

Appearances Can Be Deceiving

by Betawho

How someone so tubby could move so fast she'd never know. She concentrated on keeping up with the Doctor and trying to avoid breaking her ankle on the rocks.

“Let's go for a walk,' he says. 'It's a beautiful day,' he says.”

Right, walking does not include a 90 degree vertical surface. Her foot slipped and she yelped as she skinned her ankle on a boulder.

“All right down there, Peri?” he called back cheerfully.

“Just peachy!” she yelled back, gingerly examining her ankle. There wasn't much blood, just a scrape. She turned and sat down huffily on the boulder. He could just climb without her for a bit. She needed to catch her breath.

She looked out over the valley spread below them. She sighed again, this time in appreciation. She had to admit, rock climbing or not, this was one of the prettiest places he's ever brought her.

Sunlight dappled the dales and fields below, glinting off the rippling river. Meadows were a virtual jubilation of flowers, reds and purples and yellows. She'd much prefer to be down there collecting specimens, she'd seen some interesting looking brassica and basilicum, rather than up here where she was likely to get snakebit or buried in an avalanche.

“What’s the problem?” She turned her face up at that familiar impatient voice. Yellow trouser legs led up to his golden backlit explosion of hair. She shaded her eyes.

“I just thought I’d take a moment to compose my will before I fall down the mountain and die.”

He rolled his eyes, and huffed. “Let’s have a look then.” He sat down on a lower boulder and took her calf in his hand. She squealed. “Oh stop it, it’s not that bad.”

She was always surprised when he touched her. His hands were cool, his normal body temperature lower than hers. It was always a shock to be forcefully reminded that he wasn’t actually human, no matter what he looked like.

His hands were big, but gentle. He turned her leg and examined the ankle. “Hm, it’s not bad, superficial.” He whipped out a large spotted handkerchief, deftly folded it lengthwise and wrapped it around her ankle, tucking the ends in neatly. “Best to keep it clean though.”

He set her foot back on the rock and turned and sat down beside her, admiring the view. “It’s lovely here, isn’t it?”

She looked up at him in surprise, “Yes.” She frowned, He was always so brusque that it was surprising when he showed his more artistic side. Although his preference for that coat indicated he had one, of some type anyway.

“If you think the valley is so lovely,” she said, looking out over the view, seeing the Tardis sitting under a tree by the river, “why are we climbing this rockslide?”

“Because there is something even more interesting at the top.”

“Oh? What? I thought you hadn’t been here before.”

“I haven’t, doesn’t mean I don’t know anything about the place. Come on!” He jumped to his feet: and held down a hand to her. She slapped her hand into it and hoisted herself up if nothing else he was nice and sturdy.

They resumed climbing, slower this time. “What’s this planet called anyway?”

He was surveying the rocks ahead, looking for the easiest route. “Diphthong,” he said, offhandedly.

“You’re kidding!”

“No,” he said, resuming his climb. “The original survey team had a rather odd sense of humour. Apparently it was either going to be Diphthong or Glottal.”

“Okay, that’s just weird.” She huffed as she pulled herself up over another boulder. “What were they doing, playing some sort of linguistics game when they named the place?”

“Could have, it’s boring taking the slow route between planets. Not everyone is lucky enough to have a Tardis.

“Ah hah!” he pushed himself up onto a grassy verge, emerging onto the top of the cliff.

“What ‘ah-hah’? Give me a hand up!” He reached down and hoisted her onto the plateau.

She cleared the edge of sod and her eyes widened, “Ooh!” A crystal dome sat on top of the cliff. Three hundred feet across and 150 feet high. Cut crystal facets reflected the sunlight in every colour of the rainbow.

“Wow!”

“As you say, ‘Wow.’ Welcome to the Diphthong Observatory, one of the 1300 Wonders of the Galaxy.”

“What happened to 700 Wonders?”

“It’s a big galaxy.”

He strolled off, long legged strides carrying him so far she had to trot to keep up. Her ankle stung, but she ignored it.

He strolled around the edges of the dome, examining it like a connoisseur with a new acquisition.

“So we’re here to look at stars?” she said with disbelief. They could travel out in the stars in the Tardis, what was the point of going to a planet to look at them?

“No, it’s not an observatory of astronomy. Although I suppose you could call it cosmology if you like. The Diphthong Observatory doesn’t show stars, it shows alternate realities.”

“What?” The idea was mind boggling. “You’re kidding!” She didn’t even care that she was repeating herself. She walked up to the huge structure, she touched

one of the facets with her finger. She jumped back. "It's squishy!"

He smiled at her smugly. She poked a finger at it again. It didn't feel like crystal, it felt like some sort of huge, clear, jello mold.

He walked up beside her. "It's not stone, obviously. I suppose you could call it Time Crystal. It's a natural growth. The observatory wasn't built, it's a natural phenomenon – sort of like the Untempered Schism on Gallifrey, only without the temporal radiation."

"What's the Untempered Schism?"

"It's a place on Gallifrey where it's possible to look directly into the Time Vortex. It's part of the reasons Time Lords developed as they did." He waved a grandiose hand at the huge dome. "The Observatory is something similar, but less harsh. Instead of seeing all of Time and Space at once, it shows alternate timelines. Somewhat randomly. It was considered an oracle for millennia, people used to take pilgrimages here to gaze into the possibilities." His voice dropped dramatically at that last bit. She rolled her eyes.

"So what do we do? Just stare at it?"

He shoved his hands in his pockets and leaned back, looking as far as he could around the edges of the dome. "Apparently, you're just supposed to walk around it until you find a facet that shows you something."

"Not very mystical," she observed.

He grinned at her. "I'm sure they put a lot more pomp and circumstance into it when it was in its heyday. Come on, let's see what we can find. You go that way, I'll go this."

She shrugged and took off in the opposite direction. She studied the different facets. They weren't orderly, they were all different sizes and shapes – an impossible mishmash rather than the rational shapes she associated with crystal. "What am I looking for?" she yelled to him on the other side of the dome.

"Anything familiar that you don't recognize!" he yelled back from the other side.

She shook her head. The altitude must be getting to her, that almost made sense. She swept her gaze across the whole dome. It was that sort of clear, white

colour that uncut crystal has. She peered closely at one of the facets. A wizened, cloudy-eyed face peered back at her. She screamed and jumped back.

Her heart palpitated in her chest and she gulped in breath, until she realized the face obviously couldn't see her, it moved away to the side and she realized it was a baby's face, hugely magnified, it was crawling across the floor of some futuristic living room. She breathed out a relieved sigh.

"Peri! what happened?" the Doctor charged around the far end of the dome coattails flying, yellow-clad legs ready to charge into the breach. His eyes scanned the area for danger.

"Nothing," she waved it away, strangely comforted by the garish sight of him, poised for action. Her heart was still beating fast. "It's fine. I just wasn't prepared. It startled me is all." She waved at the milky view in the crystal.

He deflated, and stuck his hands in his pockets. "Yes, well," he said gruffly. "Perhaps we'd better continue together." Peri rolled her eyes. He was really sweet, in his own irritating way.

He walked up and stuck out an elbow, with exaggerated charm: she tucked her hand in it. He strolled along, head up, avid eyes scanning the dome. The wind whistled past them on the plateau, ruffling his sunshiny hair and swooshing through the tall grass.

She looked up at the dome again, and realized, if she concentrated, she could see faint movement in all of the facets. No two alike, all of them milky and opalescent unless she concentrated on it, then it cleared up and showed a vivid scene.

There were scenes of rainy gardens, windswept hillsides, people in cities, a pair of young lovers (she eeped a little and quickly turned away, hoping the Doctor hadn't seen that), old fashioned people on horseback, kids running down a corridor of what looked like a futuristic spaceship.

"How does it know what to show us?" she asked. "Or is it all just random?"

"No, no, the timelines are amazingly reactive. The longer you look, the more things start to be relative. Look there," he pointed. She squinted in the sunlight and suddenly a birdlike face clarified in a slender plane of crystal.

“That’s a Jacondan!” she said, surprised. The peculiarly birdlike people were forever etched on her memory.

“Uh-hm,” he agreed absently, his eyes already drawn to a different facet farther along. “Well, look at this!” he dragged her down to a large facet, at face level, several yards away. He stopped and smiled that smugly satisfied smile. “It’s me!”

Peri peered into the large, irregular facet, it clarified like a mirror. A man stood there by a young tree, looking out over a desolate field. He was tall and lean, wearing a naval officer’s dark blue, brass-buttoned coat. He had vividly curly hair, but it was jet black. He had a lean, tanned face, all angles and planes that looked like it had been carved out of teakwood. And when he turned around, Peri gasped to see he wore an eyepatch over one eye.

Peri looked up at the colourful, chunky figure beside her. “You regenerated into a pirate?”

“Apparently.” The Doctor leaned forward, fascinated. “I wonder how I lost the eye? Must have been something extreme if the Tardis couldn’t fix it.”

“So which you is this?” Peri asked. She had vivid memories of meeting a short, leathery faced version of the Doctor, a gruff, quirky little man with a Beatles haircut.

The Doctor waved the question off, watching avidly. “It’s me.”

“What me?” Peri insisted.

“Me me!” he snapped, as if she was being deliberately obtuse.

“Well, there’s no need to yell, I was just asking,” she snapped back. She knew he was currently in his sixth body. She’d been there, terrified out of her wits, when the fifth him had died. He’d been so nice in that incarnation. A bit bland by comparison, but very sweet. And a lot more patient.

“Peri,” he said impatiently, waving at the crystal, “that’s me. This me, as I would have been if my regeneration had gone differently.”

“How can you tell?” she couldn’t wrap her head around that idea.

He scoffed, stood up straight and glared at her. “I think I’d know me when I see me!” he said indignantly.

Peri shrugged. She stared at the picture in the facet. Lean, long limbed, spare,

almost gaunt. How could they be the same person?

A woman came into view beside the man. She was wearing a black leather jacket, a white tube top, big clunky biker's boots, hip hugging jeans, and a hoop earring in one ear. She was well curved but athletic. And had short, sleek, dark brown hair.

Peri gasped. It was her!

"See?" The Doctor couldn't resist rubbing it in.

Peri glared at him, but looked back at the image in the crystal. Same wide eyes, same pert nose, same face she'd seen looking out of her mirror her whole life.

Something black and bulbous floated into the view, like a pudgy black robin. The man grabbed the woman and threw her aside, yelling something.

The whole observatory exploded in a silent rainbow of jagged fractured colours.

The gel bulged at them, burst, and suddenly her ears were slammed with the sounds of an explosion and the screams of a battlefield.

"Peri!" The Doctor shoved her aside, sending her flying. She landed in the dirt, winded, but saw him fling himself in the other direction just as a tree crashed out of the observatory and slammed into the ground where they'd been standing.

A cloud of dust rose up, obscuring her view. She coughed and climbed to her feet, she rubbed her hip, that was going to leave a bruise. She waved away the dust. "Doctor! Are you all right?"

"Yes, I'm fine, Peri," answered a deep unfamiliar voice. Peri's eyes widened.

"Peri!" yelled the Doctor's familiar voice from beyond the dust cloud. "I'm okay!" Peri yelled back, the words had an odd echo, as if she'd said it twice. She looked around, spooked. Superstitious gooseflesh rose on her arms.

"Where are you?" he yelled in his usual impatient tones, apparently as blinded as she was.

The dust started to settle, and she saw his brightly coloured coat floundering its way through the dustcloud.

He emerged on her side of the cloud. "There you are, thank heavens. Are you all right?"

She stared past him, and blinked. He turned to see what she was looking at. The man in the navy blue coat stood beyond him, hunched over, hands propped on his knees as he gulped in clean breaths. He looked up, and glared, his one vividly green eye speared the Doctor, to no visible effect.

“Oh, this is not good,” they both said at the same time, in eerily the same tone.

The lean man stood up. “What are you doing here?” he asked aggressively.

Her Doctor huffed and propped his hands on his hips. “What am I doing here? I *belong* here. This is my timeline.”

The other Doctor looked around, apparently getting his bearings. He noticed the observatory, which now looked as unscathed as it had before the explosion.

“Where’s Peri?” he asked.

“Over here!” a familiar voice called, a hand waving over the top of the tree trunk. “Not that anyone cares,” she muttered.

Peri dashed over. She found her other self lying on the far side of the fallen tree. Her foot appeared to be tangled in the roots, just above where the roots disappeared into the observatory. She was using an impressively large Bowie knife to hack at the roots, trying to get her boot free.

She looked up when Peri appeared. She looked her over with an unsurprised, clinical gaze before going back to her hacking. Peri pulled back in shock, startled: she didn’t remember ever giving anyone a look like that.

“C.. can I help?” she stammered. After all, that was her lying there. That was her! This was so weird.

The two Doctors stepped over the slender tree trunk. They took in the situation with a glance. “Just slip your boot off,” “...foot out of your boot.” They said at the same time. They looked at each other.

She growled. She kept chopping. Peri recognized that dogged persistence, she’d experienced it often enough. “Like I didn’t think of that!” the other Peri grouched. “It’s too tight, it won’t come loose...”

The pirate Doctor stepped over his Peri, coattails flapping, and plucked the knife out of her fingers. He reached in among the tangled roots and cut all the laces

with a quick slice. "There," he said, handing the knife back. "Try it now."

The leather clad Peri rolled her eyes, but tucked the knife back in a scabbard on her other boot. She wiggled her foot and slipped her stocking-clad foot out with ease.

Peri's colourful Doctor leaned down and unwedged her boot from the roots with a quick twist. He turned and handed it to her. "There you go," he said with a grin.

The other Peri took her boot and looked down at the black leather. All the laces hung free, useless, sliced completely down the tongue like a gutted fish. "Gee, thanks," she said with familiar sarcasm.

Peri stared at that boot. If she wasn't mistaken, that was a steel-toed boot. When had she started carrying a knife and wearing steel-toed boots? Why? What had happened to this other her in that other timeline?

"So now what are we going to do?" Peri's Doctor asked. She looked up. Both Doctors stood there staring at each other. One was as lean and hard as a blighted apple tree, the other as robust and bright as an English summer.

The lean one reached up and scratched his head, contemplating the observatory. With both of them standing there together she could almost see a resemblance. Sort of. Not really: the only thing they seemed to have in common was their height and that bouncy halo of curls, although these were glossy black on the eyepatched Doctor.

She studied the new Time Lord. He really did look like a pirate. All he lacked was a parrot and a peg leg. And wouldn't her Doctor just *love* to have a parrot and a peg leg!

"Well, it's obvious we can't stay here," the black-haired Doctor said. "Two sets of us would upset the balance. Besides, we were in the middle of a revolution on Cerise when that Stygian grenade went off."

"So that's what caused it?" Peri's blond Doctor asked, interested, but scowling at the information.

"What's a Stygian grenade?" Peri asked.

“It’s literally a time bomb,” her Doctor looked down at the two of them on the ground. His eyebrows went up, obviously fascinated by the picture of two Peri’s sitting there, his eyes flickered back and forth, comparing them. But he continued. “It doesn’t just explode, it erases you from time altogether. And they’re banned on every world that even *knows* about them,” he said sternly, turning an accusing glare on his counterpart.

The other Doctor shrugged his navy-coated shoulders. “Rules tend to get ignored in war. The important thing is, it didn’t erase us. It blew us here instead.”

“Probably because we had the observatory trained on you. The sympathetic vibration as it tuned on you must have been enough to act as a bridge.”

“So all we have to do is go back through,” the other Peri said.

Peri turned and pointed behind her. “It’s that facet right.... there.” She turned and scanned the side of the dome. “It’s gone!” She jumped up, frantically scanning the dome. None of the facets were in the same place, none of them was the same size or shape anymore. “It’s all changed!”

Both Doctors walked up beside her, one on each side and studied the huge faceted dome. “Inverse fractals?” the dark-haired Doctor suggested.

“What’s fractals?” the stocking-clad Peri asked from the ground, rubbing her ankle.

Peri’s blond Doctor turned around. “Fractals are an endless identical recursion where large shapes are made up of a collection of smaller but identical shapes. Inverse fractals are similar shapes made up of a collection of smaller similar shapes, but never the same configuration of smaller shapes twice.”

“Not to be confused with *self*-inverse fractals,” the dark-coated Doctor clarified.

Peri’s Doctor nodded. “Now if we can just...” Her Doctor turned to the other Doctor and waved at the dome, gibberish flowing thick and fast. Peri rolled her eyes.

They watched the Doctors wander off around the dome, talking techno-babble.

“Typical, “ they both muttered.

They looked at each other and smiled. Peri helped her other self up.

Peri lead the way over to a large boulder near the cliff that formed a natural seat, with a good view of the valley. If her Doctor ran true to form, he'd be a while. She wasn't going to chase after him, just so she could be ignored. By *two* of him, no less.

She turned to sit down and saw the other woman limping. She jumped back up and ran to her in concern. The leather clad woman was carrying her boot, favoring one leg. "Are you all right?" Peri asked in concern.

The other Peri scoffed in self-derision. "I wrenched my ankle trying to get my boot free," she bit hard on her lip and doggedly walked to the boulder.

Peri fluttered, wondering if she should help or if it would offend the other woman. But the other woman was *her*. So would she want help? Yet she wasn't *exactly* her, so...

By the time she decided not to think about it, the other her was already sitting on the boulder, pulling her boot back on and tying the top shut with the last surviving long shoelace.

"So," Peri said, sitting down, feeling like an idiot and trying not to show it. She looked everywhere but at her other self. She looked off after the two Doctors.

"What's with the eyepatch?" she asked, turning to find her other self staring at her. She jumped, it was unsettling. That was her face looking back at her, considering her with a mind that wasn't hers. A stranger looking out of her own eyes. She swallowed and felt the skin creep on the back of her neck.

Her other self looked her over blatantly. Obviously puzzled by what she saw. Peri looked down at herself. She was wearing shorts and a colourful halter top. She sucked her stomach in, feeling a bit intimidated; she had never been quite as in shape as this other version of her. *That* her had a hard edge that she didn't understand.

"How did you meet the Doctor?" she asked. The Doctor had said the observatory showed them alternate timelines: how had this her's timeline differed from her own? Out of the corner of her eye, she saw the two Doctors disappear around the end of the observatory.

“How did you?” her alternate asked, cocking her head in a familiar manner.

Peri shrugged and looked down at her hands clasped in her lap. She still wasn't quite proud of that. “I was in Lanzarote, on holiday.” She slumped and sighed, remembering. “It was dead boring. So I arranged with a couple of guys I met to go backpacking across Europe until school started again.” She looked up to find the other her watching her, arms clasped around her bent knees, she nodded, encouraging.

“Except Howard tricked me,” Peri said with irritation. “He stranded me on his boat, trying to make me stay. So I swam to shore. Except,” and this part was always a bit hazy. “Something happened, I'm not sure, I think I started to drown, then I woke up in the Tardis.”

The other her nodded. “I take it you met the Doctor before this one, like I did?” she asked.

Peri raised her eyebrows in question, wondering if the previous Doctor had been the same for both of them.

“Young,” her other self continued, “blond, good looking in a kind of ‘boy next door’ way?”

“Yeah, that was him! You met him the same way?”

The other her shook her head. Peri realized her other self's hair was a shade longer than hers. The large hoop earring giving her a rakish appearance. Somehow, rakish and her had never seemed to go together in her mind.

“No, I met him later. I managed to get off the boat and went backpacking. I hiked across Europe for two years. Never could quite seem to scratch together the fare to go home. The Doctor found me after I'd lost a fight in an alley. Took me into the Tardis and patched me up. I decided it was more fun traveling with him.”

“Are you okay?” Peri said, hearing more in that description than what was said.

“Yeah,” her other self said, offhandedly. “I'm fine. He takes good care of me.” She didn't look at her. But turned her head on her knees and looked off around the curve of the observatory where her Doctor had disappeared.

Peri heard a world of dedication in that tone, almost obsession. She cleared

her throat. Her relationship with her Doctor wasn't that close. She was just along for the vacation, until school started up again. "So," she said, diffidently. "You ever plan on going home?"

The other her turned to her with freezing eyes. "Maybe. Someday."

Peri cleared her throat again, shifted a little sideways, farther away. Good god! She was nervous of herself! She rubbed her hand across her eyes, then took a deep breath and changed the subject.

"So!" she flung a hand out to where the Doctors had disappeared. "What do you think they're doing?"

"Arguing," the other her said flatly. Smiling.

Peri threw back her head and laughed. "I could make money on that bet!" she said. "Did you meet the second Doctor?" she asked curiously.

Her other self smiled, relaxing. "Yeah, he was adorable! A funny little man in a bowtie and checkered pants. I couldn't believe they were the same person."

Peri grinned back. "I know what you mean. Did you meet Jamie?"

"Scottish boy?" she asked, Peri nodded. Her other self rolled her eyes. "He kept trying to kiss me."

"What did you do?" Peri had actually thought it was kind of sweet.

Her other self gave a predatory smile, her earring making her look more like a pirate than her Doctor. "My knife was bigger than his," she answered.

Peri wanted to be appalled, but she found herself choking back a snort of laughter.

"Peri!"

Both their heads shot up at that unfamiliar shout from the other side of the dome. They got up and trotted around to the other side, one limping, where they found both Doctors leaning over the desiccated husk of a young tree. Peri stared at it, then looked back over her shoulder in consternation. It looked like the twin of the tree that had fallen out on the other side of the dome, except this one was old, virtually mummified, and falling apart.

"How can there be two trees?" Peri asked.

Her Doctor shrugged. "Either the Observatory is mirroring, or..."

“Or?” she prompted.

“It’s a different tree.”

“Great. You mean there could be another set of us running around here somewhere?” She looked around uneasily. Her creepy hairs were getting a workout today. Squiggly monsters were a breeze compared to this. All they did was try to eat you. Not show you disturbing sides to yourself.

“I sincerely doubt it,” her Doctor said. “I’m not one for being inconspicuous.”

Peri looked at him, standing there blazing colours in the bright sunlight, and very firmly bit her lips.

The dark haired Doctor ignored them, waved his Peri over and pointed down at a yellow vine which was twined around the trunk of the decaying tree. “What do you make of that?”

Peri realized this Doctor’s voice was more elegant than her Doctor’s. Her Doctor may have been more erudite, but he did have a rather harsh tone of voice. Possibly from all the yelling. This Doctor’s voice was low and mellifluous. Very attractive actually.

The other Peri knelt down beside her Doctor and studied the vine he pointed to. After a moment she looked up at him, “It can’t be.” She stared back down at the obviously very healthy vine. Peri knelt down on the other side of the log, the dirt digging into her bare knees, intrigued. The vine was a rich yellow colour, with gilt edged leaves, plump and healthy, almost visibly growing. She’d never seen anything quite like it, although it was obviously a parasite of some form.

The other Peri shrugged out of her jacket, revealing pale arms in the strapless top. Peri felt a moment’s superiority, at least she had a better tan.

The other Peri used the leather of her jacket to pick up one of the vines, rolling it sideways where it twined over the bark, revealing an actively waving mass of tendrils on the underside, aggressive hairs that writhed as they strove to penetrate the bark.

“It looks like *cassytha chronosum*.”

“What’s that when it’s at home?” Peri asked.

“Commonly called Golden Vine on Jeridian Four. What’s it doing here?”

“She’s very good,” the colourful Doctor said.

The pirate nodded.

“It’s a time-sensitive parasite, it’s job is to consume anomalous intrusions. It evolved on a planet that had been devastated by a time war,” the jacket Peri explained, engrossed.

Peri was just grossed. She watched as her twin rolled the vine back into place and stepped back.

Peri suddenly snatched out and grabbed the pirate Doctor’s hand. “What’s that?!”

A glowing yellow tendril wiggled its way under his skin, on the web between forefinger and thumb.

Her colourful Doctor grabbed his twin’s hand. “You’re the anomaly here. We’ve got to get you back home before it can take hold.”

“Like that didn’t occur to me,” the dark Doctor said, scratching the red welt, as something wiggled its way deeper under his skin.

They trotted back around to their side of the dome. Peri’s golden-haired Doctor nodded, hands on his hips as he looked down on the tree that had come through with them. It’s roots were still connected into the dome, but the top of the tree was already decaying, infested with the golden vines.

“It’s here too,” he said. “I wonder if it evolved naturally or was seeded as a defense?” he shook the thought off. “At any rate, at the speed those vines are eating the tree, you’ve only got about 3 hours before you’re stranded here forever.”

“Not my preferred outcome,” his black haired alternate said.

“Can’t we just take them back using the Tardis?” Peri asked.

Both Doctors turned to stare at her, horrified.

“What?” she asked. Why did he always make her feel like a moron? It was a perfectly reasonable question.

“No, we most definitely cannot use the Tardis,” her Doctor said with emphasis. He actually shivered.

“Why not?” the other Peri said. “It sounds like a reasonable idea to me.” Peri

nodded, she waved a hand at her in a “see?” gesture. Someone else had come to the same conclusion. She stared at her mirror image. Sort of.

The pirate Doctor locked his one brilliantly green eye on his Companion. “That would be fantastically dangerous.”

“Never known that to stop you,” she said, crossing her arms.

He shook his head, grave. “There are an infinite number of alternate realities. If we tried to just find the one we came from, we could end up getting it wrong, realities can be so close that only one decision is different in the whole timestream, but if we pick the wrong one, we end up in another universe with another Doctor...”

“And no doubt he’ll try to help...” Peri’s Doctor said.

“And if we got it wrong again, we’d risk another universe, and another Doctor, it would snowball, exponentially, until we could unbalance the whole of the causal nexus,” the pirate finished.

Leather-clad Peri chewed on her lip. “Oh, well then, what can we do?”

“What we need is some way to tune the observatory, set it to Cerise and open a portal.”

Both Doctor’s stopped and stared at each other. “The Space Time Visualizer!” they said in unison.

“If we set it for the Cerise of this timeline...” Peri’s Doctor said.

“...and set it to the vibrational frequency at the root of the tree where it’s still connected to our universe...” the pirate Doctor said.

“...it should open a portal back to your universe!” Peri’s Doctor finished. He grinned hugely. “Great minds think alike! Come on, the Tardis is in the valley.”

Both Time Lords took off at a flat run, faster than the Peris could follow them. Peri felt a bit proud of the fact that her more athletic twin couldn’t keep up with her Doctor any better than she could. She stopped on the edge of the cliff and watched the two Doctor’s hopping down the scree like a pair of deranged mountain goats.

“You’ll never get that thing up here!” she yelled.

“What’s a Space Time Visualizer?” her twin asked.

Peri looked at her in surprise. It was still unsettling to look at that face that looked so familiar, yet so different. She shook that off.

“It’s sort of a big round TV for watching different points in space and time. It’s nearly as tall as they are. And it must weigh a ton. They’ll have to wrestle it out of the storage hold to the console room too, it’ll take forever...”

There was a grinding whoop of dematerialization behind them. Both Peri’s turned to see the Tardis fade into view, turn slightly transparent, then dematerialize again and rematerialize a few feet away. The space time visualizer, looking like something Captain Nemo would watch football on, was sitting on the hillside in the spot they’d originally materialized in.

“Or they could do that,” Peri said, with a helpless wave of her hand.

Both Doctors came out of the Tardis, festooned with cables and laden with tool boxes. One headed for the visualizer, one headed for the tree. They got to work. Both Peri’s knew what was expected of them, and went over and took charge of the tool boxes. They handed the Doctors the tools as needed, followed orders, and generally acted as go betweens.

Apparently some things worked the same in both universes.

“Why do you look different?” Peri asked as she dragged a cable over from the tree to the visualizer.

“Peri!” her Doctor exclaimed from beside the tree. “That’s rude!”

“No it isn’t,” she shouted back. “I’m curious.” She turned back to the other Doctor. “If both of you are the same incarnation why do you look different?” Her voice was getting that high squeaky tone again. It always did that when she was trying to get people to listen to her. It was really irritating. I made her sound whiny and that’s not what she meant at all.

He took the cable from her and started hooking it into the visualizer. But he answered.

“We got Spectrox Toxemia while we were on Androzani Minor. We managed to get back to the Tardis with the antidote, I gave Peri her dose. I took what was left, but regenerated anyway. When I woke up I looked like this.”

“Oh, like that’s all that happened,” his Peri protested as she rooted in the toolbox for connectors.

“The antidote didn’t work on him,” his Peri said. “He went into convulsions. I was terrified. Then he started glowing with this sort of misty light, still convulsing. It was the creepiest thing I’d ever seen. It looked like he was fighting a ghost, or was possessed.” She reached up and handed him a connector.

He finished stripping the cable and took it. “I apparently wasn’t only susceptible to raw spectrox, but had an allergic reaction to the antidote,” he shrugged, fitting the connector onto the cable.

“Yeah, and then you tried to throttle me,” his Peri said, handing him a crimping tool.

“He did that to me too,” Peri said, jerking a thumb over her shoulder, fascinated with how similar but different their stories were.

The other Peri shrugged. “I slammed his head into the wall.”

The Pirate Doctor grinned, crimping the connector onto the cable. “That snapped me out of it,” he admitted with an admiring grin, tossing the tool back into the box. The other Peri grinned back.

Peri wished she’d thought of that.

Both Doctors stood back and looked at the impromptu lashup of plant, dome, and technology.

“Are you sure this is going to work?” the leather-wearing Peri asked dubiously. Peri was glad to hear someone else asking what she was thinking.

“It should,” Peri’s colourfully clad Doctor replied, checking the jumper cables attached to the roots of the tree where they entered the gelatinous dome. Most of the tree had disintegrated already, only the intertwining vines forming a husk that retained the shape it had once had. Less than a meter of intact tree remained. If it deteriorated much further, the roots would separate.

The black-haired Doctor was fine tuning the visualizer. It showed a scene of the desolate field they’d been standing on before the grenade went off. There was a hint of root tips at the bottom of the screen.

Peri jumped when she looked at the dome and saw the large facet fizzle with light, then settle into the same view. “Look!” she pointed.

“That’s it!” the black-haired Doctor said. He locked down something on the visualizer and ran over to the tree.

“Are you sure you want to go back there?” Peri asked. “I mean, couldn’t you arrive somewhere less dangerous? You said you were in the middle of a revolution.”

“We have to go back,” the Doctor said. “Our work isn’t done yet.”

Peri nodded. She’d helped her own share of revolutions. They couldn’t just walk away before the work was done. People’s lives depended on them.

She shrugged. Then stepped forward and held out a hand to be shaken. “Be safe,” she said. “Or as safe as one of you guys can be,” she added with fond exasperation.

He grinned a rakish smile at her and leaned down and kissed her hand. Her eyes popped wide in surprise. His lips were soft, and his day’s whiskers were scratchy. Her fingers tingled. He looked up at her with that one brilliant green eye. The eyepatch merely accented his lean, tanned good looks, he gave her a wink. Or, well, maybe he just blinked, she couldn’t tell with only one eye. But he was grinning.

Unnerved, she stepped back and turned to find the other Peri shaking her Doctor’s hand. “You wouldn’t look half bad if you got a decent coat,” she said.

“That’s what I keep telling him!” Peri yelled over, before she could stop herself. The black-haired Doctor looked down at her with an uplifted, teasing eyebrow. She coughed and trotted over to her Doctor, feeling weird.

“I will have both of you know, this coat is the height of fashion on Luka!” he said, adjusting his pink and yellow lapels with outraged dignity.

“No it’s not,” his other self said, stalking lightly up in his own impressive nautical outfit.

“Hah!” Peri said, pointing a finger triumphantly at her Doctor. “I knew it!”

Her Doctor ignored her. He shook hands with his other self, his broad freckled hand in his alter ego’s leaner tanned one. “Try to stay away from Stygian grenades this time,” he said.

“I’ll make sure he does,” the other Peri said. She picked up her leather jacket from where she’d left it over a boulder, she shrugged it on over her tube top, and checked her knife in her boot sheath. “Are you ready?” she asked her Doctor.

“We’ve got a war to get back to.”

He nodded.

The leather clad Peri strode up beside him, with an athletic determination that Peri could only envy. Her twin suddenly stopped, turned, trotted back and laid a deep wet kiss on Peri’s stunned blond Doctor. He stared at her wide eyed, rigid with shock. She pulled back and cocked her head at him. “Not bad.” She turned and looked at Peri who was staring at her gape-jawed.

“But mine’s better,” she said smugly.

“If you’re *quite* done, Peri.” the black-haired pirate called. She ran back over to him, sashaying a bit.

Peri stared after them, her mind completely blank. Through her shock she heard the pirate Doctor say to her other self, not quite softly enough. “So, you see,” he said, looking back over his shoulder at her and her Doctor, “our lives could have been worse.” The leather-clad Peri laughed.

He smiled back, a slashing, pirate’s smile. “Come on, Peri,” he took her hand and they stepped into the shimmering dome. “We’ve got people to enslave.”

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