

THE
DOCTOR WHO
PROJECT



**THE SAWBONES AND THE
GREY FOX**

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Prologue

Silverdale, British Columbia—31 August 1984

Maggie Weitz was starting to realise that Silverdale was more than a little off the beaten track.

They had left from Revelstoke first thing that morning. “Is it OK if we take a little detour on the way?” Ollie had asked, with rehearsed innocence, when they first stopped for gas. Maggie had agreed—too quickly, she now realised. That man could charm her into walking straight off a cliff.

They arrived in Silverdale a little after one P.M. It was now nearly four. Vancouver—and her parents’ house—seemed even farther away when she looked out onto the confluence of the Stave and the Fraser Rivers.

She wouldn’t have minded if they were stopping for lunch, but Ollie seemed singularly absorbed in pacing up and down a stretch of marsh outside this small British Columbia town. She was even more suspicious of the hip-waders he had brought with him.

“Did you lose something?” she asked skeptically, looking down at him from the river bank.

“Eh?” he asked, as if he barely heard her. He reached about a foot farther than was wise. “I was sure I felt something wooden down there. You know, they might have stored it in a chest,” he added excitedly to himself. Then he snapped his fingers and called over to Maggie, “If you held me a little farther ...”

“Then we’d both be face first in that beautiful brown water.” She indicated her tie-dyed jacket. “I’m not dressed for outdoor stuff, Ollie. And even if I were, I’d need an explanation before I jump in there with you.”

Ollie looked down in embarrassment, blinked, and shook his head. “I’m sorry, I thought ... I was sure I knew...”

“Knew what?”

“I’d read so much about it.” He looked up again, locked eyes with her with that wide-eyed, innocent kitten stare that made her love him so much. Instantly, her simmering frustration with him evaporated.

Then she looked at her watch again and she remembered to be irritated. “You know, if you didn’t want to come to my parents’ anniversary dinner, you only had to say. I *could* have gone on my own. It’s not one of the big ones—it’s only thirty-seven years. But it still seems rude to stand them up.”

Ollie blinked again and looked down at his watch. “Oh my God! I’m so sorry. How long have we been—”

“Here?” She checked back at the watch to see if it was true. It was—now several minutes closer to four. “Over two hours. At first I thought we were on a hike, but now I see it’s a marsh-wade.”

Ollie forgot all about the wooden box he thought he felt and scrambled to the shoreline, but his haste caused him to stumble back. He just about recovered, only to pitch forward, losing his right boot in the marsh and getting a face full of mud from the bank.

“Did I seriously never tell you about this?” Ollie asked. “This is a piece of Canadian history. And with any luck, I’ll be the first man to discover it.”

“What is it?”

“Silverdale’s claim to fame. It was the site of Canada’s first train robbery.”

Maggie whistled.

“You seriously had no idea about this? I was sure we talked about it.”

“Uh-uh.”

“Does ‘The Grey Fox’ mean anything to you?” Ollie pressed.

“Is that your uncle Milt, the guy who goes on all those cruises?” Maggie teased.

Ollie wouldn’t be distracted. “Billy Miner, the ‘Gentleman Bandit’?”

Maggie shook her head. The name meant nothing to her.

“He’s the guy who allegedly coined the phrase ‘Hands up’. But he seemed like an OK guy. Always told his cohorts never to shoot anyone, only to fire their guns into the air. September tenth, 1904, he sticks up a train. He supposedly ran off with some serious loot.”

Maggie arched an eyebrow. “Supposedly?”

Ollie hobbled down the bank to his hiking shoes, wiping mud from his face onto the flannel sleeve of his shirt. The surviving hip-wader was dumped into the backpack in disgust, and he grabbed some paper towels to wipe the rest of the mud off his face. He barely noticed his discomfort and ragged appearance, so absorbed was he in this slice of Canadian history.

“He was never categorically linked to the Silverdale job. But when he got out of jail, it’s believed he used money he’d hidden here to get across the border down to the US. He was actually born down there, but he’s a Canuck at heart.” Ollie stopped in his tracks and looked back out over the unprepossessing hillside. “I’m *sure* it’s out here somewhere. I’ve read so much, but it’s just so much bigger than you think ...”

“And you randomly thought you’d find this haul on a trip to see your in-laws for their wedding anniversary.”

He nodded sheepishly. Laughing (with him and—ever so slightly—at him, as well), Maggie scrubbed off the last few patches of mud and brushed off his clothes, already imagining her parents’, uncle, and cousin Larry mocking the poor *goy* when he showed up at their door. “You’re really going to marry this schmuck?” they’d ask incredulously. “A treasure-hunter too!” Though none would be crass enough to tell her she should have married that stuck-up dentist Brad Thor from high school.

“And I’m sure you’ll be just the man to find it, Ollie,” she declared. “Another time, though. Let’s do it on the way back.”

Ollie smiled. “Do you mean it?”

“We’ll do it properly, set aside a day for it.”

He looked down at his wretched appearance and said, “Sorry.”

“Hey, if we find a stolen treasure horde, all is forgiven.”

“What makes you think I’ll share it?”

Maggie gave his backside a playful smack. “Come on, jerk. It’s waited out here somewhere for eighty years, it can wait one long weekend.”

Chapter One

Revelstoke, 1997

On a late summer's morning thirteen years later, Maggie awoke alone and remembered that day. Funnily, the specifics of the weekend's main event—the Weitz family reunion and her parents' anniversary festivities, had faded from her recollection. If her memory served, they were miraculously speedy on the highway and arrived only a few minutes late, and nobody even noticed Ollie's disheveled state (he had changed the offending flannel shirt en route).

Yes, she now remembered, by the time they pulled in to the family home in a genteel corner of Kitsilano¹, the crisis of Larry's girlfriend/fiancée cancelling at the last minute overshadowed any reservations they might have with Ollie. In fact, her mum had even clasped his cheeks familiarly and said, "That's what we always knew about you. You'd stick around for our baby girl."

They went out to Silverdale a handful of other times. Maggie felt wretched to consider one or two of those occasions she had greeted the detour with a roll of her eyes and a groan of "Not again", and she knew for a fact one summer he drove her out to Rebekah's cabin, he did the pilgrimage on the way back, alone, so as not to anger her. To be fair, he was a bit obsessed with it, and his obsession grew the more times he came away from it empty-handed. He couldn't even visit a branch of the Keg—a local Canadian steakhouse chain—without ordering the 'Billy Miner Pie' for dessert, even when he'd had a baseball sirloin.

That was all a long time ago. Now it was 1997 and Maggie felt more than unusually alone. She had spent the summer, against her will, back in her home town of Revelstoke. It was good for her bank balance, to be sure—thanks to her extra shifts, Mr. Lee hadn't needed to hire any summer temps. She blushed to remember her idiotic reaction when he idly told her, "Maggie, you are just what the doctor ordered."

"D-doctor?" she repeated, as childishly hopeful about the person she knew with that title as Ollie had been about the 'Gentleman Bandit', Billy Miner.

Mr. Lee gave her a weary double take, thinking she was making fun of him. "You've heard that expression, sweetheart. You haven't been to Mars or something."

Gallingly, she could have told him that she *had* been to Mars as a matter of fact, long after it was—what was the word the Doctor used?—oh yes, terraformed. There was a city three times the size of London, and they had their own Olympic Games and everything. They had run into a faction of colonists who didn't like the way their government was going and had unearthed an ancient Ice Warrior weapon of mass destruction to prove their point,

¹ Kitsilano is an upmarket neighbourhood of Vancouver with many quirky shops and upscale eateries. Known for scenic Kits Beach, Vanier Park, and the H.R. MacMillan Planetarium.

and ... well anyway, the improbable details of that trip flashed through her mind as she considered the strip-lighting and suffocatingly cramped dimensions of Lee's hardware store. "Sorry, I was ... thinking of someone I knew."

For Maggie, the day consisted of trudging down to Main Street to that hardware store, putting on her apron, and standing behind the counter while Mr. Lee stocked the shelves. That was it. She checked in just before ten and punched out a little after seven, thanks to a late shipment of barbecues. Her solitary moment of excitement was stopping at Fiona Stornaway's coffee stand on Benson Street and trying the new recipe she had just learned.

"It's a latte, Maggie," Fiona declared, rolling both syllables on her tongue to stress the drink's exoticism. "Just as good as you'll find in Seattle."

Again, she felt the simmer of superiority from being a time traveller. She longed to tell Fiona, *I once had an espresso made by Ernest Hemingway, so don't patronize me about lattes!*

She told herself she kept her mouth shut and didn't say these things because she didn't want to change the timelines, but it was really nervousness. Revelstoke was a place where people didn't like to stand out, where not conforming was a kind of insanity. She remembered all too well that first time the Doctor and Kaylaar returned her home, and the terrible fear she had that people would judge her for having such friends, and worse, for loving them more than she had anyone since Ollie.

A thought occurred to her. "I *have* had a latte!"

Fiona had moved on to the next customer, and seemed irked to be reminded of their conversation. "Is that right?" she asked without interest.

"Yes! In this coffee shop in Mount Pleasant²."

Fiona nodded with sweet condescension. "Huh! I guess they've gotten around."

Maggie half-smiled at the memory. Of course, it wouldn't happen for another twenty-six years, but it still counted. The half-smile faded when she considered the time, not long after that, when they had just reached the end of their hair-raising adventure on Skaro, that she was pulled away from the Doctor and stuck back here.

It had all happened so suddenly—an unassuming old woman had appeared in the TARDIS, made some veiled threats at the Doctor, and then there was a flash of light³. She had been relieved to wake up in Revelstoke; relieved, really, to wake up anywhere at all. She remembered that first morning, looking up at the sky, certain the Doctor would be back to get her any moment. Then, she thought it would be any day. Dutifully, every day for the first week she woke certain she was hearing the wheezing and groaning of the TARDIS engines, and that she would peek out the window to see that police box parked untidily on her lawn. As her impatience grew those first few weeks, she went back to work purely to take her mind off the waiting.

Now it had been five months. A whole summer, and so many moments like that, where some comment or incident would jog her memory and remind her that she only felt half-present here in her home town, and her home time.

The only person she could talk to about it was her cousin Larry. He had first met the Doctor and Kaylaar when Maggie did, only he had turned down the offer of the time-travelling life after that single, hair-raising encounter⁴. When she called him to tell of her disenchantment, he said, "You're well out of it, you know. Don't look back. It was only a matter of time."

"A matter of time?" she repeated, thinking he was making some feeble crack about time travel.

But what he said was no joke. "Until you ended up dead. You told me those stories. There was always someone ending up horribly dead, or some violent situation. Gratuitously violent, I might add."

"Yes, I shouldn't have gone into such detail about the University of East Essex⁵."

"If I ever have any kids, remind me not to send 'em there."

² See *The Doctor Who Project: Sensed Presence*.

³ See *The Doctor Who Project: Return to Skaro*.

⁴ See *The Doctor Who Project: The 108 Year Hitch*.

⁵ See *The Doctor Who Project: Evil*.

For a second, Maggie became lost in a time travel quandary. Was that university out there, its evil festering and growing, right now, as they spoke? It was all off in the future, the 2020s, and yet it felt over and done with, even though it was all waiting to happen decades later.

Larry was still talking. "Knowing my IQ, that'll be the only place that accepts them."

The joke was much needed; because it was relatively recent, so horrible, with such skin-crawling details, and took place relatively close to home, that particular adventure stayed with Maggie more than most.

"But it isn't just *me*, Larry. What about the Doctor?"

"What about him?"

"He's lost Kaylaar, and now me? Who's going to look after him?"

"Two thoughts there, Mags," Larry replied. "One, he's already found some new companion, probably a green-skinned Orion woman who can put up with his bull more than we Earthlings can."

This thought did not soothe Maggie. "And two?" she pressed.

Larry paused on the line. "He likes being alone?"

"You don't know him like I do, Larry. If I knew he was safe ..."

"I'll come out to Revelstoke as soon as I can, cuz. Sounds like you need some family to pay you a visit. Unless you'll be out for your folks' fifty-first wedding anniversary in August? I remember the entrance you made for the fiftieth ..."

Maggie went beet-red at the recollection, including Aunt Mabel flirting with the Doctor the same way she once had with Ollie after two many glasses of Mogen David at Passover. "Yeah, come out, it would be nice to see you."

"And if you're gone by then, I'll tell Mr. Lee you're back on Mars."

"I wish ..." Maggie said to herself after she hung up.

More days passed in this benign yet frustrating fashion. July gave way to August, and Maggie's worry mingled with a growing sense of weariness. Maggie called her parents once to try to take her mind off the worry and the boredom of the normal life. Of course, it wasn't long before they asked, "Whatever became of that doctor you brought over last summer? Now there was a nice man."

"Mom ..."

"No Ollie, of course," she said, misinterpreting Maggie's discomfort at the topic. "I would never make comparisons."

"Except with your father!" her dad interjected.

"It isn't that, Mom. He wasn't ... he was just a good friend."

"Sure, sure," her dad chipped in. "That's how your mother and I were."

"Seriously. He's ... different."

"Oh, Maggie, if it's about his skin colour, that shouldn't matter to you. It wouldn't to us."

"We know it's hard meeting a nice Jewish boy in Revelstoke. And what difference does it make at the end of the day? We're all the same on the inside. As long as he makes you happy ..."

Relieved she never mentioned the Doctor's two hearts, Maggie said, "Thanks, Mom. But ... he went away. I'm worried about him, actually. I've not heard from him in a while. That's part of the reason I'm talking to you, to take my mind off him."

"That's always your problem Maggie. These men you like, they're easy on the eye, but they don't have their heads screwed on. Ollie, God rest his soul, a hell of a guy don't get me wrong, but he was the same. Remember that treasure he wanted to find?"

Sometime along the line, Maggie had succumbed and filled them in on Billy Miner. She scolded her parents a second time, for the slight against Ollie and repeating that they had misinterpreted how she felt about the Doctor.

She remembered those last few trips in the TARDIS: that white box he wouldn't talk about, the feeling that every landing he was expecting to meet some enemy he didn't dare tell her about, then that horrible old woman ...

"I think he may be in trouble, and I can't help him."

"Trouble? Like money trouble?"

"Not a gambler?" her dad added disapprovingly.

"No, no. Quite the reverse. He doesn't even carry money."

Of course, Maggie knew this would be inconceivable to her father. “Doesn’t carry money? Mister Big-shot Doctor, how does he pay for anything?”

She laughed despite herself. “Dad, we’re getting off-topic. I’m just worried about him.”

“Guy looks like he can handle himself. Strong handshake,” her father gruffly determined. “I can’t imagine any gangsters giving him a tough time.”

She remembered the otherworldly menaces the Doctor had faced, far worse than any two-bit gangster. And whatever he was worried about had rattled, haunted him, more than even those horrors had ...

“If he loves you, he’ll come back to you,” her mother concluded.

Understandably, this offered Maggie little comfort.

It was a Wednesday well into August when Mr. Lee wished Maggie a goodnight and added, “Maggie ... why don’t you take some time off?”

The thought made her suddenly uneasy. “Off? But what would I do?”

“I don’t know!” he chuckled obliviously. “Get out of town for a bit. There’s a new *Jurassic Park* playing at the Roxy. Catch up with those troublemaking friends of yours.”

They both chuckled at the shared memory of the (slightly) younger Mr. Lee breaking up a crowd of herself, Tracy, and Fiona one afternoon in late May, when they skipped the school Sports Day to smoke cigarettes. His wiry build and receding hairline always made Lee look in his fifties, but she reckoned he was probably younger than she was now when they had run into each other in embarrassment that day.

He shrugged. “Or stay in, catch up on your reading, rent some movies. Just ... take it easy. Sabrina can manage the extra work until after Labour Day.”

“Sabrina?” Maggie echoed querulously. “You can’t let her look after things. I don’t like to say it but ... for starters she doesn’t even know the difference between flat-head and Phillips-head screwdrivers.”

“Hey, that first time you went away, I said your job would always be open. When you came back that first time, I saw that you were better than you’d been. That’s why I want you to take this time off. You’re ...”

“Slipping?”

Mr. Lee shook his head in such a way that Maggie knew that was exactly what he meant.

“Don’t you see? This job is all I have right now!”

“That isn’t true, Maggie. You’re just putting everything into it and it’s not giving back. It can’t. When something’s wrong inside, these things won’t fix what’s going on.” He waggled a bony finger at her forehead. “Going on in there. Trust me. Take some time to yourself and the job will be here when you get back.”

“There is my parents’ anniversary ...”

“Exactly! Go out early. Lots to do in Vancouver. That city-slicker cousin with the tooth problem lives out there too, right?”

Maggie nodded uncertainly.

“Good!” Lee opined. “And I’ll cope with Sabrina, and I promise I’ll call you in if there’s any trouble with screwdriver identification.”

“What about you? Don’t you have any family?” Maggie felt guilty she had never asked before.

“As a matter of fact I do ... and this shop is the only way I can keep them out of my hair.”

They both smiled, but Maggie truthfully wished he would change his mind. How dare he suggest he knew her mind better than she did?

Predictably, Maggie did not enjoy the days off. “Now would be a great time to show up, Doc,” she implored that empty patch of lawn outside her house. But days went by, and the weather took a turn for the muggy. Work gave her a place to go, and now without it she could barely stir herself, hardly ate, wandered around in a distracted fug. It didn’t help that all her girlfriends had gone away—she was invited, but she thought she would be working. She contemplated driving out to Rebekah’s cabin herself—it occurred to her she’d never done the trip alone. But they would be back any day; she’d probably pass them on the road. Then get back, and worse, find an indented square patch in her front lawn; find that the Doctor had been and gone too.

When Maggie was a kid, losing count of the summer days was one of her favourite aspects of the holiday. Now, it made her acutely aware of the absences in her life. When she travelled with the Doctor, she was always made to feel inferior—those pesky psychic aliens that took such delight in mocking her insecurities, those life-or-death situations where she had to run faster than she ever did in her life. It made her regret every cigarette she'd smoked in her youth, every extra pound she couldn't get rid of. But now, she felt more able for that life than this routine. When had that happened?

It was a Wednesday or a Thursday—she couldn't be sure, but it had a midweek feel to it—when a letter arrived in the post for Maggie. She was still a long way off planning her drive out to Vancouver, and frankly, the thought of eight hours heading west in this heat was not palatable. On the other hand, she had rented all of the top movies of 1995 and 1996, and they were not as absorbing as she, or Mr. Lee, had hoped. Pierce Brosnan was just as good playing James Bond as she imagined, but as for the rest ... she fell asleep in the middle of *Independence Day*. Having experienced the real thing, it was hard to put up with the corny Hollywood version of it. She certainly found it hard to believe that hotshot American soldiers would be any use against extra-terrestrial invaders, having seen them in action. Maybe the girl behind the counter was right, and she should have gone with *Mars Attacks!*

She was contemplating the piles of underwhelming VHS tapes—and musing that at least she would get out to go to the video store today—when Maggie noticed the letter on her mat. She pushed aside the teetering pile and examined it. It was from Larry.

Why would Larry write? They had only spoken a couple of weeks ago.

He was probably saying he wouldn't come. Everybody was standing her up this summer, it seemed.

Maggie tore open the envelope. There was a short note paper-clipped to a photocopied piece of paper. She made out dark patches that indicated a photograph in black-and-white—no, older than that; the muddy brown tones of sepia.

She pulled away the note and read it:

Dear Maggie,

I found this in a book about 'Great Canadian Rogues'.

Love, L

She turned over the page and looked at the photograph. It was Billy Miner, the Gentleman Bandit. After those Silverdale detours, when she knew how much Ollie cared about it, she made it her business to read up on him and would recognise the picture anywhere (if not from the books, then from the Keg Steakhouse, which at the time was liberally decorated with his likeness.)

This was not the usual picture. It was a more distant photograph, the bandit's features even more hollow and aged, and washed out from the primitive photography.

But Billy Miner was not alone in the photo.

The caption read: *Billy Miner, the famous Grey Fox, pictured with an unidentified Negro traveller, c.1904.*

Maggie felt her breath leave her as she saw, standing next to him, a dark-skinned handsome man who appeared in his mid-thirties, inappropriately dressed in a flowing ankle-length balmacaan. Though it looked brown in the photograph, she was willing to bet that in reality it was a brilliant emerald green. He wore a shirt of rough denim instead of his fishing sweater and an ill-fitting Stetson hat instead of his ribbed toque, but Maggie knew exactly who it was.

"Doctor!" she cried.

Chapter Two

Silverdale, 1904

When the Doctor was a boy, he had wanted to drive trains. It amused him all these thousands of years later to remember that naïve desire, totally oblivious at the bafflement of his fellow Time Lords and the conspicuous lack of locomotives on Gallifrey. How had he first heard of them? Might one of those ghost stories the Hermit told him in that cave have been *The Signalman* by Charles Dickens? Or had bucolic transport once been a topic of one of those dust-dry lectures on not changing history on primitive planets?

Wherever he got the idea, it held his imagination for a long time. In some ways, he considered ruefully, being a Time Lord and saving the universe were fallback occupations.

These memories newly resurfaced when he stepped from the TARDIS into the dark and cramped hold, surrounded with stacked wooden crates. The rumble of the engine and the reassuring jostle along the tracks threw him right back to those innocent childhood dreams.

He frowned, and whirled back to the police box, wagging his finger. “Nice try,” he told the TARDIS. “You had me for a second there. Oh, I’d love to climb to the front of the train and give the bell a toot. But I didn’t want to be here. I set the coordinates for Revelstoke, British Columbia, Earth year 1997, remember?”

If those frosted glass windows could have darted left and right, the police box couldn’t have looked shiftier.

The Doctor continued, “Furthermore, old girl, I’ve been *trying* to get there, setting the coordinates over and over, for some little while.” He took a step nearer. “If I didn’t know better, I’d say you didn’t like Maggie Weitz. Not unheard-of. Remember how long Nyssa and I spent travelling before I ran into Tegan Jovanka again? Decades it was, all in all. That was you, wasn’t it?” He giggled at the memory. “Every time she was lambasting me for my bad navigation, you were listening and taking offence, weren’t you? Oh, you are a childish old thing.”

A threatening rumble emanated from its lamp.

Perhaps his beloved ship was as preoccupied as he was by recent events. His path had intersected for the first time in too many eons with his granddaughter Susan. It was a long overdue reunion, and the Doctor was determined to make it last. But with a sad inevitability, Susan told him it was time for her to go home. She had her life and her responsibilities. They had parted ways—on good terms, of course, but still sadly at odds.

“Grandfather,” she said sadly as she pulled away from a parting embrace. “I wish you would settle down. I worry about you. You can’t do this forever, you know.”

He had also spent some time accompanied by a 1960s London copper, Reg Cranfield, who had been instrumental in saving his lives—all eleven of them⁶.

But they were both back where they belonged, and whatever the purpose behind the Preservers, the pesky entities were apparently defeated for the time being. Somehow he doubted they were gone for good, however. He didn't understand their nature—the name 'Preserver' meant nothing to him, and he could find no relevant records about similar beings in any planet's library. On top of that worry, there was still a Time Lord message box in the TARDIS—apparently written by him at some future point—that taunted him and told him they would meet on the twenty-third of November in the Earth year 2963. If these threats didn't somehow connect, he was Rassilon's uncle.

Perhaps the TARDIS herself thought that deferring meeting Maggie would prevent that unpalatable future from happening. Perhaps it was staving off whatever calamity almost certainly lay in store on that November day in the thirtieth century. Whatever, this endless delaying tactic had made the Doctor feel lonelier than he had for a long time. Even saying goodbye to Susan was a long time ago, and he was impatient to get back to his friend. As exciting as this train compartment was, he wished he had her by his side, reeling at the impressions of her past.

He had half a mind to climb back in and try again—to let one landing come and go without knowing where he had been. Yes, he was determined. He would show that difficult old girl who was boss.

He nearly got to the door, but he noticed the train had slowed and now stopped. In another moment he heard cries from the next compartment. The voices were muffled and rustic, but their commands had a hint of menace to them.

"Doctor," he scolded himself, "you're probably a blasted idiot." But he knew, if people were in trouble, he would not—could not—turn his back on them.

He bore this in mind when he opened the train's rickety door and found the barrel of a revolver pointed at his face. Holding it was a feral man, the lower half of his face concealed by a bandana, apparently no older than nineteen.

"Hands up!" an authoritative voice behind called out.

"How many times have I heard that?" the Doctor mused wearily as he obeyed the command.

The older man brushed past. His face was also concealed by a bandana, but he had hollow cheeks and craggy features that belied his relative youth. The Doctor reckoned the fellow was younger than he looked, had passed a peripatetic and hectic life, was ill fed, and judging from their surroundings, stole most of what he needed to survive. That tended to take years off a human's life.

The man's brows knitted as he scrutinized the Doctor. "What do you mean? That's mine."

"What?"

"'Hands up!' The phrase. I came up with that." He pointed at his breast proudly.

"Congratulations," the Doctor replied. "Do you want a royalty cheque?"

"Look, Bill, we ain't got time for this," the youth cautioned. His thumb clicked back the pistol's safety catch. The older man irritably pushed the gun down. "No! We just use 'em to threaten people. Don't shoot anyone."

The Doctor smiled. "Thanks, Bill."

"Don't thank me yet." He stuffed a heavy hessian sack to the Doctor. "You're gonna give us a hand. Look like you've got a good pair of arms on you."

The Doctor peeked inside, caught sight of banded stacks of dollar bills in high denominations, then looked back at Billy and his cohorts. "Do I take it you're robbing this train?"

He nodded. "Correction—we're robbing this train."

The youth cried, "Bill, we can't cut this guy in! He ain't having my share!"

"I don't want my share," the Doctor protested, holding the bag out. "Take it back."

"Sure you want your share," Billy insisted. "Be able to carry more if we have another pair of hands. As I say, you look mighty strong ..."

"Doctor."

"Just 'Doctor'?" the young robber asked skeptically.

"No harm in that. I get ya, Doc. Want to protect your identity, your good name. I'll respect that." He nodded. "My handle's Billy Miner. That title just for show, or d'you know anything about medicine?"

⁶ The Doctor's reunion with Susan and meeting with Constable Reg Cranfield is chronicled—by Cranfield himself—in the celebratory 60th anniversary story, *The Doctor Who Project: A Mild Curiosity in a Junkyard*.

The Doctor decided modesty was best at the moment, and told Billy simply, "I've learned a thing or two."

Billy nudged his young partner. "Might have use of a sawbones too. Yeah, you'll be a real good addition, Doc. Now let's get going."

They were interrupted by a savage slam. The train engineer, held at bay by the third robber, had surreptitiously grabbed a steel hook and knocked the gun from the man's hand. Billy was half out of the train carriage. The other bandit collapsing threw the older man sideways, causing him to land on his back in the dirt.

Coughing, the older bandit acquiesced, throwing his sack of money back into the carriage. "All right. Just no violence."

The engineer did not obey, instead clubbing the youth in the gut with the other bandit's revolver and catching the weapon that fell from his hand. He pointed the two guns at the trio, his index finger quivering alarmingly on their triggers.

"Just a minute, young fellow," the Doctor cautioned the engineer. "Don't do anything rash. Here, why don't you take this money?" He extended his arms, and the sack, toward the skinny official.

"Ha! You think I'm stupid? Hold on to your money, you worthless robber. Not surprising your kind would fall in with criminals."

"My kind?" The Doctor's cheeks flushed, knowing some reference to his current skin colour was intended.

"You get over there with them!" he barked nastily. He raised the weapon at the young bandit, whose nineteen-year-old eyes widened in horror.

The Doctor charged the scrawny and sadistic engineer, causing the guns to fall from his hand as he pulled their triggers. The small cabin rang with the horrid echo of two blasts, and twice the acrid gunpowder curled in the air.

It took a moment for the Doctor's arm to sting. One bullet had hit a target: him. He saw wine-dark, thick Time Lord blood seeping from the sleeve of his sweater.

"Go on! Quickly!" he commanded. He looked back to the cargo carriage, and his escape. But the engineer was scrambling around on the ground, barring his way. The revolvers lay on the ground. The choice was clear. If nothing else, he still had Bill's money.

The Doctor hopped off the train. He hit the sloping grass reasonably gently, but as he rolled down the hill, every tumble caused the wound to sting painfully. When he got to his feet, he followed the bandits into the forest. They ran without agility but with desperate speed. Three horses stood saddled in a clearing. A fourth man, older and even more hollow-cheeked than Bill, waited for them. "Who the hell's this? Didn't realise we'd be picking up hitchhikers along the way."

"Well-dressed for a hitchhiker," Bill's young friend carped.

"Quiet the pair of you. This here's a sawbones. Damn cool head in a crisis. We owe him a lot." Billy slapped the rump of the nearest horse. "Hop on. You're with me, Doc."

The other men looked scornfully at the Time Lord as he climbed on behind Bill. Before long, the horses were galloping away. The Doctor for once was uninterested in the view forward, keeping his eyes on the train, growing smaller in the distance, in case the trigger-happy engineer chose to follow them.

Soon, the wheels chugged to life, and the sound of the train started up again. The vehicle seemed alive as it resumed its journey hastily, its echo growing fainter as it went farther away. With it went the TARDIS.

"Well, I hope you're happy, old girl. You've got me in the soup again," the Doctor muttered ruefully.

Chapter Three

Heading North, 1904

Tad Pardoe looked down at this doctor who wouldn't say his name and had inveigled his way into their party. He lay asleep in the forest clearing where they had stopped, after a night of hard riding. In the harsh summer morning light, his black skin was even more pronounced.

"Never seen a coloured man," he said nervously to Billy Miner.

"I seen plenty of 'em down in Kentucky," Billy retorted. "They're decent folk, same as anyone, but they have to put up with a lot. Now leave the Doc be."

"How's someone like that get to be a doctor anyhow? Witch doctor, if you ask me."

"You got a load of his accent, didn't ya, kid? He's foreign. Probably comes from Africa."

The third bandit, Len Lubbock, nodded as he pawed at the Doctor's bright green coat. "You were right, Tad. Fancy clothes for a hitchhiker. Never felt a coat so soft. Must have plenty of dough, I'll bet."

"Explains why this loot don't mean nothin' to him."

"Think he's come off a boat from some place?"

Tad looked down at the sweater, its sleeve sodden with blood. "Well, I guess they do bleed, same colour as us white folk."

Tad jolted back when the Doctor's eyes opened. "My ears are burning," he said, before clutching his damp arm. "And my back and my arm are too."

"Lost a lot of blood there, Sawbones," Billy told him. "Didn't you notice that?"

"I suppose that must be why I slept so long." The ride last night became hazy, and the Doctor must have lost consciousness.

"Should've told us about that there injury. Didn't notice it till the sun came up."

"I hate to complain about little trifles. You all seemed to have enough on your mind without worrying about silly old me." The Doctor rolled up the sleeve of his sweater, finding the entry wound. He grinned broadly as he traced another puncture in his flesh. "Ah! An exit wound too. It passed right through my arm. There's a bit of luck."

"Luck, he says. Must have a pretty unlucky life," Tad observed.

The Doctor smiled grimly at the young ruffian. "You have no idea. Now toss me some of that liquor you have."

Len grinned. "You read my mind, Doc."

Billy Miner removed a metal flask from his coat and obliged, and the Time Lord poured it over the raw red patch, wincing slightly at the burning contact. Then he tore off the sweater, efficiently subdividing it into strips before he tied the resulting tourniquet around his forearm.

"That ain't sore?" Len asked him.

"Of course it's sore. But let's not go on about it, eh?" With his left hand, he picked up the hessian sack. "Now then, gentlemen, our first order of business should be my return of my portion of your takings. After that I'll be on my way."

To his surprise, the three menacingly edged nearer to him.

"Problem?"

He had Billy pegged as the reasonable one, so it was all the more worrying when that older bandit asked him, "On your way, huh, Sawbones? Where you headed?"

"As a matter of fact, I need to get back to that train as soon as possible."

"And why's that?"

The Doctor didn't like the measured monotone in Billy's voice. He tried to match its matter-of-fact tone in his answers. "There's something very important on board."

"More important than this here loot? More valuable?" Tad added.

"Much more. Please, I have no quarrel with you, but it's urgent I get back."

"Oh, you'd like that, wouldn't ya Sawbones?" Tad blurted, reaching for his gun.

"I don't understand why you'd begrudge this," the Doctor honestly admitted.

"Oh Sawbones," Billy sighed. "I spoke up for you an' everything, and this is how you repay me."

"Repay you? I'm giving you back your ill-gotten gains. What more do you want? I haven't the faintest idea what you're talking about."

"You tell 'im, Tad," Len commanded.

"It's like this. You get back on that train, tell the engineers all about us and where we're going."

"But I haven't a clue where you're going."

He handed the flask back to Billy who held it a moment before thrusting it back into the Time Lord's face.

"Have a drink. Take the edge off your bullet wound."

"I'm not thirsty ..." The bandits' eyes menacingly glowered at him.

"Let's all have a drink. Be sociable, huh Doc?"

The Doctor looked at the flask and sighed, "Oh well, when in Rome ... or rural Canada as the case may be."

He swigged the vile, stinging liquid. It had been a few regenerations since he had touched alcohol (a brief flirtation with Voxnic in his sixth incarnation had put him off everything but the occasional Napoleon brandy when he dropped in on Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart). The effect was even more violent than he remembered. The clear blue sky, the weak morning light, and the blanket of spindly trees shielding them seemed to spin around him.

The rest of the gang took a finger of the nasty stuff in turn, while the Doctor tried to regain his senses.

"True rattlesnake oil," the Doctor groaned, clutching at his stomach. "I can almost feel my guts rotting."

"Doing its work, then, I reckon."

He smiled at Billy. "Goodness gracious. You're quite right. That wretched stuff has taken the pain away." He shook his wrist to demonstrate. "Perhaps you should be the doctor around here."

Billy smiled and clapped the Doctor's shoulder. "Maybe I should at that. Here." He reached into a rough hemp knapsack and pulled out a scratchy and none-too-fresh work shirt. "Too hot for sweaters, and that one's ruined anyhow. Try this on for size."

The Doctor shuffled off the ragged cream-coloured cable-knit fishing sweater and accepted the proffered shirt. It was lighter, but the material scratched at his skin. Perhaps he was getting soft in his old age.

He shook on his coat, and took the opportunity to look around. "Isn't there something missing? What could it be?" He patted the pockets of his overcoat, relieved to find his sonic screwdriver, a spare Satsuma, Mars-Venus rocket license, the Soma people's sacred Sigil of Hespys, a bag of jelly babies, an etheric beam detector, and sundry other items untouched. "Oh yes—the rest of the money in that sack you gave me! Where have you put it, Miner?"

Billy flashed the Doctor a sneaky smile. "Where it'll be safe. Our horse-wrangler Vern rode on ahead to hide it at the usual place."

He frowned as he looked at the rolled-up hessian sack by his side. "Why didn't you take it all?"

"Wanted to show you we were trustworthy folk."

The Doctor inwardly bristled at this obsession with money as a sign of their honour, but it did at least offer him some reassurance—or perhaps it was simply blind hope—that Billy Miner was a man of his word.

"Don't worry." Billy patted his breast. "You won't need to be footing the bill for the rest of us. Kept some spending money back. But we can't go around flashing rolls in public, or we'll be dead meat."

"I see." He looked to Tad and Len. "And you two are all right with this arrangement?"

"Hell, Bill's never let us down yet," Len noted.

"I see. How nice that you chaps are so close. Are we ready to move off?" he asked them.

"Don't you want some breakfast?" Billy asked, gesturing to a simmering pot on the meagre fire.

The Doctor took a sniff. "Beans? For breakfast?"

Those six menacing eyes hove into his view again, and before long the Doctor was having a large helping of the beans.

They had found their way to higher ground, and they carried on north. This was far from comforting to the Doctor, who knew the train was headed west. Still, he could hardly begrudge the poor trio, especially when, as the afternoon wore on, they caught sight of a red-uniformed troop, rifles slung around their backs, below them in the distance.

"Mounties," he reasoned.

"And I'll bet they have our descriptions," Billy noted.

So they kept heading north. The Doctor was not feeling particularly communicative, but Billy Miner was curious about him.

"You seemed like you knew me, when I mentioned my name."

The Doctor smiled knowingly. "Let's just say I've heard of you from a friend."

"Who is he? Who'd know about me? Whatever your friend said about me, he's telling you a pack of lies, I bet."

"She, actually. Maggie Weitz, a very good friend of mine. I was on my way to meet her when I bumped into you. She'll be so jealous when I tell her. You're called 'the Grey Fox', aren't you?"

The Grey Fox did not know how to respond to this, and the Doctor wasn't interested in further explaining it, so they fell silent once again. They did not stop until dark, when a small town of the one-horse configuration beckoned. Laughter, shouting, and out-of-key piano music wafted in from the saloons.

The Doctor's wound was stinging again, so his first order of business was to replace his tourniquet with another strip of his sweater. "Hasn't healed up," he mumbled to himself.

"Give it a chance, Doc. You're lucky it ain't gone septic."

"Yes, you're a bundle of cheer, aren't you Tad?" The Doctor's Time Lord abilities would heal the wound eventually—although it was taking a bit longer than usual, no doubt due to stress. However, he didn't want to go on about it, knowing that the bandits were likely to attribute any difference to his external appearance and skin colour. It was sadly appalling what the people of this time believed about their fellow men. "I'll be fine. Mister Miner, may I part ways with you here? I'd prefer to carry on. I have no desire to discover where you're headed next, and you have my word I'll say nothing about your robbery. I'll even take this money you're so desperate to give me if it would make you happy."

Billy grunted. "We'll stay the night. Do us good to sleep in a comfortable bed. Do you good, too, Doc. Then tomorrow we can revisit it."

"How very reasonable of you," the Doctor replied through gritted teeth. "I suppose I should be flattered."

"That's the way to look at it."

The Doctor was able to persuade the saloon owner to brew him some tea, and this, plus a plate of grits, considerably buoyed his spirits. He remembered his friend Oscar Wilde recounting his tour of the United States, and these parts of Canada had a similar rough-hewn aspect in this era. When he heard the pianist jauntily plucking away at a tune, he remembered that famous sign, 'PLEASE DO NOT SHOOT THE PIANO PLAYER, HE IS DOING HIS BEST'.

The dirty gang he had fallen in with were not keeping the same level head. Whiskies were going down like water, and hands of cards played so fast that they seemed on a mission to lose the small portion of 'petty cash' Billy Miner had set aside. But then, the Doctor remembered, people from this time who lived this life tended not to be the most prudent financial speculators.

The saloon was densely packed, and the three seemed absorbed in their game. The Doctor saw his chance, and crept across the teeming crowd. The tightly packed sea of hard drinkers and put-upon saloon girls nodded and

offered hugs, drink, and rowdy cheer as he snuck past, and he tried to reciprocate their friendliness without standing out or attracting his temporary friends' attention. The swinging wooden doors were nearly in his sights ...

"There you are, Doc. Got you a little present."

He cursed inwardly as he turned back to Billy Miner, fondling the brim of a brown felt Stetson. "Just won it off that big bruiser there. See if it fits."

He peeled away the Doctor's toque and slapped the hat atop his shortly cropped head. "Oh, Bill. You shouldn't have."

He meant it. The gambler who had lost it glowered violently toward them. Billy waved back at him, arrogantly.

The woman at the bar, Valerie, was attracted by the display as well. She beamed at the pair of them, rushing over to kiss Bill. "Oh, this is too precious. That there Stetson is Bear-Strangler McGee's pride and joy. Must've been really in the soup to give it up to you."

"He was," laughed Bill. "That last hand fair cleaned him out. It was either his hat or his britches."

"Knowing the smell of him, you made the right choice. And don't it suit your friend to a tee?" she chuckled, running her hands along its brim flirtatiously.

"Quite," the Doctor replied, smiling gamely but still on his guard in this setting.

Valerie clapped her hands on his shoulders. "You know what. We got ourselves a camera in back. We just *have* to take a picture of you two. It'll make the darnedest souvenir." She leaned in closer. "Not every day we get such dashing folk in here."

Before the Doctor knew it, Valerie was ushering the pair of them to the saloon's least populous corner and setting up the cumbersome photographic equipment. She set the plates and took the pictures herself.

Valerie was in the middle of pouring three fingers of bourbon when the ache in his arm and the desperation of his situation caught up with the Doctor. "This really has been a lovely evening," he told Billy, beaming through his insincerity. "But I think I should probably turn in."

"Hey, fair enough, partner."

It had been a while since the Doctor had felt this swept along by events. Accommodation in this time period was liable to be rough, and guest rooms typically had no more than one large bed, in which several were intended to pass the night. As he lay there, Billy on his left and Len on his right, both snoring with the oafish contentment of thorough drunkenness, the Doctor was wide awake. The injury was stinging again and his thoughts swirled around his head. It was almost a relief when the familiar voice rose above the din to shake him from his maudlin, sleepless contemplation.

It was Tad. His high-pitched voice floated up through the window. He must have been directly below them. "Listen fellas—"

His gabbling was cut short by the crude sound of a punch to the gut. A lower and coarser voice told him, "Keep your mouth shut, you little squirt. You ran out of money, and you either pay in cash or in teeth."

Another punch sliced through the air. Through coughing, Tad spluttered, "Listen, I ... I got money. I have a way."

"Oh yeah?" the brute shot back.

"Sure. You musta heard of that gang, did the train job yesterday."

"Heard tell of it, now's you mention."

The Doctor bolted upright. Technically, he could easily get away and let history take its course. But then, he remembered Maggie telling him of Billy Miner. The 1904 train job was never conclusively pinned on him. Surely that might still hold? He could trust time to take its course—weren't people always telling him not to interfere? Surely the timelines didn't *need* his assistance?

"Reckon there's a pretty big reward. We could split it."

The Doctor looked to Billy, snoring in blissful ignorance at the treachery going on one floor down. There was nothing else for it. "Billy! Miner! Wake up," he commanded, shaking the Grey Fox roughly. "We don't have time. You're being betrayed."

"Huh?"

"Your little ruffian friend, Tad Pardoe, he's telling them about your handiwork. And if my read of the other fellow is right, he won't take much persuasion to agree to turn you in."

They sat up in the bed, Billy crossing to overhear more of the conversation between Tad and his assailant. Billy nodded curtly and shook Len Lubbock awake. The men grabbed their meagre belongings and before long the three were out in the cool night air of the quiet town, sneaking down the back stairs of the saloon.

When they reached the stables, the Doctor was given Tad's horse. "Isn't that a little hard on Tad?"

"His new friends can give him a ride," Billy declared.

As their horses trotted out of the town's one road, Len looked back, aiming his revolver at Tad, still in the middle of his betrayal. He did not get a chance to click the hammer back before Billy Miner kicked at him with the spur on his cowboy boot.

"But surely we can make an exception for a traitor!" Len cried.

"No. No killing, not of our enemies, and certainly not of our friends," Billy maintained.

"Tad ain't no friend, Bill."

"He ain't *our* friend. We'll still be his. That's my last word on it. Now let's get going."

Len glared at his partner, while the Doctor looked at him in admiration. "There aren't many like you back home, are there Bill? No wonder Ollie admired you so much."

"Ollie? Land sakes, man, how come you know so many people heard of me? Not something a bandit likes to think about."

The Doctor shrugged. "You know how Canadians are. Inveterate gossips."

A night of furious riding followed, now headed south in case Tad and his gambling friends followed their trail. The next town they arrived in was so sparse it made the one-horse town of the previous night look like Vancouver. To the Doctor's chagrin, Billy still refused to head to the big city.

"Too risky," he insisted.

"At least let me go. Heaven knows where the CP people have put the TARDIS by now."

A well-dressed city boy with a bowler hat leaned toward them. "Scuse me," a young voice interrupted, "did you say CP?"

"That's right," Len said darkly, fingering the hilt of his Colt.

"Did you hear about that one from yesterday? The one that was robbed?"

"What about it?" Billy asked.

"Headed too fast so's they could report the robbery. Took a corner at speed and boom, the cargo carriage flies off and sails down the hill. Somewhere near the Moskie Pass."

The Doctor felt a deeper pain than the one in his wrist, knowing that the TARDIS was aboard that carriage.

Chapter Four

Revelstoke, 1997

It was going to be too hot for coffee today; Fiona Stornaway knew it. The inside of her coffee stand was positively sweltering, and she had been inside less than an hour. But there was no rest for the wicked. That damned Rancilio Silvia espresso machine wouldn't pay for itself, and there was always the possibility that Elaine Noyce or Brad Gill from the *Mountaineer* would need a large cup of their Brazilian roast because they had a deadline coming up. Those hard-wired reporters didn't care if it was the dead of winter or hotter than Hell; luckily for Fiona, they needed that boost to get past the finish line.

The morning drifted past, time seeming to stand still as she felt her smart branded black T-shirt wilting and she implored someone, *anyone*, to turn up and make her suffering worthwhile. Every so often she would step out of the stand, but the day's air was close and muggy; there was only more of it than there was inside the stand.

She took another swig of water from her metal hiking bottle—now the same infernal temperature as everything else—and marched back into her sweat lodge, when she heard her name called from across Main Street.

"Fiona! Fiona!"

"Maggie?"

She hadn't seen Maggie since the one and only latte she drank two days ago. Fiona thought she had been a little snotty about it, taking pains to point out she had already tried one. Some people were always rubbing your nose in their exotic life, Fiona had noticed.

She was about to comment on the fact, but Maggie raced toward her, grabbing at the sleeves of her sodden black T-shirt like her life depended on it. Fiona was so concerned that she momentarily forgot she wasn't thinking well of Maggie.

"Fiona—" Maggie coughed through strained breaths.

"Slow down, Maggie..."

"No," she wheezed. "You don't understand. No time to slow ... listen, car trouble. I need..."

"You need my car?" Fiona repeated. Her guard went up again; she remembered from high school that Maggie had that coterie of friends, Rebekah and all of them, with whom she had fallen out some time in later high school, probably over some boy none of them could remember all these year later. But the resentment lingered. Surely one of *them* could loan her a car.

"My car's crapped out. Battery's flat."

"What about your ... friends?"

"They're all away ... at Rebekah's cabin ..."

Maggie looked increasingly desperate. Despite her studious determination to remain stony, Fiona felt her heartstrings tugging.

“Where do you need to go?” As she blurted out the question, Fiona’s blood suddenly ran cold. She remembered Maggie usually left town for her parents’ anniversary around now. “Not to Vancouver? All that way? Now?”

“Listen, Fiona, it’s really important. *Really.*” She gripped at the T-shirt sleeve again, desperately. She was almost clawing at it. “I promise you I’ll give it back, I’ll do anything ...”

“I won’t give you my car,” Fiona said firmly. “I will drive you. How about that?”

Maggie finally seemed to collect her breath. She mercifully loosened her grip on Fiona’s T-shirt.

“There’s no need to be so warm about it. What friend would do better?”

“You are a good friend, Fiona. Thank you, you’ve no idea ... you may be saving a life ...”

“A life? Seriously?”

Maggie nodded with the weak intensity that told Fiona she was telling the truth.

“Well, let’s get on the road!”

Since she had received the picture from Larry, Maggie had gone from curiosity to worry. She remembered her reading. The robbery Billy Miner committed in 1904 was the one he wasn’t explicitly linked to. In one of those curious coincidences that sometimes makes one suspicious at what forces govern life, *it was the very haul of money Ollie had always searched for.*

What if the Doctor had got stuck back there, Maggie pondered? What if the TARDIS was buried somewhere with that loot, and he couldn’t get to it? What if that picture had ended up with Larry as a warning, and she was his only hope? She had spent so long waiting for him, when she didn’t think he might be waiting for her!

These thoughts raced around in her mind as Fiona drove her car—a fairly new Saturn—down the Trans-Canada Highway. Alanis Morissette filled the air that the two women were pointedly not filling with conversation.

“You really didn’t have to—” Maggie finally blurted.

“Oh ... that’s all right. You’d have done the same for me.”

“I know we haven’t always been—”

“Look, Maggie, why don’t we cut all the ... ‘niceties,’” Fiona interrupted tersely. “What’s going on? Do you want to tell me?”

“I’m just ... worried about a friend.”

“That doctor friend?” Fiona dimly remembered the strange day or so when he had visited in the fall of 1995. “Is he the man whose life is on the line?”

“Well, I think so.” Maggie snuck a peek down at the faded black-and-white photo crumpled in her hand.

“So we’re not going to Vancouver then?”

“No ... I have a feeling ... a hunch. Look, Fiona, it’s all very hard to explain ...” She smiled, that smile and that hunch being the only things Maggie could hold onto at the moment. “Have you ever been to Silverdale?”

Chapter Five

Interior British Columbia, 1904

Somewhere in the marshes that fed into the Fraser River drifted the pulverised remains of a smashed rail carriage. Amid its floating shattered timbers and a host of valuables and belongings was one intact object, larger and more unusual than anything around it. The blue police box bobbed briefly, before its size wedged it in a narrow part of the river and its weight anchored it in the silt of the bank. Even the ceaseless flow of the river could not shift it. It soon dipped below the water, its double doors facing up to the increasingly arid blue sky. Before long, reeds and algae would further obscure it, and the sediment would further ground it. For a vessel used to traversing the unlimited realms of time, space, and beyond, it was a particular indignity for it to be marooned in such a mundane way. But there was nothing to be done, so the police box settled in to its temporary home and waited.

The Doctor couldn't stop thinking of the train crash, and the TARDIS in that ignominious spot. His arm was aching dully, too, but that pain did not even enter his mind. Nor did he pay much attention to the beautiful surroundings of interior British Columbia, pulling up the rear of the trio on Tad's stallion, deliberately keeping a few paces behind Billy Miner and Len Lubbock. He didn't wish to speak with either man presently, instead finding himself miserable enough stewing in his own ruminations. He hated feeling sorry for himself, but at that moment he could think of nothing more productive to occupy his thoughts. Every time the older bandit looked back, the stranger threw him a sinister expression. Some of that, Len knew, was rage directed at the pair of them for dragging him along on this flight from justice. From the glimpse Len was seeing, he didn't want to test that rage any further.

"This, uh, thing you lost on the train, Sawbones—" Len began.

"I don't want to talk about it," the Doctor snapped.

"Might help you to talk through it," Billy suggested. "It was your property, right?"

"What gave you that idea?"

"Way you talked about it—"

The Doctor's eyes narrowed hatefully and a sour smile crossed his lips. "As a matter of fact, Miner, I stole it too."

"That a fact? Someone as upstanding as you, Doc. I'd never have guessed. Still, way I see it, this whole country was stolen anyway, so who are they to say what belongs to anybody?"

The Doctor forgot his dark mood for a moment, smiling despite himself at this logic.

"May as well get a bit more than what'd come our way courtesy of the Good Lord. I know that there money we all stole is gonna be better in our hands than wherever it was headed. Long as you appreciated it more than the people who it belonged to, who's to say who owns anything anyhow?"

"That's a philosophical way of looking at it. Oh, I hope I did appreciate it, Bill. It's been the one constant in my life. I've lost family, can't seem to get back to my friends, I can't go back home ... if I die here and now, there would be no one in this place and time to even mourn me."

"You ain't gonna die, Doc—"

"Oh, don't I know *that*," he spat back. "I've been stuck here before, without escape. The TARDIS was taken away from me before, as a punishment for doing the right thing. I lost three of your years sitting around trying to repair it, all the while surrounded by *humans* and their petty problems, a man of peace forced to throw in his lot with ignorant soldiers, protecting a load of barely evolved ingrates who didn't bother to thank me, when I could have been out there, doing so much more ..." He blinked, and opened his eyes. The sting in his arm burned more sharply than ever, and he clutched at it. As he came to his senses, the venom in his eyes thankfully dispersed, and the haughty and high-handed tone left his voice. "I am sorry. Truly, Bill. That was beneath me."

"Hey, we all get a bit grim from time to time. I know you're just looking over what kind of life you lead that deals out this kind of hand to you. Not personal, I know. Happens more than once on the road."

"Truth to tell, Billy ... I'm scared." The Doctor laughed at the admission. "I didn't want to say it aloud, but it's as simple as that. I'm scared of what waits for me even if I do get away from here, and scared of what waits for me if I stay. I'm imprisoned by my every decision. Everything I do seems to have these consequences, inescapable and unchangeable, and I get more and more mired in alternatives I never considered. Recently, I've become aware there are a lot of people out to get me."

"In trouble with the law too?" Billy laughed drily. "A thief and a criminal. Sawbones, you just get more and more interesting."

"Huh. Flattery will get you nowhere, Bill. Won't get *me* anywhere either just now. But anyway, I'm ... feeling the pressure of being on the run. I'm starting to question the wisdom of running away." He thought again of Susan and her words. "Even my closest family don't understand. Even I don't, sometimes. I'm striving to find somewhere, but I don't know what kind of place that would be. But what's the alternative? Go on wandering forever? Sometimes I wonder if it wouldn't be better to just let fate deal with me as it seems destined to."

"May not be any comfort for you to hear, but I know how you feel, Doc. Kentucky's my home. Canada takes some getting used to for a man raised down there."

"Billy, I have a question for you. Why the 'Gentleman Bandit' schtick?"

"Gotta get people talking, and on your side. The common folk, you know, readin' the papers. I want them rooting for me, not CP Rail and those miserable train engineers."

"It isn't just that, though is it? I know how easily violence comes to you people. Someone in your situation would be within his rights to think it easier to pull a trigger every now and then."

"Tell me about it!" Len interjected.

Billy Miner sucked air through his teeth. "Kentucky isn't any great shakes, when you get down to it. I'm no fan of Canada, and sometimes I miss ol' Kentucky something fierce, but then I remember what it was like. Violent place. Even more violent than here. And people like you wouldn't even be able to walk the same streets as people like me."

The Doctor nodded sadly. "I can imagine."

"And you just learn to take that for granted, and you wonder, well, why? Why shouldn't people expect something a little better, from the land of the God-damned free no less? Why do we deserve this country any more than those poor Indians, if we're ain't got any better ideas than the ones drove us out to this here new world in the first place? But you get so soaked into the violence. Seeps into your soul, doesn't it? Gets to be all around you, and you feel like it's part of you. But it doesn't have to be. Takes some effort, but you can pull yourself out of it and commit yourself to staying out. Oh, sure you can't help it if it takes someone you know or someone you love. You can't help it if it comes back on you, like it was gonna do thanks to young and faithless Tad back there. But you *can* help it by not taking a person someone else knows and loves off the face of this world."

The Doctor smiled. "That's ... very stirring, Bill. It does mean a lot. Thank you for sharing that."

The bandit instantly stared down at his boots, suddenly bashful at the compliment.

The Doctor's temporary goodwill was shattered by two events in rapid succession. First, he felt the most sudden and searing pain yet from the gunshot wound in his arm. A few moments later, other shots rang out in the air and echoed into the valley.

Constable Jephcott Grogan had been irritated the last couple of days. He had been assigned to take the statement of the engineer about the robbery—and listened as the small-town fool ranted and raved about the low-down character of the robbers. The engineer seemed particularly irate that a Negro had been in their party, and assured Grogan if the Negro hadn't taken him by surprise, they never would have gotten away with the loot. Grogan listened and nodded at the account, all the while full of contempt for this petty man, letting these robbers get away with it and off-loading the problem on to the Mounties.

Grogan worked out the likely course the bandits had taken, and was set to head west when he received a cable from one of their outposts in the north. A young boy, Tad Pardoe, was sleeping off a vicious beating in one of the town's jail cells. The Sheriff told Grogan he'd admitted to stealing some money and tried to use the fact to get some leverage with one of the town's worst gamblers, Morris 'Bear-Strangler' McGee—who had already lost his signature hat playing cards with the bandits' ringleader.

When Pardoe came around, Grogan found he was little help. He had taken McGee up to the bandit's room, only to find they had fled into the night, probably having overheard the young idiot's treachery. Not knowing where the treasure was buried, McGee violently took out his frustration on the young man, who was only saved from death by the intervention of the woman tending bar, Valerie, who sent for the Sheriff and his men.

But though they had a head start of a few hours, Grogan knew his men, if they picked the right track, would be able to catch up with them. They were unlikely to venture farther north—the country between here and Prince George was too open and had too few rest stops. So he mustered a detachment of Mounties and headed west, while giving his trusted constables instructions to keep eyes on the routes to the south and the east as well.

He also knew the head start the bandits enjoyed was no advantage. Both they and their steeds would be tired from having to start unexpectedly early, and the men would be the worse for wear from liquor to boot. The train engineer had proudly informed him that he had clipped the Negro in the upper arm, so Grogan was reliably certain that injury would further slow them down.

Then, as the morning was dawning on the valley near the Fraser River, he caught sight of three horses furtively breaking cover from between clumps of the Aspen trees that offered shelter in this part of interior British Columbia. He was fairly certain the leader was that new folk hero, Billy Miner the Grey Fox.

Grogan understood people like Miner were the toast of the town in these frontiers, and the North West Mounted Police would be second only to the Canadian Pacific Rail operators in dislike. People like Miner stood up for the little man, and it was hard to tell that little man that bandits made the whole country less safe. He tried to say as much to that poor young Pardoe, his right eye so swollen he could barely open it to look at the Mountie.

"It's all fun and games when you're making off with the loot, but look where you are now, lad."

Maybe if he weren't a Mountie, Grogan would see it from their perspective. Sometimes this land didn't seem to offer much opportunity. But his vision, he always told his men, was permanently coloured red—the red of his uniform. He couldn't let sympathy compromise his execution of his duties.

Now he looked out over the valley and saw Miner, his other confederate, and this mysterious, black-skinned man who had fallen in with them.

"Fire a warning shot, then charge them," he commanded. "And make sure your weapons are loaded."

"From what I've heard," one of the constables piped up, "he's a gentleman bandit. Don't open fire on nobody, even when his back's against the wall."

"He's a bandit, son," Grogan declared. "They're desperate men. I want 'em alive but I want you all alive too. So don't stay your hand. If you have a shot, take it."

He snapped at the reins of his trusty horse and rode down to intercept them. As he did, he fired into the air to give them his first and last warning.

The Doctor stole a glance back, seeing a wall of red serge racing toward them. The North West Mounted Police. He looked back to Billy Miner, racing ahead. If he was troubled by the pursuit and by how close they were getting, he didn't show it.

"Attention bandits!" cried the Mounties' leader, the acoustics of the valley carrying and amplifying his voice fearfully. "You can't get away! Surrender now or we will be forced to open fire!"

"Bill," Len shouted, pulling at the reins of his horse, "time to pack it in, eh? We can't outrun them. Their horses are fresher than ours, and there are two of 'em for each of us."

Billy flashed him a wicked grin. "Just the way I like it! Yeah!" His steed seemed to gain a second wind from his words, accelerating its gallop and speeding him into a covered clearing.

The Doctor found his vision blurring, the pain of his wound suddenly blinding. It should have healed by now? What was happening?

It made the valley through which they were accelerating a blur of frail branches and shaking greenery, as if the environment was reflecting his own dreadful feelings. He stole a glance at his fellow outlaws, and saw that Len Lubbock was not taking their pursuit nearly as coolly as Bill. The older man, sweating profusely and his eyes darting desperately around, jerked the reins of his mare violently.

"No, Len! Don't panic!" the Doctor cried, reaching out to try to calm the man, but in practice only further startling him.

Len cut a diagonal swathe across the valley, riding furiously into an open clearing past the woodland. The Doctor reared up his own horse, trying to alert Bill, who was now a distant spot ahead.

A sickening crack of gunshot punctured the air, and Len was thrown backwards off his terrified horse, which continued its flight as the Mounties drew nearer.

The Doctor stopped, climbed off, and ran toward the poor old man. He held his hand while he took his last, stertorous breaths. He saw a poor and unfortunate human life, begun and ended in the blink of a Time Lord's eye. And he felt profound regret that he had been unable to stop it ending here, for no reason, in the middle of this chaos.

He looked up from his fallen friend and out to the horizon, upon which Billy Miner was a barely visible speck. The detachment of North West Mounted Police had gained on the Grey Fox. The Doctor saw one last opportunity to help him out. He crossed back to his skittish horse and smacked its backside. With a start, the animal reared and charged off. He heard more gunshots, which seemed to aggravate his wound more. He dropped the hessian bag full of a quarter-share of Billy Miner's loot, which the trusting Gentleman Bandit had allowed him to keep. Right now, it might buy him some time—a greedy Mountie or two might prefer to take it away than chase after him.

Then he looked across this flat part of the valley and saw another wooded clearing, with some hefty and dense growth of Douglas Firs and Sequoias amid the Aspens and Lodgepole pines. He might be able to give them the slip, get up to higher ground ... if he could avoid their guns and if they deemed him a worthier target than the ringleader ...

The Doctor broke into a run.

"Sir! You'll never guess, this sack here ... it's full of money!"

Before Jephcott Grogan knew it, three of his men had dismounted and were examining this vital piece of evidence.

"If I find one bill in there missing," he called back to the avaricious trio, "you'll all be for the high jump!"

Truthfully, there was no way he could estimate how much money was in each bag. All Grogan could rely on was his ability as a superior officer to put the fear of God into his subordinates.

He gave his horse a determined smack and picked up speed. One of the two remaining bandits lay ahead, and Grogan was determined to have him behind bars by the end of this day.

By the time Billy Miner looked back, neither of his friends rode by his side. All he could see was the dense tangle of green forest through which he had come, against which a few dots of moving red, the Mounted Police, stood out. Some were still riding, some stood in a circle, and some were chasing Len Lubbock's horse, now striking out on its own without a rider. Len must have bought it, he mused sadly, and the Doctor ...

He saw the brilliant emerald colour of the Doctor's coat against the duller earth tones of the surroundings. He had sent his own horse charging off in a different direction.

"Hope you know how much I appreciate it, Sawbones," he muttered, before speeding himself to safety.

Chapter Six

Silverdale, 1997

“Turn here!” Maggie exclaimed sharply.

Fiona was irritated how much her passenger was unnerving her, and snapped back, “I saw the intersection sign! Calm down!”

Maggie looked away, all too aware how desperate she was sounding. “I ... just ... wanted to make sure you didn’t miss it, that’s all.”

Fiona downshifted as the unassuming British Columbia town appeared before them. “So this is Silverdale, huh?” She shot another irate glance at Maggie, but her words were directed just as much at herself for what now seemed a grand fool’s errand. “All I can say is this had better be worth it.”

The two women hiked up the trail, Fiona keeping her distance as Maggie scrambled down to a familiar point. She had brought a knapsack stuffed worryingly full, and had changed into rubber hip-waders whose chunky shape didn’t even slow down her sprint. Few people were on the trail at this time, but they all did doubting double-takes as they saw Maggie race past like a woman possessed.

Fiona lost her on one uphill section and didn’t bother picking up her speed to catch up. It was better just now to keep her distance—she half-expected to hear someone scream that there was a madwoman chasing after them. She caught sight of Maggie again at the foot of the higher ground she now walked on and understood the hip-waders. For Maggie was now up to her thighs in the black marshy waters that led out to the Fraser River. The rush of the waters looked ready to pull Maggie under, and each wade she took seemed less steady than the last. Her inexplicable behaviour and the slight hint of insanity made Fiona think she might be better off leaving Maggie to whatever deluded spirit quest she had embarked on. But, ultimately, the vestiges of goodwill couldn’t let her stand by and watch someone in such a desperate situation, so Fiona uncertainly tiptoed after her.

Maggie had loved Ollie, and yet she was convinced he was a few marbles short that day thirteen years ago he had bypassed their western trip and potted around Silverdale. She hardly dared to wonder what Fiona, who had not concealed her distaste with this whole journey, made of the spectacle of her fighting the river current and struggling

to stay balanced as she squelched her way through the muddy bank. With any luck, she had carried on down the trail, discreetly leaving Maggie to her own devices.

A randomly stronger blast of water hit her sideways, and the effort to stay standing made her feel dizzy. She wondered forlornly if she could hear the TARDIS using its telepathy to call out to her. But no, she felt nothing but the increasing desperation of her hopes and the increasing fear that they would lead to nothing. She could just imagine Fiona's supercilious expression when she came out of the river, wet and empty-handed ...

Another blast of water came at her, and the river hurtled near ... but then she felt an arm gripping her.

"I've got you, Maggie," Fiona said, definitively.

Maggie looked back at the woman she hadn't considered her friend since around that time they were busted by Mr. Lee for smoking. Fiona's face was hard and lined, but there was a grudging flicker of concern buried deep within its withering judgement. She had not brought hip-waders, but allowed her short Blundstone boots and the lower half of her slacks to bear the brunt of the waters. Maggie could scarcely believe it.

She took another step sideways, trying to remember where Ollie was when he had felt the treasure chest. She stood farther back than Fiona did now, firmly on the shore, looking on skeptically. If the TARDIS really were telepathic, she decided, she would beam out a thought of her own.

Come on, you cranky old crow, she called to it. I've come all this way. If you're here, give me a clue.

The river continued its attacks on her balance. She still heard and felt no sign of the Doctor's ship.

"So it's going to be like that," she said through gritted teeth.

The next pelt of water caused her to rapidly reorient herself. She pulled away from Fiona, not wanting to pull the more petite woman down into the water with her. She stumbled back, her torso nearly sinking below the water level ...

And then her left foot, unable to find land due to the current, hit something wooden.

Did she feel the familiar hum? It was hard to say through the hip-wader. But this was very close to where Ollie had stopped, wasn't it? Couldn't it be? Even the difference could be down to it shifting over the years from the current.

"Are we nearly there?" Fiona asked forlornly. "I'm soaked through and about to lose my balance."

"Just about ... give me a minute ..." Maggie pulled away and squatted dangerously low to the bank. If she went forward, she would be in the deeper currents of the river proper. Even a step that way might pull her dangerously adrift.

She put her arms below the rushing water, feeling around where she had kicked.

There it was. The vibration was lower and duller due to the water, but that was surely it.

She strained to look through the dark muddy water, but saw an unmistakable rectangular panel of Prussian blue.

Maggie whooped with delight. "It's here! It's here!" she yelled, grabbing Fiona and pulling her close into a hug. The other woman strained to look down, and what she saw scarcely made her any the wiser.

"Police?" she read. "Police box?"

"You know what this means? Ollie must have felt *it* when he thought he had felt the treasure. Must have moved closer to the shore in thirteen years. It's bound to, isn't it?"

Fiona nodded with the desperation of someone longing for an explanation.

Maggie reached into the pocket of her jeans and pulled out an ornate old key on a long chain. She ringed the chain around her arm so it wouldn't get lost when she put it below the water.

Maggie waded up to the side of the box and squatted atop the door. Maybe the old girl herself had seen to it that her door faced up. She moved to put the key in the lock, but for a moment thought better of it and looked back. "Thanks Fiona, you don't have to stay."

"Leave you here to drown? Don't even think about it, Maggie."

"I guess you're coming with me."

She put the key into the lock and turned it, and both women tumbled forward along with a lot of water ...

Maggie fell forward into the control room, Fiona stumbling on top of her. Both of them grabbed the railings that ringed the six-sided control room. Maggie reached to the front-most panel and turned the large lever that controlled

the doors. Every single item in the room, the haphazard tables and piles of Doctorish bric-a-brac, all stood surreally upright, as if nailed down to the floor.

To her relief, the two massive inner doors swung shut.

“We’re bone-dry!” Fiona exclaimed, looking from the rings against which she had pinioned herself to her black T-shirt, jeans, and boots.

Maggie didn’t understand it herself. Not a drop of water from the Fraser River had followed them inside. A blinking display on the scanner smugly informed them: “SEA DEFENCES ACTIVATED”.

“What the hell is this? Who would build an underwater bunker on its side like this? And how the hell did you know to find it, Maggie?”

Fiona’s confusion only grew as, without warning, the entire room righted itself around them, as if a massive gyroscope had reset it. The two women relaxed their grips from the railing and the console respectively, relieved but a little disoriented to be standing upright.

Maggie flailed at a row of switches on the next control panel over. “It’s not a bunker, Fiona, it’s a ship. And if it cooperates, we’re going to get it moving ...” She looked at the glass cylinder and the complex lattice of lighted tubes within it. “You were down here all this time, weren’t you? Ollie thought he’d found the treasure, but he’d actually found *you* all those year ago? Did you know one day I’d be here to bring you back to the Doctor?”

“Doctor?” Fiona interrupted. “I might have guessed *he’d* have something to do with this madness. Guess if you’re good-looking you can get away with being a total lunatic ...”

Maggie looked across at the control room. “I hope you know it’s good to see you again,” she muttered into the console, flicking the bank of switches. “Now this should be easy, just land back at the same spot you landed last time? Come on ... help me out so we can both get back to the Doctor ...”

For all the difficulties the Doctor had steering the TARDIS, Maggie was familiar with the telepathic connection between the ship and her pilot. There had been frequent occasions in the last year where they were in the vortex for extended periods of time, and the Doctor took the opportunity to give her a chance to fly the Ship. She hadn’t done it that well, and had a visceral thrill when the mighty engines shuddered and groaned in reaction to her coaxing; but maybe the two elements in concert—reaching out to the vessel with her mind while operating the controls as best she remembered with her hands—would work. She screwed her eyes tightly shut and thought of the Doctor. She kept his wise, compassionate face in her thoughts. She pulled out that old picture and burned it into her mind.

Fiona observed Maggie, looking from these fantastical control panels to the picture, her brow furrowed obsessively. “Are you OK?”

“Ssh!” She turned back to the console. “Come on, there aren’t any new coordinates to put in. You must want to find him as much as I do ...”

Her eyes closed, remembering the sequence she had gone over, Maggie reached for the final switch on the row. The entire bank of panels lit up encouragingly. Hoping this would be simpler than it seemed, Maggie pulled the largest lever on the panel upwards, as she had seen the Doctor do many times before.

Nothing happened.

Fiona looked desperately at her, clearly wondering how long they were supposed to stay in this mad room.

It wasn’t working ... unless ...

Maggie thumped the console as hard as she could.

The room filled with the ancient and unearthly roar, and the latticed tubes inside the central cylinder slid up and down. The sound was slow and a little groggy, but that was hardly surprising after all this time. For the first time in ninety-three years, the TARDIS was moving.

Chapter Seven

Interior British Columbia, 1904

The Doctor's coat ripped as it snagged on the thorns of a wild rose plant. A gunshot cracked behind him to remind him there was considerably more pain in store if he lingered too long.

He crouched low, pulling his coat-tail loose from the thorns, and surveyed the scene. A hulking figure in red serge and brown wide-brimmed hat was growing closer, a revolver playing in the fingers of his gloved hands. Had he seen which way the Doctor had come? Were the senses of people such as he honed in their relentless pursuit of fugitives from justice twitching at the closeness? Did he scent Time Lord blood in the air?

The Doctor clutched his arm, the bullet wound freshly throbbing. He knew rationally that he was fixating on this trivial injury because of his deeper neuroses over his isolation, the loss of the TARDIS, and the desperation of his plight.

The Mountie's cube-shaped head swivelled dangerously, each sweep seeming to catch him looking up. Thankfully, the Doctor's clothes were blending in with the surroundings—imagine if he still wore that patchwork frock coat.

The Doctor looked out at the expanse of plains beyond this dense woodland. Out there, Len Lubbock lay. He wondered if anyone would mourn him; he wondered if, in spite of his manner, Billy Miner would spare him any thoughts. Was that another death on his hands, the Doctor wondered? If the silly Earthman had listened to him, he would have kept his nerves and not charged off. Why didn't people listen? Didn't they know the cost? The Doctor could afford to take risks—even if this injury got septic, it was unlikely he would need to sacrifice another life to heal it. Yet these puny, silly folk would throw their own lives away, enslaved by their fears and their insecurities. As much as humans would always be his favourite species, the Doctor would be lying if he said he understood them.

Despite himself, the desperate situation forced a grim smile from the Doctor. Could this really be the end? He rifled through his pockets, turning up all that hi-tech junk. There wasn't much use for the sonic screwdriver out in the wilds of nineteenth-century British Columbia. Would his hubris cost him this time? For he did feel it would be a strange and prosaic defeat that, having saved the universe, outwitted the most fearsome and mighty forces of darkness of all time, he would finally be nobbled by a malevolent Dudley Do-Right.

But this would not be the end. For the Doctor heard a familiar sound echoing through the close-growing canopy of trees. He didn't dare believe it was real, but merely basked in childlike happiness at the prospect that it might be.

Jephcott Grogan was getting twitchy. His thumb worried at the safety catch of his revolver like it was a persistent itch. One of them was here, either Billy Miner or this mysterious coloured man. He didn't want to shoot either of them, but he felt suddenly inferior, as if he were in the presence of a much greater and unknowable mind. It was the woods, he was sure, playing tricks with his mind, but he felt it gnawing away at him. He flicked his thumb against that catch again, impotently putting his faith in the hunk of death-dealing metal in his hand, as if admitting his brain no longer had anything to offer. That was silly, he assured himself, and kept himself focused on his task.

He was glad the men were still out in the open. If he faced either bandit at close range, he wanted to dictate the terms, not have some fool open fire. That dead bandit out in the open was a travesty. Not only did he grieve for the trigger-happy taking of a life, but if they all died, the NWMP would never recover the loot.

A positive outcome to all this was looking increasingly unlikely. If only Grogan could concentrate, not jump at every twig that snapped and ever bird that chirped as he paced by. He adjusted his high uniform collar, straightened his belt, and gave that catch another flick of his thumb, for luck.

It was then that Grogan nearly jumped from his skin. A mighty roar filled the air. Grogan had never heard of a stampede of elephants, and at first took the cacophony for it. But as he listened on, whirling around on the spot to get a look at whatever was causing it, the sound went on and Grogan heard something mechanical to it, an element of some gigantic train engine chugging an almighty carriage.

Finally, an unnaturally bright blue light bathed the woodland, and a rectangular shape solidified around it. As the groaning ceased, a wooden hut appeared from thin air before Grogan's eyes. A legend at its top proclaimed the magical object as a 'POLICE PUBLIC CALL BOX'.

Then the bandit stepped forward, pacing toward the box, his eyes wide with familiarity but also with the happiness of a child. He looked back at Grogan.

The door swung open and a dark-haired woman's head swung around.

"Maggie?" he asked, his voice not rising above a whisper.

"Doctor!" she cried, running from the door to hug him. Seeing him flinch in pain at the contact, she looked down in horror at his red-stained arm.

Another woman joined them. They were unlike any women Grogan had ever seen, dressed like men and surveying their surroundings with a confidence and a lack of reserve very different from the ladies he knew.

"I don't believe it ..." this other woman was saying, unheard by Maggie and this doctor as they embraced.

Grogan played with the catch of his gun, but the weapon suddenly felt heavy in his hand, and he clumsily dropped it into the grass. He looked from one to the other, newly startled when the bandit—the 'doctor'—looked back at him, his earlier doubt dispelled, smiling triumphantly.

"What do you say, Do-Right?" he asked brightly. "I was never here. And why not let Miner away too, or else..." He extended his arm, and fluttered the fingers menacingly, his eyes bulging melodramatically alongside. With another laugh, now distinctly eerie in the wake of this supernatural threat, he ushered the two women back inside. A moment later, the terrifying wail started up again, and with the same uncanny blue glow, the police box vanished back into the ether.

Grogan stood on the spot it had inhabited, poked the space in which the object had stood so solidly for those few moments, whirled around again, and then ran from the woods as fast as his legs would carry him. The search would be called off, he was emphatic. Grogan's men were dispirited and a little skeptical to hear the news, doubting their commanding officer's sanity. But Grogan didn't care. Billy Miner and a considerable sum had been lost, but next to whatever this otherworldly being could do to him, the loss was a small one.

Night had nearly fallen when Miner returned to the place where he had stashed his loot. He nearly jumped out of his skin when he saw the three people waiting for him by it, only for a wry smile to creep across his face as he recognised the man at their head.

"Sawbones, you wily old fox," he chuckled as he jumped from his horse and gave his weary muscles a stretch. "How the hell did you know where I'd stashed this loot?"

He blew air through his cheeks. "Oh, a simple deduction based on the possible distance you could have covered on your own after the robbery, nearby landmarks, your natural inclination to head north, and a few other handy psychological tells."

"Thanks for leading the Mounties off."

He shot his friend an embarrassed glance. "I used slightly disreputable means to scare them."

Billy arched an eyebrow. The Doctor's young friend, a petite woman with frizzy curled hair, explained, "He pretended to put a hex on them."

The Grey Fox chuckled. "Is that a fact? I wouldn't put it past you to do one for real."

The Doctor laughed along with his friend. "Well, at least they won't trouble you."

"How'd you get over here without a horse?"

"Well, I'll tell you all about that in a moment. First I wanted to introduce you to a great admirer of yours: Maggie Weitz."

The frizzy-haired woman stepped forward bashfully. Billy doffed his hat to her. "Mighty proud to know you, Miss."

"Mrs.," she corrected. "My husband ... he admired you even more."

"That'd be Ollie, right?"

She laughed at his recognition. "Oh, I wish I could tell him *you* knew who *he* was. If he saw where you hid this money, he'd flip his lid."

"Same with the train company, the Mounties ..."

"Oh, not like that. Not for the money. Just because you got away with it."

Billy looked her up and down, and looked at her friend, the other woman who was staring slack-jawed at the endless, undeveloped horizon and saying, "It's real ... I'm really here ..." to herself, while patting her clothes and touching the leaves and the grass in stunned awe.

"She's my friend, Fiona," Maggie added hastily.

"Anyone else knocking around?" Billy asked warily.

"No, she's just along for the ride," Maggie said. "I promise, it'll be like we were never here."

"But no hexes?"

The Doctor nodded. "Promise." Billy dimly understood the isolation and dislocation that had dogged the Doctor throughout their brief acquaintanceship.

"Well done," Maggie said. "But don't let us interrupt you. You have a long journey ahead."

"Well," the Doctor interrupted, scratching his nose sheepishly. "Not necessarily." He indicated a strange blue outpost wedged improbably between two of the nearby trees. "My way of saying thanks, Bill. I could get you away more easily than you'd manage by horseback. We could be across the border in the blink of an eye."

"Any border you choose," Maggie added.

Billy nodded ruefully. "I don't doubt it, Sawbones, Mrs. Maggie," he said ruminatively. "But I'd prefer to go the old-fashioned way."

"I might have guessed you'd say that," she assessed.

Billy turned back to the Doctor, a sudden heaviness in his bearing. "I don't suppose Len made it?"

"I'm afraid not, old chap. I tried to warn him ... I stayed with him ... but you must believe there was nothing I could do ..."

"He was my responsibility, not yours. We can't watch out for everyone."

"No, I suppose not."

Billy straightened his bearing and stiffly leaned forward to give the Doctor a stoic half-hug. "Well, good luck on your travels. Thanks for stopping by. Pleasure to meet you, Mrs. Maggie. I'm mighty flattered you and your husband spared me your attention."

The Doctor answered, "And thank you, Bill, for helping me when I needed it. Now if you'll excuse me, I have to get these two ladies back where they belong."

Billy gave the Doctor's two friends a courtly bow and replaced his hat. He was hardly surprised when they made their way down to the blue wooden shed, and a blazing light flashed through the darkness to take it out of thin air.

"No hexes indeed ... who do you think you're fooling, Sawbones?"

Once they were gone, he ducked down to extract some of his money. He only needed enough to get across the border and cover the usual incidental expenses. The rest he'd get back to, one day ... he hoped ...

Billy Miner readied himself for his next adventure.

Epilogue

Vancouver, 31 August 1997

Maggie's parents were grateful she could stop by their anniversary party. At first they wondered why she was so different—so much happier and more at ease than when she had called them in the summer. But then her Doctor friend stepped through the door and they understood.

Everyone was glad to see him. He looked a little tired, truth to tell, and his arm was in a sling. But he was as charming and effervescent company as ever, soon joining in the conversation and recounting some extraordinary facts.

A couple of hours into the event, Maggie reflected how full her heart felt at the moment. She had been worried as spring gave way to summer and the hardware store and Revelstoke seemed to be all she could expect from life. But here she was, back with the Doctor and her family. There was all the time in the world.

Fiona Stornaway was also there, somewhat reluctantly, but the Doctor had promised to get her back to her car in Silverdale before the lot at the foot of the trail closed. She was currently making awkward small talk with Larry by the latkes.

Maggie had lost sight of the Doctor, and felt a minuscule flutter of worry. She felt silly when she saw him on the patio, staring out at the dark Vancouver sky—most unlike the skyline a century ago, now nothing but housing and electricity and sodium lighting, as far as the eye could see.

His sling rested painfully on the deck railing, and he further winced when she tapped his shoulder and startled him.

"You're not ready to go already, are you?" he asked her. "Oh, why not stay just a little bit longer?"

"Once Dad gets going on the piano, you may eat those words. But ..." She ran her hand down his back, not intimately but in friendly solidarity. "I just wanted to make sure you were holding up."

"Holding up? Me? I'm the Doctor. I always hold up. I've been holding up for over two thousand years." He looked away from her, eyes getting lost in the distant streetlights. "I've spent some time with Susan. We were thrown together, rather. But it seemed a good moment to reconnect."

"That's great."

"It is. But, as always, we had to say goodbye. And with my life, I can never be sure I'll see her again ..." He looked back through the glass at Maggie's enormous family. "I once had a family, a long time ago ... before I started on this road ..." He looked back to Maggie, his eyes frighteningly candid. "Obviously, I want you to re-join me, Maggie, but I must warn you. There's danger ahead."

"More than usual?"

“Possibly. My future is catching up with me, and I don’t know what will happen when it does. That white box, for starters ...”

“Save it for the TARDIS, Doc,” she said.

He took her hand in his. “Thanks Maggie. Welcome back aboard.”

THE DOCTOR WHO PROJECT

In 1904, Billy Miner, 'the Grey Fox', executed the first train robberies in Canada's history. One of his keenest admirers was Ollie Borcik, the late husband of Maggie Weitz. Now, in 1997, Maggie has unwillingly returned to her normal life in Revelstoke, not sure whether the Doctor survived his battle with the Preservers. She gets a shred of hope in the form of a faded photograph showing Miner accompanied by a mysterious Black man identified only as 'Sawbones'.

It is indeed the Doctor - separated from the TARDIS due to an untimely train crash, and forced to throw his lot in with the Grey Fox and his untrustworthy cohorts. Pursued by the North West Mounted Police, nursing a bullet wound, and missing his closest friend, the Time Lord is frustrated to find himself swept along by events, only a mischance away from ending up dead, and a footnote in history.

His only hope is that, ninety-three years later, Maggie can figure out how to travel back and rescue him.

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This story features the Eleventh Doctor as played by Winston Adderly

