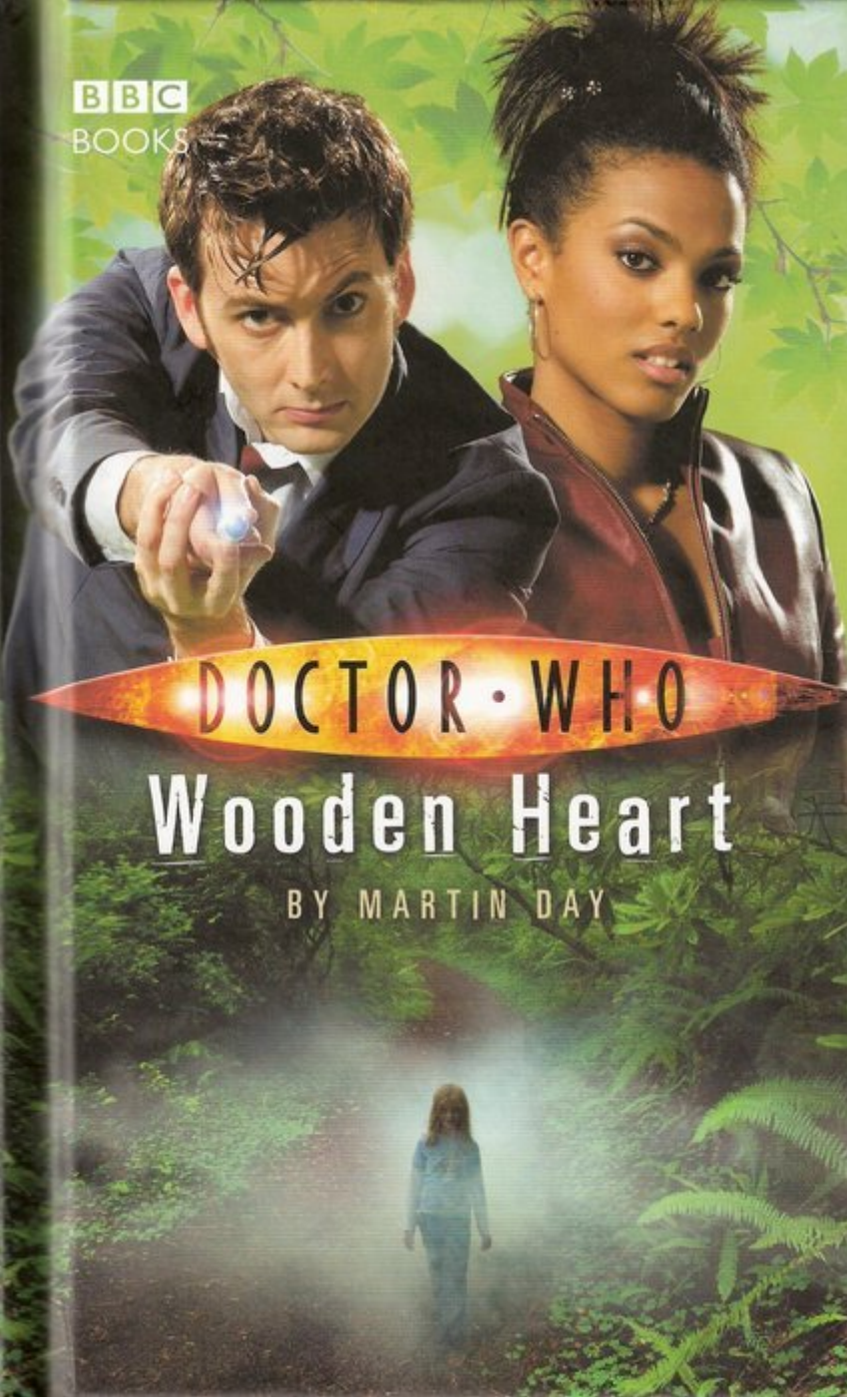


BBC
BOOKS

DOCTOR • WHO

Wooden Heart

BY MARTIN DAY



A vast starship, seemingly deserted, is spinning slowly in the void of deep space. Martha and the Doctor explore this drifting tomb and discover that they may not be alone after all.

Who survived the disaster that overcame the rest of the crew? What continues to power the vessel? And why has a stretch of wooded countryside suddenly appeared in the middle of the craft?

As the Doctor and Martha journey through the forest, they find a mysterious, fog-bound village – a village traumatised by missing children and prophecies of its own destruction. . .

Featuring the Doctor and Martha as played by David Tennant and Freema Agyeman in the hit series from BBC Television.

DOCTOR · WHO

Wooden Heart

BY MARTIN DAY

BBC
BOOKS

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Producer: Phil Collinson

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Dedicated to the memory of Craig Hinton

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'He's gone,' said Petr in a choked whisper. 'Just like the others...'

Kristine pushed past her husband and into the room. She wanted to see for herself.

She stared at the crumpled sheets on the bed, the pale pillow that still bore an impression of her son's head. It looked for all the world as if Thorn had simply got up to get a glass of water – as if he was in the next room and would soon return, rubbing his eyes and yawning.

Kristine rested a hand on the bed. It was warm.

'No,' she said at last. 'No, this can't be happening. Not to us...'

'Why should we be immune?' asked Petro, He tried to place a consoling arm around Kristine's waist, but she twisted free.

'The bars you put across the windows, the lock on the door...'
There was anger in Kristine's voice now, an anger that her silent tears could not soften.

'We knew it might not make any difference,' said Petro 'The children just disappear. There's no way of protecting them.'

Kristine shook her head. 'How can you be so accepting of it all?'

'I'm not,' said Petr, an awkward tone to his voice as he struggled with his emotions. 'But it's like I said. Just because Thorn is the son of the elected leader, it does not make him any less vulnerable.'

'I don't care about the leadership,' said Kristine. 'I don't care about the village. I just want my son back!'

'I know,' said Petro.

This time Kristine accepted his embrace; he wrapped his arms around her, muffling the tears. Her entire body shook like a slender tree caught in the wind.

Petr shook his head sadly. 'If only this nightmare would end...'

'How many more children are going to disappear?' asked Kristine. 'How many more families are going to suffer?'

'I don't know,' said Petro. 'No one does.'

‘We should ask for help.’

‘But that is not our way,’ said Petr, grateful that his wife was too weak to argue the point. ‘This... evil... will either resolve itself or...’

‘Or?’

‘Or we must hope for outside intervention. Some external factor, some *miracle* we have not considered – but you know we cannot make any approach ourselves.’

‘So we do nothing?’

Petr didn’t know what to say. In fact, he had tried every means at his disposal to protect the village from the gathering threat. But it was only now, after the evil had snatched away his own son, that he realised how pathetic their actions had been.

Just for a moment he thought he heard a footfall behind him – the creak of a floorboard, followed by the soft murmur of Thorn’s voice. But he knew his mind was playing tricks on him, and he wondered if Kristine was undergoing similar agonies.

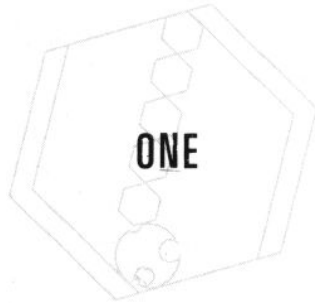
‘We’re never going to see Thorn again,’ said Kristine in a voice so flat and hopeless it almost broke Petr’s heart.

Petr thought of his son – such a proud, energetic child, forever tousle-haired and impish. Would he always be like that in Petr’s mind, trapped in his youth and unable to grow older? Petr thought of Thorn’s strong hands, his clear eyes – his sheer force of will. And the arguments they’d had!

Petr would give anything in the world to have one last row with his son, just so that they could eventually come together to mumble their embarrassed apologies to each other. Just for one last chance to say how much he loved him.

‘We’ll see Thorn again,’ said Petr firmly. ‘Somehow... Somehow all the children will come back to us.’

Kristine pulled away, a different dread in her eyes now. ‘I know,’ she said. ‘That’s what frightens me.’



For a few moments, as Martha stepped towards the main console, she thought she was alone.

The walls that pulsed with light, the huge support struts that seemed hewn from living coral, the mundane latticework beneath her feet – everything around her hummed with secrets and potential, with the hint of amazing things as yet unseen, and with terrifying things that were all too clear. It was like stepping into some old church where every footstep feels like an intrusion – or finding yourself alone in a mad scientist’s lab and wondering which bubbling experiment or complex bit of machinery you’ll fiddle with first.

She liked these moments without the Doctor – these momentary pauses for breath, when she had time to take it all in, to dwell on the things she had seen, the adventures she had already had. Paths already taken. Normal life never seemed so dull and one-dimensional as in these brief moments of reflection.

Then again, she didn’t like having too much time to think – sometimes it was scary. These events that played out before her threatened, on occasion, to wash her away entirely. Sometimes she just wanted to watch a beautiful sunset on an alien world, or meet someone famous from history, without battalions of blood-sucking monsters and

megalomaniacal villains hovering into view.

It was probably just as well, then, that at that moment she noticed the familiar and reassuring form of the Doctor, leaning against one of the walls, his face partly hidden by shadows, staring intently at the small scanner screen some feet away. He was chewing absent-mindedly on one of the arms of his glasses, seemingly lost in thought himself.

Martha circled around towards him and he looked up. 'It's just drifting through space,' he said, indicating the screen with his spectacles. 'It's easy to think that the cosmos is full of planets and stars and stuff, when actually... So much of it is empty. Bit of stray gas maybe, echoes of dark matter and plasma, but otherwise... Nothing.'

Martha came round and looked at the screen. It showed, as the Doctor said, a remarkably dark area of deep space. The velvety blackness was smudged by only a handful of distant stars. Against this there drifted the silent form of a slowly spinning craft. Orientated vertically, it resembled a great smooth tube of silver that thickened into some sort of blackened propulsion system at its base. At the top the tubular shape sprouted various spokes and protrusions.

'Every atom's full of space, isn't it?' she said. 'Even solid things... They're not really solid. Not if you look at them close enough.'

'The gap between electron and nucleus, the *chasm* between one atom and the next...'

'What's the ship?' asked Martha, looking back at the screen again.

'It's... interesting,' said the Doctor, as if that explained everything. 'A Century-class research vessel. *The Castor*, if the faint mayday signals it's giving off are to be believed. Not built for speed, as you can see – once it reached its destination it would hang around in orbit like a space station. Jack-of-all-trades sort of vessel.'

'What happened to it?'

'Dunno,' said the Doctor. 'No life signs, but no signs of collision or other damage either. I can't tell at the moment how long it's been here. Days, years, decades...'. Suddenly his hands moved over the TARDIS controls in a blur. He spoke more quickly, a growing excitement evident in his voice. 'There's an atmosphere, though, and grav-

ity – now that’s odd in itself. And there’s a few other little things as well. . .’

‘Enough to pique your interest?’

‘Oh yes!’ he exclaimed, grinning. ‘My interest is well and truly piqued. It’s reached a critical level of piqued-ness. If it were any more piqued, I’d. . .’ He slammed a few more controls home and very nearly pirouetted on the spot. ‘I think I’d run out of pique and need a little lie-down!’

The great engines at the heart of the TARDIS began to wheeze and shudder.

. Are we going to take a look?’ asked Martha, wondering if the Doctor could pick up the uncertainty in her voice. Exploring a rusting old space station stuffed with dead bodies – or worse – didn’t exactly sound like a barrel of laughs. ‘What am I saying?’ she realised, seeing the Doctor’s expression. ‘Of course we’re going to take a look.’

‘So, why the *Castor*?’ asked Martha some moments later as they stepped through the TARDIS doors and into darkness.

‘Good question,’ said the Doctor. He busied himself at a small panel on the wall, illuminated only by the piercing blue glow of his sonic screwdriver, then stepped back triumphantly as the lights flickered on.

‘*Fiat lux!*’ he said triumphantly. ‘From the Latin for *My small Italian car is on fire. . .*’

‘They’re not very bright,’ said Martha. The lights that had come on were glowing dully, leaving pockets of shadow at regular intervals.

‘Night cycle,’ said the Doctor. He looked down the long, gently arcing corridor they found themselves in. ‘I imagine whoever named this craft had a love of the classics.’

‘Castor, as in Castor and Pollux – the sons of Led a,’ said Martha, trying to elevate the conversation somewhat – and, if truth be told, wondering if she could impress the Doctor with her learning.

‘That’s right,’ said the Doctor, peering at another panel recessed into the wall. ‘Probably why on the colony world of Aractus they still say *Never turn your back on a swan.*’

Martha sighed. That was the problem with the Doctor – you had no way of working out if he was telling the truth, or deliberately escalating the conversation into the realms of the absurd. ‘I’ll remember that next time I’m on Aractus,’ she said.

‘Castor was said to be a skilled horse tamer,’ said the Doctor, ‘whereas Pollux was a pugnacious pugilist. I wonder if that has a bearing on this ship. People rarely just pluck a name from the air – it always means something. Take Martha, for example...’

‘Martha means “mistress of the house”. I remember looking it up in the library when I was a kid.’ Martha smiled. ‘Mum just said she liked the sound of it.’

‘There could be other reasons, I suppose,’ said the Doctor. ‘There’s a place near Peterborough called Castor. Just off the A47...’

‘So you’re wondering if the owner of this spaceship was born near Peterborough...? Nothing against Peterborough, but I prefer your first suggestion.’

‘You do?’ said the Doctor absent-mindedly as he pulled the mesh covering the panel clean off the wall. ‘You should have heard my third idea...’

‘Which was?’

‘Whoever owned this ship was a fan of the Popeye cartoons.’

‘Sorry?’

‘Poor Popeye – hopelessly addicted to spinach and skinny women... Anyway, Olive Oyl’s brother was called Castor.’

‘You’re a fount of useless information,’ said Martha.

‘Don’t you mean “useful”?’

‘I mean what I said.’ She tried to see what the Doctor was doing. ‘How come the lights are working?’ she asked.

‘Solar power,’ said the Doctor, as if that explained everything.

‘I’ve seen pictures of the space station,’ said Martha. ‘The one the Americans and the Soviets are building. They’ve got huge solar panels, but I didn’t see anything like that on this ship.’

‘It’s integrated into the very fabric of the craft,’ said the Doctor. ‘Almost every external component and hull panel plays its part.’

‘But you were just telling me how empty bits of space are. This thing might not have been anywhere near a sun for ages.’

The Doctor slipped on his glasses while peering at the panel’s small read-out screen. ‘It’s obviously had just enough sunlight to keep it ticking over. To be fair, it hasn’t had to expend much energy recently – a smidge on life support, a soupcon on a few other essential systems. . . The engines haven’t been used in years, so it’s just kind of drifted.’

‘Is that what drew you here?’ asked Martha. The mystery of it all – a *Mary Celeste* that drifts in the spaces between the stars. . .’

The Doctor took a step back, suddenly serious. ‘It reminds me of another ship, a craft with a link to a person from the history of your planet. . .’ He trailed away, his eyes intense, as if he could stare through the metal hull of the craft and see the stars and nebulae beyond.

‘The *Pollux*?’ suggested Martha hopefully.

‘Never mind the *Pollux*,’ said the Doctor abruptly, replacing what was left of the panel’s outer covering. ‘It’s this vessel that fascinates me now. What happened here?’

He began to stride down the corridor; big, confident steps. Steps that wanted to march into the future, to turn corners, to find out what happened next – and to revel in it.

Martha chided herself for downplaying this particular trip in the TARDIS – she’d forgotten that, with the Doctor at your side, words like ‘mundane’ and ‘everyday’ just didn’t seem to count.

‘Probably just a systems malfunction,’ offered Martha helpfully.

‘There’s no sign of any great systems failure in the central computer system,’ said the Doctor. ‘But perhaps it just healed itself. Stranger things have happened.’

Martha drew a long breath. ‘If you say so.’

‘Ah,’ said the Doctor. ‘This looks interesting.’

The corridor terminated at a circular door about three metres in diameter. It looked like a resolutely closed metal iris, and horizontal bars extended from the walls on either side and through large metal loops to give an even greater impression of solidity.

‘To keep something out, or to lock something in?’ wondered Martha out loud.

‘My thoughts exactly,’ said the Doctor. A quick wave of the sonic screwdriver and the bars retracted into the walls, leaving behind a faint smell of ozone and grease. Then the main door blossomed open.

‘Hello!’ the Doctor called as he stepped through. ‘Anyone home?’

‘You sure there’s no one on board?’ said Martha. ‘Little bit of courtesy goes a long way, you know.’

‘The TARDIS didn’t pick up any life signs,’ said the Doctor. ‘As long as the life forms in question aren’t hidden behind some sort of electromagnetic shield. . . Or out of phase. . .’

His voice dwindled to nothing as they found themselves on a high gantry, a circular walkway that had fifty or more doors leading away from it. Three metres above them was another walkway, and another; Martha risked a glimpse over the edge of the handrail, and the tubular structure they found themselves in seemed to disappear in both directions almost out of sight.

Martha took a step back from the edge. ‘This place is huge.’

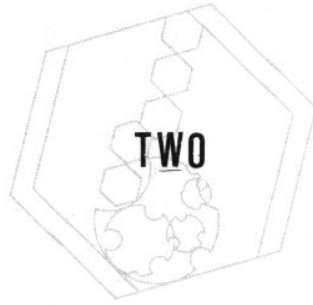
‘It is,’ agreed the Doctor. ‘Any other thoughts?’

‘It’s very utilitarian,’ said Martha.

The Doctor nodded. ‘We know this is a research vessel and not a hotel, but even so. . . It’s not at all what I was expecting.’ He pointed to the identical doors, evenly spaced along this and all the other walkways. Each had a tiny observation window at head height. ‘Remind you of anything?’ he asked.

‘A prison,’ said Martha suddenly. ‘It’s like a huge prison.’

‘I was worried you were going to say that,’ said the Doctor, walking past Martha to the first door. He waved his sonic screwdriver over the control panel at the side of the cell. ‘Shall we take a look?’



The door hummed open, a momentary interruption to the thick silence that gripped the vast chamber.

Martha paused, not sure what to expect. If you've encountered rhino-headed storm troopers and witches on broomsticks, she reasoned, you've got to keep your options open.

Nothing happened – nothing beyond a slight tingling sensation on her skin, as if the air in the cell, maintained for so long at a certain temperature and pressure, was now being released.

The Doctor stepped into the small room. 'It's perfectly safe,' he announced, though there was an ambiguity in his voice that did not inspire confidence.

When Martha followed him inside she understood the Doctor's uncertain tone.

The small area was no bigger than the box room at the front of the house where Martha had spent so much of her childhood. In the cell were a bed, a folding desk and a single cupboard high up in the corner of one of the walls. There was a screen at the far end of the room: whatever its original function, it resembled a dark, oversized tile as no power went to it now.

A few indeterminate items of clothing were scattered on the floor. A thick layer of dust had fallen on the desk and the pens and other items that cluttered its surface. 'No air filtration in here,' Martha observed in a whisper, remembering the pristine corridor they had landed in.

'No,' said the Doctor, his own voice a funereal whisper. 'Not a high enough priority, I suppose.'

Martha reached out to run her finger across the desk, then remembered that household dust was largely composed of shed human skin. She shivered, staring intently at the object of the Doctor's curiosity, for lying in the bunk, curled as if sleeping, was the long-dead body of a man, tatters of bleached-grey overall still clinging to his limbs.

'How long has he been dead?' she asked, appalled but unable to avert her gaze from the cracked, shrivelled skin.

The Doctor popped his glasses back on his nose, dropping his head to look more closely at the dead man than even Martha, with all her medical training to back her up, would have been comfortable with. 'What with the somewhat garbled information I was able to glean from the central computer, and given the obvious age of his body. . . ' He paused. 'Whatever happened on this craft, it all took place at least a hundred years ago.'

'A hundred years?'

'Yeah, give or take. The artificial atmosphere means the corpse has become. . . sort of mummified. The outer few layers of the epidermis have gone' – Martha glanced at the dust again and a shiver went down her spine – 'but the rest of the body has just. . . dried out.'

The Doctor turned to look at Martha, his body language reassuring despite his words and the environment they found themselves in.

'So sad,' he added, quietly.

'Any idea what killed him?' Martha asked, opening up the cupboard but finding only two small porcelain figures and a thick paperback book.

'Dunno,' said the Doctor, slipping his glasses into a pocket. 'How do you fancy putting your training in pathology to the test?'

'Not absolutely number one on my list of things to do in the next five minutes,' said Martha.

‘So perhaps we’d better find another way. Less... invasive.’ He turned for the door. ‘What was the book in the cupboard, by the way?’

‘Freud’s *Interpretations of Dreams*,’ said Martha, pleased to be following him out of the room.

The Doctor nodded, then pointed to the control panel set into the doorway. ‘You can only open the cell doors from outside,’ he said. ‘This part of the ship... It’s definitely a prison.’

‘What would a prison be doing on a research vessel?’ asked Martha.

‘Depends what it’s researching.’ His voice became deadly serious. ‘But I think we just found our first guinea pig.’

They stood for a moment on the circular gantry, Martha marvelling at the sheer size of the place. On the TARDIS scanners it was hard to get a sense of scale just by looking at something against the backdrop of space. As a result she’d been expecting something grim and claustrophobic, like the Russian-American space station she had mentioned to the Doctor. The reality, however, was a vast expanse of endless alloy and open space.

Mind you, the cell had been grim and claustrophobic – the prisoners here, if that’s what they were, certainly hadn’t been living the life of Riley.

She turned to the Doctor, still thinking of the few items she’d found in the cupboard. ‘I’m surprised that people in the future still have books,’ she said. ‘The way technology advances, I thought you’d... Plug yourself into a computer and download stuff straight into your brain.’

‘Even when something new and flashy comes along,’ observed the Doctor, ‘the old forms persist. You should see my record collection! Can’t beat a good bit of vinyl.’ He started to make his way to the next cell along. ‘Anyway,’ he continued, ‘what could be more practical than a real, old book made from real, old bits of paper? You can read it in bed, on a bus, in the bath even. You try doing that with a PDA when the batteries are flat!’ He held the sonic screwdriver over the door, glancing at Martha. ‘Ready?’

She nodded, and he waved his hand over the keypad like a magician with a wand. A glow of light, a briefly oscillating noise as the screwdriver doubtless tried every possible combination under the sun, and then the door hissed open.

The room beyond was almost identical to the first. The final pose of the body it contained couldn't have been more different, however. If the first prisoner they had stumbled across had perhaps died in his sleep, this one had pushed himself into the corner of the room and pulled his knees up to his chest. Though slumped now, Martha could imagine the arms being coiled tightly over his ears and eyes, trying to block out. . . What?

She shivered. 'Any signs of trauma?' she asked.

The Doctor leant forward. 'No. . . Nothing obvious.'

'The life support must have failed.'

'But the computer says life support's been ticking over with barely a problem since it first came into service.'

They tried the next cell, and the next, and the next. Each contained a body, shrivelled by the unique atmospherics of the craft. It was not obvious why any of them had died. The Doctor and Martha checked a few more, finding yet more corpses, some apparently sleeping, some apparently frozen as if in flight from an unseen terror. None, of course, could escape, for each cell had remained resolutely locked. As the Doctor observed, the entire place seemed ruthlessly efficient – it was a testament to human ingenuity that it was all still working after so long.

'I don't think we're going to find anything more here,' said the Doctor.

Martha was relieved – she didn't much fancy spending the rest of the day checking the other cells. There were hundreds of them, and there was no reason to expect that any of them would be any different from those they had already examined.

'We need to find the technical area,' said the Doctor. 'There's a limit to what the computer systems I can hack into from here can tell me.'

Martha risked a glance over her shoulder as she walked. 'All these prisoners. . . Were they criminals or political activists or captured sol-

diers or...?’

‘Yeah, that’s one of the questions I’m keen to answer,’ said the Doctor. ‘If we can –’

He stopped suddenly, Martha almost running into the back of him.

‘Did you hear that?’ he whispered, his head darting from side to side.

‘What?’ Martha hissed, suddenly more on edge. The only thing worse than exploring a mausoleum full of bodies was the idea that someone or something in there wasn’t quite dead yet.

‘I thought I heard something,’ said the Doctor. He paused for a moment, then carried on walking, head held high, as if nothing was the matter. ‘Oh, well, not to worry,’ he said loudly.

‘Not to worry?’

‘This place has been shut up for a hundred years,’ he continued. ‘No movements, no disturbances – and then we come along, breathing in the air, opening doors, generally making a nuisance of ourselves...’

‘Speak for yourself,’ said Martha.

‘Plenty of creaks and groans, but absolutely nothing to worry about!’ He grinned brightly, and just for a moment Martha was taken in by his broad smile – the sort of innocent grin that, on Earth, usually went with scraped knees and *Sorry, miss, my mate’s just hoofed our football over your garden wall, you don’t mind if we go and get it, do you...?*

Then she noticed that she couldn’t see one of the Doctor’s hands.

‘You’ve got your fingers crossed behind your back, haven’t you?’

The Doctor was immediately on the defensive. ‘Who, me? Fingers crossed? Nah, never!’

Only moments later did his left hand emerge to start inputting the correct settings on the sonic screwdriver.

Beyond the second irised door the Doctor and Martha found a much more high-tech series of corridors and rooms. The night-time lighting illuminated myriad machines and a bewildering array of desks, workstations and control panels.

‘This is more like it!’ exclaimed the Doctor.

They found yet more corpses, just as hideous as those they'd previously encountered, but some wore security uniforms, while others were in long white coats. 'Scientists?' speculated Martha. 'You said they were researching something here.'

'And hired muscle,' said the Doctor, bending over the body of one particular guard, frozen in position over a bank of computer screens. A quick glance and you could almost imagine he was still doing his job, still watching the security camera images for the slightest signs of trouble. The monitors, though, had long since powered off.

The Doctor waved his hands over what appeared to be some sort of keyboard made of thick fibre optic strands. 'One thing you can say about the people of your future, Martha. . . Is that they've long since abandoned screensavers. . . This monitor will go into complete hibernation if it doesn't detect any movement – and I'm talking blinking eyes, scratching your head, that sort of thing. Very green, and it stops the guards from falling asleep on the job.'

'But that's exactly what seems to have happened, isn't it?' said Martha. 'It's like everyone just fell asleep.'

'Hmm. . .' The Doctor didn't sound convinced.

The screen, as if it resented the intrusion after all these years of slumber, finally sprang into life. Martha noticed that others stretched along the long panel in front of them were also beginning to glow. Everyone showed a section of the multi-level prison area they had just been in; the view cycled from one hidden camera to another, and it was only the subtleties of light and shade that made each snapshot different from the last. Being a guard on this ship, reflected Martha, must have been dull in the extreme.

Before the Doctor could say anything, the lights in the room – mere glowing pinpricks against the flat, dull ceiling – became gradually brighter. The room moved from a subtle sense of autumnal night to the artificial cold-blue harshness of a working day. A quick glance at the images on the monitors, and into the corridor behind them, revealed the truth. It was as if the Doctor and Martha had intruded into some magical, slumbering kingdom, which all around them was beginning to wake.

‘What have you done?’ Martha blurted out, surprised at her own reaction. She would have expected to have welcomed the light and brightness, but, surrounded as she was by hundred-year-old corpses, everything seemed even more grotesque now. It just seemed wrong somehow, like stumbling into a funeral with hats and party poppers.

‘The daylight cycle’s kicked in,’ said the Doctor. ‘Nothing to do with me. Honest.’

Even so, Martha found herself glancing over her shoulder to make sure that they were still alone.

‘Now we’re cooking with gas!’ exclaimed the Doctor, settling down at an unoccupied console, his hands blurring over the controls. Martha watched him for a moment, but he seemed now only to be conversing with himself, muttering occasionally and sighing.

Martha turned away, feeling both lost and useless in this futuristic environment. ‘This is the point,’ the Doctor suddenly whispered, without looking up, ‘where curiosity usually gets the better of people. It has been known for my friends to go for a wander, get lost, or stumble upon something quite unexpected. . .’

‘Go for a walk around here?’ scoffed Martha. ‘Are you serious?’ She strolled over to another console – at least this room seemed safe enough. ‘You know, I think I’ll take you to Kensal Green cemetery if we ever get back to London,’ she said, warming to her theme. ‘Consider it. . . repayment in kind.’

‘Oh, I love cemeteries!’ exclaimed the Doctor happily.

‘You would,’ muttered Martha, just quietly enough for the Doctor not to hear.

‘Isn’t Brunel buried there? And Thackeray – I told him to paint those pillar boxes red, you know. He really wanted them in yellow! And Oscar Wilde’s dear old mum.’

‘Doctor. . .’

‘Oh, and Charles Blondin, of course! Do you know, when he took me across the Niagara Falls in that wheelbarrow, well, for once, I feared for my life. . .’

‘Doctor!’

‘Hmm?’ the Doctor looked up from his screen.

‘There’s something you should see,’ said Martha, wondering if he could detect the fear in her voice.

Within a moment he was at her side. ‘What is it?’

Martha pointed at the display in front of her. Something had caught her eye – and it made her blood run cold. ‘I thought you said there were no life signs on this ship.’

‘No, there weren’t – though, if you remember, I did add certain caveats, a few qualifications. . .’

‘Well,’ said Martha, tapping the screen for emphasis, ‘we’re certainly not on our own any more.’

‘Ah,’ said the Doctor slowly. He stared at the monitor, turned his head away, and then looked back at the information – as if checking he wasn’t mistaken. The readings were still there.

‘Ah,’ said the Doctor again.

‘Ah?’

‘Definitely,’ he said. He glanced at Martha. ‘Doesn’t make sense, does it?’

‘Phew,’ said Martha. ‘I thought it was just me.’

The monitor showed a map of the *Castor*, each level, room and wing picked out in fine detail. Coloured dots marked the presence of life on the ship. ‘There’s us,’ said the Doctor, indicating two strands of information scrolling across the screen. ‘One human, one *unknown* – how rude! It says we’re both standing in Security Room B, that we’re both physically fit, and. . . Oh, bad luck, Martha!’

‘What?’

‘Says you’re developing an ear infection. Something to watch out for. Or listen out for maybe.’

‘Honestly, I feel fine,’ said Martha.

‘Computer says No,’ said the Doctor. ‘And we can’t argue with this fine piece of hardware, can we? Not when it has just detected these other signs of life. . .’

He stabbed at two other dots with strips of information scrolling off them. One strand seemed awash with information, and one barely seemed to register at all. Indeed, as she peered still more closely, the fourth data stream blinked out completely.

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