

BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

LAST CHRISTMAS



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Last Christmas
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Panic was starting to set in right as the first snow fell. Dena cursed the fluids burbling out of her car and she cursed the digital navigation's empty promise of time saved by taking a rural side road. Finally she cursed the dark, mountainous Rio Grande Forest of Colorado where she found herself hundreds of miles from the nearest civilization. She was cold and tired from the long trip back to Texas where, apparently, she would not be arriving by tomorrow. She fished her phone out of her jacket pocket with quickly numbing fingers and finally burned through the remainder of her calm by seeing near empty battery charge and no signal. She always had her mother's temper, it was a sleeping beast easily stirred and hard to contain. She screamed. She threw her flashlight at the steaming engine and cursed everything she could see. She used every foul word she knew and created some clever additions on the spot. Dena raged at the silent mountain forest until her voice gave out then erupted in a nervous laugh.

As the anger coiled itself back to sleep, panic stepped in as the sun finally dipped below the horizon. How long had she been driving on this side road? An hour at least! She hadn't seen another vehicle or sign of life that whole time! Why would she? It's Christmas freaking Eve! Everyone with a lick of sense was home with hot chocolate and post card families she never had. She pulled her thin jacket closer and searched the car for emergency supplies and managed to come up with a granola bar, winter hat, gloves and a flickering flashlight thanks to her temper. She tucked her amber curls under her winter hat and took a deep breath before setting off for the long journey back to the highway in the deepening night.

An hour had passed and the mountain air tore through her feeble jacket; her eyes stung from the endless cold while the snow drifted down covering the road in the deepening dark. Dena was lost in miserable contemplation; she was in real trouble here. This was going from irritating to life threatening as her frigid fingers fumbled with the screen. Her spirit lifted for a moment when

she saw a single bar of reception before the screen shifted to a red battery dead notification before shutting down. A sob wracked her body for a moment.

“Oh God, no please...please don't do this!” she hissed, her warm breath clouding her wet glasses in the freezing wind.

Her hands ached, the gloves being a loose weave built to withstand the dry cold of Texas rather than the wet, frigid wind chill of Colorado. The rough road had become covered in the endless snow, only the margins hinting at blacktop beneath. A deep voice within told her she wouldn't reach the main highway and would be risking her life to press on unless someone happened by, assuming they would even stop in the first place. So what? Turn back to the car? Without the engine it could only offer shelter and she wasn't entirely sure she could reach that either. All the frantic thoughts screeched to halt when she saw the rough outline of a driveway up ahead. A house? She started to half jog in the snow in anticipation. Her mind raced with the mundane comforts that filled her with more joy than any Christmas present her youth could ever offer. A hot mug of coffee or even food!

Dena reached the edge of the drive and could just make out the old mailbox peeking out from the woodlands. She trudged up the steep drive which leveled out into a large front yard and a cabin beyond. Smoke rose blessedly from the chimney but no lights, which may not be a big deal if they weren't expecting company or lived more simply than her small condo in Texas. She marched right across the yard to the roughhewn front door and knocked loudly bringing a wicked sting to her freezing hands. Over the wind she distinctly heard the sound of Christmas music within; *Baby its Cold Outside* to be precise which was fitting given her situation. After some moments passed Dena pounded the door again much louder with the meaty part of her palm, “Come on, damn it!” she muttered. As more time passed, the anger uncoiled and lashed out again as she kicked the door with the side of her ruined boots and cried out, “Seriously! Wake the hell up! I really need some help here!”

With that, the door popped open from its flimsy latch and creaked slowly open; the blessed heat and cheery music from within washed over her for a moment before she noticed the darkness. She stood a moment considering what to do. Dena hadn't meant to kick the door open and that was a pretty good way to get shot down where she came from. She decided that survival was the better part of manners and called out.

“Hey! Sorry, I opened the door accidentally...” she offered into the darkened room. Only vague shapes could be made out with light from a fireplace far along the other side of the room and just out of eyesight from the front door.

“Anyway...My car broke down and I'm in a bit of an emergency, I'm freezing and need to use a phone!?...” Dena again offered into the room where only Mannheim Steamroller orchestra music could be heard from some anonymous radio secreted away somewhere within. “Ok...I'm coming in...”.

Despite her anxiety, the heat from the fireplace was quickly thawing her out and she managed to take off her jacket and hat and sling them over her forearm, shaking out her wavy auburn hair. Half closing the door behind her; Dena's eyes took a moment to adjust but it was still hard to make out the contents of the room. She could see the fireplace around the corner from the main room across from what is likely the kitchen door where some natural light banished the shadows at the far end. The main entry way revealed high ceilings with the vague outline of prize bucks mounted around the top with a heavy sofas and sturdy furniture of a rustic

type lining the open concept living room. She could see there was a second story overlooking this room but no stairs she could immediately identify. She stamped off the snow from her boots and pants before venturing further.

“Ok, well...If anyone is here, I am just going to use your phone real quick and hopefully see about getting a ride or something...Sorry again!” Dena shouted, fairly certain she was talking to herself at this point as she walked towards the fireplace.

“He sees you...” an ethereal female voice called out from somewhere up the stairs.

A startled, then embarrassed Dena replied, “I’m so sorry! I don’t know if you heard me earlier- sorry if I woke you or whatever. My car died and I was freezing out there. I just need your phone and if it’s ok to wait here until the authorities arrive to help.”

“He sees you, Dena. You were not wearing your seat belt and used very naughty language. He is making a list...” The cheerful voice called out, echoing from a different location than before; somewhere up above.

“How the hell...? How long have you...he...whatever, been watching me? How could you have? Listen, I’m sorry for barging in but I was damn well freezing to death....how do you know my name?” Dena fumbled with a rush of thoughts and the beginnings of real fear.

“He sees you now. We can’t have you ruin Christmas, silly goose! Be down in a moment and we will get you sorted out, my dear.” The terrifyingly upbeat voice replied.

Dena was trembling now, deeply unsettled. Her eyes darted around for a phone which she spotted on a small end table near the fireplace. She crept across the dim room hoping to dial the police before that unhinged woman made it down the stairs. Dena rushed to the phone and began to dial when her subconscious forced her awareness of what was hung by the chimney. She looked up as Sinatra began to sing *Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas*. Her mind struggled to take in the pair of travelers hung by their hands with a thick rough rope above the massive rustic fireplace which was covered in Christmas tinsel. They were slathered in a clear wet plastic glaze which dripped steadily into large pots below. The thin polymer sheen covered every surface of the pair including their eyes which were locked open in horror. The heavy set man and pretty young woman would twitch and seize from time to time; toes would curl and release slowly.

Dena screamed.

With her senses on the razor’s edge of terror, she felt the presence behind her. Dena turned slowly to stare into the plastic coated, glazed expression of an older woman with dead eyes and impossibly wide smile. She wore a red and green long skirt, apron and a festive reindeer sweater with a white bonnet; silver hair tucked beneath. When she spoke, her teeth and tongue were coated in the same flexible plastic.

“It’s Christmas Eve, dearie!” the old woman beamed, “You will catch your death out there! Let’s get you all tucked in, shall we? He will be here in the morning!”

The plastic creature was impossibly strong and it grabbed Dena by the neck off the ground and slammed her into the wall sending ornaments and tinsel flying. The hanging traveler’s eyes were fixed helplessly on the struggle as they swung. The old crone forced her hand over Dena’s mouth and nostrils. Dena clawed and kicked at the old woman; the slick polymer absorbed the impact. She felt the slick plastic from the woman’s hand liquefy and force its way into her nostrils and mouth before everything went black.

In a mountainous clearing high on a slope in the Rio Grande forest a grinding wheeze rang out, echoing into the valley below. A blue police call box pulsed rhythmically into existence where there stood nothing before in the early evening moonlight. The snow began to dust the strange box when the door creaked open to reveal an exasperated man of blonde curls and a vibrant patchwork coat of colors complete with a pin in the likeness of a stretching black cat. He shook his head while continuing an argument with his companion who stepped out a beat behind him. Peri Brown was flashing a stunning smile which accentuated her mirth filled eyes. Her glossy dark hair was tied loosely back as she zipped her hooded leather jacket matched with dark blue jeans and sturdy boots.

"I used to have a Professor back home that wouldn't admit he didn't know something too. Pride seems to be fatal flaw in British aliens as well." Peri observed as she pursued her prey out of the TARDIS.

"Nonsense. Complete and total. In a situation such as this; I am keenly aware of certain facts that I am in the process of exploring which you sadly mistake for ignorance. Far from it, dear Peri. I know, having a bit of experience in this regard; that the TARDIS stumbled over a certain abnormality in this region of space-time. An abnormality so significant, in fact, that our sensors were damaged in the process. Our role, should you continue to nip at my heels with your witty repartee, is to explore and examine this strange data objectively. I have currently no less than a dozen likely theories ranging from sensor error to full scale invasion." the Doctor replied while examining his surroundings and the stars above.

"And...where would you say we are? Have your expert theories gotten that far yet?" Peri said while subtly scooping up a couple of handfuls of snow out of the Doctor's eye line.

"Well, these are the Rocky Mountains and we are in a heavily forested region so...I would hazard a guess of rural Colorado, North America. Normally I could tell you exactly, but without the TARDIS sensors, we are left with my considerable experience as our only guide." The Doctor replied before turning to face his companion.

Peri stood with two perfectly formed snowballs at the ready, "Now that I have your attention, and I would hate to get snow all over your fancy coat, *when* are we?"

"Christmas Eve, that much I can tell you for certain..." the Doctor managed before being pelted with snowballs in his face and coat.

"Wrong answer, Doctor! I don't know if you remember but we haven't had the best luck with Christmas together!?" Peri said playfully.

"What you are predicting, dear Peri, is the typical human mind's version of *Apophenia*. Or, more plainly, the mind's tendency to attribute a pattern to absolutely random data. I have a bit of knack for tracking meaningful patterns and we are no more likely to experience a significant or perilous event on Christmas than any other day. You may as well say 'it's a Thursday, we are in for it now...'. The TARDIS is not particularly young, however well maintained, and there is just as good a chance this is an error as some nefarious scheme contrived from an extradimensional entity." The Doctor retorted, brushing snow from his face and coat.

"Yeah, we will see, wont we? Bet you an all-expense paid trip to a luxury beach resort that we end up running from something. Good thing about a time machine is that I can collect on this this bet right after we are done here. Deal?" Ms. Brown offered her hand to seal the deal.

“You are forgetting that a bet has two sides; if I win...I get to pick our vacation! I’m thinking of a series of mineral museums or early 20th Century dig in an Egyptian desert...” The Doctor said, shaking Peri’s hand firmly to confirm the wager.

In the distance, a weak call for help could be faintly heard. Peri smirked while setting off, “Swimsuits and umbrella drinks! Here we come!

The snow continued to drift down on the mountain as the pair hurried down the ridge and arrived at a rough path with a well-worn trail leading down to a clearing at the edge of a steep drop into the rough terrain below. A wrecked semi-truck was on its side and perched precariously close to the ravine and its ransacked trailer end facing the path. The rear doors appeared torn open with scattered debris and torn boxes strewn along deep lines of footprints leading back up the path. Looking up the Doctor saw a rural side road which circled higher up the mountain and the wrecked guardrail hanging off. The wreck had happened long enough ago to allow a thick buildup of snow on the trailer and cab where a weak voice called out again an indecipherable, desperate cry again. Lost in thought as the Doctor processed the information at hand; Peri had snatched a roll of orange extension cord from the debris and scaled the undercarriage of the overturned truck and made her way on top. The young woman slowly stepped along the trailers edge towards the truck’s cab which balanced on an incline close to the cliffs end.

“Hello! Listen, it’s going to be ok! My name is Peri and we are here to help! Can you tell me if you are hurt? Are you bleeding?” she offered, thinking back to her meager first aid training as she approached the back of the mangled cab while unrolling the extension cord.

The Doctor jogged over to the rear of the trailer which lay torn open, the door laying a few feet away to find anything of use. Colorful debris lay ransacked and strewn all along a path of dozens of well-worn sets of footprints leading from trailer further up the mountain. He pulled a clipboard containing an inventory list out of the debris and scanned it with a concerned expression.

“What is it, Doctor?” Peri shouted while slowly inching towards the cab of the truck.

“Sweaters, decorations...simple Christmas bric-a-brac.... Now what the blazes would possess all of these trips in the frigid winter to salvage this rubbish?!” he answered.

A deep groan emanated from the truck’s wreckage and Peri dropped to a knee, quickly seeking a better purchase as the whole trailer slipped inches closer to the cliff’s edge.

“Peri! Listen to me very carefully; you need to slowly come down from there. Slide on your belly until you are on this end of the trailer then jump to solid ground. It’s only a matter of moments until it plunges over the side. For once, don’t argue and trust me.” The Doctor stood helplessly.

“I’m not leaving him. We have time, Doctor.” Peri replied with grim determination. She slung the extension cord through the open window of the truck and called out, “Sir, can you see the cord? Can you grab it?” The only response was a groan.

“Peri, please. Come down from there. This is a matter of basic physics. Your movement is dislodging the wreck. Throw me the cord at least so we have a chance if it all goes wrong. ” The Doctor pleaded, helpless only to watch as his weight would likely only hasten the slide.

Peri slid further forward on her stomach to look down through the open cab window. The darkness hid the desperate situation within.

“I can’t see him. If I just get a little closer I can...”

As if in slow motion, the Doctor’s hearts sank as the truck cab suddenly exhausted its tenuous grip and plummeted into the jagged darkness pulling the trailer with it. In the pause before the fall; Peri turned and leapt, arms outstretched for salvation. The Doctor was in motion to reach out but helplessly watched as she only caught the very jagged edge before disappearing into the void before help could arrive.

The Doctor screamed into the night as he knelt by the edge searching the darkness for any sign of Peri Brown in the jagged, dense forest below.

The Doctor knelt by the edge in silence for what seemed like eternity, lost in anguish. The scene played itself over and over again in the Doctor’s mind in the freezing night. The Time Lord’s curse was knowing the probabilities; and the chances of survival from such a fall were slim.

“Oh, Peri. I’m sorry. I’m so, so sorry. I should have realized...acted sooner. I should never have let you take such a risk.” the Doctor rose with determination. He would run to the TARDIS and find her, no matter the odds.

A sound shattered his shock; snapped his senses into full alert. Footsteps and snapping branches rang out. It came from darkness of the tree line back towards the path. The flood of survival struck immediately. Gone was the wretched chill and nausea of grief. There were only his senses reaching into the darkness for some sign. The Time Lord could feel himself being watched from somewhere in the dark branches of the forest.

A figure stepped out in a horrid, inflexible gait. It was hard to tell from the distance and dark of night, but the face seemed to reflect the moon in an unsettling sheen across its pale features. It wore overalls without shoes and the hands were locked in desperate claws. Atop his head were faux reindeer antlers, twisted and soaked from exposure to the elements. A festive green and red scarf was wrapped tightly about its neck. The Doctor could hear an unsettling gurgle from deep in the figure’s lungs as it breathed rapid puffs of warm vapor while staring in a fix gaze.

“Well then, I suppose a hello is in order?” The Doctor called out.

Only gurgling breaths could be heard in response.

“I mean you no harm, but I don’t have time for this; you see my friend...” twigs snapped their warning somewhere back behind the Doctor as arms reached from the darkness towards him. This, whatever it was, did not come alone. The Doctor shoved back hard and pulled himself free.

The Doctor trusted his instincts and ran. The waxy horrors galloped in a rigid gait shortly behind. The bright colors of the Time Lord’s coat were a blur in the white forest as he fled. He caught glimpses of other shapes in the forest shambling a parallel course in pursuit. His mind raced as well, analyzing his advantage and deficits. ‘I’m faster, more agile...’ he thought, ‘but they don’t seem to be getting tired and I can’t keep this up forever. Well then, press the advantage.’

The Doctor turned from the main path and crashed into the forest at its most dense as fast as he could manage. Branches tore at his exposed skin and coat but he used every bit of

speed and maneuverability to press forward into the thick growth. Daring a glance behind him; it worked! The figures, all horrifically clad in festive attire found themselves bogged down, and in some cases, stuck as their stiff movements and poor coordination could not negotiate the heavy terrain. Within minutes of frantic effort, the Doctor broke free with no signs of pursuit.

He leaned on his knees to catch his breath and examined the minor scrapes and cuts he collected along the way. The danger was far from over. The wind was picking up. Cut off from the TARDIS; he had to find shelter because soon as the adrenaline wore off, he would begin to suffer from exposure. He could not help Peri, assuming she could be helped, if he were passed out in some snowbank or dead. A flood of guilt and desperate sadness washed over him as he jogged to a cave he could see in the distance. At least that would block the wind while he regrouped. Reaching the mouth of the cave, the Doctor's numb hands fished out a small light from an inner coat pocket and he stumbled deeper within. It was a welcome respite from the biting wind until something gripped his leg and pulled him into the shadows. He didn't have time to scream as the light clattered to the floor of the cave.

Peri was instantly awake, and a deep animal instinct kept her silent and immobile as her senses reached out for information. Throbbing pain washed over her but she choked back any sound and feigned sleep as she took in her surroundings. She heard an instrumental *Little Drummer Boy* from a distant radio and her eyes opened just enough to see a plate of cookie and milk next to her rough pallet on the floor. Without moving her head she saw an overdone Christmas tree providing the only light in the room.

"He knows when you're awake..." an elderly voice rang out from somewhere in the darkness above her.

"Hey, you are awake. I was starting to wonder..." a young, scared woman with curly hair and cracked glasses whispered; kneeling down next her. Peri noticed a manacle around her right ankle and could hear the slide of the chain links on the hardwood floor.

Peri pulled herself up halfway before wincing from the sharp pain in her legs. She looked down to see she was dressed in snowman patterned flannel pajamas and had been bandaged in a dozen places. To her horror, she felt patches of flexible plastic coating on her legs, torso and head. Her eyes betrayed her fear.

"Yeah, I thought you were dead when the Lurches brought you in. They put that gunk on the worst of your injuries which seemed to do the trick. I bandaged what else I could. Listen, I will explain what I can but I need you to stay calm, ok?"

"Lurches? Where is the Doctor? Where are we?" Peri sputtered.

"We don't have a Doctor for you, I'm sorry; but we are captives. Lurches are what I call them," Dena said; gestured to a hunched figure standing motionless nearby wearing holiday antlers and covered in pine needles and debris. Its skin and clothes carried the same sheen of plastic as her injuries. "Because of how they move...I don't know what hell they are or what they want but..." her bravery wavered and her voice cracked when staring at the figure.

"The Doctor, the man I arrived with, with come for us. Don't worry, whatever is happening, we will figure it out. You are going to be ok." Peri pulled herself up and placed a reassuring hand on Dena's shoulder.

An older woman slathered in plastic and clad in garish holiday clothes trod down the stairs and leaned down to inspect Peri. An unsettling gurgle rattled in the woman's lungs as her absurd expression of happiness shifted to curiosity under the polymer glaze. From across the house, Lurches rigidly gathered; dressed in festive garb offset their unsettling blank expressions.

"Why pout, my dear? Its Christmas morning! Father would just love a proper introduction! It'll be so nice to have company; he has been cooped up for far too long!

Peri and Dena fought and screamed as the Lurches dragged them from the house into the morning snow towards the cave.

The door to the shed finally gave way and the Doctor stumbled inside, battered and freezing in the early morning light. The smell struck him at first, causing him to retch immediately. The harsh light of dawn revealed a standard shed with all manner of farming and mining supplies. The Time Lord was filled with apprehension as he reached over the work bench to switch on a propane lamp which banished the last of the shadows. Heaped unceremoniously in a corner lay a pair of bodies which, despite the freezing weather, had begun to decompose.

With a polka dot handkerchief covering his mouth and nose, the Doctor knelt to examine the pair. The visual autopsy revealed the likely cause of death to blunt force trauma and they were covered in a thick, rigid polymer which the immune system rejected in the form of rashes and hives. On a nearby worktable were displayed a series of rock formations, mined based on the chip marks, including a peculiar specimen comprised of iron, silicates, and...oh dear. The familiar pieces all fell into place for the Doctor.

A familiar melancholy washed over the Doctor; a deep sadness for the poor souls in the corner and his dear Peri. How many? How many people had their honest lives cut short by forces beyond their understanding and control while the Doctor arrived a day late and a shilling short? The old Time Lord could never make it right for these people and that pain was a shard in his soul.

"Right then, to work." The Doctor announced as he carefully removed a sliver of the polymer for experimentation and sorted through the chemicals and tools for any advantage. A brief smile crossed his features when he forced opened a small wooden crate lined with straw.

The storm had passed, and the sun shone somewhat, battling back the morning frost. Dena and Peri were blinded by the shift from the dim light of the cabin as they were half dragged, woefully underdressed, down the mountain path towards the cave. Any chance of escape was banished by the vicelike grasp of the Lurches. A deeprooted instinctual fear gripped the pair of captives; they could sense a presence in the darkness within the cave opening.

"Am I interrupting something?" The Doctor appeared at the edge of clearing, his vibrant coat clearly filthy and battered, leaning against a tree as casual as waiting at a bus stop.

"Doctor! Is a now a good time to say I told you so? Seems like it might be my last opportunity..." Peri called out.

“Have faith, dear Peri. We’ll have you on the beach sipping umbrella drinks in no time.” The Doctor replied.

“Merry Christmas, Doctor! So kind of you to join us for the morning meal!” The Crone called out, with an insane cheery expression plastered across her features. The Lurches rigidly sprinted towards the threat as if on cue.

As the horrid forms closed the distance the Doctor produced a garden sprayer, seemingly from nowhere, and dosed the threats point blank. The plastic melted from the contact and sluffed off into the snow, sizzling. The Lurches shrieked and spewed the clear ichor from their noses and mouths before collapsing to the ground. The Crone leapt the distance between them in a single bound and landed full into the Doctor’s chest, blasting the sprayer from his hand. The struggle was brief and the old Time Lord was quickly overpowered and dragged to the mouth of the cave beside Dena and Peri. The shadows deep within the cave stirred as a stinging pain appeared behind the eyes of the captives.

“Doctor, what is happening to me?” Peri begged; clenching her eyes shut from the pain.

“Please, make it stop!” Dena shouted.

“A Nestene spore, Peri. It’s trying to consume your knowledge; the invasion of your mind is quite painful, am afraid. Never mind that, focus on my words- it may buy us some time. It will help you resist. Its minions are known as Autons, but these are a hybrid I’ve never seen before. Must have had precious little polymer to use and had to make do. The infant Nestene spores land on new worlds, infiltrate the society through consumption of local knowledge and dominate through their Autons. This one is a juvenile with no frame of reference so it identified itself through Christmas lore. The poor people who unearthed the pod must have been overwhelmed immediately. First it will digest our knowledge then it will try to feed itself for its next stage of growth. I won’t let that happen, do you hear me? No more; it ends here one way or another!” The Doctor turned to face the cave, on his face the look of determination.

It pulled itself from the darkness into the morning light and Dena screamed; the edges of her sanity frayed from the sight of the monstrosity. It was the size of the entire cave opening with no discernable features other than a brown green maw with a beak-like protrusion surrounding it. The flesh pulsed with movement and it secreted thick ooze from its surface which was filled with gravel and debris from within.

A tentacle shot out and wrapped itself around the Doctor’s leg, pulling the first course of the meal into its maw. Another shot out and bound his arms; the Lurch released the Doctor and stepped back. The crone smiled and nodded as if watching grandchildren open Christmas gifts. Peri fought like a demon against her captors as she saw the Doctor dragged towards the horror in the cave; she was held fast.

“I speak now to the Nestene. Leave this place. I will help you find another world. You have my word. But if you don’t stop...” The Doctor shouted while being pulled.

A wave of malice, of sheer spite, emanated from the Nestene and wound its way into the minds of its prey. The Doctor nodded and produced a small device from his pocket and flicked a switch on top detonating the dynamite charges at the mouth and within the cave system. The Lurches and the crone shrieked in the same pitch as the Nestene as the rock exploded. When the shrieking stopped, they fell where they stood as if they were marionettes with severed strings. The Doctor gathered himself to his feet; a sad expression passed over him as he looked to the cave before turning and rushing over to embrace Peri and Dena.

The UNIT detachment from the Cheyenne Mountain complex appeared within the hour with scientists and soldiers flooded the scene. The Doctor noted how good UNIT had become at this dance. Picking up pieces and learning from these incursions. Dena and Peri sat on the back of a military ambulance wrapped in wool blankets and sipping hot coffee in frigid hands as the Doctor approached.

“What now? What does one do after something like this?” Dena asked, “I take it that this isn’t that out of the ordinary for you, whoever you are.”

“Some of the Auton hybrids will survive apparently; who knows what long term damage this has done to them. There will of course be the non-disclosure agreements and military intelligence muckity-mucks will help you get back to your life...” the Doctor mused, taking a seat on the edge of the truck.

“But I don’t think this is what you are asking, is it? What happened to you will take time to process, to put this away and...day by day...you will think of this less and less. UNIT will provide professionals you can talk honestly with who may be able to help. A day will come when I will have to do the same and, well, it helps to know that I was not alone. To know that my friend Dena was there to mend my wounds and talk me through when things looked their worst. For that, I can only say thanks. So...thanks. Right Doctor?” Peri finished with a hug for her friend.

“Hmmm? Oh yes, quite. I couldn’t have put it better myself. Well, we should be going. Take care of yourself and let’s hope your road home is a little less eventful, shall we?” The Doctor smiled.

The Doctor and Peri vanished into the crowd of soldiers and scientists leaving Dena a lot of thinking to do on Christmas Day as the snow began to fall again.

BRIEF ENCOUNTERS



Dena's car breaks down at the worst possible time: dead in the freezing winter of Colorado on Christmas Eve. Desperately seeking safety and shelter, she happens on an old cabin on the hill where a grave threat waits and her salvation quickly becomes terror.

Meanwhile, in the deep-frozen forest of rural Colorado, a Blue Police Box arrives with the Doctor and Peri. The pair quickly respond to calls for help from a wrecked semi-truck when tragedy strikes that could well spell the end for Perugilliam Brown. The Doctor, devastated, has no time to grieve as a grave threat lurches in the forest at night and the Doctor's time is running out.

Christmas morning is coming and with it an unwilling blood sacrifice for the ancient evil. After which, there will be no stopping the devastation and could well spell the end for the Doctor and his companions. With only his wits and meager supplies, the Doctor must find a way to defeat a familiar foe in a whole new light. In a desperate struggle for survival, will humanity survive or will this be the last Christmas?

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