

Doctor Who

TO BE NAMED

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The Summons

The knock at the door, loud and peremptory, took her completely by surprise.

She was standing by the window overlooking the five-foot gap that passed for her front garden. It lay between the house and the street, separated from the latter by a low brick wall. Not that it was much of a garden, still being paved over with the original hardwearing Victorian decorative tiles, but, like many of the other similar gardens along the terrace in which she lived, it laid claim to the title by being strewn with earthenware pots of varying sizes containing flowering plants and shrubs.

The point of concern – given the fact that for the past minute or so she had been looking through the window at the street, woolgathering – was the indisputable fact that nobody could have approached her door over that short distance without her seeing them. It was, not to put too fine a point on it – employing a much-misused absolute, yet one that appeared to be utterly applicable in this context – *impossible*.

Yet someone *was* there, knocking. A second time, now, and no tentative summons, but an imperative demand for attention. It incorporated the definite implication that she *needed* to answer it. Immediately.

The man standing on the doorstep was a stranger to her; dark-haired, athletically built, probably not that much older than her if he really was in his late twenties, as he appeared to be. But what struck her most was his clothes. Something about the style of the multi-pocketed jacket, the cut of the trousers tucked into the sturdy black boots, gave her the impression they were – not wrong, exactly, but unusual, in a way she couldn't quite put her finger on. As if they were somehow not from here, not from now...

But she had no leisure in which to study them. The man's pale grey eyes were fixed on hers as he thrust a small package out to her so abruptly that she took it almost reflexively.

"Delivery for you," he said, in a tone as businesslike as his knock had been. "Confirm the details given, please." Despite that last word it wasn't exactly a request.

She looked at the package. Yes, it was her name, her address on it.

"That's right," she said, tentatively.

"Mission accomplished," he said cryptically, as if to himself. Or was he talking to someone else, who was not there...? Whichever was the case, he was turning to leave.

"Wait a minute!" she protested. "I'm not expecting any deliveries; I haven't ordered anything. Where's this from?"

He was already out on the pavement, but paused briefly to direct those piercing grey eyes at her again. He didn't look like any delivery courier she'd ever encountered; he bore himself with too authoritative an air.

"I'm doing a favour for a friend," he said enigmatically. And with that he strode swiftly off along the street, lifting his left forearm up as if about to check his wristwatch.

She looked down at the package again, puzzled, and turned it over. There was no sender's address on the back, and on the front not even any postmark or postage, just her own name and address in block capitals.

She looked along the street in the direction in which he'd gone, her mouth open to call him back, but the words went unuttered.

The street was empty. He wasn't there. There were no side turnings he could have reached in the time it had taken her to look at the package, no way he could have had time to go inside any of the other houses, certainly not without her hearing the opening and closing of a door; only seconds had passed. Yet – he wasn't there.

Uneasily, wearing a bewildered frown, she retreated into the house and carried the package to the table in her sitting room. It was rectangular, about eight inches long, three wide, and two deep, wrapped in sturdy paper fastened with tape. Within moments she had liberated the contents – a plain brown wooden box. She lifted the lid and stared at what it contained for some seconds. Then she slowly reached down to take up the item inside.

A broad leather wrist strap bearing a lidded compartment. She laid it flat on the table and carefully lifted the leather flap. Underneath was an apparently simple-looking device, but she knew that in fact it was a very sophisticated artefact. Because she knew what it was.

A vortex manipulator.

Also in the box was a folded sheet of paper – a written note.

"*He needs you,*" it said, in bold, slashing handwriting. "*This will take you to him.*" Then, underneath: "*PS: Don't forget your s.s.*" There was no signature.

She stared at it, her mind leaping like lightning along the chain of reasoning that followed from the use of that first word. "*He...*"

This vortex manipulator had been sent to her by someone who knew that as far as she was concerned, there was only one 'he' who would need no name to be given for her to know instantly who "*he*" was. And that cryptic reference to "*your s.s...*" could only mean one thing, but how did the writer of the note – whoever he or she was – know about that thing?

There was a possible – indeed, a probable – answer to that, but one thing was clear. This was a summons she couldn't ignore. *And you knew that, didn't you, mystery person?* she thought wryly. *Well, whoever you are, you certainly know how to effectively dangle a lure...*

A lure that she was clearly expected to seize upon without delay. There was a definitely Churchillian "*action this day*" tone to the message.

So she laid the vortex manipulator on the table, and began preparing to leave. First she went upstairs, where she changed her clothes to a pair of sturdy jeans, a loose, long-sleeved T-shirt and a multi-pocketed gilet, with stout walking boots on her feet. Then she stowed into the various pockets of the gilet a small bottle of water, a couple of bars of chocolate, an apple, and a few other sundry items which – given she had no idea where she was going – might possibly be useful. The reference concerning the "s.s." had been superfluous; she never went anywhere without it. So – she was ready. As ready as she was ever going to be.

She went back into the sitting room and picked up the vortex manipulator. No doubt the man who'd delivered it to her had had one of his own; that would account for how he'd managed to appear and then disappear so swiftly and covertly. A Time Agent, perhaps? "*Doing a favour for a friend.*" A friend, therefore, who could entirely plausibly be on a completely different planet, in a completely different century...

Carefully, she strapped the device onto her wrist. She knew how to operate it; that knowledge, like so much else that she now knew, had been passed to her not through personal experience but in a way that was, as far as she knew, unique. It was only because of that that she could even begin to contemplate doing what she was about to do. She looked at the controls; the destination, wherever it was, had been preset. "*This will take you to him...*" Was the mysterious writer of the note, too, to be found there – with "*him*"? There was only one way to find out.

She paused, took a deep breath, and then pressed the control that would send her through the Time Vortex.

Transit

It didn't feel at all the same as it had the last time she'd gone through it. A much rougher ride. But then, a vortex manipulator was much less sophisticated than the mode of transport she'd become used to, of course...

Arrival

Then she was no longer in the Vortex, but had no chance to analyze where she now was, because before she could take anything in there was a huge explosion very near her. She was blown off her feet and crashed full-length onto a hard, gritty surface, the air in her lungs expelled by the impact. Trying to breathe, she found her mouth filled with dust and sand, making her cough when she attempted to spit it out. There was another explosion, but further away; then another, and another. She tried to see where she was, but, like her mouth, her eyes were full of grit, and were watering fiercely, so everything around her was blurred.

Struggling onto her knees and elbows, she somehow got to her feet and stood, wavering slightly, blinking furiously as she endeavoured to clear her vision. The sky above was dark, but the flames from the explosions punctuated the darkness with indistinct patches of reddish-orange illumination. She had an impression of flat, bare, hard-baked ground interrupted by serried ranks of rock formations. There were clouds of dust everywhere, and shapes – people? – running in all directions. Her ears were assaulted by a barrage of continuing explosions mixed with screams and shouts from

the running shapes. Where was she? What was happening? Her ability to think seemed to have been blown out of her by that first explosion, and she still couldn't see because her eyes refused to stop watering.

Her instincts were screaming at her to run to safety, but which way should she run? Where was safety to be found in this screaming hell of noise and violence? She looked round helplessly, flinching as another explosion, not very far away, rocked her on her feet, almost immediately followed by another.

Then, suddenly, there was a figure coming toward her out of the blurred gloom, and she felt an instant frisson of alarm as the hairs rose on her arms and the back of her neck. She only had time to take one instinctive step backward before her hand was seized and with a jerk she was pulled into the unknown person's wake.

"Come on!" rasped a voice. "This way!"

Helplessly she followed, coughing and stumbling, into a crevice in the rocks. Once there, her hand was released, and she was able to lean back against the wall of the crevice to prevent her trembling legs from folding her to the ground. Still coughing, she fumblingly pulled a handkerchief out of one of the pockets on her gilet and wiped her eyes with it. After a few seconds, she finally managed to clear them, and could see again. Could look at the person who had brought her into this relative safety.

An old man, his grey hair and beard suggesting he was in his seventies, though the pace at which he had effected her rescue argued for his being remarkably active for his apparent age. He was of medium height and quite slightly built, with a face that had clearly seen a great deal of life, if the lines that seamed it were anything to go by. In the dim light of their refuge, such of his clothes as could be seen under the dark hooded cloak or cape that covered them gave the impression that all were worn with age, shabby, frayed. He was regarding her grimly.

Trying to catch her breath, she opened her mouth to speak, but he got there ahead of her.

"What were you doing out there? Trying to get yourself killed?" he demanded harshly.

"Do you always start by asking stupid questions?" she retorted instantly.

His eyebrows rose, as if he hadn't expected to be challenged. Then the faintest hint of humour softened his expression.

"Not always," he said, less harshly, but still terse. "Well, if you're not wedded to the idea of being blown into your constituent atoms, you'd better come with me."

"Look, where is this? Who are you – ?"

He cut across her. "Time enough for explanations later. For now, keep your head down, and don't speak unless you have to. I need to concentrate to get us out of here without being detected."

She bit down on the question "*By whom?*", and for a moment they studied each other. Disconcertingly, she was experiencing something she couldn't explain; an inchoate, irrational feeling that there was something familiar about this man, this complete stranger whom she was certain she had never seen before in her life. Yet it was on the strength of that totally unfeasible sense of familiarity that finally she nodded, and silently brought her hand up to touch her fore and index fingers to her forehead in a brief salute to indicate her compliance. The old man emitted a snort in which he managed to combine derision with genuine amusement, then turned away, indicating with a casual gesture of his hand that she should follow him.

As they went she could still hear explosions and shouts, but the target area of the barrage was being left further and further behind them as they went. The rock formations through which the old

man was leading her were labyrinthine in their complexity, and every now and again in the distance she caught sight of other figures, apparently human, moving among them, just as she and her guide were doing, and in the same general direction. She got the impression that some of the moving shapes were too large to be ordinary human beings, but it was too dark for her to make them out properly, and she needed all her attention to focus on following the old man.

Suddenly he halted and struck a listening attitude. She didn't have time to wonder what he'd heard, because he grabbed her and thrust her in front of him into a deep, shadowed recess in the rock face alongside them.

"Stay still, and don't make a sound!" he hissed, clutching her upper arm urgently.

She wasn't going to let him have it all his own way. "Why?" she hissed back.

"Because provided we don't move, it's the only way they could locate us."

"Who?"

"Them," he whispered, so low she could hardly hear him, and nodded toward the mouth of the recess.

When she saw what he was looking at, his instruction to stay still became completely superfluous; she instinctively froze.

The two shapes hovering twenty feet or so above the ground a good hundred yards away from their refuge were only intermittently illuminated by the now distant flashes from the continuing explosions, but even though she had never before seen one 'in the flesh' – if that was the appropriate term – she knew instantly what they were. She couldn't take her eyes off them, but in her peripheral vision she could see the old man looking at her as her lips silently, incredulously, shaped the word "*Daleks...!*"

The two Daleks were talking to each other. She could hear the grating, metallic shrieking of their voices, but couldn't make out what they were saying. Apparently they were deciding – or had been ordered – to cease their pursuit of the refugees from the bombardment, because abruptly they turned and flew back in the direction from which they'd come.

The old man let several seconds pass before he relaxed, and released his grip on her arm. She discovered she must have been holding her breath, because it came almost as a surprise when she found herself drawing in a long breath of relief.

"Why couldn't they detect us?" she asked, still cautious enough to whisper. "I thought Daleks had technology that can detect non-Dalek life signs."

He regarded her curiously, but didn't enquire how she'd come by her knowledge.

"Their detectors are mostly useless on this planet. There's a mineral in the rocks here that scrambles their technology. If you're out in the open, they can still detect you, but if you're protected by rock, they can't find you other than by directly seeing you or hearing you." He ventured out of the shadows just far enough to check that the Daleks really had gone, then beckoned. "We need to get to the Cave of Gathering. It's not far now."

"Glad to hear it," she said, a touch facetiously.

"So am I." He continued to scan the surrounding terrain as he spoke. "Because I've got questions for you, young woman. And I'm looking forward to the answers." Satisfied, he made a 'follow me' gesture and began to move off, cautiously.

"You've got questions...!" she muttered to his back, *sotto voce*, as she prepared to follow his lead once again.

The Cave of Gathering

A few minutes' more travel through the maze of rocks apparently brought them to the old man's destination, because he came to a halt and put out a precautionary arm that would stop her from passing him. A superfluous gesture, because she had no intention of attempting any such thing, not in an environment where she didn't know the potential dangers.

He had pressed himself flat against the wall of rock beside them and was peering warily around; she followed his example. Beyond him she could see a largish open area bounded on the far side by another wall of rock, facing them, with a jagged, dark crevice running at an angle from about fifteen feet up down to the ground. Then she caught a movement there. Someone was lurking in the shadows within.

The old man emitted a low, three-note whistle, which was immediately answered by three different notes from the watcher in the crevice. He turned to her.

"Follow me," he said, and set off across the intervening space at a brisk pace. Obediently, she made sure she was only inches behind him. As they neared their target she realized that what she had thought was a crevice was in fact a large cave, or tunnel, with a triangular face of rock in front of it acting as a screen to conceal the full size of the orifice. The old man swerved around the edge of the screening rock and into the shadows beyond.

"Elder!" The unseen man, who was obviously acting as a watchman for the concealed entrance, sounded relieved. As her eyes adjusted to this further degree of darkness, she detected the movement of his head as he turned his attention to her. "Who's this?" His voice was suddenly wary.

"She's with me," said the old man. "She was caught up in the attack. I vouch for her."

"In that case, she can pass," said the man. "Wisdom's already returned. He's waiting for you."

"Then I'll try not to keep him any longer. You, young lady, follow me."

"Hadn't the faintest intention of doing anything else," she assured him.

"There'll be light further in," he commented, "but we daren't let it be seen from outside, so there're a couple of corners to negotiate before you'll see it. Don't worry, I'll tell you when to zig and when to zag."

She could feel the guard's eyes on her back as she was led off into the darkness, but he didn't speak again.

"Where are we going?" she asked, trying to focus her dark-adapted eyes on the almost indistinguishable shape in front of her.

"The Cave of Gathering."

"And who gathers there?"

"You'll see."

She would obviously have to content herself with that for the time being.

The old man had spoken the truth about there being light; after a short distance a faint yellowish glow of illumination started to make itself visible, growing in intensity as they proceeded. But before they reached its source, he stopped and turned to look at her appraisingly.

"Where are you from?" he asked abruptly.

An unidentified instinct warned her to prevaricate, until she knew more about where she was, and why. And with whom.

"Somewhere very far away," she said. "I doubt you'll have heard of it."

"Now I'm looking forward more than ever to hearing what you're doing here," said the old man drily. "And why. But that'll keep. The important question now is, have you heard of the Tura Ostauri?"

That was easy to answer. "No."

"Then you don't know anything about their clan culture. In that case, there's something you do need to know, and it's very, very important." He paused, then said, spacing the words out for emphasis, "You must – not – tell them – your name."

She hadn't been expecting that. "My name? Why not?"

"These people have two names. Their 'real' name, and their 'known-as' name. It's absolutely taboo to tell anyone their real name. Their parents give them a known-as name as soon as they're born, but they're the only ones who know their child's real name, and they don't tell them what it is until their naming day, when they're ten years old. And thereafter a Tura Ostauri keeps their real name secret all their life. Their known-as name is how they're known by everyone else. They may keep the one their parents gave them, or, when they get older, they may choose one for themselves. Or ask their friends what name they think summarizes them best. Provided it's suitably flattering, no doubt," he added ironically.

"What sort of names do they choose?"

He shrugged. "Oh, all sorts. Their current leader goes by the name of Wisdom. His wife is Goldhair. This is a semi-desert area, so they're quite fond of water-related names. I know a Rivulet, a Rainshower, and a Droplet. Then there's Windfighter, Sandstrider, Joyous, Stronghand, Whiteflower... You get the idea."

For a few moments his voice had become relaxed, even hinted at levity, but now it became serious again. "But a real name must never be revealed. It's taboo. So whatever your name is, you mustn't say it. And before they start asking you who you are, you'll need to choose the name you want to be known by instead. So I'm giving you the chance to choose it now."

She looked at him curiously. "You keep saying 'they'. Aren't you one of them?"

"No," he said succinctly. "Though they've accepted me as one of them. We're on the same side."

"Against the Daleks," she deduced.

"Yes."

"But you're from a different clan, from somewhere else."

"That's one way of putting it," he said, somewhat shortly. "Now, are you ready? Have you chosen a name?"

She thought for a moment or two, then nodded. "Yes."

He lifted his eyebrows at her, waiting for her to enlighten him.

"Memory," she said. "You can call me Memory."

He nodded, regarding her quizzically. "Interesting. I look forward to learning the reason for your choice, if you care to confide it to me later. But now you'd better come and be introduced."

He was about to turn away, but she put a hand on his arm to stay him. There was something she wanted to know.

"Wait a minute... You don't know me. You don't know who I am. But you told that man you'd vouch for me. Why did you say that?"

He put his head slightly to one side as he studied her, considering his response. "I trust my instincts. For no logical reason at all, they're telling me *I* can trust *you*. We can talk about it later," he offered. "For now, come with me."

"All right," she agreed, without hesitation.

He cocked an eyebrow at her. "See? *You* trust *me*, or you wouldn't have said that so readily. And you don't know anything about me, do you? So we're even. Come on. This way."

A few paces further on the tunnel turned to the left, and opened out into a large cave, illuminated by the light of a large fire in the centre of the floor and by torches propped in crude brackets around the walls.

Around the fire were gathered some fifty or more individuals. The majority were, apparently, human; a mix of men and women, some young, some older. They all wore the same type of cape as the old man, and underneath them long-sleeved shirts and full, loose-fitting trousers, with sturdy flat-heeled boots on their feet. One thing that did particularly register in that first, brief moment was the fact that every one of them carried a weapon that resembled a very basic rifle.

But it was the remaining minority of the group – some seven or eight of them – that got her immediate attention, because they were manifestly not human at all.

The creature they most closely resembled, to her mind, were pangolins – giant, ten-foot tall pangolins. The faces were very similar indeed, except that instead of totally black orbs they had human-like eyes with toffee-brown irises. Another similarity was the interlocked, armour-like plates that covered them from the top of their head to the end of the thick tails which evidently helped them balance when they stood on their hind feet, as they were all doing now, though the edges of the plates were smooth-edged fan-shaped curves, not triangular. But something they had that pangolins didn't was a third pair of limbs; in addition to the normal configuration of short, sturdy front and back legs which ended in long, curving claws, they had an additional pair of arms positioned just above their forelegs, slender, prehensile and covered in brown fur, ending in small palms encircled by seven flexible blunt-ended digits. If their current physical positions were any guide, they evidently held these 'hands' with the fingers interlocked across their chest when not otherwise in use.

At a loss, she looked at the old man. He'd registered her surprise, and gave her a reassuring nod before beckoning her to follow him as he approached the group. One of the younger men said, somewhat sharply, "Elder? Who's this? She's not one of us."

One of the other men, a tall, capable-looking man with greying hair and a face that indicated strong character, stepped forward, holding out one palm toward the young man in a calming gesture as he came to greet the two newcomers.

"Elder," he said, addressing the old man with evident relief, even fondness.

"Wisdom," Elder acknowledged. "I'm glad to see you safe."

"And I you," said Wisdom. Three words only, but sufficient to convey the depth of feeling behind them. "But, like Sandstrider, I don't recognize your friend. How does she come to be here?"

"She's a stranger here. Got caught up in the attack," Elder said succinctly. "She chooses to be known as Memory. I don't yet know where she's from – other than, like me, it's somewhere very far away. Nor do I know how she came to be here. But I've decided to have that conversation with her later. For now, it seemed more important first to regroup here. What's happened? Has everyone made it back?"

A look of anguish briefly crossed Wisdom's face. "Alas, no. Eight of the clan no longer need their names, and ten more have suffered injuries. Windfighter and Stronghand and a few others are going to stay here to monitor the Daleks' movements, and wait for stragglers, but the rest of us need to leave now. We must get the injured to the Refuge and care for them. And for the dead, also... Then we'll talk about how to use what we've learned from today." He turned to Sandstrider. "Is everyone ready to leave?"

Sandstrider nodded. "The Andillor will carry the wounded and the dead for us. And I've assigned a rearguard."

"Excellent..."

While this exchange had been taking place, Memory had been scanning the faces of the watching Tura Ostauri, searching for the one familiar one she was hoping to see, though it seemed unlikely he was there. If he had been, he definitely wouldn't have been sitting quietly in the background while all this was going on.

Though even if he wasn't here in this cave, the fact that this was where she had been sent still meant that he must be here on this planet somewhere...

But wherever he was, he wasn't here now, among this group. She felt her shoulders drop slightly as she came to that conclusion. Then she realized that Elder was watching her, a speculative look on his face. He'd noticed what she was doing, and it was obvious that he'd deduced why she was doing it. But he didn't comment.

He stayed by her as the group broke up into quiet but efficient activity, observing her interest as the dead and injured were loaded onto the backs of the pangolin creatures.

"Those are Andillor," he said, so quietly that no-one else would have been able to hear him. "Another intelligent race native to Ostor, to be found only on this part of the planet. You haven't seen them before." He made it a statement, not a question, and showed no surprise when she simply shook her head in confirmation of his surmise. "They're as threatened by the Daleks as we are, so they've joined forces with us. They're valuable allies."

"So I see." She looked at the purposeful bustle of activity throughout the cave as everyone prepared to leave. "Where is it we're going?"

"The clan site. These tunnels go a long way underground. At the other end they come out into the Valley of the White River. That's where the clan currently resides."

"And I'm guessing the Daleks haven't found it."

"Not yet, at any rate. That mineral in the rocks I mentioned. Ostorin. It's protected them from discovery so far."

"Let's hope it stays that way," she said fervently.

Elder was about to reply, but was diverted by the approach of Wisdom and a fair-haired girl carrying a blazing torch.

"We're ready to leave now," said Wisdom. He addressed Memory. "You're a stranger among us, but I hope you'll accept my invitation to join our company?"

"She has to," Elder said flatly. "I've promised myself a long talk with her."

Memory's eyes touched his face for a moment as she stifled a smile. "Of course, sir," she said to Wisdom. "I'll be honoured."

"You're very gracious," he approved. He'd detected the smile, and his eyes were twinkling. "Memory, this is Droplet, my daughter. We have quite a long journey ahead, but with Elder to escort you and Droplet to light the way, hopefully it won't be too onerous for you. As clan leader my

place is at the head of the group, but I look forward to getting to know you better once we reach the clan site.” He smiled at her. “Elder, a brief word before we depart...?”

He and Elder left them and halted a little way off, immediately deep in conversation, leaving Memory and Droplet to exchange slightly awkward, almost shy smiles with each other.

“We’d better take our place in the line,” Droplet suggested, gesturing with the torch. “Elder will join us as soon as Father’s finished talking to him. This way...”

They took their place at the back of the group, who had formed themselves into ranks of twos or threes, waiting to set off. Memory looked back at the two men, her eyes instinctively going to Elder. What was it about him that kept tugging at the sleeve of her attention...?

“Droplet, who *is* Elder?” she asked suddenly. “Where does he come from?”

Droplet looked across at her father and his friend, and Memory noticed the warmth with which she regarded Elder. “We don’t know,” she admitted. “He’s not from this part of Ostor, and he won’t tell us anything about his past. He wouldn’t even give us any name. In the end Father had to give him one. It was he who chose the name ‘Elder’ for him. But wherever Elder comes from, he’s helped us so much! He’s a very great warrior and battle leader. That is” – she amended her words – “he’s a very great strategist. He’s helped us in our efforts against the Daleks over and over again. But there’s something different about him. Strange.”

“What do you mean, strange?”

“Well...” Droplet’s brow creased as she strove to explain. “He helps us to plan our missions, and he always comes on them with us, but he never fights himself. He won’t use a weapon of any sort. To us, that’s strange. We don’t understand why, and he won’t explain it. But if he wasn’t here – if he hadn’t come to join us – I don’t think things would have gone as well for us as they have so far.” She broke off. “Look, he’s coming back.”

Wisdom and Elder had ceased their conversation and had separated, Wisdom to go to the head of the waiting line and Elder coming back toward them. By the time he’d reached them the line was on the move. Memory glanced back to see the Andillor and their burdens of wounded and dead falling into place behind them, and Sandstrider and his men bringing up the rear. Beyond them, the small group of men who were staying behind to monitor the Daleks’ activity was heading into the tunnel that led to the crevice.

Memory turned her eyes forward again as it became time for her, too, to move off, Droplet and Elder alongside her. Gradually the Cave of Gathering emptied, leaving only the fire in its centre burning alone, waiting for latecomers.

The rough rock tunnels through which they were travelling echoed with the collective shuffle of many feet and murmured conversations, each rock face alternating between light and shadows as the torchbearers spread out among the group passed by. Whenever Memory glanced back, the huge shapes of the Andillor were casting enormous, distorted silhouettes on the passage walls.

“Your father said this would be a long journey,” she said. “How long, exactly?”

“Not so very long. You probably didn’t notice, but it wasn’t far off dawn when we started out, and it’ll be daylight by the time we get back,” Droplet assured her, readjusting the carrying strap of the rifle slung across her shoulder with her one free hand. She looked across to Elder, who was walking on the other side of Memory, and her tone changed. “Elder, was there any word of the Wanderer? You haven’t seen him, have you?”

"No," said Elder brusquely. Then he relented a little, and added, somewhat drily, "Don't worry, he'll be all right. That young man is always all right."

"Who's the Wanderer?" Memory enquired.

There was a hint of hero worship about Droplet's smile. "Oh, he's marvellous! He's someone else who came to help us fight the Daleks. He's brilliant, he really is!"

Memory looked at her with arrested attention. "Is he? What else is he? What's he like?"

"Oh, he's tall, slim, dark hair, dark eyes. So good-looking!" Droplet said, with something suspiciously close to an adoring sigh. "And he's got such energy! He never walks if he can run, and he's never silent if he can talk. And he's full of brilliant ideas about fighting the Daleks, isn't he, Elder?"

"He can certainly be quite inventive with his suggestions," Elder agreed in a studiedly neutral tone of voice.

"I look forward to meeting him," said Memory, striving to emulate Elder's dispassionate manner despite the suddenly increased rate of her heartbeat. "Is he one of your clan?"

"No, but he turned up not long after we realized what the Daleks were planning. Word must have spread quickly. Lots of people came to help us, once they heard about it. Like Elder. And like you!"

Memory looked uncomfortable. "I'm afraid that's not quite right. I didn't know about the Daleks."

"Oh," said Droplet, slightly taken aback. "Then why are you here?"

Memory could feel Elder's eyes intent on her as he waited for her answer.

"I had a message from someone telling me I needed to come here, so I came. But they didn't tell me anything about there being Daleks here, or that you were fighting them." She paused, then went on, with determination, "But now that I do know, I'll do whatever I feel able to do to help." She smiled a little ruefully. "Not that that may be much. I know about the Daleks, but I've never had to face them before. Armed conflict isn't something I've ever experienced, or taken part in."

Droplet impulsive reached out to take her hand and squeeze it. "I think you're being very brave."

Memory smiled wryly. "Do you? Well, you go right on thinking that."

She knew that Elder was still studying her, assessing everything she said. She wondered why he was quite as interested in her as he evidently was. She couldn't help feeling that the conversation he intended to have with her promised to be an interesting one. *Very interesting...*

The Refuge

As they finally emerged from the cave system into the clear, sharp light of early morning, Memory had her first sight of the Valley of the White River.

The tunnel mouth opened halfway up a very steep hillside, with a rough path leading down to the valley floor. As she stopped for a moment to stare, she decided it was like looking at a scene from the Mojave Desert in Arizona or New Mexico. A vast flat-topped mesa stretched out to the left, its sheer wall marching off into the distance ahead. At its foot, a flattish expanse through which tumbled the river after which the valley was presumably named, white-flecked wherever its flow was interrupted by boulders. To the right, a gentler upward slope, beyond the crest of which the dry earth undulated away for many miles, its surface punctuated only by spindly trees and clumps of

bushes. The main difference from the deserts to which she was used was the colour. The rocks of this place, seen in full light, were a dark rust brown, and the sand, or soil, which it generated was only a few shades lighter. And now that she could also see the people around her in full light, she realized that the capes they wore, made of some light, loosely-woven cloth, were dyed in similar colours and patterns; if one crouched down motionless among the rocks or even out in the open, the camouflage would be almost flawless.

Abruptly another realization swept over her, and she took a step backward, her hand going out behind her in search of something to support her.

Droplet was already on her way down the path, but Elder had glanced back, and immediately saw she was in distress.

"What's the matter?" he rasped, retracing his steps to reach her.

"Sorry – it's..." She swallowed. She'd gone pale, she could feel it. "The drop..." She gestured at the steep slope that plunged sharply away from the edge of the path for hundreds of metres. "I'm not good with heights."

"Evidently," he commented, not without a hint of sympathy. He glanced beyond her. "But you can't stay here. You're holding up the Andillor."

Memory looked round and realized that while the path was wide enough for a single Andillor, it wasn't wide enough for an Andillor and a human at the same time. And they were queued behind her, waiting to bear their burdens of wounded and dead to the clan site. She looked up into the beautiful, toffee-brown eyes of the first Andillor, waiting behind her.

"I'm sorry," she said, automatically, her cheeks colouring. "I didn't realize... I didn't mean to get in your way."

"You are in distress," said the creature, in a deep, unexpectedly beautiful voice. "There is nothing to forgive."

"I... Thank you..." Memory said, stumbling over her words.

Elder studied her for a moment. Then he said, "Stay on my left. I'll walk on the outside of you. You'll be safe."

She looked at him gratefully. What was it about this ageing, careworn man that engendered such trust, such confidence in her? So many thoughts crowded through her mind that she could hardly distinguish all of them. All she said, with feeling, was, "Thank you," and, taking a deep breath, she let him escort her down the path.

The hillside they were traversing lay at a right angle to the wall of rock that followed the course of the river off into the distance, so they were now heading directly toward it as they descended. Glancing at it from time to time, Memory suddenly realized that what she had taken to be an unbroken face of rock was not. There was a long, horizontal recess in it, a huge shelf going back into the cliff, but with an overhang that masked what lay behind until you were low enough to see underneath it. On the shelf she could just about make out a collection of what might be tents, which she suspected were coloured to use the same camouflage as the capes worn by the tribe. But she had the feeling this was not a permanent settlement. This was a temporary arrangement.

"Is that the Refuge?" she asked, slightly breathless from the tension engendered by her awareness of the drop to her right.

"Yes," Elder confirmed. "Before the Daleks came to this planet, most of the Tura Ostauri lived as nomads. Now, to survive, they've been forced to move under cover, and stay there. That isn't

natural to them. But then," he added, with that dry humour he occasionally displayed, "neither is being invaded by Daleks. It's why this place is called the Refuge."

"Don't the Daleks ever come this way?"

"There's the occasional aerial patrol, but so far they've all been at an altitude that means they've missed seeing anything. The overhang protects the Refuge from being seen from above, and the ostorin in the rocks prevents them from detecting what's inside it. Also, it's far enough away from where they're based not to merit regular monitoring. But the clan don't let their guard down, just in case. There are always lookouts posted." He glanced at her, his eyes tinged with humour. "Nearly there now. You'll be able to relax soon."

Memory looked about her, letting her eyes become accustomed to the difference between the bright, sunlit blue of the outside sky and the reduced light level it could send into the interior of the huge cavern. There was bustle everywhere she looked: the relieved happiness of families reuniting, murmured expressions of concern for the wounded now being disembarked from the huge backs of the Andillor, suppressed grief from those receiving their dead. The Tura Ostauri were clearly not given to outcry, but there was a general muted murmur in which both joy and sadness could be detected.

As she studied the scene, she realized there was something – or, rather, someone – missing from it.

"No children," she commented. "And no old people. Or not many, anyway."

Elder was still at her side, but whether through solicitousness or a determination not to let her out of his sight until they'd had the talk he was clearly set upon having, she couldn't quite decide. Perhaps it was both. The two weren't mutually exclusive, after all.

"Once the Daleks arrived, they attacked any encampment they encountered," he said grimly. "Now, most Tura Ostauri of fighting age are here in the Refuge. The rest – the very young, the very old, a few warriors to guard them – are hiding in caves far away from here, beyond the likelihood of Dalek reprisals. Usually when Daleks invade they wipe out the entire population of a planet. On Ostor, what they want is in one very specific location, and they haven't bothered to exercise their genocidal tendencies beyond the immediate vicinity. Not so far, anyway."

He didn't seem inclined to expand on that explanation for the time being, so she stifled her questions and – ostensibly, at least – continued to observe the activity in the cavern. In reality, she was covertly studying her companion, still trying to pin down that elusive sense of familiarity that he evoked in her.

Their burdens delivered, the Andillor were beginning to leave, but not all by the same route. Memory realized that as well as the rough stone pathway at this end of the cave, there was another at the far end, and also two tunnels towards the back, in the dimmest reaches.

"Why are they going?" she asked, watching the huge, gentle creatures ambling towards their chosen exits. "And where?"

"It's a matter of courtesy," said Elder.

"Courtesy?"

"They're both perceptive and considerate. Familiar with human customs. They'll give the tribe time to settle. Then they'll come back. In a while. To see what else they can do to help. It's their way." He broke off as one of the Andillor neared them. Memory suddenly realized that this was not

happenstance; it was purposely coming to speak to them. It halted in front of them and bowed its body so that its face was on a level with hers.

"You are recovered from your distress?" it asked.

"Yes. Thank you. Yes," Memory said, a little uncertainly. She was suddenly aware of experiencing a strange sensation – in her head, in her mind, though she couldn't pin the source down, exactly. But it wasn't an unpleasant sensation. Indeed, it was a calming, reassuring one, though it was also slightly distracting. She tried to concentrate. "Are you the one who spoke to me before?"

"I am. I am Raalana."

"Thank you... Raalana. It's... kind of you to ask. I'm..." She hesitated, remembering that she must give the name she had chosen to be known as, not her real one. "I'm Memory."

"You choose to be called Memory," the creature contradicted her kindly, his brown eyes – for somehow, without knowing how, she now knew his gender – regarding her closely. "But it is not your name. And you are not from this place. You have come searching."

Memory looked at the Andillor with suddenly widened eyes. "How did you know that?"

"Your purpose is strong in your mind," he said. "I feel it. I see it. Be tranquil, Memory. The one you search for is closer than you think."

Without looking at him, she could sense that Elder was suddenly paying more attention.

"You feel it?" he repeated. "You see it?"

Raalana turned those beautiful brown eyes onto him. "As I see and feel you, also, Elder," he said gently. "But you already know how that is possible." He looked at both of them. "We will speak of this again. But now I must go with my brothers and sisters. We will return when we are needed." He leaned forward and gently touched Memory's forehead with the tip of one of his soft-skinned, blunt fingers. "Farewell for now, Small Sister." He turned, and ambled away along the lip of the rock shelf toward the far pathway down into the valley.

As he went, Memory could feel that odd sensation in her mind fading. She turned to Elder, perplexed. "What did he mean, he sees it, he feels it?"

He gave her a strange look, but didn't get the chance to answer. Droplet came running toward them, and seized Memory's hand.

"Memory! Elder! There you are!" she exclaimed, her face wreathed in smiles. "Come with me!"

She began to pull insistently, and Memory could only surrender to her urgency with a half-smile. But when she glanced back at Elder her eyes were full of questions. He said nothing, but followed as Droplet drew her away into the maze of tents, finally stopping breathlessly before one of them and the tall, serene woman who stood there, silver beginning to thread the natural gold of the hair that fell to her waist.

"Memory, this is my mother, Goldhair," said Droplet, with the same air of triumph she might have shown at being able to display a valuable prize to her parent.

"To the hearth, to the home, be welcome," said Goldhair, with a smile for her daughter's enthusiasm. The phrase was clearly a ritual one, but the way she said it robbed it of all formality, making it a true welcome. "Droplet's told me how you come to be here. I hope you'll share our midday meal with us? And you, Elder?"

He didn't answer; his attention had been caught by something happening at the edge of the cave, where the path emerged up onto the shelf. People were gathering there, running to join the

growing crowd, an excited murmur rising in volume. Memory couldn't make out what was being said, but Droplet suddenly stiffened, her eyes wide and eager.

"The Wanderer!" she exclaimed joyously. "It's the Wanderer! He's back!"

She immediately took to her heels, weaving between the tents toward the growing throng. Goldhair and Elder exchanged a look that Memory interpreted as patient tolerance of the excitable young and their tendency to hero-worship. Then Elder turned to her.

"You'd better come," he said. "You might want to meet him."

I might, indeed, she thought. If he's who I think he is...

"You go," said Goldhair with quiet amusement. "I'll still be here when everyone's calmed down. Shall I take your cloak until you need it again, Elder?"

He nodded, unfastened it at the neck, and handed it to her with a small bow of thanks. Memory vaguely registered that his clothes weren't like those of the Tura Ostauri, but let the thought go. Elder was right; she did want to meet the Wanderer. Very much.

They headed toward the centre of the excitement. Even those – mostly the older adults, Memory noted – who hadn't abandoned their tents to join the growing crowd kept glancing over to see what was happening at the lip of the shelf. Droplet was there, on the outskirts of the group; she saw them coming, and waved to them to join her.

"Memory, it's the Wanderer!" she exclaimed excitedly. "He's back! He's safe!"

Memory smiled at her, mimicking her enthusiasm. Droplet smiled back, then returned her attention to the head of the pathway, hardly to be seen through the jostling horde.

"He must be quite someone, to provoke this sort of reaction," Memory murmured, hoping she could keep the anticipation she was feeling out of her voice. There was something about the look Elder gave her that made her wonder if she'd been entirely successful.

"You'll have gathered there are a great many people who'd agree with that," he said, without any particular inflection.

Suddenly there was a rise in the buzz of voices from the crowd, which began to split apart to make way for the man who had now reached the head of the stair and strode into the middle of the tumult, waving cheerfully at everyone. The crowd flowed around him, enclosing him in their circle.

"Wanderer!" Droplet shouted, managing to make her voice heard above the hubbub.

"Where've you been? We've been worried about you!"

The newcomer located the source of the shout among all the noise, and grinned at her.

"Me? Oh, you don't need to worry about me!" he declared expansively. "I'm always all right, you know that!"

He was just as Droplet had described him – tall, slim and charismatic, full of an energy that seemed to be responsible for the sparkle in his brown eyes and even the way his hair stood up in dark spikes. A man whose mere presence drew every eye toward him.

A man Memory had never seen before in her life.

He was the Wanderer, and her hopes were shattered.

Because he was not, after all, the Doctor.

The Watchpoint

She couldn't keep her face from congealing into disappointment, nor her shoulders from drooping. In her peripheral vision she could see Elder watching her, and she knew he was reading her

accurately, but she couldn't prevent him from seeing what he so plainly could. Then her peripheral vision failed her as her eyes began to blur with incipient tears. She felt his hand take a gentle hold of her upper arm.

"You're looking for someone, aren't you?" he said quietly. "And it's not him."

She couldn't speak, but her face evidently spoke for her.

"Come away," was all he said, but there was a gruff kindness implicit in his voice. She obeyed without question, swallowing hard. No-one seemed to notice their withdrawal. He led her through the maze of tents, away from the hubbub, which began to quieten behind them as they increased their distance from it.

She cast one last look over her shoulder; through the crowd she saw the Wanderer had gone to Wisdom, and was whispering something in his ear with a suddenly very serious face, before switching his smile back on as he once again waved at everyone. Then she tore her eyes away and focused on Elder, and on following him.

As they wended their way through the tents, some of the residents looked at her with a curiosity they couldn't entirely suppress – Elder they knew, but not this young woman with the tense, pale face and brimming eyes – but none of them attempted to speak, though sympathy for her distress was detectable on some of their faces despite their ignorance of its cause.

She realized Elder was heading for one of the tunnels at the back of the cave. At its mouth stood a small frame, about a metre and a half high, covered on three sides with thick, dark cloth; the fourth side, which faced the tunnel, was open. As they came to a halt beside it, the glow of a small fire became visible inside. Stacked along the sides were a number of wooden torches. Elder stepped inside the enclosed space, picked up one of the torches and thrust its head into the fire. When he re-emerged, the torch had been ignited.

"They have to keep their fires masked so there's no possibility of the light being seen from outside," he commented almost casually as he walked past her into the tunnel. As he didn't seem to expect a reply, she simply followed him into the darkness.

They walked for what seemed a long way, though she had no way of estimating how far. Elder remained silent, and she was grateful; it gave her the time she needed to recover herself. After a while she began to feel she would be able to speak rationally to him, and ventured the experiment.

"Is this the way the Andillor went?" she asked, in a low voice.

"No. They took the other tunnel. It leads down into a valley behind the cliffs. They can come and go unseen."

"Then where are we going?"

"The Watchpoint. I have something to show you," was all he said.

At last a hint of daylight began to glimmer along the walls of the tunnel, revealing a black shape huddled against one side. Another tent? A small one. Then a second shape emerged from it – whether man or woman, it was impossible to tell. As they drew nearer, the flickering light of Elder's torch revealed that it was a young man who was watching them approach, a rifle held casually in one hand, its muzzle pointing at the ground. The obvious deduction was that he – or someone, at any rate – must be posted on watch here all the time. Watching – or guarding against – what?

"Oh. Elder, it's you," he said, his pleasure tinged with relief. His eyes flicked curiously toward Memory, then returned questioningly to the old man.

"Sandrunner," Elder greeted him. "This is Memory, a friend of mine. I want to show her the view."

The words were innocuous enough in themselves, but his tone was laden with black humour, to which Sandrunner responded with a matching snort of laughter.

"Have you got a farviewer with you?" he asked; when Elder shook his head, he ducked back into his tent and re-emerged with a gadget that was similar enough to a telescope for its purpose to be instantly recognizable. He handed it to Elder. "Here, borrow mine. I wouldn't want you to miss any of the finer details, Memory." He smiled at her, but irony was still evident in his tone. She smiled back, but with one eyebrow raised, to show she had registered the fact that there was some sort of caveat to what she was about to be shown. That produced a genuine smile from him.

"You look – familiar, somehow," she said. "Were you with us in the Cave of Gathering?"

"It's his brother you remember," said Elder briefly. "Sandstrider."

"Ah," said Memory, and smiled at Sandrunner again, but he was looking at Elder with sudden intensity. The old man nodded at him reassuringly.

"Don't worry, he's safe and sound," he said, and Sandrunner relaxed, relieved.

He watched as the young woman followed Elder to the very end of the tunnel and out into the daylight, wondering who she was, where she came from. Elder didn't confer his companionship readily; she must be a special case. Sandrunner had no intention of intruding on them to satisfy his curiosity, though. Although it was his job to keep watch here, to make sure no-one approached unchallenged, and to keep an eye on what Elder had so sardonically described as "the view", he had a strong feeling that Elder intended a privacy for this encounter that wasn't achievable in the main cave.

Sandrunner also suspected that Elder's young friend didn't know about what she was shortly going to see. He wondered how she was going to react when she did. He sat down, his back propped against the rock, and waited to see how things went out there on the Watchpoint, his rifle resting on his lap.

Sandrunner's rifle was on Memory's mind as she and Elder emerged from the tunnel onto a wide, rough-floored, flattish platform enclosed on two sides by shoulders of rock, the right-hand one sloping gently downwards, the left-hand one a vertical wall that stretched for about half the length of the platform before ending in an almost artificially straight edge, beyond which the remainder of the platform extended out over the drop beyond.

"The Watchpoint," said Elder, coming to a halt. "Better not get too near the edge," he added gruffly. "Not with your acrophobia."

"Thanks for the warning," she said, coming up on his left and stopping beside him. She could see how the place had got its name. Ahead and to the right, the same flat-topped mesa that in the mass of rock behind them housed the Refuge extended on this side away into the distance, its edge curving swiftly around from the place where they stood to become more or less a straight line of cliff face ahead, stretching away toward the horizon. Every now and then fractures in the rockface indicated where small side canyons emerged from it, opening out into the narrow valley that followed the line of the mesa. That valley was flanked on the left by a series of more gently sloping hills of various heights. You could see for many, many kilometres from here.

Memory suddenly realized that that down in the valley she could see things moving. Things that were round and brown, rolling at a steady speed along the valley floor. A bit like tumbleweeds, except that... She stared. That colour – she recognized it. Were they...?

"What are those?" she almost demanded, pointing.

Elder followed the direction of her finger. "A group of Andillor," he said. "When they want to travel any kind of distance, they curl up into a ball and roll. It gets them about more quickly than using their limbs."

"I see." Memory acknowledged the information with a nod of comprehension. Then, tearing her eyes away from the rolling brown spheres, she scanned the landscape once again. The view was admittedly quite spectacular, but she wondered what there was in that view that he so particularly wanted her to see.

And the implications of that rifle were nagging at her... She turned to look at Elder.

"Something I don't understand," she said abruptly. "You said the Tura Ostauri were nomads. How do they have the technology to produce something as sophisticated as rifles? Or that." She gestured at the farviewer he was holding.

"I said *most* of them lived as nomads," Elder corrected her. "Don't mistake simplicity of life for simplicity of intelligence or lack of education. Being brought up in a tent doesn't prevent you from being a scientist or a mathematician or an engineer. You simply go about it a different way. If you're a smith, your skills are no less effective because you build your forge and exercise your craft in a cave and not a built dwelling. And I wouldn't exactly describe their rifles as sophisticated. But then, they were only intended to be used for hunting for food. Now the Tura Ostauri are putting them to another use. Protecting themselves. Or trying to. Projectile rifles against Dalek guns isn't exactly an even match. They might as well use peashooters."

That last word made Memory do a mental double-take. It was a word her grandparents had used to use; her grandfather had talked of playing with one when he was very young. But it was uniquely an Earth word, surely? How did Elder come to be using it...?

Unless – she suddenly caught her breath – *unless!* – he'd been talking to someone who *had* been to Earth, and who'd know that word! All right, the Wanderer hadn't been the Doctor, but the Doctor still must be here; he could have talked to Elder and used that phrase, and the old man might be quoting him. That would explain it.

But as that train of thought shot through her head in a split second, she saw Elder's head jerk slightly as his attention focused, apparently – and unaccountably – on her hand, her right hand. Why? She automatically lifted it to look at it herself, and realized that at some point the sleeve of her shirt had ridden up her forearm a few centimetres. In so doing, it had revealed the thick leather strap of the vortex manipulator around her right wrist. The vortex manipulator that Elder was now staring at so fixedly.

"That's an interesting-looking device," he said, with studied casualness. "What does it do?"

"That?" she said, taken unaware and fumbling for a plausible explanation; given what he'd just said about the technological level of the Tura Ostauri, she wasn't sure how much she could reveal without provoking questions that might be difficult to answer. "Oh, it – helps to get me to places where I need to be."

"Does it, indeed?" he said softly. "I see..." After a brief pause, he went on, "Well, while I'm on the subject of things I'd like to understand, I have something else I want to ask you."

"What's that?"

"There's something about the way you keep looking at me," he said, unexpectedly. "In fact, I'd go so far as to say you keep staring at me. Why?"

Faced with such a direct question, she instinctively gave him a direct answer. "Because, somehow, I – it's strange, and I can't explain it, but – I can't shake the feeling that I know you from somewhere. That I've met you before."

That earned her a quizzical look. "Hardly likely," he observed.

"I know," she agreed. "Reason tells me I can't have seen you before. But there it is. Though I feel sure I'd remember that face if I had."

"Ah, so it's my fascinating face," he said drily.

"It certainly strikes me as memorable," she said frankly. Then she added, more diffidently, "Forgive me for saying this, but – it strikes me as a face that's seen a great deal of life."

"And a great deal of death." His tone was suddenly bleak.

She experienced an instant and intuitive urge to offer him comfort – *why, especially?* – but somehow she had the feeling he wouldn't thank her for it. Instead, she said, carefully, "That's why it's a face that – I think – could tell a lot of stories."

Elder shook his head sombrely. "Once, perhaps. But not now. Now all the stories have merged together into just one. And it's not one with a happy ending."

Before she could think of a response to that, he changed the subject. "I think it's time to show you what I brought you here to see," he said decisively. "Here."

He indicated a wall of rock on their left which blocked the view in that direction. In one place there was a vertical crack running downwards, about thirty centimetres wide, too narrow to usefully see anything through unless one got very close to it. He walked toward it, and she followed him.

"Look through there," he said.

Obediently she approached the gap, looked through it – and her eyes widened.

The ranks of gently undulating hills, whose first slopes she had already seen, marched away from the mesa for what she estimated might be fifteen or more kilometres before giving way to a flat plain which stretched on out to where the horizon met the sky, serrated by complex outcrops of dark brown rock. Their configuration seemed familiar.

"Is that where we were last night?" she said, striving to keep her voice casual.

Elder grunted a monosyllable of assent.

"I didn't see – that thing – there."

"As I recall, you were a little distracted at the time."

"And it was dark," she agreed. "I suppose that would explain why I might overlook something like that." She continued to stare. "You know, there's a word for that thing. Only a very small word, but it absolutely nails it."

"Oh? And what word is that?"

"*Big*. That thing is *big*."

And it was.

Rising from the plain, facing her, was a simply enormous structure, towering above the hills in front of it; at this distance she couldn't trust herself to gauge its dimensions, though if forced to make an estimate, she'd guess about ten kilometres by five by one. Her first thought was that it resembled an abacus, a vast, rectangular abacus, with rows of huge rods running horizontally its full length. But the rods were packed solid from end to end, threaded not with coloured circular beads but thousands upon thousands of flat, lozenge-shaped tablets of what looked like pure, clear ice. Except that it couldn't be ice, not on a desert planet such as this, out in the open and exposed to the full strength of the sun.

She felt a nudge against her arm, and realized Elder was offering her the farviewer. With a nod of thanks, she took it. It was a very efficient device; even at that distance, as soon as she looked through it the details of the structure leapt at her, assaulting her eyes with their clarity.

The whole thing rested in a huge cradle that kept it upright. The rods and the frame that housed the tablets were made of some kind of silver metal. There seemed to be a vast flat sheet of the same metal resting all along the top of the frame, as if protecting it from above, like a huge overhead shield, doing the job of an umbrella. About halfway along the bottom edge of the frame was a rectangular box-like structure – presumably some kind of control room – which if scaled against its surroundings was perhaps a couple of hundred metres long. There were no viewing ports, but there were two entrances, spaced equidistantly along the length of the rectangle, both open and with ramps leading from them down to the ground. Mounted on the sides of the vast frame were two large mechanisms that were clearly propulsion units of some kind, obviously designed to lift it from the ground so it could be flown elsewhere.

None of this enabled her to glean any clue as to its purpose. But one thing was certain; that purpose wasn't going to be beneficent. Because everywhere – everywhere – there were Daleks. Hundreds of them, both on the ground and in the air, travelling up and down the ramps, in and out of the entrances, hovering by the tablets as if monitoring the quality of their installation, or flying about in patrols.

Memory lowered the farviewer and looked sombrely at Elder. "What is that?" she asked in a low voice.

"The Daleks have named it the Death Lens." He took the farviewer back and raised it to his own eyes, studying the structure and its attendants for himself. "If they did poetry, they'd probably think that a most poetic name."

"What are they planning to do with it?"

"It's made from something that only exists on this planet. Or that did exist. It was a completely unique accident of geology. Lightgem. The Tura Ostauri call it the Crystal of the Sun. The only place it occurred. A vast extrusion of a very, very pure type of transparent material, very strong – much stronger than normal crystal. I've no idea how the Daleks came to know of its existence. Ostor isn't the sort of world they'd trouble themselves with, as a rule. But somehow they learned about lightgem, and when they realized its primary property, they came here to make a weapon out of it."

"What property?"

"I'm sure you can tell me what happens when a magnifying glass is trained on a pile of dead leaves on a sunny day," said Elder grimly. "The Crystal of the Sun focuses light a hundred times more intensely than ordinary crystal, or glass, or anything similar. The Death Lens is made up of thousands of individual lenses of lightgem, each one separately controlled, but collectively able to be aligned in any direction. Position it at the required distance in front of a star, let the light from the star hit the lenses to be intensified a hundred times over, then redirect the beam of light toward the target. The resultant heat will fry whatever it's focused on. From a single ship to a battle fleet, from a city to a continent to an entire planet, depending on how many of the lightgem lenses you align on your target. That's what the Death Lens has been built to do."

He handed her back the farviewer. "Look at the hills behind it."

She took the device and raised it to her eyes again, focusing beyond the Lens itself to what lay behind. On the left, the plain started straight away, but on the right lay a peninsula of the final

slopes of the hills, dropping down to join the plain. There was something different about the rock there.

She lowered the farviewer and looked at Elder. "Those rocks. They're not brown. They're black."

He nodded. "The Lens has been positioned to align with the path of the sun during the day, so that its rays pass directly over the top of the Lens rather than through it as far as is possible. But at certain times, at certain angles, sunlight catches it slightly on this side and gets focused on those slopes. That blackening is the result. There used to be plants there, animals, insects. Just like there are in any desert environment. Growing, breeding, living. There's no life on those slopes now. Even before they've reached the stage of testing their new weapon" – his voice was filled with loathing – "the Daleks have begun to deal out death."

He fell silent, and, looking at his face, Memory didn't care to break that silence. She waited for him to speak again. When he did, it was as if he'd forgotten she was there, and was speaking only to himself.

"The Death Lens... That word again. Death. Always death. There's so much life in the universe, but all the Daleks are interested in is death. The ultimate enactors of genocide. Death to every creature that isn't a Dalek. Death until there's no more life left to kill." He spoke heavily, with the voice of a man who had, indeed – in his own words – seen a great deal of death. "And somehow, it's got to be stopped."

"What has? Death?"

The old man snorted derisively. "You can't stop death. Death comes to everyone and everything, eventually. It's one of the constants of the universe. Death can't be stopped." He looked round at her, and suddenly his eyes, his voice, were harsh and intense. "But killing? Killing can be stopped. After all, what keeps a war going? What does it feed on? Killing. Keep killing the killers, don't stop doing it, and you can keep a war going for as long as there are lives to take. That's what has to stop. Not death, but killing. No more killing." His voice, along with his passion, suddenly rose in volume. "No more killing! NO – MORE!"

She watched in deep distress as he raised his forearms and slammed both his fists against the rock face as he shouted the last two words.

What she hadn't realized was that those two words were going to be the trigger for an explosion of memories. It was like a dam breaching in her head, pouring images into her brain, rising like a flood to blank out her material sight and overwhelm even the eyes of her mind.

The sensation was so intense that it was almost a physical pain; she gasped, and staggered sideways, her left shoulder colliding with the rock face, both hands clutching her head.

She felt somebody else's hands seize her shoulders, heard a voice penetrating the maelstrom of information whirling in her mind. "Memory! What is it? What's wrong?" it was saying.

No, not *it*... *He*... *He* was saying...

The spinning images began to slow, and she was able to start processing them, comprehending them. And together, they brought her to the point of stunned realization of what they added up to.

She opened her eyes. She was staring directly into those of the man grasping her shoulders. Slowly, she lowered her hands from her head as the confusion subsided, but because of the knowledge it had left behind she knew her own face must be wearing an expression of nothing short of shock.

"It's *you*!" she breathed. Then, louder, "It *is* you! *That's* who you are!" Her eyes were wide and filled with astonishment. "No wonder I thought I knew you!"

"Memory, what just happened to you? Are you all right?" he demanded.

"Right?" she repeated, seizing on the word as if it were an anchor to stabilize her spinning mind. "No, *you*. *You* were right. I did come here looking for someone," she went on, speaking rapidly. She had to explain this to him; he had to know what she'd discovered, urgently. "Someone told me that this person needed me, and they sent me here, so I knew he must be here somewhere. And when I got here, I knew he was, that he had to be. And I've only just realized why I knew. It's because I can *understand*!"

"What do you mean, understand?" he demanded.

"What everyone's saying! The Tura Ostauri. The Andillor. I wouldn't be able to understand them, if the person I was looking for wasn't here. But he is. It's *you*."

He dropped his hands from her shoulders and stared at her as if she'd gone mad. "What are you talking about?" he rasped.

"*You*, Doctor," she said. "You and the TARDIS. Its translation circuits. I'm talking about *you*."

Council of War

His eyes widened, but he had no chance to respond. Sandrunner had seen that something was wrong, and he was hurrying toward them.

"Elder? What's happening? Is she all right?"

"I don't know," said the man who Memory now knew to be the Doctor, slowly. "I – think so..."

There was something about the way the girl and the old man were staring at each other almost wildly, their eyes locked together, that Sandrunner didn't understand.

"Memory? What is it? Are you ill?" he persisted.

With a visible effort she dragged her eyes away from Elder's face and looked at Sandrunner, that strange shocked expression still frozen on her face. Then she attempted a somewhat crooked smile.

"No, I'm not ill," she said, slowly and somewhat stiltedly. "I remembered something, that's all."

"*Remembered* something? And it did *that* to you?" His incredulity was understandable.

"People talk about recollection hitting you," she said, beginning to sound more natural. "Now I know exactly what they mean. That was a real piledriver job."

She looked at the Doctor again. When he'd shed his cloak and given it into Goldhair's hands she'd subconsciously noted that he wasn't wearing the long-sleeved shirt and full, loose-fitting trousers worn by the Tura Ostauri, but because he had already told her he was not one of them she hadn't given the matter further thought. Now, as she looked at his clothes, all suddenly so familiar – the ancient leather coat with its open flaps revealing the bandolier underneath, the velvet waistcoat, the knee-length leggings, the tattered scarf loosely wound about his throat – she wondered how it could possibly have taken her so long to realize who he was.

She also wondered how he was going to react when she told him how she knew what she knew.

Sandrunner was looking at her blankly. He didn't understand what she was talking about.

"What's a 'piledriver'?" he asked, but neither she nor Elder answered him; they were staring at each other again. He didn't know what to do or say next.

The need for a decision was taken from him when an urgent voice from the tunnel mouth made all three of them swing round to face the speaker.

“Elder! You’re needed! Right away!”

It was Sandstrider, panting with the speed which he had made in order to bring his message. As they came together the brothers briefly put a hand on each other’s shoulder by way of greeting, but Sandstrider’s attention was focused on the man who Memory now knew beyond all certainty to be the Doctor, however he chose to be named by the Tura Ostauri.

“What’s happened?” the Doctor demanded harshly.

“Wisdom needs to talk to you,” Sandstrider told him. “The Wanderer’s told him something that he wants to consult you about. I don’t know what, but whatever it is, it’s urgent.”

The Doctor nodded. “Then we’d better go,” he acquiesced, but turned to give Memory an enigmatic look. “We’re still going to have that talk,” he said flatly. “This has to come first, but don’t think we aren’t going to resume this conversation later.”

“Of course we are. That’s exactly what I want to happen,” she said, striving to sound neutral, but despite her attempt Sandrunner was still looking at them with puzzlement written all over his face, and even Sandstrider seemed to sense that something important had been interrupted by the delivery of his message. But neither brother spoke.

“Well, we’d better not keep Wisdom waiting,” said the Doctor abruptly, and strode toward the tunnel entrance, everyone else in his wake. When they reached it, Sandrunner halted. Council or no, his duty was to stay on watch. He picked up the burning torch that Sandstrider had brought with him and handed it back to him.

“Stay safe,” he said.

“No need for farewells,” Sandstrider told him. “Blackfeather and Sunwatcher are on their way to relieve you.” His eyes gleamed for a moment. “At their age, they can’t run as fast as I can... But as soon as they arrive to take over, you’re to follow us. Wisdom wants you back, as soon as you can make it. Whatever he’s planning, looks like you’re going to be a part of it. So the quicker you are, the sooner you’ll know what’s going on, yes?” Once again he grasped his brother’s shoulder, this time with a smile. Then he turned, and led the way toward the tunnel.

He had no idea what had passed between Elder and Memory before his arrival. But somehow, given the atmosphere he’d sensed between them, he was not surprised that, even when passing Blackfeather and Sunwatcher heading for the Watchpoint, neither the old man nor the girl spoke a single word the entire way back.

Once back in the Refuge, Sandstrider led them to an opening at the far end that Memory hadn’t noticed before. It led into a small cave, evidently used for private conferences, in which a low shelf had been cut into the rock around the walls to be used as seating. Awaiting them there were Wisdom, the Wanderer, and two Andillor. Wisdom raised his eyebrows slightly at the sight of Memory; not unwelcoming, just slightly surprised, as if he hadn’t expected her to be included in this meeting.

“Your young friend is still with you, Elder,” he observed tentatively.

“Yes. Where I go, she goes,” the Doctor stated matter-of-factly.

Wisdom accepted this assertion calmly. “Then sit, please, both of you,” he said, and gestured at the seating shelf opposite him. “We have much to discuss. The Wanderer has brought grave news.”

He, Sandstrider and the Wanderer sat on one side of the chamber, the Doctor on the other, with Memory beside him. She looked at the Andillor, who, having no need for human-style seating, stood

between them. They looked identical; there should have been no way she could tell them apart. Yet – she could.

“Raalana,” she said in greeting to the nearer of the two. He leaned toward her and touched one of his blunt fingers to her forehead.

“Greetings, Small Sister,” he said. “You recognized me.”

“I saw it, I felt it,” she said, with an almost conspiratorial smile, knowing that he would understand she was telling him she’d now realized how she’d known it was him. How she had come by a degree of telepathic ability was something else to tell the Doctor about, when that much-postponed conversation finally took place.

“Ah,” said Raalana, with satisfaction. “I see that you have learned much since we last met. Did I not say that the object of your search was nearer than you thought?”

“You did. And you were right. Much nearer.” She was keenly aware of the Doctor following their exchange intently, and it was all she could do to keep herself from glancing at him. Instead she looked enquiringly at the other Andillor.

“Uaalana is one of my nest brothers,” Raalana explained gently.

Uaalana bowed to her. “Greetings, Memory, Small Sister of my nest brother.”

“I think we need to set the social niceties aside and listen to Wisdom, don’t you?” said the Doctor, slightly acidly. “He didn’t summon us back here just so you two could have a cosy chat.”

Raalana bowed his head silently. Unruffled, Memory nodded amiably and turned toward Wisdom, who inclined his head graciously. Then his face became serious, and he began to speak.

“Thanks to the Wanderer and Uaalana, we now know what the Daleks intend to do with the Death Lens,” he said, looking around at all of them. He turned to Memory. “The purpose of the raid you were caught up in last night was to gather intelligence about the Daleks’ intentions. While the rest of us provided a distraction” – he turned his attention to the group as a whole – “the Wanderer and Uaalana were able to infiltrate the construction area.”

“How did they manage it without the Daleks detecting them?” Memory enquired.

“Andillor scales contain a high degree of ostorin,” the Doctor told her. “Which, as you know, interferes with the Daleks’ scanners. And the cloaks of the Tura Ostauri are also impregnated with it.”

The Wanderer’s natural vivacity had thus far been replaced by a grave intensity, but now, just for a moment, his eyes sparkled with mischief.

“I took a length of cloth big enough to blanket me completely,” he explained. “Uaalana delivered me into the danger area. All I had to do then was lie on my stomach with the cloth spread over me, and do a bit of surreptitious crawling from time to time, making sure I was totally covered by it whenever I moved. Kept to the shadows, lay totally still and made like a rock if a Dalek came anywhere near. Totally camouflaged. Even when things quietened down, the Daleks never knew I was there. Same process in reverse to get away again.”

“And what did you learn between getting there and getting away again?” the Doctor asked pointedly.

The Wanderer’s face became serious again.

“A Dalek battleship has arrived,” he said, his dark eyes fixed on the Doctor. “There are only a handful of Daleks left on Ostor, guarding the Lens. The rest of them have gone to the ship.”

Sandstrider frowned. “Why?”

"The Lens has been completed," said the Wanderer, his focus still on the Doctor. "We've always known that it was going to be launched into space and mounted on one of their battleships to be used where and when they choose. But first they intend to test it, by using it against a planet to gauge the range of its destructive capabilities. Which they're going to do tomorrow. One hour after sunrise. They're going to launch it, and test it."

"Where?" Again, it was Sandstrider who spoke. The Doctor remained silent; looking at him, Memory had the feeling that he hadn't asked the question because he already knew the answer.

The Wanderer's eyes were dark. "On the nearest target."

Four words only, but the way he said them made their implication utterly and instantly clear.

Sandstrider certainly got it, immediately. "On *Ostor*?" he exclaimed, horrified. Wisdom's face contorted, and Memory couldn't suppress a gasp of dismay. Even the two Andillor reacted, turning to each other as if seeking support.

The Doctor alone showed no surprise.

"The Daleks don't do irony any more than they do poetry," he said sourly. "But if they did, the irony of testing the Death Lens on the planet that produced it would probably fill them with delight."

"But won't that destroy their only source of lightgem?" Memory was doing her best to suppress her feelings, but her voice was tight with dismay.

"There was only ever a finite supply, and they've already used so much of it that there's hardly any left. Certainly not enough to build a second lens of a size that would be useful to them. Once the Death Lens has been launched, Ostor will be of no further use to them. It'll be – expendable." The Doctor's mouth shaped the final word with revulsion.

"But they can't destroy the entire planet, can they? Surely it's not powerful enough for that?"

"Not the planet itself, no. But its surface – assuming the Lens works as intended – they'll be able to destroy vast stretches of it. All of it, given enough time, if they want. Fry it to a cinder. Everything and everyone on it. They'll have the *power* to do it. It depends on whether they *choose* to do it. Best case scenario, some of Ostor might survive. Worst case, it might become a blackened ball, completely devoid of life."

A short silence ensued, while everyone tried to come to terms with the implications.

At last Wisdom spoke again; his voice was heavy. "This is such a burden as I never thought to bear. The fate of all those we love, of our very world itself, lies with us. We know what we face. Now we must decide what to do. And we have little time in which to do it."

"It's obvious what we've got to do!" the Wanderer snapped. "We've got to destroy the Lens."

"How?" said Wisdom simply. "We have no explosives potent enough to achieve the necessary degree of destruction, nor sufficient quantity, nor could we get close enough to use them effectively if we had them."

"There aren't enough of us to fight the Daleks directly," said Sandstrider, his jaw muscles tight with frustration at having to agree with Wisdom. "If we tried a frontal attack on the Lens we'd be slaughtered without ever getting within touching distance."

"And don't forget that any attempt to destroy the Lens with explosives while it's on the ground would be disastrous," said the Doctor. "You know where it's located."

"What do you mean?" Memory asked.

"I mean," said the Doctor, "that the Daleks have built it near – 'near' in geological terms, that is – the junction of two tectonic plates. Any explosion large enough to shatter the Lens would almost certainly trigger earthquakes and volcanic eruptions over vast areas of the planet. If the Lens was

destroyed that way, it would be at the cost of the destruction of nearly a quarter of Ostor – and probably every single human being living on that quarter. With no time to give them any warning. A high price to pay.”

“Then what do *you* think we should do, Elder?” said the Wanderer swiftly, bubbling with anger. “You’ve told us what we *can’t* do. Well, what about telling us what we *can* do? You’re the best tactician among us. What’s the answer?”

“As far as I can see, there’s only one thing we can do,” said the Doctor. “But it’s going to cost lives.”

“It’s going to cost more lives if we do nothing!” the Wanderer snapped.

“I know,” said the Doctor heavily. “I know that...”

“Then we don’t have a choice!”

The Doctor looked up with an expression that combined anger with anguish. “No. There’s no choice...” he breathed.

With her recently acquired knowledge, Memory knew exactly what was shaping his dilemma. She knew why he was so reluctant to express it aloud. Gently, she put her hand on his arm, and he turned to look at her.

“Doc – ” she began, then corrected herself quickly. “Elder... Someone – I can’t remember who it was – once said that the only real decision anyone ever has to make is what to do next. There’s no such thing as no choice. There’s always a choice. What we have to decide is whether we can live with the consequences of the choice we make. As I see it, the choice is to do nothing, or to do something. The Daleks may be planning to destroy only some of this planet. Or they may be planning to destroy every living thing on this planet. One or the other. But they *are* planning destruction. So are we going to choose to give up and do nothing, or are we going to choose to do something by trying to find a way to stop them? Even if what we try fails, which choice would we be able to live with, afterwards? Assuming we live at all, of course. But if we choose to do nothing, we mustn’t discount what that choice would do to our self-respect. And once self-respect is damaged, it can never be totally restored. Like a smashed pot. You can stick it back together, you can paint over the cracks, but the cracks will always be there, and you’ll always know they are.”

And you know it more than anyone – that is, you will, someday soon... she added, in the privacy of her own mind.

There was a short silence.

“And to think it’s my name that’s Wisdom,” said Wisdom at last, regarding her with respect. He turned to the Doctor. “Memory’s right, Elder. Sometimes it cannot be ‘we will save everyone’. Sometimes it can only be ‘we will save everyone we can’. Which may have to be at the cost of the few for the sake of the many. I’ve never had to make a decision with so much depending on it before, but as a leader, I know she speaks truth. We need to take action. Tell us what this ‘only thing we can do’ is, so we can evaluate its consequences for each and every one of us on Ostor.”

The Doctor locked eyes with Memory again, and though she knew he was not a tactile man, she leaned toward him and put her hand on his arm again, just for a moment.

“Don’t look like that,” she whispered, too low for anyone else to hear. “Seeing you so conflicted is tearing me in two.” Even though murmured, her anguish was plain. “Don’t you remember what you used to say? ‘Brave heart, Tegan.’ Take your own advice. Brave heart, Doctor.”

His eyes widened again. “Who *are* you?” he whispered almost savagely.

"Later," she said. "They're waiting. They *need* you, Doctor. Please. Save everyone you can. It's what you do."

He stared at her for a few moments more. Then he looked at the three men opposite. They had obviously all been watching the exchange between the two of them without being able to hear it, and their curiosity was obvious. They said nothing. But Raalana stretched out his hand to touch Memory on the shoulder.

"Well spoken, Small Sister," he said quietly, with approval.

She stared at him with surprise for a moment, then relaxed. "Of course," she said, equally quietly. "You know, don't you? You can tell."

Raalana looked at the Doctor. "Listen to her, Older Brother. She is your friend, and she speaks with insight. Search your heart, and you will know she speaks truth."

The Doctor looked into the toffee-brown eyes, then back at Memory. She was smiling at him. A smile of confidence, hope, and unequivocal support.

The quality of that smile, for some reason, made the difference. The Doctor took a deep breath, and addressed the Wanderer.

"That compartment with the ramps going into it," he said. "That *is* the control room, yes?"

"Yes," said the Wanderer quickly. "I couldn't see much – I didn't get long enough – but that's definitely its function. Why, what are you thinking?"

"I'm thinking that we can't risk destroying the Lens on the ground, so what we have to do is destroy it in flight," said the Doctor. "We have to get into that control room and launch it ourselves. And we need to program the propulsion units to overload so that they explode once it's high enough above the planet. High enough to ensure any fragments falling back into the atmosphere burn safely up before they reach the ground."

"And making sure we're all safely out before it launches." The Wanderer's face slowly lit up into a huge grin. "Elder, that's *brilliant!* You're brilliant!"

Memory masked the smile his words provoked. Although he hadn't turned out to be the Doctor – the Doctor she'd been expecting, the Doctor she knew best – he was still very like him in many ways, and this choice of words was one of them.

"So simple, yet so effective," Wisdom nodded.

"If it works. It's still going to be dangerous." Sandstrider sounded a note of caution. "Somehow we have to get enough of us close enough to get inside that control room to do what needs to be done without all of us being killed by the Daleks."

"I know." The Doctor was sombre. "And to achieve that, we're going to need some of the others to provide a distraction. It could mean some of them will be" – he hesitated over the euphemism – "lost."

"Some, yes," Wisdom agreed, in a tone in which regret was combined with pragmatism. "But as has been said, if we do nothing, *all* will be lost. I know my people, Elder. It will never be said that the Tura Ostauri failed to do whatever is possible to do. They will do what you need of them. You have their trust" – the Doctor flinched slightly at that, but Wisdom ignored it, and continued – "as you do mine. And we will do our best. As will you. That's all that can be asked of anyone, is it not?"

"Then we'd better get down to details," the Doctor rasped. "We haven't got much time."

He sounded *so* angry – so *resentful* – at the prospect of more deaths. Memory's heart bled for him.

Distraction and Action

In the control room of the Death Lens, the leader of the remaining Daleks on Ostor was conferring via visiplat, with some difficulty, with the Black Dalek who was his commander. They were hardly able to see each other through the lines of interference caused by the ostorin with which the planet was riddled; all Dalek-to-Dalek audio communications, whether between the planetary team and the ship or between the individual Daleks still on the planet surface, suffered from the same difficulties. There were now only five Daleks besides himself left on Ostor; the Black Dalek had ordered the return to the Dalek saucer ship of all but six of the workforce who had constructed the Lens, that number having been deemed to be sufficient to repel with any last-minute attempt by the humans to attack it.

"Report," ordered the Black Dalek tersely.

"Final pre-launch checks are now in progress," grated the leader. Behind him, in such background as was visible on the screen, the Black Dalek could see a second Dalek conducting those checks. "All is proceeding according to plan."

"Has there been any further hostile action by the humans?"

"Negative. The functioning of our scanners remains impaired, but all remaining Dalek units are patrolling and maintaining visual checks of the immediate vicinity. No movement has been detected other than from harmless local lifeforms."

"Show me," said the Black Dalek sharply.

"I obey," the Dalek leader acknowledged. He operated a control, and his image on the screen was replaced by a streaked and speckled view of the plain outside, bounded by the slopes of the nearby hills, their silhouettes black against the night sky. On the flat expanse of sand between them and the Lens were scattered what in the infrared light of the scanner looked like a group of rather lumpy globes. Every now and again one of the globes would roll forward and then stop; then another would do the same, then another. Each moved individually, but collectively they were acting like a herd. Their path seemed to be parallel to the Lens; given enough time, they would eventually pass it by completely.

"What are these lifeforms?" the Black Dalek asked, studying them.

"Merely animals," said the Dalek leader dismissively. "Primitive creatures who present no threat to our plan. Do you wish them exterminated?"

"Unnecessary," decided the Black Dalek. "Your priority is to monitor for signs of a final attack by the humans. Continue with your task. Report again when all checks have been completed, or if any activity by the humans is detected."

"I obey," said the Dalek leader, and saw the screen go blank as the Black Dalek severed the communication link.

As instructed, he immediately dismissed the group of creatures from his thoughts. Any expenditure of energy on exterminating them specifically would be nothing but a waste, therefore Dalek efficiency dictated that there be no such action at this time. That outcome would be accomplished when the Death Lens was turned upon its own planet – and that would be soon. Very soon.

Now, that had been a very remarkable experience, Memory reflected as she lay full-length on the sand where she had been deposited.

Surrounded by a soft and complete blackness, she'd been struck by the complete lack of sensation. She'd known she was travelling, but had felt no hint of movement, in any direction. And yet – like the Doctor, the Wanderer, Wisdom, Sandrunner, Sandstrider, and all the other Tura Ostauri chosen to make up the assault group – she had been efficiently conveyed toward the Death Lens. And because of the means by which that had been accomplished, the Daleks would not have had the faintest suspicion that they were being approached.

She'd just been wondering how much longer the journey would take when she'd felt a slight but detectable jolt, as if her conveyance had halted. After a few seconds her dark-adapted eyes had seen the thing unfold itself from around her, its dark silhouette looming over her, with the moonless, star-lit sky beyond.

Silently she'd slid sideways and down and flattened herself on the ground, looking up at Raalana beside her as he continued to unroll himself from the 'travel ball' in the centre of which he had carried her. Following the instructions she'd been given, she'd immediately pulled the hood of her ostorin-impregnated cloak up over her head, to minimize the chances of the Dalek scanners detecting her presence. Briefly, she'd wondered why, if she'd been revolving inside the interior space created by Raalana's rolled-up body in the same way that he'd been revolving as he rolled, her inner ears hadn't rebelled and made her disablingly dizzy from such a mode of travel. Perhaps the Andillor were able to create a zone inside themselves that remained stable, independent from the rolling motion of their bodies? If so, it was quite a trick.

But this wasn't the time for idle speculation. Right now she needed to focus on the fact that she was here and physically capable of fulfilling whatever she might be called upon to do. As she looked up at the vast silhouette of the Death Lens looming over her, she hoped that her courage would be just as ready when she needed to call upon it. Then she turned her gaze on the box-like control room, and its most crucial feature in relation to the execution of the plan, a feature noticed by the Wanderer when he'd made his reconnaissance – the fact that it didn't rest flat on the ground. The presence of the huge propulsion units on the sides of the Lens had created a small clearance of about a metre and a half between the base of the control room and the sandy surface beneath it, a factor which had presumably necessitated the creation of the ramps into its two entrances. That gap was going to be critical to the attack plan. It was too small for Andillor to crawl underneath – but humans could.

Around her the other Andillor were disgorging their passengers onto the darkened landscape, all of whom were immediately hooding themselves, as she had done. One of the shadowy shapes came crawling toward her; even in the darkness she recognized the way he moved. The Doctor came to a stop beside her.

"All right?" he whispered.

"Yes," she whispered back.

"Stay by me."

"What else would I want to do?"

Even in a whisper, not only her amusement came across but also a note of genuine puzzlement, as if she was wondering why he would even need to ask that. He tilted his head slightly for a moment, as if he was trying to penetrate the darkness of the night to study her, to analyze her response. Then he abandoned his scrutiny and looked around as two more figures came snaking across the ground to join them – Wisdom and the Wanderer. Neither spoke. Beyond them, the rest of the assault party gathered, also in silence. Wisdom raised his head and pulled the sides of his

hood back from his face so that he could scan the assembled group. Then he nodded and turned to the Doctor.

"Now, Elder?" he whispered.

The Doctor nodded grimly.

Wisdom briefly raised his arm and gestured to right and left, the agreed signal for the humans to split into two teams of eight and start crawling into the gap under the control room, each one heading for the blocks of darkness indicating the under-surfaces of the ramps that led inside. Instantly the shrouded shapes behind him began to move. Half of them followed him to their left, the other half moved to the right in the wake of the Doctor and the Wanderer. The Andillor also split into two groups, padding ponderously along the rear wall toward each end of the control room.

Out in the desert, Memory knew, other Andillor would be depositing a further cluster of the Tura Ostauri, ready to play their part in the plan.

Soon everyone was in position. The Wanderer crept forward to where the ramp entered the control room, the light spilling out from the open doorway onto the desert floor illuminating the background against which he had become a furtive silhouette. He raised his arm and gestured quickly but clearly, indicating that there were two Daleks, positioned one either side of the foot of the ramp. At the other ramp, Memory knew that Sandstrider would be performing the same role. Wisdom and the Doctor, she knew, both had small lightbeamers for signalling to each other; now the Doctor was directing his toward Wisdom's group to give two brief flickers of confirmation. A couple of seconds later, a small light about a hundred metres or so away blinked back its own confirmation. Then the Doctor did as Wisdom was also doing; he pointed the lightbeamer out across the plain in front of the Death Lens and sent more flickers of light out into the darkness – three, then a pause, then a further three.

A few seconds later, far out into the desert, three tiny points of light were briefly visible. Then they were gone.

The Wanderer raised his arm again and indicated that everyone should move forward to join him, just at the edge of the shadow cast by the bottom of the compartment and still hidden by it. A few seconds later they all lay there, ready for action, waiting for the next part of the plan to be actioned.

It seemed an endless wait before one of the Daleks inside the compartment spoke, its words faint but clear in the silence.

"Probable human movement detected," it grated.

"Report location!" came the instant demand of the Dalek leader.

"One point eight kilometres in front of the Death Lens. No movement detected in other directions."

"Are they approaching?"

"Negative. They are moving on a parallel course only. They are carrying primitive light sources."

Memory stared out across the desert. Yes, there, a long way off, a string of tiny yellow lights. The flames, she knew, of the wooden torches being carried by the decoy group.

The Dalek leader was continuing the interrogation of his subordinate. "How many humans?"

"Unknown. The interference with our instruments means I am unable to determine the exact number. However, it appears to be only a small group. Should we attack?"

There was a brief silence. Then the Dalek leader spoke again. "Negative. The humans have no weapons that constitute an effective threat to Daleks. Continue to monitor them. If they do not change direction toward the Death Lens, ignore them."

"I obey."

There was a short silence, then the Dalek leader spoke again, louder this time. Clearly he had come to the doorway at the head of the ramp to address the sentries, making sure no malfunctioning communications would impair the clarity of his instructions.

"Alert. Human activity has been detected one point eight kilometres away. They are not approaching us, but their purpose is unknown. Be ready to attack if necessary."

"We obey," came four responses in a discordant chorus.

Good, Memory thought. The distraction was working. Whatever attention the Daleks had to spare from their other tasks was now on the decoy group of Tura Ostauri. That meant the Doctor could initiate the next phase; he was already rolling onto his back, to be ready. In the semi-darkness she could see a long stick-like object being passed from Sandrunner to the Wanderer, who handed it on to the Doctor. It was, she knew, a small mirror affixed to a slim pole, angled to give him the necessary view of his target when he looked upward at it. He edged forward as near as he dared to the edge of the shadowed area and almost imperceptibly raised the pole until the mirror was just clear of the ramp, giving him a view of the interior of the control room. He stared upward at the small image reflecting down to him, making careful minor adjustments to its angle and position until suddenly he became still. Obviously he could now see what he needed to see.

Having located his target, he carefully lowered the mirror and discarded it on the ground beside him as he turned back onto his stomach. Again, he used the lightbeamer to send two flickers toward Wisdom, and received an acknowledgement. Then he turned to the Wanderer, and nodded, once. Instantly the Wanderer scrambled into a crouching position, like a sprinter getting ready for the starting gun. Watching him, Memory was struck all over again at his likeness to the Doctor – *her* Doctor – and because of it she couldn't suppress a brief, fond smile as he slipped out of his ostorin-impregnated cloak, gathering it up into his hands. Everyone else in both assault teams did the same; those cloaks were going to be vital to the success of the attack.

Everyone was ready; now it was up to the Doctor.

He was the only one who hadn't shed his cloak – because his role in the plan didn't require it. He had a different task. He reached beneath the cloak and took out what he was going to use to accomplish it. Memory could see the Wanderer looking at the object in his hand with a perplexed expression; he had no idea what it was, but she did. As soon as the Doctor had outlined his plan – although, probably because he hadn't wanted to answer any questions about the source of his means of doing it, he hadn't explained to the others how he was going to carry out this part of it – she'd immediately known how he was going to do it, and she'd added her own assurance to his. "Don't worry," she'd said to the others. "I know how he'll do it. It'll work. You can trust him on that." And Raalana, informed by his telepathic ability, had backed her up.

So Wisdom and the others had accepted their guarantees, and trusted him without seeking further details. And the Doctor had awarded her another penetrating look. Not doubting her, but still wondering how she knew what she knew.

Now it was time. The Doctor edged forward until he was clear of the concealing shadow and slowly rose erect, tucked in as close as he could get to the junction between the ramp and the doorway, just about at shoulder height. Had either of the two Daleks in front of the control array

that stretched virtually the whole length of the control room been looking in his direction, they couldn't have failed to see him. But they weren't.

The Doctor raised the hand holding his sonic screwdriver and aimed it at his target – the communication panel in front of the subordinate Dalek. A sharp movement of his forefinger, and the tip of the sonic, just for an instant, glowed red.

The Dalek rolled backwards in alarm as the panel in front of it suddenly exploded, emitting a billow of grey smoke and a shower of sparks and shards of metal.

“Alert! Alert! Communication capability destroyed! Alert!” it shrieked.

The Dalek leader swung its eyestalk wildly in every direction, but the Doctor had already ducked out of sight. “Explain!” it demanded. “What is happening?”

What was happening was now happening outside. When the alarm had been raised inside the control compartment the four Daleks guarding the ramps had started to turn to investigate, but they weren't given the time to complete the manoeuvre. The two assault teams had already emerged from under the cover of the compartment and raced towards their respective targets.

Before the startled Daleks being attacked by the Wanderer's team realized what was happening they found their eyestalks, their manipulator arms and their gunsticks swathed in ostorin cloaks, Memory's among them. There was an instant ululation of “Alert! Alert! My vision is impaired! I cannot see!” combined with “Under attack! I am under attack! Weapons are not functioning!”. But the outcries didn't last very long. Raalana and the seven Andillor with him had made short work of the distance between the end of the control room and the ramp. As the humans wrestled with the wildly gyrating Daleks, desperately fighting to keep the ostorin cloaking in place, six of the Andillor moved to stand, their backs turned to it, between the open doorway at the top of the ramp and the struggle taking place at its foot. In the planning meeting Memory had learned from Raalana that while a sustained attack from a Dalek gun could kill an Andillor – and occasionally had – the ostorin in the armoured plates which covered them meant they could take several blasts before the damage became fatal. Therefore they could provide a measure of cover from any energy blasts from the two Daleks in the control compartment – something that had not yet happened. Now, behind the screen provided by their fellows, Raalana and Uaalana used their enormously strong clawed hands to wrench out of the Daleks' casings their gunsticks, manipulator arms and eyestalks. The shrieks of the disabled Daleks redoubled, but they were no longer able to either see or attack. Both had been utterly nullified as fighting units.

At the foot of the other ramp, Wisdom's team had not been as lucky. While they had covered the eyestalk and manipulator arm of one of the Daleks, its gunstick had been left free; the other Dalek had resisted its attackers by pivoting so vigorously that they had been thrown to the ground. Both Daleks, naturally, were screaming “Exterminate! Exterminate!” and had automatically started firing, but the Andillor had not had time to reach the fight and provide any protective screening. Two of the Tura Ostauri struggling with the partially cloaked Dalek were been caught in the energy beam as the second Dalek had swept round toward them. They screamed, convulsed, and died. But the motion of both Daleks brought them directly face to face with each other, the one firing blindly, the other instinctively. The result was inevitable. Both exploded. Both were dead.

Now there were just the two Daleks in the control room to deal with.

Aware that the guard Daleks were under attack, though not yet knowing how the fight had gone, the Dalek leader had screeched, “We must inform the command ship that the Death Lens is under attack!”, and its subordinate had responded, “Unable to comply. All communication capability has

been destroyed!" The Dalek leader ignored this and sped to the nearest doorway, the one at the head of the ramp which Wisdom's team had attacked. It immediately took in the destroyed Daleks and the dead Tura Ostauri. It tried to destroy the dazed but regrouping survivors, but they were now protected by a solid wall of ostorin-armoured Andillor backs, and the two blasts it aimed at them hurt but did not damage the Andillor.

Frustrated and enraged, it swivelled back toward the subordinate Dalek, screaming "Retract the ramps! Seal the doors! Prepare to launch the Death Lens!" But it was already too late. As it turned the Dalek leader saw its hapless companion, already bereft of its weaponry and eyestalk, being propelled out of the door by one of the several Andillor now in the control room, to topple helplessly sideways over the edge of the ramp. Behind the other Andillor several humans were visible, but most of them were now protected by the huge creatures. Incensed, the Dalek leader fired blindly in the direction of the only one that hadn't yet made it fully into cover.

That one was Memory.

Who survived only because the Wanderer reached out and jerked her out of the path of the blast with only a millisecond to spare. Instead of hitting her, the energy beam fried another section of the control panel, destroying it utterly.

The Dalek leader had no opportunity to attack again. The remainder of Wisdom's team, followed by their Andillor, had made it into the control room and come up behind their last remaining enemy. Like its subordinate, it suddenly found itself blinded and helpless, and ejected out to topple helplessly onto the desert floor. All four crippled Daleks continued to scream defiance, but no-one was listening.

The Doctor had seen Memory's narrow escape. He now placed a hand on her shoulder, and asked, his voice grating slightly, "Are you all right?"

She was breathing hard and fast, and her face was very pale, but she nodded, and even managed a travesty of a smile. "*All* right might be overdoing it a bit. Will you settle for *mostly* right? With *all* right pending shortly?"

He let out that gruff snort that passed for laughter with him, and released his hold on her shoulder. Then he turned to the Wanderer and Wisdom, and immediately realized what the expressions on their faces meant.

"How many?" he snapped.

"Two," said Wisdom sombrely. "Blackfeather and Waterfresh no longer need their names."

"But only two," said the Wanderer quickly. "Two too many, yes. But not as many as it would have been if we hadn't made the attempt."

The Doctor looked rebellious for a moment, then sighed. "I know." He looked round, and scowled at the doorways through which the still shrieking Daleks beside the ramps could be heard, then at Raalana. "Take those things away somewhere, will you? I'm going to need to concentrate, and that racket isn't going to help."

Raalana's eyelids flickered quickly up and down, the Andillor equivalent of laughing. "That we will do, Elder," he confirmed.

The Doctor nodded his thanks. Just for a moment, his shoulders dropped slightly, and his face was bleak. Then he pulled himself erect.

"And now," he said, "we need to get this thing off the ground."

Ascent of the Lens

The first thing the Doctor did was order the control room cleared of everyone except himself, Memory, Wisdom and the Wanderer.

"When this thing takes off everyone's going to need to be at a safe distance from those propulsion units," he said tersely.

Wisdom nodded, and began to task Sandstrider and Sandrunner with making sure the remaining members of the attack group were well clear. As he was doing so, Memory saw that although all the other Andillor had already gone, Raalana had reappeared in the doorway and was looking at her, making a beckoning gesture. He evidently wanted to speak with her. She looked uncertainly at the Doctor, but he, Wisdom and the Wanderer were deep in conversation, so she left the group and went over to Raalana.

"What is it? Is something the matter?" she asked anxiously.

"No more than is already so," said Raalana, looking down at her with those marvellous brown eyes of his. "But there is something I feel the need to say to you."

Memory looked at him, puzzled. There was an implication of significance in his words that made her feel slightly uneasy. "What's that?"

"Life is uncertain. I do not know the future, but I sense strongly that when we part here, now, we may not meet again."

Memory made a small, instinctive gesture of protest, but she remained silent.

"If I am wrong, I will feel joy," Raalana continued. "But if I am not, I would not wish to leave without bidding you farewell, Small Sister. We are friends, you and I. I think that our friendship will remain in our hearts even if it should be that we do not meet again in person. But I wish you happiness always, you who have chosen to use the name Memory."

"You know why I chose that name, don't you?" But it was more of a statement than a question.

"Yes. I do know. So commit this to memory – that love and loyalty will always be rewarded in the end. You have my love and loyalty always. If we should not meet again – fare well, Small Sister."

Memory impulsively flung her arms around him, pressing her cheek against his chest, then stepped back again, her eyes shining with incipient tears.

"Where I come from there's a famous quotation from when two friends are saying goodbye to each other," she said, her voice tight. "One of them says to the other, '*I have been, and always shall be, your friend.*' That's how I feel." She swallowed, hard. "Goodbye, Raalana."

He reached out with one of his third pair of limbs and briefly lay its soft palm against her cheek. Then he turned and lumbered down the ramp.

She didn't see when he vanished from sight; her eyes were too full of tears. But when she was sure he was gone, she searched the pockets of her gilet for a handkerchief with which to dry the telltale evidence. One of the pockets contained a hard, round lump – what on earth was it? Oh, of course; the apple she'd brought with her, and never got round to eating. She went on with her search, and eventually located the handkerchief. She used it to wipe her eyes and face, then stuffed it hurriedly into the pocket in which she'd found it and went back to the three who had been slowly walking along the banks of controls that filled the entire length of the control room, but had now come to a halt..

"So – these are the controls that matter. What do they do?" the Wanderer was asking, his face intent, as she rejoined them.

The Doctor pointed. "That's the launch control. It fires up the propulsion units. That array there controls the alignment of the individual rows of lenses; you can align each row separately, or all of them together. These are the directional controls for the entire Lens when in flight – up, down, left, right. But we won't need those, because we don't need to steer this thing, just get it away from Ostor. What we do need, though, is –"

It didn't need his sudden silence to tell them something was badly wrong. One look at his face told them that.

"What is it?" the Wanderer demanded urgently. "What's the matter?"

"This." The Doctor grimly indicated the blackened area of the controls destroyed by the Dalek leader's final blast, the one that had been intended to exterminate Memory. "I needed to program the propulsion units to overload when the Lens reaches a safe height above Ostor. But to ensure total destruction of the Lens they need to explode at exactly the same instant, and the system I needed to reprogram to achieve that is totally wrecked. Totally," he repeated.

"So there's no way you can do it?" There was an understandable element of alarm in the Wanderer's voice.

The Doctor shrugged hopelessly. "There's a backup system for each unit, but those systems are separate, not linked, as they would have been if this set of controls hadn't been damaged." He tore his eyes away from the wreckage of the crucial system and spread his arms wide, pointing in both directions. "There, and there. I can reprogram one, but not both."

"Why is that no good?" Memory asked.

"Because the systems need to be linked!" the Doctor snarled, his voice savage with frustration. "If only one unit starts to overload, a failsafe will kick in and it'll detach from the Lens, continue on its trajectory, and explode at a safe distance. The Lens itself will be intact and the Daleks can still use it. All they'll have to do is replace the faulty propulsion unit. Only if both systems are linked will the units trigger simultaneously!"

"And you can't do anything to link them?"

"No. I'd need another one of these, that I could operate both at the same instant in each direction." He gestured helplessly with the grey tube in his hand. "And I've only got the one."

"I see," she said softly. Then, after a pause, "So if only you had two sonics, not just one, you could still do it."

He didn't answer. But then, as he played back her last words in his mind, he became aware of something unexpected in the tone of her voice; a slight tremble of what sounded, almost incredibly, like amusement. He turned sharply to look at her, ready to reprimand, and instead found himself staring at her with widened eyes.

Her own eyes were meeting his with an expression of artificial innocence. Her right hand was holding something up at eye level. A cream-coloured tube, one end of which had a dark brown cap, and at the other, a blue light.

"One like this, perhaps?" she enquired blandly.

Not exactly the same as his, but nevertheless recognizably a sonic screwdriver. And, crucially, *another* sonic screwdriver. A *second* sonic screwdriver...

"Where did you get that?" he demanded.

"Something to discuss post-crisis, don't you think?" she countered briskly. "Right now, we'd better concentrate on the problem at hand. Here." She handed him her sonic. "Now you can do what you need to do."

He stood looking at her through narrowed eyes, one sonic in each hand. Then he turned to Wisdom. "Before I start, I want you to get away from here and into cover, old friend. And I need you to take Memory with you. The Wanderer stays with me."

"No! I'm going to stay – !" Her protest was agonized and instant, but the Wanderer cut it off with a sharp gesture. "Wait," he ordered, and turned back to the Doctor.

"What about you?" he demanded.

"I'm going to link the backup systems," said the Doctor crisply. "Then I'll program the launch controls with a small delay. The Lens won't lift until both doors are closed, so the ramps will have to be retracted first. That'll have to be done manually, because their main controls are also casualties of our Dalek friend's final blast. So when everything's ready, I'll hit the launch control, and you and I will go to each of the doors, operate the ramp retraction, then hit the door controls and jump out before they start to close. And then run like hell for the nearest cover."

The Wanderer nodded quickly, then suddenly held up a forefinger as a thought hit him. Even in that instant, Memory was once again reminded of her Doctor – dark-eyed, tall, slim, wild spikes of hair, even that raised forefinger; they were so alike, in so many ways.

"Wait a moment," he said in a strained voice. "What about the Dalek ship? They'll see the Lens explode. And because they won't be able to communicate with it, they'll already know something's wrong before it does. For all we know, they already have. The chances are that they'll come swarming down to Ostor to find out why. What are we going to do about that?"

"Something we're very good at," said Wisdom calmly. "Disappear. Disperse. Go into hiding. The ostorin will still impede their instruments. They won't be able to find us. They might cause damage. Perhaps much damage. But we'll survive. We" – he addressed the Wanderer with steely determination – "we are the Tura Ostauri. We will survive."

The Wanderer was silenced. But he still looked unhappy.

So did Memory. "I'm not leaving you," she said flatly. "I don't care what you say. I won't."

The Doctor looked at her. "I want you to be safe," he said, equally flatly.

"Of course you do!" she agreed instantly. "You want *everyone*, *everywhere*, to be safe. It's what you do! But you know what *I* want? I want to be with *you*. And you know as well as I do that being with you *isn't* always safe. But it's worth it! It's *worth* it! I *know*."

"In fact, Elder, she ought to be doing this instead of you," the Wanderer interjected unexpectedly.

"Instead?" the Doctor said incredulously.

"Yes. Sorry, but we need to be realistic about this. Memory can move faster than you can. Time's going to be of the essence once the launch is initiated. She can get to the doorway quicker than you can. *And* away from the Lens once she's out. Like me. Both of us can run for cover quicker than you can. And we're going to need to. If this madness succeeds it'll be because of your brilliance, Elder. But in physical terms, the clue's in your name. We're young. You're not. It needs to be us that does this, not you."

His logic was undeniable, and the Doctor knew it. He didn't like it, but he knew it.

"Then it should be you who initiates the launch," he said gruffly. "I suppose there's some sort of justice in that. Just make sure you get it right."

The Wanderer smiled.

The Doctor turned to Memory. "And make sure *you* get it right," he said sternly. "We still have a conversation to have, remember?"

"Memory," she said, also with a smile, albeit a crooked one. "Like he said" – she indicated the Wanderer – "the clue's in the name, yes?"

Wisdom had gone over to the left-hand doorway. Now he turned and said, "Come here, all of you."

They obeyed, and realized that dawn was now not far off; the faintest hints of light were beginning to alleviate the darkness. Wisdom pointed out at an indistinct black shape about two hundred metres away.

"There," he said. "That rock formation. I know it. Around the other side of it there's a small cave. That's where we'll go, Elder. And that's where you two will join us," he said to Memory and the Wanderer, in a tone that showed he was going to brook no argument. They grinned at each other, then at him.

"Right, then," rasped the Doctor. "Let's get on with this."

Wisdom nodded, walked down the ramp, and headed toward the rock formation. Memory and the Wanderer watched him go for a few moments, then left the doorway and rejoined the Doctor. He was selecting the required settings on both of the sonics. Then he took a couple of paces backward and positioned himself between the two sets of backup system controls, a sonic in each hand. He raised them and pointed them in the required directions, and looked over his shoulder at Memory.

"Here goes," he said, and two lights flared instantaneously at the tips of the sonics – one red, one blue. Instantly a green light flashed on the undamaged part of the panel.

"Does that mean it's worked?" Memory asked quickly.

"Yes," he said briefly. "Here – this is yours." He held the second sonic out to her, and she tucked it away into her gilet. "Now to reprogram..." His sonic's tip briefly glowed red again. "It's done," he announced after a few moments. "When the Lens reaches a safe height above the planet, the propulsion units will explode. The Lens will be destroyed, and Ostor will be safe."

"As safe as it can be with a Dalek ship still up there," the Wanderer reminded him, that unhappy expression flitting across his face again. Then he grinned. "Still, one problem at a time, eh?"

"Just so," the Doctor agreed.

The Wanderer studied the controls. "And how long between clearing the atmosphere and the explosion?"

"About five minutes, I'd say. Why?" the Doctor enquired.

The Wanderer shrugged carelessly. "No reason. Just curious..."

The Doctor seemed to accept that, but Memory wasn't so sure. She remembered the intent look on the Wanderer's face when he'd asked what the various controls did. Almost as if he'd been memorizing the Doctor's descriptions...

There was a brief silence. Then the Doctor walked reluctantly to the doorway, but when he reached it he paused and looked back at her. The expression on his face clearly showed his unwillingness to abandon her, but the Wanderer was having none of it.

"Come on, Elder," he said briskly. "On your way! We'll wait for you to get to safety, then we'll launch. No point in delaying."

The Doctor still hesitated, but Memory gave him an encouraging smile. "Go on, Doc – I mean, Elder," she said, hastily correcting herself. "'Twere best done quickly'," she added lightly. "The sooner we get this done, the sooner we can have that conversation."

"I'll hold you to that," he said gruffly. "Remember," he added, "once you've hit that launch control, get out as fast as you can. You won't have long to get clear." And with that, he walked away down the ramp.

They both went to the doorway and watched him until he reached the rocks where Wisdom was waiting for him. Together the two men vanished behind the formation.

"Right, then," said the Wanderer decisively. "You stay here and do this door. I'll do the other. When I say 'Run', you hit those controls and *run*." He looked at her. "What are you laughing at?"

"Nothing. You keep reminding me of someone I know, that's all. Okay, I'm ready."

The Wanderer's face was quizzical. "Oh Kay? What does that mean?"

"It's a word we use where I come from," she said hurriedly, belatedly realizing that it wasn't a word in the vocabulary of the Tura Ostauri. "It's another way of saying 'all right' or 'yes'."

The Wanderer's eyebrows elevated briefly as he took her explanation on board.

"Okay," he repeated carefully. "Okay..." He grinned suddenly. "I like it! Okay, Memory" – he said the strange word again with relish – "let's get this done."

He left her at the doorway and strode briskly back to where the launch control waited, then turned once more to look at her.

"Ready?" he enquired.

"One last thing I need to say," she said earnestly. "Wanderer – the 'saving my life' thing – thank you."

He grinned. "Memory – the 'saving your life' thing – happy to help."

Then he pressed the launch control, and sprinted for the far doorway.

Quickly Memory pressed the ramp control, and waited for it to retract. Then she punched the door control and jumped out of the doorway. The metre and a half drop wasn't very great, but she landed slightly awkwardly. Hurriedly she picked herself up and began to run, and it was only after she'd covered about twenty metres that she threw a hurried glance over her shoulder.

And realized that although the doors were both closed, the Wanderer wasn't there behind her. She was alone. He hadn't left the control room. Instead, he'd shut himself in.

And instantly she knew why.

Her face was contorted with anguish, but it was too late; there was nothing she could do. She'd achieve nothing by going back, except waste the life he'd saved for her. She started running again, but her eyes were so blurred by tears she could hardly see where she was going. Behind her she could hear the propulsion units beginning to roar, and the instinct to live spurred her to redouble her efforts. Never had two hundred metres seemed so far. She felt as if she was running through treacle. Was she even going to make it...?

Then she was rounding the shoulder of the rock formation, and there was the Doctor, reaching out to pull her into the cave with him. Wisdom was there already, looking anxiously beyond her.

"Where is he?" he demanded.

No need to ask who he meant. She could hardly speak for panting, gasping for huge lungfuls of air, but somehow she managed it. "He's... he's not coming... He... shut himself in... He's going... up there..."

Then they were interrupted by a sudden boost in the volume of the propulsion units. Massive flames burst from their bases and spread horizontally across the desert floor. The Doctor, Memory and Wisdom hurriedly retreated to the rear of the cave, crouching together as they tried to protect

themselves from the wave of almost unbearable heat engulfing them as the roaring engines did their work.

Slowly the Death Lens began to leave the surface of the planet. The apparent slowness of its initial progress was misleading, yet gave a strange magnificence to the spectacle as it rose higher and higher into the pre-dawn sky. The further it went, the faster it seemed to go. It was on its way to its own destruction.

As soon as it was safe, the Doctor silently led Memory and Wisdom out of the cave to watch. The massive structure was growing smaller as it travelled away from them, but Memory could see the rows of lightgem lenses beginning to light up like rows of diamonds as they gradually caught the rays of the sun which to her still lay below the horizon.

Wisdom could hardly take in the sight, he was so distraught. “*Why?*” he demanded, his eyes filled with anguish. “Why is he doing it? Why is he wasting his life like this?”

“He isn’t wasting it,” said the Doctor unhappily. “He’s sacrificing it.”

“For what?”

“To protect all of you. The Tura Ostauri. To protect those he loves from any possible retribution.” He looked at Memory, and saw that she already knew what he’d just realized.

“He’s going to fight,” she said sadly.

“Fight? Fight what? Fight who?” Wisdom demanded.

The Doctor pointed into the still dark sky above them into which the Death Lens was rising, a sky filled with the thousands of sparkling points of light that were the stars. And among them one much larger light, stationary above the planet, illuminated by the light from the sun they couldn’t yet see.

“The Dalek ship,” he said.

Life and Death

If it had been given to defining things in such terms, the Black Dalek might have described itself as feeling satisfied. Despite the problems that had plagued the project because of the inhibiting effect of the mineral the humans called *ostorin* on Dalek technology, and particularly on their communications, the construction of the Death Lens had nevertheless been completed. Very shortly it would be given its first test. Once that was satisfactorily concluded, it could be turned toward more meaningful targets for destruction. A new weapon was always evidence of the superiority of the Daleks over lesser races. A concept which was – satisfying...

Or it was, until suddenly one of the subordinate Daleks monitoring the planet below interrupted the Black Dalek’s train of thought.

“Unscheduled movement of the Death Lens has been detected,” it reported. “It has launched and is rapidly gaining altitude.”

“The appointed time for launch was one hour after sunrise,” the Black Dalek protested. “Contact the Death Lens immediately. I require an explanation.”

“I obey.” The Dalek worked the controls in front of it for some moments, before being forced to admit, “I cannot contact the Death Lens. There is no response.”

“Is this an effect of the mineral that has been affecting our technology?” the Black Dalek demanded.

"Negative," was the reply. "The mineral affects the quality of communication but does not prevent it from being established. Something is preventing the Daleks operating the Death Lens from communicating with us."

The Black Dalek was beginning to feel agitated. "What is happening? I require to know! *What is happening?*"

In the control room of the Death Lens, the Wanderer was carefully manipulating the controls, the Doctor's succinct descriptions of their functions replaying themselves in his mind. *"That array there controls the alignment of the individual rows of lenses; you can align each row separately, or all of them together. These are the directional controls for the entire Lens when in flight – up, down, left, right. But we won't need those, because we don't need to steer this thing..."*

Elder had been wrong about that, he thought. It was vital to steer the Lens to where it needed to be, and to do it without alerting the Daleks to its real objective. He could only hope that the Daleks were so confused by this unexpected turn of events that other implications wouldn't occur to them. For a moment his dark eyes sparkled with amusement, as he imagined them frantically trying to communicate with the Lens with rising levels of frustration for every failed attempt.

Not long now. There wasn't much time left until the programming Elder had done would trigger the overload of the propulsion units. But enough time. Enough time for the Lens to reach the destination he intended for it, and to achieve his purpose. In fact, only another few seconds should do it...

Aboard the Dalek battleship the Black Dalek was nearly incoherent with rage.

"You *will* establish communication with the Death Lens!" it screeched. "I must know why my orders have been disobeyed! I must know why the plan has been ignored!"

The hapless subordinate made another attempt to obey, but again met with failure.

"Unable to comply. Communication can still not –"

It got no further. With a shriek of rage the Black Dalek swivelled its gunstick and blasted its minion out of existence.

"Failure deserves extermination!" it screamed furiously.

It had no way of knowing how true that was about to be.

He'd made it. The Lens was in position, and the Dalek battleship hadn't moved. The Wanderer closed his eyes briefly, remembering all his friends. For some reason, Droplet loomed large in those images. Well, he was doing this so that she'd be safe. This was a matter of life and death. He was going to die, but she was going to live. That alone made what he was doing worth it.

He became aware now of a growing vibration, a protesting whine; the propulsion units were beginning to overload. His eyes flew open as one of the control panels over to his right suddenly exploded outwards in a shower of smoke and sparks. Then another two, to his left.

There was no more time.

Unhesitatingly, he reached for the array of levers that controlled the alignment of the lightgem lenses, to do the last thing he would ever do.

Amidst the confusion in the control room, one of the Daleks suddenly realized what was happening.

"Alert! Alert!" it trumpeted. "We are in danger!"

The Black Dalek swivelled around to face it. "Report! What danger?"

"The Death Lens is positioned between us and the sun!" It was as close to gabbling as a Dalek could achieve. "The lenses are being aligned toward this ship! The Death Lens is about to destroy us!"

The Black Dalek swung toward the main screen in dreadful realization, and saw the black silhouette of the Death Lens against the glare of the sun behind it. If a Dalek could be said to gape, that was what it did. And the last thing it ever saw was the terrible white flare speeding toward the Dalek ship – a whiteness that instantly turned black.

So it never saw, a few seconds after that, the shattering explosion as the propulsion units of the Death Lens exploded, and the whole structure blew apart into a swiftly expanding cascade of scattered fragments.

Down on the planet's surface, the Doctor, Memory and Wisdom stared upwards, but none of them broke the silence. They watched as first the bright light that was the Dalek ship flared and died, and then the second light, the Lens, swelling briefly before fading away.

It was over. The Daleks were destroyed. So was their terrible creation.

And so was the Wanderer.

The Conversation

Later, of course, there was a spectacular display of what could on another occasion have been mistaken for a shower of meteors, visible even in daylight, as the fragments of wreckage from the two vehicles began to fall into Ostor's atmosphere and burn up in fantastic flares and streaks of brilliant white light.

Halfway up the rock-strewn slope of the hillside they were climbing, the Doctor stopped and pointed upwards to draw Memory's attention to the flashes and streaks of light in the sky above them.

"I hope the Tura Ostauri see them as a tribute to his courage," he said gruffly.

"So do I." Her throat was still tight with emotion, but she managed to get the words out. "Do you suppose they've noticed we're gone yet?"

"Perhaps," he shrugged, and began to walk again. "They'll have other things on their minds at the moment. But even if they have noticed, they won't know where we've gone. We came from somewhere unknown, we'll have gone somewhere unknown. They'll remember us for a while, then life will carry on."

"Not for him," Memory said rebelliously, following in his wake.

"Even for him, in a way," the Doctor contradicted. "Because of what he did, he'll have achieved a kind of immortality. What he did will be told over and over again. In the end, he'll become a legend. Legends outlast us all."

"Well, you'd know all about that," she said casually.

Before he could ask her what she meant, they crested the slope, and there, standing between two pillars of rock, was their destination. A tall blue box. Memory gasped at the sight of it – not with surprise, the Doctor noted, but with delight.

"There you are, you beautiful old thing!" She ran toward it and stretched her arms out to embrace it; her mouth smiled and laughed, but her eyes closed, as if she could experience the contact more intensely that way. "Oh, I've *missed* you!"

The Doctor studied her. It was evident that she knew the TARDIS well – but how? And when she stepped back to take it in as a whole, he saw her expression change, become tinged with dismay. In that moment he saw the TARDIS not through his eyes, but through hers – not the blue box, well-used but well-cared for, that she had evidently been expecting. Instead, a tired, old box, the blue somehow dulled with grey, the paintwork streaked with whitish-grey streaks and scars. She looked at the Doctor slightly uneasily, wondering if he was going to account for them.

"I take it you'd like to go inside?" he suggested drily.

Her face lit up in a delighted smile. "Oh, yes, please!"

He was about to step forward, fishing in his pocket for the key, when he heard a slight click – just one – though he couldn't identify its source. It almost sounded as if she'd clicked her fingers, but surely it couldn't be that. After all, why – ?

The thought was obliterated by astonishment, as he saw the door swing open. How was that possible? It had been locked! He stared at Memory, hard.

"How did that happen?" he demanded.

She looked back at him with an innocence that somehow didn't ring entirely true. "She knows me," she said happily. "So she knows me now, too. Come on!"

Now? Too? Intriguingly cryptic, but he had no chance to pursue the thought; Memory had already disappeared through the open door. He shrugged, and followed her.

Inside, he found her staring around the control room, taking in the walls covered with white roundels, the organic-looking pillars, the cables looped carelessly between them, the control console illuminated from within by the same white light that streamed upward from it through the column of the Time Rotor. Again, he experienced a moment of seeing it through her eyes, seeing the white of the roundels and the Time Rotor as again somehow greyed, dulled. The colour of hope not yet lost, but diminishing. There was a curious expression on her face, as if what she was seeing was familiar, yet not familiar.

"Not what you were expecting, I take it?" he enquired blandly.

She looked quizzical.

"No. It's smaller," she said rather abstractedly.

Well, that was a first, he thought. 'Smaller' wasn't usually a word people used when they first stepped inside the TARDIS. Though it was only too evident that this was not her first time. He leaned back against one of the pillars and folded his arms.

"Well, now, young lady, I think it's high time you accounted for yourself. Who are you, and how do you know me?"

She turned to face him, meeting his eyes directly, and straightening her shoulders as though she was bracing herself for something.

"Well," she said, taking a deep breath, "first things first. Today's big news flash. I'm not from Ostor. I'm from Earth. But you must have known that as soon as I started quoting Shakespeare at you."

He snorted. "Oh, I knew *that* the first moment I saw you."

"Did you? How?"

"You're wearing denim jeans. In all the universe, Earth is the only planet where that particular garment is to be found."

She raised her eyebrows. "Come to that, if I hadn't been distracted by the explosions, I should have known it was you the very first time I saw *you*."

"Oh? Why?"

"Because I horripilated. I went goosepimples, as the saying goes. A rather peculiar side-effect of sharing some of your mind, apparently. Whenever you first turn up – the only you I've known until now – that's what happens. And I've realized that it happened when you came hurtling out of the dark at me. But I didn't pay it any attention because there was too much else going on."

Sharing some of his mind? What did she mean by that? But he didn't interrupt. She was clearly going to explain, if he left her to do it in her own way.

Though just at the moment she'd mentally backtracked to revisit his last observation, with a quizzical look on her face. "Really? Jeans are unique to Earth? In the whole wide universe, no-one else has ever come up with the same thing? Not anywhere? That's – interesting..."

"If you happen to be interested in trivia," he growled dismissively. "What *I'm* interested in is why you came here. And how. Although I suppose 'how' is obvious. Who gave you that vortex manipulator?"

"Actually," she admitted, "I'd quite like to know the answer to that question myself."

"Seriously?" He frowned at her, and was forced to decide she was in earnest. "Are you trying to tell me you really don't know?"

"I really don't know," she confirmed. "Someone turned up on my doorstep with a package. Handed it over, then vanished. Inside the box was the vortex manipulator, with a message."

"Which said...?"

"*He needs you. This will take you to him. PS: Don't forget your s.s.*"

"*S.s.*?" he repeated blankly.

She reached into an inside pocket of her gilet and pulled out her sonic screwdriver, holding it up in silent clarification.

"So..." he said slowly. "Someone who knew we were going to need two sonic screwdrivers. Someone who knew you had one. And someone who knew what was going to happen here. A somewhat intriguing display of hindsight... And there was no name?" he probed. "No indication who sent it to you?"

"None," she said.

There was something in the way she said the word that made him pursue the matter. "But you have a theory." He made it a statement, not a question.

"I've absolutely no evidence for it, but – yes, I do. Someone you've told me about – *will* tell me about – but who I haven't met yet. But I'd better not tell you who. You of all people know the dangers of telling someone something about their future. Giving you the name might constitute – a spoiler..." There was a brief glint of humour in her eyes as she used the word 'spoiler', and he wondered why. But he didn't enquire further, because he knew she was right.

"Well, I'm sure you know what my next question is going to be. You still haven't told me your real name. You chose to call yourself Memory. Who are you really?"

She hesitated for a moment, frowning slightly, but then her face cleared. "I was wondering if I ought to say. But when we meet in the future you don't recognize me at all. Any recollection of me, or any of this, obviously gets wiped at some point. Dodgy regeneration, maybe? Or maybe now

that you know you're going to know me, perhaps you'll deliberately decide to forget. Either way, it's obviously not going to cause any paradoxes if I tell you. My name's Fionnula Thornton, Doctor. Finn for short."

"So, Finn-for-short Thornton, how did you get hold of that sonic screwdriver?"

"You gave it to me," she said simply.

"I gave it to you?" he repeated, incredulously. "Why would I do that? Why you? And when? *When* did I give it to you?"

"I mean that you *will* give it to me," she amended. She met his eyes directly, and spoke to him with a candour that carried instant conviction. "Look, Doctor. One day in the future – *your* future – you and I are going to meet for the first time. Something's going to happen – an accident – that means I'll end up with some of your mind in mine. Your knowledge, your memories. Even a degree of your telepathic ability. And in spite of the fact you could, you don't take it away. You let me keep it."

The Doctor studied her, his face unreadable. "I'd have to trust you a great deal to do that."

"Yes," she agreed matter-of-factly. "You do. In fact, some time afterward you'll give me more. Transfer more to me. Not because you'll have to, but because you'll choose to. And between those two times, you'll give me that sonic."

The Doctor considered. "An accidental transfer I can comprehend. But why would I choose to give you more? What was – that is, what *will* be – my motivation?"

She hesitated, then said, slowly, "You never talked about it. You never said why. But I think... I think it was because you knew about something that was going to happen to you, and because of it you were afraid you'd be lost. That everything you were would be lost. My having so much of you already... It gave you a reason for preserving as much more of yourself as I could safely take. The best of yourself, perhaps. I was your archive. Your insurance policy. Your backup copy. That's why I chose the name Memory here. I always carry the memory of the you you're going to become. So you won't be entirely lost."

The Doctor let out a breath of sour, sarcastic laughter.

"I was already lost. The best of myself? I don't think so. Not if *I'm* in there."

"You must have come across in the uncontrolled transfer," she conceded. "I think that that memory of yourself must have been very deeply suppressed. I would probably never have known you were there, if I hadn't been brought here and you got dragged up from wherever you'd buried yourself."

He regarded her through narrowed eyes. "And why do you suppose I would do that? Suppress the memory of this self."

She looked at him gravely, and didn't reply.

The Doctor shrugged. "Another spoiler, I suppose? It's all right. Even if you know, you don't have to tell me. I can make a guess." He sighed heavily. "You know about the Time War, of course. It's been going on for so long. So many years of fighting. So much death. Perhaps the reason I buried this memory so deeply was because I gave up. *Will* give up. The one thing I've never done, in all my regenerations. But perhaps I'm going to. Fail not just myself, but everyone else as well. I might find myself hard to live with after that. It would be no surprise if I didn't want to remember it. I'm not even sure Doctor is the right word for me anymore. I've been trying for years, and I still can't heal the damage on the scale that the Time Lords and the Daleks are causing between them." He paused, then saw the expression in her eyes.

“Why do you look at me like that? Why such sadness?”

“Because one day, *you*” – she gave the pronoun a studied emphasis – “will become the best friend I ever have. And to see you in such anguish is... *heart-rending*.” She paused, then went on, in a different tone of voice, “Look, Doctor. It seems to me that every version of you is built on the sum of the previous versions. And every one of you has had flaws and failings as well as your brilliance and the way other people matter to you. And by people of course I mean members of every living species.” She leaned forward, earnestly. “Doctor, I know you as you *will* be. I know how incredible *that* you is going to be. And you – *this* you – you’re an innate part of that. You’ve contributed to that. To that incredible man who’s my closest and dearest friend, the good and the bad of him, both. He wouldn’t be that, couldn’t be that, without you.”

What she’d said had registered with him, she could tell that. But when he spoke, it was to change the subject.

“So – what happens now? We go our separate ways?”

“I suppose so,” she said reluctantly. She turned back toward the still open door of the TARDIS and stood there, looking out at the plain far below, where formerly the Death Lens had stood. A number of small figures were moving about down there.

“Look,” she said. “They must have all come to see where it happened.”

The Doctor had come to join her in the doorway. “Or they’re looking for us.”

She thought of another possibility, and her eyes were sad. “Perhaps they’ve come here to mourn the Wanderer.”

The Doctor stared down at the activity below. This hillside where the TARDIS was standing faced the rock formation and the cave where only a few hours before he and Memory – Finn, he supposed he must remember to call her now – and Wisdom had hidden from the inferno of the propulsion units. He could see the cave entrance quite clearly. And something unexpected seemed to be happening. All of a sudden all the people out on the plain were hurrying to cluster in front of the cave.

“That doesn’t look like mourning,” he said, and went back to the control console.

Finn frowned, puzzled. He was right. Some kind of uproar was happening at the cavemouth, but the body language wasn’t that of people grieving. Quite the opposite. She joined the Doctor at the console, where he was directing the scanners onto the location of the crowd, zooming in on the centre around which they were clustered.

What they saw there kept them silent for long moments; they turned to look at each other in mutual mystification. Then enlightenment dawned on both of them at the same moment.

“There’s only one way that’s possible,” the Doctor said flatly.

Finn returned his look with dancing eyes and an ear-to-ear smile.

“Saving people, Doctor,” she said. “It’s what you do. And it looks as if there’s one last person you can still save.”

To Be Continued...

Awareness came slowly through the blackness. There’d been showers of sparks flying in all directions, fires breaking out in all directions, everything shaking, vibrating... And noise. Lots of noise as everything was breaking up. But not just the noise of the explosions as the control panels, one after the other, erupted into flames and smoke.

And just briefly, another noise. Not like any of the others. A strange mechanical wheezing, groaning noise. A noise that had faded as vision had faded, and everything was swallowed by the dark.

How long had that period of blackness lasted? Impossible to tell. But the strange noise... He had the impression it was happening for a second time, but once again, it swiftly faded out of hearing.

Then, after another unmeasurable passage of time, there was the unaccountable sensation of a breeze blowing around him, warm sunlight touching his skin, and – imperceptibly at first – he gradually became aware of a growing hubbub of voices surrounding him, a hubbub to which consternation, incredulity, astonishment and elation all contributed.

What was going on? After all, he was dead, wasn't he?

Impossibly, it seemed that he wasn't.

Slowly, carefully, the Wanderer opened his eyes, to see Droplet kneeling beside him, her face contorted by joy, her eyes filled with tears of happiness; and beyond her, all around his supine form, what looked like the entire tribe, all yelling excitedly, unable to believe their eyes, but delighted beyond all measure.

His first words, hoarse but urgent – “Did you hear that noise?” – took her by surprise.

“No. What noise?”

He frowned. “A strange sound... I thought I heard...” He fell silent, focused inward. He seemed to have forgotten the commotion all around him.

Droplet stared at him, confused. This was all wrong! He was alive, when he ought to be dead – how was that even possible? He was here, he was alive, and all he seemed to be interested in was a *noise*?

One of her tears suddenly splashed onto his face. It jerked him out of his abstraction, and he gazed up at her as if he'd never seen her before. Then he lifted one hand and cupped her cheek, wiping away the next tear with a gentle thumb.

“Where's Elder?” he said quietly, so that only she could hear.

“We don't know,” she said, half-choking on a happy sob. “We can't find him. He's gone. So's Memory.”

The Wanderer nodded, completely unsurprised. He smiled at Droplet, but in the privacy of his mind, he was thinking: *Elder, you did this. I don't know how, but somehow, you did this. Where did you really come from? Where did you get that strange little grey tube of yours that could do so many marvellous things? And Memory – is she from the same place as you? Is that where you've both gone now? I'm never going to know, am I? And I'm never going to know how I got from the Death Lens to here, still alive. But it was you that did it, I know it was. And I'll never forget you, either of you.*

He struggled to sit up, and Droplet reached out to help him, gripping his shoulders as if she needed to touch him to convince herself he was really there.

“Are you all right?” she asked anxiously.

Suddenly his dark eyes were dancing.

“Of course I am,” he said. “I'm always all right.”

As the TARDIS spun through the Time Vortex, Finn Thornton walked slowly around the control room, studying it with interest. It was so like and yet unlike the one she knew. The pillars were the

same, though there weren't as many of them. There wouldn't be enough space for them all in this version; the room was so much smaller than it was going to be in the future. The console looked very similar at first glance, but closer inspection showed it to have a different set of controls, and the surface texture of its supports were grainy, almost gravelly, not the clean grey metal they would one day become. The festooned cables were a familiar concept, but here they were more numerous and disordered; one even stretched across the floor – a potential trip hazard if ever there was. Had this Doctor started something he'd subsequently lost the motivation to complete? That certainly spoke to his attitude of growing disenchantment and clearly eroding sense of hope for the future. But it was the roundels and the light they cast that made the greatest difference, she thought. Ostensibly white, but tainted with grey, just as the Doctor's original optimistic personality had become tainted with disillusion. Was the TARDIS reflecting the Doctor's frame of mind? Who could remain upbeat in the light cast by these walls?

She sighed. Quietly, but he heard her.

"Something the matter?" he enquired.

She didn't answer at first. Then she stepped closer to the console and reached up to touch the Time Rotor as if she was offering consolation. "Don't worry – it'll pass," she said, but the Doctor was unsure whether she was speaking to him or to the TARDIS.

She dropped her hand from the Time Rotor and looked at him with an air of decision tinged with sadness.

"And now I suppose it's time I went home," she said.

He looked at the vortex manipulator on her wrist. "You know how to operate that thing all right?"

"Yes. Just reverse the transit instructions so that I end up back where I came from." She paused, then went on, "I know you aren't going to remember any of this. But I will. And what I do expect you to remember is this. Once again, you saved people. Saved lives. That's what a doctor does. So you can drop that nonsense about Doctor not being the right name for you. Whatever you think, you will *always* be the Doctor. It's who you are. It *is* your name, and it *is* the right name. Never forget it," she concluded uncompromisingly.

The Doctor studied her keenly for long moments before he responded.

"I told you," he said slowly, "that sometimes the Tura Ostauri consult other people as to what they think their known-as name should be. The name that summarizes them best. If you had to be named by me, I know what I'd call you. Friend. I'd call you Friend."

"*Always*, Doctor," she said swiftly.

It wasn't just a response – it was a vow. And the Doctor recognized that.

Finn broke eye contact and slowly pivoted on her heels, taking one last look around the control room. As she did, without being aware of what she was doing, she slid one hand into the pocket of her gilet and found herself touching the same round object she'd encountered once already.

The apple.

She paused, pulled it out and regarded it for a couple of seconds. Then she turned to look back, a smile spreading across her face.

"Doctor – that saying..."

The Doctor regarded her, intrigued. "What saying?"

"*"An apple a day keeps the Doctor away..."*"

He raised enquiring eyebrows.

Abruptly she tossed the apple through the air toward him. He caught it one-handed, and looked at her quizzically.

She smiled. "It isn't true, you know," she said. Then she pressed the activation button on the vortex manipulator, and was gone.

The Doctor looked at the apple in his hand, studying it as if he'd never seen such a thing before.

Then he did something he very rarely did any more; in fact, it had become such a rare occurrence he couldn't remember the last time he *had* done it.

He laughed. Simply for the sheer pleasure of it. He laughed.

As he did, something occurred to him that he wished he'd thought of earlier. He was sure it would have made *her* laugh, if he had.

"Thanks for the Memory," he said aloud, as if she was still there to hear it.

And laughed again.

In this period of his life, how unexpected – how memorable! – that Finn Thornton's parting gift to him, of all things, should be laughter.



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AUTHOR'S NOTE:

The full story of Finn Thornton and the Doctor is covered in the following titles, all available as free downloadable PDF files from www.deborahlatham.co.uk/aboutdoctorwho.php:

- Serendipity
- Ice World
- All In The Mind
- Felindre's Fortune
- Missing Persons
- Here Be Dragons
- Closure