

THE  
**DOCTOR WHO**  
PROJECT

**The End**



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Once upon a time, a little girl was told by her mother to take some food to her grandmother who lived at the heart of a wood and, while she was on her way, a wolf approached her and asked her where she was bound.

*"To Grandmother's house," the girl replied.*

*So the wolf asked the girl whether she was going by the path of pins or the path of needles.*

*"The path of needles," the girl replied.*

*So the wolf ran off on the path of pins and arrived before the girl and he killed the poor old grandmother. He poured her blood into a bottle, sliced up her flesh and put it on a plate, then dressed in her nightclothes and waited in the bed. There was a knock at the door and the girl came inside.*

*"I have brought you some bread and some milk, Grandmother," she said.*

*"That's very kind of you," the wolf replied. "Why don't you have something yourself? There is meat and wine in the pantry."*

*And the little girl went and ate what was offered. As she did so, a little cat said, "Slut! To eat the flesh and drink the blood of your grandmother!"*

*Then the wolf said, "Undress and get into bed with me, my darling."*

*The little girl hesitated. "But where shall I put my apron?"*

*"Throw it on the fire," the wolf replied. "You won't need it anymore."*

*And so for her bodice, skirt, petticoat and all, the girl asked the same question and each time the wolf replied, "Throw it on the fire, you won't need it anymore."*

*When the girl got into bed, she said, "Grandmother, how hairy you are."*

*"It keeps me warm, my dear," the wolf replied.*

*"Oh, Grandmother," the girl continued, "what long nails you have."*

*"They are for scratching myself, my darling," the wolf explained.*

*"And Grandmother," the little girl said finally, "what big teeth you have."*

*Then the wolf grinned and ate her.*

\* \* \* \*

The priest was intoning his words over the coffin, but Silver was only half listening. She felt uncomfortable standing in the cemetery at his funeral, like she did not belong. It was her fault that he was dead, after all. He had sacrificed himself to save her life.

Victor Cole, twenty years old, fresh out of college, fiancé to Emily, UNIT soldier, victim of the Voord.

The priest finished his monologue and Cole's body was interred, not in the earth as Silver was familiar with, but in a stone tomb above ground. The water table in New Orleans made below ground burials impractical. The Doctor had told her that heavy rains had once caused coffins to rise up out of the ground, sending bodies floating down flooded city streets. He had been quite animated as he talked about it. Silver did not share his enthusiasm.

Captain Julian Baptiste reached across to put a comforting arm around her. Julian was a big man, with a broad nose and short dark hair that curled against his scalp. His skin was the colour of rich black coffee. He looked distinctly uncomfortable in his dark suit. Silver shrugged him away. The Doctor liked him and there was no question that he had been a big help preventing the Voord invasion, but he had not earned the right to touch her.

Standing on her left, the Doctor wisely kept his hands to himself, but Silver did catch him watching over her with concern. Silver shot back a dark look. What exactly did he think she was going to do? She struggled to recall what Wiccans believed happened after death, what *she* believed. Was Victor Cole supposed to be reincarnated or was his spirit supposed to go on to Summerland? No matter how hard Silver tried, she could not remember.

The tomb was closed once more and the funeral procession began to wind its way out of the cemetery. On their way in, the band had played a dirge, but now they launched into a spirited rendition of *When The Saints Come Marching In*. The Doctor grinned broadly, showing sparkling teeth. Silver scowled.

\* \* \* \*

*Silver would have backed away, but she was already pressed up against the rail of the boat. The Voord was advancing towards her, blood already staining its flipper-like hands. The alien's rubber-like skin glistened wetly in the moonlight. It thrust its rubber-like head forward and Silver screwed her eyes shut, not able to look her death in the face.*

*There was a rustle of movement, a thump and a splash and Silver forced herself to open her eyes.*

*The Voord was in the water, struggling with Cole who must have knocked it overboard. Even in the darkness, Silver could see blood rising off the pair. Struggling to free his arm, Cole raised his pistol so that it was level with the Voord's temple and then he fired. The Voord flopped back limply and then was still.*

*And so was Cole.*

\* \* \* \*

Silver and the Doctor were left alone with Julian after the funeral. The Doctor extended a hand.

"It was a pleasure working with you, Captain," he said, "wasn't it, Silver?"

"Yeah, whatever." Silver's mind was elsewhere so it took her a moment to realise what she had said and how rude she was being. "I mean it was really great to meet you. You were a big help."

"Yes, he was, wasn't he?" The Doctor's smile had not faltered for a moment.

"The feeling's mutual, Doctor," Julian drawled. Silver shifted her wait uncomfortably from one foot to the other. She had hardly been part of the TARDIS crew five minutes and she had already learned to hate these goodbyes.

"So, what do you plan to do now?" the Doctor was asking.

Julian shrugged. "I've got some leave owed so I thought I'd go visit my folks."

"Yes, you said you had family in New Orleans...well, I guess Silver and I had better be getting back to the TARDIS. Things to see, planets to save..."

"Do we have to, Doctor?" Silver piped up. The Doctor raised an eyebrow. "I...I mean, couldn't we stay here?"

The Doctor drew her to one side. It gave the illusion of privacy even though Silver was well aware that Julian could still overhear their conversation.

"I'm sorry, Silver," the Doctor said, his smile fading at last. "This has been harder for you than I anticipated. I suppose we're not so far from your home here, so I'll understand if you want to stay."

"You mean leave the TARDIS?"

The Doctor nodded.

"No!" Silver vehemently spat out the word, perhaps with more force than she intended. She forced herself to lower her voice. "No. I'm not about to leave...all this...just yet, but...we never seem to get a break, do we? I'd just like some time to think and..."

"If you're looking for a holiday then you've come to the right place," Julian interrupted. "Where better than New Orleans during Mardi Gras?"

"Mardi Gras?" The Doctor brightened again. "You'll like this, Silver. Yes, you'll like this a lot." He and Julian began to walk down the street and Silver had no choice but to follow. "Did you know that the festival of Mardi Gras has been celebrated in one form or another for thousands of years? The Romans had a spring festival called Lupercalia."

"Lupercalia?"

"Named after Lupercus," the Doctor explained, "he who guards the sheep from the wolves."

"Sounds a bit like you, Doctor," Julian commented.

"Yes, I suppose he does..."

\* \* \* \*

It was at times like this that Natalie wondered what it was she saw in Garfield Byrne. With her wavy, honey-blond hair and her pop starlet looks, Natalie could have had the pick of any boy in school, and had numerous offers to prove it. But the jocks always came off as false. Sure, they had the looks, but they were only interested in one thing when all was said and done. Everyone

expected her, as head cheerleader, to be the scatter-brained bimbo hanging on the arm of the captain of the football team, but Natalie had a brain; she had aced her way through high school.

Scrawny, freckle-covered Garfield may not have seemed the most attractive catch, but he could at least manage a conversation and he listened – really listened – to what Natalie had to say. And if he had his little obsessions, well, didn't everyone?

But Garfield's obsessions could be downright infuriating at times.

"I've invited the coven here tonight," Garfield was saying as he shifted furniture, creating a large open space in the main room of the apartment they shared over the occult bookstore.

"Tonight, Garfield?" Natalie did not bother trying to hide her irritation.

Garfield looked up at her, raising a hand to stop his glasses sliding down his nose.

"Yes, tonight. Why?"

"You know why."

"No, I don't."

"Yes, you do."

"No, I really don't, Nat."

"Gar, you can be so..." Natalie waved her hands as though hoping to pluck the appropriate simile from the air. "Ugh! It's our anniversary, you dork. One year since we got engaged."

"It is?" Garfield dropped the chair he was carrying and ran to her side, taking her hands in his. "I'm really sorry, Nat. I completely forgot. Can you forgive me?"

"Does this mean you'll postpone the coven?" Natalie asked. "There's this nice restaurant..."

"You know I want to," Garfield protested, "but I can't."

"What do you mean you can't?"

"Here, let me show you." Garfield released Natalie and unrolled a chart over the table he had placed against the far wall. "See this alignment of stars. It'll be eighteen months before we get another chance like this."

"So what? It's not like it's really going to work, is it?"

"It won't if you don't have faith," Garfield retorted petulantly. "I know you don't take what I do seriously, but you know how important this is to me. You could at least try and be a little more understanding about..." He trailed off as he realised Natalie was staring daggers at him. "What?"

Natalie spun on her heel.

"I'm going to get some air," she said.

\* \* \* \*

Silver woke with a start. She had not meant to nod off, just rest for a while, but as soon as she closed her eyes the dream had claimed her. She hurried into the bathroom and splashed cold water over her face. She had been back on that yacht again, with those things, and the terror had been just as powerful and debilitating as the first time. Studying herself in the mirror, she ran a hand through her black hair, trying to restore some shape to it. She could hear the sound of partying outside, a carnival parade in full swing, but she did not hurry to the window to take a look. All she could see from the window of her room was a car park.

The Doctor had the view out on to the street and he had initially offered that room to Silver. He had looked hurt when Silver declined, but she could not bear to look at the painting over the bed, showing a boat on the Mississippi. She had thought that in this room she might be safe from her memories. Some chance.

Grabbing a jacket from where she had abandoned it over the back of a chair, Silver left her room and descended the spiral staircase to the hotel lobby. She and the Doctor had agreed to meet on the terrace to watch the parade go by. When she got as far as the door, however, Silver stopped. The Doctor was sitting at a table with Captain Julian Baptiste. Julian was knocking back a beer – not his first, judging by the empty glasses – while the Doctor sipped at a lemonade. Julian's presence was not in itself unsettling; Silver knew that he was staying nearby and the Doctor seemed to like him, though the Doctor seemed to like everybody. Julian's topic of conversation, however, was.

"All I'm saying is that I think you've made a big mistake," Julian said.

The Doctor's eyes narrowed behind his sunglasses. "You're entitled to your opinion, of course, Captain. I'll be sure to give it the consideration it deserves."

"By which you mean you'll ignore it," Julian replied. "Rachel's just fifteen."

"She prefers to be called Silver," the Doctor observed.

"And you encourage her, I suppose."

The Doctor shrugged slightly. "It's her choice."

"She should be in school, Doctor," Julian continued, "with other kids her own age, not flying through time and space meeting Cybermen, Yeti and God knows what else."

"Her father is dead, Captain," the Doctor replied. "Her mother is gone. Would you rather I abandoned her to the care of social workers and strangers?"

"Yes, Doctor. Yes, I would. They're professionals. They know how to help girls like Rachel. What you've done...well, it's tantamount to kidnapping."

"Are you okay?" the receptionist asked, noticing Silver still hesitating in the doorway.

The sudden voice from behind her made Silver jump, but she recovered quickly.

"I'm fine." She forced herself to throw the receptionist a slight smile. "Thanks."

She stepped out onto the terrace to join the others.

"Good evening, Silver." The Doctor raised his glass in a toast. "Sleep well?"

\* \* \* \*

"You look ridiculous," Natalie said. She leant wearily against the doorframe, not entering the room in case that implied she wanted some part in the evening's activities.

"I do not," Garfield insisted. "This robe gives me power."

"It's a dress," Natalie replied matter-of-factly.

"It's a wizard's robe," Garfield replied haughtily. "Each of these symbols has secret meaning."

"What's that one then?" Christopher asked, pointing to a spiral over a cross near the hem of the "robe".

"I can't tell you." Garfield snatched the robe away. "That's what secret means."

Cinnamon yawned, stretching her whole body languidly and cat-like.

"Are we going to talk, talk, talk or are we here to work some magic?"

Cinnamon and Christopher were two of the six members of Garfield's coven who were lounging on the bare floorboards or on beanbags. Christopher was an avid role-player, pretending to slay dragons in his free time. Natalie had never joined him, though Garfield did once. Apparently there was an argument over the way the game portrayed magic and Garfield never played again. Fortunately, the incident did not taint Garfield and Christopher's friendship.

Everyone called Cynthia Patterson Cinnamon, on account of the colour of her skin. She had the body of an athlete, though Natalie had never seen her work out and resented her because of it. She also disliked her, if she was honest with herself, because of the way Garfield's eyes lingered on her during these coven meetings. Maybe the reason she took part in these events had less to do with supporting her boyfriend and more to do with keeping Cinnamon's claws off him.

"Of course we're going to work some magic." Garfield ran a hand through his hair, causing it to stick up in chaotic spikes. "Tonight, we're going to perform..." He paused for dramatic effect before lowering his voice and whispering, "the summoning."

There was a collective gasp from the coven members, except for Christopher who launched into a rendition of *The Twilight Zone*. Cinnamon clocked him around the back of the head and he shut up. Natalie sighed.

"So what exactly is this summoning anyway," she asked, "and why are we cooped up in here when we could be partying the night away? Or celebrating certain special dates, right, Gar?"

"Sounds like someone hasn't been paying attention at coven meetings," Cinnamon remarked.

"This is everything we've been working to, Nat," Garfield explained. "We're going to summon the Loa. We're going to bring down the gods!"

Natalie folded her arms and raised an eyebrow. "Gods, huh? And you really think that's such a good idea?"

"If you're so afraid, Natalie," Cinnamon said, "then what are you still doing here?"

"I'm not afraid," Natalie replied. "I don't believe in any of this stuff. But if I did believe, I guess I might think twice before upsetting a god."

"We're not going to upset them," Garfield insisted, "and even if we did, we're quite safe inside the circle of protection. The seven of you are especially safe. After all, they're not going to want to harm their host bodies, are they?"

"Hang on, host bodies?"

"We're going to let the Loa ride us," Cinnamon said. "There's enough for each of us – even you, Natalie."

"Well maybe I don't want some crazy spirit thing inside me."

Cinnamon sneered. "I thought you weren't afraid."

"And what's supposed to protect you, Gar?" Natalie asked. "Besides a few chalk marks on the floor."

"I've brought the Loa an offering." He indicated a shape hidden beneath a sheet. Natalie stepped away from the door for a better look.

"What is it?"

Garfield lifted the edge of the sheet. Natalie screamed.

\* \* \* \*

Silver jumped as a face leered out at her from the dark.

"Are you all right?" the Doctor asked, rushing to her side.

"Yeah, I'm fine." Silver took a step away from the Doctor and shot an angry look at the statue that had startled her.

"I suppose the cemetery is a little spooky after dark," the Doctor conceded, stuffing his hands in his trouser pockets and staring thoughtfully up at the swollen moon. The night was cool and Silver had bundled herself in a dark jacket. The Doctor, as usual, had made no concession to the weather, wearing his usual white, collarless dress shirt, grey moleskin trousers and that midnight blue waistcoat decorated with silver stars. He had, at least, pocketed his sunglasses.

"I wasn't scared," Silver insisted. "I tripped, that's all. You'd think they'd make these places easier to get around."

The Doctor smiled tolerantly. "Well, it's not as though the residents are going anywhere."

"Except one," Silver pointed out.

A cloud passed in front of the moon, plunging the cemetery into darkness. When the moon was free again, Silver could see that the Doctor's smile had disappeared.

"Except one," he repeated hollowly. "Come on, the tomb's this way, I think."

Brandishing her torch like a club – just in case the locals were more active than the Doctor believed – Silver followed him. They were looking for Victor Cole's tomb. Silver had been on her second glass of Coke when Julian had taken the call. Silver had not really been paying much attention. There was a saxophonist in dark glasses leaning against the iron fence and while Silver was not much of a jazz fan, she had to admit that this guy was good. As such, it took her a moment to register the shock plastered across Julian's face when he returned to the table. Someone had stolen Victor's body right out of his tomb.

The Doctor was all for investigating right away. A genuine mystery was far more appealing than any holiday. Let's not worry about the fact that the victim was a friend, a friend to whom Silver owed her life. Julian had wanted to come too, but the Doctor had insisted that he and Silver could handle things themselves. He had not asked Silver if she minded going for a late night stroll in a cemetery; not that she would have dared to say no, not when he was thinking of leaving her behind.

The Doctor stopped in front of what looked like a crumbling gothic house.

"This is the one," the Doctor remarked as he eased open the wrought iron gate. Rusted hinges screamed in protest.

Silver looked up at the tomb. It might have been the one where she had said goodbye to her friend earlier (was it really still the same day?), but at night everything in the cemetery took on a more dangerous, sinister aspect.

"I've always been particularly impressed by these society tombs," the Doctor was saying as he led the way inside. Silver's torch fought to hold back the encroaching darkness, but the Doctor strode ahead of the beam, seemingly not needing it. "This is a military tomb – navy, I

think – but all sorts of professions or religious or ethnic groups might club together to provide a communal monument to house their dead. Did you know, the larger tombs can have up to twenty vaults and as for the number of permanent residents...they're more like mansions than tombs, but then I suppose the same could be said for the pyramids. Now where was young Victor?"

"Doctor," Silver began slowly, "do you ever regret letting me into the TARDIS?"

"What was that?" the Doctor called absently. He was running his hands along one wall, searching for the entrance to a particular vault.

"It's just that, well, I kind of forced you to come back for me," Silver continued, "after you'd already told me to stay behind."

"Mm-hmm." The Doctor heaved a stone slab out of the way.

"And what with you telling me you'd understand if I stayed behind and then there's what Julian was saying..." Silver trailed off. Had she gone too far by admitting she had been eavesdropping? Was the Doctor even listening to her at all? "I want to travel with you and see the universe and right wrongs and stuff, but I don't want you to feel like you're carrying round a dead weight. I guess...I guess what I'm trying to say is that if you wanted me to stay behind then...I would. If that was what you wanted."

The Doctor's head was inside a coffin.

"Silver, come and take a look."

Silver reluctantly stepped forward, uncertain as to whether she really wanted to see the coffin's inhabitant. She need not have worried; the coffin was empty.

"It appears he really is gone," the Doctor said. "Now to see if he left a forwarding address."

He pressed his head even deeper into the coffin, his fingers running along the plush lining.

"What are you looking for?" There wasn't enough room for both of them in the coffin, so Silver could only stand impotently to one side while the Doctor worked.

"Oh, I don't know." The Doctor's voice echoed around the chamber. "A hair, a book of matches, a signed confession by our body snatchers. Anything that might be considered a clue. Ah, now this is interesting."

He straightened up, a small, embroidered pouch cradled between the palms of his hands.

"What is it, Doctor?" Silver asked.

The Doctor shrugged. "I haven't the slightest idea."

\* \* \* \*

"What is that?" Natalie managed once she forced herself to stop screaming.

"It's a dead body," Cinnamon replied callously. "What does it look like?"

Natalie wanted to look away, but, like a deer in headlights, she was transfixed by the Y-shaped autopsy scar standing out in blue against the whiter than white flesh of the bloated corpse. She was grateful when Garfield covered the body up again, but her gratitude was insufficient to stem her disgust.

"What's that... that *thing* doing in our house?" she demanded.

"I told you," Garfield explained patiently, as though Natalie were a small child, "the Loa will require sustenance after their long journey from the Great Beyond."

"You're crazy," Natalie replied. Even though it was hidden by a sheet, Natalie could not help glancing anxiously at the corpse. "Where did you get it anyway?"

"From the cemetery. What, you think I went out and killed some guy off the street for this?"

Natalie put a hand to her forehead. "I don't know anymore, Gar. I mean, this is just too much and..."

"Put a sock in it, Natalie," Cinnamon snapped. "Think of what we're going to do here. Think of the power we'll have."

"It's not really about the power," Garfield muttered. "I just want to ask them a question, that's all."

Cinnamon ignored him. "We're going to be gods. And as for him – " she pointed at the corpse " – do you really think he cares? He's dead, Natalie. Dead!"

“And that makes it all right, Cin?” Natalie rounded on her, placing a hand on Cinnamon’s upper arm.

“Don’t touch me!” Cinnamon lashed out at Natalie, her long nails drawing blood from the latter’s cheek. She licked the blood from her fingertips as Natalie recoiled. “Gods, Natalie. Think about it. Your normal, petty, *mortal* rules no longer apply.”

Christopher hauled himself to his feet and interposed himself between Cinnamon and Natalie. “Hey, hey, calm down. We’re all here for the same thing, right?”

“Christopher’s right,” Garfield agreed. He rooted around in the pockets of his robe and began to produce embroidered pouches, which he dished out to the coven members. “If you’ll each take one of these...”

“What is it?” Christopher turned it over in his hands and then began to tug on the string that held it closed.

“No, don’t open it!” Garfield yelled. An embarrassed look washed over his features and he lowered his voice. “What I mean is you don’t want to let the magic escape.”

“Sure, man, whatever you say,” Christopher replied, smiling to show that there were no hard feelings, “but you still haven’t told me what this is supposed to do.”

“They’re gris-gris pouches. There’s blessed, um, herbs and stuff inside. They’ll act as focuses...”

“Foci,” Natalie corrected automatically

“...for the Loa to home in on when I start the summoning. We wouldn’t want them to occupy the wrong people by mistake, would we?”

“Now that would be a shame,” Natalie said.

Garfield handed a gris-gris pouch to Cinnamon and then turned to Natalie. His face fell and he began patting the pockets of his robe frantically.

“There was a seventh gris-gris,” he muttered, as much to himself as anyone else. “I know there was, but where is it?”

“Forget it, Garfield,” Natalie said coldly. “I don’t want to be a part of this anyway.”

“But... but...”

“You really don’t see it, do you? You’re so obsessed with playing at being witches and warlocks that you can’t see how wrong all this is?”

“We’re not playing,” Garfield insisted.

“Oh no,” Natalie retorted sarcastically, “because you really are going to summon a bunch of gods tonight. Grow up, Garfield. You’re a nice guy and I could put up with all this so long as it was just one of those odd little quirks some guys have, but this...you’ve gone too far and if you can’t see that...” Natalie trailed off, shaking her head to clear it. “I need some air.”

“When will you be back?” Garfield asked as she turned to leave. There was a plaintive edge in his voice that almost caused Natalie to stop, but she steeled herself and closed the door behind her.

\* \* \* \*

*Somewhere in the infinite darkness, something was stirring. Seven somethings, to be precise. They had been trapped here, banished to this far dimension with only mindless spirits for their prey and what good was prey that could not feel fear during the chase. These seven now fed only to survive, the pleasure of the hunt but a distant memory.*

*That memory was being awakened, however. Someone was calling to them, offering them a chance to roam in rich feeding grounds, to hunt prey worthy of the name. The alpha-male of their pack, entwined with his queen, let out a cry that summoned the others to his side, a cry that allowed for no refusal. As each member of the pack gathered, the alpha told them of the call, reminding them of what they once were, what they could be again.*

*Somewhere in the infinite darkness, seven hunters purred with anticipation.*

\* \* \* \*

The room filled with the sweet, cloying smell of incense.

It was causing one of the coven members to choke, but, with his eyes closed, Garfield could not tell who it was. He raised his arms and wondered if his coven would be shocked when

the sleeves of his robe fell away to reveal magic symbols cut into the flesh of his forearms. He remembered making the cuts with a razor blade in the bathroom that morning, having to bite down on a towel so as not to cry out and wake Natalie. He was still finding strands of cotton caught in his teeth. It was all worth it, though. He had no need of other magical paraphernalia. He had turned himself into his magical tool, his wand.

He began the incantation, but his words were mumbled, hesitant. Natalie's face floated behind his closed eyelids. He stopped, drew in a deep breath and centred himself. Then he started again.

"Hear me, mighty Loa, great gods of voodoo. I, Garfield Byrne, who has attained mastery of the elements and who has read the forbidden texts, humbly request an audience so that I might benefit from your wisdom. In return, I offer you whatever small knowledge that I possess. Come to me, mighty ones, ride the vessels I have sanctified and made ready for you. I call you from the great beyond by what little power I possess. Come to me. Come to me!"

The light bulb swinging from the ceiling flickered and died. A sudden wind blew an open window shut with a bang.

"Come to me?" Garfield whispered tentatively.

A low chuckle reverberated against the walls.

Garfield opened his eyes. The room was in darkness. Not only had the bulb blown, but the wind must have snuffed out the candles. Maybe that was why the magic had not worked? Then Garfield realised that there was light in the room: twelve blue pinpricks in the curtain of darkness, weaving about in pairs like fireflies. A moment later, Garfield recognised the lights as glowing eyes.

"You summoned us, human?" It was Cinnamon's voice, but there was a deeper rumble underneath it that Garfield was not used to.

"Are you the Loa?" he asked.

Cinnamon – or rather, the thing inside Cinnamon – laughed.

"No, little man, we are not the Loa. We come from a place far beyond them, far from your own tiny dimension. It has been a long and difficult journey and we hunger."

"I've p-prepared an offering for you," Garfield stammered, pulling back the sheet from the dead body.

Cinnamon hissed and her colleagues, her pack, echoed the sound.

"That flesh is old," she complained, "stale and rank."

"I'll get you a fresh one," Garfield promised. He wanted to back away, but the coven was all around him.

"That won't be necessary." Cinnamon smiled. Garfield could see her teeth, white and sharp, shining in the darkness. "You promised us your knowledge. How about we eat your brain?"

\* \* \* \*

The Doctor was lost. A twisted pathway disappeared off into the distance ahead of him. The pathway was dry and cracked and uninviting, but there was no other way to go. Behind him there was only darkness. Ahead there was the path and the shadows. A grey fog swamped everything, leaching colour from the landscape. There were shapes in the fog that the Doctor first mistook for naked trees, but instead were giant claw-like hands, clasping vainly at the mist.

The Doctor stepped onto the path and was immediately chilled by a howl that filled the air behind him. Spurred on by a fear that he did not fully understand, the Doctor ran. The path turned and corkscrewed ahead of him, folding up and over itself in defiance of conventional physics. The Doctor felt out of his depth. He knew that this was all taking place inside his head, but the chaos was an intrusion. He felt violated in the same way as when the mist-creature he and Silver had encountered in Cornwall had touched his mind. He cast about for some semblance of logic and order that he could cling to in order to keep from being overwhelmed, but there was nothing in this place he recognised.

At his back, the sounds of pursuit were getting louder. He glanced over his shoulder and saw seven grey figures gaining on him.

"Come to us," they called, the whispers travelling easily to his ears. "You belong with us."

"No!" the Doctor shouted back. "Never!"

The path beneath him fell away and, contrary to gravity, the Doctor found himself falling upwards, unable to grasp hold of anything to arrest his ascent.

“Come to me,” another voice said.

Something was towering over him, a gigantic wolf formed of darkness with glowing blue eyes. The wolf opened its jaws and the Doctor cried out as he fell inside. His cries were cut short as the wolf snapped its mouth closed and swallowed him whole.

\* \* \* \*

The deck rocked beneath her feet and Silver grabbed the railing with her free hand. The saltwater spray had made it slick and Silver had difficulty maintaining her grip. She glanced about for some means of escape or some form of rescue. The Doctor had told her not to come out here, but Silver had wanted to prove herself to him, to show that she was just as capable as all those had travelled before him, the secret agent and the Time Lady and all those other people he spoke of late at night when the hum of the TARDIS seemed to soften. She had come here to rescue those marine biologists, knowing that by the time the Doctor had talked some sense into UNIT it would be too late. Wasn't she the one who had dispersed that mist creature, freeing all those trapped souls? She could do this, no matter what the Doctor said.

It had been too late anyway. She had burst into the cabin only to find a Voord already crouched over them, its hands, if that was what they were, glistening with blood. It tilted its head towards her, noting her presence, and Silver had run. She had scampered up the ladder to the deck, slipping on the rungs, but forcing herself onwards on all fours. She had moored her boat on the...port? Starboard? She couldn't remember. It was the left hand side, anyway. But it was not there when she hurled herself against the railings, replaced instead by dark shapes circling in the water.

Behind her she could here the wet slap, slap, slap as the Voord stalked slowly towards her. Silver was shocked back to wakefulness by the hammering on the hotel room door.

“Silver,” the Doctor called. “Breakfast.”

“I'll be down in a minute,” Silver yelled back.

She pulled her knees up to her chin and waited until she was sure that the Doctor had moved on before she allowed herself to cry.

\* \* \* \*

It had taken Silver substantially more than “a minute” to pluck up the courage to face the Doctor over the breakfast table. She had spent the intervening time under the shower, letting the hot water spray pummel her skin. She could still make out the track marks on the inside her arms, relics of a darker time in her life, not long enough ago.

Her mother had left when she was only eight years old. Her father had seemed more interested in his work than his daughter. Silver felt alone and neglected. Abandoned. She struck out against them, rebelling against school, against her friends, but most of all against her parents. She tried smoking, making sure that her clothes reeked of it when she got home, but rather than grounding her for her behaviour, her father turned a blind eye.

Maybe, Silver reasoned, he had been overcompensating for the loss of her mother. It was easy to make those kind of judgments in hindsight, but at the time it had simply felt as though she was beneath his notice, someone not important enough to be bothered with.

Drugs had seemed a natural escalation, the logical next stage of a process to force him to acknowledge her. She had thought that finding drugs would be difficult, but every high school has its antisocial element, its dark side. Silver had been so far removed from it that it had passed her by, but now that she had started digging beneath the service, it rose up to meet her in all its horror and sinister attractiveness.

Ditching her own friends, she took up with these new ones, readily accepted because she brought with her Daddy's allowance. She flashed back to a basement. She remembered the hideous floral wallpaper, but the faces of her so-called new friends were blurred in her mind. If the images were masked, however, the emotions were not. The drugs had made her feel powerful, important. She was the centre of the universe even if her father could not see it.

She had put the drugs behind her, but now, as she looked at the evidence they had left on her arms, she wondered if she still had that need. Was that why she travelled with the Doctor? Did he fill some void in her life that she could not fill herself, the same void that her father had been unable to fill? And, if so, what did that make her?

She had dressed hurriedly and with little care, tying back her hair with a purple silk scarf that she had picked up in the TARDIS wardrobe. One by one, she replaced her rings on her fingers and hung her charms around her wrists and her neck. Her hands lingered over her pentacle, the symbol of her professed faith, hoping to draw some strength from it. It did not help.

She fingered the pentacle now as she trundled along in the Doctor's wake. He seemed to be in something of a hurry this morning. He had wolfed down his breakfast with gusto (Silver had just picked at hers) before striding away, not even glancing back to confirm that Silver was following.

Last night, both in town and in the cemetery, he had regaled her with amusing anecdotes and local legends pertaining to the places they passed. This morning he was unusually taciturn, a fact for which Silver, who was not in much of a talkative mood herself, was grateful.

The Doctor stopped short and Silver, caught up inside her own head, nearly walked into the back of him.

'What's up?' she asked. The Doctor held up a hand to quiet her and then sniffed the air.

"Do you smell that?"

"Smell what?" New Orleans was heady with all sorts of scents, rich, spicy and exotic. Maybe the Doctor had some kind of heightened Time Lord sense of smell, but Silver knew that she would not be able to distinguish one individual aroma within the blend.

The Doctor shook his head.

"Doesn't matter. There was a logo on the pouch," the Doctor explained as he continued his brisk walk down the street. "It was on the inside so I had to open it up to find it, but I think I've tracked down where it was bought. Which, if the directions the hotel receptionist gave me are to be believed, should be just around this corner."

It must have rained during the night because there was a film of water on the ground that glistened in the sunlight. There were no other people about that Silver could see. Presumably, everybody else was sleeping off the previous night's festivities and readying themselves to resume partying later on. If she strained her ears, she could hear some revellers stirring already.

The Doctor ducked through an ivy-covered arch into a shaded courtyard. To their left was a café. An old man was setting out some metal tables and chairs. A dark-skinned woman with close-cropped dyed red hair had already taken a chair for herself and was nursing a tall mug of something. Across the courtyard was a shop advertising occult paraphernalia. Police tape criss-crossed the open doorway.

"Let me guess," Silver mused, "that's where we want to be."

The Doctor was not listening to her. His attention was on the woman sipping her coffee as he scratched the back of his hand absently.

Silver nudged him. "Doctor?"

"Sorry?"

Silver pointed to the police tape.

"Oh." The Doctor pursed his lips thoughtfully. "Well, I guess that means we're in the right place. Come along."

The Doctor ducked under the tape and entered the shop. Silver hesitated for a moment. She glanced back at the woman who had so fascinated the Doctor and she smiled. Her eyes must have caught the sun because they flashed. Silver shivered then turned and followed the Doctor. Julian Baptiste was already inside, talking to the police.

"What are you doing here?" Silver demanded.

"I could ask you the same question," he replied.

The Doctor was already examining the shop shelves. Most of the items were related to voodoo – Silver knew that from surfing the web – but there was a smattering of books and charms relating to other occult practices, including Wicca.

"We're following a lead," the Doctor explained, "and searching for our missing corpse."

“Well, you’ve found him,” Julian replied. “He’s upstairs, along with another poor soul. The local PD called me as soon as they identified him, does that answer your question, Miss Silverstein?”

“Let’s see him then,” Silver said, heading for a door at the back of the shop. Julian barred her way.

“I don’t think that’s a good idea,” he said. “The body’s not a pretty sight.”

“And you think I can’t handle it, is that what you’re saying?”

“Yes, that’s what I’m saying. And no, before you say anything, it’s not because you’re a girl or because you’re fifteen. Two of the cops are throwing up round back as we speak and I’m lucky I’m not out there with them.”

“What did they do to him?” Silver asked quietly.

“It looks like he was eaten.”

“Eaten?” The Doctor raised his head sharply. “Well what are we waiting for? Let’s go take a look.”

Silver insisted in going with Julian and the Doctor when they ascended the stairs up to the apartment over the shop, but she stayed in the doorway, as far away from the mutilated bodies as she could get while remaining in the same room with them. The Doctor was poking around the bodies with glee, much to the consternation of the medical examiner. Julian surreptitiously eased himself away from the grisly scene and back to where Silver was standing.

“From the look of things, I’d say some kind of ritual was going on here,” he told her. “Voodoo probably, given where we are and some of those objects.”

“You recognise them?” Silver asked. The conversation kept her mind off...other stuff.

“My grandma’s big on voodoo,” Julian explained. “She was a high priestess herself in her day. She’s taught me a lot.”

“So you’re into this voodoo yourself, then?”

“No way.” Julian laughed. “All this magic junk, well, it’s all so much crap, isn’t it. I mean I can see why kids go for it and not just the mystery and the dark side of it either. Some people just need something to believe in to get them through the day I guess and more power to them, if it helps. But it’s not like any of these so-called spells actually work.”

Silver didn’t reply. His words, his opinion of why people turned to magic, were too close to the thoughts she had been having earlier and she was uncomfortably aware of all the Wiccan charms practically dripping from her.

“Have you seen these bite marks?” the Doctor called. “You’ll need to get a mould done, of course, but I’d say those were made by human teeth, wouldn’t you? What do you suppose it tastes like?”

“Doctor?”

“Human flesh. It must have some appeal otherwise people wouldn’t eat it. Or do you suppose it just tastes like chicken?” The Doctor’s expression turned wistful. “Then you have to consider whether or not this young man was alive when he was eaten and whether or not that would enhance the flavour.”

“That’s sick,” Silver said, bile rising in her throat.

“It’s an aspect of human existence,” the Doctor replied. “That in itself makes it worth considering, wouldn’t you say?”

“Frankly, Doctor, no I wouldn’t,” Julian said. “All I care about is catching the creeps who did this to a friend of mine. Now let’s get out of the way and let the police do their jobs.”

Silver followed eagerly as Julian led the way downstairs. The Doctor cast one long lingering glance back at the bodies before descending himself.

There was a commotion at the front door. A young woman with wavy blonde hair was trying to force her way past the police tape. Julian flashed his UNIT badge.

“Hello miss, can I help you?”

“Yeah, you can tell me what’s going on here and where my fiancé is.”

“Your fiancé wouldn’t have been wearing some kind of robe decorated with occult symbols when you last saw him, would he?” Julian asked. The Doctor was staring out of the window, seemingly ignoring everyone else. He was still scratching the back of his hand vigorously.

“Yes, he was.” The woman was starting to panic now. “Have you seen him? What’s happened to him?”

“You may want to sit down, Miss...?”

“Lafore. Natalie Lafore. Just tell me what it is you’ve got to say.”

“I’m afraid it’s bad news, Miss Lafore...”

“Your fiancé is dead,” the Doctor explained, without turning away from the window. “Eaten.”

Silver frowned at him. He was not usually so heartless.

“Oh god.” Natalie’s hands flew to her mouth. “Oh god, no. No, there’s been some mistake. Whoever it is, that’s not Garfield. Let me see him.”

Julian put an arm around her, partly to comfort her, but also to prevent her from racing upstairs.

“I don’t advise that, Miss Lafore,” he said.

“Why not? Won’t I have to identify the body or something?”

“I doubt you’ll be able to do that. We can get an ID from his dental records.”

“What do you mean you’ll doubt I’ll be able to identify him?” Natalie demanded.

“Eaten,” the Doctor intoned. “Think about it.”

Natalie doubled over and heaved, though nothing came up.

“What’s got into you?” Silver hissed, sidling over to the Doctor.

“That’s a very good question,” the Doctor replied. “You’ll be all right getting back to the hotel on your own?”

“What?”

“There are things I have to do,” the Doctor said, and with that he walked out of the shop leaving Silver staring after him, mouth agape.

\* \* \* \*

Cinnamon watched the Doctor over the top of her glasses. He looked so confused, so vulnerable and yet...

She put down her coffee.

“See anything you like?”

“You’re part of this, aren’t you?” the Doctor said. “I know you, but we’ve never met.”

“No, but there’s something inside you that recognises something inside me,” Cinnamon explained. “Call it instinct if you like.”

“Did you kill that boy?”

“Which boy? There have been so many it’s hard to keep track.” Cinnamon stood up, slowly uncoiling her body.

“You know which boy,” the Doctor told her.

“You’re not interested in him. You want to know what’s happening to you.” Cinnamon took his hand in both of hers and gently caressed the area the Doctor had been scratching. “You’re changing.”

“I’ve changed before.”

“Not like this.”

“No,” the Doctor conceded, “never like this.”

“I’m changing too.”

“I know,” the Doctor agreed. He took a step back. “How do I know?”

“Maybe you can smell it on me.” Involuntarily, the Doctor took a deep breath. He could smell the aroma of baking beignets wafting from within the café, the slightly burnt odour of the coffee. He could smell the blood and the slowly decomposing bodies in the flat above the magic shop, the mix of sweat and aftershave on Captain Baptiste, the delicate floral fragrance of Silver’s shower gel. And he could smell Cinnamon, fresh and spicy and intense. She smelled exciting, if an emotion could be said to have a smell.

“What’s happening to me?” the Doctor asked.

“Always with the questions.” Cinnamon ran a fingertip along his jaw. “You’re boring me now.”

She turned to leave, but the Doctor grabbed her savagely by the wrist.

“You’re forceful, aren’t you?” Cinnamon said, looking down at his hand. The Doctor snatched it away as though burned. “I like that in a man. Maybe I will answer your questions, but you’ll have to catch me first.”

She bent her legs and sprang, landing feet first on the edge of the iron railing of a balcony. Another leap took her up to the building's roof. Without thinking, the Doctor jumped for the balcony. His fingers closed around the metal bars and he swung himself upwards. The air roared past his ears and he landed in a crouch on the roof. He looked down at the ground and his hearts began to thunder in his chest. That vault could be described as superhuman and, while the Doctor might not have been human himself, he was not able to perform athletic feats of this magnitude either. Or, at least, he had not been before.

Cinnamon was standing on top of an adjacent building, a silhouette backlit by watery sunlight. She beckoned to him, then turned and scampered away. Ignoring the pain in his chest, the Doctor gave chase. He threw himself across the gap between buildings, sending tiles spiralling to the sidewalk below as he landed. He could hear Cinnamon laughing at him from up ahead.

She danced through the air with carefree abandon, fearlessly hurling herself from building to building. She pirouetted like a ballerina in midair, laughing all the while. In contrast, the Doctor was all brute force and ignorance, launching himself at each new building he came to and crossing the gap by the narrowest of margins. All of his senses were under assault. His eyes were streaming as they tried to process light that was brighter and colours that were more vibrant than he was used to experiencing.

He could hear last night's revellers rolling out of bed ready to party once again, and he could hear the music and laughter of those who had never stopped. He could identify the breakfast in each house he crossed simply by the smells that reached his nostrils. His mind was on fire, awash with sensation, but still he would not give up the chase, caught up in the game of predator and prey.

Cinnamon paused at the edge of a roof, then stepped off, plummeting from sight. Horrified, the Doctor dashed to the edge himself, expecting to find her smeared across the sidewalk below. Instead, she was crouched on top of a streetcar as it rattled eastwards towards the Garden District. She waved at him.

The Doctor stepped away from the edge, allowing himself a run-up. Then he launched himself at the vehicle trundling leisurely away. His jump was short and he struggled to grab hold of the edge of the car's roof while his knees and feet knocked against the rear window, startling the passengers within. Grunting with effort, he hauled himself up.

"Now will you give me some answers?" he demanded, his breathing laboured.

Cinnamon smirked. "You still have to catch me."

She jumped sideways, landing neatly on the roof of another streetcar travelling in the opposite direction. The Doctor spun round, registering the rapidly widening gap between them with dismay. He leaped from the car and pain shot through his legs as he landed heavily on the street, but he ignored it. In moments he was up and racing in pursuit of his olive-green target. Car horns blared furiously at him and pedestrians swore as he forced his way by, but the Doctor did not care about them. He was the hunter and all that existed for him at that moment was his quarry.

Little by little, he was closing the distance between them so Cinnamon abandoned the streetcar and darted up onto the roof of a church that overlooked the street. The Doctor was almost upon her, though, and he threw himself at the red-bricked gothic structure, practically running up the walls, before knocking her off her feet and pinning her beneath him.

She was panting and he could feel her body rise and fall beneath him. Sweat glistened on her coffee-coloured skin.

"I guess you caught me," she said huskily. "Want to claim your reward?"

Then she kissed him.

\* \* \* \*

Julian had found a chair for Natalie to sit in. Her head was bowed, her long hair falling in front of her face, but she had stopped crying. Silver was not sure, however, whether that was because she had calmed down or simply because she had used up all the tears she had in her.

"Do you feel up to answering a few questions?" Julian asked. Natalie nodded and Julian dragged over another chair, sat and produced a notepad.

“So, you and Mr. Byrne were engaged?” Natalie mumbled something which Silver took to be an affirmative.

“And Mr. Byrne owned this place?”

Same mumble.

“And where were you last night, Miss Lafore?”

“I was out,” Natalie said. “Garfield and I, we had a row.”

“A row?” Julian wrote something on his pad.

“Hang on a minute.” Natalie’s head shot up. “You don’t think I...I couldn’t...we...”

“It’s okay.” Silver crouched down by Natalie and tried to calm her. One of her hands hovered over Natalie’s shoulder as Silver was torn between a desire to comfort her and a fear of physical intimacy. “We’re just trying to find out what happened.”

“I spent the night in a hotel,” Natalie told Julian. “You can check if you like.”

Julian took down the address, then continued, “And what was this row about?”

“Yesterday was our one year anniversary.” Now the tears were back with a vengeance. “Garfield had forgotten all about it. He was more interested in his magic. We argued and I stormed out.”

She turned to Silver. “You don’t think that maybe if I’d stayed...”

“No,” Silver said emphatically. “I don’t think there was anything anyone could have done.”

“You say that Mr. Byrne was interested in magic,” Julian prompted. “Did he consider himself to be a magician?”

“Well, he *thought* he was,” Natalie explained. “He had his own circle of like-minded geeks and they’d get together once a month to ‘draw down the moon’ and whatnot. I just thought it was one of his quirks.”

“What changed your mind?”

Natalie hesitated and the sighed. “I don’t suppose it matters now. It’s not like you can arrest him.”

“Arrest him for what?”

“He brought a dead body back to the apartment,” Natalie said. “He told me he needed it for his ritual.”

“And what was he trying to do in this ritual of his?”

“He said he was going to summon the Loa and they were going to ride the bodies of his friends.”

Julian turned to Silver. “The Loa are like the gods of Voodoo mythology.”

“I know what they are,” Silver replied quietly. “And it’s a religion, not a mythology.”

“You sound like Grandma.”

“You don’t suppose they actually did summon something, do you?” Natalie asked.

“I doubt that very much,” Julian replied. “Did Mr. Byrne and his friends take any drugs as part of their rituals?”

“No!” Natalie insisted.

“We will be able to find out through analysis of Mr. Byrne’s...remains,” Julian said, “but it would save us a lot of time if you told us now.”

“Garfield did not do drugs,” Natalie repeated. “You don’t understand, he only wanted to ask them a question.”

“What question?” Silver asked.

“Garfield was adopted,” Natalie explained. “He just wanted to know who his real parents were.”

There were a few more questions, Julian took the names and addresses of the members of Garfield’s circle and then he allowed Natalie to go.

“For a UNIT soldier, you’re very close minded, you know,” Silver said.

“How so?”

“Well, given all the crazy stuff you’ve seen, don’t you think it’s at all possible that he did summon something?”

“Look, sure as part of UNIT I know that the kind of stuff you see in *The X-Files* really does exist,” Julian replied, “but I also know how rare it is. In 99.99% of cases of supposed supernatural or extraterrestrial involvement, the real cause is mundane so, unless you can

provide me with some concrete evidence, I'm not about to jump to the conclusion that a demon did this."

"So what's your theory then?"

"I think they got off their heads on some mind-altering drugs."

"And what, ate each other?"

"It happens."

"Natalie said they didn't take drugs."

"And maybe she's just trying to protect her fiancé," Julian replied. "We'll know one way or another after the autopsy. In the meantime, aren't you supposed to be on vacation?"

\* \* \* \*

Cinnamon bit down on the Doctor's lower lip and he pulled away sharply. He pressed his fingertips to his lip and they came away daubed with blood.

"Too fast for you?" Cinnamon asked.

"I..." The Doctor looked around, taking in his surroundings. He stood up, releasing Cinnamon. "What am I doing?"

"Giving in to your instincts."

"These aren't my instincts," the Doctor replied.

"They are now." Cinnamon sat up.

"What did you do to me?" The Doctor looked at the backs of his hands. He could see small dark hairs that he was certain had not been there before, as much as he could be certain of anything at the moment.

"I didn't do anything to you," Cinnamon explained. "My fine-looking host body, on the other hand; she helped summon us."

"That boy, he was performing some kind of ritual?"

Cinnamon nodded. "He called out to us, across the void. We couldn't penetrate this world without help, but he gave us targets to home in on."

The Doctor took something from his pocket. It was the pouch he had found in the tomb. He looked at it horrified. "Targets like this?"

"Oh, yeah."

"Then if I destroy it..."

"It's already too late." Cinnamon eased herself to her feet. "He's inside you now, remoulding you in his image."

"Who's inside me?"

"The alpha male of our pack." Cinnamon stepped in close to him. "My mate." The Doctor tried to inch away, but he was disturbingly close to the edge of the roof.

"There must be a way to reverse the process."

Cinnamon placed a hand on his chest and the Doctor felt both his hearts quicken at her touch.

"Even if there was," she said, "why would you want to? Think about how you felt during our little dance. Can you honestly tell me that you're not turning into something superior to what you were?"

"I'm turning into something that isn't me," the Doctor retorted. "What are you? Werewolves? Lycanthropes?"

"In human terms we might be described as Therianthropes," Cinnamon told him. "They thought they were summoning the Loa, but they reached out to something far older, far deeper in the void. We hunt the lesser spirits, but even that sport pales over the millennia, so we came looking for new hunting grounds and look what we found."

"You're predators," the Doctor said.

Cinnamon bared her teeth. "And all this world is our prey. Join us on a hunt. See that you are one of us."

"I'm nothing like you," the Doctor snapped. "I save lives, I don't take them."

"You will," Cinnamon replied. "Sooner or later, you will."

\* \* \* \*

It had started to rain by the time Silver left the magic shop. She had not brought an umbrella with her so she turned up the collar of her jacket and hunched up her shoulders as she darted from the shelter of one building to the next. She did not notice that she was being watched.

Her pursuer quickened his pace, gradually closing the gap between them. He licked his lips in eager anticipation as his right hand closed over the knife in his pocket. She was almost close enough for him to reach out and touch her, but still she had not noticed him. Almost...

He was bracing himself to strike when something barrelled into him, knocking him off his feet.

Silver spun, attracted by the noise, just in time to see the figure that had been following her be thrown into an alleyway by...by what exactly? Silver couldn't make up her mind if it was some kind of large animal or just a man in fuzzy clothing. She started to follow them into the alley.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you."

A tall black man was leaning against the wall of one of the buildings. He was dressed head-to-toe in black. Black cap on his head, black shades over his eyes. Black leather jacket over black T-shirt. Black jeans and black boots. He held a tenor saxophone in his hands.

"Predators can have predators too, you know," he continued.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Silver asked petulantly. She studied him for a moment. "Hey, don't I know you from somewhere?"

The saxophonist shrugged. "Maybe. Maybe I'm just a guy who saw a pretty girl in the street and stopped to help or maybe we really do know each other."

"I don't know what you're talking about." Silver started to back away.

"Don't you? Well, maybe you don't, but then maybe you believe there's an energy that runs through all things because if that were true then you'd have to agree that you and I were connected, wouldn't you say?"

"You seem to have all the answers," Silver replied. "What do you think?"

"I think you have a gift, though I think you have a hard time realising it. You're one of the few."

"The few?"

"The few of us who get to see the world the way it really is."

"You're talking about magic, aren't you?" Silver said, curiosity overcoming her distrust for a moment.

"Am I?"

"Were you born mysterious or do you have to work at it?"

"Morning, noon and night, little sister."

"I suppose that explains the whole man in black routine."

"That just makes it easier to match items when I can't see what I'm doing."

"Dress in the dark a lot, do you?"

The saxophonist eased his sunglasses down his nose just enough to let Silver see his eyes. She gasped.

"You're blind," she blurted. "I'm sorry...I didn't mean it to come out like that."

The saxophonist grinned broadly.

\* \* \* \*

The rain had stopped by the time the police were finished with Natalie, but there were still puddles in the street. Natalie stood on the sidewalk and watched the traffic go by. Where was she going to go? She couldn't go back to the apartment – not yet, anyway – and she did not want to spend another night in a hotel, alone. Would her parents take her in? They had not spoken in months. They did not approve of Garfield. Had not approved, she mentally corrected. She would have to start referring to Garfield in the past tense, but that would make everything real and she was not sure she was ready to face that yet.

She shook her head. Whatever had happened in the past, her parents were not likely to turn her away, were they? Perhaps she should call them first, let them know she was coming. As she thought about the telephone, it struck Natalie that she had not tried to contact the other members of Garfield's circle to find out if they were all right. Sure, the police had said they were going to get in touch with them, but she was supposed to be their friend, wasn't she?

Her eyes widened as she spotted Christopher leaning against a streetlight on the corner, as though summoned there by her guilt.

“Chris!” She waved at him, breaking into a run, suddenly fearful that he would disappear before she could reach him. He stayed where he was, smiling down at her as she joined him. “Chris, are you okay? I was worried.”

“I’m fine,” he assured her. “Better than ever.”

“Have you... have you heard about Garfield?”

“I heard.”

“Do you know what happened to him?”

“Sure I do. We ate him.” Christopher opened his mouth, exposing long, sharp teeth. Natalie backed away.

“You *ate* him?”

“Yeah. Couldn’t find any Chianti to go with it, though. You should really keep your kitchen better stocked.”

“This isn’t funny, Chris.” Natalie’s voice was trembling.

“Who’s joking?” He lunged forward suddenly, shouting, “Boo!”

Natalie stumbled and fell over and Christopher threw back his head and roared with laughter. After a few moments, Natalie started laughing with him, weakly.

“That really wasn’t funny,” she said.

“Oh, I don’t know.” Christopher reached down to help Natalie up. As he hauled her to her feet, Natalie looked at the hand wrapped round her wrist. It was covered with grey fur and the nails had elongated into claws. She looked up into Christopher’s eyes and saw that they were glowing. “The look on your face now is hilarious.”

Natalie wrenched her arm away from him, aware of his claws tearing strips of flesh from her wrist.

“Run, run as fast as you can,” Christopher called after her as she fled, “but we will catch you. I guarantee it.”

Natalie risked a glance back over her shoulder. Christopher had dropped to all fours and was bounding after her, snarling like an animal. She threw herself around a corner, skidding on the slick ground. Here was a man working on his car, his head concealed beneath the open hood.

“Help me!” she called to him. “Please, he’s trying to kill me. You’ve got to help me.”

The man glanced up. He had a wrench in his hands and, seeing Christopher pursuing Natalie, he raised it like a weapon. Christopher pounced on him, knocking him off his feet and sending the wrench spiralling into the gutter. The man screamed as Christopher tore out his throat. Natalie threw an arm in front of her eyes, as though she could somehow block out the image of Christopher with those bits of flesh and blood hanging from his teeth.

Her legs felt like lead, but she forced herself onward, certain that if she stopped then she would die. She zigzagged through the streets, not knowing where she was going and not caring, so long as it was away. She glanced left and right looking for other options, alternative routes. Her blood ran cold as she caught a glimpse of other figures on the streets running parallel to the one she was on, figures running on all fours and twisted into inhuman shapes. They had boxed her in, she realised. Were they other members of Garfield’s coven? Had they all been turned into monsters like Christopher? Whatever they were, they were working as a team, herding her along, but to what?

She skidded to a halt as she realised she had turned into a dead end. Cinnamon was standing at the far end of it. Natalie rotated, ready to flee back the way she had come, but it was too late. Christopher and his colleagues had already barred her exit. They snarled at her, drool slipping from gaping jaws.

“Poor, poor Natalie,” Cinnamon said. “You could have been one of us, you know?”

Natalie fought down the scream that was building inside her. She would not give Cinnamon the satisfaction.

“Why would anyone want to be like you?” she spat with her last vestige of courage.

Cinnamon shrugged. “It beats the alternative.”

Then she sprang.

\* \* \* \*

*Silver's heart leaped to her throat. She had been so sure that she was doing the right thing. She had not wanted to ignore the Doctor's orders, really she had not, but there were lives at stake. She had thought back to her recent experiences in Cornwall and her encounter with the Mist and drawn strength and confidence from her triumph then. She had been sure that the Doctor would secretly approve of her actions, even though he would undoubtedly berate her for them when she got back.*

*If she got back.*

*Now, seeing the dead bodies, seeing the alien standing over them, Silver began to think that perhaps the Doctor had been right all along. She stumbled backwards, her hands instinctively searching for a weapon even as her conscious mind struggled to process events. Her eyes were transfixed by the Voord and that strange fleshy antenna that sprouted from the centre of its scalp. It whistled and she knew it was summoning reinforcements.*

*Her left hand closed on something hard and sharp. The pain as she cut her palm snapped her out of her trance and she turned to see what she had found. It was a harpoon gun. It was heavy, much heavier than these things looked in the movies, but she hefted it anyway and levelled it at the Voord. It backed away.*

*Taking very small steps, Silver eased herself backwards until she felt the rungs of the ladder pressing against her spine. She shifted the weight of the gun to her right hand, ignoring the waves of pain that shot up her arm in protest, and used her left hand to search out a rung. Then, as fast as she dared, she climbed up the ladder, all the while keeping the Voord covered with her weapon.*

*She ran, searching for the boat that had brought her here. Her flight passed by in a blur and all of a sudden she was pressed against the railing, searching frantically for her means of escape. Her boat was gone, no doubt taken away by the Voord, who were swimming in leisurely circles below her. She heard a wet slap, slap of feet approaching from behind her.*

*She turned, unsurprised to see a Voord. Was it the same one from the cabin or one he had summoned with his whistle? She could not tell and it did not really matter. Trembling, she raised the harpoon gun. The Voord continued to advance, as though sensing her fear.*

*"Shoot, damn you!" someone yelled.*

*Silver's finger hovered over the trigger, but she could not bring herself to squeeze it. She could tighten her hand so far, but no further. She could not do it. Life was precious and killing went against everything she told herself she believed in. But what about the Mist, some treacherous part of her mind asked. Didn't you kill the Mist? No, she told herself; that was different. She had released the creature. This, were she to pull the trigger, this would be murder.*

*The Voord thrust its head forward and raised an arm. Silver closed her eyes, muttering a quick prayer that she expected to be her last.*

*When Silver opened her eyes again, the Voord was in the water, having been thrown there by Victor Cole. He was struggling with the alien and there was blood in the water. With the last of his strength, Cole managed to get his gun free and do what Silver could not. The Voord's head exploded as the bullet passed through it. Cole collapsed face down in the water and was still.*

*The harpoon fell from her hands and Silver dropped to her knees on the deck. She knew that he was dead. Worse, she knew – she knew – that if she had been able to pull that trigger then Cole would still be alive. Her hand tightened around the railing as she stared at the body floating below. It looked like a mannequin, not a real person at all. But it had been a real person and Silver had killed him as certainly as the Voord had.*

*When the rest of the UNIT team arrived a few minutes later, they had to forcibly pry her fingers off the rail and carry her back to the helicopter. Silver did not say a word until they were back on dry land.*

\* \* \* \*

"I save lives. I don't take them."

The Doctor's parting words to Cinnamon echoed inside his head, but they came back to him distorted and mixed up, tainted by the seven lurking in the shadows.

*"Take lives."*

*"Don't save them."*

"No," the Doctor called out to the dark, "that's not true."

“Isn’t it?” the voices demanded. “What about Giuliano de Medici or the Mist?”

“I didn’t kill them!”

“No, you didn’t, did you?” The voices were mocking now. At least one of them was snickering. “You got other people to do your dirty work for you. It wouldn’t do to stain those lily-white hands of yours.”

“It wasn’t like that,” the Doctor protested.

The silence was accusatory.

“It wasn’t,” he repeated, but the Doctor’s words sounded hollow even to him.

\* \* \* \*

Silver shivered. It was still warm outside. The rain had stopped and the sidewalks were drying rapidly, but Silver’s memories chilled her. The dreams were coming even when she was awake now, but that was okay. She deserved to be beaten on by her subconscious.

The girl on reception threw a cheery greeting her way as Silver returned to the hotel and she managed a weak smile in response. Then she jogged upstairs to her room. Her bag with a selection of her magical equipment was inside and, after her chat with the saxophonist, she was sure that there was something in there that could help her.

She still was not sure who that saxophonist was, but he had seemed to know a lot about her. At first, that had freaked her out, but gradually she realised that it made her comfortable to talk to someone from whom she didn’t need to have any secrets. He understood magic, that was for sure.

“Magic is about change,” he had said, his voice low and rich. “Not just change of the objects and events around us, but in the way people perceive those objects and events. What colour is the sky?”

Puzzled by this non sequitur, Silver had still managed to reply, “Blue, I guess.”

“How do you know it’s blue?”

“Well, I can see it.”

“But how do I know that it’s blue?” the blind saxophonist asked.

“I guess because that’s what people tell you.”

The saxophonist smiled and Silver felt unaccountably proud of herself for giving the right answer.

“Someone told me that the sky was blue so I believe the sky is blue. What if you were to tell me that the sky is green?”

“But it isn’t,” Silver pointed out.

“It isn’t because you believe it isn’t,” the saxophonist replied, “but if you told me that it was green, what would *I* believe?”

“I suppose you’d think it was green,” Silver said, not quite sure where this conversation was going.

“No, not think. I’d *know* it was green. I’d believe you. Reality is shaped by our belief – that’s what magic is – so wouldn’t that make the sky green in fact as well as in my mind?”

“No,” Silver replied. “It doesn’t work like that.”

“Why not?”

“I don’t know,” Silver admitted, “but if it did then we’d all be doing it. It’s not happening so it can’t happen, right?”

The saxophonist shook his head. “You have to get past your own limitations. I can’t see the sky so it’s easy for me to believe it can change. You see it and you tell me that it does not change so you believe that it can’t. But how do you know that you can trust what you see? You’re eyes convert light into electrical impulses that are then interpreted by your brain. You’re not seeing the sky, you’re seeing a filtered, rationalised interpretation of the sky.”

“I guess...”

“It gets better. Given that everyone is different – everyone is an individual with their own thoughts, feelings and interpretations – how do you know that the image that they see is the same one that you see?”

“Keep thinking like that and you’ll drive yourself crazy.”

“Crazy like telling people that the sky is green? We are all so limited, physically. A dog has fifty times as many scent receptors as a human. Their hearing is four times as good as ours. How can we claim to be able to perceive the world the way it truly is?”

“I don’t understand.”

“You have to free your mind. Reality is mutable. It *can* be changed. But you have to step beyond your body’s physical limitations, get away from this idea that what you think you see, what other people tell you, is definitely the way the world works if you really want to take advantage of your gifts.”

Her gifts. The saxophonist had seemed to think she was special. Silver did not feel particularly special at the moment, but if her magic could help...it occurred to her as she crossed the landing that it was early February, about the right time of year for the Wiccan festival of Imbolc. Silver had lost track of the Wiccan festivals lately. Travelling in a time machine made it difficult to keep track of the turning of the year, but Imbolc was one of her favourites. Imbolc was a time of celebration after winter, a time of rebirth. It was also a time of illumination, not only in the lengthening days, but in understanding oneself. Maybe that was why Silver was dwelling on her own place in the scheme of things so much lately.

She inserted her key-card into the door. The lock buzzed and, when the LED went from red to green, Silver turned the handle and stepped inside. It was dark inside the room and she reached for the light switch.

“Don’t,” someone growled.

“Doctor,” Silver said, “is that you?”

Her hand still hovered over the switch.

“Leave the light off,” the Doctor told her. Slowly, Silver’s eyes adjusted to the gloom. The Doctor was standing by the bed, his shoulders hunched, his face turned away from her.

“Doctor, are you okay?”

“Okay?” he asked. “It’s such a small word, don’t you think? Hardly adequate to convey such a complex idea as state of being. Then again, good or fine or lousy seem pretty flimsy words as well. One could write a novel about one’s state of mind at any given moment. Someone probably has, though the name escapes me right now.”

“Doctor,” Silver repeated nervously, “are you okay?”

“I’m sorry, I’m babbling, aren’t I. If I keep my mind active then maybe I won’t lose it.”

“Lose it?” Silver started to move towards the Doctor, but he snapped at her.

“Stay where you are!” He huddled even tighter within himself, lowering his voice so that it was barely a whisper. “You’re safer over there, away from me. I thought I could control it. My old arrogance resurfacing, I expect. But she was right, it’s overwriting me on a fundamental level, changing me.”

A dozen questions popped into Silver’s head, but she settled for the one that seemed to cover them all. “Doctor, what are you talking about?”

“Do you suppose this is what regeneration would be like if you were to slow it right down, a gradual reinterpretation of physical and mental characteristics? Would it be this frightening?” The Doctor shook his head, violently, like a nervous tick. “No, no, not like regeneration. In regeneration, Silver, all protestations to the contrary, you do have some idea what you’re going to get. I’ll still be the Doctor when all is said and done, whatever that means, but this...Silver? Are you still there, Silver? Don’t leave me.”

“I’m here,” Silver assured him, “but I don’t understand what’s going on. What can I do to help?”

“Help? Too late for help.” The Doctor had dropped into a crouch, hiding himself away behind the bed. “It’s not the physical transformation that’s frightening, you know. I could live with that. It’s the thoughts that I don’t recognise, the thoughts insisting that they are my thoughts now. When I look at you, Silver, the Doctor part of me sees my companion, my co-conspirator, my best friend. But there’s this other part of me now and it smells you. Do you know what you smell like, Silver?”

Silver shook her head.

“You smell like food.”

The Doctor wailed. Silver started to move towards the door and realised that she was shaking.

“Don’t leave me, Silver. Don’t leave me all alone.” The Doctor stood up. His eyes were glowing. “The wolf ate grandma, didn’t he, Silver, and he took her place in the bed and he waited for Little Red Riding Hood to arrive. And do you know why he waited, Silver?”

The Doctor was advancing on her now. As he got closer, she could see that his face was distorted, exposing a mass of long sharp teeth. His clothes, about which he was normally so proud, were filthy and torn and dark hair forced its way through the holes.

“He was waiting to eat her.”

The Doctor sprang, grabbing hold of Silver’s left wrist. She struggled to free herself, clawing at the Doctor with her free hand. Her nails drew blood and the Doctor pulled away, releasing Silver. He stared at his wounds, uncertainly. Then he raised his head and fixed Silver in the glare of his brilliant blue eyes.

“Run, Silver, run!”

Silver ran. The door stuck when she first tugged at it, but she wrenched it wide open on her second attempt and threw herself out and down the stairs. The receptionist called out to her, but Silver ran straight by, out into the open air and down the street.

The Doctor stood at the top of the stairs and watched her flee. When she had disappeared from sight, he returned to her room and made his own exit by the window. He left behind claw marks in the wall by the stairs where he had been holding himself in place.

\* \* \* \*

Cinnamon smelled him before she saw him. He still carried the scent of what he was, of musty libraries and long walks on the beach, dry, but not exactly sterile. He stood out like a beacon against the damp animal odours of Audubon Park and the neighbouring zoo.

“You were wrong,” he said. “I didn’t kill her.”

“But you wanted to,” Cinnamon said.

“Yes.” They both knew that the Doctor’s single word admission carried tremendous weight. “There must be a way to reverse the process, while I still have my sanity.”

“Sanity?” Cinnamon laughed. “Are you saying it’s insane to want to survive?”

“You ‘survive’ at the expense of others.”

“And it would be much more sane were we to throw ourselves deliberately in harm’s way to protect those less advanced than us. That’s really intelligent behaviour.”

“I just want to be myself again,” the Doctor said, “before somebody gets hurt.”

Cinnamon put a comforting arm around him and led him over to where the rest of the pack was feeding. Some of them, like the Doctor and Cinnamon, were still recognisably human, albeit with obvious bestial characteristics. The others had given in to the animal completely and now looked more like big cats or wolves than people.

“I understand,” Cinnamon said. “We’re all frightened of change and I won’t pretend to you that there aren’t downsides, but change is what evolution is all about.”

“Is that how you see yourselves, as the next stage in evolution?”

“Survival of the fittest,” Cinnamon replied. “Show me something on this planet more suited to survive than we are. Don’t we deserve to live?”

“Even if it’s by killing others,” the Doctor began, but his hearts were not in it. Yesterday, he knew, he would have argued much more passionately, but today the logic of his own ethics was escaping through his fingers like sand.

“Isn’t that what all predators do?” Cinnamon asked. She dropped to her knees on the grass, pulling the Doctor down with her.

“What’s right for one predator...”

“Must be right for them all,” Cinnamon concluded. “We’re animals and we behave like them. At least we’re honest about it.”

“Yes, there is that.”

“You’re special,” Cinnamon said. “We’re special. Accept it.” She kissed the Doctor and this time he did not pull away. “You missed the hunt, but won’t you join us for the feast?” She waved towards the corpse of Natalie Lafore, which her pack mates were busily dismembering. “She knew too much so we had to silence her.”

“You go to great lengths to protect your secrets.”

“We do what we have to in order to survive. You want us to survive, don’t you?”

“Yes,” the Doctor said slowly, testing out the word. “Yes, I do.”

Cinnamon purred at the back of her throat as the Doctor pulled her towards him.

“You should know,” he whispered, “that there’s someone else who knows too much. Her name is Silver.”

\* \* \* \*

Someone was hammering on the door so hard that it was vibrating on its hinges.

“I’ll get it,” Julian called out to his mother. He picked up his gun and checked that it was loaded. Then, holding the weapon behind him where whoever was at the door would not be able to see it, he descended the stairs.

“Who is it?” he asked as he approached the door.

“It’s me, Silver.”

Discarding his gun on the telephone table, Julian used both hands to unlock the door and haul Silver inside. She was trembling.

“What’s up?” he asked. “What’s wrong?” Silver looked up at him, tears smearing the make-up around her eyes.

“It’s the Doctor. He tried to kill me.”

\* \* \* \*

Silver curled up in the corner of the large sofa, pressing herself deep into the soft fabric. She had kicked off her shoes so that she could pull her feet up and under her. When Julian’s mother, Janette, had seen the state she was in, she had immediately prescribed hot milk and insisted Silver spend the night with them. Ignoring her son’s disapproving look, she had added a measure of brandy to the milk before passing the mug to Silver. The contents of the mug were still too hot to drink, but the warmth seeping into her palms was welcome.

Julian had wanted to speak to her alone, but his mother would not hear of it. Under other circumstances, Silver would have found the situation amusing, but she was so very tired. They had gathered in the living room. Silver was guided to the sofa, on which she now curled. Julian had perched himself on the arm at the other end, while his parents shared the second, smaller sofa that was positioned below the window. Julian’s grandmother was in the rocking chair in the corner, apparently asleep.

Silver had slowly, deliberately narrated her story. She did not leave anything out, though this had less to do with trusting the Baptiste family and more to do with her being too tired to concentrate on editing her account. Julian was silent throughout, the only interruptions being sympathetic noises from his parents at appropriate intervals. When Silver told them how Garfield had died, Matthew Baptiste put an arm around his wife.

“So they did summon something,” Julian said when Silver had finished. “Don’t bother saying ‘I told you so’. We’ll just take it as read.”

“That’s what you get for playing with things you don’t understand,” Julian’s grandmother pronounced, a cackle at the edges of her voice.

“Mother,” Janette Baptiste said, “I thought you were asleep.”

“Bah, don’t want much sleep when you get to my age,” she said. “There’ll be plenty of time for that soon enough.”

Silver took a sip from her mug to strengthen herself and felt the warmth flow through her. She turned to the elderly matriarch.

“Julian told me that you were a voodoo priestess,” she said. “Do you know how we can help the Doctor, turn him back into the man he was?”

“Julian’s got a big mouth,” his grandmother said, glaring at him over the top of her spectacles. “As for your friend, you can’t turn back time, more’s the pity. Serves him right for getting involved in things he couldn’t understand in the first place.”

“He didn’t...”

“Mother!”

Julian’s grandmother waved away their protests.

“You young people are all the same. You see something that takes your fancy and you think that you can just lift the bits that interest you out of one culture and wrap it up in your own. What do you know about voodoo, girl?”

“Well, it’s an African religion and it’s about worshipping and communicating with spirits called Loa,” Silver replied. “I think.”

Julian’s grandmother scowled. “I meant, what do you know about the history of voodoo?”

Silver thought for a moment. “Didn’t it originate in Haiti? It was something to do with unifying the slaves in a rebellion against their masters or something like that.”

“Humph. So you’ve read a few books. That doesn’t make you an expert and that doesn’t give you the right to play around with our heritage.”

“Grandma,” Julian said quietly, “Rachel didn’t. It was those other people, you remember?”

“People have no respect for anyone else’s culture anymore,” his grandmother complained. “Everyone wants to be like everyone else, no sense of identity. Maybe they had it right, back in the good old days. Separate, but equal, that’s what they said.”

“It was racism, is what it was,” Julian’s father said, his voice a deep bass rumble.

“Why, because they didn’t want us to contaminate their culture? Maybe they were right all along.”

Silver bowed her head and studied her milk. This was clearly an old argument and one she wanted no part in.

“Mother,” Janette Baptiste said, trying to keep her tone reasonable, “this is the twenty-first century. Times have changed.”

“And progress is always a good thing, is it?” the old woman snapped. “Still, you can’t turn back time.”

Julian stood up. “I’m going to find Rachel somewhere where she can lie down. I doubt she wants to listen to us argue about this again.”

Janette Baptiste stood as well, shooting a dark look in her mother’s direction.

“She can have the spare room. I’ll make up the bed.”

\* \* \* \*

Five minutes later, Silver was crawling, fully clothed, beneath a blanket.

“You’ll be okay in here?” Julian asked, hovering in the doorway. Silver nodded sleepily. “I’m sorry about Grandma.”

“Julian, do you think she was right? About us keeping other cultures at arm’s length?”

Julian shook his head. “I think there’s too much we can learn from each other. That said, she’s right that we need to make more of an effort to understand other cultures. I don’t think we do that enough.”

“The Doctor,” Silver said. “She said we couldn’t save the Doctor.”

“He’ll be okay,” Julian promised. “Whatever he’s got, it’s just a virus. UNIT has access to some of the best doctors in the world. As soon as we find him, he’s as good as cured.”

“You promise?” Silver had her eyes closed by this point so she did not see Julian cross his fingers.

“I promise.”

\* \* \* \*

Silver dreamed.

She was back on the boat again, the harpoon-gun heavy in her tired arms. She was being pursued, but when she glanced around, she did not see the Voord. The shapes of her pursuers were indistinct, but she could see enough to tell that they were furred, not sleek like the amphibious aliens. She backed up against the railings, no longer surprised that her escape route was gone. She had experienced this nightmare so many times now, that she knew exactly what to expect. With an air of resignation, she turned to face the Voord who was destined to kill Victor Cole.

But it was not a Voord she came face to face with. It was the Doctor.

“Put that thing away, Silver,” he said, indicating the harpoon. “You might have someone’s eye out with it. Mind you, that’s the worst you’re likely to do.”

He laughed. Silver screamed.

“Be still, child.” Someone placed a hand on Silver’s shoulder and she jumped. She spun round to face the saxophonist she had spoken to earlier. He was leaning on his saxophone as though it was a walking stick.

“It’s only me,” he said. “Well, us. Your friend has let me take up residence in here for the duration.” He stuck out his hand. “Papa Legba at your service.”

Silver looked at the offered hand warily. “Papa Legba. You’re one of the Loa, aren’t you, like that thing inside the Doctor?”

“That ain’t a Loa, little girl.” Papa Legba spat onto the floor. “Take it from one who knows.”

“Then what is it then?”

He shrugged. “There are all sorts of things out there, you can’t expect me to know them all. Your friend’s met them before. He lost his eyes to them last time he put them back in their bottle. He sensed their return, that’s why he was nosing around, silly little man.”

“So we can get rid of them,” Silver said enthusiastically.

“Wipe that smile of your face, little girl, it ain’t what you think,” Papa Legba told her. “Getting rid of them is the easy part, but no-one’s ever freed one of their mounts from under them before.”

Silver’s hope fled as quickly as it arrived. “So we can’t save the Doctor?”

“Now I didn’t say that, did I? Your friend, he seems to think you’ve got a chance, that’s why he called out to me. I open doors into other realms and he wants me to help you find this Doctor of yours. He’s got a nerve asking a Loa for a favour, that he has, but I reckon I still owe him for services rendered.”

“You’re going to take me to where the Doctor is?” Silver asked.

Papa Legba grinned. “Child, we’re already there.”

Silver turned round, surprised to see that they were no longer on the boat. Instead, they were in the TARDIS. The walls were an intense, almost blinding white and the roundels were cleaner than she remembered.

“It’s not the real thing,” Papa Legba explained. “This is the way he sees it. Without the faults.”

Silver nodded, though she was only half listening. “Where is he?”

Papa Legba indicated the console. Slowly, Silver walked round it. She found him on the side of the console furthest from the exterior doors, huddled in a ball beneath the “cap” of the mushroom.

“Doctor?”

“Shh!” he hissed.

“Doctor?” Silver whispered, crouching down.

“They’ll hear you,” the Doctor protested. “If they hear you they’ll find me.”

“Who’ll find you?”

He looked away from her. “I’m all that’s left, just the tiniest piece of me. They’ve taken all the rest. But they won’t get me, oh no, not if they can’t find me.”

“You’re just going to hide?”

“It’s the only way.”

“But, Doctor, you’ve got to fight back.”

The Doctor shook his head. “No point. Can’t win. Safe here.”

“And what about everyone else out there.”

“Can’t help them, not this time. Can’t even help myself.”

The Doctor drew himself into an even tighter ball and began scraping against the base of the console as though searching for a way inside. Silver reached out and grabbed hold of his hands, amazed at how frail and delicate they were. She forced him to look at her.

“You’re still here, Doctor,” she said. “There’s a part of you that’s still you. That means we have a chance to fight back.”

“No. Can’t fight. Too weak. Far, far, far, far, far too weak.”

“Doctor?” There was a new figure standing behind Silver. She had long strawberry blonde hair and wore a grey overcoat and a long white scarf. She smiled at Silver. “I’m Grae.”

Silver tried to return the smile. "The Doctor talks a lot about you."

"He does?" Grae raised an eyebrow, then dropped to one knee so that she was on a level with the Doctor. "Now listen here, Doctor, you've saved us on enough occasions that it's about time we returned the favour."

"Too late," the Doctor muttered. "They're coming for me. There, in the shadows."

"Who are?" Silver followed the line of the Doctor's pointing finger, but she could not see anyone. Grae waved her into silence.

"You're stronger than this, Doctor," she insisted. "You're the most remarkable person I know. I even did my Academy thesis on you. You're my hero. If anyone can beat this, you can."

"Not this time."

"Why not?" Grae demanded. "Think about all those people you've helped, all those lives you've touched. You've done more good in the universe than any other person I know, more than all the other people I know put together. The Doctor I know wouldn't just give up."

The Doctor's eyes flashed.

"You don't understand," he snapped, with a sudden display of lucidity. "I'm not in control anymore. No matter what happened, no matter what dangers we faced, no matter what else they took away from us, I always had a chance because I always had my mind. But they've taken that away, don't you see? They've taken away my advantage."

"Then take it back," Silver said.

"Can't." The light in his eyes was fading. "Don't know how."

Silver turned to Papa Legba. "Help us."

Papa Legba shrugged. "I was only asked to bring you here. I've done my bit, little girl."

"But I don't know how to help him."

"Sure you do."

"Silver," Grae said, "if there's a chance you can help him then you've got to try."

"I don't know how," Silver protested. "Really I don't."

Papa Legba scowled. The expression looked out of place on the face of the always cheerful saxophonist. And she remembered.

"Doctor, I know how you can beat them," she said with a grin that threatened to split her face in two. "Change the rules."

"Change the rules?"

"They're in your mind, right, but it's still your mind."

"Only part. Tiny part."

"That's enough," Silver told him. "Think about it. We're outside the real world, here, so the normal rules don't apply."

"Don't understand."

Silver shook her head. This was wrong, her being the teacher and the Doctor as the student.

"You can change the reality inside your head," she explained. "You think the sky is blue, but what if I told you it was green."

"But the sky is blue."

"Out there, maybe, but in here it can be whatever you want it to be. It's like magic."

"I don't believe in magic."

"Try. Please. For me."

"There's so little of me left. Don't know if I have the strength."

"Please, Doctor. Please try. I believe in you." Papa Legba put a hand on her shoulder.

"It's time to go," he said. "You've done all you can."

"But..."

But Papa Legba's grip was strong and Silver could not help being led towards the door. She risked one last glance over her shoulder as they left and her heart skipped a beat.

The ceiling of the TARDIS had turned green.

\* \* \* \*

Someone was shaking Silver awake. She opened her mouth to protest, but that same someone clamped a hand over it before she could utter a sound.

"Stay quiet," Julian whispered. "And keep away from the windows."

“What’s going on?” Silver whispered back as she rolled out of bed.

“Something’s out there,” Julian replied, “watching the house.”

“You don’t think…”

“Yes, I do,” Julian said. “They must have followed you here.”

Outside, the wind howled. The rain had returned with a vengeance and it hammered against the window-pane like gunfire. Silver swore.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t think.”

“It’s not your fault.”

“But I’ve put your family in danger,” Silver pointed out.

“And that couldn’t be helped.” Julian took Silver’s hand and together they scuttled over to the stairs, keeping low so as not to be seen from the outside. “Where else were you going to go?”

Julian’s mother and grandmother were waiting for them in the living-room when they arrived. His father joined them a moment later, bringing with him the contents of the gun cabinet.

“I shouldn’t ask,” Julian said to Silver, picking up one of the guns, “but do you know how to use one of these?”

Silver looked at the weapon in horror, her mind flashing back to the deck of the yacht.

“I can’t.”

“That’s okay. It’s a good thing, really.” Julian turned to his father. “Dad, can you give me a hand barricading the windows?”

While Julian and his father set about shifting furniture, Mrs. Baptiste sat down by the firearms and began to methodically check that they were loaded. Realising nobody was paying any attention to her anymore, Silver eased her way over to Julian’s grandmother.

“Excuse me,” she said nervously.

“What is it?” the old woman snapped.

“I need your help.”

Julian’s grandmother was not impressed with Silver’s plan.

“You really think you can beat this thing with magic?” she mocked. “You have no idea what you’re dealing with.”

They had moved their discussion to the kitchen so as not to disturb the others, but Silver fought to keep her voice down all the same.

“I bet I’ve had a lot more experience with this sort of thing than you have,” she said. “I’ve seen more horrors than you can imagine and I’ve beaten them all. Every single one. But that’s not the point. The point is that you’re right, I don’t understand voodoo. And you’re right that people shouldn’t play around with powerful magic like this if they don’t know what they’re doing. That’s why I need your help. Help me to understand. Teach me how to fight them.”

Julian’s grandmother scowled. “You need to show more respect for your elders, young lady.”

“Respect isn’t a right,” Silver replied. “It has to be earned. The Doctor taught me that.”

“Humph! So, what did you have in mind?”

Silver hopped up onto one of the stools by the breakfast bar.

“The Doctor’s been infected by a disease. It’s a magical disease, but there must still be a cure, right?”

Julian’s grandmother put a wrinkled hand over Silver’s own. “You sound like my grandson,” she said. “He has this idea that his UNIT doctors will be able to find a cure, but this is outside of his science.”

“I know that. That’s why we’re going to use magic.”

“And you think you can come up with a spell that people have spent centuries looking for without success.”

“Yes, I do.” Silver’s eyes were sparkling. “Their problem was that they were looking in the wrong place, thinking it’s either a science problem or a magic problem. What if it’s both?”

“I hope you’re not suggesting we contaminate the art with your wretched science,” the old woman said indignantly.

“Why not?” Silver asked. “I know how you feel about mixing ideas, but I’m not trying to replace one with another or destroy what’s gone before. I just want to take the best of two worlds and create something better. Will you help me?”

\* \* \* \*

Minutes slipped into hours. All of the external windows and doors on the ground floor had been blocked. Julian was sitting on an arm of the sofa, a shotgun cradled in his lap. He was peering out into the garden through the small gap he had left when moving the bookcase, but the storm clouds in the sky obscured the moon and the stars making it difficult to see much of anything. Even so, he knew that they were out there and that, sooner or later, they would act.

Silver tried not to think about the things outside. She could not afford to be hurried. Biochemistry was her field, not immunology, but she was not going to lose focus. She could do this. She had to do this. Under normal circumstances, something like this would have taken weeks, maybe months or years to complete. They had hours. But if they failed: then what would become of the Doctor?

Silver's father had been a biochemist, an extremely talented one. After her mother had left, Silver had spent more time with her father, sitting quietly in his lab while he worked. Her father had thought that she was doing her homework, but she was really watching him. She could learn far more from seeing her father in action than she could from any dry textbook. She remembered a time when she had wanted to be a scientist like her father. She had wanted so badly to win her father's approval. She never had, but now, with the Doctor's life at stake, she had to draw upon everything her father had taught her and, maybe somewhere, he'd finally be proud of her.

Silver gritted her teeth. She was not going to fail. Not this time.

They had found a microscope in the attic. Julian's father had bought it for his son's tenth birthday. It was not great, but it was adequate. Silver had set it up at one end of the breakfast bar. The gun Julian had given her lay neglected next to it. Silver was glad that she had been too tired to wash when she arrived. She still had the Doctor's skin under her fingernails from when she had scratched him and she set about making slides from the scrapings, studying the mutated tissue.

Next to her, at the breakfast bar, Julian's grandmother was chanting, mixing potions and powders and calling on the Loa to aid her. Every so often she would pass one of her blessed concoctions to Silver who would apply it to one of her samples and analyse the result. Sometimes she would just shake her head. Other times she would see something encouraging and make a suggestion to her co-worker as to what line of investigation they should pursue. It was slow work and laborious, but it was methodical and they were making progress. At least Silver hoped they were.

More than anything else, Silver prayed, begging the Goddess to watch over her and, more importantly, the Doctor. The slides and the potions and all the mechanics of what they were doing were almost irrelevant, just a means of focusing the energies on the task in hand. What mattered was Silver's faith; and she had faith in the Doctor in abundance.

Patiently, she applied the latest batch of potion to a slide and examined it under the microscope. She whooped with joy.

"We did it," she yelled, grabbing hold of Julian's grandmother and dancing round her. "We actually did it." She turned back to the microscope. "This will only work on the Doctor, though. We still need to come up with a version for humans."

"You did it once," Julian's grandmother told her. "You can do it again."

"We did it," Silver corrected. She picked up one of the slides of the Doctor's cells. "I'll need an infected human sample. Do you think I could use these to infect some of my own cells..."

Before Silver could finish the thought, a shape smashed through the kitchen window. A cloud of glass accompanied it as it threw itself at Silver, knocking her to the ground. Hitting her head on the corner of the breakfast bar as she fell, she blacked out.

\* \* \* \*

They were running across the garden on all fours.

"Those are my roses," Julian's father yelled as he raised a shotgun and fired at one of the creatures. The first shot only winged it, but the second put it down as blood erupted from the side of its head. Matthew Baptiste passed the shotgun to his wife to reload and reached for another weapon.

He nearly dropped it in shock. As he watched, the creature he had shot got back up. It rolled its head and the gaping wound in its temple closed.

“Julian,” he yelled. “We have a problem.”

“I’ve noticed,” Julian called back. He took careful aim and shot the legs out of another Therianthrope. He did not bother to watch as the leg re-knitted itself, instead moving on to his next target. “I’ve already radioed for help. We just have to hold them off until they get here.”

“Hold them off, he says,” Matthew Baptiste muttered to his wife as she handed him a freshly loaded gun. He grinned at her to show that he was not afraid in the slightest. She was not fooled for a moment.

The Therianthropes were already at the house, hammering on the doors. Two were at the living-room window, trying to force aside the bookcase that blocked their entrance.

“Help me,” Matthew said to his wife as he leaned against the shelves with his shoulder. Janette Baptiste joined him, but they could not match the strength of the monsters demanding entrance.

“Get back!” Julian yelled at his parents. He had taken a bottle of whisky from the drinks cabinet, stuffed his handkerchief into the neck of the bottle and set light to it. When his parents dived for cover, Julian threw the bottle at the bookcase and it shattered, spreading burning alcohol across the wood. The smell of burning flesh filled the air and the creatures yelped before withdrawing. For now.

“Well done, son,” Julian’s father said, clapping him on the back, “but did you have to use my favourite whisky?”

There was a crash from the kitchen.

“Mother!” Janette cried.

\* \* \* \*

Julian’s grandmother had fallen. Her hip felt as though it was on fire, but she forced herself to crawl for the door. The Therianthrope, a hideous cross between a man and a wolf, was standing over Silver. Was the girl still alive? She was not moving. The old woman wanted to go to her aid, but she would be of no use to the girl if she were dead. She could see the gun, abandoned by the microscope, but she could not reach it without going by the wolf-man. She knew that her only option was to go to get help, but her body cried out with protest each time she reached for the door. She was moving closer, but by inches. The exit was only three feet away, but it might as well have been three miles.

“Going somewhere?” the Therianthrope asked. Its voice was guttural. Horrible. Julian’s grandmother tried to call out for her grandson and the rest of her family, but terror had robbed her of the ability to speak. The wolf-man stepped away from Silver and crouched down beside her. Its breath was hot, damp and foul.

“We all know what happened to grandmother when the wolf got into her cottage, don’t we?” it asked.

“Then I guess that makes me the friendly woodcutter.”

\* \* \* \*

Silver’s head throbbed. It felt as though someone had tried to crack it open. Her eyes felt swollen, but she forced one open and then wished she had not. The same creature that had attacked her was now crouched by Julian’s grandmother. Silver rolled onto her side and the world spun. She put out a hand to steady herself, but the kitchen continued to swim around her.

“I guess that makes me the friendly woodcutter.”

Silver recognised the voice, but for a moment she was unable to place it. A tall man dressed from head-to-toe in black had clambered through the shattered window and now jumped down from beside the sink.

“Papa Legba,” Silver croaked.

The man grinned, rain dripping from his clothes onto the tiled floor. “Not this time.”

“You?” the Therianthrope growled. “We killed you once.”

“You tried.”

"This time we'll succeed." The Therianthrope threw itself at the blind man, wrapping its arms around him in a cruel parody of an embrace. They staggered drunkenly about the kitchen, smashing into cupboards and sending pots and pans crashing to the floor. Then they parted and both of them collapsed.

"What's happened here?" Julian demanded, bursting into the room. His mother dropped to her knees and helped his grandmother to a sitting position. Ignoring them all, Silver crawled over to the blind man. He was lying on his back on the tiles and there was a large wound in his throat. He reached out a hand towards her.

"Silver," he said. Then his body shook violently, blood welled up out of his mouth. Then he was still.

"How did he know my name?" Silver asked.

"Not you," Julian's grandmother said, gradually regaining her voice. "His hand."

Silver looked again and saw that the blind man was holding a box. She prised it from his fingers.

"Who was he?" Julian's mother asked.

"A friend," Silver replied.

"He was a high priest," Julian's grandmother explained. "He took over when I stepped down. It was his job to defend us from those creatures that lurk in the dark."

"Like him you mean?" Julian's father kicked the body of the creature that had killed the blind man.

"Matthew!" his wife protested.

"It's all right, Jan," he said. "This one's dead."

"What's in the box?" Julian asked Silver.

She opened it up.

"Bullets," she said. "Silver bullets." Despite everything, Julian laughed.

"Of course. How else would you kill werewolves?"

"Speaking of which..." Matthew Baptiste began. They followed the line of his eyes and saw another Therianthrope crouched in the broken window, the wind driving the rain around it.

Julian picked up the gun that Silver had left on the breakfast bar and opened it up.

"Silver," he yelled.

She snapped the box closed and threw it to him. He caught it one-handed and started loading the bullets into the gun.

The creature licked its lips.

"Hurry it up, Julian," Matthew said.

"Working as fast as I can, Dad," Julian replied.

The creature roared.

Julian snapped the gun back together, aimed and fired. The bullet caught the Therianthrope in the eyes and it fell backwards out of sight. Nobody dared to breathe as they waited for the creature to climb back up and try again. Long seconds past and then, finally, Matthew Baptiste threw his hands in the air and yelled in triumph.

"You did it, son," he said, clapping Julian on the back. "You killed the thing."

Julian did not smile.

"There are still five more out there," he said, "and no sign of UNIT. Go get the guns, Dad, we're going hunting."

Matthew Baptiste nodded and went to fetch the weapons.

"Do you have to?" Janette asked.

"It's Mardi Gras, Mom," he said. "Think about how many people are going to be out on the streets tonight. Someone has to protect them."

"By killing them?" Silver asked. Using the breakfast bar as a support, she hauled herself upright. "They're human beings."

"They *were* human beings," Julian corrected. "Now they're monsters. I wish we could try to save them, but we're not even sure they can be saved and if it's a choice between them and us..."

"And what about the Doctor?"

"I'm sorry, Silver."

Julian's father returned and began loading the other guns with silver bullets. Julian handed his already loaded pistol to Silver.

“Stay here and protect the rest of my family,” he said, “please?”

Silver wrapped her hands around the pistol’s grip and nodded weakly. Julian took a gun from his father and turned and headed for the door. His mother grabbed hold of his sleeve as he went past.

“Be careful,” she said.

“As always.”

\* \* \* \*

The rain was falling heavily and thunder rumbled in the distance, but the revellers did not care. They pressed against the barriers, reaching out towards the floats that made their slow procession down the street. Live music mixed with recordings blaring from speakers, mixed with the shouting and the laughing and the hooting and the whistling. Bodies writhed against one another and dancers gave the sounds visual life in masks and costumes ranging from the flamboyant and extravagant to the very, very minimalist.

Somewhere in this crowd were the rest of the wolves, Julian knew. He just had to find them.

\* \* \* \*

The Doctor kept watch. He had not participated in the attack on the Baptiste home or in the subsequent retreat into the carnival. Some part of him had held him back from the assault, but was he not as guilty as the others simply for leading them to Silver? Had she survived the assault?

“If she did, it’s no thanks to you. You make a habit of letting your companions down.” Tamara Scott was standing next to him. The late Tamara Scott.

“You let me die, Doctor,” she accused him, anger twisting her normally attractive face. “You could have saved me, but you chose to save others instead. Do your companions mean so little to you?”

“I thought I was doing the right thing.”

“And I paid the price for your mistake, like a good companion.”

“I just do the best I can,” the Doctor protested. “What more do you expect of me?”

“You’re the Doctor, aren’t you?” Tamara asked. “You’re supposed to be the one who always finds another way, who charms his way over impossible odds. You could have done something!”

“I wanted to...”

“That’s not good enough.”

“I’m sorry.” The Doctor buried his face in his hands. “I’m so sorry, Tamara. I failed you. I failed all of you.”

“No, you didn’t.” There was a hand pressing down on the Doctor’s shoulder. He looked up and saw Tamara again, only this time she was wearing a broad smile and the same blue cat suit she had had on when they had first met.

“Tamara?”

“Me again,” she replied, “here to undo the damage the last me did.”

“You’re here to help me?”

“Of course I’m here to help you.”

“But I failed you. I let you die.”

“You didn’t *let* me do anything,” Tamara retorted. “I went into this with my eyes open, thank you very much. And, for the record, even knowing the consequences, I think you made the right choice.”

“You do?”

Tamara shook her head. “You really are in a bad way, aren’t you? Pull yourself together, for god’s sake.”

“What’s the point?” the Doctor asked. “I’ve failed, Tamara. I’ve fought so hard for so long, but they’ve finally caught up with me.”

“Who are they?”

The Doctor shifted uncomfortably from one foot to another.

"I've lost, Tamara."

"You're lost, all right," she replied. "You know, after you dropped in on me – literally – you changed my life forever. Sure there were some bad spots along the way, but I wouldn't trade in what you gave me for what I had before, not in a million years. You showed me that one person really can make a difference and gave me the chance to be that one person. I'll always be grateful to you for that. No matter how dire the situation, how impossible the odds, you always dived straight in just because you could. That's the Doctor I remember."

The Doctor hung his head. "I don't know how much is left of the Doctor you knew."

\* \* \* \*

Julian's gun was heavy in Silver's hand. Could she actually use it if it came down to it? She doubted it. She had not been able to kill the Voord, so why should this be any different? She smacked her hand down on the breakfast bar. The microscope rocked unsteadily.

"Are you all right, Rachel?" Mrs. Baptiste asked. She was taping a bin-liner over the broken window to try to keep the weather out.

"Of course she's not all right," Julian's grandmother snapped.

"I just feel so useless," Silver said. "I should be out there, doing something."

"Leave it to Julian," Mrs. Baptiste told her. "He's a professional."

Silver hung her head. "I'm supposed to be the Doctor's partner. We're supposed to be a team. But he's out there, probably dying, and what am I doing?"

"You were trying to save lives," Julian's grandmother said, "or have you forgotten the potion?"

"We never finished it," Silver said. "What we've got will only work on the Doctor and we don't have time to make a new batch."

"Then save your friend and thank your gods that you're able to do that much." Julian's grandmother tottered over to the breakfast bar and picked up the medicine bottle half-full of liquid. She offered it to Silver. "Well, what are you waiting for?"

"She's just a child," Mrs. Baptiste pointed out.

"Well?"

Silver snatched the bottle and ran for the door.

"Just a child indeed," Julian's grandmother berated her daughter. "I wish there were more young people like that one."

\* \* \* \*

"Doctor."

The Doctor was being addressed by a tall black man dressed head-to-toe in black leather. He held a golden saxophone in his hands. The man had lost his sunglasses and his sightless eyes rolled aimlessly within their sockets.

"Do I know you from somewhere?" the Doctor asked.

The man grinned. "More intimately than you might think."

"Aren't you supposed to be dead?" the Doctor asked, frowning.

"We all have our faults." The saxophonist's smile faded. "It's time."

"So soon?"

"You've had a good run, Doctor."

"Maybe." The Doctor shook his head. "There was so much more I wanted to do."

"I can relate."

"It can't end like this, though." The Doctor looked in disgust at his hands, now covered in grey brown fur with the exception of his long curled claws. "I'm the one the monsters fear, the one who scares away the creatures hiding under the bed, who drives off the nightmares. I'm the one that makes it safe to come out from behind the sofa. Now look at me."

The saxophonist ran his thumb along his lower lip.

"It's not one of your better looks."

"I'm becoming the monster," the Doctor continued, "the very thing I've sworn to fight."

"Then why stop now? Silver believes in you, you know?"

"Silver? You've seen her? Is she..."

“Alive?” The man laughed. “Of course she’s alive. She’s a very resilient young lady. You’ve made a good choice this time, Doctor.”

“I sometimes think she chose me.”

The saxophonist nodded. “Speaking of choices, you’ve got one last one to make.”

“I think it may be too late for that,” the Doctor replied mournfully. “This time, the monsters win.”

“Now what kind of defeatist talk is that? You owe it to Silver and to Tamara and to Grae to try at the very least. There’s still a part of you left in there, Doctor. If there wasn’t then we wouldn’t be talking like this.”

“It’s a very small part, I’m afraid.”

“It’s still enough for one last throw of the dice.” The saxophonist leaned in close. “So, what’s it going to be? Are you going to choose the manner of your death?”

\* \* \* \*

Julian forced his way through the partying throng. His shirt stank where somebody had spilled beer down it and it was sticky and uncomfortable against his skin. He kept glancing from side to side, looking for his prey, and, in so doing, he sometimes missed what was right in front of him. He ignored the complaints of the people he almost knocked over, tuning out the abuse being hurled. He let his fingers curl tighter around the grip of his gun and eased his weapon out from where it was concealed so that it was just visible, peeking out from beneath the folds of his untucked shirt. That normally silenced the complaints.

There, on the other side of the parade. It was concealed by one of the floats now, but he could have sworn he caught a glimpse of grey-brown fur. He barged through the revellers, fighting his way to the front of the crowd. They fought back, reluctant to give up their prime positions. Julian flashed his UNIT badge and, when that failed to move them, drew his gun.

There it was again. The float had moved again and he could definitely make out a man-like shape covered in fur. He levelled his gun and took careful aim. People screamed. Someone jostled his arm and Julian swore, struggling to regain control. Where was his target? Where was his target? There he was, there, looking like nothing so much as...

It was a man dressed as a giant teddy bear. He had been targeting a guy in a carnival costume and, in the process, he had panicked the crowd. Shamefaced, he lowered his weapon just as another furred shape knocked him off his feet. This time it was not a teddy bear. This time he was pinned to the ground by one of the Therianthropes, his gun, fully loaded with deadly silver bullets, trapped uselessly beneath him.

Hot saliva dripped onto his face. He fought to breathe as his chest was crushed under the creature’s weight. The wolf dug its claws into his shoulder and Julian could not help crying out as the flesh split apart. He tried to thrash about, to dislodge the creature, but he was pinned firmly beneath it. If he could just reach his gun...

He screamed again as the Therianthrope sunk its teeth into him. Most of the passers-by were too frightened to do anything other than clear away to a safe distance. A couple of guys, however, fortified by plenty of drink, had picked up improvised clubs and were now beating the creature across its back.

Slowly, the Therianthrope raised its head to look at them. A low rumble began somewhere in its chest, rolled up through its throat, gaining volume as it travelled, and burst out of its jaws as a growl. The pair took an involuntary step back.

The creature sprang at the nearest one. It did not play with its prey this time, the way it had with Julian. Instead it tore this victim’s throat right out and was already turning to his friend before life had fled the body. Ignoring the pain in his shoulder, Julian rolled onto one knee, raised his gun in his left hand and fired twice in quick succession between the Therianthrope’s eyes. It looked at him for a moment with a slightly puzzled expression, then collapsed.

“Is it dead?” asked the guy who had tackled the wolf and survived.

“Yeah, it’s dead,” Julian replied. “Thanks for the assistance.”

The guy was still in shock. “Are there any more of them?”

Julian did not reply. He looked out over the chaos that had once been a procession knowing that somewhere out there were four more wolves, the Doctor among them, causing who

knew what carnage. He looked down at the remains of his right arm and shoulder and fought back the bile rising in his throat. Whatever happened now, it was out of his hands.

\* \* \* \*

They were feeding. They had retreated from the Baptiste house, not expecting them to have weapons capable of hurting them, and gone looking for easier prey by way of consolation. The Mardi Gras procession was like an all you can eat buffet and they were not about to pass up this opportunity. Blood matted their fur and strips of flesh hung from where they were trapped between off-white teeth. They could smell the fear emanating from their prey and it was intoxicating.

Then, above the screams of terror, they heard something else. The call. They were being summoned by their pack leader, the alpha male, the one in the body that had once been called the Doctor. They threw a final longing looks at the escaping prey, but, no matter how much they might want to continue to hunt, they could not refuse the summons so, howling at the sky, they ran away from the city. The call led them south and west, past Audubon Park where they had made their home and over the lazy Mississippi River to a crumbling mansion on the edge of the wetlands.

\* \* \* \*

Cinnamon found the Doctor near the top of the house, looking out of a window at the city in the distance. Lightning split the sky.

“I see that you’re finally accepting your place in the pack,” Cinnamon said, walking up behind the Doctor and wrapping her arms around him. She pressed her cheek against the fur of his back.

“What’s the point of having all of these abilities if I don’t start to use them.” The Doctor was turning something over and over in his paws.

“What’s that you’ve got?”

“This?” The Doctor turned to face her. “This is a cigarette lighter. I don’t smoke myself, but the trader who sold it to me said that you never know when one of these might come in useful.”

“A lighter.” Too late, Cinnamon tasted the air. It was almost masked by the odours emanating from the swamp, but now that she stopped to look for it she could detect the unmistakable scent of...“Gas!”

“I’m sorry, Cinnamon,” the Doctor said. “It may just have been the hormones, but I did love you for a time.”

He ignited the lighter.

\* \* \* \*

Silver stumbled, plunging her left leg deep into muddy water. There was an unpleasant sucking sound as she dragged it back out. There was a house up ahead. It looked dark and abandoned, like one of those old houses in which teenagers take refuge in horror films. That had to be where the pack had gone – there was nowhere else they could be – and where the pack were, the Doctor would be too. Buoyed by this reasoning, Silver started running towards the house.

The explosion knocked her off her feet.

\* \* \* \*

Brackish water filled the Doctor’s mouth.

“I’m alive,” he whispered.

His elation evaporated as he looked at his hands. They were still covered with fur, singed though it may have been. He could feel the beast inside him rising up to take control again, but he fought it down. He was lying in swamp water. The house above him was still on fire and it cast strange shadows across the water. The floors above must have collapsed, sending him tumbling to safety. But if he escaped...he glanced around sharply, his eyes settling on

Cinnamon's body. It was floating face down and smoke rose slowly from its blackened fur. The Doctor touched it gingerly and it bobbed away from him. Cinnamon was dead and the Doctor did not know whether to be relieved or saddened.

The one thing he was sure of was that he was very, very tired and, now that he knew that his task was done, he allowed himself to be overtaken by fatigue. As he did so, the beast seized its chance.

\* \* \* \*

Silver waded towards the burning building.

"Doctor," she yelled again, her voice hoarse both from the shouting and the smoke inhalation. "Doctor!"

He has to be alive, Silver kept telling herself. He can't die. She ignored the little voice insisting that he was as mortal as she was. There was a creaking and groaning above her and she flung herself back into the muddy water as a section of wooden wall fell away in a shower of brightly glowing embers. She screamed as it hit the water where she had been standing just a moment before.

"Jumpy, aren't you."

Silver spun round, splashing water in all directions. The Doctor crouched on the bank. He barely looked human anymore, the beast having rolled right over him, reshaping him in its image. Only the tattered clothes and the intelligence in his eyes gave any indication of his former identity. Silver raised the potion in her hand.

"Doctor," she began nervously, "I can cure you."

"Cure me?" the Doctor sprang, landing on Silver and knocking the medicine bottle from her hand. The bottle tumbled end over end and struck the side of the burning house, shattering on impact. Its contents trickled down into the swamp.

"Did you really think Silver could kill the big bad wolf?" the Doctor asked. Silver struggled, trying to throw the Doctor off her, but his weight was too much. Realising that she could not go upwards, she dived down instead, beneath the water. Caught by surprise, the Doctor released his grip and Silver kicked away, surfacing several feet distant.

The Doctor snarled and set off in pursuit, but his progress was hampered by the water, which allowed Silver to make a break for a bank. She clambered up on to more solid ground and ran. Her clothes were sodden and weighed her down. Her eyes were full of smoke and dirt from the swamp. Her chest burned. Yet despite all of this, she could hear the Doctor padding after her and that alone was sufficient to give her the strength to run.

She had meant to save the Doctor, but he had thrown away his cure. Perhaps, an ever hopeful part of her mind suggested, she could evade the Doctor long enough to make another batch. However, a more realistic portion of her mind told her that the Doctor was already too far gone, that the person she had admired and respected – loved, even – was dead and that only this vicious killer remained. She wiped her freely running nose on the back of her hand, the mucus mixed with hot, salty tears.

Black, twisted trees blurred in her vision, reaching for her with narrow fingers, their branches catching in her hair. She pulled away, crying out as several dark strands were pulled away at the roots. She could see the Doctor closing the gap between them as he powered along on all fours. As he approached the trees, he launched into the air, landing on a sturdy branch. His glowing blue eyes stood out from within the shadows as he paused and tasted the air. Then he began to hurl himself bodily from one tree to the next, covering the distance even more swiftly.

Silver turned away, digging deep inside herself for an extra burst of speed. She stumbled and fell up to her waist in mud. Maybe, she thought, maybe if I stay very still he won't see me. But the Doctor was not the only thing hunting her tonight, as Silver realised when the log nearby sprouted legs and began to move. The alligator slid into the water and began to glide towards its new prey. Silver struggled to reach the bank, but the slimy water clung to her as much as it allowed the alligator to pass unimpeded. Lightning flashed and the reptile's teeth shone.

There was a blur of movement and suddenly the Doctor was on top of the alligator. He wrapped his arms around its head, holding its jaws shut as he wrenched them back. There was a sickening snap and the alligator went limp. The Doctor discarded it like a broken toy.

“Doctor, you saved me!” Was it possible, Silver asked herself, that the Doctor she knew was still in there?

“I saved you for myself,” the Doctor replied, dashing Silver’s hopes. “I won’t have anyone else stealing my rightful prey.”

Silver’s hands searched behind her, reaching for the security of the bank.

“Aren’t you going to run, little girl?” the Doctor asked. “It’s so much more fun when they run.”

“Doctor,” Silver said as she hauled herself slowly out of the mud, “if there’s any part of you still in there, please fight back.”

“Doctor?” The creature spat. “That man rebelled against me, killed my pack, but he won’t be interfering anymore. It’s just you and me now, Silver.”

Free of the sucking mud, Silver fell over backwards. She felt something hard digging into her back and remembered the gun Julian had insisted she take. Without taking her eyes off the Doctor, she pulled it out and pointed it at him. The gun shook in her hands.

“Do you really think that can harm me?” the Doctor sneered.

“Silver bullets,” Silver replied, her voice wavering.

The Doctor hesitated. “You won’t use it, not on your friend.”

“My friend’s already dead,” Silver insisted. “You killed him.”

“Did I?” The creature’s expression of harsh cruelty seemed to melt from its face. “Silver?”

“Doctor?” Tears welled up in Silver’s eyes and in her blurred vision the creature seemed to transform back into the man she remembered.

“Silver, I can’t fight him anymore. So tired.”

“Doctor, please. You can beat him. I know you can.”

“Not this time. Not this time.” The Doctor looked down at the gun that was still pointing at him.

“I want you to use that Silver. Aim here, for my hearts.”

“You’re asking me to kill you?” Silver’s voice cracked.

“Please, Silver, I’m begging you. Don’t let me turn into a monster.”

“I can’t,” Silver wailed.

“Of course you can’t,” the creature inside the Doctor snarled. “You couldn’t possibly harm your beloved Doctor.” The creature’s face flowed freely between that of the monster and that of the Doctor. “Please, Silver. It’s the only way.”

“I love you.”

“Then save me.”

Silver closed her eyes and squeezed the trigger.

*BLAM!*

The creature – Silver could not think of it as the Doctor, not while she did this – roared with agony as the bullet struck.

*BLAM!*

The recoil forced Silver down against the mossy bank, but she gripped the gun with both hands and squeezed the trigger again.

*BLAM!*

Hot fluid sprayed onto her face and hands and clothes. With her eyes closed she could not tell if it was blood or worse.

*BLAM!*

*BLAM!*

*BLAM!*

Click.

Click.

Silver opened her eyes. The gun was empty and she let the weapon fall from her hands with considerable relief. She tried not to focus on the gaping wounds in the creature’s chest, instead concentrating on the softness behind those emerald green eyes.

“Thank you,” the Doctor said.

He fell backwards into the water.

\* \* \* \*

A red haze swamped the Doctor's vision. He could feel the beast still lurking in his mind, howling its protest against its defeat. The silver burned where it touched him, but the Doctor viewed it as a cleansing fire.

"It's death, Doctor," the beast told him, "death for both of us."

The Doctor dismissed the creature. For the first time in far too long, he felt as though control of his own mind was within reach.

"No," the Toymaker insisted. "This time the game is ours." The Toymaker's features blurred as he melted into someone else.

"This time we will claim you." Bramahl looked haughtily down at him. "This has all been for your benefit, Doctor, and you've fallen right into our trap."

"You will become like us," the Cyber-Leader said as he replaced the former member of Section 13.

"No," the Doctor told them, "I won't. My mind is my own. My beliefs are my own. You cannot take them from me."

"Then we will take your life, Doctor," the Master said, "for the very last time."

"You cannot escape us," Shemjaza told him.

"Doctor," the Gold Dalek said, "you will be exterminated!"

"This time, you will die."

"Die, Doctor."

"Die."

The red haze lifted from the Doctor's vision and with it the hallucinations. He felt the creature's essence flee his mind as his life trickled out of the holes in his chest. Had his twisted form been capable of it, a peaceful smile would have touched his lips. He could see Silver, sitting on the bank, her knees pulled up to her chin, tears streaming down her face. He wanted to reach out to her, to tell her that it was all right, but he had not got the strength.

"She knows, Doctor," Tamara said. "If not now, then she will later. Sometimes a death is necessary, no matter how much we might wish there was another way. You taught me that."

The Doctor's eyes brightened at the sight of his three former companions, here to make sure that he did not spend his final moments alone.

"She's strong, Doctor," Taryn said, "stronger than she knows. Travelling with you makes us all more than what we were."

Taryn and Tamara each took one of the Doctor's hands, lifting him up. Grae put her hands on his shoulders and looked him in the eyes.

"They're waiting for you, Doctor," she told him before stepping aside.

Behind her, in the distance, seven grey shadows were fading into being. The wise man, the hobo, the dandy, the bohemian, the innocent, the braggart and the deceiver. Old friends, all of them.

"Are you frightened?" Grae asked.

"No," the Doctor replied. "It's time."

With those final words, the Doctor cast his spirit loose and let himself be drawn to his rightful place with the other seven. His body was swallowed up by the swamp.

\* \* \* \*

*When the wolf had eaten his fill, he lay back down in the bed, fell asleep and began to snore very loudly. A woodcutter was passing by the house and, concerned by the loudness of the snoring, decided to pay the old woman a visit to see if she was in need of anything.*

*He went into Grandmother's house and found the wolf asleep on the bed inside.*

*"Do I find you here, you old sinner?" the woodcutter said. "Long have I sought you."*

*As the woodcutter raised his axe, it occurred to him that the wolf might have eaten the grandmother and that she might still be saved. So, taking a knife from his belt, he began to cut open the stomach of the sleeping wolf. He had not cut far when he saw the little girl.*

*"How frightened I have been," she said. "How dark it was inside the wolf."*

*After the little girl, the grandmother came out alive also, though scarcely able to breathe.*

*The little girl fetched great stones with which she filled the wolf's belly before stitching it back up. She and her grandmother left the house alive and well. The wolf, weighed down by the stones, collapsed and fell dead.*

The End?

# DUNCAN JOHNSON

You may remember Duncan Johnson from his contribution to the Season 32 omnibus (he can hope, can't he?), but he started his involvement with TDWP here in Season 33. He feels that this temporal chicanery is entirely appropriate when writing about a Time Lord and invites you to join him at his website, [www.themysteriousplanet.com](http://www.themysteriousplanet.com), where he persists his penchant for writing series out of typical chronological order.

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The  
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Season 34



