

The Master's Game

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Kapitel 1: A game of life and death

***"This might have been the day I met the most dangerous man in the universe.
My life would never be the same"***

For days the Doctor had been acting strange, fidgeting way more than usually, constantly checking things on the console's monitor and jumping from one place to the next, only to step out for a few moments and then return without having done anything.

Roka wasn't quite sure what to make of it. Since he had lost Donna and had left Rose with his double, the Doctor hadn't been the same for a good while. So this change of demeanor was surprising, but also gave Roka some hope that he would soon return to his old self. She couldn't stand seeing him so depressed, especially not since she couldn't do much against it.

The young woman was rather unsuspicious. Short in size and lanky, the short blond hair of her pixie cut falling into her eyes. She wore ordinary jeans and a t-shirt above a plaid shirt. Comfy. Just the way she liked it. No one but herself could see it anyway.

Right now she sat on the jump seat, a book in hands, and observed the Doctor silently, as usual. He couldn't see her anyway at the moment and she wasn't in the mood to remind him of her presence.

It was the fourth time this day - for whatever reason she still counted them - that the Doctor landed the TARDIS and stepped outside. This time Roka followed him, more out of boredom than anything else. She had spent the last days in the library, as she often did, and now needed to stretch her limbs a bit.

Surprised she saw the Doctor pointing his Sonic at the blue box, making it vanish. Did he expect danger? She looked around the place. There was nothing special around. They were somewhere between some factory buildings and definitely near the sea, because she could hear waves nearby. Staying close to the Doctor she followed him down a road and saw him peaking inside a few narrow alleys, always shaking his head afterwards and sometimes mumbling something to himself.

It was so peculiar that Roka didn't pay much attention to their surrounding, and when she turned around once, she almost let out a shriek of surprise, coming face to face with an armed soldier all of a sudden.

Even with her glitch, it was a menacing situation. The guy would not notice her on his own, but bumping into him would definitely give her presence away. Carefully Roka slipped out of the way and watched the Doctor, who had also noticed the soldier and was now striding over to him with wide steps and a confident smile on his face.

The soldier, though, only raised his hand, waving someone over and shortly after the

sound of many pairs of combat boots followed.

"Hey!" The Doctor waved, pulling his psychic paper out of his pocket. "I'm allowed to be here, see?"

A rough dozen soldiers had gathered meanwhile, but it wasn't them who let the Doctor's smile fall in an instant. It was the man who followed closely behind, a bit smaller than the Doctor, with slightly tousled bright blond hair and wearing mostly black, except a red shirt that was lurking out beneath his hoodie.

The Doctor's face turned white and alternated between worried and surprised and... relieved?

"You were dead... I burned your body," he said in an almost apologizing tone, while fixating the man's every movement.

The other one looked up and wore a wide grin on his face. "No, you lit the fire and walked away. I just rolled over." He stuck out his tongue. "I really tricked you there, eh?"

"No, you didn't. I checked. You *were* dead!"

"Well... maybe I finally found a way to come back..." He leaned towards the Doctor and poked his chest. "As often. As. I. Want." Taking a step back he took a strand of his hair. "Well... the color got messed up though. I don't like blond..."

The Doctor looked shocked. "I heard rumors... And suspected it could be you. What are you planning this time? You don't just appear somewhere without causing havoc."

"Aaaaw, listen to you..." The man's grin got even wider. "Can't I just visit an old friend? Maybe I missed you."

"Yeah, that's why you brought a whole army squad with you..."

"Oh, did I?" He turned around and looked surprised. "Whoops. Totally forgot about those... Ahh.... How about... shoot him? Or no... no no no.... don't... actually don't." He turned back to the Doctor and his grin faded away. He raised his hand. "Take him prisoner."

The soldiers obeyed immediately. One of them bend the Doctor's hands onto his back, leaving him not much room to move.

Roka was frantically trying to analyze the whole situation and find a way to help. But when it came to dangerous situations she had never been the cleverest companion the Doctor ever had. She was used to hiding and leaving everything else to the Doctor. Only that he now certainly wasn't in a position to help himself.

For now she couldn't do much more than carefully following the group. Being a glitch in reality was of advantage in some situations, although Roka still tried to stay inconspicuous for some reason. She could start singing and dancing in front of them all and they wouldn't notice.

Wait... did that hooded man just look at her? No, he turned around again. Of course he did. It was impossible to see her.

"Doesn't look like you to directly attack me," the Doctor grumbled angrily. "You're usually much less efficient."

"Hey, I just came back from the dead. Aren't you supposed to be happy? That's really not nice of you. And before you ask... I need you out of the way. For good this time. No tricks, I promise. Just a clean nice death. Or... two... depending on how much fun I have."

After a short time they entered one of the factory buildings. It looked old and partially abandoned. Inside they followed some steps downwards, where the soldier rudely pushed the Doctor into a room.

"Enjoy your stay, my dear friend. It won't be for too long" the hooded man cheered

and wriggled his fingers in a mocking wave.

From there on the men spread. Two guarded the door, but the blond one put the keys to it inside his own pockets and strode away. Roka decided to follow that one, since he seemed to be the head of this group. From here on, though, she really had to be careful. The glitch seemed to weaken when there was only one person around, and it had happened a few times that a too loud noise or a too fast or obvious movement had made a person see her.

Usually that was a good thing. But right now Roka was very eager to stay invisible.

Some stairs later they entered an office room. It was big and twice as long as wide. Half of it had been turned into some sort of workshop though. Lots of it looked very alien to Roka, but since she had gotten skilled with all kinds of tech stuff during her years in the TARDIS she still recognized a few devices. And if it weren't for the danger the Doctor was in, she would have loved to take a peek inside those crates.

The man left through another door, leaving her alone in the room. She took the opportunity and silently looked around, moving towards the big desk at the upper end of the room. Maybe there was something that could explain this strange situation. The desk was littered with papers, but Roka had no idea what all the numbers and diagrams on them were about. Her eyes stayed a while on some tiny, but detailed scribbles and sketches, and a bunch of neatly folded origami figures.

Suddenly she felt a jolt on her neck. A hand had grabbed her collar.

"Now to you..." She got turned around, directly facing the hooded man.

Surprised she glared into his eyes, they were hazel brown and filled with curiosity and a hint of coldness. Not like the reassuring warmth she always saw when she looked at the Doctor. Those eyes wore a shade of madness in them. And it was hard to look away.

"You're with the Doctor, right? Not nice of you to sneak around here... really not nice. And very unlike him not to mention you." He grabbed her throat. "Not to beg for your stupid little life." A mad grin split his mouth. "You know what? Talk and I might let you live... for a few minutes at least."

With that he pushed her away and Roka stumbled a few steps, rubbing her hurting throat. With a hammering heart she turned around to face the man once more and swallowed hard. He had an almost palpable aura of danger around him that made her body freeze and her heart race in a way that was new to her.

"I... I won't talk."

"Yeah, yeah... of course not. Would be boring if they would always talk immediately, right? How about we start with you handing me over that perception filter? They might work on my men, but not on me."

"I don't have one," Roka said toneless, not able to hide the bitterness in her voice. "It's just the way I am."

"How peculiar... Why don't they see you? And you really should answer, cause I'm very... very creative with humans."

The look in his eyes made very clear that he wouldn't mind hurting her, so Roka explained in as few words as possible what she knew herself about it. She had been born dead, but a few moments later, as if time had reset, she had been born again, perfectly healthy. Although, whatever had made this happen also had turned her into a ghost. People forgot about her very existence in usually not more than a few seconds or minutes. Every memory of her wiped from their minds until they got reminded of her, which usually required some sort of physical contact.

What else could she do than to explain it? If that guy killed her now, who would help

the Doctor? Not that she felt particularly brave, but no one else was there to do it.

"He never mentioned me, eh? Bad, bad Doctor. Always forgetting his friends." The man shook his head in mock disappointment. "He better had, so you would know that I can just look inside your pitiful little brain and see if you're lying."

"Well... then you should see that I'm not." She threw a mean gaze at him. "Why do you want to kill him? If he's your friend, then..."

"Because I hate him!" He stepped closer. "And because he walked right into my arms, which spared me from looking for him and spending months developing a plan to get him locked away. Lucky me. And now he will die and so will you. Arm in arm if you wish." He stuck out his tongue.

That man was absolutely crazy. And dangerous. His very presence made Roka shiver. She had to be careful, very careful. And quick. And smart.

And she had absolutely no clue what to do, her mind racing a million miles per hour.

"Take me... as a hostage instead. If... you tell him you got me... he won't interfere with your plans."

The man burst out into laughter. "Not bad. Really... but we both know he would try anyway. Always saving the day, doesn't he? Try again." He sat down on an armed office chair, leaning back, intensely staring at Roka.

Quick... she had to be quick.

"I..." She looked around, her gaze falling onto the workshop part of the office. "I'm really good with tech. You could say, I'm some kind of janitor for the Doctor... so..."

"I don't need human hands muddling around with that stuff." However, he looked slightly curious.

"Uhm... I can repair lots of parts in the TARDIS. I'm really good." But she knew this wouldn't help. Those cold staring eyes were still resting on her, making it hard to think. What could satisfy a man like him? A man that seemed mad, but also intelligent. She had nothing to offer... nothing but...

Raising her head she stared directly into his eyes, a shiver running down her spine. It was hard to put all her remaining confidence into her voice.

"What about a game?" she slowly asked. His eyes widened a tiny little bit, but he said nothing. "I... do whatever you want. And in return you let the Doctor..." No, he wouldn't let him go. As much as the thought hurt her, she knew he had to stay a prisoner for now. But she could buy him time at least. "...live. You let him live. And if I try even the smallest thing to help him or whatever... you can kill him."

There was a grin slowly spreading on his face. Mad and wide. "Oh, I see... Yes, I clearly see what you're planning." He stood up again, stepping closer to her. Way too close, completely ignoring any personal space. "Alright. This is fun. The Doctor's life... in the hands of a pathetic human." He leaned down to her eyelevel, hands stemmed into his side, his voice menacing. "How long do you think can you sustain? How long can you work on a little plan behind my back without me noticing? And do you really think whatever you come up with is so clever that it can beat me?"

Roka stared at him, feeling anxious and not even a tiny little bit as confident as she tried to sound. "Yes, I do." Her own gaze became malevolent.

"You don't know who I am, right? Of course not. He never talks about me. How rude..." He came even closer, almost tenderly stroking a finger along her jaw line and leaning towards her ear, his voice quiet and cold as ice.

"I am a Time Lord, like your precious friend... I am the Master. And *you* will obey me."

