

THE
DOCTOR WHO
PROJECT



**THE
CHRISTMAS
ADVENTURE**

Bob Furnell

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Published by Jigsaw Publications

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First Printing December 2024

Cover design by Alex Lydiate
Interior design and layout by Bob Furnell

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Jigsaw Publications
Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

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Prologue

No Time, No Place—Somewhere in the Vortex

Maggie Weitz had to bear in mind that the Doctor had come back for her several times before, so he would do it again.

They had last said goodbye after a picnic on a Martian sunrise, which itself came after a time-twisting adventure involving a duplicate Earth, a shrinking universe, the Doctor's past and future, and a painfully brief reunion with her dead husband Ollie¹.

At the end of it all, the Doctor promised he would return, and sure enough, he had. In some ways he had not changed at all. He was still a Time Lord several thousand Earth years of age, in his eleventh incarnation; and he still *looked* like a well-built Afro-Briton in his mid-thirties, concealing his figure in slightly rumpled attire of baggy black hemp trousers, cable-knit fisherman's sweater, a long balmacaan coat, and scuffed chukka boots. His smooth and handsome face looked not a year older, and certainly didn't even betray the anxiety of their latest adventures. He was still the same irrepressible adventurer and best friend she had known and loved, and as soon as they reunited this most recent time, they were thrust into the fray of thrilling and terrible adventures, all across the universe.

But beneath his natural cheer, there had been changes. The Doctor was, these days, carrying with him some baggage he could not discuss. He had gained the memories and experiences of other Doctors, who led different lives in the myriad parallel universes that apparently comprised reality. When he and Maggie had shared that picnic, a mysterious woman had appeared, and the Doctor's face was filled with foreboding. Since then, she knew he had some new purpose to his travels, and was in the middle of a journey beyond anything Maggie could understand. Since she had seen him again there had been no sign of that woman, nor any word of his new responsibilities. She knew he couldn't talk about them, and it was highly possible that she wouldn't understand even if he told her, so she respected his privacy. She had a fair job guessing what he might be up to ... a secret mission for the Time Lords? A war across time and space? Maybe he was finally getting around to being Merlin?

¹ See *The Doctor Who Project: The Last Doctor*.

But today, these cosmic matters were far from the Doctor's mind. Today, he and Maggie were just doing everyday time travel business—namely, landing by accident in the year 5000 and getting embroiled in one of the pivotal battles of World War Six, the Siege of Nueva Brasilia. Considering the Doctor had promised her a day of lazing about on the psychic beaches of Kilnumon Verana, this was a considerable overshoot.

Maggie had to admit it was fairly low-stakes—she had only *two* narrow escapes from death. But as she stood in the TARDIS control room, her knuckles still quivering from the horrific battle they had just fled, she felt uncertain whether she could get back into this routine as easily as she thought. She looked across at her Time Lord friend, hoping for some sympathy. He was hanging up his trusty rust-colored Raglan coat, its lapel punctured by one of the Order of Greel's synesthetic needle-bullets. "There's only one tailor in the galaxy that'll be able to mend that hole, and he's all the way over on Sigma Orielir ..." He stopped his gabbling, looked over at her, and at once she felt his understanding as he locked her eyes. "I think I know what you're about to say, Maggie."

"It's nothing personal—"

He waved away the objection. "That was a bit too intense, especially when you're just getting back into the swing of things. I've always known trouble attracts me, but honestly ... anyway Maggie, you know I'm happy to take you anywhere, do anything, but I think it's probably good for you to be home. Nineteen ninety-eight, here we come. It just might be what you need right now."

Maggie had nodded quietly, feeling that strange mix of anticipation and sadness that came with being away from the people she loved. For the last few years, the TARDIS had become a home of sorts, a place of endless adventure. She thought of it and the Doctor as her life. But sometimes, that very endlessness made her long for something familiar, something rooted. Something human.

Chapter One

Monday December 21st, 1998, Evening

The Doctor had been more perceptive than Maggie had anticipated. He understood her need for connection, for the warmth of familiar faces during the holidays. The TARDIS hummed softly as Maggie stood on its threshold staring out the TARDIS door, her fingers gripping the handle of the police box's outer door, watching the lights of her home city flicker in the distance. Despite her conviction, she still felt a tad hesitant to take the step outside.

She glanced over at the Doctor, standing at the console, his hands flicking across the controls with his usual quick movements. The Doctor, with his sunny disposition, colorful clothes and quirky persona, seemed so out of place in peaceful, quiet, snow-covered Revelstoke². And yet, somehow, he had fit in as perfectly here as he had in the fifty-first century. He belonged everywhere and nowhere. He was as much a part of her journey as everything else she encountered, and maybe that was why she could be so sure about this decision.

He looked up from the console and focused on Maggie, his dark eyes extra-intense in the dim TARDIS lighting.

"I'll be fine, Doctor," Maggie replied, her voice steady. "I need to be with people right now."

He raised his eyebrow in mock offence, but he knew what she meant.

"Family. Friends," Maggie continued. "Christmas is ... it's different when you're out there, traveling, when sometimes you start to think you have no real place to come back to."

The Doctor gave her one of his signature half-smiles, the one that could be both reassuring and full of mystery. "I understand. Just remember one thing—if you need me, you know where to find me."

² Revelstoke is a city in southeastern British Columbia, Canada, located 641 kilometers (398 mi) east of Vancouver, and 415 kilometers (258 mi) west of Calgary, Alberta. The city is situated on the banks of the Columbia River just south of the Revelstoke Dam and near its confluence with the Illecillewaet River. East of Revelstoke are the Selkirk Mountains and Glacier National Park, penetrated by Rogers Pass used by the Trans-Canada Highway and the Canadian Pacific Railway. Revelstoke is Maggie's home town and where she grew up.

Maggie nodded, her eyes brightening as she reached into her pocket and pulled out the small device he'd handed her. It was a small, metallic reproduction of the TARDIS: a model police box that could have been mistaken for a paperweight. It lacked even any controls; but he assured her it would send a signal to the life-sized TARDIS and bring him back to pick her up whenever she was ready to leave.

The Doctor didn't like to let his friends go—even all these lifetimes later, there was the prospect that the TARDIS navigation would go awry and he wouldn't land in the right place or time. But he knew this was one of those moments when he had to. Maggie wasn't just his companion on a journey; she was her own person, and he respected that.

He shrugged on his shapeless rust-colored coat, ignoring the unsightly needle hole in its lapel, and stepped out of the TARDIS to stand next to her, taking in the night air. "Brr, that mountain air is jolly cold on the scalp. Makes me wish I still had a head full of curly hair." He breathed in, nostrils quivering at the cockle-warming aroma of distant wood fires and the abundant conifers. He suddenly frowned. "Oh dear."

Maggie felt a fearful jolt. "What is it?"

"It's 5759 already."

"You said it was 1998, same year I left."

"Yes, yes, but 5759 by the Hebrew calendar. I'm dreadfully sorry Maggie, I've overshot Hanukkah I'm afraid."

She punched his arm playfully. "Is that all? That's OK." She looked back at the TARDIS. "We can always try for it next time. I'm sure Mom and Dad, and cousin Larry, and everyone else won't be going anywhere. I can give someone else a shot at winning the dreidel game."

He turned to her and gave her shoulder a tender squeeze. "Have a wonderful time."

"Same to you. You won't be ... lonely without me?"

He shook his head. "Not a bit of it. I'll be around... somewhere. There are a few galactic odds and ends to sort out." He snapped his fingers. "D'you know, I never did look into that temporal flicker in Sector 13, I wonder if it's still, er ..."

"Flickering?" Maggie finished wryly.

The Doctor met her smile and winked. "Just give me a shout when you're ready."

With that, he retreated back inside, his hands flicking various levers and buttons to set in motion the dematerialization sequence. Maggie took a step away, watching as the Doctor gave her one last wave before the TARDIS doors slammed shut and the marvelous time machine disappeared with its familiar wheezing and groaning.

At first she was disoriented—she wasn't outside her own home. She was a few blocks east, in a square patch of yard illuminated by rows of multicolored Christmas lights.

Then it clicked. Just the person she wanted most to see. The Doctor, showing that uncanny, unspoken insight of his, had left her standing in the snowy backyard of her best friend from high school, Simon.

Now, as Maggie stood at Simon's back door, suitcase in hand, she couldn't help but feel a flood of emotions. The cool air nipped at her cheeks, but the warmth from inside beckoned her.

Maggie knocked on the door. Almost immediately, the door swung open.

"Maggie?" Simon's voice was full of surprise and joy. His smile was wide as he looked her over, taking in the sight of his best friend standing on his doorstep, looking both a little worn and yet somehow at peace. "Well, I'll be damned. Look who finally came home!"

Maggie couldn't help but smile back. "Hey, Simon."

Before she could say anything more, Simon had stepped forward and enveloped her in a hug, laughing.

"I thought you were gonna miss Christmas this year! Did you finally get tired of space?" He pulled back, eyes sparkling with excitement. "Well, get in here! The house is a mess—Christmas baking, lights everywhere—but it's still home. Come on, we've got a lot to catch up on."

Maggie stepped inside, feeling the warmth of the house immediately. The familiar smell of pine from Simon's Christmas tree—like his parents, he had always insisted on a real one—mixed with the rich scent of baking. Her heart swelled a little —this is home. It had been a good six months since she had been back in Revelstoke. When she saw the Doctor again, she was only too happy to get away. Now it could not have been more different. The sight of Simon's cozy, cluttered home brought a rush of nostalgia.

"You look amazing!" Simon noted as he stepped back. His grin was wide, and his eyes gleamed with that familiar energy. He always had a way of making anyone feel like the most important person in the room. "Come on in, don't just stand there!"

Maggie stepped inside, placing her suitcase by the door. As she did, a woman's husky voice called out from the kitchen: "Simon, who was that at the door?"

Maggie was somewhat surprised, but extremely happy to see who it was.

"Maggie? Is that you?" It was Rebekah, one of Maggie's closest friends growing up. Rebekah was smiling already, but when she saw Maggie, her expression softened, and she crossed the room to wrap her in a big, warm hug. "I didn't expect you back so soon. How's... everything?" Her voice dropped a little, noticing a slight change in Maggie's demeanor.

Maggie smiled, but her eyes had turned sad. "It's been good. Busy, you know. Just needed to come home for a bit." Maggie paused to take in the sight of her friends, the familiar decor, the ambience throughout the house of preparation for Christmas. "I missed this. I missed you guys. But there's one thing I've got to know before we go any further."

Simon and Rebekah kind of already knew what Maggie was going to ask.

"It's great to see you two but, Rebekah, what are you doing here? I'm slightly confused. Since when have you two been together?"

Simon and Rebekah looked at each other and laughed. "Well..." Simon said bashfully.

Rebekah laughed too, also slightly embarrassed. "You know how things are."

"It's all pretty innocent," Simon reassured Maggie. "It started quite by accident."

Rebekah continued with the story. "It was a couple of months back. I was out shopping and I ran into Simon. I asked him if he'd heard from you, we got chatting and ended up going for coffee. It just kind of happened from there."

"Two months? Is that all?" Maggie asked incredulously.

"Well ... we both always felt that way, we just hadn't realized it."

The three friends all looked at each other smiling. Simon had dated a lot of girls during and after high school, but nothing ever lasted—usually due to his own carelessness. Back when they were young, Simon had put thoughts of family behind studying to become a big-shot lawyer. Perhaps this indicated he was settled, not so single-minded, finally ready to

be happy with himself. Maggie was happy that maybe this time Simon had finally found the right girl. If anyone could get him to grow up, it would be Rebekah.

Simon stepped forward and took Maggie's hand. "Well, you're here now, and that's all that matters. We've got all kinds of things planned for the holidays! The tree's up, and we're making my famous Christmas cookies. You've got to help, of course."

Maggie laughed, a sound she suddenly realized she missed hearing from herself. "Of course. I wouldn't miss it." She felt the warmth in her chest grow a little stronger. Despite—or perhaps because of—everything she'd been through, this—being with friends who felt like family—felt like an anchor.

As Maggie set her suitcase down and kicked off her shoes, she felt a sense of grounding she hadn't realized she'd been missing. For the past little while, it had all been about the TARDIS, about traveling the universe, chasing adventures across time and space. These latest adventures had taken more of a toll on her than she could admit. The Doctor had probably already reached Sector 13, or been diverted somewhere more dangerous. She knew he thought of her, just as she thought of him, but the problems of the universe weighed on him. But here, in this moment, in this home, she could finally just breathe and taken in and appreciate the calm.

Rebekah led her to the kitchen, where the delicious smell of gingerbread and cinnamon filled the air. There were trays of half-rolled dough and brightly colored sprinkles in bowls. It was a festive mess, and Maggie's heart lit up just seeing it.

"So," Rebekah said, pulling a chair out at the kitchen table for Maggie. "Tell us everything. How's life on the road with Doctor what's-his-name?"

Maggie's face lit up, but then she glanced down at the small summoning device the Doctor gave her, tucked carefully in her pocket. Rebekah and Simon would never have believed her if she told them this little model police box, not remotely high-tech or alien, could summon a time machine across time and space at the sound of a whistle. It was a simple thing, but she knew what it represented—the life of adventure already out of reach right now, but the knowledge that the TARDIS was somewhere, somewhen, waiting for her when she was ready.

"It's... incredible," Maggie said after a moment, trying to find the right words. "There are things out there I can barely wrap my head around. Places. Creatures. I've seen the stars in ways I never imagined. But it's not always ... easy." Maggie paused, trying to gauge her friends' reaction.

Simon didn't miss the shift in tone. "You've seen some things, haven't you?" He didn't need to ask for details, his gaze suddenly full of understanding.

Maggie nodded, a little embarrassed by her sudden vulnerability. "Yeah. Some things are hard to talk about." Presently, Maggie's thoughts unwillingly turned to their most recent stop, to the horrible scene of the ravaged husk that had been La Ciudad de Nueva Brasilia, the murderous barbarity of those horrible three-foot-tall robot Homunculi, how close she had come to death were it not for that brave Filipino Army sergeant barging in at the last minute ... She banished these horrors from her mind and focused on the here and now with her friends. "Sometimes I think I could stay forever with him—travel the universe, seeing everything. We've been separated and reunited so many times, I feel almost ... addicted to seeing the next trip, the next planet. I've made it this far, why not keep going as far as I can? But... I don't know. There are times I get homesick. And I miss the things I can't take with me."

She looked up at Simon and Rebekah, two constants in a life that had become a lot less predictable.

Rebekah reached across the table and squeezed her hand. “Well, you’re here now. That’s all that matters.”

“Thanks Rebekah,” replied Maggie. “I really appreciate that. But there’s one thing I think it’d be rude of me not to ask.”

Rebekah and Simon looked at Maggie a little concerned.

“I really don’t want to be on my own right now, especially at this time of year. Do you mind if I stay with you guys while I’m back home? I don’t want to be an imposition.”

“Oh Mags, you could never been an imposition”, replied Rebekah. “Of course you can stay here. Anytime, for as long as you want.”

Simon interjected, “We wouldn’t have it any other way. No matter how far you travel, this will always be your home from home.”

Maggie smiled, grateful for their warmth and kindness. The small police box in her pocket hummed slightly, the tiny lamp on its top giving her a friendly blink, reminding her that she could always go back to the TARDIS, that she had more adventures ahead. But for now, she was here. And that was enough.

“So, what’s the plan for the next few days?” Maggie asked, pointedly changing the subject, eager to embrace the simple joys of Christmas with her friends.

“Well, you know me and Christmas Mags,” replied Simon. “We’ve got a bunch of errands to do tomorrow, and the day after that we’re heading to the Christmas market. I’m thinking of getting a new ornament for the tree — something special, you know? I have just the thing in my mind but I can’t ever seem to find it in real life. Oh, and we’ll be having a big dinner on Christmas Eve. Mom will be coming over and everything. You’ll need to help with the stuffing.”

Maggie laughed. “You don’t have to twist my arm. I’m in.”

As they fell into the familiar rhythm of holiday plans, Maggie felt a wave of peace wash over her. She was safe, back home. This was Christmas with people who loved her. Even with her life full of endless possibilities.

Chapter Two

Tuesday December 22

The morning after Maggie's arrival, the warmth of Simon and Rebekah's home was the perfect contrast to the crisp winter air outside. The sun was just rising over Mount Begbie, casting a soft golden glow through the kitchen window. Maggie sat at the table, sipping her coffee, surrounded by the hum of a typical holiday morning. Rebekah had set out a hearty breakfast spread: scrambled eggs, crispy bacon, warm cinnamon rolls, and fresh fruit. The smells were so comforting. It was sobering for Maggie to remember that only two days ago—by her peculiar internal time travel clock—she had been languishing in a lunar dungeon, worrying over the imminent threat of execution that faced the Doctor. This was barely comprehensible as the same life, but she alone had been there, here in this mundane moment in 1998 and there in the year 5000. Maggie had almost forgotten the odd sensation of stepping back into her old life, unburdened of the strange tension that clung to her, almost constantly, during her travels with the Doctor. But these terrible recent memories made the miracle, and the curse, of the Doctor's life all the clearer in her mind.

Simon leaned back in his chair, lifting his mug to take a sip of coffee. He glanced over at Maggie, his usual grin softening into something more thoughtful. "You're thinking about life out there in outer space, aren't you?"

"I was," she admitted. "But I'm all yours now. What's on your mind, Simon?"

"So, what's the plan for today? Got anything exciting lined up?"

Maggie paused, the question catching her off guard. She hadn't really thought about it. Her time in Revelstoke had always been spontaneous—no set plans, just whatever felt right in the moment. She looked over at Rebekah, who was flipping through the pages of a Christmas catalog, the usual calm smile on her face.

"Honestly? I'm not really sure," Maggie admitted. "I should probably check in with Mr. Lee at the hardware store, I'm sure he could use an extra hand ..."

"Yes, yes, but what about ... something fun? Something festive?" Simon pressed. Maggie laughed at how little he changed from high school. At this time of year, he always became positively monomaniacal about the holidays.

"I'll kind of just... let the day happen." She shrugged lightly, then added with a grin, "I've been moving so fast lately that I kind of forgot what it feels like to just be still."

Simon raised an eyebrow. "That's a first. You're usually the one dragging us on some wild adventure."

Maggie chuckled softly. "Well, being around people who don't have a spaceship definitely changes the vibe." She paused, considering it. "But I was thinking maybe I'd take a walk around town. It's been ages since I've had the chance to just wander through Revelstoke. See the Christmas decorations, maybe pop by some old places... I don't know, just a change of pace."

Rebekah looked up from her catalog, her eyes sparkling with an idea. "That sounds perfect. You could use a little quiet time after everything, and the town looks beautiful at this time of year. There's something about the way the snow hangs on the trees, and the markets are in full swing. I bet you'll find all kinds of memories out there."

Maggie smiled, warmed by the thought. Revelstoke in December was always picturesque, the streets lined with twinkling lights and storefronts decked out in festive cheer. It was a place where the world seemed to slow down, and people—especially around Christmas—tended to be a little kinder, a little more reflective.

"I think that's exactly what I need," Maggie agreed, nodding. She could picture it already: walking past old coffee shops she used to visit, the quiet streets lined with snow-dusted trees, maybe even stopping by her old favorite bookstore, tucked away just off McKenzie Avenue. The whole town had a certain magic when the season turned.

Simon, who had been absentmindedly spinning his mug on the table, suddenly perked up. "If you're walking around, maybe you can stop by the nursing home and say hi to my mom June. She'd love to see you. She still talks about you every time I visit."

Maggie felt a pang of guilt; she hadn't even thought to visit Simon's mom June. Since the death of Simon's father, she had grown increasingly infirm, and the stairs and narrow hallways in the family home were too much for her to navigate. Back in Maggie's youth, she had been very close with June, especially after Maggie's parents retired to their place in Kitsilano³; in fact there was a time when she was almost another mother to Maggie. "Of course, I'd love to," she said, giving him a warm smile.

Rebekah nodded in agreement. "You could bring her some of those Christmas cookies we baked yesterday. June'd love that. Plus, it'll give you an excuse to chat with the other folks there. It's always a nice way to spend a little time."

Maggie thought about it for a moment. Her heart ached a little for the people who were away from family, especially in a place like a nursing home, where sometimes even a small gesture could brighten someone's day. "That sounds like a really nice idea," she said thoughtfully.

Simon smiled, clearly pleased. "I'll give you the address. It opened a few months back. It's not far, just a few blocks off the main strip. Don't let me keep you, though—enjoy your walk, Mags. Just be careful, it's a bit icy this morning."

³ Kitsilano is a trendy and upper scale neighborhood located in the West Side of Vancouver, British Columbia along the southern shore of English Bay, with Burrard Street as the neighborhood's eastern boundary, Alma Street its western boundary, and 16th Avenue its southern boundary.

“Don’t worry, I’ve got my boots on,” Maggie said, standing up and stretching her arms over her head. She felt utterly content. It wasn’t adventure, it wasn’t the unknown—just familiar places and simple acts of kindness. And today that was exactly what she needed.

“All right,” she said, heading toward the door, “I’ll take a walk around town, visit Simon’s mom, check in on Mr. Lee, and see where else the day takes me. I’ll be back later—maybe we can get started on decorating the tree this afternoon?”

“Sounds like a plan,” Rebekah said, looking up with a smile. “Have a lovely time, Mags.”

Maggie threw on her coat, grabbing a scarf and a pair of mittens before heading out the door.

The fresh, chilly air greeted her as soon as she stepped outside, and the world seemed to slow down as she made her way down the familiar path. The snow crunched beneath her boots as she walked through Simon’s front yard, the trees heavy with frost and the sky a pale blue overhead. It was a typical late morning in Revelstoke, so absolutely nothing was moving. There was something so peaceful about it. The contrast with the cloying, stagnant air of the future was harrowing. All that was to come—and yet she was lucky it was in *her* past.

As Maggie walked, she thought back to the Doctor—how everything had always been moving so fast, how there was always something new around every corner. It was ridiculous how often he popped back into her thoughts. But in that moment, there was no rush. It felt like time had stopped, just for her.

She pulled her coat tighter against the chill and walked toward town, ready to rediscover the familiar streets of Revelstoke—familiar, yes, but full of little surprises waiting to be found. It wasn’t the kind of adventure she’d had in the TARDIS, but for the first time in a while, it felt like the perfect kind of journey.

Maggie’s footsteps slowed as she approached the downtown square, the festive sights of the holiday season all around her. The Christmas lights were strung up along every building—or else familiar faces beamed down from ladders as they struggled to hang the last bunch. Storefront windows were filled with wreaths, candles, and ornaments. The town was alive with that special energy that only comes around Christmastime. She hadn’t made it far from Simon and Rebekah’s house, but already she felt like she was rediscovering something about her hometown—its charm, its spirit, the little details that had always made it feel so welcoming.

As she walked, her eyes were drawn to an elderly man standing near the corner of the street. He was dressed in a long burgundy coat, and his snow-white beard was neatly trimmed. His cheeks were rosy, his eyes a soft blue, and he had that round, jolly look about him that could have been mistaken for Santa Claus himself. But something seemed off. He had a slightly confused expression, glancing around, his hands anxiously clutching the edges of his coat. It was as though he were looking for something—or someone.

Maggie felt a pang of concern. She couldn’t put her finger on it, but she held a sneaking suspicion that he needed help. She didn’t want to assume anything, but it felt right to at least offer assistance.

She approached slowly, her footsteps crunching on the snow. “Excuse me, sir?”

The old man turned toward her, blinking as though he hadn't expected anyone to speak to him. He offered a warm, yet distant smile. "Oh, hello there, miss. I... I seem to have lost my bearings for a moment." His voice was deep and rich, with the soft and slow cadence of someone who had spent many years telling stories to children. "I was just... well, I'm not sure exactly. Feeling a bit lightheaded, I think."

Maggie took a step closer. A frail man like this, standing on his own and looking so lost, naturally aroused her concern. "Would you like to sit down for a minute? It's a bit chilly out here, and you don't want to overdo it."

The man smiled gratefully. "That would be lovely. Thank you." His jolly undertone contrasted with the quiet sadness in his eyes. Maggie worried he was troubled by something deeper than momentary dizziness.

Maggie helped him over to a nearby bench, careful to support him as they walked. He wasn't frail, but he seemed like he could use the extra arm for balance. Once seated, he took a deep breath and exhaled slowly, his hands resting on his knees.

"You're very kind, miss," he said, his voice growing steadier as he settled in. "I don't usually find myself in such a state, but I suppose sometimes it just happens."

"Are you sure you're okay?" Maggie asked, her brow furrowed in concern. "Do you need me to call someone? A doctor, maybe?" As she said the word, she unconsciously cast a glance skyward.

The man waved dismissively. "No, no need for that. I think I just got a little too caught up in the season. It's been a while since I've been out for a stroll like this. The holiday rush... it can be a bit much for anyone, I suppose. Especially for someone my age."

Maggie smiled softly, understanding more than he knew. "It can definitely be overwhelming. But it's nice, too, isn't it? The lights, the decorations."

"Takes you back to childhood?"

"We never celebrated Christmas as children," she said matter-of-factly. "It was only after my parents moved away that a ... friend of mine suckered me in to the magic of the season. I still have a soft spot for it. And when you've been away for a while, it's magical. It reminds you of what really matters."

The old man's eyes twinkled with a knowing gleam, and for a moment, it felt like there was a deeper connection between them, one that transcended their brief interaction. This close, Maggie was even more struck by how much he looked like Santa—his rosy cheeks, the laughter lines around his eyes, the twinkle in his smile. But there was something else, the way he carried himself, that added to her feeling of magic in the air—like he belonged in this season of giving and joy in a way that felt beyond mere coincidence.

She realized she hadn't even introduced herself. "Oh, I'm sorry," she said, shaking herself from her thoughts. "My name's Maggie. Maggie Weitz."

The man chuckled softly, his beard shifting with the motion. "Maggie, yes. Lovely name. It's a pleasure to meet you. I'm... well, you can call me Nicholas. Nicholas Kringle."

"Nicholas Kringle. That's a very... festive name," she said with a wink. "Are you from around here, Nicholas?"

He nodded, though his eyes wandered as though he were thinking of something far away. "I've been around, yes. But I haven't visited this part of the world in many years. My travels have taken me elsewhere, and I only return when the season is right."

Maggie raised an eyebrow, intrigued by the way he spoke. She thought she was getting carried away, but the more he spoke, the more deeply she felt this spirit of the season. It was as if he didn't quite belong to this place, or perhaps didn't belong to any one place at all. "Where do you usually go?" she asked, trying to keep the conversation light.

"Oh, here and there," he replied, his smile broadening. "I go wherever I'm needed. Wherever the spirit of the season is most alive. I've always felt drawn to those moments."

Maggie smiled, sensing something wonderfully whimsical about Nicholas. "I know exactly what you mean. It's like there's a spark in the air, a kind of... warmth that everyone shares. It's nice, isn't it?"

He nodded, his gaze distant for a moment, then met her eyes again. "Yes, it's the kind of thing that keeps you going. Even when the world feels... colder than it should."

Maggie paused, considering his words. There was something profound about them, something that made her think he wasn't just an ordinary man. After her recent travels, and the invigoration she felt rediscovering hearth and home, it struck a particular chord with her. One harsh lesson of time travel was how cruel and uncaring the universe could be, and knowing that it took some effort to remember that people—particularly the inhabitants of this planet of hers—could be fundamentally decent.

The Doctor always saw that. And Nicholas saw that too, and she appreciated that now, more than she could express. He seemed so much like Santa Claus, that if Maggie didn't know better, she'd say it was. But he couldn't be.

If Maggie was being entirely honest, her childhood memories of Santa Claus were somewhat mixed—she remembered the awkward glances of her parents when she demanded to know why he had visited her friends but not her. And Hanukkah seemed a bit sparse by comparison. But once she was older and put it in perspective, she could see the charm of the figure. It helped when she figured out Santa didn't exist. He was just a symbol of the season.

Or didn't he? After all, this elderly gentleman seemed very like the real thing.

"Well, Nicholas," she said, "it was really nice meeting you. I'm glad I could help. I should head on my way now, but I hope you feel better soon. If you need anything else, just let me know. I'll be around town." A thought occurred to her, and she pulled a scrap of paper from her pocket and scribbled Rebekah's phone number on it. "You can reach me here."

He smiled warmly, his eyes twinkling. "Thank you, Maggie. Your kindness is a gift in itself. I'll be just fine. But don't be surprised if our paths cross again... after all, Christmas has a way of bringing people together."

Maggie stood and gave him a small wave, feeling she was leaving something behind but also taking a piece of the moment with her. As she walked down the snowy street, she couldn't shake the feeling that, despite all sensible logic, Nicholas Kringle was Santa Claus.

Later that evening at Simon and Rebekah's house the trio were in the midst of preparing the evening meal. The scent of roasted vegetables and freshly baked bread filled the kitchen as Maggie stirred a pot of soup—Simon's old family recipe for tomato-mushroom bisque—simmering on the stove. Simon leaned against the counter, sipping a mug of spiced cider, while Rebekah set the table, humming softly to a carol playing on the radio.

“You’re quiet,” Simon said, watching Maggie. “That’s not like you. Don’t tell me, Mom was on about me never visiting. I tell you, it’s a lie. Every three days I go—”

Maggie’s face turned ashen. “Oh, God, Simon. I completely forgot about going to the home. I’ve still got your cookies in my bag.”

“Ah, no worries. Tomorrow’s another day and so forth.” He noticed Maggie’s intense expression. “So, spill the beans, Weitz. What’s on your mind?”

Maggie hesitated, her spoon pausing mid-stir. “I met someone today.”

Rebekah raised an eyebrow, intrigued. “Someone? Do tell. Was he tall, dark, and handsome?”

“Just the opposite,” Maggie said, her lips twitching into a smile. “Older. White beard. Red coat. He called himself Nicholas Kringle.” As she described him, she saw Rebekah’s face curl into a skeptical frown—she thought Maggie was pulling her leg.

Simon chuckled, shaking his head. “Nicholas Kringle? Come on, Maggie, don’t tell me you ran into Santa Claus downtown.”

Maggie turned, ladle in hand, and gave him a mock-serious look. “I’m not saying he’s Santa Claus, but—”

Simon burst into laughter. “But you’re saying he’s Santa Claus. Got it.”

Rebekah joined in, but her laughter gentler, tinged with curiosity. “Wait, wait. What exactly happened? Did he give you a candy cane and tell you to be good this year?”

“Actually,” Maggie said, “he looked a little lost. I helped him to a bench, and we talked for a bit. He had this presence about him—calm, warm, but a little... I don’t know, otherworldly. Like he wasn’t just another guy out doing his Christmas shopping.”

“Otherworldly?” Simon said, raising his mug in a toast. “Maggie, you’ve been traveling with aliens too long.”

“Unless Santa *is* an alien?” Rebekah teased.

“Yeah. You see mystery in everything now.”

“I’m serious,” Maggie insisted. Her friends’ mockery was merely strengthening her belief. “He had this way of speaking, like he’d been around forever. He talked about traveling and being drawn to places to spread the spirit of the season ... and his name—Nicholas Kringle? It’s a little on the nose, don’t you think? It felt like he knew me, like he was supposed to meet me.”

Rebekah sat down, resting her chin on her hands. “Okay, let’s say you’re right. What does that mean? That you had a magical encounter with the actual Santa Claus? I mean, come on Maggie, we’re adults.”

Maggie shrugged, looking between her friends. “I know how it sounds. And trust me, I don’t believe in fairy tales any more than you do. But something about him... it felt real. He told me Christmas is about connections, about finding what really matters. And the way he said it, it was like he *was* Christmas.”

Simon grinned. “So he’s Santa Claus. Great. Should we leave out cookies tonight?”

“Laugh all you want,” Maggie said, pointing her ladle at him. “But you didn’t meet him. You didn’t see the way he smiled, or how he seemed to light up when we talked about the magic of the season.”

Rebekah, her tone softening, asked, “Do you think you’ll see him again?”

Maggie smiled faintly. “He said Christmas has a way of bringing people together. I guess I’ll just have to wait and see.”

Simon clapped a hand on her shoulder. “Well, Mags, if Santa Claus is real, you’d be the one to find him. Just don’t run off to the North Pole without saying goodbye.”

“Hah, hah, very funny,” Maggie said, laughing. But as her friends’ teasing continued, a small part of her held on to the possibility that maybe—just maybe—Nicholas Kringle was exactly who he seemed to be.

Chapter Three

Wednesday December 23

After a leisurely breakfast with Simon and Rebekah, Maggie decided to spend a few hours in town. She had checked in with Mr. Lee, who in his terse but affectionate way, had firmly refused her offers of helping him out. “Call me a Grinch, but I need as much time in this store as I can get. If my daughter makes me hear Alvin and those God-damned chipmunks one more time ...” His face lit up in his usual mischievous grin. “Having said that, I have sold my entire stock of snow-blowers. I’d call that a Christmas miracle. As for you Maggie ... get out there and take it easy!”

More snow was falling lightly, adding another seasonal layer to the town, and the streets were busier than the day before with people rushing to complete their holiday shopping. It felt good to wander through the small shops, perusing ornaments, scarves, and candles.

The scene made Maggie look back to growing up in Revelstoke, and irritation that her friends got presents, and families made such a big deal about the holidays. Come to think of it, that had been one of her early bonds with Rebekah, who also never got any presents because her parents were dedicated to raising a child without the specter of materialism that they both believed was destroying society. At least Maggie got to celebrate Hanukkah, and it remained something immeasurably important and special to her—but especially as she got older, her secret fascination and love for Christmas grew. When she married Ollie, he was happy to celebrate both holidays, and despite how much she missed him this time of year, she was happy there was room in her heart for them both.

The festive spirit was palpable, and she liked the idea of just being part of the holiday bustle, of feeling like she was back in the rhythm of things. By early afternoon, she ended up on Third Street, making her way toward the Sears department store—one of the oldest, most iconic buildings in Revelstoke, with its grand holiday window displays and the scent of pine filling the air inside. It was the kind of store where you could spend hours just looking at things, lost in nostalgia and small treasures.

Inside, the store was alive with Christmas music and the chatter of shoppers. As Maggie made her way toward the back, she was drawn by the large, festive display set up in the toy department—bright lights twinkling around a towering Christmas tree, colorful wreaths, and the sound of children’s laughter echoing through the space. There was a large red velvet chair at the center, and beneath a cloud of twinkling lights sat a man in that familiar red suit, his cheeks rosy, his beard white and fluffy—Santa Claus.

Maggie stopped short, her heart skipping a beat as she took in the sight. There, sitting in that enormous, gilded throne, surrounded by kids, was none other than Nicholas Kringle—the very same man she had met the day before in the park. She blinked, her breath catching in her throat.

“No, no, no. This is too much,” Maggie thought. But there was Nicholas playing Santa Claus. Maggie stood still for a moment, watching Nicholas interact with the children. His presence was magnetic, filled with warmth and kindness. He spoke to them with such genuine attention, as though each child’s wish was the most important thing in the world. There was something so natural about him in that moment, like he was made for this role, not just in the way he looked, but in the way he made everyone around him feel.

As the line of children thinned out, and the last few made their way toward their parents with big smiles and promises of sweet treats, Nicholas—Santa?—stepped away from the chair, stretching his arms and giving a little sigh. Maggie, her curiosity piqued, felt a sudden pull to move closer. She was drawn to him, to the energy he exuded, and she had to speak with him again.

With the lull in the children, it was time for Nicholas to take a short break. The helpers, looking as miserable as people always do when asked to don elf ears and pointed shoes, put up a sign saying that Santa would be back in 15 minutes. This gave Nicholas the opportunity to step behind a curtained off area behind the display. Maggie hesitated for a moment, then followed him.

Maggie pulled open the curtained entrance and stepped inside. She was surprised how much room there was. Looking around she saw Nicholas sitting on a stool, loosening the black belt around his waist. He had a big smile and he looked as if he had been enjoying himself.

“Maggie!” Nicholas said warmly, glancing up with that same spark of recognition in his eyes.

Maggie smiled, taken aback that he remembered her name so easily. “You caught me,” she said, sitting on a nearby bench. “I wasn’t expecting to see you here. Actually, I wasn’t expecting to see *Santa* here,” she added with a laugh.

Nicholas chuckled, his eyes twinkling. “Ah, well, it’s that time of year, isn’t it? Sometimes the world brings us together in unexpected ways.” He adjusted his red suit and looked at her with a curious expression. “What brings you by, Maggie?”

She paused, her eyes narrowing—not in suspicion, but in an attempt to unravel the mystery of the man in front of her. “I’m still trying to figure that out myself. When I saw you yesterday, I didn’t think much of it. Part me knows you can’t be ... but seeing you here, dressed as Santa—it just seems too... well, too much of a coincidence. I don’t mean to sound strange, but—are you *really* Santa Claus?”

Nicholas laughed, the sound rich and genuine, and he leaned forward. “Oh, Maggie, that’s quite a question. I suppose, in a way, I am. But not in the sense most people think. I’m

just a man, filling in for the regular fellow who usually takes this role here in town. He's not well this year, so I've been volunteered to help out."

Maggie frowned slightly. "But you're Nicholas Kringle... like your name—"

He smiled, his expression becoming a little more wistful. "Ah, yes, my name. It's an old one, you see. I'm not really one for long explanations, but yes—Nicholas Kringle. Quite a coincidence, isn't it? But it's my name, and it's one I've carried for many years. As you can imagine, with a name like that I've always had a... connection with this time of year. Some might say it's in my blood." He paused, giving a quiet chuckle, as though recalling something from a distant memory. "But as for Santa? I'm not *the* Santa. You know I can't be. I'm just someone keeping the spirit alive."

"Good for you, Nicholas." Maggie nodded slowly, still feeling she wasn't getting the full story. "So, what do you do when you're not playing Santa?" she asked, her curiosity getting the better of her.

Nicholas looked down for a moment, as if considering. When his eyes met hers, his tone softened. "I live in that retirement home nearby. It's a quiet place, and I've found some peace there. But in the winter, I like to get out when I can. There's something about the cold air and the lights that just calls to me, especially when the world is still and the spirit of Christmas is strong."

Maggie was surprised by his admission. There was something profoundly humble in the way he spoke, and for a moment, she could see beyond the Santa suit, beyond the jolly exterior, to the man who lived with a quiet wisdom and a connection to something far greater than just the season itself.

"You live in a retirement home?" she repeated softly, trying to process everything. She thought of Simon's mother June, and how she intended to drop in today. But instead, she ended up here—almost as if she was meant to. "I would have never guessed. You have this... well, this energy about you. Like you belong in the middle of all this magic."

Nicholas smiled again, the kindness in his eyes not fading. "I do my best to bring a little bit of that magic with me wherever I go. But in the end, the true magic of Christmas is not in the presents or the decorations. It's in the people. The kindness we show to one another. That's where the real spirit lives."

Maggie nodded, her heart full. That summed up her feelings perfectly. She had come here looking for answers, and in a way, she had found them—not just about Nicholas, but about what really mattered. It wasn't about who he was or what he was doing; it was about how he made people feel.

She smiled at him warmly. "Well, I'm glad I ran into you, Nicholas. You're doing a lot more than just filling in for someone. You're keeping the magic alive."

Nicholas winked, standing up with a little groan. "I'm just doing my part, Maggie. But remember—Christmas magic is never really gone. It's just waiting to be found in all the little moments. Nice to see you again Maggie, but I think it's time I head back to work."

Maggie watched as he returned to his Santa seat, settling in for the next wave of children. She felt a quiet joy settle over her, as though she had been given a glimpse into something timeless and true.

The Christmas Market was alive with the hum of holiday cheer. Strings of twinkling lights illuminated the snow-dusted streets, and the scent of roasted chestnuts and mulled cider wafted through the air. Booths lined the marketplace, each brimming with festive wares—hand-carved ornaments, delicate glass snowflakes, knitted scarves, and steaming mugs of hot chocolate. At the bandstand at the end of the block, a group of carolers were braving the dropping temperatures, and wearing some chintzy-looking top hats and Dickensian ulsters, to serenade the townsfolk with a classic repertoire of “Jingle Bells”, “The Twelve Days of Christmas”, “The Huron Carol”, and more.

Simon was practically bouncing with excitement as he walked ahead of Maggie and Rebekah. “I can’t believe we finally made it! This is the year I find *the* ornament,” he declared, scanning the rows of booths like a treasure hunter on a mission. “I know it’s out there, I can see it in my mind’s eye ...”

“You say that every year,” Rebekah teased, nudging Maggie with a grin. “Since high school in fact!” At the time it had been a constant source of mockery how childlike he became at this time of year, but to his credit, Simon never backed down—neither then, nor now.

“Yes, but this time I *mean* it!” Simon replied, undeterred. He marched toward the nearest table, inspecting a display of intricate wooden carvings.

Maggie chuckled as she strolled behind them, taking in the atmosphere. She was charmed at the way strangers exchanged warm smiles, how laughter carried through the chilly air. It was like stepping into a snow globe, and Maggie felt her spirits lift.

Then her breath caught as she turned her head. Weaving through the crowd was a familiar figure in a long wine-coloured coat. His snow-white beard gleamed under the soft glow of the lights, and his movements were unhurried, as if he were a part of the scene.

“Simon! Rebekah!” Maggie grabbed their arms, her voice urgent. “It’s him! I saw Nicholas!”

Rebekah frowned, sharing a bemused glance with Simon. “Maggie, are you still on about that man you met downtown? You really think he’s Santa?”

“I’m telling you, it’s him! He’s here, at the market!”

Simon raised an eyebrow. “Maggie, I think you’ve been drinking too much cider. You’re seeing things.”

But Maggie was adamant, her eyes darting through the throngs of shoppers. “I know what I saw.”

They indulged her, following her gaze, but the figure was nowhere to be found. Rebekah patted her arm gently. “Maybe the Christmas magic is getting to you. Let’s keep looking around.”

With a sigh, Maggie let them steer her back toward the booths. She tried to focus on the twinkling ornaments and cheerful vendors, but her mind kept returning to that fleeting glimpse of Nicholas.

And then they turned a corner—and there he was.

Nicholas Kringle stood at a booth, examining a collection of hand-painted figurines. He looked exactly as Maggie remembered: the rosy cheeks, the twinkle in his eye, the kind smile that seemed to radiate warmth.

Maggie froze, grabbing Simon and Rebekah’s sleeves. “It’s him. Look! Right there.”

Simon and Rebekah followed her gaze, their skepticism melting into surprise. “Okay,” Simon murmured, “I’ll admit, he *does* have a certain... Santa vibe.”

Rebekah leaned closer to Maggie. “Are you going to talk to him, or should we just follow him around like spies?”

Before Maggie could answer, Nicholas turned—and their eyes met. His face lit up with recognition, and he gave a big wave. “Maggie! How wonderful to see you again.”

Maggie felt her cheeks flush as she stepped forward. “Nicholas! I wasn’t expecting to see you here.”

Rebekah poked her in the back, whispering, “Introduce us, already!”

“Oh, right,” Maggie stammered. “Nicholas, these are my friends Simon and Rebekah. Simon, Rebekah—this is Nicholas Kringle.”

Nicholas tipped his head politely, his smile warm. “It’s a pleasure to meet you both.”

Simon extended his hand, his expression equal parts amused and curious. “Likewise. And that’s your real name?”

He nodded.

“So, Nicholas, what brings you to the market tonight?”

“Oh, just enjoying the festivities,” Nicholas said with a chuckle. “There’s something about a Christmas market that always feels so... timeless.”

The group chatted for a few minutes, the conversation flowing easily. Nicholas seemed to have a way of drawing people in, his words full of gentle wisdom and humor. Both Simon and Rebekah, who had started the evening teasing Maggie about her belief in Santa, found themselves smiling and nodding along, understanding totally and questioning their own belief.

Simon clapped his hands together. “You know, all this talk is making me thirsty. How about some hot chocolate? My treat.”

Fiona Stornaway had trundled her coffee stand, usually found on Benson Street, to the center of the action. Simon duly bought four steaming cups of cocoa and settled at a small picnic table, one of a row erected near the edge of the market. As they sipped their drinks, Nicholas regaled them with stories of Christmases past, his voice rich with nostalgia. They were thrilling to hear, and it was only later that Maggie reflected on how similar they were to the Doctor’s anecdotes of meeting Cleopatra or Napoleon Bonaparte. When he talked about the Roman Saturnalias, Bethlehem, and the exchanges of gifts in the Elizabethan court, it was not a scholarly interest, but like hearing an eyewitness account.

Perhaps, though, Maggie was simply reading too much into this, as she seemed to be doing with everything about this man. She observed Rebekah and Simon, trying to get a sense of their reactions to Nicholas.

Rebekah leaned closer, her eyes studying him intently. “You know, Nicholas, you have this... quality about you. Like you’ve been part of every Christmas ever.”

Nicholas chuckled, his eyes twinkling. Though he must have heard that often, he always seemed bashful when it was pointed out. “Well, isn’t that the magic of the season? It has a way of connecting us all.”

Rebekah couldn’t resist pressing the point. “You really believe in all of this? The spirit of Christmas, the magic, the traditions?”

Nicholas smiled, his gaze warm and knowing. “I don’t just believe in it, Rebekah. I live it. It’s everything to me.”

As the evening wound down, the carolers finished their set, and the shoppers dispersed, Nicholas set his empty cup on the table and stood. “Well, I should be on my way. Thank you for the company—and the hot chocolate.”

“It was our pleasure,” Maggie said, rising to her feet. “It was so nice to see you again.”

Nicholas turned to her, his expression gentle. “And to meet your wonderful friends. You’ve chosen well Maggie.”

He started to walk away, but then he paused and looked back at Simon. “Oh, by the way, that ornament you’re looking for? You’ll find it at McVittie’s Christmas Emporium, aisle three.” Simon’s jaw dropped as Nicholas disappeared into the crowd.

Simon’s jaw dropped again as he discovered, in that precise aisle, the exact ornament he had so longed for. Maggie and Rebekah could hardly credit it—it was nothing more than a gaudily painted wooden angel with crude wire wings—but he lit up like the child he was inside when he saw it.

Outside the store, Simon’s thoughts turned to the man who had led them there. “How did he know that?”

The three friends exchanged wide-eyed looks, their minds racing. There was only one explanation.

“He’s got to be Santa,” Rebekah whispered.

The three of them stood there for a moment, the snow falling softly around them, before bursting into laughter. The night had turned into something extraordinary—something they’d never forget.

Chapter Four

Thursday December 24th

Maggie groggily pulled the covers tighter around her, savoring the warmth and comfort of the bed. She could hear the distant sound of the telephone ringing, muffled by the walls. The voice on the other end sounded low, too far away to make out the words clearly, but Maggie wasn't concerned—at least not yet.

She knew Simon and Rebekah were already awake; they were always up early, no matter the day. Maggie, on the other hand, was more of a night owl, enjoying the rare opportunity to sleep in. She wondered briefly if Simon had made breakfast, or if Rebekah was already planning something for the day. But that thought quickly faded as the muffled conversation continued.

The phone call went on for a few moments longer, and Maggie couldn't help but wonder who was on the other end. It didn't sound like a casual chat, the tone sounded too serious, the words too quiet and measured. Then, just as quickly as it began, the conversation ended.

Maggie heard the faint click of the phone being put back down, followed by the soft padding of footsteps heading toward her bedroom. Before she could process what was happening, there was a knock at the door.

"Come in," Maggie called, blinking the last traces of sleep from her eyes.

The door creaked open, and Rebekah's head peeked around the corner. She looked a little tense, her expression more serious than usual.

"Are you awake?" Rebekah asked, her voice soft.

Maggie stretched and nodded, still rubbing her eyes. "I am now. What's going on?"

Rebekah hesitated, stepping into the room but her eyes avoiding Maggie's for a moment.

"It's... it's about Nicholas."

Maggie's brow furrowed. "What about him? Is he okay?"

Rebekah let out a shaky breath before continuing, her voice low. "That was the RCMP on the phone. Nicholas was arrested last night. Must have been not long after we said goodnight to him."

Maggie's heart skipped a beat, the suddenness of the words catching her off guard. "Arrested? For what?"

Rebekah's face tightened, clearly struggling with the news herself. "They said he was caught shoplifting."

"That doesn't sound like him," Maggie said, her voice strained. "Are you sure? I mean, there must be some mistake."

Rebekah nodded, her face clouded with worry. "I don't know, Maggie. I can't believe it either, but that's what the police said."

Maggie swung her legs over the side of the bed, feeling the cool morning air rush in as she stood. She looked at Rebekah, her resolve starting to harden. "I need to go down there. I can't let him sit in jail without knowing what's going on."

Rebekah's eyes brightened at Maggie's determination. "I thought you'd want to go. We'll come too."

By the time Maggie, Simon and Rebekah arrived at the RCMP station, Maggie could feel her anxiety rising. In the short time she had known Nicholas, she'd really grown to like him.

The parking lot outside the building was empty, the snow clinging to the ground, adding a thick quiet to the early morning.

Inside, the RCMP detachment smelled faintly of coffee and cleaning supplies, the brisk outside air seeping in through the door every time someone passed through. Despite the early hour, the trio were surprised to find the station was busy with officers moving through the hallway, but it felt colder than usual as they approached the desk. Maggie couldn't stop her hands from shaking as they walked up to the front desk where a sergeant was working, his face stern as he shuffled papers.

Maggie spoke first, her voice tight with emotion. "We're here to see Nicholas Kringle. He's been arrested, and we'd like to know what's going on."

The sergeant looked up impassively. "You're here to see Mr. Kringle, huh? He's in holding right now. We're processing him. You'll need to wait a bit before you can speak with him."

"Why is here? Why has he been arrested?"

The sergeant cleared his throat and began to explain. "We received numerous calls late last night that a white-haired elderly man in a dark red coat had been seen taking merchandise from various stores downtown, loading them into a large horse-drawn sleigh. We sent a detachment out to investigate. He claimed he was delivering gifts to people in town—something about fulfilling a duty. But when our officers pressed him about why he was taking the items without paying, he got defensive. Started going on about how the season was about giving, not about money. Eventually, he resisted being escorted from the scene. If there's anything to clear up, we'll sort it during the questioning. Theft is serious, no matter the time of year."

“But he *couldn't* have taken anything!” Maggie protested, her voice shaking with frustration. “I don’t care what the employee says—he wouldn’t do that.”

Simon and Rebekah exchanged a glance, and Simon’s voice was gentle but firm. “Maggie, you’ve only known him for three or four days. I know you want to believe the best in him, but we really don’t know anything about him.”

Maggie recoiled from Simon’s words. “No, Simon. This isn’t right. Nicholas just doesn’t seem like the type to steal anything. He’s... he’s been so kind, so warm. You both felt the same way last night, I know!” She turned to Rebekah, pleading with her. “Tell him, Rebekah. You saw how he was at the market? He didn’t do anything wrong.”

Rebekah opened her mouth to say something but paused, clearly trying to choose her words carefully. “Maggie, I understand you want to protect him, but we don’t know the full story here. There could be things you don’t know about him. We’re not saying he’s guilty, but we can’t just ignore the fact that he was caught in the act by the RCMP.”

Maggie felt the sting of their words, but she wasn’t ready to let them go. “I can’t, and I won’t believe Nicholas would do such a thing. I want to hear his side of the story at least.”

Simon gave a resigned sigh but squeezed her shoulder gently.

The sergeant informed them, “You’ll be able to speak with him, but you’ll have to wait in the lounge area while we process him.”

Maggie sat down, her hands pressed tightly against her legs, trying to keep herself steady. Nicholas couldn’t be guilty. There had to be a reason – something that would explain all of this.

Time seemed slow to a crawl as Maggie, Simon and Rebekah sat waiting. Though she appreciated her friends’ loyalty, Maggie wondered if she would feel less anxious if she could be alone. Somehow, every attempt she made to think over the sergeant’s words got muddled and confused, and she could think of no other way to interpret the allegations.

Finally, the desk sergeant emerged from behind the counter. “All right, Miss Weitz, you can speak with Mr. Kringle now. Follow me.”

Maggie stood and followed the sergeant down the narrow hallway, her eyes flicking to every officer they passed.

The sergeant led her to a small, windowless, dimly lit room with a metal table and a couple of chairs. Nicholas was sitting in one of the chairs, slumped over, his hands still cuffed in front of him, very different from the vibrant, warm-hearted “Santa” she’d met the day before. Nicholas looked fragile, his shoulders hunched, his face pale, his eyes wide and confused—their twinkle gone.

“Mr. Kringle?” Maggie said gently. “Nicholas, are you all right? What’s happened?” Maggie felt a sharp twist in her stomach. “Nicholas, it’s Maggie, Maggie Weitz.”

His face creased in a frown as if trying to focus on her. He blinked a couple of times. “Maggie?”

“Yes, that’s right Nicholas. Maggie.”

The sound of her voice, and her gentle tone, jogged his memory. “Oh Maggie. It’s so nice to see you, to see a comforting face.”

Maggie reached across and squeezed his cuffed hand. “What’s this nonsense about you stealing?”

Nicholas cleared his throat and began to slowly speak. “I... I don’t remember.” He trailed off, and he looked down at his cuffed hands, as if ashamed. “They... they say I stole a bunch of things from the stores. I didn’t steal anything. I’ve never stolen anything in my life. I ... I think I wanted to get some things for my friends. A few little presents. I was coming out of the Sears store, when two officers came up to me. I tried to explain, but they wouldn’t listen to me. They accused me of stealing the items. I’m afraid I did the one thing I swore I’d never do.”

“What was that?” Maggie asked.

Nicholas continued, “I lost my temper. They wouldn’t listen to what I was telling them. I shook my fist at one of the officers and... well, the next thing I knew I was in the back of the squad car in handcuffs. I’m so ashamed.”

“Oh Nicholas.” Maggie’s heart went out to him. Maggie paused before speaking her next words. “Nicholas... did you pay for the items you took?”

“Pay?” he asked sounding a bit taken aback.

“Yes, pay? Did you pay, leave money for purchasing the items?”

Nicholas stared at Maggie. He had no idea what she was talking about.

Maggie spoke gently as she explained further. “But, Nicholas, you can’t just take things without paying for them.”

Nicholas hesitated, his face a mixture of confusion and regret. “I saw all the beautiful gifts and thought about how much joy they would bring. I wanted to share that joy. Isn’t that what Christmas is all about?”

“Yes, that’s true Nicholas, but you can’t go around taking whatever you like,” Maggie replied.

Nicholas looked genuinely puzzled. “But... where I come from, gifts are things you give. It’s how we’ve always done it.”

Maggie felt they were going around in circles. “But ... but what about money?”

“Money never entered into it,” Nicholas replied bluntly.

Maggie’s heart sank. His words were so sincere, so earnest but she really felt Nicholas didn’t understand what she was trying to explain to him. Worse, if he started talking about not understanding money, then his credibility really would be shot. She had seen more than a few post-capitalist utopias on other worlds and times thanks to the Doctor, but they were a long way away. This was the 1990s; about as materialistic as could be.

Maggie was still working out what to say when the sergeant stepped into the room, clearing his throat. “Your time’s up, Miss Weitz,” he said curtly.

“Nicholas, listen to me,” Maggie said firmly but kindly. “I believe you. But the people here—they wouldn’t understand if you explained things the way you just said. You need to make clear you weren’t trying to hurt anyone and you simply made a mistake.”

Nicholas sighed, his shoulders slumping. “I’ve caused a mess, haven’t I?”

“You’ve caused a misunderstanding,” Maggie corrected. This seemed to offer the defeated old man little consolation.

As she turned to leave, Nicholas suddenly summoned up a reserve of energy and blurted out, “Please... don’t let them forget about me!”

“I won’t,” she said firmly. “Hang in there, okay? I’ll be back soon.”

Maggie stepped into the hallway. She so wanted to believe that Nicholas was innocent, but after speaking with him, she had her doubts. Earlier she had wanted to believe he was Santa, and part of her still did, but this twisted that belief into something sour. She had grown to like this funny little man quite a lot, but something was off. He didn't seem to understand the concept of paying for things. Frankly, on its face it seemed to confirm that he was guilty—or at least, if he offered that as a defence, nobody would take him seriously. But how was he so genuinely confused about it? It was odd, and Maggie wasn't sure what to think.

As Maggie returned to the waiting room, she noticed a middle-aged woman, with tightly curled hair and a blue checked woolen winter coat, sitting with Simon and Rebekah. She had the solemn air of someone who bore a great deal of responsibility. The three of them were deep in conversation.

Simon looked up and beckoned Maggie over. "Maggie, this is Dr. Susan Miller. She's the head psychiatrist at the Brewer Seniors' Home, where Nicholas lives."

Dr. Miller extended her hand to shake Maggie's. "It's so nice to finally meet you Miss Weitz. I've heard a lot about you from Nicholas. I came right here as soon as I was informed that Nicholas had been arrested."

Maggie felt a moment of relief. "Thank you for coming Dr. Miller."

"I gather you've just spoken with Nicholas..."

"Yes, that's right," replied Maggie. "I'm a little concerned about him. I know I've only known him for a short time, but he's really grown on me. He's such a sweet man. I just don't understand why he'd steal anything."

Dr. Miller smiled at Maggie. "Look, is there somewhere we can sit down? I think there's something you need to know about Nicholas."

Rebekah spoke up, "There's a quiet area over in the corner..."

"... and there's a few vacant chairs as well," continued Simon.

Once they were all seated, Dr. Miller wasted no time getting to the point. "Nicholas's situation is a bit... complicated."

Maggie leaned forward. "What do you mean, Doctor?"

Dr. Miller sighed softly. "Nicholas is, in many ways, a very kind and gentle man. He's always been well-liked by the other residents at the home. But... he does have a condition. He lives in a kind of delusion that he is Santa Claus."

Maggie blinked. "Yes, we've noticed that." She felt embarrassed to add it was a delusion she shared.

"We believe it's a result of some cognitive decline he's experienced over the years, possibly linked to aging or an undiagnosed condition. He's harmless, but he does, at times, get confused about reality. He truly believes he's on a mission to spread Christmas joy, and that's why he does things like buying presents for the residents or dressing up as Santa. It's part of who he is."

Maggie was silent for a long moment, processing Dr. Miller's words. Nicholas believes he's Santa Claus. While it explained his name and so much of his behavior, it also made everything more complicated.

"But he's harmless, right? He couldn't be a danger to anyone?" Simon asked.

"Not at all," Dr. Miller reassured her. "He's very gentle and well-liked by everyone. He has no history of aggression, and he's always cared deeply for the residents. His delusion doesn't seem to hinder his ability to live a fulfilling life. In fact, many of the residents

appreciate his company and his gifts. It makes them happy. It's just that sometimes, he doesn't always understand the reality of situations outside the home. For example, it is sad, but entirely possible that he may not fully grasp that taking items from a store without paying could be seen as suspicious, even if he's paid for them. He may also misunderstand interactions with people who don't know him as well."

"So, he wasn't trying to steal anything," Maggie murmured, more to herself. "He was just trying to do something nice for the people he cares about."

"Exactly," Dr. Miller said. "Nicholas isn't a criminal. He's just someone who lives with a mental condition."

Maggie let out a slow breath. "Then we just need to clear up this misunderstanding," she said, more determined than ever.

Dr. Miller gave her a reassuring smile. "I'll help however I can, Maggie. I can provide any documentation or assistance to explain Nicholas's condition to the authorities. Let me talk to the desk sergeant and explain things. Hopefully we can get Nicholas out of here and back home as quickly as possible."

Maggie felt a surge of gratitude toward the doctor. "Thank you. This means everything to me. I won't let him be forgotten."

As Dr. Miller went over the front desk, Maggie felt the clarity that had been missing since Nicholas had been arrested. She had answers now.

The officer overseeing Nicholas' arrest – Superintendent Tornante—had come from his office, and was speaking with Dr. Miller at the front desk when the doors swung open and a boisterous group of fifteen seniors entered the lobby, carrying placards and chanting "Free Nicholas Kringle". Simon double-took when he saw his mother, June, a lively and agile woman in her late eighties, among the protestors. All eyes in the station turned and stared at the group. Passers-by outside were also peeking in.

Tornante stepped out from behind the front desk. "What's the meaning of this? You can't come in here with those placards chanting at the top of your lungs."

The crowd didn't flinch at the superintendent's stern tone. One of the seniors, a small woman with a fiery silver mane stepped forward and pointed an accusing finger at the officer.

"We demand justice!" she declared, her voice carrying the weight of decades of frustration. "Nicholas Kringle is innocent! You've got the wrong man!"

Her words were met with a chorus of agreement. A few others waved their placards, some of which read, "Free Santa!" and "Justice for Nicholas!"

Tornante's eyes narrowed at Dr. Miller, who had remained silent by the front desk, looking both bewildered and amused. The lobby seemed increasingly cramped with this crowd and their large placards. She had a helpless expression herself—the protestors were barring her way to the exit.

"This is a police station, not a protest site. I'm going to have to ask you all to leave, immediately."

But the silver-haired woman shook her head, unmoved. "We won't leave until you do right by Nicholas Kringle. We know he's been framed. Everyone in this town knows it!"

A couple of the other seniors began chanting again, their voices growing louder. "Free Kringle! Free Kringle!"

Tornante turned back to Dr. Miller, his face hardening. Dr. Miller blinked, trying to maintain her composure. "As I was explaining before they entered, it's Nicholas Kringle. He's well known in the community."

"Known for what?" Tornante asked, his tone sharp. "Being Santa Claus? All I know is the charges against him. You're telling me this man is the one everyone's rallying behind?"

At this point Maggie pushed her way back through the crowd. "Superintendent, Dr. Miller can explain everything. Nicholas, Mr. Kringle is not guilty of the charges against him."

He turned back to Dr. Miller, furious that a bunch of octogenarians had so successfully disrupted his detachment. "Dr. Miller, you've got some explaining to do."

He turned back toward his office with Dr. Miller following.

The group of seniors gathered around Maggie, Simon and Rebekah and June introduced them all.

"Mom, you've known this Nicholas Kringle guy and you never mentioned him?" Simon asked her.

"Oh, Simon, I'm sure I have. Probably just because you don't visit me enough ..." she teasingly scolded.

Maggie was thrilled to see so many residents come out to support Nicholas. It was definite proof of how much people thought and cared about him.

It couldn't have been more than five minutes when both the superintendent and Dr. Miller returned to the lobby. The crowd were chatting away and didn't see the two return.

Tornante cleared his throat. Altogether the crowd turned around and faced him. "After conversing with Dr. Miller, the charges against Mr. Kringle have been dropped. He is free to go."

The crowd cheered.

A moment later Nicholas came out.

The crowd were thrilled to see Nicholas. Cheers went up. Maggie rushed forward and swung her arms around Nicholas in a hug. "I knew you were innocent, Nicholas."

Simon, Rebekah and the group of seniors crowded around Nicholas.

Dr. Miller stepped forward. "I hate to break up this happy occasion but I think it's time we get Mr. Kringle back home."

And with that, the group filed out of the police station.

By the time they returned, it was far too late for Christmas dinner. Simon forlornly reheated some of the bisque, and Rebekah put together a few sandwiches with the leftover bread. "Never mind," she assured him. "Better to do it tomorrow anyway. Why not, instead of having your mom over here, we take it over to her at the home? Especially with Nicholas free, they'll all be in a celebratory mood."

"That's a wonderful idea!"

They stayed up late into the night—on this most magical of nights it felt appropriate. They talked about old memories and shared jokes from their past. They remembered Ollie

and looked ahead to what they most anticipated about Christmas, and about the coming year 1999. Rebekah and Simon both implored Maggie not to give anything away.

It was only much later, in the small hours of the night, that Maggie awoke, restless and unable to get back to sleep. How ironic that she had been totally free of the adventurous tension of the Doctor's life, and yet her relaxation was catching up with her.

But it was the familiar lure of a mystery, just like her friends had said. She thought back to the superintendent's face when he announced the charges were dropped. His voice had been flat and affectless. He looked blank-eyed ... hypnotized almost. And then there was that eyewitness report of Nicholas taking off in a sleigh ...

She couldn't help feeling she chose to believe this business was resolved happily, but there was something more to it, something she couldn't see.

Chapter Five

Friday December 25th

The Brewer Seniors Assisted Living facility was alive with warmth and cheer, a stark contrast to the frigid crisp air and icy snow blanketing the world outside. Twinkling lights adorned every corner of the common room, and the air was rich with the smell of pine, gingerbread, and mulled cider. Dr. Miller, who had been a quiet pillar of strength during Nicholas' ordeal, was chatting warmly with a group of residents. She looked less severe than she had the day before at the station, her laughter blending with that group of carolers from the Christmas market, singing softly in the background.

Simon, Rebekah, and Maggie bustled about, setting up the festive dinner they had brought with them to share. As they had missed their traditional Christmas Eve dinner, they were determined to make the day special instead—not just for themselves but for everyone in the home. Plates of roasted turkey, glazed ham, mashed potatoes, Brussels sprouts, assorted roast vegetables, stuffing and an array of desserts quickly filled the tables, and the residents clapped in delight at the spread.

June was sitting at a corner table, smiling and studying the festive scene with sparkling eyes. When Simon approached her with Rebekah and Maggie, her face lit up. "Hello sweetheart", she said giving Simon and Rebekah a hug each and a peck on the cheek. June was happy to see Maggie with them as well. "Ah, Maggie," she said, her tone teasing but warm, "it's so nice you finally made it to visit me. Took you long enough."

Maggie laughed awkwardly, slightly flustered but touched by the sentiment. "Merry Christmas, June," she replied, squeezing the older woman's hand.

"Better than this son of mine," she teased. "I was supposed to come over to you, but instead you come to me, and all these other people."

"The more the merrier, Mom, surely," Simon suggested. "And besides, every three days, I'm telling you—"

"I blame falling in love," June said happily, her eyes lighting up at the same time as Rebekah's.

"Not a bad excuse, I hope," Rebekah replied.

As the evening unfolded, the room buzzed with chatter, laughter, and the sound of gift wrap being torn as small presents exchanged hands. In the midst of it all, Nicholas, clad in his familiar red suit but looking far more relaxed, approached Maggie. There was something different, not only about him—he seemed more reserved and detached—but also the other residents. They did not look up to greet him; indeed, they didn't notice him enter at all.

"Can we talk for a moment?" he asked Maggie, his voice soft but insistent.

The two stepped out into the quiet hallway, away from the festive crowd. The faint strains of "Silent Night" filtered through the door as Nicholas turned to Maggie.

"I owe you an enormous thank you," he began. "For standing by me during everything—my arrest, the questions, the protests. I know it wasn't easy, and I'm very sorry if I brought any trouble into your life."

Maggie shook her head, her eyes earnest. "Nicholas, you don't need to apologize. You've done more than enough to prove who you are—not Santa Claus exactly, but someone who genuinely cares about spreading joy. That's what matters to me. These past few days... they've reminded me that there's still so much goodness in the world. For that, I'll always be grateful."

Nicholas hesitated, a small, almost wistful smile on his lips. "You think I'm not Santa Claus?" he asked gently.

Maggie tilted her head. "Well, not really. Like we talked about. I mean—"

Nicholas quickly cut her off, his voice lowering conspiratorially. "The truth is, Maggie, I'm not from here."

Maggie smiled at Nicholas. "I know that. We've talked about that before."

Obviously Maggie didn't really understand what Nicholas was trying to tell her. "No, it's much further away than that."

Maggie started to feel confused. "Nicholas, what are you trying to say?"

Nicholas knew there was no other way to say to Maggie what he had to say other than just coming straight out with what he had to say. "I'm not from Earth."

Maggie blinked. "Not... from Earth?"

"This may be hard to understand, but I mean it literally. I'm what you would call an alien. I'm from another world, far away." Nicholas watched her reaction. Perhaps Maggie wasn't as shocked, thanks to her friendship with the Doctor.

Yet despite that, it had been Rebekah who had hit the nail on the head. "Santa Claus is an alien," Maggie repeated, remembering the comment from three days ago.

"I've been coming to this planet, always at Christmas-time, on and off for hundreds of years. It was my grandfather who told me stories of this place—a planet where, once a year, people celebrate by giving gifts and spreading kindness. It was beautiful to me, especially because where I come from, we don't have celebrations like this. So I decided to see it for myself. And I've kept coming back, whenever I can, to experience the magic of Christmas. I dress as Santa, spread some cheer, and then return to my home planet. I can't stay long. I wish I could, but ... it makes the whole rest of the year back home worthwhile, I can tell you."

Maggie's eyes widened, but she didn't interrupt. "What is your world like, Nicholas?"

"Nothing like this. It's neither hot nor cold, and totally barren. To you, its atmosphere would be poison, its surface bubbling pits of acid. And my people don't believe in celebration. It isn't a very fun place."

"Why do you have to go back then? Why don't you stay?"

“I can’t. This physical form degrades after a short time; I’m more usually a ball of gas.”

“Oh! Anything like the Plizot Assembly?” Maggie asked eagerly.

Nicholas blinked, and nodded with a chuckle. “You are a remarkable human being, Maggie. But I wanted to tell you, before I go, that the joy I found here in your home felt deeper, more real, even than Christmas has done for a long while. Perhaps it’s because of you, or everything that’s happened. But now that my work here is done, it’s time for me to go home.” He sighed. “It feels so nice to admit it to someone. I never have, you know, but somehow I just knew you of all people would believe me.”

Maggie nodded slowly, her travels in time and space with the Doctor giving her the perspective to accept Nicholas’ incredible story. She’d seen so much during that time. Why couldn’t Nicholas be what he was now telling her? In fact, she scolded herself for not guessing it sooner. “Thank you for trusting me with the truth. And for everything else. It’s been wonderful to know you.”

They hugged briefly, a silent understanding passing between them.

Nicholas pulled back, his expression full of sorrow. “When I leave, no one will remember me—not Simon, not Rebekah, not the residents, not even Dr. Miller. That’s the way it has to be. But you... I have a feeling you of all people might. Emotional connections have a way of defying rules.”

“I hope so.” Maggie smiled faintly, her eyes glistening. “Goodbye, Nicholas. I hope you find joy wherever you go.”

As they stepped outside into the snow-covered garden, a shimmering red sleigh, pulled by eight reindeer, descended from the sky. The sleigh’s golden trim glowed against the darkness, and the sight took Maggie’s breath away. She grinned as widely and as giddily as a child. “Of course ... what else did I expect?”

Nicholas climbed aboard, turning to wave one last time. “Merry Christmas, Maggie,” he called out as the sleigh lifted into the night. The sound of jingling bells filled the air as the sleigh soared higher and higher until it disappeared among the stars.

Maggie stood in the snow, staring at the empty sky, her heart full of wonder. Perhaps Nicholas really was Santa Claus after all.

When she returned inside, the warmth of the room embraced her. Simon noticed her first. “Everything okay?” he asked.

Maggie nodded, her lips curving into a soft smile.

“You were gone for ages. Where were you?” he asked.

“Saying goodbye to Nicholas,” she replied.

Simon frowned. “Nicholas who?”

Maggie looked around, to see Rebekah and June equally mystified.

Maggie paused for a moment, her smile deepening. “Never mind. Let’s just enjoy Christmas.”

And with that, she joined the laughter and joy of the gathering, the magic of the night lingering in her heart.

Epilogue

Back to the Vortex

Maggie stood in the backyard of Simon and Rebekah's home, the crisp late December air nipping at her cheeks as she gazed one last time at the familiar surroundings of Revelstoke. It had been a memorable Christmas—a time of joy, reflection, and unexpected adventure. She'd come home to find comfort in the familiar, and yet, in the process, had discovered the kind of magic only where being home being with loved ones truly taught her to cherish her time with the Doctor.

As the Christmas lights twinkled softly in the distance, Maggie felt a bittersweet pang in her chest. Despite the temptation of a New Year's Eve party at their friend Tracy's house, Maggie had decided she was ready to go. She was glad to have been with the people who meant the most to her, but she also knew it was time to continue her journey, time to get back to the Doctor and the incredible adventures they shared together.

Pulling the small device from her pocket, Maggie ran her hands along its panels, then held it up and, self-consciously whistled in the night air. The little police box blinked its lamp again, then emitted a soft, whirring sound, and in an instant, the familiar groan of the TARDIS sounded from behind her.

She turned with a smile, watching as the blue police box materialized in the yard, its sides shimmering with the energy of time and space. It stood there like an old friend, offering an escape from the ordinary, ready to whisk her away to the next incredible adventure.

Maggie felt a wave of excitement wash over her. She was going back to the Doctor.

Simon and Rebekah appeared beside her, both smiling warmly, their faces filled with understanding.

"We're going to miss you, Maggie," Simon said, his voice laced with fondness.

Rebekah pulled Maggie into a tight hug. "Don't be a stranger, okay? Let us know how you're doing. And tell the Doctor we said hello!"

Maggie laughed and hugged them both back. "You two are the best. I'll be back. And you can always count on me to send a postcard from the future. Or the past."

“Make sure you use a rare stamp!” Rebekah suggested. “We could use a bit of cash after all this Christmas spending!”

“You’d say that anyway, with those anarchist parents of yours—”

“Anarchist? They just wanted to give me better values—”

Maggie shook her head at their good-natured bickering, and with one last wave, she turned toward the TARDIS. She could hear the soft hum of the time machine, its promise of new adventures and unexplored worlds calling her. As she reached for the door, she paused for a moment, taking a deep breath of the familiar crisp Earth air one last time before stepping inside.

The door swung open, and Maggie stepped inside, greeted by the familiar sight of the TARDIS console room. The space was as big and wondrous as ever, its wall roundels glowing a deep amber, its array of flashing lights and whirring levers a constant reminder that the universe was her oyster.

As the door swung shut behind her, Maggie moved to the center of the room, grinning ear to ear. The Doctor sprang up from under the console like a jack-in-the-box, his face lighting up. He grabbed her in a tight bear hug and whirled her around, the tails of his repaired coat flapping like wings. “Ah, Maggie! There you are! You’ve returned; safe and sound!”

“I have? What about you?”

“Oh, the usual routine. I was on my way to mend the coat when it turned out one of those robot Homunculi got away—” He grinned, his eyes full of curiosity. “Never mind about me. So? How was your little holiday? Did you get a good dose of that one-of-a-kind Earth Christmas cheer?”

Maggie’s eyes sparkled as she stepped closer to him. “Oh, you have no idea, Doctor. It was an adventure in itself. I met someone who truly believed he’s Santa Claus, and I even ended up helping him clear his name. I’ve learned so much about kindness and the magic of Christmas ...” She stopped, catching herself. “And the best part is, I remembered it—I remembered him. Oh, you’re going to love this story.”

The Doctor raised an eyebrow, intrigued. “Santa Claus, you say? Cleared his name, you say? Oh, this sounds *utterly* fascinating! Tell me everything.”

Maggie laughed and shook her head. “I’ll tell you the whole story while we’re flying through time.”

The Doctor smiled as he dashed off a complex sequence on the console, making the TARDIS hum with energy. “Oh, I can’t wait to hear it. But first, where are we headed next? Some planet in the upper spiral of the Andromeda galaxy? Or perhaps back in time to witness the construction of the pyramids?”

Maggie took a deep breath, the thrill of the unknown ahead of them never losing its magic. “How about we just see where the TARDIS takes us? I think I’ve had enough planning for a while. I’m ready for whatever comes next.”

The Doctor beamed at her, his eyes glinting with excitement. “That’s the spirit! Hold on, then—we’re off!”

The TARDIS roared to life, its whirring engines filling the air as it dematerialized, disappearing from the backyard of Simon and Rebekah’s home and spiraling off into the depths of time and space. Maggie gazed into the console, the blue light of the column bathing the room in a calming glow.

As the TARDIS whizzed through the vortex, Maggie couldn't help but smile, knowing that, whatever the next adventure held, she was exactly where she was meant to be — alongside the Doctor, ready to make even more memories across time and space. And this time, she'd carry with her the magic of Christmas, the kindness of a man who believed in spreading joy, and the knowledge that sometimes the greatest adventures are the ones we never expect.

The TARDIS hummed, the world beyond them a blur, and Maggie, with a heart full of wonder, sat back, ready for whatever lay ahead.

Author's Note:

The author would like to thank Hamish Crawford for his support, enthusiasm and encouragement in the completion of this story.

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Christmas 1998

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