

New Gallifrey by Xanthe

Story Notes: This is my first Doctor/Master story and I really enjoyed writing it. I've made up some Time Lord/Gallifrey stuff because it's where I wanted to go in the story but it might not be consistent with some of the earlier canon or what we know of Time Lord physiology/society. My apologies if I got anything glaringly wrong :-).

This story is archived here: <http://www.xanthe.org/new-gallifrey/>

The sky is bright red, almost the exact same shade of crimson as the sky once was on his homeworld. The Master sits on the beach, gazing at the waves as they crash on the seashore. Silvery waves, reflecting the red of the darkening sky, turning the ocean into a rippling tide of foamy blood.

New Gallifrey the Doctor calls this world, but it's nothing like the New Gallifrey the Master would have built if he'd had his way. For a start, it's completely uninhabited save for the two of them, which makes it about the most boring place the Master has ever visited. There's something familiar about it all the same; the Master wonders how long the Doctor searched for a planet so like the place where they grew up, that they could, if they wanted, pretend they were home.

Then again, the Doctor always was very good at pretending.

The weather is balmy, and this world is undeniably beautiful; lush vegetation, in a multitude of bright, vibrant colours, and a beach that stretches for mile upon mile of silvery pink sand. And there, far off in the distance, the little blue box that is home, perched on the sand just out of reach of the warm waves that bathe the shore. Yes, New Gallifrey is undoubtedly beautiful; beautiful, sad and lonely.

The Master's white shirt billows restlessly in the breeze. Restless. Just like him. Just like the Doctor, however much he tries to hide it. How long will they stay here? He thinks the Doctor might mean for them to stay here forever. There was a time when the idea of the Doctor staying with him forever would have filled him with wild joy, but that time has long since passed. He thinks he should probably find some irony in the fact that he finally has the one thing he's always wanted his entire life - and it has to be like this.

He watches as a small figure exits the blue box, and walks slowly down the beach towards him. It's been six months since they arrived; since the Doctor reanimated his living consciousness from the carefully designed ring where he'd been residing, and watched him take corporeal form again.

He was weak when he first reanimated - weak like a baby, because he hadn't regenerated. With regeneration came that rush of life, the mad giddiness of existence, of being made all over again, and the joy of discovering all that your new body can do. Being reanimated was different. He was like a foal taking its first few, faltering steps, and the Doctor had birthed him, nudging him along, helping him remember.

The memories come back daily. The ring was an inexact instrument to hold his consciousness, designed only to be used in a moment of absolute crisis. The Master still isn't sure of all the little details of what happened in the days leading up to his last "death" - those memories are still hazy - but he has little flashes of them every day.

The Doctor comes close, all big brown eyes and wide, flashing smile; the Master could close his eyes and still feel his Time Lord presence. The Doctor shines like a beacon, a shining bolt of psychic, temporal energy; bright, sparkling, and more dazzling than any Time Lord the Master has ever known. He wonders if the Doctor knows how blinding his soul is, but then snorts to himself. Of course he knows. Egotistical bastard that he is. Always was.

"Is it true, that I made you live like a dog underfoot for a year, and trained you to answer to a bell?" he asks the Doctor, when the other Time Lord reaches him. He does this every day, aiming to find some little thing that might upset or anger his nemesis.

The Doctor pauses for a moment to catch his breath, and then grins, and throws his arms up in the air. The Master sighs inwardly.

"It was enlightening. I'm much nicer to dogs now," he replies, as if nothing the Master has ever done to him has ever upset him, which they both know isn't true.

"There aren't any dogs on New Gallifrey," the Master comments sourly, surveying their new home. If only, just once, he could get under the Doctor's skin and hurt him, the way he's been hurt, over and over again throughout the years, until the Doctor's very presence beside him is like a knife nestled icily between his two hearts.

"Well, if there were, I'd be nice to them." The Doctor shrugs, and sits down beside him.

The Master hates the smell of him, the touch of his arm brushing his own, and the intrusion into his private thoughts.

"What you doing?" the Doctor asks.

The Master fantasises, as he has a thousand times, about holding the Doctor face down in the sand and smothering him to death. Sometimes, just for variety, he holds the Doctor face up, his hand around the other Time Lord's neck, keeping him still, until the waves come in and drown him. In his fantasy the Doctor chokes and splutters and pleads for his life but he keeps him there, his own hand unwavering and strong, until the Doctor quietens and dies. In reality he thinks the Doctor wouldn't plead at all, but instead would simply lie there, those big brown eyes staring up at him, forgiving him everything to the end.

Or at least until he regenerates.

The Master has considered this too. He's thought of holding the Doctor under the water and watching him die over and over again. He wonders what that would feel like, to witness face after startled face coming and going beneath him, until he reaches the last, and the Doctor finally runs out of lives. Sometimes he even thinks he'll do it. Last week for instance, when the moons were full and the Doctor was being even more insufferable than usual, staring at him with eyes so full of sympathy that the Master wanted to drag him out of the TARDIS there and then and hold him down in the water.

His fingers twitch slightly. He could do it. He might do it. One day.

"I'm just thinking," he replies to the Doctor's question, a smile hovering maliciously around his lips. "About the past."

The Doctor stiffens, almost imperceptibly, and the Master thinks he's probably wondering if he'll mention the one thing they've very purposefully not mentioned in several hundred years.

"The moons were pretty on Gallifrey weren't they?" the Master says, and the Doctor relaxes slightly, but only slightly, because they both remember what happened beneath the moons of Gallifrey one long, hot summer, many hundreds of years ago.

"Yeah," the Doctor replies. "They were. It's late." He yawns and stretches, extravagantly, showing off as usual, always play acting just a little bit, and then he gets up.

The Master smiles again. He knows that the Doctor hates talking about Gallifrey. The Doctor loved the place, although fuck knows why. The Master always hated it, and the demise of the other Time Lords is no great loss to him, either. They were all a pack of hypocritical charlatans.

"Time to head back to the TARDIS," the Doctor says.

The Master gets up, slowly, fighting back another wave of irritation. The Doctor is polite enough not to make it a command, but it is, all the same. He sleeps when the Doctor sleeps, and wakes when he wakes, eats when he eats. The Doctor wants to know where he is every hour of every day.

His captivity is one of sea breezes and walks across silver sands, and he is at liberty to wander the TARDIS, room to room, whenever he wants, but that doesn't make his imprisonment any the less complete. He is the prisoner and the Doctor is his jailer, and this, he thinks, is probably the only way they were ever going to end up living together again.

They walk across the beach together, the sea wind caressing their hair. The Master wonders if his nemesis thinks that this is in any way companionable. He suspects that maybe the other

Time Lord is deluded enough to think just that, judging by the way he allows his arm to touch the Master's as they walk.

The Doctor's TARDIS is as it always was. The Doctor likes to pretend that its Chameleon Circuit is broken but the Master knows that's bullshit. The Doctor could fix just about anything of Gallifreyan origin - the only Time Lord at the Academy with a better understanding of temporal engineering was himself - and he's damn sure he could fix the circuit if it were broken. It isn't. The Doctor just thinks the blue box is retro-cute, that it displays the quiriness of his personality to best effect. It's wasted on the Master. He knows the Doctor too well.

They were eight years' old when they first met at the Academy, the Doctor quirky and self assured, the Master shy but brilliant. Both were the acknowledged geniuses of their generation, and they were fascinated by each other. Homesick and lonely, the Master struggled at first, but the Doctor took him under his wing and they formed an intense friendship. That was when the Master first found out what it was like to bask in the bright light of the Doctor's shining essence, and, of course, once you had a little taste of it, you always wanted more. What had it been like for them, the Master wondered, all the poor saps who'd come after him, falling hopelessly in love with a man who could never love them back?

In a room in the TARDIS is a display of images of all the people the Doctor has ever travelled with. The Master found it one day, when he was bored. He went back there, day after day, for weeks, spent hours studying each and every single one of them. Some he knew, and some he didn't, but he recognised each of them as his successors.

The pictures were little moments, snapshots of the Doctor's favourite memory of each, images he'd literally fished out of his own mind and encapsulated forever in holographic form. The boy Adric, smiling that pathetically gormless smile of his; the elfin girl - Jo - peeping at the Doctor from big, admiring eyes - oh, how the Doctor must have loved her! He always did enjoy a bit of slavish adoration. There was Ace, and there Teegan. The Master was more interested in Turlough though, scowling as usual, hiding a surprisingly loyal heart behind his many betrayals. The Master stayed gazing at him for a very long time.

There were others, many, many others, but a few leapt out at the Master, and he knew why. He recognised the fellow travellers - those who had fallen in love with the Doctor, drawn to his brilliance like moth to flame, just as he once was. He saw the expression of hope in their stupid, adoring faces, and the light of their unrequited love dancing in their eyes. He knew their names as well - all he had to do was run his hand over the image and each name rose in his memory, clear and vivid. Jamie, Sarah Jane, Rose, Martha, Jack....

Jack. He had gazed at the handsome Time Agent for awhile, smiling to himself, enjoying the insouciant stare, and the bright, crisp sound of the name in his head. Jack. A memory returned when he saw that picture; he'd enjoyed Jack himself. Oh yes, he'd once strung up the handsome Captain and fucked him nightly for weeks on end - and the thing about Jack was, you couldn't be entirely sure that he hadn't enjoyed it.

Fucking Jack had felt good because Jack couldn't die, no matter how many times you killed him - and the Master went through a phase of killing the good Captain every time he brought the immortal freak to climax. It was so much fun, teasing that climax out of Jack, watching him try and hold back, desperate not to surrender to the skilful way the Master's tongue skimmed his hard cock, or the Master's fingertips dipped in and out of his anus, exciting his prostate with each inward thrust. Jack would hold off, time and time again, drawing it out, hoping to delay the inevitable, but each time he'd fail - and the Master would laugh as he slit the Captain's throat and watched the blood and come mingle together before Jack reanimated a few minutes later, still sweaty from his climax, the blood staining his beautiful pale skin.

"You enjoy doing that, Big Fella?" Jack would drawl, stone cold anger burning behind the flirtatious blue eyes.

And for a while he had, because hurting the people the Doctor cared about was the next best thing to hurting the Doctor himself. Besides, he felt they should know the true pain of loving the Doctor, just as he did. It was educational for them, and he hoped they appreciated the time and trouble he spent on teaching them what it really meant to love the Doctor - because he'd had to learn the hard way. There had been nobody to teach him.

The TARDIS door is open and they step inside. It's an artfully eccentric mess within - the Doctor has no sense of order, or at least he pretends that's the case - the Master suspects that might be more of the same irritating whimsy that the Doctor has always liked to indulge in.

The TARDIS is empty though, without essence - the Doctor has taken her heart and hidden it somewhere - somewhere the Master will never find it. The Doctor doesn't trust that the Master won't kill him in his sleep and steal off with the TARDIS one dark night so he's put her out of reach. The Doctor is right not to trust him; that is exactly what the Master would do if he had the chance.

Sometimes he thinks about stringing the Doctor up, as he once did with Jack, and torturing him until the Doctor tells him where he's buried the TARDIS's heart. He'd do it too, if there was any point, but they both know the Doctor would never tell him, not even if he tortured and killed him down to his last regeneration. No, the Doctor would take that secret to his final death. At least with the Doctor still alive there is a chance that the Master might one day escape, and be free of his nemesis at last.

The Doctor locks the TARDIS door behind them, with an apologetic look in his eyes. Sometimes, when the Master has allowed himself to forget, it's these little touches that remind him what they are to each other now. He gives a bitter, self-contained smile, and the Doctor winces.

"Nightcap?" he suggests, waving his hand at the bottle and two glasses that rest on the darkened central console. The Master gazes at him impassively. He wonders what the Doctor gets from this pretence at normality.

"If you wish," he says, inclining his head. He takes a seat, and watches the Doctor pour the drink.

"Here you go." The Doctor hands him a glass.

"Thank you, Doctor," he says pointedly. He knows the Doctor has trouble addressing him by his title, and sometimes he enjoys making him say it, or shaming him into it.

Only those Time Lords who performed a particularly noteworthy act were allowed titles of their own choosing - the rest had to make do with their given names. The Master had longed for a title of his own for years, but, needless to say, the Doctor, Gallifrey's shining golden child, beat him to it.

He can still remember the Doctor returning triumphantly from the Medusa Cascade after healing a deep rift in the space-time continuum. He was the only one who could have done it - or so everyone said. The Master knows that he took the title "Doctor" because he thinks of

himself as a healer of time, travelling across the aeons in search of rifts to heal, broken timelines to mend, and lost souls to find. It's sickening.

The Master earned the right to a title himself, some years later, after wiping out an entire colony of humans in a bid to save a small ship of Time Lords. The Doctor never forgave him for that. Neither did some of the other Time Lords - there was even a faction that fought against allowing him the honour of taking a title. He'd killed them for that of course, several years' later, when everyone had long since forgotten the original insult. He never forgot.

The Doctor sits down opposite him, holding his drink gingerly in his hands. He never was a great drinker. He's lost in thought, and the Master can guess what he's thinking about; he's known him for nine hundred years after all.

"We could go back there you know," the Master says, softly. "Gallifrey. We could go back in time, visit her, just once."

The Doctor stares at him, appalled. What the Master is suggesting is against the very ethos of what it means to be a Time Lord. Then again, the Master never did have much interest in the tedious rules and regulations the Time Lords invented for themselves. Yes, there would be consequences, but so what? What's the point of being a Time Lord if you can't screw with the universe a little every so often?

"You know we can't do that," the Doctor murmurs.

"I don't see why not. You could tell them about the Time War, warn them. We could change history, bring them all back so we wouldn't have to be alone."

A speculative look seeps into the Doctor's eyes, and the Master knows he's tempted. He likes doing this. It always was fun seducing the Doctor's dark side. That was what nobody ever understood - the Doctor has a dark side as beautiful and full of shadows as his own - he just keeps it tightly controlled, instead of giving into it. Fraud.

His own darkness was always more obvious. The Time Lords had seen it from the beginning, and shaped him to be their warrior. If they'd helped him, he could have mastered the

darkness, but they had wanted it for their own ends and thought to master him instead, to keep him tame and tethered, their obedient weapon to be unleashed on their command. His title, when he finally claimed it, had been his own sense of a warped joke. He suspected that nobody ever got the joke - not even the Doctor.

The Doctor was different. Even as a child his brilliance had shone brightly, overshadowing everyone else, including the Master's undeniable genius. The Doctor was going to be Gallifrey's ambassador for the future, the leader of his generation. Only he had proved too much the maverick, his own creativity and quirkiness putting a serious crimp in the Time Lords' plans. That's another thing they had in common.

"We could walk on the Promenade, watch the real Gallifreyan moons rise, not these pale imitations," the Master whispers. He loves how expressive the Doctor's face is. No matter what body he wears, his eyes always dance and his features are always animated.

"Yes," the Doctor says softly. "We could go back. See the places we loved. See ourselves maybe? Watch ourselves, as we once were, knowing how we'll end up?" There's a sharp glint in his eyes. He hasn't been tempted at all - he's been playing with the Master, one step ahead the whole time.

The Master inclines his head, regretfully, acknowledging that he's been defeated.

"Oh well. I never liked the place anyway. Even at its best, Gallifrey was almost as dull as this shithole."

He loves watching the little spike of hurt rise in the Doctor's eyes. He doesn't think he'll ever tire of that sight. He puts down his untouched drink on the console, and gets up.

"It's late," he says. "Time for bed."

"Good night then!" the Doctor says, with a cheery wave of his hand. "Um...Master." He always looks embarrassed saying it.

"Good night, Doctor."

The Master gives a little half bow, and retires to his room. It's big, beautifully furnished, and he keeps it scrupulously tidy, not as a reaction to the Doctor's clutter and disorder but because that's just the way he is. It's another reason why they always find living together so hard. One of many.

The Master undresses and slips, naked, between the cool, black, satin sheets. Outside, he can hear the sound of the sea crashing on the shore and it comforts him because it helps keep the other sound at bay. The drumming in his head is always worse at night, when there are no other sounds to drown it out. There is only one way to ever get any respite from it, and he knows, wearily, that it is a way he'll take before the night is through.

The Master lies on his back and gazes at the ceiling. When they left the Academy they had been so bright and full of hope, both of them so sure of the brilliant destiny that awaited them. No wonder they couldn't keep their hands off each other. They had journeyed the universe together at first, exciting each other with each new discovery, and sealing that excitement in bed each night.

The Master wonders what Jack would have said if he'd told him that he had been the Doctor's first companion, and every one of them since had been a pale imitation of himself, a reminder to the Doctor of what he had lost, and the reason why he could never fully give himself to any of them. It's been flattering, in a way, watching the Doctor try and recreate a little of what they had together with all the people he's taken on his journeys ever since.

The Master gets up, and splashes cold water from the bowl at his bedside over his face. He feels hot, and the drums are gaining momentum inside his mind. He can feel the sweat beading his brow.

It was easy in the beginning. They had been young, and the universe had been theirs for the taking. He remembers long nights spent making love, bodies moving as one, minds merging, coalescing in a bright spangle of exploding stars. They were never able to fight the attraction between them, their lives one long history of attraction and repulsion, over and over again, the lust between them always searing white hot, always needing to be sated, no matter how

long they spent apart. They both felt it, whenever they were near each other. The need, the longing, the calling...

The Master pulls on his black silk robe and walks, wearily, towards the door. The robe swings open a little, the cool air caressing his bare chest as he moves, soundlessly, barefoot, through the TARDIS.

The Doctor is still dressed. Dark blue shirt, brown trousers, but at least he's stopped wearing the ridiculous tie these days. He's sitting at a desk in the massive room that doubles as his study and bedroom, gazing at something quizzically, brown eyes blinking rapidly behind his black, heavy framed glasses. The Master stands in the doorway and just gazes at him for a little while.

"Damn!" The Doctor picks up the device he's working on, shaking his head.

The Master walks silently across the room, and lays a hand on the Doctor's shoulder. The other Time Lord doesn't move. He isn't startled or surprised by the Master's presence; he just gazes forlornly at the device in front of him.

"Not working," he says, hefting the object in his hands.

The Master reaches out and touches the cool metal device. He lets his essence sink into it a little, sensing its purpose. It isn't Gallifreyan in origin. He suspects the Doctor has picked it up on his travels somewhere. Earth probably. The Doctor is obsessed with Earth. The Master lets his mind find the fault, and then probes it with his fingers, deftly finding the problem. The Doctor is good at this kind of stuff, but he is better. The Doctor is a great improviser, endlessly creative, but the Master has a sounder grasp of actual mechanics.

"There." A light comes on, and the device gives a little hoot, as if excited to be working again.

"Fantastic!" The Doctor gives a smile that lights up his entire face. "Uh, any idea what it is?"

"I believe it's a device to make tea," the Master replies. "You get it ready the night before, prime it, leave it by your bed, and in the morning..." He shrugs and makes a little "voila!"

gesture with his hands. "A hot cup of tea awaits you. Although personally I think that's what servants are for."

"Fantastic!" the Doctor says again. "Humans! They think of all the best things."

He takes the device and places it beside the massive bed that occupies the centre of the room. The Master surveys the room wearily. If he could only move the bed against the wall, shove the desk over there, put the mass of objects, papers, and general detritus on the overflowing shelves in the corner....

"Stop that!" the Doctor says. "You're tidying things in your mind again. I can tell."

"It's a habit," the Master agrees.

"Can't sleep again?" The Doctor surveys him sympathetically.

The Master sweeps some dusty journals off the bed, and sits down with a sigh.

"The drumming is always worse at night," he murmurs. "My apologies." He hates apologising for his neediness, but he hates the neediness itself more, and feels that it should be apologised for.

"Don't be an idiot." The Doctor crosses the room and stands in front of him. He lifts the Master's chin, and gazes into his eyes. "Come here," the Doctor murmurs.

He bends down and his lips catch the Master's. It's so old, so familiar, no matter what bodies they occupy - it always feels like this. This hunger. This white hot intensity. He knows the Doctor feels it too, no matter how much he plays at being nonchalant. The Master reaches up, hungrily, and his hands come to rest on the Doctor's bottom. It feels firm and ripe beneath his fingers, and he caresses it greedily.

Once, long ago, they used to do this every night, and during one long, hot Gallifreyan summer many hundreds of years ago, they made a child between them. Time Lord children are woven in their essential spirit form by the continued merging of their parents over several months, each parent taking it in turns to keep the newly forming child within themselves, part of their own glowing inner essence, and yet separate, a new, emerging being, in embryonic stage. When complete, the child separates out from its parents, and its first corporeal body forms around it, encasing the bright inner core. The body is the vessel - the true Time Lord essence is what lies inside, shining and radiant.

Their child, their first and only child, had been as bright and beautiful as only their merged beings could produce. They called her Thalia, and at the beginning she had gone everywhere with them. The Doctor, though, fresh from his success at the Medusa Cascade, wasn't ready to settle down. That's never changed.

Even now, here on the tranquil sands of New Gallifrey, the Master sometimes wonders who is keeping who prisoner.

The Master surrenders to the Doctor's warm kisses, giving into them as he always does. He sinks back on the bed, and the Doctor straddles him, looking down on him. The Doctor's warm inner core washes through him like a gentle breeze, caressing and calming him. Slowly, the sound of the drums begins to fade and the Master starts to relax.

He hates this man, who is now, gently, so gently, running long, loving fingers along his jaw. He hates this man who is moving aside his black silk robe, and lowering his head to take a nipple in his mouth. He hates this man who he is opening his legs for, wanting to feel the warm, hard, pounding heat inside him. He hates this man who is kissing him now, tongues melting and melding as their inner cores begin to touch. The feeling of their merging is as electric as ever; hatred or love, it makes no difference to how good it feels.

He hates this man, who he loves so much.

He's reaching for the Doctor's clothes now, tearing them off him, needing to feel skin beneath his fingertips and white light blinding his mind. He pushes the Doctor back onto the bed, and reaches for his cock, loving the feel of it, hard and pulsing in his hand, loving the sound the Doctor makes in the back of his throat as he caresses it smoothly, with practised ease.

They roll over and the Doctor is now on top. It doesn't matter. Either way will do. The Doctor is slicking something cool between the Master's buttocks, and then he's sliding in, up to the hilt. He always likes doing it like this, looking down on the Master, kissing him while they make love, eyes connecting as their essences merge. The Master closes his eyes - there's no reason why the Doctor should always have it his own way.

"Why won't you look at me when we make love?" the Doctor reproaches, his fingertips firm but oddly gentle on the Master's hips.

"Because you have enough of me as it is," the Master replies, through gritted teeth. Why must the Doctor always have all of him, but never give him everything in return?

The Doctor sighs, and kisses the Master again, softly, kindly, on the lips, and much as he'd love to reject him, the Master can't. He opens his mouth and welcomes the Doctor's tongue, tasting the sweetness.

They begin moving in time; tongues, hands, backs, hips, legs...moving, moving, moving as one, becoming part of each other. It's an age-old dance, and they've danced it many times before - too many to count - but each time it feels the same. It satisfies the Master deep in the very core of his being. He has no need of Gallifrey, new or old - the Doctor always was his home.

A powerful crescendo builds deep inside the Master's body, igniting flesh, blood and soul all at the same time. He wraps his legs even tighter around the Doctor's body, and screams as he reaches his climax. The Doctor is close too, and seconds later he reaches his own orgasm, with a series of beautiful, shuddering little gasps. After nine hundred odd years, and even despite many different bodies, the Master is intimately familiar with that sound. He wishes he didn't like it so much.

The Doctor collapses on top of him, smiling. He kisses the Master again, soft little kisses that flutter on his face, and then withdraws, and slides down beside him. He reaches out, and wraps his arms around the Master's body, and the Master is too tired, and too sated, to push him away.

He lies there, dreamily, staring into space. This is the only time he is ever at peace, the drums finally silent - it's only ever this way after making love with the Doctor. Maybe during lovemaking he steals enough of the Doctor's essence to make him sane, for just a little while. He doesn't know. He just knows that it feels good, and he stretches out, humming to himself,

the Doctor's sweaty arm lying across his belly, the Doctor's mouth warm on the back of his neck, more kisses scattering across the top of his spine, his shoulders, and his hair.

When they're lying here like this, the Master can almost imagine that they are Theta and Koschei again, wrapped up in each other's arms before it all went wrong; before Theta left Koschei, and moved on.

Their relationship fell apart when Thalia was still young. The Doctor said it was because he didn't like what the Master had become, but the Master looked into the Doctor's eyes and saw that he was scared of love, scared of the intensity between them, scared of losing himself in the Master. The Doctor didn't understand that love was madness, and you had to surrender to it. He was flawed; a coward. Together they could have ruled the universe - apart they were shadows of what they might have been.

And it had hurt. It hurt more than any pain he'd ever felt, hurt more even than his first death and regeneration. And it went on hurting, decade after lonely decade. It still hurt.

Desperate to punish the Doctor, the Master took their daughter and ran. He and Thalia travelled the universe together, and he taught her everything he knew; he taught her disdain for all the endless, wearisome Time Lord codes and laws, taught her about their own superiority over lesser species, and he taught her the most important lesson of all - to hate her other parent, the Doctor, and everything he stood for.

She was dark, complex and twisted, like him, and chaotic, brilliant and sometimes capable of surprisingly noble acts, like her other parent. He gloried in her. She was beautiful, and she was his.

Eventually she grew up and left him, but they remained close. She wanted to rise up in the sky like a star, and be famous across Gallifrey. He had taught her well.

She was reckless, ruthless, and would stop at nothing to get her way. She broke every law the Time Lords had, and they punished her by sending her falling into a dying sun at Regis Prime, using up every single regeneration in that one long plunge to her death. He heard her final cry across the galaxy, but by then it was too late.

The Doctor found him of course, grief stricken and inconsolable, and, when the Master looked into the Doctor's eyes, all he saw was sympathy and forgiveness. It was more than he could bear. His grief turned to darkness and anger, and he became bitter. He turned the Doctor out before he could say the words of forgiveness that the Master didn't want to hear.

Thalia left behind a child, a daughter, young and alone. The Master went to find her, to take her in and mould her to him as he had moulded her mother, only to find that the Doctor had got there first.

"Susan will be coming with me," he said, tightly, gripping the small girl's hand and towing her back towards his TARDIS.

He was welcome to her. She was dull, pedestrian, and ordinary - nothing like her mother.

It had made him laugh though, watching the Doctor turn into a crotchety old man as he took their grand-daughter with him on his journeys. The Doctor didn't like domestic ties - they slowed him down, made him irascible. Besides, the Master knew all too well that the Doctor, the healer of the great rift of the Medusa Cascade, a Time Lord with a heart big enough to love so many unworthy, lesser species, was incapable of loving just one person.

He wonders whether Jamie, or Sarah Jane, or Rose, or Martha, or handsome Captain Jack ever realised that. Poor stupid fools. The Doctor would always run out on them, dump them, just when they started to get close. That's what he did. That's what he *was*. The Master might know himself to be dark, murderous, maybe even evil at his core, but at least he knows how to love; totally, unconditionally, with an all-consuming fervour. And he's only ever loved two people in his life. One of them is dead, and the other doesn't understand about love at all. Never has. Never will.

The Master wipes his hand across his eyes and is surprised to find that his fingertips come away wet.

He turns over to find the Doctor staring at him with those big brown eyes, full of sympathy. They could make another child. They won't though. Their species will die out after they've

lived their final regenerations. They both know that. Better that than risk making another child together.

"I forgive you," the Doctor says, as he's said so many times before, even though it never makes any difference. His hand slides down the Master's back and gently comes to rest on his bottom, stroking tenderly. He doesn't say Thalia's name but it hangs between them, unspoken, the way it has for hundreds of years.

The Master doesn't want his forgiveness. He doesn't give a damn about his forgiveness. He should be *asking* for forgiveness, not doling it out like it's only his to give.

Somewhere in the distance he can hear the sound of drums, just faintly, starting to play again. His respite from them, which sometimes can last all night after they've made love, has been all too brief on this occasion. The Master wonders what it would be like, right now, to take the Doctor's neck in his hands, and crush his windpipe beneath his fingers.

The Doctor moves his other hand to gently caress the Master's face. Little sparks of light shimmer between them in the darkness. The Master shudders.

"Is the drumming back?" the Doctor asks, sympathetically.

"Yes. Louder now than ever," the Master whispers. The booming in his mind torments him, destroying him from the inside out. The Doctor kisses him softly on the lips and the drumming recedes a little.

"What did you see?" the Master asks, as he has asked a thousand times over the years. "When you were eight years' old and they made you look into the time vortex - what did you see?"

The Doctor smiles at him, kindly, because he's answered this question a thousand times as well. "I saw the beginning and end of everything," he replies. "And everything in between. It was chaos, and it was beautiful."

"Yes." The Master nods. He clings to the Doctor's naked body, his legs wrapped around the Doctor's thighs. The Doctor wraps his arms more tightly around the Master's body, warming him, warding off the sound of drums which is growing steadily louder in his mind.

"What about you?" the Doctor asks, as he always asks.

"The same," the Master lies, as he always lies. "Beginning, end, everything in between. Chaos, beauty. All that stuff."

The Doctor nods, his brown eyes sad, aware of the lie.

They lie there for a long time, gazing at each other, the Doctor's hand still stroking the Master's naked bottom, languidly, tenderly, lovingly.

After a little while the Doctor's eyes close, his breathing slows, and he falls asleep.

The Master extricates himself from the other Time Lord's arms, and gets up. He picks up his abandoned robe, and wraps it around his body, swaying gently to the sound of the drums in his head.

He's eight years' old again, staring into the un-tempered schism, looking into the time vortex itself, and there, in the very centre, against a backdrop of time, chaos and madness, is the Doctor, dancing to a tune the Master can't hear. The Doctor is one with time, and he looks so beautiful there that the Master draws closer, longing to join in that dance, to be with the Doctor. As he gets nearer, he can hear the beat the Doctor is dancing to, just faintly at first, a distant drumbeat, and then it grows louder, and louder, until it bursts into his mind, making it reverberate with sound - a sound that will never completely go away, ever again.

It takes ten Time Lords to pull him back from the very edge of the vortex just as he's about to throw himself in. And that is how he came to realise, at the age of eight, that at the centre of time, at the very core of his universe, is the Doctor. It's a destiny he's alternately embraced and battled ever since.

The Doctor is ephemeral, like time itself. You can love him from afar but he will never love you back. You can never own him, the way you want, or keep him willingly by your side. It would be like pinning down a wave on the sand. The Doctor is elusive, eternally and utterly beyond reach, but always, tantalisingly, just there, that broad grin on his face, that maddening light in his eyes, as teasing and tormenting as the sound of the drums in the Master's head.

The Master glances back down at the sleeping Time Lord coldly. He could kill him right now. Kill him in his sleep; knock him over the head with that stupid Earth gadget he was so excited about earlier. Or smother him with a pillow. He'd enjoy it. The Doctor would regenerate and forgive him, and then they'd start all over again. It would be so easy.

The Master reaches out one finger, touches it to the side of the Doctor's sleeping head, and gently strokes. Outside, the moons of New Gallifrey have risen high in the sky, casting their silvery light over the blood red sea.

Maybe tomorrow.

The End

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