

## A Two-Companion Gap

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# **A Two-Companion Gap**

by [othellia](#)

## Summary

When the TARDIS becomes sick, there's only one person the Doctor can go to for help. Himself.

## Notes

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# Chapter 1

“FUCK!”

The word echoed through the corridors of the TARDIS, its sound waves bouncing back and forth all the way into the library where Amy and Rory were cuddled up together on one of the large couches. As it reached them Amy’s head jerked up, the back of her skull colliding into Rory’s chin.

“Oww... Amy!”

“Sorry,” she said, wincing slightly. She turned towards her husband; his were eyes closed and was rubbing the spot where she’d hit him. “Did you hear that though?”

Rory opened his eyes and gave a few experimental jaw wiggles. “Hear what?” he asked.

“The Doctor. I think he just *swore*.”

Rory stared at her. “The Doctor never swears,” he eventually said.

“I’m telling you, he just did.”

They both stared at each other pointedly for several seconds before Rory bowed his head and swept out his arms in the direction of the door. “After you then.”

Amy gave him an approving smirk.

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The Doctor was underneath the glass portion of the console room, his sonic screwdriver clenched between his teeth, his hands fiddling with some sort of circuit panel. It must have been important, Amy thought. Important enough that he didn’t notice the two of them approaching from above. Important enough that he would swear.

Amy knelt down and rapped her knuckles on the glass flooring. “Oi!” she called out. “Doctor!”

The Doctor looked up at the two of them and mumbled something, screwdriver still in mouth. His eyebrows wrinkled; he spit out his screwdriver into his hands and tried again. “Oh hello, Amy. Rory.”

“Everything alright, Doctor?” Amy asked.

“Course it is,” the Doctor said, a little too quickly for Amy’s liking. “Why wouldn’t it be?”

“Amy said she heard you swearing.”

“Oh, well that was just one word. One slip up,” he said. “That’s all.”

The Doctor grinned, his eyes traveling back and forth between the two of them as if asking them to just forget it. Amy met his grin with a solid frown and crossed her arms; perhaps he'd forgotten exactly who he was traveling with.

She won.

“It's just a minor part that needs fixing. Won't take long at all. Just a short, boring trip to a small, boring planet. Asteroid actually,” the Doctor said, his eyes avoiding Amy's. “So boring, in fact, that you'll probably want to just spend the next few hours in the library and not even leave the TARDIS.”

Amy's frown didn't fade in the slightest. Rather, it deepened into a stern glower as she raised an eyebrow to match.

“Or... not,” the Doctor said as he looked back down at the circuit panel.

He wiped his sonic screwdriver off on the sleeve of his jacket before pointing it at the panel, causing it to give off several sparks. Amy saw him flinch slightly as he took a step back. Her expression softened briefly only to harden again as the Doctor glanced back up at the two of them.

“Though...” the Doctor said, trailing off as he continued to look at them. He pointed at Rory with his free hand. “I'm starting to remember your face... or at least someone who might have looked like you. It *was* a large bazaar.”

Amy turned her head from the Doctor to Rory. He looked just as confused as she was.

“I've never been to any bazaars with you,” he told the Doctor.

“No, but you will be.”

The Doctor slipped his screwdriver into his pocket and climbed up to stand next to them.

“Doctor,” Amy said warningly. “What's going on?”

“It will all make sense in time, Amelia Pond,” the Doctor said. “But before I explain anything...” The Doctor suddenly leaned in, grabbing Amy and Rory's shoulders and pulling them into a close huddle. “Can I trust the two of you to obey every single one of my instructions, and I mean every single instruction. No ‘I didn't think it was *that* important’ nonsense, because this, and I mean, *this* – as hard as it may be for the human mind to grasp – could very well cause a rupture in the whole of time and space, ultimately destroying our entire universe... for starters.”

Amy and Rory looked at each other briefly before turning back at the Doctor.

“You can trust us,” she said.

“Fantastic,” the Doctor said, clapping his hands together as he stepped backwards and broke the huddle. “Or brilliant, rather. ‘Brilliant’ was the word I used back then.”

“Now can you tell us what’s going on?” Rory asked.

“Ah, great of you to ask, Rory!” the Doctor said as he started flipping various levers on the console. Amy rolled her eyes. If the Doctor noticed, he didn’t show it. “Well, as the two of you know, the TARDIS is alive. It’s a living organism just as much as you or me.”

“And?”

“And as you’ve probably noticed in your career as a nurse, everything gets sick now and again.”

“The TARDIS is sick?” Amy asked.

“Unfortunately, yes. And unfortunately,” the Doctor said as he reached out to push a button Amy had never noticed before. “The only way to cure this particular illness is to patch in a piece of coral – sort of like a stem cell in human biology terms – from a completely separate, healthy TARDIS.”

“Whoa... hold on a second,” Rory said, his hands coming up. “I thought you said that you were the last of your people, that this was the last TARDIS in the universe.”

“We are,” the Doctor admitted.

“So how...”

The Doctor’s fingers hovered over another button that had begun to glow. The muscles around his mouth twitched as if he couldn’t decide whether to smile or frown. His fingers curled into a fist as he looked up at the two of them.

“We’re going on a little visit to myself.”

His fist slammed down on the button before Amy could even open her mouth.

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“So introductory crash course. First things first...” the Doctor stopped pacing as he trailed off. Amy and Rory watched him from the couch. They’d all gone back into the library after the Doctor said that they had required a “mission debriefing.” The Doctor opened his mouth, turned towards them, and then closed it again. He turned back away as he resumed his pacing. “Okay, lots of first things. This *might* be a bit trickier than I thought. Regeneration. Have we gone over regeneration yet?”

“What’s ‘regeneration’?” Rory asked.

“Definitely trickier then,” he said. He stopped pacing again. “The version of myself that we’re going to visit is going to look a bit... different.”

“You mean, like, younger?” Amy asked.

“No, not younger.”

“Older?” Rory asked.

“Wait a minute, do Time Lords age backwards? They age backwards, don’t they?” Amy turned to Rory. “That’s why River always talking about how young the Doctor is.”

“But she knows that Doctor from the future,” Rory said. “If the Doctor aged backwards, wouldn’t she be talking about how old he looks now?”

“May I have a word... *please*,” the Doctor said. He paused before continuing as if to make sure they wouldn’t accidentally start up again. “Thank you. Now, I don’t age backwards.”

“Ha!” Rory said with a grin. Amy glared at him and his triumphant expression faded.

“Like I said, ‘*Thank you.*’ Now while Time Lords do eventually grow old, in the meantime we have this way of tricking death. Any time when we’re... well, just me now... Anyways, when I’m about to die, I regenerate. It’s like... installing a new operating system while keeping all your files, and it fixes everything *marvelously*. More than marvelously, it literally rejuvenates the whole machine. But it also does this at the expense of destroying every one of my cells in the process.”

“Destroying every cell,” Rory said. “Wouldn’t that kill you?”

“Yes and no,” the Doctor said. “Though I guess since you *are* a nurse, you’d be able to understand a *slightly* more complex explanation. Perhaps a better way to describe it would be...”

As the two talked, something triggered in the back of Amy’s head. Something about the odd, completely out-of-nowhere conversation she’d shared with the Doctor just the other day. Or other night rather. It got really hard to keep track of the difference between the two when they were traveling. Something familiar...

Regeneration destroyed every cell of a Time Lord’s body... every cell was stripped away...

“You regenerated right before you crashed into my shed, didn’t you?”

The Doctor stopped talking and turned from Rory to stare at her, his hands paused in mid-explanation.

“You mentioned, the other day... night, whatever. You mentioned something about every cell

of yours being stripped away. And then you crashed into my shed. Am I right?"

The Doctor kept silent.

"Yes," he eventually said. "Exactly. Exactly right, Pond. And the thing about regeneration is that our bodies change as well."

"You mean you used to be a girl?" Rory asked.

"No! *No*... No, not that sort of change," the Doctor said. "Well, it can be that kind of change, but it's always been just your average bloke to bloke for me. For example, a long time ago I could have looked like Rory, well maybe not Rory... Shakespeare! Yes, Shakespeare is good. Now imagine that I used to look like Shakespeare. Then one day I'm about to die and BAM!"

Amy and Rory jumped a bit back in their seats as the Doctor slammed his hands together.

"Huge explosion. Energy particles all over the place," the Doctor said. "A little bit messy to tell you the truth, but it usually cleans up pretty well. And by the end of it I go from looking like Shakespeare to say... I don't know, Tony Blair."

Amy looked at Rory, who was still staring at the Doctor. "If that's an *average* change, I don't think I want to know about the un-average ones," she half-whispered.

Rory pointed at the Doctor. "You mean you used to wear a giant collar?"

"No. Well... no! That's not the point."

"Alright, I think we get it. Shakespeare to Blair... though if you do get a choice in the matter, I have to say... you made a pretty solid decision this time around," Amy said with a smirk.

"But overall this means..."

"It means that the version of myself that we're about to visit is going to look a bit different than the way I do now."

"How different is 'a bit'?" Rory asked.

"I don't know," the Doctor said. "Look. A bit is a bit. And I'll be the one doing all the talking and interacting, so you two will be free to wander off and stay *out* of trouble."

"Can't we stick with you?" Amy asked. "Meeting another Doctor, another you... I mean that doesn't happen everyday."

"You can't. Oh and don't look at me like that, Pond, because that – of all "that"s – is final," the Doctor said. "Moving on, other basics... Yes, this is going to be a closed time loop."

"Closed time loop?" Amy repeated.

"You know how sometimes we can go back to certain events that have already happened and

change things... fix things, save people.”

“Yeah.”

“Well, those are open time loops, points in flux if you will. But sometimes there are fixed points, closed loops. What happened happened, and if you try to change them... well, as I said, the universe will implode for starters.”

“But wait a minute,” Rory said. “We haven’t gone back there yet. This isn’t like World War II or the Titanic. We don’t *know* what will happen.”

“Hang on. Hang on,” Amy said, her brain working furiously to try and keep up with all of the new information. “You said that we’re going to visit a past version of yourself... so that means that you...”

“Have memories of the meeting from my past version’s side?” the Doctor offered. “Yes.”

“So what you’re saying is that you have memories of you visiting you at a certain time and place to fix the TARDIS and now that you are *you*, you need to go back and visit yourself because you already have.”

“Well done, Amy Pond,” the Doctor said, a small grin rising on his face. Amy could feel a grin of her own coming up to match his.

“What?” Rory said.

“It *is* a bit complicated though,” Amy said. “You know, from an overall standpoint.”

“Yes, well, as my former self would say, wibbly-wobbly timey-”

The TARDIS groaned and started to shake, the tremors knocking the Doctor to the ground. The lights in the library flickered once, twice, and then shut off. After several seconds the tremors stopped and the groaning softened to a loud hum, but the lights stayed off.

No one spoke for a while, then...

“I think,” the Doctor said. “That’s enough basics for now.”

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Amy stepped out of the TARDIS and had to immediately shield her eyes from the bright sun. As her eyes slowly adjusted to the light, she noticed that it had a purple sheen to it.

“Welcome, Amy, Rory, to the East Market of the Grand Bazaar of Asteroid P3J1C-Apple,” the Doctor said, without his usual gusto. He looked completely detached, no interest in his voice, a monotone even. That couldn’t be right; the Doctor would never speak in a monotone.



She frowned. Was the TARDIS in that bad of a shape that he didn't even have the energy to be excited?

As if the Doctor noticed Amy's thoughts, he immediately brightened up again. "Now, you two, go over the rules one last time."

"No talking to the Doctor from the past," Rory said. Amy stayed silent, just watching the Doctor. She wished she could know what he was thinking.

"Because?"

"Because you said that you don't remember him, well you, seeing us."

"And? What else?"

"No telling people here that we travel with the Doctor," Rory said. As the Doctor opened his mouth to say something, he quickly added, "Because as far as everyone knows, there's only one Doctor wandering around and you want to keep it that way."

"Very good. Now..."

Amy started to tune out and glance around the market. It was very crowded; booths and tents were crammed onto the sides of every street that stretched and stretched as far as her eyes could see. Very shiny too... in a cheap way. Every other booth seemed to be stocked up to the ceiling with gold and silver trinkets, the kind of gold and silver that was only painted on so that people could pretend that they were buying something worthwhile.

Looking up she saw some kind of a barrier, a transparent dome rippling every so often with purple energy. The Doctor had said that this was an asteroid; perhaps the barrier was there as a replacement for an atmosphere. Whatever it was, it explained the purple sheen.

And behind her was...

"Doctor," Amy said. "Where's the TARDIS?"

"What do you mean?"

"She's right, Doctor," Rory said, his eyes widening. "The TARDIS... it's gone."

"No she's not," he said. He walked up to an old, wooden door in the side of the building behind them and softly patted it. "She's right here."

"But that's a door," Rory said. "The TARDIS is a blue box. A big... blue... box. Isn't that right, Amy?"

"He has a point, Doctor."

"Oh, no. That's just one shape, the best shape of course, but still one shape. Had to fix the

Chameleon Circuit temporarily since I don't want any TARDIS mix-ups happening while I'm here. Of course I'll change it back once we're done, but for now I rerouted the wiring through the central..."

The Doctor trailed off as he apparently realized that his companions wouldn't understand - or care about - the technical explanation.

"Look, I'll explain it once we get back," he said. "But for now this door is the TARDIS, got it?"

"Got it," Amy said.

"You have your mobile," the Doctor said. "I'll call you once the repairs are complete."

"Oh, can't we follow you, Doctor? Please? At least let us watch from behind a corner or something," Amy said. She pouted her lips and tried to put on her best begging face. The Doctor was not moved.

"I said 'no,' Pond. Go spend time with your husband. Shop," he said. "And if you really want something to do, I don't know, buy me something interesting. Here's some money. As it so happens they still use the British pound. All digital though."

Amy raised an eyebrow as the Doctor passed her a brightly colored stick.

"Don't I get one too?" Rory asked.

The Doctor looked Rory up and down. "Alright," he finally said. "If you must. Now leave, the two of you. I'm not going anywhere until you're gone first."

"Oh, come on, Rory," Amy said. She wrapped her arms around her husband's left arm and started dragging him away. "You heard the grouchy, grumpy Time Lord."

"I heard that," the Doctor called out as she continued to walk away. "And whatever you do, stay out of trouble!"

"Oh please, Doctor," Amy yelled back from over her shoulder. "It's a bazaar, a marketplace. It's not like we're going to be attacked by some big bad wolf."

If she had waited an extra split second before turning her head back around, she would have seen the instant dread on the Doctor's face.

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"So, let me get this straight, the whole planet is one giant marketplace?"

"Well, asteroid really."

“Asteroid, fine. But I mean, what you’re saying, is that it’s a whole world of shopping?”

“Pretty much, yeah.”

“That's so... so...”

"Brilliant?"

"Yeah, brilliant. Bit out of the way though.”

“Oh?”

“Well, if the whole asteroid is made out of shops, then the customers have to fly in, right? Would that be a bit inconvenient?”

“Ah, but you’re forgetting. This is the future, Rose. The future! The second bountiful human empire is rising, the forty-seventh industrial revolution is in full swing, and solar range teleporters are only nine thousand quid a piece.”

“Only nine thousand.”

“Well, there have been over a thousand years of inflation. So in early 21st century prices it’d be... what, five quid?”

“Five quid for a teleporter? Not bad. Hey... you still owe me ten quid from that bet of ours.”

“Bet?”

“We are not amused.”

“Oh, right. Well here’s ten quid; go and have a ball.”

“Oi! Thousands of years of inflation, right?”

“Alright! Alright, ten *thousand* quid then. Don’t spend it all in one go.”

“I won’t!”

“And keep your phone on! Just in case of an emergency.”

“I will! Bye!”

“And stay out of troub... Oh, who am I kidding, of course she won’t.”

“Ahem. Excuse me.”

The Doctor kept a calm face as his old self turned to look at him. Down the street, he could see a head of blonde hair already disappearing into the crowds of the marketplace.

“Hello,” the man in the brown trench coat said. He grinned, his face alight with the unguarded cheerfulness he had back then. “I’m the Doctor. And this is Rose.”

His old self turned to his right out of habit, pausing a bit before remembering that he had just let her go wandering off. “Well, was Rose. Well, still is Rose, but you just missed her. Anyways... And you are?”

The Doctor looked at the Doctor. He could feel the unease building up in the mind of his past self... and then...

“Oh!” the one in the brown trenchcoat said. The grin was gone now, his eyes wide. He started circling around his future self. “No! No... It can’t be... It is!” He stopped in front and stared the current Doctor in the eyes. “Well, this a bit... different.”

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“Why’d you ask for your own credit stick?”

“It’s a marketplace, right? Well, I wanted to get you a surprise.”

“Oh, Rory Williams, I could marry you again,” Amy said with a laugh. “Though we should be a bit careful to not get lost. You go on that street, I stay on this street?”

“Sounds good.”

“Right, meet up here in half an hour.”

They waved good-bye and Amy started wandering on her own. After passing by several booths of interesting but ultimately not-her-thing junk, Amy wandered over by one of the gold-filled booths. It’s tables were crammed with metal contraptions of various sizes and shapes that looked like they could fit in well at Epcot. That’d be an interesting trip, the Doctor at Epcot. Perhaps she’d mention it to him when they all got back to the TARDIS.

A customer was already talking the blue-skinned saleswoman, so Amy decided to just browse, picking up and putting down one item at a time.

“Of course they don’t work as well here,” the saleswoman was saying. “Seeing as how we have a synthetic atmosphere. But just hop on over to one of them terrestrial planets and you’ll never know how you got by without one. And before you go thinking it’s a fraud, I’ll let you know that all of our products have a warranty of ten days, so if you’re not satisfied you can teleport back for a full refund.”

“Well, maybe...” the customer said. Her words caught Amy’s attention, a London accent. “See I’m trying to get something for my mum, but she’s from... a backwater planet, and I don’t want to get her something that will scare her and...”

She trailed off as the saleswoman stared at her in confusion. “You know what? Never mind, just forget I said anything.” She sighed and turned to leave the booth.

“Are you from Earth?” Amy suddenly asked. The customer paused. “It’s just that you sound British. Though... it seems like everyone sounds British these days.”

The customer turned around, pushing a strand of blonde hair out of her face and behind her ear as a smile slowly grew on her face.

“Scottish?” she asked.

“That’s me,” Amy said with a grin. She held out her hand for the blonde girl to shake. “Amy. Amy Pond.”

The blonde girl took it.

“Rose,” she said. “Rose Tyler.”

## Chapter 2

### Chapter Notes

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"So all you need is a piece of TARDIS coral then."

"Yes, and that *should* patch up the central immuno-relay control mechanism, triplicating the power flow through the artron particle converter thereby allowing the old girl to heal herself."

"Sounds simple enough," his past self said with a shrug. "Then we'll get going to my TARDIS? Though... I guess that means that there are two TARDIS's on this asteroid... Do you by any chance remember where I parked the TARDIS back when you were me? Because that'd be brilliant if you did. Well, you still are me, but you know what I mean."

"No," the current Doctor said. He searched for the right words. "I remember a lot of this meeting from your end, but then I... well, you... got into a spot of trouble."

"Oh, well those sort of things happen all the time, don't they? Mind you, some of them are less fun than others," his past self said, trailing off as his eyes traveled up and down, taking in the newer wardrobe. "Bowtie? Really?"

"Respect the bowtie. Bowties are cool."

"Well... I've worn worse. Oh, down this street here," his past self said, steering the two down another crowded side street. "I do hope Rose doesn't get herself into trouble."

"Mmm."

"Is she still traveling with you? Well, I guess I should say me since we're the same person and all, but it *does* get very confusing. Do mind if I address you by 'you'? It will make the conversations a hell of a lot easier for one."

"No, go right ahead," the current Doctor said.

"And?"

"And what?"

"You didn't answer my question," his past self said. "About Rose."

"Oh," the current Doctor said. "No. No, she... she's gone now."

"Oh."

The two walked in silence for a bit. Both were losing themselves in their thoughts, barely taking in the sounds of the sprawling market around them.

"Well, I should have expected that," his past self finally said. "I mean, she'll never be able to stay with me forever, so an eventual... departure has always been, well... not even really a possibility really, but more like a..." He paused as he tried to find the right word.

"Inevitable... *change*."

"True."

"How long do I have?"

The current Doctor stared at his past self. "What?"

"How long until... no. No, forget I asked." His past self took a deep breath. "I don't want to know."

"If it helps," the current Doctor said slowly, lingering over each word of what he was about to say. It helped that he had memories of it already being said. "It will never be *truly* over. She'll be with you... always. Until the very end."

"Yeah..." his past self said. "That's her alright. Rose Tyler... Ah, but that's not the reason you're here now is it? It's time to get that TARDIS coral."

The two paused outside the doors of his past self's TARDIS. As his past self fished in his pockets for the keys, the current Doctor absent-mindedly ran a hand down the cool, comforting wood.

"Here we go," his past self said, holding up the key for the current Doctor to see before inserting into the lock. He opened the door and motioned for the current Doctor to follow.

It was strange how something could look so familiar and yet so old, as if it was from another lifetime... though it technically was a different lifetime if he thought about it from a certain angle. So many adventures, so many companions... all gone now.

Something caught his attention from the corner of his eye. As he turned to examine it, his hearts clenched.

"You really shouldn't let her leave her clothes out like that," the current Doctor said, trying to keep his voice from shaking. "The whole TARDIS will be covered with dirty laundry."

His past self turned to see what he was looking at and made a small noise of non-commitment. "Oh that," he said. "It's only a jacket. Though... I do suppose you speak from experience. Tell you what, I'll ask her to pick it up when she gets back. As for you, TARDIS coral, right?"

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It was amazing really. For all the walking and wandering that people tended to do at bazaars, Amy figured that there'd be more places where somebody could sit down once their feet got sore. Eventually the two of them managed to find a couple tables over by a fruit juice stand. Sure, the owner told them that they'd have to buy a drink if they wanted to sit down, but that wasn't a problem. They each had plenty of credits and even with a fake atmosphere the sun was pretty hot. A cool, alien beverage and time to relax would be just what the doctor ordered.

"Are you sure?" Rose asked as Amy insisted on paying. "I can at least buy mine if you want."

"No, trust me. I've got this," Amy said. "You go sit down and make sure our table doesn't get taken by some weird aliens with horns or something."

After a bit more back and forth persuasion, Rose finally backed off and let Amy go up to the cashier. She ended up with two cups of juice that were flavored by some weird, god-only-knew-what-galaxy-it-came-from plant that she didn't even know how to pronounce; they looked and smelled pretty good though.

"So, Miss London girl," Amy said as she took a seat across from Rose and passed her one of the drinks.

"Miss Scotland."

"If you don't mind me asking, what are you doing way out here?" Amy asked. "I mean, Earth's not exactly near by, now is it?"

"Could say the same for you," she said. After an eyebrow raise from Amy, the blonde added, "Alright then, I guess you could say that I'm traveling. With a man. We just sort of... travel."

"Oh I know how that feels." Amy grinned as she swirled her drink slowly in her hands, poking it with a straw.

"And you?"

"Traveling as well. With *two* men though," Amy said. "My husband and..."

Amy trailed off as she remembered the Doctor's warning. It probably wouldn't hurt to tell Rose that she was traveling with the Doctor, but it was better to be safe than sorry. Especially after the Doctor had acted so serious about not saying certain things.

"Let's just say he's an old family friend," Amy eventually said. It was true in a sense; Amy, Rory and the Doctor... they were a family now, or as good as one. "Out of curiosity though, this man of yours... are you and him...?"

"Together? Oh no. Just friends. Just... friends."

Just significant pause friends. Amy fought to keep down the smile that was slowly creeping up over her face. Eventually she had to take a slug of her juice to hide it.



The drink itself was pleasant. Nothing special compared to all the crazy foods she'd tried since she'd begun traveling, but not horrible either. She tried thinking of a way to describe it when she met up with Rory later, but it was impossible other than an overall sweetness seeing as how there was really no Earth fruit to compare it too. Alien food tended to be like that.

"So," Amy said, in between sips. "This 'friend' of yours. Is he here with you?"

"Yeah," Rose said with a smile. As if remembering something, she laughed. "He's actually letting me wander by myself today. He almost never does that; says I'm too 'jeopardy friendly.'"

"Have a problem with staying out of trouble?"

"Yeah, guess you could say that. Though sometimes it seems like he's being more than just protective..." Rose sighed, resting her cheek on top of her palm. "He's an impossible man to figure out, my Doctor."

Amy sprayed out all of the juice that had been in her mouth.

"Amy! Amy, are you okay? Just keep coughing... Is it the juice? Oh no, we didn't even think to ask if it was safe for humans! Jeopardy friendly, that's what he calls me... Don't worry. Everything will be okay. The Doctor will know what to what to do. He's here somewhere... in *one* of these streets..."

"...no..." Amy struggled to say between coughs. "It's... I'm... fine."

"But..."

Amy continued to cough, but it was slowly getting easier and easier to breathe. "Just... went down... the wrong pipe... I'm fine... really."

Rose's worried expression softened, but she still looked a bit cautious. "If you say so," she said. She looked down at her own drink and bit her lip. "Perhaps we shouldn't drink these. Just in case."

"Maybe you're right," Amy said. She let out one final cough and then inhaled deeply. "It's not the best juice I've had any... No, wait a minute. You mentioned a Doctor. *The* Doctor?"

"Yeah? Why?"

"It's just that I..."

No! This was exactly the kind of thing that the Doctor had warned her about. This girl, Rose, she traveled with him, probably an earlier version of him. Well, *maybe* an earlier version of him. If Amy told her anything about her own adventures, let anything slip, it might cause the end of the universe.

If she had the best interests of the universe at heart, she'd walk away right now without another word. She'd let enough slip as it was.

But surely... the universe was safe as long as Rose didn't know who Amy really *was*. As long as Rose didn't find out that Amy was traveling with the future Doctor... well, current Doctor from her perspective. Amy was traveling with the current Doctor who was the future Doctor to Rose who was traveling with the past Doctor, although to Rose the past Doctor was the current Doctor. And that's assuming the past Doctor was the past Doctor and not some future regeneration.

The Doctor was right; this *was* rather complicated.

"Amy, what is it? What do you know about the Doctor?"

Amy looked at Rose's face, a mixture of concern and caution that was slowly turning into suspicion, and knew that she had to make her decision quickly. And while time was all rather complicated and wobbly-wimey or whatever the Doctor had called it... *and* while she knew that any further time spent in the presence of Rose could theoretically cause the collapse of the universe (for starters)... here was someone who possibly knew something about the Doctor's past, was possibly *from* the Doctor's past, and would probably tell Amy all about it.

How could she resist?

"It's just that I've heard of him," Amy told her. "The Doctor. He's a legend where I'm from."

"Really? So the two of us finally get a bit of recognition?" Rose asked. She seemed to accept Amy's answer, any negative emotions quickly smothered by her persistent smile. "Stuff of legend, we've been called. Glad to see our work is being appreciated."

"Oh," Amy said, feeling slightly awkward. "Well, actually... I've never heard of you. Just him."

"Oh." Rose's face fell a bit.

"Don't worry," Amy said quickly. "It's not your fault. He's just really really old, yeah? He's had like... centuries to get famous... or something. Perhaps the stories I've heard were about things he did *before* he met you."

"I suppose..." It didn't seem to cheer her up very much.

"What's he like?" Amy asked, eager to change that topic and get her hands on some new information. She had to be careful not to sound *too* eager though.

"Well, you probably know, don't you? Since he's a legend and all."

"Well... legends and all. They're just stories. You know you can't ever *really* trust stories since people are always changing the details. Besides, you've met him!" Amy said with a smile. "You're a first hand witness to all the incredible things he's done. That's way better than some tall tale passed along from planet to planet. And it's not like museums or encyclopedias are any help. He likes running circles around them, and only uses them to keep score... or... so I've heard. Anyway what I'm trying to say, at least when it comes to the Doctor, you're more believable than any other source."

"So you'd believe me if I said he ate... I don't know, safety pins and grass?"

"Oi, there's a difference between believing someone and keeping a bit of common sense. If the Doctor eats safety pins and grass, then I'm a space fish."

"A what?"

"Oh," Amy said, hesitating at her blunder. Inside jokes didn't make a whole lot of sense to people and companions who weren't there. "It's nothing. Just, you know, fish in space. Vampire fish... in space."

"Okay, well... I was going to say, if you *really* want to trust in a first hand source, I could always introduce the two of you. Figure it must be exciting to meet a legend. He's hardly known back in the century when I'm from. Mind you," Rose said, lowering her voice to a half whisper. "Outright fans do tend to make his ego swell up for quite a bit after."

Amy felt a panic button slowly being pushed down in back of her head. Imaginary warning bells were starting to ring.

"Oh, I'd love to... but my husband is shopping around here and I promised him that I'd stay in the general area so we wouldn't get separated," Amy said as calmly as possible. She tried to sound slightly disheartened about the whole thing. Acting was never her strongest suit. "And we just got married recently, so I'd prefer to keep as many of my promises as possible while it's still this early in the game."

"No problem," Rose said. The girl seemed to accept the excuse; Amy guessed she was a better actress than she thought. "Though... We could always meet up with your husband and introduce the three of you later. He's probably heard of the Doctor too, right? And I'm sure the Doctor wouldn't mind meeting both of you. He loves meeting other travelers and hearing about new places. More the merrier and all. And the other person with you? The family friend?"

"Ah, well, you see my husband's not the biggest... fan of the Doctor, and my other friend... well, he..." Amy trailed off as her thoughts started to skid out of control.

How would she even finish that sentence? He... actually happened to be the Doctor from another timeline? Warned her specifically not to get into situations like this?

Amy *really* didn't like the way this conversation was headed. She had to change the subject, and fast.

So she said the first thing that popped into her head.

"So the Doctor and you, are you really just friends?"

Rose's smile disappeared instantly.

"What?" she said flatly.

Alright, perhaps that was too much of subject change, and perhaps Amy was getting into *other* things that she also should've been staying away from, and in all honestly she expected this topic would only last for five minutes at the most... but if it was between the destruction of the universe and prying into the Doctor's potential sex life, Amy didn't mind being a bit nosy.

"So is there something or isn't there?" Amy asked with a grin.

"No," Rose said, too quickly to be comfortable. "It's nothing. There's nothing. Your question was just random, that's all. Why do you even-"

"Nothing random about a crush," Amy said. When Rose opened her mouth to protest, Amy waved her quiet.

Okay, so now she was at risk of Rose either slapping her or storming off - Amy certainly would've done so if a rude stranger started interrogating her about her relationships - but at least they were off the topic of Amy's Doctor. And the only direction to go was forward.

"Believe me. As I said before, he's a legend where I come from. You don't have to be embarrassed; I'm sure half the galaxy's wanted to shag him at one point or another."

"It's not like that!" Rose shouted. "I-"

She stopped in mid-sentence. Her mouth hung open, but no words came out. Then her mouth closed, and she suddenly looked away.

Amy starred at her. Suddenly this conversation was swinging in a completely different direction. It couldn't be...

"You love him," she said. "Don't you."

Rose glanced at Amy out of the corner of her eyes, but said nothing in response. She waited for a slap, an indignant outburst detailing how Amy could mind her own business.

And then...

*She's with the person that she loves most now. And I'm happy for her.*

No... it *couldn't* be.

The girl that the Doctor had told Amy about that night, the girl he used to love... it couldn't be Rose. Could it?

As if she had set off a domino chain, other pieces started to fall into place. Separate memories that had seemed unconnected, they'd always been part of a bigger picture. The Doctor swearing when he never swore...

Amy had seen the TARDIS malfunction before. She had seen it explode. But even then the Doctor never swore. Never said anything cruder than the occasional "damn" or "bloody hell."

So why now? Because he knew that he was going to have to face something that he'd rather do anything to avoid?

And now that she thought about it, the Doctor's avoidance when she and Rory had first asked him what was wrong, when he had insisted that the two of them stay in the TARDIS while he met his past self... it was the same avoidance whenever the two of them tripped into a topic that the Doctor didn't want to talk about. It was the same avoidance that he had used that night when he'd started telling Amy about his previous companions, when he mentioned the girl he obviously had feelings for... the unnamed girl... the girl who was quite possibly named Rose.

Of course she could be wrong. Perhaps this girl was indeed from the future, a future companion for a future Doctor. Perhaps this girl was like Martha, someone who loved the Doctor, but was never loved back. Not in *that* way. After all, the Doctor was old, almost impossibly old. He probably had hundreds of ex-companions for all she knew. There was really nothing about Rose that made her different from any of them.

Also, there was something that didn't make sense. If the girl the Doctor loved was Rose, and if Rose loved the Doctor, then why would he have said that she was now with the person she loved the most? Perhaps Rose wasn't the girl after all. Perhaps she was just one of the other hundred.

But that was also unfair. If Rose was just one of the "others," then wouldn't Amy be just one of the "others" as well? And Amy didn't feel like an "other." She didn't think she'd enjoy feeling like an "other."

So what if the Doctor might not feel the same way? It didn't make Rose's feelings any less important. Besides, keeping one's feelings locked away when traveling with the Doctor – or anyone for that matter – was a recipe for disaster.

And so, after all her deliberations, there was really only one thing Amy could say.

"You should tell him."

"What?" Rose, who had apparently been lost in her own thinking, turned her full attention back towards Amy.

"Well, you obviously have feelings for him," Amy said. She grabbed one of Rose's hands and clutched it in moral support. "The TARDIS is bigger on the inside, plenty of extra rooms and hallways to hide away in when you don't want to face the world or yourself... or so I've heard, but that doesn't make it any easier, does it?"

"You don't understand," Rose said. "It's not like that. Me and him... we just... travel together. And we're going to keep traveling together for..."

"For?"

"Forever," Rose finished lamely.

Amy frowned. The girl was being extremely open considering the circumstances, and that was almost depressing in its own right. Rose must've *really* had no one to talk to about this before.

"And then what?" Amy said, letting go of Rose's hand. "You're just going to sit in there in the TARDIS forever? And you're never going to tell him? Forever?"

"I suppose... maybe one day..."

"Rose, I want you to listen to me very carefully," Amy said, lowering her voice so that Rose would have to lean in close to hear her. "Life is crazy. It's unexpected. You should know that, seeing as how you travel with the Doctor. Sometimes we take things for granted, and without realizing it we... we lose the chance to say what we really want to say, the chance to let the people we love know how much they really mean to us..."

Amy closed her eyes as she began to remember the dream world, the expression on Rory's face as he crumbled into dust before her eyes. Again when he was hit by the Silurian blast... swallowed by the crack... For the longest time she couldn't even remember that it'd even *happened*.

"You speak from experience. Don't you?"

Rose's voice snapped Amy out of her thoughts. The girl's face was softer, sensing the pain that Amy had unconsciously brought to the surface.

"I do."

"Perhaps you're right," Rose said. She sighed. "See, I had a friend, before I met the Doctor. Mickey, his name was. And I... after I met the Doctor I never treated him good enough. Took him for granted, like you said. And now... now he's gone."

"I'm sorry," Amy said.

"Oh, don't be. He's still alive," she said. Her usual smile was back on her face, but this time Amy thought it looked a little forced. "He's got his gran, and a new mate, and my dad. Well, I say he's my dad... it's a long story. But he's got all that, and I've got the Doctor... so I guess it all sort of worked out in the end."

"Don't you think you're taking the Doctor for granted though?" Amy asked. At Rose's indignant stare, she added, "Just saying as a fan. You know, as a fan, you don't take legends for granted. You're very lucky to be able to travel with him."

"Hmm," was all Rose said. She rested her chin on one of her hands and stared up at the synthetic atmosphere. "I guess you're right."

"So you'll confess?"

"What?"

"Your feelings. To the Doctor. And don't give me any of that 'one day' nonsense," Amy said before Rose could say anything in return. "Because you and I both know if you keep saying that, nothing will ever happen."

"Well... maybe."

"Yes!"

"I'm not saying that I'm confessing anything. Just a maybe," Rose quickly said. Her eyebrows narrowed. "And I'm not doing anything public, so if you've just been saying all this because you think you're going to get a show..."

"No, nothing like that. Thought never crossed my mind," Amy said. "Okay... well maybe a little, but you can't help a girl for wanting a bit of extra drama."

Rose laughed. "I should throw this drink in your face for saying that," she said.

"But you won't."

"No, I won't," she said. "I should be mad, irritated even... but I'm not. Why am I even telling you any of this?"

"Because I'm Amy Pond and – let's face it, we've only known each other for about half an hour, but you probably already know – I'm pretty awesome."

Rose rolled her eyes. "If you say so... How did we even get on this topic anyway? I mean, don't get me wrong. It feels good in a way, getting it off my chest."

"It always does."

"Oi, I told you, you're not getting a show."

"And I told you, I'm not expecting one."

"Well, as long as we have that clear..." Rose stood up and offered out a hand to Amy. "Want to do some shopping with me?"

Amy looked at her hand. So many things could go wrong... but if the universe was going to collapse, wouldn't something have happened already?

"Sure," Amy said, grabbing it and pulling herself up. "Why not?"

"Brilliant," Rose said. She was smiling again.

Amy briefly wondered if she and Rory smiled that much or if it was just a side effect of being in love with the Doctor. She wondered if the Doctor's past – or future – self smiled in the same way. The Doctor had told her that she couldn't meet him, but perhaps she could discreetly spy from around a street corner or something.

"So," Amy said as she picked up her still-cold juice from the table and started to follow Rose down the bazaar street. "What are we looking for?"

"Just something small but interesting," Rose said. "It's for my mum back home. I'd get her anything really, but she doesn't like things that are too..."

"Alien?" Amy offered.

"Exactly. So I was thinking of getting just something small for her, and – if I find something interesting enough – then maybe something for the Doctor."

"And then you'll give it to him as you confess?"

"What *is* it with you and confessing? You keep bringing it up and I'm gonna leave you, no kidding."

"Alright! Alright, I'll stop with the personal questions," Amy said with a laugh. "Sorry, by the way. I'm really not trying to be the Spanish Inquisition."

"And don't think quoting Monty Python makes it okay."

"I said alright!" Amy let out an exasperated sigh. "So let's go find a gift for your mum already."

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"You're all set with that then?"

"Yeah, should be all she needs," the current Doctor said. He held the small piece of TARDIS coral up towards the sun to make sure it was in perfect health before pocketing it in his jacket.

"Wait a second," his past self said, looking at spot somewhere behind the current Doctor. His eyes widened. "Is *that* the TARDIS?"

The current Doctor turned around and looked at the unremarkable wooden door that was his TARDIS's current camouflage. "Oh that," he said. "Why yes. Yes it is."

"You fixed the circuit!"

"Now don't you go blaming me," he said. "I had no choice in the matter. Couldn't have had Rose seeing *two* police boxes today."

"Rose? What does Rose..."

"Doctor!"

His past self laughed as the current Doctor watched Rose make her way towards them through the crowd.



"I should have known," he said. "You remembered being me, seeing you, seeing Rose." He briefly waved to her before turning back to his other self. "Isn't a bit anticlimactic though, running through everything just because it's happened before?"

"You're telling me... Now careful, she's getting into ear range."

His past self gave him a wink before turning and enveloping Rose in a huge hug. "Miss me?" he asked.

"If I say 'yes,' can I pick out where we're going next?"

"Aren't you the cheeky one today?"

"Well, can I?"

"We'll see. Or," he said, drawing out the vowel. "There's a solar eclipse happening on the fourth planet in the Pangeon System; the moon is made out of solid diamond. Millions of colours never before seen by human eyes. Happens only once every 472,895 years. Your choice."

"But Doctor, we've got a time machine. It doesn't matter *when* it happens."

"Rose Tyler!" his past self said, sounding as scandalized as he remembered being. "It *always* matters when it happens."

"I'll just get going then," the current Doctor said. He half-hoped that the two would actually let him leave, but he knew better than that. He *remembered* better than that. But oh how he wished...

"Oh, sorry. The Doctor and I, sometimes we get sidetracked," Rose said, brushing a strand of hair behind her ear. She turned towards his past self. "Well, aren't you going to introduce me to your new friend?"

"Oh, yes. Just helped him with this thing. Um... well, this is-"

"Alastair," the Doctor said, holding out his hand. "Alastair Lethbridge-Stewart."

"I think I'll just stick with Alastair," Rose said, reaching out to shake it.

As their fingers slipped together, the Doctor repressed a shudder. The last time he'd held Rose's hand had been on the Crucible. Her hand was different then, rough with calluses, probably caused by years of work for the Torchwood in Pete's World. And guns, he remembered her having a gun. He hated guns.

This hand was soft. This was the one he remembered sometimes when he saw Amy and Rory together and reached out his own hand only to find nothing there. This was the hand that he had grabbed right before he'd first told her, "Run!" This was the hand that had color-changing nail polish on it, nail polish that would be removed as soon as she got back into the TARDIS because the people from Earth didn't have color-changing nail polish quite like that yet.

This was the hand that he didn't want to let go of.

She noticed his reluctance, her smile fading slightly. Then she blinked and looked at him like she was trying to decide something.

"We haven't met anywhere before," Rose said slowly. "Have we?"

"Why would you say that?"

"I don't know... You just... seem familiar, I guess."

"That's..."

"Stupid. Yeah, I know," Rose said with a laugh, slipping her hand out of his. As she took a step back, the Doctor slowly clenched his hand into a fist around the empty air. "Sorry I brought it up. Oh, by the way, Doctor. Look what I picked up."

She reached into her pocket and held up a small, gold trinket for the past Doctor to look at. His past self pulled out a pair of glasses and bent over to examine it. The current Doctor fought to keep his face impassive.

Somewhat amused boredom, that was the expression he remembered. That was the expression that he had to keep now.

"I was shopping with this other girl, and we ended up going back to this one stall that had all this weather related stuff that was rather nifty. You see, when this gets hot, that means it's going to be sunny. And when it's cold, it's going to rain," she said. "It's umm... made out of this metal that's really sensitive to the atmosphere."

"Ah, bazulium. Basic alloy from the mining fields of Intensus Five."

"Yeah, that's it!"

"Bit useless though," he said. "Having a weather predictor in the TARDIS."

"Don't be stupid. It's not for you, it's a present for my mum."

"Oh," he said. There was a bit of a pause as he stared at the trinket. He looked back up at Rose. "Did you get me a present?"

"I couldn't find anything that I thought would interest you more than two seconds," she said. "And don't give me that look. I see you every day... my mum doesn't get to anymore."

This was it. He knew it was coming from the moment that he'd discovered the TARDIS was sick. And he had cursed. He hadn't been able to help it.

Oh, how cocky he used to be. He used to be so proud of himself. He was a man who could topple down gods and raise up empires. He was the man who had taken down Harriet Jones with only six words.

And now he was about to destroy himself with only five.

"I bet she misses you," he said.

She looked up at him. "You mean my mum? Yeah..." She trailed off as she looked at the bazulium trinket in her hand.

"Rose?" His past self looked at her, his eyebrows furrowing slightly in concern.

"Doctor? Can we... Can we visit my mum next?" she asked him. "We'll do the moon thing right after. Or something else if you want. Whatever you want. It's just..."

He wanted to scream. To warn them. To do anything but stand here with a blank expression. If only his past self hadn't listened to her. If only he had been selfish for once. He could have said no and taken her somewhere else. Somewhen else. All he had to do was not listen...

But if he knew anyone, the Doctor knew himself, and he knew that he had never been able to resist that smile. And – more importantly – he'd already lived through what had happened next.

"I understand," his past self said, oblivious to the war that was raging on inside the current Doctor's skull. "You don't have to say anything. Jackie will be happy to see us, you probably more than me."

"Thank you!"

The current Doctor watched as the two of them entered into another hug. After what seemed like both forever and the briefest of moments, they detached and turned once more to face the current Doctor.

"It was nice meeting you," Rose said. "Any friend of the Doctor is a friend of mine. Maybe we'll see each other again someday."

"Maybe."

"Oh, and good luck with the thing," his past self said.

"Thank you."

"Come on," Rose said, tugging on his arm. "You know my mum doesn't like to be kept waiting."

"But she doesn't even know that we're coming yet," he protested as she started to lead him away.

The Doctor watched as the two slowly left. Halfway down the street, Rose turned around one last time.

"Bye!" she yelled with a wave.

The Doctor waved back. "Goodbye," he said, in a voice not loud enough for her to hear. "And... I suppose. If it's my last chance to say it..."

With one last smile, she turned back around and continued walking away. He watched the back of her head as it started to disappear again into the crowd.

"Rose Tyler... I love you."

And then she was gone.

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"Amy, I don't think we should even be here. The Doctor said-"

"Shhh! If you're so concerned about being noticed, then don't talk," Amy whispered back. "Anyways, it looks like they're leaving. And... the Doctor's waving goodbye. That's it. It's over. Come on!"

"Amy? Amy, no! Wait! Amy!"

Amy walked out from where she and Rory had been spying from behind a nearby corner. Sneaking up was easy.

"Hello!" Amy said cheerfully as she tapped him on the shoulder.

The Doctor whirled around with an expression *far* more serious than she had been expecting. "Amy! What did I tell you about-"

"Look I'm sorry I didn't *completely* listen to you," Amy said, initially thrown off but rolling straight back into it. "But from as far I can tell, nothing's happened. So the universe is going to be fine, right?"

"It's time to go," he said without a trace of warmth.

"Look, I said I was sorry," Amy said, as the Doctor pushed past her towards the TARDIS. "But that was Rose, right? She looked really happy."

He froze, and then turned slowly to face her. "How do you know her name?"

"We met, earlier in the marketplace. I already told Rory about it. Hello, Rory!" Amy said with a smile as Rory finally joined them. "I was just telling the Doctor about Rose. But as I was saying, we started talking, and then we started talking about you. And you know how *we* were talking that one night and I said how it was never good to keep your feelings locked up to yourself? Well, I told that to Rose and she told me that she was going to tell you – the past you, that is – that she loves you... maybe. To tell you the truth, she was a bit nervous about the whole thing... Doctor? Doctor, what's wrong? The universe isn't going to end because I told her to confess, is it?"

"I told you this wasn't going to end well," Rory muttered.

"Doctor, tell me what's the matter," Amy said, her voice shaking slightly. Despite the universe looking like it was in picture perfect health, she had obviously done something terribly wrong. The Doctor was now as white as a sheet, and his eyes carried a horrible deadness to them. "Doctor, you're starting to scare me."

"Nothing," he said. The sharpness of his words made Amy's skin crawl. "Nothing's wrong. It's all happening exactly like I remember. Ha!"

"So she does confess?"

"As a matter of fact, she does."

"But you love her! Don't you?"

"Wait, the Doctor loves someone? That girl you were just telling me about?"

"Since you must know everything," the Doctor said, ignoring Rory. He shoved his jacket sleeve up his arm and looked at his watch. "Going by TARDIS time, in six hours and thirty two minutes she confesses, though I'm sure you and your wonderful advice had nothing to do with it. And, less than a minute after that, our time together ends. Forever. So yes, you're right. The universe will *not* be destroyed because nothing even changed. Congratulations for helping cause something that already happened."

"So this was the last..." Amy trailed off as she looked down the street, trying to catch a glimpse of Rose and the past Doctor in the crowds. It was no use. She turned back to the Doctor... her Doctor. "But the two of you were so happy! I just saw you together. You were right here!"

"I know."

"They just left. They can't have gotten far. Go after them! You can tell them about what's going to happen."

"I told you, Amy. This is a closed time loop," the Doctor said. He paused, taking a deep breath in and out. "What happens now has to happen... because it already has."

"But time can be rewritten! You've told me that yourself!"

"Not this time. Not ever."

"But that's not fair!" Amy yelled, tears starting to well up in her eyes. "The two of you love each other! Don't you?"

"Life's unfair! If you haven't noticed that by now, get used to it!"

The last time the Doctor had yelled at her, it had been on the Starship UK. She had forgotten about the sheer fury and pain that could lie behind his anger. It stunned her into silence.

They stared at each other, unmoving, and then Amy watched him slowly walk away, watched how his hands shook as he pulled out the TARDIS key and forced it into the lock. It took him

two missed tries before he was able to turn it. She tried to move, to call out to him, but she was frozen.

Down the other side of the street she heard the sounds of laughter. Was it them? Probably not. The two would be far out of her ear range by now. Maybe they were even back at their TARDIS. They only had six hours left. By the time they left this planet, maybe it would only be five. And the Doctor was just letting it happen... because he had to.

Between the universe and himself, he would pick the universe every single time.

She didn't care *what* he said. It wasn't fair.

"Amy?" Rory said softly, moving over to stand next to her. "Amy, I don't understand *everything* that just happened, but it's going to be okay, you hear me? The Doctor's got us now. You don't have to cry."

"But I do," Amy said, fighting back a sob. "Because he won't! And it won't be okay... not for him. Not for him..."

As Amy started to wipe away her tears with the back of her left hand, Rory slipped his fingers through her right. She searched through the crowd one last time, hoping to see... well, anything. A glimpse of blonde hair... A snatch of brown trenchcoat... Was she only imagining them now?

She felt a soft tug and looked down to see Rory holding her hand. No matter how much she wanted to stop it, time moved on. But she didn't want to go... If she left, if she chose to move on, it would end for sure.

With one last glance at the crowd, she let her husband lead her back to the TARDIS.

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