

Typical. The Doctor had promised me this trip would be trouble-free and I end up like this.

"I'm dying, " I said. Actually it was more like I groaned. I can't even remember the last time I'd felt this bad.

Or even the last time I'd been sick. Maybe when I was a kid and brought the stomach flu home from school? Even that didn't compare to how I felt.

"Nonsense" the Doctor said, doing that look of his where he looks like a snooty cat expecting a treat. "Never heard such rampant piffle in my life."

It's so weird. Have you ever felt hot, then cold all at once? Because my body couldn't decide if it was boiling over or freezing. And whatever this virus was, it was eating my strength. Eating might've been an understatement. Making a meal of it as if it were pudding was more like it. I closed my eyes, wanting to

just cocoon myself. I gave the Doctor a look. "Doctor, I want the truth."

"It is." He helped me lean up on the fur that currently served as my pillow while I sat on the one acting as my mattress.

I felt something soft land on me- his coat! I could've said something, but as bad as I felt it was kind of reassuring. Something bright in the middle of a lot of browns and greys. Like this blanket my mom used to wrap me in when I was scared.

"I've stewed a few of those alaela leaves you were looking at earlier," he said. I frowned. The Doctor may dress like a clown ninety-eight percent of the time, he sure got on edge a lot. . "Now, drink up, it'll do you the world of good."

"Is it safe?" It didn't smell safe. As much as I wanted to keep a cutting, whatever he'd done to the leaves smelled like yeast and old milk. Utterly disgusting!

Wrinkling my nose, I could feel the Doctor's hand on my shoulder tighten.

"Nothing's safe, Peri" he remarked, thankfully keeping the cup a few feet away from my nose before explaining how if the stuff worked, it would help my body fight the infection without any interference. Then added, in plain English , "Exactly what you need just now."

"And if it doesn't work?" I had to ask. Though when he used the words "healing coma," "fever," and "permanent" (even if the odds weren't likely), I wished I hadn't.

Boy, for someone who calls himself a doctor, he's got the worst bedside manner.

"Told you I was dying." If I had the strength to do anything, I wonder if a jury on any planet would've convicted me right then?

He gave me another one of his looks. " Yes, and if you do, I shall carve that on your gravestone for you, but I don't believe there'll be any need. Come on, Peri. You're not going to get better if you don't do what your Doctor tells you."

See what I mean?

Sighing, I let him bring the cup up to my lips. The smell had been bad enough, but the taste? "It's vile, Doctor! I'd rather be dead!" There was no way I was going to choke that down.

"Peri," the Doctor said, in that voice that you'd use if disciplining a child.

I drank it.

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How long was I asleep? Hours? Days even? Because when I opened my eyes, I was back in the TARDIS!

It had never felt so good to see those white walls. My legs felt like jelly and I worried if I got up too fast, I'd topple over. But at least I felt more like a human. Out of the corner of my eye, I couldn't help noticing a familiar splash of colors. Had he really been here the whole time?

" Ah," he said. "You made it. I was beginning to wonder - after all, if there's anyone I've ever known who'd die just to prove her point, it would be you."

Well, thanks, Doctor. "Hey!"

"Happily, however, it turns out you're as tough as old boots."

What to say to that? The Doctor could be the most stubborn, arrogant, and argumentative man I've ever met. But he also doesn't like to lose. And you know what? Neither do I. Amazing how many times that's worked in my favor. I guess I owe the Doctor for this.

