

Chapter One — The Girl From New York Who Slept in London

London had a way of pretending it didn't notice you until it decided to step on your throat.

Shaina knew which streets did it politely and which did it with flair. She knew which alleys smelled like old beer and which smelled like resignation. She knew how long you could sit on a church step before someone asked you to move along, and how to make yourself small without disappearing. She had learned all this the way you learn a language you never wanted to speak—by necessity, by repetition, by keeping your mouth shut until you knew the rules.

She was twenty and already tired of being explained.

“Don't sleep here,” a man told her once, pointing at a doorway as if it were his personal moral jurisdiction.

“I wasn't planning on staying,” she'd said, sharp enough to cut glass. “Just passing through.”

She passed through everything these days.

She slept where the city softened: under scaffolding when it rained, on buses when it froze, near bakeries that threw out yesterday's bread before dawn. She prayed quietly, always quietly. No spectacle. No audience. Just the words and the ground and the direction she hoped was right. Sometimes it wasn't. Allah, she believed, understood geometry better than she did.

She hadn't meant to end up in London. Life had nudged her across an ocean the way it nudges people into exits they didn't see coming. New York still lived in her mouth—fast vowels, faster opinions. Queens, specifically. She carried it with her like a reflex, like a refusal to be grateful for inconvenience.

She was thinking about nothing in particular when the man with the ridiculous coat spoke.

“You walk like you're late for an argument,” he said.

She stopped. Slowly. Turned.

He was all angles and energy, hair doing something defiant with gravity, eyes too curious for a city that ate curiosity alive. He looked at her the way people look at puzzles they actually want to solve.

“And you talk like you're not from here,” she said.

He grinned. “Oh, definitely not.”

“Let me guess,” she said. “Midwest? Somewhere with opinions about milk?”

“Wrong continent,” he said cheerfully. “But you—New York.”

She narrowed her eyes. "Everyone says that."

"No," he said. "Everyone says America. You say New York. Queens, actually."

She stared at him.

"That's not impressive," she said. "That's creepy."

"Occupational hazard," he replied. "I notice things."

She adjusted the strap of her bag. "Good for you. Notice me leaving."

But he didn't move aside. He gestured instead, vaguely, like the street itself was part of a longer sentence.

"You look like someone who doesn't belong anywhere right now," he said. "Those are my favorite people."

She snorted. "You collect us or something?"

"Only temporarily."

That should have been her cue to walk away. Men who spoke in riddles were usually selling something, or worse—salvation. She had left one religion already that tried to tell her what she was for. She was not in the market for replacements.

"I don't need help," she said.

"I know," he replied. "I didn't offer it."

That stopped her.

"Then what are you doing?"

"Standing in the way of your evening," he said brightly. "Possibly your life."

She laughed despite herself, a short sound that surprised them both. "Wow. You really lean into it."

He tilted his head. "You pray."

Her smile vanished.

"Careful," she said.

He raised his hands immediately. "Didn't mean anything by it. Just—people who pray like you do usually have very good reasons."

“And people who comment on it usually have very bad ones,” she shot back.

“Fair,” he said. “For what it’s worth, I’m very bad at reasons.”

She studied him, the way you study a doorway when you’re not sure whether it leads somewhere or just deeper into trouble. The street felt suddenly narrow, like it was waiting to see what she’d choose.

“My name’s Shaina,” she said, because sometimes defiance looked like honesty.

His face lit up, like she’d handed him a gift.

“I’m the Doctor,” he said.

She blinked. “That’s not a name.”

“Neither is Doctor,” he said. “It’s a promise.”

She rolled her eyes. “Of course it is.”

He pointed past her, down the street. “Do you trust blue?”

She turned despite herself.

The box wasn’t there a second ago. She was sure of it. London did not produce miracles without warning, and yet there it stood—blue, absurd, stubbornly ordinary in a way that felt intentional.

“What,” she said carefully, “is that.”

“A door,” he said. “That doesn’t ask you to explain yourself.”

She looked at it. Then at him.

“I don’t believe in magic,” she said.

“Good,” he replied. “Neither do I.”

She hesitated. The city breathed around them, impatient. Somewhere nearby, a siren laughed.

“I pray to Allah,” she said suddenly, as if testing him. “That a problem?”

He smiled, gentle this time. “Only if you think God gets bored easily.”

She didn’t know why she followed him. Later, she would tell herself it was curiosity, or exhaustion, or the simple arithmetic of a warm place versus a cold street. Later stories always lie a little.

What she knew in that moment was this: the door was open, and for once, the ground did not tilt toward punishment.

She stepped inside.

Chapter Two — The TARDIS Is a House That Moves

The first thing Shaina noticed was that the door lied.

She stepped through expecting the usual trick—closets pretending to be rooms, rooms pretending to be mercy. Instead, the world opened. Not wide in the way museums open, not polished or impressed with itself, but patient, like it had been waiting to exhale.

Her foot froze mid-step.

“No,” she said flatly. “Absolutely not.”

The Doctor closed the door behind them with a fond little pat. “Ah. That tone. First-time reaction. Very healthy.”

Shaina turned in a slow circle. Railings. Staircases that went places staircases shouldn't. A central console that hummed like it had opinions. Lights that pulsed, not rhythmically, but attentively.

She looked back at the door. Then at him.

“You're going to explain this,” she said, “or I'm going to assume I died.”

“Oh, that's always flattering,” he said. “But no. Very much alive. Congratulations.”

She walked forward, hand brushing the railing, testing for solidity. It was real. Too real. Her stomach did a strange little lurch, the way it did when planes took off or truths landed.

“This is... what?” she demanded.

“This,” he said proudly, “is my ship.”

She laughed. It burst out of her before she could stop it. Loud. Disbelieving. A little hysterical.

“That's a room,” she said. “This is—this is a building.”

“It's bigger on the inside,” he said, beaming.

She pointed at him. “You don't get to say that like it's a normal sentence.”

“Oh, I absolutely do.”

She walked again, faster now, fingers trailing over metal, wood, glass. Doors opened into corridors. Corridors into rooms. A library swallowed her whole—shelves curving away like they'd given up on straight lines centuries ago.

"You live here," she said.

"Mostly," he replied. "Sometimes I visit."

She snorted. "Of course you do."

She wandered until she found a room that felt quieter than the others. Not empty—never empty—but calmer. A bed. A chair. A window that showed stars she did not recognize and somehow did not fear.

"This one," she said. "Mine."

The Doctor nodded immediately. "Done."

"No paperwork?"

"Paperwork is a slippery slope."

She dropped her bag. It landed softly, like the floor had decided to be kind. She sat on the edge of the bed, heart still racing, brain still filing complaints.

"I'm not staying forever," she said.

"Of course not," he replied easily. "Nobody ever does."

That landed heavier than he meant it to. She looked at him, searching for pity, for expectation, for obligation. Found none.

She waited until he turned away—busy with switches, levers, nonsense—and then she knelt.

The floor was cool. Solid. She oriented herself as best she could, guessing direction, trusting intention. She whispered the words she had learned to whisper, the ones that had carried her across oceans and thresholds and nights where God felt very far and very close at the same time.

Allah, she prayed. You see this.

You see me.

When she finished, she stayed there a moment longer, forehead touching the ground, letting her breath slow. When she stood, the Doctor was very deliberately looking at a monitor across the room.

“You don’t mind?” she asked.

He glanced back, startled. “Mind?”

“That,” she said, gesturing vaguely downward.

He smiled—not wide, not clever. Just honest. “Why would I?”

She exhaled something she hadn’t realized she’d been holding.

“So,” she said, folding her arms. “Spaceship. Bigger-on-the-inside nonsense. What do you call this thing?”

“The TARDIS,” he said. “She’s a bit temperamental, but very loyal.”

She raised an eyebrow. “She?”

“She chose it,” he said. “Long story.”

She nodded, accepting that in the same way she accepted gravity and grief. “Figures.”

She glanced around again, slower now. The fear had receded, replaced by something unfamiliar and dangerous.

Hope.

“This is,” she said carefully, “the only apartment I’ve lived in with infinite square footage and zero rent.”

He grinned. “You’ll ruin the market.”

She smirked back, Queens sharpness intact. “I already did.”

The engines began to hum, deeper now, like a breath being drawn.

“Where does it go?” she asked.

“Anywhere,” he said. “Everywhen.”

She felt the floor vibrate under her feet. Not threatening. Anticipatory.

She thought of London outside. Of doorways that closed. Of prayers whispered into concrete. Of a God who had followed her farther than she’d ever expected.

“Okay,” she said. “But just so we’re clear—I’m not here to be saved.”

The Doctor’s smile softened. “Good. I’d hate to disappoint you.”

The ship shuddered, then leapt.

And for the first time in a long while, Shaina didn't brace herself for impact.

Chapter Three — Time Is Not a Straight Line (Neither Is God)

The TARDIS did not move the way Shaina expected.

There was no forward lurch, no sensation of acceleration that your body could argue with. Instead, the room seemed to decide something, and then reality rearranged itself to comply. The hum deepened, not louder but wider, as if sound had learned how to occupy space.

Shaina grabbed the railing anyway. "I just want it on record that this is not how physics is supposed to work."

"Oh, it is," the Doctor said cheerfully, flicking switches with the casual intimacy of someone making tea. "Just not the bit of physics you were taught."

She watched him work, the way his hands moved without hesitation, confident in systems she couldn't yet see. The console lights reflected in his eyes, and for a moment she wondered—briefly, unwisely—how old he actually was.

"Where are we going?" she asked.

"Somewhere important," he said.

"That's not an answer."

"It's a warning."

The sound changed. The hum fell away. The room stilled.

The Doctor straightened. "All right. Ground rules."

She folded her arms. "I love rules. Big fan."

"This is a fixed point adjacent," he said. "You look. You listen. You do not interfere."

"Define interfere."

"You do nothing that makes history notice you."

She grimaced. "I'm already bad at that."

He gave her a look. "Try anyway."

The doors opened.

Heat hit her first—not suffocating, but heavy, like the air was holding memories. Stone underfoot, worn smooth by centuries of feet that had expected something to happen here. Voices layered over one another: arguing, bargaining, praying, waiting.

Jerusalem.

She didn't need him to say it. The city announced itself in her bones.

"Second Temple period," the Doctor murmured. "A little before everything goes terribly wrong."

"That narrows it down," she muttered.

They stood at the edge of a crowd. Men in prayer shawls. Women with baskets. Children darting between legs, unaware they were running through a hinge in history. Incense curled upward, not theatrically, but persistently.

Shaina's chest tightened.

"They're waiting," she said.

The Doctor nodded. "They always are."

She watched faces turned toward the Temple, toward heaven, toward futures that had not yet decided how cruel they would be. There was electricity in the air—not divine lightning, but tension. Expectation stretched thin enough to snap.

"They think something's coming," she said.

"Yes."

"Do you know if it is?"

He hesitated. Just a fraction. She noticed.

"I know what they think is coming," he said carefully.

She swallowed. "Messiah."

The word felt dangerous in her mouth. Heavy. A promise that history kept reusing.

She thought of her parents, of tables heavy with theology, of men arguing late into the night about timelines God refused to publish. She thought of the Rebbe she'd grown up hearing about, the waiting that never quite ended.

"They've been waiting a long time," she said.

"Time is relative," the Doctor replied. "Waiting is not."

She watched a man lift his eyes skyward, hope plain and almost painful on his face.

“In Islam,” she said slowly, “we’re taught that God is never late.”

The Doctor smiled faintly. “In Judaism?”

“We’re taught to argue about what ‘late’ even means.”

He laughed, surprised. “That tracks.”

A trumpet sounded somewhere. Not dramatic. Not apocalyptic. Just... functional. The crowd shifted, expectation tightening like a held breath.

Nothing happened.

Minutes passed. Maybe hours. The sun moved, indifferent to prophecy.

“They keep doing this,” she said, not accusing, just observing. “Expecting. Preparing. Rearranging their lives around something that might not arrive the way they think.”

“Yes,” he said. “That’s one way to build a civilization.”

She looked at him. “What’s the other?”

“Accepting that salvation doesn’t announce itself,” he said quietly. “It just... appears. Usually sideways.”

She turned back to the city, to the prayers rising and dissolving into air.

“I believe in Allah,” she said. “I believe God acts.”

“So do I.”

“But this,” she gestured, “this feels like people trying to trap God in a calendar.”

The Doctor didn’t answer right away.

“Time,” he said at last, “isn’t a straight line. It loops. Knots. Frays. People mistake anticipation for destiny.”

“And messiah?” she asked.

He looked at the Temple, at the waiting, at the silence that followed hope like a shadow.

“Messiah,” he said, “is less an arrival than a pressure.”

She frowned. “Pressure does what?”

“Eventually,” he said, “it forces change.”

A child laughed nearby. A woman shushed him gently. Life continued, unimpressed with theology.

Shaina felt something settle in her—not resolution, but clarity.

“So they’re not wrong,” she said. “They’re just early.”

The Doctor smiled, and for a moment, there was something almost sad in it. “Yes,” he said. “That happens a lot.”

The TARDIS doors opened behind them, patient as ever.

She took one last look at the city, at the waiting that would outlive everyone in it.

Then she turned away—not in rejection, but in understanding—and stepped back into the blue box that refused to obey straight lines.

Chapter Four — Mecca Before the Minarets

The heat was different here.

Not the punishing kind that chased you indoors, but the enveloping kind that pressed against the skin like a held breath. Shaina—still Shaina, not yet Samira—felt it the moment the TARDIS doors opened. Sand-colored light spilled in, flattening shadows, softening edges. The air smelled of dust, animals, and something older than ritual.

She knew where they were before the Doctor said it.

Mecca

But not the Mecca she knew.

No minarets cut the sky. No call threaded the air. The Kaaba stood solid and quiet, surrounded by people who circled it without choreography, without scripture telling them exactly how many steps to take or which words to say. It was devotion before instruction. Motion before law.

She swallowed.

“This is before,” she said.

“Yes,” the Doctor replied. “Before the words arrive to explain the feeling.”

They stood at a respectful distance. The Doctor’s hand hovered near the controls, ready to retreat if time so much as twitched.

Shaina watched the people—merchants pausing, travelers touching stone, families murmuring stories whose endings had not yet been written. No one announced God. No one argued doctrine. And yet—

“He’s here,” she whispered.

The Doctor glanced at her. “You feel it.”

She nodded. “That’s the problem. I wasn’t supposed to.”

She’d grown up with lines. Before and after. Revealed and unrevealed. This place blurred them. God did not wait for scripture. God did not ask permission.

“In Islam,” she said slowly, “we’re taught that revelation clarifies what already is.”

“Yes,” the Doctor said.

“But I thought that meant before was... lesser.” She frowned. “This doesn’t feel lesser.”

“No,” he agreed gently. “Truth doesn’t become true when it’s written down. It becomes portable.”

A man passed carrying water. A child laughed and ran in a careless circle around the stone. Shaina felt her chest tighten, not with fear, but recognition.

She had prayed in borrowed corners, whispered words into cold concrete, trusted that direction mattered less than intention. Standing here, she understood why that trust had held.

“Allah didn’t start with rules,” she said. “He started with presence.”

The Doctor smiled, pleased. “You’re very good at noticing beginnings.”

She folded her arms, eyes still fixed on the Kaaba. “Don’t get used to it.”

They stayed longer than she expected. Time did not rush them. No miracle demanded witnessing. No angel needed to announce itself. God was not in a hurry.

When they returned to the TARDIS, Shaina did not speak right away. She went to her room, closed the door, and knelt.

This time, she didn’t guess direction. She simply faced what felt right.

Her prayer was steadier now. Less apologetic. She asked for guidance, not escape. When she finished, she stayed on the floor a moment longer, letting the quiet settle.

Later, she found the Doctor by the console.

“You okay?” he asked.

She nodded. “Yeah. Just recalibrating.”

“Good idea,” he said. “Travel does that.”

She hesitated. “So—God was there before the book.”

“Yes.”

“And that doesn’t mess anything up?”

He considered. “Only if you think faith needs a timestamp.”

She smiled, small and sharp. “Figures.”

The engines began to hum again, familiar now. Less like a threat. More like an invitation.

“Where to next?” she asked.

The Doctor’s fingers danced over the controls. “Somewhere with thunder.”

She groaned. “Of course it is.”

But when the ship leapt, her hands stayed loose on the railing.

Her faith did too.

Chapter Five — Sinai Without Thunder

If Shaina was expecting drama, Sinai disappointed her.

There was no fire licking the sky, no mountain cracking itself open to make a point. No voice booming on a schedule. Just rock and wind and people—so many people—arguing with the confidence of those who believed God had already spoken and now expected clarification.

“This is it?” she asked, squinting at the ridge. “No lightning? No cosmic theatrics?”

The Doctor checked a readout. “Afraid not. You missed the special effects by a few centuries.”

She crossed her arms. “Figures. Jews get revelation and then immediately start filing complaints.”

He laughed. “Ah, you have been paying attention.”

They stood at a distance, unseen, watching a cluster of elders argue over phrasing. Not what God said—that part was settled—but what God meant. Voices rose. Hands gestured. Someone stormed off, only to return five minutes later with a better argument.

Shaina felt something in her chest loosen.

“This,” she said slowly, “this is familiar.”

The Doctor glanced at her. “Careful. That way lies identity crises.”

She ignored him. “In Islam, revelation is... final. Perfect. Preserved. The argument is how to live up to it.” She watched a man jab a finger toward the mountain in exasperation. “Here, it’s like revelation is just the beginning of the fight.”

“Yes,” the Doctor said. “Judaism treats God less like a decree and more like a conversation partner who refuses to clarify His emails.”

She snorted. “That explains so much.”

A woman passed carrying water, rolling her eyes at the men debating behind her. A child tugged at her robe, bored with theology already.

Shaina thought of prayer lines memorized in Arabic, the comfort of repetition, the certainty of knowing the words were right even when life wasn’t. She thought of her parents’ table, arguments that went late into the night, questions that never quite landed.

“I believe in Allah,” she said quietly. “In His oneness. His clarity.”

“So do many Jews,” the Doctor replied mildly.

She frowned. “They don’t act like it.”

“They act like people who think God can handle disagreement.”

That landed.

She watched the argument crest and dissolve, reforming around a new angle. No one stormed heaven. No one demanded a miracle. They stayed. They wrestled. They remembered.

“So revelation didn’t end confusion,” she said.

“No,” the Doctor said. “It legitimized it.”

She felt a strange affection for the scene. Not for the noise, but for the refusal to simplify. For the audacity of standing at the foot of a mountain and insisting that God explain Himself better.

“In Islam,” she said, choosing her words carefully, “submission isn’t silence. It’s trust. But here—”

“Here,” the Doctor finished, “trust looks like argument.”

She nodded. “And somehow... that doesn’t feel like betrayal.”

A gust of wind kicked up dust. The mountain remained unimpressed.

They returned to the TARDIS without ceremony. No tablets. No glow. Just understanding carried quietly back inside a blue box that had seen too much to be impressed by thunder.

As the doors closed, Shaina lingered.

“I don’t think believing in Allah cancels this,” she said. “The arguing. The memory. The stubbornness.”

The Doctor smiled, gentle and unsurprised. “No. It just means you’ve got more than one way to listen.”

The engines hummed.

“And,” he added, “Sinai’s never done talking. People just stop climbing.”

Shaina rested her hand on the railing, feeling the vibration steady under her palm.

“Good,” she said. “I hate neat endings.”

The TARDIS leapt, carrying her onward—toward waiting, toward questions, toward a name she had not yet chosen.

Chapter Six — The Lubavitcher Rebbe and the Problem of Waiting

The Doctor did not take her anywhere at first.

That alone made Shaina suspicious.

They stayed inside the TARDIS as it drifted—idling between moments the way some people hovered between decisions. The hum was softer than usual, contemplative, like the ship itself had decided not to interrupt.

“You’re stalling,” she said, arms crossed.

“I prefer listening,” the Doctor replied. “You’ve been thinking very loudly.”

She rolled her eyes. “You ever notice how men say that when they want you to talk first?”

He grinned. “Constantly. Works more often than it should.”

She paced once around the console, then stopped. “There was a man,” she said. “A rabbi. A Rebbe.”

The Doctor waited.

“Menachem Mendel Schneerson,” she continued. “The Lubavitcher Rebbe. My parents talked about him like—like the world was holding its breath around him.”

“Yes,” the Doctor said softly. “I know the type.”

“He never said he was the messiah,” Shaina went on. “But people needed him to be. Needed time to mean something. Needed the waiting to end.”

She leaned against the railing, gaze unfocused. “And then he died. And the waiting didn’t.”

“No,” the Doctor agreed. “It rarely does.”

She looked at him sharply. “So tell me. Does messiah come through him or not?”

The question hung there, heavier than it should have been.

The Doctor didn’t deflect. Didn’t joke. Didn’t pretend it was unanswerable.

“Yes,” he said.

She let out a breath she hadn’t realized she was holding. Then frowned. “That was too easy.”

“Oh, it gets worse,” he said. “Just not the way you expect.”

She waited.

“Messiah,” he said, choosing his words with care, “isn’t always a person. Sometimes it’s a delay. A distortion in time that forces everyone else to decide whether they’ll act without guarantees.”

Shaina scoffed. “That’s very convenient.”

“Truth often is,” he replied.

She pushed off the railing. “You’re saying he mattered because he didn’t finish the story.”

“Yes.”

“That’s cruel.”

“Yes.”

She laughed then—short, sharp, very Queens. “Wow. Jews really did invent the most emotionally high-maintenance theology on Earth.”

The Doctor smiled. “And yet.”

“And yet,” she echoed, quieter now.

She thought of the streets of London. Of prayers whispered without witnesses. Of Mecca before minarets. Of Sinai without thunder. Of a people who survived by remembering rather than arriving.

“In Islam,” she said slowly, “messiah isn’t the point. Guidance is. God sends what’s needed, when it’s needed.”

“And in Judaism?”

“In Judaism,” she said, “God sends waiting and asks what you’ll do with it.”

The Doctor’s eyes lit up. “Oh, you’re getting it.”

She made a face. “Don’t sound so proud. I’m not sure I like it.”

“That’s how you know it’s working.”

She was quiet for a long moment, listening to the TARDIS breathe.

“So,” she said at last, “you’re saying messiah comes through him—but sideways.”

“Very sideways.”

“And people keep mistaking anticipation for destiny.”

“Yes.”

She nodded. “That tracks. We’re very good at that.”

The Doctor moved to the controls. “Ready to keep going?”

She hesitated. “You ever wonder if all this waiting is just... avoidance?”

He looked at her, serious. “All the time.”

“And?”

“And sometimes,” he said, “waiting is the bravest thing people know how to do.”

The engines began to rise, the ship choosing a direction that was less a coordinate and more a question.

Shaina steadied herself, feeling something shift inside her—not certainty, not resolution, but a new tolerance for unfinished things.

“Okay,” she said. “Show me what comes after waiting.”

The TARDIS leapt.

And somewhere in the stretch between seconds, the pressure of messiah tightened—not toward arrival, but toward choice.

Chapter Seven — Naming Herself

The Doctor didn't notice it at first.

That annoyed her.

Not because she needed attention—she was aggressively allergic to needing things—but because she noticed. The shift had been happening for a while now, accumulating quietly the way cities do when you stop living in them. Something in her posture had changed. Her prayers had changed. Even the way she argued had gained a new patience, like she'd stopped trying to win and started trying to place things correctly in time.

They were between destinations again. The TARDIS drifted, lights low, like it knew better than to interrupt a private thought.

“Can I ask you something weird?” she said.

The Doctor didn't look up from the console. “Statistically speaking, that ship has sailed.”

She leaned against the railing, arms folded. “Do names expire?”

That got his attention. He turned, head tilted. “Ah,” he said. “That kind of weird.”

She stared down at the metal floor. “Shaina feels like... something that already happened. Like a coat I grew out of but keep carrying because it was expensive.”

He considered that. “Names are temporal anchors,” he said. “They tie you to a version of yourself the universe recognizes.”

“Yeah, well,” she muttered, “the universe needs an update.”

He smiled, not correcting her.

“I've been thinking,” she went on, faster now, New York rhythm kicking in when she was nervous. “About Mecca before rules. Sinai after revelation. Waiting without arrival. And—” she stopped, exhaled. “I don't feel less Jewish for believing in Allah. But I don't feel like the girl my parents named anymore either.”

“That happens,” the Doctor said gently. “Travel does that. Faith does that. Surviving does that.”

She looked up. “So if I change it...?”

“Time adjusts,” he said. “It always does. Eventually.”

She paced once, then stopped. “Samira.”

He raised an eyebrow. “Samira.”

“Yeah,” she said, testing it. “It means companion. Storyteller. Someone who stays up late talking because the night finally listens.”

The Doctor’s smile was immediate and sincere. “Oh, that’ll do nicely.”

She blinked. “That’s it? No warnings? No paradox alarms?”

“Oh, there are always paradox alarms,” he said lightly. “But names chosen honestly tend to settle in without too much fuss.”

She rolled her shoulders, like she was setting something down. “Good. Because I’m done carrying Shaina like an apology.”

“Important distinction,” he said. “You’re not erasing her.”

“I know,” Samira said, surprised by how natural it felt. “She got me here. But she doesn’t have to do the rest.”

The TARDIS lights shifted—subtle, almost imperceptible, like the ship was acknowledging a change in paperwork it had never required.

Samira laughed. “Did your ship just—”

“Yes,” the Doctor said. “She does that.”

“Of course she does.”

They stood there a moment, companionable silence settling between them.

“So,” the Doctor said at last, “Samira. Companion. Storyteller. Night-speaker. What do you want to see next?”

She didn’t answer immediately. Her mind went back to Jerusalem under Solomon—gold and power and absence. To arguments held in men’s voices. To the shape of stories that left women out and called it tradition.

“I want,” she said carefully, “to meet the women history keeps summarizing.”

The Doctor’s grin turned feral. “Oh. That’s dangerous.”

“Good,” Samira replied. “I’m bored of safe.”

He reached for the controls. “Any in particular?”

She thought of laughter and waiting. Of song after survival. Of judgment without permission. Of prayer that got misread.

“All of them,” she said. “Every Jewish prophetess.”

The TARDIS hummed, pleased.

“Well then,” the Doctor said, throwing a lever, “let’s start with someone who laughs at God.”

The ship leapt.

And Samira—named, anchored, no longer apologizing—held the railing steady as time rearranged itself to make room for her.

Chapter Eight — A New York Girl in the Court of Solomon

Gold was exhausting.

Samira felt it before she articulated it—the way opulence pressed in on you, demanding awe as payment for existing. Columns gleamed. Floors reflected faces back at themselves. The air smelled like incense and certainty.

“Wow,” she said flatly. “This is... a lot.”

The Doctor glanced at her, amused. “You don’t seem impressed.”

“I’m from New York,” she replied. “If something costs this much, I assume it’s compensating.”

They stood at the edge of the court of Solomon, invisible and unremarkable in a place designed to make everyone feel small. Officials moved with practiced reverence. Petitioners waited, rehearsing gratitude. Power here was quiet, heavy, and very pleased with itself.

Samira watched Solomon listen—really listen—head tilted, fingers steepled. Wisdom, undeniable. She felt it. Felt the weight of a mind that could hold contradictions without flinching.

“He’s brilliant,” she admitted.

“Yes,” the Doctor said. “Genuinely.”

“But,” Samira added, eyes scanning the room, “where are the women?”

The Doctor didn’t answer immediately.

She followed the line of authority with her gaze. Advisors. Scribes. Guards. Judges. The architecture itself seemed to funnel attention toward male voices, male decisions, male certainty.

“Don’t tell me they’re all at home,” she said. “Because I don’t buy that.”

“They’re here,” the Doctor said. “Just... off-script.”

Samira watched a woman pass behind a pillar, carrying documents. Another murmured something sharp into a man's ear before stepping back into shadow. Influence without attribution. Presence without credit.

"In Islam," Samira said slowly, "God speaks clearly. Even when people mess it up, the voice is there." She gestured around them. "Here, it's like wisdom gets redistributed. Diluted. You have to hunt for it."

"Judaism doesn't centralize truth," the Doctor replied. "It disperses it."

She nodded. "Yeah. And somehow that means the women end up carrying it quietly."

They observed a case unfold—two voices arguing, Solomon weighing, the court holding its breath. The judgment was elegant. Fair. Applauded.

Samira clapped once, softly. "Okay. Respect."

Then she exhaled. "Still missing something."

The Doctor smiled knowingly. "Go on."

"Stories," she said. "The ones that don't end in thrones." She looked back at the gold. "This place remembers outcomes. I want the process."

She thought of waiting. Of laughter that came late. Of prayers misread and catastrophes quietly prevented. Of women whose names were footnotes until they weren't.

"I want," she said, voice firm now, "to meet every Jewish prophetess."

The Doctor's eyebrows rose. "Every?"

"Every," Samira repeated. "I want to hear how God sounds when He's not trying to impress anyone."

The TARDIS hummed faintly behind them, like it approved of difficult itineraries.

"Careful," the Doctor said. "Once you start pulling on those threads—"

"—the whole tapestry shows," Samira finished. "Yeah. That's the point."

She took one last look at the court—at wisdom gilded and archived—then turned away without regret.

As the blue doors closed behind them, Samira felt something settle into place. Not defiance. Intention.

She wasn't here to replace kings.

She was here to remember the women who taught time how to wait.

Chapter Nine — Sarah Laughs

They arrived at dusk, when the air cooled just enough to make breathing feel like a gift instead of a chore.

There were tents—real ones, not the romantic kind—and the smell of bread baked too close to the fire. Animals shifted and snorted, impatient with the slowness of human time. Everything about the place said temporary, which Samira was starting to recognize as one of history's favorite lies.

She knew who it was before she saw her face.

Sarah did not look like the paintings.

She was older than expectation and sharper than myth. Her hands moved with the confidence of someone who had kept a household alive long enough to stop pretending patience was a virtue. When she laughed, it wasn't delicate. It was dry. It had edges.

Samira froze.

"Oh," she said quietly. "You're that laugh."

Sarah glanced up, eyes narrowing—not in alarm, but assessment. "And you're very far from where you think you're supposed to be."

Samira smiled despite herself. "Story of my life."

They sat near the fire. The Doctor kept his distance, wisely deciding this was not his chapter.

Sarah spoke first. "You came for a miracle?"

Samira shook her head. "I came for the waiting."

That earned her another laugh—short, approving.

"Good," Sarah said. "Miracles are overrated. Waiting is where the damage happens."

Samira swallowed. "They always tell the story like you doubted."

Sarah snorted. "I laughed because it was absurd. There's a difference."

Samira felt something loosen in her chest. She had been told her whole life that belief required quiet reverence, that laughter near God was a failure of discipline.

"In Islam," she said carefully, "we're taught that God's timing is perfect."

Sarah raised an eyebrow. “And?”

“And in Judaism,” Samira continued, “it feels like God’s timing is... negotiable. Or at least open to commentary.”

Sarah poked at the fire. “God promised. I waited. The waiting aged me. That’s the truth they don’t like to tell.”

Samira nodded. “So waiting isn’t passive.”

“No,” Sarah said flatly. “It’s endurance. It’s carrying a future your body isn’t ready for.”

Samira thought of her own life—of doors that closed slowly enough to hurt, of prayers answered sideways, of a faith that taught submission and a heritage that taught argument.

“I believe in Allah,” she said. “But I’m still a Jewish woman.”

Sarah looked at her, really looked at her this time. “Of course you are. God doesn’t erase women. People do.”

That landed like a blessing Samira hadn’t known she was waiting for.

Sarah stood, joints protesting, dignity intact. “If you’re going to keep going,” she said, “remember this: the promise doesn’t make you holy. What you do while waiting does.”

The fire crackled. The air cooled.

When Samira turned back toward the Doctor, her eyes were wet—but steady.

“So,” he said gently, “first prophetess?”

She nodded. “Yeah.”

“And?”

Samira smiled, tired and clear. “She taught me that laughing at God isn’t disbelief. It’s honesty.”

The TARDIS doors opened behind them, patient as ever.

As they stepped inside, Samira carried something new with her—not certainty, not prophecy, but permission.

To wait.

To endure.

And to laugh anyway.

Chapter Ten — Miriam After the Sea

They arrived to sound before sight.

Drums. Feet striking earth in unison. Breath turning into rhythm. The air vibrated with movement that refused to be quiet about survival.

Samira stumbled half a step as the TARDIS doors opened. “Okay—wow. This is loud.”

The Doctor smiled, already fond. “You’re late to a party that waited a very long time to start.”

The sea lay behind them, calm now, innocent in the way only disasters that have finished can afford to be. The people—her people, Samira realized with a jolt—were singing. Not the careful singing of ritual, not the restrained harmony of prayer, but something wild and bodily and unapologetic.

At the center of it all stood Miriam.

She danced like someone who had no intention of ever explaining herself.

Miriam’s tambourine flashed in the sun, catching light the way laughter catches breath. Her feet were bare. Her hair was loose. She sang not about God, but because God had not let them drown.

Samira felt tears rise without warning.

“This,” she whispered, “this is after.”

“Yes,” the Doctor said softly. “That’s important.”

They watched as Miriam led the women—only the women—into song. No men corrected the tempo. No one told her to lower her voice. This was not instruction. It was memory taking shape in muscle and sound.

“In Islam,” Samira said slowly, “we name God before everything. Before the danger. Before the crossing.”

Miriam spun, laughing, and the women followed.

“And in Judaism?” the Doctor asked.

Samira watched the sea, the bodies, the joy that came after terror. “In Judaism, God gets named after survival. After the body knows it’s safe.”

Miriam caught Samira’s eye.

Just for a second.

Her smile widened—not surprised, not curious. Recognizing.

She broke from the circle and came closer, tambourine still in motion. “You sing?”

Samira blinked. “I—pray.”

Miriam laughed. “Same thing. Different timing.”

Samira hesitated. “What if I don’t know the words?”

Miriam shrugged. “Then you know the rhythm.”

She handed Samira the tambourine.

The Doctor raised his eyebrows but wisely said nothing.

Samira’s hands trembled as she took it. She thought of prayer lines memorized in Arabic, of careful posture, of submission measured and precise. She thought of Sarah laughing, of waiting etched into bone.

She struck the tambourine once.

Then again.

The rhythm found her before she found it. Her feet moved. Her breath joined the others. Her voice—unpolished, untrained—rose anyway.

For the first time, Samira understood something essential:

Judaism did not fear the body.

It trusted it to remember God when language failed.

When the song finally slowed, Miriam rested a hand on Samira’s shoulder.

“Don’t rush the gratitude,” she said. “It’s part of the crossing.”

Samira nodded, chest aching. “Thank you.”

Miriam tilted her head. “For what?”

“For teaching me that faith can come after,” Samira said. “That joy isn’t denial.”

Miriam grinned. “Oh, joy is defiance.”

When they returned to the TARDIS, Samira’s hands still buzzed with rhythm.

She found herself humming as she walked—quiet, instinctive, unselfconscious.

The Doctor noticed. “Careful,” he said lightly. “You’ll start enjoying this.”

She shot him a look. “Don’t push it.”

But she didn’t stop humming.

And somewhere between the sea and the stars, Samira learned that survival could sing—and that God did not mind being praised out of order.

Chapter Eleven — Deborah Under the Palm

There was no spectacle.

That was the first thing Samira noticed—and the second, and the third.

No crowd pressed in. No guards stood watch. No architecture tried to convince anyone of importance. Just a palm tree offering its shade like a practical kindness, and beneath it a woman sitting upright, attentive, unmistakably in charge.

Deborah did not look up when they arrived.

Good, Samira thought. Neither do I, usually.

“She doesn’t need an announcement,” the Doctor murmured, mostly to himself.

Deborah spoke without lifting her eyes. “If you’re here to be impressed, you’re wasting your time.”

Samira smiled. “I’m from New York. I don’t impress easy.”

That earned her a glance—sharp, measuring, satisfied.

“Good,” Deborah said. “Sit.”

Samira sat. The Doctor stayed back, arms folded, watching with the quiet reverence of someone who knew when he was unnecessary.

People approached Deborah one by one. Arguments. Disputes. Fear dressed up as righteousness. Deborah listened. Asked one question—sometimes two—and then decided. No prayer aloud. No visible appeal to heaven. Just judgment, delivered cleanly.

Samira leaned forward. “You don’t—” She stopped herself. Rephrased. “You don’t ask God first.”

Deborah’s mouth twitched. “I already did.”

Samira frowned. “When?”

“When I accepted responsibility.”

That hit harder than thunder ever could.

“In Islam,” Samira said carefully, “submission comes first. You listen. You obey. You trust that God’s law is sufficient.”

Deborah nodded once. “And in Judaism?”

Samira watched Deborah resolve another dispute with a sentence that cut clean through pretense. “In Judaism,” she said slowly, “it feels like God hands you the law and says, Now don’t embarrass Me.”

Deborah laughed—short, approving. “That’s about right.”

Samira’s chest tightened. This was the difference she’d been circling without naming it. Islam taught her how to bow without breaking. Judaism demanded she stand and decide.

“But what if you’re wrong?” Samira asked. “What if you misjudge?”

Deborah finally turned fully toward her. “Then you live with the consequences. That’s the covenant.”

Samira thought of messiah talk. Of waiting. Of people hoping history would arrive fully formed so they wouldn’t have to risk error.

“So you’re not waiting for salvation,” she said.

“No,” Deborah replied. “I’m preventing collapse.”

Samira felt it then—the inheritance she hadn’t known how to claim. Not prophecy as vision, but prophecy as responsibility. The obligation to act even when heaven remained silent.

“I believe in Allah,” Samira said. “In His oneness. His justice.”

Deborah studied her. “Good. Justice is transferable.”

The palm leaves rustled overhead. Somewhere nearby, a child laughed. Life went on, unconcerned with theology.

As they returned to the TARDIS, Samira glanced back once more.

Deborah was still there. Still listening. Still deciding.

The Doctor fell into step beside her. “That one tends to unsettle people.”

Samira nodded. “She didn’t tell me what God wants.”

“No,” he agreed. “She told you what you owe.”

Samira rested her hand on the railing as the doors closed, grounding herself.

Judaism, she realized, did not ask her to submit her will.

It asked her to use it.

And Allah, she thought—not for the first time—was strong enough to survive that.

Chapter Twelve — Chana and the Misread Prayer

The place was quiet enough to make sound feel like a transgression.

Stone walls held the air still, as if breath itself were being asked to behave. A lamp burned low. Somewhere nearby, a door creaked and settled again, unimpressed with holiness.

Samira felt it immediately—the pressure to perform.

“This is familiar,” she murmured.

The Doctor nodded. “Sacred spaces tend to attract opinions.”

They stood off to the side, unremarkable, as a woman knelt alone near the sanctuary. Her lips moved, but no sound came out. Her shoulders trembled, not theatrically, but with the effort of staying upright under something heavy and private.

Chana.

Samira’s chest tightened.

Chana prayed without choreography. No raised voice. No careful posture. Just intention leaking out wherever it could find an opening. Her mouth formed words that never crossed the air. Her eyes burned with a focus that bordered on defiance.

A man approached—authority in his stance, certainty in his frown. He watched her for a moment too long.

“She’s drunk,” he muttered, loud enough to be heard.

Samira stiffened. “Oh, come on.”

The Doctor said nothing, watching with the grave stillness of someone who knew how often holiness got misfiled as disruption.

Chana looked up then, startled—not ashamed. “No,” she said quietly. “I am pouring out my soul.”

The man hesitated, recalibrating. He muttered something that sounded like apology and retreated, dignity bruised but intact.

Samira exhaled slowly.

“In Islam,” she said under her breath, “prayer is structured. Words, times, movements. You can tell when someone’s praying because it looks like prayer.”

“And here?” the Doctor asked.

“Here,” Samira said, watching Chana bow her head again, “prayer looks like breaking the rules politely.”

Chana finished and sat back on her heels, exhausted. Samira felt the echo of it in her own body—the familiar ache of being misunderstood while doing something sacred.

She stepped forward without quite deciding to.

Chana looked up, eyes sharp but kind. “Did you need something?”

Samira shook her head. “I just wanted to say... I recognized it.”

Chana studied her, then smiled—not wide, not relieved. Seen.

“God listens even when language fails,” Chana said. “Especially then.”

Samira swallowed. “Sometimes I worry that believing in Allah makes my prayer... suspicious. Like I don’t belong anywhere cleanly.”

Chana’s smile deepened. “Prayer doesn’t belong to institutions,” she said. “It belongs to the desperate.”

That settled something Samira hadn’t known was still loose.

She thought of prayer mats and whispered Arabic, of bowing and rising, of certainty carried in repetition. She thought of Jewish prayer—argumentative, emotional, too loud or too quiet depending on who was watching.

“Islam taught me how to show up,” Samira said. “Judaism taught me how to keep showing up even when I’m misread.”

Chana nodded. “Good. You’ll need both.”

When they left, Samira lingered at the threshold, glancing back at the woman whose prayer had been mistaken for a problem.

The Doctor joined her. “You okay?”

She nodded. “Yeah. I just—” She smiled faintly. “I’m realizing God doesn’t need me to be legible.”

The TARDIS doors closed behind them with a soft, approving thud.

As the engines began to hum, Samira rested her forehead briefly against the cool metal railing.

Prayer, she understood now, was not about being understood.

It was about refusing to stop speaking anyway.

Chapter Thirteen — Abigail Stops a War

They arrived on the edge of catastrophe.

Samira felt it before she saw it—the tightness in the air, the way intention sharpened into inevitability. Men moved with purpose that had already decided it was righteous. Weapons were checked. Grievances rehearsed.

“Please tell me this is a drill,” Samira said.

The Doctor glanced at the readings. “Afraid not. We’re just in time to watch everything go wrong.”

She grimaced. “We’re always just in time.”

Ahead of them, a small group prepared for violence that would later be described as necessary. David’s men were angry, hungry, insulted, and fully convinced God was on their side. History loved moments like this. They were tidy. They fit into verses.

And then a woman rode into the space between them.

Abigail did not shout.

She did not accuse. She did not invoke thunder or prophecy or destiny. She dismounted calmly, as if interrupting a meeting rather than a massacre, and spoke with the precision of someone who understood exactly how close everyone was to damnation.

Samira leaned forward, breath held.

Abigail spoke of consequences. Of blood that would stain hands unnecessarily. Of futures that would be narrowed by one impulsive act. She appealed not to mercy, but to foresight.

David listened.

That alone felt miraculous.

“She didn’t wait for God to speak,” Samira whispered.

“No,” the Doctor said. “She spoke instead.”

The violence dissolved—not dramatically, not cleanly, but enough. Enough that people lived. Enough that history would later pretend this had always been the plan.

Samira felt something click.

“In Islam,” she said slowly, “justice is tied to obedience. You submit to God’s law so the world doesn’t tear itself apart.”

“And here?” the Doctor prompted.

“Here,” Samira said, watching Abigail remount her donkey without waiting for applause, “holiness is what you stop from happening.”

They followed Abigail as she rode away, uncelebrated, unrecorded. Samira approached her, careful not to intrude.

“You saved lives,” Samira said.

Abigail looked at her, puzzled. “I prevented foolishness,” she replied. “Saving comes later.”

Samira smiled. “You didn’t have to.”

Abigail’s gaze sharpened. “Yes,” she said. “I did.”

That stayed with Samira as they returned to the TARDIS.

Judaism, she realized, did not wait for purity before acting. It did not require certainty. It demanded intervention even when prophecy was inconvenient.

“I believe in Allah,” Samira said quietly as the doors closed. “In divine justice.”

The Doctor nodded. “And now?”

“And now,” Samira continued, “I understand why Jews don’t wait for heaven’s permission to stop hell.”

The engines hummed, deep and steady.

Samira rested her hand on the railing, feeling the vibration settle into her bones.

Messiah, she thought, was not always about arrival.

Sometimes messiah was about interruption.

Chapter Fourteen — Chuldah Guards the Text

The room smelled like ink and dust and patience.

Samira noticed it immediately—the particular stillness of places where nothing is expected to happen, only to be remembered correctly. Shelves pressed close, heavy with scrolls that had survived kings, fires, reforms, and enthusiasm. Light filtered in reluctantly, as if even the sun understood it was a guest here.

“This feels... dangerous,” Samira said.

The Doctor nodded. “Archives always are.”

They found her seated near a low table, unbothered by their arrival.

Chuldah looked like someone who had outlived novelty and was not impressed by its return.

She did not ask who they were.

She did not ask why they had come.

She simply said, “If you’re looking for something new, you won’t find it here.”

Samira smiled. “I’m looking for something true.”

Chuldah’s eyes flicked up—sharp, interested despite herself. “That’s harder.”

Samira stepped closer, scanning the scrolls. “You guard the texts.”

“I guard memory,” Chuldah corrected. “Text is just how memory stays put.”

Samira thought of the Qur’an—preserved, precise, carried intact across centuries like a promise sealed against corrosion. She thought of Jewish texts—layered, argued with, footnoted into near rebellion.

“In Islam,” she said slowly, “revelation is preserved so it can’t be altered.”

Chuldah snorted softly. “And in Judaism, revelation survives because it’s altered.”

Samira frowned. “Doesn’t that risk corruption?”

Chuldah leaned back. “Doesn’t preservation risk stagnation?”

The question sat between them, not hostile—alive.

Chuldah reached for a scroll and unrolled it partway. Marginal notes crowded the edges, voices layered over voices.

“This is what people miss,” she said. “God spoke. Then humans listened. Then humans argued. That argument is part of the covenant.”

Samira felt a familiar restlessness stir—her Jewish inheritance waking up like a muscle she hadn’t used in years.

“I believe in Allah,” she said. “In His clarity. His oneness.”

“Good,” Chuldah replied. “Clarity is a mercy.”

Then she met Samira’s eyes fully. “But Jewish women don’t live on clarity alone. We live on continuity. On asking whether the truth still holds when circumstances change.”

Samira swallowed. She thought of her life—of faith chosen, of identity inherited, of prayers that crossed borders without asking permission.

“So believing in Allah doesn’t make me less Jewish,” she said.

Chuldah smiled thinly. “No. It makes you dangerous to people who need religion to stay simple.”

That made Samira laugh.

“What about messiah?” Samira asked. “Everyone’s waiting. Everyone thinks it’ll settle things.”

Chuldah’s expression hardened. “Messiah doesn’t settle arguments,” she said. “Messiah reveals which ones mattered.”

She gestured to the scrolls. “If redemption came cleanly, you wouldn’t need any of this.”

Samira felt it then—the throughline connecting Sarah’s laughter, Miriam’s song, Deborah’s judgment, Chana’s misread prayer, Abigail’s interruption.

None of them waited for certainty.

All of them acted anyway.

Chuldah rolled the scroll back into place. “You don’t need a new prophecy,” she said. “You need the courage to stand inside the old ones without simplifying them.”

The Doctor shifted slightly, impressed. “You’d make a terrifying editor.”

Chuldah glanced at him. “I already am.”

When they left, Samira paused at the doorway, breathing in the dust and ink one last time.

Judaism, she realized, was not about frozen revelation.

Islam was not about blind obedience.

Both demanded fidelity—to God, to truth, to responsibility across time.

As the TARDIS doors closed, Samira felt steadier than she had in a long while.

Not resolved.

Not finished.

But anchored.

The engines began to hum, and Samira knew—deep in her bones—that she was ready for the story that had not yet been written.

Chapter Fifteen — Returning to London (As Samira)

London still smelled like damp stone and unfinished arguments.

Samira stepped out of the TARDIS and felt it immediately—not nostalgia, not dread, but something stranger: proportion. The city hadn't changed. She had. Streets that once pressed in now felt merely narrow. Noise that once scraped her nerves sounded... manageable.

"That's annoying," she muttered.

The Doctor glanced at her. "What is?"

"Growth," she said. "No one warns you it messes with scale."

They stopped across the street from her family's building. Same windows. Same stubbornness. Same quiet insistence that this was still home, even if it hadn't known what to do with her.

"You don't have to—" the Doctor began.

"I know," Samira said. "But I want to."

She rang the bell before she could change her mind.

Footsteps. A pause. The door opened.

Her mother stared at her like she was seeing a familiar photograph slightly out of focus.

"Shaina," her mother said, relief and worry colliding in the syllables.

Samira smiled. Soft. Careful. "Hi, Ima."

Her mother's gaze flicked past her, taking in the Doctor—coat, posture, unplaceable energy.

"And you are...?" her mother asked, polite but alert.

“This is the Doctor,” Samira said. Then, after a beat, “He’s... a friend.”

The Doctor nodded brightly. “Lovely to meet you. Your daughter’s brilliant, by the way. Terrifyingly so.”

Her mother blinked. “Oh.”

Samira took a breath. “Also—I don’t go by Shaina anymore.”

That landed.

Her mother’s shoulders stiffened. “What?”

“My name’s Samira,” she said gently. “It fits better.”

Silence stretched—not hostile, just heavy with recalculation.

Finally, her mother said, “You look thin.”

Samira laughed. “Still Jewish, I see.”

Her mother huffed despite herself, then stepped aside. “Come in. You’ll eat.”

The apartment smelled like onions and familiarity. Shoes lined the wall. A pot simmered like it had been waiting for her specifically.

Then the kids appeared.

One by one, five younger siblings poured out of the hallway like a coordinated ambush.

“Shaina!”

“Where were you?”

“Did you get married?”

“Why does he dress like that?”

Samira held up her hands. “First of all—Samira. Second of all—rude. Third of all—yes, I know I look mysterious. That’s on purpose.”

The youngest squinted at her. “Where were you?”

Samira glanced at the Doctor, who gave her an encouraging nod that absolutely did not help.

“Traveling,” she said.

“Where?”

“Oh, you know,” Samira replied casually. “Deserts. Mountains. Seas that split in half. Courts of kings. Libraries older than guilt.”

The kids stared.

“You’re lying,” one said flatly.

“I am embellishing,” Samira corrected.

“Those are bubble maybes,” another accused. “Fairy tales.”

Samira burst out laughing—full-bodied, unrestrained, the kind of laugh that startled even her.

“Yeah,” she said, wiping her eyes. “That’s what they said too.”

Dinner was loud. Chaotic. Comforting. Her mother watched Samira carefully, noting the steadiness in her posture, the ease in her voice. The Doctor charmed the table by accident, answering questions badly and honestly in equal measure.

“So you’re a doctor?” one kid asked.

“Sometimes,” he said.

“What kind?”

“Time,” he replied.

The kids groaned. “Definitely lying.”

Afterward, Samira helped clear dishes like she hadn’t left. Like nothing had broken irreparably. Like names could change and still belong.

At the door, her mother touched her arm. “Samira,” she said, testing it. “You’re... different.”

Samira nodded. “I know.”

Her mother hesitated. “You can come again.”

“I will,” Samira said. And meant it—without obligation, without shrinking.

Back in the TARDIS, Samira leaned against the railing, smiling to herself.

“They think I make up stories,” she said.

The Doctor grinned. “That’s how you know you’re telling the important ones.”

Samira laughed again, lighter this time.

Bubbe maybes or not, she thought—some truths only survive as stories.

And she was finally telling them in her own name.

Chapter Sixteen — Faith After the Stars

The TARDIS felt quieter after London.

Not empty—never empty—but contemplative, like a house after guests leave and the walls replay voices at lower volume. Samira leaned against the railing, shoes kicked off, socks on cool metal, letting the hum settle back into her bones.

“Well,” the Doctor said, hands dancing over controls, “that went... better than expected.”

Samira snorted. “Low bar.”

“You introduced me to your mother,” he pointed out. “I survived dinner. That’s a milestone.”

She smiled despite herself. “You did okay. She likes you.”

“I’m deeply suspicious of that.”

The ship drifted. Stars slid past the central screen—clusters, spirals, distances so large they stopped meaning what numbers were supposed to mean. Samira watched them in silence, the way she watched cities from high bridges: not ownership, not escape, just witness.

“I want to pray,” she said suddenly.

The Doctor didn’t turn. “Go for it.”

“No,” Samira said. “I mean—here.”

He glanced at her. “Here here?”

“Yeah. Like—right here.”

He considered this, then stepped back from the console with exaggerated ceremony. “The floor is yours. Metaphorically. Literally. Temporally.”

Samira rolled her eyes and knelt anyway.

She didn’t rush. Didn’t perform. She oriented herself less by direction than by intention, the way she’d learned to do when certainty failed but sincerity didn’t. The stars outside the screen made a mockery of maps.

Allah, she prayed, steady and unafraid.

You are not smaller because the universe is big.

You are not distant because time is strange.

She stayed there longer than usual, breath syncing with the ship's hum. When she finished, she didn't feel the old pinch of self-consciousness—the sense of being watched by rules instead of God.

When she stood, the Doctor was pretending very hard to read a monitor.

“You humans,” he said lightly, without looking up, “keep expecting God to be local.”

Samira crossed her arms. “And you keep underestimating devotion.”

He smiled at that—soft, unguarded. “Touché.”

They sat together on the grated steps, shoulder to shoulder, watching stars do what they did best: exist without commentary.

“In Islam,” Samira said, voice calm, “God is beyond time. Eternal. Untouched by sequence.”

“Yes,” the Doctor said. “Very sensible.”

“In Judaism,” she continued, “God is... entangled. In arguments. In memory. In calendars He refuses to clarify.”

“Also sensible,” he said. “In a much louder way.”

She laughed. “I used to think I had to choose which one was true.”

“And now?”

“And now,” Samira said, gesturing at the stars, “I think God can handle being bigger than my categories.”

The Doctor tilted his head. “You know, for someone who insists she's not here to be saved—”

“Careful,” she warned.

“—you've done a remarkable job of saving your faith from becoming brittle.”

She considered that. “I didn't save it,” she said. “I let it travel.”

The ship hummed in agreement.

“So,” the Doctor said, standing, energy returning like a switch flipped, “where to next?”

Samira didn't answer right away. Her mind drifted to Persia. To a story with a missing woman-shaped space. To a future that felt... unstable.

"Somewhere things are supposed to make sense," she said at last. "But don't."

The Doctor's grin widened. "Oh, I know just the place."

The TARDIS engines deepened, drawing breath.

As the ship leapt, Samira steadied herself—not out of fear, but anticipation.

Faith after the stars, she realized, wasn't weaker.

It was harder to fool.

And she was ready for whatever story tried next to pretend she wasn't in it.

Chapter Seventeen — Something Is Wrong in Persia

The TARDIS did not like this landing.

Samira felt it before the doors opened—the subtle resistance in the hum, the way the ship's usual confidence wavered, as if time itself had cleared its throat and failed to speak.

"That's new," she said.

The Doctor frowned at the console. "It shouldn't be doing that."

"Define shouldn't."

"Define this century," he replied, already recalibrating.

The doors swung open.

Heat, but not desert heat. Perfumed air. Stone polished smooth by power. Voices layered with anticipation, rehearsed excitement, the sound of a society preparing to congratulate itself.

Persia.

Not just Persia—court Persia. Achaemenid opulence stretched in every direction: columns painted in colors that refused to fade, fabrics that caught light like they expected to be remembered, servants moving with the efficiency of people who knew history was watching.

Samira blinked. "Wow. Okay. This place loves itself."

"It does," the Doctor said slowly. "Which makes this worse."

She turned to him. "Worse than what?"

He gestured subtly. "Listen."

At first, Samira thought she was missing something obvious. Music played. Courtiers murmured. Officials announced names. Women passed through the hall—beautiful, poised, exhausted—each pausing before the throne, each dismissed with polite finality.

The king reclined, bored but attentive. The machinery of selection turned.

And turned.

And turned.

"How long has this been going on?" Samira asked.

The Doctor checked the readings again. His frown deepened. "Too long."

Another woman was announced. Another evaluation. Another dismissal.

Samira felt a prickle of unease crawl up her spine. "Isn't this the day—"

"Yes," the Doctor said. "It is."

"But—"

"But the story isn't moving," he finished.

She watched the ritual continue, flawless and meaningless. Time flowed, but purpose didn't. It was like watching a clock whose hands kept circling without advancing.

"No," Samira murmured. "That's not right."

"What are you noticing?" the Doctor asked.

"There should be," she hesitated, searching for the shape of the absence, "a narrowing. A decision. A pivot."

"Yes," he said. "A fixed point."

She swallowed. "Where's Esther?"

The Doctor didn't answer.

Another name was called. Another woman stepped forward. Another almost-queen vanished back into obscurity.

Samira's chest tightened—not fear, exactly, but recognition. She had seen this before. Waiting without arrival. Anticipation stretched past usefulness. A story stalled because something essential refused to appear.

“This isn’t just delay,” she said. “This is... a gap.”

The Doctor nodded grimly. “Time is looping around a missing variable.”

Samira stared at the throne. At the men confident the system would eventually produce the right answer if they just kept running it.

“And the people?” she asked. “What happens to them while the story waits?”

The Doctor’s voice dropped. “They remain in danger.”

She thought of Sarah’s laughter. Of Miriam’s song after survival. Of Deborah deciding without permission. Of Chana praying without being legible. Of Abigail stopping bloodshed before prophecy arrived. Of Chuldah guarding memory so truth wouldn’t rot.

All preparation.

“All of that,” Samira whispered, “was leading here.”

The Doctor looked at her sharply. “Samira—”

“She’s not late,” Samira said, eyes fixed on the throne. “She’s missing.”

The room swelled with applause for nothing.

Samira felt it then—the pressure she’d sensed in Jerusalem, in waiting, in faith stretched thin.

Messiah pressure.

Only this time, it wasn’t aimed at heaven.

It was aimed at her.

Chapter Eighteen — Mordechai Has No Niece

They found him outside the palace.

Not in a place of honor. Not where history usually framed its heroes. He stood near a gate where messages were overheard rather than delivered, posture alert in the way of someone who had learned survival by paying attention.

Samira recognized him instantly—not by face, but by weight.

Mordechai looked like a man who had already lost arguments with time and kept watch anyway.

“There,” she said quietly.

The Doctor nodded. “Yes. That’s him.”

They approached carefully. The Doctor hung back, as if instinct told him this conversation would not tolerate spectators.

Mordechai glanced up—and frowned, not in suspicion, but irritation, like he'd been interrupted mid-thought.

"You're not from here," he said.

Samira smiled. "You're very observant."

"That's my job," he replied. "Who are you?"

Samira hesitated. Names mattered now.

"Samira," she said. "I was looking for your niece."

Mordechai's expression shifted—not confusion, not pain. Annoyance.

"I don't have a niece," he said flatly.

Samira's stomach dropped anyway. "Esther."

Mordechai shook his head. "Never heard the name."

The air tightened.

"You're certain?" Samira pressed.

He looked offended. "I would remember a child I raised."

Samira glanced at the Doctor. He had gone very still.

"What about a nephew?" the Doctor asked gently.

Mordechai nodded. "Yes. A good boy. Quiet. Clever. He minds his business."

Samira felt the story fracture—not break, but misalign.

A nephew. A boy where a girl-shaped space should have been.

"But the threat," Samira said carefully. "It's real, isn't it?"

Mordechai's jaw set. "Very."

He gestured subtly toward the palace. "There are men inside who speak of annihilation like it's bookkeeping. I listen. I remember."

Samira felt the cold certainty settle.

“So the danger exists,” she said. “The enemy exists.”

“Yes,” Mordechai replied. “But salvation—” He snorted. “That part hasn’t shown up yet.”

The Doctor exhaled slowly. “Time hasn’t written her.”

Mordechai looked between them. “Written who?”

Samira swallowed. She thought of Chuldah’s scrolls. Of stories that lied in order to survive. Of women whose names existed only because someone stepped forward when the text refused.

“There’s supposed to be,” she began, then stopped.

No.

Not supposed to be.

That was the mistake.

“There could be,” she said instead.

Mordechai studied her more closely now. “You speak like someone who knows what’s coming.”

“I know what doesn’t,” Samira said. “And that’s worse.”

He nodded slowly. “If you’ve come to warn me, you’re late. If you’ve come to help—” He shrugged. “We’ll take whatever we can get.”

A trumpet sounded from the palace. Another woman’s name announced. Another round of nothing.

Samira felt the pressure again—not anticipation this time, but insistence.

History was waiting.

And it was tired of waiting for permission.

As they walked back toward the TARDIS, the Doctor spoke quietly. “Samira. This is dangerous territory.”

She didn’t look at him. “All of it has been.”

“This isn’t observation anymore.”

She stopped, finally meeting his eyes. “Neither was Deborah. Neither was Abigail.”

“That’s different.”

“No,” she said. “It just ended well.”

The Doctor looked away first.

Behind them, Mordechai resumed his watch—alone, attentive, holding the line against a future that hadn’t decided whether it would include help.

Samira stood very still.

Esther did not exist.

But the danger did.

And for the first time, Samira understood exactly what that meant.

Chapter Nineteen — The Missing Prophetess

The TARDIS doors closed with a sound that felt too loud for what Samira was thinking.

She paced.

Once. Twice. A third time, faster, like motion might shake loose the shape of the problem. The Doctor watched from the console, hands still, expression carefully neutral in the way that meant he was worried.

“Say it,” he said at last.

Samira stopped. “She doesn’t exist.”

The Doctor nodded. “Yes.”

“No,” Samira corrected. “Not ‘she’s late.’ Not ‘she’s hidden.’ Not ‘she’ll appear at the last possible second.’ She does not exist. There is no Esther-shaped person in this timeline.”

“Correct.”

Samira let out a sharp breath, half laugh, half disbelief. “That’s... rude. On a cosmic level.”

“It happens,” the Doctor said. “Stories are more fragile than people think.”

She leaned against the railing, staring at the slow spin of stars on the screen. “But the threat is real. Mordechai’s real. The machinery of annihilation is already turning.”

“Yes.”

“So the story has all the ingredients except the woman who’s supposed to survive it.”

The Doctor didn’t answer right away.

Finally, he said, "Sometimes history expects someone and no one shows up."

Samira's jaw tightened. "That's not acceptable."

He looked at her sharply. "Samira—"

She held up a hand. "I know. Time rules. Fixed points. Non-interference. I've heard the lecture."

"And?"

"And I've also met Sarah, who waited and laughed anyway."

She began counting on her fingers, voice steady but charged.

"Miriam, who sang after survival.

Deborah, who judged without permission.

Chana, who prayed without being legible.

Abigail, who stopped bloodshed before prophecy arrived.

Chuldah, who guarded memory so truth wouldn't rot."

She dropped her hand.

"They weren't waiting for a role," Samira said. "They became it."

The Doctor rubbed his temples. "You're suggesting—"

"I'm not suggesting," Samira said. "I'm noticing."

He turned fully toward her now. "Noticing what?"

"That Esther isn't missing," she replied. "She's unwritten."

The words settled into the room, heavy but precise.

"Time left a gap," Samira continued. "A woman-shaped gap. And everyone keeps walking around it like eventually it'll fill itself."

The Doctor's voice dropped. "You don't fill gaps in time. Time fills you."

Samira met his gaze, unflinching. "Then maybe it's time to see what happens when someone steps in anyway."

Silence.

The TARDIS hummed, uneasy. Or excited. It was hard to tell the difference anymore.

“This isn’t messiah talk,” the Doctor said carefully. “This is self-erasure. History will not remember you.”

Samira smiled, small and sharp. “History barely remembers women on a good day.”

“That’s not what I meant.”

“I know,” she said. “You mean I won’t get credit. I won’t get a scroll. I won’t get a neat ending.”

She pushed off the railing. “I didn’t come this far for neat.”

The Doctor searched her face—for fear, for hesitation, for the kind of doubt that would let him stop this.

He found resolve instead. Not reckless. Informed.

Dangerous.

“You believe in Allah,” he said quietly. “And you believe this is what you’re meant to do?”

Samira shook her head. “I don’t believe in ‘meant to.’ I believe in responsibility.”

She glanced back toward Persia, toward a palace stuck in a loop of choosing nothing.

“Judaism taught me that God hands you a problem and watches what you do with it,” she said.

“Islam taught me that God is strong enough to survive human action.”

She looked at him again. “So yes. I believe in Allah. And I am still a Jewish woman.”

The Doctor exhaled slowly.

“This,” he said, “is the kind of thing that changes everything.”

Samira nodded. “Good. Everything needs it.”

Outside, somewhere in Persia, another name was being called. Another woman stepping forward to be dismissed. Another round of almost.

Samira felt the pressure build—not from heaven, not from prophecy, but from time itself, impatient and incomplete.

Esther did not exist.

But Samira did.

And for the first time, history felt the difference.

Chapter Twenty — Samira Enters the Contest

The palace gates did not resist her.

Samira had expected resistance—guards, questions, the friction of institutions defending themselves from interruption. Instead, the doors opened with the bored efficiency of systems that assumed no one inside them would ever truly matter.

That, she realized, was the danger.

“This is your last chance to walk away,” the Doctor said quietly as they stood at the edge of the court.

Samira adjusted her scarf, fingers steady. “I’ve had a lot of last chances.”

“This isn’t like Deborah or Abigail,” he pressed. “You won’t be able to step out after. Once you’re inside the story—”

“—the story will pretend I was always there,” Samira finished. “Yeah. I know.”

He searched her face one more time. “You’re going to disappear from the record.”

She smiled, not bravely but honestly. “So did most women who mattered.”

A name was called. Another woman stepped forward. Another polite dismissal followed. The machinery continued, flawless and empty.

Samira stepped out of the shadows.

“I volunteer,” she said.

The word cut through the room—not loud, not dramatic, just wrong enough to force attention.

Heads turned. Murmurs rippled. A court official frowned, irritated at the disruption more than the audacity.

“That is not how this works,” he said.

Samira tilted her head. “It’s how nothing has been working.”

The Doctor closed his eyes.

The official opened his mouth to protest again, then hesitated. The system searched itself for the rule that forbade this and found none specific enough to stop her.

“Name?” he demanded.

She paused.

Not because she didn’t know it—but because names, here, were tools.

“Esther,” she said.

The sound of it settled into the room like a held breath finally released.

Something clicked.

Not audibly, not visibly—but time, which had been circling uselessly, snapped into alignment like a lock recognizing a key it hadn’t known it was waiting for.

The Doctor felt it immediately. His hands tightened on the railing. “Oh no.”

Samira felt it too—the pressure shifting, the loop loosening, the story beginning to move.

She walked forward.

The king barely looked up at first. He had seen too many faces, too many rehearsed hopes. Then his gaze caught on her—on the steadiness in her posture, the absence of performance.

“Where are you from?” he asked, already bored.

Samira met his eyes. “Somewhere between survival and memory.”

He frowned. “That is not an answer.”

“It’s the only honest one,” she replied.

A murmur ran through the court. Amusement. Curiosity. Annoyance.

Good, Samira thought. Let them underestimate me.

She was led away—not triumphantly, not ceremonially, but efficiently. A new name added to a list that had been waiting for one worth keeping.

As the doors closed behind her, Samira felt the weight of it settle fully.

This was not heroism.

This was insertion.

She would have to live inside the machinery now. Navigate power without being consumed by it. Hold faith without displaying it as threat. Protect a people who would never know her real name.

Back in the TARDIS, the Doctor stood very still.

“She did it,” he whispered, awe and fear tangled together.

The ship hummed, altered.

Somewhere in the palace, a scribe dipped his pen.

History began to lie.

And Samira—Jewish woman, believer in Allah, unwritten prophetess—stepped fully into the space where Esther had never been, and made it impossible for the story to continue without her.

Chapter Twenty-One — A Queen Who Wasn't Supposed to Be

Power, Samira learned quickly, was mostly boredom.

The palace ran on it—on men who had learned to mistake repetition for authority and ceremony for inevitability. She moved through its corridors quietly, observing, cataloguing, letting people underestimate her because it made everything easier.

The king—Ahasuerus—noticed her eventually.

Not all at once. Not because she demanded attention. But because she did not.

She answered questions without ornament. She did not laugh when expected. She did not flinch at silences meant to intimidate. When asked where she was from, she never changed her answer.

“Between survival and memory.”

It irritated him.

Good, she thought. Irritation was the beginning of curiosity, and curiosity was the only crack power ever offered.

She kept her faith carefully.

Not hidden—never hidden—but contextualized. She ate what she could. She declined what she couldn't without explanation. She prayed in the quiet hours, facing no particular direction, trusting God to find her without coordinates.

Allah, she whispered one night, steady and unafraid.

You brought me here without a name.

Teach me how to leave without one too.

She thought often of the women who had brought her here.

Of Sarah, who waited long enough to understand the cost of promises.

Of Miriam, who sang after survival because joy deserved a body.

Of Deborah, who judged because someone had to decide.

Of Chana, who prayed even when misunderstood.

Of Abigail, who stepped into violence and said no.

Of Chuldah, who guarded memory so truth would outlast novelty.

They had taught her how to stand where she wasn't invited.

The court began to shift.

Subtly. A conversation redirected. A decision delayed. A rumor softened before it sharpened. Samira did not confront power head-on; she nudged it sideways, the way time itself preferred.

She spoke to servants first. Then scribes. Then people whose names never appeared in records but whose hands moved the world forward one small correction at a time.

The decree—that decree—still hovered, half-formed, waiting for the right moment to become inevitable.

Samira made sure that moment never arrived cleanly.

When the king finally summoned her alone, it was not with thunder, but irritation thinly veiled as interest.

"You are different," he said, as if difference were a minor offense.

She inclined her head. "So is time."

He frowned. "You speak like someone who expects consequences."

"I do," Samira replied. "I just don't assume they'll fall where you want them to."

He studied her, unsettled in a way he could not name. "You don't fear me."

"I fear injustice," she said. "It's much larger."

Silence stretched.

Somewhere in the palace, a scribe hesitated over a line he had written a thousand times before and crossed it out.

History, Samira knew, would never record this conversation.

It would compress her into a story about beauty and luck and coincidence. It would pretend salvation happened because a king felt generous one evening.

But the truth was quieter and harder:

A woman entered a story that had no place for her and refused to leave it unchanged.

As Samira returned to her chambers, she felt the pressure ease—not gone, but redirected. The machinery of annihilation slowed, confused, forced to wait.

Messiah, she understood now, was not an arrival.

It was the moment the story realized it could no longer proceed without accounting for someone it had tried to ignore.

And Samira—unwritten, unnamed, necessary—stood exactly where history least expected her to be.

Chapter Twenty-Two — Saving Without Being Written

It did not happen all at once.

There was no midnight reversal, no dramatic unscrolling of fate, no single moment a trumpet could claim. What happened instead was far more dangerous to power: the story lost momentum.

Samira felt it in the small things first.

A meeting postponed because a messenger arrived late.

A decree rephrased because a scribe hesitated over a verb.

A dinner invitation declined because someone important suddenly felt unwell.

The palace did not collapse. It stalled.

She learned the routes—who spoke to whom, which corridors carried truth and which carried theater. She listened more than she spoke. When she spoke, she asked questions that forced people to explain themselves twice.

“Why now?”

“Who benefits?”

“What happens after?”

Questions, she discovered, were harder to execute than orders.

The king began to rely on her—not because she dazzled him, but because she slowed him down. He found that decisions made after speaking with her felt heavier, harder to excuse away later.

“Why do you do that?” he asked her once, irritation giving way to something like respect.

“Do what?” Samira replied.

“Make everything... complicated.”

She smiled. “Because simple lies faster.”

The danger to the Jews did not vanish. It thinned. It fractured. It became administratively inconvenient. And in an empire that worshiped efficiency, inconvenience was a kind of mercy.

Samira never named herself to the cause.

She did not stand before anyone and declare allegiance. She did not confess identity. She did not frame salvation as personal bravery. She let others believe they had arrived at restraint on their own.

This, she understood, was how history survived itself.

At night, alone, she prayed.

Allah, she whispered,

You know what I am doing.

You know what they will never say I did.

She thought of Judaism then—not as doctrine, but as muscle memory. The way it taught you to act without applause. The way it trusted argument over miracles, persistence over spectacle.

Islam had taught her to trust God’s strength.

Judaism had taught her to accept responsibility when God stayed silent.

Together, they made her dangerous.

When the crisis finally dissolved—when the threat receded enough to leave no clear villain and no satisfying hero—the court congratulated itself. Officials spoke of prudence. Of wisdom. Of restraint always intended.

A scribe began drafting the story.

Samira saw it once, by accident.

The outline was neat.

A beautiful queen.

A timely favor.

A generous king.

She did not recognize herself in it.

Good, she thought.

Because if the story told the truth—if it said that salvation came from delay, from irritation, from a woman who asked the wrong questions until the machinery broke—it would invite imitation.

And power hated that.

On the day she knew it was finished—not concluded, but safe enough—Samira stood at a window and watched the city move on, unaware of how close it had come to disaster.

The Doctor felt it too, wherever he was—time rebalancing, the pressure releasing like a held breath finally let go.

History would say Esther existed.

History would give her a name, a beauty, a plot.

History would lie.

But the people lived.

And Samira—Jewish woman, believer in Allah, unwritten prophetess—accepted the oldest truth she had learned on her travels:

That the most faithful work is often the work that disappears.

Chapter Twenty-Three — Leaving Persia

Samira left without ceremony.

There was no farewell audience, no closing feast, no official acknowledgment that anything unusual had occurred. The palace resumed its rhythm the way bodies do after illness—careful at first, then eager to forget the fever.

She packed little. She had learned not to accumulate proof.

In the corridor outside her chambers, a servant paused, eyes downcast. “My lady,” she said, then corrected herself quickly, “—forgive me.”

Samira smiled. “It’s all right.”

The woman hesitated. “Things... changed.”

Samira nodded. “They do.”

That was all. Gratitude did not need witnesses.

The TARDIS waited where it always did when it knew the work was finished—just out of sight, just out of story. When Samira stepped inside, the door closed behind her with a softness that felt like respect.

The Doctor stood at the console, very still.

“You’re back,” he said.

“Temporarily,” Samira replied. She set her bag down and leaned against the railing, the hum of the ship threading back into her spine like a remembered melody.

He watched her for a long moment. “You know what happens now.”

She nodded. “They’ll write it cleaner.”

“They’ll write it smaller.”

“They’ll write me prettier,” she added dryly.

He winced. “Probably.”

She shrugged. “That’s fine.”

“It shouldn’t be,” he said quietly. “You changed a fixed trajectory. You carried the weight. You won’t be credited.”

Samira looked at him then—not defiant, not bitter. Grounded.

“Doctor,” she said, “Sarah laughed and still waited. Miriam sang and still disappeared into the crowd. Deborah judged and went back under her tree. Chana prayed and got misread. Abigail saved lives and rode home. Chuldah guarded memory and never got a festival.”

She met his gaze. “This is the tradition.”

He exhaled slowly. “You’ve become very good at this.”

“At what?”

“At leaving without breaking,” he said.

She smiled. “I had good teachers.”

The ship began to move, not forward or back, but away—time loosening its grip on the place it had just pretended was inevitable. Persia slid off the screen, shrinking into context.

“So,” the Doctor said, forcing a lighter tone, “how does it feel? Saving the day without anyone knowing?”

Samira considered. “Like praying quietly in a city that doesn’t notice you,” she said. “It still counts.”

He laughed then—soft, relieved. “You know, people keep asking if messiah will ever come.”

Samira leaned back, eyes on the stars. “It did. It just didn’t stay.”

“That’s... not very comforting.”

“Depends who you are,” she replied.

They sat in companionable silence as the TARDIS traveled, the hum steady, satisfied. Samira felt the pressure that had driven her finally dissolve—not gone, not erased, but redistributed back into the universe where it belonged.

She was not a queen.

She was not a name.

She was a companion who had stepped into a gap and then stepped back out, leaving time no excuse to continue pretending.

As the stars rearranged themselves outside the screen, Samira closed her eyes.

She did not ask to be remembered.

She asked only that the story could go on—with fewer lies, with fewer graves, and with just enough room left open for the next woman to step in when history forgot to make space.

Epilogue — Samira of the TARDIS

The TARDIS had learned her rhythms.

Not the dramatic ones—the crises, the leaps, the moments where time screamed and demanded attention—but the quiet habits that followed work well done. The way Samira curled her legs under herself on the grated steps. The way she hummed when she was thinking. The way she prayed without urgency now, as if God were not something to chase but something to keep company.

The library had changed.

It was subtle. The Doctor noticed it one day when a shelf that hadn't existed before had decided it always had. Thin volumes. Margins heavy with notes. Names that appeared once and then never again. Stories that refused to resolve neatly.

“Did you reorganize?” he asked.

Samira didn't look up from where she was reshelving a book. “No.”

“Then why does this feel... different?”

She smiled. “Because it remembers me.”

She had stopped asking where they were going next. The Doctor had stopped pretending he chose alone. The ship took them where gaps existed—places where stories were thinning, where someone would soon be told to wait when what was needed was action.

Samira did not step in every time.

That was the other lesson.

Messiah work, she had learned, was not about becoming indispensable. It was about restoring circulation—making sure history could breathe again without collapsing into myth.

Sometimes they visited prophetesses whose names never made it into canon. Sometimes they watched disasters resolve because someone ordinary refused to stay silent. Sometimes they did nothing at all, which turned out to be harder than it sounded.

Once, much later, the Doctor asked her, “Do you ever miss being... one thing?”

She considered it.

“I miss being simple,” she said. “But I don't miss being small.”

He nodded. “Fair.”

She still believed in Allah.

She still argued like a Jew.

She still laughed at God when promises took too long and prayed when words failed. None of it felt contradictory anymore. Faith, she had discovered, was not a single posture. It was a range of motion.

One night—if night meant anything here—Samira stood at the console, watching stars collapse into lines and lines into possibility.

“People are going to keep waiting,” she said. “For messiah. For rescue. For permission.”

“Yes,” the Doctor said. “They always do.”

She rested her hand on the railing, steady. “That’s okay. Waiting teaches endurance.”

“And action?” he asked.

She smiled, sharp and kind. “Action teaches responsibility.”

The TARDIS hummed, pleased.

Somewhere, a story was about to stall. Somewhere, a woman-shaped gap was forming. Somewhere, history was preparing to lie again.

Samira did not rush.

She did not announce herself.

She simply stayed ready.

Because messiah was never late.

People were just early.

And sometimes—when time finally admitted it needed help—all it took was a companion who knew when to step in and when to step back out without asking to be named.