

THE
DOCTOR WHO
PROJECT

The Yuletide Tradition



POLICE TELEPHONE
IN THE
PUBLIC CALL BOX
UNDER A RED LIGHT
WHICH CAN BE
EXTINGUISHED BY
URGENT CALLS
FULL TO OWN

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“Uh, Doctor?”

The slightly scruffy figure at the control console idly looked up from the displays. “What is it, Hannah?” he asked, most of his attention on adjusting a series of slide controls.

“Is that new?” The young woman brushed her long dark hair out of her eyes and pointed to other side of the room. “Or has there always been a Christmas tree in the TARDIS and I never noticed before?”

The Doctor followed the line of her finger.

Sitting neatly in the corner between the outer door alcove and the old brass telescope was a healthy-green tree, a Kingston Pine in a round pot decorated with reindeers and elves. Feathery tinsel wound its way around the foliage. Baubles, bells and candy-canes hung from the pines and it was topped with a white crystal star that glowed with inner light.

The Doctor was silent for a moment. “How time flies,” he said at last.

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Tamara dragged a fingertip over the tree and sniffed it. “Real vegetation, not plastic,” she observed. “It’d cost a fortune to get a real tree for Christmas back home.”

Beside her, the Doctor scratched his goatee. “One of the benefits of non-linear existence,” he explained with a grin. “No need to be a slave to supply and demand.”

“That doesn’t explain why it’s here,” she countered. “Or why it wasn’t here a few minutes ago.”

“It doesn’t?” asked the Doctor in surprise. “It would have thought it was obvious.”

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“It’s not obvious,” said Taryn, voice tight with frustration. “So why don’t you explain it to a mere mortal in words my tiny human brain can understand?”

The Doctor was gazing into his reflection in one of the baubles. “It’s Christmas,” he sighed. “Why else would there be a Christmas tree in the TARDIS?”

“Christmas?” Grae echoed.

“Please don’t tell me I need to explain Christmas,” Taryn huffed, raising her eyes to the ceiling.

Grae’s eyes narrowed behind her glasses. “Christmas is an enduring winter solstice tradition celebrating the birth of one of humanity’s major religion’s messiah, a pacifist who promoted tolerance, cooperation and understanding. As such, Christmas is a time to enact such qualities.”

Taryn was quiet for a moment. “Yeah, that’s about it,” she admitted.

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“It still doesn’t explain why that Christmas tree just appeared out of nowhere, though, does it?” Silver asked, cradling Mortimer in her arms. The charcoal-black feline had noisily announced his alarm when the tree had appeared and his tail was still fluffed up in panic.

The Doctor’s lined oval face was wreathed in smiles. “You’re no fool, my dear, I am sure you can deduce the reasons for its appearance,” he challenged.

“Okay,” the young Wiccan said, looking at the tree. “You said it’s Christmas, the time when we need a Christmas tree. Therefore, the TARDIS has created one for us. How am I doing so far?”

“All the salient points, yes,” the old man chuckled, brushing invisible dust off the pines. “It’s a quantum Christmas tree, only definitely existing on the 25th of December. The rest of the time, it never was. The TARDIS is keyed so every 365.25 days, it’s Christmas. Clear?”

Silver smirked. “Not quite,” she said.

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“So, just to be sure,” Tom said, cautiously circling the mysterious yuletide foliage, “this *isn’t* going to try to kill us or anything like that? It’s just a Christmas tree?”

“In ten lifetimes, I have yet to encounter a killer Christmas tree of any description, Mr. Brooker,” was the haughty reply from the man the Doctor had become. “I didn’t think I’d ever come across as someone stupid enough to keep such a thing on constant rotation in the control room.”

“But why is it here now?” asked Val, peering at the decorations. “We were just visiting Christmas a few weeks back but the tree didn’t turn up then at all!”

“Because, Ms. Rossi, it was Christmas *outside* the TARDIS, not *inside* it,” the Doctor retorted. “Or is that concept too complicated for either of you to grasp?”

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“When one Earth-standard year passes inside the TARDIS, the internal chronometers activate the quantum Christmas tree,” the Doctor explained. “So, it allows us to have Christmas once a year on our own timescale, not anyone else’s.”

Tamara regarded the tree. “And I first met you the second week of January.”

“Around 304 days ago, TARDIS-time,” the Doctor explained, tapping a console monitor. “I don’t suppose you fancy celebrating the festivities a few weeks early?”

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The Doctor turned around to face Grae and Taryn. “We should celebrate Christmas,” he declared. “We’ve everything we need on board the TARDIS for the holiday and there’s nothing more pressing at the moment, is there?”

“I don’t really feel in the Christmassy mood,” Taryn said.

“Well, that’s the thing about Christmas, it comes whether you like it or not.”

Taryn looked at Grae. “Time for the tie-breaker vote,” she said flatly.

Grae looked at the tree. “We should do this.”

The other woman scoffed. “Why?”

Grae met her gaze unflinchingly. “It’s what Tamara would have wanted.”

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“This will be my first Christmas since my father died,” said Silver wistfully.

“That’s something countless humans throughout history have faced,” the Doctor reminded her. “And certainly he wouldn’t want you miserable and broody now, would he? If anything happened to me, I wouldn’t want you unhappy and unable to enjoy yourself.”

“But to do that I’d have to give you lots of lectures about Christmas being a capitalist-driven riot of consumer goods with no spiritual meanings whatsoever.”

“I’m happy to listen to your arguments, Silver. I might even agree with them.”

The girl smirked. “Where’s the fun in that?”

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“Christmas in the TARDIS!” Tom enthused. “Why not? We can get each other presents from all the weird stuff lying around the place, maybe get the food machine to do a decent turkey, maybe land the TARDIS somewhere we can watch the Queen’s speech – really make a day of it?”

Val shook her head in disbelief. “After what happened the last time I let you organize Christmas?” she reminded her former lodger. “You think that’s a good idea?”

“Well, the Doctor must, otherwise why have an automatic Christmas tree?” Tom replied.

“Because,” the Doctor cut in, “a fellow traveler insisted upon it. I simply have yet to delete this redundant command protocol.”

“What fellow traveler’s that, then?”

“Her name was McShane, Mr. Brooker. Dorothy McShane. She preferred, however, to be called ‘Ace’.”

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“Big fan of Christmas, was she?” asked Tamara as she uncorked the champagne and the Doctor offered her a crystalline goblet that hummed musically as she filled it.

“Not at first,” he replied, flipping through the notebook of food machine codes for a Christmas turkey, pudding and stuffing. “Her home-life was something of a mess, and Christmas was little more than a planned itinerary of arguments and violence.”

Tamara considered what she knew of Ace. “A very big fan, then?”

“No, but she learned to appreciate the holiday for what it meant.”

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Taryn thought of the long years on Earth following the Dalek invasion, which left little time for Christmas celebrations. “Christmas was just a forty-eight hour ceasefire from people hating each other,” she said bitterly. “An excuse for excessive consumption and moral hypocrisy.”

“Yes, something along those lines,” said the Doctor airily as he set up the table and Grae started loading out savory delicacies and nibbles in a variety of Christmas-themed shapes. “The point of Christmas, of course, is that it could be any day of the year. But people make it matter, they give it a meaning, they ensure once a year we are with those we care about and treat others the way they should be treated.”

“It would be better if we behaved like that all the time,” Taryn grumbled.

“True,” Grae agreed. “But at least you behave it *some* of the time.”

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“So your friend found the true meaning of Christmas?” Silver grinned, wrapping a parcel in shiny ribbons. “And she got the TARDIS to remind you every year?”

“Once a year since we celebrated Christmas Day 1989,” the Doctor replied, expertly throwing some tinsel decorations around the time rotor. “A reminder we’ve survived another year, a distinct period where we can appreciate what we have, mourn what we’ve lost and look forward to the future.”

“As long as we don’t have to pray to Kris Kringle nailed to a crucifix.”

The old Time Lord chuckled. “Funny you should say that...”

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“Oh crack a smile, won’t you?” Tom complained, dumping another bottle of wine on the table. He’d found it in what seemed to be a wine cellar but the Doctor insisted on calling ‘the Alcohol Library’, full of priceless vintages and grapes growing out of rose bushes and the like.

The Doctor folded his arms. “Mr. Brooker, humanity has invented a reason to celebrate every single day of the year, sometime three times over. There is absolutely nothing remarkable about a mid-winter solstice bracing communities for another two and half months of inclement weather and food shortages, but if you need such vindication, I won’t stop you.”

Val looked up from the pudding she was mixing. “Your friend Ace seemed to like it.”

“She also liked blowing things up with homemade nitroglycerine.”

“You made an automatic Christmas reminder for her!” Tom protested. He glanced at Val. “You think he’ll ever do something that generous for us?”

“The moment either of you prove as useful dealing with ancient Gallifreyan superweapons and evils from beyond the dawn of time, I will consider it, Mr. Brooker.”

Tom tugged a forelock. “Gawd bless ya, Meesta Scrooge!” he jeered.

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“This,” the Doctor declared, gazing at what appeared to be a very large white chocolate bar on a paper tray, “is harder than it looks. But I’m sure it’ll taste just right.”

Tamara sipped her champagne and eyed the food machine. “I suppose takeaway wouldn’t be very seasonal,” she admitted. “Shall we exchange gifts?”

The Doctor looked up, startled. “Oh yes, gifts...” he said guiltily.

Tamara threw something at the Doctor and he caught them. A pair of pristine aviator sunglasses, more than enough to be worn by the star of a late-1980s action movie. The Time Lord laughed in delight and put them on, then noticed Tamara’s expectant expression. He awkwardly patted his waistcoat but found nothing. Then a crafty expression crossed his face.

“How would you like to meet Modesty Blaise as a Christmas treat?” he offered.

Tamara broke the news gently. “Modesty Blaise isn’t real. She’s fictional.”

“Not in the Land of Fiction she isn’t...”

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Taryn sipped her eggnog and leaned against the table, feeling like an unpopular party guest at a gathering of three people. Trying to embrace the day and seize the moment was all well in principle, but she was still uncomfortably reminded that Tamara was gone and any one of them could be next.

Grae clinked tankards with her and stuffed a gingerbread Silurian into her mouth. “As Tamara once said, eat, drink and be merry...”

Taryn completed the quote. “...for tomorrow, we die.”

“The Doctor’s off finding something in the storage holds that can be presents,” the Time Lady explained. “Do you have anything you’d like for Christmas?”

“To live to see another one?” Taryn sighed. “To not be scared all the time? To feel safe again?”

Grae sighed. “I was thinking more of some nice shoes, maybe a designer jacket.”

Taryn couldn’t help but laugh. For a moment at least, the Christmas good cheer won out.

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The Doctor and Silver clinked glasses of champagne and orange juice as they exchanged gifts.

Silver had a hardback tome of painted artworks from a variety of cultures and species whose beliefs fitted comfortably under the Wicca label, while the Doctor received a DVD about two Alpha Centurian comedians on a fishing holiday in Andromeda.

“Merry Christmas, Doctor.”

“Merry Christmas, Silver.”

Mortimer glanced up from his serving of turkey, but said nothing.

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The Doctor wordlessly piled food on his plate as Val and Tom handed over a pile of presents to each other, laughing and joking – often having to yell over the constant background of Christmas-themed pop songs bursting out of the console audio systems. He remembered the last Christmas, before his regeneration, when he had been travelling alone.

He considered retiring to another part of the TARDIS to eat his dinner, but decided he would remain where he was. This was his ship, after all; he would not be driven away to wander the corridors alone like he had one year ago.

Even the company of idiots at Christmas was better than no one at all.

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Liz Shaw looked around the TARDIS interior. It had been redesigned and was tidier, more futuristic but there were still the odd collection of objets d'art in the control room – including, bizarrely, a fully decorated Christmas tree. The Doctor was sitting cross-legged before it, his chin in his hands, gazing up from under the brim of his hat at the tree. His expression was unreadable.

“If were you were aiming for Christmas, you’re out by eight months,” she said.

The Doctor didn’t look up. “The tree appears automatically in the TARDIS when its internal chronometers register it as December 25th. Ace’s idea.”

“Oh,” said Liz, not particularly interested. “And where is Ace now?”

“I haven’t the faintest idea. I cannot remember leaving her anywhere, but she’s gone. She should be here, now, having Christmas lunch with me. I don’t even know where to look for her.”

Liz sighed. “Well, we do have the Master to track down if you need a distraction.”

“Yes,” the Doctor mused, pushing himself to his feet via his question-mark umbrella. “He is quite the distraction and it’s time we sort him out. Then I can concentrate on finding Ace. Maybe we can be back together in time for next Christmas?”

“Maybe,” Liz shrugged. “I’ve spent most Christmases alone.”

“Does it get any easier?” asked the little Scotsman quietly.

“I’ll let you know.”

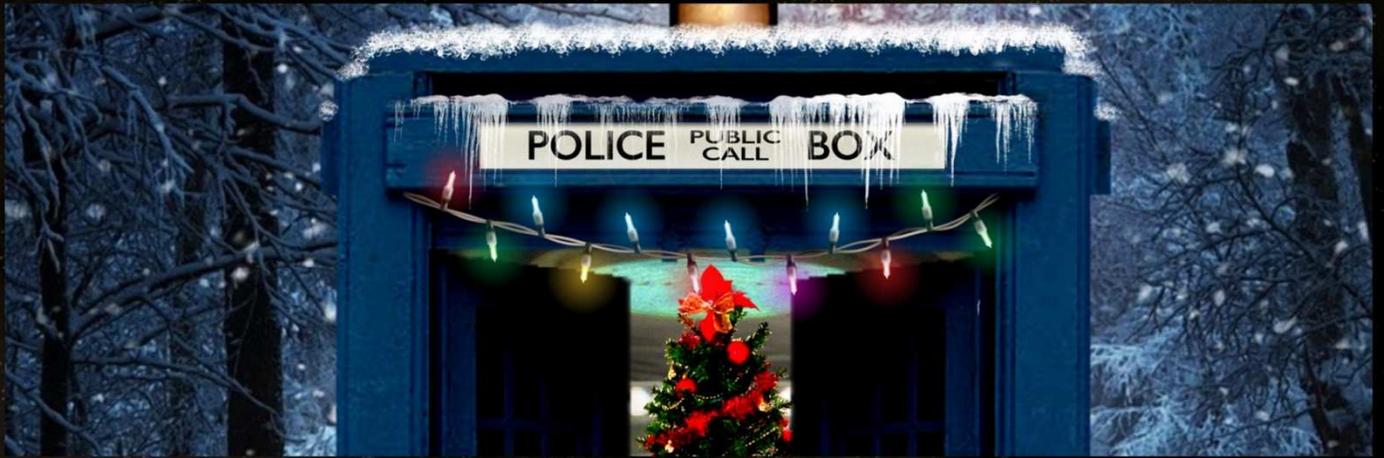
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Hannah stepped between the Doctor and the Christmas tree. “Doctor?” she repeated.

The Time Lord blinked at her then gave her his most dazzling of smiles. “Hannah, how do you feel about having some people around for a festive get-together?” he asked. “Just a few friends, some roast turkey, maybe a few chestnuts roasting over an open fire?”

“Um, did you have anyone special in mind?” asked Hannah, taken aback.

“Well, I thought start off with in an old friend in Perivale. Then there’s a rather lonely woman in Cambridge who could use cheering up. And maybe some other people we might pick up on the way...”



The TARDIS travels through time, but time passes within the TARDIS. And in the control room, when three hundred- and sixty-five-days pass, a Christmas tree appears out of nowhere – a reminder of the Yuletide.

A lot can happen in a year. Companions come and go, as do Doctors. Christmases can be as pleasant as they can be awful, as meaningful as they can be worthless.

Four Doctors.

Nine companions.

One celebration.

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This is another story in a series of original fan authored Doctor Who fiction published by The Doctor Who Project featuring the Tenth Doctor as played by Laurent Meyer

