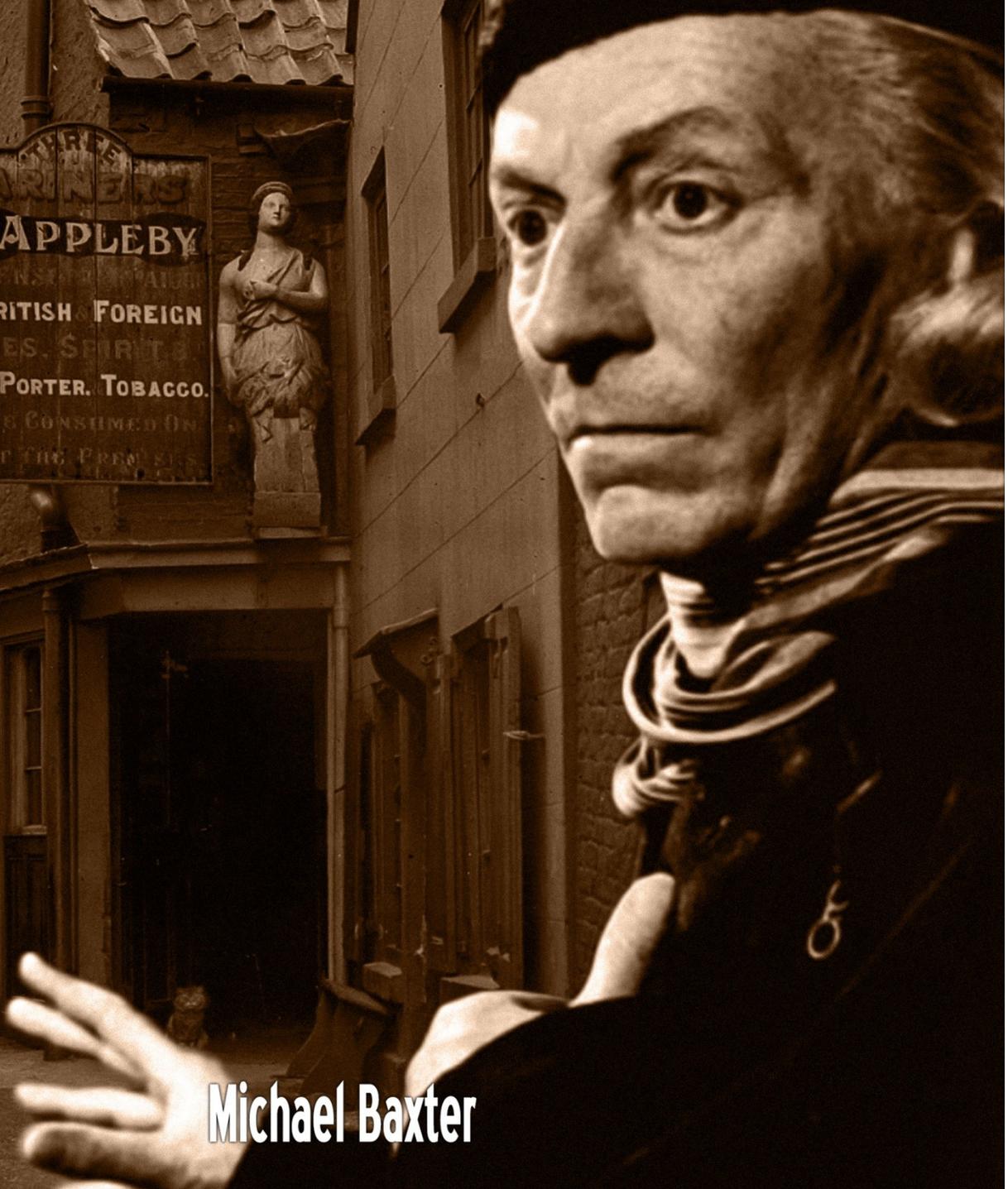


BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

The Three Mariners

MARINERS
E. APPLEBY
OF BRITISH & FOREIGN
WINES, SPIRITS
ALE, PORTER, TOBACCO.
TO BE CONSUMED ON
ORDEE THE PREM



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Published by Jigsaw Publications
Vancouver, BC, Canada

First Published February 2018

The Three Mariners
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The Doctor Who Project © 1999, 2018 by Jigsaw Publications

A TDWP/Jigsaw Publications E-Book

Cover designed by Alex Lydiate
Interior Design by Bob Furnell

Brief Encounters logo © 2009 Brian Taylor
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Typeset in Corbel

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‘The Three Mariners’, a timber frame building on Seathorpe’s ancient seafront, had been built in the year 1300, according to the black and white signboard. The old tavern, now an antique emporium, must surely, mused Dr. Who, as he stood on the sun-baked pavement before it in the summer of 1963, be one of England’s oldest buildings. Above the doorway stood a rather formidable-looking ship’s figurehead, her flowing tresses and bright drapery curiously at odds with the gimlet stare of her hard black eyes.

Glancing idly at a seagull perched on a litter bin, Dr. Who pushed open the ancient, creaking door and found himself in the subdued light of a musty-smelling room, originally the bar, still fitted with its oak settles but now stuffed to bursting with a diverse hoard of memorabilia. There were tables, brass bedsteads, papier-mâché cabinets, gutta percha chairs, a spinning wheel, a cut-glass vase with flowers made of crystal in it, a pile of Delft tiles depicting Bible scenes, trays of delicate crockery, paintings, postcards, a Victorian dress of black bombazine beaded with jet, porcelain-faced dolls in clothes of finely-worked lace, and elaborately-wrought clocks, each one frozen at a different point in time. On a wooden shelf stood a long row of ornaments that included Toby jugs of various sizes – and what hideous objects they were, thought Dr. Who.

The place was soaked in atmosphere.

An old man with wispy, snow-white hair was hunched over a large, leather-bound, ancient-looking tome, open before him on an old desk that had pennies stuck all over its surface. Was he, Dr. Who wondered ridiculously, consulting his book of spells?

The shrivelled little gnome registered his presence and peered across at him with large, startled eyes, in the manner of a squirrel disturbed in the act of laying down the winter’s supply of nuts.

‘A very old book,’ the Doctor commented, nodding towards it. ‘Centuries old, in fact, hmm?’

The crinkled parchment face of the superannuated old fellow brightened in a trice. ‘Oh yes, indeed. It’s an eleventh century spell book.’

Dr. Who, remembering his first thought on seeing the little proprietor, was taken aback. ‘Ah...indeed?’

‘My last look at it, sadly. I’m about to despatch it, with several other items, to a purchaser.’ The old man sighed. ‘Ah, well, I did get a good price, I suppose...’

‘It’ll keep the wolf from the door,’ a new voice croaked. ‘Can’t eat books, can you?’

An old woman seated on a rickety chair by the counter, whom Dr. Who hadn’t even noticed until she spoke, was sipping tea from a delicate china cup decorated with a ringleted lady in a lemon-coloured crinoline.

The old man looked miserably at the hefty volume. ‘There’s something in that, of course,’ he conceded, reluctantly.

‘Granny Crumble, they call me round here.’

Dr. Who summoned up a polite smile. ‘Delighted, Madam.’

Granny Crumble stared at him wonderingly, as if fascinated by his words. She was a worn-looking old thing, he noted absently. The long black coat she was buttoned tightly into was in a similar condition. Her slightly untidy grey hair, gathered into a very loose bun at the back, was topped with a battered hat, upon which a few bedraggled artificial flowers worked against the odds to keep up appearances.

‘Chitty.’ The proprietor offered Dr. Who his hand. ‘Edwin Chitty.’

‘Funny, really,’ said Granny Crumble.

Both men stared at her blankly.

‘Funny that everybody calls me Granny. I’ve never had no children, you know, even though my Harry and me was married quite a few years before he copped it.’

‘In the last war,’ Chitty explained to Dr. Who, making an effort.

‘A V1 on ‘The Spread Eagle’. I lived in London then. Shoreditch. I’d stayed at home with my old trouble, you see.’ She paused, remembering. ‘I saw my Harry just before they screwed him down. Looked real put out, he did. Mind you, there’d still been half an hour to go till closing time when it happened.’

Dr. Who and Edwin Chitty nodded gravely.

‘I’ve been on my own these twenty years.’ Granny drained her teacup. ‘A hard life, it’s been, but I never grumble, though I can only afford to have one bar of the gas fire on when it’s the really cold weather. I can’t even scrape up enough for a port and lemon now and then to ward off the palps.’

Mr Chitty sighed. ‘There’s tea left in my flask, Granny, if you’d care for another,’ he offered, reluctantly.

‘Oh, no. I don’t want to impose,’ Granny Crumble insisted, unconvincingly, already proffering her cup and saucer for the refill.

‘Have you heard from your old friend in Shoreditch lately?’ the old man enquired, making a determined attempt to display polite interest as he sadly watched his beverage supply diminish further. ‘A charwoman, isn’t she?’

‘Ada Drewcock? She wrote in April. Or was it May? Rambled on about some strange goings-on during that big freeze, she did. I couldn’t make head nor tail of it.’

Dr Who was well aware of the events in question, having been in the midst of them with his granddaughter, and his eyes flickered momentarily. He changed the subject with, ‘The ship’s figurehead above the door outside looks rather formidable, does she not, hmm?’

Old Chitty’s eyes swivelled towards Dr. Who. ‘Elvira? Yes, I suppose she does look rather unnerving. I’m so used to her that I don’t notice anymore. She was found floating in the sea with other wreckage and was put up there in memory of sailors from the same ship who were drowned.’

The irrepressible Granny Crumble piped up again. ‘They say she comes down from there and wanders the streets. Knocks on fishermen’s doors to warn them of approaching storms, she does.’ Granny stared into her cup, already empty again. She placed it on the counter and rose unsteadily to her feet. ‘I suppose I’d better take myself off. I’m not one to wear out my welcome. Never have been.’

‘She comes every day now,’ Edwin Chitty told Dr. Who, when the door had closed behind her. He sighed. ‘I suppose I should be grateful for the company, but Granny can drink an

ocean of tea. She lives in the old people's flats on Sycamore Crescent. Came to Seathorpe just after the war, as I remember...'

Dr. Who interposed. 'I'll browse, if I may?'

'Oh, yes, indeed. By all means do,' urged the old dealer, rising above the abrupt curtailment of his reminiscence and slipping back into shopkeeper mode as best he could.

Dr. Who noticed a stack of old comics and magazines and examined the top ones. A copy of the *Radio Times* had a wide-eyed blonde on the cover with a caption announcing the return, on Monday, of Lucille Ball in *The Lucy Show*. An issue of *TV Comic* held his attention briefly as he read through an instalment of *Fireball XL5* on pages two and three. It must be quite a task, he mused, to have to continually invent new plots. Eventually, he supposed, the editor would be obliged to replace Steve Zodiac's adventures with something else...

He ran his fingers along the spines of a row of Rider Haggard volumes, bound in black leather with embossed titles in white. *King Solomon's Mines*. *The Witch's Head*. *Mr Meeson's Will*...

'These volumes are from a collected edition?' he called across to old Chitty.

The proprietor shook his head. 'Alas, no. As far as I'm aware, there is no complete set of Rider Haggard's works. A great shame, is it not?'

Dr. Who turned the leaves of *She*. 'L Horace Holly,' he muttered. 'I visited him once. He was a poor, broken old fellow by then, I'm afraid. Still mourning that adopted nephew of his...'

Edwin Chitty was entranced by Dr. Who's words. 'Leo?'

'Holly showed me two thick notebooks, tightly bound in parchment. The pages were of an extremely thin, tough paper, and each book contained quite a number of sheets.' The Doctor paused. Then, 'They were the original manuscript of *Wisdom's Daughter*.'

Who was this extraordinary old man standing before him, Edwin wondered. He looked like an illustration from an Edwardian magazine. His old-fashioned cravat was perfectly tied, the edges of his black frock coat were bound with black silk and his narrow trousers were patterned in black-and-white check. The long white hair partly obscured the back of his coat collar. One thing seemed certain - a customer as intriguing as this one would never cross the sill of his door again, if he lived to be a centenarian.

'It was in Rider Haggard's own hand, then?' he enquired breathlessly.

Dr. Who darted a sharp look at him, then smiled enigmatically. 'Rider Haggard's? Oh no. Oh, dear me, no...'

Old Chitty stared, opened his mouth to speak, then closed it again.

'You have some most interesting Victorian coins here.' The Doctor studied a double florin with Queen Victoria's jubilee head, dated 1889; several 'bun' pennies, including one from 1860 in extremely fine condition, with every detail of the Eddystone lighthouse discernible; and a 'Godless' florin of 1849. 'I don't suppose you have an 1839 'Una and the Lion' five pounds, hmm?'

Chitty shook his head regretfully. 'That was proof only, of course, and fetches nearly a thousand pounds now. Rather too expensive a piece for my modest emporium, unfortunately.'

Dr. Who waved a hand expansively. 'An atmospheric little building, if I may say so. No doubt, in common with many an ancient edifice, it possesses some intriguing features?'

Edwin leaned forward eagerly. 'Indeed it does. It's riddled with secret passages, and hidden cupboards too, where contraband was once hidden in the days when smuggling was rife. It's also haunted by the spirit of Lady Vanessa Whitlock...' He broke off abruptly and a shadow crossed his lined old face. His eyes met Dr. Who's for a moment, then he hurried on with, 'Lady

Vanessa's body lay for the best part of two centuries on an old iron bedstead in what is now my storeroom, which then had no door. The chamber was discovered in 1894 when Orlando Ferrers, the landlord of 'The Three Mariners' at that time, discerned the outline of a small window for which there was no corresponding room in the inn. Lady Vanessa - she was eventually identified by way of a monogrammed ring on one of her fingers - had, as research by a local historian established, been a passenger on the *Fanny Salt*, a vessel that was wrecked on the rocks at Needle Head, half a mile along the coast from here, at the end of the 1600's. Elvira - the figurehead, you know - is from that ship, which still lies at the bottom of the bay. Most of the crew perished. Five of the bodies were recovered and laid out in the parlour here - it's through that curtained archway in the far corner. A cold, bone-chilling room to this day, the old parlour. Decidedly eerie, too. It's very easy to visualise a row of roughly-made coffins in there. Very nice Dutch panelling on the walls, though, dating from about 1700...Where was I? Oh, yes. Lady Vanessa was found alive, but badly injured, on the beach by the sons of Alice Stevenson, a somewhat flint-eyed widow who kept 'The Three Mariners' at that time and ruled her boys with a rod of iron. They told no-one else of their discovery, brought Lady Vanessa to the room upstairs and apparently the Widow Stevenson looked after her assiduously - though always with one eye on the jewellery she had been wearing. When her ladyship died the Stevensons appropriated the jewellery, apart from the ring I mentioned, which would presumably have been too identifiable a piece, and sealed up the room.'

Dr. Who was staring intently at the old dealer. The latter looked uncomfortable beneath the sharp, fiercely intelligent gaze, suspecting what his new acquaintance had picked up on, and said quickly: 'I saw a painting of Lady Vanessa once. A fine-boned, aristocratic-looking, patrician beauty, she was, with red-gold hair...'

The Doctor cut him off. 'You seem very convinced that this place is haunted. I take it you've seen something for yourself, hmm?'

Edwin Chitty sighed, then indicated the chair vacated by Granny Crumble. 'Sit down, my friend.'

As Dr. Who lowered himself onto the rickety seat, the old fellow moved towards a fitted black corner cupboard decorated with brasswork. The top of the cupboard was flush with the low ceiling. Old Chitty stood precariously on a little wooden stool in order to open the door, reached inside and produced a well-filled cut-glass decanter.

'Shall we take a glass of sherry wine?' he enquired.

* * * * *

The signboard proclaimed, in faded red letters on a background that had once been white, the availability of JUGS OF TEA FOR THE SANDS. The idea appealed to Dr. Who, for the glass of sherry had far from slaked his thirst on this hot day. He had no time, however, to indulge in a cup of Rosy Lee, on the beach or elsewhere, and he continued to walk steadily, cane in hand, along the seafront thoroughfare known as Marine Parade, which was thronged with noisy examples of humanity enjoying that somewhat doubtful institution, the summer holiday. Susan had picked up the idea at that wretched school, of course, and he had finally given in to her endless importuning on the subject. Perhaps he would engage a private tutor for her soon, he told himself, not for the first time. That might prove more satisfactory an arrangement. He sighed. The girl was a responsibility. There were those other two children as well, he recollected suddenly. The boy and

the girl. He wouldn't be surprised if they crossed his path one day, full of questions he wouldn't know how to answer.

Still, he reminded himself, he was rather pleased to be here in Seathorpe now. That business at 'The Three Mariners' was most intriguing. It wasn't just that, though. He had, he now admitted to himself, become somewhat exhausted by his daily wanderings around London, looking for some sort of a replacement for that faulty filament, and Mrs Wainfleet's boarding house had turned out to be a pleasantly restful little establishment. She was an excellent cook and her raspberry turnovers were an especially delightful experience. A no nonsense type of woman, he thought approvingly. She would keep an eye on Susan for him just for tonight, he was sure.

He quickened his pace a little, as he wanted to precede his evening meal with a visit to the local churchyard, dictated by that same imp of curiosity responsible for his long and far wanderings, currently curtailed by that tiresome filament. Mrs Wainfleet, he recalled, had displayed her worth once again as a source of quite fascinating historical information. Seathorpe's original church, she had revealed as they each enjoyed a mug of Ty-Phoo at her well-scrubbed kitchen table, had been submerged beneath the waves during an exceptionally fierce storm way back in 1546, and for years afterwards its spire had reappeared at low tide as an eerie reminder of the past.

The replacement church Dr. Who found to be a modest edifice, though possessing a certain charm despite its bare minimum of ornamentation. Gravestones, weathered by time, winds and spray from angry tides, leaned towards each other as though in conversation. At one point he stood before an old headstone beside the church's west door and read the still discernible inscription:

LADY VANESSA WHITLOCK

DIED AT

THE THREE MARINERS INN

SEATHORPE

1699

REST IN PEACE

+

Leaving the churchyard, he began to retrace his steps along the seafront, though shortly he would diverge from the straight route he had taken from 'The Three Mariners' and turn off in the direction of Mrs Wainfleet's establishment. There were far less people at this end of the town, he noted, for there were no amusement arcades here, with their slot machines and raucous bingo callers, like that dreadful fellow he had seen wearing the jaunty hat with the stuffed bird on it. To his surprise, the sea was becoming quite rough on what had hitherto been a hot day with hardly a breath of air, and soon he was witnessing towering waves which lashed at the

promenade railings and splashed onto the road. He stood entranced, quite unable to move, repeatedly gripped by the compulsion to see 'just one more'. Glancing along the seafront to his left finally, he gave a sudden gasp. In the distance were the tiny holidaymakers on the beach, basking in the sun, throwing colourful beach balls, or paddling tentatively in...*a perfectly calm sea.*

Yet another wave crashed, and once more salt water was sprayed upwards, though this time it was caught in the sunlight more than momentarily. Incredibly, the droplets were suspended in the air. As Dr. Who stared, they blurred, and merged, and ...yes, a face was forming... the face of a hauntingly beautiful woman. Her hair was long and quite dark, yet appeared strangely light and golden where it streamed out behind her.

A wild spirit, he thought suddenly. Wild and eternally untamed.

'I shall come again...'

The incisive voice, bold and forceful, resonated through his mind, conveying an unmistakable anger and frustration, a simmering rage that stirred the elements around her into a maelstrom of violence and fury. Her flashing eyes, unnervingly penetrating, bored into his with such intensity that he experienced actual pain.

Abruptly, startlingly, the vision was gone, and he was freed from the riveting gaze. The Doctor swayed dizzily as the water, now released, cascaded down, drenching him...

* * * * *

A pottery seagull on the wall at 'The Three Mariners', its wings aspread, watched over the two old men as they sat at a round George III table covered by an old white cloth edged with lace. On the table reposed two large flasks of coffee, the sherry decanter, two mugs, two glasses and a plate of liver paste sandwiches.

'It's very good of you to join me here, especially overnight,' Edwin Chitty told Dr. Who, gratefully. 'I shall be extremely glad of your company.' He paused, then added, 'Especially if...'

'Quite, quite.' Dr. Who helped himself to a sandwich and the old dealer poured out two steaming mugs of coffee. The Doctor sniffed the tantalising aroma appreciatively before carefully taking a sip or two. Then he leaned back in his chair and interlaced his fingers. 'When she appeared here, did she speak?' he enquired of Chitty.

Edwin sighed. 'When I saw Lady Vanessa standing there, I was absolutely transfixed to the spot, as you can imagine. She spoke, yes, but in a resounding sort of way, so unfortunately, with that and the shock of seeing her, I'm afraid I didn't make out as much as I might have done.' The old man thought for a moment or two. 'She was definitely annoyed about something, that was quite obvious, and there was some mention, I thought, of the word 'sceptre'. Yes, I'm sure that's right.'

Dr. Who stared at him for a moment, then smiled with satisfaction. 'It fits... yes... it fits. That would, if I'm on the right track, certainly be the word, my good fellow... yes, indeed!' He became thoughtful suddenly, then rose, a trifle arthritically, from his chair, moved towards a large table loaded with merchandise and began to sift through it like an eager housewife at a jumble sale. The Doctor glanced briefly at an elongated pottery dish in a lurid green edged with brown. *The pen is mightier than the sword*, ran the legend. Quite right, he thought approvingly, laying the item aside. He came across several mourning brooches and a huge black crape mantilla of the 1860's. It was upon moving the latter that he disclosed a very curious object that had reposed beneath it, which he held up triumphantly. 'Yes! I do believe this is it.'

Fashioned of crystal, the artefact was a rod, a cross and a loop combined. From each side of the loop ran thin gold wires, and on these were strung gems of vivid colours, including a striking blood-red and an extraordinarily beautiful sea-blue. On a single wire across the top of this strange object hung four tiny golden bells.

‘But what can that possibly have to do with Lady Vanessa’s spectre?’ asked old Chitty, baffled. ‘I bought it at a sale up in Cumberland about...let me see...yes...sixteen years ago.’ He sighed reminiscently. ‘I feel far less able to travel these days, of course. I suffer from hardened arteries, you know, and you wouldn’t believe...’

‘Spectre? Lady Vanessa? Nonsense! If I’m right, it was none other than...’

He broke off. A cold breeze was swirling through the room. It chilled both their minds and their bodies. An accompanying voice spoke clearly and incisively, and echoed and re-echoed around the ancient walls.

‘I shall come again. I swear it. It is true...’

A corner of the room, beyond the big table piled with memorabilia. Flames... ordinary yellow flames that, yet, curiously turned, just briefly and intermittently, to a deep, transparent, utterly breathtaking blue. There, in the midst of them, she stood, with her shapely arms outstretched, her beautiful hands held palms upwards. A loose robe, of the very palest lemon colour, draped her statuesque form.

The crystal artefact that Dr. Who still held caught her attention almost immediately, and her eyes widened, fixed eagerly upon it.

‘At last...’

Edwin Chitty managed to croak to the Doctor: ‘But if that was what she wanted, and she knew it was here, why didn’t she just take it?’

‘She is, at present, on the other side of a barrier, and must be unable to pass through it.’ Dr. Who stroked his chin thoughtfully. ‘I wonder, though... yes, she may, despite that, and with a little assistance, conceivably possess the ability to at least...’

With sudden decision, Dr. Who tossed the object lightly up into the air and towards the flame-shrouded figure. Chitty gaped as, instead of clattering to the floor as he expected, the crystalline item hovered for a few unbelievable moments above the table, then began to move, a trifle unsteadily, in the direction of the hands waiting to receive it.

The flames turned an incandescent, ice-cold blue at the moment she grasped it, and flared outwards across the oak-beamed ceiling. Dr. Who and Chitty instinctively backed away, shielding their eyes.

When they looked again, there was no sign of either woman or artefact, though a single blue-tinged flame still burned.

It flickered, and abruptly snuffed out.

There was nothing.

After a long moment, the old shopkeeper peered around the room in wonder. ‘It’s just as before. The fire has caused no damage. None at all.’

* * * * *

‘Ayesha?’

Old Chitty personified incredulity.

Dr. Who inserted his thumbs beneath the lapels of his frock coat and beamed complacently.

‘Yes,’ he confirmed. ‘Ayesha...’

* * * * *

... Ayesha, the legendary She-who-must-be-obeyed, described, in *Wisdom’s Daughter*, her birth as the daughter of Yarab, an Arab chieftain. Her mother, she added, had died after looking upon her, fearing that, if she lived on, she might give birth to another child who was less beautiful. As a young woman Ayesha loved the golden-haired Apollo, Kallikrates, but stained her hands with his blood in a fit of jealousy. Then, disobeying the instructions of her aged teacher and friend, the Prophet Noot, high priest of Isis, she entered the Fire of Immortality she had been appointed to guard and began a two-thousand-year exile of undying loneliness as queen of the ancient ruined kingdom of Kor, her only comfort being the hope that Kallikrates would one day be reborn and ultimately be restored to her. *She and Allan*, a memoir of the famous Victorian explorer Allan Quatermain, added to the history of Ayesha, but it was Horace Holly’s reminiscence, *She*, that told of how her hopes were seemingly fulfilled when Holly arrived at Kor with his ward Leo Vincey, the image of her lost love. Ironically, Leo, or Kallikrates, then lost *her* when the Fire of Immortality reversed its process the second time she bathed in it. Holly recorded how she aged to death before their eyes. In fact, she was unable to die and Leo eventually, as described in Holly’s second book, *Ayesha*, found her again in Asia, reincarnated as a virtually mummified ancient ruler known as the Hesea, who was in due course rejuvenated in Ayesha’s former image...

* * * * *

‘...The books I mentioned earlier, the ones Holly allowed me to see, the originals of *Wisdom’s Daughter*, were written in the hand of Ayesha herself during this period of her second incarnation,’ explained Dr. Who. ‘She gave those, and the sceptre that you heard her mention, into Holly’s keeping at their last parting, after the death of Leo and before she herself departed from this world. The sceptre, both a symbol and a receptacle of power, was passed on to Rider Haggard, together with the manuscript of *Ayesha*, on Holly’s instructions - but I suspect Haggard didn’t retain the items...’

Old Chitty brightened suddenly. ‘That sale I mentioned was of the effects of Mrs Hypatia Forshaw. The old lady’s uncle had been a college professor and an explorer in foreign parts, and had left her his own manuscripts and a number of unusual artefacts!’

Dr. Who nodded slowly and thoughtfully at this. ‘That rather ties things up then, does it not, hmm?’ He paused. Then, ‘There was an alternative account to Holly’s, you know, in which Kallikrates entered the flame with Ayesha and gained immortality as she supposedly lost it. He then spent the subsequent years waiting for *her* to be reincarnated. In that version, the ancient city of Kor was known as Kuma.’

‘Indeed? I can’t say I’ve ever heard of that particular rendering of the tale.’

‘There are also the writings of that fellow Tremayne. *His* footnotes to Ayesha’s story fitted in with Holly’s description of events.’

Edwin shook his head. He had no knowledge of that work either.

‘Of course, his findings won’t be published for a few years yet,’ the Doctor added hastily, seeing Chitty’s puzzled face.

The expression of the old shopkeeper, not surprisingly, remained a bemused one. He shook his head and reached for the decanter. Then a thought occurred to him. ‘So... where is Ayesha now?’

Dr. Who’s eyes became sombre. ‘When we saw her, Ayesha was looking through the barrier from the place in which she exists between incarnations. Soon, very soon now, since she has sought out her sceptre again, Ayesha will cross that barrier and return to this world, and I wouldn’t be at all surprised if the world finds itself trembling when she does.’



The Doctor's granddaughter Susan has persuaded him to take a summer holiday by the seaside. Curiosity draws the old time traveller into an antique emporium, The Three Mariners, once an inn patronised by seafarers.

Edwin Chitty, the elderly owner, tells of a spectre that haunts the property, said to be the manifestation of a noblewoman who was drowned centuries earlier. The Doctor is sceptical about the tale and agrees to take part in an overnight vigil at the shop.

The two old men witness the vision of a hauntingly beautiful woman surrounded by leaping blue flames. A strange, jewelled artefact amongst the shop's merchandise is the key to her true identity, and an indication of the power she might one day unleash against mankind...

This story features the First Doctor as played by William Hartnell

ISBN 0-918894-28-X



This is another in a series of original fan authored
Doctor Who fiction published by The Doctor Who Project

