

HERE BE DRAGONS

by Deborah Latham

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Chapter 1

The Coming of the Firedrake

The sky was much darker than it should have been, Steve Miller thought as he let himself out of his front door, his dog Molly bouncing eagerly at his heels, ready for her walk. Admittedly evening was legitimately setting about the business of becoming night at this hour, but the low ceiling of dull grey cloud really wasn't going to help visibility, even for a dark-adapted eye. Still, he had a precautionary torch in his coat pocket, and he and Molly had walked to and through the fields and woods near his cottage so many times they could probably do it blindfold by now, in any case. Which, if it got much darker, could definitely come in useful.

He liked living in the Wiltshire countryside, here, not so far from Salisbury Plain. When he'd been made redundant from the advertising agency in Southampton he'd decided to up sticks and put in an offer for the small, rather derelict and certainly very isolated cottage that he'd come across once on a day out with his girlfriend. Sheila had pitched in and helped him to do it up, and now he ran his own design business online from it while the pair of them saved up for their wedding. They'd live in the cottage together, where they could both enjoy the isolation, the countryside, the wildlife, and all the rest of it. Steve smiled, imagining the future.

Suddenly Molly whimpered. Which wasn't like her. She stopped dead, so Steve did, too. He couldn't see her very well in the fading light, but she was cocking her head alertly as if listening to something that he couldn't hear.

"What's the matter, girl? What's up?" he asked her, but she only whimpered again.

Then Steve heard it, too, as it reached his aural range. A shrill whine almost like a passing bullet, but growing in volume. And it was coming from somewhere above. From the sky.

He looked up, just at the very instant when the red streak came tearing through the clouds, heading eastward and downward. The arc of its passage seemed to burn into his eyeballs as it vanished behind the silhouetted trees of Castle Wood. Strangely, he had the impression that its speed had abruptly slowed just before it entered the tree line.

He must have just seen a meteorite land, he realized. Wow! How incredible was that? Bit strange about that diminution of speed, though. Almost as if there was something controlling it. But that couldn't be, of course – not with a meteorite. It must have been some sort of weird optical illusion – the angle, or the light, or something... Although, he realized, he hadn't felt any impact vibration. Being in such close proximity, how could he not have? That was more than a bit strange – in fact, for something of that apparent size he'd have thought it was impossible. This would definitely bear investigating.

He started to hurry forward, only to realize Molly wasn't following him.

"Come on, Molly!" he ordered, but she didn't move to obey. Muttering in frustration, he got out her lead and attached it to her collar before dragging the reluctant animal in his wake. She was still whimpering, but he ignored it.

If he could find out where the thing had landed, he could use his phone to take the very first pictures. Then he could come back tomorrow, in the light, and take more. That'd be a scoop! And of course it was crucial to make sure that it hadn't started a fire of any kind. Castle Wood dated back to early medieval times, if not earlier even than that; it'd be criminal negligence to let it burn, if it was in his power to prevent it.

He hurried through the increasing darkness, traversing footpaths, fences, gates and fields as quickly as the necessity to pull the recalcitrant dog in his wake allowed, until he reached the outskirts of the wood.

He peered at its dark bulk, black trunks and branches and leaves rising out of the mass of undergrowth toward the cloud-laden night sky. Was that a faint orange glow, over there, to the left? Better check it out. He fished the torch out of his pocket and switched it on.

He made to step forward, but Molly whined even more loudly, and stubbornly planted all four paws. Steve swore at her, and exerted his greater strength to force her to follow.

"Damn it, Molly, stop being stupid and come *along!*" he spat in frustration. "I've got to find out if the wood's on fire! Come *on!*"

Dragging the distressed animal behind him, he strode into the wood, cursing each time he stumbled over unseen obstacles underfoot. He was getting nearer to the source of the glow, but he couldn't smell any smoke or hear any flames. In fact, he realized, he couldn't hear anything at all, other than his own movement and Molly's whimpers. All around him, Castle Wood was totally silent; not a single sound, either of animal, bird, or anything else. There was something not quite natural about that, he registered dimly, but put it aside for the moment. Time to think about that when he'd found out whether the glow meant a fire, or not. And he was getting closer and closer to the spot. He must be almost on top of the site of the old castle by now...

He stumbled into the tiny clearing before he realized it was even there. His brain momentarily registered the fact that trees and bushes had been flattened and scorched, but, despite the pulsing orange glow emanating from the centre of the clearing, were not on fire.

But there was fire there. And it was blasting straight at him, enveloping him in flame. The hand holding Molly's lead spasmed in agony and let the lead drop; the dog fled, howling.

Steve Miller just had time to wish he'd trusted Molly's instincts after all. Before he died.



Chapter 2

Reunion

It was the middle of an unseasonably warm April afternoon in the south west of England. And specifically in the terraced street in Taunton in which Finn Thornton lived. The rows of houses quietly absorbed the spring sunshine; save for a lone cat padding imperiously along the pavement, no-one was stirring.

With one exception.

A man came striding along the street, scanning the house numbers as he came. He had dark hair and blue eyes and various other factors that combined to give him movie-star good looks, though there was nobody around to appreciate it at the moment. He wore a shirt over a T-shirt, and over both a blue-grey Second World War style RAF greatcoat. A rucksack was slung over his left shoulder.

When he came to Finn's house, he noted the number, and glanced quickly up and down the street without breaking his stride. Then he proceeded on to the end of the terrace, where a small earth trackway turned sharply to give access to the sheds, garages and back entrances belonging to the houses.

Once he had again located Finn's house, he made his way through the small but tidy garden to the back door. He looked around once more, craning his neck to see over the fences in each direction, but there was still no-one in sight. He reached into his coat pocket and pulled out a leather wallet containing an impressive collection of lock picks. Some of which looked as if they had never been intended to deal with any Earth-designed lock.

Seconds later, he was inside the house.

"Hey, Finn! Finn Thornton! You home?" he called softly, but he could already tell from the feel of the place there was no-one there at the moment. He unslung the rucksack, dropping it casually onto the hall floor, and proceeded to make sure with a quick tour of the house, noting with approval the clean and orderly condition of each room. No more than he'd expected of Finn, of course, but still good to see. The same kind of order Ianto would have kept.

The one thing that particularly caught his attention was a framed pencil sketch on her bedside cabinet. He picked it up and examined it closely.

She must have drawn it herself, from memory, and used some artistic licence, too, because she'd never seen him and the Doctor standing side by side, arms round each other's shoulders, as if they were smiling at a camera. But she was good, he thought – very good. She'd got both of them exactly to the life. Very flattering! And she kept it on her bedside cabinet...

He grinned. He'd have to tease her about that, when he saw her.

Whenever that turned out to be. He put the sketch back and went downstairs, turning into the living room. He eyed the sofa, then took his greatcoat off and hung it on the top corner of the door with one sleeve dangling down each side, rendering it immediately visible to anyone in the hallway. He stepped back and studied it for a moment, absently adjusting the straps of his braces with a gesture he was not aware of making. Then he stretched out on the sofa, plumping up a couple of cushions to act as pillows, making sure he was facing the doorway. And that his revolver was free in its holster.

Jack Harkness closed his eyes, relaxed, and settled down to wait.

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About an hour later, he snapped back to alertness at the sound of the front door opening and then closing again. He heard a sharply indrawn breath, followed a few seconds of complete silence. Smiling, he partially closed his eyes again, putting his hand casually on the holster of his revolver.

Through his almost closed eyelashes, he saw a wary eye peering through the tiny gap between the back edge of the door and its frame. After a few more moments came the sound of a soft, rather cautious knocking on the door itself.

Jack opened his eyes.

Finn appeared just inside the door, her left hand resting on its edge, her right hand out of sight behind it where she'd been using it to do the knocking. She regarded him with a quizzical expression; her eyes flicked over his hand ready on the holster.

"Now, that's exactly why I thought it might be safer to wake you up from over here," she remarked drily.

Jack rolled off the sofa, and stood up.

"Wasn't asleep. But sound reasoning nevertheless, Miss Thornton," he complimented her.

"*That*" – she took a step away from the door, and indicated his greatcoat with a jerk of her thumb – "gave me quite a fright, thank you! Until I realized who it belonged to... Just out of interest, how did you get in?"

"Back door," said Jack, pulling the wallet of lock picks out of his pocket and displaying its contents in her direction. She regarded them without particular surprise.

"Why is it that none of the men in my life use the front door, like other people?" she demanded, slightly tragically.

"Guess the men in *your* life aren't like other people," said Jack.

"Fair point," she conceded.

Then he couldn't wait another moment, and strode forward and seized her in a huge hug, lifting her momentarily off the floor before setting her back down and holding her at arm's length, hands on both shoulders, to inspect her.

"*Damn*, it's good to see you!" he exclaimed enthusiastically. "How the *hell*'ve you been?"

"Good," said Finn, smiling back at him. Then her expression became more sombre. "With one notable exception."

Jack sobered, too.

"Did he come and see you before he went?" he asked quietly. "Did me."

She nodded, and sighed.

"Yes, he did. And then of course I *felt* it when he went. When he changed. In here." She double-tapped her forehead. "That was – hard..." She let out a long breath. "But he's still here. In my head. The way he was. And he surfaces from time to time. Mostly when I'm least expecting it."

"That's him all over," Jack agreed. A short silence fell, brimming with memories.

Then Finn took his hands from her shoulders but kept hold of them, and looked at him intently.

"What about *you*? And *don't*," she added sternly, "give me any rubbish about 'I'm okay' if you're not. Friends don't do that. Not real ones."

Jack thought about his answer before delivering it.

"Guess I'm getting there. Some things you never get over. But I'm pretty well into the 'moving on' stage. Enough to come back to Earth, anyway. And see you."

"No-one else?" Finn asked, carefully.

"Not yet. Some day soon. This is as close as I've come so far."

“Well, one step at a time,” she said, with an empathetic smile.

Again they shared a short silence, but a much more comfortable one this time.

“So,” she suddenly spoke again, in a businesslike tone, releasing his hands. “When and where did you last eat?”

“Can’t remember,” he admitted.

“Okay. Well, the next time’s going to be in about half an hour,” she informed him. “At my kitchen table.”

“Yes, ma’am!” said Jack, drawing himself to attention and giving her a smart salute. And a wide smile.

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“That was good!” he said appreciatively, close to an hour later, pushing his empty plate away from him. Finn smiled and stacked it on top of her own, then carried it over to the sink.

“Coffee?” she offered. “Only instant, I’m afraid.”

“Yeah, thanks,” said Jack, thinking about all the kinds of coffee Ianto had used to produce at the Hub. *Over, now*, he told himself. *Moving on.*

“Okay,” said Finn. “Go on in to the living room. I’ll bring it in when it’s ready.”

She regarded him thoughtfully as he left the kitchen. While the meal had been cooked and eaten, he’d been regaling her with tales of his exploits on various planets since they’d last seen each other. There had definitely been one or two awkward pauses in the conversation; and each time they’d related to his feelings about being back on Earth. She’d immediately navigated past them, for his sake, but they’d been there, nevertheless. And she’d found them quite revealing.

When she took the coffee into the living room she found him examining her CD collection.

“You’ve got pretty middle-aged tastes for someone your age,” he observed, as she handed his mug to him.

“Matt Monroe? Herb Alpert...?”

“Hey! I’ll have you know that I happen to consider *The Work Song* one of the best tracks ever recorded on this planet, Captain Harkness!” she chided him. “And Matt Monroe – a voice like nobody else’s, and could that man *enunciate!* Still – only child, spent most of my formative years with people one or two generations older than me,” she explained. “With the net result that my musical tastes were shaped rather differently from my peers. Hey, do you know something?” she digressed, with an ear-to-ear grin. “The Doctor told me I’m the only person who was positively *pleased* to be invited to a Barry Manilow concert with him!”

Jack laughed long and loud, and offered her a high five, which she accepted with relish.

“Still, I’m happy with the outcome, personally,” she went on. “So what if my taste ended up distinctly retro? Most of my generation are barely aware of those artists. Thanks to my family, I am. Which makes me one lucky girl! Anyway, if I was going to help keep up the British reputation for eccentricity, I needed to get started young.”

“Well on your way, from what I can see,” said Jack. “And I’ll admit – always had kind of a soft spot for *This Guy’s In Love With You...*”

“I’ll bet,” said Finn drily. Then she smiled suddenly, and softly sang, “*Say you’re in love, in love with this guy, if not I’ll just die...*” She grinned. “Could’ve been written for you!”

Jack grinned back at her, took a mouthful of coffee and parked himself on the sofa. Finn took her own seat and relaxed back into it.

“Now! All the talk’s been about me, so far,” said Jack. “As is only right and proper, of course...!” Then he dropped the teasing tone. “How about you? How’ve you been, since...?” He didn’t finish the sentence, but then, he didn’t need to. Her shoulders drooped slightly, and her eyes were heartbreakingly sad.

“Missing him like crazy,” she said. “I know it only lasted for a few months. Not even that long, actually. Just a few days snatched here and there out of those months, if you total them up. But most of it was so wonderful. Like what we did on Kvitverden. Then again” – her shoulders lifted momentarily – “some of it wasn’t so wonderful. Some things happened I could definitely have done without. But even so... Literally life-changing. And now he’s someone else,” she said sadly. “*Somewhere* else. And I probably won’t ever see him again. He *looks* back – but he doesn’t *come* back.”

Jack nodded. He remembered his own words to the Doctor: “*That kid’s gold dust. Look after her.*”

“I told him to take care of you,” he said sternly. “So did he? ’Cos if he didn’t, I don’t care where he is – I’m gonna look him up, and whatever he looks like now, it’s gonna include a broken nose.”

“Gosh, you say the *sweetest* things!” Finn told him, grinning. Then, more seriously, “Don’t worry. He did. Inasmuch as he was able to. You know him,” she said with a resigned shrug. “For all he spends so much time with humans, he doesn’t always get it, does he? But he did do what he could, I promise you. And it was strange...” She broke off, and stared at Jack without really seeing him, frowning slightly.

“What?” he prompted.

Her eyes came back into focus.

“Just before he – went. He said something that came over as – well, I don’t exactly know what the right word is. Significant...? Prophetic...? I don’t know... But he said, *‘I’m still looking after you’*. Meaning, even after he’d gone. But I haven’t seen him since. So I don’t know what he meant. He obviously meant *something*. I just don’t know what.”

She fell silent, her eyes unfocused as she relived memories. Then she came back to the present and fixed him with a peculiarly intent look.

“However – back to the here and now... What else is this about, besides coming to see me?” she asked pointedly. And when he raised his eyebrows with an air of innocent surprise, “Oh, come on, Jack – never mind the big blue eyes! What is it that’s lurking under the ‘Any Other Business’ heading on your agenda?”

“Hey!” said Jack, slightly indignant. “What makes you think I’ve got any kind of an agenda? Couldn’t I just wanna come and visit with you?”

“Oh, I don’t doubt that,” Finn assured him. “For which, many thanks – I’m flattered. But it’s clear as day you’re finding it very hard to be here. On Earth, I mean. Some of the things you said over dinner. Didn’t sound to me as if you were quite ready to come. So something’s forced your hand. And instead of going – well, elsewhere – you’ve come to me. So what is it I can do for you that nobody else can? Something I’ve got in here?” She double-tapped her forehead. “Something the Doctor knew that you’re hoping I’ve got access to?”

No dodging it – she’d sussed him on this one, fair and square.

“Okay, Miss Genius, you got me,” he conceded. “I’ll go quietly!”

Finn shook her head with a wistful expression on her face.

“I’m not a genius, Jack. I simply hung out with one, for a while,” she said regretfully. “Having access to his memories doesn’t make *me* a genius. And it’s too inconsistent. Sometimes I get stuff coming through, sometimes I don’t. If I *was* a genius, I’d be able to make the connections in a millisecond. That’s what geniuses do. What the Doctor did. Connect, at speed. I can’t do that. As it is, I’ve been plodding my way towards this particular conclusion ever since I walked in and found you appropriating my sofa. But I got there in the end.”

Jack opened his mouth, then closed it again. Finn looked at his slightly pained expression and smiled.

“Look, I don’t mind,” she assured him. “I really don’t! Both reasons’re equally valid! The second doesn’t devalue the first as far as I’m concerned, I promise you. Even if in terms of priority they *were* the other way round! So, how can I help?”

He shook his head, and held his hands up in mock surrender. Then he leaned forward, with an air of getting down to business.

“Okay. Bottom line. Need to know if any of the Doctor’s memories you’ve got are to do with a character called Ormr of Bahramun.”

“Bahramun?” She made the word into an enquiry.

“Oh-h-h, the world of Bahramun is a weird and wonderful place,” declared Jack, with feeling. “Ask anyone! A long way off of Earth, in more ways than one. But unfortunately for everyone concerned, it produced Ormr. And I need to know if the Doctor knew anything about him.”

She closed her eyes, and frowned as she chanted under her breath, “Ormr of Bahramun. Ormr of Bahramun. Ormr of –”

She broke off, and the crease between her eyebrows became more marked.

“There’s – something,” she said uncertainly, the wrinkles at the corners of her eyes deepening as she closed them even tighter. “But it’s not coming through clearly...”

“Whatta you got?” Jack demanded.

“Vague picture. Very vague. Some kind of creature. Like a – like a...” She hesitated, then went on, slowly.

“A dragon? No... Wings, tail, but only two legs... A wyvern!” She opened her eyes, looking rather startled. “A *wyvern*?”

“A Wyvern,” Jack agreed. “You spotted the difference pretty quick,” he added, digressing momentarily.

She gave him an old-fashioned look.

“Jack, I live in *Somerset*,” she said with emphasis. “If I had a ten pound note for every time I’ve had to point out that the heraldic symbol of the county is a dragon and *not* a wyvern – *or* a gryphon! – I’d be a considerably richer woman than I am now!” She smiled wryly, then went back to the point in hand. “So you’re telling me there really are such things as Wyverns?”

“Bahramun’s their home world, but they’ve got around, over time. Obviously made it to Earth at some point, or they wouldn’t figure in the mythology. Except if you look hard enough, there’s generally something real, back of a legend. And, yeah – they breathe fire. High percentage of tungsten in their scales, so – skin pretty well impenetrable by most things. And a social coefficient of zilch in this particular instance. Wyverns aren’t exactly noted for their relationship skills, but Ormr’s *very* democratic – hates *everyone*. Got an extremely antisocial disposition for every other species he comes across – including his own. So the Doctor knew him?”

“Suppose he must have done – I mean, the phrase triggered *something* – but it’s really fuzzy,” Finn said apologetically. “Probably not much help, after all...”

“Maybe not right now,” said Jack. “But stay put. Got something that might help.” He leapt to his feet and vanished into the hall, returning seconds later with his rucksack. Out of it he produced an unfamiliar device which he spread out on the coffee table. Its constituent parts seemed to be a small black cube, connected in one direction to a separate flat palm-sized screen with a few control buttons, and in the other to a wire leading to an adjustable silver metal circlet just about the right size to fit around a human skull.

“What does that do?” Finn enquired cautiously.

“Clever things with the hippocampus and the visual cortex of the brain,” said Jack casually. “Takes memories and shows them on the screen. With audio, sometimes. Digs into the subconscious and pulls out related memories. I – uh – borrowed it from a friend...” The way he said it made Finn wonder whether the friend in question knew the ‘loan’ had ever taken place, but she didn’t ask. “So anything you’ve got in there from the Doctor about Ormr, I can see and record into here.”

“Let me get this straight... You want *me* to wire myself up to a strange machine that’ll give *you* the run of my brain,” she said, her face expressionless.

“Imagine the possibilities,” he grinned.

“What d’you think’s worrying me?” she demanded. Then, dropping the levity, “Still – if it’ll help... And if you’re sure you know what you’re doing!” she added sternly.

“Hey, trust me – I’m *not* a Doctor,” Jack said, encouragingly.

“I must be out of my mind,” she said resignedly, shaking her head.

“Provided you’ve still got the Doctor’s in there, *you* can be where you like,” he told her, magnanimously.

“Thanks,” she said drily. “And you didn’t say... Why exactly do you need to know about this Ormr character?”

“Because I’ve got to stop him destroying the Earth,” said Jack flatly.

There was a short pause, which she broke by observing with commendable calm, “Bit of a conversation-stopper, that one.” She met his eyes. “Okay, Jack. Wire me up. Let’s hope I’ve got what you need.”

Chapter 3

The Importance of Memories

“There, now,” said Jack, removing the metal circlet from Finn’s head. “Wasn’t so bad, was it?” She nodded slightly, admitting it.

“But did you get anything useful?” she demanded, rubbing one temple with her fingertips.

“Be better if I could play it back on a bigger screen. Where’s your computer?”

“As if you wouldn’t’ve cased the joint when you got in!” she accused him.

“Yeah, yeah,” Jack agreed. “But thought I’d be polite and ask *you* to do the login.”

He followed her into the small room at the back of the house that evidently performed the dual function of computer room and library, and waited while she fired up the PC. Then he got busy with leads and keyboard, Finn watching with a slightly bemused expression.

“Okay, let’s see what we got,” he muttered at last, and began playback. Instinctively, he and Finn both leaned toward the screen.

At first, nothing but a series of amorphous shapes, with no soundtrack. Then coherent images began to emerge. None of the backgrounds were very clear at any point, and even the main subjects weren’t particularly well focused; Finn wondered if that was because these were not her own memories, just the Doctor’s being relayed second-hand. But it was him; his voice came out of the speakers, a bit muffled, but – *his* voice... She had to swallow hard to get past the sudden lump in her throat as she listened.

The viewpoint was always the Doctor’s, of course, as if they were looking out through his eyes. He was facing the Wyvern, talking to it. It seemed to be about his own height, with a lizardlike tail ending in an arrowhead shape, and wings folded against its body, the same colour as the silver scales that covered the rest of its body. The shape of its head seemed to match the traditional image of a dragon’s, with bony ridges above the eye sockets and a grinning lower jaw. From time to time a two-tined tongue shot out of the mouth, flickered about in the air, then withdrew.

“...*Can’t let you do that, Ormr*,” the Doctor was saying. The soundtrack seemed to muffle and lapse into silence every now and again, but the main thrust of the conversation was clear enough. “... *Doesn’t belong to you. It belongs to the Fuhrendray. And they need it, or ... go wrong. Terminally. And they’ll die. So ... can’t let you keep it.*”

“*I am a Wyvern, Doctor*,” came the reply. The quality of Ormr’s voice was unusual; it reverberated in an odd way. “...*It shines, it speaks to my heart. I have to have it... will have it!*”

“*Now, now – it’s naughty to tell fibs*,” the Doctor reproved. “*You know... haven’t got a heart!...*”

“*Jeer if you wish, Time Lord! You cannot stop me!*”

“*Ah, well, you see... where you’re wrong... I can. I know exactly how to stop you. And I will, if...*”

And at that point, frustratingly, the images lapsed back into blurry anonymity, and the soundtrack sank to an indecipherable mumble. There were evidently more memories there, but the device had failed to interpret them clearly enough.

“No, no, no!” Jack protested, realizing there was no more to be had. “Come on, Doctor! There’s gotta be more than that!” he yelled at the screen.

Finn felt as if she’d failed, somehow; as if it was her fault that the memories she carried weren’t clearly defined enough. Which was nonsense, because they weren’t even hers, and she was only the custodian of them by complete accident. Nevertheless, seeing the look on Jack’s face made her feel bad. Very bad. The Earth was under threat, he was trying to save it, and she hadn’t been able to be of sufficient help.

She put a hand on his shoulder. He turned his head to look at her, and she quailed slightly under the hard, driven glare of his eyes. Nevertheless she spoke, quietly.

“Maybe that isn’t all,” she told him. “Sometimes something’ll come through, and then later more comes to link up with it. And it all gets clearer. But not always right away. Be patient, Jack. There might be more, if you give me some time.”

She watched him fight down his emotion, tone down the blaze of frustration in the blue eyes.

“Always got time for you, Finn,” he said, after a few moments, making a fair stab at a lighthearted tone.

“Thanks. Then how about using some of it to tell me a bit more about what’s going on?” she suggested. “Let’s go back in the living room. I’ll get you another coffee.”

He nodded, and began detaching the device from her computer.

Back in the living room a few minutes later, Finn put a fresh cup on the coffee table in front of Jack, who was slumped on the sofa, brooding.

“So what’s this about?” she prompted.

He didn't answer at first. Then he leaned forward, picked up the cup and took a mouthful of coffee before cradling it in his hands.

"I was in this bar on – well, doesn't matter where," he said at last. "Not the kind of bar *you'd* go to, that's for sure! Wheelin'n'dealin' doesn't *begin* to cover what goes on in that place – or on the entire planet, come to that... Point is, I happened to be where I overheard someone else's conversation and they didn't know it. Ormr – and a couple of the Slitheen."

"Slitheen?" said Finn, curling a lip in less than fond recollection. "My very first aliens, they were, bless 'em." Her tone contradicted the sentiment.

"Yeah?" queried Jack, momentarily diverted.

"Before I even met the Doctor. I was in London, and accidentally wandered into the middle of a little disagreement they were having with Sarah Jane Smith. That was how I got to know her. How I got to know about the Doctor. And then I actually met him, like I told you about on Kvitverden. Anyway – I digress..." With a lift of her eyebrows, she invited him to go on with his story.

"Well, these two were putting a proposition to Ormr. Wish I'd heard it from the beginning. I came in at the point where they'd agreed his payment for destroying all life on Earth, after which they'd split the planet's resources with him. Knowing Wyverns, that'll mean he gets all the shiny bits."

"Shiny bits?"

"Sure. Remember what he said to the Doctor? '*It shines, it speaks to my heart, I have to have it*'? Where d'you think all those legends of dragons guarding their treasure hoard come from? Wyverns have this thing about gold, treasure, all that kinda stuff. Do anything for a bit of bling, those guys! Only in this case, the planet's gonna end up dismembered for Ormr to get his cut of the deal. If I don't stop him somehow. And while I don't know the exact date, we're working to a fairly tight deadline here." Jack looked understandably grim. "So – with no chance of finding the Doctor in time, made my way here hotfoot, to find out if you knew anything I could use."

Finn blew her cheeks out.

"So the survival of the Earth could depend on *my* ability to recall someone *else's* memories... No pressure, then," she commented, dismayed.

With good reason, she felt. She'd led a quiet, unremarkable life until the shattering disaster of her family's deaths had fallen on her out of a clear blue sky. While not shy as such, she'd always been content with her own company, and she'd always counted her parents and grandparents as her closest friends, so she'd never gone through the 'rebellious teenager' or 'my parents don't understand me' phases that many of her peer group seemed to have felt it their bounden duty to undergo. Therefore she'd always been happy living at home, being with her family, living a normal, calm, unadventurous existence.

But then her family had died. Wiped out in one terrible instant. And for a while her life, and any purposes she might have been planning to put it to, disintegrated spectacularly, though she'd eventually managed to come to terms with things and get to the point where she was ready to try to recover the lost ground, tried to become someone she hoped her parents would have been proud of. Four years after her bereavement, the whole thing with Sarah Jane and the Slitheen had happened, and as a result her life had unexpectedly changed again – this time, in a good and exciting way. And then, a couple of years later, the Doctor...

So, though she'd been drawn into some extraordinary events, and had had to come to terms with things she'd formerly have classed as pure fantasy – and so far, luck seemed to have favoured her to an astonishing degree in surviving them! – she had no life experience, no trained abilities that she felt she could offer in the situation that now confronted her. And the stakes were so high...

Jack was used to working with skilled professionals to avert threats to the Earth and its population.

Now, what he had was her.

Jack had evidently been doing some thinking of his own, his dark brows drawn together as he frowned unseeingly at her; his inner eye had been focused elsewhere, while his physical eyes remained locked in the direction of the girl who happened to be in his line of vision. Now he came back into focus, and saw she'd gone pale.

"What's up?" he demanded.

“Jack,” she said nervously. “What if I *can’t* remember? It’ll be my fault if you can’t stop him! What if the Earth gets destroyed because *I* let you down? I’m not a professional, like you. I’m just – *me...*”

He saw the anxiety in her eyes, and realized he could’ve been a little more discerning in the way he’d dealt with the whole thing. Making her feel the responsibility was all hers probably wasn’t the best way to achieve the result he was after. He remembered times when he’d seen the Doctor failing to take human reactions into sufficient account; he remembered times when Gwen Cooper had attacked him for the same fault. And he’d just gone and made the same mistake again. Remedial action was indicated.

“Yeah? Well, ‘*you*’ is what I need, right now,” he declared. “Wouldn’t swap you for a whole UNIT platoon, okay?”

“Well, that’s something I never thought I’d hear you say!” she said, momentarily distracted. He grinned, briefly.

“Mean it,” he said, earnestly. “Rather have you at my back on this one.”

She looked slightly more reassured, but also sceptical.

“I bet you say that to all the girls,” she accused him.

“Finn, there’re things I say to you I *never* say to other girls,” he assured her. “Just like there’re things I’ve said to other girls I’ll *never* say to you!”

As he’d intended, that drew a laugh out of her.

“Okay,” she surrendered. “I’ll believe you, thousands wouldn’t. So what happens now? When is this deadline of yours?”

“Whatever he’s got in mind, it’s gonna kick off in the next seven days; I heard him and the Slitheen agreeing on that one. And I know he got here ahead of me, but not by how much. Or where. Need to find out where he is. So I need to go online for a while. See if there’re any recent reports of meteorite landings that sound promising.”

“Why meteorites?”

“Wyvern technology. They usually travel between planets in egg-shaped craft not much bigger than they are. Look like meteorites once they hit atmosphere. Look up the stories,” Jack advised. “See how many of them talk about fire monsters that fall out of the sky and bury themselves deep underground, guarding their treasure. The experts’ll tell you it was meteorites were responsible for the legends. Nope, wrong! Other way round.”

“So you need to know if there’ve been any sightings in the last – how long?”

“The last week. Any day from, say, 7 April, 2010,” Jack said, superfluously adding the year with a flourish.

“He couldn’a got here faster than that.” He stood up to go back to the computer, but Finn put up a hand to halt him.

“I think I can do better for you than Google,” she said, rather smugly.

“How?” he demanded.

“To coin a phrase – I’m going to phone a friend,” she said cryptically, looking inordinately pleased with herself, and pulled her mobile out of her pocket. “Someone with a very special private number he’s given me the use of.”

“I’m jealous,” Jack said, lightly.

“Oh, it’s with the full permission of the lady he lives with,” she assured him, putting the phone to her ear.

A couple of moments later, she spoke into it, twinkling at Jack as she did so.

“Mr Smith? I need you...!”

*

“Hey! Think I got it,” said Jack, a short while later. He’d been going through the list of candidate events and sightings that Mr Smith had relayed to Finn, and it looked as if already he might have lighted on the right one.

Finn came to look over his shoulder at the screen. It was an online local newspaper article from Wiltshire, three days old, reporting on the mysterious death of one Stephen Miller, found burned to death in a wood. The body had been found by his fiancée, led to the spot by the howling of Mr Miller’s dog. The police investigation was ongoing, but they were treating the death as suspicious. The article concluded with the observation – without overtly claiming there was any connection – that there had been reports by a number of people in the area that a large meteorite had been sighted on the same evening as Mr Miller was presumed to have met his death.

“So what’ll you do?” Finn asked.

“Go take a look,” said Jack, standing up. “You got a car?”

“No, I haven’t,” she said, almost sharply. “I...” – she hesitated, oddly, then went on – “can’t afford to run one at the moment.”

He gave her a quick look of surprise; he hadn’t given any thought to her financial situation. Or its potential implications for his *modus operandi*.

“I’m currently among the ranks of the great unemployed,” she explained. “And have been quite for a while. Tough economic times in Britain at the moment, you know!”

“Yeah, but – *you?*” he demanded, incredulously. “With all that stuff from the Doctor in your head?”

“Not really something I can put on my CV, that,” she said, wryly. “Doesn’t exactly constitute a recognized and certificated qualification. Anyway, can you *imagine* the interview? *‘I’ve got part of the mind of an alien genius in my head, which I got because we were both wired up to a mind-reading machine created by another alien, who wanted to rule the universe...’*” She raised a quizzical eyebrow at him.

“Guess not,” he acknowledged. “Okay. Have to find some other way.”

“What, *now?*” Her voice rose in surprise.

She glanced involuntarily at the window. Following her look, he realized it was dark; a quick glance at the computer’s clock told him it was close to midnight.

“Okay, maybe not,” he agreed. “First thing, though. Can’t afford to lose too much time on this.” Without Torchwood’s resources behind him, it wouldn’t be easy – maybe not even possible – to get hold of a vehicle, or anything else he might need, until the morning. Frustrating, but that was the way things were, now. When he came back to Earth for good, he’d need to get organized properly. There were still some storage areas, some hidden resources, he’d be able to get hold of; not everything had been at the Hub. But for the time being, he just hoped the kingdom wouldn’t end up lost for the sake of a horseshoe nail.

Of course, he did have a rather particular ace up his sleeve in the matter of travel, but he was saving that for when he knew for sure where Ormr was to be found...

She nodded, and left him staring at the computer. A few moments later, though, she called him from upstairs. He obeyed the summons, still thinking out his plan of campaign.

Finn was waiting at the top of the stairs, and unexpectedly launched what looked like a pile of laundry at him. Jack fielded it neatly, and looked it over.

“What’s this?”

“Bedclothes,” she said. She nodded at the open door of the spare bedroom, beyond which a double bed with its naked mattress and duvet was visible. “I’m sure you’ve had to make your own bed before this, Captain Harkness!”

“And lie in it,” Jack agreed. “Thing is, though... Kinda don’t bother with sleep. Not since Rose worked her magic.”

“You don’t –?”

She fell quiet for a few moments while she took it on board. Then she smiled, ruefully.

“What was it you said earlier about the men in my life not being like other people?”

Jack shrugged, cheerfully.

“Well, sorry, but I’m going to have to grab a few hours, even if you don’t,” Finn announced. “And it’d be more comfortable for you lying awake there than on the sofa... But – up to you. Do what you like. You’ve got the run of the whole house. Such as it is.”

“All of it?” Jack arched his eyebrows at her.

“You know the answer to that, you bad man,” she said, mock-stern.

“Don’t know what you’re missing,” he told her.

“Ignorance is probably the safest form of bliss, in the circumstances,” she retorted, and turned toward the door of her own room, pausing in the doorway to meet his eyes.

“Night, Jack,” she said, with a sad smile.

“G’night, Finn,” he said, and watched the door shut behind her.



Chapter 4

No Torchwood, No UNIT Platoon

“Good morning, Captain Harkness, sir!”

Jack looked up from the computer screen to see Finn smiling at him around the edge of the door.

“And a good morning to you, Fionnula Thornton,” he returned, with a flourish. He glanced at his wristwatch.

“Before six. You’re up early. Sleep well?”

“Not especially,” she admitted. “Too many things on my mind. Like having to save the world. But well enough, in the circumstances. I suppose.” She looked at the screen. “Have you been here all night?”

“Been doing some research on the place where that guy was found dead,” said Jack. “Very interesting.”

“Wikipedia? Or sources you can really trust?” she enquired drily, secretly wondering whether her finances would stand the pressure of him spending the whole night online. *Get it in perspective, Finn. He’s trying to save the planet here...*

“Oh, yeah,” he assured her. “I’m not Tosh, but I can still find my way into some interesting places,” he added, with a shrug.

The Doctor had told her about the Cardiff Torchwood team, so she knew who Toshiko Sato was – had been – and forebore to comment. There’d been such an overtone of grief in Jack’s voice when he pronounced her name. Though not as much as in the tone he used whenever he referred to Ianto Jones. Maybe one day he’d volunteer more. But, for now...

“Well, one way of passing the time, I suppose... Though, in fact” – she regarded him analytically – “you look quite remarkably pleased with yourself. Is one good thing about not sleeping that you can’t get out of bed the wrong side?”

“Oh-h-h, you’d be surprised!” Jack contradicted. “I remember this one time when –”

Finn put up a hand, quickly.

“Spare me the gory details, please,” she said hastily. “I’m green as grass in a lot of ways, and I’d like to stay that way, thanks!”

“Oh, Finn! The things I could share with you...!” he began, teasingly.

“Well, the most immediate one is breakfast!” she said quickly. “Probably going to need it. Somehow I have the feeling we’re in for a busy day, one way or another.”

“Sure thing,” he confirmed. “And it’s gonna start in about” – he consulted his watch – “oh, about three quarters of an hour or so. Got hold of a twenty-four hour car hire firm while you were asleep. Delivery is promised by 0700 hours at the latest.”

“Ah,” said Finn calmly. “I’d better crack on, then...” She smiled briefly, and withdrew.

He watched her go, thinking about that instinctive use of the word ‘we’ that she’d employed. Then he stood up and followed her.

“Now that’s what I call a breakfast,” he said appreciatively, regarding the huge fry-up she presented to him a short while later. “Cholesterol and calories in equal measure.”

“Glad you approve – assuming you do,” she said, sitting down to her own plate. “Your turn. Show me what *you* call a briefing.”

“Okay. Castle Wood – very ancient wood,” he began, filling his mouth with a forkful of egg, bacon, sausage and fried bread. Which made his words somewhat muffled, but he managed to keep them clear enough for her purposes. “Been around since before medieval times. They reckon there was a small castle in it once, but that was levelled centuries ago and for various reasons the wood’s never been cleared to take a proper look. But” – he looked at Finn significantly – “always been legends of a dragon in the area. Pooh-poohed by the experts, of course, but, like I said, there’s usually something real back of a legend.”

“And you think that’s Ormr? Do Wyverns have long lifespans, then?”

“Millennia,” Jack assured her. “They’re virtually indestructible by ordinary means, and they tend to stay solitary, so they don’t conflict with other species too much. Or each other. They sometimes dig in for hundreds of years with their collections and don’t come out from one century to the next. Here on Earth, one could stay hidden for – well, long as you like. But just sometimes they come out, leave the planet, go back to Bahramun. Again, for years at a time. Maybe the mating itch needs scratching, who knows? Even Wyverns’d have to get close up for that, no matter how they feel about each other the rest of the time! But they always come back to their hoard. Eventually. Of course, on the way some of them stop off in bars on strange planets to talk to Slitheen,” he added mischievously, scooping up mushrooms and tomato. “Maybe it was one of those times the Doctor ran into Ormr.”

“So you think that Ormr’s got a bolthole in Castle Wood, and the reports of a meteorite were him coming back?” Finn summarized. “And that poor man was in the wrong place at the wrong time?”

“Yeah,” Jack agreed. “Wyverns are knee-jerk aggressive; it’s their default setting. One curious passerby? Toast! Without a second thought.”

“But what do you think he’s going to do?”

“Dunno. Which is why I wanna go take a look. If that’s where his hoard is, that’s where he’ll be right now. Figuring out a way to get it off the planet before things really kick off.”

Finn put her knife and fork neatly on her empty plate and looked thoughtful. Then she looked Jack right in the eye.

“Whatever you’re about to do, Jack. Do you want me to come along? I will if you think I’ll be useful,” she offered. “I mean, I know I’m not much used to the kind of stuff you did with Torchwood, but if I can help, at all...? Run your errands? Carry the luggage? Supplies? Torch? Act as lookout? That kind of thing?”

“Carrying a torch for me, huh?” Jack teased her. “Well, can’t say I’m surprised. And don’t think I didn’t spot I’m one of your two pin-up boys! You’re a pretty good artist, you know?” He grinned as she pulled a face at him, blushing slightly. Then he dropped the tease and considered her offer seriously.

Very seriously. He didn’t want to put her in unnecessary danger. On the other hand, he might need further access to the Doctor’s memories. And if he didn’t stop Ormr, she’d be in danger anyway. Terminally. Along with everyone else on Earth. Including Gwen...

Taking Finn along wouldn’t be like working with Gwen; she was right, she wasn’t trained to handle such situations. But she offered other advantages. And she was a comfortable person to be around. Undemanding. Plus she’d be someone to bounce ideas off, if he needed to.

No, she wouldn’t be Gwen – but she would be Finn. Which, even discounting the Doctor’s memories, was still something worth having. And, as she’d pointed out, she might unearth some more of those at any moment...

“Could be dangerous,” he pointed out.

She snorted.

“Look, Jack, I may’ve been born yesterday, but I’ve been up all night since,” she retorted promptly. “Don’t get your auxiliary verbs mixed up – thought you’d know better than to confuse ‘will’ with ‘could’... Come *on!* ‘Course it’ll be dangerous! Didn’t need to be a genius to work *that* out! But if you think I’ll be more of a help than a hindrance, I’m still willing. I’ve got nothing –” She broke off and shrugged.

Jack completed the truncated sentence in his own mind with the two missing words, and saw her point. He’d been there himself, often enough.

“Okay,” he agreed. “Glad to have you along.”

“Instead of the UNIT platoon, yeah? Still wrestling with that one,” she said, quirked an eyebrow at him. “And of course there’s one other thing I might be useful for,” she added, slowly.

Jack widened his eyes slightly, inviting her to enlarge on that.

She smiled at him mischievously, and suddenly thrust her right hand inside her blouse and under her left armpit, as if she was accessing some kind of holster.

“Sorry,” she apologized, seeing his raised eyebrows. “But I don’t have a suit pocket to keep it in, like some people I could mention... And I like to keep it handy.”

When she pulled her hand out again, she was holding a sonic screwdriver.

Jack’s eyes went round with surprise.

“He gave you *that*?” he blurted.

She nodded cheerfully, and wagged it at him.

“Woh!” Jack exclaimed, and expelled a long breath. That the Doctor had given this girl a sonic screwdriver of her own was a revelation of the true measure of what his feelings about her must have been. And if *he*’d trusted her that much, Jack Harkness wasn’t about to do any less.

“So if we end up locked in a room together, trapped, just the two of us, you could use that to get us out?” he enquired.

“Of course,” she agreed, giving him a slightly puzzled look.

“Nah, leave it behind,” he grinned. “I kinda like the idea of being trapped with you!”

She awarded him an old-fashioned look as she restored the screwdriver to its hiding place.

“I was right, back on Kvitverden,” she said, as if to herself. “Incorrigible...”

“Oh, yeah!” Jack assured her, with relish. “But right now” – he scooped up the last forkful of food from his plate – “better get yourself organized. Car’ll be delivered in” – he glanced at his watch – “oh, about twenty minutes.”

Finn regarded him steadily.

“It occurs to me that’s something you couldn’t have organized without a credit card. Wouldn’t’ve been mine, by any chance?”

Jack looked back at her with an air of innocent interest.

Finn sighed.

“Oh, well,” she said. “Hope I live long enough for paying the bill to become a problem...”

*

“Step it up, Finn! Car’s here,” came Jack’s voice from the front door. “Got a young man down here wants you to sign for it.”

“I’m quite sure you can look after him till I get down there,” she called down the stairs, making sure the last buckle on her rucksack was properly done up. She knew she’d have to take delivery of the car: Jack had booked it in her name. A few minutes later she’d done that, the young man had departed – accompanied by a wink from Jack – and they were about ready to leave.

“You’d better make sure nothing happens to this car,” she said sternly, as she locked the front door. She glanced at the vehicle in question, and did a double-take, suddenly horrified. “An *SUV*? Jack, you’re going to bankrupt me! I’m not on a Torchwood budget, you know! I’m unemployed, remember? And there’s no way I could cover the cost if you trash it!”

“I’ll be real careful,” Jack assured her, taking her arm. She didn’t look convinced.

Just as he was about to lead her to the vehicle, the door of the house next to Finn’s opened, and a man popped his head out. He looked to Jack to be in his early sixties, with twinkling eyes and a friendly countenance.

“Ullo, m’love,” he said to Finn, in an extremely marked Cockney accent. “Goin’ somewhere nice?”

“Hello, George,” said Finn cheerfully. “Certainly somewhere interesting, anyway!”

“Oh, yeah? An’ ’oo’s this ’andsome young feller, then? Should I be jealous?”

“George, meet Jack Harkness,” said Finn, with a flourish. “Jack, this is George. ‘The boy next door.’ My secret admirer,” she added, with a wicked smile.

“Oi! Don’t you let the old gel ’ear yer callin’ me that,” George grinned.

“Oh, I’m pretty sure Kath’s already clocked what a rascal you are,” Finn teased him. “She’s had about forty years to work it out, remember?”

“Good to meet you, George,” said Jack, offering a broad smile and a handshake. “Guessin’ by your accent you’re not from this part of the world?”

“You can talk!” George retorted cheerfully. His eyes sparkled mischievously as he turned to Finn. “So – this your new boyfriend, then?”

“No such luck,” Jack told him, with an exaggerated sigh. “She’s a one-guy girl, and I’m not the guy.”

“Ah,” said George, nodding sagely. “That’ll be that Doctor, then.” He winked at Jack. “She don’t talk abah’t ’im that often, but when she does...! I can tell!” His eyes turned to Finn. “Don’t ’e never visit you no more, darlin’? I wanna meet ’im. Tell ’im what a little gem ’e’s got!”

“I promise you, George – the next time he turns up, I’ll introduce you,” she said evenly. Only Jack knew how much it was costing her to keep her composure at that moment. She even managed a fond smile at the old man. “But, look – it may not be for a while. He’s – had to go away. Perhaps for a very long time... But if he comes back, you’ve got my express permission to tell him what you like! I certainly shall!” she added, with feeling.

“Righto,” George agreed cheerfully. “Ah, well – mustn’t keep yer, if yer off for the day. Enjoy yourselves! Look after ’er, Jack! She’s a good gel, she is!”

“I know it,” Jack assured him, and gave him a cheery wave as he escorted Finn to the SUV. “See y’around!”

He threw her an amused glance as he fired up the engine.

“So – soon as the Doctor’s gone, you get yourself a boyfriend, you faithless wretch!” he teased her.

Finn smiled, then sighed.

“I’m trying to keep his spirits up,” she agreed. “But his wife’s dying. Cancer. He’s looking after her at home for as long as he can. Then it’ll be the hospice, probably. And not too long, either. They’re such lovely people, both of them. Oh, *why* do people have to be torn away from each other like that?” Suddenly her voice was trembling with frustration and sadness.

“Speaking as someone who’s had a fair bit of experience in that particular field – can’t give you a good answer,” said Jack, keeping his eyes on the road.

“No. I know. Sorry. I didn’t mean to –” She broke off.

He nodded.

She fell silent. This wasn’t a level playing field. She knew about the Torchwood team, knew who Jack had lost. But he didn’t know about what had happened to her. Didn’t know that she’d lost everyone. And how. She’d told the Doctor, but not him. And she knew he was bearing enough hurt of his own – because of what had happened to him on Satellite 5, had been bearing for close to a century and a half. Maybe he didn’t have much attention to spare for other people’s losses. *Let it lie – if you can...*

But the very fact she was having to travel by car with him meant he was quite likely to find out very shortly – if her self-control didn’t hold out. And she didn’t have much confidence that it would; previous attempts had proved woefully unsuccessful. *Travel anywhere in time and space in the TARDIS? Hey, no problem! Travel a few miles in England in a car? A whole different can of worms...*

She bit her lip, wrestling with indecision. Because of what they were doing, Jack was likely to make the discovery about her pretty soon. Should she pre-empt, explain now – or not?

“Which route to Wiltshire are we taking?” she enquired, as he navigated through the centre of Taunton.

“Gonna stop off in town and pick up one or two bits of equipment that might come in handy, first. Then the A361,” he said. “Why?”

“Just wondering,” she said, with a shrug, but something made him look over at her; her face was impassive. *Something going on there*, he thought to himself, but didn’t ask.

Nor did he say anything when he saw her left hand gripping the handle of the passenger door arm rest, white-knuckled, as they approached the road junction where their route diverged from that leading to the motorway, and the tension of her whole body until it was well behind them. He figured that if she wanted him to know what that was all about, she’d tell him. But still she didn’t say anything.

Not until they started heading north-east along the A361. Until they found themselves caught up behind a large lorry. She'd relaxed to a certain degree once they were off the motorway; now, she kept glancing in the wing mirror, and her grip on the arm rest was tensing again. Jack took a quick look in the rear view mirror; there was another lorry behind them, quite a way back, but gradually closing. And the closer it got, the more agitated Finn was becoming.

"What is it?" Jack asked, glancing sideways at her.

She shook her head, but he could see she kept glancing from the lorry in front to the wing mirror and back again.

Jack looked in the rear view mirror again. The second lorry was closing more quickly now.

Suddenly Finn spoke.

"Jack, get past this lorry," she said, and it wasn't a request.

"Why?"

"Just – *do it!* Please!" Her voice was suddenly shrill with tension. "*Now!*"

Her urgency was undeniable and imperative. He did it with a sudden swerve that brought them momentarily into the path of an oncoming car before he took them back into their own lane, followed by an angry blast of the horn from the other driver, as well as one from the lorry driver they'd overtaken. Jack ignored both and sped away until the lorries were out of sight behind them.

Finn's aura of relief was almost tangible. She let out a long, shaky sigh.

"Thanks," she said, almost inaudibly.

"You're welcome," he said.

There was silence for a couple of minutes. Then Jack asked, "So – gonna tell me what that was about?"

"I didn't want to –" She broke off and bit her lip, then started again. "I didn't want to pile any more bad stuff on you," she said, not looking at him.

"Hey – friends, remember?" he prompted her. "What bad stuff?"

"Sorry I got twitchy," she said. "Can't help it. I don't travel by car at all if I can get out of it. Because if a car I'm in gets between... I – I can't..." She broke off.

"Can't what?" he prompted again, gently.

"That's how I lost my family," she said abruptly. "Motorway accident. They got pulped between two lorries. I was eighteen."

Jack glanced at her quickly, making sure he'd understood her right.

"All of them?"

"Both parents, both grandparents. The other grandparents were already dead. I'm an only child. So were Mum and Dad," she concluded succinctly.

"Tough break," he said, quietly.

After that, nothing was said for quite a while. She stared out of the window; he thought – about a lot of things. About knowing now why she'd had such empathy with the Doctor, and with himself. About how savage her voice had sounded when she'd demanded to know why people had to be torn away from each other, like George and his Kath were going to be. About how he himself lost so many people, but one at a time, over time, while she'd lost everyone in one massive personal tragedy. No warning, no time to prepare herself. Just – gone.

"It's why I don't drive," she said, breaking into his thoughts, still wanting to account for herself. "I just can't bring myself to do it. And it's even hard to be in a car somebody else is driving... As you've just found out. Still..." She turned to look at him, and, astonishingly, there was a faint smile on her face. "Lucky for you I got my licence before my hang-ups! Or you wouldn't've been able to get hold of this car, would you?"

He smiled back at her.

"Oh, I'd've found a way," he assured her.

"I'll bet!" she agreed, with a grunt of amusement. "Just don't get done for speeding! Explanations could be awkward..."

"Can't exactly give me points on my licence. Don't have one," Jack grinned.

"See? Awkward! So just remember this vehicle's hired in *my* name," she remarked, pointedly. "*Your* actions could be *my* consequences!"

“Yes, ma’am!” said Jack smartly. “I’ll be good’n’sure to action the Eleventh Commandment!”

“A policy I feel sure you’ve stuck to your whole life!” She was teasing him now, trying to put the episode behind her. She had real guts, this girl, Jack thought, smiling at her. Things she was afraid of, distressed about, worried about – and here she was, taking them on, just so she could help him. That took courage. Even if she didn’t realize it. And he was pretty sure she didn’t think of it in those terms.

But he did.

“This ‘lady of leisure’ thing,” he said, deliberately changing the subject. “Being out of work. How long’s that been going on?”

“Couple of years now.”

“So – since before you met the Doctor?”

“Oh, yes,” she agreed, sliding an amused look sideways at him.

“He know that?”

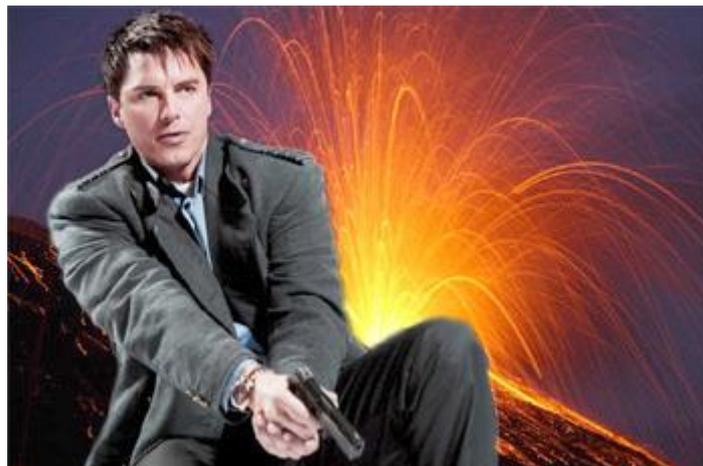
She snorted with laughter.

“Don’t be silly!” she reproved him in a tone of derision. “He never asked! Of course.”

“Y’know, I’ll love that guy forever, but sometimes he makes me wanna grab him by the lapels and shake him!” Jack declared, half amused, half disgusted.

“What wouldn’t I give for him to be here for you to do it,” she commented sadly.

“Yeah,” said Jack.



Chapter 5

Under Castle Wood

“Now I’m seasick, thanks,” said Finn, as Jack killed the engine. He’d taken them into Castle Wood as close to the site of the old castle as they could get, and it had been a very bumpy ride indeed. Finn had had to use her sonic to pop one or two padlocks on gates on their way in, but now here they were. “Definitely shaken, and probably about to be stirred,” she told him, as she hoisted her haversack onto one shoulder.

Jack ignored her remark and got out, so she followed his example. She could tell by the look on his face he’d gone into ‘professional’ mode.

She was about to speak again, but he held up his hand for silence.

“Listen,” he said.

She concentrated, but other than the sougning of the slight breeze through the trees, there was nothing to be heard.

“To what?” she enquired.

“Exactly,” he said. “You can’t. Nothing to listen to. Oughta be birdsong, at least, right? You hear any?”

She listened again, and realized he was right. In any normal wood, on a bright, sunny day like this, there'd be birdsong every few moments. Here, there was nothing. Not a sound. Castle Wood clearly didn't meet the customary definition of 'normal' right now...

"Meaning?"

"Meaning something's out of the ordinary around here, and they know it."

"An enormous cat, maybe?" she suggested facetiously.

"A Wyvern, maybe," he retorted. "C'mon."

She followed him as he strode off, realizing he was following a slightly muddy path that looked as if it had only recently been made – it must have been raining here not too many days ago. Then she realized who, probably, had made it. The police. Investigating the death of that unlucky man – what was his name? – Miller.

As he had done that fatal night, they found themselves in the clearing. Even in sunlight, it wasn't a cheery sight; soil churned by numerous feet, the black and grey of charred vegetation and the ash of burned wood, the flattened undergrowth, and a general atmosphere of – she didn't know quite how to describe it to herself – dreariness? Unhealthiness? Not a comfortable place to be, at any rate.

Jack picked up a short strand of blue and white plastic tape with the words *Police Line – Do Not Cross* clearly visible on it, waggled it at her with a significant quirk of his eyebrows, then dropped it back to the ground. He began quartering the clearing, staring intently at the surface, looking for signs of Ormr. Finn watched, waiting for him to tell her if she could help.

After a while she found her eyes wandering away from him, and around the clearing. She found her attention being taken by a dark sort of lump just visible through the trees edging the far side, away to the left. So as not to cross Jack's search pattern, she began to follow the tree line around toward it, curious as to what it might be.

When she reached it, she stood gazing at it for some seconds. Then, without turning her head, she said, quietly, "Jack..."

"Yeah?"

"Is this likely to be worth looking at?"

She heard him coming across the clearing until he halted beside her. She quirked an eyebrow at him.

"Yeah, pretty likely," he agreed slowly.

Just behind the line of trees edging the clearing was what looked like a mound of earth with a cave entrance. However, closer examination revealed that it was clearly man-made. It was, in fact, the remains of some ancient walls that must have been part of the original castle, partially buried under soil and covered with ivy.

"Weren't you the girl carrying a torch for me?" Jack enquired, eyes twinkling. Finn grinned, unslung her haversack, and hauled out a large torch, which she handed over. He switched it on and shone it into the dark maw of the opening, advancing cautiously behind the light beam. Finn fished out the torch she'd brought for herself, and followed him, conscious of a nagging sense of trepidation.

The roof was about seven feet high, allowing both of them to stand normally once inside, but the walled tunnel didn't go that far back, only some twenty feet or so, glistening with trails of damp and punctured by tree roots, before it ended in another wall, flat and blank. The floor was in many places covered by earth, blown in and compacted over the years, but elsewhere there were areas free of soil, revealing that the underlying surface was composed of ancient flagstones.

"Doesn't look as if anyone's been in here recently," Finn observed, not very hopefully.

"Beyond the occasional flatfooted plod, you mean?" said Jack disrespectfully, pointing his torch at a few scuffed bootprints in the soil. "Don't let that fool you. Wyverns're very clever at hiding their traces." He trained his torch on the end wall, looking at it carefully. "Although maybe not quite clever enough, this time."

Finn peered into the gloom, mystified. "Isn't that just a dead end?" she enquired.

Jack didn't answer for a moment. It took a few seconds more for Finn to realize that his torch beam was no longer moving, but steady on an area at the very foot of the wall. Suddenly he strode forward, crouched down, and began to brush the soil away from the stonework.

"That's what anyone comes in here's supposed to think," he said. "But see that?"

Finn looked more closely at the focus of where his torch beam was now pointing, at something he'd uncovered. Just a fragment of crushed ivy tendril, at first glance. But then she realized what was wrong about it. This wasn't crushed because it had grown out through the stones. It was *flattened*. Pulverized. By something very heavy – heavier than the weight of a human treading on it, for instance. And one end of it was pinned tight under the bottom edge of one of the stones. Which, she now saw, like all its fellows, all ended in a completely straight edge against the preternaturally flat rock floor.

She looked quickly at Jack, who grinned happily.

"Bingo," he said. "Garage door."

Somehow, she hadn't been expecting that.

"What –?" she began, then understood what he was referring to. "Ormr's spacecraft? Behind that wall? But – how can that be big enough for a spacecraft?"

"Remember what I told you? Wyvern craft aren't much bigger than their occupants. Plenty of room to park one there. And obviously used recently – that ivy's been crushed within the last few days. But that's probably not where he is. Or his hoard. He'll have that further underground somewhere. So I'm betting there's another doorway in here someplace. Just gotta find it."

"What kind of opening mechanism are we looking for?"

Jack shrugged. "Could be anything."

"What – like, for instance, any of these stones in the wall could be the button that opens the secret passage?" Finn queried lightly, but in truth slightly dismayed as she ran her torch over the wall on her left and the hundreds of stones it was composed of.

Jack shone his torch on the opposite wall, and suddenly the moving beam steadied and stopped.

"Not just any of them," he contradicted. "My money's on this one."

The stone he was focusing on was half-hidden by a swathe of ivy, which he pulled back out of the way. That enabled Finn to see that it wasn't quite like its surrounding fellows – it was darker, had a different texture, and was an almost perfect square.

"Let's see what a bit of pressure does," said Jack, and pushed against the stone. He felt a momentary vibration under his palm, but nothing else happened.

"Looks like a sonic job," he observed, stepping back. "Okay, Finn – time for your party trick."

"Yeah, well, just remember I'm still a learner driver on this thing," she warned him, fishing her sonic screwdriver out of the multi-pocketed gilet she'd chosen to wear for their expedition. "Sometimes takes me a try or two to get it right."

"Practice makes perfect," Jack encouraged her. "Think of it as a chance for on-the-job training."

A momentary memory of when she and the Doctor had been on Eutychia flashed into her mind; she'd made that very same quip about using the sonic then. She swallowed quickly, suppressing the memory, and tried to focus on the here and now.

She thumbed the controls to what she hoped was the right setting and aimed it. Jack's confidence was vindicated as the stone sank into the wall and a grating noise filled their ears.

They both had to step hastily backwards as a large section of the floor began to move beneath their feet. An area of flagstones about six feet square began to sink into the ground, loose earth rolling and trickling over its edges, then slid sideways out of sight, revealing a large circular hole, lined with the same kind of stonework as the walls.

Jack stepped forward and shone his torch down into the darkness.

"Oh, great!" he said, in a tone which made it clear that it wasn't 'great' at all.

"What is it?"

"Oubliette, looks like."

Finn wrinkled her nose.

"There's something about the sound of the word 'oubliette' I've never cared for," she remarked.

"*Been* in some you wouldn't care for," Jack grunted. "Let's see how this one measures up."

"Not well, I bet," Finn muttered.

“Wait here while I get some rope,” Jack directed, straightening up. “This is one hole I plan to be able to climb back out of.”

“Just make sure it isn’t enough rope to hang yourself,” she shot at his departing back. “Although I suppose even that wouldn’t stop *you* for long,” she added, *sotto voce*.

A few minutes later the rope, retrieved from the back of the SUV, had been anchored around a tree trunk outside the tunnel entrance, and Jack was poised to abseil down into the hole.

“Be ready,” he instructed Finn.

“I’d like to be able to claim I was born that way, but I’m having to come to it later in life,” she said, not entirely happily.

He grinned.

“You seem to be a quick study,” he told her, and vanished into the hole.

Finn craned over the dark shaft, watching the flashes of his torch on the stone walls as it jerked about erratically in response to the movements of his body as he progressed downwards. A few moments later she heard the solid thump of his feet as he reached the bottom, and the motion of the torch became steady as he trained it on his surroundings.

“Okay, wrong assessment. Don’t think this *is* an oubliette, after all,” he commented, his voice slightly reverberated by the acoustics of the stone walls.

“Why?”

“Got a passageway down here. Which kinda disqualifies it. Sit tight. I’m gonna see where it goes.”

“This is the bit where I’m supposed to tell you to be careful, right?” Finn suggested.

“Always am,” said Jack cheerfully. “After all, you know what they say – ‘If you can’t be good, be careful’. Only leaves me with the ‘careful’ option...”

“Then be good at being careful!” Finn retorted.

From below came a chuckle. Then he vanished.



Chapter 6

Ten Seconds

Trying not to imagine the worst, Finn stared at the ragged edges of the gap left by the vanished flagstones, thinking about how the spaces left were bizarrely like the gaps left by missing teeth in a child’s smile. But that didn’t distract her for long, and she soon found herself meditating instead on the fact that one of the hardest things the Doctor – and now Jack – expected you to do was stay still and wait while they might be going into danger. She wondered how any of their friends had ever managed it.

Maybe they hadn’t. Maybe they’d just ignored orders and acted anyway, unable to cope with the incredible pressure that waiting exerted. She lacked that kind of self-confidence. She was too afraid that her want of experience would result

in a fatal error of judgement to risk anything of the kind at this moment. But that didn't stop it being one of the very hardest things she'd ever done, to exercise such rigid self-control – obey – and just – wait...

She almost jumped out of her skin when his voice suddenly came floating up the shaft.

“Okay, come on down,” he said. “No sign of him so far, but he's here all right. Might need you to watch my back.”

“Why, what's it going to do?” she joked uneasily, and heard him laugh, as she nerved herself to follow him. Then, taking a deep breath, she lowered herself over the lip of the shaft, trying to make sure her hands didn't slip and abrade on the rough texture of the rope as she inexpertly attempted a copy of Jack's smooth abseil.

“There y'go,” he commented, as her feet finally met the floor. “Now...” He let her gather her breath, then pointed his torch into an opening in the shaft wall. She swallowed, then followed him through it into what at first seemed to be pitch blackness.

However, the further they went, the more a pale glow of silvery light became visible; very faint at first, but then increasing in intensity, until they were able to switch their torches off. Finn wondered what generated the light; the tunnel they were now in seemed to be purely the raw native rock, albeit leading constantly downwards at a gentle slant. But, while it might have been interesting to understand the physics – or, more probably, chemistry – of it, she dismissed the matter from her mind; there were more important things to worry about right now.

Something Jack had said was nagging away at her, and she couldn't make sense of it. Eventually, she had to ask.

“Jack – you said there was no sign of him, but he was here. So how do you know?”

In the dim light, even though his back was to her, she saw him make a gesture as though he was touching his left wrist with his right hand, the way some people do when they check their wristwatch.

“Got me a Wyvern detector,” he said cryptically. “Oh, and, yeah – something I forgot to mention,” he added, glancing back over his shoulder at her.

“What?” she asked nervously.

“If we find Ormr, keep clear of his tail,” he instructed. “Got a poison barb in the tip. He hits you with that – ten seconds, max.”

“Now you tell me,” Finn muttered, trying to ignore the surge of adrenalin this information elicited. “Anyone ever tell you your technique on a first date lacks a certain *je ne sais quoi*?”

“Hey! In some circles, I'm the acme of social role models, I'll have you know,” Jack protested. “Besides, this is hardly our first date – I figure Kvitverden counts for that. Anyway, told you now, haven't I? Better late than never! Hey, now...” Suddenly his voice dropped, and he began to walk more slowly, his left hand stretched out behind him and gesturing at her, indicating extreme caution. She also noticed that he was drawing his revolver out of its holster, though what good he imagined it was going to be against a creature protected by tungsten scales, she wasn't quite sure.

The tunnel was opening out into a larger space, lit with the same pale silver glow. Jack crouched down by the edge of the opening, motioning Finn to do the same, so they could study the scene.

The cavern was much larger than anything she'd been expecting. The rough stone walls and ceiling created a huge domed area, with the occasional rock pillar supporting the roof. The floor was smoother, but completely bare. The cavern extended round to the right, beyond their present range of vision. In the centre of the area that was visible to them was a small circle of rock pillars, enclosing a space perhaps thirty feet in diameter.

It housed what seemed to be a machine of some kind, positioned on the right-hand edge of the space – a fairly plain rectangle of metal, but with a control panel visible even at the angle from which they were looking. There was a strip of what appeared to be stone slabs forming a walkway in front of the machine. The remainder of the floor area within the circle was covered by a smaller disc of some kind of polished metal, about twenty feet in diameter, with a corresponding disc depending from the ceiling.

Heaped on the metal disc on the floor was a pile of something that made Finn blink, unsure she was seeing what she seemed to be seeing. But she was. A pile, maybe four feet high, of – well, there really was no other word for it – *treasure*. There were hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of items, and every one was clearly either gold or silver – and that wasn't counting the myriad precious stones studding many of them. Plates, candlesticks, bowls, cups, flacons, lamps, chalices. Swords and daggers, their hilts, guards and pommels set with rubies, emeralds, jade, amethysts; jewel-encrusted shields, helmets, crowns, circlets, burial masks, torques. Jewellery – bracelets, necklaces, pendants, ring-brooches, chains –

shining with turquoises, diamonds, opals, sapphires, garnets, tourmalines, pearls, aquamarines. Gold and silver coins of all ages and nationalities.

She felt dazzled. She'd never seen anything like it in her life.

"Is *that* Ormr's treasure?" she breathed into Jack's ear. To her astonishment, he shook his head.

"Nah, that's just loose change," he disagreed, equally quietly. "This whole cavern'd be piled to the rafters if it'd all been here. He must've moved most of it already. Looks like we only just made it in time." He scanned the cavern intently. "Where is he? Gotta be here somewhere..."

Finn suddenly grabbed at his sleeve as she heard a noise coming from the right hand side, the part of the cavern they couldn't see. He nodded calmly, and, a little shamefaced, she dropped her hand. Together, they waited for the source of the sound to become visible.

And there he was.

Ormr.

Seen in reality, he seemed to her much more awesome than he'd appeared in the Doctor's memory. Something like the difference between looking at a bull hippopotamus on a television screen, and standing nose to nose with one on a riverbank. The former was perfectly safe; the latter most definitely was not...

Somehow, on the screen, the Wyvern hadn't seemed so big; thinking back to that, his wings had been folded, and he'd been holding his long sinuous neck quite low, so he'd seemed about the same height as the Doctor. Here, holding his neck more erect, he was clearly much longer from tailtip to nostrils than he'd appeared to be in the images on the screen. His wings were partially spread away from his scaled body, and it was now obvious that, like a bat, they each had a spiked 'finger' protruding from the leading edge of the wing – except that these digits were considerably longer and sharper than those of any bat.

From the finger of his left wing was hanging a delicate filigree opal necklace, which he carefully – for some reason the word 'lovingly' came into Finn's mind as she watched him – draped onto the pile, looping it around the hilt of a sword so that it dangled down, resting against the blade.

Every few seconds his slender, two-tined tongue flicked in and out. This new observation triggered one of the Doctor's memories, which informed her that the mechanism being used was called the Jacobson's organ; Earth reptiles used it to sample their external environment and sense its chemical nature. Along with it came the associated fact that reptiles perceive sound as airborne vibrations – and were very sensitive to them.

The uncomfortable corollary to this knowledge was that, one way or the other, Ormr would quite likely soon be able to detect the presence of the two intruders in his cavern...

It seemed, in fact, that he already had. Straightening up from the pile of treasure, he turned around and faced the tunnel entrance where they crouched, his lambent eyes seeming to bore straight into them.

"Who are you, who have penetrated my lair?" he hissed, with that strange reverberation in his voice that had been part of the Doctor's memory. "Show yourselves."

Jack shrugged and stood up.

"Stay behind me," he instructed Finn in a harsh whisper. She nodded, her mouth dry, and followed him as he stepped out into the full view of the Wyvern.

"Are you here to steal my hoard?" Ormr demanded. "Too late, little humans! I have moved it to where you cannot reach it."

"Not why we're here," Jack said. "Not interested in your treasure, Ormr."

"You know my name?" The long neck looped sinuously. "Who are you? Where are you from?"

"Captain Jack Harkness. Lots of places, over time. But right here and now, standing for the interests of the Earth," Jack declared.

Ormr's neck curved into a new attitude, changing the angle of his head as he regarded them. Finn saw that his eyes were chatoyant; they changed from bronze to orange to yellow, depending on how the light was hitting them. At this moment they were yellow and intent.

"You are not of this planet?"

“She is,” said Jack, jerking his thumb over his shoulder at Finn. “I’m not. In fact, I get around quite a bit. Which is how, not long ago, I was listening to you fixing up your deal with Jenmar Fel-Fotch Murra-Thayron Slitheen and his pal. And, you know something? Didn’t like what I heard. I’m kinda fond of this planet. So I’ve decided to cancel the contract.”

The Wyvern snorted derisively, his eyes now glowing orange.

“As if you have the power to stop me, little man!” he derided. “No human has ever bested a Wyvern!”

“Uh-huh,” said Jack sceptically. “So it was some other species that got poked in the eye by the original guy that the legends of St George are based on?”

The Wyvern hissed angrily.

“And, besides that, I know another time when someone got the better of you. Not a human, I’ll give you that. A Time Lord. You remember the Doctor, don’t you?” Jack said ominously.

The long neck drew back quickly as Ormr reacted to that name with another hiss, this time one with an overtone of alarm.

“So, not entirely without hope that I might have a chance here,” Jack persisted. “What’s your plan, Ormr?”

Ormr’s scaled face suddenly managed to assume a crafty expression.

“If you do not know that, you have already failed,” he said. “You will not be able to follow me when I leave this place. So you will not be in time to stop me, even if you could. And of course you will not be able to.” The creature swayed, shifting his weight from one taloned foot to the other, like a cat getting ready to pounce. Finn found herself tensing in response.

“Because?” Jack enquired, tautly.

“Because you will be DEAD!” Ormr roared, and leapt into the air, his wings suddenly spread wide and bearing him down on them.

“Finn, get back!” Jack yelled, and raised his revolver.

She didn’t need telling twice, bolting for the illusory protection of the tunnel mouth. She was moving so fast that when she grabbed the left hand edge with one hand, her momentum slammed her shoulder against the tunnel wall with bruising force as the manoeuvre swung her round to face into the cavern again.

The Wyvern was hovering above Jack, who was firing up at it. Each bullet sank harmlessly a few millimetres into the scales but failed to penetrate; even in the urgency of the moment, she could hear the tiny impacts as they dropped harmlessly away to fall onto the rock floor. Ormr was stabbing at Jack with his tail; Finn remembered Jack’s earlier warning about the poison in its barb.

He managed to evade the first three or four stabs, but his luck quickly ran out. The Wyvern suddenly sideslipped, too fast for him to avoid the sudden thrust that caught him in the side of the neck. He gasped in agony and clutched at his throat, while Ormr roared with triumph, his jaws spread wide and his forked tongue extended full length. Horrified, Finn watched Jack fall to his knees, still trying to bring his revolver to bear, a revolver that he no longer had the strength to lift. Then it clattered against the rock as he toppled, arm still outstretched, to sprawl full-length on the floor.

Exactly as he’d told her. Ten seconds, max.

“Dead, little man! Dead!” Ormr crowed.

Finn saw his eyes fasten on her, glowing redly; something in their gaze made her feel as if she was pinned to the ground, even though every instinct she had was screaming at her to run.

“I could kill you, too, woman,” he hissed. “One breath from my mouth, one touch of my tail, and you would join him in death. I could do it, so very easily...” He regarded her for long, terrible moments. Then the glow of his eyes died back from red to yellow. “But why should I take the trouble? You will die before long anyway. When this planet dies. No,” he mused. “I will not kill you now. Instead, I will let you wait, knowing your death will come soon, yet knowing you cannot stop it. Or me.”

Apparently he had decided she was of no significance. He grounded, folded his wings, and, turning his back on her, strode into the circle of pillars to the disc of metal on which the last remnant of his hoard stood, and extended the finger of his right wing across the stone walkway to the controls on the machine. He turned a last scornful look on her as a white glow enveloped him and his treasure.

When it faded, he, and the treasure, were gone.

Trying to ignore the way her heart felt as if it wanted to beat its way right out of her chest, Finn ventured back into the cavern, and knelt beside Jack's body. She wondered how long it would be before he resurrected; based on the limited experience she'd had of his doing it, the speed of restoration seemed to depend on the manner of death. Maybe poison, being spread through the system, took longer to recover from than, say, a fatal stab wound. She'd just have to wait, and see.

She noticed that his right hand, outflung on the rock, still had its index finger curled around the trigger of his revolver. If he came back with any kind of physical spasm, as he apparently often did, he'd end up firing an uncontrolled shot. So she carefully removed the gun from his limp fingers and went on kneeling, cradling it in her lap, waiting for him to come back and claim it.

Chapter 7 *Dreaming of the Doctor*

"Yeuch!" Jack spat, a few minutes later, his head in his hands. "Hate the way poison leaves such a filthy aftertaste!"

"Not the kind of hangover I can comment on," Finn remarked, trying to stay matter-of-fact, to mask her relief that he was back. "Yours, I believe?" She held out his revolver. He took it from her with a brief nod of acknowledgement.

"You weren't seriously expecting to be able to kill him with that, were you?" she asked, curiously.

"Nah," he shrugged. "Though, you never know – might've got lucky with an eye or an open gullet... But I needed to make sure he thought I was the threat, not you. I've got this fall-back position you haven't, see? So, needed to make sure I was the one got all his attention."

"Jack! What a concept! *You* – an *attention seeker*? Oh, come on, now!" Finn denied, her tongue firmly in her cheek. Then, seriously, "Thanks, though."

"Yeah, well – you might say I got the point," Jack quipped.

He climbed to his feet, restoring his revolver to its holster. Then he looked around the cavern, and his attention fastened on the machine in the circle of pillars.

"Okay, so – got a transmat here," he announced, striding toward it.

"As in 'transmitter of matter', I presume?" Finn asked, moments before the Doctor's memory confirmed it for her.

"Yup. No self-respecting medieval tunnel network should be without one, wouldn't you say?"

"But..." Finn wrinkled her forehead "How long's it been here, d'you think?"

"Not exactly this year's model, but it's not that old," Jack told her, busy assessing the control panel. "My guess is the Slitheen've given him a couple – this one, and one wherever it is he's just gone. One of the elements in his contract, I'll betcha. He won't be trusting *them* with his hoard any time soon, so he'll be insisting on carting it around with him. Transmat's the quickest way. I'd've liked to use it to follow him, but he's locked it out."

"So he's vanished?" Finn asked, dismayed.

"Up to a point," Jack admitted. "But he hasn't wiped the last set of destination coordinates. So I know where he's gone. Just can't go by the same route."

"So – what *are* we going to do?"

"We," said Jack, "are gonna pack our bags and follow him. C'mon. Need to get back to your place, asap! Wanna drop my coat off there, for one thing. So it'll be safe. I know how you like protecting it for me." He grinned at the way her recollection of their departure from Kvitverden morphed into a look of incomprehension. *Protecting it from what?* he could see her wondering.

"Gonna need a different type of coat entirely, where we'll be going," he added, tantalizingly.

*

Given how ill at ease she felt travelling in cars, Jack was somewhat surprised that Finn had managed to fall asleep, as he drove them back toward Taunton at top speed. Though, he conceded, she probably hadn't slept as well as she'd claimed

the previous night, and a lot had happened to her in a relatively short time; she needed to regroup. She might wake up with a crick in the neck because of the way her head had fallen to one side, her cheek resting against the fabric of her seat belt. But she looked very peaceful...

What he didn't know was that, despite that apparent peacefulness, she was in fact deeply disturbed.

Because she was dreaming about the Doctor.

She could see him. Actually *see* him. In her dream. With the eyes of her mind.

He was standing quite close to her, so that his head and shoulders dominated her field of view. Around the edges of it, details were hidden behind a kind of shimmering effect, but in the centre, his face was as clear as day. He was looking directly into her eyes, his own large and intent.

"*You can do this, Finn,*" he said, his well-remembered voice reverberating inside her head. "*All you need to do is look properly.*"

"*What do you mean, 'look properly'?*" She heard her own voice answering him, with the same reverberating quality.

"*My memories,*" he said. "*You've just got to look the right way. Concentrate. See everything there is to see. Hear everything there is to hear.*"

"*Doctor – are you really here?*"

"*My mind in yours,*" he said cryptically. "*That's what you've got to use.*"

"*How?*"

"*Concentrate,*" he said again, still staring fixedly into her eyes, as if he was looking right through her head, to the back of her brain. "*See everything there is to see. You can do it, Finn. You really can.*"

Suddenly he smiled at her, and it was as if a thrill of joy crackled through her like electricity.

"*Two heads are better than one,*" he said. "*Both of us. Together. Look carefully at my memories. Look the right way.*"

Then he began to move backwards, as if a camera that had been in close-up mode was pulling back to wide-angle, pulling her away from him at the same time.

"*Doctor, don't go!*" she pleaded, as he shrank into the distance.

But she heard him say one last thing before he vanished.

"*I'm still looking after you...*"

For a passage of time she couldn't measure, there was only darkness and silence in her mind.

Then she found she was watching a replay of the memory Jack had recorded onto his machine. What had the Doctor just told her to do? *Concentrate. Look properly. See everything there is to see.*

She jerked awake, with a gasp.

Startled, Jack shot a look at her.

"What's up?" he demanded, concerned.

For a moment Finn didn't answer him – couldn't answer him; she was too busy analyzing what had just happened in her dream. Or maybe it hadn't been a dream. Maybe it had been something else entirely...

She looked back at him.

"Pull over, Jack," she said abruptly. "Now. And get your mind-reader out. Got an update for you."



Chapter 8

A Way to Stop Ormr

Sitting together in front of the computer back in Finn's study, Jack and she waited for the new memory download to play.

"Here it comes," observed Jack, unnecessarily, as the picture began to configure on the screen – the same scene, Time Lord and Wyvern confronting each other.

"I can't let you do that, Ormr," said the Doctor. This time both picture and soundtrack were much clearer and unbroken, but the replay had started from the same point as before. *"That khasyon generator doesn't belong to you. It belongs to the Fuhrendray. And they need it, or their whole life support system'll break down. Terminally. And they'll die. So I can't let you keep it."*

"I am a Wyvern, Doctor. See the diamonds, the gold, from which it is made! It shines, it speaks to my heart. I have to have it, no matter what. And I will have it!"

"Now, now – it's naughty to tell fibs. You know perfectly well you haven't got a heart! A perfectly functional circulatory system, yes, but no heart. Not in the accepted sense."

"Jeer if you wish, Time Lord! You cannot stop me!"

"Ah, well, you see – that's where you're wrong. Of course I can. I know exactly how to stop you. And I will, if you don't give it up."

"How? How will you stop me?" Ormr challenged.

Jack and Finn, watching, saw the Doctor hold his sonic screwdriver up in front of his face. Unconsciously they leaned closer to the screen. Before, the memory had cut off at this point. What they were seeing and hearing now was new.

"Really clever thing, this," the Doctor mused. *"Which it would be, of course. I invented it, so it's bound to be, isn't it? And one of the things it can do really, really well is emit ultrasound."*

"What of it?" Ormr was scornful.

"Means I can play around at a bit of sonochemistry if I feel like it. Know what sonochemistry is? That's the effect sonic waves have on chemical systems. What about acoustic cavitation? Heard of acoustic cavitation? No? Blimey, what kind of education system do you Wyverns have? Big gap in the curriculum there! You really ought to get it sorted –"

The Wyvern cut through the excess verbiage with a roar.

"Of what do you speak?" he demanded.

"Bubbles," the Doctor announced.

"Bubbles? What nonsense is this?"

“Oh, it’s not nonsense. See, the principle is that in liquids bubbles form, grow and then implode – but not just in liquids. At a very, very tiny level, bubbles exist even in apparently solid substances. Like metals. Like – ooh, say – in tungsten, for instance.”

The Wyvern’s body language became very wary. The uneasy rustle of its wings was clearly audible on the soundtrack.

“Well, I suppose, to be strictly accurate, they’re not always perfect bubbles,” the Doctor amended. “But the principle’s the same. Everything has tiny little pockets of air spread throughout its physical structure, even if they’re only tiny weeny weeny ones...” He demonstrated by pressing a finger and thumb tightly together just how tiny he was talking. *“So if I was to use this setting, for instance”* – his thumb delicately adjusted one of the controls on the shaft – *“and point it in your direction”* – which he did; the Wyvern instinctively recoiled a few feet – *“just imagine what might happen! All those tiny little pockets of air in your scales, suddenly going wild, heating up. Expanding and then collapsing. All sorts of nasty high velocity interparticle collisions!”*

It was clear Ormr was now deeply unsettled. His wings half rose, as if he was contemplating flight in both senses of the word.

The Doctor suddenly pointed the sonic screwdriver with more definite purpose, and his voice became hard, uncompromising.

“But there are other things I can do with it, too. And you wouldn’t like them, either. Probably even less, believe it or not! But one way or the other, if you don’t give the Fuhrendray back their generator, I won’t have any choice. So you’re the one with the choice. The choice not to make me do this. Don’t make me do it, Ormr!”

The Wyvern simply hissed in defiance and contempt, and spread his wings to full extent, clearly preparing to attack the Doctor.

The Doctor’s thumb convulsed against the shaft of the sonic screwdriver. Blue light flared from its tip. And Ormr let out a roar of anguish.

At that point, the screen went blank, sound and vision both cut off. Finn frowned, but Jack wore an ear-to-ear grin, and punched the air with enthusiasm.

“Got it!” he whooped. “A way to stop Ormr! You saw which setting he used?” he demanded, rounding on Finn.

“Yes,” she said slowly.

“So you could do what he did?”

She got out her sonic and looked at it, then nodded. Her manner was slightly abstracted, but Jack didn’t notice.

“Then we got a plan!” he enthused.

“Which is, exactly...?”

“Follow him, stop him. Easy!” Jack beamed at her triumphantly.

“Great overview, bit short on detail,” Finn told him. “Follow him where?”

“You’ll see,” Jack chuckled. “Get your stuff together – anything you wanna bring with you. Everything you need to go Wyvern hunting.”

“It would help if you gave me an exact location,” Finn remarked acidly.

Jack grinned at her.

“Gonna treat you to some love in a cold climate,” he said mischievously.

Finn sighed.

“And how are we going to get there? Or is that part of the guessing game, too?”

“With this.” Jack held up his left hand. The cuff of his shirt slid down from his wrist to reveal a thick strap with a protective flap masking something embedded in the leather. One of the Doctor’s memories surfaced in Finn’s head.

“Isn’t that a vortex manipulator?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Ah! That’s how you knew where Ormr was, yes? It can detect life signs, can’t it?”

“Yup. Does a whole load of stuff,” Jack agreed. “Doesn’t fry eggs as well as you do, I’ll admit that.”

“Why am I getting a memory of the Doctor saying they’re a rubbish way to travel?”

“Well, kind of a bumpy ride sometimes,” Jack admitted. “You know something?” he added, with slight indignation. “Just because he’s got the TARDIS, he can be such a snob about the ways some of us have to get around! But, hey! Wait till you see where we’re going!” His eyes gleamed.

“Looks like I’m going to have to,” Finn muttered. And wondered why Jack – who normally had to be surgically detached from his greatcoat – was preparing to leave it behind this time. To *‘keep it safe’*... That was an aside that wasn’t filling her with confidence.

Nor was the sense of unease she felt about the solution offered in that enhanced memory of the Doctor’s encounter with Ormr. There was something fundamentally wrong about it, and she knew it, deep in her guts, even if Jack hadn’t picked up on it. But what did she have to offer as an alternative? Nothing. So she’d have to go along with Jack’s strategy.

But it still felt wrong. If only she could work out exactly why...

Maybe if she stopped thinking about it, the answer would come to her. In time.

*

Based on the purchases Jack had stopped to make on their way back from Wiltshire – her credit card was still taking a pasting, thanks to him! – she dressed warmly, putting on her hiking boots and raiding one of the trunks in which she kept some of her parents’ possessions – the ones she really hadn’t been able to bear let go.

There they were, the old but still serviceable woollen skull-cap hat and the insulated gloves that her mother had used to wear on the occasional skiing holidays their family used to take when Finn was still a very little girl. They were still among the things she stored, not necessarily because they were useful but simply because they had belonged to her parents, and they were redolent with too many precious memories; it would have been like discarding part of her own life.

She hefted them lightly in her hands for a few moments, her eyes unfocused; then she stuffed them into her rucksack, along with several other things that she had the feeling might be useful. Given that Jack obviously had no intention of telling her where they were going – his idea of humour, presumably – she was having to operate on intuition on this one; she only hoped the results would prove reliable.

Lastly, she looked out her thickest and warmest all-weather coat from her wardrobe, and shrugged it on. Then, drawing a deep breath, she picked up the bulging rucksack and went downstairs.

“Okay – Barbados, here I come!” she said to Jack, who was waiting for her in the living room, attired in all his newly-acquired cold weather kit.

“Knock ’em dead, kid,” he said cheerfully.

“You’re the only one I can afford to do that to,” she riposted.

His expression became more serious.

“This might not be too comfortable,” he warned her, “but don’t worry – the feeling passes pretty quick.”

“I’m wondering how it works at all,” Finn remarked. She double-tapped her forehead. “I’ve got a memory in here of the Doctor disabling the teleport facility.”

“Yeah, well – that was then,” Jack shrugged. “While I was planet-hopping after Kvitverden, found someone able to fix that bit of the functionality. Still can’t travel in time, but space, I can do.”

“So how does it work?”

“Grab my wrist – just make sure you’re touching the manipulator,” Jack instructed her. He held his forearm out in front of him, flipping open the cover of the controls. Finn took hold as instructed, and looked at Jack, obviously nervous. He smiled broadly at her. Then he pressed one of the buttons.

And they both vanished into thin air.

Chapter 9

Tremors

Gasping and disoriented, Finn fell to her knees, closing her eyes against the wave of nausea sweeping through her. From the similar sounds of physical distress coming from above her head, she gathered Jack was also suffering, but had managed to stay on his feet. But he'd been right; the feeling did pass quickly. She drew in a deep breath, and opened her eyes. As she accepted the hand Jack offered to help her up, she looked around.

They were standing on an alluvial plain. There were some areas of short, brownish-green grass, but the majority of the ground was either a gritty dark grey soil or else pebbles and rocks. A delta of small river channels filled with grey water surrounded them. About half a mile to their right, a low mountain range rose up to snow-covered summits, one of which was right opposite as she turned to face that way. On the lower slopes, the black rocks were only sprinkled with snow, but further up, it became a thick blanket. The top of the mountain was hidden under a strangely low-hanging layer of grey and white cloud. From it rose a billowing column of darker grey smoke. The air was fresh – cold, even – but not freezing. Even so, despite the blue sky and sun overhead, she was glad of her thick coat.

“So where’s this? Svalbard in springtime?” she asked.

“Pretty good guess,” Jack commended her. “Wrong island, though. This is Iceland. Southern part of. And that” – he pointed up at the cloud-shrouded peak above – “is a volcano.”

“Which one?” Finn enquired, shading her eyes as she looked up at it.

“Dunno. Irrelevant, right now. The only thing I need to know about that volcano at this time is that Ormr is holed up somewhere underneath it.” Jack had the cover of his vortex manipulator open still, and he was directing it at the snow-scattered cliffs under the summit. “As the crow flies, right about – there...” He pointed toward the cliffs, but at a downward angle.

“Except that crows – and we – don’t fly through volcanic rock,” Finn observed.

“So let’s go find a way in we can use,” said Jack, and set off across the plain, seeking a route that would avoid as many of the water channels as possible.

When they reached the foot of the sloping cliffs, Jack repeated his actions with the vortex manipulator.

“What’s it telling you?” Finn asked.

“He’s there, all right,” Jack told her, absently. “Somewhere down thataway.” Again, he pointed into the cliff face at a downward angle.

“So what do we do? Start digging?”

“Keeping that for a last resort,” Jack said lightly. “Let’s walk. Keep your eyes peeled for a way in.”

They walked in silence for a while, both scanning the cliffs alongside them for caves, crevices, and the like. After a while, Jack spoke up.

“Hey, been thinking. Wanna ask you something.”

She quirked an interrogative eyebrow at him.

“Keep thinking about how you looked. When I turned up out of the blue. You were surprised, sure. But not *that* surprised. Were you?”

She gave him a sidelong glance.

“Not *that* surprised, no,” she agreed.

“So how come?”

“Well – in a way – I was expecting you. Some time. I knew I was going to see you again. I just didn’t know when.”

“*How’d* you know?”

She slid him a sidelong look.

“Because the Doctor told me I would.”

“The *Doctor* told you?” He hadn’t been expecting that.

“He told me to tell you he did what you said. Whatever that means. Something to you, presumably.”

Once again, Jack remembered his words to the Doctor on Kvitverden. ‘*Look after her.*’

This, it seemed, was the Doctor’s reply to him.

“Yeah,” he said slowly. “It does. But how did he know –” He cut himself off short. “Guess *how* isn’t really the question.”

“No,” she agreed thoughtfully. “But I’ve often wondered *why* he said it. He doesn’t go for spoilers, as a rule. So when did he find out about this? What we’re doing? And why tell me? Was it simply that he knew he didn’t have long, so he told me something he wouldn’t otherwise have done? Or was there more to it than that? Wish I knew.”

“Me, too,” agreed Jack. “That way we could’ve asked him how things turn out.”

“Captain Harkness, I’m surprised at you! Didn’t take you for the kind who looks at the last page of the story before you start reading,” Finn chaffed, one eyebrow slightly raised.

“Yeah, well – patience isn’t always my strongest suit,” Jack told her, with a shrug.

It was about a quarter of an hour later that Finn suddenly came to a halt, staring at the cliff face. Jack was several paces on before he realized she wasn’t following. He stopped and looked back.

“What’s up?” he asked.

Finn tore her eyes away from the rock to look at him curiously.

“I thought you wanted a way in,” she said, sounding puzzled.

Jack looked at her, equally puzzled.

“So?”

“Well – won’t that do?” She gestured at the cliff.

Jack looked at where she was pointing. Blank rock.

“Won’t what do?”

“Can’t you see it?”

“What?”

“The cave. Tunnel mouth. Whatever that is.” She gestured again at the cliff. Jack looked again – and this time, he could see it. A black maw of an opening in the rockface.

“Perception filter!” Jack crowed. He looked at Finn, a slight frown creasing his forehead. Perception filters were alien technology, misdirecting the senses of anyone in their vicinity, making them think whatever the filter was masking wasn’t there. Once your attention was drawn to the object that was being masked, as Finn had just done for him, the filter ceased to work. But ordinary humans couldn’t detect them. So how had she?

On the other hand, having associated with the Doctor, just how ordinary a human was Finn?

“How come you saw straight through it?” he challenged.

“That’ll be the Doctor’s mind in mine – the telepathy bit,” Finn said. “He told me they don’t work on anyone with telepathic ability. From which I’m guessing you don’t...” She half-smiled at him. “Well, it’s kind of a reassurance to have it confirmed you can’t read my mind.”

“Don’t bet on it,” Jack warned her lightly. “I’ve got ways... Okay – I’d better go first. Take my hand?” He held it out to her and his blue eyes twinkled suggestively.

“Why – are you a stranger in paradise?” Finn retorted lightly, but making no move to accept. “Well, go on! What’re you waiting for? Or should I go first after all?”

“Lead on, Macduff,” Jack invited her, with a flourish.

“Oi! Misquote alert!” she corrected him severely. “It’s ‘*lay on*’, not ‘*lead on*’. Macbeth was issuing a challenge to fight, not suggesting they take a turn round the garden!”

“Yeah, well – might find yourself doing that, too,” said Jack, more sombrely. “Fighting. When we find Ormr.”

Silenced, Finn followed him toward the opening in the otherwise impenetrable cliff. Jack paused at the entrance, and did another scan with the vortex manipulator.

“Okay, this is it,” he confirmed, and strode in.

They found themselves in a roughly hewn tunnel some twenty feet or so square. When Finn turned to glance back at the entrance, she could see the bluish-white daylight pouring in from behind them. Ahead, the light quickly evaporated into a thick darkness which nevertheless hinted that, in the distance, there might be a glow of orange ahead.

Life is so mad, Finn found herself thinking incredulously as she cautiously followed Jack toward the glow. *Here I am, the mind of an alien genius in my head, keeping company with a man who can’t die. Can’t die, for goodness’ sake! And*

what am I doing? Following him into the bowels of a volcano, of course! Like you do! And to do what, exactly? To tackle a creature who's suddenly sprung out of legend right into reality. Total it up! Doesn't that count as mad? I'd say so. Absolutely mad...

Her train of thought was interrupted as she suddenly felt a tremor underneath her feet. Alarmed, she instinctively reached out to touch the wall of the tunnel, seeking safety and stability, but that was shaking, too.

"Jack?" she said, nervously.

"Don't worry about it," he said, his head and shoulders a black silhouette against the increasing glow. "Volcano, remember?"

"But – an active one?" she persisted.

The silhouette shrugged.

"Maybe." *Nothing we can do about it*, said his tone.

He was right, of course. If this was where Ormr had taken refuge, they had no choice. Because the alternative would be even more disastrous.

As they progressed, occasional faint tremors making their presence felt, the orange glow grew stronger until they were able to see their surroundings fairly well. Not that there was much to see; just the rough surface of the tunnel floor, its seamed rock walls, winding sinuously onward and – ever so slightly, but always detectably – downward.

After a while, it became quite obvious to Finn that Jack was uneasy about something. Despite the light of the orange glow, he hadn't doused his torch, and was flashing it about, repeatedly examining the walls and the roof of the tunnel.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Too easy," he said flatly. "Too '*come into my parlour*'. He's got his hoard here, and you're telling me all there is is a nice wide pathway straight to it, help yourself? Like he's gonna let that happen!"

"So what are you looking for? Some kind of booby trap?"

"Something like –"

Jack didn't get to finish his explanation. Unbeknownst to him, he'd already found it. And triggered it.

A cracking sound from above made them both look up. A section of the tunnel roof some ten feet in length was fracturing. It was only milliseconds away from coming down on their heads.

Jack's reaction time was even quicker. He turned and gave Finn a violent shove on the chest, the force of the movement throwing him back and away from her at the same time. Taken by surprise, she stumbled backwards, crashing heavily to the floor and then rolling quickly onto her stomach.

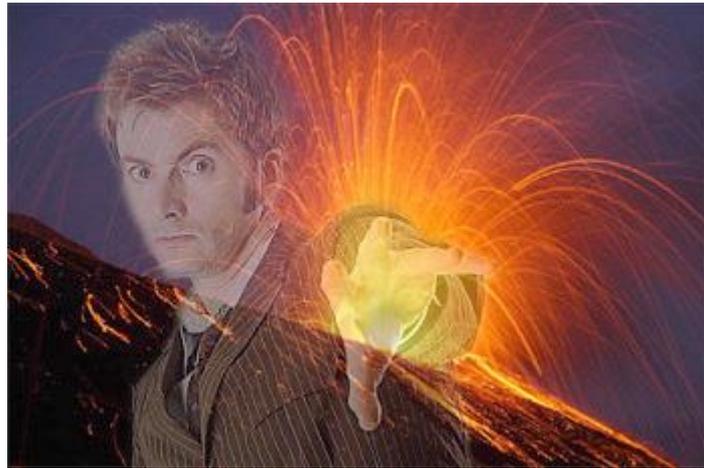
Even so, she wasn't quite far enough away. Jack vanished, blotted out under a blurred mass of falling rocks and flying dust. And in the multiple collisions of the plummeting stones, the trajectory of one of them was diverted in Finn's direction. Not a particularly large one, but the swiftness of its passage added force to the blow as it struck her above the temple, just as she was about to lever herself up. She immediately went flat on her stomach again, her body instantly limp, and lay without moving as the rocks continued to pile across the width of the tunnel until finally all had come down. The smallest ones continued to dislodge and tumble down over the surfaces of the larger ones, covering her feet and legs with a thin blanketing of rock fragments and dust.

At last, all was still. No hint of movement.

Certainly not within the mass of the rockfall itself.

Nothing moved.

Nothing.



Chapter 10

The Doctor's Return

Darkness, everywhere. But she could see the Doctor again. He was in front of her, looking at her, as he had before. But this time a slight frown made a furrow between his eyebrows.

“What is it, Doctor? What’s wrong?”

“Come on, Finn! You’ve got to do this! You’ve got to look the right way. You’ve got to look properly! See everything there is to see.”

“You told me that before...”

“Yes, but you’re not doing it! You’ve got to see everything there is to see. You’re not! You’re still missing it.” His eyes were full of urgent entreaty. *“Concentrate. Look carefully. Look the right way. You can do it!”*

He was beginning to drift away from her again, receding into the blackness.

“What? What is it I’m not seeing? Help me, Doctor! What have I got to do?”

“Look... See everything... You can do it...”

He’d gone.

And then, just briefly, she saw again a fragment of the memory she’d seen before. The Doctor, confronting Ormr.

“There are other things I can do with it, too. And you wouldn’t like them, either... you’re the one with the choice. The choice not to make me do this. Don’t make me do it, Ormr!” And his thumb on the shaft of the sonic screwdriver, the blue flash from its tip, followed by the panicked, anguished roar from the Wyvern.

A sound that faded as she came back to consciousness in the dimness of the tunnel. For a moment she lay there, still dazed, what she’d just seen and heard playing back in her mind. What was it she wasn’t seeing, that he was so urgent for her to see? Why had that particular memory been replayed? She concentrated on it, hard. What could she see? Ormr in front of him. Two hazy blurs of colour beyond the Wyvern, one either side of him – the left one pallid grey, the right a pale yellow. Right in front of her, the Doctor’s hand – seen from his own viewpoint, of course. The long, angular yet graceful fingers clasping the shaft of the sonic screwdriver. The setting he was using. Raising it, pointing it. The fear, the rage, the pain in Ormr’s scream.

What *was* it she wasn’t seeing?

And what was it about the whole thing that felt so wrong to her?

Again she saw the Doctor’s hand holding the sonic. She could sense the Doctor in her mind willing her to look, to *see*; it felt almost like a pressure behind her eyes. And, gradually, something that hadn’t been clear before began to come into focus. He hadn’t just operated the sonic once. He’d moved so quickly, so dexterously, that she hadn’t seen what he’d done until now.

She’d already seen him fire it on one setting – but he’d changed the setting and fired it again. And *that* was when Ormr roared...

The scene faded into blackness as she came slowly back to full consciousness, and found her mind suddenly swerving from the Doctor's exhortations to the question of why she was lying on the ground, why it was so much darker than it had been.

Then she remembered, and in a single swift movement she rolled over, stones spilling off her legs, and sat up.

Something she momentarily regretted, as she gasped and brought a hand to her head in an instinctive attempt to alleviate the sudden stab of pain in the temple. Coughing as her movements disturbed the dust coating her body, her fingers encountered the wool of her hat; she carefully pulled it off and stuffed it in her coat pocket, then cautiously explored the side of her head with tentative fingertips. No blood – her hat must have protected her that much – but a slight swelling was detectable. She must have hit her head somehow, or else something had hit it for her. That must have been after Jack –

Recollection slammed into her, and she stared at the huge pile of rocks in front of her. No wonder it was so much darker than before; even though there was a slight gap between the top of the pile and the tunnel roof, allowing some of the orange glow to permeate through, the mass of rocks obscured most of the light.

And somewhere under that lot...

"Oh, Jack," Finn said aloud, and sighed.

Wincing as the pain in her head jabbed mercilessly at each movement, she laboriously climbed to her feet and tried to formulate a strategy, squinting at the narrow gap at the top of the mound. There were only two possibilities: Jack was the other side of the pile, or else he was under it. Either way, she needed to get through the gap to the other side. If she had to dig him out, it was too dark here for her to see what she was doing; if not, she needed to be on the other side to rejoin him.

There was just one problem with that – what if Ormr was aware his booby trap had been triggered, and came to see what was going on?

On the other hand, what if he didn't? She couldn't leave Jack buried while she just cowered in the dark...

She called his name, but heard no response. Either he was unconscious – because even if the rockslide had killed him, he'd surely be alive again by now – or he was buried. Or both. So – Ormr or no Ormr – there was nothing for it but. Fearfully, carefully, she approached the mound of stone and began to climb.

A couple of times – once with the help of a fairly noticeable tremor – the unstable slope gave way beneath her weight, and she found herself sliding back, scrabbling for firmer handholds and pelted with falling debris. But finally she got to the top and could clear a larger space, scooping away the barrier of smaller stones and fragments that formed the crest of the pile, making it easier to thrust her head and shoulders, and then her whole body, through the gap. The momentum of that manoeuvre sent her sliding down the other side, bringing a cascade of smaller stones with her that stung her painfully as she rolled downwards, but fortunately none of the larger ones. She came to rest in an uncomfortable sprawl, face down near the foot of the slope.

Feeling battered and bruised, one hand nursing the contusion on her temple, she got to her feet and stumbled off the unsteady surface of stones onto the floor of the tunnel, staring along its length with widened eyes, fully expecting to see Ormr arrowing along it toward her.

No sign of him.

Nervously, she turned round and scanned the piled detritus.

No sign of Jack, either.

She coughed again; there was still a lot of dust in the air, and most of it seemed to be lining her throat. Wincing as her abused body complained at every movement, she eased her rucksack off her back and rummaged inside it. The plastic bottle of water she was seeking was – almost miraculously, she felt – still intact. She rinsed out her mouth and spat, then drank properly. Then she put the bottle away, put the rucksack to one side, and surveyed the pile grimly.

"Jack?" She tried calling once again, but still heard no hint of sound. She sighed. Only one thing she could do, then. Start shifting rocks...

She tried to take it at a measured pace, casting occasional nervous glances over her shoulder along the tunnel. Speed wouldn't help Jack particularly, wouldn't prevent Ormr's arrival if he was coming, and would only expend her reserves of energy – which didn't feel that great – to no purpose, even if she discounted the danger of bringing more of the fall down

on top of her if she was careless. But at least she knew there'd be a result. It wasn't as if she had to wonder if Jack was alive. He would be. He was probably just getting impatient, waiting for her to find him.

Perhaps that assurance of the outcome, and the fact that there continued to be no sign of the Wyvern, plus the noticeable receding of the pain in her head, was what lifted her spirits somewhat. She suddenly realized that, for some incredibly incomprehensible reason, she was humming *The Work Song* under her breath as she worked. It helped, somehow. Made her feel more positive. She began to hum it more loudly.

Until a muffled voice suddenly addressed her from somewhere under the rocks in front of her.

"Hey, Herb!" it said. "Lose the trumpet and get on with it, will ya?"

"Jack!" she gasped. "Are you okay?"

"Never better! Just don't want you wasting breath on the in-flight entertainment!"

"Ungrateful brute," she said with relief, and went to work with renewed vigour.

"Okay, getting close now," he said, a few minutes later. His voice was coming from under a largish rock right in front of her, supported by smaller rocks underneath it. She crouched down close to it.

"You in there?" she enquired.

"You know something? Yeah, I am," he said, his voice barbed with sarcasm. "And I'd kinda like not to be, if it's okay with you? Kind of a tight squeeze in here."

"Okay – brace yourself – this one's heavy," she said, and reached down to move the rock. She tried to shift it as carefully as possible, trying not to cause him any further discomfort, but, judging by the noises of protest coming from under it, she wasn't being as successful as she'd hoped.

"Ow-ow-ow!" he exclaimed, as she finally manoeuvred it away to reveal his head, pressed sideways against the rock floor. He swivelled it to look up at her, his face grimy with dust and grit. "Hey, that's a weight off my mind," he observed, wincing a little.

"Not convinced 'rocks in the head' isn't still an applicable description," Finn observed, tongue in cheek.

Jack growled.

"How do you spell that?" Finn enquired interestedly, and bent once again to the task of digging him out.

"Woh – that's better!" he observed some time later, once again able to stand and stretch his limbs. "Thanks," he added casually, brushing dust off his clothing.

"Oh, it was purely pragmatic," Finn assured him. "Wasn't going anywhere without you, was I? You're my canary in this particular mine."

"Thanks!" Jack grinned. "Been called quite a number of things in my time, but not a canary. Not that I recall..."

"Well, enjoy the imagery. Personally, I've been scared stiff Ormr would detect this and show up." Finn jerked a thumb over her shoulder at the rockfall. "Won't he know it's happened?"

"Maybe," Jack conceded.

"But then why wouldn't he've come to –?"

Finn broke off, as at that moment another slight tremor became detectable in the tunnel. She breathed a quiet sigh of relief when it died away.

"Maybe that's your answer," Jack commented. "Maybe because of the tremors, he figures one set off the deadfall." He wiped his hands over his face, getting off as much of the rock dust off it as he could. Finn privately decided not to tell him how much he'd failed to remove. He took off his jacket and gave it a brisk shake. Finn coughed as a fresh cloud of dust filled the air.

"Okay, then – let's go," Jack said briskly, and instead of putting the jacket back on, hooked his finger into the neck loop and tossed it casually over his shoulder as he led off. "Here's hoping we don't set off any other booby traps!"

Already a futile hope, had he but known it.

Because he hadn't noticed the tiny, matching indentations either side of the tunnel just a few feet beyond the deadfall. And therefore he had no idea that he'd just led Finn through the invisible laser beam aligned between them. Breaking it twice.

They walked on for maybe another half a mile or so.

And then, as they rounded a turn, they both froze.

In the centre of the tunnel, confronting them, stood Ormr.

For a moment, he was as taken by surprise as they. Understandably. After all, he'd seen Jack die. In England. Small wonder he was stunned to see him alive in Iceland.

"You!" he hissed, rapidly extending his wings and then folding them again in a gesture of astonishment. "You – *alive*? I *slew* you! *How* are you alive? *How* are you *here*?"

"That's need-to-know stuff, Ormr," Jack told him, eyeing him warily. He released his finger from the neck loop and let his jacket slide to the floor, so both hands would be free; he was probably going to need them. This was altogether a more dangerous situation than they'd faced in Castle Wood; here, with the tunnel blocked behind them, there was nowhere to run to. Even if they made it back to the rockfall before the Wyvern caught them, they'd never get up the slope and through the gap in time. "Thing is, I *am* here." He deliberately avoided reference to Finn, still trying to make sure Ormr concentrated on him as being the threat. "Still gonna stop you, you know."

The Wyvern hissed angrily, and his tail lashed to and fro behind him.

"So you are resistant to my poison," he purred ominously. "But there are other ways, little man..." His neck looped sinuously as he dropped his head to the same level as Jack's face.

Realizing what was about to happen, Jack yelled at Finn, "Get outta here!", and took a step forward to make himself as big a target as possible, give her as much protection as possible.

After that he only had time to blink once before the Wyvern unleashed a lethal jet of flame at his face.

Just for an instant, the world turned orange-red. Before it *burned*...

His skin, his hair, his shirt – all blistered and charred, then burst into flame. He began the process of wondering if that was Finn's scream he could hear, or his own. But he never got to finish the thought before the red turned to black.

Chapter 11 ***Well Done You***

When he shuddered back to life, he had the impression some little while had passed.

He was lying on his back on the rock floor. As he pushed himself up, propping himself on both elbows, he became aware that not even the least of blackened rags remained of his shirt and T-shirt. Just as well, or they might have fused into his skin as his body repaired itself; that had happened before now, and the remedy had been both inconvenient and painful. Fortunately his trousers had survived intact, although even they were singed and blackened with soot.

He could smell something sour and unpleasant. Turning his head to locate the source, he found Finn regarding him.

She was crouching against the wall of the tunnel, her knees drawn up to her chin and both arms clasped around them, a slightly sick look on her face. She'd evidently been literally sick, as well; that was the cause of the smell. He noticed his jacket, folded on top of her rucksack on the floor beside her.

The corners of her mouth contorted into a weak attempt at a smile.

"Well, that was educational," she remarked, striving for a normal tone of voice. "In its way. Watching you" – she chose the appropriate word carefully – "reconstitute."

"Should'a seen me the time I was literally blown to pieces," Jack commented, sitting up.

"Pass," she declined, grimacing. She still looked pretty green around the gills. "Didn't care much for the look of you this time, thanks! The bits that weren't raw were carbonized... Remind me not to use the phrase 'well done you' any time soon." She swallowed a couple of times, hard.

The corner of Jack's mouth twitched as he turned his attention to his state of partial undress.

"Damn, he burned my braces," he observed, aggrieved.

"Pants round your ankles is probably the least of your worries," Finn told him.

Something caught Jack's eye. Some soot-edged scraps of clothing, loosely grouped on the floor between himself and Finn. The tattered remains of his shirt and T-shirt. So they hadn't been completely destroyed, after all. But how had they got where they were, so far away from him? He stared at them, then worked it out. What she must have done, once she'd realized what was happening.

“That was you?” he demanded, pointing at the discoloured fragments of cloth.

“Had to,” said Finn bluntly. “Or it was pretty obvious you’d end up wearing them inside you instead of outside.” She was evidently trying not to remember the experience of having to touch his burned body too clearly. Yet she’d done it, nonetheless.

“You’ve got some guts, you know that?” Jack said approvingly.

“Yeah? Well, so have you – and I don’t want to see them again any time soon,” Finn muttered. Without looking at him, she slid his jacket onto the floor, lifted her rucksack from the floor beside her onto her lap, and rummaged briefly inside it. Then she pulled something white out of it and tossed it at him.

He caught it one-handed and realized it was another T-shirt. He threw her a surprised look.

“Where did this come from?”

“Belonged to my father,” she said. “I’ve still got some of his stuff. But I told myself, let’s face it, he doesn’t need it any more. So I brought it along. Had a feeling you might end up needing a spare.”

“You know,” Jack said, getting to his feet, “sometimes you remind me so much of Ianto, it’s not true.” He pulled on the T-shirt.

“I understand now why you wanted to leave your coat where it’d be safe. Just don’t let that wretched Wyvern torch your trousers, as well,” Finn advised him, climbing to her feet and tossing his jacket at him. “Didn’t bring a spare for those.”

“I’ll keep that in mind,” Jack agreed, fielding the jacket and putting it on. “Though – interesting possibilities, huh?”

“Even so, let’s make that a future that never happens, shall we?” Finn suggested politely, but with a slight edge in her voice.

“Spoilsport,” Jack pouted. “Where’s your spirit of adventure, Miss Thornton?”

“Focused on other things, at the moment,” she told him. She was trying to keep her tone light, but there was a note of tension in it that was very evident to Jack’s ear. *I’m not a professional, like you...* Two episodes of peril in such quick succession, and their consequences, were beginning to scrape her nerves raw. He’d better tread carefully – he needed her to stay onside, functional.

He let out an exaggerated sigh of regret.

“Told you before – don’t know what you’re missing,” he reproved her. “You know, when this is over, you oughta give me a try. Just so you don’t go through the rest of your life wondering what it would’ve been like –”

“Not now, Jack,” she said tersely.

“Oh, so you’re thinking about it, but just not now? Hope springs anew!” he suggested triumphantly.

“I said *not now*, Jack,” she repeated; quietly, but that edge of tension in her voice had grown harder. He wondered why; and why turning on his charisma full blast wasn’t helping her to relax. It didn’t usually fail him as a tactic...

“What’s wrong with now?” he demanded lightly. “*Carpe diem*, Finn! And if you don’t wanna seize the day, how about seizing me? You might –”

“Look, Jack, just shut up and give the flirting thing a rest, will you?” she snapped, suddenly rounding on him with startling ferocity. “We both know I’m not your first choice of target! Even if” – she double-tapped her forehead violently to show him how she knew – “the main qualifying criterion with you is that the object of your attentions simply has to be alive! So just drop it, will you?”

Surprised, he blinked.

“Hey, it doesn’t hurt –” he began, but she cut across him savagely.

“Yes, it does! Look, listen to me. Just listen to me, all right? Soon after my family died, I met a man. Charming, good-looking, witty, clever – seeing any likenesses here? Just when I was at my most vulnerable, looking for someone to fill that empty place in my life. Only guess what? Turned out he was a great actor! Because what he really was was just a cold-blooded opportunist, taking advantage of my circumstances. You think you can’t be hurt any more, and then you find out just how wrong you can be.”

She was almost snarling at him, the orange light of the tunnel intensifying the anger and frustration on her face. He stared at her. He’d never heard that tone of voice from her before. This wasn’t the Finn he knew.

“And now here you are, and it’s like it’s happening all over again! Here’s me, with another empty place in my life where someone who mattered to me more than anyone in the world used to be. And here’s this charming, good-looking, witty, clever guy trying to make out like a hit-and-run with him and a bit of instant self-gratification is going to make all my problems go away. Like you’d be in it for the long haul! Or monogamous, or any of the stuff I’d *really* need. Yeah, right!”

Her anger, briefly transmogrified into scorn, had now become a wail of distress.

“Well, you’re *not*! You’re *not* in it for the long haul. With *anyone*! That’s not what you do! And maybe not just because you *can’t*, for all I know!” She looked at him, her face crumpling. “Jack, you’re a friend – great friend! – but *please* – *don’t* keep messing with my head! Done that, got the T-shirt, don’t want to go through it again! Okay?”

At that point she lost it altogether. She burst into tears, covering her face with her hands, and sank to a sitting position on the floor, leaning back against the rough rock wall.

Jack stood motionless and dumb for a long while, looking down at her distress. At last he moved, slowly, sitting down beside her and putting an arm across her shaking shoulders. She let it lie there, and gradually the shaking diminished in intensity, until she took her hands away from her face, straightened up, and let out a long gust of a sigh. She attempted to dry her face with her hands, but they were so damp the results weren’t great. Then she turned to look at him, her eyes red-rimmed and puffy, still swimming with tears, her cheeks blotched red and white. And, amazingly, she was trying to smile at him.

He tightened his grip around her shoulders.

“Guess I am who I am,” he said, in a low voice.

She was touched. Because, being who he was, that was probably the closest he could get to an apology. But he was nevertheless trying to offer it to her. And also touched because she had the feeling apologizing was something he very rarely did. If ever.

“Aren’t we all?” She shrugged, despite the weight of his arm. “Wasn’t trying to change you, Jack. Know the song? ‘*I love you just the way you are.*’ It’s just not that kind of love. And it’s never going to be.”

He acknowledged that with a nod.

“Anyway, you weren’t to know. And I’m not seriously expecting you to stop flirting. Give me some credit for realism! That is what you do! But you just picked the wrong moment... I know you couldn’t’ve known that, but – I just needed you to – well, you know...” She trailed off.

“Sure.” He gave her shoulders another squeeze, then stood up and offered her his hand. She accepted it, and he gave a helping heave as she got to her feet. With her blotchy, tear-stained face and swollen eyelids, she was probably as unattractive now as he’d ever seen her. And he didn’t usually do ‘unattractive’. But there was a vulnerability in the eyes looking back at him that aroused his protective instincts almost without his being aware of it. He reached forward protectively and enfolded her in a hug.

“Friends?” he murmured into her hair.

“Yeah. Friends,” she confirmed. He heard a breath of laughter from her. “And normal flirting will no doubt resume shortly. Told you I was a realist.”

“Just as well... Okay, then,” he said more briskly, releasing her. “Back to the real agenda. Wyvern hunting. Good to go?”

“Good to go,” she assured him.

He decided she meant it, nodded, and looked up and down the tunnel, deciding what to do next. He was about to move off when Finn suddenly said, “Jack...”

He looked an enquiry at her.

“That ‘being blown to pieces’ thing,” she said. “I thought maybe you’d want to know... I know what it’s like.”

“Not the kind of thing you wanna imagine,” he advised her.

“Jack, you’re not listening,” she said flatly. “I don’t *need* to imagine it.”

“Hey, you’re kidding me, right?” he said lightly. Then, after a few seconds of looking at her, his expression changed. “You’re not kidding me,” he said slowly.

She shook her head, once.

“How...?” It wasn’t often Jack found himself at a loss for words.

“The Doctor and I got trapped. In a machine – or by it, maybe. We kept dying – that is, we thought we were dying – but we kept finding we were still alive. In reality, the machine was making it all happen only in our minds. But we didn’t know that, to start with. So it felt real, every time. And one of the times was when the TARDIS exploded, with us inside it. I could feel it happening. The blast ripping through me. Tearing me apart. Cell from cell. And I don’t think I’ll ever forget that feeling. That sensation... Even though it turned out not to be real. You?” She raised her eyebrows interrogatively.

Jack shook his head. “Not something you forget,” he agreed.

She relaxed a little, and one corner of her mouth rose into a wry smile.

“Not sure if this was really the time and place, but – since you’d mentioned it anyway – thought you might just be interested to know that we both belong to the small but extremely exclusive ‘*I’ve Been Blown Apart But I’m Still Alive*’ club. Bet you don’t meet many other members, do you?” The smile broadened slightly.

“Guess there’s not much of a waiting list for that particular club,” Jack admitted. He looked her over. “You’ve sure had some life-changing experiences since you met the Doctor, haven’t you?”

“This, from *you*?” she riposted promptly, brushing it aside.

He laughed. Then a thought struck him.

“How come Ormr didn’t –?” he began, then decided not to finish the question. Finn evidently did so in her own mind, though.

“Because I ran for dear life,” she said, matter-of-factly. “Which he seemed to find hilariously funny. I could hear him laughing behind me, but he didn’t bother to come after me. Thank goodness. He doesn’t seem to see me as any kind of a threat. Twice he’s killed you, and just sneered at me. So I bottled it. Left you there, and legged it. Though I’m calling it self-preservation, to make me feel better. ‘Discretion is the better part of valour’, and all that.” She shrugged. “I waited a few minutes, then tiptoed back. And he’d gone. So I took a look at you, took time out to throw up, then sat down to wait for you to rejoin the world again.”

“Don’t beat yourself up,” Jack told her. “You’re doing all right.”

“If you say so.” She sounded unconvinced – depressed, even.

“I do,” he said firmly. “And you know something? I’m *right*.”

“Course you are.” She smiled at him; a slightly lopsided smile, to be sure, but a valiant attempt, nonetheless. “Mind you, you’ve been having a pretty rough day, yourself. Just out of interest – what’s the most number of times you’ve died in one day?”

“You don’t wanna know,” Jack advised, with studied nonchalance. “Anyway, some days I lose count.”

“Well, don’t go for the record today, will you?”

“Right at the bottom of my list of ambitions,” he assured her. “C’mon.”

Chapter 12

The Cavern, the Bomb and the Canister

It was an unexpected development when, after another half a mile or so, the tunnel suddenly opened out into a large cave, and they found themselves facing a choice of nine new tunnels.

“Great,” Jack commented sarcastically.

“What do we do now? Chuck a stone into each one and see if anything grows?” Finn enquired.

“Think I can do better for you than that,” said Jack, operating the vortex manipulator and doing a sweep of the tunnel mouths on offer, starting with the leftmost one. When he got round to the seventh of the nine, he stopped.

“That one,” he said, pointing at it briefly before deactivating the manipulator and leading the way.

“I wonder where the others go,” Finn said from behind him.

“Probably all lead into volcanic vents or something just as cosy,” Jack opined. “Another one of his booby traps, probably – pick the wrong tunnel, end up swimming in a lava flow.”

“Nice,” Finn observed.

“That’s the kind of guy he is,” Jack returned flippantly. “Likes to give you a warm welcome. A real warm one. Be careful. Got the feeling we’re getting close now.”

They went on in silence, until Jack began to slow, evidently on high alert. He glanced back at Finn and held a finger to his lips; she nodded. Cautiously, they crept forward.

It was apparent that once again the tunnel was opening up into a larger space. Just how large was not evident until they reached the tunnel’s threshold.

Beyond it was a huge cavern, the ceiling lost in gloom high above them. They were standing on the lip of a shelf of rock some twenty feet above the floor, which stretched out almost completely flat to the other side of the vast space. The walls were formed of what looked like shafts of basalt, seamed and cracked with age.

To the left, a large gap had been broken through the barricade of shafts into the vent that lay beyond, where an angry red glow pulsed. Because of the height of their vantage point, they could see the source of the glow – the roiling surface of a pool of magma, ominously and incessantly moving, like a hot, heavy syrup, orange and yellow and red and black.

All around the cavern smaller, unseen fissures regularly released goutts of what looked like steam, though heaven only knew what other gases were being vented along with the water vapour. Hydrogen sulphide, for one – the air reeked of it; not overpoweringly, but enough to make Finn’s nostrils flare in distaste.

In the rockface opposite them, a smallish, circular black hole yawned; another tunnel, probably.

To the right, a smaller, secondary cave opened off the main cavern. In it, heaped high, was what could only be Ormr’s hoard. Jack’s description of the small pile of gold and bejewelled artefacts they had seen under Castle Wood as ‘loose change’ had been most apposite, Finn realized; the glittering sea of treasure that filled the smaller cave from wall to wall must have been at least fifteen feet deep, so much that it spilled out down in a steep gradient that sloped partway into the main cavern. The amount of precious metals and jewels it must take to fill such a space to that depth was almost too fantastic to contemplate.

In the centre, on the flat rock floor of the main cavern, stood three things, only one of which Finn recognized.

Nearest the treasure cave, a transmat platform, twin of the one Ormr had used to transport himself away from them under Castle Wood.

Of the two items she did not recognise, one was apparently some kind of lifting apparatus, standing perhaps twenty feet back from the gap into the magma vent. In general shape it was like a large tripod, supporting a long but sturdy arm. From the end of the arm dangled a claw-like mechanism, holding in its grasp a small and inoffensive-looking dark grey metal canister, perhaps as much as eighteen inches long and twelve in diameter; some kind of symbols were visible drawn in black on the grey surface. The arm of the apparatus was clearly capable of being turned in any direction, though at the moment it was extended invitingly toward them, at an angle that pointed it well away from the vent.

A few feet behind the lifting apparatus, between it and the transmat, rested a black object with slightly rounded edges, about four feet square, somehow almost obscene in its squatness.

Finn stared at the scene for several seconds, then glanced at Jack. He was staring at the canister, his brows drawn together in a scowl.

“What is it?” she whispered, just loud enough to be heard above the bubbling of the magma in the vent.

“That canister. Looks familiar.” His tone was unencouraging.

“What do you think it is?”

He didn’t reply at first; instead he fished in one of the pockets of his jacket and pulled out a small pair of field glasses, which he raised to his eyes and levelled toward the canister. After a few seconds he lowered them again, but continued to study the canister with a scowl blacker than before, if that was possible.

“What is it?” she prompted him again.

“Maratoxin,” he whispered grimly. “One of the most efficient poisons anywhere in the universe. Irreversibly fatal to all forms of carbon-based life. Animals, plants – doesn’t differentiate. And that” – he nodded at the black object – “is a bomb. A big one. Kinda size that’ll trigger the whole volcano into erupting big-time if it goes off in here.”

Finn tried to suppress her horror at the implications.

“You mean –?”

“Looks like he’s planning to trigger an eruption inside an already active volcano. That’ll mean a cloud of tephra being ejected into the Earth’s atmosphere, high enough to be picked up in the tropopause –”

“The what?” Finn interrupted.

“Atmospheric layer between the troposphere and the stratosphere. Where the jet streams in both hemispheres live. And that’ll carry the maratoxin right around the world. Give it long enough, it’ll get everything in the air, everything on the land, everything in the oceans. And when it dissipates, it’ll leave a world clear of life, but still stuffed full of the precious metals and gemstones he wants, and plenty left over for the Slitheen to make a profit out of.” Jack regarded the canister and the bomb grimly. “Neat – gotta give ’em that,” he growled.

Finn, too, stared at the canister.

“But – it’s so *tiny*,” she objected, irrationally.

“Haven’t you heard? ‘It’s the little ones’re the most dangerous,’” Jack quipped with black humour. “Don’t let the size kid you. That’s a planet killer, right there in that *tiny* tube of yours. And we’ve gotta stop it.” He stared down at the cavern floor. “Somehow.”

“What do you mean?”

Jack cocked a sardonic eyebrow at her, and the penny dropped.

“Oh,” she said. “Ormr...”

“Yeah. Ormr. Where is he, I wonder?” Jack craned his neck to scan round more intently, but there was no apparent sign of the Wyvern. “Well, sitting here won’t get the baby bathed. C’mon. And keep quiet as you can. Wherever he is, we don’t want to alert him before we have to.”

“What are you going to do?”

“Get that canister. Right now he’s only gotta swing that arm round and release the grippers and down the vent it goes.”

“What about the bomb?” Finn looked anxiously at the menacing black shape.

“Worry about that later. First things first,” Jack said, surveying the length of the rock shelf for a way down. He pointed to the left, where breaks in the rockface provided an uneven series of steps to the floor.

“What do you want me to do?” Finn whispered, following him.

“Watch for the bogey man,” Jack advised her in an undertone of black humour. “Let me know if you see him. I want as much warning as I can get if I’m gonna have to fight King Ghidorah again.”

In spite of the circumstances, Finn couldn’t suppress a chuckle at the reference.

“You’re definitely a student of the classics, aren’t you?” she teased gently.

“Renowned for it,” Jack agreed. “Just you make sure that sonic’s handy. And on the right setting. For when he shows.”

He sat down, legs over the edge of the shelf, then swivelled over and began to climb down the rockface, his back to the cavern.

Finn took the sonic screwdriver out and changed the setting. No longer the original one, the one Jack still thought was the one the Doctor had used. Now she set it to the second one, the one she’d seen when in the tunnel. Though something about doing that made her vaguely uneasy, as if there was something wrong about it still. But she had no choice; she could only act on the information she had. Making sure the sonic was readily to hand in the right-hand pocket of her jacket, she waited until Jack was clear, then lowered herself over and followed him. A couple of minutes or so and they were both down.

Finn scanned nervously around for any hint of Ormr’s presence, but Jack had eyes only for the maratoxin canister. He was about to start toward it when he felt her grip on his sleeve. He looked at her quickly, then followed the direction of her suddenly widened eyes.

From where they now stood, they had a better view of the second cave and its priceless contents, the undulating surface rolling like the waves of a golden sea. And from their new vantage point, they could see what had been hidden from them before.

Ormr. Sleeping, curled up on his hoard like a cat on a cushion. Also like a cat, the tip of his tail twitched from time to time, but he seemed to be so deeply asleep that, Jacobson's organ or no, he hadn't detected their presence. Maybe the sulphurous atmosphere was masking them from him, but they couldn't count on that state of affairs continuing.

Jack rather superfluously put his finger to his lips again. Then he pointed at Finn, indicating with forked fingers directed first at his own eyes and then toward the slumbering Wyvern that she should keep watch; she nodded vigorously. Treading carefully, he stepped toward the apparatus from which the canister depended, and began to examine it.

Finn stared at the sleeping creature, his metallic flanks rising and falling gently, the fiery eyes hidden behind silver lids, and couldn't help feeling regret that something so beautiful at rest should be so dangerous when awake.

The Doctor would have felt like that, too, she knew. Which made her wonder again: what exactly *was* it he'd done to Ormr the last time? What was it that he'd kept nagging her to notice, every time he'd been there in her head?

She couldn't escape the feeling that, whatever Jack was expecting, or intending, everything about the outcome of this encounter hinged on her remembering whatever it was that the Doctor wanted her to retrieve from his mind in hers...

She was distracted by the realization that Jack was gesticulating at her. He was standing by one of the legs of the tripod, where a small panel of controls was affixed. He pointed at her, then at a large blue button, and made as if to press it. Then he strode over to the suspended canister, stood underneath it, spread his arms, and mimed catching it. He arched his eyebrows at her, as much as to say, *Got that?*

She nodded, and went over to where he had been standing by the control panel. He held up one fist; the thumb shot out, then the forefinger, then the index finger, following by an abrupt pressing movement of the other thumb – he wanted her to give him a count of three, then press the button. She nodded again, and waited for him to give her the signal he was ready.

All of which left them with their backs to the smaller cave, and unable to see the red slits that had appeared as the Wyvern's eyelids slowly opened a little – just a very little...

Jack positioned his feet carefully, measuring carefully just where he stood in relation to the canister. Then he looked over at Finn, licked his lips, and nodded, once. Finn held up her left hand and silently mouthed the numbers as she displayed her thumb – *one* – her forefinger – *two* – her index finger – *three*. Then she pressed the button.

The grips holding the canister released, and it plummeted into Jack's waiting hands.

He blew out his cheeks, holding the canister as tightly to his chest as if it was his dearest possession. Then he came back over to Finn, and pointed to the rucksack on her back. She wrestled it off, and Jack carefully fed the canister into it before inserting his own arms through the straps and shrugging it into place on his shoulders.

He looked at Finn, and grinned; she grinned back.

And then neither of them were grinning any more, as they heard a noise behind them. They swung round, just in time to see a small avalanche of gold and jewels sliding down the slope of treasure, disturbed as Ormr leaped to the cavern floor.



Chapter 13

Hearts' Desires

As Ormr planted his feet and extended his neck and wings to full extent, Finn thought how appropriate Jack's comparison of him to King Ghidorah was; admittedly he had only the one head, not three, but – given that caveat – the likeness was a striking one. All he lacked was Godzilla to fight.

Instead, he had them...

Jack grabbed Finn and pulled her alongside him.

"Sonic!" he hissed harshly, drawing his revolver. She swallowed hard and thrust her hand into her pocket, ready to pull out the sonic screwdriver and use it. It was on the setting she had seen the Doctor use. She had only to point it and press...

The Wyvern reared his head upwards and stared at Jack with evident astonishment.

"Still you are not dead!" he hissed, perplexed. "Why do you not die? What manner of man are you, that you do not die?"

"Oh, I'm special, me," Jack assured him. "One of a kind. Ask Finn. She'll tell you. Not like the other men in your life, am I, Finn? Isn't that what you said?" He glanced at her for an instant, just long enough to wink, before returning his attention to Ormr.

She nodded wordlessly, but the Wyvern ignored her.

"Keep telling you I'm gonna stop you, Ormr, but you just don't listen," said Jack, caricaturing regret.

Ormr considered him thoughtfully for a long moment, then began to pace slowly, deliberately along the length of the cavern toward the vent. Jack began to move, too, positioning himself and Finn so that the fat black bulk of the bomb stood between them and the Wyvern, giving them an illusion of protection.

"Perhaps there is another way," Ormr mused. The chatoyant eyes turned yellow as he stared at Jack. The silver wings rustled slightly as he paced. "It is true you are not like other men, because you cannot be poisoned, you cannot be burned. But you are still a man. I have watched mankind for thousands of years, and there is something I have learned about them. There is a way in which men and Wyverns are not so very different." He had nearly reached the vent; now he reversed himself and began to retrace his steps, still at that same measured, deliberate pace.

"Uh-huh?" Jack acknowledged indifferently. "And what's that?" He kept his revolver half-raised, ready to use.

Tense, Finn watched both of them in turns. She was poised to whip the sonic screwdriver out and use it on Ormr – but something in her subconscious was still niggling away at her. She thought back to that last recollection of the Doctor's confrontation with Ormr. The setting she had the sonic on now was definitely the one the Doctor had used. But what exactly did that setting do? If she'd had enough time to analyze the problem, she had the feeling there was something she ought to realize about the new setting... If only she could remember!

But she couldn't concentrate, because she needed all her attention for the slowly approaching Wyvern as he drew level with them again. There, he stopped, and turned to face them fully.

“Like us, you love – *that*.” His left wing extended toward the cave and its heaped mounds of precious metals and gems, directing their eyes that way. His own glittered like diamonds. “Gold, silver, gemstones! And I have seen the covetousness in men’s eyes, the desire to possess these things; I have seen what that desire has done to them, what it has led them to do to each other. We Wyverns are also compelled by the desire of these things. But we differ in that men see mere wealth, and the power over wealth that they so covet. Wyverns see only beauty. Pure, unadulterated beauty that fills us with ecstasy. Look!” The wingtip and its single finger moved in a jerking gesture toward the heaped gold, the glistening jewels. “The shine, the lustre! The colours! The way light glistens and gleams on each surface, each facet! The magnificence, the splendour of it! It is beautiful almost beyond bearing!”

Despite everything, Finn found herself moved by the Wyvern’s words, the vibrant passion in his voice. She had never considered what his motivations might be, other than anthropomorphically assigning him the common human desire to accumulate treasure. That its value to him might be solely aesthetic, that his compulsions might be driven sheerly by a love of pure beauty, had never once occurred to her.

“This planet is full of such beauty,” Ormr continued, after a pause. The glowing eyes stared at Jack, willing him to be seduced. “There would be enough to be shared, once my contract with the Slitheen has been fulfilled. Enough for you to be able to fulfil any desire you wished, any desire at all. All men have their price! Even if you are deathless, you are still a man, with a man’s desires. Many pleasures may be obtained on many planets through possession of such treasures as those. Many,” he repeated meaningfully.

“So you’re offering me my heart’s desire, provided I step out of the way and let you obliterate all life on Earth,” Jack said, his voice – and face – unreadable.

“Yesss!” the Wyvern hissed quickly, interpreting his words as encouragement that his lure might be taken. “Consider! Beauty that lasts for thousands upon thousands of years! Beauty that transcends all else! Placed in the scales against transient life forms, merely living and breeding and dying and decaying in an ever-repeating cycle, leaving nothing of any lasting value?” His voice rose in incredulity, his upper lip convulsed into a grimace of contemptuous dismissal.

“Definitely in the ‘diamonds are forever’ school of thought, aren’t you?” Jack drawled. He cocked his head to one side as he looked at Ormr. “So what it comes down to is, you’re offering me a whole lot of gold instead of a whole lot of lives?”

“Yesss! Yesss! The choice is obvious!” the Wyvern hissed. As to him, indeed, it was.

“Well, now, there’s the thing, you see,” Jack drawled, shaking his head sadly. “You just don’t get it, do you? But then, you’re a Wyvern. Wyverns never do get it.”

“What is your meaning?” Ormr’s head reared up sharply, sensing that something was wrong.

“You don’t get that lives are more important,” said Jack flatly.

Even as he said it, he was thinking about how he had changed. There was no certainty those words would ever have been uttered by the man he had once been. But a lot had happened to him since then. *Down to you, Doctor...*

But there was no time for reminiscing. Ormr’s eyes blazed red, and he reared to his full height, both wings outspread.

“You *refuse*?” he roared, half furious, half incredulous.

“Fraid so,” Jack shrugged. “Nobody ever comes out ahead on pacts with the Devil. He’s got a habit of moving the goalposts.” His voice hardened. “You, a Wyvern, offering to *give away* so much as one gold coin, let alone half your hoard? Like *that’s* gonna happen!” He dismissed the notion with scorn. “You’d double-cross me, no time flat, even if I *was* interested. And I’m not! Got people on this planet more precious to me than anything your one-track mind could ever comprehend. So start listening, Ormr, and listen good. Get yourself and your hoard off Earth and don’t come back, and I might let you live. If you want to figure the alternative, go right ahead.”

Ormr stared at him, and then for the first time he turned his attention to Finn. She didn’t like the way his eyes narrowed as he looked at her. Jack, too, sensed danger, and stepped closer to her.

“This girl,” said Ormr. There was a note of speculation in his voice that Finn found distinctly unsettling. “She appears to serve no useful purpose, yet she accompanies you everywhere. Is she, perhaps, one of those people who are ‘precious’ to you?” He made a jeer of the word.

Finn didn’t like the turn his thoughts were taking. Neither, she could see, did Jack.

“*Be ready*,” he whispered. “*When I say...*” She nodded, and her fingers tightened on the sonic. The thought of what it might do to the creature in front of her was a nasty taste in her mouth.

“No useful purpose?” Jack said aloud, and smiled derisively. “You think I brought her along just for the ride? On a whim? Missing the point, big time! You keep thinking I’m the one you need to worry about. Wrong, wrong, wrong, Ormr!”

Ormr raked Finn with a look of scorn.

“She is no danger to me,” he hissed dismissively. “She lacks the courage to do anything other than flee from my presence. As she has demonstrated time and again!”

“You think?” Jack taunted. “She’s the one you really need to be afraid of, Ormr! She’s the one who can destroy you.”

The Wyvern moved his head quickly to pinpoint Finn with a sneering, red gaze.

“Explain yourself! I see nothing here to fear!” He looked at Jack with an air of satisfaction, then back at Finn. “I see an *opportunity*. You cannot die – and you have told me yourself you are one of a kind. Therefore she *can* die. How will you react, I wonder, if I threaten to kill *her*? Can she negate my poison? Can she withstand my fire? Shall I experiment, little man?” He shifted his feet and flexed his wings; his tail lashed back and forth.

“Finn! NOW!” Jack roared.

Finn pulled the sonic out of her pocket and pointed it straight at Ormr.

But she couldn’t do it. She just couldn’t.

Because it hit her in that instant why this had always felt so wrong.

The Doctor would never use the sonic screwdriver as a weapon. NEVER.

Use it to even damage, let alone kill, another living creature?

She remembered his words to Ormr, describing the effects of acoustic cavitation: “*All those tiny little pockets of air in your scales, suddenly going wild, heating up. Expanding and then collapsing. All sorts of nasty high velocity interparticle collisions!*”

Use the sonic to do *that*?

No. Never. No way.

Whatever he had done in that encounter with Ormr, that had never been his intention.

He would not have done it. Would never have done it, no matter what was at stake. Because that wasn’t his way of solving problems. That wasn’t who he was.

And because he wouldn’t have done it – she couldn’t do it, either. It would be a profound and everlasting violation of – of so many things.

No. No. No.

“Finn!” Jack shouted at her frantically. “*Do it! Do it now!*”

Even as he spoke, the Wyvern launched himself into the air and over the bomb, over their heads. Finn could see the deadly tailtip arrowing through the air toward her. Jack fired upwards at Ormr’s head. Whatever he hit, it distracted Ormr and put him off his aim; the tailtip shot past Finn’s head with only a couple of inches to spare; she heard the whoosh of air past her ear as she ducked away.

His tail missed her; his wing didn’t. Its tip caught her on the backthrust, throwing her violently against the side of the bomb. The back of her head smacked into the hard surface, and she slid limply down the black metal surface, a vision of Jack still battling the furious creature in the air above him fading as her eyes dimmed, the sound of further shots ringing in her ears but dwindling out of hearing.

*

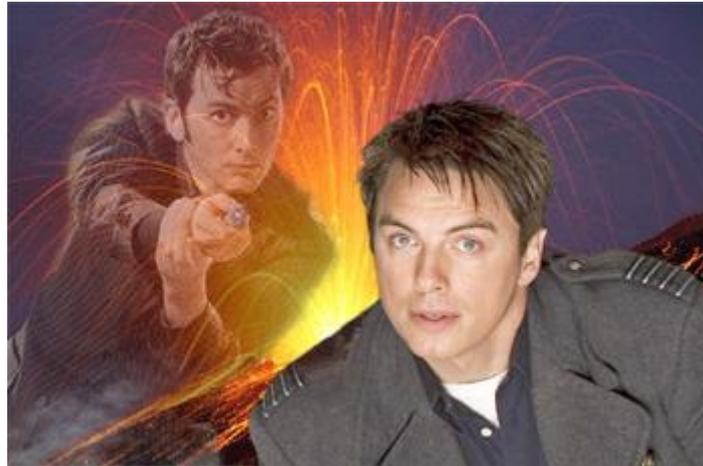
Jack saw Finn slumping to the floor, her eyes fluttering closed. There was only one chance now. He had to get back to her and get the sonic, use it on Ormr.

But the Wyvern had no intention of letting him get anywhere near her. He swooped at Jack, emitting a dissonant, evil-sounding likeness of laughter as he batted at him with his wings. The long finger on the leading edge of his right wing caught Jack’s upflung left arm, slicing through the fabric of his jacket and cutting into the flesh beneath. Jack gasped with pain, but still managed to avoid the deadly tailtip arcing through the air at him.

Ormr swooped upwards to gain height, then arrowed downward, blasting flame. Jack flung himself sideways just in time, hitting the floor hard. He barely registered the slight cracking sound as his left wrist made contact with the rock before he rolled over and back onto his feet. He'd kept his hold on his revolver, but there were only a couple of bullets left in it.

An eye shot – that was his only hope. But he didn't get a chance to line up his aim before Ormr was on him again, driving him back and back and back with gouts of deadly fire.

Maybe his luck – like time – had just about run out.



Chapter 14

Hostage to Fortune

In the blackness in front of her eyes, Finn saw the Doctor confronting her, his eyes wide and blazing, his mouth drawn back in a rictus to reveal his clenched teeth.

“Come on, Finn! Now! It's got to be now! Look! Look properly! You've got to see it NOW! Everything! Or it'll be too late!” He was frantic. *“You can do it! My mind in yours! Together! NOW!”*

She looked at the memory again. Saw him point the sonic in Ormr's direction. Heard the Wyvern's roar.

And this time, she did see everything.

A moment's blackness, and then she was coming round, back to full consciousness. She realized she could only have been out of her senses for a few moments.

But long enough for her to know what to do.

Head ringing, she scrambled groggily to her feet and looked round.

To her horror, she saw that the hovering Wyvern was driving Jack in the direction of the magma vent with threatening jabs of his tail and bursts of flame that herded him ever closer to the pulsating orange orifice in the rock. Even as she looked, she saw the tip of a sweeping wing knock him heavily to the floor on his back, his arms spread wide; she saw the bloody rent in his jacket sleeve, but she couldn't stop to think about it. She'd got to stop Ormr forcing him into that vent. Jack's ability to resurrect would be sorely tested by immersion in lava – perhaps too sorely. And, besides, he had the canister in the rucksack on his back. If he went into the vent, so would the maratoxin. And that would be the end...

She heard a memory of the Doctor's voice echoing in her head. *“Come on, Finn! Now...!”*

She drew in one deep breath, then yelled at the top of her voice.

“ORMR! LEAVE HIM ALONE!”

Taken by surprise, the Wyvern looked back at her, then dropped to the floor, turning to face her with incandescent eyes. Jack was equally startled, staring at her. Both of them had registered the unexpected snap of command in her tone. Ormr drew back his lips, displaying the savagery of his fangs, and the forked tongue flickered in and out almost too quickly for the eye to follow.

“Have you found courage to defy me at the end, then?” He tried to sneer, but there was a note of uneasiness in his words, as if something had warned him the real moment of confrontation had come. “Or is it that you wish to plead for his life?”

Jack took his opportunity while Ormr was distracted. He scrambled to his feet and dashed away from the vent, circling around the Wyvern and back toward Finn until a flare of flame directed only just in front of him made him stop quickly.

“Perhaps I cannot kill him,” Ormr said with venomous calm. “But I can *hurt* him. Hurt him again and again and again. Do you not fear for him?”

“Jack’s a big boy,” said Finn calmly. “He can take whatever you dish out. We’ve got more important things to worry about.” She caught Jack’s expression in her peripheral vision, the incredulous frown on his face, his utter astonishment at such apparent and uncharacteristic callousness from her, of all people. Later, she might remember that with amusement. But this wasn’t the moment.

“We’ve been making a mistake, Jack,” she said, addressing her words to him but not taking her eyes off Ormr. “About the acoustic cavitation. That’s not what he did. The Doctor,” she added superfluously, as if Jack would be in any doubt about who ‘he’ was.

Jack looked mystified.

“What’re you talking about?” he demanded. “We saw the setting!”

“We saw the *first* setting,” Finn corrected him. “But he didn’t use it, did he, Ormr?”

The Wyvern hissed aggressively and lowered his head, his eyes baleful slits.

“What d’you mean – *first* setting?” Jack persisted.

“The one that would induce acoustic cavitation,” Finn said. “That’s where we went wrong. Thinking the Doctor would use the sonic as a weapon, to harm a living being. As if!” A look of realization spread across Jack’s face. “But he did something even worse with it, as far as our friend over there is concerned. Didn’t he?” Finn went on, challenging the lowering creature, who hissed again, but still did not reply.

“How do you know?” Jack probed.

“I got another look at the scenario. Saw something in the background, behind Ormr. Not just his hoard. A *transmat*, too. And with my sonic, we’ve got all the same ingredients right here.”

“So,” Jack enquired, with ostentatious casualness, “what would be worse for a Wyvern than having every one of his body cells bustin’ out all over?”

“This,” said Finn. Moving like lightning, she pointed the sonic screwdriver away from Ormr, in completely the other direction, half-turning herself so that she had to look back to her left in order to see Ormr, but her right arm could point unwaveringly to the right, towards its target.

“Think about it, Jack,” she invited. “What does a Wyvern care about more than anything else in the world? What threat would make him most afraid? What’s his real hostage to fortune?” She dared not look at him directly, but sensed his dawning comprehension. “The Doctor knew just how to get to Ormr. So first he did this” – she fired it toward the transmat – “and then – he did *this!*” And she swiftly changed the setting and thrust it out in the same direction, though she did not operate it again – not yet.

“Twice? He used *two* settings? Two *other* settings? What for? What did he do?” Jack could hardly get his questions out fast enough.

“What I’m about to do,” Finn said shortly, and fired off the sonic.

Ormr’s howl of anguish completely drowned out Jack’s gasp of surprise as part of the slope of treasure spilling out of the other cave simply vanished. A minor avalanche of gold slid down to fill its place. Summoning up her memories of the Doctor’s training, Finn made another swift change to the sonic, then brandished it at the transmat again, turning her head back toward Ormr, sighting at him along her left shoulder.

“Get back, Ormr, or I’ll do it again,” she ordered. Automatically the Wyvern obeyed her and shuffled backwards, closer to the vent.

“What the hell happened then?” Jack demanded.

“That’s one pile of loose change Ormr’s never going to see again,” Finn said flatly.

“Where is it? What have you done with it?” Ormr roared at her.

“Transmatted it right across the Solar System from here, into the Sun,” Finn informed him. “Golden syrup, you might say, even as we speak.”

Jack grinned.

“Hey, I prefer maple,” he wisecracked. Finn smiled tightly, but kept watching Ormr.

“And I’ve just extended the transmat’s field to enclose the whole cave over there, Ormr. So next time I use this, the whole lot goes. And you’ll never see any of it again. So now it’s *your* turn to choose. A whole lot of lives, or a whole lot of gold?”

The Wyvern was quivering with fury and frustration. Finn tried to hide her doubts behind the inimical stare with which she faced him. Would the threat to his existing hoard, the obsessive love he had for what he had built up over centuries, be sufficient to stop him trying to carry on with his plan to acquire all the treasures of the Earth? She watched him writhe, his eyes changing from red to orange to yellow and back again, and she knew the outcome was not assured. Which way would he decide?

Jack, too, was watching the mental turmoil at the other end of the cavern, at the same time slowly edging in Finn’s direction – but also, according to her peripheral vision, slightly forward, toward the tripod mechanism. What was he up to? She dared not take her eyes off Ormr to look at him.

“Do not destroy my hoard!” Ormr pleaded. “Thousands of years! So much beauty! Can you not see it? Does it not speak to *your* heart? The man would not take what I offered. Will *you* not take it? Gold? Silver? Jewels beyond compare? I make my offer to *you*! Will you not take it?” he pleaded again.

“Ormr,” said Finn unequivocally, “this is *my* planet. *My home.*”

There was a short silence, as the realization dawned on the Wyvern that she, too, could not be seduced. His eyes began to pulse redly.

“Only if you are alive,” he snapped viciously. “The explosive device is already set and operational. Its countdown is under way, even as we speak! It *will* explode at the chosen moment, and you cannot stop it! This volcano *will* erupt! I need only kill you both now, and the plan will still succeed!”

“Hey – I won’t stay dead, you know!” Jack exclaimed urgently.

“But you will be stopped long enough for me to retrieve the maratoxin from you!” Ormr riposted malevolently. “And once it is in the magma, there will be nothing – *nothing* – you can do to prevent what will then happen!”

There was a hollow feeling in the pit of Finn’s stomach. If Ormr killed her, Jack could still use the sonic, given the chance. But Jack wouldn’t be immune to his flame, either, and Ormr was right – he’d be out of things long enough for the Wyvern to put the maratoxin into the vent. And then it would be too late.

“So, woman of Earth,” Ormr challenged in a sibilant purr, “the question is, can you escape my flame?” He lowered his head and thrust it out toward her on the long, serpentine neck.

“No, it isn’t,” she contradicted him, unable to entirely suppress the sudden tremble in her voice. “The question is, Ormr of Bahramun, can you stop me destroying your hoard?” And with a jerky movement, she straightened her arm, brandishing the sonic at the transmat and the hoard beyond it with renewed menace.

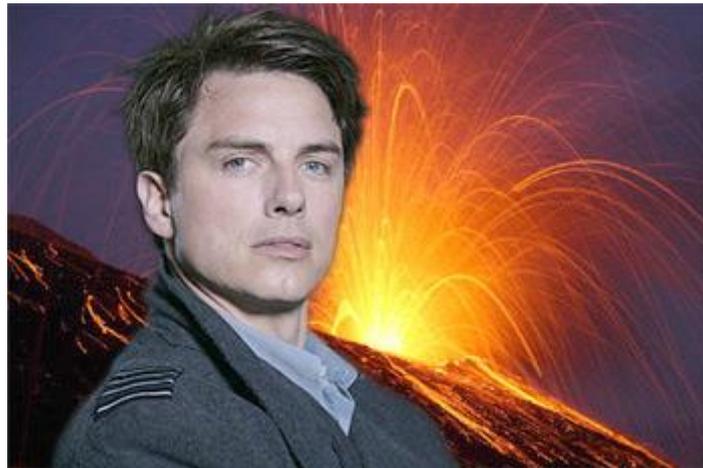
Ormr couldn’t help himself; he froze in instinctive reaction to the threat to that which he held most dear, had nurtured and cherished and loved with all his heart for so many millennia.

Which was when Jack acted. Quick as thought, he leaped forward to the controls of the tripod. The long, sturdy metal arm of the apparatus abruptly swung through the air with startling speed, arcing toward Ormr. Frozen by his dilemma, the Wyvern failed to react in time. The gripping mechanism, swung out by centrifugal force, struck the side of his head, throwing it up and back. Stunned, he stumbled backwards. But he was too close to the vent. He missed his footing, and tipped backward into it.

But he was a Wyvern – he had wings. He’d just spread them and fly out of danger. Wouldn’t he?

He tried. The silver wings began to extend. But the heat inside the vent was too intense. The silver suddenly blotched with areas of red and black as the fragile membrane of flesh beneath the tungsten scales was instantly scorched, and he uttered a shrill shriek of agony. Instinctively he snapped the wings back in to his body to protect them from the searing

heat – and plunged helplessly down into the magma. An orange gout of liquefied rock exploded upwards, then fell back, closing sluggishly over the place where he had vanished.



Chapter 15

Canceling the Contract

Moving her head slowly, as if she was trying to turn it through treacle, Finn looked at Jack, who was clinging, panting, to the leg of the tripod. He smiled at her triumphantly as he strove to catch his breath.

“Tungsten scales won’t help him down there,” he said, straightening up. “Cooked. Like a turkey in aluminum foil.”

“Aluminium,” Finn corrected him absently.

“To-may-to, toh-mah-toe,” Jack jibed. “He’s just as dead.”

“Yes,” said Finn. There was an undertone of regret in her voice. “He’s just as dead,” she repeated.

“Hey, come on!” Jack exhorted, strolling toward her. “We did it, didn’t we?”

“Yes. We did it...”

He strode up to her and put his hands firmly on her shoulders, forcing her to look at him.

“What is it?” he demanded.

Finn met his eyes with a troubled look.

“I’m sorry, Jack,” she said hoarsely, shaking her head. “I couldn’t have done it. The acoustic cavitation. Even if it *had* been the solution. I just couldn’t. I promised him I’d never do anything with my sonic that he wouldn’t do. *He* wouldn’t have done it. So *I* couldn’t.”

Jack moved his right hand to cup her around the back of her neck, so that his face was only inches from hers, and turned the full force of his blue eyes on her.

“Damn right he wouldn’t,” he said emphatically. She looked taken aback by his ready agreement. “You did *exactly* what he’d’ve done. If it’d been him there instead of you, wouldn’t’ve turned out any different! Yeah, he’d’ve done just the same as you did. And *I*’d’ve done just the same as *I* did. Know what he’d think about *that*, too. Which I can live with,” he shrugged. “But *you!* He’d’ve been *so* proud of you!” He tightened his grip on her neck and gave it a gentle shake of emphasis.

She gave him a half-smile, but she was still troubled.

“But if you hadn’t been here,” she said, intent on self-castigation. “If it’d been left to me... What if he’d done it? Killed everyone? *Everything*. It would’ve all been down to *me*. Because *I* wouldn’t – Because of –” She broke off, and looked at him with tragic eyes.

Jack squeezed her neck again.

“You listen to me, Fionnula Thornton,” he said, forcefully. “Can’t all be like the Doctor. He’s different. He’s a Time Lord. Older, wiser. Not human. Brings different things to the table. Okay, he’s unique. But *so are you*. You had to do what *your* heart told you was right. You start overriding that and you end up being someone like me. Trust me, you *don’t*

want the kind of stuff that follows you round the rest of your life when that happens. Sure, the Doctor's a hell of an act to follow! And sometimes, *it can't be done*. Not by the likes of you and me. But you want a role model? He's your man! No contest! Even if sometimes you *can't* match him. He'd've been behind you all the way on this one. And you know it," he concluded, firmly.

She stared at him for a few moments more, and nodded. Then reaction really kicked in; her eyes filled with tears and she leant into him and wept, while he put both arms around her and held her tight.

He wondered if the Doctor really had known just how lucky he'd been, to have a friend like Finn.

He damn well hoped so.

He let her cry for a few moments, then gave her a small shake and let her go.

"Come on," he said briskly. "Got some clean-up to do. Then we oughta get out of here."

As if to emphasize his words, a tremor shook the cavern, hard enough to make them sway on their feet, and to make some of the items of Ormr's treasure dislodge and come tumbling down to the bottom of the slope. Fresh gouts of steam erupted energetically from the cavern walls, and the smell of hydrogen sulphide in the air suddenly grew more intense.

"Okay, I'm convinced," Finn assured him, wiping her eyes hastily.

Jack turned away and walked over to the treasure. He stood there surveying it for a few moments, then bent down and raked through the pile, picking up a few items like necklaces and bracelets and subjecting them to closer examination.

"What are you doing?" Finn asked.

"Finding you a souvenir," he said. "Think you've earned at least one."

"Thanks for the thought, but I'm not really a jewellery person," she told him.

"Oh, come on!" Jack protested. "Not interested in *jewelry*? What kind of a girl *are* you? Not even this? It's kind of appropriate, don't you think?" He held something up, something small that she couldn't quite see. She went over to him and he displayed it with a wide grin. It was a small silver pendant fashioned with exquisite craftsmanship in the shape of a dragon, with two tiny topazes for eyes.

She expelled a snort of amusement and smiled wryly, wondering briefly how old it was, how long ago Ormr had added it to his collection, from whom he had taken it. Well, now Jack wanted her to have it. It would be churlish to refuse, she supposed. And there was a rather attractive irony about it.

"You're right," she acquiesced. "It is. Okay – thanks." She allowed him to clip the chain round her neck, and let the small, precious thing fall down to be hidden inside her jacket. Then she saw the wet red lips of the slash in his jacket sleeve.

"How bad is that?" she asked urgently, making as if to touch it.

Jack parted the bloodied edges with his fingers and peered at the wounded forearm inside.

"Nothing to get excited about," he assured her. "You want something to worry about, worry about that bomb." He nodded significantly over her shoulder; she followed his eyes, and remembered.

"Ormr said it was already on countdown!"

"Yeah," Jack confirmed, back into professional mode. "Let's take a look."

He strode purposefully back to the huge black metal shape, and dropped to his haunches by the side that faced the transmat. Finn looked over his shoulder and saw something she had not had the leisure to observe before; a small panel showing a series of alien characters in a glowing red LED-like display, along with a series of buttons with further symbols on them which gave her no clue as to their purpose.

Jack studied them for a few moments.

"Not good," he grunted.

"Why not?"

"I know this make. Falatrian. Best weapons designers in the Thousand Galaxy Cluster. This one needs a code before it'll let you change the settings. And we can't exactly ask the code-setter which combination he picked. Not any more."

Finn instinctively glanced at the smoking vent, then away. She coughed, and looked back at Jack.

"So how do we stop it?"

Jack looked up at her sombrely.

"Don't know if we can," he said.

Finn stared at him in dismay.

“Why not?”

“That might be Wyvern, might be some other language,” said Jack, indicating the red characters. “Doesn’t make any difference. Because whatever character set that is, it’s not one I know. Might be reading five days, five hours, or five minutes. No way of telling.”

“But – but the volcano’ll blow,” she stammered, and coughed again.

“As long as we’re out of here with the maratoin by the time it does, won’t matter,” Jack said, with a shrug. Then he froze, as realization struck him.

“Dumb!” he exclaimed suddenly. “Dumb, dumb, *dumb!*” He turned the full force of his blue eyes on her.

“What?” she demanded. “What do we do?”

“What do *you* do,” he corrected her. “You do what you did with Ormr’s gold. Use the sonic to change the range of the transmat field to cover it. Then transmat it into the sun. Here it’s a big fish in a little pond. There, it can blow as big as it likes – won’t make a dime’s worth of difference.”

He stood up abruptly. “Just got a call to make first,” he announced unexpectedly. “Before we run out of time.”

“To whom?” Finn asked, startled.

He ignored the question and strode over to the transmat. Part of it appeared to be some kind of communication apparatus, with a microphone-like device and a viewing screen. Jack studied the controls for a moment, then swung the rucksack off his back and took the maratoin canister out and took a closer look at it.

“Uh-huh,” he said with satisfaction. “That’s what I thought...”

“What?”

He showed her a tiny set of buttons set into a small recess at one of the canister, protected by a transparent cover.

“What do they do?”

“Kind of like a grenade. Press the right one, and up it goes.”

Finn swallowed nervously, and muffled another cough.

“So what are you going to do?”

“Watch and learn,” he advised her. He flicked a few of the controls on the communication panel, ignoring her mystified expression as the screen shimmered into life.

Finn found herself staring at the unmistakable bulbous green features of two of the Slitheen family of Raxacoricofallapatorius.

“Hi, guys!” said Jack brightly. “Figured you’d be loitering someplace close...”

The two visibly recoiled from their screen, their nictating membranes flashing repeatedly across the huge black spheres of their eyes in alarm. Then one of them recovered himself and leaned forward.

“Who are you? Where is Ormr?” he demanded.

“So sorry Ormr isn’t here to speak to you himself,” Jack apologized insincerely. “But he’s got something real hot goin’ on right now.” He saw Finn’s eyes flick over to the vent again as she stifled another cough, and smiled briefly. “So, on his behalf, I’m here to tell you – sorry, but the deal’s off. Know you’re gonna be so-o-o disappointed, but that’s the way it is. Planet Earth’s off the market right now.”

The Slitheen looked at each other.

“We think otherwise,” said the second one, belligerently. “Our instruments show the Falatrian device is in countdown mode. So Ormr has already set our plan in motion. You can’t possibly stop it. Unless you can stop an erupting volcano, of course!”

They seemed to find this very funny, and sniggered.

“So everything will go as we planned,” said the first Slitheen slyly. “With or without Ormr. In fact, it’s more convenient for us without him. This way, we don’t have to pay him. We can keep it all for ourselves! Fatter profits still! So, whoever you are, perhaps we should thank you – you’ve made things easier for us.”

“You think so?” Jack drawled. “I’d reassess, if I were you. Cut your losses. Right now. Or I might start gettin’ kind of annoyed.”

“What can you do?” demanded the second Slitheen, scornfully.

“What can I do? Oh, a whole bunch of stuff, believe me! For instance, you want I should transport this up to your ship?” The Slitheen recoiled again as they were suddenly confronted with the maratoin canister in his hand. “Complete with contents? Set to trigger the second it arrives?”

The response was that of two Raxacoricofallapatorians in a state of extreme panic, gobbling over each other to the point of incoherence.

“Yeah, that’s what I figured,” Jack cut across them. He looked at them as if struck by something odd. “You know, you seem *surprised*...? Oh, of *course!*” he went on, in a sarcastic drawl, caricaturing realization. “I’m *sorry!* You were expecting this to be down in the magma by now, weren’t you? Ready to go up when the volcano cuts loose. Guess this is what you might call a setback, huh?” There was suddenly an edge in his voice that made Finn shiver. “Ain’t gonna happen. So scram. Now. And don’t come back. Or you might find me waiting here for you. Which might make me just a tad angry. And my advice to you? *Don’t make me angry. You wouldn’t like me when I’m angry...*”

He glanced at her with a gleam of laughter in his eye, and she put a hand to her mouth to mask her amusement at his coining of the familiar phrase; while it was there, she used it to smother yet another cough.

Jack looked back at the Slitheen one last time, his voice even harder than before.

“Game over, boys. Beat it! NOW! Or you get your gizmo here right back in your faces.” He brandished the canister at the screen. “You hear me?”

Both he and Finn stepped back hurriedly; the communicator issued a brief but sharply ear-piercing sound resembling a squeal of panic as it was suddenly shut off. Jack gave the blank screen a quizzical look.

“Guess they heard me,” he said lightly.

“Quoting from *‘The Incredible Hulk’*? Probably never forget you!” Finn laughed.

“Hey! Am *I* not incredible?” Jack demanded.

“On a regular basis,” she assured him.

“Anyway, like you said – student of the classics,” he reminded her, and she laughed again.

“Score one to you,” she acknowledged.

Any reply Jack might have been contemplating was forestalled by another tremor, far stronger than the previous ones. The existing vents spouted enormous clouds of steam, hissing so loudly no-one could have heard themselves speak had they attempted it, and several new vents broke open and added their payload to the gases already filling the cavern. Shards of rock began to shatter away from the walls; further chunks of rock began to fall from the roof high above. More of Ormr’s treasure came cascading out of the smaller cave, shaken loose by the tremors, and began to pile up against the back of the transmat.

“Okay, Finn – do your stuff!” Jack yelled. “This place is coming apart!”

Concentrating as well as she could in the circumstances, Finn reset the sonic and raised it toward the transmat.

“Hey, wait a minute!” Jack suddenly grabbed her wrist. “This can go with it!” He was wrestling the rucksack off his back. “Thing about maratoin – won’t survive temperatures up around five thousand degrees Kelvin. This way, we got the disposal problem covered!”

He swung the rucksack onto the top of the bomb and hastily stepped back beside her.

“Okay – go for it!” he exhorted.

Finn raised the sonic again – but too late. Another tremor struck, even more severe. More rocks fell from the roof, smashing into wickedly sharp splinters as they hit the floor; several struck the bomb itself, though without any effect. Some came down near enough to Finn and Jack to send them instinctively retreating toward the illusory safety of the cavern wall behind them. Even as they moved, the largest chunk yet, about three feet in diameter, came plunging down from above – right onto the transmat. The thin metal surface buckled under the impact, and a number of small explosions erupted throughout the mechanism.

Finn stared in dismay. No point in even trying the sonic now. The transmat was completely trashed.

“Could’a done without that,” Jack observed, coughing. “Oh, well – it’s just gonna have to blow. We’d better –”

He was cut off by another tremor; more and more vents were opening up, and the cavern was filling with steam and who knew what else besides.

“Okay, that’s it,” he shouted over the deafening sibilation. “We’re outta here!”

He ran back and retrieved the rucksack, wrestling the straps back into place as quickly as he could. Then he drew the cuff of his jacket back from the vortex manipulator on his wrist. Finn grabbed hold of it, and Jack stabbed at the controls.

Nothing happened.

He tried again.

Still nothing.

He snatched his wrist away from Finn's grasp and examined the device urgently. As he did so, he remembered the slight crack he'd heard as his left arm impacted against the floor when he was trying to evade Ormr's attack. The vortex manipulator must have taken a hit then. Maybe not a terminal one, but enough to make it inoperable as a teleporter at the crucial moment.

He met Finn's wide and frightened eyes with a grim expression.

"Looks like it's Plan B –" he began.

The words were still in his mouth when yet another tremor struck. The vents responded with renewed enthusiasm, but even above their noise, Finn could detect a low rumbling sound – not just with her ears, but with her bones. Jack was aware of it, too, and they both turned toward the tunnel entrance in the rockface above them, from where their senses told them it was coming.

Jack's lips moved, and Finn had no difficulty reading them.

"Not good," he was saying. He made a 'stay here' gesture at Finn, and scrambled up the rockface. Without looking back, he ran into the tunnel. He could hear her coughing again, but she quickly passed beyond earshot. About twenty-five yards in he slowed, as he saw his worst fears were confirmed.

The tunnel had completely collapsed. Tons of rock lay between them and the outside world. Jack stared at the piled rubble. He barely registered the fact that he was coughing again.

There was no way back. They were trapped.

Or were they?

Jack suddenly remembered the black hole in the opposite wall of the cavern. Another tunnel – it had to be. Ormr wouldn't have been so stupid as to leave himself with only one exit. Maybe that one was still passable.

"It better be," he muttered to himself, repressing another cough. It was the only chance they had.

He ran back to the lip of the tunnel entrance, ready to tell Finn to head for the other side of the cavern.

Except she couldn't hear him.

Because she was lying on her back on the floor, eyelids fluttering, her mouth gasping and her chest rising and falling with furious speed as she hyperventilated. Her face was flushed, her body racked with bouts of uncontrolled shaking.

If she wasn't already unconscious, it was clearly only a matter of seconds...

Chapter 16

"I'm Still Here..."

Instantly Jack flung himself over the lip and down the rockface. No wonder she'd been coughing! And that he'd begun to. With those symptoms, he knew what the problem must be, and if he was to save her life, he didn't have much time.

Hypercapnia.

Carbon dioxide poisoning.

The venting steam must be releasing huge amounts of carbon dioxide into the cavern. One of the many asphyxiant gases produced by volcanoes, it wasn't as fast-acting as its more deadly cousin, carbon monoxide, would be, but in sufficient quantities it could still be a killer. So if he didn't get himself out of there, as well as her, they'd both die. But she wouldn't come back from it, like he would. He needed to get her out of this cavern, to somewhere where there was sufficient oxygen and a low enough concentration of CO₂ to bring her back to consciousness, long enough for him to get them both out of the vicinity of the volcano and its ticking time bomb.

He took a deep breath to try to inhale as much of the dwindling oxygen supply in the atmosphere as he could. Then, holding it in, fighting down the urge to cough again, he lifted Finn and unceremoniously flung her over his shoulder. She and the maratoin canister on his back together felt like quite a weight in his current oxygen-starved condition. Too bad – he wasn't leaving either of them behind. He hurried over to the far tunnel, and bore his burdens into its inky maw.

His eyes gradually adjusted to the orange glow that suffused this passageway, just as it had the one by which they'd come. He staggered on for several yards until his body, unable to go without breathing any longer, forced him to gasp out the accumulated burden of carbon dioxide in his breath and draw in whatever the atmosphere in the tunnel might contain.

He could breathe! In huge, rib-bruising gasps, he could breathe. There was enough oxygen here for him to draw in lungfuls of the precious gas. The build-up of CO₂ in the cavern would surely pressure its way up here before too long, but for now, he could breathe. Or, rather, pant violently as he made the best speed he could; this tunnel sloped more sharply than the one by which they had come in. He only hoped that this one didn't contain any deadfalls to be triggered – or, if it did, that they hadn't already come down, and he'd find their path blocked this way, too.

But he dare not risk waiting, in the hope that Finn would come round any time soon, in case another tremor caused further disaster. He could feel her body still jerking, her convulsing hands flapping against his lower back, the harsh, laboured indraw of her every breath.

Gasping for air, fighting for the energy to get the girl and the maratoin out of this volcano and away from it, Jack struggled stubbornly on.

No point telling the Doctor to look after Finn if he wasn't going to do it himself..

*

At first there was only blackness, complete and utter. But then a tiny brown dot appeared in the distance, growing larger with every passing moment. At first she couldn't make out what it was. Then she realized.

Not 'what'.

'Who'.

Who it was.

The Doctor came running towards her at full tilt, the tails of his trench coat flapping out behind him, the full-on, face-splitting grin he was wearing becoming ever clearer as he neared. He seemed about to run right into her, but instead he leapt upward and punched the air exuberantly before landing again.

"You did it! I knew you could do it! My mind in yours! You and me, together – we're brilliant, we are!" he crowed.

She felt herself smiling excitedly, responding to his mood, with a smile nearly as broad as his.

"It wasn't me! It was you!" she contradicted. *"They were your memories, not mine!"*

"Ah, but you had to find them, and use them! No good them just sitting there in your head with nobody knowing about them, was it? You had to find them, and you had look at them properly. I kept telling you you had to see everything properly, didn't I? And in the end you did! You did it! We did it!" He beamed at her. *"Brilliant!"*

Then the glow of his smile began to fade and his face took on a more serious expression. She realized what that must mean.

"You're going, aren't you? You're leaving. Can't you stay, somehow?" she implored.

He regarded her with those familiar dark eyes, the hands stuck in his trouser pockets pushing the skirts of his greatcoat out wide behind him.

"Is that you about to cry again?" he teased gently. *"No need, you know. It's all right there in your head; it hasn't gone anywhere. My mind's still in yours. You've still got it all – all the memories I gave you. You're never going to be without me, as long as they're in there."*

"It's not the same!" she protested.

"I know," he agreed. *"But I'm here whenever you really need me. I always will be. Remember that."*

He was starting to dissolve into the blackness. She wished she could reach out, take hold of him, stop him.

A cold sensation of loss swept over her.

"Doctor...!" she pleaded.

"I'm still here, Finn..." His expression was a mixture of regret and tenderness. "My mind in yours. I'm still here. I'm still looking after you..."

His voice faded. He faded.

He was gone.

But the sensation of cold persisted.

She tried to open her eyes, but they were wet, the eyelashes sticking together.

When she succeeded, she found she was looking up at Jack.

He, and everything around her, seemed incredibly bright. She realized she was lying on her back in deep snow, and the sun overhead was beating down on the white surface, reflecting light everywhere. He was sitting alongside her, his entire attention focused on the vortex manipulator; he hadn't realized yet she was conscious.

She stared at him for a moment, but she wasn't really seeing him. She was focused internally, thinking about the Doctor. About all the times in the last few days when he'd been there, inside her head, talking to her. All the times he'd urged her to look at his memories, see them properly. What had been going on there? He – her Doctor – was gone. Yet he'd been there, helping her, every step of the way. How could that be? How could that *possibly* be?

But...

Thinking back, she realized something that hadn't occurred to her until now.

She'd never once seen him when awake and aware.

Every time he'd come to her, she'd been either asleep or unconscious.

Why hadn't she registered that fact before now?

Did it mean that her subconscious had manufactured his visits out of his memories buried in her brain, and presented them to her using his appearance, his voice, while her conscious mind was unable to interfere?

Analyzing her memories, she realized that not once had he told her exactly what to look for, exactly what to do – just kept urging her to look, the way a subconscious intuition might have nagged at her. Everything he had said to her might be simply a manifestation of that part of him she carried in her mind, a visual and auditory expression of his memories, reprocessed by her.

Or was there more to it than that?

Yet – how could there be? He was *gone*...!

Whatever the explanation, his mind in hers had been the key. What he'd just said to her was right; they'd done it together. How, didn't matter. They'd done it. She, and the Doctor.

And Jack.

She moved her head slightly, refocusing on his intent profile. The movement must have registered in his peripheral vision.

"Hi," he said, without looking at her. "Welcome back."

She sat up, and put a hand to her head, which had begun to ache as soon as she'd moved. Then she began to search her memory of events, and realized it was incomplete.

"What happened? How did we get here?" She swivelled her head, bewildered. They seemed to be sitting in a shallow dip in a snowfield that spread out around them in all directions. It was only when she caught sight of the billowing column of dark grey smoke that they'd seen earlier that she realized where they must be. High up on the volcano.

"Well, you gave suffocation by carbon dioxide a shot, but I kind of persuaded you out of it," he said casually. She nodded, slowly; that, in combination with the series of collisions her head had had with various hard objects in the preceding few hours, would definitely account for the headache. "Found a back door," he went on. "And here we are."

Finn regarded him for a few moments. She didn't know exactly how far down into the volcano they'd gone, but it must have been quite a distance. Yet clearly he'd carried her all the way up and out to the surface.

"Thanks," she said. "You are – as they say – a real life-saver."

He shrugged. "Didn't plan on anyone telling me I don't practise what I preach."

She realized who he meant by 'anyone'.

"Still – thanks," she said, touching him briefly on the arm. "And don't worry. He *is* still looking after me. Just like he said he would."

“How d’you mean?” Jack asked, turning suddenly piercing blue eyes on her.

She smiled at him, but didn’t answer. The look in those blazing eyes...

For all that he had come to her specifically because of it, an intuition warned her that, consciously or not, the fact that she had the Doctor’s mind in hers – and he didn’t – could easily be making him jealous. The way he was looking at her...

Perhaps she was doing him an injustice; but if she wasn’t – far better, for his sake, if she said nothing. So she just smiled, willing him to trust her on this.

After a few moments he registered the fact that that was all the response he was going to get. He shrugged, and turned his attention back to the vortex manipulator.

“Can’t get this thing working again,” he said with disgust. “Took a hit while I was waltzing with Wyverns. That’s why I had to take the staircase instead of the elevator. Looks like the teleportation’s bust again. I don’t suppose – with the sonic...?” He looked at her hopefully.

Finn gave him an old-fashioned look, then closed her eyes and concentrated. A few moments later she opened her eyes again and shook her head.

“Sorry, Jack,” she apologized. “Not a glimmer. I wouldn’t have a clue where to start.”

He shrugged.

“Not exactly a surprise. You know,” he said, sounding aggrieved, “I’ll betcha he deliberately decided that was a memory he wasn’t going to pass over to you! Maybe he saw this coming. And he always did have a thing about me using it for travel...” He let his cuff drop down over the vortex manipulator with a gesture of finality. “So – I think maybe we should make a move.” He got to his feet and looked down at her. “In case you’ve forgotten, we’re still sitting on a time bomb here, and we don’t know when it’ll blow. We should get going, don’t you think?”

“You’ve talked me into it,” Finn agreed, hurriedly pushing herself erect. She swayed momentarily, and Jack caught her by the arm.

“You okay?” he demanded.

“I’m fine,” she assured him. “It’s the little man with the hammer trying to break through the underside of my skull seems to be the one with the problem.”

Jack bent down and scooped up a couple of handfuls of snow, and pressed them against her temples. She flinched at their first touch, but then closed her eyes as the coolness seeped through her skin and brought the discomfort down to bearable levels.

“Healing hands,” she observed, when he dropped them and the now crystallized snow they contained. “Is there no end to your talents, Captain Harkness?”

“Already told you – trust me, I’m not a Doctor,” he reminded her, assessing her wellbeing critically. “Sure you’re okay?”

“Don’t worry – I’m all right, Jack,” she said innocently, the corners of her mouth twitching. Jack gave her a look of reproof.

“Like I’ve never heard that one before,” he rebuked her. “Come on, let’s make tracks.” He surveyed the snowsheet surrounding them. “Literally.”

The snow was at least knee-high, and the going was hard; at distance the surface looked smooth, but in reality it was networked with crevices, no doubt caused by the periodic tremors; every now and then they could feel them happening beneath their feet. Nevertheless, after a while Jack, trail-breaking for Finn, heard her chuckle. He stopped and looked back at her.

“What’s so funny?” he enquired.

“I was just thinking about a film title. An alternative one,” she said cheerfully.

“Huh?” Jack prompted, inelegantly.

“*Jack Versus The Volcano*,” Finn quipped, with a grin. Jack laughed.

“Would’a broken box office records if they’d made *that* film,” he declared, and turned to face forward again, about to set off again. But then he stiffened. “Hey! Company.”

Chapter 17
“Where Were We...?”

Finn followed the direction of Jack’s pointing finger. Over a crest a couple of hundred yards away to their left, a figure had appeared. It stopped momentarily, as if taken aback by the sight of them. Then it came on toward them.

As it neared, it became identifiable as a young man, brown-haired and bearded, carrying a heavy backpack.

“Hiker?” Finn suggested. Jack studied him.

“Nah,” he disagreed. “Geologist, I betcha. C’mon, let’s go find out.”

He flung up a hand in greeting as the young man neared.

“Hi, there!” he said brightly. “Maybe you can settle a bet for us? My friend here thinks you’re a hiker, but I went for ‘scientist’. Which of us is right?”

The young man looked bemused, but answered civilly enough.

“I’m a geologist,” he said. “With the Faculty of Earth Sciences at the University of Iceland.” Jack turned to Finn with a triumphant look, then swung back to face the young man.

“Good – that’s just what I wanted to hear,” he said enthusiastically. “I win! Thanks for that – er...?” He raised his eyebrows, prompting the desired information.

“Ragnar,” said the young man hurriedly. “Ragnar Frímansson.”

“Hi, Ragnar,” Jack said effusively. “I’m Jack Harkness, and this is Finn Thornton. Quite a volcano you got here. A real restless lady, right now, huh?”

Finn couldn’t help but admire the skilful way in which Jack had diverted any potentially awkward questions the young geologist might have had by directing the conversation onto his professional speciality. Frímansson’s face immediately kindled with enthusiasm.

“Yes,” he said. Like all Icelanders, he spoke immaculate, if heavily accented, English. “Ever since December, there’ve been literally thousands of seismic events – earthquakes. Small ones,” he added hurriedly. “In early March, there were close to three thousand in just three days!” His eyes shone. “And there’ve been some massive crustal displacements! The magma chamber must be filling up fast.” He looked at them with renewed attention. “I hope you realize this is actually a very dangerous place to be?”

“That’s what I’m beginning to think,” Jack nodded. “Maybe you can point us out the quickest way down? We’ve kind of lost our bearings.”

“Of course! Follow me,” Frímansson said. “I’m just going back down myself.”

“Hey – couldn’t give us a ride to the nearest town, could you?” Jack asked winningly.

Frímansson looked at him strangely.

“Don’t you have a vehicle of your own?”

“Nah,” Jack shrugged. “We kind of hitched a lift out here.”

The young geologist didn’t look entirely convinced, but visibly decided to let it go.

“Well, I’m headed back to Reykjavik now, to the Faculty. Would that suit you?”

“Sure would! Thanks!” They began to walk, Jack falling in beside Frímansson, while Finn took up the rear.

“So, Ragnar – what exactly is it you’ve been doing up here?” Jack went on, casually, obviously intending to steer the young Icelandic onto safe subjects.

“I’ve been checking on some of the sensors. We – the University, that is – have quite a number out here, and of course we’re not the only ones keeping an eye on what’s going on here...”

Finn tuned out of the conversation, and looked around her at the snowfield stretching out over every undulation of the volcano’s slopes as she followed the two men. Brilliant, pristine white under the pure blue sky. On an impulse, she bent down as she walked, and scooped up a handful of snow, feeling its cold bite into her skin.

She wished the Doctor could have been here. He so loved snow...

But – in a way – he *was* here, she supposed. Anywhere she was, so was he. He’d proved that, over the last couple of days.

When they crested the next undulation, Frímansson pointed down the slope to a small yellow dot that stood out against the browns and greens of the plain below.

“That’s my car,” he said. “We go that way to get down to it.”

Jack glanced at Finn, and saw she had stopped a few yards away and turned back to look once more at the smoking volcano.

“You go ahead,” he murmured to the geologist. “We’ll catch you up. Just got something I wanna say to her.” He indicated Finn with an inclination of his head, significantly, if misleadingly. A look of comprehension spread over Ragnar’s face, and he smiled at what he thought Jack was telling him.

“Okay,” he said, and nodded conspiratorially.

Jack watched him go for a few moments; then he turned and retraced his steps until he stood beside Finn.

“It’s beautiful, isn’t it?” she said, almost dreamily, without taking her eyes off the spectacle of snow, ash plume and dazzling blue sky. “I wonder if I’ll ever see anything like it again?”

“Think you’re asking the wrong guy,” Jack said, surveying the scene. “But anything’s possible. You ought to know that by now.”

“Isn’t it just?” she agreed quietly.

She continued to stare at the ash plume, but there was a slight furrow between her eyebrows.

“What’s on your mind?” he asked.

She bit her lip for a moment. Then she turned to meet his eyes.

“Jack – you won’t go without saying goodbye, will you?” she asked uneasily. “Now that it’s over. You won’t just – go...? People don’t always get to say goodbye.” *We both know that*, her eyes were saying. *And we both know it’s not a good thing...*

He understood; she knew the same things he knew on that score. Maybe that was why he was prepared to make concessions to her that he wouldn’t to others. To be gentler, more accommodating, more considerate to her than he would to others. Heaven help him if Gwen ever found out...! He shook his head – a negative gesture to confirm a positive acquiescence.

“Wouldn’t do that to you,” he said, making it a promise.

She drew a shaky breath of relief.

“Thank you,” she said.

Jack continued to study her, then made up his mind.

“Look, got something I want to say. Because I think you’ve been missing a bet. About the Doctor.”

Finn looked at him quickly.

“What d’you mean?”

“You said he looks back, but he doesn’t come back. What you seem to keep overlooking is that for you, he *did*. Several times, from what you’ve told me. Kept bringing you home and leaving, but always turned up again. *Chose* to. You oughta think carefully about what that signifies. Because you’re right. For others, he doesn’t come back. He never came back for *me* – I had to go hunting *him*.” Jack’s tone, consciously or not, was momentarily tinged with jealousy; this time, there was no mistaking it. Clear confirmation that she’d been right not to tell him about seeing the Doctor in her mind. “You’re the only one he ever did it for,” he went on. “Only for you.”

Yes, he was definitely jealous; that was beyond all doubt, now. But in spite of it, he liked her, cared about her – even respected her, perhaps? – enough to be prepared to offer her this form of comfort, costly as it might be to himself. He was right; she’d never followed the thought through and seen the Doctor’s actions in that light. She found she couldn’t say what she was feeling, but her face said it for her, clear as day.

Jack went on looking at her for a few moments, looking at the way her eyes shone, analyzing how that made him feel. Then he spoke again.

“And one more thing,” he said, very definitely. “I expect to live a long time. A *very* long time. And I *don’t* wanna have to spend the rest of it without knowing I did this at least once.”

Whereupon, on the slopes of a volcano on the point of eruption, he took her head between his hands – her head with the Doctor’s mind in it – and kissed her.

*

Ragnar Frímansson's 4x4 drew up in Laugavegur, which Jack knew was the best-known shopping street in the Icelandic capital; Reykjavik's equivalent of Bond Street or Fifth Avenue.

"Will this do?" the geologist enquired.

"Yeah, great," Jack told him as he climbed out and held the back door for Finn so she could do the same. Then he looked back in through the open front door window. "Thanks, Ragnar, you've been a great help."

"Yes, thank you, Ragnar," Finn echoed from over his shoulder. "I hope your studies of the volcano go well." Trite, perhaps, but she meant it honestly.

"They should be interesting, at least," said Frímansson drily. "If she really lets rip, it's going to cause a lot of problems. And not just here in Iceland, either."

"Trust me – nothing like as many as she was going to," Jack grinned. "Thanks for all your help, Ragnar." He offered his hand through the window, and Frímansson shook it, looking at him blankly, having completely failed to comprehend the cryptic comment.

"Ragnar – one last question," Finn interjected hastily. "Which volcano was it? I mean, where were we, exactly?"

The geologist gave her an incredulous look, as if to say, *How could you possibly not have known where you were?* But he answered politely enough.

"The volcano itself is called Eyjafjalla. But where we met was on the Eyjafjalla glacier. In Icelandic – Eyjafjallajökull. It means 'island mountain glacier', if you're interested." Then, with a last, friendly wave but a still slightly puzzled expression, he drove away.

"Eyjafjallajökull, huh?" mused Jack. "Got a feeling that'll be a name on a lot of people's lips before long."

"Five gets you ten most of them mispronounce it," Finn said, with a grin. "AY-uh-fyat-luh-YOE-kuutl-uh," she repeated, doing a fair job of accurately reproducing Ragnar Frímansson's native Icelandic pronunciation. Then she looked at Jack.

"So what now?"

Jack shrugged, and looked up and down the length of Laugavegur.

"No vortex manipulator, no passports, no transport, no money, on an island," he summarized. "Just trying to figure out how I'm gonna walk you home tonight." He caught Finn's smile. "What? You got an idea?"

"Got a friend," she reminded him, fishing out her mobile and waggling it at him. "Two, even."

"Hey – good thinking, Batman," Jack said, realization dawning.

"Your classical education's showing again," she teased, quirking an eyebrow at him as she thumbed the number in and put the phone to her ear. A few moments later, the person on the other end picked up.

"Hello, Sarah Jane," said Finn. "It's me. Yes... Yes, I'm fine... But the thing is – er... Well, a friend and I have a slight transport problem. I was wondering if you and Mr Smith could help...?"

*

There was a low-lying mist over the little private airfield as the small single-engine Cessna lost height in the pre-dawn sky. It touched down and bumped along the length of the runway before coming to a halt not far from the little group of two vehicles parked a safe distance away.

Jack and Finn climbed out of the Cessna and dropped to the ground. Jack turned to wave to the pilot. "Thanks, Mac," he said. "Appreciate it."

"Any friend of Sarah Jane's...!" was the reply. "So long!"

Jack shut the tiny passenger cabin door and he and Finn started toward the slim, dark-haired woman waiting for them by the vehicles. She came to meet them, and she and Finn spread their arms and embraced each other warmly.

"Hello, Finn," said Sarah Jane. "Everything went all right, then?"

“Brilliantly,” Finn assured her. “Your friend Mac flew in and got us out again without anyone knowing we’d even been in the country, just about. Ex-UNIT, wasn’t he? Anyway, one of your more useful contacts, right now!” She broke the embrace and stepped back to gesture at Jack, speaking with caricatured formality. “I believe you already know Captain Harkness?”

“Why, yes,” said Sarah Jane, sounding pleased. “I do. We met when the Earth was taken into the Medusa Cascade by the Daleks.”

“I know,” Finn said with a smile, double-tapping her forehead.

“Still looking good, ma’am,” said Jack with a flourish and an impish twinkle in his eye as he took Sarah Jane’s hand and kissed it.

“Thank you, Captain,” she said, looking more pleased than ever. “It’s – nice to see you again.”

Finn watched the exchange with amusement; there was no other word than ‘simper’ for the look on Sarah Jane’s face, and Jack had evidently turned his charm dial up to full. Sarah Jane caught Finn’s eye and hurriedly turned to business.

She gestured toward the car with the unmistakable stamp of a hire vehicle standing beside her own little green Figaro, and held out a set of keys – first to Finn, then, when she declined them with a shake of her head, to Jack.

“That should get you back to Taunton all right,” she said. “It’s in your name, Finn, like you asked. I’ve arranged for the company to pick it up when you’re finished with it.”

“Good,” said Finn. “I’m racking up quite a collection of hire cars at the moment. Not to mention quite a bill...” She cocked a meaningful eyebrow in Jack’s direction, who chose to ignore it.

“Thank you from the bottom of my heart, Sarah Jane Smith,” he said effusively. “How’s that boy of yours doing, by the way?”

“Oh, Luke’s fine, thank you!” Sarah Jane’s eyes lit up as always at the mention of her son. “Well and happy, I’m glad to say. Almost disturbingly well adjusted to life, for a teenager!” She smiled brightly at Jack. “What about you? Have you been doing anything exciting since I last saw you?”

“Could say that,” Jack agreed. “Maybe Finn’ll fill you in sometime. But I guess we’d better get going. Before that hire car bill of hers gets any bigger.”

Finn stepped forward and hugged Sarah Jane again.

“Thank you so much for your help,” she said fervently. “Don’t know what we’d’ve done without you. Or Mr Smith! Give him my love, won’t you? And the kids. All three of them!”

“Of course!” Sarah Jane confirmed, hugging her back. “You must come up and see us again, soon. I want to hear all about what’s been going on!”

“I will,” Finn assured her.

“Hey, don’t I get a goodbye hug?” Jack demanded.

“Hah! Try to stop her!” Finn teased. Sarah Jane pretended not to have heard, as Jack came forward and put his arms round her.

“A pleasure, as always, Miss Smith,” he said gallantly.

“You’re very welcome, Captain Harkness,” said Sarah Jane, returning the embrace and then stepping back out of it with careful dignity.

Finn grinned and muttered something under her breath as she and Jack headed toward their transport.

“Didn’t quite catch that,” Jack prompted. Finn chuckled.

“Simpering again,” she said, more loudly – though not loud enough for Sarah Jane to hear.

“Huh?”

“Don’t worry about it,” Finn advised, still smiling.

Chapter 18

The Men in Finn's Life

Something was happening. A sound. Waking her up. Someone was calling her name, from what sounded like a long way off.

"Doctor...?" she responded instinctively, in a dazed murmur.

Then she woke fully and realized she was lying in her own bed, her nose almost buried in her pillow, and it was Jack's voice calling her from downstairs.

"C'mon, Finn, snap it up! You'll wanna see this!"

Still blurred with sleep, she fumbled for her dressing gown and put it on, realizing that it was bright daylight outside. How long had she been asleep? She glanced at the bedside clock. 16.27, Wednesday 14 April 2010. She'd slept not only through the night but almost the whole of the next day, as well! Breathless, she hurried down the stairs, her bare feet making no sound on the carpeted treads, and into the living room.

Jack was stretched full-length on the sofa, watching the television. As she came in, he swivelled upright into a sitting position, pointed the remote at the screen and increased the volume. Finn just had time to register that it was showing one of the news channels before the image on the screen took her attention. An erupting volcano, thick clouds of dark grey ash billowing above the snowy white flanks of the mountain.

"...Some eight hundred people are being evacuated from the area," the announcer was saying. "The amount of volcanic ash being deposited on local farms is quickly becoming a cause of concern. The ash cloud is rising several kilometres into the atmosphere, and concerns are being raised that the prevailing wind may blow the ash south and east over Europe. This could result in widespread air travel disruption, as experts say that any buildup of ash particles drawn into aircraft engines can cause them to shut down, and this would represent an unacceptable hazard to both air crews and passengers. Many airline operators are already saying..."

Jack muted the sound, and he and Finn looked at each other.

"Well, she blew, all right. Looks like Mac got us out just in time," he observed. "Doesn't look like flying's going to be a viable option for a while."

The news item continued the series of shots of Eyjafjalla from various heights and angles. A map of Iceland came onscreen, the location of the volcano marked with a red X.

"Here Be Dragons'," intoned Finn solemnly. "Even when they come under the guise of Wyverns and Slitheen instead," she added.

"You could slap that label in a whole lot of places on the map of the Universe," Jack observed. "But don't worry – the spirit of St George is alive and well. And living in Taunton!"

She laughed.

"I thought I was more the 'damsel in distress' type, actually, but thanks for the compliment!"

She continued to stare at the screen.

"Hats off to the Falatrians," she muttered. "Best weapon designers in the Thousand Galaxy Cluster..."

"Yeah, well – they won't get much trade out of the advertising value of *this* sale," Jack said with satisfaction. He looked up at her, assessing the aesthetics of her silk dressing gown, tightly sashed around her waist.

"You know, that looks good on you," he observed slyly. "Bet it looks even better off, though."

She threw him a tolerantly resigned look.

"That's for me to know and you to imagine," she said firmly. "And since I'm sure you have a *very* active imagination, I think I'd better go and put some proper clothes on."

"Sissy!" he called after her as she left the room.

"Oh, yes!" she confirmed, with a very familiar intonation, as she fled up the stairs.

Jack's mouth twisted a little. She didn't just have the Doctor in her head; she had him in her voice, too, sometimes.

When she came back down, she realized he was getting ready to go. He was wearing his greatcoat, and he was re-packing his rucksack. He'd promised he wouldn't go without saying goodbye, and he hadn't. But now he was leaving. Job done. Nothing more to stay for.

“Time I got rid of this,” he observed casually, hefting the maratoxin canister in his hand before stowing it away. “Not the kind of thing I wanna leave knocking around in a carbon-based biosphere.”

“How will you do it?” Finn asked. One corner of Jack’s mouth twitched upward.

“The same way we were gonna do it before we got so rudely interrupted,” he told her. “Gonna transmat it into the sun.”

“But –” Finn was about to protest that the transmat had been destroyed, but then she realized. Of course. Ormr had had *two* transmats. And the one under Castle Wood was still there, still operational.

“Will you be transmatting yourself off the planet once you’ve done that?” she enquired carefully.

“Can’t,” said Jack shortly, without looking at her. “Doesn’t have the range to get me anywhere outside the solar system.”

He picked up the mind-reading device and looked at it for a moment before thrusting it into the rucksack.

“Hoped I was gonna be able to slip this back to the guy I borrowed it from before he realized it was gone,” he observed conversationally. “Now I’m grounded again, might be a longer-term loan than I was planning...” He awarded the hapless vortex manipulator, just poking out from under his left cuff, a look of stern reproof. “I hadn’t figured on coming back to Earth just yet. Looks like I’m gonna have to change my plans.”

“You strike me as the adaptable type,” Finn told him drily, though her chief emotion was one of regret that he was leaving. Jack wasn’t the Doctor, but he definitely shared one of his attributes; when you were around him, things were very rarely dull.

“I guess,” he agreed, and straightened up. He was ready to go.

“The invitation still stands,” she said. “Any time you want to drop by, and all that. Good luck, Jack. Don’t forget, will you?”

“Hey! How could I forget the Thornton from Taunton?” Jack demanded, a mischievous gleam in his eye.

Finn winced slightly and wrinkled her nose at him.

“*Not* how I was hoping to be remembered,” she informed him, very definitely.

“Hey, at least you’ll be remembered!” he reproved her playfully. Then he put his arms around her and gave her a fervent hug.

“Thanks,” he said. “That UNIT platoon? Could’n’a held a candle to you!”

“I’ve seldom had a compliment the size of that one,” she said, and though he could tell she was moved, he sensed her trembling with laughter, too. He released her from the embrace, and, on an impulse reached toward her, inserting a gentle forefinger under the fragile silver chain around her neck to pull the tiny silver dragon with the topaz eyes into full view.

“Hope it’ll bring you luck,” he said. He grinned at her, then slung the rucksack over his shoulder with a decisive movement. This time, he really was going.

Finn’s eyes suddenly widened.

“Jack! Wait! Before you go,” she said urgently, putting up her hand in a ‘halt’ motion. “Just remembered! I’ve got something for *you*. Wait there! Just give me a couple of minutes, that’s all...”

She left the room hastily; he followed her out into the hall and stopped by the foot of the stairs, waiting. She disappeared into the study; he heard the computer going on, and a few seconds later, the sound of the printer. After another few moments, she reappeared, holding a piece of paper out toward him.

“Thought you might like to keep that,” she said, slightly breathless.

Jack looked down at the paper. It was a printed reproduction of her portrait of him and the Doctor, with a handwritten message in the bottom right corner. ‘*Jack – love always – Finn.*’

He read it aloud quickly, without punctuation.

“*Jack love always Finn.* That an instruction?” he enquired mischievously.

“Trust you to interpret it that way,” she chuckled, with a slight lift of her shoulders. “But then, you would anyway, no matter what I meant by it!”

“Hey! Red letter day, everyone!” Jack exulted, spreading his arms as if to a vast, invisible audience. “She’s hittin’ on me at last!”

Finn cocked a sardonic eyebrow at him.

“Meanwhile, back in the real world...” she muttered, fighting to hide her smile.

“Yeah. Well, anyway – thanks,” he said briefly, tucking it inside his coat. He’d never have admitted it, but he was touched by the gift. Finn was as well aware of his loss as she was of her own.

Not just loss. Losses.

“Wish you could’ve met Ianto,” he said impulsively. “You’d’ve got on well with each other.”

Where had that lump in her throat suddenly come from? Finn swallowed, hard.

“That, I think, is a pretty incredible thing for you to say,” she managed to respond, gently. “Thank you for saying it. And for wanting to say it.”

Jack saw the overbright shine in her eyes, and suddenly wondered, with the instinctive alarm that is aroused by the imminence of a sore spot being touched, if this was the moment she was going to start probing. But when the silence persisted, it became clear she wasn’t going to add to what she’d said. She’d never asked him about Ianto, and she wasn’t going to do it now. That was one of the things about Finn, he realized; she never tried to get you to talk about things she knew you didn’t want to talk about. Never simply for the gratification of her own curiosity, anyway. Probably one of the things the Doctor had appreciated about her; that was an approach he’d most definitely go for.

“Well, guess I’d better be on my way,” he said with studied casualness. Then he grinned. “But, hey, you know something?” He dropped his voice into a familiar caricature. “*I’ll be back!*”

Finn pulled a face at him.

“Okay, Mister Plagiarist! If we’re coining phrases, *I’ve* got one for *you!* ‘*Hit the road, Jack!*’ But *you* can come back,” she added, smiling. Perhaps a little too brightly.

“And *you* should go check out the living room,” he instructed her. “Think you’ll find something interesting. And useful.”

She looked at him with a mystified frown, but he shook his head.

“Uh-uh! Not going to spoil the surprise for you. I’ll let myself out. You look after yourself, Fionnula Thornton.”

One final, hard embrace, one final, brilliant flash of the blue eyes, and the front door shut firmly behind him.

Don’t need to, Jack, she thought. *You’ve been doing it for me. And he’s still looking after me, too...*

But she went into the living room, as he’d told her, and looked around, wondering what he’d meant. An unfamiliar object caught her eye. There was a small drawstring bag on the coffee table that hadn’t been there before. She sat down on the sofa and picked it up curiously. It was heavy for its size, and whatever it contained felt hard and, in places, spiky. She pulled open the drawstring, and carefully emptied the contents onto the table.

And gasped.

A small mound, maybe as much as she could have scooped up in her two cupped hands, of jewellery. Gem-studded golden necklaces and bracelets and brooches, every shade of the rainbow glittering from polished facets. And, in the middle of it all, a handwritten note.

She stared incredulously at the tangle of gold and jewels, then slowly reached forward and pulled the note out of the pile. She looked at the bold, slashing handwriting, her lips moving silently as she read it.

“This should cover the bills. Maybe a few other things as well. It’s the least you deserve. Don’t spend it all at once! Love, Jack.”

She stared again at the small fortune on the coffee table, a slow smile spreading across her face. He must have pocketed this stuff when he’d been raking through Ormr’s hoard, just before he gave her the dragon pendant, back in the cavern. And he’d done it for her. He’d remembered what she’d said about her straitened finances, and planned ahead for when it was all over. He’d been thinking of her, for her, even at a moment like that.

Finn dropped back into the sofa, looking up at the ceiling, and because she was happy, she instinctively began to hum her perennial favourite, *The Work Song*, with a smile on her face. Was she ever going to hear that tune again without thinking of the tunnels under Eyjafjallajökull?

But after only a few moments, her subconscious switched tracks and she found herself singing something else – a familiar tune, but with different lyrics, that seemed to just come naturally into her head.

“Hit the road, Jack, but you can come back for sure, for sure, for sure, for sure; hit the road, Jack, but you can come back for sure...”

The last note died away abruptly as there came a peremptory tap on the window. She looked up into a pair of sparkling blue eyes. He was still out there, white teeth gleaming in a wide smile at her through the glass.

“Hey! Always do,” confirmed Captain Jack Harkness, loudly and cheerfully.

But by the time she’d run to the front door and opened it, he was nowhere to be seen. Of course.

She sighed, ruefully. Jack had it right. The men in her life – the one was no longer there, and the one who had just gone – really, really *weren’t* like other people.

She closed the front door and leaned back against it for a moment, a wistful expression on her face. Then she straightened up, squared her shoulders, and braced herself to go on living life without either of them.



REFERENCES

Most Doctor Who fans won't need the various references in this story explained, but for the sake of newcomers to the Whoniverse, I have identified the source material where relevant (all episode references, followed by the year of the original broadcast by the BBC in the UK, refer to "Doctor Who" unless otherwise specified).

Author's note: "Here Be Dragons" is the sixth of a story arc of seven stories about the Tenth Doctor and Finn Thornton. It was originally published by TheDoctorDeborah on the DoctorWho fan fiction website "A Teaspoon and an Open Mind" in April 2014 (see <http://www.whofic.com/viewuser.php?uid=12695>).

Chapter 2: Reunion

- Fionnula Thornton first met Captain Jack Harkness when she accompanied the Doctor to Kvitverden, as described in "Ice World" (2 of 7, www.whofic.com/viewstory.php?sid=38983).
- The Doctor's last words to Finn are quoted from "Missing Persons" (www.whofic.com/viewstory.php?sid=53854).
- For an explanation of how Finn has some of the Doctor's mind in hers, please see "Serendipity" (1 of 7 on www.whofic.com/viewstory.php?sid=37011). When Finn double-taps her forehead, she is indicating that she has access to the Doctor's memories.
- The Old Norse word for 'dragon' is 'ormr' (literally, 'worm'), meaning 'snake' or 'serpent'.
- The heraldic symbol of Somerset officially became a dragon when the county's coat of arms was granted by the College of Heralds in 1911. The dragon is the historic symbol of the earls of Wessex, and the motto (English translation) of 'All the people of Somerset' is taken from a description in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle of the army gathered by King Alfred to defeat the Danes in 878.
- Mr Smith is a Xylok, a member of a crystalline race which crashed to Earth as a meteorite some 60 million years in Earth's past. It was trapped underneath the surface of the Earth until the eruption of Krakatoa brought a single, small Xylok to the attention of geologists. Sarah Jane received the crystal from a geologist friend as an aid to her studies in volcanic activity. She found that the crystal could communicate with her laptop; it revealed to her that it could help her track alien life and protect the earth. To this end it is the core of the supercomputer known as Mr Smith. (With thanks to Wikipedia.)

Chapter 4: No Torchwood, No UNIT Platoon

- The occasion of the Doctor's gift to Finn of a sonic screwdriver of her own can be researched by reading "Felindre's Fortune" (4 of 7, www.whofic.com/viewstory.php?sid=42902).
- The loss of Finn's family is described in "Ice World" by TheDoctorDeborah (2 of 7, www.whofic.com/viewstory.php?sid=38983).
- Jack became immortal when he died during the attack of the Daleks on Satellite 5 but was brought back to life by Rose Tyler, who was temporarily infused by the Time Vortex (episode 1.13, 2005).

Chapter 5: Under Castle Wood

- An oubliette is a dungeon with the only entrance or exit being a trap door in the ceiling.

Chapter 7: Dreaming of the Doctor

- A transmat is a device which disperses matter, transmits it to and then reconstitutes it in another location. (Thank you, the 'List of Doctor Who items' on Wikipedia!)

Chapter 8: A Way to Stop Ormr

- A vortex manipulator is a primitive form of time-travel technology. Captain Jack's is a wrist-mounted device which includes tracking of lifesigns among its other functions.

Chapter 11: Well Done You

- The encounter of the Doctor and Finn with the 'Mind Machine' is recorded in "All in the Mind" (3 of 7, www.whofic.com/viewstory.php?sid=40138).

Chapter 12: The Cavern, the Bomb and the Canister

- *King Ghidorah is an armless, three-headed dragon with large wings and two tails, and was a regular foe of the eponymous monster in the Godzilla films produced by the Japanese film studio Toho.*

Chapter 15: Cancelling the Contract

- *The immortal line “Mr McGee, don’t make me angry. You wouldn’t like me when I’m angry” was memorably delivered by Bill Bixby in the title credits of the 1978-1982 CBS television series of “The Incredible Hulk”.*

Chapter 17: “Where Were We...?”

- *Sarah Jane Smith’s meeting with Captain Jack took place in “Journey’s End” (episode 4.13, 2008). Along with the rest of the Doctor’s ‘family’ of friends, they helped fly the TARDIS as it towed the Earth back to the Solar System from the Medusa Cascade.*

Chapter 18: The Men in Finn’s Life

- *Eyjafjalla, the volcano under the Eyjafjallajökull ice cap, erupted on 14 April 2010; the resulting volcanic ash cloud, which extended several kilometres into the atmosphere, led to the disruption of air travel in northwest Europe from 15-21 April 2010.*

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