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THE ANGEL OF THE NORTH
PART TWO



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The Angel of the North
Part Two

1984

Val wakes up on the sofa. It is still dark beyond the curtains, but there is a light on in the kitchen. Mary sticks her head around the door.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to wake you."

"'S'all right."

Val sits up. Stretches. The sofa is too short to lie flat on and her back is sore due to the way she has been curled up.

"If I'd known you'd be coming back, I'd have let you have Robbie's bed," Mary says. "He could have slept on the floor in our room. I'll make sure we get that sorted tonight."

"There's really no need," Val says.

Mary's look tells her that there is every need and that Val had best not argue.

"What time is it?" Val asks instead.

"Ten past six."

"You get up at six on a *Saturday*?"

"Got to be at work at seven," Mary explains, "but the lads won't be up for ages yet. Go back to bed if you like."

Val shakes her head. "Doubt I'll get any sleep."

Mary's voice softens. "Feared on the Doctor and your other friend? The Doctor'll be fine, I'm sure. He's the type that always manages to land on his feet."

"You obviously know a different Doctor. But thanks."

"Kettles just boiled," Mary says. "Help yourself to teabags if you fancy a cuppa. We don't have any milk, though."

Val pulls a face. "In that case, I think I'll head up to the shops, if you don't mind. Get a fresh pint." Mary opens her mouth, but Val cuts her off. "I know, I know, you don't do charity, but I can't drink black tea so it's about self-preservation, not charity."

"I was just going to say thanks, I appreciate it," Mary says. "Our Robbie'll want some milk for his *Coco Pops*."

"Oh."

"Well, howway then if you're coming. I'll walk with you. The bus stop's in the same direction."

* * * * *

Ian sits on the wall outside Newcastle General Hospital. He has left his jacket inside and the cold seeps through his shirt sleeves. He has cleaned himself up as best he can, but there is still mud on his trousers and his shirt stinks of the vomit he threw up on finding the body.

Least it sobered him up.

A shadow falls across him. A big shadow.

"Want to tell us what you're doing here, Ian?" the shadow asks.

"Mr Ferris?"

"Hazel's worried sick," Ferris said. "She woke up in the middle of the night. Found you gone. Phoned me. I've been ringing round the hospitals trying to track you down. Hazel thought something must have happened to you."

"I'm fine."

"So I see. I don't like it when my only daughter phones me up in tears, Ian."

"It won't happen again."

"See that it doesn't. Whatever problems there are between you and Hazel, I want them sorted."

"Whatever problems Hazel and I have, they're none of your business."

Ferris's big hand clenches into a fist and Ian wonders if he has gone too far. Truth be told, he does not really care.

The hand unclenches.

"Thought you might want to know, they arrested George Patterson last night." A beat. "You don't look surprised. You're not a grass are you, Ian?"

"Me? I've got as much to lose as the rest of you."

"Best you remember that," Ferris says. "Go home to your wife, Ian, while you've still got one."

* * * * *

The rest of the Brookers have got up by the time Val returns. Well, Jack has moved downstairs, but is now snoring in the armchair. Robbie is watching a giant rat on breakfast television while Alan potters about in the kitchen.

"Saw your note," he says. "You got the milk?"

Val hands him the carton and Alan pours a glass for Robbie before splashing some milk into two cereal bowls.

"It's cornflakes or *Coco Pops*," he says. "Not much choice, I'm afraid."

"I'll just stick with tea, thanks."

"In the pot."

Val pours herself a mug and returns to the front-room.

"Morning, Robbie."

"Morning," the boy grunts.

"Got something for you."

Val hands over the comic with trepidation. She had not known which one to get (no *Crescent Cortex*) so had simply picked an issue at random. To judge by Robbie's reaction, she has made the right choice.

"Oh wow! This is *ace*." He flips through the pages. "Dad, can I be excused?"

Alan emerges from the kitchen, a bowl in each hand.

"What's the hurry?"

"Miss Rossi got me the new *2000AD* and I want to go read it."

"Val got you a present, did she? And what do we say, Robbie?"

"Thank you, Miss Rossi."

Val grins. "You're welcome, Robbie."

Robbie turns back to Alan. "So, can I be excused, Dad? Can I?"

"When you finish breakfast, not before."

Alan plonks a bowl down in front of Robbie. Robbie starts shovelling the little brown bullets into his mouth.

"Slow down, lad, you'll give yourself indigestion."

Robbie pretends not to hear.

"You got any plans for today?" Alan asks round a mouthful of cornflakes.

"Go looking for Tom and the Doctor, I guess," Val replies.

"Any idea where to start?"

"Find the weird and crazy. They're bound to be at the heart of it."

"Sounds like the Doctor I ken." Alan laughs. "Listen, I'm going to a rally over Exhibition Park in support of the miners. I can give you a lift into town if you'd like."

* * * * *

Mary pushes the mop down the corridor. She hates her job at the hospital. The people are all right, but she hates the way the cleaning products make her eyes water and turn her hands red and raw despite her gloves. She hates her smoke and the daft plastic hat she has to wear over her hair. And she hates that the smell clings to her, even after a shower. Alan never complains, bless, but he must notice.

Having to do the Saturday shift is not great either. Clearing up after the Friday night before. She does her best not to think too hard about some of the things her mop passes through.

People ignore cleaners. They are a necessary evil, not worth the effort to engage with, but there are advantages to being invisible. People are not as discreet as perhaps they should be.

Case in point –

"Have you seen the weirdo yet?" the first nurse asks. She barely looks old enough to be out of school.

"You know you shouldn't talk about the patients like that, Emma," her friend replies. She is carrying a stack of paperwork that looks as if it will escape from her arms at any moment.

"I know," Emma says, "but this one's different. Really... freaky."

"Freaky how?" The friend searches for somewhere to put the papers down.

"Green skin, for a start, and I'm talking proper green, not like people get when they're sick, like. And he's got this cone on the top of his head. Dr Reynolds thought it was a mask at first, but it turns out that that's his real head. And he's got scales."

"Scales? Now I know you're making it uuuUUUPP!"

She squeals the last word as the papers slip from her arms and scatter across the floor. Paperwork is not part of Mary's remit so she picks up her mop and drags her cart in the direction of the ward.

Green skin. Scales. Could it be?

It has been a long time since Mary has given much thought to the events of Christmas 1969, but the Doctor's arrival yesterday has brought it all flooding back.

First the Doctor and now...

There is only one cubicle on the ward that is curtained off so it is easy for Mary to locate the patient the nurse was talking about.

Just his luck to be brought in on a Friday night. Midweek, they might have put him in a private room.

She glances around to make sure no one is watching. She reaches for the curtain, pulls it open.

It can't be.

But it is. Prince Ryugin is asleep in the hospital bed.

Still in a coma. The same coma from fifteen years ago?

Mary lets the curtain fall.

Abandoning her cart, she hurries in search of a payphone.

* * * * *

Elsewhere in the building, someone else is also looking for a telephone. The badge on the white coat reads Dr Rajesh Desai, but beneath the skin-suit she calls herself Ds'Yn'rll. She is the chief medical officer aboard the *Hemlock* so it had seemed an obvious decision to insinuate herself into the Newcastle medical profession. She suspects G'Gugv'ntt had hoped that she would go into cosmetic surgery, with the potential for rich and famous clients to blackmail. Instead, she ended up at Newcastle General.

It is good work. Rewarding. She enjoys the challenge of learning to apply her skills to another species. It is demeaning to have to disguise herself as a man – and a testament to the

backwardness of this culture – but it is a small price to pay when she considers the words of thanks, the hugs, the smiles, the eyes of those too emotional to say anything at all.

But Ds'Yn'rll is not happy.

She wants to go home. She misses her children.

There is a photo on her desk. A gift from Mk'Trk'chnk before he ran off to Leeds. The image appears to be of two smiling, human schoolchildren, but if she taps the frame just so then the picture shifts. It becomes a scene from seven hundred years hence. Two Foamasi hatchlings playing in the arboretum.

Rn'bt and Ts'rk.

Her children.

There is a tear in her eye, but she cannot wipe it away. Not without peeling off her disguise.

I wonder what they're doing now. They'll be all grown up. Have they married? Do they have kids of their own? Do they still miss me? Or would me turning back up in their lives do more harm than good?

But she did not come back to her office to reminisce.

She picks up her communicator.

"Ds'Yn'rll to *Hemlock*. I think I've found that Draconian you're looking for..."

* * * * *

Mary's call came just as they were about to leave.

"Are you sure it's not out of your way," Val says.

"No, the hospital's just a few streets over from the rally." The Chevette turns off Leam Lane and onto the A184 towards Gateshead. "Thanks for getting Robbie that comic, like."

"It was nothing."

"It was something," Alan says. "Robbie doesn't get much in the way of treats anymore, not since... Well, you can't claim benefits if you're on strike and what Mary earns at the hospital only stretches so far."

"It can't be easy."

Alan changes the subject. "Lucky break, our Mary phoning like that."

"If there are aliens in Newcastle, the Doctor won't be far behind."

I hope.

"You wanted crazy and weird," Alan agrees. "They don't get much more crazy and weird than Ryugin."

Val's head snaps round. "Who?"

Alan concentrates on the road ahead. "Nothing. Forget I mentioned it."

"You know who this alien is, don't you?"

"It was a long time ago. It might not be the same body."

Silence.

Alan guides the Chevette around the roundabout.

"The Doctor made us promise not to say anything," he says.

"The Doctor isn't here," Val replies, "and I think I need to know, don't you?"

* * * * *

A brown plastic vial with a child-proof cap. Two white tablets sitting in the palm of her hand. Hazel fills a glass tumbler with water from the kitchen tap.

She pops the pills in her mouth.

She takes a mouthful of cold water.

Swallows.

Ian closes the front door behind him.

He sees the pills before he sees Hazel.

"Where's Katherine?" he asks.

"*Kate* is in the front-room."

Hazel is still in her dressing-gown. Her spiral perm is limp and lifeless. Her eyes puffy and red.

Ian cannot deal with this right now. He ducks out through the dining-room and goes in search of his daughter.

"Daddy, Daddy!"

SuperTed is on the television, but Katherine forgets it the moment she spies her father. She runs towards him, still a little unsteady on her feet, tiny hands reaching out. Ian picks her up and spins her around.

"It's good to see you too, sweetheart."

He puts Katherine down. She pinches her nose with her fingers.

"Daddy smells funny."

"I know, darling. Daddy fell in something icky."

"And where was that?" Hazel is standing behind them.

Ian dodges the question. "I thought we decided she was going to watch less television."

"No, you decided." Hazel says. "You don't have to stay home keeping her amused all the time."

"No, I have to go to work to pay for all of this." He pushes past her. "I have to get back to the office. I only came home for a shower and a change of clothes."

"That's it? That's *all* you came back for? No explanation? No apology?"

Ian hesitates in the doorway. "What is it you want from me, Hazel?"

"I want you to be *here*. With us. I was worried sick."

Go to her. Comfort her.

His temper betrays him.

"Yeah, well why don't you get Dr Hope to prescribe you some pills for *that* too?"

* * * * *

"This could be better," says the Doctor.

He is standing in some kind of engine-room. A female Foamasi is pointing a flechette pistol at him.

"How did you get in here?" she asks.

"Do they cover eleven-dimensional phase-space folding at the Rk'Cl'Attika Academy on Foamas? No? Then I won't waste my breath trying to explain."

Keep her talking.

"What do you know of the Rk'Cl'Attika Academy?" the Foamasi asks. "And how can a human even pronounce it?"

"I gave a lecture there once. And I'm not human."

Any minute now, Brooker will drop of out the rift right on top of her.

"You look human."

"I wouldn't have expected a Foamasi of all people to be taken in by appearances. Is that a tachyon reactor?"

"Keep away from that."

Any minute now.

"Stolen, obviously. Someone's tried to incorporate it into the regular Foamasi systems. Your work?"

The Foamasi nods. The Doctor scratches his chin with his thumbnail.

"I see. Did you actually *graduate* from that academy of yours?"

Any.

Minute.

"Oh that's just typical that is," the Doctor yells at the ceiling. "He chooses now of all times to do as he's told. I can't even depend on Tom to be undependable."

* * * * *

The doorbell chimes. Someone pounds on the door.

Mike Reid is on the television, but no one is paying attention. Kate is on the carpet, playing with her *My Little Pony* (a present from her grandfather) and Hazel...

Hazel is holding a book in her hands, but she has not turned a page in over a quarter of an hour.

The pounding continues.

Kate looks up.

"Mummy?"

"Mummy heard, darling."

Hazel gets down from the sofa. Puts on her slippers. Shuffles out into the hall.

"Who is it?"

"Please, you have to help me. I've nowhere else to go."

A voice she does not recognise. An accent she cannot place.

She puts on the chain before opening the door. She cannot stop herself from gasping.

Tall, very tall. A trace of beard on his chin, but no hair on top of his head. His long, tapering, yellow-green head. With scales.

And he is wearing her husband's suit jacket.

She screams.

"My name is Prince Genroku Ryugin," the stranger says, "and I swear on my honour that I mean you no harm."

* * * * *

"Who is this mammal?" Junior demands.

Ls'Ntwp'tt is still pointing her pistol at the prisoner.

"He calls himself the Doctor."

The Doctor is sitting on the floor. His eyes are closed and he seems to be asleep.

"Get up!"

Junior aims a kick at the Doctor's head.

The Doctor's eyes snap open. He catches Junior's foot in both hands before it hits him and throws it upwards. Junior overbalances and tips back on to the floor.

"How dare you touch me!" Junior snarls.

"Likewise." The Doctor stands up. "Next time, ask politely."

Junior gets to his feet less gracefully.

"Give me one good reason why I shouldn't kill you right now?"

"What gives you the right?"

"I am the Boss of this ship and what I say goes."

"The Boss? Really? Aren't you a little young?"

"Shut up!"

"You just asked me to talk," the Doctor reminds him. "Indecisiveness is not a good leadership quality. Maybe I'd be better off speaking to a grown-up."

"Maybe you'd be better off without lungs."

Junior steps forward. He raises his claw.

"Kv'Mt'chll," Ls'Ntwp'tt says. "He recognised the tachyon reactor. He might be useful."

"Is she right?" Junior asks. "Can you fix it?"

"You're out of shikiremium," the Doctor says.

"We know that," Junior says, "and we're making plans to get more."

"Won't help. The thing is a dog's breakfast in the first place. Turn it back on and you'll find yourselves – and most of the surrounding area – smeared across the time-stream like so many memories."

"You're lying," Junior says. "That reactor will get us home."

"Bits of you anyway," the Doctor says. "If you really want to go home, I could offer a lift."

"A lift?"

"I do own a time machine, after all. There would be consequences, though."

"Consequences?"

"I'm guessing you ended up here because you were fleeing from the authorities, correct?" the Doctor says. "If I take you home then I expect you to face the music."

"No deal," Junior says. "You take us home with no strings attached."

The Doctor folds his arms. "And if I refuse?"

"Then I'll kill you."

"Interesting. Mind if I ask who'll get you home when I'm dead?" The Doctor's smile is cruel. "Forward planning. Another leadership skill you seem lack. Maybe it's time for a management reshuffle?"

A communicator bleeps.

"Junior... err, Boss," a voice begins, "we've got a report that the target's been sighted."

"Junior?" the Doctor says.

Junior waves a claw in his face. "We'll continue this conversation later."

"Don't hurry back on my account."

* * * * *

Ian arrives too late. The police are already swarming about the office. Files are being gathered, placed in cardboard boxes and carted out to waiting cars. One officer has the IBM computer in his arms.

Ian turns, intending to walk straight back out.

He collides with DCI Brady coming the other way.

The DCI is carrying a Styrofoam cup of coffee. Half of it ends up over Ian.

"I'm terribly sorry, sir. Is that a new suit?"

"No, no it's not," Ian says. He tries to step around Brady, but the DCI mirrors his movement. "No harm done."

"Looks expensive, if you don't mind me saying, sir."

"Well, it isn't. Look, I don't mean to be rude, but I really do have some place to be."

"Of course." Brady stands aside. "Just send your dry-cleaning bill to the station, Mr Townsend."

Ian freezes.

"It is Mr Townsend, isn't it? Mr Ian Townsend?"

"I think you already know who I am."

"Indeed, sir, but here's something I don't know. Where's Richard Ferris?"

"If he isn't here, I expect he's at home."

"He isn't, sir. We've already checked."

Has Richard done a runner? Already? Should I?

"Why are you looking for him?"

"We want to speak to him in connection with a fraud and corruption investigation involving a city councillor."

Feign ignorance.

"Which councillor?"

"George Patterson. You know him, I believe."

"I used to."

"Used to? You were photographed with him only yesterday."

The Hadrian Development.

"That was part of a deal between Patterson and Ferris. I wasn't involved."

"Is that so? Interesting that you used to work for Patterson and now you work for Ferris. How's that come about?"

"I married Ferris's daughter," Ian snaps. "I'm sure even a detective chief inspector can join the dots."

Brady gives a tight, humourless smile.

"Funny how both your employers are tangled up in the same corruption scandal. What could possibly connect them, do you think?"

Ian's voice is far calmer than he feels. "Do you have any actual evidence for that insinuation or are you just fishing, Chief Inspector?"

"No, no evidence. Yet," Brady says. "Though I am curious as to how you can afford that big house in Jesmond, not to mention your designer suit."

"It's from *Marks & Spencer!*"

My designer suit's covered with mud and vomit.

"Of course, sir. My mistake." Brady has to have the last word. "Don't leave town now, will you?"

* * * * *

By the time Val reaches Newcastle General, the police have arrived and Ryugin is gone.

"I'm sorry, Val," Mary says. "He was there when I called you, but by the time I got back..."

DI Hutchins and his team are interviewing the staff.

"It's not your fault, Mary," Val says. "We just have to figure out how to find him again."

Hutchins is arguing with a doctor who is refusing to let him speak to the patients.

"But where do we even start?" Mary says

There are two figures standing near the policemen. Too far away to be with them, but too close to be completely separate either. The woman wears a headscarf, the big man has a hat, sunglasses and muffler.

"I've got an idea about that," Val says.

She strides across to the woman.

"I'm sorry, but I couldn't help noticing what a lovely scarf you're wearing. May I?"

The woman tries to stop her, but Val has already snatched the scarf away.

Bald, conical cranium. Tiny scales. Pointed ears.

The big man in the hat growls.

"Call off grizzly or I'll scream and all these people can see you for what you really are," Val says, "and that wouldn't help you find Prince Ryugin, would it?"

The woman holds up a hand to quell her colleague.

"It's all right, Sosuke," she says.

Val hands back the headscarf.

"I think you and I need to talk," she says, "don't you?"

* * * * *

Darkness. The tinkling of wind-chimes. The smell of Sayuka blossoms.

Ryugin puts one foot in front of the other. He hears his wooden clogs hitting stone. He looks up. Sees a pinprick of green light high up and distant.

The light gets brighter. Bigger. The world he is in starts to take on some shape. A thousand steps leading up to the light. He starts to climb.

He climbs forever. He does not sweat. Does not tire. His strength in this place is limitless. The light is a portal through which he can see a courtyard. Buildings. Towers.

A palace.

A Heavenly Palace of Jade.

A figure stands in the light. She is beckoning to him. He can see her lips moving.

"Brother," she says.

"Sarafina!"

Ryugin's eyes snap open.

"Hello," says the child beside him. "Why are your ears all pointy?"

"I don't know," Ryugin says. "I've never really thought about it before. Why are *your* ears round?"

The child fondles her ears while she thinks about this.

"But what on earth is he doing here?" a voice hammers its way up the stairs.

"He had your jacket. You had our address in your pocket."

"And you thought you'd just invite him in, did you?"

"He was hurt. What was I supposed to do, just leave him out on the step?"

The child pulls a face.

"Mummy and Daddy are arguing," she says.

"Arguing about me."

Ryugin sits up in the bed.

"Daddy doesn't like you much," the child says.

"Then perhaps I should leave."

"Don't go," the child says. "I think Mummy likes you and Mummy always wins arguments."

"He's not one of your causes, Hazel," the male voice is saying, "not like Save the Whale or Amnesty International or whatever the cause of the week is today. We should call the police and let them handle it."

"Because we can always trust the police."

A pause. "All right, maybe not the police. But he can't stay here."

"Then where am I supposed to take him, Ian?"

A sigh of resignation. "We've got a new development over in Spital Tongues. There's no electricity or heating, but it's finished enough to be habitable. The workmen are on their Christmas break so he should have the place to himself for a few days.

"Sounds perfect," Hazel says.

"So glad you approve," Ian replies. "I'll drive him over there. After that, he's on his own."

"I'll drive him," Hazel says.

"What's the matter? Don't you trust me?" A beat. "What am I supposed to do while you're gone?"

"Take Kate round to my mother's," Hazel says. "After that, I don't care."

* * * * *

Mary is the only one who seems to be happy with her burger. Val has taken one bite out of hers and then set it aside. Urabe and Sosuke have not even touched theirs, though Urabe does seem taken with her vanilla milkshake. Outside the Wimpy bar, the miners' rally marches past the Eldon Square Shopping Centre. Mary has her back to the window so she cannot see if Alan is among them.

"What gave us away?" Urabe asks.

"His scarf." Val tugs on Sosuke's muffler, much to his annoyance. "No local would wear a scarf in this weather. It's above freezing."

"But you think it's okay to be out in public like this," Urabe asks, "amongst all these people?"

"You'll attract less attention in a crowd," Val says. "Trust me."

"Princess, I think this is a mistake." Sosuke says. "We have no idea who these people are."

"I'm Val, this is Mary. We know you want to find Prince Ryugin."

"I met Ryugin fifteen years ago." Mary wipes ketchup from her chin with a paper napkin. "He was being chased by this big dog. We tried to help him, but he was bitten so the Doctor put him in some kind of coma and that was the last I saw of him."

"I work with the Doctor," Val says, "but he's missing too. I think he's probably looking for this Ryugin too so by helping you, I'm really helping myself. We can't prove any of what we say, but I promise we're telling the truth."

"Their story is far-fetched..."

"Perhaps, Sosuke," Urabe says, "but this 'black dog' they speak of can only be an Okuri and how could humans know of the Okuri unless they were there? I'm prepared to trust them."

Sosuke inclines his head. "As you wish, Princess."

Urabe turns to Val and Mary. "Ryugin and I were to be married, to form a political union between our households, but Ryugin died on the way to the wedding, or so I was led to believe. I was forced to marry his brother instead. He is only interested in power and he is willing to grind my people into the dirt in order to get it. I hate him."

"So why don't you just take over from him?" Val asks. "If he's as bad as you say, surely the people will support you?"

"I may be royalty, but I am also a woman," Urabe says. "The people will not follow a woman."

"That's numb," Mary says.

"It is the Draconian way."

"So you need to bring Ryugin back to Draconia, both to expose his brother's crime and to give the people an alternative ruler. It's Laryssia all over again," Val says, recalling her first meeting with the Doctor. "But why wait until now? Ryugin went missing fifteen years ago."

"I thought he was dead," Urabe replies. "I only recently learned the truth. Will you help us?"

"Of course we will, though I'm not sure how much ground just the four of us can cover."

Mary bites a French fry in half and chews thoughtfully.
"Who says it's just the four of us?"

* * * * *

The fifteen storey block of flats in Spital Tongues is completely empty. Hazel and Ryugin have arbitrarily chosen a flat on the fourth floor with views back into the city. Hazel raided Ian's wardrobe before they left and, in place of his torn and stained robes, Ryugin is now wearing a blue-grey Member's Only jacket over a white-collared, pink-striped shirt and skinny leather tie, tight white jeans, white socks and slip-on shoes. Hazel's own outfit consists of a baggy white T-shirt with a large, black "CHOOSE LIFE" logo, a leather jacket with big shoulders and an acid-washed denim miniskirt over black leggings and red stilettos.

The room is bare. Beige carpet. White walls.

"Will you be okay in here?" Hazel asks.

"It's hardly the imperial palace," Ryugin says, "but I've slept in worse. I really appreciate what you've done for me."

"It's my husband, really. He found this flat. You're wearing his clothes."

"But he wouldn't have done any of that if not for you, Hazel. You should be getting back to him."

But I don't want to.

Hazel stands in the doorway, Ryugin at the window. The emptiness of the room hangs between them.

"What will you do now?"

"Try to find the Doctor, I suppose."

"You want to go back to the hospital?"

Ryugin shakes his head. "He's not that sort of doctor. The Doctor helped me once before. He promised to come back for me, but that was fifteen years ago."

Ryugin turns away. He puts his fingertips against the cold windowpane.

"I don't know what I'm supposed to do. Growing up, I always had someone to help me. Sarafina, my sister. Yoshido, my tutor. They're both gone now."

"I'm sorry."

"I'm not ready to be alone."

Hazel takes a step forward. Then another.

"I could stay. I don't know what I can do to help, but I can keep you company, if you want."

Ryugin turns. His lips twitch, but are not quite ready to form a smile.

"I'd like that, Hazel."

Hazel's heart flips.

"Are you hungry?" she asks.

Now Ryugin does smile. "I haven't eaten in fifteen years."

"Then I know just the place."

* * * * *

The Doctor's fingers are twitching. To a casual observer, he might appear relaxed. Lounging against the wall. Eyes half-closed.

But his fingers are twitching.

A Foamasi must be able to read body language both to imitate and to avoid being deceived and Ls'Ntwp'tt is a smarter Foamasi than most.

The Doctor's fingers are a tell. They let her know that his relaxed pose is an act. That he is tense. Impatient. All she has to do is out-wait him and he will break.

"Has it occurred to you that I might know all about the Foamasi gift for reading body language," the Doctor says, "and that I might be using it to my advantage? Sending you false signals?"

Ls'Ntwp'tt forces herself not to react.

"Excellent self-control," the Doctor says. "*Junior* would have jumped out of his skin."

"Kv'Mt'chll still has a lot to learn," Ls'Ntwp'tt replies.

"So I gather." The Doctor takes a step closer. "Why do you follow him?"

"He's the Boss."

"But does he deserve to be the Boss? You're smarter than him. Why shouldn't *you* be Boss?"

"No one would follow me?" The Doctor looks sceptical, so she continues, "In order to become Boss, I would need to remove Kv'Mt'chll."

"And there is no greater crime than for a Foamasi to turn on a member of her family," the Doctor says. He taps a panel with his finger. "This is old. How long have you been stranded here?"

"We crash-landed on Earth fifteen years ago, almost to the day."

"Fifteen years, there's a coincidence..."

Ls'Ntwp'tt cannot tell if he is talking to her or to himself, but then the Doctor turns his eyes on her. Pale eyes. Cold eyes. Eyes that strip the scales from her body.

"It posits a question, though, doesn't it?" he says. "Junior may be young now, but fifteen years ago he'd have been practically larval. Crashing down on twentieth century Newcastle doesn't say much for this crew's abilities, but I doubt if even you are desperate enough to follow a child. I can't help wondering what became of your last Boss. Junior eliminated him, didn't he?"

"No," Ls'Ntwp'tt replies.

"No?"

"G'Gugv'ntt is still very much alive. He's just been placed out of the way."

"That would have been my next guess."

The Doctor is circling the room. Ls'Ntwp'tt is too, keeping the tachyon reactor between her and the prisoner.

"So it's all right for Junior to do away with a Boss, but not you?" the Doctor says. "Of course it is. You've got Junior wrapped around your little finger... claw... whatever. He'll do anything you tell him. He's Boss in name only, but as long as he *is* Boss he'll draw the crew's resentment, not you. Very clever."

"I'm glad you approve, Doctor," Ls'Ntwp'tt says, "and now that you know the truth you'll know that it's me that you have to fear, not Junior."

"I don't find either of you especially intimidating."

"But you should. Junior would simply kill you, but I've been doing this for years. I know just how much pain you can inflict on someone before they lose consciousness. I can draw out agonies for hours, days, weeks even. I suspect you could last even longer still. Wouldn't that be an interesting experiment?"

"What do you want from me?"

"I want you to help me fix the tachyon reactor."

"Weren't you listening?" the Doctor says. "I've already told you what will happen if you turn that back on. Bye bye, Foamasi. Bye bye, Newcastle."

"I have to know."

"They say there's a thin line between insanity and genius. It's a yawning chasm in your case."

"Enough witticisms, Doctor," Ls'Ntwp'tt says. "Are you going to help me or do I start by removing your skin?"

"All right, all right. Let me show you something."

The Doctor puts a hand inside his coat.

Ls'Ntwp'tt raises her pistol.

"What are you doing?"

"I'm just getting my screwdriver." The Doctor adjusts the settings. "I suspect there's still some residual shikirenium left inside the reactor. Not enough to get it working again, obviously, but if I can hit the right frequency to excite what's left then I should be able to do *this!*"

The Doctor disappears.

The Doctor reappears.

Only now there are three of him.

"Funny things, tachyons," they say in unison. "I last saw this party trick performed in the Leisure Hive on Argolis."

Ls'Ntwp'tt takes a swipe at one of the Doctors, but he vanishes as soon as she touches him.

"Which of you is the real one?" she asks.

"Maybe none of them?"

A fourth Doctor has appeared on the other side of the room.

"It could be me." A fifth.

"Maybe it's me." A sixth.

"Or me." A seventh.

Ls'Ntwp'tt lunges at Doctor after Doctor. Each bursts like a soap bubble on contact.

"It's me."

"Me."

"Me."

Ls'Ntwp'tt points her flechette pistol. Fires again and again and again.

Before long, the Doctors are gone.

And Ls'Ntwp'tt is alone.

* * * * *

An icy breeze blows in from the North Sea. It carries the stains of Dire Straits' *Tunnel of Love*.

Girl it looks so pretty to me.

The sands of Whitley Bay stretching out to St Mary's Island in the north. The white lighthouse just visible in the distance, sending its warning to ships just as St Helen's chapel did before it.

Like it always did.

Hazel and Ryugin are walking along the sea wall. They are dining on fish and chips wrapped in yesterday's newspaper and covered in lashings of salt and vinegar. Hazel is showing Ryugin how to spear chips with the two-pronged wooden fork in his hand.

Like the Spanish City to me.

They are approaching the fairground. It may be midwinter, but kids will always need somewhere to play. They scream as they are spun by the waltzers, scared by the ghost train, turned upside-down by the roller coaster.

When we were kids.

Hazel points at the dome of the Spanish City.

"Ian used to take me dancing there," she says, "in the Empress Ballroom. Not anymore."

"I don't think I know how to dance," Ryugin says. "There wasn't much call to learn."

"Everyone knows how to dance," Hazel says. "You just have to listen to the music."

"What music?"

She puts her palm against his chest.

"The music in here. Can't you hear it? Let me show you."

They put the remains of the fish and chips on the sea wall. Hazel draws him close.

"Just put your hands there – that's it – and sway to the beat."

"I feel foolish," Ryugin says.

"You need to relax," Hazel says. "Relax and let it happen."

She closes her eyes and begins to hum. *Careless Whisper* by George Michael. Ever so softly, she sings the lyrics.

I'm never gonna dance again/Guilty feet have got no rhythm.

She melts in Ryugin's hands and Ryugin melts with her.

For a moment, time stands still.

Then it crashes into fast forward.

"Hey! You!" They have been spotted by a pair of policemen walking down Marine Avenue. "Give over!"

"Run!" Hazel says.

"Not without you."

Hand in hand, they race down the sea front. Hazel totters in her heels.

"I'm slowing you down," she says.

"Never."

Ryugin scoops her up in his arms and continues running along the Promenade. They hear the sirens before they see them. A police car coming up from North Shields. The policemen

behind them are gaining. Ryugin veers left, up to slope towards the ruins of Tynemouth Priory. Waves crash against the rocks far below.

The doors of the police car slam. Its occupants and the foot patrol jog up the slope after them. There is nowhere left to run.

"Do you trust me?" Ryugin asks.

Hazel meets his eyes. "I trust you."

Ryugin turns.

"Don't be daft, man!" one of the policemen yells.

Ryugin jumps from the top of the cliff, Hazel tight against his chest. Waves close above their heads. The sea swallows them up. The police can only stop and stare.

Some time later, Hazel and Ryugin wash up on the beach. Their clothes are soaked through, plastered to their skin. Hazel has lost her shoes. Ryugin is lying on his back. Hazel is on top of him. She is breathing heavily.

"Do you trust me?" she says.

"Always," he replies.

Hazel leans forward. Kisses him. His lips are cold and she can taste the salt from the sea. She breaks away. The sand in her hair sparkles in the setting sun.

"Is there a problem?" Ryugin asks. "Did I do something wrong?"

"No, no problem," she says, kissing him again. "No problem at all."

* * * * *

Val, Mary, Urabe and Sosuke are sitting in the Brookers' front room. They are waiting for the telephone to ring.

Mary spoke to Alan during the rally. He had not wanted to help at first because asking his friends for a favour had seemed like weakness. Mary had convinced him that disappointing her would be worse.

Now miners from all across the Tyne and Wear area are out looking for Prince Ryugin because miners help other miners. And Mary, Urabe, Sosuke and Val are stuck at home waiting for someone to phone in a sighting.

Robbie is over at a friend's house. Jack is down the pub. It is just the four of them.

Just the four of them waiting.

The telephone in the hall rings. Both Mary and Val are out of their seat, but Mary reaches the door first. Val sits back down, tense as a coiled spring.

They hear the telephone receiver being replaced in its cradle.

Mary stands in the doorway, her hands in her pockets.

"They've spotted him."

They are on their feet before the third word is out.

"Where?" Val asks.

"Whitley Bay."

* * * * *

Hazel has driven them back to the flat. Their clothes are still damp and the room is cold, but neither has anything else to wear. It is dark outside, but there is a battery-powered lamp in the middle of the room.

Ryugin unrolls the single sleeping bag.

I should leave.

Ryugin sits cross-legged on the floor.

I should leave, but I don't want to.

"Have I told you about my sister?" he asks.

Hazel sits down opposite him. Her jacket squelches so she takes it off.

"Her name was Sarafina," Ryugin says, "and she was my constant companion growing up. We told each other everything. Things we wouldn't have dreamed of confiding in our parents."

"You must have been very close."

"Like twins, Yoshido used to say. We were inseparable, until my sister came of age. You have to understand that Draconia was at war not so long ago. Before I was born, but within my father's memory. Households had been at each other's throats and the wounds still felt very fresh. What I'm trying to say is that my father, the Daimyo, felt it was important to unite the various households before these wounds drove them apart again. That's why he arranged for my sister to marry a prince of House Keifu. And Sarafina, being a dutiful Draconian, obeyed our father."

There are tears in Ryugin's eyes.

"Go on," Hazel says.

"At first, I could bear the separation. Sarafina would write often and, reading her letters, it was like she was in the room with me. But then the letters stopped. What we didn't know was that Keifu Tagari was a monster and he took out the worst of his vices on his wife. On my sister. She endured. She was a Draconian princess and she had been trained from birth to endure, but what good is a life without love?"

"What happened next?"

"She found her love. There was a guard – I do not know his name – and she took comfort with him while her husband was out hunting. But one day Keifu Tagari fell from his horse and broke his leg and was brought back from the hunt early. He found my sister in another man's arms."

Ryugin is wringing his hands in his lap.

"The guard was exiled. Sarafina was stoned to death."

"Oh god!" Hazel's hand flies to her mouth. "Didn't your father try to stop it?"

"When I learned what had happened, I confronted him about it. He told me that she had disgraced our family's honour. That she had got no more than she deserved. That it was Amatsu's will." Ryugin's gaze is intense. Hazel cannot look away. "This is our culture. This is our law. Honour above love, above dignity, above freedom. And should I become Daimyo, this is the law I will be expected to uphold. Perhaps Katashi did me a favour by stranding me here. Perhaps I don't want to go back."

They sit in silence.

"I wish I had had someone I was really close to," Hazel says, "like you were with your sister."

"You have your husband," Ryugin says.

"Ian and I aren't close," Hazel says. "I'm not sure we ever were. Oh, we thought we were – we wouldn't have married otherwise – but we were young and who really knows their mind when they're young?"

"But what about your child?"

"Kate? We can't even agree on her name." Hazel looks away. "She was Ian's idea. He'd always said he didn't want children. That we were both too busy. That a child would change everything and not for the better. Always what he thought, what *he* wanted. And I... I didn't know what I wanted."

"So what happened."

"What always happens?" Hazel says. "My father happened. The great Richard Ferris. He saw I was unhappy, that our marriage was in trouble, so he told Ian to fix it. Like I was a problem to be solved. Ian said we should try for a baby that it would bring us closer together. It did the opposite.

"I love Kate, I really do, but I never asked for her." Hazel's voice is rising. "She's taken over my life. Ian is never around so it's all down to me and it's always what she wants. What about what I want? How can I love my little girl and resent her at the same time?"

Ryugin has no answer.

"I don't want to go home tonight," Hazel says quietly.

"Then stay," Ryugin says.

The lamp flickers.

"We should get out of these wet things," Hazel says, "before we catch our death."

Ryugin nods and they turn their backs on one another. Hazel strips down to her underwear. She wants to turn her head, to find out what Ryugin looks like beneath his shirt, but she does not.

Is he thinking the same?

"You should take the sleeping bag," Ryugin says. "I'll sleep on the floor."

"You'll freeze."

"Better me than you."

Hazel slides into the sleeping bag. The cool polyester lining raises goose-pimples on her skin.

"Ryugin," she says, "there's room in here for two."

Ryugin wriggles in beside her. The scales on his face run all the way down his body. Hazel adjusts her position. Her heart is hammering against her chest. Or is it his heartbeat she can feel?

"Are you sure you want this?" Ryugin asks.

"I'm sure," she says.

Ryugin turns out the light.

* * * * *

It is a big house, a very big house. Ian has never really noticed that before, but he has never been alone in it before. Katherine is spending the night with her grandmother and Hazel has not yet come back.

If she *is* coming back.

It is late. Ian has no idea how late, but television has stopped broadcasting for the night. He is sitting in the dark, staring at the blank screen. Waiting. For what, he does not know.

His eyelids are heavy. He begins to nod.

The chime of the doorbell jolts him back to wakefulness.

A dream?

The bell rings again. And again.

Insistent.

Ian has pins and needles in his left foot, but manages to hobble to the door. A man in a brown suit and kipper tie is standing outside. He flashes a warrant card.

"DI Hutchins, sir," he says. "May I come in?"

"It's very late," Ian says. "Can't this wait until morning?"

"This won't take long."

Ian takes off the chain and opens the door.

"I've already spoken to DCI Brady."

"I know, sir, but we have some follow-up questions."

Hutchins steps into the hall. His eyes dart around, sizing up the place.

"The truth is, Mr Townsend that I have all the evidence I need to charge you right now."

Ian is tired and decides to call his bluff. "If that's the case you would have done it already."

Hutchins throws a file onto the floor at Ian's feet.

"Patterson's accounts," he says. "His real ones, not the ones he declared. You can keep it, they're copies. The originals are in a safe place."

"Why are you showing me this? Why aren't we having this conversation down at the station?"

"At this time, DCI Brady doesn't even know those accounts exist. He has enough to charge Patterson and Ferris, but nothing to connect you to them beyond his own suspicions. I'm prepared to keep it that way."

"What do you want in return?" Ian's eyes narrow. "Money?"

"Not this time," Hutchins says. "I just want an address."

"An address?"

"You brought a man to the hospital this morning."

"Did I?"

"You won't have forgotten this one, Mr Townsend. He had scales. I want to know where he is now."

"How should I know?"

"He was seen entering this house."

"Well he's not here now."

"I know that, Mr Townsend, but I want to know where he is."

"And if I don't know?" Ian asks.

"If you refuse to tell me then I will have no choice but to turn over these accounts to the proper authorities," Hutchins says, "so the question you have to ask yourself, Mr Townsend, is this: what's more important, his freedom or yours?"

* * * * *

Hazel is woken by the plaintive warbling of a robin outside the window. She eases herself out of the sleeping bag, retrieves her bra from the floor and hooks it back in place.

Dawn has only just broken. The view is suffused with peach-coloured light.

"Good morning."

Ryugin is watching her. He is propped up on one elbow. Hazel wraps her arms around herself, embarrassed. She snags her T-shirt with her toe and quickly puts it on. It falls to mid-thigh.

Ryugin comes to the window, not the least self-conscious in his nakedness. He puts an arm around Hazel. Hazel flinches.

"What's wrong?" he asks.

"I'm sorry," she says, "it's just... Look, it's not you, okay?"

"Then what? Is it Ian?" Ryugin says. "Are you ashamed of last night?"

"No!" Hazel insists. "I don't know. Maybe. Please, just put some clothes on."

Ryugin moves away. Hazel stares out of the window. She tries to ignore the sound of fabric being pulled over taut muscles.

A Rover SD1 pulls up in the street below. There are no sirens, but she can see the flashing blue light.

She grabs her skirt.

"Ryugin, we have to go. They've found you."

They run down the stairs. The police are already trying to force the main entrance.

"There's a fire exit round the back," Hazel says.

A young officer is waiting outside the door. Ryugin elbows him in the throat and the officer drops before her can raise the alarm.

"This way!"

Hazel drags Ryugin through a gap between two houses, thick with nettles and brambles. At the end of the path, they reach a wooden barrier. The panels have been nailed in place and the nails are orange with rust. Hazel grabs hold of a panel and tries to pull it free.

"Allow me," Ryugin says.

One kick. The panel splinters.

Two kicks. It buckles inwards.

Three kicks. It smashes apart.

Where the panels once stood is a dark opening.

"The Victoria Tunnel." Hazel leads the way inside. "They used to use it to take coal from the mine down to the river. With luck, the police don't even know it's here."

There are no lights in the tunnel and they have neglected to bring a torch. Their fingers trace the sloping walls and they feel their way along. The bottom of the tunnel is coated with some kind of cold slime.

There is a light up ahead.

"The exit?" Ryugin asks.

Hazel shakes her head. "We haven't gone anything like far enough."

The light draws closer. Reveals itself to be a torch. A torch carried by a short man in a brown suit.

"DI Hutchins," he barks. "You're nicked, mate."

"Back the way we came?" Hazel asks.

More police are coming the other way.

"What do we do now?"

Ryugin snarls. "We fight!"

He launches himself at the cluster of police officers. His speed takes them by surprise and two go down before they have a chance to draw their batons. He uses his forearm to block an attack on his left before driving the heel of his right hand into his attacker's nose. He pivots, ducking low and swinging out with his left leg to sweep another officer off of his feet.

"Ryugin! Help me!"

Two officers have taken hold of Hazel. Her arms are pinned to her sides. She is being carried away down the tunnel.

Ryugin starts after her, but a sudden wave of nausea overtakes him and he drops to one knee in the muck. A baton is swung at his head. Lightning fast, Ryugin catches it in his right hand. Tears it from his attacker's grasp. Snaps the baton in two.

DI Hutchins backs away. He is smiling.

"Be seeing you," he says before he runs into the darkness.

His men fade away just as quickly.

Shakily, Ryugin stands up. Hutchins has left his torch and, by its light, Ryugin sees a message scratched into the tunnel wall.

A place.

A date.

A time.

* * * * *

Ian sits up on the sofa. He massages the crick in his neck.

How long have I been asleep? And what's that pounding in my head?

There is a mug of coffee on the low table in front of him. He dips a finger into it. Cold.

The pounding will not go away. It is not in his head at all. Someone is hammering on the front door.

Wiping at his bleary eyes, Ian stumbles into the hall to answer it.

The door is kicked open. The chain snaps. Ian is sent sprawling across the carpet.

"What have you done!" Ryugin demands.

"Wh-what?"

"You're the only person who knew where we were hiding." Ryugin grabs hold of Ian's shirt. He lifts him up into the air. "You told them where to find us."

He throws Ian like a shot-put. Ian bounces off the wall. Hears a crack where his arm strikes the plaster. He lands in the kitchen. A mug-tree totters then falls to the tiled floor.

Ryugin towers over him.

"Was it worth it?"

Ian tries to crawl away. Ryugin kicks him in the ribs.

"How much did they pay you? How much do you charge to betray your wife?"

"Hazel? But how... what... I don't understand."

"They took her. They came for me and they took her."

"But she shouldn't have even been there," Ian says. "If I'd known..."

"Would it really have made any difference?"

Ryugin prepares to take another swing. Ian curls into a ball. He shields his face with his arms.

Ryugin collapses against a cabinet. He clutches at his head with his hands. He slides to the floor.

Ian scuttles away. Ryugin does not pursue. He just lies trembling on the floor. Ian stands up. Ryugin does not. Gingerly, Ian pokes Ryugin with his toes. Ryugin makes a grab for Ian's foot, but feebly, like a kitten swatting a piece of string.

Ian kicks him as hard as he can.

And again.

And again.

And again.

The red mist clears. Ian goes upstairs to the bathroom. His arm is stiff, but does not appear to be broken. It hurts to breath, but his ribs are intact. He dabs at the cuts on his face with toilet tissue.

He goes to the bedroom. Takes a suitcase down from above the wardrobe. Opens it. Fills it with as many of his clothes as he can cram inside.

He drags the suitcase back downstairs. He pauses at the door and looks back. Ryugin is still lying on the kitchen floor. Twitching.

Should I call for help?

Ian inhales and is reminded of the sharp pain in his side.

He walks outside to his Saab. He throws the suitcase in the boot. He starts the engine.

And he leaves.

* * * * *

Midnight and a storm is brewing. Dark clouds gather as Sunday becomes Monday. Christmas Eve.

Alan guides the Chevette through the quiet streets. Sosuke is in the seat beside him, too big to ride in the back. Urabe, Val and Mary are squashed in next to one another.

Whitley Bay was a waste of time. Ryugin had been there – the panda cars and police divers testified to that – but was there no longer. Mary puts forward the suggestion that perhaps he has drowned, an idea with which Sosuke sombrely agrees. Val and Urabe, however, cannot accept that. They have too much riding on finding Ryugin alive.

Back at the Brookers' house in Westoe, Urabe gets Robbie's bed and Sosuke insists on sleeping on the floor beside her. For the second night in a row, Val takes the sofa. No one gets much sleep.

Then, early on Sunday morning, Urabe gets a call. Not on the telephone, but on a cylindrical communicator she has been carrying concealed within her robes. It seems she has other allies, other *alien* allies that she has chosen not to tell Val about.

So she doesn't trust us after all.

These allies have found Prince Ryugin and they wish to arrange a trade. At midnight.

"Never thought I'd hear myself say this," Alan says, "but I really don't want to go in there."

St James' Park. Home ground of Newcastle United Football Club. Kevin Keegan, Chris Waddle, Peter Beardsley. The Magpies. The lads.

"Dad used to bring us here every Saturday," Alan says. "Those were the days."

"So what is the problem?"

Alan twists round in his seat. "The problem, Princess, is that I don't reckon much to midnight exchanges with people I've never met. Have you even got something to give them?"

"I have my jewels," Urabe says. "I'm told they are priceless."

"And what's to stop these friends of yours from simply taking those jewels and doing a runner?"

"Alan makes a good point, Princess," Sosuke says. "You cannot rely on the honour of a non-Draconian."

"I can't turn back now," Urabe says. "Not when I'm so close."

"Then we'll just have to be on our guard, won't we?" Val says.

The turnstile is locked so Sosuke forces it open.

"Wouldn't want to get on his bad side," Alan says.

Mary frowns. "Keep it down."

"Sorry, pet" Alan mutters. "I'm nervous. I babble when I'm nervous."

"You're not nervous, you're feared," Mary says. "I am too."

Alan puts his arm round her.

It has started to rain. Mary has an umbrella in her coat pocket, but is reluctant to put it up. It does not seem appropriate somehow.

They step out onto the pitch.

A man in a brown suit is standing in the centre circle. He is pointing a gun at a woman in a leather jacket. Her hands are bound. There is tape across her mouth.

"Princess Urabe," the man in brown says. "How nice of you to join us."

"Who are you?" Urabe demands.

"Don't you recognise me? I'm hurt."

He raises a hand and tears off his skin, starting at his forehead and working all the way down to his feet.

"My name is Kv'Mt'chll," says Junior.

"Where is G'Gug... G'G..." Urabe struggles with the pronunciation.

"G'Gugv'ntt? He won't be joining us."

Sosuke steps forward. "Our arrangement was with him."

"Call off your dog, Princess," Junior says.

Urabe puts a hand on Sosuke's arm. "Sosuke speaks the truth. We had an arrangement."

"And now we'll make a new arrangement," Junior says.

"Only if you have Ryugin. Where is he?"

"Oh, he's around somewhere, I'm sure. Aren't you, Prince?"

A rumble of thunder.

Prince Ryugin steps out of the shadows. He is unsteady on his feet and there is a purple bruise on the left side of his face.

"Let Hazel go, you monster!"

"I'll let the woman go," Junior says, "just as soon as I get what I want."

"I don't know about what you want," Ryugin says, "but I can give you what you deserve."

He lowers his head and charges across the grass. Half-a-dozen Foamasi drop from the shadows and tackle him. They force him to the ground and hold him there.

"Temper, temper, Prince," Junior says. "I hope you know how to control this one, Princess."

"Prince Ryugin, my name is Genroku Urabe and I am your brother's wife." She bows. "I need you to come back with me to depose your brother and free our people."

"What do I care about your people?" Ryugin says.

"But they are suffering?" Urabe is shocked. "Your brother has..."

"My brother can do what he likes," Ryugin says, "and the Draconian people are getting no more than they deserve. They mean nothing to me now. Everything I want is right here."

He looks to Hazel.

"I'm afraid we can take no responsibility for defective goods, Princess," Junior says, "but we can make sure he is loaded securely onto your ship for transit. Assuming, that is, you can give me what I want."

"I have the jewels we promised G'Gu... the other Foamasi."

Urabe holds out a wooden casket. Junior knows it from her hands.

"I don't want your jewels," Junior says. "What good are they to me? I want the shikirenium."

Urabe takes a started step back.

"I don't understand."

"Shikirenium. Mined on the moons of Draconia. I need it to power my ship. Give it to me!"

"But I don't have any."

"Then get some."

"I can't," Urabe says. "We're here in defiance of my husband. If I return empty-handed then I will be imprisoned. Executed. Let me take Ryugin. Once he is restored to the throne, I'm sure he'll give you whatever you want."

"No deal," Junior says. "Shikirenium first, then the prince."

"I can't..."

"Then what use are you? What use are any of you?" Junior is screaming. "Is this all a joke to you? Did Uncle put you up to it? Is he laughing at me behind my back?"

"No, we just..."

Junior is not listening.

"Kill them! Kill them all!"

"Wait!"

A flash of lightning and a crash of thunder. The rain is coming down in sheets now, sluicing off the coat of the figure who has spoken. His hood hides his face.

"I do hope you're not throwing another temper tantrum, Junior?"

"Who are you?" Junior demands. "Is that you, Uncle?"

"Now there's a revolting thought." Using both hands, the figure pulls back his hood. "Do you recognise me now?"

"Doctor!" Val shouts.

"Thank you, Miss Rossi, I know who I am." The Doctor turns his attention back to the Foamasi. "Tell me, Junior, are you in the habit of picking fights with unarmed men." He bows to the prince. "Ryugin, I think you forgot this."

He produces a katana from inside his coat. He throws it to the prince. With a grunt of exertion, Ryugin works his arm free. He catches the sword by the hilt. He swings the blade.

A Foamasi head rolls across the grass.

The other Foamasi back warily away.

Ryugin stands.

"It is good to see you again, Doctor," he says. He carves a figure of eight in the air. "Now we can finally teach these bandits a lesson. But are you not armed yourself?"

"I have all the weapons I need," the Doctor says.

He holds his sonic screwdriver in his hand. He raises it high above his head. He turns it on.

Floodlights all around the stadium burst into life. The Foamasi cower from the light, shielding their eyes with their claws.

Light flares on Ryugin's blade.

The Doctor is at Hazel's side. The sonic screwdriver releases the bonds at her wrists. His fingers tear the tape from her mouth.

"Come with me if you want to live," he says.

Hazel turns and runs towards Ryugin.

"Could I have been any more clear?" the Doctor asks the world at large. "Humans!"

Val taps him on the shoulder.

"Explanation."

"No time."

"Short version."

"Three words or less?" The Doctor meets her eyes. "Ryugin is dying."

"Dying?"

"It's the Okuri poison, isn't it?" Mary says. "But he looks fine."

An arm round Hazel, Ryugin holds off the attacking Foamasi. Any that make the mistake of getting too close retreat minus a limb. Princess Urabe is trying to reach him. Sosuke is clearing a path.

"It's less a poison, more a virus," the Doctor says. "When I put Ryugin to sleep, it became dormant too, but now it's waking up. Why couldn't he wait for me?"

"We didn't know where you were."

"I said I was coming back. That should count for something."

"Can we do anything for him?" Val asks.

"We need to get him to the TARDIS," the Doctor says, "and quickly."

"Ryugin," Urabe says, "come with me."

A Foamasi points its pistol at her. Sosuke engulfs the pistol in his hand, crushes it and then hurls the Foamasi up the pitch.

"I don't need your help," Ryugin says.

"But I need yours. Come back with us. We have a ship, we can take you away from here. We can take you home."

A Foamasi thrusts an electric stiletto at Ryugin's abdomen. He arcs his body to avoid the blade, slices off the Foamasi's claw at the wrist, then plunges his sword through the Foamasi's eye.

"I lost my home," he says, "the day they stoned my sister."

"At least help me depose your brother. After that, you can abdicate. Do what you want. Go where you want. Take your woman with you. I don't care. But please help us. You owe your people that much."

"I owe them nothing. Come on, Hazel, we're getting out of here."

Sweeping Hazel off of her feet, Ryugin sprints for the exit. Urabe starts after him, but a Foamasi with a blade in each hand appears before her. Sosuke interlaces his fingers, brings down his fists. The Foamasi's skull crumples.

Ryugin vaults the turnstile. Hand in hand, he and Hazel race across the car park. They duck through the entrance of the Metro station, taking the steps two at a time.

Ryugin's world spins. His legs become water and he slides down the final few steps.

"Ryugin!" The blood drains from Hazel's face. "Ryugin speak to me."

Her face is out of focus. Like a ghost. Or an angel.

"I'm sorry, Hazel," he says. "I thought I could hold on a little while longer."

Hazel helps him over to the tiled wall and he leans back against it. A man in a black tracksuit – the only other figure on the platform – eyes them suspiciously. He gets up and moves to a row of plastic chairs further away. His ears are hidden beneath headphones plugged into a Sony Walkman and he turns the music up so that he can drown them out. He closes his eyes.

Ryugin closes his eyes.

"Ryugin! Ryugin, stay with me."

"Sorry." He opens his eyes. They are filled with pain. "I'm so tired."

"What's wrong?" Hazel is crying now. "What's happening to you?"

"It's the Okuri's poison. I thought I was rid of it, but it burns, Hazel." He scrunches up his eyes. "I guess my brother wins after all."

"No, you can't do this to me." Hazel's tears fall around her feet. "I won't let you. I can't lose you now. Not so soon."

Ryugin reaches out a hand. His finger touches her cheek. So soft. Like it is not really there at all.

"Be strong, Hazel," he says. "Live. Live for me."

"Isn't this touching?" Junior is standing at the top of the stairs.

"Go to hell!" Even Ryugin's voice lacks strength.

"You first, I think." Junior raises a pistol.

"Kill me then." Ryugin spreads his arms. He is too weak to stand. "Savour your 'victory'."

"You humiliated me, Prince," Junior says. "Death is too good for you. I want you to suffer."

He turns the pistol towards Hazel.

"No!" Ryugin yells.

Junior squeezes the trigger.

Looses a flechette.

From nowhere, strength floods Ryugin's limbs. He leaps to his feet. Dives in front of Hazel.

The flechette strikes him in the chest.

Pierces his heart.

He collapses back into Hazel's arms.

"No!"

The scream comes from behind Junior.

Urabe.

The Foamasi turns. Brings up his pistol. Sosuke bats him to one side.

Urabe is running, fighting against an escalator travelling the other way. Halfway down, she sees the light leave Ryugin's eyes.

"Is this the end?" she whispers to herself. "Was it all for nothing?"

She stops running now, lets the escalator carry her back up.

The Doctor, Val and Mary arrive in the station. Mary sees Hazel cradling Ryugin and runs down the steps to her side. The Doctor's eyes are on Urabe. On what she is holding in her hands.

She raises her knife.

"No!"

She plunges the point between her breasts. She collapses, a puppet without strings.

The escalator deposits her body at the Doctor's feet.

He slams his fist into the wall. A tile cracks.

"There was no need." His voice is hoarse. "No need at all."

"There was a need," Sosuke says. In Val's eyes, he seems to have shrunk. "She could never return to Draconia without the prince. Not with honour. Not alive. But now I can see that she is buried as a Draconian princess should be."

He scoops her corpse up in his arms, cradling it like a baby. He walks away. Nobody tries to stop him.

The Doctor stares at the blood on his knuckles.

"What now?" Val asks. "Ryugin dead. Urabe dead. Where do we go from here?"

"We save everyone else, Miss Rossi." The Doctor's face is set. "I'm not having any more deaths on my conscience."

* * * * *

The sky is full of lightning. Blue and pink and orange lightning.

"What's going on?" Val asks.

"A temporal storm," the Doctor replies. "Local space-time is tearing itself apart."

"Can we stop it?"

"I can, but I need to get to the source. Brooker! Brooker, I need you."

Val thinks he is talking to Tom then recalls that Tom is not here.

"Where *is* Tom?" she asks.

"I left him in 1969. He'll be safe there. Brooker, I need your car!"

"And 1969 is where we're going. That's when Ryugin crash-landed. That must be the source."

"Wrong, wrong, wrong." The Doctor runs his hands through his hair. "Imagine you throw a stone into a lake. The ripples radiate outwards, correct? When Brooker and I dived into the rift, the ripples carried us back in time, away from the source."

"So what we want is in the future." The Doctor nods. "How do we get there?"

"I'll give you one guess, Miss Rossi. Please don't disappoint me."

"The TARDIS."

"The TARDIS. That's what a time machine is for, after all. Brooker, where are you?"

"What do you want, Doctor?" Alan says. "I need to find Mary."

"Mary is down in the station looking after..." The Doctor makes circles with his fingers. "...what's her name."

"Hazel, I think."

"Yes, thank you, Miss Rossi. If it was important, I would have remembered."

Alan makes for the station entrance, but the Doctor puts an arm around his shoulders and steers him in the opposite direction.

"Brooker, your wife's not going to break down as long as she's got someone else to take care of. You know that. So why don't you help me for a bit instead?"

"I should be with Mary."

"Brooker, if you don't go to Mary, the worse that will happen is she'll scream at you a bit and you'll have to spend a few nights on the sofa. On the other hand, if you don't come with me, your whole world will disintegrate. Please tell me you can do the maths?"

Alan cooperates.

The TARDIS does not.

"Stupid, stubborn, idiotic..."

They are back on the beach in Westoe. The Doctor is hammering on the TARDIS doors with the palm of his hand.

"Let me in!"

The doors will not open.

"You short-sighted, self-centred, cowardly little... box!"

He kicks the TARDIS. It doesn't help.

"Something wrong?" Alan asks. He is leaning on the bonnet of his car, arms folded.

"The wretched girl won't let me in."

"Why not?" Val asks.

"Because she's scared," the Doctor says. "She knows what's coming and she knows that she can survive it, but only if she doesn't let it in. So she can't let us in. She won't let *me* in!"

"So what do we do now?"

"Do I have to think of everything?"

"All right, I'll have a go," Val says. "Why don't we just jump in one of those rifts?"

"Well, assuming we could even survive the experience, there's no guarantee we'd end up where we need to be." The Doctor buries his face in his hands. "No, we need a time machine. *Another* time machine." He looks up. He is smiling. "We need another time machine. Brooker, I need a lift back to town."

* * * * *

"Just act like you own the place," the Doctor tells Val.

It should be dawn, but bruise-coloured storm clouds blot out the sun. Rainbow lightning crackles overhead.

The Doctor strides into the cloaked spaceship. A Foamasi turns to him. Barks something in a language Val cannot understand. Raises his pistol.

The Doctor responds with a long series of clicks and chirrup.

The Foamasi bows its head and waves them through.

Head held high, the Doctor strolls past. He beckons for Val to follow.

"Foamasi skin-suits are remarkable inventions," the Doctor says to her. "So good, in fact, that even a Foamasi struggles to tell a skin-suit from the real thing."

Val brushes a plastic fern out of her way.

"You mean they think we're Foamasi?"

"Not terribly bright, are they? Engine-room's this way."

Ls'Ntwp'tt is tinkering with the tachyon reactor. She aims her pistol when she sees the Doctor enter.

"I don't think she thinks you're a Foamasi," Val says.

"I don't think it would matter if she did," the Doctor says. "This one would shoot me dead just to be on the safe side. Hello, Ls'Ntwp'tt. Need to borrow your tachyon reactor."

"Doctor, we have unfinished business."

"Yes, yes, love to chat. Just give me two minutes." He adjusts his sonic screwdriver. Turns to Val. "If I can excite the residual shikirenium, I should be able to create a pulse that will catapult us to the source."

"Isn't that dangerous?" Val asks. "I mean, didn't you say that activating the tachyon reactor would be catastrophic? As in, destroy Newcastle catastrophic?"

"It's only Newcastle," the Doctor says. "And we have three things going for us. One: we're only talking trace amounts of shikirenium, not a reactor's worth. Two: we only want to

transport two people fifteen years in time, not a whole spaceship and crew across seven centuries."

"And the third?"

"Me."

"Doctor!" Ls'Ntwp'tt warns.

He activates the sonic screwdriver.

* * * * *

In St James' Park metro station, the man in the black tracksuit is still listening to his Walkman. Tinny music escapes from his headphones.

There's a world outside your window.

And it's a world of dread and fear.

Hazel has her arms around Ryugin. Mary is trying to prise them apart.

Where the only water flowing in the bitter sting of tears.

"He's gone, Hazel," Mary is saying. "There's nothing more you can do. You have to let him go."

But Hazel is not listening. She is holding on to her prince. Clinging tightly to him. Sharing his last, fleeting warmth.

Well, tonight, thank God it's them instead of you.

1999

The car runs out of bridge. Plummets into the river below.

Legs tucked under her. Oversized sweater falling off one shoulder. Kate is sitting on the sofa watching a film in black and white.

"*Jules et Jim?*" says Tom.

"You're into French films?" Kate asks.

"Not really. One or two."

Because you drummed it into me.

"Here." He offers her a tissue. "You'll be needing this."

"Thanks." Kate dabs her eyes. "This always makes me cry."

I know.

The flat is small and cluttered. Kate's bedroom, a kitchenette, a tiny bathroom and this living area where Tom has been sleeping for the past week. He has been trying to keep the place tidy, but his mum, at this age at least, seems to thrive on chaos.

I wish I'd known about this all those times she told me to tidy my room.

Most of the furniture is vintage, rescued from car boot sales and antique fairs.

"It's cheaper than buying new a lot of the time," Kate had told him.

"Can't your folks help you out?" Tom had asked.

Kate had shot him a death stare. Tom has not raised the subject since.

Knick-knacks are piled on every available surface, souvenirs from Kate's travels. Mainly Wales and the Lake District, but there are few from Spain and an incense burner picked up during her summer in India. Photos are tacked to the walls. Photos of Kate. Photos of friends.

Photos of Kate with friends. There is one photo of her father, taken when Kate was a little girl. Tom has searched, but cannot find any pictures of her mother.

Kate rewinds the VHS cassette.

"How was your day?" she asks. "Up at the Central Library again?"

"Job hunting, aye."

Tom is not really hunting for a job. (Though if he is stranded here much longer, he may have to.) He is trying to send a message to the Doctor. The internet in 1999 may be painfully slow, but where there is a computer, Tom can find a way. The Doctor has a time machine. Sooner or later, he will pass this way and Tom is posting messages wherever he can so that, when he does, the Doctor will know where to look for him. Electronic SOS's in virtual bottles.

"And what about you, like?" he asks. "You been zoned out in front of the idiot box all day?"

"As if." Kate throws a cushion at him. "I'll have you know I've been working."

She points at a sketch pad on the seat next to her. It is covered with dress designs. Tom picks it up and sits down. He leafs through the pages.

"Do people actually wear this stuff?" he asks.

Kate punches him on the arm.

"For a minute there, you had me believing you were cultured, but turns out you're a Neanderthal just like the rest."

Tom shrugs. "I'm just a bloke."

"Same difference."

"Don't you have a hot date to be getting ready for?"

"No rush, he's not picking me up for another hour."

Kate as a young woman is very different to Kate as a mum.

"This would be Robert, right?" *Dad*. "Excited?"

"Yeah, I guess."

"You guess?"

Tonight's the night he proposes to you. You'd think you'd be more enthusiastic.

"It's just a meal."

"At a Quayside restaurant on millennium eve," Tom says. "It'll be costing him a pretty packet. He must really like you."

"And I like him, it's just..."

"What?"

"Well he doesn't like French films for a start," Kate says. "Not like you."

Tom blinks.

"I could always call him and cancel," she continues. "You and me could stay in with a bottle of red and *Baiser Volés*. Just the two of us."

She runs her fingers through his hair.

Tom tenses up.

Is she flirting with me? Is my mum actually flirting with me?

Kate bursts out laughing. "I'm just kidding, Tom. The look on your face."

"Ha, ha, very funny." Irritation masks palpable relief.

"Besides, Wendy would kill me."

"Wendy?"

"Didn't I mention? She's invited you to go clubbing with her and the girls."

"Clubbing? I don't know, Kate."

"Come on, it'll be a laugh. You can't spend New Year's Eve home alone."

"I can't?"

"You can't. Now let's pick you out some glad rags."

Tom pulls a face. "Glad rags?"

Kate's lips twitch. That scares Tom more than when she was flirting with him.

"Trust me," she says, "I'm a fashion designer."

* * * * *

The Tyne laps at the rotting coal staithes. The water captures the reflections of three boys kicking a ball about on the bank. Alan Shearer, Warren Barton and Duncan Ferguson.

"And Shearer sneaks it past Gerrard, past Matteo." Shearer, aka Olly Bamford, dribbles the ball around his mates. "Only Westerveld stands between Newcastle and the cup. Shearer shoots..."

The ball arcs through the air.

"He scores!"

Olly does a victory dance.

The football lands in the river.

"That's just great, man." Terry Carter throws up his hands. "That's my ball."

Terry jogs over to the water's edge. The ball bobs up and down among the reeds, just out of reach. He leans out...

His trainers slip in the wet mud and he ends up knee-deep in the river.

His friends fall about laughing.

"Aye, right laugh this is," Terry says.

He wades close to his ball. Something gives beneath his foot.

"I think there's something in here with us, like," he says.

Then he plunges under the water.

"Tel!"

Olly and the third lad, Jace Franklin, scramble down the bank.

"Tel, where are you!"

Terry splashes to the surface.

"I'm all right," he says. "Just slipped, is all."

"Aye, well don't scare us like that, man. Ain't right."

"Did I scare you, Olly? Did I?"

Terry is laughing, but not for long.

A giant, misshapen hound leaps out of the water behind him and lands on his back. Its jaws close around Terry's throat and it drags him under the river. Blood bubbles to the surface.

Screaming, Olly and Jace run for their lives.

The Okuri drags itself out of the river. It shakes the water from its fur. It is no longer the sleek, powerful predator it was in 1969. It has knitted itself together piece by piece, cell by cell, over the intervening years, but the result is uneven, like a child's plasticine model.

None of it matters.

All that matters to the Okuri is its target.

It tips back the head and sniffs the air. It opens its mouth and tastes it on its tongue. The Okuri's senses are a hundred, no, a thousand times more sensitive than a regular hound. It can single out the biological signature of its target from just one atom in a trillion. It scents it now.

Only not quite.

The bio-signature is not an exact match to the Okuri's receptors. It knows that the target must be out there so the only conclusion the hunter can draw is that its receptors have been damaged. It reconfigures them, realigning them to match the signature.

Yes, this is better. It has its target. It has its purpose.

The hunt can begin again.

* * * * *

"I said no."

Hazel is standing at the bottom of the stairs between Sara and the front door.

"But, Mum..."

Hazel raises her hand.

"I don't want to hear it. You're too young to be out all night."

"But everything else is doing it."

"I seriously doubt that's true," Hazel says, "because most of the mum's I know will be telling their girls exactly what I'm telling you. You're only fourteen."

"But it's New Year's Eve!"

"And there'll be other New Years."

"But there won't be another Millennium!"

Hazel starts to relent.

"At least tell me how many parents will be at this party of yours."

"There won't be any parents," Sara says. "That's the whole point."

Enough with the relenting.

"And you wonder why I won't let you go."

"That's so not fair."

"Who said life was fair?"

"That's your answer to everything." The points of Sara's ears twitch with anger. "I hate you!"

She storms back up the stairs.

Hazel sighs.

Was I ever that young?

* * * * *

Stupid, stupid, stupid, Sara. Mum would have let you go if there were other parents there. All you had to do was lie.

But Sara has always had difficulty lying to her mother. Hazel sees right through her.

She is not going to win this time, though.

Sara opens up her wardrobe. She flings items onto the bed, trying to decide what best to wear. Eventually, she settles on her flared jeans with the embroidered butterflies down one leg coupled with a yellow skinny-strapped tank-top. She needs something to cover her ears so goes for the Indian silk scarf that her sister had bought her as a present.

Sara is not ashamed of her ears. At least, she does not think she is. She has read up on the subject, knows that it is not that unusual a malformation and it is not like she wants to get some plastic surgery done. Not on the ears. Bigger breasts, maybe. She is a twig compared to a lot of the girls in her class. But she likes her ears the way they are. She just does not like people pointing and staring at them.

She wonders if her dad had pointed ears and, if so, if he hid them too.

She sits down at her mirror. Opens up her pink, fairy princess make-up box. The box is a bit young for her and Sara would not show it to any of her friends, but she loves it to bits. And if her mum knew that she kept real make-up in it then she would go spare. Her skin is naturally pale so her first task is to give it some colour. A bit of lip-gloss and some glitter around her eyes complete the look.

Finally, she picks up her grey, hooded fleece. It is not exactly cool, but Sara has always been susceptible to the cold. Even an overcast day in August can bring her out in goose-pimples. She shrugs on the fleece, makes sure that her gloves are in the pockets, then opens the window.

* * * * *

The phone rings. Mary reaches across the arm of the settee to answer it. On the television, Gaby Roslin is presenting live coverage of the Millennium celebrations. It has just turned midnight in Egypt and Mary is enjoying the fireworks display. There is an explosion outside the window as premature fireworks are set off much closer to home.

"Hello?"

"Mary, is that you?" The voice on the other end of the line is quavering.

"Hazel, what is it? What's happened?"

"It's Sara. She's gone."

Mary shifts the phone to a more comfortable position against her other ear.

"Gone?"

"We had a row and she stormed off to her room and I went up to make sure she was okay and..." Hazel sniffs. "Her window was open and she wasn't there. I think she's run away."

"Don't fret, pet," Mary says. "She can't have gone far. You stay put and I'll round up our Alan and come get you. Then we'll all go find Sara. Everything'll be fine, you'll see."

* * * * *

The bass-line thumps. Lights sweep the room. Hundreds of sweaty young things writhe together on the dance floor.

Sara hobbles off to one side. Her ankle is playing up again and it hurts to dance. She doubts Lisa will miss her.

"Hey, Sara? Sara Ferris?"

A boy in a polo shirt exits the scrum to join her. He has to shout to be heard over the music. He is older than Sara, but his face looks familiar.

"Do I know you?" she asks.

"Ross Parry." His smile is warm and genuine. "We both go to the same school, but I'm in Year 13 so you probably don't know us, no."

"You know me," Sara says.

"Ah, sure, everyone knows about Spo..." He cannot quite stop himself in time. "The girl with the pointed ears."

Why does it always have to be Spock? Why can't it be Saavik? Does no one else know there are female Vulcans?

"Sorry." Ross looks contrite. "I guess you get lots of idiots asking about... your ears."

Sara shrugs. "I'm used to it. I suppose you want to see them?"

"Don't you mind?"

Does it really make a difference what I think?

She lifts the edge of her scarf to expose her right ear.

Ross gasps, softly. He raises a hand.

"Can I?"

He takes Sara's silence for encouragement and runs his fingers along the edge of her ear. He is gentle, his touch no heavier than a spider out for a walk. Sara shivers. She keeps her ears hidden so much now that she has forgotten how sensitive they are.

"It's beautiful," Ross says.

Sara's face burns.

"Do you really think so?"

"Cross my heart."

Sara flashes a giddy smile. "I've got another one just like it."

The light plays across Ross's face. His square jaw and high cheekbones. She is struck by how close he is to her. She looks up into his eyes. Her voice catches in her throat.

"So," she says huskily, "did you just come here to talk about my ears or was there something else you wanted?"

"No, not just your ears."

Ross's fingers hover above her earlobe. Sara can still feel the heat radiating off of them. Or is that heat coming from her?

"You're friends with Lisa Murray, like?" he says. "You couldn't get us her phone number, could you?"

Sara's world shatters like glass.

"Sure, Lisa's number. I mean, what else could you want?"

"Sorry?"

"Doesn't matter," Sara says. "I'm going outside for a bit. I need some air."

She leaves the club without looking back.

* * * * *

Robert opens up the little black box to check that the engagement ring is still there. He is sitting on a high-backed wooden chair at a square table in a corner of Sabatini's Italian restaurant. The lights are dim, there is a candle on the table, but the venue is too popular this evening for it to be truly intimate.

Robert runs a finger round his collar. He hates wearing a tie, but it is the sort of occasion where one has to dress up. He has dispensed with a suit jacket, however, going for his best black leather one instead. The window is behind him so he cannot see the Tyne and the brand new, not yet open to the public, Gateshead Millennium Bridge. He hopes Kate is enjoying the view.

He hears Kate's heels clacking across the floor before he spies her returning from the ladies'. He snaps the box shut and returns it to his pocket. He tries not to look like he has a guilty secret.

"Sorry about that," Kate says.

She retakes her seat. She is wearing an off-the-shoulder black dress that falls to mid-calf. It has silver detailing that catches the light when she moves. A heart-shaped silver locket hangs around her neck. Robert gave her that last Valentine's Day.

"So," Robert says.

"So," Kate replies. Her smile is enigmatic.

She sips her wine from a large tulip-shaped glass.

"Do you like it?" Robert asks.

"It's good." Kate runs a finger around the rim of the glass.

"Good." Robert sighs with relief. "I don't know that much about wine, me."

"Well, you can definitely pick off a wine list," Kate tells him.

Silence elbows its way back in, the gooseberry at the table.

"So..." Robert tries again.

Kate is still smiling that half-smile of hers.

That's a good sign, right?

"Do you want dessert?" Robert says. "Or a coffee. Or... something?"

"If I have a dessert I think I'll burst right out of my dress," Kate says.

A dozen thoughts race through Robert's mind. He vets them all before opening his mouth. Discards the lot.

"So, coffee?"

"I'll have an espresso," Kate says. She sees his blank look. "It's a type of coffee, Robert."

"Oh. I knew that."

And now she thinks I'm an idiot.

"I remember the first time Dad took me to Paris," she says. "The waiter reeled off this whole list of unfamiliar words and all I wanted was a black coffee. Now, though, I don't drink anything else. You should try it."

"All right."

Robert beckons the waitress over. Orders two espressos.

"Your dad take you abroad a lot?"

"Not a lot," Kate says. "More than most, I guess."

"And your mam?"

"Not if I can help it."

The waitress returns with their coffees. Kate laughs lightly at Robert's reaction.

"Yes, that is all you get," she says. She drops two lumps of sugar into her cup. "You're supposed to sip it."

Robert does as he is told. The bitterness makes his eyes water.

"Good?"

Robert nods, not trusting himself to speak. He is saved by the bell, specifically Kate's ringtone. His own mobile phone bursts into life a few seconds late. They turn away from one another to answer the calls.

"Mum? I only gave you this number for emergencies."

"Mam? Could you maybe call back later? It's not a great time."

"Why would Sara be with me?"

"Sara? Kate's baby sister? No, I haven't seen her."

"Have you tried phoning her friends? No, I don't know who they are. She's *your* daughter."

"Of course I'll keep an eye out for her, Mam."

"Goodbye, Mum."

"Love you too. Bye, Mam."

They look at one another. Sheepish expressions. The both start talking at the same time.

"Sorry about that..."

"I'm sorry..."

Both stop.

Robert raises a hand.

"I take it your sister's missing."

"Call her Sara."

"What?"

"Sara'," Kate says. "Not 'my sister'. It's complicated."

"But she is your sister, right?"

"Half-sister." Kate looks away. "My mum cheated on my dad. Sara's the result. She's the reason my parents split up."

"But you can't blame the kid for that. She wasn't even born..."

"Can we not talk about this now?" Kate cuts across him.

"Sorry. Right." Robert looks for help in his espresso cup. "I suppose we should help look for her, like?"

"I suppose."

Robert asks a passing waiter for the bill.

"What puzzles me," Kate says while they wait, "is that Mum said she was with your parents."

"No puzzle there," Robert says, "they're friends."

"I know that, what I mean is if they're together and we're together, why'd they both phone?"

"Ah, well, that'd be because me mam doesn't know I'm with you."

"Ashamed of me, are you?"

"No, course not. It's just Mam, she doesn't approve of you."

"And you go out with me anyway? I'm surprised, Robert, I had you down as a real mummy's boy."

Robert shrugs. "Maybe there's more to us than meets the eye."

* * * * *

"You sure this is all right, like?" Tom asks.

"For the thousandth time, Tom," Wendy says, "we wouldn't have invited you if we didn't want you here. Isn't that right, girls?"

A chorus of assent from Wendy's college-age friends.

They are queuing outside the nightclub at the top end of Bigg Market. Away to his right, Tom can see the spire of St Nicholas Cathedral. Grainger Street runs by on the left. If he squints a bit, he can just make out Wendy's boutique.

Despite Wendy's assurance, he is still not sure that this is a good idea. He is uncomfortably aware that he is one bloke surrounded by five lasses and that he is very much the centre of attention. It is cold tonight. The girls are shivering in their impractical outfits. Tom wants to offer one his jacket, but which one? His choice is bound to be noted, commented on, misconstrued, so the jacket stays put on his shoulders.

Wendy is looking past him.

"Is that Kate's sister over there?"

Auntie Sara?

"She doesn't look old enough to be out on the town," Tom says.

"Lighten up, Tom," Wendy says. "It's New Year's Eve."

"Aye." One of the other girl's raises her Bacardi Breezer. "And tonight we're going to party like it's 1999."

* * * * *

"Sara, where do you think you're going?"

"Go away, Lisa," Sara says. "Go find Ross or whoever."

"What are you talking about?"

Lisa grabs Sara's arm.

"Leave me alone!" Sara tries to shake her off. "I'm going home."

"You're not going anywhere, Sara," Lisa says, "except with me."

"Lisa?"

"Have you any idea how demeaning it is," Lisa says, "to have to attend that poxy school of yours, to pretend to be your friend."

"I thought we *were* friends." Sara says.

"Friends? That's a good one. Really, who'd be friends with a freak like you?"

"But..."

"I only went through all that because of what you're worth to me. Or, should I say, what you're worth to the buyer I've got lined up."

"Buyer?"

Lisa starts dragging Sara in the direction of Collingwood Street. Her nails dig into Sara's upper arm.

"Let go," Sara protests. "You're hurting me."

"I'd like to do a lot worse," Lisa replies, "but the buyer wants you intact."

"I said, let me go!"

Sara strikes Lisa across the face with her free hand. She feels the skin part beneath her fingers. Hears it tear.

Her hand flies to her mouth.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I didn't mean..."

But Lisa is not in pain. Lisa is laughing.

Half her face hangs in ragged strips exposing emerald scales beneath. Sara's eyes widen in terror. Her heart is plugging her throat.

"What are you?"

Sara looks around for help. The area is packed to bursting with revellers, but nobody is paying them the slightest mind.

Nobody except one.

"What seems to be the problem, lasses?" Tom asks.

The skin around Lisa's left hand explodes. Her claw breaks free. She swipes it at Tom.

He jumps back.

"Steady now," he says. "I've seen your sort before."

"Where?" Lisa asks. "Where have you seen us?"

"More like when," Tom says. "You've been here a long time, haven't you?"

"A very long time," Lisa says, "but it's almost over now."

She starts to drag Lisa away.

Wendy's friend smashes her bottle of Bacardi Breezer over Lisa's head. Dazed, Lisa releases her hold on Sara. Tom snatches her away.

"Who are you?"

"He's a friend of your sister," Wendy explains.

"Wendy?" Sara is in shock. She is slurring her words. "You own the shop Kate works at."

"That's who I am," Wendy says, pointing at Lisa, "but who is she? More to the point, *what* is she?"

"Trouble," Tom says. "We need to get out of here."

Taking Sara by the hand, he turns the corner into Grainger Street.

The crowd is screaming. People are running towards them. Revellers part like the Red Sea to make way for a slaving, misshapen black hound that is loping in their direction. It catches sight of Sara and quickens its pace.

"Not that way!" Tom says.

He spins on his heel and hustles Sara in the opposite direction.

* * * * *

"Where do we start?" Robert asks. Hands in pockets. Shoulders hunched against the cold. He only has his shirt to protect him, having given his leather jacket to Kate.

The wind blows Kate's hair into her eyes. "Where did you go out on a Friday night when you were a teenager?"

They turn off of King Street and onto the Quayside, walking in the vague direction of Bigg Market. A crowd has gathered along the waterfront waiting expectantly for midnight.

Kate puts her arm through Robert's.

"Bet this wasn't how you were hoping the night would go."

"There'll be other nights." The ring is burning a hole in Robert's pocket. "Kate, there's something I've been meaning to ask..."

His words are drowned out by a thunderous crash. Too loud to be fireworks.

"What was that?"

Kate's mouth is hanging open. "What the..."

A castle hangs in the air above the Tyne. A central spire surrounded by six subsidiary towers all rising up from a circular platform. It is olive-green in colour.

A voice reverberates through the air. There can be no doubt where it comes from.

"People of Earth, I am Genroku Katashi, Minister of the West, Daimyo of Techigawa province and Mishi prefecture, head of the Genroku and Ogawa households. I have come to your miserable little world to collect my nephew. Hand him over to me or I swear I shall wipe this city from the face of the planet."

* * * * *

"Why is that thing after me?" Sara asks.

They sprint down the steep slope of Pudding Chare. The howls of the Okuri sound perilously close.

"You want me to stop and ask?" Tom replies. "Come on!"

Sara stops. It takes Tom a few more paces to realise she is no longer following. He turns.

"What's up?"

Sara narrows her eyes. "Who are you?"

I'm your nephew.

"I'm a friend of your sister, Wendy told you that."

"I've never seen you before."

"Aye, well I'm new," Tom says, "but Wendy vouches for me and you know Wendy, right?"

"But how do I know it was Wendy? How do I know she wasn't one of those green things like the one pretending to be Lisa? How do I know you're not?"

The Okuri howls again. Louder this time. Definitely closer.

"Sara, we really don't have time for this. That thing will be here any minute."

Sara glances over her shoulder.

"Maybe I'm better off taking my chances on my own."

"No way. Your sister would kill me."

"That just proves you don't know my sister."

Tom roots around in his pockets. He comes up with a smiley face badge.

"Watch carefully."

He extends the pin of the badge and jabs it into the thumb of his left hand. Sara grimaces. A bead of blood forms above the wound.

"See?" he says. "Human. Nothing hiding underneath."

Tom can see the Okuri at the top of the street. It lopes towards them, fangs bared. Sara reaches a decision. She holds out her hand.

"Let's go," she says.

"Finally," Tom mutters.

He grabs Sara's hand in his and drags her round the corner into Westgate Road. The square towers of the castle keep rise up in the distance.

"So," Sara asks, "are you Kate's boyfriend?"

"What?"

"It's just that you look like the type she usually goes for."

The Okuri is gaining. It is snapping at their heels.

Tom spots a large, steel wheelie bin at the back of a shop. He grabs hold of it and shoves it out into the street. The Okuri does not slow. It leaps, landing on top of the green plastic lid and the jumping again, launching itself in the direction of Tom and Sara. Tom scoops the girl up in his arms and throws himself into an empty doorway. The Okuri flies past, close enough for Tom to smell the rank odour coming off its fur, and lands awkwardly. It scrabbles for purchase on the loose pavement, turns and readies itself to lunge again.

A Ford Escort ploughs into the side of the Okuri and sends it flying. Brakes squealing in protest, the car comes to a halt beside Tom and Sara. Hazel throws open the rear door.

"Get in!" she yells.

The car is in motion before he has closed the door behind him. Alan is driving and Mary is sitting beside him. Hazel is in the back.

"Seatbelt," she says to Sara.

"Mum, I'm sorry," Sara says. She fumbles with the clasp of the seatbelt. "I shouldn't have snuck out like that. It was a really stupid thing to do."

"We'll talk about it when we get home." Hazel kisses her daughter on the forehead. "I'm just glad you're safe."

"Safe is a relative term," Tom says. "That dog's still after us."

"I thought we'd killed that thing," Alan says.

"You didn't do that great a job," Tom says.

"We shoved it through a coal crusher. What more were we supposed to do?"

"Ryugin was right," Mary says. "It just won't die."

"Ryugin knew about that thing?" Hazel leans forward in her seat,

"It was hunting him," Alan replies.

"And now it's hunting his daughter," Mary says.

The Escort passes under the railway viaduct, following the road down towards the river.

"His daughter?" Sara asks. "I don't understand. You mean me?"

"You haven't told her?" Alan asks Hazel.

"She's already got enough to deal with," Hazel says. "I was going to wait until she was a bit older."

"Can everyone stop talking about me like I'm not here?"

Sara shouts the last, but even that is drowned out by the sound of Mary's scream as the Okuri leaps onto the bonnet of the Escort.

"Get it off!"

"I'm trying!"

Alan yanks on the steering wheel. The Escort lurches first one way, then the other, but he cannot shake the Okuri loose. The Okuri lunges forward. The windscreen cracks.

"Alan, do something!"

"I can't even see where I'm going!"

"Look out!"

The Escort spins off the road and rides up the bank. Alan slams his foot on the brake pedal, but it is too late. The car flies off the top of the rise and plunges into the Tyne.

Green water rises up past the windows, forces its way in through gaps in the panelling.

Hazel tugs on the handle.

"I can't open the door!"

"We need to equalise the pressure," Tom says. "I saw it in a James Bond film. Try opening the windows."

There is blood on Alan's face where his nose struck the steering wheel. He leans across to check on his wife.

"Mary? Mary, love, wake up." He shakes her gently. Then with more force. "Mary!" He turns to Tom, distraught. "I don't think she's breathing."

Sara is staring out of the windscreen. Her voice is tiny.

"Do you think that thing is still out there?"

* * * * *

The sky is fractured. Blotches of brilliant colour moving round one another like a child's kaleidoscope. Waves of burnt orange, fuchsia and aquamarine ripple across the heavens. Fork lightning of rose, amber and emerald crackles towards the ground.

The crowd on the Quayside are looking to the floating spire and beyond, transfixed by the display. All but one.

"That's Dad's car."

Robert stands frozen as the Escort flies through the air. He bursts into motion when it hits the water.

"Dad!"

He runs to the water's edge. Kicks off his shoes. Dives into the water.

"Robert!" Kate chases after him. Hesitates when she reaches the riverbank.

A brown-haired head breaks the surface. Kate wants it to be Robert, but it belongs to an older man.

"Tom?"

Tom kicks his way to the bank, unable to use his arms because he is holding on to Sara. Kate helps them both onto dry land.

Tom coughs up a stream of river water. "Need to go back for the others."

Kate holds him back. "You're in no condition to do anything."

"But Hazel..."

"Mum's down there?"

Kate shrugs off her boyfriend's leather jacket with a speed driven by panic. She is about to jump into the river herself when she spots Hazel treading water. She looks dazed. Her eyes dart in all directions, but she does not see.

"Mum!"

Kate and Tom paddle over to her and guide her back to the bank. She sits down on the quay, utterly exhausted. Kate stands next to her, looking into the water.

"Where's Robert? What's taking him so long?"

Tom has no words of comfort.

"It's Mary. She..."

A plume of spray announces Alan's arrival. Robert surfaces right behind him. Father and son are carrying Mary between them. Her eyes are closed and her mouth half-open. They haul her up onto the bank and collapse beside her.

Sara is standing to one side. She is shivering. Her eyes are fixed on the river.

"It's still down there," she is saying. "They said it couldn't die."

Tom puts an arm around her.

"Sara, we have to go."

"But, Mum..."

"Sara, that thing is still out there and it's after *you*. Staying here will only put your mum and everyone else at risk."

Sara chews her lip. "I don't know if I can."

"Yes, you can. You've been brilliant so far. Don't give up on me now."

"Okay." Sara nods. Takes a deep breath. Takes Tom's hand.

"Tom." Kate is standing behind them.

Tom meets her eyes.

"Look after her," Kate says. "She's my only sister."

"I'll look after her like she was me own mam's sister," Tom says. "You can't ask for more than that."

Kate nods once then returns to the others at a run. She elbows the Brookers aside.

"Make some room," she says, "I've got this."

She starts administering CPR to Mary.

* * * * *

Twenty minutes to midnight.

Tom stumbles along the Quayside. He forces his way through the crowd, carves a path with hands, elbows and shoulders. Sara clings tightly to him, but her eyes are on the sky. Unnatural colours play across her face.

"What's happening?" she asks.

Tom does not answer. Tom has seen these lights before. In the portal he and the Doctor had used to travel to 1969 and the portal that had brought him here. The portal the Doctor had described as a tear in the fabric of space-time.

He looks up. How big does a tear have to get before the whole garment falls apart?

"We need to keep moving," he says. "We need to put as much distance between us and that... *thing* as possible."

And in so doing, Tom is getting further and further from the people he wants to be with the most. His father. His mother. His grandparents. His family.

Tom chose to travel with the Doctor. He knows the risks. He accepts the danger. What did his family do to deserve this?

Fifteen minutes to midnight.

He can see the Millennium Bridge up ahead. Shiny and new. A white eyelid with steel cables for lashes. It will not be open to the public for the best part of another year, but to Tom's untrained eye it already looks as complete as in his time, three decades from now.

But above the bridge floats something unfamiliar. An olive-green spire. A fairy-tale palace or crown.

Tom knows a spaceship when he sees one.

Friend or foe? Tom hesitates. He cannot go back, he dare not go forwards.

"Tom, look!"

Sara has been watching the river, waiting for the Okuri to make its move. She is the first to see the motorboat gliding across the Tyne towards them.

A man in a dark coat bounds the last few feet to the quay.

"Doctor!" Tom is grinning. He cannot help it. "Am I glad to see you."

"Likewise. Who's your friend?"

"Doctor, this is Sara. Sara, Doctor. She's... it'd take too long to explain. Basically, she's the lass everyone's after."

"Is that right?" The Doctor drapes arm around Tom's shoulders. He leads him away from Sara. "Tom, could I have a word?"

"You've got a plan, right?" Tom says. "What am I saying, you've always got a plan."

"Yes, I've got a plan," the Doctor says, "but I'm afraid it's not one that involves you."

He plunges an electric stiletto deep into Tom's chest. Sara screams.

"Doctor?" Tom's word is just a gurgle. Blood is in his lungs. In his mouth.

He takes a step back, staggers. He drops to his knees then to his side. His cheek rests on cold stone.

Sara is still screaming.

"Oh shut up, you stupid girl," Junior says as he tears off his skin-suit. "You'll scare off the customer."

* * * * *

Alan holds Mary's hand in both of his. Kate is counting under her breath while doing chest compressions. Hazel sits on the grass, wide eyes staring at nothing. And, along a short stretch of bank, Robert is pacing up and down like a caged tiger. He spots his jacket lying on the ground, bends down to pick it up.

He stops, not daring to move a muscle.

He is looking into the amber eyes of the Okuri.

Water drips from its fur. Its tongue lolls in its open jaws. Its fangs gleam in the strange light.

"Good doggie," Robert whispers. The Okuri rocks back on its haunches. "Sit?"

The Okuri springs.

Robert dives to one side. He brings up his jacket like a matador's cape, wrapping it round the Okuri's head. Blinded, the Okuri slips and rolls. It soon rights itself and, even without its eyes, it still has its sense of smell. It leaps at Robert again, this time catching him square in the chest and knocking him to the ground. Its claws tear at his shirt. Its foul breath is in its face.

"Leave him alone!"

Alan swings a metal bar into the side of the Okuri's skull. He has torn a fencepost up out of the damp ground and is using it as a club.

"You attack my dad!" Strike. "My wife!" Strike. "My son!" Strike. "When. Will. You. Leave us. ALONE!"

He swings the fencepost with a fury. His face is locked in a rictus of rage and pain. As his arms tire, he takes a step back. The metal post slips from his fingers, clattering against the ground.

The Okuri's head is a bloody, broken mess. One eye hangs from its socket by the nerve. The other eye is swollen shut, the fur around it matted with blood. The Okuri sways drunkenly from side to side.

But it is still standing.

It growls deep in its throat.

"Run!" Kate screams at Alan. She wants desperately to help, but she cannot leave Mary's side.

Alan stares deep into the Okuri's eyes, hypnotised by them. The Okuri advances slowly. Inexorably.

"Dad!"

The Okuri opens its jaws to strike –

White light.

The ghosts of a thousand pastel butterflies, fluttering just at the edge of vision.

A rip in time and space opening up inside the Okuri.

In places, its fur becomes darker, sleeker. In others, it greys, silvers, whitens, falls out in clumps. One limb shrinks, turns in on itself, becomes vestigial. Another withers, flesh rots and exposes bone, bone turns to dust.

The Okuri howls in agony, even its voice torn between two extremes. Simultaneously, it is being aged and rejuvenated, but it came from nothing and to nothing it will return. There is

only one way this can end. Dust and embryonic cells break down into molecules and component atoms until there is nothing left.

Nothing but the light.

Now the rift, too, closes, leaving behind two figures.

The Doctor and Val Rossi.

The Doctor points at Alan.

"The date, quickly!"

"The date? 31st December, 1999."

"For the next ten minutes or so," Robert adds.

"Are we in the right place?" Val asks.

"Close enough," he says.

Mary chokes. Spews green-brown water over the grass and over her sweater.

"Thank God." Kate is breathing heavily.

"Mary!"

Alan rushes to his wife's side. The Doctor is forgotten.

Robert wraps his arms around his girlfriend.

"You're brilliant, Kate. Champion."

Kate is trembling. Now that she no longer has Mary to focus on, the tension of the moment is threatening to overwhelm her.

"How's Mum?"

Hazel looks up at her. Tears flood her eyes, but refuse to fall. Kate breaks free of Robert's arms and drops to her knees beside her mother.

"It's all right, Mum," she says. "I'm right here with you."

"And what about Sara?"

"Sara's with Tom. He'll look after her."

"Did you say Tom?" Val asks. "He's *here*." She turns to the Doctor. "I thought you said you'd left him in the sixties?"

"He must have jumped through the vortex after me," the Doctor says. "I knew he couldn't be trusted to do as he was told. Where is he?"

"He took Sara and went off that way." Kate points east down the river. "He was trying to lead that dog-thing away from us."

"Why would the Okuri be chasing Brooker?" The Doctor frowns. "It was programmed to hunt Ryugin."

"Brooker?"

"Tom." The Doctor waves the question away with irritation.

"His surname's Brooker, too," Val adds hastily. "What are the chances?"

"None of which explains why a genetically-engineered hunter mistook him for a Draconian prince."

"It didn't. It was after Sara."

The Doctor closes his eyes. He massages the bridge of his nose between thumb and forefinger.

As patiently as he can, he says, "And Sara is?"

"My sister."

"And does *she* look much like a Draconian prince?"

"Well, I guess, aye. Her dad was one."

"Ryugin was her *father*?" The Doctor glances at Hazel.

"Is that even possible?" Val asks.

The Doctor sighs. "Don't force me to explain the birds and the bees to you, Miss Rossi."

"That's not what I meant and you know it."

"Possible? Yes. Probable? Hardly. But that's the thing about being at the heart of a tachyon storm. Causality takes a holiday and the laws of probability hide behind the sofa. Luckily for us."

"Lucky how?"

"Well, I measure our chances of surviving the night at several trillion-to-one. Come on, we need to find Brooker!"

* * * * *

Junior forces Sara onto the Millennium Bridge at the point of a stiletto.

"Katashi!" he yells at the spire hanging overhead. "I know you're up there. I've got what you want, now you bring me what I want."

A disc detaches itself from the base of the spire and slowly descends. Three figures stand on the disc. The two on either side are obviously guards, wearing lacquered armour and paired swords. The figure in the middle is Katashi. He is wearing a high, crescent-shaped collar and flowing, red-gold robes that fall to the floor. He has aged since he last set foot on Earth. His scales are now more yellow than green and he has grown a forked beard, black shot through with grey.

He steps off of the disc and onto the bridge.

"You are Kv'Mt'chil?"

His pronunciation of the Foamasi chirps and clicks is poor, but Junior decides not to make anything of it. Just as long as he has the shikirenium.

"Where is the spawn of Ryugin?"

"She's right here." Junior shoves Sara forward. "This is your brother's daughter."

Sara stumbles and falls to her knees.

"His *daughter*?" Katashi laughs. "You made me come all this way for a female? She has no status. What threat is she to me?"

Junior's stereoscopic eyes rotate, a sign of nervousness.

"I promised you Ryugin's child," he says. "I never specified her sex. Any assumptions you made are entirely your own and you can't accuse me of miss-selling the merchandise. I still expect to be paid in full."

"Do you indeed?" Katashi raises an eyebrow. "Be in no doubt that I could sever your fat head from your body before your hand reaches your pistol."

Junior tenses, but keeps his claws where Katashi can see them.

"However, you shall have your shikirenium." Katashi gestures to his guards who haul a crate off of the travel-disc and over to Junior. "You see this girl as nothing more than a piece of meat to be sold on, but for me, this is personal. I wasn't able to witness my brother's demise. My

wife escaped my wrath by taking her own life." He cups Sara's chin in his hand and forces her to look at him. "But this girl – this *half-breed* – will make a fair substitute. She will suffer as they should have suffered and I will enjoy inflicting her punishment personally."

* * * * *

Five minutes to midnight.

The Doctor taps the Draconian guard on the shoulder. He turns. The Doctor shoves the sonic screwdriver into the guard's left ear and turns it on. The Draconian's eyes roll back in his sockets and he slumps to the ground.

"Very sensitive ears, Draconians," the Doctor explains to Val. "Which would explain why his colleague's heard us coming."

The other guard draws his sword.

"Whoever you are, you'll regret coming here," he says. "Assaulting a knight of Draconia is a capital offence."

"Yes, well, before you dispatch me, you might want to take a look behind you."

"Deception will not save you."

Robert whacks the guard around the back of the head.

"Maybe not," the Doctor says to the guard as he topples forward, "but listening to me might have saved you."

Tom is lying on the ground. His shirt is slick with blood. Val rushes to his side.

"Tom, what happened to you?"

"Doctor," he gasps weakly. "Stabbed me."

Val looks up at the Doctor.

"Foamasi," he says. "Has to be."

Kate has other priorities. "Where's Sara?"

The Doctor's eyesight is better than that of his human companions. He strides out onto the bridge.

"Is this what Draconian honour amounts to?" he says. "Kidnapping children?"

"Kidnapping?" Katashi says. "I'm simply taking my niece back home."

"By force. The Foamasi gave her to you, didn't they? What did you pay them?"

"Nothing of consequence," Katashi says. "A small amount of shikirenum."

"You idiot! Have you any idea what you've done?"

"I've completed a business transaction. Your issues are with the Foamasi, not with me, and they are no longer here."

"Doctor?" Val asks.

"He's right," he says. "We're wasting time here."

He turns and walks back across the bridge.

Kate looks after him, aghast.

"But what about Sara?"

* * * * *

"Is it enough?" Junior asks.

He and Ls'Ntwp'tt are standing in the engine-room of the *Hemlock*. The tachyon reactor is open. Waiting.

"It's beautiful." Ls'Ntwp'tt's eyes sparkle as she looks into the crate.

"Excellent!" Junior rubs his claws together. "I'll start contacting the others. Once they're all back onboard, we can go home."

"Why wait?"

"Ls'Ntwp'tt?"

Ls'Ntwp'tt lifts a lump of shikiremium out of the crate. Holds it in her cupped hands.

"We have everything we need right here."

"But what about the family? We're doing this for them."

"You've already turned on your family once, Kv'Mt'chll. Remember G'Gugv'ntt?"

"I did that *for* the family."

"Tell them that. Why do you think they all left you?"

"This is my chance to make amends."

Ls'Ntwp'tt starts loading the shikiremium into the reactor.

"Who cares?"

"I care. Ls'Ntwp'tt, stop! We're not leaving without them."

"I waited so long for this," Ls'Ntwp'tt says. "Don't ask me to wait any longer."

"Ls'Ntwp'tt!"

Junior puts a claw on her wrist. He cries out as she shoves an electric stiletto into his gut.

"I'm sorry, Kv'Mt'chll," Ls'Ntwp'tt says. "I really did like you, but you were never very bright."

* * * * *

"But what about Sara?"

On the bank, the crowd are counting down the seconds to midnight.

Ten. Nine. Eight.

"Look around you, Miss Townsend. Look up at the sky. He isn't the threat here."

Seven. Six.

"She's my sister."

Five. Four. Three.

"Which is why you can't be impartial," the Doctor says. "She's just one girl. I have to balance her fate against the lives of millions of others."

Two.

One.

The chimes of midnight echo across the city. Fireworks erupt from all of the bridges on the Tyne.

The sky splits open.

The crowd gasps in awe at the spectacle.

"Please tell me that's part of the celebrations," Val says.

The awe turns to horror.

Multicoloured lightning erupts all around them. Time distorts wherever it touches. Familiar buildings are replaced by glossy skyscrapers from centuries hence. Worn, medieval architecture becomes shiny and new as the day it was first erected. People, too, age into infirmity or regress into childhood.

"It's too late," the Doctor says. "The fools have activated the reactor."

"Isn't there anything you can do?"

The Doctor pulls at his hair with both hands.

"I don't know. Maybe. The time-stream is resilient. If I can shut the reactor down then it might be able to heal itself, but I need to go now."

"I'm coming with you."

"Not this time, Miss Rossi. At the heart of the storm, you wouldn't stand a chance. You would be scattered to the time-winds in seconds."

"And what chance have you got?"

"Some."

"But not much, right?"

"I only need to survive long enough to reach the reactor." He puts a hand on each of Val's shoulders. "Miss Rossi... Val... I'm trusting you to keep these people alive until I've fixed this. You do your job and I'll find a way to do mine."

He turns to leave, but Val is not finished.

"You can't do it alone."

"He won't be alone."

This last comes from an old man at the far end of the bridge.

"Who's he?" Robert asks.

"George Patterson," Kate says. "I recognise him from a book I'm reading. It's about him and my grandfather. And Dad."

"It's a pleasure to be recognised, young lady," Patterson doffs his hat. "I'm genuinely sorry for what happened to your father. It wasn't supposed to turn out like that."

"All very moving, I'm sure, but what makes you think you'd last any longer in there than Val here?"

Patterson tears off his face.

"My name is not Patterson. It is G'Gugv'ntt and I am... was... Boss of this Foamasi lodge."

"Human. Foamasi. It's all the same to a tachyon storm. If you come with me, it's a death sentence."

"I know."

"I won't be responsible for any more deaths."

"Not everything is down to you, Doctor," G'Gugv'ntt says. "I'm old and I have a lot I need to atone for. Let me do this one thing."

* * * * *

Colours float around the room like fairy dust. Ls'Ntwp'tt tries to snatch them out of the air, but they are always just out of reach. She has not laughed like this since she was a child.

G'Gugv'ntt steps over the body of his nephew.

"What have you done, Ls'Ntwp'tt?"

"Hello, Boss. When did you get old?"

"I spent eight years in prison," he says, "thanks to you."

Ls'Ntwp'tt is unrepentant. "Kv'Mt'chll put you there."

"Only because you put him up to it. And for what?"

"For all this." Ls'Ntwp'tt gestures all around her. "Isn't it magical? The very essence of time itself. It was all so brief last time. There and gone. I've waited thirty years to see this again."

"You'll destroy us all. Was it worth it?"

"Oh yes," Ls'Ntwp'tt says.

The Doctor moves deeper into the room. "Enough talking. I need to shut this down."

"Stay right where you are, Doctor." Ls'Ntwp'tt is pointing a pistol at him.

"Oh, very clever. Do you really think that's going to stop me? We're all dead anyway if I don't turn this thing off."

"Yes, but you can't do that with a flechette through your heart," Ls'Ntwp'tt says. "There's no time at the eye of the storm. Do you think I could experience this for all eternity?"

"No, I really don't." G'Gugv'ntt is holding a pistol of his own.

"You won't shoot me, G'Gugv'ntt. No Foamasi can harm a member of his own family. That's the rule."

The flechette strikes Ls'Ntwp'tt between the eyes.

"You're no family of mine," G'Gugv'ntt says. He turns to the Doctor. "If you survive this, Doctor, promise me you'll see that her name gets erased from my family's history. She doesn't deserve to be remembered."

"I swear it," the Doctor says. "Now help me with this before it's too late."

* * * * *

Katashi steps back onto his travel-disc. Sara struggles in his arms.

"Where do you think you're going?" Robert says.

"Home," Katashi replies, "unless you're planning to stop me."

Robert bends down. He picks up a sword from one of the fallen guards.

"I just might."

Katashi raises an eyebrow. "This could be diverting."

He steps off of the disc, throws Sara against one of the bridge's steel cables and binds her wrists to it with her own scarf.

He discards his collar and robe. He is naked from the waist up. The muscles in his torso are well-defined. He draws his swords, holding his katana in his right hand, the shorter wakizashi in his left.

"Robert," Kate says. "Don't do this. He'll kill you."

"Thanks for the vote of confidence." He cracks a smile, but it fades quickly. "He's got your sister. If there's a chance I can do something about it, I have to try."

"Brave words, boy," Katashi says. "Let's dance."

* * * * *

The storm rages. All the Doctor can see now are motes of white, pink and green light. He has to navigate the controls of the reactor by touch alone.

"Nearly there, G'Gugv'ntt," he says. "How are you getting on?"

"Not well, Doctor. This equipment was designed for five-fingered Argolin, not three-fingered Foamasi."

"No excuses. You wanted to come here. I expect your best."

"I'm trying, Doctor, but I feel so very tired."

"No!"

Keeping hold of the reactor, the Doctor starts working his way round to the Foamasi. The storm tugs at his coat, at his hair, but he fights against it.

"Keep it together, G'Gugv'ntt."

He reaches out his hand. Dry, cracked scales come away in his fingers.

"Hang on!" The Doctor is shouting now. "I'll find a way to reverse this. I just need a little more time."

"I think..." G'Gugv'ntt's voice catches in his throat. "I think I have a bit too much time, don't you? Don't grieve for me, Doctor. It's better this way."

"Don't be an idiot, G'Gugv'ntt. How is this better? Don't you dare give up. Don't you..."

The Doctor reaches out again, but cannot find scales. Just dust.

And now not even that.

The Doctor throws back his head. He rails against the storm.

"Is this justice?" he yells. "Is this what I'm fighting for?"

Sparks fill his hair. His skin feels tight across his face. He lifts his hands. Squints through the lights. Sees wrinkles appearing. A dark liver spot. He has been aged by Argolin technology once before, but this was different. All appearances to the contrary, he is not ageing, he is getting younger.

"No! No, I deny this. His time is done. It's my time now."

The Doctor collapses against the generator. A wave of weakness overtakes him. His rich hair is greying and thinning, his face lengthening and narrowing. He is unregenerating.

"I'll fight this. I won't become him. Not again. I'll die first."

With a surge of energy born of stubbornness, the Doctor forces himself away from the generator and dives headfirst into the heart of the storm.

He disappears in a shower of sparks.

* * * * *

Robert staggers back against the side of the bridge. He clasps his sword tightly in both of his hands. He is breathing heavily. Bile rises in his throat.

In the centre of the bridge, Katashi waits patiently for his opponent to recover. He may be the older of the two combatants, but what he lacks in physical strength, he more than makes up for in skill and experience.

Five minutes ago it seemed so simple. Robert would play the hero, beat some sense into this bloke with the freaky scales, rescue Kate's sister and impress his girlfriend all into the

bargain. Now, though, he is having serious doubts about his ability to win. But he cannot back down. He is a Brooker and, as his dad and his granddad have taught him, a Brooker never turns away from those who need help.

The bridge is coated with frost. With luck, Katashi will make a mistake and lose his footing, giving Robert the opportunity he needs. Or it could all go the other way and Robert could be the one ending up on his arse.

Bellowing something inarticulate, he charges.

Katashi barely moves. He parries Robert's attack with his katana and uses the wakizashi to open up the sleeve of his shirt. Robert can feel something hot and damp trickling down his arm. The blade has cut through more than just cotton.

His clothes are still wet from his dip in the Tyne. That, combined with the cold, is sapping his strength. He can barely lift his injured arm.

"Yield, human," Katashi says. "Yield and I will make it quick for you. This blade has severed a thousand necks. You will not feel a thing."

Defeat is not an option.

"That's big of you," Robert says, finding the strength to flash a cocky grin, "but I could never turn me back on a damsel in distress."

Katashi inclines his head in a slight bow. "You are an honourable opponent and I salute you. But it will not save you."

The Draconian explodes. He springs forward, his wakizashi aimed at Robert's face. Robert back-pedals frantically, but the sword's tip still nicks his temple. Blood trickles into the corner of his eye.

Katashi slashes furiously with his katana. Robert struggles to block all his attacks. Each blow sends vibrations travelling up his sword and down his arms. His muscles are exhausted from simply holding the weapon in place.

Sensing his opponent's weakness, Katashi lunges using both blades in a single thrust. With a grunt of effort, Robert hauls his sword around to parry. Too late, he realises that it was just a feint. Katashi draws back his sword, pivots on the ball of his left foot, kicks Robert in the stomach with his right. Robert stumbles, doubling over. He tries desperately to keep his footing. The frost works against him.

He drops to the ground, his sword slipping from his grasp.

"You fought bravely," Katashi says, towering over him, "if not well. Take pride in that. Now it's over."

Tied to the suspension cable, Sara struggles against her bonds. They will not break. Kate starts to rush forward, screaming Robert's name, but Val holds her back. Inwardly, she curses herself, knowing that, by doing so, she is condemning not just Robert, but Tom as well. If Robert dies here, her friend will not be born.

Lying on the ground in a pool of his own blood, Tom watches the fight. Wishes he could take his father's place.

Katashi raises his sword to deliver the final blow.

* * * * *

The heart of the storm. The null point.

Left and right, up and down have no meaning here. No forward or back, no past or future, only the here and the now.

A cluster of stars gather in the null point. A constellation on a field of midnight blue. A waistcoat worn by a man with an abundance of dark hair and a goatee. He is wearing sunglasses to protect his eyes from the glare.

"Well, that was unexpected," the Doctor says.

Was unexpected. Unexpected. Unexpected. The words echo back to him, rolling around the nothingness, twisting and distorting.

He looks down at his hands. At his fingernails. Her clenches his hands into fists, squeezing as tight as he can. Checking they are real.

"I'm back," he says.

Back. Back. Back.

Definitely his voice.

But you can't go back.

Not his voice, but one that sends a shiver down his spine.

"Who are you?" he asks the void.

You can't change history to suit your whims.

His voice. His words. His warning to a woman he had once considered a friend.

You decided to play with history. Him again. Berating the same woman. Taryn Fischer. His former companion. *You might as well attempt surgery blindfold with only a hacksaw and a chisel and expect a similar chance of success.*

How sure of yourself you are. The other. Mocking. *How superior. Self-righteous.*

"She needed to be told. Changing history is wrong."

Always?

"The Laws of Time exist for a reason."

And you never doubt?

"Never."

Never?

But what about all the people who will die if I don't interfere?

"All right, I said that."

The Doctor is older now, his hairline receding. His face is more patrician, his nose more pronounced. He is grey, from the steel of his hair to his morning coat to his shoes.

"I said it, I may even have believed it, but I didn't act upon it."

Why not?

"Because it would have been wrong!"

What's the point of having this power if I can't save just one girl?

His words. Resurrected to haunt him.

"It's not that simple. Actions have consequences. Consequences I can't predict."

So you choose not to act out of cowardice.

"I prefer to think of it as caution."

Hypocrite.

Come with me. The Tower of London. Words spoken in the heat of the moment. I can take you far away, where they'll never find you.

The Doctor wants to look away, but the void is everywhere he turns.

"It was a moment of weakness. I was fortunate that Jane had a clearer head on her shoulders than I did."

"What you call weakness, I call strength."

A figure steps out of the light. Brown hair, shot through with spun gold. Hard features and pale, pale eyes.

"Unlike you, I'm not afraid to do the right thing because of what *might* happen."

"Who are you?" the Doctor asks.

"I'm you," the *other* Doctor replies, "and I want my body back."

He plunges his hand into his predecessor's chest.

* * * * *

Katashi brings his sword down.

Robert tries to scuttle out of the way, but he cannot get a grip on the frosted ground.

He does not need to.

Katashi's sword is blocked by another blade.

"You!"

"Greetings, brother," Ryugin says. "I think you and I have a lot to talk about."

If Katashi is shocked by his brother's sudden reappearance, he recovers well.

"My blade will do my talking for me."

Ryugin nods. "Exactly the conversation I had in mind."

Swords flash in the starlight. Steel collides, rings like a bell. Katashi leaps high into the air and lands at the very top of the arch of the bridge, perched like a crane. Ryugin sprints up an almost vertical cable to join him. He jumps before he reaches the summit. Hovers for a moment in the air above Katashi.

Now gravity takes over.

Ryugin leads with his sword. The blade moves too fast for the eye to follow. A blur of moonlight. Katashi parries, parries, parries, until –

His katana shatters under the relentless assault.

He drops the remains. Hears it splash in the water far below. Steps back onto the cables.

Ryugin lands next to him. Both his hands are clasped around the hilt of his sword, holding it beside his head, the blade extending horizontally towards his brother.

"If you were an honourable opponent," Ryugin says, "I would give you the opportunity to take your own life, but you have no honour, do you, Katashi?"

Katashi springs away from his brother. He jumps from cable to cable, back and forth, zig-zagging his way back to ground level. Ryugin follows, moving faster and faster, his clogs barely touching the cables.

Now he is in front of Katashi, his sword waiting for him. At the last moment, Katashi tries to change the direction of his jump, but his momentum has already taken him too far, too fast. Ryugin's blade pierces his side.

Katashi lands on the cable, but he cannot maintain his footing. He slips, falls backwards, arms spread wide. The descent of fifty feet or more seems to occur in slow motion. Then he hits the ground.

Hard.

Time kicks back into gear.

Ryugin stands beside his brother.

"This is for Father," he says. "I only wish I could kill you a thousand times over."

He raises his sword.

"No! No killing!" The Doctor's hand is raised as he marches the length of the bridge. "No one dies on my watch."

G'Gugv'ntt trails behind him. He claw is on the shoulder of a very contrite-looking Junior.

Ryugin is still defiant. "He deserves death."

The Doctor strides right up to him. Looks him in the eyes.

"Kill him and you'll answer to me. Are you really ready for that?" Ryugin drops his sword. "I've given you a second chance. Use it to build something, not destroy."

"Doctor," Val asks, "what about Tom?"

"What about him?"

Tom is sitting up. He unbuttons his bloody shirt to examine his wound. There is not even a scar.

"Did you do this, man?" he asks the Doctor.

"Don't thank me," the Doctor says. "I'm having second thoughts already."

Along both banks of the Tyne, people are cheering. The rip in time is healing itself. The psychedelic display is just a side effect, but one the revellers will remember for years to come.

Hazel, Alan and Mary squeeze through the crowd to join the Doctor and the others on the bridge. Hazel runs straight to Sara. She unties her hands. They hold each other close. Only when they break apart does Hazel take note of the other figures around her. One in particular.

"Ryugin?"

"Hazel," he says.

He steps towards her, stops a few feet away, unable to move any closer.

"I thought you were dead."

He hangs his head. "I never meant to hurt you."

Hazel puts her arm around Sara's shoulders.

"There's someone you should meet," she says. "Ryugin, this is your daughter. This is Sara."

"Sara?"

"It's short for Sarafina," she says. "I thought that was the name you would have chosen."

"She's beautiful," Ryugin says. "Hello, Sara. My name's Ryugin. I'm your father."

Sara looks from Ryugin to her mother and back.

"Dad?"

"There's a lot we need to talk about," Hazel tells Sara.

"You think?"

"Are you back for good?" Hazel asks Ryugin.

"I wish I could be." He glances to his left. At the Doctor. "I have responsibilities. It's long past time I faced up to them." Hesitation. "You could come with me, you and Sara."

Hazel shakes her head sadly.

"I don't think so. What we had was wonderful, but it was a long time ago." She beckons Kate over. Puts an arm around each of her daughters. "This is my home. *This* is my family."

"I understand," Ryugin says. "And what about you, Sara? You're half-Draconian. Are you sure you're happy here?"

Sara looks at her mother. At her sister.

"Mum's right," she says. "This is where I belong. But you could visit," she adds hopefully. "He could visit, couldn't he, Mum?"

"I'd like that," Hazel says.

Further along the bridge, G'Gugv'ntt has walked up behind the Doctor.

"You changed history, Doctor," he says quietly. "I don't know how, but you bent the energies of the tachyon storm to your own desire."

"Might have."

"What gives you the right?"

The Doctor turns his back on G'Gugv'ntt and looks down the length of the Tyne. Past the Tyne Bridge, the Swing Bridge, the High Level Bridge.

"If I have the power and the opportunity to do some genuine good," the Doctor says, "what gives me the right to do nothing?"

"There will be consequences," G'Gugv'ntt says.

"If there are, I'll deal with them." The Doctor turns around, gestures towards Hazel and Ryugin and Sara. "Look at them. Tell me what I did was wrong."

G'Gugv'ntt shakes his head.

"There will be consequences, Doctor."

The Doctor buries his hands in the pockets of his duffel-coat.

"Do you want me to give you a lift back to Foamas?"

"Taking me back to face justice?"

"I'm no policeman," the Doctor says. "I'm just offering to take you home."

"Home is where your family are, Doctor," G'Gugv'ntt says, "and my family are all here. You gave us a fresh start. I can think of worst places to make it, isn't that right, Junior?"

He pats his nephew on the head.

"Uncle," Junior complains, "do you have to call me that. My name's Kv'Mt'chlll."

"If you want people to treat you like a grown-up, Kv'Mt'chlll," the Doctor says, "start acting like one. Make your uncle proud."

G'Gugv'ntt extends a claw.

"Thank you, Doctor. For everything."

The two men shake hands.

Kate is holding a small black box in her hands. It fell out of Robert's pocket and she picked it up. There is a ring inside. Three diamonds set in a white-gold band.

Leaving Hazel talking to Ryugin, she walks over to Robert. He has torn the sleeve off of his shirt and is trying to use it as a bandage on his wounded arm. He cannot tie a knot one-handed, however, so Kate takes it from him and ties it herself.

"Guess I made a bit of an idiot of myself, aye?" Robert says.

"Don't be numb. I thought you were really brave." She holds up the box. "You dropped this."

"Ah..." Robert takes the box from her. Drops to one knee. "Kate, I love you madly, deeply, all the rest. I'm loopy about you and I want to spend the rest of me life with you. Kate Townsend, will you marry me."

Kate looks down at him. There is sadness in her eyes.

"No."

"No?" Robert struggles back to his feet. "Is it me? I can change."

"It's not you," Kate says. "I'm not ready." She looks over her shoulder at her mother. "I need to get my own life in order first."

"Ah."

Kate closes Robert's hand over the ring.

"Hold onto it. One day I *will* be ready. When that day comes, I'm hoping you'll still want to ask me again."

"But..."

Kate puts a finger on his lips.

"Robert, just shut up and kiss me."

"Did you know she was going to turn him down?" Val asks Tom.

Tom grins. "It's one of Dad's favourite stories. Course I thought he was making up the bit about duelling an alien samurai just to impress me."

Val's mouth falls open.

"You knew about all this?"

"Well..."

Val slaps him around the back of the head.

* * * * *

"I'm afraid that's not the right answer," Robert says.

"It is too," the Doctor says. "I was there."

"I can only accept the answer on the card."

"It's a stupid game anyway."

"You're just upset that Sara's beating you," Val says.

The Doctor points at his counter on the *Trivial Pursuit* board. "I haven't even got a single cheese. How fair is that?"

Alan had wanted to invite everyone back to his flat, but Mary had pointed out that there wouldn't be enough room so they have all relocated to Hazel's house in Jesmond.

"Grubs up!" Kate calls.

She and Hazel emerge from the kitchen carrying trays of food. Sausage rolls and samosas, salad and cold meats, crisps and cheese. The others break off from their game to load their plates.

The Doctor stands by the window, looking pensive.

"What's up?" Val asks him.

"We succeeded in closing the rip in time," he says. "Unfortunately, that means we can't get back to 1984 and the TARDIS."

"But the TARDIS will still be where we left it, right?"

The Doctor shakes his head. "I've already checked."

Across the room, Sara and Tom pull a cracker.

"So we just hitch a lift with a passing time-traveller," Val says. "Simple."

"Simple? I'll have you know, Miss Rossi, that not every time-traveller is as accommodating as I am."

Alan comes over to join them.

"Sara asked me to give you this."

He holds out a red paper hat for the Doctor.

"I don't think so," the Doctor says.

"Oh, go on," Val encourages. "You wouldn't want to disappoint a kid, would you?"

"I save the city and this is the thanks I get."

He settles the crown on his head.

"Very fetching," Val struggles to keep a straight face.

"I'm sure, but it doesn't help us find the TARDIS."

"Is that that blue box of yours?" Alan says. "I think I might be able to help you out with that."

* * * * *

Sometime later, once all the goodbyes have been said, Alan shows Val, Tom and the Doctor up to the St Michael's Road allotments.

"I'm down here most evenings, like," Alan is saying, "but I think I'm still a long way from me dream of a prize-winning marrow."

The Doctor is not listening. He has spotted the shed at the end of the allotment. He races past the vegetable patch, presses his hand against the blue-painted wood.

"Hello, old girl," he says. "Miss me?"

"Got a mate of mine to bring it up here from the beach," Alan says. "Figured I'd look after it until you came back to collect it."

"We can't thank you enough Alan," Val says.

He shrugs. "Least I could after all the three of you have done for me and mine."

The Doctor turns away from the TARDIS. He extends a hand to Alan.

"Well, Brooker, it's been a real pleasure."

"You mean that?" Val asks.

"I'm trying to be polite," the Doctor replies. "This doesn't come easily to me, you know."

"Try harder."

"I've been meaning to give you something, Miss Rossi." The Doctor roots around in the inside pocket of his coat. "You should take it before I change my mind."

Val holds the TARDIS key up to the light.

"Not that I'm not grateful," she says, "but what have I done to deserve this?"

"I asked you to keep everyone alive. You did."

"Yes, but I didn't actually *do* anything."

"I trust you, Miss Rossi. Let's leave it at that." He gestures at the door. "Try it out."

"Don't I get a key as well?" Tom asks.

"Brooker, you couldn't tell the difference between me and an overweight chameleon," the Doctor says. "If you think I'm trusting you with a key to my ship then you've got another thing coming."

"It looked a lot like you."

"Give it up, Tom," Val says. "You know what he's like when his mind's made up."

"But Val..."

"Don't 'but Val' me. I'm still mad at you for not mentioning that you had a real-life alien in your family."

"I didn't know she was an alien. I thought all aunts were like that."

Val rolls her eyes.

"It's discrimination, that's what this is," Tom mutters. "The two of you are ganging up on me."

"Just shut up and get in the TARDIS, Tom." Val holds the door open for him.

"Shut up and get in the TARDIS, Tom," Tom imitates. He steps into the ship. "I see where this is going."

Val is about to follow him, but pauses on the threshold.

"Doctor, that Foamasi. Did he mean what he said about there being consequences?"

"There are always consequences, Miss Rossi. The question is whether or not you're prepared to take responsibility for your actions."

"And are you?"

"Always."

"Hey, what's keeping you?" Tom calls from inside.

"Come along, Miss Rossi," the Doctor says, "we can't keep the universe waiting."

With a great grinding and straining of gears, the blue box fades away to nothing. Alan is not surprised. After all he has seen, that these three should disperse like a dream on waking seems perfectly normal.

Whistling softly to himself, Alan puts his hands in the pockets of his donkey jacket and walks back down the path towards home.

Home and family.



The Angel of the North - Part Two

"Just wait for me. I'll come back for you. I give you my word."

The Doctor returns to 1984 seeking a way to save Ryugin, but he is not the only one looking for the prince. Genroku Urabe, his once-betrothed, needs Ryugin's help if she is to save her people and she will take whatever aid she can get to complete her mission, be it that offered by Nat or by the Foamasi. But when Ryugin wakes, the first person to cross his path is Hazel Townsend and it is an encounter that will change her life forever.

Finally, the TARDIS crew reunite on New Year's Eve 1999, just as the Foamasi reactivate the tachyon reactor, unleashing a temporal storm across Newcastle, past, present and future. As the Doctor races to save time and space, Tom's concern is for his family, caught up in a decades-long Draconian family feud. Who is Sara Ferris? What is her secret? And why is she so important to both the Foamasi and the Draconians?

Among the shadows stalks the Okuri, determined to complete the mission at which it failed thirty years earlier. Has time already run out for the Doctor, for Tom and for the city of Newcastle?

This is another in a series of original fan authored Doctor Who fiction published by The Doctor Who Project featuring the Tenth Doctor as played by Laurent Meyer

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