

THE CHILDREN'S CRUSADE

Julio Angel Ortiz

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Tamara was getting impatient.

It wasn't all that unusual to get impatient with the Doctor, Tamara thought to herself. She'd been traveling with him enough to know his mood swings, his subtle mannerisms and his annoying tendency to be decidedly *not* human at times, even though he unapologetically looked human. His dark hair, clear eyes occasionally hidden behind sunglasses and neatly trimmed goatee, along with the sheer presence he commanded upon entering any room - all could lead anyone to think that the Doctor was just like anyone else.

And that is probably what bothered Tamara the most- she knew the Doctor was *not* like anybody else. In all her travels through time and space with him, she'd certainly seen the Doctor get out of situations that she herself would not have even gotten two paces away from. He'd saved people, races, and whole planets - hell, he's probably saved the universe on more than one occasion, Tamara thought.

And that was all the more infuriating. When dealing with someone with those kinds of credentials, you just had to be patient. Even when he makes you wait. And wait.

And wait.

"Doctor?" Tamara asked carefully.

The Doctor was sitting in a chair on the other side of the room, as the TARDIS' console stood in between them. The rotor of the console was gently moving up and down, casually indicating that they were still in flight. The Doctor was sitting passively, his eyes squarely fixed on the pages of the book in his hand - a copy of *The Pickwick Papers*. He glanced up at Tamara. "Yes?"

Tamara gave a slight cough. "I was wondering just where are we going?"

A smile slid across the Doctor's face. "You mean Grae didn't tell you?"

Tamara felt a little irked. It was certainly a little bit of an adjustment traveling with two Time Lords instead of one now. Why did she sometimes feel like the odd-man out? "No, she didn't mention a word to me."

The Doctor closed the book in his hands. He stood and, leaving the book on the chair, walked over to the console. "Well..." he began.

"Good morning everyone!" came Grae's familiar voice. Tamara looked over at her as she entered the room. *Perfect timing*, she thought to herself, as Grae joined herself and the Doctor at the console.

"Good morning Grae," the Doctor said without lifting his head up from the console.

"Good morning Grae," Tamara mustered.

"Are we there yet?" Grae asked, quite innocently. Tamara couldn't help but crack a smile.

"Almost. I was just about to tell Tamara where we were headed."

"Ah, yes." Grae looked over at Tamara. "I'm sorry, I forgot to mention it earlier."

"The Doctor has a mouth," Tamara said with a hint of sarcasm. "He could certainly have told me himself."

"And indeed I shall," the Doctor said as he pressed two buttons on the console. "We are headed to a nice little getaway."

"We're going on holiday?" Tamara asked, almost dumbfounded.

"Yes," Grae replied.

"And where exactly is this holiday spot?"

The Doctor lifted his eyes from the console and smiled at Tamara. "I haven't been there in a long time. It's a little spot near the rim of the Universe called Sumara."

Tamara rolled her eyes. "It wouldn't happen to have a restaurant, would it?"

The Doctor looked at her innocently. "Yes, in fact it does! The food is quite good."

"I'm quite excited about going there. I haven't really ever taken a vacation." Grae chimed in.

“You’ll enjoy it,” the Doctor began. “You get to sit back and relax and do absolutely nothing.”

“Nothing?” Grae asked, unsure.

“Nothing,” Tamara confirmed.

“But that sounds rather...dull.”

“Grae,” the Doctor began, “‘nothing’ is a relative term. When people go on holiday, they go somewhere to relax, to get away from it all! Some people may play games, or go swimming, or sightseeing. It depends on the individual.”

“But we could do all of that here, Doctor,” Grae said.

“Grae, don’t Time Lords ever have fun?” asked Tamara.

“Only this one,” Grae said with a smile, pointing her thumb at the Doctor.

Tamara looked over at the Doctor, raising her eyebrows. “And why Sumara, anyway? We could go anywhere in the universe- why there?”

The Doctor looked lost for a moment. “I don’t know. I suppose it was a random choice. It was either there or Hawaii.”

“Hawaii?” Tamara yelled aloud, just as everything went wrong.

The TARDIS gave way to a violent rocking motion, which immediately tossed Tamara and Grae back. The Doctor held on tightly to the TARDIS console, frantically moving his hands over it, pressing buttons and pulling levers. The rocking intensified, as the lighting in the console room began to flicker madly. Several sparks spewed out from the console, as the Doctor desperately tried to regain control.

“Doctor! What’s happening?” Grae cried out as she tried to stand.

“We’re caught in a temporal storm!” the Doctor bellowed. “It seemed to come out of nowhere!”

Tamara was almost successful in maintaining her balance as she stood up, but another shake of the TARDIS threw her to the floor. Grae was having more success, as she slowly made her way over to the Doctor.

“Grae,” the Doctor began, “we have to get the TARDIS out of the storm, or we risk - ” Suddenly, there was a small explosion from the console at the Doctor’s side, throwing Grae to the floor. As she fell, she saw the Doctor get thrown back as well, and as he fell, she saw his head hit one of the sides of the console.

Grae would later recall that she heard the Doctor say something along the lines of “Now this feels oddly familiar,” right before falling unconscious.

The TARDIS continued to veer out of control. Grae moved over to the Doctor, but it was no use - he was out cold. Grae looked over at Tamara, who looked back at Grae with terrified eyes.

“He’s okay,” Grae reassured Tamara. “I think,” she whispered under her breath. Grae looked over at the console and struggled onto it. She looked furiously all over the console - it suddenly looked like a maze of dials, knobs, levers and screens. *Focus*, she told herself. She was a Time Lord, after all. TARDISes, even ones as old as the Doctor’s, were not foreign to her. There was a solution here, and she just needed to put the pieces together.

Grae looked around, and finally something caught her eye. There was a lever with a blue handle that she hadn’t noticed before. She looked at it, and her instincts told her to pull it. She looked back at the Doctor, who was now being tended to by Tamara. Around her, the TARDIS continued to shake violently. Another explosion emerged from the console, almost throwing Grae back. Grae looked at the lever again.

And she then quickly pulled it.

Almost comically, the shaking stopped. Grae was pushed forward a little, as if in a car that suddenly braked. The rotor in the console crawled to a stop, and Grae could almost feel the TARDIS landing, like an elevator reaching its destination. She turned around to face the Doctor and Tamara.

“Well?” Tamara said, looking at Grae with hopeful eyes.

“We’re okay. The TARDIS has landed.”

“What did you do?”

“I just hit this lever,” Grae replied, pointing at the console.

“How many times,” came a groggy voice. Tamara and Grae eagerly looked down, to find the Doctor awakening and pulling himself up. “How many times have I told you to not touch that?” Tamara and Grae looked at each other with confusion, and then looked back at the Doctor. The Doctor looked at both of them, and appeared to be clearer of mind. “Oh, never mind. I was somewhere else for a moment.” The Doctor quickly jumped up and dusted off his jacket. He looked around at the room and at his companions. “I trust that you’re alright?”

“Yes,” Tamara said. “Grae used some quick thinking and was able to get the TARDIS to stop being all crazy.”

The Doctor looked over at Grae, who was turning red. “Really? Good job!”

Grae quickly turned around and tapped some buttons on the TARDIS console. “The scanners appear to be offline, as well as sensors. I can’t get a fix on where we are. All I can tell is that the environment outside is safe for us.”

“How’s that for a surprise.” Tamara began. “We try to go on vacation and we get sidetracked.”

The Doctor was caressing his goatee with his right hand, deep in thought. “Yes, it does seem odd that that keeps happening to us.” The Doctor paused for a moment. “Maybe the Universe is trying to tell me something.”

“Yeah.” Tamara said sarcastically. “You need to book a new travel agent.”

* * * * *

“Just where did you land us, Grae?” was the first thing that came out of Tamara’s mouth.

The Doctor said nothing. Grae was too busy observing their surroundings. The first thing that caught her eyes was the mountains - they were made of glass. Grae had to keep looking at them to make sure her eyes weren’t deceiving her. The mountains in the distance were made of glass - a translucent, foggy glass, almost impossibly smooth.

Grae’s eyes made their way up the mountain and into the lavender above. Grae looked closely at the sky, and at first she thought there were clouds in the stratosphere, as she saw something moving. But as she let her eyes focus, Grae realized that there were not clouds at all, but what looked like an ocean. An ocean of lavender high above them, complete with waves and breaks. She looked over at Tamara and the Doctor, who were also looking around. Grae heard Tamara’s voice.

“Look at those flowers!” Tamara said, pointing at a nearby cluster of yellow. Ignoring a casual but dark warning from the Doctor, Tamara and Grae gathered around the flower. It looked like a large sunflower, except that it was breathing. They could see the flower moving slightly as it took in breaths, and let them out. As it exhaled, they could barely see pollen being let out into the air.

“Fascinating,” the Doctor said.

“Doctor, where are we?” Tamara asked.

“I don’t have a clue. I can’t say I’ve even heard of a place like this.”

“The sky...” Grae began.

“Yes, I noticed the sky too.” the Doctor said. “This place certainly does hold some mysteries.” The Doctor looked around some more. “Let’s go for a walk, shall we?”

* * * * *

The TARDIS crew walked for only twenty minutes before they came upon a town. In fact, once they had cleared a hill near where they had landed, it was plainly visible - nestled between the hills where the TARDIS had landed and the glass mountains in the distance. Grae could not help but note that, although the town seemed quite a distance away, they seemed to make great time in getting there.

Upon entering the first streets of the town, the Doctor offered his usual observations.

"Hmm," he began.

Tamara knew what that meant. "Something not quite right?" she offered.

The Doctor did not immediately respond. He kept looking around, observing the buildings and the street work. Everything looked fairly modern - the paving of the roads, the off-white of the sidewalks, the street lights...

"No," the Doctor said. "Something isn't right."

"How so, Doctor?" Grae inquired.

"Well, let's continue to have a look, shall we?" the Doctor said, and he proceeded to walk on. Grae and Tamara quickly followed.

They continued further into town. There were a variety of stores along the street: candy store, a bookstore called *Metropolitan Books*, a curio shop called *The Unicorn's Garden*, several coffee shops, a deli, and a boarded-up jewelry shop. As they continued through town, they came upon a park, where several children were playing.

"So there are people here," Grae commented. The Doctor looked on silently.

Two of the children looked over at them and quickly stopped in their activities. They pointed their fingers over at the TARDIS crew, and soon the other children looked over at them. The children began to quickly talk amongst themselves, and seemed to be surprised at their arrival. Tamara picked up on this.

"I guess this place doesn't get a lot of visitors," she said dryly.

Soon, the children began to leave the playground and cautiously move towards them. A smile grew across the Doctor's face.

"It's okay," he said. "We don't bite!"

The children came up to them. From the corner of her eye, Tamara noticed that they were being watched - from the stores, homes, and around the corners of buildings. All by children. Several more were approaching from down the street. The children ranged in ages six to twelve, and they appeared to be human. Tamara knew however from her travels with the Doctor that appearances were deceiving.

One of the children - a girl, aged about seven, pulled on the Doctor's sleeve. "Who are you?"

The Doctor ruffled the girl's hair a little. "I'm called the Doctor. These are my friends, Tamara and Grae." Tamara and Grae each gave small waves of their hands.

Grae leaned down to face the girl. "Where are we?" she asked.

"What do you mean? You're in town." the girl replied.

Grae looked at the girl for a moment, quizzically. Tamara snickered in the background. "No, I mean, what is this planet called?"

"Oh." the girl said. "This is Giminae."

"Giminae," the Doctor pondered. "No, I've never even heard of it."

"Hey," Tamara began, "where are your parents? Where are the adults?"

The children suddenly became silent, and looked at each other. Tamara could have sworn that a subtle look of fear crept across their faces. Suddenly, a boy who had just walked up to them answered.

"There are no grownups here," he said.

The Doctor looked over at him and narrowed his eyes slightly. The boy looked to be about ten years old. He had short, black hair, and deep eyes. Tamara noticed something peculiar in the way he looked at them. Was it hate?

“No adults at all?” the Doctor asked.

“None,” the boy responded.

“What’s your name?” Grae chimed in.

“Gabriel,” he responded, and again Tamara almost could hear some disdain in his voice.

“And where exactly are the adults?” the Doctor pressed on.

“Gone.”

“Gone?”

“There are none here. Only the children remain.” The boy’s gaze was fierce. The Doctor’s eyes remained affixed on Gabriel, as he pressed on.

“What happened to the adults? How long have you been living like this?”

Gabriel looked aside, somewhat distressed. Grae reached out and placed her hand on his shoulder.

“It’s okay,” she began. “We’re here to help.”

Gabriel looked up at Grae. “It was the Revenant.”

Grae and Tamara looked at each other, then over at the Doctor. The Doctor’s eyebrows furrowed

“The Revenant?”

“Yes, the Revenant.” Gabriel began. “It’s a horrible creature that came in the night and killed our parents. It attacked over time until eventually... not one grownup was left.”

The Doctor looked at Gabriel with a raised eyebrow. “This creature killed *all* of the adults?”

“Yes,” Gabriel responded.

“Didn’t the adults try to stop it?”

“They tried,” Gabriel said, as he glanced around at the other children around him. They looked on, becoming uneasy as the tale unfolded. “But it was too strong. They would go in packs to hunt it down. Those packs would never return.”

“Almost sounds like a bad horror story,” Tamara commented.

“I wish it was,” Gabriel said. “But the Revenant kept coming, every night, until they were all gone.” He pointed back to the hills where the TARDIS stood. “You have to leave.”

“Leave?” Grae said, astonished.

“Yes,” Gabriel continued. “You have to leave before the Revenant finds out that you’re here. Before it kills you too.”

Grae’s voice was of amazement. “But we can’t leave you children alone here with a creature like that roving about!”

“Which brings me to an interesting point,” the Doctor said, turning his attention back to Gabriel. “Aren’t you children afraid of the Revenant?”

“No,” Gabriel said flatly. “The Revenant has never harmed a child.”

“Never?” Grae said, rather surprised.

“No. It never has,” Gabriel responded.

“That’s not true,” came a girl’s voice from behind Gabriel. The TARDIS crew’s attention shifted, looking behind Gabriel into the group of children. Amongst the children, a small girl, perhaps about seven years old, stood looking shyly at the ground. She lovingly held a doll in her arms, as if cradling a baby. The Doctor moved closer to her and knelt down beside her.

“And you are?” he asked.

“Madeline,” the girl said meekly.

“Madeline. A very pretty name.” The Doctor reached into his pocket and pulled out a candy cane. “Care for one?” The girl’s face lit up, and she gave a small chuckle as she took the candy cane from the Doctor. “Now, Madeline,” the Doctor continued. “What do you mean that it’s not true? Are you saying this ‘Revenant’ has attacked children before?”

“Once,” Madeline said.

“Do you know who?” Grae asked.

“A boy named Curien. The Revenant came one night and took him away.”

“That’s a lie!” Gabriel shouted. Tamara and Grae jumped with shock at Gabriel’s sudden outburst. The Doctor noticed Madeline draw back, the expression on her face wilting. Gabriel walked up to the Doctor and Madeline. “Curien was taken away by some adults. They returned without him, and we never saw him again.” Gabriel directed his voice at Madeline, and continued in a harsh tone. “Madeline was friends with Curien and makes up stories to make herself feel better.” Madeline looked away, in shame.

Tamara was growing angry at Gabriel’s verbal lashing of Madeline. “Leave her alone. I’m sure she’s been through a lot, as I imagine you all have.” Gabriel looked back at Tamara and, after staring at her with some anger, walked away. The other children continued to crowd around the TARDIS crew, with more arriving all the time. The Doctor looked at Grae and Tamara.

“Well,” he began, “it looks as though our vacation plans are on hold.”

* * * * *

“Tell me what you know about the Revenant,” the Doctor said to the children gathered around him

The Doctor, Tamara, and Grae had walked along a little further, and sat on a bench that they found. The children sat around them, fascinated at seeing an adult for the first time in, quite possibly, years. Grae looked at them with an odd interest, which Tamara noticed. The Doctor took out a bouncing ball from his pocket and threw it towards the children, who immediately began playing with it. They threw it back and forth amongst themselves and at the Doctor. The Doctor laughed, almost childishly, as he threw it back to them.

Tamara observed the Doctor with mild amusement and some awe. She saw the Doctor as he interacted with the children, the genuine enthusiasm he showed as he played. It was almost as if he’d had children of his own, one time.

“What do you want to know, Doctor?” one of the boys asked.

“Anything at all about the Revenant,” he said as he threw the ball back at the boy.

“Well...” one of the children began, “our parents told us that it came from the southwest. Across the mountains and in some valley called Shadow’s Grove.”

“Has anyone ever been there?” Grae asked.

“Not any of the children. Our parents said no one had been there in de...dec...decades - that’s it!” one of the girls stammered.

“Why not for so long?” the Doctor asked.

“We don’t know,” the girl said. “Something horrible happened there, they said. But they wouldn’t want to talk about it.”

“This Revenant...” Tamara began. “What does it look like?”

“It’s like a shadow,” one of the boys said dramatically. “A living shadow. And it comes at night so it’s hard to see it.”

“That would make sense,” the Doctor offered, with a straight face.

“And nothing can hurt it!” offered one of the other boys.

“That’s not true,” came Madeline’s voice. The Doctor turned to face her and motioned her to come closer. Madeline shyly moved to stand beside him.

“Now Madeline,” the Doctor began, “tell me what you mean. You know of something that hurt the Revenant?”

“She’s making it up!” one of the boys cried out. The Doctor gave a disapproving glance upwards, and then fixed his attention back onto Madeline.

“Go on, tell me,” the Doctor said.

“Well, I don’t know what exactly happened,” Madeline said, fighting back tears at her memories of the event. “My mother... it was trying to attack my mother. She was on the

floor...hurt. I got in front of her, and I was crying. I don't remember a whole lot, but I do remember that the monster went away quickly."

"Quickly?" commented the Doctor.

"Yeah. It just vanished like that," Madeline said, snapping her fingers for emphasis. The Doctor looked over at Grae and Tamara, who were giving him the same questioning look. The Doctor looked back down at Madeline and smiled.

"Thank you, Madeline. Again, you've been most helpful." Madeline smiled up at the Doctor and went off to play. The Doctor turned his attention back to Grae and Tamara.

"We seem to have a rather interesting conundrum set out before us, Doctor," Grae said, a little enthusiastically. Tamara looked at Grae with some amusement.

"Yes, indeed," the Doctor said, stroking his chin, deep in thought. Then he turned around. "I think I'm going to take a little trip to the library."

"The library?" Tamara asked, surprised.

"Yes," responded the Doctor. "I'm curious. I want to find out more about the history of Giminae." The Doctor looked down at some of the children. "Tell me, where is the library?"

The children seemed to look at each other, somewhat disconcerted. The Doctor waited patiently as they all stared around, unsure for a moment what to say.

"Well?" the Doctor said again, patiently. "You do have a library, correct?"

"Yes," one of the children mustered. "It's three blocks over, that way," he said, pointing.

The Doctor patted the boy's shoulder. "Thanks." He turned back to Tamara and Grae. "I'll catch up with you a little later. Try to stay out of trouble!" The Doctor then walked on at a brisk pace.

"You know what that means," Tamara said, not taking her eyes off of the Doctor as he rapidly disappeared around a street corner.

"That we won't see him for a while?" Grae commented.

"That's right," Tamara said. "And trouble is sure to rear its ugly head before then."

* * * * *

Tamara and Grae were walking down one of the main streets of the town. Around them, they saw children engaged in various acts of work and play: working in garden beds, tending to some small animals or cleaning the outside of homes, as well as playing with each other. Tamara's eyes focused on one girl, probably twelve years of age, assisting a younger child with a scraped knee. No doubt due to horseplay, if the guilty and repentant gaze of a nearby friend was anything to go by.

"It's something, isn't it?" Tamara pondered.

"What?" Grae responded, continuing to observe the children as they walked on.

"These children. Who knows how long they've been on their own? No parents, no supervision. And yet look how they've adapted."

"If there's one thing I've learned about humans, it's their unshakeable ability to respond to difficult circumstances."

"Why thank you, Grae," Tamara said, glancing quickly over at Grae, who was still observing the children. Tamara noticed how fascinated Grae seemed with the children. "Have you ever considered having children?" she asked, a little hesitant.

Grae quickly looked at Tamara. "Have you?"

Tamara looked at Grae in surprise. "What's this? Are you avoiding the question?"

"Not at all," Grae responded. "I'm using one of your human methods of reasoning - the Socratic Method, I believe it is called?"

"Ah, yes," Tamara said, turning her attention back to the children. "To be honest, I never thought about it when I was younger. Children... well, they never fit into my equation of career advancement and, uh, personal fulfillment. I had friends who had children at young ages, and I

felt that they became sidetracked with that. Their careers and lives came to a halt, and I used to think it was so foolish. There was so much I wanted to do.”

Tamara looked aside, and her eyes followed a nearby tree from its roots to the sky. “Then I had a boyfriend- a long term one- who brought it up. And then it hit me. If I was going to be in a relationship, the issue of children was no longer just one-sided. I mean, here he was, asking me about children, and I told him that I had never thought about having one. His response was ‘Well, what if we stay together?’ And I looked at him like he had three heads.”

Tamara gave a little laugh, as Grae just looked on. “We could never get past that issue. I told him that, at the very least, I wanted to wait. I just wanted my life to be settled. I wanted to feel like I accomplished something with my life first, before having children. I guess he was in more of a hurry than I was.”

Tamara looked aside a little sadly, her voice shifting to something resembling regret. She paused for a short moment. “Last I heard, he had married and had two little boys. I’m happy for him.” Tamara looked straight ahead, though her mind seemed a million miles away.

“I’m happy for him,” she repeated, softly.

“I’ve never quite understand the human need to procreate,” Grae said, her attention turned back to a boy giving a girl some flowers. Grae’s eyes panned across to a nearby garden bed, which was now missing several flowers. Grae smiled and turned her attention back to Tamara.

“Well, that’s difficult to explain,” Tamara said, taking in a deep breath. “For some humans, it’s not so much the need to procreate, as it is the sexual drive that is in humans.”

“Sexual drive?” Grae asked, genuinely fascinated.

“Yes,” Tamara said. Then she paused. “You, uh, *are* aware of how human procreation works, right Grae?”

“Oh yes, I am well aware,” Grae said, as though she was talking about a mathematical thesis.

“Well,” continued Tamara, “humans, for the most part, enjoy the act of mating. However, mating can lead to having children. So people take precautions to not have children unless they are ready.”

“All to enjoy the act of mating?” Grae asked, rather surprised.

“Yes.”

“That seems like an awful lot of hassle. Why bother?”

“Well, sex is certainly a powerful force.”

“But it just seems so... impractical,” Grae said, almost disturbed.

“No one said humans were practical,” Tamara said, with a smile.

“Indeed,” Grae said, looking back at the children once again.

“Well, how about you? Have you ever thought about having children?”

“Time Lords do not have children. Time Lords are loomed and, for lack of a better term, ‘born’ as full-grown adults.”

“Loomed?” Tamara asked in surprised.

“Yes,” Grae said, as though it were common knowledge.

“Uh, okay,” Tamara said, trying to grasp the concept. In her mind, images of the Doctor being born from threads of cloth appeared. Tamara shook her head and turned her attention back to Grae. “But... well, if someone from your race wanted to... I mean...” Tamara struggled to find the right way to ask.

“Yes,” Grae said quickly, and smiled at Tamara. “Everything ‘works’, if that’s what you’re getting at.” Grae paused. “It’s curious how humans, for being a race driven by the act of sex, can have such difficulty talking about it.”

Tamara blushed. “Very, very true, Grae.” Tamara noticed Grae looking at the children intently. Tamara suddenly realized that they had walked quite a distance now, covering several

blocks in a short time. Tamara realized that Grae was still looking intently at the children. “Is everything okay, Grae?”

“Yes,” Grae said slowly. “But there’s something... odd about this place.”

“There’s a shocker.”

“I can’t put my finger on it, but there’s something... strange.”

“About the children?”

“I don’t know.” Grae looked as a group of children played a game of *parachute*. “I just don’t know.”

* * * * *

The Doctor was absorbing the history of Giminae at a fairly rapid rate. The problem was, it was all too familiar. *I thought that this world was a colony of Earth*, he thought to himself. But as he read through the pages on the history of Giminae, it rapidly became apparent that it was not. Explorers who had crossed oceans and populated lands; conquerors and empires that rose and fell; even naval battles sounding vaguely familiar to Earth’s history. This planet’s history resembled Earth’s, and that was something of a curiosity. Because the children were clearly human. And there were so many questions. Why were there no cities nearby? Where was there no trade and commerce between these cities? Why had no one found the children earlier, if there were indeed other cities and governments? The Doctor paused in thought for a moment. Perhaps the Revenant had destroyed them all. Perhaps this was a prison of some sort. Perhaps there was a war. Perhaps Earth’s history had been altered..

It was too troubling a thought, and so the Doctor put the book he held back onto the bookshelf. He reached out for another book when he heard a sound. The Doctor paused and turned his head, waiting to hear the sound again. It was as if something had fallen. The Doctor shrugged his shoulders and reached up again to pull out the next book from the shelf, when he heard the banging sound again. The Doctor stopped and moved to the end of the aisle, poking his head out to see if he could spot anyone.

“Hello?” came the Doctor’s voice, echoing in the empty library. “Is anyone there? You know, it’s awfully rude to make loud noises in the library.” Still, there was no response.

The Doctor turned his attention back to the bookcase when he realized that there were two blazing eyes staring at him from behind the books. The eyes were red, and fire dripped off of them like honey. The Doctor was taken a back for a moment. *Could this be the Revenant?* the Doctor thought to himself. The Doctor immediately reached out and pushed the books aside, trying to remove any barriers between him and the glowing eyes. The Doctor extended his arm into the bookcase, but found that nothing was there.

The Doctor quickly ran around to the other side of the bookcase, but still found no one. The Doctor hastily glanced over at the door - the only exit available to anyone - and saw no one leaving. He moved around the room, like a tiger stalking its prey, trying to find any sign of life. But nothing.

The Doctor scoured the whole room and found nothing. He moved over to the doorway, and turned around. Everything was eerily quiet. The Doctor turned around and left.

* * * * *

By the time the Doctor caught up with Tamara and Grae, they had just finished their walk around town. It was getting late in the day - dusk could not have been more than an hour or so away. Tamara and Grae sat down on a park bench, waiting as the Doctor walked up to them at a brisk pace.

“How was everything?” were the first words out of his mouth upon meeting them.

“Fine,” Grae said. Then, after a moment, “Rather educational.”

“Oh, is that so?” asked the Doctor, giving Tamara a curious glance.

“Don’t worry, Doctor. She’s still as innocent as she was when you last saw her,” Tamara said, giving Grae a quick wink.

“Well,” said the Doctor, coughing, “we have some other issues to deal with. I had a rather interesting experience at the library.” The Doctor then quickly recounted what had happened to him. Grae and Tamara grew concerned.

“While were walking around town, I noticed something strange about the children, but I can’t seem to place it,” Grae offered.

“Yes, I picked up on that as well,” the Doctor said, rubbing his chin in thought.

“Do you have any ideas?” asked Tamara.

“None yet, unfortunately.” The Doctor frowned and sighed. “However, I think we may do well to visit Madeline.”

“Why?” asked Grae.

“She’s the only one who was able to repel the Revenant. She may hold some important answers to helping these children.”

“Doctor,” Tamara began, “we don’t even know if this Revenant exists. Other than your experience in the library, we’re merely going on the word of these children. What if something else is going on here?”

“Like what?” replied the Doctor.

“I don’t know. Maybe the children did something to the parents. Wasn’t there some movie - *Children of the Corn* - about this?”

“I’ve never heard of a plant species giving birth to complex mammal offspring before. It must be fascinating!” Grae said, a little too enthusiastically. Tamara looked at Grae for a moment, and then looked at the Doctor. The Doctor scratched the back of his neck nervously.

“That’s not quite what the film is about, Grae,” the Doctor said. Grae blushed heavily.

“Back on topic,” Tamara began, “my point is, and we just don’t know enough about these children to even trust them.”

“True. But you’ve seen them. They have been nothing but helpful, and I don’t get the sense that they are hiding anything from us. The only one who seems to be hiding something from us is Madeline.”

“You really think so, Doctor?” Grae asked.

“Yes. Let’s go pay her a visit, hmm?”

* * * * *

After inquiring as to Madeline’s whereabouts, the TARDIS crew headed over to Madeline’s house. Madeline lived at the edge of town, facing the mountains towards the southwest. By the time they arrived, it was dark. From outside, one could barely detect a light source from within the house. The Doctor knocked on the door, and after a minute it opened. Madeline stood there, with a candle in its holder, in her hand.

“Yes?” she said.

“Hello there, Madeline. Remember us?” the Doctor said, a wide grin on his face.

“Yes, I do,” Madeline said, a little hesitantly.

“May we come in?” Grae asked.

“What do you want?”

“We’re hoping to talk to you, Madeline,” the Doctor said, “about the Revenant.”

Madeline looked at them sadly. “I don’t know anything else.”

“Madeline, please.” The Doctor knelt down in front of her. His voice grew soft, gentle. Madeline could have sworn the shade of his eyes changed as he spoke. “It is very important. Something is wrong here. You know that, because I can sense it. We only want to help you and the rest of the children. But I think there’s something you know, whether you

realize it or not, that will help us greatly.” He paused for a moment. “Can we please come inside?”

Madeline turned away for a moment. “okay.”

The TARDIS crew followed Madeline into the house. After she closed the door, Madeline lit several candles that were around the room. Tamara looked around the house. It was very well kept, amazingly so for an eight year old. Tamara felt a twinge of sadness overcome her. Madeline had grown up so fast. She observed Madeline as she pulled out a chair for herself, allowing the TARDIS crew to sit on the sofa. Tamara knew that Madeline had to be more mature for her age, considering the circumstances she and the other children were faced with. *Maybe quietly she had snapped*, Tamara wondered.

“Thank you very much, Madeline,” the Doctor said.

“Don’t mention it.”

“What I’m curious about, Madeline, is the night that the Revenant attacked you.”

Madeline grew immediately uncomfortable. “Yes?”

“Do you recall the events of that night?”

Madeline paused, and stared at the coffee table, deep in thought. “Yes, I do. Though it’s kind of hard.”

“Just try,” the Doctor said consolingly.

“I remember... I remember my mum. She was lying on the floor... like something had pushed her down...”

As Madeline spoke, Tamara’s attention turned towards the fireplace, and the mantle above it. On the mantle, she noticed some picture frames. Tamara slowly stood and walked over to the fireplace, looking at the frames. *How could they have pictures when they don’t even have electricity?* Tamara asked herself. One was of a woman, whom she assumed was Madeline’s mother, holding Madeline. Another was of her mother and father, holding a baby. The baby, however, didn’t look like Madeline - it didn’t share her auburn hair. Judging from the outfit, it could have been a boy. In the background, Tamara could still hear Madeline telling her story to the Doctor.

Then suddenly, everything changed.

From the corner of her eye, Tamara saw Grae fly across the room and smash into a cabinet. Tamara turned quickly, as the sound of glass and plates shattering filled the room.

Deep down, the darkly humorous part of Tamara - the part that didn’t believe that any of this was really happening - wanted to laugh. Grae looked like a rag doll flying through the air. It seemed so... *unnatural*. Then her attention turned back to where Grae was standing. Her eyes quickly darted over to where the Doctor was, in front of Madeline, pulling her into his arms for safety. Tamara could scarcely make out the Doctor calling out for Grae, and there was no response. Tamara’s eyes went to where Grae was sitting, and she saw something emerging from the shadows, like a swimmer breaking through the surface of the water. Tamara could not believe her eyes.

Standing there was a tall creature, measuring about six and half feet in height. It’s arms, hands, and legs were bundles of straw, moving unnaturally in the dark. Its “head” was a large oval object, almost like an egg, appearing to be made of ivory, hovering disconnected from its neck. The ivory head was blank and smooth, and around it floated several small flaming skulls, moving their jaws in twisted laughter. The flaming skulls circled the ivory head in a slow, circular motion. The abomination wore a Victorian-style cloak, and Tamara believed that she could make out a ring on its left straw hand. For a moment, it did not move, appearing almost lifeless.

“Doctor!” Tamara cried out.

“Is that the Revenant?” he said quickly to Madeline, who was holding onto the Doctor tightly.

“Yes...” she said weakly, her voice full of tears.

The Doctor quickly turned his attention back to where Grae had landed, but he could see no movement. “Grae!” he cried out. But there was still no response.

Tamara’s eyes were stuck affixed in horror on where Grae had landed. *No*, she thought. *Not like this*. Her attention turned back to the Revenant, and it suddenly moved towards her.

Tamara ducked just in time, as the Revenant’s fist smashed into the mantle above the fireplace, shattering it. The pictures flew everywhere, some into pieces. Tamara dove to the side and rolled into a stance facing the Revenant. Just as quickly it was right there, bringing its left arm across Tamara’s face. Tamara flew to the side into a table. For a moment, Tamara thought that it had broken her neck. Her head was ringing, but all she could think of was that creature coming at her, and Tamara didn’t want to wait to find out what it would do. She stood up, fighting a sharp pain in her right shoulder. She could hear the Doctor shouting at her from across the room.

“Tamara, run! Don’t fight it!”

His words were a haze in Tamara’s mind. She should run; she knew it. But what of the Doctor and Madeline? From the corner of her eye, she could see the Doctor motioning for Madeline to sneak out the door, which was a little too close to where the Revenant was standing. *I’ll need to distract the damn monster*, she thought. Tamara thought back to her training and braced herself.

“Come on, you beast!” she cried out. The Revenant lurched towards her, and in that moment Tamara reacted. She moved forwards, then quickly arched herself back and threw a crescent kick towards the Revenant’s chest. Her hope was to kick the creature aside, knocking it off balance long enough to allow Madeline to escape.

Sometimes hope isn’t enough.

The Revenant caught Tamara’s leg before it had a chance to connect.

“Oh sh-,” she cried, but before she could even finish, the Revenant swung her completely around. Tamara was completely airborne, just like Grae. And just like Grae, Tamara was thrown like a rag doll, except this time out the nearest window. Glass shattered and crashed to the ground as Tamara sailed out through the window and hit the ground with a sickening *thud*.

“No!” the Doctor cried out, as Madeline ran back to him. He placed her behind him, as the Revenant turned its attention back to the Doctor and Madeline. The Doctor stood his ground, staring at the Revenant in defiance and with great anger. “Stay behind me, Madeline,” he said, as Madeline cowered behind him.

The Revenant took a step towards them.

“Madeline, right now would be an ideal time to remember what you did to ward off the Revenant,” the Doctor said, never moving his eyes away from the monstrosity. Madeline only responded with sobs.

Suddenly, the Revenant was in front of the Doctor, and reached out and grabbed him by his shirt. In one swift motion, he lifted the Doctor up and, swinging him around, smashed him through the coffee table. Wood shattered and splintered everywhere. The Doctor grunted with pain, and found himself unable to move. The Revenant stood over him for a moment, like the Grim Reaper. But then it turned its attention to Madeline, who was hiding in a corner. Slowly, it strode over to her. Her sobbing intensified. Across the room, the Doctor lay almost motionless.

“Madeline,” he said weakly, “run... run now...”

Madeline was frozen in fear. She kept looking up at the Revenant, and then turned back into the corner to hide away. The Revenant towered over her, and then stopped. It reached out with its right hand, palm out, and extended all its straw fingers. Its hand began to emit a low, red glow. Madeline’s cries became louder.

Then, something hit the Revenant’s leg. The Revenant looked down and saw an unwound yo-yo laying at it’s feet, and the Revenant’s head followed it’s path to the Doctor, laying on this stomach, arm outstretched. It turned its head back towards Madeline, but she was

not there. Its head quickly turned and saw Madeline moving towards the front door. Before it could even move, something barreled into it from behind, and the Revenant buckled down to one knee. The Doctor looked up, and a small smile couldn't help but crawl across his face, as he saw Grae there, on the Revenant's back, trying to knock it down.

"Run, Madeline!" Grae cried out. Madeline ran towards the door.

The Revenant's arm reached out and grabbed Grae by the throat. Then, it stood up and pinned Grae to the wall with its hand, a couple of feet off of the ground. Grae's hands grabbed and clawed at the Revenant's, trying to break free as she coughed and gasped for air. The Doctor jumped to his feet and hurried up to the Revenant.

"Put her down, now!" he cried out.

The Revenant let go of Grae, who crumpled onto the ground. As the Revenant turned around, the Doctor reached out, and grabbed a hold of the ivory head. The Revenant recoiled quickly, attempting to push the Doctor away. However, he held on tightly, and continued to do so until the Revenant connected with a swift punch to his abdomen, which made the Doctor reel. The Doctor fell back against the couch, and looked over quickly at Grae, who was barely moving. Sighing in relief, he looked over at where the Revenant stood. Slowly, the Revenant began to recede into the shadows, and within moments melted away to nothing. The Doctor slowly leaned closer, but found no sign of the Revenant.

After realizing that the Revenant was gone, the Doctor looked over at the front door. Madeline was crouched at the doorway, looking in hesitantly.

"It's okay, Madeline," the Doctor called out. "I think it's gone."

Madeline slowly entered the room, and then broke into a dash over to the Doctor, who was slowly lifting himself up off the floor. The Doctor welcomed her with a hug, and then limped over to Grae.

"Grae," the Doctor began.

Grae groaned in a low tone, and her eyes fluttered open. She reached for bruised neck. "Doctor... where's Tamara?"

The Doctor shot a horrified glance over at the window and rushed over to it. He looked out through the window, and saw Tamara lying still on the ground. The Doctor jumped through the window and knelt down beside Tamara. He moved his fingers to her neck.

A pulse. Tamara was still alive.

He looked over her. Shattered glass lay all about Tamara's body, like snow in the morning of winter. Small cuts run up and down her arms, and her upper lip had been busted open. On her forehead, there was an inch-long gash. Much to the Doctor's surprise, there was not as much blood as he was expecting. He sighed in relief.

"Tamara?" he stammered.

No response.

"Tamara, it's me, the Doctor."

A guttural moan echoed in Tamara's throat, but she still didn't move.

The Doctor reached into one of his pockets and pulled out a small flashlight, and with his one hand opened Tamara's right eye, flashing the light onto it. The eye responded to the new stimulus.

"Good, good," the Doctor said to himself. He heard Grae's voice right behind him.

"Is she okay?" Grae said, standing at the window with Madeline.

"She's badly hurt. We need to take her back to the TARDIS." The Doctor lifted his head and looked around. "No children?"

Grae looked at the Doctor, caught off guard by the apparent non-sequitur. "What?" she asked.

"How is it no children were awoken by the sound of the window shattering? I would have thought that some would have come to check out what was happening."

"They won't," Madeline said quietly.

The Doctor shot her a glance. “Why not?”

“They’re too scared. Too scared of the monster.”

The Doctor looked back down at Tamara again. Slowly, her head began to move, from side to side.

“Doctor?” Tamara said, in a whisper.

“Hush, it’s okay. Don’t move, Tamara. We have to take you back to the TARDIS for examination.”

“Is... is it gone?”

“Yes, the Revenant is gone. Just rest and save your energy.”

“I’m fine,” Tamara said, with a little more energy. She made a movement to sit up, but her face grimaced with pain. She lay back down.

“Just relax,” the Doctor said, motioning for Grae to join him. Turning his attention back to Grae and Madeline, the Doctor said, “Madeline, you’re coming with us back to the TARDIS. Grae, are you well enough to help me move Tamara?”

“Yes,” Grae said, without hesitation.

“Good.” The Doctor looked back down at Tamara. “Let’s begin.”

* * * * *

“Thankfully, you only suffered a mild concussion, aside from your scrapes and bruises,” the Doctor said, looking over Tamara as she lay on a bed in the TARDIS.

They were in the med lab of the TARDIS, which Tamara quietly admitted to herself was the most comfortable ‘hospital room’ she had ever been in. She had an IV in her arm, which her eyes followed the tube all the way up to a bag containing some sort of solution that the Doctor was putting into her body. The solution looked like water, but whatever it was, it was doing the trick. Tamara was feeling a thousand times better than a couple of hours ago, after her run-in with the Revenant. The trip back to the TARDIS was fuzzy in her memory - the Doctor and Grae had carried her gently the whole time. A small feeling of guilt crept into Tamara’s stomach. She hated being defenseless, to depend on others to care for her. And here, the Doctor was, oddly enough, playing *doctor*.

“What is this stuff, Doctor?” Tamara said, pointing to the bag holding the solution.

The Doctor looked up at Tamara, appearing to have been disturbed from being deep in thought. “Oh, that? An interesting substance I picked up during my travels. Fascinating substance. It helps the body recover faster from injuries. I’m only using it to help you with your concussion. I’m afraid your cuts will take a little longer to heal.”

“That’s fine with me. I feel a lot better.”

“That’s great to hear!” The Doctor patted Tamara’s shoulder. “You’ll be up and about in no time. But you’ll need a good night’s rest.”

“You’ll get no complaint there.”

The Doctor moved towards the door of the med lab. “Get some sleep, and we’ll catch up later. Sweet dreams!”

Tamara was already half-asleep. She mumbled something to the Doctor, before slipping off into tranquility.

* * * * *

The Doctor walked to a nearby room, where he found Grae putting Madeline to bed. The Doctor stood at the doorway and smiled at Madeline.

“So what do you think?” he said with a smile.

“I can’t believe it!” Madeline said, bouncy and wide-eyed. “Is this really your home?”

“Yes it is. It’s called a TARDIS.”

“Wow... a TARDIS.” Madeline slowly touched the fine wood paneling of the bed. “How can it... well, I mean... it’s so big, but outside...”

“Well,” Grae began, “the TARDIS is the result of transcendental engineering. You see, the outer shell is in fact separate from the inner dimension of the TARDIS. The mathematical-”

“Grae,” the Doctor interrupted, as politely as he could.

Grae shot an innocent glance over at the Doctor. “Yes?”

“She’s a child. She’s not going to understand transcendental engineering.”

“But Time Lord children...”

“...Are different,” the Doctor concluded.

“Which is something I’d like to talk to you about, sometime.” Grae looked back at Madeline, who appeared quite confused.

“Why do I have to stay here, anyway?” Madeline asked.

“I think it’ll be safer for you, Madeline,” the Doctor said. Grae stood up and walked over to the Doctor. “Goodnight, Madeline.”

“Night, Doctor. Good night, Grae.”

Grae smiled. “Good night, Madeline.” Grae leaned over and kissed Madeline gently on the forehead. She then stood and walked to the door.

The Doctor and Grae left the room, and the Doctor closed the door behind him. Together, they walked down the corridor and back into the TARDIS console room.

“Doctor,” Grae began.

“I do hope this isn’t about human children and reproduction.”

Grae froze for a moment. “No, it’s not. Tamara and I already discussed that earlier.”

“Oh dear.”

“No, this is about the Revenant. How did you stop it?”

“What do you mean?”

“How did you get it to stop attacking us?”

The Doctor paused, and stroked his chin. “Well, I when I reached out and grabbed its head, I tried to communicate with it telepathically.”

Grae was surprised. “Really? Did you make any sort of contact?”

“No.”

Grae’s eyebrows furrowed in surprise. “No?”

“There was nothing there. When I reached out with my mind, it was like reaching out into an empty space, a void. Nothing was there, at all.”

“Rather odd. Like the rest of this place.”

“Yes, indeed.” The Doctor paused for a moment. “I don’t understand why it went after Madeline, though. There is definitely some kind of connection with her and this thing. Maybe the answer is buried deep in her subconscious.”

“Yes, but what? A lot of things here don’t make sense.”

“True, true.” The Doctor looked around in thought, and his eyes settled onto several books on a small table across the console the room. He stared at them for a long while. Grae noticed this, and looked back and forth between the Doctor and the books.

“Doctor?” she asked.

“The library,” the Doctor said.

“What?”

“The library. I have to go back to the library.” The Doctor’s voice was full of renewed vigor.

“Why?”

“No time to explain. Stay here with Tamara and Madeline. I’ll be right back.”

“You’re not going alone with the Revenant possibly still out there. I’m coming with you.”

The Doctor looked at Grae. “You need to stay here and watch over Tamara and Madeline.”

“They’re sleeping, Doctor. They will be fine, but you may need my help.”

The Doctor paused. “Fine, come along then. But try to keep up!” he said at last with a smile.

* * * * *

The Doctor and Grae entered the library cautiously. It was dark, save for the dim light of the Doctor’s candle. They slowly entered the room, and Grae closed the door behind her. She could feel a sense of dread in the air, particularly after the story the Doctor had told her about his experience earlier in the library. She looked over at the large windows high on the walls, allowing the soft light of the full moon to fall onto the tall bookcases. The bookcases then cast menacing shadows onto the floor, pointing towards the Doctor and Grae as if in accusation. Grae walked closely behind the Doctor.

“You still haven’t told me why we’re here,” she said in a whisper.

“We’re not breaking in illegally, Grae, so you don’t have to whisper,” the Doctor said, in a full voice.

Grae blushed. “Well? Why are we here?”

“Back in the TARDIS I realized something. Whatever I saw in here - perhaps the Revenant - was trying to distract me from something.”

“From what?”

“Perhaps I was getting close to the truth about the children, about the Revenant, or about what happened to the adults. Perhaps about everything.” He paused as they approached the area where the Doctor saw the burning eyes. “It was like the Revenant attacking Madeline. We’re getting closer than we may think to the answers.” After climbing some steps, the Doctor pulled out a book from the top of the bookcase. He quickly paged through its contents, and then summarily threw it down to the ground. The Doctor repeated this process several more times, and each time he flung the book down onto the floor.

Grae looked up at the Doctor in mock disappointment. “I’ve never known you to be quite this messy.”

The Doctor quickly climbed down the steps and moved over to another bookcase. He began to repeat the same process again - pull out a book, flip through the pages, and then throw it on the floor. After several books suffered this process, he stopped and gave one to Grae. “Look at this.”

Grae, confused, took the book from the Doctor’s hand. She opened the pages and, finding it difficult to read the text, put the candle closer to the pages, only to find them blank. Grae flipped through several of the sections.

“They’re all blank!” she said in surprise.

“Yes, exactly. All the books I have just perused and tossed aside are blank.”

“All of them?”

“The only ones not blank are the ones on the history of Giminae.”

“But... but that’s absurd!”

“Yes, I would say so,” the Doctor said, tossing aside another book. “But why would they fill a library full of blank books unless...”

“...Unless they were trying to deceive us!” Grae said, excitedly.

“Yes. Exactly!” The Doctor turned on his heels and marched for the door. Grae quickly followed suit.

“I think it’s time,” the Doctor said as he walked out the door, “that we paid the Revenant a visit at his home.”

* * * * *

The night passed rather quickly for Grae, and before she knew it they had accomplished quite a bit. After leaving the library, they headed back to the TARDIS and rested. The following morning, the Doctor cooked a rather delicious breakfast consisting of eggs benedict, sourdough toast with butter and jam, milk, orange juice, and a cinnamon roll. Madeline was enthralled with the meal. Tamara joined them for breakfast, looking and feeling much better. Though she had a slight headache, breakfast seemed to make it better. After breakfast, the Doctor, Grae, Tamara (despite the Doctor's protests), and Madeline headed back to town and dropped her off. The Doctor made her promise that she would stay with a friend until they got back, which Madeline happily did. Then, the TARDIS crew began to head southwest, armed with rations, towards Shadow's Grove.

Towards the southwest were the mountains made of glass, looming ominously before them. Grae and Tamara were mere steps behind the Doctor. He was in an upbeat mood, whistling as he walked along. Tamara was beginning to second-guess her decision to join the Doctor and Grae on their little trip. Despite the wonder-cure the Doctor had fed to her through the IV, her legs were still rather achy, and were growing more so by the moment. Grae, on the other hand, looked fine and did not appear to be suffering any ill effects from her encounter with the Revenant. Sometimes Tamara wished that she had that amazing Time Lord physiology.

"So what's your plan, Doctor?" Tamara asked.

"Hmm?" He turned his head to face her.

"What do you plan to do when we find the Revenant? Maybe offer it some jelly babies and ask it to be nice?"

"No no no. I am curious as to what lies in the southwest. From what we can tell, there are no other cities around, despite what their history books say. I'm curious if maybe there's anything beyond the mountains."

"And what if we run into the Revenant?" Grae asked, a little wearily.

"Well, we'll cross that road when we get to it."

"We've already crossed that road once, Doctor," Tamara, a little stronger than she cared to.

"Have some faith, Tamara," the Doctor said, staring at some flowers that appeared to be made out of styrofoam.

"We've covered quite a bit of distance already, Doctor. How long have we been walking?" Grae asked.

"About two hours or so," the Doctor responded. Looking up, he could see what Grae meant. The mountain range was much closer than he had anticipated. Within an hour, they should be arriving at the base of the mountain, the Doctor surmised to himself.

Two more hours passed, and the TARDIS crew were still not at the mountain range. Tamara was quite tired by this point, still feeling the effects of her weakened body. Grae was walking along fine, but looked a little confused. The Doctor appeared deep in thought.

"Doctor," Tamara said, "it seems like we're getting nowhere."

"Agreed. We should have arrived at the mountains by now," Grae added.

The Doctor kept walking for several more seconds, and then stopped. He gazed at the mountains for a minute or so, and then turned around. Tamara stared at the Doctor as he simply kept walking in the direction from which they came. After exchanging quick glances, Tamara and Grae rushed to catch up with the Doctor.

"What's going on, Doctor? Why did you turn around?"

"We've gone far enough," the Doctor said, continuing his walk back.

"What do you mean?" asked Grae.

"We'll never reach the mountains." The Doctor stopped, and then looked around. "I wonder[..]" He began to run off in a quick sprint towards the northwest, and then came back to where Tamara and Grae were standing. Then he broke off into a run towards the southeast.

After running for a couple of minutes he came back and continued back to town with Tamara and Grae.

“Were you having a ‘Chariots of Fire’ moment, Doctor?” Tamara asked.

“It’s a Xeno Effect.”

“Really?” Grae asked, surprised.

“Wait a sec,” Tamara said, in confusion. “A Xeno-what?”

“Xeno Effect.” The Doctor kept his eyes straight ahead of him.

“I understand,” Grae said. “No matter how long we would have walked, we would never have reached the mountain range because every step we took covers half the distance of the previous step. Thus, our movement is infinitely shortened.”

“The reason I took off running was to see if the effect covers this area. It appears to cover the circumference of the town.”

“So... this town and everything immediately around it is surrounded by this Xeno Effect?” Tamara asked.

“Yes. Which means that the Revenant must originate from within the town itself.” The Doctor began to take hurried steps. “Quickly, there isn’t much time to spare!”

* * * * *

By the time the TARDIS crew arrived back in town, it was late afternoon. They walked through town casually, and found the children on the streets involved in various forms of work and play: playing jump rope, hop-scotch, drawing with chalk on the pavement, as well as gardening and cutting the grass. The Doctor, Tamara, and Grae continued to walk several blocks and observed the children.

“Something is still not right,” Grae said.

“About the children?” Tamara asked.

“Yes.”

“I agree,” the Doctor said, looking at the children closely. Then his eyes widened. “Wait.” The Doctor took off at a sprint to the next block over, and ran down that street. Grae and Tamara followed. When they catch up with him, he is pointing at several children who were playing.

“Do you see what is wrong?” the Doctor said.

“No, I don’t,” Tamara said, looking around wildly. “They’re just kids playing.”

“I’m afraid I don’t see it either, Doctor,” Grae said.

“Yes, they’re playing, but they- the children- are performing the same activities all over the town!” He walked off to the next block, into the center of town. He pointed out the children to Grae and Tamara. “See?”

Tamara and Grae looked around. Children were playing, gardening, and cutting the grass. Various games that the children played were being repeated all throughout town. And then Tamara saw the deeper meaning. The children were playing the same games, performing the same functions, right down to the exact movements.

“The same movements, the same mannerisms,” Tamara said.

“Exactly,” the Doctor concurred.

“And yesterday, they were doing the same exact things, playing the same exact games, gardening in the same exact spots,” Grae said, her voice filled with amazement.

“They’re like robots,” Tamara added.

The Doctor tapped his bearded chin in thought. “Hmm...”

“It’s like clockwork, Doctor. Perhaps they’re under control by some force?” Grae commented.

“Perhaps,” the Doctor said. The Doctor looked across the town square, and noticed a rather large building. Several of the children were entering it. Tamara and Grae looked over at it as well.

“A town hall of some sort?” Grae offered.

“Yes, indeed. Let’s pay it s a visit.”

They walked over, across the town square and by the children who were playing. The children did not stop to look up at the TARDIS crew. Tamara glanced at the children and felt some sadness well up inside of her. *These poor children*, she thought. Whatever was controlling them had to be stopped. They didn’t deserve this. Her sadness turned to anger, and she walked into the town hall, right behind the Doctor and Grae.

Upon entering, they noticed the town hall housed a large auditorium, and inside were many children, who were reading as they sat. The Doctor, Grae, and Tamara split up, walking down the aisles and glancing at the children. The children did not seem to notice them and merely continued to read. The Doctor leaned down and noticed that the pages of the children’s books were blank. Grae and Tamara noticed the same thing, shooting worried glances over at the Doctor. They walked over and joined the Doctor.

“The pages of the books...” Tamara began.

At that moment, the Doctor felt a tug on his jacket. Turning around, he saw Madeline standing beside him, holding a book in her hand. The Doctor smiled down at her. “What is it, dear?”

Madeline silently lifted up the book and handed it to the Doctor. Suddenly, there was a violent scream from across the auditorium. Several of the children shuffled in terror, turning around to see where the scream came from. Grae and Tamara shot glances up as well, and were horrified to see the Revenant across the auditorium.

“No!” the Doctor cried out, as he saw a figure in the Revenant’s grasp. The creature was holding a young boy by the throat, pinning him against the wall. The Doctor moved closer to the Revenant, but it raised its free hand, motioning him to stop. The Doctor stopped, stamping his feet in frustration.

“What are you? Why are you hurting these children?” the Doctor screamed.

The boy was pinned to the wall began to speak. His voice was weak, gasping for breath with every word. “Doctor...”

The Doctor looked over at him, and recognized him from earlier. It was Gabriel. “Just relax, I’m not going to let him hurt you.”

“Doctor,” Gabriel said weakly, “he’s hurting me. I... I can hear him talking, in my mind...” Gabriel let out a cry, as the Revenant pressed its hand closer around his throat.

“What does it want, Gabriel? Can you communicate with it and ask it what it wants?” The Doctor’s voice was full of desperation.

“Read the book, Doctor,” Gabriel said. “It wants you to read the book.”

The Doctor looked down at the crimson volume that Madeline had handed him. On the cover, embossed in gold lettering, were the words *To Be Read Aloud*. “This book?”

“Yes, Doctor. He’ll... kill me if you don’t.”

“Very well,” the Doctor said, hurriedly opening the book to its first page. Then the Doctor began to read the words.

“*‘Once there was a man who knew everything, who could travel anywhere with a special box. He had two friends that he took with him everywhere, and one day they landed in a strange place with strange things and people. The children there were frightened of a mean monster, called the Revenant, who had taken all of the parents away from Giminae. The man wanted to save the children from the monster, so he stayed and tried to find a way to beat the monster. When he searched he realized how he could beat the monster.’*” The Doctor paused and looked up at Gabriel, whose face was twisting in pain. The Doctor glanced over at Grae and Tamara, who were looking at him in fear and hope. The Doctor turned back to the book. “*‘In order to*

beat the monster the man had to say a few special words. First, by saying his own name, which was the D-'" The Doctor suddenly stopped, and threw the book down to the floor. Grae and Tamara looked at him horror. The Revenant's hand that was holding Gabriel against the wall began to glow read.

"Doctor, he's going to kill me!" Gabriel cried out.

"Doctor what are you doing?" Tamara yelled in horror.

"I'm not reading anymore of that book!" the Doctor said sternly, eyes firmly set on the Revenant.

"Why not? It will kill Gabriel!" Grae said.

"But that's what it wants me to do! It wants me to finish that story, to read on, but if I do then we'll become just like them!" He swept his arms, pointing to the children in the room.

"Doctor, I don't understand," Grae said, her eyes darting back and forth between the Doctor and Gabriel, his eyes filled with horror.

"It's this place," the Doctor said. "We're trapped in the Land of Fiction."

* * * * *

"What?" was all Tamara could muster.

"*This* is the Land of Fiction?" Grae said, a hint of awe creeping into her voice.

"Yes. I should have realized it sooner," the Doctor said.

"What are you talking about?" Tamara asked.

"For whatever strange reason, I've been here before, on more than one occasion," the Doctor began. "It's basically a dimension which brings to life things from your imagination. However, once you place yourself into a story - which I would have by reading my name out loud - you become fiction as well." The Doctor looked back at the Revenant. "Whatever entity that controls this dimension needs someone to create the fiction - a master storyteller, if you will. Isn't that right," the Doctor paused, then continued, "Gabriel?"

"What?" Tamara said in surprise. The TARDIS crew's eyes all fell on Gabriel. And then, the expression on his face turned from one of fear to one of surprise, and then of satisfaction, as a dark smile grew across his face. The Revenant let go of Gabriel, and stood up straight, taking steps behind Gabriel as if making way for its master. Gabriel took a few steps towards the Doctor.

"Yes, Doctor," Gabriel began, "you're right. I am the Master of the Land of Fiction now. I was warned that you were very smart, but I didn't think I gave you any clues to figure out what was happening."

"No, you specifically didn't give me any clues," the Doctor said. "But indirectly you did."

"How?"

"The blank books in the library were a clue. I figured that there was a reason why you lured me out of there. Your mind, even with the help of the entity here in the Land of Fiction, couldn't possibly create the variety necessary for a full library of books. Especially at your age. Thus, the more books I looked at, the faster you ran out of ideas, and the pages became blank."

"Very good, Doctor. I'm surprised."

"Well, you shouldn't be." The Doctor took a deep breath. "The children performing their functions in clockwork function - that was another clue. In fact, I'm sure, when we're not around, they're not doing anything, are they? They just stand there, like mannequins, until we walk by. And at night, I'm sure the homes they go into are empty, correct?"

"Correct," said Gabriel, a hint of impatience seeping into his voice.

"Now the Xeno Effect around the town makes sense. You see, I didn't realize it was a Xeno Effect at first because it really isn't. A true Xeno Effect leaves temporal resonance, which a Time Lord such as myself or a Time Lady such as Grae would detect. It is a defense of the

Land of Fiction.” The Doctor coughed. “Giminae is an anagram of ‘imagine’, but I thought that was just coincidence. The Revenant having no mind was another clue. Being a work of fiction, he wouldn’t have any feelings or a mind to touch.”

“But he can sure throw a punch,” Tamara said, a little louder than she cared for as the Doctor and Grae threw her a quick glance.

The Doctor turned to Madeline. “But Madeline is real too, isn’t she?” he said.

“Yes,” Gabriel said. “She’s my sister. But she doesn’t remember.” Gabriel paused. “I made her forget after we came here.”

“I thought as much.”

“How did you know that she was real?” Gabriel asked, genuinely curious.

“Well, she would have otherwise vanished the moment we took her into the TARDIS. Since the TARDIS interior is a separate dimension, the powers of the Land of Fiction would no longer operate.”

“Ah, okay,” Gabriel said, looking over at Madeline. She held onto the Doctor’s jacket like it was a life preserver. The Doctor caressed her hair consolingly.

“Why were you trying to kill your sister, then?” the Doctor asked darkly.

“I wasn’t trying to kill her!” Gabriel screamed, with a fury that made Tamara’s heart sink. Gabriel stiffened for a moment, and then spoke more gently. “I just wanted her out of the way until you all left.”

The Doctor turned back to Madeline. “Now do you remember what you did to protect your mother?”

Madeline paused for a moment, and looked over at Gabriel. “I... I called for him. I called out for Gabriel.”

The Doctor smiled down at her. “I see. The trauma must have caused some of the old memories to resurface.”

“I was surprised when she called out my name... I lost control of the Revenant and it vanished.” Gabriel’s cheeks were red, Tamara noticed. In embarrassment? Fear? Frustration?

“And the parents? Were they fictional as well?” Grae asked gently.

“Yes.” Gabriel paused for a moment.

“But why make the Revenant take them away? Why go through the trouble of eliminating the parents?” Tamara asked.

Gabriel’s face twisted in anger, and he screamed, his face becoming even redder as he held back tears. “Because all grownups just hate their children. They hate kids! They regret having us!” Tears were flowing down Gabriel’s cheeks. “That’s what my father told me. Every night when he would hit me, he’d tell me how much he wished he’d never had me. How much of a pain I was to him. How stupid I was and that I was too dumb to be his son.” Gabriel looked over at Madeline, whose eyes were watering up. “And when he was done beating me, he’d go into her room, and shut the door, and lock it, and...” Gabriel looked away, ashamed. “She wouldn’t stop screaming until he left her room. Then he’d go downstairs and drink... drink some more. Until he was passed out.” Gabriel took in a deep breath. “Mom would just sit in the attic, knitting and rocking back and forth in her chair, not doing anything.” Gabriel pounded the wall next to him in frustration. “She wouldn’t do anything! Moms are supposed to protect you and make you feel better. But she didn’t.” Gabriel sat down on the floor, his back to the wall. The Doctor, Grae, and Tamara slowly walked over to him. Gabriel continued to sob heavily. “She didn’t do anything,” he whispered.

The Doctor knelt down beside Gabriel. Tamara could have sworn she saw the Doctor fighting back tears. “It’s going to be okay,” he said softly.

“My dad used to lock us in the basement sometimes,” Gabriel continued, his voice very low. “My sister and I would just sit down there for hours. It would be dark... cold. I would tell her stories. We would make stories just so that we could pretend we were anywhere but there.” Gabriel paused. “One day, I was telling her a story about a crusade of children, and they were

marching away, towards a paradise. Towards a place where nothing hurt anymore, and no parents were there to hate you. And then, suddenly, there was this light. There was a light in the basement. I thought it was a fire, but it was- it was like a portal. And on the other side was paradise. And a voice spoke, telling us to go through, that it would be safe. So I took Madeline, and we rushed through. And the next thing we knew, we were in a place that could be anything that we wanted. No parents, no hate, nothing to hurt us. It was... perfect.”

Gabriel looked down at the floor. “The voice spoke inside my head and said I could make Giminae into anything I wanted. So I made friends, a new home, everything. We made the world look like how we wanted to. But Madeline... she became depressed. She wanted to go home.” Gabriel’s voice suddenly flared. “But I didn’t want to go back! I wasn’t going to go back to that place, to that horrible place. So I made her forget. I made her forget who she was and where she came from. And we stayed here.”

The Doctor rubbed Gabriel’s back. “But don’t you see? You just traded one prison for another. The entity that controls this Land of Fiction is using you! It needs your imagination. It doesn’t care about you! It’s only using you for it’s own selfish needs.”

Gabriel exploded in anger. “That’s not true!” Gabriel stood up and moved away from the Doctor, back towards where the Revenant stood. Gabriel turned to the Revenant. “Get him! Get the Doctor!”

The skulls burning and floating around the ivory head of the Revenant began to move in mock laughter, and the Revenant moved towards the Doctor. It raised its hands, turning them into fists. Grae and Tamara began to move towards the Doctor, but he motioned them to stay back.

“No, don’t come closer,” the Doctor said. “I’ll handle this.”

The Revenant moved in closer, and was almost upon the Doctor. The Doctor stood his ground, not even flinching.

“I’m not scared of it, Gabriel. I’m not scared of the Revenant.”

“It’s going to kill you, Doctor!” Gabriel cried out.

“No it won’t,” the Doctor said softly. “I know that it’s a manifestation of your fear and hatred of your father. You created the Revenant as both an outlet for your anger and as a statue of your father worship, because deep down inside you want your father to love you, no matter how much you want to deny it.”

“No!” Gabriel then let out a drawn-out shriek, and the Revenant shimmered, and then faded. The Doctor slowly moved over to Gabriel, who was on his knees, pounding the floor in frustration. The Doctor grabbed Gabriel by his shoulders and looked straight into his eyes.

“Gabriel, listen. You have to end this! I know that you don’t trust adults. I know you think parents hate their children. But it’s not true, Gabriel. Some do, yes, and it is a very sad and horrible thing. But I can help you, Gabriel. I promise that I will help you and Madeline. But you have to trust me. You need to leave this place. You can’t go on living here with your sister. Just give me a chance.” The Doctor paused, looking kindly at Gabriel. “I’m not like any other adult you’ve ever met. Please - just give me a chance to set things right.”

Gabriel looked into the Doctor’s eyes for what seemed like an eternity. For the same amount of time, Grae and Tamara watched on, breathless.

And then Gabriel broke down in tears, into the Doctor’s arms. The Doctor just held him close.

Suddenly, everything began to shake violently. A strong earthquake seemed to rock the town, Tamara thought, as she struggled to stay upright. The Doctor grabbed a hold of Gabriel, lifting him up and carrying him in his arms. He turned back to Grae and Tamara.

“Grab Madeline and let’s go! We have to head back to the TARDIS immediately!”

Grae picked up Madeline, and together all of them ran out of the town hall, just as it collapsed behind them. Out into the decaying streets they ran, and Tamara glanced around. It seemed to be the end of the world - the buildings were crumbling, shattering like hard, dried mud.

All around her, the children were turning into dust, falling to the ground where they were playing. They didn't even notice what was happening around them. As they ran out of town, Tamara noticed the mountains beginning to fade to a dull gray, then white, in the distance. The white void seemed to be getting closer by the moment. The flowers were withering to a gray, clumpy matter, and then falling to dust. The earth was beginning to crack open, revealing only the white void underneath.

"Doctor!" Tamara cried out.

"We're almost there!" he shouted in response.

Up ahead, they saw the TARDIS, and a little behind it was the white void, beginning to encompass the world. Tamara turned around and saw the town was completely gone. In Grae's arms, Madeline was crying heavily, screaming and holding onto Grae for dear life. They reached the TARDIS, and the Doctor quickly took out the key. He opened the door and ushered everyone inside, himself following thereafter.

After putting Gabriel down besides Tamara, the Doctor rushed over to the TARDIS console and began to frantically work the controls. The TARDIS rocked with a strong force, bringing back unfavorable memories of when they landed here. Finally, the Doctor pulled a lever and the glass column in the center of the console began to move up and down, and the rocking stopped. They were greeted with the familiar sound of the TARDIS in flight.

"Doctor?" Grae asked, tentatively.

"Yes, Grae. We've escaped." He paused and turned back to Grae and Tamara. "We've left the Land of Fiction."

Grae and Tamara sighed in relief. Tamara looked over, and saw Gabriel crumpled onto the floor. His eyes were open, but he was not speaking. His gaze was dull, almost lifeless.

"Doctor, it's Gabriel!" Tamara cried out.

The Doctor rushed over to her side and looked down at Gabriel. "He's in shock. Take him to the med lab, and I'll take a look at him shortly."

Tamara nodded and picked Gabriel up, taking him away through the door exiting the console room and leading to the rest of the TARDIS. The Doctor turned his attention back to the TARDIS console, tapped a few more buttons, and was about to head to the med lab when he was stopped by Madeline.

"Yes dear?" he asked.

"Doctor, are you going to make everything okay?" she asked quietly.

The Doctor paused, and then smiled. "Yes, Madeline," he said, hugging her. "I promise."

* * * * *

"Mr. Harcourt, I presume?"

"Yes," said the man who answered the door.

"I just wanted to know that your children are safe," the Doctor said, taking a quick glance at Mr. Harcourt's home. The house was an upper-middle class home, in an affluent community in a small suburb. The lawn was neatly cut; the sun was warm and high on a beautiful day. Across the street, the neighbor walked his dog as he jogged. In the drive were parked two BMWs.

The man's eyes grew wide. "My children? Do you have them? Did you take them? I'll kill you if -"

The Doctor spoke sternly. "Your children are fine, Mr. Harcourt. They have been given to the proper authorities, where they will be taken care of."

"What do you mean?"

The Doctor's eyes grew dark. "You know what you have done, to both of them." The Doctor took a deep breath. "There is a sanctity, Mr. Harcourt, in children. In raising them. In

caring for them. When they are young, they do not know their way through the world. It is our job as parents to teach them and guide them. The things you have subjected them to are horrific.”

Mr. Harcourt’s eyes grew hot with anger. “What are you accusing me off?”

The Doctor raised his voice. “Nothing that they have not already condemned you for.” The Doctor took a step closer and got right into Mr. Harcourt’s face. “I have contended with many horrors and menaces in my lifetime, Mr. Harcourt. But the things you did to Gabriel and...” The Doctor’s voice grew in disgust. “... And to Madeline, are among the most vile. I hope that whatever god you believe in forgives you, because who knows if your children will.” The Doctor stepped back. “Or should.”

The Doctor turned, silently, and walked down Mr. Harcourt’s driveway, and soon vanished down the street. Mr. Harcourt could only stare out towards the sky, eyes lost in thought, as the sun continued to burn in the sky.

