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**The Rani of Chennai**



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## Prologue

Tamara Scott caught a flicker of movement out of the corner of her eye. She continued to drink her Chai nonchalantly, while shifting her weight onto her left foot and bracing her right against the counter.

As she began to sense movement behind her, she put down the steaming cup of tea and launched herself into a cartwheel away from the counter. The figure behind her was taken by surprise and instead of landing a blow on Tamara's side, her attacker found himself being thrown sideways against the counter by the force of Tamara's shoe against the side of his head.

Ignoring the spilled tea, the assailant turned to face her, just in time to sidestep another well-placed kick. Taking the opportunity while Tamara's leg was still in the air, the attacker punched her in the side. Her left arm swung down quickly enough to deflect most of the blow, and as soon as her right leg made contact with the tea counter, she lashed out with her left and brought it hard into the man's chest.

Tamara, now standing on the tea counter, kicked at the man's head, but realizing he was in an inferior position, the man had started to run at breakneck speed away from Tamara. Tamara leapt off the counter and gave chase along the featureless wall, knowing that her assailant would have no chance to duck into an alcove or veer down a side alley until he had reached the end of this block.

Tamara laid on the speed and slowly but surely she began to catch up with the man. Unfortunately, she wasn't quick enough and the man made a sharp left around the first corner. When Tamara rounded the corner, the man was nowhere to be seen. She stopped for a moment to guess where he might have gone, and he suddenly appeared from above, having somehow scaled the wall and held onto a moulding on the second story of the building.

Her attacker's feet connected with her shoulders and Tamara went down hard. She managed to keep from hitting her head on the ground and rolled quickly onto her back, a

position from which she delivered three rapid kicks to the man's groin. He backed away from her and she leaped once again to her feet. Not giving the man a chance to catch his breath, Tamara kicked him in the side with her right foot, then her left, alternating for a short time - and then, when the man began blocking her kicks with his arms, she slammed him with two, three, sometimes four blows in a row with the same leg.

Soon, the skilled attacker began to return the kicks, landing blow after blow on Tamara's sides. For a time, it seemed like they were engaged in a violent dance, both sides kicking at each other as they moved in a slow circle around one another.

Finally, Tamara began to feel the cumulative effects of the constant pounding, and she wondered how much longer her assailant could keep this up. She had come up against this opponent before and knew that his stamina was almost as great as her own - but she had been battling him on and off for almost twenty hours now, and she felt sure that his recuperative powers were much greater than hers.

She decided that she would have to take the chance of tiring him out in another way. Taking her opponent by surprise, she suddenly dashed off down the street at top speed. Her attacker took off after her, following her as she weaved in and out of the narrow alleys of the small village. She was hoping that he would not realise where she was heading, but as she neared her mark, her attacker suddenly disappeared. She knew that he would try to head her off. She knew that her route was shorter, but she did not let up on her speed. Sure enough, seconds after she had rounded the corner of the alley she had been targeting, she saw her opponent round the corner on the other end.

In the centre was a stairwell. Tamara ran for her life towards it, knowing she had a two second head start, but that she would be slowed down when she reached the stairwell. Nevertheless, she reached it before her opponent and began the long slog up the steep staircase.

As she had known would happen, her opponent began to fall behind. Tamara ran and ran up the stairs. One hundred steps. Two hundred. Three hundred. Five minutes. Ten. Tamara's legs felt like jelly. The muscles were straining to keep up with the merciless task she was forcing them to repeat several times a second. Her heart pounded in her chest and the sound her breath made as it rasped in and out of her mouth reminded Tamara of a dying animal. The blood rushing through her skull began to disorient her.

"How could it take twenty minutes to run up a staircase?" her mind was saying to her. This can't be real. It's like a dream. "If it's a dream," thought Tamara, "then there's no point in running." Was this a trick? Was her mind trying to get her to stop or was she really dreaming? Or was it a trick that her opponent was playing on her? With a renewed energy, Tamara focused on the task at hand.

She looked up the long staircase that lie before her and saw only an infinite number of steps leading up to the top of eternity. The staircase was lined on both sides with flaming torches, and the heat was beginning to get to her. Heat rises, she reflected. I must be getting near the top if all the heat is clustering up here.

She ran another five minutes.

Then another five.

Thousands of steps.

How many?

She had never counted them.

It probably wasn't the same number each time anyway.

Suddenly, the stairs ended and Tamara smashed through the door into the TARDIS' console room. She turned to see that the Doctor was so far behind her that he was just coming into view. She slammed the door and dropped the heavy bolt into place. A bolt that she had concealed behind the door the night before, without the Doctor noticing.

The Doctor slammed against the door with all of his weight and was surprised to bounce back. Tamara could hear him falling down the stairs. Eventually he stopped his fall and trudged back to the top of the steps. He knocked on the door.

"Yes," said Tamara.

"Can...I...come...in?" he gasped.

"Do...you...give...up?" she asked between breaths.

"I...give up," he gulped.

She removed the bolt and let him into the console room.

"I win again," she croaked triumphantly.

The Doctor grabbed her and fell to the floor, taking her with him.

The two of them lay there on the floor of the TARDIS next to the console breathing hard, muscles aching, and let the soothing hum of the TARDIS lull them to sleep.

## Episode One

Eric Walji took a sip of his wine as he waited for the Captain to finish chewing. Before the Captain could take another forkful of rice, Eric asked, "So, Captain. I hear that a lot of people have taken ill over the last few days."

Captain Stammers put down his fork.

"That's right, Eric," he answered. "We had another couple take ill this afternoon. That makes sixteen people since we left Chennai."

"Is that normal?" asked Miranda, Eric's wife, who was seated between him and the Captain's partner, Gordon.

"Doctor Howe tells me it's not an abnormal number of people, but usually it's just sea sickness. These people have a touch of something that's kept them confined to their cabins. The couple that took ill on the first day is still feeling under the weather."

"How awful," said Kamal, who was sitting next to Eric.

"Not food poisoning is it?" asked Sasheen, Kamal's wife.

"Oh, no," answered the Captain. "First thing Doctor Howe thought of. No real common food between all of the sick passengers. Nothing that we haven't all eaten ourselves, that is."

"I haven't seen any helicopters," said Eric. "No one's asked to be flown back to India, I gather?"

"No," said Captain Stammers.

"Surprising, that," said Miranda. "I think that's what we'd do, isn't it, honey?"

"Yes," answered Eric. "I think so."

He took a sip of his wine.

\* \* \* \* \*

Tamara had awakened some time ago, taken a shower and changed into some casual clothes: jeans and a T-shirt. When she returned to the TARDIS console room, she found the Doctor looking fresh and clean, apparently still wearing the same clothes. He didn't smell. He never smelled.

"About to land," he said as he glanced back and forth between some dials on the console. "Care to do the honours?"

"Sure," said Tamara, taking her place at the console.

She checked the flight-path indicator. The reading -- whether it was in kilometres or seconds or some other strange unit of measure she hadn't quite yet figured out -- indicated how close they were to landing. Tamara had found it best to assume that it was in seconds, because then she could just estimate the time of impact. Uh, landing.

She turned the automatic short-distance navigation dial to its highest setting - not just a little under, as the Doctor normally did

Synchronic feedback circuit: on.

She checked the multi-loop stabiliser.

She flicked on the external hazard avoidance mechanism.

She increased the interior/exterior time velocity differential.

The familiar wheezing, groaning sound of the materialization filled the console room.

Tamara disabled the temporal drift compensator.

She kept monitoring the proximity warning needle.

She kept her thumb on the emergency de-materialization switch.

She depressed the spatio-temporal realignment button every second or two, just to bug the Doctor.

She counted out the seconds by tapping her foot.

The TARDIS landed with a thud, while the materialization sound finished with an impolite judder.

Tamara paused for a second or two, realizing that she had been holding her breath. She exhaled and took her hands off the console. She looked around as if she couldn't remember the next thing to do.

"Turn the headlights off and take the key out of the ignition," prompted the Doctor.

Tamara laughed.

"Hang on," she said. "I remember."

She checked the radiation levels. Atmosphere. Gravity. Pressure.

She turned off one or two of the switches - that could stay on anyway, but she was stalling for time - because she couldn't remember the other thing she was supposed to do.

"Okay," she said.

"That's it?" asked the Doctor.

"Uh, yes," she said definitely.

"All right then. Congratulations Tamara Scott on your first solo landing of a TARDIS."

Tamara beamed.

She turned and started towards the door.

"Bugger," she said. She turned back and flippantly tossed open the door control switch.

The Doctor smiled and followed her out.

Into the bedroom.

Or rather, into the bed.

The TARDIS was wedged tight against a set of bunk beds. Crawling onto the bottom bunk, the Doctor and Tamara found that they were in the only available space left in what was mostly likely the cabin of a ship.

"Most likely the cabin of a ship," said Tamara, stepping onto the floor and making room for the Doctor.

"Mmm," agreed the Doctor, straightening himself up beside her.

There came a knock at the door.

The Doctor and Tamara looked at each other.

"Are you in your cabin?" asked a woman's voice.

"Miranda? Eric?" came a man's voice.

Tamara opened the door.

The couple appeared shocked. They both looked at the number on the cabin door: 237.

"I'm sorry," said the woman. "We were looking for the Waljis. They were in this cabin last week."

"We haven't seen them in days," added the man. "They weren't feeling well when we last saw them, so we thought they might be holed up in their cabin."

"I don't think they're here," said the Doctor. "At least I hope not," he added, looking at the bulk of the TARDIS taking up the bulk of the room.

He took Tamara's hand and stepped forward into the hallway, anxious to head off any unwanted questions.

As she came out, Tamara grabbed the keycard lying on the small table by the door and shut the door behind her.

"I'm the Doctor," said he, offering his hand. "And this is my daughter, Tamara."

The Indian couple looked at the two. Tamara looked to be in her early thirties and the Doctor in his mid-thirties.

"You don't look old enough to be her father," said the woman.

"Don't I?" asked the Doctor, looking completely surprised. "Oh."

"I'm Kamal Kalia," said the man, "and this is my wife Sasheen."

The Doctor and Tamara could see that they were obviously on a cruise ship.

"We were about to have dinner," said Tamara. "Would you like to join us?"

"An excellent idea," said the Doctor. "Then we can try and figure out what happened to your friends, the Waljis."

\* \* \* \* \*

"The Rani of Chennai," said Tamara as the server put another slice of turkey on the Doctor's plate. The Doctor moved along the buffet table and Tamara held out her plate to indicate that she too would like a slice of turkey.

"Where?" asked the Doctor, looking around the dining room.

"The name of the ship," said Tamara. "It's called *The Rani of Chennai*."

"Life preservers?"

"Yes."

"Sounds Indian," said the Doctor. Tamara looked around the dining room. Ninety-five percent of the people in the room looked Indian.

"I'd say that's a safe bet," said Tamara.

"You know," said the Doctor contemplatively. "I went to school with a girl named Chennai," said the Doctor.

"Really?" asked Tamara.

"No," answered the Doctor, sullenly. "Not really."

After loading their plates, the Doctor and Tamara joined the Kalias at their table. With the middle-aged couple sat a man in his mid-thirties.

"Tamara, Doctor," said Sasheen. "This is our son, Peter." She smiled at Tamara. Tamara took the hint and sat next to Peter. Short black hair. Pretty face. Nice muscles. She smiled at Peter and laid her napkin onto her lap.

Long black hair. Pretty face. Nice muscles. Peter smiled at Tamara and took a sip of his water to give himself a few seconds to think of something clever to say.

"And this is Diana," said Sasheen. "She's Peter's ex-girlfriend but there's nothing going on between them now. He's quite single."

Peter looked at his mother and widened his eyes in mortification.

"What?" she asked him. "People are going to think you're together and you won't meet anyone on this cruise."

Tamara took a sip of her water to try to avoid getting involved in the conversation.

"What about you, Tamara?" asked Diana. "Are you and the Doctor a couple?"

She swallowed her water and put down her glass. "No," she said, perhaps a little too hastily. Then she realized that Diana herself might be interested in the Doctor. "No," she said again. "We're just traveling companions."

"And both single?" prompted Sasheen.

"Yes," answered the Doctor, as he had finished his plate and was getting up to get another helping of turkey. "Quite."

Just a few moments after the Doctor had left; another Indian couple approached the table. "Good evening Kamal, Sasheen," said the man, whom Tamara judged to be in his mid-fifties. "Raja, Kismet," said Kamal. "Please have a seat. This is Tamara Scott. This is Raja and Kismet Jhalli.

"Nice to meet you," said Tamara, getting up to lean over the table and shake their hands.

"Oh, you've just missed the Doctor," said Sasheen. "You've got to meet him. He's so very interesting."

"Doctor Howe?" asked Kismet.

"No," answered Sasheen. "Doctor..." She looked at Tamara. "Who?"

\* \* \* \* \*

A newlywed couple was sitting on the upper deck of the ship, looking out over the bow at the night sky. The sound of the waves splashing against the ship. The gentle ocean breeze blowing past their faces. The giant slug-creature sliding across the deck.

"Don't move," whispered the man. "I don't think it's seen us."

"It's blocking the stairs," said the girl, looking over the railing. The swimming pool was one deck below them, but she didn't think she could jump far enough to avoid landing on the deck.

The man looked over the railing and came to the same conclusion.

"I'll distract it and you run for help," said the man. He started to inch over to one side of the deck, the sound of his footsteps attracting the dark grey creature's attention. The size of a man, it shifted its bulk slowly towards the young man and then began to slither forward at thirty centimetres per second. It left a slimy trail behind it, which the young woman leaped over as she made for the door to the staircase.

Swallowing, the young man edged his way along the edge of the deck, hoping he could manage to keep out of the creature's way until help arrived.

\* \* \* \* \*

"I'm the Doctor," he said as he returned to the table with a heaping plate of turkey.

"Raja Jhalli, said the newcomer. "The kids used to call me Jolly Roger."

"They still do," said his wife. "Kismet."

"Very nice to meet you both," said the Doctor, just before stuffing a forkful of turkey in his mouth.

"There's Captain Stammers," said Kismet. "Perhaps he knows what's happened to the Waljis."

"Good idea," said Sasheen. She waved the Captain over.

"Captain," she began. "That couple we had dinner with last week. The Waljis. We haven't seen them since that night, and now their cabin's been re-assigned to another couple."

"Really?" asked the Captain. "How odd. I'll have the purser check on the cabin assignments. Perhaps they asked to be moved."

"Or perhaps they were helicoptered off the ship," suggested Kamal. "Remember, they did say they wouldn't want to stay on board if they were sick, and they both started feeling ill after dinner that night."

"That's too bad," said the Captain. "But no one's been helicoptered off the ship. I'll check with Doctor Howe as well. Perhaps he knows something about it."

Captain Stammers stayed to chat for a few more minutes and then went back to his table, where he was dining with his partner and the lucky guests who had been invited to the Captain's table that evening.

"I've started to lose track of time," said Tamara. "How many days have we been at sea?"

"Nice going Tamara," thought the Doctor. He smiled at her. She smiled back.

"Let's see..." said Jolly Roger. "We left Chennai on the nineteenth. Today's the..." -- He looked at his watch -- "fourth." He thought for a few seconds. "Sixteen days," he announced.

"Oh," said Tamara. "Your watch has the date. Does it have the month and the year too?"

"No," said Roger. "Just the day."

"Oh," said Tamara. The Doctor grinned. Nice try.

"The Doctor and I were just trying to remember if it was a leap year or not," said Tamara.

"No, 2160 will be the next one," answered Roger.

Tamara smiled. Somewhere between 2157 and 2159 then. Not bad. And he hadn't said 'next year', so it was probably not 2159.

The Doctor, without stopping his attack on the turkey, reached into his pocket and pulled out a newspaper and laid it down between his and Tamara's plates. July 4, 2158. Tamara kicked him under the table.

The newspaper was made, in fact, out of no paper whatsoever, but out of a flimsy sheet of translucent pale-grey plastic. Down the side of the page, Tamara could see what looked like the scrollbars she was used to seeing in Windows. She touched one and the page scrolled down in a leisurely and very pleasing manner.

"Want to go for a walk on the upper deck after dinner?" suggested Peter. Tamara, annoyed at being distracted from playing with the newspaper, looked over at him and realised that he was talking to her.

"Sure," she said.

"Take a sweater," said Sasheen, scratching her forearm. "It could get cool on the deck."

"It's India in July, Mother," said Peter.

"Do as your mother says," said Kamal.

The pair left the table and the Doctor got up to get another plate of turkey.

"You're eating that turkey like you haven't eaten all week," noted Jolly Roger.

"I don't always have time to sit down and eat," said the Doctor. "When I show up somewhere, the shooting usually starts fairly soon afterwards."

A scream tore through the dining room.

"And the screaming," added the Doctor, putting down his plate and setting off towards the sound of the woman's cry. "Let's not forget the screaming."

\* \* \* \* \*

"There's some kind of large creature up on the deck," the woman shouted hysterically. "It's got my fiancé," she said.

The Doctor arrived at the scene. He heard the woman's story and raced up the stairs the woman had pointed to, arriving on the deck to find the woman's husband climbing up a flagpole.

"Where's the creature," shouted the Doctor.

The man stopped and looked down. The creature was nowhere to be seen.

"It was down there," said the man, scanning the deck. The Doctor saw the trail of slime leading to the deck's edge.

"It's gone over the side," said the Doctor. As the man slid down the pole, the Doctor peered carefully over the edge. On the deck jutting out below, there was a wet patch of slime, but no creature.

"It was large," the man said as he detailed the story to the Captain, the Doctor and several others that clustered around him and his wife. "It was like a slug, but as big as a small bear."

"A Greyslug," declared the Doctor. "Not native to this planet."

"An alien monster," asked Stammers.

"Not necessarily a monster," said Jolly Roger. "It could be a sentient life form."

"True enough," said the Doctor. "But in this case, they're neither sentient nor monsters. They're simply very large slugs from a planet far, far away."

"All right," said the Captain. "Why don't you two get back to your cabin, freshen up, and have a nice relaxing drink in the lounge. We'll take care of everything here."

"It's still loose on the ship," said the young man excitedly. "What if it comes into the lounge?"

"I'll alert the crew to be on the lookout," said the Captain soothingly, laying his hand on the man's shoulder and looking into his eyes. "There's nothing to worry about. We've got the situation well in hand."

"Nothing to worry about," repeated the man, somewhat calmed. He took his wife's hand. "Let's go and have that drink."

The couple made their way down the staircase, and a few of the other onlookers decided that there was nothing else to see and left the deck also, leaving Captain Stammers, the Doctor, Roger and Kismet Jhalli and the Kalias.

"The first thing we need to do is get some samples of the slime," said the Doctor, "just to make absolutely sure that we're not dealing with anything dangerous."

"Just hold on a minute -- Doctor, was it?" said the Captain. "The first thing we have to do is keep the other passengers from hearing any of this nonsense and starting a panic on my ship."

"But Captain," began the Doctor. "If there is a creature on the loose, alien or otherwise --"

"Doctor," said the Captain disapprovingly. "The only thing that's loose on this ship is a tarp from one of the pools, or the parasail that went missing a few days ago. A young couple who's had a little too much to drink getting a little spooked by a silk sheet and a gust of wind is not something I want ruining the holiday of the rest of the passengers, including yourself."

"It couldn't hurt to just make sure," said the Doctor.

"Doctor," said the Captain. "I'll have my crew on the lookout for a run-away tarp. If they spot your giant slug monster --"

"Greyslug," corrected the Doctor.

"Greyslug, whatever," said the Captain, "I'm sure they'll inform me immediately. Until then, I don't want to hear any more talk of monsters. Understood?"

"Perfectly," said the Doctor. He looked at his four companions. "Shall we retire into the lounge as well?"

"Why not?" said Kamal. "Did you know they have fifty beers on tap in the aft lounge?"

"I want to sit in the forward lounge, where we can see out the front of the ship," said Sasheen.

"I'm sure they'll let you order a beer from the aft lounge and drink it in the forward lounge," said the Captain, ushering them down the stairs. "Tell them the Captain gave you permission." He smiled.

Sasheen stumbled on the stairs and the Jolly Roger caught her and steadied her.

"Careful," he said.

"Sorry," said Sasheen. "I'm feeling a little dizzy. I just need to sit."

\* \* \* \* \*

Tamara and Peter were standing on the main deck of the ship, watching another couple try to do the 'King of the World' thing from *Titanic*. They were both sipping through straws from one of those large exotic drinks that one really must try when on a cruise.

"I can't believe people still know about that movie," said Tamara.

"It's a timeless classic," said Peter. "Like *The Wizard of Oz*, or *Back to the Future VIII*."

Tamara wasn't sure if he was joking or not. She wasn't sure if there had been a *Back to the Future VIII* yet in her time.

"So what's the deal with your ex-girlfriend coming on this trip with you?" asked Tamara.

"Well," said Peter. "We had kind of planned this trip for a few years, back when we were still together. And once we broke up, we stayed friends, and both of us still wanted to do the cruise, so it didn't make sense for her to cancel."

"Mmm," said Tamara, contemplating the situation. "How long have you been broken up?"

"Almost two years," said Peter.

"Have you seen any other girls in that time?" asked Tamara.

"A few. Nothing long term," said Peter. "I've been traveling a lot for work lately, so it hasn't been all that easy. I was seeing a flight attendant for a while."

"How old are you?"

"Thirty-two," answered Peter. "You?"

"Thirty-four," replied Tamara. She had been calculating her age recently.

"Been married or anything?" asked Peter.

"Lived with a guy for a couple of years," said Tamara. "We worked together. He got transferred and the long distance thing didn't work out."

"Mmm," said Peter understandingly.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Doctor and the Kalias and the Jhallis had ordered drinks in the beautifully decorated forward lounge.

Stretching from wall to wall was an ornate, hand-woven Indian carpet. The walls were paneled with an expensive wood that the Doctor couldn't quite identify, and the walls were lined with cozy furnishings: wooden bookcases filled with classics, an intricately carved grandfather clock, a wood fireplace (although the Doctor knew that the 'wooden' logs were

actually made of some kind of pressed vegetable matter) and a handsomely carved wooden bar, behind which a bartender mixed drinks as well as serving sherry and port, which is what the little group was now drinking.

"So is this your first cruise, Doctor?" asked Jolly Roger, as he settled into a 'leather' upholstered armchair that was as comfortable as it looked.

"Oh," said the Doctor, remembering his and Tamara's recent shipboard experiences, "I've been on a few cruises in my time. How about you?"

"Oh, Kismet and I go every year," said Roger.

"What do you do?" asked Kamal.

"Oh, we're both retired," said Kismet. "We used to work together at various Indian embassies around the world, so Raja and I got used to traveling."

"Embassies," said Sasheen. "You must have met a lot of interesting people."

"Well, from time to time," said Raja. "We weren't exactly at the top of the totem pole. Not everyone who works at an embassy is an ambassador who lunches with royalty every day."

The group laughed. "And what do you do?" Raja asked the Kalias.

"I run a software development firm in Chennai," said Kamal.

"Me too," said Sasheen. "He's the competition," she added, indicating her husband.

The group laughed again.

The clock chimed midnight.

"Time for your medicine, Darling," said Kismet.

Raja patted his wife's arm and excused himself for a few moments.

"And what about you, Doctor," asked Sasheen. "Are you a Doctor?"

"Oh, not really a medical Doctor," he answered. "I mostly travel. Check out what's going on. Help people."

"Sounds like an easy life," said Raja. "Did you inherit a lot of money?"

"Something like that," answered the Doctor.

"What about your family?" asked Peter.

"My mum's back in London. Never knew my Dad. I have one brother, Shawn and another brother Ryan who was an astronaut. He died on a mission."

"Ryan Scott?" said Peter quizzically. "Like the famous astronaut Ryan Scott?"

"Uh," said Tamara. He was probably talking about her brother. Who knew that a hundred years after his death people would still remember one of the scores of astronauts that must have died on missions? She smiled. "My brother was named after him. We're related to the earlier Ryan Scott."

"Ah," said Peter. "Was he like your grandfather or something?"

"Sort of," said Tamara. "He was my Dad's uncle." This lie was getting more convoluted. Tamara felt bad lying to Peter, but she couldn't very well tell him that she was a time traveler from a hundred years in the past. She was an experienced agent, however, and even with the occasional leftover memories of Liz Shaw's getting in the way (don't ask) she had no difficulty keeping her story believable.

"It must have been weird for your family to find out he was still alive after all those years," said Peter.

Tamara nearly choked on her drink.

Peter patted her on the back, happy to have the excuse to initiate physical contact with her. "Are you alright?"

"Yes," Tamara managed to gasp.

Peter waited for Tamara to stop coughing. "Did you ever meet him?"

"I don't remember," said Tamara still trying to come to terms with what Peter had inadvertently told her about her own future. Her brother was still alive! How could this be? And here she was, a hundred years in the future, and it was a piece of history already. Time was not letting her properly acknowledge this momentous piece of information. How very odd she felt.

"So your Dad's not your Dad then," said Peter.

Tamara looked at him blankly.

"You said you never knew your Dad, so..."

"Oh. Oh! He's my step-dad," said Tamara. It was bad enough having to keep her lies straight, now the Doctors oddball idea to pretend to be her father was making things difficult for her as well.

"Such a huge family," said Peter with a little sound of disapproval in his voice. "How did that come about?"

"Uh," said Tamara, not for the first time that evening. How to explain to someone from the middle of the twenty-second century that her parents, raising children in the first quarter of the twenty-first century, were too selfish to limit themselves to just one child in an effort to help curb the world's impending overpopulation. The problems she'd glimpsed on the front page of the Doctor's newspaper were the direct result of her and her parents' generation. How could she defend her very existence to this man? Should she even bother explaining that Ryan and Shawn were her stepbrothers? Finally, it came to her. There was a quick way out of this conversation.

"Triplets," she lied.

"Oh," said Peter smiling. "I figured it had to be something like that."

\* \* \* \* \*

2 AM found the Doctor skulking around the upper deck looking for some trace of the Greyslug. Some trace of slime. But there was nothing.

\* \* \* \* \*

4 AM found the Doctor lying flat on his back in the top bunk of the cabin. Tamara had sneaked quietly into her bunk a few moments earlier.

"Not sleepy," said the Doctor suddenly.

"Neither am I," said Tamara. "We just had that long nap before dinner. This is more like early evening for us, I think."

"I would say so. Your young man too tired to keep you entertained until the sunrise?"

"Yeah," said Tamara. "He was drifting off at two already."

The two lay there in silence for a while. Tamara put her hand against the outer wall of the TARDIS. Its gentle vibrations were very relaxing. She used the relaxation techniques that she had learned in spy school and was just about to drift off to sleep - or maybe she already had - when she heard the scratching noises.

“Do you hear that?”



## Episode Two

"Do you hear that?" asked the Doctor, obviously wide-awake.

"Yes," replied Tamara. "It sounds like scratching."

"That's what I thought at first, but it's more like something heavy being dragged across the floor."

Tamara listened. The sound stopped again. Then started again. It was extremely annoying trying to sleep with the noise so irregular. Eventually, the sound stopped and she awoke the next morning a little bit uncomfortable from having slept at the wrong time. It didn't help that it was her first night at sea and that the disconcerting noises had kept waking her up just as she had been drifting off.

She expected the Doctor to be gone already, since that's how things usually went - but the Doctor was not only still lying in his bunk, he was sound asleep. Tamara decided to shower in the TARDIS and changed clothes.

When she came out, the Doctor was gone.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Doctor was lying on a lounge chair by the main pool when Tamara and Peter ran across him.

"Morning Tamara, Peter," he said.

"Morning Doctor," said the pair.

"Don't get a sunburn," said Tamara.

"Not a problem," said the Doctor. He pointed upwards and Tamara's eyes followed.

"I don't see anything," said Tamara.

“Those poles,” said the Doctor, indicating thin metal poles along the ship’s railing and the wall. “There’s a very fine mesh draped over them,” explained the Doctor. “It’s permeated with a ultra-violet radiation filter. I can lie here all day if I like.”

“Very clever,” said Tamara.

“You haven’t seen these before?” asked Peter.

“We don’t get much sun in London,” said Tamara quickly. Peter seemed to accept this as a real possibility.

“I’ve never seen those sunglasses before,” said Tamara.

“Twelve thousand years old,” said the Doctor, taking off the whale bone with a narrow slit carved into it in front of the eyes. “The Inuit and Inupiat were the first peoples to invent sunglasses: a full ten thousand years before the Chinese.”

“Bold fashion statement,” said Peter as the Doctor once again rested the whale bone on his ears and nose. “I’m going for a quick swim.” Tamara nodded absently as she looked at what the Doctor was doing.

Peter headed off towards the pool.

“What’re you doing?” asked Tamara, indicating the digital pad in the Doctor’s hand.

The digital pads were available all over the ship. No need to bring your own PDM with you. Just borrow one, use your thumb print or implanted chip to log in, and you could check your e-mail, surf the web, read the news or even do some work, if you were so inclined as to waste your holiday doing work.

“Oh, the usual,” answered the Doctor, referring to a research project that he and Tamara had been carrying on for years now.

“Let me see what I can find,” said Tamara as she took a seat in the chair next to the Doctor. She took an available pad from a little slot in the lounge chair.

The Tannoy in the corner came to life, “Attention passengers, the beach volleyball tournament is about to begin on the Lido deck. All registered players should already be present. Passengers are invited to watch throughout the day.” The message repeated.

The Doctor showed her the various search engines he’d been using, and Tamara spent some time getting used to the PDM by looking at the headlines scrolling across the top. One caught her eye: *King to visit England*.

“What’s that all about,” she wondered. To her surprise, it had transpired at some point during the last hundred years that England had abolished the monarchy, and that the house of Windsor had packed up and moved to Canada, where they had built a modest palace in the Western city of Victoria and earned their keep as a tourist attraction.

Tamara was about to make a comment to the Doctor about it when she noticed he had disappeared. She had noticed that he seemed rarely to use the toilet, but she supposed that that’s where he had gone.

*Mir contamination zone extended to Hawaii* read another headline. Tamara knew all about the Mir contamination zone. Even in her time, an unknown contaminant had started killing sea-life around the Fijian crash site of the Mir space station. At first a few fish had turned up dead. And then the water started to turn a colour that could only be described as sickly. Eventually, all animals and plants living in the water were dead, and even people who swam in the water began experiencing long debilitating illnesses. The zone had been cordoned off to all ocean-

going vessels; and eventually, even planes were not allowed to fly over due to the odd mixtures of gases that erupted from beneath the surface of the water from time to time.

By 2045, the contamination had reached the coast of Australia and was on its way towards Malaysia and the South China Sea. Now, a hundred years more had passed, and the contamination zone was massive. Tamara looked in horror at the area shown on the colourful map. All of the waters between Australia and Asia were contaminated, and much of the Pacific Ocean between Australia and the Hawaiian Islands seemed to be affected too.

To take her mind off the depressing thought of her planet slowly being eaten by an unknown force, she called up 'www.tamarascott.co.uk' and was surprised to find her website still in place, albeit with an unfamiliar password request on the first form.

She typed in the password that she normally used for personal things and laughed when she saw the page that came up as a result.

"If you can read this then you are too far in the future."

"I guess that means I'm going home again someday," said Tamara, who had not really thought one way or the other about it in all of her time with the Doctor.

She decided to get back to the task at hand, and shared her findings with the Doctor when he returned.

Peter came around the corner, towelling himself off after his swim to find the Doctor and Tamara still huddled around the PDM.

"Nice sunglasses," he said when he saw the Doctor.

"Oh, thank you, Peter," said the Doctor. "These are the Chinese sunglasses I was mentioning earlier. You see, they used thin slivers of Onyx to make an opaque, dark lens of sorts." He held out the delicate instrument for Peter to examine.

"Oh, it's time for breakfast," noted Tamara. "Are you going to join us, Doctor?"

"No," said the Doctor. "I've already eaten. I'll be here if you need me."

\* \* \* \* \*

Tamara and Peter had plans to join his parents for breakfast, but only Peter's father showed up.

"Sasheen's not feeling well," said Kamal, scratching his forearm. "She's got a dark brown rash all over her arms. I've told Doctor Howe to go and see her."

"Isn't that what some of the other people on the ship have got?" asked Peter with a worried look on his face.

"I think so," said Kamal with a similar look on his face.

"I heard that a lot of passengers have taken ill today," said a woman at the next table. "My husband hasn't been able to get out of bed at all this morning."

"Maybe we should talk to Doctor Howe about this," suggested Tamara.

After breakfast, the three of them went to find Doctor Howe. They found him with Sasheen in the Kalia's cabin.

"Just like the rest of them, I'm afraid," said Doctor Howe. "It starts with a rash on the arms, and by the end of the second day the entire body is covered by a dark greyish rash."

"What about the people that got sick early on in the voyage?" asked Kamal. "What happened to them?"

"Well," said the doctor slowly. "They started off the same way." He paused. "Started off with a rash." He paused again. "Then they became bedridden."

"Are you saying that no one has gotten better?" asked Sasheen.

The doctor's breathing became a little bit laboured. He loosened his collar. "No one has gotten better," he said.

"And what about the people in Cabin 237?" asked Tamara. "They seem to have been relocated."

The doctor's face became red and he undid the first few buttons on his shirt. He sat down suddenly.

"Are you alright?" asked Kamal.

The doctor couldn't speak. He looked up at Tamara and lost consciousness. She grabbed him by the shoulders as he fell, her quick thinking keeping him from injuring himself as he fell face-first.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Good morning, Doctor," said Jolly Roger, as he and his wife took up residence in the lounge chairs next to him. The Doctor put down the data pad and smiled. "Jolly Roger and Kismet. I hope you're having a pleasant morning."

"I think I've put on five kilos already," said Roger, laughing. "There's just something about an all-you-can-eat buffet that overrides my sense of modesty"

"He eats like a pig," affirmed Kismet. "And what about you, Doctor? Have you had enough turkey yet?"

"Still eating all I can," answered the Doctor.

"And why not," said Kismet. "We're on vacation."

"Exactly," said the Doctor. "In two years, the planet will be enslaved by aliens and you'll spend ten years living under their despotic rule. Might as well eat up while you can."

Roger laughed and Kismet gave the Doctor an uneasy smile. The Doctor grinned at her.

"Interesting sunglasses," said the waitress, as she brought the Doctor his margarita.

"Thank you," said the Doctor. "Oh, I should have ordered a pitcher." He looked at Kismet and Roger.

"Strawberry margaritas?" asked Kismet. The waitress nodded. "A pitcher sounds like a marvellous idea.

When the waitress had left, the Doctor asked the Jhallis, "Did any of you hear any strange noises last night?"

"Just the sound of the ocean," said Kismet.

"And the ship," added Roger. "Engine noises. That sort of thing."

"No, Roger," said the Doctor. "More like slithering noises."

"You're just spooked by that young couple's story about the giant slugs," laughed Roger.

"They weren't the only ones," said the waitress as she brought two more glasses and some serviettes. "I've talked to several people who said they ran into more of those giant slug creatures in the middle of the night."

"Really?" said the Doctor leaning forward and looking very interested.

"Yeah," continued the girl. She pointed over at a nearby couple. "Ask them."

The couple looked over when they noticed they were the object of the waitress' attention. The waitress shouted inappropriately at them. "I was telling them about the giant slugs you saw last night."

The couple came over, eager to tell their story once again.

"We were comin' out of the night club," said the man, with what is colloquially known as an American accent. "We got half-way down the stairs to our floor when we saw this creature comin' up the stairs from below us."

"We had to run back up the stairs and it chased us all the way," added the woman.

The portly couple was gasping for breath, as if they were reliving the ordeal simply by relating the story.

"I don't think Greyslugs can move quite that quickly," said the Doctor.

"And it called for us to stop," added the man. "That's what spooked us the most."

"I don't think so," said the Doctor. "Greyslugs have no vocal chords."

"Oh it was callin' to us alright," said the woman, annoyed at the Doctor's disbelief.

The Doctor was puzzled by the woman's insistence that the creatures could talk. "Where exactly did you see these creatures?"

The woman told him.

"I think I'm going to have a little look around," said the Doctor.

\* \* \* \* \*

Tamara and Peter helped Doctor Howe back to the sick bay. He seemed to have calmed down a bit and Peter helped him to lie down while Tamara got him a glass of water. She took the opportunity to scan the contents of the doctor's desk, and noted a passenger list with notations on it. When she had given the water to Howe, she turned back to the desk and surreptitiously scanned it for the Waljis' name. Sure enough, there was a notation with the cabin number and several other cryptic codes. Tamara pocketed the list and returned her attention to the sick man.

"I think we should let the Captain know you're ill," said Tamara.

Howe nodded and laid back on one his cot.

\* \* \* \* \*

A few crewmembers gave the Doctor odd stares as they saw him crawling around on the decks with a magnifying glass. The Doctor found it odd that there was no trace of the slime anywhere. It appeared to have evaporated very quickly. Finally, the Doctor spotted something. As he examined a staircase with a magnifying glass, he noticed that on the edges of the steps themselves, there was a little build-up of slime that had not dissipated. He quickly scraped up as much as he could into a little glass jar and headed back to the TARDIS.

\* \* \* \* \*

After leaving the Doctor's office, Tamara showed Peter the list.

"It looks like a lot of people have gotten sick," he said.

"Let's pay a few of them a visit," said Tamara. She picked the closest cabin off the list and knocked on the door. When no one answered, she picked the electronic lock and the pair entered.

"How come you have lock picking tools?" asked Peter.

"I'm a secret agent," said Tamara.

"I thought you were joking about that," said Peter.

"Nope," said Tamara.

The cabin was uninhabited, but there was a suitcase in the closet. Clothes had been stuffed into it haphazardly.

"This is just what we found in our cabin," said Tamara. "The Walji's suitcases seem to have been hastily repacked."

"This is very odd," said Peter.

"Those dates next to the names," he said, indicating the sheet in Tamara's hand. "I think these are the dates that the people got ill. See, my mother's name has today's date beside it. Let's pay a visit to someone that got sick a little later."

"Good idea," said Tamara. The pair left the cabin and re-locked the door.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Unbelievable," said the Doctor as he looked at the cells under the microscope. "They're hybrids," he said aloud. He looked around and noticed that no one was listening to him. "I must tell the Captain about this."

\* \* \* \* \*

When Tamara and Peter entered the next cabin, they found that it too was uninhabited, but this time there was something strange in it as well. Set up on a wheeled trolley was what appeared to be a science experiment. Two immense glass beakers were being held up by a wire frame. From the base of each beaker ran a length of clear plastic tubing, which fed into a much smaller glass beaker.

The large beakers had a dried clear substance in them, while the small beakers were coated with a dry grey residue.

"Suitcases, same as the other ones," said Peter as he looked into the closet.

\* \* \* \* \*

Doctor Geoffrey Howe, MD. Captain Stammers looked at the sign on the door to the sick bay for a few seconds before knocking on the door.

"Captain Stammers," said the Doctor as he came around a corner. "I've been looking all over for you."

"Doctor Howe's taken ill," said Stammers. "Couldn't have come at a worse time."

"True enough," agreed the Doctor. "But I think I may have found something that can help us explain the illnesses."

"Please go on," said the Captain.

"I analysed the slime from one of those Greyslugs creatures," said the Doctor, ignoring the Captain's annoyed look.

"They've been genetically modified. They're not pure Greyslugs. They appear to have some human DNA and some plant DNA. This would explain the reports that the creatures are able to speak, and why they would be able to infect the passengers."

"You think this sickness that people have been coming down with has been transmitted by giant slugs from outer space?" asked the Captain incredulously.

"Captain, there are enough people on board who have confirmed the existence of the Greyslugs."

"Please keep your voice down, Doctor," said the Captain. "Let's talk in here." He gestured towards Doctor Howe's cabin.

They entered to find Doctor Howe straightening some papers on his desk.

"I heard you'd taken ill," said the Captain.

"Feeling better now," said the doctor. "No time to be ill. So many patients. So *many* patients!"

\* \* \* \* \*

Breaking into another cabin, Tamara and Peter found the same set up they had found in a number of rooms. Bags packed. No sign of people, and the strange apparatus set up in the middle of the room. This apparatus, like several of the others, had a large grey gelatinous mass in each of the two large beakers.

"I think this is distilling the contents of the large beakers into these smaller ones," said Tamara.

"The liquid in the smaller one is a lot darker," said Peter. He got his face too close to the beaker. "And it smells terrible," he added, shuddering from the scent.

\* \* \* \* \*

"The plant DNA is the strange thing," said the Doctor. "It looks quite similar to something I've seen before. Almost like one of the food sources we had at home, which was distilled from highly nutritious algae. I would almost say that it's possible that someone has crossbred these Greyslugs with an alga to turn them into a food source. But why change plants into animals just to eat them?"

"Doctor," said the Captain. "I can't have you frightening the other passengers. You are not to talk about these theories of yours with anyone other than myself. Is that understood?"

Before the Doctor could answer, the Captain's mobile phone rang. "What!" he bellowed into it and raced out of the door.

Bidding farewell to Doctor Howe, the Doctor chased after the Captain. Four decks up, the Captain and the Doctor came upon a small group of crewmembers huddled around a

Greyslug. Some of them had pool skimmers and some had shuffleboard sticks. They were keeping it contained within the small circle.

“Help,” came the slippery voice of the Greyslug.

The Doctor’s eyes went wide.

\* \* \* \* \*

As Tamara and Peter followed the trail of passengers on the sick list, they found a progression in the apparatus that they found in each room. The rooms of the first passengers to be stricken were either empty or had apparatus with empty beakers. As they went through the cabins in chronological order, they found more and more of the grey jelly in the large beakers. The beakers in the last cabin had been overflowing with the grey mass, so much so that the grey blob didn’t even touch the bottom of the beaker. At the bottom was what appeared to be a corrosive compound: a handful of white crystals that gave off a small whiff of white smoke.

“I think it’s melting down the grey blobs in order to distil them,” Peter had said.

“It looks that way,” Tamara had answered.

Now, as they looked at the state of the cabin of a couple that had taken ill only three days earlier, they discovered the horrible truth. The apparatus stood in the centre of the room untouched. And on the two bunk beds lay two Greyslugs, dressed in the remnants of clothing.

“Help us,” came the voice of the Greyslug in the upper bunk.

“Gurgle,” said the Greyslug in the lower bunk.

“They’re passengers,” said Tamara. “The Greyslugs are passengers. And someone’s distilling them into little jars of grey slime.”

“I think I’m going to be sick,” said Peter, as he rushed towards the toilet.

“What about your parents?” said Tamara. “They’ve been infected. In a day or two...”

A puddle of slime began to form around the Greyslug.

“Don’t hurt it,” said the Doctor. “It’s not malevolent.”

The slime began to bubble and give off smoke.

“It’s acid,” said the Doctor. “Careful.”

The acid burnt through the deck and the Greyslug landed on the floor below with a squishing sound. Looking through the smoking hole, the Captain saw the Greyslug quickly ambling across the deck.

“After it!” he shouted.

The Doctor raced with the small group down to the deck below. The Greyslug was nowhere to be seen. After a few moments, one of the crewmembers shouted. It had spotted another hole burned in the deck. They rushed down one more level. They searched for several minutes, but the Greyslug had eluded them.

“Strange that there’s no slime,” said the Doctor, examining the edge of the hole. “It appears they have the ability to make it or not, depending on whether they need it.”

He stood up.

“Captain,” said the Doctor. “We need to do a thorough search of the entire ship. I’ll get some of my equipment. If we can calm one of the creatures, I think I can communicate with it.”

"Doctor," said the Captain. "I am still in charge of this ship, and the last thing I need is a ship full of hysterical passengers."

"But Captain," said the Doctor. "We might be running out of time."

"Doctor," said the Captain. "You are on holiday. I suggest you avail yourself of some of the wonderful activities on board the ship and let us handle the creatures."

"I have much more experience with these sorts of creatures than any of your crew will have," said the Doctor.

"That was not a suggestion, Doctor," said the Captain. "That was an order."

"I'm afraid I can't just let these creatures be hunted by your crew," began the Doctor.

"I am the Captain, and you will obey me," shouted Captain Stammers. "If you don't leave this area at once and cease any attempts to investigate these events, I will have you confined to the brig for the remainder of this voyage. Is that understood?"

The Doctor could see that the Captain was on the verge of carrying out his threat.

"Understood," said the Doctor.

\* \* \* \* \*

Tamara's mobile phone rang. Surprised, she answered it.

"Tamara," came the Doctor's voice.

"I didn't think this phone would work," said Tamara.

"PDM," explained the Doctor. "I was able to hack into the old phone company records and convince the computer to connect me with your outdated number. Luckily, the system was originally designed to be backward compatible."

"Doctor, there's a lot I want to tell you."

"Me too," said the Doctor. "Meet me in the TARDIS."

\* \* \* \* \*

As the Doctor peered through his microscope to examine the black slime that Tamara had brought him, Tamara told him of their findings in the cabins.

"So here's what I think," said Tamara. "I think the infection is turning the passengers into these Greyslugs, and then someone is killing the poor creatures and distilling them into this black liquid for some terrible purpose."

"Sounds about right," said the Doctor. "This distillate appears to be an extremely powerful nutritional supplement. I daresay: if you ate this every day of your life, you could live forever."

"Well someone on this ship is using it as his or her very own food supply then," said Tamara.

"I wonder if the Captain could be behind it. He seems very concerned that I stop investigating immediately."

"What about Doctor Howe?" asked Tamara. "He got sick earlier, when we started asking him about the people being relocated."

"He was fine when I saw him," said the Doctor.

"I wonder if he was faking it to avoid answering questions," said Tamara. "He's the only one who's had access to all of the sick passengers, and he seems to be keeping Captain Stammers in the dark as to how bad things really are."

"You could be right," said the Doctor.

"Can you find a cure for it, Doctor?" asked Tamara.

He looked at her for a few seconds.

"It's Kamal and Sasheen," said Tamara. "They've both been infected."

"I don't think I can reverse the process for those who have already mutated into the full Greyslug hybrids," said the Doctor sadly. "But I'll see what I can do for the Kalias, as well as the rest of the people who've just started changing."

The Doctor worked for hours, while Tamara and Peter got a list of all of the remaining infected people.

"Thirty-five people," said Tamara when she reported back to the Doctor.

"I'll make up thirty-five batches of the antidote," said the Doctor. "Tell me Tamara, were any of the Greyslug people able to speak?"

"A couple of them, why?"

"I'd like to question one later. Maybe they can identify who did this to them."

"Do you want me to do it?" asked Tamara.

"No," said the Doctor. "I want you and Peter to distract the Captain. If he spots me snooping around, he might have me locked up - and by the time I escape, it might be too late."

"Fine," said Tamara.

As the Doctor started working on the antidote, Tamara filled Peter in on the plan and got changed for dinner.

\* \* \* \* \*

"There," said the Doctor, putting the last batch of vials and syringes into a small carrying case.

"That should be enough for the ones we know are infected, as well as the ones we don't know about yet."

He left a note on the table for Tamara and headed for cabin 1720, the cabin in which Tamara had said she had talked to the Greyslugs.

As he exited cabin 237 and closed the door, Raja and Kismet Jhalli appeared at the end of the hallway.

"There you are, Doctor," said Jolly Roger. "We were just coming to get you. I believe I saw a turkey in the buffet." Raja chortled.

"I'm afraid I'm a bit busy right now," said the Doctor.

"Oh," said Kismet. "Too busy to eat?"

"Yes," said the Doctor, starting off towards the elevator. "As I told you, once things start to fall apart, there's usually no time to eat."

"Things are falling apart are they, Doctor?" asked Raja.

"Oh yes," said the Doctor. "Someone has created a hybrid Greyslug that is infecting passengers on this ship and is turning them into food."

The Jhalli's blinked as if they hadn't heard the Doctor correctly.

"Food?"

"You met the Waljis, didn't you?" asked the Doctor.

"You don't mean..." said Kismet.

"I *do* mean," answered the Doctor.

When they got to cabin 1720, the Doctor pushed open the door that Tamara had left open for him.

Inside, they found the macabre scientific equipment, as well as a middle-aged couple who were already well on their way to becoming Greyslugs. Someone had moved them from their bunk beds into the giant beakers. Their bloated bodies were stuffed into the tops of the beakers. Their heads bobbed around as they tried to free themselves.

"Oh my God," said Raja. "What are these things?"

"They're your fellow passengers," said the Doctor, taking a couple of syringes out of his pocket. The Greyslug-people looked at them in horror and tried to escape, but succeeded only in wedging themselves further into the glass jars.

"Don't worry," said the Doctor as he injected each of them with the antidote. "You'll feel much better very soon."

To Raja and Kismet he said, "Help me get these poor people back into their bunks."

While the trio returned the couple back to their beds, they flopped and twisted as if trying to escape. Only when they were back in the beds did they calm down a little.

"Now," said the Doctor. "Let's see if we can communicate with them."

He stood in front of the Greyslug-person on the upper bunk. "Can you understand me?" he asked.

The Greyslug made a moaning sound.

The Doctor tried for a time, but could not hear any intelligible sounds.

"Let me try," said Raja. "Perhaps they're trying to speak Hindi."

Raja leaned in to the upper bunk and whispered something to the Greyslug. It tried to speak, its mouth making guttural sounds.

"I'm afraid I don't understand it either," said Raja. A hissing sound from above caused the trio to turn their attention to the ceiling.

White smoke began to appear and then suddenly, with a terrifying crash, a Greyslug melted its way through the ceiling and fell onto the floor of the cabin, separating the Doctor and Kismet from Raja.

The Greyslug seemed stunned momentarily, and then turned slowly looking back and forth between Raja and the Doctor and Kismet. It stretched its head up, as if rearing to charge, and let itself fall forward, putting itself between the Doctor and Raja. Raja looked around for an escape route. He began to inch along the back wall of the cabin, hoping to be able to clamber up onto the dresser and leap towards the door, but the Greyslug pushed against the apparatus table with its bulk, causing it to cut off Raja's path and leave him trapped against the door to the toilet.

"Help me!" shouted Raja.

The Doctor leapt at the Greyslug and tried to grab it around its slippery neck, but the acid on its skin burned his hands and the Doctor let out a roar of pain.

Raja managed to get the door to the toilet open and fell inside. As he tried to close the door, however, the Greyslug's great bulk was already blocking it.

"No, no!" cried Raja. "Get away from me."

The Greyslug's body filled the door of the small toilet, and the Doctor and Kismet could only watch helplessly as it pushed its way into the tiny room, towards the helpless man.

Raja screamed.

And then the screaming stopped.

## Episode Three

The Doctor looked around desperately for something to use as a weapon against the Greyslug.

An odd and yet familiar sound broke the silence in the small toilet, from which only a moment before Raja's screams could be heard.

The Greyslug screeched somehow and then began making a gurgling sound, as its body seemed to deflate.

The Doctor watched, astonished, as the Greyslug shrunk to the size of a normal earth slug. When the shrinking had stopped, the Greyslug was dead.

The Doctor looked up at Raja and saw the device that had made the familiar sound. Jolly Roger was holding a Tissue Compression Eliminator in his hand. He was smiling at the Doctor. With his left hand, Raja touched a tiny button on his lapel and his face began to change into the familiar form of his oldest enemy: the Master.

The face was familiar: the same one he had taken from Tremas all those years ago, but it was old and decrepit. It looked even older than Tremas had when the Master had originally stolen his body.

"You're behind this abomination," spat the Doctor. "I should have guessed."

"Oh, come now, Doctor," said the Master. "I'm sure you have two or three other acquaintances that are capable of a scheme of this nature."

He smiled benignly at the Doctor.

"As you can see, the body that was created for me by the Nlakans was not designed for, shall we say, extended wear. It was only designed to last long enough to be executed. The cells are degenerating rapidly. I need to re-invigorate myself several times a day."

"Re-invigorate! By killing innocent cruise ship passengers!"

"How do you know that these people aren't going to be killed by the Daleks over the next decade, Doctor?" asked the Master smugly. "I'm giving them a chance to help a dying man."

"You've cheated death enough times, Master," said the Doctor. "First with Tremas' body and then with the new life cycle given to you by the Time Lords - and now this clone of Tremas' body. It's time to give up, Master. You've lived a very long life. Much longer than anyone deserves. Especially you."

"My dear Doctor," said the Master. "How ironic that you should put it that way."

He smiled again as his companion Kismet raised the neural disrupter to the back of the Doctor's neck and stunned him into unconsciousness.

\* \* \* \* \*

Tamara and Peter had wangled an invitation to the Captain's table. Tamara was charming the entire table with her tales of espionage, while Peter just looked at her in amazement. Tamara deftly kept the conversation away from Greyslugs, unknown illnesses, and, most importantly, the Doctor. She hoped the Doctor would have plenty of time to interrogate one of the Greyslug-passengers, and she hoped that he had completed the antidote that would be needed to save Peter's parents.

\* \* \* \* \*

When the Doctor regained consciousness, he found himself standing upright in a glass cylinder.

He tried to move, but found that he couldn't. He was held fast by a series of leather straps around his arms and legs, his chest and torso, and one around his forehead. On his head was a metallic helmet with thirteen electrodes jutting out of the top.

As his vision cleared, he noticed that they were in the main lounge. He saw the Master working away at a console, connecting wires to it that ran from the chamber in which the Doctor was being held as well as from an identical chamber a few feet away. A very thick cable that obviously carried a lot of power ran from the console to the grandfather clock along the wall. The Master's TARDIS.

Aside from the Master, the room was devoid of people.

"Doctor," said the Master, when he noticed that the Doctor was conscious. "How nice of you to join us."

"What are you up to now, Master?" asked the Doctor.

"With you here, my dear Doctor, I hardly have need of these pathetic creatures."

"So you plan to drain my life essence?"

"More than that, Doctor. I plan to take your remaining regenerations."

"That's foolish," said the Doctor. "That body will be unable to store the Artron energy."

"Come now, Doctor," said the Master. "Do you really think that I would be so foolish as to try this if I didn't think it would work? The Nlakan's cloning machine was amazingly thorough. I've discovered that their device replicated the cell matrix given to me by the Time Lords in order to give this body a new regenerative cycle. All that's missing is the Artron

energy, Doctor, and I can use this body to regenerate once again. How many lives have you got left? Five? Six?"

"This is my eighth self," said the Doctor.

"So at least five, then, maybe a little more depending how much extra Artron energy your cells have absorbed living in a TARDIS for eight hundred years. So you see, Doctor, I have no reason to believe this won't work."

"And have you ever thought that maybe what your doing is just plain wrong. That *that* is a good enough reason not to do it."

"Doctor," said the Master disappointedly. "How long have we known each other?"

"Long enough for you to have learned something about morality. Long enough for you to realise that other living beings are as important as you are. That we've all been given an equal gift of life and that being greedy and selfish goes against the very nature that has given you this gift."

The Master looked long and hard at the Doctor, and finally spoke.

"You know why I am this way," said the Master quietly. "Ten thousand years hasn't made one bit of difference." He flicked a switch and the Doctor's body stiffened as a current began to run through it. A meter on the Master's console that measured the Artron energy potential in the Doctor's body slowly began to climb.

\* \* \* \* \*

Ensign Colin Raesler consulted the deck plan again and made his way down a short flight of stairs. He had calculated the Greyslug's path of descent, and figured he would head it off as it came through the ceiling of the empty ballast tank. He opened the first of two double-doors that led to the huge tank. He closed the first door and then double-checked to make sure that there was no pressure, before opening the interior door. He was hit by a wave of water that lapped over the edge of the airlock.

Colin was surprised that there was still this much water in the ballast tank. Then he realised why. There was a Greyslug sized hole in the ceiling of the tank. And on the floor of the tank, the panicked Greyslug was melting itself another hole: straight through the hull of the ship. Agitated by the salt water, the Greyslug was putting out more acidic slime, causing the twenty centimetres of salt water in the tank to take on the same acidic properties and slowly but surely begin to burn through the hull.

Colin slammed the door shut, opened the outer door, slammed it shut too and dialed the bridge on his mobile communicator.

\* \* \* \* \*

Peter waited in the hallway as Tamara went into her cabin to get the Doctor's antidote. She came out a few moments later, with a case full of syringes that she had found lying on the table next to his equipment. She hoped it was the antidote. She hoped it would work. The ship's alarm came on just as she was coming out of the cabin.

"Attention all passengers," came the Captain's voice over the Tannoy. "This is Captain Stammers. The ship is taking on water. This is an order for all passengers to abandon ship. There is plenty of time to get into the lifeboats. Please proceed in an orderly fashion to the nearest muster station and follow the instructions of the crew. Please remember that blood vaccine carriers will have first priority in the lifeboats."

The message began to repeat.

"Oh God," said Peter. "This can't be happening. I've got to find my parents."

"And I've got to find the Doctor," said Tamara. "I hate to say this, Peter, but I think we had better split up."

"I'll see you on the rescue ship, then," said Peter.

Tamara looked at him. "We have our own craft on board, Peter. We might not end up in any of the lifeboats."

They looked into each others' eyes for a few seconds and then kissed passionately, for just a little longer than the urgency of the situation allowed.

"Call me as soon as you get away from the ship," said Peter.

"I'll try," said Tamara.

The pair ran up several decks, and then, with one more hurried kiss, they split up: Peter, with two of the syringes in his hand, running in the direction of his parents' cabin; and Tamara in the direction of the main deck.

Tamara had no idea where the Doctor might be. She had to avoid various crewmembers that were herding passengers away from the entertainment areas.

Tamara scanned the crowd, shouting for the Doctor over the sound of the alarm bell, the constant repetition of the Captain's message on the loud speakers, and the distraught voices of the other passengers.

\* \* \* \* \*

Diana, who had been having an amazingly good time with a couple of guys from Italy who were working on the ship for a year as musicians, was finding it more and more difficult to crawl up the slippery, angled dance floor towards the door leading to the outer deck.

The couple of guys from Italy, who were also into mountain climbing, were trying to use their mountaineering skills to get the three of them up the wooden floor to safety.

Outside, the trio could hear a few people rushing around like mad, some crewmembers calling orders to passengers, some passengers calling orders to crewmembers.

When Diana and the musicians finally made it to the doorway and hoisted themselves around the corner and collapsed against the wall, they witnessed a parade of other passengers trying to race along the deck by walking half on the floor and half on the wall. They quickly picked themselves up and went with the flow.

Diana at first wondered why so many people were coming along this side of the ship, and soon realised that these were people who had decided they could get onto the lifeboats faster if they raced around to the other side of the ship and ran around towards the front and approached the lifeboats from the less-populated foredeck.

Many of them ended up tripping over opened doors and injuring themselves and then getting trampled by others who were eager to jump the queue and escape the sinking ship as soon as possible.

Diana and the Italian guys helped an elderly lady to her feet and led her in the direction of the lifeboats.

\* \* \* \* \*

As Kismet entered the lounge, struggling to close the door of the now steeply inclined ship, the Doctor could hear the sounds of the people rushing past the lounge entrance. The alarm and the Captain's message were slightly quieter in the lounge than they were out on the deck.

"I'm ready if you are, my dear," said the Master, stepping into the other glass cylinder. Kismet affixed a helmet similar to the Doctor's onto his head.

\* \* \* \* \*

Peter began to have trouble keeping his balance as he found his parents cabin. Inside, he found his father trying to lift his mother off of the bunk. Her weight was too much for him when combined with the angle of the ship.

"Dad," shouted Peter. "I've got an antidote. The Doctor made it."

Peter rushed to his mother's side. He was shocked to see how bad she looked. Her skin was dark grey all over her body. It had started to become very soft and fleshy. Peter was worried that he would not be able to find a vein properly. He saw the jugular vein pulsing in his mother's neck and decided that it would have to do. He slowly pushed the needle through the thick but gelatinous skin, and when he was as certain as he could be that the tip was in the vein, he slowly injected half the contents of the syringe into her.

"Give her the other one too," said his father.

"No," said Peter. "This is for you."

He took his father's greying arm and injected the antidote into his father. The ship lurched and the needle stabbed Kamal.

"I don't even feel it," said Kamal sadly. Peter pulled out the needle, tossed it into a corner, and together with his father they picked up Sasheen and began the long trip up the slanted ship.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Ready?" asked Kismet.

"I am," said the Master.

"Why are you helping him?" asked the Doctor. "Do you know how many people he's already killed? Do you think he'll hesitate to kill you?"

"I've been with the Master for forty years now, Doctor," answered Kismet. "I think I know where I stand." She flicked a switch.

"Don't do this," said the Doctor, just as the ship lurched a little and the angle at which it was sinking became more pronounced.

Kismet finished flicking the rest of the switches and then pulled down the large red lever. An increasingly loud hum filled the room as both the Doctor's and the Master's bodies began to vibrate.

\* \* \* \* \*

Tamara was racing through every room on the deck, calling for the Doctor. She was trying doors that had been locked by the crew once the rooms had been cleared. She broke open the doors in order to check if the Doctor was inside.

\* \* \* \* \*

The large column that registered the Doctor's Artron levels was filled with a deep, blood-red gas. The identical glass column affixed to the top of the Master's cylinder was clear. Slowly a pink gas began to seep into the Master's Artron indicator.

\* \* \* \* \*

Peter helped his parents into a lifeboat and then told them that he would come on another. He managed to work his way back through the crowd of people and avoided the crewmembers that were trying to keep people from panicking and pushing and shouting.

He started opening doors and looking in windows and saw something that seemed to make time stop for him for a second. As he peered through the small, round window into the lounge, he saw the Doctor, an old man he didn't recognize and Kismet Jhalli doing something that he couldn't even begin to explain. The door was locked or jammed shut, and when he banged on the door and shouted, no one inside reacted. He decided he would find Tamara first and then worry about the Doctor.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Doctor's Artron indicator was a paler shade of red now, and the pink gas in the Master's indicator was getting deeper and redder by the second. The Doctor couldn't speak as the Artron energy was being drained from his cells. The Master, too, was unable to move as the power entering his cells froze him as if there were an electric current flowing through him.

Kismet had settled on the halfway point for the lever. She had calculated that the Doctor's Artron energy would be drained at this rate with plenty of time for her and the Master to escape the sinking ship. Transfer the energy too quickly and the equipment could overload and then a cooling off period would be required. That would be wasted time that they didn't have.

"Tamara," shouted Peter, losing his balance, falling face first onto the wet deck and sliding down the hallway into the knee-deep water in which Tamara was standing.

"Peter, you've got to get off this ship," yelled Tamara.

"I've found the Doctor," he said as he held onto her for support.

"Where?" she asked.

"In the lounge," he said, "but the doors locked."

As the pair made their way back up to the lounge, Tamara grabbed a couple of fire axes.

\* \* \* \* \*

In the lounge, the Artron indicators were both a bright shade of red now as the Doctor's Artron energy drained from his shaking body.

Suddenly, a fire axe broke through the door of the lounge. Kismet heard the sound and reached for the Master's tissue compression eliminator.

"Kill them both," shouted the Master with great effort. "They must not interfere."

Tamara threw her axe at Kismet, catching her off-guard, and then leaped forward, punching and kicking.

"Get the red lever," shouted the Doctor through clenched teeth. While Tamara fought with Kismet, who was remarkably fit for a fifty-five year old woman, Peter went to the console and pushed the red lever up. The humming sound increased in pitch and a spark jumped from the helmets of both the Doctor and the Master, leaping across the two meters of space between them.

"Wrong way," shouted Tamara as she kicked Kismet in the jaw, finally sending the woman into unconsciousness.

Peter pulled the lever in the opposite direction and the Doctor's body relaxed suddenly. He appeared to be unconscious.

"Get out of here," shouted Tamara.

"Let me help you with him," said Peter, going to the Doctor. As he tried to loosen the Doctor's restraints, he felt an electrical charge coursing through the Doctor's body.

"This machine's still on," he said. Tamara looked at the instrument panel and flicked the entire bank of switches. All of the green lights went off. And just to be on the safe side, she disconnected the power cord that plugged into the side of the console as well.

Peter and Tamara loosened the Doctor's restraints.

The ship began tilting smoothly but rapidly now. Kismet began to awaken.

"What about them?" asked Peter, as he and Tamara dragged the Doctor's unconscious body out of the lounge.

"If there's time, I'll come back for them," said Tamara. "Now you get on one of those lifeboats!"

"Where are you going?" asked Peter.

"I told you," said Tamara. "We have our own transportation. Have you got the antidote?"

He held up the bag of syringes and vials.

"There should be enough for everyone that needs it," Tamara said. She grabbed Peter's head and kissed him hard. "Now get the Hell out of here."

Peter did as he was told as Tamara lifted the Doctor onto her shoulders in the fireman's carry position.

"Peter!" came a voice. It was Diana. "Hurry up," she said. "Your parents are already in the water."

He ran towards her. As they got onto the lifeboat, they were helped by Doctor Howe - no longer under the Master's hypnotic spell, apparently.

"I'll need to talk to you later," Peter said to him.

\* \* \* \* \*

Tamara practically slid down the deck to the staircase, and then had to carefully drag the Doctor down the immensely steep slope of the tilted stairs. Luckily, there was water in the stairwell to break the fall when they slipped near the bottom.

As they neared the cabin that contained the TARDIS, the entire corridor was underwater. Tamara put the life preserver that she had grabbed en route onto the unconscious form of the Doctor; and leaving him floating in the water, she dove down, swam three doors down and unlocked the door to their cabin. She noticed that there was a bubble of air trapped near the ceiling of the dark room. She hoped it would be enough.

She swam back up, took in a few lungful of air as she let the air out of the Doctor's life preserver, and then, taking a huge breath of air, she dragged the unconscious Doctor under the water, kicked hard until they had reached the door to their cabin, and forced the Doctor into the room.. Once inside, she pulled him up to the air bubble and, gasping lungful of air, she re-inflated his life preserver.

Diving once again, she closed the door of their room, leaving her in pitch darkness. Another breath. Another dive. Tamara felt her way to the TARDIS and for what seemed like agonizing moments, she fumbled to get the key around her neck into the TARDIS lock. Just when she thought her lungs would burst and she would have to go back up for another lungful of air, the TARDIS door opened and Tamara was swept inside.

The cabin was instantly clear of water, except for the stream rushing under the door from the flooded corridor. Tamara crawled up the slick floor of the TARDIS to the console and flicked the switch that would set the interior right side-up again. Then, by the light of the console room streaming through the open door, she found the unconscious Doctor wedged up against the bunk beds and, working against the now nearly perpendicular ship, she dragged his waterlogged body into the TARDIS, closed the doors, dematerialized the time ship and began performing mouth-to-mouth.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Doctor was lying on a couch in front of a roaring fire. Tamara had made him some tea, which he was drinking slowly to warm himself up after his time in the cold water. His acid-burned hands had been wrapped in gauze.

Tamara had a blanket wrapped around herself her body and was treating herself to a hot chocolate. She had used the PDM that the Doctor had swiped to send Peter an e-mail telling him that she was all right.

"What happened?" asked the Doctor, when he noticed she had finished.

"Peter pulled the lever the wrong way," said Tamara.

"That caused the spark," said the Doctor. "I remember now. That's when I lost consciousness. How long was I out?"

"Until a few minutes ago."

"No," said the Doctor. "How long before you disconnected me from the machine?"

"We tried to un-strap you from the device, but there was still some kind of charge running through you. I had to disconnect the power first."

"How long?" asked the Doctor weakly.

"Maybe thirty seconds," said Tamara.

The Doctor went white. "Thirty seconds? That's not enough time. Did you notice the glass tube above my head?"

"I don't know. Maybe?"

"What colour was the gas inside?"

"Oh, the glass tube. Yes. It was a reddish-pink, I guess."

"Reddish-pink. Not dark, dark red?"

Tamara shook her head.

"Oh, no," said the Doctor.

"What's wrong?" asked Tamara.

The Doctor's head fell backwards and he lost consciousness.

All of the colour had drained from the Doctor's face.

Tamara thought for a second that he had stopped breathing. As she jumped up and knelt beside the Doctor's couch, he opened his eyes and whispered hoarsely, "Something's not right."

\* \* \* \* \*

"Master," shouted Kismet as she disconnected him from the transference machinery. He did not regain consciousness. Kismet dragged him across the floor to the grandfather clock, kicked the door open with her foot, and then dragged the Master into his TARDIS.

Dematerializing the space/time craft, Kismet waited anxiously for the Master to stir. His hearts were beating. He was breathing. She loosened his clothing and touched his face. She stroked his hair. The Master's breathing got shallower and shallower. Tears started to stream down Kismet's face. The sound of the air was raspier in his throat now, but even as his body struggled for air he did not awaken.

"Don't die," she pleaded, crouching beside him and taking hold of his hand. His hand suddenly lost all of its warmth and she was holding a cold dead hand. The breathing had stopped and the face was lifeless.

"Oh, no," cried Kismet. "Master," she cried. "Master!"

Then the Master's hand started to warm up very quickly and it became too hot to hold. As she dropped his hand, his skin began to glow. She took a step back and lost her balance. When she had righted herself the process had already finished and she was staring at the face of a new man. Her new Master.

The Master took a couple of very deep breaths and then opened his eyes.

He turned his head and looked directly into Kismet's eyes.

"You're not my wife," he said.

He sat up too quickly and looked around wildly. "And this isn't my TARDIS," he shouted.

"Calm down," said Kismet. "You've just regenerated." She laid her hands on his shoulders and tried to push him back to the floor of the TARDIS.

"It's a trick," he said. "It's a trick."

"Shh," said Kismet soothingly. "You'll be alright."

"You're working for them, aren't you," he said in a voice that frightened Kismet. "This has been their plan from the beginning."

"Who are you talking about, Darling," said Kismet. "You're confused. You need to rest. Let me put you to bed and in the morning everything will seem clear."

The Master let himself be led out of the control room. Kismet could hear him mumbling under his breath, over and over again, "We'll see. We'll see."







The Doctor and Tamara find themselves on a luxury cruise ship where they find that they must battle more than long buffet queues, copious tropical drinks, and swimsuit-clad beach volleyball players. The ship is being overrun by monsters, and it's a life or death race as the Doctor and Tamara try to stop the creatures before they kill everyone on board.

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