

BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

REIGN OF THE UNEXPECTED

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“Now then,” Dr. Who said to his grandchildren John and Gillian, “I suppose I’d better make yet another effort to get the pair of you home, hadn’t I, h’mm?”

John, a young extrovert with a flame of red hair, looked alarmed. “There’s no rush, Grandfather, really there isn’t,” he insisted, firmly.

“Er - Grandfather...” Gillian began.

“What is it, my child?”

“The last time we were at school, Mrs. Overseal, our class teacher, said that she would soon be asking us to write a story about Queen Elizabeth the First.”

“Is that right?” responded the Doctor. “Well, what of it?”

“I thought that, before we try for home again, you could take us to her coronation,” Gillian ventured, ever hopeful.

“What a great idea, sis,” John enthused. “Our stories are sure to be the best then.”

“Yes,” his sister agreed.

John’s spontaneous burst of excitement faded. “But Grandfather will never get us there, or home either,” he reminded her,

“Won’t I indeed?” said Dr. Who, indignantly. “We’ll see about that.”

He turned to the six-sided control panel and began to adjust dials with the utmost concentration. John smiled to himself. He had seen all this before and felt confident that the TARDIS would arrive on some weird alien planet instead.

“Right, that’s the preliminary settings done,” announced the Doctor, turning back to his young relatives. “Now for the fine tuning. The exact date, if you please.”

John looked blank, but Gillian had at least retained a handful of relevant facts.

“The fifteenth of January 1559,” she supplied, trying not to sound like a know-all.

“Capital!” Dr. Who declared, beaming at her before returning to his instruments.

A nonchalant Gillian avoided looking at her brother, who maintained a dignified silence.

“We are now on our way there,” the Doctor informed them a few minutes later, with supreme confidence.

“Good-oh,” John put in, insincerely.

“To the English people, Elizabeth’s coronation was much more than a celebration of her accession to the throne, of course,” the old man stated, in the manner of a lecturer. “It also symbolised the end of her late half-sister’s reign of terror, during which many Protestants were burnt at the stake.”

“You mean they were glad to see the back of Bloody Mary,” inserted John.

“Quite so, my boy.”

“She must have been a very wicked woman,” Gillian contributed.

“She was certainly a fanatic, my dear, who was convinced that she was in the right. In other respects, though, she was said to be quite soft-hearted and given to charitable works.”

“Soft-hearted!” scoffed John.

Dr. Who wagged a finger at him. “Some people are a strange mixture of both good and evil.”

John and Gillian looked at each other uneasily, disturbed by the idea of persons who couldn’t be neatly placed in one category or the other. It would sometimes make things terribly difficult, surely?

The round glass column in the center of the control panel, which rose and fell steadily while the TARDIS was in motion, began to slow down.

“We are about to arrive, children.”

Wait for it, John told himself, remembering their previous landing on a barren world occupied by giant lizards and still fully expecting something along the same lines now, despite his grandfather’s well-worn display of optimism.

The TARDIS came to rest and Dr. Who took his long, all-concealing cloak from the wooden stand and put it on. Then he opened the Elizabethan chest that stood against the pale green, roundelled wall.

“Find yourselves a cloak each if you can, to cover your everyday clothes. We don’t want to draw unwelcome attention to ourselves, do we, h’mm?”

“We need to keep warm as well,” added Gillian. “It’ll be January, remember.”

Could she, John wondered, possibly have forgotten how often they had found themselves in the wrong place and time?

“Come on,” his sister urged him, as she knelt by the chest.

John made an effort and joined her, reminding himself that something interesting usually awaited them outside the TARDIS, if not their intended destination.

It was Gillian who pulled out two robe-like garments that resembled cloaks. They were of a velvet-like material that was rather pleasant to touch. One was royal blue and the other a vivid scarlet.

“I’ll take the blue,” John said quickly.

“Is this all right, Grandfather?” Gillian asked, holding up the scarlet one.

Dr. Who’s brow furrowed as he studied it. “Well, it isn’t sixteenth century, of course, but it looks sufficiently like Tudor apparel to suffice, I believe.”

“I’m going to look a right idiot,” asserted John, who now held the blue one and was staring at it critically.

Gillian laughed. “At least no-one from school will ever see you in it.”

“Thank goodness for that.”

The children swathed themselves in the shimmering garments. John's fitted him reasonably well, which mollified him to some extent. Gillian's was certainly too long.

"I'll have to turn up the hem and put in a few stitches here and there to hold it in place," she said, and went off to find her little sewing kit.

"Where did these clothes come from, Grandfather?" John enquired.

The old Doctor stroked his chin. "Not Earth, I'm sure of that."

When Gillian reappeared, she looked quite presentable. Even John was impressed.

"Well done, child," praised Dr. Who.

Gillian was pleased now that she had taken at least some notice of her purse-lipped Aunt Sarah's needlework instruction.

At the Doctor's request John opened the doors by operating a little black switch and the three of them stepped outside into a very narrow, exceedingly filthy alleyway.

"This place reeks of piss and worse."

The words had come out of John's mouth automatically. Gillian's eyes widened and Dr. Who gave him a reproving look.

The police box exterior of the time machine stood between two ramshackle outbuildings. A holly tree beyond a fence on the other side of the alley cast shadow across the grimy passageway.

John regarded their surroundings with distaste. "It's a rats' paradise."

Gillian was alarmed. "Rats? You haven't seen any, have you?"

"Not yet, but I'm expecting to."

Dr. Who tapped his walking stick on the ground. "Now, now. That's enough about rodents," he chided.

The children both subsided.

"Now, let's look for a thoroughfare with more to recommend it, shall we, h'mm?"

He made the TARDIS secure, then turned back to the children, hesitated for a moment or two, then suddenly heard a cheery shout and moved decisively in the direction from which it had come.

"Come on, John. That was probably someone going to see the coronation procession," Gillian said excitedly.

John rolled his eyes. "Some hope of that!"

As the three approached the end of the alley the sound of conversation, mingled with footsteps, became audible. They turned into a street of wooden houses, each with a rickety, overhanging upper storey. People in a celebratory mood, plainly dressed and smelling far from fragrant, brushed past them. Three or four displayed touches of tawdry finery, like a limp piece of lace or a tired straw hat that a new piece of blue ribbon had failed to revitalise.

"Where are they all heading for, I wonder?" the Doctor said in a playful tone, looking from John to Gillian.

"Somewhere they can have a wash, I hope," John answered.

"It isn't their fault that they're somewhat unsavoury, my boy. That's down to the times they live in."

John eyed the rubbish and sewage that lay on the uneven road.

"I see what you mean," he admitted.

"Do you really think we've arrived at the time of Queen Elizabeth's crowning, Grandfather?" queried Gillian.

"The indications are encouraging, child."

“Wouldn’t there be decorations in the street?” John asked. “There’s nothing here.”

“I believe they placed those along the route of the procession,” responded Dr. Who. “If we follow these good people we should come to the relevant part of the city.”

It wasn’t long before they beheld streamers, lighted torches and other adornments that indicated a celebration. This street was crowded with chattering Londoners and the atmosphere was one of unrestrained enjoyment and merrymaking. The coronation procession would surely pass through here, thought Dr. Who. They did need to be certain, though, so he approached a small, wizened old fellow with large eyes who was sitting cross-legged on the ground at the side of the road, gnawing the last scraps of meat from a bone.

“My grandchildren and I haven’t missed the main event, have we, my good man?” he asked, choosing his words carefully as he gestured towards John and Gillian.

The shrivelled old relic swallowed. “Nay. Wouldn’t still be stickin’ to my spot ‘ere if you ‘ad, would I?”

So, this was definitely the route, Dr. Who thought with satisfaction.

“A great day for us all,” he hazarded, hoping for at least a little more information.

“Aye. T’will be good to ‘ave a gander at ‘arry the Eighth’s daughter when she goes by. Soon she’ll ‘ave the crown on her ‘ead. Be a relief to ‘er after all the trouble.”

Meaning the reign of her sister Mary and the public burnings, not to mention her own imprisonment in the Tower of London, the Doctor told himself.

He rejoined the children. “We’re in the right place and time,” he announced, exultantly. “Your old grandfather has done it!”

Gillian’s dark eyes shone. “That’s wonderful, Grandfather, it really is.”

“Well done,” John added generously, though he felt far from elated, for this meant that the old man would repeat his latest attempt to guide the TARDIS but aiming next time for the year 1964.

“Let’s have a good look at all the trimmings and anything else they’ve done to please Good Queen Bess,” he said hastily, smiling at his sister with an effort, desperate to distract both her and their grandfather from the inevitable next stage of suddenly having the use of a directable time machine.

The banners and pennants were of vivid colours. Fountains and conduits were running with red wine. Apple sellers stood beside their loaded trays. Pageants were being performed. One of them included the figure of an angel all in green, trumpet in hand, and when a real trumpeter, carefully concealed, blew his instrument, the angel raised trumpet to mouth, to the great amazement of many onlookers. John and Gillian laughed at their simple-mindedness and Dr. Who looked disapprovingly at the pair. Several portly aldermen stood nearby, dressed in their finest. A high-spirited youngster teased his dog with a stick, watched indulgently by an affluent-looking couple. The market cross had been cleaned and shop signs were freshly painted. A burly fellow stood on the weathercock of a steeple, waving a long streamer. He balanced on one foot and shook the other, then kneeled, to the accompaniment of much gasping from his thrilled audience. Choristers sang and minstrels played. A colourfully dressed boy pranced about while trilling away on his flute. A jester demonstrated wonderful feats of juggling. There were triumphal arches and hanging tapestries, plus a huge, highly coloured exhibit depicting four swarthy-looking giants that drew much admiration. The cobbled road was liberally strewn with grass.

“Is this the main street of ye olde London?” asked John, somewhat flippantly.

“The principal street in this day and age was not, in fact, a street at all,” the Doctor informed him, bending a repressive stare at the boy for his levity.

Gillian was interested. “What do you mean, Grandfather?”

“The River Thames was - is - the most important thoroughfare of Tudor London, my dear. At this very moment it will be alive with traffic - fishermen’s boats, barges, merchant vessels and shallow rowing boats known as wherries, which are the equivalent of the taxi, whisking people from place to place.”

“They had to shoot the rapids under Old London Bridge, didn’t they?” John chipped in, having remembered this from the illustrated textbook dished out at school.

Dr. Who looked gratified by this unexpected contribution. “That’s right,” he confirmed, then added with a wicked smile: “the passengers must become most alarmed.”

The children looked at each other, amused.

“Of course, London Bridge is the only bridge spanning the Thames at this time,” supplemented the old man.

They strolled on, taking in each new and colourful sight with pleasure.

“It isn’t too cold a day for January, is it?” said John, blinking in a shaft of sunlight.

“It’s special Coronation weather,” Gillian told him, happily.

John raised his eyes to heaven. The silliness of girls was priceless, he thought.

The Doctor noticed, standing by a barber’s shop, an old beggar-woman. Bent and bony, with straggly white hair, she had excessively wrinkled features that were partly the result of her exposure to all kinds of weather. Her drab garments included a tattered grey shawl. She was holding out a battered wooden cup. He could easily have believed her to be the very oldest person in Tudor London.

Gillian followed his gaze. “Do you have any money from this time that we could give her, Grandfather?”

Dr. Who reached beneath his cloak and drew a small but diverse collection of coins from a pocket of his frock coat. John, though hampered by an almost total lack of numismatic knowledge, gamely joined in the Doctor’s examination of the assortment and extracted a very worn specimen that had a ‘days of yore’ look about it.

“What about this one?”

Dr. Who peered at it. “No, no, boy. That’s the Roman Emperor Claudius on there...” He broke off and refocused on the coinage in his hand. “Do you know, I’m sure I remember seeing... Yes, there it is! A silver Henry VIII halfpenny - only lightly clipped.”

“Clipped?” queried John.

“Unscrupulous rascals clipped bits of silver or gold from currency for their own gain,” explained Dr. Who. “It was against the law and those convicted of doing it were often hanged.”

“Let’s give her the ha’penny,” urged Gillian.

The Doctor repocketed the other coins, some of which were from planets light years away. Then the three of them approached the weary-looking old woman. Dr. Who handed the halfpenny to his granddaughter, who dropped it into the donation cup and offered a smile for good measure.

“God bless you, child,” croaked the beggar-woman.

“My name is Gillian. This is my brother John, and this is my grandfather.”

“I’m Anna Bray,” came the reply, in a tone of surprise, for even her benefactors rarely wanted to progress to introductions.

“My good woman, don’t you have any family or friends who could help you?” asked Dr. Who, realising as he spoke that few would live like this if there was an alternative.

Anna, resigned to her lot, shook her head. “I did have a daughter, long ago,” she said, confidently. “Tamar, her name was. She was a lovely, sweet-natured girl.”

“What happened to her?” Gillian asked, curiously.

“The smallpox carried her off,” said Anna, suddenly sounding very matter of fact. “She was taken only a day or two after poor Ned Hastie, who was a wherryman and the last regular admirer I had. As for those I knew from farther back, in my younger days, well, they’re all dead and gone now. Yes, every single one of them. It’s to be expected, when you live to be as old as me.”

“I suppose so,” agreed John, not very tactfully.

Fortunately, Anna wasn’t listening. “I was a pretty young thing in my youth,” she reminisced, dreamily. “My hair was long and dark yellow, my eyes were bright and clear, my skin was neither too pale nor too florid and I was really full-bosomed... I was the fancy of Harry the Eighth himself for a day or two, when I was a serving woman at Bracket Hall. He was young then, tall and broad-shouldered, with golden hair, not the ugly barrel of lard he turned into later. I was a fair bit older and taught *him* a thing or two...”

She smirked suddenly.

“After that Lord Fanbraid of Walberford made me his permanent mistress. I wore the finest silk, lived in luxury and dined off the best. My poor Tamar was his lordship’s child. When he died his widow had her revenge, took back everything he’d given me, and my hard times began. I was handy with a needle, though, and made a living repairing lace... I satisfied my customers and their husbands as well at one time. As the years passed, I sank into real poverty. Now I’ve been begging and sleeping in fields for years on end. Do you know, I’m so old that I’ve lost track of my age.”

“Good heavens,” the Doctor responded, politely, though he was more than anxious to move on by this point.

John’s patience was running short. “Come on, Grandfather,” he chivvied. “It’s Coronation Day! We don’t want to miss anything, do we?”

Before Dr. Who could react to this, Anna Bray cut in with: “What are you talking about, young fellow? Coronation Day is tomorrow!”

All three of the time travellers turned as one to gape at her in disbelief.

“But... the street is choked with people!” the Doctor spluttered.

“The celebrations are taking place now!” added John.

“You must be mistaken,” augmented Gillian, in a kind voice.

“Mistaken fiddlesticks!” Anna said stoutly. “This is the day before the coronation, when the new monarch takes the royal processional route from the Tower, through London and on to Westminster.”

“Westminster is part of London, isn’t it?” John put in, speaking to his grandfather in an undertone and still not quite believing that Anna was in full possession of her wits.

Dr. Who kept his own voice low as he replied: “No, not yet, but it soon will be, for London has already spread as far as Charing Cross.”

“So, she does know what she’s talking about and the coronation *is* tomorrow?”

“I’m inclined to think so,” the Doctor admitted reluctantly, looking a trifle downcast.

John, feeling sorry for the old man, tried to cheer him up by saying brightly: “We’re only one day out, Grandfather. That isn’t much, is it? We can still see the actual coronation, can’t we?”

Anna had been distracted by a middle-aged man who had dropped a coin or two into her cup. Gillian had heard only snatches of the conversation between John and their grandfather and the latter now assured her that the slippage of one day in his co-ordinates was of little consequence.

John’s attention had already been engaged by something else. A fair-haired young man, dressed in well-cut clothes of a deep green with a few touches of black and wearing red and white feathers in his hat, who had been making his way through the crowd, had stopped in order to speak to an older, black-bearded fellow in dark purple who stood a few yards away from Anna’s pitch. Something about their manner now struck him as being rather sneaky, and when, in response to something the man in green said, the one in purple lightly patted his jacket - though he knew it was called something else in these days but couldn’t remember what - in an unthinking manner while nodding in a satisfied way, he suddenly felt absolutely certain that some shady plan was about to be put into operation. The younger man spoke again briefly, touched the older one on the shoulder, then walked away and vanished into the throng of sightseers. As he stared at the remaining fellow, he knew that whatever was intended just had to involve the new queen. Was the man carrying a weapon? Were guns available yet? Was an assassination about to be attempted?

He drew Dr. Who and Gillian to one side and quickly regaled them with his story, taking care not to be heard by anyone else.

“I’m sure the man that’s still there is going to try something, Grandfather,” he declared, earnestly.

“You can’t be certain of that, my boy,” the Doctor pointed out, sounding rather uneasy nonetheless.

“But what if we ignore my idea and then I turn out to be right and he does kill Queen Elizabeth when she passes by? We’ll have suspected him but let it happen anyway,” John responded, anxiously.

“But we know that Elizabeth the First was crowned and that she reigned for forty-five years,” protested Gillian. “She definitely won’t die today, so we don’t need to get involved, do we?”

Dr. Who stroked his chin. “Unfortunately, child, it isn’t as simple as that,” he admitted

“What do you mean, Grandfather?” she asked.

“Well, what if she only survived because we did intervene?”

“But you told us that we can’t change history,” Gillian objected.

“We wouldn’t be changing it. We would be ensuring it remained unchanged.”

Gillian stared at him, bewildered.

“When we visit the past, we become part of it,” elucidated the Doctor. “We are woven into the tapestry of history. Some of the events you’ve read about in your school text books may have been affected or influenced by actions that we have yet to take.”

There was a pause, then John said thoughtfully: “If that’s true, then we can’t stay out of it, can we? Even if I’m wrong about that fellow, we can’t risk doing nothing.”

Dr. Who took a quick glance at the man in purple, then shook his head resignedly.

“No,” he acknowledged, looking from John to Gillian, “we can’t.”

Quite soon afterwards there were murmurs of excitement from the onlookers, who moved to one side of the street or the other. The procession, Dr. Who told his grandchildren, must be approaching. Gillian swallowed nervously and John touched his grandfather's arm to get his attention before gesturing with his eyes towards the man in purple, who had now taken up a position just in front of an alleyway between a baker's shop and a hostelry called The Saddler's Inn.

"He could be planning to make a quick escape down that alley after he's carried out his task, Grandfather."

"Possibly, possibly," replied the Doctor, "but we must remain calm, and bear in mind too that nothing may happen at all."

The queen's chariot was preceded by several gentlemen on horseback. These, said Dr. Who, in an attempt to soothe the two children's nerves, were knights, bishops and lords. The portly fellow in the crimson gown, wearing a chain and carrying the monarch's gold sceptre, was the Mayor of London.

The royal conveyance, which had a canopy held over it, was draped with cloth of gold and the six horses that drew it were adorned with the same. The Queen's gown was of the richest purple velvet and its edges were trimmed with ermine. Her copper-coloured hair, which hung loosely, was topped with a small circlet of gold studded with many valuable jewels, which appeared to have made it uncomfortably heavy, for Her Majesty had her hands held up to it as if she needed to hold it in place. For this reason, those in the crowd were denied a clear view of her, at least for the moment. Gillian would have been disappointed by this if she had not, like her grandfather and brother, been too occupied with watching the man in purple to spare the new monarch more than a fleeting glance.

The suspect undid the top buttons of his doublet and reached inside it.

The Doctor and John edged closer to him, both ready for action if it was needed.

The tension was making Gillian's heart beat very rapidly.

The Queen's carriage was almost in line with the sinister, purple-clad figure.

Was anything going to happen, or not?

The assassin pulled out his pistol and raised it.

Dr. Who strode forward, raised his walking stick and brought it down heavily on the would-be killer's hand. The pistol fell to the ground as its owner yelped and then turned to glare fiercely at his assailant. Before the irate fellow could lunge at the Doctor, John hurtled forward and head-butted him in the stomach. He staggered backwards, but recovered quickly, spotted his pistol and dashed towards it. John realised his intention and hastily kicked it further away...

The crowd were cheering and waving, so hardly anyone noticed the disturbance.

Gillian was tugging on the arm of a handsome young man she had chosen for her purpose. His loyal greeting was cut off in mid-shout and he looked at her irritably.

She gestured towards the fracas. "A villain has tried to murder the Queen. Please help my grandfather and my brother."

He took in the situation rapidly, spoke quickly to the two friends he had with him and the three darted towards the participants in the struggle. The purple-clad assassin, as soon as he saw them, turned, sprinted towards the alleyway and went careering down it as fast as his legs would carry him. Gillian's good-looking ally tore after him. One of the other men scooped up the pistol, shouted to the third man, and the two joined in the chase with admirable alacrity.

The cheers continued as the Queen's chariot rolled away.

"Nobody seems to have noticed what happened," said John, looking rather aggrieved.

The Doctor, quite invigorated by the encounter, laughed merrily. “When there’s royalty about, other things tend to be ignored, my boy.”

A dignified gentleman, leading a fine horse with red and gold trappings, came next in the grand procession.

“That will be the Queen’s horse, I think, children.”

“What a beauty,” commented Gillian.

“We came to see the Queen, not her horse,” John reminded them.

“Yes, well, we must try to obtain a better view of her tomorrow, outside Westminster Abbey,” replied Dr. Who.

The children, reminded of this second opportunity, nodded their agreement.

“Just think,” the Doctor went on, “if we hadn’t intervened, with the assistance of those helpful young men, the Elizabethan age, which gave us Drake, Raleigh, Shakespeare and the great victory of the Spanish Armada’s defeat, would, in all likelihood, now be negated.”

“It’s hard to take in,” responded John.

Gillian’s dark eyes shone with pride.

“Let’s pay attention to the procession. We don’t want to miss anything else,” urged Dr. Who.

The next carriage, decorated with cloth of silver, was occupied by two ladies. One of them was on the large side and richly clad in bright yellow. A stunningly ornate gold necklace, augmented with flashing diamonds, emeralds and rubies, was displayed across her shelf-like bosom. A dog, black with touches of brown and white, and of the type that would one day be known as a King Charles Spaniel, sat on her lap. There was another one, which John identified as a Springer Spaniel, white with black markings, sitting at her feet. The other lady was very slim, with pale features and red hair. Her gown was of a deep pink, but very simply cut. A further carriage conveyed ladies of the court, all attired in red velvet.

“Well, you three had a bit of excitement, didn’t you?”

Anna had arrived at the Doctor’s side and sounded quite gleeful over the incident, but Dr. Who hadn’t been listening to her and the children merely nodded, so she didn’t get the inside story she’d been hoping for.

“Who’s the lady in yellow?” Gillian asked the old woman, to distract from their conversational deficiencies.

“Why, the Lady Anne of Cleves, old King Henry’s fourth wife. She’s the only one of the six who’s still alive, you know.”

The Doctor, looking somewhat uneasy, was paying attention now and chimed in with: “What about the young woman with her?”

Anna became impatient at this point. “She’s the Lady Elizabeth, of course - Queen Mary’s half-sister. They say there’s no love lost between them. How could there be? The Queen’s mother was cast off by King Hal to make way for Elizabeth’s mother, that strumpet Anne Boleyn. On top of that, Mary is of the true religion and Elizabeth is a heretic.”

Deciding that she had neglected her pitch for long enough, Anna moved away.

“I remember reading that a display at Elizabeth’s coronation represented the Tudor dynasty from Henry VII onwards,” said Dr. Who, half to himself and half to his grandchildren. “Anne Boleyn, for the first time in more than twenty years, was publicly depicted as the wife of Henry VIII.”

“So?” queried John.

The Doctor answered resignedly with: "I've yet to see such a presentation today, which seems to confirm the situation, I'm afraid."

"That this is Bloody Mary's coronation," contributed John.

"Keep your voice down, boy," ordered Dr. Who.

"But everyone looks so pleased," objected Gillian.

"My dear child, Queen Mary hasn't become infamous yet. Her coronation is being viewed by many as a happy event after the trials and tribulations of the attempt to place Lady Jane Grey on the throne. Mary is the daughter of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon and is recognised by the people as the rightful heir."

Gillian responded to this with a dispirited nod.

Suddenly, John gave vent to an exclamation that went beyond the expression of mere disappointment over a time discrepancy and communicated utter dismay: "Oh, Grandfather!"

"What is it, my boy?" questioned the Doctor, though he knew already.

"The people that Mary burnt at the stake," he whispered in distress. "We're responsible for their deaths! We saved her and made sure that she could order those awful executions."

Gillian gasped. Her eyes were like saucers. She couldn't manage to speak.

"We are not responsible!" Dr. Who insisted, forcibly. "The blame lies with Queen Mary. She was a misguided fanatic who believed that she was saving the souls of the victims!"

"But we..." Gillian began.

"We have been the unwitting servants of Time, which ensures that history unfolds as it should, both the good and the bad. It's as simple as that, I'm afraid, so try not to feel too upset about what's happened. It's part of being travellers in time, which is a great privilege, though not without its drawbacks."

John and Gillian, though comforted to some extent by their grandfather's words, still looked stunned by the turn of events.

"Now, let us return to the TARDIS," said Dr. Who. "We were only five years astray, you know, which isn't very much, relatively speaking, so after a few minor adjustments to the controls we may yet see the coronation of Good Queen Bess."

"Er... Grandfather..." Gillian began.

"Yes, child?"

"If you ever do get us home, and I have to write that story, I think, if you don't mind, that I'll do my research at the library."



The Doctor promises to take John and Gillian to the coronation of Queen Elizabeth I, though the children are dubious about his ability to direct the Tardis there. Gillian refuses to give up hope as she wants her school project to be the best in her class.

Surprisingly, the time-travellers find themselves in the midst of coronation revelry in the be-decked streets of Tudor London. John and Gillian realise that the Doctor's success means he will be able to return them to 1964. In the meantime, they enjoy the colourful sights around them.

When an assassination plot comes to their attention, the Doctor is concerned about history straying from the right path. Could it be down to them to foil the conspiracy and ensure that Good Queen Bess survives to reign for 45 years?

The three decide to intervene, but matters take an unexpected turn and the children are horrified when they realise what terrible events their efforts have helped to ensure...

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