

# BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

IF AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED



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The room was in semi-darkness, with the only light coming from a monitor screen flickering on a wall. Its rays illuminated the outline of a slim figure looking at the text it displayed. After a moment, the figure finished his perusal and switched on a lamp on a nearby desk. The figure, a young man in his early twenties with cropped dark hair and attractive features, smiled and his eyes glistened as he looked towards a door, now revealed to one side of the room, which was decorated with several mirrors of different shapes and sizes.

“And now it is time for you to go to work,” he murmured, looking towards the door. From the other side of the door, there came the sound of breathing, followed by a quiet singing noise.

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The newsagent’s shop was situated in a side street. Every inch of space was filled with clutter as the owner tried to attract passing trade by offering as wide a range of products as the supermarket chains which were leeching his trade and profits more and more each day. There was only one customer at the moment – a young man in his early twenties with a ponytail and earrings who was leafing through a glossy magazine. After a few minutes, he stopped at a page and made a note on his hand, before returning the magazine to a shelf and then leaving the shop. The shopkeeper sighed in disgust at yet another wasted opportunity.

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Outside, the young man crossed to a red telephone kiosk. Once inside, he glanced at the number on his hand, and dialled. As the connection was made, he spoke quietly to the person on the other end, and smiled before ending the call and leaving the kiosk.

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The dog ran along the canal towpath, full of energy and easily outpacing its owner, who puffed heavily along behind. The sun was just peering through the early morning mist and there was a chill in the air. The man stopped for breath, then looked up as his dog started barking. He moved forward and saw that she was barking at something in the undergrowth beside the path. Looking closer, he saw something resembling a tailor’s dummy – and then he saw the wedding ring...

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The towpath was now cordoned off with blue and white plastic tape flapping in the breeze, and a large white tent had been erected around the body. A flap opened and a tall man in his forties emerged to greet a new arrival.

“It’s another one, sir. Just like the others.”

He stepped to the side as Inspector Howe entered the tent and gazed down at the victim, wondering who was responsible for this latest atrocity. In his early thirties, he had been head of the local CID for five years and had seen more than his fair share of dead bodies, but nothing quite like this.

“Who found the body?”

“A man out walking his dog, sir. Thought it was just a mannequin – until he saw the ring. I’ve taken his details, sir, but he didn’t see anything.”

The older man was Sergeant Wilson, a career policeman who had worked his way up from constable on the beat to the heady position of Detective Sergeant, a position he had no ambitions to move on from.

“Has the pathologist arrived yet?”

“On his way, sir. There was a crash on the ring road, but he should be here soon.”

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Doctor Evans looked up from the body and shook his head.

“Such a waste of a life.”

Howe nodded.

“Time of death?”

Evans shook his head again.

“Sometime in the last twelve hours. It was cold last night, but, as before, the victim was killed elsewhere and dumped here. If it happened indoors, the body temperature could be misleading. I’ll know better when I get him back to the lab.”

Howe turned to Sergeant Wilson.

“I want a fingertip search of the area. Sooner or later we must get lucky. The killer can’t always get away without leaving any trace, not even a footprint. I also want an appeal for witnesses – there are usually fishermen along here at night. Someone might have seen something.”

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Later that afternoon, the three men again stood over the body, only this time in the clinical surroundings of the hospital mortuary. Evans was the first to speak.

“I’ve examined a lot of bodies in my career, but nothing quite like this.” He paused. “How old did you say he was?”

Howe consulted the notes he was carrying.

“Twenty-four.”

Evans shook his head. “It’s just the same as the others. There’s no way he was only twenty-four. Look at the condition of the body. The skin, the face, the hair. He could have been eighty-four, not twenty-four.”

Howe looked down at the corpse and had to agree. The skin was old with brown liver spots, and there were only a few wisps of hair on his wrinkled scalp.

“But if that was the case, he would have had to have aged sixty years in the space of a few hours! What on Earth could have that effect on the body?”

Evans looked bemused.

“I’ve never come across anything like it. I’m going to contact the Home Office to ask for their help. With four dead now, we need to stop this before anyone else dies.”

He looked thoughtful for a moment, then continued.

“It’s like something one of my predecessors might have dealt with.”

“What do you mean?”

“Before I came to the town, I used to be a doctor in East London. There was a story told to new students about a series of puzzling deaths that happened in the last century.”

“Jack the Ripper, you mean?”

“No, after that, but as with that case, all the victims were young women who disappeared. The police doctor was a man called Litefoot, and he had help.”

He paused thoughtfully.

“What sort of help?”

“A scientist, a man with a remarkable knowledge of science and people. He claimed to travel through time and space – in a police box of all things. Anyway, they solved the murders, and then this scientist disappeared.”

“A fascinating story, but I don’t see the relevance...”

“It’s just that this case sounds right up his street.”

“What was he called?”

“That’s the funny thing. Apparently, he was known only as the Doctor.”

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In a suburban street, not far from the hospital, an unexpected wheezing, groaning noise shattered the silence and the incongruous shape of a police telephone box materialized into existence. As silence returned to the street, a door opened and two figures emerged. The first was a tall man with a shock of curly blonde hair, dressed in a vulgarly coloured patchwork coat and yellow-and-black striped trousers. His companion was a pretty, dark-haired young woman in a pale blue figure-hugging trouser suit.

The tall man breathed in deeply.

“Just smell that air, Peri. We’re back on Earth again.”

Peri looked round the street, and was not impressed.

“Why do we always end up in the crummy areas? Even when we went to Blackpool, we ended up being chased round by a bunch of homicidal dwarves and a mad Mandarin.” She noted the Doctor’s disapproving look and sighed. “Where are we anyway?”

The Doctor studied the instrument he was holding.

“Somewhere in Hertfordshire, I think.” He noticed Peri’s blank stare. “About twenty miles north of London. Come on,” he said and strode off down the street.

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A few minutes later, they arrived in the shopping precinct which ran through the centre of the town. The Doctor walked briskly past the various shops, as ignorant of their contents as of the stares they were receiving from passers-by. Peri was almost having to run to keep up with him.

“Where are we going?” she asked after a while.

“To find the source of the time activity. It’s somewhere nearby, and certainly has no right to be here in the late twentieth century.”

“And when we find it?”

“Time travel is extremely dangerous in the wrong hands. I must put a stop to it.”

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They walked on for a moment, then came to a small brick building. The sign on the wooden green door identified it as a power substation, and that it carried high voltages and must not be entered without express permission. The Doctor held the detector against the door, and nodded.

“I thought so!”

Peri looked at him.

“What?” she enquired.

“It’s a TARDIS!” he exclaimed loudly. “One with a working Chameleon Circuit as well. This could be more complicated than I thought.”

He reached into his coat pockets to find something to try and pick the lock with, whilst Peri looked around, hoping that they would not draw too much attention to themselves.

“Doctor.”

“Mmm?”

“Doctor!”

He looked up from his task – to find himself face to face with a uniformed policeman.

“Can I help you, sir?”

“Ah, yes, officer. My friend and I were trying to gain access to this building.”

“And why would that be, sir?”

The Doctor thought quickly.

“It belongs to... a friend of mine, and he asked me to look after it for him.”

“Really, sir?” The officer wasn’t impressed. “Perhaps you and the young lady could explain it better at the police station. It’s just across the road here.”

The Doctor was about to protest, but after a glance from Peri, he allowed himself to be led across the road and into the front office.

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The Doctor looked around the interview room and thought wryly that the décor in one police station looked pretty much like another. He mused that at least they hadn’t invented the Mind Probe yet on Earth. He glanced up as the constable re-entered the room. The policeman sat down at the desk and opened his notebook.

“I’m Constable Hughes. Maybe we can start with your names?”

Before the Doctor could answer, Peri spoke up.

“I’m Perpugilliam Brown, usually known as Peri, and this is the Doctor.”

“Doctor, eh? Doctor who?”

The Doctor smiled.

“Smith. Doctor John Smith.”

Now it was the constable’s turn to smile.

“Come now, sir, you can do better than that, surely. Are you from some show, a travelling circus maybe?”

The Doctor looked puzzled.

“Your fancy dress.”

Offended, the Doctor exploded.

“Fancy dress? Fancy dress?” He paused for effect. “Fancy dress! I’ll have you know that this is haute couture on at least three planets in the Mison Galaxy. It was made especially for me by the tailor to the Emperor of Draconia.”

Hughes looked to the ceiling then returned his gaze to the Doctor.

“Really, sir? Well, that still doesn’t explain what you were doing trying to break into the substation in broad daylight. What were you planning to do in there?”

The Doctor leaned forward.

“It’s not really a substation,” he informed him in a whisper. “It’s a time machine.”

Hughes raised his eyebrows, wondering which lunatic asylum this one had escaped from – so much for care in the community.

“Yes, sir. Well, in that case, I think I’d better let my inspector know about it. Would you two wait here for a moment, please?”

As he left, Peri looked at the Doctor, shaking her head.

“Now what have I done?” he replied indignantly.

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A few moments later, Hughes stood in Inspector Howe's office. He had just finished giving him the edited highlights of the story, and was a little surprised that he seemed to be taking the story seriously.

"A Doctor and a time machine? I wonder... Perhaps I'd better come and have a word with them after all."

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Howe sat and looked at the Doctor. He was certainly dressed strangely.

"Well, Doctor, I've heard many stories in my time, but never one quite like yours." He paused. "I don't suppose you happen to know someone called Litefoot?"

The Doctor, who had been feigning disinterest in the proceedings, suddenly looked up.

"Not George Litefoot the pathologist? But he must have been dead for seventy years or more."

"Our pathologist, Dr Evans, has heard tales of Litefoot and a mysterious Doctor with a time machine. Something to do with murderous Chinese in Victorian London."

Though his memory was hazy at times over the escapades of his previous incarnations, the Doctor's mind flashed back to his battle against the war criminal Magnus Greel and his deadly followers.

"I remember." He paused, then changed the subject. "Where are we by the way? My map is a little out of date."

"This is Hemel Hempstead in Hertfordshire. If you are the same Doctor, our Dr Evans thinks that you might be just the man he needs. There's been a series of murders happening around here. Most mysterious, he says."

The Doctor's eyes glistened with enthusiasm.

"Could I talk to him?"

Howe shook his head.

"Out of the question. You could be anyone, even the killer!"

The Doctor stared at him in outrage.

"Impossible! We've only just arrived!"

Uncertain, Howe paused. The Doctor seized on this.

"How about if I was to get someone to vouch for who I am?"

He reached over and scooped up the telephone handset.

"Nine for an outside line, I suppose?"

He punched in a long series of numbers, and after a moment a voice came on the other end of the line.

"Porton Down scientific division? Who is that and how did you get this number?"

The Doctor thought for a moment.

"Get me Harry Sullivan and tell him it's the Doctor."

The person on the other end went silent, then a familiar voice came on the line.

"Professor Harry Sullivan here."

The Doctor handed the phone over to Inspector Howe.

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A few minutes later, Howe put the phone down and stared in surprise at the Doctor.

"I don't know who you are, but you certainly have some influential friends. It seems you are to be given full access to the files and all help we can offer."

Peri realised that the Doctor would want to see the bodies, something she was far from keen to do. She turned to Howe.

“Whilst the Doctor is busy on the scientific side of things, could I speak to some of the relatives of the victims? They might open up more to a civilian – if this is anything like the States, people don’t always like talking to the cops?”

Howe looked at the Doctor, who waved Peri away distractedly, deep in thought.

“Wilson, perhaps you could escort the young lady here... Peri... and help her with that.”

Wilson and Peri left as Howe contacted Evans to arrange to see the bodies.

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Peri looked around the room, her gaze settling on a portrait of a couple with a young child playing happily at their feet. The door opened and Sergeant Wilson entered with a young woman whose red eyes belied the fact that she had been crying. He spoke to Peri.

“This is Eve. Go gently with her. Her GP has given her a sedative, but she might not be much help.”

Peri crossed over to her, and indicated to Wilson to leave them alone. As he left, she spoke quietly to the grieving woman.

“Had you been married long?”

The woman nodded.

“Three years next July. Our son was born nine months ago. My mother is looking after him upstairs.”

Eve broke off, sobbing. Peri placed an arm around her.

“I only wish that we hadn’t argued yesterday.”

“What was it about?”

Eve reddened.

“I don’t think I should be talking about it. If we hadn’t argued, he might not have gone out, and might still be here now.”

Peri sensed that it might be something important

“Please tell me,” she asked. “It might help to catch whoever did this to him.”

“It’s personal, embarrassing. Since Jamie, our son, was born, I haven’t felt – intimate – towards Peter. He’s always been so understanding about it, but last night, it all got too much and he left...”

She started sobbing again.

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Meanwhile, the Doctor stood in the mortuary, discussing the case with Dr Evans. Though he had never met him before, Evans’ enthusiasm for his work and his curiosity about the Doctor dispelled his reticence to discuss the case.

Studying the file, the Doctor spoke.

“And you say that all four bodies were stripped and dumped near the water. Why did you think that was?”

“At first, we thought that it might have been to get rid of any forensic evidence of where they had been killed, but nothing has come of it so far.”

“And the cause of death?”

Evans’ enthusiasm for the mystery overcame his initial reluctance to discuss the case with a stranger.

“All the victims were young males, none older than thirty-five, yet as you can see, all the bodies resemble people much older. It’s as if they had died of old age, but how can a man age sixty years in a few hours.”

Something – a rogue memory perhaps – was pricking at the back of the Doctor’s mind. Something about the method reminded him of something he had seen before – but what? The ageing

reminded him of the Rani, but it was not quite her style. Before he could place it, the door opened and Inspector Howe entered, his face grim.

“There’s been another one,” he announced.

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The Doctor and Howe looked out into the field, where a policeman stood guard outside a white tent. Wilson came over to them.

“I don’t think you should see this, sir.”

“Why not?”

Before he could answer, Howe opened the tent and looked down at the body. His face drained of all colour, and he swayed as if about to fall. The Doctor laid a steadying hand on his shoulder.

“What is it?”

Howe’s voice was a hoarse whisper, thick with emotion.

“It’s my brother!”

The Doctor stared down at the body as Howe regained control.

“It’s my younger brother Michael. I only saw him a couple of days ago.”

As they stood there silently, Dr Evans came in and stared in horror at the body.

“It’s Michael!”

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Howe looked at the Doctor and Peri across his desk. Wilson and Evans stood to one side.

“This should never have happened. He was happily married and they were hoping for a child. Why would anyone do that to him?”

Evans shook his head.

“I’ve contacted the Home Office and asked them to send a specialist in to help.”

Silent until now, Peri spoke.

“The wives and girlfriends of the victims all said the same thing. They all led normal, almost boring, lives, and had been happy together, for years some of them. They can’t think of any reason why their partners should have been attacked and killed. They were all just ordinary families.”

The Doctor commented.

“They all have something in common. They all met with the killer – for whatever the reason. And because of that reason, they all died. We must find out what the link is before anyone else is killed.”

Howe looked up suddenly.

“Time machine!”

The Doctor looked uncomfortable.

“You have a time machine! You could take me back in time to last night and prevent him dying.”

The Doctor looked even more uncomfortable.

“I can’t do that. It would break all the laws of time.”

“I don’t care about that. I want my brother back!”

Peri looked at the Doctor.

“Is there nothing we can do? Would it really be that bad to save one life?”

The Doctor nodded.

“It would be like dropping a stone into a pond. The ripples would spread out in ways I couldn’t begin to explain.” He paused. “There is just one possibility – we could go back in time to the time of death...”

“About half past ten last evening.”

The Doctor continued.

“If we could capture the killer red-handed, it would at least stop any more needless killings and bring them to justice.”

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Reluctantly, Howe agreed, but the look in his eyes still worried the Doctor.

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The four figures stood behind the hedge at the edge of the field and stared in horror at the body on the ground ahead of them.

“We’re too late,” the Doctor noted.

Howe looked at him.

“Could it be a different killer? He still looks like I knew him. He hasn’t aged.”

The Doctor nodded slowly.

“Yet...”

As if in reaction to his comment, Michael’s face seemed to change before them. Lines appeared on his cheeks, which seemed to sink in, his hair thinned and turned grey, and his complexion darkened as brown blotches appeared. Fascinated, the Doctor spoke.

“So, the ageing happens at the point of death, or very soon before. But why?”

His thoughts were interrupted as Howe turned to him.

“Take me back again, only this time earlier.”

“I’m not running a taxi service, you know. The TARDIS isn’t used to these small hops. And besides...”

Howe noted his reluctance.

“Besides what?”

“It’s the Blinovitch Limitation Effect.”

Howe looked in disbelief.

“The what?”

“The Blinovitch Limitation Effect. It was named after one of the early pioneers of time travel on Earth, sometime in the fiftieth century. He discovered that you can only return to the same point in time once – more than that and you run the risk of running into yourself from the time before. The release of temporal energy that would cause is too terrible to contemplate. Even I have to be careful.”

Howe’s shoulders sank in despondency.

“So, what we can we do, Doctor?”

“We go back to square one and try and track down the killer the old-fashioned way – with solid police work and a touch of genius.”

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The Doctor was hunched over the desk, poring over the files, deep in concentration. Suddenly he looked up.

“You said there was no connection between the victims?”

Howe nodded.

“But there is – they were all married or in steady relationships.”

“I don’t see where you are going with this. Your friend Peri told us that this morning.”

The Doctor looked over at Peri.

“Didn’t one of the women you spoke to say that she had argued with her husband over their relationship?”

She nodded.

“They hadn’t been intimate since the baby was born. I understand it’s quite common in new moms.”

The Doctor explained.

“Let’s go one step further and say that all the victims needed something extra that wasn’t available at home. Now assuming that the odds of all the victims having an extra-marital affair with the same woman are so high as to rule that possibility out...”

He paused, and looked across at Howe.

“Is there a red-light area in this town?”

Peri stared at the Doctor, amazed that he could have any knowledge of such things.

“Certainly not. As far as I know, there isn’t even a brothel, although there may be the odd prostitute plying her trade through the contact magazines.”

“Contact magazines?”

“They advertise their services in them rather than walking the streets.”

The Doctor looked pleased.

“I think we may have found the missing link. Where might I find one of these publications?”

Avoiding Peri’s incredulous gaze, the Doctor allowed himself to be led out of the room.

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A short while later, the Doctor sat at Howe’s desk, flicking through a lurid publication entitled *Girls, Girls, Girls*. He seemed to be oblivious of the pictures of semi-naked women on every page but instead scanned the texts of each advertisement. He looked up as Howe entered.

“I think we’ve struck lucky, Doctor. It was a long shot, but we checked the phone records of all the victims and then compared those that matched with those in the magazines. And we found this one.”

He held out a phone number.

“It’s a mobile number. We checked the network provider and they tell us that it is registered to a Miss Merrie Carroll. With a name like that, it’s unlikely to be her real name.”

The Doctor thought quickly.

“I’d like to meet this Miss Carroll. Could one of your men make the arrangements for me?”

“Do you really think that wise, Doctor? It should be one of my men.”

“It might be better for me to face her as policemen usually stand out in a crowd, so...”

Howe looked at the Doctor’s coat and wondered how that could not do the same, but then nodded.

“I’ll get someone to give her a call.”

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That evening, the Doctor strode down a tree-lined street on the outskirts of the town. He looked about him and thought once again that he much preferred Earth to many of the other planets he visited – so many of them looked like quarries to him, and when you’ve seen one quarry... He stopped at a detached house and strode up to the door. He reached out and rapped confidently on the knocker. After a moment, the door opened and a middle-aged woman in a patterned dress appeared.

“Yes?”

“I’m here to see Miss Carroll. I rang earlier – Mr Smith?”

She smiled at the name.

“Please come in.”

She closed the door behind him, and directed him to the room at the top of the stairs, adding that Miss Carroll would be with him shortly and to make himself comfortable.

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The Doctor looked curiously around the room. It was dominated by a large double bed covered in satin linen. In one corner was a wardrobe, and when he looked inside, he discovered that its contents would have been more at home in one of the many torture chambers he had found himself in. He heard footsteps coming up the stairs, and the door opened.

“Now, Mr Smith, what can I do for you?”

Recognition dawned on the Doctor as the voiced echoed round the room. He turned to face the newcomer. ‘Miss Carroll’ was an attractive woman in her mid-thirties with long blonde hair and piercing eyes. Her smile vanished as she recognized him too.

“Circe! I might have guessed. It all makes sense now – why all the victims were men and the cover of an escort. Once a Siren, always a Siren. One thing I don’t understand though – why were all the bodies aged so suddenly?”

The woman glared in hatred but ignored the barrage of insults and questions.

“How do you know who I am? We’ve never met.”

The Doctor explained.

“I’m a Time Lord. I’ve travelled around – your face is on wanted posters on a dozen worlds. Now tell me what a Siren would want on this insignificant planet? Male victims I could understand, as you love to be in control of them, but why the ageing unless...”

Recognition dawned as the pieces fell into place.

“You need the chemical that prevents ageing! With it gone, the body decays in a few hours until the heart gives out. But why would a Siren need it – you aren’t a scientist?”

Circe hissed at the Doctor’s correct guesswork, and he continued.

“You do realize that I can’t let you get away with this? Whatever their faults, they still have a right to live and make their own decisions.”

Circe sneered, her voice now heavy with sarcasm.

“I suppose that it’s all right for you to just breeze in and despatch hordes of alien races with the excuse that you can’t let them overrun another species? Look at what you did to the Autons, for example.”

“That’s something else entirely...”

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As the bickering continued, there was a disturbance downstairs and two policemen rushed upstairs, followed by Inspector Howe. At his instruction, Circe was led to the police station with the Doctor warning them to be very careful of her as she was ‘full of surprises’. Once they were alone, Howe turned to the Doctor.

“You recognize her then?”

“Oh yes, Circe is one of the Sirens.”

“But the Sirens were mermaids that lured sailors to their doom on the rocks.”

“Like most myths and legends, it has a basis in reality. The Sirens are a race of alien women who use their beauty to lure unsuspecting men into their traps. They have the same disregard for life as the rest of the murderers you encounter – the difference being that they have no concept that they are doing anything wrong.”

Howe smiled.

“Maybe a long time in prison will help her to consider things.”

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It was after midnight when Howe, Wilson, Peri and the Doctor finally retired to the office. Howe offered them some tea, but the Doctor seemed troubled.

“Something doesn’t add up,” he commented worriedly. “The Sirens don’t have the power to travel through time, and Circe avoided the question of why she needed the chemical.”

He looked out of the window, and a moment later jumped to his feet.

“It’s gone!”

Howe stared at him.

“The substation! It’s gone!”

He headed to the door.

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“I must see Circe – now!”

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The Doctor ran into the cell area, closely followed by Peri and Howe. Circe’s cell was empty – apart from a large door in one wall that hadn’t been there a few minutes earlier. A waving hand disappeared round the back of it. Then, with a strange whooshing noise, it vanished, leaving them staring at an empty cell.

“Where has she gone? And where did that door come from?”

The Doctor shook his head.

“Did you search her?”

Wilson entered in time to hear the question and nodded.

“All she had on her was some sort of plastic spoon, and she was allowed to keep that.”

The Doctor grimaced.

“A Stattenheim Remote Control for a TARDIS! She’s gone, Inspector.”

“I’ll put out a bulletin straight away. She won’t get far...”

“I’m afraid she’s left Earth by now. She could be anywhere in the Universe by now.”

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The next morning, the Doctor and Peri stood outside the TARDIS, watched by Howe and Wilson.

“What is that thing, Doctor? I thought you said you had a time machine, but that looks like an old-fashioned police box to me.”

Peri smiled.

“You’re in for a surprise. You wouldn’t believe him if he explained it to you.”

The Doctor opened the door.

“Goodbye, gentlemen. I don’t think you’ll be seeing Circe again, but if you do, contact UNIT and they’ll probably be able to get hold of me. We’re going to get after her – there are too many things that just don’t make sense.”

The Doctor and Peri entered the TARDIS, which dematerialized, leaving Howe and Wilson watching in disbelief as it faded from the street.

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Inside the TARDIS, the Doctor busied himself in a rush of activity. He operated a lever on the console, and a monitor screen rose up to reveal a flashing light moving rapidly from left to right.

“What’s that screen for?” asked Peri. “I’ve never seen it before.”

Distractedly, the Doctor explained.

“It’s the Time Path Indicator. It shows if there are any other time machines in the vicinity. Hopefully, it will allow us to track Circe and find out who is behind all this.”

Peri watched as he carried out a complex series of calculations, puzzled.

“But I thought Circe was behind the killings?”

The Doctor sighed at this interruption to his train of thought.

“Circe might have been responsible for the deaths, but there are too many questions I need answers to. The Sirens don’t have the ability to travel through time, and certainly aren’t capable of constructing a time machine like that. And why did she need to take the chemical that reduces ageing from them? No, there is someone else behind this devilish scheme, and that’s the person we need to find.”

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In a darkened room, a similar monitor screen was flickering with activity. Unlike the one in the TARDIS, this one was showing two dots on a parallel course, heading towards a planet on the right-hand side of the screen.

“‘Come into my parlour’, said the spider to the fly.”

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The time rotor slowed and came to a halt. The Doctor operated the scanner, and the screen flickered into life to show an empty room, its walls a brilliant white. In the far corner, instead of a doorway, was a familiar shape – a blue oblong with a flashing light on top.

The Doctor laughed.

“It seems our adversary has a sense of humour, Peri. He’s changed his TARDIS to look the same as mine.”

Peri was not impressed.

“I don’t find it very funny. Anyone who can kill people for no reason doesn’t make me laugh.”

The Doctor nodded.

“It’s time we put a stop to this. Come on.”

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The door of the TARDIS – the real one – opened, and the Doctor and Peri moved into the antechamber.

“Welcome to you both. I wondered if we would ever meet.”

The Doctor looked around for the source of the booming voice, and spotted a small door to the right of the fake Police Box. He strode purposefully over to it and yanked it open.

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The Doctor and Peri found themselves in a luxuriously decorated study. There was a solid oak table with books and bottles of various chemicals. The walls were adorned with a collection of timepieces from all areas of Earth’s history, from a sundial through Grandfather Clocks to a modern solar powered digital display. The chair behind the desk was shrouded in darkness until, once the door had fully closed, a light beam came on to illuminate the figure, who then rose, his hand outstretched.

“Welcome again, Doctor. I’ve heard so much about you, but never thought that we would actually meet. My name is Janus – perhaps you’ve heard of me?”

The Doctor studied the newcomer intently. Standing at just over two metres tall, his short-cropped hair was grey and his wrinkled face gave the impression that he was a man in his fifties. He wore plain blue robes and carpet slippers.

“Should I know you? The only thing I know about you is that you are in possession of Time Lord technology – stolen of course – and that you are responsible for a number of deaths on Earth.”

Janus shook his head and smiled.

“Not stolen, Doctor, merely ‘borrowed’. Just like you did.”

The Doctor ignored the comment.

“Hardly the same. After all, my race invented the technology, whereas you...”

Janus interrupted him.

“Your race, Doctor? How do you think I came into possession of the technology so easily? I too was born on Gallifrey!”

The Doctor was stunned.

“You are a Time Lord?”

Taking a deep breath, Janus explained.

“No, Doctor, not a Time Lord. True, I was born on Gallifrey, but my family were poor. We were never fortunate enough to be accepted into one of the more noble Chapters.”

Peri looked at the Doctor.

“What is he talking about?”

The Doctor explained.

“Much as it is on Earth, the people of Gallifrey have a class system. The more noble families are invited to live in the Capitol and join one of the three Time Lord Chapters – The Prydonians, of which I am one, the Arcalians and the Patrexes.”

Peri smiled.

“A bit like Harry Potter, then.”

“Not exactly. As with any society, there are those who reject that life and exist in the area outside the Capitol, where life is more basic and not based on technology.”

Janus took up the story again.

“My family came from the wastelands – Shebogans, you call them – but I wanted to be better. I worked hard to gain access to the Academy and studied to be a technician on the Transduction Barriers.”

The Doctor explained.

“The Transduction Barriers are the force-field around Gallifrey which prevents attack from other races, similar to the ‘Star Wars’ technology suggested by your people around the time we just left.”

Janus nodded.

“Not being of noble birth, I was not empowered with the gift of regeneration. My parents had it, but it wasn’t passed down – some kind of genetic anomaly.”

The Doctor understood.

“So, you will grow old and die whilst those around you continue to live seemingly forever.”

“Yes.” Janus’ tone was bitter. “So, I went into the TARDIS launch bays and stole a TARDIS. From its data banks, I found the information on Earth and decided to take what I could not get myself – the chemical that reduces ageing. That way I could live forever!”

Peri was curious.

“But why did you use Circe?”

Janus smiled.

“I enlisted the help of a Siren to take advantage of the one thing guaranteed to attract the attention of almost any man – the lure of a beautiful woman. And once they were snared, I was able to extract what I needed.”

Whilst Janus was talking, Peri had been looking at him. Something wasn’t right. She frowned and whispered something to the Doctor, who nodded solemnly.

“It won’t work, you know. Human physiognomy and chemistry are very different from that of Gallifreyans, especially ones with genetic defects already. It could easily have the opposite effect.”

“You’re lying!”

The Doctor pointed to a shiny surface.

“See for yourself.”

Janus turned and stared at the reflected image. His skin was glowing with an unnatural energy and his skin wrinkled to resemble a dried grape.

“Your body’s metabolism has gone into overdrive. You have consigned yourself to the same fate as your victims.”

Janus screamed in pain as his skin stretched and split. Peri turned away as his body crumbled to the ground, the skeleton turning to dust before their eyes.

Peri swallowed hard.

“It’s horrible. What happened?”

The Doctor looked fascinated by the process.

“It’s like someone receiving an organ donation, and then their body rejecting it. His body was already at the end of its life, and without the miracle of regeneration, there was nothing he could do. The process was accelerated until every atom was destroyed.”

Peri was horrified.

“Is that all you can say? A man died before our eyes, more on Earth, and you don’t seem bothered. Sometimes you don’t seem human...”

The Doctor put his arm around her shoulder, and led her back to the TARDIS. He opened the door, then stopped and turned back.

“I’m going to set the other time machine to return to Gallifrey. It’ll be a surprise for whoever is monitoring the Transduction Barriers, but it’s better than letting Circe have it to roam all of time and space.”

Peri looked back at the other room.

“What are you going to do about her?”

The Doctor thought for a moment.

“I’ll let her stay here. It should be peaceful enough for her not to do any mischief. There’s nowhere she can go: she can’t leave here without a TARDIS. I think she’ll be calm enough away from Janus’ influence.”

He vanished briefly into the other Police Box, then returned to Peri’s side, holding the Stattenheim Remote Control. He placed it on the floor, and crushed it under his foot.

“Just in case,” he said.

After a couple of minutes, the other time machine vanished from the antechamber. The Doctor looked down at Peri.

“It’s time we went somewhere peaceful. Have you ever wanted to visit the Eye Of Orion?”

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Moments later, the TARDIS dematerialized from the antechamber, the sound dying away to leave the quiet singing of Circe in the distance.





A small town on 20th Century Earth  
A series of bizarre and unexplained deaths  
The Doctor and Peri are caught up in the search to find a mysterious killer  
in modern-day England, and a race against time  
to stop before they strike again.  
They soon discover that the female of the species  
can be deadlier than the male...

This story features the Sixth Doctor and Peri

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This is another in a series of original fan authored  
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