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SEANCE IN A TYPE 40 TARDIS



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Episode One

Silver listened. It was the sort of silence that seemed to be a tangible *sound* in its own right. Dead, absolutely and utterly *dead* silence. Not a gentle rustle of a slight breeze, not a remote hum of power, not the distant sounds of passing traffic or twittering birds and especially not the general hustling and bustling noises of people. Nothing whatsoever. It was little wonder she was bored.

She actually jumped when the Doctor closed his book. Jumped not just because he did it so suddenly in one of his typical changes from one mode of thought to another but also because the sound of the two halves of book snapping together reverberated up and down the passage they were in and, it seemed, all around her. It took several seconds before the last distant echo faded back into the all-engulfing silence.

‘Not a patch on his earlier works’, the Doctor commented, replacing the book into the perfectly-sized gap amongst all the other tomes on the shelf.

‘Mmm?’ Silver replied out of courtesy, barely interested.

‘Managananon. I think his disillusionment shows too much in his last few books. But he was a rather bitter old man by then. Hardly surprising really when you’ve been celebrated by all your people and then suddenly hated and despised. Made him very paranoid too.’

‘Yes,’ Silver nodded, completely oblivious to what her mysterious guardian was talking about. It was effort enough just to keep her eyes focussed.

‘Do you know what he said to me last time I visited him? Well, I say the last time... It was only the third time really, but it was the last time as far as he was concerned, in terms of his life chronology... The real last time I met him he was just a boy... But yes, he wouldn’t even invite me into his home, he said I was probably another one of those so-called friends of his who sold all his secrets to any journalist who would meet my pay demands! And this was after all that help I’d given him pointing out the continuity flaws in his manuscript for *Lawson’s Reach!*’

As the Doctor fell silent and the echoes of his excited voice slowly retreated into the distance, Silver looked at his face as the passion faded from it, the eyes slowly glazing into deep thoughts and long-forgotten memories.

‘Dead now, of course,’ he mused quietly, regretfully. ‘Been dead for a couple of millennia, I shouldn’t wonder. Survived only by *this*,’ he added wistfully with a tap of the book he had just replaced.

‘And by you,’ Silver pointed out, still not especially interested in whichever old acquaintance the Doctor was babbling on about this time. She’d lost track of all the people he’d told her about after the first two hundred or so.

The Doctor’s eyes suddenly fixed on her, and he raised his eyebrow in that certain way that told her he hadn’t really been listening to her.

‘You remember him – you met him,’ she prompted. ‘So, in a way, he survives through you – he’s in your memories.’

‘Yes, but to me he’s not really dead at all,’ the Doctor shrugged, then put an arm round her shoulders. ‘No one is. If I wanted to, if I really wanted to, I could take the TARDIS back in time now and in less than half an hour I could be sitting having tea with him. It’s the same with anybody. I’ve seen so many good people die... And I can just go back and see any of them again anytime the mood takes me.’

Once more the man’s eyes seemed to lose themselves in a myriad of memories. ‘But I don’t like to,’ he added. ‘Not after I’ve seen them go.’

Silver drew her arms together as the temperature suddenly seemed to drop a degree or two. It wasn't often that the Doctor ever expressed personal emotions, and though there'd been many times when she'd wished he would drop his guard and open up, moments like this when he seemed to be on the verge of doing so spooked her a little. She felt compelled to snap him out of it.

'Doctor,, can't we leave here now? I'm bored.'

It took a moment before his eyes renewed their fix on her, then his brow furrowed. 'Bored?!?' he scoffed.

Silver gulped and nodded.

Withdrawing the arm from around her shoulders and gesturing around him, the Doctor was suddenly animated once more. 'One of the biggest libraries ever to be assembled, we're right in the heart of it and you're bored?!? Rachel, I could happily spend weeks in this place!'

She looked past him as he shook his head in despair, down along the passageway lined on either side by shelves upon shelves of books. The passageway so long that, in this subdued lighting at least, its end could not be seen. She turned her head one-hundred-and-eighty degrees to be greeted by a similar view as the passageway extended in the opposite direction, the only difference being that she could at least see a break in the bookcases where another passageway intersected this one. And not a soul in sight.

'It's nothing but books!' she said, turning back to him, flinging her hands out in an exaggerated gesture of incredulity.

'It's a library,' the Doctor retorted sarcastically. Silver couldn't tell if he was actually sneering, but he certainly looked like he was as his nose craned upwards towards the higher shelf before him.

'And so popular,' she said returning his sarcasm. 'You can hardly move in here for the crowds of people.'

'Don't be obtuse, Rachel,' the Doctor told her firmly without averting his gaze from the books. 'This place is for scholars – it doesn't promote itself to every passer-by, you know. If it were besieged by people, then the books would get lost or damaged. And I expect a great many of these are the very last copies in existence, certainly in this form.'

Silver suddenly felt like a child again, recalling the days when she'd be getting dragged around the shops by her mother when she really wanted to be out playing with her friends. Deep down she knew that the Doctor, like her mother, meant well but just wasn't appreciating the fact that she was young and wanted a little more excitement. Libraries were not the places to find excitement, no matter how big they happened to be.

Her arms folded, she shifted her weight from one leg to the other, waiting impatiently and hoping that the Doctor would call it a day and take her away to somewhere better. After all, he'd done what they'd journeyed here to do, to hand in that book he'd found from the library on Serapea. A quick browse around, he'd promised. It was difficult to tell how much time had passed since then, but her legs were aching and – yawn – she couldn't stop yawning. And that musty smell was beginning to irritate the inside of her nose.

The floor looked smooth but hard, made of tiles made of a terra-cotta-coloured substance she didn't recognise – but it looked clean enough, so she sat down on it, drawing her knees up to her chin and wrapping her arms around her legs. She buried her head and hoped that the Doctor would take the hint.

She didn't peek but she could hear him continuing to select various books, flick through them and then put them back, often muttering little comments to himself about

their contents. If this library was so great, then the Doctor wasn't having particularly good luck in finding a book to hold his interest.

After what must have been another quarter of an hour, Silver heard her stomach start to rumble. Her bum was now getting sore, too, from the cold hard surface of the floor.

'Oh come on, Doctor, enough's enough. Look, I'm a young girl who wants some fun, this is about as depressing as a wet Saturday afternoon! Can't we go back to the TARDIS now? Please?'

She tried out her little puppy dog expression on him, but to no avail – he barely glanced at her. He was stepping back from the shelf and scanning it as if looking for some particular book.

'Rachel, you must have some respect for what *I* want,, too,' he said, sounding too much like a parent now. 'You can't expect me to just run around taking you to all the places *you* want to visit.'

'It's all right for you,' she muttered sulkily. 'You've got hundreds of years to do all the things you want to do. I might only have about fifty left.' She pouted grumpily as she pondered on her own words. Not so long ago, fifty years had seemed like a very long time. Since meeting the Doctor, she realised it was no time at all, barely the wink of an eye. God, that was depressing!

'Well, there must be something amongst these millions of books to interest you,' he went on. 'You needn't stay with me. Why not go and have a look around?'

'Because I'd get lost! This place is huge! I don't fancy spending the rest of my short, miserable life running up and down these aisles trying to find you or the TARDIS or the way out, thanks very much!'

'You won't get lost,' the Doctor said, flashing her a smile with a knowing twinkle in his eye. He pointed to a button on the upper edge of the bookcase and pressed it.

Nothing happened, though the Doctor showed no sign of disappointment. Silver looked around her a few times but still couldn't see how anything had been affected by the button. She did note, however, that there seemed to be similar buttons on every bookcase.

'What was that?' she asked him, out of ideas.

'What was what?'

She stood up and pointed at the button. '*That*, as if you didn't know! What did it do?'

'What, the button?'

Silver huffed. He was playing games with her now and she wasn't in the mood. 'Just tell me, what's the button for?'

'To call *him*,' the Doctor smirked, and pointed at her. No, *behind* her.

Silver whirled around and was jolted backwards such was her surprise at seeing a figure suddenly looming so close to her. It was tall, thin and motionless, clad from head to toe in a cowled cloak made from some coarse, heavy fabric. The hood was pulled low and no facial features could be detected beneath it.

'Hello!' the Doctor said to the newcomer cheerily, beaming away. 'My friend here would like to see your section on spiritualism.'

The figure showed no response at all and continued to stand there absolutely motionless in a most unnerving way. Silver looked to the Doctor for reassurance, concerned how this person had appeared to suddenly and silently.

'Librarian,' the Doctor said simply in a soft voice to her. 'Go with him.'

'No,' she quickly gasped, surprised at how afraid she sounded.

The Doctor seemed surprised at her response, too. 'It's quite all right – he won't bite you,' he chuckled. His amusement vanished as he appreciated the depth of her concern.

'He's going to take you to the books on spiritualism – I'm sure you'll find something to get your teeth into there whilst I'm browsing through this lot.'

'I'll get lost,' she said again.

'You only have to press a button for him to come. And he'll take you to wherever you want. To the romance, to the horror, to the religion, to the cuisine sections, to the TARDIS, to me, wherever. You only have to ask him.'

Silver looked at the mysterious figure, which offered no token of encouragement. 'Doesn't say much, does he?'

'Doesn't make him a bad person, Rachel.'

Silver still felt uncomfortable about the idea, but she didn't want to seem cowardly. If she wanted the Doctor to treat her like a responsible adult, she knew she had to behave like one – and being too scared to walk off with a stranger wouldn't help her cause one bit. Besides, she'd been in many scrapes now and felt somewhat battle-hardened for it all. If this librarian did turn nasty, she was confident that a good strong kick in its nether regions would be enough to subdue it – even if that failed, she was sure she'd be able to outrun it because its robe was heavy and restrictive.

She nodded at the Doctor, who smiled back, then looked at the librarian once more. Its head gave the tiniest of bows; then it began walking forward at a slow but almost mechanically even pace. With a last hopeful glance at the Doctor, Silver followed it.

* * * * *

Silver was not expecting the journey to take quite so long. It must have been twenty minutes just advancing down the same passageway before they took a left turn into another passageway lined with bookcases. Another long walk, then another turn, then another long walk, then a couple more turns, and all the while she was desperately trying to remember her route in case she needed to find her way back to the Doctor in a hurry. It was impossible to memorise, since there was a total absence of any distinguishing features – just bookcase after bookcase after bookcase.

As she walked, she looked up at the high arches of the ceiling some sixty metres or so above her head, with its dull yellow lighting filaments neatly intertwined with the ornate carvings. It was a very dark and dreary place, but the Doctor said that the low lighting levels were to protect the books, so that made some sort of sense. She had a memory of a school outing to an art gallery once where flash photography had been banned to protect the old paintings. It had seemed stupid to her back then, that one little flash could do any damage. So stupid, in fact, that she'd taken a photo anyway in pure defiance, only to find herself ejected from the premises and put on detention for a week by Mr Banks. The crazy thing was that she hadn't even been interested in the painting and couldn't even remember now what it was actually of. It hadn't particularly struck her before, but she realised now that she'd only done it to impress the other kids, to show them how smart she was.

She had no peers around her now, though. No one to impress. And this huge alien library, so many billions of miles and so many thousands of years from her childhood home, did not seem the best place in which to try misbehaving.

She wondered if she ought to try to converse with her guide, but the hooded figure was uninviting. It walked so rhythmically, almost floating over the smooth floor, that she wondered whether the creature within was organic or robotic.

At last they came to a huge spiral staircase, and Silver found herself led down and round and down and round... She peered over the handrail to try and see where they were going, but the staircase seemed to go down into infinity. She snapped her head back and

looked upwards only to feel dizzy as she saw the staircase spiralling upwards into the darkness high above her. She counted at least seventeen levels that they passed during their descent, and she was really starting to feel dizzy by the time her guide finally led her onto a new floor. Her thighs were aching too – far too many steps!

Suddenly the Librarian came to a halt and slowly turned to face her. Silver cursed herself for gulping. It slowly raised its right arm, pointing it straight outwards towards the nearest row of bookcases.

‘Spiritualism?’ she asked, trying to disguise her nerves through mock cheeriness.

There was no response from the Librarian other than to lower its arm and give another of those almost imperceptible nods of the head. Then, with that, it began to walk back towards the spiral staircase.

‘Er, thanks,’ Silver said, momentarily relieved that the creature was now leaving her. Her relief turned to fear once more as it disappeared from view and she felt isolated and vulnerable. During the whole of the long walk with the Librarian, she had not seen another living thing, even heard anything from the other side of the room or anything. She listened intently, but the silence was unremitting – apart from her pounding heart and her gasps of breath.

She composed herself and began to look at the books on the shelves before her. The first spine she saw was endorsed with a title that she couldn’t make out for a split-second, then it suddenly formed clearly into the words *The Ideology Of Continuing To Be*. It made Silver blink and read it again. Of course it was all to do with that Time Lord trick that the Doctor had told her about, something to do with him allowing her to share his gift of understanding alien dialects. It somehow meant she could read and understand alien writing too.

She examined other titles. *Raising The Dead*. *The Dead Mind’s True Power*. *Life After Death Volume 66*. Where were all the other volumes? *The Wallurah Method*. *The Most Haunted House In England*. England?!? That couldn’t possibly be a coincidental translation, could it?

Silver snatched the book from the shelf and leafed through it. Amazing! It really had come all the way from Earth! It seemed to be all about a place called Borley Rectory in Essex, England. The author was one Harry Price.

‘Thank you, Harry Price, whoever you were,’ she chuckled as she replaced the book. ‘You don’t know how good it was to see someone from home...’

* * * * *

Silver completely lost track of time as she dipped in and out of some of the many books around her. It pained her to admit it, but she was actually starting to enjoy herself in this library. There was so much great stuff written on these pages, so many fascinating things to discover. For example, many races believed that the method by which a dead body was disposed of was crucial to its soul being capable of remaining in touch with the living. Some even went as far as removing the brains from corpses and pickling them, an idea that made her stomach turn.

There was even some fascinating mumbo-jumbo from a writer who claimed that he had succeeded in reincarnating his dead grandparents in the form of his new grandchildren; he expected to be reincarnated himself at a later date and he’d write a follow-up book in his second life to prove it. Silver looked for the book without success.

Most of the books took the familiar form of words (and sometimes pictures) on bound printed pages, but some here and there were completely different. There were electronic

gadgets, some of which she couldn't figure out how to use at all; some were plastic discs that presumably needed a player of some sort; and others just defied all description.

Her legs were still tired, and a few sessions sitting on the floor only brought numbness back to her rear end, so Silver looked around for a chair of some description so that she'd be able to read in a little more comfort. Surely they had reading areas in this place? It could hardly claim to be the greatest library in the universe if it didn't!

What she did chance upon was a book sitting all on its own in a domed glass case on top of a small pedestal. Presumably a very rare or valuable book indeed to have received preferential treatment over all of the others.

Investigating more closely, Silver fumbled around and found a catch that allowed her to open the glass dome, permitting her access to the book which she picked up very carefully.

'From Death To Life,' she read the title aloud to herself, and gingerly opened the volume. It was in immaculate condition, stylishly bound in a scarlet-red leather-type substance with golden trimmings. The pages were thick and had an almost waxy feel to them.

'Most believe that death brings an end to a person's existence,' she read the introductory paragraph aloud, *'but this is not so. Far from it, the soul lives on eternally but is cut off from our reality once its corporeal terminal, the brain, ceases to function. That is not to say that the souls of the dead cannot be reached through other means of communication. This book will outline clearly certain proven methods that are guaranteed to summon any "dead" soul and allow any living person to communicate with it. No extra-sensory abilities are required – just faith, patience and honesty.'*

She read the paragraph again and then flicked through random pages excitedly. From what she could see there were details of how to conduct various types of séances, what kind of items you needed, how many people were required, and so forth. This was *brilliant* stuff! There were all sorts of testimonies and reports at the end of the book enforcing the fact that these techniques were fully proven to work and needed no psychic powers of any kind whatsoever.

Silver wanted to have a go there and then, like a child who had just been bought a new toy and couldn't wait to get it home. She closed the book and clutched it to her chest.

Looking around, the looming bookcases stretching into infinity before her, there was still no sign of life. No one to keep watch over the book. No one to see if she took it.

Borrowed it, she corrected herself. If she took it away to read, she could always get the Doctor to return it when it was convenient. And surely that was the whole point in having a library, wasn't it? So that people could borrow the books?

It was a little too big to conceal easily, but Silver was not deterred. She stuffed the book inside the top of her jeans, a struggle that reminded her that a diet wouldn't go amiss sometime in the near future, then pulled her T-shirt over the part of the book that was still protruding. It looked so obvious, but when she stuck her hands in the pockets of her denim jacket and drew it closed, the bulge couldn't be seen at all. She hoped.

She was about to press one of the buttons to summon a librarian but suddenly stopped herself, theorising that if these weird creatures were any good at their job, then they might notice the book missing from its display case. She quickly selected a similar-sized volume from the nearest shelf and put that in the case instead, carefully closing the dome over it. Then she ran, fleeing the scene of her crime. After all, she could summon the librarians from anywhere a button was situated, so why draw them to the exact spot that she didn't want them to see?

She just hoped they didn't have CC-TV in this bizarre place...

* * * * *

‘Did you find anything of interest?’ the Doctor asked her, popping his head out of the TARDIS door as though he were taking a shower in there.

Silver thought very hard about how she could answer convincingly, and ended up shrugging. ‘Nothing in particular.’

The Doctor shrugged back. ‘Me neither. Come on, let’s be off!’

Silver followed him inside, wincing at how bright the TARDIS interior suddenly seemed after spending so long in the subdued lighting of the library outside. And still the TARDIS had that knack of managing to be exactly the right temperature for her.

The Doctor was already at the control console, his hands lightly passing over various knobs and levers.

‘So, after all that enthusing over this place, you couldn’t find a single book that you were interested in?’ she scoffed.

‘Nothing that held my attention for too long...’ he answered, his eyes fixed on the central column of the console as it began to jerk into motion, bathing his face in light. ‘I had a flick through Gan Gran Graria’s *History of the Lenesse Empire* – it was so riddled with errors I actually found it quite amusing. For example, if he’d actually been at the siege of Sarnax,, then he’d have known that the weather conditions couldn’t possibly have contributed to the Fortieth Army’s defeat...’

‘Doctor, you’re going way over my head again!’ Silver rolled her eyes.

‘Eh? Well let me put it this way: Considering how weakened the Thirty-Ninth Army was after the immense tactical blunders by General Orffph, I hardly think they did much damage to the advancing hordes, do you?’

Silver stood there looking at him until he finally turned his head her way and noticed that he wasn’t making the slightest bit of sense. A flash of guilt furrowed his brow.

‘Ah, military history not your thing, I was forgetting...’ he muttered and, looking a little embarrassed, diverted his gaze back to the console.

‘Where are we off to now then?’ Silver quizzed him. ‘Will we be long?’

‘Just wandering through the vortex for a few hours. It’ll give you a chance to relax...’

‘Great!’ Silver chirped. ‘I’ll be in my room.’

She waltzed out of the console room, leaving the Doctor alone .

He looked after her, and added quietly, ‘It’ll also give you a chance to read your book...’

* * * * *

Silver felt stupid, despite her continual attempts to tell herself that she shouldn’t. She was sat cross-legged on the floor of her room, her hands by her sides, the library book perched open just in before her. Between her and the book sat a torch, casting an arc of yellow light around her. The rest of the room was shrouded in pitch blackness, since she had turned off the main lights.

She tried to compose herself and tutted. She leaned forward and tossed the socks and jacket she had discarded earlier aside so that they no longer sat in the circle of light. She didn’t want any distractions, no matter how small.

Again she composed herself, straightening her back, turning her arms outwards and relaxing them so that the backs of her hands rested gently on the floor as the book instructed, then she strained to read the next few lines.

'Now repeat the ancient incantation over and over again, all the while reaching out with your mind to find the souls of the dead... Reaching out with my mind?!' She wasn't too sure how to reach out with her mind, but with a final shrug of resignation, the girl breathed deeply then turned her attention to the magical words on the pages before her.

'Morrilum, kartha sorrum, vesta horum, scillatorum,' she whispered, then stopped, her eyes darting around the gloom. There was nothing to see, nothing to hear but her breath and the constant hum of power that surged deep within the bowels of the ship. Was this just a load of all mumbo-jumbo?

She so *wanted* it to be real. She read the words again, this time louder, more forcefully: 'Morrilum, kartha sorrum, vesta horum, scillatorum, morrilum, kartha sorrum, vesta horum, scillatorum, morrilum, kartha sorrum, vesta horum, scillatorum, morrilum, kartha sorrum, vesta hor-

She jumped and came to a sudden halt as there was a sudden fluttering sound behind her. Swallowing hard, she turned her head around but could see nothing. She held her breath and listened but could hear nothing. What had made that noise?

She relaxed her muscles and slapped her forehead as she realised that one of her magazines had slipped off the top of her chest-of-drawers onto the floor.

Recomposing herself, she tried again. 'Morrilum, kartha sorrum, vesta horum, scillatorum... Mmorrilum, kartha sorrum, vesta horum, scillatorum... Morrillum, kartha sorrum, vesta horum, scillatorum... Morrillum, kartha sorrum, vesta horum, scillatorum...'

As she continued to chant the words, she started to feel a little strange, as though there was an energy flowing around her... Around the whole room! Spurred on, she continued her chant more and more loudly, more quickly. 'Morrilum, kartha sorrum, vesta horum, scillatorum... Morrillum, kartha sorrum, vesta horum, scillatorum!'

Something *was* happening! Her hands, her arms, her cheeks, her feet all felt suddenly cold as though exposed to an icy wind. The small circle of light she and the book were in seemed brighter, the rest of the room darker.

'Morrilum, kartha sorrum, vesta horum, scillatorum, morrilum, kartha sorrum, vesta horum, scillatorum,' she continued without even thinking, almost as though something was now forcing her to say the words. Her stomach muscles felt tense. Pressure seemed to increase within her skull. She felt afraid and at the same time sensed an almost orgasmic feeling within her. An ecstatic smile spread her lips, her head rolled back and the words continued to ooze automatically from her mouth: 'Morrilum, kartha sorrum, vesta horum, scillatorum!'

Lost in the rhythm of her own chant, she was almost oblivious to the rattling noises that were now all around her. Her last senses connected to the room around her managed to detect that the noises were from various bits of furniture that were shaking – the drawers, the chair, the doors of her wardrobe... Yet even though these things were all so close the sounds seemed so distant, so *irrelevant*...

'Morrilum, kartha sorrum, vesta horum, scillatorum,' she continued, her head rolling about as tingles of pleasure pumped through her body.

The light before her shrank like an iris and disappeared altogether, leaving her eyes to see only blackness for several seconds before a tiny dot seemed to form in the distance. Slowly, ever so slowly, it started to grow, then more and more quickly until suddenly Silver realised it was something very far away rushing towards her at a fantastic speed. So fast that no sooner had she concluded that the growing dot had some features than suddenly it was a giant face about to engulf her. A ghastly white face with rough skin and lifeless staring eyes, horrible wide staring eyes.

Silver yelped and recoiled instinctively at this face zooming right up to her own. As she fell backwards, she felt a sharp pain on the back of her head and winced.

She blinked a few times, and to her relief she found that the face had vanished, as had the total darkness. The light from the torch had now returned and she could see the book on the floor in front of her once again.

She rubbed the sore spot on her head gingerly and realised that she had fallen backwards and knocked her head against the leg of her bed. She suddenly felt very weak and shaken and lay still for several moments, catching her breath and trying to concentrate on the room around her.

This room had effectively been her home for some time now – she'd made it her own – and now all of a sudden it felt imposing, almost threatening. The threat felt so intense that she suddenly found herself clambering to her feet and racing for the control to turn the lights back on.

The light was a relief to see. Silver sighed and then had to take a few quick gulps of air to get her breath back. Jeez! Why was she so breathless? She must have been far more spooked than she'd thought!

She tried to rationalise everything in her head. Just a moment ago she'd been reading that weird spell, that incantation. Trying to summon the dead. Something... had *happened*. Something had come here, into the room, into *her*. She'd felt it. Maybe even seen it, in the form of that freaky face. Thankfully everything was still now, quiet, normal. As it should be.

'Freakin' wuss,' she cursed herself. She had to admit it – she'd wimped out, got scared just as things had been getting interesting. Just as she'd really been on the verge of contacting the dead!

She felt a tingle of delight as that realisation hit her. The book was genuine! It told the truth! There *were* ways to contact the dead – and she could do it!

She walked back to the book and picked it up. She smiled at it, then slammed it shut. This was the beginning of something. She'd try the procedure again, and this time go through with it properly instead of letting it scare her. Next time she'd succeed.

But not yet. She wanted to recharge herself. She needed a break.

Episode Two

Silver winced. If this was wine, then it was like no wine she'd ever tasted back home.

'Real Grannigan, fortieth century vintage,' the Doctor beamed, having just taken a gulp himself. 'Third galactic calendar, of course.'

'Don't tell me – the whole planet's a vineyard,' Silver said sarcastically, remembering the vast library that seemed to be the only function of the planet Hilomino.

'No, only about two-thirds of it,' the Doctor informed her, apparently ignorant of her tone. He did, however, note her distaste of the drink. 'Ah yes, a bit strong perhaps for the unaccustomed tongue. But you'll quickly learn to appreciate its fine body.'

The only fine body that Silver had any appreciation of in this restaurant that the Doctor had brought them to was the one belonging to the waiter serving over on the far side of the room. Given that the Doctor had ordered their food as well as the wine, she hoped that the waiter didn't turn out to be the finest dish in the place.

She had one of those reality check moments. This wasn't some restaurant across town or in another city. It wasn't even in another country. This was in outer space, in a completely different point in time! Yet here she was, dining out in style with a friend and it seemed so *normal*. God, it was so ridiculous! Was this just some mad dream she was having, and she was going to wake up from it all? Did she want to wake up? Did she want to go back home?

Could she go back home? That was a scary thought.

'You okay?' the Doctor intruded into her thoughts.

'Yeah, I...' she searched for the right words. 'I'm fine. I guess this place just reminded me of life back home, that's all.'

'Sorry, I thought something like this would make you happy... I should have realised.'

'No... No its cool... Honestly,' she dismissed his apologies with a wave of her hand. And as a further gesture, she smiled and took another gulp of the wine. She even managed to keep on smiling at him even though the wine still tasted like a mixture of vinegar and sea-water.

'Still,' the Doctor continued, clearly trying to shake off his own discomfort as quickly as possible, 'there's no point in travelling through time and space and not sampling the culinary delights en route! Sarah seemed to like this place... I don't think Tegan was too impressed, though.'

Silver saw his eyes wander again. Every time he mentioned certain old friends, he seemed to drift off into his memories. It made her wonder just how many there had been, what they had meant to him. What number down the list was she? What did she mean to him? Would there come a day when he'd be reminiscing about her in this way?

And what *had* happened to all the others? He was always very reticent to discuss things like that with her. Did they just get fed up and leave him? Did they accidentally get left behind somewhere? Did they stay with him until they grew old and died? Or... or did they get killed?

She'd had enough scrapes in her time with him to know that death had to be a distinct possibility, perhaps the most likely termination of her relationship with him. What if he got himself killed first? Where would that leave her?

She looked around the room, with its pretty twinkling lights, splendid wooden décor, immaculately dressed staff and huddles of patrons laughing and smiling at their tables as

the soft music played from who knew where. This was as familiar an environment, as friendly a place as she had been to in the TARDIS, and even this wasn't a place she fancied being stranded in.

'Doctor...' she began, deciding it was time to cut to the chase.

'Mmm?' he'd been looking around the room himself and turned his attention back to her.

'Do you believe in ghosts?'

'Ghosts?!?' he said in an exasperated manner as though she'd asked him if he believed in fairies at the bottom of the garden. 'Now why are you asking me a question like that?'

'Because I wanted an answer to it?' she pressed him teasingly, raising an eyebrow.

The Doctor chuckled. 'My dear Rachel, ghosts most definitely do not exist, at least not in the way that you mean.'

'How do you know what way I mean?' she asked him accusingly.

'The *Earth* way! Apparitions of the dead, their souls come back to haunt the living. Sheer nonsense!'

'Nonsense?' she was surprised at his attitude. 'Didn't you once tell me it's important to always keep an open mind?'

'True,' the Doctor conceded, 'but it's stupidity to believe in the impossible.'

'Oh come on, Doctor, while I was in that library on Hilomino, I saw lots of books on ghosts, and they were all from different worlds and different times. If ghosts don't exist, then isn't it a coincidence that so many societies believe in them?'

The Doctor's eyes darted right and he leaned back as the waitress brought their food to them, naming each dish in turn. Luckily the Doctor knew which was which, as Silver didn't have a clue.

The plate that was delivered to her was filled with something resembling macaroni and cheese covered in what looked like bits of blue cabbage, and the whole thing smelt like hot toffee. Not especially relishing the idea of eating this meal, Silver glanced at the Doctor's plate to see if he had something more appetising. However, one look at the freshly-dead sea creature on his dish was enough to turn her stomach.

The Doctor looked chuffed to bits as he thanked the waitress, who invited them to enjoy their meal before beating a smiling retreat.

'Ah, this looks good,' the Doctor said with a lick of his lips, sprinkling a condiment onto his meal.

Silver tactfully decided not to offer an opinion of her own and instead returned to the previous subject. 'You were saying about ghosts? If so many societies believe in them –'

'So many societies *want* to believe in them,' the Doctor cut in. 'People enjoy life so much, they're scared to let go, they want to believe there's something more to it after death.'

'But ghosts have been *seen*,' she protested, 'all over Earth, all over the universe! They can't all be hoaxes!'

'Oh, they're not all hoaxes,' the Doctor agreed cheerily. 'But they can all be explained. Leaks in time... Psychic projections... Yes, they can all be explained if you have sufficient knowledge. That's the trouble with your species, you see – whenever something happens that they cannot explain, they attribute it to ghosts or some such phenomena.'

'What about séances, ouija boards and mediums, then?'

The Doctor shrugged. 'What about them? They're nearly all hoaxes, and the few that aren't have some other rational explanation.'

Silver thought back to her experience in the TARDIS, reading the spell from the library book. Could that be rationally explained? Would the Doctor be able to so easily account for rattling furniture, the darkness, that face? She was so tempted to ask him directly about those things, but she didn't want him coming out with the line that it had just been her imagination getting the better of her. She *knew* it wasn't as simple as that.

Mmm! The food actually tasted quite delicious! Strange – but yes, quite delicious! Very unusual texture to it though, almost like plastic.

'So...' she picked her words carefully. 'Have you ever tried contacting the dead?'

'I've sat in on a few séances in my time. All but one of them a complete scam, I'm sorry to say,' he told her.

'And the other?'

'That was an interesting one. The poor fellow conducting it had telepathic abilities that he was completely unaware of. He thought he was hearing the voices from the dead – instead, he was picking up random thoughts from people around the table.'

'But have you ever tried conducting a séance yourself?' she quizzed him.

'My dear Rachel, what would be the point when I don't believe in them?'

'Well, as a scientific study perhaps? Just to prove to yourself that it really is all mumbo-jumbo? Or perhaps you're scared that it might really be true?'

She had to wait until the bulges in the Doctor's chewing cheeks diminished before he answered. 'Scared? Now why should I be scared?'

She took another mouthful of the food. Mmm! It really *was* nice! Chewing gleefully away, she just shrugged back at him.

'Is this leading to something?' he asked with a twinkle in his eye, the corners of his lips forming the hint of a smile. 'You want to try a séance, don't you?'

Still chewing, Silver rolled her eyes and nodded in resignation.

The Doctor sighed. 'The limitless curiosity of the human mind! No wonder I find your species so entertaining!'

She leaned forward, resting her elbow on the table and supported her chin with her hand. Then, swallowing, she wrinkled her nose and flashed him her cute mischievous smile.

'As you wish,' the Doctor ceded. 'We'll play your little game tonight in the TARDIS.'

* * * * *

'It's not often I feel stupid, but I most definitely feel that way right now,' the Doctor told her, his face bearing a pained expression.

Silver pulled in her chair and rested her forearms on the small table where she and the Time Lord were sitting. She took hold of his big, warm hands. It felt kind of nice.

'I hope you haven't built your hopes up too much,' the Doctor warned her.

'Shush! You've got to be positive and treat it seriously, or it won't work,' she chided him. She so wanted him to see that ghosts *could* exist... Not for the sake of proving him wrong, but just so... Well, so that they could share the experience together, discover this new realm of the supernatural together.

The Doctor obediently fell silent. She looked into his eyes and they began to roam around the small room. It made her take a quick look at it again too. It was smaller than most of the other rooms she had seen within the TARDIS and had been quite empty until the Doctor had brought the table and chairs in. The walls, like all of the others within the ship, were covered from top to bottom in deep roundels, though two of the roundels had covers over them which led her to suspect that there was something inside.

Her eyes met the Doctor's once more, and he now looked focused and stern. She gave him a silent, stern look back and also gave his hands the slightest of squeezes. For a moment, she was suddenly conscious of the hum of the ship, so still everything suddenly was.

'Ready?' she asked him in hushed tones.

He nodded grimly. 'Yes. Get on with it.'

She was a little surprised. 'No,' she chirped, '*you're* meant to be doing it!'

'Me?' the Doctor looked incredulous. 'I don't know what to do!'

'Yes, you do!' she spluttered. 'Just make something up! But *believe* in it!'

The Doctor shook his head in exasperation then composed himself once more. He cast his eyes upwards. 'Is anybody there?'

He looked and listened for a moment then his eyes rolled down to seek approval from her.

She nodded, and squeezed his hands again, urging him to continue.

'Ah, this is the Doctor here,' he went on, clearing his throat, 'and this is my friend Rachel Silverstein. We mean you no harm... We would like to help you, if possible. Please, um, please come and talk with us.'

He stopped and they listened intently, all the while looking into each other's eyes. He looked so serious, the lines on his face exaggerated by the low lighting level, and she was pleased that he seemed to be treating the whole exercise with a degree of respect.

Nothing could be heard except the constant, unceasing hum.

'I repeat, we mean you no harm...' the Doctor continued solemnly. 'We're quite alone, we're not using any recording equipment... We would just like to speak with you, that's all. Please come and talk.'

Again he stopped and they listened. Nothing.

'We can close our eyes, if you prefer,' Silver suddenly chipped in, desperate to make this work. She prompted the Doctor with another squeeze of his hand, and he closed his eyes. She followed suit and bowed her head. 'You can use one of us to talk if you wish. Or if you'd prefer, just give us a sign that you're here. Knock on the table or something.'

She listened, inhaling the fresh warm air through her nostrils. Previously, she might have thought that no ghosts could penetrate the TARDIS interior, but as she'd obviously made contact with one earlier in her room, then that was clearly not the case. Why? Why wouldn't they come now when it was so important to her?

'Enter my body,' she pleaded desperately. 'Take control of me! Speak to the Doctor, show him you're real!'

She concentrated hard, trying to form that ghostly white face in her mind once more. She could picture it, but only as a memory. It wasn't putting itself there as it had done last time. Who was it? What was it? *Where* was it?

'Concentrate, Doctor! Concentrate hard!' she ordered him. 'Open your mind to them! Try and sense them!'

Still she concentrated, screwing her eyes up with the strain, holding her breath. She listened for noises, tried to feel the slightest movement in the table or her chair, tried to sense the slightest change of feeling in her body.

But there was nothing.

'It's not working, Rachel,' she heard the Doctor say softly.

'It *must*,' she pleaded.

She tried to concentrate once more, but desperation was now giving way to futility. She let her breath go, relaxed her muscles and slowly opened her eyes to see the Doctor had already opened his and that he was peering sympathetically at her.

It was too much. She quickly withdrew her hands and covered her face, but couldn't help giving a big sniff.

'You must think I'm pretty dumb, huh?' she said, wiping her eye. Her mascara stung.

The Doctor just gave his head a little shake, then began rubbing his bottom lip with his forefinger, waiting for her to speak again.

'Dumb, crazy human, that's me. Silly teenager.' It was suddenly hard for her to look him in the eye. She began tracing marks on the table top with her finger.

'We can try again if you'd like?' the Doctor said quietly.

She swallowed hard and shook her head. Even speaking was difficult now. She sniffed again. 'No, I...' she had to swallow again. 'I'm feeling tired. I think I'll have an early night.'

And unable to look at him, she stood up and walked out of the room as quickly as she could.

* * * * *

'Morrilum, kartha sorrum, vesta horum, scillatorum,' Silver chanted, almost angrily, certainly with much emotion. She was ashamed of herself for crying, and after an hour or so of lying on her bed, hugging the pillow in self-pity, she had now pulled herself together and was making another determined effort to pursue her beliefs. She was sat cross-legged in front of the book *From Death To Life* once again, just as before when she had made the experiment work. Once again, the lights were turned off and the only illumination in her room came from the torch. Everything had to be the same as last time. She'd even opened the book at exactly the same page and was using exactly the same spell.

'Morrilum, kartha sorrum, vesta horum, scillatorum, morrilum, kartha sorrum, vesta horum, scillatorum, morrilum, kartha sorrum, vesta horum, scillatorum,' she kept repeating, determined to redeem herself. She was breathing deeply and clenching her fists tightly at her sides. She kept her eyes firmly fixed on the book for a while, constantly repeating the incantation.

Finally, she sensed it. That little tingle of pleasure down her spine. The slight drop in temperature. She closed her eyes and lolled her head back.

'Morrilum, kartha sorrum, vesta horum, scillatorum, morrilum, kartha sorrum, vesta horum, scillatorum,' she continued, her voice softening as her whole body began to tingle as though love itself was touching her.

She heard things in the room begin to move, things begin to rattle or fall onto the floor. She didn't open her eyes. She rolled her head back and forth, loving the strange numb feeling in her neck and shoulders. She tried to concentrate her thoughts on the spirits. She tried to reach them with her mind. Where were they?

Something made her eyes snap open. An involuntary action on her part, it was like something else had control of them. All she could see was the book, still open at the same pages, lit up as though the light was emanating from within it. Everything else was pitch black.

'Morrilum, kartha sorrum, vesta horum, scillatorum,' she continued, her voice reduced to little more than a moan. As before, her mouth was now speaking the words without her brain ordering it to.

Silver realised that her head had stop rolling. In fact, her mouth apart, her body was completely still. She couldn't move! And yet... Somehow it didn't seem to matter.

She still had her thoughts. All that was important were the spirits... She had to reach out to them, find them...

Concentrate she willed herself.

Come to me. That was weird. She wasn't sure if that last thought was her own or whether it was someone else's inside her head.

The book and the glow surrounding it started to retreat away from her. Slowly at first, then faster, more and more quickly into the distance. As it retreated, so the blackness grew. Finally, the glowing book was so far away it seemed no more than a feeble white speck in the far distance. It never quite disappeared. The speck seemed to dance around for several minutes, almost as though it was toying with her, goading Silver into going after it. Not that she could move a single muscle. She wasn't even aware of her own body anymore. She couldn't feel her hands, her arms, anything. Although she could still hear her voice repeating the spell, it now sounded more distant and she could not feel her mouth forming the words at all. Was she still seeing with her eyes, listening with her ears, smelling with her nose? Or was she just *aware*?

The white speck in the distance stopped its dancing and stopped still once more, right at the centre of her vision. Then it very slowly began to swell, and as before Silver realised it was rushing towards her at fantastic speed. The speck was no longer the book but a face, a wretched and ashen face similar to the one that she had seen on the previous occasion. It grew and grew until the horrific image completely filled the visible area before her – then it seemed to be all around her.

Then it was gone, and Silver found herself in total blackness once again – but only momentarily. Another speck appeared in the far distance and began rushing towards her, then another, then another. All of them grew into horrific faces that could have originated from zombie movies.

As each one rushed past her, Silver began to wonder whether the faces were moving or she was. Some of the faces began to laugh as they approached her, high-pitched shrieking laughs that left her in no doubt as to their evil intent.

'*Morrilum, kartha sorrum, vesta horum, scillatorum,*' the words continued in her own voice inside her head, almost rhythmically now. She wanted to stop chanting them, to say something else, to call out to the dead spirits and communicate with them. How could she tell her mouth to stop saying the words when she couldn't even sense it? Her mind was completely disembodied, she could only sense her surroundings in this unknown realm of darkness and think.

She tried closing her eyes to block out the vision, but she had no eyes to close. She had no hands to clasp to the ears that she no longer had to attempt to block out the shrills of mocking laughter. She had no mouth, no voice with which to scream.

Silver mentally tried to pull herself backwards, but still the faces came rushing past. It slowly dawned on her that she was quite terrified by her predicament. The only reason she hadn't recognised it sooner was because she had none of the physical symptoms that one associates with that particular state of mind. This was a pure *fear*.

Her mind racing – it was the only thing she had left – Silver weighed up her options. It wasn't difficult. She faced either a possible eternity trapped in this void, or she had to find a way back, back to the TARDIS, to the Doctor... Back to her own body!

The TARDIS! That was it! She had to concentrate on that, on her bedroom. That was where she *really* was. Sitting there on the floor with that book in front of her. She had to focus on that, continually remind herself that she was still there.

A ghoulish face hovered before her, taunting her, its few remaining rotten teeth grinning, its wide bulging pale eyes leering at her from behind the matted strands of grey hair.

Silver wanted to speak to it, ask it questions, shout at it, scream at it. How? How could she communicate? Could it read her thoughts?

Who are you? Where am I? she asked over and over in her mind. It had absolutely no effect – either the spirit couldn't hear her or was ignoring her.

Help me! Doctor! Anybody! Please help me! Silver screamed in her mind, trying to make her thoughts louder than the chanting words of her voice.

What had she done? How stupid had she been, meddling with forces that she didn't fully understand? She hadn't even read the book properly – for all she knew, there may have been an appendix warning her what to do if this situation arose. She was completely powerless, completely isolated, unable to influence the situation in any way whatsoever.

As Silver surrendered all hope, the face before her stopped laughing. It leered a moment more before opening its huge jaws wide and slowly approaching until the darkness within its mouth completely engulfed her awareness.

* * * * *

Did she lose consciousness? Silver wasn't sure... There'd been a very strange sensation, one she could only describe as being frozen yet on fire simultaneously... Then... Perhaps a *break* in her awareness. A split-second? Or years? She had no idea.

She could feel her body! She had her body back again! And yet... There was no sense of movement. She was aware that she was now seeing through her eyes again, hearing through her ears, breathing through her nostrils... She could feel her fingers, her toes... But no more than that. She tried to lift her hand in front of her face, but her arm didn't move at all. She couldn't even wiggle her fingers. She couldn't tilt her head or even move her eyes to look anywhere other than in the direction she could now see.

It wasn't dark anymore. She was in a place of many colours, constantly pulsing and shifting as though she were inside a giant kaleidoscope. There seemed to be the faintest of breezes – she could feel that much on her cheeks. She had a feeling that she was lying horizontally, but she couldn't be sure as there was no real clue about which way was up and which way was down. Was she in motion? Falling, perhaps? Or soaring upwards?

The face had gone – all the faces had gone. Her terror had subsided. She was still filled with trepidation as to this unknown dimension, but she drew some comfort in the fact that she was reunited with her body to some degree. Why couldn't she control it, though? It was like she was wrapped from head to toe in invisible chains.

Then again, what good would movement do her in this intangible void? If she could run, where would she run to? Only swirling, squirting blobs of intense colour lay in every conceivable direction as far as her eyes could see.

Doctor! Can you hear me? she tried thinking. As she tried to clear her mind to hear any possible response, Silver suddenly realised that she was no longer chanting the incantation from the book.

Was this *supposed* to happen? Had she arrived wherever she was supposed to be to make contact – some sort of astral plane, perhaps? Was she still travelling? Had she gone off course?

She cursed herself again for not having read the book thoroughly before starting to try the spells. Mum had always said she was too impetuous. If she were here now, she'd be saying 'I told you so' for sure.

Silver became aware of something happening. The colours around her were growing weaker, paler... Everything was turning white.

As the colours melted away, she became uncomfortable – there was a feeling of pressure on her body, as though... as though her body were getting heavier.

She gave out a little groan as the pressure increased, and her eyes widened in excitement as she realised she'd made the groan happen. She'd made her eyes widen too! She could move again!

She wiggled her fingers, waved her hands in front of her, felt her face. Ran her fingers through her long hair. She cuddled herself and laughed, tears of relief welling in her eyes. Everything felt good. Even the sound of her own voice, and surely no one would call her egotistical under these circumstances.

This place was just so strange! Now that she could touch things again, she realised that she couldn't. She seemed to be standing on something but there was nothing to see, certainly no floor in this white void. She bent down and felt between her feet, but they didn't seem to be standing on anything. She could even feel the underside of her feet without lifting them.

She looked around in all directions, yearning for some clue as to what to do next. She clutched the gemstone around her neck, toying with it as she pondered. Should she stay put? Should she move? *Could* she move?

She hesitantly took a step forward. It seemed to work. She didn't suddenly feel herself plummeting downwards, and it felt like she advanced. But was she really any closer to anywhere? There was still nothing but white all around her.

'Helloooooooooooooooooooooo!' she cried out, cupping her hands around her mouth.

She could actually hear her voice retreating into the distance, eventually fading into nothingness. There was no other sound to hear. She couldn't even hear the hum of the TARDIS' power, even when she concentrated. Had her body really now been transported somewhere else?

'Doctooooooooooooooooooooo?' she cried out again. 'Is anybody heeeeeerrrrrrrrrrreeee?'

No responses.

She took a few paces forward, then stopped when it seemed so pointless. Was she really moving forward, or was the effect just like moving on some invisible treadmill and she wasn't really going anywhere?

She tried jumping. That was weird too. She seemed to go up but not go down again. But it wasn't as if there was no gravity – her hair, her breasts, her jewellery, her clothes all hung downwards – she could feel a weight to her own body. Maybe she hadn't even moved upwards when she jumped. It was so difficult to tell.

She tried sitting down. That was freaky, too. Was her torso moving down to the level of her feet, or were her feet just drawing themselves up to her torso?

Silver sat cross-legged and wondered if she could trick herself into believing she was back in her bedroom in the TARDIS and thereby somehow actually getting back there. She closed her eyes and tried to relax, which was not easy with the adrenalin gushing through her.

No power hum. She wasn't back. So she tried the magic words again. 'Morrilum, kartha sorrum, vesta horum, scillatorum,' she whispered several times, then a few more times with more conviction.

Then she stopped and listened. No power hum. She took a peek. Still the white void. 'Shit.'

She stood up once more – or at least uncurled her body. She looked from side to side, feeling increasingly desperate. What was she meant to do? Where was she meant to go?

Suddenly there was *something*. The tiniest, tiniest speck just visible in one direction, barely visible, hanging there in front of her.. Like one very pale grey pixel on an otherwise white computer monitor. Had it been there all along? It was very easy to miss. Or had it just appeared?

She reached out to snatch it, and missed. She tried again and missed again. She realised that the speck was actually a little further away than she'd thought – it was so difficult to get a perspective. She pointed her body in the direction of the speck as best she could then took a few paces forward. She reached out for it again and realised that she was still not close enough to grab it.

Once more she took a few steps forward and once more she attempted to take hold of the speck in her hand. Yet again she realised that she wasn't quite close enough to it.

She began jogging towards it, continually reaching out with her hand and continually finding that it wasn't as close as she thought. She stopped and frowned, waving her hand back and forth before her. Was the speck moving away every time she moved towards it? Was she not really moving forwards at all? Was it destined to permanently stay just beyond her reach?

Silver chewed her lip, then gritted her teeth. 'Right,' she said, feeling a new determination flow through her. In the absence of any other viable alternatives, she made the speck her goal and began running at it. Somehow she *had* to reach it.

Initially she expected to suddenly run right past it, so close it seemed. But she didn't – it always seemed to be that tiny little bit out of reach.

Every now and then, she took a swipe at it with her hand, always falling short. She ran harder, feeling her muscles strain. The soles of her bare feet seemed to patter on a surface, and yet at the same time they didn't.

Silver eventually stopped, wondering if a new strategy was in order. But as she stood there, hands on hips, looking at the elusive speck, she squinted at it. It had *grown*. She was sure of it! It was more obvious now than when she had first spotted it.

The truth dawned on her. Whatever it was, it wasn't a tiny little speck. It was something bigger, and it was much much further away than she'd realised. It was like those faces in the darkness, giant when up close but nothing more than a pin-prick size when far away. She *had* to get to it, find out what it was.

She ran again and this time kept on running. Harder, faster. Unfortunately, in this alternative dimension – wherever she was – exercise was still tiring, and before long her legs were aching and her lungs were heaving.

The speck grew as she gradually got closer to it. How far had she run? The equivalent of five kilometres? Difficult to say. She guessed that there was still just as far to go. She pressed on until she was too breathless, then stopped and rested, hunching over with her hands on her thighs. Was this air – oxygen – she was gulping into her lungs? If not, what was she breathing? Did she really need to breathe at all in this place? It felt like she did, and the worrying thought was that she might need other basic requirements such as food, water, shelter.

She walked for a while, occasionally taking a backward glance but mostly with her eyes fixed on the speck ahead which was now developing into a sizeable object. And a very familiar one.

'The TARDIS console!'

Episode Three

Silver gasped, totally relieved to see such a familiar and reassuring sight. With renewed energy, she ran again. Immediately her mind was racing, trying to rationalise the presence of the TARDIS control console. What was it doing here? Did this mean that she was still inside the TARDIS? Perhaps it wasn't the main console that she was familiar with, but another one that lay elsewhere in the ship – she had, after all, heard the Doctor refer to others before now.

As she got within about sixty metres of it, she stopped running again and slowed to a walking pace. The console had to be her key to escaping this place, but she was still unsure of what she could do. She was only familiar with a handful of the controls on its six facets and had no idea how to set coordinates or make the TARDIS take off.

When she reached the console, she surveyed it hungrily, her eyes pouring over the many controls and instruments, trying to make sense of them. What functions did each of them perform?

She squinted the control panels, willing them to help her. One of the buttons or knobs just *had* to be the right one to get her home, back to reality. But which one? Which one?

She licked her upper lip in anticipation as she saw a dial that seemed to almost beckon her hand toward it. Yes, she could *feel* it – perhaps the sentient heart of the TARDIS was assisting her, guiding her to the right control. She gave the dial a twist and relaxed as though the job was done. Some indescribable feeling told her that help would be on its way now. Whether that help was in the form of the Doctor, or that the TARDIS was going to somehow transport her back to her bedroom, she didn't know.

After several moments had passed, during which Silver paced around the console with increasing agitation, it became apparent to her that nothing was happening. She looked around anxiously. She took a few steps forward, trying to see if there were any more specks in the distance, something else she should be heading towards.

'Doctor!' she called out, wondering if he was out there anywhere, able to hear. It was doubtful.

She turned back to face the console, now a few feet away from her, and started as she suddenly saw a figure approaching it from the other side. The figure seemed to be slowly forming from transparency into solidity as though stepping out of a mist. She immediately recognised it as the figure of a tall man, carrying something at his side. He immediately went to the console and hunched over it.

She could see dark trousers and a dark jacket.

'Doctor!' she exclaimed and rushed to him.

The figure that looked up, however, was not the one she had expected. Within the shabby, threadbare jacket was a broad, stocky man. His facial features were thickly set into his head, which looked an almost nobbly shape thanks to his fair hair being almost completely shaven away. He had a scar across the bridge of his nose, a scar down his cheek and a further scar on his bulging lower lip. There was a bit of his left ear missing, leaving a ragged edge. He wouldn't have been a pretty sight to anyone, least of all to someone who recognised him.

'It can't be...!' Silver gasped, clasping her hand across her mouth as she recoiled in horror. She'd never met Jack Stone before, but she'd seen his photo in enough books and newspapers to recognise him at once. There hadn't been a single kid in school who wasn't

familiar with the exploits of this fearsome criminal. He'd been one of the most famous people in Connecticut. Or, more accurately, one of the most notorious.

His face, as if it hadn't been imposing enough, formed a snarl as he beheld her. Silver stepped back and gripped her necklace tightly. Nothing she knew about this man reassured her. How many people had he murdered? Ten? Twenty? All at random, all innocent people, most of them young women like herself.

He reared himself up to his full height, which made her take another couple of steps backward. He was huge, well over six feet tall, and his hands looked big enough to crush a skull.

But he'd *died*! It was a well-known piece of local history: He'd eventually been caught, confessed to his crimes – some said he'd even bragged about them – then he'd gone to the electric chair! All some twenty years before she'd been born! As she'd grown up, the name of Jack Stone had been bandied about as someone to fear like the bogeyman, but as scary as the threats had been, she'd always known deep down that she was safe because he was dead. Long dead.

He began to emerge from behind the console, and Silver gulped hard as she saw the axe he held down at his side. She looked at his face again and was chilled to see that the snarl had now been replaced by some semblance of a smug grin. He made slow but steady steps towards her, his eyes twinkling at her.

Silver continued to back away, trying to make some sense of what was happening. Jack Stone was dead – fact. It was by following a spell to contact the dead that she had ended up in this place – fact. The inescapable conclusion was that she had now somehow made contact with Stone's spirit. Not the ghost she most wanted to communicate with, but if he was a ghost – just a spirit – then that meant that he couldn't hurt her, right?

Why was she not convinced, then?

Stone continued to advance at the same pace that she retreated backwards. He raised the axe so that he now held it in both hands. She could see dark brown patches on the axe-head. The blood of his victims.

'Look, this isn't real, you know,' she tried reasoning with him. Would he be able to understand? Did he remember dying? 'You're dead,' she told him.

'No,' he snarled, flashing her a toothy smile. '*You are!*'

In a flash of movement, he suddenly lurched forward, sweeping the axe in a big arc before him. The margin by which it missed her was so narrow that Silver actually felt a rush of air pass her face.

As the momentum threw the big man off guard for a second, Silver seized what little advantage she had to nimbly dodge aside and quickly scuttle to the TARDIS console. If she could keep it between them, then she at least had some chance – she was too tired to outrun him, and there was no way that she was going to be able to match him physically.

He turned and came towards her again. She edged away from him around the console, keeping herself on the opposite side to him. His face, distorted by the glass, peered back at her through the central column.

'I know who you are! You're Jack Stone!' she babbled on, hoping that he was not beyond all reason. 'You went to the electric chair – don't you remember?'

'Aren't you going to scream for help, little girl?' he sneered, curling his misshapen lip. 'That's what they normally do before I smash their skulls open.'

He raised the axe high above his head then brought it sweeping down onto the console with an almighty crack, sending sparks and chips of metal and plastic flying in all directions.

'Doctor! Help me!' Silver screamed as Stone quickened his efforts at chasing her around the console. For a few moments she was successful in keeping him at bay but finally he got just that bit too close. As she ran, his boot thrust out between her legs and tripped her perfectly.

Silver went hurtling over, cracking her head on the side of the console on her way down. There was no surface to land on, though, so thankfully no more impact. She put her hand to her sore head and felt blood, but then a mighty hand gripped her forearm and gave it a mighty jolt, turning her over.

'No! No!' Silver screamed as Stone's hand clamped itself around her neck to hold her head still.

She lashed out desperately with her feet, managing to kick him, but she might as well have been kicking tree trunks for all the effect it had.

Grinning grotesquely as he leaned over her, Stone raised the axe high above him. 'That's right, little girl,' he snarled. 'You struggle and scream. I'll take care of the rest.'

As she saw the axe swinging down towards her Silver screamed as hard as she'd ever done in her whole life...

* * * * *

The Doctor knelt down and examined Silver. She was breathing normally and appeared to be relaxed. He forced open her eyelid to check the unseeing eye beneath it for a moment. She was quite unconscious.

His fingers then carefully checked the cut on her temple. Nothing too serious, thankfully. Though he wasn't sure why the blow she'd taken had knocked her out cold.

'Rachel? Silver?' he called gently to her.

She didn't stir at all.

The Doctor rubbed his forefinger against his lips as he pondered the problem. The girl had been acting very strangely a moment ago and had now collapsed in a dead faint. She'd been distressed earlier when their little séance had failed, and he knew from experience that stress could make humans behave very irrationally at times. Yet he also knew from experience that Rachel was too strong a character to let her embarrassment get to her *that* much.

As she wasn't about to wake up, the Doctor decided that it wasn't good to leave her lying on the hard floor of the console room, so he carefully lifted the girl up in his arms. Just as he was carrying her out of the room, the lighting flickered.

The Doctor paused, frowning at the lighting units. 'Odd,' he mumbled. He waited a moment, but the lights seemed to be all right once more, so he continued on his way, carrying the girl through the roundel-walled passageways to her bedroom.

When he entered her room he was shocked at the sight that greeted him. He didn't come into the room very often out of respect for the girl's privacy, and it had been some days since his last visit. On that occasion, it had been rather less than tidy with clothes and magazines left lying around all over the place.

To say that the room was less than tidy now was a massive understatement. It looked, to use that Earth expression, like a bomb had hit it. The furniture was all out of place, most of it all pushed up into the four corners of the room. The two chairs were lying on their sides, one of them on the end of the bed. The bedclothes were all twisted up and looked like they'd been dragged from the mattress with some force. The girl's various vanity items, usually in some order on her make-up table, were littered across the floor, mostly in the corners. The mirror had an impact crater in it about the size of a coin, from

which cracks spread in the pattern of a spider's web. A glass of juice had been spilt all over the floor.

The Doctor allowed his lips to curl up momentarily in a look of displeasure, but the girl was too heavy for him to just stand there surveying everything. He carefully placed her down on what part of the bed he could, then swept the chair and other pieces of litter off it. He retrieved the pillows from where they'd been cast, puffed them out then put them in their proper place and adjusted Rachel's position so that her head lay on them. Then, with some difficulty, he untangled the sheets and drew them over her unconscious body.

He checked the cut on her temple. The blood had all matted now, and he was glad that it had stopped bleeding. But he was concerned that she was comatose. And even more concerned now that he had seen the state of her bedroom. What had she been doing in here?

He stroked his chin solemnly. It all added up to one grim conclusion.

Drugs.

The girl had been distressed, had flounced off to her room and, in need of a boost, had taken a substance. After all, she'd confessed to having used drugs in the days before she'd first met him. In a moment of weakness, she'd now gone back to them and, it seemed, taken too much. She'd started hallucinating or something, had some major tantrum in here and thrown everything around and then started wandering the TARDIS. Finally, by the time he'd found her in a delirious state in the console room, she was no longer aware of what she was doing or who he was, and after a quick struggle when he'd tried to reason with her, she'd passed out.

It hadn't been the knock of her head against the console that had rendered her unconscious. It was the effect of the drugs.

The Doctor thought quickly. The girl might be in more danger than he'd realised. If she'd overdosed, then there wasn't a moment to lose.

His eyes darted around, trying to spot a wrapper or a packet or something that might indicate what she'd actually taken. Spotting nothing, he quickly checked in her pockets but that search proved fruitless, also.

He raced from the room and through a network of corridors to the nearest storeroom where there was a medical box, hidden inside a roundel. Carefully moving his old ormolu clock aside so that he could get at it, he snatched up a few of the contents in his trembling hands and then raced back to the girl's room.

The moment he entered the room, the lights dimmed once more. He looked upwards, frowning, and the lights came back on. This was all he needed, a fault with the power flow when Rachel's life was at stake.

He quickly knelt down at her bedside and filled the syringe he'd brought with solution from one of the little medical jars. He then rolled the girl's sleeve up and injected her.

'That'll help keep you stabilised for a few hours,' he muttered, relieved.

He delicately moved the strands of her fringe out of her eyes with his finger, glad that her smooth, pretty face looked at peace. Then it suddenly vanished from view as the lights failed again.

The Doctor slowly stood, looking around him in the darkness. The power hum had also faltered, and although it was now constant again, it was lower in tone than normal. Something was very wrong with the TARDIS. He looked over to where the open door was just visible, and it was clear that the entire ship was affected as the blackout extended to the corridor outside also.

Why could he make out the doorway, though? Everything should have been pitch black, surely?

He realised there was a weak source of light nearby and, stumbling through the mess in the corner, he found it to be a small torch which, for some reason, had been left turned on. He gratefully picked it up.

‘Well, old girl,’ he said aloud, ‘let’s see if we can find out what your problem is.’

* * * * *

‘All systems functioning normally?’ the Doctor read out, incredulous. He gave the Fault Locator a thump with the end of his fist. He hadn’t waited twenty minutes while it performed a thorough diagnostic check, plodding along on its own reserve power supply, just for it to pretend that everything was okay.

Sleeking his hair back, the Doctor crossed over to the main console wondering if any of the readings on it would offer any clue. His hands lightly passed over the various controls he knew so well. He’d spent many lifetimes at these panels, and if the ship wasn’t working properly, it affected him as much as... Well, as much as Rachel being ill.

‘Unfortunately, Rachel’s problems are a lot easier to diagnose,’ he mused. ‘You, old girl, are a bit more of a problem patient.’

He activated the scanner, and the screen flickered into life to show a swirling mass of electric blue colour. He hoped they would emerge from the space-time vortex before the power was drained from the ship completely. The more the power was sapped, the longer the journey time was taking.

He switched the scanner off again and went to the battered old chest in the corner of the room. Rummaging through the old rags and various pieces of bric-a-brac, he found the old oil lamp and lit it, which provided rather more light than the little pocket torch. He placed the lamp on top of the central column and as it slowly moved up and down, as though the console itself were breathing, so all the shadows within the room swayed back and forth in time to it.

The Doctor’s eyes narrowed as he spotted a shadow on the far wall that refused to move in time to the column’s rhythm. In fact, this particular shadow didn’t move at all. The Doctor went over to the patch to scrutinise it more closely.

It was a dark area that snaked around and into four of the roundels, feathered at the edges. Up close, it appeared to be a very dark green in colour and seemed to have a waxy texture to it. The Doctor reached out to touch it, then withdrew his fingers.

‘No... Can’t be too careful,’ he sniffed. ‘Could be highly poisonous. Best take a sample first, I think...’

He walked out of the console room, producing the torch from his pocket again as he paced along the corridor. As the light caught the wall on the corner at the far end, he spotted a similar dark green patch to the one he’d just left in the console room. Similar, but about twice the size. A closer inspection confirmed it to have the same properties as before.

Concerned now, the Doctor shone the torch against other parts of the walls, and also the ceiling and floor. There were green patches everywhere, some small, some large.

‘A virus...!’ the Doctor breathed. ‘The TARDIS has been infected by some virus!’

Quickening his pace, the Doctor strode to the nearest laboratory and got a sample bag and a scalpel from one of the cabinets. He didn’t have to leave the room again, since there were green patches on the walls in there, too. He carefully scraped away at one with the scalpel, catching the tiny fragments that dropped off into the bag.

He then put the bag into the Molecular Analyser. Taking away the elements he knew originated from the TARDIS walls, it seemed that there was now living plant tissue present.

‘A parasitic plant...’ the Time Lord mused. ‘It might only have taken one single cell, brought aboard unwittingly... Perhaps recently, perhaps a century ago... And now, under the right conditions, it’s growing, feeding on the TARDIS itself!’

The Doctor hated to admit it, but he relished a challenge. Less so, however, when his TARDIS, his one true sanctuary, was invaded. At least he now knew the source of the problem even if he wasn’t yet sure how to combat it.

He rushed back to the console room, dismayed to see that the original green patch was now much bigger than before and that it was now accompanied by several others dotted around the room.

The readout on the console suggested that the journey was now barely progressing at all. The estimated arrival time was now far greater than it should have been.

Even worse, there were waxy green fragments all over the control panels. Even as he looked at them, he could see them straining, stretching, growing slowly but noticeably.

This plant, whatever it was, had to be feeding off energy, the Doctor assumed, hence the energy drain that had knocked out the lighting and was slowing down the flight. Dropped the heating a few notches too, he suspected, since his cheeks felt colder than normal.

Reluctantly, the Doctor shut down all but the most essential life-supporting systems. Every scrap of power had to be preserved now. He watched sadly as the central column slowed its rising and falling motion then came to a total halt.

The Doctor patted the console affectionately. ‘We need to get you better, old girl,’ he said. ‘I need to find a way to give your immune system a boost, I think.’

There was no guarantee that switching most of the power off would even slow down the drain on it from the plant. But it seemed pointless wasting power on a flight that might not ever reach a conclusion when it might be put to better use.

Rolling up his shirt sleeves, the Doctor lay down at the foot of the console and unfastened one of the panels on its underside. He disconnected the dematerialisation circuit and pocketed it. There was no way he was going to let the plant infect *that*. Then he began disconnecting as many of the power cables as he was sure he could get away with. It wouldn’t stop the energy drain, but it would surely slow it down and perhaps keep some of the important flight mechanisms free from infection for a longer period of time.

After half an hour or so, the Doctor could really feel the cold on his exposed forearms and noted that he could now see his breath. The heating was on the verge of failing altogether.

He sat up and rolled his shirt sleeves back down, and noticed a slim pair of legs slowly walking towards him.

‘Ah, Rachel!’ the Doctor beamed. ‘Glad to see you up and about again...’

As he clambered to his feet, his smile tapered away as he saw the humourless, blank expression on the girl’s face.

‘Rachel?’

She gave no response, didn’t even cast the slightest glance at him. Instead she knelt down at the open panel he’d just been working at.

To his horror, the Doctor saw she was about to put her bare hand into it. Without hesitation, he quickly flung the girl backwards, away from the console. ‘What are you doing?!? Some of those circuits are live – poke your fingers in the wrong one and you’ll be burnt to a crisp!’

The girl just looked mildly irritated and began to struggle free of his hold. ‘Nnnnyaaaaaa!’ she screamed like a child in a tantrum as she broke free. She crawled back to the console, but this time, instead of going for the panel, she lunged for the thermal lance that the Doctor had been working with and left lying there. She turned and pointed it in his direction, her eyes narrowing, her lips pouting. It was not the Rachel he knew.

‘Give me that,’ the Doctor said firmly.

She advanced a step, still brandishing it in a threatening manner.

The Doctor stood his ground. ‘Rachel, that’s a dangerous device to play with – give it back to me,’ he ordered.

A smile spread across the girl’s face. Not a friendly, welcoming one but an evil, malicious one. Her thumb operated the thermal lance, the end of which lit up in a bright pink colour.

Even from six feet away, the Doctor could feel the heat from it. Rachel stood there, silent, tensed like a tiger about to pounce on its prey. Then, so suddenly, she lunged at him...

* * * * *

This was fun, Silver thought. That big bully wasn’t so tough now, was he? In fact, he looked positively afraid of her now.

As he retreated around the water fountain, she carefully followed, making sure not to get too close to him. So long as she had the knife, she held the advantage. All she had to do was get a good clean shot and then he’d be defeated. But if she timed her lunge incorrectly, he might be able to grab her arm, force the knife from her grasp. A mistake he’d make her pay dearly for.

Yet, for the moment, it was good just to see him squirming with fear. Him, the mighty Butch Willis, feared by every other kid in the school, every kid in the neighbourhood. The mighty Butch Willis, who saw more of the local police officers than he did of the school teachers. The mighty Butch Willis, who ruthlessly beat up anyone who didn’t do as he said.

Yes, Silver remembered only too well the times he’d cornered her in school or in the park, asked her for money or cigarettes and she’d tried standing up to him, only to suffer a merciless beating. Twice she’d even suffered at his hands for intervening when he had been threatening one of her friends.

Some kids told on him. Told their parents, their teachers. Never did much good though. Willis would get a telling off, maybe a mild punishment – then he’d get even. Silver always told her Dad that her bruises or cut lips were always caused by something else, like slipping on wet leaves or falling off her bike. She hated suffering in silence, but telling Dad about Butch Willis would only make matters worse. She was determined to fight her own battles, even if it meant losing them.

Right now though, she was winning. Butch Willis was at her mercy.

She’d spotted him here, vandalising the fountain, removing bricks from it, obviously hoping for all the water to drain out of it. That was typical of him, trying to ruin something just for the sake of it.

She’d defiantly started putting the bricks back in place, but he’d shoved her away. But the fool had left his knife lying there and she’d snatched it up. Now she had his own weapon trained on him. There was nowhere he could run, not in this white void.

Something was wrong. Why was it so hard to think? There was a conflict somewhere, at the back of her mind. What *was* it?

The white void! Yes, they were in this white void, just the two of them and the damaged fountain. But...

Surely the fountain was in the park, wasn't it? Surrounded by grass, trees... What was it doing here, in the void? Where was this void? What was *she* doing here?

She tried hard to think, to remember how she'd arrived here, where the park had gone. Somewhere there were other memories locked away that she couldn't reach. Butch Willis was her enemy from school... She'd *left* school, hadn't she? Or had she?

And somewhere in the back of her mind was another conflict... A man called Jack Stone. A convicted murderer who had been executed before she was born. And yet... Hadn't she met him recently? Hadn't he killed her?

Killed her?!? How could he have killed her when she was alive now?

Why was it so difficult to think?!?

Her confusion proved to be her undoing. Willis spotted his opportunity and leapt at her. Silver couldn't react quickly enough with the knife, and he deflected her attack easily. His hand clamped round her wrist so that she couldn't make any more lunges with the knife.

She gasped for breath as he grappled with her, her back hurting as it was forced backwards against the side of the fountain. Silver gritted her teeth and tried to summon up every ounce of her energy.

The Doctor tried to go easy on the girl, but she wasn't helping matters at all. As he had her pinned down over the console, she was still making a determined effort to free the arm that held the thermal lance so that she could attack him with it again.

'Rachel! Listen to me!' he hissed. 'It's me, the Doctor! Drop the lance!'

Still, she refused to concede, and the Doctor had to reaffirm his grip on her as she made another determined lunge with the weapon.

As he moved his free hand across to try to wrest control of it from her, her head sprung forward and her teeth snapped round his hand.

The Doctor cried in pain.

Silver dug her teeth in hard, as hard as she could, relishing the pain she could see on Willis' face. He screamed in frustration, and she drew her knee up sharply, catching him in the groin area. It knocked all the tension out of his body and he relaxed his grip, recoiling, doubled over.

Silver caught her breath and stood upright. Brushing the forelock of hair out of her eyes, she smiled and advanced on her now helpless, lumbering opponent.

Episode Four

As Rachel bore down on him, the Doctor, clutching his stinging hand, now sadly concluded that there was now no other option but to use force on the girl. He timed his move perfectly so that the moment she struck forwards with the thermal lance, he nimbly sidestepped her. Twisting his body, he delivered a mighty chop to the side of her neck. It felled her instantly, and the Doctor caught her before she hit the floor. The thermal lance fell with a clatter, and the Doctor kicked it out of harm's way before lowering the girl down.

He rubbed his hand again, not impressed by the sight of her teethmarks in it.

'This isn't the influence of drugs after all, is it?' he puffed. 'Something's got you, taken you over.'

He looked around at the walls, the dark waxy tendrils now swamping huge areas. 'The same thing that's taking over the TARDIS!'

Hurriedly, he hauled the girl's body up, leaning it against the console where he could see her better in the light from the flickering oil lamp. He looked carefully at her face, her neck. Then her hands.

A shiver went down his spine as he saw the palms of her hands. In the centre of each, a dark green waxy area was forming.

'No,' the Doctor breathed, shaking his head sadly. 'No... Oh Rachel, no...'

A firmer shake of the head rid himself of the grief, and he wrenched the girl up over his shoulder and rushed her to the medical bay, laying her on a padded couch within.

Feeling guilty about it, he strapped her down. 'Don't want you attacking me again, or wandering around...'

Wandering?

On both occasions her delirium had led her to the console room. The first time he'd found her at the controls. On this second occasion she'd tried to affect the inner workings of the console. Perhaps undo the work he'd been doing...

Of course! The plant had used *her* to attack the TARDIS! She was the link! Whatever it was, it had been brought into the ship by Rachel, taken her over, then used her to get at the TARDIS itself!

But they'd come from a harmless restaurant – it just didn't make sense. He'd been there countless times before... Had there been something far more sinister than a fly in Rachel's soup?

Even the previous planet, Hilomino, had been harmless. What threat could there possibly be in an old library?

'*The book!*' the Doctor hissed excitedly. Rachel had smuggled a book into the TARDIS! Perhaps it wasn't a book at all – perhaps it was a shape-shifter or something!

In which case... Did he have any chance of finding it?

There was only one place he could begin looking – Rachel's bedroom.

* * * * *

Rather than hunting for the proverbial needle in a haystack, the Doctor felt more like he was looking for a needle in a pigsty as he entered the room once again. Everything was still strewn about as before, and it didn't help that he only had the benefit of torchlight with which to look.

Thankfully, his task was no sooner begun than concluded. The library book, completely overlooked by him as an irrelevance previously, was lying right in the middle of the room. In fact, it looked almost obvious now – it was the only significant object that hadn't been pushed aside to the corners of the room, as though it had been at the very epicentre of the whirlwind of energy that seemed to have dropped in unannounced.

The Doctor tugged one of the blankets off the girl's bed and used it to wrap up the book. He wanted to avoid touching it as much as possible, given what was happening all around him.

As he made his way to the lab, it was disheartening to see that there was very little surface space left unaffected by the invading plant. The power hum was barely audible now and the Doctor felt uncomfortably cold. There was even condensation forming everywhere, the occasional drip falling from above.

The Doctor stormed into the lab and placed the book into the molecular analyser. The resultant readings confirmed what he'd already suspected.

'Living tissue,' he solemnly said aloud, looking up from the readout.

* * * * *

Silver's head was pounding. She winced with the pain and tried to rub her temples to ease it. Something was wrong though – her arms were caught up in something.

She tried to sit up and found that something was holding her down.

Blinking a few times to clear her vision, her thoughts also became more clear. First realisation: she was awake. Second realisation: that meant she'd been asleep, and she couldn't remember going to sleep. Third realisation: it was very cold and very dark. Fourth realisation: she was fastened down to some bench and the Doctor was sitting nearby, his features illuminated by a desktop lamp alongside him.

'Doctor...?' she tried to sit upright again and on failing, cast him a look to ask why she was restrained like this.

'How are you feeling?' he asked, rising to his feet and moving towards her.

'Like shit,' she answered testily. The throbbing in her head was enough of an irritation without him asking her dumb questions. Even more annoying was the fact that she couldn't move. 'What's going on? Get these damn things off me!'

The Doctor didn't answer. Instead he drew his attention to a monitor above her head.

Silver struggled with her bonds impatiently. What was he doing to her? Why had he turned all the lights out? Did he have a psycho side to him after all?

'Doctor, let me go!' she seethed, still struggling. Somehow she *had* to get free. 'I mean it, let me go *right now!*'

'Well if I do, I hope you're not going to do *this* again,' the Doctor replied calmly and held the side of his hand a few inches from her eyes.

Silver struggled to focus and saw that his hand had a reddened patch with divots in.

'Gave me quite a nip, you did,' he continued as he began unfastening the straps that fixed her down.

As soon as she had a hand free, Silver clutched it to her throbbing head. 'Jeez I feel horrendous. What are you talking about?'

'Okay, you've noticed that you don't feel very good. Notice anything else?'

'Yeah, you've turned the lights off. And the heating. I'm freezing!'

She rubbed her arms, feeling the goosepimples.

'Not me,' the Doctor corrected her. 'Look at the walls.'

Silver frowned and followed his instruction. What was he on about? She could hardly see the walls in this light but they didn't look any different. Or did...? They were *darker*... And... Had they changed colour? And texture...! They didn't look quite so smooth anymore, it was almost like...

'They've got veins in them!' she exclaimed, whirling round to look at him for an explanation.

'Of sorts,' the Doctor nodded. 'Follow me.'

Fishing a torch out his pocket, the Doctor led her out of the room and along the corridor. Silver was concerned to see that *all* the walls of the TARDIS seemed to be covered in this dark green substance. Where had it all come from?

But there were more pressing questions. 'Doctor, what was going on in there? What were you doing to me?'

'Helping you, of course.'

'Helping me? Yeah, right, like I needed it!'

'What's the last thing you remember before waking up just now?' he snapped the question at her.

Struggling to keep pace, she was tempted to jeer at his stupid question when she suddenly realised that her answer wasn't quite as forthcoming as it should have been. What *was* the last thing she remembered?

The meal in the restaurant... No, they'd come back into the TARDIS after that...

Their séance! It had worked!

Err, no, it hadn't. She'd only succeeded in making a complete fool of herself in front of the Doctor.

'Oh my God,' she said, the memories finally returning. 'I was in my room... With that book...'

'Yes,' the Doctor said flippantly, '*that* book! That book you smuggled out of the library onto *my* ship!'

He led her into the next doorway and Silver found herself in a gloomy laboratory, lit only by a few lamps dotted around on various work surfaces and by the tiny lights on different pieces of equipment.

'*That* book there!' the Doctor pointed to the volume in question, which Silver saw sitting inside the glass-panelled chamber of a machine, all illuminated.

'Doctor, it works! I remember now! I managed to make contact with the dead!' she told him excitedly. 'I used the spells in that book, I was transported somewhere... Well... My mind was... I think.'

'What did you experience?' the Doctor asked, curious.

'I saw a lot of weird faces, I was conscious of going somewhere...' She thought hard to remember all the details. It was like trying to piece together an old dream. 'I encountered the spirit of this old serial killer from back home – he was in this void with me... The TARDIS console was there, and he was there, but there was nothing else, nothing at all except white space.'

'You say the TARDIS console was there?' the Doctor gripped her shoulders, eager for information.

'Yes... Not at first... I had to go to it... And that's where I found Jack Stone... Er, the killer.'

'Did you fight with him?'

'Yes,' Silver nodded. 'He... He *killed* me... Doctor, he *killed* me!'

‘Thankfully, he seems to have made a bad job of it.’ The Doctor flicked her nose with his finger and then gestured to the book again. ‘I’m afraid though that your little trip into the afterlife was nothing of the sort.’

‘You’re saying it was just a dream, is that it?’ Silver was about to protest further.

‘Oh, it was more than just a dream,’ the Doctor waved her protests away. ‘The spells you used were just poppycock, though. A ruse. The book’s true power is in its physical form, not its texts. Those pages are made from plant cells.’

‘*Plant cells?!?*’ Silver repeated in disbelief.

‘Some of your plants on Earth have strange properties, narcotics and the like. This is an alien plant which goes a step further. It has psychic abilities.’

‘Oh come on Doctor, that’s –’ She was about to say the word stupid but stopped herself. Experience had taught her to keep an open mind on any concept the Doctor happened to introduce her to.

The Doctor noted her change of heart and continued with his explanation. ‘The plant is not intelligent as such, but like all plants it has its own built-in survival programme. This one sustains itself from pure energy and makes use of a psychic link with animal life in order to find itself an energy source.’

‘But it didn’t, Doctor,’ Silver told him. ‘It didn’t do anything to me at all! It was me reading the incantation that started everything!’

‘The plant’s psychic power isn’t a threat,’ the Doctor went on, ‘until a mind makes a concerted effort to connect with it. The spells in that book, as I said, are a ruse. A trick to get your mind to concentrate, to link with the cells which the pages of the book are made from.’

‘And I fell for it,’ Silver scolded herself. ‘Hook, line and sinker.’

‘Once the cells had you under their influence, they used you to reach out for the nearest energy source for them,’ the Doctor continued.

Silver thought for a moment. ‘The TARDIS!’ she gave a little gasp.

The Doctor nodded. ‘When you went to the TARDIS console in your imagination, you were also going to it here, without realising. The plant wanted you to tap into its power. Unfortunately, I happened to walk into the console room whilst you were there.’ He stopped, it seemed for dramatic effect, then carried on, looking very serious indeed. ‘When I saw that you were delirious, I tried to stop you. The plant, exerting its control, made you see a recognisable enemy that you had to defeat.’

‘You mean... When I saw Jack Stone in my dream... It was really *you*?’

‘Yes. So it would seem, anyway.’

‘B-but...’ it was almost too much for Silver to take in all at once. ‘I wouldn’t have been able to beat Jack Stone... He was big, strong, he had an axe...’

‘Interesting... Yes, most interesting,’ the Doctor mused, clearly piecing things together himself. ‘It’s as though the part of your subconscious that was not under the plant’s control was fighting back... Yes, ingenious! The plant forced you to see an enemy, but you counteracted it by seeing an enemy you couldn’t defeat! Well done! Well done indeed!’

Silver rubbed her aching head. The she suddenly remembered the other part of her dream. ‘The fountain! I had to stop the local bully from vandalising the fountain!’

‘Bit him, did you?’ the Doctor said, once more showing her the wounded portion of his hand.

‘Yes...’ Silver said distantly, remembering biting Butch Willis in exactly the same part of his hand.

‘That wasn’t your bully vandalising a fountain,’ the Doctor explained. ‘That was me trying to protect the TARDIS from this plant. So the plant sent you in to stop me. Even made you attack me with my thermal lance.’

‘I, er, I’m sorry...’ Silver said. How could she have mistaken the Doctor for that creep Butch Willis? Guilt oozed through her as she remembered the knife and how she’d been determined to cause her opponent serious harm. The knife, in reality, had been the thermal lance. She shuddered at the thought of what she might have done to the Doctor. Thank goodness all he’d suffered was a bite on the hand.

‘Well, don’t be too harsh on yourself,’ the Doctor said cheerily. ‘All you did was steal a library book. Now we have to find a way to save our beloved TARDIS.’

He marched out of the lab. Silver dwelt on his words and then followed.

* * * * *

‘Can that plant still control me, Doctor?’ she asked him as they entered the console room. What was normally a familiar, welcoming sight now looked creeping and foreboding, lit as it was by just a solitary oil lamp. She rubbed her shoulders.

‘Thankfully not,’ he told her. ‘Once I realised that the book had some psychic hold over you, I administered some drugs.’

He lent over the console, tutting at the large areas of it that had now become green and waxy.

‘Drugs?’ she queried.

‘Yes... There are some drugs that can temporarily heighten a person’s psychic ability. Conversely, there are some that can temporarily kill it off completely. By completely neutralising your psychic ability, your link to the plant – or, more precisely, its link to you – was terminated. Oh, and a bit of weed killer didn’t go amiss either.’

‘Weed killer?!?’

‘Your hands,’ the Doctor said, momentarily looking up, then he flopped down to begin working under the console.

Silver looked at her hands but couldn’t see anything wrong with them. He was talking in riddles again.

She took hold of the oil lamp, glad for the tiny bit of warmth it provided, and knelt down beside where the Doctor was working under the console.

‘Do I get to know what you’re doing?’ she asked him after a moment.

‘Just putting everything back together again,’ he said. ‘Reconnecting all the connections I disconnected.’

‘Uh, so why did you disconnect them in the first place?’

‘To stop the plant making use of them, of course.’

‘Excuse me for being thick,’ Silver hissed at him, ‘but doesn’t that mean that by reconnecting them now, you’re just helping that plant thing?’

‘Yes,’ the Doctor nodded, grinning. ‘Yes, that’s absolutely right. It’ll have some nice big open energy channels available to it now.’

‘And how will that help us?’

He sat upright and looked at her sternly. ‘It’s our only chance,’ he said, the lines of his face forming a grim expression. ‘I’ve isolated the book, so without its link to you, it can’t feed itself or control its tendrils. But all these tendrils will go on feeding on energy, sustaining themselves, growing. They’ve overrun the TARDIS already.’

Silver saw the Doctor reach inside the console and flick a big red switch amid the mass of wires and circuits within. Immediately the console came alive, lights on it began winking and the central column slowly juddered back into life.

The Doctor clambered to his feet.

Silver unsteadily stood up too. The Doctor took the oil lamp from her and blew it out. Now they were both silhouetted against the weak lights from the control console.

The Doctor put one arm around her shoulders and raised his other hand in front of them.

Silver could see that his fingers were crossed.

‘One chance,’ he said. ‘Our last.’

With that he pulled one of the larger levers on the console.

The first effect that Silver noticed was the sudden restoration of the lighting. She had to screw her eyes up to cope with that alone. She was therefore caught completely off guard when the whole room gave an almighty lurch and she would have gone reeling across to the wall had the Doctor not caught her arm and steadied her sufficiently for her to regain her balance.

She opened her eyes to find everything juddering. She felt like she was sitting on top of a spin-dryer operating at high speed. Sparks flew from the console, the lighting went off again for a few seconds and then came back on.

More juddering, then both Silver and the Doctor were suddenly falling backwards as the whole room seemed to tilt. Silver was winded as her back slammed against the hard wall. As she lifted her arm, she was taken by surprise at how heavy it suddenly felt. And it was getting heavier – a moment later it was too heavy to even lift. Her whole body was pressed hard against the wall by some invisible force.

‘G force...’ she heard the Doctor’s strained voice from somewhere to her right. She was just able to turn her head enough to see him pinned to the wall alongside her.

‘We must be spinning very fast... Having a centrifugal effect...’

She could only marvel at how he managed to continue explaining everything to her even when they were under such trying circumstances as this.

‘Doctor, it’s crushing me!’ Silver gasped, finding breathing difficult with such a heavy weight pressing down on her chest. She could feel her face contorting under the pressure. It felt like her eyes were being pushed back right through their sockets, like something was trying to tunnel through her throat and out of the back of her neck.

There was a harsh smell of burning electronics and rubber and an incredible stuttering roar of the TARDIS engines. Silver kept her eyes screwed up tightly, trying to protect them from the G-force, trying to blot out the pain she was in. She could only manage little breaths now. Her senses seemed to be fading, as though she were on the brink of losing consciousness.

Was this the end? Crushed or ripped apart in the space-time vortex? She felt like she’d already experienced death recently at the hands of Jack Stone. That had been terrifying but quick – yet not even real. Was this real? Her thoughts were groggy, unclear... She couldn’t be sure this *was* real after everything she had been through. Had she ever even left her own home and time? Was the Doctor, the TARDIS, the psychic book and all the other bizarre things from her recent history all just part of some drug-induced dream she was having?

Nah, that sounded too much like *Dallas*. This hurt too much to be anything other than reality.

She couldn’t breathe anymore. She didn’t really care. She felt at peace now. It hadn’t been the longest of lives, but she’d broken free of the mundane existence that had

ensnared all of her peers. She'd experienced the most fantastic things – different worlds, different times... That had to be worth more than another fifty years of life spent in Connecticut.

How long did she spend in that tranquillity, hovering on the brink of death? It was impossible to say – probably just a couple of minutes, but it seemed like hours. She should have been relieved to escape it but such was the violent jolt that suddenly lurched her forward, she went staggering into the console and was sure she was about to vomit as her midriff ploughed into its side.

She collapsed on the floor, making strange wheezing noises as she tried to suck as much oxygen into her lungs as she could now that it was available to her again. For thirty seconds or so, it seemed like she just couldn't get enough air in time – but then, ever so gradually, her breathing started to become easier. She didn't dare try to move, though, as such exertion seemed a daunting prospect. Lying there clutching her stomach seemed the safest option for the moment.

She could see the Doctor examining the console. He was walking stiffly, stretching his arms and his neck a couple of times, but he didn't look the slightest bit out of breath. When he saw her looking up at him he seemed to anticipate her question.

'Respiratory by-pass system,' he said. 'Always handy to have a Plan B.'

Silver managed a smile. It felt good to be able to move her face again. It made her smile even more. And the oxygen smelt sweeter than ever.

The Doctor rubbed the back of his neck, still clearly stiff from the attack of G-forces. 'Well, the old girl managed it, Rachel. A few burnt-out systems but thankfully nothing essential. We're travelling normally once more.'

He beamed down at her and suddenly yanked her up by the arm. She felt dizzy and her legs felt too weak to support her, so she lent forward, resting her chest on the console and looping her arms around the central column as though giving it a big hug. Perhaps, in a way, she was.

'That mean we're safe?' she asked. Oof, that took too much breath to say.

'Quite so,' the Doctor chirped. 'It was a close call, but yes, we're out of danger now.'

It was a couple more minutes before Silver felt confident enough to try to speak again. 'The plant?' she puffed breathlessly.

This time the Doctor did not speak. Instead, he indicated the patches on the console, the nearest ones she could comfortably see. They no longer had a moist, waxy look to them, nor were they green. Instead they were dry and flaky, a charred brown colour. Dead.

She raised her eyes up to his. That was enough to demand the next answer from him.

'What did I do?' the Doctor anticipated. He shrugged, modestly. 'Well, since our little friend was feeding on the TARDIS's energy, I'd taken the precaution earlier of disconnecting the emergency back-up supplies, as I didn't want us losing that.'

He thrust his hands down into his trouser pockets and began pacing around before her. 'I'd disconnected you from the plant, and also disconnected its primary source, the book, from the tendrils that were spreading throughout the TARDIS. Effectively, they no longer had any kind of brain – they were operating on the most basic instincts, to feed, to grow...'

He paused, looking at her to make sure she was understanding. 'With the tendrils sucking on the little energy remaining to them as hard as they possibly could, I surprised them by re-channelling the reserve power through the TARDIS once more. The maximum power was too much for them, and it effectively burnt them out. Well, most of them anyway. And a bit of the TARDIS herself, the poor dear.'

He patted the console affectionately.

Silver tried to laugh but only had the energy left for a laughing smile.

‘An amazing creature, that plant. Able to use raw energy to convert molecules into its cells. Given enough time, it would have transformed the entire TARDIS into itself. And the two of us, also. The TARDIS will be able to repair itself, I hope... Rather like our bodies know how to heal wounds. Just needs a bit of time and tender loving care, that’s all.’ He paused for a smile. ‘As for the tendrils that haven’t been killed, there are obviously far too few left to affect the TARDIS’s energy flow for the moment. As soon as we land I can shut down the power completely and, well, get the weed killer out, I suppose. Destroy the last few living bits.’

Summoning up all of her strength, Silver pushed herself up off the console and stood in a more upright position, though she still needed the support of her arms on the control panel to help support her weight. She still felt sore and dizzy. But happy.

‘You know, I thought that book was in its own special case back in the library because it was a rare edition, or valuable,’ she laughed, despite the pain it caused in her side. ‘That case was to shield people from its psychic properties, wasn’t it?’

The Doctor peered at her and nodded silently.

‘Not that I took it because it was worth something!’ she suddenly thought she’d better emphasise, her tone becoming serious. ‘I just wanted to try the stuff in it.’

He nodded again.

‘Guess I screwed up big time, huh?’

Another little nod.

‘Yeah, I’m... I’m really sorry, Doctor. Thanks to me I nearly got you killed, nearly ruined your TARDIS...’

He nodded again, moving round to the next control panel.

‘Sometimes I hate myself, y’know?’ she said, in total seriousness. She looked and found him waiting in staring, emotionless anticipation for her to elaborate.

‘Everything I do seems to turn out wrong,’ she continued. ‘The smarter I try to be, the dumber I end up looking.’

She’d said all she was going to, but the Doctor just kept looking at her, like he was waiting for more.

‘It was wrong of me to take the book...’ she admitted. ‘I didn’t mean any harm by it. I – I just wanted the spells to work, I wanted to be able to be *good* at something for once. Something even *you* couldn’t do.’

The Doctor’s eyebrows arched inwards as she made that last comment, as though he were hurt by it. No, not because he took it as an insult... But because he suddenly seemed to understand her.

‘It’s not easy always being inferior to you, you know.’ She felt like crying, but was determined not to. Though she hated having to be brutally honest like this – especially to him, because he meant so much to her.

He gazed upwards, eyes moving back and forth as though he were searching for the right words.

‘It’s not your fault, Doctor. I don’t want you blaming yourself,’ she cut in before he had a chance. His head still angled upwards, his eyes closed as if to spare him the pain of what he was about to hear.

‘You’re a great guy, the best,’ she told him, a lump suddenly growing in her throat. ‘And maybe we’ll be the ideal team one day, you and me roaming the universe together. But not yet. I’m too much of a liability. Too much of a kid. I think maybe you’d better drop

me off somewhere safe where I can grow up a bit and learn some common sense. You can come back and find me one day...'

The tears were threatening to come now, so she unsteadily walked away from the console, towards the door that led into the heart of the ship. Halfway, she hesitated and turned to him one last time.

'Yeah, you come back when I've finished being some dumb kid and matured and started acting and behaving like an adult for once.'

She turned away again and made for the door, wishing that her legs were strong enough to walk faster and more steadily.

'Silver!' she heard the Doctor call her as she was just short of the door. She hesitated, wondering if it was worth prolonging the agony. Her eyes were already moist now and she really didn't want him to see her blubbing again. Yet... He'd done so much for her, been so great... She knew she owed him the chance to speak. So she stopped, and turned to face him properly, even sweeping her hair out of her face so that he could see the tears welling in her eyes.

He walked right up to her. 'I think you just have,' he said.

That was so bloody typical of him! Always finding the perfect thing to say whatever the situation! She tried to speak but the lump in her throat was too big now, all she could do was nod, and sniff, and nod some more, trying and failing and trying again to look him in the eye. She swept her hair back again, trying to compose herself, giving a big sniff and swallowing hard.

'Thanks,' she managed to say in a voice so tiny she barely recognised it as her own.

'So we'll have no more talk of leaving,' the Doctor said seriously, although she knew that inside he had to play-acting and was probably jumping for joy. 'Although before you grow up completely, there's one last thing you're going to do as a kid.'

She screwed her face up in puzzlement.

'Go and tidy your room!' the Doctor ordered her sternly, pointing his finger in the direction of the door behind her.

A smile broke across her face, and it was a joy to see him suffer the same reaction. She reached up and gave him a big hug. He reciprocated for a moment or two and then they parted again.

'Your room,' he reminded her. 'It's a tip! Now hurry up and get it tidy,' he ushered her out of the console room. And as she went on her way, she heard him add one last comment.

'We've got a library book to return.'

THE
DOCTOR WHO
PROJECT

SEANCE IN A TYPE 40 TARDIS

DAVID P. MAY



The Final Journey?

An innocent trip to the most mundane of places – a library – is the catalyst for the most dangerous of adventures for the Doctor and Silver.

Is there such a thing as life after death?

The Doctor insists there isn't.

Silver wants to believe there is.

And the library book Silver has stolen would seem to support her argument, especially when she tries out one of its ancient spells and finds that it works!

However, the girl is dabbling with powers she doesn't understand, and very soon the very TARDIS itself is under siege whilst in the space-time vortex.

The Doctor faces a desperate race against time to save his companion, his ship, and, indeed, himself.

Can he identify and defeat the mysterious power that is attacking his ship or is this one journey the TARDIS is destined never to complete?



This is another in a series of original fan authored Doctor Who fiction published by The Doctor Who Project featuring the ninth Doctor as played by Anton Robbins

