



ICE WORLD
by Deborah Latham

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Chapter 1
“I Love Snow...”

You really can have too much of a good thing, Finn Thornton reflected to herself, as she trudged along the route home, laden with carrier bags.

She squinted upward for a moment, almost resentfully. Above her, the sun shone brilliantly in an intense, clear blue sky, which should have been a beautiful sight, especially after the indifferent summer they’d been having.

But while Finn liked ‘warm’, she didn’t like ‘hot’. Not the humid, muggy heat that was so often Britain’s answer to the dry heat that more favoured countries offered.

What she hated about it most was feeling perpetually sticky; the way you washed or bathed or showered, and within five minutes it was as if you'd never bothered. Even so, a shower was definitely on the agenda, once she got home.

It was as she was crossing the park that something odd happened.

Suddenly, she shivered.

In this heat?

Startled, she stopped, and looked at her bare arms. Like the rest of her, they had gone to gooseflesh. And there was a faint but strange sensation in her head that she didn't know how to describe to herself.

Something had just happened. But what?

She looked around, but everything looked absolutely normal – children playing while their parents lolled on benches or on the grass, dogs scampering, couples walking at a leisurely pace, enjoying the sunshine.

She looked at her arms again; they were back to normal. But there was still that trace of indefinable sensation in her head. It almost felt familiar – like...

Surely not... She shook her head, firmly.

Frowning a little, she resumed her route home.

The little terraced house initially provided an illusion of coolness when she opened the front door, but she knew the feeling of respite wouldn't last for long. She unpacked her shopping and stowed it in the appropriate cupboards in her tiny kitchen. The next priority was a long, cold drink. She emptied ice cubes from the tray in her freezer into a tall glass, filled it with water from the cold tap, and took a long draught. Fantastic! When it came right down to it, no matter what anybody said, there was nothing, absolutely nothing, that could beat pure, simple, ice cold water for thirst-quenching.

Now – that shower...

She started along the hall toward the stairs, still clutching the partially-drunk tumbler of water. But as she went past the doorway to the living room, her peripheral vision picked up a unfamiliar dark mass partially obscured by the slightly open door. What on earth was *that*?

Slightly alarmed, she retraced her steps and began to open the door, but before she'd completed the action, she suddenly froze, as she realized what she was seeing.

Fitted in about as snugly as it was possible to be, the TARDIS was standing on her living room carpet at one end of the room.

Gaping, she pushed the door further open and took a couple of paces into the room. It really *was* the TARDIS! Her face lit up, and she stepped forward and stroked the blue wooden surface fondly.

"Hello, you wonderful old thing!" she exclaimed. "Fancy seeing you here! Have you brought him to see me?"

"Suppose you could put it like that," said a well-remembered voice from behind her.

Finn nearly dropped the glass as she spun on her heel to face the other end of the room.

Bold as you like, the Doctor was draped full-length on her sofa, his white daps parked on one arm of it, his brown suit jacket thrown carelessly over the back, while he relaxed there in his shirt-sleeves, hands behind his head, smiling broadly at her.

Finn's face lit up.

"*Doctor!*" she squealed in delight. Then realized. "*That's* why I had that odd feeling! It was *you!* Arriving!" She tried to look reproving. "Make yourself at home, why don't you?"

"That's what I knew you'd say," he grinned, unabashed. "So I did. Missed me?"

"What do *you* think?! Oh, this is *brilliant!* I know I *said* to drop by any time, but I never thought you'd really take me up on it! How *are* you?"

"Well, found myself at a bit of a loose end," he said, swivelling on his backside to bring his feet back onto the floor. "So I thought I'd come and see how you were doing. How you're getting on with my mind in yours. Checking you hadn't come across any side effects. Although it seems you get a telepathic proximity alert when I turn up, which I suppose you could say is a side effect."

"Sort of counts as you talking to yourself, doesn't it?" she suggested mischievously.

“Yeah, I suppose it does,” he admitted cheerfully, after a moment’s consideration of the concept.

“Well, at least it means you can’t sneak up on me without warning!”

“Aww! You spoil all my fun!” He pretended to pout.

“Not all of it, I bet!” she challenged cheerfully. “Been saving any more worlds since we last met?”

“Oh, one or two,” he shrugged nonchalantly. “I’d saved this one not long before we first met, I’ll have you know!”

“What – *again?*” she said incredulously. “What trouble were we in, that time?”

“Earth almost got invaded by a huge swarm of flying metallic stingrays that would have reduced everything and everyone to dust,” said the Doctor, as if it was an everyday occurrence. “That is, would have if I hadn’t been on the bus that got back through the wormhole ahead of them and closed it off.”

“The *bus?*” she queried, incredulously. “You did say ‘bus?’”

“Yeah – I was on a bus that went through a wormhole and ended up on another planet. As you do. I don’t advise travelling through wormholes on buses, actually – it’s a *really* uncomfortable ride... And it doesn’t do the bus a lot of good. I don’t suppose the bus company would’ve been very happy if they’d seen it. If they’d had the chance.”

“Why, what happened to it?”

“Oh, a friend of mine flew off in it.”

“*Flew –?*”

Finn gave up, floundering, and opted for a different subject of inquiry.

“And these stingray creatures – you saved us from them?” she prompted.

“Yeah,” he agreed. “Me and the other people on the bus. Admittedly three of them did get through, but your friend Captain Magambo dealt with it all very efficiently. So now everyone’s living happily ever after again. For the time being.”

His tone sounded cheerful enough, but Finn marked the brief shadow that crossed his face. Evidently something had happened during those events that continued to trouble him in some way. But something warned her not to pursue it.

“What about that business with all the children being rounded up by the army last month?” she said.

“Nobody tried to take Luke or Clyde or Rani, thank goodness, or I think Sarah Jane would have started World War Three on the spot! All by herself! But even so, the whole thing had her seriously upset, I can tell you! I was on the end of some industrial-strength ear-bending about it. When she gives vent to her maternal worries, she doesn’t hold back, does she?” She couldn’t suppress a brief smile at the memory. “Was that anything to do with you?” she added, more seriously.

“Not me,” he said. “I was somewhere else. You’ve got Jack – and Torchwood – to thank that that didn’t end up any worse than it did.” Again, he looked grim, and she decided to drop the subject. She cast around for another, less dangerous topic – something she didn’t feel she was doing too well at, so far.

But then his face cleared, he smiled at her, and he looked at the tumbler in her hand. “You know, I think I could do with one of those.”

“This instant!” Finn vowed. She put the tumbler down on the nearest surface, and turned to go to the kitchen, but suddenly paused and looked at him doubtfully.

“You’re not going to go and vanish on me while I’m not looking, are you?”

“Who, me?” said the Doctor innocently.

“Oh, of course! Silly me! As if you’d ever do a thing like that!” she retorted, and raced to the kitchen.

“So – no side effects, then?” he called out after her. “Well, other than the one we just discovered?”

“Not one,” she replied joyfully. “I don’t regret it for a moment! It can be a bit strange from time to time, when something suddenly pops up out of nowhere, but – it’s still brilliant!” He heard the happiness in her voice, and smiled to himself.

“Phew! Thanks,” he said, when she returned with his drink. “Bit hot here at the moment, isn’t it? Not as hot as when Martha and I were on the *Pentallian*, of course, but even so...”

“Ah, well, you’ve arrived on a very auspicious day, you see. The British Summer is happening today,” Finn explained. “In this part of the country, anyway. Which means it suddenly gets enervatingly sultry. Unlike a lot of people, not my favourite bit of climate variation. I like it a bit cooler than this. Give me snow rather than sand, any day!”

“Snow...” said the Doctor reflectively. He looked at her. “You like snow, do you? I love snow,” he added wistfully.

“Oh, yes, so do I,” she agreed fervently. “It’s so beautiful! That’s something so special about falling snow, isn’t there? Not that I’ve ever really been anywhere where it can be enjoyed for its own sake. Instead of being a way of paralyzing routine, which is what it always seems to do here. But one day I hope I’ll be able to go somewhere like that.” She, too, sounded wistful.

The Doctor considered this for a few moments, then said, “Take you, if you like.”

“Where?”

“Somewhere like that.”

“If I’d like...?!” she exclaimed, incredulously. “What – in the TARDIS? But – you said last time it’d be just the once!”

“That’s a ‘Yes’, then,” said the Doctor happily, studiously ignoring his own inconsistency. He bounced up from the sofa and put his jacket back on as he headed for the TARDIS door. No sooner had he vanished inside, than he suddenly stuck his head out again.

“Oh – and you might just want to bring a coat,” he said.

Chapter 2 **Kvitverden**

A short while later, the Doctor once again stuck his head out of the TARDIS door, and looked around.

“Spaceport terminals,” he said, unimpressed. “Seen one, you’ve seen ’em all.” He stepped out, and Finn took his place in the doorway.

“Gosh, that’s a fair old temperature difference! Where are we?” she asked, shivering slightly.

“The Yullir Galaxy. I’ve been meaning to come here for quite a while – just never got round to it. Planet called Kvitverden,” said the Doctor. “Norwegian name – means ‘White World’. First discovered in 10050. By a Norwegian, obviously. Keeping up the Norwegian tradition of groundbreaking explorers. Now, what was his name, again...? Not Erikson – not Amundsen – not Heyerdahl – wrong millennium entirely...” He frowned, trying to remember.

“Uh – can we just rewind a moment?” asked Finn, somewhat faintly. “Ten thousand and fifty...? You *did* say 10050? First *discovered* in 10050? When are we *now*?”

“10987,” said the Doctor. “10 – 9 – 8 – 7,” he repeated, enjoying his own joke. “Thought I’d skip the rest of the digits.”

Finn took a deep breath.

“Okay – just hang on a moment or two while I try to take that on board emotionally, will you?”

“I don’t know... You first-timers – you’re all the same,” said the Doctor mock-indulgently, shaking his head sadly.

Finn awarded him a slightly pained expression, and looked around her.

The TARDIS was standing snugly against the wall of a huge building – clearly the rear wall, for it was plain and unbroken save for a couple of closed double-door entrances, one of which was only a few yards away. The ground on which it had been built was not soil, but a dark-grey rock that had been artificially excavated, judging by the fact that the flat snow-covered surface on which they stood stretched out for a few hundred yards before it reached a small cliff face that ran in both directions along, and beyond, the length of the building.

The whole area had clearly been dug downwards into the native rock, and the cliff top marked where the original surface had been. Where the cliff top started, so did the ice. Everywhere beyond the edge of the excavated area was thick ice, covered with a thinner layer of rather grey-looking snow around the spaceport. Further off, the slopes of snow rose to all points of the horizon in apparently unblemished undulations of white.

Finn stepped away from the TARDIS and craned her neck up at the building. Suddenly she caught sight of something over the edge of the roof that made her back up even further for a better look.

A rocket ship! A real, honest-to-goodness rocket ship! Towering above the terminal building, squat and functional-looking, but – a rocket ship, nonetheless. She strove to convince herself she really was seeing what she was seeing.

The Doctor was watching her, smiling. Despite all the times he'd seen this kind of reaction before, it never ceased to amuse him. Then he assumed a businesslike manner.

"Right, enough rubbernecking," he said. "You'll freeze to death if we don't get going."

"Going where?"

"Surprise," he said cryptically. "And we've got to go through disembarkation first."

"But won't someone spot that we didn't get here on that?" Finn asked, gesturing at the rocket.

"Oh, no problem," said the Doctor airily. "Now, first things first."

He was, as usual, wearing his brown trench coat, but astonishingly shrugged himself out of it, and tossed it casually into the TARDIS.

"Won't you want that?" said Finn, mystified. She was very glad she'd taken his advice and brought her own coat.

"Nope," he said, shutting the door behind him. "Cold doesn't affect me like it does humans. Plus other reasons that'll become clear later... Now, then!"

He headed for the nearby entrance and got out the sonic screwdriver. Seconds later they were inside, and shortly after that they were slipping unobtrusively through a door that let them into the main concourse.

There were a lot of people milling about, apparently aimlessly, but the Doctor pointed toward a queue at the far end.

"Ah! That's the one we want," he declared, and strode off toward it. "Let's blend in."

When they got to the head of the queue, deft use of the psychic paper and some fast talk (Finn sometimes wondered if the Doctor did any other kind) got them past the officials and out with the rest of the passengers to board a many-compartmented vehicle which appeared to operate on some sort of hovercraft principle.

"Window seat?" the Doctor offered.

"Thanks," she said, and took it. He plumped down beside her just as the vehicle started on its way, with what she found a slightly weird sensation of floating upward before it began to move forwards.

"Right, we're off," he said with satisfaction.

"Off where?"

"I told you – surprise," he said. "Not going to spoil it for you. Patience is a virtue, remember?"

"What I remember is that the last time you told me that, we were trapped and trying to get out of a locked room!" she retorted. He simply waggled his eyebrows up and down and assumed a smug expression.

She looked at him in some exasperation, then decided she had no alternative, and gave her attention to what was visible through the window.

The – what should she call it, this thing they were riding in? 'Snow train' was as good a description as any, she decided – the snow train headed smoothly away from the spaceport through a narrow cutting in the dark rock and out onto a landscape so like the television programmes of the Arctic she'd seen back on Earth that she had to deliberately remind herself that she wasn't *on* Earth any more. She only had to look round at the physical features and skin colourations of some of the other passengers to see that. She really was on another planet! In another galaxy! Close to nine thousand years on from her native century! In a way, it was easier not to think about it. *Just enjoy the experience, Finn. Take it as it comes. Don't spoil it with too much analysis...*

The snow train proceeded along a fairly well defined trackway, marked periodically by metal poles, each topped with a light that flashed once the vehicle got within a certain range. Something that ensured accurate navigation if a blizzard blew up, she assumed. On either side of the trackway, smooth, unbroken sheets of snow spread out for many kilometres, glistening in the pale, watery sunshine, rising to distant hills – or were they mountains? – in the extreme distance. To start with, the snow seemed to have a grey cast over it – pollution from the spaceport, she supposed – but after a few miles it graduated to pristine white.

“Doctor,” she said after a while. “No trees. No animal tracks. Does anything live here?”

“No native life at all,” he said. “Not that anyone’s discovered. Complete biological blank. Just snow, ice, the occasional lake, and a couple of oceans. It’s a bit like Europa, only bigger, this place.”

“The astronomers at home are always speculating about there being life on Europa, under the ice,” observed Finn. She looked at the Doctor intently. “What you just said – does that mean it’s going to turn out there isn’t any?”

“Don’t you know?” asked the Doctor. “Not triggering any of my memories, then?”

“No – or I wouldn’t be asking, would I?” she said crisply.

“Then I mustn’t spoil any surprise that might, or might not, pop up, must I?” said the Doctor, and folded his arms, grinning at her.

“You can be really exasperating sometimes – you know that, don’t you?” she muttered.

“Yeah, but you love me anyway,” he agreed smugly.

“Think I painted myself into a corner on that one,” she complained, with a rueful smile.

“Ah! Now! Here we go!” said the Doctor suddenly, and pointed out of the window.

Finn looked, and saw that the trackway the snow train was following was curving slightly to their right, and that it headed toward what at this distance looked like a large, dark lump on the skyline, a lump that grew in size with each passing kilometre, until it separated itself from the horizon and became properly defined. It began to look increasingly familiar; when the snow train came to a halt in front of it (this time giving a distinct sensation of sinking), and they had their first good look at it, she realized why.

“It’s an ice hotel!” she exclaimed. “Like they do in Scandinavia and Canada back home!”

“Yup,” agreed the Doctor, leading the way out of the compartment. “Told you it was a Norwegian discovered this planet, didn’t I? Some of his countrymen subsequently decided it’d make a great leisure destination. Humans, and humanoids, all seem to have an affinity for snow sports. Skiing, glacier hiking, ski-dooing, you name it – they do it here. Holidaymakers flock here from all over the universe. Very exclusive, this place is. And what do holidaymakers need?”

“Lots of money for the inflated prices, usually,” said Finn cynically.

“They need a place to stay,” said the Doctor, giving her a reproving glance. “A hotel. No trees here to build them with. Or anything else, come to that. They could ship it all in, of course, but ‘back-to-basics-low-tech’ is the fashion in this particular galaxy just at the moment. So – an ice hotel. All part of the experience. Come on. Let’s check in.”

Finn followed him in through the ice-pillared entrance, wondering how they were going to manage to check in to a hotel where they had no booking.

Because, of course, the receptionist standing behind his desk of ice in the ice-walled reception hall, whose name badge on the shoulder of his white parka identified him as Yngvar Espeseth, had no record of them whatever.

“You must have,” the Doctor contradicted him firmly. “Look, I’m Doctor John Smith, and this is my associate, Miss Fionnula Thornton. The booking was made ages ago. I can’t believe you haven’t got it. You must know who I am!”

He brandished the wallet with the psychic paper at the perplexed receptionist, who looked at it and widened his eyes respectfully.

“Yes, sir, of course! I’m dreadfully sorry! I really don’t understand how this could have happened!” he apologized profusely, the slight Scandinavian lilt in his voice becoming more noticeable as he frantically operated the touchscreen in front of him.

After a few moments, he looked relieved. “Fortunately, sir, we do have one room left unbooked. I hope you’ll be happy to share?”

The Doctor suddenly realized that while it made no difference to him – since he usually dispensed with sleeping as an activity anyway – Finn might feel differently. He looked at her uncertainly, and found her regarding him with huge, innocent eyes, raised eyebrows, and a distinct air of amusement. He ignored all three and turned back to the receptionist.

“Well, if that’s all there is, I suppose we’ll have to,” he said severely. “I hope there won’t be any more problems like this, though. I shouldn’t like to have to take a negative report of your establishment back to my colleagues.”

“Oh, no, sir! I’m sure you won’t have any such cause,” protested the receptionist. “I’ll make personally sure of it, sir, madam. Now – perhaps you’d make your way to the Membrane Chamber? Then someone will show you to your room.”

“Right. Thank you,” said the Doctor sternly. “Come along, Miss Thornton.” He turned away from the desk and strode in the indicated direction, Finn on his heels, to join the queue of people standing in front of an entranceway with the words ‘Membrane Chamber’ carved into the ice above the lintel.

“What’s a membrane chamber, Doctor?” Finn asked, as the queue shuffled along.

“Not been in one before?” said the Doctor offhandedly. “Oh, well, just follow the attendant’s directions – you’ll be all right.”

Finn looked at him closely. Something about his tone of voice and his innocent face was making her very suspicious, but at that moment they reached the head of the queue.

“Sir? Madam?” said the attendant, another young man with a Scandinavian accent. “Gentlemen to the left, ladies to the right.” He indicated the two corridors beyond the entrance way. “Please go through, and remove your clothes.”

Finn did a double-take.

“I beg your pardon...?!” she exclaimed, and looked sharply at the Doctor.

He was grinning. Widely.

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In one of the staff quarters behind the hotel, Håkon Aamodt shrugged into his parka. He’d just come off duty from his work in the kitchen, and he felt like some fresh air. He couldn’t go far – he’d have to be back on duty before dinner was served this evening – but a quick walk along the Blåfjell glacier path would do for the time being.

He mounted his ski-doo and set out along the well-used track towards the glacier. As the feature nearest to the hotel, it was generally the first destination of new guests, so it tended to be in constant use. However, there weren’t likely to be too many of them about yet – they’d mostly still be settling in to their new surroundings. Not many of them made straight outdoors when they first arrived.

As he’d expected, there were only a couple of other ski-doo’s parked at the foot of the slope that marked the near wall of the valley through which the glacier flowed. He breathed in the crisp, clear air with satisfaction as he made his way toward the well-trodden crevice in the ice that led up to the crest, from where the ice path led in both directions along the side of the valley.

He could see a couple of figures in the distance, making their way slowly upstream – a word he always felt sounded too active for the flow rate of a glacier! He turned downstream and set out along the path.

A short while later, he paused beside the Mirror Crevice. Like any glacier feature, it wouldn’t last forever, but for the time being it was a popular tourist landmark – a place in the glacier where the ice face of the crevice below

was so completely smooth that it was possible to see your own reflection distinct in the blue ice, almost as if it was a still lake, if the light was at the right angle.

It wasn't the right time for that today – the sun had already moved too far on – but it marked the extent of his excursion on this occasion. Time to turn back, or he'd be late.

He removed one of his mittens for a moment so he could scratch a sudden itch that had developed on his left earlobe. That done, he stood for a moment, enjoying the beauty of the scene.

Where he stood there was a wall of ice behind him, with a straight, plain surface up to a height of about four feet; above that was a concave indentation, with a lip some six feet or so above him, decorated with icicles of varying sizes. Below him flowed the river of ice, white on its surface, crevices of blue showing further down into the depths. The sun made everything glisten and sparkle. He never got tired of looking at scenes like this.

He turned to look downstream again; a few yards away there was an overhang of snow above the path that blocked his view slightly. He rested his ungloved hand on the ice shelf beside him for a few moments to balance himself as he leaned slightly to his right, out over the edge of the path, for a better view.

He didn't think to look up; he had no reason to.

Which was why he didn't see a small but intense flash of bright white in the ice overhead, and the horizontal line suddenly developing along the thickest part of one of the icicles suspended above him. A crack was forming – with no apparent cause. It widened and spread. Within moments, the icicle was ready to detach.

Then it fell, its needle-sharp point arrowing down and skewering the unprotected hand below, breaking into fragments with the force of the impact.

With a cry of pain, Håkon instinctively snatched his hand back toward him, cradling it in his other. Blood ran across his skin and dripped onto the path. He looked up instinctively to identify the source of attack, and saw the truncated stump of ice above him.

Even in his discomfort, he found a moment to be puzzled. Why would such a thick icicle break off like that when none of those around it had? There was something unnatural about it. Ice didn't behave like that...

But the pain of his injured hand distracted him. He found something in one of his pockets with which to bandage it, and gingerly inserted it back into its mitten.

Then he headed back up the path at the best speed he could manage. He'd need to take an injury like this to the hotel doctor, and quickly.



Chapter 3

Chill Factors

“You could have warned me!” Finn exploded, when they met again outside the chamber exit.

The Doctor looked innocent.

“What, and spoil a brand new experience for you?”

“Well, I’ve never been in a hotel before where a shower and complete body blow-dry were part of the check-in! What’s all that about?”

“Ah, well, it wasn’t just any old shower, that,” said the Doctor. “You’ve been sprayed with a membrane of super-insulation. Absolutely invisible, but keeps your body at a safe temperature no matter what you’re doing in this environment. Not necessarily a comfortable temperature, mind you,” he qualified, “but a safe one. You know what tourists are like – no matter how much you tell ’em what to do to stay safe in a hostile environment like this, there’ll always be the ones who don’t listen. And therefore die. Having the punters turning black with frostbite would be bad advertising. And bad for business. So one thing they can do is make sure that whatever else you get up to, at least you can never freeze to death.”

“Then why all this get-up?” Finn enquired. Like the Doctor, she was now wearing what appeared to be a sealskin parka, leggings and mukluks, courtesy of the hotel. “Is this real fur?” she added, looking at it closely.

“Of course not,” said the Doctor, slightly indignantly. “No need for the real thing these days. Not with the membrane. No, this is all part of the ‘Arctic experience’. Helps create atmosphere, and all that. Gives you the right look and feel.”

At that moment they were approached by one of the hotel staff, who, like the receptionist, wore a white parka; Finn realized it must be a kind of uniform, distinguishing them from the guests, who all wore various shades of brown and black. This employee was a young woman, a pretty blonde, who smiled at them charmingly.

“Doctor Smith? Miss Thornton?” she said. “Welcome to Ishotellen – the Ice Hotel. My name is Ingeborg, and I’m your appointed Ishotell usher.” Finn made a mental note of the pronunciations – ‘iss-hotel’, and the silent second ‘g’ in Ingeborg’s name. “May I show you to your room?”

“Of course,” said the Doctor, equally charmingly. “Lead the way!”

“Ladykiller,” murmured Finn out of the side of her mouth as they followed Ingeborg through the reception hall and down one of the corridors.

“Just being polite, that’s all,” said the Doctor, wearing his innocent look again.

Finn didn’t reply – but her wide smile was clearly visible in his peripheral vision, all the same.

As they walked along the corridor and past the other guest rooms, Finn realized that none of the rooms had doors, which was rather different from what she was used to – especially in a hotel. But the hotel designers had dealt with the privacy issue rather cleverly, she thought; inside each opening was a thick block of opaque ice the same width as the doorway but set about three feet back, so you went either to the left or right to go in, but once in, you weren’t visible from the corridor.

“Here is your room, sir and madam,” said Ingeborg, ushering them in.

All the furniture – bed, chairs, table – was carved from ice, as were all the decorative features. Two synthetic reindeerskin sleeping bags were spread on the rectangle of ice that formed the bed, which was set in an ornately carved alcove. (Two bundles, also wrapped in reindeerskin, turned out on later investigation to contain their clothes, delivered direct from the membrane chamber to their room.)

Like the ice of the walls, the bed itself was somehow lit from within with a pale green light – had this been back on Earth in her own time, Finn would have expected that to be done by fibre optics, but they probably did it some completely different way by now. A very beautiful and tranquil effect, though, however it was achieved. There was a spare, stark beauty to the whole thing that she found very appealing.

“Right! Wonderful! Thanks,” said the Doctor to Ingeborg.

“Dinner will be served any time from sundown,” she informed them. “The restaurant and all the other hotel facilities are shown on this guide.”

She handed them each a small rectangle of what looked like clear plastic. When Finn touched the centre experimentally, a diagram of the layout of the hotel appeared; she found she could drag it around the screen by moving her finger over the surface, and zoom in and out by simply tapping on the plastic.

“Many of our guests enjoy visiting the Ice Garden adjacent to the hotel when they first arrive,” Ingeborg suggested, in her charming Scandinavian accent. “Perhaps you yourselves may like to do this prior to dinner?”

But if there is anything you need, there is a small communication device here in the wall beside the door that links to the reception desk.”

She pointed to an unobtrusive silver metal plaque with a small button. “Just keep the button depressed while using the device. Or please come to reception and ask for me, or make your wishes known to any of the hotel staff. We’ll do our best to help you enjoy your stay.”

“I’m sure you will,” said the Doctor. “Thank you very much.”

With a smile, Ingeborg left.

“Well, you certainly know how to look after a girl,” said Finn, simulating indignation, hands on hips. “I hope you don’t snore!”

“I hope neither of us does,” retorted the Doctor.

Finn reached out and touched him on the arm.

“Doctor,” she said, dropping the levity, “joking aside... Thank you. For bringing me here. For giving me the opportunity of such an incredible experience. I still have to keep reminding myself where – and when! – I am. All those flashes of memory of yours, of so many events, so many places. And now here I am in one of those places myself. It’s... Well, I haven’t the words. Just – thank you. I feel as if I’m the luckiest woman alive.”

“Hold that thought,” advised the Doctor. “If you make it through the next few days still feeling the same, that’ll be a result.”

“Why wouldn’t I?”

“Well, you know... Me and trouble...”

“Oh. Yes. Well, I see what you mean,” she admitted, then grinned at him. “But I’m willing to risk it!” She looked around the room again, and then back at him. “So – what do we do now?”

“Ooh, I don’t know. What about a quick walk around outside? Explore the grounds, so to speak? The sun’ll be going down soon, so we probably don’t want to stray too far. For now.”

“Sounds good,” Finn agreed.

They made their way back to the reception hall.

“I’m just going to have another word with young Mr Espeseth,” said the Doctor. “Find out what else there is to do here.”

“Okay. I’ll be over there,” said Finn, pointing towards the far wall, where there was a eye-catching display of intricate ice sculptures. She approached and looked at them with interest. Were they abstract representations, or actual creatures and real objects? She had no way of telling. Truly alien art, to her! But whatever they were meant to be, they’d all been exquisitely carved and mounted on plinths of clear ice.

As she was looking at one, a smooth curl like a stylized flame, a sudden movement caught her eye – as if something had moved *inside* the ice.

She looked quickly at where she thought she’d seen it. Was that a brief, tiny glitter of white, moving? It was too quick for her to be sure. There wasn’t any movement now. What might have caused it? Some reflection of light from somewhere else? The ice was now blank.

She shrugged. It must have been some sort of optical illusion. After all, what could move *inside* ice?

She turned, and saw the Doctor coming toward her.

“Glacier hiking, snowmobile safaris, cross-country skiing, ice sculpting, evening light shows of the local aurora, sea trips to see icebergs calving,” he reeled off. “What d’you fancy? There’s a small glacier not far away. Called Blåfjell – means ‘Blue Mountain’. Presumably where it comes from. Ever seen a glacier?”

“Only on television.”

“Not the same,” said the Doctor dismissively. “Go and have a look tomorrow, shall we?”

“Whatever you say,” Finn agreed.

“Right! Now – let’s explore...” The Doctor turned and led the way out of the main doors – the only bits of wood Finn had seen anywhere. Just about everything else – *everything* else! – was ice.

First, in line with Ingeborg’s prompt, they looked around the Ice Garden – an area of more ice sculptures, but these were tall ones, anything up to fifteen feet or so high. A couple of them were recognizable to Finn as

representations of the human form, but the rest left her mystified – except when the Doctor threw in the odd comment like, “That’s a permamole – burrows in the permafrost on Hanway Three,” or “Very good likeness of a freezemoth, that,” or “Don’t think much of that spicule snail – too clunky,” and similar remarks.

Then they decided to walk round the perimeter of the hotel – which they found was quite a distance because of the staff accommodation complex – clocking the locations of facilities like the restaurant, the sauna, the medical centre, the “little shop”, as the Doctor delightedly called it, and so on.

It was as they were making their way back past the staff quarters in the now quickly fading daylight that a ski-doo slowly overtook them and faltered to a halt in front of one of the doorways.

The rider dismounted in a very sluggish way that caught the Doctor’s attention. It was like watching a slow-motion film. The man just stood there, apparently motionless – but then it became obvious that he was starting to sway. Suddenly he toppled to the ground and lay still.

The Doctor ran over to him, Finn following, and they both knelt beside the prone body.

“What’s wrong with him?” she demanded.

“Don’t know – yet,” said the Doctor, pulling back the parka hood to reveal the face of a young man, eyes closed, obviously unconscious. He gently thumbed back one of the eyelids, revealing a dilated pupil.

“Doctor – is that blood?” Finn suddenly asked. He looked where she was pointing – at the mitten on the left hand, where a dark stain was clotting the fibres together.

“Looks like it,” he agreed, and eased the mitten off. A bloodstained cloth was wrapped around the hand, and he carefully removed it.

They stared at the hand. There was a raw, angry stab-shaped wound of damaged flesh, which was no surprise, given the amount of bloodstaining.

What was strange was that all across the undamaged skin was a pattern of sharp-edged, opaque white crystals.

Ice crystals.

They should have looked harmless enough – beautiful, even. Yet Finn, peering over the Doctor’s shoulder, was unpleasantly reminded of deadly bacteria cultures spreading across an agar plate.

The Doctor looked at the crystals very intently. Then, without raising his head, he said, “Finn.”

“What?”

“Go and get the hotel doctor. *Now.*”

There was something in his voice that sent her sprinting away just as fast as she could across the snow, without another word spoken.



Chapter 4 Ice in the Blood

“Have you ever seen anything like that before?” the Doctor asked.

Doctor Einar Solberg shook his head.

“Never,” he said, staring down at the unconscious Håkon, stretched out on the bed beside which they stood.

They were in the medical unit, a separate building outwardly no different in appearance from the other snow-covered units of the hotel complex, but inside very different. No ice walls here, but a completely modern and very well equipped mini hospital.

“We provide medical services for the guests, the hotel staff, and the spaceport personnel, but never in all my years here have I seen anything resembling this,” Solberg went on. “That wound – a stab wound, you think?”

“Of some sort,” agreed the Doctor. “Bit of an odd shape, though, don’t you think? As if he was stabbed by something cylindrical. Or conical.”

Solberg shrugged.

“Perhaps,” he agreed. “But it’s these crystals that worry me. Ah, Dagrun! You’ve run the blood test?”

This was addressed to the dark-haired, petite girl who had just entered the room, a small palm screen in her hand at which she was frowning in perplexity.

“These are the results,” she said, handing the device to Solberg. He scanned the screen, the Doctor shoulder-surfing behind him.

“Oooh! Now! That’s odd,” said the Doctor, pointing to one of the entries. “And more than a bit worrying.”

Solberg looked at it, and frowned.

“Crystalline structures in the blood? *Ice* crystals are forming – *in* the blood?” He sounded incredulous. “How can that be?”

“Dunno,” said the Doctor. “But the effect’s the same as if his blood was solidifying in his veins. If it keeps up at the same rate, it’ll stop flowing entirely.”

“But that’ll kill him!” protested Dagrun.

“Yup,” agreed the Doctor. “And look at his body temperature – falling all the time.”

“What can we do?” she said.

“Have you got anything that can act as a pump that’ll force his blood to keep moving? And an anti-coagulant of some kind?” suggested the Doctor.

“Yes. Yes, we can do that,” agreed Solberg eagerly. “Dagrun, get the circulator set up. And a heparin drip.”

“And I think you’d better do it quickly,” advised the Doctor, gesturing at Håkon. “Look.”

They looked. The crystals now covered not only the whole hand, but were starting to spread up the forearm. And that had happened just in the few minutes they’d been talking.

*

“How is he?” demanded Finn. She’d been waiting outside the medical centre for the Doctor to reappear, and fell in beside him as he began to walk slowly back towards the hotel.

“In trouble,” said the Doctor gravely. “Something’s producing ice crystals in his blood. His whole circulatory system is clogging up. Prognosis – not good.”

“But how can ice crystals form in blood in the first place?” she asked incredulously. “And not melt once they’re there?”

“Good question,” said the Doctor. “Wish I had a good answer...”

He stood staring in a rather abstracted way for a few moments – not at Finn, but through her. Then he snapped back into focus, and smiled at her.

“Right, then – bet you’re hungry, aren’t you? So – dinner!” he declared, and took off in the direction of the restaurant, clearly determined to give her the holiday he’d promised her, in spite of what had happened.

There were not that many diners, but at the table next to theirs Finn made eye contact with a young man of about her own age. He was sitting with two other men, who at that moment were in deep discussion.

“Hello,” he said with a friendly smile. “Just arrived?”

“Yes, today,” said Finn.

“Thought I hadn’t seen you before,” he said, with a friendly nod to the Doctor. “I’m Christoph Murveray.”

“Finn Thornton,” she introduced herself.

“And I’m the Doctor,” said the Doctor, leaning forward to shake hands with Christoph. “Holidaying, like us?”

“Ah – no, actually. I’m working. We’re media students, making a documentary about Kvitverden. Of course, lots of other people’ve done the same thing, but the idea of a completely blank world – lifeless, I mean – well, it’s exciting, isn’t it?” His face lit up with professional enthusiasm.

“Yeah, it is, isn’t it?” smiled the Doctor, recognizing a flavour of his own delight for the new and fascinating. “Where are you from?”

“Mahron, in the Mellasan system – I don’t know if you’ve heard of it?” Finn hadn’t, but the Doctor nodded. “We don’t have much in the way of ice or snow there. So we find it kind of fascinating, especially on a planet-wide scale like this.”

“And which bit of the film-making process do you do? Write, shoot or talk?” Finn enquired.

“Oh, I’m the cameraman,” said Christoph, a little shyly. “Dee does the scripting and narrating, Romor’s the director and editor.”

“That’s the theory,” said one of the other young men, now aware of the new conversation and joining in. “But we all do a bit of everything, really. Hi, I’m Romor Kistlun. And this is Deemah Zaralay.” The third man smiled amiably.

“So how far have you got with your film?” the Doctor asked.

“We’re doing all right,” Romor admitted. “Overall we’re planning to tackle the environmental impact of the spaceport and the tourists on a pristine setting. Today we’ve been visiting one of the more spectacular ice caves in the glacier.”

“It was incredible!” said Christoph, in a burst of youthful, and professional, enthusiasm. “There were some really great shots inside the ice. The colours...! You’ve got to visit it yourselves!”

They went on chatting over their respective meals. The Doctor had a lot of insights that the young film-makers obviously found fascinating, and it was with some reluctance that they eventually took their leave.

“We want to make an early start tomorrow,” Dee said by way of explanation. “But it’s been really great talking with you, Doctor. Maybe we can compare notes again sometime?”

“Be glad to,” agreed the Doctor.

Only seconds after they’d gone, Dagrún entered the restaurant, pausing just inside the door to scan the clientele. The Doctor jumped up and waved to her. She came over to their table.

“Dagrún,” said the Doctor. “This is my friend, Finn Thornton. Dagrún’s Doctor Solberg’s assistant,” he explained to Finn. The two girls smiled and nodded to each other. “How’s Håkon?” he added, gesturing to Dagrún to sit down with them.

She sighed.

“He’s dying,” she said bluntly. “The spread of crystals is increasing. Even the circulator is having to work at maximum to keep his blood flowing, and that’s in spite of the anti-coagulant. And his core temperature keeps falling, no matter what we try. We don’t know what else to do.”

“Can I take another look at him?”

“I’m sure Doctor Solberg won’t mind,” she agreed. “Now?”

“If that’s convenient,” said the Doctor. “If we’re not stopping you having your meal?”

“I’m not very hungry,” Dagrún said, looking a little depressed. “Håkon is a friend of mine... Come, then, please,” she added, standing up and leading the way.

*

Finn gasped when she saw the unconscious man in the bed. His left arm, discoloured an alarming shade of purple, was now covered with crystals, patterning the skin like stars. More were creeping across the left side of his chest, neck and face. He seemed barely to be breathing.

The Doctor leaned over him, his eyes only a few inches away from the still face, peering intently at the crystal formations.

“Where did he go this afternoon, Dagrún – do you know?” he asked.

“Probably to the glacier,” she said. “He often does that between shifts. It’s his favourite place when he wants some down time. We all tease him about how he never seems to get tired of it.”

“I might take a look in the morning,” said the Doctor. “See if there’s any sign of where he got injured.”

“This isn’t your responsibility, Doctor,” she protested. “You’re a guest. This is our problem.”

“Oh, I don’t mind,” he said, looking up at her with a friendly smile. “We don’t mind, do we, Finn?” he repeated, turning to Finn for corroboration.

“No, Doctor, of course we don’t,” she agreed with the air of someone resigned to the inevitable. “Don’t try to talk him out of it, Dagrún. Won’t work. He’ll want to be involved. He always does.”

“Well – thank you,” said Dagrún uncertainly. “Is there anything else you want or need, that I can help you with?”

The Doctor looked down at the crystals again, and extended a fingertip towards one of the biggest.

“I was just wondering –” he began, when he was cut short.

With a suddenness that drew an involuntary shriek from Dagrún and made Finn take a step backwards in alarm, the right hand of the apparently unconscious man grabbed at the Doctor’s wrist and held it in a vicelike grip, halting the fingertip before it could touch the crystal. Even the Doctor pulled himself away, startled, as far as the imprisoning hand would allow him.

The closed eyes were slowly opening. At first they stared straight up, but then slowly turned to focus on the Doctor with a hostile stare.

“Håkon? What is it? Are you –?” Dagrún began, instinctively stepping toward her patient, but broke off as the Doctor waved at her to stay where she was.

“Don’t come near, either of you,” he ordered. “Not till we know what we’re dealing with.”

The inimical blue eyes continued to stare at the Doctor for some seconds. Just for a moment, the Doctor thought he saw small, intensely white flecks moving across the left eye – but if so, they were gone before he could even be sure they’d been there.

Then, suddenly, Håkon spoke. His voice was sluggish and hoarse, as if his vocal cords had not been used for some time – or as if the crystallization of his blood was affecting them.

Or as if they were being used by someone, or something, unused to speech.

“Go,” he said. There was a disconcerting gap between each word he spoke. “Go. Away. Leave. Go. Leave. Alone.” The tendons in his throat were taut with the effort of speaking. “Go. Now. Listen. Tell. Go.”

Then, suddenly, his eyes closed and his whole body relaxed, his hand sliding off the Doctor’s wrist to fall limply back onto the bed.

The Doctor stepped back, allowing Dagrún to come forward and anxiously check him over.

“I don’t think there’s anything more we can do here,” he said. “You’d better tell Doctor Solberg what’s happened, Dagrún. And in the morning, we’ll take a look at the glacier.”

As they trudged back through the darkening night to the hotel, Finn noted how grim the Doctor was looking. “That sounded like a warning, didn’t it?” she ventured at last.

“Yes,” the Doctor agreed. “The question is, who was doing the warning? Håkon, because he knows about some sort of danger? Or –” He broke off. “Anyway, you’d better get a good night’s sleep. I want to make an early start tomorrow.”

Finn suddenly chuckled, which surprised him.

“What?” he demanded.

“You and trouble,” she said, with a grin.

He shrugged ruefully.

“Yeah, well... Makes things more interesting, doesn’t it?”

“Goodness, yes! Heaven forbid that you should have a plain, ordinary nice time!” she teased him. “Oh, and, Doctor...”

“What?”

“Bagsie the sleeping bag on the right!”



Chapter 5 Undying Gratitude

Early next morning, having made use of Ingeborg’s assistance the previous evening to arrange the use of two ski-doo’s, the Doctor and Finn were on their way to collect them. It was as yet rather dim in the early morning light, and very still and cold.

Unexpectedly, the subdued whirring sound of a hovercraft started up nearby in the gloom. The Doctor craned his neck, trying to pinpoint its location. Then, from behind the toilet block, a vehicle that looked like some sort of tanker slowly pulled away.

“What’s that?” Finn asked, watching it too.

“Emptying the septic tank, by the look of it,” the Doctor shrugged. “They can’t exactly bury it underground here to decompose naturally.”

“I suppose not,” she agreed. “It’s hardly the thing about yourself that you’d most want to have preserved in ice...” Her eyes twinkled. “So I suppose they have to ship it off the planet entirely. I bet that little extra adds to the cost of the holiday!”

The Doctor didn’t answer. Looking to see what had distracted him, she saw Doctor Solberg leaving the medical centre.

It was immediately obvious what had happened; his body language was tragically eloquent. He saw them, and altered his course to intersect with theirs.

“He’s dead,” he said heavily. “About half an hour ago. His blood just wouldn’t flow any more. It couldn’t get the oxygen to his cells. To all intents and purposes, he suffocated.” He looked at the Doctor, his eyes troubled. “And those crystals – they’d spread over his whole body. He froze virtually solid.”

“I’m sorry,” said the Doctor sombrely.

“I don’t know how to report this,” said Solberg. “What do I give as the cause of death? I have no idea what caused it!”

“We’re going over to the glacier,” said the Doctor. “Dagrun said that was the place he most often went in his free time. We thought we’d see if there was any sign of where he had his accident.”

“I’m not sure what it would prove, but thank you for wanting to help,” said Solberg, not sounding particularly hopeful that they’d succeed. He nodded to them, and turned away toward the hotel.

The Doctor looked at Finn.

“Let’s get to it,” he said. “We need to find out what happened to Håkon Aamodt. So it doesn’t happen again. Hopefully.”

As they left the hotel behind them, Finn glanced briefly over to her right. In the distance, the tanker vehicle was a shrinking black dot. She wondered where it was going. Clearly not directly to the spaceport; it was heading in completely the wrong direction, parallel to the course of the glacier. She shrugged mentally, and concentrated on the task at hand.

In spite of the circumstances, she found herself thoroughly enjoying the ski-doo ride to the glacier; the adrenalin rush of making speed across the snow, the beauty of the landscape, the glint of the sun on ice and snow. She saw the Doctor’s face lit up with pure glee, and laughed at him; he caught sight of her doing so, and laughed back.

There was just one other ski-doo there when they arrived. As Håkon had done before them – though of course they weren’t aware of it – they instinctively headed toward the vehicle and parked beside it.

“Someone else is up early,” observed the Doctor, switching off his engine.

“I hope he’s here for a happier reason than we are,” said Finn.

They emerged from the entrance crevice onto the path, and looked both upstream and down for a sight of the rider of the ski-doo, but there was no-one in sight.

“Wow,” said Finn, gazing awestruck at the glacier, magnificent in the early morning sun. If this was a ‘small’ glacier, she’d take vanilla! “You’re right – not the same as on television, at all.” She tore her gaze away and looked at the Doctor. “So what do we do now?”

“I’ll go upstream, you go down,” said the Doctor. “See if you can see any sign of where Håkon had his accident. Judging by that wound, there ought to be some blood about somewhere. If there is, it’ll show up pretty well against the ice. Take this.”

From somewhere in his parka he pulled out two hand-sized devices, and gave one to her.

“What is it?”

“What passes for a walkie-talkie around here,” said the Doctor. “Press that button to transmit, release it to receive. It’s tuned to mine. If you find anything, anything at all, tell me.”

“Okay,” said Finn. “How far should I go?”

“Not too far,” said the Doctor seriously. “Something happened to Håkon; I don’t want anything happening to you. If we get too far apart, stop and come back here. Don’t go taking any risks.”

“Tell you what – I’ll be as careful as you would be yourself,” she retorted with a knowing smile, and turned downstream.

“No, you don’t,” he contradicted her firmly. “I want you to be *more* careful than that!”

“Hah! I will if you will!” She flung another grin over her shoulder as she strode away.

The Doctor watched her go for a few moments, frowning slightly; then he turned upstream.

As well as looking carefully around her as she went, every couple of minutes or so Finn paused to turn back to check whether she could still see the Doctor’s diminishing figure. After one of those backward glances, she turned downstream again to find that she could see someone coming toward her, though still some way off. That must be the third ski-doo rider.

The ice path was quite narrow above the drop down the cliff to the glacier surface, but at least there were some wider shelves that could act as passing places. By her estimation of the time she and the other person would come to cross paths, it looked as if there was going to be such a place – underneath a big overhang of snow and ice about three hundred yards away.

She went on, scanning her surroundings for any sign of bloodstains, still turning round to check on the Doctor from time to time, and gauging her progress towards the man – for it had become fairly obvious now that it was a man, not a woman – heading upstream toward her.

Suddenly her peripheral vision picked up a scattering of darker colour against the ice. She looked to her left, where there was a concave hollow about four feet up in the ice wall. Yes! Those dark spatters were frozen blood

droplets, she was sure. And there were fragments of smashed ice, too. This had to be where Håkon had suffered his injury.

She pulled the communication device from her pocket and pressed the transmit button.

“Doctor, I think I’ve found it,” she said.

“Right! On my way,” was the reply, followed by silence.

She put the device away, and looked around again for the approaching stranger. The path downstream must curve inward from the cliff edge slightly; just at the moment she couldn’t see him, but he couldn’t be far away by now.

Then she heard him; his footsteps crunching on the ice, first faintly, then louder. Suddenly he came into view; she saw him about to walk under the overhang of snow a few yards away.

That meant she also saw a sudden line of intense white at the crest of the overhang – almost too brief for her optic nerve to register it – and the crevice that instantly opened where the line had been. Snow began to slip downwards. It was blindingly obvious that the whole thing was about to disintegrate onto the man underneath.

The man whose face she could now see very clearly – and recognized.

She was on the move without making any conscious decision about it; her feet were taking her toward him, even as she yelled, “Jack! Get out of there! It’s coming down!”

The man stared at her for one split second, then instinctively looked up. Snow was starting to dribble over the edge of the overhang; the whole thing was milliseconds from giving way.

She reached him, grabbed his wrist, and yanked with all her might even as she pivoted her own body away from the imminent fall. The momentum she imparted meant he couldn’t help but follow her.

He hadn’t cleared the overhang by more than a few inches when it collapsed in a spectacular spray of snow and ice, exploding over the edge of the path to cascade onto the glacier below, spraying them with flying crystals. They were both thrown violently onto the ground, she on her side, he on his stomach beside her.

“Wow, that was close!” he breathed. He looked at the girl lying beside him. “You okay?”

She nodded, blowing out her cheeks with relief.

“You?” she returned.

“Oh, yeah,” he confirmed.

They got to their feet and by unspoken mutual consent turned to look at the mass of snow and shattered ice blocking the path, some of it still trickling over the edge to spill into the chasm in the glacier below.

“There, but for you, go I,” he said fervently. “I guess I owe you a real big debt of gratitude. I’m –”

He suddenly broke off, as he realized something.

“Hey, wait a minute! You called me ‘Jack’. How do you know my name?”

“Well, I recognized you. I know you – sort of,” she said, to his astonishment. “That is, I know who you are. You’re Captain Jack Harkness. Which means you owe me your *undying* gratitude, of course,” she added, quirked a mischievous eyebrow at him.

Jack stared at her, taken aback.

“What gives?” he demanded. “How do you know –?”

She couldn’t help laughing at his consternation.

“Sorry, but you should see your face!” she apologized. “I admit, I’ve got an unfair advantage. I happen to know someone who knows you rather well.”

“And who might that be?” Jack persisted.

“Oh-h-h, that would be me,” said a familiar voice from behind them.

Jack turned, and gaped in sheer astonishment.

“*Doctor!* What are *you* doing here?”

“I could ask you the same thing,” said the Doctor, guardedly. “In fact, I *will* ask you the same thing. Not just what you’re doing here, but, more to the point, what you’re doing here *now*? How did you get to Kvitverden in 10987 from Earth in 2009?”

“Well, that’s kind of a long story,” Jack hedged. “So maybe we should go back to the hotel and talk things over, instead of standing out here.” He flashed a look at Finn. “Then I could buy this wonderful young lady a drink and thank her properly for saving my life.”

“You being who you are, ‘saving your life’ smacks of hyperbole,” Finn disclaimed. “Wouldn’t it be more accurate to say I just saved you from dying *today*?”

“Even so – it all counts with me,” said Jack. “And I’d *really* like to show my gratitude,” he added meaningfully.

The Doctor took a couple of steps forward until he was right in Jack’s face.

“*You. Best* behaviour. She’s a *friend*,” he said sternly, punctuating each phrase with a jab of his forefinger against Jack’s breastbone.

“Okay, okay! Got it – loud and clear,” said Jack, giving ground and raising his hands in a ‘don’t shoot’ gesture, registering Finn’s veiled amusement at the Doctor’s instinctively protective reaction. He gave her a quick wink. “So, since we evidently need to change the subject – what *are* you doing here?”

“Looking for where one of the hotel staff had an accident,” said the Doctor. “Which I take it you found?” he added, turning to Finn.

“Right behind you,” she said, pointing at the hollow in the ice wall. The Doctor swivelled and strode over to it, Finn and Jack following.

“Is anyone gonna tell me what’s going on?” Jack asked plaintively.

“Of course,” Finn assured him. “Oh, and by the way, because I think we skipped this bit – I’m Fionnula Thornton.” She held out her hand to shake his. “But call me Finn. ‘Cause that’s what all my other friends do,” she added.

“Thanks,” he acknowledged. “So – hi, Finn! Nice to know you. What’s the story?”

Finn recounted what had happened to Håkon Aamodt, while the Doctor examined the bloodstains and their location with great care.

“Take a look at this place,” he said at last, stepping back to join them. “Anything strike you as strange?” Jack and Finn looked around, but shook their heads.

“What about that?” said the Doctor, pointing up at the row of icicles depending from the top lip of the hollow. Jack’s eyes narrowed as he saw the one thick ice stump among all the rest of the delicate frozen daggers.

“Why would the thickest one detach when the rest haven’t?” he said. “Any motion strong enough to break that one off should’ve brought down the rest.”

“Exactly,” said the Doctor. “That’s got to be how his hand was punctured in the first place, but, as you say – if that one came down, why not the others?” He rubbed the point of his chin, deep in thought.

“Perhaps the ice round here has an irritable temperament,” Finn suggested facetiously. “After all, that overhang waited until Jack was right under it before it decided to fall on him!”

She’d meant it as a joke, but the Doctor turned and stared at her as if she’d said something of world-shaking importance.

“Oh, come on, Doctor!” she said, her unique knowledge of his mind instantly helping her deduce what he was thinking. “*Sentient* ice?”

The Doctor shrugged.

“Never rule anything in, never rule anything out,” he said. “Keep an open mind, Finn.”

“I do – I keep yours, remember?” she said. Jack looked at both of them, puzzled.

“Am I missing something here?” he enquired.

“That’s also a bit of a long story,” said the Doctor. “So maybe you’re right. Maybe we should go back to the hotel and swap yarns. I don’t think we can learn anything more here.”

Chapter 6

The 'Albatross Epsilon' and Other Stories

“So, what *are* you doing here, Doctor?” Jack asked again.

They were sat round an ice table in the hotel bar. Finn and the Doctor had both declined a drink, but Jack had one in front of him, in spite of the early hour – served in a glass made of ice, naturally.

“Oh, just giving Finn a break from the weather back home,” shrugged the Doctor casually.

“And where – and when – is home?” Jack asked.

“Where’ is the county of Somerset, England, Earth,” she said. “You must know Somerset, Jack – it’s the place everyone rushes through in their hurry to get to Devon and Cornwall!” There was a notable degree of irony in her tone. “I live just about thirty miles almost directly south of where you used to be in Cardiff... And ‘when’ is August 2009. Or should that be ‘was’ 2009? Or even ‘will be’ 2009...?”

“Your tenses do get a little mixed when you’re around this guy,” Jack nodded. He looked at the Doctor.

“You know – it’s good to see you, Doctor,” he said, a little abruptly, as if he didn’t want to admit it.

“And you, Jack,” returned the Doctor blandly. “Though I’m still trying to work out how it’s possible. I disabled your vortex manipulator. How did you jump nearly nine thousand years into the future? You must’ve worked out a way to re-enable it.” He raised an interrogative eyebrow.

“It wasn’t quite like that... I guess you’ll know what happened with the 456?” said Jack slowly. The Doctor nodded.

“And Finn knows a bit,” he said. “But not everything. Only what most people know.”

Jack glanced at Finn briefly, nodded, and looked down at the ice glass in his hands, fidgeting with it.

“After that, I couldn’t stay. Too much happened. Too much lost. I needed to get away. So I hitched a lift away from Earth. And then something fairly radical happened to my getaway plan. Have you ever heard of the *Albatross Epsilon*?” Jack asked obliquely.

“*Albatross Epsilon*... Ye-e-es,” said the Doctor slowly. “That’s the freighter that fell into an anomalous temporal shift. Went missing for several thousand years. Suddenly popped back into normal space one day with all the crew dead except for –” He broke off, and looked at Jack with suddenly widened eyes.

“Except for a stowaway,” he went on, with growing animation. “That was *you*? You’re ‘the Stowaway of the *Albatross Epsilon*’?”

“Got me my place in history,” agreed Jack. “Not under my own name, though. Caused a lot of excitement in the space archaeologist community for a while there! Until the next sensation came along. I just played dumb. Then I kind of snuck away into obscurity. Been bumming around since then.”

“Wait a minute – do you mean you were alive on that ship for all that time?” Finn asked, incredulously.

“Ah, well, it wasn’t ‘all that time’ for him,” the Doctor disclaimed. “A temporal shift seems from the subject’s point of view to happen almost instantaneously. No subjective passage of time for him. Well, hardly any,” he corrected himself.

“Thank goodness for that!” Finn said warmly. “I had this dreadful vision of you being stuck in limbo somewhere, repeatedly dying of starvation and coming back, over and over...! I’m glad I can junk that idea!”

Jack looked at her curiously.

“For someone I only met today, you seem to know quite a bit about my situation,” he said. “How come?”

“That was me. Though not quite in the ordinary way of things. We had... sort of a meeting of minds,” said the Doctor. “And she ended up with some of mine.”

“Some of your...?” prompted Jack, not quite understanding.

“Some of my mind,” said the Doctor. “My memories. My knowledge.”

Jack widened his eyes at Finn.

“That so?”

“Yeah,” she confirmed. “Access can be a bit patchy, though. And incomplete. Puts a whole new slant on the phrase ‘Random Access Memory’! So sometimes I know bits, not the whole story.”

“My story?” Jack asked, gravely.

“Enough to know when to keep off the grass, I hope,” she said, just as gravely.

He nodded, accepting the implied promise she was making him.

“So,” he said, with a sudden change of manner, addressing the Doctor. “What about this guy Aamodt? I can tell by now when you’re head down on a scent. What do you think happened to him?”

“Not sure yet,” said the Doctor. “Have you been here long?”

“A week or so.”

“Anything out of the ordinary happened?”

Jack considered.

“Not really,” he said. “Unless... Look, this may not mean a thing, but I do happen to know there’s been a rash of complaints about vision problems among the guests.”

“What sort of vision problems?”

“Seeing things that aren’t there,” said Jack, with a grin. “Movements in their peripheral vision, and there’s nothing there when they look. Little white sparks that no-one else can see – that kind of thing.”

“Well, I saw one of those,” interposed Finn. Both men looked at her quickly.

“Where?” said the Doctor.

“In one of those pieces of artwork in reception,” said Finn. “I thought it was just an optical illusion, or a flash of reflected light, or something.”

“Yeah, that’s what Doctor Solberg keeps telling everyone,” said Jack.

“But now you don’t think so?” said the Doctor, looking intently at Finn.

“Well, it’s that thing about white sparks,” said Finn. “See, what I didn’t get round to telling you earlier was what I saw just before that icefall cut loose on top of Jack. Well, nearly on top of him...”

“I still plan to thank you for that,” said Jack, raising his glass to her.

“Yeah, well,” said Finn, with an air of sticking to the topic in hand, “there was something odd that I thought I saw. The trouble is, it was so quick, I can’t be sure I didn’t imagine it. But –”

“But what?” the Doctor persisted.

“Well, it was like a line of intense bright white. Just for an instant. And the thing is, where I thought I saw it, was exactly where the crack formed that brought the whole thing down. *Exactly*. So now I’m wondering whether it’s not a flaw in my imagination – more a flaw in my physiology.”

“Your physiology?” queried Jack, puzzled.

“Because my brain couldn’t register sufficiently quickly what my optic nerve told it I’d seen,” said Finn.

“Something real, but very, very fast indeed,” agreed the Doctor. “Which would be why people keep thinking they’ve seen movement, but there’s nothing there when they look.”

“So you think there’s something to it?” said Jack.

“I know there is,” said the Doctor. “Because I saw the same thing. In one of Håkon’s eyes – little white lights. The thing is, what to do next. How do we create the conditions under which we can see them again?”

“Stand under a lump of ice,” Finn advised him promptly. “That’s the common denominator between Håkon and Jack, as far as I can see.”

“Hey, with friends like you, who needs enemies?” Jack quipped.

“She might have a point, all the same,” said the Doctor. “Perhaps –”

He broke off as he caught sight of Christoph Murveray coming towards their table.

“Hello, Christoph!” he said expansively. “How’s it going? Do you know Jack Harkness?”

Christoph smiled at Finn and nodded to Jack in a friendly but rather abstracted manner. Clearly his mind was on something else.

“Yes, I’ve met Captain Harkness,” he agreed. Then he got to the point. “Doctor, I was hoping I’d find you. Something I filmed yesterday – it’s really strange. We wondered if you’d have any ideas about it. Would you mind coming to have a look?”

“It’s coming up in a few seconds,” said Christoph, seated in front of a small portable playback device in the boys’ hotel room. The Doctor, Jack and Finn were clustered behind him, peering over his shoulders; Romor and Dee stood one either side, doing the same.

“Where was this filmed?” asked the Doctor, peering at the walls of blue ice displayed on the screen.

“In the Safir Ice Cavern,” said Dee. “It’s about ten miles downstream of here, where there’s a break in the hills, and there’s a little branch of the glacier that diverts into a small lake.”

“Where does the main glacier go?” asked Finn.

“Out into the sea,” said Jack. “That’s where you can go see icebergs calving.”

“I’d love to see that,” said Finn wistfully. The Doctor looked at her.

“We will,” he promised. “I haven’t forgotten this is a holiday, you know.”

“More like a busman’s holiday, if you ask me,” Finn teased him.

“Look, here it is!” Christoph interrupted. His finger pointed at the screen. They looked more closely.

The camera was looking at a smooth face of blue ice. But it wasn’t an unblemished blue. There were three tiny, pale blots clustered on it. The picture zoomed in on the blots and held for a few seconds. Then it cut to a close-up of one of them. It looked like a sticky patch of residue – the sort of gunk Finn remembered from the first time she melted sulphur in a chemistry lesson at school. But whatever this was, it wasn’t sulphur; the colour was wrong, for a start. Instead of yellowish brown, this was an intense, pure white.

The Doctor had whipped his glasses out of one of his parka pockets and was frowning through them at the screen, as it continued to display close-ups of that and the other patches.

“Now, then – what are you?” he muttered.

“Any idea what it is, Doctor?” asked Dee, sounding fairly excited. “Is it” – he hesitated over the enormity of what he was suggesting – “some kind of lifeform?”

“Well, it certainly looks like it,” admitted the Doctor.

“But I thought you said this planet had no life at all,” said Finn.

“Ah, well – if you remember, I added the words ‘not that anyone’s discovered’,” the Doctor hedged. “I don’t want to raise any false hopes, but – maybe what was going to be a documentary about a lifeless world is going to turn into a scoop about something else entirely.” His words were upbeat, but his eyebrows were drawn together in a perplexed frown.

The three young men looked at each other excitedly.

“That’d be something, huh, boys?” grinned Jack, responding to their exhilaration.

Finn, though, was watching the Doctor, and he wasn’t looking as enthusiastic about the possible discovery of new life as she would have expected him to. Instead, he kept staring at the screen with a very serious look on his face.

“What should we do next, Doctor?” asked Romor, trying to stay calm. “How do we prove whether it’s a lifeform or not?”

“Well, I could go and take a look at it for you, if you like,” offered the Doctor, tearing his eyes away from the screen and putting on a more relaxed expression.

“Would you?” exclaimed Romor, overriding Christoph’s “We hoped you would!”

“Yup – in fact, right now,” said the Doctor decisively.

Dee’s face fell a little.

“Oh,” he said, obviously a little disappointed. “I was hoping we could come with you, but we can’t.”

“We’ve made an appointment to interview the executive vice president of the Ishotell company this afternoon,” Romor explained. “He happens to be visiting Kvitverden at the moment. We can’t cancel that.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll let you know what I find out,” said the Doctor brightly. “I –”

He’d broke off as he caught sight of something on the screen, which was still playing Christoph’s footage, and leaned forward intently.

“Christoph, can you take it back a few seconds?”

“Sure,” said Christoph, a little mystified, and did so. The Doctor’s finger suddenly shot out.

“There!” he yelled. “Now bring it forward a frame at a time.”

Intrigued, the rest of them stared at the screen, which was showing the smallest of the three patches. For quite a few seconds, nothing changed – it was just a stationary shot. Then, just for an instant, something blinked into view near the patch, and immediately blinked away again.

“What was that?” demanded Romor.

“Don’t know,” said Christoph, taking it back again. And there it was – one moment, nothing; then, for the duration of a couple of frames only, a small, intensely white glitter. In the next frame, it had vanished again.

“Must be a flaw in the capture,” suggested Dee. “Don’t worry – we don’t need to include those frames in the edit.”

The Doctor, Jack and Finn all looked at each other, and said nothing.

“Right, then,” said the Doctor, sounding very businesslike. “We’ll be on our way. See what we can find out for you.”

“See you later,” Jack nodded.

“And good luck with the interview!” added Finn.

Well out of earshot down the corridor, the Doctor turned to Finn.

“Hardly surprising your optic nerve was having trouble keeping up,” he said. “Whatever that thing was, it was visible for milliseconds only.”

“Well, at least I wasn’t imagining things,” said Finn with satisfaction.

“And we’re going to the Safir Ice Cavern, I take it?” said Jack.

“Yes, we are,” agreed the Doctor. “Come on!”

Chapter 7

Breaking the Ice

Finn stared up at the ice roof above her. The Safir Ice Cavern was well named – the ice was so blue it was easy to imagine you were walking about inside a sapphire. A cut one, at that. None of the jagged icicles decorating the cavern mouth were to be found in here; the walls, the roof, were worn smooth by the action of meltwater, and, to look at, reminded her – rather bizarrely – of solidified jelly (that would be ‘jell-o’, to Jack, she supposed, despite all his years in Britain – assuming his cultural background matched his accent; she didn’t know enough about him to vouch for that). Solidified, blue-white jelly. But a lot harder to fall down on if you lost your footing, as she’d already discovered to her cost.

“This way,” said the Doctor, ahead of her. “The third passageway on the right – that’s this one.” Characteristically, he didn’t wait for her and Jack to catch up.

This tunnel in the ice was considerably bigger than any they’d passed so far, and after only a few yards it opened up into a fairly big and unusually regular-shaped space, about one hundred feet square. In front of them, Finn recognized the blue ice face Christoph had filmed. And there were the white patches.

The Doctor knelt to examine them more closely, whipping a magnifying glass (where had he been keeping *that?*) out of his parka.

Jack and Finn looked round. The ice face by which the Doctor was kneeling sloped back quite steeply to meet the ceiling some thirty feet or so above them. There was something almost cathedral-like about the grandeur of the setting, but no cathedral ever sounded like this; continuous distant creaks and groans, from places where the ice was trying to move within the confines of the hills between which it flowed.

“Quite a place,” Jack said quietly. Finn nodded; even though it wasn’t an overly large space they were in, something about it generated a real sense of awe.

The Doctor, meanwhile, had produced a small screw-top plastic container of some sort and a knife from the mysterious cache of useful objects he'd somehow stowed about his person, and was chipping around one of the patches to detach it from the surrounding ice. He deposited it in the container, which he shoved into his parka, then stood up, and, like Jack and Finn, surveyed the extent of the cave.

"Now, then," he said. "I wonder if our little friends are going to show up?"

"I think they already have," said Jack suddenly. He pointed at the ice where the two other patches remained. The Doctor spun round to look.

Yes. There were tiny sparkles, flecks of white, collecting around the damaged ice where the Doctor had been gouging at it. Just a few at first, then more, and then more still. Like miniscule white fireflies, they flicked about, increasing in concentration, making the ice glitter like a cascading firework.

Finn began to feel nervous, and put out her hand to grip Jack's arm.

"What do you suppose they are?" she asked, finding that her voice was annoyingly hoarse with trepidation.

"Dunno," said the Doctor, watching them intently. "But there certainly are a lot of them... Hullo! What are they up to now?"

Instead of concentrating near the floor, as they had been doing, the white flecks began to swarm upward through the ice, like a column of smoke rising. Then they began to spread out in thin lines across the ceiling of the cave.

"Doctor, I've got a bad feeling about this," warned Jack. "I think we ought to get out of here."

"I think you're right," agreed the Doctor. "For little white lights, they certainly manage to convey a strong impression of being angry about something..."

"Doctor!" Finn shrieked at the top of her voice, her hand tightening convulsively around Jack's arm. With her free hand, she pointed upward.

The lines of white flecks suddenly solidified momentarily into lines of intense, bright light, like lightning strikes. Along every line the ice started to shatter. And then to fall.

By then they were racing out of the cave, along the passage, toward the cavern entrance. But a swift glance overhead showed the Doctor that the lines were following them – and everywhere the lines appeared, the ice cracked and fell in an avalanche of huge chunks and evilly sharp shards, following them along their path.

The Doctor knew from previous experience that Finn couldn't run as fast as either he or Jack could; he reached back and grabbed her wrist, and pulled her forward at a faster rate than she could manage by herself.

Jack, close behind them, was the one who saw that the lines were not only keeping pace, but were beginning to overtake them. They were so nearly out! But it was going to be too close for comfort.

And then he saw the huge, lethal chunk that was about to detach itself from the ceiling and would crush both Finn and the Doctor if it caught them.

Instantly he launched himself at them and gave them both an enormous shove in the back, catapulting them violently out from under the lip of the entrance.

But Jack's momentum threw him onto the ground, surrounded by the detonating projectiles of ice as they hit the surface around him. And the huge block of ice came smashing down right on top of him, crushing him as it shattered on his body.

He heard Finn scream his name just before everything went black. As it always did...

*

Interval.

*

And then he was back, violently gasping, his whole body shuddering in the paroxysm of resurrection. Even as he felt the familiar sensation, he was aware that, this time, someone was holding his hand. He couldn't avoid

the reflex action that squeezed it with what must have been painful force, and he heard a sharp intake of breath. But the hand kept hold of his. He opened his eyes.

The hand was Finn's. She was kneeling by him, her eyes overbright, while the Doctor stood behind her.

"Hi, there," said Jack, feeling understandably battered and bruised. "Was I gone long?"

"Just long enough for us to dig you out of that lot," said the Doctor, nodding at the collapsed heap of ice and snow a few yards away that was all that was left of the former entrance to the Safir Ice Cavern. "I think that's one tourist spot that's off the itinerary for a while."

Jack looked at the hand with which Finn was clinging to his, then up at her.

"Thanks for hanging on in there," he joked.

"Remind me to ask you what it is with you and icefalls, will you?" she riposted, wiping her eyes. "Twice in one day, too!"

They let go of each other's hand, and climbed to their feet. Then she put her arms round him and hugged him fervently.

"Thank goodness you were here, Captain Scarlet," she whispered. "*You* just saved *my* life. Thanks. More than I know how to say."

Jack smiled at the reference. He had to admit the similarity. He wondered briefly how Rose would have felt about being assigned the role of a Mysteron...

"Hey, think nothing of it," he said lightly, putting a finger under her chin and tipping her face up. She gave him a watery grin.

"Sorry, but I think rather a lot of it," she disagreed. "I've just got the one go at life, you know. Not like you two! So call me biased, but I think it's an occasion for gratitude!"

"Okay," agreed Jack equably. "Maybe I can help you think of a suitable way to express it? How about I treat you to a shared sauna when we get back?" He lifted his eyebrows wickedly.

"Oi! Stop it!" said the Doctor sternly. "Let's stick to the point. Which is that there really is something in the ice. And we need to find out what it is. Because it's clearly intelligent. I want to get this stuff back to Dagrún for analysis."

"And I want a drink," agreed Jack. "And Finn needs one to steady her nerves, I'll bet. So, yeah – let's get back."

*

Solberg and Dagrún looked up in some surprise as the Doctor came bolting into the medical centre, the ice sample cradled in his hands. He put the plastic container down on the bench surface beside Dagrún.

"Doctor Solberg! Dagrún!" he said expansively. "I need your help. Can you analyze what's on that piece of ice for me? Urgently?" He gave them one of his most winning smiles.

"Of course," said Dagrún. She drew the sample out of the container and placed it on a glass tray. Solberg leaned forward to take a closer look.

"Where did you find this?" he demanded, looking at the Doctor almost indignantly.

"Oh, it wasn't me," the Doctor disclaimed. "It was three media students making a film who spotted it. Inside a cave in the Safir Ice Cavern. The entrance to which, I'm sorry to say, is now rather blocked by a cave-in. There were three spots of this inside, and I need to know what it is, rather quickly."

Dagrún was already busy making a slide. Very shortly she was displaying the view through the microscope up onto a screen for the others to see.

It looked like hundreds of little pure white-coloured beads, all clumped together.

"But – those are bacteria!" exclaimed Solberg.

"Very dead bacteria, by the look of them," agreed the Doctor.

"But what makes them that colour?" Dagrún asked. "I can't think of anything here that would cause bacteria to turn such a pure white."

“Yeah,” said the Doctor thoughtfully. “They come in quite a range of colours, as a rule, but you’re right – absolute white isn’t one of them, there’s usually some tinge of colour somewhere. Can we find out what kind of bacteria they are?”

He had to wait a while, kicking his heels, while Solberg and Dagrún ran their analysis. At the end of it, Solberg turned to him, puzzled.

“These appear to be human bacteria,” he said. “*Streptococcus salivarius*. From inside a human mouth.”

“You mean someone was spitting onto the ice? That was rude!” said the Doctor severely, tutting. “But do we know what killed them?”

“Presumably some kind of antibiotic, but I have no idea what it is or what its source might be,” said Solberg.

“It’d have to be something fairly muscular,” said the Doctor thoughtfully. “Bacteria are hard to kill, as a rule. They make up some of the most tenacious extremophiles in the universe. A bactericidal antibiotic on an ice world is a bit unusual, wouldn’t you say?”

“Where would it come from, anyway?” Dagrún asked, shrugging her shoulders in perplexity. “What in this environment could produce such an antibiotic? If there’s no life, how could one even be present?”

The Doctor unexpectedly grinned at her.

“You might want to think through what you just said there and work out the implications,” he advised briskly. “Thanks!” He included Solberg in that. “Now I think there’s someone I need to go and have a word with about this.”

Had there been any dust in the spotless medical unit, there would have been a distinct sense of it settling after the Doctor swept out of the room, Dagrún felt.



Chapter 8

Friends and Lovers [1]

Finn and Jack, seated at the same table in the bar as before, looked up as the Doctor approached.

“What did you find out?” asked Jack.

“Human bacteria,” said the Doctor. Finn’s face fell.

“The boys’ll be disappointed about that,” she said. “They thought they were really onto something there.”

“They were. Because those bacteria were killed stone dead by some kind of bactericidal antibiotic. Which has no business being here unless there’s a lifeform here nobody knows anything about. Yet.”

“Woh!” said Jack. “So what happens now?”

“You wait here while I go and have a word with that executive vice president the boys were interviewing this afternoon. There’s a potential threat to all his guests and staff that I think he ought to know about, don’t you? Okay to stay here?”

“I’m good,” agreed Jack.

The Doctor raised a sceptical eyebrow, and Finn grinned.

“Not what I’ve heard,” she said lightly.

Jack looked indignant.

“I don’t know how people get these ideas about me,” he complained.

“Really?” said the Doctor cynically. “Well, keep on it – it’ll come to you.” He looked at Finn. “Okay?”

“We’ll be fine,” Finn assured him. “As far as I can make out, Jack’s strategy is to keep trying to ply me with vodka. I think he thinks it’ll make me more susceptible to his charm.”

Jack wore an air of injured innocence.

“As if I’d try a thing like that!” he protested.

“Especially knowing what I’d have to say to you if it worked,” agreed the Doctor, cocking a meaningful eyebrow at him.

“Don’t worry, Doctor, it won’t,” Finn assured him. “Alcohol really isn’t my thing, so I’m waiting to see what his alternative tactic’s going to be. But it’s fun seeing him try!”

The Doctor made the classic ‘I’m watching you’ gesture at Jack with forked fingers, and pivoted on his heel, hearing Finn’s gurgle of laughter behind him.

As he headed for his destination, the Doctor found himself analyzing Finn’s reaction to Jack. It wasn’t the typical one, he realized. Usually everyone on whom Jack turned the full force of his charisma succumbed – instantly.

On the other hand, from the very outset Finn had seemed to just take him as a friend; a very charming one, but a friend only.

He wondered how much of that attitude she’d picked up from his own feelings about Jack, transmitted during that mind transfer on Mynydd y Seren, and how much was her own natural reaction. He’d had a brief roam around her mind after the transfer, and knew the quality of it – much higher than she herself realized. But even with his knowledge of her thought processes, it was still hard to know why she wasn’t as susceptible to Jack as others of his acquaintance had been.

Still, he was somehow more relieved than he cared to admit that she hadn’t just fallen at Jack’s feet the way so many did. Rose had. And Martha. And Donna. Even Sarah Jane! But not Finn...

He was distracted from his train of thought by the sight of Romor, Christoph and Dee, coming toward him.

“Hello!” he said gaily. “How’d the interview go? Did the revered vice president have anything interesting to say?”

“I think he did,” said Romor. “Although, at times, it was what he *didn’t* say that was interesting.”

“Really? Do tell!” the Doctor invited him.

*

Jack watched the Doctor leave, then turned back to Finn with a quizzical expression on his face.

“He seems pretty protective of you,” he observed.

“More than he has been of others, do you think?” she enquired, with interest.

“I’d say so,” agreed Jack. “Though he always sits on me pretty quick in any case.”

“So I’ve gathered! Maybe he feels more responsible for me.”

“Why would that be?”

“Because of having some of his mind in mine, I suppose. That’s a more personal connection than some. It’s like I’ve got custody of a part of him. Perhaps he just wants to make sure I take care of it. Or perhaps he wants to make sure it doesn’t cause problems for me. I don’t know.” She looked thoughtful.

“Have you fallen for him?” Jack asked, suddenly and directly.

Finn snorted; Jack found it difficult to decode whether in derision or amusement.

“Now, come on, Jack, don’t be bashful,” she chided him humorously. “Come straight out with it and say what you *really* mean!”

“Come on, Finn, don’t be evasive,” he riposted. “Come straight out with it and say what *you* really mean!”

She grinned at him, then became more serious.

“I don’t think there’d be much future in it,” she shrugged. “The way you’d probably phrase it – it’d be kind of dumb, wouldn’t it? For someone like me, anyway.”

“Why d’you think that?”

“Because he’s not a ‘for the rest of your life’ kind of man. He’s not even a ‘for the rest of *his* life’ kind of man! Of *course* you could get fond of him that way. That’d be *very* easy! And I know other people have. But, somehow, it’s just not the way I think of him. At least” – she paused to consider that honestly – “I don’t think I do. I don’t *think* I do...”

She thought about it for a few moments more, then went on – switching from first to second person, Jack noticed.

“But, anyway, supposing you did? Sooner or later he’d go and regenerate into somebody completely different, and you’d’ve lost him. He’d be the same man – but, then again, he wouldn’t. And hearts could get broken that way. So it’d be a bit of a stupid thing to do, if you knew that ahead of time, wouldn’t it?”

“I guess so,” said Jack thoughtfully.

“And even if I did, Jack, I’d do my absolute darndest not to show it,” Finn went on, leaning forward earnestly.

“Why not?” he asked, puzzled.

“Because it’d put pressure on him, if he happened not to feel the same way. I’ve got privileged access. I’ve picked up on how difficult some situations have been for him. Some of it’s been because of this ‘unrequited’ stuff. I’d never want to put him in that position with me. Maybe I haven’t been lucky, but it’s been my personal experience that friendships, real friendships, are much more likely to survive than love affairs. Now, that’s something I *can* do. Be a friend to him. So I plan on being a friend. A *real* friend. Always.” She shrugged on the last word.

Jack regarded her. It wasn’t his own way, but he found he was impressed by her logical reasoning. Not that the human heart had a whole lot to do with logic, of course...

“You seem to have given it careful thought,” he observed, taking another sip of his drink.

Finn was silent for a moment, and Jack had the feeling there were quite a number of things she wasn’t saying. Then she leaned back and looked at him.

“Shortly after I first met him, he told me I should read Robert Heinlein’s work. So I did. And one of his Lazarus Long stories really hit home. It’s ‘The Tale of the Adopted Daughter’ – do you know it?”

“Lazarus Long – that’s the guy who’s exceptionally long lived, isn’t he? A mutation of some sort. Lives a couple of thousand years at least?”

“That’s the one. At one point he finds a little orphaned girl, raises her, falls in love with her, marries her, and she grows old while he doesn’t. She’s the love of his life. Inevitably, she dies and he then has to go on living his long life without her. And he *never* stops grieving for her. Just buries it away instead. Jack, it broke my heart reading that story. Because I realized that that’s the Doctor’s story, over and over. Or is when he allows himself to care too much about any specific individual. Though” – she looked at him with sharpened attention – “I suppose it’s your story, too, isn’t it? And I have no idea how either of you can cope with it. And that’s why maybe you need friends even more than lovers.”

Jack looked at her sombrely, without speaking. Then he lightened his expression, and raised his glass to her.

“To friendship,” he said.

Finn smiled and clinked her glass against his.

“Friendship,” she agreed.

Jack put his glass back on the table.

“This privileged access,” he said curiously, deliberately changing the subject. “How did that happen?”

“Ah – well, now,” she said, with a smile. “There’s a story! And it goes like this...”

*

Asbjørn Thorstad leaned forward, rested his immaculately clad elbows on his impressively large desk, and steepled his fingers.

The Doctor's heart sank when he saw that. It told him exactly what kind of man he was dealing with, and exactly the kind of response he was going to get to his warning.

"Really, Doctor," said Thorstad, expansively – and predictably. "Do you honestly expect me to take this seriously? Scientists beyond number have been to Kvitverden, and they're all in consensus – there is no indigenous life here. It's one of the things that our guests find so appealing – an absolutely pristine world where they can do what they wish without any danger of harming the local biological community. Because there isn't one."

"There's never anything, until it's discovered for the first time," argued the Doctor. "Just because you've never seen something, doesn't mean it's not there. It can mean that nobody's looked in the right place, or they've looked but haven't recognized what they've seen. These white flecks the guests are seeing all of a sudden. Håkon Aamodt's death due to some unknown agent clogging up his blood with ice crystals. And that your doctor can't identify. Those are *new* factors, Mr Thorstad. Things nobody's come across before. Haven't *discovered* until now."

Thorstad maintained his expression of polite patience, but there was an unmistakable flicker of something – doubt? fear? – in his eyes for a moment.

"Really, Doctor! Those white spots are probably simply a result of our lighting effects, or reflections in the glacier. And Aamodt's death, while regrettable, is probably simply due to an unknown virus or something picked up from one of our thousands of guests. People come here from an enormous number of different planets; it would hardly be a cause for surprise if something like this were to happen from time to time. It would be more of a surprise if it didn't! I'm sorry, but until there is incontrovertible proof of real danger, I shall not be taking any action."

He looked almost affronted.

"What would other people say if I raised foundationless alarms that would simply put guests off from visiting us? I have to answer to our shareholders, Doctor. And I'm afraid that what you've told me just would not be convincing enough to persuade them that I'd justified their faith in me."

"I see," said the Doctor, nodding. "So you're more worried about your profits, your shareholders and your job than you are about a threat to your guests."

"An *unproven, theoretical* threat," Thorstad emphasized, unable to repress the indignant frown that the Doctor's accusation brought to his face. "And I'm afraid that until such time as you are able to present me with such proof, Doctor, this conversation is suspended. Indefinitely, I suspect."

The Doctor caught and held his eye in a way that the executive found extremely discomforting.

"I hope you like the taste of those words, Mr Thorstad," said the Doctor grimly. "Because when this conversation resumes, you might just have to eat them."



Chapter 9 Cold Comfort

Jack and Finn were still sitting in the bar, talking hard, as the Doctor approached them. They both looked, he thought, unusually serious. He wondered what they were talking about.

“... and that’s why I’ve got an insight nobody else’s got. I just hope that’s a good thing,” Finn was saying.

“From where I’m sitting it is,” said Jack. “Because – trust me! – empathy’s a hell of a lot easier to take than sympathy.”

At that point Finn spotted the Doctor. Jack turned and looked at him as he brought up beside their table and slid onto the bench beside Finn.

“Didn’t go well, I take it,” he observed, looking at the Doctor’s face.

“Of all the things I really, really hate, smug, self-satisfied businessmen who care more about profits than people are right up there on the list,” the Doctor grumped.

“So what are we going to do?” asked Finn.

“Not a lot we can do, without proof,” said the Doctor. “Which is what our friend Mr Thorstad is insisting upon. Which I can’t produce in his office. And he doesn’t look like the sort who comes out of it very often.”

“What about Christoph’s film?” asked Finn.

“Oh, that’ll be just some sort of reflection in the glacier,” said the Doctor. “Just like the flecks here’ll be a result of the hotel’s lighting effects. And Håkon’s bad luck that he picked up a one-off, mysterious disease from some guest or other from some unidentified planet who knows where.”

“Like that, huh?” Jack sympathized.

“Exactly like that,” the Doctor agreed.

“I wonder how Romor got on with interviewing him?” Finn mused.

“Ah, well, now – that was quite interesting, apparently,” said the Doctor, perking up a bit. “They were pressing him a bit on the environmental impact of the development on this planet. Apparently they’d talked to some of the spaceport staff, and *they’d* reckoned there was an increase in the number of tremors.”

“What – earthquake tremors?” asked Finn, widening her eyes.

“Oh, yes,” agreed the Doctor. “This planet’s got two moons exerting tidal acceleration on it, which shakes up the plate tectonics every now and again. Nothing startling, but enough to feel the odd quiver or two from time to time. The tourists’d never notice, other than as a one-off bit of excitement if it happens while they’re here. But the people Romor spoke to, they’re here for the long term. And they think tremors are getting more frequent. And the *really* odd thing is the number of icefalls that happen when there are no detectable tremors at all.”

“Isn’t anybody monitoring that?” Jack asked.

“Ah, well, Mr Thorstad says there’s no need, you see,” explained the Doctor. “Nothing out of the ordinary, as far as he’s concerned. And certainly no need to alarm any of his customers. So the fact that there are more and more icefalls – like yours, Jack – is mere rumour-mongering by overimaginative employees.”

“Uh-huh. So what do we do?”

“Nothing we *can* do, at the moment,” the Doctor shrugged, obviously frustrated. “Not till we can come up with some evidence that’ll convince that devout and practising sceptic in the head office.”

“And how do we go about that?” Jack persisted.

“We don’t, just for the moment,” said the Doctor, surprisingly. “Not for this evening, at least. This is Finn’s holiday, and the boys tell me there’s a particularly good show of the local *aurora borealis* expected tonight. Well, to be strictly accurate,” he corrected himself, “given we’re in the southern hemisphere of the planet, it’s more of an *aurora australis*, geographically speaking. But you’d like to see it, wouldn’t you, Finn?”

He savoured the way her face lit up at the prospect.

“Ohhh, I’d *love* to!” she exclaimed excitedly. “I’ve *always* wanted to see the Northern Lights! The ones on Earth, I mean. But I’ve never been able to afford to travel to anywhere that has them.”

“Well, the actual travel’s free with this guy,” said Jack lightly, jerking his thumb at the Doctor. “Costs you in other ways, sometimes, but...”

He left the sentence unfinished, and he and the Doctor exchanged an unreadable look. Finn looked at them both. So that hadn’t entirely been a joke... Oh, dear, was Jack getting protective, too? She decided she’d better behave as though it had been purely a jest.

“Tanstaaf!’, Jack!” she grinned. “There ain’t no such thing as a free lunch’, remember? Even if you don’t have to pay your money, you still takes your choice! And this is my choice, any day of the week. My *informed* choice, honest! And more informed than most, let’s face it!”

The Doctor quirked his eyebrows at Jack, as if to say, “See?”, and Jack grinned back with a shrug.

“Okay, then – it’s a date,” he announced.

“And did *ever* a girl have two such escorts?” Finn asked rhetorically, with twinkling eyes. “But in the meantime, if you’ll excuse me, I’ve got to go. If you know what I mean!” She stood up. “Back soon!”

They watched her leave. Then Jack turned to the Doctor.

“Okay,” he said decisively. “Finn’s been explaining how she knows so much about you. What do you know about her?”

The Doctor looked momentarily blank.

“We-e-ell... I met her on a mountain in Wales,” he said. “She helped me to –”

“Yeah, yeah, got that bit already,” Jack cut him off, impatiently. “But what do you know about *her*? What’s her back story? She got a family? Parents? Boyfriend?”

Completely caught out, the Doctor opened his mouth, realized he couldn’t answer, and shut it again, looking slightly ridiculous.

Jack’s eyes widened accusingly.

“You haven’t even asked, have you?” he challenged indignantly. “Boy, you never change, do you? You don’t even wanna know, I bet! In case it gets complicated. For *you*.”

“Well, I’m sure she’d tell me if it mattered,” the Doctor said, lamely.

“Would she, heck!” Jack contradicted, in some disgust. “I’ve only known her a few hours, and seems like I already know more about your relationship than you do! You seriously think she’s gonna tell you anything she knows you don’t want to hear?”

Abruptly he got to his feet, and looked down at the Doctor.

“If you think that kid’s ever gonna do anything other than put your welfare ahead of her own, you haven’t been paying attention!”

He emphasized the last word with an accusatory jab of his finger, then walked away.

The Doctor stared after him, uncomfortably. Feeling chastened was a rare experience for him.

And he didn’t much like it.

*

“It’s magic,” said Finn softly.

The Doctor glanced at her, looking at the rapt expression on her face, then back at the sky above them, where swirling curtains of blue and green and red light danced and trembled across the firmament, partially veiling the stars beyond, sometimes breaking into streamers of paler shades, sometimes swelling up into what seemed to be flames licking at the sky.

“Yeah, it is, isn’t it?” he agreed, in a similar tone. That tone he used every time it hit him afresh what an incredible place the universe was. After more than nine hundred years, it was still making him marvel, and it added so much more when he found he was sharing the same realization with someone else.

“Of course, I know – thanks to *you!*” – she gave her forehead that quick double tap that he was beginning to recognize as her way of referring to his mind being in hers – “that technically it’s photons and oxygen and nitrogen atoms being excited by the solar wind.” Her tone had been momentarily more prosaic, but now reverted to quiet awe. “But, still – it’s magic.”

“You know what they say about magic,” shrugged the Doctor. “It’s just science you haven’t understood yet.”

“It’s a quality, too, though. And *this* is magic,” she asserted.

“Yngvar was telling me that according to Norwegian folklore it’s the light cast by the armour of the Valkyries,” Jack offered. “The ‘choosers of the slain’.”

“Oh, it’s much too beautiful to be associated with death,” Finn contradicted firmly. “I’m sticking with ‘magic’. Oh-h-h! *Look!*”

She broke off as a particularly spectacular set of multiple veils of light suddenly sprang into being, rippling across the sky, and stared spellbound at them. Her exclamation was echoed in soft chorus by the many and various other guests, spread out across the snow in small groups, who had also come out to see the display.

Jack caught the Doctor’s eye, and crooked a finger at him. The Doctor moved closer.

“Doctor, those white lights,” Jack said in a low voice. “What do you figure they really are?”

“Something the size of a microbe,” the Doctor speculated. “Something tiny enough to be able to move around inside the physical structure of ice. Some microbes come in at around two hundred nanometres. Maybe something even smaller, the size of a virus, just twenty nanometres.”

“How big is a nanometre?” Finn chipped in, her eyes still fastened to the spectacle overhead.

“I think ‘small’ is the word you’re really after,” the Doctor advised her. “One billionth of a metre.”

Finn wrinkled her brow, trying to visualize it, and signally failing to do so.

“One *billionth*?” she marvelled. “But then why would we be able to see them sometimes and not others? Bypassing the question of how we can see them at all, if they’re that size!”

“I think,” the Doctor theorized, “we can see them when they’re stationary. Or more or less stationary. Or at least when they’re moving at a speed sufficiently slow for our eyes can pick them up. And – judging by the lines of light in the ice cave, and the one you saw out by the glacier – if there are enough of them together in one place. They must radiate some sort of energy, which we see as specks of light. But if they’re on the move – maybe they move faster than we’re able to see them. So small, they can slide in between all those spaces between the crystals too fast for us to register.”

“But if they’re microbes, or viruses, or whatever,” objected Jack, “how come they’re radiating energy? And where are they getting it from?”

“I didn’t say they *were* microbes or viruses,” the Doctor amended. “Just the *size* of microbes or viruses. They may be something else entirely. But as to where they’re getting their energy from – well, on Earth, for example, there’s a microbe called *geobacter metallireducens* that likes to live in iron-rich mud and gets its energy by transferring electrons onto rust. Producing magnetite as a result. Maybe something similar’s going on here. This planet’s riddled with magnetite. And temperature isn’t an issue. There’s another microbe that rejoices in the name of *colwellia psychrerythraea*, and it can survive temperatures right down to about minus one hundred and sixty centigrade. But until we can conduct a conversation with one of our little friends here, it’s going to be difficult to prove just what they are, one way or the other.”

“How do you plan to do that, exactly?” Jack enquired.

“Still working on that one,” the Doctor admitted. He looked at Jack speculatively for a moment, then turned to Finn.

“Jack and I are going to wander off for a while,” he said.

“Are we?” queried Jack, surprised.

“Yes,” the Doctor said, without turning. “We need to talk. See you back here later,” he said to Finn.

“Okay,” she agreed, and watched the two men walk away into the dark, wondering what the Doctor needed to say to Jack that could cause his brown eyes to be visibly so serious, so sad, even through the advancing gloom of the night.

*

True to her word, Finn waited where she was, even when the other guests had dispersed. The aurora had faded, and one of Kvitverden’s moons had begun to rise, casting its pale light over the snowfield – a spectacle, too, in its own way. She sat in the snow, looking up at the pale sphere, and marvelling at the efficiency of the insulation membrane keeping her body safe from the sub-zero temperature. If she’d tried sitting in snow for this long on Earth, she’d have been suffering from hypothermia long ago.

It was more than an hour before she made out the tall figure of the Doctor trudging back across the snow. Alone.

“What’ve you done with Jack?” she asked, as he came up and folded down cross-legged into the snow beside her.

“He needed some time on his own. I gave him some things to think over.”

“Like what?”

The moonlight made dark shadows across the Doctor’s face.

“Like what happened with the 456. He had to make some soul-destroying choices. I know about those. I’ve had to make some of my own, from time to time. So I shared one or two things with him.”

“What things?” Finn asked, quietly.

“About choices. What you choose to do in a crisis. About how, sometimes, whatever the consequences, other people will tell you there’re always choices, but often, when it comes down to it, there’s only one, if you want to have even the faintest chance of being able to live with yourself afterwards. And that if you give it long enough, the pain subsides to manageable levels.”

“But it never quite goes away.” Finn could feel parts of his memory resonating deep in her mind, and made it a statement, not a question.

“Never quite,” agreed the Doctor. “But you learn to deal with it. Try to remind yourself that you did try every other way. But in the end, you have to opt for the greatest good of the greatest number. Knowing you’ll never stop grieving for the sacrifices others’ve made. Or that you forced them to make. Taking *their* choices away from them. You never forget, and you never forgive yourself. Even when the outcome is the best you could have managed. But in the end, you learn to live with it. You have to. Because it never goes away.”

Finn looked at the Doctor with a troubled expression.

“You know, I think that’s the most heartbreaking thing I’ve ever heard. It’s such terrible unhappiness to have to bear.”

“Oh, Jack’ll be all right,” the Doctor shrugged. “He’ll adjust. Eventually.”

“I wasn’t talking about Jack,” she said.

They looked at each other in silent mutual comprehension for a few seconds. Then the Doctor looked away and surveyed the silvery landscape around them, as if seeing it for the first time, and cocked his head to one side.

“So – what d’you fancy doing tomorrow?” he said, with a complete change of mood. “I’m still trying to give you a holiday here, you know.”

“I know you are,” she smiled. “Things just keep cropping up and getting in the way, don’t they?” She considered the question. “What about one of those sea trips you told me about? To see where the glacier meets the sea? Seeing an iceberg being calved is one of those boxes I’d love to tick.”

“Sea trip it is,” confirmed the Doctor.

Chapter 10

A Box Ticked

When, at breakfast the next morning, Romor, Christoph and Dee heard what they were planning, there was some swift and excited conversation between the three of them before Romor proposed that they, too, hire a craft and do the same.

“The thing is, would you mind if we used you as subjects for filming?” Romor asked. “So we can use you to provide scale, and human interest, in some of the shots?”

“We were going to get round to filming there at some point anyway,” Christoph supplemented, “but it’d be really helpful if you could do that for us.”

“Fine by me,” Finn grinned, “but be warned, Romor – I don’t know how well these two take direction!” She indicated both Jack and the Doctor with her thumbs.

“Hey!” Jack objected. “I’ve always wanted to be an actor. And I’m a quick study. Who knows? Maybe this’ll be the start of my next career.”

The Doctor looked abstracted, as if he were only half listening.

“Is it okay with you, Doctor?” Finn said, touching him on the forearm to get his attention.

He looked at her for a few moments without speaking. Then his face suddenly galvanized into one of those almost maniacally animated grins of his.

“Wonderful! Absolutely! Yes! Completely!” he enthused. “Well, come on, everyone! What are we doing hanging about here?” And he leapt up and headed for the doorway.

“D’you know, I get the distinct impression that’s a ‘Yes’,” said Jack drily, as he and Finn followed at a more sedate pace, Romor, Christoph and Dee behind them.

Finn pursed her lips and pretended to consider.

“Where’s your evidence?” she queried sceptically, as if in doubt. Then they grinned at each other broadly, and Jack gallantly ushered her out of the restaurant.

*

A couple of hours later they were out on the sea, in a craft which – like the ‘train’ on which they had travelled to the hotel – could pinch-hit for a hovercraft. Which Finn supposed made sense, since – as was only too clear from the length and detail of the personal disclaimers they’d all had to sign in order to use the craft – swanning about in an area likely to be crammed with icebergs of varying sizes was a potentially dangerous activity, and a hovercraft would lay them open to less risk of terminal collision with something solid enough to sink them. Though it had been explained to them that it would continue to float even if the engine was switched off.

They were very comfortable little craft, she decided, as the Doctor steered theirs over the green-grey water so characteristic of the colouration where a glacier meets the sea (though she’d elected to call them ‘boats’ in her own mind, for ease of reference). At a pinch you could have fitted another half dozen passengers onto each of the benches that ran along either side of the interior, so there was plenty of room for just herself and Jack. There was even an awning you could put up to protect both the helmsman and the passengers from the elements if need be, but there was no need for that today; it was fine, and calm, with fairly clear visibility despite the unbroken blanket of cloud overhead.

She glanced at the Doctor, erect and alert at the wheel, and unexpectedly found herself thinking of the captain of the 'Flying Dutchman'. But then, there was a certain similarity between them. Not that the TARDIS was a ghost ship, but it was certainly captained by a man forever wandering the ocean of the universe, doomed never to return home. And a man – depending on which version of the legend you went by – eternally haunted by lost love.

And then she thought about Jack, in such a similar situation...

Suddenly she realized Jack was aware that she was staring at him, and was looking at her with an enquiring expression. Hastily she gave him a bright smile. He returned it in a way that told her he wasn't entirely convinced she was all right, and moved from his side of the boat to sit beside her.

"You okay?" he enquired.

"Oh, yes," she said, a genuine feeling of pleasure overcoming her again as she thought about where she was, what she was doing, and who she was doing it with. "You know, this is – well, it's so *special!* I'm never going to forget this, as long as I live!"

"You know something? I'm pretty sure I won't, either," he said, seriously.

"Gosh! When *you* say you're going to remember something as long as you live, that gives it a whole lot more meaning, let's face it!" she grinned.

Jack laughed aloud, thinking how liberating it was to be able to talk – and even joke – with someone up front about his unique circumstance, instead of keeping it in the background, hiding it from those who didn't know, and wouldn't understand.

Finn looked away out over the sea to where the second boat was following them. Dee was at the helm, while Romor hung over Christoph as he filmed their progress. Jack followed the direction of her eyes, and gave the other boat a cheerful wave.

"Tut, tut!" Finn scolded him. "To be a successful documentary subject, you need to pretend they're not even there, you know!"

"You sound like you know all about it. Is that what you do?"

"No, I'm just an armchair film-maker," Finn joked. "Like being an armchair athlete. I've always been fascinated by the process of film-making – you know, I watch all those documentaries on how it's done. I've just never done it myself. But I'm pretty sure that ideally they want to preserve the illusion that the camera isn't there between the subject and the audience. Which won't happen if you keep waving at them!" she concluded with a grin.

"Okay, ma'am," Jack agreed, with an ironic salute. "I'll behave myself from now on."

"Now, now!" she reproved, with another grin. "You shouldn't make promises you can't keep!"

"Hey, I *always* behave myself!" Jack protested.

"Yeah, but mostly it's badly," the Doctor interjected.

"You been listening in on a private conversation?" Jack challenged, lightly.

"Yup," the Doctor agreed. "Needed to know when to interrupt. Look!" He pointed ahead and slightly to the right.

The low cliffs of the shoreline had begun to curve inland, away from them, to be replaced by a cliff of pure blue-white ice. The calm surface of water in front of it was dotted with small bergs ranging in size from hundreds of tiny lumps no bigger than Finn's fist up to some more or less the same size as their boat.

"That's the calving front of the glacier," said the Doctor, throttling back on their speed and gradually bringing them to a stop in a space between the bergs from where they had a clear view of the glacier face, about half a mile or so away. "No telling if it's going to perform, of course," he warned Finn.

"I know," she agreed. "But even if it doesn't – isn't this *great?*" She turned an excited and delighted smile on him, and he grinned back. It was always gratifying when other people shared his enthusiasms.

They sat in silence for a while. The hovercraft floated on the milky glacial water with only the slightest, almost imperceptible sensation of motion. The silence was broken only by the muted sound of the other

hovercraft somewhere behind them, moving among the floating ice. Jack glanced around, and saw that Dee had taken it further out to sea, presumably so Christoph could get some shots of them against the face of the glacier.

“Hope the boys are getting the footage they want,” he commented.

“In that case, they’d better be filming now,” said the Doctor, suddenly sharp. “Look!”

He pointed urgently toward the glacier; Jack and Finn snapped their heads round to follow the direction of his finger.

“Oh, wow,” Finn breathed. She got to her feet and took a couple of paces forward to stand beside the Doctor; Jack came up to stand the other side of her.

With a ponderous slowness that was the only indicator of the scale of what was happening, a thick shaft of blue-white ice was separating from the glacier face. Its forward motion was a curious combination of sliding down and toppling forward at the same time; majestically it leaned over the water, poised on the cusp of collapse.

Then down it came, bringing an avalanche of loose ice and snow with it, creating a moving curtain of material crashing down into the water.

For a moment there seemed to be no effect; then the swell of a huge wave rose from the surface of the sea, an ominously smooth surface spattered with chunks of ice that rose up and over the travelling crest as if they were no heavier than pieces of cork. The forward pressure of the wave, which must have been close to twenty feet high, forced the water in front of it up into a huge bulge, pushed forward by its motion; behind it more waves followed, nearly as big. As the waves got further away from the glacier, they began to fall over into huge ‘white horses’, causing further, more violent movement among the pieces of floating ice.

“You’d better sit down and hold on to something,” warned the Doctor, stepping backward to the seat behind them and pulling Finn with him. “Ever been on a bucking bronco?”

“No, of course I haven’t!” Finn snapped, almost crossly, as if annoyed by the apparent irrelevance of the subject. In truth, of course, she was feeling very nervous, as the turbulence came racing toward them. Suddenly the hovercraft didn’t feel particularly sturdy.

“Well, hang on,” advised the Doctor. “You’re about to find out what it feels like.”

Jack plumped down on the seat next to Finn, and gave her an excited smile.

“This is gonna be fun,” he assured her, grabbing her hand.

“Oh, good,” she said, in a tight little voice. “That’s all right, then!”

“Here it comes!” warned the Doctor, seizing Finn’s other hand.

The wave had lost some of its height – it was now probably only about six or seven feet; even so, for a moment it gave the impression it was going to swamp them. But the little craft rose gamely up the sloping face, hung for a moment on the crest, and then slid down the other side with a distinct swooping sensation.

“If anyone sees my stomach anywhere, can they please return it to its rightful owner?” Finn said plaintively. “I seem to have left it up in the air somewhere.”

“Maybe you’ll be reunited with it in a moment,” chuckled Jack. “We’re going up again!”

The next wave wasn’t quite as high, but imparted a similar sensation. But gradually each wave decreased in height, until they were left rocking on a gentle swell.

Jack gave Finn’s hand a squeeze.

“Box ticked, huh?” he smiled. She almost wriggled with sheer delight.

“Oh, yes! That was incredible! You were right – it *was* fun!”

The Doctor grinned at her.

“Worth it, then?” he asked.

“You know it was,” she said happily, gripping both their hands for emphasis. “It’s funny – I hardly knew I had an adrenalin gland before I met you. Now it seems to be in permanent overdrive!”

“Yeah – brilliant, isn’t it?” the Doctor said, his smile so wide his face was nearly split in two. He let go of her hand as he twisted round to look behind them. The other boat, being further away, had also successfully ridden it out. The three young film-makers were waving at them. Christoph in particular was gesturing enthusiastically at his camera, indicating he was very happy with the footage he’d captured.

However, something had caught the Doctor's attention. As he gazed out over the ice-strewn sea, suddenly he knew, he just knew, something wasn't right. Subliminally, something was screaming at him to realize what it was.

Then, abruptly, he did. Jack saw his expression, and followed his line of sight. Then he copied the Doctor's perplexed frown.

"Hey, that shouldn't be happening, should it?" he asked.

"No," said the Doctor slowly. "It shouldn't."

Finn looked at each of them in turn, puzzled.

"What shouldn't be happening?" she asked.

"That berg, there," said Jack, pointing.

A large berg, even bigger than their hovercraft, was moving slowly through the water. Finn looked at it in mystification, her brow creased as she tried to identify what was wrong. Because something clearly was, judging by the faces of the two men staring at it.

Then it dawned on her. The berg wasn't floating away from them, in the direction the waves had travelled. It was moving toward them. *Against the motion of the water.*



Chapter 11

Not Waving, But Drowning

"How's that possible?" Jack asked. "What's making it move?"

The Doctor swivelled his head to scan all round.

"It's not just that one," he said grimly. "Look."

All round them, large bergs were slowly closing in on them. From all directions.

Finn looked at the other boat. The boys had picked up on what was happening, too: Dee was poised at the wheel, while Christoph had his camera in action again. Romor was waving urgently, and pointing.

"Doctor," said Jack urgently. "They're getting real close."

"Too close," agreed the Doctor, and leapt back to the pilot's station to restart the engine.

Which, entirely predictably, failed to fire.

The Doctor wrestled with the controls at furious speed, but to no effect.

"Doctor!" Jack said again, even more urgently. The nearest berg was looming large, only a few yards away. Then the Doctor heard Finn gasp. He looked round quickly.

She was pointing at the top of the berg.

"White light! I saw a line of white light!"

But he didn't have time to respond. The berg was tipping toward them. If it didn't crush them, it would swamp them for sure.

Fortunately, the very action of tipping pressured the water in front of the berg toward them, pushing them a few feet further away. But even that wasn't quite enough to save them entirely. The crest of the berg came rolling

over and caught the side of the hovercraft a glancing blow. It was dragged down into the water momentarily, and all the occupants were drenched as a thick sheet of water came jetting up.

The Doctor held on to the wheel with one hand, and with the other grabbed Finn, who seized him in a terrified grip.

Jack wasn't so lucky. Not anchored to anything, he was thrown into the water, vanishing beneath the tipping edge of the berg.

"JACK!" Finn screamed. The Doctor shook herself out of her grasp and rushed to the side, frenzied eyes darting every which way over the roiling surface. For long, horrifying moments there was no sign of the missing man.

Then, with a sudden surge, his head broke the surface; he was gasping loudly with huge, hoarse intakes of breath. The sudden shock of the freezing water would, under other circumstances, probably have killed him. Again. The sudden temperature drop for a human body being plunged into such cold water could easily have caused his heart to simply stop beating. But his insulation membrane must have come to the rescue.

"Jack!" the Doctor shouted, leaning over the side and stretching his long arm toward the struggling man. "Come on! It's still moving!"

Finn, horrified, saw that the Doctor was right. Instead of settling, the berg was still rotating in the water – and was still coming for them, flashes of white light shooting along its crest with each revolution. She, too, reached her hand out toward Jack, who, emitting those loud, hoarse gasps, was now almost within reach. The Doctor got a grip first, on the hood of his soaked parka, and with astonishing strength for someone of such slight build, hauled the half-drowned man bodily over the side, Finn helping as much as she could. Then he abruptly abandoned Jack and leapt back to the controls.

The bergs were beginning to cluster dangerously close, and the engine still refused to start. Finn, on her knees with Jack's head in her lap, knew what the Doctor's next move would be. Sure enough, his hand dived inside his parka, and an instant later the sonic screwdriver was out and being wielded.

A frantic glance showed Finn that another berg was about to tip onto them. She couldn't help herself; she knew she was about to say the most superfluous thing possible in the circumstances, but, still – out it came.

"*Hurry, Doctor!*"

He spared her one irritated look, as much as to say, "What d'you *think* I'm doing...?!", and, really, she couldn't blame him.

Then – the engine burst into life. The Doctor swung the wheel and the little craft reared round in the tightest possible turn as he headed it toward the one remaining gap in the closing siege wall of ice. He fired the sonic screwdriver at the controls again, and instantly the engine note changed, became louder; their speed suddenly doubled. At least. Maybe even tripled. Finn found she was holding her body as rigid as if she herself had become ice, as they flew towards the diminishing slit.

At the last possible moment, like a pip from a lemon, the hovercraft shot out through the swiftly closing gap, both sides scraping the ice as it made its escape. Only when they were a safe distance away did the Doctor throttle back to a more sedate speed.

"Phew!" he said. "That's how Jason must've felt, trying to get through the Symplegades."

"The what?" asked Finn, weakly.

"The Clashing Rocks. Cliffs that crushed any ship that tried to pass between them. The only route he could take to get to Colchis to get to the Golden Fleece."

"Oh. Yes. 'Jason and the Argonauts'. I remember the film," Finn said, sounding slightly bemused at the turn the conversation had taken.

"Yeah? Well, I remember the real –" The Doctor was interrupted by a plaintive voice from the deck.

"Hey! Does anyone care that I'm turning into a block of ice here?"

Finn and the Doctor both looked at Jack, who was still cradled on Finn's lap, streaming water from his drenched parka, and then glanced at each other. Yes, they were on the same wavelength...

"Oh-h-h, you'll live," said the Doctor off-handedly, as if it didn't matter.

“Yeah, I know, but...” Jack looked slightly indignant, and turned his face up to Finn in the hope of a more sympathetic reaction. Like the Doctor, she assumed a stern expression.

“Jack, you’ve got to stop this thing of getting crushed under ice, or I’m going to think you’re nothing but an attention-seeker,” she warned.

“Hey, you can give me all the attention you want, any time,” Jack said, his teeth chattering. “Anyway, it’s working right now, isn’t it?”

Finn looked at him through narrowed eyes.

“Tell me,” she said, “was it very gratifying when they invented a special word, just for you?”

“What word?”

“INCORRIGIBLE,” she said, loudly.

“Now, now, Finn – don’t ‘incorrigible’ him,” the Doctor reproved her. She ostentatiously winced at the pun.

“I thought you two were my friends,” Jack complained.

“Can’t help what you think,” said the Doctor, with a shrug.

“Well, thanks a bunch!”

“You’re welcome.” The Doctor spared a brief moment to wink surreptitiously at Finn before he turned to look as Dee brought the other hovercraft alongside theirs.

“Are you all right?” Romor asked anxiously. “We saw someone go into the water!”

“That was me,” said Jack, still prone on the deck. “But, hey, don’t give it a thought! No problem!”

“Don’t worry,” said the Doctor. “He’s still with us.”

“We saw the whole thing,” said Dee. “What happened? It looked like the ice was surrounding you!”

“It was,” agreed the Doctor. He looked at Christoph. “Did you get it on film?”

“All of it,” Christoph confirmed. “Look, Doctor, we kept seeing these flashes of white light on the tops of the bergs. Not all the time, just at odd moments. Do you know what they could’ve been?”

“I’m beginning to get a good idea,” the Doctor confirmed. “I think we need to get back and have another talk with Mr Thorstad. With the evidence from your camera. This time he’d better listen.” His expression was grim. “Or we could all be in trouble.”

“We?” queried Romor.

“Everyone on this planet.”

And somehow, looking at his face, no-one felt like questioning that flatly-delivered and alarming prediction.

*

Infuriatingly for the Doctor, Asbjørn Thorstad was not there.

He slammed his hand down on the reception desk in sheer frustration. Yngvar instinctively leaned back, away from the sudden expression of violence, his eyes widening. The Doctor belatedly realized he was displaying poor behaviour for a guest.

“Sorry, Yngvar. Not your fault. But look” – the Doctor leaned toward him urgently – “I’ve *got* to speak to him as soon as he gets back. *As soon as he gets back*. If you can get a message to him, tell him it’s urgent. Very urgent! Extremely urgent!”

“Of course, Doctor Smith,” Yngvar assured him earnestly. “I’ll see if I can contact him right away to let him know.”

“And tell him I know exactly what’s happened,” the Doctor added ominously. Yngvar looked both puzzled and alarmed as he began to operate his communicator.

The Doctor nodded, and stalked back to the group waiting for him over by the ice sculpture display.

“He’s not here,” he announced. “Been called over to deal with some kind of emergency at the spaceport and won’t be back until the morning. Romor, Christoph, Dee – get that film edited down to something we can show him. We’ll need it first thing tomorrow.” The three young men nodded. The Doctor turned to Jack and Finn.

“Finn – we’re going to talk to Dagrún. See if she knows any more about the tremors and the icefalls. She’ll tell us, if anyone will.”

“What about me?” asked Jack.

“You? You can join us later. Right now, you’ve got something else to attend to.”

“What’s that?”

“Getting into some dry clothes,” said the Doctor, eyeing Jack’s soaked parka and leggings with some distaste. “I’m not walking round with someone who keeps squelching, every step he takes!”

*

They found Dagrún alone in the medical unit. Which was as the Doctor had hoped. He had the feeling that Doctor Solberg wouldn’t have contributed much beyond exclamatory disbelief to the proceedings.

“Dagrún, we need to ask you some questions,” he said. “It’s important. All right?”

She nodded wonderingly.

“Good. Great! Thanks. Now, I’m told that staff at the spaceport have noticed an increase in the number of tremors and icefalls. Do you know anything about that?”

“Well, yes,” she said, a little uncertain about where this was heading. “I’ve got some friends over there. They’ve talked about it from time to time.”

“Brilliant! Now, can you tell me exactly what they’ve said?”

“I’m not sure if I should,” she said, slightly nervously. “I don’t think Mr Thorstad would like it if I talked about such things to a guest. He’d be afraid it would make business even worse than –” She broke off.

“Why? Is business falling off?” Finn asked quickly, picking up on the implications.

Dagrún looked unhappy.

“Please don’t tell anyone I’ve told you,” she begged. “I’d get into trouble. But, yes – business hasn’t been so good lately. Not so many people have been coming. Leisure tastes are changing, perhaps? We’ve been having to cut back on some things. Or change the way we do them. So even a *hint* of something else that might affect visitor numbers... Mr Thorstad held a staff meeting not so long ago, and while he didn’t say so outright, he was – well, I suppose he was *warning* us not to talk about anything which might be construed as a negative, that might put people off coming.”

“Dagrún,” said the Doctor earnestly. “I know you’re a loyal and reliable person, and I wouldn’t ask you about this if it wasn’t vitally important. I promise you. But I really do need to know.”

She looked at him, at Finn, then back at him, and visibly came to her decision.

“Well, there’ve always been tremors, of course,” she said, concentrating, because she could see it really mattered to him. “But all of a sudden they started to become much more frequent.”

“How long ago was that?” Finn interrupted.

Dagrún thought hard.

“Nine months? Perhaps a year ago?”

“And when did you start making these cutbacks and changes?” asked the Doctor.

She looked at him with slightly startled eyes.

“At about the same time, I suppose,” she admitted. “Perhaps a little before then. Why? What connection could there be?”

“What sort of cutbacks and changes?” the Doctor persisted.

“We had to start saving costs wherever we could. Less administration. Combining some of our health and safety procedures. Changing our suppliers and contractors.”

“So not everyone here is an Ishotell company employee?”

“Oh, no. There are staff from our sub-contractor companies here, too. But they’re based at the spaceport, not here at the hotel.”

Finn could tell from the Doctor's face he was making his usual lightning-quick connections between pieces of information.

"Dagrun, the waste disposal arrangements for the hotel. Discarded food, human waste products, that sort of thing. Who deals with that?"

"Well, the company used to do that itself. It used to be shipped off-world for disposal. But now an external contractor deals with all of it. They have a processing plant, I think, somewhere up between the spaceport and the glacier. I've never been there."

"So none of that's taken off-world any more?" said the Doctor, with a look of dawning comprehension on his face. "Whatever happens to it, happens here? On Kvitverden?"

Dagrun nodded, clearly puzzled by the line of questioning.

The Doctor's head dipped in a deep, slow nod of comprehension. Then he smiled at Dagrun.

"Dagrun," he said. "I can't tell you what a help you've been. You've been brilliant. You have, really."

She smiled happily.

"I hope I have. Thank you."

"Thank *you*," said Finn, on behalf of both of them. She looked at the Doctor. "What do we do now? Go and find Jack again?"

The Doctor nodded.

"Okay. I'll go and see if he's looking for us outside. Thanks again, Dagrun." Finn pushed open the door of the infirmary and headed for the outer exit.

The Doctor paused and looked at Dagrun again.

"You may not realize it," he said. "But you might just have saved a lot of lives with what you've told me."

"What do you mean?" she asked incredulously.

"I hope you never find out," he said seriously. "But the only way you won't, is if I'm wrong. And I'm never wrong. Well, almost never. Well, hardly ever."

And on that less than comforting note, he left.



Chapter 12

Chionophilia and Pagophobia

Before he got to the main door, he was unexpectedly intercepted by Finn coming back down the short corridor that led to it. There was a strange expression on her face, as if she was trying to mask some strong emotion.

"Doctor, I know you've got a lot on your mind right now," she said hurriedly. "But there's something happening that you need to see."

"Okay," he agreed. "What?"

"Trust me on this?" she asked, oddly.

Puzzled, he nodded. "Of course."

"Then shut your eyes," she said.

"What?"

"Shut your eyes," she repeated, taking hold of his hand. "And follow me. But don't open your eyes, whatever you do. Not till I tell you you can. Promise?"

He had no idea what she was doing, but this was someone he trusted without reservation. He nodded, and closed his eyes. Then he followed as she led him by the hand along the corridor, negotiated the door, and guided him for what he estimated to be about a hundred yards or so, first crunching across the compacted snow underfoot, but then into softer snow.

At last she stopped, at what he estimated must be some distance away from the hotel complex, and so did he.

"You can open your eyes now," she said softly.

So he did.

Snow was falling. Huge, soft, fluffy snowflakes. Millions of them. Wafting gently down from the leaden sky above, enormous and white and beautiful. The obscuration of the view in the distance, merged into a soft, dove-grey backdrop, simply served to highlight the pure white of the flakes. As he lifted his face, they kissed his skin with tiny, freezing contacts. His parka was rapidly changing colour from brown to white as the snow settled on it. When he looked at Finn, her hair was likewise becoming covered with crystals.

She didn't say anything, though her face was glowing with pleasure. But not for herself, he realized. For him. He'd told her he loved snow, and here, now, in the middle of all their troubles, she was able to give it to him. To take a few precious moments and give him a priceless gift. And, for his sake, she was delighted.

He didn't say anything, either. The huge smile spreading across his face said more than any words he might have used. But he turned and enfolded her in a grateful and affectionate embrace for a few moments. Then he pulled away, but took her hand, and they watched the tumbling, swirling white confections delicately descending all round them.

Until something unexpectedly hit him, hard, between the shoulderblades.

He swung round, startled, as did Finn. Behind them, Jack was compacting a double handful of snow into another snowball.

"Didn't expect me to resist an opportunity like that, did ya?" he challenged.

"Of course not," agreed the Doctor, bending down to scoop up his own ammunition. "Any more than you'd expect me to." And he unleashed the snowball, flying with tremendous speed and unerring accuracy to hit Jack on the left cheek.

"Ouch! That stings!" he exclaimed, and immediately returned the Doctor's fire.

Finn watched them snowfighting, laughing with sheer gladness; they weren't holding back, they were really trying to hit each other, but they were really enjoying themselves, too. Two men who didn't have many such moments, behaving like a couple of completely carefree children. Which was what delighted her. Until they came to the conclusion that she was being left out of things, and combined to attack her from both sides...

At last, her mouth full of snow from Jack's last assault, she flopped down in the snow, laughing uncontrollably. Jack and the Doctor dropped down beside her, breathless but chuckling.

The Doctor let out a long and happy sigh.

"D'you know, I haven't done that in – well, in a long time. Too long," he added.

"Me, too," admitted Jack. "I'll have to remember how good it feels."

Finn, flat on her back, propped herself up on her elbows, and surveyed them both with a joyous smile.

The Doctor looked at her.

"Thank you," he said simply.

"For what?"

"For remembering."

"Remembering what?" asked Jack.

"That I love snow," said the Doctor, still looking at Finn.

She smiled at him.

“Well, so do I,” she said.

*

A couple of hours later, Dagrún left the medical unit. She looked around her as she stood outside the door. There had obviously been a fresh fall of snow, but it wasn't snowing now. She thought sadly of Håkon; he'd have loved to see everything under this new, fresh blanket of white.

On impulse, she decided she'd go to the glacier. As he would have done, had he been here. And in that way, say a final goodbye to him.

Shortly afterwards, she was parking her ski-doo and making her way up through the crevice toward the ice path. The fresh snow creaked under her feet with each compacting step as she climbed up, and she suddenly found herself unexpectedly tense with anticipation. Something about that creaking sound almost felt like a premonition of something bad. She scolded herself for an over-active imagination.

Her face, as she emerged onto the ice path, was a curious mixture of grief and expectancy.

A few moments later, as she looked at the glacier, it had become a frozen mask of alarm and horror.

*

The guests sitting in the hotel bar all looked up in some alarm as Dagrún hurtled in and headed straight for the table where the Doctor was in conference with Jack, Finn and the three boys. Heedless of the curiosity and even alarm she was evoking, she grabbed the edge of the ice table, panting, her face streaked with tears.

“Hey, what's going on?” Jack demanded. “You okay?”

She shook her head, speechless for a moment. She could feel herself shaking, and couldn't seem to stop. She stared at the Doctor out of wide, frightened eyes.

“Doctor – the glacier...” she panted. “There's something wrong...! You need to see it...!”

Instantly the Doctor leapt to his feet. Anything that could frighten somebody as calm and capable as Dagrún this much needed immediate investigation. “Come on, everyone! Christoph, bring your camera!” He paused to look at Dagrún. “Coming?”

“I'm not going back there!” she gasped in instant rejection of the idea. “But, you – go! Go on! Please! Quickly!”

The Doctor obeyed, following the others, who were already gone.

Ignoring the stares of all the pairs of eyes fastened on her, Dagrún made her own way out of the bar, still weeping with fright. Out in the reception, Yngvar, who was talking urgently to Ingeborg, leapt up and they both came toward her.

“Dagrún!” he exclaimed. “I saw you come in. What's the matter? What's wrong?”

But all she could do was stare at them, still shaking, unable to speak, with the tears streaming down her face.

*

It was beginning to get dark, but the line of ski-doos flying across the snow toward the glacier were still driving at maximum speed. Having seen Dagrún's fear, the need for urgency was imprinted on all of them.

Christoph was the only one not going completely flat out, out of care for his camera equipment, although even so he was more or less keeping pace at the tail end of the line. But by the time he'd parked alongside the others and mounted the camera on his shoulder ready for use, the others – with the Doctor in the lead, of course – were already clambering up the crevice. As he himself drew near to the exit out onto the ice path, he suddenly realized that they were all standing in rigid poses, as if suddenly frozen into stillness, staring downwards.

The Doctor's voice, sounding very grim, came down to him.

“Christoph. Where’s that camera?”

“Coming, Doctor!” he panted, pushing his way between Romor and Dee to stand at the Doctor’s side.

Where it became only too evident what had transfixed them all, and terrified Dagrun before them.

The glacier, which should have been serene and beautiful under its fresh coat of snow, had become a spectacle to be feared. Up and down its whole length – the length of it that they could see, at any rate – it seemed to be pulsing, glowing a deep, electric blue. And along it, racing in all directions, were lines of white light, lashing along it like wave fronts or stabbing like lightning strikes. Instinctively one felt such violent activity ought to have been generating tremendous noise, but there was not a sound. Which felt wrong, counter-intuitive, uncanny. The utter silence, and the deepening gloom, only added to the eeriness of the spectacle.

“But – what is it?” He finally found his voice.

“Creatures. Life-forms. Living in the ice,” said the Doctor grimly. “And very, very upset, by the look of it. Get this on film, Christoph. Thorstad needs to see this. We’ve got to convince him of the danger.”

“What is the danger?” asked Romor.

Before the Doctor could answer, Finn grabbed his sleeve.

“Doctor – look!” she said, pointing along the ice path.

They all looked; Christoph swung his camera round to include it in shot. The shooting lines of white weren’t confined just to the glacier itself. They were starting to travel along the ice-covered slopes of the valley itself. Along the path on which they stood.

“Let’s get out of here!” the Doctor snapped. “This isn’t a safe place to be!” He seized Christoph, who was still filming, by the shoulder and swung him round. “Get that camera down to the ski-doo! *Now!* Everyone – *move!*”

Startled by the urgency in his voice, they began to obey. As they hurried back down through the crevice, slipping and skidding in their hurry, Finn realized why. Some of the white lines were following them down the path. And, as she glanced upwards, there were flashes along the crest of snow at the top of each side of the crevice.

“They’re going to trigger an avalanche!” she exclaimed. The others looked up and grasped the danger for themselves. The Doctor seized her hand and bolted down the slope, dragging her in his wake, Jack on their heels. The boys were already ahead of them, Christoph clutching the camera as if his life depended on it.

Just as they reached the bottom, a cracking noise sounded from above. Too late for the purpose it was meant to achieve, snow came crashing down from both sides of the crevice. But they were already clear, and halted, panting, to watch the hurtling mass smashing downwards and blocking the path. As it gradually ceased to move, a nebulous cloud of snow and ice particles briefly permeated the air, fading into the gloom with one last, ominous glitter as it settled.

“Well, that makes a change,” Finn panted. Jack looked at her, puzzled.

“What does?”

“It’s not like you not to be buried underneath it,” she said, with a brief smile.

He grinned momentarily, and thumped her shoulder in half-hearted reproof for the levity.

“Doctor – should we go?” asked Dee.

“Yes,” agreed the Doctor. “You need to edit that into to Mr Thorstad’s personal film show. We’ll be right behind you.”

Dee nodded, and he turned toward the ski-doo, Christoph and Romor with him.

Finn watched them leave. When she turned back, she saw Jack gesturing silently along the line of the glacier valley wall and the flat snowfield spreading away from it. The Doctor looked. White lines were beginning to appear in the snow. Small, and not moving that fast as yet. But all heading in the direction of the hotel.

“How long d’you figure we’ve got?” asked Jack quietly.

“Don’t know. At that speed, a few hours at the outside.” The Doctor brooded. “I’ve got to find a way to communicate with those creatures. And I can only think of one.”

“What’s that?”

“Like Håkon,” said the Doctor with bleak succinctness.

“But he died!” Finn exclaimed in immediate rejection of the idea. “It killed him, having those things inside him!”

“It’s the only way I can think of,” repeated the Doctor. “If they’re inside me, I should be able to communicate with them telepathically. Reason with them.”

“And if you can’t?” demanded Jack. “What, exactly, makes you think you can stop them doing the same to you as they did to him?”

The Doctor looked at him bleakly and didn’t reply.

“Oh-h-h, great plan, Doctor!” said Jack sarcastically.

Finn looked miserable. She knew there wasn’t a chance they were going to talk him out of it.

“So what are you going to do?” she asked in a tight voice.

“Håkon was stabbed by a piece of ice,” said the Doctor simply. “That worked.”

He started to walk back toward the heaped snow of the avalanche. There were bound to be shards of ice in there. Jack and Finn followed him in mute revolt.

Suddenly Jack leaned down and whispered in Finn’s ear. “*Distract him.*”

She looked at him, startled. Then she realized what he was planning, the implications.

“*But, Jack –!*” she began to protest. He grabbed her arm.

“*Do it,*” he ordered.

“*Jack...*” she breathed in agonized comprehension. They looked into each other’s eyes for a moment. Then she got her face in order and hurried after the Doctor, who had reached the edge of the avalanche and was scanning the heaped snow for a suitable ice shard.

She seized his sleeve and pulled him around to face her.

“Doctor, isn’t there any other way?” she pleaded, aware of Jack moving quietly up behind him. “This could kill you!” She couldn’t see Jack directly – the Doctor was blocking her view – but she could tell he was close to the piled snow and ice.

“Finn, I’ve got to do this,” said the Doctor adamantly. “You *know* I’ve got to do this. Whatever it is that’s happened, whatever it is they want, we’ve got to find out what it is. And we can only do that by talking to them. And the only way we know to do that is – this way. So I’ve got to do it. You, of all people, know that.” He was, in his own way, pleading for her understanding – even her approval? – she, who knew his mind better than anyone.

“But it doesn’t have to be *you*,” she argued desperately. “You’re too important to” – she hesitated, then plunged on – “to too many people!”

“Finn,” he said quietly. “*Everyone’s* important to someone.”

“I know,” she admitted rebelliously. “But this is *you*. And I’m sorry, but that makes it different!”

He couldn’t help smiling. “Is that your idea of a logical argument?” he asked.

“Doesn’t matter what she thinks,” came Jack’s voice from behind him. Something in his tone made the Doctor spin round to face him in instant realization.

“Jack!” he said warningly. “You haven’t –!”

“Oh, yes, I have!” Jack contradicted him. He dropped the shard of ice he’d been holding in his right hand onto the snow. Finn’s eyes followed its fall and she saw, for an instant, the moving flashes of white in it. Then she looked up at the hand Jack was holding out toward them. There was a large, bloody gash in the heel of the thumb.

“Finn’s right, Doctor,” he said. “You’re too important to some of us. Not risking you if there’s an alternative. This time, we’ve got one. And I’m it.”

For a moment, the Doctor glared at him in angry frustration. Then he spun on his heel and stalked toward the ski-doo.

“Come on, then!” he snapped over his shoulder. “Håkon only just made it back before he passed out. I don’t want to have to pick you up and carry you half the way.”

Finn looked at Jack.

“Oh, Jack,” she said, helplessly.

“It was the only way, wasn’t it?” Jack asked, unanswerably. “He might not have made it. Might not have died, but might’ve had to regenerate. And I kind of like him the way he is. Me – I *always* come back.”

She leaned up and gave him a brief kiss on the cheek. Then she took his uninjured hand and gave it a pull.

“Come on,” she said. “He’s right. You haven’t got much time.”



Chapter 13 Dying to Talk

Romor and Dee were in the reception area, deep in conversation with Yngvar and Ingeborg – who, despite the lateness of the hour, were still there, aware that some sort of crisis was taking place – when the Doctor came bursting in through the front doors.

“Where’s Christoph?” he demanded unceremoniously.

“He’s adding the footage to the film, like you asked,” said Romor. “He won’t be long.”

“Good, because there’s something I want you to do,” said the Doctor. “I have the feeling Mr Thorstad is going to be hard to convince, in spite of all the evidence. So there’s someone else who needs to see that film. And for that, we’re going to need your help, Yngvar. In fact, there are two things I need you to do...”

*

Asbjørn Thorstad had barely closed his office door when it burst open again.

He turned to find the Doctor almost looming over him. He instinctively backed away and took refuge behind his desk.

“Doctor!” he said, trying to sound authoritative but, annoyingly, only succeeding in sounding unnerved.

“This is most unmannerly of you! I’ve only just –”

“We haven’t got time for this,” the Doctor interrupted him brusquely. “We need to talk – urgently.”

“Yes, I – received some message claiming that you ‘know what’s happened’.” Thorstad tried to sound as if it was nothing important. “What exactly is it that you *think* you know?”

“Oh, when I said it, that was just a way to get you back here quickly,” said the Doctor, a tinge of amusement momentarily diluting the dark frown on his face. “Haven’t you ever heard the story of the man who played a joke – sent a message to ten of his friends that said ‘Fly – all is discovered’? And next morning they’d all left town? Same principle. Got *you* back here, didn’t it?”

“What do you mean – *when* you said it?” Thorstad didn’t care for the implications.

“Well, strictly speaking, it wasn’t true when I said it,” the Doctor admitted. His eyes darkened. “But it is now. I’ve worked out what’s happening. And there are lives at stake. The guests, the staff, everyone at the

spaceport – even *yours*, Mr Thorstad. So you’re going to listen to me. *Now.*” He raised his voice to carry out into the corridor outside. “Romor!”

Romor appeared in the doorway, carrying a portable playback device.

“Sit down, Mr Thorstad,” said the Doctor. For a moment Thorstad remained standing, trying to stare him down. But suddenly the Doctor really let rip.

“SIT DOWN!” he bellowed furiously. Defeated, Thorstad dropped into his chair. Romor silently put the device on the desk in front of him.

“Now, you’re going to watch this. And you’re going to believe me when I tell you this is a threat to all our lives,” said the Doctor levelly. He stabbed the playback control.

Thorstad’s eyes were reluctantly fastened on the screen as – with the benefit of a very savage commentary by the Doctor – he saw the dead bacteria, the behaviour of the icebergs, the pulsing glacier, and, as a theme running throughout, the white lights everywhere.

At the end of the playback he continued to stare at the now blank screen for a few moments, rallying his resources for a further attempt to deny the undeniable.

“Very interesting, Doctor. And I’ll look into it, of course. As a matter of urgency. But I’m sure there’s a perfectly reasonable explanation for all of it,” he blustered.

The Doctor leaned toward him, almost threateningly.

“Ah, but you don’t want to *explain* it, do you, Mr Thorstad?” he accused. “You want to explain it *away*. Ignore it. Bury your head in the sand. But if you do, it won’t be sand it’ll be buried in. It’ll be ice. And very soon.”

“What do you mean?”

Before the Doctor could answer, Christoph burst into the office.

“Doctor – they’re in sight!” he panted, urgently.

“Right – now, then! You were going to look into it as a matter of urgency, weren’t you, Mr Thorstad? Well, it just got more urgent. You’re coming with me,” the Doctor said, in a tone that brooked no argument.

He led the deflated executive out of the hotel, ignoring Yngvar’s curious stare as they went through reception, Romor and Christoph in close attendance.

They marched in silence out through the staff quarters, out to the rear of the complex. There they saw Dee, standing like a sentry, staring in the direction of the glacier. He turned as he heard them coming.

“Look,” he said, pointing out across the snowfield.

Thorstad could feel the Doctor’s penetrating gaze boring into him as he looked out in the direction indicated by the young man.

Despite the fact that the night was now in retreat and the sky beginning to lighten, above the lines of hills that confined the Blåfjell glacier there was an eerie, pulsing glow. And in the distance, across the snow, he could see tiny flickers of white light on the still, flat surface, like ripples on water.

His shoulders sagged. He could no longer deny that something was happening, but neither could he afford to abandon his official stance.

“What are those lights?” he demanded.

“Living creatures,” said the Doctor, staring at him. “And I’m going to talk to them. Right now.”

He spun on his heel and stalked away, heading for the medical unit. Romor and the other two hesitated, watching the calculating look on Thorstad’s face as he turned back for another look at the flickering sky and the advancing skeins of white light. Then the last thing the Doctor had said suddenly seemed to get through to him, and he frowned.

“What did he mean – talk to them?”

“Perhaps if you go with him, you’ll find out, sir,” said Christoph, with innate politeness.

Thorstad looked at him with an expression on his face as if something putrid was being held under his nose. Then he turned to follow the Doctor, but he was already out of sight.

“I think you’ll find he’s gone to the medical unit, sir,” Christoph prompted. “Shall we follow?”

By the time they entered the infirmary, Thorstad's thought processes had focused on just one thing. As soon as he saw the Doctor, ignoring everyone else in the room, he burst out, "Living creatures, you said! What living creatures?"

The Doctor turned round and looked at him with an unencouraging expression.

"Tiny ones. Tiny, tiny, tiny ones. So small, they travel about in the spaces between the crystals of the ice and snow. They just look like little sparks of light to us. And they can move so fast that we don't even see them most of the time. But they're there. They've been there all along. Remember what I told you? 'Just because you've never seen something, doesn't mean it's not there.' Well, they *were* there. And, thanks to the way you've been operating on this planet, they're very, very angry."

Thorstad suddenly took in the rest of the scene. As well as the three young men who had escorted him here, he saw Doctor Solberg and his assistant – he couldn't remember her name – standing by a laboratory bench to his right. He looked bemused, she looked frightened. There was another person, lying on the bed behind the Doctor, but Thorstad's view was blocked, so he couldn't see who it was, though he could see a young woman standing on the left side of the bed; again, he didn't know her name, but she must be a guest, presumably a friend of the Doctor's.

"What do you mean – the way we've been operating?" he said, his feelings suddenly metamorphosing into a burst of anger.

"I told you I knew what had happened, didn't I?" the Doctor challenged him. "Well, now you're going to hear it for yourself. Come here." He crooked a finger at Thorstad, an unpleasantly grim expression on his face.

Reluctantly, Thorstad moved forward; the Doctor made way for him so he could stand at the side of the bed.

Thorstad looked down at the man lying on it, and his face was a picture of shock.

"Who is this?" he demanded.

"I'm sure you'll be very happy to hear this is one of your paying guests," said the Doctor with heavy irony. "Captain Jack Harkness. Currently playing host to some of our little friends. And with his help, I'm going to talk to them."

Thorstad looked down again at the man in the bed. His eyes were closed. All the skin of his naked upper body was discoloured purple. Disconcerting enough in itself, but that empurpled skin was covered with sharp, distinct white crystals, like a universe of evil stars. He was hooked up to a drip and a medical device of some sort. Thorstad gestured at it.

"What's that?" he asked.

"It's to assist his circulation," said Solberg from behind him. "This is what happened to Håkon Aamodt, sir. Ice crystals are forming in his blood. We're pumping anti-coagulants into his bloodstream, and using the circulator to keep it flowing. But eventually..." He faltered. "The volume of the ice crystals becomes too much. Effectively, the victim suffocates because the blood is unable to carry oxygen to the cells of the body."

"He's in this condition because he volunteered. He deliberately infected himself – if you want to call it that – specifically so we could try to find out what these lifeforms want. He expects to die as a result, Mr Thorstad," said the Doctor, truthfully if misleadingly; he had no intention of relaxing the pressure on the still defiant executive. "So *you* are going to listen to what they have to say."

"But if he's dying, how can we use him to talk to these creatures?" Thorstad asked, not comprehending.

"Like this," said the Doctor. He stepped past Thorstad and put his hands on the temples of the apparently unconscious man for a few moments.

"Let them through, Jack. Don't fight them. Help them talk to me." He took his hands away and took a pace back.

Jack stirred restlessly for a few moments. Then his eyes flew open, staring blankly at the ceiling, eerily unfocused. After a few moments, he began to turn his head until he was staring at the Doctor, still with that unfocused look. The blue eyes were stony and inimical. And tiny flecks of white slid to and fro in them.

"We – are – here," he said jerkily.



Chapter 14

Human Error

Standing beside Jack, Finn didn't touch him, but she couldn't stop her fingers closing convulsively around the edge of the blanket on which he lay. It was so deeply disturbing to see those wide blue eyes staring out of the discoloured face, the skin starred with crystals, and hearing that juddering delivery of words. Knowing it wasn't Jack who was speaking, but the alien creatures inside him.

"Who are you?" the Doctor asked.

"We – are – the – Imus," came the reply.

"These people are humans," said the Doctor, gesturing around the room. Subliminally Thorstad identified something odd about that statement – the way the Doctor almost sounded as if he was excluding himself from the human race – but he had no time to think about it.

"Humans – are – killing – us," the tight, hoarse voice went on. "You – do – not – stop. You – will – not – stop. So – we – must – stop – you."

"What do you mean, they *will* not stop?" asked the Doctor quickly. "I don't think they've even understood what they're doing to you."

"What *are* we doing to them, Doctor?" Dagrún interrupted.

"Poisoning them. Destroying their habitat."

"What do you mean?" Thorstad exploded. "We're doing nothing of the sort!"

"Oh, no?" the Doctor swung round to face him, his brows drawn together in a ferocious frown. "Regularly excavating the ice to constantly rebuild and maintain this hotel? Turning the snow round the spaceport grey with pollutants? And worst of all, burying all the waste deep down under the surface, instead of shipping it out, as you used to do?"

"What possible harm can that be doing?" Thorstad protested.

"Come on, Thorstad! Even the bacteria in a tiny patch of spittle was so toxic to them that they had to kill them to try to protect themselves. If you lived on a world of pristine, pure ice and water, how would you like it if someone moved in on you, started polluting your environment with filth hazardous to your very existence? Because that's exactly what you've been doing to them!"

"But – but – we're just in one small area of the planet," Thorstad sputtered. "Why can't they just go somewhere else? Keep away from us?"

"Why should they?" demanded the Doctor. "They were here first! *You're* the intruders. The *invaders*. Nobody takes kindly to being invaded, do they, Mr Thorstad? The Imus didn't invite you here. And they don't want you here!"

"But it's not as if we're doing anything dangerous!" Thorstad argued. "The waste – we process it at a plant. We dispose of it with the utmost care!"

"And was it taking the utmost care that caused the leak?" the Doctor challenged him.

Thorstad was taken aback.

“How did you know about that?”

“What are you talking about, Doctor?” asked Dagrún. “What leak?”

“The one that must’ve happened in the last day or so. The one that got the Imus really angry. The straw that broke the camel’s back. The accidental, large-scale leakage of untreated waste that’s polluted a wide area around the plant. Am I right?” The Doctor cocked an eyebrow at Thorstad, whose shoulders sagged slightly at this unwelcome revelation.

“Yes,” he admitted reluctantly. “You’re right. But it was an accident! New procedures will be put in place. It won’t happen again!”

“Human error,” said the Doctor. “You can’t eliminate it forever, no matter how hard you try. If you stay here, it *will* happen again.”

“You – have – killed – us. So – many – of – us,” came Jack’s pseudo-voice from the bed. “Millions – are – dead. We – try – to – flee. But – it – contaminates – us. Death – spreads – from – one – to – another.”

Thorstad stared in horror at the icy blue eyes; everyone else stared at him.

“When – you – came... In – the – beginning – we – did – not – realize – the – danger – you – represented. We – withdrew – from – the – areas – where – you – were. You – did – not – find – us. You – did – not – know – we – were – here. But – sometimes – some – of – us – encountered – your – bacteria – by – accident.”

Dagrún, listening with the rest, was struck by how much more fluent this communication was than that with Håkon had been. But then, Håkon had probably been fighting the alien presence within him. Jack Harkness, even dying, was trying with all his might to help this conversation take place.

“Whenever – this – happens – death – always – follows. The – bacteria – in – your – bodies. They – poison – us. They – kill – us. We – who – are – in – this – body – are – already – doomed. So – will – any – of – us – be – who – come – into – contact – with – humans.”

“Like the Europeans who colonized the Americas,” said Finn. The Doctor nodded, flashing her a glance of approval for her quick comprehension, but Romor frowned in confusion.

“I don’t understand,” he said. “What do you mean by that?”

“On Earth, where I come from,” said Finn. “People from one continent went to colonize another. They found a huge population already living there. But what they’d done was act as carriers – brought with them all sorts of diseases from their own continent, that their immune systems were accustomed to. But the people on the new continent – they’d never come across those diseases before. Their immune systems couldn’t fight them. Whole populations were decimated, or wiped out completely. The colonizers didn’t mean for that to happen. But the people they came into contact with were just as dead.”

“That’s what you’re doing to the Imus,” said the Doctor, pointing an accusing finger at Thorstad. “The bacteria in human waste products. You need bacteria and all sorts of other microorganisms in your bodies for them to function. The ones in your gut help you digest the food you eat. But to the Imus, they’re not benign. They’re pathogenic. For them it’s like the Spanish flu – smallpox – measles – bubonic plague. Overwhelming them. They can’t fight them off.”

“Withdrawing – from – here – will – not – save – us.” Jack’s lips moved again. “It – is – hard – for – us – to – kill – the – bacteria – you – bring. We – cannot – kill – enough – to – protect – ourselves. If – you – stay – here – at – some – time – in – the – future – you – will – destroy – us. So – we – must – destroy – you. To – survive.”

“No-no-no-no-no!” said the Doctor, instantly reacting to that. “You don’t need to *kill* them. You just need to make them *understand*. Make *him* understand.” The staring blue eyes followed the Doctor’s gesture to fix on Thorstad.

“Understand what?” Thorstad burst out.

“That if humans stay on this planet, it’ll kill the Imus. A long drawn out, inevitable genocide. So there’s only one solution to this,” said the Doctor grimly. “You’ve got to leave.”

“Leave?” Thorstad understood very well – but he didn’t want to understand.

“Leave this planet. At once. Everyone. And never come back.”

“*Leave?*” Thorstad exploded. “Impossible! The amounts we’ve invested in this venture! The board – the shareholders – they’ll never stand for it! Absolutely out of the question.” His expression became an odd combination of determination and shiftiness. “There must be something we can do to – to *remove* these creatures. So they no longer present a problem.”

The Doctor wasn’t fooled by the euphemism for an instant. His expression was a mix of outrage and fury.

“What, wipe them out? Destroy a whole race of living beings? Just for the convenience of your shareholders? *I don’t think so!*” he shouted, nearly spitting with rage.

“Well, I do!” Thorstad shouted back at him. “I’m the Executive Vice President of this company, and what I say, goes!” He looked round the room, at all the faces staring at him. “We *will* not be driven away by some – some creature too small even to see! We’ll find some way to deal with them. And we’ll stay! And people will continue to visit, and enjoy our facilities on Kvitverden! *And that is my final decision!*”

The Doctor startled him by snatching two handfuls of his parka and shaking him, a look of anger combined with another emotion on his face. Finn recognized that other emotion. It was fear. The *Doctor? Afraid...?*

“Don’t be so stupid!” he shouted at Thorstad. “Don’t you realize the danger we’re in? If we don’t go, they’ll kill us all!”

“But they’re just tiny – tiny *things* in the ice! What can they possibly do?” Thorstad scoffed.

Before the Doctor could muster the words to reply, the answer came in another form.

The floor beneath their feet began to shake as a huge tremor made the whole building vibrate. Finn grabbed at the bed, Dagrun and Solberg the laboratory bench, but the others had no immediate handholds. Romor and Dee were thrown against the wall and slid helplessly to the floor; Christoph fell through the open door and measured his length in the corridor outside. Thorstad was knocked to his knees, and would have fallen full length had the Doctor, the only one who seemed able to keep his feet, not been gripping his parka.

“*That’s* what they can do!” the Doctor yelled at him, as the violent shaking continued. “You might not think ice is much of a weapon, but they can make it do whatever they want it to! Move it, shatter it, disintegrate it! And what’s your hotel made of, Mr Thorstad? What does it stand on? What’s just about this entire planet made of?”

At last it got through to Thorstad how much danger they were in.

“We must evacuate!” he exclaimed.

“Brilliant!” said the Doctor sarcastically. “It took you a while, but you got there in the end. Yes! Evacuate everyone! Get them out of here! Get them out to the spaceport and bring in enough ships to get everyone off the planet. *Everyone!*”

“We must evacuate,” Thorstad repeated. But he raised defiant eyes to the Doctor’s face. “We’ll withdraw to the spaceport. That’s built on rock. They can’t get us there. And then we’ll think of a way to deal with them.”

The Doctor looked as if he was very nearly ready to hit Thorstad. But he quite visibly restrained himself, evidently deciding to deal with the most urgent element of the crisis first.

“Don’t think this part of the discussion is over!” he snapped, jabbing a threatening finger at Thorstad, as the tremor subsided; Romor, Dee and Christoph picked themselves off the floor, eyeing the Doctor nervously. “But right now, we’re out of time! We’ve got to get everyone out of here! Before the Imus bring the hotel down on top of us. So –”

He broke off as Ingeborg appeared in the doorway, her eyes flying around the room to locate him.

“Doctor, it’s here!” she said urgently. “We’re getting all the guests out of the hotel and on board, as quick as we can! And Yngvar fixed your transport – it’s outside.”

“Good! Get back and help Yngvar and the rest,” the Doctor said swiftly. “I’ll be right there.”

She nodded and left at a run.

“What’s here?” asked Thorstad, confused. “What does she mean – ‘on board’?”

“Oh, I had a pretty good idea of how you were going to react,” said the Doctor, eyeing him balefully. “So I borrowed your identity for a while. Used your authority to arrange for the snow train to be here, now. Lives

could have been lost if we'd been depending on *you*. Could still be lost. If they are, it'll be *your* doing, Thorstad," he added harshly. "And don't think people won't be told about it, either."

Before Thorstad could reply, another tremor shook the building.

"Get out of here!" the Doctor yelled at Romor, Christoph and Dee. "Get to the snow train! Doctor Solberg, I need Dagrun to stay with Jack. You go and help get people to safety. We'll see you at the spaceport!"

All four nodded and left the room in a hurry.

"What about me?" demanded Thorstad.

The Doctor looked at him coldly.

"Just at the moment, I'm finding it very hard to care about what happens to you," he said grimly. "So you might like to think about seeing to your own safety. I'm sure that'll be a personal priority of yours in any case, won't it?"

Thorstad's face was furious, but he made no reply, and stalked out.

The Doctor switched his attention to Dagrun.

"Dagrun, I need you to rig Jack's circulator so it can be moved with him. Can you do that?"

She nodded.

Lastly, the Doctor turned to Finn. "Stay here. I'm just going to check the evacuation's total. Then I'll be back for you. For all of you."

His eyes met Finn's only momentarily even as he was already on the turn to leave, but she had time to nod, to give him an encouraging smile in spite of her own fear at the situation as another tremor made the ground quiver and shift beneath them. Then he was gone.

Suddenly a thought struck her.

"Dagrun, there's something I need to do," she said urgently. "I'll only be a few minutes. Will you be all right on your own?"

From somewhere, Dagrun had re-summoned her usual calm competence. She nodded authoritatively.

"Whatever you're doing, be careful," she said. "I'll be here with him." She was already working on the circulator.

"Thanks," said Finn.

As she left the medical unit, she almost ran right into the vehicle parked in front of it. It was a hovercraft, but in size and apparent function it reminded her of a minibus. Clever Doctor! He'd realized it would be dangerous, perhaps even impossible, to transport Jack safely on the snow train, with a mob of possibly panicking guests. So he'd got Yngvar to arrange this.

But she couldn't waste time staring at it. She had something else she needed to do. Right now.

Chapter 15

Cold Fury

As the Doctor ran to the front of the hotel, he was faced with a scene of apparent chaos, as frightened hotel guests surged toward the waiting snow train. However, Yngvar and Ingeborg had obviously briefed their colleagues, and the staff were managing – just about – to keep some semblance of order about the evacuation.

He turned and forced his way against the tide of people flowing out of the main door, fighting his way into the reception area. He looked around anxiously, scanning the fabric of the construction, afraid of what he was going to see.

Rightly so. Inside the ice, lines of white light were racing about, ranging up and down the walls, across the ceiling, inside the desks and the ice sculptures. He was looking at one of those just as it exploded into fragments, showering the nearest guests, still trying to get out of the doors, with shards of ice. A series of screams arose as people became aware of this new peril, and redoubled their efforts to get out.

Another ice explosion sounded behind him; he spun round and saw that Yngvar's desk had shattered. In the corridor that led to his and Finn's room, a section of ceiling detonated. Chunks of ice flew from the doorway to the membrane chamber. It wouldn't be long before the whole hotel was totally destroyed.

The last few people were now pushing frenziedly out of the door. The Doctor looked round one last time, then followed them. Just as he made it outside, the ice pillars on either side of the door exploded, throwing him to the ground. Slightly dazed, he picked himself up, and staggered for a moment, reorienting himself.

It seemed that everyone was on board, with the exception of Yngvar, who was hesitating in the open doorway of the foremost compartment, where the driver was poised to go. Behind him, the camera lens almost resting on his shoulder, Christoph was filming the devastation of the hotel. Once a cameraman, always a cameraman...

"It's all right, Yngvar!" the Doctor shouted, making a huge sweeping gesture with his arm to indicate they should leave. "I've got Dagrun with me! We'll be right behind you! Get them to safety!"

Yngvar gave one jerky nod, and slammed the door of the compartment closed.

The Doctor spared a few seconds to watch it start to pull away. Beyond it, in the Ice Garden, the statues were shattering, sending sprays of snow and ice into the air.

Time to go.

To his astonishment, as he raced around toward the medical unit, he saw Finn, carrying some sort of bundle, also running in the same direction. He realized that she, too, must have gone into the hotel. The fact that she was now out, and obviously unharmed, did nothing to suppress the instant of fear he instinctively felt on her behalf.

"What are you playing at?" he screamed at her furiously. "I told you to stay with Dagrun and Jack!"

"Never mind that now," she panted. "I'm all right. Come on! Let's get Jack out of this!"

The Doctor scowled at her with an angry 'just you wait until later' kind of look, but knew she was right. Together they pounded over the snow to the medical unit.

Dagrun had already got Jack as far as the front door on a gurney to which she'd attached the circulator and a portable power source for it, and the anti-coagulant drip. Finn paused just long enough to throw the bundle she'd gone to such lengths to retrieve into the hovercraft, then ran to help the Doctor and Dagrun load the equipment and its still living burden into the compartment.

Dagrun looked nervously out of the windows at the buildings, shattering and detonating all over the complex, lines of white light shooting over every surface of ice.

"Please, Doctor, let's get out of here," she begged.

"Don't worry, Dagrun, we're on our way," the Doctor assured her, firing up the engine.

Suddenly, he looked at Finn and grinned from ear to ear.

"You know what I'm going to say, don't you?" he prompted gleefully. They were back in rapport, and she grinned back at him.

"It wouldn't be 'Allons-y', by any chance, would it?" she asked in the same tone of voice.

"Oh, yes!" agreed the Doctor, and the hovercraft raced away over the snow, heading towards the spaceport, the snowfield across which it went flickering madly with pursuing, furious streaks of white light.

*

The same streaks of white were permeating the snowfield around the spaceport as they raced toward it. Plumes of snow and ice were erupting from the surface everywhere; it was as if they were driving through a minefield with the mines being set off all around them. Finn looked nervously at the piles of snow heaped either side of the cutting into the port. Even at this distance, she could see the white lines clustering in them.

"Doctor, you don't think -?" she began.

"I *do* think," he contradicted her. "We'll have to go full tilt and hope they get their timing wrong again."

It didn't seem likely. By the time they were a hundred yards away, snow was already beginning to trickle down, as the Imus prepared to bury them with another avalanche. And the hovercraft was already going at top speed.

Except that they all suddenly found out that it wasn't.

The Doctor was suddenly wielding the sonic screwdriver, as he had when they were out on the sea, being pursued by the bergs. And, as then, there was a sudden roar as the engine responded with an extra burst of pace.

Though even that nearly wasn't enough.

Dagrun cried out as she saw the crests of snow on either side of the cutting explosively burst skyward, the heavy masses of the slopes begin to slide down toward them. Finn stayed silent, but her heart was in her mouth as the white mounds closed in on them from both sides.

Then they struck.

The windows were instantly whited out, so they could no longer see what was happening, but there was a sudden and strange sensation of the whole hovercraft rising into the air. Finn guessed that the pressure of the colliding bodies of snow was pushing them upward, as if they were riding a wave. The Doctor fought with the controls, his face distorted into a rictus of determination, his mouth an ugly rectangular shape around his clenched teeth.

But then, somehow, they were through, they'd ridden it out; the whiteout cleared, and they could see out again. They'd made it into the spaceport; the Doctor abruptly reduced their speed before they hit any of the milling crowd of people who seemed to be running aimlessly all over the place. Shouts and screams could be heard. Obviously word of the crisis was spreading. And so was panic.

Dagrun looked out of the back window; a cloud of snow crystals hung in the air, thrown up by the meeting of the two bodies of snow colliding in the cutting, now completely blocked to a height of some ten feet or more. She let out a silent sigh of relief.

"Right!" snapped the Doctor. "Come on! We need to get Jack inside. And we need to find Thorstad."

He left his seat and came back to lean over the gurney. Jack was lying motionless, eyes closed.

"Are you there?" the Doctor asked, loudly. "Are you still there?"

More sluggishly this time, the blue eyes opened. Jack was evidently weakening. So, perhaps, were the creatures dying inside him.

"We – are – here," came the faltering reply.

"You can communicate with the rest of the Imus, can't you?" the Doctor asked.

"Yes. But – we – are – dying..."

"I'm sorry," said the Doctor. "I'm so sorry. There's nothing I can do. But can you hold on a little longer? Your people are going to need to know what happens here. Can you do that?"

Jack's head turned a little, though his eyes remained as unfocused as ever.

"We – will – try..."

"Come on!" the Doctor snapped at Finn and Dagrun. "We need to hurry!"

By the time they'd unloaded the gurney, Romor, Christoph and Dee were racing toward them.

"Doctor! You made it!" Romor exclaimed.

"How's the Captain?" Christoph added quickly. He looked at Jack's supine and discoloured body, the unfocused staring eyes, with some alarm. "Is he dead?"

"Not yet," said Dagrun. "But I don't think he can hold out much longer."

"All the more reason to get him to Thorstad," said the Doctor. "He and the Imus need to talk again."

"We'll help you," Dee offered promptly. "We know where he is."

"Right!" agreed the Doctor. He and the three young men surrounded the gurney and began to run with it. "Finn – Dagrun – clear the way for us!"

"Just watch us!" Finn vowed. She picked up the bundle she'd retrieved from the hotel and clasped it in front of her. "This'll do for shoulder-charging with, eh?" she added, with a grin.

*

Bursting unannounced into Asbjørn Thorstad's office was becoming quite a habit with the Doctor. One he was indulging in again, right at that moment.

Thorstad looked up from the communicator on his desk with an expression of both anger and dismay, as Finn, Dagrún and the three media students followed, pushing the gurney through the doorway.

"Doctor!" he blustered. "This is not the time! I'm trying to resolve this situation, and I haven't got time to –"
The Doctor cut him off.

"You're going to make time," he said uncompromisingly. "Resolve it? You created it! You've deliberately chosen to shove a stick into an anthill. Well, now the ants are on the march – at you! And I think you'll find you're going to need a bit more than a kettle of hot water to sort this out..." he added, with rather snide satisfaction.

Thorstad didn't appreciate the flippancy.

"Look, I'm not going to argue with you now about the cause of this. I need to organize a response! Look after our customers and our staff. Protect them. Ensure the security of the port. I can't worry about anything else right now. I –"

He broke off as a woman suddenly put her head around the door. She was instantly identifiable as some sort of personal assistant; Finn found it strangely reassuring that the look hadn't really changed, even nearly nine thousand years on from her native century.

"Excuse me, Mr Thorstad, but Mr Kjelland is calling, urgently," she said, looking flustered. "I think you need to take the call, right away..." She vanished again.

Thorstad looked startled.

"Who's Mr Kjelland?" Finn asked Dagrún.

"The Chief Executive of the company," Dagrún said.

"The man at the top," enlarged the Doctor. "The very top. The Big Boss. Who wants an explanation from you, I'm sure, Mr Thorstad. And probably wants to discuss the contents of that film you were shown."

"He's seen it?" Thorstad blurted in dismay. "How? When?"

"Oh, last night," said the Doctor casually. "Not long before you saw it yourself. Yngvar was very helpful. Got me in direct touch with him, straight from the hotel. We had a very interesting conversation, while I explained to him what was happening. I'm sure he's got a view on your handling of the situation. Why don't you find out what it is?" he concluded, with a rather evil grin.

No procrastination was going to be possible. It was a call Thorstad would much rather have taken in private, but he quickly realized it was pointless even suggesting it. The Doctor's feet were planted wide, his hands thrust deep into his parka pockets, and a pitiless look on his face that almost bordered on the cruel. He wasn't going anywhere.

The flashing light on his communication screen could be ignored no longer. Reluctantly, Thorstad reached out and pressed the button to accept the call, trying to arrange his features into an expression of confidence and capability with which to face his Chief Executive.

"Henning!" he began, brightly, striving to sound calm and businesslike. "Sorry you've had to be bothered. We've got a bit of a situation –"

The face of the man on the screen was that of a cool, calm decision-maker. It was a strong face, one that inspired confidence.

"Asbjørn," he said. Just the one word, his name. But hearing the tone in which that one word was said, Thorstad feared the worst. "The situation was explained to me as of last night. What's the current position?"

The Doctor strode around to the rear of the desk, so that he was looking over the shoulder of the crestfallen Thorstad.

"Mr Kjelland," he said by way of greeting. "Hello, again! I don't expect Mr Thorstad's up to a very coherent summary at the moment. I'll fill you in, shall I?"

"Doctor," Kjelland acknowledged warmly. "Please do."

“The Ishotell has been completely destroyed, but we got everyone out in time. I don’t know about the waste processing plant...” He broke off to look at Thorstad, who nodded miserably. “Also evacuated, apparently. So everyone’s now here, at the spaceport. The Imus have got us surrounded. They can’t get to us as long as we stay on the rock base the port stands on. But if anyone tries to leave here and go back out onto the ice, I wouldn’t answer for their safety. We need ships here, to evacuate everyone off the planet, as soon as possible.”

“I’ve already arranged it,” said Kjelland. “Two of our largest liners have been diverted. They are on their way to you now. They should arrive within a few hours.”

“Good! Excellent!” said the Doctor. “That’s the short-term solution. But we need a long-term solution, too. One that involves leaving the planet for good.”

Thorstad stirred in protest at that.

“Surely that’s too drastic a solution, Henning!” he objected. “There must be some way we can deal with the situation, recover our position –”

The Doctor interrupted him sharply.

“Don’t forget we’re not the only ones here, Thorstad,” he reminded, gesturing over at the gurney on which Jack lay. “The Imus are hearing every word you say.”

“Is it possible for me to speak to the Imus?” Kjelland enquired calmly. “I have something to say to them.”

Chapter 16

Values

“Absolutely,” the Doctor confirmed. He gestured to Finn and Dagrún, who manoeuvred the gurney round behind the desk. The Doctor shifted the angle of the communicator away from Thorstad and onto Jack, so that Kjelland could see him.

The Chief Executive took a moment to absorb Jack’s appearance; even his apparently innate composure was momentarily shaken. But he swiftly regained it.

“My name is Henning Kjelland. I am the head of this company,” he said, speaking in a calm, distinct voice. “I represent the humans on your planet.” (Thorstad stirred restlessly at the use of the word ‘your’.) “Can you hear me?”

The discoloured lips moved sluggishly.

“We – hear – you,” they said.

“Nothing I can say will restore the Imus we have unknowingly destroyed. I am truly sorry for that. But I will make you a promise, if you in turn will make one to me.”

“What – promise?”

“If you promise to allow us to leave your planet in peace – if there are no deaths – my promise to you is that we will leave for good. We will not come back. The planet will be yours again.”

Thorstad started to rise from his chair in protest, but he caught the look in the Doctor’s eye and subsided into his seat again.

“Will you – the Imus – let us do that?” Kjelland persisted.

There was a long pause. Not a muscle on Jack’s face moved. Not a person in the room dared move, either, as if afraid even the slightest motion would in some way imperil the agreement Henning Kjelland was seeking. Everyone stared at Jack’s blank blue eyes, so tense they were hardly even breathing.

Like him.

Then his mouth moved again.

“We – will – promise,” the hoarse, tight voice said.

The Doctor let out an almost explosive sigh of relief, echoing the look on the Chief Executive’s face.

“There’s something else that needs to be done to help the Imus, Mr Kjelland,” he said quickly.

“What’s that?” Kjelland asked sharply.

“The waste processing plant,” said the Doctor. “The leak, the contamination. You need to promise to do everything you can to clear that up, to remove it, to make the area as safe as possible again. You can’t possibly get every last bacterium that’s escaped. What you can do is get it down to a level where they can deal with the rest themselves. But” – he turned toward Jack, staring at him earnestly – “they can only do that if you also promise to leave them alone while they do it. Do you both agree to that?”

“I do,” said Kjelland firmly.

There was a brief pause before the Imus responded.

“We – agree. We – have – told – the – others – of – the – Imus. They – agree.”

There was a palpable atmosphere of relief in the room. Until Jack spoke again.

“But – after – that – is – done. If – you – ever – seek – to – return – to – this – planet...” There was a further pause. “We – will – defend – ourselves.”

“Quite right, too,” approved the Doctor briskly. He re-angled the communicator screen so that it brought Thorstad back into the view of his superior. “Looks like you’ve got a busy time ahead, Mr Thorstad,” he said cheerfully. “Lots of arrangements to make!”

Thorstad looked at him balefully, and turned to Kjelland.

“Henning, surely there’s some other way –” he began, but Kjelland, suddenly running out of patience, overrode him.

“Asbjørn, start using your head!” he exclaimed curtly. “The Imus can use snow and ice as weapons against us. Is that not yet clear to you? What would you propose? To destroy all the snow and ice? Leave just bare rock and water? To what end? Where would be the business you’re so desperately trying to preserve?”

“And those are just the practical implications,” interjected the Doctor, with an air of drawing to everyone’s attention that the main point was being missed. “There’s the moral aspect, of course.”

“Moral?” said Thorstad, blankly.

“Oh, I realize it’s probably a foreign concept to someone as obsessed with profit margins as you seem to be, Mr Thorstad,” said the Doctor slightly. “But morally, exactly what right do you have to propose the obliteration of an entire species of intelligent beings, just so a few humans make some more money for themselves?”

“You seem to have forgotten your heritage, Asbjørn.” Henning Kjelland took up the theme. “Think back in history, back those thousands of years to when our forbears left Norway, left the Earth, and began to explore the stars. Our values have always been to be honest, to look after and preserve the environment in which we live, to live in peace and toleration with others. We left our original home planet with those values, and we should retain them now. That is why we will leave Kvitverden to the Imus. It is their home, not ours. If we try to stay, at some point, whether we mean it or not, there’ll be another tragedy. We don’t need to risk that. There are other planets in the universe.”

He turned from the thoroughly deflated Thorstad to the Doctor.

“Doctor, I am immeasurably grateful to you for apprising me of the situation on Kvitverden. You have saved countless lives, both human and Imus. I must thank you.”

“Oh, it wasn’t just me,” the Doctor disclaimed. “Just about everyone here – with one possible exception, who’ll remain nameless” – his glance touched Thorstad briefly – “played a part in it. Dagrund, here – Doctor Solberg – Yngvar Espeseth – Ingeborg – ooh, everyone, really. You’ve got a terrific group of staff here, Mr Kjelland. Not to mention some of your guests, too.” He glanced over at Romor, Dee and Christoph. “And *I* should thank *you*,” he added.

Kjelland raised his eyebrows in polite enquiry.

“For being a human being. A *real* human being. One who remembers there are other kinds of being in the universe, who also have the right to live. I didn’t necessarily expect to find someone like that heading up a big company. But there you are. So *I’m* thanking *you*.”

“It seems thanks are due all round,” Kjelland smiled. Then his manner shifted. “But I think I should turn my efforts toward making further arrangements to facilitate the evacuation. For now, I once again express my deep gratitude. Goodbye, Doctor.”

The communication screen went blank.

The Doctor went over to the window overlooking the port. Outside people were still running around in panic, scurrying like – well, like the ants he’d instanced earlier to Thorstad.

“There are an awful lot of frightened people out there,” he observed. He turned back to face Thorstad, who was sitting slumped in his chair, staring blankly at the floor. “I think your first move is to get down there and reassure them, don’t you, Mr Thorstad? Explain what’s going to happen. Calm them down and get them organized for when the liners get here.”

Thorstad looked up slowly, then nodded in like manner.

“I must go and speak to my assistant,” he mumbled, and, getting up, shambled out of the room.

“And as for you three!” said the Doctor, suddenly animated, as he looked at Romor, Dee and Christoph. “*What* a documentary you’re going to make out of this! A real journalistic scoop! Won’t you be famous, eh?”

The three young men looked at each other almost wonderingly, as if the implications were only just dawning on them. They began to smile.

“We owe you so much, Doctor,” said Romor earnestly.

The Doctor waved away his thanks.

“Just mention me in the credits,” he suggested. “Now, you’d better get going. You’ll need to be ready when those liners arrive. You’ve got to get your film away safely, or none of it’ll ever happen! Go on – scam!”

Romor and Dee raised their hands in farewell, and were about to leave, when Christoph suddenly said, “What about the Captain? What’s going to happen to him? Isn’t he dying?”

The atmosphere was suddenly grave. The Doctor glanced at Finn, then at Dagrún, who was staring silently at the motionless body of her patient, his eyes now veiled by the closed, discoloured lids.

“Perhaps the best way you can thank him is to mention him in the credits, too,” suggested Finn quietly. “‘Special thanks to Captain Jack Harkness’.”

The boys looked at each other, and nodded, subdued.

“We will,” Romor promised.

As they filed out, the Doctor turned to Dagrún. He could see a tear trickling down her cheek from the outer corner of her eye.

“Don’t cry for him, Dagrún,” he said softly. “He chose to do it. To help others. The memory of courage always lives on.”

She nodded, choking back more tears.

“And in their own way, the Imus showed courage. The ones who attacked Håkon. They must have known they were going to die once they entered his body. But they still gave their lives to try to communicate with us, to warn us. They didn’t have to do that. They could have just attacked everyone without warning. So many of *them* had already died.”

She nodded, grieving for Håkon.

“Any death is one too many,” the Doctor went on. “But think of all the lives that were saved, rather than the two that were lost. Maybe that’ll help. A bit.”

Dagrún put her arms round the Doctor, seeking comfort from the embrace. Then she pulled back, wiping her eyes and squaring her shoulders.

“I’ll go and find someone to help us move him,” she said. “Even the dead will have to leave with us.”

“Thank you,” said the Doctor.

Which left just him and Finn in the room, with Jack’s body.

*

Of course, when Dagrún returned, the office was completely empty. The Doctor, Finn, and the dead man were nowhere to be found.

And it wasn't until much later on, as the now loaded liners were waiting to take off, that two of the security staff, making a last check of the spaceport to make sure nobody has been left behind, reported to her that the gurney had been found.

Mysteriously, it was standing out behind the rear of the spaceport, by the wall.

Abandoned.

Completely empty.

And, save for an unexplained square imprint where something had recently been standing on the snow, nothing and no-one else to be seen anywhere.



Chapter 17

Friends and Lovers [2]

The Doctor and Finn both looked up from the TARDIS console as Jack came back into the control room, now clad in trousers and a T-shirt.

“That’s more like it,” approved the Doctor. “Purple definitely wasn’t your colour. Nice to see you back to normal.”

“Normal, huh? Now there’s a shaky concept,” Jack demurred cheerfully.

“Definitely, in your case,” agreed the Doctor off-handedly.

“Guess I rank as high in his opinion as ever,” said Jack, winking at Finn.

“Well, you rank high in mine,” she consoled him. “For doing what you did.”

“Well, he was never really at risk, though, was he?” the Doctor pointed out, slightly disparagingly.

“That’s not the point,” said Finn, firmly. “He still didn’t *have* to do it. But he *wanted* to do it. And that makes the difference.”

The Doctor didn’t reply, and seemed intent on devoting all his attention to the console, but Finn could read the signs; his very silence constituted a concession that she was right.

“Can you imagine,” said Jack, feigning incredulity, “there are still some people who think I’m just a shallow guy, only out for a good time? Can you *believe* it?”

“Yeah?” responded Finn, in the same tone. “Well, there’s only one thing I can say to that! And” – she grinned hugely – “I’ve always wanted to say this!” She paused, eyes twinkling, then delivered the punchline. “Hey – *they don’t know Jack!*”

Jack grinned and touched one finger to his forehead to give her an informal salute.

“Well, now,” he said. “Moving on. Guess I’d better work out what I do next.”

“I know exactly what you’re doing next,” said the Doctor uncompromisingly. “You’re coming with us.”

“Not back to Earth!” Jack protested, a look of something close to panic suddenly crossing his face. “I’m not ready for that! Not yet...”

“No,” agreed the Doctor. “Not back to Earth. But definitely back to 2009, where you’d still have been if that temporal shift hadn’t happened. There’s where you should be. I’ll take you to where the *Albatross Epsilon* would have gone, if it had ever reached its intended destination. After that – up to you.”

Jack nodded, more calmly.

“I’m kinda surprised the TARDIS stood for having me on board,” he observed.

“Oh, I had a word or two,” said the Doctor. “Did some calming down. Besides, you were dead when we brought you aboard. After that it was a bit late.”

Finn looked puzzled.

“What do you mean? About the TARDIS ‘standing for it’? Standing for what?”

“Doesn’t like having me on board these days. I offend its sense of what’s right and fitting in the universe. The Doctor explained it all to me very carefully, once.” The two men exchanged a brief glance, remembering the conversation between them on Malcassairo, at the end of the universe. “I’m a fixed point in time, see?” Jack explained. “Makes me all wrong. Makes the TARDIS twitchy.”

“Not just the TARDIS,” muttered the Doctor, not looking at anyone. Jack glanced at him, then back at Finn. She reached out and touched him comfortingly on the arm.

“I’ll bet he didn’t have any real trouble talking her round,” she said. “He’s got quite a way with words – had you noticed?”

Jack laughed.

“Doesn’t he just!” he agreed, still grinning.

The Doctor pretended to ignore both of them.

“Hey!” said Jack suddenly, looking at the Doctor’s brown suit. “I’ve just realized... You must have a spare. That can’t be the suit you were wearing when you got here!”

“Yes, it is,” said the Doctor, without looking up.

“But how? I mean, all your stuff must have gotten left at the hotel, didn’t it?”

“Erm... No, actually,” said the Doctor. “It didn’t.”

“What? You went back for it?” Jack was incredulous. “With the whole place doing an imitation of London in the Blitz?”

“Not exactly,” said the Doctor. “It wasn’t me.”

He didn’t look at Finn, but Jack was quick on the uptake.

“You did that?” he demanded of her.

“Well, I know how fond he is of it,” she said, with a shrug.

“Wow, what a girl you are,” he said admiringly, then looked wistful. “Wish you could’ve gotten my coat at the same time. Ianto gave me that coat. After I lost the one I had before.” His eyes grieved.

“Well, now you come to mention it...” said Finn, with the air of someone about to make an embarrassing admission. Exchanging a glance with the Doctor, she stepped over to the console and picked up something that had been lying on the floor at its base, out of Jack’s sight. Jack, watching as she handled it, recognized it as one of the fur bundles in which all the hotel guests had received their clothes back after going through the membrane chamber. The Doctor leaned back against the pilot’s seat, looking on with an expression of reserve bordering on disapproval, his arms folded.

Finn was rather awkwardly wrestling something out of the bundle. Something she then held up to Jack’s full view.

A long, military blue RAF greatcoat.

Jack’s eyes widened in amazement as she came forward and handed it to him. He clutched it, staring at it, and then his face lit up, eyes blazing with joy.

“My coat!” he yelled. “You got it!”

He threw it unceremoniously over the railing, seized Finn and lifted her bodily off the floor, and proceeded to swing her round in a circle, crowing joyously, while she clung on to his shoulders, laughing.

"You are, without question, the most wonderful girl in the entire universe!" he shouted.

"I wouldn't take too much notice of him," advised the Doctor drily. "He says that to all the girls."

Just as suddenly as he'd lifted her, Jack deposited Finn back on the ground, dropped to one knee in front of her, and spread his arms.

"Fionnula Thornton, I *love* you! *Marry* me!" he exclaimed, expansively.

The Doctor's eyebrows shot up, and he looked somewhat perturbed.

"He doesn't say *that* to all the girls," he muttered.

Finn caught his eye and grinned, then looked down at Jack.

"Jack, I love you far too much to ever think of cramping your style like that," she told him, her face alight with amusement. "Not even for a man who looks as much like Al Jolson about to deliver a chorus of 'Swanee' as you do right at this moment..."

"Damn! And still she resists my charm," said Jack, snapping his fingers in mock dismay as he got to his feet.

"Well, there you go – life's full of little disappointments," said the Doctor, almost cheerfully. "Right, then!" He began dancing round the console, operating various controls. "Let's get you back where you belong, Jack Harkness."

*

"So where are we?" asked Finn, as the TARDIS came to rest. "Can I have a quick look outside?"

The Doctor nodded.

"We'll be along in a minute," he said.

She skipped down the ramp, opened the door, and stepped outside, leaving it open.

Jack, now wearing his coat and with a haversack slung over his shoulder, turned to the Doctor.

"Thanks, Doctor," he said. "For everything."

He put out his hand, and the Doctor shook it.

"Look after yourself," he said.

"Do my best," said Jack gravely. "And while we're on that subject... Something Finn told me. Said she hasn't been lucky in relationships." He looked the Doctor straight in the eye. "You'd know a thing or two about that, yourself. Maybe you owe it to her to find out what she meant."

The Doctor's face was expressionless for a few moments. Then he nodded, once.

Jack pointed at him with an emphatic forefinger. "Okay," he said. "Make sure you do. That kid's gold dust. Look after her."

Before the Doctor could reply, Finn came bursting back in through the doorway, hardly containing her excitement.

"Do you realize," she demanded, "that means I've now stood on *two* other planets, besides my own? *Two*?"

Jack grinned. "We'll make a seasoned traveller out of you, yet," he assured her. He shrugged the haversack into a more comfortable position on his shoulder, nodded at the Doctor, and strode down the ramp. He stopped in front of Finn.

Her excitement had abruptly evaporated as she realized this was goodbye.

"It's been good knowing you, Finn Thornton," said Jack, putting a fingertip under her chin and tipping her face up. "Shan't forget you."

He reached his arms around her and gave her a long and fervent embrace, then released her.

"Goodbye, Jack," she said, her eyes now overbright. "Look after yourself. Please."

"Hey, what's this? Not crying again?" he said, lifting a fingertip to touch the corner of her eye.

"I'm afraid so," she admitted. "I cry very easily. You must have noticed!"

"Yeah," he agreed. "But not for me. I always come back, remember?"

“Well, if one of those ‘come backs’ is ever to Earth, you can always look me up,” she said. “Maybe you’ll never want to, or need to. But, if you do – well, the invitation’s there...”

“Maybe I will,” he said. “Just maybe I will.”

“And something else,” she said, in a low voice. Too low for the Doctor to hear. “I still don’t know what really happened with the 456. But whatever it was, it hurt you very badly. I can see that. And I just wanted to say this. What you’ve just done on Kvitverden. Thanks to you, millions of lives have just been saved. A whole race, a whole species. That happened because of what *you* chose to do. That counts. It really counts. And don’t forget, you saved another life. One that’s very important to both of us, I think. So don’t forget the positives about yourself, will you?” She looked at him steadily.

“There’s a time I wouldn’t have done it, you know,” he said, just as quietly. “I didn’t use to be that kind of a man. Maybe I’m not quite such a great guy as you like to think. It’s because of *him*, you know.” His head moved in a quick gesture to indicate the Doctor.

“Well, that’s what he does, isn’t it? That’s what we get from being with him,” she said simply. “He makes us better people.”

He didn’t answer that, other than with a slightly wistful smile. He leaned down and dropped a kiss on her forehead, then walked out through the door.

But then, unexpectedly, suddenly he was there again, his fingers curled around the edge of the door, blue eyes alight with mischief.

“Come on, Finn – last chance!” he exhorted her. “Dump this guy and come with me, and we’ll make beautiful music together!”

The Doctor looked at Finn quickly, wondering what she’d say.

“I don’t think we sing in the same key, Jack,” she said, quirked a significant eyebrow at him.

He dipped his head in amused acknowledgement of the truth of that statement, then grinned at both of them.

“Guess not... Well, can’t blame me for trying! See y’around,” he said, with a swift, informal salute, and, this time, he really was gone.

Finn made sure the door was closed, then came up the ramp.

“Well, that’s Jack safely on his way,” she said with a shrug. “And I suppose it’s me, next.”

The Doctor nodded, busying himself with resetting the controls.

“Weren’t tempted to go with him, then?” he said, not looking at her, keeping his eyes fixed firmly on the console.

“No,” she said, simply.

“Not even the tiniest bit?” The Doctor found he couldn’t stop himself from pursuing the point.

She looked at him with a slightly puzzled frown.

“No,” she said again, with more emphasis. “Why?”

The Doctor shrugged, trying to make it look as if he was just indulging in idle curiosity.

“Oh, I don’t know,” he said casually. “I’ve known some girls who’d have jumped at the chance.”

“I don’t doubt it,” she said. “But I’m not one of them.”

“Why not?” he asked, still trying to sound as if it didn’t matter.

“Well, despite his knee-jerk flirting, I’m not really his type, am I?” Finn cocked her eyebrows meaningfully. “And even discounting that, Jack and I have a fundamental incompatibility issue.”

“Really?” The Doctor’s brow creased; he hadn’t expected that response.

“An absolute showstopper, for me. Jack is not, either by nature or by principle, monogamous. I am,” said Finn, flatly.

“Ah,” said the Doctor. “Right.”

There was a pause.

“Okay, then,” said the Doctor, a little awkwardly. “Home.”

Finn looked at him rather quizzically, then came round and sat on the pilot’s seat. There were a few moments of silence.

“Actually,” said the Doctor suddenly. “There’s something else.” He had an inner vision of Jack’s blue eyes staring at him, urging him to ask the question.

“What’s that?”

“I never asked... Is there someone? I mean, anyone else at home? Waiting for you? Boyfriend? Or anything like that?”

“No,” she said, suddenly quiet. “No-one like that.”

“But parents, surely? You’ve got parents, haven’t you?” He tried to make light of it. “Thought I might need to know. I’ve had a tough time from some of the parents. Well, the mothers, anyway. One of them nearly dislocated my jaw, once.” He had a brief vision of Francine Jones hauling off at him.

Finn didn’t smile. Instead, she looked at him with an unreadable expression, silent for an uncomfortably long time.

“How exact can you be with landing the TARDIS?” she said at last.

“On a sixpence,” said the Doctor, quietly. Usually he’d have said that with a proud flourish, but her body language told him it wasn’t the right time.

“And at a precise time?”

“The very second, if you like.”

“Okay, then,” said Finn, in a low voice. “I suppose this is something you ought to know. Take her exactly where I say...”

Chapter 18

Something To Look Forward To

The Doctor stepped out of the door and looked around.

They were back on Earth. England. In the year 2004, as she’d directed him. The sky above was dull and grey, the atmosphere wet and dreary. It was raining quite hard. The TARDIS was standing in the corner of a field, tucked up tight against a hedge behind which stretched a stand of trees. Beyond the far edge of the field, cars and lorries raced up and down a motorway, spray flying up from the road surface with every passing vehicle.

The Doctor retreated to just inside the door to get out of the rain.

“What am I looking for?” he said, over his shoulder.

“Two white supermarket lorries. Heading south,” said Finn quietly. She had made no move to come with him; she was standing with her back to the door, by the console, gently touching it with her fingertips.

Supermarket lorries? thought the Doctor. *Why supermarket lorries?* He looked outside again, to his right. He had a clear view for quite a long way in that direction; the fencing along the fields looked fairly new, and the shrubs growing along the verge weren’t more than three or four feet high at the most. Despite the rain, he could see for at least a mile from that direction.

Which allowed him to identify two large white lorries in the distance, emerging from the grey murk, following a couple of cars.

As they drew nearer, he saw that the red car at the head of the queue wasn’t travelling all that fast. Very wise, given the road conditions. But it looked as if the driver of the big silver car behind was beginning to get impatient; he was certainly getting too close to the back of the red car. Behind him, the first lorry’s right indicator was flashing as it prepared to move into the middle lane.

Then the Doctor watched, horrified, as the silver car suddenly swerved out in front of the lorry in an overtaking manoeuvre, utterly without warning. There was a squeal of brakes as the lorry driver, taken by complete surprise, tried his best to avoid collision. His colleague in the second lorry, who had been following his path, was also left with little time to react.

It was only as the unfolding tragedy drew directly level with him that he realized the most terrible thing of all. Between the two huge lorries, there was a third car. A small white saloon. With four passengers.

They had no chance. The second lorry couldn't stop in time. It plunged forward toward its mate in front, aquaplaning on the wet tarmac. The white car was crushed almost beyond recognition between the two as the cluster of vehicles concertina-ed away to the left and out of sight behind the trees that lined the carriageway in that direction. The dreadful sounds of screeching brakes and grinding metal faded.

The Doctor stood there for some minutes more, watching the following cars slowing to a halt, gradually blocking the southbound carriageway; seeing a column of black smoke, obscured by the rain, rising up above the trees; until he heard the sound of sirens in the distance. Then he stepped back, and shut the door.

He turned and looked at Finn. She was still stroking the console with those tiny movements of her fingers, and she made no sound, but her shoulders were shaking slightly, and he knew she was crying. He felt like crying himself.

He walked slowly up the ramp to her, took her by the shoulders, turned her round, and enfolded her in a tight, intense embrace. Her face was buried in his shoulder, and he felt her still shaking. He held her until finally she grew still. He heard her draw a deep, trembling breath, and then she pulled away from him slightly. She didn't look at him, but put up a hand to touch where her face had been pressed against him.

"I've soaked your jacket," she said, so quietly he could barely hear her.

"So I should think," he said gently. "The white car. Who was in it?"

She leaned against him again, and his arms tightened round her.

"My parents. And my grandparents. My mum's parents. My dad's were already gone. That was everybody I had left in the world."

Wordlessly, he pulled her closer still, and rested his cheek on the top of her head. They stood in silence for a while. Then she spoke again.

"But you lost your family, too," she whispered. "I don't know how, or why. But sometimes I can feel the loss – your loss. Whenever I think about – what you just saw. It brings up yours, too. Like an echo."

He closed his eyes in pain. That same pain she could feel. She could feel his, and he could feel hers. Shared experience, linking them.

Then she pulled away from him again, just far enough so as to put her hands on his upper arms and look up at him, his hands now gripping her shoulders.

"But do you know something, Doctor? It helps me."

He frowned down at her in puzzlement.

"What d'you mean, *helps* you?"

"Knowing what you feel about it. How long you've been feeling it. Always there in the background, underlying everything. But look at you! What you do, in spite of it. Running around the universe, discovering new things, making friends with new people, helping! A coping strategy like no other! And I think: *Well, it works for him. Maybe it'll work for me.* And then I'm thinking of you, and that starts me smiling again. 'Unforgettable, that's what you are'," she quoted, softly, as she had once before. "So it helps, you see?"

The Doctor stared at her, speechless, then began to shake his head, almost helplessly.

"Fionnula Thornton," he said, beginning to break into a smile. "You're brilliant. You're just absolutely brilliant."

"Like I've told you before – only because you are," she disclaimed, smiling back.

"Oh, it's nothing to do with me," he said. "You're brilliant all by yourself!"

"Ah, but I'm *not* all by myself, am I? You're in here too, remember?" She tapped her forehead, and this time there was a full-on grin on her face.

Then she sobered again.

"But – can you take me home now, please, Doctor?"

"Of course," he agreed gently. "Course I will."

*

“We’re here,” the Doctor announced.

Finn, still rather subdued, nodded.

“Thank you,” she said. Then she suddenly turned and stroked the edge of the console, looking up at the now quiescent Time Rotor. “And thank *you*,” she added, obviously addressing the TARDIS itself. The Doctor was intrigued, and amused – and, he admitted to himself, inordinately pleased. He couldn’t remember the last time anyone had addressed the TARDIS as something with an independent intelligence. Other than himself, of course. But then, in a lot of ways, because of what had happened between them, Finn *was* him, as far as the TARDIS was concerned...

Finn turned back to the Doctor, and he was relieved to see she was now looking more her usual self. In fact, she was starting to smile.

“What?” he asked.

“Well, I thought perhaps I ought to say ‘Thank you for my holiday’,” she said, reciting the phrase like a little girl, her hands folded demurely in front of her.

The Doctor shifted uncomfortably.

“Yeah, well, I’m sorry about that,” he apologized. “It’s just – you know –”

“I know,” she smiled. “You and trouble...”

“You were brilliant, though,” he assured her. “And we did see some incredible things, didn’t we? The borealis lights? And the iceberg calving?”

“And the snow,” she reminded him. “Don’t forget the snow.”

“No, I’m not going to forget the snow. I’m never going to forget the snow,” he agreed, seriously, as if making a solemn promise. Then he moved forward and took both her hands.

“Next time, I’m going to *really* give you a holiday,” he said, earnestly. “I’m going to take you to wonderful places, show you wonderful things, and give you wonderful memories. I promise you. You deserve it.”

“Something to look forward to, then,” she said happily.

“Yeah,” he agreed. “Something to look forward to.”

He dropped her hands and strode to the door.

“Come on, then,” he said.

As soon as they stepped back into Finn’s living room, the heat hit them again.

“Phew!” the Doctor gasped, quickly loosening the knot of his tie even more than usual, and whipping out of his coat and throwing it casually back inside the TARDIS. “I’d forgotten how hot it was here!”

“Have a cold drink before you go,” Finn suggested. “I’ve just remembered – I’ve got some cream soda in the fridge. Do you like that?”

“Cream *soda*?” repeated the Doctor enthusiastically. “Oh, I *love* cream soda! All that lovely *va-nil-la*” – he rolled the word off his tongue with relish – “flavour – yum! You’ve talked me into it.”

“Okay – on it,” Finn assured him.

Just as she got to the door, she suddenly hesitated, and turned to face him.

“Doctor, that ‘next time’,” she said. “Don’t make it too long, will you? Before you come back, I mean.”

“Why?” he asked, sharply. There was something odd about her manner, setting off a distant alarm bell in his mind.

“I don’t know,” she said slowly. “I’ve just got this feeling that you didn’t ought to leave it too long...” She looked almost puzzled at her own words. Then she shrugged, and her face lightened. “Anyway. Sorry. Cream soda! Right away!”

The Doctor watched her leave the room, frowning. He deliberately hadn’t told her – yet – about what the Ood had said, and what Carmen had repeated, about his song ending soon. Had the connection between their minds, his with hers, somehow planted that knowledge into her subconscious? Did she now know something that she didn’t know she knew? That he didn’t have all the time in the world – in the universe...? His face fell into sullen lines as he thought about what he had been trying to put out of his mind ever since the return from San Helios.

Then he heard Finn coming back along the hall, and rearranged his face into a more cheerful expression. He didn't want to give her any more burdens than the ones she already had, right now.

She appeared in the doorway, holding two glasses of fizzing clear liquid from which the delicate scent of vanilla rose to perfume the air.

"By the way, Doctor, there's something I forgot to ask if you'd like," she said mischievously, wagging the glasses in her hands invitingly.

"What's that?"

"Ice?" she suggested, her eyes twinkling.

The Doctor thought about it.

"Perhaps not," he said.



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: "Ice World" is the second 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 October 2010 (see <http://www.whofic.com/viewuser.php?uid=12695>).

Chapter 1: "I Love Snow"

- For an explanation of why Finn has the Doctor's mind in hers, see the story "Serendipity" (1 of 7, www.whofic.com/viewstory.php?sid=37011).
- The references to the stingrays and the bus relate to "Planet of the Dead" (episode 4.15, 2009).
- The 'children being rounded up' refers to the "Torchwood" miniseries "Children of Earth" (episodes 3.1-3.5, 2009).
- The mention of Martha (Jones) and the 'Pentallian' refers to "42" (episode 3.7, 2007).

Chapter 2: Kvitverden

- For those less familiar with the contribution of Norway to the various areas of exploration and discovery of the world, the Norseman Leif Erikson (or Ericson) (circa 970-1020) is credited as the first European to land in North America; Roald Amundsen led the first expedition to reach the South Pole in 1911; Thor Heyerdahl is best known for his 'Kon-Tiki' expedition across the Pacific in 1947 on a raft built primarily of balsa wood, and the 'Ra' expedition using a ship built of totora reed to cross the Atlantic.
- I can only give approximate Norwegian pronunciations at best, but both 'å' and 'aa' are pronounced 'aw' (hence 'Blåfjell' = 'Blawf-yell', 'Håkon' = 'Haw-kon', 'Aamodt' = 'Aw-mott'). In the name 'Yngvar' the 'y' is pronounced with a sort of 'oo' sound – something like 'Oong-vahr'.

Chapter 3: Chill Factors

- A parka is a hooded jacket, originally made of fur, invented by the Inuit people of the Arctic. Mukluks are soft boots traditionally made of reindeer or seal skin.
- In Norwegian, the indefinite article 'en', when attached to the end of a word, becomes the definite article ('en ishotell' = "an ice hotel"; 'ishotellen' = 'the ice hotel').
- The name 'Ingeborg' is pronounced (approximately!) 'Inger-bore'.

Chapter 6: The 'Albatross Epsilon' and Other Stories

- The 456 are the alien race in the "Torchwood" miniseries "Children of Earth" (episodes 3.1-3.5, 2009).
- 'Safir' – the Norwegian word for 'sapphire' – is pronounced 'sah-feer'.

Chapter 7: Breaking the Ice

- As all sci-fi fans will know, Captain Scarlet is the hero who cannot die in the 1960s British television series "Captain Scarlet and the Mysterons".

Chapter 8: Friends and Lovers [1]

- "The Tale of the Adopted Daughter" is a section of the novel "Time Enough For Love" by Robert Heinlein (first published 1973).
- The 'ø' character of the Norwegian alphabet tends to be pronounced as 'er' – hence 'Asbjørn' = 'Azb-yern'.

Chapter 10: A Box Ticked

- *For those unfamiliar with the terminology, a pinch hitter is a substitute batter in baseball; ‘pinch hit’ is often used colloquially to indicate a substitute or stand-in.*

Chapter 12: Chionophilia and Pagophobia

- *For those who don't already know (!) – chionophilia is the love of snow; pagophobia is the fear of ice.*

Chapter 14: Human Error

- *Reference note: The Latin adjective ‘imus’ (the superlative contraction of ‘infimus’) means ‘inmost, lowest, deepest’.*

Chapter 17: Friends and Lovers [2]

- *Malcaissairo is the planet that is the setting for the events of “Utopia” (episode 3.11, 2007) when the TARDIS, in an effort to avoid the presence of Jack Harkness, throws itself to the end of the universe.*
- *Francine Jones, Martha’s mother, slapped the Doctor’s face in “The Lazarus Experiment” (episode 3.6, 2007).*

Chapter 18: Something To Look Forward To

- *The opening line from the lyrics of the Nat King Cole song “Unforgettable” was first quoted by Finn to the Doctor in the final chapter of “Serendipity” (1 of 7, www.whofic.com/viewstory.php?sid=37011).*
- *In “Planet of the Dead” (episode 4.15, 2009), it is Carmen who repeats the prophecy first given to the Doctor by the Ood (in “Planet of the Ood”, episode 4.2, 2008) that “his song is ending”.*

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