

BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

THE BLACK SHIPS



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Jamie crouched down amongst beachside trees, his nimble fingers quickly pulling his dagger from its concealed scabbard. He leaned forward, using the blade of the *sgian dubh* to gently prise apart the foliage and provide him with a better view of the strange, foreign warrior.

The tan-skinned man was wearing crimson and russet silk robes, with two elegant swords slung from his left hip. The weapons appeared to be similar to the claymore and dirk of a highlander, a blade for each hand, which Jamie knew could be combined to terrible and bloody effect. This left the highlander certain that he would lose any fair fight; but fortunately he was always prepared to consider far less respectable strategies. He crept along the sand, moving closer to the stranger, very aware that the man's hand was already resting on the pommel of his longer sword.

The warrior was watching the beach; where the Doctor, Ben and Polly were strolling along the sand, oblivious of the danger.

"Where do you think we are?" cried Polly excitedly. "France? Spain? Italy?"

"Oh," the Doctor grinned happily. "I suspect were considerably further away from England than that!"

"That's the Pacific, right?" replied Ben, breathing in a lung full of sea air, a dreamy smile of familiarity spreading across his face.

"Been here before, have you?" asked the Doctor curiously.

"Yeah, did a tour on HMS Fearless. Saw Malaysia and Hong Kong long before I saw Atlantis or the Moon." The smile slipped from his face. "Seems like a lifetime ago now."

"Oh, this one's never happy, is he?" laughed Polly, playfully nudging Ben in the ribs. She turned to grin at the Doctor, but found that all of his carefree happiness had suddenly dropped from his face.

"Oh dear," mumbled the Doctor, staring at something over her shoulder. "I rather think we're in Japan."

"So?" Polly turned hurriedly, her eyes desperately scanning the beach to find out what had alarmed her friend. "The war has been over for twenty years!"

Then she saw the Japanese swordsman standing at the edge of the beach, his colourful

kimono lightly flapping in the ocean breeze.

"Yeah, but I don't think we're in our time, Pol," cautioned Ben as he stepped protectively between her and the stranger.

"That man is a Samurai," declared the Doctor, his words edged with same deep dread he would normally reserve for when he recognised some terrifying alien monstrosity.

"So?" questioned Polly, beginning to get annoyed with Ben's persistent attempts to usher her backward. "He's got no reason to hurt us, has he?"

"No reason? No reason!" The Doctor stared at her in disbelief. "He has every reason!"

The Samurai moved forward, his sandals cutting a trail of footprints into the sand as he moved across the beach toward them.

"We must have landed over a hundred years before your time," the Doctor explained hurriedly. "In this era Japan is a closed country and they kill any alien on sight!"

"But we're not aliens, are we?" argued Polly. "We're as human as he is!"

"No, Duchess, don't you see?" Ben tried to keep his voice level, to hide his fear, but was unsuccessful. "Here, to them, we are the aliens."

The Doctor's voice fell to a low, panic-filled whisper. "And for us, just stepping onto this beach was a crime punishable by death."

"But he can't just kill us for that," replied Polly, pleading for reason. "Can he?"

"He's a Samurai." The Doctor stepped forward, positioning himself directly in the path of the on-coming warrior. "They have the lawful right to kill anyone who merely fails to show them the proper respect; and we're both aliens and criminals!"

The Samurai came to a halt a few feet away from them. The Doctor cleared his throat, lowered his eyes and then bowed deeply.

"Konnichiwa," said the Doctor, maintaining his bowed position and waiting for a response from the warrior.

"Konnichiwa," the Samurai spat the word, with little more than a nod of the head. "You are forbidden from coming to our country."

"Blimey," Ben muttered. "Speaks good English, don't he?"

"Considerably better than you do!" the Doctor snapped at Ben sharply. "The TARDIS can translate the words for you, but that just makes it more likely that you'll say something that will get us all killed!"

"You will come with me. You will meet with the *Daimyo*," replied the Samurai, ignoring their bickering.

"Who's he then?" asked Ben, despite frantic warning gestures from the Doctor. "Your boss, or somethin'?"

"He is the lord of this land. Your lives now belong to him." The Samurai glared at Ben, clearly daring him to challenge his statement. "He will decide if you should die for your transgression."

Jamie slipped out from the behind a tree, padding quietly across the sand toward the foreign warrior. He could see the fear in Polly's eyes. He could see Ben's clenched fists. Even the Doctor looked flustered and afraid. Jamie knew at once that he only had one chance to save his friends; he had to surprise and overpower their enemy before the man could even draw his weapon.

"Oh my word!" cried the Doctor, his eyes widening with alarm as he spotted the young highlander creeping up behind the Samurai. "There's no need for all this, you know!"

Jamie ignored the Doctors protest, knowing that even though he was as wise and brave as the greatest *laird*, he still lacked the stomach for real hand-to-hand fighting. Jamie stepped up close behind the foreign warrior, so close that he knew the man's claymore would be too large to be used effectively in combat, and then - blood pounding - he instinctively let loose his clan battle cry as he lunged forward with his dagger held high.

"Creag an tuire!"

The warrior turned, his hand dropping from the handle of the larger sword to that of the second blade. In a heartbeat Jamie realised his mistake, the man's second blade was not used in the left hand like a highlander's dirk, but was instead meant for use in close combat.

Jamie saw a flash of silver as his enemy's blade sliced toward him.

The force of blow, driven against the speed of his charge, sent Jamie reeling, spinning away. His leg twisted, the world tilted, and he found himself colliding painfully with the ground.

Polly screamed.

There was blood on the sand.

His blood.

The Samurai spun around to face the Doctor.

"When I say run," the Doctor whispered, his dark eyes darting between the bloodied blade and the twitching body of the fallen Scot. "Run."

"But we can't leave Jamie!" Ben yelled, trying to push past the Doctor, but the little man held him back with a single arm that suddenly seemed to be more rigid and impenetrable than anything Ben had ever known.

"I'll stay," the Doctor explained calmly. "But you must get Polly away from here."

Then, as if the sun had somehow dimmed, the Doctor's face darkened. His normally warm and friendly features became cold and hard, his voice carrying an unquestionable power of absolute authority.

"Now. Run!"

Ben grabbed Polly's hand and ran.

Their shoes pounded up the beach as he pulled her away from the man with the sword, away the Doctor, away from the TARDIS and away from Jamie's convulsing body.

The Doctor stared the swordsman in the eye.

"I surrender," he said simply.

"Your friends will not get far," the Samurai stated simply, his sword tip hovering dangerously close to the Doctor's throat. "They will be hunted and killed for their disobedience."

The warrior stepped back and turned toward Jamie, raising his weapon high, ready to deliver a killing blow.

"No!" cried the Doctor, stepping hurriedly beneath the blade.

"He fought as a warrior," the Samurai responded. "He deserves to die as a warrior."

"Jamie is much more of the *live to fight another day* mentality," explained the Doctor.

"He would be unable to live with the shame of defeat."

"Oh no, he'd be fine with that."

The Samurai, with puzzlement and disdain etched on his face, twisted his grip and

sheathed his sword.

"If you can save his life, then do so." The Samurai kicked sand at Jamie's fallen body. "Succeed or fail, you will then face the judgement of the *Daimyo*."

Many hours later, Ben crept out from beneath an outcrop of rock and cautiously peered over a boulder at the beach.

"Have they gone?" Polly whispered from the darkness of their hiding place.

Ben shook his head. He could see almost two-dozen villagers searching the beach.

"We're never going to get past that lot on foot," he muttered, as he glanced around at the ocean. "But maybe there's another way around."

He grinned as he saw a small fishing boat gently paddling toward them, its owner's attention clearly focused on the fish in the water and not on the aliens hiding amongst the rocks.

"Polly," he whispered urgently. "If we get that boat then we can get past them. We can get back to the TARDIS!"

"And then what? What if the Doctor and Jamie aren't there?"

"One thing at a time, Duchess."

Without another word the young sailor slid off the rocks and down into the salt-water. He swam out to the boat, quietly took hold of the side, then rocked the little wooden craft and sent the fisherman tumbling into the ocean.

Ben quickly heaved himself aboard and grabbed hold of the paddle, thrusting it menacingly at the spluttering fisherman, forcing him away from the boat.

"Come on, Pol! Hurry!"

Polly flung herself out into the ocean and desperately swam toward the little fishing boat.

Ben held out the paddle for her, which she grasped tightly as he pulled her aboard, while the fisherman struggled out of the water and up onto the beach. Gasping, short of breath, he yelled out for help. Within seconds a pair of Samurai appeared, one of them notching an arrow into a bow.

"Row, Ben! Row!" cried Polly.

Ben crouched down, thrusting the paddle into the water on one side of the boat and then the other. An arrow sliced through the air over their heads and cut deep into the sea, but Ben did not stop, he gritted his teeth and rowed on as arrow after arrow fell just wide of the boat.

Ben turned and watched as the bowman let loose one final arrow which fell short of its target. They were out of range. Polly cheered and laughed as the bowman gave up his assault.

"We did it, Duchess. We did it!" Ben hugged her, the numbness and chill of the sea momentarily forgotten by both of them. They clung to each other for a long moment, just grateful to be alive.

The feeling of elation buoyed them on as Ben rowed them back to the TARDIS, but when they arrived the feeling died in a single, terrible moment. They could only look on in horror as a pair of Samurai supervised the Police Box being loaded onto a horse-drawn cart.

"Now we're really in trouble," whimpered Polly as they watched the Samurai and the TARDIS disappear behind the tree line.

Ben hung his head, unsure how to reassure her, unable to even look into her worried eyes.

Then he heard the bell.

It was a sound any sailor would recognise instantly. He looked up, his mouth agape in surprise, as he saw a fleet of ships cutting through the water toward them. The two leading vessels were giant ironclad warships, which were pumping great plumes of black smoke into the air as their coal-fired engines drove them through the water. Emblazoned in gold lettering on the dark hull of the closest ship were the letters: *USS Mississippi*.

"It's the Americans!" cried Polly excitedly, as their little boat was thrown about in the choppy water churned up the gargantuan vessels. "They can help us."

"They're heaving too," muttered Ben as he watched the great ship bring itself slowly to a halt. "They're taking us aboard."

"That's great though, isn't it?" questioned Polly.

"That depends on what year this is, doesn't it?" replied Ben. "England and America weren't always on the best terms, were they?"

He glanced up at the massive ship as it loomed over them, watching as the American sailors unspooled a rope ladder down toward them, unsure if they were being rescued or being captured.

Jamie opened his eyes, blinked and watched the world swim back into focus. The sky was gone, replaced by a low and featureless ceiling. The walls around him were unlike anything he had ever seen before; they appeared to be constructed of hand-sized white rectangles of paper, framed in black wood, which were so thin that they actually allowed sunlight to seep in from outside.

"Try not to move," the Doctor's worried face appeared above him, as he used his handkerchief to gently mop the young Scot's brow.

"Och, why not. We highlanders are a hardy-" Jamie sat up and gasped in pain. He slumped back onto the hard mat. "Oh, then again, I might just stay here a wee while."

"Our hosts have patched you up as best they can," the Doctor said as he tucked away his handkerchief and sat down cross-legged on the floor, thoughtfully tapping his index fingers together. "Thanks mainly to a practice known as *Rangaku*. It would seem that they've been importing Dutch medical texts, allowing them to learn the basics of western surgery. So, it would seem this culture isn't completely cut-off from the outside world after all. They're just very selective about the influences they let in."

"Oh, aye." Jamie replied, raising his head off the mat. "They may have saved my life, but I'd wager we're still prisoners?"

"No," the Doctor scowled at him. "We're guests of a *Daimyo*, a kind of local lord, like a *Laird*. His name is Hagino Hoshiko."

"Guests? We're allowed to leave then, are we?"

"Well, no, not exactly," The Doctor mumbled. "Not without lord Hoshiko's express permission."

"Aye, prisoners then." Jamie let his head rock back onto the mat so that he could stare gloomily at the ceiling.

"No, Jamie." The Doctor turned his dark eyes on the boy. "There are wooden cages outside where they leave their prisoners to die."

"Oh, aye." Jamie nodded, understanding finally sinking in. "Guests it is then."

One of the panelled walls suddenly slid sideways, revealing the kneeling figure of a thin, young Japanese woman dressed in a pink kimono. Behind her stood two broad shouldered

Samurai, both with hands resting within easy reach of their weapons.

"Ah. Konnichiwa, Satoko!" The Doctor grinned happily at the woman as he beckoned her into the room with a little wave of his hand. "Satoko here has been tending to your wound."

"Och aye, why do all the good things happen while I'm unconscious," moaned Jamie, letting his eye linger on the pretty girl.

"Probably *because* you're unconscious," retorted the Doctor bluntly, as Satoko softly scurried into the room. She bowed her head, before turning her almond eyes on Doctor.

"Lord Hoshiko will talk with you now," the young girl advised quietly. "You will accompany the Samurai."

"Oh, I really think I should stay with Jamie, you know. He really isn't in a good way."

"It is a command from my master," replied the girl seemingly genuinely surprised by his objection. "And must be obeyed."

The Samurai at the door reached for their swords.

"Very well, very well! There's no need to get edgy about it." The Doctor flustered. "I guess I really don't have very much choice, do I?"

"None," replied the girl, clearly puzzled by the notion. "I shall remain here to tend to your friend."

Satoko bowed her head again, clearly motioning for the Doctor to leave via the open door. Reluctantly the Doctor rose to his feet and stepped out toward the waiting Samurai.

The American sailors shunted Ben up the deck, pushing him along with the barrel of a pistol, toward the imposing figure of a tall naval officer. The man had a thick moustache, was elegantly dressed in a high-collared uniform and had a ceremonial sword hung from his belt.

"You're a long way from home, boy." The officer's eyes glinted with suspicion. "Where you from?"

"We're English," said Polly as she stepped forward, her chin raised defiantly. "And we would be grateful if you would lend us your assistance."

The officer laughed.

"Nice try, Duchess," Ben muttered despondently, an edge of anger creeping into his voice. "But I think these sailors have forgotten how to treat a lady."

The officer strode forward, grabbed hold of Ben's chin and twisted it so that he was forced to look up at him.

"It may be thirty years since British and American ships were at open war against one another, but I'm of no-mind to help you now." The officer let go of Ben and turned his back on him. "Your decrepit empire may have got its claws into most of the Pacific, but this is where that ends. It will be the United States that opens up and controls trade through Japan, it is manifest destiny!"

"Yeah. We're not arguing, mate. I'm sure there's nothing in the world that can stop you." Ben shook off the grip of an American sailor. "We just want a little help dealing with the Japanese."

"And risk British interference in our mission?" The American snorted derisively. "I do not think so."

The officer looked out at the coastline, staring out at where the shore suddenly seemed to have reached an abrupt end. On the last rocky outcrop there stood an enormous, five-story pagoda, from whose tip a warning-fire suddenly flared.

"This is it!" cried the officer. "Uruga harbour."

Ben watched as the ship ahead of them suddenly turned. The two coal-fired warships swept into the bay, cutting a path directly through a number of hastily launched Japanese galleys. A hail of burning arrows shot from the Japanese ships thudded uselessly against the iron-hulled giants, causing the American officer to snort with laughter.

"Hardly an auspicious start for trade negotiations," Polly sneered at the American officer as he directed his men to drop anchor.

"Quite to the contrary," chuckled officer. "This is ideal."

"Yeah. It's always best to negotiate from a position of strength, right?" Ben looked at the heavily armed sailors that surrounded him.

"Absolutely," the officer smiled at him. "Throw him in the brig."

Two of the heftier sailors suddenly grabbed hold of Ben and pulled him backward towards an open hatchway, ignoring his protests.

"What about me?" Polly asked, unable to prevent a tremor of fear rattle her voice.

"Tonight, we dine with the Commodore aboard the *USS Susquehanna*," the officer smiled. "After all, we do have to prove that we do still know how to treat a lady."

The officer raised his hand, offering to escort her, as Ben was dragged from the room.

The Doctor accompanied his Samurai escort down a winding path, to where Hoshiko sat waiting inside a bamboo roofed teahouse. The aging Samurai bowed his head in greeting as his visitor removed his shoes and stepped into the room, but the Doctor's attention was immediately stolen by the object that stood by the open door at the back of the hut.

"I say, that's a rather fine telescope," he cried excitedly as he trampled past the delicately laid out tea set. "Another Dutch import, I'd imagine."

"It was made in Japan, but based on Dutch designs." The old Samurai stared at his spilt tea. "It reveals much; I have seen where you are from."

"Really? From here? That's incredible." The Doctor clapped his hands together in excitement. "Mayn't I have a little look?"

"Go ahead," Hoshiko replied gruffly, patiently remaining sat on the floor.

The Doctor leaned forward, pressing his eye to the telescope, to be confronted by a view of a large iron-clad warship dwarfing a pair of wooden Japanese galleys. The Doctor straightened up.

"That's not where I'm from, you know." The Doctor stepped back from the telescope and slowly sat down opposite Hoshiko. "But now I know what year this is."

"The year is Kaei Six," the old man frowned at the seemingly absurd nature of the Doctor's remark.

"Which on the Gregorian calendar would be 1853." The Doctor pointed a finger at the open door. "And those are the Black Ships. An American fleet under the command of Commodore Matthew Perry. This is the day that Japan's isolation comes to an end."

The old man stiffened, his face darkening with anger.

"The Shogun will never agree to their demands!" insisted the old Samurai.

"Oh, my dear fellow," replied the Doctor, picking up his tea and staring glumly into the cup. "The Commodore won't give him a choice."

Polly was stood on the deck on the *USS Susquehanna*, watching the horizon as the last of the daylight faded and the red sun slipped silently away behind the mountains. From the cabin behind her came the muffled sound of negotiations, as American naval officers and Japanese Samurai desperately tried to communicate with each other. It had been a long time since she had felt this isolated and alone, with Ben locked in the brig and no news of the Doctor or Jamie since the battle on the beach, she was suddenly aware of the precariousness of their existence. Four unarmed, unprepared travellers blundering randomly through all of time and space, was it any wonder that they so frequently found themselves in trouble?

"Konnichiwa," came a voice from further down the deck, snapping her out of her reflections. She turned to see a stocky Japanese man stood mid-bow. He had obviously come aboard ship with the rest of formal greeting party, but this man carried no swords and was armed only with a strangely reassuring smile.

"Konnichiwa," she replied as she straightened her back and bowed. "You are not a Samurai?"

"No," The little man laughed, making his chins wobble. "I am Jiro, a Chōnin."

"Chōnin?" Polly frowned, unsure why the TARDIS had failed to translate the word.

"Merchant. Craftsman. Beneath Samurai. Beneath peasant. They all despise us, they believe that making money is beneath them, so consequently many of them are very poor," the man chuckled. "The Samurai have little interest in trade, but I do. So, is there anything that you require?"

"I've lost two friends on the mainland," Polly told him. "And I would very much like news of them."

"The Scottish boy was wounded, but is alive. The other man is unharmed," Jiro replied, glancing behind him to make sure they were still alone. "They are guests of Hagino Hoshiko."

"You know them?" Delight and relief flooded through Polly, the man's words suddenly rekindling some fragile hope that they she might somehow be reunited with all of her lost friends.

"No. Western strangers stand out in Japan," the man replied, his eyes locked on hers. "Particularly a woman with golden hair."

"You came looking for me?" Polly gasped, shocked by the man's nod. "You're offering to get my friends back for me?"

"Hoshiko would never sell your friends to me."

"Then how can we trade?" Polly felt her shoulders sag.

"Perhaps we should instead be talking about what services you can afford to buy?" The little man chuckled, an evil glint stealing into his eyes.

Jamie lent on Satoko's arm as she guided him into the garden, but every step made a fresh burst of pain blossom in his neatly stitched wound. They found The Doctor and Hoshiko still sat inside the candle lit teahouse, clearly intent on continuing their conversation long into the night.

"Jamie!" The Doctor cried delightedly. "You're up and about!"

"Oh aye, I can walk almost thirty or forty feet with just one wee lassie to lean on," moaned Jamie as Satoko carefully lowered him onto the step and removed his shoes. Jamie gingerly turned to face them, but his attention was immediately stolen by the pair of swords that lay beside the old Samurai. His fingers had found their way onto the scabbards before he even noticed Hoshiko's warning glance.

"You don't mind if I take a wee look at your claymore, do ye?" enquired Jamie innocently, pretending not to have noticed the burning fury in the man's eyes. "I wouldne have the strength to swing it."

"It is *katana*, not a claymore." The Samurai pulled the blade from Jamie's weak fingers. "The smaller sword is *wakizashi*."

"I'll never understand why you need so many names for such similar weapons," said the Doctor glumly.

"The Doctor doesne understand the relationship between a warrior and his weapons," Jamie explained.

"You are a warrior?" The Samurai looked surprised.

"Oh aye, I'm Scottish, my clan were in many battles against the English."

"You were a leader? A *Daimyo*?"

"A *Laird*? Och no, I was the piper." Jamie grinned at the befuddled Samurai.

"Piper?"

"Aye."

"I do not understand." The Samurai frowned, confused, he stared at the Doctor in hope of an explanation. "And why does he claim to have been at war with the English? I understood that these countries had been unified under a single monarch for more than a hundred years?"

The Doctor bit his lip, his eyes widening with alarm.

"One hundred years!" Jamie repeated, the words chilling him.

"Yes, Jamie. The Battle of Culloden was lost." The Doctor explained softly to the highlander. "The up-rising failed. The Jacobite cause was defeated. The clans were stripped of their power. Your languages banned on pain of death. They even made it illegal to wear a kilt, unless of course you were serving in the Highland regiments of the British army."

"No, it cannae be."

Hoshiko nodded.

"This is the future that we fear the Black Ships will bring to Japan. The end of our way of life." The old Samurai replied, clutching his *katana* and *wakizashi* to him as he stood up, his sharp eyes suddenly focused on the depths of the darkness outside. Hoshiko pulled an object from his kimono and tossed it to Jamie.

"His knife?" the Doctor raised his eyebrows in surprise.

"It's called a *sgian dubh*," Jamie told him sharply.

"In case you need to defend yourself," Hoshiko explained as he pulled his *katana* from its scabbard.

"Aye." Jamie paused. "From what!?"

"Summon my men!" the old man yelled as he stepped out into the night, glancing around him at the shapes moving in the darkness. The Doctor hurriedly helped Jamie to his feet, as Satoko made a desperate dash to fetch help.

A trio of Samurai suddenly came out of the darkness, all armed with *katana*, clearly confident that they would easily overwhelm the single old man.

"Step aside, Hoshiko," cautioned one of the intruders. "We are here for the foreigners."

"I will not step aside," Hoshiko spat back. "I could not live with the shame."

The old Samurai rushed forward at his opponent, swinging his *katana*. The clear ring of metal chimed out as their two blades collided.

One of the intruders advanced into the teahouse. Jamie stumbled backward, away from the warrior, readying his little knife, but knowing that he stood no chance against the deadly *katana*. In desperation the Doctor threw himself in front of the sword, shielding his face with his

hands and shouting; "No!"

The Samurai stopped.

"What are you doing?" asked the bemused warrior. "I am rescuing you."

"Oh!" The Doctor peeked through his fingers. "How delightful!"

"This way." The Samurai scurried out of the back of the teahouse. Hurriedly, the Doctor grabbed their shoes, tucked an arm around Jamie and helped him stagger out after the stranger.

They moved headlong into the darkness, ducking through the branches of a thicket of maple trees and hurrying as quickly as they could along a narrow path toward the coast. The distant ringing of katana blades coming from the garden suddenly stopped and Jamie glanced at the Doctor, wondering whether the other intruders had fled or if Hoshiko was dead.

"I don't know, Jamie. I just don't know."

The Samurai led them quickly down onto a beach, from where they could see the towering American ships backlit by a large silver moon. They headed along the sand to where a small wooden rowing boat sat floating in the shallows, upon which a solitary cloaked figure stood patiently waiting for them. Their Samurai rescuer turned, bowed briefly and then shot off back into the woods.

"So," the Doctor raised his voice, with fierce but obvious bravado. "Do we have you to thank for our rescue?"

"Yes," replied the cloaked figure as she pulled back her hood and shook free her long golden hair.

"Polly!" cried Jamie happily.

"Now, into the boat, the pair of you." Polly replied sternly. "Quickly!"

"But where on earth did you obtain a small army of Samurai?" asked the astonished Doctor as he and Jamie splashed out into the water.

"They're *Ronin*. Masterless Samurai," explained Polly as she helped Jamie into the boat. "They're extremely poor and therefore very cheap to hire. You owe me a new necklace, wristwatch and earrings!"

"What an inspired idea," the Doctor clapped happily as he fell into the little boat.

"Aye, Doctor, but Hoshiko may have been killed!" Jamie protested.

"Killed?" Polly's voice was the faintest of whispers, as a look of terror crept into her eyes.

"We were his prisoners, Jamie. Living under constant threat of death." The Doctor glanced at their bewildered faces, before his eyes suddenly grew distant. "Besides, try to understand, it would be a good death for an old Samurai. He would have been proud."

Ben sat brooding in his tiny cell, feeling oddly calmed by the familiar swaying sensation of the sea. His despair was suddenly broken by the sound of a key in the lock of the cell door and the sight of the Polly standing beside the guard. The American was so distracted by Polly that he did not see Jamie slip through the doorway behind him, not until the Highlander's dagger was hovering by his throat, glimmering in the light of the oil lamp.

"You dinne wanna try fighting," Jamie whispered in the ear of the terrified sailor. "I just wanne get my English friend out of here."

Jamie shoved the sailor forward into the cell, just as Polly pulled Ben out through the door. Ben turned and hurriedly relocked the cell door.

"Thanks for the hospitality, mate." Ben grinned at the imprisoned sailor through the cell bars. "But I really have got better things to do."

"Aye, you have to help me back up the steps," Jamie gasped, clutching his side with a

grimace of pain. "I'm glad he didn't fight, I wouldn't have stood a chance."

"Nice rescue so far," whispered Ben as he helped Jamie up the steps. "But just how are we going to get off this heavily armed warship and where are we going to go?"

"Don't worry," Polly smiled at him, opening the hatchway to the deck. "We have a plan."

The Doctor was stood outside, his distinctive clothes replaced by a neatly pressed officer's uniform, complete with an awkwardly large black cap that kept falling over his eyes.

"Steady now! Bring her forwards. That's it." The Doctor yelled out in a badly faked American accent, as a team of Japanese villagers gently lowered the TARDIS onto the deck of the ship.

"How?" gasped Ben, flabbergasted by the surreal events unfolding before his eyes.

"Oh, I just added the return of the TARDIS to the list of demands made by Commodore Perry," replied the Doctor slipping back into his normal voice. "They seemed happy enough to oblige, thanks largely to this rather fetching uniform and the Commodore's veiled threats to reduce the city of Edo to rubble. Turns out you can ask for pretty much anything you like, when you have a pair of invincible iron warships anchored within firing range of wooden city. Gunboat diplomacy, I think you call it."

"There's a wee dark side to you, you know," observed Jamie, staring at the little man with renewed respect.

"I'm not proud of this, you know," muttered the Doctor distastefully. "It's not generally how I like to do things."

"And just where did you get that uniform?" queried Ben.

The Doctor mumbled something incomprehensible and glanced innocently at his bruised knuckles.

"Our friend, the officer from the *USS Mississippi*, is too tied up to look for it right now," grinned Polly.

"Aye, with rope," added Jamie unnecessarily.

"Needs must," the Doctor muttered darkly.

The TARDIS hit the deck with thump. The Doctor hurriedly unlocked the door, grabbed a small bag containing his ordinary clothes and then disappeared inside. Ben, Jamie and Polly hurried after him, slamming the door on the dangerous world outside.

"Oh, it's good to be home," cried the Doctor as he scurried around the console, the coat tails of the officer's uniform flapping wildly. "Captain of my own ship again."

"What happens here next, Doctor?" asked Polly quietly. "What happens when we're gone?"

The Doctor flipped switches and turned dials, setting them in flight, before raising his dark eyes to meet Polly's enquiring gaze.

"The Shogun has no choice but to accept Commodore's demands, forcing Japan into a very unfair trade agreement." The Doctor replied, as he turned to watch the time-rotor slowly rise and fall. "Within a decade the ruling government is overthrown, the Samurai gone. An entire culture comes to end, without a single shot ever being fired."

"Until the nineteen-forties," Ben muttered from where he was stood in the corner of the console room. "Until the war."

"Nations can hold grudges much longer than people." The Doctor frowned at the quiet sailor. "They always remember what they were."

"Aye," added Jamie sadly. "I hope so."



Japan, 1853.

An important milestone in the history of both Japan and the United States.
The TARDIS has arrived on a beautiful Pacific beach, but the Second Doctor, Ben and Polly
are about to be reminded that during their adventures through history,
such tranquil locations can be far from safe.
Jamie is the first to see Samurai. Sometimes, just arriving somewhere,
can be a crime punishable by death...

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