rule wisely and well, and yet they were sent to a hell of the Directorate's making because they didn't share their eagerness for war?" He began to pace. "But in the end, they didn't even do what, did they? They sent innocent people into a void of their making and *for no real reason whatsoever*?"

"From the records, they didn't have much choice! They knew that the Coriani wouldn't follow them if the Colors were executed out of hand. There were too many still loyal to the Glitterati and wouldn't want to see them killed. They needed them alive, in order to show the people that they could be merciful, but to also hold their safety over the heads of those who would have tried to rescue them. And yet, they needed to discredit the family enough to avoid having to look over their shoulders all the time. Imprisoning them in a dimensional bubble was really their only alternative."

"Didn't anyone try to rescue them?"

"Of course there were rescue attempts! None of them worked! We do have evidence that someone within the dimensional pocket tried to bridge the interface. It's the reason why such things as mirrors and reflective surfaces are banned on Corian...the interface has become unstable, and people were seeing the House and the Glitterati in random objects. The Directorate couldn't take the chance that they'd be able to escape."

The Doctor considered her words. "When did this happen?"

Glisanda shook her head. "I don't know...about thirty years after their imprisonment?"

So, thirty years after the Colors' imprisonment someone had still been alive within the bubble. The Doctor was willing to bet it had been the then-current Lord Indigo; that particular branch of the Glitterati had been some of the greatest of the dimensional engineers.

He wondered if it had been the same man he'd met, all those years ago. If what Glisanda said was correct, then it could very well be. He did a quick mental calculation, and came to the conclusion that the overthrow had to have happened perhaps a mere decade after he'd visited. That notion made his hearts sink just that much more. He'd respected Lord Indigo, as well as the rest of the Colors. He'd personally met them all on his visit back then.

"I want to see these records," the Doctor said. It wasn't a request, and Glisanda seemed to understand that.

"Of course," she agreed, bowing her head. "They have been kept in my family for generations. We're on a direct line of descent to a cousin of the Indigo line, and it has been our honor to remember what occurred."

"Then, I want to see about breaking this dimensional bubble."

Her eyes went wide once more. "Doctor, we no longer have the scientific know-how to do that, or else we would have years ago. Besides, they'll be dead now. Shouldn't we let those poor souls rest in peace?"

She was correct; the lifespan of the average Coriani was nearly one hundred years, and it had been triple that. Still... "Yes, I'm sure they are," he admitted. "But they didn't deserve what happened to them. And they certainly don't deserve to be forgotten. Besides, the Directorate needs to take responsibility for what's been done to your world, and how they're gradually destroying it. Your people deserve better."

"The people don't even remember, except for the very few who kept the old knowledge alive," Glisanda answered. "They don't remember anything before the Directorate, because the Directorate wouldn't let them remember. They'd been told lies until they believe the superstitious nonsense that was given to them to explain why there were no mirrors on the planet. As I said, the Directorate has made this a superstitious time for us all."

"No, First Caliber Toranda, the Directorate didn't *make* anyone superstitious; they simply gave you a fantastical story in order to explain their actions. It was the *people* who did it to themselves, when they chose to accept what they were being told without questioning it. That is the real shame here...the willing acquiescence to what your Directorate wished, without putting up that much of a fight to get to the truth."

She looked as if he'd physically slapped her. It was obvious that the Coriani had given up and simply accepted whatever the Directorate had told them, not matter how fantastical.

But, seeing how stricken she was, he decided to take a little pity on her. His scowl vanished and he smiled. "So, where are these records you have?"

Glisanda seemed to accept the change of conversation. She stood. "They are hidden in my flat," she answered. "Come, it's not that far." Together they left the room.

Following closely on Glisandra's heels, the Doctor had time to ponder the situation. He really wanted to get a first-hand account of what the Directorate had done, and hoped there would be some clue to the actual science involved in the creation of the dimensional prison. He wanted to close the bubble down, and leave evidence that the lies about demon worship was just that...a story. He recognized the feeling as righteous indignation, and considered himself justified in that particular emotion. Innocent people, left to die for no other reason than they hadn't agreed with what others had planned. It was wrong, and it needed to be addressed.

Glisanda led him up a set of steep steps, and into the back of what had to have been a shop. A curtain separated this room from the front. Through a gap in the folds the Doctor could make out the shopkeeper – Charish was his name, Glisanda said – he'd approached about the dimensional transducer. He'd stepped into a hornet's nest without realizing it. All he could do was shake his head at the irony of the thing.

He accompanied Glisanda out of the back of the shop, and into a passageway between two buildings. It reminded him of the place where he'd landed the TARDIS. That made him think about his companions, He knew they were perfectly able to get into trouble without him. Hopefully they'd gone back to the TARDIS to wait for him, although if he didn't return he was quite certain they'd come looking for him.

He wondered if Glisanda could spare someone to go and find the TARDIS and see if they'd returned yet. Just to reassure them that he was fine. Would either one of them believe a total stranger if they were approached?

Probably not.

But still, he reached out and took Glisanda's arm, stopping her forward momentum. "I have two companions," he said, "and they'll come looking for me when I don't arrive back at our ship."

The woman considered, chewing her lip thoughtfully. "I might be able to spare someone to find them, but I cannot promise anything. It depends on who will be at the flat when we arrive."

He let go of her arm, and Glisanda turned and resumed her way down the alley. The Doctor followed, hoping to get more answers to the questions he had.

\* \* \* \* \*

*She was ashamed of what she had done.*

*As her Aunt led her away, she cringed at the recriminations laid at her feet by her brother – who would understand the implications of her actions – she wished she could make it right. She glanced back over her shoulder at the stranger...the first stranger ever to have set foot within the House since their imprisonment. The woman, Val, was now trapped here.*

*How could she have done such a thing? And to an innocent? What had she been thinking?*

*That was just it...she had not been thinking at all. The lure of the sunlight and the outside had called to her, and she had let it overwhelm her instead of waiting for the rest of her family to arrive. If she had only been patient and kept her own mind under firm control...*

*But, no. She hadn't, and it had condemned another to her family's fate simply because the sun was something she had recalled, and had missed terribly within the gloom of the House.*

*She could not face what she had done.*

*Her heart ached and her head hurt and the light had dazzled her senses until nothing else had mattered, letting it burn across the dust of ages within her mind. She'd reached through the window and had dragged Val into their prison.*

*Her aunt supported her as the certain knowledge of her actions stole the strength from her, and she sobbed with the unfairness of it all. And yet, she wasn't weeping for herself or for her family...it was for that young female alien who she'd stolen from the light.*

*It was too much.*

*"Everything will be well," Aunt soothed, sounding as if she almost believed it.*

*She leaned shamelessly on her aunt, because she could do nothing else. Her actions weighed her down; ground her into the dust of their existence. As she stumbled along, she wanted nothing more than to hide from what she had done.*

*She was hardly a fighter. There was nothing to fight for.*

*The sunlight gleamed in her minds' eye, bright and warm and home. She wanted that back, to dance in the light and to never go back into the darkness.*

*The darkness, though, was all that awaited her.*

*The memories of those long-ago times of playing in the daylight and feeling warm and happy drew her thoughts, and it was only her aunt's presence that kept her from following the siren call of them. She had forgotten what the sun had been like...until she'd been faced with it once more.*

*"You cannot let what happened take you from us," Aunt murmured, her voice kind with fear. "You must stay with us, child. Please, stay with us."*

*But the lure of the past was nearly too much, and the memories were flooding back now, too strong to maintain her distance.*

*And then, she stopped in her tracks, the brocade of her dress swishing about her feet. She didn't deserve the good memories, she realized. Not after what she had done. No, she deserved the darkness and silence and dust of untold times past, and to see the recrimination behind the strange alien eyes of the person she'd trapped there in her own weakness.*

*She couldn't handle the grief of that...not anymore. She was far too weak to accept as her penance to remain within the house and the present.*

*She knew what she had to do.*

\* \* \* \* \*

"Look," Val said, "I know you've been trapped here a long time, but that doesn't mean you should underestimate my friends, especially the Doctor. He knows a great deal about weird dimensions..." Her words petered out as she noticed the look of surprise on Leon's handsome features. "What?"

"The Doctor? Is he a Time Lord?"

"Yes, he is." Val felt a bit scrambled, and it wasn't just about traveling between dimensions against her will. "You know him?" Yes, the Doctor had intimated that he had been there before, but how had this alien met him?

Indi looked at Leon in confusion. "What is this, husband?"

Leon turned to regard Indi. "You must remember! The Time Lord who came to visit before...before our confinement." He rubbed his forehead. "It is so faint, I don't know if my memories are true..."

Val watched as Indi's face went from blank, to painful, and then to realization. "Yes, I...think I remember. It was so long ago...I don't know how long..."

She began to put things together, and didn't like the picture she saw. Of course she'd gained the distinct impression that the Doctor had been there before; it was in the way he knew how the city was divided, and about the supposed peacefulness of the place. She had no idea how long it had been, but if these so-called demon stories had started about three hundred-odd years ago, and the family that had been accused of calling it up had been imprisoned then...she really wasn't enjoying the puzzle she'd been presented.

Val was about to say something when Trina had reappeared, out of breath and with a look of fright on her face. “Come quickly,” she demanded, one hand to her chest as if to push the words out past her gasping.

“What is it, Aunt?” Phyre asked. The men didn’t speak, but they both looked worried.

“It is your cousin...your sister. She has taken to her room and doesn’t answer my knocks. When I attempted to enter...” her voice faded out, sadness and terror trying to win the war for control of her words and eyes.

Indi gasped, and with a single curse was heading back out of the room, Leon on his heels. Phyre had her small hand over her mouth, and she looked up at Trina pleadingly. “She hasn’t locked the door, has she?”

“I’m afraid so,” Trina answered faintly. She knelt down and reached for the girl, but Phyre dodged around her, darting after the two men.

Val couldn’t help but be confused. “What’s going on?”

Trina stood, looking so very tired. “My niece has confined herself to her room, and doesn’t answer the door.”

“So? Maybe she just needs to be alone.” What exactly was wrong with what Rylla had done?

“You do not understand, and I’m sorry. We’ve been here so very long...we don’t even recall how long, but time had been slowly crushing us under the weight of our own memories, which is why we’ve forgotten so much, it would drive us all mad if we could recall what we were before this place. But, today...Rylla saw the sun. None of us know what that even looks like anymore. And my nephew found her once dancing to music only she could hear, and she was seen reading a book that she’d read as a child...I have been afraid for her, and now the worst has happened.”

“You mean she’s remembering what it was like when you were free?” Val thought she could grasp what Trina was saying, that being trapped in this darkness would drive anyone insane. But to remember what you had before, knowing you would never have it again...

“Yes, exactly. Plus, she feels terribly guilty for what she’s done to you, and I believe this has pushed her beyond what she can stand.” A nearly weightless yet ice-cold hand rested on Val’s shoulder. “We have already lost two of our number to this. The first was my sister, but she has been gone now for so very long I don’t even know if she exists any longer, and she had had so much to lose. My brother has just recently retreated to his own room and refuses to come out or even acknowledge that we even exist. They are both lost in the memories of what was once their lives, and their freedom, and they will never come back.”

Val swallowed, hard. This terrible place had driven these poor beings mad. Her heart went out to them, and now it was even more of an imperative that Tom and the Doctor find a way inside and rescue them.

“If I’m the reasons she’s withdrawn, then I’ll be the one to bring her back.”

Trina smiled sadly. “I hope you can. Please, come with me.”

Val followed her out of the room and into a hallway that seemed to stretch into infinity. It was almost as if she’d stepped back onto the TARDIS with its weird dimensions, odd perspectives and twisted borders, and it was all she could do not to vomit. Instead, she focused on Trina, as the Coriani made her near-silent way toward the left, past doors that Val might have once been interested in exploring but now just didn’t seem very important.

She remembered Indi saying that the dimensional interfaces were unstable, and while Val wasn't a scientist it sounded very ominous. Perhaps that was why this corridor appeared to be infinite, and she wondered if it could somehow be fixed.

Val had no idea how long they walked before the three other 'residents' of the house came into view, clustered around one of the closed doors. Leon was knocking and calling out, while Indi held onto Phyre, comforting her when Rylla did not answer.

They all looked up as they approached. "You were right, Aunt," Leon sighed. "We cannot get her to let us in. We've lost her."

"Let me try," Val said with a confidence she didn't feel. "I'm the cause of this, maybe she'll listen to me."

Neither man didn't look convinced, but Phyre smiled up at Val with hope in her eyes. "Please, Lady Val. Can you help her?"

"I can try." Val stepped up to the closed door, the four Coriani standing aside for her. She took a deep breath of the too-dry air, and then set her knuckles to the door. "It's me...Val. I think we need to talk. Why don't you open the door and let me in?"

Silence.

Val knocked again. "I don't blame you for what happened to me. Besides, I have friends who will be coming, and then you'll be free. Don't you want to be able to see sunlight for real? Although with your pale skin you'll need a lot of sunscreen --"

"What is this 'sunscreen'?" she heard Indi whisper behind her.

He was shushed by the other members of his family.

"Listen," Val tried once more, "I think you and I could be friends. You could use a friend about now, don't you think? Besides, you can't leave me alone with these guys out here...they're bloody boring and I need a woman my age to talk to. Don't leave me to their mercy."

She stood there, hoping for some sign that Rylla was hearing her. "Look, if you go mad in there because of me I'm gonna kick this door down and drag you out by the hair. Just see if I don't! I refuse to have this on my conscience so you better open this door right now, or else."

Just when she was about to give up, there was a small, clicking noise that, in the emptiness of the corridor, sounded like a gunshot. The door opened slightly, and Rylla peered out. "You would really kick my door down?"

"Well," Val said, relief washing over her, "If you come out we'll never know. Come on, let me in. If I'm going to be here until the men in my life get their heads out of their arses and rescue me, we might as well get to know each other."

"How can you not blame me?" she asked softly. "I have trapped you here."

"And, as I said, I have friends who will be coming to help. When they do, we can all get out of here together."

Rylla shook her head, and Val just knew it was because she couldn't understand the notion of being rescued. "I truly am sorry for what I've done to you," the woman whispered. Her eyes were bloodshot from crying, but they were clear, and Val was glad she hadn't lost herself to the old memories.

"Rylla!" Phyre exclaimed, rushing forward and hugging her tightly. "Thank you for letting us in."

Rylla reached down and stroked the little girl's blonde hair. "I am sorry for scaring you."

That was the sign her family must have been waiting on, and Val stepped neatly out of the way of the inevitable crush. She stood back and let Rylla reassure her family, and she

couldn't help but smile at it. She was glad she'd been able to get through to Rylla, although she wasn't exactly sure how she had. These people had been through enough.

It was watching the reunion that gave Val yet another piece of the puzzle, and she kicked herself for not seeing it sooner.

Indi was simple; just from the color of his clothing and the abbreviation of his name she knew this was Indigo, for which an entire section of a city had been dedicated. Trina, with her yellow dress and broken gemstones, was obviously Citrine, Val having spent a great deal of time in her particular part of the capitol.

The others...well, it took Val a bit of time to get Vermillion out of Leon, but Sapphire had to be the little girl, Phyre, and Rylla was a nickname for Beryl, her green dress giving her away.

And Trina had mentioned that there were two more, locked away in their own rooms, stifled by the weight of their most ancient memories. She was willing to bet that one was some fancy name for orange, and the other purple.

Val was staring at the Colors, the ones the Doctor had called the Glitterati.

She wondered how they'd come to be imprisoned here, and why given the Doctor had assured her and Tom that Corian was a peaceful planet, and that these people were the rulers of this world.

Something had happened. Val wanted to know what it was.

\* \* \* \* \*

Tom found Indigo Section easily enough...the hard part was finding the Doctor.

He felt a surge of frustration. He'd entered ten shops so far, describing the Doctor to those inside, with no luck at all. He stood in the midst of the foot traffic – which wasn't quite as heavy as it had been over in Citrine – and tried to come up with a different plan. He needed to find the Time Lord desperately; Val was counting on him, and he knew the key to her freedom was the Doctor.

He also couldn't help but feel guilty about her being taken; after all, it had been his idea to get the mirror from the TARDIS, and it had also been his fault for not transferring his key from his wet clothes and into his dry ones. He could have gone back in, grabbed another mirror, and maybe he could have gone in after Val. He could have saved her...

*Or, a wee small voice said in his head, you could've been trapped as well.*

At least he would have been with Val.

There were times when he wondered just when she'd become the center of his own personal universe. He'd pretty much been a ladies' man. How many women had he managed to get involved with just in his time in the TARDIS?

He decided not to count. He didn't want to become more depressed than he already was.

Tom sighed, and headed toward the next shop on the street. He'd started on one side, and knew he'd keep going until he found someone who might have seen the Doctor. It would have helped if he could tell just what the illustrations on the painted-over windows actually meant. Even though he was quite good with technology, if he did say so himself, the colorful pictures were pretty abstract, and he wondered just how anyone could tell what each shop stocked just by looking at them.

He headed into yet another one, but was stopped by a hand on his shoulder.

Tom turned to give whoever it was a piece of his mind – unless it was the Doctor, of course – and found himself looking up into the pale face of a male Coriani, dressed in the usual bright clothes of the natives and wearing what had to pass as a charming smile. “Excuse me, friend,” the man said, politely enough, “but I understand you’re looking for an offworlder named the Doctor?”

Tom wanted to be suspicious, but then he hadn’t exactly been circumspect in his inquiries. “Yeah, I am,” he admitted.

The man nodded. “I know where he is. If you could come with me?” He didn’t even wait for Tom to respond, instead heading down the street and toward one of the alleys that broke up the flow of the buildings.

Tom had no choice but to catch up. “How the hell do you know the Doctor?”

“I don’t,” the Coriani answered. “But he’s known to a friend of mine, who managed to get him off the streets before the security forces caught onto him.”

That sounded like the Doctor, all right.

Tom didn’t say anything else. He accompanied the man into the next alley, and down toward what looked like another passageway that went off at right angles from the alley. They turned left, and continued on. Tom didn’t know where they were going, and fought down the idea that he was being led into a trap. He thought about running, but couldn’t figure out another way to find the Doctor.

“Just what is going on?” he finally asked after several minutes of walking. They had only passed two others since they’d entered the ally. The lack of people was a bit unnerving.

“You were asking after the Doctor,” the man explained. “One of the shop owners made my friend aware of it, and she sent me for you. I’m quite certain getting arrested would not have been in your plan.”

“And just how was I gonna get arrested?”

“You happened to mention outlawed technology in your inquiries. You were lucky that I found you first.”

“I thought your people were supposed to be good at dimensional tech. At least, that’s what the Doctor thought.” He should have known this would go all pear-shaped. The Doctor had been all too certain that he’d be able to get his gizmo replaced and then they would all take off again. Seemed like he was wrong about a planet...again. Tom should not have been at all surprised.

“We were, but no more.” The man looked slightly ill, as if there was something inherently wrong with not being good at something. “And to even talk about such science any longer has been outlawed.”

“I suppose it has something to do with all that demon crap, right?”

The man snorted. “I’ll let my friend explain. She will be much better at it than I am, since I’ll simply get angry and want to hit something.”

Tom could get behind that feeling.

“Let’s just say,” the Coriani went on, “that there are people here that don’t like what the Directorate have done, and leave it at all.”

He wondered just what this Directorate had done to annoy this guy and his friends but could wait for an explanation.

Of course, what he’d just learned put a whole new spin on things. If there wasn’t dimensional technology around anymore, then how would they be able to fix the TARDIS? And how would they be able to get Val back?

Tom decided that, if the Doctor couldn't free Val, he would either stay there on Corian and wait until something could be done or he would use a mirror to get into the other dimension himself. He wasn't going to leave, not even if there wasn't any hope left to get Val back.

It seemed too much of a betrayal to leave her, trapped and alone.

His guide kept them moving, until they reached an intersection and turned right. Tom glanced down in the opposite direction and saw the busy main street, and then followed on, eventually coming out into yet another street. This one had a vaguely residential look to it, and yet still had the blocked-out windows on either side of the road.

Tom went along behind the Coriani, using the image of a wheel – the way the city had been laid out, per the Doctor – and realized they must be in one of the wider areas between the actual spokes. It made sense that residences were nestled in those larger areas, tucked in between the main parts of the capitol where the public handled its business.

The man led him to a set of steps going up into one of the residences, opening the door with what looked like an electronic key. Dim light filtered down into the entryway from a fixture in the ceiling. Tom's guide led him up to a circular flight of stairs.

They went up three flights, stopping on a landing with two doors. The Coriani opened the door on the left and led Tom inside.

It was a pristine living area, lights blazing from tall sconces on the wall. The door clicked shut behind Tom, and he turned to find himself alone.

Oh, just lovely.

There were voices from beyond the living area, and he followed them until he came to a small office that was just across from an equally small bedroom. Tom entered, finding a Coriani woman wearing muted colors in a fierce argument with none other than the Doctor, who had what looked like an ancient book opened in front of him. He sat at an unadorned desk, glaring up at the woman as he said, "And I'm saying that not doing anything is just as bad as siding with the Directorate! If things were so bad then you and your people should have fixed it ages ago!"

Tom felt the charged atmosphere and he felt justified in interrupting whatever was going on by clearing his throat very loudly.

Both looked at him; the Doctor appearing surprised to see him there, and the woman seemed relieved to have been saved from an argument Tom knew she couldn't win...not against the Doctor.

"What are you doing here?" the Doctor asked, frowning.

"Looking for you," Tom answered, letting his frustration show.

The Doctor did have the grace to look just slightly chagrined. "I do suppose I wasn't back when I said I would be..."

It was nice of him to admit to that. "Well, that's not the reason I've chased you all over the city," Tom replied.

Tom explained everything, from their trying to find out about the lack of mirrors, to being taken into custody, and finally to going back to the TARDIS to test the story about the so-called soul-stealers. He was very proud of himself for keeping control of his voice when he got to the part where Val had been dragged through the mirror.

He would have thought the Doctor would have been at least a little worried about Val, but instead he broke out into a smile. "That is fantastic!" he exclaimed, slamming the book closed.

"I don't understand," the woman said, confusion in both face and voice.

“Of course you don’t, First Caliber,” the Doctor scoffed. “But my companion here just gave us some very good news.”

Tom held back from shouting at him. “I fail to see how Val getting grabbed and taken off God knows where, is good news, Doctor.”

“Because, Mr. Brooker, you don’t know the full story.” Standing, the Doctor grabbed the book from the desk and then strode past Tom out of the room before anyone could react.

“Where are we going?” Tom shouted.

“Back to the TARDIS!” was the reply.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Doctor fairly flew down the stairs, out of the building and into the passageway beyond, not bothering to pay attention to if he was being followed. He knew at least Tom would, with the news that he’d brought, simply because he would want to know what how they were going to rescue Val.

He could hear talking behind him, and knew that First Caliber Toranda was explaining things. Good. The Doctor had his own thoughts to gather, and didn’t want to take the time to go over his suppositions.

The Doctor had been considering just how he was going to get the TARDIS repaired, at the same time thinking of ways to bring the dimensional bubble that had been the Glitterati’s prison down around the Directorate’s collective ears. After so long, he’d believed that the Colors were dead and dust, but with the news that Val had been grabbed by a hand and pulled through the mirror they’d used to bridge the dimensional gap...he had no idea how the Colors had survived, but at least one of them had.

Not only would he need to rescue Val, but also whoever was left within the pocket dimension.

He really had no idea who would still be within the bubble. Tom had mentioned a hand in a green sleeve, which would mean at least the Lady Beryl, was there. The Doctor had his proverbial fingers crossed that she wasn’t the only one.

The very notion that at least one of the Colors was alive within the dimensional prison was a sobering one. It also meant that there had to have been some sort of temporal element within its written code, which took the Doctor by surprise. On his last visit he hadn’t suspected that there had been time travel experimentation had been going on. Perhaps Indigo hadn’t been aware of it, either.

The temporal aspects of the dimensional prison were certainly worrying, and the Doctor knew that those calculations would need to be taken into consideration while untangling the actual equations used to build the pocket dimension. He could handle those; he was putting his belief in Indigo being able to work on the actual coding itself.

He managed to get to the TARDIS before Tom and Glisanda, and he really didn’t recall much of the journey, lost as he had been in his own thoughts. The Doctor knelt down beside the wreckage of the mirror, letting the sand-like grains of glass fall through his fingers. Yes...there was something most definitely temporal involved; while the traces were faint he could just sense the time energy within the disintegrated glass.

Standing, the Doctor tucked the book under his arm and made his way into the TARDIS. The moment he stepped inside his senses were bombarded by his ship’s twisted dimensional

interface, and for just a second he was worried about her being parked so close to an unstable pocket dimension. He suspected the presence of the TARDIS had made the disruption worse.

Shaking himself free of the confusion his eyes were showing him, the Doctor headed deeper into the TARDIS. He knew what he had to collect before he could make his assault on the dimensional barrier between the world and the people he meant to save.

It didn't take him long, and he was busily wrestling yet another mirror out of the TARDIS when he registered conversation just outside.

"— just don't think this will work," Glisanda was saying.

"Then it's a good thing you're not the one going to attempt it," the Doctor breezed, squeezing himself between the scientist and Tom to prop the heavy mirror he'd brought with him against the wall, next to the frame of the one that had been destroyed. He dropped the bag of equipment he'd managed to dig up on the ground, heading back inside.

"Don't do anything silly," he warned, his voice echoing.

He dragged another mirror out with him, with a threadbare blanket draped over it. He was glad for once that he seemed to collect all sorts of detritus in his travels. He rested it against the wall next to the first one, not bothering to consider the reason he'd have so many large mirrors around, and that wasn't including the ones brought onboard by various former companions...

"Are you going to tell us your plan, then?" Tom asked, frustrated.

Ignoring Tom, the Doctor didn't answer, instead darting back into the TARDIS one final time. He slid himself under the console, hunting for the internal dimensional controls. He pulled open the panel, staring at the small, square dimensional transducer that had been giving him so much trouble. Even though it was malfunctioning, removing it completely without having the replacement handy would cause all sorts of problems with the TARDIS, but he needed to take it along. He knew he wouldn't be able to find a new one, but he was hoping that Lord Indigo would be able to repair it.

He really was pinning a great deal of hope on Indigo still being alive.

There was no help for it.

The Doctor gently pried the transducer from its housing, aware that the dimensions would be twisting even worse. The disruption would eventually lead to a near-total collapse of the TARDIS interior. If he played his cards right...yes, he could just manage to override the interface by by-passing where the circuit had been. It would hold for a short while, and if couldn't get the transducer at least repaired it wouldn't matter. The TARDIS would be trapped on Corian.

He got to his feet, grabbed the old book where he'd set it on the console during his quest for equipment, and left the TARDIS, touching her wall gently in farewell.

"The plan?" he asked, shutting the door behind him. He slid the transducer into his pocket, covering the motion by thrusting the book into Tom's hands. "The plan, as you say, is to pop this bubble and get everyone out. I should have thought that was obvious."

Tom looked as if he was going to attempt some sort of witty response, but Glisanda, gasping, had them both turning in her direction. The First Caliber was looking into the uncovered mirror, and the Doctor stood beside her, getting his first glimpse into the prison that had held friends of his for far too long.

Just from what he was seeing the Doctor could tell just how unstable the pocket was. He saw a dark and dirty room, looking as if it hadn't been inhabited in centuries.

“What a mess,” he commented, taking a step closer. “With or without my interference this place will implode sometime soon.”

There was movement from inside the ‘room’ beyond the mirror, and a Coriani stepped into view.

Glisanda gasped once more, and the Doctor felt his anger returning. The girl couldn’t have been more than twelve Coriani years old, and wore a torn and filthy dress that would have been a rich blue if not for all the dust on it. She had pale hair – a rarity among the locals – and pale eyes. Her head was cocked, and it was obvious that she could see them as easily as they could see her.

“She’s just a child,” Glisanda moaned, horror in her voice.

“That,” the Doctor said, “is the Lady Sapphire. The Directorate would have had to banish them all...including a child.” He began looking at it from a scientific point of view, needing to get his detachment back in order to diagnose what was going on.

Everything within the dimension had obviously decayed, including the girl’s clothes, and yet she didn’t appear to have aged. Some form of stasis, perhaps? Or was this a result of the temporal equations that he believed to have been a part of the bubble’s creation?

He needed to make sure.

“All right,” he said, picking up the satchel once more and taking the book from Tom’s hands, “I’m going in there –“

“Is it safe?” Tom asked.

“For a bit longer,” the Doctor answered, “I need to figure out what’s happening inside the dimensional pocket if we hope to get everyone out of there.”

“Then I’m going with you.”

“No, you are not. I need you and the First Caliber to stay out here just in case I get trapped as well. Then you can help me get back out through the second mirror I brought.” He made a vague gesture toward the covered mirror. “When I’m through, uncover it and wait for word. We’ll be fine.”

Tom looked as if he wanted to argue, but he clamped his lips shut, for which the Doctor was very grateful for.

“Now, the moment I breach the dimension barrier, it’s most likely going to break this particular mirror, due to the basic instability of the interface,” he went on. “I’d stand well back if I were you.”

Once Tom and Glisanda had moved out of the way, the Doctor took a deep breath and pressed his hand against the glass of the mirror. It bent slightly; he pushed a bit more and the glass flexed out of the way.

The girl within the mirror looked very surprised. The Doctor motioned her closer, and she came, reaching out for his hand and then stopping, her eyes confused and afraid. He nodded, knowing he would need a bit of a pull in order to break the barrier.

Sapphire shrugged, and then she grabbed toward his hand. She looked shocked when she actually managed to clasp his fingers, and with a gentle tug the Doctor found himself sliding past the barrier and into the room beyond.

\* \* \* \* \*

*She had no idea what it was about the Lady Val that made her trust and like her, but she was willing to go along with it. It had been too long since she'd any real friends, and the notion of it caused her heart to ache, although it was a good pain.*

*She had to admit, she was impressed with the alien woman. She'd forgiven so easily, but it was most likely her trust in her friends outside of the House that had made that possible. Trust was a heady thing, and for so long she had simply had her family around her, so believing in another was a unique occurrence. Still, she welcomed her newest acquaintance into her room, where she'd previously invited no one.*

*It had seemed the only thing she could do, to lock herself away as she suffered under the sudden onslaught of memories that seeing the Outside had caused. For as long as she could recall she and her family had lived in the gloom and the silence and the dust, and seeing the sun had opened something within her mind that had let everything she'd forgotten come to the fore.*

*It was madness awaiting her to wallow within the past, but it was near impossible not to give in.*

*But she hadn't reckoned with Lady Val and her ability to forgive. It had brought her from the brink of despair, and she was grateful for it.*

*"Please, sit down," she motioned to a decaying chair in the corner; it was the only place beside the bed where someone could be even remotely comfortable. She glanced back over to her family, who were all crowded in the doorway, various expressions of concern and fear on their faces. "Do not worry," she rushed to assure them, "I shall not attempt that again."*

*The relief was palpable, and her family gently dispersed into the hallway beyond, going their own ways with smiles and nods. Her brother and his husband each gave Lady Val a look of gratitude, and her guest nodded, giving them her own smile.*

*Lady Val sat after trying to dust the chair down a bit. "I'm not sure I quite understand what just happened," she admitted.*

*She took a seat on the bed, straightening her dress. "I do not know how to explain it to you. Only that everything I had once forgotten returned, and the memories threatened to pull me under. We have lost so much," a sob threatened to break, but she forced it back down, already ashamed of her previous emotions. She had been taught better.*

*"So you remember everything?"*

*She nodded. "Although I'm still...processing. I had even forgotten who I was, in a way. I knew I was a member of a powerful family, and I could 'see' my mother clearly in my mind, but the only name I have ever known was what my cousin has called me."*

*Val was nodding. "You're Beryl though, aren't you?" It was not a question.*

*"Even that is not my real name; it is only the title I was given when I ascended to the position over my Color. I gave up my birth name when I gained Beryl."*

*"Seems a lot to give up."*

*"Not really." She smiled sadly. "I have had so much more taken from me, that that hardly matters any longer." She took a closer look at her guest. There were so many questions she wanted to ask, but the part of her that her mother had trained to be polite was warring with her curiosity. "Is one of the people outside someone very close to you?" She wasn't certain why that was her first query, but she needed to know what she had taken away from this friendly person who had saved her.*

*Lady Val opened her mouth, and then closed it once more, a soft expression crossing her alien features. "Yeah, he is." Her eyes – and it was strange to see someone with only two of*

*them, how could they even see properly? – glittered slightly. “We’ve known each other for a long time, but just since we began traveling...it’s become something more.”*

*“I am glad for you,” she answered, glancing down at her hands in her lap. “I...seem to recall a young man myself; I believe he and I were quite close. He was a cousin to my brother’s husband, and we once danced at a great ball held by my mother and the rest of the Glitterati, before the end. I...cannot recall his name, though.”*

*She could see the sympathy in Lady Val’s eyes. “I’m sorry.”*

*She shrugged. “Our prison was not of your making. There is no need to be sorry. In fact, I am a bit jealous of your faith in your young man, perhaps because I would hope that mine might have missed me as much as yours is missing you and had been determined to rescue me as well.”*

*“I’m sure he was,” Lady Val assured her, with a certainty that made her heart ache just a little.*

*They continued to speak, the lady telling her about where she’d come from, and about some of the adventures her merry trio had had together. She couldn’t help but laugh at some of it, and to feel incredibly sad at others, and they talked without paying attention to whatever time was passing.*

*She was enjoying herself. She was more than happy to share her recovered memories with her new friend, in reciprocation of what Lady Val was gifting her. She spoke of the former brilliance of the House and those living within it; of the parties that had been held; of the wondrous things she’d seen before her family had been hunted down and imprisoned within this wreck of the House she had grown up in.*

*Val asked why they had been trapped within this place and she told her, as much as she could bring to mind. There had been the cadre of scientists, and she could practically hear her brother shouting at them about responsibility and honor, and about doing the right thing for their people. She also spoke of the trial, of standing before that cadre that had called themselves the Directorate, and of being exiled from the sunlight and fresh air and everything that had once been good and familiar.*

*Lady Val had made her way to the bed, and had hugged her as she talked, and she was grateful for it. She marveled at this stranger – not such a stranger now, of course – and at her ability to comfort her as she relived the beginning of the darkest time of her life.*

*“Niece,” her aunt’s voice had her turning toward the door. Her face was paler than ever, and she was staring at Lady Val as if she could not quite believe what she was seeing. “You and Lady Val need to come with me. We have another visitor.”*

\* \* \* \* \*

Val enjoyed her time speaking with Beryl.

The poor woman had been through so much, and Val was impressed with her ability to remember it all and not go mad. Of course, she almost had, but she liked to credit her not going down that path more to personal strength than anything that Val had done. If there was some way for them to do it, she wanted to talk the Doctor into going back so she could punch the lights out of those responsible. No one deserved this, let alone an entire family who hadn’t appeared to do anything to warrant such pain.

Still, it was nice talking to Beryl, who really wasn’t much younger than Val herself was. It gladdened her to see her laugh, since she doubted that laughter had been heard in the House in

many long years. It made her glad that she'd been pulled inside, because if she could somehow make their existence just that bit better, then it was worth it.

Beryl's question about Tom had taken her by surprise, but Val had answered it truthfully. It had brought home to her just how much Tom meant to her, and it made her wonder where this relationship of theirs would go next. It almost made her, for perhaps the first time, think about beyond the TARDIS, beyond their travels with the Doctor, and if he would still be with her when it was time to leave the Time Lord's company.

She hoped he would be.

Val was surprised when Citrine had come to the door, but when she announced that someone else had arrived; she knew it was either Tom or the Doctor. Most likely it was the Doctor, knowing his penchant to needing to figure things out for himself despite the danger or complications.

There had been moments that she wondered if the Time Lords didn't have cat genes, in order to explain the Doctor's curiosity.

She rose, and Beryl did as well, Val surreptitiously dusting herself down. Surprisingly though none of the dust on her new friend had transferred to Val's clothing. She wondered once more if these people didn't know what a bath was.

They followed Citrine down that impossibly long hallway and into the room where Val had first arrived. She grinned and rolled her eyes as she caught sight of the Doctor in fierce discussion with Indigo and Vermillion, and she wondered about the book that was tucked under his arm. He also had a satchel hanging from one shoulder.

"– the interface is too unstable!" Indigo said fiercely, glaring at the Doctor.

The Doctor chuckled. "I understand that," he answered. "And I believe it was your interference that made the interface this bad."

"Yes, it was," the man admitted angrily. "But something went wrong...I don't know why...I cannot remember..."

"That's because there's a temporal aspect to whatever equations were used to build the dimensional bubble, and you didn't know about it to take it into consideration," the Doctor explained. "I hadn't been certain until I'd passed through the dimensional wall. I hate to tell you, but you've all been trapped within this pocket for almost three hundred years."

Beryl gasped, and that sound drew the Doctor's attention. "Ah, Valentina," he greeted her. "And you must be Lady Beryl," he said to her companion, "and Lady Citrine. Where are Titian and Amaranthine?"

"They have gone mad under the weight of their memories," Vermillion explained gently. "We...don't recall much of what occurred before coming here."

The Doctor frowned. "Did you block it out, or is it yet another component of the dimensional code?"

"We don't know," Vermillion answered.

"I remember," Beryl said. "However, it was only recently that I regained what I had lost."

"I can recall some as well," Vermillion replied, "but my memories are only coming in trickles."

"I'm surprised you, of all people, have forgotten," the Doctor said, "since you always have had an eidetic memory. Whatever happened must have done something to negate that."

"How do you know that?" Indigo demanded.

“Because, I travel in time, and I was here a mere few years before any of this happened. I met most of you then.”

Vermillion’s eyebrows drew together. “You travel in time? You’re a Time Lord?”

“That’s right. I’m the Doctor.”

“But you don’t look like...ah, of course. Regeneration.”

“Precisely.” The Doctor looked as if he wanted to pet Vermillion on the head like a puppy, despite the Coriani being a good foot taller. “Now, we need to work together to break this bubble and get all of you out of here.” He thrust the book he’d been holding into Vermillion’s unresisting hands. “Why don’t you read that while Lord Indigo and I get started? Usually I’d just do this myself, but since he was the last to try to escape, I’ll need his expertise to help get you all out. Do we have a place where we can work?”

Indigo looked angry and gobsmacked all at the same time, and Val felt a bit sorry for him. The Doctor really could run over people at times.

“Lady Val!” Sapphire’s excited voice came from near the windows. “I brought the Doctor over, like Rylla did with you. Only he wanted to come. And there are others out there, too.”

That was when Val noticed light lancing into the room through one of the windows set in the grimy wall. She walked over to her, and looked out into what was the alley where the TARDIS had set down.

She felt warmth in her chest and couldn’t help but smile when she saw Tom standing on the other side. He was with another Coriani, and judging from the look on her face she wasn’t at all happy.

When Tom saw her, his face lit with happiness. He said something that she couldn’t hear. She shook her head and pointed toward her ear, and he seemed to get the message, nodding quickly.

“Is that your young man?” Beryl asked. She had joined her without Val noticing.

“Yes, it is,” she admitted.

“He is quite handsome...for only having two eyes.”

Val snorted. Beryl had gained some poise as compared to the first time she’d seen her, lying on the floor with fear in her face. “It’s a good thing he can’t hear you. He’d either puff up at the compliment or be insulted at the two eyes comment.”

She could hear the Doctor and Indigo back to arguing, but their voices were fading as they left the room. Val didn’t even pretend to know what they were discussing; the TARDIS didn’t translate technobabble, after all.

“You could leave now, if you wanted,” Beryl murmured.

Val realized that yes, she could, with a second mirror in place. It would have been easy to climb out of the window and back into the outside world...but no, she wouldn’t do that. “Are you kidding?” she quipped. “And miss all this?” Her waving hand took in the gloom and ancient dust of the house.

Beryl tried not to laugh, and it came out more of a choking sound than anything else. “You may have it, Lady Val,” she said, once she’d managed to recover. “I have spent enough of my lifetime within the House, and am ready to see the outside now.”

There was a tug on Val’s blouse, and she looked down into the awed pale eyes of Sapphire. “We’re really going to go outside?” she asked, softly and hopeful.

“You’ve got the Doctor on the case,” she answered, grinning. “Count on it.”

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\* \* \* \* \*

Tom and Glisanda flinched when the mirror shattered into dust as the Doctor stepped through.

It had been one of the hardest things he'd ever done to let the Doctor go into that place without him. Tom had wanted to rush to Val's rescue, to make certain was all right, and he wondered how she would have felt if she'd known about all of these protective feelings he was having at the moment. She'd probably laugh, although Tom knew she shared his feelings.

"I cannot believe they imprisoned a child in their hubris," Glisanda murmured. She reached up to the second mirror and ripped down the blanket covering it, and revealing yet another view of the gloomy-looking place on the other side. Inside it, they could see the little girl talking to the Doctor, curtsying politely. He seemed to take her seriously because he bowed in return.

"You'd be surprised what people are willing to do to put their own agenda forward," Tom answered, chewing his lip thoughtfully as he continued to watch what was going on in the pocket dimension.

"I hope to never become that cynical!"

"It's not being cynical. It's being honest. You see a lot when you travel with the Doctor. Although it's not all bad...some of it is fantastic. It's just that there are a lot of people out there in the universe who feel they're right and everyone else is wrong." He hated that someone had trapped these poor Coriani into that dimension, but it wasn't the worst that he'd seen.

As he watched, two men appeared in the mirror with the Doctor, and they all moved away, leaving the child alone. She glanced in their direction, awe on her alien-elfin features, and she smiled, waving at them.

Tom couldn't help but wave back.

He was wondering about Val. Where was she?

Tom didn't have long to wait.

Val looked good, and she smiled at him the moment she saw him. Something rattled loose in his chest, and he recognized it as the anxiety he'd been feeling ever since she'd been dragged into the mirror.

"Are you all right?" he asked.

Val shook her head, pointing toward her ear, and Tom figured out that she couldn't hear him. A woman in green – she must have been the one to pull Val through to the other side – stepped up beside her, saying something to her. She nodded, speaking back, and Tom wished he could hear her.

The woman said something that made Val look as if she was trying hard not to laugh. There was a look in her eyes, and Tom knew that, whatever they were talking about, it was him.

"Do you really think the Doctor will be able to do what he promises?" Glisanda asked, breaking the spell seeing Val had wrapped him up in.

"He'll find a way," he answered. "It's just down to waiting, now."

And wait they did.

Tom kept watching the mirror, glancing at his watch every few minutes, getting more and more impatient. Val stayed in front of the mirror, but her attention kept getting pulled away, either by the woman in green or the child the Doctor had called Lady Sapphire. At one point an older woman wearing yellow joined them, and stared at Tom and Glisanda in what seemed to be sheer joy. He wondered what it had been like to be locked away so long, and suddenly being able to see the outside again? How had they been able to handle it?

The sun was going down and Tom was getting more and more antsy by the time the Doctor reappeared, practically shooing Val and the others away from the mirror. He held something in his hand, and he was speaking to someone just out of sight, gesturing almost wildly toward the mirror as if he was having a hard time getting his ideas across.

Finally, Tom saw him roll his eyes, and one of the men in a blue-purple ensemble stepped into view. He nodded once, and then faced the mirror. Tom could see him breathing in deeply, and he looked uncertain of what he was about to do.

A crowd was gathered behind him, including Val, who must have said something encouraging because the man suddenly relaxed. Breathing again, he took a step forward.

The Doctor did something with the device he held, as the mirror seemed to bow outward. The glass twisted strangely, distorting the image in it.

The man from the other side of the mirror suddenly fell at Tom's feet.

Without even thinking about it, Tom was kneeling beside him, a hand on the dusty shoulder. "You all right, mate?"

The men blinked, staring up at Tom as if he was witnessing a miracle. But then, he'd been in a dark and dirty prison for centuries, so maybe he was. "I..." he managed to say, his voice cracking as his eyes blinked once again, and then squinting slightly.

He let Tom help him to his feet. Glisanda simply stood there, her own shock evident. And then, she bowed. "Lord Indigo," she sighed, her voice almost choked with reverence. "Welcome back."

\* \* \* \* \*

The Doctor finally managed to argue Indigo into convincing him to work on the dimensional transducer.

"I'm not certain I remember how," the Coriani admitted. He'd let the Doctor manhandle him out of the room with the open portal and into a hallway that made the Doctor's senses spin. Vermillion had taken the lead, ushering them into a room across the corridor. It looked almost like a workshop, only the tools within were rusted and ancient, the place covered in the ever-present dust.

The Doctor was certainly glad that he'd thought to bring his own.

"We need to get the transducer working in order to get everyone out of here," the Doctor explained once more. "It's the only way we can stabilize the dimensional pocket for the time we need to leave."

He'd thought it out carefully, and chivying Indigo into helping was the only way his plan was going to work. Also, if he was being completely selfish about it, it would also give him a working transducer and get the TARDIS time and spaceworthy once more.

He could feel the strangeness of the temporal coding around him, making his skin tingle slightly. It was uncomfortable, and the sooner they were able to leave the better he would feel.

"I'm going to help," he went on, "but only you have the expertise necessary for the dimensional coding. I can handle the temporal just fine, but you are literally the one we need to make this happen."

"You can do this, husband," Vermillion said quietly. He'd come to stand beside the Doctor, and if anyone could give Indigo the confidence he needed it would be Vermillion.

Indigo was shaking his head. "I'm also the one who tried and nearly killed us all when the pocket became unstable."

“But you didn’t know about the temporal aspects,” the Doctor insisted. “Those equations are what are keeping you and your family alive long past your lifespan. But they’re unstable as well, which is why everything else around you is deteriorating...even your clothing. Eventually, it’s all going to collapse around you. Don’t you want to do everything you can to escape before it’s too late?”

“Of course I do!” Indigo exclaimed vehemently.

“Husband, all you can do is try,” Vermillion said. “That is all we ask.”

Indigo lost any and all fight. “Very well.” He met the Doctor’s eyes. “I will count on you a great deal, old friend.”

The Doctor nodded. “I know what I’m doing. Let’s get you back up to speed. Meanwhile, Lord Vermillion can read and catch up on what happened after you were imprisoned here.” He handed the book he’d taken from Glisanda’s home.

He then set his satchel down onto the worktable Indigo had chosen, spreading the tools out and then taking the transducer from his pocket.

They got to work.

\* \* \* \* \*

Val was *this* close to Tom, and she was impatient to get back to him.

She had no idea just what the Doctor, Indigo, and Vermillion were doing, but she hoped they’d hurry. This dimension was really beginning to get to her, and she wondered just how the Colors had managed to deal with it all this long.

Then perhaps, they really hadn’t.

At one point in the waiting, Vermillion had come back in and fetched Citrine, and together they had left, the young man looking very determined.

More time passed...or it certainly felt as if it did. Val glanced at her wrist watch once, only to find that it had stopped.

Beryl kept her entertained with more of her remembered stories, and it helped to keep her mind off the fact that Tom was so very close...and yet she couldn’t reach out and touch him without destroying their way out. Certainly, she felt they could find another mirror inside the TARDIS, but she didn’t want to risk it. It was more important that they all leave together, than just one of them sneaking out.

Even if they could leave the same way they got in.

It occurred to her that this must have been the main reason that reflective surfaces had been outlawed: that the people in charge must have been afraid that the family would somehow escape through one of them, and they couldn’t risk it. She did wonder why they hadn’t just killed them all out of hand, to avoid them even escaping, but she figured the only people who knew the answer to that were now long dead.

She could tell it was getting dark outside. Val chewed on her thumbnail in agitation, and jumped when they suddenly were joined by the Doctor, the three Colors she knew, and two others that were being led by Vermillion and Citrine; an older man and woman, the woman wearing faded orange and the man in what would have been rich purple if not for the accumulation of dust and dirt encrusting the once-fine robes.

“How...?” Beryl gasped as she saw the new arrivals.

“We broke the doors down,” Vermillion explained, looking triumphant. “They may have become lost in their own minds, but we cannot leave them here to die.”

“I thought they would have been dead by now,” Val said, confused. If what she’d been told was true, then these two would have been locked within their own rooms for years, if not centuries.

“It’s the temporal coding that the idiots building the dimension added to the mix,” the Doctor answered. He was fiddling with a small, square device with a tiny green light on it.

“From what I was able to read,” Vermillion added fiercely, holding the old book up in front of his chest, “our captors did not want to kill us outright, in an effort to keep their hands clean...well, as clean as they could be after the purge they instituted.”

“And those equations were destabilized,” the Time Lord went on. “Time began passing within the pocket, but for some reason the family was kept in a form of stasis. I doubt they even realized that they no longer needed to eat or sleep. It also affected their memories, but I’m not quite certain how that occurred.”

He stepped up in front of the mirror. He held up his device. “With this, we can hold the dimensional interface stable enough to cross over.”

“I just don’t know if this is going to work,” Indigo sighed. “I’ve forgotten so very much...”

The Doctor looked irritated, and threw his hands up in frustration. “It will work! Trust me, all right?”

Indigo stood up straighter. “I’m going first. I won’t risk anyone else.”

Vermillion’s eyes went wide. “Husband...” he murmured.

“The Doctor is right. It’s all or nothing. And I am going to be the one to go first.” He leaned forward, rubbing his nose softly against his husband’s.

Val thought it was cute.

Indigo let go of Vermillion, stepping in front of the mirror. He looked very uncertain, and Val couldn’t help but say, “You can do this.”

Those simple words must have bolstered his courage, because Indigo took a deep breath and stepped toward the window.

The device in the Doctor’s hand beeped once.

Another step forward, and suddenly Indigo was through. They could see him sprawled on the stone walkway outside, and Tom was helping him up.

Val couldn’t help but cheer.

After that, things went quickly.

Vermillion had to help Titian and Amaranthine through, but they went first, followed by Sapphire, who laughed her way to the other side, and Citrine went through elegantly.

Beryl looked at Vermillion. “You first, brother.”

“No, you should, sister,” he protested.

“Your husband is waiting,” she reminded him. “I shall go through with Lady Val.”

Val nodded. “Go on. You know you want to.”

Vermillion smiled, a sweet thing, and took his steps out into the free world once more.

“You two next,” the Doctor ordered. “I need to stay until last, to keep things stable.”

“You better be right behind us,” Val warned.

The Time Lord rolled his eyes. “As if I want to stay here!” He made a shooing motion with his free hand. “Go on with you both.”

Val looked up at Beryl, who was smiling. “After you, my lady,” Val said, waving Beryl through.

The Coriani snorted, but she stepped through.

Val watched as Tom helped Beryl up, and she couldn't help but see the sheer joy on her new friend's face.

That was worth it, right there.

Val glanced at the Doctor, and then made her own way out of that terrible place.  
And straight into Tom's arms.

\* \* \* \* \*

Tom didn't want to let Val go.

He held her tightly, his eyes closed so he could concentrate on the familiar feel of her. He felt himself relaxing for the first time since she'd vanished within the pocket dimension, so very happy that she was with him once more and yet he was almost afraid that she'd vanish if he released her.

"And there we go," the Doctor's voice broke into his enjoyment of having Val – *his* Val – back where she belonged.

He pulled away, but not enough that he let her go completely. Tom turned to watch as the Doctor did something with the machine he was holding, and the image within the mirror began twisting impossibly, as if the glass was becoming the event horizon of a singularity, sucking what had once been a man-made dimension in upon itself.

There was a brilliant flash of light, and the mirror became a simple reflective surface once more.

"Oh goddess," a female voice moaned.

Tom didn't see who it was before the dirty and damaged former prisoners were gathered together in a group hug. Several of them were openly weeping, while the two who had been unresponsive when they'd come through the mirror simply allowed themselves to be held, not reacting to anything around them at all, not even to the outpouring of pain and joy that surrounded them.

Tom couldn't help but feel sorry for them, even if one of them had taken Val away. But then, it had actually been his fault...

"Forgive me," he whispered.

Val looked at him askance. "Whatever for?"

"For the whole mirror thing in the first place."

He felt a hand come up and cuff him in the back of the head. "Don't be an idiot."

Tom couldn't help but smile.

The Doctor called for all of their attention once more. "Now, I don't know what's going to happen next, but you can bet the Directorate will know something's happened to the dimensional pocket. They can't have left it completely unattended."

"We thank you for rescuing us," Vermillion said, stepping forward, "but I think the next step is up to us. We are the aggrieved party, and as such it's our duty to figure out what we are to do next. We would appreciate it if you would advise us, Doctor, since there are still so many things we do not remember..."

The Doctor nodded. "I'll be glad to. But I think you're right...it really is up to the Colors to decide what they're going to do next. Whether it's face the Directorate for what they've done...or to slip quietly away and live your lives in peace. Although, if it were up to me, you'd do something about that Directorate of yours. They've wrecked this planet and I'm not certain if your economy and your people can ever be completely redeemed."

“We need to see exactly what we’re dealing with before we make any sort of decision,” Indigo answered, his arm around Vermillion...who Val whispered was his husband. Tom could tell by the tone of her voice that she thought they were adorable. “And find some help for Titian and Amaranthine...I hope we can heal them some day, but they have lost so much...”

“Perhaps I and my friends can help,” Glisanda stepped forward. She bowed to them all. “I certainly hope we can.”

The Doctor actually smiled at her. “I was hoping you’d volunteer.”

“We sat and did nothing for so long,” she answered. “It’s not going to be easy, but I’d like to try to make up for some of that.”

“All right,” the Doctor said, tossing this small box in the air and catching it handily. “I’m going to get the TARDIS back up to snuff, and then I’ll see about getting us back to the First Caliber’s flat. Then we can plan.” He entered the TARDIS, leaving the others to get used to being free once more.

“Val,” Tom said, “I missed you.”

She rolled her eyes at him playfully. “You’re still an idiot.”

He laughed. He couldn’t help it.

\* \* \* \* \*

They ended up staying on Corian another six days, while the Colors became re-acclimatized to living outside the pocket dimension they’d been trapped in for so long.

The Doctor had been more than happy to help them, mostly by attempting to aid them in regaining what they’d lost during their imprisonment. He wasn’t able to fully explain the loss of memory they’d all suffered, only that it had something to do with the rude temporal equations that had been woven through the calculations that had created the bubble in the first place. He could understand why they would become overwhelmed when the memories did return; it was as if they did all at once, almost like an uncontrolled info dump, and they would feel as if they were drowning. The only one that didn’t suffer from that was Vermillion, and the Doctor chalked that up to his eidetic memory, although whatever had caused the loss had wiped his memories as well.

It was a mystery he didn’t think would ever quite be solved.

Amaranthine and Titian were damaged, and while the Doctor wasn’t a professional he wondered if they would ever come back to themselves. They would take nourishment and let themselves be led, but they would not respond to outside stimuli. In the end, the Doctor knew that they were what made the decision for the rest of the Colors to confront them.

The Doctor was proud of them.

He offered to stand with them, but Vermilion – the de-facto leader of the Glitterati now – had declined, and the Doctor could understand: they needed to take their destiny back into their own hands, and no matter what happened they would stand on their own feet and face the future as a family. He did, however, help them plan what they would do, and they were glad to accept his suggestions and advice.

“You’re more than welcome to return,” Vermillion said, his gratitude obvious in his words and his eyes. “Perhaps we can make this world into something that resembles what it used to be.”

“I think you will,” the Doctor said, offering his hand.

Vermillion took it, followed by Indigo. “Thank you all,” he said gruffly, trying to hide the fact that he was wiping a tear from his left eye.

“You’re welcome.”

He turned, to where Val and Tom spoke with Beryl. They had become friends in the time they’d spent there, and the Doctor could tell that Val had been good for the Coriani woman. She’d cleaned up – they all had, first thing upon arriving in Glisanda’s small flat – and her pale skin was shone and her eyes were bright. She was out of the heavy brocades that she’d worn for so long, favoring the light fabrics of the current fashions. Her dress was still predominantly green, but that was to be expected. All of the Glitterati had stuck close to what they knew, and that was identifying with the color that they had been born to wear.

He called his companions over, although they were both stopped for hugs and farewells. He could tell that Val was a bit sorry to leave, but it really was time to go.

It was time to let the Glitterati to become what they were made to be.

The Doctor had absolute faith that they would.

\* \* \* \* \*

The next six days were good ones for Val, and for Tom, and they were sorry when the Doctor had decided it was time to go.

But, it had been a close thing as to whether they would actually leave with him when he was ready.

On their fourth day, Tom had come to her while she was with Beryl and Sapphire. The little girl had coped wonderfully with every new experience thrown at her, and Beryl had blossomed, becoming more poised and happy as time went on. Val was glad to see it, because she’d come to really like Beryl’s company, despite how their first meeting had gone.

But Tom...it was as if he still wasn’t certain that Val was there. He would touch her at times, just a soft caress, whether they were sitting together or walking down the closed streets of the residential areas of the capitol, and he would get this look on his face that she thought was relief. She tried to reassure him every time she could, and she felt as if they were getting closer than ever before.

“Do you ever think about leaving?” Tom asked, drawing her away from her friends and catching her unawares with the question.

“What do you mean?” She thought she understood, but she wanted to make certain she wasn’t misreading the situation.

“I mean,” Tom clarified, leading her out onto the small balcony that looked out over the passageway that ran between the rows of buildings, “have you ever thought of just leaving the Doctor and the TARDIS?”

“What brought this on?”

He shrugged. “I almost really lost you this time. I thought I’d just ask. But if you didn’t– “

She put a finger to his lips, stopping the flow of words. “You can let me answer before you assume what I want.” Val cocked an eyebrow at him, and Tom nodded. She removed her finger and he remained silent. “Now, let me just say that, before coming here I can honestly say that no, I hadn’t. But...being in that pocket dimension, there was an atmosphere inside it that...I don’t know, I guess it made me really think. And while I had absolute faith that you and the

Doctor would come for me, I wondered about it. About the future, that is. And what things would be like beyond the TARDIS.”

“We’ve been traveling with him for a long time, now,” Tom said. “And it’s been great. But, Val...you and I both know that something’s happening between us, and it’s serious. And I want it to survive our adventures to know what exactly that is.”

Val took a deep breath past the sudden warm spot in her chest. “Yeah, so do I.”

She put her hand in his, and leaned against his shoulder. He let her, and she sighed with the simple pleasure it was to just be with him.

\* \* \* \* \*

Tom had to admit, there was a part of him that didn’t want to leave Corian, to leave their friends to make their own way without help. Still, after centuries of confinement, he couldn’t fault them,

His talk with Val about leaving had been productive, and they’d both decided to wait a bit longer before making their final decision. Tom had never considered himself a settling down kind of guy, but for Val...he would. He totally would. They’d had fun, and had lived with danger chasing them, but they’d also seen wonders that he’d never forget. However, there was a point where a person burned out on such things, and Tom felt he was reaching his limit.

He was just glad that Val would be going with him.

The day of their leaving finally arrived. The Doctor had told them that he’d done all that he could, and now it was up to the Colors to build their own future, and that he thought it would be a great one. And, perhaps they’d come back some day to see what they’d done.

Tom doubted that he and Val would see that day, although he said nothing.

Beryl was sad to see them go, but one of the first things she’d discovered was the camera that Glisanda kept, and she’d been busy taking pictures of everyone, including the TARDIS the Doctor had parked in the building’s basement. “To remember you all by,” she’d said. “Memories are more important than ever, now.”

Tom could understand that.

She even gave them one of herself, and then one of the entire family. Val had been grateful for it.

As they took their leave, receiving hugs and well wishes from everyone, even Glisanda, Tom knew they’d never see this world again. It should have been like any other planet they’d left before, and yet this was the place he’d come the closest – in his opinion – of losing Val after they’d gotten so much closer.

This was also where they were leaving such good friends.

Val was sad to leave, but so was Tom.

\* \* \* \* \*

*She let the sun bathe her face, as she relaxed on the chair that had been set up on the balcony of Glisanda’s flat.*

*The place was quiet at that time of day, her brothers plotting something based on the Doctor’s advice as they readied themselves for what could end up being a war. Glisanda had been spreading rumors about them, and those had been picked up by others in her network, as small as it was, and were being disseminated amongst the people. Stories of how the Directorate had lied, of how the law against reflective surfaces was wrong, and that there were no demons to*

*be afraid of. That there were those who would see the Directorate answer for crimes against the people, and were simply waiting for the proper time to make their case known.*

*Things would change. And she and her family would be at the heart of that change.*

*She was still awestruck by everything around her, although she had regained the memories of the times in the light before the darkness, before the fall. Before fear and loneliness and despair had weighed them down as they had languished in their prison, losing themselves to time and dust. Free from that at last she felt so much lighter than she could recall. It was a blessing to be able to bask in the sun and feel the wind and simply enjoy being alive.*

*She would miss her friends, Val most of all. She had forgiven her for what she had done, and had helped them find their way home. Val had talked to her and had stayed with her when her memories had tried to overwhelm her.*

*She was the closest thing to a sister that she had ever had.*

*But she knew that Val and her young man had had to leave, in order for the remaining Glitterati to stand on their own. However, she would always honor them, and would never, ever forget.*

*Beryl, Lady of the Glitterati and of Color, would remember her best friend for as long as she lived.*









The planet Corian had once been known in the Twelve Galaxies  
for its mastery in the dimensional sciences.

So, when the TARDIS' dimensional transducer malfunctions,  
it's the first place the Doctor thinks of to go to get a replacement.  
However, when they arrive they discover that all mirrors and reflective  
surfaces have been outlawed.

When Tom and Val are arrested after asking for a mirror,  
they are given a story they find very hard to believe.

This leads the team to investigate...but then Val vanishes.  
Can Tom and the Doctor find out why before it's too late to save Val?

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