

BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

MAUVAISE RENCONTRE



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Johnny was awake. He wasn't going to go to sleep without a fight; it was the usual routine. He hadn't tidied away his toys, he hadn't brushed his teeth and he hadn't picked up the clothes from his floor, but he still expected a story. Being read a story was an inalienable right, surely. How dare Mother threaten to withhold it just because he hadn't kept up any of his ends of the bargain?

Barbara Chesterton wasn't going to give up without a fight, either. However, before she could push the matter, the lights went out. That was becoming part of the routine these days, too. So, tired and deciding not to bother with trying to read by candlelight, she decided to dig into her memories and give the boy another piece of her past.

"What do you know about Blackbeard, Johnny?" Barbara asked.

"Blackbeard the pirate?" he responded, enthusiastically.

"That's right. Come and give me a cuddle, and I'll tell you about the time Father and I met him". They got themselves comfortable under the soft sheets and she began.

* * * * *

The year was 1718. May, to be precise, as your father and I later researched. The TARDIS was approaching the coast of Charles Town, which was then in the Province of Carolina in the American colonies. The Doctor was fussing at the controls of the Ship. I'm sure you know what the control room looks like, I've described it often enough. He had a way of spreading himself over two or three panels of the console at once that reminded me of a spider controlling its web. As we heard the engines begin to groan we knew we were landing, and he Doctor stood back, clutching his lapels, to admire his work.

"There, you see? A perfect landing. Yes, perfect. You know, I really think I am getting rather good at programming our destinations... programming them, with great precision!" he proclaimed with a triumphant smile. Still clutching one lapel, he wagged a finger at Father and continued, "if you'd care to operate that scanner control, Chesterton, you will see out of that screen there, London, in the year 1963, as requested".

Your father smiled and flicked the relevant switch. The scanner popped into life with a crackle of static and a light thump, like our television, and a flickering image started to form. It was of radiant sunshine, which seemed wrong for a start. As the image became clearer, we

saw rigging, masts and endless ocean, which seemed even more out of place for central London.

"Well, Doctor, I admire your optimism, but unless we're on the Cutty Sark and it's a particularly balmy day, I'd say we're a little... adrift?" Father smiled with his tongue in his cheek, in that way that he does, because he knew it would infuriate the Doctor.

The Doctor's face fell and he blustered, "Yes, yes, well, you're welcome to try yourself, young man. It's a very complex piece of machinery, not a taxicab! Still, it looks pleasant enough, yes... a pleasant place to spend an afternoon".

"Do you think we're on the *Endeavour* again?" I asked. "It looks very familiar". It felt familiar, too. The TARDIS swayed very gently along with the ship, and I could almost hear the creaking of timbers.

"No..." the Doctor replied, not unkindly. "If you look over there, my dear, you'll see all the bolts and joints are made not of iron, as with the vessels of Captain Cook's time, but wood. If I know my history, and I believe I do, I'd say we're about, eh, fifty years before that period, hmm?"

"I had no idea you were such the expert mariner, Doctor," Father joked.

"I'm quite the expert on any number of subjects, Chesterfield. But if you don't believe me, allow me to prove it to you. I shan't be a moment. You two go outside and make yourselves comfortable. Go on, run along, run along!" So saying, the Doctor opened the main doors with a chuckle and then disappeared through another pair, deeper into the ship. Father and I went outside.

* * * * *

I stepped onto warm wood, which shifted almost imperceptibly. The heat of the sun felt wonderful on my sandalled feet. Gulls wheeled and squawked overhead. I covered my eyes to shield them from the glare and scanned the horizon, where the sun sparkled on the water like diamonds on velvet. We seemed to be anchored some way from a shore; too far to swim but close enough that we could make out a settlement or town. Three or four similar ships seemed to be anchored nearby.

Father was just about to open his mouth to say something before a loud bang drew our attention. I turned round in the direction of the noise and saw that a hatch had been thrown open on deck. Two men carrying very long, very sharp swords emerged from below. They were dressed somewhat like the pirates you see in films, but less theatrically. They were not recently shaved and were thin and ill-looking; their faces, particularly their mouths, were drawn and sore-looking. Their breeches, shirts and waistcoats were dirty and torn. These men didn't get to go home at night after a day's filming, but we had no doubts as to what they were. Oh yes, Johnny, your father and I were frightened.

Father stepped forward instinctively to try and put himself between the men and me, and said, "Good afternoon, my name's Chesterton and..."

"Down there, be quick about it!" The taller of the two men moved round behind me, so that in fact he ended up between us and the TARDIS, and the other pushed Father towards the hatch with his sword; Father looked back to make sure I was alright. I smiled at him as best I could and, somewhat satisfied, he did as he was told and went down through the hatch as I

followed. We usually got a little longer to explore our surroundings but this time, we were straight into the thick of it. I prayed that the Doctor would be a little longer in the TARDIS so that he didn't meet the same fate; with one of us free, there was some hope.

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The atmosphere inside the sailing ship was very different to up top. On the deck, the heat of the sun had been invigorating; below, it was stifling. The room was dark, lit by candles and oil lamps. At a quick count I would say there were around thirty people huddled in the centre, but they were not dressed like the pirates who'd caught us. They wore finer, cleaner clothes and the looks on their faces told us that resistance was best avoided for now. The air was faintly sulphurous and there were other smells that spoke of the conditions in which these people—obviously prisoners—were being kept. We each received a shove from the men.

I turned to the one nearest me. "W... what's your name?" I asked.

"Move quickly, missus, lest you find yourself a-dancing with Mr Ketch".

Father and I headed for the group and crouched down beside them, trying to look as invisible as possible. The crowd were engaged in hushed but normal enough conversation, which almost reminded me of waiting for a teaching conference to begin, when they fell suddenly silent. The men at the sides stiffened as best they could in their condition, and a new figure appeared at the top of the room.

I knew at once who it was. It wasn't anyone we'd met before on our travels, but the impression was clear enough. The man was incredibly tall, with a very long, very dark beard, which was tied in tails with bows. His clothing was dark, also, but on a strap across his broad chest, glinting dully in the pale, yellow light, were a number of pistols.

Your father and I exchanged glances. "Ian, do you know who that is?" I whispered.

"Yes, yes I think I do. Barbara, listen. Keep your head down and try not to get involved with whatever's going on here. We should be ready to take any chance to try and get back to the Ship," Father replied. Try not to get involved. I could almost have laughed. Trying not to get involved felt like our life's mission, but it was almost always impossible.

The tall man spoke. "Listen, listen well. I wish you people no harm, but I will not have my commands disputed. My men have the debility, and we need medicine from the Colony. If this we receiveth not, you will surely all die. Your heads I shall send to the Governor, and the hunt's dog shall have your blood 'pon his hands".

Silence.

"Wragg," the man added. "Which of you is Wragg?"

A round, youngish man to my side made a feeble gesture; half a raised hand, half a wave. It reminded me of a child who knows an answer but is afraid to look too clever. He was wearing a powdered wig and breeches; of all the things I don't think I ever quite got used to when travelling with the Doctor, it wasn't alien planets or strange monsters, but seeing real people from history, our history, like old paintings and sketches brought to life.

I made the mistake of watching Wragg as he got unsteadily to his feet and ambled towards one of the pirates. My eyes caught those of the tall man, just for a second, but it was enough. I quickly looked down again, and if I could have willed the moment away through the sheer determination with which I stared at the timber floor, I would have.

"That woman also". The tall man spoke again, and he was pointing at me.

* * * * *

Wragg and I were taken to what must have been the captain's cabin; after having only been below deck for a few minutes, it was a relief to be able to breathe properly again. He told me this ship was called the *Crowley* and, oh, it was beautifully decorated. Dressers and tables around the sides of the room were ornately carved, from mahogany, I think, and covered with sculpted candlesticks and leather-bound books. A large map hung on one wall, and an exquisite chandelier of candles hung from the ceiling. Every inch of the room – floors, walls, all of it – was built from oiled wood which shone a rich red in the sun as it came in rays through the latticed windows. The tall man seemed to have no regard for this and threw his hat upon a desk, sending a fine crystal brandy goblet skittering to the floor where it shattered. He did not seat himself there, choosing to stand.

"I am Commodore Teach", he said. "Thou art Mister Wragg, of the Council of Carolina, sir?"

Wragg drew himself up a little and, with as much dignity as he could muster, he responded and appeared determined not to show fright. "I am he, sir, and I have the honour of s...serving as such".

"I do believe thee to be the man of most import aboard this ship. Where is she bound?" demanded Teach.

"You shall have no quarter from me, p...p... picaroon".

Teach took a step closer to Wragg. That was all he did, but Wragg seemed to physically recoil and I am sure it felt cooler all of a sudden. Teach's step brought him into shadow, and his eyes suddenly shone more clearly as his face darkened; they reminded me of Tlotoxl, and had the same violent intensity. It was only a moment and Wragg coughed to revive his nerves, and replied, "...London".

Teach looked at me and back to Wragg, "this woman, she is of the Council also?"

Wragg turned to me and shrugged, and told Teach he had never seen me before. "A curiosity indeed," Teach responded, "who are thee, madam?"

"I'm Barbara... Barbara Wright. I'm just... a passenger," I replied.

"And art thou bound for London, Mistress Wright?"

"Well... yes, in a manner of speaking. The long way round".

"And yet you are not known to Mr Wragg. Nor I, for I did not see you when we took this ship. This matters not. Wragg, I have need of thy aid to obtain for my men the medicaments we seek. Wilt thou see these items secured or must I see the desk of thy master, the Governor Johnson, awash with thy fellows' blood?"

Wragg held Teach's gaze for a second, then looked at me and then at the floor. His earlier pretence at bluster had faded and he said, "I have no choice, sir. You are a scoundrel and a blaggard, but I will not see blood shed. I shall attend to the matter myself and go immediately..."

Teach cut him off. "Nay, sirrah. Here shall thee remain, but name one man to accompany two of mine own".

Wragg looked up again and seemed to be contemplating defiance, but replied, "Oh, very well. My man Marks will do as you require".

"Your servant, sir," said Teach, with a grace that belied his power over us, as he swept from the cabin to the deck below to arrange the mission with this Marks. It felt warmer in the room again. Wragg swallowed hard and mopped his brow with a lace handkerchief, and I crossed to the cabin door to try it. To my surprise, it was unlocked. I opened it a crack but quickly closed it again; I didn't like the look of the man who'd been left to guard us.

"I say, Mistress Wright, would you pour me a little of that brandy? It has been a most trying afternoon," said Wragg, as he collapsed into a chair.

"Are you alright?" I asked him, pouring a small glass. He looked at the glass, but then took the bottle and drank.

"Tis my son," he choked suddenly on the drink. "He must not find my son, William. That man may take my money, my goods... but my boy is below, and I fear for him if that demon should discover it!"

"What's your name? Your first name, I mean?" I asked.

"Samuel, Miss. Samuel Wragg, at your service".

"Well, Samuel, that was no demon. He's a man, that's all. He walks like you and I; he talks like us. If he's as intelligent as he seems, surely we can reason with him?"

"Mistress Wright, I am grateful for your words. But the blaggard is known about these parts, and I fear you should not underestimate the fellow. He takes not only ships and fine things, he takes people. His surgeon, his cook; 'zounds, even the villain's *cabin boy* was taken from another craft. His family must think him dead".

"It's terrible I agree, but he doesn't want people now, he only wants medicine".

"I admire your fortitude, Mistress Wright," Samuel smiled. "Do you know what they renamed the ship he left them? Those upon whom fortune smiled and who escape being pressed into his service? The *Mauvaise Rencontre*. 'Tis mildly put".

My French wasn't too bad, though if you ever think of learning it, Johnny, there are better places to start than a French prison. After thinking it over I replied, "*Mauvaise Rencontre*... that means... bad encounter, doesn't it?"

"Aye. To think that such a fate could so easily befall my William..."

Well, I can entirely understand his fear now, Johnny, since you've come along, but although I didn't have the same understanding at that time, I could see it in his face. I made sure he had calmed down and he waved me away, so I crossed to a window. The fine latticework may as well have been iron bars. The view outside was as glorious as when the TARDIS had first landed. The sea still glittered, and the birds still arced, and I thought of your father, still below.

* * * * *

For the next hour or so we were left alone, and the ship was very quiet. There was no one on deck aside from our guard, who had taken to sitting in a pocket of shade. I felt sure the two of us could have found a way past him, but Samuel was determined not to do anything that might risk reprisals. I thought I could hear voices and creaking wood, followed by a splash, but then all was silent again until Teach returned.

"The men have departed for the town," he said as he entered. He eyed the almost empty brandy bottle but evidently decided not to pursue the matter. He turned to me and said, "Thou are a continued source of intrigue to me, Miss Wright. Nary a soul below can vouch for thy presence. Well, have you no tongue? Art thou afraid of me, Miss?"

I decided honesty was the best policy. "I am, and I am aware of your reputation, your name is known across the world. But I know you would rather not kill people". I knew a little of this period and added, "You could accept a pardon, and lead an honest life".

"Tis true," he replied, "I could".

"Why won't you let the prisoners onto the deck? It's stifling down below, and I'm sure if they were all more comfortable, everyone would be more co-operative. After all, surely a group of politicians and travellers are no threat to you and your men?"

Teach looked at me and then away as he considered my request. "Very well, Miss Wright".

He crossed to the door and shouted an order for the prisoners to be sent up as I tried to hide my happiness. As they filed through the deck-hatch, squinting and shielding their eyes from the glare of the sun and casting off coats and jackets, I watched urgently for your father. But as the last of the passengers emerged and the hatch was shut, he was not there.

"But... is that all of them?" I asked the Commodore. "Where is Ian, Ian Chesterton?"

"Ian?" he replied. "Be he a man of height, dark with dull and humdrum raiments?"

Well, I suppose that's how he may have appeared to these people, wearing 1960s slacks and a plain shirt. "Yes, that's him".

"But... Chesterton? Surely, thou art referring to Ian Marks, for he so identified himself to me".

I felt suddenly queasy as my mind connected the dots and I realised at once what must have happened. I knew then your Father was not on the ship, and I could guess what he had done, but I didn't know why.

"Ian is with my men, Miss Wright", Teach continued, "and he has made for Charles Town. He has one day to return with that which we require, or this ship shall burn, along with thee... except thy head".

As the threat sunk in, I noticed on the deck that there was no longer any sign of the TARDIS. I know, Johnny; without it, I was stuck. Alone.

* * * * *

The day that followed was one of the worst of my life. I've been in some difficult situations, as you know, but they were often all so... so alien. Although freed from the sulphurous lower deck, there was little respite from the heat for Teach's prisoners. What rations there had been were fast disappearing into the apparently bottomless stomachs of his men. Some clearly had scurvy, though they wouldn't have known what it was. Others looked generally malnourished. Teach's desperation for medication seemed understandable but I wasn't convinced if he actually knew what it would do, or what needed treating.

I helped Samuel with his friend Marks, the real Marks, who was most decidedly still on the ship and not heading for the town. "Thank you, Miss Wright," he said, as I offered him some water. It didn't look particularly clean, but then neither did anything else.

"What happened, man?" asked Samuel.

"I must have bumped my head, or else had an attack of some miasma. I felt most peculiar below. I was speaking with your husband, madam..." he began.

I blushed and corrected him, "Ian's not my husband, we're, uh... travelling companions".

"Ah, there are none so blind, Miss Wright," Marks smiled back at me. "Your... travelling companion, he spoke to me to vouchsafe for my health. When I heard that wicked man, the picaroon, calling for me I made to stand but I am afraid my legs betrayed me. Ian took my place. I made to intervene but alas, I had not the strength".

"Yes, that sounds like Ian. Well, I'm sure he can look after himself, and you just make sure to rest here". Samuel and I left Marks to recuperate.

Though it clearly pained him, he had tried to keep away from his son. Any sign of a connexion between the two might, he feared, be exploited by the Commodore. William, for his part, had tried to stay away from his father but clearly found this difficult. I tried to do what I could to help and offered to play the part of intermediary.

"Hello... it's William, isn't it?" I said, sitting beside the boy on sun-kissed wood. He was sitting on a stained rag of a blanket, that I suppose passed for his bed at night.

"Yes, miss".

"My name is Barbara. I'm a teacher. You know, my pupils are only a little older than you. Do you go to school, William?" I asked him.

"Please, miss, I just want to sit with my father," he replied, his eyes watering.

I put my arm round him, just as I am with you now, and did my best to reassure him. "I have a friend, Ian, who has gone out to get help, and when he gets back I promise you, you'll be back with your father and on your way to London". What I didn't know at the time, was that we were being listened to.

* * * * *

As the sun finally began its descent at the end of that day and a welcome cool, salty breeze began to blow, I could hardly contain my anxiety. Father had not returned, and his deadline was about to expire. Teach was likewise awaiting news, as he stared out at the sky, which was turning a brilliant burnt red as stars began to twinkle. When news arrived, it was not Ian with medicine that was helped onto the deck after being offered an oily rope, but a messenger from the town. He had been sent by one of Teach's men to explain that the small boat Ian had taken to shore had capsized on the way, delaying his journey.

Teach had been unusually silent all day, and I suppose I'd allowed myself to believe, or had perhaps convinced myself to believe, that the famous pirate of fiction was nothing like his real-life counterpart. How many names from history do we never know at all, save through the hyperbole of those who write it?

"Wragg!" he thundered, finally breaking his silence and rounding on the smaller man. "This Marks thinks me a fool! Capsized on a millpond? Fie, the man is wenching and drinking, as my peppered crew wait here to die!". Never mind what it means, Johnny, just be sure that it didn't sound like Father!

"I...I...I..." Samuel began, stumbling to his feet. Foolishly, he risked a quick glance at William.

"Thy son. The truth from me cannot be so easily concealed, council man. Why, such a small head as this would be scarce enough to distract the Governor from his scribblings".

Samuel threw an arm around his son, as Teach drew closer. "Thy time has come, Marks has failed", continued the pirate.

"No!" I called out impulsively. "Please, leave the boy alone. I promise you, Ian will be back, he wouldn't leave me here, he just wouldn't!"

"Am I to be defied by all?" roared Teach, and he rounded on me instead. "This woman would ring a peal in my ears!" Some of his crew, the older ones, slunk back, and others moved forwards, a kind of childish eagerness on their faces. Either way, they seemed to sense something.

"Ian is a teacher of... of science, of chemicals," I carried on. "When he returns, he will be able to help your men, and administer the medicine. You must believe me!" I wasn't sure if I was getting through or not. "You don't need to harm anyone, I know you don't want to".

Teach's face was inscrutable, and after he'd held my gaze for seconds that felt like hours, he shouted, "Fraser!" This was aimed at a young ship-hand from his crew; a lad who could only have been sixteen or seventeen. The boy scarcely had time to look up from where he had been sitting before his chest bloomed scarlet and he slumped back, the shot still ringing across the ocean and into the night as Teach replaced the smoking pistol into his belt.

"If I did not shoot one or two crew ere now," he spat, maliciously, "people may forget who I am."

I screamed. This was the man from the history books. "There was no need for that!" I shouted. "What have you achieved by murdering that poor boy?"

He smiled now. "If Ian do not return before two nights, or if his skill be found lacking with my men, then, Miss Wright, shall thee dance upon nothing."

Teach looked at Wragg and laughed, "Aye, and the boy".

* * * * *

For the next two days I watched the streak of town that marked the coast. I got a headache from the glittering of the sun on the sea as I strained for any sign of a little boat coming our way. We tried to keep out of Teach's way as best we could. His mood had deteriorated, and he and his men started by moving from eating the ship's food to drinking whatever they could find in the cabin. As well as his mood, his health also seemed to be suffering, and that of all his men. Some of them were very ill and had... toilet problems. I recognised some of the symptoms of others as those of scurvy; they were irritable, moreso, and their mouths and lips were terribly sore. No, perhaps they weren't brushing their teeth twice a day, Johnny.

On the evening of the first day, Teach and his men had captured a larger vessel attempting to leave the town and took everything from it. The meat and drink had lasted barely longer than the time it took to open the cases. The fruits and vegetables, and I couldn't help but reflect on the fact they would have prevented this situation, were left to us.

Fraser had been thrown overboard.

They had robbed the prisoners of most of their valuables and possessions, and took from Samuel six thousand dollara worth of coins, as well as his finer clothes. Although they had not harmed his son, Father's deadline had been extended and extended again, and we knew we couldn't just sit here waiting forever. Before we could despair further, the pirates stumbled out of the cabin and onto the deck.

"Marks has not returned," announced the Commodore, a little unsteady on his feet. It was fortunate for him the sea was so calm. He addressed the prisoners, "Those lily-livered curs of the Council clearly value thee so little, for they maketh no effort to secure thy lives for medicine. 'Tis a fine bargain, methinks! No matter, we shall take that which we need ourselves. We'll make a little mayhem about the town, and see how long we may stand it," he shouted, to drunken cheers from his men. "Weigh anchor!"

The men were suddenly frantic, preparing weapons, emptying bottles and setting the sails for the settlement on the shore. They no longer minded the prisoners, who either hid below deck or in the deserted cabin.

"Wragg, Miss Wright," barked Teach. "I desire thy company when we debark, that Marks, be the dog found, and the Governor see I am a man of my word."

"And Ian is a man of his," I responded. "Besides, anything is better than sitting around here," I said, and the man would have struggled to have stopped me coming with them anyway. I somehow knew Father would be alright, but I wanted desperately to see it with my own eyes.

As the ship approached the town, its features started quickly to clarify. It looked very pleasant, despite the circumstances; the buildings were made of either brick or wood, and painted various pastel shades, a little like an old picture-postcard English town picked up and dropped onto a beach. The harbour was busy with little boats being loaded and unloaded and people began to notice our approach.

Amongst the figures busying themselves with finding swords or shelter on the walkways, and the numerous crates of various cargoes, I saw Father. He looked a little haggard but tanned and was sitting on a wooden chest. I felt a weight lift from my shoulders and smiled, for the first time in a while. He was a solid point in the maelstrom.

"It's Ian!" I cried, pointing to the figure.

Teach strained to see and squinted, before confirming. "Aye... aye 'tis Marks. A merry time had he, I am sure".

As the ship approached the harbour Teach gave the order to drop anchor, before a boarding ladder was lowered onto one of the wooden-planked walkways. Teach descended first, followed by some of his men. I stepped up to the top of the ladder and down onto the gangway, where the sensation of being on a moving vessel took a while to subside. Father stood and opened the chest.

"Barbara!" he shouted, "Barbara, are you alright?"

I ran up to him, stopping just short and not sure what to do next in that restrained, English way, and I was followed by Samuel and his son. "Ian, I'm fine, what happened to you?"

"Aye, I would know this also," interrupted Teach, stepping towards Father. "One day did I thee give, five days since".

"Your medicine," Father replied, pointing to the chest. It contained vials and jars with various powders and liquids. I thought back to the lemons, left to rot, and the boy Fraser.

"If this thee obtained, why didst thee not return?"

"Ask your men," Father said.

"Whereabouts are the hounds?" asked Teach.

"That's a very good question. You know as much as I do, friend," Father replied. "After we arrived at the town, they left me. They may be in one of the taverns here, I'm not sure. I managed to get this from the Governor, once I explained what you'd done. I would advise you to keep more reliable company in future".

"But Ian, that's wonderful! How ever did you get it?" I asked.

"They must have seen us approaching the harbour; there were men waiting when we arrived. After my... *escort* fled, my greeting party was only too happy to take me to the Governor. They all have friends or family on those ships, you know". Father turned to Teach and his expression hardened. "Did it ever occur to you to simply ask for the medicine?"

Teach and father held each other's gaze for a moment and it was the Commodore who broke off first, ordering two of his men to take the chest aboard to distribute the medicine. As they spoke, I approached Father. "Ian, I'm so pleased you're alright. Have you really been waiting here all this time?"

He smiled at me. "Yes, it's not quite the Ritz but it's better than London after an invasion! I did send a messenger to try and explain things, but I suppose he vanished as well".

"Uh... yes," I started, before I suddenly remembered our other problem. "Ian, I don't know how to tell you this, but the ship isn't on the deck anymore. We've lost the TARDIS!"

"Don't worry," he beamed, "I've found the TARDIS. Some of his men brought it below deck before I left. They must have thought it was a crate of something valuable".

"Oh, Ian, that's a relief. I was worried we'd be stuck in this terrible place".

"Don't worry; they'd have been the ones getting a nasty shock if they'd managed to get it open!"

* * * * *

Satisfied with the medicine Father had secured, Teach released *Crowley* and her prisoners. He kept what he had taken from them, but the people were free. Samuel, safe and together with his son, had been recognised by people on the shore and had gone to give his account of our ordeal. Our part, we asked him, was to be kept secret. I don't think he minded that and he seemed to be enjoying the praise: the politician back in his natural environment. On board the ship again, Father and I headed below deck to find the TARDIS.

"You know, there's one thing I don't understand, Barbara," Father started, as we stepped through the hatch and back down into the sulphurous dark below, where the candles had long-since burnt out, leaving blackened wicks in pools of hard wax of various shapes and distortions. "Why didn't the Doctor show his face while you were here?"

It occurred to me then that I hadn't really considered this during our time held prisoner; it was Father's whereabouts that had troubles me. The Ship was where your father said it was, apparently untouched, surrounded by various looted items of jewellery, clothes and money.

"Doctor?" I called, "Doctor, are you in there?"

The door clicked and opened a fraction, as we heard the whirring of the interior doors being activated. We stepped inside.

* * * * *

"Welcome back", said the Doctor, without getting up from where he was sitting in a large, wooden antique chair. He appeared to be staring into space, not focussing on us.

"Doctor, are you alright?" I asked.

"Yes... yes, I believe I am. You know, it was most curious, Miss Wright. I... look, my skin has that prickling sensation again," he said, holding one hand tenderly in the other, before going on, "I was looking for my Big Book of Ships, when I... I found myself in this strange contraption, like some kind of pyramid, speaking to a... a dandy and clown," he said, appearing incredulous at his own answer and narrowing his eyes. "Yes, where did those names come from? It's disappearing from my memory now... I wonder..."

Father and I looked at each other, confused.

The Doctor's eyes widened again as he smiled and looked at us properly for the first time. "Good gracious, that's quite a tan you've both got. You can only have been outside a few minutes, the temperature gauge must be faulty. Chesterton, come with me to the fault locat—"

"A few minutes? Doctor, we've been out for five days! If you knew about the experience we've just had..." I cut in. I was too surprised to say much more.

"What's that, five days? My dear Barbara, you and Chesterfield stepped out of the door mere moments ago! I've the memory of an elephant, I assure you and any case, if it's as hot outside as all that, I may have second thoughts about spending the afternoon here. The heat won't do me any good. No, no good at all!"

With that, he activated the controls to set the TARDIS in motion, and as the central column began its rhythmic rise and fall, Father and I watched the scanner as the *Crowley* became smaller and smaller, and until it was only a drop in the ocean.

* * * * *

"Well, we eventually explained to him what had happened to us," said Barbara, "and do you know what he said? He said we were 'simply being confused by the differentiation in the perception of the speed of the passage of time that one experiences at sea level'! Can you believe that?"

But Johnny was asleep.



**That was no demon. He's a man, that's all.
If he's as intelligent as he seems, surely we can reason with him?**

Trapped on a ship off the coast of the American colonies, at the start of the eighteenth century, Barbara Wright is a prisoner of the infamous pirate Blackbeard.

He is holding a ship's passengers hostage – his demand, a chest of medicine for his crew, who are malnourished and ill.

His threat – if the medicine is not given, the heads of his prisoners will be sent to the colony's Governor.

Separated from the Doctor and Ian, Barbara must try to prevent the simmering temper of the man from boiling over whilst using as much of her limited knowledge of the period as possible to keep the passengers, and herself, alive.

Is Blackbeard the fanatical and fearsome man of historical legend,
or can Barbara make him see reason?

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