

# HARMONY

by  
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(inspired by the BBCtv Series Doctor Who)

*The past is but the beginning of a beginning, and all that is and has been is but the  
twilight of the dawn. - H.G. Wells, "The Discovery of the Future," 1901*

## Chapter Six

It was all Rory Williams could do to prevent his wife from diving through the Rift after them. She struggled wildly, screaming at him to let her go, but he held firm. He had been close enough to hear what the Doctor said. Massively unstable. He wasn't going to take a warning like that lightly. He was not going to risk losing Amy again. Not for the Doctor. Not even for *two* Doctors.

"Rory, let me go!"

"No! Amy, no! Did you hear what he said? It's unstable. It could close at any time--"

"All the more reason for us to follow them," she told him, twisting in his grasp.

"If it closes, we'll be trapped on the other side."

"If it closes and we're not with the Doctor you'll wish you *were* on the other side!"

A moment later, it was a moot point. The portal expanded with a rush of eyebrow-singing energy then closed in on itself and winked out. Amy let out a gasp of disbelief, then pounded him soundly on the chest. And kept pounding. He took the abuse, repeating to himself that the Rift had been unstable, unsafe, unstable, unsafe... but there was nothing he could do to deter her anger.

"Now what are we going to do?" Amy demanded, her face flushed from the exertion of running, followed by her effort of fighting with him. She jabbed a finger over his shoulder, forcing him to look. "The *Tardis* is out of phase again, *both* Doctors are

gone, and I have a photo shoot in the morning!”

Rory grimaced. He had forgotten that minor detail...

“Well, you know,” he said weakly, offering up his sweetest smile. The one that usually worked but was not, apparently, working just then. “Time travel and all that. You know him. He’ll get us back in time. Even if it takes awhile.”

“Oh yeah?” she said, pounding him on the solar plexus one more time before she turned abruptly, flipping her long hair in his face, hugging herself against the rain that had begun to fall again. “What if it takes him 40 years? I don’t think aging that much overnight is in my contract!”

He coughed hard, thinking better of trying to say anything else clever to make her feel better. She glared at him one final time before stalking away.

“Where are you going?”

“To take the dog out!”

All in all, he thought, she was taking being marooned on an alternate Earth remarkably well.

“Pick up the phone,” she yelled, just before he lost sight on her in the woods.

“The--?”

Jackie Tyler’s pink, bejewelled mobile lay in the dirt where it had fallen when the Doctors had jumped through the rift. Rory picked it up.

“It says ‘Rose’ in missed calls. Should we call back?”

The world transformed with a sickening shimmer and he emerged on the far side, tumbling arse over elbow onto a road. A very dirty, very hard road. He had barely time to lift himself up, let alone draw a single breath before the Doctor slammed into his back, knocking him flat on the ground once more. To think traversing wormholes looked so easy on the telly. When was the last time he had seen Daniel Jackson crash into Jack O'Neill? The horse and rider they had followed from Pete's World were a few metres away, visibly shaken, but recovering enough to move off with all due speed. With no time to lose, he retrieved the Doctor's stylish new hat from where it had fallen in the mud, plopped it on the Time Lord's head, and they began their pursuit.

After what seemed like miles at a dead run he could feel himself tiring. Instead of running side by side like the wind, the Doctor was now outdistancing him, apparently unaware of his encroaching fatigue. He pushed on as long as he could, finally shambling to a halt, hands on his knees, head bent, gasping for breath. The Doctor ran back to him, hopping about manically. The waterlogged ostrich feathers on the hat hung in ridiculous spikes.

"Com'on, com'on! We're gaining on him--"

He groaned. They had lost sight of the horse and rider miles back, made at least one wrong turn which had taken them nearly to London, before trusted instinct and the pattern of hoof prints on the damp road guided them back. Rain showers had since obliterated the hoof prints, the entire road churned into flowing mud. The Doctor's claim of a horse detection application on the new sonic screwdriver was absurd. No doubt the hapless pair were leaving a trail of *void stuff* in their wake. Were it not for the mud he suspected even his more-human-than-not olfactory sense would have smelled it.

“--just... need... a minute,” he stammered, sucking air into his lungs. He clutched at his chest. “Inferior vascular system, remember?”

The Doctor blinked at this revelation, as if it had already been forgotten.

“Riiight. Sorry. Catch your breath.”

Ignoring the sludge, he sat in the middle of what passed for a road, legs drawn up to his chest. He wrapped his bare arms around his muddy jeans, resting his head against his knees. The Doctor splashed back and forth across the road, a curious, bandy-legged gait made all the more comical by dirt smudged trousers. The Time Lord’s handsome moleskin jacket was mud-splattered and wet and the man’s hair hung in crazy tendrils from beneath the sagging hat. Not that he imagined he looked any better. In his haste, he had left his long coat behind. It would have afforded him somewhat more protection from the elements than a T-shirt and he could only guess at what useful items remained in the pocket—aside from the brolly. . He reached down to touch the road lightly. Vibration. A moment later he was on his stomach, ignoring the mire, ear pressed to the muddy ground. He looked up at the Doctor.

“Fancy a climb?”

The Time Lord snapped shut the sonic screwdriver and whirled around. “Why?”

“Someone’s coming,” he said. “Correction. A whole lot of someones.”

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From their vantage point high in an ancient, sprawling yew, and with the aid of a pair of high-tech binocs and the vintage spyglass the Doctor had produced from trans-dimensional coat pockets, they could just make out what appeared to be two separate military regiments moving up and down the narrow road that divided a rambling town of

half timber structures, most of which crouched on the far side of a rapidly flowing tributary. Several hundred buildings stretched away from the stone bridge, shops and homes alike. Modest, but well established, he thought. Perhaps grown up in support of the nearby abbey which, if he calculated correctly, was no longer functioning in that capacity. But that's all it was. Calculations. It bothered him, not being able to verify the period instinctually, relying instead on a good, long memory—and logical clues. He'd been here before. Or near here. And near *now*. He sensed that, clearly, but... but that was all. As the Doctor recalled previous adventures in the vicinity, he listened to the pulse in his ears, focusing on his heart beat. One heart, whose only function was to pump blood. It did nothing to keep Time. It did nothing to key him into the universe at large. And having no concrete sense of where and when in Time he was made him feel ill.

“You look... time sick,” the Doctor said suddenly. “Are you all right?”

No. No he was far from all right. But when had that ever stopped him?

“I'm always all right.”

He returned his attention to the town. Whenever it *had* grown up in the past, it remained a trade hub of some note to have spawned the statelier three storey houses to the east, enclosed gardens adorning those not on the Thames. At least he assumed it was the Thames. To the fore, on the south side of the river not far from the bridge, a church spire rose against the bleak, autumn sky. 15<sup>th</sup> Century by the looks of it, with a rag-stone tower capped with crenulations. He wondered if it had bells. He rather fancied the sound of church bells. When the atmosphere was right at the Tyler's manor house he could hear them from the old church by the river. By the... river. No. It couldn't be. Could it? He shifted his gaze. Closer still, a ribbon of houses dotted the road, the most prominent

being nearest them. A Lord's house no doubt, and one that had its own share of Redcoats busying themselves to make it more defensible.

It was difficult to tell from the milling sea of buff, red and purple coats and dull metal helmets just which side of the conflict they represented, but he would have wagered they were Parliamentary troops preparing to defend this sprawling village from the Royalists in support of Charles I. As of yet no flags had been raised, as if whoever it was did not want to advertise, but the flurry of activity suggested something was afoot.

Fortifications were being erected around the manor house nearest their roost, earthworks heaped up against what looked like little more than pig fence. Thorny hedgerows would serve them better. On the bridge and further along the road to the east, barricades were being assembled from fence posts and wagons. The inhabitants of this village were digging in for something. Hundreds of musket and sword toting men moved amid the buildings and civilian population, and he had seen at least two small cannon being dragged into defensive positions within town. All focus was on the road leading to the west. Somewhere, in this military tangle, lay a precious store of Zeiton 7. Two sonic screwdrivers confirmed it. But where? Perhaps acting on impulse had not been the wisest choice.

The Doctor lowered binoculars and turned to him.

“Jon. Can I call you Jon?”

“I wish you wouldn't,” he said, scanning the bridge with the spyglass. It was a remarkably sturdy structure, supported by three arches. Quite a change from the first time he had been in the region, hunting with Saxon King Edmund.

“Sorry? Jackie called you Jon.”

“Jackie calls me all sorts of things.” He wondered where this line of questioning was leading and tried not to sound too cross. “It’s an alias. That’s all. To fit in long term, since I didn’t have much choice about that. But it’s as much me as ‘John Smith’ ever was. Well, less than when I really *was* John Smith.” Having eschewed that mortal life, relinquished that happy future to embrace his Time Lord nature, he’d found it difficult to think of himself as John Smith anymore.

“But, it’s so much more than an alias,” the Doctor told him earnestly. “Really. Jon Noble. Brilliant name.”

“It was Rose’s idea.”

“Like I said. Brilliant.”

He supposed it was. And as apropos a pseudonym as he had ever had. Jackie had suggested *Don* Noble, after Donna, thinking herself so clever. He’d rejected it in a heartbeat. Not that he rejected Donna or that part of herself that she had unwittingly given him during the meta-crisis that resulted in his creation. Donna. His Donna. A backlash of Time Lord consciousness had transformed her into the Doctor-Donna, just as the Ood had foretold. His last best mate. They were going to travel the stars forever, he and Donna. Well, as long as she could keep up with him and knowing Donna, that would have been a very, very long time.

“You did marry her?” the Doctor asked suddenly, gripping a branch to keep from falling to the ploughed field below.

“What?” He lowered the spyglass and glanced sideways, now quite sure he wanted no part of this line of questioning. They had more important things to do than to



talk about his personal life. Though, truth told, he was surprised it had taken this long.

“Rose. You were going to tell me something back in the greenhouse.”

He raised the glass again and concentrated on the structures on the far side of the bridge. A pub stood near the church. That was handy he supposed. The Doctor was being ever so patient, waiting for him to answer.

He sighed at last and, without looking at his companion, said, “Now wouldn’t that have been a happy ending.”

“What can I say? Love a happy ending, me. And fairy tales. She broke down the walls between worlds to find... you.”

Now he turned, taking in the Doctor’s new features all over again, his long, oval face and that square chin! Blimey! Not to mention the cascade of hair twisting over a bright green eye. Indie rock Time Lord. All they needed was an electric keyboard.

“No. Let’s at least get that part straight. She wanted to find *you*, well, you from before.”

“That would be *you*,” the Doctor pointed out smugly, raising the binoculars once again.

He turned away. What was the point in arguing? He couldn’t even begin to explain what it felt like to be unable to lay claim to his own identity. To not even own his own name. To walk through life having to make it all up as he went along. To be exiled. How was that for irony? Perhaps he didn’t need to explain it at all.

“I doubt she’d go for this,” the Doctor told him, sticking out a prodigious chin before crinkling up the rest of a very youthful face. “She wasn’t keen on my changing the first time. Thought I was a Slitheen in a man suit. As if a Slitheen could squeeze into

your skinny, uhm, skinniness. Blimey. I forgot just how skinny I was. Don't you eat? I remember eating all the time. Must have been all the running. And you can still run!"

"Professional hazard."

"It is that. But, Rose... " the words trailed off.

"Don't," he said at last. "Just don't say anything."

Green eyes darted everywhere except straight ahead into the face that had once belonged to him as well. Then a smile edged nervous, see-sawing lips. A very small, very wistful smile.

"You know what happens when we change. It's the same, but it isn't the same. New man, same as the old, but not. And Rose... I don't expect her to... Not that way. It's... complicated."

"You're telling me."

"Not the half of it."

He curbed the desire to ask the obvious question, surmised it had something to do with River Song, the woman who knew his name. The woman from a future he would never know. Where had they met, anyway? And how was it she knew his name? What had she told him all those years ago? *Spoilers*.

He lowered himself down to another branch that he might survey the surrounding area further. He gazed down the long road, a remnant of ancient Rome, no doubt, then back at the bridge and coursing river that ran beneath it. He tucked the spyglass under one arm and breathed on his fingers. The autumn air grew colder as the day grew longer. He was in need of a coat. Perhaps a hat. Albeit one less waterlogged than the sad affair sitting atop the Doctor's head. He looked back at the bustling town again. A

Parliamentary flag had finally been raised.

“Assuming this is the London Road, and that is the River Brent, and that lot,” he gestured with the spyglass, “are Parliamentarians, I’d say we’re in for a Civil War battle. And if they’re building barricades that quickly today...”

“They’ll be expecting Prince Rupert’s Horse tomorrow.”

“That’s bad.”

“Very, very not good,” the Doctor agreed. “Unless of course history plays out differently here on Pete’s World—assuming we didn’t also travel sideways into another universe as well as backwards--or these guys are just out for some historical cosplay.”

“You know, Tegan never did forgive us for that,” he said, the image of his companion, Tegan Jovanka, dressed as the May Queen coming to mind.

“I fear Tegan never forgave us for a lot of things.”

That brought him up short, stirring up memories that he had no wish to grapple with just then. Too many people had died. Too many were to die after.

“And we have yet to mend our ways,” he said softly. “But, no. The English Civil War happened on Pete’s World. Only here--if we are *here* and not *there*--Essex didn’t reach London before Charles did. Things... changed after that.”

“And you know I love a history lesson, and I was really hoping to lay hands on that Zeiton 7 for you, but right now I’m thinking--“

“We should leave.”

“Yes. Yes we should.”

And they would have, were it not for the group of angry Roundheads gathered directly under the tree.

Given the choice to climb down of their own accord or be shot down, they choose the former and descended to the ground, hands raised in the air. Not a man in the ranks stood above either of their shoulders, but the pikes made them look taller.

“Speak the truth. Are ye for King or Parliament?” asked the leader.

“King.”

“Parliament.”

They looked at one another in shock, hastily reversing their answers.

“Parliament.”

“King.”

“Yes. Definitely. King/Parliament,” they chimed together.

“Damn Cymru dogs,” one of the soldiers muttered.

That’s when it hit him and he turned suddenly toward the Doctor. “How’s your spoken English?”

“My what?” the Doctor asked him with a nervous laugh. “I speak English perfectly, why?”

“No translation circuit here and you’ve been speaking Gallifreyan,” he said.

“I most certainly have *not*,” the Doctor told him, this time the nervousness spreading over the Time Lord’s entire face.

“You have, too. So have I. I didn’t even know I still remembered how. But I have been---since we got here!”

“Quit your nattering, you two!” one of the Roundheads barked.

“I told you they’re Cymru dogs. Shifting their speech and allegiances as the wind changes,” said the first man.

“You know,” he said, still directing most of the conversation toward the Doctor, “he has a point. The Welsh were notorious for that. Bad day at Edgehill wasn’t it? Of course they’ll come ‘round again. Uhm, Tomorrow, if memory serves...”

One of the soldiers pressed a pistol into his ribcage. He swallowed hard.

“This really isn’t the time to debate the subject, though. Too right. Sorry.”

“Oh, hello,” the Doctor said suddenly, nodding toward the young man they’d encountered earlier outside the orangery. The man they had pursued back in Time. The poor fellow stood at the rear of the assembly, obviously trying to master invisibility. “It is you, isn’t it? Good to see a friendly face. Well, a familiar face at least. We weren’t properly introduced earlier. I’m called the Doctor. And this is...”

“Jon Noble,” he muttered, hating to say it but having little choice.

“Yes, right. *Doctor* Jon Noble. May I just say what a marvellous hat you have. I’ve quite enjoyed wearing it, but of course here it is for you. To wear. Again.” The Doctor leaned toward him. “I mentioned it was marvellous, right?”

“That you did. Twice. I don’t think he wants it back.”

“Mott!” the soldier in charged barked. “You know these men?”

The younger man drew back sharply, clearly ill at ease but not wanting to elaborate. And rightly so. The poor dear had been transported to another world. A world as alien and terrifying to someone of this age as any advanced and hostile civilisation might appear to someone from the world they’d come from.

“Mott?” he asked, making the connection to Donna’s grandfather. Wilfred Mott.

Good ole Wilf! The red hair, the sad eyes, that deer-in-the-headlights expression. “Are you from Chiswick then? Oh, you are, aren’t you? No. You are kidding me. That’s some strong genetic transference, there.”

The Doctor was equally bemused.

“Mott!” the group’s leader barked at the young soldier again.

“By all that’s holy, I don’t know them. Only seen them on the West Road on my way to Braynforde. They—they had a big blue wardrobe in the forest with a torch on top of it.”

“A wardrobe!” scoffed the man who had previously made disparaging remarks about the Welsh. Snaggle-toothed did the bloke justice. The large, hairy wart on a pock-marked cheek didn’t help. The sort of man you wanted to avoid in any century. “In league with that devil, Rupert, I’d wager.”

“Don’t be absurd,” the Doctor retorted, tossing back an impressive fringe before donning Mott’s hat again. “Do I look like a poodle?”

“Well, if you really want to know,” he began, wishing he had a mirror just then.

“At least I have on a jacket and tie.”

True and true again.

“Are you here from Colnbrook, then?” asked one man eagerly. Several of the others joined in, pressing them for news, asking if they were envoys of the King.

“Something like that,” he replied, thinking quickly for an angle to play.

Any chance of constitutional compromise had broken down early in 1642. If it was now fall of the same year, the peace negotiations that Parliament had entered into with Charles I had gone awry, no matter which timeline they were to follow. If they had

fallen back through time on Pete's World, as they suspected, the consequences for Brentford were even more dire than on the world Rose and her mum had come from.

"As you can imagine, it's imperative that be on our way to London."

The Doctor caught on to his ruse and offered up the psychic paper with what he hoped now contained convincing credentials and not more Gallifreyan nonsense. They really did need to assess those calculations. In any case the Doctor didn't show the leather wallet for long.

"There, you see? Doctors Smythe and Noble, due in London this very day."

"You'll nae get there before nightfall," replied one of the men.

Indeed. The hour was well past what it had been on the other side of the portal. Hazard of time travel.

A swift riding courier drew their attention.

"It's Essex," the newcomer told them quickly, breathing hard. "He's moving toward Acton to regroup with Hampden. They're calling for more men. London's fallen to the Royalists and Prince Rupert Horse moves in from the west."

The officer in charge drew a sharp breath.

"Take these two men to Sir Wynn's house and put a guard on them. Lord Brooke can attend to them upon his return. If they're the King's men they may be all that stands in the way of Braynforde burning to the ground. And if not, then may God have mercy on their miserable souls."

There were worse places to be detained than Sir Richard Wynn's curing house, he supposed, though the insidious meat hooks from which hung slabs of bacon and ham

hocks were far from comforting. Nor were the eels. He rather hated eels. Especially since that incident with the Nemonites during World War II. Barrels of salt stood along one wall of the small building and a low fire filled the room with choking smoke. Really, it could have been worse. At least they hadn't been put with the bees. Then again, it was November. The bees would be docile. Pigs then. It was better than being put with the pigs. But only just.

"A little early to have killed the fatted calf, isn't it?" the Doctor asked, poking a sizable ham with an index finger.

"Imagine feeding that lot. There'll be scarcely a chicken left in all of Brentford before long. A lot of local fish in here--aside from the eels. Someone's been to Billingsgate," he said, wrinkling his nose. He swept the room with his sonic screwdriver. "Though, I'd wager--if I were a bettin' man--that we'll find something more interesting hidden in those salt tubs."

The Doctor wrestled the lid off of one, then quickly slammed it down again. "Just not that one."

"What's this then?" he asked, pushing the lid off another and lifting out a bronze shield boss covered in Celtic knot work. "Oh, that's a pretty thing, isn't it?"

"It is indeed," the Time Lord agreed, and they both bent over the open cask to see what else could be found.

"Quite the spot for antiquities, Brentford. All sorts of bits and bobs dredged out of the Brent and the Thames, including the rather famous..." he pulled out a small bronze fitting and held it up triumphantly, "Brentford Horn Cap. Or, should I say, *pair* of Horn Caps."



He tossed the second horn cap to the Doctor who gave it a fair appraisal.

“Very interesting. Historically, there’s only one, kept in the British Museum. Love the British Museum. Spent a fortnight in the vault sorting things they don’t even have names for yet.”

He fiddled with his sonic screwdriver, scanning each of the ornate chariot pieces in turn. The one in the Doctor’s left hand resonated as he adjusted the frequency, the excited Zeiton 7 particles in the copper-alloy producing a faint, unearthly glow as the temperature was elevated.

“What sort of devilry is this?”

Equally startled, they looked up through the billowing smoke to see a well-dressed gentleman standing at the open door. If the bloke they’d managed not to cross swords with earlier looked grumpy, this fellow looked genuinely cantankerous. Bad combination, superstitious and a bad-temper. This was an age when they burned suspected witches and then determined the fate of their souls if they were found innocent. Not to mention charging their family for the wood with which to burn them.

“It isn’t what you think,” he said quickly, switching the sonic screwdriver off.

“Wait. What do you think?”

“Sorcery. Alchemy. You’re transforming lead to gold!”

“Am I? Oh, dear. I suppose that is what it looks like.”

The Doctor shook a finger at him. “That was the conclusion someone else had, that other time when we did that other thing at Camboglanna. As you may recall it did not turn out particularly well.”

“*That* was an accident,” he pointed out and might have argued the point further

where it not for the six armed men crowding into an already crowded smoke house.

“Who are you? Who sent you here?”

“Didn’t you get the memo? We’re the Doctors. A better question would be who are *you*? Not Lord Brooke. And you’re not Denzil Holles. Met him in a pub once...”

“You’ll show respect for Captain Bennet,” one of the men barked at them.

“Bennet? William Bennet? Oh my,” he said, recalling the list of the dead after the swiftly approaching battle. “I am sorry.”

“Yes, yes. I was told you were Doctors,” Bennet told them, affording them little courtesy. “And Doctors we’ll need if Rupert’s Horse reaches Braynforde before we have reinforcements. But not your kind.”

“I’m sorry?” the Doctor asked, laughing nervously. “And what kind might that be?”

“The kind we hang from trees,” Bennet growled, turning to leave. “Cattorill, Willoughby, remove the unholy instruments and burn them. Then put our *Doctors* someplace more secure until Holles or Brooke return. I have more pressing things to attend to. Is Lilburne still here...?”

Two of the soldiers advanced on them and he backed away amid the eels, lowering the sonic screwdriver so as to make it appear less threatening.

“You really don’t want to do that because, because--”

“--because of the wonderful things it does,” the Doctor added. They were backed nearly into the rear wall now.

“Yes. Right. Wonderful. Helpful things. Good, wonderful, helpful and not-threatening things.”

The soldiers hesitated, obviously uneasy about the orders they had been given. Couldn't fault them. Suspected sorcery was a chancy business. He noticed that the other four were in no hurry to advance on them either, and instead crowded around the door, discussing the need for a chaplain.

"What wonders do you speak of?" asked one.

"What wonders. This fine gentleman wants to know what wonders your, ehm, tool, can perform..."

"Wasn't turning lead to gold impressive enough?" he asked.

"Evidently not," the Doctor said.

"All right. All right. It is also used very effectively for bluffing."

The Doctor looked at him quizzically. "Bluffing?"

"Yes. Bluffing. You remember bluffing? We're both very, very good at bluffing..."

A moment later they were shoulder to shoulder, brandishing their sonic screwdrivers like comic book ray guns. A short burst of energy heated the belt buckle of the first Roundhead's trousers until it was at a sufficiently high temperature to be noticed. In a flash, the poor man was more concerned about catching on fire than keeping a watchful eye on two bizarre prisoners. The man's obvious distress caused two others to look away and when subsequent blasts popped the metal bands on salt barrels, splattering meat and grease alike, the rest of the men scattered, calling for reinforcements. Smoke billowed from the curing house, masking their escape.

"The horn cap!" he cried, turning back.

"It isn't worth it!" the Doctor shouted at him.

“It is to me!” He ducked back into the choking pork-scented miasma, feeling his way through slippery eels and sausages to the crates.

He scooped up one brass fitting, then the other one, uncertain which one he needed. A faulty sonic screwdriver did nothing to sort out his dilemma. Behind him, the Doctor urged him to make haste. *Run* was the word used. Twice, in fact. The quickest solution was to take both of the bronze-age relics and he did so, pocketing the artefacts as he dodged back out, blinking smoke from his eyes.

For a third time, and with considerable gusto, the Doctor shouted “Run!”

If only he’d known in which direction. As luck would have it, he went the wrong way.

## Chapter Seven

He awoke on cold, hard ground, his arms fastened securely behind his back, his legs clamped in irons. Joy. It had been ages since he'd been held in a dungeon--even if it was little more than a dank cellar. The result was the same. And the smell! Nothing quite compared to *parfum pestilentiel de prison* mingled with burning lard. To make matters worse it was wet. The steady beat of rain outside meant the trickling stream already coursing through the centre of the room would be increasing. Were it to keep up he'd have need of a skiff. And a paddle. As he blinked the grit from his eyes he was just able to discern the shadow of another inmate.

"Yes. It's me."

He had never been quite so relieved to talk to himself. Even if doing so in the fetid darkness while chained to the floor was more than a little disconcerting. It was all rather familiar, now that he thought about it. All that was missing was Jamie McCrimmon. Ah, Jamie. Good man, Jamie.

"You've been unconscious a long time. They hit us both pretty hard--and hit you more."

"Why?" he asked, making his first attempt to sit up.

"You were fighting back."

"And you weren't?" He spit the dirt from his mouth as he attempted for a second time to rise and having scarcely more luck than he had had at the first go. At least this

time he didn't pitch forward into the slime.

"There were seventeen of them and only two of us."

"Only seventeen?" he asked.

"I thought instead of being knocked out or dragged off straight away to be drowned in the Thames, that I'd try to convince our lovely hosts that we are not in league with Satan, were not engaging in the transmutation of lead to gold, are not Prince Rupert's spies, familiars, or even his tailors. That last was not difficult to sell seeing how you're dressed. And to think I used to wear suits. Have you examined yourself in a mirror lately? And when was the last time you had a cut and trim?"

"While I was at it I also attempted to express to them the futility of the war and why deposing the king wasn't going to work in the long run as, unknown to most of them, Parliament was also abusing power and had their own issues regarding fiscal responsibility, corruption, and in any case it was pig-headed foolishness to pit brother against brother over religious ideals."

"You said all that?"

"I don't remember," the Doctor said, chains and shackles clinking as the Time Lord shifted in the darkness. "I was talking fast and might have been a bit difficult to understand seeing as they were dragging me by my hair."

"Were they swayed?" he asked.

"Not so much," the Doctor replied, sounding rather sad. "And now I have a terrible headache. Almost as bad as when I met you."

"Thanks for that, mate."

"Don't mention it. I am afraid I may have misquoted their scriptures. It has been

rather a while since I read it. Only just chewed through the sock they stuck in my mouth,” the Doctor told him with a loud smacking of lips. “My tongue tastes like a wet sheep.”

He struggled for a third time to sit up. The Doctor scooted toward him, offering what little assistance might be got when both parties are inconvenienced with shackles. Their solitary source of light emanated from a crudely-fashioned stoneware lamp high on a ledge. Judging by the odour and the smoke, efficient fuel was not being wasted on prisoners. As his eyes adjusted he slowly focused on the Doctor’s face and one blackened eye. He cringed.

“Believe you me, you look worse. I’ll have you know I asked for a room with a view, but you see where that’s got us.” After a pause the Time Lord added: “I was concerned. I... couldn’t hear your hearts beating.”

“Heart.”

“Sorry?”

“Heart. Singular. One. One heart. One, human heart.”

“Ah...yes. That would explain it,” the Doctor sighed.

“Well, then. Aside from the eye thing there, and your mouth tasting like a wet sheep, are you all right?” he asked, genuinely concerned.

“I’m always all right,” the Doctor responded with practiced ease.

“You’re lying,” he shot back.

“Yes. It was a stupid question. Have any more?”

“I don’t suppose there’s anything to eat?” he asked.

The Doctor began to laugh. “Peckish at a time like this?”

He shrugged helplessly. One did work up an appetite running for miles in the rain, climbing yew trees, and fighting off seventeen Roundheads. No spaghetti rings and hot dogs for Tea after all.

“Well, it depends on your definition of food,” the Doctor told him, nodding toward two bowls on the floor, the contents of which matched the contents of what passed for a toilet, and no doubt left over from the last unhappy inhabitants. “If recollection serves... no. Not even for you.”

“Right... so...,” he rattled chains like the Ghost of Christmas Past, “manacles, shackles, chains and a really dark, smelly dungeon. Well, just a cellar, really. Lord Wynn’s cellar I imagine, and with Lord Wynn not in residence we’ll have little chance of appealing to any kind of real authority. Have we thought of a brilliant plan yet?”

“Several,” the Doctor told him smugly, then sighed. “Unfortunately I haven’t got a case of lemons, a box of shortbread or a llama.”

“The best plans always seem to go to waste,” he said, twisting about to test his restraints. They were more than adequate, but... “Hello, what’s this? It feels like I still have the horn caps in my pocket *and* my sonic screwdriver,” he said, surprised by the discovery.

The Doctor twisted around to look. “Indeed you do. And mine is in my coat pocket if I’m not mistaken. After our little show down they were afraid to touch them. Something to be said of bluffing after all.”

“Wait. I’ve been lying in the dirt and,” he wrinkled his nose, “other things, on my face, and you just sat there with a sock in your mouth? You could have sprung us free by now!”



“Where’s the fun in that? Oh, fine. Have it your way, but it’s going to be a hell of a game of Twister.”

He knew he should have studied longer with Harry Houdini.

Their captors had obviously planned for their eventual attempt to escape, and while they had not been chained to either end of the room, they had been chained in such a manner so as to impede their efforts to assist one another without considerable contortion. As they twisted about, grinding ever more dirt into their clothing, thunder rolled overhead, shaking the house to the foundation. He felt the dissipated charge of unearthly energy.

“There’s something intensely unsettling about these storms,” the Doctor said.

He had to agree. Given its inherent instability, the open Rift might be exacerbating the storms, but if that were the case, the influx of temporal energy from this time might also provide the *Tardis* an unprecedented feast of *artron* energy. If the internal power regulator was functioning properly. A big if. And a vital necessity. If he failed to get enough thrust the next time he piloted her, they might not be so lucky with their landing. And it wasn’t the only problem still facing the Time Ship. The Doctor had been right. Dimensional instability meant an ever-increasing danger of time spillage, an event which he had begun to suspect was already effecting the present day. If they failed to remedy the situation he would have more to worry about than dying in 1642 and never seeing Rose Tyler again.

“We did, you know,” he said suddenly, thoughts of Rose and how much he wanted to be home flooding his mind. “We got married. Rose and I. You asked before.”

“So I gathered. You’re not wearing it now, but it’s obvious you had a ring.

That's a nasty scar on your left hand by the way."

"Discharge from a faulty capacitor, just about the time the briode nebuliser failed and about six minutes before I crashed in Pete Tyler's garden," he said, angling his body so that the Doctor might retrieve the sonic screwdriver from his back pocket. The chariot fittings in his front pocket dug deeply into his groin and he let go a painful yelp before shifting the other way.

"Oh! I almost had it!"

He groaned and leaned again. "It was rubbish," he said through a grimace. "Not the ring. Well, it was rubbish after it melted, but, the wedding. Well, not the wedding. Well, *I* was rubbish."

"We're always rubbish at weddings." The Doctor sounded remorseful. "Did you dance?"

"I... after a fashion," he said, worming his way closer. Perhaps it would be easier for him to fish the screwdriver from the Doctor's coat pocket. "They made me dance with *Jackie!*"

"They *didn't!* Regeneration would be easier."

That was a fact.

"I wondered if you'd do it."

"I'm sorry?" he asked.

"Get married. I wondered if you'd get married. If that's what she wanted."

"You never considered what *I* wanted," he pointed out.

"I assumed you'd want what I wanted."

"Which was?"

“It’s a little fuzzy now.”

“There you have it. I honestly didn’t have an opinion one way or the other, but after awhile, well, why not? I wasn’t going anywhere, was I? When Jacks got wind that we were going to run off to America, though, it just sort of happened. It’s not like I was going take Rose to New Vegas City to be married by an Elvis impersonator. But, oh no. I wasn’t going to cheat Jackie out of her only daughter’s wedding. So we had one. A big, posh English country garden wedding with those crinkly paper bows, and balloons, and confetti and sky lanterns, and little napkins with our names printed on them. I mean, seriously? Our names on napkins. Why, I ask you? And cake. Lots of cake. Lots of really good cake, actually.”

“Last time I got married we didn’t even have Jammie Dodgers...”

“You what?” He could not see the Doctor’s expression to know whether or not that statement was facetious.

“Oh, never mind. This is your story. And I’m sure it’s better than mine. Tell me about Rose. She... she must have been lovely.”

Something in the Doctor’s tone gave him pause, but he chose to go on. “Too right. She carried roses. Blue roses. And wore a blue dress.”

“I’m noticing a theme here. Were the balloons and the bows blue, too?”

“Oh, belt up. It’s what she wanted. We did it her way. Mostly. There were... some concessions. She wanted it to be Gallifreyan, too. But, you know. That would have been...”

“Difficult?” It was more of a statement than a question.

“Yeah,” he agreed. Some things were best left in the past. “But it all turned out

right in the end. I even took her to Barcelona. Finally, Barcelona. Can you believe it? Not the planet, but Barcelona nonetheless. Seemed like I owed her that much. It was that or Port Adventura but the last time we'd been there she got sick on the loop-de-loop. And we were happy. Really, really happy..." the words trailed off. "Everything I ever dreamed. It was like Christmas. Every day. With snow."

"And snowmen?" was the Doctor's earnest question.

"Oh yeah. Armies of snowmen," he grinned, remembering those days. Days he had never dreamed would actually be his to live. Life on Pete's World hadn't been all bad. Some days had even been... fantastic. "It was the best. Until... it stopped snowing."

Words slipped away from him then. He did not want to admit it to the Doctor anymore than he wanted to admit to himself, but there it was. It stopped snowing. It just. Stopped. Snowing. The Doctor was evidently too occupied with their weak plan of escape to notice the change in his tone.

"Can you reach now and get--"

"--almost have it--"

"Ow!"

"Sorry," he said. "Lean to the left. No, your left."

"Sorry. Ow!"

His fingers slipped past the sonic screwdriver and he tried again, almost, almost. Then he stopped moving. He had to tell the truth. Why did those moments of personal revelation always seem to coincide with his life being in peril?

"I haven't seen Rose in months."

“Ye what?”

“I took the *Tardis* and left Scotland. Not quite as dramatic as when we left Gallifrey behind, but there you have it.”

“You left Rose in Scotland?” the Doctor asked, incredulous. “*Scotland?*”

“Well, it's not like I painted her blue and made her eat deep-fried porridge! It's part of the modern world, Scotland. They've got cars and indoor plumbing and everything.

“That’s where our *house* is, you muppet. Well, not so much a house as an estate. Well, Torchwood, actually. The house I mean. It was her idea, not long after you left us here. Move to Scotland she said. I’d forgotten how much it rains. But she loved it. There are more stars there than in London. When it isn’t raining. You walk on the moors late at night and you almost forget you still can’t touch them.”

That’s where he imagined she would be. That was if she had saved the planet from the sheep-stealing-alien-threat she had been dispatched to investigate. He was glad he wasn’t going to be asked to fill out *that* paperwork.

“Well that explains your accent.” A sonic screwdriver clattered to the ground. He wasn’t sure which one. “But you left her? After the wedding and the balloons and the dress and the--the--the--napkins? You *left* her?”

“Whoa, Sunshine! It wasn’t like *that*!” Trust himself to suspect the worst of himself.

But the Doctor was not going to let him explain. Why should he? It struck him, quite suddenly, that the Time Lord harboured some guilt regarding the matter and it provided him some perverse pleasure to realize that even now, after so many years—ever

so many more for the Doctor, if he understood correctly how old the Doctor was--it still hurt. And so it should, after all the hurt he'd endured himself. Not that they hurt for the same reasons. Not anymore.

"I punched a hole back into a parallel world to bring her and her mum back safely to Pete--not to mention putting 27 planets back in their rightful places, and saving the *Earth* by towing it back from the Medusa Cascade and then," the Doctor sputtered, not even pausing for breath, "I leave her with me, well, you, which I thought was what she wanted to 'grow old along with me' and you left her? You told her. You told her what I couldn't. You told her that you loved her!"

"Oy! I helped with saving those planets, if you remember," he yelled back. "And it was 26 planets and one moon, to be precise. And I do love her. You're the one who couldn't say it!"

"I didn't think it needed to be said."

"Yeah? Well put that one on your list of epic fails, Time Boy."

"You *left!*"

"I... "

"You *left Rose*? How could you leave *Rose*?"

"I... she... we had... It's complicated."

"What did you do to her?" the Doctor demanded, low, level, and threatening.

"Do?" he gasped, not only at the accusation but at the sharp tug on the chain attached to his manacled wrists. He tripped over his words, trying to make sense of it all, but how could he? How would it ever make any sense? His entire existence made no sense.

“I didn’t do anything,” he said in his most measured tone. “I couldn’t do anything. That was the problem. I couldn’t do anything. It didn’t matter how much I wanted to, I just couldn’t. But it wasn’t my fault!”

“What then? It was hers?”

“No,” he stated firmly, fervently. “No. It was not hers.”

“So, what? You’re saying it was mine?”

“Well, you made me Time Boy!” he snarled.

“Believe me, it was not intentional! But here we are. And you know what? I gave you everything. I gave you *Rose*. *And stop calling me Time Boy!*”

“She wasn’t yours to give away--and neither was I!” he shouted back, feeling a degree of anger he hadn’t felt in oh so very long. Anger... and despair. How frequently were they bedfellows. “You had to have known it wouldn’t work. You left me here, for her. To have the life you wouldn’t give yourself. I get that. I trusted you. Hated you, but trusted you. I have one heart. I’m part human, but I’m also Gallifreyan. A pathetic, halfling mutant. The Time Lord That Isn’t. I wasn’t sure what else that meant.”

“What else what meant? What do you mean what else?”

They both struggled to get free then, their total lack of cooperation making it impossible for either one of them to achieve their goal. The sonic screwdriver was drawn from his back pocket at last, only to clatter to the ground. He felt a hot sting on his hand when one of the devices was accidentally activated. He suppressed the urge to cry out but only just.

“What the hell kind of setting is that? Give it here before you burn a hole in my--

”

Another blast and the manacles were hot, the chain between then hotter still. He twisted his hands, attempting to break free, instead pressing the fingers of his right hand against the scorched metal. He pitched sideways in pain, knocking the sonic screwdriver out of the Doctor's hand. They both scrambled to retrieve the fallen devices in the dim light, pushing and shoving one another until the chains that bound them were tangled about their legs and they were left sitting back to back, completely spent.

"I couldn't look at it anymore," he whispered at last, thoughts of home raw in his mind. Thoughts of the nursery he and Rose had never finished decorating. "I stayed as long as I could. For her. To make sure she was all right. But then I just... had... to leave."

"Couldn't look at what?"

He stared into the gloom, tears streaming silently down his face. It had been so long since he had allowed himself the luxury to cry. So long since he had given himself permission to grieve at all. He kicked out savagely, driving the heel of another ruined trainer into the wet ground, resenting having been brought to tears this way. Here. Now. With *him*.

"An empty cradle, all right? He died. My son died. Our son."

The Doctor's back stiffened against his.

"Your son? You lost your...? Rose had--*your* baby?"

"Yes, my baby. What did you think I meant?" he rasped, battling raw emotion.

"Small person. Slippery when wet. You remember those?"

"I—yes, yes..." The words trailed off in a sad whisper. "I remember."

How stupid to think otherwise. He took a long, ragged breath then let himself



collapse. A strong back held him up as he wept.

Never had he expected to be a father again. He had abandoned any thought of that long before the end of Gallifrey drew nigh. Even here, with Rose, it was out of the question. Not with *this* insane biological profile. The man that shouldn't exist. *Never been another like me* he thought bitterly. For a reason! Though he looked like the same man on the outside, under the microscope he might as well have been Frankenstein's Monster. Part human. Part Time Lord. And his son. Their son. Their dear, small boy... Not enough of either. What began as a miracle ended in a nightmare. And he without the time or resources to devise a viable genetic solution. Cleverest mind on this world, but not clever enough to save his own child. Not even a time machine helped in the end. He would have smashed his way through the Time Lock to Gallifrey itself had he come up with a way.

Such a fool he had been in the aftermath. He'd never broken so many things in his life. Not intentionally. Never punched so many holes in so many walls. He would never have guessed just how intense human anger could be, being so accustomed to his own, dark fury. Combined... they were terrifying. Words betrayed him, first refusing to come and then, when they did, it was every wrong thing. Stupid alien brain in a human head saying stupid things about destiny and genetics and biological imperatives to the grieving mother of his child. Rose. His precious, precious Rose. Strong to the last, stepping from the ashes to focus on the future. She never blamed him. Not once. But he did. And he would not let her forgive him for not saving their child.

"I couldn't save him," he said, voice hoarse, eyes stinging. "Of all the people in the world, I couldn't save that one. She said I needed time to sort myself out. Imagine!

Me, sort myself out. As if I'd know where to start.

“She made me better before. You said so yourself—that day in Norway, when you left us there together. She made me better, but not this time. Imagine what that felt like, for both of us. You gave us a fairy tale. We should have known the Trickster would be first in line after you left.”

“Time can be rewrit--”

“Don't. Just... don't.”

“But--”

“I said *don't*.”

After a long pause the Doctor spoke again, gently.

“I'm sorry. I am so, so sorry.”

This time they both knew it was true.

## Chapter Eight

They sat in murky silence a long time, all thought of escape gone. The wick in the earthenware lamp on the ledge guttered out ere long, leaving them in smoky darkness. Still they sat, each lost in his own thoughts. They might have been the same thoughts. He had not the words to ask.

A flurry of activity upstairs interrupted their miserable reverie and he raised his head slowly to listen. The Doctor shifted behind him, no doubt doing the same. A series of shots followed soon after, suggesting morning had arrived, but they had no way of verifying the time. All he knew for sure was that he was exhausted and aching and gnawingly hungry. The rumble of thunder once more shook the house. Belatedly he realised it was not thunder at all, but heavy artillery. Cannon fire. The day was upon them, and with it Rupert's Horse.

In a flash of green and blue light from both sonic screwdrivers, he was free of the crippling shackles and staggering to his feet. For a moment he wasn't sure he remembered how to walk.

"Time to get outta Dodge," he said.

"And not a moment too soon," the Doctor agreed, training a beam of green light onto the remaining shackles. For some reason they were being more resistant to release.

“You’re doing it wrong--”

“If you don’t mind, you’re in my light!”

“What light? Here, let me--” he swiped the sonic screwdriver from the Doctor’s hand.

“Do I look like I need help?

“As a matter of fact, yes.”

“Stop there if you value your lives.”

He spun round at the sound of a quavering voice. Red-headed young Mott stood in the doorway, an ornate bronze lamp in the shape of a peacock in one hand, a pistol in the other. The reluctant time traveller looked none the more pleased to be in the cellar than they did.

“Really,” he said, “that’s the wrong thing to ask us. And what are you doing down here anyway? They send you to mind the prisoners while the cavalry charges into Brentford? Blimey. We’re more popular than I realized. What’s your name anyway?”

“Don’t talk to me. The chaplain warned me you’d try to bewitch me.”

“Did he, now?” He slid the Doctor’s sonic screwdriver into his back pocket then raised his hands, turning them back and forth that young master Mott might see that he was unarmed. “There. Is that better? I don’t want to hurt you. *We* don’t want to hurt you. Don’t want to hurt anyone. Really. We just want to get back home, preferably with all our limbs attached. Bet you want to go home too. Back to Chiswick, yeah? Yeah. You want to go home. What soldier doesn’t.”

Mott kept the pistol raised, but slowly nodded in agreement.

“But you know what’s happening here, right? This is the lull before the storm.

Foggy outside is it? Before long 1,000 Musketeers are going to sweep through Brentford--”

“Braynforde,” the Doctor corrected for the time period.

“Braynforde, right, and on toward Turnham Green. There’s no going home to Chiswick right now, my friend, and men firing from behind hedges are not going to be enough to hold back what’s coming.”

“The bridge will hold and if not--”

“Barricades in town? Snipers in the side streets? Lord Brooke’s men armed to the teeth? Or what’s left of them since you lost half of them to reinforce Essex yesterday--which, by the way, was not supposed to happen. By nightfall all of Br-aynford will be burning. And this house will be the first to fall.

“Awww,” he smacked his head with his hand. “I’ve gone and said too much, haven’t I?”

“Not inspiring much hope in the troops, no,” the Doctor observed.

“Listen, it only stands to reason. The King engaged Essex before he could get to London. It wasn’t supposed to happen that way, but that’s neither here nor there. It wasn’t my fault when it happened the other way ‘round and I don’t see how it’s my fault this time, either, but who knows? Not me.

“Trained Bands will be in an uproar, yeah, but the King has the city and Rupert’s Horse and the remaining regiments are closing in. All that stands between London and them is the River Brent and the village of Braynforde and I’m sorry, I’m truly, truly sorry, but tomorrow’s market day really will need to be cancelled.” He turned to the Doctor. “Did I say too much again?”

The Doctor waved a hand dismissively. “History is rewriting what’s already been rewritten. Go on. You’re on a roll.”

“You aren’t helping.”

“There isn’t a large enough mop in the universe.”

He scowled at the sarcasm then turned back to Mott and tried another approach.

“You’ve been places you didn’t expect to go, eh? Noticed you weren’t letting on about that yesterday in front of the boys. What would they think of that, eh?”

Now Mott had something to say. “They’d never believe me if I told them. It wasn’t real. It can’t be. It was a nightmare.”

“Well,” he drawled, “to you, yeah. Just as terrifying as it would be for, oh, I don’t know. Job. Like the sound of that name. Jo-o-ob,” he drew the name out long and low.

“Good man, that Job. I rather liked him. Anyway, let’s say Job sets foot in London today. What could he possibly think because that place would be truly terrifying. He wouldn’t belong there, stepping out of his time and everything he knows. But it’s just a place. Where you were, where we were, where we should be. Just a place.”

“By God’s teeth it was like *hell*.”

“Trust me, there’s worse places. Not that I’ve been to hell, though, Krop Tor would be right up there.”

“I don’t think that’s helping,” the Doctor pointed out.

“Oh. Right. So, what’s your name? Go on, tell me it’s Wilfred. That’d just be brilliant. So what is it?”

“It’s George.”

“Oh. Well. George. Good. Really. Good name. Helped him with a dragon

once. But you! You, George Mott, you travelled to another time and another world. Think of the stories you can tell your sons, one of which you could name Wilfred. Assuming you have sons. Or a wife. Do you have a wife? I have a wife. And I'd very much like to see her again."

As he spoke, he edged nearer and nearer the younger man, keeping eye contact until his hand closed gently on George's pistol and he tipped it lightly out of the soldier's hand.

"There. Better."

Though frightened, young George Mott was not to be won over so easily. A second pistol swung into view and while there was no time to prime it, it served admirably as a club. He took the first blow in stride, still trying to talk his assailant down, but there was nothing for it. Mott was not going to be convinced quickly and he was experiencing a rare moment where he was lost for words. It might have had something to do with the growling in his stomach being louder than the cannon fire outside. In a spontaneous motion he blocked the next strike, knocked the pistol from Mott's hand and rammed the heel of his hand into the younger man's jaw.

"Don't hurt him!" the Doctor cried as the pistol clattered to the ground. By the way the Time Lord scrambled out of the way one would have thought it was a viper poised to strike. "He might be Donna's great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great granddad!"

"Wrong universe!"

"You still shouldn't hurt him."

"What about him not hurting *me*?"

“Try giving back his hat.”

“I didn’t have his hat! You did!”

Undeterred, Mott set the lamp aside and reached for a knife. What was it about humans and poky bits of metal? This was not going to end well. He whipped out the Doctor’s sonic screwdriver, searching in the dim light for inspiration. A decorative wooden case on a rough-hewed oak table against the far wall drew his attention, and he fumbled with the unfamiliar device until the Doctor made a series of suggestions. The last one unlocked the crate. He heard the telltale click, but the box remained closed.

The Doctor glanced up. “Wood?”

“Wood.”

“Been meaning to work on that,” the Doctor apologized.

“Me, too. Time to improvise.”

Finding himself up against a damp, stone wall, he reached into his pocket for one of the horn caps and lobbed it across the room, rimming it off the case. He knew he was going to hate himself for it, but he grabbed the second one and threw it full force.

The latch on the case popped wide open on impact, spilling heavy boxwood balls to the ground. The distraction gave him the strategic advantage and he wrestled the knife from his assailant’s hand without getting stabbed even once. He could have followed it with a fist into the soldier’s face and laid the man out flat were it not for the Doctor spouting rhetoric that had once fallen from his own lips. Rarely had the old maxim, *he who hesitates is lost*, been truer. George Mott grabbed one of the wooden mallets still resting within the box and swung. The blow sent him reeling, sonic screwdriver flying out of his hand and splashing into one of the pans of whatever hadn’t passed the edible



test earlier. He dropped to his hands and knees, swaying, his vision narrowing into a slash of white light. He gritted his teeth against the pain, swearing that when he got home he was going to sleep. A long, long time. Real sleep. No dreams. No regrets. And he was going to leave the Doctor here.

“There’s something in your hair.”

He touched the side of his head and winced. “That would be blood!”

Why Mott ran off down the hall without finishing him off he couldn’t comprehend, choosing instead to be thankful for small favours.

“The prisoners are escaping!”

So much for small favours.

“What? That’s a bit premature,” he groaned, crawling to where the Doctor sat on the grubby floor, still tangled in chains.

For a terrible moment, as blood dripped between them from the blow Mott had inflicted on him, he glared at the Time Lord. Then he grabbed his sonic screwdriver and attempted to resonate the rusty screws. When the instrument once more backfired, he hurled it across the room with an angry cry and staggered to his feet, searching frantically for the Doctor’s sonic screwdriver in a bowl of slimy gruel.

“Go,” the Doctor told him.

“What?”

“Just go. Go on, while you can--”

“They’ll shoot you!” he pointed out.

“Better that than both of us. I’ll Regenerate. You won’t. Probably.” A crooked grin appeared on the Doctor’s face. “Maybe I’ll even be ginger this time.”

“Don’t you dare!” he growled. “And you won’t Regenerate if they shoot you in the head. Or if you *do* Regenerate they’ll shoot you again. And unless my count’s off, you’re running out of Regenerations.”

They both grimaced at the thought. He tossed aside the first bowl and grabbed the other, sloshing globs of an unknown, reeking substance as he pulled out the Doctor’s dripping sonic, flipping it triumphantly in the air.

“Hah! Now, shut up, hold still, and let me--”

But the heavy sounds of thudding boots and pistol fire heard above them spelled disaster. Sir Richard’s Wynn’s house had, at last, been overrun by the Royalists. From there they would move on to Brentford proper, overcome the barricades, outnumber Lord Brooke’s Parliamentary forces and later loot and burn the city. It wouldn’t be long before the first of who knew how many soldiers burst down the cellar steps in search of escaping enemies. They might be lucky and be among the captured that Charles I later pardoned. Then again, they might not. Given their luck thus far this trip, he did not want to leave anything to chance. He shoved the sonic screwdriver into the Doctor’s hands and collected one of the pistols he had taken off of George Mott.

“What are you doing now?!” the Doctor cried.

“Shhhh! Spanner!” He put a grimy finger to his lips. “Hopefully nothing if you can free yourself fast enough. Gnaw through it if you have to, but pipe down and let’s be about it, shall we?”

“You are not shooting anyone!”

“Only if they try to stop us,” he said levelly. He retrieved the fallen lamp and moved into the hall, searching for the steps, wondering how many pell-mell mallets

would be required to fortify the cellar door.

Horses trampled past the house and he could hear musket fire and, in the distance, the rumble of field guns. They were in the middle of a ruddy war. To think he had fancied a bit of an adventure. Oh, this little expedition just couldn't get any better. Soaked and muddied to the skin, smoked, beaten, imprisoned, and left without the very thing they'd made the trip for. The horn caps, if he was not mistaken, were now in George Mott's powder bag. The man might be legitimately afraid of them, but was no fool. To make matters worse the Doctor was lecturing him. *Him!*

"Are you insane? Put that gun down! You are *not* shooting anyone *at all*."

"More sonicing, less talking—com'on, com'on *Doctor*," he poked his head back into the prison chamber. "My God, am I always this annoying?"

"As far back as I can remember," the Doctor said, hands now seemingly tangled in the length of chain attaching ankle shackles to the floor. "But there'll be no shooting. Not now. Not ever. I forbid it."

He strode back into the room then, lowering the weapon slightly. "You forbid it? *Forbid?* You pompous, self righteous, arrogant git! Are you quite free?"

"Shhhh!" the Doctor whispered. "Spanner!"

They limped down dark corridors in search of an escape tunnel that did not lead up into the house itself. From the rattling and banging above it sounded as if the cellar door had been barred from within. Not his doing. That meant George Mott had taken an alternate route to freedom, and he was bound and determined to find it. The Doctor trailed behind him, fiddling with the settings on the sonic screwdriver he'd dashed into the wall previously. Mingled light, sapphire and emerald, illuminated their path. He

raised his head, listening to the increase in musket fire. History books in both universes would later call the Battle of Brentford a skirmish, but he was reasonably sure that was not what the men who fought that day would have called it. Given the political--and religious—climate, he knew they would fare no better with the king's men than they had with Cromwell's if they were labelled as heretics. He wondered bleakly what would become of George Mott.

The Doctor handed him back his screwdriver and he shoved it into his back pocket without looking at it. A handkerchief followed.

“For--you know--” the Doctor indicated his bleeding head.

“Right. Thanks.”

They edged around a corner, moving as rapidly as possible down a long, roughly hewn shaft that led away from the house and cellar. The air was cleaner here, moving steadily through some unknown exit.

“Are you planning on taking that?”

“What, this?” He tossed the pistol toward the Doctor, who set it down on the ground nervously.

“You really are a great big outer space dunce. That one wasn't even loaded.”

Brentford burned. Thatched roofs blazed, glass shattered, men drowned in the Thames, and he wrestled with the sombre reality that he could do nothing. They could do nothing. Nothing. The cleverest men in the room had failed to win the confidence of one, young man named George Mott, certainly had not made any points with the Parliamentary soldiers, and lost the only source of Zeiton 7 they'd discovered during

their short stay in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. Worst journey ever. Oh, and Brentford was burning. But he already knew that.

History was repeating. As were his thoughts. Both hurt.

Prince Rupert of the Rhine had had the perfect cover, he mused. Morning mist had all but blotted out the sun, but the Prince had not anticipated the resistance his forces would meet on the approach to Brentford and had been forced to withdraw until the Welsh infantry arrived. Ironical they would plunder Lord Wynn's house first. But plunder they did. Nothing was sacred. No one was spared. Men and horses ran everywhere now. Men with pikes. Men with swords. Men with scrawny chickens tucked up under their arms. Rows of men charging over the bridge with muskets. If any one of the Roundheads they had tangled with yesterday had recognized them during their flight, they were in no humour to detain them now.

The Doctor was clearly horrified. And angry. Such emotion looked strange on an otherwise jovial face. Part human though he was, he still knew the fury of a Time Lord. Still knew the fury of *this* Time Lord.

"They called us The Oncoming Storm," the Doctor said softly. "And here we are, sitting in a tree while Brentford burns, and people die, and we're doing nothing. We can't just walk away from this."

"We have to," he said, handing the spyglass back to the Doctor and preparing to climb down from the tree. "And we have to do it now."

What could they possibly do? Brentford fell. In both worlds. The only way to have prevented any of this was to have prevented Rupert from attacking, and they had been rather indisposed. Besides, the outrage this night would bring would be a powerful

catalyst for the Parliamentary cause. It might not be a fixed point in time, but it was what it was. No matter how difficult it was to walk away, he knew they needed to, and yet, what was the point of being a Lord of Time if...

“Would you really have shot someone to get us out of there?”

He hesitated a moment, troubled by the question. Troubled further that he hesitated at all.

“What? No. Of course not. Maybe. I don’t know. I wasn’t going to let them shoot you.”

The Doctor fell silent, as if absorbing this bit of unsettling information. Surely it couldn’t be that much of a surprise. What was that line? Desperate times call for desperate measures? He had done worse. Far, far worse.

“I had to leave you behind, you know.”

“Yes. I know,” he said wearily, lowering himself gingerly from the tree. His legs buckled for a moment and he struggled to stand. The November night drew close and he regretted not having borrowed a coat off one of the fallen.

“Really, I--”

“I know.” He could admit it was true. He might have done the same. It didn’t mean he had to like it.

“You were dangerous,” the Doctor told him, jumping down from the tree. “At that moment maybe the most dangerous man in the galaxy. Maybe you still are. God knows I’m dangerous all by myself but you--you committed genocide ten minutes after you were born.”

“More like 900 years after I’d been born! You’re one to talk about genocide!

You were the Destroyer of Worlds before I was, Sunshine. This,” he jerked a thumb over his shoulder at the blazing sky, “this is nothing compared to what we saw. What we did.”

“That was different--”

“In whose dreams? You’d bung a Dalek with a rock if that’s all you had! Know how I know that? Because I’d do the same thing! Honestly, what did you expect from me? I burst into existence in a burning *Tardis* sinking in the belly of the Dalek Crucible, Davros is about to explode the Reality Bomb and cancel out all of creation, and I’d just realized I was part human. I was having a really bad day!”

“There’s always another way. Always.”

“Not always. And you know it.”

They trudged on in silence, passing into the shadows. And rain. He hugged himself, shivering against the cold. His clothes were filthy, the jeans mud-caked and his t-shirt plastered against his skin. His trainers squelched in the mud. Why was it that he was always coming home in the rain like some unwanted, stray mongrel?

“You know what the worst part was?” he asked, side stepping the remnants of a broken plough jammed deeply into the field through which they walked. “The worst part was realizing you’d have forgiven the Master just so you wouldn’t be alone. But not yourself. Not me. At times... I envied him dying.”

The Doctor said nothing. And it was a strangely unsettling nothing.

“Forget it. Forget it. And stop lying to yourself. I’ll tell you why you really left me,” he said through chattering teeth, feeling marginally magnanimous at the moment.

“You had to take Donna home.”

Now the Doctor responded, raising soulful green eyes slowly, face creased with

pain. “You knew?”

He laughed. A painful, mirthless laugh. Of course he knew. Poor Donna could not have survived having a Time Lord consciousness poured into her mind anymore than Rose could have survived after looking into the heart of the *Tardis*. He wasn't sure at first that he was going to survive himself, but had just enough Time Lord DNA to tip the scales in his favour. He had yet to decide if that was a blessing or a curse.

“She was my best mate, Donna,” he said.

“Yes she was. The best. And the best part of you if you don't mind my saying.”

“She'd agree with you on that, Time Boy,” he said, a smile edging his lips.

“Sorry. Time Boy. Got a nice ring to it, though, don't it? Time. Boy. Just tell me she made it home. She made it home... didn't she?”

“Hmm? Oh, yes. Yes. Of course. Back home in Chiswick. Doesn't remember a thing, making due. Married. A mum herself by now. They're all fine,” the Doctor told him, looking up briefly. “All of them. I made sure this time. Before I... left.”

The tone of those words betrayed some additional dark memory. He chose not to ask. He had had enough of dark memories for one day.

He looked back over his shoulder once more at Brentford, burning in the night. They had made their escape, but how many others had not? How many more would die during this bitter, bitter civil war? Brother pitted against brother.

“This isn't the way it's supposed to be,” the Doctor said, bitterly. “It isn't the way I work--we work--it's all wrong. All of it. We didn't make a difference here at all. We didn't do anything and just like that it's all over? We just go home?”

He raised an eyebrow at that. “It's far from being all over.”



“Oh, shut up, me,” the Doctor told him. “Remind me again why I followed you here?”

“You couldn’t resist a big shiny, swirly-whirly space portal anymore than I could?”

The Doctor only glowered at him, stuffed hands into pockets, shoulders hunched against the cold rain.

“It would have been better with a llama.”

## Chapter Nine

The end of every good adventure began when it was time to sit down, put up his feet, and congratulate himself on a job well done. It was not time, nor was it the end, (and as far as he could tell, nothing good had come from their travels) but he was sitting down nonetheless. It was preferable to melting like a damned chocolate teapot and being dragged back to his feet, a dance move they had been perfecting for at least half an hour. The Doctor ran circles around him now, bright circles like gold thread stitching lovely Gallifreyan arithmetic into the November air. Loud arithmetic. He covered his ears and put his forehead on his knees. The grey sky was also far too loud. As were the trees. And the ground? The ground's only kindness would be an unmarked grave in 1642. If he was lucky.

The Doctor dashed past him again, pointing the sonic screwdriver six ways to Sunday, scanning the road, the air, the trees, the back end of a snarling badger, muttering and criss-crossing the road, waving the instrument high and low. His own screwdriver was bollixed up again. He whacked it hard against the palm of his hand. Blue light flickered then faded. He sighed.

"I'll have a proper look at that when we get back. Better yet, I'll give you a new one. My parting gift. I'd say party gift, but this has been anything but a party."

"I don't want a new one," he growled, thumping the device hard against the bottom of his shoe. He did, but not that way.

“No, I didn’t think so,” the Doctor said thoughtfully, spinning around. When the Time Lord scratched a cheek, skin-coloured smudges appeared where the grim flaked away. “What?”

“You look like hell.”

“I’m cultivating a new image. Do you like it?”

“No.”

“Neither do I.” The Doctor whipped out the sonic screwdriver again, sweeping the air once more. “It should be right here! There are still faint energy traces from where we came through, but the Rift is gone. Well, not so much gone as moved. Well, not so much moved as shifted... a lot, which is terribly inconvenient. And--”

“There’s more?”

The Doctor scanned again, examined the results, then extended the sonic screwdriver so he could see for himself. There was no mistaking. The energy signature was fading.

“Oh, that is not good,” he said, a surge of adrenalin giving him the strength to regain his feet.

“Very, very not good,” the Doctor agreed.

“You *are* Welsh, aren’t you? Or Scottish. Anyway, *you* are, Thin Man.”

They both turned slowly at the sound of a familiar voice, and found themselves staring down the barrels of George Mott’s pistols. The soldier sat astride the bay gelding in the shadow of the forest, training wheellocks on the pair of them like a cowboy with six shooters. A rather incongruous pose for one dressed like a Puritan.

“Oh, not again. I suppose it was my fault this time. Head’s not working like it

should. Never realised Gallifreyan was my default setting. Explains why Rose can't understand me when I talk in my sleep. You might have said something," he told the Doctor.

"I was rather enjoying it."

"Shut up, the pair of you!"

"Oh, you are persistent, I'll give you that, George Mott," he began crossly, arms swinging. He wondered how they were going to get out of this one, almost too tired to care. "But, George--can I call you George? Well, it would be silly to call you anything else wouldn't it? George. Dear George. Dear, dear George... you really don't want to do that. Really, you don't."

"Tell me why I shouldn't shoot you both where you stand!"

He licked his lips and looked sidelong at the Doctor, searching the Time Lord's face for a good excuse and getting nothing besides a weak shrug. Evidently they were both fresh out of those. A poor excuse might have to suffice.

"You don't *belong* here," George Mott told them.

Perhaps a poor excuse wasn't going to be necessary after all.

"No, we really don't," he said slowly, pocketing his sonic screwdriver and showing his palms in what he hoped was a non-threatening manner. It hadn't worked so well in the dungeon, but maybe now, in the mist and morning light--both of which were still screaming at him--it would be more effective. On the planet Fustanec such a gesture would have been considered unspeakably rude, but then the Fustani were suspicious of anyone with hands.

"Persistent and smart. Didn't I say he was smart? Well, I would have. And, I'm

really very sorry about that bruise on your face and no hard feelings about using my head for pell mell, but you are too right. We don't belong *here* anymore than you belonged *there*. Remember how that felt? How you just wanted to get home? That's all we want. To go home. Preferably alive."

"To your wives and families?"

"Yes," they both answered, exchanging glances.

"But... but there are no marriages in hell. No families. Not an ounce of God's love. And that place you hail from, surely it is hell?"

"Hell really is a whole lot worse," he said, forcing his aching body to move forward, step by squelching step, until he was standing near the horse. It eyed him suspiciously then pushed roughly at his shoulder, nearly toppling him. Great equine lips nibbled at his hair

"Then you are not the devil's minions?"

"I'm a lot of things, George Mott, but I am no one's minion," he said, blowing softly at the horse's muzzle. The bay flicked its ears then puffed back.

"Then who are you? I warn you, speak the truth this time, and I will stand down. And once you are gone I shall never speak of you or your mysteries again."

He exchanged looks with the Doctor and they both shrugged. Nothing for it. Time to spill the proverbial beans. Mott would believe them and release them, not believe them and shoot them, or believe them and shoot them anyway.

"Fair enough," the Time Lord said, striding confidently forward, "though you may find us a little harder than that to forget. Most people do.

"We're travellers. Just that. Travellers from a very long ways off. Travellers

who want only to get home to those we...love. You said yourself there are no marriages in hell. I don't suppose there would be love, either, would there? And I'm no expert on demons--well, maybe I am, but that's neither here nor there-- and you may have the power of a righteous man going for you, but I ask you. Have you ever seen one bleed?"

"Excellent point, Doctor."

"Why, thank you, Doctor. And you are again, I'm afraid," the Doctor told him, handing him a clean handkerchief.

Slowly, George Mott lowered both weapons. Exhaustion shone in eyes that reminded him so much of Wilfred Mott. And Donna. He suspected the man had been separated from his regiment, on the run all night, just as they had been.

"What about those things you stole? They say you were practicing alchemy."

"What? With those libble-ittle baubles you pocketed?" he said, stumbling over his words, wincing as he dabbed at his aching skull. A wonder it wasn't fractured. Perhaps it was. That would explain why the colour brown smelled so bad just then.

Thunder rolled overhead. Before long it would be tipping down rain. Again. Always with the rain. Mott was watching him closely, awaiting his answer. Oh dear. That meant he was going to have to construct a coherent thought in order to reply.

"Oh, well. That would have made the trip worthwhile. The beatings notwithstanding. Or the dirt. Or," he examined the handkerchief, "the blood."

He hesitated to admit the truth, then decided it was one of those rare occasions where honesty probably really was the best policy. Besides, if he were correctly interpreting the Doctor's impatient watch tapping, they were running out of time. Always. Still.

“We neeb ‘em--that is neebed--neeb--*needed* what they are made from--for... a... uhm... something important that I can’t seem to recall at the moment, but it goes *drrrr drrrr drrrr*. A little help here?” he pleaded with his companion. The Time Lord and the Out-of-Time Lord, he mused to himself. That was rather funny. Beside him, the Doctor looked appalled. He wasn’t sure if that was because of the blood, his inability to speak, or the blood.

“We *need* them for a... machine,” the Doctor told Mott hurriedly. “So it will work properly. A highly sophisticated... clockwork. Magnificent feat of engineering. Christiaan Huygens would be green with envy. Or will be after he invents the pendulum clock. The pieces you took aren’t magic, just made from a very rare... metal that fell to Earth a long time ago. You have to admit, they weren’t doing anyone much good packed in salt with bacon grease dripping on them.”

“You’ll want this then,” Mott said, tossing a bright, brass fitting through the air.

He made to catch it, dropped it, then nearly collapsed retrieving it. The Doctor gripped his elbow and pulled him upright. He turned the horn cap over in his hand, wondering which one it was.

“I meant to throw them both in the Brent, back where they were found with a host of unholy relics. To be rid of the cursed things, but... you left me with strange dreams last night. About that place. About how you needed to return there. Perhaps that will serve to repair your machine?”

Doubtful in that quantity, but he smiled and lied. “It might, just. Thank you.”

“Oh, but that’s brilliant!” the Doctor told them. “Don’t you see? The Brentford Horn Cap won’t be found for two hundred--oh. My turn. Mouth, say hello to foot.”

“Two hundred what? Two hundred years?” Mott asked, eyes grown wide again with distrust. “How can you know that?”

“We’re well travelled. Pick up the scuttlebutt.”

“Scuttle...?” Mott shook his head. “That place I saw... I know that house. It isn’t far from here. I was told to carry a message there ... but a storm of wind and light arose and... and everything changed. I feared I had put my mortal soul into jeopardy by stepping through that portal.”

“Nah,” he said, patting the horse again on the neck. They were fast friends now, he and that horse. Fast, fine friends. “You just wandered through the wrong door’s all. Easy as slipping on a bana--bana--ba--”

“Banana peel,” the Doctor finished the sentence for him.

“That too. Or would be if you knew what a banana was, which I have a feeling you don’t, personally, but you will. Soon. They’re delicious, by the way, and don’t be so wary of potatoes. They’re really fine. Should see what the Americans do with them. Molto Bene!”

“Your friend needs a Doctor--”

“Believe me,” the Doctor told him, “I know.”

“Had yourself a wee peek at merry Olde England, George Mott,” he said, grinning up at the young man. The pain in his head was fading. Or getting worse. One or the other. “Same as now, except, er, merrier.”

“Sorry to interrupt,” the Doctor told them, taking him firmly by the arm and steering him back toward the road, “really. It’s all quite lovely. But, as the White Rabbit said, ‘we’re late, we’re late.’ And we’re about to be joined by a rather large contingent of



men carrying tall, spiky bits of metal. Not conducive to our escape.”

He turned to the Doctor, concerned. “I don’t remember the Rabbit saying that.”

“I know nothing of this Rabbit, but if we’re to be set upon, that’ll be the Cavaliers that set fire to Braynforde. Rupert and his devil dog among them,” Mott told them, dismounting swiftly and checking multiple pistols. “They say that dog is a demon on four legs; a spy for his unholy master.”

“Oh, I do like the sound of that,” the Doctor said, then quickly added, “by which I mean that’s a fascinating theory that I’d like to put to the test; but not today.”

“Take my horse. He’s strength to carry you both and you’ll need to ride fast if your path back to your England is through the Shimmer. My dreams led me back to find it. To make sure I wasn’t mad,” Mott explained somewhat sheepishly. “You’ll know the place by a lightning-struck walnut tree. What you seek lies just beyond, in the gully. It is greatly diminished from when I first saw it.”

“Oh, George,” he said, pumping the man’s hand vigorously in thanks. He took the offered reins. “You’d best have a care. Curiosity like that could get you into trouble.”

“It already has. Away with you, Doctors,” Mott told them, ducking back into the cover of the forest.

Ignoring the Doctor’s protests, he dragged his sorry self into the saddle and hauled his companion up behind him. The horse danced sideways, crow-kicking as the Time Lord slid sideways before settling with an agonizing groan behind the cantle. A moment later they were galloping away from the swiftly approaching cavalry, the horse’s hooves pounding against the muddy road as they hastened on to make their escape. The

Doctor continued to protest about which of them should be behind the reins, but he only grinned and pressed their mount for speed. Staying on the horse was easier than staying on his feet.

True to his word, Mott had tied an orange sash around a magnificently ancient, storm-splintered walnut tree on the north side of the road. Below, in a wide, shallow gully, the *Shimmer*, as George had labelled it, rippled the air into a spiralling vortex of iridescence. He reined the horse toward the muddy slope. It tensed beneath him, tossing its head, withers rippling as the waves of energy assailed them. The poor creature had twice passed through Time and was not inclined to make a third foray. Not for these strangers. He leaned low on the gelding's neck, whispering encouragement to the frightened animal.

Behind them, warning shouts proceeded the crack of black powder as the soldiers in the front line opened fire. The gelding lurched forward in response to the sound, sliding partway down the incline. The Doctor was unhorsed unceremoniously, landing with a heavy thump, rolling ahead of them down the muddy embankment. He fought to hang on or else go arse over elbow himself.

"Run!" he shouted as they reached the bottom of the ditch, using the horse and himself as living shields in front of the flicking time tunnel. "It's collapsing!"

"I can see that!" the Doctor yelled, attempting to dodge as the animal sidestepped. The Time Lord went down again. "Watch out, then!"

More shots whizzed by them and he could see half a dozen soldiers busily reloading along the rim of the valley they'd descended into. Foot soldiers lowered their pikes and were on the advance, the eroded hillside churning under their boots.

“I said run!” He grabbed the Doctor by the arm as he dug his heels into the horse’s side and reined the protesting animal toward the Rift.

They might all have just made it if a ball from the third round of shots hadn’t grazed his left shoulder. He twisted in pain, the reins slipping from his hands. The horse, already sunk to its hocks in the mud, panicked again, knocking the Doctor down for a third and final time as it struggled for firmer footing. The Time Lord vanished in a splash of energy. One down, one to go. He prepared for an undignified dismount.

A second ball grazed his thigh and, for a moment, all he could think about was how inaccurate their weapons were. Even at close range. Then he felt the horse collapse under him and he went over the gelding’s frothy shoulder, slamming painfully into the ground.

When he again raised his head, the horse was gone, as was the gleaming promise of escape. In its place stood a dozen angry, mud-spattered Royalists, pikes and pistols all trained on him. The red coats hurt his eyes almost as much as the keen of metal in his twisted senses. He had been in worse predicaments and survived, but just then he couldn’t fathom how. When it began to rain again he lowered his head against his bare arm, closed his eyes, and waited for the killing shot. Or thrust. At least at this distance he trusted he would not have to wait long.

*Rose, I’m so sorry...*

Someone called a halt. A man’s voice, heavily accented. Soft footfalls brought him around to consciousness again. Something nudged at his head. A warm tongue licked his ear. He opened his eyes to find a large black dog standing over him. The poodle’s dark eyes were glimmering pools.

*You're a long way from home, Time Lord...*

"I'm not a Time Lord," he told the dog as he tried to raise himself up, thought better of it, and collapsed again on the cold, wet ground. "Not anymore."

*You will be* was the last thing he heard before slipping into unconsciousness.