

The Daughters of Theogenes
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Chapter 1

The Daughters of Theogenes

A Doctor Who short story

“I don’t like the dress.”

“This is classical Greece, Doctor. Sometimes it’s wise to blend in.”

“Yes, I know, but all those yards of white cloth make you look...” the Doctor paused and ran his eyes up and down the offending garment, “terribly amateur theatrical. I mean, the Greeks are quite civilised. They won’t put you to death for looking different.” He crammed his hat down on his tight curls, took another look at Romana’s dress and shook his head. “Anyway, very colourful people, the Greeks.” He sniffed to himself. “This way I think,” he added and set off down a side street.

“This is it.” He stopped before a slightly run down building. “The house of Theogenes,” he said proudly, “and there’s Aristarchus.”

He strode forward and embraced an old man who had just left the house. The old man was tall and dignified, his white hair close-cropped to his head and Romana felt it was a most unlikely occurrence, to see this regal old man’s face light up at the sight of the scruffy Time Lord.

“Doctor, this is truly a welcome surprise.”

“Well, you know how it is. I was passing and I thought I’d drop in on your master.”

The old man’s face fell.

“Theogenes died ten years ago. His son-in-law now runs the house but I’m sure he’ll be very pleased to see you.”

“Poor old Theogenesis, I’ll miss him... Oh, by the way, this is Romana.”

The old man looked her up and down, taking in the white dress and the fashionable ringlets which she wore in her blonde hair. He positively beamed with

approval.

“You are a true beauty my dear,” he said courteously, “and,” he added, “obviously civilised.”

The Doctor coughed slightly. “Well, Leela was a bit rough at the edges,” he admitted.

“Come in,” said Artistarchus, “I will fetch the master.”

He left them in a small antechamber and padded off into the depths of the house. A few minutes later a tall, austere, beauty entered the room. She had raven black hair fastened in ringlets that framed a classical face, perfectly proportioned with a firmly chiselled beauty. She wore a dress similar in style to Romana’s but where Romana’s was a stark white, hers was a pale peach colour and gold bracelets were clasped on her arms giving the impression of soft luxury. Her eyes ran up and down Romana’s gown and her mouth twitched slightly, just enough to convey that she thought Romana’s attire was vaguely quaint and amusing. Romana instantly disliked her.

Turning to the Doctor the lady curtsied slightly and said, “I am Phaedra, the eldest daughter of Theogenes. My husband is out at the moment but he will be back soon. I trust you are being well looked after.”

“Yes, very. It is a pleasure to meet you. Theogenes has a very beautiful daughter,” said the Doctor gallantly, raising his hat and bowing.

Praedra smiled in a vaguely distant way and Romana’s dislike intensified. The Doctor immediately began to talk to her about her father, but after a few minutes, smiling the same vague smile she said she had work to do and glided serenely out of the room.

“Was Theogenes like that?” asked Romana.

“No, not a bit. His wife was though. A great beauty with no real intelligence. Anything she didn’t understand she ignored or avoided. She didn’t take to me at all.”

“I can imagine.”

“Excuse me, who are you?” Another woman had entered the room. She looked startlingly like Phaedra, but where Phaedra was classically beautiful the newcomer’s looks just managed to fall short of Phaedra’s perfection. Her hair instead of being jet black was a slightly dingy dark brown. Her chiselled features, instead of giving her the looks of a carefully sculptured statue made her look vaguely shrewish, a look accentuated by her hair, scraped back tightly into a bun. She was livelier though. She seemed more alert and the gown she wore was an uncompromising red. Romana felt sure that, seen together, the eye would automatically be drawn away from Phaedra to this more human vision of beauty.

Her appearance drew a far more welcoming smile from the Doctor than Phaedra's had done.

"May I assume you are another daughter of Theogenes?" he asked.

"Yes, I am Creusa, his youngest daughter."

"Well, I am the Doctor, a friend of your father's."

Creusa's face was transformed by a genuine smile. "The Doctor! My father often told me about you. I am pleased to meet you." She turned to Romana. "And you are?"

"I am Romana."

"May I welcome you both to my father's house," she said, formally but with real pleasure. "You will stay for dinner?"

"I don't know about that," said the Doctor doubtfully. "I'm not sure your sister was greatly taken with me."

"Phaedra's a cow," said Creusa with surprising vehemance. "I wouldn't take any notice of her. You must stay."

The Doctor grinned broadly. "If you insist."

Creusa smiled back. "Aresias, my sister's husband, will be back soon. I'm sure he'll insist as well. Meanwhile do let me show you the house."

The tour of the house turned out to be a rather depressing affair. There was nothing conspicuously wrong with it, in fact it was all very pleasant but, thought Romana, that was about it. There was no character in it. It gave her the impression of decay somehow, though there was no tangible evidence of dilapidation. The place, she decided, showed a lack of care or thought about how it looked. It sufficed. That was all.

They returned to the small antechamber and Creusa continued to entertain them for a while. Then a young man entered. He was tall and athletic-looking, and handsome in a homely sort of way. His features were deeply tanned and quite thick set and his teeth glistened whitely when he smiled as he did when he welcomed them. He was Aresias, Phaedra's husband, and he seconded Creusa's invitation to dinner. It was almost ready, he said, if they would follow him.

Taking Romana by the hand he led them into the dining room. Artistarchus had obviously anticipated their remaining, for five couches had been placed around a low table. Phaedra was already seated and Aresias sat next to her, placing Romana on his other side.

The meal was delicious and the Doctor and Romana were well entertained by Creusa and Aresias with Phaedra contributing the odd word here and there. Aresias, especially, was very pleasant and entertaining and he eagerly told Romana a potted history of the town and surrounding countryside.

As the evening progressed Aristarchus mentioned the arrival of a soothsayer who wanted to tell their fortunes.

“Tell him to go! We do not wish to listen to his lies,” said Aresias somewhat severely. “You don’t believe in such foolery do you?” he asked Romana.

“Superstition is the retreat of the primitive mentality,” she quoted, somewhat pompously.

“What about God?” asked the Doctor, that dangerous gleam beginning to show in his eye that meant he was about to propound one of his theories which it would be impossible to refute on account of a refusal on his part to stick to the laws of logic. However, he was prevented by Creusa.

“Let him in!” she said. “It’ll be fun to hear what he has to say.”

Aresias looked as though he was about to argue with her, then changed his mind and smiled charmingly.

“Very well, show him in Aristarchus.”

Shortly, a tall stocky figure entered wrapped in a long hooded cape which concealed all the features. Aresias’ mouth twitched slightly into a faint sneer.

“Well, man, what can you tell us?”

“I can tell of the past, present and future, but those who listen must be prepared to face the consequences of my knowledge.”

Phaedra giggled slightly. The faceless hood turned towards here.

“You would do well not to mock. I know enough about each of you to bring your world crashing down about you. You, for instance,” the hood swung back to Aresias. “You are the eldest son of your father’s house are you not?”

He paused slightly, letting the question hang in the air. Glancing across the room, Romana was shocked and surprised to see Creusa leaning forward, a faint smile hovering about her lips and her eyes glued eagerly on the seer.

“Yes, I am my father’s only son.”

“Whyfore then do you live here on your wife’s money and do not claim your own inheritance?”

Aresias’ features seemed to form themselves into a mask and he suddenly looked as though he could have been carved out of granite. His voice, when he spoke, held a slight tremour but whether it was of anger or grief Romana couldn’t tell. “I have my reasons and would ask you to respect them,” he said.

“Respect?” said the stranger with barely controlled anger. “What respect did you show the father of Eteonicus and Conon when your family dragged his carcass through the streets of Thebes?”

Aresias went white. “Alcibiades of Thebes killed our mother.”

“By mistake, but still you killed him for it and started a feud that has all but destroyed both your families. You, the last son of Thrasyllus, hide here so Conon, the last son of Alcibiades, shall not find you to avenge the deaths of his father and his brother whom you butchered when he came to offer you peace.”

“He offered me peace, yes, when he was alone and I had many friends about me. But what did he offer my brother when he met him in a back street in Corinth? He did not speak of peace then.”

“Then he was still grieved at the death of a father. Later he repented and went voluntarily to you for reconciliation and you had your men behead him, then carve him up and hang him out for the carrion to feed on.” The soothsayer’s last words came out in short gasps and he stopped abruptly and turned his head away from Aresias. The people in the room remained stock still and the tableau they formed remained etched upon Romana’s memory for the rest of her life. Creusa sat curled up on her couch hugging her knees, her sharp, pretty face wearing an exultant expression, her brown eyes wide and dilated and fixed on the soothsayer. Phaedra reclined on her couch gazing at her hand with the embarrassed air of a fashionable hostess with an ill-mannered guest, trying to pretend nothing has happened and everything is normal and civilised. Aresias was sitting bolt upright, his face a ghastly white, his bright blue eyes staring fixedly at the stranger. One hand was convulsively clutching the arm of the couch. The Doctor had an expression of disgust and sadness on his face. This was not what he had expected on paying a visit to his old friend. In the centre, the tall figure of the soothsayer dominated them. His broad shoulders bowed as if supporting a great burden and his head was lowered. They remained frozen as if time had stood still for a few seconds. Then, slowly, Aresias got up and moved towards the soothsayer. The bowed head looked up as he approached so they stood face to face, Aresias staring into the dark recesses of the hood.

“Who are you?”

The shoulders straightened with a jerk and the cowl was shaken free. The face revealed was strikingly handsome. It was at the same time aristocratic and dignified but softened by sadness. The eyes were a deep warm brown. Romana felt that once he smiled the face would have lit up and warmed the room and the small cold company that had gathered in it. Then Phaedra let out a piercing shriek and the place dissolved into chaos. Aresias was calling for servants and Creusa had her arms around Phaedra who continued to let out one long scream that echoed through the house. Within seconds the room was full of people who descended upon the stranger and pinned his arms behind him. Phaedra’s scream gradually subsided into choking and sobbing. As the place calmed down Romana realised

that her hands were shaking slightly and she felt as though she had been through some ordeal.

Aresias picked up a goblet and rather nervously filled it then he turned to face the stranger with a show of Bravura. "Welcome Conon."

That, thought Romana, explained a lot.

"It would seem I have had a lucky escape. You could have killed me easily. I was defenceless."

Conon seemed to draw himself up. "Unlike you, I believe in fighting fair."

"Unlike your brother as well," flung back Aresias with some venom.

Conon turned his eyes upon the weeping Phaedra with a look of contempt. "Ah! yes my brother, who supposedly stabbed your brother in a back street."

Suddenly the Doctor was on his feet. Quietly he stepped between the two men. "That's enough, both of you!" he said sternly. "The wrongs, real or imaginary, that you each appear to have suffered are more than repaid by the vengeance you have exacted on each other's families. The time has come to call a halt." He held them with his compelling eyes, then smiled disarmingly. "Don't you think?"

Romana stood up. "Why not bury the hatchet and start afresh?"

The Doctor smiled more brightly. "Exactly."

"But my brother..." started Conon.

"My brother!" said Aresias fiercely.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," said the Doctor soothingly. "You've each lost a brother why not leave it at that?"

Conon considered this a moment and then he smiled, an almost childlike smile as though a burden had been lifted from him. "Yes... I am prepared to start again." Romana watched amazed as he seemed to visibly relax, as though every muscle had been taut and tense. He must, she realised, have worked himself up to a fever pitch in order to carry out his intentions. She also noticed the slight dropping of the Doctor's shoulders.

"My brother was murdered, dishonourably, by that dog's family. He is unworthy of forgiveness. He is a craven coward. His brother was a back-street assassin and his father was a murderous quack of a peddler. I scorn the very ground he treads on." Aresias' lip curled viciously. "I will see him hanged like a common thief."

The Doctor's shoulders straightened again with a jerk. Conon looked like a man betrayed. Then he reddened. "I am no coward. My father was a good doctor and my brother met yours in open combat. He, like you, was hiding in this house and your wife handed him over. No one was ever told because she begged us not to, but I will not have my family slurred in that way."

Aresias' eyes flickered dangerously and he turned contemptuously towards Phaedra. "Is this true?" he asked. Phaedra moaned and wept. "Creusa?" he commanded savagely.

Creusa's eyes were very bright. She looked across the room and caught Romana watching her. The eyes dropped to the floor. "Yes, it is true."

Aresias looked back at Phaedra. He paused for a moment then quite suddenly he took two steps towards her, picked her out of the chair and slapped her savagely across the face. She started screaming. He slapped her again with such force that she staggered backwards and fell over the couch, hitting her head on the marble floor. Aresias started after her but the Doctor grabbed hold of him. The two men struggled and several of the servants went to help. Creusa was crouching beside Phaedra who was struggling up, blood pouring from a gash in her forehead. Romana hurried round and started examining the cut. Then with a shout of triumph, Conon shook free of the man restraining him and leapt upon the group now holding Aresias. In his hand he held a small deadly-looking dagger. He grabbed Aresias by the shoulder and ran it home. The two men stared at each other for a moment then Aresias slowly collapsed into Conon's arms, grabbing hold of him. Conon caught the body and gently lowered him to the floor. The head fell back and the grasping hands went limp. Conon's head bowed and he let out a sob. Then he straightened and looked at the Doctor.

"I'm sorry!" he said.

By now he was surrounded by the household servants and he passively allowed them to lead him off, leaving the Doctor and Romana alone with the two sisters and Aresias' dead body. It was Creusa who broke the silence.

"Aresias!" she screamed and rushed to the body. She held the head and turned the sightless eyes towards her, then she held her hands over her face and began to sob.

Phaedra rested against Romana, weeping quietly, the tears and the blood mixing and leaving dark stains on Romana's dress.

Gently the Doctor moved over to Creusa and lifted her off the body. "Creusa," he said, "show me where I can find some water to bathe Phaedra's cut and a blanket to cover Aresias."

Creusa drew in a deep wracked breath, wiped the tears from her eyes and then nodded and moved towards the door. Romana felt Phaedra stiffen. Turning towards Creusa, she said, "You told him where to come didn't you?"

"What?"

"I saw you talking with the soothsayer in the market. You told him where Aresias was! You KILLED HIM!"

Phaedra took two tottering steps towards her sister. "You! you did it!" Sobbing shook her body and she crumpled up in a small forlorn heap.

Quietly the Doctor came over, picked her up and carried her to a couch. Setting her down, he poured some wine and handed it to her.

"Why should Creusa plot to kill Aresias?" asked Romana, coming over and sitting beside her.

Phaedra looked passed her at her sister who stood stock still in the doorway.

"Because she was in love with him."

Creusa turned round and faced them. "You thought I didn't know," continued Phaedra. "You and Aresias thought you were being so clever."

Romana met the Doctor's eyes over Phaedra's head.

Rather half-heartedly Romana said, "I'm sure you're imagining it. So many awful things have happened."

"Aresias had an eye for a pretty girl. He was working on you."

Romana opened her mouth to protest then shut it again. Aresias had, indeed, been "working" on her. He had been charming, amusing and attentive and had barely spoken to the Doctor.

"But still," said the Doctor then he trailed off too. Events were beginning to make a nasty sort of sense. Comments, looks, little things all put together built up an unpleasant tableau.

Creusa read the looks on their faces and she walked forward until she stood before them, her hands clasped demurely in front of her, head held high, sharp chin jutting forwards.

"Yes, I was in love with Aresias and he was in love with me but he wouldn't leave Phaedra because she had the money." Her lip curled slightly. "But, you see, if he'd known what she did to his brother he would never have even looked at her again." Creusa made a small gesture with her hand. "I never thought... thought that this would happen."

"What did you think would happen?" asked the Doctor angrily.

"Conon couldn't just kill him. He'd have to confront him first and then he would be caught. Conon wasn't the killing sort, anyway. He was looking for a way out. It was all working too until he attacked her." Her cold eye turned on Phaedra and her face constricted slightly in a spasm. "He's dead now."

Phaedra began to cry again. "Bitch," she said vehemently. "Get out! get out of my house and never come back."

"Oh, I'm going all right," said Creusa calmly then turned and walked serenely out of the room.

Phaedra convulsively gulped down the wine.

“You will stay, won’t you,” she suddenly pleaded, looking at the Doctor. “At least until Aresias is buried, please.”

“Of course,” he said gently.

“Father trusted you, you see, and I don’t know what to do.”

The Doctor smiled and patted her hand. “Don’t worry. I’ll see to everything. You should try and get some rest. Romana, will you go and find Aristarchus and get him to remove the body.”

Romana left the room and headed for the servants’ quarters. However she met Aristarchus halfway, looking tired and distressed. She was about to relay the Doctor’s message but he forestalled her by the expression on his face.

“What’s happened now?” she asked.

“Creusa,” he made a small tired gesture. “She has hanged herself.”

Romana sighed quietly and put her hand to her head trying to think.

“Is there somewhere you can put the bodies?”

“Yes.”

She nodded, deciding to stick to practicalities.

“Can you move Aresias there and you’d better put Creusa with him for the time being.”

Aristarchus moved off and Romana returned to the Doctor. A wailing broke out somewhere in the house.

Phaedra was sitting up rigidly when she entered. The Doctor was staring out of a doorway onto the square courtyard at the centre of the house.

“What has happened?” demanded Phaedra. “Why is someone crying?”

“Creusa’s dead.”

Too tired even to cry Phaedra sank back and buried her face in her hands.

“How did it happen?” asked the Doctor.

“She hanged herself.”

“If only I had forgiven her!” said Phaedra suddenly, pressing her hands together in an agitated fashion.

“I don’t think it would have made any difference,” said the Doctor gently.

“Oh yes it would.” Phaedra got up and started pacing earnestly up and down the room.

“You should try to get some rest,” said the Doctor.

“Rest! How can I rest. There’s things to do.” She continued pacing, looking nervously at them.

The Doctor moved over to Romana. “I’ve got some sedatives in the TARDIS. You try to calm her down.” He moved off silently.

“You can’t do anything now,” said Romana desperately to Phaedra. “You should get some sleep. You’ll be able to think more clearly in the morning.”

After some more persuasion she got Phaedra seated and fairly calm. Aristarchus came in and consulted on what they should do with Conon who was presently locked in a cellar. Romana directed he should be fed and given blankets and they would hand him over to the authorities the next morning.

When she returned Phaedra had gone. Concerned, she checked the rest of the house, but could not find her anywhere. She then came out on the roof and found Phaedra standing on a small parapet built round the edge of it, silhouetted against the setting sun.

“Phaedra!” she called and started towards her.

Phaedra turned round to face her, stumbled, lost her balance, and fell.

“You did your best.”

“That isn’t very consoling. Three people have died. I mean, what was the point?”

“There was no point. That’s just how life is.”

Romana nodded, then shook her head. “But at the academy we were taught that you can learn from everything. Nothing is valueless... what have we learned from this?”

Romana turned and regarded the battered facade and peeling paintwork of the house. Quietly a door opened and a tall hooded figure emerged and slipped quietly away.

“Aristarchus has chosen to save a life at least,” murmured the Doctor.

He turned and Romana followed him back to the TARDIS.