

A Quiet Corner

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A Serena Story

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<http://drwho.rartec.com/>

Abstract: In the weeks following Serena's rescue by Voyager, the two travellers enter into a dimensional pocket called M-Space in their quest to flee the Doctor's influence. While there, Serena and Amy discover a planet with unnatural similarities to twentieth century Earth. Could it be more of the Doctor's meddling, even in this quiet corner of the universe? Featuring Serena.

There was a loud pop, followed by a muttered Gallifreyan curse. The acrid smell of smoke drifted through the room.

Amy glanced up. She was sitting in a corner, playing solitaire, trying to stay out of the way of her friend. Serena had been tinkering with the console for the last two days and seemed calmer than she had been for weeks. She seemed completely engrossed in whatever technical problem she was working on, and the diversion was distracting her from the trauma of recent events in which the Timelord had discovered unpleasant truths about her past. "You okay?" she asked nonchalantly.

"I will be in a moment." Serena slid out from beneath the console, lifting up a circuit and eyeing a blackened edge suspiciously. "Back in a moment," she said, jumping up and walking out of the console room.

Amy played out her hand, losing the round. She was reshuffling the deck when Serena returned, a triumphant gleam in her eye, having successfully repaired the broken

circuit. She slid back beneath the console, popped the circuit into place, fiddled with a few other components, and then replaced the panel. “There! Done!” she announced.

“So, now are you going to tell me what you were doing?” asked her bored companion. The last time she had asked, Serena’s reply had been a little vague.

This reply was no better. “Just trying a little experiment,” replied Serena. She stood up and wiped her dirty hands on her jeans. She gave her friend a mischievous half smile and her eyes gleamed a little with the recent insanity that had plagued her.

Amy frowned.

Serena turned her attention to the console and began pressing buttons and checking the computer. “Here goes...” She paused before pressing one last button. The TARDIS trembled slightly and the engine noises sounded strained.

The human woman held her breath, expecting the TARDIS to lurch at any moment. She glanced around for something to hold onto, but there was nothing, so she just pressed further back into her corner and prepared to brace herself. But the expected jolt never came. After a moment the trembling ceased and the TARDIS began to sound like it was operating normally.

“I think it’s worked!” Serena looked as pleased as a child who has solved an extremely difficult math problem. She circled the console and flicked the button for the scanner.

“What worked?” Amy’s patience was wearing thin.

Serena crossed the room and sat down cross-legged in front of her friend. “When I was still a student I read a few scientific papers written by our current president, Lady Romanadevoratrelundar.”

Her companion raised an eyebrow at the long name, but Serena did not notice.

“When she was younger she spent some time travelling with the Doctor,” began Serena, grimacing when she spoke his name. She shook herself and continued. “Anyway, at one point they discovered a void in our dimension and traveled into E-Space. They were trapped there for a while, but eventually they figured out a rather cumbersome way to get back into regular space. It was a very chancy procedure. Romana stayed behind to help out some people there, and she was basically trapped without the aid of the Doctor and his TARDIS. But eventually she worked out a sounder way to travel between E-Space and regular space. And that’s what these papers were about.

“So you’ve done what—taken us into E-Space?” guessed Amy.

“Not quite. Those papers gave me an idea: What if there were other voids? Other pockets in our dimension? We might be able to travel in and out of them at our leisure.” Serena smiled happily, apparently thrilled with the breakthrough and expecting her human friend to understand the consequences.

“So we have more places to travel to now?” asked Amy, trying unsuccessfully to guess what her friend was thinking.

“Well, yes... But not just more places to travel, but more places that might be free of the Doctor’s meddling influence. Places where he might have some difficulty locating us. So we can basically hide out for a while without limiting ourselves to one time and place.” Serena was growing more excited. “It would be like exploring an entirely different universe, minus the difficulties presented by traveling in a real alternate

universe—the physical laws are the same in these little pockets as they are in our dimension.”

Amy smiled. A bit of exploration minus the Doctor’s influence would be perfect.

“So, are we in this ‘E-Space’ now?” asked Amy. The scanner image did not look any different to her: it revealed an ordinary-looking star field.

“Not quite. A similar void. M-Space if you like,” replied Serena. “Here—let’s find someplace more interesting.” She activated the TARDIS again, and in a moment they materialized on a planet. The scanner scene changed. All they could see now was a brick wall and a pile of garbage.

“Lovely scenery,” muttered Amy. “Still, I suppose it must be inhabited.”

Serena bustled around the console, taking readings and making observations. “Hmm... interesting. Very much like Earth of the twentieth century. Similar air, similar pollution levels. Land mass and ocean coverage is similar. Plenty of life. Lots of activity on the air waves.” She smiled. “That’s about all I can tell you from here. I don’t even know what the planet is called. It’s not in the TARDIS record base. It’s uncharted, as far as Gallifrey is concerned.”

“Let’s take a look.”

As soon as they opened the TARDIS doors and stepped out into the alley they could hear the noise of many people. The end of the alley opened out into a market. Serena suddenly paused, hit with a wave of nervousness as she realized their isolation from Gallifrey and everything she knew. But Amy was excited and dragged her friend along towards the hustle and bustle of the market. They soon found themselves in the middle of the busy pedestrian thoroughfare. There were stalls lining each side of the cobblestone road, selling everything from vegetables to shoes.

As they walked along, taking in their new surroundings, Serena’s refined Gallifreyan senses picked up on something. “Hey, Amy,” she murmured to her friend. “I think all these people are human.”

“But there are a lot of humans out there in the universe with all of the colonization and space travel. What’s so special about these?” asked Amy, taking a closer look at the people around her. The people looked ordinary to her.

“It just strikes me as odd. Of course, I could be wrong about them—I won’t know for sure without a DNA sample that they are the same species as you. But there are too many similarities. How did they get here? A colonial ship could never have found its way into M-Space unaided.”

“Well, maybe we’ll meet someone who can tell us more about their history,” suggested Amy.

“Maybe.” Serena paused and watched a man picking out some vegetables. “And there’s something else. Tell me, what are they selling at that stall?” She gestured at one of the open crates.

“Looks like...” began Amy, stepping closer to get a better look. “Looks like potatoes.” She approached another crate. “And onions,” she added, a quizzical look crossing her face.

Serena picked up a red fruit from the next stall. "A tomato?"

"Maybe they brought food crops with them?" suggested Amy uncertainly.

"Hmm." Serena put the tomato back.

The vendor interrupted them. "Did you want to buy any?" he asked Serena.

Serena smiled and declined. They carried on down the road into a section where vendors were cooking and selling food.

Amy inhaled the smell of barbecued meat and announced that she was hungry.

"We'll need some money if we want to buy anything. Looks like they're using paper currency and coins," Serena observed. "If I could get a few samples, I could make some back at the TARDIS."

Amy wrinkled her nose. "I don't know. That sounds too easy. Why don't we try the old-fashioned method? Let's look for a job."

"A job?" Serena thought for a moment, then smiled. "Yes. That's not a bad idea. It might help us learn more about this place."

They turned down a side street away from the market. Away from the pedestrian zone, they had to stay out of the road where there was plenty of vehicular traffic. This too was similar to twentieth century Earth. The cars were a little different stylistically, but functionally they were very similar. Serena commented about the noticeable pollution and wondered about the odds of evolution taking such a similar track.

As they walked along pondering how they were going to go about getting a job, Amy found a lost currency note on the ground, and Serena used it to procure a tourist map from a newsstand they passed. They had a little change left afterwards, so they decided to see if they had enough for a coffee (or whatever the equivalent turned out to be). They were in luck because they were at that moment in an area of town known as "Restaurant Row".

Serena found a menu in the window of the nearest restaurant. Thanks to her Timelord linguistic abilities she was already well on her way to deciphering the written language of this planet. It was not an Earth language, but it might well have evolved from one. "Amy, this looks promising. I think we have enough money to buy this drink." She pointed at one of the words.

Amy looked at the symbols on the menu and sighed. "If you say so." At least her friend's Gallifreyan technology allowed her to understand spoken alien languages. "It's all Greek to me."

They entered the establishment and were seated at a small table by the window. They were a little early for the lunchtime rush, so many of the tables were still unoccupied.

The man who had seated them came over to take their order. He introduced himself as Burkell.

"Could we have two *tikcha*'s please?" Serena asked.

"Certainly. Anything to eat?" The man, who appeared to be in his fifties, had a pleasant voice but he looked tired.

"Nothing for now, thanks."

He left and quickly returned with two cups, pouring into them a steaming black liquid. He then set down a small pitcher filled with something that looked remarkably like cream. "Let me know if you need anything else."

Amy picked up the cup and smelled it. "Is it too much to hope?" she murmured, wishing intensely for it to be coffee—it certainly smelled right. She took a sip and then put the cup down. "It *is* coffee!" she announced, still rather amazed.

Serena took a drink. "So it is," she said. As she mixed some cream into her coffee, she added, "There has to be a link with Earth."

"We have to figure it out."

They enjoyed their coffees and continued discussing the strange coincidences and similarities. Burkell stopped by to refill their cups, and Serena had an idea. "Pardon me, Burkell, but do you know where we could find a couple of jobs around here? Doesn't have to be anything special. We're stopping in the area for a few months and were hoping to pick up a little extra spending money."

"Hmm. I don't know," he replied, rubbing his chin. "You might be able to get a job at one of the department stores up on Tenth Avenue. And one of the restaurants up the road might take you. I wouldn't mind some good help here myself, but I really shouldn't—no offense."

"None taken. But may I ask why?" asked Serena. There was an uncertainty in his voice that caught her attention.

The question caught Burkell off guard. "Ah well, I've had some trouble lately, and it's making it difficult to keep help on."

"What kind of trouble?" asked Amy.

The old man avoided her direct question. "I'm just saying you might prefer working at one of the other restaurants."

"Why is that?" Serena's curiosity was growing.

The man lowered his voice so the other customers would not hear him. "There are these boys, you see, who keep harassing and scaring off my staff. It's getting more and more difficult to keep people on. All that's left is me and my wife, Lise, who cooks the food. Without her I'd be out of business."

"Why are these guys harassing you so much?" asked Amy.

"Because I am a follower of Pordalleh, and most people around here are Legonites." Burkell noticed their blank stares and chuckled. "You really must be from far away to know so little about this region."

Realization dawned across Serena's face. "Ah, I see. You have conflicting religious beliefs."

"Yes. There is not much tolerance around here. My wife is also a Legonite, and this seems to make some people even angrier that we are married. Luckily the tourists don't seem to care much, so we get enough business without the locals." Burkell glanced around. "And now, if you'll excuse me, I must get back to the other customers." He hurried off to check on some people across the room.

Amy leaned forward and said, "We should try to help Burkell. I like him."

Her Gallifreyan friend looked doubtful. "I don't know if there is much we can do here. Religious conflicts are intrinsically difficult to solve, and this society is not very advanced."

"I'm not talking about fixing the whole society. I just want to help this one man."

Serena was still unenthusiastic. "I don't know..."

"Please?"

Serena relented. "Okay. *If* he'll let us."

Burkell came by a little later with more coffee.

"Burkell," began Serena, "We've been discussing your recent difficulties, these thugs who've been harassing your help. And we'd like to stay anyway, if you'll have us."

He looked down at the woman who looked so much younger than he did and sighed. "I don't think it's a very good idea," he replied, just as two groups of people came in. It was the beginning of the lunchtime rush. "Excuse me." He went off to seat the new customers.

"I don't think this is going to work out, Amy," murmured Serena.

Amy said nothing but watched Burkell bustle around the room. As a few more luncheon parties came in, he began to look harried. He was running back and forth between the kitchen, the various tables, the register, and the entrance. It was obvious that he was not managing well by himself. Serena and Amy watched as one impatient customer sent Burkell back to the kitchen to correct a mixed-up order.

"I can't take any more of this," announced Amy. She drank up the last of her coffee and stood up. She spotted a spare apron behind the register. In one motion she crossed the room, donned the apron, and picked up a pad and a pen.

Serena blinked. She could hardly believe what her friend was doing. She did not think Amy had any prior experience in waitressing, but now she was seating a twosome like a pro. It looked like her sudden boldness was working out okay until she came to take the order at the next table. Serena caught the look of panic that crossed her friend's countenance when the people started ordering *maklah*, *shumli*, and *borsk*. Serena did not yet know the English equivalents, so her friend would not be able to benefit from the Gallifreyan mental translation trick. Amy was frantically writing the unfamiliar syllables on her pad, apparently not realizing that her message would be unreadable in the kitchen. Serena sprang into action. She found another apron behind the register and casually caught Amy as she walked toward the kitchen.

"Here. I'll take that. You seat customers and I'll write the orders, and we'll go from there," whispered Serena, snatching the notepad from her friend's hand.

Amy looked relieved. "Okay." She headed to the front to greet another party.

Serena quickly translated Amy's guesses into the local language on the next sheet of the pad and stuck it on a clip at the kitchen window. Just as she was turning around to survey the room and see who needed help next, Burkell returned from the kitchen with a new plate for the customer he had been helping. He looked at Serena in surprise. But there was too much to do; there was no time for arguing. Serena smiled and went to take the next order.

Lunchtime had come and gone quickly. The place had cleared out by two in the afternoon, and Burkell had put up the closed sign. The restaurant closed for a few hours every afternoon in preparation for the dinner service.

“I don’t know how to thank you,” he said. They were sitting around a table, snacking on some of the luncheon leftovers. Lise was still in the kitchen, cleaning up.

“We really don’t mind,” said Amy. “It was kind of fun.” Helping Burkell was turning out to be quite a job.

“We were very busy today—more than usual,” said Burkell.

“I’m not surprised. This quiche is delicious!” Serena popped another bite of seafood quiche into her mouth. By this time she had figured out all of the English food equivalents, making life much easier for Amy.

“But now I am worried for you both,” said Burkell. “For your safety, you really should leave. If those hoodlums find out you are helping me—and it never takes them long—your lives may be endangered.”

“Well, it wouldn’t be the first time,” replied Serena, remembering recent events. “Listen, Burkell. You’d be surprised, but we’re actually quite adept at defending ourselves.”

“I’ve had self-defense training,” added Amy.

“Please let us stay on. You’ll see. It’ll be okay.” Serena wore her most reassuring smile.

Burkell smiled. “I suppose you can stay on. But I won’t be upset if things don’t work out and you decide to go. And I can’t promise much pay. I can only give each of you twenty five credits per day.”

“Oh, that’s okay. Our boarding situation is already covered, so money is not so important. It’ll just be nice to have a little extra cash,” explained Serena.

“We open at 7 for breakfast, and we stay open through lunch until 2. If you want to help in the kitchen, come early. Lise and I are usually here by 5:30 to get the food ready. We’re closed tomorrow—both for rest and for Lise, who likes to experiment with new recipes. We open for dinner at 5 and stay open until 9, later on Friday and Saturday.”

“Sounds good. So we have a few hours before the next crowd?” Serena was eager to do a little research away from the restaurant.

“Yes.”

“Good. I think we’ll go for a walk and get a little exercise. Burkell, is there a library around here? We could really do with a little study about the local history—I feel absolutely embarrassed about how unprepared we are for our visit here.” Serena spoke in her most charming voice, reminding Amy suddenly of the Doctor.

“The city library is only a few blocks away—a fifteen minute walk from here.”

The visit to the library was a fairly productive one, although Amy felt a little useless, being unable to read the language. But Serena’s translations were interesting, and the two hours passed quickly. Soon it was almost time to head back to the restaurant. Serena went to try to get a library card and borrow some books. Amy flipped pages in a

child's history textbook and stared at pictures and unreadable text, waiting for her friend. She thought about some of the things they had learned. The planet was named Kemth, and they were in the town of Thenstor. The planet, though very similar to the Earth Amy knew, was a few hundred years behind, technologically and socially.

Serena returned. "No luck. Without proof of residency they won't issue a card. And since this society hasn't developed computers yet, there's really nothing I can link up to with the TARDIS."

Amy sighed. "Oh. I guess we'll just have to come back here tomorrow."

"We're not completely stuck. I'll just bring us over here tonight in the TARDIS after everything closes. That's probably more efficient anyway. I can continue to do research after you go to bed."

"Sounds like a plan."

They left the library and headed over to the restaurant.

"This planet really puzzles me. It's definitely not natural—something has been interfering with its progress to make it resemble Earth," said Serena.

They walked along quietly for a while, each pondering the possibilities. Amy finally broke the silence.

"Do you think it's the Doctor?" asked Amy.

Anger flickered across Serena's eyes. "Probably," she replied darkly.

As they approached the restaurant they were so engrossed in their thoughts they did not notice the teenager watching them from across the street. They went inside and the young man took a last puff on his cigarette, before stamping it out and sauntering away.

"Hey, you're turning into an expert at this waitressing gig," Amy said as they passed each other at the kitchen door.

Serena was balancing several empty plates on each arm. "How the mighty have fallen," she joked.

"I think that guy over at table three fancies you," Amy added, winking. A man in his fifties with a grizzled beard was laughing at a joke his son had just told him. They were having a great time and were the only people left.

Serena returned a blank stare. "Fancies me?" Life on Gallifrey had not prepared her for the human concept of flirtation.

Amy giggled. "You know. He likes you and maybe wants to be more intimate—fancies." She grinned. Her Gallifreyan friend might be brilliant, but she certainly had some strange gaps in her education.

Serena was inwardly thankful that her human friend was so patient. Now understanding the joke, she grinned. "Don't be silly. He's too young!" cried Serena. She laughed and took her dishes into the kitchen.

When Serena returned from the kitchen, Burkell was chatting with the man and his son as they paid their bill. Everyone was in good spirits. The evening had gone well and Serena and Amy were starting to feel at home. Burkell was all smiles; Lise had received many compliments for the small spinach soufflés she had created as the special.

The two men left, and it was time to clean up. Amy started to relax a little. Some of the work was difficult for her since she was trying to hide the fact that she could not read the language—she had memorized the contents of the menu with Serena’s help, but she had worried about being caught all evening. Fortunately, Burkell had handled the register and she had not had to deal with the money. She and Serena had both made a little money in tips, in addition to the amount Burkell had promised.

“Do you think we have time to do a little shopping at the market tomorrow?” she asked as she was wiping tables.

Serena had the task of sweeping up the floor. “I don’t see why not. I’d like to spend some time doing a little investigating on my own in the afternoon. Can you manage?”

“Yeah. I suppose I could come in here and see if Lise needs some help with her cooking.” She grinned suddenly. “Say, we’ve faced Sontarans and soldiers and Cybermen. And now we’ve conquered waitressing.” She stood heroically, holding her wash rag like it was some kind of trophy. “What do you suppose we’ll do next?” She was feeling silly.

Serena grinned. It was good to relax. “Take on Broadway?” She did a little tap dance with her broom as her partner.

“You’re not bad. But don’t give up your day job just yet!”

“I’d like to see you try it.”

“I’m not even going to go there. I took ballet lessons once as a kid and it was a disaster. Lasted all of a week!”

“I’d better remember that, in case we ever visit Kondullar. They use dancing as a form of communication. You might end up telling them the wrong thing.”

“What—like instead of ‘Hello, my name is Amy,’ I’d accidentally say ‘You look like a big elephant with rabbit ears?’” Amy grinned.

“Something like that.” Serena giggled. “Where did that imagery come from?”

“My empty stomach. Kind of ironic—working around all this food, and yet we were so busy we didn’t have a chance to eat anything.” Her stomach growled, as if on cue. “You know what would be really good right now?” Amy looked wistful. “A big hot fudge sundae.”

“Mmm. That does sound good,” agreed Serena. “I could probably throw something together back at the TARDIS.”

“I’m all done here. Let’s get going.”

They collected their wages and said their good-byes to Burkell and Lise.

“I wonder what Xena is getting up to back on Earth,” said Amy. “Do you think we’ll catch up with her again some time?” They were walking back in darkness to the TARDIS and the street was quiet.

“Probably. She gets around pretty well on her own. I think she likes to go back there every so often to check on things. But I don’t think she likes to stay. There are others on Earth with the immortality trait, and they’ve developed a weird subculture of hacking each others heads off, which she’s not particularly excited about,” explained Serena.

“Wow. You mean there are other humans like her?” Amy knew about Xena’s ability to regenerate, but she had not known any of the details.

“Yes, more of the Doctor’s interference. One of his most benevolent actions, actually.” Serena felt awkward. She felt so disgusted and angry with the Doctor that she had been trying to forget all of the good things he had done across the universe.

Three young men stepped out from an alley and took them by surprise. Serena and her human friend jumped.

“We hear you’ve been hanging out at Burkell’s,” stated the one in the middle. His voice dripped with hostility.

“I suppose we have,” replied Serena icily.

“We think it’s time you moved on,” added the man on the right who was closest to Amy.

Despite the shadows and dark clothes, Amy could see that he was large and well built, probably from weight lifting. The one in the middle was tall and wiry, and the third man was stocky. She glanced at her friend out of the corner of her eyes. Serena’s expression was cool and fearless, and when the moonlight glinted off of Serena’s eyes, something in them made her shiver.

Serena gave her challenge. “I don’t particularly care what you think.” Her voice lowered in command. “Now, let us by.”

The thug in the middle chuckled and shook his head. This seemed to be some sort of signal to the others, and the big one lunged toward Amy. Taking advantage of his large size, she ducked. Her self-defence training kicked into gear. She lowered her centre of gravity and tried to put her attacker off balance. She dodged out of the way and this gave her a brief moment to look at her Gallifreyan friend. Serena kned the stocky thug and smacked his nose with a flattened palm. The leader stood away from the scuffle, watching for the moment.

The large man grabbed hold of Amy’s arm. She twisted in his embrace and turned her hip into him, throwing him with a neat judo flip. He landed hard and groaned, grabbing his shoulder which had hit the ground. He picked himself up off the ground and withdrew from the fight, apparently in some pain from a dislocated shoulder. Amy was surprised and inwardly relieved at this stroke of luck.

At the same time, Serena was also inflicting more painful blows upon her attacker’s face. Blood was running down from his nose and lips, but still he did not draw back. This time Serena twisted his arm behind him and there was a dull snap that made Amy cringe. The man cried out and ran off.

The lead thug was still watching. He sneered and pulled a switchblade out from his pocket. He moved quickly towards Amy. Amy stared at the knife, suddenly paralyzed with a mixture of uncertainty and fear. Serena came to her rescue. She knocked his arm away from Amy a moment too late, and the blade tore into Amy’s upper arm. Amy winced and backed out of the way, clutching her injured arm and feeling the sticky blood seep through her fingers. The thug laughed at Amy and her injury and taunted Serena, and Serena’s eyes flashed with venomous anger. In a blur of fury she flung a roundhouse kick at his chest that knocked the wind out of him and sent his knife flying. She pursued him and sent a savage blow at his knee—bones cracked. He crumbled to the ground and

the crazed Timelord drew back her arms, winding up for what was obviously some sort of deathblow.

“Stop!” screamed Amy. She was terrified. She had never seen Serena fight like this, never seen her so furious and uncontrolled. “Don’t kill him! Please, Serena, stop!”

The words of the frightened human somehow made it through Serena’s frenzy in the last instant. She launched her blow and stopped just before striking the man’s throat and chest. She was seething, and beads of perspiration dripped down her temples. Her eyes flashed crazily, but there was a glimmer of sanity in there somewhere. The man crumpled and lay back on the ground shaking, the whites of his eyes catching the moonlight.

“Serena!” Amy stepped towards her friend.

Slowly, Serena dropped her attack stance. She took a deep breath and shook herself a little, as if waking from a deep sleep. She knelt down and briefly examined the thug’s injured leg. “It’s a clean fracture. It won’t kill you. Will your friends be back?”

The man weakly nodded towards the shadows. “Probably going for help now,” he whispered between laboured breaths.

“Good.” She stood up and looked down at the man with a stern expression. She muttered, “I’d advise you to leave us alone.”

Turning her attention back to Amy, she forgot about the injured man. Amy, still clutching her wound, wore a pained look. Blood continued to ooze slowly around her fingers and had drenched her sleeve. “We’d better get back to the TARDIS and see to that arm of yours,” Serena said, much calmer now.

Amy nodded silently and they headed off towards the TARDIS.

“There. Good as new,” pronounced Serena as she closed up the med-kit. “It’ll be sore for a couple days, but otherwise you’ll never know you were wounded.” She avoided eye contact with Amy. They were both still in shock over the attack and Serena’s swift and nearly deadly response.

Amy preferred to leave the subject alone for the time being. She needed time to think and recover. Rubbing her tender arm, she marveled at Timelord technology. She yawned. “I think I’ll go get some sleep.”

“Good idea. You look exhausted.”

“Get some rest, too, okay?” Amy looked at her friend. Serena was a mess. Her shirt and jeans were splattered with blood from one of their attackers, and her hair looked bedraggled.

“I will. I’m just going to move us over to the library, and then I’m looking forward to a quiet spot of reading.”

In the morning, Amy found a note from Serena stuck on the console room door. “I’m in the TARDIS library. S.” She made her way through the corridors and poked her head around the door. Serena was sitting at a large table surrounded by many books, all apparently borrowed from the town library. She looked rested and alert, although it looked like she had been reading all night, and she had cleaned up her appearance. She

was now wearing some smart khaki trousers and a crisp white shirt, and her hair was pulled back in a loose French braid.

“Good morning,” said Amy, entering the room. She took a seat across from Serena.

“Morning. Did you get some breakfast? There are still a few biscuits left,” Serena said, pointing at a plate at the edge of the table.

“I’ve already had some toast, thanks. Learned anything?”

“A little,” replied Serena. “Some of it’s rather fascinating.”

“Any more evidence of the Doctor?” asked Amy.

“No. That’s the funny thing. Yesterday I was convinced it had to be him, but there’s nothing to suggest it in Kemth’s history—no oddities in the timeline, nothing to suggest the Doctor’s presence. There’s not a single reference to him. But I also don’t think this is being caused by some odd natural phenomenon—a warp in the space-time continuum, or something equally unusual.” Serena looked thoughtful.

“So what could it be?” Amy changed her mind about the biscuits and selected a lemon cream.

“Well, I did find something interesting when I was studying the planet’s geology and evolutionary record. Just like on Earth during the respective time period, there is something of a debate over Kemth’s origins, and the origins of humanity. Basically the same stuff Darwin started back on Earth, only here it was suggested by some man named Cordem about a hundred years ago.” Serena turned a book towards Amy and showed her some pictures of fossil samples. “Here’s where it gets weird. Everything here like these fossil samples looks authentic, as if it has been here hundreds of thousands of years, but there are little flaws that you would never find in an Earth sample. In fact, I think I’ve just about proven the case of the local creationists. Remember the blood on my shirt, so kindly provided by the locals? I managed to do a little DNA analysis of that blood and compared it to yours. And not only was it human DNA, but I was able to correlate the deviations in the two samples and can estimate the divergence point to be only about six thousand years ago.”

“So you think the people were brought here from Earth?” asked Amy.

“Yes. But not just the people. Everything. Plants, animals, bacteria. Everything.”

“But what about the planet? How old is it?” asked Amy.

“Well, according to the local technology, it’s about as old as the Earth. But the TARDIS has other ideas. The planet is quite old, but it’s current structure seems to have come into existence about six thousand years ago. Before that, I think it was probably more like Mars than Earth. I think the whole place is manufactured.” Serena turned another book towards Amy. It had thin paper and small text.

“Religious text?” Amy guessed.

“Yes. This one is the Legonite holy book. Rather similar to several Earth religions, but it’s not a direct copy, either. But there is one story that is almost identical, except that it has greater prominence in the book. Remember the Ark?”

“As in Noah’s Ark? Are you suggesting everything here came on some sort of space ark?” Amy was incredulous.

“I don’t know if there was a space ark, but it is suggestive that these people would keep that particular story. Toward the end of the Ice Age, about 12,000 years before our present date, the Earth began to grow warmer. The vast ice sheets melted, causing the oceans and seas to grow deeper and spawning floods around the planet. As time passed, these floods were remembered from generation to generation in many legends, including the Ark story. Now suppose something brought a bunch of humans here from the Earth six thousand years ago. They probably didn’t understand what was going on, but they remembered the flood story and it became another way of explaining what was happening.”

Amy was amazed. “And whatever it was also modified the planet to be as Earthlike as possible. *And* this force continues to influence the planet’s development to this day.”

“Exactly. If we hopped back to Earth right now without travelling in time, we’d be in your twenty-third century. These people are only a few centuries behind. It’s as if this manipulative force is monitoring Earth and then quietly influencing the local development to mirror Earth’s progress. It’s not precise, but it seems to be closely following development trends. Very sophisticated, whatever it is.”

“Why? What could be the purpose?” asked Amy, completely baffled.

“I don’t know. But I intend to find out,” Serena added.

“So what do we do?” asked Amy. They were back in the console room. Amy stood at Serena’s side, watching her check the TARDIS sensors. “Hop back in time six thousand years to find out how it all started?”

Serena shook her head. “Not just yet. I think we may be able to learn the truth here in the present, but we can keep that as an option. Plus I don’t really want to leave until we’ve finished helping Burkell.”

“So let’s see,” said Amy, “what are the possibilities?” She counted off on her fingers. “Some sort of training ground for an invasion of Earth? A complicated scientific study of humans? Some sort of domination scheme?” She sighed, unable to come up with any more ideas.

Serena pondered Amy’s suggestions. “I suppose it could be a preamble for an invasion of Earth. But you would expect it to be more accurate. The social trends are all about the same, but many of the lesser details are different. These people don’t speak any Earth languages, for example. If invaders were using this as a practice ground, about the only thing they would learn about is human behavior. They wouldn’t be prepared to fit in on your homeworld. Besides, I can think of half a dozen easier ways to prepare a good simulation of Earth for such a purpose.”

“Okay. So what about science? Maybe someone is just studying human behavior for the heck of it.”

“Again, the environment doesn’t seem to be controlled enough. If they were going to be so relaxed about things, why didn’t they just study people on Earth? And as for domination, well, I suppose it’s possible. But whoever is playing god here isn’t going in for the usual power kick. Everything is too subtle. These people are being manipulated, not controlled, and there’s no obvious goal.” Serena frowned.

Amy's face lit up. "Here's a thought. If these people are being manipulated but aren't fully controlled, what happens when something happens that could potentially shift the societal trends away from the Earth model? You know, some major catastrophe, or some amazing invention. Like if someone here developed the computer a thousand years too early—that sort of thing."

"I imagine our unknown force has to take more direct action to correct things when that happens." A sly smile spread across the Timelord's face. "If we could produce or even fake such an event, we might be able to prompt a response and draw our mysterious force out into the open."

Outside the TARDIS, it was still early in the morning. The morning air was on the chilly side, and Amy was glad she had remembered to bring a sweater. In the bright morning light everything looked different. But as they passed by one of the alleys along the way, Serena paused for a moment. Amy knew they were at the spot where they had been attacked the night before. On the pavement there were a few small dark spots which Amy guessed was dried blood. But there was no sign of anyone.

Amy decided it was time to broach the subject. "I'm a little uncomfortable with what happened last night," she began. She kept remembering how easily Serena had disabled the leader of the thugs. She could picture the way Serena's eyes had flashed in the moonlight, full of anger and cold menace. Serena said nothing, so she continued. "And I'm not talking about those men that attacked us. I'm talking about the way you dealt with them. I've never seen you like that before."

Serena was silent a moment longer and then said, "It was strange. It felt like..." she searched for the words, "like I became separated from myself by rage. But it wasn't like my last... episodes. When the Chaktor brainwashed me, I couldn't cope with their conditioning and I lost my sanity. Even back on Voyager, when I took over the ship, I wasn't very rational. Clever maybe, but irrational. But with this thing last night, I didn't feel the same." Serena's voice wavered a little. "It was like I was watching everything from a distance, following each action in slow motion. My sanity was intact but I just couldn't seem to control my rage. When he hurt you, I knew that killing him was the wrong response, and yet I couldn't seem to stop myself from trying to do just that."

"You're going to have to find some way to keep control, Serena," Amy said. "What if this happens again, only you don't stop?" Amy looked away from her friend. "I promised Shaltravin I'd look after you, but if you started killing people in cold blood, I'm not sure I can stand by you."

The Timelord nodded. She spoke quietly. "I understand. I guess I'm just going to have to work on my mental control." She did not sound very confident that this would be a solution.

"And where did you learn to fight like that anyway?" Amy added, her tone a little less severe. "Do you realize you brought that bloke down in two moves? I've never seen anyone move that fast, except maybe Xena."

Serena gave a hollow laugh. "I just had some standard martial arts training back on Gallifrey. Certainly the element of surprise helped—he was relying too heavily upon that knife and didn't seem to know what to do when he lost it."

“But it wasn’t just him.”

“No, it wasn’t. Like I said, everything was moving in slow motion for me. I was just methodically picking out the vulnerabilities of the human body and attacking each point in textbook fashion.”

Amy shivered at her friend’s words and pulled her sweater tighter around her shoulders. “You make it sound so easy.” She could feel a little distance creeping between them. Amy realized she was becoming a little afraid of her friend.

“I’m sorry,” Serena said quietly, sensing Amy’s unease. “I promise I’ll try to work at doing better.”

Echoing something Serena had said to her another time, Amy replied, “Don’t make promises you may not be able to keep.”

“Good lord! You two look glum,” said Burkell as soon as they entered the restaurant.

“What happened to you?” asked Lise.

“We just had a really long night, that’s all,” Serena said. She did not want to scare them by telling them about the attack.

Amy continued. “Our hotel is a little too noisy.”

“You must find a better place to stay,” said Burkell.

“I thought I might go look for something a little nicer today,” lied Serena. “But Amy doesn’t feel like coming.”

“Do you mind if I stay and help you in the kitchen, Lise?” asked Amy.

“I’d welcome your help, if you don’t mind a bit of menial labour.” Lise smiled. She was a large woman who definitely enjoyed food—she fitted the stereotype for a good cook. “I’m planning to experiment with a new dessert.”

Amy grinned. “If it involves chocolate you can definitely count me in!”

“So, did you learn anything else today?” asked Amy. Serena had reappeared in the late afternoon to pick up Amy. They decided it was wise to head back to the TARDIS while it was still light.

“More of the same,” replied Serena. “No more clues on our mysterious force. But I’ve come up with an idea to get its attention.”

“What’s your idea?” asked Amy.

“Well, it’s a bit complicated. I had to think of something that would theoretically rock the very foundation of this society. Originally I thought I might be able to fake a worldwide disaster, like a sudden, dramatic climate change or a new and apparently deadly disease. But I don’t really want our experiment to change or damage this world, so those ideas were out. It has to be something that’s easy to fake. But it’s got to look real, and I don’t want it to be traced back to us.”

Amy agreed. “No, that would be bad. We don’t want to be the ones caught in the trap.”

“So here’s my idea. Using the TARDIS, I can create a phenomenon that looks natural and generates an unusual sort of radiation. This radiation in turn triggers one of the human genetic sequences for telepathy.”

“Telepathy? I thought you didn’t want to change this world?” Amy found the idea a bit daunting. Would she develop this telepathy, too?

“Ah, that’s the tricky bit. I’m going to make this phenomenon start really small in an isolated place, so we can limit the number of people it affects. The phenomenon will also grow at a constant rate, so sooner or later our mysterious force will have to take notice and act, or the whole planet will discover the joys of telepathic communication.” Serena grinned mischievously. “Left unchecked, it would throw things into complete chaos—when the sudden and widespread development of uncontrolled telepathy has happened naturally on other planets, it usually results in a complete reorganization of society—after all, it’s hard for people to continue warring and committing crimes when everyone knows what everyone else is thinking. Of course, I don’t expect to run this experiment that far—all we need is a fix on the location of the force and then we can put things back to normal. The radiation’s effect is only a temporary one.”

“Wow. That’s quite a plan,” said Amy, still daunted by the idea. “Will I become telepathic, too?”

“Probably not. I’m going to set it up in the southern hemisphere on one of the less populated continents to try to limit the effect. But it’ll probably be a week or two before the news starts trickling out and it gets noticed.”

“Well, I guess that will give us a little more time with Burkell,” said Amy. They were passing through the street market now, and Amy observed several of the people around her. Judging by the bone structures, complexions, and other features, they might have been in some European city. “I wonder where all these people came from, on Earth.”

“As near as I can tell, the population makeup probably started as a percentage of that found on earth six thousand years ago,” explained Serena. “Also, while the languages here seem to be original, I have discovered many linguistic similarities and even the occasional shared word, particularly with Greek and Chinese. But this leads me to believe that they must have started life basically from scratch—the original settlers were no doubt primarily young and uneducated.”

“People who wouldn’t be missed.”

“That would be my guess, too.”

Amy tried to imagine what it must have been like for the first settlers on Kemth. “It must have been terrifying.”

Serena stopped and looked at her friend. “I promise you we’ll do everything we can to put this force out of action. These people don’t deserve that kind of interference.”

As Serena had predicted, their experiment did not produce immediate results. Two uneventful weeks passed. The two travellers settled into the routine of working at Burkell’s restaurant and waited impatiently for something to happen. They did not even see any sign of the hoodlums who had attacked them. Amy started to help Lise in the kitchen more and more often, learning how to cook and coordinate orders. Serena grew restless and bored.

“Let’s go out and get a newspaper, Amy,” suggested Serena. They were sitting at the table in the TARDIS library. It was their off day, the day of the week when the

restaurant was closed. Serena had spent the morning staring in a microscope, tinkering with a piece of microcircuitry, while Amy poured over some cookbooks she had found in the TARDIS library.

“Okay,” replied Amy, somewhat reluctantly. She had discovered a new interest in cooking and was actually enjoying the experience of working in the kitchen.

They left the TARDIS and stopped at a newsstand in the street market. Serena purchased a paper and they sat down on a bench to read.

“Anything in your section?” asked Amy. “There’s nothing in the headlines yet about people getting telepathy.”

“Nothing here, either,” replied Serena. She had hoped that this would be their lucky day. But the newspaper stories only confirmed the TARDIS’ sensor readings—nothing unusual had happened yet in response to their experiment.

“Something else here of interest though,” said Amy thoughtfully. She pointed to a small article at the back of the main section. “There was some vandalism on the other side of town last night. Someone broke a bunch of shop windows. And it appears all of the vandalized shops were owned by followers of Pordalleh. We should go see if Burkell has seen this.”

They walked down to the restaurant and found Burkell in a state of frenzy.

“I’m so glad to see you,” he said with some relief. “Lise has come down with a terrible case of the flu and I didn’t know how to get in touch with you. I thought we might have to close down for a few days. Amy, I know it’s a lot to ask, but do you think you can handle the kitchen tomorrow? I can help with food preparation, but I’m not half the cook that Lise is.” He was very anxious, but he had seen how quickly Amy had been learning from his wife.

Amy forgot about the newspaper story. “I suppose I could probably manage.” She felt pride at being asked to fill in for Lise, but it also scared her because she was not sure she would be able to keep up with orders.

“So that’s a yes?” asked Burkell anxiously.

Amy cast off her anxiety. “Yes,” she replied, smiling.

“I hope Lise is feeling better soon,” added Serena. She had watched the interchange and wondered how her friend would manage a restaurant kitchen with only a few weeks’ experience. At least it was only a small restaurant.

No one remembered to mention the newspaper story.

Serena was bored. Amy had gone to sleep hours ago. Normally Serena needed to sleep, too, but the last week had been so dull that she had rested enough to last a decade.

She checked the sensors for the twentieth time that night. There was nothing she could do to speed up their experiment. She had even taken some time rigging a special mobile sensor so they could pick up the alarm from the TARDIS, should anything unusual be detected while they were away. She drummed her fingers impatiently on the console. There were still a few hours left before daylight, before her human companion awoke. The Timelord eyed a small pile of cookbooks Amy had left by the door.

“Well, maybe I can find something to do,” she murmured. She jotted a quick note down for Amy, scooped up the cookbooks, and left the TARDIS.

Amy let herself into Burkell's restaurant. It was four in the morning—she had arrived extra early because she wanted to be sure of having enough time to get ready for the day.

There was a loud clatter and clang from the kitchen. Serena? She knew Serena had come over some time during the night. Amy pushed open the swing door to the kitchen.

The kitchen was a mess of bowls, utensils, and ingredients. There were several globs of dough covering the table and floor, flour and sugar was scattered across the room, and flour dust hung thickly in the air. The scent of something burning wafted to her from the oven. And in the middle of the culinary disaster stood Serena, covered from head to foot in flour. Tears were streaming down her dusty face and she was staring down at a doughy mess stuck between her hands.

“Oh, Serena,” whispered Amy. She brought her hand up to cover her mouth.

Serena looked up. She was distraught. Sobbing, she blurted out, “I was trying to help... I just wanted to help...” She lifted up the drooping glob of dough as if it were some sort of dead animal.

Amy started to laugh. She could not help herself. She could only repeat, “Oh, Serena.” She laughed harder and harder until her body was shaking and tears came to her eyes.

Serena looked down at her hands. She too began to chuckle, and soon she was laughing as hard as Amy.

After about five minutes, their laughter tapered off.

“Let me help you get this place tidied up. What were you trying to make, anyway?” asked Amy. She picked up the brush and dustpan. They were going to have to work quickly to get everything in order before Burkell arrived.

“Bread.”

Amy shook her head and chuckled again. “Oh, by the way—it looks like people are starting to notice something funny on the continent of Bellar.” Before she came in, she had picked up an early edition of the newspaper. Amy turned the folded paper over to show Serena a small article. There, in the small print, was a strange little story about a tribe of Bellar aborigines who were demonstrating some rather peculiar behavior.

“Things should really start cooking now,” she added.

Amy yawned. “What a day! I've never been so tired!”

“It was certainly a busy one,” agreed Serena. They had somehow managed to survive the day without Lise. Aside from Serena's early morning kitchen disaster, the day had run smoothly. Amy was a natural chef and handled things well, with a little help from Burkell.

“I'd just like to soak in a hot bath,” said Amy. Her feet ached from the long hours of standing, and her arms were fatigued from all of the chopping, stirring, and mixing.

“Mmm. That sounds lovely.” Their conversation was interrupted by a beeping sound. Serena pulled her mobile sensor from a pocket and looked at the small readout screen. “Forget the bath. Looks like we’ve got something!”

Amy was a little disappointed. She wanted to find their mysterious force, of course, but she was very tired and was not looking forward to staying up all night chasing this thing.

They ran back to the TARDIS. As soon as they were inside, Serena checked the full readings and set coordinates. “Time to see what we’ve got,” she announced. She activated the dematerialization circuit.

A moment later they rematerialized. The Timelord operated the scanner to find that they’d arrived in some sort of large hall.

“Good atmosphere, nothing hostile detected,” murmured Serena. “Doesn’t look like we’ve been noticed, either. Shall we take a look?”

“Let’s do it.”

As they came out of the TARDIS, they were overwhelmed by the size of the room in which they had arrived. There were perhaps one hundred tall marble columns running down the hall. The ceiling was forty feet high, and there were windows that looked out onto a starry night. The sound of their footsteps on the tiled marble floor echoed down the length of the room.

“What a place,” said Amy, gazing about room. The room was dark, but even in the starlight it was beautiful.

“I wish Xena were here. This place would be right up her alley,” added Serena. The architecture looked vaguely Greek and reminded her of the Parthenon.

They came to the enormous double doors at the end of the hall. Amy started to reach forward to see if they would open when they began to open on their own. “Someone expecting us?” she asked nervously.

“Probably not,” reassured Serena. She pointed to a tiny electronic eye above the door.

They stepped into the huge room, and a multitude of small ceiling lights flickered on like stars. The room was round, and there were arched corridors leading off to the left and right. On a large dais at the center was a huge control console. Aside from the general shape, it was completely unlike the TARDIS console. It was mainly comprised of some sort of exotic crystalline circuitry, and the user interfaces were complicated touch screens. From a distance it was a beautiful piece of technology, and Serena immediately stepped forward to get a better look.

The Timelord ran her fingers over the console, marveling at the unfamiliar technology. She felt dust and lifted her hand away. “Looks neglected.” Brushing the dust off on her trousers, she studied the touch screens and began making a few entries.

Amy moved closer to watch her friend. Serena’s selections became more confident, but her expression slowly changed from curious wonder to grim determination.

“What’s wrong?” asked Amy.

“This computer,” said Serena in a hushed tone, “is being used to control the course of events on this planet.”

“That’s no surprise. Why do you look like someone died?”

Serena looked up at her friend with haunted eyes. “Because the primary course of events currently being implemented is a major world war—identical in scope to the second war of the twentieth century on your world.”

Amy felt embarrassed. The twentieth century was a few hundred years before her time. She had never paid much attention to history in school, and she knew few details of the wars of that era. “I’m sorry,” she murmured. “But I...”

“But you don’t know much about that war,” snapped Serena. “It’s no wonder your planet has so many problems if your people can’t be bothered to study their own history and learn from their mistakes.” Whatever she was seeing on the screen was upsetting her, and her growing anger landed on the only available target, Amy.

Amy felt her face turning red. She opened her mouth to reply, but nothing came out.

Serena continued. “Well, let me educate you. Millions of people died in this particular war. Many of them were murdered in concentration camps. Many were tormented and killed because of their beliefs and their ancestry. More died fighting to end the crisis. The first nuclear weapons killed millions more innocent people. Shall I go on?”

Amy shivered. She was stunned. “And this is going to happen all over again on Kemth? Isn’t there something we can do to stop it?”

“There must be,” replied Serena, her fingers flying over the screen. Her voice was full of desperation.

By the look on the Timelord’s face, Amy knew that Serena’s attempts were failing. “You can reprogram it, can’t you?”

Serena did not reply right away. She tried more combinations and watched more results scroll by. In a sudden burst of anger, Serena slammed her palm down on the console. Amy jumped.

“I’ve tried everything I can think of,” the Timelord said quietly. Her voice quivered. “But this program has been active for over one hundred years, setting the groundwork for this war by implanting suggestions in select brains of the planet’s inhabitants. I’ve entered hypothetical corrections to stop the war, running statistical analysis to see the predicted results, but everything I try only causes worse things to happen.”

“Worse than those things you told me about?” Amy found this hard to believe.

“Much worse. In one scenario, a nuclear holocaust wipes out most life on the planet. In another, the megalomaniac who starts the war wins instead of being defeated—he ends up becoming a tyrannical emperor over the entire planet. And another—the war ravaged world is plunged into a one thousand year long dark age. Nothing I try seems to lessen the effects.” Serena stared down at the touch screen.

Her human friend voiced the thoughts Serena could not say. “Then you’ll have to let it run its course,” Amy said quietly.

“Burkell and Lise will probably die in the war,” whispered Serena.

The color drained from Amy’s face. “How?”

“They live in one of the countries at the heart of the crisis. Because of Burkell’s beliefs, it is likely that they will both end up in a concentration camp, or worse.”

“We’ll have to warn them, get them to evacuate.”

The two friends did not speak for several minutes. Each looked at the console and thought about the people on Kemth, and about their friends.

Finally, Amy broke the silence. "Can you disable it? Stop it so that after this, it can never be used again?" She wondered who had set this program in motion, and why.

"I think so. This equipment is already in a state of disrepair. I have to make sure it finishes this program, but I should be able to set up a time-delayed routine that will permanently destroy the circuits after the program completes." Serena keyed in her own program. At last she announced that it was done. "Let's see if we can find out who runs this place."

"There are only two ways to go." Amy gestured at the two arched side corridors. "Let's try this way first," she said, randomly picking the one on the right.

"Good as any."

They walked down the corridor and came to another set of automatic doors. The doors opened to reveal a smaller room, warmly lit and decorated in bright colors. There was a large ornate bed in the middle of the room, but it was no ordinary bed. It was framed by more crystalline circuits, and a shimmering light glowed around the figure in the bed. Serena realized it was some sort of stasis field. The figure in the bed was beautiful. She was humanoid, with high cheekbones and a gorgeous mane of auburn hair gathered around her pale shoulders above the blankets. But she looked deathly ill and was unconscious. Her closed eyes were sunken and her lips were pale and bloodless.

Amy realized that there was someone sitting at the side of the motionless figure. "Oh!" she blurted.

The man looked up. He was dressed in rich robes of red and blue and wore a huge medallion. "Oh, look, Magalla," he said, speaking to the unconscious figure. "We have visitors." He stood up and stepped forward regally. "It has been a very long time since we have had visitors, hasn't it Magalla. Allow me to introduce myself. I am Zimthos, Lord of Creation, and this is my Queen, Magalla." He smiled warmly, but his eyes were full of despair and sadness. And there was something else in them, something that Amy recognized because she had seen it in Serena's eyes: madness.

The Timelord, still upset about their discovery, straightened and said somewhat haughtily, "I am Serena, Lord of Time." She neglected to mention that she was not the only 'Lord of Time' running around the universe—it sounded better this way and countered his grandiose claim.

Amy, lacking anything resembling a grand title, said quietly, "I'm Amy Wilson. From Earth."

Zimthos caught her last word. "Ah, Earth," he said, sighing. He looked down at his comatose consort. "We remember Earth well." He looked at Amy nostalgically.

"How did you end up here, Zimthos? And why are you recreating Earth on this planet?" Serena asked bluntly while studying Zimthos' medallion.

Zimthos' countenance darkened abruptly. "We searched for a long time after our homeworld was destroyed for a new place to live. Travelled for millennia, hopping from place to place, until we found Earth. It was such a beautiful planet. Magalla loved Earth immediately. We tried to settle there, but when the others found us, they exiled us," he

growled. His eyes flashed darkly as he recounted the tale, and Amy thought she could hear thunder rumbling in the distance.

“Who were the others?” asked Amy, suddenly very curious.

The disturbed man’s wrath vanished like a summer storm. He ignored her question. “Magalla had the idea that we could bring a little of that world with us. She found this quiet corner of the galaxy where we would not be bothered. Didn’t you, my love?” He turned towards his wife as if she were speaking to him. “Yes, Magalla, I’m just getting to that.” He continued. “All we really needed were the people. We were gods to them, and they were our children. We brought many of them here. But they were unhappy because it was so unlike their home. So we planned to recreate everything. Magalla snuck back to Earth to get samples so that we could rebuild their homeworld here.” His wrath returned suddenly. “And the others injured her as she was leaving. But the ship brought her back.” He looked down at Magalla, his eyes welling with tears. He shook himself. “But we’ve made our way here, my love. I’ve created everything just the way you planned. In spite of them.”

“Who?” Amy asked again.

Serena knew the answer. “Zeus. Hera. The Greek Gods.”

Zimthos’ eyes flashed and there was a loud crack of thunder that shook the building. “They said they had no room for any more gods,” he said darkly.

“They were your own race, and they couldn’t make room for you?”

Amy was bewildered. “How did you...?”

“His medallion. An ancient, powerful race, whose lust for power led to the destruction of their homeworld. Only a few escaped. A few came to Earth, where they prospered and had children. The primitives worshipped them, and they began to believe they really were gods.” She addressed Zimthos. “I suppose you and Magalla thought you would fit right in.”

Zimthos gazed down at the Timelord. He seemed to grow a little bigger. More thunder crashed outside and the walls trembled.

“Serena,” whispered Amy.

“Well, your godship is finished!” cried Serena. “I have put an end to your tampering.” She matched his angry gaze.

More thunder. Amy could hear the buildup of power which seemed to be coming from the walls and floor. “Serena! We’d better get out of here!”

“You shall bow down before us!” cried Zimthos. He lifted his hand and pointed at Serena.

Amy instinctively lunged at her friend and knocked her to the floor. An energy bolt flew from Zimthos finger and singed the spot where Serena had been standing only a moment before.

“It’s time to go!” shouted Amy. Her hair was standing on end from the static that was building in the room.

Serena looked up at her friend. The near miss had knocked some sense into her. “Agreed!”

They rolled out of the way, dodging another blast, and stumbled through the door. Zimthos pursued them as they ran back down the corridor and through the control room.

He lobbed a few more bolts at them before they turned the corner into the main hall. They sprinted past the columns towards the TARDIS. Serena fumbled with the key. Amy looked back. Zimthos came through the huge double doors. He was a giant now, and his blood (??) was boiling with fury.

“Hurry, Serena,” said Amy. Zimthos strode down the hall towards them. The ground shook.

At last the door opened. The two travellers jumped inside and shut the door just as Zimthos launched another bolt. The TARDIS shook, but the shielding absorbed most of the energy. They were safe. Serena rushed to the console and activated the dematerialization circuit.

Amy tried to catch her breath. “Will he come after us?”

“I don’t think so. I don’t think he wants to leave Magalla.”

“Was she dead?” asked Amy.

“Brain-dead, by the looks of it. His stasis field was only keeping her body alive.”

Serena set coordinates to return them to their original location.

Amy suddenly remembered their discovery. “We’ve got to warn Burkell. How long do they have before the war starts?”

Serena thought about this for a moment. “I think it’s still a few years off.”

“That’s good. Plenty of time to make arrangements to move.” Amy was relieved.

The two travellers made their way through the market. It was still early, and the vendors were just setting up.

Amy yawned. They had only salvaged a few hours of rest before it was time to go to the restaurant. Amy was not looking forward to the day. How were they going to get Burkell to move to someplace safer without telling him of the future?

They rounded the corner and came out onto Restaurant Row. But they were not greeted by the usual morning sights of traffic and pedestrians. Smoke was billowing out of one of the restaurants—Burkell’s restaurant. Firemen were pumping water in through the broken windows. Burkell stood back at a distance with other onlookers, red-eyed and distressed.

Seeing this, the dismayed travellers ran over to talk to him.

“What happened?” cried Amy.

Burkell choked back tears. “We were firebombed in the middle of the night.”

They stood watching the smoldering mess. Amy was sad for his loss, but it gave her a glimmer of hope. “Are you going to leave? You could move to someplace where you and Lise’ll be more accepted,” she suggested.

“No. We’re going to rebuild right here,” said Burkell stubbornly. “I’m not going to let anyone bully us around.” His eyes, though full of sorrow, showed his firm desire to stay.

Amy began to argue with him, but Serena cut her off. “It’s time to leave, Amy. There’s nothing we can do.” Amy saw the truth in Serena’s eyes and knew she was right.

Burkell added, “Even with the insurance money, it’s going to be months before this place is rebuilt. I can’t ask you stay and wait around.”

“We were only planning to stay for a few months, anyway,” agreed Serena.
“We’ll try to come back and visit some time.” They shook hands.
“Please do come back. Lise and I will both miss you. You’ve been a great help.”
Amy looked at the kind old man and spontaneously hugged him. “I’m so sorry,” she said, stifling a sob.
“I’m sorry, too.”

Back in the TARDIS, the two travellers prepared to leave. Amy avoided making eye contact with her Gallifreyan friend and decided to seek refuge in her room. As she opened the door to the corridor, she could not resist glancing back. Her friend stood at the console, staring aimlessly at the controls.

“Zimthos will be out of action after this war, won’t he?” Amy asked.
“Yes,” replied Serena. She spoke gently, brushing her fingertips over the edge of the console. “He won’t be able to repair my sabotage without Magalla’s help—she was the technical expert, and he was barely able to keep the equipment operational without her. When his war program is complete, the computer will self-destruct. His power will be substantially reduced. And he’ll have to come to terms with Magalla’s death—her life support will also cease to function and her body will finally die.”

Amy thought back to the desperate look in Zimthos’ eyes. It was a sad way to end up. “What will happen to Zimthos?”

“I don’t know. His race doesn’t normally die, except in extreme circumstances, as with Magalla,” said Serena. “But sometimes they can also will themselves into non-existence. Without his power and his wife, he may decide it is time to go.”

It was a grim fate, and Amy thought it was something no one deserved. She shook her head sadly and retired to bed.

The End