

It's a Fantastic Life
By TheRelativeDimension

"Doctor," said Rose Tyler, "I've been thinking..."

The Doctor didn't look away from the incomprehensible Gallifreyan symbols that swirled around on the scanner. "Didn't I warn you about that?"

Rose forced a smile. "Christmas, 2005," she said.

"What about it?"

"Well I missed it, didn't I?" said Rose, unable to hide the upset in her voice. "Thanks to your bad piloting we skipped right over it and I was missing for twelve whole months!"

The green glow from beneath the console played across the Doctor's weary features. "You're never gonna let me live that down, are you?"

"Can we see it, though?" Rose asked eagerly, making her way around the TARDIS to get closer to the Doctor. "Can we go back?"

The Doctor flicked a few switches and wandered off to the other side of the console. "I don't know," he said quietly. "It's always risky, travelling so close in your personal timeline. Remember 1987 and the Reapers?"

Rose's gaze dropped to her trainers. He was never going to let *her* live that down either. "Yeah, but we've done so much since then. I'm like an expert at all this time travel stuff now."

The Doctor broke into a cautious smile. "You're getting there, Rose."

"And I just thought, you know, now we've dropped Jack off at that party and we've got a few hours to ourselves we could, I don't know, see what we missed out on."

He didn't answer.

Rose looked at the time rotor and said playfully, "Of course, if you don't think you could actually get us there, to the right time and place..."

Alarmed, the Doctor said, "Oh, don't you worry about that, Rose Tyler. I could get us there in a flash, without even breaking a sweat."

Rose held his gaze. "Prove it."

"Christmas, 2005?" the Doctor said, with that manic look in his eyes.

"Christmas, 2005," confirmed Rose.

"Easy!" cried the Doctor, as he slammed a lever on the controls.

As the time rotor writhed at the centre of the console, Rose watched with her arms folded as the Doctor pulled up one of the grates on the TARDIS floor and lifted out a chest that contained dozens of weird and wonderful gadgets.

The Doctor sorted through them, tossing expensive-looking and no doubt valuable equipment halfway across the room until he found what he was looking for.

"Here," he said, handing Rose a small, egg-shaped device with a few buttons and blinking lights on it. "Clip this onto your belt."

Rose did as she was told, and watched as the Doctor attached his own.

"What is it?"

"Portable perception filter," the Doctor replied, programming his device and then doing the same to Rose's. "It'll put us a little out of sync, keep us hidden, out of sight. We'll be able to see Christmas Day, but Christmas Day won't be able to see us."

Rose nodded, knowing she had to listen to him this time.

The time rotor stopped, and then there was only the creaking of the TARDIS, and the pounding of Rose's heart in her chest.

The Doctor held out his hand as he made for the doors. "Shall we?"

"Definitely got the landing right this time, yeah?" asked Rose, as she stepped out of the TARDIS and on to the Powell Estate.

"Yep," said the Doctor confidently. "Definitely right."

Rose arched an eyebrow. "Sure about that?"

The Doctor tapped his watch. "Okay, it's Christmas *Eve*," he admitted. "But it's almost midnight, only a few hours to go. We're not *that* far out."

"I'll let you off, then," Rose conceded. She looked up at the stars that twinkled in the night sky above her. She pointed up and said, "Been there."

The Doctor mirrored her huge smile. "Fantastic, isn't it?"

Rose nodded. Now she was back on Earth, she found herself yearning to be up there among the stars again. Somehow all that running around and battling monsters seemed easier than being at home...

"So, where you gonna go first?" the Doctor asked. "Wanna see your mum, check she's doing all right in there on her own?"

"Actually," said Rose, feeling a hint of nervousness creeping into her voice, "I thought I might go and see Mickey instead."

"Mickey?" The Doctor rolled his eyes. "Ever since you two met up in Cardiff the other day you've been pining for him."

"I have not!" cried Rose, not entirely convincingly. "It's just... We had a heart to heart then, when we were on our own, and he told me a bit about what he got up to while I was missing. He started to open up and then..."

"Then what?"

Wearily, Rose said, "Then the sky ripped apart and a Slitheen tried to kill me. You know, just like always, aliens getting in the way of your love life. But I've been wondering... What *did* he do while I was gone?"

"Good question. Let's go get our answer."

The Doctor headed off, but Rose hesitated. She had worked out that, by this point, she would have officially been missing for roughly nine months, and she was a little anxious about what she was going to discover.

What was the world going to be like without her in it?

"You could wait here, if you wanted," she said. "I know you're not Mickey's biggest fan. I'm not expecting you to come with me."

"Rose, it's Christmas Eve," he said matter-of-factly. "Who wants to spend Christmas Eve on their own? Seeing as you're the only other person on the planet who can actually see me right now, I think I'd better stick with you. And if that means watching Mickey the Idiot sulk in his flat, so be it."

It was only a short walk to Mickey's flat, but much to both Rose and the Doctor's surprise, there was no sign of him sulking inside.

“Don’t worry,” said the Doctor, flourishing the sonic screwdriver, “I can use this to find him. Follow the sonic!”

Rose scurried after him as the glowing blue gadget lit up their path through the shadowy council estate.

“You’ve got a Mickey detector on there?” she asked warily. “I bet you use that to avoid him, don’t you?”

“Don’t be so daft. It’s just a general stupidity detector. I normally have to turn it off when we come to Earth to stop it from overloading. Humans!”

“You’re kidding?” replied Rose. When he didn’t answer immediately, she added, “Aren’t you? Doctor, tell me you’re kidding.”

“Yes!” the Doctor cried out. “Here we are.”

He stopped outside the front door of a flat that Rose immediately recognised, much to her annoyance.

“He’s in *here*?” Rose said, taken aback. “What the hell is Mickey doing here, with *her*?”

“Why? Whose flat’s this?”

“Lily Teller,” she replied, allowing disgust to invade her voice. “Dull as ditch-water and about as bright.”

“She sounds perfect for old Ricky boy,” the Doctor teased.

“I never liked her. She worked in the shop for a few weeks until we found out she’d been sticking her hand in the till.”

The Doctor waved the sonic around. “I’ve got a jealousy detector on here too, you know.”

Rose hit him on the arm, and he tucked the screwdriver away.

“Can we get inside?” she asked eagerly. “Gotta see what’s going on.”

“I told you, Rose, these things don’t just hide us from sight,” he explained, tapping the perception filter on his waist, “they put us a second or two out of sync with the rest of the universe...”

“We just walk through the door as if it’s not there.”

The Doctor stepped into the flat, phasing right through the front door.

Rose followed, and couldn't help but break into a smile. "We're gonna have to do that again some time. That was so cool!"

"It's not so cool when you forget you're not wearing these and you try it," he replied, his hand going to his forehead. "I think I've still got a bruise."

The Doctor put his arm around Rose, as they stood in Lily's flat.

Lily and Mickey were cuddled up on the sofa, watching TV. She was giving a running commentary about the reality show that was on, and Mickey could barely get a word in edge-wise. But, somewhat begrudgingly, Rose had to admit that he seemed happy.

"I'm sorry, Rose," the Doctor said quietly.

Rose wiped her eyes. "It's all right. Like you said, who wants to be on their own at Christmas?"

"He misses you, though. Still thinking about you."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, it's obvious, isn't it?" He pointed at Lily. "Look at that girl. Blonde hair, red hoodie, worked in a shop, even her name... Sound familiar?"

Rose folded her arms defiantly. "Don't see it. She's nothing like me."

"No," the Doctor said. "But maybe, for Mickey, she's *enough* like you. You're not here anymore, so he goes out and finds himself a cheap Rose Tyler knock-off. I reckon it'd be quite funny if it wasn't so tragic."

Rose said nothing for a while. The Doctor was right, and she surprised herself when she realised that it wasn't *anger* she was feeling towards Mickey. It was towards *Lily*, of course, for running into the arms of the man she... she used to go out with...

But for Mickey, in her heart, Rose felt only sadness.

Suddenly Mickey looked up, and over his shoulder, right at Rose.

She froze and looked to the Doctor. "You sure he can't see or hear us?"

"As long as you haven't fiddled with the thingymabob," he said. "Please tell me you haven't fiddled with the thingymabob."

Rose was looking right into Mickey's eyes now. "I haven't fiddled with the thingy-mabob."

"Good. Then no, he definitely doesn't know we're here. Trust me."

"What is it, babe?" asked Lily, not taking her eyes off the telly.

"Can't you hear that? Or feel that?" said Mickey, looking all around the flat now. "That noise, that rumbling... I think it's coming from outside."

Mickey leapt up off the sofa and ran for the door. He passed right through Rose, and that time the feeling made her shudder.

"I don't hear anything, do you?" said Rose, shaking off her unease.

The Doctor could only shrug. "Out of sync. Could be World War Three out there and we'd never even know it."

As Mickey ran out into the cold, Rose said, "Well don't you think we should maybe find out?"

The Doctor nodded, and they followed Mickey outside.

Mickey stood in the centre of the estate, enclosed on all sides by darkness. The Doctor and Rose raced down the stairs to catch up with him.

The ground beneath Mickey was shaking, the buildings vibrating gently, but though he staggered slightly on his feet he kept his balance.

The Doctor and Rose came to a halt a few metres behind him.

"What's happening, Doctor? What's going on?"

The Doctor pointed up at the sky. "We've got company."

The clouds in the night sky parted and a single precise bolt of lightning burst forth and slammed down on the ground right in front of Mickey.

The bolt dissipated with a blinding flash, and the rumbling ceased.

And an alien creature appeared.

It was tall, several feet taller than Mickey, and wearing heavy, beaten battle armour on its humanoid body. The only part of it exposed was its face, which was coated with coarse brown hair. Its beady yellow eyes were almost hidden beneath the fur, though its cruel fanged smile was all too visible.

The creature held an oversized laser rifle, pointed right at Mickey.

“Mickey!” cried Rose instinctively, panicked.

She ran at the creature, intending to wrestle the gun from its grasp.

But she passed right through it, like a ghost.

The Doctor came to stand by her side again. “We can’t, Rose,” he said, indicating the device on their waists. “Not with these.”

“Then turn ‘em off. We’ve gotta help him.”

“Now, wait a minute,” the Doctor said. “We can’t make assumptions about this creature. Just cos it’s an alien with a gun and battle armour that appears to be splattered with blood, we shouldn’t jump to conclusions.”

The alien cocked its gun, snarled, and said, “You are Mickey Smith, ally of the Doctor’s. On your knees! I’m here to kill you.”

Rose looked to the Doctor and raised an eyebrow.

“Okay. That’s cleared that up, then.” The Doctor nodded, and indicated his perception filter. “But the thing about these things is, they don’t exactly have an off-switch. It’s a little more complicated than that.”

“How much more complicated?” said Rose, watching panicked as Mickey dropped to his knees, and he bowed his head without question.

The Doctor smiled weakly. “Oh, a fair amount. I’m working on it.”

As the Doctor whipped out the sonic screwdriver, Rose turned her attention back to Mickey. She thought if ever this were to happen to him, he might have put up more of a fight. He had done with the Slitheen, when they’d tried to kill him and Jackie.

But this was before all that. This was the Mickey who had waited months for Rose to return and had perhaps begun to accept that she never would. Was that why he was so willing to just give up?

“He can’t die here, though, can he?” said Rose, daring to hope. “When we landed back on Earth after missing this Christmas, he definitely wasn’t dead...”

“Temporal mechanics, Rose,” the Doctor replied. “He dies now, at the hands of this bounty hunter, everything we know gets changed.”

“So he *can* die?”

The Doctor had a grave look in his eyes as he tried to fix the device.

Rose looked desperately at the alien that was about to kill Mickey.

"Why?" said Mickey weakly. "I'd like to know why I have to die."

The creature cackled. "I'm looking for the Doctor because other people much richer than me are looking for his head on a spike. And my intelligence tells me that *your* head on a spike will bring him right here, to me."

"You think he cares about me that much? Or even at all?" Mickey let slip a humourless laugh, tinged with sadness. "I hardly even know him! And anyway, he hates me."

"Why do you say that?" asked the alien.

"Cos he's rude and sarcastic and calls me an idiot."

Rose glared at the Doctor.

"What?" he cried, throwing his hands up in the air. "This was a long time ago. I'd only met him once at this point, and half the time he was plastic. Now I'm completely different towards him."

Rose folded her arms, unsatisfied.

"Well, maybe not *completely* different... Anyway, Rose, concentrate on the *now*. There's an alien with a gun and I don't like him."

The alien with the gun, who Rose had to admit she didn't like either, mainly because the gun was pointed right at Mickey, prepared to fire.

"I don't need to know the ins and outs of your relationship with the Doctor," the bounty hunter said. "I just need your smouldering corpse to get his attention, then I can kill him myself and claim the handsome bounty for the last of the Time Lords. Any final words, boy?"

Mickey shook his head, staring down at the dirt.

"Doctor, can't you do something? Anything!" cried Rose.

"I'm trying!" The Doctor was frantically buzzing the sonic on his perception filter, but the lights were flashing red and it seemed to blow a raspberry at him. "Oh, I hate these things. There's a reason I don't use them."

Rose grabbed her own device and randomly tried a few of the buttons. But it was no use. She and the Doctor were stuck as ghosts, helpless to intervene, as Mickey was about to die.

"This'll never work, you know," said Mickey quietly.

The alien lowered its gun. "Sorry, what?"

"This plan of yours, to use me to get to the Doctor. It won't work."

"Why not?"

"Cos it relies on the Doctor actually caring about me, about whether I'm dead or alive. And I can tell you right now, he definitely doesn't."

Rose looked to the Doctor, but he was staring straight ahead.

"He just came running into my nice little life out of nowhere," Mickey went on, "and stole away everything I held dear."

"He only took your puny human girlfriend..."

"And *she* was everything I held dear!"

"Exactly," the alien went on. "She is with the Doctor, and even if he doesn't want revenge for me killing you, *she* will. She'll bring him to me."

"I wouldn't be so sure about *that* either," mumbled Mickey.

Rose wiped away a tear that rolled down her cheek.

Suddenly the Doctor snapped his fingers, and tapped at the keys on his perception filter. A halo of energy erupted outwards, engulfing Mickey, swallowing him up, and he disappeared.

The creature looked all around. "What trickery is this?"

Rose was wondering the same thing.

"I managed to widen the parameters of the filter," the Doctor explained. "Mickey's on a different wavelength, so we can't see him and he can't see us. But most importantly, now he's invisible to that bounty hunter."

Speaking of which, the alien exhaled loudly and rubbed its eyes. "Blimey, I just can't catch a break today... I think I need a drink."

The alien clicked its heels together, and the lightning bolt slammed down, whisking the creature away from Earth, back up to the stars.

Mickey Smith reappeared a few seconds later, understandably confused, but relieved to still be alive. "A miracle," he breathed.

After a few deep breaths to calm down he headed back up the stairs to Lily's flat.

Rose could only stand still with the Doctor, watching him go.

But there was a sudden crackle of electricity from her perception filter, and the device fizzed and sparked and made some unhappy noises.

Rose felt herself being plunged back into sync with the rest of the universe, no longer invisible...

Just as Mickey stood at the balcony and looked right at her.

She opened her mouth, though she had no idea what she was going to say or if she could say anything at all. But before she could utter a word she heard the device give a triumphant *ping*, and once again she was a ghost.

"You fiddled with the thingymabob, didn't you?" accused the Doctor, tucking the sonic away. "I told you not to fiddle with the thingymabob."

But Rose couldn't take her eyes off Mickey.

He was still staring at where Rose was. There was no doubt that he had seen her, however briefly. He looked at the door to Lily's flat, hesitated, and went back to staring down into the courtyard.

Then he made up his mind, and ran down the stairs, and went charging through the estate, calling out, "Rose! Rose, where are you? Rose!"

He ran straight past her, then vanished into the night.

"Stay exactly still," said the Doctor, taking hold of Rose's shoulders, as if knowing that she wanted to run after him. "We mustn't be seen. Again."

In the distance, Rose thought she could hear sirens. She remembered what Mickey had told her about the year when she had been gone, when everyone thought Rose had been kidnapped or worse, and Mickey had become the prime suspect.

"Doctor, those sirens," she wondered aloud. "The police... You don't think they're here to arrest Mickey, do you? Not now, on Christmas Eve?"

The Doctor checked his watch. "It's basically Christmas Day now."

"Doctor," Rose pressed.

He didn't answer for a moment. "Whatever happens tonight always happened. We can't intervene. Tonight we stick to that old rule of mine."

They walked back to the TARDIS in silence.

"Well," said the Doctor, with a heavy sigh, as he tossed the perception filters back in their chest and locked it away, "that was a total disaster, wasn't it? Gotta be a contender for Worst Christmas Ever, I reckon. Those Welsh zombies are looking pretty cheery now, in comparison, aren't they?"

"No." Rose shook her head slowly. "No, it wasn't a disaster."

"You *were* there, weren't you? It was really grim." He wandered over to the console and slammed a lever. "Let's get a move on, eh?"

Rose leaned back against the railings of the TARDIS, deep in thought. She couldn't stop thinking about Mickey, about all the things he had gone through without her, but *because* of her.

And after all that, he never forgot about her. Never stopped looking, or hoping. Or loving.

Mickey had given up everything with Lily to chase Rose's ghost.

"I wanna go and see Mickey again," Rose said quietly.

"But we've just been..."

"Not to the past," she went on. "I wanna see him *now*, in the present. He should be back from Cardiff, yeah? I wanna see *that* Mickey."

"All right," said the Doctor, throwing his hands up. "You're the boss."

He began programming the co-ordinates into the controls, but Rose had one other request. She wanted to make a quick stop on the way first.

Rose burst out of the TARDIS and ran as fast as she could to Mickey's flat.

She knocked loudly on the door until he answered it, dressed in his pyjamas and rubbing his tired eyes.

He blinked. "Rose? You're back?"

She couldn't find the words, and just threw her arms around him.

“Wow!” he said, squeezing her tight. “What was that for?”

Rose couldn't stop smiling as she pulled away. She revealed to Mickey the box she was holding, and handed it to him.

Cautiously, he took it. “What's this?”

“Christmas present,” Rose said simply.

“But, Rose... It's the middle of June.”

“One thing I've learnt in the TARDIS, it can be Christmas whenever you want it to be. Or sometimes, whenever you *need* it to be.”

She kissed him on the cheek, and they went inside his flat for a cup of tea and a catch up. A few hours later, they headed off for a walk around the estate, reminiscing about all the times they'd spent there together, and chatting about all the times they'd missed.

“Thanks,” she said.

“For what?”

She smiled. “Everything.”

Rose Tyler and Mickey Smith strolled along through the Powell Estate, arm-in-arm, and walked straight past the TARDIS.