

Slivers of Yesterday  
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A Doktor 13 Story

Abstract: The past whispered of gossamer memories... Had she ever really known serenity? Featuring the seventh Romana.

As she attached the first bomb to the column in front of her, Romana thought about the strange ironies in her life.

She glanced around, surveying the orderly aisles of dusty books. She tried to remember what it was like to go to a library to read for fun. The past whispered of gossamer memories that wavered, phantomlike, in the distant corners of her mind, dissolving whenever she tried to grasp them with conscious thought. Had she ever really known serenity? The War was devouring every shred of normalcy in the universe.

The morning sun peered through the windows, casting an auroral glow over the wide room. It promised to be a gorgeous summer day. A few wispy clouds caressed the upper atmosphere, softening the morning sky.

Romana breathed in deeply, enjoying the stillness of the empty reading room. In former times she would have enjoyed browsing the assorted volumes, pouring over Archaean tales and histories. The cool air soothed her, and not a sound disturbed the tranquility. Although she had an important task to complete, no immediate sense of urgency compelled her. Closed until the afternoon, the library would remain quiet for hours. It was a weekend, and the natives took their rest seriously.

She paused to watch two birds chase each other outside. They glided, then flapped their wings vigorously before alighting on a leafy branch. Their free, unhindered flight

carried her mind back to battle. She visualized the resistance star-furies and Dalek drones diving this way and that, while glittering weapon-bursts flashed in between the vessels, occasionally resulting in fiery extinction. It was hard to believe that such a battle raged within a few light-years of here.

The people of Archaeis enjoyed rare comforts. Though a Dalek outpost, the planet enjoyed special protection—*his* protection—which made it a perfect choice as a target.

Certainly, Daleks patrolled the area, but the Archaeans did not suffer underneath the Empire's rule. In fact, the Dalek presence was minimal. Scouts frequented the government zones but rarely ventured out into the cities. Their ships orbited the planet and handled all interstellar trade and communications, keeping the people confined but otherwise untouched.

Most of the inhabitants probably didn't even encounter the Daleks on a regular basis, and the units were under strict orders to preserve the peace—a peculiar mission for the warmongering monsters.

Of course, in the current universe, stranger things were happening all the time.

Romana stepped back, satisfied with her work, and selected her next target based on her calculations. She still had nine more bombs to place, more than enough to obliterate the building.

After she finished setting the second detonator, she headed toward the main staircase.

Her visage reflected back from a glass display, and she lingered. Sometimes, when she looked in a mirror, her soldierly reflection startled her as if she expected to see someone else standing there. However, today it bolstered her confidence, strengthening her resolve and affirming her purpose.

A flawless crew cut of spiky chestnut hair framed her face. In gentler times, her features might have been described as elegant, even captivating, but the War had left its mark: a jagged white line crossed from right temple to ear lobe, serving as permanent reminder of a friend's betrayal.

Long lashes cast shadows over her dark brown eyes, which gleamed like dangerously deep pools. Her full lips, painted a plum shade—her only acknowledgement of vanity—pressed together in a tight line. Her practical, military attire consisted of a sleek bodysuit trimmed with intimidating gadgets, while the pack slung over her shoulders concealed the lethal tools of her mission. She might have been the very personification of Vengeance.

The corner of her mouth turned up slightly at this thought.

Her eyes focused beyond the glass, noticing the contents of the display: a large, impressionistic painting. It portrayed a carnival, full of people in motion. The nearby plaque described the artist, Maraia Flynn, a famous painter from three hundred years ago.

She briefly studied the exuberant style, the way the vibrant colors practically pulsed with life. When it had been painted, Archaeis had been more innocent, unaware of interstellar travel and still untouched by the Dalek race.

It was a quiet moment, and she allowed a glimmer of sentimentality to warm her heart. Her fingers absently stroked the edge of the display case. For one split second, she wished she didn't have to destroy the library. The cultural loss would devastate the

locals; her single act would destroy their sense of security. She didn't like being the one to introduce them to the terror that infected so much of the universe.

"Ouch!" Her index finger snagged something sharp.

She examined the assaulted digit and discovered a tiny fragment of wood poking through. The point eluded her attempts to extract it. It broke off, leaving a sliver beneath her skin, still visible as a fine line.

Swearing under her breath, she forgot all about the painting and the effect her mission would have on the Archaeans.

As she crossed the next floor, she ignored the annoying sliver. After all, she'd suffered much more serious injuries. Her body—and mind—were trained for worse. A little sliver was nothing to her.

"Who are you?" A surprised voice broke the silence.

Suppressing a grimace, Romana turned to face the undesired interruption.

"You aren't supposed to be here," said the young woman who had addressed her. She carried herself with the ease of someone who knew she belonged. Her appearance did not entirely identify her occupation: she wore a simple blue dress, ruffled at the collar and flaring out at her hips. The dark fabric draped her slim form gracefully, and white tights covered her slender legs. Comfortable-looking loafers adorned her feet, suggesting she spent a lot of time either standing or walking; a pile of books nestled in one arm, as if awaiting shelving.

The woman's brow creased, and she hooked her straight blond hair behind an ear.

The gesture spooked Romana. She suddenly felt déjà vu, like she was looking at a mirror image of herself in the distant past.

She shook away the sensation and adopted her coolest expression to cover any awkwardness she felt. Matching the woman's matter-of-fact tone, she asked, "Why are you here?" She surreptitiously studied her wrist scanner to check for additional life signs. She had been alone when she'd arrived; the woman must have come in afterwards.

"I work here," countered the woman. "I'm one of the librarians." She returned an equally cool gaze and straightened a little, trying to make her petite form look taller as if unconsciously reacting to the intruder's imposing height.

Romana confirmed they were alone, that no one else was in the library. She decided on the straightforward tack. "My name is Romana," she said, steeling herself against the inevitable response, "and I'm here to demolish your library."

The librarian stared and seemed to think it was a prank. "What?! You must be joking."

"I wish I were."

The woman read the grimness in Romana's gaze, and her posture shrank. "You're serious, aren't you." Several books slid off her pile, tumbling to the floor in successive thuds.

"Always," replied the soldier.

Stunned, the librarian stooped to recover the fallen volumes, uncertain how to react. She trembled, maintaining eye contact without looking at what her hands were doing.

Suddenly, she bolted for the stairwell.

Romana didn't miss a beat, anticipating the maneuver. She raced and caught up easily.

Not dressed for sprints, the librarian tripped and nearly toppled headfirst down the stairs. Romana caught her arm.

The woman gasped, yanked back from her fall. "Let me go!" she cried, continuing to resist.

Romana's grip remained fixed, secure and unrelenting. Her laden backpack swung wildly, but she held the woman steady and forced her around to face her. She towered over the librarian by several inches.

She examined her captive's face. The cyanic tints of her adrenalin-contracted irises mingled with paler ripples. Dainty eyebrows, light brown in color, perched timidly over her eyes, and tiny freckles lay scattered over her nose and cheeks, softening her otherwise pale face. A dimple interrupted her delicate chin, and seashell-like ears appeared between long strands of sandy hair that swished back and forth with her chaotic movements. She had agreeable though undramatic features, like that of a sheltered violet whose beauty appears only under close inspection.

"I'll sedate you if I have to," warned the soldier.

She finally stopped struggling. "Please don't kill me," pleaded the young woman, searching Romana's gaze like a frightened lamb.

Self-disgust surged through Romana like a wave of bile. She shoved her prisoner back into the room. "I'm not going to kill you," she growled.

The librarian stumbled and caught herself against the wall.

"But I have a job to do," Romana added. She unsnapped her leg holster, withdrawing a laser pistol and aiming it at the woman.

Her captive focused on the weapon.

"What's your name?" The mercenary toned down the harsher edges in her voice.

The librarian hostilely offered her response: "Deanna."

"Deanna," murmured Romana. "I know this is difficult for you, but I *must* complete my mission here. I promise I have no intention of harming you. I have set my weapon to its lowest setting, but it wouldn't be very pleasant to take a burst from it. If you move, I won't hesitate to stun you." She didn't mention that she preferred to keep her captive awake; it would be annoying to have to retrieve an unconscious prisoner before detonating the building. "But I won't kill you. Will you promise to cooperate?"

Deanna frowned, seemingly troubled by the peculiar hint of trust buried in Romana's menacing tone. At last, the woman nodded.

"Good." She directed the librarian to a bench and slid her pistol into its holster, leaving it unbuckled in case she needed it in a hurry. Then she set to work placing the next timer. She kept a wary eye on her prisoner, just in case.

After several minutes of concentrated silence, Deanna ventured a comment. "I suppose this has something to do with the War."

Romana didn't mind; conversation wouldn't keep her from her task. "Yes." Her finger began to throb intermittently, nagging her about the splinter.

“It doesn’t make any sense to me.” Deanna picked at the edge of her dress. “I realize you work for the enemies of the Empire, but this outpost isn’t exactly a major strategic location, from what I can tell.”

The soldier paused mid-task, surprised by her unexpectedly well-informed captive. “So, you know something of the situation?” she probed. Most locals knew very little of the circumstances of the War. Archaeis remained isolated in the present year, in spite of its status as a Dalek outpost, though its future was much less protected.

“A little.” Deanna lowered her voice conspiratorially. “We have access to some of the news feeds in the library. Like the Voice of the Resistance.”

Romana’s lips parted, letting a chilly laugh escape. “My, you are a sneaky little pet, aren’t you?”

Deanna glared softly, perturbed by the snide remark yet puzzled.

Shaking her head, Romana returned to her work.

As they moved to the next column, Deanna worked up the nerve to question her captor further. “Are you... with the resistance?”

“What little there is,” acknowledged the soldier. She flinched from a miniature jolt of pain in her index finger.

Deanna’s eyebrows rose inquisitively. “I don’t understand how the Daleks can be as bad as the reports claim.” She threw her statement out as bait, as if she expected Romana to propagandize.

“They’ve treated your planet remarkably well,” said Romana. Her tone cut through the air like a double-edged sword. “So polite and helpful. I’m sure life here has improved greatly with their presence.” Wires rolled and twisted between her expert fingers.

The librarian scowled. “They said they’d bring stability and ensure our safety, that they’d keep us safe from the War.” She played with a loose thread in her skirt hem. “Which they’ve done,” she concluded.

“Your overlords do marvelous work,” praised Romana, locking the timer face to the base.

They interrupted their verbal tennis match to go to the next floor.

After Deanna had settled into a sagging lounge chair, she remained silent for some time, thoughtfully drawing her fingers through her tresses as she contemplated the soldier. Romana felt awkward under the prying gaze but maintained her poker face.

“They aren’t like this everywhere, are they?” asked Deanna.

“No.” Even though she didn’t elaborate, Romana’s simple answer conveyed something of the atrocities carried out in the name of the great Dalek Empire.

Deanna broke eye contact and shifted in her seat. She rested a palm on the nearby table, her fingers absently exploring its contents, while her gaze dropped to the carpet.

Their dialogue didn’t resume until they went to the next level.

This time, the guerrilla picked the topic. “Did you ever meet the one they call *The Valeyard*?” The name rolled off her tongue like spoilt milk.

Deanna perked up, her curiosity roused. “Once.”

“What did you think of him?” Romana’s voice gave nothing away of her own opinion.

The librarian studied the periodical racks opposite her and answered, “He seemed... charismatic.”

“And?” Romana knew there was something else she wanted to say.

She smoothed her skirt. “I don’t know. Charming, I guess.”

“He talked to you, didn’t he,” guessed Romana, sucking on her finger for a moment. It throbbed constantly now, matching each of her heartbeats in annoying syncopation.

The young woman nodded, obviously recalling the particulars of the interaction. She pushed her hair back.

Romana was more prepared for the habitual gesture this time and blotted out the treacherous memory that surfaced.

“He actually asked me if I wanted to leave Archaeis,” Deanna added, her gaze turned inward. “He wondered if I’d like to see something called the Angeltide Nebula.” She laughed, but it was not a comfortable sound. “As if we might just go visit it in that very instant.”

A curious smile flickered on Romana’s face as she adjusted the timer settings.

Deanna sighed. “He seemed almost... lonely. But I didn’t like the way his eyes flashed at me. There was something not right about it.”

Romana looked down, giving her full attention to the woman, taking in every detail of the account.

“When I didn’t respond, he just gave me a funny smile and offered me a sweet. I reached out—felt like I was underwater—but he withdrew the bag before I could accept one.” She looked up at the mercenary. “And then he left. The head librarian was showing him our famous collection, the ancient writings of Mephilia.”

“Be grateful you stayed here,” hissed the soldier, giving Deanna a bone-chilling glance before returning her attention to the final detonator.

The sliver twinged in her finger.

“This has something to do with him, doesn’t it?” surmised the shrewd librarian.

Romana flashed a tight smile, confirming the guess with a nod. “Our forces need a diversion,” she explained. “And, as it turns out, the Valeyard is rather fond of this place.”

She left out the details, that he planned to exploit the library’s reknowned collection to foster the growth of a nearby civilization in one hundred years—solely to benefit his goal of universal domination. It disgusted her to think she had to fight his temporal disturbances, his overt manipulation of local development. It often seemed impossible to unravel the twisted cobweb of altered history, but she still had to make the effort. Long ago, before anyone had tampered with the timelines, the library at Archaeis had been destined for destruction in a natural fire. She knew it had to be destroyed, one way or another, to reassert some of the original historical events in the system.

“With a bit of luck, when the Dalek forces come running to investigate, it’ll expose their flank to a counterattack. Our forces are trying to liberate a Dalek colony—a world crushed under three decades of brutal slavery and uncontrolled strip mining.”

“Couldn’t you just destroy our capitol building? Why must you ruin the library?” Her eyes lovingly surveyed the shelves and tables, cluttered with books and newspapers.

“Above all else, the Valeyard wants *this* place intact.” Romana completed her final adjustment and put her tools away, pausing to glare at her irritated finger. “I want to make sure I get his attention.”

She hustled Deanna towards the back exit and scanned the building to confirm that they were still alone.

The librarian abruptly turned. “You hope he comes, in person,” she declared, reading the murderous intent in Romana’s eyes, “so you can assassinate him.”

Romana said nothing. Her expression remained stoic, unflinching.

“This isn’t just about winning an important battle,” continued Deanna. “Is it? You’ve got a personal grudge against him.”

“It’s secondary to my mission,” she snapped, not exactly denying the accusation. She suddenly found it difficult to look into the young woman’s eyes. Deanna’s face, features, and manner, though only superficially resembling a past incarnation of herself, nonetheless gave her the fleeting impression that she was arguing with her own conscience.

The librarian saved her the trouble of looking away. She turned to open the back door, and they exited the building.

Romana ignored the blazing pinprick of pain in her finger and guided them to a safe distance, taking shelter behind a wall. Her sensor still read all clear.

“Did he give you that scar?” asked Deanna, ever observant.

She ignored the question, rubbing her thumb against the inflamed digit. The time for conversation was over.

“Why do you hate him so much?” Deanna’s blond hair fluttered in the breeze.

Romana met her scrutinizing gaze and pressed a button on her control pad.

The concussive boom tore through the library walls. A massive fire ball blossomed. Concrete shards and shimmering glass showered the street. Paper shreds fluttered in the air like unsettled birds, soon vanishing in an expanding cloud of smoke and ash.

Silvery patrol cruisers soon appeared in the sky, rapidly closing on the burning building. An acrid haze drifted over the neighborhood.

“Well, it looks like you got their attention,” whispered Deanna.

Romana stood before her TARDIS console, monitoring the readouts and using a pin to work the sliver out of her finger.

Following the explosion, she had transported Deanna to her house to keep her out of harm’s way. The scanner display kept her informed of the progress outside. Daleks now scoured the blast site, buzzing around like flies. Curious bystanders dotted the street here and there, gawking at the astonishing act of destruction. The sun shone down through breaks in the smoke, incongruously warm and inviting.

She knew what would happen next. The Daleks would send an alert to central command, asking for additional assistance in case of further attack.

They wouldn’t realize she’d planted additional explosives on their communication satellites in the system, set to trigger following the first outbound transmission. Central Command would get one brief message describing the library’s destruction, and only one.

One of the console lights blinked green, indicating this had just occurred.

The communication blackout would surely draw reinforcements. They would be obliged to send help, drawing forces away from the line and opening up the flank to attack. Soon, her colleagues would be able to launch their offensive.

Her mission was nearly complete.

She wiggled the pin back and forth, attempting to dislodge the miniscule chip of wood. It shifted but refused to come out.

An alarm beeped, alerting her to nearby temporal activity—the telltale sign of another TARDIS arriving. She'd placed several temporal detectors in the area, knowing *he* would have to come. She set the pin down and checked the readings.

“Got you,” she murmured. She reached out to adjust a control.

The alarm ceased as abruptly as it had begun.

“No!” She toggled the switch, but nothing happened. “You can’t escape—not now!” She checked and re-checked the readings.

At last, she realized she had failed—again. The Valeyard had detected her trap, escaping before she had been able to tighten her snare.

She pressed her fists against the console, her knuckles trembling and whitening under the pressure.

The sliver stabbed into her finger again, and she cursed under her breath. An image of the insightful librarian sprang to mind, unbidden and unwanted.

She flicked the scanner switch, sealing her away from the outside view, and picked up the pin. Deftly thrusting it under the sliver, she ignored the sharp flare of pain it produced in the nerve. A single layer of skin tore, exposing the tiny irritant. She nudged it out and tossed the freed splinter away.

Though a little sore, her finger finally stopped throbbing. She gave a half-chuckle which sounded more like a humorless croak: getting a sliver was a non-event, after all. Just a trifling annoyance.

She raised her eyes to the silent column, picturing the impressive destruction she had managed. At least she had righted one wrong.

Conjuring the distant memory of another bright summer day, she observed, “Was that too ostentatious for you, Doctor?”

She grimaced at the airy lightness in her own voice and activated the dematerialization switch.

*The End*