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PALIMPSEST



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It was that kind of a Friday. When seven o'clock came around, Hank had to haul himself off the streetcar and drag his feet into Tujague's. Every step of the way from Bourbon to Decatur, he thought how lucky he was not to have plans for the weekend; a fortifying beer, and then he'd probably head straight to bed.

There was the usual mix of patrons there, and he noticed Red hadn't done anything about the broken furniture from that brawl two nights ago. He nodded a greeting to the elderly barkeep, relieved to see his beer waiting on the counter. He grabbed it like an old friend and moved to a quiet corner where he could take the load off his feet. Every second of his long and unremarkable day seemed ground into his shoes.

He was distracted by a foreign voice rising above the hum of the bar. "Go on, have a bite! You won't regret it."

Another voice, American and female, replied: "I told you, oysters don't agree with me. I had a bad one a few years back. All it takes is one bad oyster."

"Well, I don't want to sound judgemental, but one can't expect to find a good oyster in Montana."

"*Wyoming*, Doctor."

"Oh yes. Landlocked, though, is my point, Miss Redfoot. Well, at least until the twenty-ninth century—"

Despite himself, Hank was intrigued by this garrulous pair. For a start, ladies seldom entered the saloon, and most people's conversation centred on baseball. The man—English by the sound of him—had stretched his long legs under a corner table, and was halfway through a passionate culinary embrace with an oyster loaf. His English accent and long-haired, vaguely Gallic appearance gave him an aristocratic air. However, his un-tucked, short-sleeved lobster patterned shirt, unbuttoned linen waistcoat, and wide-whaled corduroy trousers were casual to the point of seediness. Hank had seen many such men during his all-too-brief sojourn in Paris after the War. The man in the lobster shirt continued extolling the virtues of the sandwich, occasionally gesturing with it to emphasize a point. The woman next to him rolled her eyes, and recoiled every time the offending loaf neared her. Hank guessed from her complexion that she was a Native Indian, but he had never seen an Indian, or any woman, wearing such masculine attire. They must have met abroad, he reasoned.

"I just can't believe I take you to New Orleans, one of the finest culinary centres in the universe, and you're not hungry."

"I'm fine with my soup," she insisted, stirring her spoon listlessly to prove it. Catching Hank's gaze in a sideways look, she hissed to her companion, "And keep your voice down, Doctor. All this 'universe' talk, you're making a spectacle of yourself."

"It's too bad the coordinates slipped. We're about ten years too late to see Buddy Bolden play at the Little Gem." The Doctor suddenly looked up in Hank's direction. "Look, my friend, could you convince her about these oyster loaves?"

Hank smiled. "He's right, ma'am," he said to Miss Redfoot. "You came to the right place for 'em, too." She smiled sweetly at him, and the man slid a wooden chair Hank's way. "Ah, no thank you sir. I'm sure you don't want to pass the time with a coloured man."

The man furrowed his brow in puzzlement. “I’m afraid I don’t understand. Coloured?”

His friend whispered something in his ear. He shook his head, clearly still confused. “Please, I insist. It would be my pleasure—if you knew how many colours skins can be you’d realize how little it matters.”

For a moment, Hank was reminded of that glorious sense of freedom in Paris before demob. He took the seat and politely raised his glass to the man. “Name’s Hank Logan. Pleasure to make your acquaintance.”

“Likewise. I’m the Doctor; this is Hannah Redfoot. I’d love to chat with a local.”

They sipped their drinks, while Hannah took a token mouthful of soup. Hank was suddenly self-conscious, and asked, “So, you’re visitors? From England?”

“From quite a few places,” the Doctor replied. “Miss Redfoot here is always on at me about not being polite.”

“My wife’s the same,” he nodded. Though, looking at these two, he could tell from their slight distance and the Doctor’s avuncular manner – plus his insistence on calling her ‘Miss Redfoot’ – that they were not married. As his second beer arrived, Hank asked them a little about their visit. For all their friendliness there was something not quite right about the pair of them. Hank chalked it up to the strange manners of the English; in the interests of being polite, they were often just the opposite.

“You’re a streetcar driver, Mr. Logan?” the Doctor asked, dabbing the last spots of sauce on his plate with the remnants of the loaf.

“Been at it for nearly a year. Started when I got back from the war. Not bad for a man of fifty-four.”

“Yes indeed. I’m sure you know New Orleans better than the Mayor.”

“Wager I do!” laughed Hank.

The Doctor’s eyes clouded over and he leaned in conspiratorially. “You don’t know much about Tremé, do you?” Hannah raised her eyebrow, clearly suspicious of the Doctor’s questioning.

“More a residential part, Doctor. I’d say the French Quarter’s much livelier.”

“Well, I believe a chum of mine has recently moved in to Tremé, and I wanted to pay him a call. Any, er, strangers recently arrived in that part of town?”

“Can’t say I really—” A nasty thought came to Hank, and he stopped talking. Teresa’s friend, Mrs. Laurier, and his little boy Elijah had spent some time there. That little boy ran in—not even screaming and crying, Teresa said, but quiet. Quiet the way children are when they’ve seen something they can’t handle. No one in that church group would even talk about it, and for all that Hank suspected it wasn’t healthy, he didn’t want to be the one to bust down the door. Looking at this Doctor, though, Hank could see here was a man ready and willing to do it—and he was a little unsettled by that too. Hank avoided the Doctor’s inquisitive gaze.

“Doctor, Hank doesn’t want to talk about it,” Hannah said. “Who’s this chum of yours anyway? You never mentioned anyone to me. You wouldn’t stop talking about oyster loaves—”

“The oyster loaf was one reason ... *this* is another.”

The Doctor leaned in, but Hank had said all he was going to. “Thanks for your time. It was a pleasure meeting you both.” He stood to leave.

“Oh, come now Mr. Logan. I think you know what I’m talking about.”

Hank felt a little angry. “I get you, Doctor. One of them thrill-seekers, huh? Pokes his nose in every spook show? Well, I’m a respectable God-fearing man, and I don’t listen to that kind of hocus-pocus.”

Hannah raised her eyebrow. “Hocus-pocus?”

Seeing her curiosity, and wanting to protect her from her friend’s recklessness, Hank sat down again with a sigh. “Look, if your buddy’s at the house I think he is, you should both forget about it and go right back to England. Used to be old lady Collette Oldfield’s place. Ill-starred match from the start on account of him bein’ a white boy and her a Negro.” Hannah flinched. If Hank didn’t know better he’d almost say she was uncomfortable with that word.

Hank continued: “They say her husband drove her crazy--or she saw something *there* drove her crazy. Either way, the poor lady never leaves it, and people say they’ve seen things there ... things from Hell itself.” He finished his beer. “You fight in the war, Doctor?”

“I’ve seen a lot of wars,” the Doctor replied distantly. “I’ve tried to help out where I can.”

“Alls I know about is the one we just wrapped up in France. Since I came back, a lot of good people get drawn into all kinds of stuff, turn their backs on right and wrong and get drawn in to the dark arts. I’m a church-going man, don’t believe nothing good can come of that kind of fooling.”

The Doctor turned away from him, suddenly guilty. “My friend, let’s not part on bad terms. I didn’t know. I understand.”

He trailed off into embarrassed mumbling, and Hannah explained, “That’s his way of saying sorry. He can’t manage it in plain English or it’ll puncture his pride.”

The Doctor checked his watch and muttered something unconvincing about needing to leave. He and Hannah exchanged amicable farewells with Hank and left the bar. After a while, Hank finished his beer, reflected on the odd chat, and also went on his way.

Of the three of them, only Hannah had noticed, in passing, a woman standing at the bar in a long black coat and a hat (not unlike a fedora) pulled over her face, whose gaze had never left their table. The woman duly followed them outside, her steady gait interrupted only when she stumbled over a stool inconsiderately placed in her path.

The face Collette saw in her nightmares was a different one. Its cheeks blazed red with a permanent rage, its nose was a bulbous, alcohol-damaged wreck, and its eyes had angry fire behind them.

Mr. Oldfield’s face was smaller and kinder, the high cheekbones and grey eyes more refined, without a trace of anger. Yet perhaps something more fearful, more unknowable than mere rage, lurked behind his dispassionate gaze.

Whenever she saw this horrible apparition, she saw the angry face. For so long it had been one she feared and retreated from, yet in this moment, he was racked with agony, and those angry eyes were paralysed with a dread that she found wrenching to watch, even after everything he had done to her.

She didn’t recognize this man--and yet she had known him so long.

Whenever she asked Mr. Oldfield about it, he always said, “There never was anyone else, Collette. You’ve only ever been married to me.”

When he had more time, Mr. Oldfield explained it in terms of a dream. The human mind, he said, can create detailed architecture of places it has never been, and these images and impressions can become more vivid than memories. It was quite different from his own entirely rational mental architecture, and why humans could be so much more imaginative than his own pompous kind. Why could it not, though, create an unconscious bogeyman?

The house squatted with a slant on top of a steep hill. Weeping willows clung to its sides, as though trying to straighten it. Mangy patches of Spanish moss clung to their roots, their dark grey appearing to drain colour from the rest of the scene. A solitary Lodgepole pine standing erect at the back struck Hannah as odd; she was sure pine needles didn’t flourish so far south, and its vivid, oversaturated green stood out sharply against the other drab foliage.

A little boy stood tentatively in front of the yard. He was hiding behind one of the stray shoots of Spanish moss, peering with a kind of petrified fascination. When he heard them approach, he bolted quickly away, despite the Doctor’s amiable wave.

“Real Anne Rice territory here, Doctor.” Despite her snark, Hannah revelled in this part of time travel. There was a palpable difference around her, something that she could sense in the past. It was as prosaic as the earthy and un-polluted air she breathed, or the freshness of old buildings that no amount of patient and painstaking restoration could quite recover: the slight warping of paint, the wood chipping away, a touch of gentle decay not yet given way to dereliction.

The Doctor either hadn't heard her jibe or ignored it. A couple of times he had been a little unsteady on the way over, but he shrugged off her concern. “Remember what I said about bad oysters,” she warned.

“It's something else ... a bad feeling. It—” He stopped, and his face froze. He spun on his heel, but there was nothing behind him.

Before Hannah could say anything, she felt her body gripped all over with a kind of pressure. She was rooted to the spot, incapable of movement. “Hannah? Hannah, talk to me!” the Doctor called as he ran over to her. He sensed what was holding her; even with his time sensitivity, merely running a few yards felt like wading through thick mud.

Through the garden's crumbling stone wall, a bony arm projected itself. Skeletal fingers stretched and flexed, and then, before the Doctor's eyes, they sprouted ugly lumps of rotting flesh. It was as though a dead body was coming back to life.

The Doctor back away from the hand's reach. He wasn't sure what it might do to him, but something about its desperate clawing filled him with a strange dread. “*Help ... help me ...*” a voice called out, at once a whisper and a scream, echoing through his head and shaking the branches of the nearby trees.

Then there was a face. First young, then mottled and old. Now a young man, simultaneously a corpse. Always though, with its face stretched in a rictus grimace of terror and pain.

There was a loud screech and all was silent again. A bird tentatively cawed in the distance, and the Doctor was surprised to see himself supine against the wall. Hannah took his hand and pulled him to his feet.

“What did you see? A ghost?”

The Doctor shot her a withering glance, but then thought to himself. “It's sometimes said that haunted houses are often found on sites of time fissures, rifts between realities ...” He chuckled grimly. “Maybe the people who say that just don't want to admit they're afraid of ghosts.”

He marched sternly up to the front door, unceremoniously rapped on it. After that strange encounter Hannah was a little worried at who or what might answer the door. She did her best not to look too surprised when an intense-looking man with untidy hair slid open the latch. His shabby-genteel black coat and heavy silk cravat, coupled with his short stature, gave him the look of Edgar Allan Poe. The anachronistic clothes alone were clear evidence that he was a fellow Time Lord.

The corners of his lips curled up, and in a soft Boston accent asked, “Surely ... Doctor, is it you? Come in, come in!”

Hannah exchanged introductions with the man as they walked in--“Mister Oldfield now,” he said proudly. “I had to relinquish my old title when I, er, retired.” The Doctor nodded in understanding. There was clearly something about their names that they couldn't share with mere mortals; it was, presumably, the same reason she couldn't ask ‘Doctor Who?’ without getting any more than a wry smile.

They had made their way into a parlour so thick and rank with the smell of humidity and neglect that entering it made Hannah feel she was wading through mud. The dark Victorian furnishings and wallpaper made the space seem oppressive and undefined, a kind of limbo.

The Doctor whispered in her ear, “I think even Lestat might think twice about walking in here.”

“Who's that, my love? Do we have visitors?” a woman's voice called from the top of the stairs.

“Come down Collette,” the man replied. “An old friend of mine dropped in.”

An elegant African-American lady with short curled hair and a fine floor-length embroidered silk gown descended with a stately grace that gave the impression of floating. Hannah wondered if Hank was right about her: she gazed ahead without focus, as though only partially awake. However, when she locked eyes with the Doctor her expression warmed. “Pleasure to meet you.”

“This is the Doctor, and his companion Miss Hannah Redfoot,” Oldfield announced.
“I never get to meet any of his friends,” she said.
“Well, the chaps back home don’t get out much,” the Doctor explained.
“Why don’t I rustle up some tea?” Oldfield suggested. “It’s a lovely evening; we can sit out on the porch. I assume you’ve had an oyster loaf, Doctor?”
“Wouldn’t have missed it!” he chuckled back.

The Doctor and Mr. Oldfield spoke at length about the situation on their home planet, the Doctor’s recent adventures, and their mutual bafflement over Earth and humans. It had been a stressful period of late and it seemed he was glad to get some of the drama off his chest. Hannah took such conversation in her stride, but was surprised that Collette was similarly unfazed. Mr. Oldfield had explained, in his words, “his true self” to her, “and she still married me, to my immense good fortune”. Whenever that half-dreamy expression returned to her face, Hannah worried just what the hell he had told her--and how serious its ramifications had been on her psyche.

Hannah had never met another Time Lord before, and from what the Doctor had told her most of them numbered among the universe’s deadliest villains. Seeing him with Mr. Oldfield, she could tell there was something beneath their cordial bonhomie: something akin to the stark mutual assessment of two predators. For all his complaints about humans, Hannah saw (as he would never admit himself) that the Doctor was far more at ease with her kind than his own.

“It was a close escape, though, wasn’t it Miss Redfoot?” he concluded. She hadn’t been listening to his story, so she nodded indulgently. Disappointed by her nonplussed reaction, the Doctor rose and strode from the porch to the overgrown grass.

“Adventures! I always admired your thirst for them, Doctor. I don’t have much stomach for them. I wanted to see the universe, and I immediately retired here.” Mr. Oldfield leaned over to Hannah and Collette. “None of us ever believed it when he told us how lovely this little planet was. But you know he was absolutely right. Unspoiled, untouched by the barren hand of technology. A little prone to invasion, but you can’t have everything.”

“Wait a hundred years and you’ll see humans do a good job of spoiling it,” Hannah said archly, fingering her mobile phone in her jeans as she did. She turned to Collette. “Has he ever shown you, uh, life on other planets?”

Collette stared at her uncertainly. Hannah thought she had said something wrong, but then she slowly replied, “Nowhere I could go to get away from ... from ...”

“Collette’s a little excitable,” Mr. Oldfield interrupted cagily. “Maybe in a decade or two I’ll fire up my TARDIS for an outing, but right now I’m very happy to stay in New Orleans, I must say.” He patted her hand; to Hannah, his words seemed to carry a sinister undercurrent.

“Falling in love with a human,” the Doctor sighed. “I’m very impressed, my friend. There aren’t many of our kind with the emotional maturity to devote ourselves to that kind of life.”

“I thought I had missed my chance to have a family. Unlike you, eh Doctor?”

“*That* was a very long time ago.” The Doctor shot a poisonous look at Oldfield. Whatever past secret this hinted at, neither man looked ready to reveal. Instead the Doctor changed the subject with the banal observation, “It must take a lot of work, building the relationship.”

Collette looked up. “I don’t know if you’re so different from us as you make out.”

“I didn’t mean any offence.” He flinched at her unblinking stare.

The tension hardly hung in the air before Oldfield clapped his hands together and stood. Hannah wondered if they’d be leaving, but then he said, “Doctor, I hope you and Miss Redfoot will stay for dinner. You may not believe it, but I’ve mastered quite a few Creole dishes.”

Collette half-smiled. “You like to think so anyway.” Her husband mimed an arrow striking his left heart, then his right.

The Doctor turned to Hannah and cocked an eyebrow. “Well, what do you say, Miss Redfoot?”

She raised her eyebrow in turn. She still felt a certain malignant atmosphere, but on the other hand ... “A Time Lord who can cook? Well, I *have* to see this.”

The next few hours passed in animated conversation over a startlingly delicious jambalaya. Since Hannah had never seen the Doctor make anything more elaborate than a sandwich or a cup of tea, the care and deliberation Oldfield had taken over his cooking was all the more surprising.

Throughout the evening, the conversation had become so relaxed that Hannah forgot her earlier anxieties. Oldfield and Collette were easy with each other’s company. Perhaps that earlier tension was merely a manifestation of every couple’s worry when they entertain friends for the first time. The Doctor had seemed a little looser and less formal than usual, but when Oldfield was clearing away the plates, he whispered to her, “Why don’t you talk to Mrs. Oldfield?”

“Something wrong?”

“I’d just like to know what she makes of ... all this. There’s something about it that’s nagging at me.”

Faced with this task, Hannah accompanied Collette into the kitchen. After a few minutes of small talk, she finally went for the direct approach: “You seem very happy with ... Mr. Oldfield.” Funnily, even after all these hours she had not heard his first name. These Time Lords and their titles.

Collette had been a whirlwind of activity, filling the kettle and grinding coffee beans. At these words, she froze; then she rounded on Hannah, her breathing momentarily unsteady. She steadied herself, and at last replied with a slight tremble to her voice:, “I think things’ll be all right now.”

“Listen, Collette, is he—”

“He’s just fine with me now,” she interrupted. “Our life together, who we are now, that’s all that matters. That’s one thing you can take away from all this time travel stuff. Nothing good comes of dwelling on the past after all.”

Hannah nodded, uncertain what to say next. “It’s funny you should say that. To me, all this is the past. It’s a wonderful freedom, in some ways.” She couldn’t tell if Collette was even listening, and asked, “Is there any time period you’d like to visit?”

For a moment, a bit of levity broke through Collette’s grave face, and she said, “You’ve seen how things are in my life. I wouldn’t mind yours. Hundred years, eh? The twenty-first century ...”

“2014. You might be surprised at how similar things are. I haven’t visited New Orleans, but I bet this part’s exactly the same. Listen ...” Hannah sighed, and then tried another blunt statement. “Maybe if you got away somewhere – somewhen – it might take you away from this – whatever it is that’s on your mind.”

Collette looked past Hannah and then closed her eyes forcefully, as if trying to bring some unwanted memory to mind but simultaneously to bury it. “He wasn’t always ... there was a time when he was different. No matter how much he tells me—‘There’s only ever been me, darling’, ‘You ain’t never had another husband’—he *was* different.”

“Different how?”

Collette wrapped her arms around herself, a protective gesture that suggested to Hannah some suppressed memories of abuse. “He was a totally different man. I mean, he was still Mr. Oldfield but he wasn’t--didn’t look like him, didn’t act like him. He used to be bigger, violent. Didn’t like me because of ... being coloured. He treated me like I was his property ... he *liked* that ownership he had over me.” Collette brushed some stray tears from her eyes, and then excused herself. Hannah squeezed her arm in sympathy as she left, saddened and enraged at the tell-tale signs of shame and self-doubt that plagued the abused. “But you know, these memories come and go, and I look at him now and I think, that’s the real one. This kind and considerate gentleman. He’s real, and this other one must be in my head. That’s what he tells me too but I just can’t shake it...”

She abruptly stopped talking and walked to the window. Hannah was puzzled to see her frown. She pointed outside, where, across the street, it was just possible to make out a tall woman wearing a long

black duster and a broad-brimmed hat pulled down over her face. If she was craving anonymity, this woman was failing—and what’s more, Hannah was positive she had seen her in the saloon just before they came here.

“That lady’s been mooching around here before,” Collette explained.

“Are you sure?”

Collette chuckled cynically. “I may have lost my senses, young lady, but I sure as hell recognize someone dressed like that loitering around my front garden.”

“There was a boy outside when we arrived.”

A sad smile flickered across Collette’s face. “Elijah ...” she said to herself. “He and his mother live down the road. His poor father died in the war. He used to love coming around, but things changed some time.” She shook her head and squinted through the kitchen window again. “That definitely wasn’t Elijah though. A lady of some kind, I think. Wonder what she wants? Some kind of vagrant? Course, my husband knows all kinds of strange people.”

Hannah decided to settle the matter in person, but by the time she had gotten outside, the mysterious woman was gone. There was no sign of her on either side of the boulevard, although in the fading light she could be feet away and Hannah wouldn’t see her. Maybe she’d chosen that get-up for a reason.

Collette didn’t seem unduly concerned by Hannah’s news. “She hasn’t caused any problems before. New Orleans is filled with all kinds of characters, and there’s nothing much we can do about it anyway.”

That distraction over, Hannah turned her thoughts back to Collette’s memories, and her cryptic statements about a different Mr. Oldfield echoed in her head. Could she be describing Mr. Oldfield regenerating? Could this abusive, monstrous other be a previous incarnation of the kindly, slightly-built man who was still outside conversing with the Doctor?

Hannah wasn’t sure when they had agreed to spend the night, but here she was, turning over in a musty four-poster bed, resolutely awake and wanting to open a window.

The evening had ended abruptly, with the Doctor and Mr. Oldfield finally wearing each other out. Oldfield at one point discussed “interest in his work” before clamming up.

“Work? Who was interested in your work? Was that why you’ve come here?”

The Doctor’s graceless pouncing on the comment raised Oldfield’s suspicions. “I came here to retire,” he said simply. “And I’m starting to wonder what *you’re* doing visiting me Doctor.”

“You can’t think I’d be working for them? I’m a renegade, I’ve got a worse reputation back home than you do.”

Collette put her arm to her husband’s side. Hannah grew more puzzled to see her protective of him, and wondered how it sat with those violent memories. “Look Doctor, perhaps you’ve talked with him enough.”

“Collette, can’t you say anything to him—”

“I could, but I don’t want to. Now you’ll just have to leave it alone.”

“I’m *trying* to help him, you have to understand.”

“I’ve met plenty of people tried to help me,” she said coldly. “Only one that meant it is sitting here next to me.” With an eerie, silent grace, the couple rose and went to bed, not saying another word.

Hannah looked from the door to the confused Doctor and back again. “I haven’t seen a room clear that quickly since the frat-boys showed up at the Geology faculty mixer.”

The Doctor absently punched the arm of the chair, his features expressionless and fixed ahead. “Why won’t he tell me? *What* won’t he tell me?” he whispered softly.

Hannah crept nearer to him, and shared her conversation with Collette from earlier. To her frustration, he didn’t seem to pick up on what she was saying, merely nodding with minimal interest at the details. She trailed off at the end.

“Well? Was that it? Just these fragmented memories?”

“Well, what if ... they were him? Mr. Oldfield? What if *he* was abusive to her? What if this was his previous, you know, regeneration?”

The Doctor shook his head. “We’re not like that.”

“Not like what?” Hannah’s frustration grew to anger; the Doctor was dismissing her out of hand.

“Well, if you’re describing—”

“Racism is what I’m describing. Don’t tell me your race is incapable of racism.”

“Don’t get me wrong, Miss Redfoot. We can have terrible faults. Arrogance, megalomania, disinterest, cynicism, lack of cosmic perspective ... but human racial distinctions? Oldfield wouldn’t perceive them.” He shrugged, aware that Hannah was very irritated with him. “I mean, I’m aware it’s an issue for humans, but ...”

“It hasn’t occurred to you? Despite you both looking like white men?”

The Doctor looked down at his hand, mumbled, “It’s not something we understand”, and then marched out of the room, still preoccupied. Hannah turned the conversation over in her head. Was he naïve? Was he entitled? No, he was an alien.

No less awake than she was forty-five minutes ago, Hannah got up and walked across the room. Despite herself, she was creeped out by this place. It was funny that in her university days she thought nothing of geological time-scales of millions of years, but some overwrought Victorian architecture scarcely a fraction of that age could make her jumpy. However, the natural world made sense to Hannah, and she could think of no better symbol of nature’s beauty, progress, and rationality than the Medicine Bow Mountains visible from her gift shop window in Laramie.

This home could not have felt more irrational to Hannah—designed contrary to any domestic principle of making its tenants feel comfortable or safe. It was a barren and inhuman space, and even her sparse, Ikea-furnished apartment in Laramie was warmer than this, for all its floral wallpaper and overstuffed club chairs.

She wrenched open the bay window and looked outside. A full moon bathed the overgrown garden in limpid blue light. A pleasant summer wind gusted through the window. And on the deserted street, she thought she saw someone.

She jumped at the sound of a knock at the door. She was even more annoyed with herself when she locked eyes with the Doctor.

“I hope I didn’t wake you,” he said. If he was meaning to be apologetic, it was merely coming across as sarcastic simpering.

“Ha, that’s a laugh. I haven’t got a wink.”

“There is something peculiar about the atmosphere in here, isn’t there?”

“*That’s* the understatement of the year. So what’s up?”

The Doctor scratched the back of his neck and mumbled as casually as he could, “Uh, I’m just going to pop back to the TARDIS. I won’t be long. I’ll just grab my toothbrush and be right back.”

“Why don’t I come with you?”

“Well actually, I was hoping you might hold the fort.”

Hannah leaned in to the Doctor and hissed, “You had better start telling me what’s going on.”

“I wish I knew,” he said gravely. “I can’t find Oldfield’s TARDIS anywhere. I’ll need to run a quick surface scan.”

“And I’m staying because—”

“I don’t trust this relationship with Collette--not because of, er, what we talked about earlier. There’s something else. I’m worried about her.”

Hannah nodded and waved goodbye, then returned to the window to see the Doctor sneak through the garden with the slinky stealth of a cat burglar.

Collette woke with a start. It was here. *He* was here. She could feel it. And she knew she wasn’t asleep.

Hank couldn't believe he was standing here. He had waited until Teresa had gone to bed. His mind was made up, and didn't want her talking him out of it. On the way up, he started to think that maybe they went to a different house, or had already left with nothing but a mild chill down their spines.

No luck there though. A few minutes after he spotted the house—drunkenly leaning away on that hill, its dainty woodwork going to seed—he saw the Doctor sneak out. He was nearly satisfied to go home and salvage a night's sleep, but then he saw someone dressed in black follow that oddly dressed Limey down the road. Sighing to himself, he pulled up the collar of his donkey jacket and followed them. The Doctor and his pursuer crept all the way down Esplanade, and just for a moment, as Hank turned the corner he was sure he'd lost them, until he caught sight of the pursuer again. The Doctor had just retreated inside a blue box nestled beside the St. Louis No. 3 Cemetery gates.

It'd be just like this creepy Limey to lurk in the St. Louis all hours of the night, Hank mused as he crouched behind a particularly ornate tombstone. As he backed away from its gargoyles, he wondered if he should leave them to it. Then he saw the Doctor's pursuer draw a long, thin tube, which looked enough like a gun to worry him.

He tiptoed behind the figure and raised his fist. The element of surprise was all he had. As his arm drew level with the neck, he saw some long, flowing auburn hair beneath the hat. It was a woman!

Hank's chivalry gave the woman enough time to perceive he was there. She turned and knocked her jaw against his still-raised arm. He quickly brought his other arm down to the tube, and tried to knock it out of her hand. As she tried to free herself from his grip, they both crashed into the box's wooden doors. Despite the tension, they paused to look around.

Somehow, they were tussling on the floor of a cavernous control room, its walls glowing from yellow discs and a six-sided control panel blinking with bewildering technology at its centre. At the far end of the chamber, the Doctor had just entered, a toothbrush jammed into his mouth. He stopped in his tracks and stared at his visitors at length.

Immediately, Hank came to his senses. "Doc, this woman was trying to kill you."

The woman got to her feet and retorted petulantly, "I was *not*. My name's Yara. Are you the Doctor?"

He nodded, and then finally, through a mouthful of toothpaste, he said, "Make yourselves at home."

The second knock on Hannah's door was frenzied. She opened it to find Collette looking around in stark terror. "It's coming, it's happening again," she repeated several times as Hannah took her by the shoulders and led her into the bedroom.

Collette stopped in her tracks, and grabbed Hannah's arm. "No. Wrong way!" she exhorted breathlessly, before seizing her.

"Where are we going?"

"It's the house ... it's *him* ... we've got to get away!"

They ran through the front door. The night air had cooled still further, but Hannah scarcely had time to notice it at the speed Collette was running. Hannah finally pulled against her and they stopped under one of the weeping willows, catching her breath while Collette frantically looked around.

"What is it? Is it Mr. Oldfield?" she asked.

Collette nodded, then immediately shook her head. "He wasn't ... himself ... he's disappeared somewhere."

Remembering their earlier conversation, Hannah's eyes widened. The more Collette denied it, the more certain she was that Mr. Oldfield was central to all this. "Listen, Collette, you're safe with me. We'll go to the Doctor."

A dreadful howling sound broke the night around them, and a sickly green glow penetrating the overgrown bushes of the Oldfields' garden. With it she found she was rooted to the spot, paralyzed in a heartbeat ... falling, tumbling into the night...

The Doctor and Yara were bickering at length. Hank heard him say "*Inekshi bounty hunters are strictly forbidden from Level Five planets*" and "*Where did you even get time technology? Let me guess, a dimensional stabilizer slipped off the back of a lorry?*" Her reply was equally perplexing: "*Temporal weapons lying around? What was I supposed to do?*" He sat in an uncomfortable wooden chair by the doors, Yara's tube-like gun balanced across his knees, and listened with calm detachment. He could make no more of their argument than he could of this eerie space, its soothing hum paradoxically unnerving him. He felt as though the doors to that blue box had only taken him deeper into that cemetery after all, and now he was watching the dead call each other names.

He looked up at a screen suspended from the ceiling, showing the view outside. Before he could stand up and run back through the doors, the Doctor called over to him, "Mr. Logan, how are you holding up?"

"I've got one or two questions," he replied frankly.

The Doctor smiled and clapped him on the back. "I'd be happy to answer them in a moment, but for now please keep looking after that pea-shooter of Yara's. And I owe you one, for watching my back."

"Look, how can I convince you? It wasn't you I was after," Yara insisted. "The weapon was just a precaution."

"Yes, well, you and I may be after the same thing."

"And what is that?" Hank asked.

The Doctor prodded a few buttons on the console, bringing up an aerial view of New Orleans. Most of the map glowed light blue, but one corner burned red. "A friend of mine may have a rather nasty weapon."

"A likely story," Yara sneered.

"It happens to be true," the Doctor snapped. "I was hoping it was an accident and I could take it and be on my way. But he didn't just retire, he buried this weapon somewhere in your city, Mr. Logan. Putting you and everyone else at risk."

"What kind of weapon are we talking about, Doctor?" Hank asked.

"I wish I knew. It causes instability in the time stream, but those readings suggest a much cruder device than I've seen before."

"Deadlier too, I'll bet." Yara's arms were folded, as if she was scolding the Doctor.

Registering the gesture, he turned to her. "Any hints?"

"All I know is that the Inekshi Cybernetics Consortium had fifty million kopecs for whoever could nab it."

The Doctor chuckled humourlessly. "Well, my dear lady – that may turn out to be awfully cheap next to your life."

She rounded on him, raising a muscled arm to his face, when Hank interrupted. "Should that number at the bottom be changing?"

They both turned and focussed on the read-out. The digits had read '1919', but were now blinking on and off, between '1909', '1903', '1914', and around again. The Doctor pressed some more buttons. "And I assume we know where it's coming from?" Yara asked. He didn't reply, instead running to the doors, shrugging on his coat and grabbing a box that beeped loudly. He turned to Hank and asked, "What do you say Hank? Up for tagging along?"

Hank looked to the sky, and muttered to himself, "Sure? Why not visit a haunted house at the dead of night?"

"Don't think you'll be able to leave me behind!" Yara called after him, but she suddenly found her feet rooted to the spot. "What the hell? You *cannot* be serious."

The Doctor looked back at her, and then snapped his fingers. “Now look here, my good woman, I’d just like to keep you out of the way until I know what’s going on. It’s not that I don’t trust you, it’s just—” He coughed. “Well, it *is* that I don’t trust you actually.”

Her objections were abruptly cut off by the shutting of the TARDIS door.

“It’s coming for me,” Collette moaned.

“Then I’ll make sure I’m standing in front of you,” Hannah insisted, hoping Collette didn’t hear the tremor in her voice.

The sight in front of her eyes was something beyond even a nightmare. One second it was a cadaver, the next a baby, then a grown man dressed like Mr. Oldfield. It shuttled from one to the other, randomly. The baby would have the grey pallor of the dead body, then the skeleton would have patches of healthy skin. Round and round it went, from youth to death and back, surrounded by the green glow, the only consistency being its outstretched arms and expression of agony.

In a wail that sounded like several inhuman tones, at once high-pitched and deep, the thing called out: “Collette ... Help ...”

Collette’s fear vanished and she yelled back at the apparition: “Don’t you dare beg me to help! Not after what you did!”

There was the sound of running through the bushes, and Hannah sighed in relief as the Doctor appeared from behind the weeping willow, clutching a clunky hand-made gadget. He extended its antenna, and a vibration coursed towards the creature, which recoiled in something like pain as if burnt.

Behind the Doctor stood Hank, open-mouthed with horror at the creature, which was now regressing in age; a ragged skeleton whose only flesh covered a youthful face stood before them for a moment.

“Collette,” the Doctor hissed, “this is very important. Where is Oldfield’s TARDIS?”

“He said it doesn’t work.”

“That’s not important. Where is it?”

She wearily pointed, and the Doctor bolted towards a large tree at the far end of the Oldfields’ garden. It was out of place, a tall Lodgepole pine amid the weeping willows and the brilliant azaleas. The Doctor felt around its back, and then pushed its trunk inward. “Hank, you stay out here with Collette.”

Hank double-took at the approaching skeleton. “Are you serious?”

“Perfectly. Yara’s impulse laser might hold it off. It’s just like any other Earth weapon,” he said with a hint of distaste. “You aim it and pull the trigger.” He disappeared inside the tree. Hannah crept in after him.

Despite his urgency, the Doctor had time to tut to himself, “Typical new model.” The console was smaller than the Doctor’s and had only five panels, studded with delicate crystalline controls, which matched the blown-glass appearance of the walls. The daintiness of the design was offset by the wires strewn liberally around the floor and the troubling dark green bleeding through the central column and the walls--the same colour that shrouded the apparition outside.

Oldfield lay beneath the console, a wire pierced into his left arm. Hannah judged from the way his bloody right hand clutched at the cable that he had done this himself. There was a low rumble shaking the walls in time with his thready/ragged breathing.

“He’s tried to interface with his TARDIS directly.”

“Why would he do that?” Hannah asked.

“To undo the damage ... that *he* must have caused.” The Doctor frantically hammered at the console’s crystalline panels.

“And smashing his controls will help how?” Hannah asked.

“Doctor!” called Hank from outside. “Your little box blew up. It’s getting closer. Whatever the hell you’re doing, you’d better hurry!”

The Doctor carelessly pulled one of the loose wires out of Oldfield's arm and jammed it into a recess in the console. He twisted the large crystal sharply to one side. Around them, the TARDIS' familiar wheezing groan filled the room, then shuddered outward. Peeking through the doorway, Hannah saw the creature vanish as the vibration sliced through it.

"I shunted it a half-second forward in time, on top of itself." The Doctor caught his breath. "The two temporal instabilities cancelled each other out."

"You sound surprised that it worked," Hannah said.

"I am." He caught his breath, and looked over at Oldfield with a burning rage. "As for *him*, it's time I got some answers."

The Doctor set the badly wounded Oldfield up at a complicated healing station in the TARDIS infirmary. Then, clearly feeling a little contrite, he released Yara from her confinement. She immediately swung a fist his way, only for him to block it and sneer, "You've proven your innocence by being here while all that was going on."

"You've hitched your star to a hell of a wagon," Yara said to Hannah.

"Don't I know it," Hannah replied ruefully. "Well Doctor, since you seem to be handling the situation with your usual tact, I think I'll excuse myself and try to get a few hours of non-haunted sleep."

The Doctor bade her goodnight, turning just long enough to catch a punch to the other side of his head from Yara. "Now *that* was just cheating!" he snapped. "Listen, if the roles were reversed, are you honestly telling me you wouldn't have done the same?"

"I might just have thrown away the key," she admitted. "Well, thank you for your hospitality, but if you don't mind, I'll be getting as far away from you as possible." She marched toward the ship's doors, then stopped and sighed. "Who am I kidding? I suppose I'm stuck with you now if I want those fifty million kopecs, right?"

"With all this going on, simply getting your *money*—" The Doctor made the word sound as dirty as possible—"should be the least of your worries. Now look here, you can make yourself useful by helping me watch over Oldfield?"

They returned to the infirmary. "This device should aid his natural healing powers. Even Time Lords have limits, somewhere around plugging into the mains of a TARDIS," he sighed.

Yara looked down at the frail little man sleeping in the hospital bed. "I watched over him and Collette for a little while," she said. "You people are always so easy to spot."

"I dare say he was easier to spot than most. He's barely been away from our planet for any length of time. Such a bookish young fellow when I knew him. I can't imagine he had much of a flair for human customs."

Yara saw the Doctor's eyes shadowed with regret. "Well, penny for them," she prompted. "We apparently have some time, and neither of us seem like we need to hit the sack any time soon."

The Doctor looked over at her, then away. He had suddenly become awkward and distant. "Oh, I don't know." He paced up and down the infirmary's narrow corridor, then threw up his hands. "Yara, when I look at someone like Mr. Oldfield here, it just seems such a waste."

"How so?"

"Well, if you know about my people, you may have heard of a few of a few like the Master, the Rani, Morbius. Then there are the ones who stayed around—Meilyr, Narcissa, Borusa ..." He half-smiled at this last name, a fleeting memory lifting his spirits, before he resumed his train of thought. "What is it about us that is so corruptible, so rotten?"

Yara again looked at the sleeping man in front of her. "What makes you think he's rotten?"

"Oh come on, Yara. It's why we're both here, isn't it? And it's my job ... it's *always* my job to clean up after them."

"Then do your job, Doctor," Yara said simply. "But don't feel you have to apologize for what he, or anyone else, did. And please don't waste your time asking whether you're a good man or not."

“Why’s it a waste of time, Yara? Because you think I am?” There was a hint of a challenge in the question.

Yara looked at him coldly and said, “Because you need to get on with it.”

Hannah awoke to find the TARDIS empty, and realized the others must be at Collette’s house. Thinking she probably had time before the end of the world next loomed, she stopped in a charming small café in the French Quarter to pick up some pastries. As she neared the Oldfields’ house, munching on a danish, Hannah couldn’t quite believe how peaceful the place looked in the daylight; only a distant raven cawing as she climbed the hill to the front door made her consider anything amiss.

She was surprised to see Hank standing by the steps, idly kicking some stones. “Thought I should make sure everything was okay.” He gestured to the bunch of lilies in his hand. “Wife thinks I’m dropping in on a sick friend. I hope I don’t really need ‘em.”

Hannah offered him a pastry as they walked in. The Doctor nodded terse greetings to both of them amid getting his ear bitten off by Yara.

“So I’m supposed to find this thing for you but not get the dough?”

“Didn’t you see that thing last night? Listen, there are better ways of getting fifty million kopecs. If you have any shred of decency--”

“Have you met a lot of bounty hunters, Doctor?”

The Doctor and Yara exchanged glances.

“Where’s Collette, Doctor?”

“Upstairs. This whole ordeal has been a terrible strain on her, and I’m afraid it’ll only get worse. That’s why I have to get to the bottom of this, and there isn’t time to stand around arguing.” He scowled back at Yara.

“Hey,” Yara said bluntly, “the sooner I get this weapon and get out of here, the better.”

“Mr. Logan, you kept her impulse laser, didn’t you?”

Hank put down the lilies and produced the weapon from his jacket. “But I gotta warn you Doc, I wouldn’t feel right about shooting no lady.”

Yara gave him a coquettish wink. “Don’t worry. I’m no lady.” Hannah wondered what an old-fashioned man like him made of the futuristic art of flirting. Hank stoically cleared his throat and avoided her gaze—*so just the same way most men handle it*, she concluded.

As if to press home her advantage, Yara sidled up alongside him and suggested to the Doctor: “Look there’s clearly some chemistry here between Hank and me, so why doesn’t he look after me?” Yara pulled from her coat a boxy computer that showed a blinking light in the direction of the St. Louis Cemetery. “I picked up some increased energy output this morning. My guess is our charming host is powering up this weapon thing and buried it somewhere in that cemetery. Only the Doctor won’t let me out of his sight.”

The Doctor looked from Yara to Hank and back again, then nodded wearily. “Find it and wait for me, all right?”

Yara considered this for a moment. “Do you want me to shake on it, Doctor?”

“That won’t be necessary. Keep an eye on her, Hank.”

After they left, Hannah said, “Are you sure Hank can look after her? He’s a reliable guy, but—”

“The deck is slightly stacked in my favour,” the Doctor admitted. “One handy side effect of this temporal instability is that neither she nor I will be able to leave until it’s sorted. One ray of sunshine in the gloom, anyway.”

“If you say so. Maybe I should have gone with her.”

“No, I need you here with Collette. This next part could be difficult.”

Later, with Collette woken and dressed, the Doctor brought Oldfield back to the house. “I’ve been able to fix most of his physical trauma, but he hasn’t woken up,” he sighed. “As far as I can tell, this isn’t the first time he’s been doing this. Is that right?”

Collette nodded. “He usually slips away in the night, then he comes back with those bruises and slashes on his arm. Doesn’t like me to ask too much about it. I like to stay away from that machine of his anyway.”

“And the other device? You don’t know where that was kept?”

“I know he buried something in the cemetery a few months back. We never talked about that though. He got so upset – and worse – so sad about it.” She gripped his hand. “Doctor, what was he doing?”

“I wish I knew. Don’t you see Collette? If he’d just opened up to me last night we could have stopped this!”

“He wouldn’t let me. He didn’t trust you.”

“The feeling was more than mutual, I assure you.”

Before the Doctor said anything more tactless, Hannah asked, “Could it be the TARDIS? Is *it* what created that monster?”

The Doctor shook his head, staring at Oldfield’s prone form. “No, I’m positive it’s whatever is in the cemetery. I just hope we can sort this out before Yara and Hank dig it up.” He sighed, and touched his hands to the man’s head. “It’s the only thing for it.”

“Mind-meld?”

The trace of pedantry in the Doctor’s voice as he began, “That Roddenberry fellow didn’t invent telepathy, you know ...” made Hannah slightly relieved when he slipped into unconsciousness.

The Doctor swam through Oldfield’s memories. It had been a while since he had performed contact, but he knew how to cut through the bewildering tangle of temporally scrambled memories and reams of obscure data Time Lords acquire (which tangled itself more and more with each regeneration), and shot his mind straight to the first time his compatriot saw New Orleans, and Collette.

There he was, in Congo Square. It was a blazing hot Sunday in spring 1918, and couples and families strolled jauntily through the streets while energetic jazz was playing around them. His dark, faded old clothes stood out in contrast to those gaily-coloured ones worn by the humans around him, and the Doctor noted his bright-eyed enthusiasm as he took in every detail of his surroundings in. Even as passers-by impatiently brushed past him, sometimes even knocking him backwards, he continued his eager observation of every last detail. The Doctor wondered if he had ever looked like that; maybe all those centuries ago, first exploring the universe, realizing how narrow his perspective had been. Certainly by the time Barbara and young Chesterton – *or was it Chesterfield? Too long ago ...* – had blundered into his ship, he had taken to masking it all with bluster and impatience. By contrast, this man looked blatantly child-like, and it was very charming.

No doubt it had charmed Collette. She wore a billowing dress and she had locked her eyes on the man from across town. By the time she neared him, he had collided with two rude soldiers and was over-preciously smoothing their uniforms. Whether she wanted to talk to him or not, she walked past and pretended she hadn’t seen him—no doubt another parochial social custom, the Doctor noted.

He saw her, and ran after her. “Excuse me my dear lady, I seem to be lost.”

“You sure are,” she replied wryly. “I can’t remember the last time I saw a white man in Congo Square on a Sunday, unless he was wearing a police uniform.”

“Congo Square? I thought this was Louis Armstrong Park—no wait, it isn’t yet, is it?” Collette nodded sympathetically as he mumbled to himself. He turned back to her and asked, earnestly, “When you say *white*, are you saying I don’t blend in? Do you think I look ... alien?” Collette shook her head in total bafflement, and he smiled and shook his head in reply. “Never mind. I’m just ... looking to get lost.”

“Well, that makes two of us,” she sighed. “Why don’t I lead you around?” She extended an arm and he gingerly took it.

“Where are you going?”

As they circled the square, he was turned from the jazz to her delicate features. She returned his gaze with—if such a thing was possible—a coquettish steeliness. Eventually, he found some words and gabbled hastily, “I’m afraid I’m new on this planet—er, this city of yours. New Orleans?” He pronounced it the French way, and Collette giggled. “I’ve said something wrong?”

“Not at all. I can tell you aren’t from around here.”

He chuckled self-consciously and looked at his feet. The Doctor could tell it was more than awkwardness; he was suddenly reminded of being a fugitive, and thought he could conceal himself by sheer willpower.

Collette sensed his discomfort and, with a polite cough, changed the subject. “Whereabouts are you from, Mister? New England?”

He paused, and then nodded. “Yes, somewhere like that.”

“I’ve never left New Orleans.” Collette glanced at the distant clocktower and shook her head. “Forgive me, I must be on my way. It was a pleasure to make your acquaintance, Mister—?”

Not wanting to use his title, he merely mumbled, “Oh, er, you too, ma’am.” Collette nodded and went on her way. For a second the man watched her go, breathing a little hesitantly, and then he dashed after her. The pursuit—Collette gliding serenely through the square and he clumsily shuffling his stubby legs after her—was somewhat comical, but also very sweet. The Doctor watched it with a combination of pity and admiration for his friend. It was nice to think one could be so smitten that looking like a damn fool didn’t matter at all.

The Doctor was happy, despite himself, to spy on their exchange; as a recovering romantic, he couldn’t help but be fascinated and a little moved by this relationship. It was also remarkably sweet to see one of his countrymen descend from his Olympian perch and take so enthusiastically to the everyday joys of life on Earth. He worked tirelessly in Collette’s kitchen to perfect an authentic Creole jambalaya. He must have listened to every New Orleans jazz musician in town. And next to him, no matter how late the hour or disreputable the location, Collette was right there, her enjoyment doubled by seeing it anew through him.

The scene was now late summer. The blue sky masked a little autumn crispness, and some rain was speckling their path through New Orleans’ grand boulevards. They ducked into Tujague’s—the other patrons surprisingly blasé at this formally dressed white man and a woman entering their enclave—and tucked into oyster loaves. Oldfield was, if anything, even more passionate about the delicacy than the Doctor had been.

They passed the afternoon in intimate relaxation. Oldfield sampled the Ramos gin fizz and tried his hand at pool (not a pastime that the Doctor would recommend to a new visitor at this particular time period). Apparently sensing that this newcomer might be an easy mark, the old hands welcomed him—and indeed, his first few shots weren’t lined up properly. It took only a few moments observing how they lined up shots, though, and he was soon pocketing balls without even analysing the angles. The sharks grew wary, and Oldfield’s obliviousness could have easily tipped them into downright hostility. After the game, however, he guilelessly congratulated them and enthused, “Well, that was rather fun to learn. I always had a good eye for geometry. Perhaps it could be adapted for five dimensions.” He lost his train of thought when he saw Collette anxiously standing at the door, and he added, “I really must thank you for giving me the opportunity.”

His opponent, a particularly hatchet-faced regular, pounced on the remark. “So you’ve never done that before?”

“Easy there—” Red called over from the bar.

He held his hands above his head to satisfy Red that there wouldn’t be another outbreak of violence in his bar. Then he whispered to Oldfield: “I don’t know where you’re from—England or somewhere—but, war or not, we’re not going to have standards lapse.” This sinister and pompously worded threat sounded downright incongruous through his drunken drawl.

For his part, Oldfield followed the lout's gaze between him and Collette. Whatever its inference, he totally failed to pick up on it. "I'm not sure if I've offended you, old chap, but perhaps I could get you a Ramos gin fizz. Terrific drink."

In a piece of legerdemain that astonished the Doctor, Oldfield had picked the man's pocket while holding his gaze during this tense exchange, and as the ruffian was enjoying a drink bought with his own money, Collette grabbed him by his coat's frayed collar and hoisted him out of the bar.

"Damn it, I don't think you're right in the head some times. It's too dangerous taking you out into town."

"Nonsense," he replied with a touch of pomposity. "I was in total control of the situation, my love. And it was rather thrilling too in its own way."

Collette gave a throaty laugh. "Nearly getting beaten up is thrilling, is it? I can't believe a gentleman like you could get so far and have so little common sense."

He pulled her into an alley and gave her a long and passionate kiss. "I say, it's rather nice to start one of those too."

As they walked back home, Collette mused: "Everything around here—it's just some old stuff to me. Most of it is a downright damn nuisance, but even the best of it I never think much about. But to you, it's all so marvellous. How do you get so much damn *joy* out of playing a game of pool?"

"Everything around me is so joyful. Most especially you, Collette. Just being here makes me so happy, it energizes every fibre of my being."

She laughed along with him. "Must be pretty bad back home then."

All of a sudden Oldfield's joyful mask slipped away and his centuries returned to him. The Doctor recognized it. It was a bleak expression commonly found on the faces back home. It was that soul-crushing *ennui* that he knew so well, and that chilled his blood whenever he thought of that planet.

"Where *do* you come from?" she pressed.

"No place," he said.

"Well, what does that mean? No place?"

He looked around desperately, his eyes finally coming to rest on some floral-patterned china in a shop window. He pointed to the plate and tapped on the glass. "There's nothing like this back home. Your beautiful old house for instance, with those armchairs and wood panels and—"

"Faded wallpaper and drafty windows?" she suggested

"All of that, it's the most incredible world to me. And when I compare it to ... even that word, *home*. Where I come from is no place like home. What's it like? Cold, lifeless. Full of people—a kind of people, but without colour and without souls. Cities overlooking a universe that they see only as a thing to control. When the night sky is burning its brilliant orange, they're in their cloisters studying and plotting."

He cried silently. They were back at the steps of her house, and he leaned against the sagging wooden steps as though he had no energy left.

"That's all right. You don't have to go back if you don't want to."

"You've no idea, Collette. I would never go back there. Especially now."

With a slightly motherly touch, she brushed aside his tears and smiled reassuringly at him. He put his painful memories away and smiled back at her.

What was it, though, that lurked in Collette's thoughts? The Doctor could see it there in her eyes every so often, even as Oldfield put his troubles behind him and became, with each passing day, more serene.

The weather had changed again. The heat had returned, but the moisture hung in the air. The Doctor estimated from the foliage and the surroundings that it was an unusually warm day in November. Collette was sitting outside in the garden. The shell of Oldfield's TARDIS was overgrown and unkempt, its imperfect imitation of a conifer only noticeable to the trained eye. None of the house's inhabitants were looking at it: while Collette talked to a simply dressed woman ten years her elder, while Oldfield played with his characteristic glee with the woman's strong-looking eight-year-old son. *The same lad who*

was outside their house when we first visited, the Doctor considered. However, there must have been quite a change to make the carefree scamp running through the yard into the withdrawn child who ran away from them. The contrast could not be greater: while the man and the boy climbed the nearby trees and chased around with toys, the women talked quietly and sternly.

“It seemed like such a waste, having so many Americans over there fighting.” A tentative smile spread across the woman’s sharp, stern face. “Days like this, though, and it looks like we have nothing but good on the horizon. This world might be a better one going forward.”

Collette nodded. “You know, Mrs. Laurier, I’m starting to think the same thing.”

“Collette, I never thought I’d hear the day you became an optimist.”

“Life’s been pretty good to me lately.” She smiled at Oldfield. Her friend nodded, but she could clearly not share in her friend’s good feelings. The Doctor saw that Mrs. Laurier did not trust Oldfield; humans did have an unerring ability to spot outsiders no matter how much they tried to blend in, and he could see that Oldfield’s respectable façade had, in his stay in New Orleans, fooled precisely no one.

Collette caught her disapproval and shook her head.

Mrs. Laurier tried to ignore the tension and change the subject. “Well, even if we can’t agree on everything, we can surely agree that this war ending will be a good thing for the country and the world. As for me, I’m hoping Sam gets back and it will all be worth it. For the sake of little Elijah.”

“Not so little anymore, Mrs. Laurier!” Oldfield called back as he tousled the lad’s hair. In response, Elijah prodded him sharply with a branch, clearly gaining some advantage in their improvised game.

“You know something Mister?” Elijah asked him. “You don’t act much like a grown-up.”

“Where I come from you’re not allowed to have a childhood, so I’m making up for it now.” And with that, he snatched the stick from the boy’s hand and ran for the tree.

The ladies chuckled politely and returned to their conversation. “You know what it means, though, Collette.”

“What does it have to mean anything?”

“This ... well, you can’t go on like this.”

“Why not? He doesn’t care about these social rules.”

Her friend regarded Oldfield, now sweeping his grass-stained shirtsleeves. “To think that a white gentleman is so free and easy with us.”

“Why shouldn’t he be? Maybe he’s not the strange one. He doesn’t see it, doesn’t see any of it. You’ve no idea how free I feel with him, just not seeing any of these things we have to take for granted living in this country.”

“But what does he do, Collette? Where does he come from? Who *is* he?”

Collette shrugged. “Is it bad of me to say that I don’t care one whit? He just wants to spend time with me. And the time we’ve spent together is some of the best I can recall.”

“Collette, I know how things have been, but you know there’s no escaping. He’ll be back soon, and you’ll have to confront it.”

Collette’s eyes burned at her friend, and the Doctor spied the same anger she had shown him over dinner. “But you’re right,” she said with a heavy sigh. “Sooner or later this will end. But before I have to worry about *him*, I have a little oasis of contentment. Surely I can just enjoy that for the brief while I have it?”

It was now a month later. This time Collette walked him through Lafayette Cemetery. They held hands and their stroll was particularly listless, underneath it a clear desire and desperation to hold onto every rapidly vanishing moment of their happiness. By now the earlier nerves were entirely replaced by an easy and charming familiarity. They had come here a few times; Collette enjoyed the quiet, while Oldfield, like many Time Lords, enjoyed sites rich in history.

That afternoon, Collette wore a new dress, the most luxurious yet, while he had merely augmented his black clothes with a cheap straw boater. She was somewhat guiltily talking about the cost of the dress.

“How did you afford it?”

“Oh, a bit of money put away ...” The Doctor heard him mumble, “Back in 1868 ... and watch fifty years of compound interest ...” before finishing triumphantly, “It all pays off.”

“I’m a lucky lady. Here’s a gentleman who has money for every possible thing I could afford, and he never has to do any work. So he can spend all his time with me.”

“I’m rather good at time management,” he said archly. “Which makes me think, maybe it’s time to think of the future.” He was talking his head off, gabbling away about the life they could have together and how he had never met anyone like her. “You’ve no idea how alive you are. I’ve never met anyone like you. And this world of yours! When I think of the dust and the cobwebs back home. Oh, you make me feel alive too! I’ve been a walking corpse for so long and now I can live!”

Collette suddenly pulled her hand away. “This isn’t right.”

“No, no, it *is* right. Nothing in my life has ever been more right, I know that now.”

She shook her head. “I’ll give you back this dress, sir. You see ... I just got word. I’ve put it off for too long. He’ll be back any day now.”

“Who’s that then?”

“My husband.”

He nodded, knowing instantly what this meant.

“I should have said earlier, but there were times when I wished. Oh, the more time we spent together the more I wished—I’m sorry.” She ran away from him, weeping.

“Why didn’t you take her away in your TARDIS?”

“Doctor, I wish I could have. But I was afraid to go anywhere. Afraid that the more I travelled the greater the chance they would track me down, and afraid that if they found me, my work ... what I had taken away with me ... they would be after that too. You know they would.”

“So what did you do?” The Doctor was surprised to find himself afraid of the answer.

Suddenly, the memories raced forward again. The man lurked outside that old Tremé house, his dark clothes perfectly blending with the shadows as he watched Collette emerge from a hansom cab with a burly, red-faced southern man. The man the Doctor reasoned was the real Mr. Oldfield.

“No Doctor!” Oldfield called out to his mind. “You have to see more.”

“I’ve seen quite enough.” Their thoughts mingled together, and so the Doctor instantly felt a violent reaction against his distaste as his friend’s passions rose up.

“Please, let me try to make you understand why. I followed Oldfield, went back to see their marriage ...”

The Doctor felt highly uncomfortable at the double-voyeurism: watching his friend’s memories of watching the Oldfields. He had gone a few years back to 1915, and was now lurking at the back of a small but ornate neighbourhood church where a tiny gathering—starkly divided by race and staring bitterly across at each other—watched this southern man slip the ring on her finger.

“Turns up late to his own wedding,” Collette’s mother whispered.

The couple looked at each other in a grotesque distortion of married bliss: in Collette's eyes was a touch of the weariness and desperation of a woman bullied to the altar and wondering if she would get another chance at marriage, while her new husband looked back with an unsavoury possessiveness.

There followed scene after scene of unpalatable, all-too-human misery. Oldfield seemed to have treated Collette poorly from the start, but things quickly and sadly deteriorated even from there: he raged at her, hit her, drank heavily. Their better days were marked by indifference, or public shows of decorum, and the worse days were hellish. He stooped into these scenes of violence with lazy boorishness.

Collette shrunk into herself, becoming meek and silent and worse, *accepting* her treatment. And every time, watching at the windows, becoming one with the lengthening darkness, stood this Time Lord shadow. How many trips in his TARDIS had the poor fellow taken, wondered the Doctor? How long had he watched this travesty, these ongoing travesties, unfold? Long enough for that childlike innocence in Congo Square to vanish. In its place was something uglier; something more human.

An uncomfortable silence had descended throughout the Doctor and Oldfield's eerie communion, and as the minutes passed, the two women tried to find a spot of wall to look to avoid each other, or the even worse sight of her husband's drawn and pallid face.

Hannah and Collette jumped as the Doctor and Mr. Oldfield awoke, gasping like men starved of air. They locked eyes at each other.

"Now do you see?" Oldfield asked weakly. "I didn't want to tell you."

"I don't blame you." Despite his best effort, the Doctor sounded more pious than sympathetic.

"Don't you dare judge me, Doctor! You don't know the first thing about what Collette had to deal with! I made a choice, and if you blame me for that, you may as well have stayed home."

"I make choices everywhere I go," the Doctor replied calmly, his voice so quiet he seemed to be talking to himself. "Sometimes I wonder if that responsibility will drive me insane. When I think of how easy it was to stay uninvolved, never interfere..."

"Exactly, Doctor. That's what I felt too. I had to interfere, to help."

"That's why you have to bear the consequences of bad decisions. What you have done ... if you cared about Collette, you wouldn't have put her through that."

"What the hell is he talking about?" Collette asked, clinging to her husband in confusion. "What does he mean, what I dealt with?" Oldfield couldn't look at her.

The Doctor asked Hannah, "Are you familiar with a palimpsest? You might know it better if you'd taken English at school."

"As a matter of fact, I did a couple of medieval courses. Something about scraping off text and replacing it with different writing."

The Doctor nodded grimly. "'Mister Oldfield' here has hidden himself in this time using the same method."

Even by the standards of temporal weapons, what Mr. Oldfield had created was an abomination. Erasing an individual from history was already devastating and immoral, and left a kind of scar on the timelines. Those who knew the former individual would suffer from a deep sense of trauma, tormented by fragments of the life that was deleted. And sometimes, the rifts were large enough that creatures of nightmare compiled of the worse-than-dead would roam the land of their former life, tormenting those dear ones further. Oldfield's process was cruder than anything developed previously, using tachyons for its dirty work. The advantage of this crudity was that the weapon could be portable, and reliant on the energies of the TARDIS—and thus defiling those venerable machines.

Oldfield knew as soon as he tested it that *they* would be interested. It wouldn't do for a peace-loving race like the Time Lords to be without the latest devastating weapon. They would put it away in

their archives, but it would only take some power-hungry maniac of the calibre of the Master to inflict dreadful harm for his own gain.

His flight across the universe became increasingly tempered with fear that he would be discovered and this weapon might be used. Every time he went into his TARDIS he was worried its recall crystals might glow and he would be hurled back to answer for his departure, and have his dubious morality made public.

Most of all, he wasn't looking for a reason to use it—he could have happily hidden away on Earth for the rest of his lives and let its secret die in a few short millennia. When he saw the banal cruelty of that debased human, he certainly found it. An innocent and lovely woman could be saved. One worthless life erased, making room for a new and wonderful one for himself. It was a bargain.

The Doctor's last glimpse in Oldfield's memory was of an overcast day in July. A wind shook the trees of Tremé so severely that he wondered if some elemental force of nature knew the violation that was to occur.

The two Oldfields met at the bottom of his front step. The human was straightening an unruly necktie and patting down his greasy hair. The Time Lord had emerged from his TARDIS (disguised as a hedge-row), and held the weapon in his hand. A worm-like cable snaked from the hedge's doorway to a stubby, spherical outlet that sizzled and pulsed devilishly. It looked less like a weapon and more like a bulbous-headed python.

“What're you doing on my front step?” the man slurred at him.

“How's Collette?”

“What do you know about her?”

“How could you do it? How could you take someone so wonderful for granted? When I think of the life I could have here ...”

This sad speech was clearly more to himself than to the man, because he furrowed his brow and growled, “She's *my* wife...”

The Doctor thought he might have seen some wavering in the Time Lord's face, but only for the briefest of moments. He drew up to his full height, his features suddenly set in a cold and vengeful grimace. “Not any longer.” He lifted the sphere up to the man's face. The street began to shudder, and the Doctor could see it was this moment that time had gone out of sync. Each moment shuttled back and forth in a hallucinatory strobe effect.

“What are you *doing*?” the man shrieked, his hands against his pulsing head, his mind already straining to burst under the influence.

“I'm doing it for Collette! I love her!” he replied, a tear in his eye. The man reached out with a fist. As he swung it out, the flesh on the hand withered away to bone. Soon, a skeleton in the human Oldfield's shabby clothes staggered towards the Time Lord, his face gripped with the most existential agony the Doctor had ever seen. This was the pain of feeling every second of one's entire life unravel. This nightmarish half-creature of mismatched ages would become the apparition that would haunt Collette no doubt continuously. Then—perhaps worse—the skeleton regressed in age, and ended up as floating particles of dust.

Oldfield observed this gruesome spectacle, his lip quivering, but then he stepped forward to where the human stood. As the dust scattered in the blazing light of the beam, time reset itself. The winds were gone and the scene was calm. The Time Lord had carved out a hole for himself and sat in the place of this man's wrenched soul.

If any angst over his actions was preoccupying Oldfield, he didn't show it. His work done, he hopped up the stairs two at a time and gave the front door a jaunty knock. Collette opened it, and the Doctor couldn't help but be moved at the passion and the gratitude in his eyes as Oldfield flung his arms around her.

“It’s you, isn’t it? You saved me from—” she asked. Her eyes flickered with recognition, clearly negotiating the old and new timelines simultaneously.

“I didn’t save you from anything anymore.”

As her memories rearranged themselves, Collette’s brow creased in confusion for a second, but then she appeared to forget and repeated flatly: “It’s just you ... it’s always been you ...”

“Yes, it’s me. I love you Collette, and I want to spend every second of my life with you.” He held her in his arms, savouring the moment as he kissed her. “Now my dear,” Mr. Oldfield said formally, taking her arm in his, “what do you say we go somewhere and celebrate?”

“Can you honestly say it wasn’t worth it?” Oldfield concluded. “You saw what the real Oldfield was like. Collette didn’t deserve that, and I have given her a better life in the last few months than that tyrant did in his three years.”

“There were a dozen other ways you could have helped Collette. You did this for your own sake as much as hers—so you could get revenge on the human Oldfield, and so our friends back home wouldn’t find you.”

“Partly, I admit.”

“Listen, it just won’t work. The temporal instabilities from your weapon will get worse and worse. That phantom of the real Oldfield won’t go away. And ultimately, you know full well that *they’ll* come and take it away, and take *you* away for what you’ve done.”

Oldfield recoiled at what the Doctor said, and Hannah could tell every word of it was true. Both men looked resigned; the Doctor with guilt, Oldfield with hopelessness. He seemed genuinely comforted, though, when Collette rubbed her hand on his shoulder. “I appreciate what you did.”

“That’s exactly the problem,” Oldfield responded. “You can’t. Your distorted memories—I thought they’d go away eventually. But you may be stuck with them permanently, not to mention that ... ghost of the real Oldfield haunting us.”

“And if you leave in your TARDIS—”

“They’ll find me.” He rounded on the Doctor as though it was his fault. “Don’t you see Doctor? I know was wrong, but I’ve paid for my decision.” He straightened himself and gripped Collette’s hand proudly. “And I’d do it all again if I had the chance.”

The Time Lords stared at each other. Hannah couldn’t agree with the Doctor’s harshness, but at the same time it was hard to see any way out. The beep of Yara’s communicator sounded harshly, and the Doctor jolted forward as she said, “I think we’ve found the device and there’s some kind of timer on it. Counting down ...”

“Please tell me it’s just his microwave?” Hannah joked weakly. Oldfield looked ahead, perversely stubborn in his evasiveness.

“What have you done?” the Doctor hissed, but didn’t wait for a reply. Hannah put down her pastry and bolted after him.

With the two of them gone, Oldfield said, almost to himself: “I’m a little disappointed in him. After all, we’re supposed to have the same mind.”

Collette couldn’t figure out why his sudden relaxation worried her so much.

One thing Hannah could never get used to with the Doctor’s way of life was the running. Through Tremé and the French Quarter, and down past the TARDIS into St. Louis No. 3, she thought nostalgically for that New Orleans trip she had anticipated where the Doctor just ate lots of oyster loaves, maybe had some Tarot cards read, and listened to some jazz. These crises that he seemed to attract made it all just prettier-than-usual scenery to race past.

As he went, he barked commands to Yara about the design and function of the device. Hannah saw he was concerned about her pinching this weapon after all, but that paled into insignificance next to his worries about Oldfield. “You know where you are with bounty hunters. They *want* to kill you and make heaps of cash. It’s the backstabbing deviousness of my lot that knocks me back every time.”

Hannah sighed in relief to see Hank and Yara, both pacing around a small spherical device, with trailing wires and a fleshy, scaled texture.

“Some kind of organic elements in there?” Hannah asked.

Yara nodded. “Sure as hell makes it a lot creepier to handle than your average computer.”

“As you well know Yara, this is no mere computer—it’s a weapon as well.”

“Don’t remind me Doctor. Just get on with whatever the hell you think you can do.”

The Doctor rolled up his jacket sleeves and sunk his hands into its rubbery skin. Soon thin strands of glowing wires spilled from its scaly flesh like entrails.

“What could happen when this reaches zero?” Hannah asked, seeing Yara and Hank thinking the same question.

“He must have enabled it to try to get rid of the creature,” the Doctor muttered to himself, before looking up at them. “Massive temporal instabilities. A release of chaotic energy that would unravel causality and make the worst weapon of your planet seem like a ... pop gun.”

“You know, that countdown’s awful low ...” Hank said, his voice placid given the circumstances. The Doctor pondered his comment for an unusually long time, and sat back from his work. Everyone looked down at him expectantly, and Hank finally added, “Did I say something wrong?”

“You saw the countdown? Looking like this? When you got here?”

Hank and Yara both nodded slowly, and then the bounty hunter added, as if talking to a dim-witted child, “So, uh, Doc? Do you want to carry on, you know, stopping it from unravelling causality and all the rest?”

“But why put a countdown on it? And look at it—it’s low-tech, dollar-store work too.” He bashed the top of the sphere with his fist like a reception-desk bell, and the countdown reset to zero. Nothing else happened.

“Is that—?” Hannah began.

“An alarm clock.” Embarrassed, the Doctor prised the lid of the device below the clock into two hemi-spheres, and nodded to himself. “It’s empty. He’s taken the core.” A look of horrified realization shrouded his face and he sprang to his feet and sprinted back the way he came.

Hank and Yara followed, and Hannah pulled up the rear, the ache in her legs still raw from the dash there.

The Doctor’s usual reserve made his frenzy as he ran back into the Oldfields’ house all the more pronounced. It was obvious from a distance that his dire predictions were indeed occurring. The strobing, vibrating time-jumps returned, which made even getting through the front door take a strange and deep concentration. The closer they got, the more it overcame Hannah, Hank, and Yara, who in turn froze in paralysis from the bitter winds of time rushing over them. Only the Doctor weathered the storm and marched into its eye.

In the front room, he saw Collette looking on in horror. In the centre stood Oldfield, wreathed in the ghostly green vapours of that apparition. All around there was a wailing sound, a single agonizing note echoing. It was painful to the Doctor’s ears, and he couldn’t imagine how Collette was enduring it.

Though all this mayhem, Oldfield was calm and still. His face ultimately bathed in a luminous kaleidoscope, and vanished. It was replaced by face after face in quick succession.

“It’s the only thing powerful enough!” screamed the Doctor by way of explanation. “He’s burning through all his remaining regenerations!” He stepped nearer.

“Stay back, Doctor!” Oldfield’s voice called out. The kaleidoscope formed a solid boundary of light, and the Doctor could only retreat from it and nod a sad acknowledgement. Oldfield then turned to Collette, slowly enough to savour the finality. “Please, don’t look at me.”

“I don’t want to miss a single second of you,” she insisted, reaching out to touch him, but like the Doctor, she was physically pushed back by the energies ravaging her husband. “What will I do without you?”

“Remember ... I’d do it all again for you ... and it seems I am...”

A blazing light finally enveloped the pallid features, as death overcame him. The faces that followed became increasingly stunted, the last ‘incarnation’ being little more than a crude skull with blackened, hollow sockets for eyes. Along with this process, Oldfield’s initial calm was replaced by expressions of exponentially amplifying pain. Even the Doctor could not imagine how it was to live and die so often in such a short space of time, to pay for one’s love not merely once, but half a dozen times.

As calm returned to the room, only a charred husk remained in Oldfield’s clothes. It looked as though it had been in that spot for centuries. After a moment, it too dissipated, its very cells breaking down into nothing. The box he held clattered to the floor, as harmless and useless as the joke-shop countdown in the cemetery.

The Doctor pulled them all from the house, leaving Collette by the ashes of her husband. She wept silently, and just as he left, he saw her lose consciousness.

The Doctor did something more unnerving than allow his grief to overtake him. He buried it beneath a surfeit of over-friendliness. He was gabbling away about other things to do in New Orleans, dropping hints to Hank to watch out for Louis Armstrong when he starts up, telling Yara there were many careers she could do rather than all that nasty business of bounty hunting. His goodbyes to them both were hollow jollity personified—he even suppressed his disapproval to suggest that Yara drop by Federal Asteroid G-65 to make up for her lost bounty. “It may not be fifty million kopecs, but there should be something to avoid making this a complete bust. And as for you Mr. Logan—Hank—look out for Louis Armstrong.”

“Doctor,” began Yara, reaching out to stop him.

“Bye!” he cried, and he leapt through the TARDIS door as though pulling a ripcord, never even making eye contact.

Hannah lingered longer, and nodded a farewell to both of them. “Look after that old Limey,” Hank said.

They walked away, Yara hoping to make a speedy getaway from all this overly emotional business as soon as possible. She and Hank didn’t stay to see the TARDIS vanish away into the vortex.

“Why don’t you keep the impulse laser?” Yara suggested.

“Seriously?” Hank felt a little honoured.

“Well, as long as you promise not to use it.”

“No problem there. I had enough of guns by the end of the war, never mind all this...” He trailed off, a little uncertain what to make of it all. “You think they’ll be okay? They’ll be off to some other strange world, just like you?”

“Another time, another place,” Yara nodded. “You’ve done very well Hank, taking all this in your stride.”

“Well, when you live in New Orleans, you can’t help but see the wild side. Listen, uh, feel free to drop by next time you’re in town,” he called back to her prosaically.

“It’s a date!” she called back, and derived particular satisfaction from making the poor chap blush one last time.

When Hank arrived home that afternoon, his wife’s diatribe was interrupted by the long and slow hug he gave her.

Meanwhile, in the TARDIS, the Doctor whirled around the controls, pulling levers and glancing from screen to screen like a frustrated slots player. Once there was no conceivable button left to press, he turned his attention to Mortimer, who had padded into the control room, and rubbed his back against the Time Lord's trousers—either picking up on the Doctor's need for some comfort, or else merely enjoying the texture of the corduroy whales against his fur.

Hannah interrupted his absent-minded stroking of the cat's back by bluntly asking, "Doctor, what will happen to Collette?"

"Well ..." he blustered, "it's ... as for the, uh, two Oldfields, there may well be two ghosts prowling around Tremé. No end of good for the tourist trade, they love a good ghoul in that city. As for Collette ... I mean, to be fair, I've never seen this kind of weapon before. I hopefully never will again ..." He pushed away from the console, sank back on his feet, and slumped onto the floor. Mortimer circled him once more and then slunk away, having spent his minimal reserve of feline empathy.

Hannah looked down at him for a minute; at that moment he seemed as helpless and uncertain as any human she'd ever met. She knelt next to him and patted his hand. She could feel him recoil innately at even that minimal contact, but held on anyway. "Doctor, you know it wasn't your fault. You shouldn't always feel like it's your job to save the day. You did everything you could, but even you couldn't have stopped him."

"He was a good man, Miss Redfoot. When I think of the people I've seen go bad, and go unpunished for the most horrific crimes. All Oldfield wanted to do was live a quiet life. He was just trying to do the right thing, to make the right choice in a universe that didn't care." He heaved out a mighty sigh. "As for Collette ... it was just as well we left when we did. She'll have no memory of us, the mere sight might push her over the edge." He quipped, weakly, "I sometimes have that effect on people."

"But you think, you know, that she'll stay on the right side of the edge?" Hannah asked uncertainly.

"Well, her memory and the timelines will be twice tampered ... I don't know what kind of impact that would have on the human mind. She has a strong mind, accepting his world and all those horrors the way she did. Against that, she had her share of demons even before ... part of me hopes some aspect of him might survive, might pull her through." Hannah could tell, for all his hopes, he didn't believe for a minute that would happen.

They sat together, not speaking, for a long time. The TARDIS ground its way on through the time/space vortex, far away from New Orleans.

Collette Oldfield wept. And suddenly all she could remember was weeping, and somehow the forgetting made her even sadder. And then she wept even more. She couldn't remember how long she lay there on the floor of her house, but it was quite a while later that she heard a soft tapping against the window. She looked up and saw Elijah. He and his mother had been such good friends, until all this had happened (all what exactly she could not recall). Yet here he was, bright-eyed as ever, gesturing to the hanging door. She nodded, and he ran in. He hugged her, and it felt like the first time in years she had any human contact.

Even though she was sure there was someone.

No. There was no one. A little flicker of a shadow stirred in her memory, but almost as soon it was gone.

"I'm sorry you're so sad," he said. "And I'm sorry I haven't spent more time with you."

Collette wanted to get up and straighten herself out in front of the boy, but she couldn't summon the energy. She remained slumped on the floor, her arms draped around Elijah for support. "Thank you for being here now, Elijah."

"I know you're upset, but here's something I noticed. I think for some reason it feels a little better being in your house. The air feels a little clearer. There was a little while there when I hated walking past

it. But now, it feels like—” He broke off as he tried to put his thoughts into words. “Even though things have been bad, maybe they’ll be better tomorrow. And my mom and I will be right here with you.”

Collette nodded through her tears, and hoped Elijah would be right.

About The Author

Hamish Crawford is the author of *The Best and Wisest Man* (2015, MX Publishing), charting the Sherlock Holmes stories from the perspective of Mary Morstan, and the short story collection *A Madhouse, Only With More Elegant Jackets* (2012). He has also contributed stories to the anthologies *The Temporal Logbook* and *Grave Warnings* (both for Pencil Tip Publishing), scripted the short **film** *Penny For Your Thoughts* (2016) and co-scripted the short film *Sleep* (2015). In January 2017 he taught a three-part Science Fiction course at the Calgary School of Informal Education.



The Doctor takes Hannah to 1919 New Orleans, and not just to enjoy an oyster loaf. He is checking up on 'Mr. Oldfield', a retired Time Lord living in married seclusion in Tremé. Oldfield is a picture of carefree bonhomie, but his wife Collette's barely concealed dread betrays that all is not as it seems.

The locals fear that the Oldfields' house is haunted—and Hannah soon comes to believe it when a zombie-like travesty, seemingly incarnated from Collette's nightmares, pursues them in the night. The Doctor, meanwhile, is dogged by a mysterious woman from another time, who has heard rumours of a devastating weapon hidden in this time period. These occurrences are all somehow connected to the seemingly benign Oldfield.

To uncover the truth, the Doctor must explore Oldfield's memories, which expose the terrible price he paid for his present happiness—and the impossibility of escaping his past.

This is another story 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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