

THE  
**DOCTOR WHO**  
PROJECT

**SOMETHING MORE  
THAN A CRICKET BAT**



**Will Hadcroft**

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## Bonus Feature The Lost Stories

### *A Word From Bob Furnell*

The story you're about to read was originally intended to be part of The Doctor Who Project (TDWP) series of stories dedicated to past Doctors – Doctors one through seven. The original idea Kyle and I had for this series was a collection of stories published in omnibus form, just like the full season omnibuses. We initially put out a request in 2001 to our writers that we were looking for stories centering on past doctors. If memory serves me correct, there was quite a bit of interest expressed in this idea and we received several story outlines involving past Doctors. The writers to pen to paper so to speak and we received Timothy Farr's first Doctor story "An Attack From Time" and Will Hadcroft's sixth Doctor and Mel story "Nothing More Than A Cricket Bat", both of which Kyle and I intended to publish in our first collection. It was our intention to publish the first collection in 2001. Tim passed and sadly due one thing and another, we eventually abandoned the idea. Both Kyle and I felt bad that we had abandoned this idea and we really wanted to see both Timothy and Will's stories published at some point, but where? It wasn't until early 2006 when we came up with the idea that we would be publishing future TDWP seasons on our website that we found a vehicle in which to finally publish the stories as bonus material.

### A Bit About The Author

#### *Will Hadcroft*

I've known Will for a few years now but for the life of me I can't recall how we originally met. [*Bob: Sorry Will.*] Will submitted the idea for "Something More Than A Cricket Bat" and both Kyle and I immediately liked the idea for the story. I'm sure Will won't mind me saying that I think he is a first rate writer. He captures the essence of what it means to be a writer in all of his stories, evoking crystal clear pictures in the readers mind that make you feel like you're part of the events unfolding. Since submitting "Cricket Bat" to us, Will has gone on to be a published author with his well-received first novel "Anne Droyd and The Century Lodge" and his autobiographical account dealing with Aspergers Syndrome in the novel "The Feelings Mutual" both of which can be purchased through Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

## Something More Than A Cricket Bat by Will Hadcroft

“Oh dear,” said Mrs M, straining to put the vacuum cleaner back into the cubby-hole under the stairs. She held her back momentarily and winced over the stabbing pain. Then, as the pain subsided, she straightened up, and, as she walked across the carpeted hall of the cottage and into the living room, she sniffed the scented air and smiled with satisfaction as the polish gave off its aroma. *Cleanliness is next to godliness*, she thought, and then made for the kitchen.

Routine was very important to Mrs M. Get up early, have breakfast, put the washing machine on, read the morning papers, do the crossword, peg the washing out, dust and sweep, take a rest before lunch. She was at the latter stage now. At her age it was always wise to punctuate the day with regular rest periods and plenty of tea.

No soon had she begun to fill the kettle, a sharp rat-a-tat-tat broke the serenity. She flinched a little, but not because of the sound. No. She flinched because it was Thursday. She never had visitors on a Thursday. She paused, kettle in hand, and wondered if it was those religious people again. No, it couldn't be. They had promised to give her a week to read the pamphlet.

A second rap of manly knuckles broke her trance and she made for the front door.

The heavy oak creaked and whined as the door swung inwards. Two people, a man and a girl, stood smiling at her. “Hello,” beamed the man with an over-exaggerated air of pleasantness. “Would I have the honour of addressing a Mrs M?”

The elderly lady took in the garish attire of her inquisitor. *I don't know*, she thought, *modern fashion*. He was wearing green shoes with purple spats, black and yellow striped trousers, a chequered waistcoat, and a three quarter multi-coloured patchwork coat. *What is the world coming to? Maybe he is a fan of that pop singer. George something.*

“I'm sorry, I don't recall having the pleasure,” she said, frowning hard and trying to place where she might have seen him before.

The man beamed his overly pleasant smile again and gestured to his companion. “Suffice it to say that this is Melanie.” He paused to correct himself. “Or should I say Mel.” The smile broadened as the stranger held his lapels with pride. “And I am known as the Doctor.”

*I am known as the Doctor.* The words echoed through the avenues of her mind, conjuring a distant memory. The face was different, younger, and kindly. The voice softer, unassuming.

“Are you OK, Mrs M?” It was the girl. Her smile was also broad, but considerably more sincere than that of her Doctor friend. There was something about the young lady Mrs M immediately warmed to. Her clothes were smart and contemporary and her ginger locks complemented her fresh complexion.

“I am sorry,” Mrs M apologised. “Do come in.”

The Doctor clasped his hands together and took a step forward, only to be snagged at the elbow by his companion. Without warning his smile fell into a glaring accusation. Mel pressed against his arm and whispered, “You haven't told her why we're here.”

Straight away the angry features melted into a look of melancholia. But Mrs M had already disappeared and there was no choice but to follow her inside.

Melanie shut the door and the Doctor stood, hands still clasped, and boomed into the sweet smelling air, “I do apologise for not writing first, Mrs M. The committee of the museum at Lord's were adamant that I come and see you immediately.”

“The museum?” The authoritative voice floated in from the kitchen. “Oh, do sit down, by the way.”

The Doctor and Mel seated themselves and waited for Mrs M to continue. She didn't.

Mel leaned forward and whispered again. “Are you sure this is the lady you've come to see?”

Eyes bulged, brow furrowed and hair fluffed and bounced as her companion launched into another bout of intolerance. “Who else could it be? There aren't that many elderly ladies in this location at this point in time who go by the abbreviated name of Mrs M, are there?”

“I know,” whispered Mel, trying to humour him. “But you can’t be sure the bail is definitely here either.”

As if to show her how wrong she was, the Doctor fumbled in his coat pocket and produced a yellowed newspaper article, complete with photograph. “Look Mel. Here she is at the match in 1920. Top left.”

“I know,” Mel replied, taking the ancient picture. A group of men in cricket garb dominated for the most part and a selection of young women graced the edges, with the slender blonde at the top left hand side holding a distinctive bat in her arms. Mel dropped the aged cutting onto a coffee table and pondered over the bat’s accompanying wickets and bails.

The rattle of teacups and the sound of refined politeness cut Melanie’s next question short. “Would you just move that cutting off the table please?”

The girl found herself obliging while Mrs M lowered the tray with frightening efficiency. “I’ve never seen you at the museum,” she said, falling back into her chair.

“Err, no,” said the Doctor, “I don’t actually work at the museum itself.” He cleared his throat, getting ready to announce the purpose of his visit.

“I do like that cravat,” Mrs M observed, cutting her visitor short. She studied the flowing red material with its bright white spots. “Where did you get it?”

“I can’t rightly remember,” said the Doctor vaguely, genuinely taken aback.

“When you get to my age, young man, you’ll know the true meaning of forgetfulness.”

The Doctor managed a half smile. “Well when I *was* your age, I remember thinking exactly that.”

Mel shot a reproving stare, but the old lady didn’t seem to acknowledge the sarcasm laced with truth.

“*Whitakers*,” Mrs M continued. “They might have one. Although *Debenhams* would probably be my best bet.”

Before the Doctor could let out one of his over-exaggerated sighs, his companion touched the lady’s arm gently. “Mrs M,” she said as she handed over the news cutting, “is this you?”

“Oh, hang on.” She fumbled in her cardigan pocket. “Let me get my glasses.” After putting on her spectacles, Mrs M took the newspaper cutting and studied it. In seconds she filled up, crestfallen and sad, removing the lenses from her face. Melanie instinctively held her hand tight.

“Yes,” said Mrs M finally. “It is me. Where on earth did you get it?”

“Oh, err.” This time it was Mel’s turn to feel flummoxed.

The Doctor came to her aid. “I’m an archivist for several museums. That’s a copy of *The Times*. May 1920.”

Mrs M seemed to suddenly be relaxed in herself and started pouring the tea. “I was just twenty-years-old,” she enthused. “The village cricket team were having a surprisingly good year. They’d won several matches. The girls were supplying the refreshments. We were honoured to grace a newspaper as distinguished as that.”

Melanie said nothing about the woman’s youthful demeanour, though she wanted to. Could she really be a hundred-and-two years old? A single framed photograph gracing the old bureau desk in the corner drew her attention. A man in military attire stood confidently, smiling and full of beans. “Is that your husband?”

“Yes,” said Mrs M, not looking up.

“Isn’t that a World War One uniform?”

“Yes.” The woman swallowed. “He was on leave and we had a drink together. We got into a bit of bother and we had to marry.” She shook her head and tutted. “Married at eighteen. He went back to the war just two months before it ended.” She stirred the teas and handed them out. “I never saw him again.”

Mel was horrified, partly by the casual way Mrs M was telling the tale, but mostly because of her own feelings of guilt. She wished she were not so inquisitive, yet she couldn’t resist looking for evidence of a son or daughter. The room was devoid of any more photographs. Maybe the baby arrived stillborn. Maybe she miscarried. Maybe she had fallen out with her child and washed her hands of him-her. Maybe, maybe, maybe.

The Doctor looked very serious and raised his eyebrows slightly. "You never married again?" For the first time the wizened brown eyes met his sharp blue. "No."

Mel smiled affectionately. "True Love."

"Oh no," said Mrs M, suddenly laughing heartily. "I met my true love in 1920."

"At this cricket match?"

"Yes."

The Doctor cleared his throat. "Mrs M, it's imperative that I ask you about something you may still have in your possession." He returned her attention to the yellowed clipping. "The stump bails that go with this bat in your hand."

The old lady just smiled at him.

"Do you have them?"

Mrs M sipped her tea, leaned back, smiled some more and exhaled noisily. "He was so dashing, he was. Like no one else I'd ever met."

The young girl immediately picked up on her tone. "Your true love?" Her bombastic mentor burned stifled irritation into her face. She ignored him.

The widow stared into an imaginary scene. "He was tall, blond. Well, blondish. The perfect gentleman." She turned to the burly man sat opposite her. "He was a doctor too."

"Really," came the wry reply.

"He played cricket like no one had ever seen." She chuckled to herself. "And no one could remember who had invited him to play."

Mel was completely caught up in it now. "And did you fall in love?"

"We danced that night," continued the spinster, not registering the question. "He took some persuading and seemed rather preoccupied about something."

"Yes," said the Doctor knowingly. Mel turned to find that her companion was also lost in the past.

"He danced better than anyone I'd danced with before. Better than my husband, certainly. He knew every move." She broke off and started laughing. "And everyone kept pointing because he was still wearing his cricket clothes."

"He sounds charming," said Mel gently.

The Doctor immediately revolted at the suggestion. "He sounds wet."

Mel shot him another reproving look, and he retreated into a childish sulk.

"He kept saying someone was trying to sabotage the game. He was very concerned about fair play."

"A bit too concerned," groaned the Doctor.

Mrs M took another sip of her tea. Melanie looked on in anticipation. *Is that it?*

"There were two others with him," she began again. She wasn't really talking to them, Mel realised, and she was just rereading history to herself. "There was a girl about my age, she spoke with an Australian accent. Megan I think she was called. Very feisty. Very..." She broke off.

"Bossy," said the Doctor. "Mouth like a foghorn."

Melanie smiled. He obviously knew whom the lady was talking about. *Must have met her*, she thought.

"Assertive, I was going to say," cautioned Mrs M. "The young man she was with was sharp and intelligent. Oh, what was his name? Marlowe, or something."

"Mrs M," interrupted the Doctor.

"Turlough! Yes that's it. And the girl kept whining about the last time they attended a match like ours."

"Mrs M."

As if snapping out of the trance, the old woman turned. "Yes?"

"Did your doctor friend leave you the bat and wickets?" His finger was stabbing aggressively at the cutting.

She grinned again. "Oh yes," she enthused. "He was extremely absentminded. All fingers and thumbs."

"All of a dither," the Doctor muttered under his breath with contempt. He glared at Mel. "Thank goodness I changed for the better."

The girl's jaw dropped in astonishment.

Mrs M struggled to her feet. "I'll get them for you."

Once their hostess was out of earshot, Mel nudged the Doctor's ribs with her elbow. "You were her true love?"

The Doctor smiled wryly. "It would seem so."

"And she's lived a life of celibacy ever since?"

He made a show of looking hurt. "Is that really so hard to believe?"

"I wish I'd met this other incarnation myself. He sounds like a real gentleman."

The Doctor's eyes burned again. "And I'm not now?"

"Here it is." The spinster's return saved the moment. "He told me it dated back to 1883." Her voice fell into a whisper as she handled the oiled cricket bat with great sensitivity. "He told me it was used in the historic Ashes Test match against Australia." Then the whisper broke into hearty laughter. "Oh, it is funny. Every time I see them showing it in the museum at Lord's cricket ground on television, I can't help chuckling, because I know it's not the real thing."

Melanie was intrigued. "Did he give it to you, Mrs M?"

"Well, not quite," confessed the old lady. "He forgot it. He wanted to avoid being photographed by *The Times* reporter and slipped away with his two young friends back to his little police hut and," she broke off again.

The Doctor's voice was strangely hoarse with empathy. "And they vanished," he concluded for her. "You never saw him again."

Mrs M nodded the way people do when they are about to start crying. She unravelled a handkerchief from under her cardigan sleeve and dabbed her eyes. Trying to put on an appearance of normality, she collected the cups and saucers onto the tray and carried them off to the kitchen.

Melanie tried not to look at the Doctor for a moment. He had suddenly become abashed and dejected, pained by his own absentminded cruelty. It was difficult to know how he was feeling sometimes, he being so alien and all. He was often outspoken, yes, but there were prolonged silences like the one she was experiencing now that betrayed a deep and tortured soul.

Melanie had observed that the Doctor seemed to long for release at times, and she often found herself wishing some terrible accident would befall him and trigger the regeneration process. His previous incarnation, although she'd never known him, had clearly been diametrically opposed to his current form. Could he not somehow change himself back?

She knew it was inevitable the Doctor would regenerate again, but probably not in her lifetime. "Doctor," she said at last, snapping him out of his trance. "Why is the bail so important?"

The Doctor was suddenly animated. "As you heard, the bail is from the Test of 1883."

"So?"

"Think Mel. When Australia defeated England in 1882, a mock obituary appeared in *Sporting Times*." He paused for a second, searching his vast mind for the quote. "'The body will be cremated and the ashes taken to Australia'. The following year, when England won, they burned one of the bails and kept the ashes in an urn."

"Hence the Ashes Test."

The Doctor beamed triumphantly. "Precisely. It has an important place in history."

"But surely," Mel pondered, "so long as they have the ashes of a bail in an urn at Lords' museum, it doesn't matter if the bail is the wrong one."

"But it does matter, Mel. It's a change to the established time line. A small one, granted, but a change nonetheless, and who knows what long term damage might be done as a result?"

Mel was pleased to see his beaming intellect back in harness. "So that's why you want to get it back to the museum?"

"No," said the Doctor seriously. "I want to get it back to 1883."

"Oh." Mel was confused now.

"I borrowed the bat and wickets after I'd stopped off to help the Australian team out, show them a few moves, that kind of thing," mused the self-professed genius. "The trouble is I took the equipment into the TARDIS *before* the historic match."

Mel was catching up again. If the bail was taken before the match was played, the British must have burned a different one. She shuddered at what the Doctor had said earlier about alternate time lines being created as a result. He had explained the principle several times since their first meeting. She pondered further. There will be a time line where Mrs M never met her husband, and another where she did but he never died in the war, and yet another where she never encountered the Doctor. The time lines were a fragile setup; she understood that much, and it didn't help matters when new ones were forged from those already existing.

The Doctor's brow wrinkled with concern. "I've got to right the situation before the Time Lords detect it."

Melanie shivered again as she recalled the Doctor's lofty superiors. He had only recently escaped their farcical courtroom drama. Attracting their ever-critical eye so soon after the event did not convey evidence of discretion.

"If my dithering former self hadn't left it in 1920," he continued, placing a lot of emphasis on 'dithering', "I wouldn't have to come to this point to retrieve it."

Melanie tugged his coat to silence him. They both looked at the kitchen door. The sound of clashing cups and water had stopped. How much had Mrs M heard? The woman re-emerged in the doorway. "You know I've been clinging to that cricket bat for over eighty years, and now you're going to take it off me."

The Doctor and Melanie rose to their feet. "It won't be too far away, Mrs M" the girl said sweetly. "You'll be able to look at it when you visit Lord's museum."

Mrs M nodded and smiled. "Yes," she said. "Yes I will."

Mel turned quickly, knowing it was no substitute for having the bat at home. And what would happen to the timelines once things had been put right? Would Mrs M automatically inherit a replacement, or would it be as though she had never owned the bat in the first place? Mel grappled with the contradictions and uncertainties, but to no avail.

The Time Lord slipped the bails into a pocket and cradled the bat in his arms. "Thank you," he said, his voice unusually soft and empathetic.

Mel cleared her throat. "Well thanks for all your help. You've been invaluable."

The Doctor opened the heavy oak door and turned to face his admirer. "You know, Mrs M, I never did catch your name."

The cracks in the woman's old and fragile face broke into a knowing smile. "No Doctor," she said, "and I never quite caught yours."

For a few seconds the Time Lord just stared into her eyes. Then he fell back into that crestfallen look, like a man with a million secrets, and strode out of the cottage. Following her mentor, Melanie waved goodbye and shut the door behind her.

Mrs M watched the odd couple walk up the gravel road to something square and blue. Her eyes were not what they used to be. Nor her ears.

\* \* \* \* \*

The elderly spinster managed to get herself booked onto a day trip to the legendary cricket grounds that very week. She stood for quite a while gazing upon the bat, which they believed, had won the 1883 test against Australia, and recalled the charming nameless Doctor and the dance they shared together.

Then one morning, a week to the day of the odd couple's visit, a parcel arrived. It was quite a large parcel at that, a cardboard box containing something rather heavy. Mrs M took it from the postman and wondered what it could be. She cut the string and tore off the brown rapping paper, before slowly raising the lid.

Her heart felt heavy and her eyes welled with tears of joy. "Oh," she choked, smiling and trembling at the same time. Bending down, she reached into the box and touched the folded white v-necked pullover. Underneath was the item that weighed so heavy. It was exactly as she remembered it from eighty years ago. She slid her arms under the mustard-yellow frock coat, held it close to her skin, and cried silently.

As she wiped her eyes, she noticed two other items in the box: a long white dotted red cravat and a hand written note, which read:

*To Mrs M. Something better than a cricket bat. Love, The Doctor.*

Mrs M sighed in disbelief. She never did catch his name.

