

## Chapter 61

As dawn broke over Sheffield Castle, the soft glow of the morning light filtered through the narrow, arched windows. Yaz, already awake, sat by the hearth, the crackling fire casting a warm glow on her face. Anaya was cradled in her arms, making soft cooing sounds as she fed, her tiny hands gripping Yaz's finger. The peaceful moment was interrupted by a gentle knock on the heavy wooden door.

"Yes?" Yaz called out.

"It's me," came Nadjia's familiar voice from the other side.

"Come in."

The large door creaked open, revealing her mother, wrapped in a woolen shawl against the morning chill.

"Morning," Nadjia greeted as she stepped inside.

"Hey... ready to go?" Yaz asked, adjusting Anaya.

"Just waiting on your father and the Doctor."

"Dad's with the Doctor?"

"Mmm." Nadjia nodded, moving closer to admire her granddaughter. "Went out hours ago... Oh, look at her," she cooed, leaning in to trace a gentle finger over Anaya's cheek.

"She's hungry. Slept through the whole night though."

"That's good." Nadjia's smile softened, but her expression soon turned serious as she sat in the chair opposite Yaz. "I wanted to talk to you, Yaz."

Yaz sighed, already sensing where this was going. "About what?"

"This whole thing... you, the baby... your lifestyle."

"Muuuum, pleeeeeease," Yaz groaned, rolling her eyes.

"I'm just saying, Yaz. This is no place for a baby."

"You've said that a million times. This isn't—" Yaz started, but the door creaked open again, cutting her off.

The Doctor strolled in, her usual energy filling the room. "Hiya! Morning, Nadjia," she greeted with a grin.

"Morning," Nadjia replied, her tone polite but cool.

Yaz's eyes lit up at the sight of her wife. "Heeey... where have you been?" she asked, her smile softening as the Doctor leaned down to press a kiss to her forehead. "Loving the curls" she smiled softly tucking Doctor's hair behind her ear.

"It's damp outside..." she smiled "Just had a nice walk. Thought I'd sniff around, see if I could figure out why we're here."

"And?" Yaz tilted her head, curious.

"No idea." The Doctor shrugged, twirling sonic in her hand. "Everything seems normal. Told ya, just a fluke. Must've been that navigational circuit acting up."

"So, we can go home?" Nadjia interjected, clearly eager to leave.

"Yup," the Doctor replied with a satisfied nod, already bouncing around the room and gathering Anaya's things. "Unless you fancy staying for a bit..."

"Nooo," Nadjia and Yaz said in unison.

The Doctor raised her hands in mock surrender. "Alright, alright! No need to get your knickers in a twist. It was just a suggestion."

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Back in the TARDIS, the Doctor flicked switches and spun dials with her usual enthusiasm, finally pulling down the lever with a dramatic flourish. The engines groaned, the whole control room vibrated violently, and then, with a final thud, the TARDIS settled.

"Right! Let's have a peep!" the Doctor chirped, bounding to the doors. She flung them open, her grin as bright as ever, until it wasn't. The smile slipped. Quickly, she slammed the door shut and rushed back to the console.

"What's wrong?" Sonya asked, bracing for the worst.

"Wrong? Nothing's wrong! Why would anything be wrong? Everything's *fine*! Totally fine. Just doing a bit of... recalibration. Standard stuff." The Doctor gave a wide-eyed grin and yanked the lever again.

Another shake. Another stop. This time, the Doctor crept to the doors, cracked them open just enough to peek through, then shut them just as fast, spinning back to the controls with a forced, cheerful hum.

“Doctor?” Yaz’s voice softened with worry. “What’s going on?”

“Oh, nothing major,” the Doctor mumbled, throwing a sideways glance at the TARDIS. “Just a minor disagreement with a very stubborn, ancient, sentient time machine. Happens.”

“We’re stuck,” Nadjia declared flatly.

“Don’t be so negative!” Hakim interjected. “Doctor’s got this.”

“I’m gonna end up scrubbing tavern floors again, aren’t I?” Sonya sighed. “Ryan’s ever gonna let me live this down.”

“He’s used to it by now,” Yaz quipped, before narrowing her eyes at the Doctor. “Wait. Is this about that filter I told you needed cleaning?”

“Absolutely not!” the Doctor shot back indignantly. “And for the record, we’ve landed in Sheffield, 1448. See? Nothing to worry about!” She paused, side-eyed the TARDIS, then yanked the lever with more force. “Come on, old girl!”

Another thud. Another door peek. Another cow’s face staring at her confused.

The Doctor slammed the door. “Sheffield, 1548. Progress!” she announced, clearly unimpressed. “One more time for luck.”

A few more tries later, the monitor now read 1848.

“At least we’re moving forward,” Sonya muttered, folding her arms.

Yaz’s eyes narrowed. “Hang on a second. Does anyone else see the pattern here?”

“What pattern?” The Doctor frowned, now visibly frazzled.

“We started in 1348. Then 1448. 1548. 1648... 1848. We’re jumping *exactly* one century at a time.”

The Doctor blinked. “Ohhhhh, Yaz! Brilliant, as always!” She smacked her forehead with both hands. “How did I miss that? So obvious!”

“What’s going on, Doctor?” Nadjia pressed.

The Doctor scratched the back of her head, her voice gaining speed as she rattled off possibilities. “Could be a temporal anchor point lock...TARDIS might’ve latched onto a fixed

anomaly, dragging us through echo points in history. Or a circuit feedback loop! Navigational circuits resetting to a safe point each time. Which would be bad. Like, *really* bad. Or..."

"Or what?" Hakim asked, leaning in.

"Or we're following a temporal trail." The Doctor raised her eyebrows, her eyes sparkling with intrigue.

"A trail?" Yaz tilted her head.

"Yup! Like breadcrumbs. Another time traveler, or a major event, left a trail that connects everything back to 1348. And we're just tagging along for the ride." She shrugged. "Or it could be something else entirely. Loads of possibilities. Isn't time travel fun?" she grinned

"Oh, absolutely." Sonya huffed "Just like a lovely stroll through a minefield...what could possibly go wrong?"

Yaz groaned. "So, what do we do now?"

The Doctor grinned, bouncing on her heels. "Oh, I've got a plan! It's half-baked and slightly mad, but that's where the best ones start, right?" she grinned

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"This is your plan?" Yaz said, her voice tinged with disbelief as she stared up at the worn, wooden sign swaying gently in the cool breeze. The Fox and Hound, it read in faded gold lettering.

The building was a sturdy, stone structure with ivy creeping up one side, and smoke curling lazily from a chimney.

The Doctor, hands shoved deep into her coat pockets, grinned like she'd just discovered a secret treasure.

"Yep! Me mind works better on a full stomach. Besides..." she shrugged playfully. "They're supposed to do some *cracking* food here. Trust me." She spun on her heel, already heading toward the door, her energy undeterred by the skeptical looks behind her.

Yaz sighed and glanced at the others. Sonya tugged irritably at the hem of her Victorian dress, her corset making every breath a battle. Her mother was visibly tired but nodded, clearly too worn out to argue and her dad, always ready for another adventure haply followed the Doctor

"I haven't had breakfast. I could do with something," he said, stepping forward eagerly.

The inside of the pub was dimly lit but inviting, with dark wood beams stretching across the low ceiling. The air was warm, filled with the scent of roasted meats, fresh bread, and the faint tang of ale. A roaring fire crackled in a massive stone hearth, casting flickering shadows across the room. Mismatched wooden tables and chairs filled the space, each one occupied by locals in period clothing, their conversations a gentle hum that filled the air.

Behind the bar, a burly man with a bushy mustache polished tankard, nodding in greeting as they entered. The Doctor led them to a quiet corner booth near the fire.

"This'll do nicely," she said, plopping down with a grin and patting the seat beside her for Yaz. Sonya flopped down dramatically, tugging at her corset again with a groan.

"What's everyone having?" Hakim asked cheerfully.

"Surprise me!" the Doctor beamed.

Nadjia gave a small smile. "Just some juice for me."

Yaz gave her order before turning back to the Doctor, who was already pulling out her sonic and fidgeting with it on the table.

Once Hakim returned with a tray of mugs and glasses, the Doctor clapped her hands together. "Right! Let's talk next steps." She leaned in, eyes sparkling with excitement. "Now, here's the thing. We've got a bit of a temporal hiccup on our hands. See, the TARDIS keeps jumping centuries, which means something, or someone is anchoring us to these points in time."

Sonya frowned. "So, what do we do? Just keep hopping until we figure it out?"

"Not exactly," the Doctor said, taking a sip of ginger beer from her mug and grimacing. "Blimey, that's strong. Anyway, we need to find the source of the anomaly. Something, or someone is leaving breadcrumbs, and I reckon we can find some clues here in 1848."

Yaz exchanged a glance with her mum. "So, what's the plan?"

The Doctor grinned "First, we eat. Then, we investigate. Simple as that!"

"And how do we do that?" Sonya asked "Can't exactly google strange things happening in Sheffield recently"

The Doctor leaned in closer "Right, here's the thing. We'll hang about for a bit. A day or two, maybe three. Do some snooping but quietly, of course. Someone or something here might be causing the TARDIS to act up, and if we're lucky, we'll figure it out before we're all bored stiff."

"Stay here? In Victorian Sheffield?" Sonya raised an eyebrow, tugging at her corset again.

“In these clothes?”

The Doctor tilted her head, considering. “Bit restrictive, yeah. But you look fab. Totally pulling off the Victorian chic.”

Sonya rolled her eyes. “I’m pulling off breathing. Barely.”

Hakim chuckled, taking a sip of his beer. “I think it’s brilliant. I always hoped we’d come to this time...The industrial revolution at it’s peak.”

Yaz shook her head, leaning closer to the Doctor. “Are you sure about this? It feels like we’re walking into trouble.” her hand stroking Anaya as her eyes filled with worry she was trying her best to hide in front of her mother.

The Doctor’s grin softened. She reached for Yaz’s hand, squeezing it gently. “Trouble’s already here Yaz. Besides, we’ve faced worse, haven’t we? This’ll be a doddle I’m sure if it.”

Nadjia wasn’t convinced. “And Anaya? What about her? A Victorian tavern isn’t exactly baby-friendly.”

“I know, mum,” Yaz said, sighing. “We’re doing do the best we can...Not like we planned this”

“Absolutely!” The Doctor nodded firmly. “Anaya’s top priority...If things get rough, her and Yaz are always safe inside the TARDIS...So...you lot stay close, blend in. I’ll do the heavy lifting, chat with some locals, poke around, see what’s what.” She took another sip and grimaced again. “Honestly, this stuff’s like liquid punishment.”

Hakim chuckled. “I think it’s quite nice.”

“Well, you can have mine,” the Doctor said, sliding the mug toward him. “Right, I’ll head out after lunch. Start with the market square...always a hub for gossip and odd goings-on. You lot should explore too. Stick to pairs, though. Less suspicious.”

“Pairs?” Sonya asked, looking around.

“You’re with me,” Yaz said quickly, giving her sister a warning glance. “Mum, you and Dad okay to take Anaya for a bit? You can just stay out of trouble...go to a park or something.”

Nadjia nodded reluctantly. “Fine. But if this goes sideways...”

“It won’t,” the Doctor interrupted, bouncing up from her seat. “Probably.” She caught Yaz’s look and gave a sheepish grin. “Joking. Totally joking. Everything’s gonna be brilliant.”

Sonya groaned, already regretting the decision to follow along. “This better not end with me in some Victorian jail.”

“No promises!” The Doctor winked grinning

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Sonya and Yaz strolled down the cobbled streets of Victorian Sheffield, the faint scent of coal smoke and freshly baked bread wafting through the crisp air. The market square bustled with life, vendors shouting, and townsfolk bustling about in long coats and bonnets. Sonya struggled with her corset, fidgeting every few steps.

“Stop pulling at it,” Yaz whispered as they passed a group of women in aprons gossiping by a bread cart.

“I rather stop wearing it,” Sonya shot back, tugging again. “I swear this thing is trying to kill me.”

Yaz smirked but kept her focus. “We’re looking for a place called the Paradise Square Tavern. The Doctor said it’s where most of the locals gather after work. If there’s gossip or weird stuff happening, someone there will know.”

Sonya sighed. “Great. More time in a corset. Lead the way.”

They turned down a narrow street, the noise of the market fading behind them. Paradise Square opened up before them, a neat square surrounded by tall brick buildings, with gas lamps casting a soft glow despite the daylight. The tavern itself was a grand, imposing building with dark oak doors and frosted windows.

Inside, the air was thick with the scent of ale and pipe smoke. The tavern was bustling with life, workers fresh off their shifts at the foundries, their faces smudged with soot, sitting at long wooden tables, mugs in hand. A few glanced up as Yaz and Sonya entered, but most quickly returned to their conversations.

“This place is... cozy,” Sonya muttered, looking around warily.

“Blending in, remember?” Yaz whispered, guiding her to a quieter corner. They found a small table near the fireplace, where the warmth quickly thawed the chill from their bones.

A barmaid approached, wiping her hands on her apron. “What can I get you, ladies?”

“Two Sarsaparillas, please,” Yaz said, trying to sound confident.

Sonya raised an eyebrow. “Are you tryin' to sound clever?”

“Shhh,” Yaz hissed as the barmaid walked away. “...We need to fit in.”

Sonya leaned back, arms crossed. “Alright, so what’s the plan? Just sit here and hope

someone spills the beans about time anomalies?”

Yaz scanned the room, lowering her voice. “No. We listen. People talk when they think no one’s paying attention.” She nodded toward a group of men gathered near the bar, speaking in hushed tones. “Start with them.”

Sonya rolled her eyes. “You’ve been watching too many spy films.”

“Maybe,” Yaz smirked. “But trust me, it works.”

As they sipped their drinks, Sonya grimacing after each sip, they listened intently. Snatches of conversation floated their way, talk of factory shifts, rising prices, and... something about strange lights in the hills.

Sonya’s ears perked up. “Did you hear that?” she whispered.

Yaz nodded. “We need to know more. Come on.” she shot from the table, Sonya quickly leaving her mug

“What the hell?” She muttered following her sister

They approached the group cautiously, Yaz putting on her most charming smile. “Excuse me. Did I hear you say something about lights in the hills?”

One of the men, a burly fellow with a thick Yorkshire accent, eyed them suspiciously. “What’s it to you?”

“Just curious,” Yaz said quickly. “We’re new in town, and we’ve heard all sorts of strange stories.”

The man relaxed slightly, leaning in. “Aye. It’s been the talk of the town, it has. Strange lights up near Wincobank Hill. Some say it’s spirits. Others reckon it’s summat worse.”

“Worse?” Sonya repeated, intrigued despite herself.

He nodded gravely. “Best stay away, if you know what’s good for you. Some folks went missing.”

Yaz exchanged a glance with Sonya, her heart pounding. “Thanks for the advice,” she said, slipping a coin onto the table.

As they walked back to their seats, Sonya muttered, “Spirits or worse? What’s the bet it’s alien tech or some other weirdness? And people missing...what the hell is that all about?”

“Either way,” Yaz said, “it’s where we’re going next.”



"What?"

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The Doctor strolled into the heart of the bustling Victorian marketplace, her coat billowing behind her as she navigated through the throngs of shoppers. A newsboy hat atop her curls, a half-hearted nod to blending in, but really, she couldn't be bothered with the full costume. Her multi-colored scarf and overall odd look drawing a few curious stares, but she brushed them off with a grin.

She soaked in the sounds of bartering, clinking coins, and clattering hooves. The smells were a mix of fresh produce, roasted chestnuts, and the inevitable tang of coal smoke hanging in the air.

"Right then, market intel," she muttered, adjusting her coat and strolling towards a stall selling apples.

A stout vendor with a ruddy face caught her eye. "Apple, miss? Fresh from the orchards."

The Doctor picked one up, inspecting it with exaggerated care. "Hmm, bit knobbly, but charming. Like it's had a life." She bit into it, her face lighting up. "Mmm, tangy! Love a good apple with character."

The vendor chuckled. "Aye, rough growing season. Strange weather's been playing with the crops."

"Strange weather, you say?" She raised an eyebrow, chewing thoughtfully. "Storms? Raining frogs?...Or just the usual British drizzle being dramatic?"

The man leaned in, glancing around as if sharing a secret. "You're obviously not from around here...Terrible storms and lights in the sky, up by Wincobank Hill... Folk reckon it's a bad omen."

The Doctor's eyes widened, her voice dropping to a conspiratorial whisper. "Bad omen, eh? Love a bit of folklore. Spooky lights... how long's that been going on?"

"Few weeks now. Comes and goes. Always near the hill."

"Wincobank Hill... noted." She tossed him a coin. "Cheers for the apple. And the mystery."

As she turned to leave, a commotion broke out further down the market. The Doctor's curiosity flared. She weaved through the crowd, arriving at a scene where a group of men argued over something concealed under a cloth. The tension was palpable. One of the men, tall and wiry with a shock of white hair, seemed especially agitated.

"Excuse me, gentlemen!" The Doctor beamed as she approached, hands in her pockets. "What's all the shouting about? It's market day, should be all smiles and bargains."

"You shouldn't mess around with it...Gonna get folks killed" someone added from the crowd

"Mess around with what?" The Doctor asked intrigued

"None of your business," the white-haired man snapped, pulling the cloth tighter around the object.

"Ooh, secretive! Love it." She tilted her head, eyes narrowing. "What's under there, then? A prize turnip? Or something a bit... spicier?"

The man glared but didn't answer.

Undeterred, the Doctor whipped out her sonic giving it a quick buzz. The device under the cloth hummed with temporal energy. "Aha! Not a turnip. Thought as much."

"Back off!" the man barked, stepping protectively in front of the object.

"Easy now. I'm just here for a friendly chat. But that," she pointed to the covered device, "is not from around here, is it?"

"He got it from the Wincobank Hill" someone said

"Where the lights appear?" The Doctor asked

"You don't know what you're talking about." the man snapped

"Oh, I really do." She leaned in, lowering her voice. "And if it's doing what I think it's doing, we've got a problem. So... what say you let me look at it...ha?"

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Nadjia and Hakim strolled through the quieter side streets of Victorian Sheffield, their steps soft against the cobblestones. Hakim carried Anaya swaying gently to keep her content. The baby cooed softly, drawing smiles from passersby.

"Looks like she's enjoying all this," Hakim whispered, glancing at Nadjia.

"She doesn't know any different," Nadjia replied with a fond smile. "But we're not here for a leisurely walk. We need to find out what's happening before the Doctor's next wild plan."

"I thought we're meant to stay out of it?"

"Sooner we find out, sooner we get out of here...Come on!" She pulled him by the sleeve

They turned a corner and found themselves outside St. Mary's Church, a local gathering spot. A few townsfolk milled about, chatting in hushed tones. Nadjia noticed a noticeboard filled with handwritten messages and public announcements.

"Maybe there's something here," she said, leading Hakim toward the board.

Hakim scanned the notes. "Missing livestock... warnings about strange lights... another one about someone falling ill near the hill."

"Look at this one." Nadjia pointed to a notice:

*Seeking information on missing children....* Look, two kids went missing... last seen at Wincobank Hill." She gave her husband a worried look

"That just made the hairs on the back of my neck stand up...You think it has anything to do with what the Doctor was saying?"

"I don't know, she said to make a note about anything strange. So, we're making a note. We don't exactly have many leads. It's worth checking out."

They moved away from the board, continuing their stroll. Hakim adjusted the sling, bouncing Anaya lightly as they passed a small bakery. The scent of fresh bread wafted out, making both of them pause.

"Fancy a bit of bread?" Hakim grinned.

"We're supposed to be investigating," Nadjia reminded him, though her stomach rumbled in agreement.

"Noo...We're supposed to stay out of it...I'll grab a loaf. You keep your eyes open." Hakim handed Anaya to Nadjia and disappeared inside the bakery.

Nadjia stood by the window, watching the bustling street. A group of children ran past, laughing and playing, while a pair of women gossiped near a water pump. Her gaze drifted to a man in a long coat, standing at the edge of the square, watching everything with a hawk-like intensity. His unusual dressing style catching her attention.

Hakim returned moments later, breaking off a piece of crusty bread. "Here, try this. Nothing like it in our time."

"Look over there," Nadjia whispered, nodding toward the man, pointing at trainers on his feet.

Hakim followed her gaze. "Alright...that's a bit...suspicious?"

“Very. Let’s follow him...carefully.”

“I thought you’re worried about the baby?” He said behind her

“I am” she added walking off

They trailed the man through winding alleys, careful to keep their distance. Anaya stirred but remained quiet, her tiny hands gripping Nadjia’s shawl. The man finally stopped at a narrow building with faded paint and slipped inside the shop.

“What do you think’s in there?” Hakim asked.

“No idea,” Nadjia replied. “But we need to find out.”

Hakim sighed, adjusting his stance. “I’ll go first. You stay back with Anaya.”

“No way! We stick together.”

He smiled at her determination. “Alright. But let’s be quick.”

The small store looked like a general goods shop, rows of shelves lined with jars of dried herbs, bolts of fabric, and small tools. The man moved with purpose, locking the door behind him and flipping the sign to “**Closed.**”

They approached the door cautiously pressed themselves against the shop’s window, peering through the foggy glass.

Hakim raised an eyebrow. “Doesn’t seem like the kind of place you’d need privacy for.”

“Look at his bag,” Nadjia whispered, nodding toward the man.

The man placed a large, weathered bag on the counter, carefully unfastening its buckles. He pulled out an object wrapped in cloth, unrolling it with precision. As the last layer fell away, a strange device gleamed under the dim gaslight, a metallic sphere covered in glowing symbols that pulsed with a soft, rhythmic light.

“What’s that?” Hakim breathed, eyes wide.

“No idea, but it’s not from around here,” Nadjia replied, her voice tense.

The man placed his hands on either side of the device, muttering something under his breath. The glowing symbols grew brighter, and a faint hum filled the air, growing louder by the second.

Suddenly, the entire room was flooded with an intense, blinding light. Nadjia shielded Anaya’s face, and Hakim stumbled back, squinting against the brightness. A strange,

warping sound, like the fabric of reality being twisted, echoed from inside.

When the light dimmed, the shop was silent. The man was gone.

Hakim blinked rapidly, trying to adjust his vision. "Did he just... vanish?"

Nadjia nodded, still holding Anaya close. "Yeah. And whatever that thing was, it's not here either."

They cautiously tried the door, but it wouldn't budge. Nadjia knocked loudly, but no one answered.

"We need to tell the Doctor," Hakim said, already moving back toward the main street.

"She's gonna love this one," Nadjia muttered, cradling Anaya as they hurried away.

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Back at the marketplace the Doctor wasn't giving up on the strange machine. The white-haired man's lips tightened into a grimace, and his hand hovered protectively over the object beneath the cloth. The Doctor, her curiosity piqued, leaned in a little closer.

"Go on," she said, practically bouncing on the balls of her feet, "Just let me have a peep"

"Back off...This is none of your business"

"Oh but it is my business...See I bet this device is causing time to *wiggle* around a bit...Strange lights up on a hill...Cause if that's the case...Well, I'm your girl"

The man scowled and looked to the others in the group, exchanging nervous glances. It was clear he wasn't planning to divulge anything.

"Alright, alright," the Doctor muttered under her breath. "You wanna play hard to get. Fair enough!"

She raised her sonic again, giving it a swift flick. The air around the object buzzed, and the man flinched as if the sonic was a live wire. The Doctor's grin widened.

"See? Temporal energy. That's why it's humming. You're messing with the fabric of time, and..."

Before she could finish her sentence, the man whipped around, clutching the device close to his chest. "No! Stay away!"

In one swift, desperate motion, he darted away from the crowd, weaving through market stalls like a man possessed. The Doctor blinked, then without hesitation, took off after him,

her feet a blur of movement as she sprinted down the cobbled streets.

“Oi! You can’t just run off with a time device! Where’s the politeness in that?” she called out, dodging a startled street vendor who almost spilled a basket of apples in her wake.

The man’s feet pounded the street, his silhouette darting between carts and into narrower, darker alleys. The Doctor wasn’t about to let him get away that easily. She zoomed around a corner, nearly tripping over a stray cat, and then—WHAM!, she collided with a woman pushing a pram.

“Oh, *sorry!* So sorry, but I’m chasing a rogue time traveler, nothing to worry about!” she called as she bobbed around the stroller and kept running.

The streets seemed to close in around her, the tall buildings casting long shadows as the man continued to weave through the labyrinth of alleys. She zipped past a pub, narrowly avoiding a barrel of what looked like salted fish. The man was getting closer to the end of the street now.

With one last burst of energy, she launched herself forward, reaching the end of the street. The man was cornered. He’d run into a cul-de-sac, and now there was nowhere to go but... up.

He glanced around, wild-eyed, and then, with a growl of frustration, he shoved the device into his coat. Before the Doctor could react, he *ran straight toward her*, knocking her out of the way as he ran into the nearest building.

“Oi! Nope, not happening!” The Doctor scrambled up, her sonic already buzzing. She darted into the building after him, only to find herself face to face with a *whole lot* of boxes.

“Really? This again?” she muttered, looking around the cramped, cluttered storage room. She heard the man breathing heavily just beyond a stack of crates.

The Doctor didn’t hesitate. With one grand leap, she jumped over the boxes, her hands reaching out as she snagged the man’s coat sleeve. “Gotcha!”

The man let out a startled yelp as the Doctor swung around to face him. The device was now fully in his hands, he tried stuffing it into his coat as if to shield it from her view.

“Look, mate,” she said, her voice suddenly very serious, “You’ve got to stop running from me. Time’s been all kinds of squishy lately, and you’ve got something that can fix it. I can help. Really! I’m *quite* good at fixing things.”

The man’s expression softened just a fraction.

“Please,” the Doctor added, her voice gentle but firm, “Tell me about the device. You’re making it worse, and we don’t want that.”

He hesitated for a moment, then, with a reluctant sigh, handed the device over. The Doctor grinned, holding it up. The hum was stronger now, and the device practically pulsed with energy.

"Well, that's much better!" she said, giving the man an encouraging smile. "Now, we can get to fixing this. Time waits for no one, especially not when it's got a bit of a temper."

She flicked her sonic over the device one more time, calming the energy with a steady, rhythmic buzz. The light from the device faded, and the tension in the air dissipated.

"Much better. Much better. Thank you!" she beamed, "See? No harm done."

But the man, clearly scared pushed her out of the way and ran passed her, disappearing around the corner.

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The Doctor, clutching the device in her hand, sprinted back into the busy market square, her mind buzzing with possibilities. As she reached the spot where Hakim, Nadjia, Yaz, and Sonya were gathered, the atmosphere was electric with tension. Everyone was speaking at once, trying to get their findings across.

"... the man disappeared in thin air, like *poof!* Gone!" Hakim was saying, his arms flailing dramatically.

"No, no, no! It was like a light! He just vanished right into it, and he was wearing trainers...he definitely don't belong here" Nadjia interjected, looking as stunned as ever. "We followed him inside and..."

"Wait, wait, wait!" Yaz raised her voice, trying to be heard above the chatter. "In the tavern...They said something about the lights on Wincobank Hill... they're connected, I know it! It's all linked."

Sonya, who was trying her best to keep up, added, "Remember the Doctor saying it could be a person...Maybe it's that bloke you saw...it's all strange!"

"Hiya" The Doctor grinned as she approached but nobody even noticed, still in the middle of a chaotic conversation. "Excuse me...I'm right here" she said again but still nobody paid attention to her.

She held up her hands, raising her voice just enough to cut through the noise. "Oi! Pack it in!"

They all fell silent, turning to the Doctor as she took a deep breath and beamed at them, her expression a mix of determination and excitement. "Look what I got!"

Everyone glanced at the device in her hand for a moment of collective silence just to start talking over each other once again.

"That's like the thing from the shop" Nadjia said

"No it's not..." Hakim added "It had symbols...Where do you see symbols?"

"Alright!..." the Doctor yelled again "Look...I know you lot are all exited and dying to say what you found out but not here... I know this is all a bit... chaotic, but we're going to figure this out.... Whatever this is, it's tied to everything, Wincobank Hill, the strange lights, and our time-jumping friend." She looked at them seriously. "But I need more information. And we can't talk here...And that means... we're gonna have to stay here for a bit."

"Stay here?" Sonya raised an eyebrow.

"Yep!" The Doctor grinned, completely unbothered. "We need time to think, to watch, to piece it all together. Trust me, the longer we wait, the more things will start to fall into place. There's a nice place around the corner..."

"But the lights..." Yaz said

"Those lights aren't going anywhere till tomorrow Yaz...If we're going to solve it properly, we need to spend the night and poke around some more tomorrow. See what else we can find."

The group exchanged uncertain looks, but the Doctor's infectious optimism seemed to push any doubts aside. She flashed them all with a reassuring smile. "Right, then! Let's get everyone a place to sleep, I'll sort out the arrangements. And in the morning, we'll get to the bottom of this."

"Guess we don't have much choice, do we?" Sonya shrugged, her voice softening.

"That's the spirit!" The Doctor beamed. "I'll work out the details. For now, let's make sure the TARDIS is safe and maybe grab a bite to eat. Can't solve a problem on an empty stomach, after all. I'm really in the mood for a fried egg sandwich... I wonder if they've got any?"

As the Doctor clapped her hands together with a satisfied grin and took Anaya into her arms, the skies above began to darken, clouds gathering quickly as the wind picked up. The first crack of thunder rumbled in the distance, followed by a flash of lightning that lit up the market square.

"Ah, typical weather, isn't it?" the Doctor remarked, looking up at the sky and closed her coat around the baby. "Can't trust the British weather to cooperate with a good plan."



Sonya's eyes widened, pointed toward the hills

"There," she said, her finger unwavering as she stared into the growing storm. "The lights!"

The group turned toward the distant hills, where the glow of the strange lights had begun to shimmer faintly through the darkening mist.

"Definitely not normal," Yaz murmured, frowning. "We'll need to get up there"

Before anyone could respond, another gust of wind howled through the market, and the rain began to fall in sheets, heavy and unrelenting.

"We do," the Doctor said pulling her coat tighter around the baby "But not today"

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