

Autumn

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Autumn

by [Kalya_Lee](#)

Summary

Her girl comes with the mind of a thief and the spirit of a warrior, and her hair like flame and falling leaves, like endings, always endings, endings and beginnings.

When her girl goes, she does not mourn - her girl is autumn, and autumn always comes back.

Notes

After clicking the refresh button on the Doctor Who pairing generator page about a million times, I came up with:

Donna Noble/The TARDIS/Autumn.

This, I suppose, is that story.

He mourns her wolf, floating her over a patch of dead space, and the tears dry hard on his cheeks.

She had loved (*will love, is loving, in a way that is present and not aching past like her thief's*) her wolf, too, the little golden child who dared to see her, who came back (*and comes back and is always coming back*), and she aches for her thief and for the way that linear beings are always losing each other, but she does not mourn.

In a moment that layers close to this one a girl comes, with the mind of a thief and the spirit of a

warrior, and her hair like flame and falling leaves, like endings, always endings, endings and beginnings. Her girl (*woman, adult, but they are all children to her, so young and innocent*) tastes like a thousand unyielding things all wrapped in Huon gold, and in a moment close to this one she draws (*will draw, has drawn, is drawing*) them together, and this is right.

Her thief cannot see her girl, cannot see past the darkness of the loss in his chest, and so he mourns while she does not. But then she is always seeing things that he cannot see.

She drifts, for him, over dying stars and licks of light and burning nothing, because she loves him, but she does not mourn. She waits.

(In some sense, then, she has always waited, will always wait, is always waiting.)

The linear beings think she doesn't feel the days like they do, and they are mostly right. She doesn't feel days like most of them, like links in a chain, trapping and binding and only ever going in one direction. She doesn't feel them like her thief and his people, either, like a smooth string to be doubled back and twisted and stolen and tied into Gordian knots but always looking only forward.

Instead, for her, the days stack like sheets, one on top of the next, layer upon layer upon layer. She feels them all at once and slowly, and forever.

Sometimes new layers are added where-and-when she doesn't see them coming (*burning, burning, forests on fire*) and sometimes old layers die, never-to-have-been, but she feels them anyway, as ghosts of could-haves. Mostly the days stay, and they are past and future and always, always present.

She feels the days, but as possibles and impossibles and as finite infinity, and they weigh, one on top of the next, on the light she has instead of a back.

Her girl passes by so many times without seeing her that if she were the type to feel missed opportunity she would have screamed in frustration. As it is she tugs on the link between them, reels in the golden light as best she can, feels as close to impatient as it gets for her.

She waits. She is always waiting, for the end of this moment and the beginning of the next.

Her girl passes her, flame hair flying away, both *before* and *after*, but she doesn't blame her, not at all. Her girl is made of endings, and beginnings aren't her strength. Nothing to be done about that.

She tastes days like linear beings taste fruit, draws the words she uses to describe them from their heads. Succulent and fibrous, juicy and crackling, saccharine and acrid and savoury. Coffee and cocoa and melon. Flavours she knows but will never taste, that she understands and never will.

(Paradoxes like this can live, but only in her mind.)

Sundays taste of hearth and smoke and warm gin, and she likes them but her thief doesn't and so they are rare, a delicacy. Spring tastes of wildflower honey and strawberry cream, the summer is lemon and water and heat, the smell of hot dry earth; winter is ice and snow and sugar, dead and beautiful, bittersweet.

Autumn tastes of caramel and goodbye, is gold and red, is rich and sharp and brittle. It tastes of petrichor, of cleansing, and it is lovely and glowing and it aches.

The days of her thief are ash and champagne, but the days of her girl are heady and alluring and orange-burning, and they draw her and repulse her at the same time.

She loves the taste of autumn, but it has jaded her by now.

Her girl burns things, just like her thief does, and she feels glad. Her wolf had known her, but her girl knows *him*, in a way that neither of them (*yet*) understand. Her girl presses the button, and Pompeii burns, and time shudders and stills, and she feels a wrench of nauseating horror and the glow of horrible pride.

Her thief dreams of a forest on fire, not just in dawn but always burning, leaves felled by his hand, but he never tries to return. He runs (*has run and will keep running, forever, forever*) from the sparks he lights, and never turns around, lets his flame raze the ground behind him and leaves the ashes in his shadow.

Her girl sparks, too, but then she goes back. She wades through the ash and the fall of leaves and catches the ones she can, and races, futile but hopeful, to make right. Humans, she knows, believe that to catch a falling leaf is to grant themselves a wish. Her girl has no such illusions, but she does it anyway.

It doesn't make her love her any more, but it does let her see the difference: her thief runs, and her girl catches. Her thief will stay. Her girl will not.

She does not allow all of them to fly her.

With her thief, of course, she has few objections, although they both know that her sense of direction is better than his will ever be. With the pilots before him, she'd had little choice, but at least they'd steered her with almost gentle precision, even if it had been cold and calculating and disgustingly impersonal.

She allows a few humans to move her, as well. Her wolf had tried, pressing a button or pulling a lever with careful instruction and childish delight, and then she'd poured her heart into her and they'd flown away together. And one day, soon, she (*had, has*) will have a child, and she will let her child know her, and *they* will fly together as well.

Her girl is not her child, and her girl does not have her heart. But she lets the girl call her, lets the girl be called, responds gently to the movement of her girl's hands on her mind.

She lets her girl fly her, into the death of her wolf and the undoing of the Racnoss and the loss of Agatha Christie. She lets her girl fly her into the end, over and over again.

Her girl does not know. She does not mind.

She lets her girl see her, sometimes, lets her see all the complexities that lesser beings cannot hope to understand. Her girl is a lesser being, too, but for one shining moment she (*is not, was not*) will not be, and for her that moment is infinite, just another layer over all the others, and it is enough to

earn her love.

She makes corridors and she twists them in interesting directions, drops gold light through the vents in her girl's room, opens circuits and displays couplings as she walks past. She makes rooms that will make her girl laugh, which she only does (*only did, only will do*) for her thief, because for an eternal moment they are one and the same.

Her girl sees the room of filing cabinets and rolls her eyes. She opens a door to dark emptiness dancing with stars and gasps with fear and delight. And she goes into a room that is as ever-autumn as her mind, all red grass and silver leaves and fire sky, and just sits for hours and hours.

She can hear her girl's single heart beating faster, can feel the leap of joy she expected and the rush of sorrow she *should* have expected. She knows that her girl doesn't know why she's crying.

Her girl will understand, someday. It will only be for a moment, but to her all moments are forever.

The thing about autumn – it is an end, but it is beautiful.

When her girl goes, she is not surprised.

This is, of course, because she had seen and will see it coming, because time for her is *heavy* and wide instead of long and every moment is always past and future and *now*. But it is also because her girl is not infinite, not eternal – she is autumn, and she burns bright and undaunted, but she is also an ending, is wrapped up in endings, and she had always been waiting to burn out.

It is her thief that does it, in the end. He holds her girl in his arms like a fragile thing, and he steals her girl the way he'd stolen *her*; with desperation instead of remorse, and because he needs to run away and never stop running. He watches and she watches as their girl's eyes shine golden, and then he burns her out and burns her bare, holds her fallen leaves, aching and trembling in his shaking hands.

She is glad of it, she decides. She knows the peculiar weight of broken pieces, after all – sees it in the way her thief always flees like the ground is scorching his feet, feels it in the way he touches her like he has nothing else, when she knows he also has all the broken glass under his skin that he won't ever acknowledge. Her girl, though – her girl has been broken with no debris, and her girl is lost but she will never know it.

(This never is certain, in the unchangeable form – her girl has known but she will not know again, and the never cancels the future of the knowing, makes it unwritable, unsayable, unreal.)

There is something beautiful, she thinks, about the never.

Her girl passes her, on one of those days (*relatively*) after. She watches her go – her girl's eyes are as sharp as they've always been even without a golden glow, her hair is a deep fallen-leaf russet as it blows past, her steps crunch and crackle against the pavement.

Her thief is too busy hiding the loss beneath his flesh, and he does not see, and so she does not call out. She could, but she does not, did not, will not.

Even endings have an end, she knows; it would not be right.

He mourns her girl, flying her to somewhere he doesn't care to see, and the rain soaks through the clothes he does not change, and he pretends that the chill is all of what makes him shake.

She had loved (*will love, is loving*) her girl, too, but she does not mourn with him.

Instead, she waits, because her girl will not come back to her and yet she will. She waits because the days are layers for her, and every *then* is a *now* is a *soon*, and every ending is a beginning is an end.

She waits because she can taste it in the air and the minutes, already, rich and red and joy and loss, the autumn that has always come, will always come, is always coming for her. She waits, because her girl is autumn, and autumn always comes back.

She waits, and she loses, and she waits, and she waits, and she has, and she gains again.

(Somewhere, somewhen, the leaves are beginning to fall.)

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