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PROJECT

THE CLOCKMAKER'S DAUGHTER

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Prologue

*From the clock-tower,
wreathed in smoke,
Time speaks gravely,
stroke on stroke.*

Song at Summers End by ARD Fairburn

Dismal.

One manner to describe how the town looked on that particular morning. From the dune-ceiling of the world to the incomprehensible carpet, rain thundered, storming down, obscuring the dreary masterpiece from the grand city-scapes and into an abstract canvas of blurred shapes and contours. Unidentifiable objects struck across the sky, seemingly riding the lightning, each flash illuminating their onyx wings, looking like those of a giant bat; ragged and frayed at the edges, spiking out at different intersections.

The streets had been emptied hours before and now, hidden in the confines of a blanket of decomposing newspapers, as grey as the town that surrounded them. The man looked toward the sky, keeping the bundle he held close to his chest. His face showed woe in each wrinkle, contorting it until his skin looked like elephant-hide.

Thunder ejaculated, causing Cedric's eyes to widen. He kicked the newspapers away from his body and stood up, wrapping his duffel coat more firmly around himself. He observed the sky, watching as the beasts flew across the trail of lightning that proceeded to scar it in rapid succession.

The rain continued to bombard the ground in its torrential motion as he stepped onto the street, making sure not to make too much of a splash. Torrential wasn't the correct word to describe such a kamikaze attack of rain; this was a monsoon that wouldn't have happened had

the army managed to fight back. If the enemy didn't know how to transform cities into deadly places then Cedric knew that he would still be living in his niche in a small corner of his hometown.

Lightning struck once more and Cedric slipped into another doorway to hide from the beasts in the air. With the shock subsiding, he walked out and continued on his journey. He prayed for no one to notice him, but when had his prayers been answered? Each night he had prayed for a savior who could drive the beasts and their riders away, but he'd figured long ago that prayers were only wishes that weren't egocentric and that wishes never came true.

Back streets had become a haven, he thought as he sped down one now. Sheltered from the rain by canopies of candy-stripes, Cedric recognized where he was immediately. The old base of operations, he had met with the others who had wanted an uprising against their new lords and masters. Murder had been their final end. Of course nothing was spoken of anymore, so the only thing that made him mute about the situation was the fear that the same fate would conquer him and force him into submission.

He stopped at the corner, nearly tripping over his own feet just so that he could manage to brake on time. Two others were conversing in the next alley; the alley that he *had* to go down. But everyone had left, presumably, everyone who had survived anyway. Could these be the beings that Cedric heard so much of but never saw; the myth that had cursed him for years, the legend that had become a plague that you used to scare children to sleep at night? Could these people be The Damned Legion?

The murmurs began then, quietly at first, then became such a cacophony of sound that he couldn't hear the thunder. He didn't understand the words. They came so quickly that the snippets of indescribable nonsense he did hear caused his mind to stray. The senility of age had fast-approached in those few seconds and he found deafness, blindness and the state of arthritis plunging themselves upon his body. A mild case of amnesia crossed his mind for a moment and in that moment he forgot who sat in his arms. She cried now, a cry that roared above all the noise that the voices were making and Cedric knew one thing. He needed to run. He needed to run fast.

His legs couldn't carry him fast enough. He threw his coat to the ground in a fit of rage that caused the fear to expand, catching in his chest and causing his throat to contract. Blood rushed to his head and the pressure it added caused much unwanted pain. But he couldn't stop.

The voices still screeched out to him; a banshee's call on the wind, and yet he didn't stop. His toes thrashed against the ends of his boots and the slight pain felt there was nothing compared to the pain that now attacked his stomach. He could feel the feeling rush through his body at the pace of a leopard chasing its prey.

He managed to contain himself until he reached the corner. He stopped, but the voices continued and he could see something coming through the rain. He heaved but managed to contain the vomit; letting The Damned have his DNA could prove terrible for himself.

Something unseen surrounded him, and the sound became nothing but the pattering on the shield that had done so. Now he found himself trapped. In the light from the lightning above he managed to see the dust that sat at his feet, covering his boots to his ankles. The dust started to rise, first at the edges of the shield, it stroked his boots as it moved into the forms that the dust seemed to be taking. Three shapes increased and decreased at certain points in the

bodies, before finally settling into what seemed to be two men and a woman.

“Dust?” Cedric said, his voice quivering with fear that his question may be his last.

The woman raised her hand to her mouth and snickered in a childish manner. “Dust is close, dear sir, but we are creatures of sand.” She walked towards him and he watched the parts of the sand glitter before finally settling across the woman's visage into a practically human face. She looked beautiful, had her skin not been of terracotta pallor then Cedric would have been in awe of her. Her eyes were like cats and her hair hung about her shoulders like a crown settled on a fair queen's head.

“Stop showing off, Beth,” said one of the men, presumably the one in the centre, but Cedric couldn't be sure.

“Now, now, don't go giving the game away.” The second man's face appeared for a moment to show him sneering, before the lightning disappeared once more.

“State your business and let me go,” he implored.

Beth raised her hand and brought it crashing down. Cedric flinched, bracing himself for impact. But the blow never met his face. Nothing touched him, save for the rain that now fell upon him. However, on the floor the sand lay, now burnt within an inch of its life. He praised the entity he thought long forgotten. He continued after taking a deep breath and pondering how much longer he would last in the current climate.

He sighed and turned to continue on his trek. Silence returned, and he reached the corner, a smile beginning to play across his lips.

Crunch!

The blade stabbed through his chest and snapped his ribs, his eyes rolled back in his head and the blood gurgled to the ground. He let out a guttural growl and his body slipped to the ground; rain lightly tapping his corpse.

I

She knew him better than he knew himself. He didn't like to admit it, but his connection with his Ship was far more intimate than his travelling companions suspected. The Doctor drummed his fingers against the closed door leading to the TARDIS gallery, then exhaled and rested his forehead against the cool metal. He emptied his mind, and trusted her to do the rest. The door slid obligingly open.

Inside was dark, except for a pool of warm light bathing a delicately hand-blown bottle. Picking up on the Doctor's pensive mood, the Ship had narrowed the gallery down from the endless trove of treasures it sometimes presented to a single, exquisite item. Light played against the swirling blue glass, rippling like seawater from a broad base to an impossibly waspish waist, before gushing out generously to accommodate the ornate stopper. The fragrance the bottle had once contained, long since spent, had been a roughly concocted mimicry of a high end perfume, with rough cinnamon edges and sickly floral notes. But the perfume was not the point; the bottle was a true work of art, glass like clear water frozen in time. The Doctor reached out and gently laid a finger on the tip of the stopper. He smiled, deep in thought, and closed his eyes.

The Doctor felt the precise moment the sharp point of glass beneath his finger vanished. One moment it was there, the next his finger was hovering questioningly over an empty space. The Timelord's eyes snapped open. The bottle was gone. Not just tucked away somewhere, rearranged as the TARDIS gallery did endlessly, simply gone. It had ceased to exist. The Doctor frowned. This was bad. Things disappeared all the time, of course – all physical things get closer every moment to the point they'll fall apart into dust. But to simply wink out of existence, in a state of temporal grace such as the TARDIS, was more sinister. This required a field trip.

II

France.

An awe-inspiring country of *pain au chocolat* and architectural masterpieces. At least that's what sprung to mind when the Doctor mentioned that they would be travelling there. What they found could hardly be classified as awesome.

Rain fell from the sky in such a way that you couldn't see your hand in front of your face. Unless, of course, you had an umbrella- which was inevitably the case as the TARDIS seemed to house a vast array of the plastic saviors.

The houses hadn't been as Val expected either. When she considered the time-period and the setting, she envisaged a small, closely knit village of cottages whose bricks were over-run by ivy, laurels and other majestic forms of flora. Instead she found huge steel buildings with bars across the windows. Uniform in their cubic resolve, they added more dreariness to the landscape than could possibly be required.

"Doctor?" she called out, a small attempt made so that she could be heard over the thundering tundra.

He spun on his heels and faced her, a smile plastered over his face. "Yes, Val?"

She rolled her eyes and looked to Tom, who seemed more disgruntled by the fact that they were experiencing typical British weather in France. "Why are we here again?" The Doctor was about to answer when she tagged a second question onto the end of her dialogue, "And are you sure we are on the here, in the here you wanted to be?"

The Doctor looked positively hurt, almost like a naughty school-boy who had just been sanctioned for his bad performance. "Well, Val, if you remember correctly, I was in the TARDIS gallery, observing one of my more favorable pieces in the collection when it disappeared."

"Are you sure it disappeared, Doctor?" Tom asked; his face mellowed into an expression of compassion. "Are you sure you didn't just misplace it?"

The Doctor's mouth opened into the perfect 'o' shape before shutting again; this procedure continued for a few more times, making him look as though he was miming a goldfish. He spluttered, failing to say the words that he wanted to let escape from his throat. His eyes wide, he exclaimed, "The sheer audacity of the youth of today." He tugged on his lapels. "Or tomorrow, as the case may be." He placed the thumb and index finger of his free

hand on the bridge of his nose. "First I'm being accused of poor workmanship and now it seems that I'm on the brink of senility!"

"Well, you are how old, exactly?" Tom asked, smirking.

"Age is but a number." The Doctor looked to away.

"And your age is more of a *phone* number." Tom and Val stifled guffaws.

"If we were driving a car, I would park it, force you onto the street and drive off."

"Leaving us to catch pneumonia – thus being the overall cause of our deaths." Val stated; her lips pursed like one does when trying to annoy someone.

The Doctor pointed to his left at the one remaining stone building on the street, only illuminated by the dim street lamps that had yet been extinguished. "Perhaps we can find out what time it is."

"And dry ourselves off," Tom suggested.

"I gave you umbrellas – and I did offer a cagool."

"I'm sorry, Doctor, but waddling about in a canary-yellow, plastic poncho isn't really on the agenda."

They continued down the street for a few minutes, none saying anything to the other, simply because of the cold and the feeling of the inability to do so. Reaching the end of the street, they turned right, and found a sight that none of them expected to see.

One man, rags thrown over his body in a haphazard manner ran down the road, tripping over the small trails of fabric that caught at his feet. But that was not the reason that the Doctor and his companions were shocked, but the fact that the ragged man was being chased by a knight – a stereotypical medieval knight on his steed his sword in the air, preparing himself to bring the man to his knees.

"Doctor – I'm beginning to think that we really are in the wrong time-zone" Val turned away as she saw the glint of metal in the air, hearing a crunch that warped the sound of the terrible downpour that exploded from the sky in a wicked succession. She found that she couldn't keep herself from looking back, and what met her gaze was worse than she could possibly be imagined.

The man she had seen, the fear that had been so prominent on his face, lay sprawled across the cobbles, with blood spurting from his back in fountains, mixing with the rain on the ground. The sword had been removed, and the knight stood at the street corner, a smile on his face. On any other day, Val would have found him handsome, now she saw a cold-blooded killer, but worse, this man had killed for fun.

She clenched her fists, only applying care to the fact that this man was dead, but more thought went to the fury that caused the adrenaline to burst within her. The Doctor restrained her as she attempted to move forward and let all Hell break loose upon the knight. Why wouldn't he let her? Surely she would be in the right if she did reprimand the callous murderer that wandered around the streets of France.

"Val, he has a sword," the Doctor said, his voice barely a whisper. "And, if you didn't notice, no one on the street cares. It seems to me that this is a common occurrence."

"How can murder be called a common occurrence?"

"Trust me, Val; I have stumbled upon many planets before where this has been the case." The Doctor thought about what he had said for a moment, normally he wouldn't speak in

such a fashion, but something inside of him had caused him to do so. Maybe it was how he felt of himself as a guardian over his companions. He couldn't let them die like the man that was now being dragged down a back alley. He wished he knew what was going to happen to him.

The expression on Tom's face switched between bewilderment and anger. He felt sick to his stomach, as though someone had taken his intestines and wound them into a firm knot. Fear also applied itself to his mind – the Doctor had taken him into strange, often wonderful, situations before, but this, this was something different. How could murder ever be all right? How could people just stand around and watch as some of their closest friends – possibly be family – were brought crashing to the ground by a sword from someone who didn't even know who they were killing?

“Doctor, I know that you care for us – I do – but I just can't help this feeling that we should be helping these people. I can sense what is right, but my instincts tell me not to intervene. I'm a ball of conflicting morals and now I'm looking to you for advice. What should we do?”

Both the Doctor and Val were shocked by Tom's interjection, but both knew that it was thoroughly needed for them to understand what they needed to do. But again, they knew that they couldn't.

“Doctor – I can't sit around and do nothing!” Val exclaimed. “And I can see in your eyes that you can't either. Suggest something, please.”

He rubbed his eyes and threw his head back, letting some rain splash against his face. “All right, I have a suggestion, whether you agree or not is something we can decide on later. We split up. You two go together and see what you can find out, and I'll do the same. Once we have enough evidence, we can meet up at the TARDIS in say ...” He pursed his lips and scrunched his eyes up. “... two hours?”

Tom and Val looked into one another's eyes, their expressions flitting between shock, fear and, ultimately, determination. Val clenched her fists and pursed her lips, before nodding her head and facing the Doctor. “I think that it's the best idea. Two hours seems like a fairly reasonable time to ascertain an answer.” She faced Tom once more. “What do you think?”

“It could work – but since when has separating ever worked before?” He folded his arms and his gaze shifted to the street, watching as the battering tundra hit the ground and the blood was washed into the gutter. The peasants quivered on the pavement eyeing up the guards the spread themselves about the street, smirks roaring across their faces. “I can't believe that we didn't think of this earlier.”

The Doctor smiled. “Two hours from now, we'll meet back here again.”

His companions nodded and walked away, leaving the Doctor alone, facing not only the peasants and the onslaught of rain.

His first port of call was a small girl on the street corner. She'd tied her hair behind a scarf, small straw-like hairs falling out from beneath the ragged piece of flimsy fabric. Her cheek-bones were accented quite well, probably due to her malnutrition. Her clothes seemed to consist of nothing but rags, thrown across her body in the hope of keeping her warm.

France had certainly been corrupt since he had last been there.

None-the-less, the Doctor sidled across to the girl, beaming. “Hello,” he said, simply. She trembled, but he couldn't be sure whether or not it was due to the shock of being spoken to,

or the fact that the wet had gotten to her and she was freezing to the bone.

The former seemed to be the case when the girl turned away from him and aimed her face towards the wall. He made to place a hand on her shoulder, only for her to recoil.

“Please – just go!” The first and final exultation that the Doctor would hear from her as he busied himself with travelling down the cobbled street.

The people had been friendlier when he was last in France as well. Things were changing and he found they were only for the worse. Hospitable would have been the adjective the Doctor would have used if he had been asked about how he found the natives after his previous visit. This time, however, he would have completely abolished this opinion, if asked.

Dark, decrepit and dingy, three D's and he was happy with himself because he was the fourth, the Doctor, and he was going to remove them from their dilemma

He reached the end of the road and looked above him to find a small tavern, its sign hanging onto the roof by a rusting hinge. A whistle soared through his teeth and he smiled, rushing into the tavern in a rambunctious manner, as though he was nothing more than a common puppy.

However the Doctor was soon shot down by the silence that permeated throughout the room. He looked towards the men on the left of the dingy dwelling only to be received with blank stares, and some shoving themselves over drinks that toppled over, coating the man in front of him. On any other day, said man would attack the man who thrust a drink over him, but seeing as there were exceptional circumstances on this day, he decided to let it pass. Much to the Doctor's dismay – there's nothing like a good fisticuffs to get information out of people.

With no facts being let out by the customers, the Doctor decided to head straight to the source; the landlord, a relatively overweight man who hid himself behind a beer-stained apron and a shield of sweat that gleamed off his body beneath the dull naphtha lamps.

The Doctor extended his hand in a gesture of goodwill, to receive a sneer from the landlord who pushed it lightly away. Instead of rubbing the hand down his shirt to make it look as though he hadn't been offering his hand, the Doctor lifted his hand again, this time smiling as well. Yet the landlord still wouldn't take his hand. This time, the Doctor added more thought to the proceedings and began his dialogue with, “Hello, would it be possible for me to have a nice brew, please.”

“Your kind ain't welcome around these parts,” the landlord grunted before walking away, leaving the Doctor with his arm extended outwards and a solemn expression on his face.

Sighing, he reached inside his pocket and removed a small gold fobwatch.

Without warning, the men that had been silent started to yell at the top of their voices, the guttural sounds roaring around the tavern, calling the knights into the small public house.

The Doctor spun on his heel and raised his hands, the knights grabbing him and forcing him to the ground. “You are being arrested on charges of owning a piece constructed for time-meddling, the penalty of which is death.” Blackness encroached upon the Doctor as a sudden thump punched him in the back of the head.

III

Val could have sworn that the monsoon was getting worse, not better, which upset her. Not because she disliked getting wet but because it meant that her mind dragged up memories of the unnatural things she had seen as of late. Once more, this wasn't the thing to upset her, but the fact that it kept her wondering as to whether or not she and the Doctor were correct in their suspicions, or could it not have just been a spout of torrential rain unheard of in many historical almanacs?

Tom had disappeared a while ago; another thing that she wasn't really worried about. If the Doctor could trust them both to leave him alone, then she could let him go his separate way without a second thought. Unless, of course, she met the Doctor, in which case she would make an excuse about an urgent need for the lavatory, or something of that sort.

She supposed, upon recollection, that it had been a bad idea to let Tom go off on his own. She should have sought him out, but it hadn't been her fault. She could recall it greatly, which she was glad of; if she couldn't then there would be a slight problem because it had been only moments ago. She'd turned around to ask him a question and where had he been? Nowhere. There wasn't one singular place in the midst of spray from the rain that splattered against the pavement that allowed her to see him. Even when she squinted she could only see so far as to tell that Tom was nowhere near her.

The question she had to ask had been of no importance, she just wanted to know what time it was. Thankfully the town clock had answered that question for her; counting the dings, she had arrived at the conclusion that it was about one o'clock in the afternoon. Not that you could tell. Typical British weather ... in France. Not something one goes on holiday for.

Yet she wasn't on holiday. She was on an expedition with an alien from the far-reaches of the galaxy. Unless she'd gone insane. Maybe she'd just gone mad in her old age.

"Questioning yourself is never a good thing, Valentina," she whispered, her eyes darting back and forth. "Neither is talking to yourself, so I guess I'm screwed." She rolled her eyes, pulled her jacket more firmly around her and walked on, her feet squelching as they approached the small town inn.

The inn, or "Crookshanks' Ye Olde Country Inn" as its mold-ridden sign proclaimed, was a rather drab little place, inset between the larger steel buildings that didn't belong. Val

found it difficult to remind herself that they didn't belong. Val imagined that it had once been rather homely, but now it sat as dilapidated as the Titanic, that would sit at the bottom of the ocean and waste away. Well it would in the future; she doubted that the Titanic had even been thought up yet.

Still, at that moment, Val couldn't care less if the room was unfit for a cockroach to live in. She was soaked to the skin and shivering with cold. She just hoped Crookshanks was in to give her something to warm her insides to a humble glow.

She reached out, smiled and pushed the door open, the scent of mold infesting her nostrils and causing vomit to rise in her throat, a bout of nausea causing her to fall into the nearest seat. Settling down, she stared out of half-opened eyes around the room, widening them when the dismal grayness rode her retinas, looking as though a mildew stew had exploded across the room in all of its brothic glory, if stew included rubble and stone-dust.

The room looked as though a bomb had gone off, if bombs had been invented of course. Perhaps gunpowder could have been used to rubbish the place, but surely that would decimate more than just the interior. Age seemed like the more viable cause. Perhaps everything in Renaissance France with a modern edge became dusty and rubble-ridden as it gained more of a darker hue.

"I wouldn't stay here, if I were you." The voice sounded as though it came from a young girl, prepubescent, it was too sprightly to be someone having to go through the terrible endeavors of puberty.

Val turned around slowly, her eyes wide and her hands braced against the table in case she had to bash the creature around the head with the table. Thankfully the girl was only about twelve and thus didn't require being given a concussion with a rather heftily-weighted table.

"If you didn't notice, it's absolutely pouring it down out there. I'm not leaving here unless there's threat of the world being destroyed by little, green men." She stroked some dust from the table. "And then I'd still have this table first."

The girl chuckled uncomfortably. "I still think you should leave."

Val shook her head and brushed a hand through her hair. "I still think I'm not going to."

The girl leant in and whispered, "If you don't go, they'll kill you." She stepped back and looked around, her long straw-like hair spinning over her shoulders, split-ends flailing about.

"Who are they?"

"The name is forbidden." She placed a hand out and Val took it, flinching as her palm met the girl's cold touch. "Come with me. The ship leaves at midnight."

Val shook her head, before placing a piece of hair behind her ear. "Tell me who you are first, and then you can perhaps tell me who these 'forbidden-named-ones' are."

The girl pushed Val's hand away and let herself fall to the dusty floor. "My name is Sophie Flint, I am the daughter of the last clockmaker in the world years ago, those with the forbidden names arrived and assassinated the king. The knights fought back but the Clocktower set their own soldiers upon them – men made from gold who had swords in place of their hands.

"They began to steal away all the clocks in France, setting human soldiers upon us to steal them, creating a penalty of death if we didn't give them up. Most of France have managed to leave on ships and begun trading with other ships across the globe."

"But why did they want the clocks?"

Sophie glanced towards the floor, and Val watched as a tear drop fell against the dust. "The reason the time-pieces were taken is because They thought that the time-pieces could be used to travel in time. That's why I have the last time-piece; my father figured it out long ago." Sophie reached into her pocket and removed a golden hob watch, engraved with swirling patterns that showed dragons breathing amber flames around the rim. "The reason that the Clocktower killed so many is because I have the last time-piece. I have the ability to kill them."

Lightning struck outside and Sophie ran into Val's arms. Val held her close as she breathed heavily, their hearts beating faster as they came together.

The doors flew open and they screeched as the shadowed figure entered, garbed in a cerulean blue overcoat and had a belt around his waist, in which he held his telescope and cutlass. He had a thin, black moustache and a beard tied with a brass band at the bottom; two scabbards hung at his sides, the cutlasses wedged enough for him to tear them away at the slightest moment.

Sophie peeked from beneath her hair and a smile beamed upon her face. "Krihn!" She rushed towards him, throwing her arms around his waist and embracing him.

"Sophie, we must leave now, the Clocktower have torched the remaining ships. The *Sovereign* is the only ship left. If we don't leave then we will be next."

Val hung her head in shame. "I guess you best be going." She picked at her nails, her lips twitching at the corners as Krihn and Sophie watched her. No doubt their mouths would have dropped, their chins looking as though they were about to hit the floor. Val had seen that look enough times when the Doctor had attempted to be chivalrous.

Her head felt like a dead-weight attached to her neck as she raised her head to look at the expressions she had expected to adorn the faces of the two. "I can't go, I'm sorry, but I have friends here. I've lost them both, and we're working to stop the Clock-people as well."

"Their names are the Clocktower." Sophie jutted out her lower-lip. "They are the reason that France is under siege, and our departure is the only way that the world can be saved."

"It doesn't matter, Sophie." Krihn smirked. "She will either come with us, or I will carry her."

Val closed her eyes and sighed. She crouched down and looked into the eyes of the young girl. "Sophie." Her hand reached out tentatively, stroking a strand of blonde hair from the girl's eyes. "I'm sorry, but my friends are here, I have to stay and help."

"You can't help if you're dead!" Krihn exploded, surging forward and thrusting his arms about Val's waist as though she were nothing more than a rag-doll. She flew over his shoulder, and decided not to protest; he was a rather tall man after all and if he dropped her she doubted that the Clocktower would have to try.

Soon they were running. She didn't know where but the uniform buildings seemed like a maze, marked here and there by blood that had congealed into nothing more than a crusty brown stain upon the bleach-white walls.

The scent of sea-air inhabited her senses quite quickly and she closed her eyes, taking great pleasure in the salty taste as it wove its way through her nervous system.

Her satisfaction was short-lived.

Krihn threw her to the ground and pulled her along, rushing her towards the plank that

led onto the ship, Sophie following on soon behind.

She glanced behind them. She'd never seen such strange creatures. In the darkness, they appeared to be nothing more than brass cogs and gears floating in mid-air. "What are they?"

But Krihn didn't answer. He just shook his head, and she knew the answer. *Clocktower*.

She saw her then, a woman wearing a dress of the finest silk. Val pushed Krihn away and made to head back down the plank, but it was too late. "No!" Val forced herself back towards the captain. "You have to put the plank back out. They'll kill her!"

"One life lost is better than two hundred, my lady." He grimaced, staring down at the dock. "Anyway, that woman happens to be Elizabeth; one of their leaders."

IV

“Let me go!” Tom pulled away from the hefty figure on his right once more, only to slam his head into the chest of the second hefty man on his left. *I’m not Stretch Armstrong, or a rubber band. This is not going according to plan.* He thanked his mind for reminding him of such details, albeit sardonically. Once more, he tried to get them to let him go, but they were having none of it. He may have had some strength in his bones, but the Frenchmen had more, and they were using only a slight amount to keep him in check, on that matter, he was sure.

He wouldn't have minded so much, he thought, if Val had been taken as well; or if she had noted for that matter. Yes, she had been in a world of her own when he had yelped her name, but surely, surely she could have understood that he was in mortal peril. Well maybe not mortal peril. He assumed it was just a misjudgment and once they had finished dragging him across the village they would let him go, dusting off his back and saying, “Awrat, Guv, naw harm done, ay?” If of course they were cockney scavengers.

If they'd let him walk by himself it might have added some more comfort to the tossing and jubilant pulling at his limp arms. He castigated himself for making such useless and trite marks as, “Let me go!” and tried to force himself to think in a manner that would help him get out of this mess. But this is a rather difficult task when you are being thrown about like an airless basketball.

Tom sighed as he saw a familiar sight in the distance. The TARDIS, in all its afternoon glory. There was a donkey beside it, seemed like a sentry guarding the place. *No doubt the Doctor put it there as some wry joke.* Thinking of the Doctor brought Tom to another thought, why wasn't he there?

The streets were empty.

Where there had been peasants before, now there was nothing but the lingering smell of sweat. “Where is everyone?” But his question remained unanswered. In fact, Tom noticed, the men had let up their hold on Tom's arms and were keeping strangely quiet. A foreboding silence; the kind in horror movies where you know that something extremely terrible is going to happen.

The men led Tom down the street where he, Val and the Doctor had watched the peasant slaughtered earlier. Silence remained, save for the light tapping of their feet against the

cobbles as they walked. He heard a low whispering then. It could have been nothing, but he knew it couldn't be.

The whispering came from within a tavern that the men meant to enter. They relinquished their hold on Tom, seemingly leaving him to his own devices. He sensed they wanted him for something more.

Puffing out his chest, he followed them as they entered the tavern, taking into account the decrepit state of the deteriorating dwelling. The smell of ale struck in the air here, mixing with the nuances of body odor that had been left behind. The whispering had accumulated into a low growl now, and Tom glanced around the room.

These men, he was sure, had been the peasants he had seen on the street before. He was sure he knew them from their dusty complexions. Yet now, each of them wore armor of silver and in scabbards around their waists, hung heavy long swords.

"Name." A man approached him from behind the counter, his heavy gut restrained by his armor.

"What?" Tom appeared startled, but only for a moment. He gave the man his name. "What is all this?"

"This, my good man, is an army, dedicated to the destruction of those vile creatures that have threatened us for so long. It may have taken time for us to arrange ourselves accordingly, but it is done, and any naysayers shall feel the back of my sword before day-break." The man threw his arm around Tom's shoulders. "My name is Eurich Flint, and I'll be your –"

The sound of horses, their hooves clattering too quickly against the cobbles.

"Quickly, you must leave," the owner called in his hoarse voice. "They approach." He thrust open a trap-door into the ground. "You must leave through the sewers, I can hold them off, but I don't know for how long."

Tom had never seen men run so fast.

V

Cold.

He felt as though his blood had turned to ice and his body had frozen in space. He lay frozen on the floor of a dank and dingy cell. If he could open his eyes without feeling a shock of pain in his retinas, he'd have noticed that his prison belonged in a cheap sword-and-sorcery paperback, with himself cast as hero. But even in the leading role, The Doctor couldn't fathom how to get himself out of this mess.

He moaned and stretched himself, trying to unleash a yawn, but finding that he lacked the strength to do so. Luckily, he had the strength to think, and it was this strength that helped him recognize the fate that faced him, and this sent his primal instincts into overdrive.

Not caring about the pain, or the cold, he threw himself to his feet, letting his eyes blink over and over until they warmed. Looking out he found that he shared the room with rats; larger and somehow more sinister than any he had seen before. "Honestly," he said aloud, "I've faced the Daleks and now I'm scared of a few rats."

He stroked his hand along the wall and looked at his fingers to find them coated in dust. "Dirty and not a chaise lounge in sight, well the hospitable adjective has definitely gone out of the window." He folded his arms and looked to the corner of the room. "At least I get a window. No glass, but a window all the same."

The Doctor sniffed up and looked to the rats again. "Sea air?" He shook his head. "Why in whoever's name do I smell sea air?" He writhed his body against the stone, pulling himself towards the gap in the wall that he assumed to be his window. Where there had once been three bars, now only the outer two stood, leaving him enough room to push his head through. "Oh my ..."

He stared out into the darkness, listening to the rush of the sea outside. He looked down, finding himself too high off the ground to get away. If there was any ground. The ocean spread below him, an indigo darkness seething with foam.

Then he saw it. The emerald snake, writhing its way through the water. He saw it rise out of the water, sliding its way around the concrete pillar of his prison. Its scales glittered in the moonlight, obscured only by the dark clouds as they rode over it.

The yellow eyes widened as it met the Doctor's gaze, opening its mouth, revealing the

daggers of teeth. Lurching forwards, the snake threw itself towards the bars, causing him to fly back against the floor.

The snake slid away again, leaving the Doctor to watch a strange green residue as it burnt away at the stone, corroding it into a black gelatinous mass.

Someone slammed something against the metal bars of the prison. The Doctor turned to face the knights in their silver armor as they grimaced at him.

“Stop taunting the basilisk, and remain silent.”

The Doctor blinked. “I beg your pardon?”

“The basilisk, leave her be.”

And with that, the cogs of the Doctor's mind started to whirl into action.

VI

"They massacred my family," Eurich said as he and Tom lingered at the back. "I was but a boy – my father hid me in a narrow alleyway, where only I could fit. He covered it with a tarpaulin, but I still saw." He gulped and blinked, looking towards the ceiling of the sewers. "They have golden swords for hands, and the screams I heard." He shook his head and returned his gaze to the front. "It doesn't bear thinking about."

Tom reached out a hand, but pulled it back. Sentimentality may not work in this situation. "I'm sorry, Eurich, I hadn't anticipated that they could be so..."

"Please, Thomas, we cannot dwell on the past. We must look forward, and I look forward to slaying them like the hounds they are." Eurich struck Tom across the back with a hearty blow. "What made you want to join the cause, Thomas?"

"I – um – I was brought here by two men. They seemed to want me to."

Eurich's eyes widened and his jaw dropped. "You're one of them."

"No, really, I'm not."

"A spy." Eurich ran towards his men screaming. "Clocktower!"

"No, I'm not, I'm too -" but the swords were out and aimed for his throat.

"Why did you join, Tom?"

"I wanted to help. I have no stories. I'm too young."

Eurich looked to the men beside him. "What do we say? Is it plausible?"

The men affirmed it, and Eurich spoke once more. "Why didn't you leave on the ship?"

"I never could – I needed to help."

"Very well, Tom." Eurich eyed him suspiciously. "Why don't you lead the group? If you take us in the wrong direction, we will know where your alliances lie."

VII

The food was too salty, the chair too firm, and Val felt too sea-sick. If only she were Goldilocks. She'd been told about how they used salt as a way of preserving food when she was in school, but embracing the fact was something that she'd never want to experience again.

If that wasn't bad enough, the ship threw itself about so much that each time she'd try to raise the fork to her mouth she'd be thrown sideways and her food crashed away to be fed to whatever monsters hid under her bed.

This procedure carried on for a while, before Val gave up and struggled over to the bed, settling herself down onto the rough mattress.

And was cordially thrown to the ground a second later as the ship lurched to the side. The lamps began to flicker, before extinguishing completely. A cold air swept through the ship and Val through herself up, rushing out of the room and down the corridor. Reaching some steps, she slammed her way on deck.

"As if this couldn't get any worse." Lightning struck across the sky and she saw them illuminated; like giant bears with bat wings and bull's horns, their teeth too big for their slavering maws.

Turning slowly around, she tried to creep away as they launched themselves at her. An explosion of light above her sent her crashing to the ground. She rolled over and kicked upwards as a Burden-Beast bit at her. Val saw her then: the woman from the pier. Elizabeth.

The female Clocktower cackled, letting her head fly back, flashing her golden teeth.

Roaring with determination, Val stood up and exclaimed, "Elizabeth!" at the top of her voice.

Elizabeth fell forward, her mouth open and her eye-brows curving inwards as confusion conquered her senses. She kicked her heels against the sides of her steed and hovered towards Val. "What is it, human?"

Val looked to the floor, shaking her head. Steeling herself, she clenched her fists and faced Elizabeth. "I wish for entry into the Clocktower."

Elizabeth smirked, before letting a small chuckle emanate from behind her lips. "You? A simple-minded ape, wants to become part of one of the greatest empires in history?" She sat back casually. "Go on then, ape, tell me why I should let you become part of this."

"I could help you. I have travelled through time and space with a time-lord called 'The Doctor'. I have seen all manner of weaker worlds; I could help you plan which planets and galaxies to take control of next."

Elizabeth seemed to consider this for a moment, but only a moment, after that inkling had dissipated she shook her head. "No."

"I could also tell you where they intend on taking the ship next. Do you honestly think that I want to remain on this ship with these idiotic human beings? Could you imagine it? I have seen the future and there is more to life from this. Please, just humor me. I'll be the lowest of the low. A simple star in your extensive universe. Let me become a part of the cause, don't let me remain as the problem!"

Captain Krihn and some of the other men had slipped onto the deck, and all seemed severely disturbed by Val's exultation.

Sensing this disturbance, Elizabeth smirked once more. "Fine." She clicked her fingers and a Burden-Beast flew down. "Climb aboard the beast's back, even if you don't know how to ride, he is trained."

Val did as she asked and slipped on as Elizabeth had asked.

"You treacherous leech!" Krihn bellowed. "If our paths cross again, I shall have your head!"

Val saw her then. Sophie, tears pouring down her face as she cried, her knees shaking with the cold. "Let me bring the girl," Val called to Elizabeth, "she is my daughter. She could prove to be a great asset."

"Yes." Elizabeth nodded, clicking her fingers once more. "Bring the girl."

A beast swooped down, snatching Sophie in its teeth. Val had never heard such a scream; her heart felt as though it would throw itself from her chest and out of her mouth.

Sophie was deposited on Val's lap, and tried to move away but Val pulled her to her chest. "Don't struggle," she whispered. "Please, Sophie, it's for the best."

"You've betrayed us all." Sophie shook her head, but her voice was steady now. "Why?"

Val hushed her. "This is our only chance, Sophie; we need to infiltrate the Clocktower. Know your enemy"

Silently, Sophie seemed to accept this answer.

VIII

The Doctor rummaged in his pockets as he enjoyed doing to pass the time when up to his neck in a sticky situation. He found a small piece of twine, a yo-yo, a pocket watch, a small yellow package and several old jelly babies that had congealed into a gelatinous lump. Finally he found a small glass vial that he had stolen from a merchant in his younger years when his legs had been more nimble and there had been a bit more of dexterity in his fingers. Having seen the wall disintegrate beneath the venom of the basilisk, the Doctor had formulated a plan. Now it was time to put his plan into action.

He found a crevice in the wall where some of the venom dripped to the floor below, slowly creating a small hole in the ground. Placing the vial beneath this, he let the venom continue to drip until he had half filled it. Once this procedure was finished, he closed the lid on the vial and walked over to the metal bars that led the way from his prison. He listened intently; far below he could hear the dull hum of conversation, the clinking of glasses. The guards were otherwise occupied. Satisfied, the Timelord unstopped his vial and gently directed a few drops of the bitter liquid into the lock on the door.

Down, down, deeper and down. The rough hewn stairs led The Doctor in an ever downwards spiral. After a few minutes he came to a sturdy wooden door, hanging slightly ajar. Light glowed from within. From the darkness of his corridor haunt, The Doctor could see three guards seated around a low wooden table, hungrily shoveling their way into bowls of stew. The stewpot plopped lazily over a fire built in a rough stone hearth, and without a chimney the ceiling was thick with smoke. There was another high, barred window, but no other door. Time to keep moving.

Rock bottom. The steps stopped here, carved stone blocks giving way to the raw living stone of an underground chamber. There was no door. The Doctor turned slowly on his heel in confusion; he had obviously been brought in here somehow, as had the guards, the firewood and the ingredients for the stew. But he'd now tramped from the top of this wretched tower to the bottom, and any sign of an exit was conspicuous in its absence.

A tearing metallic screech made The Doctor spin around. Before him, the solid stone wall was opening like a flower, spiraling out from a tiny point until it formed a perfectly round hole wider than he was tall. Judging by the rough wail of metal on dry metal, these walls weren't solid stone after all. The Doctor made for the hole but was stopped by a deep, rasping slithering, so low it was more a sensation than a noise. He stood stock still as the noise grew louder. A moment later, the basilisk erupted into the room.

The wood paneled walls were a dark, honey brown which soaked up the lamplight like a sponge, leaving little to light Val's path to bed. The four poster in the centre of her new chambers was massive, and looked soft and warm. Val's aching muscles, tired and jarred from her flight on the Burden-Beast, just wanted to snuggle under that thick eiderdown and sleep for a week. She shook herself awake as her guide set the guttering lamp down on the bedside table.

"You will find suitable garments in the armoire, Mademoiselle. Is there anything else you require?"

The girl was gold; the soft sheen of old, pure gold. Val had been relieved to find her new maidservant's slender arms ended in delicately articulated golden hands, rather than the hacking blades she'd seen on the Clocktower's warriors.

"No, thank you. Everything's fine."

"I shall leave you to rest, Mademoiselle." The golden girl curtsied low and left noiselessly. Val eased off her jacket and hung it over a chair, and wondered whether there was any point trying to untangle her windblown hair.

"NO! We don't have time for that now, Jeremiah."

Val looked up in alarm. Elizabeth's voice, right outside her door. This wasn't good.

"What did you let that ape in for?"

"Because it shows promise. If we start tonight we can -"

"That thing isn't to be trusted, Beth!"

"Trust is irrelevant. It could be useful."

"Yes. After the transfusion. Now, be silent."

The basilisk swayed from side to side, as though confused. At such close quarters The Doctor could smell the acrid poison dripping from its maw, see his reflection in the gloss of the creature's scales. A slow realization crept across his face.

It was good, no doubt about it. Very convincing. Its sides even rippled in and out as though the beast were breathing. No doubt there were enough biological components that it would even bleed if injured. But this basilisk wasn't an animal. It was a machine. A ship. It was his ticket out of here.

The Timelord fished the yellow package out of his pocket. He flicked it open, and the emergency cagool flapped out in all its high-visibility yellow glory. The basilisk swung around

to face him, attracted by the movement and color. It growled deep within its unnatural chest, and its mouth opened wide, wide, wide, so wide The Doctor could see the passageway beyond the three rows of dripping teeth.

The Doctor took a deep breath, slipped the poncho over his head and made a run for it.

It was slippery. Not only was there acid running in rivulets down the basilisk's teeth, but the lolling tongue wasn't an easy surface to run across. By the time The Doctor made it to the safety of the uvula there was little left of the poncho but a handful of plastic lace, and his jacket would never be the same again, but he was intact. He gingerly flung the remains of the plastic behind him, and would have lobbed it out of the basilisk's mouth if the creature hadn't chosen that moment to slam its jaws shut. Deciding that was a hint to get moving, The Doctor set off down the passageway of the ship's synthetic throat.

The control room was deep in the beast's belly. The smooth, curved metal walls were covered in swirling, circular designs which to the human eye might have been mere decoration, illustrations of cogs and gears. The controls themselves were on a freestanding hexagonal console in the centre of the room. Classic Gallifreyan design.

Val leaned against the door, one hand resting on the bronze doorknob, listening intently as the Clocktower pair argued about her. Ape indeed! Suddenly the knob turned under her hand, and Val skittered backwards in alarm, tripped over the rug and landed heavily on the bed in an awkward heap. She was still sitting, slightly winded, when the door opened and Jeremiah entered, a warm, loving and deeply insincere smile twisting his features

"We're so happy you've chosen to join us." A withered hand reached out to stroke Val's hair, and she instinctively pulled back, repelled.

"Don't be shy. Cousin Jeremiah isn't going to hurt you, little one."

The basilisk was hard to manage. Without the telepathic link which helped him guide his own Ship, The Doctor danced a quickstep around the basilisk's controls, pulling a lever here, caressing a touch-screen there, ever moving as one Timelord tried to do the work of six. At last a deep, wheezing groan came from somewhere deep in the belly of the beast, and The Doctor felt the familiar tingle of a TARDIS slipping gently between the folds of reality.

Val forced a smile which felt more like a grimace, but Jeremiah didn't seem to notice her discomfort. He gently brushed Val's hair away from her neck and bent down, as if to kiss her.

Val screamed as a sharp, biting pain tore through her. She gasped, seeing stars, and pushed weakly at the man standing over her. Jeremiah smiled, all trace of warmth and love now gone, and abruptly turned and left. As the door closed Val stumbled to her feet, shaking her head gingerly and trying to fight the urge to black out. She staggered to the washstand, where a heavy porcelain jug held water so cold a thin film of ice covered the surface, despite the fire in the room. She splashed water on her face and leant heavily on the washstand, feeling the last of the sick feeling recede. She looked up and into the mirror, and suddenly felt sick all over again.

There was something on her neck. It was small and plastic, a chunky beige disk with a raised lump in the middle. Val's first hysterical thought was that it was a department store security tag, something that belonged on a cheap blouse to deter shoplifters. She reached up to touch it, but as she tried to pull it off wave after wave of pain coursed through her neck and arm. She let go. The pain stopped. She touched it again. More pain.

Val frowned and peered more closely in the mirror. As she watched, the beige plastic was changing. It was becoming thinner, more flexible, adhering closely to her skin rather than jutting out. It was also changing color, becoming by the second a closer match to her own skin tone. Within a few minutes, it was barely visible.

Which way? Which way? The winding streets all looked the same to Tom. He knew he was lost, and he knew the knights knew it too. The knights following him. With swords. And knives. And other sharp things they were going to use to chop him into little pieces at any moment.

"How about down here?" Tom poked his nose down a long, narrow alleyway. He ignored the sniggers from behind him - he'd seen a rusty ladder bolted to the side of one of the ever-present metal buildings, about halfway down the alley. If he made a run for it, he might get there before the knights. In his jeans and joggers he might be able to climb faster than the knights in their armor. And once on the roof...

Tom's worries were interrupted by a metallic, elephantine screeching, which seemed to come from nowhere and everywhere. It sounded vaguely familiar, but Tom couldn't place it. Something was appearing, materializing out of thin air. The knights fell back in alarm, but their hands were never far from their weapons. A massive, serpentine shape appeared, filling the alley and doing structurally improbable things to the buildings down one side as its semi-corporal tail lashed and writhed. It was huge. It was some sort of giant snake-thing. And it was here.

The knights behind Tom shouted, charging forwards towards the beast with swords drawn and bloodlust in their eyes.

The maw opened, and the snake-thing spat a massive gob of viscous green liquid. Tom watched in horror as the gunk started to dissolve the knights' armor where it landed. Weapons smoked and curled to ribbons, spreading holes appearing in chest plates and helmets. The

knights scattered down the alleyway and out into the rain in terror, stripping off their armor as they ran before the acid could reach their flesh.

"No! No! Get back!" The voice seemed to come from inside the creature. Tom stared.

Doctor? A lithe figure darted from the gaping jaws.

"Doctor! What the hell is that thing?"

"I'll explain later. Where is Val?"

"How should I know? You think I'm being led around at sword point for the fun of it? She didn't even notice when they jumped me."

"We have to find her. Come on, we'll be able to search more quickly in the--"

"Actually, Doctor, if it's all the same to you I'd rather not travel in something that spits poison."

The Timelord nodded. "Well, it's shanks' pony, then."

"Suits me."

"So you have no idea where Val is at all?" the Doctor asked as they continued walking down the sewer.

Tom shook his head. "No, I hoped you'd be able to tell me something. The Clocktower have control, Doctor, and I don't know how the knights are going to cope without some help."

"Knights? They're working for the Clocktower." His eyes widened as a sudden realisation ran through his mind. "They've set up a resistance, haven't they?"

"I only joined so that they wouldn't kill me." He shrugged. "Who are the Clocktower, anyway?"

"I wondered when you'd ask." He smiled. "The Clocktower are an ancient Gallifreyan sect who became intent on conquering the universe and controlling time. They were exiled from Gallifrey centuries ago, no one knows what happened, but they disappeared from the time-stream around the same time."

They came to the ladder that led into the tavern and proceeded up the wooden rungs. He pushed open the trapdoor and made his way through.

The tavern was empty, save for the landlord who seemed astonished to see the Doctor stood there. "But how? How did you escape from them?"

The Doctor smiled. "Has anything happened since my unfortunate exit?"

"They have a new member now, her name is Valentina and it transpires that she is the most ruthless. She has cunning and wit unlike anything we've ever seen before."

"Val, what have you done?" he murmured, before facing the landlord once again. "Where are the Clocktower?"

"Where have you been for the last few centuries? They live in the palace." He sighed, reaching for a glass. "But the only way to infiltrate the palace is by killing the soldiers that guard its walls, and then you'd still have to face Burden-Beasts."

"It just so happens that I have my own mode of transportation." He smiled. "Come on Tom." And with that he ran out of the tavern, heading into the streets to face the onslaught of rain.

The Doctor and Tom ran to the TARDIS. "We just have to make a small jump through space and we should enter the palace." He thrust open the doors and headed towards the console. "It's a fairly simple process and shouldn't take more than a few moments." The doors closed and the Ship picked up momentum and began to travel towards the destination the Doctor had set.

After a short time, the Ship stopped and they left, finding themselves in a large room. The walls were painted with peach and a four-poster bed sat in the middle of the room, a young girl, no older than ten sat upon it, a smile on her face. "Val told me about you. She isn't really evil, you know? She's just pretending so that they won't kill any more people."

The Doctor noticed a small pocket watch in her hands, a golden chain draped over her wrists. "May I ask, what is that you have there?"

"My father created it to travel in time, fifty years from now, but it won't go anywhere and I can't use it no matter how hard I try."

The Doctor stepped forward, his hand outstretched. "May I see it?"

She passed it to him and he turned it on its back, opening the small door on the back. "The cogs used here mean that it can only travel from two points, now and its point of origin. Each time it travels, however, it will create a hole in time that anything would be able to travel through."

"Could that be how the Clocktower managed to escape from Gallifrey?" Tom asked, looking at the innards of the time-piece as well.

"It could be, however, I don't think that it was." The Doctor closed the hatch. "How many times has the watch been used?"

"Once, someone stole it from my father; Jeremiah, we were caring for him, not knowing he was Clocktower and he brought us with him. Yet my father disappeared. I only know this because I've been told this by the Clocktower; I suppose at least they know some of my history."

The Doctor smiled. "Is it possible for you to take us to Val?"

She nodded. "My name is Sophie, by the way."

"A beautiful name for a beautiful girl."

She beamed. "Thank you." She stood up, and he passed her the time-piece. "Follow me." She left the room, shortly followed by the TARDIS companions. She led them down the corridors, and through doors, taking them into the labyrinthine intestines of the palace. They reached a door. "She's in there."

Things were being thrown about in the room beyond the door. A man's deep voice exclaimed profanity, his words in some strange mangled form, but the Doctor could make out enough words to know that Val was in trouble.

She could hold her own, he knew that much, but she didn't seem to be saying anything back. That worried him. Val wasn't the type to just sit back and let a man roar at her as though nothing at all were happening.

"Val!" Tom exclaimed, his eyes wide as he grabbed hold of the knob and thrust the door open. It swung on its hinges, revealing a man who lunged at Val. She swerved in time and crashed into a dressing table. As she moved away, it collapsed brass clattering against the floor.

Val blinked at Tom, a vacant expression in her gaze. "You must leave. I am warning you, if you don't, then you will be harmed." The way she spoke her words, mechanical, as though she had been transformed into some strange android, scared Tom to the core. Val faced her attacker and smirked. "Come near me again like that, Jeremiah and you won't live to tell the tale." She stood up and brushed herself off, raising her hand; her sleeves rolled back down her arm, revealing that golden veins strode beneath her skin, and her fingernails had been transformed into gold claws, that looked as though they could cut through diamonds.

Jeremiah returned her sneering glance and raised his arms, the skin on his wrists stretching open, large sabres thrusting themselves from the gaping holes. "The men of this operation have always been seen as the hunters."

"That may be so, Jeremiah, but I, however, was a warrior before I joined, and I shall continue to fight when I believe someone has been wronged."

"You mean this girl?"

Everyone turned to face the young girl, Tom noted the golden pocket watch in her hand, and his eyes widened.

Sophie opened the watch, and faced Jeremiah. "My father warned me that something like this would happen." She shook her head and sniffed back heavily. "I didn't believe him at first; but now I realise that this is the only way I am going to help save this world." She turned the hands on the watch until a look of satisfaction appeared on her face. Her index finger reached towards the centre, where the hands met, and they all realised that she approached a button.

As she pressed in on the button a slight wind flew around the room. The walls began to blur as the wind picked up speed.

"Doctor?" Tom closed his eyes as the wind stabbed at his face. "What's happening?"

"It seems, Tom," the Doctor grabbed hold of a pillar beside him, "that we are about to take an adventure through time." He rose into the air as the windows flew open, sending a blue surge of light into the room. It surrounded them all, encasing them in a gelatinous substance. The light began to expand before reaching a highest point and exploding outwards, taking them with it.

They landed in a small, square room, lit dimly by naphtha lamps. The room had a golden hue to it, as though someone had thrust them into a world of sepia. Wooden desks were attached to the walls, spreading around the vicinity of the room.

"Who are you?" A man stood against the wall, his eyes wide. In his hand he held a time-piece similar to that of which Sophie also held.

Sophie stepped forward, a smile on her face. "This is my father." She approached him and took his hand in hers. "As you can see, he is just in the process of creating the time-piece that I myself now hold."

"No, my daughter is upstairs, sleeping in her crib."

"Father, please, listen to me."

He shook his head and turned her to face him. They looked into one another's eyes for a few moments, moments that seemed like they lasted forever to everyone in the room. "You look just like your mother."

Sophie smiled as her father pulled her into his arms.

Val smirked. "Her vocabulary is rather advanced for someone of her age group, isn't it?"

The clockmaker stepped forward, his lip jutted out. "How dare you speak of my daughter in that manner?"

Val looked around the room. "Where is Jeremiah?"

As she spoke, a blue light appeared on the ground, expanding outwards and taking the form of Jeremiah. "Help," he croaked, his body flitting between the form of a human and that of the golden Clocktower.

The Doctor ran forward. "He's dying!" He shook his head, taking the fallen Clocktower into his arms. "The time-piece hasn't been properly created in this period of time, meaning that he is losing his ability to travel through time. It's the energy from the time vortex that helps the Clocktower to live."

"If you're a doctor, why don't you attempt to save him?" Val smirked

"Sophie, what are they doing here?"

"Father, its fine. They're my friends."

"This is beyond my comprehension."

Out of nowhere, Val bellowed and grasped at her neck. Sparks flew from beneath her hands as her knees buckled. The golden hue roared from her body, flying across the room, as the screeches tore themselves from her chest. "Doctor!"

"Tom, go to her!"

Tom ran across the room, leaving the Doctor to listen to Jeremiah. "You still don't seem to realise that this is where the paradox was created. I've ran through this moment in my time-line too many times. The girl's father cares for me and then I steal the time-piece; Sophie and Eurich are taken along with me.

"It may not seem like it now, but we are in the future. I travelled back in time to meet with my comrades. We came in with your TARDIS, see? Someone managed to trap us in a bottle that you then bought. How we were released I'll never know, but we took control and I will have control again."

"Doctor!" Tom exclaimed as Val slumped in his arms, the cog from her neck disconnecting itself and rolling along the floor.

Sophie's father appeared shocked as his eyes caught sight of the cog. "That's it! That's just the part I need to finish the time-piece."

The Doctor ran swiftly towards him. "I have to take this to save the past and stop the Clocktower. Time-travel is not to be accomplished in this century" He took the time-piece from Sophie and smiled. "I must return everything to its original state, meaning that you will disappear. There can't be two versions of you in one time-line."

She nodded, tears in her eyes. "This time my father will help me to grow. I wasn't born in that era of history."

The Doctor placed a hand on her shoulder and returned the hands of the time-piece to its previous position. "I can't believe that someone sabotaged the bottle." And with that he pressed the button.

Wind grew and forced its way into the room again. Jeremiah's body fluttered away into golden dust, roaring away with them. The surge of blue bounded over them, taking them with it once more.

The three companions fell against the floor. Val sat up and shook her head, rubbing a hand through her hair. "Well that was strange."

The Doctor's eyes widened. "Val, I have to ask, why did you sacrifice yourself to them?"

Val stood up and shook herself off. "I had to do something to help save the world from them, and had to figure out how to get back to land."

"Doctor, where are we?" Tom asked, stretching upwards as he stood.

He was obviously referring to the fact that the sun now shone in the sky, beaming down upon the beautifully crafted buildings, sculpted so ornately. The clouds swam across the azure sky, settling on the tops of the emerald trees. A slight wind brushed through their hair and they couldn't recollect ever seeing a more blissful sight.

The Doctor placed a hand on Tom's shoulder. "This, Tom is France. Just as it should be."

Tom beamed and continued to bask in the splendour. "Where's the TARDIS?"

"I think you'll find we're stood right in front of it."

They turned around and there the Ship stood in all of her glory. The Doctor headed inside, dropping something on a small table that stood beside the door. He closed the door and came back outside.

Val shuffled her feet and looked up to the Doctor. "Doctor, are we leaving now?" She sounded hopeful.

He placed an arm around her shoulder and smiled. "Nonsense, Val! We haven't found the sculpture yet."

The three companions laughed, and looked at the sun-lit street.

France.

Just as it should be.

Arriving in Renaissance France,
the Doctor and his companions find that it is being ruled under martial law.
Going their separate ways, the Doctor finds himself arrested,
Tom joins a motley band of knights and Val finds Sophie,
the final clockmaker's daughter and possessor of a watch
that will help them travel through time.

Travelling through France, each member of the TARDIS crew
decides they must enter the sanctum sanctorum of the Clocktower,
and find out how the Clocktower managed to take over.
But with Val being transformed into Clocktower herself,
the Doctor has to make the decision
to either force the Clocktower out, or let his companion die.

This is another in a series of original fan authored
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featuring the ninth Doctor as played by Anton Robbins

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