

THE
DOCTOR WHO
PROJECT

THE LIBRARIAN OF SERAPEA

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The space cruiser *Storm of Destruction* glided through space like a blunt-nosed shark. A five-mile long blunt-nosed shark. With guns. Beneath the space cruiser, connected by the umbilical cord that was the docking tunnel, was a much smaller, much spinnier ship. If the *Storm* was a shark, this was a speck of space-plankton.

The captain of the *Storm* was a lizard-like individual dressed in lobster-coloured armour, and as he crossed over to the spiny vessel and entered the audience chamber, his entourage raised trumpets to their lips to bestow on him a triumphant fanfare. The reception he received within the chamber was distinctly less impressive. The room was dark, though whether this was due to the low lighting or simply the thick fug of cigar smoke that was making his eyes water, he could not say. He shuffled forward – paradoxically attempting to make the cautious movement look as regal and dynamic as possible – and collided with something. Correction: with someone, who growled at him angrily. The figure stank of rotting meat, an odour the captain would normally have found attractive; on this occasion, he chose not to push his luck.

“Oozle?” the captain called out, straining to see through the smoke. “I thank you for agreeing to see me.”

“Agreeing to see you?” There was a wet and guttural edge to the voice, like fresh fish slapping limply on the deck of a boat. “I *summoned* you, Captain, whatever you may have told your men.”

The captain licked his lips nervously.

“I see you brought the *Storm of Destruction*,” Oozle said, “the ship that I purchased for you.”

“And most grateful I am to you for it,” said the captain. “I don’t want your gratitude,” Oozle snapped. “I want the money you owe me.”

“Yes, well, that could be a problem.”

“I don’t like problems, Captain. I like solutions.”

“Unfortunately, the war is not going our way and...”

“...and...”

“...and I don’t have your money.”

“Ah well,” Oozle sighed. “*C’est la vie*.”

“Does that mean I can go?”

“No, it does not. You’re not leaving this room until I’ve been paid and if you can’t pay in cash, you can always pay with your life.”

“Are you threatening me, Oozle? My men stand ready to defend me.”

“They do?” Oozle feigned surprise. “Here’s the thing, you have failed to pay your men in much the same way that you failed to pay me. I, on the other hand, have paid them handsomely. Kill him.”

The captain’s men swapped their trumpets for handguns and shot their former master in the head.

“Clear up that mess, would you,” Oozle instructed the guards. He turned to the man standing beside him. “So, Dexter, you see how I deal with those that disappoint me.”

Dexter, who looked incongruous in his blue frock coat and powdered wig, swallowed. “I see.”

Oozle draped a tentacle over Dexter’s shoulders.

“I trust that you won’t become a disappointment, then.”

* * *

Protesting like an asthmatic elephant, a blue box struggled its way into existence. The time

and space machine inside made something of a thump as it landed bumpily on some uneven surface.

“Subtle,” Silver remarked as she emerged.

“Not as discreet as one might have liked, I’ll grant you,” the Doctor conceded, surveying the success of his parking. The TARDIS had materialized beside...

“The Statue of Christian Charity – more commonly known as Eros. This is Piccadilly Circus.”

“Aren’t you worried that someone’s going to notice?”

The Doctor shrugged. “They’ll probably assume that it’s publicity for a new television programme.” He licked his index finger and waved it in the air. “This way.”

He dashed across the road, oblivious to the blaring horns of black cabs and red buses. Shaking her head, Silver wandered over to the traffic lights and waited until the man turned green.

“So, where are we going?” she asked, catching up with the Doctor as he strode swiftly down Shaftesbury Avenue.

The Doctor tapped the side of his nose enigmatically. Silver might have accepted this behaviour from the old Doctor, but this new one had yet to win her full trust. She stopped dead, causing a pile-up of pedestrians caught behind her.

“Doctor, I’m not moving from this spot until you give me a straight answer.”

“You’re not?”

“No.”

“Ah.” The Doctor drummed his fingertips against his chin and said no more. Silver found herself wondering if she had the patience to outwait a Time Lord.

“I have a right to know what we’re doing here, don’t I?” she asked.

“It was meant to be a surprise.”

“What was?”

“Your treat.”

“My what?”

“After everything you’ve been through lately – for which I take no small measure of responsibility...”

“You don’t say.”

“Well, quite, but the point is that I felt that you deserved some form of a reward.”

Things were looking up, Silver decided. “And what form is this reward supposed to take?”

The Doctor beamed. “I’m taking you to see a play.”

“A play?”

“Well, a musical really.”

“A musical.”

“Indeed.”

“With singing and dancing and stuff.”

“That’s the usual situation, though I’m a little vague as to exactly what ‘stuff’ might be.”

“Sounds...” Silver checked herself. The Doctor had the look of a puppy craving affection. At least he was trying, she supposed. “That sounds great, Doctor.”

“I knew you’d like it,” he replied with a broad grin, bounding away and humming to himself.

At least she would only have to endure it for a few hours, Silver thought to herself, and maybe she could convince the Doctor to take her shopping afterwards...

* * *

Silver fought hard not to laugh aloud. "I take it that this is the place."

"But...but...but I checked the date twice." The Doctor was staring intently at the sign on the doors, as though he was trying to change what it said by mere force of will, daring it to remain the same. Despite his best efforts, the sign still read: "Closed for renovations. Opening again in Spring."

"And I was so looking forward to this too," Silver said, "for all of the five minutes I knew about it. Still, I suppose we'll just have to write it off as one of those things and go back to the TARDIS. I don't suppose we could detour via Carnaby Street on the way, could we?"

"Never fear, Silver." The Doctor was all purpose again. "We're in the middle of London's West End; I'm sure we can find you something to watch. You'll get your play."

"You know, there's really no need, Doctor. It's enough that you tried and..."

But the Doctor wasn't listening. He had become transfixed by a poster on a neighbouring theatre.

"*Loves Labours Won*," he read softly. "A play by William Shakespeare."

"Don't remember that one from school," said Silver.

"You wouldn't. It's been lost for centuries."

"What's it about?"

"Nobody knows," the Doctor replied. "It's referred to as a comedy in a few places, but the nature of the play has been a mystery since Shakespeare's day. Some people believe it's a sequel to *Loves Labours Lost*, but why speculate when we can find out for ourselves, hm?"

"You mean use the TARDIS to go to ask Shakespeare himself?"

"Actually, I was thinking more along the lines of buying two tickets for the matinee over the road."

* * *

"According to this," the Doctor said as he studied the programme, "the manuscript was recently discovered by the play's producer. It doesn't say how, though." He stared into the middle-distance, murmuring softly. "What I wouldn't give to take a look at that manuscript."

"Well, what are we waiting for then?" Silver jumped to her feet, eliciting complaints from the people behind her. "Let's go find it."

"Now?"

"Why not?"

"I was rather hoping to see the play, actually. It's not every day that you get an opportunity like this, Silver. And, to tell you the truth, I've always wondered whether or not Biron and Rosaline ever got back together."

"Fine, satisfy your own curiosity. I'm going investigating." With that, Silver headed for the exit.

The Doctor sighed.

"Young people these days," muttered the woman in the next seat. "No appreciation of culture."

"So very true," the Doctor sighed.

* * *

Silver straightened her jacket and wandered nonchalantly backstage. Sneaking in would obviously look suspicious so Silver was hoping to convey the impression that she belonged, fitted in. So far, no one had batted an eyelid, being far too concerned with the costume changes and prop requirements of the play taking place on the stage above. She could hear the first actor declaiming the classic Shakespearean prologue and hoped that the Doctor was enjoying himself while she was doing all the work.

The Doctor had said that the play's producer had the manuscript, but that did not tell Silver where it was. Nothing ventured, nothing gained...

"Excuse me," she asked a woman struggling into a nun's habit, "could you tell me where the producer's office is, please?"

"Just at the end of the hall, love. Must dash, I have a lover's tryst to interrupt." The nun hurried in the direction of the steps onto the stage, stumbling over the floorboards as she went.

This is going to be easier than I thought, Silver told herself as she followed the nun's advice. At this rate, she would have the manuscript back with the Doctor before the end of Act One.

Or not.

The door to the producer's office was firmly locked. Silver dropped to one knee and peered at the lock. She was not about to go back to the Doctor and ask him for the sonic screwdriver. No – she could do this without his help. She inserted a hairpin in the lock and tried to remember how the Doctor did it.

"What do you think you're doing?" a voice boomed from behind her.

* * *

Much to the Doctor's delight, the play was indeed a sequel to *Loves Labours Lost*. At the end of the latter, the lovers had agreed to meet again at the end of a year and the first half of the play seemed to be about the events of that twelvemonth, with the first act focusing on the King of Navarre and his friends and the second following the Queen of France and hers.

"What do you think of it so far?" said the woman sitting next to the Doctor in the space between acts.

"Well, the literary allusions are as plentiful as in its predecessor," the Doctor replied. "One almost gets the sense the Shakespeare is showing off."

"Yes, it is very dense, isn't it?"

"But that's what I like about it," the Doctor continued. "In fact, if I have a complaint, it's that Biron isn't quite as animated as I remember. I realise he's working in a hospital now, but the play would benefit greatly from more of his wit."

Someone in the row behind hissed for quiet, so the Doctor and his newfound companion sheepishly settled in for the next act.

* * *

"And stay out!" ordered the security guard as he ejected Silver from the building roughly. Silver pulled a face at his retreating back. So Plan A hadn't worked out; time to try Plan B. Whatever that was.

"Ah," she said to herself, spying an open window. It was high on the wall, well out of reach. Undeterred, she dragged a dustbin across to the wall, positioned it beneath the window and then climbed on top of it.

The plastic lid snapped beneath her weight and she fell unceremoniously into the

rubbish. Bin juices oozed over her socks.

“The Doctor had better appreciate this,” she muttered darkly as she hauled herself out. Then, balancing precariously on the edges of the bin, she reached for the window. It was a tight fit and Silver had to abandon her jacket in order to squeeze through, but finally she made it, dropping softly onto the floor inside the theatre.

“You again,” said the security guard.

“Hi.” Silver smiled sheepishly. So much for Plan B. At least she still had twenty-four letters of the alphabet left to work with.

* * *

“You look disappointed,” the Doctor’s new friend remarked.

The intermission had arrived and the pair had shuffled off to the bar. The Doctor swirled his drink around his glass.

“It’s a very good play.”

“I’m sensing a but.”

“It’s silly really,” the Doctor said. “I suppose I must have already worked out in my head what the sequel would be like. Perhaps I had unrealistic expectations.”

“And a *very good* play doesn’t compare to the one in your head.”

“Reality very rarely measures up to fantasy. That’s why we have fantasies after all.” The Doctor stopped, staring at his companion. “I’m sorry, I’ve been terribly rude. We’ve spent half a play together and I haven’t thought to introduce myself. I’m the Doctor.”

His friend laughed and extended her hand. “A pleasure to meet you, Doctor. I’m Jane Messingham.”

“Not...” The Doctor consulted his programme.

“The play’s producer? I have that honour.”

“The honour’s all mine, I assure you,” the Doctor replied. “I’ve been hoping to meet you.”

“Really? Well, perhaps we can continue our conversation after the second half. That is, assuming you can be persuaded to sit through the remains of what is merely a ‘very good’ play.”

“I would be delighted.”

* * *

Silver held the bouquet of flowers in both hands. She had gone for the largest bunch she could find – she would claim it back from the Doctor later as an incidental expense – in order to obscure her face, but now she was finding it difficult to see where she was going.

“Do you need a hand?”

Silver nearly jumped when she realised it was the security guard.

“No thanks,” she said, trying to disguise her voice. “Could you point me in the direction of the producer’s office?”

“Follow me,” the guard suggested.

Silver grimaced. Being chaperoned by the security guard was not exactly part of the plan, but what choice did she have? Keeping the flowers between her and the guard, she dutifully followed along.

“Here we are,” the security guard said when they arrived at the office door. He frowned. “You know, it’s probably best if you put those in water. I shouldn’t do this really, but...”

He unlocked the door for her. Silver bit down on her lower lip so that she would not cry out in triumph. “Don’t take too long,” the guard warned Silver before letting her inside.

Silver waited until she was sure he had gone before putting down the flowers and closing the door. Now, where to start? The office looked as though a tornado had whipped through it, scattering books and papers everywhere. Boxes and tins were stacked in tottering piles and a painting hung on the wall at a crooked angle. Silver tilted her head momentarily to look at the artwork, then straightened it. She located a vase – in a shoebox under the desk – and filled it with water for the flowers. Given what she had paid for them, she was not about to just let them die.

Finally, she cracked her knuckles.

“So where are you hiding?” she whispered before diving headfirst into the creative disarray.

Forty-five minutes later, she was thoroughly dejected. The office looked a lot neater, Silver having ordered and filed the papers and pamphlets and folders in her quest to find the manuscript. Unfortunately, her quest had failed to bear any fruit. When the Doctor and Jane Messingham arrived at the office, they found Silver sitting cross-legged on the floor with her head in her hands.

“Silver?” the Doctor began. “What are you doing here?”

Silver looked up at the sound of a familiar voice. “Not much,” she replied. “It’s not here.”

“What’s not here?” Jane Messingham asked.

“Well of course it’s not here,” the Doctor said. “Jane had it with her and she was kind enough to show it to me.”

“Jane?” Silver looked from the Doctor to Messingham and back again.

“Yes, Jane. The producer.”

“Oh, that Jane.” Silver stood up. “I’m, um, sorry for breaking into your office. I bought you flowers.”

“That’s quite all right,” Messingham said. “The Doctor’s already explained everything.”

Silver decided that she disliked this woman intensely.

“I’m no expert,” the Doctor said, “but the handwriting on the manuscript looks genuine to me.”

“I’m no expert either, Doctor,” Messingham replied, “but I do employ them from time to time and they concur.”

“May I ask how you got hold of it?”

“At an auction. And before you ask, no, I don’t know who the seller was. He chose to remain anonymous.”

“Or she,” Silver interjected.

“I’m sorry?” Messingham’s eyes flitted briefly back to her.

“You said he chose to remain anonymous. Could have been a she.”

“Well, yes, I suppose so.”

“It was just a figure of speech, Silver,” the Doctor chided gently.

“Whatever.”

“Is there anything else I can help you with, Doctor?” Messingham asked.

“No, no, you’ve already been most helpful. Silver and I really must be going.”

“Already?”

“I’m afraid so.”

“Well, feel free to come back anytime,” Messingham said. “I really enjoyed our chat.”

“As did I, Jane.”

Messingham leant forward, inclining her head in preparation for a peck on the cheek. She was somewhat disappointed when the Doctor merely took her hand in his and shook it warmly.

Silver tugged on the Doctor's sleeve. "Come along, Doctor," she said.

* * *

"There was no need to be rude."

By the time the two had emerged onto the street, the Doctor was scolding Silver.

"Jane was a very pleasant individual."

The sky had darkened and rain was falling heavily. Silver turned up the collar of her jacket and hunched her shoulders.

"You would think so," she muttered.

"And what's that supposed to mean?"

"Oh, come on, Doctor, she was all over you," Silver said. "Don't tell me you didn't notice."

"Well, as it happens..." the Doctor began, flustered.

Silver laughed. "You really didn't, did you?" She shook her head, flinging water droplets from her hair in all directions. The Doctor produced an umbrella Silver could have sworn he had not been carrying earlier.

"Friends?" he asked, unfurling it neatly as the rain came tumbling down. Silver didn't reply, but she did sidle close enough to share the umbrella.

"So where are we going now?" Silver asked as they dashed across a road, leaving a chorus of car horns honking in their wake.

"Back to the TARDIS," the Doctor replied softly.

"And then?"

"Remember how I told you that the handwriting was genuine? Well, what's suspicious is that the paper it's written on isn't nearly old enough."

"So, it's a fake after all?"

"No, it's definitely authentic," the Doctor insisted. "Which means that it must have been brought forward in time. It's my guess that whoever sold the manuscript to Jane originally obtained it from Shakespeare himself."

"But Jane doesn't know who sold it to her," Silver pointed out.

"Indeed, but old Will might recall to whom he gave it. Let's ask him, shall we?"

"So your grand plan is to go back in time and chat to Shakespeare," Silver said slowly. "You do realise I suggested that hours ago, don't you?"

"You did?" the Doctor asked perplexedly. "Are you sure?"

Silver kicked a puddle at him.

* * *

The horse-drawn cart ploughed through the deep pool of rainwater, spraying mud in all directions. Silver was not fast enough to jump away.

"Great," she complained. "Now look at my dress."

"I did try to warn you that it wasn't really suitable," the Doctor reminded her.

"Doctor, we're going to see a performance of Shakespeare by Shakespeare at the original Globe Theatre. Who knows, there might be royalty present. I want to look my best." She eyed the stain on her dress dejectedly. "Correction: wanted to look my best."

"You do realise that the Globe is in... ah... a somewhat less than salubrious

neighbourhood, don't you? You're liable to be the best dressed person there."

"Even with the mud?"

"Judging by the condition of the street, I doubt that mud is optional. Trust me, you're still guaranteed to turn heads."

Silver grinned. "Maybe even the King's?"

"You're not his type. And anyway, it wasn't a compliment. I did tell you we were trying to be discreet, didn't I?"

"Oh, don't be such a spoilsport, Doctor. What's the point of being able to travel in time if you don't get to dress up a little?"

"My dear Miss Silverstein," the Doctor replied, "I do hope you're not suggesting that our TARDIS travels are simply an excuse for you to wear a pretty frock?"

"Of course not, silly," Silver replied. "Who needs an excuse?"

"Careful now," the Doctor said, guiding Silver out of the way as a woman emptied a chamber pot out of an open window. "One stain on that dress is quite enough."

"You weren't kidding about the neighbourhood, were you?"

The Doctor shrugged. "They do that sort of thing in London too."

"I thought the Globe was in London."

"In your time, certainly," the Doctor said. "At this point in history, London doesn't quite extend that far yet. Now hurry up or we'll miss the performance."

"I *am* hurrying," Silver protested. "It's not easy in this..."

"Yes?" the Doctor prompted, raising an eyebrow.

"Say I told you so and I'll thump you."

"I wouldn't dream of it."

"If I didn't know better," Silver continued, hiking up her skirt to keep the hem out of the mud, "I'd say you were jealous of my outfit."

"Nonsense," the Doctor replied, tugging on his doublet to straighten it. "The very idea. Why, I..."

"Don't worry, Doctor." Silver patted him on one velvet-covered arm. "You look pretty too."

* * *

"Will, Will, Will, you know how much I respect you and how much I adore the part, but I really can't go on. It's my voice, don't you see?"

"It sounds sufficient to my ears, Richard," William Shakespeare replied sceptically.

"I do not doubt it, Will," said Richard Burbage, "yet we two stand but feet apart. If you were up on the balcony yonder, I swear my words would be lost upon the summer breeze. Answer me this, Will, should your Romeo declaim his love for fair Juliet with fire in his heart or with a frog in his throat?"

"A point well made, to be sure," said Shakespeare, "but surely an apothecary could..."

"There's no time, Will. The curtain rises in less than an hour."

Shakespeare gnawed on his knuckle. "Of all the compounded misfortunes. It's bad enough that Jack is late for his first performance, but now I must lose you as well. I might as well rename the play Mercutio and Tybalt."

Burbage raised his hands placatingly. "It breaks my heart to disappoint you. If I could go on, you know that I would."

"Indeed I do, Richard, and I apologise for ever doubting you. But what is to be done?"

"You must recast. There's nothing else for it."

"Recast? And whom might you suggest? There is not one amongst our company who

knows the lines and no time for one to memorise them.”

“You know them, Will.”

“Me?”

“Why not? Who knows better the emotion behind those lines than the man who crafted them?”

“Forgive me, Richard, I must protest.”

“Then protest at length, Will,” Burbage said, “but do so while getting into costume. Your public awaits.”

* * *

“Shouldn’t we be looking for our seats?”

“Seats?” The Doctor shook his head. “Silver, I think you may be in for a bit of a shock. Anyway, you didn’t seem particularly enthusiastic about going to the theatre earlier.”

“That was different.”

“How so?”

“This is... well, it’s Shakespeare.”

“So was that.”

“Yes, but this is proper Shakespeare in its natural habitat. This is something special. Come on, Doctor, you must know what I mean.”

“Not really, no.”

“Well, it’s just different, okay.”

“As you wish. In any event, let’s not forget why we’re here.”

“To see Shakespeare.”

“Exactly, and the best place to do that is backstage.” He turned to one of the actors who was awaiting his cue. “Excuse me, I don’t suppose you could point me in the direction of William Shakespeare?”

“Shakespeare? Why, sir, that’s him on stage, bawling his heart out about Cupid’s arrows and what have you. Personally, I think it’s a bit much the playwright giving himself all the best lines, but that’s writers for you, isn’t it, sir?”

“It is?”

“Oh yes, no respect for us actors. If the play’s any good that it’ll all be down to the quality of the writing, but if it fails then who do you think will take the blame? Well, it won’t be Master Shakespeare, you mark my words.”

“Yes, quite.”

“So the best place to meet Shakespeare is backstage, is it?” Silver muttered. “I’ll be round the front if anyone wants me.” Silver started to push her way past the actors in search of a way to the audience when a pair of hands grabbed her shoulders.

“There you are, Jack,” her assailant said. “You’ve had us worried sick, you have. Jimmy there thought that maybe first night nerves had got the better of you and you weren’t going to show, but I knew that you wouldn’t disappoint us.”

“But I’m not...”

“Not ready? I know. I felt the same way my first time, but you have nothing to worry about. Just go out there and say your lines and you’ll knock them dead. Here’s your cue now.”

Silver opened her mouth to protest, but she had already been forced onto the stage.

* * *

“Burbage, isn’t it? Richard Burbage?”

Burbage squinted up at the stranger. “Who asks?”

The stranger drew himself up to his full height, thereby exaggerating the slightness of his frame. “I am generally known as the Doctor.”

“Just the Doctor?”

“Indeed.”

Burbage waited for the “Doctor” to elaborate, but when the silence started to become uncomfortable he was forced to pick up the conversation himself. Odd, that; he had not wanted to talk to the man in the first place, but now he felt obliged to keep the dialogue going. “You’re not a friend of that Tanner fellow, are you?”

“I very much doubt it,” the Doctor replied. “I’m... new to the area.”

“And yet you’ve heard of me... I mean, heard of Richard Burbage.”

A smile tugged at the corners of the Doctor’s mouth. “Surely everyone has heard of you – I mean of him – one of the greatest actors of the age.”

Burbage leaned forward in his chair. “Do you truly think so?”

“Of course. In fact, I’m somewhat surprised that you aren’t – I mean that he isn’t – on that stage right now.”

Burbage started to reply, to repeat the same excuse about his voice he had used on Will, but the Doctor was waving him to silence. He was staring at the stage, with something of an exasperated look on his face.

“I’m all for getting stuck in, but really that girl takes things a step too far.” The Doctor turned back to Burbage. “I’m going to need a dress. Quickly, man, there’s no time to lose.”

* * *

Silver wanted to run, but her legs would not move. Hundreds of faces were looking up at her from the pit below the stage or from the balconies around the sides. The stage was empty – no scenery to hide behind – except for herself and a man in a wig and a dress who was looking at her expectantly. Then it hit Silver. Everyone was waiting for her to say something.

She had no idea what her lines were.

She had no idea what part she was playing.

She didn’t even know what play this was.

“Daughter?” the man in the wig prompted. Okay, so she was somebody’s daughter. That must narrow it down a bit. Her mind was racing, but all Shakespeare seemed to have escaped her. Her mouth was dry, her tongue seemed to have doubled in size, but she knew she had to say *something*. Her lips parted.

Another man in a wig and a dress burst onto the stage. With a start, Silver realised it was the Doctor! He winked at her.

“How now, Juliet?” he said. “Your mother calls.”

Right, so she was Juliet. That told her the play as well. Now, could she guess the line?

“I’m here, mother,” she said, hesitantly. “What can I do for you?”

Not quite Shakespeare, but hopefully close enough. The man playing her mother frowned at her, but forged valiantly onwards.

“This is the matter – Nurse?” The last word was a question and the Doctor gave a small nod so “her mother” continued. “Give leave a while. We must talk in secret.”

The Doctor turned to leave and panic gripped Silver again. Was he abandoning her already to carry the rest of the scene without him? But wait, “her mother” was still talking.

“Nurse, come back again. I have remembered me, thou s’ hear our counsel, thou knowest my daughter’s of a pretty age.”

“Faith,” the Doctor replied, “I can tell her age unto an hour.”

“She’s not fourteen.”

“I’ll lay fourteen of my teeth – and yet, to my teen be it spoken, I have but four – she’s not fourteen. How long is it now to Lammastide?”

“A fortnight and odd days.”

“Even or odd, of all the days in the year, come Lammas Eve at night shall she be fourteen.” The Doctor now launched into a long speech and Silver’s attention began to wander. She tried not to focus on the fact that they were dramatising the love-life of a thirteen year-old and instead tried to remember what she could about *Romeo and Juliet*. They had performed it at school and Silver had auditioned for a part. She had ended up helping to paint scenery. Now here she was with the starring role, about to prove how right they had been to keep her off the stage in the first place.

The Doctor’s eyes were boring into her own and Silver realised that she had not heard a word he had said.

“Um, yes?” she tried.

The Doctor threw up his hands. “Peace, I have done. God mark thee to his grace, thou wast the prettiest babe that e’er I nursed. And I might live to see thee married once, I have my wish.”

“Marry, that ‘marry’ is the very theme I came to talk of,” the mother said. “Tell me, daughter Juliet, how stands your disposition to be married?”

“I guess I hadn’t really thought about it,” Silver replied.

“Hadn’t thought about it? Hadn’t thought about it?” the Doctor rounded on her. “*Hadn’t thought about it?*”

Okay, no need to ham it up, Doctor, Silver thought to herself. She caught him winking at her and realised with surprise that her nerves were fading. The dialogue bounced back and forth between the Doctor and “her mother” and this time Silver remembered to pay attention so that she was ready for her cue.

“Speak briefly,” “her mother said to her, “can you like of Paris’ love?”

“I’ll try to like, if that’s what my mother wants for me.” She knew she had not got the words, but the Doctor’s grin told her that she had, at least, stumbled across the meaning. She fought not to grin back; she was still in character after all. A few lines of dialogue later and Silver was able to escape backstage. She collapsed against a supporting pillar and tried to get her breath back.

“You were fantastic,” said the Doctor cheerfully.

“You’re just saying that.”

“Nonsense, that was the best performance of Juliet by someone who has absolutely no idea of what she’s doing that I’ve ever seen.”

“Thanks, I think.”

“Don’t worry, you’ll knock them dead in your next scene.”

Silver’s eyes widened. “My next scene? You’ve got to be kidding me. No way am I going back out there.”

“Silver, you’ll be fine.”

“No, I won’t.”

“Silver...”

“I can’t believe we’re even discussing this.” Silver pushed herself up from the pillar

and started to walk away. "I've had quite enough acting experience to last for the rest of my life, and then some."

"Silver..."

"... not listening, Doctor."

"Silver, shut up! Listen to me." The Doctor's words cracked like a whip bringing Silver up short. When he continued, his words were soft again. "We are here because we need William Shakespeare's help. How helpful do you suppose he is going to be if the two of us ruin his play, hm?"

"I guess..."

"Silver, I've seen you face up to much scarier, much more dangerous challenges than this. It's just a play. How hard can it be?"

Silver bowed her head, her hair falling in front of her face. "Fine, Doctor, you win."

"That's my girl." The Doctor handed her a slim paperback book. "You've got the space of a scene to learn your lines. I suggest you get started."

* * *

"Charlie, don't do this," Mary Tanner begged. She tugged on her husband's arm, but her slight weight was insufficient to slow him. "He's not worth it."

"Not worth it?" Charles Tanner demanded of his wife as he dragged her up the steps of the Globe Theatre. "You've changed your tune – or do you just have low standards for the people you sleep with?"

"Charlie!" Blood rushed to Mary's face. "Please, not in public..."

"Heaven forefend that I might shame you, Mary! You've brought enough shame on our house for the both of us. You and *that* actor." Tanner spied a man sitting on a chair behind the stage. "You there – I'm looking for a Richard Burbage. My wife tells me he's in this –" Tanner spat on the floorboards. "– play."

The man, head bowed, extended his arm and pointed at the curtain.

"Much obliged," Tanner grunted. Shaking Mary from his arm, he brushed the curtain aside and headed for the stage.

Mary giggled. "Oh, Dickie, you are awful."

The man in the chair – Richard Burbage – gave her a crooked grin. "That's why you love me so, Mary." He patted his lap and Mary sat in it, wrapping her arms around his neck.

"You know what I want to know?" she said.

Burbage ran a hand through her hair. "Enlighten me."

"Well, what with you being such a great actor and all..."

"Indeed, tell me more."

"Why aren't you out there on stage?"

"And face the wrath of your charming husband? Tell me, Mary, would you still love this face after he has redecorated it with his fists?"

"You know I would."

"Even so, let us not put it to the test."

"So who is on the stage?"

"Just the playwright," Burbage told her. "Chap called Shakespeare."

"But Charlie'll kill him!"

Burbage shrugged.

"Writers are ten a penny. I hear that Johnson fellow's supposed to be pretty good. Now hush, Mary, and give me a kiss."

* * *

“Have not saints lips, and holy palmers, too?”

Silver felt a frisson of electricity running down her spine. The man acting opposite her, playing the role of Romeo, was none other than William Shakespeare. Tongue-tied, she stumbled over her line, repeating the words as the Doctor prompted her from off-stage.

“Ay, pilgrim, lips that they must use in prayer.”

Silver and Shakespeare circled one another. “O then, dear saint, let lips do what hands do: they pray; grant thou, lest faith turn to despair.”

Silver glanced to the alcove where the Doctor was hiding, reading his lips. “Saints do not move, though grant for prayers’ sake.”

“Then move not while my prayer’s effect I take.”

Shakespeare’s head dipped forward and his lips brushed hers. Silver put her sudden feeling of faintness down to the thought of hundreds of pairs of eyes watching her.

“Thus from my lips,” Shakespeare said in a whisper that nonetheless filled the auditorium, “by thine my sin is purged.”

“Then have my lips the sin that they have took.”

“Sin from my lips? O trespass sweetly urged! Give me my sin again.” They locked lips once more. Silver could hear someone clearing their throat, but it sounded very far away.

“Madam, your mother craves a word with you,” the same someone said. A pause. “Juliet.”

Laughter rippled through the audience.

“Already moved on to your next conquest, Burbage?” another voice declared.

“That isn’t in the script,” the Doctor mumbled as he pulled Silver away from Shakespeare.

“Burbage?” Shakespeare turned to the newcomer. “My good man, you mistake me for someone...”

“Shut up.”

Charles Tanner slammed his fist into Shakespeare’s face, sending him tumbling to the ground.

“Sir?” Shakespeare dabbed at the blood at the corner of his mouth with his fingertips. “If I have given cause for offence then I entreat you to accept my humblest apology.”

“An apology? You think I’d accept an apology from the man who slept with my wife?” Shakespeare considered. “I take your point.”

“Get up,” Tanner demanded. “Get up so I can knock you down again.”

“I take it that you realise that it isn’t the most convincing of arguments?” the Doctor interjected, appearing next to Tanner.

“Who asked you?” Tanner replied. “And why are you wearing a dress?”

“He’s jealous,” Silver told him.

“Can’t we just talk about this reasonably?” Shakespeare asked. Tanner produced a knife. “I guess not.”

“You’re going to pay for what you did to me.”

“I was under the impression it was more in regard for what he did to your wife.”

“And I was under the impression that I’d told you to shut up.” The Doctor raised his hands and took a step back.

“If I might be permitted to defend myself,” Shakespeare said, “I haven’t been with

any man's wife. Not recently at any rate."

"Are you calling my Mary a liar? She told me it was you, Mr Richard Burbage."

"Ah, now we're getting to the heart of the matter," said Shakespeare. "My name is not Richard Burbage. I am William Shakespeare."

"Who?" Tanner asked.

"Kill me now," Shakespeare muttered, "and put an end to my misery."

"That wasn't an invitation," the Doctor added hastily.

Tanner rounded on him. "Do you want some of this," he said, brandishing the knife, "because you're going the right way about it."

"I'll be quiet," the Doctor replied, "but I should probably warn you to look behind you first."

Tanner glanced over his shoulder. "Why, what's..."

Silver clubbed him with a chair and Tanner collapsed unconscious to the resounding applause of the audience.

The Doctor winked at Silver. "A hit, a very palpable hit."

"Wrong play," Shakespeare muttered absently.

* * *

"Will, if I had known..."

Shakespeare, still nursing his injured head, simply scowled at Burbage. Then he turned to the Doctor. "You were asking about one of my old works."

"Yes, *Loves Labours Won*. Whatever became of that?"

Shakespeare scratched his beard. "Her Majesty was unwell when we premiered the play at court. She passed away not long after, God rest her soul."

"And the play?"

"Oh, I sold that. The tide had turned away from comedy."

"You sold it? But... I really have no response to that."

"Art for art's sake is all very well, Doctor, but it does not satisfy one's creditors."

"No, I suppose not," the Doctor conceded. "So tell me, to whom did you sell the manuscript?"

"A young man who approached me in a hostelry," Shakespeare replied.

The Doctor looked away. "It gets worse," he muttered.

"He had ready coin and I had a play I no longer had a use for. It seemed a most suitable match."

"Did you at least take the name of this gentleman?"

"Not that I can recall. He had an odd manner of dress, but I simply assumed that he was a player. There were a lot of them about on that day."

"There were?"

"Indeed. Everyone turned out for King James' coronation."

"March, 1603." The Doctor clapped his hands together in triumph. "Thank you, Will, you've been most helpful. Come along, Silver, we have work to do."

* * *

Cassius Chaerea, Captain of the Guard, stood three paces behind the accused, his hand resting casually on his gladius. Cassius felt anything but casual, however; one could never let one's guard down in the presence of God.

"Well, Crispus," Emperor Caligula asked, "is this the man that blasphemed against

us?"

Caligula was not a tall man, but there was an intensity in his gaze that caused much stronger men to quail before him. Blood visibly drained from Crispus' face as he withered beneath the stare.

"It is he, my Lord God."

"And what exactly did he say about us?" Caligula languidly turned to regard the accused Varus, and his betrothed Quintilia.

"I hesitate to say," Crispus said nervously.

"You would deny your God?" Caligula demanded.

"No, it is just that... I, er... he called you a 'bald-headed Madame', Lord God."

"He called us *what*?" Caligula was purple with rage.

Crispus opened his mouth to reply, but Cassius cleared his throat, attracting his attention, and shook his head. It was not wise to provoke Caligula unnecessarily.

"Is what Crispus tells us true? Did you utter such blasphemy?" Caligula asked Varus.

"No, Lord God," Varus insisted. "I would never..."

"Lies!" Caligula screamed, cutting him off as he flew off into a violent rage. "I am surrounded by liars!"

He turned to Quintilia. "And what of you? You whom he claims as his love, with whom he shares his innermost thoughts. Has Varus sinned? Answer truthfully or you shall share his fate."

Quintilia drew herself up before replying, her chin jutting out proudly. "It is Crispus who lies, my lord, not Varus. Crispus is jealous because I chose Varus over him and now he seeks to condemn my beloved with these baseless accusations. Varus is a good man and has always been loyal to you and to Rome. If my utterance of the truth condemns me then I shall share his fate gladly."

"So be it," Caligula decreed, almost casually. "Put them both on the rack."

Cassius stepped forward, then hesitated.

"You have something to add, Captain?" the Emperor asked. Cassius, impressed by Quintilia's bearing, had acted without thinking and now found himself trapped. To back down would be a sign of weakness, but to speak out could well be worse.

"Lord God," he said, "you cannot do this. Only slaves may lawfully be put to torture."

"Do not presume to tell me what I can and cannot do, Captain. I am God! I make the laws! If I demand that they be tortured then tortured they shall be." Caligula's eyes narrowed. "And if I command that you should supervise their torture, that you should turn the screws with your own hands... then you shall do so!"

Cassius bowed his head. "As my Lord commands."

* * *

The Doctor marched into the TARDIS console room, Silver at his heels.

"Where are we going?" she asked as the Doctor began adjusting the controls. For a few seconds, the central column rose and fell and then was still. "We've landed?"

"No, no, no," the Doctor replied, hunched over a screen.

"Then where are we?" Silver circled the console so that she could peer over the Doctor's shoulder.

"We're in hover mode." The Doctor turned to her. "Tell me, what do we know about this man who bought the manuscript?"

"We know he's young," Silver replied, trying to recall what Shakespeare had said.

“True, but that isn’t going to help us much, is it? What else?”

“He can travel in time?”

“To be fair, we don’t know for sure that the same man sold the manuscript four hundred years from now, but it’s a good working hypothesis. What else?”

“I don’t know,” Silver admitted eventually.

“We know the exact date on which he met Shakespeare.” The Doctor pointed at the screen.

“What are all those lines?”

“Time tracks,” the Doctor explained. “Each of those lines represents a time traveller who visited London on the day of King James’ coronation. I’ll wager one of them is our mystery buyer.”

“But there are so many.” The picture on the screen looked like a mass of multi-coloured spaghetti floating in space.

“Mm, yes, there are a lot of visitors, aren’t there? Unfortunately, Shakespearean England is something of a tourist trap. Still...”

The Doctor tapped away on a keyboard and several lines disappeared. He produced a pen from behind his ear, scrawled some equations on a Post-It note, crossed them out and started again, tapping at a few more keys.

“We can follow the time tracks to see where our travellers went next and given what we know about our buyer’s proclivities, or at least what I suspect...” A single throbbing green arc was now displayed on the screen. “That’s our man.”

* * *

The splinters on the wooden handle dug into his palms as Cassius turned the screw and stretched the rack. Quintilia’s face contorted with pain as her limbs were slowly wrenched from their sockets, but she did not utter a sound of protest. She refused even to cry, though Cassius could feel tears running down his own cheeks as he reluctantly did his duty.

Why would she not confess? Even if it was a lie, at least it would spare her further agony. Her death would be swift. If she persisted in her defiance, did she really think that the Emperor would let her live? Perhaps he would – Caligula’s moods were fickle at best – but more likely he would take her refusal to speak as a personal affront and insist on a slow and excruciating demise for her. Cassius looked away. Caligula had not commanded him to watch as he turned the screw, so he could spare himself that at least.

There was a figure watching him from the doorway.

“Who’s there?” Cassius asked, taking his hands from the rack and reaching for his gladius.

The figure advanced from out of the shadows, hips sashaying as she walked. Cassius recognised Messalina, the teenage wife of Claudius, uncle to the Emperor.

“My apologies, my lady,” Cassius said. “I didn’t recognise you in the darkness.”

Still Messalina said nothing. Her eyelashes fluttered like restless butterfly wings and behind those eyelashes her dark eyes considered him. A man could drown in those dark vortices, Cassius thought.

“Can I help you?” he asked.

Messalina tilted her head to one side, her dark curls falling like water over her bare shoulder.

“Perhaps,” she said at last. Then she turned on her heel and walked away.

Cassius turned back to the rack, uncertain of what to make of Messalina’s words. His hands resumed their familiar position on the wheel that turned the screw and yet he

could not bring himself to apply any pressure. The woman was innocent; he was convinced of that by now. Hadn't she suffered enough?

"I'm sorry," he whispered.

He had not meant for Quintilia to hear, but nonetheless her eyes opened.

"I forgive you," she said. "Sometimes it must be hard to obey orders."

Hard? No, it was not hard, Cassius thought. After all, what was the alternative?

* * *

"You have a serious case of frock envy," Silver said as she entered the console room.

"It's a toga," the Doctor replied, referring to his costume.

"If you say so." Silver grinned.

The Doctor tutted and inspected her outfit critically. "You'll pass muster, I suppose." He tugged on the door control and stepped outside. Silver shielded her eyes from the glare of the sun.

"So now we go and find the guy who's behind all this?"

"Not just yet," the Doctor said. "I thought it might be a good idea to arrive a little before he does."

"But doesn't that break some kind of law or something?"

The Doctor raised a finger to his lips. "Don't tell anyone; I might get a ticket. Come along, the palace is this way, I think."

"The palace? Am I going to get to meet the emperor?"

"I sincerely hope not. You really wouldn't like him."

"First the king and now the emperor," Silver complained. "Are you ever going to let me meet any royalty?"

"When this is all over, I'll take you to meet King Charles. He was a decent fellow, before power went to his head."

"And then he lost it. You know what I don't understand?"

"Probably."

"Why are we doing this? I mean, all this guy is doing is stealing some books. Or not. If Shakespeare's to be believed, he's paying a fair price for them. It's not exactly fate of the universe stuff, is it?"

"And we should only get involved if the whole universe is threatened, should we?" the Doctor said archly. "Anything less than that, and we should just turn a blind eye?"

"That's not what I meant, and you know it," Silver insisted, "but this isn't even a crime."

The Doctor stopped and spread his arms wide, nearly bowling over a group of people on their way to the market.

"Look around you, Silver. In your time, most of this will be gone. Some structures will still be standing, archaeologists will uncover still more, but compared to the vibrancy and the complexity of the civilisation surrounding you now, they're merely scratching the surface. So how else do we learn about the Romans, assuming, of course, we don't have access to a TARDIS?"

Silver could already see where this argument was going. "We read about it, I suppose."

"Indeed. Consider Pliny, Tacitus, Virgil, Seneca and all the others whose writings shaped your civilisation's understanding of its own past. Now imagine if those writings didn't exist."

Silver was unimpressed. "So we wouldn't know much about Rome. Big deal."

“Silver, Silver, Silver, how can you say that? An understanding of one’s past is essential to deciding on one’s future. Those who do not learn...”

“... from history are destined to repeat it,” Silver completed for him. “I know the quote too. I’ve just never been terribly impressed by it.”

The Doctor sighed. “Very well. You want another example: let’s look at the effect of literature on the era in which it is written. Consider Dickens, for example, and how his writings drew public attention to the plight of the poor. Society owes to his works a great debt and would be much less without them.”

“Okay, I guess I can accept that you don’t want someone coming in and just taking these books out of time,” Silver said, “but at least he’s putting them back.”

“And that can be just as damaging,” the Doctor insisted. “Society is shaped by its culture, by its works of arts and literature, but everything has to be considered in context. Change that context and you impact on one’s interpretation of the original work.”

“Kind of like the way the prequel themes tainted the experience of *Star Wars* as a whole?”

“Probably,” the Doctor said dismissively, “if I had the faintest idea what you were talking about. In any event, by moving works of literature from their proper place in time and then depositing them elsewhere, our quarry is changing history and, while it may not seem like much to you, the consequences are potentially catastrophic.”

“So what can we do about it?” Silver asked.

“It’s really very simple.” The Doctor winked at her. “We stop him.”

* * *

“Well?” Caligula raised an eyebrow.

“The prisoner did not confess, Lord,” Cassius explained.

“Did she not?” Caligula’s brow furrowed in thought. “Perhaps Varus is not guilty after all. Or perhaps, Captain, you lack the stomach for properly inflicted torture. Did you cry while turning the screw? Did you look away lest the sight offend your *oh-so-delicate* eyes? Are you a soldier, Captain Cry-Baby, or an old woman?”

The subject of Caligula’s scorn held his tongue.

“Nothing to say? No fire in your belly? No, I don’t suppose there would be. You should follow the example of Quintilia here. She’s twice the man you are. Out of love for Varus – love like that of my Caesonia for me or that of Claudius for young Messalina – she stayed her tongue in spite of her agony. Such love should be rewarded, don’t you agree? I’ve half a mind to give her a captaincy, given the material I currently have to work with...”

“Here is my judgment. Varus is to receive a full pardon and his marriage to Quintilia is to proceed with our blessing. For her dowry, Quintilia is to receive eight thousand gold pieces from Crispus’ estate. He won’t be needing them anymore since he is to be executed for bringing false charges in our presence. There, now everyone is happy.”

Caligula paused, then raised a hand to the thinning hair on his head, his look of satisfaction giving way to one of confusion. “They called us a ‘bald-headed Madame’, Captain. It’s not true, is it?”

“No, Lord God,” Cassius insisted, but he had hesitated just a moment too long.

“You agree with them, don’t you, Captain?” Caligula roared angrily, but his rage evaporated as quickly as it had arrived. “But no matter. What would you, with your little girl ringlets, know about a manly head of hair? Still, we cannot take chances. Every man in the palace is to have their head shaved. If they refuse, they can lose it.” Caligula giggled at his joke. “Now, go about your business, Captain Hairnet.”

Simmering with suppressed rage, Cassius marched from the room. Messalina was waiting outside.

“My lady?”

“I heard what was said in there.” Messalina tilted her head towards the audience chamber. “What he said about you.”

Cassius stiffened.

“It would be a shame if something were to happen to him,” Messalina continued, twirling the ends of her hair absently.

“I don’t know what you mean.”

“I think you do.” Messalina stepped closer to him, her voice dropping to a husky whisper. “A real man would stand up to him. The Emperor thinks that you’re weak, but I think you’re so much more.” She put a hand on his chest and Cassius shivered.

“Are you a real man, Cassius?”

* * *

“So, who are we going to see at the palace?” Silver asked.

“Tiberius Claudius Drusus Nero Germanicus,” the Doctor replied, “the Emperor’s uncle. Claudius is quite the amateur historian and writer and by your time, there are quite the number of lost works attributed to him, making him rather a tempting target for our book-seller, I should say.”

A troupe of performers in brightly coloured costumes wandered past. Silver watched as the jugglers amused themselves by throwing objects to one another between their companions.

“So this guy writes history books,” she said. “And what are we going to do when we find him?”

“Well, we’ve still got a little time before our friend arrives,” the Doctor said, so I thought I might take the opportunity to have a bit of a chat with Claudius. It would be a terrible waste if I were to pass up this opportunity to peruse a lost manuscript, don’t you agree?”

“Yeah,” Silver agreed absently as the performers disappeared around a corner. “What a waste.” The Doctor stopped walking and turned to face her.

“I’m sorry, Silver, I wasn’t thinking. Of course you don’t want to listen to a couple of old men discussing history.”

“It’s not that,” Silver insisted. The Doctor raised an eyebrow. “Okay, maybe it is that.”

The Doctor produced a pouch of coins from within the folds of his toga and handed it to Silver.

“Assuming I’ve got my dates right, we’re just in time for the Palatine Festival. You should be able to find something to amuse you there. Why don’t you go to take a look, and we can meet back at the TARDIS later.”

“Well, if you’re sure that you don’t need my help.” As much as Silver wanted to go to do something interesting, she didn’t want the Doctor to think she wasn’t pulling her weight.

“Tell you what...” The Doctor produced another object from his toga. “Why don’t you take this? It detects anomalous time travel. You can use it to keep an eye out for our man’s time machine. That way, you can see the festival and still help me catch him.”

“But won’t you need this?” Silver asked, taking the device from him. The Doctor tapped his temple with his index finger.

“I’ve got all the gadgets I need up here,” he said.

* * *

“Hmm, definitely a real man,” Messalina sighed, rolling onto her back.

“Do you say that to your husband as well?” Cassius asked, running his fingers lightly through her hair.

“My husband is an old man,” Messalina replied. “I sleep with him because it’s expected of me.”

“Whereas you sleep with me because you want something.”

“Can’t a girl mix business with pleasure?”

Cassius sat up. “You’re asking me to commit treason.”

“Is it treasonous to cut out the black heart that is corrupting our city? I’m asking you to save Rome.”

“And it’s just a coincidence, I suppose, that my actions will put your husband on the throne?”

“Surely you’re not having moral qualms, Cassius?” Messalina put her hands on his shoulders and eased him back down onto the bed. “Why don’t you let me take care of those for you?”

* * *

“Excuse me,” the Doctor said, sticking his head around the library door. “I was wondering if you could tell me where I might find Claudius Germanicus.”

During his wanderings through the forum, the Doctor had been unable to come up with a convincing excuse to give the guards for his presence, so he had simply avoided them, sneaking into the palace alongside a party of petitioners for the Emperor Caligula. Now that he was inside, no one spared him a second glance. Unfortunately, he felt no closer to locating Claudius, hence his swallowing of his pride and asking a scribe for directions.

The scribe set down his stylus. “I am Clau-Clau-Claudius.”

“Of course you are,” the Doctor said, taking a seat opposite. “That regal bearing, the noble brow – your nephew must get that from the other side of the family. May I see what you’re working on?”

“I d-don’t think I’m inclined to humour a stranger,” Claudius replied, tilting his pages so that the Doctor could not see them.

“I’m the Doctor and you’re Claudius,” the Doctor said. “We’re strangers no longer.”

“So you’re a m-m-m-medical m-man, are you?”

“More of a scholar, really,” the Doctor admitted.

“A scholar?” Claudius leaned forward eagerly. “T-t-tell me, Doctor, are you acquainted with our histories?”

“I have a passing interest.”

“Mine goes beyond p-passing,” Claudius replied. “When my n-n-nephew invited me to stay at the palace, I knew I had to avail myself of the gr-great library.”

“Indeed,” the Doctor agreed heartily. “What for?”

“Why, to compose a history of my own, D-D-Doctor, one free of all those irritating incon-consistencies.”

“May I see?” the Doctor asked, gesturing towards the manuscript. This time, Claudius gladly handed the work over to him.

“This is sterling stuff, Claudius.”

“Do you really think so? I just hope I have a ch-ch-chance to finish it before Caligula

throws me out of the palace again.”

“Oh, he won’t be a problem for very much longer,” the Doctor said distractedly as he examined the pages, “and then you’ll have as much access to the library as you want. Tell me, you wouldn’t consider selling this to anyone, would you?”

“What a strange question? Only a m-m-moment ago I sold a c-copy of one of my works to another gentleman. *De Arte Alea*. A piece on g-g-gambling that I wrote in my youth. Nothing fancy, but he seemed quite t-taken by it.”

“Already? But I was certain we’d arrived ahead of him,” the Doctor said. “Where did he go?”

“He went th-th-that way,” Claudius replied, baffled. “I c-could describe him f-f-for you, if you’d like?”

“No time, sorry.” The Doctor was already at the door. “It’s been a pleasure, Claudius.”

“And I was so hoping he would stay and ch-ch-chat,” Claudius bemoaned to the empty room.

* * *

The Doctor did not notice Cassius standing outside the library, but the captain had seen him and had heard his conversation with Claudius. He raced through the palace corridors, startling those in his way, until he reached Claudius’ bedchamber.

“You’re eager,” Messalina remarked. “Have you recovered so soon?”

“We don’t have time for that,” Cassius snapped. “I’ve just seen your husband with another man.”

“If you want to make me jealous of my husband then you’ll need to try harder than that, Cassius. Much, much harder.”

“This isn’t a laughing matter, Messalina. This man knows that we plan to assassinate Caligula.”

Messalina’s eyes narrowed. “Are you sure?”

“I heard him,” Cassius replied. “He said that Caligula would not be a problem for much longer, and that Claudius would have all the access to the palace that he would like.”

“It could just be a coincidence,” Messalina mused. “Why didn’t you just have him killed? No, you wouldn’t want to sully those hands of yours. I’m starting to wonder if the Emperor wasn’t right about you. Don’t worry, Cassius, I’ll deal with this stranger for you. You just make sure that you’re ready to do your part when the time comes.”

* * *

Silver was hungry. On either side of the street were wooden stalls from which the aroma of fruit and meat and vegetables assailed her nostrils. Silver couldn’t have any of it. The pouch of coins that the Doctor had given her had not gone as far as she might have hoped. In fact, they hadn’t gone at all, mainly due to the fact that the coins had on them the head of an emperor that had not even been born yet. After one awkward discussion with a stallholder, she had decided the coins were best left in her pocket.

So she was hungry. And her feet hurt. She could always go back to the TARDIS, she supposed. Assuming she could remember the way. Which she couldn’t. Where were the aliens? Sure, you got threatened and tortured and shot at by aliens, but at least it could never be described as dull.

The detector the Doctor had given her beeped.

Silver cheered. Things were looking up.

* * *

“Going somewhere?”

The Doctor paused, then turned to find a young, dark-haired woman standing behind him. One hand rested on a jutting hip, the other beckoned him towards her.

“Young lady, I’m really in something of a rush,” the Doctor said. “If you’ll excuse me.”

“Don’t you know who I am?” the woman asked haughtily.

“Should I?”

“You know my husband.”

The sestertii dropped. “Messalina,” the Doctor deduced. “How do you know I met your husband?”

“You were overheard.” Messalina sauntered over to him, deliberately invading his personal space. “It sounded as though you were saying things that might be best left unspoken.”

“What things?”

“Things about our Emperor’s long and fruitful reign.”

“Or not.”

“Or not,” Messalina agreed. “Such talk could be very dangerous.”

“Madam, I can assure you I have no intention of stirring up any trouble. I just want to be on my way and...”

“You’ll have to work harder than that if you want to convince me.” Messalina placed a hand on the Doctor’s cheek. “I could make it worth your while.”

The Doctor took hold of her wrist and gently but firmly moved her hand away.

“Madam, I very much doubt you have anything I could possibly want.”

“You would much rather have me as a friend than as an enemy.” Messalina took a step backwards. “Guards.”

Three soldiers stepped from the shadows.

“The Lord God ordered that every man in the palace was to have his head shaved. This man still has a full head of hair.”

The Doctor looked from the guards to the exit and back again. “Well, I suppose I could do with a trim.”

“He also decreed,” Messalina continued, “that anyone not complying with this edict was to have his head cut off. Do your duty.”

* * *

The detector led Silver to the Circus Maximus. She did not think that it looked nearly as impressive in real life as when she had seen it in *Gladiator*. As she followed the detector’s signal, she found herself carried along by the crush of people. Everyone was eager to be part of the festival and commoner and noble alike were fighting for seats.

Within the royal box, the Emperor stepped forward. He raised his hand and everyone fell silent. Silver accidentally trod on someone’s foot as she struggled to get a better view, but the man bit down on his lip rather than cry out and interrupt the Emperor.

“We declare this festival open,” Caligula announced, stifling a yawn. “We also declare that should any citizen present ask for a boon that it is within our power to grant, we shall grant it.”

“More bread!” one lone voice shouted.

“More bread,” his colleagues echoed. “More bread and lower taxes.”

“More bread, less taxes!” The mantra rolled round the amphitheatre. “More bread, less taxes!”

Caligula turned purple. “Is that how you respond to our magnanimity?” he roared. “Perhaps we have been too generous.”

He snapped his fingers and his guards descended from the box onto the benches below where they proceeded to decapitate anyone who got in their way. Oblivious to the screams and to the blood spraying over them, Caligula’s personal soldiers inflicted his displeasure on his people with fatal results. Silver turned away in horror, her stomach, though empty, threatening to rebel.

After a few minutes of this, Caligula clapped his hands once and the guards returned to his side.

“Does anyone else wish to request a boon?” he asked, pausing momentarily. “I didn’t think so.”

* * *

“Can’t we just talk about this like civilised beings?” the Doctor asked. His hands had been bound behind his back and he had been taken to a dungeon, presumably so that his blood would not stain the palace artwork. Messalina had gone off to attend to more important matters – more important for whom, the Doctor wanted to know – leaving him alone with his captors.

“Kneel,” one of the guards ordered.

“And what will you do if I don’t, hm? Kill me?”

“If you don’t, we’ll chop off your legs at the knees. Then we’ll kill you.”

“Well, since you ask so nicely...” The Doctor knelt.

“We’ll try and do this in one clean cut,” the guard told the Doctor.

“That’s very considerate of you.”

“Unfortunately, the sword hasn’t been sharpened in a while so we might have to hack a bit to take the head right off. You just sit tight and we’ll be as quick as we can.”

“You know, if you want to take the time to sharpen the sword, I really won’t mind waiting. Or maybe you could exchange the sword for some other implement. Stick of celery, perhaps?”

“On the count of three.” The guard raised his sword. “One.”

“Any chance of a last request?”

“Such as?”

“Don’t chop my head off?”

The guard sighed. “As if I haven’t heard that one before. Two.”

“It was worth a try.”

“Three.”

“Wait!”

The guard turned his sword away at the last second and it clanged on the stonework. He rounded angrily on the newcomer. “I’ve gone and blunted the blade. Now there’s no chance of a clean cut.”

“You were just going to behead him?” the newcomer asked. He was wearing a powdered wig and a blue frock-coat.

“Emperor’s orders,” the guard replied. “Who are you anyway?”

“Dexter Dean, friend to the Emperor’s uncle.” Dexter removed his glasses and began

to polish the lenses with a silk handkerchief. "I don't mean to tell you how to do your job – well, actually I do, so I don't know why I said that – but do you really think Caligula wants this man to have a quick painless death? I hear he likes them to scream."

"You've got a point there," the guard agreed. "Okay, let's tie him to the rack."

"Now hold on a minute," the Doctor protested as he was lifted up from the floor.

"Shut up or I'll cut out your tongue," the guard said.

"I can't scream if I haven't got a tongue," the Doctor pointed out.

"You'd be surprised." Within moments, the Doctor was securely tied down.

"All right men," the guard said to his companions, "who wants to turn the screw?"

"Hold on, hold on, hold on," Dexter interrupted.

"What now?"

"Well, it's no good making him scream if the Emperor's not here to hear it, is it?"

"I suppose not," the guard conceded.

"He's not going anywhere, so why don't you go off about your duties and you can resume torturing him when the Emperor gets back from the festival."

"I don't know," the guard began dubiously.

"I'll even stay and watch over him for you, if that'll help," Dexter offered. "What do you say?"

"Oh, all right," the guard finally agreed before leading his men away.

"Thank you for the save," the Doctor said when the guards were out of earshot.

"Now, if you could just untie me..."

"You're a time traveller, aren't you?" Dexter said.

"What gave me away?"

"Syntax."

The Doctor nodded. "Of course. I can speak the language, but I don't have the idioms of a native. You travel through time as well, I take it?"

"How can you tell?"

The Doctor looked at the wig and the coat. "Lucky guess," he replied, deadpan. "So, about these ropes..."

"What are you doing here?" Dexter asked.

"Not getting tortured, ideally."

"I mean what are you doing in this time period?"

"Well, stopping you from taking any more literary works from their native times," the Doctor replied. "I assume that it *was* you and I apologise if you just happen to be some other time traveller who has stumbled into this time period. Have you any idea how much damage you could do?"

"I'm always careful," Dexter protested sulkily.

"Careful? You can carefully drive a car through a raging inferno while juggling chainsaws. That doesn't make it a good idea."

"I knew you were going to be like this."

"Like what?"

"Unreasonable."

"*I'm* unreasonable?"

"And now I've got to leave you tied up so that you can't stop me getting away. Sorry about that, but you did rather bring it upon yourself."

The Doctor had no response.

"Don't worry," Dexter continued, a small smile in his face. "You've still got a few hours before Caligula gets back. I'm sure you'll figure a way out by then."

And on that note, he left.

* * *

The chariot racing might have been thrilling, but Silver could not get the sight of the guards hacking mercilessly at unarmed people out of her mind. The headless bodies had been left on their benches and the people around them had inched away, out of reach of the blood. No one dared leave before the Emperor, however.

Silver consulted the detector. According to the readings, she should be right on top of the source. She stood up and peered down into the arena. She raised a hand to her eyes to shield them from the sun. There, just beyond the track the charioteers were using – it looked more like a coffin than a time machine, but the TARDIS did not exactly advertise its presence either. Silver was sure that was what she was looking for. Now all she had to do was to wait until the end of the race and then she could go and fetch the Doctor and...

... and someone was heading towards the capsule. He was wearing a white wig and a blue frock-coat and could not have looked more out of place. He had to be their time traveller. If Silver did not act soon then he would get away.

“Here goes nothing,” she muttered before jumping down to the next rank of benches. “Gangway,” she called. “Coming through. The fate of the world is in the balance. Allegedly.”

Ducking beneath thrusting elbows and turning a deaf ear to the hurled insults, Silver scampered down from the stands. A chariot was pulling to a stop beside her.

“Did you win?” she asked the driver. His baleful look told her everything she needed to know.

High above, Caligula clapped his hands again. “Release the lions!”

Gates swung open and ravenous cats padded out into the arena, stalking the area between Silver and the time capsule.

“When it rains, it purrs,” she muttered darkly. The bewigged time traveller was already on the other side of the stadium, closing on his time machine. If Silver was going to act, it had to be now. She turned to the charioteer beside her.

“Follow that man,” she said, pointing at the time traveller.

The charioteer stared at her. “You’ve got to be kidding,” he said. “I don’t know if you’ve noticed, but there are lions out there.”

Silver sighed. “Fine, I’ll do it myself.” And she hopped up into the chariot and shoved the charioteer out.

“Hey!” the charioteer protested, but it was too late. Silver was snapping on the reins and the chariot was flying across the sand.

Sensing prey, the lions roared and bounded towards the chariot, teeth bared. Away from the chariot track, the ground was uneven and the chariot bounced and rolled. A lion leaped at her, but fell short. The others closed in for the kill. Silver screwed her eyes shut, gripped the reins even tighter and prayed to the Goddess for protection. The Goddess must have heard her because within seconds she was past the lions, the horses... inspired by fear, easily outpacing the big cats.

The time traveller had reached his ship and was opening the door. Silver willed the chariot to move faster. The time traveller had disappeared inside. The doors were slowly closing shut.

“Too late to turn back now, Silver,” she told herself before jumping from the chariot. She fell through the doors of the time capsule, skidding to a halt on the console room floor.

The time traveller peered at her over the top of his spectacles.

“Avon calling?” Silver suggested weakly.

* * *

Caligula yawned.

“Bored now,” he complained. “Oh, that charioteer who raced the lions was all right, but it’s all a bit stale now. Those slaves you’re feeding them aren’t putting up any kind of fight at all.”

“We could bring on gladiators, Lord God,” one of his companions suggested. “Have them fight each other for your entertainment. Perhaps even have them fight the beasts.”

“Tempting, but when one has seen one person eaten one has seen them all, no matter how well armed or armoured the meal appears. No,” Caligula determined, “We shall go to the theatre instead.”

As the Emperor left the circus with his entourage, he saw Cassius waiting for him outside.

“Why, if it isn’t Captain Goldilocks! Tell me, Captain, are you still mourning the loss of your beautiful hair?”

“It is my honour to obey my Lord God’s commands,” Cassius replied stiffly.

“Of course it is, Captain. Of course it is. Now, if you will excuse us, Captain, we are going to the theatre.” Caligula turned to his companions. “What play are we going to see again?”

“*The Tyrant’s Death*, my Lord,” said Cassius.

Caligula raised an eyebrow in surprise. “You know it?”

Quick as a flash, Cassius plunged his sword between Caligula’s ribs.

“I know it.”

* * *

Back at the imperial palace, Claudius was still in the library. However, his studies were disturbed by the ringing of metal against metal as soldiers loyal to Caligula fought those loyal to the revolution in the halls. Fearing for his life, Claudius ducked behind a curtain. Unfortunately for him, the curtain was too short to hide his sandals.

“What have we here?” a soldier asked, jabbing the curtain with the tip of his blade. “Come out where we can see you.”

Claudius stumbled into the open and fell to his knees in front of the soldier.

“P-p-p-please don’t k-k-k-kill me,” he begged. “I had nothing to d-d-do with it.”

“To do with what?” the soldier asked. “The assassination or the oppression that came before? Whose side are you on?”

Claudius began to stammer and answer but he was cut off by his wife who came running into the room.

“He is on Rome’s side, as you are,” Messalina insisted. “Don’t you know who this is?”

The soldier peered closer at the snivelling wretch on the floor.

“Can it be? Claudius Germanicus, the Emperor’s uncle?”

“It is he.”

“Why, my Lord, we’ve been looking for you all over.”

“So you c-can k-k-kill me too?” Claudius asked.

“Nothing could be further from the truth,” the soldier said, helping Claudius to stand. “We want to make you Emperor.”

“Emperor? Me?”

“Rome is in crisis,” the soldier explained. “The only thing that will stop those loyal to Caligula from tearing her apart is if one of Caligula’s family ascends the throne.”

“But I don’t want to be Emperor!”

“Do it for Rome, my love,” Messalina said, “or, if not for Rome, do it for me. We’ll all be killed if you refuse. What is worse: being Emperor or being dead?”

To Claudius’ credit, he paused for a long time before answering.

* * *

“More tea?” Dexter asked, raising the china pot.

“No, thank you,” Silver replied. She reached for another doughnut, then hesitated, fingers hovering tantalisingly close to the frosting.

“Go right ahead,” Dexter told her. “The staff aren’t going to eat it.” He indicated the figures standing at the door, robots decked out in the same style of wigs and velvet as Silver’s host. Silver also matched the decor, having been provided with a dress to replace her Roman outfit.

“So, you live here on your own?” Silver tried to start a conversation.

“Not alone,” Dexter corrected. “I have my androids and I have my books. Napkin?”

Silver gratefully took the offered cloth and wiped jam from her chin.

“What’s more,” Dexter continued, “if all goes to plan, these corridors will soon be bustling with activity as scholars from all over the galaxy come here to make use of my collection.”

Silver balled the napkin and dropped it onto her plate.

“Is that all this is? A library?”

“Not *just* a library – Serapea is my life’s work!”

“Sorry, I didn’t mean that to come out like that, it’s just...” Silver paused, considering her words. “You can travel anywhere in time and space. I don’t understand why you’d use that just to collect some books.”

“Some books? But...” Dexter paused and collected himself. “Why don’t I show you around? Perhaps you’ll appreciate it more when you see it.”

Silver shrugged and stood up. “Why not? After all,” she added in an undertone, “it’s not like I can do anything else until the Doctor gets here.” As Dexter and Silver left the room, robots silently glided to the table and started to collect the tea things.

“What’s keeping him, anyway?”

* * *

“D-D-D-Doctor?”

The Doctor opened one eye, studied the questioner with it and then opened the other one.

“Claudius? *Emperor* Claudius, I should say,” he said to the newcomer. “How nice of you to stop by.”

“B-B-But, Doctor, what are you d-doing here?”

“Catching up on forty winks. I think I got as far as thirty-eight.”

“But you’re t-t-t-tied t-to the rack.”

“I’m told it’s good for the back,” the Doctor replied. “I’m yet to be convinced. You know, I hate to be presumptuous towards a new emperor – and congratulations on that, by the way, or possibly commiserations – but would you mind untying me? I’m starting to forget what my hands feel like.”

“Of course, of course.” Claudius started to reach for the ropes, but a discreet cough stopped him.

“Hello, Messalina,” the Doctor said. “I didn’t see you over there. Forgive me if I don’t get up.”

“No apologies necessary, Doctor,” Messalina replied, gesturing for one of the guards to free the Doctor. “You’re taking things very calmly.”

“Well, I’d hate to lose my head,” the Doctor said.

“Have you been down here the whole t-t-t-time?” Claudius asked.

The Doctor sat up and began to rub the feeling back into his wrists. “Did I miss anything? Other than the obvious, obviously.”

“Well, there was that girl charioteer,” Messalina offered.

The Doctor rolled his eyes. “I’m getting a very bad feeling about this.”

“C-C-Caligula had just released the l-l-l-lions and this child climbs into a ch-ch-chariots and races through them.”

“Then she climbed into a box and vanished.”

“A box. That vanished.” The Doctor put his head in his hands. “Whatever am I going to do with that girl...”

“You know her?”

“For my sins.” The Doctor bounded off the rack, then yelped in pain and started hopping about. “Sorry. Cramp.”

“Is there anything I c-can do to help?” Claudius asked as the Doctor hopped towards the exit.

“Rule wisely,” the Doctor called back over his shoulder.

* * *

“What’s down there?”

After the sumptuous drawing room, the corridors of Serapea were something of a contrast: clinical and white, with no decoration and one wall taken up by a window onto the starscape. Silver was pointing down a connecting corridor that was shrouded in darkness and had been blocked off by a mesh gate.

“Ah, yes, well...the truth is that Serapea isn’t quite finished yet,” Dexter admitted. “It’s not easy turning a barren asteroid into one of the finest libraries in the galaxy. It’s not particularly cheap, either. Now, this is what I wanted to show you.”

Dexter opened a wood-panelled door and ushered Silver inside.

“Wow,” Silver said in spite of herself.

The room was vast. Silver had stepped onto a circular balcony. Behind her and running round the edge of the room were floor to ceiling bookshelves packed to bursting point with books. She stepped to the brass railing and looked down. There was another level below, just as richly appointed with reading material. And another level below that. And below that...

“It goes right through the asteroid,” Dexter explained.

“Right through...” No wonder Silver could not see the bottom.

“It’s not so impressive,” Dexter said with a shrug. “It’s not that big an asteroid.”

“I’m surprised there’s not a cloud layer,” Silver remarked.

“We couldn’t have that; the moisture would damage the books.” Silver could not tell if he was joking. “Speaking of which...”

Dexter gestured to one of the ever-present robots who went and fetched a book from a high shelf for him.

“Every one of these works was reported lost to history, destroyed by fire or flood or ignorance.” Dexter put on a pair of cotton gloves before accepting the book from the robot. “I

rescued this one from Florence. A monk called Savaronola saw it as sacrilegious and wanted it burned.” Dexter slowly turned the pages. “I see it as my mission in life to save all of these lost works. It probably sounds a bit egotistical, but I want to build a place where people can come and read these books that might otherwise have been denied to us forever. Would you like to take a look?”

Dexter offered Silver a pair of gloves and wandered over to the railing while she put them on. “This central chamber is the main book store and there are a number of reading rooms where patrons can consult the books at their leisure. And then there are the separate dining areas where you can be waited on by the robot servitors. No reading in those rooms, I’m afraid; we can’t risk damaging the texts.”

“Of course not.” Silver ran a finger along the spines before settling on her chosen book.

“What have you got there?”

Silver flipped open the front cover. “Property of *The House*,” she read. “due for return, May 5, 2562.”

Dexter looked at his shoes in embarrassment. “That one must have been put in the wrong box by mistake.”

Before he could say anymore, a rumbling shook through the room.

“It’s coming from outside,” Silver said.

Dexter had already dashed back out into the corridor. Through the window, they could see a spiny spaceship, looking much like a sea urchin, coming in to land.

“Oozle.” Dexter’s face was grim.

“Who’s Oozle?”

“Bad news. Stay out of sight. Let me deal with this.”

* * *

Dexter nervously straightened his coat and started polishing his glasses. He could hear the mechanical clunk as the airlock of the ship connected with the airlock of the library. The sound of gears whirring as the doors opened set his teeth on edge. He would have to get that fixed before Serapea’s official opening. Assuming that he lived that long, of course.

“Mr Oozle, what a pleasant surprise,” said Dexter as the cephalopod floated into the room flanked by his simian bodyguards.

“I doubt that on both counts,” Oozle replied, a fresh cigar in his beak.

“I’m sorry?”

“You must have been expecting me, Dexter, ever since you missed your last payment. As for the other... I don’t do pleasant.”

“I can explain,” Dexter began.

“I’m sure you can,” Oozle gurgled, “but that can wait. Firstly, we detected two life signs on this asteroid when we approached. The library’s not open for business yet, so who’s your guest?”

“There must be some mistake,” Dexter stammered. “There’s just me and my androids.”

Oozle burbled dismissively. “In that case, you won’t mind if my guards take a look around.”

* * *

From behind a shelf, Silver was eavesdropping on the conversation and as soon as Oozle

suggested sending someone to look for her, she had hurried off down the corridor. She tried to move quietly until she reached the end of the first corridor, after which she launched into a full-blown run, or as best she could given the restrictions of her dress. Fortunately, her pursuers were slow moving. She could feel the metronome beat of the feet through the floor. Unfortunately, they were big, ugly and armed and Silver did not fancy her chances if they ever caught up with her.

She darted into one of the reading rooms and closed the door behind her. Frantically, she looked about for some kind of locking mechanism before realising that there was an old-fashioned key in the lock. She turned it and heard a satisfying thunk as the bolt slid into place.

She breathed a sigh of relief.

It was short-lived.

A meaty fist punched straight through the door. Silver jumped back, her heart racing. The guard began pulling on the splintered wood, trying to create a gap large enough to squeeze through. Silver eyed a bookcase, weighing up its potential as a barricade before deciding that she would never be able to move it on her own. Then she remembered Dexter's robots. There were two standing sentry-like in the corner, awaiting instruction.

"He's an intruder," she yelled, pointing at the broken door. "Stop him."

Eerily quiet, the robots glided towards Silver's pursuer. Not waiting to see what happened, Silver ran for the other exit. The reading room had been carpeted, but the corridor was not and she almost fell over as her feet hit the smooth metal floor. She put a hand out to the wall to control her skid and hurled herself down a junction, ricocheting off the window looking out over the barren surface of the asteroid. She collided with something soft and both she and the object went down.

"Get off me," Silver cried, beating the object with her fists. "Let me go."

"I'd love to, Silver, but you're sitting on top of me."

Silver blinked. "Doctor?"

The Doctor had changed out of his toga and was now back in his usual suit. "It's a pleasure to see you too."

"How did you find me?" Silver asked, helping the Doctor up.

"Do you still have that detector that I gave you?" Silver produced the device and the Doctor took it from her and pocketed it. "It's part of the TARDIS. Makes it very easy for her to track. I take it you found our time traveller?"

"You mean the guy in a wig? What's that about anyway?"

"Regency revival," the Doctor explained. "It was all the rage in Andromeda in the mid-twenty-sixth century. It explains your dress."

"I feel like I'm wearing a wedding cake," Silver complained.

"You look like one," the Doctor replied. "And put your tongue back in your mouth; you look like you're catching flies. So, other than trying out the local fashion, have you learned anything useful?"

"Dexter – that's the time traveller – wants to create a library for all those books that were lost throughout history. That's what this place is, or will be; it's not finished yet. He called it Serapea, I think."

"Named after the Serapeum, I imagine," the Doctor said. Silver raised an eyebrow. "The temple attached to the library of Alexandria."

"Still none the wiser," Silver admitted.

"I doubt that it matters," the Doctor said dismissively. "So this Dexter is travelling through time collecting literary works before they disappear forever? No, it doesn't fit."

"What do you mean it doesn't fit? It's what he told me."

“Yes, yes, yes, but that’s not the point. You’re forgetting your Shakespeare, or rather Jane’s Shakespeare. If Dexter is trying to set up a library, why is he selling the books rather than holding on to them?”

“Maybe it has something to do with that octopus from the spaceship,” Silver suggested.

“What octopus?” the Doctor asked. “And what spaceship, for that matter?”

“The octopus that arrived just before you did,” Silver explained. “Dexter seemed pretty scared of him and he told me to stay out of sight, but the octopus knew I was here somehow and he sent guards to find me and...”

“Those guards?” the Doctor asked, gesturing over her shoulder.

Silver turned slowly and saw two simian figures standing at the other end of the corridor. One of them held a robot head.

“Ogrons,” the Doctor said. “It seems your octopus is something of a traditionalist. All things considered, I think it might be best if you introduced me to him.”

He nodded to the Ogrons. “After you, gentlemen.”

* * *

Oozle opened a hatch in the top of his life-support bubble to release the cigar smoke that had built up inside. Dexter coughed into his handkerchief.

“Hello again, Dexter.” The Doctor strode into the room as though oblivious to the Ogrons behind him. “I can’t say I think much of the company you’re keeping.”

“And who are you?” Oozle demanded gurglingly.

“I’m the Doctor,” he replied with an exaggerated bow. “That’s Silver; she’s my best friend.” Silver felt her cheeks burning, but she put it down to the heating in the chamber.

“The man in the wig is Dexter. He built all this as a repository for knowledge believed to be lost, but then I think you know all about that. And over there are a couple of Ogrons. Thanks for the escort, chaps. So that just brings us to you and your part in this affair.”

“I am Maximus D. Oozle.”

“D?” Silver asked. Close up, she was able to get a much better look at him. He was a blue-green octopus floating in mid-air thanks to engines attached to the bottom of the transparent bubble that encased his head and torso. The bubble was presumably filled with whatever atmosphere was the norm on Oozle’s home planet, but most of what Silver could see was smoke and ash generated by the fat cigar in his beak. Protruding from the bubble were Oozle’s eight limbs, each of which was encased in metal armour – unless the limbs themselves were metal, Silver supposed – and had a grabbing claw on the end. Oozle gesticulated with these as he answered her question.

“D as in dismember, disembowel and disintegrate.”

The Doctor tutted. “Somehow I don’t believe we’re going to get along.” He began to pace around the room. “I take it that you’re the one who is forcing Dexter to sell his precious collection.”

“He owes me money.”

“Mr Oozle loaned me the capital to build Serapea,” Dexter explained sheepishly.

“At an exorbitant rate of interest, I’ll bet,” Silver said.

“At a competitive rate,” Oozle amended, “considering that no one else was willing to put up the money in the first place.”

“Please tell me you’re using the profits for some gloriously convoluted master-plan.” The Doctor massaged his forehead with his fingertips. “Are you trying to save your dying

race?"

"Don't be ridiculous, Doctor," Oozle replied. "The money is all that matters. This is purely a business arrangement, nothing to do with you."

"Nothing to do with me? Have you any idea the damage you're causing to the timelines?"

"Should I care?"

"I care," the Doctor replied, "and I am a Time Lord from the planet Gallifrey, which makes it my responsibility to stop you."

"A Time Lord?" Dexter said in an awe-struck whisper. "But I thought they were just a legend."

"In my experience, most legends contain a grain of truth," the Doctor replied, turning his attention away from Oozle.

"Doctor," Oozle said, "I think you're forgetting who's holding the guns." To emphasise the point, one of the Ogrons jabbed the muzzle of its blaster into the Doctor's back.

"Kill us if you like," the Doctor said, causing Silver's stomach to lurch uncomfortably. "But be warned: my people will find you and they're not nearly as merciful as I am."

"Maybe, maybe not," Oozle said. "Might be interesting to find out."

Silver closed her eyes and hoped it would be quick.

"Wait!" Dexter yelled. "I'll pay you back everything I owe you."

"With interest?" Oozle asked.

"With interest. Just don't harm them. And I'll..." Dexter's voice caught in his throat. "And I'll shut down Serapea. The Doctor's right. We shouldn't be messing around with history."

"Suit yourself," Oozle replied. "I don't care what you do with this place just as long as I get my money. You have got my money, haven't you, Dexter?"

"If I sell everything I've collected so far..." Dexter's voice trailed off.

"Well?"

"No."

"What?"

"How much do you owe him?" the Doctor said tensely.

"I can get you the rest," Dexter said hastily. "I just need to make one more trip."

"Agreed," said Oozle, "but if you're lying..."

"I'm not, I swear."

"And I've sworn enough times myself to know what that's worth. I think it might be a better incentive if a couple of my guards and I accompanied you to wherever it is you're going."

"Whatever you want. Just don't kill anybody."

"I'm not making any promises."

"I can't let you do this," the Doctor said.

"You're forgetting the guns again, Doctor," Oozle replied. "In fact, I think it might be best if you came with us on Dexter's little jaunt."

"And why would I want to do that?"

Oozle shrugged his tentacles. "Either you come with us or my guards will rip your friend's arms from their sockets."

Two Ogrons eagerly took up position either side of Silver.

"Well, since you put it that way..."

* * *

Dark clouds gathered in the sky above the city of Alexandria. In the principal square, two factions approached one another, their moods equally dark.

“Stand aside, Olympius,” commanded Theophilus, Patriarch of Alexandria. Behind him, an army of Christians shouted their agreement.

“Never!” Olympius was a tall man, but he had the stoop of someone who spent most of his time poring over texts. “The Temple of Serapis is under our protection and, should that fail, the protection of Serapis himself.”

“A pagan deity,” Theophilus spat. “What power does he have compared to the one true God?”

“He has served Egypt well enough before now,” Olympius said. “He will continue to serve her when your god is lost beneath the shifting sands. He guarantees our harvests and causes the Nile to swell with bounty: do you really want to risk his anger?”

There were murmurs of consternation in the ranks behind him so Theophilus raised his voice to drown them out.

“Serapis is a false god! Those miracles you attribute to him are the actions of the Father and of his Son.”

“So you say.”

“So says the Emperor Theodosius and his word is the law.”

“And yet, even in Rome itself, there are more temples to so-called ‘false gods’ than there are churches to the one you follow,” Olympius replied. “The will of the people is against you.”

“The will of the Emperor is all that matters.”

“Even beyond that of your God?” Olympius asked with a smirk.

Theophilus ignored the jibe. “Theodosius has ordered that the temple is to be razed to the ground and a church erected in its place. Leave now and you will not be harmed.”

Olympius shook his head slowly and sadly. “We are but priests and scholars, not soldiers, but we will oppose you until our dying breath.”

“So be it,” Theophilus growled.

* * *

“Everybody comfortable?” Dexter asked as he set the coordinates.

“Just get on with it,” Oozle growled.

The Doctor peered over Dexter’s shoulder. “The Library of Alexandria. I should have guessed.” Dexter shot him a confused look. “You named your own library in homage to it. I’m just surprised you haven’t raided her already.”

“The Great Library is somewhere I’ve always wanted to go,” Dexter explained, “but I wanted it to be special and I was waiting for the right time. I suppose it’s too late now.”

The Doctor reached for the controls. “If I might suggest a change in date...”

“Watch it, Doctor.” One of Oozle’s mechanical claws grabbed for the Doctor’s fingers.

“There’s no need to snap,” the Doctor replied. “I’m not trying to sabotage our flight. I’m still on board, remember. No, I was merely going to point out that, if you wish to obtain the largest haul from this trip then Dexter’s choice of time period isn’t necessarily the best.”

“Is this true?” Oozle demanded, rounding on Dexter.

“It’s not Dexter’s fault,” the Doctor said. “He’s chosen the date when our task would be easiest. However, if we were to arrive just before the library closed down then the collection would have had more time to accumulate. More books equals more profits, Oozle. So what’s it to be: safety or riches?”

“Very well, Doctor,” Oozle said, gliding back. “We’ll play it your way.”

“Thank you.” The Doctor began amending the coordinates.

Dexter leaned over to whisper in his ear. “You do realise what happened on that date, don’t you?”

The Doctor grinned. “My dear Dexter, I’m counting on it.”

* * *

The Ogron growled at Silver as she put her hand on the door.

“It’s a call of nature, okay?” Silver said, self-consciously aware that she was doing the foreign tourist thing of speaking slower and louder so the Ogron would understand her. “You’re already checked in here. No way out.”

The Ogron snorted and turned away and Silver took this as permission to enter the bathroom. Waiting for her inside was the robot she had sent here earlier. It had already stripped off its Regency garb so Silver squirmed out of her dress and handed that to the robot before donning its outfit herself. She turned to appraise the machine, now dressed as she had been. The disguise would not have fooled a human for a moment, but Silver got the impression that the Ogrons were not very bright and the robot only had to fool them for long enough for her to find her way back to the TARDIS.

“You’ll do,” she whispered, patting the robot reassuringly on the arm. “Now get out there and keep quiet.”

The robot nodded once and then exited the bathroom, settling down cross-legged on the floor with its back to the Ogrons. One of the Ogrons gave it a cursory glance and grunted before turning back to its colleague. Once she was sure that it was not going to turn back around, Silver tiptoed out of the bathroom and headed off down the corridor.

* * *

The Temple of Serapis, also known as the Serapeum, had been built on the summit of an artificial hill, rising a full hundred steps above the rest of the city. Attached to the Serapeum – and indeed some halls were even contained within it – was the library of Alexandria. This was not the Royal Library: that had been burned down centuries earlier when Julius Caesar had attacked the city. Rather, this was what had been reconstructed, its collection built from what had been saved from the fire and what had been written in the years since. This was a place of peace and tranquillity, for the contemplation of the divine and of the scholarly.

Until tonight.

On the steps leading up into the Serapeum, Olympius and his fellow priests and scholars used improvised weapons to battle the Christians. The Christians, however, were backed by Alexandria’s armed forces and these trained soldiers made short work of men for whom the most strenuous exercise prior to tonight had been to lift heavy tablets up to and down from the top shelves. Well-forged blades sliced through flesh and broom-handles with equal ease.

“Stand firm!” Olympius yelled to his fellows as they fled in panic, hurling themselves from the steps and tumbling down the hillside. The Christians let them go; their target was the temple. The resistance was disintegrating. Anger and despair materialised as Olympius realised that all was lost. Bellowing with rage, he charged forward. A blade pierced his side before he even had the chance to land a single blow. He slid slowly to his knees.

“Where is your god now?” Theophilus asked, standing over his opponent.

“Serapis will have his revenge,” Olympius promised before collapsing face down in a pool of his own blood.

* * *

“Look at all this.”

Dexter gestured at the marble hall around them, at the tiled *armaria* containing dozens upon dozens of scrolls and manuscripts. “All of this accumulated wisdom, five hundred thousand scrolls that in just a few hours will be completely destroyed. Is it so wrong to want to save this for future generations?”

“No, it’s not so wrong to desire it,” the Doctor replied. He was sitting at a table watching the two Ogrons carefully as he shovelled the scrolls into containers ready for transport back to the twenty-sixth century. “It is, however, wrong to act on that desire. Changing established history, however honourable the motive, never works out well. Trust me, I know.”

If Dexter needed further convincing, the haunted expression on the Doctor’s face told him everything he needed to know.

“However bad you think your current situation is, it can always be made worse.”

“Where is everybody?” Oozle demanded, gliding back into the room as a reminder of his presence.

“I would have thought that you would be grateful not to be disturbed,” the Doctor replied.

“This is supposed to be an active library, so where are the librarians? If this is some kind of trap that the two of you have cooked up...”

“Oozle, I think you’re forgetting who holds the guns,” the Doctor said with no hint of derision in his voice. “Today is a religious festival. If you listen carefully, you can probably hear them celebrating.”

“Whatever.” Oozle opened up his protective bubble to expel some of the smoke that had built up. The Ogron nearest to him wrinkled its nose. “Stop complaining, you big baby. It’s only cigar smoke.”

Dexter sidled up to the Doctor. “That’s not just cigar smoke I can smell, is it?”

The Doctor shook his head. “It’s starting.”

* * *

It had taken the Ogrons half an hour to realise the Silver had escaped. Unfortunately, in all that time, Silver had not been able to find where the Doctor had parked the TARDIS.

“Not that big an asteroid, he said,” she complained as she descended a ladder between levels. “Seems plenty big enough to me.”

A violent angry war threatened to puncture her eardrums. An Ogron, spittle spraying from its mouth, was looking up at her from the level below. Scrabbling for purchase on the metal rungs, Silver changed direction and began to scale the ladder even as the Ogron swung up after her. Fast as she was, Silver could only take the rungs one at a time. The Ogron, however, was launching itself up the ladder like an ape throwing itself from tree branch to tree branch. In moments, it was on her, its meaty hands clasped around her boot, crushing her ankle.

“Let go of me!”

Silver tried to yank herself free, but the Ogron’s grip was firm. It wound its legs around a lower rung and began to pull. Silver’s head spun as she looked down and saw the

drop that awaited her if she lost her grip. The Ogron bellowed again, and this time Silver got the impression that it was laughing at her.

Despite her better judgment, Silver took her free foot off the ladder and brought it down on top of the Ogron's head. It was like kicking concrete and Silver yelped with pain. Nonetheless, she lashed out again. And again. And again. This time her boot drew a thick viscous fluid that may well have been blood, and the Ogron reeled, releasing its hold on her ankle.

"Take this," she cried, hauling herself up on her arms and then swinging back down so that both of her feet connected with the Ogron. It staggered, went cross-eyed and lost its grip. It lunged for the ladder, but it was already falling too far and too fast. Silver watched it until it was nothing more than a speck in the distance. Then she dragged herself up onto the balcony. She lay there panting for a few minutes, recovering her breath, until a roar reminded her that there was still a second Ogron out there.

* * *

"The noise has stopped," Oozle said.

The Doctor got up from his chair. "Yes, I expect it has."

"Um, Doctor," Dexter began, "shouldn't we be getting back before..."

"Before what?" Oozle lashed out, one of his tentacles wrapping round Dexter's throat and lifting up into the air. "What do you know?"

"Can't... breathe..." Dexter gasped, his legs pedalling ineffectively.

"Put him down, Oozle," the Doctor snapped. "This was my idea, not his."

A tentacle swung out and a mechanical claw connected savagely with the Doctor's face, knocking him from his feet. Unsteadily, he clambered up to his knees, wiping the blood from his mouth with the back of his hand.

"Feeling better now, Oozle?" he asked. "You were right, this was a trap and you walked right into it. You've been outplayed."

"You're wrong, Doctor. I still hold the trump card." He waved Dexter around like a rag doll. "Help me or he dies."

The Doctor shook his head. "You don't get it, do you? No one's getting out of here alive."

Behind him, the flames began to devour the cabinets.

* * *

Silver hobbled down the corridor, wincing every time she set down her injured ankle. The Ogron sounded like it was right behind her. She rounded the corner and was confronted by the mesh gate she had asked Dexter about earlier.

"The unfinished section," she murmured to herself, easing open the gate and limping into the darkness. She had to feel her way around the abandoned equipment, sinking deeper into the black labyrinth, hoping all the while that the Ogron was having as much trouble in here as she was. For all she knew, the TARDIS was in here too; she could be right on top of it and never notice. Her hand settled on a torch and she switched it on with a flick of her thumb.

She screamed.

Standing directly opposite her, face cruelly illuminated by the silver torchlight, was the Ogron. Silver stumbled backwards, knocking over a crate behind her and sending its contents tumbling across the floor. Silver overbalanced and despite attempting to use her

arms as windmills, she found herself falling backwards. She landed heavily, pain shooting up her left arm. Tears filled her eyes, blurring her vision, but she did not need her eyes to know that the Ogron was mere feet away.

She crawled along the floor, the screws and bolts from the crate parting before her like waves from the prow of a boat. Every second she could keep from the Ogron was a precious commodity. Up ahead of her was the outer wall of Serapea, looking surprisingly flimsy. Maybe it was, Silver wondered, desperation latching onto even the most unlikely possibilities. Maybe that was why this area was unsafe. She ran her fingertips along the uneven surface until she located the point at which two panels met. Then she pulled back her arm and swung the torch at that point. The torch cracked, but the panel remained resolutely intact.

“Break, damn you!” She could smell the sweaty odour of the Ogron, hear its heavy breathing as it bent down over her, feel its hand as it took hold of the velvet of her jacket.

Then the panel buckled.

It was only a small crack, but that was all that was needed. The atmosphere within Serapea rushed to fill the vacuum outside and the pressure as it did so tore the gap wide open. Even the heavy Ogron could not resist the rushing wind and it was thrown off its feet and hurled out of the Serapea, Silver in tow.

Silver snatched at the flapping panel, managing to grab the ragged edge that halted her flight. The Ogron was still holding on to her jacket, however, and her arms felt as though they would be ripped from their sockets. She might have cried out in pain, but the raging gale swept the sound away before it could reach her ears.

Suddenly, the force tugging on her arms lifted. All the links in the chain had been tested and it was the jacket that had been found wanting. The material had torn and the Ogron had been sent careening off into space. Silver smiled grimly and, bracing herself against the wind, tried to pull herself back inside the library.

The panel came away in her hands and she was blown away from Serapea like a cork from a champagne bottle.

* * *

“You should have read up on your history, Oozle,” the Doctor said. “The Library of Alexandria and all its contents were destroyed by fire.”

Behind him, the room had become a raging inferno as scrolls caught fire like kindling.

“I warned you to stop threatening established history,” the Doctor continued. “While we’ve been talking, the flames have spread throughout most of the library. They’re between us and the exit. Or, to put it another way, there’s no escape.”

“There’s still his time machine,” Oozle replied, shaking Dexter. He turned to the Ogrons. “Fetch the crates. I can still make a profit on this misadventure.”

Hefting one crate of scrolls each, the two Ogrons led the way into the adjoining room where the time machine was waiting.

“You see, Doctor,” Oozle said as the Ogrons crossed the wooden floor to load the time machine with her precious cargo, “I still win. You, however, can remain here to enjoy the fate you had in mind for me, as can this traitorous librarian.”

He threw Dexter down at the Doctor’s feet.

“I’m sorry, Oozle,” the Doctor said quietly. “You lose.”

As if on cue, the wooden floor, already weakened by the fire, collapsed beneath the weight of two Ogrons, two large crates and a time machine. Oozle hovered over to the edge

of the hole, but could see only flames beyond.

“The time machine!” he wailed. “Do you realise what you’ve done?”

“It’s better this way,” the Doctor said. “It will be buried beneath the ruins of the library and your ability to meddle with the timelines will be meddled with it.”

“And what about us, Doctor,” Dexter asked, massaging his throat, “or doesn’t your plan extend that far?”

“Well, I’m afraid that rather depends on Silver.”

* * *

Light was the first thing that Silver noticed when she regained consciousness; light so bright that it burned through her closed eyelids. Divine light...? She raised a hand to block out the glare and it was at this point that she noticed the pain.

She blacked out again.

The second time Silver regained consciousness, the pain had receded somewhat. It was still there, but it was now at a more manageable level. She risked opening her eyes.

She was lying on a bed in some kind of medical facility. Several of Dexter’s androids were fussing over her. They wielded strange devices that were bedecked with LEDs and that beeped every few seconds. Most of Silver had been covered by a sheet, but she could see her bare arms and was shocked to see that they were covered with purple welts and cuts. Well, that explained the pain at least.

In the corner of the room was a sight that almost swept all of her pain away.

“There you are,” she said in a cracking voice. The object she was referring to was the TARDIS.

Silver sat up and swung her legs over the side of the bed, ignoring the attempts of the robots to force her to stay where she was.

“I know you’re just trying to help,” she said, “Really, I do. But the Doctor’s in trouble and he’ll need my help.” The floor was cold beneath her bare feet. “The Doctor said he’d programmed the TARDIS to track that detector he gave me, the detector he took back and put in his pocket. I just hope he didn’t bother to reset the controls...”

* * *

Dexter was half-sitting, half-sprawling on what remained of the floor. He had shed his jacket and wig and was loosening the collar of his shirt.

“How long do you think we’ve got?” Dexter asked. “Before the flames reach us, I mean.”

“It’s not the flames you should be worrying about,” the Doctor replied. He seemed unperturbed by the heat despite his heavy suit. “Smoke inhalation will do for us first.”

“All right, how long until that happens?” A trumpeting roar filled the air and a wind whipped up the manuscripts, scattering the pages about the room.

“I’m hopeful that it may be a long time coming.”

A ghost of an outline hovered in mid-air, becoming more solid, darker, bluer...

“Silver!” the Doctor said happily as she stepped out of the TARDIS.

“Miss me?” she asked.

“What’s this?” Dexter asked, clambering to his feet.

“This is my time machine or, to put it another way, our exit. After you, Dexter.” The Doctor paused, studying the scars on Silver’s face with concern. “Are those vacuum lesions? What happened?”

“I’ll tell you later, when we’re safely out of here,” Silver replied. “Where’s Oozle?”

“Right here,” Oozle replied, gliding up behind her and lifting her off her feet with his tentacles.

“There’s no need for any more violence, Oozle,” the Doctor said, raising his hands. “I’ll be happy to take you back to the twenty-sixth century and we can put this whole sorry business behind us.”

“That’s easy for you to say, Doctor. Have you any idea how much this ‘sorry business’ has cost me?”

“When are you going to realise that not everything in life is about money?”

“When are you going to realise that all the things that matter are?” Oozle tightened his grip on Silver. “Now, you and Dexter are going to gather up all the scrolls that you can carry and I’m going to salvage as much from this farce as I possible can.”

“How many times do I have to tell you that I can’t let you do that?” the Doctor replied.

“Then I hope you like to hear the sound of your friend’s screams.”

“I’m through with being a hostage,” Silver declared. She twisted in Oozle’s grip, grabbing hold of the hatch in the top of his life support bubble and violently wrenching it open. “Why don’t you try breathing our air for a change?”

Silver gagged as cigar smoke billowed up into her face, but she kept the hatch open and within moments Oozle began to flail about beneath her as the atmosphere that kept him alive began to escape. In desperation, Oozle flung Silver away from him and floated away to recover.

Flames swept into the room, crawling inexorably along the wooden beams.

“Both of you into the TARDIS, now!” the Doctor ordered Silver and Dexter. They did not need to be told twice. The Doctor stood on the threshold of his time machine and looked to Oozle. “There’s still a place for you inside, if you want it.”

“Not without my money,” Oozle retorted, snatching at scrolls with his claws.

“There’s no time!”

Oozle rounded on him. “I never give up!”

There was a resounding crack as the beam above Oozle split. The ceiling shattered and fell down on top of him, accompanied by flaming spars. The Doctor started forward, but was driven back by the heat.

“I’m sorry,” he whispered, before turning on his heel and disappearing inside the TARDIS.

“Shouldn’t we go back for Oozle?” Silver asked as the Doctor crossed to the console.

“It’s too late for him,” the Doctor replied sombrely. “Perhaps its better this way.”

He hit the dematerialisation control.

* * *

A few hours or over two thousand years later, depending on your point of view, the Doctor, Silver and Dexter were back in the infirmary on Serapea. Silver was back on the bed while a robot with a dermal regenerator healed the last of her scars.

“I’m going to miss this place,” Dexter remarked.

“As dreams go, it was a good one to have,” the Doctor told him. “I think there could be hope for you yet.”

“That’s his version of a compliment,” said Silver.

Dexter’s robots were ferrying the last of Dexter’s books into the TARDIS.

“We’ll make sure they all get back to their proper places and times,” the Doctor said.

“Even that overdue library book of yours,” Silver added.

Dexter tried to smile, but his heart was not in it. “It just seems such a waste, sending all that art to be destroyed.”

“Those works were missing, *presumed* destroyed,” the Doctor replied, tapping the side of his nose. “If they’re needed in the future then I’m sure they’ll turn up again without the need from any interference from you or me. Time has a way of looking after her own.”

Dexter sighed. “I hope you’re right, Doctor.”

“He usually is.” Silver got up off of the bed, her skin good as new. “He’s annoying like that.”

“Annoying? Me?”

“See what I mean.”

“After that, I’ve half a mind not to give you the choice of our next destination,” the Doctor replied loftily. “I suppose you want to go somewhere exciting this time.”

“Actually, Doctor, I think I’ve had quite enough excitement for a while and, if I remember rightly,” she said, poking him in the chest with her finger, “you promised to take me to a boring old musical.”

“Your wish is my command.” The Doctor smiled and put an arm around Silver’s shoulders as he led her towards the TARDIS. “Did I mention that Cameron Mackintosh is an old friend of mine...?”

* * *

Theophilus walked slowly through the still smoking remains of the temple and the library and felt a pang of guilt in the pit of his stomach. Or possibly that was just a reaction to his lunch.

“Where be your god now, Olympius?” he taunted his fallen foe.

As if in response to his words, the rubble shifted and Theophilus took a nervous step back. He cried out in terror as a green, tentacled apparition floated up out of the wreckage.

“Are you responsible for this?” the apparition demanded in a ghostly, distorted voice.

Theophilus could not speak, but he nodded his confirmation.

“Then you will suffer.”

Theophilus blanched. Olympius had been right; Serapis would have his revenge.

“But first,” the apparition continued, “there’s a time machine buried somewhere under here. You’re going to dig it out for me.”

“A... a time machine?” Theophilus stammered.

“A box,” Oozle snapped. “You’ll know it when you see it.”

Theophilus nodded, not wanting to anger the spectre any further.

“Well, what are you waiting for?” Oozle said. “Get digging.”

Theophilus immediately fell to his knees and started pawing at the rubble. Oozle turned away and looked out towards the horizon.

“You cost me, Doctor,” he said softly, “so I’m going to find you and I’m going to make you pay. I did warn you, didn’t I? I never give up.”

THE
DOCTOR WHO
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THE LIBRARIAN OF SERAPEA

DUNCAN JOHNSON



Can a play really threaten history, as we know it?

The Doctor certainly thinks so and a chance discovery in London's West End send him and Silver across time and space in a quest to preserve the timeline.

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Will the Doctor escape the rack?

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